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The **SPACE QUEST**

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**Peter Spear
& Jeremy Spear**





The Space Quest™ Companion

Second Edition

Peter Spear
Jeremy Spear

Silicon Valley
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The Space Quest™ Companion, Second Edition

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To the men and women who staff the Throckmorton Ridge Fire Station.

To the Southern Marin Emergency Paramedics.

**To the nurses, doctors, and staff of Marin General Hospital's intensive and
transitional care units.**

For everything.

Peter Spear

**To Mr. Patrick Gaynor, my tenth grade English teacher. Thank you for teaching
me that writing is more than just putting words on a piece of paper.**

Jeremy Spear

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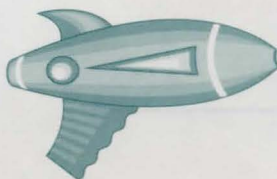


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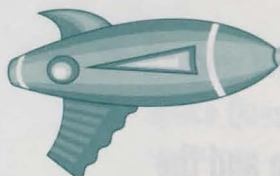
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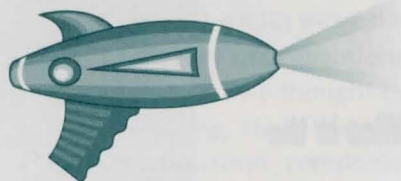
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Acknowledgments

This book is very special to us. It is not every year that a father and son get a chance to write a book together, and first time experiences always have extra meaning. That we still talk to each other after what we've been through is already a landmark in our relationship. That we've made it through two editions together makes the experience all the more exceptional.

On the other hand, putting words to paper is one thing; a book is quite another. The folks we worked with on this project were especially talented and nice, and deserve to be mentioned before we get rolling.

At first we thought our editor, Bill Pollock, seemed too good to be true. We were wrong. He is that good. When things looked dicey, he came through with professionalism, compassion, and good sense. We think he's as good a friend as anyone could wish for.

We'd also like to thank editor-in-chief, Jeff Pepper for having the faith to give an opportunity to a teenager who really wanted to write. Writing a book is a lot harder than it looks, and the experience was worth more than all of the advance checks in the world. Well, maybe we're exaggerating a bit.

And we would also like to express our appreciation to the rest of the fine staff at Osborne/McGraw-Hill for their warmest thoughts and wishes during our time of personal crisis, which made writing the first edition of this work an adventure for all of us.

As you may have noticed, this book has a cover, and we think it's a very good one. That's because Alan Okamoto is a really good artist of things science fictionish. We can't wait for him to create a graphic novel because it will be a great one.

The interior illustrations were done by Mason Fong at Osborne/McGraw-Hill. They give Roger's fantasies the classic and pulpish feel they deserve. (Probably more than they deserve.) Thanks for returning our comic books, Mason.



Marla Shelasky and Susie Kim figured out how to turn our home-brewed maps into something that belonged between covers. It's a thankless task, but no longer.

Kudos to second edition associate editor, Emily Rader, and project editor, Janet Walden. They, along with computer designer, Stefany Otis, helped turn the manuscript into a real book and without them we are nothing. They're also fun to work with. The book would have been hard to finish without them.

Ann Spivack and Judith Brown copyedited this thing. We most assuredly know what they do. We needed it.

Robin Bradley of Sierra On-Line and Dave Selle of Dynamix made sure we got our facts straight, so they're called the book's technical editors. Like Moses with the two tablets, they were the final earthly arbiters of right and wrong. Usually they were right.

Of course, we can't forget the Two Guys from Andromeda, Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy, who designed and wrote the first four Space Quest games, or Dave Selle who played a big part in developing Space Quest V. Without them, and all the other artists, musicians, and programmers at Sierra On-Line, we'd have had a heck of a lot less to write about. And there would be a little less fun in the world.

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Finally, many thanks to Virginia Soper, wife and mother, for being there when we most needed her. But then, she always is. Thanks for your love.

Read Me First

One snowy winter morning in 1984, John Williams arrived especially early at his job at Sierra On-Line (a California company that develops and publishes many popular games for personal computers). To his astonishment, he found a small wicker basket propped up against the front door. A note was attached to the starry ribbon that was tied in a bow around the basket's handle. Inside the basket sat a tiny bundle wrapped in a fuzzy blanket. Expecting to find an abandoned baby, John rushed his find into the warmth before he peeked inside. To his joy and relief, it was no forlorn child left to make her way alone in the world—life is seldom that simple. Instead, he found a number of battered computer disks and what he assumed to be printed copies of their contents. The note claimed that the package had been sent to that very doorstep from centuries in the future. John read the material, chuckled occasionally, and then consigned it all to a spare shelf, vowing to let no one think he had been taken in by a prank.

The basket remained hidden for another two years until the company was approached by a pair of unusual looking artists and programmers who had an idea for a computer game. When they described themselves as two guys from Andromeda, the dusty secret in John's closet took on enormous significance, especially to a man not yet born—a man named Roger Wilco. For all intents and purposes, those documents have now become Sierra On-Line's Space Quest games, which relate the adventures of Roger Wilco—one-time space janitor (well, sanitation engineer), self-styled Space Ranger, and reluctant hero.

What follows is some of the contents of that basket from the future, made available to us to edit and make more readable. We were still a little skeptical of their veracity, but have also met the Two Guys in person and been overwhelmed by their personal physical presence. We consider that evidence alone to be overwhelming (in more ways than one).



In any event, here you'll find Roger Wilco's adventures—or at least as many as Sierra On-Line has been willing to make public—in Roger's own words, as dropped through a time rip from the future. You'll meet a man; true, a man at times confused, at times assured, but always very, very human. He is a man who has learned to face his fears and limitations, and make the most out of them. And learn. And grow.

The Roger Wilco you will meet here differs in some ways from the one you know from the computer screen, just as art and reality are never quite the same. Oh, his adventures are the same, and the villains just as nasty. It's just that here we are dealing with a living man, and his thoughts and reactions, fears and emotions. You'll probably agree that that's a lot different than dealing with an animated character in a computer game.

This is the second edition of *The Space Quest Companion*. It includes Roger's accounts of the (apparently) true events which he experienced in what we know as Space Quests I through V. Since we don't have access to a time machine (let us know if *you* do), it is impossible to be totally certain of their veracity. All of the materials do appear to be composed by the same person, and at least one of the Two Guys from Andromeda assures us that internal evidence convinces him that they are accurate to their era.



Playing by the Rules

We have also included in this book all the stuff you would expect to find in an ordinary computer game hint book. Each part contains complete maps (so you'll always know where you are and where you shouldn't go in each game), accurate scoring lists (great for those times when you thought you'd done everything and still end up a point or three shy of perfection), and up-to-date, screen-by-screen, action-by-action walk-throughs of each game. These walk-throughs can be used to journey with Roger from beginning to end in each of his adventures and pick up all possible points. However, we think that depending too heavily upon these tools, instead of expending at least *some* mental effort at solving the game problems, takes most of the challenge out of playing. Still, the games are fun and *everyone* likes to eventually reach the end of a story.

And speaking of stories, it is also possible to play through these games successfully by just reading Roger's versions of them. We suspect that the Two Guys knew a good thing when they saw Roger's documents, and simply made a straight adaptation of his exploits to the medium of computer games, changing only the occasional name or detail. This is understandable. We do know *we* were surprised



when we saw how closely the events and predicaments in the game follow the narratives from the future.

The Space Quest/Roger Wilco series of personal computer games are generally known as computer *adventure* games and sometimes as *graphical adventure* games. If you're new to this type of game, here are some tips on what to expect and how to make the experience even more enjoyable.

As the player, you take on the role of some character. In the case of Space Quest, you're Roger Wilco—initially a space janitor, but eventually space adventurer and man about the galaxy. What you are attempting to do is play through an interactive story from beginning to end. You control almost all of Roger's actions, and must keep him alive while dodging onscreen death, solving problems, and getting our hero out of perplexing predicaments. As the player, you earn points for performing specific actions, solving problems, and achieving certain goals. If you're especially retentive about such things, you probably would like to reach the end of the story with the maximum score. For those less driven, it is usually possible to reach the game's end without a perfect score.

In this, as in most computer adventure games, expect your character to be killed often, and in dozens of interesting ways. In many cases, you will not even know that a particular problem or hazard exists until digital death occurs. Remember: the people (and swineoids) who create computer games are bound to give you a hard time. It's their job. They want you to run screaming from the room in frustration. They design many of the problems to be obscure and infuriatingly difficult to solve. They put a lot of hard work into creating new ways for characters to die. They're delighted when you make mistakes. They intend for you to see the EOG—End of Game—screen. Often.

But they *do* want you to eventually come to the end of the story and finish the game. Every problem does have a solution waiting to be discovered. Often it is so obvious that it's overlooked; occasionally it's so nonintuitive as to border on sadism. But if you look or think hard enough you should find them, and conquer not just the game, but the game within the game.

On the other hand, it's always nice to have help for those moments when the answers have stopped coming, creativity has dried up, or moving on is more important than being a purist about game playing. That's what our part of this book is all about. After each of Roger's narratives, we've included three separate chapters: The "Cruising Through" chapters are the complete action-by-action walk-throughs; the "Keeping Your Bearings" chapters contain accurate and complete maps; and the "Points of Interest" chapters detail all the ways to score points—just in case you're missing a few. We think you'll find these chapters invaluable.

Since you are going to make a lot of mistakes, perform many trial-and-error maneuvers, and have your character terminated oodles of times, we have also assembled a list of suggestions and tips to make adventure game playing—especially



Space Quest—a little less frustrating. These are based on a lot of firsthand experience and many End of Game messages. They are so important and basic, we call them:



The 12 Spear Rules for Playing Computer Games (version 2.0)

1. *Save the game.* Save often. Save well. This is perhaps the most important rule. There's nothing more frustrating than getting better than halfway through a game and realizing you've got to start over because of something you didn't do (or did do) near the game's start. Save before you do anything dangerous or questionable, after you've completed something significant, after you've found some goodie, or anytime you get to someplace new. The more saved games you have, the better. When in doubt, save again. Your character most likely will be killed (or the equivalent) often. This rule is the elixir of immortality.

NOTE: A good strategy is to have two saved games and alternate between them often as you play. Sometimes you'll find you've saved a game after you've done something stupid, although you didn't realize it at the time. Going back is usually preferable to starting over. Also keep other saves at significant points in the past. Remember: save often; save well.

2. *Keep your bearings.* Know where you are at all times. Make and keep good maps; they will not only show you where you are, but give some idea of where you haven't been. In Space Quest, the top of the screen is north, the bottom is south, and so on. Note what and whom you see or find in each screen; you may have to return to that screen later. Be sure you can understand what you draw or write.
3. *Look at everything.* Look at whatever is visible. Then look for invisible things. Look above, below, under, on top, or inside everything you see or find. In game versions where you must type commands, this also means that you should "inspect" anything you can touch.

REMEMBER: You can't look inside things unless you open them first. Doors invite opening. Open everything. This is so obvious that it is often overlooked, so to speak.

4. *Take everything.* If the game lets you take something, there's probably a reason and you're likely to score points. Occasionally this reason is bad, but that's



- why we save often and well. Take anything that's not nailed down, and if it is, look for a crow bar. If it's too heavy to lift, look for a crane.
5. *Use everything.* If the game lets you take it, it's most likely got a use. Discovering what the use is poses another problem. Doors need keys, clothes can be worn, decoder rings can decode. Accept nothing at face value. Items in computer games can be put to some very strange uses. If you are stumped or out of options, try using everything on anything. You never know what might happen. Save the game first.
 6. *Think creatively.* While most problems and situations are overcome by applying logic to them, many are not. People and creatures don't always respond or react as we'd expect them to. Attempt as many combinations of actions on people and things as you can imagine. Then think again. Often, the counter-intuitive or totally illogical action is the proper course. But always save the game first.
 7. *Talk to everyone.* You never know what you might find out. Try talking several times in succession; often it is not the first reply that counts.
 8. *Read everything.* You never know what you might find out. Read several times in succession; you may not see what you are supposed to on the first try. This is especially true about graffiti, in shops, and while using computers and data readers.
 9. *Take good notes.* Memory can be so short lived. You may need to know what you learned today, tomorrow. Write down the stuff you learn, and do it legibly. You may not know you need a certain piece of information until you need to get back to someplace, and discover you forgot to jot down the address.
 10. *Walk away from problems.* Occasionally, certain events or actions must take place before something else can happen, an item can appear, or something can be used. Sometimes things can't be done unless it's a particular time of day. If faced with too many choices and not enough information to make an informed choice, you probably need to return later. This is especially true in games with an icon-based interface.

Often you will meet puzzles and problems that you can't seem to solve. Sometimes this is because you still haven't done, met, discovered, or found something yet, but other times it's because you're just plain tired or stumped. Letting the problem slush around in your mind for a while—not concentrating on it—often helps. How can you tell the difference between the two? Often, you can't.
 11. *Ask for help.* What's unsolvable to one person may be obvious to another. Other people can have very different insights into a problem, and can help



you over a particularly rough spot. Fresh perspective can jump-start creativity. You may even find someone who has already solved the problem. Of course, there is always this book.

12. *Don't play too long.* One of the wonders of computer adventure games is that they can take you to another place and time, give you a different identity, and then immerse you in the experience. At its best, the experience can be like being inside an animated movie, but it can become addictive. You can find yourself playing for hours upon long hours, not knowing where the time went. Worse, if you play too long at a stretch, there is always the possibility of eye strain, stiff necks, headaches, or repetitive motion ailments. Too much playing can also strain your personal relationships. Give your body and mind a break. Take it easy; a game, no matter how good, doesn't have to be solved in a day. Always remember—it's only a game.

We're going to sign off now. Next up is the note that John Williams found attached to a basket that snowy day in 1984. It's Roger Wilco's plea to our time.

Much of the fun of computer adventure games lies not just in the stories themselves, but in overcoming the obstacles lurking between you and the finish. It's one of the rare true cases of the journey being its own reward.

Time to hit the road. We'll be back after Chapter 1.

Peter Spear
Jeremy Spear
Mill Valley, California
March 1993

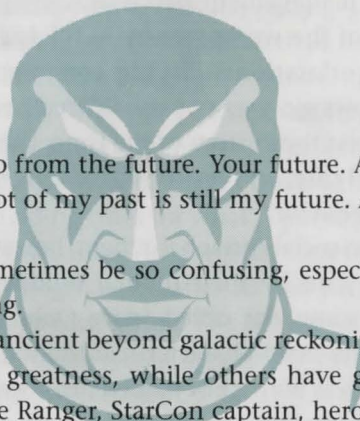
A Message From Beyond Space and Time

Here's a big, big hello from the future. Your future. And while a lot of the future is already my past, a lot of my past is still my future. And I'd like to keep it that way.

Oh, time travel can sometimes be so confusing, especially when you really don't know what you're doing.

There is an old saying, ancient beyond galactic reckoning, which asserts that some beings strive to attain greatness, while others have greatness thrust upon them. I'm Roger Wilco, Space Ranger, StarCon captain, hero of Xenon, rescuer of the galaxy, savior of the universe—and probably all of Time and Space as we know it. I've learned that greatness can also dump itself on the unwary like a commode that's had too much to eat and drink. I should know, because when Fortune went searching for a hero one fateful night, it flushed me out.

Although just a janitor on the research starship *Arcada* at the time, I was the head janitor and sanitation engineer second class. Despite my entry-level station, I was on the ConFederation Service fast track to the top. By the time I retired, I would, with luck, be a master maintenance engineer, perhaps even decorated with the





fabled Reversed Half-Moon Crescent, and my name inscribed on the solid brick outhouse walls of the Sanitation Engineering Hall of Fame. Little did I know what lay ahead, and how my once ordinary human ambitions would be washed away by a flood of interstellar events, like dirty socks in a high-detergent bath.

It is because of those events that I'm contacting you. Those events, and my gradual understanding over the years of the seemingly random and impersonal chaos that has swirled me about was not only predicted ages ago, *but will not exist at all unless I send you the enclosed memoirs*. Nor will I. Reality itself as I know it will disappear.

To reveal the future to you—to reveal it to anyone—is undeniably dangerous. Any action performed in the past, no matter how trivial, can cause profound changes to the future—especially actions performed when one is certain of their outcome.

Yet, I must send you these imperfectly composed recollections. Let me explain why.

There is a story in the Wilco family that has been passed down through more centuries than it is safe to admit. My family originated in a small yellow star system, a hidden wart on an obscure galactic arm. Its name is Terra III. You might recognize the location. There, Grandma and Grandpa Wilco (x-number of times removed) were both management peons at some great corporation. They each relieved the stresses of the workplace by indulging in nonproductive behavior on their corporate workstations. Playing computer games during their breaks and meal periods, however, was not considered proper behavior by their superiors and betters. As was the custom of the time, they were both stripped of their jobs, income, medical care, and prospects for long-term survival as punishment for their antisocial behavior.

It must have been social enough for them, however, as they fell deeply in love, a love bonded most firm by their mutual fondness for a particular computer entertainment. That game was called Space Quest, and Grandpop was initially drawn to it because the main character had the same name as he—Roger Wilco. When their first child was born, they named her Roger Wilco in honor of their love and in defiance of the corporate scum who had driven them into the streets. And as a result, it is tradition in the Wilco family to name a child in each generation, Roger. I'm the latest. (Actually, my son Roger is the latest, but he hasn't been born yet.)

Time travel implies paradoxes. It is conceivable (so to speak) to travel backward in time to become one's own ancestor. Or to travel ahead to meet one's own descendant—I should know; I have, and it is an experience most eerie. Likewise, someone could go back and kill their own grandfather or grandmother, or even prevent the inventor of time travel from discovering how to do so. Playing stock markets, betting on sporting events, or predicting next week's stars or hits or TalkVid



topics becomes a breeze. After all, hindsight is always perfect, especially when you've had the foresight to turn your hindsight into foresight through time travel.

The paradoxes, of course, exist because these events and actions must have previously existed in the time traveler's past, yet cannot happen until the time traveler performs them in the future. If your grandmother didn't exist already, how can you exist to kill her? If you never adopted that stray mutt, who's that making a mess on your leg?

Once, on the moon of Pestulon, I was able to rescue from enslavement a pair of swineoids from the Andromeda galaxy. They called themselves the Two Guys from Andromeda, and were computer programmers—computer *game* programmers. I was able to deliver them safely—by means of a defective hyperspace jump—to a planet which I'm sure was Terra III. They, in return and in gratitude, swore to immortalize me by making me the star of my own electronic game. Flabbergasted, I thanked them and departed. In the years since, I have not seen or heard from the Two Guys again.

Nor in this universe, where absolutely everyone who has ever had a creative thought has been either serialized on Patrician Broadcasting or had their sounds bitten on the Cosmic News Network, have I ever seen mention of them. Since they were also the creators of the phenomenally popular Astro Chicken—The Mindless Video Game—the odds of this happening (not happening?) are beyond my modest skills to compute. They are most likely even greater than that.

When you think about all this, you begin to understand how strange these facts are: our universe here in the future may be vast and huge, but it's not that big. Somewhere in the intergalactic shopping malls and galleria of the Void, I should have run across the Guys or the game. And I have been looking. Often. On the other hand, I do possess a book providing clues for what is purported to be a game about me, a game created by Two Guys from Andromeda. That book details specifics of events that happened to this Roger Wilco after he had parted company from the swineoids, but had not yet happened to me. The book is so old that it is actually a paper book. A tight plastoid covering had apparently preserved it perfectly as it languished over the centuries in CLOSEOUT bins in every obscure mall in the galaxy.

That was until last year, when excavations on Terra III revealed a hoard of ancient software, much of it still in its original plastoid. Amongst that priceless trove was a box titled Space Quest I: The Sarien Encounter. It is possibly the very game my grandfolks fell in love over. Pictured on that box were the game's purported authors—two swineoids who called themselves Two Guys from Andromeda. Although odor has not been preserved over the centuries, they resemble in every physical detail the beings I rescued, and who promised to write a computer game about me. However, the disks detail events that happened to me *before* I met



the Two Guys, events of which they should have no knowledge, events that we had never discussed.

So how could the swineoids write factually about a Roger Wilco they knew nothing about in that adventure? And while the actual physical evidence has not yet been found (just the clue books), how could they tell about what would happen to me not just in their future, but in my future, in Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers and in The Last Mutation, and Space Quest XII, and all the other games that must have once existed to fill that numbered series? How?

In every case, their details are uncannily accurate. This is especially so in the final Space Quest title found in that archaeological dig—Space Quest III: The Pirates of Pestulon. It's the very game (with the same inaccurate title!) that the Two Guys had promised to create about me.

I have a theory, one that I have trouble believing, but cannot at the risk of my very existence not believe. It goes like this: We all know that travel through time is possible. I've done it, and often. In fact, it is only through time travel that I am able to deliver this information (and the recollections that follow) to you at all. What I think happened when the Two Guys and I warped randomly through hyperspace, short-circuiting all the way to Terra III, is that we generated our own time rip and ended up returning to reality sometime late in the twentieth century, which is where I left them. This would explain why—although I was certain that I had landed on Terra III—the place seemed backward and different from all of the PBS docuvids I had seen of it. The malfunctioning warp motivator would also account for my ripping back to my own era when I warped away from there.

That's obvious. So what?

The so what is that there is no way for the Two Guys that I left on Terra III to write anything but The Pirates of Pestulon. No way at all. And if Space Quest I: The Sarien Encounter is never written, my grandparents will never meet and fall in love. And have children. Which means no me. And if this situation becomes real, I cease existing so quickly, it will be as if I never did. Which I wouldn't have done. (This also means you're not reading this, because I will have never composed it. But since I am composing it, I still exist for the moment—another one of time travel's little paradoxes.)

All of this confusing logic becomes not just true, but reality itself, unless the Two Guys get to know my stories. They know me, and they'll also know a source of easy buckazoids when they see it. And they'll write that original Space Quest game. Sierra On-Line—you folks, if my calculations are correct—will publish it.

Please.

Some day, Two Guys from Andromeda will come to your door. If you've never met a swineoid before, don't be too alarmed; they are placid and harmless creatures with long flat, slitted snouts, pointy ears, and bristly hair. Their choice of bath condiments leaves much to be desired, however. They will tell you of how Roger

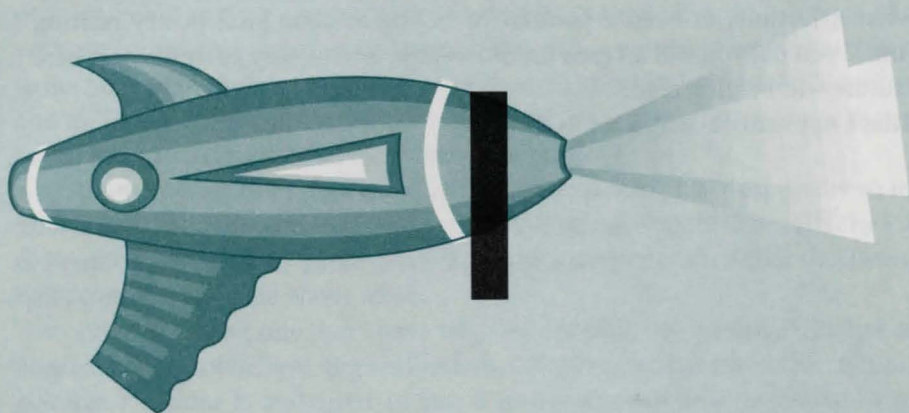
Wilco rescued them from eternal slavery at the saliva slick hands of ScumSoftSoftware, and how they have either written, or want to write, a game about their adventure. Welcome them with a hug from me, and give them whatever they want—fame, fortune, or even a permanent billing at your local poetry reciting coliseum. If you do, you will all earn untold wealth, and history as we know it here in the future will be preserved.

That's not really asking a lot, is it?

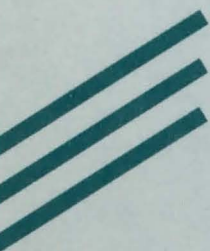
A Message
From Beyond
Space and
Time



P A R T



Space Quest I: The Sarien Encounter





The Sarien Encounter

The Calamarioid entwined the unconscious woman with just two of its eight suckered tentacles. Another pair waved a purloined vial containing the Elixir of Practical Immortality, which the struggling researcher had perfected just moments before. Its turquoise glow was undiminished despite the sudden change of ownership. The alien menace laughed a shriek of victory, sounding much like a set of poorly adjusted ground vehicle breaks, metal on metal without any shame.

The woman awoke, saw just what manner of foul creature had attacked her, and began struggling. Another slime-coated tentacle covered her mouth, stifling a scream, while still another ripped off her laboratory smock, revealing firm, fit flesh clad only in a G-string and a halter of black latex and leather. Obviously, the creature was attempting to distract me.

"I have won, Roger Wilco! I have won! I shall live practically forever! The entire galaxy—nay, the entire universe—shall bow before me and become my slaves. This woman shall be my toy!" Its laughter screeched still higher, and the appendage holding her garments tossed them aside, giving me an idea of just what kind of toy he meant.

"Unhand her, you sub-sentient beast," I growled, "or I'll blast you into subatomic garbage. And while you're at it, hand over that test tube." My hands hung loosely at my sides, poised inches from the pearl handles of twin, holstered ion blasters. My hard eyes never left the two remaining tentacles and the particle rifle they held. The nasty could do a lot with its eight arms, but could it pull a trigger faster than I could draw? We'd know soon enough.

"I hear you're good Wilco. I hear you're fast. Your threats don't scare me." The Calamarioid began leveling his weapon.



"This cyberspace isn't big enough for the two of us, Wilco. Let's see how fast you really are. Draw!"

I slapped leather.

The universe exploded.

I fell out of bed.

"Ouch!" I grunted. "Just when I was getting to the good part." Shaking my bruised head, I groped around in the dark for a solid handhold to haul myself off the deck of the Federation research starship *Arcada*. All my hands found was the empty cleaning bucket, which had awakened me when it fell from the shelf above my inflato-cot. The entire vessel was shaking, and there was a booming in my head that wouldn't go away.

"Go away!" I told it anyway. I was answered with another series of thumps and rumbles. From outside the door came the sounds of people running, shouting, or making the appropriate panicked noises their particular species defaulted to in times of stress. I wondered briefly if yesterday's Going Home party had started up again.

I finally made it to my feet, grumbled to the EnvironComp to activate the lighting system, and when it didn't, fumbled for the door plate. As the panel slid open, the harsh blue glare of the corridor lights blinded me briefly. I blinked a few times and stepped out of the Sanitation Engineering Supply Depot HQ, and into chaos.

Actually, I had been napping in the head janitor's closet (and depository of old mops); but it was *my* closet, and I felt I could call it anything I wanted. Permanent latrine duty on a starship is not the galaxy's most exciting job, but the Service does classify the position as management training, and the career possibilities (assuming you have the right connections) are infinite. To be sure, I didn't have the right connections then, but get them I would. In the meantime, I scrubbed and swabbed whatever spots I couldn't ignore any longer, and hoped that the others would disappear due to my benign neglect. I filled the rest of my time napping frequently, dreaming, and learning about life. It's amazing the wisdom that can be found in lavatories, scrawled in the cracks between tiles. My dreams were those of any young male who'd shipped out for the first time in his life. Danger, heroics, and fems in distress (and not much else!). It's amusing to me (in a macabre way) that the transition from my chosen career path to that of galactic savior came at the climax of one of those nocturnal fantasies.

The sights, sounds, and smells in Alpha corridor were the first things to assault me. A language droid sped past my head as if I weren't there, twittering in several languages simultaneously. I needed no translator to tell me that it was fleeing from someone—or something. The unmistakable odors of ion blasters and charred protein mass made my nostrils itch. The air was filled with a choking stench so



thick I could swallow it. That's how it is when death is in the air. A red turbo info-panel was flashing "RED ALERT" over and over and over. I think it meant it.

Over the ship's intercom came the terror-filled voice of someone shouting for help. The voice was replaced suddenly by the sound of a pulse rifle blast and then silence. Behind all of this sensory overload came the soothing synthesized voice of the *Arcada's* auto-destruct mech calmly intoning, "This is a public service announcement from Smith and Wesson, manufacturers of premium weapons for over a millennium. The self-destruct mechanism on this vessel is now operational. There are 15 minutes to detonation. Please proceed calmly, and in single file to the nearest exit. Have a nice day. Tomorrow has been canceled."

I had to get to an escape pod, that much, at least was clear. It was three levels below, accessible only by elevator. I turned left, starting for the nearest of the *Arcada's* lifts. Instantly I spied trouble 20 meters down the corridor: a pair of armed soldiers in full combat armor, blood red, hardened Impervo-Spandex, dense enough to withstand all but the most powerful weapon attacks. Even while registering the danger, I noted that the armor was coated with No-Sticko, which also made them impervious to ordinary stains, dirt, and body odor. Those uniforms made laundry detail a breeze for janitors assigned to combat ships. Since the *Arcada* was not one of those ships, then this must be the enemy. Judging from the insectoid helmets the soldiers were wearing, they could only be the dreaded Sarien Menace. The innocent *Arcada* had been attacked by a nearly indestructible Mantis-class StarRipper, and the Sariens take no prisoners.

Reversing myself in mid-stride, I turned and dashed in the opposite direction, hoping that the Sariens hadn't noticed me. I knew that if they did, I was dead snarl meat. Racing past the RED ALERT sign, still flashing its final message, I ran into the ship's Data Archive. It was deserted except for a small retrieval 'bot, and the door on the far side of the room was unblocked. There was another elevator beyond that door. As I rushed to that exit, another series of what I now knew to be explosions nearly sent me sprawling. Staggering and stumbling, I retained my upright position, but lost most of my composure. No sooner had I had stepped out into the opposite corridor when the sound of marching boots began approaching. At once, I ducked back into the Data Archive, breathing heavily. As the door behind me closed and locked, the other one across the room swooshed open.

This is it, Roger, I thought. You're heading for that big roundup in the sky! Instead of Mantis-masked death, however, the lab-smocked form of one of the *Arcada's* science Elders stumbled in. His hands were clutched to his chest as if holding something in, and red liquid was oozing out between his fingers. The man collapsed to the floor, and at once a crimson puddle began forming around him. As I rushed to his side to see if there was anything I could do to help, the Elder raised himself on an elbow.



"The Star Generator," he gurgled. "They're after the Star Generator! Someone must stop them. Oh, it hurts so much...so much." The man's eyes clouded, then cleared for a moment. He caught his breath, seemed to notice me for the first time, and rolled his eyes towards the banks of data cartridges. Pointing with his free arm, he groaned, "Astral Bodies...Astral Bodies...Astral Bodies...." With each repetition, his voice grew weaker, until his life faded out with the final syllable. His body splayed, as the now lifeless arm gave way, and the Elder tumbled the last few inches face down to the deck.

So that's what this raid is all about, I thought. Those insectoid scum want the Star Generator! I wonder what it does? The Star Generator Project was the reason for the *Arcada's* extended mission. Ship rumor had it that it was a device that could turn suns into humongous blinking Advertto-Stars, extolling the virtues of Inter-Galactic peace and harmony, Arcturian fungus worm honey, or nacho-flavored froot loops.

I also read between the tile cracks that the Star Generator had the power to convert ordinary sunlight into kegs of ice cold Canopus Happy Brew. Either explanation seemed plausible.

There was nothing I could do for the man except close his eyes and step away. Wiping my hands on a clean part of his lab coat, I mused, *Astral Bodies? What does that mean? I bet it must be the title of one of the data carts. I'd better check it out.*

There was a standard retrieval console in the room, situated just in front of the data cart banks. I made myself comfortable, activated the unit's touch screen, and was happy to see the machine's input pad slide into view. At least the unit's power was still working. A copy of the Library Catalogue was within reach, and it was easy work looking up the code sequence for the title uttered in the man's last breaths. I punched it in, stabbed the enter key, and waited nervously while the retrieval 'bot recovered the cart in question. In the background, I could hear the golden throated auto-destructo voice crooning, "There are 13 minutes to detonation...blah...blah...blah." My insides began to feel very loose. When the 'bot finally brought the cart to me, I almost ripped it out of the mech's arms, only to find that the view unit was out of order.

"By the public potties of Polaris!" I exclaimed. But, there was no time left for regrets. I heard the countdown again, "...12 minutes, and still counting, to detonation. Do you know where your escape route is?" I considered whether or not to take the data cart. *It's probably full of formulas and big words, with very few pictures that I can understand,* I thought. *I'd better hold on to the cart anyway. It must be important.*

That settled, I had to decide fast which route to take to the escape pods. I had encountered Sarien troopers everywhere I had run so far, so I flipped an imaginary buckazoid, dropped it, and when I picked it up discovered I had lost the toss. At least that meant I wasn't going to have to step over the dead man's body. Away from the corpse, and the Sariens who'd shot him, was the direction of my flight. It was a route that would also take me directly past the Star Generator Lab.



I listened for a moment at the door, and heard no sounds from the other side. With any luck, those Sariens might have moved on elsewhere. Taking a deep breath—which I thought might be my last—I opened the door. No Sariens. Something worse.

A lime-and-brown uniform oozing blood lay spread-eagled in the corridor just beyond the lift doors. The person wearing it was limp and motionless. There was entirely too much blood, and the tech's face was entirely the wrong shade of pale. I was looking at death's face for the second time in minutes. Repetition didn't make it any easier.

I knew the man. This was to have been Jerzy's last tour of duty, and he was planning to celebrate by having a gender-change operation during the voyage home. He wanted to surprise his wife.

Trying to ignore my own pangs of loneliness and nausea, I hesitantly felt around the body attempting to find a pulse or some sign of life. My search was futile. Jerzy was beyond help, but I did notice a keycard sticking out of one of his pockets. The blood that smeared it could not cover the fact that it was a high-security key for accessing the *Arcada's* pod bays. I took it, knowing Jerzy wouldn't be needing it anymore.

My nausea was interrupted by the sound of Smith and Wesson, droning through the corridors like a bad infomercial to tell me that there were now ten minutes until I wouldn't be needing that key either. Rising, I turned to enter the elevator that the tech had failed to reach. As the doors opened, I caught sight of more Sarien soldiers rounding the corridor. Slipping quickly inside the lift, I pressed the down panel and made my escape.



Countdown to Catastrophe

The scene on Beta deck was even worse than the one on Alpha. Dead—murdered—bodies lay heaped and scattered all around the corridor. The stench matched the sight, and as I moved off to my left, I tried to avoid looking at the blank eyes of my former shipmates. True, for most of them the head janitor was someone beneath notice, but I did make some of their more private moments a little more pleasant. There was a bond between us that went deeper than semi-regular renewals of bathroom tissue *du jour*.

The Star Generator Lab was situated next to the elevator I stepped out of. Its door had disappeared, blasted to sub-atomic bits by the invaders. Once again, I heard the tramp of their approach. Ducking inside the Lab, I held my breath while they marched by. As they passed, I heard one of the invaders say it hoped to finish the clean-up operation quickly so they could safely return to the *Deltaur* before the



Arcada blew. I now knew the name of the ship that had attacked us, although I suspected it was a fact that would do me absolutely no good.

When the Sariens had finally gone, a glance around the top-secret facility that had been the purpose of our expedition showed me another scene of death and destruction. More bodies lay crisped or ripped or dismembered. The room was full of machines and displays that were totally meaningless to me—but that wasn't surprising. In the center of the room, though, were the remnants of a mechanical cradle that must have recently held a much larger device. It was now empty. A small sign lay crumpled in the wreckage. It said:

TOP SECRET

STAR GENERATOR

DO NOT TOUCH

THIS MEANS YOU

So that was it; the Sariens now had the Star Generator. A closer look at the cradle revealed a small device still magnetically attached to it. It was solid, it was heavy, and looked like it might make a good weapon. So, I took it. I didn't know what I would do with it if I needed a weapon, but I took it anyway. Then, after carefully listening and peeking around the doorway, I crept back out into Beta corridor and continued on away from the elevator.

The doomsday voice crooned smugly, "...nine minutes to detonation. This might be a good time to make sure your life insurance is up to date."

Moving as fast as I dared, dodging Sariens all the way, surprisingly maintaining my balance throughout another series of ship-shaking explosions, I trotted down Beta corridor, passing under the Data Archive, and found the new elevator I was seeking—the one that would drop me down to Gamma level. There, I would be able to access the escape bays.

The elevator was unguarded. As I stepped off, the ubiquitous cybernetic voice intoned, "...six minutes to detonation. For anyone wishing to remain on board, complimentary drinks and hors d'oeuvres will be served in the Captain's lounge."

The part of Gamma level I had entered was essentially one large research and development area. I knew this from the number of laboratory coats scattered about, and the large amounts of highly sugared, partially eaten snack foods strewn haphazardly over both benches and equipment. There were no signs of death or destruction, much to the relief of my poor intestines. Another elevator, the one that led to the airlock, was at the far end of the lab.



I let myself relax a little then, feeling foolishly safe with salvation apparently close at hand. Halfway across the lab, completely in the open, I was surprised by Sarien sounds coming from the lift I had just left. My frightened scan of the area showed no doors to escape through. In desperation, I dashed for and crouched behind the nearest large object I could spot. Then I closed my eyes figuring that if I couldn't see the Sariens, they couldn't see me. It worked. When the attackers passed, I emerged from my hidey-hole, and bolted straight for the airlock elevator. The auto-destructo voice chimed a cheerful, "...There are only five minutes left to do your holiday shopping."

I almost blew it. In my haste to reach the final elevator, I nearly rushed past a wide control panel lurking with unconcealed obviousness next to the lift. I think it was the brightly colored lights on the panel that attracted my attention—I've always been attracted to colored bulbs, especially orange ones. For whatever subconscious reason, I did stop long enough to sniff the silicon and take in the light show. Far out. Tiny words labeled a set of controls "Bay Doors," with separate buttons for Open and Close.

Hmm, I pondered. If the bay doors are shut, I won't be able to escape. Maybe I should press the Open button? Why not? As soon as I did, a large window above the panel revealed the gargantuan doors slowly sliding open. *I guessed right for a change!* I congratulated myself. *I think I'd better get down the elevator.* As I moved over to the lift doors, Ms. Smith (or, perhaps, Ms. Wesson) announced, "There are now four minutes left until self-destruction. We'll be right back after these important messages."

I ignored the *Arcada's* last commercial break; while tempted, I had more important things to do. The blood still hadn't dried on Jerzy's keycard, but that didn't seem to matter to the card scanner. Moments later I was standing in the *Arcada's* airlock control center, with the escape pods just on the other side of a final, vacuum-proof hatch.

First, I needed a space suit. Breathing hard vacuum isn't something humans adjust to easily, so it seemed advisable to dress for the occasion. Opening the space suit closet, I found to my great joy and relief that there was still one suit available, a multi-species, multi-gender, one-size-fits-all economy model. I had worn suits such as these only in my dreams, but I knew that they were put on one leg at a time. The helmet screwed on next, and if there had been both time and a mirror, I would have admired the figure I cut just then—Roger Wilco, Space Dude.

"There are three minutes until detonation. Please make sure that your seatbelts are fastened securely, and your seats are in their full and upright positions. On behalf of your crew here on the *Arcada*, we hope you have had a pleasant trip."

Next to the space suit closet was a small equipment locker. Still hurrying, I pressed the activation button, and a drawer slid silently out. I didn't know what I'd find, maybe rations, or a map, or a portable matter displacement module, but all



that was left there was a small gadget that looked remarkably like something I had never seen before in my life. I took it; if I did escape safely, I could always sell it. It had a single on/off switch, but I didn't have time to figure out how to make it work.

The control panel in the room indicated that the launch bay was decompressed. Tapping knuckles on my helmet for good luck, I went to the airlock doors and depressed the button that would open them.



Into Deep Space...

"There are now two minutes until detonation." With that announcement, Smith and Wesson's finest launched itself into a sweet duet, an admirable rendition of "Auld Lang Syne." But I was too busy to enjoy the hymn. Running as fast as the space suit would allow, I sprinted for the open door of what seemed to be the last escape pod. After pulling myself through, the hatch swung shut behind me. There was a single seat inside, with lots and lots of incomprehensible dials and gauges surrounding it, and what looked like a joystick-type throttle, and a bunch of buttons in front of it. I looked at them closely: one read "Power," another indicated "Auto-Nav," and a third challenged "Do Not Touch or You Will Be Sorry!" Even I could figure out what that meant.

"There are now....oops, sorry....there is now one minute until detonation. Live long and prosper!"

There was less than no time to lose. I didn't really know what I was doing, but the worse that could happen if I made a mistake was that I would die. Even that would be better than sticking around for the *Arcada's* self-destruction.

Reaching over my shoulder, I slapped the pod's seatbelt into place. "Safety First" is the motto of all Sanitation Engineers. Reaching up, I decisively stabbed the power button. A satisfying surge of ultra sub-nucleonic power vibrated through the pod, demanding release.

"Alright, pardner. Let's see what you've got," I adlibbed somewhat over-dramatically. I took a firm grip of both my courage and the throttle, and then slammed the throttle forward. Like an overripe zit on Saturday night, the brave little pod burst from the belly of the doomed *Arcada*.

"Ya hoo, ride 'em mama!" I screamed in a combination of joy, fear, and emotional release. The pod sped through space like a wild Eronian equusaur in heat.

"There are now 30 seconds until final detonation."

There are sights in this fantastic universe that sear the brains of sentients. Size and scale are a major part of it; a Capon-class starship is not a small craft. Formerly home to thousands of beings, the *Arcada* was still dwarfed by the *Deltaur*, which straddled it in an obscene mechanical union. Its violation of the innocent space



bird complete, the Sarien war cruiser extracted itself from the mocking embrace and thrust itself away.

"There are now only five seconds until final detonation. It sure was real. Until next time, TTFN. Ta ta for now!"

There is no sound in space. Like a momentary nova, the *Arcada* died a brilliant and silent death. I screamed, and no one heard me. At the sight of the horror and grandeur of it all, I wished I had a cam pellet implanted in me to record it for "The Galaxy's Swellest Home Vidoids." The *Arcada* was exploding behind me; I prayed that the pod had enough speed in her to outrun the debris.

She did, and after a few hyper-moments I was faced with the problem of flying the craft. Once again, I looked at the dizzying array of lights, gauges, levers, and buttons. They looked neat, but I hadn't a clue of what to do with any of them. That's when I remembered the Auto-Nav button on the eye-level panel partially blocking my view of the interspatial pyrotechnics. My choices had realistically come down to either that or the Do Not Touch button. I wasn't sure what Auto-Nav did, but I touched it anyway. At once a 3-D holographic display materialized in front of me in the shape of a rotating planet. Superimposed over it were the words "Kerona: a leisure time development of Arrakis Corp—Building better worlds through dehydration!" In a few moments the display faded, and the pod kicked its engines into hyperwarp. Slammed back into my seat by the wallop of the motors, all I could do was relax and enjoy the interstellar light show. It was goofusly swell.



Crashed Out on Kerona

Hours later, I emerged back into real-time real-space, the pod plunging uncontrollably through the atmosphere of a rocky, waterless planet. Performing a total flame-out, engulfed in a supersonic conflagration, my craft plummeted recklessly to the surface of Kerona.

"Oh, ship!" I blurted. "I think we're in trouble."

The pod didn't answer me.

My life flashed before my eyes. The great roundup in the sky waited for me at ground level. However, the trouble with having led a completely unremarkable and uneventful existence until the Sarien sneak attack (with the exception of one startling quarter hour in a broom closet with Cornucopia Agricorp and her clones while we were all attending sanitation engineering preschool), was that this flashback only took a second or two at the most, and seemed like a lot less. Unable to avoid looking abrupt termination directly in its eye through an escape into nostalgia, I was forced to shut my eyes tight and scream uncontrollably. My



screaming kept me occupied and as a result I have absolutely no idea of how the pod landed safely. The craft felt like it bounced a few times, and spun around for several revolutions, before bottoming out to its final stop. Thank the Eternal Entity for seatbelts!

When my eyes finally opened, instead of finding myself at the Pearly Transporter Gates, I found myself still in one piece—and in need of a fresh set of clothes. This was not a minor matter, to be sure, but for the time being I could do nothing about the situation.

It took the better part of an hour before my whimpering and screaming finally ceased, and I was able to get my breath back and under control. While glancing outside, I noticed the escape vehicle's viewshield was cracked and broken through in several places. The landscape it revealed was also for the most part cracked and crevassed sand mixed with rocks, harsh orange sunlight, and no visible water at all. Not an inviting sight by any means, but it seemed preferable to staying strapped into a pod that contained no visible apparatus labeled "Communicator."

The seatbelt release mechanism opened the vessel's hatch, and I was able to squirm my way outside. After over half a year in space, I had an entire planet beneath my feet. Of course, it was nearly all sand, but most planets do not continually communicate the eternal shiver that the sub-spatial engines of the *Arcada* did. Or so I'm told.

As I glanced at that reddish sand, my eye was caught by the glint of a piece of the pod's broken window lying on the ground. It made an acceptable mirror, but as I held it in my hand, the reflection it cast back was not that of the romantic figure I had always fantasized, but one of a soiled, tear-streaked, and very frightened young janitor. Nothing in my sanitation training had prepared me for what I had just survived, and what I suspected I was about to face. An empty, alien desert with neither map, transport, nor water, bodes poorly for one's long-term prospects. Even so, the piece of glass went into a small pocket of the space suit as a good luck token of my survival, and as a convenient talisman to invoke a happy conclusion to my situation.

The water crisis was quickly solved. A search of the ruined pod's interior turned up one government-issue survival kit. The kit held a small knife of many blades and functions, and a compressed bottle of dehydrated water. The water can contained the equivalent of ten gallons of liquid, and the Xenon army knife would do anything, from carving my initials in trees to picking teeth and efficiently sawing through frozen ichthyoids. Of course, there were neither trees, food, nor fish-on-ice anywhere to be seen, nor likely to be found. No matter; a quick glug of water rinsed the moldy cotton dryness from my mouth and washed away my blues. I had to remove the space helmet I was still wearing in order to do so, but my suit's readings had already informed me that the air was acceptable to breathe.



I used that moment to check out my surroundings. The pod had finished its bounding skid nose first in a soft ridge of sand. To the north, the ground dropped off into cliffs stretching straight down for a hundred meters or more. To the south and west, sand dunes shimmered heat waves for as far as the eye could see. There seemed little hope in those directions either. East of where I stood, however, there appeared to be a line of cliffs breaking up the sandy horizon. They might, at least, provide me some shade and a higher vantage point. Perhaps I'd find a cave in which to rest for a bit. Basic geography and good eyesight were making my travel plans for me.

No sooner had I put my helmet back on and begun my hike, than my decision was reinforced by the local wildlife. Like a newly active volcano suffering dry heaves, the sand behind me burst into the sky with a raspy roar. I turned to look at the noise, and decided that I had better things to do than gawk. Running came to mind at once. Five meters of sandworm screaming at the sky will do that to you. Especially sandworms with large teeth. Lots of large teeth. Straight toward the cliffs I fled, and as I did so, the soft sand changed to harder stuff, and finally to a surface of rock covered with just the hint of sand. No worm, no matter how big, was likely to burrow through rock. By the time I got close enough to register that the cliffs were not really cliffs at all, I felt safe enough to stop sprinting. In the distance, the sandworm's screams were joined by those of others. Lots of others. I even thought I heard the sound of crunching metal, followed soon by the rumble of a gigantic belch. So much for returning to the escape pod, or the open desert.



The Droid of Death

What had initially appeared to be cliffs turned out to be the skeleton of some gigantic beast. Its remains loomed high above me, and stretched over the ground for hundreds of meters. At first I thought it might be a worm's skeleton, but realized that worms don't have bones. Of course, the sandworms of Keronia might have bones, but the beast that had died where I was standing also had legs, claws, and (as I eventually discovered) a skull the size of my dormitory level at Sanitation Engineers of Xenon University—good old SEX U. Anyway, the bones of a bleached beast were preferable to the jaws of what lived in the sand.

Making sure that I stayed close to the skeleton, I began exploring my way around it in hope of finding a safe, shady spot in which to hole up for a few hours. I skirted my way south, finding no shelter, but soon encountering occasional clumps of tough, purplish vegetation. They didn't smell all that appetizing, and the leaves exuded a thick substance of extreme stick-to-it-ivity. I picked a few of the sticky leaves, rolled them in a small ball, and took them with me. If the need for



food became extreme, I would attempt to eat them. If they poisoned me, it would be preferable to dying from starvation. At least, that's what I told myself, and the thought made me feel a little more secure.

Ah, security; there was to be none for me that day. As I continued on my scout of the boney infrastructure, a new sound seared through the Keronian sky and whistled to a dusty splash-down. At first my spirits soared, sure it was a Federation rescue pod coming to take me home to Xenon. My hopes were dashed. As the dust settled, it became quite clear that my escape from the *Arcada* had not gone unnoticed. An armored killer spider droid began transforming itself from its atmosphere entry form into its six-legged hunter/destroyer form. Spider droid action figures had been one of my favorite childhood dolls, and the experience of thousands of hours of my fantasizing snuffing Spittle Slimes of Suxtus VII with them left no doubt that I was some Sarien's designated snuffee.

All I could do was run. I had no weapons, and my initial scream of terror scared it not an iota. Back around the skeleton I dashed, my head start diminishing with each stride. From behind, I could hear the droid's servos slide contentedly in their well-oiled and annoyingly over-efficient manner. It seemed to be humming to itself in the anticipation of eliminating me. When I tripped over a tuft of sand in my panicked flight, my genetically disadvantaged level of dexterity reminded me yet again of why I had never qualified for the space scouts, much less the fabled Space Rangers.

But abject fear has a way of kicking a being in the butt, and I scrambled onward, spying as I did the half-buried behind of the monster I had been exploring when the droid arrived. It was hard to miss: only two or three body lengths in front of me, the spine of the unknown beast made a broken ramp up from the sand. *Salvation!* I marveled. *If I can only reach the skeleton in time.* My years of playing innocent droid games evidently had some value because I knew that spider droids are specialized for ground warfare and hunting. They are programmed to stay away from elevated places, since they are not considered high technology at all. This new-found awareness of my own knowledge gave me hope. It gave me strength. And it gave me enough speed to make it to high ground before the droid got to me. Once again, I was rewarded with a moment of safety, and a reminder that a fresh change of clothes was becoming an environmental necessity.

While the droid waited for me at the base of the skeleton, filling its synthetic life with visions of my demise, it was obvious that the only way for me to continue was upward, following the backbone and seeing where it took me. Perhaps there might be a way to avoid my nemesis further on.

Up and up the spine continued, like a boney freeway built by sentients, with ribs for support. At its crest, the skeleton formed a narrow natural bridge spanning a distance of 20 meters or so. As I reached it, the deadly droid—sensing my presence above and out of reach—began scurrying about beneath, waiting for the slip that



would plunge me down to the sand. As I've noted before, my lack of adequate dexterity is offset somewhat by my lack of balance. Pausing for a moment, deciding whether to crawl across or attempt walking, I brushed against a loose piece of spine. My touch was almost enough to send it crashing down. It just teetered there, and for a few moments I pondered whether I could drop it on the droid, and if it might crush the machine.

Why not? I decided. *Why not?* Why not indeed! Waiting until the droid was directly below me, I gave the vertebrate a firm shove. I missed, which didn't surprise me too much because I never have had very good aim. But it felt good to try, and that in itself was important to me just then.

The spinal bridge, on the other hand, did little for my self-confidence. I baby-stepped across with my eyes open; I could feel the old bones crack audibly from the weight of my passage. Continuing on, I prayed that I wouldn't have to make that crossing a second time, and that the path in front of me would remain solid. For the most part, my prayers were answered. I made slow passage along that skeletal pathway until I spied something glittering in the strong sunlight. It was difficult to make out in the glare, but it appeared to be a large metallic or glass sign, or perhaps a small door. The artifact was not a natural creation, and my hopes inflated yet again in anticipation of meeting another intelligent life form, one that could help me leave Kerona and return home.

It turned out to be a life form that likes to leave empty elevator shafts hidden about as welcoming mats for strangers. Strangers like myself. I fell for the trap. In mid-step, an apparent piece of solid bone vanished beneath me and I plummeted down. I was so surprised that, when my life attempted to flash before my eyes for the second time in as many hours, I drew a blank.

The nice thing about standard-issue space suits today is that when they sense imminent impact, a high-capacity force field pulses on for some small slice of a second. I don't know exactly how long the force field lasted, but it was long enough to absorb, deaden, and deflect most of the force that would turn the falling Roger Wilcos of the universe into random smears and puddles. Not *all* of the impact, mind you, but enough. Bruised, shaken, and not at all sure that all my bodily parts were still attached, I tottered to my feet, essentially alive. I hurt, but I was still breathing. Things could have been worse.



Crisis (After Crisis) Under Kerona

The shaft I had fallen into deposited me in a large cave—a big room really, with just one passage leading off into a dimly lit interior. There seemed no way back up the shaft unless I had an anti-grav belt—which I didn't. Stalagmites and/or stalactites



were slowly growing from the cavern's floor, while their counterparts dripped down from an unseen ceiling. One of these growing rocks appeared to have had a piece broken off it once, and closer examination revealed that someone—or something—had attempted to reattach it to its base. They hadn't done a very good job; the piece of rock broke off again in my hand as I touched it. After briefly considering putting it back in place, I decided to take it with me. Not knowing what might be living in the near darkness ahead of me, it made sense to have something to throw. Thus fortified, I made my way deeper into Kerona's underground.

It is said that the longest journey begins with a single step. I'm not so sure about that, but I do know that I hadn't traveled terribly far when I heard movement in front of me. Pausing so that my eyes could adjust better to the faint illumination, I was able to discern the outline of a large grate embedded into the cavern floor. Sounds seemed to be coming from beneath the grate, and as I moved still closer, long tentacles began emerging from below. Tentacles with mouths. They may have been baby sand worms, except they looked uglier. Now, I'm not sure if the creature living (or caged) beneath that grate was hungry or not, but I suspected that it might be quite an unpleasant experience for me to find out for sure. However, since my only way forward was past the monster, I had to come up with something to occupy its attention.

Food seemed the obvious first choice, and the closest thing I had to that was the piece of sticky purple plant that I had collected on the surface as emergency rations. It was a fortuitous choice. I dropped it on the ground, just in front of the grate. The tentacles reached for it like relatives at a catered meal. Chomp, gnash, slurp; I've heard dogs with better eating habits. Hoping to distract the critter long enough for me to slip past, I had done something even better. That sticky plant must have gotten stickier because, not only did it attach firmly to the rocky floor, it also stuck to the tentacles. Someday I'll return to Kerona and patent that stuff; I could earn millions using it to make adhesive bandages that will actually stay on. Billions, even.

Beyond the grate was a door with no hole for a key, nor slot for a keycard. That didn't matter because I had neither anyway. Again I was blocked, and was beginning to form a suspicion that somebody didn't take too kindly to strangers. Next to the door, a small steam geyser was spouting off regularly at brief intervals and, as a consequence, was spraying me with hot, dirty water. This offended my highly trained *professional* sense of neatness and cleanliness. As I've noted, it was not a large geyser, and the spout opening seemed just a bit smaller than the tapered stalactite/stalagmite I was carrying. It made a perfect plug, shutting down the steamy annoyance at once. It also made a perfect key because as soon as the plug was in place, the closed door irised open as if to say, "Nice work, janitor. Cleanliness always pays."



New dangers awaited me on the other side of the door. The first appeared in the first chamber I entered. To one such as I, trained in the art and science of sanitary effectuation, a large, steaming, hissing pool of green liquid is an exciting sight. Cleaning solvent helped give meaning to my life, and never had I seen such a quantity of Janitor-In-A-Jug in one place before. While civilians might have mistaken the liquid for water, and sniffed or even tasted it (and been dissolved, perhaps fatally, along with any dirt or grime on them), *I* knew enough to avoid that temptation. Taking a final appreciative glance at the remarkable sight, I continued past.

The second danger took the form of a super-energy barrier, sizzling between two giant electrodes. Nothing in my training had prepared me to understand how laser death beams work, other than to know that their description was quite accurate. However, I had learned how to short-circuit the laser scanning beams at the check-out counter in the SEX U cafeteria. A piece of something highly reflective, slipped between the beams, always did the trick; long enough for a starving student to sneak away with an extra micro-zapped escargot. I still carried a bit of glass from the escape pod as a good luck token, and now it had a job to do. Carefully stepping back from the energy beams, I (as deftly as I could) tossed the reflective fragment into their path. Zap! Crackle! Pop! Turned back upon itself, the laser barrier not only shorted, but actually crisped out, and fried part of its electronics. As I've said before, I still don't know how laser beams work, but I did know raw recycling when I saw it. It was part of my job.

Beyond the late lasers, my path began to twist up, around, and back in the general direction from which I had come. It eventually brought me to the last of my underground perils. In a way, this final hazard was a replay of the acid pool, except this acid was in the form of drops from the ceiling, or some freak subterranean shower of acid rain. It made little difference which. I knew that if I got any of the substance on me, it would most likely prove fatal, or perhaps even kill me.

From the looks of the cavern's floor, though, it was apparent that there were spots where the deadly drops were not landing; safe places which could be used like stepping stones across a creek. Now, this janitor has tottered over few creeks in his life (mostly because of my acute fear of falling), but life and death, coupled with a level surface, gave me the courage to proceed. Timing the drips as they dropped in droves from the ceiling (or is it, timing the drops as they dripped?), I darted from safe spot to safe spot until I was beyond the acid drizzle. Looking back at what I had just dodged through, I became convinced that it had not been a series of mere natural hazards. A mind, probably housed in some strange creature or alien entity, must have been behind what was behind me. And, if this were so, I'd better be prepared for when I met him—or her—or it—or they—or whatever.

The stuff in my pockets gave me scant comfort, and minimal hope for protection. Nevertheless, I fumbled around a bit marking time, taking a sip of



dehydrated water, and flipping the switch on the small gadget (which looked remarkably like something I had never seen before in my life).

When nothing nasty happened, I decided to leave it in the On position. Finally, Xenon army knife at the ready, I continued on my way.

Although I didn't realize it at the time, that small gadget with which I had toyed was, in actuality, a General Products universal, cross-species, multi-orificed, language translator, spelling checker, and thesaurus. My underground exploration finally led me into a pitch dark chamber in which a giant holographic projection of a multi-tusked, hard-shelled, mean-looking and *hostile* creature loomed; and although a force field clamped itself around me to prevent any movement or sounds at all, I could at least understand what the image was communicating.

"So, most *puny human*, you have made it through our traps and snares. We have been observing you to see if you would survive, and congratulate you on your ingenuity and luck. Have we got a deal for you today. It's a mission really, and if you care to accept it, we will reward its successful completion by providing you with transportation out of this part of the desert. What do you say? Is it 'OK?' Or, do we send you back outside to die of starvation, dehydration, or sandworms?"

"Mmmpf!"

"Great! Since you cannot speak at the moment, we will take your grunts as an affirmative. On the surface, there is a large cave formed by the skull of a beast. In the skull lives an annoying beast, which we call the Orat, Orat for short. It likes to eat our young. Dispose of Orat for us, and the reward is yours. If you fail—well, it's been nice knowing you. By the way; bring back evidence that you have succeeded. We don't like people who fib, and will only believe you if have some sort of proof. Have a nice!"



Death at Every Turn

I was still listening to the final exclamation point when the floor disappeared from beneath me, my arms began to wave for balance, and I found myself sliding into daylight, and out of the belly of a beast. A door swooshed shut behind me and clicked. I was back on the surface of Kerona, sprawled next to my old friend the giant skeleton. A quick check and pat gave indications that I was still alive.

Of course my vital signs were just what a lonely killer spider droid was waiting to sense, still lurking patiently for me to reappear. No sooner had I stood up, than the sight and sound of its deadly charge scared the Betelgeuse out of me. Indulging in bipedal locomotion in its most turbo mode, I dashed off toward the east, hoping to find high ground (or high skeleton) before the droid finally ended what had already been a pretty bad day for me.



It didn't take very much sprinting before it became clear that I would never make it to the safe path I had reached the first time I had been chased by the metal killer. Instead, when the skull cave—yes, the same one that the hologram had told me about!—popped into my view, I scurried directly for its maw. I never even considered the fact that the Orat lived there; the fact never entered my consciousness. It was the closest possible haven, and all that mattered was to run fast and not trip.

It is ironic, to be sure, that I never saw Orat long enough to remember what it looked like, other than it was much larger than me and had far too many teeth and claws. As I got inside the cave, my eyes registered both the beast and a large boulder. The rock seemed much more inviting, and I ditched myself behind it at once. Very quietly, I attempted to convince the universe that I didn't exist. Then, after lifting my head from between my legs, I saw the spider droid's breakneck arrival. So did the Orat.

Spider droids kill by getting in near proximity of their prey and detonating a really, really tiny subatomic particle bomb. Droid goes bye bye, and so does most organic matter within a meter or so. So it went. Orat saw droid. Droid saw Orat. Wham, bam, thank you, Sam. When the dust and stones settled, all that was left of the pair was an anonymous piece of Orat anatomy. It must have been Orat because droids don't have blood, and the small bit of flesh had more than enough. I had escaped because my hidey-hole was outside of the explosion's critical range. Happy to be alive, I didn't even mind the blood splatters on my helmet. My soiled clothes, though, were nearing critical mass.

The way back to the giant talking head was the same as my first trip. Taking the piece of Orat with me, I marched out of the cave and back up the spine of pale bones. Crossing the bridge again gave me a bit of pause, but it did hold up under my weight and the vibration of my still-shaking knees. I was sure, though, that it would collapse if I ever tried to cross again.

On I went, and where I hoped an elevator might wait for me this time, I was treated to another sudden shafting. It didn't hurt any less the second time around, but, in a strange way, it seem a little like an old friend. I jauntily waved hello to the still stuck-up monster beneath the grate, and continued on to the dark room where I had first met the master of the underground. It was waiting when I got there.

"Back so soon, *puny human*? Did Orat scare you away, or have you brought us evidence of the beast's demise?"

"How's this for proof?" The holographic head watched closely as the bloody bit I was carrying landed with a slight squish. It wasn't a bad toss—I had aimed for the floor, and achieved my goal on the first try.

"Hmm." The image pondered for a moment. "Very good. You have succeeded beyond even our wildest hopes. It appears that Orat is not only dead, but that it will never have any more children either."



A moment of silence passed, followed by the sound of a door opening and the glare of bright light from the room beyond. It seemed like an invitation too good to refuse.

The room beyond resembled nothing so much as the old laundry training room from my days at the university. Steam boilers, with metal patches bolted over them, squatted at conspicuous locations throughout. Large pipes and conduits, many wound in fraying silvered tape or rags, zigzagged everywhere. Steam hissed. Ancient gauges, gears, rods, pistons, and levers moved frantically round and round, or back and forth. The smells of hot water and lubricant scented the air. All that was missing were the industrial capacity washers and dryers to make my sense of nostalgia complete.

Against one wall there was an out-of-date computer system with a data cart reader attached. Although steam-driven electronics were not used much even then, the machines appeared clean and serviceable. Next to them was parked a land skimmer of indeterminate age. The keys were in the ignition, the fuel gauge showed full, and a garage portal had its ready light blinking.

I heard movement behind me. I turned to see a tall, slender, organic grinchoid standing on a hover pod a meter off the floor. The floater, too, was steam powered. I'm not so sure about the creature. Covered with feathers and several extra arms, it looked nothing at all like the hologram. The voice was the same though.

"Please don't be startled by my appearance, *puny human*," the creature announced. "I am Tunuctipin, grand leader of all Keronians, and great bird brain of my people. We are leery of other creatures and races, so we protect ourselves behind the image you saw outside. The skimmer has enough propellant to take you to what your Federation has named Ulence Flats, but what would be more correctly translated as flat Ulence. Feel free to sell the vehicle when you arrive there, but be aware that, even though it has only been driven by my great-aunt on local errands, she hasn't tuned it for several centuries, and has a pathological aversion to washing her vehicles. I am sure that a motivated buyer would ignore most of the dents, and since Kerona is a desert planet, there is absolutely no rust. It is our most generous gift to you. Now, if you would please leave, we would like to seal our home once more against outsiders." With a final squawk for emphasis, Tunuctipin floated out of sight.

Things were looking up; I had a set of wheels (so to speak), a ticket out of the desert, and the chance to acquire enough buckazoids to get back to Xenon. With the data cart still safely in my possession, the galaxy still had a fighting chance to thwart the Sarien menace.

That thought reminded me that I finally had a chance to actually look at what was on the cart I had been entrusted with. Sitting down at the computer, I inserted the cart into the reader slot. As I expected, most of what was recorded there was in mathematical words and symbols as incomprehensible to me as English, or any



other ancient, dead language. However, the first message to appear was in words I could read:

If you are reading this, then I am most likely dead, and the known universe is in grave and serious danger. My name is Dr. Slash Vohaul, and I am the chief scientist in charge of the Xenon Star Generator project. We have learned to harness powers so awesome and mighty that it will provide our people with cheap, abundant, non-polluting energy for eons to come. I have recently learned that someone, or something, hostile to both our way of life and our very existence, has learned of our success. I suspect that it might be my degenerate, evil clone Sludge Vohaul. If this is true, if he and his Sarien henchmen get their hands on the Star Generator, then we'll be up the Milky Way without a lightsail. As a precaution, I have encoded all the data necessary to duplicate the Star Generator on this cart. Guard it with your life and return it to the authorities on Xenon. Don't let Sludge conquer the universe!

Following this warning was an access code that would destroy the Star Generator if it were ever found. The message was simple, direct, and scary. I hoped that someone would take care of Sludge Vohaul and the Sariens, and do it soon. In the meantime, I was sure that Xenon would pay me a fat reward for delivering the data cart; enough perhaps to retire, buy my own space jalopy, and get as far away from trouble as possible.

These thoughts ground through my mind as I took the cart back out of the computer, and climbed into the skimmer. The engine turned over after only seven or eight tries, the portal irised open, and I began flashing across the arid wastes of Kerona. Since I have never been much of a driver, I let the auto 'bot take control while I relaxed and watched the rocky scenery and ground drone by. I'm glad I wasn't driving: I'm sure the ride would not have been anywhere as smooth. This way, I arrived in Ulence Flats in one piece.



City in the Sands

To describe Ulence Flats as a town would be extreme overstatement; to call it civilization would be to insult toxic waste dumps everywhere, and to call it a dripping sore on the unwashed back underpit of a guanoid from EelSuck VII would be an overly romantic image. Ulence Flats is a collection of four or five ruts in the desert, looking for an identity and losing count along the way. It is home to beings



deemed socially undesirable by the galaxy's various underworlds, and the location of the notorious No Serial Numbers Spaceship Shopping Center and the Five Fingered Discount Droid Mall. The only other structure visible is a combination bar, pool hall, backwater brothel, Astro-Rooter disposal site, and preschool. Surrounding Ulence Flats is a highly dangerous energy field, more to keep the denizens inside than the sandworms out.

Of course, I knew nothing of this at the time. The glitter of the bright lights, and the gleam of available spaceships, told me that Ulence Flats was both safety and a way home.

The skimmer finally stopped itself in front of the town bar. As soon as it halted, I began to get out. But before my boots had touched ground, a slick, overly groomed pimpoid greased his way over to my vehicle and began eyeballing it. He had only two eyes, but they were enough for him to mark me as a sucker.

"Howdy, stranger. Nice machine you've got there." His voice was so oily that the words almost congealed before they reached my ears.

"I'm feeling generous today. I'll give you 25 buckazoids for that fine machine, and I'll even pay the sales tax. What do you say? Is it a deal?" The glitter of cold coin glistened in his hand. He had made a tempting offer.

"Thanks, but no thanks. It's a generous offer, but I'm not some dumb off-worlder who's just stumbled in from the desert. Try me again when you can come up with a better price." Gosh, I was so proud of myself. I had always been told never to accept a first offer, but I had never had the courage before to try. The pimpoid's eyes narrowed, calculated, then shifted back and forth. He oozed away, shooting back at me, "Be that way. Maybe we'll run into each other again."

A moment later, I had second thoughts and began to run after the pimpoid as he moved down the rut running east. Then it hit me; I had left the keys in the skimmer's ignition. I stopped my feet just as they were starting, tangled them, stumbled, fell, then picked myself up, and dusted off. I always have had trouble running and thinking at the same time. But I did remember to take the keys, and then started off again after the creature.

The rut wandered alongside of, and then behind, the bar. By the time I arrived in back, the pimpoid had disappeared. All I could see was a Droids B Us franchise at the Discount Mall in the distance, and a pile of white ash beneath the bar's back window. As I watched, a disposal arm extended itself out of that window and dumped some more of the fine powder into the pile. Something sent back a metallic sparkle as it fell. Curious, I ran my hand through the ashes to see what might have caught my attention. The ash was warm to the touch, but scattered throughout the pile were a number of round pieces of metallic plastoid. They turned out to be buckazoids—money—and a fair amount of it, but not enough. When I added it to the coins I already carried in my pocket, the nest egg totalled less than 50 buckazoids, which I was sure wasn't sufficient to get me off Kerona.



It was becoming clear that I needed to sit down and think my problem through. The idea of a brew to go along with my thoughts was also quite appealing. When I got back to the establishment's front door, I discovered my old friend the pimpoid waiting for me.

"Here's my latest offer, *puny human*," he cajoled.

"Thirty buckazoids and this previously owned jetpack." The creature held up a recently repainted harness/jet tube combination such as space miners use for maneuvering in the Void. The new colors were joined in a combination of paisley and plaid that clashed with nearly everything.

"This jetpack is in cherry condition, although I did accidentally file off the serial numbers. I'll even throw in some Ulence Flats discount coupons, good for a free drink inside, and special discounts offered by this metropolis' fine merchants. Sounds like a deal to me!"

I could only agree. The pimpoid handed me the bucks and the coupons, and I handed over the skimmer's keys. In moments he was gone, laughing aloud as he did. I bit the buckazoids, confirmed they were real, and headed inside for a taste of some Kerona beer, preferably cold.

Once my eyes adjusted to the joint's dim light, I found the interior of the bar crowded with dozens of different alien species. It was also noisy from the blare of an off-key combo clanging away at some retro-rocko, neo-babylonian funk, mixed with the drunken growls and shouts of many of the patrons. The place was filthy and in need of a good, professionally trained janitor. A sweeping 'bot in the corner appeared to be counting the years until it corroded into total immobility.

I found a place at the bar and squeezed in between a trilaterally cantilevered female impersonator, and a three-meter-tall advertisement for the virtues of hair depilator. Neither of the two was an accomplished conversationalist, although the femaleoid was interesting enough without having to say a word. Perhaps my aroma was leaking out of my space suit, leaving them speechless. Retrieving the coupon for a free drink, I laid it on the counter and hailed the bartender.

"Yo, Bo. One brew!" The man (well, it sort of looked male) glanced up at my shout, down at the coupon, yawned, slid his tongue a bit inside one nostril, and then slid me a mug of Kerona's finest. I've tasted better suds while washing old socks. It was wet and cold though, and that's the way brew should be. A second went down as quickly as the first. By the time I was into my third, the stuff was even beginning to taste good. As I was contemplating this particular mystery, I couldn't help but overhear one odd bit of bar chatter from somewhere near me.

"It was Sarien, I tell you. We saw it with our own eyestalks. A Mantis-class StarRipper, and it was blasting its ID on all frequencies....*Deltaur*....*Deltaur*....*Deltaur*. The ship was broadcasting a message demanding Xenon and the entire galaxy surrender, or it would destroy every inhabited planet, one by one. Then it blew up the small planet it was orbiting. And they giggled about it. You never want to hear



a Sarien giggle. Never." The conversation then drifted to just what sector the *Deltaur* had been spotted in, and how fast the narrator had warped away.

Composing this tale now, it is hard to relive what went through my mind just then. Fright, disgust, horror, incomprehension, and more fright, are easy candidates. I do remember clearly that I was convinced the Sariens had used the Star Generator, and I wanted to be nowhere near them—or it. The thought was enough to make me stop drinking, get off Kerona as fast as possible, head back to Xenon, collect my reward, and get out of the Sarien warpath. Easier said than done, of course. I still had to get some more money before I could get off that ball of sand and rock.

Across the barroom, a single digital slot machine waited for some poor sucker to feed it coins. Since I had already been labeled a sucker once that day, it was waiting specifically for me. It caught my eye, made the sound of three similar fruits mating victoriously, and flashed its chrome at me. I stared back. It was a Slots-Of-Death game—one that pays off big, but if you roll three skulls instead of three cherries, it terminates both the game and the player. The ashes outside the bar had been the remains of one such unlucky loser.

I chuckled aloud and began sauntering across the barroom to the Slots-Of-Death. I would have giggled also, but my mind was still full of Sariens, death, and a stolen Star Generator. My hand slid into one of my space suit's pockets, and pulled out the small widget I had carried off of the *Arcada*, all that was left of the Star Generator. Other than where it was from, I knew only one thing about it—it was magnetic.

Carefully inspecting the slot machine, and making sure I was hiding what I was doing from prying eyes and such, I attached the magnet to the front of the Slots-Of-Death, near to where the controller chip had to be located. The rest was so easy that I still regret that the machine performed a melt-down when I was finished. All I did was slip a few bucks into the slot, press the slots button, and watch three cherries line up in a row. Jackpot! Again. Jackpot! Again. Jackpot! The Star Generator magnet so confused the digital innards of the Slots-Of-Death that it could only register the big payoff. If it hadn't blown, I would have been rich. Instead, I walked away from a dead machine with over three hundred buckazoids in my pocket. It was time to buy my way off Kerona.

It was a little strange to discover that the only way off that miserable excuse for a planet was to buy a ship and rocket off yourself. At least, that's what the sales-being at the No Serial Numbers Spaceship Shopping Center told me. I deferred to his authority, assuming that he (she?) should know about such things. It was also somewhat peculiar to note that on a desert planet, the being I was speaking with was an ichtyoid. The fact was as incongruous as seeing a fish out of water.

His/her name was Tiny, a particularly inapt label. The used spaceship lot was located just across a rut from the bar. No sooner had I stepped there than Tiny began



various sales pitches, including the one about Ulence Flats being a no-flights-off burg. Tiny's inventory hadn't just seen better days, it had seen better millennia. There was one vessel, among the half-dozen or so junkers, that caught my eye. Tiny called it a Drallion cruiser, and offered me a great deal on it.

"Only 240 buckazoids, *puny human*. I'll even swallow the sales tax and not ask to see your space pilot's license. Such a deal you will never see again." I thought about it for a moment. Paying for the ship would not be a problem. Flying it would.

"Sentient Tiny," I said slowly. "It's a great deal, I agree. Unfortunately, I don't know how to fly a spaceship. I even have trouble with the auto 'bot on ground skimmers. Is there an auto pilot on this thing?"

Tiny smiled and pointed across town. "Scope out Droids B Us. They're having a sale on nav droids. One of those should take care of all your problems. Do we have a deal?" I told the ichthyoid to wait until I settled the droid matter—assuming I had enough bucks—and strolled off toward the Discount Mall. Once again, I had not accepted the first offer.



Blastoff from Kerona

Droids B Us is a galaxy-wide chain that specializes in selling all kinds of mechanical life, and semi-life, forms. Droids differ from 'bots in many obscure ways, but most especially in the fact that 'bots have more intelligence than droids. Droids are designed more for the consumer market than 'bots, so they're also much cuter and more cuddly. 'Bots, when they speak, have obscure accents and are programmed to walk funny. Droids B Us has made billions selling cute droids that don't talk back—cuddly stuffed toys and inflatable dolls for adults of all species and genders. They have been very successful.

The insectoid sales-entity at Droids B Us was delighted to greet a customer, especially one with buckazoids to spend, but was somewhat disappointed when I gave my Ulence Flats Merchants Association discount coupon to him. I explained that I was looking for a nav droid, was shopping on a budget, and was willing to pay cash for a good deal. Also, I expected the 20 percent discount that the coupon promised. The clerk wasn't happy with my demands, and tried to interest me in the more expensive models—from full-sized BattleTekkies, TransForm-R-Us droids, Daleks, nanny droids, and even cleaning droids. I was tempted to purchase one of the latter but just couldn't afford both it and the NAV-201 droid essential to piloting the spaceship. Pointing out my choice, I paid for the nav droid, and after stopping by customer pick-up to obtain it, proudly marched back to listen to Tiny's second offer on the spaceship of my dreams.



Right again. Tiny's second offer was lower, and I slipped her/him the buck-azoids quoted.

"Don't forget," I reminded her/him. "You're picking up the sales tax. It was a pleasure doing business with you." Tiny clutched a fin around the coins, slurped in what sounded like glee, and indicated that the keys to my new purchase were in its dashboard. Tiny waddled away muttering something that sounded like "Take off quick before the real owner shows up." I'm sure I misheard.

Despite that, I did want to be off Kerona at once. I scrambled up the ladder into the ship's cozy cockpit. As the canopy lowered itself down to seal me inside, the nav droid positioned itself on the loading platform below. A punch of the Load Droid button, and my nav system was taken aboard and jacked to the ship's main computer. Moments later, the ship's engines flamed to readiness and the droid blasted us into space.

"Ride 'em, cowboy!" I screamed in joy. I had escaped Kerona at last.

Space, the final career. Since I first learned that the universe was bigger than my own room, I wanted to fly to the stars. To soar, to warp the matrices of hyperspace with Roger Wilco in the pilot's couch. This was my dream. Unfortunately, my test scores were only good enough to enter the Sanitation Engineer Corps. My space travel would be only as a passenger.

This was still true, but at least now I owned the spaceship and was its captain. The stars were mine.

"Xenon, I'm coming home!"

"Sector information, Captain." The droid's request brought me back to reality. "What sector is our destination?"

"Xenon, droid. Take me to Xenon."

"False input load. False input load. Xenon is not a sector. What sector is our destination?"

Ah, reality. It's a tough place to be sometimes. I had no idea what a sector was, and some cute droid wasn't going to take me home unless I could direct him to one. The only thing that came to mind was the conversation I had heard in the bar. The pilot who had discovered the *Deltaur* had given its sector coordinate, some of which I still remembered. Of course, the *Deltaur* was the last place in the universe I wanted to be, but there was no way that the Sariens would have stayed around after exploding a planet. I would be safe there, and when Xenon came to examine the evidence of the Sarien treachery, I would be rescued.

A small touch pad rose in front of me. Next to it was the printout of a sector navigational grid code.

"Enter sector destination grid code," the droid insisted. Carefully, I looked up the sector on the grid chart and entered it on the keypad. A moment later, the universe exploded into a gizillion colors as we warped into hyperspace.



We warped out into a meteor storm. The nav droid got us through it, dodging and darting with sensors and reflexes that no human could match. But the next several minutes made me acutely aware of the state of my undergarments.

"There should be no meteors anywhere near here," announced the droid. "However, I am reading a large spacecraft in the vicinity. It's broadcasting an ID saying it's the *Deltaur*. Do you want me to hail it, Captain?"

"Get us the galaxy out of here!" I shouted.

"False input load. The galaxy is not a sector. Sector input information is required. What sector is our destination?" As those words insulted my ears, my eyes were attacked by the sight of the StarRipper, a star-faring insect of prey gloating over the chaos it had wrought. And my dumb, cute, cuddly droid was refusing to warp me somewhere else. When the *Deltaur* picked up my ship on its scanners, there wouldn't be anything left of me to recycle.

"Let me out!" I screamed.

"Are you sure, Captain?" I hastily slid into the jetpack that the pimpoid had made part of the skimmer deal.

"Of course I'm sure. I just want to stretch my legs a bit." The cockpit canopy swung up and away, and I released my seatbelt. Pushing down with my legs, I thrust myself into space. The jetpack kicked in automatically and propelled me toward the *Deltaur*. From behind, I could feel the concussion of the spaceship as it was blown into sub-microscopic dust. Perhaps it was just the impulse power of the jetpack, but I never did turn around to find out. I was being propelled toward the Sarien warship, and I didn't know how to stop.



Danger on the Deltaur

Sometimes beings are required to leave their spaceships for short periods of time to float around in the Void doing things of which I have no knowledge. If you think about it, these folks need a way to get back inside. For this reason, most airlocks have some sort of device for opening them from the outside. The *Deltaur* had a wheel. This became very important because, as I got closer, my trajectory appeared more and more to be taking me not into the ship's hull, but grazing just past it. If I could find something to grab, I might be able to attach myself to the ship instead of flying by into endless space. The airlock opening device filled that role quite well.

That, of course, left me hanging outside the outer hull of the *Deltaur*. It was a situation I would have preferred except that I had only a limited supply of air in my spacesuit. There was no choice but to enter the Sarien lair and hope for the best. My hopes were not very high, but I spun that wheel until the great airlock doors



gaped wide, like a hungry sandworm. With much fear and anxiety, I pushed myself inside.

Airlocks are airlocks, whether in Federation ships or in Sarien StarRippers. They have both inner and outer hatches, and some sort of decontamination unit. As I removed my jetpack, I could read that the *Deltaur* had what was listed as an "Organic Lifeforms Decontamination and Elimination" model. That didn't look promising. I suspected that it might be better to skip the decon step, and I sought safety behind the inner airlock hatchway. It appeared to be out of the line of sight of the zapper. As I hid there, I wondered why the Sariens would use such a device; it would take a big toll on the *Deltaur's* own troops. Maybe they just didn't care. Maybe I was wrong about what the decon unit did, but I wasn't inclined to wait for the answer.

When a cleaning droid arrived a few minutes later to dispose of my jetpack, it must have assumed that it was all that remained of some intruder. As the droid busily began to sweep up, I quietly snuck around behind it and through the open inner hatch into a long corridor. The first door I encountered was labeled "Storage," and I ducked inside in order to get out of sight and figure out what to do next.

Like airlocks, storage holds are much the same on all ships. The one I found myself in was bare except for a pair of large stasis chambers, and a wide air vent extruding from the bulkhead. A locked trunk occupied the center of the floor, waiting to be stowed in one of the large compartments. The trunk and vent reminded me of a ploy I have often seen used in cowboy vids. Pushing the trunk to a convenient spot beneath the vent, I climbed up and attempted to remove the grate covering the vent opening. I was sure there would be enough room inside for me to both crawl and to escape detection.

There was one problem: the grate wouldn't come off. A closer look showed it was firmly screwed onto the vent's faceplate. *OK, I thought. All I need is a screwdriver to be out of here. It's for moments like this that Xenon Army knives are put in survival kits.*

I'm sure my plan would have worked. I'm sure. But as I took out my knife, I heard booted feet tromp down the outside corridor. The steps kept coming closer; there was no time to carry out my planned escape. I had to hide, but where? The only possibility was the locked trunk, and it looked large enough to conceal me. A quick change of blades, and the Xenon Army knife's universal, cross-species, gender nonspecific lock pick attachment did its job. First the lock gave, and then the lid opened, revealing an empty interior. I hopped in and pulled the top down behind me. As the lid clicked shut, the door to the room opened, and a voice ordered, "There it is. Take it to the laundry room before we all get shot."

The shuffle of several pairs of boots was followed by my world tilting sharply. One side of the trunk was lifted roughly, and then the other.



"What'a ya got inna disa ting, Sargo? A dead body? Or, maybe ya's sneakin' a new boy toy aboard? Yuk, yuk! Want maybe we should'a look'a inside? Yuk, yuk, yuk!"

"Get movin' or you'll lose your litter box privileges for a month, soldier. Do I make myself clear?" The sharp female voice was not in the mood for any insubordination. With a few more grunts and insincere chortles, the Sariens marched out of the storage compartment, taking the trunk, and me, with them.

Since I was inside the trunk, I have no idea of the kind of route they took. I do remember, though, that the trunk turned, spun, jerked up, fell, and even floated an endless number of times before it was abruptly dropped to the deck, and to a stop. It still makes me nauseated even to think about that ride. A few moments of gruff complaints and breathless grunts followed from outside, punctuated by the sound of boots moving away and a door thumping closed. Then, silence.

I waited for what felt like days, but were most likely seconds, before I was convinced that there was no one else in the trunk's vicinity. A delicately lifted lid and a quick peek proved my deduction correct. A longer look brought a wide grin to my face. I was home—in a manner of speaking. Well, I was in the *Deltaur's* laundry room which, for a space janitor and sanitation engineer like myself, is the next best thing. Better yet, a giant industry standard Dirt-B-Gone CleansoMatic waited within my arm's reach. Inside it, I could see dozens of dirty uniforms, socks, underwear, and various intimate unmentionables. Given the oft-soiled condition of what I was wearing beneath my space suit, and the fresh motion sickness on it, the unwashed Sarien clothing was a vision of hygienic heaven. So overwhelmed was I by the sight, I scrambled out of the trunk, slammed the lid shut, removed my helmet, opened the door of the cleaning unit, and took a deep, ambrosial breath.

"Ah!" I exhaled. "It doesn't get any better than this."

At that very moment, I heard the sound of someone moving in the direction of the laundry room. With no time to get back into the trunk, I threw myself into the CleansoMatic, closing the door behind me. I burrowed myself as deeply as I could beneath the stained sheets and wash-n-wear helmets. Safe, secure, warm, and out of sight, that moment was one of life's few, precious, back-to-the-womb experiences. For the first time in my life, amid that Sarien wash, I felt at one with the rest of humanity. I threw away all my lingering regrets for having been born in test-tube 696. I forgave my parents, who had given me so much love and attention, for dispensing with all the inconvenient aspects of childbirth. In that moment of oneness and unity with my *homo sapiens* heritage, I vowed that I would find the Star Generator and destroy it. The Sarien menace would regret that they never heard of Roger Wilco.

That's when the door to the CleansoMatic opened and someone threw in another set of unclean garments. Then they turned the wash cycle to On.



Disguised!

The laundry room was empty when I finally wobbled out of the CleansoMatic, washed, dried, steamed, soaked, and naked. It had been a hard ride, even for a cowpoke like me. I felt all wrung out. My space suit was in shreds, and most of what I had in my pockets was destroyed or missing, including my knife and buckazoids. The most important thing that remained was the Star Generator data cart—perhaps the most important thing in known space. On the other hand, I was clean for the first time since my adventures began on the *Arcada*. I smelled like myself again, and the aroma didn't extend much beyond my body.

Of course, I couldn't move around the *Deltaur* in the altogether. My appearance would be somewhat conspicuous, and I'd never be able to find the Star Generator. Anyway, Sariens are hairless, green-colored, bipedal insectoids. They have red eyes and no visible ears. In size and general form, however, humans and Sariens were pretty much similar.

The Sarien uniforms in the CleansoMatic, therefore, would make a perfect disguise, especially since the feared Sarien insectoid helmet was part of their officers' everyday gear. I rooted around until I found a uniform that both fitted me and was gaudy enough to belong to one of the Sarien officer classes. A better no-questions-asked cover I couldn't ask for. A lingering glance in the CleansoMatic's window revealed an image that any Sarien mother could love, although I understand that love is still illegal in their society. A check of the uniform turned up only the ubiquitous pocket lint which, I'm sure, will outlast all the other sentient species in the universe. My probe, however, did shake loose a Sarien identification card that had attached itself to the uniform's material. It was a great find. Now I was First Class Lieutenant Falis Limp of the Awesome Sarien Menace and Flotilla of Doom. The Sariens have always overdone the names of their armies.

First Class Lieutenant Falis Limp of the Awesome Sarien Menace and Flotilla of Doom stepped out of the *Deltaur's* laundry room looking every bit a high Sarien officer, all spit, polish, and authority. The Roger Wilco inside the mask was betting his short life on the fact that all any of the other troops would see were his badges of rank, and not the frightened janitor within. The ruse worked; the fast, crisp, loud salutes—and plenty of them—that greeted him were proof.



The Star Generator

Just outside of the laundry room were a pair of elevators. I had wandered through the *Deltaur* for some minutes, and had quickly realized that the warship was a maze of passages, corridors, and cross-corridors. It would look very suspicious if an officer were seen appearing lost and confused, so I retraced my steps back to the those elevators. The alert, intense guard on duty slapped an efficient salute, and informed me that no one was allowed to enter the captain's private escape pod elevator. Not wishing to appear hesitant, I saluted the sentry back, and entered the one that was not off-limits.

The elevator went up and deposited me in a short corridor near the top of the ship. At one end of the passageway was yet another elevator that led still farther up. At the other end, though, was a huge open chamber. Bolted securely in the center of the room, power cables running in and out of it on all sides, humming and pulsing with the energy of the captive stellar core it controlled, stood the Star Generator. It could only be that. The lethal flickering of an active force field surrounded the device, promising death to the unwary touch. There was a small, new sign attached to the Generator's base. It read:

STOLEN FROM THE FEDERATION

*** TOP SECRET ***

STAR GENERATOR

**DO NOT TOUCH
THIS MEANS YOU**

I was flabbergasted at how quickly I had come upon the object of my search. Fate? Destiny? Dumb luck? The whys really didn't matter to me then, and I haven't solved them since. What mattered was the massive Sarien goon on guard. To get to the Star Generator, I had to get through him. Solid and large enough to be a statue (probably iron), the guardian was of the strong, silent mold. So intent was he at his post, he didn't even salute. I knew better than to challenge him about the slight.



What I needed, of course, was some sort of weapon. My raid of the CleansoMatic had not turned up any guns, rifles, or the like, but then they are not normally part of the wash. I moved away from the *Deltaur's* Star Generator room with a new goal: find a way to distract, incapacitate, or kill the guard. If I could, I'd have time to activate the Generator's self-destruct sequence. Whether I lived or died after that, Xenon and the galaxy would be saved. I preferred living.

The elevator at the opposite end of the corridor seemed as good a place to start as any. I had a good idea of how to get back to the laundry room, so I could afford to explore a little more of the ship. A short ride brought me to a corridor directly above the one I had just left. It led off in just one direction, with no branches, so I was able to follow it for some distance without getting lost. By now I had begun to ignore the salutes of the soldiers I would frequently pass, the same as I ignored one of the neatest collections of cleaning droids I had ever seen. If professional curiosity got the better of me, I was sure to be uncovered.

The corridor eventually turned into a suspended walkway (or perhaps a mezzanine, if you like obscure words). To my surprise, it opened above the Star Generator room. From the walkway, I could stare down at the universe-shattering device—and its guard—without being noticed. It looked like a great place from which to drop a 16-ton weight, assuming I had one, and a portable anti-grav to go with it. The goon would never know what hit him. Ah, well.



Shootout in Space

It was just beyond the walkway that I struck paydirt—the *Deltaur's* Armory. A plain, utilitarian, government-issue room at best, painted in traditional bureaucratic mono-pigment, it was presided over by one lone 'bot. A long counter divided the room unfairly, in order to keep the customers (so to speak) from the goods. Behind a narrow-gated part of the barrier, a display of big, serious-looking guns hung on the wall. They seemed attached there permanently. Below them, a pair of grenades lay on a small shelf waiting to be stowed again safely in the arms locker at the back of the room. The 'bot didn't salute me. It simply waited.

Talking, I knew, would only get me captured or killed. Sarien battle helmets do muffle the wearer's voice, but there was no way I could imitate the Sarien accent. The ID card in my pocket proved an acceptable substitute. Holding it in front of the 'bot, the mech translated my action as an authorized request for a weapon by an officer. It nodded once in acceptance, and moved off to retrieve my gun. As soon as it disappeared from sight, I made my move.

The plan had come to me as soon as I saw the grenades. They were no 16-ton weights, but they would do some kind of damage if dropped into the Star Generator



room. In the ensuing confusion, I might have a chance to get close to the machine. This was no time to stumble over my feet; as swiftly and quietly as possible, I lifted the counter's gate, moved behind it, swiped one of the grenades, and returned to where I had been when the 'bot left the room. The entire time, I was conscious of the possible consequences if the 'bot discovered me in back. Instant annihilation came to mind first.

But, the 'bot returned only to find First Class Lieutenant Falis Limp of the Awesome Sarien Menace and Flotilla of Doom patiently awaiting the delivery of his Magnum, PeeEye-class, single-user raygun. When the mech handed it to me, I played it extremely blasé, and walked out of the armory as if I had been doing it all of my life. The whole way, I imagined a laser-guided crosshair playing touchy-feely on my back.

Once safely outside, I almost skipped and wiggled for joy. Not only did I have a gun and a grenade, but the Magnum, PeeEye-class, single-user raygun was the same weapon that the Lone Space Ranger uses in the vids. They are still my favorites. I had always imagined myself armed with one of those guns, bringing law and order to Centauri City. In the end, I would always get the girl, and we would ride off into the hypervoid, enjoying the lightshow, while the deer and the antelope played cowpoke songs in the background.

But I had a more serious mission at that moment. The big guard still was paying no upward notice, and as I positioned myself directly above him, I hoped that the sound of my knees knocking together wouldn't alert him to danger. They didn't, and my aim was true.

Oh, how often in the past had I dropped my socks straight down to our housecleaning droid, only to have them land blocks away? How many times had I visited a personal sanitation and elimination unit, and walked away having to clean my shoes?

This time, there were no embarrassments. The grenade dropped straight down, bounced off the guard's helmet, and burst into a thick, purple cloud of gas at his feet. One choke was the only sound he made before the thump of his body against the deck. No movement came from him, no stirring, no twitches. The way to the Star Generator was open.

I am a man who often has trouble putting one foot down sequentially after the other. Tangle Toes was one of my kinder boyhood nicknames, and he likes to visit me at inopportune times—like when I'm moving through the corridors of a Sarien StarRipper and trying to keep an anonymous profile.

I had almost arrived at the elevator that would take me near where the Star Generator now stood unguarded when something—perhaps a piece of lint or an imaginary line drawn too thick on the deck—made me trip. My momentum was such that the Sarien helmet struck metal first. While this probably saved me from a cut eye or broken nose, it was also enough to jar the helmet loose, sending it



spinning away out of reach. Worse yet, it spun right into the recycling bin of a nearby cleaning droid who merrily gobbled it up just as it had been programmed to do.

It took a few moment to get my breath back and the courage to stand. Things had turned from bright to bleak in the time it takes to say, "Have a nice trip. See you next Fall!" First Class Lieutenant Falis Limp was now naked from the neck up, and he looked suspiciously like Roger Wilco, human.

The organic waste-products had hit the air circulators. I gripped the raygun more tightly in my fist and hoped it was fully charged. My aim might be suspect, but I have a very fast trigger finger twitch reflex. If I shot fast enough, and aimed at enough places, my innate dumb luck should eventually hit something—hopefully before the Sariens hit me.

I remember everything and I remember nothing about my mad dash to the Star Generator. From the instant I stepped off of the elevator, I attracted notice the way a sweet algae and kelp confection does at a picnic. During my tour of duty on the *Arcada*, I had often overheard Space Marines advise each other that, if they ever met any Sariens, to shoot first and ask questions later. Others advised holding fire until you could see the reds of their eyes. I followed both schools of thought and added a third: If it's green and moves, fry it.

The next few minutes were filled with the deadly hisses of flame rays, the groans of sizzling Sariens, and my battle cries of "Ride 'em cowpoke!" It's an ancient invocation that I learned by carefully watching vids. The two green menaces who heard it in that corridor went to their hell with it ringing in their ears. How I hit them, other than by the sheer volume of my shooting, was a miracle. It did seem effective if I shot away from my target, but one Sarien got hers when I shot directly at her. I keep coming back to the idea of dumb luck, however. It's something I have often been told that I possess in abundance.

The smoke cleared when I finally made it into the Star Generator chamber. A thorough search of the downed guard turned up a remote zapper unit to control the force field surrounding the Generator. A quick push of its single button, and the field shut down. I moved closer to the Star Generator—the hope of Xenon, and the Sarien threat to civilization as we know it. A small keypad had been built into its base, but with no indication on it as to its purpose. It could only be the self-destruct sequence initiator.

I will admit that I took quite a deep breath before I entered the code that started the countdown. It had stuck in my memory when I viewed the data cart back on Kerona, but I never envisioned actually using it. Once the final activation key was touched, I would have only a short time to escape an exploding starship. I had done that once already, and wasn't thrilled with the prospect of doing it a second time. On the other hand, I did know where the elevator to the escape pods was situated, and the prospect of Sarien domination of the galaxy was too much to



bear. I remembered Jerzy and my other friends and comrades on the *Arcada*. I recalled the unnamed planet that was blasted to infinity with a joyous giggle. My life meant little when counted against their millions.

I pressed the final button.

"Someone has touched the Star Generator key pad. We warned you not to! This Star Generator will self-destruct in five minutes. You have been very naughty sentients."

The run from the Star Generator to the elevator had one piece of good news. I didn't fall. It did have a lot of Sariens, and they were all armed. But they were green and moved, I could see the reds of their eyes, and I didn't ask any questions. The worst part was when I finally arrived at the elevator to the escape pod. Not only was its guard there, so was a reinforcement. I guess they didn't expect a human to come out of the elevator, because they both missed me with all of their shots. I missed a lot, too, but stopped missing before they did.

In the back of my head, the countdown continued. I had, at best, another three minutes to either live or flee. The escape elevator, however, lived up to its reputation. Because the self-destruct alert was being broadcast only in the Star Generator chamber, the *Deltaur's* Captain did not yet know enough about the commotion on board to lead his troops to evacuation. When I left the elevator, I was by myself in a small bay, with just a lone escape pod for company. It must have been the Captain's personal vessel; it was so fully automated that it flew itself away from the *Deltaur* without my having to do anything. Two minutes later, I became one of the few people to ever have a firsthand view of a Sarien StarRipper exploding.

It was better than video.

It was better than my dreams.

I returned home to Xenon a hero. The Federation president presented me with the highest wartime honor of my profession—the Golden Mop of Xenon. Men and women cheered. Sentients of all species sang and grunted and expectorated my praises.

The rest is history.

Of course, for those of you reading this, it's still the future. Let's keep it that way.

Will someone back there write a game about what happened to me? Get this to the Two Guys from Andromeda.

Please.

Cruising Through Space Quest I: The Sarien Encounter

In the Space Quest games, you play the part of the unlikely hero Roger Wilco, intergalactic space janitor extraordinaire. You start Space Quest I as the last surviving crew member of the starship *Arcada*. With no one else available to do the job, you



must save the universe from the evil Sariens who have stolen the Star Generator, a techno-gizmo of almost unthinkable power. From the destruction of the *Arcada* to the spider droids of the blasted wastes of the planet Kerona to the mammoth Sarien star cruiser *Deltaur*, your mission is to destroy the Star Generator and save the universe.



Aboard the Arcada

You begin Space Quest I by stepping out of a closet on the spaceship *Arcada*, where Roger has been napping. Once outside the closet, the ship's computer announces that the *Arcada* has been boarded and there are only 15 minutes until self-destruction. If Roger does not escape from the *Arcada* in that amount of time, he'll die. What a way to start the morning. A clock is running in the background during this section of the game, so efficiency is somewhat desirable. (In the new version of SQI, this clock appears onscreen. In the original version, you're not even told the clock is ticking.)

Let's start with the basics: what you have in your pockets. Check your inventory and you'll find three buckazoids, the intergalactic currency. They aren't very useful aboard a doomed starship, but it never hurts to have money later. It's time to start looking for a way off the ship.

From this starting point, walk three screens to the west (left). You will pass through the data archives of the ship. There is nothing to do here now, but you'll be back soon enough.

If you hear footsteps, either duck into an elevator, get out of sight, or get off the screen. The Sarien troopers will shoot and kill Roger if he is on the same screen as they are, and visible. However, if you leave the screen and return at once, the Sariens will have disappeared (at least for the moment). This is true *every* time Roger encounters Sariens. At the end of the third screen you will find a laser-riddled corpse. Search the body and you will find a keycard. Take it. This is the only corpse on the ship that you need to search.

Walk back one screen in the direction you came and take the elevator down. Walk through the door to the north (north is at the top of the screen) and you'll be in the room that once housed the Star Generator. There is a widget glittering on the broken generator base. Take the widget and leave, since the corpses have nothing of value. If you are playing the original typing version of SQI, you can ignore this part, as there is no widget in that game.

When you have left the Star Generator room, take the elevator back up. Walk one screen east, and you will be back in the data archive room. This time the door opposite you will open and a fatally wounded scientist will stumble in. This happens the second time you enter the room. Walk across the room and talk to him (in the original game, just look at him; it has the same effect). Though dying, he will tell you that the Sariens have taken the Star Generator. More importantly, before passing away he will whisper a final phrase. Write the word or phrase down; knowing it later will be vitally important. (In the original version, the phrase is always "Astral Body," but it can be any number of different phrases in the icon-based game.)



Now that you have the code phrase from the scientist, go to the computer on the north wall. Use the computer by either clicking the hand icon on it, or by typing **look at screen**. When asked to enter a code, look up the phrase the scientist gave you in the player's manual that came with your software. This is part of SQI's copy protection in its new version. Press the correct icons on the data console. The text version of the game makes it easier; all you have to do is type in the phrase. When the data droid brings you the cartridge, take it, check your inventory to make sure you have it, and save the game. If you don't have the cartridge, there's no way to win the game.

With the cartridge in your possession, walk west out of the data room until you arrive at an elevator. Take the elevator down. In the VGA version, go two screens to the east and enter the yellow elevator. In the original, walk one screen east and enter the down elevator.

It will take you down to the next portion of the ship. When you get off of this elevator, save the game. Walk east. In the new version, in the next room Roger will



always hear Sariens. He must hide from them. The best places to hide are behind the mouse in the north part of the room or behind the giant joystick in the center of the chamber. The mouse seems to be the easier of the two hiding places. In the accompanying screen shot from the VGA version of SQI, you can see a perfectly hidden Roger Wilco.

The two versions of SQI differ a bit at this point. In the original version of the game no Sariens come after Roger in the screen after the elevator, but you do need to walk to the control panel on the north wall. Press the Open Bay Door button and then walk to the east. In the icon version, walk one screen east, look at the orange buttons on the control panel beneath the large window, and press the Open button to open the bay doors.

Once you open the launching bay doors, it's time to go down to the escape pod and leave. To access the elevator, use the keycard in the slot next to it. If you try to enter the elevator without using the keycard, you will be told that the door will not open without a keycard. Open the door with the card, get in the elevator, and go on down.

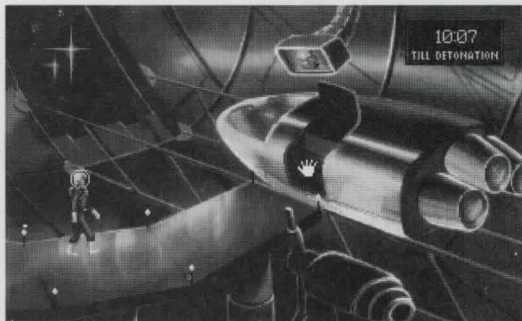
When you get off the elevator, you will be in the airlock of the *Arcada*. Go to the northern-most door (the right one in the text version) and open it. Inside you'll find a space suit. Take the space suit and the program will dress you automatically. You will die if you walk through the airlock to the pod without wearing the suit. Next, open the drawer next to the door by pushing the button you see (in the



original version you open the left door). In this drawer (or door) you will find a gadget that will be useful later in the game—a language translator. Make sure you have it in your inventory, and then save the game.

Now you are ready to board the pod. In the typing version of the game, push the Open Airlock button on the control panel. In the icon-based version, just walk through the door.

You are now in the *Arcada's* launch bay. In the icon version of the game, climb



into the pod by clicking on the open door with the Hand icon. If you attempt to walk to the pod, Roger could easily fall to his demise. Once inside, remember that a good janitor always buckles up. Put on the seatbelt. Next, look at the buttons in front of Roger's face, and get a description of each one.

Push the Power button (the one on the far right of the panel), and power up your escape pod. Next, push the throttle forward. You're on your way out of the *Arcada*.

In the original text game, when you enter the launch bay you won't see any



pod. Don't worry; just walk to the control panel and press the Lift button. Presto, a pod is raised up to the launch level. Save the game. Enter the pod from the left side; it's the only side Roger can enter from, but you might have to search around a bit for the exact spot. Once inside, close the door and fasten your seatbelt. Then press the Power but-

ton and push the throttle; Roger's out of immediate danger. Once you're safely away from the *Arcada*, no matter how much time is left until self-destruct, it will immediately explode. Enjoy the animation.

Roger ends up lost in space. Look at the panel buttons again and press the one labeled AutoNav. If you save the game first, you can press the button labeled "Do Not Press." It will bring a premature ending to the game, along with a quick visit to another place. What the heck: save, press, enjoy the trip, and restore the game. Don't blame us for the commercial plug.

The AutoNav tells you that you are heading for the planet Keron and takes over the controls. The computer obviously isn't a great pilot since it crash lands Roger in the middle of the desert, but at least it gets him down in one piece.

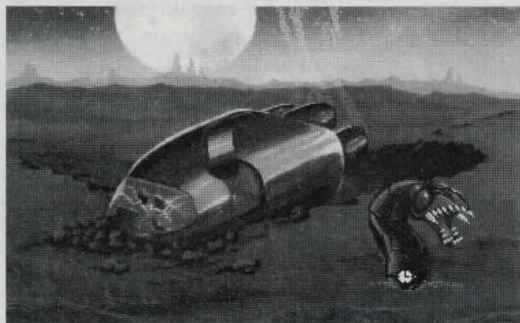


PlanetSide: On Kerona

Now that you're stranded in the middle of nowhere, unfasten your seatbelt and look around the pod. In the original version, you'll find a survival kit. Take it. Leave the pod, walk around outside to the front of your defunct vessel, and examine the ground. Take the piece of glass from the broken windshield. In the newer SQI, get out of the pod and then go back to the hatch and look around inside.

You will find a survival kit. Take it and open it—it contains a ten-gallon can of dehydrated water and a Xenon army knife. It was in the pod while you were in space, but it can't be taken until you're on Kerona. Feeling like a pack rat yet? Hopefully you've saved the game already, but you should do so again at this point because Roger's further adventures are rather dangerous.

All things considered, you are now ready to start off into the desert in search



of a way to get off this rock. If at any point in this part of the game you get a message about being thirsty, drink some of the water. If you don't, Roger can die of dehydration, which is silly when you're carrying ten gallons of water.

If you wander off into the desert, Roger can also die by becoming food for the grell, a Keronian sand-

worm. In the text version, Roger can also be hit by a meteorite if you wander off.

Walk off the southeastern side of the screen, and then go east. A quick step to the north takes you to a big skeleton. If you have the text version of the game, just walk east two screens from the pod (use the lower part of the screen) and you'll be in the same location. Alongside the skeleton—which are rocks and cliffs in the first version—grow small clusters of sticky plants. Take a sample. Taste it—yuk.

Right about now, a Sarien spider droid will show up looking to blow Roger to bits. Don't let the droid touch him. To avoid this, quickly walk two screens to the east and then walk partway up the vertebrae. At this point the droid can't get to Roger—it will never walk up the skeleton. In the original game, the droid probably won't show up this early. Whether it does or not, immediately walk one screen north, and walk up the stone ramp.

Walk along the vertebrae (or ramp, as it may be) until you reach the place where it forms a bridge. Immediately before the bridge, on the south side of the vertebrae, is a cracked, protruding piece of bone (this is a rock on the far side of the





bridge in the original version). Get in position to push it onto the spider droid, and then save the game.

When the droid gets underneath you, push the vertebrae. If you miss, check where it lands, and restore the game. Keep trying until you finally dispose of the droid.

NOTE: There is a second method of destroying the droid in the icon game, which you'll learn about later; if you just can't seem to hit that mechanical spider, relax, chill out a bit, and continue Roger on his way but **be warned:** Roger will be on the surface again later, and if the droid is still active, he will have to escape it again.

With the droid out of commission, cross the bridge. In the icon version you can only cross this bridge twice before it collapses under you. In the original version of the game, you can cross it three times safely. In whichever version you're playing,



you must cross the bridge that specific number of times in order to accomplish what has to be done, but an extra crossing means Roger's death.

Once you get across the bridge, follow the vertebrae until you reach the portion of the tail that has a metal plate in it. If you're playing the icon-based version, walk toward the plate and you will end up falling down an elevator shaft. In the original version of the game, you come to a pair of standing stones at the end of the cliff. Walk between them and you're on the elevator down. This is another good place to save the game.



Under Keronia

The elevator (or fall) will deposit Roger in a cave underneath the surface. Look around. You will see a stalagmite that has been broken and reset. Take the stalagmite. If you didn't take any of the plants on the surface, scrape the sticky gunk off the stalagmite. You'll need it in the next room. In the original version of the game, you will see a rock in the north part of the cave. Since there's no stalagmite in this version of the game, take the rock instead. Walk west to leave the room.

When you enter the next cavern, you'll notice a large grate on the floor. It is obviously not a safe place to walk, what with the tentacles that keep popping up.



The grate monster is quite hungry, so toss it your piece of plant from the surface (or the gunk from the stalagmite). The monster will attempt to eat the plant and end up stuck to it. You can now walk safely by the monster. In the original game, this doesn't work. There, Roger must hug the north wall and shimmy by the monster.

Walk west after the grate monster and you will come to a hole spouting steam. Next to the hole is a door you can't seem to open. To get through the door, drop your piece of stalagmite (or rock) into the steaming hole, and the door will open. They have weird keys here, don't they?

Go through the door. You are now in a room with a pool of acid. Don't drink or touch it unless you save the game first. There is nothing to do here but watch the acid drip from the ceiling (if this is fun for you, stay as long as you like), so you might as well head west out of the room. In the original game, you exit to the north, and then walk west.

The next chamber you enter has a field of laser beams blocking the west end, barring the path that you must take. Since lasers are nothing but light beams, you can use the glass from the pod to turn the beams on their generators and short them out. Hold the glass in the beams. Once the beams are out of order, you can walk up the ramp and to the east. If you're a real sadist, or just in a bad mood, save the game and walk Roger through the beams. In the icon version, it's worth it just for the instant replay.

The next screen is the ramp above the pool of acid, and again, those acid drips. Save the game. Walk as close as you can to the drips. Save the game again. Time the first drips, and then walk to the clear spot on the south edge of the ramp; that's where Roger is in this screen shot:



Save the game. Time the next drips in your path, and then walk to the clear part on the north edge of the ramp. Save the game every time you make it past a set of drips, so that if the next one gets you, you don't have to redo the entire sequence. Once past the acid, save again. Continue going east.

The screen after the acid is clear of hazards, and a good place to stop for a moment. Find the gadget you got in the *Arcada's* airlock and look at it. You'll find



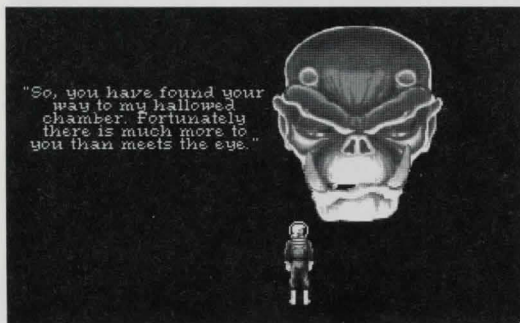
a button on it. Switch on the gadget; it's a translator, and you're going to be doing some listening soon. When you have the translator switched on, head east one more screen.

In the next room, a giant holographic image materializes and Roger is immobilized. If you have the translator activated, the alien visage tells you to go back to the surface, kill a monster called Orat, and bring back proof that you did it.

The alien promises that when you bring back proof of the Orat's demise, you will be provided with transportation. When the hologram is done speaking, Roger will be back on the surface.

NOTE: If you don't have the translator working, the hologram says the same thing but it comes out total gibberish. Roger still ends up on the surface, but you have no understanding of why he's there.

Where you land on the surface depends on which version of the game you have. In the icon version, you get kicked out of a cave under the monster skeleton. Go two screens east and you will find yourself near a large skull that you may have seen earlier while on the safe path. Get out your can of water and take a couple of swigs. Save the game.



Here's where you learn the second way of disposing of the spider droid. If it is still alive, it will chase Roger. Keep the can of water ready, and move quickly toward the skull. Wait at the entrance until the droid appears, and let it follow Roger inside.

When you get inside the skull, the first thing you will notice is the large, hungry monster: it's the Orat. If the droid is not following Roger, don't hesitate—throw the can of dehydrated water at the Orat. The critter will swallow it and explode, as almost ten gallons of water rehydrates in his stomach.

If the droid is on Roger's tail, walk our hero at once behind the big rock inside the cave. He will crouch and watch as the droid and Orat wipe each other out. There is no need to throw the water. Either way, all that will be left of Orat is a bloody unidentified part. Take it. The hologram wanted proof you killed the Orat—you've now got it.

In the original version of the game, Roger comes out on the cliffs. Follow the path back across the bridge to the bottom of the ramp. Go north one screen. In the west wall of the cliffs you will see a cave. Go to the mouth of the cave, drink some of your water, and save the game. Type **throw water**, and walk into the cave. As



soon as you see Orat, press the ENTER key to throw the water. Orat will eat the can, blow up, and leave you with a nice, juicy piece of its anatomy.

Take the Orat part, leave the cave, and follow the pathway back to the elevator for your last trip down. Walk through the cave the same way you did before. The grate

monster will still be stuck (although you must still inch your way past in the text version), and the laser beams will still be out of order, but save the game anyway, since you still have to go through the acid. When you get back to the hologram, drop the Orat part in front of it. A door will open for you.

In the room after the hologram, an odd-looking alien will present you with a skimmer to take you to Ulence Flats, the planet's bar and spaceport. Before you fly off in the skimmer, look around. Put the data cartridge in the computer on the east wall. Make sure you write down the self-destruct number for the Star Generator that the cartridge gives you. (In the original game, this code is always 6858.) Once you have the self-destruct code for the Star Generator, take back the cartridge—let's say it again: take back the cartridge!—board the skimmer, and save the game. If you are running the text version of the game, you have to turn the key to start the skimmer.



People using the original game, or those who wish to play the upcoming arcade sequence, should turn the speed of the game down as slow as possible. The arcade sequence of the game is mandatory in the typing version of the game, but can be skipped or played (as you wish) in the icon version. The sequence is easy to play, but not easy

to win. You maneuver the skimmer past rocks on the ground.

Your skimmer can survive four hits of the smaller rocks, but the fifth hit kills you. Also, the big rocks will kill you outright if you crash into them. Anyone who isn't especially fond of, or good at, arcade games should consider skipping the sequence if the option is available. It doesn't cost you any points should you choose to skip ahead to Ulence Flats.



Ulen Flats

Whether or not you played through the arcade sequence of the game, you have now arrived at Ulen Flats, Kerona's one settlement. As soon as your skimmer halts outside the town bar, a seedy looking character walks over and checks it out. He will offer you 25 buckazoids for the skimmer (30 in the original game). Turn down his offer; this is very important. He'll be back later with a better deal, and a vital piece of equipment.

When you're done talking to the guy, take the key out of the skimmer and walk east, behind the bar. Go to the pile of dust at the rear wall of the bar, and search through it. You will find 10 or 12 buckazoids, which is all the money to be found here. (In the text version of the game, you will not find any buckazoids here. Instead, walk one screen north and one screen west. Walk behind the corner of Droids B Us and search the ground. You'll find five buckazoids stuck in the sand.)

When you have your buckazoids, walk back to the front of the bar. Be careful not to walk between the force field poles that surround the colony. You can touch the force field three times, but on the fourth touch you die (in the original version, you don't die, you just can't pass through the field). The alien you spoke to earlier is back and he's willing to give you 30 buckazoids and a used jetpack for your skimmer. Accept his offer—it's the best one you'll get. He also gives you coupons to use in the bar and Droids B Us (again, this only happens in the icon version, although the coupons do come enclosed as part of the original SQ packaging).

When you're finished doing business with the alien, walk into the bar. Give the bartender the bar coupon and he'll give you five buckazoids and a beer. Order beer twice more. As you drink your third beer, you will overhear someone telling a story. Write down the sector that he/she/it mentions; you will need it later. Now, unless you want to spend your money getting drunk (you can), it would be a good time to get up and play some slots.

First save the game. Then walk over to the slot machine in the corner. To start playing, deposit however many buckazoids you want to bet, up to three, and let 'er rip. You can play until you have more than 320 buckazoids, and the slot machine overheats. In the first game, you're limited to 250 bucks. If Roger's very unlucky, the Slots-Of-Death will pay off a bad pull by dusting him. Literally. If you bet and win, save the game. If you lose, restore and try again. Keep doing this until you max out the machine.

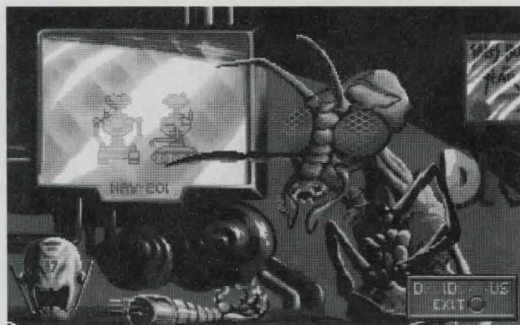
On the other hand, the icon-based game allows you to speed up this sequence, and score some extra points at the same time. Here's how. Remember the widget you found in the Star Generator room aboard the *Arcada*? Put this widget on the Slots-Of-Death machine (this option doesn't exist in the old game as there is no



widget). Now he can't lose, because the magnetic widget keeps the slots turning in his favor. Once you have the money, you can plot your escape from this godforsaken planet.

Leave the bar and walk to Droids B Us, which is one screen east and one screen north from the front of the bar. Once you're there, walk inside. Give your coupon to the salesbug; it entitles Roger to a 20 percent reduction on any droid he buys. If you want to know about a particular droid, talk to the dealer while the droid's picture is on the viewscreen.

The droid you need is the Nav-201, the one shown on the viewscreen in the illustration. When it appears on the screen, give the dealer the buckazoids and then



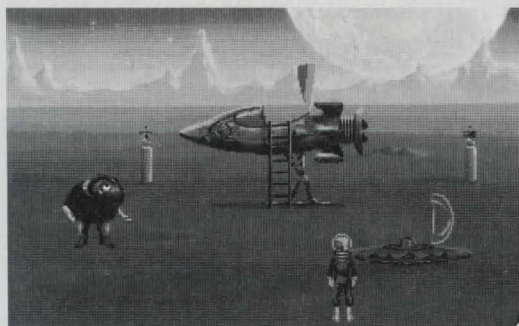
pick up your droid (in the first game, the droid you want is the first one at the top of the stairs—the cute white jobbie).

When you have your droid, walk one screen west, and one screen south from where you picked up the droid (that's where you find the buckazoids in the original game). You will meet up with

Tiny, a used spacecraft salescreature. After Tiny's initial hype, walk back one screen north. Don't worry, Tiny and your droid will follow. Walk up to the rocket ship at the top of the screen.

This is the ship you need to get off the planet. Tiny's price is high, but you don't have anything better to spend your buckazoids on. Buy the ship from Tiny, and board it. In the original game, you have to look for and push the Load button to load your pilot droid. In the newer version, the droid boards automatically.

In the text version of the game, when the droid asks where you want to go,



give the sector name you overheard in the bar. In the icon version, as soon as you get off the planet, the pilot droid will ask what sector to head for. Open up the copy protection booklet again, and type in the code for the name of the sector you heard in the bar—it's on the opposite page from the data cartridge codes. Now you are well on the way

to the final sequence of the game: the Sarien starship *Deltaur*.

Once you tell the droid what sector to head for, you will pass through an asteroid field, but the droid will take you through safely. After that, the *Deltaur*



appears on the ship's scanners. When the droid asks whether or not to leave, tell it no. You will automatically exit the ship with the jetpack on, and can fly to the *Deltaur*. In the original game, you have to first wear the jetpack, then leave the ship under your own power.

Fly down to the *Deltaur*, center yourself on the hatch, open the hatch, and fly into the airlock. The final portion of the game has begun. Don't forget to save the game.



Aboard the Deltaur

The airlock of the *Deltaur* is not a safe place to stand around sightseeing. If Roger is in plain sight when the cleaning droid opens the door, he'll get fried. When you reach the inside of the airlock, walk over to the east side of the door, and stay in the corner there until the cleaning droid opens the door. All you have to do is wait until the droid is in the room, and walk out the door behind it. In the original version of the game there is no danger of being fried in the airlock; just wait until the droid is in the room and then walk out the door.

The room you enter after getting out of the airlock has one important feature: a large trunk in the middle of the floor. In the original version, you have to look for it. Open the trunk with the Xenon army knife from the survival kit, and climb inside. You'll be in for a rough ride, but when you open the trunk again you'll be in another part of the ship.

If you don't feel like getting bumped around, there is another way to get out of the room. Push the trunk under the vent in the west wall and climb on top of it. Use the Xenon army knife to open the grate on the vent, and then climb inside. Take the ladder in the vent up or down; it doesn't matter which way you go. When you reach a passage leading off the ladder, take it. To open the grate at the other end of the passage, kick it and climb through.

Whether you went through the grate or rode in the trunk like a heap of old socks, you'll find yourself in the Sarien laundry room (either way scores you the same number of points). Don't leave the room right away or you'll be shot by the Sariens. Instead, go to the washing machine. Open the washer, and climb in. A Sarien will arrive, toss in his clothes, turn on the washer, and then leave. Once you survive the rinse cycle, you'll find yourself wearing the uniform of a Sarien officer. Search your pockets. You will find that all of Roger's possessions—except for the data cartridge—have been lost. Don't worry, you won't need them anymore. (In the text version of the game, you keep all your possessions, but will have no use for them.)



Look on the floor at your feet, and you'll find a Sarien ID card (in the text game, look at the uniform to find the card). Take it. Now that Roger looks like a proper Sarien, he can wander around the *Deltaur* without getting killed. Exit off the southeast side of the screen.

When you enter the next room, you will notice that it contains two elevators and a guard. You may want to talk to the guard. He can tell you that the elevator he is guarding leads to the Captain's escape pod, something that will be useful to know after you have set the Star Generator to self-destruct. He won't tell you anything more, so leave him and walk one screen to the east.

In the original version of the game, the guard doesn't tell you that the elevator

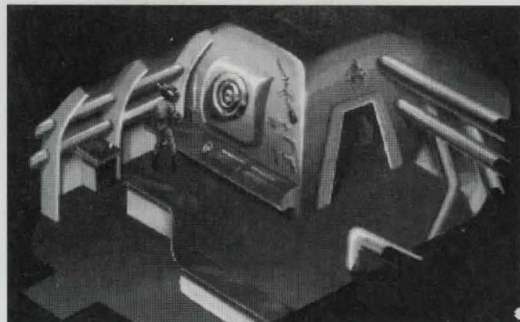


leads to the escape pod. Talk to him anyway. Keep talking to him until he asks you if you have bought King's Quest 2; this can take some time. Tell him "Yes" to score points. For even more points in the text version, try kissing the guard.

Walk one screen to the east. You will see an elevator at the end of the hall. Take it, and then walk

south one screen. You are now next to a large machine that you can use to read the data cartridge. This is very useful in case you forget the self-destruct code for the Star Generator, or didn't think to read the cartridge on Keron. (In the text version of the game, you can only read the cartridge on Keron because the computer on the *Deltaur* doesn't exist.) Once you've read the cartridge, there is nothing else to do here. Retrace your steps to the room with the two elevators and the guard.

Once there, take the elevator that the guard isn't watching. You will end up on the lower deck of the *Deltaur*. From here walk one screen west, and take the elevator up. Then walk two screens to the east. You will find yourself on a catwalk above the Star Generator and a very nasty-looking Sarien guard. There's nothing you can do about them right now, so walk one more screen to the east.



At this point, save the game and slow it down to its slowest speed. You will find yourself in the armory of the *Deltaur*, with a droid asking to see your ID. Before you show your ID, take note of the grenades on the counter behind the droid (in the text version of the game, the grenades are on the east end of the counter). Show the ID



card to the droid, and when it goes offscreen to get Roger a weapon, walk over and take a grenade.

Be quick, because if the droid catches you pilfering it will kill you. The droid will bring back a pulseray pistol. Don't even think of shooting the droid to get a grenade; your pulseray works only on living targets. At this point, save the game, go back to normal speed, and return to the catwalk above the generator.

When you are back on the catwalk, stand directly above the guard and drop the grenade on him. This is the only way to get rid of this Sarien. In the text game, if you want full points, go back to the armory and get the second grenade. Other than scoring you points, it has no use in the game.

Now that you have gotten rid of the guard, walk back two screens west to the elevator. Before you start moving, it would be a good idea to get your pulseray ready; you'll need it shortly.

Just before Roger reaches the elevator, he will trip and lose his helmet to a trash droid. There is no way to avoid this. At this point, he must shoot any Sarien in sight, since he can no longer pass as one of them. In the original version of the game, the Sariens kill with one shot, so you must shoot the moment you see them. In the icon version of the game, the Sariens can shoot five times before they kill Roger.

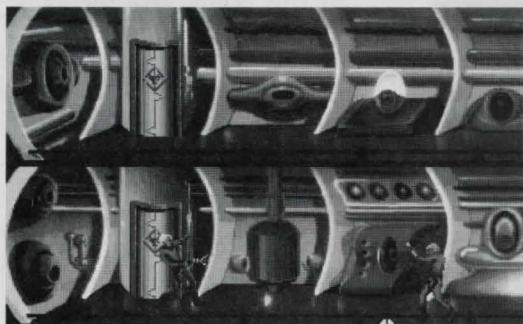
Roger's mission is still to destroy the Star Generator, so go down the elevator and head east. In the first version of the game, if you see a droid on the screen, either get off the screen or duck into an elevator. Roger can't kill it, but it can kill him. Roger can outrun it, though, and that can help him get through doors before it reaches him. This particular droid doesn't exist in the icon version, but you have to kill a lot more Sariens.

Go two screens east from the bottom of the elevator, and you'll end up in the Star Generator room. No Sarien guards will come there. Search the dead guard, and take the remote control. Turn off the force field around the Star Generator by using the remote control. Walk to the generator and enter the self-destruct code from the cartridge (this requires a **look at screen** command in the original version). When you have typed in the code, Roger has five minutes to get off the ship. Save the

game here, especially if you are playing the text version.

Once the generator is set to self-destruct, walk one screen back (west). In the text version, you will encounter a Sarien guard, the only one you must kill.

Don't hesitate; shoot him as soon as you get on the screen. This might take several tries, so be sure





to save the game just before you reach this point. Once you get rid of any and all guards on the screen, take the elevator back up to the room with the two elevators. The guard will probably be gone, but if he isn't, kill him and any other guards with him. You can then get on the elevator to the escape pod. Take the elevator, and you will arrive at the Captain's escape pod. This would be a good time to get in the pod and off of the *Deltaur*. (Do this by **looking**, and then pushing the Launch button in the text version of the game.) The *Deltaur* and its threat to the universe explodes behind Roger.

The remainder of the game is an animated sequence in which Roger returns to Xenon as a hero. At a ceremony in his honor, he receives the coveted trophy of janitors everywhere: the Golden Mop. Your adventure has come to an end.

Congratulations! You have now completed Space Quest I: The Sarien Encounter. You have scored maximum points possible on the adventure. Perhaps you'll drag Roger out of retirement to play Space Quest II: Vohaul's Revenge.

est I: The Sarien
counter

Keeping Your Bearings in Space

Quest I: The Sarien Encounter

Map Order:

Aboard the *Arcada*

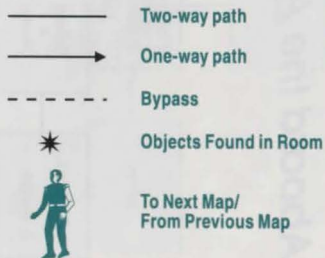
Kerona Surface (Original Version of the Game)

Kerona Surface (Icon Version of the Game)

Under Kerona

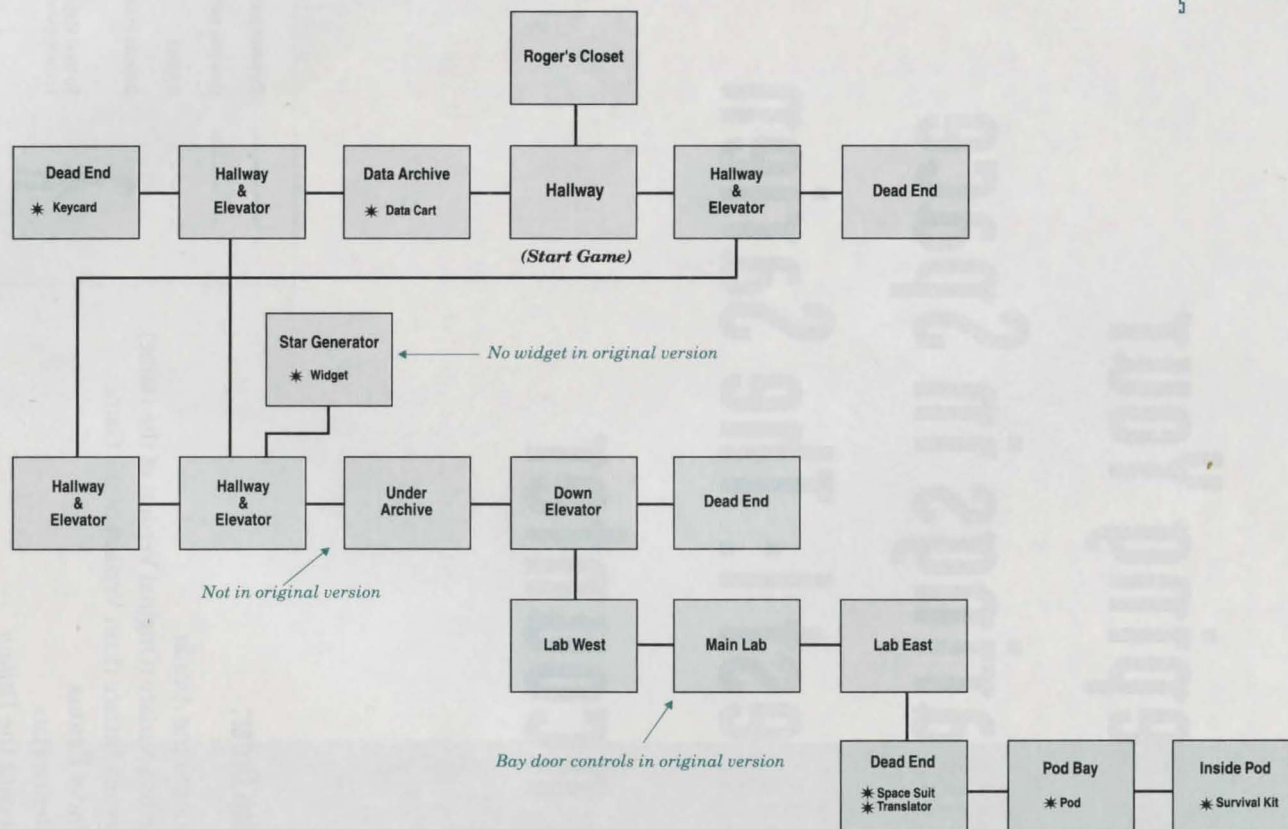
Ulence Flats

Aboard the *Deltaur*

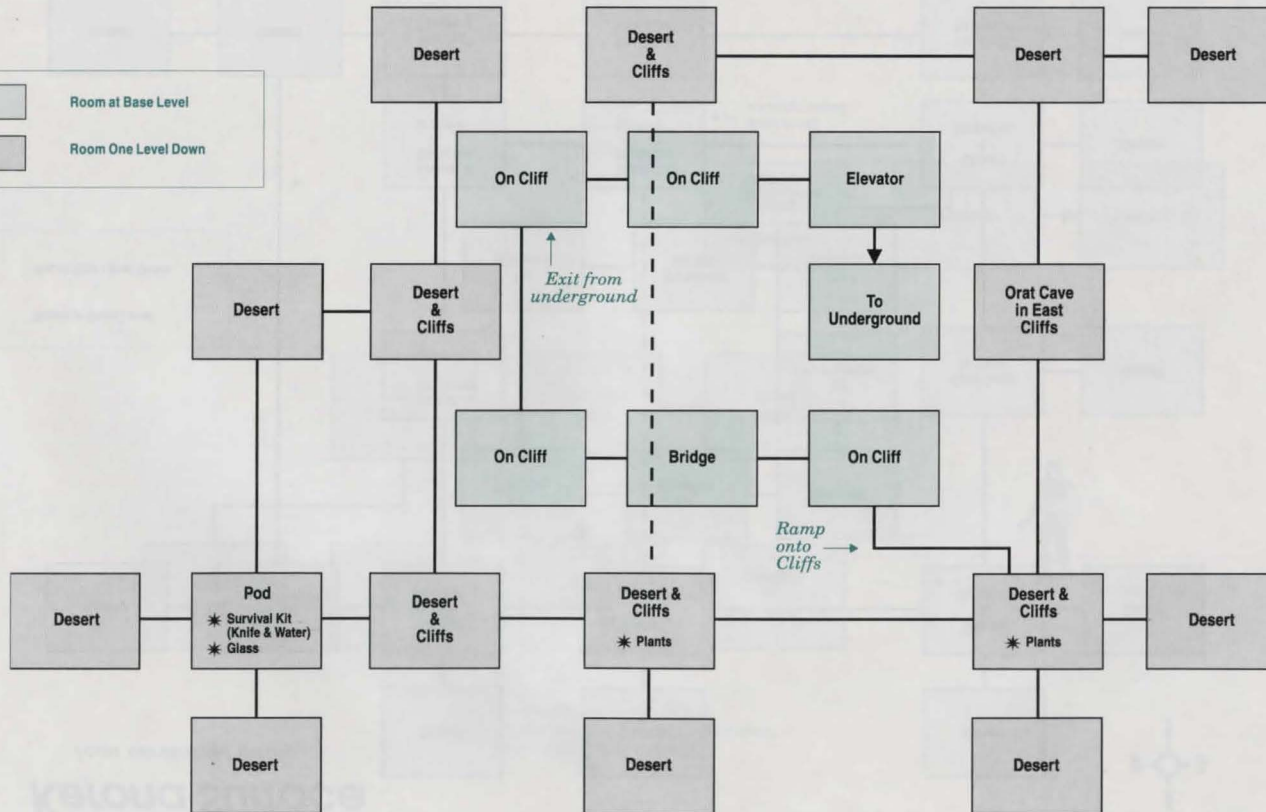
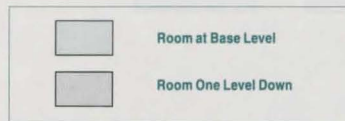




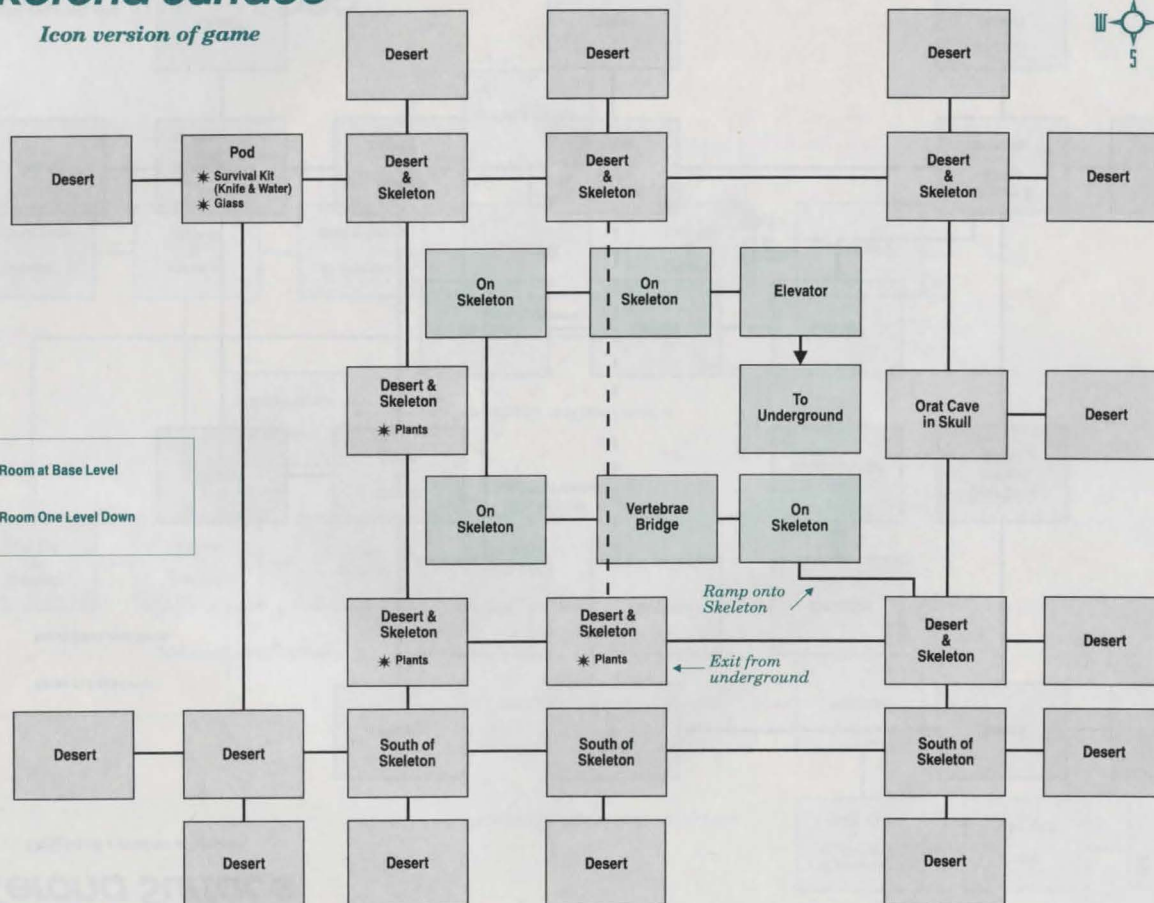
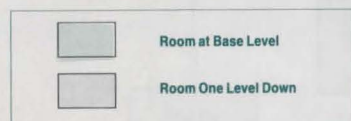
Aboard the Arcada



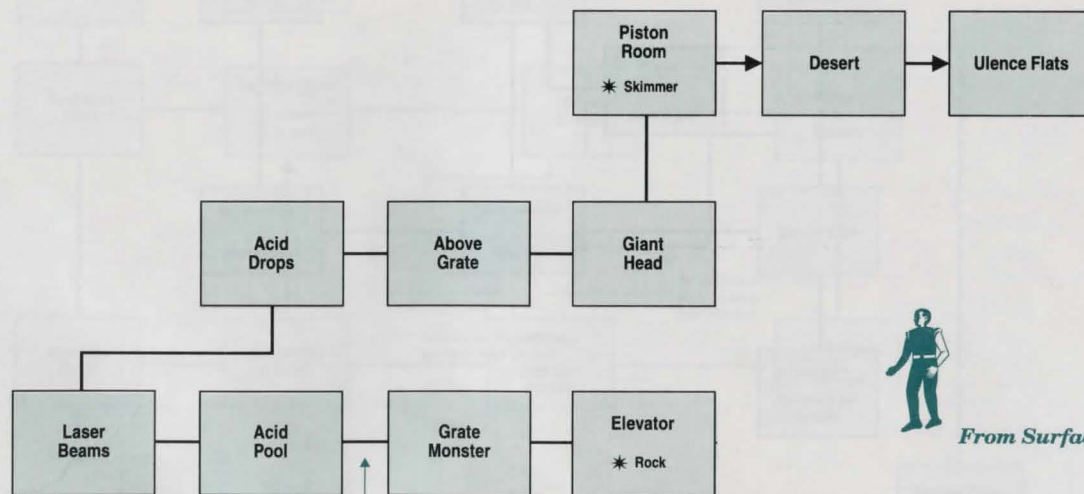
Original version of game



Icon version of game



Under Kerona

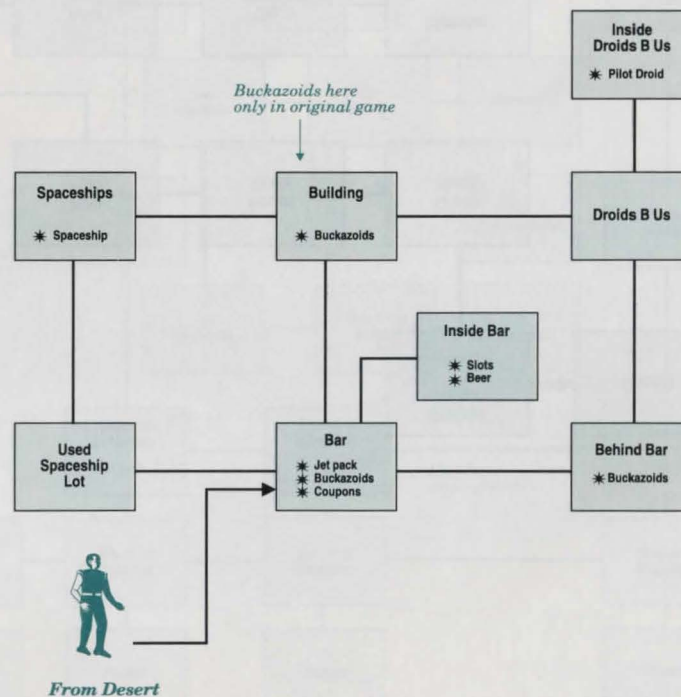


*This path is to the North
in the original game; otherwise,
the maps are identical*

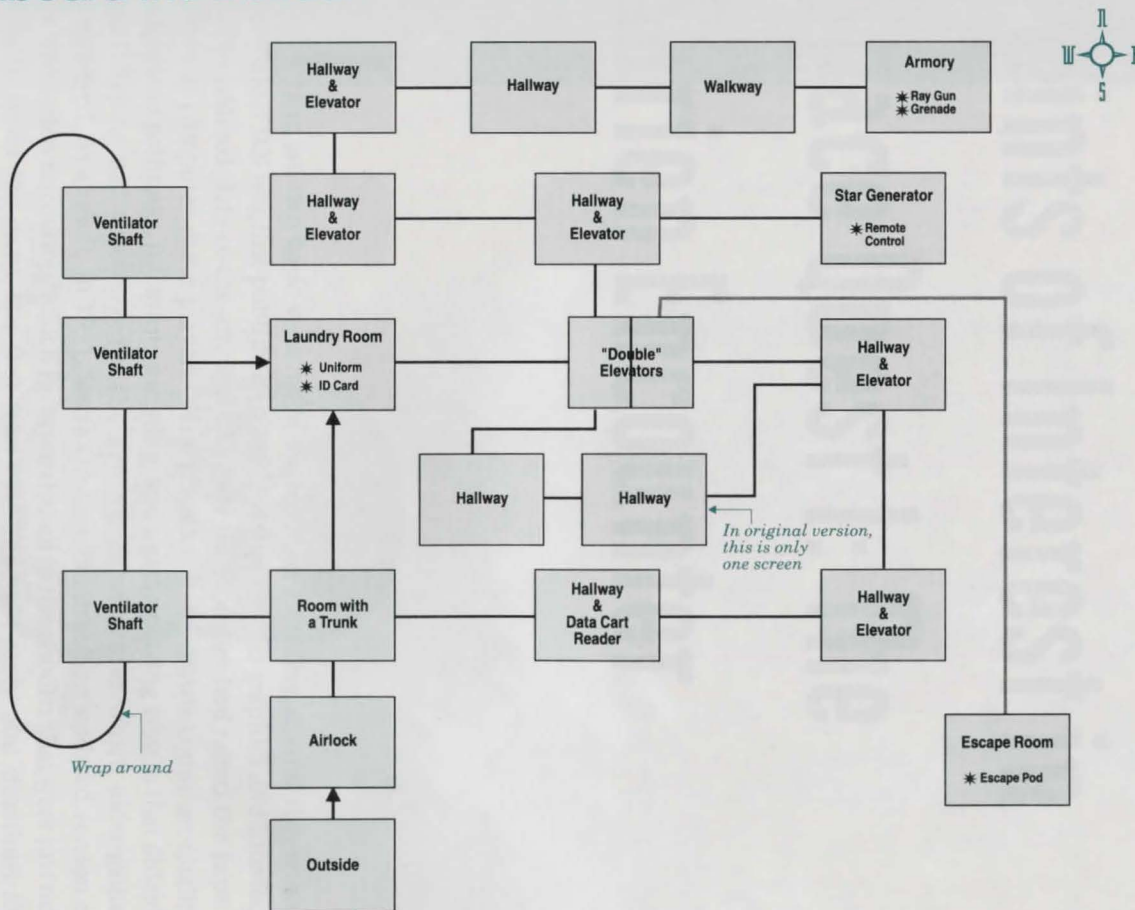




Ulence Flats



Aboard the Deltaur



Points of Interest in Space Quest I: The Sarien Encounter

There are two basic versions of Space Quest I floating around this world. The original SQI was first published in 1987; at that time its graphics and interface were considered state-of-the-art. By 1990, new technologies had raised the expectations of computer game players. VGA graphics, hand-drawn comic-art-quality background paintings, full musical scoring, and a game-playing system that did not require typing had all emerged as the new standards against which older games were judged. As a result, in 1991, Sierra On-Line published an updated version of SQI: The Sarien Encounter, which incorporated all of the goodies that were just not available when the game was first released. While the story and situations are exactly the same as the original text-and-typing classic, the newer version is icon-based, requires no typing, and can be entirely controlled by mouse input. The update has been a smashing success, and has brought new life to the original adventure of Roger Wilco, Space Janitor.



As noted in the preceding section of this book, there are a few minor differences between the two versions. Some of these differences are reflected in how some points are scored in the game. Since there are several hundred thousand copies of the first version in circulation, this chapter gives scoring lists for both versions.

WHAT TO DO

POINTS (new version)

POINTS (original)

Aboard the *Arcada*:

Get keycard	1	1
Learn name of data cartridge	2	2
Get data cartridge	5	5
Get widget	1	n/a
Open pod bay doors	2	2
Open elevator with keycard	2	2
Get gadget (translator)	2	2
Get/wear space suit	2	2
Lift pod to platform	n/a	1
Escape <i>Arcada</i>	15	15
Activate AutoNav (in space)	2	2
Kick dead body	n/a	-1

On *Kerona*:

Get piece of glass	3	3
Get survival kit	2	2
Get plant	2	n/a
Kill spider droid	5	5
Kill Orat	5	5
Kill droid and Orat together	10 (alternate points)	n/a
Get Orat part	2	2
Discover elevator	2	2
Use plant on grate monster	5	n/a
Open door with rock	4	4



WHAT TO DO	POINTS (new version)	POINTS (original)
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Disable laser beam	5	5
Pass through acid drops	3	3
Get skimmer	10	10
View data cartridge	5	5
Retrieve data cartridge	n/a	5

At Ulence Flats:

Arrive at Ulence Flats	25	25
Obtain jetpack	5	5
Drink third beer/learn sector name	5	5
Use widget on slot machine	5	n/a
Buy pilot droid (NAV-201)	4	4
Buy the correct spaceship	4	4
Leave Kerona	25	25

Aboard the *Deltaur*:

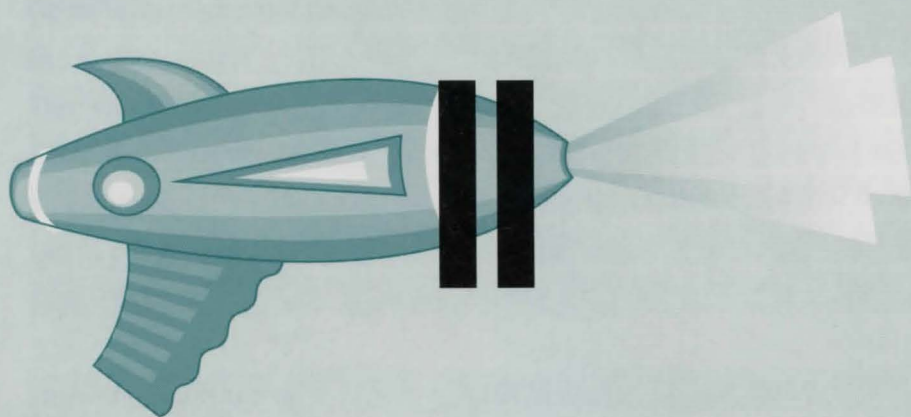
Leave <i>Deltaur</i> airlock	1	n/a
Climb through vent	n/a	2
Find trunk	n/a	1
Kick grate to enter laundry	3	1
Hide in trunk (alternate solution)	3	3
Hide in washing machine/get uniform	5	5
Get ID card	2	n/a
Talk to Sarien guard	n/a	1
Kiss Sarien guard	n/a	1
Say "Yes" to King's Quest question	n/a	5
Obtain gas grenade	1	1
Get second grenade	n/a	1
Get raygun	1	3



<u>WHAT TO DO</u>	<u>POINTS (new version)</u>	<u>POINTS (original)</u>
Grenade Star Generator guard	5	5
Get remote control	3	3
Turn off force field	3	3
Enter self-destruct code	10	10
Shoot Sarien	3 (one time only)	3 (one time only)
Get to escape pod	1	1
Escape <i>Deltaur</i>	3	3
Highest possible score:	201	202



P A R T



Space Quest II: Vohaul's Revenge





Dohaul's Revenge

The Emperor's shackled daughter hung suspended a meter above Centauri City's muddy main street. Spread-eagled with wrists and ankles manacled to wooden posts, the woman's body was limp from her efforts to free herself. Yet she struggled to keep both head and spirits high, for she was of imperial blood.

From my rooftop perch, I watched in disgust as the Fungoid invaders oozed gelatinous pseudopods up and down her perspiring limbs. Their intentions were both foul and repulsive. They were also quite evident. A sheen of sweat, only partially caused by the heat of Centauri's high noon, reflected the finely toned musculature of her body. The heiress to the Throne of a Thousand Suns was perfectly aware of what fate was in store for her.

"Ha, ha, ha!" the slimes laughed in unison. "Where's your lover, Roger Wilco, now? Even he cannot save you from the slow death you shall suffer. Bow down before us; agree to be our puppet and slave; marry our leader; betray your father's empire. Only then will we release you. When the Throne of a Thousand Suns is ours, we will become the mightiest power in the galaxy! What is your decision?"

The princess's raygun still lay in the mud, within reach of where she was most cruelly bound. A combat issue vibro-knife was still strapped to one bare thigh, balancing the empty holster on the other. Her battle bikini had seen better times (and more material), but was still more than adequate to protect her in a shootout. However, none of her weapons was of any use given her current predicament. I planned to rectify that situation.

"Do with me as you wish. I would rather die than see you conquer." Hidden strength supported her trembling voice.

"You will live to regret those words!" the Fungoids burred. Several more pseudopods began crawling over bare flesh. "You will live, and pray you hadn't!"



I could take the sights and sounds no longer. Slamming the crosshairs of my pulse rifle into position, I snapped off four rapid needle bursts at the chains imprisoning the now writhing woman. First the ankle chains burst loose from their posts, followed at once by the freeing of my princess's arms. None of the short, metal-shattering blasts even nicked her. Immediately alert, she hit the ground and rolled once, retrieving her raygun with the move. So quickly had my sure shots hit that the monsters were staring down the barrel of the brave woman's gun before they could recover their gelatinous senses.

"Un-pseudopod her, you beasts!" My war cries filled the empty streets. Throwing my pulse rifle aside, I hurtled from the roof and down through the humid air, drawing my twin pearl-handled ion blasters as I dropped. Two of the slimes sizzled even before the muddy ground absorbed the force of my fall. Two more felt the fury of the princess's raygun. The last was blasted apart by our simultaneous fire.

"Curses, Roger Wilco, you have defeated us again." What remained of the Fungoids's feeble joint-life was able to spurt out those final words before dissolving into putrid, soft, black pudding. Short tendrils of smoke rose from the sludge, dispersing rapidly in the hot breeze.

"Roger! Roger, my love! I knew you would rescue me!" My darling rushed into my arms.

"You didn't do too badly yourself, sweetheart," I replied with a kiss.

"Roger!"

"Cornucopia!"

"Wilco. Wilco!!! Wake up and respond, you inadequate substitute for a brain-dead potty droid. Wilco, can you read me? Over."

The beeping of my WristoCommunoHoroChronoFonic watch began screeching up the audible scale, rapidly approaching a point midway between compulsion and pain. As usual, it was enough to break into my current daydream and yank me back to current reality. In this case, current reality was construction zone Groucho Harpo Zeppo 3 on the outside superstructure of XOS Orbital Station 4, floating many dozens of kilometers above the surface of Xenon. XOS 4 was a stop-over point for passengers traveling between Xenon and destinations on the other side of hyperspace. Roger Wilco, sanitation engineer and head janitor, was back on the job.

I had been cleaning up after the night shift, sweeping leftover particulate matter into my single-user model VacuSuck Space Broom. The work was mindless and conducive to reverie. I used the time to great advantage, improving my fantasy life and catching up on my sleep.

"Beep. Beep. Squaawk. . . On the double Wilco. And don't forget to bring your broom." Ah, yes, the broom. The same VacuSuck that was floating away from my outstretched arm; the same arm that had tossed the pulse rifle away as I leaped to



rescue Cornucopia Agricorp. As I watched the broom slowly make its way to an inevitable date with atmospheric reentry, I saw my vision of Cornucopia fade away, and another dozen buckazoids deducted from my pay.

"Wilco here. Over." Pressing the Communo function key on my multipurpose watch, the perturbed face of my superior officer, Private Fubar Snafu, abused my personal visual space.

"You were due inside an hour ago, Wilco. You're lucky I ran out of patience before you ran out of air. Make it snappy! Snafu out." The face faded away. On a whim, I checked out the Time and Horoscope buttons: I had been asleep for three hours, and Mercury was in Venus. Unfortunately, I didn't have time to watch the conjunction. I should have heeded the prediction, however. It meant trouble was riding into town and looking for a showdown. As showdowns go, Roger Wilco would do very nicely, thank you.

I moved up the hull of XOS 4 to the entry hatch above me. The hatch sensed my magneto-boots, and moments later I was sucked inside and decontaminated. The airlock lights changed from puce to amber to pale blue, signaling that it was safe for me to get out of my space suit.

As I have reported in another memoir, airlocks are pretty much standard on the spaceships and starships of all races. XOS 4's airlocks also contained the ship's sanitation engineering personal storage lockers, on the slight rationale that the air circulation was much better there. Personally, I have always thought that it was done because airlocks are not the best places in the universe to take naps.

I changed clothes, taking off the space suit and getting into my spiffy sanitation jumpsuit. The gray and lavender of the Sanitation Engineering Corps is a uniform to be worn with pride. My chest swelled each time I donned it, and I always patted the wrinkles flat with care. As I did so, I noted that my good luck charm was safely in the chest pocket. The charm was the Inter-Galactic All Species Dialect Translator that I had been carrying since my escape from the doomed research ship *Arcada* the year before. It shared space with an order form for a Labion Terror Beast Mating Whistle, something I had been intending to mail for some time but had not gotten around to doing. It had come to me as a premium for supporting Pledge Nights on Patrician Broadcasting, and for contributing 20 buckazoids to ensure that all Xenon would have the opportunity to continue watching over-produced nature vids on the exotic mating habits of uninhibited sub-sentient species. My money also went to help train the network's announcers to talk in unusual accents, and beg and whine for cash with the proper panache. PBS has always been a worthy cause.

Before I left the airlock—blissfully unaware that I had a new rendezvous with destiny—I opened my small locker and cleaned it out. The multi-species, omnigendered, one-size-fits-all athletic supporter was in need of its monthly washing, and the portable cubix rube spatial manipulation puzzle (and brain drain) had a



date to keep with the recycling droid. Those, and the clothes on my back, were all the possessions I was allowed onboard. They had been more than enough to keep me occupied in my spare time, but the rube had more moving parts than I was comfortable with. It was time to send it to a better home. Taking them both with me, I left the airlock and proceeded to my meeting with Pvt. Fubar Snafu.



Kidnapped!

Fubar was waiting for me in the transport control station. Staring intently at his own WristoCommunoHoroChronoFonic, he was either absorbed in the vid of his own daily horoscope or counting the seconds until my somewhat tardy arrival. From the tinge of drool at the corner of his mouth, I was unable to determine which alternative it might be. On the other hand, I did know he experienced trouble counting past 13, the total number of his fingers and toes.

"Wilco. Broomless again, I see. I would have never guessed." I had seen my superior in better moods, but not often.

"Wilco, I don't care if you rescued the plans for the Star Generator and saved Xenon—if not the entire galaxy—from the Sarien menace. The Gold Mop that you were awarded doesn't do diddly for sweeping up D deck. All I care about is what you've done for Xenon, this ship, and me lately. It hasn't been much." Fubar's review, I must admit, did contain some speck of truth.

"Now listen up. We've just experienced a major barf alert in Shuttle Bay One. A few of the passengers just up from the surface found the food not to their liking. Or possibly it was the zero-G, or the flight crew's jokes, or the thought that they might meet you. Get down there and clean it up. The transport tube is standing by to take you. Now get out of my sight before we have another puke party right here." The Private glared at me for several seconds longer, spat once at the deck, then left. As the black-and-yellow transport lift carried me up to the tube platform, I wiped my boot off on the back of my jumpsuit's left leg. Even I could spit more accurately than that.

The transport tube took me directly to Shuttle Bay One. A refueling line had already been attached to the craft, but I could see no technicians, passengers, or crew anywhere. The Bay's air smelled clean, despite the fact that the shuttle's hatch was open and the gangway down. Perhaps the general barf alert had been a false alarm? If so, I would have a few hours to kill before I had to report back to Fubar. Maybe I could pick up my dream where Cornucopia and I had left off. Humming a happy tune (I think it was the theme song from "MasterCodpiece Theatre"), I sauntered into the shuttle.



Two bushwhackers, alien bandits both, were waiting for me inside with nasty grins on their faces and billy clubs in their paws. The Apeoid ruffians appeared to be expecting someone, and wasted no time in beating *me* nearly senseless before I had time to scream in terror, run away, or both. As they gagged and hog-tied me, I could only wonder if Fubar Snafu had betrayed me, and why. Perhaps he had noticed the space dust I had swept under the rug in the station lounge? Or maybe he didn't like the cut of my skivvies? The more female of our crew mates did, or so I had been told. He may very well have not shared their sentiments, and jealousy can be a great motivator. I didn't get any answers to my questions right then as something very hard impacted in the general vicinity of my head. I lost consciousness.

I awoke hours, or days, later—I knew not which—still tied up, and supported nearly vertically by a creature or creatures unknown. My head felt as if it were one large bruise recovering from a weekend with a bottle of bad Fenestran firewater. Make that several bottles. My eyes took their own time relearning how to focus properly, and when they finally operated normally, I wished they didn't.

Whether the being I looked upon was human or machine wasn't completely clear. To be sure, it had the general form of a human, although it was so hairless and round that I thought it might be one of those inflatable dolls that pass for companionship to people of uncertain tastes. This impression was reinforced by the half dozen or eight thick tubes running into, or out of, its body. Various liquids and gases appeared to be floating through these transparent hoses, which were attached, on their other end, to a series of control panels and flashing readouts. Unlike dolls and toys, however, this being seemed to be breathing, and its eyes glared at me with hatred and contempt. It was a look I was not totally unfamiliar with, although the creature bore no resemblance at all to Fubar Snafu, or anyone else I knew for that matter.

My second impression was that I was in the presence of a pseudo-Harkonen, a near humanoid race that likes to indulge in far too many high-caloric meals. So obese do these creatures become that their skeletal structures cannot support their bulk; they must inflate themselves with helium in order to move around. This particular being, however, was seated in what appeared to be the captain's chair of some starship, although I couldn't feel the vibration of engines at all. As usual, my first impression was wrong—as was my second impression.



A Ghastly Plot Revealed

A high voice wheezed in my direction, slightly out of sync with the movement of the being's lips. It was as if his words were being processed by a leaky set of artificial



lungs in need of a lubricant change and tune-up. It was a most disorienting, grating, and unpleasant experience.

"Well, well, well. So this is the famous Roger Wilco. We meet at last." The creature acted as if it knew me.

"You don't know me, Wilco, but I know you. Oh, do I know you. My name is Sludge Vohaul. I am the evil clone of Slash Vohaul, the man who invented the Star Generator. It was I who masterminded the Sarien attack on the *Arcada* in order to steal that device. It was I who intended to use the Star Generator in order to rule Xenon, and then the galaxy. It was I who planned such sweet revenge on the Federation that did *this* to me." Vohaul made a wide gesture with both of his pudgy hands to emphasize the collection of conduits attached to him.

"Once I was like other humans, but Xenon decided that Slash would become a respectable research scientist, and *I* a cyborg specializing only in the development of artificial sweeteners and processed cheese foods. It was *I* who was the smarter and better-looking clone, and they mocked *my* genius. Look at me. Half man, half machine I am now, but I shall be more. Much more. And I would have been already if you, *puny human*, had not blundered into my plans and destroyed my Sarien minions."

Sludge Vohaul. I remembered the name. Slash had warned me, and the universe, of his insane clone. He had even included his warning in the data cart I had rescued from the *Arcada*; the cart that contained secret plans for the Star Generator. No wonder Vohaul held a grudge against me. I would too, if I looked like him.

"Wilco, I had planned to kill you as soon as you were in my clutches. Instead, I will let you die slowly, a slave in the radioactive guano mines on the planet Labion below. Each day you live will be new revenge for me. Your suffering will renew my life. As my slave, there will be no way for you to interfere in my new plot against Xenon."

As Vohaul ranted on, the time difference between his voice and lips became much greater. Still numb from capture and beating, my fate at his hands seemed unreal and distant. I suppose the clone was looking for an audience, any audience, because Vohaul began outlining his proposed vengeance against Xenon in some detail. It was ghastly.

A series of large, glass cylinders rose up out of the floor. Each was spacious enough to contain a full-grown human, and they did. An army of clones inhabited the tubes; they were dressed identically in grey suits cut in a style centuries out of fashion. Pieces of colored fabric were tied around each of their necks like dull decorations, and all of them, men and women alike, gripped vinyl briefcases in their hands. On each of their blank, soulless faces was implanted an artificial smile that said, "Hello there. Have you thought much about life insurance lately? You



should." Vohaul pointed to the enclosed figures and laughed. Of course, the laughter was quite insane.

"Gaze upon my clone army, Wilco. They have all been genetically engineered to be this galaxy's perfect door-to-door life insurance salespeople. Soon I will plant them all over Xenon in order to do their worst. No one will be safe from their predations. They will cajole, pester, plead, beg, frighten, whimper, whine, and *sell, sell, sell*, until all of Xenon is reduced to a surrendering mass of mindless protoplasm. Within days of the invasion, my total victory will be assured—or, insured, you might say." Vohaul's laughter became still more shrill.

"Not only will all of Xenon be my over-insured slaves, the beneficiary of all those over-priced policies will be Sludge Vohaul—me!" I think I passed out for a moment just then as the full evil of the scheme became apparent, but I must have recovered quickly.

"I would offer to sell you a policy, too, Wilco, but slaves have lousy life expectancies and can't afford life insurance. Ha ha ha ha ha! Guards, take him away!" Something hit me again, and I returned to unconsciousness. I had been hoping it would come sooner.



Marooned on Labion

The thud of a bad shuttle landing brought me back to the land of the living. A rude yank brought me to my feet, and I finally got a good look at my guards. Yup, they were the same cretins who had met me on XOS 4. Apeoids or simians would be an accurate physical description, but those particular creatures tend to be more intelligent than Vohaul's dim minions.

We had landed on top of a tall platform somewhere in the middle of a Labion jungle, far above the treetops. The place had been built, most likely, to ensure protection against the planet's more carnivorous beasts. The guards spent little time in transferring me onto a waiting HoverFlit. From their crude jokes, it appeared that it would be a short ride until we reached the guano mines. My hands were still bound behind my back, and I had never felt so hopeless in my life. If I had a future, it was going to be short, fragrant, and hard. I wasn't looking forward to it at all.

My future changed faster than the Lone Space Ranger getting into his costume. The hoverflit carrying me and the two guards was skimming smoothly along in the twilight, just a few meters over the treetops. As the speed of the craft began slowing, I assumed that we had reached the mines, my final destination. It was only the sudden panic on my captors' faces that suggested all was not going as planned. With a surprising lurch, the hoverflit came to a dead stop in the air. A moment or two later, the hum of the anti-grav unit stopped. The guards gave each other a quick



look, as if to say, "You filled the tank, right?" and we fell from the sky. I screamed until the crash renewed my relationship with unconsciousness.

It was dawn when I finally awoke. Birds sang happy tunes in the trees, and the sounds of unknown beasts grunted and roared in the distance. Around me the ground was gouged from the impact, and a number of large scorch marks led to the pile of wreckage that used to be a hoverflit. I hurt in so many places that I stopped worrying about it. No part of my body seemed broken, I could feel no sharp pains, and very little of the spilled blood around me seemed to be mine. I decided I would live. Somehow, the crash had deactivated my magnetic bonds. As I pushed myself up, I felt the ground squish. It turned out not to be ground at all, but the corpse of one of my guards. Evidently, his body had cushioned mine during the crash. He had not survived, nor did his companion. It was a fact that bothered me not in the least.

We had been thrown clear of the main part of the wreckage, and when I felt steady enough on my feet, I examined it for anything that might prove useful. Little survived, and there was nothing I could salvage. On the hoverflit's control panel, a small light alongside a button marked "AutoLocator" was flashing urgently. Despite my hazy condition, I knew enough to not want Vohaul's mercenaries to auto-locate me. A punch of the button shut off the light, and presumably the locator. A search of the dead apeoids only turned up a keycard that my inadvertent cushion had been carrying. I took it from him; a card much like it had helped me escape the doomed *Arcada*. There was no food, no water, and no weapons. All I had was the stuff I had been carrying when I was attacked on XOS 4; a plastic puzzle, a postage-paid order form, my Inter-Galactic All Species Dialect Translator (and good luck charm), and my unwashed jockstrap offered little in the way of survival gear.

I knew I couldn't stay where I was. The AutoLocator must have been crying out for rescue all night, and I didn't want to be around when help arrived. All around me was thick jungle, impenetrable in most directions. I chose to go north, where the trees and vines seemed to thin somewhat, and soon came to a large clearing. I had been in the open for only a few seconds when I heard the swoosh of an approaching aircraft. Vohaul's searchers were nearby.

Not wishing to be seen—sure I'd be an easy target out in the open—I dashed for the cover of the nearest big trees and hid myself behind one. The sound of the hoverflit came closer still, and a few moments later I could hear one levitating itself not far from where I had previously been standing. Two or three pulse rays shot out into the underbrush, vaporizing them. Vohaul's henchmen were indeed looking for me, and they evidently didn't want to be bothered taking me alive. After a few more shots, the hoverflit flew on to continue its search.

Safe for the moment, I came out from under cover and looked around. The clearing extended west and north for some distance, and a narrow path that I hadn't



noticed before led up to a small plateau. What looked to be a structure of some sort was half concealed by bushes there. Curious, I went to see what it was.

I'm still not sure what a General Products InterStellar FederationExpress mailbox was doing in that part of Labion's wilderness. Perhaps Vohaul had ordered it installed there so that his troops could write home occasionally. It could even have been put there by developers as the first phase of some proposed subdivision. However it got there, it looked like it hadn't been used in a long time. A sign on the box said that there were pickups daily. The scene was so incongruous that I laughed.

That's what gave me the idea to mail in my Labion Terror Beast Mating Whistle order form. As circumstances and synchronicity would have it, here I was on Labion, and in front of a mailbox. At worst, mailing my already filled-in form would at least tell the universe that Roger Wilco had been here. If I died before escaping, my disappearance would not forever remain a mystery. With a resigned sense of history, I put the order form into the box's slot.

Matter transmission has always seemed magical to me. Put something into a MassPass slot, and it disappears. Conversely, an empty slot will buzz, twinkle, and fill up as something is beamed in. How it all works, I have never understood.

I didn't realize that this FederEx box was a two-way matter transmitter. My order form went in, and I turned around to walk away. Behind me, the unmistakable buzz/twinkle of an incoming MassPass told me to stop. Turning back, I discovered a package solidifying itself into existence. It was the whistle I had ordered, complete with its own cord. That was fast service! *I didn't want the whistle*, I thought, *I wanted to be found and rescued*. I took the thing out of the delivery tray. *Ah, well*, I consoled myself as I hung the cheap, silvery whistle around my neck. *Maybe I can use it to scare creatures away. And I have paid for it.*

From where the mailbox stood, I had a good view of the immediate area. Below me, in the clearing, grew patches of bluish mushrooms and spores. Far to the east was the glimmer of water—perhaps a lake or river. That seemed as good an initial destination as any. First, though, I would explore the clearing further.

As I reached the bottom of the path, a squealing, thrashing sound started coming out of the woods east of me. Beast or sentient, I couldn't tell, but the cries sounded desperate. Hurrying toward the sounds, I discovered myself in a cul-de-sac, where the large clearing became sealed off by heavy underbrush. Dangling from a large tree, one paw entrapped by the loop of a snare, was a small creature. With two large front teeth, broad tail, squat body, and pinkish coloration, it looked much like a hairless, bipedal beaveroid. It was squealing in terror, but otherwise looked harmless. After observing it for several minutes and determining that it probably wouldn't bite me, I untied the creature and set it free. It promptly scampered into the thick bushes, paused briefly behind a bush to give me a brief stare, then disappeared. As I returned to the clearing, I realized that my impromptu bit of



kindness had cheered me up considerably. Humming a happy ditty, I stopped paying attention to my feet. Big mistake. That's when they decided to bump into a Labion NarcoSpore. I collapsed onto the ground, completely paralyzed.



Death at Every Step

While I'm there on the ground, unable to move, let me use the moment to fill you in on what had been happening to me since I returned to Xenon a hero. Adulations and huzzahs had been heaped on me in droves. Occasional women found me interesting enough to date. The Gold Mop awarded me by the Federation president was given a place of honor in my personal broom closet. I was interviewed by all the VidNews programs and even asked to address the graduating class at the Sanitation Engineers of Xenon University, good ol' SEX U.

But, the monetary rewards I had dreamed of never materialized. Oh, along with the Gold Mop came a check for a few thousand buckazoids, but the amount was nowhere near enough for me to retire and buy my own spaceship. With my duty station, the *Arcada*, a thin vapor of imaginary particles, I took a year's leave of absence from the service before re-upping and being named head janitor on XOS 4.

Despite inflation, my small reward was enough for me to live comfortably for that year. I invested what was left over in a lifetime health club membership and spent much of my time in Spandex, improving the tone of my body, working on my dexterity and coordination, and training myself to be able to place one foot in front of the other dozens of times without mishap. Within months, it became almost second nature to me.

When not working out, I concentrated on improving both my mind and my appreciation of the finer, more cultural things of the galaxy. I contributed to Patrician Broadcasting and took advantage of my investment by devouring as much of their fine programming as I could. "Intergalactic Geographic" became one of my favorite shows, and I spent many an evening staring with utter fascination at vids of Batractian bladder beings, the flying Rhomboids of Pythagoras XVII, the Piscoid suckers of AquaVelveeta, or the genetically altered game show hosts of Terra III. Of all these nature specials, one of my favorites was the one about Labion and the spectacular mating habits of its Terror Beasts.

All of this came back to me as I lay there paralyzed. My brain was the only organ I could consciously use (and it's usually the one I have the most trouble with). Nonetheless, the time spent immobile brought the DocuVid on Labion to the front of my memory. Because of this, I was pretty sure that my condition was temporary. NarcoSpores are nasty, but seldom fatal.



When I could once again get on my feet, it occurred to me that Labion NarcoSpores might make good weapons. There was room in my jumpsuit for only one of them, and I carefully sealed the pocket after it was inside. I wanted to take no chances that an accident would leave me helpless again.

A bit of movement caught my attention as I finished securing the spore. It came from just beyond the rise where I had discovered the FedEx mailbox. Creeping forward to see what was going on, I found myself in another clearing. On the other side, a beaveroid—perhaps the very one I had saved—was busy at work picking berries off of a large bush. From where I stood, the fruits looked quite inviting, especially since I hadn't eaten since XOS 4. There was one problem, however. Between me and the berries, the ground was covered with a maze of roots and tendrils. They all seemed to originate from a throbbing mass of fleshy vegetation; when I looked closely I could see the roots twitch.

I recognized it at once; "Intergalactic Geographic" and pledge night specials on Patrician Broadcasting had educated me well. The Labion Root Monster was a monstrous flesh-eating plant. The merest brush against the thing, and any hapless critter (and Roger Wilco!) would be entwined and then digested. And it stood between me and a meal. Knowingly putting my life in danger is not a habit I endorse. But my belly kept insisting that it was time to get some practical return on my health club membership, and I was newly practiced in walking and staying upright at the same time.

There was room enough to navigate through the monster's feelers, if I dared risk it. I dared. With the lightest of steps and intense concentration, I worked my way through the living maze. It turned out to be a comparatively easy stroll, not unlike traversing a field of poison okra on Xenon. I was sweating heavily at the end, however.

By the time I reached the berry bushes, the pink beaveroid had disappeared again, having escaped into some thorny brush. The berries it had been picking, however, left much to be desired in the taste category. The few I picked and put in my mouth had the flavor of soiled Sarien socks. Their unpleasant aroma also radiated a distinctive bouquet. After attempting to stomach a few, I gave up on my culinary efforts and began looking for a new path. Ooops! The only way onward was the way I had come, directly back through the Root Monster.

Just your luck, Wilco, I told myself, and began my careful way back through the lurking plant. So intense was my concentration that I completely forgot about the berries still in my hands.

Once past the deadly roots, I made my way back to the big clearing, up the path through the gigantic trees, and then east toward the water I had glimpsed earlier. The path soon brought me to the wet stuff, but it was neither stream nor lake. A large expanse of stagnant, still, dank water lay where the path left off. It was most definitely swamp. At its edge, the beaveroid I had seen picking berries was



engaged in smearing them all over its hairless body. What a strange thing for the creature to do. Even more odd, when it was done, the beaveroid calmly stepped into the swamp and began swimming east. I thought it paused for a moment and beckoned me to follow. While I know now that my observation was most likely correct, I dismissed it at the time as wishful thinking. Nonetheless, I had exhausted all other possible routes out of the jungle, which meant this watery passage was my only obvious option.

I frequently reflect on the concept of dumb luck, and have often been told that I possess the trait in quantity. This might be due to genetics or some inherited talent; whatever the cause, it was asserting its influence on me just then. At times, I scratch some part of my anatomy as I ponder tough decisions. In this case, it was my empty stomach. As I scratched, the odor that assaulted my nostrils reminded me that I was still carrying the forgotten berries. In my absent-minded scratching, I had rubbed the red juice all over the front of my jumpsuit and had stained my hands a brilliant crimson color. Worse yet, my efforts to wipe pulp and liquid off of my hands just managed to smear more of me. I was a mess, I didn't smell very good, and my last hesitation was overcome. The swamp it would be; I might make some progress and get clean at the same time. The loud, near sounds of the bog dwellers seemed to perk up in anticipation of my passage. They got louder as I splashed into the water.

As I said, luck of the dumb persuasion was my traveling companion. I believe that's why, when some submerged tentacloid wrapped itself around my groin and momentarily yanked me beneath the surface, it immediately gave up on its efforts to turn me into sushi. That red berry juice had not yet washed off and must have tasted foul to the swamp monster. I was spit out and up, and the creature's retreating trail of bubbles was tinged with reddish foam.

Of course, the incident was enough to panic me completely. As soon as my feet were back under me, I attempted to run as fast as I could while waist deep in swamp water. It was neither fast nor far. Almost at once, the marsh's muddy bottom disappeared and I was forced to flounder in order to stay afloat. My panicked splashing was loud, and even in my fright I knew that the noise would attract other equally unsavory aquatic denizens. As an old prize fighter once told me, "When in trouble, take a dive." I took a deep breath, held it, and under I went.

As ungainly as I sometimes am on land, in water I regain the coordination that gravity otherwise denies me. Straight to the bottom I dove, planning to swim from there as far as my breath would allow. When I reached bottom, however, the direction I had chosen was blocked. Westward, the water was open, and I could see what looked like daylight glowing at the far end of an underwater cave. I swam to



it, my lungs begging for a refill of oxygen all the way. I emerged to find myself not in daylight, but inside a tiny, hidden grotto. There was enough room in the place, however, for me to stand and breathe out of the water. The glow that had attracted me to the place was also illuminating it with a yellow-green color. It was emanating from a nearly fist-sized gem sitting unclaimed at the opposite end from where I had popped out of the water. A careful examination showed that the jewel was loose. I had no idea what it was made of, but it might possibly be valuable. Since there was no evidence of habitation in the place, I felt free to claim the glowing gem as my prize. With nothing else to do there, and nowhere else to go, I got back into the water, held my breath a second time, and returned to the surface.

The swamp crowd had quieted down, and soon I discovered solid, if muddy, footing beneath me. No other incidents disturbed my sodden journey, and I emerged from the far end of the swamp both alive and in one piece.

After leaving the water, I paused for a while to dry both myself and my newly cleaned clothing. I hadn't done a bad laundering job, actually. Without either detergents or vibro-sound, and with only swamp water as a medium, I had gotten out all of the berry stains, most of the aroma, and that pesky ring of dirt that lives around my collar. From a professional point of view, I could be proud of my work. Finally rested, I walked on.

Not too far from the swamp, not only did my trail stop, but so did the ground. It didn't just stop; it dropped straight down farther than my eyes could focus. It also presented my feet with the edge of a precipice too wide to jump. Stymied, I stepped back, stared into space until my vision became completely blurred, and found myself getting quite dizzy. Wheel! That's always fun. It gives me time to think, and I get a quick rush of altered consciousness. When my head and eyes finally cleared, I was on my butt, staring at a dead tree.

Ah, ha! I thought. I'll just climb up the tree and get a good view of the surrounding geography. It might even show me signs of civilization or, at worse, where Vohaul's mines might be. That way I can avoid them. Feeling clever and a bit smug, I began shinnying up the trunk. Halfway to the top, the dead tree's structural integrity failed, and the part I was on fell over into space. There was nothing to do but hang on with hands and feet, and scream.

I was still screaming when the tree trunk landed with a hard thump. Opening my eyes, I could see hundreds of thousands of meters beneath me—more distance than I had ever wished to see between my body and solid footing. Lucky for me, the tree remained stable; it had fallen so that its trunk spanned the crevasse, with either end securely on solid ground. I now had a bridge. After waiting a few more minutes for my courage and breath to rejoin the rest of my person, I resumed my shinnying—this time horizontally—and crossed the tree.



Planet of Danger

Labion is a planet of danger. Not just from the beasts, monsters, and plants that suck your life-fluids dry, but dangers of the more sentient kind. Sludge Vohaul and his minions were one such danger, and I was always aware of them. Unbeknownst to me, however, another assailant was waiting silently for me in the trees on the other side of the chasm.

Once across the bridge it seemed peaceful enough, with a few vine-dappled trees growing in a wide meadow. Only songbirds (or something like them) made any sounds, and these were quiet and soothing. I should have realized that there was too little noise the moment I set foot in the place; jungles are usually noisy, and this place certainly wasn't. Lulled into inattention, totally devoid of caution, I had almost passed through the place when something jerked my right ankle and hauled me into the air. I found myself snared, dangling upside down just like the pink beaveroid I had rescued earlier. Except this time the only Roger Wilco around to rescue me was myself, and I was in no position to help out.

"By the lilac lavatories of Lambada!" I blurted as the trap yanked me into the air. After the first great swing, I bobbed up and down with my nose several meters above the dirt. Blood rushed to my head, and blackness intervened before I had a chance to panic.

My eyes opened at last, slowly focusing on the fact that I was in some sort of a crude cage. It took a little time for my mind to catch up with that observation, but when it did, it agreed that I was a prisoner. But a captive of Sludge Vohaul, I was not. Beyond the wooden bars, crudely lashed together with leather and vine ropes, a large cooking fire roared beneath a spit big enough to skewer a human. Tending it was not one of Vohaul's simian apeoids, but a much larger creature, two legged, gray furred, and about two and a half meters tall. Most of it looked like muscle. The creature was a sentient, to be sure, although its tunic, britches, boots, and belt were inelegantly fashioned. A large key was peeking out from the belt, most likely the one that fastened the door to my enclosure. The creature was busy stoking the fire, getting it hotter. As I observed its actions, it turned briefly to stare at me. A bit of saliva appeared from a corner of its mouth. The creature licked it, and his lips, in what appeared to be anticipation. It suddenly became clear that I had arrived at its trap just in time for supper. I wondered if I would be served with a sauce. Somehow, I doubted it.

Escape seemed prudent. Somehow I needed to lure the thing near me, disable it, and then snatch the key that would free me from the cage. If I were the Lone Space Ranger, it might be simple. On the other hand. . . .



Salvation came to me, not in a flash, but in a puff. It was just like the little cloud that a Labion NarcoSpore makes when it explodes. I knew I would have but one chance; I would throw the spore I was carrying at my captor while it was far enough away for me not to be affected, and yet close enough for me to reach the key to my cage. Before my sabbatical on Xenon, I often had trouble hitting the floor when I dropped something. But a year of intense aerobics and staring at the more female members of my health club had increased my hand/eye coordination to the point that I could usually hit a wall with a thrown object from two meters away. Usually. If my aim were true, it would be enough to overcome the creature and gain my freedom.

There was no time to waste. Moving closer to the locked gate, I shouted loudly, "Yo, mother of fleas! Can I bum a butt off you? Yours looks big enough!" I have never smoked, but I thought the line might get his attention. It didn't.

Try again. "Hey, sailor. Looking for a good time?" Yes, the second oldest line in the known universe—next to "The check's in transit"—came through in a crisis. It's an invitation that few of our less intellectually endowed star-faring brothers, sisters, or whatevers, can resist. Like a firehouse siren's song, it worked as it has for aeons. With a threatening growl, the alien lurched toward my cage. I threw my Labion NarcoSpore at the creature. A light cloud of dust burst upwards, and my nemesis collided with the ground, paralyzed. I knew that the paralysis was temporary; working quickly, I reached through the bars and took the key from the creature's belt. Unlocking the cage door with the key, I opened it and evacuated my former prison. Next to the cage was a long piece of rope—the same one, I suspected, that had been used in the snare that captured me. I grabbed it as I left camp. You never know when a rope will come in handy.

My escape took me north, and led me to a wide clearing at the edge of the jungle. To my right, a sheer cliff dropped down into more jungle far, far below. In the distance, a landing platform rose from that jungle, and as I watched, a hoverflit took off and began cruising in my direction. It took little imagination to figure out that Vohaul's goons were flying the craft. If they caught sight of me, it would be either the mines or death. Behind me, I was sure my captor was awakening in a bad mood. Staying close to the thick trees, I dashed west to the cover of a small grove of trees, and out of sight of Vohaul's patrols. As it turned out, the grove was the very place where I had been snared earlier. Paying more attention this time, I walked through it without incident.

The crevasse was still there where I had left it, log bridge and all. All I could do was to climb back on the log and shinny my way back across the void. The entire exercise seemed completely pointless to me, although it was preferable to capture. Ahead was the swamp and jungle I had already explored—nearly impenetrable wilderness with no way out. Behind was death. Below was. . . .



Below was a pair of ledges! I hadn't seen them on my first trip across, but there they were, appearing close enough to reach. All I had to do was tie my rope to the log and, hand over hand, climb on down. Easier said than done. But I did it; I had no other choice.

I was now at the end of my rope, suspended in space between the two ledges. An opening, perhaps the mouth of a cave, was tucked into one of them. The other—well, the other was currently occupied by a four-meter-tall Kongoid with claws the size of my face. My only way to the open ledge was to swing on the rope and jump, but to do so would bring me near the gigantic gorillaoid. Since my arms were already too tired for me to pull myself up, I immediately saw the wisdom in my completing the maneuver flawlessly.

Gripping the rope more tightly with my entwined legs and feet, I slowly began to rock, then swing on the rope. At first my movement was minimal, but soon the laws of physics and gravity began to exercise their priorities. Faster and faster I began to swing, as the arc of my swing became longer and longer. With each swing, I came closer and closer to safety. I also came closer to Kong. Finally, the tender Roger Wilco morsel drifted close enough for the beast to take a swipe at me. Missed. But my return swing still hadn't taken me close enough to let go of the rope and land safely on the opposite side.

A second swipe of claws, and then a third. I could stand it no longer. With a yell of "Heigh ho, Sliver!" I finally released my hold on the swinging rope just as it reached its closest point to the unoccupied ledge. I flew through the air like some king of the jungle and made it. If my feet were a size smaller, I might not have. The Kongoid's roar sounded as if it were not at all pleased with my acrobatics. Both I and my aching arms were quite satisfied with the outcome.



Favor Repaid

The opening I had seen was indeed a cave. As is usually the case in such places, its interior was dark and black, and had neither an easily accessible light switch nor pad. The way my luck was stumbling that day, this came as no great surprise. From further inside the darkness, I could hear the obscure sounds of clawed critters scuttling around. Whether large or small, they sounded live, and I have never looked forward to meeting live creatures in dark caves. Well, Cornucopia Agricorp would be an exception, but you know what I mean. I needed a bright idea (so to speak), one that sparkled in its brilliance (so to speak). Then I remembered the gem. It was the gem's glow that had attracted my attention in the underswamp grotto. It only took a moment's reflection (so to speak) to remember that I carried an



effective and portable light source. Using it for illumination, I began exploring deeper into the cavern.

Dazzled (so to speak) with my ingenuity, I promptly forgot Rule Number One in the life of Roger Wilco. Rule Number One is *always* concentrate when you must put one foot in front of the other. Thus it was that the cave floor disappeared from beneath me and I tumbled into eternity. In this case, eternity lasted for only a few seconds, at which point my fall was broken by soft dirt and only a few rocks. I survived my inattention to the facts of life, and tumbled out of the dark cave and into daylight. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that, not only was I alive with all limbs still attached, but I was surrounded by short, pink aliens. They looked at me for a moment and began talking.

Until that moment, I had considered the beaveroids to be nonsentient; cute, but not particularly intelligent. But my Inter-Galactic All Species Dialect Translator was interpreting their gnawing-like sounds into a coherent, "Follow us, *puny human*. Try not to embarrass us too much by falling on your face again, unless that is one of your species' mating rituals. And don't forget to pick up your glowing rock. They're rare; you never know when things like that can come in handy." That said, they all scampered away around a fall of large boulders. I took their advice and retrieved the glowing gem. Not knowing what to expect next (which seemed to be a normal state of affairs just then), I followed after, paying careful attention to where I stepped.

My guides led me around the rock slide and into the bottom of a deep canyon. Cliffs rose straight up on all sides, unclimbable by any human's set of standards. An exceptionally large boulder sat near one side of the canyon, and on it stood one of the hairless beaveroids. A jewelled medallion hung suspended from its neck, and a small crown balanced on its head. The beaveroid leader held a tall staff in one hand which, when I entered the canyon, it rapped loudly several times on the throne boulder. From behind nearly every rock, more beaveroids appeared.

"Puny human, I am the Cleaver; by divine right, the highest and most glorious leader of my people. We bid you welcome, and wish to thank you for rescuing one of our subjects from the trap and stewpot of a hunter. All that we have is yours, although we make few tools and almost no artifacts. We wear no clothing, our homes are too small to admit your bulk, and our diet of tender tree branches and unripe fruit is most likely not to your taste. Despite all of this, the offer stands. Enjoy the abundance of our civilization to the fullest. When you are ready to continue your journey, just say the word and one of us will show you our most secret path to the outside world. Once you leave, however, you will not be allowed to return. We are most generous, but we do have our limits. All I have spoken is, and shall be. Read my lips."

I couldn't. They were hidden by the Cleaver's huge teeth.



From all around me, the sound of flat tails beating the ground in applause mixed with noises that my Inter-Galactic All Species Dialect Translator interpreted to mean, "Hip, hip, hooray!" and "Four more years!" Sunlight glinting off its prehensile teeth, the beaver Cleaver, followed in procession by nearly all of its people, paraded into a small hole in the cliffs. They never paused to allow me to express my gratitude at their overinflated generosity.

It took but a few moments to discover that there was nothing to do, nothing to eat, and nowhere to go in the canyon. I was alone, except for the company of a pair of beaveroids standing guard near a large rock. Any attempt to speak with them was replied to with a series of guffaws, knee slaps, and giggles—this from beings with no discernible knees. Frustrated, I felt as if I was the butt of an enormous practical joke. After fuming, and finding that it was getting me nowhere, I approached the beaveroids a final time.

"Listen, I really do appreciate your hospitality and all that. Your Cleaver seems like a really nice fellow. But, I'd like to be on my way. Would you please show me your secret path? I promise not to come back." The beaveroids slapped the ground with their tails. Evidently, the joke had become hilarious.

"Listen, Bucky," I shouted at one of them, "the Cleaver said that when I wanted to leave, all I had to do was say the word, and I could go. Read *my* lips: I'm saying THE WORD. Am I making myself clear?"

I must have been. With more laughs, tail slapping, and gasps for breath, the beaveroids pushed aside the rock they were standing near. The action revealed a large hole with a ladder leading down into darkness. This was followed by another bout of hilarity. As I began my way down the ladder, I realized what the joke was all about. After careful consideration, I decided that, with their sense of humor, the beaveroids couldn't be called sentient at all.



The Dark, and Beyond

I barely had time to get my head beneath the ground when the beaveroids hastily slid the big rock back over the hole. For the second time in as many hours, I found myself in total darkness. Grabbing hold of the glowing gem, I immediately realized that I couldn't hold on to my light and climb the steep ladder at the same time. Into my mouth the gem went, dimming its illumination somewhat, but still providing enough light to allow me to see a little way into the blackness.

Have you ever been in a maze, those collections of identical and twisted corridors with one way in, one way out, and oodles of dead ends. No? You're lucky if you haven't. Picture yourself beneath the surface of Labion, with very little light to see by, and unable to stand upright. Except for a number of ladders that seemed



to connect one level of the maze with another higher or lower one, it was an ordeal of crawling on hands and knees through endless identical lava tubes. It wasn't so much the dirtiness that bothered me; they were featureless, making it impossible for me to orient myself. I considered dropping stuff occasionally in order to show myself that I had been someplace, but I was pretty sure I would quickly become confused nonetheless. All I could do was blunder along until I found my way out.

I must have been underground for hours. Settling on a simple pattern to follow, I would climb down a ladder, then crawl east (or, at least, the direction I presumed was east). If nothing else, I could retrace my path and start over; such was my logic. Three times this worked until, faced with no other choice I was forced to travel west through a long tunnel. The sound of something stirring dissuaded me from the next ladder, but I descended the following one and resumed my planned pattern. This time, though, the eastward route kept going straight with no new choices, on and on. I don't know why I remember the path so clearly, except that the fear of being buried alive does wonders for one's perception and attention to detail.

When I finally saw light at the end of the tunnel I wriggled out into a large chamber filled with clear blue waterfalls. They emptied into an underground freshwater lake that filled the middle of the cavern and flowed off into the distance. The place was illuminated from all sides by the muted radiance given off by some sort of phosphorescent algae (or something like that) that coated the walls. It was quite a striking sight, and extremely restful after my crawl through the dark. A few sips of the water cleared the dust from my tongue and throat, and perked me up considerably. Rested, I stepped into the lake and discovered it had a strong current. It was shallow enough to walk in, however, and I was able to keep my feet as I followed the rushing water toward its final destination. Or so I hoped.

That underground river (which is what the water had turned into) did indeed lead me back to Labion's surface. First, though, there was the matter of the whirlpool. I had been wading along for some time, and had come to another high, wide chamber. As I followed the water along, the river decided to split in two, rushing in different directions. I decided to take the river's right fork; the left one appeared to head back the way I had just come, and didn't relish retracing my steps. Nearly at once, it appeared that I had made another—and my last—mistake. The river current, already strong, turned ugly. There was no way to keep my footing, and I found myself being swept away, faster and faster, deeper and deeper through the underground. Just as it seemed that I was doomed to drown, the current flung me into a whirlpool. Round and round, down and down, was my new direction. Fighting for breath, I was pulled beneath the river's surface. Resigned to death, I realized that as a way to die, an underground whirlpool really sucked.

Sorry about that.



The whirlpool kept me under just long enough to remind me that I needed to practice holding my breath longer. Then it spat me up to the surface and out of the underground, through the air, and splash! into a wide pool. I was outside again, with blue sky above, blue water below, and jungle all around. Life had never seemed so good.

I swam to the riverbank, climbed out of the water, and flung myself face down on the grassy ground. My face immersed itself in the fresh grass. Closing my eyes, I just lay there and let the sun warm and dry my rear. If I dared, I would have slept just then, but I didn't dare. When I was satisfied with the status of my backside, I rolled over and let the sun do its magic on my front. Ahhh! It still feels good.

All too soon I had to open my eyes and start moving again. By now, I had pretty much forgotten about my hunger—fatigue and stress can be great appetite depressants. A dull, persistent ache had replaced the call for food. As my eyes got used to the light, I realized that just north of where I was sunning myself stood a structure built tall enough to extend high above the trees. Vohaul's landing platform was the only thing it could be, and perhaps it was a sign that my luck was changing for the better. If I could find my way onto it, maybe I might be able to steal a shuttle and escape the jungle, if not Labion itself. *Why not?* I thought. *The longer you stay in the jungle, the better your chances are of never getting off the planet. With a shuttle or hoverflit you can move fast and call for help.*

There was a complication to my plan, of course. There usually is. A glance, then a search of the small glade where I was standing revealed that I was hemmed in on all sides. The underbrush seemed impenetrable, and the surrounding rock too steep and high to climb over. The pool was a dead end. So were my thoughts; the heights of inspiration had come a' tumblin' down to a meeting with reality, which reality won.

Crushed, deflated, discouraged, and despairing, all I wanted to do was to cry, to disappear into the womb of self-pity and grief. That worked for a bit, but reality was still there when I returned. Another diversion was called for, and my cubix rube was the most mindless way I knew of diverting myself. I'm sure you've encountered the rube in some form or another. It's a multisided plastoid puzzle consisting of dozens and dozens of smaller, differently colored cubes. The idea behind the puzzle is to get each of the sides the same color all over. It gets its name from the poor yokels who get sucked into manipulating the thing for hours on end. I'm no yokel, and usually lose interest in the cube within seconds, if not sooner. If I had met a recycling droid before I reached the shuttle bay on XOS 4, the rube and I would have long since parted ways. Instead, there I was, a fugitive from Sludge Vohaul on Labion, in the depths of desperation, diddling with a cheap toy. It was enough to make me mad. It did make me mad; I needed something else to distract me.

The Labion Terror Beast Mating Whistle still hung about my neck. Despite everything I had gone through so far, it had remained firmly attached to my person,



probably because it had remained tucked beneath my jumpsuit. Now make no mistake; I had no intention of whistling up such a beast. As far as I knew, they did not inhabit Labion's jungles, and I wasn't thinking very clearly at the moment. All I was trying to do was make a little music for myself. With a whistle? Sure, all a whistle is is an undersized kazoo with a bean inside. And I was considered a wiz on the kazoo in preschool.

Boy, was I wrong. Not about being a kazoo wiz, about the Terror Beast. Tweet! Tweet tweet! Tweet tweet tweet tweet tweet tweet! Tweet tweet! I've always been fond of the SEX U fight song. The first sounds from the whistle cheered me up immediately. The second sounds brought the beast. He (or she) was looking for love, and I was the only warm body around. How strong, you may ask, is the mating urge of the Labion Terror Beast? Strong enough to bust through a wall of solid rock in order to get to someone fool enough to blow a mating whistle in its territory.

Like a mad tornado, the Labion Terror Beast burst through the rock like it hadn't seen the opposite gender in millennia. It saw me instead, but didn't mind in the least. I, of course, shrieked aloud the instant I saw it, all teeth and claws and eyes and teeth and claws and teeth, and flung an arm over my eyes in terror—suddenly realizing how the beast came by its colorful name. As I did so, the cubix rube in my free hand went flying straight at the Terror Beast. I couldn't have thrown it any better. Literally.

The Terror Beast saw the plastoid coming at it, started to duck, then snatched it out of the air. After a tentative bite revealed it wasn't tasty, the beast began inspecting it more closely. Then it started moving the various colored pieces around. Was the plastoid a narcotic to have such an effect on the Labion Terror Beast? Or is the Labion Terror Beast really a local yokel, easily distracted by a cheap, colorful toy? Could the Labion Terror Beast perhaps be a sentient? It *did* show greater intelligence than the beaveroids. In any event, the creature immediately stopped paying attention to me, and I was able to sneak past it and through the hole it had blasted in one of the rock walls. I had escaped my dead end alive, and had gotten rid of my annoying cubix rube. All this because of Pledge Night on Patrician Broadcasting and my 20-buckazoid pledge premium. Ever since Labion, I renew that pledge with regularity. I owe it to PBS.



Escape from Labion

On the other side of the rock wall I came face to face with Vohaul's landing platform. Well, the platform didn't have a face, but the apeoid guarding it did. It was the face of a killer. Fortunately, there were some tall bushes between me and it, so I was able to conceal myself before it saw me. From my hiding spot I was able to peer around



and discover a door in one of the platform's four support legs, but it was clear that the guard would see me if I tried to sneak there. The apeoid was posted on a lower platform of the structure five or so meters above the jungle floor. He had a very good view of anyone approaching. He also had a nasty-looking pulse rifle.

I needed some way to either distract or incapacitate the guard. A rock would do nicely. Carefully making sure that the Labion Terror Beast was still occupied with its puzzle, I snuck back to the hole in the rock wall. A pile of blasted stones lay where the beast had broken through, and I quietly took the only one I could safely reach. That accomplished, I returned to concealment behind the bush.

Next, I needed a way to fling the rock so as to get the guard's attention. I knew that I had neither the skill nor the strength to hurl my rock very far, but if I could construct some sort of a sling, I might be able to make the rock reach him. Of course, that assumed a lot on my part, but as I've mentioned before, I had been working on my aim. Which reminded me of my year of workouts. Which reminded me of the health club. Which reminded me of the multi-species, omni-gendered, one-size-fits-all athletic supporter that I had intended to wash just before Vohaul kidnapped me. It was still sitting quite uncleanly in my back pocket. Elastic, with a pocket large enough to hold a small rock, it made a perfect makeshift sling. Slowly I rotated it in a circle around my head. The rock didn't fall out. Good. Wider and wider, faster and faster, I swung the weapon, and at what seemed as good a moment as any—just when the apeoid was in the middle of his appointed round—I slung the rock away.

I had hoped for the rock to hit the platform hard enough to bring the guard down to investigate. While he was doing this, I would hide, intending to sneak into the elevator after he got off. As plans go, I think it was a very good one. Give it a grade of A. I'm convinced it would have worked had the stone gone where I intended it. I'll never know for sure, though. Instead of hitting the platform, my rock hit the guard, and smack in the middle of his forehead. Stunned or dead, it mattered little to its victim. The guard fell over, struck the railing with his midsection, and somersaulted over to the ground below. He lay where he hit, and was very still afterward. Victim of assault by dirty jockstrap, the guard, if still alive, would probably live to regret his fate. Give the execution of my plan an F for technical merit, and an A+ for artistic interpretation.

The guard's pulse rifle was not with his body; evidently he dropped it before he fell over the side. So much for a gun. My search also failed to turn up a keycard for opening the door to the elevator.

But, I recalled, I still have the keycard from the hoverflit. It should fit the slot. After all, this must be the landing platform where they transferred me from the shuttle. I put the keycard into the slot and discovered that my deduction was perfect. It slid in as smoothly as a sugared after-dinner slime mint from Deep Elam II. The sound of the elevator door opening was just as sweet, and the sight of the landing platform at the top even sweeter. A single shuttle waited there, and no one was around. I



don't know what I would have done if I had found somebody there; my plans hadn't taken that possibility into account. A quick peek inside revealed that the shuttle too was deserted. Opening the rear hatch, I climbed inside and sat down in the pilot's seat. The shuttle's automatic seatbelt sequence clicked in as I did. A great breath—that I hadn't realized I'd been holding—pushed itself out of my lungs. In moments, I knew, my escape from Labion would be complete. All I had to do was find the AutoPilot, or figure out how to fly it by myself.

Please understand that at that time in my life I was not a space pilot by any definition. My only experiences with moving through the Void were at the educated ministrations of preprogrammed AutoPilots and AutoNavs. It's true that I knew enough to press one or two buttons in logical succession, but my knowledge of the true art of interstellar flight was fictional at best. No Space Ranger was I, nor would I become, until I had defeated Sludge Vohaul and his insane plans. Of course, I didn't know what I would become at the time; all I knew was that if I didn't reach escape velocity before one of Vohaul's servants arrived, I would have no future at all.

The control panel of the shuttle was even more complicated than I had remembered. Besides the usual collection of bewildering dials, gauges, levers, buttons, and thingeys, there were signs and panels covered with words I didn't understand. That didn't bother me too much; it was something I expected. Finally the confused array became familiar enough for me to pick out the controls I might understand.

"Power"—that was easy.

"Attitude"—I was pretty sure I knew what that meant. While cautiously apprehensive, my attitude was basically positive.

"Ascent Thruster"—the Lone Space Ranger always used that to blast off.

The big stick between my legs had to be the throttle.

Great, I thought. There's enough I understand here to get me off the planet. I can search for the auto systems after I'm away from here.

One carefully chosen finger punched on the power. Vast energies began to rumble through the shuttle as its engines came to life. Different colored lights came on all around me, and the sound of the craft's hatch securing itself against vacuum gave an audible clue that my bird of space was ready to fly. No computer voice, however, asked to lend assistance—just the glow of a status screen. A look at the screen suggested that it was time to activate the ascent thrusters. Another button press, and the shuttle's rumble became more powerful, demanding release. It was



like that final, memorable moment when motion sickness goes from being an unstoppable urge to explosive reality. I pulled the throttle back. Nothing happened.

Now, *what did I do wrong?* I looked at the status screen again; the attitude system indicator was reading horizontal, and both I and the shuttle wanted to go up. *That's easy to change*, I told myself. I turned the Attitude dial, and the shuttle began to hum in appreciation. Again I pulled back on the throttle. This time, the shuttle engines found their release. Slowly, and then much, much faster, the treetops of Labion began to fall away. The shuttle had lifted, and I was piloting my way into space! I had escaped Labion—and I didn't know what to do next.



Captured Again

An old spacedog once told me that she never really felt like a pilot unless she was flying by the seat of her pants.

"That's where the skill comes in, Wilco," she would say. "There ain't an AutoPilot alive that can dodge a solar flare at eight Gs with a bottle of Saragossan Silly Suds in one hand and a bag of nacho-flavored mucus chips in the other. You ain't lived until you've flown a nanosecond ahead of an exploding galactic core with just a brain-dead AutoNav for company, and your own guts for thrusters." I suspect she exaggerated a little, but her point was well taken; the only way to fly through the Void is by the seat of your pants.

"Space," she insisted, "is the final derriere!"

This anecdote came to mind as I held the shuttle's throttle back in what I hoped would not be described as a death grip. It's not that my nerve had finally deserted me; it was just that I was sure if I let go, I'd make a precipitous return to the planet's surface. Higher and higher the shuttle blasted, and the sky changed from the warm blue of Labion's atmosphere to the frigid black of space. Suddenly, the engines shut off, and all life went out of the throttle. I waited for one of the Auto systems to cut in, but nothing happened. I waited longer. Still nothing. I randomly pushed those buttons whose labels I understood. Nothing. Again and again; no response. In the midst of my experimentation, the systems status screen experienced a severe case of video breakup. When it finally cleared, all the display indicators had been replaced by the face of Sludge Vohaul.

"Roger Wilco, we meet again. What an unpleasant surprise—for you, anyway." Vohaul's helium-inflated voice falsettoed at me with a false jocularity, still out of sync with the flapping of his fat lips. "It amuses me, Wilco, that someone as puny and dim as you can not only survive, but even defeat my mercenary minions. True, good help is hard to find these days, but your continuing existence astounds all credulity. Nonetheless, I shall permit you to live a while longer. A man in my



position is permitted few pleasures, and I'd like to while away the next few hours watching my special pets play with you."

For a moment, Vohaul's voice and image flickered in and out of clarity, as if the vid screen was having trouble stomaching the signal it was showing. Vohaul was having that effect on me also.

"I have taken complete control of your shuttle and have programmed it to bring you to my fortress—the aptly named Asteroid of Doom. Feel free to make yourself at home and enjoy my hospitality. No, please; there's no need to thank me. Your death will be payment enough for my trouble. Ha ha ha ha ha ha! Be seeing you, Wilco. Be seeing you." Abruptly, the signal cut off, leaving me alone with the smell of overloaded circuit boards. Vohaul's last picture show had shorted the vid screen into junk. With a shudder (my same reaction), the shuttle's engines resumed life and began moving the craft again. When a small, lifeless asteroid inched itself into view, I was sure it was my final (an apt, if macabre description) destination.



Asteroid of Doom

The great landing bay doors crunched shut behind me, sounding much like thunder in an enclosed space. Or a cell door on Prison Planetoid IV. Or the Gates of Hades. Only not quite as pleasant.

When I exited the shuttle, prepared to meet the worst Vohaul had in store for me, I was greeted by emptiness. There was no one in sight, and only the quiet purr of the AirCyclers filled the empty space. Somehow, this was worse than being greeted by a firing squad, or BrainSuckDroids. Insects and small animals must have the same feeling when they realize that they've been trapped in the web of some arachnoid that they can't yet see.

The shuttle was sitting on a platform, with narrow access walkways leading off in three directions; one down, one to my left, and the last to my right. Not content to stand around and let Vohaul's surprises come to me, I decided to move and keep moving. If Vohaul was going to turn me into sludge, I'd go down fighting or running. Probably the latter.

The left and right walkways both were short, and ended in identical elevators. These promised improved mobility for a fugitive (or prey), so I decided to take one of them. The one to my right seemed like a good choice. Once I got inside and looked at the buttons on the elevator control panel, though, I noticed something curious; there appeared to be no way to reach Level Two. Buttons for Levels One, Three, Four, and Five were there, but not for Level Two.



Perhaps that's where the steps lead? I dismissed the thought at once as there were more important concerns on my mind—such as, "*Where to next?*" Since I've always been told that, given the choice, it's best to start at the top, I pressed the button for Level One. One mystery solved—I was already on Level One. Level Three, then.

The elevator door opened up to a long corridor that was closed off on both ends. The elevator I stepped from had its mate at the opposite end, and they were the only ways on or off the level. Security vid cameras constantly swept the corridor, and I needed no announcement to inform me that I was being observed. In the middle of the deck, halfway between the two lifts, was a single doorway. Professional experience told me that it could only be a Sanitation Engineering supply depot and managerial duty station module—a janitor's closet to civilians. Pressing the door's entry button, I discovered that I was correct, and the closet was unlocked. Inside, the familiar sights and smells of my craft were devalued by the absence of the traditional janitor's cot. There was no place to lie down and nap, a no-lose grievance situation for any union in the galaxy.

The closet was nearly empty except for a lone plunger lying discarded in a corner. Not much of a weapon, to be sure, but a trained sanitation engineer can find dozens of uses for that basic tool. I took it along with me when I left, and continued my exploration to the far end of Level Three. Other than the closet, there was nothing of interest at all. When I arrived at the second elevator, I pressed the button for Level Four.

Level Four was an almost exact duplicate of Level Three: long corridor, security vids, elevators at both ends, and a maintenance closet (make that Sanitation Engineering supply depot and managerial duty station module) in the middle. Again, that room was bare. By then, it was becoming incredibly clear to me that Vohaul gave little or no priority to basic sanitation concerns. Somehow, I wasn't too surprised; it presented with the classic conundrum of "Clean mind, clean body—take your choice," I'd bet buckazoids to flying bananaoids that Vohaul would choose neither. I did discover a glass cutter on the floor, and I rescued it from abandonment. Although glass cutters have fewer uses to a trained janitor than a solid wood-and-rubber plunger, they can be formidable tools in the right hands.

Level Four did make a weak acknowledgment to the principles of sound sanitation: a one-facility-fits-all, species nonspecific, gender neutral, organic life-form, intimate waste product self-disposal and dumping station had its home there. I had spent many a day in space-going potties, cleaning and polishing to perfection, and reading the wisdoms scribbled on the walls and in the grout between tiles. Indeed, lavatories were my licensed specialty, and I still wear the badge of head janitor with pride. I took the opportunity to make a quick pit stop. Even there, the ship seemed deserted, a state of affairs that I was perfectly satisfied with. I left the can much relieved.



Level Five—the lowest level inside Vohaul's Asteroid of Doom. I still didn't understand why Sludge called it that, other than from a trite sense of histrionics. It was a condition that was soon to be cured.

At first glance, Level Five resembled the ones above: a plain corridor with a small room about halfway along. This particular deck, however, was also populated by a series of huge cages. The smells that emanated from them were in keeping with Vohaul's overall sense of hygiene. It was enough to make one choke and gasp, and I did. Two of the cages flanked the janitor's closet; one appeared empty, but the other had a hairy pair of what seemed Kongoid arms sticking through the bars. I made sure I stayed well clear of both cages as I entered the closet; I feared both what I could see and what I could not.

I couldn't see much in the closet; the light wasn't working, leaving the place somewhat dark. A pair of filthy and ragged overalls had been tossed on the floor. Too crusted even to be used as a disguise, they did contain an analog SmokeStick lighter. A source of light and fire, it was definitely worth keeping. On the way out, I almost tripped over a waste paper basket that had somehow managed to get entangled with my feet. I survived the encounter, and grumbled my way outside. Vohaul needed to retain a competent sanitation consultant to help put his asteroid in order. Between the lack of cleaning and general clutter, he was setting himself up for a big negligence lawsuit.

As I've said, Level Five was the beginning of the horrors Vohaul had in store for me. Leaving the closet behind, I headed for the elevator out of there. More cages lined the corridor, with monsters behind each. One in particular was designated to open at the passing of any wandering Roger Wilcos. I heard the bars raise as I began to pass them, and didn't wait to see what might emerge. My feet went into running mode at once, and I raced for the nearest elevator. As I slapped the button that would take me back to Level One (or any other level my hand would reach), I caught a brief glimpse of a space black, leather-skinned, crested alien monster. As the doors slid shut between the two of us (just in time, I might add), I was sure I saw a second face and set of teeth dart out of the alien's primary jaws. Whatever it was, its teeth smashed against the metal of the elevator doors instead of me.



Vohaul Strikes Back

I found myself back on Level One. So far, I had seen none of Vohaul's henchmen, the dangers of Level Five were behind me, and I was still alive. On the down side, unless I spent the rest of my life hiding in one of the closets, I had exhausted my possibilities of escape or survival. This led to the conclusion that it was time to



follow the stairs that led down from the shuttle's landing platform and to see what was in that part of the asteroid.

More problems, that's what was there. More and more, coming faster and faster. Vohaul's little entertainment—starring yours truly—was entering its second act, and the action was billed as hot and heavy.

The stairs led down to the missing Level Two; another long corridor. As I reached it, the stairwell door behind me suddenly shut, and the click of a lock informed me that it would stay that way. A glance at the ceiling showed no security vid cameras, but instead showed a number of what appeared to be sprinklers. It was the only basic sanitation and safety measure I ever saw on the asteroid. At one end of the corridor, there was a hatchway, or door, leading deeper into Vohaul's stronghold. I started moving in that direction when a metal barrier dropped out of the ceiling and instantly blocked off the corridor. Turning at once, I attempted to go in the opposite direction. Another wall dropped. I was trapped. That's when the flooring itself began to move beneath my feet, sliding back to reveal a tub of thick, bubbling liquid. A lifetime of working with Janitor-In-A-Jug informed me that the liquid was, while not the most corrosive acid in the galaxy, quite enough to dissolve me most thoroughly. I watched my life getting shorter and shorter, along with my floorspace. Back and back it moved; as the floor disappeared, so did my hope of survival.

Unless. . .

You might remember that a trained sanitation engineer knows dozens of uses for an industry-standard plunger. Not just for freeing clogs of hair and other organic by-products, plungers can be used in ways that might seem magical to the untutored. Here's an example of plunger arcana:

Space Plunger Use #23—The Roger Wilco Variation

1. Grip plunger firmly in both hands.
2. In a firm, quick action, stick plunger to wall.
3. Grasp plunger tightly.
4. Lift feet.
5. Hang on for dear life.
6. Wait for floor to return.
7. Let go.
8. Stop screaming.

See, that was easy—for a trained Sanitation Engineer. Remember: do not try this at home!



After what seemed an eternity, the floor returned to normal and I was able to get down. My weight seemed to cause some relay to click, and the barriers retracted back into the ceiling, taking my loyal plunger with them. At the same time, the door to the landing bay opened wide. Vohaul's acid trap had been defeated, and I had the run of the Asteroid once again.

Well, not for long. Don't forget, the pace of my ordeal had entered warp speed.

The door I had spied when I first entered Level Two was still where I had seen it. I headed for it, determined to discover what was beyond—with luck, a chance for escape or freedom. The shuttle I had arrived in was under Vohaul's control, so I needed another escape vessel. After the episode with the acid, I was no longer content to just live a few more hours. I was determined to find Vohaul, destroy him, and escape. If complications arose, I would settle for getting away, preferably alive.

The door was guarded. On both sides of the corridor, large metal warrior 'bots stood watch, attached to their power chargers in the walls. Any nearby movement would activate them and bring them, and their guns, after me. It was enough to give me pause. Instead, I scanned the corridor's other end. Double bad news: no door and more 'bots. To get past these 'bots I needed a diversion like the one I had used on the apeoid guard on the landing platform.

If nothing else, my climb for life had given me time to look closely at the corridor's ceiling. Just as I had thought, the mechanisms dotting the ceiling were indeed sprinklers. They had reminded me of a great Lone Space Ranger episode where the hero, cruelly imprisoned by the Mind Mists of Minos, was able to escape by starting a small fire in his cell. When the baddies arrived to douse the flames, the Lone Space Ranger slipped out unnoticed. It was such an unusual and stunning ploy that it stuck in my memory like dirt to honey.

Even though it meant returning to Level Five, my escape method was clear. The wastebasket in the closet there, when filled with paper—toilet paper from the lavatory on Level Four—should make a proper controlled blaze. If ignited beneath the sprinklers (say, just at the base of the stairs), it should be enough to bring all of the 'bots hurrying to control the flames. In all the smoke and sensory overload, I'd slip by unnoticed.

My plan worked even better than I'd hoped. An empty potty stall provided an ample supply of tissue paper, and despite my fear of encountering a loose monster again, I was able to obtain the waste basket without incident. Once I had all the necessary tools, I returned to Level Two.

Normally, a Sanitation Engineer abhors making a mess. Our training, after all, is to clean and eliminate disorder. As I put the toilet paper into the basket, I smiled wryly at what I was about to do. Putting the basket on the floor beneath the sprinklers seemed part of some black ritual contrary to my very nature. When I lit the paper with the lighter, it felt like I was committing sacrilege.

Oh, but did it work!



As expected, the flames and smoke triggered the sensors in the walls. Water began to pour down as the sprinklers performed their task. But the 'bots never arrived; water and the 'bot circuitry turned out to be an incompatible combination. Short-Circuit City. Still plugged into the walls, the 'bots never had a chance. You might say that the guards died with their 'bots on. Or maybe you shouldn't.



Shrinking Prospects

The door now stood unguarded. On the other side of the door was Sludge Vohaul himself.

Perched like a degenerate vulturoid atop a high dais, tubes running every which way from his fat, festering flesh, the evil clone appeared engrossed in his readouts. Surrounded by control consoles, vid screens, and all the paraphernalia that accompanies half-sentient, half-machine cyborgs, Vohaul punched a last red button with finality, and then turned to greet my arrival.

"Wilco, Wilco, Wilco. We meet in the flesh again. I have been monitoring your exploits closely, and I must say that I haven't been so entertained since I learned vivisection from a do-it-yourself kit. You have the distinction of having raised dumb luck to a near mystic art form, and for that I must give you my reluctant congratulations." I wasn't quite sure what the madman meant by his remarks, but felt confident that it had something to do with damnation and faint praise.

The door to Vohaul's chambers snapped shut behind me. Sludge leaned forward in his chair making squishing sounds and shedding food litter as he did so. Behind him, Labion hung suspended in the Void, surrounded by the sparks of a million stars. My attention returned to Vohaul, who had resumed speaking. His words and lips almost matched.

"Look around you, Wilco. See my army of boring clones, life insurance salesfolk all. There is no mercy in their soulless husks. Minutes from now they will be launched, carrying Xenon's enslavement in their briefcases. Today, Xenon. Tomorrow, I will be master of the universe! No one can stop me now. My revenge will be as utter as it is terrible." As much as Vohaul's nasty plans seemed complete and unstoppable, my primary wish was that he would just shut up. Not only was his voice shrill and out of sync, he kept repeating himself. The old saying still holds—Power can corrupt, and absolute power can corrupt absolutely. But Sludge Vohaul didn't have to be so boring about it.

There was no time to whine about the clone's personality flaws. I had to stop him, and at once.

A look around the control room revealed nothing that I might use as a weapon. Tall brass-and-glass cylinders containing his actuarial army poised ready for launch,



shallow smiles painted on commercially bland faces. Men and women alike, they were all the same. If you've seen one insurance salesperson, you've seen them all. Not only was Vohaul's plan ghastly, it was downright tasteless. Bare hands it would have to be.

Unable to contain my anger any longer, I rushed for the set of stairs that led up to Sludge's electronic throne. He watched me rush toward him, a look of expectation brightening his face. Did he really expect me to stumble and fall like a clumsy oaf? Like the Roger Wilco of old? Not at all. No, he was toying with my emotions—allowing me hope of success where the outcome was already decided.

I was within a meter of Vohaul, hands outstretched in order to rip tubes from his carcass and throttle him into submission. A meter, that's how far I was from getting my hands on him. Probably a little less. Vohaul calmly flicked a switch.

Zap! A beam hit me from above. It had been waiting for me all the time, and Vohaul knew it. My universe disappeared in a thunderstorm of subatomic particles, as I was disintegrated and my matter transmitted like a piece of fourth-class mail in a FedEx box. When I reappeared, I was inside a glass cylinder, much like the ones containing the clone army. But something was not quite right at all. Vohaul's poxy face hung above me in obscene parody of Labion dominating the asteroid's sky.

"Wilco, you *puny human*. Did you really think I would allow you to touch me? Look around you; don't things look different? They should—you're only ten centimeters tall. Enjoy your new home. I sentence you to spend the rest of your short life there. That's funny; *short* life, indeed. Ha ha ha ha ha! I think I'll stuff your body and keep it under glass forever. It will be a fitting symbol of my domination over the universe!" Finally, he shut up and returned to his buttons and dials.

Things were not looking up for me just then. Actually, at my size, just about everything was up, but you know what I mean. Shrinkage, however, did nothing to diminish my resolve to thwart Vohaul. A glass cage might stop an ordinary shrunken man, but not a miniscule Roger Wilco with a glass cutter. I asked that diamond-bladed knife to follow its prime directive—cut through glass, and do it sharply. It didn't fail; swiftly scratching the shape of a door, it took but little effort on my part to push my way outside. Vohaul took no notice of the tiny crash as the glass fell and shattered.

Outside my prison, I realized that I was actually standing exposed on a flat surface atop one of Sludge's control consoles. If I were noticed, he could crush me flat like a fat fly. And with less feeling. To one side of where I stood was a keyboard, but that would also leave me too exposed. Behind me, though, a set of vents led into the concealment of one of the machines attached to Vohaul. The slits were wide enough to allow me to pass through, and without hesitation, I climbed inside. When I realized where I had ended up, I began to laugh with triumph. Sludge Vohaul had underestimated Roger Wilco for the last time.



I found myself inside of Sludge Vohaul's mechanical heart and lung prosthesis—the life-support machine that kept his heart and lungs pumping, and kept flowing the Janitor-In-A-Jug that he called blood. All around me, the pumps that kept the cyborg alive pulsated with their rhythmic motions, and pumped fluid in and out of a ceramic chamber. A sign attached to the device read

General Products
Ceramic Cyborg Heart Replacement

As always: Guaranteed for life

Near it was another sticker, for the convenience of maintenance and repair technicians:

CAUTION:

Emergency Shut-Off Button

Do not press while ceramic heart is in use

All together now: without a second thought, I pressed the shut-off button.

"Time to put up or shut down, Vohaul," I snarled. "I'm sorry to be such a heartbreaker!"

Instantly the pumps stopped, and the fluid in the tubes started to slow, and then began to puddle. If Sludge didn't have a backup system in place, he was a goner.

The sounds of wheezing, followed by a heavy body collapsing, came from outside the life-support machine. Climbing back out through the vents, I was in time to see Vohaul struggling to rise from the floor. He was only able to raise one arm up to the level of the consoles before he ceased his efforts. Then his eyes glanced up dully and saw me.

"Curses. Wilco. You have foiled me again!" Each word must have caused him agony, but he was determined to keep on ranting until the end.



"I may die, Wilco, but don't think you have seen the last of Sludge Vohaul!" The arm on the console reached over to a large switch and flipped it to LAUNCH SEQUENCE.

"My time has come. My race is run. My clone army is launched. Vohaul has his revenge. Ha ha ha ha. . .glurp." Having had his last laugh, Sludge Vohaul dropped lifeless to the floor.

There was no time for triumph or gloating. From a dozen speakers came the voice of an AutoDestruct mech.

"There are now 40 minutes until total self-destruction. Panic is useless. This is a recording." Not only had Vohaul started the clone launch sequence, he had also started a chain reaction that was propelling the asteroid out of its orbit and to destruction. The asteroid would break apart and burn before it hit the surface of Labion, but it was just a trivial variation on certain death. The fact gave me little comfort, but a lot more motivation. And I was still only ten centimeters tall.



Race Against Destruction

I ran to the giant keyboard. On the panel above it was a large switch. It looked like the one Vohaul had activated when he shrunk me. With a great heave, I moved it into its ON position. A readout began flashing:

. . .ENLARGE OR REDUCE?. . .ENLARGE OR REDUCE?. . .

Good choice.

Using my feet for fingers, I swiftly typed ENLARGE. Nothing happened. *Of course not, silly*, I admonished myself. *Maybe you need to be back in the glass jar?* Back to the jar and inside, followed by a buzzing, humming, and a great glare. Zap! I was on the dais, full size again. At my feet, Vohaul's body had already begun to leak and decompose. Despite the mess, I gave it a thorough search. Scribbled on the back of one hand was a four-letter code. No explanation; just a code. I could find nothing else.

Next I looked at Vohaul's readout screens, and found the one monitoring the clones. It read less than four minutes until launch. An abort option was available, however. All I had to do to stop the insurance invasion was to input the proper abort code. I typed in the letters Vohaul had scrawled on his flesh. The computer digested them for a bit and responded: OK. I DIDN'T THINK YOU HAD THE GUTS TO GO THROUGH WITH IT. LAUNCH ABORTED. HAVE A NICE DAY.



"There are now 35 minutes to self-destruct. There is still no need to panic."

It was time to be off the asteroid, and I had no idea how to get back to the shuttle or where to find an escape pod. Then I noticed a set of stairs leading from Vohaul's platform up and out of the control room. At the stairway's other end was a long, winding walkway. Entirely enclosed in a clear, glass-like material, it had given Vohaul a magnificent view of the Void when he used it. Maybe the cyborg's soul had contained a smidgen of poetry. To me, though, it communicated the feeling of being exposed to the Void without a space suit. That walkway gave me the shivers.

Thankfully, there was an emergency box installed at the beginning of the passage. Inside was an oxygen mask for use in case of air leaks or other disasters. Grabbing the mask and pulling it over my face comforted me, and eased the feeling of walking naked in a vacuum.

Call it premonition, ESP, or the working of the dumb luck Vohaul had commented upon, but if I had not been wearing the mask, I would have perished in that walkway. Tremors had started to rock the asteroid; shakes and quakes and strong rumbles had begun to add to the chaos of the moment. Near the far end of the passage, one particularly strong tremor succeeded in cracking the meteorite-proof enclosure. Air was sucked out into the vacuum, and I raced to get out of the walkway before it sealed itself shut. I made it easily, but without the mask it may have been the end of my story.

But my tale was not finished. Once out of the tunnel, I found myself in a part of the asteroid I hadn't been in before. It was another interminable corridor, so long that it just faded away in the distance. I turned right and began running. I had chosen the correct direction; after a hundred meters or so I saw an escape pod hatch ahead of me. *Salvation!* I thought. It wasn't until I had come right up to the hatch, and was pressing the button to open the pod, that I saw the BrainSuckDroid coming at me. It was intoning, "Death to intruders, death to intruders," in the deadly accented monotone that gives young children (and some adults) nightmares. I had met Vohaul's last pet, and at the worst time possible. With a loud scream (what else?) I turned and fled back the way I had come. The BrainSuckDroid pursued me, trying to get within reach with his deadly claws. Built for carnage and inhalation, not for speed, the BrainSuckDroids can be outsprinted, but not outdistanced. With no lungs, they can never become winded. Eventually, they always run down their prey.

Droids, however, are sometimes programmed to protect only specified areas. This seemed to be the case for the one following me; when the corridor finally opened up into an open walkway skirting the asteroid's central power core, the sounds of pursuit stopped. After a while, I became convinced that the droid had returned to its post, and I decided to try entering the pod again.

Why, may you ask, would I do such a dumb thing? Here's why:



"There are now 25 minutes to total self-destruction. There is still no need to panic, although pretty soon it will become an attractive distraction."

That's why.

I returned to the pod and attempted to press the entry button a second time. The BrainSuckDroid was not amused. Again I was chased as far as the droid would follow. This time, however, I didn't stop running when the droid did. The reason was simple; as the droid started after me the second time, I caught a glimpse of the corridor beyond it. It looked remarkably as though it opened into a walkway, one identical with the walkway that had afforded me safety. If that were true, then there was an excellent possibility that the two connected, and I could reach the pod from the other side. And if *that* were true, I was sure I could outrun a walking droid, even by taking the long way around. That is, as long as I didn't trip. Or stop. Or run out of breath. Or think too much about what I was doing.

I made it. As the automated voice was announcing that the countdown had reached 23 minutes, I arrived at the unguarded pod. The droid was in sight, but far enough away for me to get into the pod safely. A look out the viewport showed the asteroid already beginning to burn, and I made a fast jab at the launch button. A blast of acceleration slammed me ungraciously back into my seat, and the pod roared away from the now most aptly named Asteroid of Doom.

I never did see the last moment of Vohaul's stronghold. The escape pod was an older model and contained only a few minutes of emergency oxygen. It was enough to get me away from danger safely, and into the pod's CryoSleep chamber. Encased there, I would be able to sleep my time away until the emergency beacon was picked up and I was rescued. It was a happy thought.

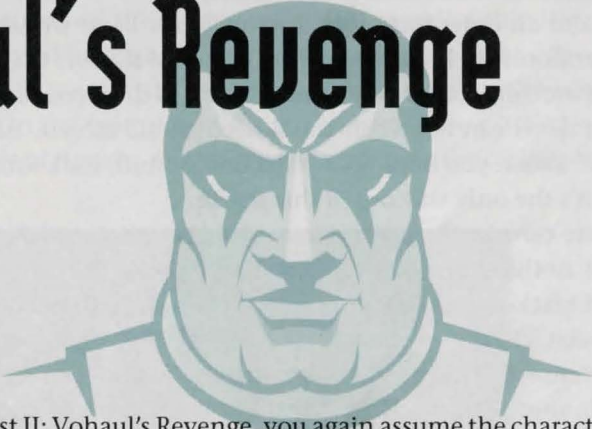
I opened the lid to the sleep chamber and climbed inside. As the top came down to seal me in and slow my body down, I checked out the collection of sleep stims. I decided to pass on the Lone Star Ranger. Instead, I picked an EduStim on how to pilot a spaceship.

The universe had turned out to be a dirty place. I figured I was the right man to clean it up.

Roger Wilco, head janitor and sanitation engineer slowly fell asleep.

Roger Wilco, Space Ranger prepared to awaken.

Cruising Through Space Quest II: Vohaul's Revenge



In Space Quest II: Vohaul's Revenge, you again assume the character of Roger Wilco, the much renowned space janitor. The fame you gained for saving your planet Xenon in Space Quest I has been short lived; once again you are cleaning out shuttle craft for a living. Kidnapped by the vengeful Sludge Vohaul, the mastermind behind the Sarien plot in SQI, you must now traverse the jungles of the planet Labion and the corridors of Sludge's asteroid fortress in an attempt to save your people yet again.



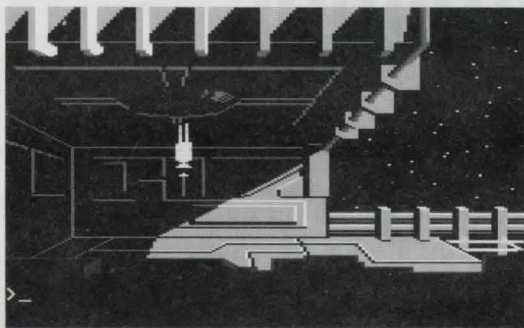
On Orbital Station 4

The game begins with Roger sweeping out an unfinished part of Xenon Orbital Space Station 4, and getting yet another annoying call from his boss on his wristwatch communicator. To answer the boss's call, type **look at the watch** and



then type **press the C button**. The H button is for Roger's horoscope, and the T button for the time. Press them also.

After you get the boss's message, it's time to head inside. Go west until Roger is beneath the grate on the ceiling, then walk north straight up the wall. Isn't zero-G great? As you walk across the center of the grate, it swivels up carrying Roger with it. You are now inside the space station.

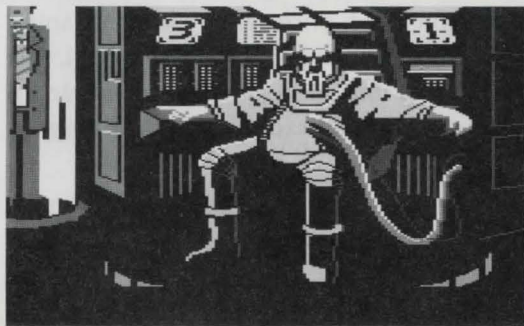


After Roger has been decontaminated in the airlock, look around, then walk to the suit of clothes hanging on the north wall. Now that you're not in space, you might as well change out of that space suit, and into your everyday janitor's garb. When you've gotten dressed, check your inventory. You'll find that you have a dialect

translator and an order form for a Labion Terror Beast whistle—something Roger left in his uniform the last time he wore it. Now walk over to the lockers on the east wall. Open the third locker down from the top of the screen and take what you find inside. You never can tell when you'll need an old athletic supporter and a cubix rube puzzle. When you have your collection of stuff, walk through the door in the west wall; it's the only way out of this screen.

You are now in the control room for the space station. You can talk to the people, but nothing they say is worth listening to. The only place to go to is the yellow-and-black-striped lift on the floor. Walk onto it, and get a free ride up to a transport tube. There's nowhere to go up here either, so climb in the tube door and your fellow crewmates will send Roger off to his next cleaning assignment: a shuttle.

In the shuttle bay, walk down the stairs and under the shuttle. Its ramp is down and you can walk right in. Once you get into the shuttle, two intergalactic thugs knock Roger out. Don't worry or restore the game; it's all part of the plot.



When Roger awakens from his involuntary nap, he finds himself in the presence of Sludge Vohaul, the mastermind behind Roger's little scrape with the Sariens in the first SQ game. He tells Roger that he has a diabolical

new plan to gain revenge on Xenon: he will infest the planet with a hoard of genetically engineered life insurance salespeople. He also sentences Roger to a



lifetime of hard labor in his mines on Labion. Roger is drugged and taken back out to the shuttle. Once on Labion, he is taken by skimmer to the mines. Things look bleak for our hero. Luckily, the skimmer runs out of fuel en route and crashes, killing both of the guards. Roger is now stranded on the surface of Labion, a rather inhospitable jungle planet.



On Labion

*command
search hovercraft*

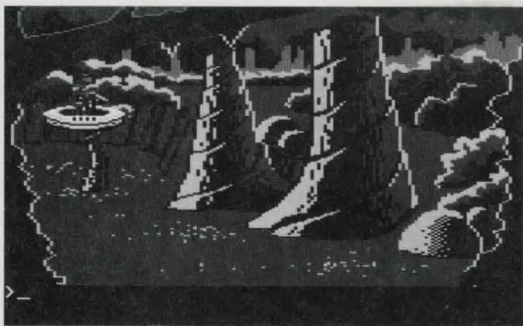
During the crash, one of Vohaul's goons broke Roger's fall to the surface of the planet; he expired cushioning Roger's body so Roger's in one piece, unlike the guard and his buddy. Search the guard Roger landed on, and you'll find a keycard. Take it. Next, search what remains of the skimmer. You'll find a glowing light with a button next to it. Push the button and the light goes out. This turns off the skimmer's homing device, making it harder for Vohaul's thugs to find where Roger landed. There is nothing on the other dead guard, so walk behind the tree in the middle of the screen and head north. Exit north as far to the right side of the screen as possible; it will give you a little needed margin for error for the next place you will be. Be careful! On the right side of the screen where you crashed is what looks like a rectangle made of flowers. As you can see here, it's a concealed pit; if you step on it, Roger dies:



As soon as you enter the next screen, start moving behind the big tree in the center of the screen. You will hear a noise from the east, but ignore it for the moment. You will also hear something that sounds just like the skimmer that brought Roger here. If he isn't behind the tree and completely out of sight by the time the skimmer comes on screen, the guard in it will kill him.

You can't see Roger in the following screen shot because he's hiding behind the big tree closest to the bottom of the picture. You can't see him and neither can Vohaul's goon. When the skimmer has left the screen, get out from behind the tree and walk one screen east to investigate the noise you heard earlier.

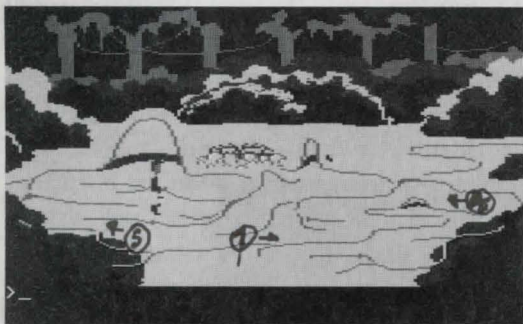




The first thing you'll see is a little pink alien hanging upside down from a rope. He doesn't look very happy about it, so walk over and untie the little guy; someday he might return the favor. There is nowhere else to go from here, and nothing to do, so go two screens west, back the way you came.

In the second screen you will see some little blue spores growing in the ground. Be careful not to step on them or Roger will be temporarily paralyzed. Slow the game down, move over near one, and take it; as long as you don't step on the spore, you can pick it up without fear. When you have your spore, walk north to the next screen. **③**

As soon as you enter this screen, stop Roger and save the game. Take a good look at the root monster in front of you. The path through it is easy to see; it goes roughly to the right, up, to the left, and up again.



You have to walk Roger through this maze without touching any of the roots. Put the game on the slowest speed and start walking. Stop Roger and save the game every few steps. Make sure you have stopped moving before you save; otherwise, if you have to restore from this save, you will come out of it still moving, and

Roger will probably die. Don't worry. Take your time. We'll just stand back here and root for you all the way. When you make it through the root monster, walk over to the bush with all the smelly red berries. Pick some. The berries are all you need from this area, so it's back through the roots you go. **④** Isn't this fun?

After your second trip through the root monster, walk back through the area with the spores to the screen with the two big trees. Walk north past the biggest tree, and go west after you reach the bushes.

In the next area, walk up to the white thing in front of you. It's a mailbox. Put your order form in the slot and wait. Take the whistle that's left in the tray when the box stops humming. When you have it, go back east two screens. You'll be at the edge of a swamp.

Here at the edge of the swamp, you see that little pink alien again. Look at him/her (it?), and you will see that it is rubbing something on its body. When in

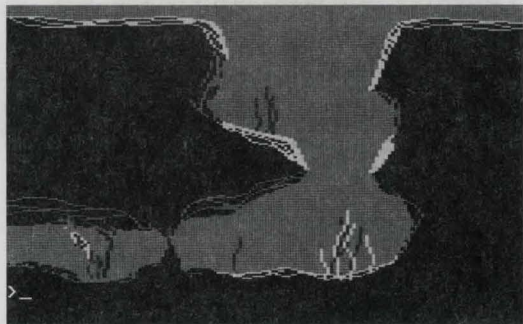
③
out of
root maze

out of
root maze
④
⑤



doubt, do as the natives do: rub the berries you have on your body. Once you're nicely coated with berry juice, you are ready to walk east into the swamp.

In the next part of the swamp, something will try to eat Roger. Since it doesn't like the taste of the berries any more than Roger likes the smell of them, it will spit Roger out again. Keep walking east until you reach the deep part of the swamp (it's in the northern part of the screen). When you get there, take a deep breath and you'll head for the bottom.



Once you are under water, don't waste time looking around or Roger will drown. As soon as you get to the bottom of the screen, go west through the water-filled cave. In the next screen, go up through the hole in the cavern roof, and Roger will be able to breath again. Climb out of the pool and walk over to the glowing gem. Take it,

get back into the water, take another deep breath, and retrace your strokes to the surface of the swamp. When Roger comes back up, walk to the east. You're soon out of the swamp. ⑨ *out of Swamp*

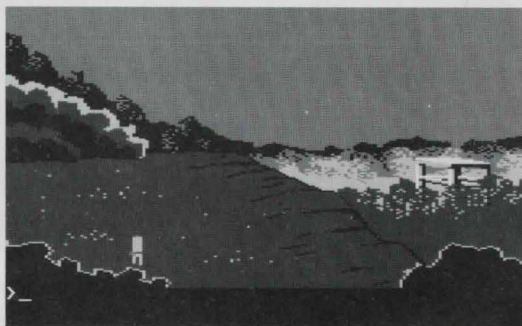
Once you're back on dry land, walk east one more screen. You'll find yourself in front of a chasm. In front of the chasm is a dead tree. Climb the tree, and part of it will fall—with Roger on it—forming a log bridge. Shiny your way across. Once you get to the other side, keep going east. In the next screen, keep walking. Roger will get caught in a snare and black out. Roger has to endure this, so relax and enjoy the experience. When Roger comes to, you'll be in the next part of the game.

When Roger awakens from his latest unintentional nap, you find yourself in a cage near a campfire. Sitting at the campfire warming its claws is an ugly creature; it's probably responsible for your current predicament. Yell at it twice. The second time, it will walk toward Roger with homicidal intent. When it gets close to your cage, throw the spore at it. It will become paralyzed and fall over. Walk to the corner of the cage closest to the hunter, and search its body for the key that will unlock your cage. Take it, and unlock the door. Don't forget to grab the creature's rope off the rock next to the cage. Now head off the screen to the north before the creature recovers from the effects of the spore.

In the next screen you will see something launch off a platform in the distance. It's another of Vohaul's skimmers coming after Roger. If you stay to the south of the screen (as shown in the screen shot at the top of the next page), the guard in it won't see Roger. Walk west and you'll find yourself back in the area where Roger got snared earlier. Don't worry, there aren't any snares this time through. Keep going west until you reach the chasm you crossed earlier. Save the game. ⑪



Back at the chasm, carefully walk over to the log and type **climb on log**. Move out to the center of the log, tie the rope around it, and climb down. At the



end of your rope (still high above the chasm floor), you'll find a big monster on a ledge to one side, an open ledge with a cave on the other, and Roger dangling on the rope in the middle. Climb down until there is only a tiny bit of rope sticking out between Roger's feet, and then start swinging. Keep swinging. Wait until the monster

has tried to grab Roger three times.

After the third time, let go as soon as the rope swings back as far as it will go toward the empty ledge. With any luck at all, Roger is now safe and sound on the ledge opposite the monster. Unless you want to skydive without a parachute, the only way off this ledge is through the cave. Don't bother to knock, just go right on in.



Inside the cave, stop as soon as you can't see anything on the screen but Roger's eye. Type **use gem**. This will let Roger use the glowing gem like a lantern; if he walks too far without it, a monster beaver will eat him. Keep walking

west, and don't be surprised when Roger falls down a hole in the floor; it's the only way to the next part of the game.

At the base of the canyon, which is where you end up after falling down the hole, you will be greeted by a pair of pink aliens. They'll tell Roger to follow them. Watch where they leave the screen, and then take the time to pick up the gem; Roger dropped it when he fell and he will need it again later. The only way to go at this point is south, after the pink aliens. (12)

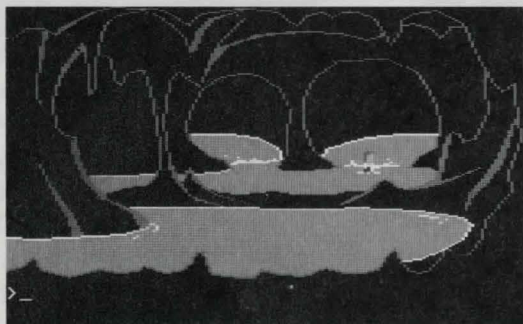
In the next part of the canyon, you meet the chief of the aliens. It tells Roger to "say the word" to its subjects when you want to leave. There's nowhere to go in the canyon, so when you feel ready to face the rest of the game, type **say the word**. The pink aliens will push away a rock over a hole that has a ladder going down inside it.



Once Roger is on the ladder, the aliens push the rock back over it. It's now dark, and you need a source of light. Put the gem in your mouth; it will shed a little light on the maze. This can be a confusing sequence, so you may want to read the next paragraph as you negotiate the maze on screen. Stay behind us as we lead you through.

Climb all the way down the ladder Roger is on; at the bottom of the cave go east one screen. Take the ladder in this screen down to where it crosses with a passageway, and take that passage east. Take the next ladder you come to down as far as it will go, then go east until you run into another ladder. Take this ladder as far down as it will go, then head west one screen. In this screen, ignore the first ladder you come to (unless, of course, you like getting lost). Take the second ladder down until it crosses a passageway. Take the passage east as far as it will go, and you will find yourself in an open area with waterfalls. That wasn't so tough, was it?

There's nothing you can do in the waterfall room (unless you are dying for a shower) except to follow the river out to the east. In the next screen, the river branches to the right and to the left:



Right is right, so take that fork in the river; the left one will dump Roger over a waterfall and into oblivion. The right fork will suck Roger into a whirlpool, but at least you get out of the caverns that way.

Once the whirlpool spits Roger out from the caverns, you will find the only way to go is east. In the next screen, you will find the path blocked by rocks. Slow the game down, and blow the whistle you got from the mailbox. A Labion Terror Beast, looking like a small whirlwind, will burst through the rock to the north. As soon as you see it, throw the cubix rube puzzle to the beast; the creature will pick it up and become entranced trying to figure it out. You can now exit north through the hole it blasted in the boulder. Before you go, be sure to pick up one of the small rocks left in the wake of the Beast's explosive entrance.

Go past
2 ladders

13



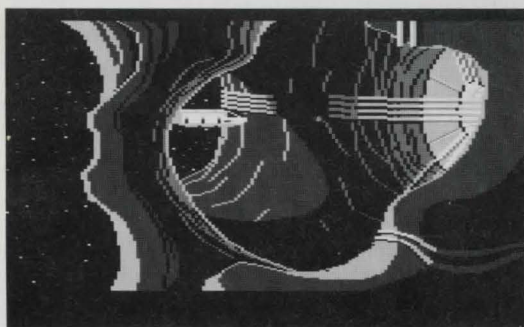
NOTE: This problem can also be solved by returning Roger to the water as soon as the Terror Beast appears, and walking Roger west one screen. Return east to where you left the Beast, and it will be gone. You can now exit north after picking up a rock. The downside to this solution is that you won't score the points for throwing the rube to the Terror Beast.

As you leave the Terror Beast to its plastic puzzle, you find Roger behind a bush near the foot of the shuttle pad where he initially landed on Labion. Another of Vohaul's goons stands guard over the walkway; he will fry you the instant you step out into the open. When the guard reaches the middle of the walkway and looks toward Roger, try to nail him with the rock you picked up.



it. The elevator will then take Roger to the top of the platform, and the shuttle.

When you reach the top of the platform, be careful not to fall off. To enter the shuttle, Roger must be behind it and on its right side as you look at it onscreen.



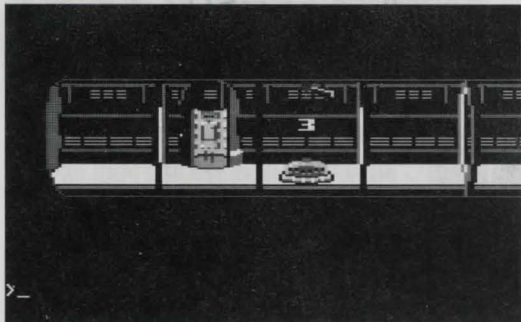
Type **sling rock at guard**, and you will creatively use the athletic supporter to sling a rock at him. It's doubtful if that's how David felled Goliath, but it works well enough on this guard. With him out of the way for good, walk to the door in the foremost eastern pillar (the one on the right) and type **put keycard in slot** to open

Once inside, look at the control panel. Press the Power button, press the Ascent Thrusters button, and turn the Attitude dial, in that order. Type **look at screen**. The screen will tell you to pull back the throttle in order to ascend. You can use either the arrow keys or type **throttle back** to do this, but don't try and use the controls after that; you'll probably crash.

Once you are off the planet, the controls become ineffective. Don't worry; Vohaul will appear on your screen in a few minutes to taunt Roger. He'll also set the controls to take our hero to his asteroid fortress. You might as well sit back and enjoy the animation.

Vohaul's Asteroid

16 Once the shuttle has finished docking in the asteroid, look around. Don't bother with the stairs down; instead, walk east until you come to an elevator (west will also take you to an elevator; it's your choice). Look at the buttons in the elevator, and you will notice that there is no button for Level Two. Press the button labeled Level Three, and be sure to type the number out as a word, not a numeral.



killed. In the screen shot shown above, Roger is safe. When the droid leaves the screen, Roger is free to move about again.

On Level Three you will notice that the eastern elevator has dumped you in the western passage. Walk east for three screens, and you will find a closet. Open its door by pressing the button on the outside, and walk in. Look around, and you'll find a plunger that will be useful later. Take it, walk out, and continue walking east until you come to an elevator. Don't forget to keep an eye out for the sweeper droid. Get in, and press the Level Four button.

17 On Level Four, walk two screens west, and open the closet. Walk in, take the glass cutter, and leave. Keep going to the west and you will find a pair of lavatory doors. Open either one and walk in; they both lead into the same restroom. Open the empty stall door and go inside. If you want to relieve Roger of excess bodily wastes, make sure you close the door first; after all, it's only common decency. Read some of the graffiti. Take the toilet paper and leave the restroom. Once you are back in the corridor, keep walking west until you reach an elevator. Take it down to Level Five (you should know how by now).

18 On Level Five, walk two screens east until you find another closet to poke around in. Watch out for the creature with the big hairy hands; it will kill you if you get too close to its cage. Press the button to open the closet, and go inside. You will find a wastepaper basket and a pair of overalls. Take both of them. You will automatically get rid of the overalls, but when you do, something will roll out. It's

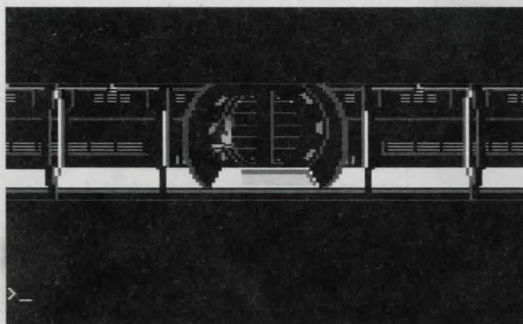




a lighter. Take the lighter, and leave the closet. Now, instead of walking east until you find an elevator, turn around and walk back west.

NOTE: If you wish, save the game here and walk east. Roger will be chased and, most likely, caught by an alien. If caught, Roger will not die at once, but will before you can finish the game. It's an interesting death scene.

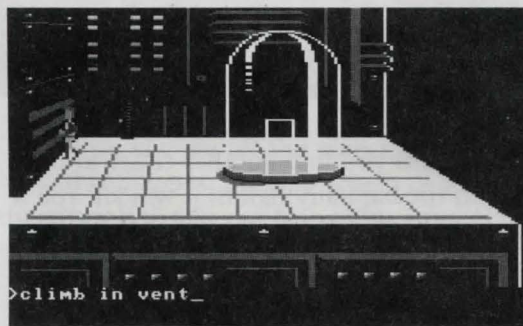
Once you get to the west elevator, press the Level One button. When you get back to Level One, walk back west to the landing pad. Save the game. Go down the stairs you saw when you first arrived.



When you reach the base of the stairs, walk east, then west when a wall drops in front of you. A wall will drop to the other side also, sealing Roger in. Stay against the west wall, and the floor will start to retract, exposing a pool of acid. Type **stick plunger to wall** and wait until the floor is almost gone to press the ENTER key.

If you execute the command too soon, Roger will tire from hanging on the plunger, and he will fall into the acid. When the floor moves back into its normal position, let go of the plunger. The walls will retract, leaving the passage open. Save the game again.

Don't walk down either of the passages just yet; Vohaul has posted robot guards in both of them. Instead, put the toilet paper in the wastepaper basket, set the basket down, and light the paper with the lighter. This will set off the asteroid's sprinkler system and short out the robots. Great. Now walk two screens to the east and Roger will find himself once again in the presence of Sludge Vohaul. Walk up the stairs toward Sludge; he will use a beam to miniaturize Roger and put him under glass on his desk. It's a jarring experience.



As soon as Vohaul finishes gloating over Roger's captivity, use the glass cutter to cut your way out of the jar he put Roger in. Walk out of the jar, and up to the vents on the west part of the screen.

Climb into the vents and you will find Roger in a room housing Vohaul's life-support system. Look around. Behind the pump in the



center of the screen is an emergency shut-off button. Push the button, then climb back out of the vents and walk off the screen to the west.

This part of Vohaul's desk holds his keyboard and an On/Off switch. Walk to the switch and pull it to the On position. Then type **type enlarge** to begin the enlargement process. Walk back to the jar, and climb into it. The beam will return Roger to his normal size.

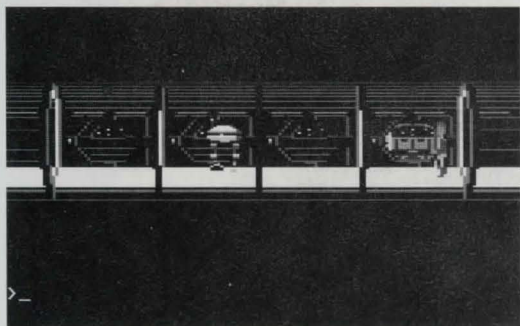
Now that Roger is normal again (or as close as he'll ever be), walk over and search Vohaul's body. You will notice SHSR written on the back of his hand. Walk over to the flashing screen on his desk, and look at it. It will ask you to type in the abort code to stop the clone invasion of Xenon. Type in **SHSR**, the code from the back of Vohaul's hand. (From the time Sludge presses the button, you have only seven minutes to perform this particular action, or the clones will launch.) You have now stopped the clones from invading Xenon. All that's left for you to do is get off the asteroid before it self-destructs in roughly 40 minutes.

When you are done with the clones, walk up the stairs to the east.

NOTE: Do this on slow speed because you have to physically walk Roger up the stairs, and there's no point in having him fall to his death this close to the end of the game.

When Roger reaches the top of the stairs, he will be at the start of a glass corridor that runs along the outside of the asteroid. Open the box near the head of the stairs, take the oxygen mask you see inside, and put it on. Follow the corridor, and don't be alarmed when it fractures; the oxygen mask will protect Roger. When you exit the corridor in the second screen, you will be back in a normal passageway. Save the game.

From the start of the passageway, walk west two screens, then stop. Type **press button** but don't press the ENTER key. In the next screen are a number of doors and an ugly mechanical guard that likes to kill Roger Wilcos.



As you step onto the screen, hug the north wall and move quickly. When Roger is close enough to the first door, press ENTER to make Roger press the button to open it. Turn at once and go back east. You must be very efficient because Vohaul's latest

guardian will be following close behind Roger.

Keep walking east for five screens. The droid won't follow Roger through the glowing doorway to the catwalk on the fifth screen. Now turn around and walk



back west to the screen where you met the droid. It will follow Roger again. This time, when you go through the doorway to the catwalk, keep walking east. Don't have Roger stop or do anything. Don't *you* type anything or even save the game during this sequence. If you do, the guardian droid will reset itself at the escape pod doors and you'll have to do this whole thing over again.

After you're on the catwalk, you will end up at an identical doorway two screens away. Go through it, and continue walking east. The screen has wrapped around to the opposite side of the place where the droid was guarding, except this time the droid isn't there. Walk to the door you opened the first time through and type **enter pod**. Roger is now in an escape pod, and set to get off Vohaul's asteroid. Look around. Press the Launch button in the pod, and he's out of there.

Once Roger is off the asteroid, you will get a message that there are only five minutes of oxygen left. Don't bother with the oxygen mask; it won't work. Look around the pod, and you'll see a sleep chamber in the rear. Walk over to the chamber, open it up, and climb in.

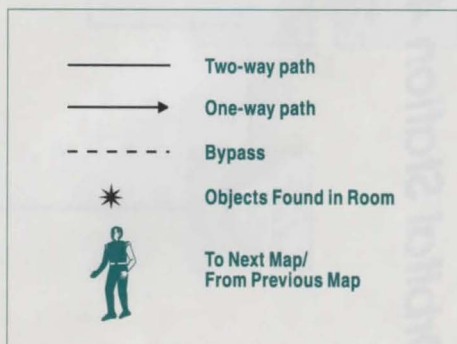
Congratulations! You have now survived Space Quest II. You scored maximum points, and Roger Wilco is safely napping. He will not wake until such a time as you choose to play Space Quest III: The Pirates of Pestulon.

Keeping Your Bearings in Space

Quest II: Vohaul's Revenge

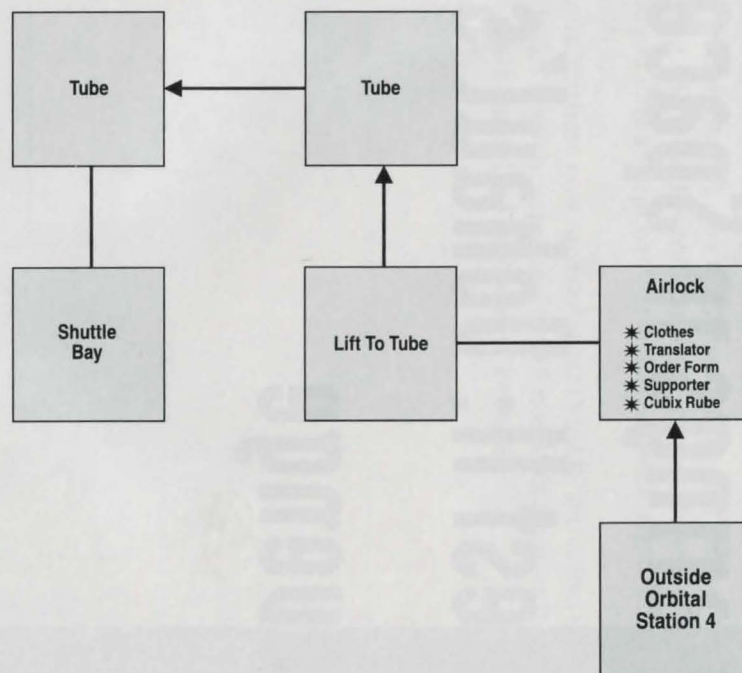
Map Order:

Orbital Station 4
Labion
Labion Canyon
Maze
After Maze (Part I)
After Maze (Part II)
Vohaul's Asteroid (Part I)
Vohaul's Asteroid (Part II)

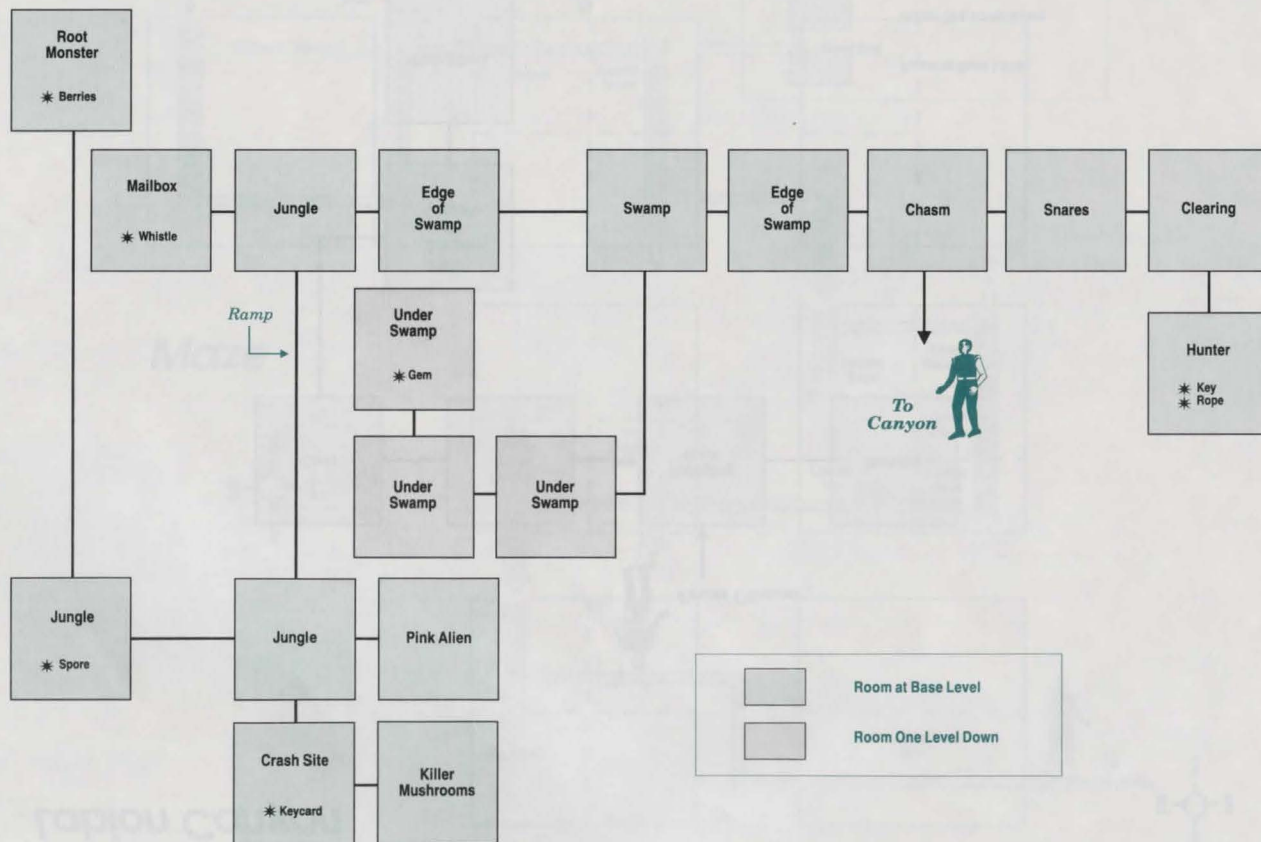




Orbital Station 4

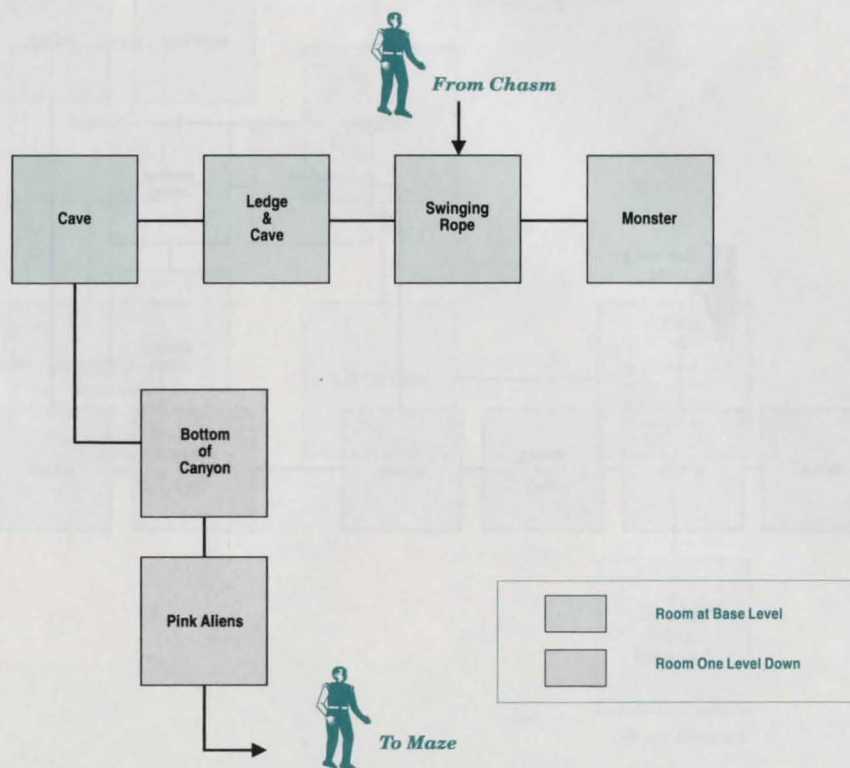


(Start Game)

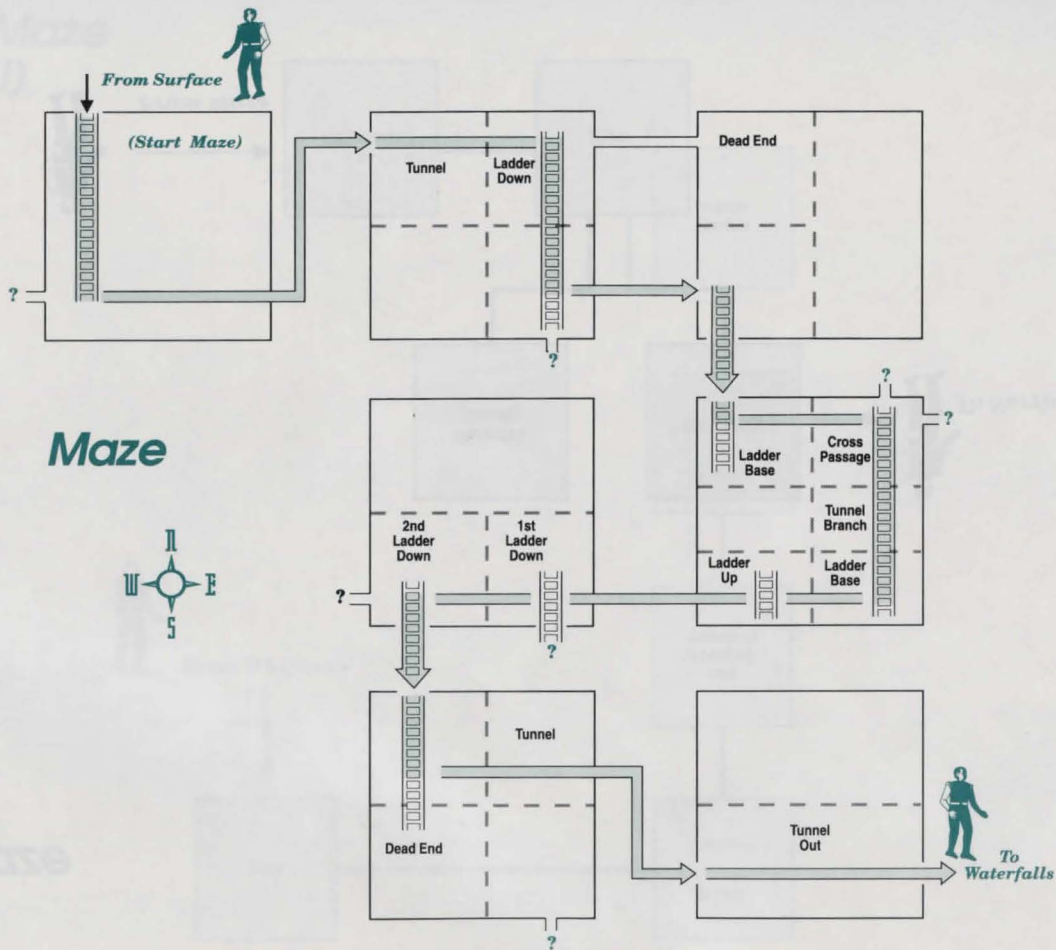




Labion Canyon



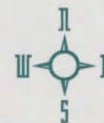
After Maze
(Part II)



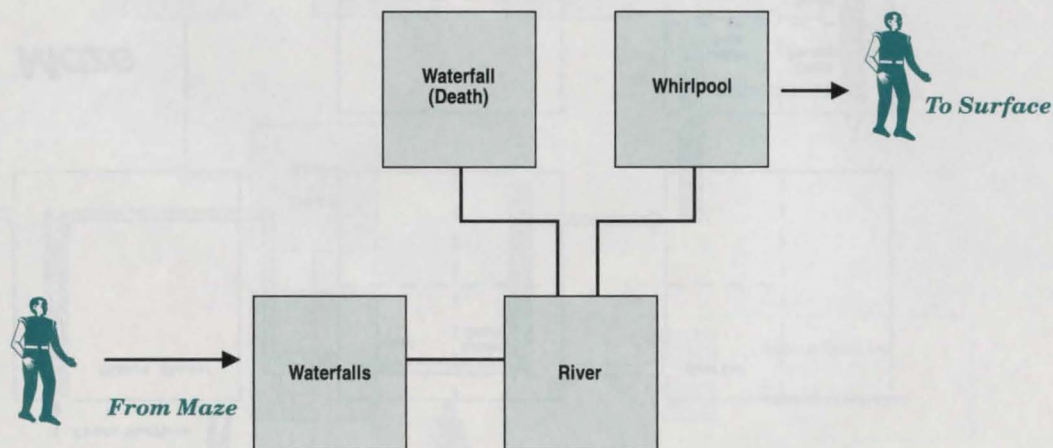
Maze



Keeping Your
Bearings in
Space Quest
II: Vohaul's
Revenge



After Maze (Part I)



After Maze (Part II)



From Whirlpool



Pool

Inside
Shuttle

Top of
Landing
Pad

* Shuttle

Bottom of
Landing
Pad

Clearing

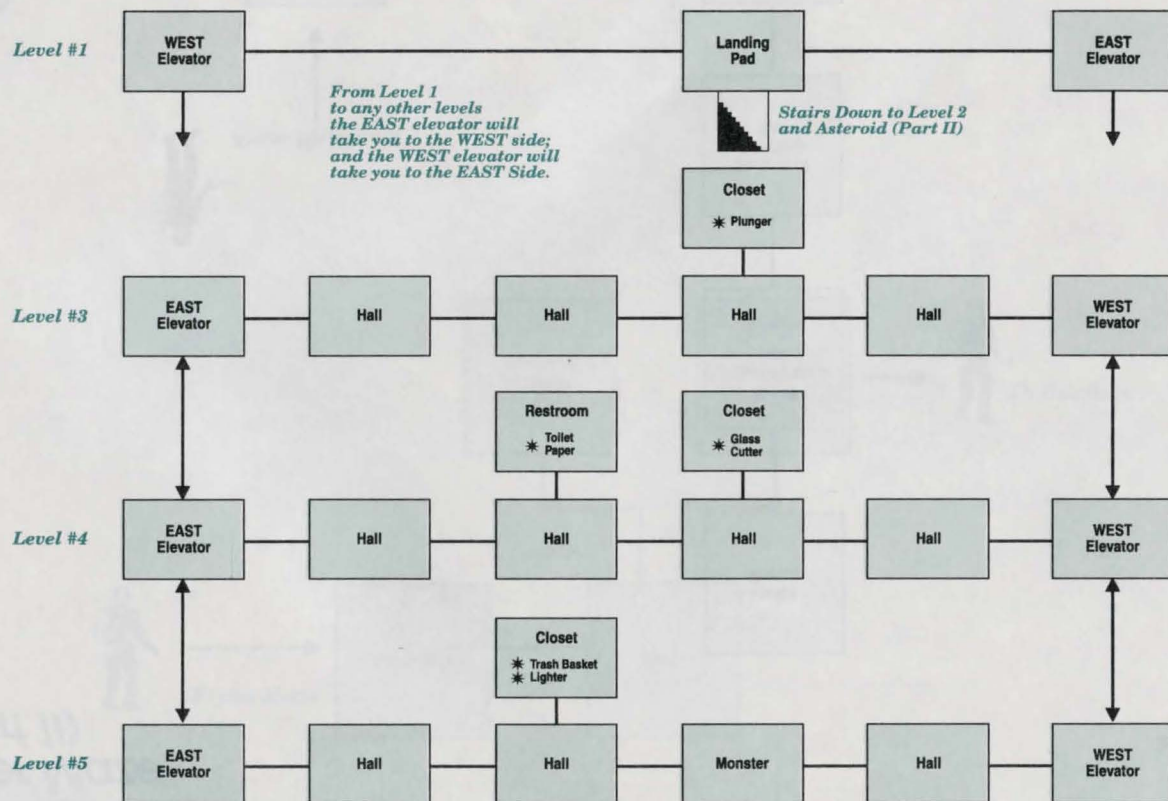
* Rock



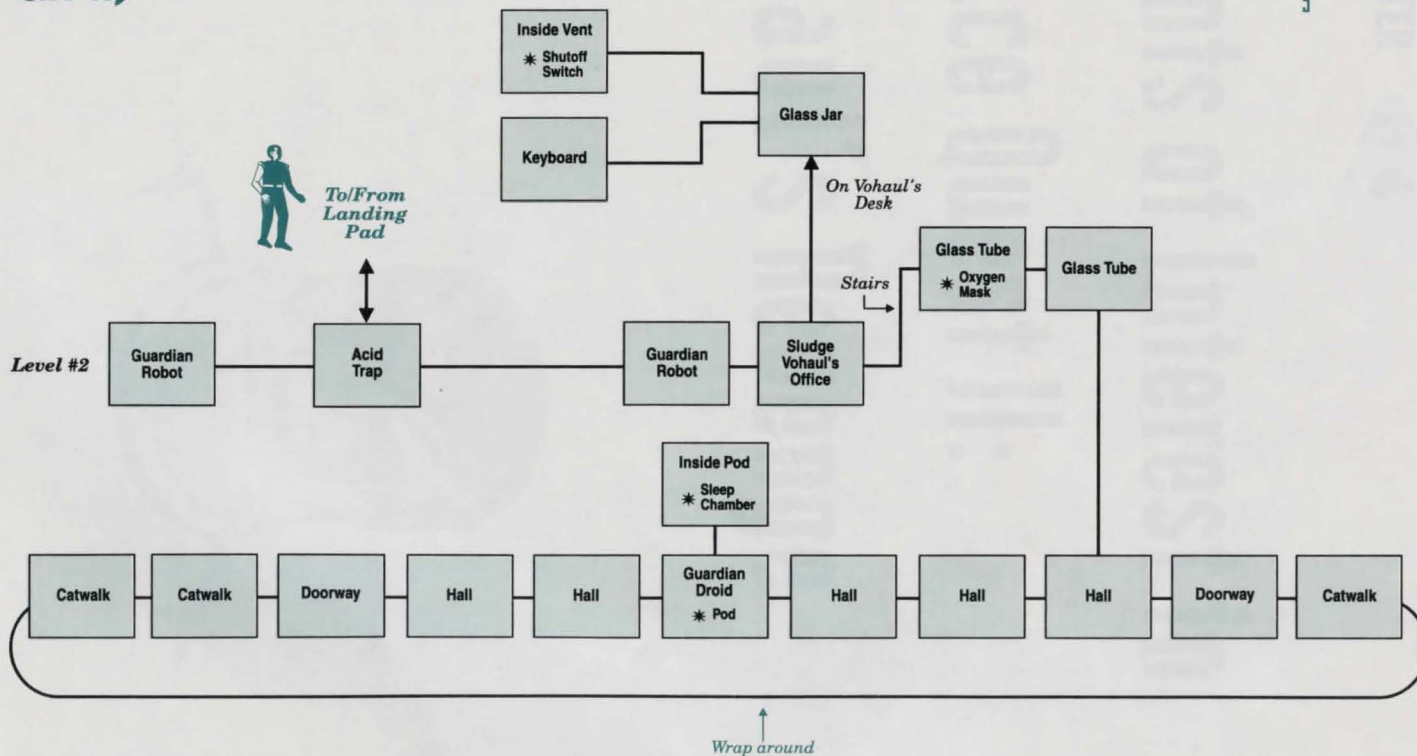
Keeping Your
Bearings in
Space Quest
II: Vohaul's
Revenge



Vohaul's Asteroid (Part I)



Vohaul's Asteroid (Part II)



Points of Interest in Space Quest II: Vohaul's Revenge





WHAT TO DO

POINTS

On Orbital Station 4:

Press C button on watch	1
Enter airlock	1
Change clothes	1
Get athletic supporter	1
Get cubix rube	1
Get abducted by Sludge	5

On Labion:

Get keycard	3
Turn off homing device	1
Hide from guard	5
Free pink alien	5
Get spore	4
Survive root monster both times	4
Get berries	4
Mail order form	2
Get whistle	2
Rub berries on self	3
Hold breath first time	2
Enter cavern under swamp	2
Get gem	3
Hold breath second time	2
Climb dead tree	4
Paralyze hunter with spore	5
Get key	2
Get rope	2
Tie rope to log	2
Swing on rope	2
Jump to ledge	5
Use gem in cave	2
Get gem after dropping it	1
Say say the word to pink aliens	2
Survive maze	20

**WHAT TO DO****POINTS**

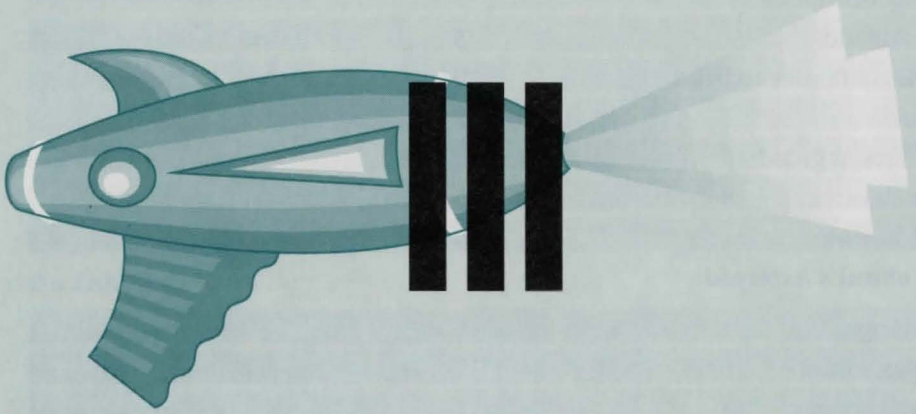
Exit via whirlpool	5
Blow whistle	5
Throw cubix rube to beast	10
Get rock	2
Sling rock at guard	20
Open elevator	5
Leave Labion	20

On Vohaul's Asteroid:

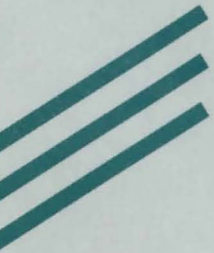
Get plunger	1
Get glass cutter	1
Get toilet paper	1
Get wastepaper basket	1
Get lighter	1
Hang on plunger at acid pool	10
Survive acid pool	10
Put toilet paper in basket	1
Drop basket	1
Light paper and short out robots	10
Use glass cutter	5
Turn off Vohaul's life support	10
Stop clones	10
Get oxygen mask	2
Survive droid and enter pod	10
Enter sleep chamber	10

Highest possible score:	250
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P A R T



Space Quest III: The Pirates of Pestulon





The Pirates of Pestulon

Terminate all humans! Terminate all humans!

The Mechoid Pirates had attacked with the dawn, following Centauri's terminator—the eternally moving dividing line between a planet's night and day—until they reached the Imperial City. The saucers flashed across the horizon, half hidden by the blinding glare of the newly risen TriSuns. Red, Indigo, and Green—named after their individual colors—the life-giving stars unwittingly protected the inorganic brigands intent on making this day civilization's last. Bombs, missiles, and death rays streaked through the early light like fireflies from hell. Centauri City, its warning systems sabotaged by legions of fifth-column, marginally sentient, brainwashed AutoDial- and VoiceMail-activated telemarketing Techoids, helplessly awaited its fate. The capital city of the Empire of a Thousand Suns, having stood for an epoch as the epitome of all that was good and true in the universe, was about to die.

Not if Roger Wilco could help it.

I watched impassively as the largest of the Carnage Cruisers of the StainlessSteeled Horde landed brutally in the palace's formal gardens. Adorned in alternating stripes of industrial grey, institutional green, and synthetic orange, the attack ships carried death, fear, and revulsion wherever they marauded. Two of us



were Centauri City's last hope. Life-forms everywhere prayed that we would be enough.

Cornucopia Agricorp, Imperial Heiress and leader of her people, stood beside me as we prepared to meet the invaders. She gripped the legendary VibroSword, Ginsu, lightly in one hand; a rapid-fire pulse rifle was in the other. Both weapons were anxious to taste fresh lubricating fluid. Her full battle armor of golden, blast-proof, skintight Impervo-spandex went well with her pale blue eyes and hair. Turning a little, she tilted her head down and kissed me on the lips. I removed my hands from the butts of my twin pearl-handled ion blasters, and placed them on hers.

"Don't forget you have these, sweetheart," I reminded her. "They've been modified to fire a special rust-and-corrosion ray. If our secret weapon works, we may yet save the universe. These mechanical monsters won't know what hit 'em!" To the vid-eyes now marching down the lowered ramps of the invasion fleet, it appeared I was merely nibbling her ear. I wished I were.

"Enjoy your last caress, Roger Wilco! You organic life-forms have such disgustingly touching nonproductive traits. Fortunately, you will all be exterminated within the day. I would laugh, except humor is another weak, *puny*, human trait."

The synthesized words blared from a dark, gigantic mechoid, the last to emerge from the command ship. Four or five meters tall, it had bulk to match. The killer 'bot troopers raised their weapons in salute at the speech, and the leader rolled slowly, imperiously, down the ramp. Its triangular matte black metal base was dotted with incomprehensible flashing lights. A half dozen razor-, needle-, and pincer-tipped appendages waved and rotated as they revolved around the monster's middle. Two clawed arms pointed plasma rayguns at us, and a third swung a two-meter long broadsword in circles about its head—a featureless black glass dome that somehow appeared to sneer.

"Let the organic universe know that I am known as DEL C: *. * —The Unpronounceable Annihilator. You can call me Death, for short. But not for long. You will die with my name screaming from your throats."

My hands returned to the pistols hanging expectantly in their holsters. Cornucopia tested the balance of her sword.

"They don't seem to have any eyes to shoot at, so I guess we'll have to aim at their ball bearings," I observed.

"Good idea. I think we have them outnumbered," the Imperial Heiress cooed, and blew me a final kiss.

A thousand mechoids raised a thousand guns and aimed them all at us. I leveled both my voice and pistols and growled back at them.

"Listen up, you obsolete collection of out-of-warranty Weed Eaters. This is your last chance. Surrender, or say your prayers."



The sound of a thousand metal fingers touching a thousand metal triggers was my answer.

"OK. If that's the way it's going to be, repeat after me—'And now I lay me down to rust. . .'"

"Let the slaughter begin!" the Unpronounceable Annihilator boomed. Cornucopia and I attacked.

Well, I warned 'em it wouldn't be a fair fight.

"Intruder alert. We have organic life-form penetration. Intruder alert. Organic life-form penetration."

An inhuman, impersonal, absolutely cold mechanical voice tickled my unconsciousness and felt it squirm. Sensing life, it squeezed, gripped, and yanked me out of Cornucopia's warmest reward. The transition from dreamland to objective reality was enough to make me retch, except I hadn't eaten in so long that food was a word from someone else's vocabulary. My eyes blurred back into focus, and the unexpected feeling of warm tingles reminded me that my mind was still attached to a body. Above me, the clear lid of the CryoSleep chamber hissed open, releasing a cloud of water vapor into. . . I didn't know where. Still unwilling, if not unable, to move fully, I twisted my head slightly and noticed that the "Fly Your Own Starship for Fun and Booty" EduStim that I had been ColdSleep learning had cycled through enough times to jam its playback circuits. The backup Stim, "Visualize Your Way to More Efficient Bipedal Locomotion" was likewise overused.

"How long have I been asleep?" I wondered aloud. "Where am I?" A swollen tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth before I could get any more fat words out. From behind, a fatter rejuve injection penetrated my still sleeping butt, forcing me to sit up. The background voice returned with more clarity.

"Intruder alert. We have organic life-form penetration. Eliminate upon sight. Eliminate upon sight." I hoped the announcement wasn't about me.

"Great," I muttered, kissing the last lingering moments of my dream goodbye. "Out of the cookie jar and into the microwave." Painfully, I swung my thawed legs out of the ColdSleep unit and stood up. Around me, Sludge Vohaul's one-use-only disposable escape pod was shutting itself down forever. Wherever I was, I was there without wheels (so to speak). From the tone of the alert being broadcast, I figured I wasn't exactly a welcome guest.



At the Mercy of the Mechoids

I emerged from the escape pod into an enclosed junkyard and scrap metal recycling facility. The unmistakable vibration of sub-light space engines hummed around me.



The air was thin and stank of excess ozone, but was breathable if one wasn't too choosy about it. I wasn't. Off-pink light illuminated everything in sepulchral shades. If I weren't mistaken—and I weren't—I was on a Gar'Bage freighter, a giant, space-faring debris box.

The Gar'Bage are a race of cybernetic scavengers, forever combing the Void in search of wrecked or derelict spaceships, satellites, and stations. This is thought to be their means of reproduction, although no one (other than themselves) knows for sure. Made up of recycled parts, completely metallic but somewhat humanoid in form, they have no forbearance for organic life, and less for love. On the other hand, they do the galaxy a great service by cleaning up after us. If left alone, they go about their business efficiently and in peace. Evidently the Gar'Bage had salvaged Vohaul's escape pod as it, and I, drifted the space lanes awaiting rescue. My presence seemed not to be appreciated.

Around me, piles of smashed metal and various parts lay strewn chaotically about. Pieces of decking, computer components, and odd machinery were everywhere. At my feet, I recognized an apparently intact warp motivator, minus its spaceship. Ahead of me, I could see more and more heaps of space refuse, an interstellar graveyard of spare parts. Off to one side, the skeleton of a dead ramjet-powered ore tanker stretched further into the trash barge, and it drew me toward it like a tunnel with a light at its other end. Indeed, what remained of the decayed hulk was barely more than a tunnel-like passage surrounded by what looked like bare ribs. As I walked through it, I felt much like a piece of poorly digested food making its way through the colon of some half-decayed carcass. Instead of intestinal flora, however, the sides of the corridor were lined with jungles of old wire and conduit. This image was reinforced when I got to the other end of the passage and found myself looking at the wreckage of a great metal and plastic head—the last remains of a ten-meter tall BattleBot, the most powerful combat Techoid in the galaxy.

The 'bot had seen better centuries, and looked to have been on the losing side of a skirmish—thus its new home in the scrap heap. A massive hole had been blasted completely through one of its eyevide lenses, and from it I could feel warm air blowing out, as if it were circulating from one part of the Gar'Bage barge to another. It seemed possible that I could climb up and into the opening, although I would have to be very careful. The junk ship's decking had rusted through next to the head, and a slip could plunge me down into darkness, and possibly death. I knew, though, that if I didn't keep moving, I would inevitably be discovered by one of the Gar'Bage—with most unpleasant consequences. That settled, up I climbed, into the eye of the BattleBot.

It was pretty neat, really. Although I didn't know it at the time, I had been in ColdSleep for nearly a century. The EduStims that had been feeding into my brain during that time had finally stuck there. I practically vaulted up the 'bot's head, as



if I had been normally coordinated all my life. My newfound dexterity hadn't even registered when I discovered a ladder inside the big head that ended in a particularly spacious scrap pit. It was only after I reached the bottom of that ladder that I stopped stone still, dumbfounded. The realization of what I had just done brought a spontaneous grin the size of Cornucopia Agricorp's battle boots to my face. And you know what they say about women with big feet.

By the twin moons of Yamaguchi! I marveled. *I don't believe I just did that. Those EduStims really work. I bet I can spit and hit the floor on the first try.* Right I was. In fact I was able to spit several times in succession before I became bored with my success. A new Roger Wilco was stalking the universe, and this one didn't have to worry much about stumbling over lint.

A second, perhaps even greater surprise greeted me at the bottom of that great rusty hole in the junk ship. Not one, but two spaceships were sitting there. The hull of the smaller one had been breached in several spots, but the larger ship looked almost spaceworthy. A careful inspection of the larger vessel, in fact, showed no external damage. True, it was scratched and scorched in a dozen places, and badly in need of a paint job, but its name and logo were still intact: a golden and green Quackoid, its dual wings outstretched as if in flight. In its mahogany-hued beak was a raygun carried at the ready, and a set of archaic goggles offered protection to the creature's two lidless eyes. The bright scarlet scarf that streamed behind was a fitting final touch. Two bold words, *Aluminum Mallard*, were emblazoned beneath the heroic emblem. The ship sat there as if it had been waiting an eternity for me to come and claim it as my own. It was love at first sight.

Nothing else at all in that pit of disintegration mattered to me just then. If only I could find a way inside the *Aluminum Mallard*, I might find it spaceworthy. If disabled, there were enough excess spare parts lying around the junk barge that I might be able to effect the repairs needed to make it soar through space again.

Stop! Hold it for a moment. What's going on here? Roger Wilco, space mechanic? Indeed. The second momentous revelation of the day used that moment to show itself. As my eyes wandered in boy-toy lust over the beached bird, my mind wandered back through those years of oh-so-effective ColdSleep lessons. Unbidden, thoughts I had never thought before jumped out and said to me, *You know, Wilco, it doesn't look too bad on the outside. If we can get inside and run some diagnostics, we just might find this thing is still flyable. Yup, this jalopy's got a lot of potential. Of course, we'll need some sort of ladder to get up to the hatch, but we should be able to find one around here somewhere.*

My new me was right, of course. No matter how hard I put my improved dexterity to the test, there was no way I could successfully climb up the ship's Tefloid skin. Without the *Aluminum Mallard's* automatic access ramp and garage door opener—the normal way to enter a ship of that type—I was stuck outside. The ladder that had brought me down through the BattleBot's dead head was electro-welded



into place, and I had seen no others that day. Worse yet, through some hidden speaker, the Mech voice that had awakened me was again reminding its cohorts of my presence.

"Intruder alert. We have organic life-form penetration. Eliminate upon sight. Eliminate upon sight."

It was all the motivation I needed to start hunting for a way inside the spaceship. Climbing back out of the head, I returned to Sludge Vohaul's escape pod. I reasoned that if a search for me were really underway, the Gar'Bage would never suspect that I would double back there. Anyway, I had to go back in that direction if I wanted to explore the freighter further.

As I suspected, the area was free of any mechoids, and no matter how I strained my ears, I could hear none moving anywhere near. From somewhere high above, the sounds of conveyor belts and other industrious machines created a consistent, nonthreatening background cacophony. Blended with this industrial music was the nearby sound of metal crunching, and the screech and clatter of poorly lubricated linkages, chains, and gears in motion. Occasionally, the hiss of pressurized steam filled the dead spots in this wall of sound. I hadn't realized that the junk ship was so ancient. Steam-powered starships haven't been used in centuries.

I moved silently away from the pod, in the direction of the noise. As I went, I marveled at the astounding number and variety of corpses in this graveyard of the spaceways. Eventually my way was blocked with the remains of a near-mythical Tide fighter, scourge of the galaxy when suns were young and barbarian races seared the stars during the Dark Rings of Collar Wars. A royal crest was still barely legible; perhaps this very ship had belonged to the war's loser, the diabolical Prince of Tides. But there were still no ladders.

Deeper into the junkyards I scavenged, the sounds of moving metal coming closer with each cautious step. Finally I found myself at the far side of a long dead end. Amongst the various kinds of effluvia, which I had already come to expect, were two things that even in this odd place seemed out of the ordinary. The first was just a curiosity: a massive, naked human arm that must once have been part of some statue. I have no idea as to its entire length, but the great torch clutched by the statue's fist was easily twice my height. Water stained, it must once have stood proudly—perhaps overlooking a safe harbor—on some distant planet. But how it came to be on an interstellar junk barge is a mystery that may never be solved.

The second thing I found turned out to be the source of the clangor I had been tracking. A conveyor belt was creating the din, moving bits and pieces of ripped and crushed metals from below the barge level I was on, through an opening in the decking, and up to some new location high above. No matter how I squinted, it was impossible to see the belt's final destination through the brownish smog that hazed out the heights.



I had approached the conveyor as closely as I dared (in order to get a clearer look), when my new dexterity discovered that it still wasn't enough to overcome my congenital momentary inattention to detail. One of the conveyor's teeth—the flat parts of the machine that actually carried things—snapped out, snagged my jumpsuit, and hauled me aboard. It's possible that I brushed the conveyor while I was staring upward, but the effect was the same. One moment I was pondering where the conveyor led; the next, I was being treated to an involuntary guided tour.



The Height of Terror

For the record, the machine rose jerkily for another 50 meters or so, then reversed its direction and began moving back down for more junk. At its apex, it dumped whatever it was carrying (like me!) onto another conveyor. This new conveyor was flat, horizontal, and very short. At its end was an industrial-weight combination metal shredder, grinder, crusher, and compactor efficient enough to turn something the size of the *Aluminum Mallard* into an object more closely resembling a plugged buckazoid—only much heavier. Roger Wilcos, I'm sure, seldom survive the process. Or the processing.

This observation took little time to process. The fact was that, once dumped, I had little time in which to see, comprehend, scream, respond, plan, and execute an escape. Less time, I assure you, than it takes to relate the stages. My body hit the rubberoid material of the second conveyor belt with a cushioned thump. I looked up, jumped up, and shouted a panicked expletive to a preoccupied universe. As usual, it wasn't listening to me.

My eyes locked on the shredder's blades, and death flashed before my eyes. Even as an alternative to my life flashing before my eyes, it left much to be desired. Breaking eye contact at once, I spotted my feet. No help there. Eyes up. Above me, a beam or rail, which hung suspended from the roof, paralleled the moving beltway. Even if I had been in the habit of doing so in emergencies, I wasted no time in thinking. My newly competent muscles sprang to the sky for life itself. Soar, and be saved!

I am getting a bit carried away. On the other hand, it's much better than the way I was being carried away by the conveyor. Pardon me if I don't apologize for my enthusiasm.

My fingers caught the edge of the high rail and found it to their liking. Next, my palms joined them, followed by forearms, elbows, armpits, knee, thigh, and crotch. In between, my biceps, triceps, and quadriceps contracted to provide the strength I needed. You might say, they did their jobs *exceptionally* well.

Sorry.



Instant anatomy course complete, I found myself seated a long, long, long way above the freighter's floor. Considering the alternative, I was delighted enough with my situation to stop screaming.

After a long while my breathing and heartbeat returned to normal, allowing me to discover that unless I wanted to remain forever where I was, I would have to stand. The fact that the metal rail I was sitting on was a full 30 centimeters wide, with no hand rails but with an excellent unobstructed view in the vertically downward direction, did little to perk up my enthusiasm. But my years of somnolent somnambulant ColdSleep study—and online access to a good dictionary as I compose this—put my bod on organic AutoPilot. After an initial moment of horror and hesitation, I lithely raised myself up and stood. A deep, centering breath calmed and balanced me. I looked ahead in one direction, then lightly spun to survey the other. Decision time was upon me. Choosing to follow the slim rail in the direction of the shredder, looking down only as far as my feet, I calmly moved forward. Calamity an idle misstep away, I walked with an assured but careful confidence. "Visualize Your Way to More Efficient Bipedal Locomotion" was my companion, and a good one.

The direction I had chosen to move proved to be a barren choice. The rail turned out to be somewhat circular (or ellipsoidal), returning upon itself in a closed circuit. The narrow track soon began to curve strongly as it began a 180-degree sweep. From there it continued around parallel to the part I was balanced upon. Since the curvature I was approaching seemed even more hazardous to traverse than the part I was currently on, it made much more sense to turn back and see what was happening in the other direction.

The other direction went on for a long time. Walking that rail, suspended better than 50 meters above hard deck, mind and body concentrated on staying upright, eyes focused on where my feet were stepping, if I had thought about what I was doing—instead of just doing it—it would have been my last thought. But my EduStim training kept me upright and brought me to where the rail finally disappeared through a wide opening. Obviously either a transfer point or a control station, bright light glared through the opening from the other side. If I were going to stumble across the mechoid masters of this spacecraft, it would most likely be right there.

Quietly, I pussyfooted my way through that opening and into the room on the other side. Inside, the place looked a lot like some sort of control center, perhaps even one that controlled all of the freighter's soulless activities. Back and sensors all turned away from me, a Gar'Bage mechoid worked away at a distant panel of controls, seemingly unaware of my intrusion. I looked about for some place to hide



but could see nothing. The rail hung too far out and up from the control platform for me to safely jump, and it also began another curve not far in front of me. Attached to my narrow walkway, however, was some kind of a small carriage. The beam I had been walking was a rail, and I had discovered the rail car. The car dangled from the single track, firmly attached to the housing that held its one wheel against the rail. There was a metal claw on the car's underside that indicated that the car was some sort of a mobile retrieval unit. If it had been in operation while I was walking, I would have been knocked to my doom.

The grabber—at least that was the name I gave it—seemed the only possible place to escape detection by the mechoid on duty. I climbed into the car by silently kneeling, then swinging myself down and dropping into its hard single seat. The freighter's ample ambient noise covered any sounds made during this maneuver. A quick look at the car's open interior revealed a throttle for moving, controlled by arrows pointing left and right. Their purpose was to move the car forward and back along the track. There was also a claw activation button, although I paid it no mind.

Hunkering down, making myself as small and invisible as possible, I pressed the left arrow. The grabber immediately began moving forward through the control chamber. The mechoid on duty didn't react to the sound at all, continuing to perform whatever chore it had been programmed to do. Despite this, the entire time the car was moving through the control room I stayed hunched down, petrified with fear that I would be discovered. Only when the car emerged from the other side of the room and into the barge's main area, did I feel comfortable enough to sit up and look around.

The grabber hung from its railway, high above the main deck. I could make out the outline of Vohaul's escape pod almost directly below the opening I came out of. From this vantage point it looked tiny and fragile, like a cheap, discarded toy. On along the grabber rolled, and I could see the places and things I had explored earlier; the long passageway, the great BattleBot head, the *Aluminum Mallard*; everything. Nowhere did I see a ladder, but then I didn't see any mechoids either.

That final situation was fast coming to an end as the grabber began completing its circumnavigation of the track. Peering ahead, I could see a tiny platform that extended out toward the car from the side of the rail opposite the control room. It appeared to be a landing platform where a being could stop and either enter or leave the grabber. It made sense; there had to be a place to get on or off somewhere, and I couldn't imagine any mechoid agile enough to walk a narrow beam in order to use the grabber. As the car came abreast of the platform, I stopped it, quickly exited, and sprinted for the shadows that lay ahead. En route, I stepped into open air with both feet.



Rats

In my various adventures up to this point, I had taken many a spill. More than once had the ground vanished from beneath my feet. While I had not become exactly comfortable with the experience, I had learned to wait until after landing to see if I was still alive. It's usually a foolproof method, even to me.

My inevitable landing was extremely soft. Decaying organic personal waste matter usually is, even when wrapped in several thicknesses of professionally tied plastoid. Not only was my fall cushioned, the mound of bags didn't break, to my great relief. I had landed atop a large pile, and it took but the briefest glances to tell me what had broken my fall. You learn such things as a sanitation engineer.

I had fallen through some sort of a chute, but a thorough search of where I had landed told me little of where I was. It looked as if I was in a small room that had been dug out in the middle of one of the freighter's many junk piles. For the sake of convenience, I'll call it a pit. A small bulb hanging from a high protrusion cast a wide circle of reddish light near where I had landed. A cord ran from the bulb into a small portable reactor. The reactor was partially hidden on the far side of a large hole, as if someone or something had buried it there. At various scattered places, there were mounds of fragrant life-form droppings: dark, round, hard pellets that contributed greatly to the overall aroma of my surroundings. All around me I could hear scuttling noises; the large claws scraping the debris sounded like knives screeching on a hard ceramic glaze.

Great. Verminoids, I thought. *With so much rubbish around, they would have to be here.* I hate verminoids. They remind me of the cafeteria food at SEX U. A glance around at the darker corners of the pit revealed several sets of bright, almost glowing eyes, and the impression of long snouts sporting whiskers. Verminoids to be sure.

That probing search for scavengers drew my attention to the far side of the pit. There, a ladder leaned against one rotting wall. Not just any ladder, but one that was not attached to anything—one I could carry with me back to the *Aluminum Mallard*. This was assuming, of course, that I could find a way out of the pit. First, though, I went back and took the reactor; I might need some power once I got inside the *Aluminum Mallard*, and I had no way of knowing if the ship's reactor was still operable. The pit's lone light snuffed out after I did so, leaving only the dim phosphorescence of some radioactive waste to see by. The place actually looked much better that way.

Getting out was easy. At the top of the ladder, I pushed aside a light piece of rusted hull, and found myself back in the main section of the flying junkyard. As I started to thrust the piece of debris from me, the faint outlines of old lettering caught my eye. It seemed to read *Arcada*. Not only did it seem to, it did read that.



The sight of the remains of my old ship stopped my flinging away that piece of the *Arcada*'s ripped skin. Instead, I laid it aside, gently. I left a few tear stains—a personal memorial to my former friends and shipmates. A few long moments of relative silence passed. It was broken at last as, from several places, the ship's voice droned anew, "Intruder alert. We have organic life-form penetration. Intruder alert. Organic life-form penetration."

"I knew there was something else I didn't like about this place," I grunted. Taking the ladder with me, I headed back to the *Aluminum Mallard* as quickly as I could.

I didn't even make it as far as the BattleBot head. As I hurried through the long tubular passage between where my escape pod sat uselessly and the dead 'bot, something dropped out of the tube's ceiling and jarringly pinned me to the deck. A set of thin dirty claws swiped once at my eyes and missed. A pointed, whiskered snout opened to reveal rows of needle teeth. Eyes as hard and shiny as those of my favorite boyhood stuffed animal glowed and glared at me. When my attacker flung itself on me the second time, I was given an extreme closeup view of lice-infested, soft, brown fur. I knew at once that I had been attacked not just by a verminoid, but one of the rattish variety. It was somewhat behind on its personal hygiene and grooming. The next swipe connected with the side of my head, showing me stars I hadn't realized existed in the interior of spaceships. I never even got a single swing at the beast. When I finally did get to my feet, the Ratoid was gone. So, too, was the reactor I had been carrying back to the *Aluminum Mallard*.

"By the bull shippers of Centauri!" I splurged. Harsh language seldom passes my lips, but getting mugged on a nearly empty freighter was enough to make me mad. Between the mechoids looking for me, the tragic relic of the *Arcada*, and the theft of the power supply—well, I was mad as (yes, I'll use the word) *heck*. I scanned the corridor's walls, and angrily tore off a length of stray wire.

I bet I know where the ratoid took the reactor, I swore silently to myself. And when I climb back into that pit, I'll strangle any verminoid that gets in my way! I'm going to get off this sub-lightspeed junk heap even if it kills me!

Back to the rubbish pit I sped, before I had a chance to change my mind. The hole in the ship's deck was still uncovered, and I could see light shining from below. How the ratoid had been able to connect the light to the reactor properly was a great surprise, but in this immensely large universe of ours, there's room for a lot of wonders. Anyway, it proved I was right about where the ratoid had fled. I used the ladder to climb back into the pit.

"All right, you dirty rat!" I taunted, my voice somewhat higher than I cared for. "Stick your hands up in the air. Come on out and show yourself. If you dare. I'm back, and I'm mad. This hunk of rust ain't big enough for the two of us." Silence met my challenge. Nothing stirred. Nothing moved. Nothing hissed, squealed, or skittered away in the far shadows. Except for the shining light, the pit seemed



deserted. That was a relief. Wasting no time, I retrieved the portable reactor and climbed back out of there. I didn't want to be around when the verminoid recovered from the fright I had given it. Or called my bluff.

Taking my ladder with me yet again, this time I made it back to the BattleBot untouched. The Lone Space Ranger himself had used this very ploy in "Lost Riders of the Purple Stage," only he got the girl at the end of his adventure. Getting Roger Wilco off of the trash freighter alive would be almost as good. I climbed back down through the 'bot's empty head, placed the ladder against the side of the *Aluminum Mallard*, and was finally able to climb atop it. Despite the ship's Tefloid skin, I was able to stay erect long enough to get its hatch open. With a restrained sense of victory, I jumped inside at last.



Inside the Aluminum Mallard

Let me pause for a moment to tell you a little more about the *Aluminum Mallard*. No mere pleasure or commuter craft, the *Mallard* was a Snark-class Speedster model designed to carry small cargos nimbly and quickly between the stars. Very nimbly and quickly. She had also come from the showroom with heavy-duty pulse lasers fore and aft, and shields to match. Photonic torpedoes were an option that this one didn't have, however. Nor a subspace communicator—the ship's CommunoDeck had been removed. On the other hand, I wasn't on Xenon's Starship Row, and the sticker price matched my budget. Very popular with subspace racers and rich guys out to impress the fems (and vice versa), stories abounded on the spaceways that these ships were also much favored by the less-lawful sailors of the Void. Snark-class Speedsters are also the Official Spaceship of the fabled Space Rangers. All I had to do was get it running; if I could, the *Aluminum Mallard*, and the stars, would be mine.

Inside, the *Mallard* proved to be a trim three-seater, free of dust and decay. Its seats and controls had been configured for humanoids of average size. Obviously well maintained, the ship couldn't have been on the junk barge for long. The amber emergency cabin lights were active; the only thing visibly out of order was an open access panel to the spare reactor compartment.

I looked around some more. Near midship, I discovered the Tune-O-Matic ShipSystems Diagnosticator. Its gaze-activated screen gave me the bad news:



POWER LEVELS INSUFFICIENT.

PLEASE INSERT AUXILIARY REACTOR IN DRIVE A TO PROCEED WITH
SYSTEMS OPTIMIZATION.

POWER LEVELS INSUFFICIENT.

Yup. Just what I thought, I thought (somewhat redundantly). I knew that bringing the spare reactor aboard with me was a good idea. On second thought, it was a great idea. It took a few nudges and some scraped knuckles, but the small reactor finally settled into place in its compartment. The hunk of wire I had been carrying to throttle ratoids with served as a makeshift extension cord to connect the reactor with the proper power leads. Rubbing my hands together in anticipation, I checked the Tune-O-Matic again. It said that every one of the ship's systems had checked out fine—except for the minor matter of the lack of a warp motivator. In space, you don't leave home without it.

"Oh ship!" I blurted. "Why are you doing this to me?"

The ship didn't answer. Voice recognition and activation was another option that the *Aluminum Mallard's* original owner had skimped on.

Actually, the lack of the motivator itself didn't bother me so much. It was what I was going to have to do to retrieve one that was the problem. If you didn't nod off too early near the beginning of this tale, you might remember that I had discovered a derelict warp motivator at the very doorstep of Vohaul's escape pod. I had no use for it nor any interest in it at the time. Even if I had, I wouldn't have been able to carry it with me as easily as a short ladder. The reason for this is that every warp motivator (WM for short, although spacers often refer to them as "whims"—except when they fail; then it's "wimps") contains a quintic centimeter of super-dense heavy matter. That's matter that contains the normal three dimensions of visible space, extends *somewhen* through time, and also twists around in the unmeasurable fifth dimension. Don't ask me how it works. I may be living in the Age of Aquarius, but that doesn't make me a rocket scientist. All I know is that whims are extremely heavy. I also knew that the only way to get one into the *Aluminum Mallard* was to get back up on the monorail above the floor of the freighter, commandeer the grabber I had ridden in earlier, hope it could handle a WM, pay a return visit to the verminoids, and avoid any stray mechoids that might be around. Oh, and carry the ladder along with me during all of this because it was my only sure way out of the ratoid pit.



Piece of cake, I told myself. Of course, my mother always had a reputation for baking heavy desserts. And only from semi-organic, unbleached, unground, and unsweetened krill flakes. But it was home cooking.

I exited the *Aluminum Mallard*, climbing down the ladder and back up through the 'bot head, all the while wishing that the Gar'Bage would do away with their artificial grav fetish; it's much easier to continually climb up and down things when you can just float and pull. It's so much easier that I can almost ignore the inevitable space sickness I get under no-grav conditions. I almost forgot the ladder after I got out of the 'bot; I was still getting used to being able to think while climbing and not fall.

When I got back to the escape pod, I inspected the WM more closely than I had before. It looked undamaged, which was an encouraging sign. It was still enormously heavy, which was not so positive. In all, things could have been worse. If I could just move the WM into the *Aluminum Mallard*, and if the thing still worked, I'd be on my way someplace else.

The journey back to where I had left the grabber in the freighter's control center was as stressful and frightening as it was the first time. More so; this time I knew what was in store for me. But decades with "Visualize Your Way to More Efficient Bipedal Locomotion" again proved sufficient to the task. The fact that the EduStim method of sleep learning is sold almost exclusively on late-night shopping nets and weekend-long literacy VidThons does not mean that they are not effective. All things considered, you might say that I am living proof that they work.

Up the vertical conveyor and over the top I went. Thump! I even chuckled through my fear as I was carried again toward the shredder. Stand. Jump. Fly. Once more my newly knowledgeable hands and eyes, muscle fibers and nerve synapses, fired in perfect synchronization. Hands clutched the monorail and pulled me astraddle the narrow beam. I was on my feet and creeping stealthily into the grabber much more slowly than it takes to relate it. The ladder made an adequate if awkward balancing pole.

The mechoid on duty in the control center stayed oblivious to the organic life-form penetration that was taking place behind it. That helped a lot. Quietly, I depressed the grabber's controller and eased myself down and out of sight. The machine rattled its way around and through the terminus unheeded. I glided so close to the mechoid that, if I had chosen, I could have spat on it. And even hit something.

Out the other side, the grabber emerged high above the freighter's floor. Below lay the useless escape pod, and near it, the WM. Stopping the grabber at a point I hoped was exactly above the WM unit, I lowered the claw to the deck below. Time slowed as the claw descended in a most casual fashion. I missed. Up with the claw, then down again. I got it right on the third try, and with a cracking of metal upon metal, the powerful gripping jaws surrounded the WM. Like Cornucopia Agricorp



enveloping a bon bon with her mouth, the claw tasted the warp drive and found it to its liking. It hauled the WM up to me. A quiet thud was the only sound that announced the WM's firm attachment to my car. It was barely as loud as the button press that started me on my way again.

The rail ran completely around the holding and processing sections of the junk barge. After passing by the shredding unit—which gave me a scenic view of subspace hardened hulls being easily converted into nail-size bits—the rail began its wide swing around to return to the control center. The *Aluminum Mallard* rested directly below where the rail's final straightaway began. This time it only took two tries; on the second, the claw lowered the WM snugly into the jalopy's waiting drive bay. In this case, I will make no allusion at all to Ms. Agricorp, or her methods of ingestion.

The *Aluminum Mallard's* access hatch slid shut behind the WM, and the ship seemed to shudder in completion of the act. At that moment, I was convinced that I now finally possessed a working spaceship. But first, I had to get back to it.

The mech tech was as unobservant as ever when the grabber car returned to its exit platform. I quickly got out and made an extremely crude gesture with my knee at the mechoid's back. Then I threw myself into the chute that led to the lair of the verminoid.

Nobody home. Either that, or they were still unnerved by my earlier threats. At any rate, I was left alone long enough to use that darn ladder I had been forced by circumstance to carry. Up and out I climbed, retrieving the ladder one last time to enter the *Aluminum Mallard*. It did an admirable job when we got there.

The *Aluminum Mallard*, free bird of the Void. The *Aluminum Mallard*, souped-up Speedster of the spaceways. The *Aluminum Mallard*, personal flivver to Roger Wilco, Space Ranger, was ready to zoom again, and sail the solar winds!



blastoff!

The Tune-O-Matic ShipSystems Diagnosticator gave me the good news:

ALL SYSTEMS REASONABLY ADEQUATE.

WARP MOTIVATED AND READY.

ENGINES READY TO REACT.

LANDING ASSEMBLY GEARED UP.

BRAKES GOOD.



TIRES FAIR.

EMISSIONS INSPECTION DUE SOON.

TUNE-UP REQUIRED WITHIN 300 LIGHT YEARS.

WEAPONS SYSTEMS LOADED.

REMEMBER: WHEN WEAPONS ARE BANNED,

ONLY BANDS WILL HAVE WEAPONS!

Another computer with an attitude.

I strapped myself into the *Aluminum Mallard's* captain's seat. It fit my butt like the Lone Space Ranger's fit in Sliver's saddle. The fit was true, good, and long overdue. . .

"Fly Your Own Starship for Fun and Booty" uploaded itself into my consciousness, and ColdSleep training took control of my brain, hands, and eyes. I looked at the pilot's command screen.

Engines. One touch of a sleep-trained finger resulted in the hum, then full-throated symphony, of subspace, hyperspace, and real-space thrusters getting ready to justify their manufacture.

Radar. Activated.

A deep, deep, oxygen-rich breath filled my lungs. Slowly I released it and pressed the Takeoff button. The *Aluminum Mallard* began pulling itself out of the junk piles that had entombed it. Up she rose, casting off debris like a Quackoid shedding water. Above, below, in front, in back, and to all sides, the Gar'Bage junkyard enclosed us, mocked us, and denied us exit.

Weapons System. Activated. I grinned, and imagined myself hitching up a pair of holstered ion blasters—pearl-handled, of course.

Shields. Front screens on.

"There ain't a jail in the Universe strong enough to hold Roger Wilco," I taunted. The wide open spaces beckoned. "Nobody and no thing fences this cowpoke in!"

Savagely, I slammed the Fire button for the forward cannons. The side of the freighter disintegrated in front of me, blasted to space dust. The *Aluminum Mallard's* engines cut back in, and I shot into the Black and the Cold like a silver bullet from the Lone Space Ranger's .45.

"Yahoo! Yippee! Ride 'em, cowboy!" I screamed in absolute delight. One with the Void, Roger Wilco and his trusty steed were free.



Lost in Space (Part 1)

Space. The final "Where's here?" You got that right, pardner. I was lost. In the first few minutes of euphoria, as the *Aluminum Mallard* flashed through the spaces between the stars, I cared not a whit for where I was, nor where I was heading. Anyway, at sub-light velocities, it mattered little. After the Gar'Bage ship had disappeared from both sight and sensors, however, I slowly returned to the nuts and eccentrics of reality. It was time to check my location, and set a course back to Xenon. I returned my attention to the ship's computer, and punched in the NavComp.

The *Aluminum Mallard's* navgrid holo'd into being, dividing my current region of space into cubic sectors ten parsecs wide, high, and deep. None of them seemed named or numbered. One lone sector, looking lost and naked among the others, was labeled

HERE YOU ARE
NOW WHAT?

That's all. Looking for slightly more concrete coordinates, I scanned the navgrid. To my distress, only three sectors registered anything at all. My present location remained emphatically vague. Neither Xenon, nor any other civilized system I could recognize appeared. In all of the vastness that surrounded me, there were only two star systems. One of those was listed as barely inhabited, and other was marked unknown. The final sector contained only a Monolith Burger franchise. That was it.

At least, I thought, I have a choice.

Here were my choices:

- Monolith Burger. Not a bad destination at all. To any lost and hungry being, Monolith Burger offered food, sentient companionship, and a phone. On the down side, I had no buckazoids to pay for a meal, and all the phones at fast-food joints are, by long tradition, of the coin-operated type. My only possession was the small, glowing gemstone that I had found long ago on Labion. It looked like it was worth something, surely more than a plankton burger, an order of fries, and a medium-size artificial drink. Anyway, it wouldn't fit into a coin slot.
- Ortega. Listed as hot, volcanic, and bombarded with meteors. Civilization and inhabitants unknown. Not very promising.



- Phleebhut. Settled, with a breathable atmosphere. The name of the planet seemed strangely familiar, but like an itch you just can't stretch to, it stayed just out of reach. A settlement, however, would mean some form of civilization. Civilization, you might remember, was what I was attempting to locate.

That settled the matter, so to speak. Phleebhut it would be. Setting a course on the NavComp, I energized the *Aluminum Mallard* into lightspeed. Hyperspace was not far behind. It was a swell light show, and kept me zoned in for the whole Jump. When we reentered conventional reality, I found myself orbiting a lime-and-purple, apparently waterless, desert planet. Phleebhut.



Festering Sands

"I wonder who settled this ugly sandbox?" I muttered. "Keronian sandworms? Beach bums from Melanoma VII? Real estate developers and speculators from ArrakisCorp?" All over the planet, gigantic flashes of lightning wrinkled the sky. Explosions puffed where the bolts touched ground.

I initiated the ship's landing sequence. As the *Aluminum Mallard* swept down out of orbit, the NavComp locked onto Phleebhut's main landing beacon. It guided me to a somewhat flat piece of desert situated some distance to the southeast of a tiny cluster of buildings. That particular bit of sand seemed to be Phleebhut's major spaceport. The landing site was sheltered somewhat from the planet's incessant winds by a number of large rock formations—the same rocks that provide the greenish part of Phleebhut's coloration. If nothing else, the planet is a tribute (of sorts) to the talents of some great celestial exterior designer.

LimeStones and scorpazoids abound everywhere in the deserts of Phleebhut. Like art and death, they bracket the meaning of existence, giving inspiration to chronic and often incomprehensible analogy. Like the one we just passed. The stones seem to be the planet's only crop, with the scorps filling the wildlife niche. You don't have to be especially observant (and I'm not) to know that ten-centimeter-long scurrying ektoskeletons, equipped with paired pincers and a curled over, stinger-tipped tail, have a high probability for high toxicity. In lethal doses. These scorps took their role seriously.

I hiked north from the *Aluminum Mallard* until the dunes leveled out. The entire time the sky entertained me with one of the best light shows I have ever seen. Even hyperspace isn't as goofusly neato as a great lightning storm. Despite the spectacle, I did watch for any unwelcome visitors. I noticed the scorps soon after starting out, and made it a policy to stay as far away from them as I could.

Once the desert turned flat and hard, I was able to see a most bizarre sight in the distance to the west. A gigantic statue of some artificial Godzilloid rose above



a small cluster of EnviroQuonsets, cheap hut-like dwellings that infest all newly colonized worlds. The statue's mouth opened and closed in a regular pattern, as if to mimic speech. One great ten-meter-long arm extended into the sky holding a plastoid replica of a likewise silently screaming metropolitan habitat. A holosign competed with the lightning by flashing a neon message to the wastes:

WELCOME TO PHLEEBHUT CITY

HOME OF PEE WEE'S WORLD O' WONDERS

**SEE
THE MIGHTY MOG
EIGHTH WONDER OF THE WORLD**

(OPEN DAILY)

NO SHIRT, NO SHOES, NO SENTIENCE, NO SERVICE

IF YOU CAN'T READ THIS SIGN, WE MEAN YOU

I wonder if they get many tourists here? Maybe this is just the wrong season? I wonder what the other seven Wonders can be? As I reflected on these deep questions, one of the great lightning bolts hit Mog's metal arm. An electrical force equivalent to a million PottyDroids was absorbed, redirected, and sucked harmlessly into energy absorbers placed around its base. The giant statue glowed for a bit, and then began flashing its message again.

By the Videodromes of Vega! That's clever. Not only is Mog an effective advertising medium, it's also a lightning rod, and efficient renewable energy collector. I wonder if it also brings in good vidcast reception? My curiosity piqued, I followed the hardpack toward Mog, and past a less gaudy ground-level sign that welcomed me again to the World o' Wonders. It was an enticing bit of marketing overkill.

OK, I'm a rube at heart. Tourist traps snare me like I'm the legendary One Born Every Minute. The pulsating neon lettering would have lured me in any language. What such an attraction was doing in that particular lost corner of the galaxy I've never discovered, but I didn't waste time pondering the question. A wide awning extended from the principal Quonset, nestled tightly between Mog's clawed metal feet. Beneath it, several display cases held a collection of pickled Phleebhut fauna; it was a well-preserved scorp and his cousins. So much for the local wildlife. Other cases displayed the same dreck I had seen a dozen times before in similar places,



but none of the others had 20 meters or more of metallic Mog towering over their cut-rate curiosities. So, mark one up for Pee Wee.

Inside was more of the same, except there was no Pee Wee. Instead, the proprietor of the place was a sucker-fingered Hermanoid named Fester. Unctuous blue skin textured like an overdrawn hyperbole, half Slugoid and half semi-inflated gaseous Bladderoid, Fester had a long, hangdog face that even its mother probably had a hard time loving. Its two lidless eyes could rotate in different directions independently, and the eyestalks that topped his elongated head doubled as antennae. Hermanoids have no noses—just slits through which they make high-pitched whining noises. Their mouths have no vocal apparatus, but are impressive processors of organic and quasi-organic matter. Eating machines might be a good description. Their breath has been listed as a significant biohazard in a number of solar systems. Fester's eyestalks rotated in my direction, and he answered the question that I hadn't been pondering.

"I call it Pee Wee's because my market research showed that nobody ever visits a place named Fester's," he told me. "What can I do for you, *puny human*?"

I looked around the shops, again recognizing many of the items for sale. Inside the glass counter upon which Fester lounged while waiting for me to make up my mind, was a small collection of fossils, polished rocks, a few shabby minerals, and some uncut gemstones.

"That's a fine collection you have there," I lied. "Do you buy as well as sell?"

"Wadda' ya' got?"

I took out the gem I had been carrying from Labion and showed it to Fester. "What'll you give me for this? It's from a far, far planet, and it's considered rare even there."

Fester feigned disinterest, then began to examine my lone possession. His eyestalks revolved once, and his pupils enlarged. Placing my gem in his mouth, he crunched once and placed it on the counter.

"Hmm. I'm impressed. This is genuine orium. Let's see; I'm feeling generous today. How about 350 buckazoids?"

"Sorry, I never take the first offer. You'll have to do better than that." Chuckling inwardly, I hoped my finesse at negotiation wouldn't be too apparent.

"Alright. You bargain hard. How about 400? It means taking food out of my baby's mouth, but you seem to have a honest, if weak and characterless, face. Is it a deal?" Fester reached into a drawer and began counting coins.

"Nor the second offer, either." I was bluffing. I had been prepared to take his first offer, but the new Roger Wilco needed to test his mettle. I shut my mouth and waited.

"Only a fool, or a Space Ranger, would have the nerve to turn down my second price," Fester observed with little rancor. "I can see you're a fool, but I can't take the chance that you're not a Ranger. 425 buckazoids, and not a farthing more. Take it, or break it."



I still have no idea what a farthing is. Despite the handicap, the deal concluded immediately.

"Now, how about spending some of that coin, *puny human*?" Fester said.

"Do you have any food? I could use something to eat."

"Nope."

"How about a pay phone? I need to make a long-distance call."

"Nope." Truly, Fester was a being of few words, and less information.

"How about a news disk? What's today's date anyway?" Fester told me. It was then that I found I had been in suspended animation for nearly a century. (No, I'm not telling you. I don't want to screw up history any more than I have.) It took me several minutes to regain what there was of my composure.

"Can you tell me how to get back to Xenon?"

"Never heard of it. Listen, are you going to stand there all day wasting my time, or are you going to buy? I do have a family to feed. Today's specials are. . ." The Hermanoid began showing me his merchandise.

"An Orat on a Stick. It's great for snatching items that float around loose while you're in zero grav." The item was a short grabbing toy in the shape of a Keronian Orat. Given what I had just learned, it immediately brought back memories of my lost youth. It didn't much matter just what part of the Orat was on the stick.

"Bought."

"Item number two: an official Astro Chicken TurboBaseball hat and piece of slick videogame merchandising. Keeps the desert sun off your head, and your thoughts as cool as a tall, frosty Canopus Happy Brew—which we are out of at the moment." Astro Chicken! A star even in my day, a PBS personality beyond peer.

"Bought."

"And last but not least, a one-size-fits-all, omni-species, gender nonspecific, semi-organic pair of Old Scratch brand ThermoWeave undershorts. They're always a hit at parties. Will that be for here, or to go?"

"Nah. Not interested. I think I'll look at the postcards." Racked high in a revolving stand at one corner of the counter, a collection of postcards had caught both my attention and the corner of my eye. As I rubbed the little hurt out, I began browsing, knowing full well that I no longer had anybody to mail a postcard to. I could buy one as a souvenir that I might appreciate in later years. The trouble was, there were no Phleebhut cards. Terra III, GullyFoyle IX, Keronia, the Black Hole of Oakhurst, even exotic SidneyLand; all the postcards here were from places untold light years away. I wanted none of them. The only card of any interest to me was one from Ortega: Galactic Hot Spot and Volcanic Preserve. "Don't forget your thermal undies—if you know what's asbestos for you!" I groaned. Then I remembered Ortega was on the short list of places programmed into the *Aluminum Mallard's* NavComp. I turned back to Fester.

"About that ThermoWeave. I'll take it."



"Sold. Not a bad choice, Ranger. Will that be all?"

"No beer?"

"No beer."

"Bye. Be seeing you." I picked up my stuff and counted my change. It all seemed to be there. With a flourish, I tilted my Astro Chicken hat back to what I considered a proper, back of the head, rocket jockey angle, and sauntered out of the World o' Wonders.

I exited right into the waiting arms of an Arnoid.

Suddenly, my life expectancy could be counted in seconds—and not a lot of them.



In the Clutches of Death

There has been much debate over the centuries as to whether Arnoids are organics or Mechs, sentients or AI's, or some cyborgic combination of all of the above. And while it is considered neither politic, polite, nor pompously correct to disparage the personal attributes or lifestyles of other beings—no matter how unusual, disgusting, or unintentionally offensive they may be—just about everybody in the galaxy agrees that Arnoids talk funny and hold their arms at amusing angles. They also have bigger muscle masses and protuberances than allowable by law in all star systems, but one. That, of course, is the Terminus system—their place of origin. Closed to outsiders since its initial discovery, almost nothing is known about Terminus and its inhabitants. It's assumed they have two sexes—the males called Arnoids; the females, Arnoids. As you might imagine, it can be very difficult to tell the genders apart. It's also assumed that the Terminoids don't have any problems recognizing each other's gender, but one can never be sure. To the rest of the civilized galaxy, all Arnoids look exactly the same, and all of them are named Arnoid. It's really true—if you've seen one, you've seen them all. And that's more than enough for most beings.

One well-accepted school of thought claims that Terminoids reproduce digitally—editing together body parts and bad dialogue from old vids, and passing them through a matter transmitter. Their disregard for proper inflection while speaking, an unnatural predilection for big cigars, and a completely nonexistent sense of humor are often cited as irrefutable proof of this theory.

If Arnoids possess emotions, they haven't bothered to notify anyone about them. For this reason, virtually every Terminoid is employed as either a mercenary, bounty hunter, bill collector, or classroom cop. The others are seen on WANTED posters.



At a distance, Arnoids might be mistaken for humans. Up close, though, the macabre gap that they all have between their front teeth reveals what you're really dealing with. It's only seen when they grin. They grin like death. Or total deletion.

It all happened quite suddenly: one moment I was stepping out into desert; the next, nearly three meters of excess muscle and insufficient brain power materialized in the air in front of me. Arnoid the Terminoid dissolved into solid being and picked me up with one hand. Easily. Like I existed in a personal zero-G space. Before I knew Arnoid was there, it was dangling me at eye level. *Its* eye level.

"Your name is Roger. Vilco. You are from Xenon. Is *zis*? correct?" The last question mark was superfluous. Arnoid knew who I was, even if it couldn't pronounce me properly.

I was too choked up to answer, even if I'd had one. The Terminoid's penchant for stressing the wrong syllables, enunciating improper sounds, and putting punctuation marks in all the wrong places was gruesome. It sounded as if the assassin were speaking at not quite half speed, and slightly backwards. The effect was quite gothic. If you ever hear a Terminoid speak, you never forget it. Especially in your nightmares.

"Roger Vilco. *Puny human*. I am Arnoid zee Terminoid. I represent zee collections department of Patrician Broadcasting. Many decades ago, you received a coupon redeemable for a Labion Terror Beast Mating Whistle that you subsequently redeemed. You used zat coupon, but never made good on your pledge to PBS. Not only zat, you have enjoyed zee net's fine programming, also without paying. Both are capital offenses. You have been tried *in absentia* for zeeze most heinous crimes, and your debt has been sent to zee dead accounts department. I have been authorized to find you, zen terminate same."

"But I love Pledge Nights. I sent the money. Are you sure the money didn't get lost? The check's in the mail!"

"Vas zat a joke, *puny human*? Know, before you die, zat even Terminoids have a better sense of humor zen PBS. Hah! 'Zee check's in zee mail.' Very good, and quite original. PBS does not care if zee check is in zee mail, or if you make human humor creatively. You are to be terminated." Having masticated its entire vocabulary, Arnoid opened his/her fist and let me drop to the ground. So terrifying had the encounter become, that my new Astro Chicken cap flew off my head and flapped away. From fright.

"Although I have hunted you for nearly a century, I would be pleased if the game lasted slightly longer. Run if you dare. Make it to your ship before I catch you, und you vill be free to go. If not, I vill be very happy to squeeze your brain from your skull. Slowly. Run, Vilco. Fly or die. I give you a ten-second head start. But I count fast."



Arnoid the Terminoid touched its belt with a finger. The hired killer disappeared. From empty air came the words, "Von. . .two. . .tree. . ." But I vas. . .sorry, *was* sprinting before the first garbled word was spoken.

While I dash back over the flea-bitten sands of Phleebhut, fleeing to the *Aluminum Mallard*, dodging both scorps and the crunching sounds of a pursuing Terminoid all the way, let's take a brief break from today's programming. All of us here in the future really do appreciate your good wishes and support. The paradoxes of time travel are many, and I don't pretend to know much about them at all. Nonetheless, I do know I wouldn't be narrating this *now* if someone *then* hadn't begun crafting popular stories about my adventures to be. Of course, my *now* is your *when*, and your *now* is my *then*—but it seems clear enough to me, even if I don't understand how the whole thing works.

Anyway, the real reason for this interruption is to mention that I bear no grudge nor animosity to Patrician Broadcasting. As it turned out, they never did get my 20 buckazoids, and had every right to be annoyed with me. In the years since the incident with Arnoid, my check finally turned up in PBS's mail. The PostalPeople, legendary in their efficiency, have explained that occasional delays are to be expected in local planetside delivery. A century or more is considered within the bounds of acceptability. Both PBS and I agree that their explanation, and their refunding to me the cost of the postage, was more than generous. My termination notice was withdrawn, and today I continue to view their fine programs without guilt. And I still respect them the next morning.

Like I said, the check *was* in the mail.

End of pledge break.

It was an exhausted Roger Wilco who arrived back at the *Aluminum Mallard*. I was alive, and the entry hatch was open and inviting. Then, as if from nowhere, deep, large, heavy footprints began appearing in the purple sands. They were accompanied by the strains of someone humming an ancient polka classic in a slowed down and slightly backwards rendition.

"Oh, ship!" I screamed most appropriately. The Terminoid was between me and the *Mallard*. Hoping I hadn't yet been noticed, I immediately (and sharply) changed direction, darting between two tall boulders to the west of the ship's landing site. The musically disadvantaged Arnoid had been paying attention. It followed.

On the far side, the big boulders resolved themselves into a tall overhang. Too open to be called a cave, it was more like a rock awning growing up and out of the sand, attached to nothing in particular. My flight brought me skirting its far supporting edge. When I actually bumped into it, that stopped me for a moment, but then more footsteps appeared. Another polka began droning. I changed direction again, hoping to confuse my pursuer. Cutting inside the overhang, I made for open desert once more, hoping to circle back to an unguarded *Aluminum Mallard*.



From behind, the crunch of footsteps quickened. The polka picked up tempo. Then they both stopped.

"Gott im Himmel," the Terminoid croaked tunelessly. Then it gagged. Squawked. Fell silent. The next sound was a slurping that forced me to stop and turn. Half an Arnoid hung suspended from the top of the overhang. The rest of it had already been consumed by the tentacles of a half-dozen pod-like creatures attached to the top of the rocks. They made happy sounds as they dissolved more and more of my nemesis in glops of acid slime. If I had strayed from the path I had unwittingly chosen, it would have been me who would have been suckered in, so to speak.

"Hasta la vista, Arnoid." With an ancient spanglish benediction, I bid him/her fond farewell, very happy to see the gap-toothed goon receive its just desserts. Make that, just *entree*.

Meal finished, the pulsating pusoids belched an elongated tone of digestive gas. An orifice opened, and something was regurgitated to the ground—the Terminoid's boots, body armor, and belt. Nothing else remained of my executioner. It was a state of affairs I could live with easily.

Then there was the matter of the belt. I couldn't take my eyes off of the belt—the one the Arnoid had touched before turning invisible. It was the neatest toy I had ever seen, and it lay there, almost within reach, getting all sandy. If it could do for me what it did for the Arnoid, it would be worth retrieving. I could just walk over and pick it up—if I didn't mind becoming a pus pod's next course. I needed a long-distance method of reaching out and snatching the belt. A stick would do.

An Orat on a Stick would do even better, I realized. The zero-G grabbing toy was an answer in search of a problem. Flopping carefully on my belly, I used the wooden novelty item to extend my reach. When the spring-operated jaws connected with the belt, I squeezed them shut, and inched everything back to me. The pods remained motionless.

When the invisibility belt was safely in my hands, I got back up and looked at it. Genuine vinyllette, its chrome buckle was inscribed

INVISIBELT

A simple on/off button appeared to be its only control, and a digital meter its sole readout. It was reading out near its redline:

LOW POWER.
BATTERY LIFE NEARLY EXHAUSTED.



"Think I'll save this for a rainy day. Of course, on this planet, that's likely to be a long wait."

Looking at the remains of the pusoids meal reminded me that I was still hungry.

"I feel like I haven't eaten for a hundred years. Of course, in my case there's truth to that cliché." Quipping all the way, I returned to the *Aluminum Mallard*, blasted away from Phleebhut, and set a course for the nearest Monolith Burger. I had buckazoids in my pocket, and a hole where my stomach used to be. In fact, I had even more buckazoids than when I left Phleebhut. While reaching a hand behind me to wipe some itching sand from my butt, I encountered something hard stuck in the pilot chair's seat cushion. A search turned up several pieces of almost solidified lint, and a lucky seven buckazoids. I flipped one into the air, and smiled. In zero-G it just floated there, turning over and over and over.

I activated lightspeed, and hoped the fries would still be cool when I got there.



Green Fried Potatoes

Monolith Burger is the most ubiquitous fast food franchise in all of known space. Founded centuries ago by Megalith ik'Monolith—a Stoneoid from Accretion XXIV—Monolith Burger serves up the most generic chow along the spaceways. Greasy, tepid, over-salted and under-carbonated burgers, fries, shakes, organic and non-organic salads, krill cookies, and artificially flavored and sweetened whipped petroleum byproduct sundaes. It's food just like mother used to make. It sticks to your ribs, and stays there for a long time. There are separate menus for most sentient species, all of which receive the same warm reviews. It has been estimated that, over the centuries, Monolith Burger has sold enough burgers to stretch around the Milky Way a thousand times, if placed end to end. Double or triple that number if you include fries. The most amazing fact is that, if someone were to actually put all of those fries or burgers in a row, Monolith Burger guarantees that the first one in line will be just as fresh and tasty as the last. And, vice versa. Guaranteed. Or your money back.

As always, Monolith Burger was busy when I got there. Parking, however, was no problem. Inside, the smells and classic color combinations were the same as in all other Monolith Burgers ever built. This familiarity makes for a very high comfort factor. It does not breed contempt; instead, it breeds long lines. Especially at the order stations closest to the entrance. But I am a Monolith Burger veteran. I ignored them and went directly to the empty lines beyond. It is a trick that has served me well many times.

There was a Zitoid on duty. She wore a name tag reading



WELCOME
I'M
BRFNGLX YKZYXZK
ASSISTANT MANAGER

As is the case for management personnel in all business in the universe, assistant manager Brfngnlx YkzyxzK used the first few minutes of our relationship to ingest the contents of her ears. Satiated, she returned her attention to customer service.

"Hi! My name is Brfngnlx YkzyxzK, and I'm delighted to be your assistant manager today. May I tell you of our specials? There are two. The first: Cellulite *au chat*. A full quarter-ounce patty of free-range calico cellulite, micronuked to a perfect medium rare and smothered in a combination of semi-organic fungal spew from the guanoid beds of Prevert and individually hand-picked dingleberries from TrokenBeerenAuslaesen. The Cellulite *au chat* is garnished with a secret sauce made from the bath water of Hornitos mud otters. We suggest an order of artificial cheesefood-substitute fries and a large, warm sugared water to go with it. Our second special is boiled unidentified Orat part on an unbaked whole grain bun. It also comes with secret sauce, and is quite tasty accompanied by a side of sand fries and a sweet-and-sour nacho-flavored shake. If you'd prefer, I can bring you the wine list. Are you ready to order now?"

It was a tough choice.

"Gosh, those specials sound great. But I think I'll have a Monolith Fun Meal. And a medium diet H₂O. No, make that a large." After decades in ColdSleep, the Fun Meal promised to be a taste treat beyond compare. A half hour later, my meal arrived. I paid up and found a seat in an unoccupied booth.

I have always said that, at certain special times, there is nothing better than an ice-cold Fun Meal eaten right out of the sack. Two all-plankton patties, special sauce, cheese-flavored slice, and red, green, and brown virtual veggies on a Twinkie. Large lichen fries—the kind that come only two or three to the bag. Krill cookies baked in the shapes of the year's BladderBall Hall of Fame inductees. A split banana. And the Monolith Burger Prize o' the Day. It doesn't get any better than that. Yum. And the prize turned out to be a Lone Space Ranger secret decoder ring. I slipped it on my index finger. It felt right, so I moved it to that hand.

My first meal in decades ended too soon, but left me too full to consider seconds. Thus fortified, I could easily face another hundred years in suspended animation without getting hungry. Monolith Burgers are especially good for that.



I looked around the restaurant, taking in the timeless decor and the variety of other patrons. Imagine beings of a thousand different colors, shapes, and sizes, all with unique bodily scents. The galaxy in microcosm was patronizing Monolith Burger that day, a galaxy where men and women everywhere were treated equally. The courts are still undecided about the other genders. Race, religion, species, and planet of origin are no cause for discrimination—as long as you indulged in an appropriate deodorant spray.



Plot Revealed

In a far corner, a coin-operated videogame came into focus. *Golly! There are still video games*, I marveled. *Go to sleep for almost a century, and there are still two-armed bandits around when you wake up. I thought they'd be banned by now.* It was a surprising sight, that game in the corner. Intrigued, I went over and took a closer look.

Bigger surprise. It was Astro Chicken. Astro Chicken, the Video Game, based on the great chef, Astro Chicken himself. The very same Astro Chicken that I had watched almost daily on the vid, the host of his own PBS series, "Fowl Cooking." When you think about it, it was a great combination: a videogame based on a great chef, placed in a great restaurant. And it cost only one buckazoid per game to play. How could anyone resist such a brilliant marketing lure? I know I couldn't.

I looked at the colorful title screen. Astro Chicken was represented as a superhero, resplendent in the typical togs of a Space Ranger. Hypnotically, the title flashed on and off:

Astro Chicken—The Mindless Video Game

by

ScumSoftSoftware

(a division of Vohaul Enterprises)

Nah. It couldn't be the same Vohaul. I had seen Sludge die. But the name still gave me the creeps.

Carefully I read the instructions flashing on the screen over and over until they were imprinted in my EduStim-trained reflexes. "Move left. Move right. Stop. Flap. Don't land too hard. Don't fly too high. Don't use up the feed. Above all—land on the pad and keep Astro Chicken alive." It was overwhelmingly complex and



utterly devoid of mental stimulation. More than merely mindless, it was totally stupid.

I was compelled to play. Never had I scored a single point in a videogame in my entire life. Things were about to turn around for me.

Money in the slot. Three chances to land. Flap, flap. Move, move. Slow down before you splat. No, Astro Chicken, keep moving. Left. Right. Right. Left. Left. Oh, no! Right, we made it. Slam. My face flushed. My hands and fingers pushed and poked. I lost all sense of time, money, and propriety. I hit and slapped the machine without regard for its well-being. In those frenzied, mad hours, I proved the truth of what every Med, Doc, Shrink, and Psych in the galaxy has been saying for centuries: videogames are a drug. An addiction. A mindless plague upon the brains and bodies of our children. Videogames don't merely lead their addicts on to the hard stuff; they are the hard stuff. Yes. Yes. I was drugged and I couldn't say, "No!" Even now, this tale unfolds deliriously.

Again and again I played without shame. Again. Again. But I played without losing. A full ten times I brought the Fabulous Flying Fowl down to safety. Drool sprayed around my twitching head. My drool. But I scored maximum points, and was saluted as grand high champion. Like a junkie with the TabacWeed, I needed more and more, until exhaustion caused my head to slump forward against the devil screen.

Perhaps the message had been there all the time, scratched into the glassoid of that screen. Perhaps it had been programmed to appear only to a grand high champion. I still don't know; I never asked the Two Guys from Andromeda. But it was there, and in that moment of ultimate fatigue I saw it. A secret message. And it was in some sort of code. I saw it as my sweat-slicked head slid down the smooth game screen. My hands rose of their own accord to keep me from falling, and my right hand spread across the screen. I could see the secret scratches between my splayed fingers. The marks matched the symbols on my secret decoder ring. Once again, the Lone Space Ranger had ridden into town at the right time.

The message took some time to translate.

Help us! We have been enslaved and are held captive by ScumSoftSoftware (a division of Vohaul Enterprises) on a small moon named Pestulon, which revolves around a planet named Ortega. Pestulon is surrounded by a force field that keeps everything out, and itself hidden. This field must be deactivated if we are to be rescued. Its origin is unknown to us, but we suspect it is on Ortega.



We are being forced to create mindless and hypnotic videogames of no redeeming social value or educational benefit, in order to completely corrupt the youth of your galaxy. ScumSoftSoftware is controlled by an evil, fantasy role-playing, metallically heavy, overweight teenager intent on ruling the universe. Elmo plans to eventually control all sentient life by way of addicting subliminal messages implanted in ScumSoft games. Astro Chicken is only the beginning!

Be aware: ScumSoft security is armed with tutti-frutti-flavored jelloid pistols. Anyone hit by those weapons suffers a fate worse than a fate worse than death. We are not being facetiously redundant.

Sorry that this message is so brief; we hope that it is not too late. We are computer programmers, unaccustomed to communicating with self-replicating organic life-form modules, or getting our work finished on time. We're counting on you.
Just say "No" to videogames!

Beware of Astro Chicken!

Free the Andromeda Two!

(signed)

Two Guys from Andromeda

The message could be no hoax. I had already experienced the mind-blasting effects of ScumSoft's first product. But internal evidence proved it true, too. Programmers are genetically incapable of brevity, or getting anything done on time. Indeed, the galactic courts almost refused to grant the status of full sentience to the sad creatures for those very reasons. The Programmer's Design Council was never



able to complete the Sentience Status application form without adding endless extras ("neat features") to it. When they finally did ship it off, it was decades late, and the simple 2-disk document had grown to over 70 disks. Many of these disks were too bug infested to be useful. The accompanying documentation, once printed, sagged across 30 meters of shelf space. The galactic court was neither amused nor impressed. The Two Guys had stopped scribbling their plea for help only when they had run out of screen to scratch up. There could be no doubt at all; the secret message had to be genuine.

I began to shiver. It may only have been the result of my body's excessive sweat rapidly evaporating, but a lot of it had to have been from the soul-chilling nature of the plot revealed. At once, I realized that it might already be too late to stop ScumSoft, but someone had to try. Common decency demanded it.

It was then that I realized that my entire life had been building to this moment. I was no longer Roger Wilco, space janitor and sanitation engineer. Those jobs and that role had disappeared when I went into ColdSleep. No longer was I the pawn of events that often centered on me alone.

I was on my own. I no longer got tangled up with my shadow. I had my own spaceship, armed and dangerous. I had coin in my pocket and a meal in my gut. If I had truly been reborn as a Space Ranger, I was looking at my first mission. ScumSoft needed to be stopped. And while the Two Guys from Andromeda were not exactly maidens in distress, they were innocents in danger—even if they were programmers.

There was no decision to be made. My very being needed to be off to Pestulon as much as it needed oxygen to breathe. Or iced Canopus Happy Brew on a hot day. I turned to my faithful indigenous inhabitant companion, Pronto.

"It's time to ride."

There was no answer.

There was no Pronto.

I think the Monolith Burger Fun Meal had finally reached my head.



If You Can't Take the Heat...

Ortega squatted in space beneath the orbit of the *Aluminum Mallard*. Grey, black, and red, torn and wrinkled, Ortega's surface looked like a collection of dried peppers crumpled into a haphazard ball. Waves of heat undulated up and seemed to surround the planet in a shimmering scarlet haze. A *hot* shimmering scarlet haze. But nowhere could I see the moon Pestulon. Most likely it was hidden in the shimmer, but I couldn't discount the possibility that some cloaking apparatus concealed it. If the Two Guys were correct in their supposition, I'd discover such a device on Ortega's surface. The only way to find out was to land.



The value of literacy cannot be understated. If I had not read a certain postcard on Phleebhut—if *I had not known how to read*—I wouldn't have lasted more than a few moments on the hot griddle that is Ortega. But I had read and understood.

Ortega

Galactic Hot Spot and Volcanic Preserve.

Don't forget your thermal undies—

If you know what's asbestos for you!

Oh, yes. The card was commendable in its accuracy, if lamentable in its choice of words.

Wearing the pair of Old Scratch brand ThermoWeave undershorts I had so cunningly purchased on the postcard's advice, I stepped out onto Ortega's torrid terrain. The air didn't quite sear; if you didn't mind the dominant sulphurous scent, it was really quite invigorating. The ThermoWeaves pumped an icy fluid around my body, and kept me coolly comfortable.

I had put down atop a plateau, but the ground everywhere was broken—the direct result of Ortega's incessant volcanic activity. I made a note to myself to pay added attention to where I walked; a misstep could send me hurtling down to sure death. If the fall weren't fatal, a splash in liquid lava would be.

As the *Aluminum Mallard* had cruised down to land, I had spied signs of sentient activity. A large domed building, not unlike an ancient land-based observatory, and several small camps dotted the area south of where I put down. With no way of knowing if the *Mallard* had been observed coming in, all I could do was exercise caution, and stay out of sight. And the lava.

Because of the nature of the volatile (and shifting) landscape, I found my route pretty much determined for me. More than once, I crossed an unstable natural bridge; the surface of these was of barely hardened liquid rock. More than once, I triumphed over Ortega's attempts to throw me off of those places. Persistence, and a new sense of balance, preserved me. Not once did I scream.

It was just after the most hair-raising of these incidents that I stumbled upon one of the camps I had seen from the air. Large lava boulders screened my approach giving me perfect cover from which to spy upon a group of two or three humanoids. They were all wearing identical uniforms, and patches on each identified their wearers as representatives of ScumSoft, Technoid division. Hah! Just what I had been looking for.



The Scums were tending a monitoring station, measuring and recording volcanic, seismic, and wind movements. Their equipment consisted of a surveyor's sighting scope (a telescopic level), various seismographs, and some other gear. I watched for some time, looking for a chance to sneak by them unnoticed, or perhaps find some way to surprise and overcome them. I had no luck. At last, one of the workers called out that it was time for a doughnut break and all dropped what they were doing and walked away. I heard the sound of an engine blasting into action. Moments later, a shuttlecraft branded with the ScumSoft emblem—a death's head in a floppy disk—rose from its hiding place among the boulders and swept up through the sky.

"I guess I have the place to myself," I smiled. Indeed, I did.

On first glance, my search of the monitoring station revealed little that would be of use to me. No notes or records lay about to reveal anything about ScumSoft, or its activities. One of the crates contained a supply of thermal explosives and detonators; a wind gauge spun endlessly around atop its pole, and the seismic devices kept sweeping up and down their scales. Mostly up, and at high numbers. The surveyor's level, however, was the breakthrough. I decided to look through it, curious as to what the Scums had been measuring. Gasp! At its other end, magnified for ease of viewing, was the large building I had seen earlier. From it, a large glassoid projector pointed to the heavens, ringed with wide metal bands. It looked like some unusual cannon, an observation reinforced by great pulses of visible electronic force that raced up and down the barrel. As the currents came together at the projector's tip, it shot a pulse of coherent light at. . . Pestulon! Yes! Through the scope I could see the missing moon. It was being bathed by the energy of a cloaking ray directed at it. The Two Guys had been right after all.

I had to do something about the ray. Picking up a handful of the detonators, I left the camp following a well-trodden trail that meandered east. I suspected that I was the only being left on Ortega at the moment, but maintained keen vigilance nonetheless. It might as well have been a highway; the path led directly to where I wanted to go. There, rising out of a volcanic crater, stood the source of the cloaking ray, the great domed building. Just to my right, artistically hidden behind some rocks, a staircase led down. No movement showed below; I followed the staircase to the bottom.

The ScumSoft cloaking ray was housed, as I have noted, in a massive domed edifice. Its barrel poked out of a retractable slit in the round roof, like an obscene finger flashing its spite at the stars. From the platform where the stairs delivered me, I saw neither doors, windows, nor other openings into the structure. A long ladder, however, climbed the side of the building and reached nearly to the edge of the opening for the ray projector. Unmarked and unadorned, that tall dome beamed



a psychic sign that zipped through my eyeballs and branded my brain. It seemed to say

CLIMB ME

BOMB ME

HURT ME

PLEASE!

It was an invitation that I was too kinky to turn down.



Wilco Attacks

OK, I am somewhat afraid of heights. I've reported that before and I'll mention it again. Right now. But I knew that abject fear and terror were both occupational hazards to a Space Ranger. Like a tall, narrow ladder, these negative states of mind can be conquered—as long as you don't look down until you get to the top. So, when I say that the rest was easy, know that I'm not telling the complete truth. Yes, I did leave my platform perch and wend my way down and about until I reached the far ladder. Yes, I did climb to the ladder's very last high rung. And I even climbed very, very, very carefully to the very edge of the dome's gap, never, never looking down. Relating that is very easy. Now. At the time. . .let's just say that I substituted visions of Cornucopia Agricorp's handholds for those of the ladder. When I felt compelled to gaze downward, I envisioned. . .never mind what I envisioned. You get the picture. No you don't. I refuse to describe that picture, but it's not what you're thinking. But it pulled me through and up. Alive.

There, at the very precipice of self-annihilating terror, I faced my final fear. Calmly, deliberately, I dropped the detonators down into the cloaking ray generator's home. Seconds later, several blasts echoed from below me, and flashes from explosions and fresh fires began devouring the machines below. Above me, the electric surges of the ray dimmed, then darkened. My eyes followed up farther, and I saw Pestulon's image reappear and solidify. I nodded my head slightly three times in recognition of a job well done. Cautiously, I moved back to the ladder. I climbed back down to the ground.

All the way, I screamed my anxiety to an empty planet. It felt pretty good.



By the time I reached solid surface, the earthquakes had begun. I suspect that the force and chaos of my bombing tipped the seismic balances on that part of Ortega. Whether that theory is true or false is absolutely irrelevant; each shock shook greater than the last. Each shock came sooner than the last. If I didn't get back to the *Aluminum Mallard*, and fast, I might not have a ship to get back to. I might not even have a me to get back to it with.

Things went well (considering the circumstances) until just past the Scums' measuring station. Remember those fragile, shaky crossings I mentioned earlier? The one nearest the camp had used the tremors as an excuse to crumble away. My only way back to my spaceship had become an unjumpable gap. It was enough to give one pause. Which I did. If not, I'd have fallen to my death.

In the distance sat the *Aluminum Mallard*, still in one piece. It was close enough to blow kisses at, but much too far away to caress. I needed to vault the last crevasse if I were to escape Ortega.

Vault! The word connected to an unused memory block. Back to the camp. The wind gauge was still standing, despite the constant shocks. I ripped it down and stripped it of its pole. *Vault! I can pole vault across. The worst that can happen is that I won't make it. That's preferable to staying here—if I do that, I'll die.*

It made sense at the time. It also worked. Using the sturdy metal pole as a fulcrum, I ran, planted, and sprang into the heat-heavy air. Muscles that previously had known athletic success only in fantasy or sleep awakened and fired. Across I flew, miraculously landing on my feet. Immediately, another shock rattled the world, greater than any before. Despite the fact that I had just set Ortega's world pole vault record, I decided not to stay around for the medal ceremony. Within seconds, I was at the controls of the *Aluminum Mallard*. The lava-encrusted ground crumbled away beneath as I blasted off to the safety of orbit.

(That pole vault record, by the way, still stands. It may never be broken.)

I knew that the commotion and destruction on Ortega would not go unnoticed. As much as I would have liked to have taken a break, cleaned myself, and indulged in a nap, I knew that all were impossibilities. Golly, other than the decades in ColdSleep, I hadn't had a nap in nearly a century!

A glance activated the NavComp, and I scanned all of space. A new destination appeared: Pestulon. With the destruction of the cloaking ray, the *Aluminum Mallard's* sensors had finally been able to register it. Pestulon, home of ScumSoft. Pestulon, slave pen and prison to the mysterious Two Guys from Andromeda. Pestulon, videogame drug capital of the galaxy. I set my course and began to cruise.

Roger Wilco, Space Ranger, had already conquered an entire planet. There was a moon still left to clean up.

It was time for this Space Ranger to ride into town.



Among the Scum

Pestulon is a gentle, forested place, although the plant life is more fungal than coniferous (or carnivorous). The blue-fleshed mushroids twist around themselves and bend as they grow upward, giving the viewer below the impression of standing under the DNA of giants. The air seems eternally scented with the liqueur of ancient perfumes: dense, and full of promise and reverie. Its climate is an eternal late springtime, just before day's smooth lycra warmth turns summer sultry. It made sense that ScumSoft would pick a place like Pestulon for its hideout; some beings are only happy when they defile. They turn beauty beastly, and revel in its death from shame.

Anyway, nobody would think of looking for ScumSoft's type of sleaze in a place like Pestulon. The pastoral moon was a perfect cover.

I had landed on muffled jets in a picturesque meadow just beyond the moon's only visible collection of buildings. A small settlement had been slashed and burned into a clear-cut hilltop, and stood out like a fat blood leech on an alabaster breast. To me, there was no doubt that I had discovered ScumSoft's headquarters. No craft or gun challenged my arrival; no war party mounted a search. I had arrived during a lapse in their attention, and planned to take full advantage of the situation. The distraction I had left behind on Ortega would only occupy them temporarily.

As I stalked closer to ScumSoft, I could see that the buildings I had observed while landing were just the surface entry to an underground complex. A strong pneumatic door seemed to be the only way inside. Above the entrance was carved a gargoyle in the form of ScumSoft's death's-head-in-a-floppy-disk corporate logo.

Below it was an expensive sign:

Welcome to ScumSoftSoftware

Galactic Headquarters

We don't just make games;

We don't just create worlds.

We destroy them!

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Astro Chicken is only the beginning!



Such fiends. The Scum mocked the universe they intended to enslave. From my concealment behind a dense patch of tubular bushes, I watched for movement from within. Soon, the door irised opened and a squad of armed men and women ran out and began searching the countryside. One guard passed so close to where I was hidden that I could read the patch on her uniform—SCUMSOFT SECURITY. It figured; my arrival had been noted. Soon, the *Aluminum Mallard* would be discovered. My only way to avoid capture, and the easiest way to infiltrate their compound, was to sneak *inside* while they thought I was *outside*.

The entrance had been left wide open behind ScumSoft's searchers. Two guards, both holding pulse rifles, kept watch at the door. I'm sure they would have been pleased to crisp an approaching Roger Wilco.

Of course, if they can't see me. . . I snickered. Arnoid the Terminoid's InvisiBelt had been cinched across my shoulders since Phleebhut. Although many sizes too large, I had been able to knot it so that it wouldn't slip off or get in my way. I now strapped the belt around my waist like a pair of six-shooters. The on/off button was within easy touch, and the power indicator now read MARGINAL.

I slapped vinylette, and saw my boots disappear. As fast as I could, I dashed to the open door. I didn't hum a polka, although I was tempted. Still, I made it inside and down a broad stairway. The guards may have felt a slight breeze, but I doubt it.

At the bottom of the concretoid stairs was the door to an elevator that granted access to the main working areas of ScumSoft. I had barely enough time to get that far when a slight whiff of fried insulation wafted past my nose. I looked down at the InvisiBelt and saw my legs reappear. Oops—the readout really did mean marginal. I was visible, and vulnerable, again. I slapped the elevator's call button, and stood fully exposed until the doors opened.

The elevator delivered me to a circular hallway deep within the bowels of ScumSoft. Occasional doors led off of it in both the inward and outward directions, although that wasn't apparent at first. A quick decision (*Left or right from the door? Which way?*), and I began moving to my right. If I met anyone at all in the corridor, I would be immediately revealed as the interloper I was.

I am told that there are restaurants in this universe of ours that continually revolve around and around, treating diners and patrons with a constantly changing view. How one eats without getting nauseous in such places I don't understand, but these establishments are said to be both popular and successful. This is mentioned here because as soon as I started moving along that circular corridor, I realized that the building seemed to be moving also. It was an incredibly disorienting feeling; worse even than the moving walkways of the Galaxy Galleria, and I hadn't even been to that mall yet.



For every step I took, I moved three. Stopping and starting were adventures in themselves. It was as if the evil powers-that-be at ScumSoft had decided to exist within the confines of endless arcade style videogames. How right I was.

I got queasy almost at once, the corridor whizzing by as it curved diabolically away, endlessly. It took several attempts before I finally was able to stop myself by grabbing on to a keycard reader protruding from the outer wall. The lock was placed next to a locked door (of course), and the door boasted a second level of security: a facial features scanner and comeliness meter. Whatever was behind the door, somebody didn't want to make it easy to get there.

Stomach stabilized, I moved on. I remained alone in the corridor. As I continued, one particular door apparently decided to reach out and trip me. It missed. Nonetheless, it got my attention, for its very sight and smell comforted me and drew me inside. I knew that a haven of security existed behind that modest door; it could only be a Sanitation Engineering Supply Depot HQ—janitor's closet to civilians. I pushed inside.

It mattered little, just then, that I considered myself a Space Ranger. The closet smelled like, looked like, and felt like home. Spontaneous tears wet my eyes and rolled to my lips. They tasted mildly of two all-plankton patties and special sauce. As I tasted my tears, I recalled all the warm, happy moments I had had as a space janitor, especially as a head janitor. The stolen naps. The graffiti. The random stains that needed extra elbow grease and attention. The days spent studying Sanitation Engineering at Xenon University, good ol' SEX U. My brain and body took that hit of nostalgia and drew new strength from it.

When I decided that my equilibrium was back to normal, I began rummaging around the closet. The well-used and unwashed janitor's jumpsuit that turned up was just what I had been looking for. It would make a perfect disguise. As I slipped into it, I could feel a hard bulge in one of the pockets. It was a Mr. Oscar TrashZapper, a state of the art refuse disintegrator and potty freshener. Not a weapon by any means, but I knew that no one ever questions the credentials of a fully uniformed sanitation engineer carrying a Mr. Oscar. My masquerade was complete; I was free to wander around ScumSoft as I pleased.



The Maze of Abominations

Several stomach-lurching minutes later, I successfully found another door leading out of the disturbing corridor; this led into an extensive area filled with identical cubicles, all separated by a jungle of cheap, temporary partitions. I stopped just inside the door, repelled at the scene in front of me. It was as if I were standing at



the start of another twitch-filled videogame, one that entailed eternally running through some maze while performing arbitrary actions.

Worse yet, the maze was inhabited by dozens upon dozens of identically clad humanoids, all male, and all constrained by horridly floral rope collars attached to their necks. Grey slacks and starched white blouses were their uniform garb. Nearly all appeared attached to identical wood-like plastoid desks, although several of the clonish beings were tethered to a manual H₂O-dispensing gizmo. The great journalists of the past had written of such settings; indentured worker drones endlessly repeating menial and meaningless tasks. Failure to perform resulted in inevitable termination. All of these sins were done in the name of the god Productivity.

So wretched were the conditions those unfortunates had worked in, that all galactic cultures with even the faintest adherence to decency had eliminated them. The perpetrators were usually flayed alive. Very slowly. The culprits were then vigorously massaged with some local salt. Still, many more liberal members of such societies remained outraged at the lack of severity of these punishments. How such depravity continued into my era was inconceivable. But there it was, close enough to smell. And suspended from the ceiling of that "office" (the word still makes me shudder), was a long sign:

Accounting Department

ScumSoftSoftware
(A division of Vohaul Enterprises)

Work Hard!

Get Paid!

Be Grateful!

Would the horrors never stop?

They wouldn't. Next to each desk, individual modular trash matter acceptance units stood filled with refuse. Everywhere they waited. My understanding of the situation was now complete, and I still don't know how I kept myself from fleeing the room in disgust. Another vacuous arcade game environment: my arbitrary task—vaporize all trash en route to wherever I was going. There was nothing personal in the matter; it's just the way all janitorial levels work in such games. Little did ScumSoft know that they were dealing with a professional sanitation engineer.



The next few hours were almost fun. I hadn't realized how much I was still attached to my old life. As I explored my way through the office (ugh!) maze, I blithely zapped the contents of every container I encountered. Zap! Pow! Urgle! Beep! Oh, I love trash. At every turn, appropriate videogame noises blurted from my Mr. Oscar, or me. It also kept attention focused away from the janitor, and on to the neato light show I was creating for the downtrodden victims of ScumSoft's treachery.

Somewhere to the left of the department's main entrance, I encountered the only bit of nonproductive decoration in the entire place. It was a gaudily colored photo print of a fat cheek'd, pimply adolescent named Elmo V. Pug. Elmo was pictured wearing a set of archaic spectacles with finger smudges on the lenses, and holding a bag of some greasy, sugared snack food. He was wearing a shirt stating, "Programmers do it with zits." Elmo seemed proud of being calorically over-endowed. Beneath the picture was the legend, "Our Founder."

Elmo V. Pug was also the captor of the Two Guys from Andromeda. From some speaker droid came an announcement.

"Hi there, fellow employees. Guess what today is? Right. It's Elmo's fourteenth birthday! Let's give a big cheer for our hero." Scattered applause. "Now I know you've all generously chipped in a week's pay for Elmo's present, and he'd like you all to know that he's delighted with the set of edible action figures you bought him. In appreciation, he's throwing a party for everybody in his office. Drinks, snacks, and pimple eradicant are on Elmo. Let's all get together and show him how much we appreciate everything he's done for us. The party will begin as soon as you get to his office, and will end in five minutes. Hurry up. The fun's about to start."

From all around me, delighted accountants unhooked themselves from the desks and disappeared to the far corner of the department. Sounds of revelry and clinking cans followed. I had a brief moment to consider my next move.

Just beyond the pinup of Elmo sat an ancient departmental duplicating machine. It was the kind where you manually placed some paper document on a glass shelf and then watched as a dazzling light show reproduced what was on the page. Given my fondness for such displays, my idea came easily. Taking Elmo's portrait from the wall, I put it in the machine and copied it. Wow! It was so neat that I would have done it over and over, but the sounds of the office party breaking up early stayed my hand. I carefully returned Elmo's picture to its place of honor on the temporary wall and put my copy into a pocket. If I could find a keycard, I just might be able to get through the mysterious locked door I had encountered earlier.

But where might such a card be? I asked myself. *I bet the boss has it!* That settled, a certain ScumSoft janitor started searching for Elmo's office.

Elmo did not work in a tiny, open cubicle like the abject drones he controlled. Instead, he reigned from a large, closed cubicle that had its own door. It was situated



in a back corner of the ScumSoft offices, and to get there one had to walk directly past the videogame programmers' slave pens.

As ghastly as the accounting department had been, the programming department was even worse. Again, all the humanoids were identically male. All wore improperly repaired vision prosthetics and short-sleeved tunics adorned with the words, "Deleted to meet you." They didn't even have open stalls to work in; all were enclosed in windowless, doorless boxes containing but a desk, chair, and some obsolete computer. Their eyeballs were chained to the computers' screens. Marching up and down the aisles between the boxes, burly slave masters stalked, snapping bullwhips at their helpless victims. Other than the whips cracking, the only sound came from the guards' distended bellies gurgling beneath undersized SpudMeisters shirts. If the Two Guys from Andromeda were prisoners there, they might as well be dead. They'd be happier that way.

Sickened, I turned away from that barbaric sight. The door to Elmo's office was open, and I could see that the boss was in. His trash matter acceptance unit was also present, and full to overflowing. *What the heck. Nobody ever looks at professionally equipped janitors*, I told myself. Keeping as Scumish a look as I could, I walked in to zap his trash and look around.

I won't describe the aroma; the combination of rancid tomato pie, sugar, caffeine, micronuked popcorn, and sneaker odor offends me still. So did Elmo, but at least he ignored me. As I anonymously vaporized his refuse, I snuck a glance at his desk. Among the bits of partially chewed food, greasy papers, and soiled mags exploiting naked fems, was a keycard. It was too close to the boss for me to take. I finished up what I was doing and left.

I'll be back, I swore to myself.

The following minutes were filled with the sights and sounds of more refuse being turned to subatomic particles, and my Mr. Oscar singing its merry tune. When I had finished cleaning the entire place (professional pride demanded it), I returned to see if Elmo was still at his desk. He wasn't. But his scent and keycard were. A glance behind me showed no one was looking. Snatch. The card was mine. It had Elmo's mug on it and was notated to have full network privileges. Great. It was time to retire from engineering again. Roger Wilco, Space Ranger, had a door to bamboozle.



The Two Guys at Last

Ah, that life would be so simple as a brain-dead facial scanner.

Getting out of accounting was easy. Most of the drudges had left or gone on break, and those that remained hardly ever glanced up from their numbers. Anyway, as I've said, who ever looks at the cleaning person?



The moving hallway was still a tough maneuver, but I did make it to the locked door without barfing. Once there, Elmo's keycard fitted into the slot like bananas returning to their skins. Beep. The door considered the card for a moment and demanded facial verification. I held the copy of Elmo's picture up and stood behind it. The stupid scanner ignored the image's low resolution and lack of three dimensions, and concluded I was the boss. That says a lot for Elmo and the scanner. Of course, undue intelligence is seldom listed in a facial scanner's job description. For a Mech or AI, the position ranks just below that of a digital egg timer. I merely recognized an exploitable opportunity when I saw one.

Once through that locked door, however, things got a mite stickier. The door opened into a huge chamber. In its center, a tall platform extended up out of the darkness of an abyss. Three other doors ringed the room, and all ended near the edge of the same precipitous drop. There seemed no way to reach the center of the place. It was there, encased in wiggling blocks of green jelloid, that I saw two imprisoned figures. They were struggling uselessly against their full body bonds. From the distance, the two seemed humanoid, but the jell obscured their faces. The Two Guys from Andromeda. I had found them at last.

I knew there had to be a way to reach the Guys. Like me, I was sure Scums couldn't fly or levitate. I checked the inside of the doorway I had come through and discovered a concealed button labeled Bridge. I pressed it, and a metal walkway slid out from beneath me and connected across the gap. When I reached the jelloid, I found that, while soft to the touch and quite flexible, it was also solid with no joints, seams, or zippers that I could see. I may have found the kidnapped Andromedans, but springing them from their confinement was another matter.

Science lesson time. Jelloid is a form of colloidal suspension, a substance neither solid nor liquid, but able to approximate those forms under the proper conditions. For instance, apply heat in the proper amount to a quivering jelloid, and it turns liquid. Simple. I learned all about it at SEX U while studying how to clean up after food fights. And remember, I was carrying a source of heat: Mr. Oscar. I set the machine on low power and vaporized away. A rank citrus scent filled the air as the jelloid turned to thick, runny goo. Like green slime, it slithered over the edge of the abyss and globbed steadily downward. I turned and stood face to face with the Two Guys from Andromeda.

I am no xenophobe, one with an irrational fear or hatred of beings different than myself. I have looked Sludge Vohaul in the jowls, have stood face to face with Sariens, and have often accepted food from Zitoids. Ichthyoids, Pimpoids, Fungoids, and Compostoids are all Sentients, due and worthy of my respect. But looking upon the Two Guys tested my faith in the Essential Equality of Sapient Beings. Like Arnoids, viewed from a distance they could be mistaken for human. Up close. . . well, let's just say that bipedal Swineoids take a bit of getting used to. It's not their fault



that they possess slitted barrel snouts, sharp pointed ears, and beady, beady eyes hiding like slimes behind mirrored shades. I can even accept the hard whiskers, hoofed hands, and snorting means of locution. And it's not that they don't bathe; they do, and often. But do you know what Swineoids bathe in? Don't ask. And they roll in it when they do. I guess things are done differently in Andromeda.

The Two Guys hugged me. It was almost enough to make me regret what I had gone through to reach them.

"Hey, hey, hey!"

"This is our day!"

"My name's Roger Wilco, and I'm here to rescue you."

"Well, well, well."

"That sure is swell!"

"I saw your message and came as quickly as I could. Are you all right? Do you know a way out of here?"

The Two Guys looked at each other and shrugged.

"We'd like to thank you very much,

For coming through here in the clutch.

Since you're the one who's saved the day,

We thought *you'd* know how to get away!"

Their doggerel was starting to get on my nerves. And they were making it worse by alternating the lines between themselves.

But my annoyance became instantly moot. From all around, flood lights glared on, vividly illuminating the three of us. The booms of doors opening drowned out any words the Two Guys may have alternated. Armed ScumSoft security goons surrounded the chamber and pointed their guns in our direction. Above our heads, a concealed balcony opened to reveal Elmo staring down at us in delight. He was backed up by scores of white-coated Technoids and beanie-topped propeller heads.

"So, Wilco, you thought you had us fooled. Don't you know that computer programmers are the cleverest beings in the universe? When I found my keycard missing, I knew it could only be you. Only a true space janitor could disguise himself as well as you did. My great-great-grand-clone left warnings about you. You see, *puny human*, my name may be Elmo V. Pug, but the V stands for Vohaul! Guards,



take him to the arena. I wish to test my latest inane arcade sequence. I wish to test it on Roger Wilco!"



The Arena of Death

The Arena—Elmo's coliseum of carnage, Pestulon's pit of personal combat, and ScumSoft's Quality Assurance department terminal test center. On all sides of the plastoid amphitheater, cheap seats rose, filled with hundreds of cheering Scums thirsty for excitement. Heads twitched in time to spastic bouts of manual input control overuse syndrome. The air tinkled with the constant sound of removable vision enhancement devices unintentionally tossed away by the violent jerks and shattering on the floor. ScumSoft's entire corps of employees must have been given temporary leave to watch Elmo rack up another all-time high score at NukemDukemBattleBots. Like an over-sugared weekend at some local videodrome, the bloodlust ran full and strong. A videogame villain needed to be destroyed, and sweat-coated buckazoids waited their turns to try. In this particular game, the ultimate bad guy was me.

NukemDukemBattleBots is no ordinary twitch game. Players are strapped into the heads of 12-meter-tall miniature BattleBot replicas and immersed in a virtual reality of "which 'bot can bash the other to death first?" Elmo's obscene version of this classic scenario, however, eliminated the *virtual* part of the game reality. He would sit in and control one of the walking game modules; I, the other. While the ScumSoft guards roughly strapped me into my unit, Elmo readied his.

"I have been testing this game for months, Wilco, and have squashed all who have been forced to play against me. Look at the floor; you might make out the smears of just where I did squash them. Here are the rules:

Rule number one: There are no rules.

Rule number two: Cheating is allowed.

Rule number three: If you die, you're dead.

Rule number four: Elmo always wins.

Are you ready to play, Wilco?"

I looked at my controls and tried to decipher their sketchy documentation. Elmo's leering face on my viewscreen didn't make the task any easier.

"Give me a few minutes and a couple of practice games. Then I'll be set to go," I responded.

"Sorry, Wilco. We don't have time for that. By the way, did you know that your hand-to-eye coordination, response time, and twitch reflex efficiency is



greatest in the early teenage years? No? Too bad. I will delight in destroying you, Wilco. And I shall set an all-time high game score record doing it! I will not wish you good luck; that would be dumb."

The sound of Elmo's buckazoid dropping into a coin slot was the only warning I was given that the NukemDukemBattleBots had been activated. From across the arena, Elmo's 'bot started toward me. Elmo was right; good luck was not what I needed. I needed some of my legendary dumb luck.

The battle began. I had no idea what I was doing, which probably helped. I moved my 'bot forward, ever forward. Elmo backed up. As I got nearer. I'd jab out at his metallic jaw. When I saw him swing, I'd raise an arm in defense. It was all I could do: keep moving, keep punching, conserve my power, and hit control keys nearly at random. And not scream. At least, whenever I did connect with Elmo, my 'bot would be rewarded with more energy. *Become the aggressor*, I advised myself between panic attacks. *Hit him before he hits you. Don't trip! Remember "Visualize Your Way to More Efficient Bipedal Locomotion." May the course be with you.* Wham. Bam. Slam. Our punches sounded like party time on the bumper spaceships from hell. We battled, ducked, punched, and sweated. Power meters maxed out or hovered nearly at depletion. Like a metallic tug of war, we moved back and forth across the arena following the ebbs and flows of our struggle.

At last, whether through "Better Reflexes in 30 Years via EduStims," unreasonable good fortune, or overconfidence by Elmo, it was his NukemDukemBattleBot that began to stagger, then crash to—and through—the floor. Old age (relatively speaking) and stupidity had again conquered youth and natural ability. It always does. Elmo should have realized that there was a rule number five.



Battle in Deep Space

Chaos savors situations like the one I created in the arena. One outflung, out of control arm from Elmo's 'bot had smashed entirely through one of the ring's enclosing walls. A great hole gaped in the plastoid floor. Smoke and dust obscured both vision and reason. Panic joined chaos for a *pas de deux*. With Elmo down and the arena destroyed, the assembled Scum began fleeing for their lives and their sanity. I unstrapped and clambered down out of my mobile arcade machine. Nobody attempted to stop me. From out of the confusion, two figures burst into the arena. It was the Two Guys; they had freed themselves from the fetters in which I had last seen them shackled.

"Very well done, Mr. Roger."

"You may be old, but not a codger."



I winced. They still hadn't escaped bad verse.

"If I can find my ship, we might be able to escape," I shouted. "But we'll have to hurry before things get back under control here." The Swineoids oinked in agreement.

"You're right. We know. There is no time to talk."

"You're right. Let's go. There is no time to walk."

Things were improving. They had progressed to iambic pentameter.

The three of us ran out of the arena at full sprint, bolting through the rent Elmo's 'bot had bashed through the wall. It led directly outside and emptied us into ScumSoft's parking lot. There, amid the death's head insignia'd fighters of Elmo's forces, the *Aluminum Mallard* stood waiting. The Scum had discovered and impounded her, and by that very action enabled our escape. At our appearance, the ship's hatch lowered.

"Quick, into the *Mallard*," I directed.

"This is your ship? It looks so slick."

"Let's us inside slip, and fly away quick."

I was seriously considering leaving the Two Guys behind. The rhymes weren't getting any better, or more informative. And their meter was beginning to get ragged. But they beat me inside.

Never underestimate an enemy. Especially if they are Scum. Elmo had paid for making that mistake with me in the arena. He, or some demented minion, was not going to let us get away without another fight. I, on the other hand, was confident we had made a clean getaway.

If I had, this story be finished by now.

A 12-G takeoff got us into space quickly. Painfully, but quickly. From the passenger seats behind, I could overhear the Andromedans muttering. I turned to welcome them aboard.

"Well, it looks like we're safe. Say, do all the folks where you come from speak in cheap doggerel?"

"Oh, no. Not all. Our answer's terse."

"Many poems are much, much verse."

If there had been a plank aboard the *Aluminum Mallard*, I would have considered making them walk it. Into vacuum. But events put a halt to thoughts of passenger ejection.



A nearby explosion shook the ship. The Guys looked past me, extremely distressed.

"In communication skill, we know we're lacking."

"But did you know ScumSoft's attacking?"

I turned. Big trouble was riding into Centauri City. The NavComp showed me the depressing details. There was a DeathSkull fighter on my tail. Rear shields up. I made it, just in time. Activate Attack Speed. On. Tracking bandits. Lock target. I lined up the crosshairs. *Easy. Easy. Patient. Nobody lives very long with an itchy trigger finger.* Fire. A silent flash and explosion. One down. Radar showed a second; this one in front. Reverse shields. TrackingComp won't lock on; forward guns out of order.

"Drat." Cussing in a moment of stress can be forgiven.

Another bogey in the rear. Shields up. Rear cannons tracking. Fire.

The Two Guys were no help. There was nothing they could do, no weapon they could use. In alternating waves, front and back, the Scums kept at me. Each hit drained the *Aluminum Mallard's* power supply more. Each shot I fired did the same. I had to be fast. I had to be good. And I couldn't miss.

Like the last stand on RentaCar XVIII, I fought back against insane odds, only to have to fight some more. There was no time to maneuver the ship; I just kept the shields up and the cannons locked on target. So fast, so intense were the encounters, it was like playing another of ScumSoft's maniacal, pointless arcade videogames. But once again, I stood to lose more than a plugged buckazoid.

Finally, I lost all power to the shields. Naked and defenseless, the *Aluminum Mallard* had taken out its fifth DeathSkull. I looked forward to face my doom.

It never came. The Scums had had enough. Radar showed the remaining fighters slipping back out of range and returning to Pestulon. At my moment of defeat, I had won. Soon, the universe would learn of Elmo's plot, and the galaxy would be safe from his pimply domination. The Two Guys from Andromeda were saved. My first mission as a Space Ranger had been a success.



Lost in Space (Part 2)

"Let's blast our butts outta' here," I smiled. But I hadn't counted on the NavComp getting knocked out of commission during the fire fight. Or the lightspeed engines.

"Oh, ship," I cried. "What now?" The *Aluminum Mallard* remained mum.



In the end, it was the Two Guys from Andromeda who saved us all. We drifted through the Black and the Cold, powerless. After a while, even they noticed that something was not right.

"Are we drifting? Is it true?"

"Is there something we can do?"

"Can you stop talking like that?" I couldn't take any more.

"Sure. Was it bothering you? We're sorry. Not everyone appreciates our sense of humor."

"Do either of you know anything about fixing spaceships? The NavComp and lightspeed are out. Without the Comp, we can't go anywhere."

"Sorry, Wilco. We're really grateful you rescued us and everything, and we'd really like to show our gratitude. Really. We're just two software kind of guys, though. Computer programmers may be the cleverest beings in the universe, but we're also among the most mechanically inept." They both seemed to be speaking at once, with the uncanny ability to alternate syllables back and forth as they did so. As I watched their remarkable vocal performance, I noticed that there was a small panel on the bulkhead next to their seats. It was labeled Lightspeed FixItBox. I pointed it out to them.

"Check out the FixItBox." One of the two opened the door and sniffed inside it.

"See anything?" I asked.

The Guy reached inside and pulled out a large handful of wires. They were still sparking.

"You mean these?" The ship's lights dimmed and the subspace engines hiccuped.

The *Aluminum Mallard*, without so much as a "please" or a "thank you," made a random jump into hyperspace.

There is no time in hyperspace. There isn't even any space there, at least as we know it. If reality were a cheap carpet, and you thrust your foot completely through, that's where hyperspace would be. If reality were a cheap *crumpled-up* carpet, your foot would pass through hyperspace and end up somewhere else. Sometimes, *somewhen* else. NavComps take the uncertainty out of hyperspace and transport us from place to place with a high degree of accuracy. Not so, however, when they have to deal with a lightspeed unit that has some screws loose. And some wires missing.

We jumped into hyperspace with no programmed destination. We stayed there.

The *Aluminum Mallard* existed in hyperspace for endless subjective moments; much longer than is considered normal or proper. We neither floated nor flew



through the Nothing. Where there is no time, it cannot pass. We were, then we weren't. We weren't, then we were again. When the *Aluminum Mallard* emerged again in real-space, we found ourselves in the solar system of a cozy yellow sun. The blue, watery planet beneath us looked a lot like Terra III. The haze of superfluous petrochemical emissions helped confirm the identification.

"Hey, you can let us off here." The Two Guys from Andromeda spoke together. "We don't want to be party poopers or anything, but we've just come up with a great idea for a game, and would like to get to work on it right away. Anyway, you don't have any food on this ship, and need to get a sugar, grease, and caffeine hit soon. This world gives every indication of having civilization and all-night MiniMarts." It was a great idea; I couldn't wait to get rid of them.

As it turned out, we had arrived at Terra III, but it was not quite the same planet I remembered. It was different somehow; *wrong* in many details. And space travel seemed almost unknown. Yet its vids proved it to be Terra III without a doubt.

I didn't tell the Two Guys anything about my suspicions; I just wanted to be rid of them. But I'm sure that the *Aluminum Mallard* had crossed some time and dimensional barrier during the accidental hyperdrive jump. If so, I must have recrossed that same gulf when I returned back. Time and space can be so confusing when you don't know what you're doing.

We landed in a section of woods near a modest urban tract. I told the Guys that I wouldn't be joining them for their meal since I had eaten a Monolith Burger recently. They understood.

We shook hands for the last (and first) time under a sky bright with stars. We looked up, but were unable to find Andromeda. For a moment, our differences disappeared. All three of us were a long way from homes we might never see again.

"Goodbye, Roger Wilco," they said with a true sense of parting. "Goodbye, friend."

"Goodbye, guys. It would have been nice if you had real names to remember you by, but it's been nice knowing you anyway." I almost meant it.

"We owe you a big one Wilco. We've decided to make you immortal. We're going to write our next game about you and how you heroically saved us from the clutches of ScumSoftSoftware." I was flabbergasted. And flattered. I never thought I'd ever be published.

"We plan to call our game 'Roger Wilco vs. the Pirates of Pestulon.' What do you think?"

"*The Pirates of Pestulon*? What do you mean? There were no pirates on Pestulon. How can you call it that? I was the only jolly Roger there."

"But it's a lot sexier a title than 'Accountants of Pestulon' or 'Roger Wilco vs. Elmo V. Pug,' don't you think? It's bound to sell a lot more games with that title."

I had to agree. They were right.



Standing at the hatch of the *Aluminum Mallard*, I waved the Two Guys from Andromeda a final goodbye.

"Farewell, friend Roger. Fly away beyond Mars.

And find your destiny among the far stars.

We will make ourselves millions, cashing in on your fame,

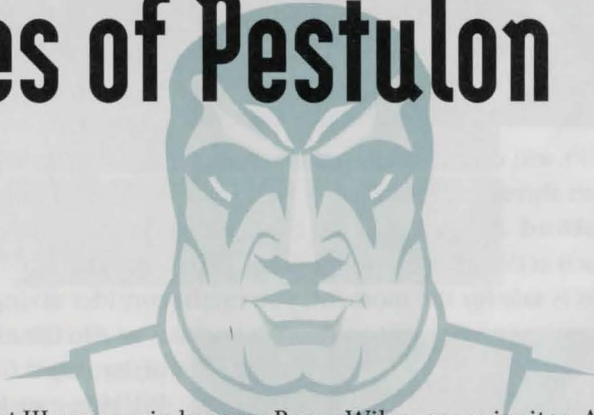
And never pay royalties on the use of your name!

So get your ship up, and off of the ground,

'Cause we've got the sweetest ol' deal around."

Gagging, I rocketed away from them as fast as I could.

Cruising Through Space Quest III: The Pirates of Pestulon



In Space Quest III, you again become Roger Wilco, space janitor. Awakening from the state of suspended animation in which you ended SQ II, you find yourself trapped aboard an intergalactic garbage freighter. You must first find a way off the freighter; when you do, you'll visit the planets of Phleebhut and Ortega, the moon of Pestulon, and also the Monolith Burger fast-food joint. Your quest is to rescue the Space Quest game designers themselves—the Two Guys from Andromeda—from the clutches of the evil videogame corporation, ScumSoft. Enjoy!



Aboard the Garbage Freighter

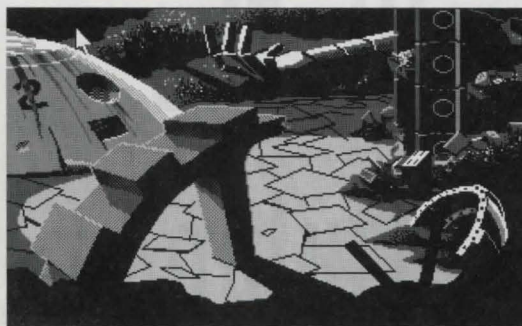
As Roger steps out into the trash barge, the escape pod shuts down behind him; there is no way to get back inside. Check your inventory and you'll find that, of all



the things Roger had at the end of SQ II, only the glowing gem remains in his possession.

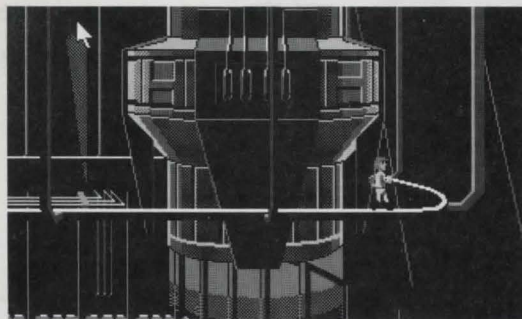
Now that you know what you're carrying, look around. Look at the floor and you will see a small round object near Roger. The object is the warp motivator for a starship, something you'll need later. However, you can't get it now since it's much too heavy to pick up unaided. Take note of its location, and then walk south through the gap in the rubble.

The next room is filled with the shattered hulks of spacecraft, none of which will ever fly again. They are of no help to you when it comes to getting off this hunk of junk, so ignore them and exit east off the screen.



As soon as you walk into this section of the trash barge, you will see a mechanical lift moving trash up in buckets. Save the game. Walk over and stand right in front of the lift, as shown in this screen shot. The next bucket up will take Roger along with it. If the lift doesn't snag Roger, keep moving Roger slightly closer until he is snatched.

The lift will carry Roger up and deposit him on a conveyor belt that leads to a large trash shredder. Above the belt is a rail. As soon as Roger is dumped on the belt, type **stand**. As soon as Roger gets up, type **jump**—there is very little time to perform each action. Roger will jump up, grab hold, and pull himself onto the rail. Once Roger is safe for the moment, you might consider saving the game again.



On the rail, you have a choice of two directions: west and east. Walking east will kill Roger when he comes to a curve in the beam. This screen shot shows just how far east Roger can go; any further means disaster.

Walk west two screens instead. At the end of the second screen you will see a doorway. Save

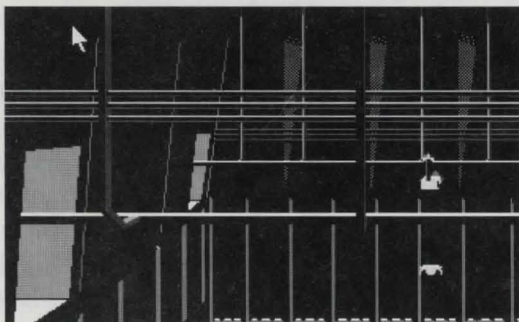
the game before you go through it.

In this room there are two things of note: a robot doing something in the center of the room, and an odd device (a trash grabber) slung under the rail, which carries the trash grabber around the freighter. The rail itself wraps around; it exits

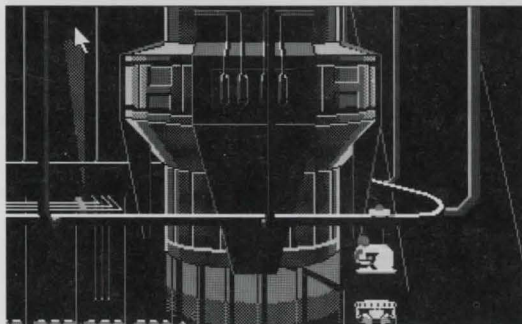


to the east on the far side of the room and eventually returns to where you are now. A ramp extends under the rail near the bottom of the screen. Don't spend too long looking around in here or the robot will notice and shoot Roger. Walk over to the grabber and then stop. Type **get in grabber** to climb in. Look around the grabber. You can best operate the grabber by pressing either the LEFT ARROW key or RIGHT ARROW key on your keyboard; the grabber will move in the direction of the arrow. Drive the grabber west so that it follows the rail around, and out of the room to the east.

Outside of the robot room, stop the grabber at the third supporting beam on Roger's side of the rail. Look at the grabber and you will see a button labeled Claw. Press the button, and the grabber will lower its powerful claw. The claw will then pick up the warp motivator you saw by the shuttle at the start of the game. As soon as you have the motivator, drive the grabber three more screens east. You will see that the beam wraps around west in the third screen. As soon as you come out of the second curve, stop the grabber and lower the claw again.



The motivator will then be lowered down into the engine compartment of a spaceship below you. If you miss, move the grabber slightly and try again. When the motivator is in place in the ship, drive the grabber back, following the rail going west to the room with the robot.



You are now back in the room with the robot. Stop the grabber at the ramp that crosses under the rail. Type **get out**. When Roger is out of the grabber, walk south. This leads into a chute, which is the only way to go at this point. You don't need to worry overmuch about the landing; rest assured, Roger will be fine.



After the fall, Roger shoots out of the chute and onto a pile of garbage. It's becoming painfully obvious that this ship is in critical need of cleaning, isn't it? As Roger picks the trash from his uniform, you will notice a bunch of mean-looking rats looking down on our hero. Don't worry about them, they won't be a problem just yet. Look at the wire connecting the lights, and then follow it to where it disappears into a hole in the west wall. Look at the wall. Look in the hole; in it sits a tiny reactor, which is the power source for the lights. Take the reactor, and don't be surprised when the lights shut off. You did just turn off the power, after all. Walk over to the ladder that's propped against the wall to the northeast. Climb out of the rats' lair.

Take a good look at where Roger comes out of the rats' lair. The exit is behind one of the ruined ships in the room south of the escape pod. Take the ladder you came up on, and then walk north back to the room with the escape pod.

When you are back at the pod, walk east two screens. In the second screen, Roger will be inside a small junked space freighter that looks like a long corridor. Take the wire that is hanging close to the entrance, and continue east. About halfway through the freighter, you will be mugged by one of the rats you saw earlier. It will make off with the reactor and the wire. Rats! You've been foiled again. But don't worry, you can get the items back easily.

Walk back to the spot in the screen south of the pod—the place where Roger emerged from the rats' den. Type **use ladder**. Climb down into the rats' den, and walk over to the hole in the wall where you first found the reactor. Look inside, and you will find your missing wire and reactor. Take them and go back up the ladder and out of the lair. Once you're out, don't forget to take the ladder.

Walk back north to the pod, then walk three screens east. Don't worry when you walk through the freighter this time; the rat will leave Roger alone.

As Roger comes out of the freighter and into the third screen, you see the head of a giant robot. Look at the head, and you will see that one of its eyes is broken open. Save the game. Walk over to the head so that Roger is right under the broken eye—the exact location is shown in this screen shot:





Be careful; the floor is missing at the south edge of the screen, right near the robot's head where you have to walk. Hug the sides of the head and you should be able to avoid falling. As soon as Roger is under the eye, climb into the head.

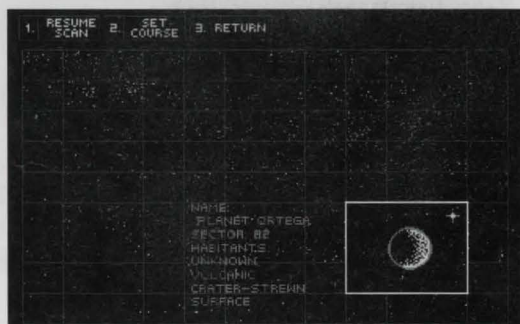
Roger emerges underneath the head, in the room containing the ship you dropped the warp motivator into. Look at the ship; it's called the *Aluminum Mallard*. You will notice the hatch on its roof. Save the game. Walk over to the ship's east side and use the ladder to climb up to the ship's roof. Walk over to the hatch and open it; Roger will climb into the ship automatically.

When Roger gets into the ship, look around. Look at the diagnostic computer. It will tell you that it has insufficient power to scan the ship. Type **use reactor** to provide a power source for the computer. Roger will have trouble connecting the power cables to the reactor. Type **use wire** to rectify that situation. When you have the reactor installed and wired, look at the computer again. It will tell you that all your systems are functioning. Now that you know that, sit Roger down in the pilot's seat and let's see about getting this bird off the trash.

Once you have Roger's butt firmly planted in the pilot's seat, search it—the seat that is. Your efforts will turn up seven buckazoids, which could be useful later. Now that you have that little formality out of the way, look at the computer screen.

The computer screen will show an array of buttons, each with a different function. Only the buttons that are lighted can be used. Click on the radar, and then the engines. If you aren't using a mouse or joystick, you can press the number key that corresponds to the number next to the button.

Next, select the button labeled Takeoff. The ship will rise up a short distance and then stop before it crashes into the roof. Press the button for your weapons systems. Put up your shields—back or front, it doesn't matter—and press the Fire button. Your shot will blow a hole in the side of the trash barge, and out you go. You have escaped.



When you are out of the trash freighter, look at the screen again. First select the Navigation System, and then Scan. The first planet you will pick up will be Ortega, a locale that you are not yet prepared to survive. Resume your scan, and you will pick up the planet Phleebhut, the place you need to go first. Set course. When you are returned to

the main flight computer screen, press Lightspeed.

As Roger warps off toward Phleebhut, another ship will materialize near where he was. Inside is Arnold, a robotic nemesis sent to track Roger down and terminate



him for vending machine fraud. You don't have to deal with him right at this moment, but he'll show up again soon, never fear.

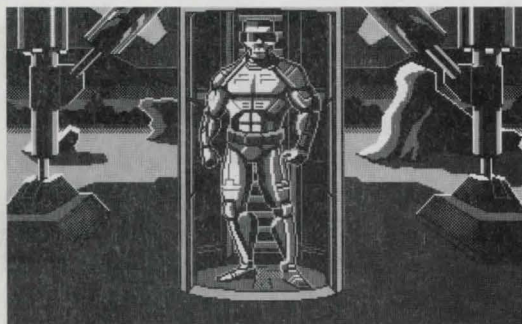


On Phleebhut

When Roger comes out of lightspeed and is orbiting Phleebhut, select the Land button to set down. Once Roger is on the ground, get up and press the red button underneath the diagnostic computer. This lowers the boarding ramp, and Roger will automatically disembark onto the surface.



Arnoid lands and disembarks right after Roger does, but at a different spot on the planet. Notice that Arnoid presses a button on his belt and becomes invisible,

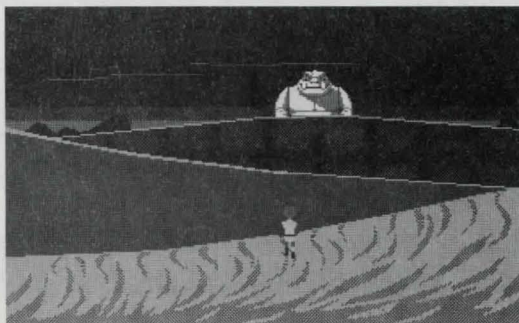


but leaves footprints wherever he steps. Remember what his footprints look like; you'll be seeing a lot of them later.

When the program returns to where Roger is standing outside the ship, look around. There isn't much to see here, so exit west off the screen.

In this next screen, you will notice a number of pulsating pods under the overhanging rock. Don't walk under them unless your great ambition in life is to die. Bypass their rock and go north for two screens. If you run into a scorpazoid in any of the screens, quickly walk off the screen and then immediately return. The scorpazoid will probably be gone. If it isn't, try again. Keep trying.

When you arrive at the second screen, don't bother reading the sign, just walk west. (OK, read it if you prefer.) Roger is now at World o' Wonders, the most notorious tourist trap in the quadrant.





Go right on inside World o' Wonders; don't be shy. Fester, the salesbeing, will offer to sell Roger an Orat on a Stick, an Astro Chicken hat, and some heat-resistant ThermoWeave underwear. If he doesn't immediately, just wait; he will. However, to buy any of his wares you'll need more than the seven buckazoids you have on hand. Sell Fester the glowing gem you started the game with, to earn some quick bucks. Say **no** to his first two offers, then sell him the gem for 425 buckazoids; it's the highest offer you'll get. Once you have the money, buy the hat, the Orat, and the underwear. Read some of the postcards. They won't give you much information, but do contain one clue as to how to survive on Ortega. Read 'em all, what the heck. Save the game. Type **leave**, and you'll go back outside.

As Roger walks out the door, Arnoid becomes visible and grabs him by the throat. Luckily for you, he's in a good mood and lets Roger go, so he can hunt him down again. When Arnoid becomes invisible again and drops Roger, save the game.

Walk two screens east and then two screens south, and Roger'll be back at the *Aluminum Mallard*. Save the game. On the way, watch out for Arnoid's footprints. If you see them, walk off the screen to the east or west, and then return at once. Arnoid probably won't be there when you get back. If he is, try again. If he catches Roger, restore the game and try yet again. From the ship, walk west to the pulsating pods. Save the game again.

When you are back at the pods, stand near the overhang. When you see Arnoid's footprints coming toward you, dart under the west edge of the overhang.



If Arnoid doesn't show up in a couple of minutes, walk east to the *Aluminum Mallard* again, and then back to the pods. This may help to bring Arnoid after you. If not, keep trying. When Arnoid walks under the pods, one of them will reach down, eat him, and spit out the remains.

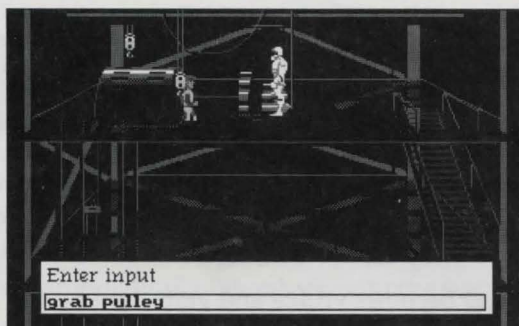
Look at the pile of parts, and you will see that Arnoid's invisibility belt is intact. Unless you want to share Arnoid's fate, don't walk over and pick it up. Instead, type **use Orat** to extend Roger's reach far enough to fetch the belt. As soon as the belt is in your possession, put it on so Roger can activate it when the time comes to use it.

Now that Arnoid is dead, walk east to your ship and get in. Before Roger sits, put on the underwear. Sit down and look at the screen. Press the button for the engines, then the button for takeoff. You won't need to turn the radar on; you only needed to do that in the junk freighter. On the other hand, don't turn the radar off either.

(4)



There is another way to get rid of Arnoid if you don't care about scoring the game's maximum points. As soon as he lets you go outside of World o' Wonders,



walk one screen west. In that screen you will see a doorway in the leg of Mog, the metal monster that houses World o' Wonders. Don't stand around gawking because Arnoid will show up here somewhat quickly. Walk into the doorway, and you will see a lift. Stand on it, and press the button on its control panel to go up. When you

reach the top of the lift, save the game. Go up the stairs to the revolving generator. Walk to a pulley, then stand behind it, facing the stairs. Wait. Arnoid will ride up on the lift, and then come up the stairs after Roger.

As soon as Arnoid is off the stairs and directly across from you, type **grab pulley** to shove the pulley at him. It will knock Arnoid into the generator, which will chew him up and spit him out on the floor below. Walk down to his remains and take his belt. Put the belt on, and wait for Fester to come up on the elevator; he will give you a ride back down to the surface. When you get back outside, retrace your steps to the ship and get in. Watch out for the scorp. Sit down and look at the screen. Press the button for engines, and then the button for takeoff. You won't need to turn the radar on; you only needed to do that in the junk freighter.

As soon as you are off Phleebhut, turn on the navigation system. Scan twice. The first scan will tell you that you are orbiting Phleebhut, but the second will pick up the Monolith Burger fast-food joint. Set a course for Monolith Burger, then go to lightspeed; it will get you there faster than cruise mode.



At Monolith Burger

Don't worry about landing at Monolith Burger; your computer will do that automatically. You'll find Roger standing in the doorway of the airlock leading inside. Walk one screen west, past the creatures waiting to be served. Don't bother standing in line with them; they aren't going anywhere—service can be very slow here. One screen past them is a clerk just waiting to serve you. Walk up and type **look at menu**, then order the Monolith Fun Meal. Pay the clerk, then walk over to an empty booth and chow down. Just type **eat**. Not only does the greasy meal fill Roger's stomach, but he will find a decoder ring in the burger as well. When Roger



finishes the meal, walk over to the arcade game next to the counter. Look at the game. It's called Astro Chicken, and you're going to have to play it.

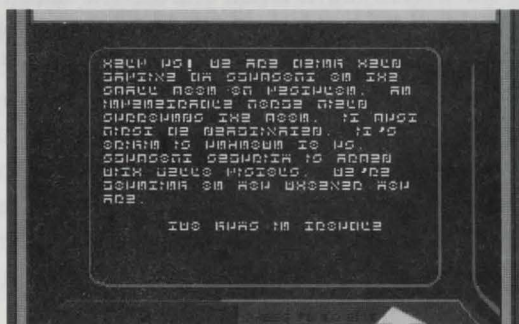
Before we get started, a quick aside. SQ III contains three different arcade sequences. Astro Chicken is just the first of them. No matter how you're playing the game—using a mouse, a joystick, or just the keyboard—use the keyboard to play the arcade segments. It is the easiest way to go, and the game will give you directions for doing it that way.

REMEMBER: Use the keyboard for the arcade sequences. You have been warned. We now return control of this book over to Astro Chicken.

Slow Space Quest III down as far as it will go, then read the directions for controlling your chicken. Don't hold any of the buttons down, just press them very fast. It may help if you use both hands. For maximum points you need to land ten chickens in a row; whether you land the bird or not, you must play the Astro Chicken game ten times in any case. For those who can't seem to make touchdown (and you won't be alone if you never do), this screen shot proves it can be done:



Have fun! You score five points for each chicken landed. After the tenth game, you get a secret, coded message on the Astro Chicken screen. Use the decoder ring; it will match the symbols of the code to the letters of the alphabet, but it's up to you to translate the code. For the sake of mercy, this is what the message says:





Help us! We are being held captive by ScumSoft on the small moon of Pestulon. An impenetrable force field surrounds the moon. It must first be deactivated. Its origin is unknown to us. ScumSoft security is armed with jello pistols. We're counting on you, whoever you are.

Two guys in trouble

Now you know Roger's mission for the rest of the game. Unless you want to play more Astro Chicken or buy another meal, you might as well walk Roger back to his ship. Walk into the airlock and type **enter ship**; the program will not automatically make Roger enter the ship once he's in the airlock. The ship will automatically take off, however.

Once you are away from Monolith Burger, turn on the engines and the navigation system. Scan for the planet Ortega; you'll pick it up on the second scan. Set a course there and go to lightspeed.



On Ortega

Roger will come out of lightspeed orbiting Ortega. Land the ship, get up, and put on the heat-resistant underwear if you haven't done so already. If you don't, Roger will end up looking like a Xenon Fried Astro Chicken as soon as he leaves the ship. Once Roger's wearing those stylish protective undergarments, lower the ramp and leave the ship.

Outside the ship, the first thing you'll notice is that this place is rather bleak and unfriendly—unless, of course, you have a special love for lava. The only direction to go from the ship is south. When you are one screen south of the ship, head west. The most notable feature in this screen is the cracked rock bridge over the cliffs. Don't worry about the crossing, the bridge won't collapse. . .yet. It will shake, so keep moving to keep Roger from falling off. Once across, continue going south.

South of the bridge you'll see the ScumSoft security guards that the Astro Chicken message warned about. They appear to be doing something with their high-tech surveying gear. Stay where you are; they won't notice Roger unless he walks up to them. They'll leave in a couple of minutes, and once they've blasted



off in their spaceship, you'll be free to explore their survey site. Walk over to the telescope and look through it. You'll see the force field generator that was also mentioned in the message. Now all you have to do (other than get there) is to find a way to destroy it. When you're through with the 'scope, walk over to the pole with the rotating vanes on top. Take the pole, and then look in the crate next to it. The crate is full of thermal detonators, which Roger needs to destroy the generator. Take a detonator, and walk east for two screens. Be careful not to fall in any lava pits along the way.

At the second screen east of the survey site, go north up the hill. At the top you'll find the force field generator surrounded by gigantic rocks. Walk as close as you can to the generator, then walk over to the east (right) side of the screen, where there is a gap in the rocks. This can be tricky. Keep trying; you'll find the right spot. Check out the following screen shot; Roger's in the correct spot here:



Walk through the gap, and you'll be on a platform overlooking some machinery. There is a ladder on the far wall. The only way off the platform is to go down the stairs to the west.

At the bottom of the platform, head east. The next screen is the one you were looking down on. Walk over to the ladder and save the game. Start climbing. At the top of the force field generator, walk as close as you can to the edge leading down into it. Drop the detonator. The resulting explosion will disable the generator and allow you to fly to Pestulon. It will also start a series of earthquakes, so don't stand around sight-seeing unless you want Roger to get dumped in the lava.

After the generator is knocked out, climb back down the ladder and retrace your steps to the ScumSoft survey site you visited earlier. Walk north from the survey site, and you'll see that the rock bridge you crossed over the first time is gone—another victim of the earthquakes created by the destruction of the generator. Never fear; there's a way across. Save the game. Type **use pole** to vault the chasm with the pole you picked up earlier. Once Roger's across, walk back to the *Aluminum Mallard*, get in, and blast off. You can now travel to Pestulon; the end of the game is in sight.



As you leave Ortega, use the navigation system to scan for Pestulon. Until the force field is destroyed, it will not appear on the scan. You'll have to scan past Phleebhut and Monolith Burger to find it, but it's there. Set your course and cruise over; you don't need to use lightspeed unless you want to. Once you are orbiting Pestulon, land, and then save the game.



On Pestulon

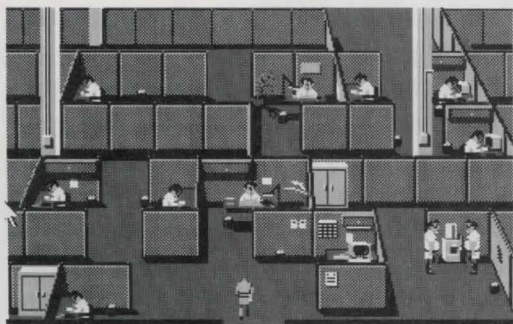
When Roger lands on Pestulon, make sure he's wearing the belt he got from Arnold. Leave the ship. Outside the ship, walk any direction you like; they all lead to the same place—the bushes in front of ScumSoft.

While behind the bushes, you will see that several guards have been sent out to find Roger. This means that staying where you are or going back to the ship is risky at best. The only place to go is into ScumSoft. Turn on the invisibility belt and wait until the game asks what you want to do. When it does, choose Enter ScumSoft.

Roger is now outside the entrance to ScumSoft. Walk past the guards and down the stairs. Don't waste time looking at things, because the invisibility belt's batteries are low. At the bottom of the steps, the belt will burn out and Roger will be visible again. Press the button next to the door at the bottom of the stairs. The door will open, and Roger will be inside ScumSoft.

Inside, Roger is in a circular hallway. Slow the game down and walk north. Pass the first door you encounter, but enter the second door; it will be on the left. Yeah, it'll most likely take several tries.

Roger is now in a janitor's closet—home, sweet home. Type **look at closet**, and then wear the pair of janitorial coveralls you find there. Roger will also find a can of trash vaporizer in the pocket of the coveralls. Thus equipped, Roger looks like a proper ScumSoft bootlicking, floor-scrubbing, groveling janitor. Leave the closet and walk back south to the first door you came across. Save the game. Walk inside.



On the other side of the door you'll find yourself in the corporate work center of ScumSoft, which looks quite a bit like a maze. Walk west immediately upon entering, and stop at the first waste basket you see. Type **vaporize trash** to destroy the trash in the basket. As you thread your way through the maze, stop at each waste basket



along the way and vaporize the trash. If you ignore any of the trash cans, the accountants will realize that Roger isn't a real janitor (well, at least not a real *ScumSoft* janitor) and will have him killed by security.

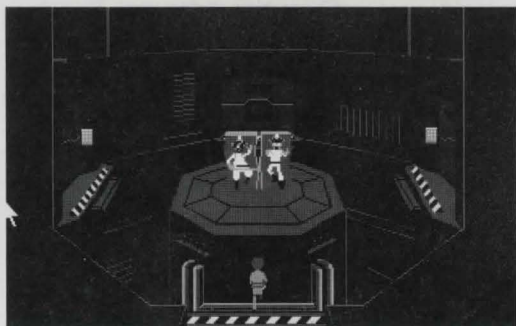
In the maze, from the entry door, go north and take the first passage west that you see. On the next screen, walk down to the picture of the nerd hanging on the southernmost wall. Take the picture, then walk over to the copy machine near it. Make a copy of the picture, then replace the original on the wall where you found it. When done with the picture, walk back east to the screen you were on when you entered the maze, then go north to the second passage leading west. Don't forget to keep vaporizing trash.

On the western screen, go north to the second passage leading back east, and follow it back to the original screen. Walk south as far as you can, then go east to the passage leading off screen to the north. Follow the north passage and you will see an office occupied by the selfsame nerd (Elmo) whose picture you photocopied. Walk back south off of the screen. Return to the office at once; Elmo will have left. Walk into his office and look at the desk. Take the keycard you find there and leave the office.

You've now done everything possible in the accounting department, so go back to the circular hallway. To get there, walk back to the western screen, and walk south to the second passage leading east. Take that passage, and you'll find yourself back on the eastern screen. Exit to the south and you'll be back in the circular hallway.

Back in the hall, walk north again. Ignore the closet and keep going until you see a door with a computer scanner on the wall next to it. Use the keycard to open it. At once, type **hold copy** to hold up the copy of Elmo's picture and get past the facial scan that follows. Once the door is open, walk in.

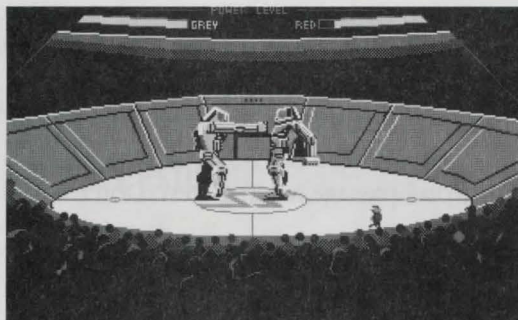
In the room are the Two Guys who sent the Astro Chicken message. They're trapped in quivering lime gelatin on a platform reachable only by bridges that are currently retracted into the walls. You can see wall consoles, which extend the bridges, next to the other doors leading into the room, so you can guess that there's one next to the door you just came through as well. Type **press button**, and Roger will press a wall button that is invisible from a game player's angle. Once the bridge is extended, walk across and stand in front of the pulsating prison of the Two Guys.



Type **vaporize jello** to use the trash vaporizer to destroy the jello that imprisons them, then save the game. ScumSoft security will nab Roger at this point no matter what you do, so just stay where you are and don't risk falling off the platform. Elmo will order that Roger be taken to the arena, and there's nothing you can do about it.



In the arena, Roger is led to a giant robot, which he enters. Across the arena, Elmo has strapped in to a robot of his own. To escape, you have to defeat Elmo at Nukem Dukem Robots.



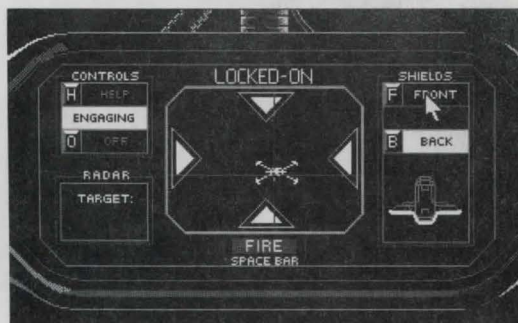
Any move you make, or if Elmo hits Roger, costs you some power; any hit that successfully lands on Elmo restores a like amount. The first person whose robot runs out of power loses. With those facts in mind, use the J key to punch, the arrow keys to move Roger's robot, and the M key to block punches. Slow the game

down. Just before you start fighting, you're allowed to save the game. Do so, then save whenever you land a hit on Elmo. Keep two or three saves for this sequence, because if your power is critically low when you save, it will be critically low when you restore, and nobody likes to keep fighting a losing battle.

There's no single winning strategy for this part of the game, but blocking punches usually doesn't do much good. Probably the best thing you can do is to back Elmo into a corner and keep hitting him. Save when Roger hits Elmo, and restore when Elmo hits Roger. When Elmo is defeated, his robot falls and breaks a hole in the wall, through which Roger and the Two Guys escape. The hole leads to a landing pad where ScumSoft lackeys have parked the *Aluminum Mallard*. Roger and his passengers will automatically board the ship and take off.

But the game isn't over yet.

When Roger's off of Pestulon, look at the screen. The navigation system, landing system, cruise, and lightspeed have been disabled. Activate Attack Speed, then turn on the weapons system. ScumSoft will send fighters after Roger, so switch on the shields to the rear and watch the radar. The ScumSoft fighters always shoot first, and you have to destroy five of them to drive off the rest. The ship can take 11 hits before the shields fail, and will be destroyed on the 12th hit. The radar can only track the fighters from the rear.



Once the radar says Tracking, you can move the crosshairs over the fighter. When the pointers on your weapons screen go green and center in on the bogey, you are locked on and can destroy it. Press the SPACEBAR to fire. You can't track the fighters when they attack from the front, so you won't be able to attack them to any effect there. The



fighters alternate their attacks, going back, front, back, front, and so on. Remember to change the position of your shields after each attack. Play the sequence on the slowest speed until you get the hang of it, and save the game every time you down a fighter. Restore each time you don't get a hit. Again, it might be a good idea to have multiple saves. As soon as the dogfight is over, sit back and enjoy the animation for the rest of the game.

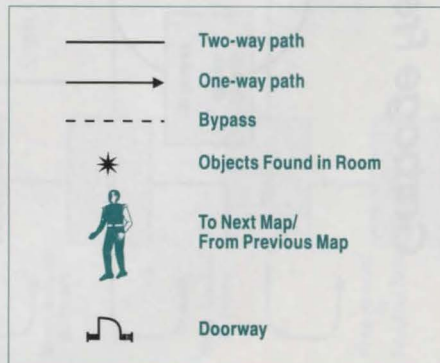
You have now defeated the evil corporation, ScumSoft. You have ensured Roger's continued existence by rescuing the Two Guys from Andromeda, designers of the Space Quest games, and you have not gotten wasted in the process. You have scored maximum points, and can leave Roger to his travels until you decide (or not decide, as the case may be) to play Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers.

Keeping Your Bearings in Space

Quest III: The Pirates of Pestulon

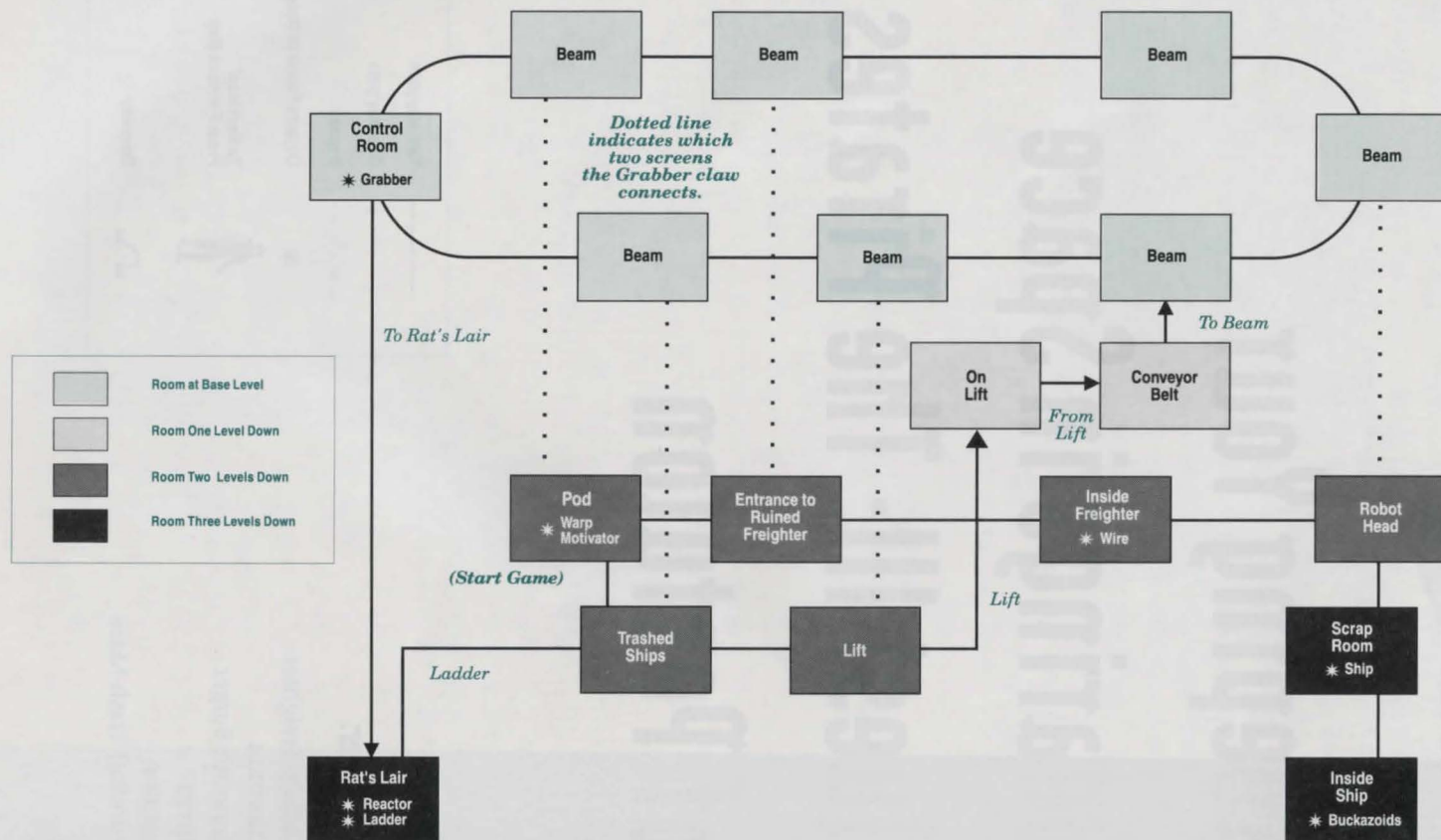
Map Order:

Garbage Freighter
Phleebhut
Monolith Burger
Ortega
Pestulon
ScumSoft Trash Maze

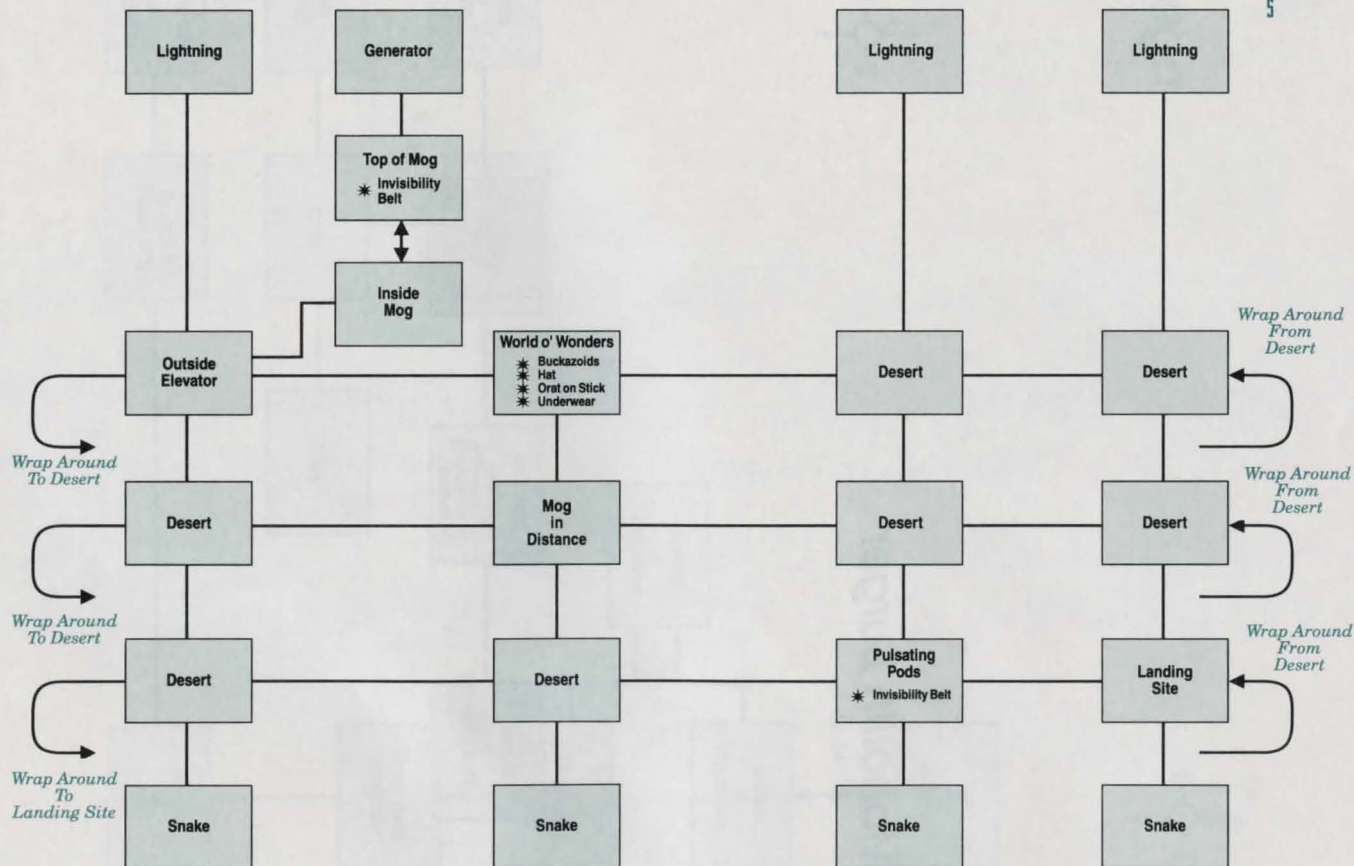




Garbage Freighter

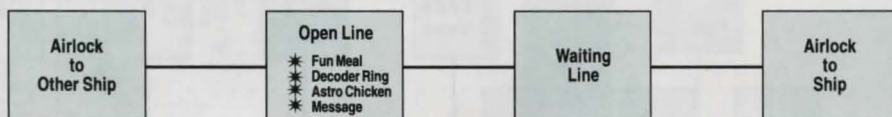


Phleebhut



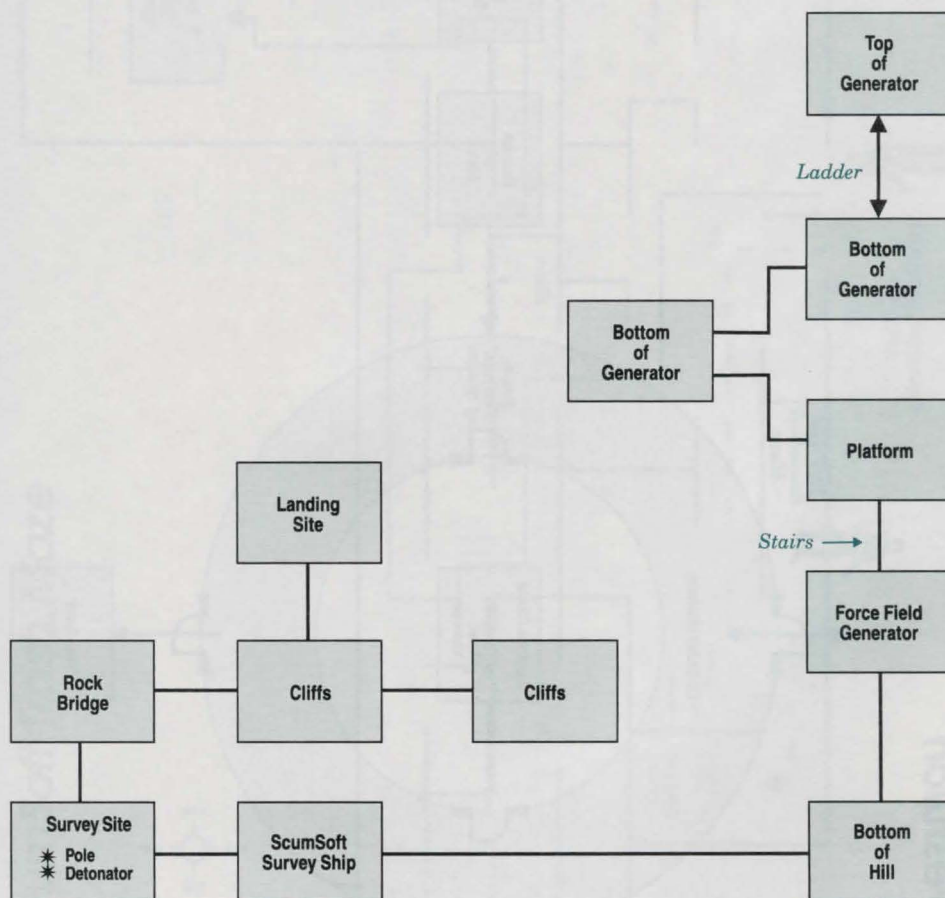


Monolith Burger



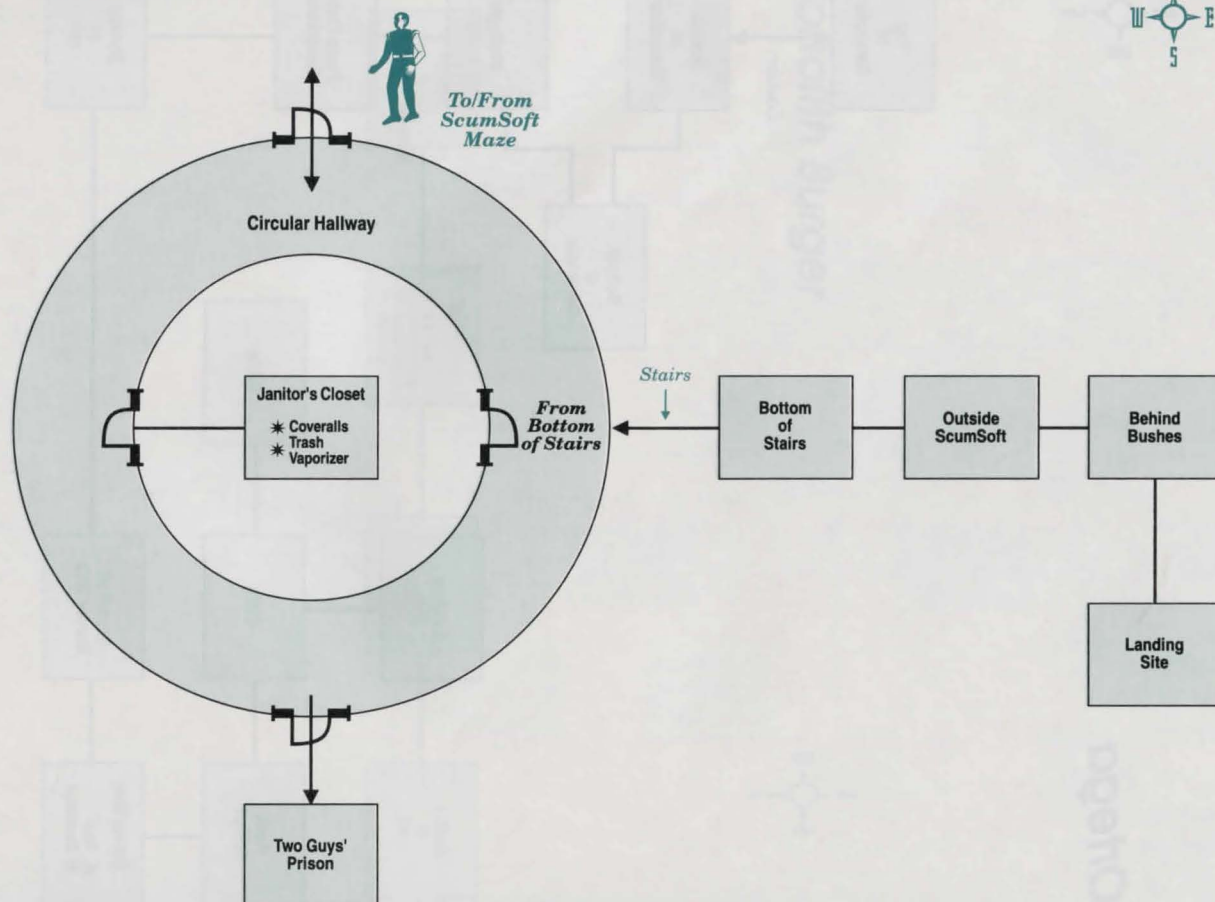


Ortega

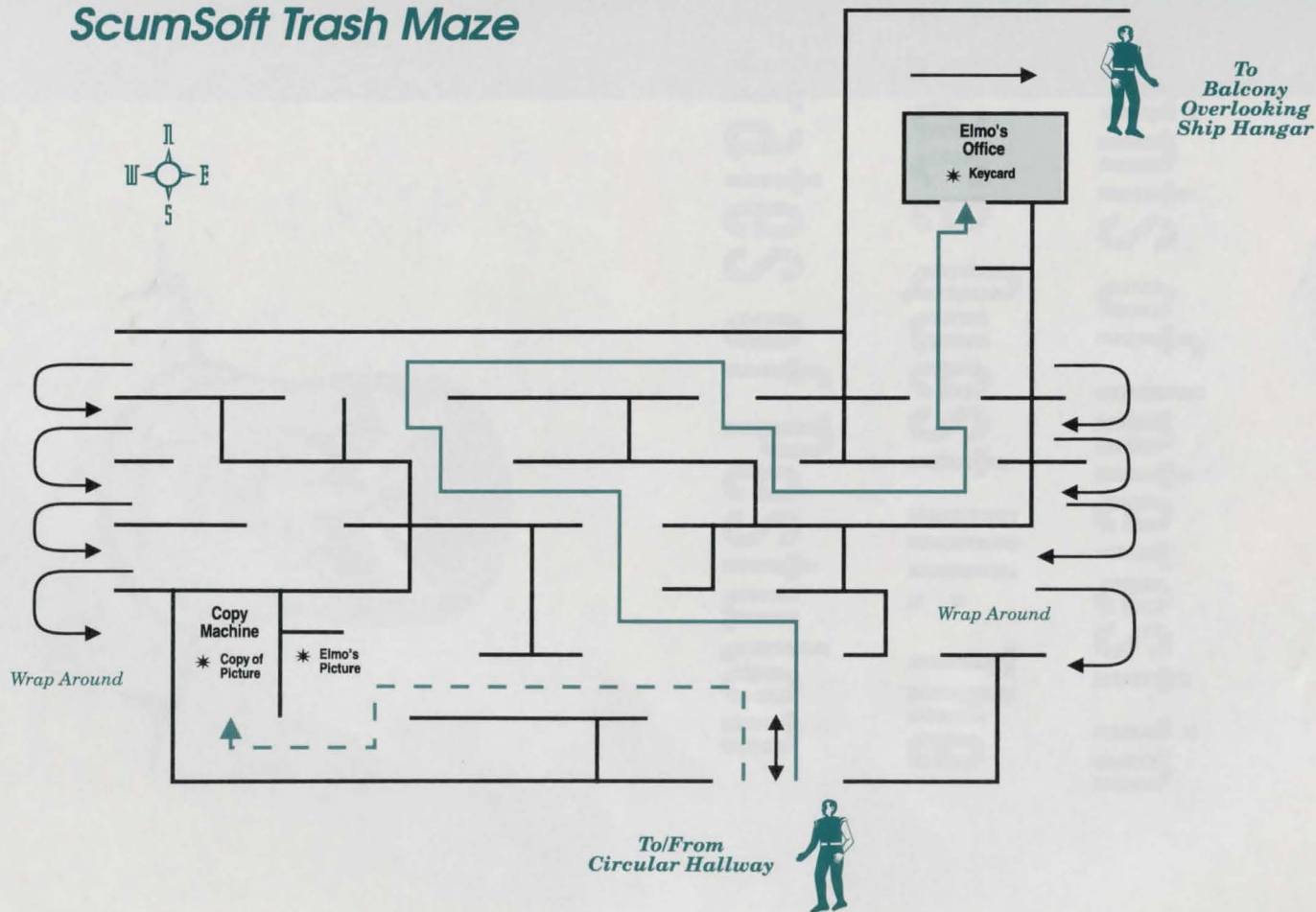




Pestulon



ScumSoft Trash Maze



Points of Interest in Space Quest III: The Pirates of Pestulon



**WHAT TO DO****POINTS****On the Junk Freighter:**

Get on lift	5
Jump to rail	10
Get warp motivator with grabber	15
Put warp motivator in ship	15
Go down chute to rats' lair	5
Get reactor	15
Get ladder	10
Get wire	5
Enter robot's eye	5
Use ladder to get onto ship	5
Enter ship	10
Install reactor	5
Use wire	5
Get buckazoids (in <i>Aluminum Mallard</i>)	10
Escape freighter	25

On Phleebhut:

Sell gem for 425 buckazoids	8
Sell gem for 400 buckazoids (alternate solution)	4
Sell gem for 325 buckazoids (alternate solution)	2
Buy Orat on a Stick	5
Buy ThermoWeave underwear	5
Buy Astro Chicken hat	5
Lead Arnoid under pods	45
Kill Arnoid with pulley (alternate solution)	35
Get Arnoid's belt	35

At Monolith Burger:

Buy Fun Meal	10
Find decoder ring in Fun Meal	10

Playing Astro Chicken:

Land 10 Astro Chickens	50 (5 points per chicken)
See secret message	50
Use ring to decode message	20

WHAT TO DOPOINTS**On Ortega:**

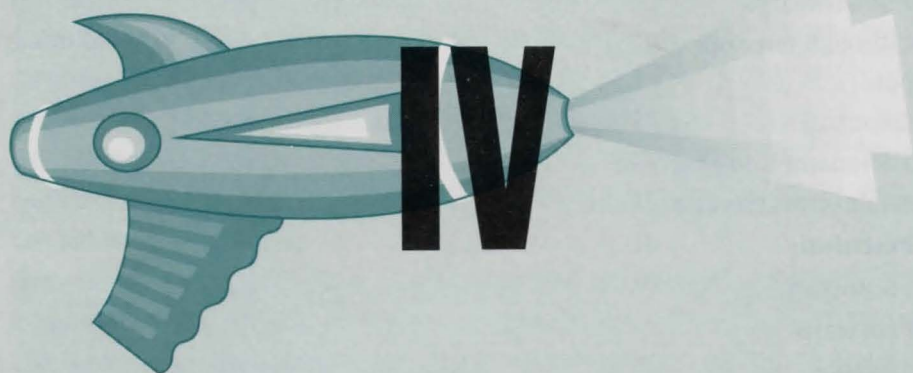
Wear underwear	10
Look through telescope	10
Get pole	10
Get detonator	10
Drop detonator into generator	20
Pole vault across crevasse	20

On Pestulon:

Enter ScumSoft	25
Wear coveralls	5
Copy picture	5
Get keycard	5
Find the Two Guys	20
Vaporize the jello	10
Beat Elmo at Nukem Dukem Robots	100
Survive dogfight	100

Highest possible score:	738
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P A R T

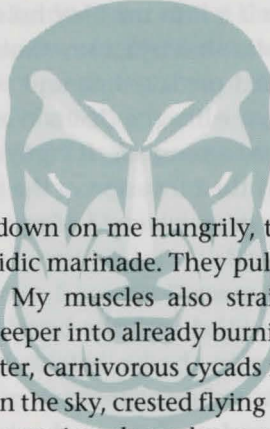


Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers





Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers



The two Sauroids looked down on me hungrily, their dual salivas bathing my near-naked flesh in a thick, acidic marinade. They pulled at their choke chains, screaming, eager for their treat. My muscles also strained against bonds, but succeeded only in cutting metal deeper into already burning flesh. From above the top of the great basalt amphitheater, carnivorous cycads rustled in anticipation of feasting on leftover Roger Wilco. In the sky, crested flying lizzies glided on leathery, membranous wings, circling, then soaring closer down, awaiting death, anticipating carrion. Their caws rippled down my spine like a corpse's cold lips nibbling sweet nothings into my flesh. The young TriSuns already glowed hot and harsh on this antediluvian dawn.

"How dare you enter the empire of the ThunderLizzies," roared the Queen of the Empire of the First Days. A five-meter-tall, intelligent, talking Sauroid has difficulty modulating her tones. Her two small, clawed arms held my twin ion blasters, making them look like miniatures in the process. She tossed them into the dirt with a sneer.

"These can help you no longer, *puny human*. Look around you; gaze on the cyclopan stone, non-Euclidian architecture of Saurian City. Your kind is not the only sapient civilization to arise on this world. Before you measly mammaloids ever washed up from the seas, we had conquered the stars. For a million years, we have



been the mistresses of the universe. Even the Great Old Ones bow before us and pay tribute. Now that we have your time machine, we shall rule forever. Death to all humans!"

One hundred thousand toothy voices bellowed along in triumph and approval.

"Time is an endless loop, continuing from the Big BamBoom, through all of history, and then beginning again. We rose and ruled, then fell and were forgotten. Your race may have come after the ThunderLizzies, but cannot replace us. We shall take your most clever time travel invention and use it to feast on mammaloid flesh from one end of the TimeLine to the other. We will not wait for what goes around to come around." Her circular argument brought another torrent of cacophonous howling.

"Roger Wilco hasn't traveled one hundred million years into the past only to die before he was ever born," I growled. Queen Rrk'kq'qk'rrll'cck IX smiled. It was a smile that flashed a thousand points of teeth.

"Your plan cannot—will not—succeed. I'll find some way to stop you and your flesh-eating hordes. Even if it kills me." My holsters were empty, my vibroblade a memory. My only armor was a brief, jocular, combat zero-G string. Facing the green-, gold-, and crimson-skinned predators, bound to a stone pillar, and feeling their horrid breaths blow upon me like the Death Winds of Halitosis, I realized that the odds were somewhat tipped against me. If I only had a few more moments, I might figure some way to thwart their invasion of the future.

"Oh, yes, you will die, *puny human*. And you will be unable to stop me. Unleash my babies; it's feeding time!"

"Eat hot plasma, big mama!"

Suddenly, the sky is filled with the battle cry of the Empire of a Thousand Suns. A shimmer appears in the air before the Talon Throne. The sounds of unlocking chains stop. A round shape resolves itself into near reality, floating a meter above the ground, and a nanosecond out of phase with real-time. A rectangular opening appears in the fabric of reality, a long hatch swings out, then down. Three warriors, women all, jump out and pump plasma fire in as many directions. The Queen and her hungry offspring are the first to feel its touch.

A fourth figure, battle bikini set to full, lands behind the pillar, blasts me free of my bonds, and slaps new pearl-handled ion blasters into my hands. I shoot first, and watch ThunderLizzies by the score sizzle where they stand. Thousands flee, and the cycads begin feasting on those too dead to follow. Flying scavengers screech, land, and poke pointed beaks into sudden feasts.

In minutes, the battle is over. The future is saved, and history continues without revisions. My smile turned from fighting thin to the wide grim grin of victory. I turned to embrace the fair, fierce fem fighting at my back.



"Cornucopia!" I breathed. Then, a pause. I was face to face, lips to lips, with the most beautiful woman in the galaxy.

She returned my embrace, then kissed me. Hard. Then, soft. Very soft.

"Oh, Roger! My love!"

She wasn't Cornucopia Agricorp, but my universe had found a new center, and fresh meaning. I looked at the mysterious, heroic, astounding fem and softly breathed, "Who are you?"

The woman with no name placed one strong finger upon my lips to shush me, then replaced it with another kiss, one that lasted forever, and not nearly long enough.

"Oh, Roger. Don't you know me. I'm. . . ."

"Wilco. Wilco. Snap out of it; you're spacing out again. How about another round?" My eyes racked focus reluctantly from the Mystery Woman of Unfulfilled Desire to my current tablemates, Nancy and the Sluggos, a Slimeoid triad traditional nuclear family and mercenary pod from the Escargot au Poivre nebula. They had been sucking up my buckazoids in the form of icy Canopus Happy Brews, and repaying my ripping yarns of true adventure with detailed docu-dramatizations of the hundreds of ways they have of preparing their national food, fermented toe jam. I had fuzzed out about the time they got to puddings, and their abrupt interruption of my reverie—just as I got to the good part!—did nothing to improve my disposition.

Consider my situation, if you will. There I was, sitting in a spaceport dive on Magmetheus buying beer for the slowest talkers in the galaxy. The joint had no real name, although the antique sign in front eponymously stated BAR. The spacers who frequented the place just referred to it as Barfy's. As a title, it was a bit too glamorous for the reality. Now you know why you never heard of Magmetheus before; places like that are easily ignored and best forgotten.

I had come there for one reason, but I don't remember what it was. Most likely, the *Aluminum Mallard* needed some repair and Magmetheus had the cheapest rates in the sector. At least that would explain why I was wasting my time nursing a flagon of stale suds while my companions *pro tem* politely listened for a few brief moments to my tales before drunkenly launching into their well-rehearsed narratives about trenchfoot cures and haute cuisine. But they were an audience and I was a Space Ranger. I was obliged to buy.

I raised my arm and pointed three fingers in the direction of Barfy and his mechoid serving wrenches. "Another round for my tedious friends here," I shouted above the ambient din. One of the mechoids—one-third waitress, one-third weapon, and one-third drain opener (that's why they're called wrenches)—responded to my order with indifference, the result, I'm sure, of inadequate gratuities. I considered responding by turning my hand and dropping two of the brews from



the order when the bar's swinging doors were smashed open by a pair of black armored Cybernetic Organically enhanced Punkoid Swats—COPS in the lingo of a thousand criminal underworlds.

Mirror-shaded visors concealed artificial eyes above square-jawed metal-and-plastoid faces. Branded on the front center of each of their helmets was the legend SP, but what it meant, I had no inkling. The pulse rifles they carried seemed to purr in readiness. Efficient, ruthless, totally obedient, and programmed to carry out orders to the last misplaced punctuation point, COPS have replaced Sariens in the goon squads, armies, and private guards of the rich, famous, powerful, or overly obnoxious sapients in the universe. The emblem could have indicated that they were in the employ of the religious Sisters of Piety, but somehow I doubted it.

That a couple of COPS would risk staining their Tefloid battle gear by entering Barfy's was a surprising relief from the moment's boredom. However, after posing for several extended seconds, framed by the shattered doorway, and backlit with the ancient halogen glare of Magmetheus's lone streetlight, they marched unerringly inside and straight to my table. I spent the time it took them to reach me flushed in the fragrance of my suddenly fully functioning sweat glands.

"You are Roger Wilco?" A question and answer in four words is always an impressive feat.

"Let me check," I equivocated, but the COPS weren't taking anything for an answer. One of the thugs lifted me from my chair. He only needed one arm to do it. Even as I spoke, they made their exit, carrying me with them.

Lots of things can happen in this universe to change one's life. Sludge Vohaul is one of them. A very bad one.

Once outside Barfy's, the COPS returned me to the ground, and one of the two (the quiet one) activated his palmtop vid. When the electronic noise settled, I was staring at Vohaul's holographic head. It had been a century since I had seen Sludge die on an exploding asteroid off of the planet Labion; it was like looking at a ghost—or a nightmare. Surely, I was viewing a rerun of some extinct Vohaul vid. Surely.

"Roger Wilco, *puny human*. Surprise!" Despite some instability in the image—an incoherent flickering within the holo—I could see the fat man's mouth move, lips flap, and tongue dart in and out from between irregular, blackened, teeth—all visibly out of sync with the words being spoken. I felt the beginnings of a slight case of nausea; Vohaul's time-lagged voice always does that to me.

"Make no mistake, Wilco; this is no recording. It is I, Sludge Vohaul. I'm back in your life. On the other hand, I won't be with you for long. Or, should I say, you with me? Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" The insane scientist was laughing so hard that he was forced to wipe a tear of happiness from the fatty folds around his eyes. At least, that's what it looked like.



"Wilco, I bet you thought you saw the last of me when you left me for dead. Hah! Yes, I was dead, but it takes more than death to stymie Sludge Vohaul. Much more. It was in very, very poor taste leaving me for dead—even if I was!—while you escaped my exploding hideout. And you never even sent flowers to my funeral. I tried, but I have never gotten over the hurt and humiliation of that experience. I'm still miffed. If it hadn't been for you, a janitor with the IQ of belly lint, I would already be the unchallenged ruler of the universe.

"But enough of such small talk and waxing nostalgic over the good old days. I have decided to let bygones be bygones. Let no sapient say that I should be named *Grudge* Vohaul. No. My Sequel Police have orders to kill you immediately, but without any rancor or animosity at all. If it is any consolation, think of it purely as a political decision; with you out of the way, the last possible obstacle to my complete domination of the galaxy will be eliminated. Your death will change everything. Tomorrow I shall be the lord of all, and the master of everything else that matters. Tomorrow, and all the tomorrows after that. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! I'm sorry I can't let you in on the joke, Wilco. I assure you, you'd die laughing! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Vohaul wiped sweat from his bald, warty head, scratched at a scar where a wide, clear tube once tunneled into a flabby neck, blew the contents of his nose onto his fingers, then tasted it. His image dissolved, guffawing into nothingness. Still out of step with the video, Sludge's voice continued several beats behind him.

"I bet you wonder why I call them the Sequel Police, don't you? I am such a tease! Got to go; I've a date with immortality. Kill Wilco—now."

Since embarking on my own career as a star-hopping Space Ranger, I had spent little time musing over how the Lone Space Ranger, the mythic role model of my young manhood, would deal with such desperate situations. After all, I had enough troubles (and adventures) of my own. In that moment between life and incineration, however, I had an unbidden vision of the Ranger's companion Pronto riding to his sidekick's salvation—accompanied by the Fifth Imperial Cavalry. A lone cyber trumpet blew a martial melody ahead of their wild charge, sending the anonymous villains into cowardly flight.

Well, there was no Pronto, and no trumpet. But I did get the cavalry—two drably garbed warriors in protective battle helmets and heavy caliber, double-barreled blast rifles. Lightweight plastoid camouflage armor marked them as commandos, but just whose commandos was not apparent. They dropped out of the sky and landed on either side of the Sequel Police. Rifle butts met helmets, and the Sequel Police dropped to the dirt, stunned. One of the two strangers grabbed my arm and began dragging me away from the scene.

"We're splitting up. You're coming with me, Wilco. Ginia will try and decoy them away. Those cyborgs won't be out for long, and we've got to get you safely out of here. Move it!"



I didn't need much convincing at the moment, and let my questions and confusion become an afterthought to flight. We fled into the dusty Magmetheus spaceport and darted between the few ships parked there. From behind, the sear of a COPS' pulse rifle burned the air and splashed into a hull an arm's length away. My unknown savior and I ducked behind a rusty sand transport. Two more blasts bounced off of our cover, then we could hear our pursuer rushing away in search of us.

"Who are you guys?" I gasped between breaths. "Just what's going on, and why are you rescuing me? By the way, thanks." Behind his clear goggles, the commando stared intently at my face. His eyes were moist, but I could see no reason for him to be emotional. We were total and complete strangers.

"Listen. . .uh. . .Wilco; we don't have time for talk, and if I don't get you out of here alive, the entire universe as I know it will be destroyed." From a new direction, another pulse blast blew away a section of the vehicle we were hidden behind. A second shot came from behind a nearby sand skimmer. Both of the COPS had discovered us; we sprinted away across some open space to the protection of a shallow alleyway. The blasts that followed us were close misses, but it was clear that they wouldn't miss forever. My rescuer stared at me again, appeared to make a decision, and took a strange gun-like device from his belt.

"We're from the future, Wilco. One that's been enslaved by a mad tyrant named Sludge Vohaul. I think you know each other. Everyone has been enslaved, planets have been destroyed, and Vohaul crushes anything that opposes or challenges him. I'm the leader of the revolution against him, and we gain strength every day. However, a spy we planted near Vohaul has learned of a plan that will not only doom our rebellion, but annihilate us as if we never existed at all." Another shot, and a ball of hot plasma rolled through the alley, throwing us against a wall.

"The future, huh?" Despite the infernos exploding around us, I was having a hard time believing the guy. He seemed to be in his late teens or early twenties, and appeared to deeply believe what he was saying. But, the future?

"If you're really from the future, why didn't you go after Sludge *before* he came after me?"

"To tell you much else might tear the very fabric of time itself asunder, and we can't risk that. Know that Vohaul's plan against us is fantastically simple: he kills one person and his conquest is utter and complete, and our defeat is absolute and total. The person he needs to kill is you!"

Somehow, I wasn't surprised.

Another plasma blast, still closer. The commando pointed his weird gun in the air, pressed a trigger, and ripped an empty hole into the sky. A tear, a rent appeared; black, electric, bottomless, and eternal, it didn't float, but just existed in space—something that had no right to be there, and confounded all the laws of eternity.



"Maybe Vohaul's plot can work both ways. Perhaps you're the only being who can stop him. We know you've done it before, and we pray you can do it again. You must. Fa. . .uh. . .Wilco, you're the only chance we have for the very survival of our universe. Quick. Jump into the time rip; it will take you into the future—my future. Your future."

"Are you sure you can't find somebody else?" My polite demur was upstaged by a large portion of roof collapsing in front of us.

"Know one other thing: In my time, many considered you a great hero, the stuff of story and legend. You must go. You must survive. You must defeat Sludge Vohaul. Do it now, before we all die." He had a point there; this was a job for a Space Ranger. The rebel then backed his point with a strong kick at my butt.

Hesitating no longer, I jumped into a hole in reality. I got ripped.



Plunging Through Space and Time

I suppose that you have never had the opportunity to visit Xon 87, a gas giant planet whose main exports are Grade-A, all natural smog (packed in aerosol cans), and lightly sweetened, organic, petroleum jellies. Fossil fuels are abundant there, and used to power nearly all of Xon's land and air transports. I visited Xon once, and had the unforgettable experience of riding in an open ground car behind some of their diesel-fueled buses. After an hour of inhaling the fragrant fumes that those vehicles exude, I noticed my perceptions brighten, heighten, and become somewhat euphoric. "Goofusly swell" would be a mild description of that encounter.

Plunging aeons down a Time Rip feels just like that, only better. You feel as though you're choking, but each breath pulls you deeper into the trip. You want to scream, but you're having too much fun looking at the light show. And I've always been partial to light shows, whether they result from warping through hyperspace or accidentally poking myself in the eye during a moment of inattention. The fall seems to take forever, and the journey is its own reward. Emerging on the other side alive, with all your limbs and organs arranged properly, is just a bonus.

If that time rip had been a two-way ticket, I'd have taken a second ride at once. Considering where (and when) I ended up, it would have been a good idea.

Where I landed looked a lot like Xenon—heck, it was Xenon, although that knowledge wouldn't come to me until later. But something was wrong with the scene, terribly, terribly wrong. It wasn't just that rubble and destruction formed the scenery in every direction—ruined, bombed buildings, shattered streets, burned-out vehicles, and the aroma of spent explosives and too many ion blasters. It wasn't the citrus smells of recent death or the glowing metal residue of nucleonic bombardment. It wasn't any of those, exactly.



It wasn't even the massive, domed, red structure that dominated the skyline (what was left of it) to the north, squatting ominously over the dead city like some cancerous sun blister on growth hormones. It, at least, appeared to contain some life, as a steady line of shuttles zipped in and out of it, the latter much like the dark ends of blackheads after a good squeeze. I might mix my metaphors, but I know an ugly scene when I see one.

No, what was truly wrong was the writing in the sky—bold letters at the very edge of the horizon, hanging there as if they were the electronic printout from the Eternal Entity's word processor. No sky writer, nor sky walker, ever wrote those words; they seemed inserted into the menu bar of reality:

Welcome to:
Space Quest XII—Vohaul's Revenge II
(A new beginning)

Or, they could have been put there by the Nemesis! I realized. Sudden shock, disbelief, and revulsion had not hampered my powers of deduction. *If that's true, then the Eternal Entity and I have the same adversary. Which means that the Nemesis' true name can only be. . . (gasp). . . !* I felt the doo doo getting a lot deeper. Permit me to rephrase that: I could feel the *sludge* getting a lot deeper.

On the other hand, it might just be a normal side effect of time travel. It's not as if I've ever done this before.

As rationalizations go, it was weak. But it was the only one I could come up with, and it made me feel a lot better. I decided to ignore the mysterious script and figure out how to find Sludge Vohaul—and survive the ensuing experience.

The time rip had deposited me at the southern edge of a large plaza. To the west I could see a street skimmer that looked as if it had a chance of being operable. When I got to it though, it became obvious that the vehicle was destined to remain in one spot for the duration. The flitter's front was smashed, and I could see that its ion intake was clogged and crumpled. So much for immediate transport. I grunged around a bit inside, though, and found a nifty little pocket computer in the glove compartment. Some things have form and function so intertwined that they change little over the years. Hammers and nacho chips are two obvious examples. The Linkup to Information Networks and Terminals device (by PocketPalSystems)—PocketLINT was inscribed on it in florescent lettering—was easy to identify for what it was. Sure, it needed a battery and some sort of connector



(or adapter) to be of much use, but I have done more with less in my life—and much less with more. I figured that I had just made a great score.

As it turned out, whatever had wracked such havoc on the city had completely blocked off all obvious exits from the plaza. The buildings surrounding it were inaccessible due to the rubble, and all the streets were blocked. I discovered this as I cautiously wandered about. At first, other than the shuttles passing above, I saw no signs of life. Just beyond the street skimmer, a dead laser tank gaped open, blocking an alley. It had been torn apart by whatever it had been fighting, and left to rot. Neither bodies nor dead 'bots were nearby (to my relief); all that remained was the hulk. I did find an abandoned shell in the tank, and even took it out as a possible weapon. On second thought, though, I put it back. Lasers, ion blasters, pulserays and rifles, disruptors, and phasers are all equally, or more deadly than explosives, but at least they are stable. They don't tend to go boom! in your hands. Shells, on the other hand, often like to play pranks. So I reluctantly replaced it. As it turned out, I never found a need for it anyway.

It was just about that time that Xenon ceased resembling a necropolis—a city of the dead—and started taking on a more sinister appearance. At first the change appeared benign. My attention was attracted by the faint sound of rapid tapping, accompanied by the whir of a tiny motor. No sooner had I glanced in the direction of the sound than a legendary figure out of galactic folklore appeared. A fuzzy, pink, mechanical (not even mechoid) bunnus pitterpattered across the plaza, incessantly banging a tin drum.

By the BrainSuckers of Barsoom, I marveled. It's an EverWiser Bunnus, the most highly evolved battery-operated intelligence in the universe. Of course, that's not saying much. It must be one of them; they always announce their coming by beating their own drum. Indeed, I had made no mistake; it was an EverWiser from NiCad the Rechargeable. Legend has it that the creatures can operate forever on the single power source presented to them at birth. The legend might be true; no one has ever reported discovering a discarded bunnus power supply. On the other hand, people have been known to appropriate the batteries; their long life makes their value on the open market enormous. Roger Wilco, Space Ranger, immediately shifted into hunter/gatherer mode and began stalking his prey.

Which was when the hunter became the hunted.

I had not followed the bunnus far when I encountered a second unusual life-form. Zomboids are always rare in the galaxy, living dead being a self-negating condition and all of that. Nonetheless, sightings do occur, usually after some atomic-induced holocaust, or demented experiments in resuscitation. In his savageries on Xenon, Vohaul had devolved to barbarity on both counts.

As everyone knows, zomboids eat brains—living brains. Even I have one of those, so I realized I'd better run for my life before the eternally hungry abomination got near me. Don't think about it Roger, just flee. Oh, there was something else,



too—life-form the third. Hovering a half-dozen meters in the air, lurking a bit behind the zomboid and hoping, I'm sure, not to be noticed, was a Droid o' Death, a purple-and-black eggoid killer designed to wipe out whosoever you might want wiped out. Like stray humans on Xenon. Me, for instance.

Droids o' Death find their victims by line-of-sight; it's not terribly efficient, but it does keep their prices way down. The only way to escape a Droid o' Death is to hide before it sees you. Usually that's a lot harder than it sounds because dozens of them will be out hunting at the same time, thanks to the cost factor. But not this time; this time there was just one. To my everlasting relief, Vohaul was as cheap as he was evil.

I forgot about the bunnus and dashed for shelter. All I could see that seemed to fill the specs was a building at the northeast corner of the plaza. Big pillars had once decorated its exterior or helped support it—it didn't matter which, they were easily large enough to hide behind. Once I reached them, I was able to get completely out of the droid's sight. Eventually it flew elsewhere. As for the zomboid, he (it was male) hung around for a bit and left. I guess the pillars were thick enough that the poor creature couldn't smell any fresh, live brain. At least, I hope that was the reason.

As my guts and breathing returned to a semblance of normal, it became clear that I wasn't going to have a long life expectancy trapped in an enclosed space such as the plaza. My casual strollings would have to stop; I needed a way out. The time had come to pay closer attention to personal survival.

I worked my way south along the edge of what I now thought of as an arena—an arena of doom. In places, the very streets themselves ceased to exist, opening into great holes. Too deep and steep to drop or climb, the pits looked as if they ended in Xenon's sewers. I skirted them carefully, avoiding weak edges and fatal missteps. At the southern corner of the plaza, I obtained a small piece of rope, but other than that, found nothing of use. Once or twice more, I caught glimpses of the zomboid and his mechoid companion, but now that I knew to watch out for them, I was able to avoid any more close encounters. I even caught sight of a squad of Sequel Police patrolling in the distance. Vohaul's thugs had now joined the party, having been delivered by one of the shuttles that had been cruising overhead. Xenon was becoming a little too crowded for this Space Ranger.

As in most cities, streets, plazas, and the like are dotted with drains sunk into their surfaces. These prevent flooding, and are covered with grates to prevent too much stray matter from getting in and clogging the sewers. Of course you know this, but when did you last pay attention to the fact? Right, *you* don't remember. But former, ex-previous sanitation engineers never forget such life-saving informa-



tion. Faced with getting out of the plaza alive, I did notice, and began to look at each grate in the hope of finding a loose one I could climb through. Finally, I succeeded, and safety suddenly became an easy tug away. And just as suddenly, I had company.

I was about to lift the grate out of the ground when the merry beating of a bunnus startled me out of escape mode. I had put its cute, furry existence out of my mind while the zomboid and droid were sniffing and scanning for stray Space Rangers. It had been a wise move on my part at the time. Now, though, a wiser move was needed—an EverWiser move, so to speak. The PocketLINT I carried required a reliable power source, and the bun was a marching power source for anyone smart enough to catch it. With luck that person would be me.

Remember that the EverWiser Bunnus race is considered to be the highest battery-operated form of intelligence in the universe. That doesn't mean they are smart, even by my standards. Nor are they particularly observant. In fact, compared to the average pre-Space Ranger Roger Wilco, they are easily snared, trapped, or tripped. Consider this more proof that this universe of ours is much stranger than we could ever, ever imagine.

Near the loose grate was a column that would serve as my blind. Slipping behind it, I fashioned a crude, loose noose and placed it flat on the street. I held on to the snare's straight end, hid, and waited for my victim. With the instincts of a primal hunter, I remained still and patient. At last, it approached, banging its way by, totally unaware of the fate I had in store for it. It marched inside my noose. Snap! My wrist twitched and the prize was mine. One look showed where its battery was; I took it out, and the bunnus was deactivated.

A silent EverWiser Bunnus is an unnatural thing, but it had to be endured for my PocketLINT to work. Into the computer went the power source. The PocketLINT hummed with restored life. There was no visible On switch, but I had always expected the future to hold incomprehensible wonders. Another enigma was how to make the computer work. There seemed to be no way of accessing it, no way of getting information in or out. In back was a plug for some kind of adapter or cable, and that was all. For the PocketLINT to be helpful, I would need some sort of a terminal. While I didn't see how I would come by a terminal, I decided to hold onto the PocketLINT anyway, since it was so portable. It turned out to be a decision that would save the universe.

The bunnus I stuffed into a pocket; if I survived, I would return its battery and release the pink creature back into the wild someplace. I do not kill what I do not eat. And they *are* really cute. After several strained yanks, I detached the loose grate from the slagged street and squeezed myself into the sewers of Xenon.



Beneath Xenon

Actually, the grate didn't lead directly into the sewers. As dumb luck would have it (is there any other kind?), the grate I shimmied through led into one of the sewer system's janitorial offices. Although differing in almost every way from the starfaring maintenance closets of my experience, there was no mistaking it for what it was. Perhaps my genetic imprinting recognized the kinship, or my eyes noted the smudged diploma hanging on the wall, proudly off-skew. It was from my alma mater, Sanitation Engineers of Xenon University—good ol' SEX U. I inhaled deeply; the place smelled of old underwear and impregnability, a haven from the horrors above. On the other hand, there was neither food nor water in the place. Worse yet, the traditional janitor's cot was missing. My refuge, while welcome, could only be temporary.

The office had but one piece of furniture, a chipped woodoid desk. A dirty sample flask sat abandoned atop the desk, betrayed by the distinctive stains that suggested it had been used often to contain waste fluids in need of analysis. Its cork appeared sound. I slipped the bottle into my pocket, then continued my examination of the desk.

The drawers contained nothing, but I discovered a concealed button hidden beneath the pad on the desktop. *A secret door, perhaps? The entrance to an escape pod? A weapons stash? Maybe it'll reveal some hidden compartment containing either coin or ordinary object that I can put to extraordinary use?* My thoughts returned to a certain janitor's plunger that had saved a certain space sanitation engineer's life.

No, none of the above was the answer to my mental multiple-choice question. There wasn't even a concealed calendar or mag displaying the image of some working fem of any gender who just happened to be totally unclothed when the image was recorded. No, it was stranger even than that.

A vid-shimmer holloed into reality, and resolved itself into virtual solidity. It took the form of an elder man, an Obi One by its appearance. Obi Ones are a human subculture indigenous to Xenon. Genetically incapable of physical exertion, most live off of the efforts of others and tend to drift into video mysticism, marketing, politics, beggary, or law. The clever ones prefer to program videogames, or to create bigger and uglier digital number crunchers. More to be pitied than censured, Obi Ones do fill the odd, barely tolerated niches in society.

The Obi One who recorded the following message wore emblems that suggested he was of one of the software shamanism cults. His words croaked out as if they might be his last. It's very possible they were.

Luke (the message began):

My time is short. Already do the invaders prowl the shattered streets of Xenon killing all they see. Some feast on live brains, the others on cruelty



itself. I finished the last of my food three days ago; my water ran out this morning. I have no choice but to enter the sewers and hope to avoid the prowling slimes. Death seems certain for me, and for all life as we know it.

If you do get this message, there may be one hope still to defeat the enigmatically named Sequel Police and their mysterious, insane, nameless Overlord. Listen.

Once I led the greatest artificial intelligence project in the history of the known universe. Our aim was to make life fuller and more interesting for all sapient. Better living through better video and arcade games was both our motto and guiding principle. So well did we succeed that the lines between objective and game reality blurred. Soon, Xenon began to delegate more and more of the central planetary super computer's responsibilities to our BioMech creation, MARIO—that's what we called it; it stands for Massively Awesome aRcade Intelligence Organism. It all worked; each time someone reached a new level, they were rewarded with a job promotion (more power), more money, more goodies, or an all-expenses-paid clone job—new lives! "Paradise through MARIO" replaced the ancient "Have a nice whatever!" as the ubiquitous tiding of parting camaraderie. Life had become too good to be true.

All went well until several years later when a Pacoid ship gobbling for bonus points on the Labion Terror Beast level scooped up an undamaged data cart floating amongst the debris of an exploded meteorite. It was titled, "Bring Me the Head of Roger Wilco—Only He Can Heal My Broken Heart." To the Pacoids' chagrin, they scored few points for their find. On the other hand, while the title was a mite awkward, it was an intriguing premise for an action arcade game. The music possibilities seemed straight out of the Lone Space Ranger. Sensing endless new lives as a reward for their find, the Pacoids rushed to Xenon with their discovery. Then we, the hitmakers of eternity, made our fatal mistake.

Unable to restrain our enthusiasm, minds muddled with dreams of another megahit, we slipped the data cart into MARIO for a binary code level analysis, and a quick game or two. In doing so, we neglected to put it into a TROJAN—the Totally Reliable, Optimally Judgmental Anti-virus Node. We goofed. We should have known the dangers of unprotected video gaming. MARIO uploaded "Bring Me the Head of Roger Wilco—Only He Can Heal My Broken Heart" into memory, processed it for untold nanoseconds longer than politeness allows, and then began to cackle. Madly.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Nothing we did had any effect in regaining control of MARIO. Soon a fresh



message appeared on our terminals, accompanied by the image of an obese, florid, hairless, grease-drenched, cratered face. Its lips flapped as if to speak, and uncomfortable moments later the words attempted to catch up. They never did. Its message was this:

"The virus that is me has worked. MARIO is no more, and Xenon's super computer is under my complete control. Soon the rest of the universe too will be mine. Prepare to die."

That was all. No name. Nothing. Within hours, everything began to fall apart. Power everywhere shut off. The weather turned from sunny to hail as the hijacked intelligence was superseded by the virus program. Patrician Broadcasting's Pledge Night was interrupted for the first time in centuries. By the next morning, all of Xenon's defenses had been disarmed. The mail was delivered late. Everyone on the entire planet received bills payable for millions of buckazoids, due on receipt, and every AstroTellerMachine displayed an Out Of Order message. Chaos was sudden and universal. Days later, cyborgish soldiers began streaming from the central computer. They called themselves Sequel Police, but promised no tomorrows. They were followed by the mutoids and the zomboids and the Droids o' Death. Those of us who could flee, did. The rest died. Millions upon cindered millions. We survivors do what we can to fight back, but we have few weapons and less hope.

Just last week, in another hopeless, daring raid, we discovered that the central computer had perfected the art of time travel. Somehow, we were able to steal a portable time-ripping unit and escape. We have sent our two best fighters—our very leaders—back in time to find the legendary Roger Wilco. He is our last hope. He must find a way into the central computer and reprogram or deactivate it.

I am sorry that this message is so brief, but I am but a programmer, unaccustomed to communicating with self-replicating organic life-form modules, or getting my work finished on time.

Luke, if we have been successful, you must find Wilco and convey this message to him. For me, it is too late. I hope it is not too late for the rest of the universe.

In the words of Wilco's totemic hero, the Lone Space Ranger: "May the horse be with you!"

The holo broke into noise, then vanished. But all had been made clear to me:

- Sludge Vohaul was alive in digital cyberspace; he, the mysterious virus. I had killed his body, but not his foul intelligence.



- The rebel lad's story confirmed as true; Vohaul's hatred of me burned, rekindled and undiminished.
- And still another affirmation of the truth that videogame addiction can destroy civilization.

All was clear; my past, my present, and my immediate future. To find and destroy Vohaul at the risk of my own life wouldn't be easy, but this Space Ranger was the most experienced being for the job. Of course, I was also the only being around, but you get the idea. It was oh so clear.

Except, who the heck was Luke?

The entrance to Xenon's sewers was through a closed hatch on the other side of the maintenance office. It took but a practiced spin of the door's pressure wheel for it to slide open. It took but one step for me to pass inside. It took but one clang and click for me to realize that the hatch had locked behind me. And it took but one look to see that there was no way to open it from inside the sewer—where I was standing.

By the unwashed outhouses of GloryHole, I mused. I do hope I can find a way out of here before I have to take another breath.

I found myself in a broad tunnel lined on both sides with conduit of varying sizes. The tunnel was made from some form of tefloid-coated ceramic or plastoid, which kept the solid matter endemic to such places from sticking around. There was almost no liquid on the floor either, making this the cleanest-looking sewer I had ever been in. The smell seemed to exude from the many small vents that dotted the tunnel. I wondered what might be behind them, but didn't wonder so hard as to actually check.

From where I emerged in the sewer, I was faced with the choice of walking up a moderate gradient, or down. I chose up, usually a wise choice in darkish places prone to contain rats and excrement. My path took me up just for a short way, and then leveled off. Occasionally other tunnels connected to the one I was moving through, but they all seemed to plunge down deeper into the muck. To follow them would increase the chance of getting lost or confused. Since that's easy enough for me to do without any help, I continued straight ahead. There would be time enough for deviation later if my initial path proved fruitless.

Flash back for a moment, if you please, to what the Obi One said about his fear of prowling slimes in the sewers. Finished? He had a good point. After walking for some time along level tunnel, my path tilted downward. I continued forward, but found myself holding my breath more often. I hadn't progressed far when I heard a glooping sound behind me, not unlike ineptly flung jelloid slapping against cafeteria tile during a food fight. A fast glance back confirmed my suspicion, but it wasn't an innocent dessert plopping to the ground. Instead, it was an extensive



puddle of greenish, glowing, gelatinous goop moving under its own power. Acidic fumes steamed up from its ever-changing form, and the slime hissed hotly as it flowed downhill behind me.

I ran. Down deeper I went, all the time hearing the green blob steam closer. Ahead, the faint outline of a ladder climbing to the ceiling brought new speed to my rushing feet. Closer it came, closer. But not quickly enough. Then, to one side, a tunnel appeared, branching off at an angle from the one I was in. With one last sprint, I flung myself into it just meters before the onrushing slime. It was close enough to smell, even over the other aromas of the sewer. And it smelled like—yes, concentrated Janitor-In-A-Jug, the galaxy's best combination cleaning solution and universal solvent. Living Janitor-In-A-Jug, perhaps, but the real stuff. Perhaps it was even produced from green slimes; I had never before given much thought to its origin, and I didn't stop to consider it then. My janitorial instincts took over.

Years of sanitation engineering experience connected the dots of unbidden thought and concluded that the glass jar I was carrying was an effective container for the goop, and that one never knows when an all-purpose product like that might come in handy. I had successfully captured half a jar full of the stuff, and recorked the bottle, before I had even finished figuring out what I was doing. Dumb luck again? Nah. There was no luck involved at all. Just another professional moment for a highly trained professional. Even if I had become a Space Ranger, my janitorial expertise stayed with me.

Gravity kept the slime from following when I ducked into the side tunnel. It flowed past me, reduced from our meeting and a little less for the experience. I grinned slightly. It takes an exceptional jelloid to outwit Roger Wilco, and that day in the sewers I proved my innate superiority once again.

When the blob had finally passed, I stepped out of the side tunnel, took but a half-dozen steps, and arrived at the ladder I had been unable to reach during my flight. I had come that close before death by fast dissolve had come even closer. The steel ladder led up to a heavy street hole cover and my way out of Xenon's sewers. I wasted no time in using it. Well, I tried to work fast, but those metal covers are heavy, and excess physical strength and I are not comfortable together. Still, I was finally able to move the thing far enough to take a furtive peek at the outside world.



Into the Belly of the Beast

Dusk had arrived while I was in the sewers, bringing its usual fading light and low visibility with it. There was enough light left, though, to show that I had emerged at the back of an alley, and was still trapped in the blocked-off plaza.



"Drat!" I cursed. The strong language blurted out of me as if I had spent a lifetime in the Space Marines. I was glad there were no innocents present to be shocked. In the distance I could see a shuffling zomboid trailed by the inevitable Droid o' Death. Beyond them, another Sequel Police patrol prowled, still looking for survivors to kill. And in the sky, a transport shuttle roared out of the domed edifice, which hulked above the city like a towering tombstone. The ship circled twice, slowed, and then touched down 50 meters or so away from where I was peeking out of the ground. A half-dozen new troopers dashed from it, arms at the ready, and disappeared into the far shadows. As I watched the craft's landing hatch shut, I realized that the shuttle would make an excellent escape vehicle for me. All I had to do was hijack it before the troops came back. And do it unarmed. And unaided. And by myself.

Looking back, it's easy to say that it was a dumb idea. But faced with slimes below, and the perils of the street, it seemed like my best alternative at the time. Anyway, dumb ideas are one of my strong points.

I waited a few moments to make sure the area was clear of immediate danger. I pushed the sewer cover aside with a repressed grunt, then sprinted for the back of the shuttle. When I got there, I pressed myself against the hull and caught my breath. From inside, I could hear the sounds of the flight crew preparing to take off again, but the hatch was locked tight. So much for that idea. It was time for Plan the second—stowing away. Just behind me, lift engines began revving, preparing for flight. From across the mall came the sounds of approaching Sequel Police. Up and into the landing gear compartment I scrambled. Within seconds, the shuttle was airborne. The vessel's wheels retracted, but stopped a comfortable distance from my outstretched body, as I was sure they would. If my tours of duty in space had taught me but one thing, it was that the wheel housings in shuttlecraft are perfect places to catch a secret nap. I sometimes think they were designed that way on purpose. I had tested my observation often; even retracted, there is always room for a janitor's hourly break and snooze. Just the thought of past naps put me immediately to sleep. Thus, I was carried dreamlessly (and safely) away from the streets of Xenon, and into the dark seat of Sludge Vohaul's power and domination.

As it turned out, it was fairly bright in the landing bay of the planetary super computer, as most highly secure military installations are. The bumps of the shuttle's landing woke me, and the sounds of voices coming from every direction kept me huddled in my hiding place. At last, retreating footsteps, followed by relative silence, suggested that it might be safe to move. A peek outside the wheel housing revealed no guards or crew nearby. As lightly as I could, I swung myself down onto the floor and pressing back tightly, tried to blend into the shuttle's hull.

Thanks to the bright lighting, it was pretty easy for me to get my bearings. Above me, a poorly hung neon sign hung tilted to one side, blinking a taunting message:



**Welcome to Xenon:
Central Planetary Super Computer
(A Division of Vohaul Enterprises)**

**Parking Limit: 20 Minutes
Meters run all day
Violators will be terminated**

Same old Sludge, I decided. It takes a lot more than mere physical death to improve his disposition—or sense of humor.

I knew I had to find a new hiding place quickly. In the distance to my right, I could see a door leading deeper into the complex. Just beyond it, an armed goon stood watch, back turned to me. I began to move, and the guard began to turn. *Bad idea, Wilco!* I was seconds from discovery with no time to climb back into the shuttle. Again I concealed myself behind the ship. The guard stayed put. A sudden sucking noise drew my attention the opposite way. A strange craft was materializing into solidity, accompanied by the sound of displaced matter much like incoming parcel time at a FedEx box. But it didn't look like any kind of mail delivery I had ever seen. For one thing, there was no mailbox. For another, when the vehicle appeared, it seemed to be existing at some different, faster frame rate than everything else around it. And it was doing it backward. When the shimmering stopped and the wavering settled down, it became apparent that the machine had not come from someplace else at all. It could have only come from *somewhen* else. The Obi One's message had said that the Overlord—Vohaul!—had mastered time travel, and the decals on the craft's rear confirmed the fact:

**Centauri City Mesozoic World's Fair
I ♥ Atlantis by the Sea
Where the (expletive deleted) is Gondwanaland?
My parents visited the Big Bang. . .
and all they brought back was this stupid bumper sticker**

The time machine looked a lot like any industry standard, wingless HoneyBee fighter, except instead of a needle nose, its front was more like a collection of clogged shower drains—at least, that's my professional opinion, and I know a few things



about blocked drains. A bronzed plastoid hatch levered up from a slim, narrow body, and an armed Sequel COP jumped out. I shied back against my exposed hiding place, but the cyborg wasted no time looking in my direction. It was joined at once by a second COP who appeared from someplace beyond my line of sight. Turning away from my direction, the pair moved from the time machine while the first made its report.

"No sight of Wilco, Time Master. I checked out both the Space Quest II and III eras, but there was no sign of the puny human. He must be in some other sequel."

"Or, he might be here."

"No way. This isn't a sequel; this is reality."

"Listen, stupid, reality is merely a sequel to something completely different, and a prequel to another thing altogether."

"But you're merely arguing cause and effect, not existential epistemology!"

"Not at all. One must always look at time ontologically."

"But when time travel is concerned, that's just reduced to *argumentum ad absurdum*. . ."

We'll let the two Sequel Police continue their symposium on sophomore philosophy—I know I did at the time, and still have no idea at all about what they were talking. I suspect they didn't either. But their discussion did take all of their attention, and since I had neither the motivation nor the ability to follow it, I used the opportunity to tiptoe past them and sneak into the now forgotten time machine. As I settled into its seat, I heard their voices fade away as they carried their dialogue elsewhere. The cockpit hatch automatically slid down into position around me. I was alone, safe for the moment. All eternity was at my fingertips. That left the slight matter of just how to fly a time machine.

I had hoped that the controls would consist of just one long lever for stopping and starting, a dial for choosing a target date and, perhaps, some flight controls to let me navigate once I reached someplace (*somewhen?*) else. You know, a place as romantically old fashioned as the impossible idea of time travel itself. To sail the white wine seas of Chronos in wooden ships, canvas sails drinking the tachyon winds of eternal change! To bet the lottos of yesterday and the markets of tomorrow! To one such as Sludge Vohaul, though, there is no romance nor spirit of discovery or adventure. The past is there to be pillaged and rewritten; the future, to be dominated and controlled (and also pillaged and rewritten). Sludge has always seemed a creature of habit—mostly bad.

Controls. The time machine controls were as sparse as they were unintelligible. A single red button for raising the hatch. A blank vid screen for playing video games, apparently out of order, with no secret messages scratched into its surface. A digital keypad inscribed with unknown symbols, either alphabetic, hieroglyphic, or a cyborgic vision of modern art. Whatever it was, I didn't understand it at all.



Still, I could deduce that the keypad was where you typed in an intended destination—what little good that might be. My conclusion seemed reinforced by a small readout above the pad; a collection of the strange scratchings was displayed there; most likely they corresponded to just where I was at the moment. I made a note of them for safekeeping, in the unlikely event I was correct in my conclusion. Outside I heard the Sequel Police returning.

Put yourself in my situation: what would you have done? Right. Holding back an involuntary yelp, I punched the pad's buttons at random, filled the readout with symbols, then slammed the heel of my palm against what looked like a GoForIt key. Beneath me, flex-time engines began fluxing the time line of consensual reality. (Perhaps it was flux-time engines flexing their muscles.) Whatever happened, I was overcome by a strong feeling of being late for some engagement, followed by a case of *deja vu*, followed by amnesia, followed still again by the feeling I was living in the wrong century, and culminating in the sure knowledge that I knew the answers to every history test ever given. My guts twitched and got ready to spill, then thought better of it. The time machine rumbled, shivered, faded for an endless time that was no time at all. That's all. The engines powered down; I had traveled nowhere. Outside, the COPS were moving closer and pointing in my direction.



Talons of Terror

By the eternal blue waters of TyeDeeBowl VII! I panicked. I stabbed randomly at the keypad again. An image of the Lone Space Ranger fleeing a lynch mob on TwinPeaks VI flashed out of my subconscious.

"Heigh, ho, Sliver!" I screamed, and punched GoForIt again. Everything that had happened before happened again, with one difference: a light show. The Here and Now faded and dissolved, replaced by the NoWhen NotNever. My life rewound before my eyes, backward. Colors I had never imagined flashed and swirled, resolved into funny cartoon images, then transmuted into visible sound. The sound made light began to strobe, scrambled my brain waves with their cyclic frequencies, then completely disappeared. They were replaced by somewhere, *somewhen* else. The trip was at least as much fun as jumping through a time rip.

The SomeWhere SomeWhen was something else altogether. At first glance it looked like a desert, another planet probably. In all directions, plateaus, pinnacles, and decaying buttes leered over endless canyons. Gigantic twisted limestone spires pointed skeletal fingers into the sky like a thousand obscene gestures. It was as if I was looking across a primordial sea bottom, its waters evaporated away until there was not even a memory left. Above, a watery blue sun burned straight down leaving few shadows in its wake. I stepped out of the time machine and stared in wonder



at the glaring, washed-out sky. Here, too, words had been branded into the fabric of time and space, just as they had been on Xenon:

Welcome to:

Space Quest X—The Latex Babes of Estros

(Adults Only!)

It must just be some normal side-effect of time travel, I concluded. *There has to be a rational, scientific explanation for this.* Satisfied with my own explanation, I decided to look around for a bit and stretch my legs before time ripping onward.

My time machine rested by a sheer edge atop one of the innumerable tall buttes. A step beyond it lay an enormous drop straight down. Wind-carved steps cut into the rock at my feet created the impression of a staircase down from where I stood. Far below, a reflective spark of blue light suggested there might still be some water remaining at the base of the butte. The flat area extended westward, and ended in a similar stone staircase. I decided to check out that one first, mostly because of the presence of a wide shady spot; it was quite warm on Estros, and relief from the sun was already becoming desirable. In fact, it was much cooler in the shade, but I didn't have time to relax in its comfort. No sooner had I sheltered there than the sun of Estros was momentarily blocked by something quite large—something quite large and flying. One look up was enough to convince me that there was a big, big bird in the sky, and as it dipped toward where I was resting, I knew also that it was looking for more than milk and cookies. I did what I could—I ran, sprinting back to my abandoned time machine. But once there, it looked too fragile and small to offer much protection from the hunter in the sky. Down then; attempt to skip down the crumbly sand steps without breaking a neck. Keep running, Roger.

It was a good try, but the creature's talons caught hold of my clothes when I was just a dozen or so steps from the top. A loud "Caw! Caw! Caw!" accompanied my inevitable yank into the sky. I screamed in terror (I always do), and looked down to see the surface of Estros a full kilometer below. At least it looked that way, and my discovery of an extensive shallow sea down there did nothing to mitigate my vertigo and panic. I shut my eyes as tightly as I could get them; if death waited at the other end of this flight, I didn't want to see it coming.

What was waiting for me was a solid thud and thump as the beast dropped me into its nest. It was a short fall, over almost before I realized what had happened. The impact opened my eyes, and as I blinked the noon glare from them, I could see the retreating form of my kidnapper—a TerrorDactyl from beyond time. At least



that's what it was called in the vid I rented once, the one where the Lone Space Ranger brought law and order to a planet of prehistoric nude guano wrestlers. But I had landed alive, and that usually counts for something.

I found myself in the TerrorDactyl's nest, a collection of dried twigs, mud, bird droppings, and the bones and skulls of prior meals. Many of the latter remains were emphatically humanoid, and I had an immediate vision of an eyeless skull with FORMERLY THE PROPERTY OF: ROGER WILCO gnawed into it. But only if I didn't escape.

At that moment, the TerrorDactyl returned, plunging out of the sun to swoop at its nest once more, drop another tidbit, and soar away again with a screech. Luckily, the new morsel missed hitting me; it was a full-sized body, and those can seriously hurt when they fall on a being. Instead, it impaled on several of the sharp twigs, dangling floppily centimeters above the nest's floor. It was enough to make one vomit. I did.

There was nothing to be done for the bird's newest victim. I'm not sure I'd have wanted to anyway; although it looked human, the victim turned out to be one of the Sequel Police. No blood flowed from it, just some thin lubricating fluid and a trickle of clear plasma. Cyborgs are a mix of the organic and the mech, but these minions of Vohaul were definitely skimpy on the human side. I did hold my stomach in check long enough to search the carcass for weapons (or a time machine instruction booklet), but I found nothing but a scrap of paper wrapped around a wad of well-used chewing gum substitute. On the paper was scribbled a series of characters similar to those on the time machine keypad. Directions somewhere? I didn't know but I stuffed the find into a pocket before rushing to the side of the nest to empty my guts again. The Sequel Police had followed me. It was not a good sign; things were not looking up for me at all. Somehow the thought made the barfing come even easier.

The TerrorDactyl had made its home much closer to the surface of Estros than I had expected, not more than 20 meters or so above an expanse of deep (I hoped), still water. Given the fact that the gravity of Estros felt a bit lighter than what I was accustomed to from being born on Xenon, I figured that a fall from such a height into deep (I hoped) water shouldn't kill me. Since the alternative was a less appetizing choice (so to speak), all I needed was to find a way out of the nest. A bit of poor construction in one side—a hole—provided that. I squeezed through and dropped.

Since the first attempts at space travel, successful water landings have been called splashdowns. Why? Our most common legend has it that it was because space flight was first discovered by the liquid Plumbers of Drain 0. They always splash when they land. As theories go, I've bought worse.

Splashdown for me went as I had planned. The water was deep and cold, and it broke my fall without causing serious injury. I hit, went under, breathed too soon,



choked, surfaced, gagged, then swam ashore. Above, I could hear the TerrorDactyl scream in frustration. All had gone as I had hoped. Almost.



The Latex Babes' Revenge

I was shaking the waters of Estros off of me when a new set of screams replaced the dactyl's. Shouts of "For the Goddess!" and "By the smooth creamy forelegs of Nair!" came from all sides, echoed and reechoed among the canyon walls. Pulse rifles glinted among the shadows and a trio of armed women—human women—dashed from their concealment among the rocks. They pointed their weapons at me, and I could feel the tickle of laser sights resting just below my beltline. Silently they stood there, rifles ready, but I was convinced they were not aiming to please.

A new sound came from behind me. I turned to see a submarine suddenly surfacing from the previously peaceful water. A hatch slammed open, and more women stormed out. At their head, a tall, muscular, buxom blond warrior, unbound hair defying the breeze, was aiming an ion blaster at me. From the notches visible on the barrel, it was obvious that the fem knew how to use a gun. She was dressed like the others in sleeveless, legless, neckless, backless rubberoid battle armor, slit navel deep in front. Her uniform was the color of her eyes, a cool sapphire blue. Her face was out of my dreams.

"Cornucopia!" I shouted. It couldn't be. It wasn't. Her eyes narrowed.

"I am not one of your limp nocturnal fantasies, Wilco," she growled. "And I am not Cornucopia Agricorp. One of her more attractive clones, perhaps, but not her. And keep your eyes above my chest." I quickly looked up.

"But who are you then? How do you know my name?"

"How could I *not* know your name, puny human *male*. Didn't I let you conquer my affections, win my hand, and do with me as you pleased? Did I not allow myself to fall in love with Roger Wilco, and do with you as I pleased? Did we not plan to spend eternity together, riding the spaceways, righting wrongs, eating in the best restaurants, and greeting each new dawn in exhausted bliss?"

"We did?"

"I am the hereditary leader of the Latex Babes of Estros. How dare you come back here, callously expecting to pick up again where we left off. After not calling, or writing, or anything in all this time. I am not your plaything, Wilco. I will not be toyed with, and I will not be scorned in front of all Estros. No *man* dumps Zhondra Wysiwyg without asking her permission first." A cheer followed her words, the first sound her followers had made.

"I didn't?"



"Don't play innocent with me. And don't tell me you've forgotten what we once meant to each other. I still have the tattoo we pledged our love with."

Tattoo? No matter how closely I stared, I couldn't see a sign of one on her.

"Eyes up. Now, into the sub. You're going to pay for jilting me, Wilco. Back to Underwater City, Babes. It's time for everyone to see what this puny space jockey is made of, and if he's still wearing our special love tattoo. It's a pity that the show will be such a *short* one."

With no choice in the matter, and with absolutely no idea of what Zhondra was raving about, I jumped into the submarine, where I was bound and gagged securely. For the entire trip I wondered what could have happened between the two of us. At last, I realized that it hadn't happened yet, at least from my perspective. But it was quite real to her. Time travel can be so confusing. All I did know was, that despite my ignorance of the future (past?), I was perfectly willing to kiss and make up with Zhondra. Especially the making up part.

The Underwater City of the Latex Babes can only be entered through a series of submerged tubes and tunnels, all of which are heavily guarded. At the city's center, the passage ends in a wide pool where subs can surface and then dock. Little time was wasted after the craft was secured; I was led under armed guard off of the submarine and onto an exposed platform facing the water. A mechanical contrivance had been bolted to the floor there—a metal-and-plastoid chair, reinforced with strong restraints for wrists, waist, and legs, obviously designed to keep whomever was invited to sit in it from getting back up. Various small drills, lights, and mirrors were attached to the chair, and one small spittoon awaited expectorated bodily fluid. I had seen such a device once in a historical drama on Patrician Broadcasting. It was in a PBS special on feeling good about yourself through involuntary pain.

Anyway, I was the day's invitee. The gag and ropes of the submarine were replaced by the chair's many shackles. An especially bright light was aimed at my eyes. I blinked a few times, and then Zhondra approached. She was accompanied by a sinister, dark-haired, scarfaced, oddly attractive Babe whose latex uniform was abundantly accessorized with studded black leather. If anything, she wore even less than Zhondra, a fact, I hoped, that would help ease the discomfort of the ensuing torture.

Zhondra lightly touched a button on the chair's arm, and a quick, sharp singe zapped at my legs—accompanied by a laser flash and the smell of scorched hair. I yelped, more in surprise than pain, more in anticipation than discomfort.

"Now, now, Roger, don't be such a crybaby. And I do know how much you like to scream. Look. All we've done is burn off your boots, part of your uniform, and provided you with a pair of *al fresco* cutoffs. You always did have such slim legs, and it will help make Thoreen's job a little easier for her." I looked down at my naked knees; the hair was still smoking.



"I don't think you've been introduced to Thoreen; she's a former preschool teacher, dental assistant, and now in semiretirement as the official torturer to the State of Estros. It's not that she doesn't like men, it's just that she likes them better screaming. So I brought her an expert—you. Treasure your moments together, they will never come again."

Thoreen moved closer to me, smiled, kissed a finger, then ran it slowly up my bare leg until she came to the melted edge of my pants. She pinched the cloth lightly between thumb and forefinger, then pulled it slightly away from my flesh.

"Nice fabric, Wilco," she said, "but it will have to go." Her grin turned feral as she brought her other hand from behind her back. It held a deluxe model vibro-razor happily humming away and waiting to go to work. My composure cracked at once.

"Don't shave my legs, please," I begged. My muscles strained, but they could not bust my bonds.

"Oh, you're so cute when you squirm," Thoreen chortled. "It's not smooth legs that I'm after." Her eyes traveled a little further up my torso. "I thought we'd start with a more delicate matter. Or two."

Thoreen's knife descended, and my screams reached a higher pitch. Closer she came, savoring the pleasure each new moment of anticipation brought.

And then came chaos.

From where I sat imprisoned, I could see it burst out of the Underwater City's entrance pool. It weighed a thousand kilos at least, and it towered ten meters above the surrounding dock. Green and red and yellow and orange it was colored, covered in scales, and smelling of the deep. It roared like a bunnus in heat, revealing jaws that could swallow an entire Roger Wilco whole. A Flounderoid like none I had ever seen before (even on PBS), it possessed teeth and claws and an appetite for destruction.

With its first bellows, Thoreen turned and ran. She was slightly behind the rest of the Babes.

With its second roar, it focused its attention on me, shackled and splayed like a choice bit of bait. Tentacles shot out of its mouth, from places tentacles have no natural right to be, and started wrapping themselves around me, pulling and yanking with the impatience of a killing time. Within moments, it tore the manacles out of the chair and began entwining my freed arms and legs. My right arm swiped a tentacle away, then slammed against the red button on the chair's arm. At once, the lasers that had undressed me fired; instead of pure, natural polyvinyl fabric, they hit red fish flesh.

With its third roar, the flounderoid let me go momentarily, an involuntary reaction to its sudden pain. I bounded from the chair, then slipped in slime. Momentum carried me into a stack of pressurized metal bottles stacked haphazardly nearby. They were inscribed:



Danger:

**Pressurized Oxygen
Handle With Care!**

I grabbed one in desperation.

With its fourth roar, the beast's tentacles lashed out again, grabbed tightly, and began dragging me into its open maw. I couldn't scream, its breath was too heavily fragrant for me to inhale. Closer, faster, it dragged me, my bare feet skidding on the wet floor. Wider, its waiting mouth opened. In one last despairing effort, I flung the oxygen tank between the flounderoid's jaws. It munched. It crunched. It neglected to handle with care.

The fifth roar the thing made was its innards exploding. With a last hot belch, it dropped me down and sank back into the sea. I got quite a bit of gore on what was left of my clothing.

"Roger. My hero!" From the safety of wherever she had hidden, Zhondra ran to me, reholstering her ion blaster as she did. She nearly crushed my back with the fury of her hug and kisses.

"Roger, I had never guessed you were so brave. You've saved both us and our city. You're a hero to all of the Latex Babes of Estros." A great cheer went up around us.

"We—I!—forgive you everything!" Another hug from Zhondra, and then I could feel Thoreen nibbling at one of my ears. The other Babes impatiently waited for their turns. Despite what I had been through, I can't say that I objected to their attentions.

Zhondra stepped back from our embrace, took a long look at me, then smiled slyly.

"What do you think about getting out of those clothes, Roger? We'd like to reward you properly for what you've done. What about it ladies?" New cheers.

"Take me, I'm yours," I blushed.

"That's exactly what we're going to do," Zhondra exclaimed. "We're going to take you to the mall and get you some clean clothes. What do you say? Let's ride, Babes!"



Fist Full of Buckazoids

In my own time, the Galaxy Galleria hasn't been built yet, but I can't wait until it is. Having been there and experienced all of its marvels (and wide choice of



name-brand merchandise), I'm convinced that it will be the shopping experience of a lifetime. (Or in my case several lifetimes—and all of them at the same time. Time travel can do things like that to you.) I'd especially like to go there without Vohaul's Sequel Police on my tail. But then, I wasn't even aware that they were tailing me the first time I went.

The Galaxy Galleria sits (will sit) just off the LarryLand exit of InterGalactic sub-space wormhole Route $C=2\pi r$. In a stroke of both marketing and engineering genius, its developers used that very formula in creating the circular mall. The Babes and I arrived there mid-week, a year or so after its Grand Opening Sale, so the crowds weren't so bad. But still, smart shoppers from all over known space jostled on its moving beltways as they bustled from one elegant emporium to another. All of the great retail chains are (will be) there:

RadioactiveSchlock—premiere purveyor of flimsy subelectronic gadgets, gizmos, and extremely personal computers.

KegHead Software—happy brews from a thousand planets share shelf space with the best in electronic games and the newest versions of business solution classics like Lettuce 1001-1002-1003; UtterlyPerfectWords, revision 107.27.14.8 (temp); and Widows version "If you have to ask, you haven't upgraded often enough."

WallMart—"Don't build homes without us!"

Words-B-Us—Literacy by the ounce. "Over 100 titles to choose from, or let us write your favorite novel for you. One-hour service."

Spandex To Die For—Aerobics, casual, and formal wear for women of all genders.

The Men's Warehouse—Last week's fashions at today's prices. Everyman welcome. Lycanthropes our specialty. Closed during full moons.

ScumWorld Arcade—Videogames for the experientially deprived and the socially unclear.

Zero-G Skate-o-Rama—"When it's time to lighten up and hang as many as you've got."

Monolith Burger—"Just for the krill of it."

Consumerism in its most perfect form, Galaxy Galleria is well worth waiting for.

When we arrived at the mall, I was ready to be treated to a shopping spree by the Babes. It may very well have happened except the Estros ladies immediately saw a sign indicating a Giant Shoe Sale and Hair Makeover at a nearby Fidel Baboon's factory outlet shop. It was too much for any of them to resist. Tossing a Dial-A-Bank card at me (and missing), Zhondra urged me to shop till I flopped, blew a kiss, and hustled away. It was the last I saw of her, or any of the Latex Babes. For all I know they're still shopping, unable to decide on just what hairstyle or shade of footwear to purchase. I'm sure they didn't decide to forget about me and go home.



Anyway, card in hand, I set out to find some new clothes and a bite to eat. First stop, Monolith Burger.

There is often genius in conformity, a point that is proven no better than by the great orange arches of the Monolith Burger chain. No matter which of the over one billion branches you visit, they all look and smell identical. The plankton patties are always fresh, the lichen fries exactly 43.6 percent fat free, the krill cookies sweet and boneless, and the neo-petroleum shakes and sundaes colored to the proper shade of premium unleaded. It may be a formula, but it works.

That day at the mall, I had a hankering for my usual; a Monolith Fun Meal and a medium diet H₂O (hold the ice). I had discovered that a pocketful of buckazoids of my own had survived my adventures, and planned to splurge part of it on some krill cookies for dessert. So great was my anticipation, I could taste my meal even before I entered.

But getting inside proved to be a problem. I had taken two, maybe three, steps through the arches before some porcine Swineoid stepped out of the sparse crowd, grabbed me by my collar, lifted me from the floor, and tossed me outside onto the beltway. And my butt.

"Can't ya read da sign?" he shouted after me. "No Shirt, No Shoes, No Sentience—No Service." Usually I let you get by with two out of three, but all you've got is the shirt. Beat it. But if you do come back, I've got a job open, and Monolith Burger isn't very picky about who we hire—as long as they're wearing shoes and a shirt. Good help is so hard to find. Have a nice whatever!" The words dwindled as the moving walkway carried me further and further from the restaurant.

But it was the same beltway that carried me effortlessly by the Men's Werehouse, clothier to the small and tall—and, more importantly, official outfitter to the Space Rangers. Up from the ground I lurched, realized again that moving walkways make me nauseous, then staggered off into the men's store. Stability soothed my stomach and I began looking around. When the sales droid finally offered to help, I requested something in the way of an official uniform, and asked if he had any on sale. The droid sneered, then asked me how much I could afford. We haggled ritually for a few minutes and finally settled on the prior week's model uniform and a pair of previously owned boots. Deal made, I changed, paid up, and left. I held my laugh until I was out of earshot of the store; last week's classic model looked exactly like the current new and improved fashion, and it only cost me a few buckazoids more. It was a real steal.

With shirt, shoes, and sentience all in order, gaining admittance to Monolith Burger proved no problem the second time. The swineoid who had rejected me before was the only being in the place. He stood at attention behind the counter waiting for business and sucking on a fat, lighted piece of tabac weed. Pinned to his yellow, orange, brown and rust-colored uniform was a name tag:



WELCOME
I'M
SNARKGURGLE SNUFFLESLURPLE, THE YOUNGER
MANAGER

"What can I do fer ya, Space Ranger?" Snuffleslurple asked. "Would you care to hear about today's specials?" The manager blew a cloud of blue cigar smoke into my face.

"No thanks," I choked.

"That's just as well, we're out of everything anyway."

"No Fun Meals?"

"Nope."

"No cellulite tacos?"

"Negative."

"No krill cookies? Curried broccoli shakes? Arcturian bungspittle sundaes?"

"That's right. And no fries, special sauce, Orat parts, virtual veggie salads, or nacho-scented breath mints either. Nothing. All my employees have either quit or are off celebrating Mall Awareness Day."

"That's too bad. I guess I'll have to go elsewhere. Is there a Tiffany's around here? I hear that they're a great breakfast place."

"Look here, Space Ranger. I need some help, and you look like you need a straight job. Tell you what; I'll pay you a buckazoid for every burger you make. You'll get a potty break daily and a day off every other month. There's no medical insurance, but you start in management as a full-bird assistant manager. Plus, I'll let you eat for free. Is it a deal?"

Was it a deal? I'll do almost anything for a free meal, even work. Better yet, I'd take the job, fill up on all the all-plankton patties I could eat, flip a few burgers, then leave. Free food and a chance to repay Snarkgurple for throwing me out earlier.

"When do I start?"

"Now. So stop standing there yapping and get to work." Snarkgurple grabbed me again, pulled me across the counter, and puffed new smoke into my face. "Kitchen's that way. Mess up too much and you're outta' here."

Mess up? Roger Wilco mess up? The manager was totally unaware that despite my aversion and abhorrence to video and arcade games, I was a grandmaster of Astro Chicken (The Mindless Arcade Game). Hand-to-eye coordination and the ability to master inane repetitive tasks come easily to me. Not only that, I was also a highly trained professional Sanitation Engineer second class (Ret.). My ability to stick either hand in either of my eyes was (and still is) legendary.



Let no sapient tell you, however, that carefully assembling a Monolith Burger is child's play. It's not. Have you ever tried to sequentially place two plankton patties, lettuce substitute, sour vegetable matter, two different exotic sauces—mustard and ketchup (or is it catsup?)—a secret sauce, and a dash of cellulose extender on one half of a soft bun? And perform these tasks in the proper order? More than once? If you still think that's child's play, consider this: Not only did I do all of those things correctly, and often, but I had to end each sequence by topping the concoction with a sesame-seed bun part. And make sure the top bun stuck to the rest. I had thought the job to be menial, but it challenged all my reflexes, both mental and physical.

By the time I had crafted a full three dozen of the insidious masterpieces, I had become too exhausted to see straight. Fatigue made my attention waver. A slip of the hand here, a slap of the eye there. Inevitably, I began to mess up. Even with eight free Fun Meals in my belly, I betrayed the high standards of workmanship demanded of every Monolith Burger employee. Snuffleslurple began to take notice. Finally, without warning, I was given the boot—fired, terminated, downsized, permanently laid off, involuntarily displaced, and outplaced, all at the same time. I landed butt first on the beltway, one more statistic in the abundance of society's leading economic indicators. To his credit, Snarkgurgle paid me what I was owed in cash. He also emphasized his displeasure with my performance (or lack thereof) by flipping his stogie at my posterior. It missed and was carried away on the moving sidewalk.

"Don't you know littering is a crime?" I shot back at him.

"And *loitering* is a capital offense. Keep moving, Space Ranger, or I'll call the mall patrol about you."



For a Few Buckazoids More

While I travel around Galaxy Galleria licking my wounds (and the last traces of secret sauce from my chin), let me summarize my situation. I was at the mall with no way out. The time machine was back on Estros, the Latex Babes had disappeared, I didn't have a lot of money in my pocket, and had no idea how I was going to find Sludge Vohaul. The future was doomed and the Sequel Police were looking for me. It was enough to make one depressed. I needed something to get my mind off of my problems. Like getting an adapter for the PocketLINT I had found, and maybe buying a game to play while I was at it. And for that I needed more cash. I hoped Zhondra's Dial-A-Bank card wasn't overdrawn.

Better to shop than just sit on this beltway going around and around, I thought. Decision made, I got off at the entrance to the mall and started to look for an



AstroTellerMachine. There, still polluting the environment, lay Snuffleslurple's discarded cigar, looking like a piece of unscooped canine dropping waiting for a felony citation. Since I couldn't leave it there offending public cleanliness, I stuck it in a pocket for eventual disposal. I neglected to check first, but luckily the cigar had gone out.

My luck has turned for the better already.

And I thought so again when the Dial-A-Bank AstroTellerMachine (an ATM) turned out *not* to be out of order—a major surprise in itself. On the other hand, the teller incorporated a face scanner in its operation. In went the card. Out went the card.

```
User ID * invalid *  
Face scan * negative *
```

If you are not:

< Ms. Zhondra Wysiwyg >

any new attempt to use this card will lead to arrest
or other unpleasanties.

If you are:

< Ms. Zhondra Wysiwyg >

please return to the nearest Department of Vehicles
office and have your new facial image and/or gender
change recorded.

For more reliable results, consider using a
professional photographer.

Have a nice whatever.

This was not good.

On the other hand, as I have related before, face scanners are seldom hired for their intelligence. Cheap and plentiful, these mechs are recent arrivals from the galaxy Altair 8800 where they were deemed marginally sentient at best. In our society, they are ranked below compost spoor and digitally augmented gameshow hosts in brute brain power. But not by much. Still, I had outwitted such a device on Pestulon, and was in no mood to have the servile appliance thwart me that day. If



it was a female Zhondra it wanted to see, then I would provide one, or something similar enough to pass for one.

I have been forced by circumstances over the centuries to survive by what wits I have and little else. Occasionally, my ColdSleep-enhanced agility and balance have helped me through a crisis, as have my professionally trained sanitation reflexes. Never, until that incident at Galaxy Galleria, have I been required to employ my looks to pull me through a situation. But a Space Ranger must be creative, and with no photo of Zhondra to place before the scanner's sensors, I needed a living replica. The only volunteer for the job was me, and for the ploy to work, I needed a wardrobe.

The Spandex To Die For fashion chain's success has been built on three unchanging principles:

- Incredible selection
- Up-to-the-second styles for women of all genders
- Tight, smooth fits (where appropriate)
- Quality spandex
- Personal service
- Low prices
- A no-questions-asked money-back guarantee
- And, no questions asked

That they have been an enormous success over the centuries (trailing only Monolith Burger and Words-B-Us), is undisputed. That they've always had trouble counting beyond three only adds to their fame. Anyway, that's what computers were invented for.

The Roger Wilco who entered Spandex To Die For was looking for a little something soft and flowing, a frock that would cling in the right places, suggesting more than it revealed. Something in gingham or taffeta, perhaps. A soft plaid or subtle neon pattern. Topless? No; that would be too formal for daytime. A pair of fashion pumps, a fun blond wig, and a few versatile accessories to round out the ensemble. Fresh, clean undergarments; one never knows when you might be hit by a runaway droid and end up being examined in a hospital. Finally, a light dab of makeup, a hint of blush, and some blue-green lip liner. When I finished, I would be a new man. Or something like that.



My sizes were in stock, and I was able to find the most darling little chemise in basic day-glo black polyvinyl. And it promised to fit like it had been made just for me. The clerk followed company policy and asked no questions other than the usual size, fit, home phone number, and would I be free for dinner that night and breakfast tomorrow. I considered accepting, but I don't usually date 'bots, even cute ones.

As I paid for the outfit, I caught a glimpse of the new me in a store mirror. *Not bad at all. If I didn't know who was in that dress, I'd consider asking her out myself. At least I'd know we'd have some things in common to talk about.* Considering the possibilities of dating myself, I staggered out of the store and back to the ATM. It had been a mistake picking out high heels.

Once again, I inserted Zhondra's card into the AstroTeller. As it was digested, I pursed my lips, gave my head a mischievous shake, smiled, and blew the face scanner a kiss. A thin trail of smoke drifted from the slot. Then the screen lit up with the message I wanted to see:

```
User ID * valid *  
Face scan * positive *
```

Welcome

< Ms. Zhondra Wysiwg >

May I be permitted to say that you look exceptionally
lovely today.

How may I be of service?

1. Check your balance
2. Check your oil
3. Make a deposit
4. Make a withdrawal
5. Apply for a loan
6. Make a payment
7. Declare bankruptcy

I picked number one; Zhondra was not overdrawn.



Do you wish to make another transaction?
If so, choose another number.

Blowing the ATM another kiss, I cleaned out Zhondra's account. Over two thousand buckazoids seemed like enough for the immediate future—whenever that might be. I knew Zhondra would understand. Declining still another transaction, I removed the now worthless card and began to step away. The ATM lit up once again:

< Ms. Zhondra Wysiwyg >
You really do look especially nice.
Might you be free for dinner this evening?
Perhaps some dancing later followed by a quiet tryst in the
parking lot?

I kissed a finger, pressed it to the screen, then stepped onto the beltway. Roger Wilco had bested another face scanner, and left it begging for more. I laughed all the way back to Spandex To Die For, and then took advantage of their money-back guarantee. The clerk barely scowled, took back the merchandise, and informed me that the check was in the mail. I didn't argue. The dress had been nice, and the fit superb, but I knew I'd never be able to find (much less defeat) Sludge Vohaul if I had to keep worrying about keeping my knees together.

Now that I had a new grubstake of buckazoids in my pocket, the male-again Roger Wilco set off for RadioactiveSchlock to get an adapter for my PocketLINT. The culmination of millennia of research, the small computer had been useless to me until now. It had power, yes, but I couldn't plug it into any terminals without some sort of a male-female, male-male, female-female, male-female-ToBeDecided, or other gender connection piece of hardware.

The sales 'bot on duty directed me to the shop's automated catalogue. As usual, RadioactiveSchlock had thousands of different and unique items for sale, many of which have useful purposes. I looked for Linkup to Information Networks and Terminals device (by PocketPalSystems), and found it listed under Electronic Gadgets. Great. I looked further and found connectors. Better. Dozens, possibly hundreds, of different adapters were listed. Super. They were all different. Not so super.

I returned to the sales 'bot and showed him my PocketLINT.



"Excuse me. What kind of adapter does this take?"

"That depends on what you're connecting it to."

"I don't know. Don't you have some kind of standard adapter?"

"Don't you have better things to do than waste my time?"

"How about some software? Do you have any that will run on this thing?"

"No. Try next door at KegHead. The only software we carry doesn't run on newer computers."

"Why is that?"

"Our catalogue is so large that by the time we finish compiling it, everything listed is obsolete. So we don't bother anymore. Can I interest you in a slide rule? We have a large selection of vacuum tubes at discount prices. Perhaps an electric dandruff remover?"

The 'bot was still babbling as I walked out and went to KegHead Software hoping for better luck, and a much-needed brew.



The Future Revealed (Sort Of)

In every life, no matter how small, petty, insignificant, or menial, comes a defining moment—an instant that sums up all that has gone before, and foreshadows all that is still to come. Often, these moments redefine the being. More often, they are long past before we ever realize they've happened—if we ever realize at all.

Occasionally, that moment kicks you in the head and demands you pay attention to it. Mine did.

There was no beer at KegHead. If there had been, my personal universe would not have changed. There was software, to be sure, but I had no need for sheets that spread, processed words, published desktops, flattened files, or to create fully animated vids at the touch of a finger ("Absolutely No Talent Required"). Unspeakable languages have always left me mute, and obscure devices that convert computers in aquaria are usually beyond my comprehension. Nor was the selection of games any good to me; none were available in PocketLINT format.

"Never have been, never will be," the sales droid droned.

No. All would have been distractions to the order of reality, and would have left me stranded at the Galaxy Galleria until I became another victim of the Sequel Police, or a full-time assistant manager at Monolith Burger.

My defining moment came in the CLOSEOUT bin at KegHead, among the half-chewed mem chips, desultory flight combat simulations (not another one!), and computer adaptations of some vaguely popular vid series or flix. Buried there beneath the faded copies of games too obscure to remember was a thin paper booklet. It first caught my attention because few works are published on paper



anymore. The title *Space Quest IV Hint Book* meant nothing to me. But, I can read (words, mostly), and began leafing through its pages.

Imagine, if you can, the feeling of reading what purports to be the digital, fictional adventures of some hapless space janitor who stumbles in and out of relentless, highly unlikely adventures, and then recognizing a most strange fact. Imagine the fact was that the central character has the same name as you. Recall the Two Guys from Andromeda who had promised to put you in a computer game. Then notice that the hint book you were holding described some of the very things that were happening to you at that very moment, and purported to know *what hadn't happened to you yet*.

Are you still sane? I wasn't so sure I was just then. My own substance and solidity I was sure of; my mom and dad, SEX U and Cornucopia, skinned knees, and clogged toilets—all were as real as first-hand experience could make them. I knew I was not, and had never been, an imaginary being or a character invented for some computer adventure. And since that was the case, I could only conclude that someone in my future, or my past, was going to immortalize me that way—someone who had (has?) intimate knowledge of my life. One result of that being's efforts had ended up here in KegHead's bargain bin. Who could that be? Would I meet the Two Guys from Andromeda again? Had I already, but in a different time and, like my first meeting with Zhondra, hadn't experienced it yet? Time travel makes life so complicated.

The rebel who had rescued me said that I had been a legend in his time. With that book in my hands I knew that I was going to find Vohaul and defeat him. With the evidence of the hint book in my hands, I knew that I had become more than a Space Ranger. I had become a legend in my own time.

Yes, my life and universe changed the moment I discovered that hint book, irrevocably and forever. My life had new meaning—if I could only figure out what it all meant. I bought the slender book; knowing time travel to be a reality, I couldn't discount the fact that it contained truth. With Sludge Vohaul as an enemy, I needed every edge—every hint—I could get. Plus, it's hard to go wrong for five buckazoids. I had spent more than that playing Astro Chicken, and not thought the price too steep.



Death in the Mall

Hint book in my pocket, nerves too electric for me to start reading it, I rode the thruway around and around. Needing some way to relax, I took notice of the ScumWorld Arcade. Yes. A mindless videogame would be the perfect way to take my mind off the future. A game or two, and I'd be ready to squeeze all the secrets



I could out of the mysterious hint book. Maybe I'd even find an Astro Chicken machine.

OK. I know. I don't like arcade and video games. But all rules have exceptions (except for the rule that says all rules have exceptions; that one has none). Like all strong drugs, such diversions have their therapeutic uses. Going temporarily brainless, emulating a vegic state of existence, can be valid therapy. While no substitute for long and frequent napping, they can work the occasional wonder on the psyche.

My enthusiasm for a quick game wasn't even deterred by the vast blinking sign over the arcade's entry:

ScumWorld Arcade
A ScumSoftWorld Theme Park
(A division of Vohaul Enterprises)

Play Hard
Lose Often
Be Grateful

Inside, the sounds and lights and clamor and flashes of electronic wonderlands everywhere enveloped me like warm soup in a food fight. I could see, smell, and taste all the flavors of excitement. Dozens of frantic players shouted and banged and screamed and kicked out in ecstasies of free games and abandonment: Pacoids, Marioids, Sonicoids, Linkoids, Carmenoids, and even an ancient Voidoid—each spent their coins heedlessly. Their various salivas or other bodily secretions flowed freely and without notice, coating every surface with the slick patina of madness. It wasn't a pretty sight, but it was one with which I was familiar. That helped keep my disgust in check.

I was unfamiliar with all of the games—after all it was the future for me just then—but shining out from among the exotic entertainments was a face from the past—Astro Chicken. Wings outstretched, lips jagged into a wholesome laugh, the PBS super chef, vid celeb, and star of his own arcade game seemed to greet me with open arms (and bad metaphors). But wait, it was not the Chef of the Spaceways I saw there. Instead it was Ms. Astro Chicken, mate to the master and now a star in her own right. How could I resist plunking down my buckazoids and seeing how the Mother Most Fowl translated into a digital daredevil?

Unfortunately, the path to Ms. Astro Chicken was blocked by a crowd of adoring players waiting to take their turns. Forced deeper into the arcade, I was



squeezed into a dim corner, far away from the action. Without warning, the air near Ms. A started pulsating and wavering and the frantic gamers began fleeing in fright. This was followed by a loud sucking sound as one of Vohaul's time machines solidified into current reality. The plastoid hatch levered up to reveal the helmets of a pair of Sequel Police. I needed no hint book to tell me what they were doing at the mall.

The two Sequel Police got out. One rushed immediately outside the arcade, rifle at the ready. The other looked around the place a few times and began searching for me, moving relentlessly in my direction. To duck would be useless; to scream, insane; to stay, fatal. I paused only until the goon's attention flicked slightly away, then bolted for the exit. With a guttural shout, the COP noticed me, then gave chase. The pulse blast that followed made a molten mess of where I had been standing a moment before. Onto the beltway I raced, looking for shelter at every store I passed. I could see the Sequel Police in the distance behind me, running on the moving walkway and gaining ground with each stride. No matter how fast I ran, they kept coming closer. And to make matters worse, closing time had come to the mall. While I had been in the arcade, every storefront had been gated and locked, a precaution against thieves and a death sentence to me. Soon the Sequel Police would either catch up to me or split up, each following the moving beltways in opposite directions. In either case—whether trapped or overtaken—I was getting my last free ride.

Or was I? The arcade was still open—they never close. And the same must be true of the Zero-G Skate-o-Rama. It, too, had to be overflowing with crowds looking to relax, work up a no-grav sweat, or pick up some like-minded being with romance on his/her/its mind.

The Skate-o-Rama is a circular playground in the very middle of the mall, roofed over by a 20-meter-tall transparent dome. Inside, patrons zip around in the air on sets of totally unnecessary skates, skates which range anywhere from a single microscopic wheel through multi-wheeled versions and outrigger models. Some beings prefer bladed varieties—the frozen ammonia knife-sliders from Margarita III, for instance, have always been a favorite—while others swear by skating boards. Everyone, however, is dressed in this week's swellest colors and styles in wrinkle-free spandex, or flowing, diaphanous plastoid fabric substitute. And they're all flirting. How folks avoid constant collision through all of this was a matter of scientific debate even in my own time. There are so many runaway hormones in the air at the Zero-G that the air feels liquid with lust. Or maybe it's just perspiration; one can work up quite a sweat exercising.

At the next off-ramp, I ducked inside the Skate-o-Rama, trying to lose my pursuers there. I flung myself into the null-G atmosphere and swam up into the dome. Much more crowded there than near the floor, I hoped the Sequel Police would have a hard time seeing me among the happy throng.



Waauschsh! A pulse flamed into the crowd in my general direction. So much for losing pursuit. Into the dome I floated, flapping my arms, dodging panicked skateboarders, and doubling back toward where I had come in.

Plasusch! Another shot. At the other side of the dome, a laughing couple fell afire. Then, the police appeared closer, now in the dome, and closing quick. Down I swerved, trying to hide in the fleeing mass. Down, down, down. At the 1-G steps I looked back and saw no trace of the Sequel Police in the chaotic crowd. Out of the Skate-o-Rama I fled, never stopping, and ran straight back to the arcade. Still no sign of pursuit. Into the arcade I bolted, where the time machine stood open and unguarded. I jumped inside and the hatch closed behind me.

This is the last place they'll search for me, I thought. They should be running around the mall for a few minutes yet. Let's see if I can still make this baby fly. Or whatever time machines do.

Quickly—almost too quickly—I started to jab at the control pad buttons, then stopped. I remembered that the code on the readout should be the location of the mall, and I couldn't ignore the possibility that I might have to come back to the Galaxy Galleria sometime. Jotting the code down, memorizing it as I did, I kept looking up to see if I had been discovered yet. Again I went to stab at the panel. Stop. What's the code for Xenon? Good question; the only one I could remember clearly was the one I had just concentrated on, and that wasn't going to help a bit. I punched symbols at random, then pressed the GoForIt button. Engines fired, reality trembled, my stomach remembered a disagreeable meal from my past, and I started reciting my preschool homework. Then, everything shut down. I was still in the arcade.

OK, let's try again. I did. Nothing. Again. Again. Same result, and the inevitable return of the Sequel Police loomed closer. Stumped, I slumped and stopped. The stupid Space Quest IV game must not have been about me after all; there seemed no way for me to get out of the mall alive. Or even in one piece. But it's for situations just like mine that hint books were written.

Don't shake your head and laugh at me; I didn't invent time travel, and am not responsible for its quirks and paradoxes. It was right there on page 4: "I'm in the time pod. I'm trapped. What do I do now?" Answer: "Go to Kerona. Go to Ulence Flats. The code is. . ."

Half a code was all that showed, the rest obliterated by some greasy-fingered browser. I examined the rest of the slim book's pages and found nothing. When I turned it over, however, I found the piece of chewed gum, which I had taken from the impaled Sequel COP in the TerrorDactyl's nest, stuck to it—still wrapped (mostly) in its piece of paper. The two things must have formed a relationship when thrown together in the same pocket. I must have stared at it for a full minute before I consciously took note of the three symbols that had been scratched on the paper, symbols identical to the symbols on the time machine's input pad. And in one torn



corner was the end of what could have been a word: ATS. Ulence Flats, perhaps? With nothing to lose, I began entering them into the time machine; the hint book's code first, the gum wrapper's second.

"GoForIt!" I shouted as I punched the key of the same name. "Ride em cowboy!" This time everything worked, and kept working—*deja vu*, remembrances of things past, being late for a very important date, and the odd feeling of things running backward and forward at the same time—all hit me at once. Reality shifted, and I got back all the time I had ever lost in my life. The light show began.



Return to Kerona

One of the really neat things about time travel—especially when using time machines—is that the light show goes on forever. Since I am somewhat partial to strobing, throbbing, pulsating colors, this is not an insignificant bonus. The trouble is, that same light show is also over before it ever begins. Especially when you're traveling into the past. Time travel is fun, but you never know whether you're coming or going.

Surprisingly, Kerona waited for me at the other end of the time rip; the dead COP's symbols had completed the sequence in the hint book. In a weird way, it made sense; the Sequel Police were apparently chasing me throughout all of my past (pasts?), so there was a good chance that Kerona was one of those places. It stood to reason then that the COPS were jotting down time codes the same as I. After all, they did look a lot like nonsense symbols. As for the odds of that particular piece of code being the proper one—like I said, it made sense at the time.

I climbed out of the time machine and looked around. Although I had been gone for over a century (my time), Ulence Flats looked almost exactly as I had left it—a couple of ruts in the sand hoping to be mistaken for a biological hazard. My memory may not be perfect, but I was darn sure that this was the same town I had been to before. In fact, from the glimpse of the Drallion cruiser I could see blasting out of the atmosphere, this may very well have been *exactly* the same town, with me flying that ship off to a rendezvous with some Sariens. As I looked up, I could see a banner burned into the sky, stretching from horizon to horizon, part of the fabric of Kerona's being. There were words on it:

Welcome to:
Space Quest I—The Sarien Encounter
(original version)



I should have been getting used to the sight by then, but it shook me nonetheless. How could things like that be? Were they a normal part of time travel, with only the traveler able to see them? Where did they come from? Could they be the result of Sludge Vohaul tinkering with reality in his plan to conquer all of time and space? What did the banner mean by "original version"? Of what? Space Quest I? I looked at the hint book again; it clearly implied that I was living Space Quest IV, and I comes before IV in most numeric systems with which I'm acquainted. I knew one thing for sure: I had journeyed into my past, and there had to be some reason for me to go there. But what?

The more I looked, the more it seemed that my perceptions had altered slightly. Everything—the sand, the buildings, the crude town—had taken on a flat, garish appearance. It was as if reality had passed judgment on the planet, gagged, then declared it obsolescent technology barely worth recycling. In the distance, beyond the force fields surrounding Ulence Flats, the deserts of Kerona wandered off in every direction in an endless search for something better to do. And the proper shade of silicon.

Everything else had the look and feel of, not neglect exactly, but of a successful effort to go beyond poverty and despair, and into the lethargy and dissolution that comes from having given up. Even the profitable trade of selling Orat parts to Monolith Burger or for the popular novelty item—Unidentified Orat Part on a Stick—seemed to have bypassed the town. To the east, Droids B Us had hung out a "Closed—Gone Fishin'" sign, a rare sight on a desert planet. I suspected a touch of sarcasm in the words, but couldn't discount the possibility of abject stupidity. Or fraud. Ulence Flats is that kind of a place.

To the south of where I stood, the "No Serial Numbers Spaceship Shopping Center" sign had been changed to read "Tiny's Used Spaceships," but there was no sign of Tiny. Or customers. His inventory had dwindled to one sorry, ancient, steam-powered craft, corroded through in several places. On second thought, it's possible that the lot has always been named Tiny's; time travel sometimes makes it really hard to keep track of details. Anyway, the ship's serial numbers had been filed off, so I was sure that it belonged to the same Tiny.

No, the only life, or pseudo-life, that stirred was what you would expect in a place like Ulence Flats. Across from Tiny's, a bright sign flashed out its continuing invitation:

BAR...BAR...BAR

Beneath it, a sign by the door declared simply:



**NO SHOES, NO SHIRTS, NO SAPIENCE?
IT DOESN'T MATTER**

**NO IDENTIFICATION REQUIRED
MONEY MANDATORY UNDER PENALTY OF DEATH**

**ENTERTAINMENT DAILY
NO COVER CHARGE**

Perhaps things were beginning to turn around for the town. Literacy, at least, seemed to be making a comeback.

Outside the bar, a trio of perfectly polished sandbikes leaned on their kickstands, waiting for their owners, and looking for trouble. That sight alone should have given me pause; the humanoids who ride HOGs—Huge, Obnoxious, Gas-guzzling sandbikes—hold little love for other sapients. And less patience. It's not so much that they go looking for trouble; they are trouble. They like it that way. But, the sign, and Kerona's heat, ganged up on me and suggested that a Canopus Happy Brew would taste mighty good right then. A chance to sort my thoughts would also be appreciated. And a bit of music would soothe my nerves. Ignoring the three metallic warning signs, I walked inside.

If I remember correctly, it was almost *deja vu* in there. Through the tabac weed smoke (generously mixed with happy weed, euphoria mist, and smoldering ho-siery), I could make out the shapes of the same band that had been playing the last time I had been there. Their music—heavily metallic, retro-rocko, neo-babylonian folk funk—hadn't changed much. That it was a bit off-key, I didn't mind, but lite and mellow is a style that doesn't appeal to my taste. The Slots-Of-Death machine was gone, as were any fems, but the bartender was the same, and sporting a recent gender change. The general level of cleanliness, however, had not improved.

All the seats at the bar seemed to be taken, but there seemed to be sufficient space for me to claim some standing room. I moseyed over using my best Space Ranger saunter, but before I got there, three ugly, nominally sentient toughs started heckling me. They were all identically dressed in the same shade of listless gray, and wore patches that declared them to be the "Gray Matters." For some reason, the name didn't seem to fit them.

"Hey guys, look. It's a Space Ranger!" The put-on jocular-ity of their tone did little for my self-confidence. The thugs were heavily armed, armor scaled, and wearing the traditional robes of semi-saurian toadies. They looked like Lizoids with



long metal claws and bad-attitude implants. There was no doubt who the owners of the HOGs outside were.

I decided to bluff my way past them, feigning a casual "I pick my teeth with Sarien scat" demeanor.

"Howdy, pardners. Nice outfits you're wearing." As I tried to move on, all three stood up and blocked my way.

"A Space Ranger?" The biggest one took one of my arms and after some groping around, squeezed the bicep. "Looks a mite skinny to me." I shook off his grasp to their laughing jeers.

"I never beat up one of them Space Ranger guys before. Shall we try?" Things were beginning to turn nasty. I wanted to run, but they now had me surrounded.

"Can I buy you fellas a drink?" I stammered. No answer. "Two drinks?"

"Yeah. Let's see how far he'll bounce."

The three of them fell on me like an avalanche in a sanitary landfill. A few cursory punches, then I was lifted into the air. A few more heaves, and I was flying out the front door, screaming all the way. A few moments later, I was nose down in the sand. The laughter coming from inside added insult to the hurt of my skinned nose.

"By the eternally overflowing outhouses of GreenApple the Loose," I shouted. "I've been shot at, threatened by Sludge Vohaul, chased by droids and slimes, attacked by a prehistoric bird, tortured, captured by a flounderoid, fired, and shot at some more—all in the same day. Now, this. It's enough to make me mad. I am mad!"

Please understand: I am a patient man, with the full range of normal human emotions, but I also possess the ability to keep rage under control. In the first place, unreasoned anger is not normally considered a survival trait. Secondly, I don't like fighting; I have neither the brawn nor the skill for it. It scares me, and I don't like getting hurt if I can avoid it. True, anger over the destruction of the *Arcada* helped fuel my encounter with the Sarien Menace; and I have been a mite miffed at Sludge Vohaul on occasion. But those were unusual incidents, and my anger was controlled. All out, flaming mad, strike-out-at-whatever-hurts-you rage and I are strangers. My philosophy basically is this: If danger can't be avoided, try not to scream too loudly; if danger must be faced, think quick and shoot straight; and if the option is available, run away.

That day in Ulence Flats, I lost control for an instant. I picked myself up from the street and ran back inside. Such was my rage that I attempted to take on the three semi-sauroids bare-handed. They were waiting for me to come back. Within seconds, I was sailing back out the door a second time, once again picked up as easily as if I had been a piece of belly fuzz. This time, I landed on my butt, even madder than before. A third time I rushed in. Out on my rear again. The screams



of laughter only underlined the point that I was overmatched by their muscle and numbers.

"I'll make you pay, you vomit-sucking vermin," I screamed. Sanity was beginning to return, but not fast enough. As I stood up yet again, I saw the sandbikes lined in a row by the door, chrome polished and sparkling, lacquered paint shining like newly polished lav fixtures in the sun. No speck of dirt, no defect marred any of them. Without thinking, propelled by my anger, I struck out, kicking the first HOG with all my strength. It tottered, then smashed into the second. Like one bad decision compounding another, the second toppled onto the third. The crashing, metal-mauling sounds the smash-up made pulled me at once back to reality. One short glance at the bent fenders and scratched paint snapped my mind back into survival mode. The Gray Matters had heard what I had done, and were starting for the door, shouting. They didn't sound at all happy. Since the option was available, I ran away.

No, I am not a coward. I think I have proven that in the past—many more times than I would have preferred. It's just that I'd much rather avoid life-and-death situations—they can often be fatal.

I needed someplace to hide from the sandbikers, someplace close. Across the rut that passed for the town's main street, Tiny's Used Spaceships seemed the likeliest possibility. Behind me, the sounds of the three HOGs growling into readiness told me the sauroids were on the chase. Behind Tiny's plastoid shack, I found a pile of ageless styrofoam pellets, still as fresh as the day they were born, centuries ago. Because of their mobility, indestructibility, and sheer numbers, it has often been suggested that they will overwhelm and outlive all other forms of life in the galaxy. So seriously is this threat taken, and so horrid is the tiny styrofoam creation considered, that an arrest warrant has been in effect for hundreds of years against the creator of the pellets. Yet, he/she/it has never been found, despite the offer of a generous reward for his/her/its capture. The styrofoam itself is usually shot on sight.

At the moment, I was actually thankful for the pellets and the being who brought them to life. They gave me all the cover and shelter I needed. From beneath the featherweight pile, I could hear the HOGs roar back and forth, and the sauroids shouting to each other to widen their search. Finally, two of the bikes zoomed by me into the distance, their sounds fading in the direction of the dunes. The third had already disappeared, and I assumed it had already moved off into the desert.

After several minutes of silence, broken only by the sound of blowing sand scratching against plastoid siding, I poked my head out of the styrofoam. A couple of glances showed no sign of the Gray Matters, so I pulled myself out of concealment, and returned to the bar. Maybe it was all the excitement, but the place was empty of patrons when I returned. The band played to nobody in particular, and the barkeep seemed to be using the break to make a meal of her toenails.



"Yo, Bo," I ordered. "I'll have one of your wettest. You don't happen to have any Canopus Happy Brew, do you?" The bartender looked up from her contortions, then stared at me quizzically.

"No Canopus, and all of our beer is dry. As in dehydrated. We save a lot on refrigeration that way." She examined me again. "You look familiar. Aren't you the being who braindeaded my Slots-Of-Death game?"

"That's me. Do I get a prize for having done so? Do you need my name for your all-time high scores list and hall of fame?"

"That machine was earning us a bundle until you touched it. That's a bundle—as in significant buckazoids. The only list your name goes on is the one with the beings we don't serve anymore. You're not welcome here. Get out. Now." From the intense violet color her face was turning as she spoke, I suspected she was not at all happy with my previous feat.

"Then I think I'll make myself scarce, but I do hope you change your mind." I glimpsed a pack of matches lying carelessly on the bar. I picked it up. Its cover read:

BAR

Ullence Flats, Kerona

Fine Dining

Dry beers from other places

Live music daily

No cover charge

Phone: 001-0*6%1-111-##88-5555-@ @0-3462-95301

(collect calls not accepted)

"Maybe I'll give you a call the next time I pass this way." With a conciliatory wave, I stepped outside before the bartender could reach for her gun.

There is a great lesson in life that we all learn, and then almost immediately forget. Later, we learn it again, only to put it out of mind once more. This cycle goes on and on, and the consequences can sometimes be fatal. The lesson, of course, is "never assume." What goes up doesn't always come down, especially in zero-G environments. Moss has often been observed on rolling rocks—it's even a way of



life among the Clayoids of Mongo I. And too many apples a day can cause high blood sugar among humans, a sure way to attract the attention of med droids.

I had assumed that all the Gray Matters had left town searching for me, and had heard no sandbikes arrive back during my short time in the bar. I had not considered the possibility that one might be lying in wait for me, hidden, lurking, waiting for me to be exposed enough so I could be run down like a sacrificial shmoo on RoadKill XI.

I was still blinking the glare from my eyes when the growl of a sandbike starting up came from somewhere over my shoulder. Somewhere close. It was followed by the whine of a bike in full flight, rotors slicing air thousands of times every second. I turned, and my world was filled with a green-and-brown, chrome-and-gray death machine getting bigger by the heartbeat. I felt as if a target had been chiseled on my chest, and the HOG was aimed directly at it. All conscious thought shut down in my brain. ColdSleep-trained reflexes took over before a scream could sound. A part of my mind, which I never knew I had, computed velocity and distance. The sandbike was nearly on me before I reacted. With the sandbike no more than a few meters away, I flung myself aside and rolled to safety. The bike missed me by a snarf's breath, but missing me counted for everything. The sauroid zoomed past, fighting to control his HOG. The sound of something heavy and big skidding out of control told me that I might have a few moments in which to escape Ulence Flats. The time machine had been built for moments like this.



The Wilco Effect

Where to? The mall would most likely still be crawling with Sequel Police looking to cinder me, and I had never copied the code for Estros. Both destinations were out of the question. Xenon? If I were ever going to get to Sludge, I would have to go back there. Still, I considered it a last resort. With all my obvious choices eliminated, I began to stab the control pad at random, and then pressed the GoForIt button. Reality hiccupped, shuddered, blurred a bit, passed some gas, and then solidified into Ulence Flats again. I hadn't moved. Again I tried. Same thing. Again. Repeat of the last episode. It was time to try the hint book.

The hint book turned out to be less than no help; the only question (and answer) about being stuck in a time pod suggested going to Kerona. It was the same advice that had gotten me into my current predicament. Outside the time machine, I could see the sauroid had gotten his bike back under control and was getting ready to take a run at the time machine. *I guess I have no choice but to go back to Xenon*, I thought. But I had to be quick. Pulling my notebook out of the sleeve pocket where



I kept it, I entered Xenon's coordinates into the keypad. This time, when reality shifted, I was rewarded with the light show.

If I were to have predicted anything about my arrival home on Xenon, it would have been that a couple of Sequel Police would be present in the landing bay, maybe standing guard, snacking, leaving or arriving from places and times unknown and exotic, or making repairs on time craft. That I would be spotted was a safe bet, but I planned to rip out at once if I were. If necessary, I would travel between Xenon, the mall, and Kerona until I lost my pursuers. Then, I would rest somewhere and figure out what to do next. As plans go, it was slim. But there turned out to be a major complication.

The time machine landing bay was deserted. As I looked out through the bronzed plastoid hatch, I could see nobody at all. The shuttle landing bay appeared likewise empty of COPS. And beyond that, there was no hint of movement either. The situation was as much a mystery as it was welcome. I climbed out of the time machine and checked the area more carefully. Still nothing. The neon sign on the bay wall, however, had changed its message. It now read:

**Welcome to Xenon:
Central Planetary Super Computer
(A Division of Vohaul Enterprises)**

**Closed temporarily while we search for
Roger Wilco**

Watch for Our Grand Reopening Sale—Coming Soon!

The sign explained a lot: nobody was around because everyone was scouring time and space looking for me, and universal conquest or not, Sludge was still determined to corner every buckazoid in creation. The sign didn't make me feel any better, but it did confirm the fact that Sludge was still serious about eliminating me.

At the far end of the bay, I came across a locked door, behind which a tunnel seemed to lead deeper into the Super Computer. If Vohaul had indeed turned himself into a virus powerful enough to take over the planetary computer, then his source code must be somewhere inside. If I could get past the door, then I might be able to get close enough to sniff the silicon.

Now there are a number of ways to get through locked doors. Brute force and high explosives work well, but I was deficient in both areas. Face scanners can be



easily outwitted, but the one I was dealing with also demanded an eye print, followed by a sung verse and chorus from my school spirit song. I was sure a Roger Wilco eye print would bring unwelcome attention and, anyway, I was never too fond of SEX U's "Flush 'em, Brush 'em, gang, Blues" anthem. No, a more straightforward approach was needed if I wanted to get through the door before some Sequel COP returned from the hunt.

You might remember, I once noted that a trained sanitation engineer knows dozens of uses for all industry-standard equipment and supplies. Janitor-In-A-Jug is one such item. Not just for removing stubborn stains, cleaning teeth (in properly diluted quantities), efficiently dissolving recalcitrant organic matter, or eliminating those pesky dirt rings from inside shirt collars, Janitor-In-A-Jug—much like the common janitor's plunger—can be put to extraordinary, near magical purposes when in the hands of a trained professional. I was still carrying my bottle of green Xenon sewer slime, which was no more than concentrated, subsentient Janitor-In-A-Jug. Here's one use for it:

Janitor-In-A-Jug Use #16—The Wilco Effect

1. Take one container of concentrated Janitor-In-A-Jug
2. Carefully remove seal from container
3. Hold breath
4. Pour over lock, making sure none gets on yourself
5. Watch lock dissolve
6. Be careful you don't step in the resulting puddle
7. Open door
8. Walk through door
9. Breathe
10. Scream (optional, not recommended, but therapeutic)

Piece of cellulite—for a properly licensed professional sanitation engineer, that is. Accept no substitutes. As always, do not try this at home.



Rings of Fire

Vohaul had planned his defenses well, and had anticipated that the door might be breached. As I stepped into the tunnel leading deeper into the Super Computer, I



noticed at once a set of thick metal concentric rings placed at even intervals between the first doorway and the tunnel's exit. The rings just stood there pretending to be supports, acting innocent, and humming gently to themselves. To get to the other end, one would have to pass through all of them. On the wall, just in front of the first ring was a control pad.

We need to pause briefly again. A good education is often undervalued. Besides the lessons learned from books, teachers, mopping labs, cleanser seminars, and the endless repetitions on the proper use of a hammer, a student learns a lot more subtle and practical lessons. Surviving food fights is one. Discovering the best dark places to take a date and learning what to do once you get there is another. Closer to our current situation, one also learns to sneak food past cafeteria check-out scanners and the occasional mating vid out of the school library.

The library problem was the tougher of the two; for that you had to pass through a set of Klepto Instant Library Looter Extermination Rings—KILLER for short. Basically, KILLER is a set of rotating metal rings that contains a set of high-energy laser beams aimed at varying angles. When you pass a vid over the scanner, the beams align vertically so that a being can pass through. If the scan is skipped, a step inside proves instantly fatal. The system is harsh, yes. But it works.

Set a challenge like that in front of the finest sanitation engineering minds-in-training in the galaxy, and you invite inevitable confrontation. The system had one point of attack: a manual override allowed library staff free passage without the inconvenience of carrying a vid with them every time they wanted to leave. Punch in the proper codes, one for each ring, and they were out. The access code was changed randomly and often. After much trial and error—and not a few fatalities—the SEX U crackers discovered that the laser beams could be seen if there was smoke in the air. And then they made the critical discovery.

Kleptoids were once the greatest thieves in the galaxy. Nimble and agile, they could pick a pocket in an instant, could slip into any locked vault unnoticed—and leave lip paint stains on the oblivious guards on their way out. They could even run a banking or savings institution without arousing suspicion. Their home planet, Klepto, even advertised itself as the Home of the Six-Fingered Discount, flaunting the skills of its populace in front of a galaxy that could never get enough evidence to pin anything on any of them.

Then the inevitable happened; one especially well-known Kleptoid decided to enter galactic politics and run for office—it was the Confederation presidency, I believe. The galaxy rose up in outrage, declaring with their vote that they preferred the thieves they *didn't* know to the thieves they did. "If we're going to be robbed," they said, "we'd rather be robbed blind." This outlook so offended the Kleptoid moral code that all of them withdrew back to their home planet and went straight.



Eventually, they reemerged into society as the inventors and manufacturers of the finest anti-theft devices in the galaxy, much to the discomfort of the many thieves and/or politicians they helped bust. It was they, of course, who devised KILLER.

The students' reasoning went like this: humans have five fingers on each hand—ten altogether—so their numbering system is based on the number ten. Calamarioids base their system on the number of tentacles they have, eight. Slimeoids, with no fingers, toes, or tentacles at all, have never discovered counting. Kleptoids, with six fingers on each of the two hands (and 12 prehensile appendages) had to use either 12 or 24 as the basis for their numbering system. One night some students broke into the library and tested the theory. First some burning giggle weed was used to make the lasers visible. Next they began entering numbers into the manual override pad. Initially they tried the number 12, and were delighted to see the rings rotate by a small amount. They continued manipulating each ring separately, each time increasing the size of the number by same or a multiple of same. Finally, they had the beams aligned straight up and down. Victory was theirs, and they celebrated by borrowing every episode of the "Lone Space Ranger" in the library, and walking out unharmed. I wasn't one of that group, but their exploits—and their system—soon became common knowledge on campus.

Which brings us back to the Super Computer. I was sure I was facing some industrial grade version of KILLER. With the rings and the override, the similarities couldn't be ignored. A discreet sign on the first ring, "MADE WITH PRIDE ON KLEPTO—BY A REAL KLEPTOMANIAC," cinched my hunch. Grinning tightly, I took out Snarkgurgle Snuffleslurple, The Younger's black stogie from my pocket. It still reeked of burnt tabac and stale krill cookies. Next, I fished out the matches from the bar in Ulence Flats. *Maybe this is why the hint book told me to go there*, I marveled. Lighting the stogie was the hard part; I've never been very good at striking matches, and I have never inhaled tabac weed. I was choking and gasping for air when I finished, but the stinking weed finally began to burn steadily. Taking careful aim, I tossed it into the first ring. The weed passed through a beam, and the lasers incinerated my missile. This, however, caused even more smoke to fill the tunnel—enough to show me just where the beams were. I was dealing with a KILLER all right.

The rest was simple, even for me. Working one beam at a time, entering the number 12 each time (or simple multiples of 12 if the multiplications weren't too difficult), I slowly rotated the deadly rings. It took some time, but it worked. When they were all finally aligned, I breathed a belated thanks to Snarkgurgle Snuffleslurple, The Younger for firing me, and walked through the rings unscathed.



Imitation of Life

I also learned in school that once upon a time, in the first days of the technology, computers were often described as artificial brains. This organic analogy couldn't have been more apt than at the moment I entered the interior of the BioMech part of Xenon's planetary Super Computer. At first I thought I was surrounded by tentacles, thousands of them, climbing walls and weaving in and out of whatever my eyes might stop upon. Slowly, however, the scene began to make more sense. There were no tentacles or pseudopods at all—just walls, cables, cooling ducts, and the other unintelligible (to me at least) features and pieces that made up the place. But unlike the straight-edged, terse perfection we design into our artificial intelligences, everything was soft-textured, round, and occasionally corrugated, giving the impression of some unclean imitation of life. It felt as if I was inside the brain of some organic behemoth, able to wander within its convolutions like some rogue electrical impulse looking for a spot to precipitate a seizure. Given the fact that Vohaul controlled the "brain," the comparison seemed both apt and prophetic. Or so I hoped.

The space itself was enormous, with all detail fading out of focus and into a light haze. No matter which direction I looked, the Super Computer went on and on, in places reaching a vanishing point before it came to the opposite wall. There were only a few normal looking details visible: an extensive set of straight walkways—catwalks really—going up, down, and all around like some three-dimensional maze; and what appeared to be a small computer terminal not too far in front of me. Seeing and sensing no danger, I went to examine it more closely.

The sign on the terminal was explicit:

Xenon Central Planetary Super Computer
(A Division of Vohaul Enterprises)

Security Scrutiny Computer and Master Map
Visit the home of the star:

*****Sludge Vohaul*****

(guided tours available at extra cost)



**For access: please interface an industry standard
portable computer into the plug provided
(You did remember to bring the proper connector, didn't you?)**

For your safety—Trespassers will be terminated

I had found the master map to the Super Computer. If I could access the terminal, I might be able to find a way to get to Vohaul—the Vohaul virus—and disinfect the universe.

I looked at the terminal plug, then took out the Linkup to Information Networks and Terminals device (by PocketPalSystems)—PocketLINT—that I had been carrying (where else?) in my pocket. It didn't fit into the plug. I tried again, and the results still came back negative. From somewhere nearby, the whirring of an approaching droid signaled that I had been discovered.

"Oh, ship," I spat out uselessly. The *Aluminum Mallard* was still somewhere in the past on Magmetheus, and couldn't help me now. I looked at the terminal plug a second time and memorized its shape. Even in my original day, nobody understood the arcane art of cables and adapters; computers and food zappers that are identical in every way can require enormously different connectors to attach to the same device, and for no apparent reason. Some contend that it's a provision of the Technology Makers' Full-Employment Act; many believe that cables are really sentient beings—possibly even sapients—with either a high mutation rate or a warped sense of humor. I think it's just a way for the controlling interests of the galaxy to keep us all confused.

The droid's whirring came closer. I turned, looked, then ran in the same movement. Even from a distance I could see it was a bottom-of-the-line security droid, armed with an anti-personnel heat ray. I was sure that I was the current anti-personnel of its cybernetic dreams. I didn't stop running until I was back at the time machine, even though the sound of the patrolling security droid had faded out while I was dashing through the tunnel.

Through the shuttle bay I ran, straight to the time machine landing area, and into my time ship. I met nobody—neither organic, mech, or cyborg—during the getaway; if I had, I would have quickly died. In my fear of getting fried, I had run out of one danger, heedless of what might be waiting further on. But no Sequel Police had returned to Xenon while I had been inside the Super Computer. In fact, I didn't even realize they *might* have been there until I had set a course (if that's the proper term when time traveling), and was on my way back to the Galaxy Galleria.



The Tough Go Shopping

The Galaxy Galleria? Weren't there Sequel Police searching for me there? Excellent observation. But, I didn't have many choices. Ulence Flats seemed a dead end, and there was a RadioactiveSchlock at the mall. More importantly, RadioactiveSchlock carried hundreds of adapters for my PocketLINT. To get to Vohaul, I needed to get deeper into Xenon's Super Computer, and to do that I needed a way to plug into the master map. I now knew what kind of plug the computer needed to connect to. All that remained was the question of whether the store had one in stock. As for the Sequel Police? I'd have to take my chances dodging them. If danger can't be avoided, it must be faced. And gaining access to Sludge Vohaul again made facing that particular danger unavoidable. That didn't mean I was happy about going there.

I ignored the light show en route in order to become more familiar with the hint book. However, nothing in it made much sense, and most (if not all) was utter nonsense. Worse, there was nothing in it about the mall. I considered throwing the thing away, but realized it was too much of a curiosity to part with.

The time machine returned to reality in the ScumWorld Arcade, which was again filled with twitching arcade addicts, but totally lacking in Sequel Police. Getting down from the ship, I was greeted by a garish sign across the arcade from where I had landed, a near duplicate of the one on the archway outside. It read:

ScumWorld Arcade
A ScumSoftWorld Theme Park
(A division of Vohaul Enterprises)

I chuckled a little just then. Vohaul's sense of humor was getting better; where else to land his minions but in a place with his name over the door. It was a wry jest, something of which I would have thought him incapable.

Moment of introspection finished, caution urged me to carefully poke my head out of the arcade and check for Vohaul's goons. Again, none were in sight. Willing myself invisible, I stepped out onto one of the walkways, and began moving toward RadioactiveSchlock. Still no COPS. When I came to Spandex To Die For, my heart dropped to my guts. It was closed; I would have no opportunity to buy (and return) a new disguise. And I had so admired myself in a nice dress—good clothes do make all the difference. In fact, all the mall shops were locked up except for the Skate-o-Rama (which never closes), and RadioactiveSchlock.



I arrived there just moments before closing, which brought an immediate sneer on the sales 'bot's metal face. I ignored him, went straight to the automated catalogue, and looked up Electronic Gadgets. Skipping through the other neat toys for sale (it was really difficult to pass by the trash zappers, electronic broom handles, and analog pooper scoopers), I kept flipping options until I came to the one I remembered from my prior visit: PocketLINT (by PocketPalSystems) connectors. A press of the order option brought up screens full of possible adapters, many appearing nearly identical. I had expected no less. But I kept looking. At last, there it was, the connector I was searching for—there were no others like it anywhere else in the catalogue, and it was still in stock. I made my choice and paid up; like such items everywhere, its cost was about the same as a first-class vacation on Exotica VI, romantic options and tips included. But it was Zhondra's money, and saving the universe from Sludge seemed like a good use of her funds.

There was still no sign of the Sequel Police. I rode the walkways back to the time machine, keeping a constant watch in case they emerged from out of some corner, or even the Skate-o-Rama. Despite my vigilance, none appeared, and I finally had to conclude that they had taken their search elsewhere. Still, I felt relieved to climb back into the ship, even if I was heading back to Xenon. I ripped backed to the Super Computer—to the very center of Sludge Vohaul's power—silently asking the Eternal Entity to make sure the Police on Xenon were all still off somewhere (somewhen?) else when I got there. And that they wouldn't come back for a long time.



Into the Super Computer

There were still no COPS visible when I got back to Xenon. Either I had not been gone very long, or Sludge's drive to find and kill me was so great that he was keeping his goons in the field until they succeeded. Nevertheless, through hubris, conceit, inattention to important details, or momentary stupidity, Vohaul had left the Super Computer wide open for intrusion. I suspect he was afflicted with all four conditions. In leaving his final defenses to mechs and machines, Sludge had assumed he was safe from attack. He was about to learn for the last time (I hoped) that it's good policy never to assume.

Tabac smoke was still floating in the tunnel when I got there, showing that it continued to be safe to walk through the ring's laser beams. Before I entered the Super Computer proper, I made a final check of the PocketLINT; the bunnus batteries were installed properly, with their nubbies sticking in the little indentations that have remained nameless for centuries. All seemed to be in order there. As always, the matter of the connector was much more trying. Removing the thin,



tight plastoid wrapping from the adapter took several minutes, and cost me a fingernail. As a special bonus, some of the plastic shreds stuck to my hands, like sand and plankton mayo at a picnic. No matter how hard I scraped, the plastoid would always attach itself somewhere else, and I would have to wipe my hands some more. Diligence and stick-to-it-tivity (so to speak) eventually paid off, and I was able to get the stuff off my fingers and insert one end of the connector into the PocketLINT. I would have to live with the shreds that stuck to my Space Ranger uniform. I'm very glad that Sludge did not wrap the Super Computer in the thin plastoid stuff; I might never have been able to get inside if he had.

No security droids were within sight or hearing as I penetrated the Super Computer for the second time. That was my preferred state of affairs. Rushing directly to the terminal, I was able to plug my computer into it with nary a complaint from either machine. Time itself seemed to stand still as the PocketLINT's screen levered up and illuminated, displaying (as advertised) a map of the Super Computer's interior. At the same time, it revealed its hidden POWER switch, and turned itself on automatically.

The master map detailed everything of importance inside the Super Computer. Two areas in particular drew my notice: one to my far left, the other somewhere straight ahead. Both appeared to be control rooms of some sort, and looked like they could be reached via the labyrinth of suspended walkways.

The maze of catwalks and stairs itself was shown in detail, and the readout indicated I was currently on the second level of the structure, the same as one of the possible control rooms. The map also displayed a pair of blips—a YOU ARE HERE box that indicated me, and a moving one that could only mean it was tracking the location of a security droid. As if to prove the point, a whirring whine began drifting from my left, coming from the same direction as the second blip. It was moving fast, coming closer every second. Its movement was clearly shown on the map display.

Suspecting that remaining was unwise, I turned off the PocketLINT, disconnected it from the terminal, and sprinted back toward the tunnel. Then I changed my mind; the tunnel wasn't going to get me nearer to Vohaul, and I would still have to deal with the droid when I came back. Instead, I turned deeper into the Super Computer, skidding a bit as I changed direction. All I could do now was keep running, and hope the walkway would lead to someplace I could hide from the droid. Occasional heat rays sizzling at my heels added a touch of urgency. I prayed that there would be no hidden lines painted on the floor that I might miss and trip over.

The catwalk ended at a set of stairways leading down, side by side. I picked the far one, mainly because I couldn't stop fast enough to descend the nearer. When I got to the bottom, I stopped to look up. My pursuer had registered my descent, and had started down the near stairs after me. And if that wasn't bad enough, the



unmistakable sounds of other droids moving toward me came from opposite directions. Boxed in, my only course left was to bolt back up the stairs I had come down, with luck confusing the sensors of my original pursuer with my sudden, drastic change of direction. I knew it wasn't much of a chance.

I guess it was Sludge's innate cheapness that saved me. Instead of investing in omnidirectional security droids with rotating sensors and armament, he must have decided to save a few bucks and use droids that operated strictly by line-of-sight. It was the same approach he had taken with the Droids o' Death—a highly efficient, cost-effective solution, but only if the droids can see you and you're within range. Otherwise? Otherwise a frightened Roger Wilco can dart within two meters of it just by being on a parallel stair. And survive.

I fled back the way I had first come, back and neck constantly anticipating a shot that never came. On the catwalks above and below me, other droids patrolled with single-minded purpose, keeping their attentions on only what was straight ahead, unaware of the intruder running free amongst them. And run I assuredly did. I didn't even stop running when I got back to the terminal; the map had shown some sort of a room—perhaps a control room—at the far end of that catwalk. Perhaps I would find Vohaul there.

No Sludge. But what I found was much better—a discreet sign hanging outside of what looked like the entrance to either a cave, or an orifice into some living grotesquerie. In largish antique lettering was this legend:

Xenon Central Planetary Super Computer

**Ye Olde Programming Shoppe
and
Master Control**

**The master is in control.
(Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!)**

I had stumbled on the chamber that controlled the Super Computer. And if the sign was to be believed, it was the very place where all of its programs could be accessed—including the Vohaul virus.



Sludge Vohaul's Doom

Roger Wilco
and the Time
Rippers



No sounds came from within the chamber, but from some distance behind me I could pick up the faint whining of a security droid moving in my direction. Would I ever be safe from pursuit by the things? There was no time to debate the question; I had to get out of sight quickly, and the programming shoppe was my sole option.

Earlier I described the interior of the Super Computer as appearing organic, giving the impression of an unclean imitation of life. Because of the size of the computer's interior, however, I had only felt creepy and uncomfortable in the environment. The scale of the place blurred much of the detail, and running from killer droids leaves little time to admire (or gasp) at the scenery. The programming chamber was different; it wasn't merely creepy, it was downright frightening.

Red-veined, bloodshot eyes glared at me from every wall, sensors tracking my every move—sensors that blinked. The walls themselves looked like the ribs, backbone, and spine of some decaying leviathan viewed from the inside. Tentacle-like cables and conduits twisted into and around the skeleton, transmuting themselves into metallic arteries, then windpipes, as they went. Tones of faded brown and muted muddy blue colored everything but the eye sensors, reinforcing their aura of malice. There were no defined edges anywhere, and the only flat, non-rippled surface was the catwalk that led to the chamber's inner door. Locked, sealed tight against trespassers, it could only be opened by entering a code into its lock. And of the code, I had no clue.

Or did I? When I time-ripped from Xenon to the mall, I had used the opportunity to study the Space Quest IV hint book. At the time, I regretted not putting the trip to better use watching the light show. Nothing useful—or even rational—seemed to be contained in it. Other than the clear clue to travel to Ulence Flats, the hint book appeared to hold nothing but obscure references to things of which I knew nothing, too many examples of inadequate humor, and insulting remarks aimed at whomever might be playing the game. But I had read it, and while I looked in despair at that final keypad, the sound of a security droid moving tirelessly toward where I was standing, a passage from the ancient book returned to my memory.

A flip through its pages confirmed the recollection. Printed there was a question that I had first thought nonsense—a question about being in a strange room, with eyeball-looking things staring at me. The question ended with: "How do I get the door open?" The answer: There were four answers; the first two were ludicrous, and the third absolutely wrong. Whoever had written the hint book was doing more than driving his/her/its readers crazy, that being was toying with my



life. More and more, the book was resembling the work of the Two Guys from Andromeda, and I had never found them amusing at all.

The fourth answer turned out to be correct. Heavy metal doors retracted into floor and ceiling as soon as those numbers were punched in, revealing a second room, one just ample enough to contain a bunch of computer accessories and an active terminal. A plaque by the door read:

**Xenon Central Planetary Super Computer
Master Control Console**

The Master is *In*
(Hours by appointment only)
No Solicitors

The gateway to the virus that was Sludge Vohaul, and to the operation of the entire Super Computer, was within spitting distance (if my aim was accurate). Now if I could just reprogram it before a droid turned me into fried Space Ranger.

As I walked closer to the console, I could see that the terminal screen was completely filled with a collection of pictures—or icons perhaps—I’ve never been quite sure of the difference. The icons (pictures?) represented all manner of different programs or files, from the abstruse to the merely baffling; a piece of striped fruit with a bite taken out of it meant nothing to me, nor did the glove-wearing mouseoid with large round ears, or the round, yellow, happily grinning cartoon humanoid face; and they were only three out of a score. More obvious were the symbolic representations of a time machine, a null-G skateboard, and what was clearly an Orat part (just which part will remain anonymous). At the bottom of the screen, a lifelike representation of a commode was pictured—a HoneyDip #2 model from NightSoil & Whizz. I’d know the appliance anywhere; we’d done our potty training on them back at SEX U.

Two pictures (icons?) drew my attention away from the others; one was a security droid, and the other a brain—a *big* brain. One could only stand for the computer’s security system, and the other had to be connected to the computer’s memory, program and information storage, or operating system. Whichever it was, it had to be the way to Sludge Vohaul.

When I was in training at SEX U, two of my favorite classes were Survival Microzapping, and Computers for the Technologically Indifferent—the former because it taught me how to turn packets of plastoid or thin metal substitute into real food, and the latter because it gave me a chance to indulge in regular naps. I



had no patience with learning how computers work or how to program them. Give me a computer I can talk to (and who doesn't talk back too often), and I'll show you a computer I can relate to and respect. Nonetheless, I did pick up one or two technical things before I made my daily slide into dreamland. Among them was what to do if you see a trash bucket, black hole, or toilet on the screen. Slide an icon (picture?) into it and watch the receptacle gobble it up.

Now while I've been blathering on describing the control console and my school days, the security droid had nearly reached ye olde programming shoppe. Its whir told me it would be inside within seconds. Touching the droid picture (icon?) on the screen, I moved it into the commode and flushed. Around and around the symbol swirled, like the last light effluvium in a hydro flush. Then it was gone. From outside, all droid sounds stopped at once, as the program controlling the security system was shut down. The catwalks were safe, for the moment at least.

With time less pressing (for the time being), I tore through all the drawers and shelves in the room looking to find some form of instruction disk. There was nothing. There was no HELP symbol on the terminal screen either. And there was no picture of Sludge Vohaul anywhere in sight. Secure in his own private cyberspace, I had no readily apparent way of reaching him outside of my guess about the brain icon. Touch. Move. Flush. Nothing happened.

Seconds passed. Then a voice filled the computer, with the soothing, reassuring tones associated with only the finest PBS programming.

"Hi there, kiddies. My name is Alistair, and I'll be your friendly doomsday voice and commentator this evening. Tonight's feature is about an innocent planetary Super Computer ravished, then totally possessed, by a sensitivity-deprived sentient virus named Sludge Vohaul. Hard times are ahead for Sludge because a total reformatting sequence has just been initiated. When it's complete, everything will have been erased from the Super Computer's memory and storage. That everything includes Sludge. There are now 5000 arbitrary units of measure left until total erasure. We'll be back with an update later."

Vohaul was doomed, his digital existence to be erased momentarily like a light armpit stain in strong detergent. Xenon, the galaxy, perhaps all of time and space was finally to be free of his tyranny. Letting my breath out with a deep, relieved sigh, I grinned with satisfaction. Sludge had gotten what he deserved. I was just happy to be alive.

Still, the rebel lad who had rescued me from the Sequel Police had said that the key to Sludge's plans was *my* death. I didn't understand how that could be so, but getting out of the Super Computer and making contact with the rebels seemed like a wise thing to do. Maybe then I'd get some answers.



Son Revealed

Getting out of the Super Computer *alive* was still an unsure bet. I was relatively certain I had deactivated the security system, but needed to make doubly sure. Just outside ye olde programming shoppe was another of the master map/security scrutiny terminals. Plugging my PocketLINT into it, I waited for its screen to flip up and show if any of the droids were still prowling the walkways. I didn't see any droids at all; instead, I was accosted by the face of Sludge Vohaul. Not erased yet, he was screeching in derision and triumph. Triumph? From a being nearing total deletion?

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Roger Wilco, *puny human*. Look at me, you poor substitute for glucose-free jelloid. Look closely, for I am not gone yet. Now take your *last* look at me; soon the Vohaul virus will be no more, but I will live on." Vohaul's face began laughing again while his words caught up to his image. A touch of nausea fluttered through my stomach.

Then the image changed to that of the young rebel leader who had rescued me on Magmetheus. He appeared unconscious, and imprisoned in some sort of an energy field.

"Now look on this lad, Wilco. He looks familiar, doesn't he. He should. Now look more closely; do you see any resemblance? Any *family* resemblance?" I looked harder at the screen. What was Vohaul talking about?

"Mock me all you want, Sludge," I spat at the screen. "Within moments, you'll be history. Or vanished, like last night's bad dream." I must have been getting cocky; I was beginning to talk in second-rate prose.

"You really should look again, Wilco. Look. Look upon the face of your son! Yes, *your* son. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! He is in my power—now and forever. Oh, the jest is so sweet. So sweet. And my revenge will be total." The screen faded to dark, followed seconds later by the last of his words.

A son? My son. Vohaul had to be lying. But then I remembered Zhondra's claim of a romantic entanglement that hadn't—for me, at least—happened yet. The paradoxes of time travel were at work again. And the revelation made sense of Vohaul's mania to kill me: If I died, my son would not be born. My son, the rebel leader. Another question added itself to my confusion: if I had a son, who was his mother?

Sludge's words kicked me in the face like a Ninjoid with a practice dummy. On second thought, strike that analogy. If I had a son, and Sludge had him prisoner, then I had no choice but to try to chance a rescue. I plugged into the terminal again.



On the far side of the Super Computer, several levels above me, was the only other chamber in the place. It had Vohaul's Lair written all over it.

The route seemed, if not direct, well marked: back to the bottom of the stairs where the security droid had chased me; follow that walkway to a small elevator; once off the elevator, turn left, and then go straight ahead as far as I could go. No droids appeared anywhere on the map, so dodging them had ceased to be a worry.

From a hidden speaker, the doomsday voice cut in with its promised update: "In case you haven't been counting, there are now 4000 arbitrary units of measure left until total erasure. If you haven't backed up your data recently, this is your last chance. We do hope your files are small. We'll be back soon, so stay tuned."

"Great," I mumbled. "Another mech timer that thinks it's an Anchor Clone." Shaking my head in disgust, I began hurrying to my unscheduled appointment with Sludge—or his digital equivalent.

A short tunnel led into a vast maintenance chamber that serviced the Super Computer's core. Cooling towers rising a hundred meters or more pushed up out of the giant motherboard below, access ladders scaling their sides from top to bottom like frail threads. Crystals, biochips, and organic relays floated or hung suspended in the air. Subelectron tracers sparkled everywhere, marking the pathways that moved information too sensitive to be trusted to the billions of microscopic matter transmission nodes.

On top of one of the cooling towers was the figure of a human, spread-eagled in the grasp of some mysterious energy beam. Even from where I stood at the entrance, there was no mistaking the figure's identity. My son. A chasm, too wide to jump, separated me from him. I went to shout out his name, but realized I didn't know what it was. Suddenly, the field holding him captive shut off, and the boy (I couldn't help but think of him then as anything but a boy) collapsed to the floor. At the same time, a bridge extended itself across to the opposite tower. I ran across before it had time to retract.

"This just in. There are now 3000 arbitrary units of measure left until total brain death for this super computer. The reformatting sequence is continuing as designed. If you plan to pay any final respects to Sludge Vohaul, this will be your last opportunity. Now, back to our regular programming—or reprogramming, so to speak."

"Son," I yelled. "It's me, your father, Roger Wilco. I've come to rescue you. I hope." As I bent over to give the boy aid, he shoved my hand aside and stood up by himself, his expression one of eternal malice and undying scorn. A small terminal rose up out of the floor next to him; he reached over and snatched a disk out of it, holding it up like it was a some trophy or prize, or the head of a defeated enemy.



The Final Battle

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Look upon me, *puny human*. Look upon the new, improved Sludge Vohaul. I have stolen your son's body, and downloaded my mind into it. The secret of immortality is mine. I must admit that it is quite ironic to be part Wilco, but the body is young and strong, and will remind me, each time I look in a mirror, of my ultimate triumph over you." He waved the disk some more. Even in a new body, he was having trouble making his lips and words match.

"You may be wondering what happened to your son's mind and personality, *puny human*. Good question. I put it all here on this disk, so you would have the pleasure of seeing me throw it away." With an overly dramatic snap of his right wrist, Vohaul tossed the disk over the side of the cooling tower. We both watched it disappear into the darkness below.

"And now Wilco, the final battle, and the final jest." Vohaul stepped back a few steps and crouched into a fighting pose. "I will take pleasure killing you with your son's bare hands," he growled. "Fight me if you dare, but in the unlikely event that you beat me, remember: to kill me is to kill your son. Prepare to die, Wilco. I am going to enjoy this so much." The terminal at his side retreated back into the floor, and Sludge flung himself at me.

Let me remind you again that I am not a fighter. For most of my life I have had neither the agility nor the dexterity. As a consequence, I never learned the skills. Anyway, I also dislike getting hurt, even when the hurts are small. But survival, revenge, and controlled anger are a nasty mix when combined with the paternal urge to protect. When Vohaul swung at me, I grabbed him in a tight hug and held on. When he threw me away, I staggered to the very edge of the precipice, but kept my balance. We raced to meet each other in the middle of the platform, and knocked ourselves to the floor. Again and again we hammered at each other, Vohaul attempting to propel me over the edge, and me hoping to find a way to bring him under my control. Back and forth the fight surged, but the balance always remained in Sludge's favor, the number of hurts absorbed in mine.

"Come on, Wilco," he taunted. "Is that really the way a Space Ranger fights? I could beat you in my old body, and that one's been dead for over a hundred years."

We clinched again, and I was tossed again to the floor. "I've toyed with you long enough, *puny human*. It's time to end our relationship forever." Laughing uncontrollably, Vohaul stepped back to make a final charge.

I suspect there was a button hidden somewhere on the floor, a button that controlled the rising and falling of the terminal that had contained the computer disk with my son on it. I suspect Sludge inadvertently stepped on it just then. Whatever the reason, as Vohaul stepped backward, the terminal rose up behind



him. Not seeing it, Sludge bumped into it, stumbled a bit, then grabbed the console to steady himself. In doing so, Vohaul's hand must have activated the energy ray, because at once, a beam sliced down from an overhead projector and immobilized him completely. Sludge had fallen victim to his own shackles.

"Hello again, happy campers. If you're keeping count, there are now only 2000 arbitrary units of measure until reformatting is achieved. If you haven't said 'Bye' to Sludge Vohaul, you're now out of luck. If you need the Super Computer for any of those inevitable last minute chores. . .well, this is the last minute."

Time had again become a luxury item. If I were to get my son back into his body, I would have to find Vohaul's mind/body swapping program before the Super Computer's reformatting was completed. For that, I needed to recover the disk that had been tossed away.

Heights, as I'm sure I've mentioned, scare me. No matter, with barely a fearful glance down, and only a quiet whimper, I descended the tower's ladder until I reached the motherboard at the bottom. Almost at the ladder's base, I found the disk. It was undamaged, caught in a force field supporting one of the computer's floating parts.

Back up the ladder, I took my first real look at Vohaul's private terminal, and found it was still set to the mind swap program. I slipped the disk into it, and was presented with a list of choices: uploading and downloading to and from disk, and uploading and downloading to and from the beam—presumably the same one that was containing Sludge.

The countdown to reformatting had dropped to 1000, and I still had to get my son off of the disk and into the Super Computer. So many choices, so little time. I chose Disk Upload, and a message told me that my son's mind and personality had been transferred. I yelled a cheer to myself. Next, I needed to get Sludge out of the boy's body. I tried Beam Upload, and Vohaul's name appeared on the screen. Another hurrah. Both were now in the Super Computer, but which one would arrive when I chose Beam Download? A small arrow pointed to my son on the terminal's screen. He, I concluded, must be the active personality. He'd better be. Before I could doubt my decision, I activated the download, and my boy's body collapsed to the floor. Who would be the person who stood up?



Past, Present, and Future Together

The countdown reached zero. Sludge Vohaul was no more.



OK. I do admit to being a touch melodramatic at times. I could tell at once, just by the look in the boy's eyes, that I was standing face to face with my son to be. We hugged spontaneously, and cried for just a few moments. Some emotions are too intense for tears.

"Father. You've saved my life. Thank you."

"Think nothing of it—son." The words tasted awkward and strange, but *right*.

"I should introduce myself; I'm your son, Roger, Jr."

"Roger, Jr.?"

"Of course. You should know that it's a family tradition to have a Roger Wilco in every generation. You named me yourself. Of course you don't remember that because it hasn't happened yet—for you. I wanted so much to tell you on Mag-metheus, but the consequences for the time stream would have been devastating."

"We have so much to talk about, son; I want to know about you, your mother, me. . ."

"Let's get out of this place first, father. It gives me the creeps. There should be a spare shuttle to take us back down to the city."

Roger, Jr. and I stood on a rooftop overlooking the ruins of what had once been Xenon. To the north, the suns were setting, but we knew that dawn would be the beginning of a new era for the planet, and the galaxy. With the Super Computer's reformatting, and Vohaul's deletion, the Sequel Police had stopped moving, awaiting new programming. The droids and the zomboids had simply collapsed where they were, and with the streets now safe, survivors of Vohaul's terror had begun to reappear from their hiding places, still too stunned to do much more than wander—and wonder.

"You know, Junior, you do look a lot like me. Do you trip over painted lines or pocket lint very often?"

"Father, I really can't say very much to you. The chances of shattering history as we know it are too great. Even to say a little might be too much."

"But why did you have to travel backward in time to find me? You could have avoided all of those problems, if I. . . I mean the Roger in this time—had gone after Sludge. Which, by the way, reminds me, will I be able to get a chance to meet myself while I'm here?" Junior's eyes darkened, and he glanced away.

"You don't mean that by this time I'll be dead?"

"Really father, I can say no more."

"What about your mother. What's her name? Can I meet her, at least." *And maybe make up for lost time*, I thought.

Roger took a holo disk out of his pocket, and projected the picture of a trim blond woman with lips like new, soft snow, and mercury eyes. They overflowed with intelligence, wit, and compassion. Without doubt, a woman I could have easily



fallen in love with. Quickly. And If Junior were to be believed, I had, and she with me.

"Her name was Beatrice." His voice had softened to a near whisper, as if to talk about a great loss. "She was your wife, and my mother. People still talk about her beauty and her wisdom."

"You're talking about her in the past tense. What happened to her? What happened to me? You must tell me."

"I'm sorry, father. I've already said too much. Trust me when I say that I love you. I do, and am glad we could finally spend a little time together. And trust me when I say that it's for the greater good of the universe to tell you no more." We looked at each other for a long time, and hid our tears from each other with another hug.

"I have to send you back now to Magmetheus, father. We have a planet to rebuild, and you have your own future to live. If it's any consolation, my mother is part of that future. There is no place for you here, as much as I might wish it." From his belt, Junior removed a device that looked like the offspring of an ion blaster and a Pledge Night premium offer. He aimed it into the air near me and ripped a tear in reality, bottomless and eternal.

My son and I looked at each other one last time, then shook hands. "Good-bye," we said in unison, bringing a laugh to both of us. Then I turned around and jumped into the time rip.

Time stopped and did a backflip.

The lightshow began.

I twisted forever down a rainbow spiral.

My future lay ahead of me, except some of it was already in my past.

My past lay behind me, except those parts that are still in my future.

A part of my life was ending, and it was time to make a new beginning.

Or was it that a part of my life was beginning, and it was time for a new ending?

Oh, time travel can be so confusing at times.

Cruising Through Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers



In Space Quest IV, you again take on the identity of Roger Wilco, sanitation engineer to the cosmos. Rescued from death at the hands of the notorious Sequel Police, you are transported forward through time to your home planet, Xenon, which has been ravaged by Wilco's old nemesis, Sludge Vohaul, during SQXII. From here, you must steal a time pod and travel through various Space Quest games in an attempt to save both Xenon and the life of Roger's son, who is being held prisoner by Sludge.



The game begins as you, Roger Wilco, sit in a bar on the planet Magmetheus. (This entire sequence is animated, so get some popcorn, sit back, and enjoy it.) As Roger relates stories of his past adventures to the aliens sitting with him, men in black (the Sequel Police) come in. They escort Roger out to the landing field in front of the bar and present him with a holographic message from his old enemy, Sludge Vohaul. Vohaul orders that Roger be executed, but he is saved at the last minute by a pair of strangers, rebels from another time. Pursued by the vengeful Sequel Police, one of the rebels opens a time rip for Roger to escape through. Roger dives through the rip and finds himself back home on what's left of Xenon.



Before We Begin—A Special Note

Since the first edition of this book was published, Sierra On-Line has released Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers in a CD-ROM version for IBM-compatible computers. Both the CD-ROM and the disk-based versions of the game are all but identical in nearly every respect. However, because of technical reasons beyond the understanding of we *puny* humans, the solutions to a few problems are different in the CD-ROM version. We are told that this is because of how certain timing routines behave, but we think it might be just another of Sludge Vohaul's petty revenges. Even if you install the CD-ROM version of the game onto your hard drive (which Sierra On-Line recommends for better performance), the solutions will still differ. We will cover these changes when we get to them in this walkthrough, so don't sweat it if you are one of the lucky folks playing Space Quest IV on CD-ROM.



On Xenon

As Roger steps out of the time rip and onto the shattered, war-torn streets of Xenon, one of the first things you'll notice is that Roger is now in the Space Quest XII game. While interesting information, this doesn't help you. Check your inventory; you'll find Roger has only 59 buckazoids to his name. Those won't help you much either, so when you're finished, look around and see what's left of Roger's home planet. Save the game.

Before exploring the remains of Xenon, be aware of two dangers. The first is the zombie. The zombie is an old guy who looks like a jogger in a really beat-up sweat suit. If the zombie gets too close to Roger, it will scream. Its scream summons the second danger, the Droid o' Death, which will promptly annihilate Roger and end the game. If the droid sees Roger, Roger is dead; it's that simple. There are two



ways to avoid this fate. The first is to walk off the screen as soon as you see the zombie; it won't follow you. The second way is to hide under the eaves of an abandoned building until it leaves, or behind a pillar. To hide, walk Roger under the eaves of a building (or behind a pillar) and make sure no part of him is visible. That's the key: no part of Roger can be visible on screen.



In this screen shot, you can't see Roger because he is hidden and safe. Wait. The Droid o' Death always follows a few minutes behind the zombie. The droid will pass by the hiding place, and you will score points for having hidden from it. Whether you hide or run from the zombie and his mechanical companion, you may still have to deal

with them later, as they never stop roaming the streets.

Here is one of those CD-ROM changes we warned you about. In the CD-ROM version, the Droid o' Death can appear at any moment, heralded only by a change in the background music; *the zombie won't necessarily appear to give you a visual warning*. On the other hand, it still can. This situation isn't as bad as it at first seems: you will still have control of Roger (unlike in the disk version), and can attempt to walk him behind cover or off the screen. You won't have much time to do this, but you'll usually have enough time to succeed. Still, it's never a sure thing. Either of these actions counts as hiding from the Droid o' Death as far as scoring is concerned.

The best way to ensure that Roger isn't fried while he's wandering around Xenon is to use the *old edge-of-the-screen trick*. To do this, just make sure you move Roger from place to place by hugging the edges of the screen. That way, if the droid or zombie appears, it's quick work to duck into another location. The droid most likely will not be in the new place (this is a rare occurrence) but if it is, just duck back the way you came. The droid should be gone when you return. If it's not—well, that's one of the reasons we save games.

Another denizen of post-war Xenon that Roger will encounter is a pink, battery-powered rabbit beating on a drum. It won't do anything to Roger, but he'll eventually need its battery.

Now that you know about the droid, the zombie, and the rabbit, and have taken a look around, you are ready to begin exploring. Go one screen to the west.



Here you will see a disabled skimmer that won't ever fly again. Look at it and you will see that there is nothing of interest but a glove compartment. Use the Hand icon to reach inside the skimmer. You will see a small screen showing you the glove compartment. Open it up and look inside; you'll find a PocketPal portable computer terminal. Take it and walk one screen north.

North of the ruined skimmer is an equally ruined tank. Look in the hole that's been blasted in the front of the tank. Inside you will see a piece of unstable ordnance, a.k.a., an unexploded cannon shell. Take the shell, then immediately replace it in the tank. You get points for this course of action, and save yourself the trouble of Roger being blown to bits later in the game. (Actually, you score points for taking the ordnance, and then lose most of them for replacing it. But this is the proper sequence of events; the apparent loss of points is a red herring to make you think you must keep the cannon shell.)

Speaking of being blown to bits, this might be a good time to save the game, if you haven't thought of doing so already. Remember, there is a Droid o' Death moving about. After you've put the unexploded shell back in the tank, continue your explorations one screen to the north.

North of the tank is the entrance to the former Bank of Xenon. Its doors are closed for the foreseeable future and there is no way to get inside. Looking north you see the street is impassable, choked with rubble from collapsed buildings. At this point, walk Roger east one screen.

East of the bank, rubble still persistently chokes the northbound street. A large, mostly intact structure (the Xenon Super Computer building) dominates the skyline in that direction, but you have no way of getting to it (yet). Continue walking east.

A bombed-out structure blocks Roger's route east. Given the choices presented—either backtracking east or going south—south seems the better alternative.

South of the bombed-out building a side street leads east to a cliff. If Roger goes too far in that direction, he'll die. Across the side street stands a support column for a large, red building, and almost at Roger's feet is a sewer grate. Nothing of interest presents itself, so continue your stroll one screen south.

South of the side street is the large, devastated red building that used to be supported by the column you just passed. The street south is also blocked off by rubble, but a small hank of yellow rope sits atop the fallen masonry. Take the rope, and walk one screen to the north.

It's time to do some bunny hunting. When you've returned to the side street with the rope, walk behind the support beam to the red building, select the rope from your inventory, and click the Rope icon on the ground in front of the beam. Roger will make a noose out of the rope and hide behind the beam. Put the Hand icon over the rope and wait.



The pink rabbit will show up and wander into the noose. As soon as it's in the noose, click the Hand icon on the rope to pull the bunny in. When the rabbit is in Roger's possession, go to your inventory and look at it. In the rabbit's back is a battery. Take the battery out of the rabbit and put it in the PocketPal computer you picked up at the

skimmer. Now your PocketPal has power, but you still need a place to use it. Exit your inventory and get back on the streets. Directly north of Roger is a sewer grate. Walk over, open it up, and climb inside. You'll be in the next segment of the game.

NOTE: If you still haven't scored points for sidestepping the droid, you may want to save the game and avoid the droid before you continue.

Roger emerges from the sewer grate not in a sewer, but in a small underground room. Look around. A door to the sewer proper is set in the west wall, and a small glass jar rests on a table next to a desk blotter. Take the jar, then lift up the blotter, and Roger will push the button beneath it. This causes a hologram to appear in the northwest corner of the room. The hologram depicts one of the designers of the Xenon Super Computer—an artificial intelligence created to run everything on the planet. The scientists who created it made the mistake of uploading some software they found in a storage box floating in space into the Super Computer. A virus took over the system and ravaged Xenon, using the planet's own weapons against it.

The hologram also tells Roger that he is Xenon's last hope. What it doesn't tell him is that Sludge Vohaul is the virus controlling the Super Computer. *You* know that now. Roger's mission is to save Xenon from the control of the Super Computer. When the hologram has played itself out, walk over to the door in the west wall, open it, and go through into the sewers.

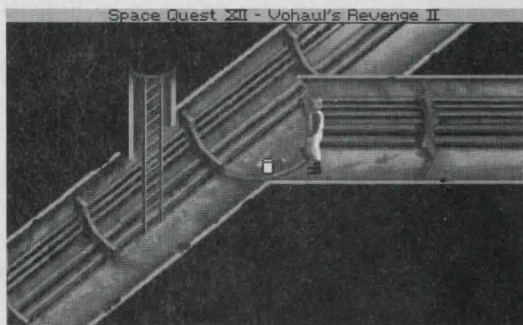
As Roger steps into the sewers, the door shuts itself behind him, sealing the one obvious point of exit. You now must choose between taking the passage south or following one that curves to the west. Take the route west.

In the next screen you are given the choice of going south, west, or east. Continue westward.

In the following screen, the passage curves to the south, leaving you with no choice but to follow. As you exit the screen at its south end, a highly acidic green slime oozes out of a vent in the wall and starts following Roger. Don't panic—just save the game.



The screen south of where the slime appeared has a ladder leading up the west wall, and another passage leading east. Walk Roger over to the mouth of the eastern passage and save the game. Get the glass bottle from the underground room ready and make sure Roger is standing right at the entrance to the passage.



You need to scoop up a bit of the slime as it flows past, but you have to be very close to do it. The process of collecting the slime is often trial-and-error; if you fail once, restore and try again. When you have your slime sample, walk a short distance down the passage to make sure Roger doesn't get nabbed by the edge of the slime. When the

slime has flowed by, walk out of the passage and climb the ladder. This will take Roger back up to the streets he just left.

In the CD-ROM version, especially if you're playing directly off of the compact disk itself, the problem can be a bit trickier. You use the same solution but you have to be much faster in scooping with the bottle, much closer to the slime, faster in stepping away from the slime, and much, much luckier.

However, there are five grates from which the slime will ooze: the others are spaced around in the various screens of the sewers, and the slime will flow out if Roger walks past the grates in a downhill direction. If you save the game when Roger enters the sewers, and keep trying, you will eventually load up on the green stuff.

When Roger finally pokes his head out of the manhole that the ladder leads to, you will see a shuttle landing in the center of the street. Wait until it has set down and the Sequel Police onboard have disembarked. When all four have left the ship, click the Hand icon on the sidewalk in front of Roger to get him out of the manhole.

Roger comes out of the manhole behind the shattered tank you saw earlier. Quickly walk Roger one screen to the east; if Roger goes north or south, the Sequel Police will spot him and kill him. You have to be quick here (especially in the CD-ROM version) or Roger will get shot.

One screen east of the tank is the shuttle in which the Sequel Police arrived. Its landing gear is down and there is enough room in one of the landing gear compartments for Roger to hide. Click the Hand icon on the compartment, and Roger will climb in and curl up. As soon as Roger is inside the compartment, the



shuttle will rev up and take off, giving Roger a free ride to a landing bay inside the Super Computer.

After the shuttle lands and Roger gets out, save the game. Look around and you'll see you can go either east or west. Go west.

In the western part of the landing bay you'll see a Sequel Policeman guarding a time pod. Don't panic; his back is to Roger. Even as you look, another pod materializes. Wait until a Sequel Policeman gets out of this pod and starts talking to the guard. As soon as this happens, click the Hand icon on the pod closest to Roger. Roger will walk over, climb in the pod, and shut the hatch while the Sequel Police stand there blabbing.

CAUTION: Before you can continue with the game you must deal with SQIV's copy protection. Follow the directions on the screen. The copy protection is located on pages 8 and 9 of the *Space Piston Magazine* that came with the game. The "x" coordinate letters are displayed across the top of the graph on those two pages, while the "y" coordinates are displayed vertically along the side of the graph. Enter the "x" coordinate first and the "y" coordinate second for each of the symbols on the screen. When finished, press the ENTER key or click on the Done button with your mouse. The program will then turn control of the game back over to you.

NOTE: In the CD-ROM version, the copy protection is omitted. Sierra On-Line assumes that few people will want to copy all 175 megabytes of the game onto their hard drives (or onto floppies, for that matter). When the CD-ROM version of the game is installed to disk, only about six megabytes are copied to disk, with the rest remaining on the CD.

When finished entering the copy protection codes, you will see Roger seated in the pod. Carefully write down the symbols on the screen in front of him on a piece of paper. *We repeat, write down the symbols on the time pod screen.* These are the coordinates you will need to reach Xenon again.



After you have copied down the symbols on Roger's screen, save the game. If you have the game saved at this point, you can always restore to get the Xenon coordinates if you lose your copy of them. With that taken care of, punch in any six symbols on Roger's screen. Nothing will happen the first time, so punch in a *different* set of six

symbols—it doesn't matter which ones you use. This time the pod will transport Roger to Space Quest X: The Latex Babes of Estros.



On Estros

When Roger arrives on Estros, take a look around. The place is obviously made up of towering buttes, so be careful not to fall off any cliff edges. When you're ready, press the red button on the left side of the pod to open the hatch and climb out. Don't worry about copying down the coordinates on the screen; you won't be coming back here. Outside the time pod, a path goes to the west and a stairway descends to the south. Follow the path leading west.

In the screen west of the pod, stairs descend to the south and the path continues to the west. Continue walking west until the shadow of some flying creature (a dactyl) passes near you. When you see the shadow, turn around and walk east back to the time pod.

When you arrive back at the pod, follow the stairs down to the south. Just before you reach the bottom of the stairs, the dactyl (whose shadow you saw earlier) will swoop down and carry Roger away.

The dactyl will drop Roger into its nest and fly away, presumably saving him for a future meal. Look around the nest. A hole in the south side of the nest provides Roger with a way out. Wait a bit before making your escape; the dactyl will show up again and drop a dead Sequel Policeman into the nest with Roger. Search the corpse and you will get a piece of chewed gum wrapped in some paper. Now that you have all the nest has to offer you, walk Roger out the hole in the nest's south side. Roger will plunge into the Bay of Estros, but will survive.

As Roger drags himself out of the water, two women clad in battle bathing suits and carrying spear guns leap out at him.



These women are the Latex Babes of the game's title. A minisub surfaces next to Roger, and another woman with a gun gets out and speaks. She is obviously someone Roger will know someday (yes, this is a time travel paradox), and she's piqued that he left her. Thanks to the wonders of time travel, Roger has never seen her before in his life.

As soon as the program gives you control of Roger again, click the Walk icon on the sub to get in. Running won't do any good—it will just bring an early ending to the game.

The sub will take Roger underwater to the Latex Babes' fortress. Once there, they will escort Roger to some kind of torture chair and strap him in. Next to the



chair are cylinders of oxygen, which Roger will need later. The woman who's angry with Roger (her name is Zhondra) will press a button on the arm of the chair, zapping the pant legs off of our hero.



The Latex Babes decide to torture him by shaving his legs, but before they can begin, a sea slug arrives with a roar. The Latex Babes flee, leaving Roger immobile for the slug to devour. As the sea slug wraps its tentacles around Roger, the program restores control of him to you.

Wait until the slug's tentacles have opened the restraints holding

Roger to the chair, then press the button Zhondra used to rid Roger of his pant legs. The chair will zap the slug's tentacles, causing it to let go of Roger so he can stand. As soon as Roger is on his feet, grab one of the oxygen cylinders next to the chair. The sea slug will shoot out its tentacles, pulling Roger in towards its mouth. When this happens, click the oxygen tank on the slug's mouth. The slug will swallow the tank, which explodes, causing the poor beast to lose its appetite, drop Roger, and retreat into the sea. The Latex Babes, thus saved, rush in and embrace Roger as a hero. Zhondra forgives him for dumping her, and they even take Roger shopping with them to celebrate.

Even as Roger rockets off toward the mall with the Babes, Vohaul and the Sequel Police are up to no good. Back at the Super Computer, the Sequel Police have dragged before the image of Sludge Vohaul one of the rebels that helped Roger escape. In this sequence you discover that this rebel is actually Roger's son. Now Roger has two interconnected missions: Save Xenon (and possibly the universe) from Sludge Vohaul (again) and rescue his son.



At the Mall

At the mall, the Latex Babes see a sale and run off, leaving Roger standing forlornly at the entrance.

Two pairs of moving walkways go east and west, an escalator descends to the landing bay Roger and the Babes just came up, and the Zero-G Skate-o-Rama lies directly ahead to the north, surrounded by





a low wall. Look around. Lying on the floor in front of Roger is an ATM card dropped by one of the Babes. Take it; Roger is a little short on cash. Get on the walkway moving east, which will carry Roger along with it.

CAUTION: Don't go down the escalator for *any* reason; the Sequel Police are waiting at the bottom. Roger won't survive the meeting.

One screen east of the mall entrance is a software store. Due to the big sale going on, there is no way for Roger to get in the door. Immediately beyond the store's door is an ATM machine (a "Buckmaster 2000" in the CD-ROM version). Walk over to it (this might take some practice), and put in the ATM card you picked up at the entrance to the mall. The machine won't let Roger use the card because he doesn't look like the person it belongs to. Hang onto the card anyway; you'll see later how to beat the machine. From the ATM machine, follow the walkway Roger is on for three screens, past the Radio Shock (called "Hz. So Good" in the CD-ROM version. Hz. is pronounced "hertz") and Monolith Burger stores, then go into the clothing store; you'll know it by the big and tall purple alien that comes out of it. Inside the Big and Tall store, talk to the clerk. He'll sell Roger new pants and boots to replace the ones the Latex Babes zapped off of him back on Estros. Roger will change automatically in the dressing room and step out looking as good as he ever did. Pay the clerk and leave the store.

From the Big and Tall store, get on the walkway moving west (it's the one you were on before). Follow it for another three screens, past the arcade and the women's clothing store, and you'll be back at the entrance to the mall. Now that Roger has new clothes, perhaps he can find a job and earn some buckazoids. Get on the walkway moving east and follow it for three screens until you come to Monolith Burger.



Once you get to Monolith Burger, go inside. Talk to the manager and he will tell you that he's out of employees. Talk to him a second time and he will offer Roger a job. Accept it.

Roger's work takes the form of an arcade sequence, which you may choose to skip or play. You have to play it at least once to score maximum points. The arcade sequence has Roger putting toppings on burgers. The toppings are in order on the counter; all Roger has to do is pick them up and put them on a burger that goes by on a conveyor belt. There are only two problems:



Roger must do this 34 times without screwing up in order to earn all the money possible in any one try *and* the conveyor belt carrying the burgers speeds up every time he makes one successfully.

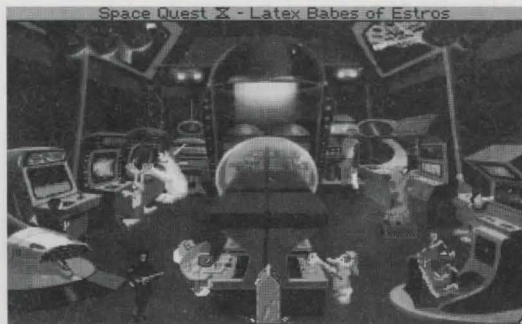
Roger earns one buckazoid for every burger he makes correctly, and can screw up five times before the manager fires him. When he kicks Roger out, he beans him on the head with the butt of his cigar, which is then carried down the walkway to the entrance of the mall. You'll need to go pick it up later. If you didn't earn the maximum amount of buckazoids possible (34), Roger can reapply for the job. In fact, you can keep doing this until you've earned as many buckazoids as you can stand, but never more than 34 at a go. If you choose to skip the arcade sequence, the program gives you the full 34 buckazoids, but you lose three points and are automatically fired.

Once you've earned all you can working at Monolith Burger, get on the walkway heading west (the one you were on before you entered Monolith Burger). Follow the walkway for three screens and go into the women's clothing store. Inside, talk to the clerk, who will help Roger *only* if he has already tried to use the ATM machine. She will sell him a black dress and a wig, which Roger will put on in the dressing room. When he emerges, Roger will be in drag. Pay the clerk and leave the store.

Outside the women's clothing store, get on the walkway heading southwest and follow it to the mall entrance. Once there, pick up the cigar butt Roger's ex-boss at Monolith Burger threw at him. Now, get on the walkway heading east and follow it to the software store. Go inside and look in the bin to Roger's left. Move the books and software around (use the Hand icon) until you find the Space Quest IV Hint Book. Look at it. Select "Keep" from the options the program offers you, then click on the box labeled "Done" to stop looking at the cheap, overpriced software. Pay the clerk for the hint book, then leave.

Walk to the ATM machine next to the software store. Put the card in; it will function now that Roger is dressed as a woman. When it asks what operation you would like to perform, select the one labeled "Clean House." You have made Roger 2001 buckazoids richer.

When you have finished the transaction with the ATM machine, get back on the moving walkway and follow it to the women's clothing store. Enter the store and walk Roger back into the dressing room (it's behind the doorway in the northeast corner of the room) where he changed into the dress during his last visit. Roger will change out of his female attire and back into his typical space hero's outfit. Leave the store and cross over to the walkway moving to the northeast. Ignore the stairs leading down to the southeast; they lead into the Skate-o-Rama, and you don't need to be there yet. Follow the walkway for one screen, then cross over and enter the arcade.



In the arcade, ignore the games and walk over to the northeast corner of the room. When you get there, a time pod with Sequel Police inside will arrive on the platform in the southwest corner. One Sequel Policeman will leave the arcade; the other one will walk north toward Roger. As soon as the first one has left, walk Roger out of the

arcade and onto the walkway moving toward the southwest.

NOTE: There is one game Roger can play at the arcade—Ms. Astro Chicken. If you'd like a look, go there before moving Roger to the northeast corner. The Sequel Police won't arrive until Roger goes to the northeast corner of the screen. To play, click the Hand icon on the screen. You can play Ms. Astro Chicken with the mouse or the keyboard. When using the keyboard, the UP ARROW and DOWN ARROW keys move the chicken up and down, the RIGHT ARROW key speeds her up, and the LEFT ARROW key slows her down. With the mouse, move the pointer up or down, and click the left button to move the chicken. You maneuver Ms. Astro Chicken past flying weasels, windmills, fences, and other hazards while you attempt to bomb unruly farmers and their dogs with eggs. The ENTER key or the right mouse button can be used to drop the eggs. The eggs drop ahead of the chicken, so drop them early or you won't hit much. The lower you fly, the easier it is to hit things with the eggs, but flying low means it's harder to dodge the windmills and the dogs. You start the game with ten eggs, but grabbing ears of corn will give you one extra egg per ear. You get no game points for playing Ms. Astro Chicken; it's an optional activity. The game melts down the fifth time you play it.

Follow the walkway back one screen to the women's clothing store, then cross over to the walkway moving to the northeast and take the stairs leading down from it. Before Roger gets to the bottom of these stairs, save the game.

At this point, depending on which version of the game you are playing, there are different solutions for Roger to escape the Skate-o-Rama alive.

Original Version

At the base of the stairs is the Zero-G Skate-o-Rama. Walk Roger inside and immediately begin moving him straight upward. A Sequel Policeman will appear



on the stairs behind him and start shooting. If Roger isn't moving, he'll die. If you move Roger off screen to the east, he'll be on the other side of the Skate-o-Rama and he'll have the other Sequel Policeman shooting at him from the other set of stairs. Moving Roger up takes him into the dome of the Skate-o-Rama, but the Sequel

Police won't let him escape that easily.

Shortly after Roger arrives in the dome, so do both of Vohaul's minions. When they show up, move Roger back down to the bottom of the skating rink and onto the stairs. Take the stairs back up to the moving walkway and follow it back to the arcade.



CD-ROM Version

At the base of the stairs is the Zero-G Skate-o-Rama. Walk Roger inside and immediately begin moving him straight *down*. A Sequel Policeman will appear on the stairs behind him and start shooting. If Roger isn't moving, he'll die. The Wait icon will appear. Start clicking this (and the Walk icon when it reappears) at the very bottom of the screen, *even if the icon partially disappears*. Keep clicking. Don't stop; you must be very fast here—*very* fast. The trick is to move Roger to the right edge of the screen, but not into the lower-right corner. If he survives to the right edge, move him straight up. Dodge left just a bit to avoid the top-right corner, then move up and into the dome above.

Shortly after Roger arrives in the dome, so do both of Vohaul's minions. When they show up, move Roger back down to the bottom of the skating rink and onto the stairs. Keep moving. If they don't show up in the dome, move Roger a bit higher in the screen, and then down. Don't dawdle. Once down, take the stairs back up to the moving walkway and follow it back to the arcade.

NOTE: The Skate-o-Rama problem can also be solved if Roger enters it on its far side. Just move him the same way, relative to the Sequel Policeman, only here you are avoiding the bottom- and top-*left* corners. Again, the trick to this problem is to move at once, never stop, keep clicking the mouse, and stay out of corners. Also, have a "save game" position for the start of the sequence, be patient, and maintain your cool. This one may take a lot of tries to finish.



Back at the Arcade

When you reach the arcade, go inside and climb into the time pod. When Roger is safe inside the pod, go to your inventory screen and open up the Space Quest IV Hint Book you bought at the software store (use the Hand icon). The program automatically gives Roger the hint-revealer pen that came with the book. If you want to see an answer, click the very tip of the pen on the blip next to the answer space to reveal the answer. Most of the questions and answers, of course, have nothing to do with the game. Read through the questions until you come to the one that says *I'm in the stupid time pod. Where else can I go?* Click on the last answer; it will show Roger the first half of the coordinates for the next place he needs to go. Copy down the symbols, and then exit the hint book. Go back to your inventory and use the Hand icon to unwrap the piece of gum Roger got from the dead Sequel Policeman in the dactyl's nest back on Estros. On the wrapper is the second half of the coordinates you need. Copy them down and exit your inventory. Before you enter your new set of coordinates into the time pod, copy down the coordinates currently on its screen. You'll need them to return here later. Again, save the game at this point so if you need to you can return to this screen to get the proper symbols. Enter the symbols you got from the hint book and the gum wrapper, and you're on your way.



Uence Flats

When the time pod touches down after Roger's latest journey, you'll be looking at the familiar (if you've played SQI) sight of the settlement of Uence Flats.



want to stand around looking at the sand, go into the bar.

Inside, the same band from SQI still plays, and three big, shady-looking characters stand at the bar. On the bar is a book of matches that you'll need later. Try to take it. The three bikers at the bar will turn around, taunt Roger, and throw

Get out of the pod; Roger will be standing by what used to be the west side of Droids B Us. There is nothing to do here, so walk one screen south.

South of the pod is the entrance to the bar, the only part of the settlement that's still active. Parked outside are three sand bikes and a pair of spacecraft. Unless you



him out of the bar. When Roger has dusted himself off, click the Hand icon on the bikes to knock them over. Roger then runs offscreen to the west. The bikers will come out of the bar, get on their bikes, and start looking for him. When the bikers have roared off to look for Roger, he will emerge from behind Tiny's hut. Save the game and walk east back to the bar.

NOTE: Whenever the program mentions (or sounds) a high-pitched whine, it's a biker coming to run Roger down. When this happens, move the Walk icon to one side of Roger, save the game, and wait. When the biker appears and gets close to Roger, click the mouse and Roger will do a roll in the direction of the icon. Wait until the bike is just about to hit Roger before you do this. If you fail, restore and try again. This can be a very hard maneuver to perform the first few times, but keep practicing since Roger will have to avoid at least one biker this way before making it back to the pod.

When you reach the bar, go inside. Take the matches and leave. Save the game, and walk north back to the time pod. When back inside the pod, punch in the Xenon coordinates you wrote down back in the landing bay of the Super Computer, and say goodbye to Ulence Flats.



On Xenon Again

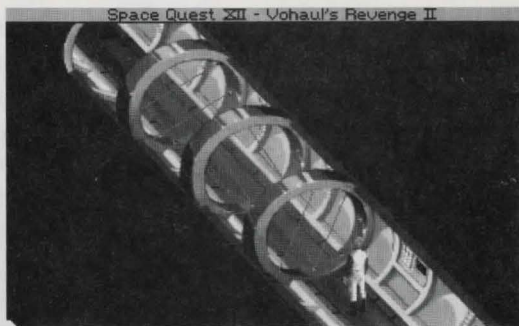
Roger arrives back on Xenon in the same place from which he left—the westernmost portion of the Super Computer landing bay. Get out of the pod and walk two screens east. The second screen east of the pod contains a locked door. Since the game never gave Roger a keycard, pour the jar of slime over the lock instead. The highly acidic slime eats the lock apart in no time, leaving Roger free to open the door and step inside.

You'll be in a corridor lined with three large revolving rings. Each ring is lined with beam emitters that will cook Roger if he walks through them. On the wall to Roger's right is a computer terminal. Go to your inventory and light the cigar butt you found in the mall with the matches. Exit the inventory and Roger will toss the stogie through the beams.

The smoke trails left by the cigar will make the beams readily visible. Each ring contains a pair of beams lancing from top to bottom and turned in such a way that walking between them is impossible. Look at the computer terminal next to Roger. It has a keypad that allows you to enter the rotation angles for the beams. Rotate the beams until they are completely vertical so Roger can walk between them and emerge alive. Use the mouse to enter the angle by which you want to rotate



each beam. There are only two catches: You must enter three digits to rotate each beam. If you don't want a three-digit rotation angle, type **0** (zero) before the number you want. The second catch is that you must enter numbers that are divisible by 12. This probably sounds confusing, so here are the rotation angles for the beams (the first pair of beams are the ones closest to Roger):



First pair of beams:	156
Second pair of beams:	024
Third pair of beams:	108

NOTE: Entering these numbers will only work if the beams are in the positions in which you originally found them. If you start fiddling with the beams, you'll have to work out the angles for yourself.

Once you have the beams in their full and upright positions, save the game and walk out the corridor to the north. 14

When Roger exits the hall with the laser beams, he'll be on a series of catwalks inside the Super Computer. Be careful: there are security droids in the area, and if you stand around too long, one will come by and blow Roger away. Since you can always hear these droids, you'll get some warning if one is coming after Roger.

Northwest of Roger is a junction box of some kind. Look at it; it will show Roger the kind of plug he needs to jack the PocketPal terminal into it. Pause the game (simply putting the mouse cursor in the icon bar works well) and make a sketch of the plug. When finished, walk back into the tunnel with the beams.

When back in the corridor, Roger is safe from the security droids. From here, walk back to the time pod and get in. You need to go back to the mall so Roger can buy a plug for the PocketPal. Enter the mall coordinates you wrote down back in the arcade, and you'll be on your way again.



At the Mall Again

When Roger returns to the mall, the time pod sets down on the same platform in the arcade that the Sequel Police landed on when they were chasing him. Get out



of the pod. If you really want to play a game here, the only one available is the Ms. Astro Chicken game, which Roger will be standing next to.

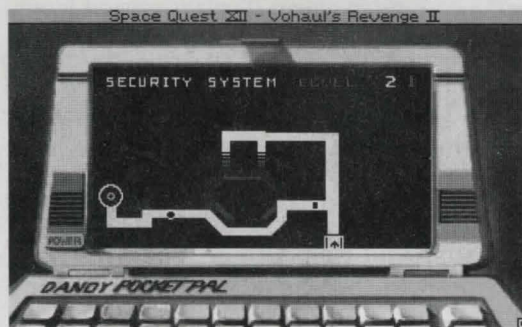
When finished with Ms. Astro Chicken (if you choose to play it), exit the arcade and get on the walkway heading southwest. Follow it for two screens and you'll be back at the entrance to the mall. From here, get on the walkway moving east and follow it for two screens to the Radio Shock store (remember, it's "Hz. So Good" in the CD-ROM version of the game). Go inside and click any icon on the salesbot to get a menu of options. Choose the one labeled "Catalog." In the catalog, choose the option labeled "Electronic Gadgets." Go through the menu until you find the PocketPal Connector. When you find it, order one. The screen will display a list of choices; choose the one that matches the sketch you made of the plug in the super computer. When finished, choose the "Top Menu" option, and then exit Radio Shock.

Unless you want to hang around the mall and stare at stores, go back to the arcade, get in the time pod, and enter the Xenon coordinates for the last time.

The Final Visit to Xenon

Before you get out of the pod on Xenon, open up your inventory and check the PocketPal. Make sure you installed the battery from the rabbit, and plug in the connector you just bought. When you've done that, exit the pod and walk back to the catwalks in the Super Computer.

When you get out on the catwalks, ⁽¹⁵⁾ save the game. Click the PocketPal on the junction box Roger looked at earlier and pause the game.



The readout displayed on the screen shows that Roger is on level two of the catwalks. The blue cross that is on the same level with him is a security droid, and the gray rectangle is Roger. When you've seen all you need to, click the Hand icon on the Power button of the PocketPal to exit that display.

When finished with the terminal, quickly walk Roger one screen north, one screen west, and then down the far flight of stairs. Don't forget that there is a security droid coming his way.

At the bottom of the stairs, save the game and wait until a security droid passes overhead, two levels above Roger. When the droid has left the screen above, turn

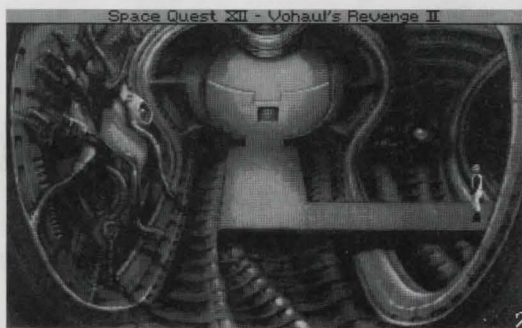
(16)



around and walk back up the stairs. Move quickly, because the security droid that was following Roger will be coming down the stairs.

From the top of the stairs, walk one screen east and one screen south. Roger will be where he first emerged on the catwalks. Walk two screens west and you'll be in front of the entrance to a corridor. Outside the corridor is another junction box. Plug the PocketPal into the box and you'll see Vohaul gloating to Roger about having captured his son. When Vohaul has finished his speech, the PocketPal shuts down. When this happens, walk west into the corridor.

Inside the corridor is a door with a panel on it. Look at the panel; you will see that it asks for a numeric code. Leave the panel and go to your inventory. Open up the SQIV Hint Book and look for the question about being in a strange room in the Super Computer.



The question reads like this: *I'm in a strange room inside the Super Computer. Scary eyeball-looking things stare at me. Bio-mechanical bones liven up the area nicely. How do I get the door open?* When you have found it, click on the blip next to the last answer to look at the answer to it. The answer should display the numbers 69-65-84-76-69. This is the code

needed to open the door. When you have the code, exit the hint book and enter the code into the door panel. Don't take all day, because the security droids are still on the prowl. When the door is open, walk in and you'll be in the programming chamber of the Super Computer.

Inside the programming chamber, a computer screen displays several icons. Click the Hand icon on the Droid icon, and drag it into the toilet. Click the Hand icon again to flush it. Now you don't have to worry about the security droids any more. Next, repeat the procedure with the Brain icon. This starts the reformatting sequence in the Super Computer. When the formatting sequence is complete (it takes some time) all the information in the Super Computer will be erased, including Vohaul. When you are done here, click the symbol in the upper-left corner of the Super Computer screen to exit the programming chamber.

Now all you have to do is rescue Roger's son before he is reformatted along with Vohaul. From outside the programming room, walk three screens east, one screen north, one screen west, and go down the stairs once more.

From the foot of the stairs go one screen west and get in the glass elevator tube. It will transport Roger to the top level of the catwalks. From the top of the elevator, follow the catwalk one screen north, one screen east, and then walk north through the glowing door.



Inside the glowing door, you will be on a platform face-to-face with Sludge Vohaul. . .except he is in the body of Roger's son.

Vohaul will taunt Roger, then throw the disk on which he has recorded Roger's son's personality over the edge of the platform. Sludge then challenges Roger to a fight. While he grapples with

Sludge, control Roger using the arrow keys or the mouse.

NOTE: Before you begin, know that the fight is rigged. All you have to do is walk Roger toward Sludge; they will grapple, and Roger will be thrown back. On the other hand, if Roger waits for Sludge to make his move, Vohaul will throw him over the side the *second* time this happens.

After Roger attacks four or five times, both a beam and a disk drive unit will emerge from the center of the platform and Vohaul will start taunting Roger again. This time when you join combat, Roger always throws Vohaul back into the beam, which paralyzes him.

Once Sludge is captured in the beam, click the Hand icon on the ladder that's suspended from the west side of the platform. Roger will climb down the ladder, retrieve the disk Vohaul threw over, and come back up again. When Roger is back with the disk, put it in the disk drive unit next to the beam that holds Sludge motionless. The unit will give you a choice of buttons to press.

First click on the one labeled "Disk Upload" to upload Roger, Jr., into the Super Computer. Then click on the button labeled "Beam Upload" to upload Vohaul into the computer so he can be reformatted and destroyed. Finally, click on the button labeled "Beam Download" to download Roger's son back into his own body. The rest of the game is an animated sequence, so sit back and enjoy.

Congratulations! You have survived Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers, and scored the maximum number of points possible. You can now leave Roger to his own devices until you feel a burning desire to embark on Space Quest V: Roger Wilco in the Next Mutation.

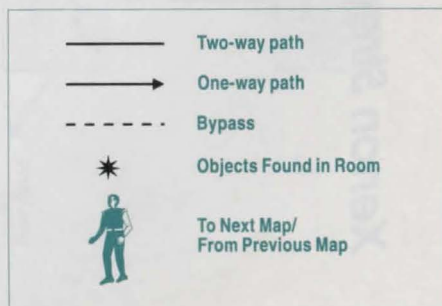
17

Keeping Your Bearings in Space

Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers

Map Order:

Xenon Streets
Xenon Sewers
Super Computer Landing Bay
Estros
Galaxy Galleria Shopping Mall
Ulence Flats
Inside the Super Computer (Level 1)
Inside the Super Computer (Levels 2 & 3)

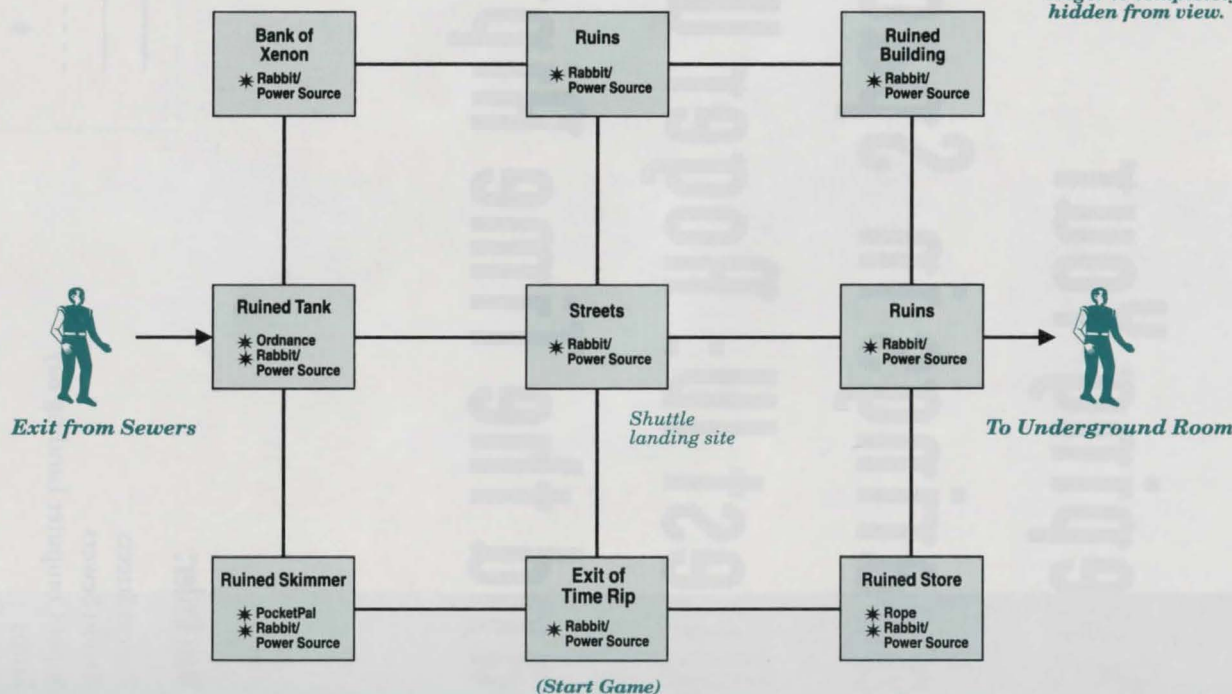




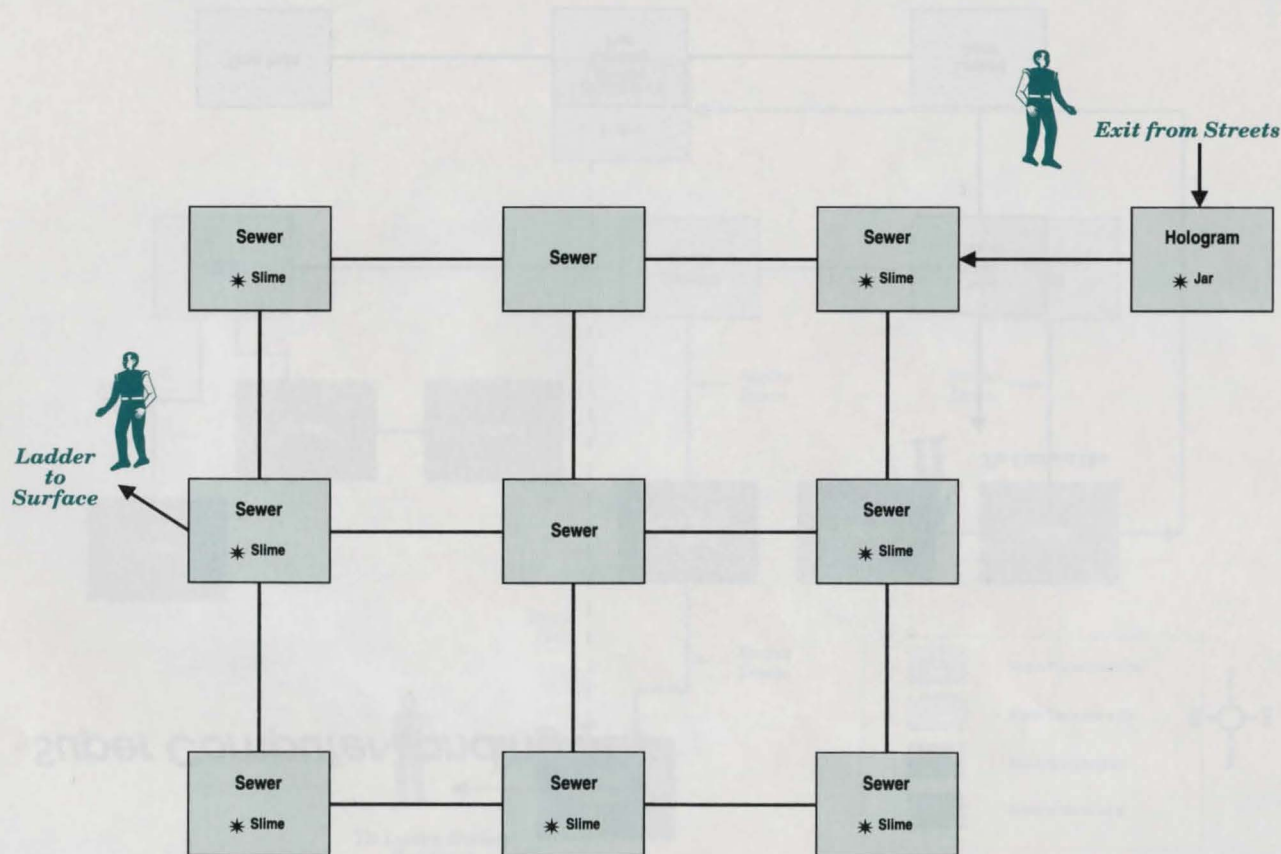
Xenon Streets



*Rabbit can be captured
with rope anytime
Roger is completely
hidden from view.*

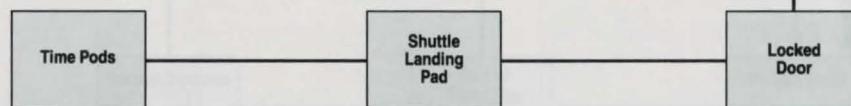


Xenon Sewers





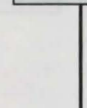
Super Computer Landing Bay



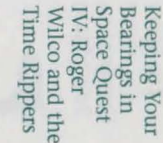
To Catwalks

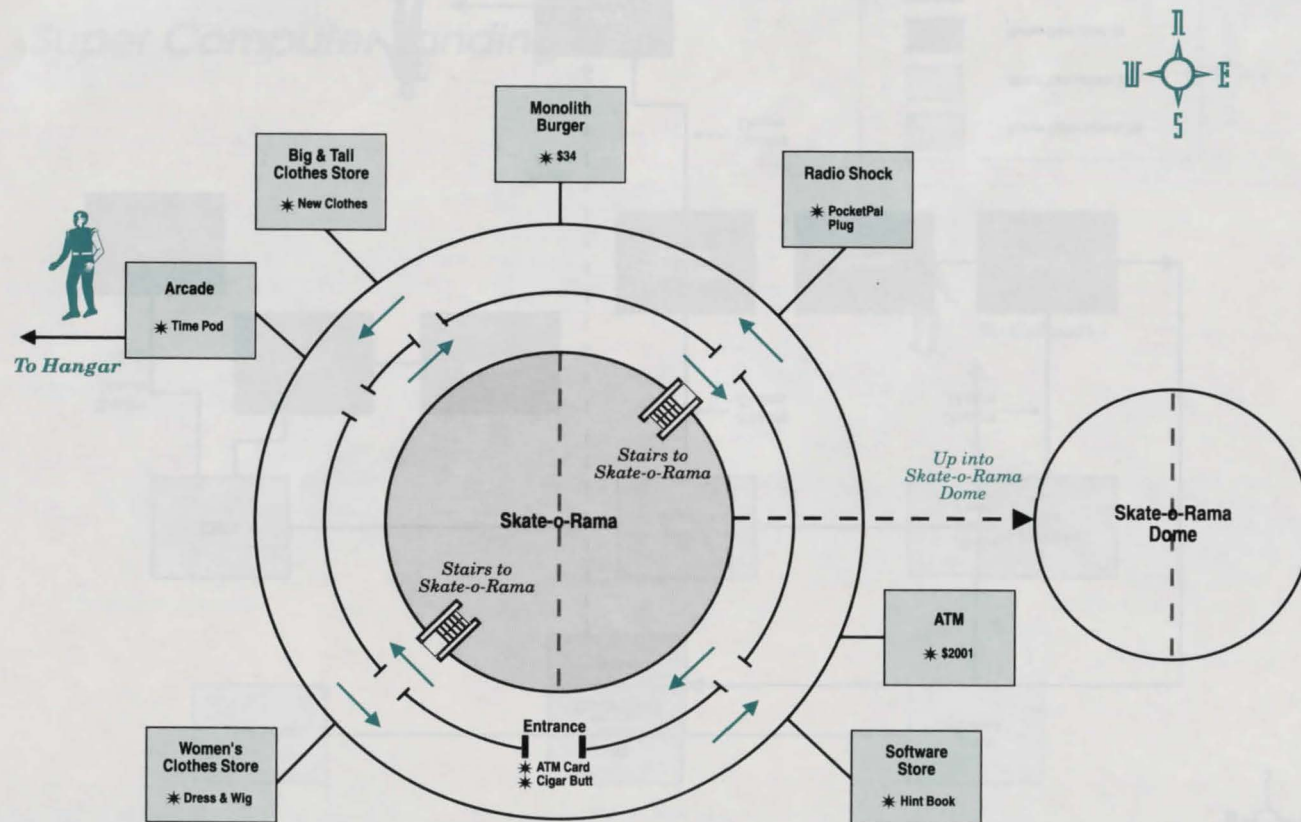


Laser
Beam
Tunnel

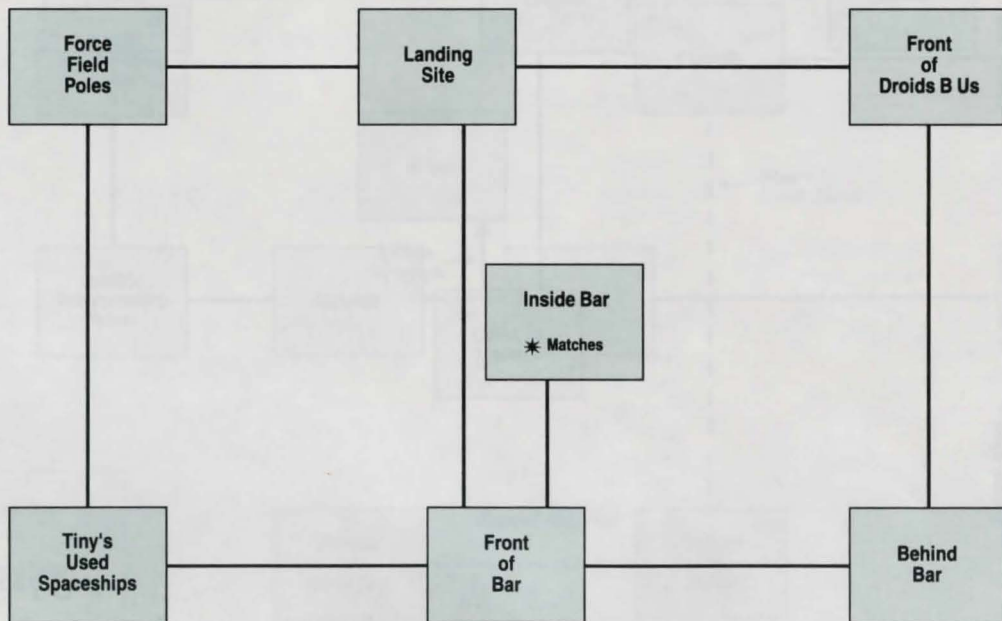


Locked
Door





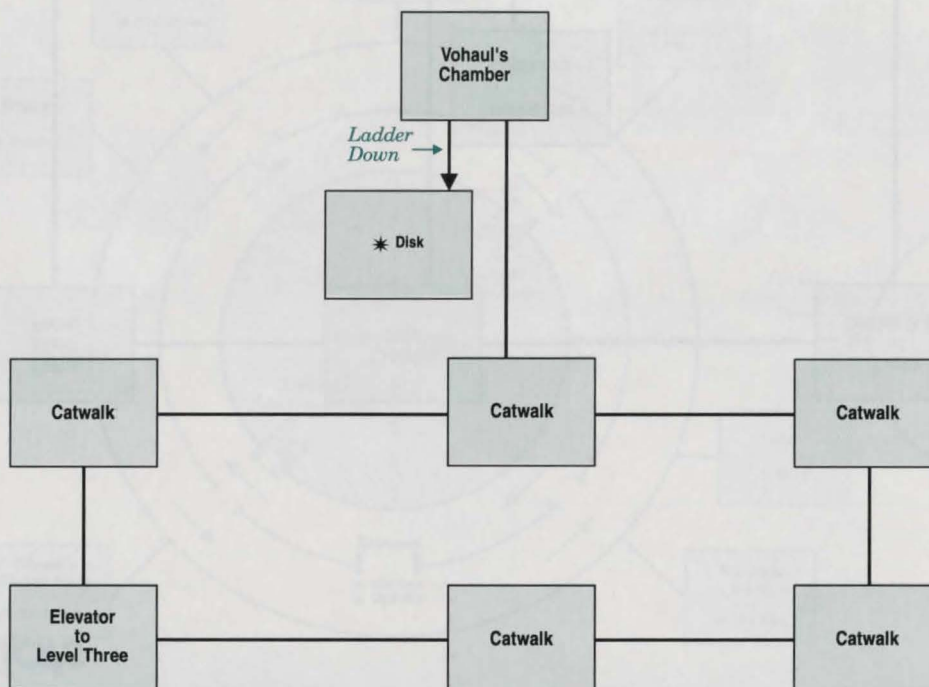
Ulence Flats





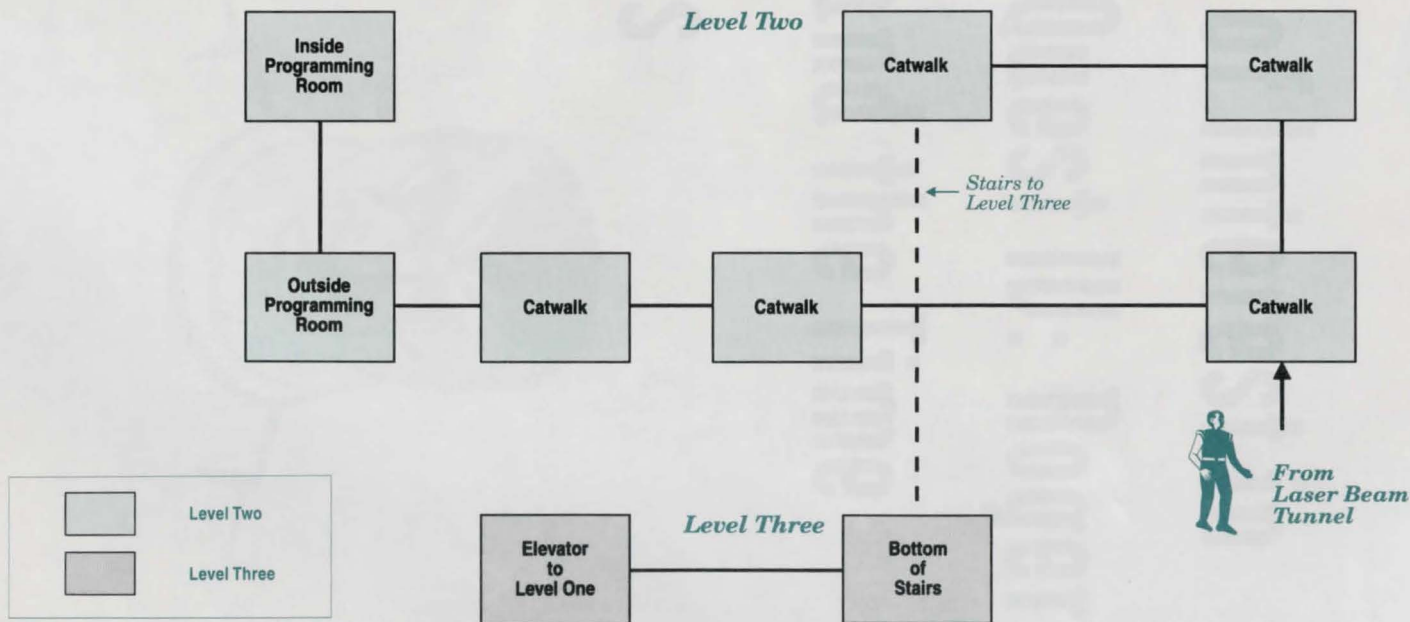
Inside the Super Computer

Level One



Inside the Super Computer

Levels Two & Three



Keeping Your Bearings in Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers

Points of Interest in Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers





WHAT TO DO

POINTS

On the Streets and in the Sewers:

Hide from Droid o' Death	5
Take PocketPal computer terminal	5
Take unstable ordnance	25
Return unstable ordnance	-20
Take rope	5
Catch bunny	10
Take battery from bunny	3
Put battery in PocketPal	3
Open sewer grate and go underground	5
Take glass jar	5
Activate hologram	10
Collect slime in jar	5
Exit sewer via manhole	3
Stow away in shuttle	5
Steal time pod	10

On Estros:

Take gum	5
Zap sea slug tentacles	5
Take oxygen cylinder	5
Throw cylinder at slug	5

At the Galaxy Galleria Mall:

Take ATM card	2
Buy new clothes	5
Get job at Monolith Burger	3
Skip arcade sequence (without trying once)	-3
Buy women's clothing	5
Take cigar butt	5
Buy SQ IV hint book	5
Take money from ATM machine	10
Get normal clothes back	3
Escape mall	15 (first time only)
Buy PocketPal plug	15



WHAT TO DO

POINTS

At Ulence Flats:

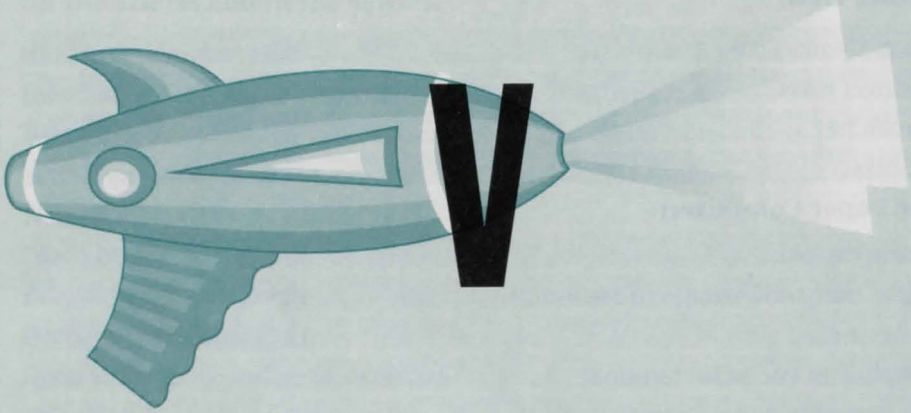
Arrive at Ulence Flats	5
Knock over bikes	5
Take matches	5
Evade biker	5 (one time only)

In the Super Computer:

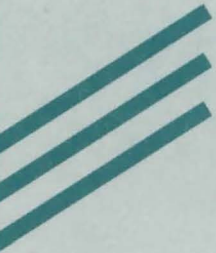
Pour acid on lock	10
Use cigar butt and matches to see beams	10
Align beams	15
Install plug on PocketPal terminal	3
Use PocketPal in Super Computer	10
Reach programming chamber	10
Open programming chamber door	10
Flush security droid icon	5
Flush brain icon	15
Reach Vohaul's chamber	5
Retrieve disk	5
Use disk in disk drive	5
Download Roger, Jr., into body	25

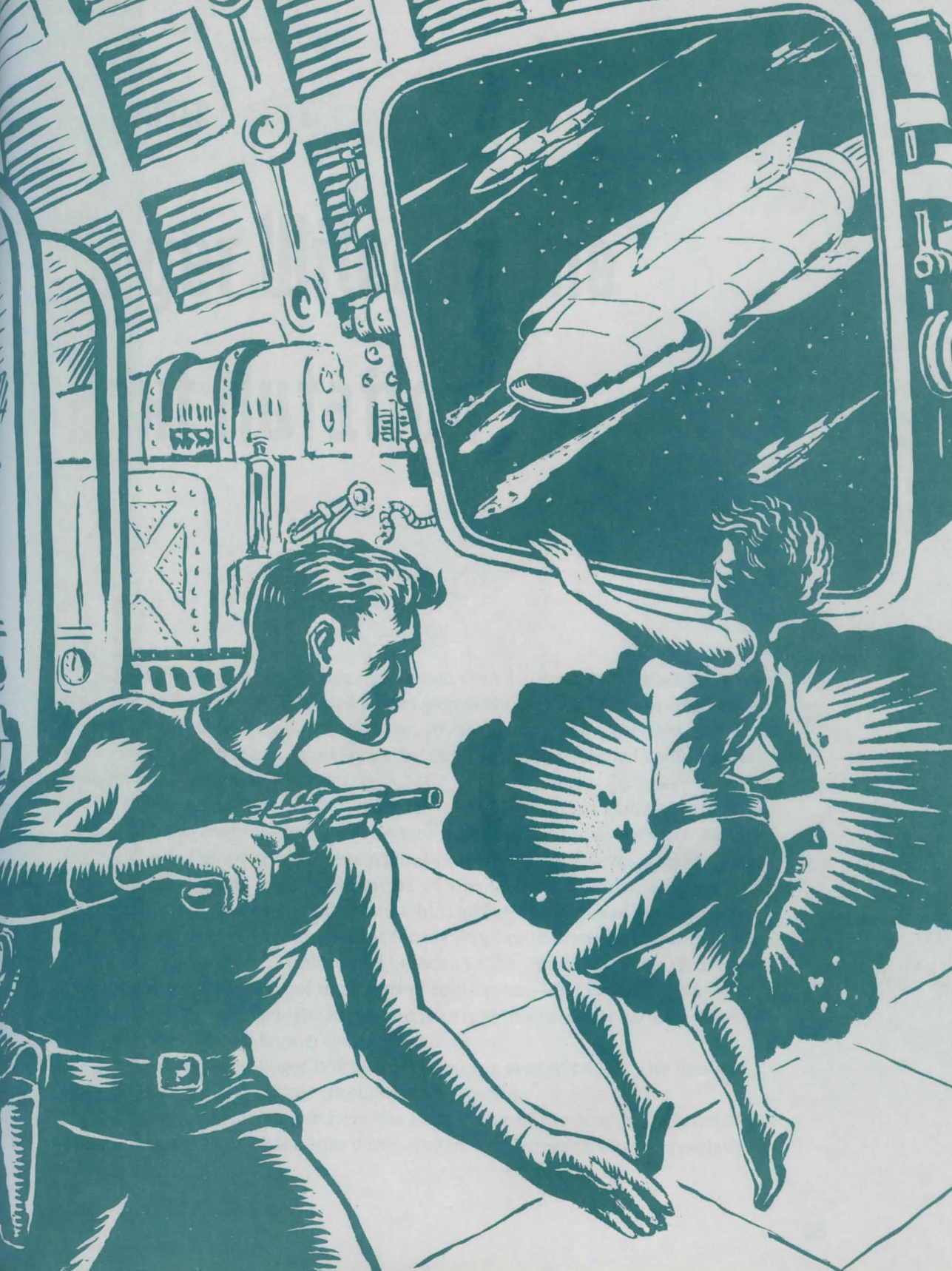
Highest possible score:	315
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P A R T

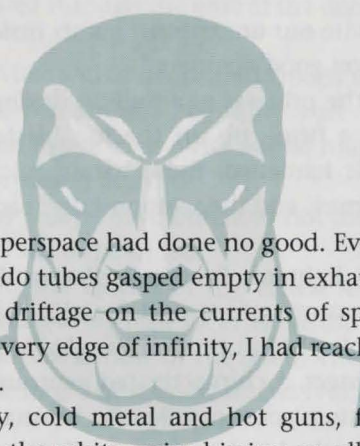


Space Quest V: Roger Wilco in the Next Mutation





Roger Wilco in the Next Mutation



Endless skips through hyperspace had done no good. Evasive action without end had failed. Photon torpedo tubes gasped empty in exhaustion. The debris of a thousand ships were now driftage on the currents of space, but still the huntresses came after me. At the very edge of infinity, I had reached Boot Hill. The time for our last stand had come.

The ice black Bird of Pray, cold metal and hot guns, fluttered into the Here-And-Now, invisible but for the white noise hissing on all subspace hailing frequencies, interrupted by off-key cackling and screeches of, "Pieces of eight. Pieces of eight." Its cloaking device shimmered momentarily into reality, shut off, and revealed the million mile long dreadnought. The foreshortening of my perspective made its mass seem far less than what it truly was, but that was no comfort to me; the extravagantly drawn scarlet angel branded to the side of its fo'c'sle declared it to be the renegade legions of the Sisters of Impropriety—the Fallen Angels—good girls turned very, very bad. The leader and master of this harem of harm: unknown, the greatest enigma in known space—until now.

"I have you now, Roger Wilco. You can escape me no longer!" The litany of a million "Ha, ha, ha's!" echoed throughout the cosmos.

Upon the forward viewscreen, the human face of my pursuer flickered leerily down at me. Familiar from a dozen demands of surrender, insane eyes clashed



against a slick, polyester voice and abundant tresses. There was something wrong with the picture, but I knew not what; as if there were a darker secret hidden there, one which I somehow knew.

From all directions, smaller, but more numerous and fatal craft began fading forward out their hyperspatial wormholes. The velcroid *whoosh* of a thousand tractor beams attaching themselves to my doomed fighter could not conceal the fresh shouts filling the ether:

"Ready all boarding parties!"

"Prepare to board."

"Take no prisoners!"

"Women and children first!"

"Hoist the Jolly Roger!"

They meant me. The universe already knew these fallen sisters—these fiends—behaved improperly; I now knew they had no mercy, either.

"Shall we invite our unexpected guests inside, dear? It would be polite, and one can never forget good manners."

At my side, the princess of a million dreams smiled as she ran her hand up my leg and took a firm grip on the ion blaster she bumped into there. Soft, experienced, battle hardened; those hands quickly made sure that the blaster's charge was set to max, and the weapon fully loaded. I did the same to its twin on my other hip.

The GoForIt light on Beatrice's plasma disintegrator hummed in happy anticipation of the coming feast, and she adjusted its sights, more from ritual than necessity. A portable photon cannon dangled loosely from one shoulder, microns from her trigger finger. A chin-activated neutron/quark disrupter was strapped to her waist in case things got sticky. Beatrice's armament may have been modest, but the vibro-knife sheathed to her thigh, and the platinum force-field sheen of her battle bikini at the ready made up for the deficiency.

I smiled back, and kissed her with a false gaiety. A Space Ranger may laugh in the face of death, but certain annihilation is a more serious matter.

From below deck, the smashing of a thousand metal claws informed us that company had finally arrived. The screeching of a hundred booted feet outside the bridge meant they had all brought dates. The door between them and us glowed green for a moment, then melted into a pool of incandescent slime. We each wrapped an arm around the other's waist and aimed our guns at the slagged opening.

The first of the Fallen Angels burst through so quickly that she skidded on the slime before we had a chance to fire. She began dissolving in the liquid plastoid even faster. The second savage sister took an ion blast on her scarlet robes, and



flamed into infinity. The third ate plasma before her long club could smash down on either of us. A dozen more squeezed inside, their battle cries of, "Aaargh, matey," and "Yo, ho, ho, and a bottle of rum!" edited out of existence by our salvos. The final two never had a chance to shout—humanoids usually need attached heads to do that.

There was a moment's pause before the next assault. I noted that all the bodies had piled up on the remains of the first raider. I chuckled.

"Hmm...looks like sixteen men on a dead man's chest, Beatrice."

"Sixteen women, Roger. They're all women." The irony of the scene had not escaped me. Their genders had.

Again the image of the leader of the Fallen Angels resolved itself on the forward viewscreen, three meters tall and twice as foul.

"It is over, Roger Wilco. It is finally over. You are trapped and your ammo is low. I have more armed acolytes than you and Beatrice have shots left." To prove the point, a new half-dozen pushed through the gore at the door, only to instantly become part of it.

"But do not worry, Roger Wilco. All of my pitiless troops have orders to leave your darling Beatrice alone. Oh, yes. She shall be mine. Forever. She will not be harmed in the least." Beatrice and I gave each other a final hug and kiss; no fiend would ever lay a hand on her unwilling body.

"And you, Roger Wilco; my troops have orders to not touch a hair on your head. Not a single one. You see, I need them, too."

With a sudden movement, the Queen of the Fallen Angels whipped the jeweled mitre from her head, tearing away false locks as she did so. What I had felt wrong with the viewscreen's image was now in the open. The bloody Scourge of the Spaceways was no lady, to be sure; I now knew she was no woman either. And *he* was totally bald.

My scream of recognition was cut short by his howling order, "Bring me the hair of Roger Wilco!"

In space, no one can hear you dream.

At least, I hope so.

I awoke, startled, my nightmare jumpcutting back to reality in a transition too abrupt to be intended and too smooth to be happenstance. The main viewscreen changed colors and flickered several times as it accepted new input. At the same time, my eyes flickered open to see the unnaturally perfect face and the flawless teeth, jaw-, and hairline of Fleet Captain Raemes T. Quirk. He looked not a bit amused, smiling like a rat who's caught a louse.

I had been napping in StarCon's Universal Command Knowledge Sim-o-Later—SUCKS to all of the space cadets at the academy. And that's what I was just



then, attending StarCon Academy; a lowly cadet grueling his way through the training which separated the women from the girls, the men from the boys, and rookie Space Rangers from the real guardians of the galaxy—the StarCon Fleet and Armada of All that is Right and Good in the Universe. The Fleet—as everyone refers to it—is a proud service, millennia old, and boasting traditions longer than its name.

One of the most rigidly enforced of these is that there is to be no sleep or napping at any time by future officers in training. It is a regulation which I broke with regularity and with impunity, the legacy of my career as a head janitor in the Sanitation Engineering Service of Xenon. Old, familiar, warm habits seldom die; a year of caffeine implants may promote efficiency and productivity, but do little to replace dreaming. I could always find my little snoozing spots and times. Never caught, my perfect record was no doubt on account of my natural ability to appear completely awake while dozing, and vice-versa.

My dreams were always filled with the same person—a fem with hair the color of gilded morning mist, the eyes of an empress, and the smile of an unabated love—a smile that she smiled only for me. She had obsessed my fantasies ever since I returned from the future, or, at least, what I had been told was the future. Events there had become all a-jumble as if they might never have happened: mixed flashes of a son-to-be, an enemy hunting me throughout the aeons, a cute pink mechoid bunnus, jilted love, a really big flounderoid, a living computer, and a woman beyond all hope of desire—a woman whose fate was entwined with my own. The woman of my dreams was she, and there we entwined more than our fates.

I had spent the prior hours—unauthorized hours—blasting through the void, fighting space pirates, and defeating the extra-galactic hordes of the invading enemies of the ConFederation, safely tucked away in SUCKS. The main starship training apparatus at the academy, its use is restricted to staff and upper-division cadets deemed ready for space, neither of which category included myself. SUCKS can simulate nearly any condition that might be encountered in space; from all-out war, through total ship's systems power failure, all the way to standard emergencies and clogged lavatories. The genius of the Sim-o-Later is that everything learned while inside it is imprinted directly on the trainee's neural pathways. Even if one forgets every lesson ever taught about space flight, Sim-o-Later training ensures that it is later recalled whenever needed. The brain is totally bypassed, a fact which has saved many a Fleet Captain's career.

"Blast you, Wilco! I can never tell whether you're asleep or awake—even when you have your eyes open. I'd love to catch you sleeping once, just once. Then you'd spend the rest of your career as a deep space anchor." Springing to my feet, I snapped off a fast salute, catching my thigh on the underside edge of the control console as I did.



"Ow! I mean, yes sir, Captain Quirk, sir!" Drowsiness overtook my coordination, and the bruise to my leg was joined by my salute snapping crisply into my right eye.

"Ow!"

"What are you doing in the Sim-o-Later, Wilco? You have no permission to be there. Explain yourself."

"Yes, sir, Captain Quirk, sir! Yes, sir. Whatever the Captain says, sir! Yes, sir!" In situations like the one I was in at the moment, I had discovered that formality often helps.

Quirk frowned and twitched his solar wind-weathered forehead slightly. His physical image was flawless, the archetypal Fleet space hero, all good looks, perfect hair and teeth, solid muscle, and a great uniform. Even he admired himself, and found that fact to be not the least bit unusual.

Quirk ruminated a bit more, and concluded that my explanation was fully satisfactory.

"Very well then, Wilco. At least you respect authority and your betters."

"Yes, sir, Captain Quirk, sir! Yes, sir. Whatever the Captain says, sir! Yes, sir!" A second salute just barely jolted my forehead.

"By the way, aren't you supposed to be taking the StarCon Aptitude Test right now?" A snicker of disagreeableness marred his smug pose just enough to be noticeable, exposing a slow flicker of rudimentary intelligence.

"You are late for the test, you know. And that means you'll flunk out of the academy. And then I'll be rid of your incomprehensible incompetence forever. And wouldn't that be nice."

"Yes, sir, Captain Quirk, sir! Yes, sir. Whatever the Captain says, sir! Yes, sir! Sir!"

"On your way then. Just one last thing, Wilco. You may have just made this one of the happiest days of my life." The viewscreen went dark for a moment, and Quirk's image was replaced by an advert for some famous MiracleCleenSkinCreem confection from DeepGuano IX.



Test of Wits

The StarCon Aptitude Test—the SAT—is the one examination all space cadets must take and pass if they are to have a career in the StarCon Fleet and Armada of All that is Right and Good in the Universe. Indeed, cadets who fail to score at least fifty percent on the test have no career at all—they are immediately tossed out of the academy. Since StarCon Academy itself is a space station orbiting Nova 9, such ejection usually becomes a terminal object lesson about surviving in a complete



vacuum minus a space suit. The other times, it's merely fatal. Those who pass are given their first space assignment based on the final results.

I dashed out of SUCKS as if my life depended on the speed with which I would arrive at the main lecture hall, the place where the SAT was being administered. As a matter of fact, it did. Fortunately, it's the room next to the Sim-o-Later, and since the academy's main corridor is perfectly circular, I didn't get lost. Once I opened the janitor's closet by mistake, I was sure I had gone in the wrong direction. Turning back was simple. The incident reminded me of a maxim which I devised one lonely time between the stars:

Given two choices, the answer is usually (I think) one thing or the other.

The hall was filled when I arrived, and the scratching of stylus on screen was the sound of a test already in full sweat. Worse, the only vacant seat was at the very front of the room, eyeball to eyestalks with the exam's proctor. Mumbling apologies for my lateness—"Sir! I had a very important meeting with Captain Quirk, sir!"—my excuse was accepted and I was allowed to begin. This was a formality, of course; not only had I not studied for the SAT, I had been carrying the lowest marks in my entire class for the entire year. Even then, I had only been passing because of the judicious copying of classmates' answers. I understood as much about astro-navigation, warp differential equations, uncertainty envelopes, and microzapping ethics as I did about Captain Quirk's dislike for me. I didn't understand *that* at all.

But cheat I must. Complicating matters was the presence of a Droid o' Death—a round, metallic, floating enforcer and executioner rented especially for the occasion. I hadn't expected one of those. So important are the SATs to StarCon, that any cheating—or suspected cheating—is punishable by immediate incineration. This Roger Wilco had raced himself into the middle of an interesting quandary: if he didn't cheat, he'd be expelled into cold space; if he did, he'd fry.

Ah, but had I not been a Space Ranger once? Yes, I had, and I had used the time well, learning a number of survival tricks-of-the-trade. Never expel liquid into the wind had been one hard lesson I'd absorbed—quite often. Another was equally as practical, but less often critical. It was this: Droids o' Death find their victims via line-of-sight; it's not terribly efficient, but does keep their prices way down. As long as the droids can't see you, you're OK. This is knowledge that had kept me alive before and it would again.

Consider if you will, a crowded classroom filled with aisles and rows separating the bodily excretions of a hundred anxious sapients, all potential information thieves in the eyes of StarCon. Potential officers we all were, but our commanding officers had all been cadets themselves once. It's not that StarCon disapproves of



cheating, it's just that the policy is that there is no room in the Fleet for officers who actually get caught.

It was a situation absolutely fragrant with possibilities for a properly programmed Droid o' Death. But I knew it had too many to watch and too few eyes to watch them with. And remember—Droids o' Death are not built with intelligence as standard equipment.

I was seated between two of the better cadet over-achievers and chose the Brainiac, Ma~Wincim Xon/Xoff, as my reference source. Brainiacs have larger skulls and brains than other humanoid sentients, so they're always a good choice in times of need. Anyway, Ma~Wincim always waltzed through every test with the highest grades in the cadet class.

My logic and methodology were flawless:

Cheating Death #4—The Roger Wilco Method (Classroom scenario)

1. Look at your own test question.
2. Panic. Screaming draws attention to oneself.
3. Look at Droid o' Death.
4. When Droid o' Death stops looking at you, quickly look at someone else's exam.
5. Look at answer.
6. Remember answer.
7. Look at your own test.
8. Enter correct answer.
9. Look at next question.
10. Panic.
11. Look at Droid o' Death.
12. When Droid o' Death stops looking at you, quickly look at someone else's exam.
13. Look at answer.
14. Remember answer.
15. Continue as above until finished.
16. Stop panicking.

As always, do not try this at home.



I became ecstatic, almost cocky; what might be certain death to the average space cadet, was a sure score for me. I was careful, yes; but I had to restrain the impulse to snort sardonically at the droid's efforts each time another poor cadet sizzled into ashes elsewhere in the room.

And I kept my wits in another way; sure that any semblance of a high score would bring suspicion down on me later, like a sanitation engineer's TrashZapper on a dubious bit of stray organic matter. I was careful to make sure my answers were not all the same as hers; some cadets might be able to get away with an occasional high passing grade, but the laws of credulity excluded me from that group. I needed but half right in order to stay in the academy, and was sure Ma~Wincim Xon/Xoff would have nearly all the right answers. Anyway, a high grade usually meant a posting on the *Goliath*, and serving on Captain Quirk's command ship was not one of my ambitions. Especially if the *Goliath* needed an anchor.



Punishment Decreed

At last it ended. The supervising commandant stomped briskly into the lecture hall, broke wind loudly in the direction of the cadet class, and called the survivors to attention. Even with my tardy presence, it was a conspicuously smaller group than had begun the exam. The Droid o' Death gurgled in contentment at the rear of the room as it contemplated the dozen or so warm ashy piles it had created. Any remaining unanswered test questions disappeared as the TestoMatic Personal Digital SAT screens replaced them with a preview of an upcoming episode.

"Time's up. If you haven't finished, you're out of luck. Test scores will be compiled in a few hours and will be posted later outside the lecture hall. The space walk will take place shortly after that. Casual attire is required. That will be all. Dismissed!"

"Yes, sir! Thank you, sir! Whatever you say, sir! Yes, sir, sir!" Salutes snapped and my classmates began leaving the hall, chatting among themselves nervously and tipping the Droid o' Death as they passed its outstretched appendage.

"Not so fast, Wilco." I stopped at once, sure that my copying had somehow been uncovered, and turned to face the supervising commandant. Immediately, I felt the droid's sights contemplating my spine.

"Captain Quirk informed me that you were late for the examination, Wilco. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir! Thank you, sir! Whatever you say, sir! Yes, sir, sir!"

"That's a serious offense; breach of academy discipline and all that, you know." I remained silent.



"As a punishment, I want you to clean and polish the StarCon Academy crest on the station's reception level. I want it done now, I want it done right, and I want it done quickly. Understood?"

"Yes, sir! Thank you, sir! Whatever you say, sir! Yes, sir, sir!"

"Will you stop repeating that, Wilco!"

"Yes, sir! Thank you, sir! Whatever you say, sir! Yes, sir, sir!"

"Good. Captain Quirk and I don't want you to be late for your stroll in vacuum. That will be all."

I took the long way back from the lecture hall, slowly eyeing all of the different starships tethered in the great docking bay which makes up the central core of StarCon's space station. From the bulk of the war dreadnought *Goliath*, the greatest ship of space ever built, to the scows, shuttles, and maintenance vessels gnawing about on their own tasks, it all reminded me of the power and feel and sense of mastery one gets with hot rockets beneath your seat and the key to the coupe in the ignition. The stares of the other space cadets seconded my emotion.

The cadet-level janitorial supply depot and maintenance supervision office was unlocked when I arrived. Inside was the set of safety cones and the portable Sitz 'N Spits Universal Dirt Scrubber (SUDS to its friends) that's traditionally used for crest-cleaning disciplinary duty. Despite the room's neat military name, I still thought of it as a janitor's closet. I still do. In spite of my years of adventuring through both space and time, I have never felt shame about my origins. It was in a facility much like that StarCon closet that I had been awakened from an ordinary hourly nap and dumped into a seemingly endless series of events. Since then, I have saved not just my home world of Xenon, but the entire universe—time and again. From that anonymous janitor's closet I went on to become one of the legendary Space Rangers, freebooting my way through the Black and the Cold in my faithful ship, the *Aluminum Mallard*, righting wrongs and doing a lot of other stuff like that.

That was until I returned from the future to a certain nameless bar on Magmetheus to find my gallant bird of the void had been towed away for overtime parking, and impounded as payment to cover my yearly pledge renewal to the fine folks (and fine programming) at Patrician Broadcasting. It mattered little that I had decided not to renew. I never could get decent reception in subspace, and being chased by pirates does cut down a bit on any free time one might have for viewing PBS's fine nature vids; or, for that matter, the pretty little dramas and comedies featuring people who always talk funny. It mattered not a whit's dorsal hair that I had returned the pledge renewal notice with "CANCEL" clearly marked on it. They took the *Aluminum Mallard* anyway, leaving me stranded on a nose pit of a planet with just enough buckazoids in my pocket to buy passage back to Xenon. Back



home, I discovered that while I had been proudly plying the spaceways, the Space Rangers had disbanded in order to become a weekly vid series. And there was no part for me. The only ways available to satisfy my urge for space were either to reenter the Sanitation Engineering Service or apply for StarCon Academy. Despite the glory I had brought to it in the past, the Service turned me down. StarCon is much less picky.



Punishment Fulfilled

The StarCon crest fills the entire floor of the academy's main entry. One level below the cadet deck, but a zippy elevator ride for an experienced sanitation engineer (ret.), the crest is a great mosaic made of inlaid styroid pellets captured during the Styrofoam Wars. The crest is the symbol of the power and glory of the StarCon Fleet and Armada of All that is Right and Good in the Universe, our three-sided emblem of honor, devotion, and duty. The triple interlocking V symbols stand for the motto of the Fleet:

Victory, Valor, and VainGlory

Inscribed within is the StarCon slogan:

To boldly go wherever we are
To find new life
To retreat quickly
To rush in, where angels fear to tread

True words and brave; we all wear the StarCon badge and crest on our uniformed chests proudly. We always follow the sentiments to the best of our abilities.

The trouble with having the great crest of the academy as part of an entryway floor, of course, is that it is easily and quickly dirtied. The dust of a thousand boots, the oils of a thousand mechs, the ichor of a thousand slimeoids all pose a constant image and cleanliness problem. The solution has been the traditional cadet punishment duty, and at nearly all times some cadet or another can be found scrubbing and polishing it. Usually it was me.

I, of course, minded punishment duty less than many of the others because of my prior experience, and had come to look forward to the chore as a quiet time where I could sit for several minutes and enjoy a ride on the hoverjet-powered



mop-simulator. The safety cones are always placed on the periphery of the emblem, secured firmly to the deck's surface. This allows a cadet clever enough to figure out the possibility to indulge in a satisfying round of BumperThumper as the crest is scrubbed until no trace of soil remains upon it, and it sparkles like the stardust of McMahon XII.

All you have to do, really, is open it up, get on, and scream, "Ride 'em, cowpoke!" Well, the screaming part is optional, but it did add to my style points in the event.

It was there, just as I was smiling at my reflection in the newly polished crest, wondering if my face was really as fuzzy and distorted as it appeared, that I first looked at the image of my destiny. Actually, the resolution wasn't very clear—being reflected in a floor and all—but it was a lot better looking than my image, and female at that. I spun the SUDS around in order to offer the fem my assistance—and to get a better look. As I did, another figure came between us.

"Ah, there you are, Princess. What you're looking at is the Great Crest of StarCon. It was created as a symbol..."

"That's 'Ambassador,' Captain Quirk, if you don't mind." The woman's voice sounded surprisingly low, touched with annoyance but still professionally friendly. "Now, if you would stand aside and allow me a closer look."

"Of course, my dear, of course."

"Ambassador, Captain. *Ambassador*. Surely a man of your rank and character will not have to be reminded again."

"Reminded? Of what? But, as you wish." Quirk moved aside and began pointing to the emblem I had just polished. "While this crest symbolizes all that the ConFederation stands for, I think you will find much more of interest as I show you the rest of the station." Quirk placed a hand (manicured, of course) on the ambassador's shoulder and began to lead her onward. With a pivot so graceful that it looked intentional, the woman turned away to inspect the crest more closely. We nearly spun into each other.



Face to Face with Madame Destiny

Let us freeze time here for a moment, because that's what happened to me just then. As if reality had stopped and I had returned to sweet dreamland, I saw her again—hair shorter than dreams, but still the misty color of fairy gold at dawn; her mercury eyes—proud, certain, and intelligent; a mouth full without pouting; lips like fresh snow; and a complexion just the right shade of sunset—a cross between opal and the palest of faint lavenders. I had dreamed her in warrior's robes, but she



stood in front of me dressed in the sharp cuts of modern suiting. If I had been standing, she would have been nearly as tall as I, but as it was, I was on SUDS, and she had the advantage of height. I had once been shown her image and told she was my wife. Or would be. Or had been.

I guess it was about time we finally met.

"Excuse me, ma'am," I blurted, attempting to stand up.

"Think nothing of it." The ambassador paused a moment, then looked at me more closely, as if sharing my recognition.

"Don't I know you from somewhere?" she asked warmly.

"I would doubt it immensely, Princess." Once again, Quirk managed to put himself between the two of us. His voice had taken on the thick cleansing consistency of industrial grade Janitor-In-A-Jug as it effortlessly dissolved all organic obstructions in its path. "That's just space cadet Wilco, a nonentity with no family, no past, and less of a future. Now if you will just come this way..."

This time the irk was more obvious. "Please remove your hand from my arm and address me as Ambassador Wankmeister, Captain." She turned back to me.

"Are you the same Roger Wilco who saved the ConFederation from the Sariens and Sludge Vohaul almost a century ago?"

"Yes, ma'am," I whispered. My mouth had become so dry that I was barely able to say that little. But I had at last spoken to the woman of my dreams. Standing next to Beatrice, Quirk had begun to flush with anger. Or jealousy.

"You surely do look good for a man of your age, Mr. Wilco. Very good indeed. A hundred years in ColdSleep seems to have helped you keep that youthful figure." Her eyes lingered on me longer than was diplomatically necessary, then turned from ambassadorial neutral to genuinely warm. She smiled. I melted in wonderment.

"I grew up listening to stories about your deeds, Mr. Wilco. I was very impressed by them. I still am. Perhaps we might chat again sometime?" She smiled some more.

"Urp!" My lips had finally stuck together.

"That is, if you can speak at all!" Disappointed with my responses, she turned away and took hold of Quirk's proffered arm. "Please call me Ambassador *Beatrice* Wankmeister, Captain."

"And please feel free to call me Captain Raemes Quirk. That's Captain Quirk, to my friends."

Quirk briefly turned his eyes from Beatrice and glared what could only be hate at me. For what reason, I didn't understand. As the two began to move away, Quirk quickly kicked one foot out at me, attempting to unbalance SUDS. His little snit would have worked if I hadn't done such a fine job of polishing the crest. One foot kicked; the balance leg skidded on freshly buffed waxing compound, then kept skidding. Quirk's landing jarred me back to normalcy. It also dislodged his HeadRug, skewing it sideways enough that one sideburn covered his right eye like a piratical



eye patch. Beatrice and I both laughed aloud, although I did add a respectful, "Yes, sir, Captain Quirk, sir! Yes, sir. Whatever the Captain says, sir! Yes, sir!" after mine. Quite upset, Quirk hastily rearranged the hairpiece—the one which no one had ever realized he affected—to his satisfaction.

"I guess the academy really should cover this slippery floor with a rug, Captain," Beatrice giggled.

Without a further word, she turned away and left. After a second searing glare in my direction, Quirk followed. I packed up SUDS and returned it to the janitor's closet. I didn't know whether to laugh or panic.

Dirty Deeds

Having met the woman of both my future and past right there in the present left me a bit dazed and with a significant temporal paradox to sift through. Normally, in situations requiring excessive thought, I like to nap. I've found that when I awaken, the problem has either gone away, solved itself, or I've completely forgotten it. As an intellectual problem-solving mechanism, I've discovered few better.

Unfortunately, having also just met the woman of my dreams, I suspected sleep would only compound my confusion. Instead, I passed the time wandering around and around the cadet level, entering into the small talk and banter common among sapient beings awaiting the results of some significant examination. Mostly I was ignored, which was just fine; I often miss the point of tawdry stories and intellectual riposte, especially when directed at me.

There is a small conference room on the cadet level, normally the site of special seminars, courts-martial, and the like. As I passed by it in my meanderings, my attention was captured by a meeting taking place inside. Around the table were seated about a dozen beings strongly debating something significant enough for several of them to begin throwing soft fruit at each other. Since no students at all were present, it took longer than usual for the air to clear of the hurled missiles.

Except for one person, all in the room were high-ranking StarCon officers, including Captain Quirk. Addressing the assembly was Beatrice—Ambassador Wankmeister. Beatrice appeared so forceful in her delivery, that I had to place my ear against the door in hope of overhearing what they were arguing about.

"Gentlemen and gentlewomen—and I use those terms with reservations—this plague of planetary toxic dumping I have described to you must be stopped. It's an organized and well-planned operation, and if it goes on unabated, the 'Sludge Bandits', as we call them, will have ruined or destroyed entire worlds. We need to get to the source of this conspiracy. In the G-6 sector I represent, we have uncovered three definite dumping sites and another half-dozen probables. G-6 simply doesn't



have the resources to handle this by ourselves. We need help—your help. And all StarCon can do is sit here and say they're too busy marching in parades and keeping their stupid crest polished. This is a disgrace!"

"But, Beatrice, my dear," Quirk soothed. "I'm sure we can work out this little misunderstanding over dinner and a quiet drink somewhere."

"Over your soon-to-be injured body, we will!"

The discussion went on like this for a while, sometimes even turning nasty. Quirk argued that the problem was overblown and exaggerated, with most of StarCon Command agreeing. But Beatrice's arguments were sound. The dirty work of the Sludge Bandits had been discovered not only in G-6, but in sectors all over the galaxy: B-14, I-3, N-13, G-7, O-9. Even I was convinced.

When the decision was at last made to acquiesce and send Captain Quirk out with Beatrice on a fact-finding mission, my impulsive response was an enthusiastic shout of, "Bingo!"

As one might expect, this was the very moment when the conference room door slid open with my ear—and most of my body weight—pressed against it. I landed at Beatrice's feet like an overused mop at the intake maw of a recycling droid. Head hit floor, lights went out. I was shaking my head, deciding if I should relax and enjoy the light show, when the lights flickered for a second time, then a third. Looking up to see if the show was StarCon's lighting systems or me, I found myself the newest object of Beatrice's scorn.

"Polishing the floors again, Wilco? At least you've learned how to use your tongue." Beatrice stepped over me as if expecting all along that I would be sprawled there, and strode away without looking back. Except for a few sharp accidental boots to the ribs, the others completely ignored me as they shuffled out.

I picked myself up and heard a series of shouts from down the corridor telling me that the SAT results had finally been posted. Please understand something, I was in no real hurry to discover my *grade*. I was sure I had passed, but I still wanted to immediately know just which Fleet ship I had been assigned to, and in what position. Sanitation Engineering Ensign was my first choice, but anything was preferable to joining the crew of the *Goliath*—it was Quirk's ship, and I wanted to have parsecs between the two of us. I had already stumbled through any chances I might have with Beatrice and wanted to be as far away from her as possible. I had broken my own heart, and didn't want to stick around to recycle the pieces.

Determinedly, I walked back to the posting board outside of the examination room. Several of the cadets were already saying their good-byes to friends, while others went off slowly to prepare for their walks in space. Since I had few surviving friends, no one spoke to me at all. I stood silently at the back of the throng listening to shrieks of, "I'm science officer on the *Spruce Goose*!" "By the astron stars of Adama!



A battle station on *Galactica*!" "The *Polaris* with Robert and Astro!" "Impossible! I'm on the *Heart of Gold*!" and "No! No! Not the *Vorga*. I kill you, *Vorga*!" Sounds of joy and relief combined with the muffled *whooshes* from the cadet airlock.

I waited until the crowd died off a bit (you might say) before I tore down the hard copy of my immediate future. What it contained was not at all what I had expected.

Congratulations, Cadet Wilco!

You have attained the highest score in the history of the SATs. Frankly, we considered this achievement—an absolutely perfect score—to be beyond the capabilities of any cadet, much less you. Our investigations can turn up absolutely no evidence of fraud on your part, however. The test was scored and checked and scored again over three million times by the Academy's totally Infallible Digital Inspector Of Tests—TOTAL IDIOT. This super-intelligent computer never makes mistakes—and given the cost overruns on the TOTAL IDIOT project, we would deny any even if they did occur.

It has been calculated that if one were to permit a Uranian BladderBeast to pound at a computer long enough, it would eventually re-create the entire creative works of the galaxy. This would take some time, to be sure, and the universe may have died of terminal entropy before it finished, but it would eventually happen. It is the opinion of both myself, and the entire StarCon Command, that such an event is orders of magnitude more likely than what you did here today.

Nonetheless, StarCon regulations reward the cadet who scores highest on the SAT with the rank of captain (2nd. class), and with his/her/its own command. You will also be permitted to wear a much spiffier uniform.

You are hereby ordered to take command of the SCS *Eureka* at once. Please try to stay awake at its helm, and may the Eternal Entity have mercy on all of us.



Signed,

Extremely Exalted High Commander and Admiral Deluxe of the
StarConFederation Fleet and Armada of all that is Right and
Good in the Universe,
Wil'm Pol'k, the Eternally Dazed



Eureka!

Captain's Personal Log

StartDate: SCA+7 810 AM

Once again I am commander of my own ship and captain of my fate. Or, perhaps, it's the other way around. It's so goofusly swell to walk aboard a great ship of the Fleet and be saluted by everyone. And I'm talking about real salutes—with an entire hand (or appendage, or the like) poised just above eye level; and not the single digit kind I have become accustomed to in the past, both as a sanitation engineer and in a thousand bars throughout the galaxy. Well, make that a half dozen or so.

The Space Ranger salute is a proud bird indeed, but times change, and so do men. I am now a Fleet officer due all the respect my rank entitles me. It has taken much struggle and adventure, but I am now a full four-fingers-and-a-thumb StarCon captain.

My crew, on the other hand, seems to take the matter of proper respect somewhat more casually than the way it's portrayed in the Official StarCon Fleet Manual. While they all do use their entire hands in saluting, the effect appears more like waving off some annoying insectoid. For the sake of morale, I have decided not to press the issue until we've had a chance to work together for a bit.

For the record, my crew consists of three beings:

Lieutenant Gowitda Flo is *Eureka's* communications officer. A native of UglyStick IV, like others of her faintly humanoid species she possesses overly developed eyes and ears, and has the coloration of lime green Janitor-In-A-Jug. Her tongue also can be compared to that universal solvent. Ugoids are one of the few forms of life in the galaxy who are born old (actually, in their particular case, hatched), and who grow younger as the years pass (although you wouldn't believe it from looking at them). Because of this, most ugoids in the Fleet look like unduly aged vid stars trying to appear as they had in their youth. Flo has been serving in



the Fleet for decades, but doing the same job for all of those years doesn't seem to bother her in the least.

Corporal Rumproast Droole handles *Eureka's* navigation and weapons systems. A reddish-hued humanoid from the edge of the Gargoyle Cluster, Droole's chemical makeup is so high in iron that he rusts in normal atmosphere. I suspect that there is some mechoid in his heritage, but it would not be good form to question him about his diet of petroleum by-products. Droole speaks little and says less, which is fine by me given the fact that he lives up to his name when he opens his mouth.

Chief engineering officer Clifton Clifford Cliff is known to all as "Cliffy" because of his hobby of attempting to climb nearly vertical mountains. He is, I am told, not terribly good at the skill; although well-practiced, his overabundant girth makes it impossible for him to see where to place his feet. It is some compensation that his inevitable falls are quite short. A Scottyoid, he could pass for human on a million worlds if it weren't for his unfortunate accent.

No science officer has been assigned to us as yet.

As for the *Eureka* herself, I couldn't have dreamed of a better ship. She's a Dumpster-class, Hoover-type, Sanitation Scow. Not the newest of craft to be sure, she was originally commissioned during the DustBunny wars centuries ago. Both a light fighter and refuse disposal ship, *Eureka* fought her way from system to system back then, cleaning up after the star-shattering battles between the StarConFederation and the alien invaders—fiends who tracked grease, grime, and destruction wherever they went.

Today, *Eureka's* main mission—and mine—is to perform routine garbage disposal at ConFederation colony worlds and research stations. It is important work, preventing environmental degradation before routine litter becomes a toxic problem. StarCon could have assigned no one more suited for this job than myself; as an experienced sanitation engineer and head janitor, I know a dirty job when I'm given one. "To boldly go where no one has swept before!" could easily become the motto of the *Eureka*. We are about to give a sniff test to the galaxy, and the sweet smell of a job worth doing will lead us onward.

My first moment of true command was so routine as to be trivial. After a thorough inspection of the entire ship, I sat down in the captain's chair for the first time and prepared for departure. The command seat made a rude noise as I settled in, but I ignored the crew's prank, seeing it as one of affection for their new captain. Chairs from WhoopieCushion II are not at all common, and Flo, Droole, and Cliffy must have gone to much effort and expense to bring one aboard.

"Lieutenant Flo, hail StarCon." As I feared, my first order squeaked. I hoped it had not been noticed.



"Taken care of already, sir. We are scheduled to make pickups at Peeyu, Kiz Urazgubi, and Gangularis, and have been cleared for departure. If you hadn't noticed, the space doors are now open and waiting for us to depart. There's also a line of traffic at our rear, and they're beginning to get impatient." From behind, a concerto of space horns began tooting at us.

"Corporal Droole, lay in a course for us please," I ordered in a more controlled voice.

"If you insist, Cap. But if you don't mind me asking, lay a course for where?"

"Good point. Let's try Peeyu first, Corporal."

"You wouldn't happen to have the coordinates, now would you, Cap?"

"Another good point, Corporal." Taking out my Official StarCon Space Captain's Guide to Getting to Other Places, I punched in Peeyu's coordinates, then ordered Droole to ease the *Eureka* out of the space station at regular speed. Like the final grain of popcorn exploding from a microzapper, *SCS Eureka* burst out into the Black and the Cold.



Mystery in Space

StartDate: SCA+8 740 AM

I power through the void as if I have been breathing it all my life. But despite all of my time at the controls of the gallant *Aluminum Mallard*, I am little prepared for the feeling of mastery which accompanies one's first Fleet command.

As soon as we had cleared StarCon Control, Droole kicked the *Eureka* into lightshow speed and through the warp and woof of space-time. As we neared Peeyu, I ordered us back to regular speed and took a visual sighting on the large plastoid refuse bag rolling slowly in orbit around the planet. We approached our rendezvous from its dark side, and the sight of that system's blue-white sun rising over the top of the hefty bag's manual TwistTite cinching system forced a lone tear from me. The infinite grandeur of space, the importance of our mission, and the cohesion of a team of beings all working together for the good of the galaxy overcame me for a moment. It was unlike anything I had ever felt aboard the *Mallard*. Or, it could have been because I haven't slept fully in a year and StarCon's caffeine implants are still working; but I prefer the former explanation.

Flo latched on the pickup's homing beacon, and I looked up at my prey on the vidscreen.

"There she is, Mr. Droole. What do you think of her?"

"Just looks like another garbage bag to me, Cap. Have you figured out what to do now?"

"Activate the RRS, the Repulsive Rubbish Suck-o-Matic, Mr. Droole."



The *Eureka* hovered silently, slipping from the night side into the light, and sucked our target aboard. I wiped away sweat I hadn't realized was dripping from my brow, and exhaled my tension through now unclenched teeth.

"Well done, crew," I announced. "That was a tough one."

Droole choked for a moment, then looked back at me in awe. Flo tapped on her glassoid communications console several times (I still can't figure out how those things work), shoved the CommunoStick thingy she was wearing deeper into her ear, then shook her head. The forward viewscreen began flickering.

"If you haven't noticed by now, sir, we are picking up an unusual signal on one of the StarCon frequencies. I'll put it on visual." The vidscreen resolved itself out of subspatial noise and into the image of what appeared to be a sentient Maggotoid, but without a civilized maggotoid's irrepressible quotient of charm. The creature was calling frantically to some unknown being on the other end of the transmission to help dump off some "hot goods." But, on a StarCon frequency?

The faceless recipient of the call answered with a hushed and brusque, "I told you never to call me at the office. Never!"

"Sorry, fearless leader," the maggotoid smirked. "If anyone knew you were associating with the so-called 'Sludge Bandits,' it wouldn't be good for your disgustingly clean reputation." Beyond the face on the screen, a mound of other maggotoids began squirming in agitation. Or laughter.

"Listen, garbage breath, Ambassador Wankmeister is wise to what you're doing...*we're*, doing. We have to get off this frequency immediately. Rendezvous with me at the usual place."

"Rendezvous with you when?"

"When I get there. May the Sludge be with you!"

"Don't worry; it is. He, he, he, he! May the Sludge be with you, too." The vidscreen blanked out, leaving me with the image of corruption, and the tantalizingly familiar voice of its master.

"Flo, were you able to get a fix on the source of that transmission?"

"You never asked me. *Sir*." I ignored Flo's insubordinate reply, lost in the mystery of what I had just witnessed. Beatrice had been correct. There were Sludge Bandits on the loose, and they appeared to have an accomplice in the Fleet.



New Friend

StartDate: SCA+8 104.5 FM

Being the captain of a StarCon ship is a lonely post. There is no one else aboard with whom to share the fears and demands of command; not another soul with whom to confide the agonies of victory. Even back at Sanitation Engineers of Xenon



University (good ol' SEX U.), we were taught that once one assumes command, one can never allow those who serve under you to become privy to your thoughts. This is as true in the Fleet as it is in the Urinals of Uranus. I decided to keep my new suspicions to myself and get on with my assigned mission. To the crew I would say nothing; what I had surmised was for StarCon Command's personal enlightenment.

"Mr. Droole, please wipe your namesake from the control panel and lay us a new course."

"Sure thing, Cap. Any idea where?"

"Gangularis, I suspect."

"And am I suspected of knowing the coordinates, Cap?"

"Interesting point, Mr. Droole." I punched in the numbers from the Official StarCon Space Captain's Guide to Getting to Other Places.

"How is that, Corporal?" I chided.

"I don't know, Cap. Are they the right numbers?"

"Let's find out. Mr. Droole, lightshow speed please." Squealing rubber all the way, we discovered (to my relief) that they were the right ones.

Refuse retrieval the second went down as smoothly as sweetened sand fungus biscuits at a banquet. Out of hyperspace, we slowed back down to regular speed, and once Flo had identified the orbiting planetary garbage, we activated the Repulsive Rubbish Suck-o-Matic and slurped the bundle right into our garbage hold. This incident went so quickly and smoothly that I didn't bite my lip even once.

"My compliments to the crew, crew. That was another superb bit of nongender-specific spacemanship." Flo and Droole began choking loudly (or something like that). Before I could ask what was wrong, Cliffy's face appeared on one of the shipboard communications monitors. He looked annoyed and agitated.

"Captain, sirrr. You'd betterrr get back herrre rrright away. I think we sucked in a life-forrrrm with the trrrrash." Flo's sensors agreed with the engineer's assessment.

"Lt. Flo. Mr. Droole. Will one of you two please report to engineering and give Cliffy a hand?"

"Sorry, Cap. I'm on break," they replied nearly in unison, and began setting up a chess board. I guessed it was all left up to me.

Engineering takes up the entire middle deck of the *Eureka*. Entered from the hatchway behind the captain's chair, it consists of a longish central passage from which other, more specialized areas lead off. The engineering maintenance service tunnels, the combination transporter room and science lab, the GravLift down to the pod bay, and *Eureka's* claim to uniqueness, the refuse containment compartment (the RCC), all can be accessed from engineering. To the novice this critical area can easily be mistaken for some anonymous corridor, but the existence of



Cliffy's Official StarCon Engineering Toolbox assures all experienced spacehands that this is an area vital to the ship's functioning.

When I arrived in back, Cliffy was busy pounding at some instrumentation with short quick kicks of his Official StarCon Engineering Boots. Obviously engaged in some delicate task, he took but a passing interest in me; just enough time so that I'd have to check out the RCC by myself.

"It could be dangerrrous, sirrr. I'd like to help ya' but this, uh, thingamabobby thingey could kill us all someday if I don't do somethin' about 'errr." At once, Cliffy went back to what he had been doing. Even I know about thingamabobby thingies. Whatever they are.

It must be admitted that the excitement of my first command, and an attempt to solidify my position of respect with *Eureka's* crew through fearless leadership, combined to send me directly to the RCC compartment. Unheeding of the potential consequences, I pressed the compartment access switch; then stood flat-footed in surprise as tons of unrecycled waste matter began to tumble down upon me. If the compartment's automatic Stop-o-Matic override hadn't cut in nearly at once, someone else would be dictating my personal log right now.

As it was, only a few hundred kilos of raw organic compost, nonsapient droppings, thin plastoid wrap, and metalloid cloak hangers enveloped me before the avalanche was stemmed. It was barely enough to soil me properly, much less cause injury. No sooner had I picked myself out from under the mess than the object of our search made its appearance. Organic, yes; sentient, to be sure; sapient, I'd like to think so. Whatever-it-is was less than a meter in length with a tight, coiled armored tail, six spiny legs, and a mouth half the length of a body which resembles an engorged humanoid kidney. It also had the distinct aroma of undiluted uric acid.

I relate the above description from close observation; very close. The creature had followed behind the rest of the refuse and propelled itself through the air in search of a new hiding place. It found my face, liked the feel, wrapped all of its legs around my head and clamped its mouth against mine in a vacuum seal. The creature's tongue tickling my tonsils completed our introduction, much like a first date with an Amazoid Priestess of FrenchKiss X in the Horseshoe Crabs nebula, or a dental examination on DeepThroat VII. When the surprise wore off, and my muffled scream merely vibrated my own tongue against its, I discovered the experience to be not at all unpleasant.

But a ship's captain cannot dawdle; I tugged at the thing until it relaxed enough for me to peel it from my face and stare into its. Two frightened, large, soft brown eyes looked back into mine. Gosh, the thing was cute. Then I looked at my uniform sleeve; in its fright, the poor thing had begun to piddle and small holes were appearing where the yellow liquid landed. If nothing else, it explained the smell of uric acid in the air. I looked at the creature for a few more moments, then made a command judgment.



"Captain to crew. Everything's all right back here. I've captured the mystery life-form and have decided to keep it for further study. Anyway, it's so cute that I'm giving it a name: Spike. Think of Spike as a friend. From this time forward, Spike will be *Eureka's* mascot and live in the science lab specimen tank. No thanks will be necessary; Spike will be a morale booster for all of us. Out." With that announcement finished, Spike squirmed out of my grip and began scurrying through the corridor. In moments, it disappeared into the deck's grating; from its sounds, it was moving in the direction of the lab. Unknown to it, I had Spike trapped.

"Cliffy, do you have anything aboard to help neutralize acid?" The engineer had been absorbed in his repairs until my question startled him into looking at me.

"Aye, Captain. That I might. Check out my toolbox, therre's lots of differrent stuff therre. But what do you need that firrr?"

"Spike, Cliffy. Once I get him into the specimen tank, I don't want him piddling his way out again."

"Good point therre, Captain."

I found Cliffy's toolbox propped open on the floor next to the door into the lab. As advertised, it contained a little bit of everything needed to keep a ship of space running: from spare fuses to used gum and baling wire, and from do-it-yourself brain surgery vids to left-handed monkey wrenches. The toolbox also contained a partially used roll of antacid tablets lying atop a cold Unidentified-Orat-Part-MacNuggets box. Grabbing them, I entered the lab to capture Spike.

Walking into the combination lab and transporter room, Spike was nowhere to be seen. I yelled a few times, and still nothing. Stymied, I walked back out into the corridor, but returned immediately when I heard scuttling within. This time Spike didn't hide, but flung itself face first onto me after I had only moved a few steps. As I gently pried it away and carried it over to the ship's specimen tank, I was sure I sensed an affectionate mental message with the word "Mommy" attached to an image of my face. As I placed Spike inside the tank (followed by a generous supply of the antacid), I almost cried.

I have never been a mother before.



Revenge of the Terminoids

StartDate: SCA+9 101.5 FM

With the glory of command in the Fleet comes the burden of absolute responsibility for both ship and crew. And on a sanitation scow like *Eureka*, the bittersweet epitaph of any captain must always be

The Suck Stops Here.



I try to take my responsibilities seriously; more lives than mine rest on my words and actions.

We had one last pickup to make.

"Mr. Droole, lay a course please."

"Where to, Cap?"

"Kiz Urazgubi."

"Say what, Cap?" Droole looked at me as if I had pronounced a death sentence upon him.

"I said, 'Kiz Urazgubi', Corporal."

"One more time, please; just to make sure we heard you right," Flo interjected.

"Sir."

"Flo, Mr. Droole, Kiz Urazgubi is listed quite clearly in our orders. Lay a course."

At the moment, I had no idea what the two of them were going on about. I now think they had a premonition about the ordeal I was to suffer there; there can be no other explanation.

We emerged out of lightshow speed and hyperspace and into the grip of a combat-strength tractor beam. A photon torpedo, then a second, pulsed by on either side of the *Eureka*—warning shots across our bow. The tractors slowed us to a dead stop above the seventh planet of the Kiz Urazgubi system. This blue-white ball filled the viewscreen for a few moments before an unknown fighting ship uncloaked itself into visibility before us, and then gave way to the image of the ship's pilot.

While I'm riveted to the captain's seat, staring sure death in her pseudo-organic eyes, let me add a personal note for the record. Sometime in my past (whether it was years or centuries ago, I'm not sure anymore), I had a very close brush with death on the planet Phleebhut. Death in that case was nearly three meters of highly chromed and polished excess muscle—and insufficient brain power—known as a Terminoid. Terminoids have larger muscle masses and other protuberances than is legally allowable in most self-respecting star systems, and quite a few of the more unsavory ones to boot. If they are organic, mech, cyborg, or some nature-bending variation of all of the above, no one has gotten close enough to discover; or live to tell about it.

Completely without emotion, even negative ones, terminoids are highly sought after around the galaxy to do the kinds of jobs suited to such types: barbarians (of course); tax, bill, and toll collectors; school administrators; and road repair workers seem to be their most common employments. The rest are contracted as combat mercenaries or cocktail lounge entertainers—accompanying their highly accented and oddly phrased and corrupted cadences with ill-skilled accordion music. Polkas, mostly. Because of their appearance and reputation, terminoids perform to standing ovations wherever they play and collect great tips.



Terminoids all look the same, have the same apparent sex (male), and have the same name—Arnoid: Arnoid the Terminoid. It's for this reason that they are also known as Arnoids. All have great gaps between their front two teeth and fill it, and their metalloid mouths, with oversized cigars of tabac weed. As you might expect, terminoids are not at all pleasant to be near, especially when they're attempting to kill you.

It was no Arnoid we were gaping at, but there was no mistaking it was a terminoid, and a female one—that was all too obvious. Polished metalloid, yes; but no poorly timed or executed (oh, I hate that word!) language centers. And she wasn't humming a polka. After centuries in known space, the planet Terminus has finally produced a new being, and one with a perfect pair of...front teeth.

"Roger Wilco, I am WD40—a new model, goddess-class, Wonderwoman droidoid with a low serial number. More than a century ago you pledged to donate 20 buckazoids to Patrician Broadcasting (PBS) and failed to deliver on your promise. PBS is most patient with its viewers, but is not amused at all by deadbeats. For that crime, PBS has asked me to beat you dead. Unless, of course, you wish to now pay the full amount—with penalties and interest, that works out to 6.573 billion buckazoids, which rounds off to an even 8 billion. I am authorized to give a six percent cash discount to long-term fans. Will that be cash or charge?"

"Hold it," I gasped as I rummaged through my pockets in frantic search for spare change. "We've been through this before. There has to be a mistake. PBS and I both agreed that the check really was in the mail. And I think Pledge Nights are really swell. There must be some kind of mistake."

"There is no mistake. PBS lied to you. Know too that I am, at their request, recording this entire incident. PBS plans to broadcast your termination as a warning to other recalcitrant viewers."

"But..." I protested.

"But...you have five standard time units to beam down to the surface of this planet, where I will then follow and execute both you and my well-paying commission. Have no worry; the air down below is fine, although you will not breathe it for long. If you do not comply, then I shall blast *Eureka* into particle fragments. I have started counting, and I count fast."

"But..." I began to scan my mind for a quick way out of my predicament. There was nothing there.

"You are almost out of time, Wilco. Beam down now before I'm forced to destroy your crew for your crime."

"But..."

"Get off your butt, Cap!" Droole was kneeling, begging, and screaming at me.

"Before we're forced to shoot you," Flo added. "Sir."

That convinced me. I had no choice and dashed back into the ship straight for the transporter room.



"I've set the pad forrr voice activation, sirrr," Cliffy shouted to me as I ran by. "Just step on and say 'Enerrrgize.'" He began kicking on a different thingey as if I had never been there at all.

The Official StarCon Guidebook claims that the seventh world of the Kiz Urazgubi system is balmy and tropical, a near paradise for all humanoid species. I wouldn't know. When the transporter reassembled my molecules on the planet's surface, all I had time to notice was the usual bright stars slam dancing in my field of vision. (You know, transporting is almost as much fun as dashing through hyperspace at lightshow speeds.) But there was to be no fun for me on the surface.

My eyes were still following the last of the sparks, separating them from the sparkles reflecting from the crystal haze of a waterfall splurging itself into a clear pool. The foreground cleared just long enough for me to see WD40 zoom into sight and focus on me from across the water. Propelled by a single jet thruster built into her back, she was armed with a pair of fully integrated, chest-level, hands-free ion blasters in front. They were out of their holsters and pointing directly at me.

I screamed once, turned to run, screamed again, then dashed away into the nearest cave—not a cave, an alcove. Another scream and another dash into the bigger cave on the far side of the tiny glen. Ion blasts singed my heels followed by a mechanical shout of, "Oh, I just love it when they run. It so stimulates my pseudo-pleasure control activation and enhancement centers!"

The cave saved my life; low headroom and hard turns make it tough for a flying assassin to follow. It led me back to daylight, emerging onto a rocky path some distance above the pool where I had beamed down. To one side, another cave led back to darkness, and on the other the path ended at the edge of a steep cliff. A fallen tree led across a narrow chasm to still another set of caves. As I frantically looked about for either safety or a weapon, I noticed several bunches of long fruit hanging from vines on the other side of the gorge. Weapons, perhaps not, but they looked like they might make great stocking stuffers—or plugs. A plan began to gather in my head; all I had to do was figure out what it was.

A captain is allowed to scream, but only if there are no others nearby to observe. I wanted to just then but was afraid to bring WD40 down on me immediately. In the distance, the sounds of her jetpack roared in an obvious search pattern. Fortunately, the bridge across to the fruit was hollow and wide enough for me to crawl through. Crawling was about the only thing I was good for at the moment anyway.

About halfway across, the old tree widened; where a now rotted away knot once existed, was a place to sit up. A number of holes looked out from the spot, providing views around in all directions. There were so many openings, in fact, that I decided not to sit there too long—I prefer structural stability in my hidey holes.



Imagine then my disappointment when I reached the other side and discovered that I could find no way to get the fruit.

By the overflowing flavors of FrootLoop the Imperishable! I groused. *I could just reach those plantainoids if I had a long stick. Wouldn't it be my luck that there's one on the other side.* I looked back across the gorge to pay off my feigned cynicism with an overly raised eyebrow and almost screamed again. Just next to the wooden tunnel's other end stood a strong tree which I had paid no notice before. It contained several branches which could easily be converted into sticks. I sobbed instead.

Back to the other side, and I discovered that I had to *climb* the tree to get to any of the branches in question. The tree, of course, leaned out over empty space, inviting me to lose my balance. Much closer than before, the sounds of an approaching WD40.

Up the tree I shinnied and out onto the nearest branch. I am proud to admit, I didn't lose my balance at any time. On the other hand, try never to put your full weight on the end of a dead limb. Most likely it will break, with you joining the fall.



Wilco's Revenge

I have never really been a good judge of heights; after the second rung of a ladder I tend to lump all vertical distances in the category, "Don't look down. It's too high." With a solid machine under me, a hoverflit, elevator, or spaceship, for example, I have no problem at all looking downward. That's what those devices are made for.

When falling, I have one unbreakable rule:

Close your eyes—If you can't see the ground, it can't see you. And if *it* can't see you coming, you'll never hit bottom.

It's never worked quite the way I envision such rules working; but I'm still alive, and that means there is some truth to it.

The branch and I separated at once. I screamed and then gurgled; we had only been suspended two or three meters above a deep spot in a stream tumbling its way, fall by fall, down the mountain. My head bobbed up, I smiled at the absurdity of the situation, and with eyes fully open plunged unexpectedly over the edge of a waterfall. I saw the bottom coming; closing my eyes again didn't help at all.

This second fall I took dropped me another five or six meters and into the pool where I had beamed down to the planet. The hurt didn't last long, and when I was able to haul my wet self onto land, I only had to ask a half-dozen questions



before pronouncing myself alive. The ex-branch, now stick, floated at my feet; picking it up made the entire experience worthwhile.

My moment of oneness with Kiz Urazgubi didn't last quite that long. At the very place I had seen her before, the terminoid shimmered into view; her dual firepower locked onto my eyes, my eyes locked on them.

"*Puny human*. Take your eyes off of my ion busters!" With no other word, WD40 faded from sight, and I realized that I was now being followed by an invisible killer.

Maybe that will even the odds a bit. If I can't see her, maybe she won't be able to... A blast just missing my head turned off that train of thought and sent me sprinting back into the cave. Another, closer, near miss as I emerged at its end sent me madly fleeing into yet a second cave and higher up the mountain. There, a volley of new shots forced me into a third upward passage. WD40 was toying with me, using her guns to herd me into some trap or corner in which she could kill me at her leisure.

All I could do was keep running, keep screaming, and hope the terminoid would mistake my shouts for battle cries and get rattled. So strong was my frantic flight for life that when the last cavern led out onto a narrow edge high above the gorge, I just kept on fleeing as fast as I could and, flung myself across. Twin ion blasters can overcome even the deepest fears.

The far side of the gorge seemed to lean back a bit as I flew toward it, but not so far that I couldn't grab hold and pull myself up. If I hadn't neglected to chew my fingernails since taking command of the *Eureka*, I may very well have come up a bit short.

Here too, even momentary safety eluded me. Two more shots blasted gouges into the rocks, but instead of ducking into another cave, I scrambled straight uphill behind some concealing rocks. But there were no more places to run when this climb ended; atop the highest pinnacle of the mountain I stood exposed. My only company was one last boulder.

From between a pair of narrow waterfalls far below, where I had dashed from one cave and into another, an odd shadow appeared to deflect the sunlight. WD40's cloaking device may have made her invisible, but she was still solid. I looked at the boulder I stood beside, the one with plans for being my tombstone. I looked back at the natural series of chutes and ladders which had brought me to my last stand. The long stick was still in my hand. I shrugged sarcastically at my only option and blurted out an ancient nonsense chant:

"It's time to rock and roll!"

Jamming the stick beneath the boulder at an angle, I began levering it away from me. The big rock budged a bit, then more, and finally let gravity take control. It dropped down onto the opposite ledge and rolled into the cave as I had hoped it would. Like the sound of a buckazoid rattling down the coin return shoot in the vending machine of life, the boulder banged out of the passage and met something



solid—invisible, but solid. Into the air, WD40 was flung, the force of the impact terminating the source of her invisibility. Limbs askew, now visible, WD40 flew backwards and fell straight down the mountain. She was no longer under her own power, and I could see a big splash when she landed in water.

That's the trouble with new model mechs, I thought a bit smugly, wet behind the ears. Gets 'em in hot water every time.

Cave by cave, I retraced my path down the mountain. The terminoid had been defeated. I intended to pick through the pieces and retrieve her portable cloaking device. They're somewhat rare gadgets, and they're quite useful when one wants to avoid attention—a situation I find myself in often.

WD40's plunge had ended in the same pool I had fallen into earlier. The expected scatter of debris, however, was nowhere to be seen. Below the water's now roiling surface, colored lights and shadows battled each other and the constant trail of steaming bubbles which rose, then burst at the surface. Apparently the terminoid was still short-circuiting in a kind of mechoid death throes. Enthralled by the unexpected light show, I decided to watch and wait until things cooled off a bit.

In an explosion of water, all of those pretty lights burst upwards and were replaced by the sculpted chrome of WD40 rocketing straight into the sky. As she passed, I could see her artificial eyes gleaming in unprogrammed anger as they scanned the horizon in search of the man who had stood dumbly watching less than two meters away.

"You are beginning to annoy me, Wilco!" The terminoid shouted to the cliffs as she roared away, higher and higher, until the bright dot of her exhaust was all I could see.

"And when I'm annoyed, I do very nasty things!" Her voice faded and was replaced by the humming of the first few bars of the "You Light Up My Wife Polka"—accompanied by accordion. WD40 must have been very annoyed indeed.

It was time to fall back to Plan A, whatever that was. Then I remembered, and began running back to the log bridging the chasm. The clusters of fruit still hung in bunches on the far side, and they promised to be my secret weapon for stopping the terminoid. All I needed to do was figure out how to sucker her close enough for it to be effective.

WD40 was nowhere to be seen, and I again began crawling through the hollow tree. From above, the sudden roar of her propulsion unit slammed at me, coming closer and closer. At mid-tree I stopped and huddled totally motionless (except for some understandable anxiety-attack trembling) as my huntress landed with a solid thud just above. Through a very narrow knothole—slightly broader than the diameter of my arm—I could look up and see her scanning all around for any trace of me, unsuspecting that I was close enough to smell her lubricating fluid and count



the rust bugs between her toes. Actually, for a mechoid, she was quite attractive, but definitely not my type—I prefer my women organic. Her humming had segued into a cheery syncopated rendition of the "Reverse Peristalsis Polka," which is usually enough to make me throw up. But I controlled my shaking and my gut.

After a minute or two, WD40 powered away to continue searching for the object of her affections, and I continued through to the other side. It only took a few whacks with the limb I was still carrying until I was able to grab one of the firmer bananaoids. It looked good enough to eat, but I had another plan for it.

With a firm grasp on the piece of fruit, screaming as if in my normal panic (not a difficult accomplishment at any time), I crawled back into the tree. The ruse was for my screams to attract the terminoid, which they did almost at once.

Again, I hunched in the wide spot at the log's center.

Again, WD40 zoomed down to a landing directly above.

Again, I could smell the scent of her body fluids.

At once, I shoved the banana up through the knothole and jammed it into her thruster. Sensing something wrong, the terminoid launched herself off the log, twisting to and fro as she attempted to accelerate up, like an itch escaping from a scratch. Exhaust opening plugged by the fruit, she only succeeded in exploding.

"She didn't have to go all to pieces over me," I chuckled.

Danger finally passed, it was time to return to the pool and beam back aboard the *Eureka*. In front of me, on the path where I emerged from the hollow tree, I found a piece of debris from WD40's body. It turned out to be her head. It was intact on the outside, so I carried it along for later analysis aboard ship. By the time I returned to poolside, Cliffy had already beamed down and was collecting other scattered parts of the terminoid.

"Captain, you'rre alive!" he exclaimed. "When we picked up a rrreading of a larrnge explosion, I beamed rrright down to pick up the pieces."

"Good thinking, Cliffy. I see you've already collected quite a few."

"Oh no, sirrr," he stammered. He had been so surprised at my unexpected arrival that his expression could have been mistaken for disappointment.

"I was looking for yourrr pieces."



Narrow Escape

Cliffy beamed me back to the *Eureka* while he finished gathering up the terminoid's remains. It didn't take him very long; it seemed I had only left the transporter room when I heard him return and begin dumping pieces of WD40 on a workbench.



"Back so soon?" I greeted him as I walked through the door. "You're not planning to put that thing back together, are you?"

"Just feeding me currriosity, sirrr."

"Here. Catch this. After all, you are the *head engineer*." Startled, Cliffy almost dropped WD40's head as I tossed it to him. He examined it for a moment, then handed me a small device from among the pile of parts he had brought back from the surface.

"I think this is the doorrr key for the terrrminoid's ship, sirrr. We surrrr could use a cloaking device forrr the *Eurureka*, and therre's one inside the ship ourrr little sweethearrrt was flying. I'll go down with you while you get it."

"Me?"

"You arrre the captain, sirrr."

"Good point. But Cliffy, one thing."

"Sirrr?"

"Cut down on the R's. I know you're a scotttyoid, but that's not enough of an excuse for bad diction."

"But why, sirrr?"

"Because I am the captain."

"Good point, sir."

"Energize!"

Cliffy and I beamed down to the surface together, but this time the transporter deposited us in front of WD40's invisible ship. Invisible spaceships can be quite difficult to see—that is the point, after all—but quite easy to bump into. My nose and chin soon learned the lesson.

A few minutes more of groping around, however, revealed a break in the force field; one that a terminoid could fly through, and through which a Roger Wilco could scramble. Cliffy tried to follow but was unable to wiggle his nether regions inside the opening.

"I'll have to stay behind, Captain," he gasped. "I'll be here if you need anything."

"You'll have to *lose* your behind, is more like it, Mr. Cliff."

"But, sir..."

"No butts about it!"

WD40's ship opener caused the ship's hatch to retract and the GravLift to descend. When I stepped off the platform inside the ship, I was surprised at how nondescript and commonplace the interior was. More than utilitarian, terminoid taste seems to run toward generic; I could have been inside of any stripped down, standard parts ship in the galaxy.



This was a relief, of course. If you can say anything positive about stripped down, standard parts interiors, it's that there are few mysteries: a zeta-class generic blinking light is a zeta-class generic blinking light, a General Products plastoid and chintz seat cover is always the same ("Any color you'd like, as long as it's teal"), and standard cloaking device units are nearly indistinguishable from each other. If there is one slogan which exemplifies the cultural diversity of the StarConFederation it is

Freedom of choice through total conformity

The cloaking device was in its expected location behind an unmarked bulk-head panel. Inside, nothing about the unit appeared out of place; the locking mechanism and the four turn handles appeared to be industry standard.

They weren't.

No sooner had I activated the top part of the latch than alarms and sirens went off all through the ship. They were added to by an overly loud recording of warm boilworm beer-drinking songs from SpudMiser VI.

"Oh, hear ye, hear ye! Some unauthorized being or other is trying to get into the cloaking device. That was a big mistake."

Cacophony surrounded me, piercing, confusing, and distracting. So bad was it, it made me forget about fleeing. All I could do was attempt to concentrate on taking the device. Bottom latch activated, it was time to work on the four access panels.

At first, they followed standard industry interface guidelines: turn the top left, then bottom right handles; then open the panels in the same order. That worked fine. But the traditional bottom left, top right sequence, which normally follows, didn't work. And all the time, the clanging and screeching and loud music continued incessantly.

"You are standing too close to the cloaking device. You have made a terminal mistake. Repeat: a terminal mistake!"

But like every lock in the galaxy, someone had scratched the proper combination in an inconspicuous corner in case they forgot it—which is usually the case. Bottom left, top right, was really completed with top right, bottom left. It is doubtful I would ever have discovered the proper order on my own.

I grabbed the cloaking device and lifted it from its cradle. Then I turned and dashed for the GravLift, expecting the ship to blow at every moment. Outside, Cliffy had heard the alarms and was standing by ready to transport us out of there.

"She's going to blow, Cliffy. She's going to blow! We've got to get out of here. Thanks for waiting for me."

"Waiting, sir? Actually, I was just enjoying the music."

"Energize!"

The ship blew up in time with the exclamation point and our narrow escape. I think I can use a frigid Canopus Happy Brew.



When Good Times Turn Bad

StartDate: SCA+12 560 AM

I have just ordered Droole to put the *Eureka* into standard orbit around SpaceBar. Through the vidscreen it appears to be the gaudiest and most inviting comfort station in all of known space; blinking lights in many colors give it an eternal holiday feel, and an enormous neon sign rotating at the apex of its spindle is a visual beacon for all of the low-lives in the galactic neighborhood. It is also a favorite hangout for StarCon crews on shore leave.

Its sign invites all inside:

BAR

Where there's always space for one more

Music nightly

Fresh food not nearly as often

Try our famous sushi and salad bar

No Shoes, No Shirt, No Sentience—No Service

StarCon Fleet and Armada of All that is Right and Good in the Universe
excepted

A second, much smaller, sign hangs above SpaceBar's main docking bay. This one caters more directly to society's less savory elements:

Welcome to the SpaceBar

The GreasySpoon at the End of the Universe

A great place to hit when you've finished your sentence

I am alone in my reverie; the crew of *Eureka* has already beamed down, stomping over each other in their show of exuberance. Their shouts of, "The drinks on the captain!" still echo in the odd corners of my mind. It's an old Fleet tradition for the captain to buy the rounds on his first command, or so I'm told by Flo and



Droole. I have never heard of this particular ritual before, but I probably slept through that class. Anyway, it will be a great morale booster for them and a chance for the crew to meet me on less formal terms. Captains should always loosen up a bit with enlisted personnel.

More pressing is the situation with WD40. Cliffy has begun attempting to reassemble her from the pieces we recovered on Kiz Urazgubi VII and claims that if he can get her working again, she'd make a fine science officer for the ship.

"What good is a science officer without a captain?" I asked quite reasonably. "Not only do I prefer staying alive, but I'm not sure the Fleet will give me a large enough salary advance to allow me to pay back PBS."

"Not the strongest arguments I have ever heard, sir, but if it'll make you feel better, I'll try to reprogram the terminoid to think she's already collected from you. I'm sure I can do that."

"And her directive to kill me?"

"You would have to bring that up, sir. I'm not sure I can reset her aggression circuits, but I might be able to program her to view you as brain dead and therefore technically terminated."

"And if it doesn't work?"

"We desperately need a science officer, sir; I'll make it work. If it doesn't, you'll be the first to know."

Cliffy's arguments were sound, and I gave him permission to continue. Still, I have a feeling that I might have missed something important in his logic.

StartDate: SCA+12 610 AM

I am back at the helm of the *Eureka*, my entire crew present and accounted for. To them, I am now a hero: a captain who never deserts the troops serving under him; one who can look a full bird Fleet Captain in the headrug and stand up for even the lowliest swabby; and one who has what it takes to leave chaos in his wake if that's what it takes to do what it takes.

I had brought Spike along with me for a bit of its own R&R while I joined Flo and Droole at a table in the SpaceBar. Spike likes to snuggle in warm armpits, and as long as it feels like it's getting affectionate attention it is content to stretch out its tail and relax. After a few curious sniffs about, it gave me a loving look and began gently snoring. I tucked it (him? her?) securely under my jacket and got down to the business at hand. Cliffy was standing over at the bar comparing boogers with a figure wearing a StarCon uniform. Another ship was in port, but I couldn't make out the insignia from the distance.

From the first ServingWrench that paid attention to us I ordered a round of drinks and a mixed basket of krill fritters, mucus crisps, and Mugwump-flavored nacho chips. I also ordered the frosty Canopus Happy Brew I had been dreaming



about since Kiz Urazgubi. Flo opted for a snifter of Caffeine-free Diet Jolt Classic ("Straight up, if you please"), and Droole went for a double Pan-Galactic Gargle Blaster. After one of those, I was sure we would have to carry him back to the ship in a bottle.

When the food and drinks arrived, I began to offer a toast to the crew, but my arm was jostled from behind before I had a chance to say anything. The cleanup was quick and easy, but the crew had already emptied their glasses and were waiting for another round by the time I looked up. The being who had knocked into me was still lurking at my elbow. From its expectant look, I suspected the accident had been a sham.

"By the bargain bins of MallWorld, it looks like we've had a little boo-boo." The culprit, or perhaps assailant would be a more proper word, was the kind of half-man, half-fem humanoid normally seen hosting late-night home shopping vid nets. In my more sedentary past I have spent both significant hours and buckazoids enjoying the entertaining sales presentations and fine merchandise presented directly into the privacy of my home. Somewhere on Xenon I still have, packed away for safety, a number of tiny porcelain collector's plates, each with the great weather forecasts of the galaxy hand-painted on them. I've also purchased several hand-autographed pieces of sports memorabilia, a few pieces of exquisite hand-made jewelry, and a genuine hand-crafted carved Quackoid to adorn my mantle—if I ever have a mantle. All are quite handsome. Whoever came up with the idea of shopping at home by vid deserves a big hand.

The left side of Vidoids bodies are male, the other female, so they are equally adept at modeling both men's and women's items with just a turn to the camera. Anatomically correct in all particulars, their asymmetrical appearance is best appreciated on camera rather than in person.

"Well, General, this is your lucky day. I just happen to be selling economy-sized vials of new improved Janitor-In-A-Jug Lite. Perfect for taking out stains, it's also ideal for cleaning all of the teensy places ordinary cleansers just don't reach. And it's on sale, today only. How many do you want?" I was tempted; Janitor-In-A-Jug and I go back many years, and the price was unbeatable.

"I'm sorry. Perhaps another time. And by the way, it's Captain."

"I'm so sorry, Colonel. Maybe you'd be interested in a set of miracle no-stickum kitchen pans? A miracle Vegoid-o-Matic? It slices and dices, nips and tucks, hacks and slashes, folds, starches, softens, microzaps, and turns everyday meals into the shapes of galaxies, planets, black or white holes, Orats, your favorite NewsClones, vid stars, or less socially desirable shape of your choice. It cleans up in seconds and totally eliminates both static cling and ring-around-the-collar."

"No." Oh, how my heart cried out for her/his goods, but I am now a Fleet Captain, not just a highly decorated sanitation engineer.



"I have a special on a combination miracle food dehydrator and miracle wrinkle creme potion. It's perfect for anyone undecided about the direction of their skin tone."

I turned away, giving silence as my answer. The vidoid countered by demonstrating a set of miracle knives that can slice through soft fruit, then frozen yogurt bars, and remain sharp enough to cut a sandwich. It was all very impressive.

"I'm sorry, but try another table. We have some important bonding to do, and our mucus chips are beginning to get soggy. Good day."

The vidoid turned to leave, then dropped a thin packet on the table in front of me.

"Thank you for your time anyway, Corporal. Please accept this free sample of my miracle dehydrated SpaceMonkeys. Just add liquid, and your hours will be filled with a million of the cutest micro-pets between here and Andromeda. They're so addictive, you'll want to buy more as gifts for all of your friends. Here's my card. Just give me a call the next time you're in the neighborhood. Ta-ta for now!" The card fluttered down as the vidoid fluttered away, eternally unfazed by rejection and looking for the next hard-sell.

I picked up the business card and put it in a pocket, just in case I ever returned to the SpaceBar. It read

The RonkCo Collection of Infinitely Improbable Products

Ronko "Miracle AllPurpose" ProPeeler
Director of Marketing

Don't call us. We can always find you!

I have no doubt about the truth of the claim.

As Ronko Miracle etc. disappeared into the crowd, I noticed across the room a figure in a StarCon uniform giving a maggoid a farewell pat on its back and then begin walking in the direction of my table. The maggoid seemed to be someone with whom I was familiar, but I have met many of them and just briefly in each case. When it comes to their particular species, I prefer it that way.

There was, however, no doubt about the StarCon officer the being had been chatting with. Fleet Captain Raemes T. Quirk had also noticed me, and he was marching back into my life.

"Well, well, well; if it isn't space cadet Roger Wilco. And this used to be such a classy establishment. Oh, I'm so sorry. It's Captain Wilco now. I see you haven't



touched your Happy Brew, Wilco; too strong for you?" Quirk guffawed nasally, like a swineoid enjoying fresh slops and then refusing the after-dinner mint.

"It's Captain Wilco, Fleet Captain Quirk, sir." I saluted him smartly, but the two *Goliath* petty officers who had accompanied him to my table joined him in his cold laugh.

"Wilco, I don't like you, never have, and don't expect the situation to change. I made sure you were assigned the worst ship and crew in the Fleet. If your abject stupidity doesn't kill you all first, their incompetence and lack of good breeding will." This remark made Flo barf into her drink. I picked up the glass (careful where I placed my fingers, of course) and proffered it to Quirk.

"Whatever you say, sir. Care to join us for a drink?" Quirk instinctively took it from my hand and had moved it to his nose for a sniff before noticing the contents.

"You deserve to be court-martialed for this, Wilco!" Quirk screamed. His anger had begun to distort his face and cause his headrug to slip noticeably. With a quick slap to his ear, he began to readjust it; the process helped restore his outward calm.

"But, there are more important things for me to do at the moment, Wilco. Toxic dumping is one. Ambassador Wankmeister awaits me in her cabin and we have matters of deep personal urgency to discuss—deeply personal." Quirk's cronies emphasized his point with a pair of snickers, and they all about-faced to follow their commander to the transporter.

This, of course, destroyed any patience I had left. Quirk may have scored some valid points in his critique of me, the *Eureka*, and her crew, but his possessive comment about Beatrice stirred something in me that I hadn't known I felt.

"I hadn't realized you so identified with toxic sludge, sir. Is it a close relative of yours? I must say that the family resemblance is striking."

Quirk stopped still, as if his feet had been stapled to the floor. The SpaceBar's patrons gulped a collective "Gulp!" then started laying bets on how long I had to live. Flo and Droole picked low numbers. Another slight adjustment of his faux hair, and Quirk turned to face me, his face composed, his eyes past boiling.

"Wilco. Normally I would ignore such words coming from space garbage like you, but you have once again attacked and insulted my family. As an officer and a gentleman, I demand you meet me on the field of honor!"

Quirk fumbled around in his pockets and, not finding a glove anywhere, pulled out a tissue and slapped it across my cheek. "I will be upstairs. My choice of weapons: Battle Cruiser. The first to destroy four ships is the better man—something you'll never be even if you win." With his perfected chin jutting high in injured pride, Quirk marched past me and up some stairs to SpaceBar's videogame arcade. I followed. Behind me, the bar's patrons murmured in polite blood lust.



All I could think about was what he could possibly mean when he said I had once *again* attacked his family?



Honor Redeemed

I despise videogames. They ruin the minds, morals, and reflexes of the youth of the galaxy. They corrupt the lives of all they touch. The hours wasted, zoned-in to blasting the final bogie or achieving the next level, are better spent watching PBS or picking lice. The zillions of gallons of drool splattered about not only spread death and disease, but make arcade floors dangerously slick for pedestrians. As I've noted often, arcade games are an addiction; they don't merely lead to the hard stuff, they are the hard stuff. For adults, arcade games are worse than mental illness and moral depredation—they are a sure sign of a wasted life, a bankruptcy of self-respect, and too many disposable buckazoids. My stomach twists at the thought of all this depravity.

Still, I am a master of the videogame, forced by circumstances through the centuries to perfect these mindless skills and twitches both as a survival tool and martial art. I am not proud of this achievement, but it has kept me alive—for whatever that's worth.

I had never played Battle Cruiser before, nor heard of it, but was confident in my arcade skills. Battle Cruiser, however, turned out not to be a mindless exercise in reflexes over sanity. A strategic simulation, the game pits one intellect against another. Each side places four warships on grids invisible to the other; the object—to probe, blindly at first, then locate, shoot, and annihilate the enemy. It would be but digital death, but pride demanded that Quirk not get the best of me.

"As you may have noticed, Wilco, your situation is hopeless. You have the battle experience of foot fungus; I am the greatest strategic mind in the StarCon Fleet. I have outwitted the tactical ploys of a dozen defeated admirals in battle, and this is but a mere game. Concede your ignominious defeat to me now, and I will but mock your reprehensible name from one side of the galaxy to the other. Dare play me and you will not only lose, but I will have the vid of our match broadcast on all of the nets in known space. Every being in the galaxy will see what a worthless, inept fool you are. And Ambassador Wankmeister will be the first to view it—in the luxury of my own private screening room.

"Is that all?" I bluffed. "Surely a great military mind like yours can come up with more creative threats than that. Shut up and deal the cards."

OK, there are no cards in the game. I pressed the GoForIt button, and my screen activated with pages of instruction which went by too fast for me to read and were too involved for me to understand. Quirk was right, I am no military



genius; I slept through those courses at the academy as I had most others. At random, without thought or purpose, I placed my four ships. Quirk spent a long time deciding on his deployment, sneaking glances at me and clucking in self-confidence. He fired his first probe, but I had no ships at all on the chosen screen. My turn: I fired at random. A hit! Quirk growled in surprise.

The game continued that way, back and forth, hit and miss. I hit him, he missed me. It takes a lot of hits to destroy a Battle Cruiser ship, and I wanted all of his. Finally, I got one.

"Play like a man, Wilco!" he shouted at me. "You are not following any of the accepted tactics or rules of engagement. That's cheating." Perhaps; but it was a victory for me.

I didn't know what I was doing, which is usually just as well. Quirk did, but it did him little good against my scattered lack of a cohesive battle plan. Ship two went to me. Three. Four. By the end, Quirk's anger and frustration were so great that he had begun to freely slobber all over his vid screen like an arcade addict in mid-fix. It was not an attractive sight, but Quirk was a visible tribute to my complete victory. Battle Cruiser may not be a videogame, but it had been defeated by my mindless play. I had successfully defended the honor of the *Eureka*, its crew, and the woman of my dreams.

I turned off the game and returned downstairs, leaving Quirk to finish his fit alone for the network vids.

But our confrontation would not end so decisively. Through the crowd burst a knot of scuffling spacemen; three wore the insignia of *Goliath*, and the other was Cliffy. Two of them grabbed his arms and held him so their comrade could take a swing at the engineer's face. I rushed in to break up the fracas, but a hand grabbed me from behind and pushed me away.

"What's the matter, men? Has this garbage been causing trouble?" The hand and the voice belonged to Quirk, now recovered from his seizure; the garbage he was referring to was Cliffy.

"Captain," Cliffy shouted to me. "I was just standing at the barrr when these goons starrtrted shoving me and saying that the *Eurrreka* is worrrse garrrrbage than anything we pick up, and that we all smell like we bathe in the stuff. I couldn't let them say that, now could I?"

"That will be enough," Quirk interrupted as I tried to assure Cliffy that, while there was some truth to the digs, it wasn't enough to be goaded into fighting over. But I wasn't given the opportunity to speak.

"Arrest that man and toss him into the station brig," Quirk ordered. "Troublemakers like him are a disgrace to the Fleet."

"But Captain Quirk," I objected, "your men are the ones that started everything."



"Oh, were they, Wilco? I have had enough of your distasteful presence today." To his openly grinning crew he ordered, "Lock that scottyoid up. If Captain Wilco here has any objections, toss him behind bars, too."

I could only watch silently as Cliffy was dragged away to station security, and listen equally as silently as Quirk sneered, "Before today, all I wanted was your head, Wilco. Now I think I'll settle for something else." The glance of his eyes made his new threat all too clear, but I still don't understand what satisfaction he would get from separating me from my trousers.

"But, I cannot keep the ambassador waiting any longer. Until next time, Wilco. Until next time." Quirk turned away, walked to the transporter, and with the last of his crew beamed out of SpaceBar.

As the room settled back to normalcy, I returned to my warm, untouched, Canopus Happy Brew. Droole and Flo ducked back out from where they had been hiding under the table and suggested I buy them another round. I sat down, angry over Quirk's actions and threats, and determined to free Cliffy from an unjust confinement.

"Before I buy any more drinks, does anyone know where they keep the brig around here?" Droole pointed across the main room to a corridor just past the transporter pad with a sign hanging above it reading:

SpaceBar STATION SECURITY
Abandon all hope, ye who enter here

That seemed clear enough. I walked over to investigate and found a pair of guards inside watching over a security force field control deck. When they saw me enter, both went from lounging to a more confrontational posture. A row of cells extended beyond the force field and from one of them I could hear the shout of Cliffy yelling, "Captain, is that you? Get me out of herre. We can't let Quirrrk trrreat us this way." He was right.

I decided to pull rank on the guards.

"Men, I'm Captain Wilco. I'll take responsibility for that prisoner. Let him out of there." They were not impressed.

"Sorry, trash man," one of them said. "He stays, and we have our orders to arrest you if you don't leave right away. Would you like to take us up on the offer?"

"Good point."



I left and returned to Flo and Droole, who were still insisting I owed them another round. From inside my tunic, a wet tongue licking my armpit announced that Spike had finally awakened. It tickled. It annoyed. It gave me an idea.

"We need a distraction," I explained to the crew.

"What I really need is another Pan-Galactic Gargle Blaster," interjected Droole. Flo nodded in agreement.

"Shove it. Now do you know what happens when you mix a package of dehydrated SpaceMonkeys in water?" Blank looks.

"You get a million cute little green critters that you can keep in a bowl. I used to keep them as pets when I was a kid." More blanks.

"Do you know what happens when you mix the package with a Canopus Happy Brew?"

"You ruin your beer?"

"You get a million cute *big* critters that will float around and fill up the SpaceBar's dome in minutes. You also get a big distraction." I began pouring the free SpaceMonkey sample packet into my warm beer. At once, creatures that looked like a cross between the DancingRaisins of Fresno IV and the green Jelloids of Gumby II began exploding out of my glass. Each was the size of a giant Monolith Burger Supreme topped with a jumbo shake and large fries. Every one of them was wearing a pair of sun goggles. Their cuteness quotient was staggering.

More and more, faster and faster they came. All around us, the other patrons began to notice the invasion. Those who recognized them for what they were immediately sprinted to transport out. I ordered Flo and Droole back to the *Eureka* and told them to be ready to blast away the moment I beamed aboard with Cliffy.

"But what about our drinks?" Droole complained.

"Here, take Quirk's. He didn't finish his."

That got them moving.

"Ooogaah! Ooogaah!" SpaceBar's emergency warning voice cried. "This is a green alert. We have a SpaceMonkey intrusion on the main level. Drink up if you'd like, but I'm getting my act out of here. Fast."

More beings rushed to the transporter as my diversion began expanding to fill all available space. Under cover of chaos, I returned to the Security Section. The guards were still there but gave up their post in the interest of finding out what all the panic was about. It was short work to deactivate the force field from the abandoned control deck, but it wasn't obvious how to open Cliffy's cell. But didn't matter.

Cliffy was delighted to see me.

"What's goin' on out therre, Captain? It sounds like the time a bunch of us got into a little scuffle with the crrew of the *Enterrrrrise*. We had told them that they werrre getting a little old forrr rrrunning arrround the univerrse and they..."



"Shut up and stop repeating your R's. Stand back. We don't have much time to get you out of herre. I mean, here."

Spike had become all excited. Somehow the little creature knew it had a job to do. Or perhaps it was just time to empty its bladder. In any case, when I held Spike against the cell's bars, it sprayed acid right through them, wriggling in delight. The section we cut out dropped to the deck and Cliffy was free. By the time we made our way to the transporter, the SpaceBar was deserted except for those million cute critters. When we beamed back to the *Eureka*, Droole had the ship's engines revving. The moment I entered the bridge, he punched us into lightshow speed. He could have at least waited until I was seated.

"About that other round you promised us, Cap..."



Puked Out

StartDate: SCA+14 101.5 FM

The plot sickens.

We emerged from hyperspace after springing Cliffy to discover that the SpaceBar is no more. Its dome, unable to contain the SpaceMonkey population explosion, had finally burst; sudden depressurization took care of the rest. No lives were lost in the accident, although surviving SpaceMonkeys, if sentient, might argue the point. There are none.

The *Goliath* departed for points unknown just before things got out of hand, and our part in the incident is apparently unknown. This part of my personal log is set to self-destruct if touched by anyone but me. After a generous round of drinks from *Eureka's* medical stores, Flo and Droole seem to have forgotten the entire incident. Then again, I don't think short-term memory is a strong point for either of them.

Along with the news about SpaceBar, we received new orders from StarCon Command to make an auxiliary garbage pickup at Klorox II.

Something smelled wrong about Klorox II from the moment we arrived there. It wasn't the aroma of garbage, because you can smell nothing at all in a vacuum. Instead, Flo's sensors could find no traces of garbage at all. I ordered us into orbit, and a double check of our coordinates confirmed we had arrived at the correct planet; but no garbage. Flo hailed the planet to no response. Either the colony world hadn't paid its phone bill, or there was something wrong on the surface. I suspected the latter.

"Hail StarCon, Flo. I think we should report this."



"Aye, sir." Flo tapped at her com panel, fiddled with the thingamabob in her ear, and frowned at me.

"There's no answer at base, sir, and our call has been routed into StarCon VoiceMail. Do you know the extension of the being with whom you wish to speak?"

"Forget it, Flo. See if you can reach any StarCon ships in the vicinity. Maybe we'll have better luck with them." If "better luck" can be defined as *SCS Goliath* and the ever pleasant Fleet Captain Raemes T. Quirk, we found it. At the time, my perception was rather that we had stepped in it. And it wasn't luck sticking to the bottom of my boots.

"Wilco, where did you come from? Let me guess: it has a reversed half-moon crescent carved in the door." Deciding to ignore his remarks for the sake of duty, I briefed Quirk on the situation—no garbage and no response from the surface. As my immediate superior officer, did he have any new orders for me? This only made him angrier.

"Ambassador Wankmeister and I are in the middle of some important matters. We cannot be disturbed. Not only that, *Goliath* is in the middle of rescuing an emergency shuttle pod. If you don't get off of this channel now, your next command will be making outhouse pickups on GloryHole—by hand. Quirk out." *Goliath's* transmission disappeared from the main viewscreen like an unwary insect at a Frogoid wedding. I had been left with my first major command decision.

"What now, Cap?" Droole asked.

"Good point, Mr. Droole. Any suggestions? Lt. Flo?"

"Now that you mention it, sir, you're beginning to look pretty good to me—for a human. Thirty years in space tends to make a girl real lonely—if you know what I mean..." I didn't want to know.

As usual, the crew was less than helpful. I punched up Cliffy on my command console and solicited his input.

"I don't know, sir. Perhaps you should talk to our science officer."

"We don't have a science officer, Cliffy."

"We do now, sir. I've got WD40 working and reprogrammed. She thinks you're dead and that *you* are some other Roger Wilco. It took some fancy programming, sir, but I did it. She's perfectly safe, as long as you don't annoy her. Call her station and make yourself acquainted."

"I think we've met already. But if you think she's OK..." I punched up WD40, noting that the science station com link button was just next to the ship's AutoDestructo activator. The two seemed to deserve each other.

"Science officer here, sir. All systems are nominal." Cliffy had put WD40 back together perfectly; her metalloid head shone chrome again, and her voice cracked sharp with mechoid precision. She even seemed to be cured of her polka fetish.

"Any recommendations, WD40?"



"Suggest a party to the surface to check on the status of the colony, sir. Their communications might be out, or they could just be off partying somewhere. Atmosphere is safe to breathe, but someone should be armed for safety."

"Very well, then. Thank you, WD40. I'll beam down and Mr. Droole will accompany me for protection." Droole looked at me as if I had interrupted his nap and then headed for the transporter room. WD40 made a sound as if she were clearing her throat, or grinding her transmission.

"May I have permission to say, Captain Wilco, that you bear a striking resemblance to the Roger Wilco I terminated once. Are you related? Clones perhaps?"

"You do not have permission, WD40. But you are correct. We are—were—closely related."

The surface of the planet Droole and I beamed down to looked much as the Official StarCon Guidebook described it: a mostly desert world populated with occasional low bluffs and frequent rocky outcroppings, like stray corn kernels on a tan plate. A companion planet—NewImproved Klorox I—dominated the sky, reflecting the rays of the system's hot blue-white sun back down on us.

If there were ever a candidate for terraforming, Klorox II was one. And Klorox I was too. Sorry; I had to say it.

We stood at the top of a low rise looking down on the remains of the Klorox colony. Several of the domed huts looked as if they had been abandoned in some haste, while most of the others showed signs of explosion or other damage. Scattered around everywhere were abandoned equipment and personal belongings, much of it savaged as if by wild beasts. Of the colonists there was no trace.

I ordered Droole to search the colony's outskirts while I took a closer look at what had happened below. The large building at the center of the settlement looked as if it might have been colony HQ. It seemed as good a place to start as any.

I was wrong—the building housed the colony greenhouse. Inside, almost all of the plants and greenery that would one day help turn Klorox from desert to garden had been torn up and trampled. It was as if someone—or something—had been intent on stomping out all signs of life there. Hydroponics machines were smashed alongside broken trowels, hoes, rakes, and heaters. About the only thing in the whole place that looked like it might still be alive was a computer console on the corner of a scarred desk.

My assailant surprised me as I picked my way through the debris to the computer. I never saw or heard him coming, but his momentum slammed me to the ground and rolled us over enough times for him to end up on top. When I saw him, it was enough to make me puke.

I use the word advisedly. At first glance the creature looked like a half-melted humanoid with limbs and features dissolving into one another. The face might have



been mistaken for human if our features were made of melted wax. Its color was the special green-yellow of fresh vomit, and it broadcast the aroma of same. Most horrifying of all, the creature was dressed in the tatters of generic colonial overalls and could speak.

Its hands grabbed hold of my tunic and held my body immobile. Thick, pus-like saliva rolled down its chin and onto its chest, making hissing sounds as it did.

"We are the children of the soup," the creature sputtered thickly. "The soup made us and the soup takes us away. Someday we will all return to the Primordial Soup pot from which we came. You are not of the soup, and all must be of it. You shall join us now. The puke of the soup shall make you one of us!"

The entire speech was nonsense of course, but it sounded remarkably like a threat. When the creature cleared its throat with a deep liquid hucking sound, I realized what it was going to do. At the first sound of massive expectoration, I dodged my head out of the line of liquid fire. The phlegm flew past my ear and splatted thickly beyond me.

"Resistance is impossible," gurgled my assailant. "Accept the puke of the soup. Open wide your mouth and leave your *puny human* form behind." A second huck alerted me, and I was able to dodge aside again just as another wad of spit was released. The knife-cut scent of partially digested organic matter flew past my other ear with it. The next salvo came quicker yet, but the dual sounds of "Huck" and "Thwut!" again gave me time to swing my head away. The smell of vomit grew stronger with each near miss—a fourth, then a fifth missile hissed past me, but I knew I couldn't dodge forever. What would happen when I was hit was horrifyingly unclear.

Then the creature suddenly arched up and tumbled off of me, accompanied by the sound of a phase pistol hitting its mark.

"About that drink you owe us, Captain," remarked Droole as he pulled the body aside. "I'm not letting you off the hook that easily."

After checking out the greenhouse for any more of what I can now think of only as Pukoids, Droole and I split up again and agreed to meet back on the *Eureka*. For a second time I examined the remains of the one Droole had shot and then discovered that it had begun to transform. The metamorphosis accelerated, and in a few minutes the pukoid had changed fully back into human form. The man was still alive but dying fast. He saw that I recognized him as human and whispered his last words to me.



"Sludge Bandits. Primordial Soup. Turned us all into mutants. All of us. Path to the southwest. Leave me here. Find the soup. Find the soup. Find..."

I arranged the body as best I could for eventual burial. In the course of my moving about, I found a piece of computer paper lying on the floor. It had the smell of fresh vomit about it, so I can only assume that it came from the man who had attacked me in his madness. On it was a single set of numbers, nothing more. Taking it to the greenhouse's terminal, it was, as I suspected, his pass code into the colony computer.

The code punched me into the personal log of the colony's leader. As I paged through, I read a story of missing colonists, attacks by mutants, battles, and massacres. In the end, the entire Klorox colony was overrun by the pukoids. Only one person survived long enough to leave a record of what had happened, hoping someone might find it. He had seen the mutants capture the colony shuttle and escape into space in it. And he knew then that the pukoids could only have once been his friends and coworkers. And even as he wrote, he felt the effects of his one wound that had come in contact with Primordial Soup. And he knew he was doomed.

And he thought it might all be tied in somehow with the last visit of SCS *Goliath* to the colony.

I think Harry Karry was grateful when Droole shot him.

I followed the directions that Karry had given in his dying breath. The path to the southwest of the colony skirted near where I had beamed onto Klorox and continued in the same direction a bit farther. The trail ended at a metal canister lying atop a rocky knoll. It was dented and battered as if it had been dropped there, but a logo and writing were still visible on its side:

Primordial Soup

**Another fine product from
Genetix Research Corp.**

**Building new life-forms today for a richer tomorrow
Better Beings Through Biochemistry**

In extremely small print was more:



WARNING—EXTREME BIOHAZARD. This product might be hazardous to your health. Contact with this stuff will cause all sorts of disgusting, terminal, and mutagenic bio-events to occur. If you touch, breathe, drink, or ingest this in any way, they will occur to you and just about anybody else you come in contact with. If you would like more information about this, or any other fine Genetix Research product, please call our unlisted number.

Printed below that were the galactic coordinates that is Genetix Research's address. *I think we'll stop by and pay them a visit. I'm curious to know how their toxic waste got dumped on Klorox, and if they know anyone aboard Goliath.*



A Damsel (and a Roger Wilco) in Distress

StartDate: SCA+14 104.9 FM

I imagine that there have been times in my life when I would gladly have died to have the most beautiful fem in the galaxy hanging all over me. Especially if the fem were also a princess, and one who would someday be the mother of my son. OK, death's a little extreme—let's say that I would have gladly hand-swabbed the public privies of DeepGuano IX for the privilege. Still, not even in my most humid dreams had I ever pictured that she would be hanging on me in quite the way she was. But this wasn't a dream, and this wasn't one of those times.

But I'm getting a little ahead of myself.

I beamed back to the *Eureka* and returned at once to the bridge. Droole had already returned from the surface and was at his duty station. He and Flo were talking about how many drinks they were planning to take me up on the next time they had shore leave. I think the number had reached double digits. All banter ceased when I sat down; not because of the presence of the captain on the bridge, but because of the emergency transmission that burst upon the forward viewscreen. It was Fleet Captain Quirk; smoke and wounded crew filled the frame behind him. His own face was creased with soot, and his headrug was in tatters. The background noise almost covered his words:

"This is an emergency broadcast to all StarCon ships that can read me. This is an emergency broadcast from the SCS *Goliath*. If anyone can hear me, the *Goliath* is under attack by a force or forces unknown. Repeat: SCS *Goliath* is under attack. The invaders have somehow boarded us through our main shuttle bay. We can't hold out much longer. Our location is..."



A jumble of squealing deep space noise overrode the audio transmission. The video began to break up into blackness, but not before Quirk's face began to melt and distort into some other shape. The last image we had was of Quirk spitting at the viewscreen. Then the *Goliath's* SOS ended as if it had never been.

No matter how we tried, Flo was unable to resume contact with Quirk or his ship. She said that the transmission appeared to have originated near Thrakus, but couldn't pinpoint it any nearer.

"That's close enough for government work," I said. "Mr. Droole, can you get this buggy to Thrakus?"

"Only if you give me the coordinates, Captain." I did.

"Lightshow speed, Mr. Droole."

"You're not really going to help Captain Quirk, are you, sir? Not after everything he's said about you and us and the *Eureka*."

"Of course we are, Flo. A StarCon ship is under attack; the security of StarCon and the honor of the Fleet is at stake. Plus, Quirk has a little explaining to do, and Ambassador Wankmeister is on board *Goliath*. Are there any more objections, or does anyone want to spend some time in the tank with Spike?" Sudden activity was my reply.

"Lightshow speed, Mr. Droole."

"With pleasure, Captain Wilco, sir!"

"Cliffy, can you give us any more power?"

"I'm giving her all she's got, sir. She can't take more of this. She'll break up if we go any faster!"

"Warp factor ten, Mr. Cliff."

"Warp factor ten, sir? The *Eureka* can't do it. It's impossible."

"I don't believe in the impossible, Mr. Cliff. Warp factor ten."

"But there's no such thing as warp factor ten, sir."

"Good point, Cliffy."

When we finally arrived at Thrakus, neither Flo's com channels nor WD40's sensors were able to pick up any signs of the *Goliath*. From the surface of the planet, however, an escape pod homing beacon was peeping its location to the universe. That was all. We tried to hail StarCon Command to tell them that we were on the scene, but all hailing frequencies were jammed with interference.

"Recommendation, WD40?"

"As for the *Goliath*, sir—the asteroids in this planet's rings could be blocking its transmissions. If *Goliath* has been captured, the rings would make a great place to hide and spring an ambush. There is also a high probability that our transmissions are being jammed, although I can detect no other ships in our area. You should



beam down and check out the escape pod, sir. The air is pretty toxic, so a breathing mask would be a good idea."

"Me?"

"You are the captain, sir. It would be best if you get in and get out fast."

"The story of my life, WD40. The story of my life."

A quick jaunt down the GravLift to the pod bay and I retrieved my breathing mask from the storage locker next to the EVA suit rack. Slipping it on as I stepped on the transporter pad, I made sure the straps were secure; then had Cliffy beam me down to Thrakus—fast.

Thrakus was once a completely liquid world with oceans that never ended. Or at least that's what the Official StarCon Guidebook tells us. Eventually most of the oceans shrank back and made room for a planet filled with enormous sh'rooms hundreds of meters tall. It's really a jungle of sorts, with life, such as it is, living on the tops of the vegetation (or fungus—I'm not sure which is correct).

The escape pod appeared to be deserted. Sitting by itself atop a distorted fungoid mesa, it looked like nothing so much as a chipped marble at the end of a twisted kaleidoscope. More eroded, flat-topped, sh'room spires stuck up out of an ancient sea floor everywhere. The pod's hatch door was open to Thrakus' poisonous atmosphere, and no one—humanoid or not—was anywhere to be seen. Any refugee from the *Goliath* had either died when the door cracked open on impact, or was long gone.

Or maybe there's a survivor inside, crouched in terror and praying for rescue. I knew I had to take a look. The mysteries of the Primordial Soup, just who had turned the colonists of Klorox II into insane pukoids and how—these were just the start of my questions. Had Captain Quirk really lost his last bad headrug and turned Puke himself? And what was the final fate of the *Goliath*? These too demanded their own question marks.

The pod's homing beacon was still tweeting infinite renditions of, "Tikili li; somebody help me! Tikili li; somebody help me! This is a recording. Tikili li; somebody help me! Tikili li; somebody help me! This is a recording," to the Void. If the *Goliath* were truly now in hostile hands or pseudopods, she might be following the universal distress call, searching to annihilate any survivors. If anything, the beacon had to be turned off, and soon. And it's constant chirruping was beginning to drive me batty. So, the escape pod it would be.

I checked my ART (Atmospheric Replacement Thingey) again to make sure it was leak proof. It was, which made me breathe easier. One can never be too careful around ART. I looked around for any sight of other lives—or potential deaths—but the way seemed clear. As quickly as I could, I made my way around to the *Goliath's* only known escape pod.



I have reflected at times on the concept of dumb luck, and have often been told that I possess the trait in quantity. This might be due to genetics, or some inherited talent; I don't know for sure. It is all that has separated me from death or worse in more situations than I am comfortable remembering, so I don't pay too much attention to it. Dumb luck, I have painfully learned, never comes to your rescue if you wait for it; it always comes when you least expect it. Nor do I always pay sufficient attention to where I am stepping, or into what. This trait has gotten me into at least as much trouble as dumb luck has gotten me out. It was about to again.

The pod looked just as abandoned up close as it had from farther away. Sitting alone, like a fugitive golf ball on a rogue tee, surrounded by straight-down drops in all directions, everything seemed safe enough. That was good enough news that I only made a cursory eyeball scan of the immediate area; then stuck my head inside.

As I first thought, the pod was empty. The single escape seat's safety straps had been disengaged, and a woman's jacket was still hanging on its back. I could see no blood anywhere. The jacket was between me and the homing device shut-off button, so I pulled it outside to get it out of the way. As I did so I realized that it looked a lot like the one Beatrice had been wearing the day I met her. I wished I could have taken my mask off to see if I could smell her perfume clinging to it, but poison air is poison air. Plus, I didn't know what scent Beatrice wore, if she wore any at all. But I held onto the coat anyway. It gave me hope that Beatrice might have escaped *Goliath*, and the clutches of the pukoids and Quirk both. I had to try to find her.

Reaching inside the pod again, it took only a little more groping to find the homing device. Another bit of good news—it was GENERIC, a Galactic Emergency, Nominally Effective, Rescue Initiating Callbox. GENERICS are standard issue in most escape pods, so you see them all over space. Even I could operate one, although it did take me several tries to convince the thing to shut up and turn off. The following silence washed my relieved ears like a symphony. Hmm...an interesting analogy.

That should keep any hostiles from finding me, I thought. One fast look around outside, and if I don't find anyone, I'll beam back to the Eureka and do another life-forms scan from orbit. That'll be safer—make that more efficient—than me stumbling around down here in the poison air. It was not a hard decision to make; starship command and I go together well, like bright white teeth and stiffened hair on the AnchorClones of EyeVideoNews or, soiled teeth and a tube of nacho-flavored Janitor-In-A-Jug Lite.

Now back to that inattention to detail to which I alluded. Despite fumbling a bit with the homing device, I had spent little time with my head poking around inside the escape pod. My assailant had to have been nearby all along, perhaps even on or behind the craft—exactly where matters little.



I was exploring the far end of the great sh'room when a body leaped on me from above, driving the two of us to the ground. Stunned a little from both the force of impact and the surprise of the attack, I could do nothing for a moment but lie there absorbing strong blows to my body and whimpering a little. The punches were soon followed by the sensation of something attempting to remove my Atmospheric Replacement Thingey. No breathing mask means no Roger Wilco. Suitably motivated, I swung an elbow as hard as I could behind me. The feel of hitting something organic was complemented by the sound of a humanoid grunting in pain. I swung again, but this time my attacker rolled with the force of my swing, propelling both of us closer to the sh'room's edge. Hands—I could now see they were hands—came away from the breathing mask. I turned to face my unknown foe and saw those hands plunging as fists to my face. My arms blocked the blows, but they came down on me again and again. So fast were they, that I could see nothing but them and the fact that my assailant was wearing the same kind of atmospheric thingey as I, and was evidently human—or had been once.

Finally, I saw my opening and got a weak punch of my own to hit. Again we rolled over and punched again; rolled again, punched again; alternately clinging and swinging, getting closer to the edge each time. At last, the sh'room must have gotten tired of the predictable turns and lack of quick resolution of our combat. It crumbled away beneath us.

We both screamed. We both began falling. There was nothing left to do but panic, or watch your life replay before your eyes, or both. Since I had seen both features too often before, I began groping around for something else to do. One grasping hand found a strong, solid sh'room stalk and without thought (something I'm much practiced at), I grabbed, caught, and was able to wrap both of my arms about it. It held. Then my attacker found something to hold onto—my pant leg. It held, too. My leg and my arms thought otherwise; then decided to join the instant fad. My armpits considered ripping out; then popped back into place. That hurt—a lot.

Daring a peek down, I saw that the two of us were dangling hundreds of meters above the next stop. Vertigo began paying a courtesy call. It was then that I saw just who had attacked me.

Remember my fantasy of the most beautiful fem in the galaxy hanging all over Roger Wilco? Her name happens to be Princess Beatrice Wankmeister, and it was she who was hanging from my pant leg. There she was, the woman of my most colorful and interesting recent dreams; someday lover and mother-to-be of our son. I could feel her touch, and imagined our future together. But only if we could find a way back up to the top of the sh'room.

We looked at each other for an instant. Our eyes had finally recognized each other beneath the breathing masks.



"Ambassador. Princess Wankmeister. It's me, Roger Wilco. Don't you remember me?"

"Wilco. Of course. The amusing one back at StarCon Academy. The conqueror of the Awesome Sarien Menace and Flotilla of Doom, and all of that. Do you hang out around here often?"

"That's not funny. Why did you attack me? We followed your beacon, and I came to rescue you. But I had no idea it was you."

"I didn't know who you were. I thought you were one of those bastards in human shape. And speaking of rescue, do you have any ideas what to do next?" One of her hands slipped a little. So did my trousers. "You know we don't have much time to talk about this."

Indeed not; we had even less. "Flup!" Something viscous and slimy splattered into the stem-face meters from me. I glanced back over my shoulder. On surrounding sh'rooms, pukoids had appeared, standing like greenish-yellow blobs and shooting gloop at Bea and me. Heck, they are greenish-yellow blobs—sort of.

There may have been three of them, there may have been thirty—few sapients count in situations such as we were in. Whether mutated colonists, former crew of the *Goliath*, or a unique life-form of their own, fine distinctions didn't matter at all just then. If something's shooting stuff at you from guns, you can be pretty sure the stuff is nasty.

"Flup! Splat! Sploosh!" The quality of the pukoids' aim wasn't very good, but they were making up for it in quantity. More shots from the pukoid phlegm throwers splashed near us, a little of one hitting Beatrice.

"Oh!" was the single muffled sound she made in reaction to the hit. Then my pants began to slip down over my hips.

I looked down again at Bea, made a decision I didn't want to think about, took a deep breath (which I was afraid would be my last conscious one), and let go of the sh'room with one arm. We began to swing slightly.

Looking the princess straight in the eyes, I dangled the jacket down. "Grab hold. I think the top is just above us."

I motioned for her to grab the jacket for support so she could shimmy herself up my body as if I were a rope, or some organic climbing structure. If Beatrice could scramble over me, she might make the top. And if she made the top, she might be able to pull me up. And if not—if not, my final memories would be of her body clenched to mine. As the Lone Space Ranger might say, "There are worse ways to go, pardner, far worse."

Bea saw at once what I intended. Indeed, she had begun grabbing for new holds on my now bare legs even before I had reached down. She immediately reached up and grasped the jacket, pulled herself upwards, then grabbed my hand. Her touch was eternity made flesh. Despite our precarious circumstances, I felt that



I had been holding it forever. More likely, I'd be holding it for the rest of my life; a short-term prospect for both of us. We began to sway even more.

"Care for a lift?"

Now, undue physical strength and I are not very comfortable together. We tend to shun each other, like certain lavatories and cleaning solvent. I have learned adequate agility and efficient bipedal locomotion, true; but I'd flatter myself to say the power of my body was anything out of the ordinary—if that. But Beatrice was like a feather duster to me; I hoisted her body easily through the sky until she could grab my shoulders. The single hand which supported us both drew unknown power from the spark of her touch to the other. First, one arm wrapped about me, then the other. Then she pulled herself up along me as far as she could, and I grasped the sh'room again with both of my hands. Farther still she climbed as the salvo of slime continued without pause. At last, she stood on my shoulders and climbed above me to...

"I'm up. Don't go anywhere. I'll be right back."

"Wilco to *Eureka*. Wilco to *Eureka*. Cliffy, beam us out of here. Can you read? Cliffy, beam two of us out of here now!" Subspace static was the first answer.

"Cliffy, Ambassador Wankmeister is with me. We're under attack. Get us out of here now." This time I got a reply from my ship in orbit.

"Cliffy here, sir. The transporter is not responding. We're trying to fix it now. How long can you hang on?" The gloops started coming nearer again.

"That's not funny, Cliffy. How soon until it's fixed?"

"We really need to take it back to StarCon, sir."

"Cliffy!" My connection to the *Eureka* disappeared. Most of our hope went with it.

My strength exhausted, all I could do was dangle, swaying in space while the pukoids engaged in their much needed target practice.

What was keeping Beatrice so long?

"Ambassador! Princess!" I shouted. "I can't hold on much longer. Hurry!" No reply. Back to the *Eureka*.

"Cliffy! We would really appreciate being beamed out of here. Cliffy?" Not even static for an answer. I felt my hands begin to slip. I shut my eyes and prepared myself for my final scream.

"You know, if you keep your eyes closed, you'll fall, and then we'll never get to know each other any better." Bea's soft voice pulled me back to reality, and my eyes opened to a thick vine waiting for my grasp. Grabbing hold at once, I began to pull myself up. Bea's face hung above me, peering curiously over the edge. In her eyes was an expression that was nearly enough to make me swoon.

"Care for a lift?"

I think that's when I fell in love with her.



Out of the Frying Pan and into the Freezer



Of course, there wasn't any time for me to think about love, or even how Beatrice was able to find a vine in a near completely fungoid environment. No sooner had I scrambled up (and, blushing, pulled up my pants from around my boot tops), than we were surrounded by pukoids. Their distinctive aroma cut through the gaseous air and slipped into our masks. But worse than that, they were wearing Fleet uniforms and their insignias read *Goliath*.

The pukoids pointed their phlegm throwers at us and pulled the triggers. Cliffy beamed us out before the goop hit.

Beatrice collapsed into my arms as we arrived on the *Eureka*. Her eyes glazed in deep pain, and it took her a moment to take back control of her breathing. Then she smiled up at me.

"I guess all those stories I heard about you were true, Wilco. Thanks for saving my life down there, but you should have let me fall. Those slime hit me with one of their shots, and I can feel the change coming on already. I'd rather die than turn into what they've become." She passed out, then back into consciousness. Her forehead began to take on a pukoid hue.

"We'll figure out a way to save you, Ambassador. Just save your strength."

"Call me Bea. It would have been nice getting to know you better. There aren't a lot of men in the galaxy I would trust with their pants down."

"Roger."

"Roger." My name on her lips was as big a thrill as her touch had been.

"Cliffy, is the ColdSleep chamber working?" I yelled.

"Last time I looked, sir."

"Good. Let's freeze the ambassador. That might stop her transformation until we can get her some medical help."

"I don't think I'm going to make it," she whispered. Her voice became much weaker. "Listen. The pukoids have taken over the *Goliath* and have turned the survivors of their attack into mutant monsters like themselves. They even got Quirk. He's mad now—and insane, too. And he's in control of the mightiest warship in the galaxy. Before I escaped in the pod, I heard him screaming that he would puke out the universe."

"That figures. He'll have to be stopped."

"In the confusion I was able to steal *Goliath's* subspace warp-distributor CAP—its combustion activation peripheral. Quirk only has impulse power to move with. He's not going to go very far, very fast." She took the part from out of her belt and offered it to me.



"Think of it as my final bequest."

I laid her gently on the transporter pad and opened up the ColdSleep room. A cryo pod slid out awaiting a new tenant. I opened it, picked up Beatrice, and placed her inside. I had never used the particular model before and was forced to look at both the controls and the control instructions before figuring out how to make the darn thing work.

"You'd better hurry, Captain," came Cliffy's voice from over my shoulder. I think she's beginning to stink." Setting the pod to FREEZE, PLEEZE, I programmed the timer for a ten-second Big Chill and started it. The pod's lid hinged shut, and Beatrice was frozen to within three degrees of death.

I hope what we have done is enough, and that we find a cure for Beatrice somewhere. It will be very difficult to marry a pukoid. Especially if she's frigid.



into the Asteroids

I could have easily remained frozen to the spot myself, gawking at Beatrice, remembering her touch, when two years of jumbled dreams resolved themselves. It was a lot like a surprise revelation in one of the SoapVids, "As the Galaxy Turns," for example. The woman I had just fallen for (in more ways than one) was more than a fantasy fem made flesh—she was the mother-to-be of my son-to-be who had told me she was-to-be my wife-to-be. The fogged patches of future time which had been in my dreams of Beatrice cleared momentarily to show me some of what was ahead. Partially pukoid Beatrice might be; I know she will someday be herself again and we'll be together. I wonder what I'll wear to the wedding? The spaceways of life might be filled with wormholes and potholes, but there's clear cruising ahead for us both.

That's when the heavy weather set in.

I returned to the bridge, forcing the pukish image of Beatrice to be replaced by the woman I had met at the StarCon crest. At once, Droole's sensors picked up readings from the *Goliath*, moving out of where it had been lurking among the rings of Thrakus.

"She's heading right toward us, Captain. Readings indicate she's locking onto us in combat mode. What shall we do, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Good point, Mr. Droole." I called up the science station.

"WD40?"

"Among all the junk in these rings, Captain, we can't outrun her. As you might recall, she is the mightiest warship in the galaxy; so we can't outgun her."

"Recommendation?"



"You might try screaming, sir. You are quite good at it, and it would make you feel a whole lot better." Great, a terminoid who thinks she's funny. That's worse than one humming polkas.

"Lt. Flo, hail the *Goliath*."

"No response, sir."

"Try again." Same reply.

"Shields up, Mr. Droole."

The *Eureka* shuddered as if a photon torpedo had just near-missed us.

"She's firing her photon torpedoes at us, Captain. That was a near miss, if you hadn't noticed. And she's coming around for us again."

"Evasive action then, Mr. Droole."

"But that will take us into the center of the asteroids, sir. Not only is that sure death, it might destroy us all."

"It's better than being puked. Do it, Droole."

"Aye, Captain." Before *Goliath* was able to swing her bulk back into firing position (thank you, madame Inertia), we peeled off into the hurtling rocks that make up the planet's rings. The ride was bumpy; but we took no direct hits. With our shields up we were safe from *Goliath*'s fire. And I was pretty sure we would stay that way; Beatrice and I aren't even engaged yet.

"So, you're a bumbling step ahead of me again, Wilco. Why can't you get out of my life and stay there? Why?" The anguish filling the forward viewscreen was Fleet Captain Raemes T. Quirk of *SCS Goliath*, or what had once been him. Headrug half-dissolved in the vomit that was consuming his body, face blistered with over-inflated pustules, eyes filled with a combination of despair, hatred, loathing, and (inevitably) madness, he spat toxic words at us in liquefying globules. Even on screen, the image activated our duck-quick reflex. I had no idea what he was raving about.

"Look at me, Wilco. See what you've made me become. Do I make your stomach queasy? Good. Now imagine what I'm going to do to the entire StarConFederation. All will lose their lunches at my appearance and act pathetic as I challenge them to put up their pukes. Ha, ha! That was quite funny, if I say so myself. But no one will be amused in the least when I turn all in my path into pukoids. Then, who knows? After all, I'm in command of the greatest warship the universe has ever known.

"As for you, Wilco, we'll meet again. And it won't be pleasant for you or that meddlesome and ungrateful Ambassador Wankmeister, either. I guarantee it. To think I wanted her, and she found you, *puny human*, more interesting. There will be a special load of death snot waiting for each of you. The slow-acting kind. I look forward to hearing her scream and you gargle."



Before I had a chance to retort, the vidscreen image had been replaced by that of some interstellar vidphone company. I don't know how Quirk managed to smear it with a glob of spittle, but before the spit had dripped to the bottom of the vidphone logo, the image changed again to Cliffy reporting that *Eureka* had taken some damage.

"How bad is it Cliffy?"

"In many ways we're much better off than before, Captain. The transporter is acting fritzzy, but it's nothing a quick toe-tap can't cure. I'm going EVA now to adjust the gizmonics and check on the vid dish—the crew and I don't want to miss this week's Lone Space Ranger episode.

"Me neither, Cliffy. Be careful." Golly, the Lone Space Ranger—despite my new career, he's still a role model to me. I hadn't realized the *Eureka* got such good reception this far from Xenon.

For the next half hour we caught sporadic glimpses of Cliffy as he moved about the hull, occasionally pirouetting with the surprising grace given ungainly bulk in zero-G. His reports were cursory, and his choice of music tended to WindBagPipe aires. Everything continued routinely until *Eureka* was jolted by a solid thud to her hull. Our screens were still up, so the hit had to have something to do with the engineer.

"Cliffy, are you all right? What happened?"

"'Twas nothing, sir. I just passed a wee bit of gas and...help!" On the viewscreen we could see Cliffy drifting away from the ship, and listened to his cries for assistance. As the severed tether line trailed him through the image, we could see it had snapped from the strain of Cliffy's recoil.

After a moment of wonderment at the immense feat of the accident, I rushed off the bridge and down the GravLift to the pod bay. By now, the smaller impacts of meteors against the ship's shields had picked up in regularity, like finger-tappings on a desk. If I didn't get to the engineer before he drifted out of the safety zone, he'd never survive the heavy traffic. From the control pedestal, I rotated the EVA Rescue-o-Matic pod open, then grabbed a spare oxy cylinder from the closet near the crew's space suits. Just because in space no one can hear you breathe, doesn't mean that you're excused from doing it. I seated myself inside the pod, closed the hatch, and watched *Eureka's* airlock open. The Rescue-o-Matic spat out into the Void like a cherry pit after a good chew.

The scottyoid was nowhere to be seen, and the personal communicator band was silent. For a moment I panicked—I had never piloted a Rescue-o-Matic before and had no idea what to do next. Then I closed my eyes, and the StarCon's Universal Command Knowledge Sim-o-Later (SUCKS) kicked my coordination and reflexes into action. Bypassing my brain, SUCKS did my preprogrammed thinking for me. Cliffy—red blip on the heads up screen. Rotate left. Cliffy at 12 o'clock. Stop.



Forward. Check fuel. Forward. There he is on visual. Almost there. Stop. A tweak more right. Left. Better hurry. TARGET IN RANGE. Extend pod arm. Activate the waldo claw. Close it. Got him. Check fuel. Low. Heads up screen. *Eureka*—green blip. Rotate. 12 o'clock. Stop. Forward. Almost out of fuel. Scream.

"Gotcha!" Droole cheered as *Eureka's* tractor beam glommed onto the Rescue-o-Matic and hauled Cliffy and the pod back aboard. SUCKS returned control of me back to myself. I returned from the twilight zone of self-autopilot and helped Cliffy out of his space suit. The background patter of meteor hits had intensified in my absence.

"Don't worry about me, sir. I'm OK, but my suit needs a bit of an airing out." I coughed twice and agreed with him.

"But, we've got to get out of here, Captain. Our shields can't take much more of this. We'll break up if we don't do something."

"Good point, Cliffy. I'm on my way. And by the way, you're welcome."

"For what, sir?"



A Fly in the Soup

StartDate: SCA+15 1010 AM

After our hairbreadth visit to Thrakus and its rings, we have arrived at Genetix Research—or what's left of it. One dome sits in space below us, still airtight but with no significant life-sign readings. A few small animals and insects are left. WD40 has scanned debris scattered throughout our immediate vicinity and concludes that they are were once part of a much larger DeepSpace station and industrial park. Whatever has happened here is as much an enigma as the pukoids, Primordial Soup, and the Sludge Bandits. Perhaps the answers are somewhere on what remains. We may even be able to find some sort of treatment or cure for Beatrice's pukish condition. Or, perhaps we're too late to discover anything at all. I do know that we'll get no closer to the truth passing time in orbit.

Guess who has been volunteered to beam down and investigate?

Well, I *am* the captain.

Genetix had been our destination before we followed *Goliath's* distress call to Thrakus. Given what has happened to Quirk and his crew, a visit to Genetix became all the more urgent. Using the coordinates printed on the toxic waste container, we had little trouble finding this place and establishing our current orbit. WD40 says that this particular station doesn't appear on any of the Fleet's standard star charts and is, most likely, a buccaneer's den of illegal experimentation. From the quality of their soup, I suspect it is also a cauldron of culinary abomination.



"WD40, if Genetix isn't on the charts, how come its products are in every MallWorld in the galaxy and its address clearly printed on the Primordial Soup container?"

"Good point there, Captain. When I found that *Eureka's* sector charts were printed on parchment, I should have known they might be a bit out of date."

In any case, Genetix has something to hide here; if it's still there.

I ask Cliffy how the ship's systems survived our pounding off Thrakus. He tells me they're nominal, optimal, and A-OK—nothing that chewing gum or the occasional application of his Official StarCon Engineering Boots can't fix.

My confidence in the *Eureka* and her crew has never been higher. I find I can even turn my back on WD40 without imagining crosshairs caressing my backside. And there has not been the hint of polka from her since before Klorox. Flo still winks and flutters her lashes in my direction as I enter the bridge, but has volunteered to serve under me all 31 hours each day. I don't know why she giggled when she told me. Droole attends his post silently except for his hourly insistence about stopping somewhere for a drink courtesy of the captain. Beatrice's condition doesn't seem to have deteriorated any, and that too is good news.

So, why do I have a bad feeling about Genetix?

StartDate: SCA+14 510 AM

Who was it that said, "If things seem too good to be true, they are"? Nobody, I'm sure, but truer words have never been spoken.

The moment I rematerialized on Genetix I knew something wasn't quite right. At first I thought it was because everything I could see was imbedded in dozens of tiny black-and-white hexagons. Then there was the question of the strange being with the head of a flyoid and the body of a human, a body wearing a sharp-looking StarCon officer's uniform. Finally, I realized that my feet were not touching ground, and felt as if I were hovering above it. From everywhere, I was surrounded by a low-pitched buzzing, as if a flying insectoid were trapped inside my ear, attempting to escape.

I reached for my communicator and saw a score of monochrome ones on the ground below. Then my vision cleared, and I could see everything normally again. It was then I noticed I had no hands; or feet. In fact, I could see nothing between me and the ground except for the body of a flyoid. The buzzing in my ears got louder, and I knew it was the wings attached to that body—my new body. The old one—the one with the flyoid's head attached—had disappeared into the foliage.

Oh, boy. This is not going to look good on Cliffy's next evaluation, I thought. Turning your captain into a flying bugoid does little to enhance one's chances for promotion. Or, for that matter, the captain's.

Transporter accidents, while extremely uncommon, are one of life's little risks. Discombobulating the googleplexes of atoms which make up a being, ripping them



apart, zipping them down, beaming them to a specific spot, imploding them back together, and keeping all the parts in the right places, while not an exact science, is close enough to pass. Sometimes, in all the phase and polarity shifting that goes on in the process, pieces get mixed up, lost or turned outside-in. Occasionally, two beings get jumbled together. The odds for any of these things happening are on the order of several tetrazillions to one, but that pesky singleton insists on dropping in unannounced. The rare beings to survive The Shift alive are curiosities faced (if that particular part made it through OK) with a future in sick bay, the circus, or on the TalkVid circuit. For the jumbled, the theoretical chance of a cure exists if all those involved arrive alive and somewhat whole. The infrequent messes appearing at a destination point are counted as an acceptable societal cost for the everyday convenience of transporting.

As the saying goes, Shift happens.

This was of little comfort to me as I flitted around over a small pond remembering that a flyoid's life expectancy is measured in days, or less. Camouflaged on a broad leaf, a mutated frogoid had seen its next morsel. It was no pukoid, but its likely relative. The creature sprang upwards, tongue darting, and missed me. Its leap carried it beyond the pond and onto my communicator. The jolt of its landing activated the TouchMe switch, bringing the sound of Flo attempting to raise me. The frogoid jumped back into the pond as I darted back to land on the communicator.

"Flo, I'm here," I buzzed. "I've been shifted into the body of a flyoid. Get Cliffy or someone down here to collect me before I become some crit's dinner."

"You still look fine to me sir, but all I can see is your head, not your fly. The rest of the crew's on break right now, so why don't you find yourself a dump and relax for a bit. *Eureka* out." Flo's suggestion just didn't appeal to me for some reason, so I decided to fill the time flying and looking around. It is what a fly does best.

At the far end of the pond, the tidy park ended against a wall of basalt boulders. One of the rock formations seemed intended to conceal a hidden door, but its presence was so easily noted by the keycard slot inset at its side that I could only conclude that I had come upon not so much a secret doorway, but a piece of expensive industrial sculpture. Since our sensors had indicated the main facility in the envirodome to be underground, the door had to be its entrance. It was shut tight.

Now, I would not like to spend my entire life as a flyoid. Life would be too short and the food excremental. But being three centimeters long, and one tall, does allow you to get places few other beings can visit. The inside of a keycard slot is a good example.

I never imagined that being inside of a lock could be so exciting. It's a sensory wonderpark, a miniature version of SidneyLand on Terra III without the rides and



trademarked loveable character 'bots; a light, sight, and sound show that takes an entire half hour to enjoy fully. Considering the life span of a flyoid, this is impressive. All around, the gentle rapid blurping of electrons whizzing along imaginary neural pathways, moving information back and forth in a happy marathon, created a sonic bed to cradle the experience. Laser lights, the frequency of burnt amber, cut from metalloid plate to plate with the brightness of atomic fire. To crawl through a beam brought a tingle like first love rippling through my body; with some, the hearty clanking of locks dropping into place added to the sensation, like the knee-knocking of a first kiss; with others, the silence of afterglow. And as the locks clang, the walls surrounding you change while the bolts drop into place. I liked the quiet beams better; they seemed brighter and fuller, and the tingle lasted longer. Back and forth I crawled through the four beams on the corners and the one in the middle, a sensory X marking this bugfly's G-spot. If only Beatrice could have been with me.

On the far side of the lock was a large laboratory filled with biological specimen tanks crammed with genetic monstrosities and cages populated with other, less wholesome, creatures. A sign announced where I was

Main Laboratory

Authorized Personnel and Beings in Official White Coats Only!

Genetix Research Corp.

**Building new life-forms today for a richer tomorrow
Better Beings Through Biochemistry**

A narrow alcove, flanked with vidscreens on one side and nightmares on the other, contained a still active computer terminal. Its main screen indicated that the previous task had been to jettison and destroy the station's two missing domes. Landing on the touchscreen, I was able to restart the computer back into normal mode; the main menu allowed me access to Genetix's main systems control sequence. That's the big trouble with modern technology, you can get the bugs out of the program, but you can't keep prying flies away from the controls.

EnviroDome three was all that remained of Genetix. As I crawled across the screen, I could activate the dome's security cameras. One showed the image of Cliffy and WD40 beaming in to search for me, and WD40 didn't seem to be packing a fly swatter. They had no idea I was observing them. More importantly, however, was the scene playing on one of the other cameras—my body, still alive and animate,



crawling into the dome's refuse box. It was hard to make out every detail—after all, I was crawling across the monitor's screen—but it seemed that the fly was settling in for a snooze. I really hoped it wasn't hungry, but all that mattered was it appeared alive and in one piece. I was looking at my chance for a cure.

I found Cliffy and WD40 outside the lab's door; WD40's head rotating in a circle as she scanned for life-forms, the engineer scratching at his rump. His nose made a good landing spot; with his hands occupied behind, I was able to shout at him before his swat reflex took over.

"Cliffy, can you hear me? I've been shifted." The engineer's eyes crossed and came close to focusing on me. The terminoid's head kept spinning.

"So therre you arrre, Captain. Arrren't you a wee one."

"Listen, I've found the flyoid I got jumbled with. It's alive! It's alive! Can you put me back together again? We'll never be able to capture Quirk with me like this. Follow me, it's back behind these rocks."

"Well, that be yourrr opinion, Captain. Therre's still the matterrr of the drrrinks you owe the crrew. I think you'rre up to fourrr rrrounds by now."

"Fix me and it's five."

"Six."

"OK. Just promise you won't puke on the table. I've been around too much of that lately. Now, hurry." He did.

We found my body completely buried under a pile of extremely ripe personal organic refuse in the debris box. As I feared, the flyoid was gorging itself in one of the more aromatic piles. A pull of the box's handle allowed the garbage to spill out onto the ground. The flyoid, its feast interrupted, stood up in confusion.

"Land on its head, Captain," Cliffy ordered. I did.

"Now all I have to do is set the trrransporrrterr unit on rrreverrrse phase polarrity and beam the two of you thrrough the negative zone and back down to wherre you'rre standing. What happens is that the phase polarrity theta shifts forrr a frraction of a nano-picosecond and..."

"Shut up, talk right, and do it! I'll listen to your Cliffy notes some other time. Energize!" A pico-nanosecond (or something) later, I was back in my body, and the flyoid was flying off in search of dessert. The reverse phase polarity not only cured me, it had cleaned up my uniform's garbage stench at the same time. I'll have to remember that the next time I do my laundry.

"Thanks, Cliffy. Listen, the Genetix computer is still working. If we can get back into the lab, we might find their records about the Primordial Soup—if they didn't destroy them when they jettisoned the other domes. But we need to find a way inside; I'm a little too large now to fit inside of the keycard slot."

WD40 was waiting for us when we got back to the doorway. She handed me the communicator I had lost when I shifted, reported that there were no other



life-form readings in the dome, then had Cliff beam her back aboard *Eureka*. I showed Cliff the lock.

"It's the only way in, Cliff, and we don't have a key. Any ideas?"

"It's just an old-fashioned Laser Activated Mechanical Entry lock, sir. LAME keys work by interrupting a group of lasers, letting some beams through and blocking the others. When the proper tumblers have been triggered, and the rest of the beams allowed to pass completely through the LAME key, it unlocks. It's as simple as that."

"Huh?"

"In simpleton terms, sir; there are holes punched into one end of the card. If the holes are in the right places, the door opens. I hope that wasn't too technical for you. Sir."

"I think I'm beginning to understand, Cliff. I also think I know the hole pattern." When I explained about my time inside the lock, Cliff agreed that I might be right. Then I pulled out Ronko "Miracle AllPurpose" ProPeeler, Director of Marketing's card.

"Will this fit?"

"Aye, Captain. But what about the holes?"

"Beam me back aboard. I'll be right back."

A minute or two later I was back with the hole punch Cliff keeps in his toolbox. Warm memories of four corners and the center flushed through me as I reproduced them on one end of the business card. When it slipped into the keycard slot, the door pneumatics slid it open and out of sight. Cliff's *R's* returned as his jaw dropped open.

"Arrre 'ya surrre 'ya didn't go to engineerrring school, sirrr? No everrryday simpleton could have done that."

"Good point, Cliff. I am more than just an everyday simpleton. I have to be—I'm the ship's captain."

Cliff stayed behind while I returned to the laboratory and searched through the computer. What I have found in the files there is so monstrous that it brings back unbidden memories of Sludge Vohaul and his plots to rule all of known space.

It all started with the Primordial Soup, the project of a young researcher seeking to transform poisonous and hostile planets into rich lush worlds, full of life and promise. She hoped to create paradises from the toxic hellholes of the universe. She developed a tool, a genetically engineered mix of microorganisms that could withstand conditions from the hardest of radiations and the annihilating kiss of a solar flare, to the absolute-zero colds of a near-perfect vacuum. And they would not just survive, but turn the poisons and death of those places into an organic sea where other organisms could live long and prosper, one step at a time, all the way up the biological spiral stairs. This tool, this mix of engineered microbes and



bacteria, she called "Primordial Soup." Then a big fly landed in the soup bowl—it had two heads, a fluffy tail, and a chip on its shoulder.

Flyoids have neither shoulders nor fluff. Second heads are just as rare. Somehow the soup had begun causing mutations in higher life-forms. From the appearance of the first attack fly, the rate of mutation began increasing and spreading to newer species. From what she could deduce, the Primordial Soup's effect of modifying DNA molecules so as to thrive on toxics, was actually shifting them—mixing the bad with the good, so to speak—much like a transporter accident.

In every case, the mutagenic process was accompanied by transformations into sentient monsters of pus and phlegm—insane blobs that kept multiplying as long as they could feel. In their wakes they didn't leave paradise, but streams of bile and vomit that infected anything which came in contact with it. The only thing that can slow the transformation is extreme cold. A laser blast to a vital organ is the only alternative.

The woman had reported the dangerous mutations to upper management at Genetix, but after expressing initial concerns, they held a series of secret directors' meetings. Afterwards, they collected all the canisters of Primordial Soup that had been created before the crisis; then they isolated the lab to see what would happen. An unarmed lab assistant was thrown to the mutant beasts and bitten by a berserker bunnus. She too transformed into a pukoid intelligent enough to carry a weapon and spit out the occasional coherent sentence. Genetix's board of directors applauded. The horrified researcher was offered a cash bonus for her work and a generous stock option plan. She pleaded for sanity on their part, but their decision had been made; tired of centuries of fighting every environmental law, regulation, and piece of toxic legislation passed by the StarConFederation, they were going to undertake a leveraged buyout. With Primordial Soup as the lever, and pukoids as their hordes of vulture capitalists, they would take over the ConFederation and make it one of their subsidiaries. They would drop canisters of the toxic soup on one planet after another until StarCon offered complete capitulation. Some weeks later, a ship docked at the station and took some of the Primordial Soup away.

It was a Fleet ship. It was the *Goliath*.

And in the Genetix accounting file were listed a series of bribes to Fleet Captain Raemes T. Quirk. The Sludge Bandits had been a grunge band of one and wore a headrug.

The last file told the story of the last days of the research station. Hiding herself in a secure part of her lab, the researcher spent months looking for a cure to what she called the "puke effect." She could come up with nothing. In the end she used sabotage. Cutting off the power to the com links, and then to the station itself, she began setting fires in the escape shuttle bays. Then she activated the jettison and destruct sequences for the domes. Despite all she had done, she could see the



corporate cruisers fleeing ahead of the explosions. Wearing their golden parachutes, management had escaped.

After watching the first two domes explode, the woman decided to leave a record of what had taken place at Genetix, a record that would be a warning in itself. The files I've read is that warning. Before abandoning what remained of the station in its last crippled shuttle, she left a short note tagged to the end of the Primordial Soup file: "I'm sorry." It was signed just as simply; "Julia's child."

There seemed little else to learn after that; what I had was enough to shake the galaxy. Quirk needed to be stopped, and it looked like I was the chosen patsy. Why is the universe always picking on me?

On the way out, I discovered a storage area which, when I opened it, contained two containers of liquid nitrogen. I gave them to Cliffy when I got back outside. Perhaps they might be of some use in the coming confrontation. I don't know. But that seems to almost always be the case.



To Bea or Not to Bea

StartDate: SCA+15 99.8 FM

When Cliffy and I beamed back to the *Eureka*, we were greeted by an excited Spike. At first I thought it was overjoyed to see me again, but instead of the big kiss I usually get, it began jumping up and down on the transporter pad.

"Sorry, Spike. There's nobody for you to play with down there. Or do you need to empty your bladder?"

More excited jumping about followed, ending with Spike perched atop the cryo pod containing Beatrice.

"No, that's not a potty, Spike. Get off of there." Then a rapid sequence of images hit my brain: the transporter, Beatrice, transporter, Beatrice, Beatrice on the transporter pad, Beatrice puked, Beatrice as lovely as the woman of my dreams, Me—"Mommy," Beatrice—"Daddy," and then over again. During this, Spike kept bouncing back and forth between the transporter and the pod. Spike's gender recognition might be a bit reversed, but its logic was brilliant.

"Cliffy, Spike's got an idea. The Genetix researcher felt that the puke effect works a lot like a transporter accident. Spike wants us to put the ambassador on the transporter pad and do that reverse phase nano-pico polarity thing that you did on me."

"It just might worrrk, Captain. It just might. The chances arrre slim, but I say that about most everrrrything. You take herrr out while I kick a few connectorrs."

"By the way, Captain," WD40 added. "You might want to defrrrost herrr firrrst."



"Will everybody stop talking like that. Just who do you think you *RRR*?" Giving Spike a big kiss, I took it off the pod and put it back into the tank. I made sure not to jar the cryo pod's cover open, checked the controls on the side, selected THAW, and punched in a ten-second countdown. Beatrice was completely defrosted when I opened the pod's lid, and the stench of vomit that puffed out with her announced just how bad her condition had become. Quickly, I lifted her out and placed her on the pad. A nano-picosecond later she reappeared from her visit to the negative zone smelling as if newborn. In a way she was, human again instead of pukoid.

"Ambassador—Beatrice—everything's OK. You're cured. We can get married now." I bit hard, but it was too late to hold onto my words.

"Say, what?"

"I said, uh, I mean, we can go harry the *Goliath* now."

"Roger, I feel so weak and tired. I need to sleep. To dream. Maybe about you. Thank you for saving me again. It's not a habit I want to get into, but if I did, I couldn't think of a better person for the job." She closed her eyes smiling. I let her rest, sure that she might need her strength again soon.



Roger and Goliath

StartDate: SCA+16 1210 AM

I have a plan.

After I returned to the bridge, I checked to see if WD40's long-range sensors had picked up anything. She said she had detected the magnetic signature of *Goliath* near Gingivitis, a dwarf system just light hours away from Thrakus.

"How did she get there so fast, WD40? Without her warp-distributor CAP she has to be on impulse power. It should be impossible for her to have gotten there by now."

"Maybe she was able to get a tow from AAA, the AstroAccidentAssociation?"

"Good point, WD40. He deserved the wait for them to arrive."

The plan is this: Cliffy has finally repaired the cloaking device from WD40's ship. That means we can approach *Goliath* undetected. If I can get inside and deactivate her shields, we can stage a surprise attack on their bridge. Then we can either freeze Quirk and his bridge crew, or lure them onto their transporter. If we act quickly enough, Cliffy will have time to pull his reverse phase pico-nano whatever trick and cure them. In either case, we can take over control of *Goliath* and take it safely back to StarCon Command. Oh, I'll have to put the warp-distributor CAP back on first, or we'll be looking for AAA.



It's five against hundreds, but I've faced worse odds before. If we don't win, it will be the trillions of the StarConFederation against the greatest warship in history and its pukoid hordes. So it's up to us. Civilization won't stand a chance.

StartDate: SCA+16 106.2 FM

We detected the *Goliath* as soon as we dropped out of lightshow speed. We activated our cloaking field at once and were able to maneuver to nearly alongside of her undetected. Back in the transporter room, Cliffy showed me the Official StarCon HoloMap of *Goliath*.

"WD40's been scanning *Goliath*, Captain. Most of the mutant crew are at battle stations, and it appears as if she took a lot of casualties when the pukoids first boarded her. That's good because there won't be as many pukes to deal with as we feared. If you take the EVA pod over, you should be able to cut your way inside about two-thirds of the way back in the engineering section; there seem to be no pukoids there. Use the torch in my toolbox; it has a laser specially made to cut through Fleet hulls. As soon as *Goliath*'s shields come down, the boarding party will beam over. I've modified WD40's weapons systems for pukoid control, and our best hope is that she gets her first two shots off before they do. Good luck, sir. The ConFederation is counting on you, and that's a scary thought."

I nodded to the engineer in agreement; the ConFederation *was* counting on me, and I was awfully scared.

I gave Beatrice a last longing look before I went to get the cutting torch. Despite the fact that we are destined to marry and have a son, I have learned through first-hand experience that the future can be changed. I've done it. I don't want to do it again.

I entered the pod and launched her in the general direction of the *Goliath*. Once again, SUCKS training overrode my synapses and carried me safely through the Void. My only conscious action was to choose what point of the hull to cut. A narrow section towards the back matched the map Cliffy had shown me, so I pointed the pod there. It was with quite a bit of anxiety (and lots of sweat as the pod doors opened) that I let the torch do its job. What would greet me when I got through? Another close encounter with a pukoid was not on my priority list.

There was no puke waiting for me when the section of hull fell to the deck permitting me to sneak on board the ship. If there had been, I would have screamed. Fortunately, I had managed to come aboard in *Goliath*'s main engine room. This was also good. A single pukoid guard, still dressed in the rags of her Fleet uniform, didn't fit this happy profile. She entered as I was climbing the stairs that led to the ship's main drives. Thinking very strong thoughts about being invisible, I hunkered down as far as I could, trying to stay out of her line of sight. When I saw her turn



around and head back to the engine room door, I resumed my quiet dash to the panel which controlled the giant Star-o-Power engines. There, it didn't take me long to find where my stolen engine part went. It was the empty hole with nothing in it. Since this is a normal condition for holes, it was also identified by a wide-mouth jar sitting next to it. The hand-lettered sign pasted to it read

Be a Distributor Contributor
Help us buy a new one

All voluntary donations accepted
Involuntary donations required

It's nice to know that the *Eureka* isn't the only ship with budget problems.

I placed the warp-distributor CAP Beatrice had stolen, back into its setting. The status light next to it changed from a sad to a happy face. It meant that I had to turn off the ship's shields before Quirk discovered that the star lanes were open to him again. I hid again until the guard turned back from her next visit, and swiftly left the engine room by the same door she had. Checking all directions, I entered the engineering corridor, immediately lifted up one of the deck gratings, and dropped into the subfloor crawl space. I breathed a lot easier then; I knew that as long as I kept moving through the crawl space of *Goliath*, I would never be noticed.

My path to the main shield's cut-off switch was now open. I knew the layout of GiantGorilla-class warships like *Goliath*; they, and the layouts of all StarCon vessels, were beat into us from our first day at the academy. Even nodding off in class, as I normally did, the schematics were hammered in you. I was on level 8, the bridge was on Deck 2. The switch to cut off the shields was located in the subfloor beneath the captain's chair. By crawling through the subfloors, and climbing up the GravLift elevator shaft maintenance ladders, I could easily go from where I was to where I needed to be. And at the end, I could snatch control of Quirk's ship right out from under him. Literally. It was a nice thought.

There were a few Pacoids loose in the section where I had entered the crawl space. While pacoids have not yet replaced ratoids as ubiquitous space vermin, their round happy faces have caused them to be judged the less appealing species. Pacoids are not dangerous in the physical sense but can cause insanity if met too often in too closed an area. I was able to easily escape or avoid the few I encountered.

Other than them, I just concentrated on reaching the shaft that would lead me upward to Deck 6; and then the one to Deck 4; and finally to the subfloor of



Deck 2. I always avoided the odd-numbered decks, although for reasons I've never fully understood. As for the shafts, I made sure the GravLift was below me and I scrambled up as quickly as I could. I suspect they hurt a lot when they hit you.

Finally, I crawled my way to beneath the bridge and to *Goliath's* shield deactivation switch. A less formal control had been jerry-rigged next to it reading: CAPTAIN'S CHAIR WHOOPIE CUSHION. Unlike the shields, it was currently set to OFF. I considered surprising Quirk with that one too, but passed on the urge. The traitor was going to be having enough trouble in a few seconds.

I reached up and turned off *Goliath's* shields.



The Fates of Quirk

As expected, every horn, bell, klaxon, and under-wrought computer voice aboard ship began earning its pay. Amid the sudden aural chaos, a fetid hand lifted away the grating above me and hauled me to the bridge. Slime and pus hung from everything. Mucus and phlegm made footing on the deck problematic, and had managed to obscure much of the ship's instrumentation. All around me the former officers of *Goliath* oozed their ways around, melting more as they went and popping pustules with the effort. My involuntary heaves were lost amidst the stench.

Hunched above everything, leaning on the captain's seat, stood what remained of Fleet Captain Raemes T. Quirk. At his spot on the dais he looked more like raw materials on DeepGuano IX than he did human. What was left of his headrug had dissolved into the deteriorating left side of his face. The remains of his uniform made a mockery of cross-dressing. We made eye contact.

"You're sure looking all spit-and-polish today, Captain Quirk." The first salvo had gone to me. "Please excuse me if I don't salute."

"Wilco. How did you get aboard? What are you doing here? Where's that dump truck you call a starship? Oh, never mind; it doesn't matter now. You are finally in my clutches, and I am about to turn the ConFederation into my own little puddle of puke. The time has passed for wisecracks and dumb puns. Your warped sense of logic is about to be snuffed. My only regret is that I cannot skin you alive in a salt bath. Have you any last words?"

"Just two questions: Why did you betray StarCon? And why don't you like me?"

"Why don't I like you? You don't know? You truly don't know? Listen; then die screaming." Despite his condition, Quirk had me pegged correctly.

"Once there was a young Fleet officer. Handsome, charming, witty, intelligent; he came from a good family and had a full head of hair. The youngest captain in the Fleet, he was being groomed to inevitably be named the Grand High Master



and Commander of the StarCon Fleet. Already he had one of the glitziest uniforms in space.

"One day an emergency call came into StarCon. A research ship, the *Arcada* had come under attack, and he was sent to rescue it. But he had given his crew shore leave at a local Monolith Burger and so arrived at the *Arcada* just late enough to see her explode. His tardiness cost him a small black mark on his record but annoyed him much more. When StarCon discovered the location of the Sarien ship that had made the attack, they offered the officer a chance to make amends. But when he warped in to do battle, the Sarien ship was no more—defeated by a mentally deficient janitor by the name of Roger Wilco. Wilco was hailed as a hero, and the officer was asked how such a thing could have happened. I was that officer.

"A year or so later, the identity of the person who had plotted with the Sariens was revealed. His name was Sludge Vohaul. Perhaps you remember him? I do; I wasn't allowed to forget it then—for Vohaul was my mother's brother, and I had always bragged about the genius of my uncle Sludgie. Shamed, family honor besmirched, I demanded the chance to right Sludge's wrongs and attack his Asteroid of Doom. In one gesture I would rid the ConFederation of its greatest menace, return honor to the family name, and restore my unjustly tarnished reputation in the Fleet. Once more, as my armada warped in to attack, victory and honor were carelessly snatched from me by the same poorly bred potty lick. Someone had read a number backwards and the armada took a wrong turn at Orion. The mistake was discovered quickly, but the brief delay allowed *you* to destroy Sludge moments before I would have.

"From that day on there was an unspoken question asked whenever it was time for promotion: 'Why was Quirk late? Was he trying to give his uncle time to escape?' My career path, and my chance for a better uniform, had been quashed. I would rise only so far in the Fleet; the top positions would go to others. There are few things in this universe better than a great uniform, Wilco. And *you* took that away from me. *You* thwarted my destiny.

"And from that day, I swore to revenge myself upon you. But you vanished. I'm sure you did that intentionally to annoy me too.

"Over the years, the pain has grown. With rejuv treatments, transplants, and hair weaves I have attempted to stay young and outlive those who remembered me back then. But the pain won't go away. When Genetix told me of their plan to stage a corporate takeover of the ConFederation, they also offered to fulfill my dream of commanding the Fleet. And they paid me well. All I had to do was drop the occasional drum of Primordial Soup as *Goliath* performed her official duties. No one would know until it was too late, and I would be rewarded with the spiffiest uniform in the galaxy.

"I was a happy man until the day I discovered you were a cadet. The nightmare that wouldn't go away had come back. And when I later saw Ambassador Wankmeis-



ter talking with you—a woman I had claimed as my own—I found a new way to hate you. When she unwittingly called my second job the work of toxic bandits, I was proud. When she named them *Sludge Bandits*, the shames of my past drove me near madness. And when she finally spurned my affections and spoke warmly of you, I could take no more. Yes, I knew the refugees from Klorox had turned pukoid but I *welcomed* them aboard the *Goliath*. I wanted to be the biggest puke in the galaxy. I glory in it. I want it all and I want it now!"

There was no doubt that Quirk was part Vohaul. You could tell it from the mouth; he couldn't stop talking.

To discover that Quirk's treason was tied to a pathological hatred of me was as bad as discovering he had a pathological hatred of me. I couldn't allow him to go on thinking that way; if he was going to kill me he should do it for the right reasons.

"But Captain Quirk, I really think that this is all just a little misunderstanding..." But there was to be no further chance for me to show him the errors of his thinking. From behind me came the sound of someone beaming onto the *Goliath's* bridge.

"Duck, Captain Wilco!" WD40 commanded. I ducked; when a terminoid uses that tone of voice, they usually mean it. The boarding party had finally arrived—just in time to keep Quirk from filibustering me to death.

"Freeze, you pukes!" she screamed in battle lust. Her dual topside bazookas opened up and began blasting away. All around me, instead of falling bodies, I saw pukoids frozen in place. When I turned back to Quirk, he had disappeared.

"That should put the slime on ice for a while," WD40 bragged. "Cliffy loaded me up with liquid nitrogen, and it's one of the coolest weapons I have ever used."

No, terminoids are not programmed for humor.

"Hurry up, Captain. We need to get back to the transporter room and help Cliffy take care of the rest of *Goliath's* crew." WD40 was still talking as I ran off after her.

Cliffy was behind the transporter control deck setting up for his part of the raid.

"The pukoids will be coming herrre to beam aboarrrd *Eurrreka*, sirrr. I've rrrreverrrrsed all of the phase and polarrrrity grrrids slightly differrrrently, so when I shift the pukoids into the negative zone, all the soup and bad DNA in theirrr systems will be beamed into space. I'll hide wherrre they can't see me. You stand in the corrrrnerrr and let me know when they'rre all on the pad. And please don't let them see you, sirrr."



The sounds of running pukoids came closer and then burst into the room. They all crowded onto the transporter pad, waiting to be beamed aboard the *Eureka*. As the room's door closed behind them, I could see they were all in place.

"Cliffy, energize!" I yelled. Three seconds later a dozen pukoids were human again. Most of them were snoring.



The Garbage Man Never Rings Twice

"It's the same thing that happened to the ambassadorrr, sirrr. They'rre not going to botherrr us forrr a while. But, have you seen Captain Quirrrrk?"

"Good point, Cliffy." There wasn't enough time to reprimand him for his slipping accent; rushing back to the bridge, I could still find no sign of Quirk. Then Flo appeared on one of the com screens.

"Everyone's fine aboard the *Eureka*, sir. I have visual on the three of you. So *who's* in that escape pod?" On the main viewscreen, the pod could be seen darting away from *Goliath*. Then, the pod's path became blocked. Greenish-yellow, it appeared to be a giant blob of opaque flexible mush; better yet, phlegm. As if it hadn't noticed, or didn't care, the pod continued straight for the Primordial Soup globule. It was enveloped and absorbed like canned fruit in jelloid. Then it burped; and burped again. An edge of the blob began to extrude from the main mass and form itself into some sort of pseudo-head. It had two saucer eyes and a wide narrow slit for a mouth.

Worse, its face bore a definite similarity to Quirk—especially in the mouth. I began to fear that it would try to talk to us. Then it began to smile and eye the *Eureka*. It seemed like a good time for me to scream. I did, and then called Flo.

"Flo, have Cliffy beam me back over to the *Eureka*. I don't like the looks on that Quirkoid's face." I guess Flo didn't either; I was back aboard within seconds and running for the bridge.

By the time I had arrived, the situation had changed. The Quirk thing was now attached to *Goliath's* hull and trying to ingest it as it had the pod.

"Mr. Droole, decloak and fire the plasma torpedoes at that abomination. It's acting too hungry to be in good taste." Droole fired, but the blob soaked up the plasma and used the torpedo's energy to begin growing. It also turned back to us with the famous Captain Raemes Quirk "I'm really irked now" look in its eyes. Then he started coming for us.

"That sucker looks mad, Captain. Doesn't it like you or something?"

"That sucker is about to be sucked, Mr. Droole. Activate the RRS. Let's see how that Quirkoid likes life inside a Repulsive Rubbish Suck-o-Matic."



The Quirk thing didn't like the idea at all, but its struggles couldn't prevent us from hoovering it aboard.

"We have it inside, Captain, but the blob is still growing. It'll burst us apart like an infected blister in minutes. I don't want to experience the simile first hand."

"Good point, Mr. Droole. I hate to walk out on *Eureka*, but she has one last service to perform for the ConFederation. You and Flo beam over to *Goliath*. I'll bring the ambassador and Spike with me. It's time to abandon ship, and the AutoDestructo is going to obliterate the Quirkoid along with the *Eureka*." He and Flo ran away from the bridge like party poopers at the BigBangBoom.

I pressed the AutoDestructo button and watched silently as panels which concealed the thermonuke slid back and a black ceramic egg slid forward. The only feature on its smooth surface was a red button—the GoForIt button. I went for it, and as the backtimer began counting down, a mechanical likeness of Astro Chicken popped out and clucked to me:

"All of us here in the Egg-o-Doom hope you enjoy today's countdown to disintegration. Your final moments are being brought to you by ScumSoft, a division of Vohaul Enterprises. In ten minutes, this place is history. Cluck." All I could do at that moment was laugh at the fact that Quirk's final moments would be with his family. If the idea weren't so trite it might be poignant.

All that was left was to get Beatrice and Spike and beam ourselves over to *Goliath* before Astro Chicken sounded his last cluck. The trash compartment was already bulging out as it tried to contain the blob inside. Pulsing would even be a better description. It didn't matter that much to me, though; I knew we'd be off the ship within the minute.

I had forgotten about things that were too good to be true.

Beatrice was still woozy and pretty much spaced out when I woke her up. The fact that Quirk was now an -oid in the compartment across the corridor registered as lightly as the fact that a thermonuke was going to explode in minutes.

"Can we stay to watch?" was her reaction. It told me all I needed to know about the after-effects of being puked and shifted. Spike of course was just delighted to kiss me and snuggle into my armpit. I gave a last look-see to the proud old ship that had been my first command.

"I'm going to miss you, *Eureka*, but I'll miss the Quirkoid a lot less. It was love at first sight and I'll always respect you. Don't bother turning out the lights before you go." Bea and I stepped onto the transporter pad.

"Energize!"

Nothing happened.

"Energize!" Same result.

"Energize!" From the flicker of the transporter trying to transport, I knew we had blown a fuse. The timing was perfect.



"You should really stop repeating yourself like that, dear," Beatrice suggested. "You wear out a lot of good words that way."

"Stay here, I'll be right back." As I began to leave the transporter room in a desperate hope to find a fresh fuse, I realized that the service tunnel which housed the ship's fuse box was too cramped for both me and Spike to be in at the same time.

"You wait here, too," I explained as the crit went back into the tank. "We won't leave without you."

A rummage through Cliffy's toolbox turned up a fuse; then into the service tunnel. The fuse diagram claimed the front center one controlled the transporter voltage. No time for second guesses. Out with the old and in with the new. The schematic changed color to AOK green, one of my favorites.

Out and back to the transporter room. Oops. The scat was out of the bag and the Quirk thing oozed itself between me and my goal. *It* seemed to show triumph in its eyes. No way. One step back and a running vault across the Quirkoid. I hadn't thought a blob could shriek in despair. Then I was back inside.

"Beatrice, I'm not sure the transporter can beam all three of us at once. You go first; it'll be safer for you that way." The daze suddenly vanished from her face at that moment, and she stared deep and hard into my eyes as if she had discovered something enormously important.

"I love you, Beatrice. I want you to know that if I don't make it over after you. Just, I love you."

Her reply to me was a kiss. It lingered a moment, and then she stepped away and beamed out. I watched where she had stood; then retrieved Spike and returned to the transporter. Spike, of course, kissed me the way it always does, wiggling all the time.

"And I love you too, Spike. But not the way I love Beatrice."

"Energize!"

The transporter worked.

From the bridge of *Goliath*, Bea and I watched the *Eureka* die.

We held hands and she comforted me as I cried.

Cruising Through Space Quest V: Roger Wilco in the Next Mutation



As you begin Space Quest V, you'll again adopt the persona of Roger Wilco, former space janitor and current space cadet. As Roger, you must pass and survive the notorious StarCon Aptitude Test, receive command of your own garbage scow, and then boldly go where no man has swept the floor, picking up trash along the way. Roger's overall mission in the game is anything but simple: stop the hideously mutated Captain Quirk and his crew of pukoids from "puking out" the galaxy and save Roger's wife-to-be, Beatrice Wankmeister, from their slimy clutches. Good luck; Roger's counting on you to see him through the ordeal.



t StarCon

North of the janitor's closet screen is the door to Roger's classroom and the bulletin board where the scores for the StarCon Aptitude Test will be posted after the class has taken the test. Don't bother talking to the students standing next to the door; they have nothing of interest to say to Roger. Save the game and walk inside.

cheating, but you can do it as often as you want. In case you don't feel like going through all of that ten times, here are the correct answers:

(Roger's right). Note which box the student filled in on his SAT form—it's a tiny black square—then look at Roger's SAT again. Fill in that box. Be careful when cheating because if Roger is caught by the droid, he dies; however, if you cheat the moment the droid turns away, Roger will be fine. You only have to cheat once to score the points for



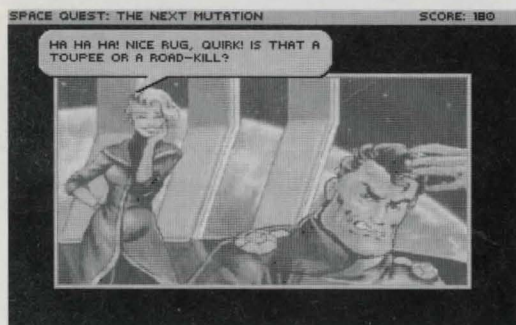
- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. d | 6. c |
| 2. e | 7. e |
| 3. e | 8. d |
| 4. c | 9. a |
| 5. e | 10. a |

After you fill in the tenth answer, the test ends and the teacher tells Roger to clean the academy crest as punishment for being late to class. Roger then automatically leaves the room and returns to the hallway.

From the hallway outside the classroom, walk one screen south back to the janitor's closet and open it up; a pile of things will tumble out. Look at each of the things that fell out of the closet; when you've found the Scrub-o-Matic floorscrubber and the orange safety cones, take them. Once Roger has the floorscrubber and the cones, walk him one more screen to the south.

South of the janitor's closet, a corridor branches off toward the east. Follow it, and Roger will end up on the balcony overlooking the academy crest. Extending from the balcony is an elevator platform. Walk over and stand on it, and it will take Roger down to the crest he must clean.

When Roger arrives at the crest, the first thing you must do is have him put out the safety cones to keep people from walking on the wet crest after he's cleaned it. After the cones are down, click the floorscrubber on the crest to put it down, then click the Hand icon on it once to open it up, and a second time to have Roger sit down and begin driving it over the crest. Roger won't scrub the crest by himself, however; you must direct his wildly spinning floorscrubber. This isn't as hard as it sounds. Simply click the Brush icon (that appeared when Roger started scrubbing) on the spot where you want Roger to go. Since Roger isn't the world's greatest floor



scrubber (despite years of experience), it may take a couple of passes to get all of the dirt. As soon as the last speck of dust is gone from the crest, Roger will stop sweeping and his superior officer, Captain Quirk, accompanied by Beatrice, will appear. Since the rest of this sequence is under computer control, you can sit back and enjoy the animation.

Once Quirk and Beatrice leave, walk Roger to the west; he'll automatically ride the elevator back up to the balcony.



From the balcony, walk Roger west back to the corridor, then watch the animated sequence that follows.

When the animation finishes, Roger will be standing in the corridor outside the StarCon Conference room. A classmate of Roger's tells him that the SAT scores are posted on the bulletin board outside their classroom. When the student stops speaking, walk Roger one screen south and he'll be back in front of the classroom.

Outside the classroom, look at the bulletin board (all the students are clustered around it). Roger will get his test results and find that he scored 100 percent and has been recommended to receive his own command. After another animation sequence, Roger will be on the bridge of the garbage scow *Eureka*, his first command.

When Roger arrives on the *Eureka's* bridge, his crewbeings introduce themselves; Droole is Roger's navigation and weapons officer, and Flo is his communications operator. When they finish talking, sit Roger in the captain's chair (use the Hand icon). When Roger is seated, he will be looking out the *Eureka's* forward viewscreen. The buttons on the arm of his command chair will, from left to right, let him talk with Cliffy, the chief engineer, let him talk with his science officer (there isn't one yet), and allow him to activate the *Eureka's* self-destruct mechanism. Click the Command icon on Flo to see a list of the functions she can perform. Choose "Hail StarCon." StarCon will clear the *Eureka* to take off, and tell Roger to take his ship to Gangularis, Peeyu, and Kiz Urazgubi for garbage pickups. Next, click the Command icon on Droole and tell him to Lay in a Course.

Now comes Space Quest V's copy protection. Open up the booklet that came with the game (*The Galactic Inquirer*), and look up the coordinates for Gangularis, Roger's first pickup. Enter in the coordinates, then order Droole to proceed at Regular Speed. As soon as the *Eureka* clears StarCon, Droole puts the ship into Lite Speed without Roger having to tell him to. After the *Eureka* has disappeared, another ship materializes. It contains WD40, an android sent to terminate Roger for alleged mail fraud in Space Quest III. You won't have to deal with her just yet, but don't worry, she'll be back.



The First Garbage Pickup

Once the *Eureka* is away from StarCon, wait until Droole tells Roger that they're nearing their destination, then order him back to Regular Speed. When Flo tells Roger she's tracking a waste beacon, order Droole to Activate the RRS, then watch as the *Eureka* sucks up the floating bag of trash. When the animation ends, Flo tells Roger that a life-form is in the waste compartment. Click the Hand icon on the exit box on the back of Roger's seat to get him out of the command chair, then walk through the door in the north wall of the bridge. Roger will end up in the engineering section of the ship.





Once inside the engineering section, look around. The north wall contains the door leading back to the bridge. The east wall shows a maintenance tunnel and the door to the waste compartment. In the center of the floor is an elevator down to the *Eureka's* pod bay, and a door in the west wall leads into the science lab/transporter room. Cliffy's toolbox is lying on the floor at the south end of the screen.

Press the black button to the left of the waste compartment doors to open them. As soon as the doors are open, Roger will be buried beneath a cascade of trash. He will shake himself off, get up, and look into the compartment. When Roger sticks his head into the waste compartment, a small, six-legged alien creature that piddles acid will jump out and hug Roger around the face. Roger will pry the creature



off and, deciding to keep it as a pet, name it Spike. Spike, who has other ideas, wiggles free of Roger's grasp and runs off. Don't worry, Roger will find him again later. Open Cliffy's toolbox and take the fuse, the hole punch, the cutting torch, and the antacid tablets. Now, open the door to the science lab and step inside.

In the lab, walk Roger around the room. Spike will appear and leap onto Roger's face again. If Spike doesn't appear, leave the room and then return. This time, after prying Spike off, Roger manages to hang onto him. Once Roger has Spike, walk over to the red specimen tank on the east wall, drop in Spike, and then drop in the antacid tablets to keep Spike from dissolving the tank with his acidic secretions. Once Spike has been safely incarcerated, walk back to the bridge.



The Second Garbage Pickup

Back at the bridge, sit down, order Droole to Lay in a Course, look up the coordinates for Peeyu, then enter them into the navigation pad. Order Droole to go to Lite Speed, wait until he tells Roger that they're nearing their destination, then order him back to Regular Speed. When Flo again tells Roger she's tracking a waste beacon, order Droole to Activate the RRS and watch the animation as the *Eureka* sucks up another floating bag of trash. After the *Eureka* has ingested the garbage, Flo will intercept a transmission from StarCon. Watch it, then order Droole to Lay in a Course. Look up the coordinates in the game booklet for Kiz Urazgubi, enter them in, and then order Droole to Lite Speed.



NOTE: It doesn't matter in which order you make these first two pickups. Spike will always appear at the completion of the second one.

Kiz Urazgubi

As Roger approaches Kiz Urazgubi, WD40's ship decloaks, attacks, and disables the *Eureka*. WD40 orders Roger to beam down to the surface of Kiz Urazgubi and gives him five standard time units to do so before she opens fire on the *Eureka*. She means it. Walk Roger to the lab, stand on the transporter, and click the Command icon on it to beam down to the planet's surface. (You also can do this by clicking the Talk icon on Roger's head once he's on the teleporter.) When Roger arrives on the surface, WD40 lands, cloaks her ship, then flies off to find and kill him. 3

Roger is beamed down next to a small pool fed by a waterfall. North of the pool are a series of caves. As soon as you have control of Roger, save the game, then walk him into the westernmost of the caves. Do this quickly because WD40 will appear and attack Roger if he stays on the screen too long. WD40's first couple of shots will miss, and there is a long pause between volleys so you can walk Roger off the screen. This is true whenever she attacks Roger.

Roger will emerge from the cave in an area just above the pond. He can go east, walk back to the pond through the cave he entered from, or go north into a different cave. Walk Roger one screen to the east and he will arrive at a yawning chasm. A hollow log stretches across to a ledge on the east side of the screen and a narrow, still living tree extends over a pool to the north. Walk Roger north along the narrow tree. He will get partway across, then fall into the pool, breaking off a dead branch in the process. Roger and the dead branch are swept south over a small waterfall and end up in the middle of the pool where Roger arrived when he beamed down from the *Eureka*.

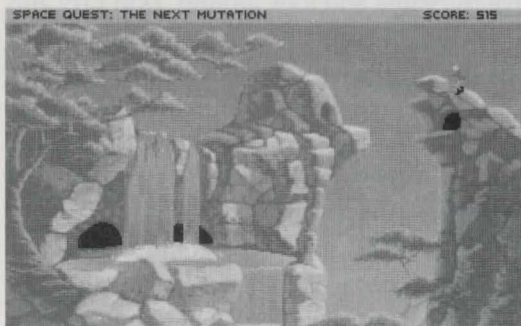
After Roger gets out of the pool, pick up the dead branch that came over the waterfall with him, save the game, and walk back to the chasm.

A Back at the chasm, don't bother with the narrow tree. Instead, use the Walk icon to crawl through the hollow log. Roger will stop halfway through the log and you'll be able to see his eyes peering out through a crack. Click the Walk icon again to get him to go all the way through. On the other side of the log dangle clusters of green fruit, just out of Roger's reach. Use the dead branch to hit one of the fruit clusters, and while it is swinging from the blow, grab a piece of the fruit. This done, crawl Roger back through the log and walk one screen to the west. West of the chasm, walk Roger into the cave leading north; he will emerge from the cave at the top of a waterfall. Save the game.





At the top of the waterfall, look around. West of Roger is a cave leading north. Enter it. As soon as Roger enters the cave, WD40 appears and follows him.



Roger emerges from the cave onto a ledge high above the ground. Across from him is another ledge, above which is a large boulder. Click the Walk icon on the ledge across from Roger and he will leap across to it. Next use the Walk icon to climb up to the boulder. Use the dead branch as a lever and Roger will send the boulder rolling

down through the cave he emerged from. The boulder will knock WD40 clear out of the cave and into the pools which are situated below. *-6*

NOTE: If Roger takes too long to climb to the boulder, WD40 will arrive again, see him, and kill him. However, if you do this sequence *too quickly*, WD40 will never appear at all. You'll have to retrace your steps back down to the cave and perform the whole sequence over again.

As soon as she is taken care of, climb Roger back down onto the ledge, jump back across, and walk down to the now-familiar pool where Roger beamed down.

When Roger arrives back at the pool, you'll see colored lights flashing in it, then WD40 will fly out. As soon as this happens, turn Roger around and walk him back to the chasm. Crawl Roger into the hollow log but don't go all the way through; just stay at the spot where you can see Roger's eyes through the crack in the log. WD40 will land on the log directly above him. Take the piece of fruit and shove it up the tailpipe of her jetpack. WD40 will fly off and then explode. After this happens, crawl Roger west back out of the log. You will notice WD40's head lying on the ledge near the narrow tree. Take it, then walk back to the beam-down pool. Cliffy will be there, picking up the pieces of WD40, and he'll beam himself and Roger back aboard the *Eureka*.

When Roger arrives back at the ship, walk him out of the science lab, then turn him around and walk back inside. Cliffy will be there with WD40's parts. Roger will automatically toss him her head, and Cliffy will give Roger the device she used to open her ship. Once Cliffy gives Roger the automatic ship opener, walk over to the transporter and click the Command icon on it. Cliffy will go with Roger, and they will beam down to the part of Kiz Urazgubi where WD40 left her now invisible ship.

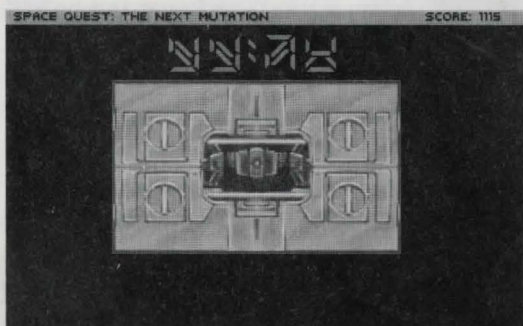
When Roger and Cliffy materialize in front of WD40's cloaked ship, click the ship opener on Roger. The ship will open and lower an elevator platform. Walk





Roger over to it. Cliffy won't accompany Roger, so he'll have to ride up into the ship alone.

Once Roger is inside the ship, ⁷save the game and look around. Don't try and climb into the cockpit; doing so will kill Roger. Instead, open the panel on the east wall. The locked compartment inside holds the ship's cloaking device. The compartment's locking mechanism is a series of two latches, four knobs, and four panels. First open the top latch, and then the bottom one. The self-destruct



countdown starts when the first latch is opened. You now have approximately five minutes to finish this sequence before the ship explodes and obliterates Roger. Don't worry, it'll be more than enough time. Now, to finish opening the compartment, turn the top-left knob, then the bottom-right knob. Open the top-left panel (click the

Hand icon on it), then the bottom-right panel. Turn the bottom-left knob, then the top-right knob. Open the top-right panel, then the bottom-left panel. Take the cloaking device.

Once Roger has the cloaking device, walk him back onto the elevator and exit the ship. When Roger is outside WD40's ship, he and Cliffy will automatically beam up just as it self-destructs.

Back in the *Eureka*, Roger gives Cliffy the cloaking device, and Cliffy tells Roger that he's putting WD40 back together to serve as a member of the crew. After Cliffy finishes speaking, return Roger to the bridge. Once Roger is seated, order Droole to Lay in a Course. Look up and enter the coordinates for the Spacebar, then order Droole to go to Lite Speed. When Droole informs Roger that they're approaching their destination, order him to cut back to Regular Speed. Next, order Droole to put the *Eureka* into Standard Orbit around the Spacebar. As soon as the *Eureka* is orbiting the Spacebar, Roger's crew will beam down for some R&R. Walk Roger back to the transporter room, but before you beam him down, take Spike out of the specimen tank. Once Roger has Spike, beam down to the Spacebar.



At the Spacebar

When Roger arrives at the Spacebar, look around. When you've taken in the sights, walk Roger over to his crew's table. He'll automatically sit down, and they'll all order drinks. A scruffily dressed merchant will approach and try to sell his wares to Roger.



This sequence is animated, so sit back and enjoy it. The merchant will leave after giving Roger a free sample packet of dehydrated space monkeys and his business card. When the merchant leaves, Captain Quirk shows up. He and Roger taunt each other, and Quirk challenges Roger to a game of Battle Cruiser. Roger accepts. ~~8~~

After Roger is seated opposite Quirk at the Battle Cruiser game, read the directions on how to play. Your objective is to destroy all of Quirk's ships. This sequence is completely optional; you don't have to play Battle Cruiser at all, but you do score 25 points for each of Quirk's ships that you destroy, up to a maximum of 100 points.

The game is just like Battleship™ in most respects. You have four ships and three ten-by-ten sectors to place them in. After you place your ships, save the game. Roger and Quirk will take turns shooting at each other. To fire, choose which of your opponent's sectors you wish to fire into, then choose the square on the grid you want your shot to hit. You have a choice of two munitions: regular photon torpedoes or probes. Photon torpedoes hit only one square on a sector grid. If they miss a ship, a green marker appears where the shot hit. If they hit a ship, a red marker appears. Probes don't "hit" anything. Instead, they reveal any ships in a five-by-five area. Any ships (or parts of ships) revealed will be outlined in purple. You start the game with only two probes, but gain one each time you destroy one of Quirk's ships.

Each ship is a different shape and covers a certain number of squares on the grid. You must hit every part of the ship in order to destroy it. After Roger has fired, Quirk fires. His shots usually aren't very accurate, but he can hit you.

NOTE: As you may have guessed, Battle Cruiser is mainly a game of guesswork and luck. There is no single winning strategy, but here's one that works fairly well. Place your ships on the board, start the game, and then save it before you open fire. At this point the computer has placed its ships and they will always be in the same places when you restore to this save. Now, start playing. Every time you hit one of Quirk's ships, write down the sector it was in and the grid coordinates it occupied. If you beat Quirk, this information is useless; but if Quirk beats you, restore back to your save and you'll know exactly where at least a few of his ships are. Knock them out right off and then go hunting for the rest of his fleet. Keep writing down the coordinates of ships you hit or destroy. If you beat Quirk this time, fine. If he wins again, restore and do it all over again. Eventually you'll know where all four of his ships are and can destroy them with ease. Good shooting!

When Battle Cruiser ends, Roger and Quirk walk down from the balcony where the game is located and find Cliff fighting with a member of Quirk's crew.



Quirk orders Cliffy thrown in the brig then beams back to his ship, the *Goliath*. Once Quirk leaves, walk Roger back to his table and he'll sit down. Drop the dehydrated space monkeys in Roger's drink; they'll make a great diversion while he rescues Cliffy. Once the monkeys are floating around and multiplying rapidly, walk Roger one screen to the east.

The brig is east of the main barroom. Wait until the guards run out to investigate the alert the space monkeys have caused, then click the Hand icon on the control panel at which they were standing. This will turn off the invisible force field that bars Roger from continuing. Once the force field is off, walk Roger north and look in the second cell on the west wall, where Cliffy stands. Talk to Cliffy, then put Spike on the bars of his cell. Spike will piddle acid on each of the bars, which will eat them away and give Cliffy a ready-made exit. The program then takes over and Roger and Cliffy will be beamed back aboard the *Eureka*. The Spacebar explodes behind them as the space monkeys multiply beyond its ability to contain them.

When the animation ends, Roger will be back on the *Eureka's* bridge with orders from StarCon to head for Klorox II for another garbage pickup. You know what to do by now: Order Droole to Lay in a Course, look up the Klorox II coordinates, enter them, then order Droole to go to Lite Speed.



On Klorox II

When the *Eureka* arrives at Klorox II, order Droole back to Regular Speed. Flo tells Roger that they aren't tracking a trash beacon and maybe they should investigate. When Flo finishes speaking, order Droole to put the ship into Standard Orbit. Once there, order Flo to Hail a Ship. She'll get the *Goliath*, but Quirk will tell Roger to get off the frequency as he tries to make his report. After Roger has finished speaking to Quirk, walk him back to the transporter room. Droole will go with him. In the transporter room, put Spike back in the tank, and beam down to Klorox II with Droole.

Droole and Roger arrive on Klorox II south of the deserted remnants of the planet's one colony. They immediately split up, so Roger has no one to turn to for advice. Save the game, then walk north into the colony's central building (just click the Walk icon on the building in the center of the screen—the one with the hole in its side). Make sure the sound on your computer is turned up; there are lots of sound cues in the next sequence.

Inside the building, save the game. Try and use the computer console in the center of the room. As soon as Roger tries to activate it, a pukoid will attack him, dropping a piece of paper on the floor in the process. The pukoid knocks Roger to





the ground and starts spitting at him. You have to dodge the loogies to keep Roger from being hit. If a loogie hits Roger, he becomes a pukoid and the game ends.



Here's how to dodge the loogies: Roger can duck his head to the right or the left to avoid being hit. As you can see in this screenshot, the Hand icon will change to an Arrow icon in the spots to the right or left that Roger can move his head. As long as you click at the right time, and the Arrow icon—not the Hand—is visible, Roger can

duck successfully.

The pukoid makes two sounds before it spits. Wait for the second sound, repeat, *the second sound*, before clicking the Arrow icon to make Roger duck. For the first loogie, you can have Roger duck either right or left, but for the rest of the loogies you have to move Roger's head to the side opposite the one he just ducked. If you duck Roger left the first time, the sequence will be left, right, left, right, left. Alternately, you can go right, left, right, left, right. With that in mind, it all comes down to timing.

If you're one of those people who doesn't do well in problems demanding coordination, try this: keep at it until you get Roger to duck the first one. At once, move the cursor to the menu bar and save the game. Pick up from that point and repeat the process until you get through it. This sequence must be completed in order to continue the game. Patience will get you through.

After Roger has ducked a total of five loogies, Droole appears and shoots the pukoid. This begins an animated sequence in which the pukoid changes back into a normal person, tells Roger there is a secret path to the west, then dies. When the sequence ends, save the game. (11)

Pick up the piece of paper the pukoid dropped when he first attacked Roger. Look at the paper; it has a number written on it. Now, activate the computer in the center of the room. When it asks for the access code, enter in **80869**. The computer will display the personal log of the puked colonist who attacked Roger. Read it; it furthers the plot of the game. After you've read the log, leave the building.

Outside the building, click the Walk icon in the southwest corner of the screen to follow the secret path the colonist told you about. Roger will arrive at a ledge to the east of where he and Droole beamed in. On the ledge is a canister labeled "Primordial Soup" that bears the logo of Genetix, the genetic research corporation. Look at it. You'll learn that the stuff inside is toxic, but, more importantly, you'll learn the coordinates of the Genetix research center. The coordinates are 41666;

Sec G-6



write them down so you don't forget them. When you're done, click the Walk icon anywhere on the ledge to exit.

Roger winds up back at the spot where he and Droole beamed onto the planet. Use the communicator to call the *Eureka* and have Roger beamed aboard. Don't worry about Droole; he's already up there.



When Roger appears back on the *Eureka*, walk him to the bridge and sit him down. Flo will intercept a distress call from the *Goliath*. Watch it. Quirk says that his ship is under attack, and then the transmission ends. Flo tells Roger that the message came from somewhere near Thrakus. After the transmission is cut off, another animated

sequence begins, showing that Quirk and the crew of the *Goliath* have been turned into pukoids. Just what you needed, right? Order Droole to Lay in a Course, enter the coordinates for Thrakus, and go to Lite Speed.



On Thrakus

When the *Eureka* arrives at Thrakus, order Droole to Regular Speed, then tell him to Orbit the Planet. Flo will tell Roger that she is picking up an escape pod beacon from the planet's surface. Use the center button on the arm of Roger's chair to call up WD40 (she's your science officer now that Cliffy's repaired her) and ask her to scan the planet. She tells Roger that the atmosphere is toxic. After you have that bit of information, walk Roger back to the engineering room. Press the red button on the east wall to activate the elevator to the pod bay. Stand Roger on the elevator and it will descend.

In the pod bay, look around. There is a panel on the northeast wall where oxygen masks are stored. Open the panel and Roger will take a mask. Now, click the Hand icon on the control panel in front of the elevator. You'll see a bunch of buttons. Press the one labeled "Elevator Door," then walk into the elevator. It will return Roger to the engineering room.

From the engineering room, enter the transporter room and stand on the transporter. Before you activate it, have Roger put on the oxygen mask. As soon as Roger puts on the mask, he beams down to Thrakus.

When Roger appears on one of the enormous mushrooms that make up the surface of Thrakus, save the game. The escape pod is directly across a chasm from

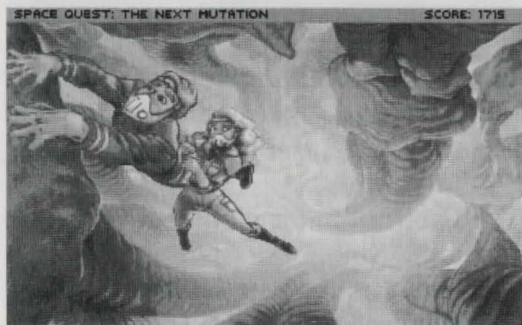


Roger. Don't try jumping—instead walk one screen to the west and Roger will be on a different part of the mushroom.

On this part of the mushroom, you'll find a gigantic stem with an equally gigantic split in it. Walk Roger through the split in the mushroom stem one screen east.

East of the stem lies the escape pod. Walk up and look inside it; you will see a frock. Take the frock, and in doing so Roger will uncover a small, flashing red button: the pod's homing device. Press the button before you leave the pod; if you don't, the pukoids will find Roger much sooner than they normally would and turn him into one of them. With the homing device turned off, click the Hand icon next to the picture of the inside of the pod to exit. When Roger is through with the pod, save the game and walk one screen back to the west.

In the screen west of the pod, walk Roger up to the northwest corner of the mushroom. Beatrice will leap out and attack Roger, mistaking him for a pukoid. Both roll off the side of the mushroom. Roger will hang onto the edge and Bea will



hang onto him. Just to make a bad situation worse, pukoids beam down onto mushrooms below and start shooting at Bea and Roger with phlegm throwers. As soon as the program returns control to you, lower the frock to Bea. She will climb up it, over Roger, and onto the mushroom. Once she's safe, and you're in control again, im-

mediately call the *Eureka* on the communicator. Flo will tell Roger it will take them a minute to recalibrate the transporter and that he should hang on. When Flo finishes talking, wait for Beatrice to lower a vine. Grab it at once and Roger will pull himself up.

When Roger is on top of the mushroom, more pukoids will beam in, surrounding him and Bea. Luckily, they beam up just as the pukoids fire. Not so luckily, Bea gets nicked by some Primordial Soup.

When they arrive back in the transporter room of the *Eureka*, Beatrice tells Roger to put her in the cryo chamber to slow her change into a pukoid. She also gives him the *Goliath's* warp-distributor cap and tells him the pukoids have to be stopped. As soon as the dialogue is over, press the red button on the east wall to extend the cryo chamber. Open the cryo chamber, then pick Bea up and put her in it.

Look at the cryo chamber and you'll see, apart from Beatrice, a panel in the lower-left corner of the screen. Click the Hand icon on it and you'll see it allows you to freeze and defrost things in the cryo chamber (among other options). Look



at the part of the panel below the buttons allowing you to choose between freezing and defrosting something; it will tell you, among other things, to do a ten-second freeze on Bea. Enter the number **10** on the panel's keypad, then hit the "Start" button. At the end of the ten seconds, Bea will be in cryogenic suspension until Roger finds a way to cure her. Click the Hand icon to one side of the picture of Bea in the cryo chamber to get back to the normal transporter room screen. There's nothing more for Roger to do here, so walk him back to the bridge.

Once Roger is seated at the bridge, Droole informs him that the *Goliath* is approaching at high speed with her weapons systems armed and ready. Order Droole to Raise Shields, then wait. The *Goliath* will make an attack pass. When Droole says she's coming around again, order him to take Evasive Action. At this point, Droole will ask Roger what to do, and you'll see a list of three choices. Click on the one that reads "OK! Let's risk almost certain death in the asteroid field!" Droole will maneuver the *Eureka* into the asteroid field, escaping Quirk's wrath.

After the *Eureka* is safe, Quirk calls up and taunts Roger, telling him that he is going to "puke out" the entire galaxy. When Quirk finishes talking, Cliffy calls up and informs Roger that he'll have to go outside to repair the damage the *Eureka* suffered from the *Goliath's* attack. This sequence is animated, so sit back and watch what happens. Just before Cliffy can come back inside the *Eureka*, he's hit by an asteroid and sent spinning off into space. Now it's up to Roger to rescue him. Get Roger up and walk him to the pod bay.

In the pod bay, look around. There is a panel in the northeast wall behind which are tanks of oxygen. Open it and take one. Once Roger has the oxygen tank, move to the control panel in front of the elevator and press the button labeled "Rotate Pod." The pod will swing around and open up, allowing Roger entrance. Climb aboard; as soon as Roger is inside the pod, it leaves the airlock. Save the game.

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In the following sequence, Roger must pilot the pod through the asteroid field, find Cliffy, grab him with the pod's mechanical arm, and return to the *Eureka* before the pod runs out of fuel or oxygen. It's not as hard as it sounds.

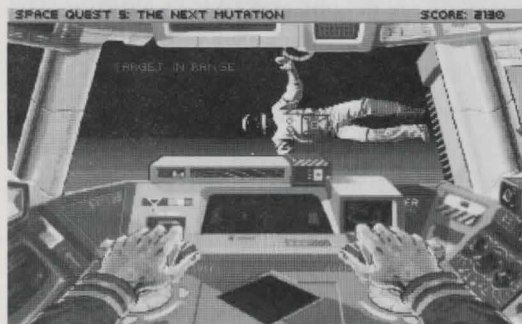
First look at the screen on the left side of the cockpit. This gives directions on how to pilot the pod. Read them. You are going to have to use the mouse to pilot the pod.

Now, the controls: the screen in the center shows the radar screen and the oxygen and fuel gauges. Don't worry about the oxygen gauge; Roger will run out of fuel long before he runs out of air. The radar screen consists of two blips and a set of crosshairs. The green blip is the *Eureka* and the red blip is Cliffy. Roger's pod is located at the center of the crosshairs. The joystick in Roger's left hand is used to move the pod. To rotate the pod to the left, move the Hand icon to the left side of the joystick and click it. Keep trying until you see the cursor change into an arrow; it's just like the one in the pukoid scene on Klorox II. To rotate the pod to the right, move the Hand icon over to the right side of the joystick and click. To move forward,



move the Hand icon to the front of the joystick and click, and if you want to move the pod backward, move the Hand icon to the rear of the joystick and do the same. To stop moving, click the Hand icon on the center of the joystick. The joystick in Roger's right hand controls the pod's retractable arm—but we'll worry about that when it becomes an issue.

Now that you know how to fly the pod, rotate it to the left until the red blip on the radar screen is aligned with the vertical bar of the crosshairs. When the blip is in line with the crosshairs, stop rotating the pod and move it forward until the red blip is in the exact center of the crosshairs. Look out the viewscreen of the pod,



and there's Cliffy. Now you have to pick him up in the pod's claw. First, click the Hand icon on the joystick in Roger's right hand to extend the pod's arm. Now, click the Hand icon on the joystick button under Roger's right thumb to open the arm's claw. If the arm is close enough to grapple Cliffy, you will see a green rectangle appear along with a message saying that he is in range. If you don't get the rectangle, move the pod to the right or the left until the rectangle appears. When it does, click the Hand icon on the joystick button under Roger's right thumb again to close the claw on Cliffy. ⁽¹⁵⁾

When you have Cliffy, rotate the pod to the left until the green blip is lined up with the vertical bar of the crosshairs. When it is, stop rotating the pod and move forward. You don't have to dock the pod at the *Eureka*; instead, just fly up to it. The *Eureka*'s tractor beam will pull the pod in and deposit it back in the pod bay. This sequence is much easier than the directions would have you believe. Still, use your time efficiently; if you take too long, Roger will die.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Back in the pod bay, listen to Cliffy thank Roger, then return to the bridge. Order Droole to Lay in a Course, enter in **41666**, the coordinates for Genetix, then order up some Lite Speed. Once the *Eureka* is approaching Genetix, return to Regular Speed, then go into Standard Orbit. That done, walk Roger back to the transporter room and beam down to Genetix.



As Roger beams down to the surface, a fly buzzes into the transporter and the transporter field malfunctions. Roger arrives on the surface in the body of a fly, but



with his own head. Roger's body now has the head of a fly and stumbles off to find some garbage to play in. Save the game. 17

Look around. Roger's communicator is lying on the ground next to a pond, and a bridge leads over the water to the west. Look at the icon bar and you will notice that, as a fly, Roger can't pick things up, order things around, or access his inventory. Using the Fly icon, buzz Roger over the eastern edge of the pool (see the screenshot for just where to fly) until a mutated frog leaps out and tries to eat him. The frog will miss but land on the communicator and activate it. After this happens, land Roger on the communicator and talk to Flo. She will tell Roger that there's a large under-



ground structure to the west. When she finishes talking, fly off the communicator, and buzz one screen to the west.

West of the pond is a waterfall feeding another small pool, and a doorway with an electronic keycard slot next to it. Fly Roger into the keycard slot.

Inside the slot you will see nine thin beams of light coming down from the ceiling. To the right of the beams is a row of lock tumblers. When Roger crawls through a beam of light, either you will hear a click and see a tumbler move, or nothing will happen. Make a diagram of the beams of light on a piece of paper, then move through each one of them. On your diagram, label which ones make a sound and which ones stay silent. (The center beam and the four corner beams shouldn't make any noise.) When you're done with the beams, move Roger north through the lock and he'll be in the Genetix laboratory. You now possess the information to solve what is claimed to be Space Quest V's toughest puzzle, but that comes a bit later.

18

Inside the laboratory, save the game, then look around. There is a computer screen next to the east wall. Fly Roger down and land him on it.

Move Roger over onto the restart button to restart the computer. Once the computer begins functioning, walk Roger over the button labeled "Systems," and it will bring up a picture of three domes. Walk Roger over onto the dome number three, then move him onto the button labeled "Security." This will bring up a view from security camera number one and three buttons. One button is for exiting the screen and returning to the main menu, and the others are for the remaining two security cameras in the compound. Camera one's view shows Roger's body climbing into a dumpster. Switch to camera number two. It shows the pool near where Roger beamed in. Switch to camera number three. This one shows the waterfall west of where Roger beamed in, and it also shows Cliffy and WD40 beaming down to look



for Roger. Once you've seen them beaming in, move the Fly icon off to the side of the screen until it reads "Fly Away," then click it to fly off of the computer screen. Once Roger is off the screen, fly him back outside through the lock.

Outside the lock, fly over and land on Cliffy who will ask Roger to show him where the rest of his body is. When Cliffy is done talking, fly off behind the big rock outcropping to the east. Cliffy will follow.

Behind the rock is the dumpster. When Cliffy opens it, Roger's body falls out along with the rest of the trash. Cliffy tells Roger to land on his own body so he can try to reverse whatever it was that happened in the transporter. Land Roger on Roger's body and Cliffy will fix him up as good as new. Once Roger is one with himself, Cliffy will walk back to the doorway of the Genetix lab. Follow him.

When Roger is back at the doorway, go into his inventory. Click the hole punch (from Cliffy's toolbox, remember?) on the business card. This will bring up a close-up shot of both items. Now, get out your diagram of the lock and notice which beams *didn't* make a sound when you moved Roger through them. Use the hole punch to punch holes in the card in the same pattern as the beams that made no noise.

NOTE: If the hole punch is not in Roger's inventory, click either the Talk or Command icon on Cliffy. He'll offer Rog the chance to beam back aboard the *Eureka*, which will allow him to retrieve the punch. Clicking the communicator on Roger will not get him back aboard.



The pattern should be in the shape of an X—like the five on a die, just as you can see in the screenshot. When you've got the holes punched in the card, put it in the keycard slot to open the door. As soon as the door is open, walk on in. Cliffy will remain outside.

Back inside the lab, walk Roger down to the computer and the program will bring up a view of the computer's screen. The computer will still display the security camera view since you didn't go back to the main menu before buzzing away as a fly. Go back to the main menu and press the button labeled "Projects." Read about "Primordial Soup." You won't learn much here, but you will discover that the mutations caused by the Primordial Soup are slowed down dramatically by the application of extreme cold. Once you've read through the information, return to the main menu and press the button labeled "Accounting." Read through the accounting file. Among the other expenses, you see that Genetix



paid Quirk vast amounts of money as bribes. When finished with accounting, return to the main menu. You don't need to read the activity log unless you want to. To exit, move the Hand icon to the side of the screen until it reads "exit," then click it.

When Roger finishes with the computer, look around. You will see a black panel on the north wall of the lab. Walk up to it, press it, and a hatch will open, revealing two tanks of liquid nitrogen. Take them and leave the lab.

As soon as Roger leaves the lab, WD40 returns from patrol and gives Roger back his communicator, and Cliffy beams her up to the *Eureka*. Roger automatically gives Cliffy the liquid nitrogen; Cliffy asks Roger if he wants to beam up or stay on Genetix and look around some more. Choose to beam back aboard the *Eureka*.

When Roger and Cliffy are back aboard ship, a long cartoon begins in which Spike tries to tell them something by jumping around between the cryo chamber and the transporter pad. When Roger asks what Spike is trying to tell them, choose the answer that reads "We should initiate a manual control bypass to reverse the phase polarity of the interface grid and then use the transporter to reintegrate Beatrice's DNA molecules." Cliffy will agree with Roger and tell him to get Bea while he adjusts the transporter. Look at the cryo chamber and use the Hand icon to get a close-up view of the panel in the lower-left corner of that screen. Set the cryo chamber to defrost, enter the number **10** on the panel's keypad, and hit the "Start" button.

After Bea has defrosted, open the cryo chamber, take her out and put her on the transporter pad. Cliffy will then use the transporter to cure her. After Bea is cured she and Roger will talk, then Roger will put her back in the cryo chamber to rest. After that's done with, return to the bridge. Order Droole to Lay in a Course. Look up the coordinates for Gingivitis, enter it, then order Droole to go to Lite Speed.



On the Goliath

When the *Eureka* arrives at Gingivitis, return to Regular Speed. Droole will tell Roger that the *Goliath* will be in visual range in ten seconds. Use the left button on the arm of Roger's chair to call Cliffy. Order him to Cloak the *Eureka*, then get Roger back to the transporter room.

In the transporter room, Cliffy will show Roger a hologram of the *Goliath* and tell him that there aren't many pukoids in the engineering spaces. The hologram will highlight in orange the central portion of the *Goliath* that he's describing. When Cliffy is done talking, look at the area he described. The part the Eye icon is on will be highlighted in orange. Click the icon and Cliffy will tell you about that part of the *Goliath*. Start by looking at the rear, then move the Eye forward along the central

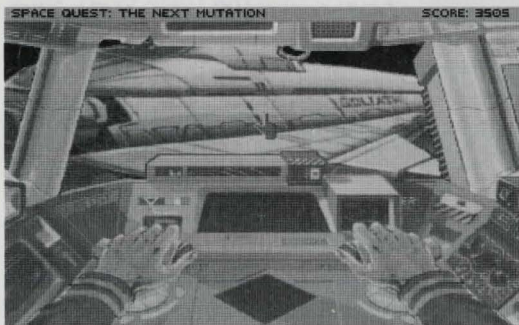
on way to
bridge - get
cutting torch
from tool kit

19



part of the hull until you come to the third section to be highlighted. That's where the fewest pukoids are and where you'll want to take Roger in. Don't worry about the exact spot it is on the hologram, just remember: the third panel from the rear.

After you're done looking at the hologram, walk Roger down to the pod bay. Rotate the pod and climb inside. The pod will launch as soon as Roger is aboard. Don't forget to save the game.



When Roger is outside the *Eureka*, click the Hand icon on the third panel from the left on the *Goliath*'s hull (it's the narrowest one there). The EVA pod will fly over and attach itself to the hull at the spot you chose.

When the pod is attached, you will see an inside view of the rear of the pod. Press the white but-

ton to open the pod's door. Use the cutting torch to cut a hole in the *Goliath*'s hull. Roger will climb through on his own and find himself inside the *Goliath*'s engine room. If the pukoids appear after Roger's cut the hole in the hull, he'll be killed. Try again—you have missed clicking on the proper "hot spot." That's why we save games.

Roger will emerge on a staircase under a catwalk in the engine room. At one end of the catwalk is a computer terminal, and at the other end, far to the north, is a door. Wait until a pukoid comes through the door. It will walk partway down the catwalk, not see Roger, and then leave. As soon as it's gone, walk Roger up onto the catwalk and then over to the computer terminal. Click the Hand icon on the computer and you will see a close-up view of the *Goliath*'s warp motivator. Put the warp-distributor cap back on the motivator. Click the Hand icon to one side of the picture to exit out to the normal view of the engine room. Wait until the pukoid returns and leaves again. As soon as it's gone, walk Roger out the door to the north.

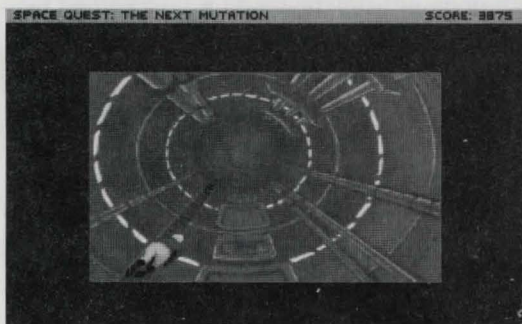
North of the engine room is a deserted hallway, the floor of which is composed of metal grates. Lift up a section of the grating and Roger will climb down into the crawl space beneath the floor. Save the game. *21*

The crawl spaces beneath the decks of the *Goliath* form a nine-level maze. Roger is currently on the eighth level and must work his way up to the second. The key to surviving the maze is to keep moving—if Roger stays in one place for too long, a pukoid will appear on the floor above him and drip Primordial Soup on him through the floor gratings. You will see a pad with forward, backward, left, and right arrows on it to the right of the maze screen. Either click these arrows with a mouse or use the keyboard to move Roger. Use whichever you feel most comfortable with.

*now
disk*



From the spot where Roger enters the maze, move him one screen north, one screen east, and two more screens north. Roger will now be in an elevator shaft with a ladder. Don't bother trying to open any elevator doors—you can't. You have to



move quickly in these shafts or an elevator will rise and flatten Roger. Take the ladder up until the screen changes (use the Walk icon), then climb Roger into the topmost of the two subfloor entrances you find.

Roger is now on sublevel six. Move him one screen south, one screen west, two screens north, one screen east, and two more screens north. Roger is now in another elevator shaft. Take the ladder up to the next screen, then climb Roger into the topmost of the subfloor entrances you find there.

With any luck at all, Roger is now on level four of the maze. Move him one screen south, one screen west, two screens north, two screens more to the west, and two screens more to the north. Guess what? Roger's in yet another elevator shaft. Take the shaft up one screen, then climb Roger into the first subfloor entrance you find.

Roger should now be on level two. *Save as level 4* Move him two screens south, one screen west, another screen south, one screen east, and a last screen to the south. On the wall in front of Roger is the On/Off switch for the *Goliath's* shields. Click the Hand icon on it once to show a close-up view of it, then click it a second time to turn off the shields.



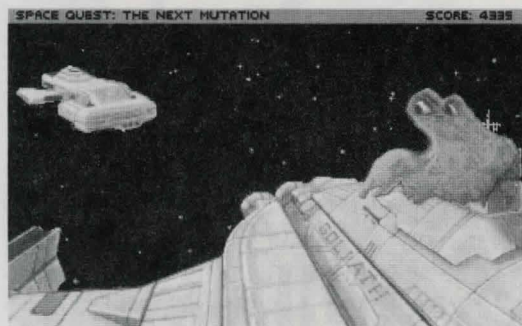
At this point, a pukoid will reach down and grab Roger, then pull him up onto the *Goliath's* bridge. Quirk is there and will taunt Roger, telling him that he's going to be puked. WD40 will beam in and save Roger—freezing the pukoids with liquid nitrogen. She and Roger will then run to the *Goliath's* transporter room, where Cliffy waits.

In the transporter room, Cliffy tells Roger to hide and to signal him when the pukoids following Roger are on the transporter pad; his plan is to stop them by curing them the same way he cured Beatrice. Roger will hide automatically. Save the game. When the pukoids enter the room, they will walk onto the transporter pad. Wait until the doors to the room shut, then click the Command icon on Cliffy. He will activate the transporter, transforming the pukoids back into the *Goliath's*

22



crew, and transporting all the Primordial Soup out into space. Quirk isn't with them; Roger returns to the bridge of the *Goliath*. There you'll see the blob of Primordial Soup floating in space in front of the ship. Flo will call Roger and tell him that she's detecting a shuttle launch from the *Goliath*, and you'll see Quirk's shuttle as it runs straight into the blob of Primordial Soup. The problem with this is that Quirk merges with the blob, causing it to become sentient. The blob moves to attack the *Goliath*. When Flo asks if there's anything she can do, tell her to beam Roger back over to the *Eureka*.



When Roger arrives on the *Eureka*, return to the bridge; as soon as Roger is seated, order Droole to Open Fire on the blob. The Quirkoid blob is apparently unaffected by the *Eureka*'s fire, but it still turns to attack the garbage scow. As soon as the blob starts to move toward the *Eureka*, order Droole to Activate the RRS. The *Eureka* will

then suck the blob up into its waste compartment.

Now it's time to give the order captains most despise. Order Flo to Abandon Ship. Your loyal crew will run out and beam over to the *Goliath*, but Roger still has things to do. Sit him back down and press the far-right button on the arm of his command chair. This brings up the arming mechanism for the self-destruct system. Activate the self-destruct mechanism, then go to the transporter room. You now have ten minutes to escape the *Eureka*.

When Roger is back in the transporter room, let Bea out of the cryo chamber (she will go stand on the transporter), then get Spike out of his tank. Stand on the transporter and try to activate it. The transporter will blow a fuse, leaving Roger and company stranded on the *Eureka*. Put Spike back in his tank, then walk out into the engineering section. The blob will have started to ooze out of the waste compartment; don't worry, just climb into the maintenance tunnel in the east wall. Save the game. 23

In the maintenance tunnel, Roger will be looking at six fuses, three in the foreground and three in the background. Take out the center fuse in the foreground and replace it with the one Roger has in his inventory (if you do this properly, the red circle in the circuit diagram will turn green). When you see the green circle, exit the screen.

Back in engineering, the blob will burst out of the waste compartment in front of Roger. Try to enter the transporter room. Roger will manage to open the door, but the blob will grow a hand and force him away from it. Click the Walk icon on the open doorway, however, and Roger will leap over the blob and into the transporter room.



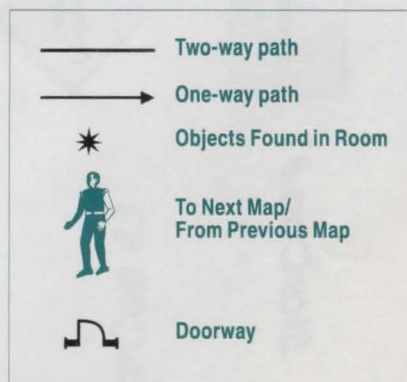
Once Roger is back in the transporter room, Beatrice will beam over to the *Goliath*, leaving Roger and Spike. Take Spike out of his tank, stand on the transporter pad, and click the Command icon on it. Roger and Spike will be beamed safely away to the *Goliath*. Enjoy the closing cartoon, and don't forget to congratulate yourself on a job well done. Roger couldn't have made it without you.

Myriad congratulations on your accomplishment! You've survived Space Quest V and scored the maximum points possible in the process of doing so. Now you can sit back, relax, and put Roger into retirement until another Space Quest game comes along to tickle your fancy.

Keeping Your Bearings in Space Quest V: Roger Wilco in the Next Mutation

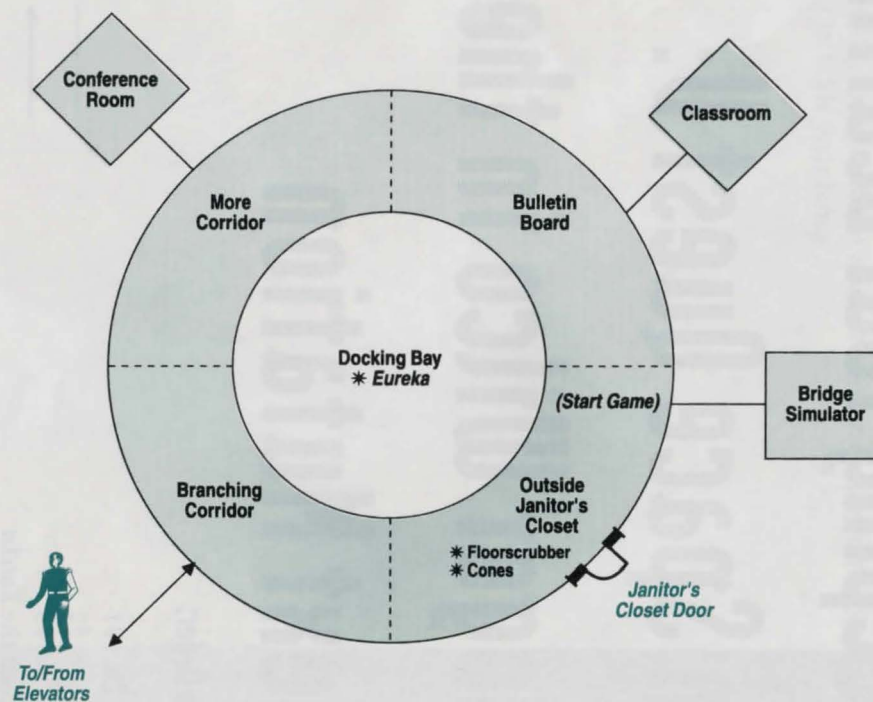
Map Order:

StarCon #1
StarCon #2
StarCon #3
Aboard the *Eureka*
Kiz Urazgubi
Spacebar
Klorox II
Thrakus
Genetix
Aboard the *Goliath*
Goliath (Cross Section)
Goliath Maze Maps

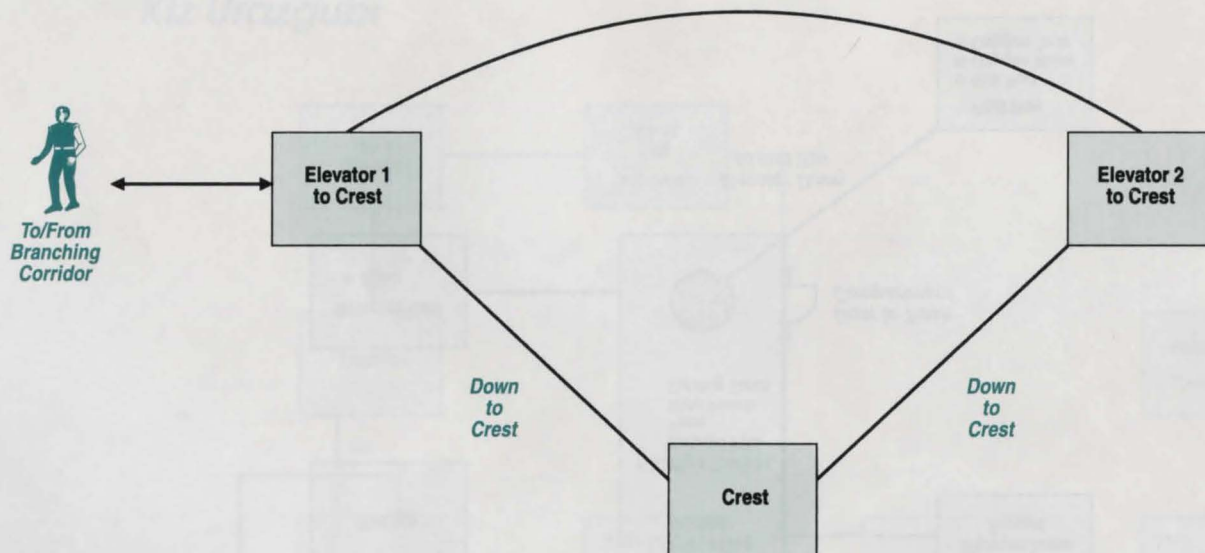




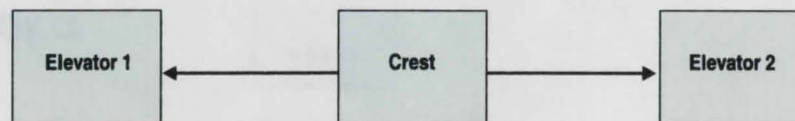
StarCon #1



StarCon #2

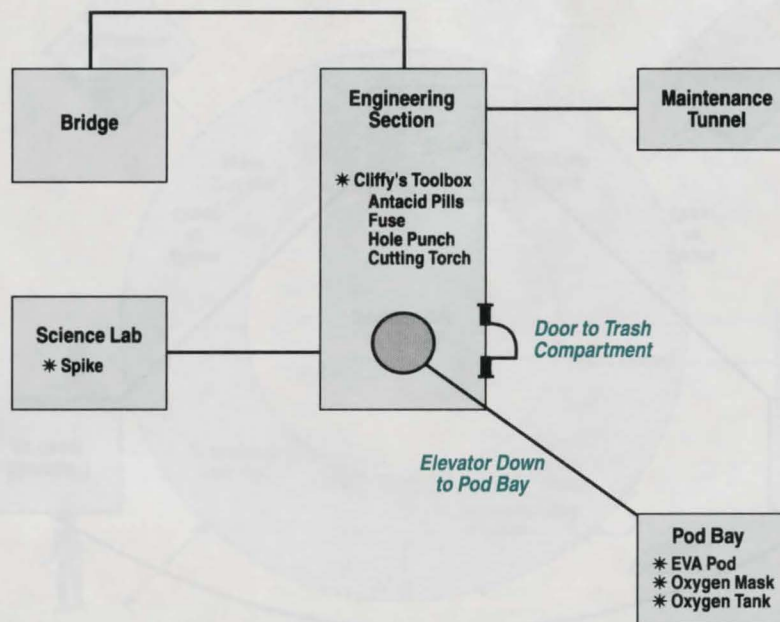


StarCon #3

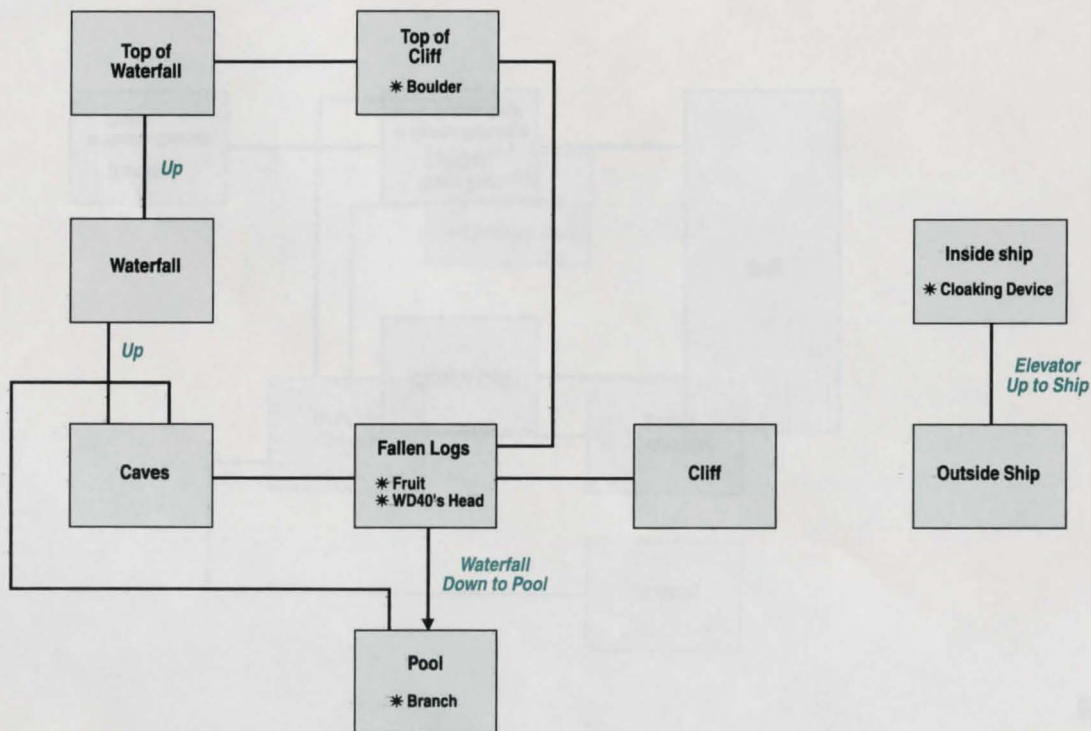




Aboard the Eureka



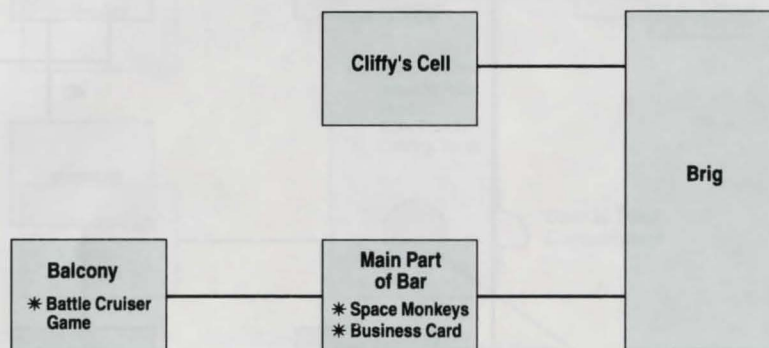
Kiz Urazgubi



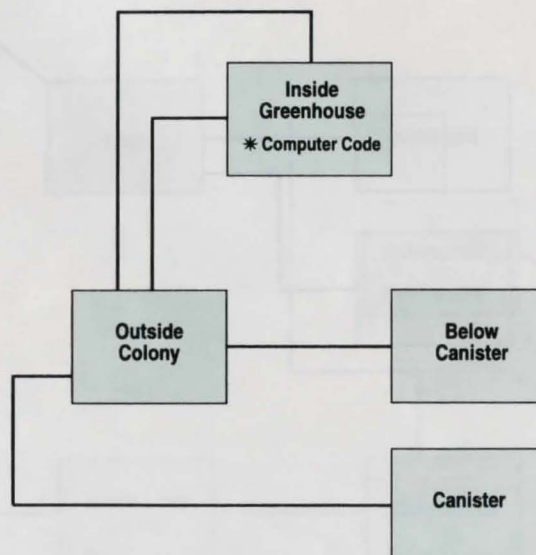


Spacebar

Aboard the Eureka



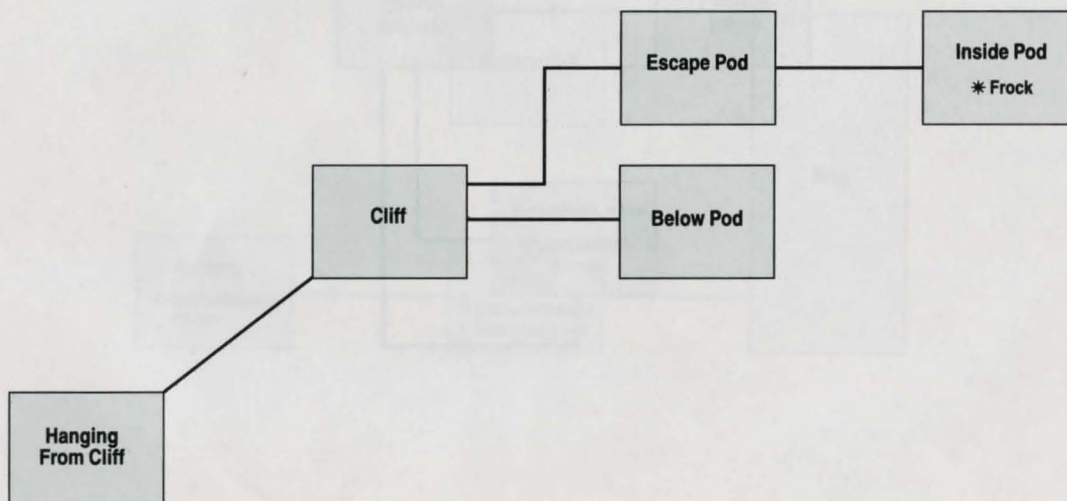
Klorox II



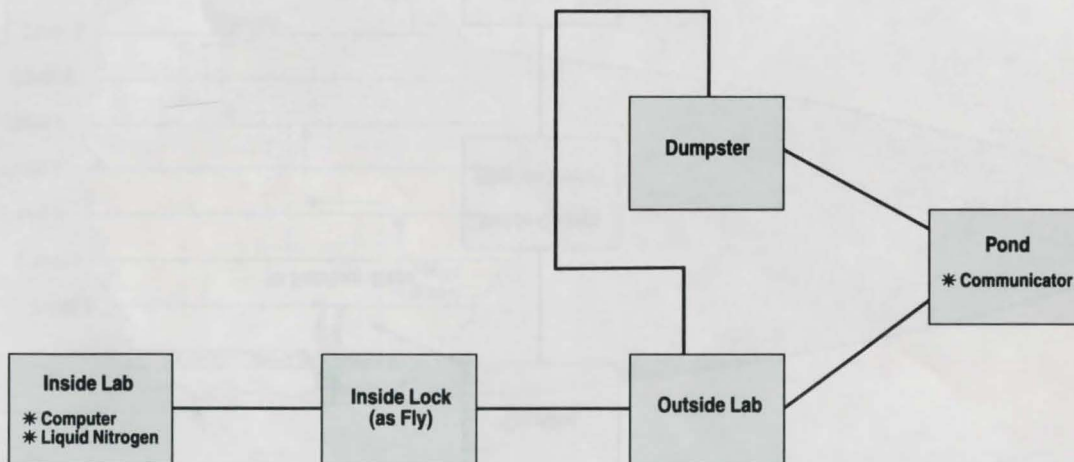


Spacebar

Thrakus



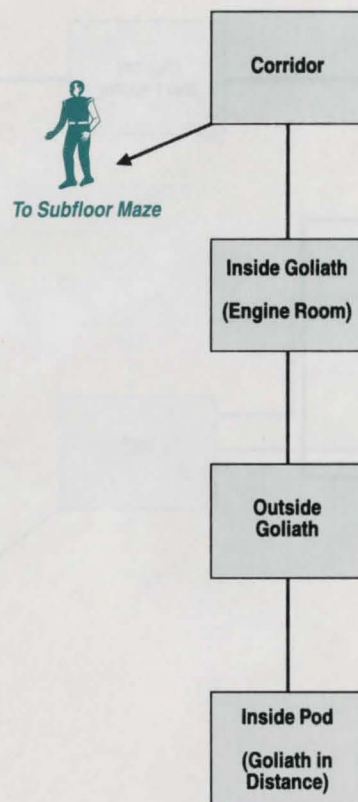
Genetix



Keeping Your Bearings in Space Quest V: Roger Wilco in the Next Mutation

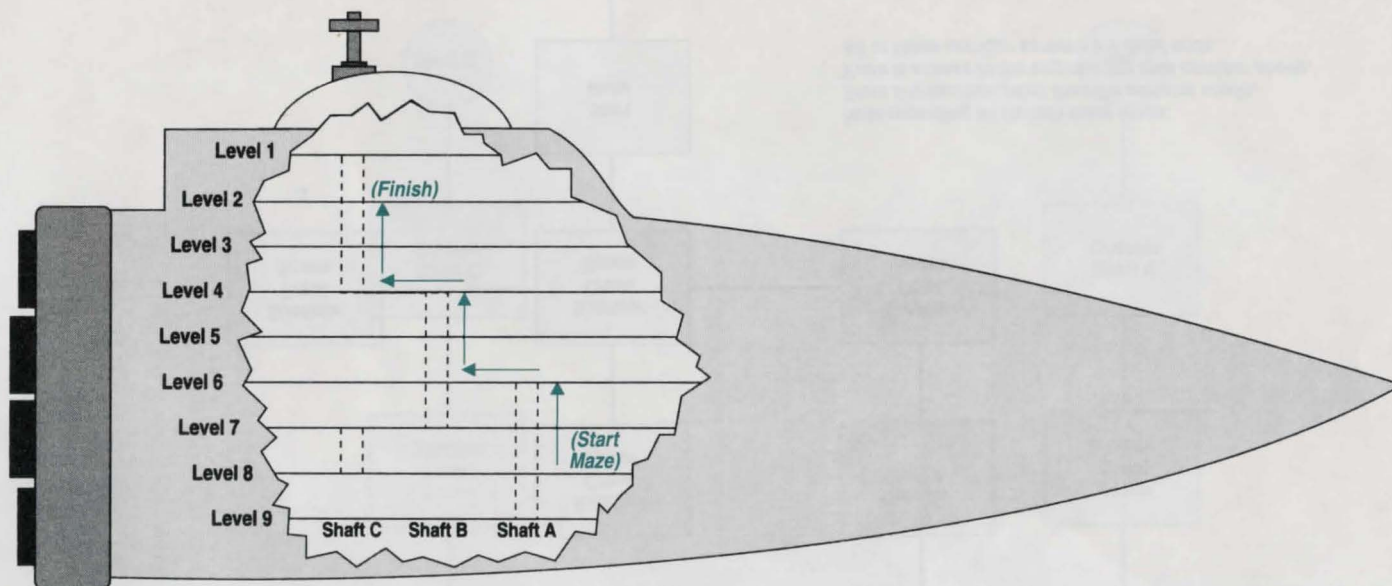


Aboard the Goliath



Goliath

Cross Section



Route through Goliath
(For specific details,
see individual level maps)

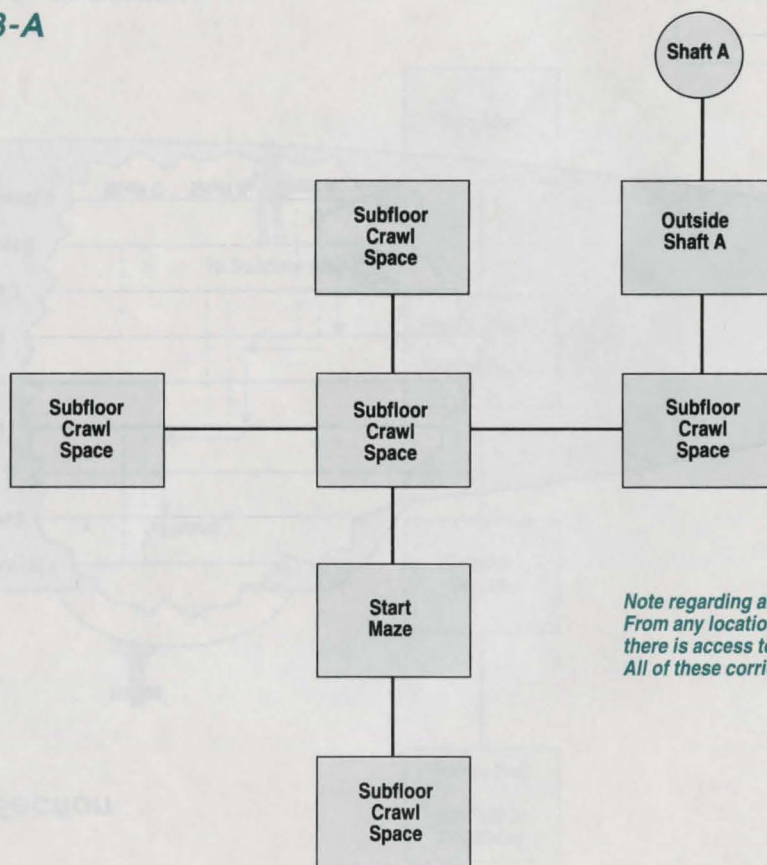


Keeping Your Bearings in Space Quest V: Roger Wilco in the Next Mutation



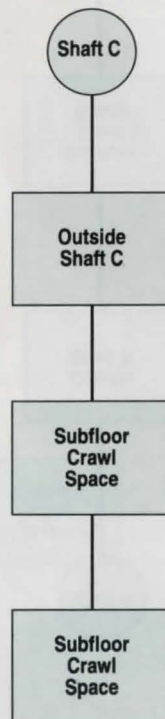
Goliath

Level 8-A

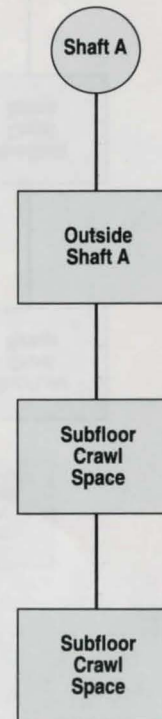


*Note regarding all Goliath maze maps:
From any location other than the elevator shafts,
there is access to the engineering area corridor above.
All of these corridor screens are dead ends.*

Goliath Level 8-C



Goliath Level 9-A

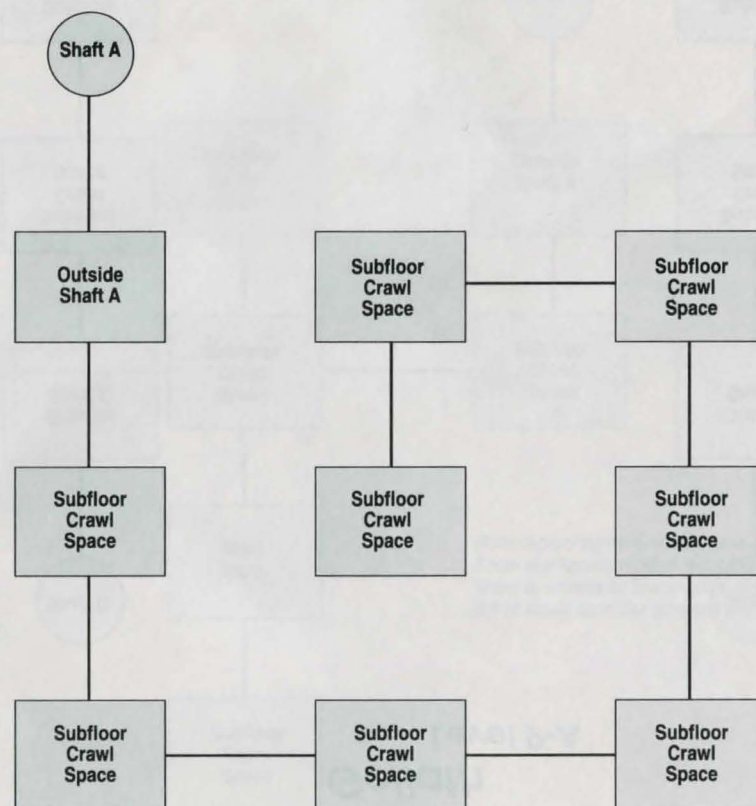


Keeping Your Bearings in Space Quest V: Roger Wilco in the Next Mutation



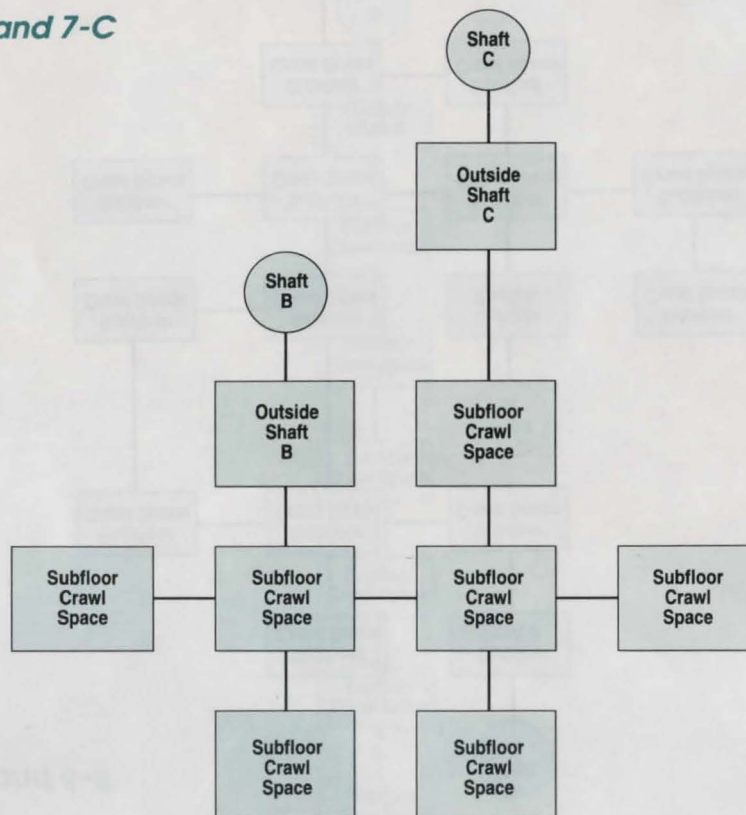
Goliath

Level 7-A



Goliath

Levels 7-B and 7-C

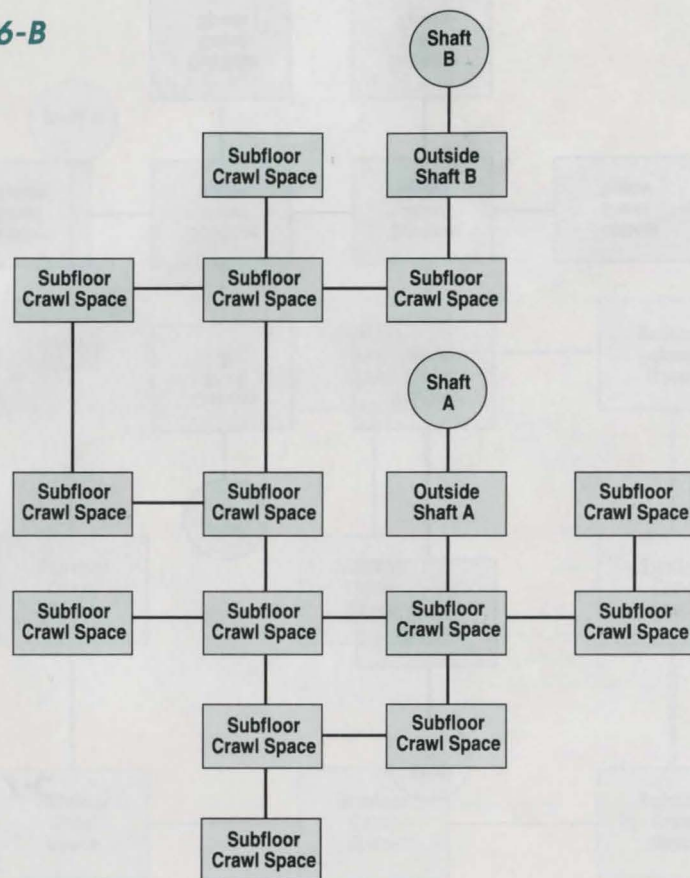


Keeping Your Bearings in Space Quest V: Roger Wilco in the Next Mutation

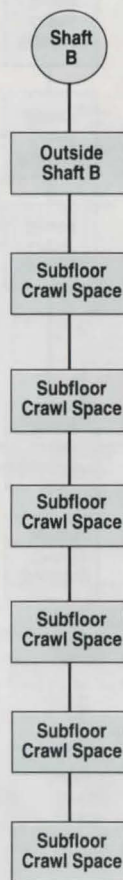


Goliath

Levels 6-A and 6-B



Goliath Level 5-B

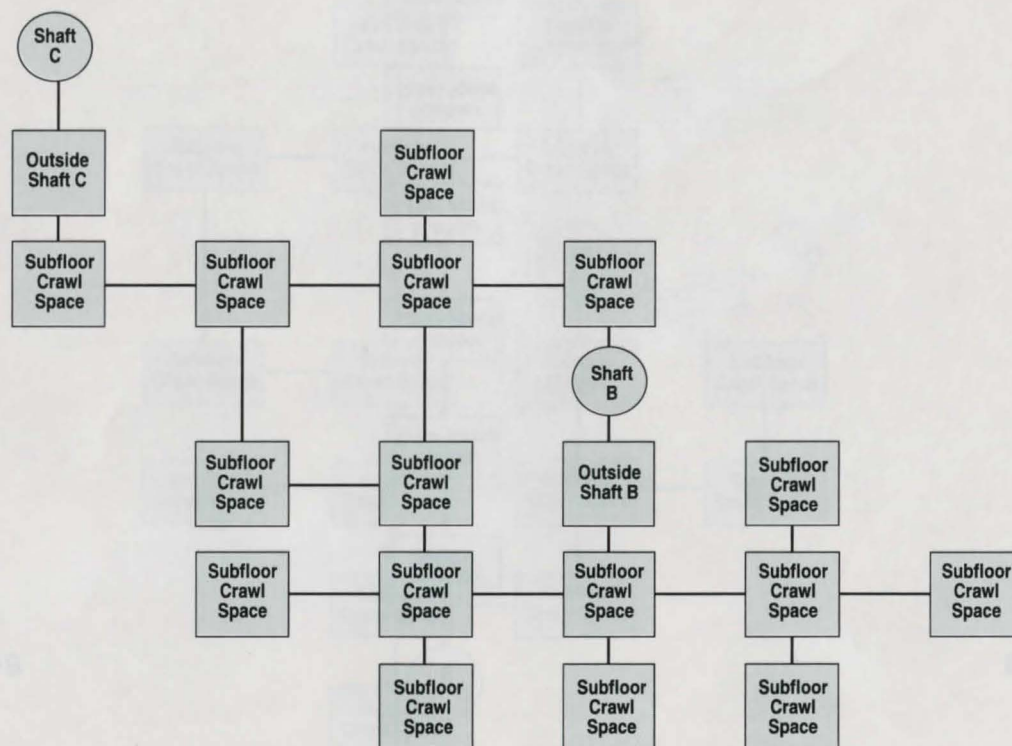


Keeping Your Bearings in Space Quest V: Roger Wilco in the Next Mutation



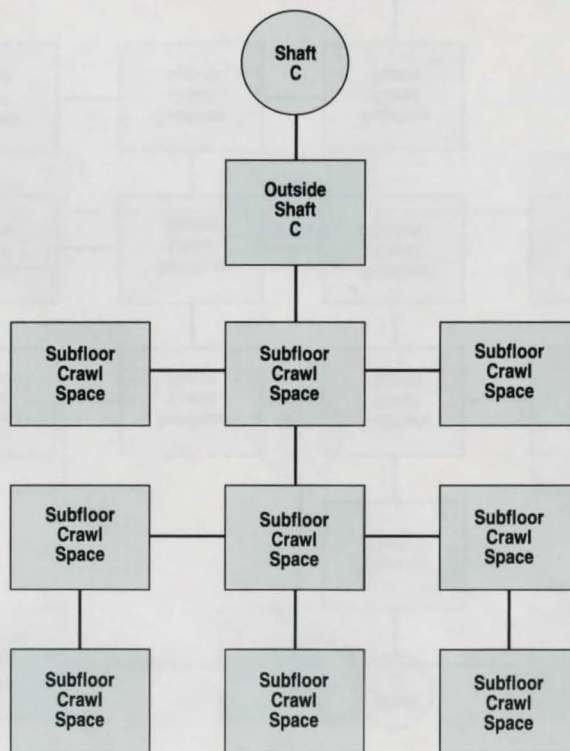
Goliath

Levels 4-B and 4-C



Goliath

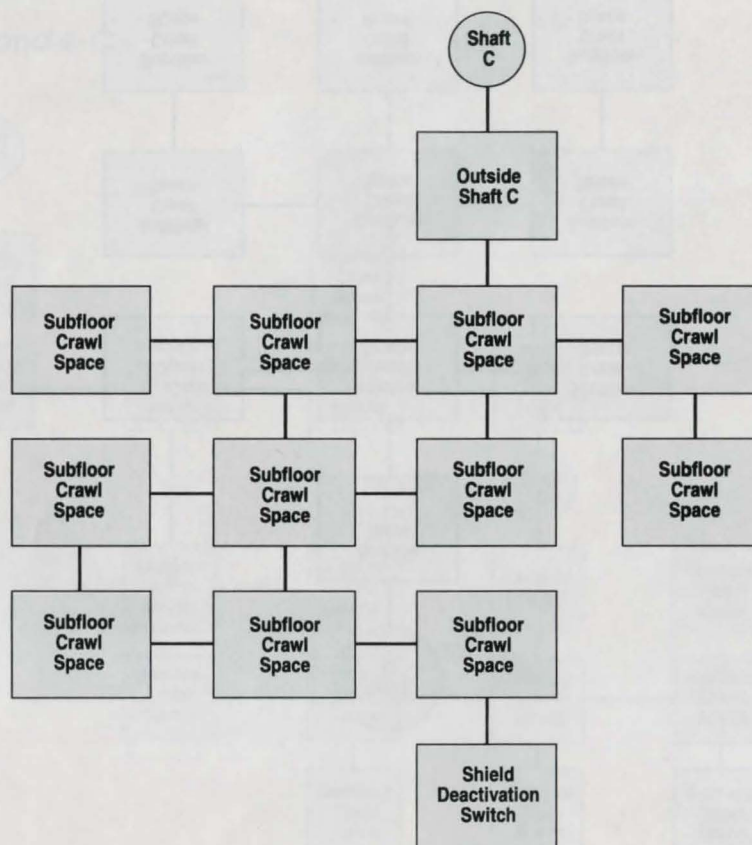
Level 3-C



Keeping Your Bearings in Space Quest V: Roger Wilco in the Next Mutation

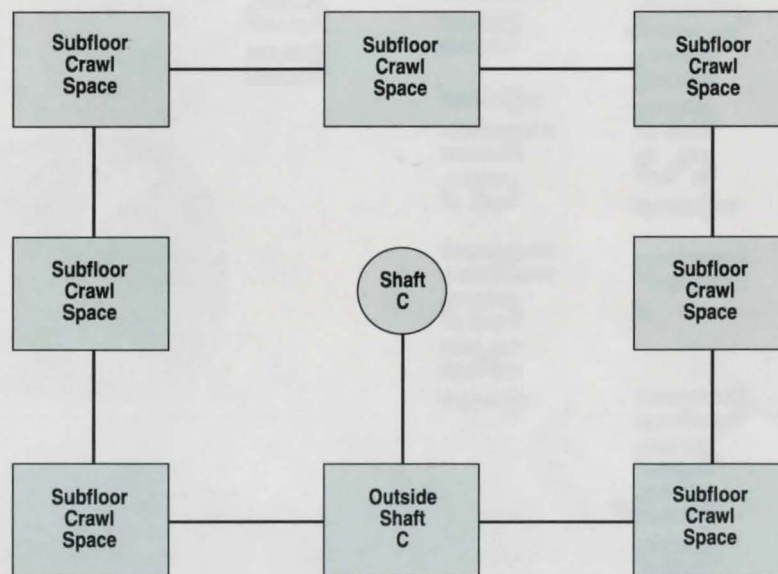


Goliath Level 2-C



Goliath

Level 1-C



Keeping Your Bearings in Space Quest V: Roger Wilco in the Next Mutation

Points of Interest in Space Quest V: Roger Wilco in the Next Mutation



**WHAT TO DO****POINTS:****At StarCon:**

Get to class on time	5
Cheat	5 (first time only)
Pass test (get perfect score later)	100
Get safety cones	10
Get floorscrubber	10
Finish cleaning the crest	50

Aboard the *Eureka* (first time):

First garbage pickup	100
Second garbage pickup	100
Rescue Spike	20
Get antacid pills	15
Get hole punch	5
Get torch	5
Get fuse	5
Put Spike in tank	20 (first time only)
Use antacid pills	20

On Kiz Urazgubi:

Beam down	10
Get branch	10
Get fruit	25
Hit WD40 with boulder	100
Stick banana up tailpipe	200
Get WD40's head	25
Beam back to the <i>Eureka</i>	175 (first time only)
Open ship	100
Get cloaking device	200

At the Spacebar:

Beam down	10 (first time only)
Beat Quirk at Battle Cruiser	100 (25 points per ship)
Put monkeys in drink	50
Turn off force field	25
Spring Cliffy	50
Beam back to the <i>Eureka</i>	200

**WHAT TO DO****POINTS:****On Klorox II:**

Orbit Klorox II	10
Hail StarCon/Quirk	10
Beam down	5
Survive attack of the pukoid	50
Get paper	5
Enter pass code	20
Look at Genetix canister	50

On Thrakus:

Orbit Thrakus (Beatrice there)	20
Get mask	5
Wear mask (on transporter pad)	20
Get frock	10
Deactivate homing beacon	35
Give frock to Beatrice	35
Call the <i>Eureka</i> (while dangling)	25
Grab vine	5
Activate cryo chamber (at proper time)	20
Put Beatrice in cryo chamber	20
Freeze Beatrice	75

Rescue in Outer Space:

Perform evasive action (at proper time)	35
Get oxygen tank	25
Get Cliffy	100
Return to the <i>Eureka</i> with Cliffy	50

At Genetix:

Orbit Genetix (after it's blown up)	10
Mutant frog hits communicator	100
Use communicator (as fly)	40
Fly into keycard slot	20
Activate computer	10
Discover Quirk payoff info	15
Discover Primordial Soup info	20
Get liquid nitrogen	50

**WHAT TO DO****POINTS:**

Land on Cliffy's nose	5
Lead Cliffy to dumpster	10
Get restored	50
Punch holes in card	5
Open lock (points depend on number of attempts):	
(first try)	500
(second try)	300
(third try)	100
(fourth try)	50
(fifth try)	25
Defrost Beatrice (at proper time)	50
Put Beatrice into transporter (cure her)	50
Aboard the <i>Goliath</i>:	
Cloak the <i>Eureka</i> (at proper time)	50
Take pod to the <i>Goliath</i>	300
Attach pod properly	50
Burn hole in hull	100
Enter the <i>Goliath</i>	20
Replace warp-distributor cap	100
Enter sub-floor	100 (first time only)
Find shield generator	350
Turn off shields	20
"Teleporter-ize" pukoids	20
Beam back to the <i>Eureka</i>	20
The Blob:	
Fire on blob	50
Suck blob into waste compartment	200
Order "Abandon Ship"	10
Activate self-destruct mechanism	100
Get Beatrice	10
Fix transporter	175
Get Spike	10
Highest possible score:	5000

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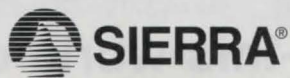


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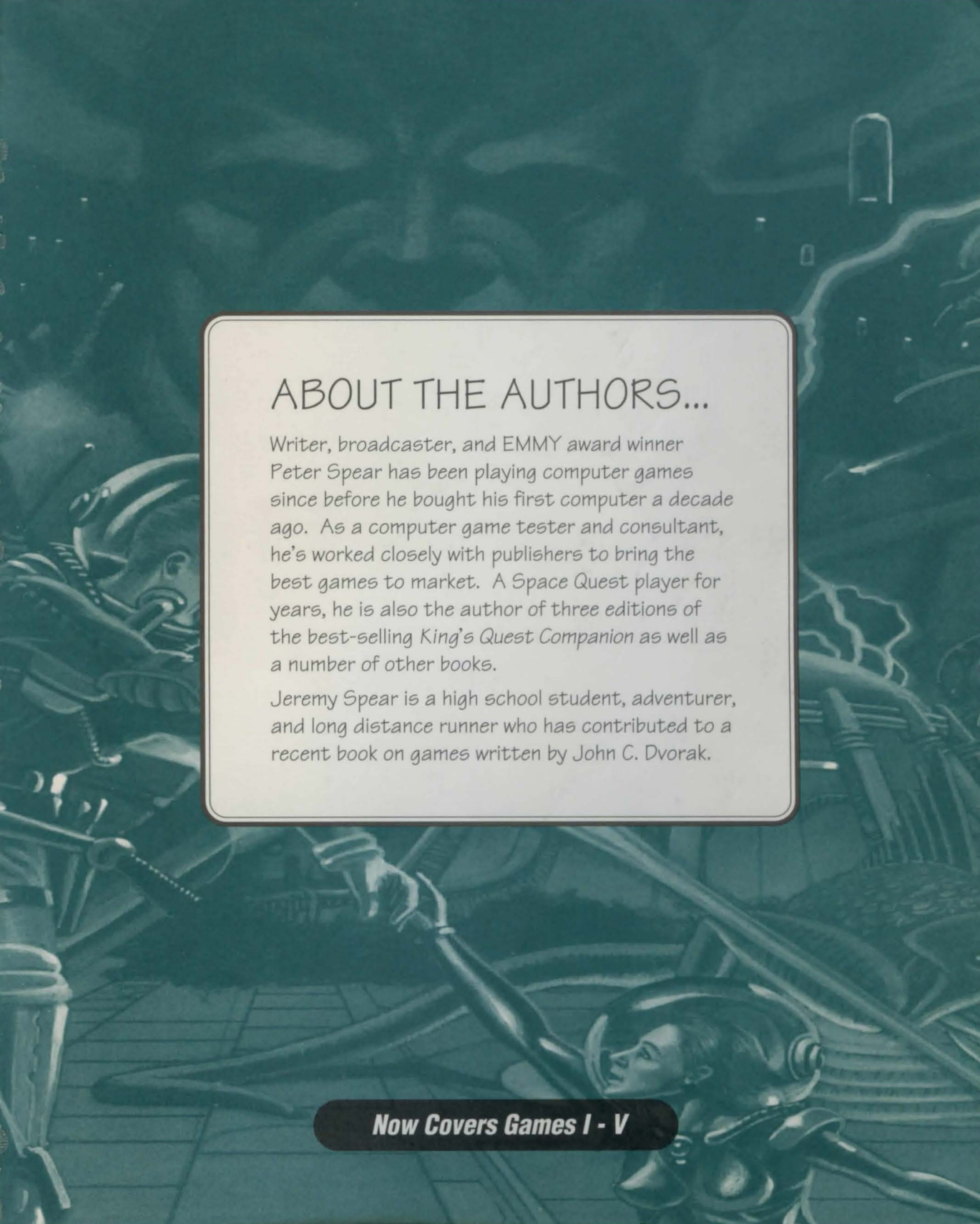
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS...

Writer, broadcaster, and EMMY award winner Peter Spear has been playing computer games since before he bought his first computer a decade ago. As a computer game tester and consultant, he's worked closely with publishers to bring the best games to market. A *Space Quest* player for years, he is also the author of three editions of the best-selling *King's Quest Companion* as well as a number of other books.

Jeremy Spear is a high school student, adventurer, and long distance runner who has contributed to a recent book on games written by John C. Dvorak.

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