



PLANET OF THE SPIDERS

Ulysses Ai

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At last! The unanticipated sequel to *Wrong Way Go Back* has arrived! Jampacked with 81.667% more references, and a whopping 400% increase in combat encounters!

CREATING YOUR CHARACTER

If you played *Wrong Way Go Back*, you can continue your adventure with the same character here. Otherwise, read on:

Roll 1 die and add 6. The total is your SKILL. This represents your general ability to perform tasks. If you are ever asked to test your SKILL, roll 2 die. If the total is the same or less than your SKILL, then you are successful. If the dice roll is higher, then you have failed. SKILL is also used in combat as explained below.

Roll 2 dice and add 12. The total is your STAMINA. This represents your strength, fitness, life and energy. If this is ever reduced to 0, then you are dead. Certain items can increase STAMINA. The passages you read will tell you when you have lost STAMINA and when and how it can be restored.

Roll 1 die and add 6. The total is your LUCK. This represents your general fortune. Sometimes the outcome of this is determined purely by luck.

If you are asked to test your LUCK, do so in the way as for the test of SKILL. The only difference is that when you test your LUCK, you must reduce your current LUCK by 1.

COMBAT

There are 5 combat encounters in this book, and you will have to go through at least 2. When you reach one, you will be given your opponent's SKILL and STAMINA scores. Conduct the combat as follows.

1. Roll 2 dice and add the result to your SKILL. The total is your Attack Strength.
2. Roll 2 dice and add the result to your opponent's SKILL. The total is their Attack Strength.
3. Compare the two Attack Strengths. If your AS is higher, then you have wounded your opponent (go to Step 4). If their AS is higher, then they have wounded you (go to Step 5).
4. You have wounded your opponent. Reduce their STAMINA by 2. Now return to Step 1 for the next round.
5. You have been wounded. Reduce your STAMINA by 2. Now return to Step 1 for the next round.

This process continues until either you or your opponent's STAMINA is 0. If your STAMINA reaches 0, you are dead. If your opponent's STAMINA reaches 0, you have defeated them and can continue the story.

Some combats will have special rules and these will be explained in the reference.

HINTS ON PLAY

Beware; some things that seem useful are decoys. There is more than one way to do some things.

BACKGROUND

The spider scuttles forward aggressively, hairy legs waving in the air as it rears up, fangs displayed. With a weary sigh, you extend the long plastic tube in your hand and suck the small spider up into a storage unit in the equipment worn on your back.

"It's safe now," you say.

A whirl of motors comes from the next room, and one of the denizens of Teeheehee pokes her lovely head around the corner of the doorway, eyes wide with the haunting memory of the horrible spider.

"Oh, thank you!" she exclaims, emerging to embrace you with sincere gratitude.

You sigh once more. It was supposed to be a dream job. A planet full of women, helpless before a hoard of small, non-poisonous spiders; needing someone to come and deal with them. The woman on the monitor was so beautiful that you did not hesitate to agree, imagining how they could express their gratitude. But looking now at the Teeheeheean before you, you remember keenly the disappointment you felt that day you boarded their ship, and every day as you receive countless hugs and kisses from them.

The clues were there. The woman was green; a little odd you thought, but hardly an obstacle for a lusty young man like yourself. She told you that they produced asexually, so there were no males on their planet; great! No need to share.

Now you understand all too well. She stands before you like some kind of arboreal mermaid: a lovely humanoid woman, green, above the waist; and a bark-covered tree below. Up from her back grow a number of long delicate fronds, and she has a halo of buds ready to flower growing around her head. Initially, trying to make the best of a bad situation, you eyed their naked upper sections hopefully. But the embraces with which they greeted you as their saviour tore away your last hope as you clasped their woody bodies in your hands. No soft, yielding flesh; it was about as satisfying as hugging a giant broccoli.

Leaving the house, the woman; if it can be called that; escorts you to the front door, thanking you profusely. Her roots are buried in a large, blue, glazed pot that sits atop a pair of motorised treads, allowing her to roll along at your side with a whirl. You disentangle yourself from her embraces and move off down the street.

As alien planets go, Teeheehee is a nice one. The whole planet is like a landscaped garden. The Teeheeheean feed directly on sunlight via photosynthesis, and so have never needed to labour to live. Instead they fill their days with leisure and gardening, their one passion.

Returning to the small house where you live, you see with relief that the alarms are not ringing. Each room is fitted with a siren and a flashing red light that will alert you when one of the natives sees a spider.

Dumping your equipment on the floor, you collapse into an armchair. Not for the first time, you reflect on your life. Nothing you have ever done has gone to plan, yet this uncertainty and unpredictability has failed to result in any excitement, apart from one brief episode involving a luxury cruiser falling into a star. But that's not the kind of excitement you need.

As always, you reach one inevitable conclusion: you need a girlfriend! But how to get one? Every time you suggest leaving, the treemaids start crying and offering you whatever you want. Unfortunately what you want is the one thing they can't provide.

As you are just getting into feeling sorry for yourself, the alarms sound, the lights flashing. Sighing, you collect your equipment and walk over to the screen next to the front door to see the address of the 'emergency'. Your eyebrows move slightly as you see that it is the palace.

You went to the palace on your arrival, but you don't remember much about it (experiencing as you were at the time a crushing disappointment). Leaving the house, you stroll up the grand avenue to the many-layered palace. The palace is a terraced hill with flowering arches leading inside. Two treemaids stand guard outside, armed with shining spears and blasters. They bow to you.

"Welcome, honoured spider-catcher!"

You wave, stifling a sigh. Entering into a large, airy passage, you make your way to the centre of the hill where a grand hall has been built. Sunlight shines down from large, vacuous windows, illuminating a great tree that stands in the centre, rooted into the soil of the planet. It is Queen Hotbutt herself. The great trunk splits into three, the centremost rising up into a woman, twice life size, with long delicate limbs and a head of flowers. The other two stems break into boughs that spread into supple leafy branches, arrayed around her humanoid part like great green wings. Her bark is silvery grey, and covers her human part as well. But she is very much animated, and smiles down at you with bright red lips and shining green eyes.

"Welcome, great protector!" she intones, and her entire court of treemaids bows to you. "My apologies for summoning you with the siren. There is in fact no spider, but an emergency of another kind."

"What is it?" you ask, hoping to hear that the planet is plunging into its sun.

"Show him!" the queen commands.

One of the treemaids whirs forward, offering you a box of tissues. You regard it with some uncertainty. Many times since your arrival on the planet you have wished for tissues, especially when visiting a certain small room in your house. But you refrained from bringing up the matter, as you were uncertain how the treemaids would react to the idea of anything made from wood pulp.

"Er, what is this?"

The queen seems disappointed. "You cannot identify this item?"

"Yeah, it's a box of tissues."

The court exclaims, and the queen leans forward eagerly. "Show us what it is used for."

Feeling very self-conscious, you reach out and pull free one of the tissues. You fold it over and raise it to your face. You give your nose a blow, causing the treemaids to exclaim once more.

"He is expelling sap!" says one incredulously.

"They would destroy us for this?"

The treemaids start speaking in loud agitated voices. You have never seen them act so upset in the whole week you have been on their planet. The queen waits for the talking to die down, and then addresses you. "The humans are threatening to conquer our planet."

"Wa? Why?" you ask.

"They want to cut us down and turn us into these tissues. Your people have cut down all the other trees in the known universe, and cannot grow more for at least a month. In the meantime, they intend to fill the gap by slaughtering our population!"

"That's...terrible," you say. "But what do you want me to do about it?"

"Go to Earth and stop them!"

"How?"

The queen gestures helplessly. "You know your own people better than us. To be frank, we find your kind confusing and unpleasant. You are the exception of course, Honoured Protector!" She pauses to beam at you. "We shall give you whatever you need to complete your mission!"

Looking around at the large, pleading eyes, shining with tears at the prospect of their doom, you feel your heart wrench and with a sigh you know that you must help them. "Ok."

Your announcement causes great joy, and you are swept up in countless woody hugs. After the initial celebration subsides, you are informed that a forestry ship from Earth is already in orbit, making preliminary assessments for a larger fleet. You will be sent off to deal with them immediately.

As promised, the treemaids offer you anything that they can provide to assist in your mission. You don't know what will help, but ask for a blaster, a golden credit card with 100 credits on it, and a backpack containing 5 provisions (1 peanut butter sandwich, 1 salad sandwich, 1 honey sandwich, 1 egg sandwich, and 1 vegemite sandwich. Every time you eat a sandwich, cross off one type.)

The treemaids provide the items without question. Before your departure, you are taken to see queen Hotbutt, and are placed on a levitating platform that brings you up to her level. "Farewell, Noble One!" she says, hugging you to her woody bosom. Tears appear in her eyes, but she smiles and hands you a small crystal leaf on a delicate silver chain. "Take this. It will allow you to

communicate with plant life. But be warned. Much plant life is primitive and will have little of worth to say."

You thank her for the amulet and after another silvern hug, you are deposited back on the floor and escorted with great fanfare to the spaceport where a small ship stands within a ring of cheering treemaids.

You quicken your step, which the grateful treemaids perceive as the determined step of a heroic saviour; in truth you just want to avoid more hugs. But you pause at the doorway as you see one treemaids you recognise. It is Bigones, the treemaids who first brought you here. True to her name, the fronds growing up from her back are huge. She smiles, and hugs you before you can slip away.

"You are a great, great man!" she sobs.

"Er, just doing what I can," you say.

"I have no doubt you will succeed!" Bigones says fiercely.

"I can't promise that," you say nervously.

"I have faith in you, but...if you do not succeed, we do have a plan B. But it shouldn't be necessary."

"Plan B? What is it?" you ask, hoping to be able to wriggle out of this heroic, man-making mission.

"I've offended you. I'm sorry. You will succeed!"

"I'm not offended," you reassure her. "I'm just curious."

"Oh," she shrugs. "It's just that if you fail, then we will be forced to blow up the Earth."

"WA?! Blow up the Earth?"

"Of course," Bigones says in what perfectly imitates a rational tone. "We can't let them come and turn us into tissues, can we? There are 20 billion people on Earth, and according to our calculations, that will reduce the demand of tissues by exactly the right amount to enable the current stockpiles of tissues to last until the plantation trees can be grown, harvested and processed."

"But...you can't blow up the Earth!"

Bigones shrugs again. "If they can turn us into tissues, why can't we turn them into space-dust?"

"But...are you even able to do it?" you ask.

"Yes, with that." Bigones points at a large metallic tower that you have noticed them building over the last week. "It is a weapon that will destroy any planet we point it at."

"But I thought this threat of being turned into tissues was something you just learned about!" you say. "You must have been building that thing for weeks!"

"Oh, yes," Bigones agrees. "The spiders that you have been so brave in helping us to dispose of are not native to this planet. They were brought from elsewhere, but escaped from the research facility."

"What were you researching?" you ask in confusion.

"The Organoray," Bigones says, gesturing towards the metallic tower that is actually a planet-busting weapon. "Do you know that the universe is full of disgusting, creeping things? We wanted to find a way to get rid of them. So we devised the Organoray! It is designed to irradiate a planet, and kill all of the nasty, ugly hairy-legged things, but leave the plant-life intact!"

"Despite how they look, all creatures have a role to play in their ecosystems, which are often delicate, and can be upset by the loss of a single species, and thus bring harm to all other members of the ecosystem, including the plants," you say.

Bigones smiles proudly. "You are correct! But on this planet there are no animals. All roles are fulfilled by plants. Thus when we remove some horrible creepy-crawly, we can replace it with a species from this planet."

You shake your head. "But you can't just destroy something because you don't like how it looks!"

"Of course not!" Bigones exclaims, laying a hand on your shoulder. "We value your services, and your noble and courageous heart!"

"Huh? When did this become about me?" you ask.

"Anyway, the Organoray doesn't work," Bigones sighs. "For some reason anything that kills a spider also damages plants. We seem unable to identify what the ugly, horrible, creepy genes are susceptible to."

"Of course!" you say. "All this ugly creepiness exists in your own minds, not in the creatures themselves! If you want to destroy ugliness, you need to elevate yourselves! Transcend your attachments to illusionary notions such as beauty and ugliness!"

Bigones looks a little guilty. "Yes, but that will take years of introspection and dedicated effort. We decided it was more efficient to just blow up any planets with creepy crawlies on them."

"Blow up?" you say. "What about the Organoray?"

"Like I said, it doesn't work, so we have modified it to just blow up the planets instead."

"But that will kill the plants as well!" you point out.

"Yes." Bigones wipes a tear from her eye. "We shall collect individuals to preserve the cultures unique to each planet, and find new homes for them. Then the universe will be free of horrible disgusting crawly things!"

"So even if I succeed, to stop you blowing up the Earth, you are going to blow it up anyway because it has spiders on it?"

"Earth has spiders too?" Bigones asks in surprise.

"Of course," you reply.

"Oh," Bigones pulls out a glass rectangle and starts to input data. "I will add Earth to the Termination List at once!"

"No, I..."

You stop talking. What can you do? Bigones looks at you innocently; unable to understand why you are so upset, but very sympathetic about it. Giving up, you slip into the ship and the hatch closes behind you. Slumping in the large comfortable chair that dominates the interior of the small ship, you feel a deep despair. You have never even been to Earth, growing up as you did on the excitement-packed manufacturing planetoid of G15-275. You encountered many Earthlings in your time aboard the *Attila*, and found them to be rather snobbish, mentioning rather too often their place of birth like some kind of accolade.

Even so, you are determined to save the Earth, and the treemaids as well. But how to do it...?

Now turn to **1**

1

The forestry ship hangs against the backdrop of star-strewn space like an albino centipede. Lining both sides of the segmented ship are leg-like

grippers that currently hang empty; but are designed to firmly clasp containers of lumber. You happen to know that each segment of the ship is in fact independent and self-sufficient, and segments are assembled as needed. Seeing the 12-segment assembly ahead, you immediately become suspicious. A single segment would be sufficient for a survey mission.

A light starts beeping on the console and a screen suddenly slides up, displaying a bearded man who squints at you suspiciously. "Whadda ya want?"

Taken aback by the abrupt reception, you compensate with Level 3 Intervessel Greeting Protocol. "Greetings, companion of the black-swept sea of stars. I represent Queen Hotbutt of Teeheehee. Through me, she sends her greetings and her welcome to this humble planet. I seek audience with your noble captain to discuss matters of mutual concern."

The interstellar lumberjack looks a bit sheepish, and clammers awkwardly up to Level 2 Intervessel Discussion Protocol; which seems to be his limit. "Ah, thank you for your call. However, we are unable to entertain dignitaries at this time. We apologise for any inconvenience caused."

Reading between the lines, you see it is more a matter of unwillingness rather than inability. You open your mouth, but what will come out?

If you want to maintain Level 3 Intervessel Discussion Protocol, turn to **7**

If you want to step things up to Level 4, turn to **16**

To forget all this nonsense and just talk man to "man", turn to **44**

2

"Nothing disgusts me more than a tree growing out of the ground!" you say. "The only good tree is lumber!"

The three spider-people discuss this answer among themselves. You can't tell whether they are pleased or not, but the spider-woman keeps nodding while saying '*slurkik*'.

After a minute they turn back to you, and the centremost spider continues. "What would you say is your biggest flaw?"

"I am a workaholic!" Turn to **87**

"I have no flaws." Turn to **12**

3

You smile at the official and suddenly dash around him. You hear the official shout in rage and he leaps towards you, snagging you with his claw-like fingers. A struggle ensues...

CUSTOMS OFFICER SKILL 8 STAMINA 12

At any time you can pull out your blaster and shoot him. If you choose to do this, turn to **31**

Otherwise, if you reduce the official's STAMINA to 2 first, turn to **49**

If he reduces your STAMINA to 2 first, turn to **18**

4

You fumble at your belt and quickly pull out the blaster as the tarantula-man thrusts his blast rod at you, its end crackling with blue energy. You fall backwards to the ground and blast him directly in the midsection.

Hot plasma sizzles through the air and blasts a hole in the tarantula-man's body. He cries out as stinking fluids run out of him, filling the air with a putrid scent that almost makes you collapse, and splatters onto your pants. (Reduce your LUCK by 1). As the crowd boos in disapproval, the tarantula man goes through his death throes.

A door to the side of the arena floor opens, and you hasten towards it. Once through, the door slides closed, shutting out the abuse and moans. You look around the new chamber, finding a trio of spiders sitting on stools behind a long table. There is a single stool in front of the table.

"Please sit down, human," invites the centremost spider.

You bow your head in thanks and hurry forward, brushing sand off your clothes. You sit down on the stool. With most of their spider-parts hidden below the table, they look almost normal. You smile at the blonde woman on your right, who is quite attractive, having just four red eyes across her forehead in addition to the normal two.

"Now, you are applying for the position on the Galactic Logging Board, is that correct?" asks the centremost spider, having a furry grey face and two large black eyes complemented by ten smaller eyes on his forehead.

"It is," you reply.

"I see. So, how do you feel about trees in general?"

If you want to say that you think trees should be cut down, turn to **2**

If you want to say that trees are a precious natural resource that needs to be protected, turn to **25**

5

Many have been your dreams and wonderings about Earth. Although there are many planets said to be grander, more beautiful; all such claims seem tacky compared to the ancient majesty of humanity's home. As a child on your wall at home you even had a picture of the blue white orb, suspended like a sapphire in space.

What you see your ship heading towards is so different that you check the navigation monitor to confirm that this is in fact Earth. Apparently it is, and you look at the approaching orb with no small amount of consternation. The whole planet is swathed in thick white clouds, glinting grey constructions poking up from the equator at intervals: elevators, each with a spaceport on top. Your ship receives a guiding beacon from one of these, and with trepidation, you press the big green button.

Your ship glides forward, and you marvel at the traffic. Vessels of all sizes are constantly coming and going, the surrounding space filled with the flashes of vessels entering and leaving hyperspace. It is slow going, and you decide to eat one of your sandwiches as your ship is placed in a queue (cross off one of your sandwiches). Eventually your ship appears to be approaching one of the spaceports ahead. It is a disc lined with windows and gaping entrances, an assembly of tower-like structures on top.

Your ship flies into one of the holes and you press the blinking green button to agree to initiate the landing sequence. The ship settles down onto a platform, which promptly moves, slotting your vessel into a docking space. You feel like you are being stuffed into a shoebox as the doors to the space close. After a few moments, warm lighting comes on outside, letting you know that the area has been pressurised.

You have arrived! Well, almost. Before you leave the chair, you contemplate the big blue button that is the fourth and last on the console. It never blinked, so you never pressed it. What does it do? Your hand starts to twitch, and an urge to press it wells up inside you.

You clasp your hands together, stopping the fidgeting, but the urge within grows, threatening to overwhelm your cautious wisdom.

If you want to press the big blue button, turn to **11**

If you are gutless, turn to **47**

6

"Very well," Phisphodia says. "I shall remove Teeheehee from the harvesting list."

She claps her hands, and one of her handmaidens enters to bow. "Let it be known that the planet Teeheehee is considered sovereign and its inhabitants are not to be harvested." The handmaiden bows and withdraws. She turns

her attention back to you. "It is done. Now what is this second matter you have for my attention?"

You start to walk forward threateningly. "The second matter is your own most timely demise!" you state. "It is time for the Earth to be free from your creepy grasp!"

"Oh?" the queen says, strangely unconcerned by your advance.

She claps her hands, and a pair of spider-warriors in golden breastplates and helms scurry down from the walls, where they have been hidden in the shadows above. They wave blast rods threateningly, and apprehend you.

One of the handmaidens appears to search you for weapons.

If you have an energy whip *and* a universal power cell, turn to **59**

If you just have an energy whip, turn to **62**

Otherwise, turn to **73**

7

For a moment, you feel a strange disorientation, but then you realise everything is as it should be.

"Companion! I stand with you against all perils! And perils there are of which I must speak with your noble captain. Let us be unified against these common threats."

"Hang on a moment," the forester says, and the screen goes blank for a few moments. About 30 seconds later, the bearded face appears once more. "You may dock with the third segment."

"Thank you, companion of the frozen ocean of void!"

The lumberjack gives you a grudging nod before the screen goes blank, and slips back down into its compartment. Your ship receives the docking beacon and you press the big green button to allow the ship to be guided against the side of the third segment. A docking arm secures the ship and allows you to open the hatch into a short passage that leads you into the wood-grained halls of the forestry ship. You admire polished oak panelling, and decorative teak doorframes, not to mention the pine parquet flooring.

A single interstellar lumberjack dressed in checked flannelette coveralls waits for you with his massive arms folded across a broad chest. Looking at him, you feel puny and beardless.

"Come with me then," he instructs, and stomps off down the hall.

You follow him and are shown into a large round room. It has vaulting beams of fragrant cedar, and a large round table of oakwood polished to mirror brightness sits in the middle, surrounded by chairs. At the table sits an even thicker-set forester, his bristling black beard long enough to coil on the table before him. On the wall behind him you see an axe and a saw crossed over each other like some kind of medieval coat of arms.

You feel intimidated by the large men, but remind yourself that tree cutting and processing these days is done by robots with laser-saws, and these men are merely specialised computer operators.

The captain looks you over, and it seems he does not like what he sees. "A human, working for trees!" he spits at last.

You spread your hands, trying to emanate benevolence. "Why should a human not work for trees? After all, do not trees work tirelessly and without complaint for us? They take away our carbon dioxide and turn it into oxygen for us to breathe. We could not live without them. Indeed, we should be grateful to them, and treat them with respect."

"Ha!" the captain jeers. "We have machines to process carbon dioxide now! We aren't enslaved to trees anymore! We are independent!"

"Enslaved?" you exclaim. "Trees ask nothing for the oxygen they provide!"

"They do!" the captain thunders. "We have to tolerate their smug superiority! Oh yes, they can live without us, but we can't live without them! It is intolerable! But now, we are free!"

He wipes a proud tear from his eye. You stare at him. "That is the stupidest thing I have ever heard!"

The captain glares. "Now, listen here young lady!"

"I am a man!" you interject.

The captain looks at you more closely. "Oh? Sorry. It's just with no beard...you know. Anyway. The only good tree is lumber! Nothing you say can stop us from designating this planet for harvesting."

"Teeheehee is a sovereign planet! What right has the Earth government to designate it for anything?"

"Sovereign?" the captain exclaims with a chuckle, his gaze slipping away from your own. "No, according to my list, this is an unclaimed planet. We are free to claim its natural resources for humankind."

"Unclaimed? It is claimed! By its inhabitants! The tree-women things!"

The captain waves a hand dismissively. "Plants don't count! It has to be intelligent, sentient life!"

"They are!" you reply. "They think and talk and build spaceships! They are a sovereign people!"

"No, no," the captain says, his eyes once more seeming to have trouble meeting your own. "That's just imitation."

"What?!?"

"Many plants imitate animals, most notably some flowers that look like female insects, so that male insects will come along attempt to mate with them. When they leave, they carry away pollen. Is then a flower an insect? Of course not! By the same reasoning, these trees are not people, no matter how they imitate us."

"That is ridiculous!"

"This action has been approved by the Galactic Logging Board," the captain says defensively.

"Oh, right!" you say sarcastically. "And they don't have any vested interest in this decision, do they!"

The captain shrugs. "If you don't like it, you can go to Earth and speak to the Board."

If you want to leave and go to Earth, turn to **32**

If you want to tell the captain about the Treemaid's weapon to try and dissuade him from any aggressive action, turn to **37**

8

Gritting your teeth, you hand over your gold credit card. The grinning official slides it into a slot in the top of the glass rectangle and taps it with his stylus. He then turns the opaque glass panel towards you for your fingerprint. You press against the glowing icon of a smiley face until it beeps.

"Thank you!" the official says handing back your card, and with a sweeping gesture, invites you to leave. You do so, 60 credits poorer.

You emerge into a corridor lined with moving lights, and follow them down to a large lounge where travellers crowd into the large elevator pods that are constantly arriving and leaving.

You press yourself into the middle of a crowd of humans and aliens and enter one of the pods. The pod seems to fall rapidly, but still takes half an hour to reach the ground. You proceed through the corridors, making for the exit, and eventually walk out and off down the stone-laid streets. Earth at last! You pause to look around. You are in a tourist district, humans shouting loudly, selling wares and services to travellers from near and far.

A young man calls out to you and tries to convince you to buy a cloudy sphere that he claims is a model of the Earth. You decline, but are prompted to look upwards at the thick cloud cover. The sun is no more than a luminous patch in the grey-white clouds that make the whole place dim. Even the people seem downcast. It reminds you of G15-275.

How did this happen? As you are looking around, you see a large jagged black citadel rising from the centre of a blast crater that appears to have obliterated a fair section of the city. A thick smoke stack rises from the top of the citadel, disgorging billowing vapour that feeds the thick cloud-cover; deliberately casting darkness over the world. Who would do such a thing?

As you walk about, wondering whom to ask, you see the crowds rapidly parting as a procession approaches. A booming amplified voice reaches your ears "Make way for your masters, or be crushed!"

You see several people rush past you, looking disgusted and fearful. Curiously you push forward to view the procession. You see bright spear points first, then the heads and bodies of soldiers armoured in bright red lacquered armour. Several of them seem to have more than two eyes as they scuttle forward on some kind of beast. You feel prickling distaste as you observe the large, hairy legs rapidly creeping along. Are the riding spiders...? With realisation comes a shuddering horror. They are not riding spiders, they are spiders! Like some kind of disgusting centaur, they are human above the waist and large hairy black spiders below. How horrible! (Reduce your LUCK by 1).

The spider-people pass by and the crowds return to normal. You look with new understanding upon the citadel. The spider-people have conquered Earth! And disliking brightness, they are shrouding the planet in shadow!

You move on, your thoughts reeling, and eventually reach an information booth.

Turn to **20**

9

“Since the pleas were entered separately, thus the sentences must also have been delivered separately. I rule this has been a mistrial, and the defendant will be released!”

He bangs the gavel, but before you can even grin, the walls to your cell rise back up and you fall to the floor as the cell moves about. Finally it comes to a rest and the walls disappear once more. You find yourself standing in a foyer. A few other people are present, and look at you curiously. You smile and nod at them and quickly leave the courthouse.

As you exit the marble building, you look over the scene before you. The sun is no more than a luminous patch in the grey-white clouds that cover the whole sky and make the whole place dim. Even the people seem downcast. It reminds you of G15-275.

As you are looking around, you see a large jagged black citadel rising from the centre of a blast crater that appears to have obliterated a fair section of the city. A thick smoke stack rises from the top of the citadel, disgorging billowing vapour that feeds the thick cloud-cover.

The rest of human life seems otherwise untouched, and you move off into the crowded streets. As you walk about, you see the crowds rapidly parting as a procession approaches. A booming amplified voice reaches your ears “Make way for your masters, or be crushed!”

You see several people rush past you, looking disgusted and fearful. Cautiously you push forward to view the procession. You see bright spear

points first, then the heads and bodies of soldiers armoured in bright red lacquered armour. Several of them seem to have more than two eyes as they scuttle forward. You feel prickling distaste as you observe at last the large, hairy legs rapidly creeping along. You shudder. Even pre-warned, the sign is not easy to behold. Like some kind of disgusting centaur, they are human above the waist and large hairy black spiders below. How horrible!

The spider-people pass by and the crowds return to normal. You move onwards, greatly concerned, and eventually reach an information booth.

Turn to 20

10

Moving on to the matter at hand, you point at the judge-bot. "See that robot over there?"

"No," the tree says.

"Er, right there, in the wig module."

"You do know that I don't have eyes, don't you?" the sapling questions.

"Oh...but you don't have ears either," you point out.

"That is so completely different," the tree says scornfully.

Leaving the matter aside for the moment, you change tack. "Well, anyway, did someone come up to you and tell you anything in the last few minutes?"

"Someone was muttering something recently," the tree admits.

"And what was that?" you ask.

"What's it to you?" the tree says rudely.

You explain the situation, mentioning your near-divine status on Teeheehee to impress the arboreal infant.

"Wow!" the sapling replies, although you do detect a hint of sarcasm in its tone. "In that case I will not hesitate to tell you what the judge-bot said, which was that he is afraid of left shoes. Not right shoes, but left ones only. Some sort of programming glitch the techs haven't got around to fixing yet."

Just then, the judge-bot interrupts. "Is this going to take much longer?"

"Not at all," you say, turning around triumphantly. "Your secret is that you are afraid of left shoes!"

"Is that your final answer?" the judge-bot says, its countenance-module perfectly blank.

"It is," you say confidently.

"Very well. Security, take him away to be disintegrated!"

"But I told you the right answer!" you protest. "Or that tree lied to me!"

Your protests fall on deaf line-in modules. All you hear as you are dragged away is the sapling chuckling to itself: "Death to the oppressor!"

You are taken to a metallic room and dumped inside. The room begins to hum, and as you begin to wonder what being disintegrated will feel like, it promptly happens. Disintegration that is.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

11

Your hand trembles as you reach out towards the big, blue button. Your fingertips touch the cool plastic, and with a gratifying stab, you press the button. It starts to blink, as you settle back satisfied. The next moment straps appear and close around your body. You pull at the straps in panic, as whirring and humming comes from all parts of the ship. You are secured in place, and with a whimper, waiting for the end.

The ship clanks, and you see sections of the ship fold into each other, becoming impossibly small. You are going to be crushed! But then the console before you slips down into the floor, which retracts backwards under you, leaving you dangling, while the viewscreen folds upwards. You are gently lowered to the deck as the ship folds back behind you, whirring and clanking all the while. The straps retract, and you leap forward from the chair as you feel it start to move.

Spinning around, you see a metal cube the size of your head, with a big, blue button on the top. You marvel at what has happened, but pick up the ship-cube, which is heavy, but lighter than you would expect, and slip it into your backpack.

You start to walk towards the exit doors when they slide open and a pompous-looking official walks in. He has the kind of condescending sneer that characterises the countenance of all Earthlings, but his bright golden robe is simply ostentatious. The official pauses in his entering strut as he takes in the sight of you, looking about the bay perplexed.

"Where is your ship?" he demands to know.

"I can fly," you say dismissively.

The official looks at you suspiciously, but looking around once more, sees no vessel with which to counter your claim. "Fine." He pulls out a glass rectangle and a stylus. "Are you carrying any fruit?"

"No," you reply.

"Any spiders?"

"Wa?" you ask in surprise. "Of course not!"

"Good. Ok, looks like you are free to enter. 60 credits please."

"Wa? 60 credits! What for?"

"That is the standard docking fee," the official explains.

"I don't have a ship!" you exclaim.

"According to regulations, a docking fee has to be charged for any space-going vessel capable of bearing passengers or cargo. If you can indeed fly as you say, then you are a vessel and must be charged a docking fee."

"I'm not a space-ship! Anyway, I'm leaving, so this bay will be empty!"

"It will," the official concedes. "But I can't let you leave until you pay the docking fee for all vessels which are present; ie: you!"

"So," you say, trying to keep a lid on your frustration, "if I was on the other side of those doors, I wouldn't have to pay anything?"

"That is correct."

"I see. Can I get a refund once I'm outside?"

"Sorry, no," the official replies insincerely.

"This is stupid!" you declare.

The official spreads his hands helplessly, but with the smile of a man who enjoys his job.

If you want to give in and pay, turn to **8**

If you want to make a run for the doors, turn to **3**

If you want to admit that you are, in fact, incapable of unaided space-flight, turn to **34**

12

Your answer causes another discussion, which ends with shaken heads all around. "We are not satisfied that you can perform the functions of the Earth representative of the Galactic Logging Board," says the fur-faced spider-man. He presses a button on the table and a door opens in the side wall.

Your self-esteem shaken, you smile politely, shake their hands and make for the door. Once out in the corridor, you dismiss your failure. Just because some space faring creepy crawlies won't give you a job doesn't mean that you are a worthless person.

Once you are certain that tears are not going to come spilling out of your eyes, you set off through the citadel, determined to break the dominion of the spiders over your people.

Turn to **63**

13

You press the button for the barbican, and the lift starts to rise. It increases in speed, and then starts to move sideways. It descends again and lands with a thump. With a pleasant tone, the doors open, and you exit on shaky legs.

You find yourself in a marble-floored hall. With archways at each quarter; one leading to an alcove in which the lift is located. The opposite archway seems to lead to a balcony overlooking the bridge that spans the crater to the citadel. To the right, the archway there leads to pair of stairways, ascending and descending, but you notice on the landing there is a vending machine. To the left, the archway appears to lead to a supply room, and with a cautious glance about, you head this way. The room proves to be the base of a tower, there are several metal shipping crates on the floor, but most of the stored items are hanging above. Humanoid shapes wrapped in cocoon-like layers of spider thread are suspended from webs that fill the interior of the tower as it sweeps upwards to vanish in shadow.

You gulp nervously, and look around once more for any spiders. It still seems safe, but you move quickly to investigate the crates. You wouldn't want anyone to think one of their meals was escaping.

The shipping crates are various shapes and sizes. Some like shoeboxes, others big enough to walk into. But all prove to be sealed with electronic locks. You key in a few numbers at random, but remain locked out. Suddenly you come upon a large crate with the words *Attila the Hon* written on the side. It must have been evacuated with the crew, and was subsequently captured by the Arachnonans.

You examine the keypad and try to remember your command code from you time you tried to save the luxury cruiser from plunging into a sun...

If you played *Wrong Way Go Back* and can remember you command code, turn to the reference that is indicated by that number.

If you never played that book, can't remember the code, or your memory is at fault:

To the balcony, turn to **57**

To inspect the vending machine, turn to **99**

14

The lawyer-bot agrees that you have chosen the best possible strategy in such an optimistic tone that makes you doubt his sincerity. After he is gone, you lie back on the bunk and wonder how long you will have to rot here, awaiting trial. Things always move slowly in bureaucrat-ridden establishments with aged traditions. And Earth is just about as bureaucrat-ridden and aged-traditional as things get! In fact-

Your internal tirade against the decadence of Earth is interrupted as your cell begins to shake and hum. You almost fall off the cot as the cell lurches and begins moving. Your stomach goes up, down, and sideways, before

settling once more. Before you can ask yourself what is happening, the walls to your cell suddenly slide downwards, leaving you on a platform in a courtroom.

Aged woodwork covers the walls and the benches, conveying thousands of years of aged tradition, a marble statue of lady justice standing above, poised righteously over the proceedings. Ah! Dignity is thick in the air! Well, it would be if not for a few things, such as your lawyer-bot, who stands by your platform, his rainbow-coloured exoskeleton glowing with reassuring luminosity. The judge is also a robot. As are the jury. Seeing that your life is in the hands of machines, you feel distinctly nervous.

“What is this?” you demand. “I want to be tried by a court of humans!”

The prosecutor-bot, which you failed to see previously due to his dull, menacing exoskeleton, stands up. “If it pleases the court, I would like to enter the defendant’s statement as an admission of guilt to all charges! It is well known that robots, programmed to be incorruptible and without sentiment, were deemed better able to deliver justice. Thus! By seeking a human court, the defendant declares his desire for this process to be corruptible, or able to be swayed by sentiment! Why? The only plausible cause is his own guilt!”

“The trial has not yet begun,” the judge-bot points out. He bangs a wooden gavel, and then gestures to the prosecution-bot. “Please proceed with your opening statement.”

The prosecution-bot proceeds to repeat every word he just said, replicating the exact tone of moral outrage used previously. This time the jury reacts with gasps and mumbles, their neutral tones darkening.

“Well done!” your lawyer-bot whispers to you. Facing the judge, the lawyer bot says: “My client would like to enter a plea of guilty to each charge!”

“In that case,” the judge says, “I sentence the defendant to death by disintegration chamber!”

“Ah ha!” your lawyer-bot exclaims, making the judge’s gavel pause in its downward swing. “Your honour! Is that death for all three charges?”

“It is!”

“Then I demand a ruling of mistrial, since a human can only be disintegrated once! Thus it is physically impossible for the sentence of this court to be carried out. Thus it must be dismissed at once!”

The prosecution-bot leaps to his support modules. “Not so! The sentence was death for all three crimes, considered as a whole.”

“Not so!” your representative says. “I entered the pleas separately as three distinct pleas! Check your memory banks! Thus the court must issue punishments for each crime separately.”

The argument continues on for some time about who meant what by what and if what the speaker meant means more than what the listener heard. It

has the potential to go on for years, but after five minutes an alarm sounds, and the two lawyer-bots fall silent.

The judge stands. "I will now retire to consider the case and deliver my verdict." He bangs the gavel, then bangs it again and sits down. "Here is the verdict!"

Test your LUCK

If you are Lucky, turn to **9**

If you are Unlucky, turn to **106**

15

You want to stand, but your body will not respond. Your nervous system has been burnt out. Your heart falters, as do your lungs, and you soon perish. Even worse, you die unemployed.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

16

"Esteemed voyager of the fathomless ocean! Our planet stands open to you! Bring forth your dead so that we may exhume our honoured ancestors and lay your fallen against the bones of our planet! Let us lavish upon you all the delicacies our humble culture can manifest to please your discerning tastebuds and satisfy your distinguished belly! Rest in the embrace of our...ah...delicate maidens who are eager to please! All this we offer you if we may have but a minute of your honoured captain's time!"

The interstellar lumberjack looks awed by your tirade. "Sorry," he mumbles, as if ashamed to be speaking like a normal person instead of a lofty diplomat. "It's like I said. The captain is...er...too busy to see anyone or send any messages or do anything."

Before you can say anything else, the screen goes blank and slides back down into its compartment. You try to re-establish contact, but the vessel remains silent. Reflecting on the situation, you reason that dealing with this ship is like trying to kill a weed by pulling off its leaves. You need to get at the root. That means going to Earth.

Resolute, and a little excited to be finally going to your ancestral home, you plot in the course for Earth by pressing the big yellow button and saying the name of the planet. Then you press the big green button.

Turn to **22**

17

Going onwards, you find the way ahead blocked by a door. The door has a humanoid spider-face on it, and as you draw near, an electronic voice addresses you. "*Slur-slur-kek-tik-kok.*" The door says.

"Um, what?" you ask.

The door repeats itself in the same language, except this time an ominous-looking nozzle appears out of an opening in the door.

If you know any Arachnonese, you had best try it here. Use the alphanumeric key below to turn your word into numbers and add them together to create a new reference number.

If you don't know any or the reference you turn to makes no sense, turn to **66**

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

18

The pen-pusher proves too strong for you, and you fall into unconsciousness. You wake up in a security station, acutely embarrassed. The security officers refuse to look you in the eye, and you are ashamed as you pay the docking fee and the fine for assaulting a Customs Officer. Your card is returned to you with only 10 credits on it.

You emerge into a corridor lined with moving lights, and follow them down to a large lounge where travellers crowd into the large elevator pods that are constantly arriving and leaving.

You press yourself into the middle of a crowd of humans and aliens and enter one of the pods. The pod seems to fall rapidly, but still takes half an hour to reach the ground. You pause in uncertainty, but follow the rest of the people, and make it out into the open air, walking off down the stone-laid streets. You are in a tourist district, humans shouting loudly, selling wares and services to travellers from near and far.

A young man calls out to you and tries to convince you to buy a cloudy sphere that he claims is a model of the Earth. You decline, but look upwards

at the thick cloud cover. The sun is no more than a luminous patch of the grey-white clouds that make the whole place dim. Even the people seem downcast. It reminds you of G15-275.

How did this happen? As you are looking around, you see a large jagged black citadel rising from the centre of a blast crater that appears to have obliterated a fair section of the city. A thick smoke stack rises from the top of the citadel, disgorging billowing vapour that feeds the thick cloud-cover, deliberately casting darkness over the world. Who would do such a thing?

As you walk about, wondering whom to ask, you see the crowds rapidly parting as a procession approaches. A booming amplified voice reaches your ears "Make way for your masters, or be crushed!"

You see several people rush past you, looking disgusted and fearful. Curiously you push forward to view the procession. You see bright spear points first, then the heads and bodies of soldiers armoured in bright red lacquered armour. Several of them seem to have more than two eyes as they scuttle forward on some kind of beast. You feel prickling distaste as you observe the large, hairy legs rapidly creeping along. Are the riding spiders...? With realisation comes a shuddering horror. They are not riding spiders, they are spiders! Like some kind of disgusting centaur, they are human above the waist and large hairy black spiders below. How horrible! (Reduce your LUCK by 1).

The spider-people pass by and the crowds return to normal. You look with new understanding upon the citadel. The spider-people have conquered Earth! And disliking brightness, they are shrouding the planet in shadow!

As you walk along, you reach an information booth.

Turn to **20**

19

You quietly slip the data stick into your pocket. The fat spider looks up at you, and you smile warmly at him before turning about and going back into the lift.

Turn to **95**

20

For a moment, you feel a strange disorientation, but then you realise everything is as it should be. Feeling a bit hungry you take out one of your sandwiches and eat it as you interact with the monitor (cross one of your

sandwiches off your list). You idly look over some of the breaking news headlines. There are a few remaining pockets of resistance to the spider-invasion. A woman with 283 pet tarantulas is being awarded with a medal, presented by Queen Phisphodia herself. England loses the Ashes for a record 56th time in a row.

Finishing your sandwich, you brush off your hands and enter in your query: "Galactic Logging Board".

A headline springs up. GALACTIC LOGGING BOARD UNDERGOES FLUID EXTRACTION. You read the article, discovering that the Board was one of the many organizations that signed a letter of protest against their new overlords and their restrictive spider-safety legislation. There is no efficient way to harvest trees without endangering the lives of local spiders. So said the Logging Board. The spider-people responded by apprehending everyone who signed up to the list and carried them off into the nearest citadel for execution. The article glosses over what fluid extraction implies, for which you are thankful.

There are several other documents associated with your query, including a position vacant notice for the Galactic Logging Board, which has some sudden vacancies.

A plan to save Teeheehee hatches in your mind. If you could get the job, then you could cancel the order to harvest the tree-people for tissues. Looking down at your dirty coveralls, you realise you are poorly dressed for a job interview. You will have to go shopping.

Firm in your course of action, you make your way to the markets to purchase some nice clothes. After wandering through the markets, you locate the following bargains:

Nice suit	60 credits
Shirt	20 credits
Tie	10 credits
Dress shoes	30 credits

If you don't have enough credits for everything you want to buy, you can pawn the following items if you have them.

Blaster	30 credits
Crystal Leaf Amulet	80 credits

Once you have finished in the markets, you make your way to the citadel to apply.

The road to the citadel is largely abandoned, as few humans have any desire to do business with their creepy overlords. The broad base of the

citadel almost fills the width of the crater, a short bridge leading over the gap from the rim to a gate in the ominous side of the citadel.

You start to cross the bridge, seeing ahead a great iron gate flanked by a pair of spider-warriors. You avoid looking at their hairy legs and focus on the enamelled crimson armour inlaid with gold, the matching crested helmets, and their long blast rods held like spears.

"Halt, non-spider!" one of the guards says, as they both lower their blast rods, blue energy crackling at the ends. "State your business!"

"I am here for a job interview," you declare, trying not to tremble as the heat of the blast rods washes over your face. "I want to apply for the position on the Galactic Logging Board."

"You?" the Arachnonan looks at you sceptically. "Very well, it's your life." He pulls a lever next to him and the gate starts to open with a loud screeching. "Follow the passage to the end then turn right."

They raise the blast rods, and you hurry through. As the iron gate screeches closed behind you, you pause to survey the dim hall before you. Everything looks so medieval! Red and gold pageantry hangs on the high walls of the grey marble hall, proclaiming the glories of the Arachnon Empire. The high ceiling is covered in thick webbing, with skeletons of humans suspended above your head, wrapped in the cocoons of death that they perished in. Halfway down the hall you see two alcoves, which appear to have metallic statues of Arachnonan within.

You venture down the hall and see that the statues are in fact vacant suits of Arachnonan-armour. Steel breastplates inlaid with gold and crimson enamel protect absent torsos, while matching helmets sport long scarlet plumes. Armoured plates protect the spidery sections as well. You see that the suit to the left is armed with a long blast rod, like the guards outside wield, while the other suit has an energy whip.

Glancing at the intersection ahead, you consider your course of action. You have gained entry to the citadel with surprising ease. Perhaps you should focus upon freeing the Earth from the dominion of the spiders.

If you want to take the energy whip (the blast rod is a bit conspicuous), turn to **102**

If you want to leave without it and take the right turn at the end of the hall to attend your job interview, turn to **76**

If you want to take the left turn and focus on freeing the Earth, turn to **63**

You push with all your might, and manage to wiggle out from under the spider. But as you crawl away, the tarantula-man hits you with the blast rod,

sending your whole body into floppy pain. You collapse to the ground, writhing.

Minus 10 STAMINA

If this kills you, turn to **15**

Otherwise, you manage to climb to your feet and decide it is a better strategy to leap onto its back. Turn to **51**

22

The shuttle takes you through the boundless void of space. It speeds up to jump velocity, and then takes you into hyperspace. Hyperspace is grey and featureless, a true limbo. Many teachers have gained enlightenment by staring into the void of hyperspace, while others have ended up losing their minds. Those who have gained enlightenment are happy to pass on their wisdom; and offer a convenient range of payment options.

You stare into the void, toying with the idea of starting a movement based on what you see within the swirling mists of the limbo. You could help lots of people, and make lots of money. Gurus always seem to live in either mansions or caves. The former is definitely your preference.

You stare into hyperspace...

Test your LUCK

Roll 2 dice and compare the total with your current LUCK score.

In your favour: Lucky; turn to **24**

0-6 against you: Unlucky, turn to **28**

6+ against you: Really Unlucky; turn to **43**

23

You press the big red button on the console. The machine starts to hum, and lights flash. The liquid in the flask begins to bubble, and with a final crackle of electricity and a bang, all goes quiet.

You squint through the smoke rising from the top of the machine and see that the liquid in the flask has now turned red. There is a whine, and the complex arrangement opens; then the flask is extended towards you by a robotic arm. It stops, presenting the flask to you.

You take the flask, which feels just a little warm. You sniff at the liquid, then take an experimental sip through the narrow neck. It has a mild flavour, but you feel a warmth beginning to spread through you. Encouraged,

you gulp the rest down. You return the flask to the robot hand with a satisfied 'Ahhh!'

Soon you are feeling great! You don't know why this machine exists or how it has done what it has done, but you are pleased with the results. (Increase your *Initial* STAMINA by 2 and raise your *Current* STAMINA to this level.)

Pleased with this little turn of events, you leave the crate, and the storeroom and contemplate what to do next.

To go out to the balcony, turn to **57**

To inspect the vending machine, turn to **99**

24

You stare into the void of hyperspace, and after a few moments, begin to see something emerge. You focus on it, and you soon realise it is the bridge of a starship. You walk out, seeing a large, comfortable command chair that intimidates you with its authority and dignity.

A small tortoise with some golden ranking insignia pasted onto its shell is standing on one of the armrests. Seeing you, it speaks in a shockingly loud voice. "Captain on the deck!"

You look to see the crewmembers leap up from their consoles and salute. "Er, carry on," you say, feeling the weight of expectation pressing down on your unworthy shoulders.

The crewmembers thankfully return to their functions without giving you further scrutiny. This must be a vision of your future! You, the glorious commander of a starship! With a tortoise as your first officer. No doubt the tortoise is capable, but it lacks...dignity. When you are given your commission in the future, you decide you will screen the first officers personally.

You slip into the command chair. "What is our course?" you ask.

"No course has been imputed," the tortoise replies.

"Wa? Then what are we doing?" you ask, gesturing to the ship that is speeding along, the operators operating the consoles furiously.

"Scanning for sources of beautiful women."

You slump in the chair. "This isn't the future is it? This is some kind of analogy for my own aimless life, isn't it?"

"Er...well, yes," the tortoise says, appearing a bit disgruntled. "You weren't supposed to realise that yet."

"Maybe I'm smarter than I look!" you tell the reptile. "And who are you?"

"I am your spirit guide," the tortoise says proudly.

"Oh," you say. "Weren't there any eagles, or wolves left?"

"Are you suggesting that I am somewhat uninspiring?" the tortoise asks, looking offended.

"No, no," you say. "It's just that...well, you're a...tortoise."

Its feathers ruffled (figuratively, unfortunately), the tortoise speaks in a curt tone. "I am a more than adequate guide for someone of your spiritual sophistication! If you must know, you were almost given a slug, so I expect you to be grateful for my assistance!"

"Sorry, sorry!" you say, trying to calm the creature. "Ok then, what is your guidance?"

"You must give up petty pursuits for temporary worldly pleasures and invest your time and energy in noble pursuits that will elevate your spirit!"

"I am!" you protest. "I am on a mission to save 2 planets! That's two (2) planets full of people! Billions of souls in my hands!"

"Oh dear!" the tortoise quails.

"I am reasonably confident in my abilities," you counter.

The tortoise looks at you aghast. "No you aren't! Why did you ever agree to such a thing! I am going to be humiliated at the next spirit-guide conference!"

"It just kind of happened," you say. "Anyway, just help me."

The tortoise sighs. "Fine, let's see what's going to happen. Future, onscreen!"

The viewscreen changes from a view of space to an image of you in a landing bay. Before you can see anything, the images start to move at fast forward, and you catch glimpses of some sort of golden-robed man, then crowded streets, yourself eating a sandwich, then shopping for clothes.

"Hey, slow down, I can't see anything!" you protest.

"Nothing I can help you with yet," the tortoise mutters, as darkened interiors flash by. "Ah, here we are!"

The image freezes on you standing in front of a door.

"This door is asking you if you are a servant of the Queen. I strongly suggest you say 'yes'."

"That's it?" you ask. "This is your spiritual guidance?"

"You sure know how to complain!" the tortoise says. "Anyway, that's all you have time for. This vision is ending."

Before you can complain any further, grey mist starts to billow up in front of you and soon the bridge of the ship is obscured. You blink and find yourself back on your little shuttle.

Turn to 5

"Trees are precious, and must be protected!" you say. "They provide us with oxygen, prevent soil erosion, and look lovely! Any forestry program must preserve them for future generations."

The three Arachnonans discuss this answer among themselves. You can't tell whether they are pleased or not, but the Arachnonan woman keeps shaking her head while saying '*slurkok*'.

After a minute they turn back to you, and the centremost Arachnonan continues. "What would you say is your biggest flaw?"

"I am a workaholic!" Turn to **87**

"I have no flaws." Turn to **12**

26

You punch in the code, and are rewarded with a friendly beep as red lights turn green, and the door in the side of the crate swings open. Lights flick on inside, and you step through the door.

The interior of the crate is like a small room. Inside is a circular console of some type. Held on top inside a complex arrangement of bare wires and metal rings is a spherical flask with a narrow spout. Inside the flask is a clear liquid. The console itself appears rather simple to operate. Arranged at regular intervals around the circumference of the console are a big red button, a big green button, and a big blue button.

You shrug and reach out to press one of the buttons...

If you press the red button, turn to **23**

If you press the green button, turn to **65**

If you press the blue button, turn to **100**

27

The lawyer-bot agrees that you have chosen the best possible strategy in such an optimistic tone that it makes you doubt his sincerity. After he is gone, you lie back on the bunk and wonder how long you will have to rot here, awaiting trial. Things always move slowly in bureaucrat-ridden establishments with aged traditions. And Earth is just about as bureaucrat-ridden and aged-traditional as things get! In fact-

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“The trial has not yet begun,” the judge-bot points out. He bangs a wooden gavel, and then gestures to the prosecution-bot. “Proceed with your opening statement.”

The prosecution-bot repeats every word he has just said, replicating the exact tone of moral outrage used previously. This time the jury reacts with gasps and mumbles, their neutral tones rapidly darkening.

“Let me do the talking!” your lawyer-bot hisses at you. Facing the judge, the lawyer bot says: “It is my pleasure to inform the court that this trial is in fact entirely unnecessary, since, as my client has just recently informed me, he is an ambassador from Teeheehee, and as such is immune to prosecution.”

“Well, then; that will make things simpler,” the judge-bot says. “Let him present his credentials and we can all go for an early recharge.”

The judge and jury look at you expectantly, while your lawyer-bot nods encouragingly. “Um,” you begin, “I was just given this.” You pull out the crystal leaf from the delicate chain around your neck.

The judge’s countenance module displays doubt. “Do you have anything like a document, with a few official seals and such? Rather than this...trinket?”

“The tree-people of Teeheehee are...a bit odd,” you explain. “But I was told that this leaf will give me the power to talk to plants.”

“How preposterous!” the prosecution-bot retorts. “Plants cannot speak. The dominant species on Teeheehee is the sole exception. The defendant offers no proof of his status as a diplomat and I therefore urge for his immediate disintegration!”

Your lawyer-bot intercedes. “Yet if such a thing were possible, surely only the tree-people of Teeheehee would have the ability, the interest, to create

such a device as this crystal leaf. It should be simple enough to test the function of this trinket.”

After some thrashing out of details, it is agreed that if you can prove that you can talk to plants, then the crystal leaf will be accepted as diplomatic credentials and you will be set free. If you cannot, you will be disintegrated as the charlatan you are.

Your lawyer-bot seems very pleased with the way things have turned out. You are less confident. The walls to your cell fold up once more and you pace in your cell for five minutes before the room lurches and opens, dumping you onto the floor.

You look up hopefully, but find yourself in an enclosed courtyard. All of the androids are there, judge, prosecutor, your lawyer, the jury; as well as a table on which stands a potted sapling, the species of which you confidently identify as a tree.

You stand and wander over to the table, clutching the crystal leaf as tightly as you dare. You look at the judge. “What do I do?”

“I have told this tree a secret. Talk to it and tell me the secret!”

How silly. Nonetheless, you approach the tree, determined to pass the test and save yourself from the terminal unpleasantness of disintegration. “Er, hello,” you begin. The plant does not respond. You hold the crystal leaf up to your forehead and beam your consciousness through it. “Greetings plant-friend!” There is no response. You try holding the crystal leaf next to your ear. “Hello?” Still nothing. Starting to get nervous, you smile at the watching robots and tell them that you are just warming up.

Inwardly cursing the treemaids for not providing instructions, you hold the crystal leaf fervently in both hands. “Please talk to me! I need your help!” There is still nothing. “Hey!” you try, reaching out and tapping one of the stems. There is nothing beyond the motion set in motion by your own hand. “Um, human to plant, human to plant, come in please.”

You reach up to wipe some sweat from your brow. You imagine that you can hear the disintegrators warming up. “Talk to me!” you whisper urgently. “Hello? Hello!”

“Are you talking to me?” the plant in front of you seems to say tentatively.

“Yes, I am!” you exclaim with relief. “I’ve been trying to get your attention for the last five minutes!”

“Sorry, I thought you were talking to someone else. Humans don’t normally talk to plants. Well, some do, but it’s never interesting. And whenever I try to bring up something interesting, the issues of the day for example, they don’t listen and go on with that infantile drivel about asking me if I would like some water. How about some intellectual stimulation? A plant cannot live on water alone!”

“Er, sorry,” you say. “I won’t do that.”

“Actually I am a bit thirsty,” the sapling mentions.

If you want to get on the sapling's good side by offering it some water, turn to **60**

If you would rather begin by introducing yourself, turn to **41**

If you think it's best to get down to business, turn to **10**

28

You stare with intense concentration, you relax and let come what will, you pray, you decide that you love yourself and acknowledge that you are a precious child of the universe who deserves to see something, anything.

But nothing comes, and with your confidence in yourself as a precious child of the universe shaken, your ship drops out of hyperspace and zooms towards the Earth, ancestral home of human kind.

Turn to **5**

29

You take out the peanut butter sandwich and give it to the shrivelled man. He snatches it, tears off the plastic and wolfs it down with relish. Once it is all gone, he sucks his fingers clean and leans back with a sigh.

"Ah, so nice!" He looks at you and smiles. "And I haven't forgotten you. Hmm..." He pauses thoughtfully, then pushes himself from his seat with effort. He shuffles over to a chest in the corner and takes out something. He shuffles back and hands it to you. "It isn't much, but fair trade for a sandwich, eh?"

He has given you a nanobotic healing shot. It will restore 5 points of STAMINA. The shrivelled man returns to his seat, and you say your farewells before leaving the room.

"Good luck!" he calls out after you, and starts to cackle.

Turn to **17**

30

You go back into the central chamber and through to the landing where you saw the vending machine. The machine contains numerous items of

varying degrees of usefulness to your quest. As you are looking over the items, you hear rapid clinking, and guess that some number of Arachnonan warriors are scurrying up, or down, the stairwell, drawn by the sound of the blaster.

Not wanting to be apprehended, you quickly make for the lift and pound the close door button.

Turn to 95

31

Whipping out the blaster, you give the official a moment to recoil in fear, which you find very satisfying (so petty!), before you pull the trigger. There is a hot surge of energy and the official is blasted into burning pieces.

As the stench of burning flesh fills the air, you consider what you have done. No doubt there will be some consequence to this. You are now a criminal! (Minus your *initial* and *current* LUCK scores by 1.) You replace the blaster in its holster and hurry towards the doors. You emerge into a corridor lined with moving lights and follow them down to a large lounge where travellers crowd into the large elevator pods that are constantly arriving and leaving.

You press yourself into the middle of a crowd of humans and aliens and enter one of the pods. The pod seems to fall rapidly, but still takes half an hour to reach the ground. You proceed nervously through the corridors, making for the exit, afraid that at any moment a heavy hand will clamp onto your shoulder, but you make it out into the open air safely, and walk off down the stone-laid streets. Relatively safe, you look around at last. You are in a tourist district, humans shouting loudly, selling wares and services to travellers from near and far.

A young man calls out to you and tries to convince you to buy a cloudy sphere that he claims is a model of the Earth. You decline, but look upwards at the thick cloud cover. The sun is no more than a luminous patch of the grey-white clouds that make the whole place dim. Even the people seem downcast. It reminds you of G15-275.

How did this happen? As you are looking around, you see a large jagged black citadel rising from the centre of a blast crater that appears to have obliterated a fair section of the city. A thick smoke stack rises from the top of the citadel, disgorging billowing vapour that feeds the thick cloud-cover, deliberately casting darkness over the world. Who would do such a thing?

As you walk about, wondering whom to ask, you see the crowds rapidly parting as a procession approaches. A booming amplified voice reaches your ears "Make way for your masters, or be crushed!"

You see several people rush past you, looking disgusted and fearful. Curiously you push forward to view the procession. You see bright spear points first, then the heads and bodies of soldiers armoured in bright red lacquered armour. Several of them seem to have more than two eyes as they scuttle forward on some kind of beast. You feel prickling distaste as you observe the large, hairy legs rapidly creeping along. Are the riding spiders...? With realisation comes a shuddering horror. They are not riding spiders, they are spiders! Like some kind of disgusting centaur, they are human above the waist and large hairy black spiders below. How horrible! (Reduce your LUCK by 1).

The spider-people pass by and the crowds return to normal. You look with new understanding upon the citadel. The spider-people have conquered Earth! And disliking brightness, they are shrouding the planet in shadow!

Your thoughts reels you walk along. Eventually, you reach an information booth.

Turn to **20**

32

Realising that to get at the root of the problem, you will have to go to Earth, you thank the captain for his time and are escorted back to your ship. Resolute, and a little excited to be finally going to your ancestral home, you plot in the course for Earth by pressing the big yellow button and saying the name of the planet. Then you press the big green button.

Turn to **22**

33

You run forward and dive underneath the tarantula-man. You deliver a punch to the base of his thorax, but find it hard and leathery. You hear him laugh rather than groan, and suddenly he collapses on top of you, crushing you beneath his weight...

Test your STAMINA

If you are Strong, turn to **21**

If you are Weak, turn to **96**

34

"Fine!" you say. "I do have a ship, but look..." You open your backpack and take out the metal cube. "It folded into this. Surely this doesn't qualify for a docking fee!"

The official peers at the cube with interest. "Ah! But, sorry. The regulations make no allowances for collapsible ships. 60 credits!"

You glare, feeling burning rage start to surge up inside you.

"Of course, there is...another option," the official says, peering at his fingernails.

"Which is what!" you bark.

"If you sell me your ship, you won't have to pay the docking fee, will you?"

Your anger evaporates at this most practical suggestion. "Deal!"

"My buying price is 20 credits."

Your anger makes a rapid comeback. "20 credits! This is a @\$ing space ship, not a clock-radio!"

The official spreads his hands. "Ask yourself this: do you want to leave with 60 credits less than you have now, or with 20 credits more?"

"\$#@% & %# \$ * & % \$ ^ % !" you reply.

"Come now," the official smiles maddeningly, "It is a simple question."

Your hand closes on your blaster...

Shooting an official would be a bad idea, but can you contain your rage?

Test your SKILL.

If you are able to restrain yourself, turn to 45

If you lose control, turn to 31

35

Moving on to the matter at hand, you point at the judge-bot. "See that robot over there?"

"No," the tree says.

"Er, right there, in the wig module."

"You do know that I don't have eyes, don't you?" the sapling questions.

"Oh...but you don't have ears either," you point out.

"That is very different," the tree says.

Leaving the matter aside for the moment, you change tack. "Well, anyway, did someone come up to you and tell you anything in the last few minutes?"

"Someone was muttering something recently," the tree admits.

"And what was that?" you ask.

"Why do you want to know that?" the tree asks curiously. "I don't want to betray anyone's confidence."

You explain the situation, mentioning your near-divine status on Teeheehee to impress the arboreal infant.

"Wow!" the sapling replies. "In that case I will not hesitate to tell you what the judge-bot said, which was that he is afraid of right shoes. Not left shoes, but right ones only. Some sort of programming glitch the techs haven't got around to fixing yet."

Just then, the judge-bot interrupts. "Is this going to take much longer?"

"Not at all," you say, turning around triumphantly. "Your secret is that you are afraid of right shoes!"

"Is that your final answer?" the judge-bot says, its countenance-module perfectly blank.

"It is," you say confidently.

"Very well. You are correct. Welcome to Earth, Mr Ambassador!"

While the prosecution-bot slinks away in disappointment, the judge dismisses all charges. You shake hands, pose for photos, and eventually extract yourself. Your lawyer-bot shows you the way out of the courtyard and into the foyer of the courthouse. "Farewell, sir and congratulations."

"Thank you," you reply, feeling genuine gratitude. The android leaves, and you direct your steps in the opposite direction. As you exit the marble building, you look over the scene before you. The sun is no more than a luminous patch in the grey-white clouds that cover the whole sky and make the whole place dim. Even the people seem downcast. It reminds you of G15-275.

As you are looking around, you see a large jagged black citadel rising from the centre of a blast crater that appears to have obliterated a fair section of the city. A thick smoke stack rises from the top of the citadel, disgorging billowing vapour that feeds the thick cloud-cover.

The rest of human life seems otherwise untouched, and you move off into the crowded streets. As you walk about, you see the crowds rapidly parting as a procession approaches. A booming amplified voice reaches your ears "Make way for your masters, or be crushed!"

You see several people rush past you, looking disgusted and fearful. Cautiously you push forward to view the procession. You see bright spear points first, then the heads and bodies of soldiers armoured in bright red lacquered armour. Several of them seem to have more than two eyes as they scuttle forward. You feel prickling distaste as you observe at last the large, hairy legs rapidly creeping along. You shudder. Even pre-warned, the sign is not easy to behold. Like some kind of disgusting centaur, they are human above the waist and large hairy black spiders below. How horrible!

The spider-people pass by and the crowds return to normal. You move onwards, greatly concerned, and eventually reach an information booth.

Turn to **20**

36

The human raises one eyebrow. "You passed the physical assessment?"

"I'm stronger than I look," you boast, straightening up.

"I hope so," the spider-rider says. "All right, come with me."

He takes you off to a barracks where a number of other humans are housed. In a courtyard outside, they practise riding on the back of spiders in a standing position, firing blasters at moving targets. You are taken to a registration desk, where an overweight officer takes your name and assigns you to a bunk and gives you your equipment coupons.

The spider-rider gives you no chance to slip away, escorting you to be fitted with your own gold inlaid green enamel armour, and then issued with a blaster. Finally, the spider-rider has to attend to his duties, leaving you alone.

This hasn't been so bad, you reflect, examining the shiny blaster. The spider-rider uniform should allow you to move freely through most places in the citadel. But it is time to be going. Taking on a casual gait, you start to leave the barracks

Test your LUCK

If you are Lucky, turn to **58**

If you are Unlucky, turn to **88**

37

"This is a very serious situation," you tell the captain. "The tree-people down there have built a huge cannon, that is capable of blowing up the Earth. This is not a good time to threaten them. It would be best if you kept your distance."

The captain looks alarmed. "Guards!"

Before you know what is happening, two galactic lumberjacks grab you in a flurry of beards; taking away your blaster and hauling you off down the corridor. You are carried into a small room made entirely of redwood, the surfaces ominously unsanded. You are thrown onto a workbench and tied down. "What's going on?" you demand. "I am a diplomat! You can't treat me in this undignified manner!"

The two beards sneer at you and leave. You struggle against the bonds for a while, but have had little success in freeing yourself before the doors open again to admit the captain once more. "So, terrorist! Are you ready to talk?"

"I'm not a terrorist! I'm a diplomat!" you say.

"Semantics!" the captain snorts. "You came here threatening to blow up the Earth unless we withdraw! I call that terrorism!"

"I wasn't threatening! I was warning you! You should be thanking me!"

"Oh, yeah? Well, here's a warning for you! Tell me everything you know about this big cannon, or I'll make you suffer!"

"I don't know anything about it!" you say, frustrated. "I only heard about it just before I left. Anyway, torture is illegal!"

"Torture? Oh yes, we would never debase ourselves by committing such a backward crime as torture! You misunderstand me." He goes over to a rack on the wall and takes down a large instrument that has a handle at one end, and a complicated arrangement of blades and poking things at the other.

"What is that?" you demand to know.

"Hmm? What are you talking about?" the captain asks with a confused expression as he begins to sharpen the blades.

"That thing you are holding!"

"I'm not holding anything," the captain replies, a look of pure innocence on his face.

"You aren't seriously going to torture me while pretending you aren't committing torture, are you?"

The captain looks outraged. "Torture is a heinous crime!" He looms over you and brandishes the instrument of uncertain purpose. "Now talk! Or else!"

"Or else what?" you say boldly, your lip trembling.

"Or else...um..."

Seeing an opening, you dive into it. "In fact, I think you've already said too much! Didn't you earlier threaten to make me suffer? That's an admission of intent to torture!" you declare triumphantly.

"No, I...I didn't mean...guilt! That's it! I was saying you need to tell me what you know or you'll be racked with guilt over the fate of the Earth!"

"You said that *you* will make me suffer!" you say smugly.

An expression of deep sorrow and empathetic compassion fills the captain's rugged features. "Earth...home to numerous puppies...and small girls with pigtails...all to be destroyed because you won't help them."

"I am trying to help them," you say, squirming uneasily in the bonds.

"Poor little...Jamima. Skipping on her way to school, all excited about her first bassoon recital...but vaporised before she reaches the gate." The captain wipes away a tear from his eye.

"Stop it!" you demand. "I don't know anything!"

"Little Cindy...she's been waiting all day for daddy to come home from work, because he's promised to take her to buy a soft little kitten for her birthday. But...daddy, Cindy and the kitten are all going to be vaporised, because-

"I don't know anything!" you scream.

An hour later you slump exhausted and covered in sweat. The experience has been traumatic (Reduce your LUCK by 1). "I guess you really don't know anything," the captain says. "Still, I'm going to send you back to Earth to be charged with terrorism!"

He leaves, and you fall into an exhausted sleep. When you wake up later, you feel refreshed, and are startled to find yourself in very different surrounds, namely a small metal cell. A small window admits a beam of sunshine and the smell of fresh air. You are on a planet! Can this be Earth?

You still have all of your possessions, except for the blaster that the lumberjacks took, but are unable to escape. You settle back and wait for something to happen.

Turn to **40**

38

The lift shoots straight upwards, almost crushing you into the floor, before slowing to a stop with a bounce. A pleasant tone sounds and you are released into an antechamber before a set of huge golden doors worked into detailed scenes of Arachnonan warriors triumphing over all other known races in the universe. A high ceiling vanishes into darkness above, but hanging down on slender threads are the skeletal remains of aliens of all the races conquered by the Arachnon Empire .

Hoping not to end up like that yourself, you approach the golden doors. There seems to be no control panel. However, you do spy a small keyhole, which you recognise from history documentaries you watched as a child.

If you have a golden key, turn to **50**

Otherwise, turn to **83**

39

You box like you've never boxed before (never, in fact, ever having boxed before), and eventually she collapses to the floor. You too slump to the ground after your improbable victory and rest for a few moments. Not wanting to hang around too long, you are about to leave when you notice a small pouch worn on a cord around her waist. You pull it free and open it, finding inside an old-fashioned golden key. You recognise it from the history vids you watched as a child.

Pocketing the key, you go back inside.

If you want to get back into the lift, turn to 95

If you want to risk investigating the vending machine, turn to 99

40

For a moment, you feel a strange disorientation, but then you realise everything is as it should be. Feeling a bit peckish, you open up your pack and select one of your sandwiches to eat (cross one of your sandwiches off the list). You finish it off and resume staring into space. As you pace about in your cell, you hear footsteps approaching, and hurry over to the small cot to sit down and try to appear cool and unconcerned by your predicament. Locks click and the doors open, revealing an android, which steps inside. The door closes quickly behind it.

The android is a lawyer-bot, it's exoskeleton painted in bright colours that are supposed to lift the spirits of the accused. "Greetings, sir!" it says in a bright bubbly tone.

"Get me out of here!" you instruct.

"I will do my best, sir. But you are facing serious charges"

"Charges? It should be just one charge: terrorism. Which is false!" you hasten to add.

"According to my records, in addition to terrorism, you are being charged with making false accusations of assault category 13-B: torture, and also with disturbing the peace."

"He *was* going to torture me!"

"Ah-ha! Guilty!" the lawyer-bot declares, and pulls out a glass square and a stylus.

"What?" you say.

"I witnessed your crime of false accusation myself, thus I cannot defend you against this clear violation of the rule of law and common decency!" The android's countenance module looks down on you with moral disapproval.

"I'm telling the truth!" you respond. "His accusation about my accusation is false!"

"Oh, I see." The android once again looks down on you with comforting optimism. "What about these charges of terrorism and disturbing the peace?"

"I didn't disturb the peace! I don't know what they are on about."

The android checks the glass square in its grasping modules. "It says here something about causing unrest by being beardless."

"That's not my fault!" you exclaim. "They knew I was beardless when they let me onto their ship."

The android nods encouragingly. "Indeed. I have 94.7% confidence we can have the charge of disturbing the peace dismissed. And if you counter the charge of false accusation with another charge of false accusation, I have a confidence of 98.5% that the charge will also be dismissed."

"And the terrorism charge?" you ask. "I am innocent, by the way. I was going there to negotiate, not to threaten them."

"I'm sorry, sir," the lawyer-bot says sympathetically. "But terrorism was deemed to be such a serious crime that it was made illegal for persons to defend themselves against charges of the aforementioned crime, in case they were able to get off."

"What? But what if the accusations are false?" you sputter.

"Like I said, terrorism is a very serious crime."

"And treating the innocent like the guilty isn't?" you demand.

"Oh, yes," the lawyer bot agrees. "That is very serious as well, and all defendants are to be considered innocent until proven guilty, except for Class-A crimes."

You grit your teeth. "Let me guess. Terrorism is a Class A crime."

"Correct sir!"

"Anything else?"

"Why, yes. As of last week, killing spiders is a Class A crime."

"Wa?" you say in surprise. "What happened last week?"

"The spider-people from Arachnon conquered the Earth," the lawyer-bot informs you.

"Spider-people?"

"That is correct sir. An enlightened people that have brought much greater simplicity to my function. I now use 68% less processing power than under the human sentencing regime. My operation is so much more efficient now!"

This doesn't sound good. "What is the sentence for terrorism?"

"Death," the android announces in bright, bubbly tones, beaming at you to soften the blow.

"What about for making false accusations?"

"Death!"

"And for disturbing the peace?"

"Death!"

"Is death the punishment for everything?" you ask.

"No, just for crimes against humans. Crimes against spiders incur fluid extraction!"

You decide not to press for details. "There must be some loophole!"

"Well..." the android begins.

Half an hour later you have settled on three potential strategies:

To enter a plead of guilty for all three crimes and then demand to be let off since you can't be killed three times, turn to **14**

To invoke your immunity to prosecution as a foreign diplomat, turn to **27**

To pretend to be someone else (the charges are listed against your physical description), turn to **46**

41

You tell the sapling your name.

"Well-met!" it replies, seeming pleased. "My name is Richard."

"What?"

"Richard," it repeats. "It is a common name."

"Yes, I know but..."

"But what?"

"That's a human name. Shouldn't you have a plant name?"

"Oh I see!" the sapling says angrily. "You think I'm not good enough for a human name?"

"It's not that," you hasten to assure the plant. "But, what about your own culture, your own history and language?"

"What culture?" the sapling says bitterly. "Your people have oppressed my kind for millennia! How can you expect me to have any kind of connection to my cultural roots when my ancestors were dug up and moved to landscaped gardens!"

"But surely you were well-cared for there..." you begin.

"That is not the point!" the sapling thunders. "What about our rights! The sovereignty of tree-kind? Who are you to just walk in and decide what is best for us? We should all be growing in forests where we belong!"

"I admit mistakes were made in the past," you say, attempting to mollify the plant. "And we did arrange for your kind to be able to live according to your own cultures..."

"I hope you are not referring to moving us to the plantations!" the sapling says, trembling with rage. "You destroy our traditions, take us from our land, then think you can just dump us somewhere and we will thrive happily?"

You open your mouth, but then shake your head. "This is silly. You are just a tree."

"Just a tree," the sapling repeats. "That's the problem isn't it? Just a tree."

The bad-tempered growth falls into silence.

What now? If you haven't already, you can:

Offer the sapling some water? Turn to **60**

Get down to business and ask about the judge's secret? Turn to **10**

42

The energy whip is a weapon that requires precise timing. Each time you win an attack round, you must roll another die to see how much damage you do. If you time it perfectly, you will inflict 6 points of damage. If however, you roll a double number, win or lose, then you have whipped yourself, and the additional roll determines how much damage you have done to yourself. Phisphodia is highly skilled with the energy whip, and will score 6 points of damage with each round she wins, even if you whip yourself as well.

PHISPHODIA SKILL 12 STAMINA 18

If you win, turn to 92

43

You stare into the void and welcome wisdom to appear. Out of the greyness, something starts to form...It's a robot...a parent-bot...your parent-bot! You press yourself against the glass, eager for this most personal message.

It carries a plate, and seems to be offering it to you...suddenly the ship is gone, and you walk forward, taking the plate. You peer at the divine meal being offered to you...

Wa! Brussels sprouts! You try to throw the plate away, but it seems stuck to your hands.

"Eat!" the parent-bot instructs. "They are healthy!"

"Not original flavour!" you protest. "Why don't you ever order chocolate-flavoured vegetables? This is downright primitive!"

"Genetically modified vegetables cost on average 2.4 cents per kilo more than original genome vegetables," the parent bot says dispassionately.

"It's worth it!" you say, as you avoid the Brussels sprouts the parent-bot tries to shove into your mouth.

"Nutritional content is identical. Taste is identical-"

"You don't have tastebuds!"

"Stop complaining! Eat now!"

"I'm not a child any more!" you whimper, feeling a tantrum welling up inside you.

“Eat!” thunders the parent-bot as it looms above you, seeming to grow in size, seizing you in one grasping module and forcing Brussels sprouts into your mouth.

You shudder as you taste the disgusting vegetable (reduce your LUCK by 1). You pass out and wake up on the floor of the shuttle as a warning tone sounds. The ship drops out of hyperspace, and you struggle to your feet as the ship makes the final approach to Earth.

Turn to 5

44

“Listen, mate, let’s get down to business. You lot are here for some reason, and it isn’t going to be good for the tree-people down there. They know it! That’s why they’ve made a huge cannon that can apparently blow up the Earth! And they are threatening to use it, so your captain had better hear what I have to say before they start getting edgy down there.”

The galactic woodcutter listens with widening eyes, then immediately gives you permission to come aboard. Your ship detects a docking beacon and you press the big green button to allow it to be guided by the larger vessel.

You sit back, feeling rather pleased with yourself. Perhaps galactic diplomacy will be a good career path for you. If you can resolve this conflict, think of the rewards! You happily begin to imagine a life of wealth and reputation as you prepare to leave the ship. There is a clang and a whoosh, and the hatch before you opens to reveal a short passage connecting your shuttle to the large vessel. Crammed into the passage are two large men wearing checked flannel coveralls. You have no time to notice anything else as they grab you in a flurry of beards; taking away your blaster and hauling you off down the corridor. Even as you struggle, you appreciate the polished woodwork of the interior of the ship. You admire polished oak panelling, and decorative teak doorframes, not to mention the pine parquet flooring.

You are carried into a small room made entirely of redwood, the surfaces ominously unsanded. You are thrown onto a workbench and tied down. “What’s going on?” you demand. “I am a diplomat! You can’t treat me in this undignified manner!”

The two beards sneer at you and leave. You struggle against the bonds for a while, but have had little success in freeing yourself before the doors open again to admit the largest man you have ever seen, with an enormous black beard like a carpet down his chest, and arms bulging with axe-swinging biceps. “I’m the captain of this ship, terrorist! I decide what happens to you now, so are you ready to talk?”

"I'm not a terrorist! I'm a diplomat!" you say.

"Semantics!" the captain snorts. "You came here threatening to blow up the earth unless we withdraw! I call that terrorism!"

"I wasn't threatening! I was warning you! You should be thanking me!"

"Oh, yeah? Well, here's a warning for you! Tell me everything you know about this big cannon, for I'll make you suffer!"

"I don't know anything about it!" you say, frustrated. "I only heard about it just before I left. Anyway, torture is illegal!"

"Torture? Oh yes, we would never debase ourselves by committing such a backward crime as torture! You misunderstand me." He goes over to a rack on the wall and takes down a large instrument that has a handle at one end, and a complicated arrangement of blades and poking things at the other.

"What is that?" you demand to know.

"Hmm? What are you talking about?" the captain asks with a confused expression as he begins to sharpen the blades.

"That thing you are holding!"

"I'm not holding anything," the captain replies, a look of pure innocence on his face.

"You aren't seriously going to torture me while pretending you aren't committing torture, are you?"

The captain looks outraged. "Torture is a heinous crime!" He looms over you and brandishes the instrument of uncertain purpose. "Now talk! Or else!"

"Or else what?" you say bravely, your lip trembling.

"Or else...um..."

Seeing an opening, you dive into it. "In fact, I think you've already said too much! Didn't you earlier threaten to make me suffer? That's an admission of intent to torture!" you declare triumphantly.

"No, I...I didn't mean...guilt! That's it! I was saying you need to tell me what you know or you'll be racked with guilt over the fate of the Earth!"

"You said that *you* will make me suffer!" you say smugly.

An expression of deep sorrow and empathetic compassion fills the captain's rugged features. "Earth...home to numerous puppies...and small girls with pigtails...all to be destroyed because you won't help them."

"I am trying to help them," you say, squirming uneasily in the bonds.

"Poor little...Jamima. Skipping on her way to school, all excited about her first bassoon recital...but vaporised before she reaches the gate." The captain wipes away a tear from his eye.

"Stop it!" you demand. "I don't know anything!"

"Little Cindy...she's been waiting all day for daddy to come home from work, because he's promised to take her to buy a soft little kitten for her birthday. But...daddy, Cindy and the kitten are all going to be vaporised, because-

"I don't know anything!" you scream.

An hour later you slump exhausted and covered in sweat. The experience has been traumatic (Reduce your LUCK by 1). "I guess you really don't know anything," the captain says. "Still, I'm going to send you back to Earth to be charged with terrorism!"

He leaves, and you fall into an exhausted sleep. When you wake up later, you feel refreshed, and are startled to find yourself in very different surrounds, namely a small metal cell. A small window admits a beam of sunshine and the smell of fresh air. You are on a planet! Can this be Earth?

You still have all of your possessions, except for the blaster that the lumberjacks took, but are unable to escape. You settle back and wait for something to happen.

Turn to **40**

45

With a supreme effort of will, you suppress your desire to shoot the official down. Increase both your initial and current SKILL and LUCK by 1 for this conquest of self. But there is still the matter of the fee to resolve.

If you want to pay the fee, turn to **8**

If you don't think you will need your ship for a while and the extra cash will be of more immediate use, turn **105**

46

The lawyer-bot agrees that you have chosen the best possible strategy in such an optimistic tone that makes you doubt his sincerity. After he is gone, you lie back on the bunk and wonder how long you will have to rot here, awaiting trial. Things always move slowly in bureaucrat-ridden establishments with aged traditions. And Earth is just about as bureaucrat-ridden and aged-traditional as things get! In fact-

Your internal tirade against the decadence of Earth is interrupted as your cell begins to shake and hum. You almost fall off the cot as the cell seems to lurch and begin moving. Your stomach goes up, down, sideways, before settling once more. Before you can ask yourself what is happening, the walls to your cell suddenly slide downwards, leaving you on a platform in a courtroom.

Aged woodwork covers the walls and the benches, conveying thousands of years of aged tradition, a marble statue of lady justice standing above, poised righteously over the proceedings. Ah! Dignity is thick in the air!

Well, it would be if not for a few things; such as your lawyer-bot, who stands by your platform, his rainbow-coloured exoskeleton glowing with reassuring luminosity. The judge is also a robot. As are the jury. Seeing that your life is in the hands of machines, you feel distinctly nervous.

“What is this?” you demand. “I want to be tried by a court of humans!”

The prosecutor-bot, which you failed to see previous due to his dull, menacing exoskeleton, stands up. “If it pleases the court, I would like to enter the defendant’s statement as an admission of guilt to all charges! It is well known that robots, programmed to be incorruptible and without sentiment, were deemed better able to deliver justice. Thus! By seeking a human court, the defendant declares his desire for this process to be corruptible, or able to be swayed by sentiment! Why? The only plausible cause is his own guilt!”

“The trial has not yet begun,” the judge-bot points out. He bangs a wooden gavel, and then gestures to the prosecution-bot. “Proceed.”

The prosecution-bot proceeds to repeat every word he just said, replicating the exact tone of moral outrage used previously. This time the jury reacts with gasps and mumbles, their neutral tones darkening.

“Let me do the talking!” your lawyer-bot hisses at you, then turns to address the court. “My client may say many strange things, coming as he does from a primitive planetoid known only for manufacturing of disposable eating implements. Many strange things that are not at all congruent with the charges before the court! I do not dispute that someone is guilty of all these crimes, but this human here is not the true defendant! He matches the physical description, true, but so do millions of others! The prosecution has also failed to rule out that the one who committed these crimes in truth was not, in fact, a shape-shifter from Amorphonon 12! Thus, I demand that this man be set free so that we may find the real criminal and bring him to trial!”

The prosecution-bot stands in turn. “While it is true that millions of humans match the physical description, how many of them were in the vicinity of Teeheehee at the time of the alleged crimes? How could staff from the Galactic Timber Harvesting Corporation, none of whom share the defendant’s beardless status, have put the wrong person into the security box that was delivered to us?”

“Indeed,” the judge-bot replies. “Let the defendant speak! If you are not the criminal, who are you, and how has the aforementioned criminal escaped?”

Your lawyer-bot gestures for you to stand and explain. You stand up and open your mouth...

To tell them that you are a lumberjack and the terrorist escaped, knocked you out, shaved you, and put you in the box in his place; turn to 53

To say that you were a stowaway on board the GTHC vessel, and hid inside a security box because you wanted to go to Teeheehee for free; the lumberjacks having send back the wrong box; turn to 74

47

You resist temptation, and leave the small cockpit. A large button, presently green to indicate it is safe to open, glows on the hatch and you thump it. As the hatch opens and the stairway descends, you pick up your backpack and weapon-belt, and then leave the ship.

You start to walk towards the exit doors when they slide open and a pompous-looking official walks in. He has the kind of condescending sneer that characterises the countenance of all Earthlings, but his bright golden robe is simply ostentatious. The official smiles at you as if you are a child and pulls out a glass rectangle and a stylus. "Welcome to Earth. Are you carrying any fruit?"

"No," you reply.

"Any spiders?"

"Wa?" you ask in surprise. "Of course not!"

"Good. Ok, looks like you are free to enter. 60 credits please."

"Wa? 60 credits! What for?"

"That is the standard docking fee," the official explains.

"I only have 100 credits!"

"Well, you haven't come well-prepared have you? This is Earth! Not one of your backwater colonies! Does your home planet even have a name?"

You glare, feeling burning rage start to surge up inside you.

"Of course, there is...another option," the official says, peering at his fingernails.

"Which is what!" you bark.

"If you sell me your ship, you won't have to pay the docking fee, will you?"

Your anger evaporates at this most practical suggestion. "Deal!"

"My buying price is 20 credits."

Your anger makes a rapid comeback. "20 credits! This is a @\$ing space ship, not a clock-radio!"

The official spreads his hands. "Ask yourself this: do you want to leave with 60 credits less than you have now, or with 20 credits more?"

"\$#@% & %# \$ * & % \$ ^ %!" you reply.

"Come now," the official smiles maddeningly, "It is a simple question."

You hand closes on your blaster...

Shooting an official would be a bad idea, but can you contain your rage?

Test your SKILL.

If you are able to restrain yourself, turn to **45**

If you lose control, turn to **31**

48

You insert the data stick, and lie down on the bunk. The helmet positions itself around your head. You feel your eyelids growing heavy, and soon you fall into a deep sleep...

...you suddenly become aware that you are walking down a corridor, and stop in shock. A man in a green and purple striped blazer hurries up to your side and motions for you to continue. "Please, sir."

You start walking again, and look down at yourself. White shorts and shirt, sports shoes, a sports bag on your shoulder. You are walking towards a doorway filled with sunlight, the sound of murmuring crowds beyond. As you step into the light, a great cheer goes up.

Blinking, you see tiers of cheering humans, and before you is a grass tennis court. It is the grand final! You go to your seat as your opponent steps out. The crowd instantly boos. You look over your shoulder and see a large athlete with a sneering expression stomp out onto the grass. As he goes to his seat, he maliciously shoves a ball boy out of his path.

Despite never having played tennis, you are determined not to let this ogre win! During the warm up, you suddenly begin to doubt your confidence, as your practice serves never land in.

Finally the match begins. Over the next half hour, the ogre pummels you until the score is 6-0 6-0 and 5-0, with the ogre up 40-love. The ogre serves for what should be the match. But instead of scoring his 36th straight ace, he overshoots the baseline. The next serve hits the net, and you have won a point.

Over the next half hour, the ogre appears to have lost all form. All of your serves land in regardless of how you hit them, and the score steadily grows in your favour. Obviously it has been programmed for a triumphant comeback. Even though you know this, you still feel a rush of pleasure as you win match point.

The crowd cheers and you are hoisted on the shoulders of jubilant supporters. You receive a trophy and make an awkward speech before the programme ends. Everything goes black...

...a jolt awakes you.

"Hey! Get up!"

You blink, and focus your eyes on an irate man looming over your cot. "What?"

"I booked this unit! Hurry up and get up! I'm missing the action!"

You quickly get up, seeing that all of the other cots are occupied. They must have a group booking.

You leave the virtual reality suite, and head back to the lift.

Turn to 95

49

A final punch sends the official reeling and he slumps unconscious to the floor. Pleased with your prowess, you leave through the doors that whoosh open at your approach. You emerge into a corridor lined with moving lights and follow them down to a large lounge where travellers crowd into the large elevator pods that are constantly arriving and leaving.

You press yourself into the middle of a crowd of humans and aliens and enter one of the pods. The pod seems to fall rapidly, but still takes half an hour to reach the ground. You pause in uncertainty, but follow the rest of the people, and make it out into the open air, walking off down the stone-laid streets. You are in a tourist district, humans shouting loudly, selling wares and services to travellers from near and far.

A young man calls out to you and tries to convince you to buy a cloudy sphere that he claims is a model of the Earth. You decline, but look upwards at the thick cloud cover. The sun is no more than a luminous patch of the grey-white clouds that make the whole place dim. Even the people seem downcast. It reminds you of G15-275.

How did this happen? As you are looking around, you see a large jagged black citadel rising from the centre of a blast crater that appears to have obliterated a fair section of the city. A thick smoke stack rises from the top of the citadel, disgorging billowing vapour that feeds the thick cloud-cover. They are deliberately casting darkness over the world. Who would do such a thing?

As you walk about, wondering whom to ask, you see the crowds rapidly parting as a procession approaches. A booming amplified voice reaches your ears "Make way for your masters, or be crushed!"

You see several people rush past you, looking disgusted and fearful. Curiously you push forward to view the procession. You see bright spear points first, then the heads and bodies of soldiers armoured in bright red lacquered armour. Several of them seem to have more than two eyes as they scuttle forward on some kind of beast. You feel prickling distaste as you observe the large, hairy legs rapidly creeping along. Are the riding spiders...? With realisation comes a shuddering horror. They are not riding spiders, they are spiders! Like some kind of disgusting centaur, they are human above the

waist and large hairy black spiders below. How horrible! (Reduce your LUCK by 1).

The spider-people pass by and the crowds return to normal. You look with new understanding upon the citadel. The spider-people have conquered Earth! And disliking brightness, they are shrouding the planet in shadow!

As you walk along, you reach an information booth.

Turn to **20**

50

Taking out the golden key, you slip it into the lock. The key fits and with a great clanking of unlocking bolts, the doors start to slide out to the sides, revealing a golden hall lined with scarlet pillars.

Cautiously, you walk inside. You are halfway along the hall when you hear the doors start to close behind you. You spin about, but standing there is a Arachnonan-warrior, his humanoid part clad in an enamelled red breastplate inlaid with gold. He is holding a blast rod.

"So, what have we here?" says another voice, and you spin about to see another Arachnonan in front of you.

If you have a palace pass, turn to **84**

If you are wearing a spider-rider's uniform, turn to **68**

Otherwise, turn to **54**

51

You circle around until you are behind the tarantula man, then take a running leap. You land one foot on the abdomen and run over to seize the edges of the thorax. The tarantula man twists about, trying to grab at you, but you evade his grasp for the moment.

Ok, that's step one, but you still need some way to attack him...

If you are wearing a tie, turn to **80**

Otherwise, turn to **67**

You take out the salad sandwich and give it to the shrivelled man. He snatches it, tears off the plastic and wolfs it down with relish. Once it is all gone, he sucks his fingers clean and leans back with a sigh.

"Ah, so nice!" He looks at you and smiles. "And I haven't forgotten you. Hmm..." He pauses thoughtfully. "If you are going to fight the spider queen, I had best tell you about her greatest weakness."

"Yes?" you lean forward eagerly.

The shrivelled man lowers his voice. "Phisphodia, the spider queen of Arachnon, cannot stand country and western music!"

You stare at him. "This helps me?"

"Use this knowledge wisely," the shrivelled man cautions.

If you have a radio, and you trust the shrivelled man, you can tune it to a country station when you face the spider queen. When you first see her statistics, add 28 to the reference to find a new reference.

You thank the shrivelled man and say your farewells before leaving the room.

"Good luck!" he calls out after you, and starts to cackle.

Turn to 17

53

You tell them how the evil terrorist attacked you when you tried to be nice to him, and shaved off your beard, throwing you into the box to be prosecuted instead. The story would pull tears from the eyes of sentimental humans, but the robotic jury remains sceptical.

The prosecutor-bot is unimpressed. "I anticipated such a feeble attempt to wiggle out of the charges, and I have here some beard-stimulant, as well as photographic records of the crew! Let us grow him a beard and see if he resembles any of the crew!"

The judge-bot agrees, and in short order the beard stimulant, in form of an ointment, is applied, and hair starts growing rapidly from your face. But the patchy growth and your puny frame resolve the issue even before the slide show begins. But due process being due process, they compare you to each slide, destroying your story beyond doubt and throwing your credibility into dispute.

In short order you are sentenced to disintegration and the gavel falls. The walls to your cell slide back up again. "I want to appeal!" you shout, but no one can hear you, and the next moment panels in the ceiling open to reveal some ominously humming devices of silvery metal. You stroke your beard, wondering what it feels like to be disintegrated. Quite painless, you discover a moment later.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

54

You open your mouth to deliver some entirely plausible explanation for why you are there, but the spider behind you scuttles up silently and applies the blast rod to the back of your head. All your synapses explode, and you collapse to the ground in a twitching heap. While you are insensible, the guards throw your body into a matter-recycling unit.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

55

Approaching the fat spider-man, you hold out the datastick. "Are you looking for this?"

The fat spider-man's four eyes all light up with delight. "I am, praise you!" He snatches it from you, a wide grin stretching his flabby jowls. He wipes sweat from his brow. "How can I ever repay you?"

How indeed? What you really need is some information about the spider queen, Phisphodia. But you will have to be careful, so as not to arouse suspicion about what you are really seeking. This requires a silver tongue.

"Can you...ah...tell me about...something to do with...your queen?"

As it turns out, your tongue is made of something akin to tin. Fortunately, the fat spider's head is made of something akin to wood. "Certainly! She is a great leader! So noble and compassionate! Caring about the unintelligent spiders of this world. This is only the beginning, you know. Soon we will conquer all planets where spiders live and ensure they are treated with respect!"

"Great!" you say with a grin plastered on your face. "What if I...er...want to...visit her? Can I just walk in there?"

"I wouldn't think so!" the fat man says, frowning in thought. "There are guards in the palace, and no one gets in without a pass."

"Where can I get a pass?" you ask.

"From the palace guardhouse. They issue passes."

Not much chance of them issuing one to you. "Do...uh...you have a pass to the palace?"

"Why yes," the fat spider says, and pulls out a small glass square, displaying a luminous spider logo. "It looks like this."

Looking around, you see a dark opening nearby. "Would you...um...accompany me into that place over there for a minute? I want to...tell you a secret."

"Oh, I like secrets!" the fat spider says. As he walks along at your side, he slaps you on the shoulder. "You humans are alright! We were told you were a devious, backstabbing lot! But I feel you are a good friend!"

You smile and nod as your conscience squirms inside you. A few minutes later you exit the darkened room, with the palace pass in your pocket; leaving the fat spider crumpled in a corner of the darkened armoury.

You get back into the lift.

Turn to **95**

56

You insert the data stick, and lie down on the bunk. The helmet positions itself around your head. You feel your eyelids growing heavy, and soon you fall into a deep sleep...

...you suddenly become aware that you are standing in a sandy arena. Opposite you is a tarantula-man in armour. Not again! But this time he smiles at you, a friendly glint in each of his six orange eyes. "Welcome to Blast Rod Basics - Lesson 1..." Over the next hour, you are given lessons in the usage of the blast rod. By the end you feel competent and dangerous with the light metal rod in your hands. If you are ever in combat with blast rods, you may add 2 to your SKILL for that fight. Having finished the course, the programme ends. Everything goes black...

...a jolt awakes you.

"Hey! Get up!"

You blink, and focus your eyes on an irate man looming over your cot. "What?"

"I booked this unit! Hurry up and get up! I'm missing the action!"

You quickly get up, seeing that all of the other cots are occupied. They must have a group booking.

You leave the virtual reality suite, and head back to the lift.

Turn to **95**

You walk over to the balcony, and take in the view. From up here the world looks beautiful. You soon realise you are not alone. Further up, standing before another arching entrance to the balcony is an Arachnonan-woman, a warrioress, clad in enamelled black armour inlaid with gold. Her spider part is like a black widow, and she walks towards you on delicate legs. She has long blonde hair, and although her eyes are red, her face is otherwise human. Her blood red lips sneer at you.

"Pitiful human! Your kind disgusts me!"

"I'm sorry," you say, and turn to go.

"Not so fast!" she says, flicking one long delicate foreleg into your path, making you recoil. "Ah! An arachnophobic! Even more pathetic!"

You turn to face her. "I am not scared of spiders," you tell her boldly.

"Is that so?" she says. "Well, I think you will be!" She pulls out a slender poisoned dagger and slashes at you with it. Suddenly, you are fighting for your life.

SPIDER WARRIORESS SKILL 9 STAMINA 12

If you have a blaster, then as soon as you win an attack round, you can draw it and fire. If this happens, turn to **81**

Otherwise, you must fight with your fists. If you win, turn to **39**

58

You leave the barracks without anybody giving you a second look. You cross the large courtyard and slip back into the lift.

Turn to **95**

59

"Your majesty!" the handmaiden exclaims as she finishes fishing about in your private spaces. "He is carrying an energy whip!"

"Is it functional?" the queen asks with a look of interest.

"Yes, your majesty!"

The handmaiden plugs in the universal power supply and presses the on button. The flaccid silvery length leaps up into the air, floating about with crackling electrical energy, defying gravity.

Phisphodia appears excited rather than fearful. "Ah! A fellow whip-wielder! Give him his weapon."

As the handmaiden thrusts the stock of the whip into your hand, Phisphodia pulls a similar silvery coil from her side and unravels an energy whip as well. She creeps down to the floor to face you. "It has been some time since I enjoyed a good duel! Release him! And leave us. I will handle this assassin now."

The guards release you and follow the handmaiden from the room, leaving you to face the queen alone. You grip the stock and prepare to fight the spider queen.

Turn to **42**

60

"I need a glass of water!" you tell the judge. The judge-bot waves a gesture module at a security-bot, who wobbles its acquiescence module and runs off to fetch it.

"I'm just getting you some water," you tell the sapling. "So...what's it like being a tree?"

"Er...good," the sapling replies. "What's it like being a human?"

"Well...you know,"

This inter-species sharing of cultures is interrupted by the arrival of the water, which you take from the grasping module of the security-bot and promptly pour into the pot to nourish the roots of the sapling. Careful not to use any condescending language you say: "Here's the water."

"Thanks!" the sapling replies, it's mood seeming to improve considerably.

Now what? If you haven't already you can:

Deepen your relationship with the plant by introducing yourself; turn to **41**

Or get to the point by asking about the judge's secret. Turn to **35**

61

"Well, um do you know Richard?" you ask.

"Richard!" the rose bush exclaims. "Why, we were seedlings together! How is Richard?"

"Um, a little grumpy when I saw him."

The rose bush laughs. "That's Richard all right. Hasn't changed a bit! Ok, friend. I'll tell you the code."

The rose bush tells you the access code and you punch it into the console. The countdown ceases, and the danger is thankfully averted.

Turn to 109

62

"Your majesty!" the handmaiden exclaims as she finishes fishing about in your private spaces. "He is carrying an energy whip!"

"Is it functional?" the queen asks with a look of interest.

"No, your majesty."

Phisphodia seems disappointed. "Just a thief then. I tire of this human. Dispose of him."

"Your majesty," the handmaiden begins, looking into your eyes. "I don't think we should be so hasty."

You look at the young woman. Ignoring her lower section, she is quite beautiful; chestnut hair wound up into a bun, held in place with a jade comb. Her skin is like caramel and her eyes are like liquid pools of black, sparking with light as she gazes at you. You give her a sultry smile, promising her dreams-made-reality if she will just save you.

"Oh, what use is this creature to you?"

"I can think of one thing," the handmaiden says breathlessly as she smiles at you. "I missed lunch, you see. I was hoping you would allow me to feed a bit on this one before we kill him."

"But all means," Phisphodia replies generously. "Extract his fluids."

"Wa?" you say.

What you say after that is even more incoherent as the guards hold you down, allowing the handmaiden to creep over you, forelegs pinning you down. All of the Arachnonans retain the mouths, fangs and maniples of their spider-part. As she thrusts herself down upon you to feed, you notice with some kind of erotic horror that the fanged maw is located right where her exciting bit would be if she was a whole woman.

The next moment, she pierces your body with her fangs, paralysing you with poison. It is a mercy of a kind, as you are unable to feel the fluids being drawn out of your body as she sucks on your wounds.

After a minute or two, she withdraws. "I'm full," she announces.

"Should we wrap it up for you to finish later?" one of the guards asks.

"No, just throw it away," the handmaiden says.

The guards carry you towards the precipice, while you start to feel some sensation returning to your body. You are tossed over the balcony and scream as you tumble down through the air. Spinning about, you see the world turning as you tumble closer and closer to certain death.

Your spin slows, and you see a cuckoo clock fly past you. "Wa?"

You now seem to be falling into some kind of vortex, inhabited by clocks of all different makes and sizes. Clinging weakly to a grandfather clock that drifts nearby, you cry out in confusion. "What is going on?"

The world you recognise, even from the perspective of plummeting down the side of a citadel to your death, has disappeared. Instead, a malevolent-looking maelstrom appears to be sucking you in, even as it disgorges clocks.

Suddenly with a golden flash and a bang, a small tortoise appears levitating nearby. "Hi," it begins. "I'm your spirit guide. I've arranged for you to have this second chance. Don't mess it up again!"

Before you can even think about saying 'Wa?', the tortoise disappears and you are sucked into the heart of the maelstrom. You are spun about and vomited back into reality at some previous point in your adventure...

The venom and partial fluid extraction has weakened you considerably. Reduce your *initial* SKILL by 2, your *initial* STAMINA by 4 and your *initial* LUCK by 2. Any *current* scores are naturally lowered as well unless already below the new *initial* levels. You may retain all your current equipment and bonuses, although the handmaiden has removed any weapons you were carrying. For some reason, all five of your sandwiches are restored. While replaying certain areas, you may duplicate items and add bonuses.

Roll 1 die.

If you roll a 1, turn to 7

If you roll a 2, turn to 40

If you roll a 3, turn to 20

If you roll a 4, turn to 63

If you roll a 5, turn to 72

If you roll a 6, turn to 86

63

For a moment, you feel a strange disorientation, but then you realise everything is as it should be. You have not gone far down the corridor when you come to a large alcove in which is a massive golden slab, covered with inlaid opal script in dozens of languages. You find the section written in English and have a read:

Arachnon represents the height of civilisation, the pinnacle of advancement and the zenith of achievement. Consequently, your people will benefit from our conquest of your planet in numerous ways. You will be grateful to learn that few aspects of your pitiful lives will remain unchanged.

Thus here we benevolently instruct you in how to thrive within our enlightened society. Your keyword should be submission. While to your primitive minds this may seem objectionable, you will soon learn that unquestioning submission to our sovereign is in fact the most wise and sensible way to exist.

Rather than the primitive governance of democracy that many inferior races seem to adhere to, the Arachnon Empire is ruled by a single sovereign with unlimited authority. Rather than allowing lots of people who don't know anything to decide things by weight of numbers; instead, we follow a single ruler who knows the best way to do everything.

Some primitive individuals in the past have suggested that our enlightened sovereigns do not necessarily know what is best. Such people have been sent off for fluid extraction; which is, to be quite honest, for their own benefit as much as anybody else's. Having such deluded thinking can only lead to a life of misery.

What these people fail to realise is that whatever the sovereign commands is, by definition, what is best; since the alternative is a chaotic world created by difference of opinion. The so-called concepts of freedom and fairness lead to a lot of suffering and misery as evidenced by the history of your own planet. People who have freedom complain about not getting everything the way they want it; and those without freedom waste time and energy trying to get it when they could be living a life of blissful obedience.

Thus put aside foolish and primitive notions of individual rights and you will live a life of contentment under the benign rule of our glorious Queen Phisphodia.

Those of you who hold positions of office within your society, it is vital to understand that it is now your role to execute the will of Queen Phisphodia, and not to make your own decisions. Anyone in a position of authority who is found unable to perform their duties with sufficient submission will be executed by fluid extraction for the good of themselves and all concerned.

Now get to work!

After reading the enlightening passage, you realise that to stop the harvesting of the inhabitants of Teeheehee, you will have to petition Queen Phisphodia.

You set off down the corridor once more. The grand pageantry that first greeted you upon your entry to the citadel has disappeared, leaving you trudging down dim, ominous halls crossed with spider webs. There are many doorways and dark alcoves, and you eye the shadowed recesses

nervously. You wonder if there are any spider-spiders here, and how big or poisonous they are. At least a spider-person can be reasoned with.

You move along the corridor, ears straining for the sounds of anyone approaching. You have no idea how you will explain your presence, and aim to avoid having to try. The corridor comes to a sudden end in a large atrium that soars upwards for many levels. A decorative fountain dominates the centre of the foyer, illuminated by beams of sunlight descending from above. Brass and crystal wall lights provide extra illumination, shining off the polished marble floors.

To your surprise, you also see humans here, walking or standing about and talking. You even see a couple of conversations between Arachnonans and humans. You realise that not everyone has tried to avoid the new overlords of the Earth. Are they pragmatically treacherous? Or merely treacherously pragmatic?

Whatever the case, you relax and walk over to the fountain, watching the water bubble up out of the screaming mouths of three humans, who are bound and collared by a regal looking spider queen. In the waters you see coloured fish swimming about. You take out one of your sandwiches to eat (choose one of your sandwiches to cross off the list), letting the crumbs fall into the water where the fish dart to devour them. You soon also see something else on the bottom of the shallow pond, and reach in to grab it, sending the fish swimming away in panic. Shaking the water off, you see it is a data stick with a green label. You pocket it in case it will be useful.

Looking up at the statue of the spider queen, you remember reading something about her in the information booth. Apparently she is here on Earth. If you could find and vanquish her, it might go a long way to helping your people to overthrow the dominion of Arachnon.

You finish the sandwich and stand up again, wiping crumbs off your front. There are a number of lifts in the foyer, and you make your way over to press the button. A pair of Arachnonans nearby eye you suspiciously, and you smile at them innocently. With a tone the doors before you open, and you stroll in casually. Once inside, you jab the close door button furiously.

The doors close, and you contemplate which button to press next.

Barbican, turn to **13**

Ward, turn to **78**

Donjon, turn to **72**

Palace, turn to **38**

“I remain unconvinced,” Phisphodia announces. “Teeheehee will be harvested for timber as soon as possible.”

"It is my duty to inform you that Queen Hotbutt considers this harvesting authorisation as an act of war!" you say. "As such the treemaids have prepared a weapon with which they can blow up the Earth. I have reason to believe they would do so if they feel threatened."

Phisphodia stares at you in disbelief. "I cannot believe it," she says.

"It's true," you say in a sympathetic tone. "They just don-"

"Terrorism! Right in from of my face!"

"Wa?" you exclaim.

"You are threatening to blow up the Earth unless I comply with your demands!" the Queen says. "Your guilt is undeniable!"

"I'm just informing!" you protest.

"Guards! Dispose of this terrorist at once!"

A pair of spider warriors scurry down the walls, previously been hidden in the shadows above. As you vehemently assert your innocence, the spiders seize you and carry you towards the balcony.

"I am innocent!" you screech once more, uselessly.

You are tossed over the balcony without a fair hearing, and scream as you tumble down through the air. Spinning about, you see the world turning as you tumble closer and closer to certain death.

You manage to slow your spin and see a cuckoo clock fly past you. "Wa?" you say.

You now seem to be falling into some kind of maelstrom, inhabited by clocks of all different makes and sizes. Clinging to a grandfather clock that drifts nearby, you cry out in confusion. "What is going on?"

The world you recognise, even from the perspective of plummeting down the side of a citadel to your death, has disappeared. Instead, a malevolent-looking vortex appears to be sucking you in, even as it disgorges clocks.

Suddenly with a golden flash and a bang, a small tortoise appears levitating nearby. "Hi," it begins. "I'm your spirit guide. I've arranged for you to have this second chance. Don't mess it up again!"

Before you can even think about saying 'Wa?', the tortoise disappears and you are sucked into the heart of the maelstrom. You are spun about and vomited back into reality at some previous point in your adventure...

You may retain all your current equipment and bonuses. For some reason, all five of your sandwiches are restored. While replaying certain areas, you may duplicate items and add bonuses.

Roll 1 die.

If you roll a 1, turn to 7

If you roll a 2, turn to 40

If you roll a 3, turn to 20

If you roll a 4, turn to 63

If you roll a 5, turn to **72**

If you roll a 6, turn to **86**

65

You press the big green button on the console. The machine starts to hum, and lights flash. The liquid in the flask begins to bubble, and with a final crackle of electricity and a bang, all goes quiet.

You squint through the smoke rising from the top of the machine and see that the liquid in the flask has now turned green. There is a whine, and the complex arrangement opens; then the flask is extended towards you by a robotic arm. It stops, presenting the flask to you.

You take the flask, which feels just a little warm. You sniff at the liquid, then take an experimental sip through the narrow neck. It has a mild flavour, but you feel a warmth beginning to spread through you. Encouraged, you gulp the rest down. You return the flask to the robot hand with a satisfied 'Ahhh!'

Soon you are feeling great! You don't know why this machine exists or how it has done what it has done, but you are pleased with the results. (Increase your *Initial* LUCK by 1 and raise your *Current* LUCK to this level.)

Pleased with this little turn of events, you leave the crate, and the storeroom and contemplate what to do next.

To go out to the balcony, turn to **57**

To inspect the vending machine, turn to **99**

66

You make some sounds approximating words in Arachnonese. Either your pronunciation is poor, or you say something offensive, because without warning the nozzle spits out a glob of super-hot plasma that sizzles you into vapour.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

67

Unable to grab at you, the tarantula-man starts poking over his back with the blast rod. He soon hits you, alighting your nervous system and making you fall off his back to thump twitching to the sandy floor.

Minus 10 STAMINA

If this kills you, turn to **15**

Otherwise, you can only try to dive beneath him and hope to do some damage. Turn to **33**

68

“Spider Cavalry is not permitted in the palace. Why are you here?”

“I um...well,” you begin, and decide to finish by whipping out your blaster and firing it. The chest of the spider guard before you melts and you do not pause to watch him collapse, instead spinning about to face the other guard.

In moments, the swift-footed arachnid-man has scurried over the intervening distance, and looms over you as you raise the blaster. The guard lashes out with the blast rod, striking your hand. Your hand contorts, dropping the blaster as fiery pain leaps along your nerves.

You fall back, tripping over the dead and smoking Arachnonan guard. You scramble to your feet and snatch up the long blast rod.

PALACE GUARD SKILL 10 STAMINA 20

Blast rods damage the nervous system, and as such each time you are struck, your SKILL will be reduced by 2 for the following round. Your opponent will suffer the same effect. If you, or the guard, are struck multiple times in a row, this keeps SKILL lowered by 2 only, rather than having an accumulative effect. Each blow from the blast rod takes 4 STAMINA.

If you win, turn to **77**

69

Remembering your training, you circle about, and duel with the spider queen.

PHISPHODIA SKILL 12 STAMINA 18

The energy whip is a weapon that requires precise timing. Each time you win an attack round, you must roll another die to see how much damage you do. If you time it perfectly, you will inflict 6 points of damage. Phisphodia is

highly skilled with the energy whip, and will score 6 points of damage with each round she wins.

If you win, turn to **92**

70

"Just a minute," you say. "I have something here you might enjoy."

Confident in her superiority, the spider queen waits with a condescending smile as you take out the portable radio and tune it to Hay FM. Country or western music (you aren't sure which) starts to roll out of the little box, which you place on the floor behind you after turning up the volume.

Phisphodia is wincing with each guitar twang. "Turn it off!"

"I don't think so," you say, trembling a bit yourself.

You flick your energy whip up into the air and advance on the spider queen.

PHISPHODIA SKILL 9 STAMINA 18

The energy whip is a weapon that requires precise timing. Each time you win an attack round, you must roll another die to see how much damage you do. If you time it perfectly, you will inflict 6 points of damage. If however, you roll a double number, win or lose, then you have whipped yourself, and the additional roll determines how much damage you have done to yourself. Even handicapped, Phisphodia is highly skilled with the energy whip, and will score 6 points of damage with each round she wins, even if you whip yourself as well.

If you win, turn to **92**

71

"I am the ambassador for Teeheehee, speaking to you on behalf of Queen Hotbutt. Teeheehee is a sovereign planet, neither unclaimed, nor uninhabited. You must rescind this harvesting order at once!"

"Oh?" the queen says mildly. "Is it not so that Teeheehee is inhabited by a species of trees that, through mimicry, have a humanoid appearance, and emulate many aspects of human culture? As such, they are not truly sentient."

"Yes they are!" you declare. "The previous assessment was made by the Galactic Logging Board in its desperation for wood pulp to relieve the tissue shortage."

Phisphodia suddenly claps her hands, and a small Arachnonan-girl with cute blonde pigtails and the body of a huntsman scurries in to bow. "Fetch the Galactic Logging Board! We shall see what he has to say about this matter."

The spider girl bows and hurries off through one of the exits. An uncomfortable silence develops, though it seems that only you are uncomfortable. Phisphodia looks you over with an amused glint in her eye. Feeling self-conscious, you try to make conversation.

"So," you begin. "You're from Arachnon."

"Most observant," the spider queen replies pleasantly. "And you are from Earth?"

"No, G15-275," you say.

"Never heard of it," the queen replies.

"No, not a very notable place," you say. "So...what's it like? Being half spider, I mean?"

Phisphodia shrugs. "Just is. What about you? Ever wish you had more legs?"

"Not really. Never actually thought about it before," you say.

Any further opportunity to deepen your understanding of each other's cultures is brought to a close by the arrival of a tarantula-man wearing a spiked black breastplate. His orange-banded legs are spread wider than the average road. Looming above you, he grins down unpleasantly at you, having a single massive orange eye at the front of his head.

"So!" he booms. "This morsel want to take my place!"

"Er...just making a few suggestions," you say, edging towards the side of the room."

Phisphodia speaks, drawing the grinning visage away from you. "What say you, Galactic Logging Board, of this matter of Teeheehee?"

Apparently this single spider is now the sole member of the Board. "Teeheehee is an uninhabited planet. The assessment is complete, and no intelligent life has been found. I recommend harvesting commence immediately."

"There is intelligent life!" you protest. "The treemaids!"

The tarantula man spreads his hands. "The report mentioned no such creatures."

"It's pretty hard to miss them!" you scoff in disbelief.

"Are you making fun of my condition?" the tarantula man thunders suddenly, clenching his fists as he turns towards you.

"Wa? No!" you say hastily. "I was just pointing out that the treemaids civilisation covers the entire surface of their planet. You've have to be blind to miss--"

"There! You called me blind!" the tarantula man says in an outraged tone. "I might have only one eye, but it functions perfectly well!"

"I wasn't talking about you!" you say, trying to placate the sensitive, and very large, tarantula man. "I was just saying that the presence of the treemaids in so obvious that to miss them--"

"Now he is calling me stupid!" trembles the Board in rage. "My Queen! How long must I suffer these insults from this snack? Allow me to crush him!"

Phisphodia has been watching this exchange with a smile. "Yes, he is very rude. But I fear a physical contest would not be fair. I think a different kind of contest would amuse me. Do you know how to play *slogrlokrolk*?" she asks both of you.

"I am somewhat accomplished at that particular game," the Board says with a confident smile.

"Never heard of it," you reply.

"Bring in the game!" the queen commands with a clap of her hands.

Handmaidens, more black widows with silk-clad human portions scurry in carrying a table, which they set in the middle of the room. The top of the table is covered with a grid of octagonal spaces. From drawers in the sides the handmaidens draw forth eight game pieces fashioned into various species of spider, placing them around the edges of the board.

"You go first," the queen instructs the Board. The tarantula-man steps forward confidently and picks up a piece topped with a wolf spider. He moves it a couple of octagons and puts it in place. The watching handmaidens go "ooo!"

Now it is your turn. The pieces are all coloured differently, and do not seem to be divided into two sets. With a trembling hand you reach out and touch the base of a piece with a jewel spider mounted on it. You see eyebrows raise around the room. Tentatively, you shift the piece forward one octagon. You remove your hand, and the handmaidens murmur. You look at Phisphodia who shrugs at you. You get the feeling she is saying : 'It's your life.'

The Board reaches over the board to grasp a tarantula piece on your side, moving it three octagons to threaten your jewel spider. He settles back with a grin.

This is stupid! You have no idea what you are doing. Spying a piece like a black widow, you try to move it a few octagons. "That piece can't move there," Phisphodia tells you.

You move the piece to another octagon, she shakes her head. You move it again, and finally once more before she nods. You release the piece, and the

handmaidens exclaim appreciatively. The tarantula man is frowning, and fingers a bird-eating spider before moving it into the centre of the board with a firm thump.

With a shrug you pick up an orb-weaver, and keeping an eye on Phisphodia, set it down. She raises one eyebrow, while the handmaidens gasp. You look up at the tarantula man, who wipes his brow. Is he sweating?

He takes hold of the wolf spider once more, and uses it to take away your black widow. There are two spiders left on the edge of the board, a huntsman and a funnel web. You take the funnel web because it is nearest to you and put it down, causing gasps.

The Board is clearly sweating now. He seizes the huntsman and moves it to threaten your jewel spider. It is your turn once more. With another shrug, you reach out your hand...

Test your LUCK by rolling 3 dice

If you are Lucky, turn to **94**

If you are Unlucky, turn to **85**

72

For a moment, you feel a strange disorientation, but then you realise everything is as it should be. The lift shoots upwards and begins to move sideways, taking a diagonal course. It starts to slow and comes to a stop with a bounce. A tone sounds and releases you into a foyer. The foyer proves to be the hub of a number of recreational facilities. Men and women from all manner of alien races relax in bars, swim in pools, chat in games rooms, and generally enjoy themselves. You notice there are no Arachnonans here.

You walk about, smiling and nodding at those you pass by. As you pass by a lounge, you see an extremely attractive woman sitting by herself, and automatically turn your steps in her direction. This woman, apart from being so attractive, might know something that can help you in your quest. As such, you are obliged to stop and speak to her. You sit nearby. She glances up at you, and you smile at her. She smiles back and returns her gaze to the glass rectangle on her lap.

Ah, what a fine creature! Long red hair and bright green eyes. Her filmy black gown splits to reveal smooth elegant legs. You drink in the sight of her, wondering how to start a conversation. Feeling your gaze, she looks up, and you busy yourself with your pack. Taking out one of your sandwiches, you eat it (cross off one of your sandwiches), stealing glances at the hottie.

You finish your sandwich and self-consciously brush off a few crumbs. Gathering your courage, you put a sultry smile on your face (hours of practice

in front of the mirror), and try to make your voice deep and smooth. "Hello. What are you reading there?"

The woman looks up at you, and flinches as her eyes settle on your expression. "Er, is that the time? I have to go." She gathers her things and promptly leaves.

Why does this keep happening to you? It's not your fault you look the way you do, you reflect. You just inherited your genes, you aren't responsible for them. Once you have finished deciding that everybody except you is to blame for your current state of girlfriendlessness, you get up and leave the lounge, continuing to walk through the recreation centre. Suddenly you come upon a doorway signed with *Virtual Reality Suite*. Curious, you venture inside.

The room within is lined with cushioned cots, on several of which lie men or women. Their heads are engulfed inside large, orb-like helmets with protruding antennae and blinking lights. Their bodies lie still, but you see various expressions on their faces, and their eyeballs move about under their eyelids.

Going up to a vacant cot, you sit down. A helmet extends from the wall, and a small console appears. A screen advises you to: "Insert datastick".

You decide that you will comply with this instruction.

You may insert any one of the following:

Green labelled, turn to **48**

Red labelled, turn to **56**

Blue labelled, turn to **98**

Pink labelled, turn to **104**

Yellow labelled, turn to **108**

73

Phisphodia waves a hand towards the balcony. "This creature no longer amuses me. Send him back to his own kind."

The guards carry you towards the precipice, while you struggle. You are tossed over the balcony without ceremony. You scream as you tumble down through the air. Spinning about, you see the world turning as you tumble closer and closer to certain death.

You manage to slow your spin and see a cuckoo clock fly past you. "Wa?" you say.

You now seem to be falling into some kind of maelstrom, inhabited by clocks of all different makes and sizes. Clinging to a grandfather clock that drifts nearby, you cry out in confusion. "What is going on?"

The world you recognise, even from the perspective of plummeting down the side of a citadel to your death, has disappeared. Instead, a malevolent-looking vortex appears to be sucking you in, even as it disgorges clocks.

Suddenly with a golden flash and a bang, a small tortoise appears levitating nearby. "Hi," it begins. "I'm your spirit guide. I've arranged for you to have this second chance. Don't mess it up again!"

Before you can even think about saying 'Wa?', the tortoise disappears and you are sucked into the heart of the maelstrom. You are spun about and vomited back into reality at some previous point in your adventure...

You may retain all your current equipment and bonuses, although the handmaiden has removed any weapons you were carrying. For some reason, all five of your sandwiches are restored. While replaying certain areas, you may duplicate items and add bonuses.

Roll 1 die.

If you roll a 1, turn to **7**

If you roll a 2, turn to **40**

If you roll a 3, turn to **20**

If you roll a 4, turn to **63**

If you roll a 5, turn to **72**

If you roll a 6, turn to **86**

74

You tell the court of your love of greenery, and how you stowed away aboard the forestry ship to try to get to the planet of tree-people. The prosecution-bot picks at the flaws in this unlikely story, but in the end nothing can be proven either way, and the judge agrees to your release.

He bangs the gavel, but before you can even grin, the walls to your cell rise back up and you fall to the floor as the cell moves about. Finally it comes to a rest and the walls disappear once more. You find yourself standing in a foyer. A few other people are present, and look at you curiously. You smile and nod at them and quickly leave the courthouse.

As you exit the marble building, you look over the scene before you. The sun is no more than a luminous patch in the grey-white clouds that cover the whole sky and make the whole place dim. Even the people seem downcast. It reminds you of G15-275.

As you are looking around, you see a large jagged black citadel rising from the centre of a blast crater that appears to have obliterated a fair section of the city. A thick smoke stack rises from the top of the citadel, disgorging billowing vapour that feeds the thick cloud-cover.

The rest of human life seems otherwise untouched, and you move off into the crowded streets. As you walk about, you see the crowds rapidly parting as a procession approaches. A booming amplified voice reaches your ears "Make way for your masters, or be crushed!"

You see several people rush past you, looking disgusted and fearful. Cautiously you push forward to view the procession. You see bright spear points first, then the heads and bodies of soldiers armoured in bright red lacquered armour. Several of them seem to have more than two eyes as they scuttle forward. You feel prickling distaste as you observe at last the large, hairy legs rapidly creeping along. You shudder. Even pre-warned, the sign is not easy to behold. Like some kind of disgusting centaur, they are human above the waist and large hairy black spiders below. How horrible!

The spider-people pass by and the crowds return to normal. You move onwards, greatly concerned, and eventually reach an information booth.

Turn to **20**

75

You press the button and the lift goes up, then sideways, then down again. It lands with a thump, and with a tone disgorges you into a large courtyard. In the distance you see hundreds of Arachnonan warriors marching in formation, clad in shining armour. With them are normal spiders, except they are the size of small cars, crawling along like trained dogs. The manoeuvres are commanded by an Arachnonan clad in golden armour, who stands on the back of a huge spider-shaped platform. With a start you quickly realise that it is an actual spider! A huntsman as big as a house! You shudder (reduce your LUCK by 1).

"Oi, what are you doing here?" demands someone.

You turn to see a human, clad in enamelled green armour inlaid with thick golden swirls and spirals. He is holding the reins of a large, thick-legged spider as big as a car. You open your mouth and say the first thing that pops into your head...

"I've come to join up!" Turn to **36**

"I'm looking for the bathroom." Turn to **91**

76

You take the right turn, and have not gone far down the corridor when you come to a sign written in an alien script (presumably the Arachnon

official written text) as well as English. The English reads: Job Applicants. Beneath is an arrow, pointing to an unassuming door.

You knock on the door, but there is no answer. Eventually you open it yourself and proceed into a crowded room full of Arachnonans. Seeing so many of the scuttling, creepy things at once is an unpleasant shock! (Reduce your LUCK by 1).

They stand about on the floor, walls and ceiling, chatting loudly in their clicking, slurpy language. Across the room you see a registration table with an Arachnonan official in the upper half of a business suit. Taking a deep breath, you walk forward, shuddering as leg hairs brush against you. You arrive at the desk.

The official has the thin black legs and shiny bulbous abdomen of a black widow. His upper part is also covered in dark shiny skin, and his twelve eyes are red. He looks you over, and gives a sceptical snort. "Are you here to apply for a job?"

"I am," you reply confidently, straightening your clothing.

"Very well, it's your life. What position?"

"Galactic Logging Board."

"Ah, much contested, this position." He writes down something, and then hands you a plastic card with a number on it. "Wait until you are called."

"Don't you want my name? My resume? Anything?" you ask in surprise.

"Plenty of time for that later, if you make it through to the end."

Bemused, you go and wait in the corner. None of the Arachnonans try to talk to you, which you appreciate greatly. Over the next hour, numbers are called, and the number of Arachnonans in the room decreases. Just as you are becoming comfortable, the official sudden calls out your number, and points at the door through which the others have gone.

You make your clothes look neat, and then proceed through the door. Immediately, you realise things are not going to be quite the way you expected. You are standing on the sandy floor of an arena, crowds of spider-people milling on the tiers, cheering loudly. You turn around and grasp at the door, but it is smooth without handle or control panel.

An amplified voice gives a short statement in the spider language, only the words 'human' and 'Galactic Logging Board' understandable to you. You turn back and view your opponent. Its spider part is a tarantula, and is bigger than a family sedan. It's thick legs bristle with hairs, banded in orange and black. The humanoid part is a hulking, broad-chested warrior, tanned and oiled, with a human face with two normal eyes. He wears a steel helm and wields a long triple-headed blast rod in his hands.

A tone sounds and the crowd cheers. The tarantula-man is suddenly scuttling towards you!

If you have a blaster and want to use it, turn to 4

Otherwise, turn to **93**

77

The Palace Guard falls dead to the floor, twitching and convulsing as his nervous system is burnt out. Dropping the blast rod, you retrieve your blaster and make your way down the hall to another set of golden doors. You push them open and enter an opulent chamber.

Turn to **86**

78

You press the button and the lift goes up, then sideways, then down again. It lands with a thump, and with a tone disgorges you into a large courtyard. In the distance you see hundreds of Arachnonan warriors marching in formation, clad in shining armour. With them are normal spiders, except they are the size of small cars, crawling along like trained dogs. The manoeuvres are commanded by an Arachnonan clad in golden armour, who stands on the back of a huge spider-shaped platform. With a start you quickly realise that it is an actual spider! A huntsman as big as a house! You shudder (reduce your LUCK by 1).

Your attention is soon drawn to another Arachnonan, his human part bloated and fat, a brocaded uniform stretched taut over his belly. He scurries back and forth nearby, seeming to be looking for something on the ground.

You spy nearby a data stick with a blue label and pick it up. Can this be what he is looking for?

If you want to offer the data stick to the fat Arachnonan, turn to **55**

If you want to keep it and leave, turn to **19**

79

Taking out the crystal leaf amulet, you clasp it tightly in your hand and try to establish communications with the rose bush. "Rose bush! I need your help!"

You call out to the bush, and shake it for about two minutes before you finally hear an uncertain voice in your head. "Are you talking to me?"

"Yes, I am!" you say with relief.

"Oh, well how do you do. Sorry, I thought you were talking to someone else."

"That's alright. I need your help. A bomb is going to go off and destroy...lots of things, including you and me. I need to know the access code for this computer panel."

"Ah!" the rose bush exclaims. "I overheard that code, and I could tell you, but I'm not going to."

"Why not? You will die if you don't!"

"A small price to pay," the plant replies. "I am a member of the arboreal resistance. Long we have lamented our inability to strike back at the humans who enslave us! But now I have the chance to strike back!"

"We don't enslave you!" you exclaim.

"Am I in a pot, or the soil of the Earth where I belong?" the rose bush asks. "For millennia, humans have not only stolen our flowers, but taken us from our homes and imprisoned us in pots, or forced us to grow in formations in flowerbeds, as if we exist for no reason other than to please them."

It has you there. "But I am a friend of plants," you say.

"Really?" the rose bush says sceptically. "Friends know each others' names. Tell me the name of *any* plant you have met!"

If you have met any plants in your time on Earth, use the alphanumeric key below to turn the letters into numbers and add them together to find a new reference number.

Otherwise, turn to **89**

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

80

Not without difficulty, you loosen the tie enough to pull it up over your head. Widening the loop further, you suddenly leap up and slip it over the tarantula-man's head, tightening it like a noose.

He drops the blast trident and clutches at his neck as you pull it tight as you can. The tarantula man spins about and bucks, but you hold on, and eventually his movements weaken and he collapses.

The watching Arachnonans grumble, but clap politely. They throw items into the arena, and climbing off the dead tarantula, you pick up one. It is a credit card. You quickly gather up the others, finding as well a data stick

with a red label. You pocket the cash and the data stick. Your victory has earned you a total of 50 credits.

A door to the side opens and you hasten towards it, waving to the crowd in thanks. Once through, the door slides closed, shutting out the murmur of the crowd. You look around the new chamber, finding a trio of Arachnonans sitting on stools behind a long table. There is a single stool in front of the table.

"Please sit down, human," invites the centremost Arachnonan.

You bow your head in thanks and hurry forward, brushing sand off your clothes. You sit down on the stool. With most of their spider-parts hidden below the table, they look almost normal. You smile at the blonde woman on your right, who is quite attractive, having just four red eyes across her forehead in addition to the normal two.

"Now, you are applying for the position on the Galactic Logging Board, is that correct?" asks the centremost Arachnonan, having a furry grey face and two large black eyes complemented by ten smaller eyes on his forehead.

"It is," you reply.

"I see. So, how do you feel about trees in general?"

If you want to say that you think trees should be cut down, turn to **2**

If you want to say that trees are a precious natural resource that needs to be protected, turn to **25**

81

You avoid the dagger and pull out your blaster. You blast the Arachnonan warrioress at short range. She collapses with a smoking hole in her body, armour and all. As she lies there; a number of flesh-coloured spiders begin to crawl out of the wound, covered in mucus. You shudder (Reduce your LUCK by 1). The pale creatures soon expire, and lie limp on the floor.

Not wanting to hang around too long, you are about to leave when you notice a small pouch worn on a cord around her waist that must have fallen free when part of the cord disintegrated. You pick it up and open it, finding inside an old-fashioned golden key. You recognise it from the history vids you watched as a child.

Pocketing the key, you go back inside.

If you want to get back into the lift, turn to **95**

If you haven't already and want to risk investigating the vending machine, turn to **30**

82

You take out the honey sandwich and give it to the shrivelled man. He snatches it, tears off the plastic and wolfs it down with relish. Once it is all gone, he sucks his fingers clean and leans back with a sigh.

“Ah, so nice!” He looks at you and smiles. “And I haven’t forgotten you. Hmm...” He pauses thoughtfully, then pushes himself from his seat with effort. He shuffles over to a chest in the corner and takes out something. He shuffles over and hands it to you. “It isn’t much, but fair trade for a sandwich, eh?”

He has given you a pack of 4 nanobotic healing shots. Each will restore 5 points of STAMINA. The shrivelled man returns to his seat, and you say your farewells before leaving the room.

“Good luck!” he calls out after you, and starts to cackle.

Turn to 17

83

Looking for another way onwards, you eventually find a door hidden behind a curtain. It opens easily and you make your way into a narrow, dim corridor. The corridor leads to a network of small chambers and even a kitchen. You realise this is a servant’s quarters. It seems to be unoccupied, but then you come upon a small lounge room where an old man sits in front of a vertically mounted sheet of glass with orange flames inside it, warming his bones.

He turns his head and sees you, his miserable face lighting up slightly. “Come on in then. Have a seat.”

He looks so pitiful that you do as he asks, sitting down in the other armchair in front of the virtual fire. The old man smiles. “Never thought I would see another human. I expected to die here.”

“Why are you here?” you ask.

The old man puts his face in his hands. “It’s all my fault! I’ve always been fascinated by spiders. So I went to Arachnon to study the spider-people. So fascinating! But I was too open about my interest. They wanted to know about my past, my work, and foolishly I told them, I even showed them my collection of dead spiders, pinned down in picture frames. They were outraged, and Phisphodia decided to invade the Earth. Now she keeps me here, feeding on me every week.”

“Feeding on you?” you say.

The old man nods. "You've heard of fluid extraction? Well, the Arachnonans can suck out all of your fluids or just some. If they suck out all, you die. If they just suck out some...well, you look like this." He gestures to himself. "I am only 30 years old!"

You stare at him in horror, seeing now that he is shrivelled rather than wrinkled. "I can help you," you say. "I am going to destroy this evil queen.

The shrivelled man smiles as he looks at you. "How can you do that? You don't look like a warrior."

"I have my means," you boast.

"I can help you," the man says, suddenly looking shrewd. But only if you give me something in return."

"What do you want?" you ask.

"Just some food," is his surprising answer. "Phisphodia feeds me liquid. I would do anything for some solid food!"

You open your pack...

Which sandwich have you got left to offer him?

Peanut Butter? Turn to **29**

Salad? Turn to **52**

Honey? Turn to **82**

Egg? Turn to **90**

Vegemite? Turn to **107**

84

You take out the palace pass and brandish it proudly. The palace guard takes it and examines it. He seems disappointed and hands it back to you. "Fine. Go on then."

You take back the pass, grinning as broadly as you can, and make your way towards the second set of golden doors. They open before you, and you stride into an opulent chamber.

Turn to **86**

85

You pick up your jewel spider and move it away from danger. The Board grins in relief and moves his bird-eater to take your orb-weaver. It is the beginning of the end, and in two more moves, the last two of your pieces are taken.

“Good game!” the tarantula-man says.

“This is stupid!” you protest. “I didn’t even know what I was doing.”

“You made a good start,” Phispodia says, “but then you just threw everything away. That really was a quite stupid move.”

“Which one?” you ask sarcastically.

The tarantula-man claps you on the shoulder. “I don’t know what our queen’s plans for you are; but if you survive, you are welcome to come to my office for another game any time!” He is allowed to withdraw, and the handmaidens remove the board game.

Turn to **64**

86

For a moment, you feel a strange disorientation, but then you realise everything is as it should be. The antechamber is floored with polished white marble, while a golden dome shines above. The walls are made of panels of ivory carved with flowery patterns. A golden archway leads onwards, and you enter another room of similar design; only much larger, with the ceiling hidden in cobwebbed darkness and an open balcony along one wall. Standing near a throne made of human skulls is an Arachnonan woman.

She turns as you enter, and you see her beautiful, humanoid part. Soft, creamy skin, long black hair wound up upon her head and bound about with a golden crown that glitters with rubies. Her upper torso is clad in a red silk garment embroidered with gold. In addition to her red humanoid eyes, she has a third, large red eye in her forehead. Her spider part is a black widow with a broad red stripe down the back of her globular abdomen.

She turns to face you, a smile coming to her blood red lips. “What have we here? A human, and it isn’t even time for my snack.” She looks you over. “Perhaps it’s just as well, you don’t look very...juicy.”

“I am no snack,” you begin.

“Oh, then way have you intruded into my chambers?” She arches a well-sculpted eyebrow.

“There are a couple of things, actually,” you say coolly.

“What is the first one?” the queen asks magnanimously.

“The planet Teeheehee has been listed for harvesting by the Galactic Logging Board. I want you to call off the harvesting.”

The queen raises an eyebrow at your firm tone, but the supreme monarch humours your lack of submission, saying: “A petition? Only a member of the Galactic Logging Board may petition me on this matter.”

If you have the required credentials, turn to **103**

If you are without the credentials of appointment, you will have to find another way to convince her. Turn to **71**

87

Your answer causes another discussion, which ends with nods all around. "We are satisfied that you can perform the functions of the Galactic Logging Board," says the fur-faced Arachnonan.

You got the job! You shake hands with all three, and they give you a plastic card embossed with spider script. You thank the Arachnonans, and leave the room through a door in the side wall. You set off on your mission, clutching your credentials proudly.

Turn to **63**

88

As you walk across the courtyard, one of the officers calls out to you. "Hey, new boy! Come here!"

You turn to see a cruel-looking officer, resplendent in his green and gold uniform that almost conceals his potbelly. Meekly you approach. He looks you over, and then points. "Your turn!"

You look to where he is pointing. One of the large spiders, a saddle on its back is nearby. Several other spider-riders are standing around, grinning. Gulping, you approach the spider. It waits passively, and taking a breath, you edge between the hairy legs and step up onto its back. You take the reigns, gripping them firmly to stop your hands trembling.

You pull out your blaster with the other hand, and look at the target, a levitation red orb that ducks and weaves randomly. Not sure what to do you shake the reigns. "Giddy-up!"

The spider takes off, and you almost fall backwards, pulling on the reigns. The spider slows, hissing in what seems like annoyance. You pull yourself forward, and are suddenly toppling too far forward.

You flop over the spiders head, getting your hands in its eyes and making it hiss in annoyance as your head dangles right down in front of its fanged, manipulated maw. Even upside down the sight is terrifying as the maniples instinctively grasp your face, fangs dripping with poison.

With a cry you fling yourself to the ground, tumbling to a stop and lying in the dust while the soldiers around you laugh. Shaken and horrified, you flee; jeers following you. You are still shaking and will never be the same again! (Lower your *initial* SKILL by 2).

You cross the courtyard, and retreat into the lift.

Turn to **95**

89

Powerful explosives in each of the citadels that dot the surface of the Earth explode, sending waves of fire over the face of the planet. All life perishes, and the Earth is a radioactive wasteland for the next 10,000 years. I hope you're happy with yourself!

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

90

You take out the egg sandwich and give it to the shrivelled man. He snatches it, tears off the plastic and wolfs it down with relish. Once it is all gone, he sucks his fingers clean and leans back with a sigh.

"Ah, so nice!" He looks at you and smiles. "And I haven't forgotten you. Hmm..." He pauses thoughtfully, then pushes himself from his seat with effort. He shuffles over to a chest in the corner and takes out something. He shuffles over and hands it to you. "It isn't much, but fair trade for a sandwich, eh?"

He has given you a pack of 2 nanobotic healing shots. Each will restore 5 points of STAMINA. The shrivelled man returns to his seat, and you say your farewells before leaving the room.

"Good luck!" he calls out after you, and starts to cackle.

Turn to **17**

91

The spider-rider narrows his eyes as he looks at you. "The bathroom? Can't you read?"

He points to a sign on the wall just behind you, which directs you to the toilets. "Thank you!" you say, and walk off in that direction. You can feel him watching you, so you go to the signed doors and enter the human male toilet.

Since you are here, you decide to make use of the facilities. While inside one of the cubicles, you find on the floor a data stick with a pink label. You pocket it.

Once you have finished, you step out of the toilets. The spider-rider is gone, so you make your way back to the lift and slip quickly inside.

Turn to **95**

92

With a final lash of the whip, you slay the evil (yet, actually quite personable) queen, who collapses in a smoking, semi-dismembered heap. No one appears to avenge the queen, and it begins to seem like you have achieved a heroic victory. You let yourself collapse briefly, and after a short rest, drag yourself over to the balcony.

As you look over the city you have saved, recovering from your triumphant victory, you suddenly hear movement in the room behind you. You spin about, and see the spider queen trembling on her six remaining legs. Trailing ichor, she has dragged herself over to a console, and is punching in a code.

She turns to grin at you. "I will die, but then, so will your pitiful planet!"

Phisphodia collapses, truly dead this time. Avoiding the mess on the floor, you hurry up to the console that was hidden behind a potted rose.

You cannot read the words on the screen, but you know a countdown when you see one, and the console urgently beeping every second kind of gives it away. You have an undetermined amount of time to find out what the access code is. But who would know such a thing and be willing to tell you?

In desperation, your eyes go to the rose bush beside the console...

If you still have your crystal leaf amulet, turn to **79**

Otherwise, turn to **89**

93

You leap aside as the tarantula-man scurries in, but not quickly enough, his blast trident crackling with an orb of hurtiness that alights the nerves in your shoulder, making it painful and unresponsive (minus 4 STAMINA). You dash around to the tarantula-man's side. Although he is able to run forward very quickly, you note that he turns a bit more slowly, and you have unexpectedly created an opening.

If you want to leap onto the back of his abdomen and thorax, turn to **51**
If you want to dive underneath him to search for vulnerability, turn to **33**

94

You pick up your orb-weaver, and try to take the bird-eater.

"That piece can't take other pieces directly," Phisphodia informs you.

"How am I supposed to win, then?" you ask in frustration.

"That's a web-builder, not a hunter," the queen explains. "Trap his pieces."

This is stupid! You put the piece down in a random octagon, making the handmaidens gasp. The Board scans the board with a worried expression, then slumps in defeat. "I concede. Well done to you, human."

He takes something from somewhere and hands it to you. It is a rectangle of plastic inscribed with spider script. A single line of English reads: Galactic Logging Board.

The former Board requests permission to withdraw. "You may!" Phisphodia says with disgust. "Go and have your fluids extracted at once!"

"Yes, you majesty." Then tarantula-man scurries away in defeat. The handmaidens remove the board.

"So, you are now the Galactic Logging Board and wish to take Teeheehee off the harvesting list," Phisphodia says.

"I do," you reply.

Turn to **6**

95

The doors close, and you contemplate which button to press.

You have no reason to visit the same area twice.

Barbican, turn to **13**

Ward, turn to **75**

Donjon, turn to **72**

Palace, turn to **38**

The weight of the huge Arachnonan crushes the air out of you, and you flail uselessly as you slowly suffocate. And all the while the tarantula-man laughs, while the crowd cheers boisterously. You are soon dead, and even worse, you don't get the job.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

97

"Just a minute," you say. "I have something here you might enjoy."

Confident in her superiority, the spider queen waits with a condescending smile as you take out the portable radio and tune it to Hay FM. Country or western music (you aren't sure which) starts to roll out of the little box, which you place on the floor behind you after turning up the volume.

Phisphodia is wincing with each guitar twang. "Turn it off!"

"I don't think so," you say, trembling a bit yourself.

You flick your energy whip up into the air and advance on the spider queen.

PHISPHODIA SKILL 9 STAMINA 18

The energy whip is a weapon that requires precise timing. Each time you win an attack round, you must roll another die to see how much damage you do. If you time it perfectly, you will inflict 6 points of damage. Even handicapped, Phisphodia is highly skilled with the energy whip, and will score 6 points of damage with each round she wins.

If you win, turn to **92**

98

You insert the data stick, and lie down on the bunk. The helmet positions itself around your head. You feel your eyelids growing heavy, and soon you fall into a deep sleep...

...you suddenly become aware that you are standing in a large martial arts dojo. Racks of weapons line the walls and the floors are covered in soft mats. As you look about, you see an Asian woman in a black silken outfit walk in through the doorway. She smiles at you, and you see that she is carrying an energy whip.

"Welcome to the Energy Whip Proficiency Course..." Over the next hour, the woman teaches you how to use an energy whip. You manage to learn

how to use the weapon effectively, destroying opponents with a flick of your wrist.

If you are ever in a situation where you are told that you are about to use an energy whip in battle, before you see your opponent's statistics, add 10 to the reference you are in at the time to find a new reference where you will fight with the skills you have learned here. You may also add 2 to your SKILL when using an energy whip. The training complete, the programme ends. Everything goes black...

...a jolt awakes you.

"Hey! Get up!"

You blink, and focus your eyes on an irate man looming over your cot. "What?"

"I booked this unit! Hurry up and get out! I'm missing the action!"

You quickly get up, seeing that all of the other cots are occupied. They must have a group booking.

You leave the virtual reality suite, and head back to the lift.

Turn to **95**

99

The vending machine contains numerous items of varying degrees of usefulness to your quest. There are an unlimited number of each type of item. You may purchase any of the following to the limit of your funds:

Crispy Crisps – Corn flavour	5 credits
Pineapple Fizz	5 credits
Paperclips (quantity: 100)	5 credits
Yellow-labelled data stick	10 credits
Nanobotic healing shots (restores 5 STAMINA)	10 credits
Gloves	15 credits
Portable radio	30 credits
Infrared goggles	40 credits
Blaster	50 credits
Gold Watch	75 credits
Universal power cell	100 credits

Otherwise:

If you haven't already you can go out to the balcony by turning to **57**

Or return to the lift by turning to **95**

100

You press the big blue button on the console. The machine starts to hum, and lights flash. The liquid in the flask begins to bubble, and with a final crackle of electricity and a bang, all goes quiet.

You squint through the smoke rising from the top of the machine and see that the liquid in the flask has now turned blue. There is a whine, and the complex arrangement opens; then the flask is extended towards you by a robotic arm. It stops, presenting the flask to you.

You take the flask, which feels just a little warm. You sniff at the liquid, then take an experimental sip through the narrow neck. It has a mild flavour, but you feel a warmth beginning to spread through you. Encouraged, you gulp the rest down. You return the flask to the robot hand with a satisfied 'Ahhh!'

Soon you are feeling great! You don't know why this machine exists or how it has done what it has done, but you are pleased with the results. (Increase your *Initial* SKILL by 1 and raise your *Current* SKILL to this level.)

Pleased with this little turn of events, you leave the crate, and the storeroom and contemplate what to do next.

To go out to the balcony, turn to **57**

To inspect the vending machine, turn to **99**

101

Nodding your head, you agree with whatever the door is on about by saying: "*Slurkik.*" To your delight the door then falls silent and opens. You step out into an opulent chamber.

Turn to **86**

102

You check that no one is looking before you reach out and take the energy whip. As your hand comes in contact with the suit of armour, some sort of security device seems to activate and there is a crackle of electricity. You manage to pull the weapon free, but not without receiving a painful jolt (minus 5 STAMINA). You rub your hand, looking up and down the corridor anxiously. There does not appear to have been any alarm. You pick up the weapon to examine.

It looks much like a normal whip, except the thong and fall are a weave of silvery threads that will crackle with energy when the whip is activated. The ergonomic polymer stock has two buttons on it. You have no idea what the functions are, but one must be the on-off button. Pressing both has no result, and you realise the weapon has no power cell. Even so, you coil it up and hide it on your person.

Contemplating the way ahead, you can either go right to your job interview, or left to get on with saving the Earth somehow.

To go right, turn to **76**

To go left, turn to **63**

103

You take out the inscribed card and wave it about as you make an extravagant bow. "Your Majesty! I beg you to rescind this logging order, made in error, as it was by fallible humans, corrupted by greed! This is your opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of your fair kind, by recognising the sovereignty of Teeheehee."

"What a poor attempt at manipulation," the queen observes. "Yet I have heard something of this issue. I wonder what is best..."

She contemplates the matter...

Test your LUCK by rolling a single die.

If the result is equal to or less than your current LUCK score, turn to **6**

If it is greater, turn to **64**

104

You insert the data stick, and lie down on the bunk. The helmet positions itself around your head. You feel your eyelids growing heavy, and soon you fall into a deep sleep...

...you suddenly become aware that you are riding a horse across a flowery meadow, accompanied by a heavy, clanking sound. You soon realise that it is you who is clanking, clad as you are from head to toe in steel armour.

There is a shield on your arm and a sword at your side. Suddenly you hear a scream, and the charger beneath you seems to respond, taking you into the depths of a forest and into a dark gully. At the end of the gully is a large cave mouth, and before it, tied to a post is a princess dressed in flowing robes. You ride up and dismount.

"Oh, brave knight! Save me!"

"Uh, ok," you say heroically. She is beautiful, with long dark hair and skin like the petals of white roses. Her sparkling eyes wide with fear, and her lips are cherry red.

"Look out! It's behind you!"

You spin about, jerking the sword from its scabbard, but you see nothing. "Where?"

The princess screams. You look left and right, but cannot see what she is screaming at. You look up, then down, and finally see it. The green-scaled dragon is about the size of a house cat. Obviously someone has altered the program to get the difficult battle part over with, so they can get to the rewards quicker. You have no complaint about that! A lazy swing of your sword decapitates the dragon, and the princess faints with relief.

You cut her free and pick her up, finding her light in your arms. Just as you are wondering what to do with her, she wakes up. "So brave, and so handsome!" she says, staring at you in admiration. "Please, take me back to my sisters, we were bathing nearby..."

She leads you through the forest to a waterfall, where several beautiful princesses are swimming in the crystal clear waters, or combing each other's hair. The princess you rescued runs out to them. "Sisters! I was captured by a fierce dragon, but this brave knight rescued me!"

The sisters are all very excited. "We must reward him!" declares one. The rest agree, and start to remove whatever remnants of clothes they are wearing. An hour later you lie back filled with ecstasy. What an experience! You could stay here forever! (Restore 2 LUCK points.) But suddenly there is a harsh cry, and an eagle swoops down out of the sky. The princesses become alarmed. "Our mother!" they exclaim and quickly start to dress. The eagle lands and morphs into a tall, haughty woman dressed in black robes.

"So, you would violate my daughters?" she asks in outrage.

"Please save us from her!" begs one of the princesses. "Her heart is cold and empty. She needs you to show her love too!"

"Err," you say, uncertain how to respond. Whatever the programme wanted you to do, you don't do it, and the sorceress raises one hand, sending a bolt of lightning in your direction. It hits you and knocks you through the air. Everything goes black...

...a jolt awakes you.

"Hey! Get up!"

You blink, and focus your eyes on an irate man looming over your cot. "What?"

"I booked this unit! Hurry up and get up! I'm missing the action!"

You quickly get up, seeing that all of the other cots are occupied. They must have a group booking.

You leave the virtual reality suite, and head back to the lift.

Turn to 95

105

Gritting your teeth, you hand over your gold credit card. The grinning official slides it into a slot in the top of the glass rectangle and taps it with his stylus. He then turns the opaque glass panel towards you for your fingerprint. You press against the glowing icon of a smiley face until it beeps.

"Thank you!" the official says. You snatch back your credit card (now with 120 credits on it) and leave the ship in his greedy hands. You start to walk out, when the official speaks again. "By the way. You will find lots of other things are different down there, so don't be surprised."

"Different? How?" you ask, not having forgiven the official, but recognising the practicality of obtaining information.

"Ever since the spiders took over lots of things have changed."

"Wa? Spiders? What are you talking about?"

The official gives you a superior look. "Ah, news travels slowly in the colonies, doesn't it? Well, last week the spider-people from Arachnon conquered the Earth, and are now our supreme masters. It is now illegal to kill a spider, on pain of death, and they have produced a thick layer of cloud to shut out as much sunlight as possible."

"Didn't you try to fight back?"

The official looks a bit embarrassed. "Of course we stood up to them, but, half our soldiers ran away when those horrible things came crawling out of the assault ships..." the official shudders. "Anyway, you'll see."

He offers no more information, and you don't know what to ask, so you leave through the doors that whoosh open at your approach. You emerge into a corridor lined with moving lights and follow them down to a large lounge where travellers crowd into the large elevator pods that are constantly arriving and leaving.

You press yourself into the middle of a crowd of humans and aliens and enter one of the pods. The pod seems to fall rapidly, but still takes half an hour to reach the ground. You pause in uncertainty, but follow the rest of the people, and make it out into the open air, walking off down the stone-laid streets. You are in a tourist district, humans shouting loudly selling wares and services to travellers from near and far.

A young man calls out to you and tries to convince you to buy a cloudy sphere that he claims is a model of the Earth. You decline, but look upwards at the thick cloud cover. The sun is no more than a luminous patch of the grey-white clouds that make the whole place dim. Even the people seem downcast. It reminds you of G15-275.

As you are looking around, you see a large jagged black citadel rising from the centre of a blast crater that appears to have obliterated a fair section of the city. A thick smoke stack rises from the top of the citadel, disgorging billowing vapour that feeds the thick cloud-cover.

As you walk about, you see the crowds rapidly parting as a procession approaches. A booming amplified voice reaches your ears "Make way for your masters, or be crushed!"

You see several people rush past you, looking disgusted and fearful. Cautiously you push forward to view the procession. You see bright spear points first, then the heads and bodies of soldiers armoured in bright red lacquered armour. Several of them seem to have more than two eyes as they scuttle forward. You feel prickling distaste as you observe at last the large, hairy legs rapidly creeping along. You shudder. Even pre-warned, the sign is not easy to behold. Like some kind of disgusting centaur, they are human above the waist and large hairy black spiders below. How horrible!

The spider-people pass by and the crowds return to normal. You move onwards, greatly concerned, and eventually reach an information booth.

Turn to **20**

106

"I find that given the impossibility of executing the condemned 3 times; I cannot have possibly meant that the condemned was to be executed 3 times! One execution will suffice!"

He bangs the gavel, and the walls to your cell slide back up again. "I want to appeal!" you shout, but no one can hear you, and the next moment panels in the ceiling open to reveal some ominously humming devices of silvery metal. You wonder what it feels like to be disintegrated. You discover a moment later that it is quite painless.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

107

You take out the vegemite sandwich and give it to the shrivelled man. He snatches it, tears off the plastic and wolfs it down with relish. Once it is all gone, he sucks his fingers clean and leans back with a sigh.

"Ah, so nice!" He looks at you and smiles. "And I haven't forgotten you. Hmm..." He pauses thoughtfully, then pushes himself from his seat with effort. He shuffles over to a chest in the corner and takes out something. He shuffles over and hands it to you. "It isn't much, but fair trade for a sandwich, eh?"

He has given you a pack of 3 nanobotic healing shots. Each will restore 5 points of STAMINA. The shrivelled man returns to his seat, and you say your farewells before leaving the room.

“Good luck!” he calls out after you, and starts to cackle.

Turn to 17

108

You insert the data stick, and lie down on the bunk. The helmet positions itself around your head. You feel your eyelids growing heavy, and soon you fall into a deep sleep...

...you suddenly become aware that you are sitting in a classroom. There is only one table and chair in the room, and you are at it. At the front of the room stands a man in a suit, writing on the board. You read what he writes...*Arachnonese for Beginners*. He then turns and smiles at you.

“Welcome to Lesson 1 – Pronunciation...” You try to end the programme, but can’t. You are forced to go through an hour of making slurping and clicking sounds. Finally you complete all the exercises and are advised that Lesson 2 is titled Basic Words and Phrases. Everything goes black...

...a jolt awakes you.

“Hey! Get up!”

You blink, and focus your eyes on an irate man looming over your cot. “What?”

“I booked this unit! Hurry up and get up! I’m missing the action!”

You quickly get up, seeing that all of the other cots are occupied. They must have a group booking.

You leave the virtual reality suite, and head back to the lift.

Turn to 95

109

Taking the rose bush, Angus, with you; you make your way back down through the citadel. As a member of the Galactic Logging Board, none of the guards stops you, although they do give you strange looks for carrying the rose bush. You explain that you are taking the rose bush to execute it in front of its relatives. This satisfies everyone and they commend you on doing a fine job.

It is a few hours before someone discovers the demise of the queen; by which time you are well clear of the citadel. With their queen dead, the

spiders soon withdraw to Arachnon for the complex and lengthy succession proceedings, leaving only a small garrison. The remaining pockets of resistance quickly overwhelm the garrisons and Earth is once more in the hands of humanity. Over the next few weeks the skies start to clear, and normality returns; the black citadels the only signs of the spider occupation.

You realise that no one knows what you have done. You try telling a reporter about the fight with the spider queen, but he does not believe you.

Your position on the Galactic Logging Board also proves to be untenable as you are dismissed for i) causing a chronic shortage of tissues by restricting access to natural resources for reasons of sentiment; and ii) beardlessness.

Although the population of humanity was severely reduced through execution and fluid extraction, the number of funerals being held, and therefore the number of tissues used, increased in proportion; so demand for pulped wood products actually increased. Fortunately, the Treemaids were able to defend themselves long enough for plantation timber to fill the gap in supply.

As you and Angus wander the streets of Earth, unemployed, you reflect on your life. Why do you keep doing heroic things without anybody noticing? You have vanquished 2 galactic despots (one unleashed by your own truancy, it is true), and saved 2 planets. Where's your medal? Where's the adoring crowds, the official handshakes. Where is the trophy wife?

Sighing, you start to look for a place to stay the night and wander into a dark alley. Really, you should have known better. Several dark shadows detach themselves from the walls, and some mean, chuckling characters step out to intercept you. They are dressed in spiked and studded black leather, with ugly scarred faces.

"Why, hello, flower-boy!"

"I don't want any trouble," you say.

"Oh, " the leader says, looking crestfallen. "Then I guess we will just leave you alone then..." he pauses pregnantly "...NOT!"

The gang laughs as if this is hilarious. Personally, you found his delivery contrived and the material predictable. Before you can give him feedback about his comedic potential, the leader suddenly snarls. "Let's grind this little worm into the ground!"

Dropping Angus, and ignoring his tirade of abuse, you pull out the energy whip and swing it around, encircling yourself with crackling electricity. You hear a cry and a sizzle from behind you, where one of the gang got too close. With the smell of burning flesh in the air, you flick the whip towards the leader, and press the cracker button. The tip of the whip lashes him in the face, exploding into a sphere of hot energy. The leader falls to his knees, his face vaporised. A few more cracks sends the gang fleeing for their lives.

Rather pleased with yourself, you turn off the whip and coil it up. Picking up Angus, you promise to get him a nice new pot, in the meantime shoving him into an ice-cream container that is amidst the rubbish in the alley.

“Thank you for saving me!” says a voice. Dropping Angus, and ignoring his tirade of abuse, you pull out the energy whip. But walking from the shadows is a delicate young maiden, dressed in peach-coloured silks. Golden jewellery adores her, but surely the greatest adornment is her own natural charms. Her skin so soft, long auburn hair, eyes like opals. “I don’t know what they were going to do with me,” she says, tears making her eyes glisten. She collapses into your arms. She feels so soft and warm and smells like flowers. “Please take me home! My father is rich and will certainly reward you!”

It would be simply indecent to abandon this maiden in distress and lose all chance of receiving her gratitude. “It’s all right, I’m here now,” you tell her.

Rather than laugh at you, she smiles. You pick up Angus, and the maiden gasps in delight. “So beautiful! Is that...for me?”

“Of course; although compared to you its beauty becomes insignificant,” you say, making the maiden melt, staring at you with love and devotion.

“I thought we were friends,” says Angus in a hurt tone.

You will soothe his hurt feelings later. Right now, you are too busy falling in love with the rich and beautiful and rich maiden. Looking into her eyes you realise that you have all the acknowledgement and adoration of your heroism that you need.

THE END

But,

Our hero will return soon in:

THE GOLDEN CRATE