

SPACE QUEST 2

HIDDEN PLANET

Chapter 2

by James Gelsey

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“WHOOOOOAAAAH!”

The Quest rolled down the side of the crater, rattling everyone and everything on board. The little round spaceship rolled partway up the other side, and then back down again. So it went, up and back, until gravity took over and brought the pod to a stop at the very bottom of the crater.

“Is everyone all right?” asked Leep.

“Great landing spot, Solar Boy,” Zale said.

“Right on the edge of a crater.”

“But there wasn’t a crater on the map,” Bey replied.

“So this one magically appeared?” Zale asked.

“I’d say ‘opened up’ is more like it,” Bey said.

“Look.”

The cadets watched through the pod’s transparent hull as a large disc slowly passed over the top of the crater. Within moments, the Quest was plunged into total darkness..

“There’s our proof of intelligent life on this planet,” Bey observed.

“What proof?” Zale countered. “You don’t have to be smart to put a cover on a hole in the ground.”

“You do if it’s a trap,” Sivah suggested.

“What do you mean ‘trap’?” Zale asked.

“Think about it,” Sivah continued. “One second there’s no crater, the next second it appears

out of nowhere. And as soon as we fall into it, it closes up. Whoever lives here wants us to stay. The only question is for how long.”

Something caught Bey’s attention outside the pod. He tried to see into the darkness, but the lights inside the pod made it difficult. Bey was from the Solar Moon, where it was dark for half the year. As a result, the inhabitants of that planet developed a night-vision capability centered in a bulge on the side of their heads.

“I think there’s something out there,” Bey said.

“But my night vision doesn’t work well with all these lights on.”

THUD! Something slammed against the hull.

“Aaaaaah!” Sivah shrieked.

The lights from inside the pod illuminated the underside of a long, bird-like creature with three claw-tipped feet.

“Don’t move!” Bey whispered.

The creature tried crawling across the hull, but it slipped on the curved surface. Unable to stand, the creature pounded the pod with its long, spike-tipped beak. A tiny crack appeared.

“It going to smash us open like a yallu melon!” Zale cried. “Leep, do something!”

“Very well,” she replied with a *whirrr* and a *beep*. And she collapsed herself into a small metallic cylinder.

“Narlin! Do I have to do everything around here?” Zale shouted. He activated a keypad on the

captain’s chair with a sequence of four numbers. A small command console opened up across his lap. His fingers quickly but nervously danced across the controls.

“Zale, what are you doing?” Bey asked.

“I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to end up some space monster’s lunch!” Zale replied angrily. He activated two red switches on the panel and grabbed the oversized joystick in the center of it.

“So long, mohedd!” Zale said as he squeezed the release switch on the joystick. A sudden burst of light flooded the crater and the pod. It was so bright, the cadets had to shield their eyes.

“RRRRRAAAAAAWWWKKKK!”

The creature no longer pecked away at the pod. It just sat there, motionless. Slowly, the creature slid off the pod and crashed to the ground. It shattered into thousands of tiny crystalline pieces.

“Blastin!” gasped Zale. “Never seen anything like that before.”

“Me neither. It looks like the creature turned into...glass,” Bey said.

“I’m not talking about the creature,” Zale said. “I was talking about that light blast. I thought I was firing the stun cannons.”

“These pods don’t have stun cannons, Zale,” Sivah said. “Do you think they’d let Endio Academy cadets have access to weapons like that? Dr. W told me they replaced the stun cannons with star flares.”

“The light must have crystallized the creature,” Bey said.

“Well, whatever it was, it saved us,” Sivah said. “Another few minutes, and that thing would have cracked the view shield right open.”

“Well, that’s only one of our problems,” Bey reported. “The star flare drained two of our fuel cells. Unless we can find a new energy source, we’re not going anywhere.”

A dull pounding suddenly echoed through the pod. Everyone froze.

“It’s another one of those creatures!” Zale whispered. He got ready to fire another star flare.

“I don’t think those creatures would use the door,” Bey said. “It sounds like someone’s knocking.”

“We’re stuck in a pit in the middle of a planet!” Zale shouted. “Who’s going to be knocking on our space ship? The Nutrin Nuber Ice Cream Man?”

“There’s only one way to find out,” Bey shrugged. He looked at Sivah, who turned to Zale, who got out of his seat and pushed Leep’s black “reset” button. The L-P series robot popped back up to her regular size. They told her what was going on.

“Very well, cadets,” Leep said, “weighing concerns for your short-term safety against your

chances for long-term survival, I can come to only one conclusion.”

The cadets stared at Leep in anticipation as the knocking became louder.

“Open the door.”

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