

SPACE QUEST 3

RUNAWAY COMET

Chapter 1

by James Gelsey

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“Blastin!” Zale exclaimed. “Do you see that?”

On board their tiny space ship, the three Endio Academy cadets watched in wonder as the crumpled remains of a charred space ship drifted by.

“I wonder what the battle was like,” Zale said.

“I wonder where it’s from,” Bey said.

“I wonder what happened to the crew,” Sivah said.

Leep, the L-P Series android traveling with the cadets, moved forward on her rolling tread feet.

“And I wonder how we can make this a valuable learning moment,” she said. “Oh, I know.

Think back to your expedition reading list. Chapter four in Major Mifflin’s textbook on intergalactic—”

“Leeeeeeeeeeep!” moaned the cadets.

“Don’t you think being accidentally launched from our school’s space ship and sent through a stellar vortex into the middle of nowhere entitles us to not have to do any school work?” asked Sivah. Sivah Benjamin was the smartest girl in the whole class. Her parents were famous Ban’ok explorers who disappeared on their last expedition.

“I don’t know,” Leep said. “I think Dr. W would be terribly disappointed if I didn’t keep you up to date on your studies. After all, you are still on an Endio Academy expedition.”

“Then how about teaching us something

useful?” asked Zale. Zale Gyre was all about action. Being the son of a famous general, Zale looks for any excuse he can to get into the pilot’s seat of the cadets’ tiny pod. “Like how to get the pod outside the gravitational pull of the comet we’ve been trailing for the past three hours.”

“Or how we can outmaneuver the Navan’od cargo cruiser that’s about to overtake us,” Bey said. He had been staring out into space, monitoring their situation through the pod’s transparent hull. They all watched the enormous black space ship emerge from a mass of debris.

“Where did that come from?” asked Zale.

“It must have gotten caught in the comet’s tail like us,” Bey said.

“Do you think it will attack?” asked Sivah.

“I don’t see why it should,” Leep said. “As far as it’s concerned, we’re probably just another piece of space junk.”

Two silver flashes left the Navan’od space ship and zoomed past the pod on either side. The flashes collided into chunks of rock and exploded.

“If we’re space junk, we must have big fat bulls-eye painted on us,” Zale said. Two more silver flashes quickly zipped past the pod. Zale jumped into the captain’s chair in the middle of the bridge.

“What are you doing, Cadet Zale?” asked Leep.

“Taking evasive action,” Zale said. “Since we don’t have any weapons on this thing, there’s nothing

we can do to protect ourselves.”

Zale entered some numbers on the keypad on his chair. A miniature command console unfolded across his lap. He gently maneuvered the ship forward and down into the bulk of the comet’s long tail. Chunks of ice and other debris began slamming into the ship’s transparent view shield.

“Careful, Zale, you’re getting too close to the comet,” Sivah warned. Up ahead, she could make out a bright white flame.

“Watch out, Zale!” Bey called. “They’re firing again!”

“Oh, yeah?” said Zale. “Watch this!” He yanked back the command stick, abruptly pulling the pod up and back. The sudden change in momentum

slammed Leep's robotic body against the front of the bridge. Bey and Sivah barely managed to stay in their seats. The cadets watched the silver pulses fly forward and slam into the back of the comet. The Navan'od ship zoomed forward beneath the pod.

"It worked!" Sivah shouted.

"Of course," Zale said.

Bey watched the Navan'od cargo cruiser begin to slow and adjust its position. "Uh oh," he said. "I think it's on to us."

But before the Navan'od ship could move any further, an energy pulse came out of the comet and blasted the Navan'od ship. The black cargo cruiser shuddered under the impact and tumbled out of control. The cadets watched it spin off into space.

"I've never seen a comet fire a stun cannon before," Zale said.

"That's because it's not a comet," Bey said.

"It's a space ship!"

What was once a fiery ball of flame was now a sleek silver space ship leaving a wispy trail behind.

"The Navan'ods must have hit it," Sivah said.

"It's changing course," Bey said. "It's heading for that space station in the distance."

"I say we follow it," Sivah said. "Just to make everything's all right."

"I say we follow it because maybe somebody there can tell us how to get home," Bey added. For a moment, it seemed that everyone forgot that they were actually lost, having been pulled through a stellar

vortex and shot to some unknown point across the galaxy.

“I don’t know,” Leep said. “It could be dangerous.”

“Dangerous? I think it’ll be incredibly cool,” Zale said. “How often do you come across a space ship that can become a comet?”

“Now that would be a valuable learning moment,” Bey said. “How about it, Leep?”

Leep paused to consider the request. She looked at the three cadets and saw the smiles on their faces. “Very well, cadets,” she said. “Follow that comet!”

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