

SPACE QUEST

BLAST-OFF!

Chapter 4

by James Gelsey

Copyright ©2004 by James Gelsey.
All rights reserved.

Chapter 4

*Team Quest report to the pod deck for
orientation!*

Leep's voice echoed through Zale's telepatch. He dropped his nutrin bar and grabbed his purple backpack. "The pod deck! Blastin'!"

He raced down the hallway to the lift but didn't notice Sivah stepping out of her room. They collided with a mighty THUD. Zale bounced back against the wall, and Sivah's bag crashed to the floor.

"Watch it!" Sivah yelled.

"Sorry," Zale said.

"What, was there a Zyrillian Funger Beast chasing you or something?" Sivah asked. She knelt down and peered into her bag, making sure nothing

was broken.

“I said I was sorry,” Zale shot back. He adjusted his backpack and continued to the lift. As he stood waiting, Sivah walked over and stood behind him. When the door slid open, they stepped inside.

“Pod deck,” they announced together. Sivah and Zale looked at each other and suddenly realized they were teammates. Sivah rolled her eyes and let out a small sigh of disgust. When the door opened a few moments later, Zale hurried out of the lift and onto a balcony that seemed to be floating in mid-air.

“Wow,” Sivah gasped upon stepping out next to him.

The pod deck was actually a cavernous hangar larger than anything either of them had ever seen.

Two rows of five enormous planetary observational modules stood before them. Each pod was as large as a house on Endio and perfectly spherical.

“Welcome to the pod deck, Team Quest,” Leep said cheerily. Sivah and Zale noticed Bey standing beside her. “Now that you’re all here, we can begin our orientation. Watch your step, please.”

The cadets followed Leep onto a long, narrow walkway that stretched between the two rows of pods. The walkway reached from the balcony all the way to the far end of the hangar deck. A short entry ramp dangled from the walkway to each of the pod’s doorways.

“These pods were originally designed for short-term deep space exploration,” Leep lectured. “But

once the Great Galactic War began, they were used in another way. Can anyone tell me what that was?"

"As emergency escape vehicles," Sivah answered. "They were pre-programmed to take war refugees to various safe destinations. They helped save hundreds of lives, if not more."

"Excellent, Sivah," Leep said. "Did you learn that by reading Major Mifflin's textbook, *A Ban'ok History of Space Exploration*?"

"No, I learned it by reading my parents' expedition journals," Sivah responded. "They were part of the original Ban'ok expeditions that used ships like the Vahok during the Great Galactic War and eventually discovered Alron."

"The Ban'oks didn't discover Alron!" Zale

interrupted. "Alron was a fully developed civilization by the time the Ban'oks came along. It was the Alronians who noticed the Ban'oks floating around in space and let them hang out on Alron for a while."

"Very interesting," Leep noted. "Perhaps at a later time you both can add some of this information to my data files. Ah, here we are."

Leep stopped in front of one of the ramps. "Welcome, cadets, to your very own planetary observation module," she said happily.

The cadets saw "QUEST, VK 27.45" written over the doorway. They stepped over the threshold and onto the pod's bridge. An imposing command console wrapped half way around the circular space. The only other remarkable feature was the pod's

transparent shell, giving the cadets an unobstructed view of the hangar wall. Zale eyed the captain's chair in the center of the room.

"Dibs!" he shouted as he threw himself into the cushy seat.

"The living quarters and mini-lab are on the level below us," Leep said. "Engineering and cargo are below that. And cargo is where we'll be spending our time today."

"You mean we're not staying up here?" Zale asked, crushed.

"No, Zale, your orientation starts at the bottom and works its way up," Leep explained. "But don't worry, we'll be back up here before you know it. Your task today is to make sure the craft is adequately

supplied for deep space exploration."

"I don't believe this," Zale muttered. "My first time on a real pod, and I have to spend it in the closet."

"After I activate the essential systems, we'll proceed down to the cargo level," Leep said. She rolled over to the command console and placed one of her fingers into a computer port.

Suddenly, the entire pod shook as if hit by a giant hammer. Sivah and Bey tumbled to the ground. Zale was almost thrown from the captain's chair. And Leep careened across the bridge and slammed into the rear wall.

"Narlin!" Zale exclaimed. "What was that?"

"Are you okay, Leep?" asked Sivah.

Leep beeped and whirred a few times. The image on her monitor flickered between waves of color and star charts. Finally, the screen went black and her eyes appeared to open. They blinked a couple of times.

“I’m fine, Cadet Sivah,” Leep answered.

Bey meanwhile studied the command console.

“Leep?” he called.

This was the first word Zale and Sivah had heard him speak. They were surprised at how normal he sounded.

“Yes, Cadet Bey?”

“What did you do?” he asked.

“I activated the pod’s essential systems so we could begin work in the cargo area,” Leep replied.

“Are you sure?” continued Bey. “Because I think the pod’s computer systems have come on-line.”

Leep rolled over and scanned the command console.

“You’re right, Cadet Bey,” Leep said. “I’m no expert in space crafts, but I believe the computer has activated the launch sequence.”

“Launch sequence?!” Zale and Sivah exclaimed.

They spun around as the pod’s door slid shut. Zale ran over to open it but couldn’t find a handle. Instead, he pounded on the door with all his might.

“Hey! Open up! Let us out of here!” he shouted, stopping only when he felt the sensation of motion. He turned and watched as the pod deck rose

above them.

“What’s happening?” Sivah cried. “Where are we going?”

“It looks like we’re going beneath the pod deck,” Bey said. “But I’m not sure where.”

A moment later it became very clear where as the cadets stared down into a long, red tunnel.

“It’s the launch chute!” Zale shouted. “Quick, sit down and buckle yourselves in!”

Zale raced over to the captain’s chair while Sivah and Bey jumped into the two seats in front of the command console. They watched helplessly as a ring of red light at the far end of the chute turned green. Ring by ring, the chute filled with green light. As the lights changed, the far end of the chute began

to open. When the ring closest to the pod turned green, the cadets felt a rush like they never felt before.

“WHHOOOOOOAAAAHHHHH!”

The pod barreled down the launch chute and flew out into space.

“I have a funny feeling this wasn’t supposed to be part of our orientation,” Sivah said.

Don’t miss Chapter 5 of

SPACE QUEST: BLAST-OFF!

Coming next month only to James’s Bookshelf at

WWW.GELSEYBOOKS.COM!