

SPACE QUEST

BLAST-OFF!

Chapter 7

by James Gelsey

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“There’s no way they left us,” Zale said confidently to Sivah. “My dad’s an Alronian war hero. Your parents are like the explorer gods of Endio. And you...”

Zale’s voice trailed off as he realized he didn’t know anything about Bey.

“Anyway,” he continued. “They’re not just going to leave three cadets out in space by themselves.”

Leep made a couple of inconspicuous beeps to remind Zale of her presence on the pod as well.

“Maybe they didn’t leave us,” Bey suggested. “Maybe we left them.”

Zale looked at Bey like he was crazy. Sivah was intrigued.

“Think about it,” Bey said. “We all saw ourselves getting pulled towards the center of the stellar vortex. Maybe we actually got pulled in and came out the other side.”

A thousand words fought inside Zale’s head for the privilege of being the first ones out. The phrase, “What are you, some kind of mohedd?” won.

“Zale!” scolded Sivah, angry that he would use that kind of a swear word.

“I can’t believe you’re taking him seriously,” Zale countered. “Nothing can come out the other side of a stellar vortex because there is no other side. Only one thing can happen when you get sucked into a stellar vortex: you get vaporized into sub-atomic particles.”

“Or not,” Bey said quietly.

“That’s because...because...the vortex became unstable and broke up by itself!” Zale announced victoriously.

“Then where is everyone else?” asked Bey. “If your theory is true, the Vahok should be waiting for us behind the planetoid field,

and the rescue pod should have been here by now.”

Zale stared out into the emptiness of space and realized that Bey had a point. But Zale’s stubborn side still refused to give in.

“I say forget them,” Zale announced. “Let’s just go back to Endio ourselves. Leep, now that your hand is fixed, try to override the navigational systems again and get us back to Endio.”

Leep carefully inserted her slender metallic fingers into the comm link.

“The computer’s navigational system is unable to do that,” Leep responded.

“Why?” Sivah asked. “Did one of those quantum pulses damage it?”

“No, all systems are operating perfectly and free of any pre-programmed directives,” Leep replied.

“Then what’s the problem?” Zale questioned impatiently.

“I know,” Bey said. “It can’t find Endio.”

“That is correct, Cadet Bey,” Leep answered.

“But we just left Endio last night,” Sivah remarked.

“It’s not a matter of time,” Bey said. “It’s distance.”

“That’s the problem with these old pods,”
Zale complained. “The navigational computers
have absolutely no range.”

“Actually, the range of the computer’s
navigational memory is over one hundred
million star units,” Leep said.

“Then why can’t it find Endio?” Zale
demanded.

“Because Endio’s not here,” Bey said,
looking back into space. “Or more precisely,
because we’re not there. At least, not
anymore. Not since we went through the
stellar vortex.”

“We really did go through a stellar
vortex,” Sivah echoed in amazement.

“Don’t listen to him!” Zale shouted.
“What does he know about space travel? He’s
from the Solar Moon!”

“And you’re from Alron!” Sivah shot back.
“And my parents were from Vahok. But none
of that matters now because we’re all stuck on
this pod in the middle of nowhere, all right?”

Bey thought it curious that Sivah would
jump to his defense so quickly, considering she
hardly even knew him. But at least it silenced
Zale for the moment. The three cadets quietly

stared out into space, trying to wrap their brains around the situation.

“According to the Quest’s navigational computer, we are in an uncharted sector of space,” Leep reported.

Zale couldn’t take it any longer.

“Space ships don’t just appear in uncharted sectors of outer space,” he exploded. “They can’t travel that fast. So there’s gotta be something wrong. Either something happened to the pod’s computer, or Leep popped a circuit. And whatever it is, I’m not going to sit around and wait to figure it out.”

“What are you going to do, Zale?” Sivah asked nervously.

“What I should have done before,” he replied as he threw himself back into the captain’s chair. “I’m taking over this ship!”

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