

SPACE QUEST

BLAST-OFF!

Chapter 8

by James Gelsey

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“Cadet Zale, you are in direct violation of the Endio Academy code of conduct,” Leep sternly announced as she whipped around. Unfortunately, she forgot to remove her hand from the comm link before turning. Looking at the exposed end of her robotic arm, she sighed, “Oh, dear, not again.”

“Listen, the pod’s computer can’t help us find the Vahok or get back to Endio,” Zale argued. “And Leep’s certainly in no condition to fly this ship. If we’re going to have a chance at getting back, we have to do it ourselves.”

Sivah was beginning to tire of Zale’s arrogance.

“So who made you the captain?” she asked.

“Do you think the thousands of hours you wasted after school playing video games gives you special powers that neither of us have?”

“No,” Zale said quietly. “But this does.”

Keeping his eyes on Sivah, he reached down for his backpack. Zale opened it up and took out a small black box. As he opened the box, the bridge filled with the soft orange glow of the magnel. Bey’s eyes widened in surprise and wonder.

“What is that?” he asked, stepping in for a closer look.

Zale didn’t reply. He simply smiled.

“It’s his magnel,” Sivah explained, unable to take her eyes off it. “All Alronians have one. I read

once in my parents’ journals that they have all kinds of special powers. But the powers only work on Alronians.”

“What does it do?” Bey inquired.

“By itself, it doesn’t really do anything,” Zale said. “But once it comes into contact with me it, it can help me do a lot of things.”

“Like fly a pod?” Sivah snapped.

“No, smarty. But it can help me navigate,” Zale answered. “Once, during the Great Galactic War, it helped my father find a hidden enemy base. It can get me anywhere I want to go. Like Endio.”

“How does it work?” Bey asked, trying to understand how something so small could be so powerful.

“I don’t know,” Zale shrugged. “I don’t think anyone on Alron knows. When they were discovered, they just sort of started communicating with us. And no one’s ever been able to figure out what’s inside or how they work.”

“Excuse me, Cadet Zale, but even if your magnel can help find the way home, we don’t know how to activate the control panel to fly the pod ourselves,” Leep pointed out. “We lost contact with Dr. W before she could finish providing the security code.”

Bey nodded thoughtfully for a moment. “It’s five,” he said.

Sivah and Zale looked at Bey quizzically.

“What’s five?” they asked in unison.

“The last number of the security code,” Bey replied. “It’s two-seven-four-five.”

“How do you know that?” Zale asked suspiciously. “Only Dr. W knows the code.”

“Actually we all know the code, we just don’t know that we know it,” Bey replied. “When we first came onto the pod, there were some numbers over the door.”

Sivah’s eyes lit up.

“Quest VK 27.45!” she exclaimed. “Of course!”

Zale wasted no time punching in the numbers. A miniature command console flipped open on his lap.

“Sivah, on my command, disengage the automatic systems,” Zale said, his voice all business now. “You know, the orange switches.”

“I remember, thanks,” Sivah replied curtly.

“Bey, get ready to activate the energy shields, just in case,” Zale said.

Zale examined the control panel. His fingers danced along the two rows of buttons and switches. He grabbed the oversized joystick with his right hand and took a deep breath.

“Disengage the automatic systems...now!” he ordered.

Sivah flipped the orange switches. The pod lurched slightly as Zale’s grip on the joystick tightened.

“Easy does it,” he whispered to himself.

Zale grabbed the magnel tightly in his left hand and closed his eyes. His face tightened up in concentration. Zale’s left hand glowed as the magnel within it brightened. With his eyes closed, Zale moved the joystick slightly to the left. The cadets could feel the gentle shift in direction as the stars before them moved across their field of vision.

“Wow,” Sivah gasped. “This is pretty neat.”

Bey and Sivah split their attention between Zale behind them and the view of space before them. Zale opened his eyes and smiled.

“Just like the simulator,” he bragged. “Easy as nutrin pie. Shouldn’t be long now.”

The pod continued along Zale's magnel-inspired course for some time. And after a while, Bey and Sivah began to grow impatient.

"It feels like we've been doing this for hours, Zale. How much longer?" asked Sivah. "Or should I ask your magnel?"

Zale's eyes narrowed a bit. "Very funny," he said. "Leep, ask the computer how far we've traveled and to do another sector scan for Endio."

Leep had been passing the time trying to get her hand out of the comm link again. Grateful for something else to do, she acted quickly.

"According to the computer, we have traveled one hundred twelve star units in a recurrently

diminishing mono-plane course," Leep announced.

None of the cadets understood a word.

"In other words," Leep explained, "we have been traveling towards the center of a giant spiral."

"What?" Zale exclaimed. "That's impossible! My magnel's supposed to be getting us to Endio. We're supposed to be there any minute. Endio's gotta be here. It's just got to."

Zale jumped up to explore the vast star field himself. Sivah got up and walked over him.

"Zale, even a magnel can't help us find Endio if Endio isn't here to be found," she said gently. "Look, Zale. No Endio. No suns." She looked over her shoulder at Bey. "Not even the Solar Moon. Face it, Zale. We're lost. All alone."

“We may be lost,” Bey said, focusing his gaze on something in space. “But I don’t think that we’re alone.”

Sivah, Zale and Leep looked out and saw a tiny red light flashing in the distance. As the pod got closer to it, they could begin to make out a pattern to its flashing.

“That looks like a space beacon of some kind,” Sivah gasped.

Just beyond the flashing beacon, the cadets saw something else. It was a dark, oddly shaped mass hanging in space.

“It’s too big to be a planetoid,” Bey said. “But its faceted surface seems almost too smooth to be a planet.”

“I’ll bet it is a planet,” Zale said, jumping up.

“My magnel found a planet. It may not be Endio, but it’s a planet, all right. Yes! It does work!”

“The question is whether there’s anyone there who can help us,” Sivah said.

Zale, Sivah and Bey gazed out onto the new discovery.

“There’s only one way to find out,” Zale said, jumping back into the captain’s chair. “Hang on, everyone. Team Quest is going for a ride!”

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