

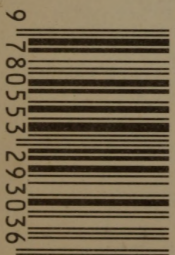
CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE® 133

THE FORGOTTEN PLANET

BY DOUG WILHELM



ISBN 0-553-29303-6



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Jo Nathan

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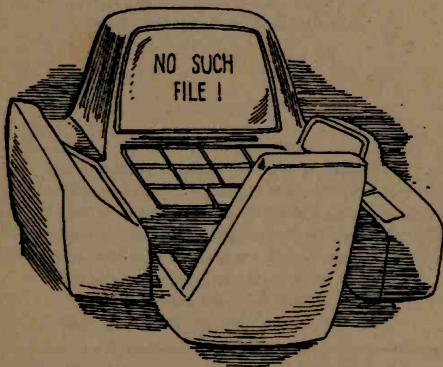
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CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE® • 133

THE FORGOTTEN PLANET

BY DOUG WILHELM



ILLUSTRATED BY RON WING

An R.A. Montgomery Book



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THE FORGOTTEN PLANET

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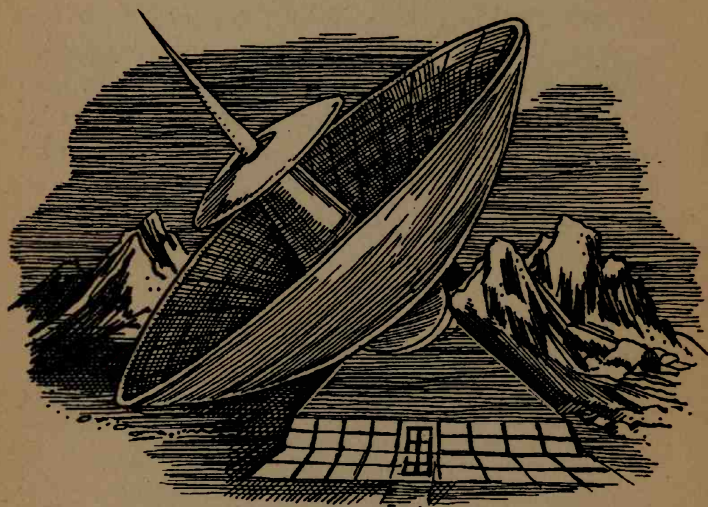
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For Peter Colman



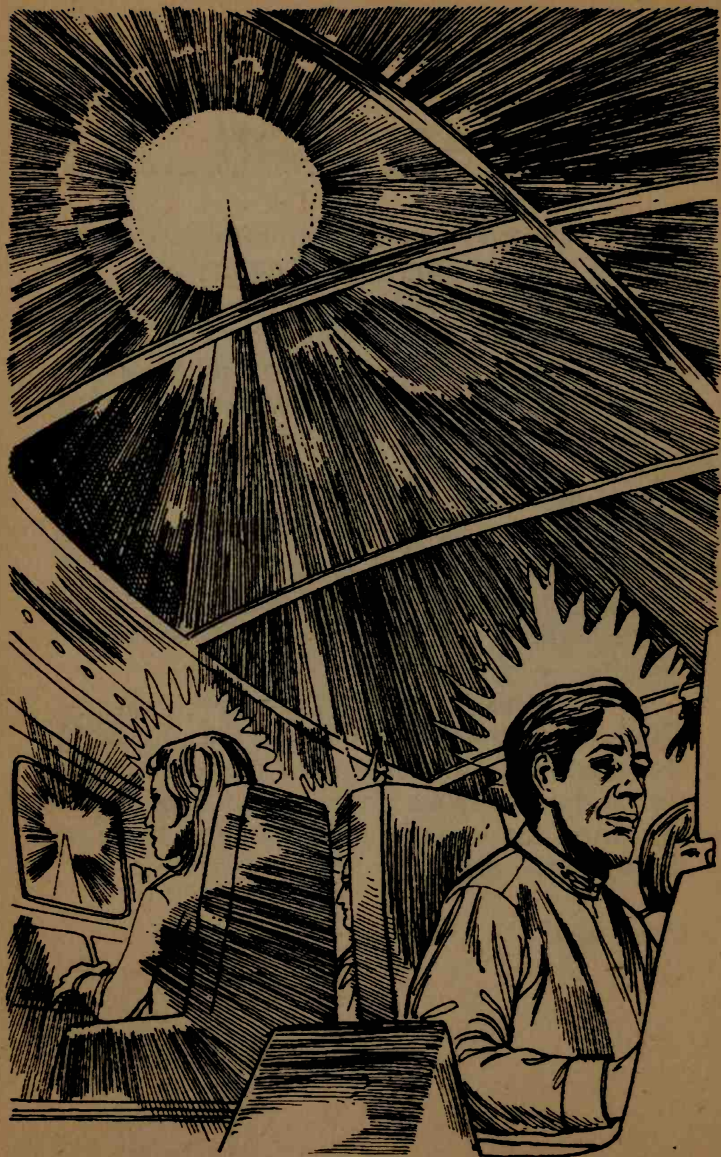
WARNING!!!

Do not read this book straight through from beginning to end. These pages contain many different adventures that you may have as you investigate the disappearance of a space probe near the planet Minos. From time to time as you read along, you will be asked to make a choice. Your choice may lead to success or disaster!

The adventures you have on your home planet, Casgar, as well as on Minos are the results of your choices. You are responsible because you choose. After you make a decision, follow the instructions to find out what happens to you next.

Think carefully before you act. In the year 2145 the galaxy can be a dangerous place. You may rescue the lost space probe from Minos or you may meet the same fate and be lost forever on the forgotten planet.

Good luck!



It's been a boring day at Interweb Central, where you are working as a summer intern handling information requests on your computer.

Your Interweb station is on the planet Casgar, in the Sirian solar system. The year is 2145, midway through the twenty-second century, and you're a third-year student at the Galaxy Union's Academy of Advanced Applications, majoring in Interweb operation.

"Earth News Service requests info-search." The amber letters float on your holographic monitor. "Subject: Unexplained Disappearance."

Your day has just gotten a lot more interesting. Eagerly you tap the command pads for video and audio communication with the news bureau. A tight stream of digital impulses shoots powerful microwaves from Earth to your planet. The data stream is one of millions entering the central station for Interweb, the galaxywide communications system.

As the data stream enters your display, the hologram it creates is fuzzy at first, then sharpens to a 3-D image of a dark-haired man with sharp features and bright, probing eyes.

He wastes no time in telling you what he needs. "Someone is blocking my reporters' access to information we must have immediately," he says to you. "We've hit a solid wall every time we've tried. The situation is dire. Can you help?"

You love a challenge. "Sure," you say. "I'll give it a shot."



Interweb is one of the galaxy's most vital systems, handling every space-crossing linkup that's needed for communication, information, navigation, and defense. Many feel it's the life plasma of the galaxy.

You are happy that defense isn't much needed anymore. At the end of the twenty-first century, all planets grounded their long-range missiles and bombers and formed the Galaxy Union. You are one of the first generations to live in an era of safe, clean, hydrogen-fusion power, free and open sharing of technology, and peace.

"My name is Herbert, by the way," the Earth newsman's hologram says. "Jack Herbert. We've been trying to do a story on the disappearance of a space probe, but we can't seem to get any information. Forty years ago, a long-distance probe ship vanished on a mission to explore a planet called Minos."

Something stirs in your memory. "I've heard of the Minos Probe," you say.



You know about the Minos Probe from your uncle Jardon, who has raised you since you were a small child, when your parents were killed in a spacecraft accident. Jardon works in the Interweb Archives next door as a Galaxy Union historian. "We have a hero in our family, an astral explorer," Jardon told you once when you were younger. "She traveled on the Minos Probe. Her name was Julia. She was your great-aunt."

"As you probably know, the Minos Probe departed Earth in 2105," Herbert is saying. "Minos is in the Eighteenth Sector—a pretty remote area. But its solar system has an active sun, and infrared scans showed that Minos might harbor life. So we sent a probe to see what might be out there. After sixteen months in flight, the probe entered Minos's orbit. Then it vanished. Interweb lost all contact with it."

You never actually learned what happened to Julia. Jardon told you about her only once, and you can't recall him mentioning her ever again.

"But that's not all that's strange," the newsman says. "There's more."

"Hey, kid," says Herbert's hologram in front of the miniscreen. "We got cut off. Weird things are happening."

"Yes, they are," you say. "Listen to me, okay? I have to tell you something. You need to drop your inquiry."

Herbert frowns. "Drop it? I'm a newsman. Why should I drop a good story?"

"I can't tell you what I know, but it's urgent. You must . . ."

A gloved hand covers the miniscreen. Another hand grabs your elbow and spins you around.

You're face-to-face with two uniformed men. They're not Casgar police. They're Galaxy Union federal officers.

"Please come with us," says the one who has just hung up on Jack Herbert.

Now, just as suddenly, all the screens settle down. The storm subsides. Interweb comes back on-line.

In the short time you've worked at Interweb, this has never happened. You try in vain to reestablish contact with Herbert, with no luck.

You have two courses of action. You can use your expertise on the Interweb system to try to get past whatever obstacles the Galaxy Union has implemented to hide the probe's fate. You're not sure how far you'll get on your own, though. And it might also be the easiest way to get caught. You can't afford a black mark at the academy.

Or you could ask Uncle Jardon for help. He's a historian, and he knows about the Minos Probe. But why hasn't he told you anything about it in all these years? Is he part of the coverup?

You're eager to find the real story. Which way should you begin?

*If you try probing Interweb on your own,
turn to page 29.*

If you talk with Jardon, turn to page 51.

You wait and listen carefully. You hear the truck slow down.

"He's at the gate," Morgan whispers. "He's showing his pass."

You hold your breath. Will they notice the leak? Then you hear the truck start moving again. You sigh with relief.

"Let's give him time to get far inside," you say.

You wait a minute, then another.

Now it's time.

You train the laser on the thin dark line on the road. In a microsecond, the volatile fuel ignites—and the flash zips around the bend.

FFFFWWWWOOOOOOOM!



It's a risk, but you decide to go for the second dish. You put your ship into a dive and another wrenching turn. But your pursuers are on you now, closing fast.

Seeing them on the screen, you realize how good they are. Your stomach turns over. You put the ship into another turn, another climb, but it's no good. They're on you.

But you're at the second transceptor! You lock on your target and fire.

You watch the digital screen that shows your missile closing in. On impact, the huge dish erupts!

Your panel shows the Minotian ships firing—with you as their target. Your ship joins the fireworks that rain in a million fiery pieces on the startled Minotian city below.

In the seconds before you go down in flames, you hope that somehow Jardon and Murphy will know you died a hero.

The End

Your shoes crunch on hard ground. It's dark. Dull yellow mountains rise into the deep, clear night. Tall fences topped with razor wire cross the base of the mountains, hemming you in.

You've been shipped—so fast you couldn't believe it was really happening—to the Zanskarian solar system, home to a dying star and the Galaxy Union's dreaded Exile 3 prison planets.

The Exile 3 planets are barren deserts. They're the hopeless destination of the worst criminals in the galaxy.

Of course the Union was monitoring Herbert's calls. If only you'd heeded Murphy's warning!

Your mind is racing. What about Jack Herbert? Maybe you should get to him and warn him that further inquiry may land him in jail. Right now you're feeling a bit betrayed by your uncle Jardon. You know he wasn't allowed to tell you he was working with Intelligence. But he kept the truth from you.



*If you decide to warn Herbert,
turn to page 52.*

*If you stay with Jardon and Murphy,
turn to page 63.*

Though you're acting calm, inside you're in torment. There's only one thing to do—you must escape. Yet you can't take 2-4.

You wish there were another way. Forgive me, 2-4, you think as you casually aim the ruby eye up and punch **Project.**

You're gone.

You've done some damage. Now you're going to project yourself out of here.

The three pursuit ships are closing in on you. Frantically you scan the horizon. If you can get back onto the mountains . . .

You yank out the Projector II, taking one hand off the bomber's controls. The ship noses into a spin.

You cartwheel end over end. Your body heaves with the force of gravity, and your gut turns somersaults. But at least you're now a tough target for the pursuit ships. You've got the projector ready, but there's no way and no time to aim the ruby tip. With blind hope, you tap the command for **Project**. Everything goes black.



"Let's go," says a voice. "We can't waste time. They'll come. They heard the shot."

Three figures are standing nearby. These people shot the soldier. They saved your life.

"Wait!" you call out. You sit up and focus.

You see a white-haired older man, a young woman, and a young man. They carry weapons like the soldier's.

"That was a close call," says the older man. "He was about to kill you. You're in great danger. We'll take you with us if you can come right now."

Your ears still throb, but you're okay. You stand up and touch your pocket—the projector is still there.

"I'm ready," you say. You scramble with your rescuers over the rocks toward a narrow path.

"I cannot overstate how secret this information is," Murphy warns you. "If the Galaxy Union authorities learn that you know anything about it, they may throw you in prison. It might be tough even for us to get you out."

"Okay," you say. "But how can transmissions from as far off as Minos upset the whole Interweb?"

This time Jardon answers. "It's a new form of an old technique called radio jamming," he says. "That's when you interfere with someone else's transmissions by sending out stronger waves on the same frequency. In the past, jamming had a limited range. But this is different. We suspect the Minotians have built a transmitter so powerful that its waves reach a critical intensity. They can cover the whole galaxy in minutes, and they overpower every other transmission they meet. We call it hyperjamming."

"But why would the Minotians do this?"

"We don't know," Murphy says. "Why did they seize our probe ships? But we must find out—and that's where you can help."

You can only stare. Murphy leans back. "As you know, all matter is really energy," he says. "Any particle of matter is a quantum of energy."

"Of course," you say. "That's quantum theory: early twentieth-century Earth."

"Yes, and energy particles can be made to jump from one place to another—instantly, without traveling the space in between."

"Sure. That's the quantum leap."

"So it is," Murphy says. "Now, holography is the projecting of molded light energy, using a highly concentrated light beam—a laser. Well, we've developed a holographic laser so concentrated, so powerful, that it can project whole particles instantly, making the quantum leap."

"Whole particles," you say slowly. "You mean . . . not just the image?"

"Right," Murphy says. "We call it the Quantum Projector. Using this we can project onto Minos a quantum hologram of you. It wouldn't be an illusion. It'd be you."

Murphy reaches into his desk. He pulls out two thin, square, palm-sized units. They're the size and shape of Interweb handsets. He hands one to you.

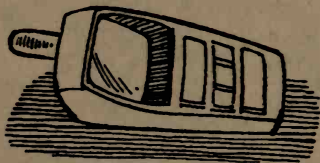
"Meet the Projector II," he says.

You examine it. It's got an ordinary mini finger pad and a tiny holoscreen. From one end protrudes a small, round, deep red eye.

You know how to operate flight systems. It's basic training at the academy. Maybe you can project yourself into one of those star bombers.

It would be risky. But no one would detect you right away, and if you could launch the ship, you might do some real damage before the Minotians could respond.

On the other hand, you would like to learn more about the rebels. Your mission, after all, is only to learn what the Minotians are doing, then get back to Casgar. And they *did* save your life.



If you try projecting into a Minotian star bomber, turn to page 49.

If you stay with the rebels, turn to page 41.



The software is pretty basic. The whole operation is run from a central control system—that's where you are. Using the projector, you select each one of the operating system files. Then you enter a very simple command: **Delete Batch.**

Suddenly there's chaos in the rainbow river. It's not a river now, it's a waterfall. Raging electrons rip and roar by, all sucked into a vortex of destruction, a whirlpool of disintegration over the waterfall's edge. You're falling, too. Then the wild destruction is over: quadrillions of stray electrons, freed from the now-vaporized software, dissipate into the universe, making a quintillion quantum leaps of their own.

Suddenly it's quiet—a soft backwater, like a shimmering pond. With the whole Minotian control system destroyed, you know it's safe to send a message on Interweb.

You type: **All clear**

Jardon's words appear before the screen: **Are we glad to hear from you! Where are you?**

You type: **Hard to say. Can you bring me in?**

The answer: **Yes. Hold on.**

Now the backwater flashes into motion. No—it's not motion. Not really. But whatever you call it, you're going home.

The End

As you start to walk toward the guard, you pretend to stumble. You fall into 2-4 and slip the Projector II into his hand.

Now the guard steps forward. He grabs 2-4's hand and rips the unit out of it. He stares at the device, and a terrible anger crosses his face. You glance at 2-4. His downcast eyes are bright with terror.

You remember what 2-4 said. On Minos, possessing technology means death. And now the projector is in enemy hands!

The two of you are shoved outside and into a purple, windowless van. It drives away. You huddle in total darkness, terrified. After a long while the van jolts to a stop. You're brought into a room and left alone. A minute later a door opens, and a man in a spotless purple uniform steps in.

"My name is Kalin," he tells you. "Commander Kalin."

You expected harsh treatment, but this man speaks softly. He seems very concerned.

"Please," he says. "This is very worrisome. Explain to me how two young workers could have got something like this." He pulls out the Projector II.

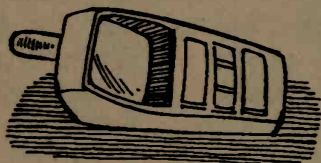
"It's mine," you say. "This boy didn't know about it."

"I see," says the officer. "And just what is it? Perhaps you can explain that to me also."

"I'll show you," you say.

"Please do," says Kalin. And he hands the unit to you.

Now 2-4 looks up at you. No! his pleading eyes seem to say.



You bank, leveling off. Dozens of lights flare on beneath you. An angry voice shouts in your headset. "*Identify immediately!*"

You slip off the headset. You can't think about being caught. You've got a split-second chance to do some damage.

The three enormous transceptors are the biggest and most tempting targets. You're sure the hyperjamming comes from them.

You aim your ship at the nearest dish. You lock the weapon guide screen onto the target's digitized image and press **Release**.

The transceptor explodes! Multicolored fireworks blast into the night sky. You smile, but just for a moment. The ship's screen shows three dart-shaped pursuit ships behind you closing in fast. In a moment they'll fire.

You put your ship into an evasion. With a sickening howl it turns and climbs. You've bought a couple of seconds, no more, to think about what to do.

You could try to outfly the Minotians and go for dish number two. Or you could project out of this ship.

*If you try to destroy another transceptor,
turn to page 10.*

*If you try to project—somewhere—
turn to page 14.*



You jog in line just behind the crest of rocks that hide the city below. As you bring up the rear, you peer through the darkness at the heavy, riflelike weapons the three ahead of you carry. You recognize them as shoulder weapons used by Galaxy Union troops about forty years ago. They fire intensely focused sound waves, and are quite effective at short to midrange.

The three turn and silently slip into the rocks. You follow. You climb toward the crest, scrambling up the rocks as quietly as you can. At the top you look over the edge and gasp.

You forgot to zip it into your pocket. You must have dropped it in your scramble to reach safety. There's no use looking—the heat will have melted its circuitry.

You've saved the galaxy—at least for now. It'll take a long time for the Power to build a new reactor. Meanwhile, you can only hope the Union sends in another spy mission—or perhaps its infrared sensors will detect the energy blackout on Minos.

When the Union ships come, the Purples will be powerless. They'll be defeated, and maybe the workers will have a chance to live—and learn—in freedom. For 2-4's sake, you hope so.

"There's no work tomorrow, 2-4," you say.

"No? What will happen?"

"Well, let's go find out."

You start back. Before you, the city of Minos lies in peaceful darkness.

The End

You decide to help the Earth News Service. You call Herbert on Interweb and say, "I'd like to come see you about the project. But I'm coming on my own."

Herbert whistles. "What happened to your job?"

"The funding for my internship was suddenly cut. I have a feeling it was because of this inquiry."

Hearing this, the newsman chuckles. "I think we've stumbled onto something very big. Come on over."

Later that day you're on the overnight shuttle to Earth. You're strapped in your seat, and the ship is about to penetrate Earth's atmosphere. Your window shade is drawn; you're watching a movie on an Interweb entertainment channel.

All at once the holographic figures on the screen explode in a spray of random data bits.

Then the ship lurches. It bellies downward and goes into a spin.

You decide to help Jack Herbert discover the fate of the Minos Probe.

You touch your panel's command pad for **Search** and type in **Archives**. When **Subject?** appears on your holographic screen, you enter **Probe Ship, Minos, 2105**.

Your routine info-query gets just what Herbert's did: the message **No Such File**. You try the *FactScan*, a year-in-review archive, for 2105, entering the keywords **Minos, Probes, and Astral Explorers**. But each time you get close to the Minos Probe, the computer stops you cold.

Syntax Error, it says. Then, **No Such Listing**. And now, **Interweb Does Not Recognize Minos**.

Herbert was right. Something strange is going on. Interweb says there's no planet called Minos, yet you know there is. You try to call up a biography file for your great-aunt. **No such person** the computer tells you.

Now you begin to get angry. Who—or what—has created this info-blockade?



A line of prisoners marches out of a windowless building nearby. As they trudge near you, a hand grabs your shoulder.

It's a guard. He wears a hooded suit that's as dark as this planet's night. On it, metal spikes and buckles glimmer. The guard looks like an apparition in a nightmare—and that's how he is supposed to look. This is a place of terror.

The guard shoves you toward the marching line.

Will you ever get out of this place? Murphy said he and Jardon might not be able to help if you were thrown in prison. And even if they can do something, it may be light years before you're free. You may never know how you might have helped save the galaxy.

The End

"Every time we ask for information on the Minos Probe," Herbert tells you, "Interweb Archives on your planet Casgar stops us cold. **No such file**, they say. But we know there is a file, because we know the probe went out."

Finally, something exciting is happening on your summer job. "The system's always been reliable," you say. "What do you think is going on?"

"We suspect the Union is covering up the disappearance," says Herbert. "It doesn't seem to want anyone to remember the Minos Probe at all. I need to find out what happened to the probe and why the coverup. You know the Interweb system, and your building is right next to the archives. With your help I can break a major story here on Earth."

It's a bold request. If there is a coverup, you could get into big trouble for nosing into it. But Julia was your great-aunt, and you want to find out what happened to her.

"I'll help," you tell Herbert. "There are two things I can do for you . . ."

Before you can finish, Herbert's hologram explodes—and vanishes.

Amazing, you think. Thirty-five years ago there were three Minos probes. And today Interweb denies their existence altogether.

Quickly you scan the files. The fate of all three space probes was just what Herbert described: Each ship entered Minos' orbit, then vanished without a trace.

The computer records tell of an official Union investigation into the mystery. You follow the news forward in time. The first Union reports suspected a hostile life-force on Minos. Then, in 2114, the public investigation suddenly became classified information and the files were sealed. News about the probes disappeared.

On your screen the following words appear:

Info-query involves Outlaw Planet.

Unauthorized entry.

Info-link broken.

Then your screen shows nothing.

You sag in your chair and stare at the screen. Before you have a chance to digest the information you've just learned, an image of your supervisor's face appears.

"I'm afraid I have bad news for you," she says.

"2-4," you say, "I'm going to go away now. I'm going to send some people back here. I want you to meet them—take them where they need to go. Okay?"

"Yes," he says. You and 2-4 decide on a place for the boy to wait for a commando demolition team. It'll be up to them to find and destroy the power plant.

You activate the Projector II, knowing that hyperjamming can't affect its light-beam transmission.

"2-4," you say, "I will see you again."

He smiles. "Of course!"

And you enter **Project: Home.**

The End



"Julia!" You could leap for joy.

Morgan is surprised. "You know that name?"

"Know it? She's my great-aunt!"

"She is Casgarian," says Morgan thoughtfully. "Well then. You must know the anguish we feel. Julia has been captured by the Power."

"What's that?"

"The Power rules Minos. It is brutal and ruthless. We have watched the Power complete an enormous military buildup. We have no way of knowing what the target may be. But it cannot be on this planet, because the Power rules everything here. Outside the central valley, there is nothing to rule."

"Why not?"

"The rest of Minos is barren," Morgan explains. "Nothing but stones. They contain minerals and a great deal of purple iron ore—good for building machines and weapons—and little else. That is why the Power cast us out here, after seizing our ships. They thought we could not survive."

"So we're sure the Power has readied some great assault across space to obtain more power and more resources," Morgan says. "We can go on trying to sabotage them, to slow them down, or we can risk everything to free Julia. We fear she is being tortured."

*If you agree to help the rebels try to free
Julia, turn to page 43.*

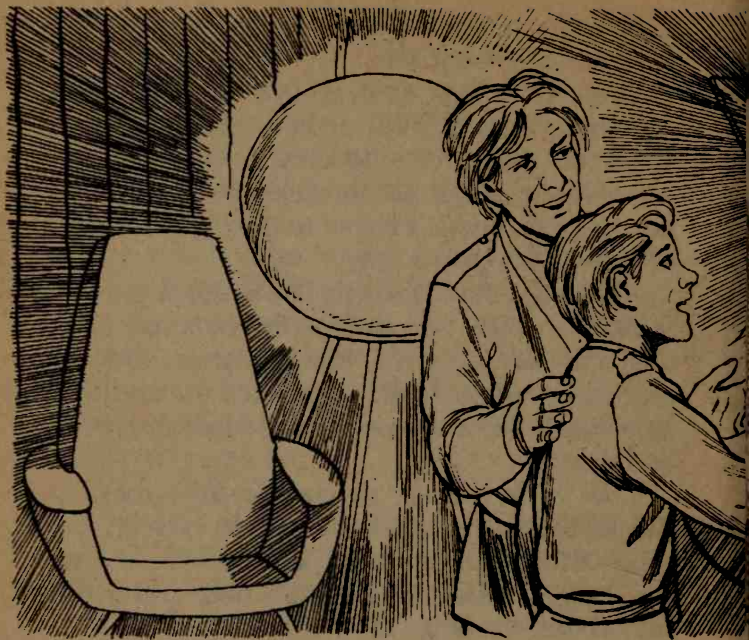
*If you help sabotage the Power,
turn to page 105.*

In a few moments you're in the cockpit of a Minotian star bomber.

There's no sign that you've been detected. The base is quiet. All around you, the other spacecraft stand ready to launch. The Minotians seem set to begin some major military operation. You suspect it's linked to the hyperjamming of Interweb in some way.

Now's the time to act. The control panel is familiar to you. You put on the headset, touch the activation controls, and the ship comes to life. The engines catch and burn behind you. You speed the warm-up. These seconds are life-and-death.

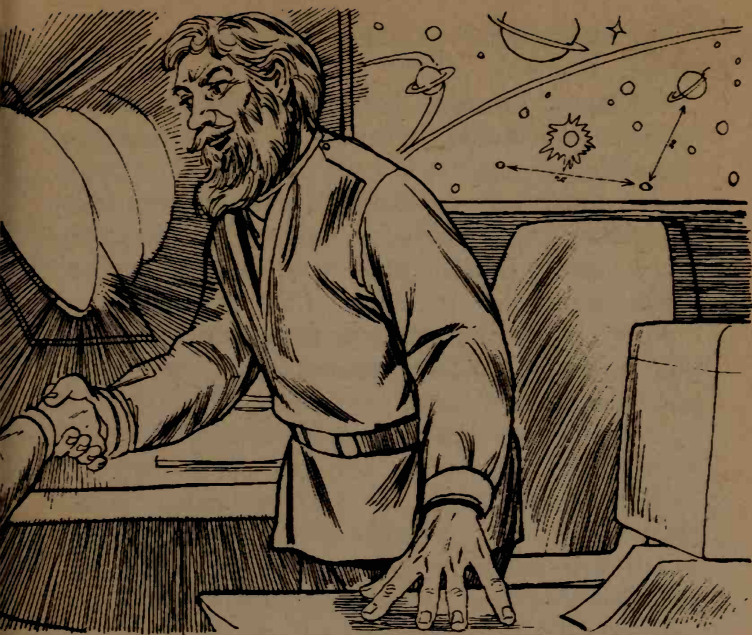
Your radio begins to crackle as a message comes through. You don't wait to hear it. You touch the launch controls. With a violent lurch your ship heaves off the launcher, and you're hurled into the sky.



You and Jardon walk back to the Interweb Archives. Jardon speaks briefly into a private intercom. Then he motions for you to follow him. His research center is on the second underground floor—yet the elevator you take keeps going to the fifth underground floor.

On this lowest level are ordinary-looking offices. Jardon leads you to a white polymerized door that slides open onto a smallish office. At the desk is the usual Interweb terminal.

Behind the desk, though, is a most unusual-looking man. He's huge, with a bushy red beard.



He rises, dwarfing his desk, the office, Jardon, and you. "Well, well!" his voice booms. "This must be our talented young prospect!"

Jardon introduces him. "This is Murphy," he tells you as you shake the man's bearlike hand. "Murphy is a top technological officer with Galaxy Union Intelligence."

Your heart thumps once, hard. The spy service!

Go on to the next page.

"Uncle Jardon?" you ask, "Do you work with him?"

"First and foremost I am a historian," Jardon replies. "But I also do some work with Galaxy Union Intelligence."

You can't believe it. Jardon raised you and he's never told you what he really does! You feel anger, amazement, pride, and fear all at the same time.

Murphy gives you no time to sort through your feelings. "You're here because we need you," he says.

These ragtag rebels may have some answers for the galaxy. You're going to stick with them.

"We're going to have to consider you our prisoner," says the white-haired man. The young woman's hands pad down your flight suit as she searches you. They stop, feel around, and pull out the Projector II.

Her eyes turn hard and cold.

"Please put your hands up," says the older man. The younger man aims his weapon at you.

You've got no choice but to obey. Still, it baffles you. The projector looks like an ordinary handset. How could they think it was a threat? A blindfold is slipped over your eyes, and you're led for miles along a rocky, twisting path. When the blindfold is finally lifted off, you're in a large cave. Firelight flickers over the faces of a dozen people and casts shadows along the stone wall behind them. A few are older, like the white-haired man. The rest are young. Everyone's clothes are ragged.

The white-haired man holds the projector. "My name is Morgan," he says. "As you must know, in this world only the enemy has technology. Please explain why we should not kill you now."



Family comes first. You'll try to free Julia somehow.

With a small band of rebels, disguised as a street-cleaning crew, you and Morgan penetrate the Minotian city.

Before you is a great building with thick window bars. Soldiers in purple stand guard out front.

"This is the prison," whispers Morgan. "Julia is somewhere in there. It does look hopeless."

You push your broom and rack your brain for an idea. Now an armored military vehicle, silver and purple, hovers at the prison gate. The gate swings open and an armed guard marches forward. Surrounded by other guards, walking with haughty dignity despite her ragged clothes, is a tall, white-haired woman.

Morgan shoots you a look and nods.

It's Julia!

You've got to act now.

"With Interweb paralyzed, the Galaxy Union could not resist an attack of this magnitude," Julia tells you. "You've seen the Minotian forces. They would overwhelm the galaxy. We can do just one thing."

"What?"

"You must project yourself back to Casgar. Tell them what you've learned."

"But I can't leave you here. I must help you escape."

"You have no choice. Once they capture us, they won't let me live anyway. Nor you." Julia pauses. "Listen."

In the distance you hear the growl of many vehicles roaring after you. Heavy beating sounds fill the sky.

"Hovercraft," Julia says. "In a few moments they'll be on us."

You veer hard toward a transceptor and roar to a stop before the giant tower. You turn to Julia.

"There's another possibility," you say. "I can lead them away from you while you get on Interweb and tell the Union everything. You know much more than I do."

"But then they'll get us both. Please," Julia pleads. "If you escape now, you can try to come back for me."

*If you choose to project yourself home,
turn to page 104.*

*If you insist that Julia send a warning
instead, turn to page 64.*

"Why," says Jardon finally, "did you run a query on the Minos probes?"

"I was asked to. By a guy from the Earth news bureau. And Uncle Jardon—I remember about Julia."

Silently, slowly, Jardon nods.

"There's some kind of coverup," you say. "Isn't there?"

Jardon looks closely at you. He seems to be weighing some kind of decision. "Let's walk a bit," he says. He is silent for a while. Then he tells you, "It's a lot more than a coverup. You've stumbled into a very serious situation."

He stops and looks right at you. "But there may be something you can do about it."

Your heart races with excitement. "I'll do anything, Uncle Jardon," you say.

"I'd like you to meet somebody," Jardon says.

"When?" you ask.

"Right now," Jardon says, as he strides with purpose across the park.



You're on the roof of the Minotian command building. You look around, awestruck at what you see.

All around are long-range star bombers. Hundreds of them—thousands! Each is a glimmering purple. These must have been what the factory was making. Each bomber is poised on a launcher, ready to go. You can't believe it.

It's some kind of interplanetary attack! That's what the Minotians are planning, and it looks ready. Beyond the bombers are enormous, dish-shaped objects that resemble incredibly powerful transceptors.

Murphy was right!

You've got to get back. You're set to enter **Project: Home**. You can't let yourself think about 2-4. He was innocent, but you must leave him to his fate. The galaxy is full of innocent people; you've got to think of them.

You enter the commands. And Minos—this strange, frightening planet—vanishes.

You only hope you can sound the alarm in time.

The End

"I've just received word that funding for your summer internship has been cut," your supervisor goes on. "I'm not sure why, but your internship will terminate immediately. You'll have to clean out your work space today."

Your supervisor may not know why you were fired, but you do. Your initial computer inquiries have raised suspicion, and Interweb wants you out—now.

Now you're free to continue your investigation on your own.

You could still go to Uncle Jardon. As a historian he's always been independently minded. He might tell you the truth.

Or you could fly to Earth. Your solar system, orbiting the star Siria, is closest to Earth's, so the journey would be short. You could meet Jack Herbert and offer your help as an Interweb expert.

You think carefully as you clean out your Interweb station.

*If you ask Jardon for the truth,
turn to page 90.*

*If you fly to Earth to meet Jack Herbert,
turn to page 28.*

You decide to send yourself into a Minotian ship.

"I've got an idea," you tell the three rebels. They turn and look at you with friendly curiosity.

You pull the Projector II from your pocket. "You see," you start to explain.

"Freeze!" orders the older rebel.

All three raise their weapons at you.

"So you're with the Power, after all," shouts the young man.

"You think we'd be that stupid?" the young woman spits out. "You think we'd let you radio our position to them?"

"No," you say. "It's not . . . I'm not a . . . What did you call them?"

"Just lay the unit on the ground," says the older man. "Very slowly. Now."

"Incredibly powerful transmissions have been disabling the entire Interweb system," Murphy tells you. "So far the episodes—we call them seizures—have been brief. But they have already caused several spacecraft accidents. And we fear that's only the beginning."

You remember the momentary blackout at Interweb Central earlier that afternoon. A seizure of the system—that's exactly what it seemed like.

No one needs to tell you how dangerous a disabling of Interweb could be. Without it, the Galaxy Union would be totally helpless.

"These seizures seem to be coming from the Eighteenth Sector of the galaxy," Murphy goes on. "To be precise, from the planet Minos."

You call Jardon and arrange to meet for dinner at a small cafe. As he sips his coffee, you trail your spoon across an uneaten bowl of sherbet.

"I've never seen you fail to wolf down dessert," your uncle says. "If I were a detective, I'd suspect something was up."

You look up at Jardon's gentle face. He's happy with his quiet archival research. Maybe you shouldn't trouble him with this. Yet somehow, you know it's important.

"Uncle Jardon," you say, "I got a request today for information about the Minos Probe."

Jardon sets down his coffee cup. When he looks up at you, his face is a mask—expressionless.

"From whom?"

"So there was a Minos Probe!" you say.

"I'm not saying that. I'm just asking who made the request."

Your scholarly uncle is acting very strange. "It was a news bureau," you say. "From Earth. The editor said Interweb didn't want to give them any information about the Probe. But I remembered what you told me about Aunt Julia."

Jardon's shoulders sag. He's himself again, mild and kind. He shakes his head.

"I wish," he says, "that this hadn't happened."

You decide to warn Herbert. "This is a lot to absorb," you tell Murphy and Jardon. "May I take a short walk?"

Murphy frowns. "I don't think . . ."

But your uncle steps in. "A short break won't hurt."

"Well . . . all right," Murphy says. "Five minutes. That's all."

A minute later, Jardon has taken you to the lobby of the Interweb Archives building.

"I'll be back in five," you say.

"Four," says Jardon. "Okay?"

"Okay." You stride out the door and disappear into the rush-hour crowd. You look right and left, until you see a public Interweb unit.

Swiftly, you place a call to Earth.



You're going to transmit. This is risky. If the Minotians detect your signal, things could get hot again fast.

But you've got to try. You activate the projector's microwave communicator. You bring in the Interweb frequency. . . .

Something's wrong. There's no Interweb. The machine's going haywire. You can't get it to connect or even respond. Baffled and scared, you punch **Reset**.

That works.

Then you realize what's happening.

It's a hyperjam!

It's happening silently, right now. This could be another test, or this could be it: The knockout of all the galaxy's defense and communications so the first wave of star bombers and missiles can launch.

You can't take the chance. You've got to get back.

"You understand that holography is the projecting of light to make a 3-D image appear in a new place," Murphy continues.

"Sure. We use holography all the time."

"Yes. And it uses light waves—not radio waves."

"Which means the Minotians couldn't jam a hologram."

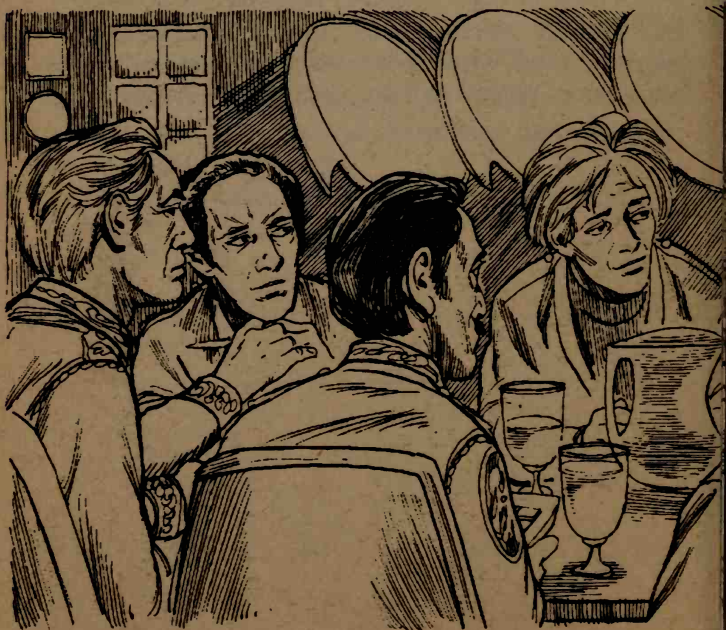
"Right!" Murphy beams.

"But so what? You can't fight the Minotians with holograms—they're only illusions."

"Wrong," says Murphy. He leans so close his red beard almost tickles your chin. "What if I told you we can send a hologram that's a whole person? And what if we can place that person anywhere, within inches, on Minos—instantly?"

It's a full day later. You, Jardon, and Murphy are finally emerging from seven long hours with the Galaxy Union's top military commanders. In an exhaustive debriefing, you've convinced them that the Union must act decisively, and fast.

The key, you've said, is to use lasers to fire light beams that hyperjamming can't stop, knock out the transceptors, then send an assault force to destroy the outlaw planet's missiles and star bombers.



"It's the only chance for survival," you tell them.

The commanders listen and nod. "You're right," they say. "We'll get an operation started."

Go on to the next page.



Now, walking to the spaceport for the flight home, Jardon congratulates you.

"You're a hero, you know," he says. "The Union can't say anything publicly just now, but it will."

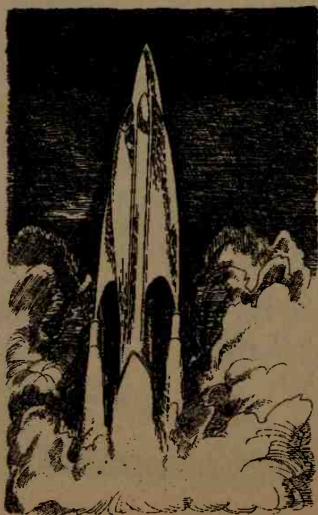
"Thanks."

"Now," he says. "Tell me about Julia."

"She's the real hero, Jardon—Julia and her band of rebels."

You start at the beginning. And you tell him everything.

The End



It's clear to you now that whatever the probe found upset the Galaxy Union enough to have prompted a coverup. You also realize that the coverup must have been set in motion sometime after the Minos Probe disappeared.

What if you create an info-query about Minos that comes from the past?

Quickly you change the date on your query to the Archives from the present 2145 to 2110—just five years after the probe vanished.

You request **All info on Minos Probe.**

This time your terminal gives the whirl of a response coming through.

Choose Topic:

Minos Probe 1

Minos Probe 2

Minos Probe 3

You choose to be placed on the mountains that surround the city on Minos.

You sit in the holography chamber while its ruby lenses activate. In your hand is the Projector II. Murphy's last words echo in your head. "This unit also has a microcomputer and an Interweb communicator. But be careful about contacting us! The Minotians may be able to detect microwave transmissions."

The red lenses come to life. They glow softly, then brighter, stronger . . .

And now you're nowhere. You're rushing in a river of light. No, you're not moving at all. You're somewhere new.



"We had a small problem with projecting fully grown individuals with Projector I," Murphy explains. "We think we've solved it with the Projector II. However, to project a person who's not entirely full grown gives this mission the best chance of success.

"In the next room is the new Quantum Holography Camera. Once it records your hologram, we can use this hand unit to project you. The camera will also record the hand unit you're holding, and we'll send that with you. Once you're on Minos, you'll be able to relocate your image—and to project yourself home."

"One question," you say. "Will I be *real* there? If I'm captured, will I be stuck?"

Murphy's face is serious. Jardon chews his lip and looks down. "It's impossible to be in two places at once, I'm afraid," he says. "If you're killed, you'll be dead." He pauses for a moment. "So that's it. Reach Minos, find out what they're up to and get back."

You decide it's too risky to try to contact Herbert. "Tell me more," you say to Jardon and Murphy. "How can I help with this?"

"We believe you are the person to undertake a dangerous and uncertain mission," Murphy says. "We need your youth and your special talent with technology. Also, Jardon highly recommends your courage. And because you two are family, we believe we can trust you. That's vital. If the Minotians can knock out Interweb, they can paralyze us—and who knows what they might do next. But just as they have pushed radio jamming into a new dimension, we've done something very similar. We've built a technology that could save the galaxy."

"Sorry, Julia," you say. "I'm staying. You've been fighting the Power for decades. I want you to get on Interweb to Union Intelligence, and tell them everything you can."

Looking at you, Julia's eyes grow sad—but only for a moment. "All right," she says. "Get me on line and then buy me as much time as you can."

In a few moments the stage is set. Julia has climbed into the transceptor's superstructure. She's got the projector and Interweb on line. The Minotians won't look up there. They'll chase the armored vehicle. You slam it into gear and push it to the fastest possible speed, leaving a plume of dust behind you.

With a pounding throb of engines, the half dozen Hovercraft heave into view. They dive out of the sky like high-tech hawks. On the horizon you see more dust plumes rise, as armored cars race in pursuit.

You lead the wild, thundering chase for as long as you can, gaining Julia several precious minutes to send the intelligence that could save the galaxy. When finally the Hovercraft are on you, you wheel the car to a spinning stop. Dust gusts up and hides you for a few seconds more.

When it clears, you're surrounded. The armored cars and the Hovercraft slowly close in, like purple beasts of prey. You sit in the car, knowing you've done your best.

The End



In the darkness you and 2-4 hide in a ditch. Peering over the edge, you see just what you had hoped to see.

It's a tall structure with round walls. There are no power cables coming from it. Those would run underground, you figure. But there are trucks, parked all around and mounted with purple tubes, to carry the modified hydrogen that's used to fuel the fusion reactor.

Earlier, you described just such a place to 2-4. "It would have tall round walls," you said. "Vehicles carrying long tubes would go in and out."

2-4 smiled. "Sure," he said. "That's the place of great heat."

And that's what it is. Fusion is the force that powers the stars. In a fusion reactor, altered hydrogen is heated to an incredibly high temperature—more than one million degrees centigrade. At that heat hydrogen atoms fuse, or combine, releasing energy that is clean, safe, and almost limitless. After decades of study, galaxy scientists finally developed a way to safely contain those high temperatures by creating a shield of dense electromagnetic waves.

You'd only have to get to the control panel for a few moments—long enough to turn off the magnetic shield.

You aim the projector at the reactor's control area.

You can't take the chance. You shove the boy away. As you bolt out the door, his shocked, sad look haunts you.

You run out just as a group of armed men, soldiers in purple uniforms, storm around the corner. They grab you and seize the projector. You see an arm go up. Something swings down at your head. Then everything goes black.



It's simple. The Power captured the probe ships, and they learned to use Interweb!

They must have been fairly advanced already to be able to force down a probe. They must have imprisoned or killed the crews and used the equipment. Using Interweb they could have downloaded detailed plans for Galaxy Union technology, such as microwave transceivers, long-range star bombers, and hand-held weapons. After all, the Union made all this information openly available.

But the Union didn't count on a planet like Minos having access to this information. That's how the Power got so powerful. They downloaded all the information they could until the Union imposed its info-blockade thirty-one years ago.

That's why everything here is old-fashioned. That's how they learned Casgar's language, too. They stole it!

Then the Minotians must have gone on inventing, developed hyperjamming, and built a fleet of long-range assault ships to attack the Union once hyperjamming was ready.

And it must be about ready. You'd better send a transmission to Murphy and Jardon now.

But there's one more piece of information to learn—the most vital piece of all. There's got to be a source of power, a generating plant to run all of this. If you can find it, and if the Union can knock it out, then the Power will go down.

Should you try to locate the power station? Or risk a transmission first?

*If you look for the power system,
turn to page 66.*

If you try to transmit first, turn to page 54.



It's now or never. Run for it!

You break away from 2-4 and the startled guards. You sprint into the rows of people, tools, equipment, and great purple objects. There are shouts from the guards but no shots. They don't want to destroy anything, you think. They won't shoot. So you duck behind equipment, dodge around workers, swerve under the purple shapes.

It's mayhem in the factory! People yell, shout, pound their feet behind you. Somehow, to your surprise, the workers are helping.

As you scurry past, tools are dropped so your pursuers will trip. You look frantically for someplace to hide. Hands grab you, lift you, and stuff you inside one of the purple objects. A hatch is shut behind you. You lie still, barely daring to breathe, while the footsteps pound past.

Slowly the clamor settles down. So does your heart's hammering. In the dimness here, you lift your head and look around.

You're astonished to realize what you're looking at.

For a terrifying moment, you're sure this is it—a spinning crash into a planet, the same kind of accident that killed your parents.

Suddenly the spinning stops, and the craft rights itself. Your dizziness and queasiness ease. On your screen the blizzard fades. The shuttle pilot's image appears.

"Folks," he says, "our internal communications are okay, but we have temporarily lost contact with the suborbital flight-control center. Please remain calm."

This is the same thing that happened on your last day at Interweb Central. Suddenly all the linkups were gone, and suddenly they came back. Why is this happening? Interweb has always been reliable!

"Okay," you say slowly. "Let's do it."

"Good. There's one more decision to make," Murphy says. "Long-range infrared scans tell us that Minos has just one major city. It's hemmed in by a range of low mountains. We can project you straight into the city. That might be the best way to inject yourself into Minotian civilization."

"Or," says Jardon, "we can place you on the mountains that surround the city. You'd get a good overview there. But it might be tough to make your way down."

*If you go to the Minotian city,
turn to page 82.*

*If you choose the mountains,
turn to page 60.*

You're dizzy, confused. The last thing you remember is those big red eyes glowing in the imaging room. Now you're on your hands and knees, shaking your head to clear it. In your nostrils is heavy dust. You look around.

You're in a city you've never seen before. It looks poor and undeveloped. This can't be Mynos! Dust floats everywhere. Buildings are the pale color of dried mud. Pale people pass in rough, colorless clothes. They shy away from you, as if they're afraid.

You've got to figure out where you are. You pull out the handset. The people around you freeze in terror. A woman points to the unit and shrieks. Others begin to scream as well.

You start to run. But where can you go? You don't even know where you are!

You hand the projector to the boy. He grips it, running his fingers over its smooth, shiny surface. Then he hands it back.

"It is beautiful," he says. "Do not let anyone see it except me."

"Okay," you say. "How do you speak my language?"

"The Power makes us. Our own language is forbidden. Wait here. I will get you some clothes."

In a few minutes the boy is back, and you're also dressed in rough tan clothes. You ask, "Who is this Power?"

"The Power rules us. They make us work. That's all we do. Lately we have to build, build, build."

"Build what?"

"The great machines," says the boy. "And the great towers."

"These towers," you say. "Are they wide and round at the top?"

"Oh, yes. Very, very big, too."

"Right." Microwave transceptors—surely those are the source of hyperjamming. But what are the great machines?

"These great machines," you say. "Can I see them?"

The boy smiles. "Of course," he says. "I told you I know everyone."

You tell the boy your name and ask him for his.

"My name," he answers, "is 2-4."

Your monitor emits a blizzard of disjointed data bits. You've lost all contact with Earth. In fact you can't get a signal from anywhere on Interweb.

You peer over the wall of your cubicle. The huge communications room is in chaos. People are jabbing at their finger panels. Other operators are standing and shouting at each other, frantic for answers.

"What's going on?"

"I was guiding a ship into the astralport. It'll crash!"



You're in an old Galaxy Union star bomber—a long-range, heavy-impact, interplanetary assault vehicle built during the end of the last warfare era, about forty years ago, right around the time of the creation of the Galaxy Union. This ship looks exactly like the old models except that it's made of this odd purple metal.

Outside the half-finished ship, you hear the sounds of ordinary work again. The search seems to be over. You wait silently for a long time; when night comes, you project yourself outside the building.

2-4 is waiting for you. You're amazed to see him, but he only grins.

"Where next?" he says.

It's night, and there are rocks around you. At first you feel dizzy but then your head clears and you stand up.

You look over some rocks to a great chasm before you. Beyond that you see blinking lights and what seems like huge shapes in the night. Your eyes focus: You're looking down at a sprawling city of low buildings. Outside it, those are the biggest . . .

BWWOONNNN! The noise makes you fall back. Your ears are in terrible pain. You hear footsteps scrabbling up the rocks toward you. When you look up, you see a man in a helmet and deep bluish-purple suit rising from the rocks. He aims a weapon at you.

From behind you comes another earsplitting blast. You're surrounded.

The soldier trembles from the blast, then collapses at your feet.



While you wait, you raise the shade to look out. What you see makes you scream in terror.

Another shuttle, coming up from Earth's orbit, is veering crazily in space. With Interweb disabled, the shuttle trying to exit Earth has gone haywire. It's out of control, and it's going to hit you.

You were planning to build your life around Interweb. Now its failure is going to take everything away.

Your mind screams one last question: *Why?*

But there's no answer—only a ripping, shattering crash as the two shuttles collide.

The End

You decide to go to the Minotian city. Before the transmission, Murphy briefs you on the Projector II's operation. For short-range projections, he shows you how to aim the ruby eye at the target, then position a pointer precisely on or inside the target's holographic image that appears above the projector's screen.

"Okay," says Murphy. "Now this unit is also a regular Interweb communications set and microcomputer. You can reach us, but don't call unless you have to. Any transmission might alert the Minotians that you're there."

"Right." You zip the handset into your flight suit and shake your uncle's hand.

Murphy leads you into the holographic imaging chamber.

"2-4," you say, "do the workers have any histories?"

He looks blank. "What are those?"

"Did people write down what happened, say, before you were born?"

"I don't understand 'write down.' But we have stories from the old days."

"You do? Who knows them?"

"Everyone hears them—at night, when the Power isn't listening. Old workers tell them." He grins. "I remember them all."

You smile at this kid. He's smart and you like him. You think, what a waste for the Power to treat these people this way! "Are there any stories about three ships that came from far away?" you ask.

"Yes. Of course. Three ships brought the River of Secrets."

"What happened to the people in the ships?"

"That I do not know."

"Okay," you say. "What's in this secret river?"

"It's not a river of water. It brought knowledge to the Power, which ruled Minos even then. It's a magic river. It tells the Power what to build, and they make us build it."

You ponder this.



"I . . . I didn't know," you stammer. "I'm not from this world. I come from the Galaxy Union. From the planet Casgar."

Morgan's eyes grow wide. His face softens. "Casgar," he whispers. "I haven't heard that name in almost forty years. How did you get here?"

"Forty years," you say—and now you begin to understand. "Why, you came on the probe!"

"Yes. The second probe," says Morgan. "And you?"

"Well . . . Union technology has come a long way," you say. "I was sent here by quantum holography. Just me. No ship, no weapons. Only that unit to communicate with the Galaxy Union. My mission is to find out what's going on here."

The older people confer for a moment. They must all be probe ship veterans, you're thinking. Maybe the younger ones are their children—or Minotians who joined them.

Then Morgan turns to you. "We believe you. The situation here is very, very bad. We believe the Union is about to be attacked. And our leader has been captured. She faces death."

"Who is your leader?"

"Her name," says Morgan, "is Julia."

Soon you and 2-4 are inside a huge, windowless building. All around you echo the *click* and *tap* of tools. In this factory hundreds of workers labor away, each one dressed in the same pale clothes. You and 2-4 push a water cart along an aisle, ladling out drinks.

"I must tell you," the boy said before you entered. "Do not let them see you look up. Always look down, or seem to look down. If you look up, you'll be searched and beaten."

So you can only sneak quick glances under your downcast eyes. You glimpse uniformed guards, standing everywhere, dressed in purple—and great, gleaming shapes, also purple. They're round and long, and they're what the workers are building.

You must see more. You look longer. Then a little longer still.

Sharply, a guard calls out. A purple figure steps in front of you. The guard is pointing at you.

You glance at 2-4. His eyes, staring down, are wide. You can't be searched. If you are they'll find the projector! You could try to escape. Maybe you could lose the guards in this huge building. Or you could try slipping the projector to 2-4. But that would put him in danger.

*If you pass the projector to 2-4,
turn to page 22.*

If you make a break for it, turn to page 71.

Amber letters float before the tiny screen:
Command Center Security

It's got to be the Minotians. All around you messages are flying. You grab one, then another. **Where is intruder?** says one. **Crash site inspected—no pilot.** And now: **Virus in system. Attempting to locate.**

You can't float in this stream for long. They know you're here. A virus-destruction program could find you and wipe you out.

You realize that if the security system's message stream can be accessed by your Interweb unit, the control system could be, too.

In the control room are two sleepy workers and a guard. You get lucky: You materialize behind the guard, who doesn't see you. One well-aimed blow to the back of his neck puts him to sleep for a while.

You grab his weapon and aim it at the workers. They back away. You step up to the control panel. It's just like an older model, you think. This'll be simple.

"Get out—now!" you tell the workers. You hope they do, because in just a couple of minutes the magnetic shield will dissipate. The unleashed heat will liquefy everything in the building within the next few seconds.

You aim the projector outside. In a moment you're crouching beside 2-4 again.

"Move fast," you say. "Run!"

Morgan takes you to a spot where the roadway curves around a cluster of big rocks. Beyond this bend is the gateway into a launch field. The gate and the field are heavily guarded, but this piece of road is quiet and the rocks hide you from sight.

“Basically, this unit is a laser,” you say to Morgan, indicating the Projector II. “When lasers were invented, back on twentieth-century Earth, they were first used for boring holes.”

A rumbling approaches. You and Morgan crouch down. Soon a purple truck heaves into view. Behind the cab is a long, gleaming purple metal tube.

Because it's loaded with highly flammable spacecraft fuel, the truck moves slowly. As it passes, you aim the projector's ruby eye at the rear of the tube. You activate the laser and keep it carefully trained on the same spot. The operation takes only a couple of seconds.

As the truck lumbers around the bend, a thin stream of liquid arcs out from the hole. It leaves a trail on the road—a dark line so thin that, if you weren't looking for it, you'd never notice it.

You call Uncle Jardon at the Interweb Archives and ask if he's available at the end of the day for a private chat.

"Sure," Jardon says. "Is anything wrong?"

"No. Just need to talk about something," you say.

Later that afternoon, you take a walk with Jardon through a quiet park. You look carefully around. It seems safe to talk.



"Uncle Jardon, I was fired from my job today."

"You were *what*? Why?"

"Because I got some information from Interweb."

"So? That's what you're supposed to do."

"I know. But this information was about the three Minos probes."

Jardon stops. His face turns pale.



You climb the rocks and look down. A yellow-orange-blue-red fireball expands in the midst of the bomber base, like a multihued balloon about to pop. The explosion is deafening as the truck erupts. Flaming metal and rocket fuel spray in every direction, landing on star bombers, melting more metal, and, as you'd hoped, spreading destruction toward the numerous fuel tanks.

One thunderous blast after another rips the space base to pieces as the fuel tanks ignite. Dozens of star bombers are destroyed. The fireworks are spectacular!

"What else can you do with that thing?" Morgan asks with a smile.

"If we put our rebel heads together," you say, "I'll bet we can think of a few things."

Together you climb into the rocks of Minos and return to the rebels' hideout to plan your next mission of sabotage.

The End

You run for your lives, scrambling over ditches and dashing across roads. In a few minutes an incredible heat wave surges from behind. You grab 2-4 and dive into a ditch. Protected by the water at the bottom; you stay flattened while the astonishing heat fades.

You look up. All Minos is dark. Mission accomplished.

It's time to go.

But the projector is gone!



Jardon leans across the small table. "What I'm going to tell you is totally, absolutely between you and me. Okay?"

"Well, sure."

"Okay. There wasn't one Minos Probe. There were actually three."

You listen, spellbound.

"After the first probe vanished, the Union sent a second, to find out what happened. We—that is, the authorities—figured the ship had just crashed. But we had to be sure."

"We? Uncle Jardon, I thought you were a historian."

Again his face is a mask. "I am a historian. It was important, for history, that we knew what happened. The second probe disappeared, too. And when a third probe met the same baffling fate, Minos was declared an outlaw planet. All travel to the planet, information about it, and contact with it was terminated. Interweb was programmed to deny the existence of Minos and of the probes. So your newsman can't find out anything further, and if he tries he'll arouse suspicion."

You feel bad about Herbert. You kind of like him.

Jardon stands up. "I'd like you to come meet someone," he says.

You wake up with your head throbbing. A fuzzy face peers down at you . . . a fuzzy reddish face.

It's Murphy!

You sit up. "Ow!" You hold your aching head. Hands gently guide you back down.

"Don't try to move," says your uncle Jardon softly.

You can't believe it's them. How did they get here?

But now you recognize Murphy's office. Somehow you're back on Casgar.

"What happened?" you ask.

"Someone activated the projector's transmitter and began entering gibberish," Murphy says.

"We knew it wasn't you, so we brought you back."

"But they've got the projector!"

Murphy smiles. He hands you the little unit.

"It was a hologram too," he says. "Remember?"

"But . . . but I failed. Didn't I?"

"Not completely," says the big man. "You got there, and you got back. Now we know holographic travel works. We're going to send in a commando team."

"Can I go?"

"No. Sorry."

You're left frustrated. If only you'd trusted that boy!

The End



Rising outside the city are enormous transceptor dishes, each the size of a stadium. Vast launching fields hold hundreds of interplanetary star bombers and missiles, each one aimed at the sky.

The star bombers and missiles look just like Union equipment of a few decades back, except they're the same bluish-purple of the soldier's uniform. But there's no time to puzzle over that. Your three companions are moving toward a transceptor that rises close to the mountainside.

When you're as close as possible, the three raise their weapons, aim at the transmission tip, and fire.

The sonic weapons throb in unison. The transceptor's tip vibrates violently. Lights blaze on all around the transceptor. Search beams train on the cliff. Heavy sonic blasts hone in and pound the rocks all around you.

Frantically you all scramble back over the crest. Your ears ache again. Rock shards cut the young woman in front, and she grabs her bleeding arm.

The sabotage attempt has failed. It was a pretty pitiful try, you think. You know you could help with something much more effective.

The virus program combing the security system searches for you in vain: You're no longer there. And you've gained access to the Minotians' computer control center. You haven't just sent in a message. You've sent yourself.

Quickly you scan the directories. You spot what you're looking for: **Master Control.**

You enter that command and look through the listed files. It's amazing. The Minotian system is set up just like a Galaxy Union computer control panel of about forty years ago. Just like the systems that would have been carried on the three lost Minos probes, in fact.

So that's it! Somehow the Minotians captured and copied those systems! That's why they're compatible with yours. They used Interweb to steal the plans for Union technology. That's how you knew how to fly their star bomber.

The Union cut Minos off from Interweb thirty-one years ago. All the technology they copied is old. But once the Minotians learned about Interweb, you figure, they could have used those years of silence to develop hyperjamming. They could have been testing it with those brief seizures . . .

And that could be why their huge space fleet is armed and ready. With hyperjamming ready to knock out Interweb, they're set to launch an all-out attack. This planet could easily conquer the Galaxy Union—or destroy it.

But not if one holographic hacker has anything to say about it.



Surprise is a powerful ally. You and Julia fly through the streets, making fast for the edge of the city and the rough road into the hills.

Julia climbs forward. "Who are you?" she says.

"Your nephew Jardon is my uncle," you say. "I heard you needed a little help."

Her eyes grow wide and soft. "Jardon?" she whispers. "I never thought I'd hear that name again. How," she adds, "did you get here?"

"Same way I got into the car. It's called quantum projection. It's a new technology. Julia, the Power has been transmitting an intense microwave signal, covering the galaxy and disabling Interweb."

"So that's what those things are doing," she says, pointing at the transceptors. "That's the part we never understood. Now it makes sense: The Power plans to knock out all your defenses, then hit you with an all-out assault."

"Can we stop them?"

Your great-aunt has been the rebels' mastermind. She thinks for a moment.



Your choice is terrible, but you know Julia is right. You can tell the Union authorities quite a lot if you return now.

Still, as you take one last look at your heroic great-aunt, your heart breaks.

Like drumbeats, the sound of your pursuers closes in. But you've got to say one last thing.

"Julia," you tell her, "for you to live such a brave life and have it end like this, it's just wrong."

"It's not wrong," she answers. "Don't you see? This is what we have lived for—to find some way to warn our galaxy about the evil that has grown here. It's you who has finally made that possible. Now go!"

You nod. The Hovercraft are visible now—dark purple birds of prey. They're closing fast. Any second they'll start to fire. You know your vehicle's armor won't hold.

You prepare the projector. Julia squeezes your hand. You punch **Project: Home**.

You decide to help sabotage the Power. The danger Minos poses to the galaxy makes you put aside family priorities for the moment. You console yourself with the knowledge that you'll come back to rescue Julia later.

"There must be a better way to sabotage the Minotians than the feeble attempt I just watched," you tell the rebels.

Morgan spreads his hands. "We have only the few weapons we've been able to steal," he says. "Is there anything you can do with that little piece of technology?"

You stare at the Projector II. "There might be something," you say. "How close can we get to the entrance of a star bomber launch field?"



You wake up in a river. You feel as if you're swimming in a many-colored, shimmering stream. Colors rush by you like a kaleidoscope.

The water isn't wet, though. It's electrons, billions upon trillions of electronic impulses. Your quantum hologram has entered or been pulled into a data stream.

You poke at the Projector II panel. It seems to work. You wonder . . . can the machine read any of these data streams going by?

It's worth a try.

You call up the projector's communication function. You touch the command to **Identify Messages**, then float in the rainbow river and wait.

It's working. Something's coming up.

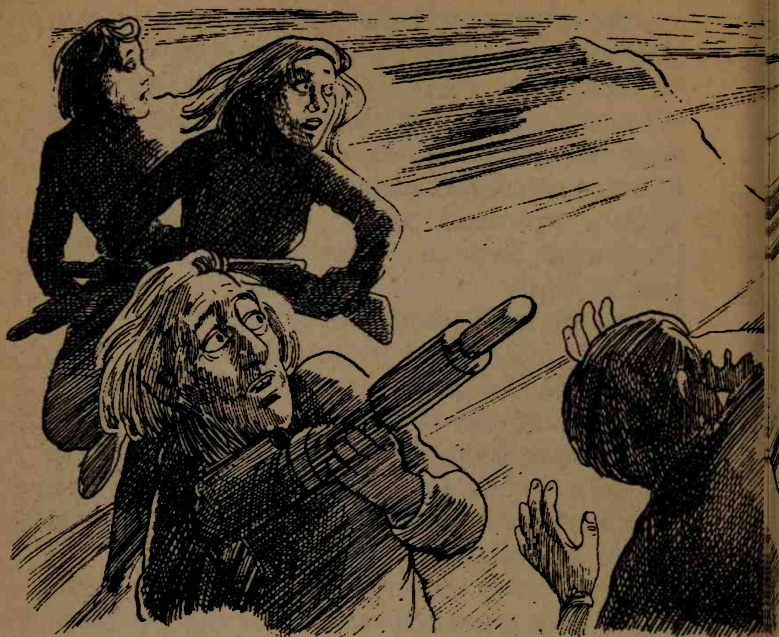
You keep your face expressionless as you slowly pull the projector out of your pocket. You crouch and pretend to pick up some trash. Actually you're aiming the projector at the cab of the craft. You point the ruby eye at your target. The holoscreen creates an image of the craft. You enter a command, and a pointer moves inside the image. Then you enter the command **Project.**

You are inside the craft!

You knock out the driver with one swift blow. Pushing him aside, you put your hands on the controls and wait. The rear door opens. Julia is shoved roughly in. Swiftly you open the passenger door and shove the unconscious driver out. Julia's guards begin to step in—but you gun the engine and blast into gear.

As you lurch forward, you look in the mirror to see your great-aunt almost fall out the back. "Shut the door!" you yell at her. The soldiers fire one blast after another—but the craft's heavy armor holds.

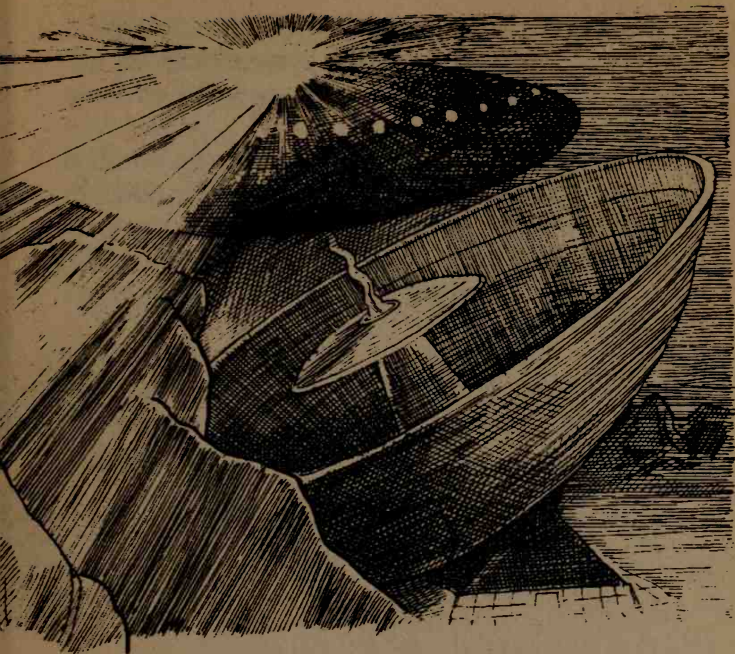
You speed through the city, spraying dust and garbage to cover your escape. You barely glimpse the rebels' amazed faces as you roar away.



You have no choice but to do what the rebels tell you. Noticing a powerful humming sound behind your back, you start to bend down.

All of you are suddenly frozen in a beam of brilliant light.

The rebels look up in terror. A purple gunship rises, engine throbbing, from the rocks behind you. It must have snuck up, hugging the rocks. The rebels scatter. A blast from the ship hits the young woman. Another blast knocks the young man down hard. He scrambles on hands and knees into the rocks. The ship blasts again.



You slip back into the stones near the crest. The gunship pursues the rebels, blasting again and again. Then it lifts off and swings back for you.

Go on to the next page.

Its searchlight probes. Clutching the projector, you flatten yourself against a stone. In a few moments the gunship lifts again and circles back over the crest.

Now you're looking over the edge again. The searchlights have been turned off. The gunship is descending in a slow arc. You touch the projector's finger panel, and its screen glows softly.

“But first,” Murphy says, “I need to give you some background. When the other planetary life-systems began visiting Earth in the late twentieth century, Earth governments suppressed all evidence of those contacts. Early in our century, the Galaxy Union was faced with something that we, too, could not understand. Something about Minos was unexplainable—and deadly. So we declared the planet an outlaw—an outcast.”

“That was a long time ago,” Jardon murmurs.

“Yes, thirty-one years back,” Murphy agrees. “But lately, something very strange has begun to happen.”



You dash into a maze of dusty alleys. Frightened people shrink away from you. You duck into an empty-looking doorway.

In the cool darkness you pull out the Projector II. But before you can enter a command, a small hand grabs the unit away.

You look down. A boy is clutching the projector, looking at it eagerly.

"Give me that!" you say. You grab it back.

He looks up. His eyes dart toward the door. "I know you are not from Minos," he says. "I can tell by your clothes. Do you know they will kill you for this?"

So this is Minos after all! You're surprised that the boy speaks your language. "Kill me for what?"

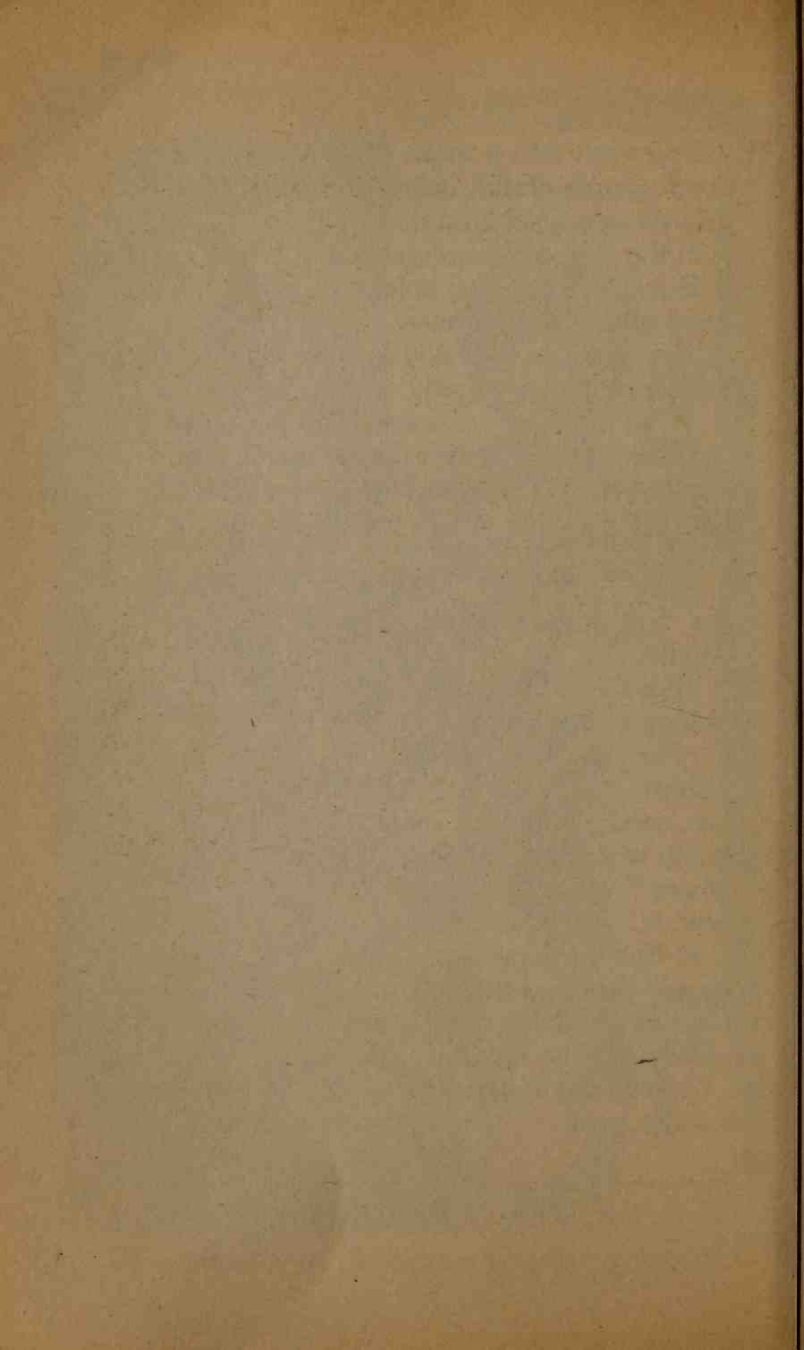
"For this." He points to the projector. "Technology is forbidden. Only the Power can have it. For us it is death." He looks around. "Shhh . . . I will help you," he whispers. He has sandy hair and quick, gleaming eyes. "I know where everything is. I have friends everywhere." He points to the Projector II. "Let me hold it," he says. "Please."

In this strange place, you need help. But should you trust the boy? If he steals the projector, your mission is finished, and the peaceful galaxy may be finished, too.

Something in you says to run. Something else says to trust.

If you trust the boy, turn to page 75.

If you run for it, turn to page 67.

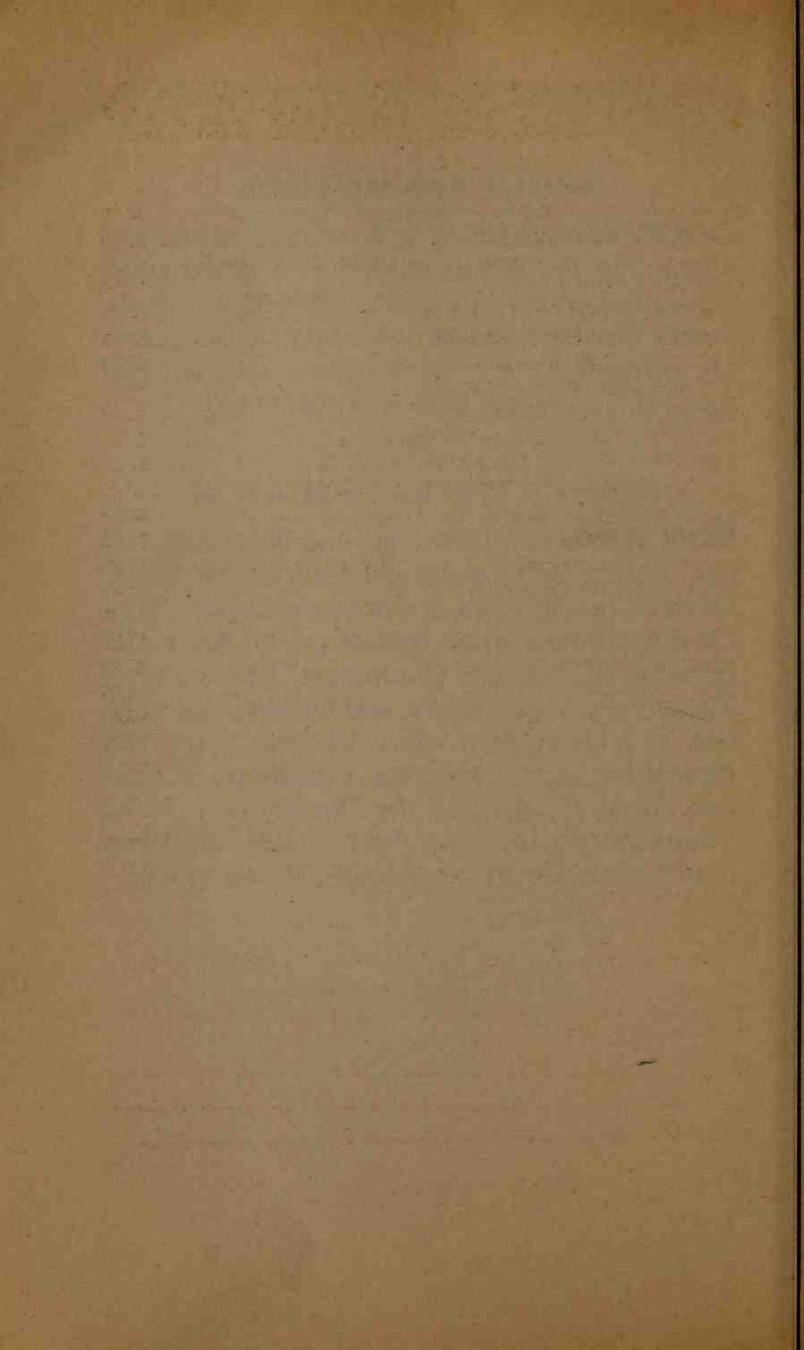


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DOUG WILHELM is a free-lance writer and editor. He has written articles for newspapers across the country as well as magazines, newsletters, and Ben and Jerry's ice-cream wrappers. He currently lives in Montpelier, Vermont and has a son, Bradley, who is six years old.

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RON WING is a cartoonist and illustrator who has contributed to many publications. He has illustrated many books in Bantam's Choose Your Own Adventure series, including *You Are a Millionaire*, *Skateboard Champion*, *The Island of Time*, *Vampire Invaders*, and *Outlaw Gulch*; as well as titles in the Skylark Choose Your Own Adventure series, including *Haunted Halloween Party*, *A Day with the Dinosaurs*, *Spooky Thanksgiving*, and *You Are Invisible*. Mr. Wing now lives and works in Benton, Pennsylvania.



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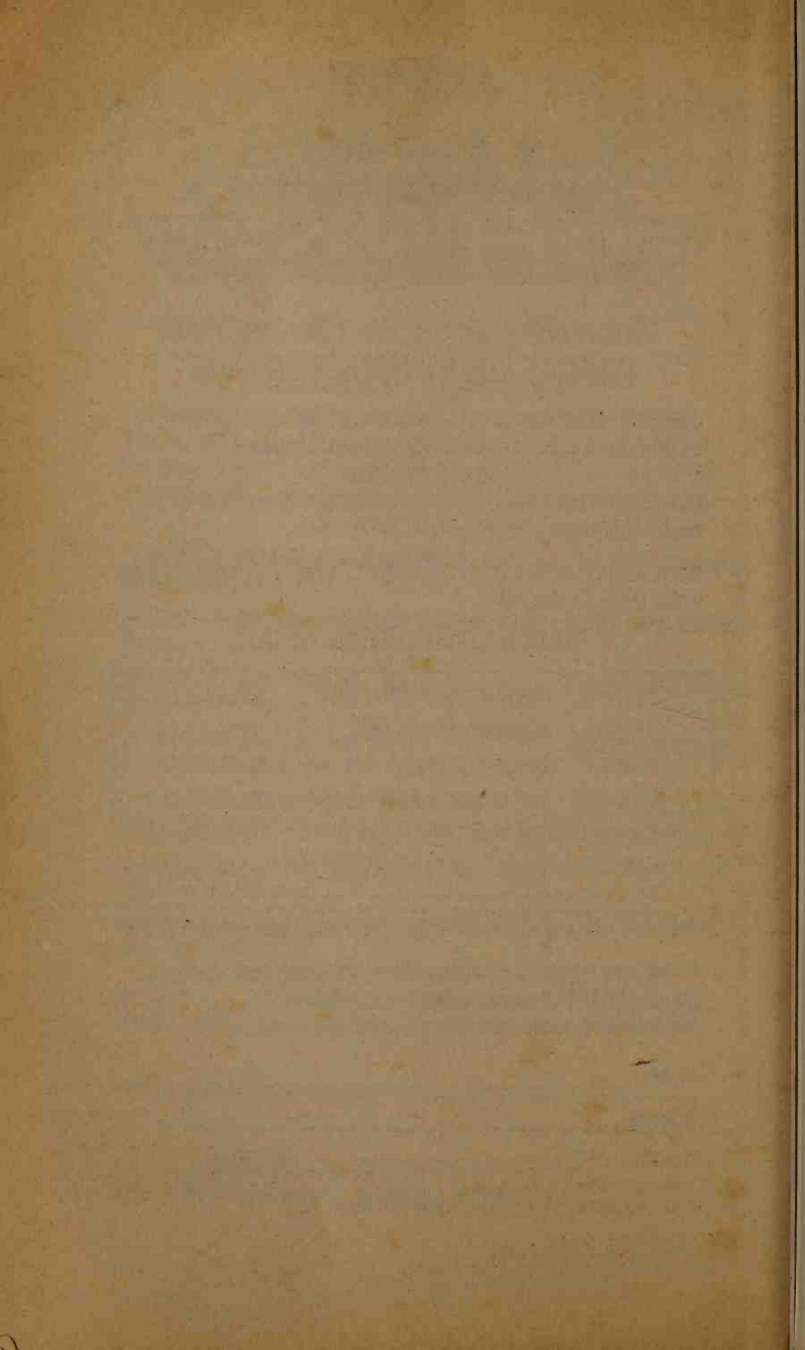
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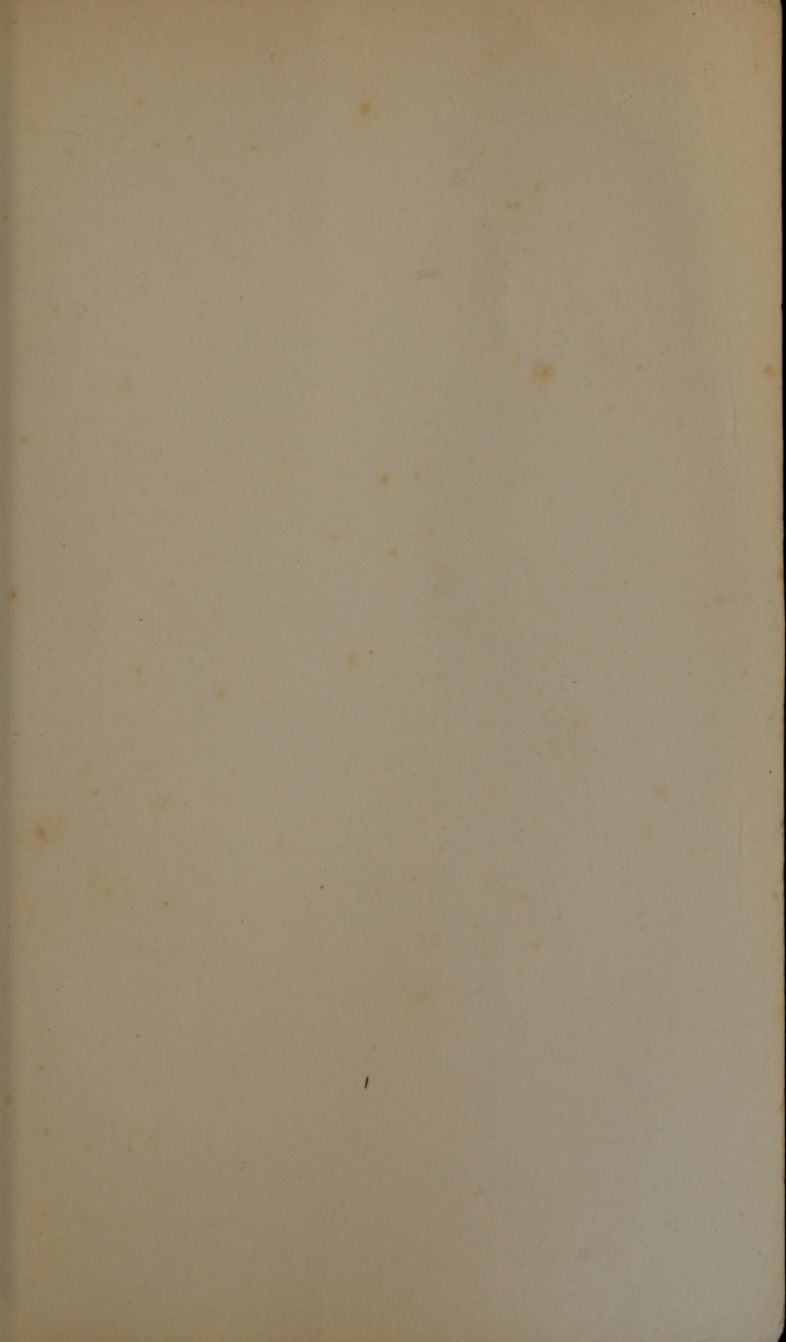
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If you decide to investigate on your own, turn to page 29. If you decide to question your uncle, turn to page 51. But beware! What you find out may put you in grave danger. You might solve the mystery of the missing space probe. Or you could find yourself stranded forever on the forgotten planet.

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