

While you're playing Wasteland, you'll be referring to paragraphs in this book. We know that as a Desert Ranger who enjoys the best of challenges, wouldn't randomly read these paragraphs in search of clues. But intense radiation, coupled with the blazing sun, can impair your good judgement, rendering you totally unable to resist. Fight your best fight here – try not to read a paragraph you're instructed to. You'll get a lot more out of Wasteland this way. Once you successfully complete Wasteland, you can then kick back in your best lounge chair under a shady cactus and read the rest of the fictional vignettes.

**1** You creep up to the window and, in the soft, muted tights, you see a tall woman with long, blond hair. She sits before a mirror and brushes her hair, then stands and walks over to the sunken tub off to her left. She kneels and her blue, silken robe drops to the floor. She turns the water on and steam slowly fills the air. You watch in fascination as she reaches down into the tub, whirls, and points an Uzi in your direction. “Stop reading paragraphs you're not supposed to read, creeps.” She sighs deeply. “Next time I'm going to demand they put me in a Bard's Tale game, this Wasteland duty is dangerous.”

**2** You have come upon the rail-nomads' camp. Ornerly looking longhorn cattle wander among dusty tents, from which sullen faces peer. In the background, a ramshackle collection of railroad cars, patched with wood, hide, and an odd piece of corrugated aluminum, sits on a rail siding. Two of the cars, the locomotive at the front and the caboose at the rear, appear to be in better condition than the others. As you approach, a strained silence falls over the camp and you grow uncomfortable under the collective gaze of the assembled nomads. Finally, one of the nomads steps forward. “Welcome, Rangers. I am the Brakeman of this train. I would be honored if you would visit with me in the caboose before leaving our camp. In the meantime, please accept our hospitality.” The Brakeman turns and strides back into the camp.

**3** The Hobo nods to you, and then drains the bottle of Snake Squeezins. “Twins born by the same hands,” he intones solemnly, “are twins no more. Wake the sleeper to cure the sick.”

**4** “We have four clans here: the Chattanooga, the Amtraks, the Conrails and the Hiders. You may acquire provisions for your party at our trading car or amuse yourselves in the casino car. You may, of course, avail yourselves of the services of our Hobo oracle. If you dare, you can try to reason with the Hiders, though finding them is difficult. I am told that you have already met our Brakeman.” At the mention of the Brakeman, a brief scowl crosses the Engineer's face, but his smile quickly returns and he adds, “We feel safer with Rangers here, so stay as long as you like!”

**5** You study the torn piece of paper in your hand. Originally written in red ink, the text has turned into large fuzzy blotches of pink. Though mostly unreadable, you make out the word MORTAL followed by HIDEOUT: TYRANNOSAURUS, but TYRANNOSAURUS has been scratched out and AZRAEL has been written

under it.

6 The diary talks about the last days during which the satellite facility was operating. “Las Vegas is still intact. Needles wasn’t damaged by bombs, but some flooding occurred when the river level rose. Quartz suffered a lot of damage.” In hurried script, the last diary entry reads, “We’re abandoning the satellite installation so we can join the farmers out at the Ag Station. We’ve deactivated the alarms and electronic countermeasures that protect this place.”

7 Once the introductions have been made, the Big Boss pulls out a box of cigars and passes them around, explaining that it is his special blend, grown somewhere further north. When everyone is comfortable, and the bodyguards have taken up unobtrusive positions behind you, he begins to talk.

“You must be the Rangers sent to help.”

“What do you mean?” you cautiously ask.

“One of my men is missing. We don’t think he’s dead, because he’s too valuable to kill. We think some other group in town has grabbed him. If we don’t get him back, the whole town will probably be overrun by these damn death machines that have started to appear, because he’s the only one in town with the scientific know-how to fight them. He’s the one who thought of the landmines, and they’ve destroyed more robots than anything else in town.” Brygo reaches into his desk and brings out a drawing of a rather ordinary looking man. “This is Max,” he explains. “He came to us about a year ago from the Wasteland to the east. He was the greatest hand-to-hand fighter we’d ever seen and he also seemed to know a lot about the science from before the War. He didn’t remember where he came from – at least, that’s what he told us. I quickly made him my right hand man.”

“When we began to hear rumors of death machines coming out of the west, and especially when the first of them reached the Vegas borders several weeks ago, Max grew frantic. He began to talk crazy, about how all life was in peril, and how only he could save us. He said he needed special equipment, and that someone near Vegas should have it. I should have put a guard on him then, but instead, I decided to send Ace out to look for help. One night Max disappeared. We’ve been looking for him ever since without success. Now I’ve lost my best man, and things are getting worse. Newer and stronger robotic death machines are appearing all the time. If we don’t find Max soon, even a fortress like this may not be able to hold out against the death machines. Go see Charmaine in the Mushroom Church. Tell her I sent you and she may be able to help.”

You nod your head. “Yeah. We’ve tangled with some of these death machines before, and we gotta stop whoever’s making them. Any clues?”

“There are two other power groups here in Vegas that we know of. Fat Freddy runs the criminal element. He’d like to take over my position. There’s also the Servants of the Mushroom Cloud – religious fanatics who won’t be happy until

every person in Vegas has been converted to their own poisonous religion. There may be others. Vegas is a big town. But those are the ones we suspect most. I need you to go find Max. What do you say? Will you do it?"

The Desert Rangers huddle for a few minutes. You decide that taking on this mission could be quite an adventure and decide to go for it. Besides, your curiosity has been aroused. You are sure that Max knows a lot more than he has told Brygo. If you want explanations, he's the man you'll need to see.

"All right," you tell the Boss, "we'll find him if he's findable. In the meantime, you try to hold out here."

The Big Boss stands up, shakes your hands, and wishes you all luck. Then he shows you the way out.

**8** Fat Freddy has long-since forgotten the concept of personal hygiene. His dirty black hair clings to his face like dead ebony vines. A thin, scraggly Beard barely conceals deep red pock marks. Effluvium that scrapes your nasal passages raw seeps from every one of the fat man's pores.

"I am so glad to meet you. I've always admired the Rangers and I consider you the only people I can trust with some secret information." The fat man's yellow eyes slip side to side in his obese face. "Faran Brygo is trying to get \$100,000,000 in diamonds to York Isle on the east coast of the continent, and he needs someone like you to make the journey. If he succeeds, he will destroy the economy of the world and we will all be thralls in his new empire."

Freddie produces a handkerchief and wipes the sweat from his brow. "I will let you keep the diamonds if you can stop his mad plan. Find him, kill him, and you will save the world."

**9** The battered pewter LD.. bracelet on Dewey's wrist has had several legends engraved and scratched out, but one remains clear. It reads "27," and, judging from the lack of corrosion on the number, it was recently inscribed.

**10** "Everyone is worried about Mayor Pedros but others are held hostage too. Felicia Pedros, his wife, is our friend. We think she has been moved to the outlaw hideout. We hope you will try to rescue her. And remember what Ellen said when you go to the Stagecoach Inn." They smile and leave.

**11** "Yeah, some of the guys working in the base took sick. Mad Dog Fargo and Metal Maniac are still in the back rooms, sicker than dogs."

**12** A man sits up in his cell and stretches. "Rangers – great. I should have known. I need you guys here like I need a hole in the head." He stares at you for a second, then sighs. "Look, I guess I could use your help. I need some capable fighters in Las Vegas to help me with a shipment back east. Are you guys up for it?"

**13** The book you find is a slim volume written in a light, delicate hand. The

work is titled, "Love Slave in Santa Fe." It reads:

I recall the first time the invader chieftain called my name. "Diana," he said softly, "are you not yet finished chewing the leather to make soft moccasins for me? A man has needs."

I hung my head in shame. "Forgive me, beloved Red Hawk, but I am the lowest of your 30 wives. How can you even think of me when you have so many women more beautiful than me?"

Red Hawk smiled. "Yes, I have 30 wives, each more beautiful than the last, and each of them is insatiable. If I could find other men to help me take care of my wives, I would, but no one except for the bravest warriors of Wasteland could satisfy them. You, my newest wife, are the only comfort I have in my life..."

The account ends abruptly here, the last few pages of the book torn out by a previous reader.

**14** The Director, a handsome, slender man, waves you to chairs that face his desk. Beyond his desk you see a window into an alien landscape. Through the window you see a red world with strangely-shaped plants. You see animals slinking through the shadows and crawling across massive rock outcroppings. You shudder. It just doesn't feel right.

The Director, Irwin John Finster, notices your stare and smiles like a snake oil salesman. "I see you've noticed my pet project. This is how the world will be when all men are gone. It will once again return to the pristine paradise it was before man rose up and destroyed it."

He turns away from the window and smiles at you. "By the very fact that you are here, I know you have recovered certain items of a technical nature. Whatever prompted you to violate this base's security, I do not know, but I am willing to forgive it." He sits, leans back and steepled his fingers. "Because of the delicate nature of our work here – all very hush-hush, you know – I must ask you to leave."

Suddenly he leans forward and scowls. "If you do not want to go, well, we are not without means to deal with even the likes of dreaded Desert Rangers."

**15** Max reaches up and gives his head a bit of a twist. You hear a click and the android smiles. "I came down here to negotiate a peace with the cyborgs and what do they do? They rip me up and start using me for spare parts.

Ingrates!" He stretches and stands. "I have to get back up to Vegas and help prepare for the next assault, but I've got a mission of great importance for you. Head northeast from here and, across the bridge, you'll find a hidden base. It is a journey you must succeed at. There, you will find lost technology and information that you can use to stop Cochise before it's too late."

A secret passage slides open in the room's south wall. At the same time, a blast proof security door slides down in front of the entrance to the room. It short circuits, preventing exit. "Go through the secret passage to get out of here. One thing," Max adds, "It is possible you'll need to recover some equipment from Project Darwin before you can complete the rebuilding of the sleeper base. Be careful, though, and rebuild as much of the base as you can before you venture off to Darwin. I don't like the things I've heard about it at."

**16** The old man stands in the shadow of the satellite dish and sighs loudly. "Rangers, thank the gods you have come here." He thrusts a bony finger at the red planet hanging low over the horizon. "The Space Pirates from Phobos come daily to steal our food. They carry it off to their goddess, a harsh, cruel woman who has no appreciation for artwork and will tolerate no illumination or visual symbols in her edicts to subjects. You must find the rocket ship and travel to that malevolent star. Trail the death bunny to its lair and you will save the earth from this horrid invasion."

**17** "We have three clans here: the Atchisons, the Topekas, and the Sante Fes. You may acquire provisions for your party at our trading car or amuse yourselves in the casino car. You may, of course, avail yourselves of the services of our Hobo oracle. I am told that you have already met our Brakeman." At the mention of the Brakeman a brief scowl crosses the Engineer's face, but his smile quickly returns and he adds, "We feel safer with Rangers here, so stay as long as you like!"

**18** "Faran must have sent you to look for Max. Last I knew he was headed for the sewers. He built a special key to get down there. It's called a Sonic Key. Max made a few of them and told me that he was hiding one somewhere in the old golf course. Didn't tell me where, though. Didn't do him any good, either. The Newmen grabbed him before he could do anything. If you return to me the Bloodstaff from the Mushroom Church in Needles, I can show you the way. Tell the bishop BUZZARD."

**19** The screen flashes to life with Capt. Phil Thomas's personnel file. Aside from test scores and other nonsense you read, "Capt. Thomas's performance in the village strafing runs was admirable. The AH-6503 attack helicopter performed at the height of technical specs and destroyed two small Mexican villages before having to return to base and reload. The AH-6503 is the ultimate weapon."

**20** The Premacorin Mural is a work of art which you have only heard rumors about. It records all human history in one vast display of gaudy colors. At the beginning of the display you see the image of Charles Darwin walking arm-in-arm with an ape in a wedding dress. Next to that you see a youthful Egyptian pharaoh in mummy wrappings and a gold mask dancing on the stage of a place called (according to the neon lights behind him) Radio City Museum of Unnatural History. Proceeding along, you see a masked man brandishing

silver six-shooters on the back of a silver Tyrannosaurus, hot on the trail of a mustachioed man wearing a swastika. A fat man in a red uniform with white trim flies through the sky in a sleigh pulled by eight F-19 Stealth bombers. He has bags full of guns, ammo and bombs, which he is freely dropping down to King Arthur and his knights so they can battle Genghis Khan and the Yellow Peril. Yet further on, a man in a green and gold uniform (with the number 12 emblazoned on it and a G on the helmet) has just thrown a missile to a man vanishing in the white glow of an atomic mushroom cloud. Finally, at the far end of the wall, you see the ape in its tattered wedding dress, squatting and studying the fire-blackened helmet.

**21** Fat Freddy is a genetic nightmare – a squamous mass of slimy flesh shuddering and twitching before you like some animated blob of flesh-colored Jell-O. He smells like a swamp, a foul, choking miasma of rotting mastodonian flesh left to putrefy. His presence is overwhelming – perhaps he has some mutant ability to control men’s minds. While in his presence, you have to sternly control an urge to salute or kneel. There is no doubt that he is a leader of men.

When he speaks, his voice sounds like bubbles of carbon dioxide burbling up out of a morass. It is difficult to understand him, but after the first few phrases of introduction, you begin to get the hang of it. Fat Freddy is a man driven by ambition, and he has an offer to make.

“Brygo thinks he controls Vegas,” bumbles Freddy, “but he isn’t half the man I am. Haw! Haw! Haw! This should be my town, and it will be. I’ve had your men watched since you got to Vegas. They tell me you are the best fighters ever seen in these parts. Well, then, it shouldn’t be too tough for you to do me a favor. Kill Faran Brygo, and bring me the onyx ring he always wears. When you do that I’ll give you \$25,000 and anything else you want in this town.”

You tell him that you need a few minutes to think things over, and go into a corner to confer among yourselves. You have a very, strong feeling that Freddy doesn’t want to hear any negatives out of you.

**22** If you read any further, Wasteland Thought Police will appear at your door within three hours to conduct you to a cell in Needles where your fingernails will be systematically removed. You have not been instructed to read this paragraph anywhere, hence so dire a punishment.

**23** “Things have been rather nasty in Quartz,” you are told. “One of the larger desert bands, led by a guy called Ugly, has taken an intense interest in, ah, civic affairs. Normally a town of our size could drive them off because the bandits don’t try all that hard when attacking, but this time they hit us with a vengeance. It’s almost like they don’t want to remain in the desert.”

**24** The bartender smiles at you. “Which one,” he asks, “Hotspur or Falstaff?”

**25** Charmaine takes the Bloodstaff and smiles. She begins to twirl it and you hear the acolytes hidden in the shadows behind her begin to hum “On

Wisconsin” as she marches back and forth. “Now we’ll win the big game. If you help Faran Brygo get his diamonds to Yorktown back east, we’ll be able to place some big bets there on the next World Series. We have a four-armed pitcher who’s guaranteed to win for us,” Charmaine smiles and points back the way you came. You must travel back to Cooperstown and get us the blessed Bat of the Sultan of Swat. Then you will be ready for the trip with Faran.”

**26** Ugly’s smile makes you uneasy, as uneasy as staring down the bore of his weapon. “It’s really very simple,” he laughs. “The bomb’s disarm code is 11-27-57-04-30.”

**27** You unsnap the ID bracelet from Louie’s limp wrist and run your thumb over the worn silver surface. The number “99” is etched into its tarnished face.

**28** As you board the locomotive you are met by a short, but solid looking fellow. He is dressed in garishly striped overalls and wears a rather battered and much patched engineer’s cap. “Greetings, I am the Engineer of this train.” The Engineer makes a sweeping gesture that encompasses the entire camp. “I hope your stay with us will be a pleasant one.”

**29** Going back to his work, Sam says, “I suppose you wanna know about the Bloodstaff.” He wipes his hands on a greasy rag and sighs. “Don’t mind telling you the murders have lots of folks worried. People just up and vanish. Then, when we find them again, they’ve been drained of blood – every drop.” He squints at you and his voice drops to a tense whisper. “I seen one of the bodies and it had a cut in the neck, just like a scar my grandmother had on her neck. She said once, when she was little, a priest used the Bloodstaff on her after she got snake bit. I think the Blood staff is involved, and that means trouble.”

**30** The Junk Master speaks and tells you how to find Base Cochise, home of the Deadly Robots. He sniffs and takes a pull on a small bottle of Snake Squeezins. “Out in the middle of nowhere, that’s where it is. Way up in the northwest. We’ve tried to scavenge things out there, but the robots are deadly, so we backed off.” He looks at you rather strangely. “If you want to venture out into those mountains up there, fine, but don’t expect any of our people to go with you. We got more sense than you Rangers.”

**31** The Guardians, as you have heard, are very friendly people who are great admirers of the Rangers. They have planted fluorescent orange flags to mark the outer edges of their mine fields. You’ve been told by a Guardian that the only safe passage is to walk with feet straight and breath held between the flags and the Citadel wall.

**32** The bartender smiles at your question. “Which one, Cretian or Proteus?”

**33** “Hi. They call me Crumb,” he purrs as he moves closer to you and starts to stroke your nametag. You jerk him violently by the collar, and he squeals with delight at your show of might. “See Faran Brygo! He’s my boss!” As you throw him down onto a table and head for the door, he yells, “Use the password

PHOENIX.” Before you can get out the door, he puckers his lips and blows a kiss your way.

**34** “Darwin was a science base a long time ago. Supposed to be hush-hush, but I grew up in its shadow, so...”

**35** A man sits up in the cell and stretches his arms. He squints at you as if you’re brighter than the desert sun, then allows a small smile to grace his tan, weathered face. “Rangers, I should have known. Listen, I’ve been sent down from Vegas to recruit folks who know the right end of a gun from the wrong. Bandits ain’t the only thing crawling out of the desert, and we’ve got a war on our hands. Interested in heading back with me?”

**36** Capt. Andrea Mills’s personnel file flashes up onto the screen. Aside from a large amount of test scores and other data, an occasional paragraph of interest slides by. One that catches your eye reads, in part, “Despite her having won the Nobel last year, Andrea’s been unable to finish work on the clone pods. She is unsure they are safe, and the chances of a clone surviving production is not thought to be that great.”

**37** You appear on what seems to be the lower half of a large chessboard. A booming voice echoes through the game grid. “Do not stray from the path if you value your health.” Spectators fill the dark galleries to hoot derisive jeers at you and wager against your success.

**38** “Everyone is worried about Mayor Pedros but others are held hostage too. Felicia Pedros, his wife, is our friend. We think she has been moved to the Temple of Blood in Needles. We hope you will try to rescue her. Remember what Matilda said when you go to the Whiplash Inn.” They smile and leave laughing.

**39** The guard looks you over closely and then tells you to wait outside as he disappears into the tent. You hear a brief muffled conversation and the guard returns with another man. The newcomer introduces himself as the headman of the Atchison clan. He understands that you have done a great favor for his brother. He dismisses the guard and motions you closer. He explains that they keep no treasure here, but he will give you directions to a secret cache. “Here, take this shovel,” he instructs you. “Stand on the south rail, west end. Take twelve paces to the south. Dig and you shall be rewarded.” The guard returns and the headman bids you good day.

**40** Maj. Harrison Edsel’s personnel file flashes up onto the screen. Aside from a large amount of test scores and other data, an occasional paragraph of interest slides by. One that catches your eye reads, in part, “The discipline problem with Edsel has resolved itself. Once he learned he would be transferred to Base Cochise to program that computer with his new artificial intelligence routines, he stopped complaining about the primitive rules restricting his creativity on this project.”



**41** “I think Finster has something to do with the strange creatures hereabouts.”

**42** The Director, a slender, handsome man, stands as you enter the room. “Rangers, thank the heavens.” He follows your gaze as you stare out the window behind his desk and study the alien landscape below. The Director smiles. “As you can see, that lurid, red landscape is the closest approximation we have to the surface of Mars. We have Martian raiders coming to our world here and stealing animals and slaves. We hope, by breeding hunter-killer animals we can take the Martian starships and mount a counter offensive against the extra-terrestrial raiders.” He nods. “Will you Rangers join our effort?”

**43** As you pass the open doorway of this car you are almost overcome by the strong odor of fermented cactus fruit. As your eyes become accustomed to the darkness of the car you can make out a straw-covered floor littered with numerous bottles of Dr. B. Bilius Balfour’s Snake Squeezins. At the back of the car lolls a rotund Bearded figure rocking back and forth as if the mere act of sitting offered a difficult feat of balance. Finally, seeming to take notice of you, the shadowy figure issues an invitation: “Welcome to my humble abode, gentlefolk. Step on in.”

**44** The fetid, musky scent of a dead animal oozed from the car in a miasmal cloud. Within, mummified by the overpowering heat, you see the dried remains of a flower-strewn old bum. This is the oracle the railroaders have referred to, and he’s obviously long been dead. You notice a large quantity of empty Snake Squeezins bottle, and you suspect that that - vile liquor is the author of many of the oracle’s pronouncements.

**45** The faded map on the wall shows the world well before the war. You notice a star that roughly corresponds to your current location. On a long, southeast diagonal you see another star. A third star, to the west and out from Needles, forms a shallow triangle out of the three stars. Obviously other bases are hidden at these sites.

**46** You stare with utter disbelief as the Snake Squeezins vanishes down his throat. The hobo smiles, his eyes glazed over, and he burps. “Beware the man who has lived longer than the Wasteland.” Your oracle’s eyes clear and he smiles drunkenly.

**47** As you scan over the large, messy room you think to yourself, “Early American pigsty.” Piles of dirt cover the long-lost floor. The earthen smell of compost hangs heavy in the air. In the far corner of this indoor barnyard you spot a square-shaped room.

**48** Lt. Russel Heller’s personnel file flashes up onto the screen. Aside from a large amount of test scores and other data, an occasional paragraph of interest slides by. One that catches your eye reads, in part, “I thought Heller would be a discipline problem, but I grossly underestimated the situation. He does not get

along with the other workers and considers the AI work being done in Project Haskell the ultimate work. He even considered the move to Needles to finish Haskell a blessing.”

**49** You study the torn piece of paper in your hand. Originally written in red ink, the text has turned into large fuzzy blotches of pink. Though mostly unreadable, you make out the word MUERTE followed by HIDEOUT:THANATOS, but THANATOS has been scratched out and KAPUT has been written under it.

**50** Carved into the weathered hardwood you see, “The launch code is MORTAR.”

**51** The game High/Low is played with two nuclear warheads. Both players toss a nuclear warhead into the air and the one whose bomb explodes higher in the air wins. This game is usually played by people of low intelligence, hence the name High/Low.

**52** Col. John Smith’s personnel file flashes up onto the screen. Aside from a large amount of test scores and other data, an occasional paragraph of interest slides by. One that catches your eye reads, in part, “After the confrontation with Finster concerning the shift of Darwin’s focus, Smith requested and got a transfer to the Base 2 operation. He remained acting commander until the project’s completion in 1995.”

**53** “Finster forced all the sick ones out, to prevent the spread he said, but it just leaves them to die without help.”

**54** The Brakeman tells you, “Take this visa card and give it to Head Crusher in Quartz.” As the Brakeman passes you the card, the sunlight catches the dove hologram and glints brightly. You slide it into your breast pocket as he turns and leaves without another word.

**55** After years of searching you’ve finally found it. You unfold the piece of parchment paper and read, “When you reach the Martian Base, quickly access the Navigational Laser Center on the left of the entryway and type GWCD.”

**56** Closer now, you can hear the conversation of the men you saw when you came in. There is a short silence after each man voices his thoughts. They speak of varmints who are impossible to kill. The varmints are stealing their food faster than ever before and they seem to be massing for a major attack. The simple weapons of the farmers are not enough to stop them. They have no idea what to do. One of them jumps as he notices you and they all turn to face you. A stocky man they call Miguel approaches.

**57** Head Crusher says, “Thank you. Go to the Atchison’s tent and tell them CATERPILLAR.”

**58** The Martian Commander slithers forward on his coppery-scaled stomach.

“So, Rangers, you have found our secret starport.” His laughter, hissed quietly and malevolently, crackles through the speaker on his helmet. “It matters not. Our robot warriors have conquered your world. You will now come and be our slave...”

You smell the sweet odor of flowers as your sight dims and you fall unconscious...

**59** The thin Martian atmosphere saps your strength, but you dash across the maroon landscape and dive at the Slavemaster. He raises a pseudo-pod and crashes it down upon your head. A sucker tears your flesh, but you strike out and smash his writhing purple lips back into his needle-sharp teeth. The Slavemaster reels back, but you give him no pause, no chance to recover. You wrap your hands around a rock and, as your tortured lungs labor to pull in enough of the oxygen-poor air to keep you conscious, you crush the Slavemaster’s head.

You cast the green, gore-spattered rock aside and look at the other slaves. “Come,” you growl breathlessly, “Now we fight for our freedom and for our world!”

**60** As you might expect from his surroundings, the demon-priest is an utterly corrupt individual. A flowing blue robe covers his diseased body.. and a foul smirk twists his face askew. He smiles and teeth blacker than ebony glint in the half-light. Palsey’s wracked hands grasp the Bloodstaff tightly and threaten you with it. “You will not have it,” he whispers harshly. “You cannot take my life!”

**61** This detective reminds you of Humphrey Bogart. As you approach, he snicks a match with his thumbnail and lights a cigarette. An overflowing ashtray sits on his desk beside an open bottle of Scotch. His eyes are cold and hard as he watches you. You note the lump of a roscoe in a shoulder holster under his gray suit coat. He introduces himself as Spare Shade and points out that he will not play the sap for you or anybody else. That settled, he asks what you want.

**62** Torn and battered, your party drags itself through the sub-terranian Martian titanium mines. Your lungs burn from the thin air, and you’d give your fight arms to be back on earth. Then, suddenly, a vision of female loveliness appears to you.

Tall and slender, with golden hair cascading down over her diaphanous gown of shimmering green and gray, she smiles and your heart quickens. “Do not believe the Serpioids are the Martians because they are not. They conquered us a century ago to turn our beloved world into a staging area for their conquest of your home. Please join with us and help repulse these invaders.”

She gestures and a secret opening appears in the south wall of the tunnel.

**63** Capt. Phil Thomas’s personnel file flashes up onto the screen. Aside from a large amount of test scores and other data, an occasional paragraph

of interest slides by. One that catches your eye reads, in part, “Thomas, a recent transfer from Project Darwin, has expressed reservations about Finster’s experiments. He voiced some of the same objections to them that prompted me to leave Darwin. I don’t know if he’s on the level, or if this is some trap set by Finster...”

**64** Your Martian guide leads you through a twisting pathway of long-abandoned tunnels that finally leads into a beautifully-sculpted city. The artistry, though alien, makes harmonious symbols that give you a warm feeling when you look at the buildings. The architecture almost sings, and you hear a pleasant symphony of echoes as your booted feet click against the city streets. Your guide, her golden hair riding unfelt breezes, leads you to a massive door. You feel the power and you could swear the patterns change, but you cannot put your finger on any particular change at any one time. At about the time it hits you, the door speaks – it’s alive! “Welcome, Earthmen,” it booms, “Speak the name of your beloved and enter as friends.”

**65** The binding threatens to splinter apart as you take the book in your hands. The pages have warped into stiff yellow curves through contact with liquids. Some pages at the beginning have been torn out. Where the writing begins, it is a crude scrawl, with some letters written backwards. Deciphering it is no easy task. Luckily it is fairly short, so you persevere.

“The Secrits of Las Vegas. My name is Dave Dawkins. I found this old empty book, and I’m gonna rite down all my secrits case I fiegit them.

I’m a gard for Fat Freddy. He is #2 is Vegas and he wants to be #1. There is a big reward for anywun who can kill Faran Brygo, the Big Bess. Brygo stays hidden most of the time.

My hare is starting to fall out. I wunner if its bucu I joind the Servants of the Mushrum Cloud. It gives me a good feelin to be with my new frends in the Temple. They tole me the secrit password. It is 3 letters – NRC. Nurk! A lot of the Servants are bald. Maybe I will be 2.

Lately there has bin a lot of fitin. I try to hide, but ware is it safe? Robot Deth Masheens are the wurst. Ar guns don’t always kill them sukkers. Freddy sez we need better wepuns and thats why we gotta find this Max guy. I dint say nothin. Im afraid to tell him that the Servants sa.v Max is kapchurd by the Siborgs.

I am lookin at my words in this is ok and I am proud. I dint no I cud rite so good till I tride it. I will rite agin later.”

Here the writing breaks off. From what you know of the Vegas situation, the diary can’t be more than a week or two old, but Dave apparently didn’t come back.

**66** Although you do not recognize it at first, the object before you is massive

and sends shivers up your spines. You stud,,, it, splitting up to explore both sides at the same time. From the other side someone yells, "It's a missile – but the insides have been removed!"

**67** The guard looks you over closely and then disappears into the tent. You hear a brief muffled conversation and the guard returns with another man. The newcomer introduces himself as the headman of the Atchison clan. He understands that you have done a great favor for his brother. He dismisses the guard and motions you closer. He explains that they keep no treasure here but he will give you directions to a secret cache. "Here, take this shovel," he instructs you. "Stand on the north rail, west end. Take four paces to the east and seven south. Dig and you shall be rewarded ." The guard returns and the headman bids you good day.

**68** Closer now, you can hear the conversation of the :men you saw when you came in. There is a short silence after each man voices his thoughts. They speak of Martians who are impossible to kill. The Martians are ste,,ling their food faster than ever before and they stem to be massing for a major attack. The simple weapons of the farmers are not enough to stop them. They have no idea v hat to do about it. One of them jumps as he notices you and they all turn to face you. A stocky man they call Miguel approaches.

**69** "He's an inhuman monster..just cuz he don't get sick he figures no one else should."

**70** Capt. Andrea Mills's personnel file flashes up onto the screen. Aside from a large amount of test scores and other data, an occasional paragraph of interest slides by. One that catches your eye reads, in part, "Despite her having won the Nobel last year, Andrea's relationships with the other project members have not changed. She's still her affable self, and she's made others feel, through their work on the clone pods, they've each earned a piece of that Nobel themselves."

**71** "Hi. They call me Crumb," he says with a nod of his head. After he exchanges handshakes with everybody, he tells you "See Faran Brygo. He's my boss. Be sure to use the password KESTREL." As you leave, he yells, "Tell him I sent you!"

**72** You bow deeply out of respect for the Martian Emperor, and he smiles graciously. He nods toward your guide and looks upon her with love in his eyes. "I thank you, Alandriana. Once again, my beloved daughter, you have served me well."

He turns back to you. "I need your help to rid our world of the Serpioids. We need to destroy their base on Phobos and can only do it with a device you call a 'plasma coupler.' Your scientists developed it after we sent them telepathic transmissions that instructed them in its construction. We need to get it into the heart of the Serpioid base, then detonate it. Our problem is that none of us Martians can withstand the radiation the Serpioids need to live." His voice

drops. “You, on the other hand, can live for a while in that radiation bath. Will you help us?”

**73** “Faran must have sent you to look for Max. Last I knew he was headed for the sewers. He built a special key to get down there. It’s called a Sonic Key. Max made a couple of them and told me that he was hiding one somewhere in the old golf course. Didn’t tell me where, though. Didn’t do him any good, either. The Newmen grabbed him before he could do anything. If you return to me the Bloodstaff from the Mushroom Church in Needles I can show you the way. Tell the bishop PASTEL.”

**74** The Martian Warlord hands you a Firelance and some Verchitin armor. “I realize this is not as good as having a Red Ryder Range Model Air Rifle with a compass in the stock, but it’s the best we can do.” He leads you out to the Ornijetcopter and you board the strange craft. “Good luck,” he says. “Alwa nasci korliri das.”

You flown and ask him what that last bit means.

He smiles. “It’s an old Martian warning. It means, ‘Keep your powder dry.’”

**75** Head Crusher says, “Thank you. Go to the Atchisons tent and tell them LADYBUG.”

**76** Charmaine takes the Bloodstaff from you and her face lights up. You clear your throat. “We’ve done our part,” you say, “now do yours. We need to find this character Max before all of Vegas is overrun by these killer robots.”

“Ah, yes, Max,” she croons, “that strange flunky for Faran Brygo. You probably don’t know that he is a robot.” sdfs The news hits you hard. “Things keep going from bad to worse,” you mutter. “Outlaws, Blood Cultists, Killer Robots, Bomb Worshipers, and now Cyborg Robotnappers! What next?”

She inserts the Bloodstaff into a secret compartment and turns it. You hear a low groan, as if some new doors were opening up. “The way is now clear for you,” says Charmaine. “If you survive your encounter with the Newmen, look me up in a couple of months. I might have another mission for you.” You can only grumble and take your leave.

**77** A pair of Blood Guardians flank a complex control panel, the like of which you’ve not seen before in the wasteland. One of the guards looks at you and you hear him mutter “infidels” under his breath. Beyond them you see a large area of painted floor that looks very much like a giant chessboard, but you can’t begin to guess at what it might be for, or what it’s doing in the middle of a temple.

**78** The Martian Warlord hands you a Firelance and Verchitin armor. “I know you’d much prefer a Red Ryder Range Model Air Rifle with a compass in the stock, but this is the best we can do.” He waves you toward the Ornijetcopter

and says, “Wodpre rashi Karna das.”

You frown, “What?”

He blushes purple. “It’s an old Martian wish from one warrior to another. It means, ‘Keep your powder dry.’”

**79** You’ve entered a room where dozens of drills and saws are singing an ear-piercing song. Blue and white sparks jump from welders and cutters, dropping to the ground to bounce out their brief lives. A robot torso passes before you as it lumbers its way across the room on one of the countless conveyor belts. Even the robot repair area looks in need of repair, with the roof and wall supports laying exposed. In the far corner you notice a square shaped room.

**80** “Irwin John Finster, he runs Project Darwin. He still thinks the world’s like it was before, you know?”

**81** The Ornijetcopter takes off on an azure tongue of flame and shoots toward Phobos. Suddenly, out of the brown shadow of Deimos, three SerFioid fighters stoop on your craft and fire their missiles. Your craft shudders under the impact. The blast rips the cockpit away and shreds the controls beyond any chance of repair. With black, choking smoke pouring from the cockpit, the OrnijetCopter spirals into the dense Phobosian jungle!

**82** The impact of craft hitting planet jars everyone aboard and, if not for your Verchitin armor, all of you would surely have perished. Suddenly the door to your craft opens. Standing there, dressed in a spotless white suit, is Irwin John Finster. “I suppose,” he begins, “I owe you an explanation.”

**83** The pit boss sends a stream of brown saliva from between his front teeth to the tip of your boots. He slowly sucks on the tobacco pocketed between his cheek and gum as he continues to eye you. Working a finger into his mouth, he scoots the chew around and finally breaks the silence. “See Crumb, the manager,” he says with a long drawl.

**84** In the shadow of an enormous satellite tracking dish stands the old man. Over 100 years old, he is still vigorous and bright of eye, although he rambles incoherently at times. The farmers remove their hats as they approach and wait for him to speak. Frowning, deep in thought, he stares at what appear to be the remains of a 15-foot tail carrot. He holds a long shaft of broken metal in one hand and mumbles something about wascally wabbits that he had to beat away with his best rake.

Miguel explains that you have come to help. The old man studies your weapons, and tells you that he doesn’t think your peashooters will do any good against the armored varmints, but that you’re welcome to try. If you succeed, he wants you to come back and see him. There is something he would like to show you.

Free to roam the veggie field, you head towards the carrot patch. From a

distance, you hear the old man warn you, “Watch out for Harry, the Bunny Master!”

**85** You know the Guardians to be strange collectors of old items and as xenophobic fools who would not hesitate to kill strangers without ever seeing the whites of their eyes. You’ve learned that the flags are in place to mark the closest an outsider may approach the walls without being attacked.

**86** “The Head Crusher likes visa cards.” The man smiles. “He slathers peanut butter on them and eats them.” He shakes his head. “Weird, but then, most everything is weird out here – present company excepted, of course.”

**87** The room is empty except for a small, square room in the corner. There is an oval pattern on the floor that reminds you of alien eggs just waiting for you to examine them too closely so they could explode in your face. You hesitate, but then get on all fours to study the pattern more closely.

**88** “Finster forced all the sick ones out, to prevent the spread he said, but it just leaves them to die without help,” grumbles the bartender.

**89** Finster sits down on a Phobosian tree. “At birth the Serpioids captured me and educated me to be a spy against my fellow humans. I rebelled, but I cannot strike them directly.” His hands shake. “You have to understand. Their queen is my sister!”

**90** Faded but still visible you see a map tacked on the wall of the area before the war. You see a small star that roughly corresponds, as nearly as you can tell, to the base you now stand inside. Almost directly south you see a second star, and directly west, at the map’s far edge, you see a third star.

**91** Dr. Franklin Beams’s personnel file flashes up onto the screen. Aside from a large amount of test scores and other data, an occasional paragraph of interest slides by. One that catches your eye reads, in part “Dr. Beams’s assessment of Edsel’s obsessive behavior concerning the computer and AI just works as another nail in Edsel’s coffin. The faster I can get him out of here, the better. Let Cochise’s boss deal with a fully-aware computer.”

**92** Head Crusher says, “Thank you. Go to the Atchison’s tent and tell them LIZARD.”

**93** The diary talks about the last days during which the satellite facility was operating. “Las Vegas is still intact. Needles wasn’t damaged by bombs, but some flooding occurred when the river level rose. Quartz suffered some damaged.” In hurried script, the last diary entry reads, “We’re abandoning the satellite installation so we can join the farmers out at the Ag Station and defend the world against the newest threat...the invasion from Mars!”

**94** A speaker crackles. After a flourish of trumpets you hear: “You have the privilege of an audience with His Brightness, the Supreme Commander of



Mushroom Forces, Western Sector. Unfortunately, our Great Leader is away on urgent business. Aware that you will require aid in your holy assault on the infidel Temple of Blood to steal the Blood Staff, he has opened our armory for your use. Take all you need. If you fail in your quest, you may return here to commit ritual suicide.”

**95** “Things have been rather nasty in Quartz,” you are told. “One of the larger desert bands, led by a guy called Pedros has taken an intense interest in, ah, civic affairs. He even calls himself ‘Mayor.’ Normally a town of our size could drive them off because the bandits don’t try all that hard when attacking, but this time they hit us with a vengeance. It’s almost like they don’t want to remain in the desert.”

**96** Three Card Monty is played with three cards; one is a queen and the others are 10’s. The dealer shuffles the cards and places them face down on the table. The player then has one guess to pick out the queen. The bet is \$10.

**97** You leave the weeping Finster behind at the crash site. You can sympathize with him, and would have preferred to have him helping you, but you can understand his reluctance to face his own flesh and blood. Still, his heart is in the right place. Onward you trek to destroy the Serpioid base, and try to redeem Finster’s soul.

**98** The Brakeman tells you, “Take this visa card and give it to Head Crusher in Quartz.” As the Brakeman passes you the card, the sunlight catches the skull and crossbones hologram and glints brightly. You slide it into your breast pocket as he turns and leaves without another word.

**99** Faran Brygo’s office is modest, yet clean and pleasant. Two guards, one tall, blond and stern looking, the other shorter and stockier, flank the desk. Brygo, a dark, handsome man, smiles at you. “I understand you want to speak with me, gentlemen?”

**100** Maj. Peregrine Cite’s personnel file flashes up onto the screen. Aside from a large amount of test scores and other data, an occasional paragraph of interest slides by. One that catches your eye reads, in part, “Peregrine accurately assessed the security problems with the storage area. While the base is not meant to be an armed camp, his precautions are well noted and should provide a surprise for unauthorized personnel operating in the base.”

**101** Lt. Russet Heller’s personnel file flashes up onto the screen. Aside from a large amount of test scores and other data, an occasional paragraph of interest slides by. One that catches your eye reads, in part, “I thought Heller would be a discipline problem, but he’s not. His jokes relieve the tension as we work to finish this base. Others worry about the news that Edsel’s new computer is helping to finish Cochise all by itself, but Heller shrugs it off. ‘Who wants to work with someone who won’t sit down for a cold beer after the work’s done anyway?’ Perhaps mankind does stand a chance against superior machines.”

**102** The Serpioid ambush almost takes you by surprise. The Serpioids rise up from the underbrush, which you ignite with your Hamelances, but their tactical advantage spells doom for you. Their advantage evaporates, however, when Finster appears and launches himself at the Serpioid leader. Finster's kick snaps the Serpioid's head back and drops him where he stood. The battle begins and energy weapons burn to life around you...

**103** The Mushroom Bishop explains to you, "I sent out my second-in-command to look into a series of murders." You notice the bishop nervously twisting a ruby ring around his finger.

**104** The pamphlet contains two tips for the wise: "(1) Buy an AK-97 assault rifle. (2) If there's someone hanging around your neighborhood you don't know, shoot him."

**105** "No," Finster shouts. "We can't take any more time to skulk around. We've got to go straight in. Don't worry, I know the password. It is TRAITOR!"

**106** Your savage attack blasts away the enemy pillbox and you pour into the heart of the Phobos defense. Finster blasts a control panel. "Perhaps, with their defense system down, the Emperor can aid us."

**107** You lift up Louie's lifeless wrist to look at his gold ID bracelet. Twisting it over to view the underbelly, you see "27" etched on the dulled surface.

**108** Hidden panels in the walls drop away and Serpioid snipers open up on you. Your Firelances rake the ambush ports with murderous sheet after sheet of flames and you hear the screams of Serpioids as they reel away in death.

"Finster, look out!" one of you screams, but it is in vain. A pit opens beneath his feet and he vanishes.

A vile, female voice fills the corridor. "Leave now, earthmen. You cannot save him or your planet. At least save yourselves."

**109** The wall map is covered with scribbled remarks that are virtually unreadable. A star over one building in the southeastern section of town has the legend "Bar - trouble spot" scrawled over it. A skull decorates another building in the central-eastern part of the town. The word HIDEOUT covers it. An arrow leading from the word draws attention to another building diagonally to the southwest, though it has the word SEKRET painstakingly written beside it.

**110** The Hobo guzzles Snake Squeezins the way an assault rifle gobbles bullets. His eyes glaze over and his voice deepens. "Those who guard the past guard the secret to immorality."

**111** "Don't get your hopes up. We have to deal with the Bloodstaff murders first."

You frown. “What murders?”

The robot clerk squints at you. “You mean you’re not here about the murders? People are found dead, drained of blood. We think it’s some mutant vampire or something from the desert.” He looks at you very hard. “How do I know you’re really Rangers? Just you keep your noses clean in my town, hear?”

**112** The glowing torchlight flickers across a horrific scene. Men in torn and blood spattered robes struggle against the ropes binding them to massive steel tables. The tables slope down at the head and a catch basin at the lowest corner is used to collect the dark flow of blood dripping from the small wounds cut into each writhing victim.

Priests rush from one table to another, gathering buckets the way a dairy farmer gathers the bucket of milk from his cows. They pour the smaller quantities of blood into a hole in the floor, but you cannot tell where the dark fluid drains away to in this dim chamber of horrors.

**113** “Where did you find that? Oh my God, you’ve found the thief. Where is he? Tell me, I must know!”

**114** “Well, victims get red-faced and all delirious.” The bartender shakes his head. “It’s really odd.”

**115** Without Finster and his knowledge of the Phobosian Citadel you can only stumble around blindly. You slink through corridors and around corners, easily avoiding the inattentive Serpioid sentries. Then you catch a flash of white from a window and, for a half second, you see Finster.

You blanch. The building he’s in Bears the legend “Ministry of Genetic Rehabilitation.”

**116** Gunfire rips the Master Geneticist in half. You slit Finster’s bonds. “We must hurry,” he urges, “The final invasion begins in an hour!”

**117** The Hobo quickly drains the bottle of Snake Squeezins and drops into a trance. Then, uttering each word metronomically, he says “A steel storm threatens the City of Gold.”

**118** You see an empty room with a small square room in the corner. On the floor is an intricate diamond pattern. You remove a magnifying glass from your back pocket, get down on all fours, and begin to carefully study the pattern of dots.

**119** Fat Freddie turns the ring over in his thick hands. A smile creeps onto his face like scum over stagnant water. “I don’t believe it, you actually were foolish enough to kill him.” He stares at you with piggish eyes. “You are obviously too dangerous to live.”

**120** Finster points out the window. “Dive for cover!” he screams. You look

up, then suck tile as a kamikaze Serpioid in a fighter corkscrews down into the hanger where you have taken cover!

**121** The bartender frowns. “Not much news since the plague forced Finster to isolate the base.”

**122** Three Card Monty is played with three WWII generals. One pretends he’s Montgomery, while the other two are Bradley and Patton. A German player then tries to figure out which one will lead the invasion. If he guesses right, the Fourth Reich gets to start with bases in Germany, France and England.

**123** You peer at him over the top of your sunglasses. As you cock your fist to counsel him on the error of his reticent ways, he blurts, “The password is THERMODYNAMISM!”

**124** You see written here: “The launch code is MOTEKIM.”

**125** The explosion rips the hanger apart, but a force shield projected from Finster’s belt holds off the ocean of fire washing through the hangar. “Quick,” he yells, “Get to the fighter over there. We’ve got no time to waste.”

**126** Felicia smiles as you cut her bonds. She nearly falls as she makes her first attempt to stand up. “Don’t worry about me,” she says, “Ace is being kept in the cells.”

**127** You unravel the message from the leg of this massively strong pigeon. “Boss,” the note begins, “I’ve tracked the bum to Needles. There’s lots of ruins and abandoned buildings here, so the search is not easy. I know he’s hiding in one of them, and I hope I can find him before someone else does. I don’t know if we want his information to fall into the wrong hands. Oh yeah, there’s Rangers about, so it looks like things actually can go from bad to worse.”

**128** The Hobo finishes the Snake Squeezins in record time and smiles wisely at you. He burps. “One man’s dream is another’s nightmare, but a machine’s dream is everyone’s nightmare.”

**129** “Faran must have sent you to look for Max. Last I knew he was headed for the sewers. He built a special key to get down there. It’s called a Sonic Key. Don’t confuse it with the four keys of the Citadel. Max made a couple of them and told me that he was hiding one somewhere in the old golf course. Didn’t tell me where, though. Didn’t do him any good, either. The Newmen grabbed him before he could do anything. If you return to me the Bloodstaff from the Mushroom Church in Needles I can show you the way. Tell the bishop DIPSTICK.”

**130** You’re drawn into a large room filled from floor to ceiling with countless computers. The flashing lights and video screens bring the room to an eerie life. Through the glow of colors, you spot a small square room in the far corner.

**131** Once the introductions have been made, the Big Boss pulls out a box of

grenades and passes them around, all the while explaining that it is his special blend, made somewhere further north. When everyone is comfortable, and the bodyguards have taken up unobtrusive positions behind you, he begins to talk.

“One of my men is missing. We don’t think he’s dead, because he was too valuable to kill. We think some other group in town has grabbed him, but if we don’t get him back, the whole town will probably be overrun by these damn death machines that have started to appear. He’s the only one in town with the scientific know how to fight them. For example, he’s the one who thought of the land mines, and they’ve destroyed more robots than anything else in town.”

Brygo reaches into his desk and brings out a drawing of a rather ordinary looking man. “This is Finster,” he explains. “He came to us about a year ago from the Wasteland to the east. He was the greatest hand-to-hand fighter we’d ever seen and he also seemed to know a lot about the science from before the War. He didn’t remember where he came from – at least, that’s what he told us. I quickly made him my right hand man.

“When we began to hear rumors of death machines coming out of the west, and especially when the first of them reached the Vegas borders several weeks ago, Finster grew frantic. He began to talk crazy, about how all life was in peril, and how only he could save us. He said he needed special equipment, and that someone near Vegas should have it. I should have put a guard on him then, but instead I decided to send Ace out to look for help. One night Finster disappeared. We’ve been looking for him ever since, but without success. Now I’ve lost my best man, and things are getting worse. Newer and stronger robotic death machines are appearing all the time. If we don’t find Finster soon, even a fortress like this may not be able to hold out. Go see Charmaine in the Mushroom Church. Tell her I sent you and she may be able to help.”

You nod. “Yeah. We’ve tangled with these death machines before, and whoever is making them has gotta be stopped. Got any clues?”

“There are two other power groups that we know of here in Vegas. Fat Freddy runs the criminal element. He’d like to take over my position. Then, there’s also the Servants of the Mushroom Cloud – religious fanatics who won’t be happy until every person in Vegas has been converted to their own poisonous religion. There may be others. Vegas is a big town. But those are the ones we most suspect. You get Finster back in one piece, and I’ll pay you \$20,000 and give you command positions in my special forces. What do you say? Will you do it?”

The Desert Rangers huddle for a few minutes. From the veiled looks and secret gestures you’ve intercepted between Brygo and his men, it’s obvious that the only way you’ll get out of this room without a fight, is to take the assignment. Besides, your curiosity has been aroused. You are sure that Finster knows a lot more than he has told Brygo. If you want explanations, he’s the man you’ll need to see.

“All right,” you tell the Boss, “we’ll find him if he’s findable. We may have to leave Vegas to do it. In the meantime, you try to hold out here.”

The Big Boss stands up, shakes your hands, and wished you all luck. Then he shows you the way out.

**132** A growl rumbles from the bartender’s throat. “The Martians forced all the sick ones out, to prevent the spread they said, but it just leaves them to die without help.”

**133** Each of you mans a gun station as the fighter bursts from the flaming hanger. Fingers tighten on triggers and massive energy pulses coax sour, ozone vapors from the atmosphere. You blaze away at the swarm Of enemy fighters whirling around you. Your shots blast the Serpioid ships apart, but the horde of them looks too great for even you to defeat.

Suddenly the fighter lurches to a stop as a blue-green light bathes it. The wings disintegrate and Finster screams, “Tractor beam. Their command ship has us!”

**134** “That’s a brilliant plan!” Finster exclaims. “You’ll get a promotion for that one!” In accordance with your plan, he cuts the engine back and the tractor beam drags you quickly toward the floating Citadel that is the Serpioid flagship. Then as you grow close, Finster punches the afterburners and your ship, a fuel-laden bomb, dives in at the flagship.

“Hope your force field holds, Irwin,” you laugh. He swallows hard. “My power level is too low. We’re going to die!”

**135** Finster huddles with the rest of you in the corridors of the flagship. “If not for quick thinking and linking my power belt into the fusion engine on the ship, we would have died. Now we’ve crippled the flagship. We have won!”

“No,” you remind him. “It won’t be over until your sister is dead!”

**136** The darkened cell reeks of decay. You take a step inside and feel something slick on the cell’s floor. You stoop and touch it, then recoil as if burned. The empty cell is full of blood!

**137** The bartender sighs. “He was working in the base as a janitor. Now he’s real sick.”

**138** A squad of Serpioids fills the hallway. “Come, Rangers,” the leader invites, “Come and die.”

**139** High/Low is a game played with two dice. The player rolls a die and then the dealer rolls a die. If the player rolled higher than the dealer, he wins. The bet is \$10 per roll.

**140** “He wandered in from the desert to study here. He talked with Finster but got sick before he got a job.”

**141** Snake Squeezins drip off the Hobo's chin as he drains the bottle. His eyes grow distant and his voice drops an octave. "To the mother who speaks in riddles comes a child of promise. Aid her and aid justice."

**142** You stoop and recover your African Throwing Knives from the Serpioid bodies. You grin at Finster. "I'm going to skin one of these things, someday, and make me a pair of boots."

**143** You unceremoniously rip the bracelet from Hewey's limp wrist. your chest several times to remove the blood, you see "13" engraved on it.

**144** You can hardly believe your eyes. Here, in the middle of the Guardian Citadel's fourth level, you stand before the object of five year's search. You remove your gloves and gently run your hand over her belly, fighting the temptation to throw yourself entirely against her. Slowly, you take several steps back. Unable to resist it any longer, you blurt triumphantly to the crew, "The Titanic! What a find!"

**145** This paragraph can be reached from no place in the whole adventure. We know who you are, and we will get you for reading this paragraph. Expect it most when you expect it least.

**146** The bartender leans forward. "Darwin was a science base a long time ago. Supposed to be hush-hush, but I grew up in its shadow, so..."

**147** You flip the lifeless Hewey onto his back with the toe of your boot. After you rummage through his pockets, you start removing his jewelry, having a particularly hard time working the ID bracelet over his swollen hand. You finally separate it from the dearly departed with a hard jerk that pops the bracelet off. Flipping over the bracelet, you read the only etching of "11."

**148** The Hobo lowers the now empty bottle of Snake Squeezins and stares at you with glassy eyes. "Destroy the wombs and destroy the threat." He then passes out.

**149** "Hi. They call me Crumb," he says with a nod of his head. After he exchanges handshakes with everybody, he tells you "See Faran Brygo. He's ray boss. Be sure to use the password CLOVER." As you leave, he yells, "Tell him I sent you!"

**150** "Where did you find that? Oh my god, he must be dead. The Bloodstaff was stolen from here and I'll generously reward you if you find it and bring it back. Last I knew he was going back to downtown Needles."

**151** Your mouth dries instantly. Perched within a weightless bubble of blood, Finster's sister laughs derisively. "Come so far just to die. Poor little men. Your world is lost."

**152** The hastily inhaled Snake Squeezins dull the Hobo's eyes and deepen his voice. He tells you, "A body is only a box to keep your mind in."

**153** “Not by a long shot,” you scream back at her. You flick the charging level of the needle rifles you found earlier, “Eat hot slivers of death, witch.” The deafening roar of your assault swallows any comment she tries to offer.

**154** As you gently thumb through the brittle pages of the little black book, you notice a list of names and phone numbers, some of which have four stars next to them. At the bottom of the last page you notice some unusual text: “The launch code is ATOM.”

**155** You unceremoniously rip the bracelet from Dewey’s limp wrist. Rubbing it against your chest several times to remove the blood, you see “16” engraved on it.

**156** The Snake Squeezins vanish into the Hobo faster than water evaporates in the desert. The Hobo smiles quizzically, his eyes get a distant look, and he burps. “Trust the one born beneath the battlefield.”

**157** Finster and his sister stand over your dead bodies. “The fools should have realized,” she says, “those were my weapons. Having them explode when used against me is easy.

Finster smiles. “They were more foolish than that, Lucretia. They actually trusted me.” The twins’ laughter echoes in your dying ears for an eternity.

**158** “Where’d you get that ring?” the detective demands. I think his Holiness is looking for that thing.”

**159** She beckons you to come nearer, the shining three-inch red nail on her index finger mesmerizing you closer and closer. Pushing the hair away from your ear, she whispers, Ugly’s bomb disarm code is 31-17-54-07-99.

**160** Snake Squeezins lubricate the Hobo’s throat and loosen his mind to travel places unknown to the sane. “Man before wife, save a life.”

**161** You study the torn piece of paper in your hand. Originally written in red ink, the text has turned into large fuzzy blotches of pink. Though mostly unreadable, you make out the word MUERTE followed by HIDEOUT: THANATOS, but THANATOS has been scratched out and MORS has been written under it.

**162** The coppery-skinned youth smiles. “I come from the Junkyard Village. My father is the Junkmaster and he’d be very grateful if you would return me to my home.” He looks down at his feet. “I understand, though, if you do not want to take me home. You are the mighty Desert Rangers who have destroyed the Guardians of the Old Order, so you don’t need any help. Still, my father knows where your enemy lairs.”