
Disco ball

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Sparkles

In front of me, about two meters away, spun a sparkling sphere.

Wait.

Let me think.

No, it wasn't in front of me. It was ABOVE me.

Above me, about two meters away, was a faceted sparkling sphere.

Rephrase that.

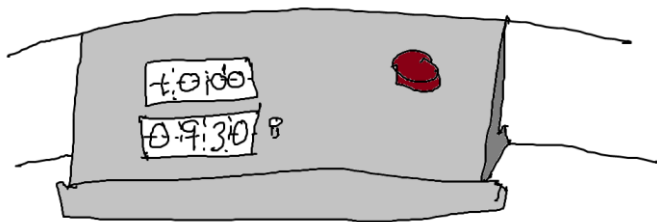
Sorry, it takes me forever to wake up.

My eyes had opened. I was lying on my back, and I gradually perceived my UFO's disco ball as it sparkled above me.

I hate hyperspace, by the way. All the tingling and swooshing really gets to you.

I continued to stare blankly at the disco ball, numbly hoping that my alarm clock wouldn't go off yet, and that my mind could rebuild itself in quiet peace without having to squeeze out enough thought to find and smash the snooze button.

This being a space-plane, it wasn't actually called a "snooze button", probably a chronograph cessation mechanism. It was a faux digital display constructed of little piece of steel that flipped around every ten minutes. At least it didn't blink 12:00 when it wasn't set. Below the always-misinformed time display was an identical flip-time-displayer (the technical term) with a push-in pull-out knob for turning on/off the alarm.



What time was it anyway?

According to which sun?

And which planet?

And whose ancient time measurement?

Might as well get up.

I rolled over and knee-ed up.

The world felt a bit crooked.

I must be in low-gravity.

Nearly tripping over a fold in my rolled-out bedroll, I stumbled over to the alarm clock, built into one of the wall-mounted control panels. If the designers had laid the panel flat, instead of cambering it, the alarm-clock panel (including the “door opening button”) would have made an excellent coffee counter.

Oh well.

At least the lip held escaping pencils.

The displays told me that I had thirty minutes until my alarm would go off... or that my alarm went off thirty minutes ago... I wasn't sure.

I pushed the alarm button in to pre-empt the alarm.

It didn't budge.

So I pulled it out.

My basement

Food.

There wasn't any up here. I ate my secondary food cache last night. The wrappers were still someplace around... looking around, pointing... there!

I walked over to the wrappers on the floor, picked them up, and shoved them in my pocket.

My main food-cache was stored in my basement.

My basement was on the “floor” below.

I had to open my central trap door to get to my basement.

My unrolled bedroll was on top of the trap door.

I had to roll up my bedroll first.

Solve the adventure game yourself; fortunately, I didn't have to make a cheese sandwich and place it on top of a satchel to capture a flying bot... or however that game was solved.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hitchhiker's_Guide_to_the_Galaxy_\(computer_game\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hitchhiker's_Guide_to_the_Galaxy_(computer_game)))

Oops... In the above action walkthrough, I forgot that I had to press "D" to walk down my ladder-stairs. I hate ladder-stairs.

Once down in the storeroom, I threw my rolled-up bedroll onto a shelf. My food wrappers I placed in my treasure display case, technically called a waste basket, and got one adventure-game point.

On another shelf was a box of "Wheezit Energy Bars". I pocketed two bars, climbed up the ladder, and closed the trap door.

Just a minute. The phone is ringing... Not in my story, but in real life.



I'm back

Sorry, I had to answer that.

It was my bank, I think, but I missed the phone call, and when I called back I got a computer, so I hung up.

Back to my story.

To recap the excitement: I pocketed my energy bars, climbed up the ladder, and closed the trap door. (Always remember to close the trap door. If you forget, you'll always remember.)

Damn.

I should have taken the disco ball down too... Next time I head down.

By the way, the automatic basement light really does shut off when you close the trap door.

My pellet gun sat on the cambered counter opposite the alarm-clock door-thingy combo.

I have a friend who likes old westerns. She had someone on a low-tech planet make me a leather belt and holster for my zip gun. The belt-maker added bullet-holding loops, complete with gunpowder bullets (that wouldn't fit my gun)... Kind of useless... But they looked really cool, and you never know, they might prove to be as useful as the "Jewel encrusted egg".

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zork>)

Buzz

The alarm went off.

Didn't I just shut it off?

Bother.

I ambled to the other side of my small UFO, dragging my holster, and shut off the alarm.

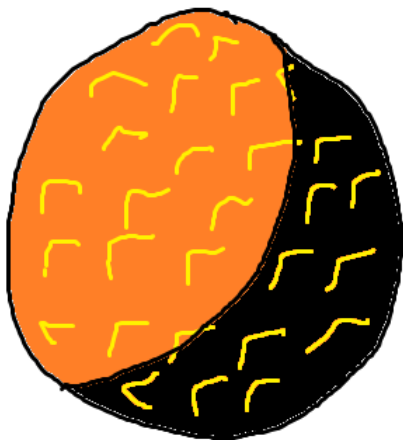
I put on my holster. It hung at the proper, 23-degree angle.

While my alarm-clock technology was around 600 years out-of-date, my UFO's telemetry was not.

I thought to my spaceplane that I wished to see what was outside.

One of the bots stored in my basement dematerialized, zipped out of my UFO through a hatch, and had a squiz.

A visual panel appeared on the down-angled wall in front of me. I could see the bot's telemetry (it was working okay, but needed an oil change soon), as well as visuals from one of its eyes.



Two hundred meters from my craft was a slaver sphere, parked dead in space.

My team had requested that I check it out... mostly because they didn't want to, but partly because I liked caving... and I appreciated the long snooze getting to the site.

Really big disco ball

Simply put, slaver spheres look like really big disco balls in space.

They're spherical because spheres are cheap to build.

They're about one hundred meters in diameter because they're large. (Some are less large, and some are less small.)

They aren't silver though; they're kind of a matte gold colour, kind of like titanium-coated drill bits.

Their surface isn't completely smooth either, not unlike a good disco ball. (Completely smooth disco balls don't properly distribute the light in cool diamond patterns.)

I mentally zoomed my bot towards the slaver sphere, waiting for it to get blown up.

Luckily for me, my bot wasn't attacked, because if it was, my ship would have been sliced about two seconds later. I hate vacuums.

My bird (in the other room) just jumped to the ground. One minute.

I'm back again

I saved her from being euthanized. She was a wild (Galah) teenager when she managed to irrevocably break her wing. The vet was going to euthanize her because she couldn't be released back into the wild.

My bird doesn't so much as fly, as plummet.

She didn't want to go back in her cage, or come into this room, so I left her wandering around the living room.

Back to the story...

While I was checking on my real-life bird, my story bot made it to the slaver sphere.

When she (my bot) tried to fly into the middle level of the sphere, she was blocked by thick material or defensive fields.

I directed her to try one floor up, and she managed to weasel her way through the sphere's wall, and into the sphere's "caves".

So as not to ruin the story, I'll discuss the caves later.

I zoomed by bot through the entire ship over the next hour. I found no-one. I couldn't find a way into the blocked-off middle level though.

Slaver-sphere architecture

I like caves.

My bot returned to home base after I finished the scan.

I mentally piloted my extradimensionally-offset ship into the edge of the sphere, my floor level with the sphere's floor.

Not quite level.

Never-ever make your spaceplane's jump-floor exactly level with your destination floor, or your feet will end up being embedded in the floor.

I did that once. (Actually, my friend did, but she won't ever admit it.)

For those of you who have never flown a QFA-439.39C, getting in and out of the UFO is easy:

You can either open the trap door, climb down, press the red button (not the blue one), and a portion of the floor will ramp down. If you happen to have piles of boxes placed on the ramp, the scene of boxes tumbling out of your UFO onto the airport tarmac is quite embarrassing. (I did that once, my friend points out.)

The other way to get out of a QFA-439 series UFO is to stand on the trap door, right above the red-duct-tape X, and think to the ship, "Push me".

Thanks to many safety systems, the spaceplane floor was locked a few centimetres above the slaver-ship floor, so when I was pushed out, I only fell a short distance. A ten centimetre fall is uncomfortable, but not as bad as a negative-two-centimetre fall. Being off by an imaginary distance is distinctly unpleasant. (My friend did this also... and so did I.)

I like caves

I also admire architecture.

Slaver spheres are a maze of twisty cave-like passages, all alike.



Here are some things to remember about slaver spheres:

- Slaves being transported are incredibly bored... and panicked. Placing them in a maze of twisty passages provides them something to do, resulting in less panic and violence.
- Mazes prevent slaves from congregating in large open areas and then rioting.
- Faux-cave mazes have no pointy edges for slaves to hurt themselves with, or others.
- The cave architecture-metaphor allows for elevated pools of water that slaves can drink from.

- Never drink from the sunken and flowing streams of water around the periphery of the ship.



I appeared three levels above the blocked off centre level.

No-one was around, as expected.

I wasn't killed instantly, as unexpected.

I looked around:

The ceiling lights were all operating properly.

A quick stride to the latrine wall (at the periphery of the sphere) revealed the stream to be clean and flowing with water.

Gun holstered, I crept towards the centre of the ship. (Unholstered guns tend to get one shot.)

The elevated drinking-water basins were clean.

A bit further on in the maze, I found a foil-packaged energy-bar hidden away in a crevice. Slave “enrichment”, to keep them busy. Its expiry date hadn’t yet been reached.

Though I wasn’t willing to eat it (slaver energy-bars are often drugged), I swapped my “Wheezit Energy Bar” for the slaver energy-bar. There was no reason to steal.

After ten minutes of wandering through the maze, I found the approximate centre of the ship.

Pushed

If the slaver-ship had no slaves, then standing in an alcove near the centre of the ship should trigger a “push” that would pop me to another level.

I stood for a few moments... in an alcove, of course.

The tingling began.

I felt an invisible “arm” grab me.

A few seconds later, I stood in a “white room”.

Someone shot me from behind.

It felt like bullets going through Mythbusters’ ballistics gel.

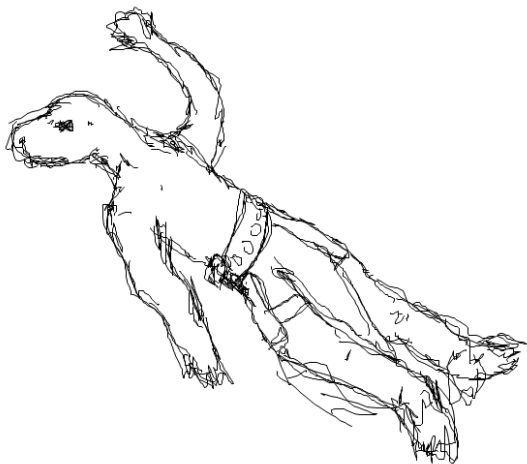
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythbusters>)

My body tipped down, face forward.

Blank.

Dead.

Insert quarter to play again.



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