

Escape from Planet Zog

Paul Davies

'The people on Planet Centram are in trouble – we must help them,' said Zanya.

'They'll die in six hours, forty-two minutes if we don't find any xarkon for them,' IB4E said.

'What can we do?' asked Jason.

'I think we can get some on Planet Zog,' answered IB4E.

So Zanya, Jason, and IB4E go to Planet Zog to find the xarkon – but they can't leave! Can you help them escape before everyone dies?

Hotshot Puzzles are readers with a difference. Every two pages there is a puzzle to solve. The stories are carefully graded and are written for young teenagers.

Level 3 400 headwords

ISBN 0-19-422481-3

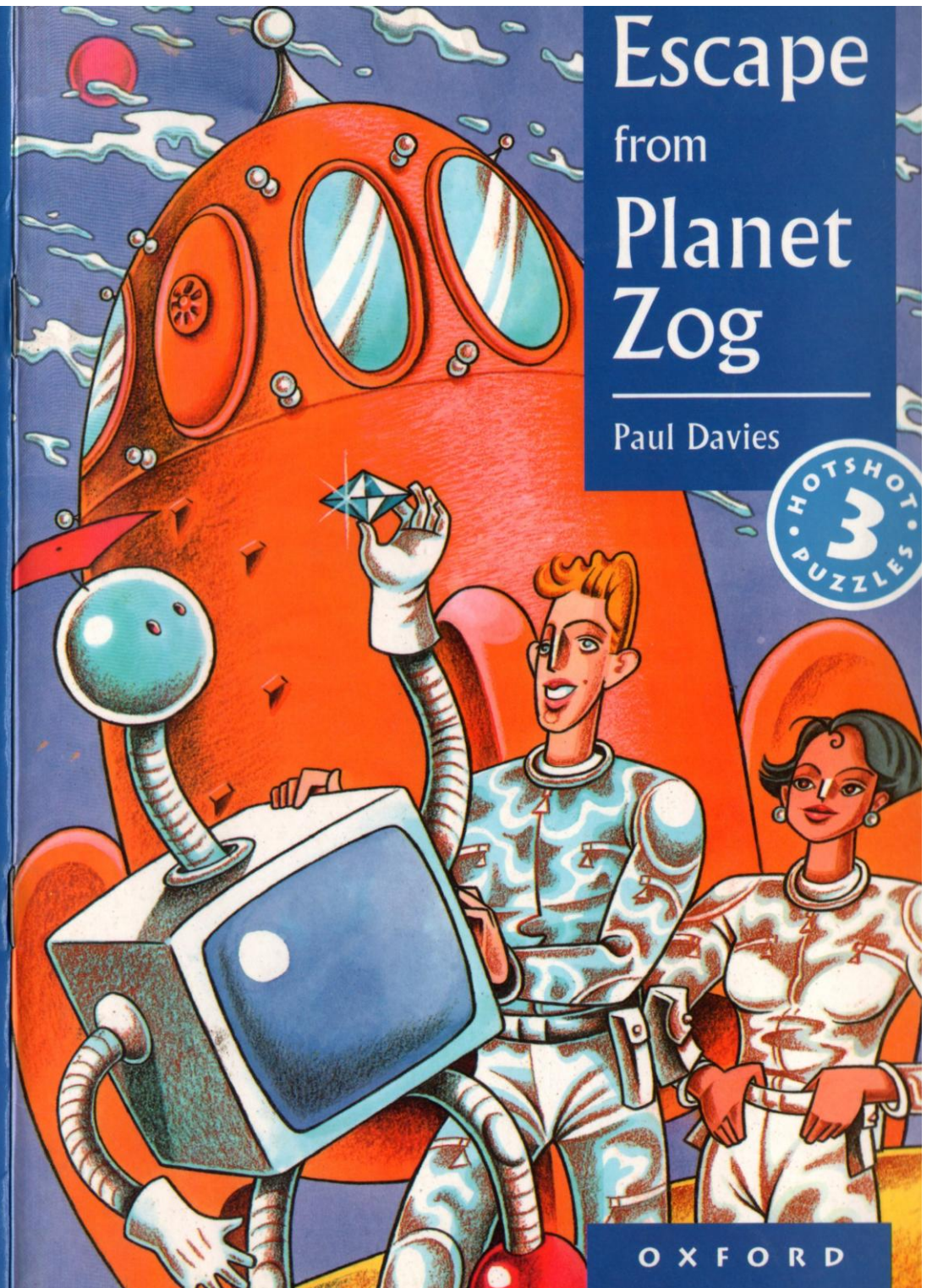


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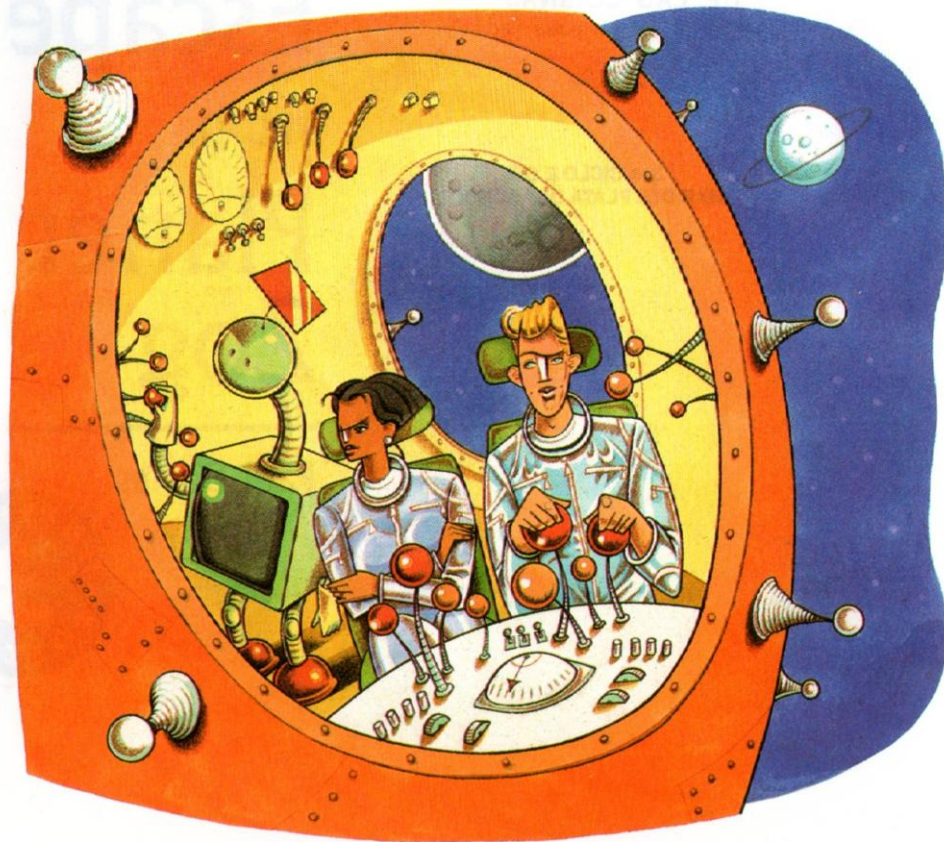
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Escape from Planet Zog

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Oxford University Press



'What are we going to do?' said Zanya. 'Our class is tomorrow morning. We have to write ten pages about 'The dangers of pollution' – and we haven't started yet.'

'I'm thinking,' replied Jason.

'Thinking won't help. We need a planet to write about. I'm sure the other students have found one.'

Zanya looked out of their spaceship; but she could only see a large, boring, grey planet. She turned to IB4E. He was the android who always travelled with them.

'Can you write it for us, IB4E?'

'Not possible. Your teacher said that you and Jason must do all the work.'

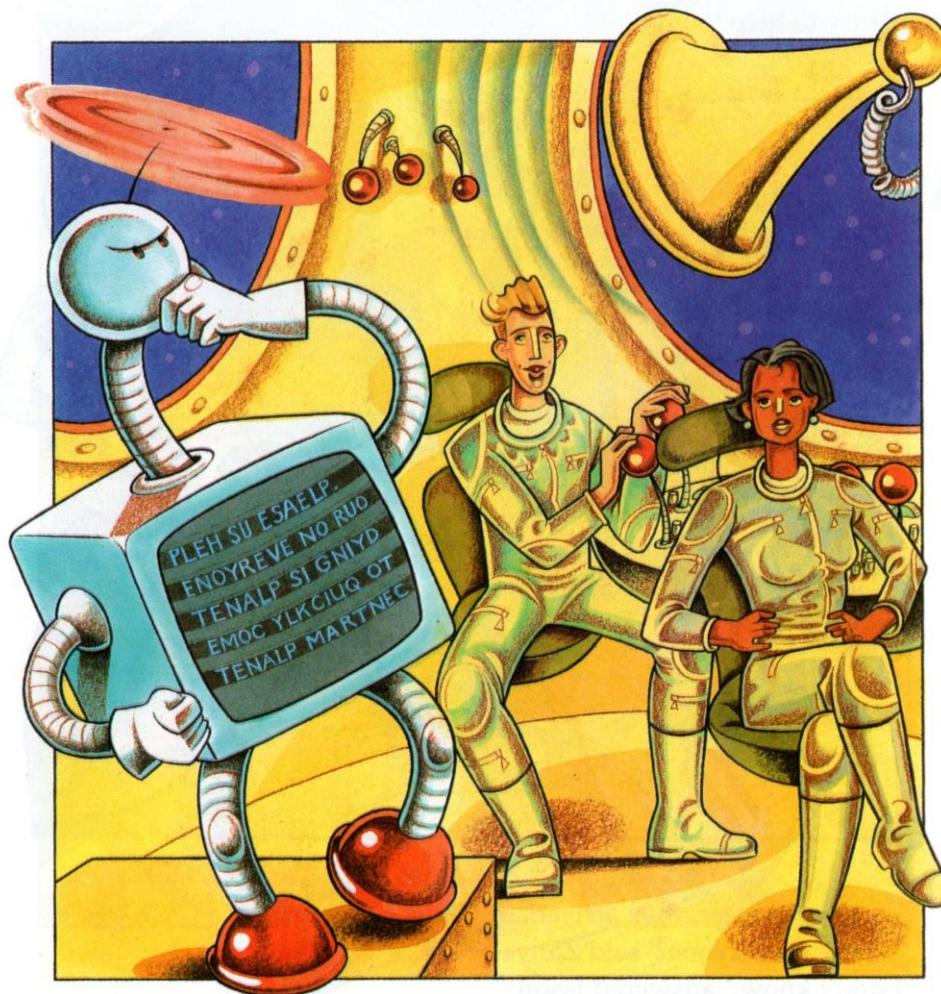
'Thanks, IB4E,' said Zanya. 'Thanks a lot.'

'Shh! The radio – listen!' said Jason suddenly. 'It sounds like a message.'

Jason and Zanya listened.

'I can't hear it, it's too quiet,' said Jason. 'IB4E – can you show us the message on your computer?'

'I don't know,' IB4E answered. 'It's very difficult to understand.'



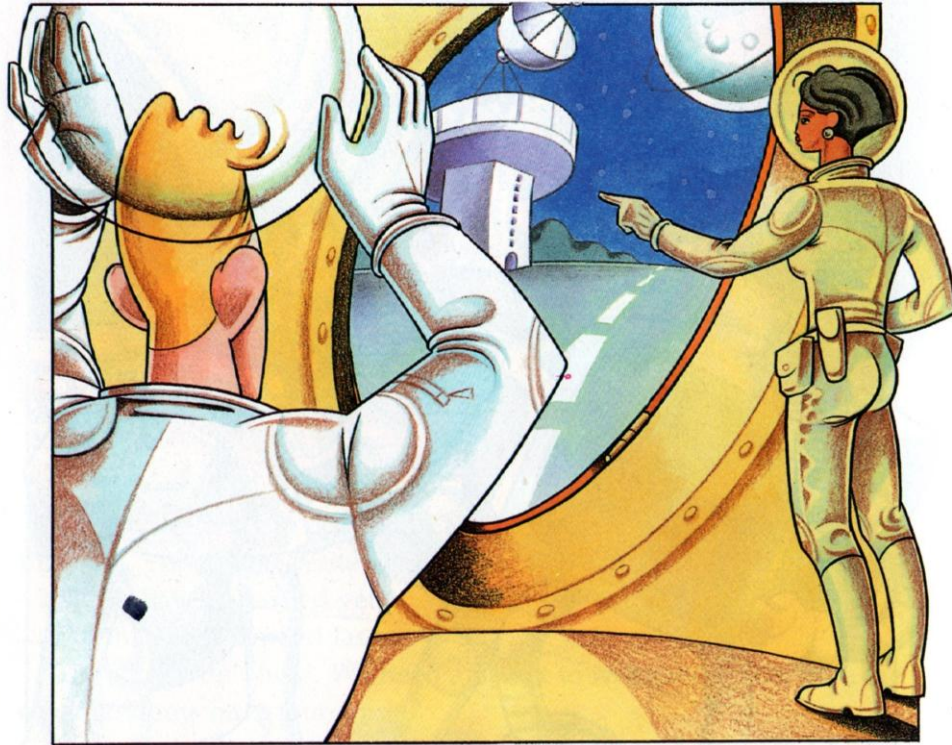
• Look at the computer. What is the message?

'I think I can read it!' said Jason. 'It says, "Help us please. Everyone on our planet is dying. Come quickly to Planet Centram."' "

'And look,' said Zanya. 'Planet Centram is only six minutes away in our spaceship. Let's go!'

'Wait a minute,' said Jason. 'This sounds dangerous. Shall we call the space police?'

'There's no time!' Zanya replied. 'These people are in trouble – we must try to help them.'



Six minutes later, they arrived on Planet Centram.

'Where is everyone?' said Zanya.

'I don't know,' answered Jason.

'Well, let's look around,' said Zanya. 'Come on. Perhaps there's somebody in that building.'

Jason, Zanya and IB4E looked inside.

'Everyone's asleep!' said Zanya with surprise.

'No, they're unconscious,' said IB4E. 'And they'll die in six hours, forty-two minutes if nobody can help them.'

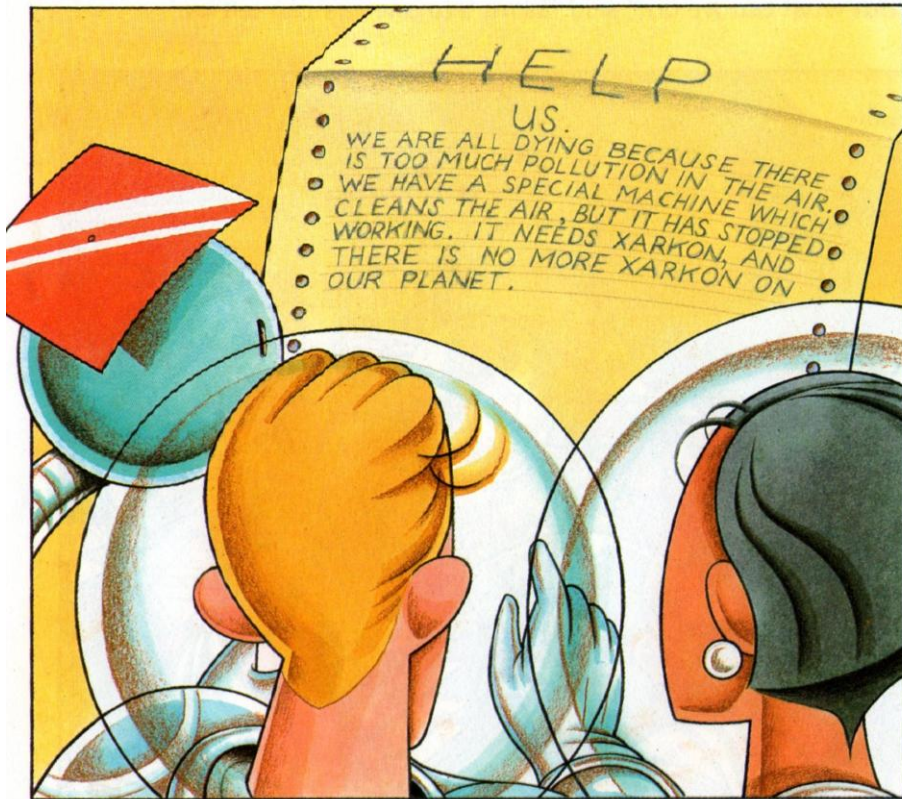
'But what can we do?' said Jason. 'No one *here* can tell us.'



- Look at the picture. Somebody has left a message. Where is it?

'Look,' said Jason. 'There's something on the paper under that computer.'

'Let me see,' said Zanya.



'We must help them,' said Zanya, running to the door. 'We must find more xarkon. And we've only got six hours and thirty-five minutes.'

'But we don't know what xarkon is,' said Jason, 'or where to look for it. IB4E, can your computer tell us?'

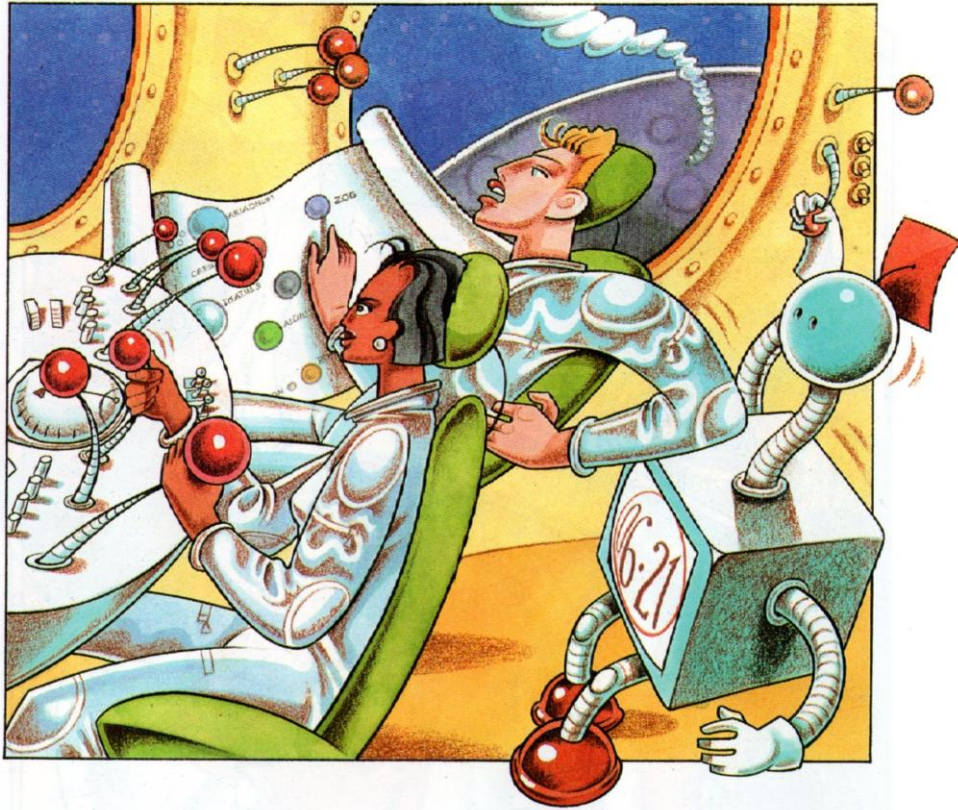
'Of course,' replied IB4E. 'Look.'

'Now we need to look at a map,' said Jason.

'There's one here, on this desk,' said Zanya. 'We can take it with us.'



• Look at the map. What is the nearest planet which has xarkon?



'Aldius is larger than Romula and smaller than Ikatus 3,' said Jason, 'and it's very near to Centram. Ah – but it's green. We need to go to . . . er, . . . Planet Zog!'

Zanya, Jason and IB4E ran back to their spaceship. 'Planet Zog, here we come!' shouted Zanya as they left. 'Jason, hold the map.'

'All right. But don't tell me what to do all the time. And don't go too fast, it's dangerous.'

Suddenly, the spaceship began to shake. 'I told you not to go too fast,' said Jason.

'I'm not,' cried Zanya. 'It's an asteroid storm.'

'Oh no! We're going to crash,' cried Jason. 'IB4E, what can we do?'

'That's a very interesting question,' replied the android. 'You see, some asteroids are made of gas. They are all right to travel through.'

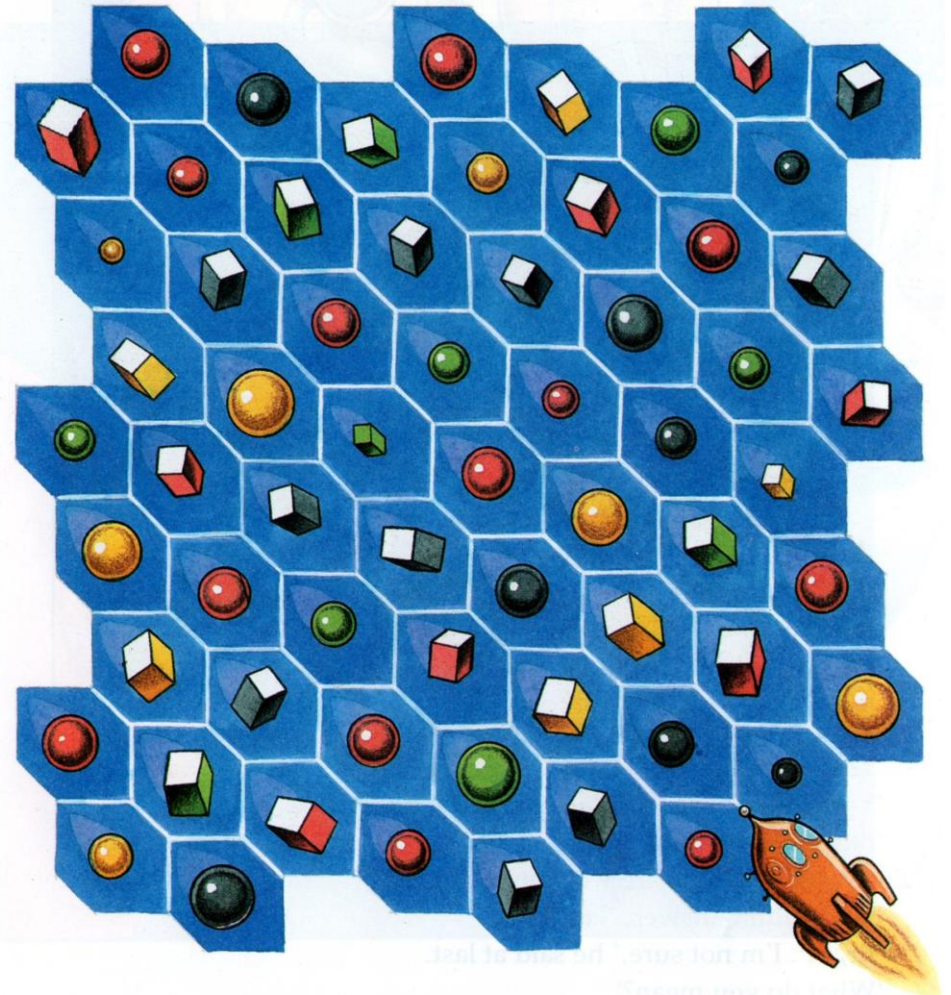
'Which ones?' shouted Zanya.

'You mean, which ones are made of gas?' said IB4E.

The spaceship began to shake more.

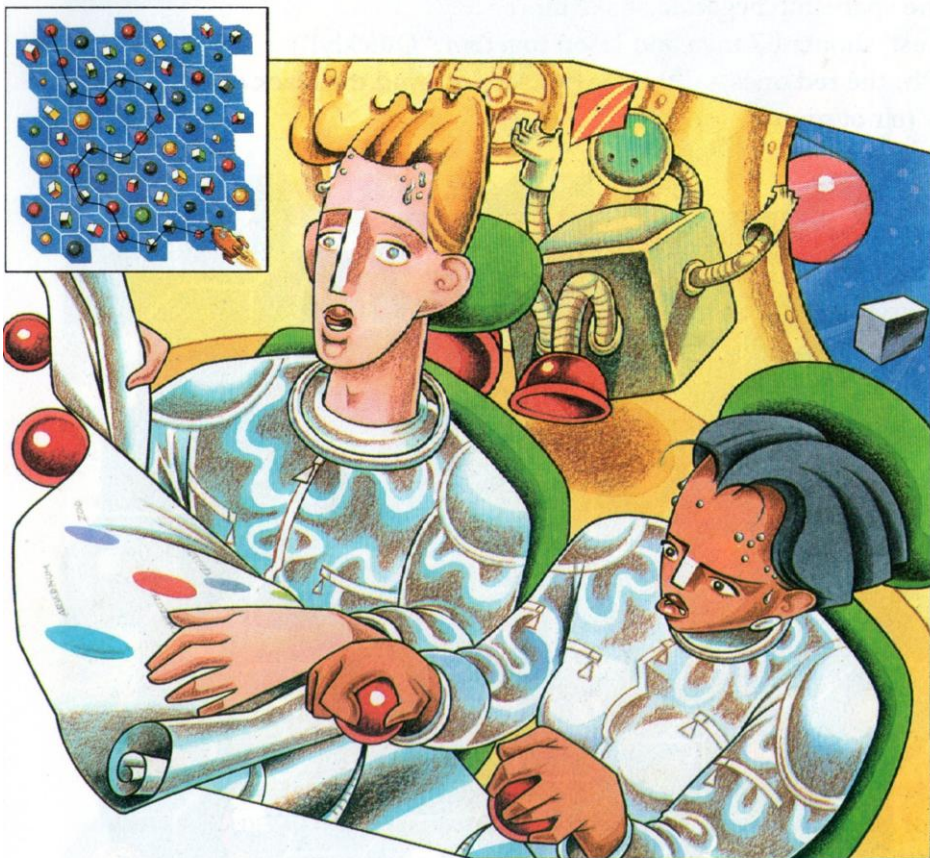
'Yes!' shouted Zanya and Jason together. 'Quickly!'

'Oh, the red ones – if they're not square. And the black ones, too – if they're not round.'



• Look at the picture. How can the spaceship escape from the asteroid storm?

'I can't watch,' said Jason. He looked out of the window of their spaceship and saw another asteroid fly past.



'That was a narrow escape,' said Zanya.

'Yes,' Jason agreed. 'We nearly crashed – twice.'

'But we didn't,' said Zanya. 'And we must be very near to Planet Zog by now. When are we going to arrive?'

Jason didn't answer. 'Jason?'

'Er, . . . I'm not sure,' he said at last.

'What do you mean?'

'Well, don't shout at me – but I'm afraid we're lost.'

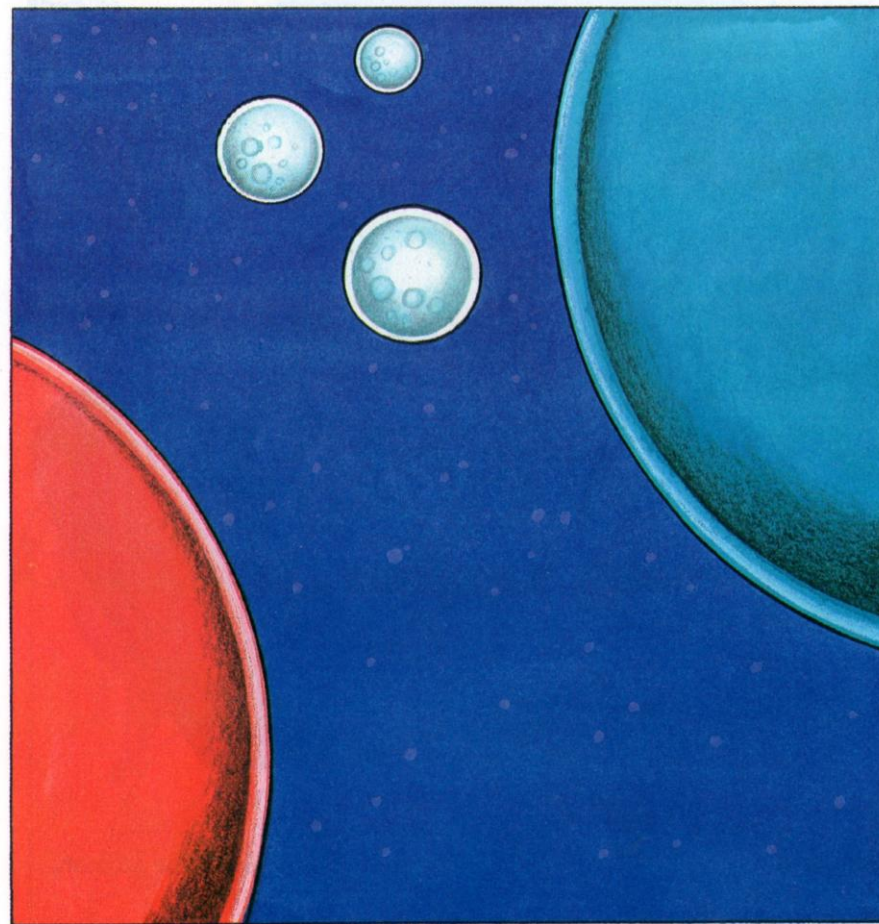
'Lost?' shouted Zanya.

'Yes. You see, when we went through the asteroid storm, I didn't watch for a few seconds. Sorry.'

'So where are we now?' asked Zanya.

Jason thought for a minute. 'Well, let's look at the map,' he said.

'That large, red planet on the left is Capurnicum. And that blue planet on the right with three moons looks like Ariadnum. Hmm . . .'

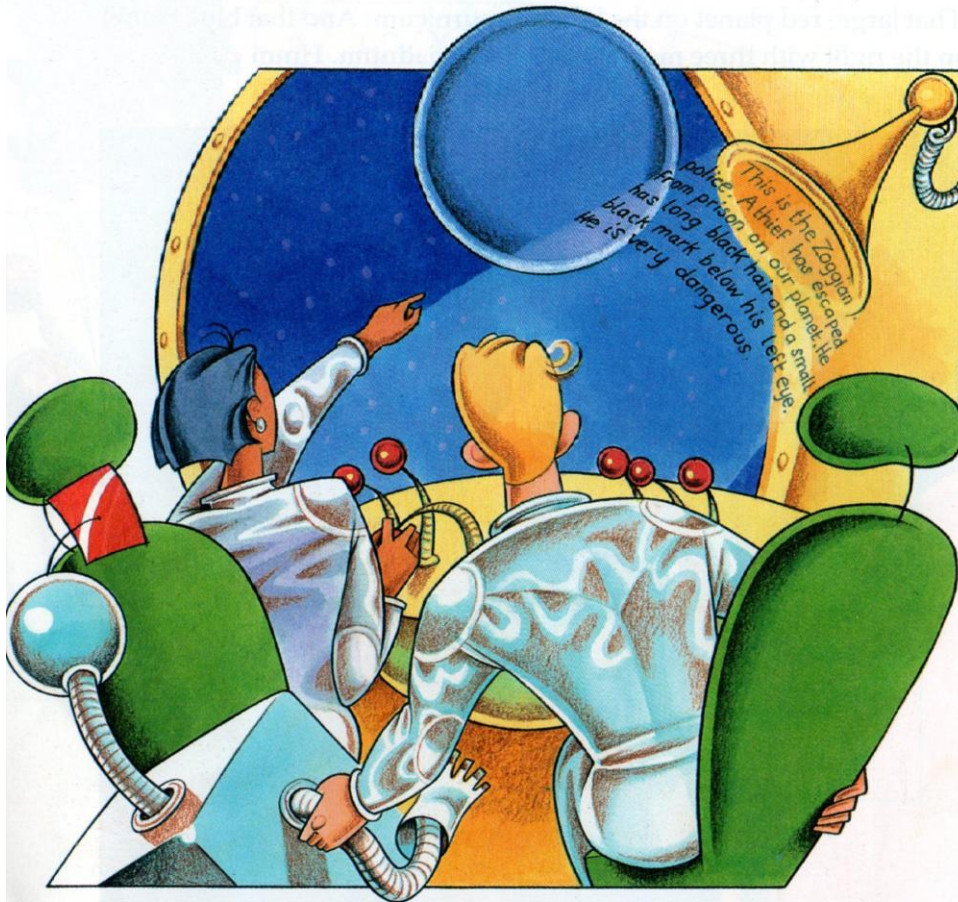


- Look carefully at the map on page 7 again. Where are they? And where is Planet Zog?

'If those planets are Capurnicum and Ariadnum,' said Jason, looking at the map, 'then Planet Zog is behind us.'

Zanya turned the spaceship round. 'There it is!' she cried.

Just then, they heard a voice on the radio . . .



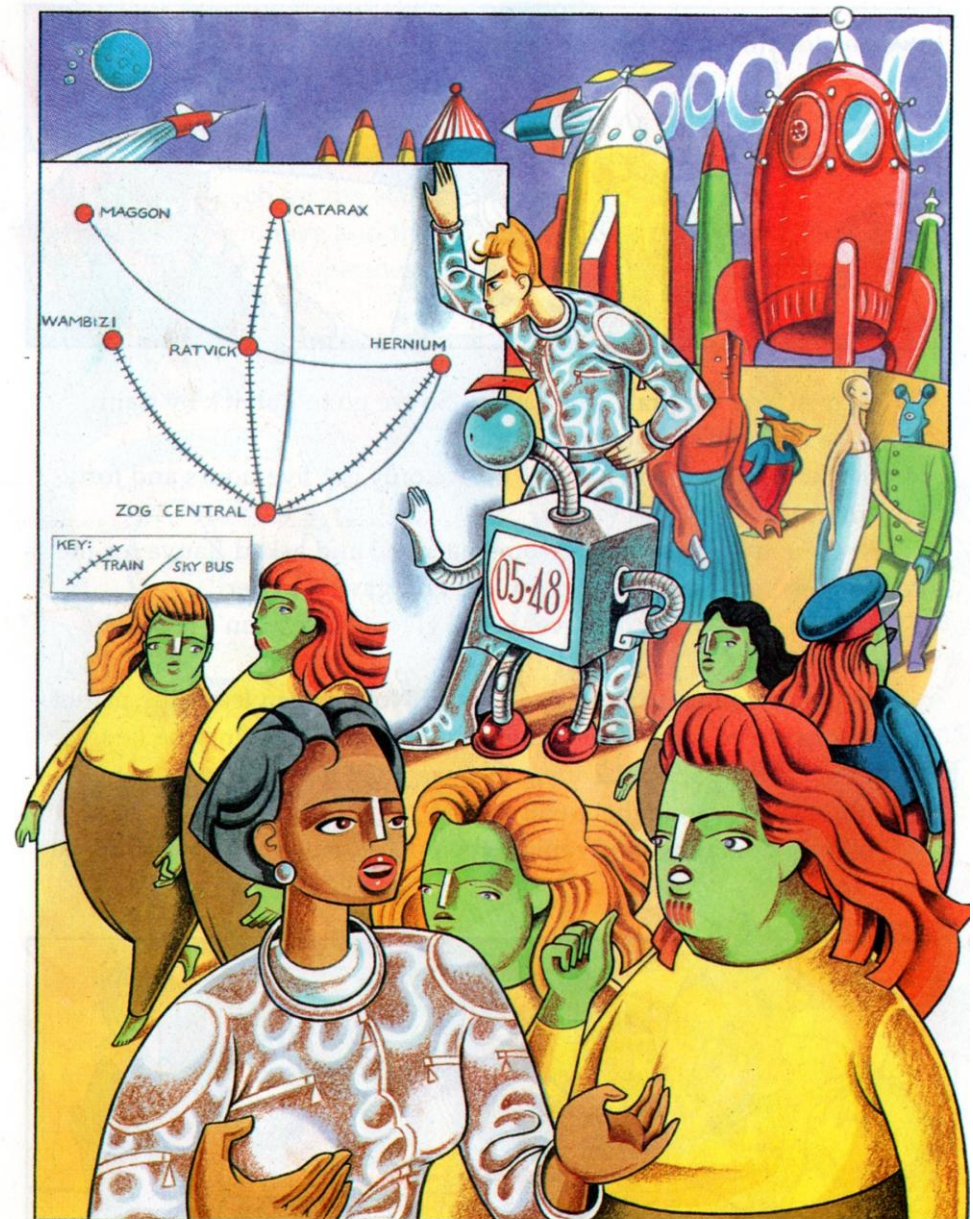
Zanya, Jason and IB4E arrived on Planet Zog.

'Can you help us?' Zanya asked a Zoggian. 'We need some xarkon. It's very important.'

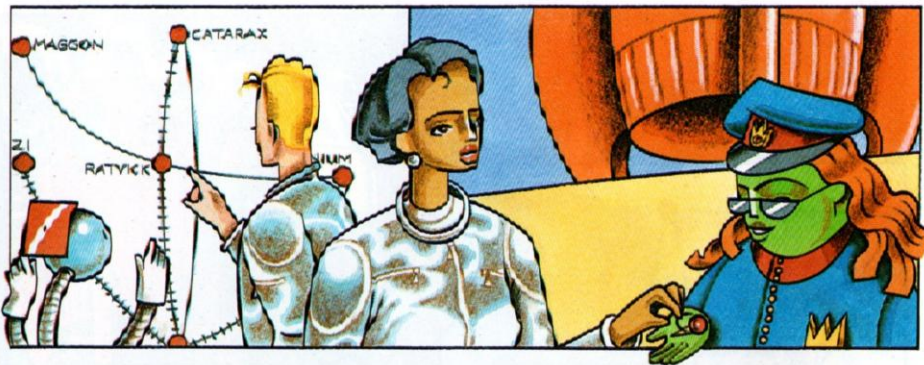
'There's a xarkon factory in Maggon,' he replied.

'How do we get there?' Jason asked.

'Well, it's a long journey. The train is too slow. You need to take the sky bus, but it doesn't stop here.'



• Look at the map. How can they get to Maggon quickly?



'We're at Zog Central,' said Jason. 'So we go to Ratvick by train. Then we take the sky bus to Maggon.'

'And let's hurry,' said Zanya. 'We've only got five hours and forty-four minutes.'

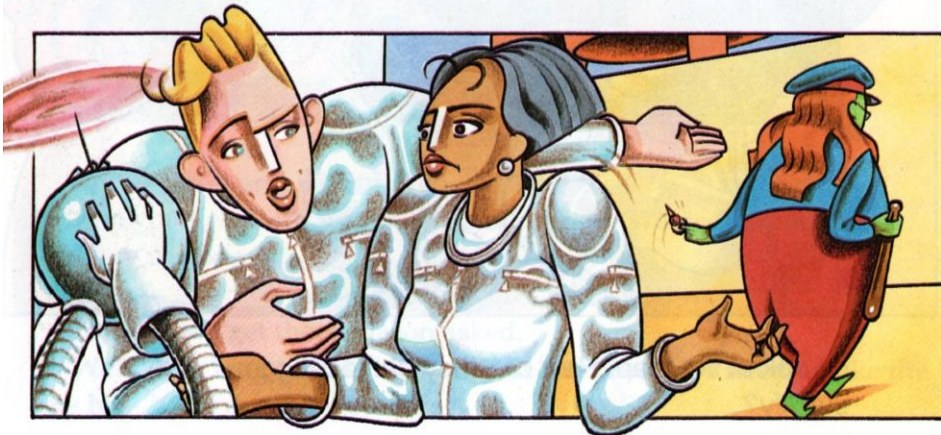
Just then, a Zoggian policewoman arrived and asked Zanya for the key to their spaceship. Zanya smiled, and gave it to her.

'And when we want to leave, you'll give it back, won't you?' she asked.

The policewoman smiled too. 'Oh no. Nobody can leave the planet – not before we've caught the dangerous thief. I'm keeping the key.'

'But . . . , but . . . ,' said Zanya, 'but we must get back to Planet Centram, or everyone there will die.'

'I'm only doing my job,' replied the policewoman, and walked away with the key.



Another Zoggian looked at their passports.

'This stamp shows when you arrived,' he said. 'You can only stay on the planet for twenty-four hours.'

'But the policewoman said that we can't leave,' said Zanya.

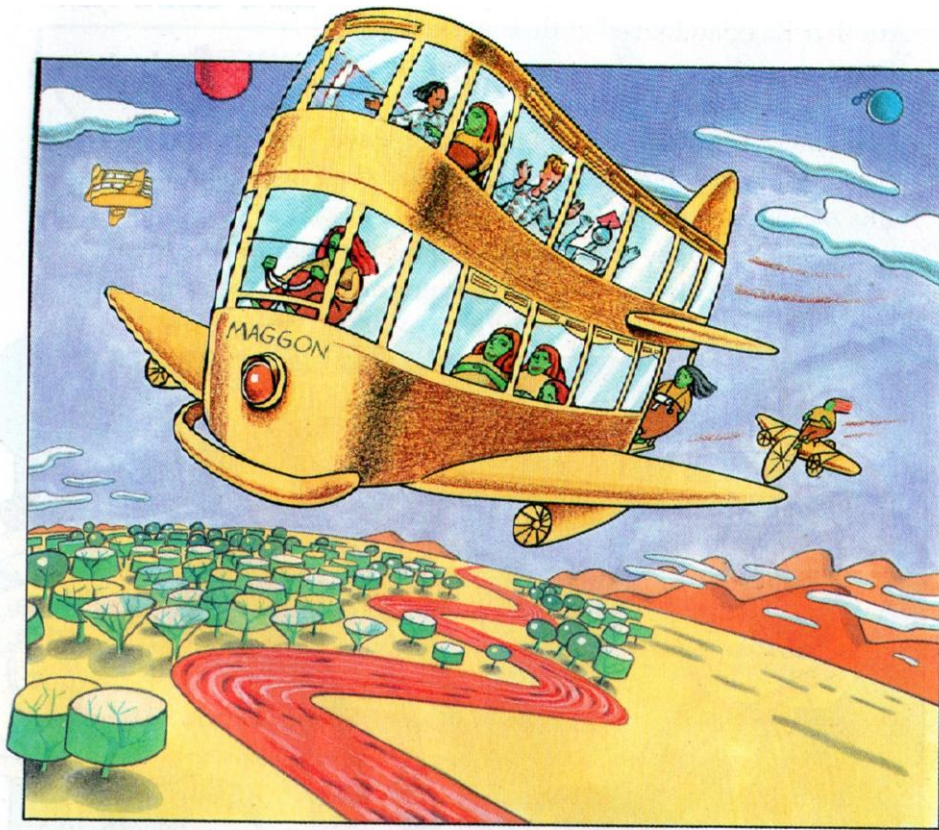
'Look, don't give me any trouble,' replied the Zoggian angrily.

'That's \$48.50 each for the stamps. Next!'

IB4E paid the money and they waited for the train to take them to Ratvick. After twenty minutes, three trains arrived at the same time.



• Which train will take them to Ratvick?



Zanya, Jason and IB4E got on the train to Catarax.

'This one goes through Ratvick,' said Jason. 'We can change to the sky bus there.'

Soon they were on the sky bus, hundreds of metres above the dark Wambizi Woods. They flew over the Caprian Desert and across the Meridian River. They could just see the Maggon Mountains to the West.

Zanya began to talk to a passenger. 'We need to buy some xarkon,' she explained. 'Do you know where the factory is?'

'Yes,' replied the Zoggian.

'Can you tell us?'

'You'll see it when we arrive in Maggon,' he said.

'Thanks,' said Zanya.

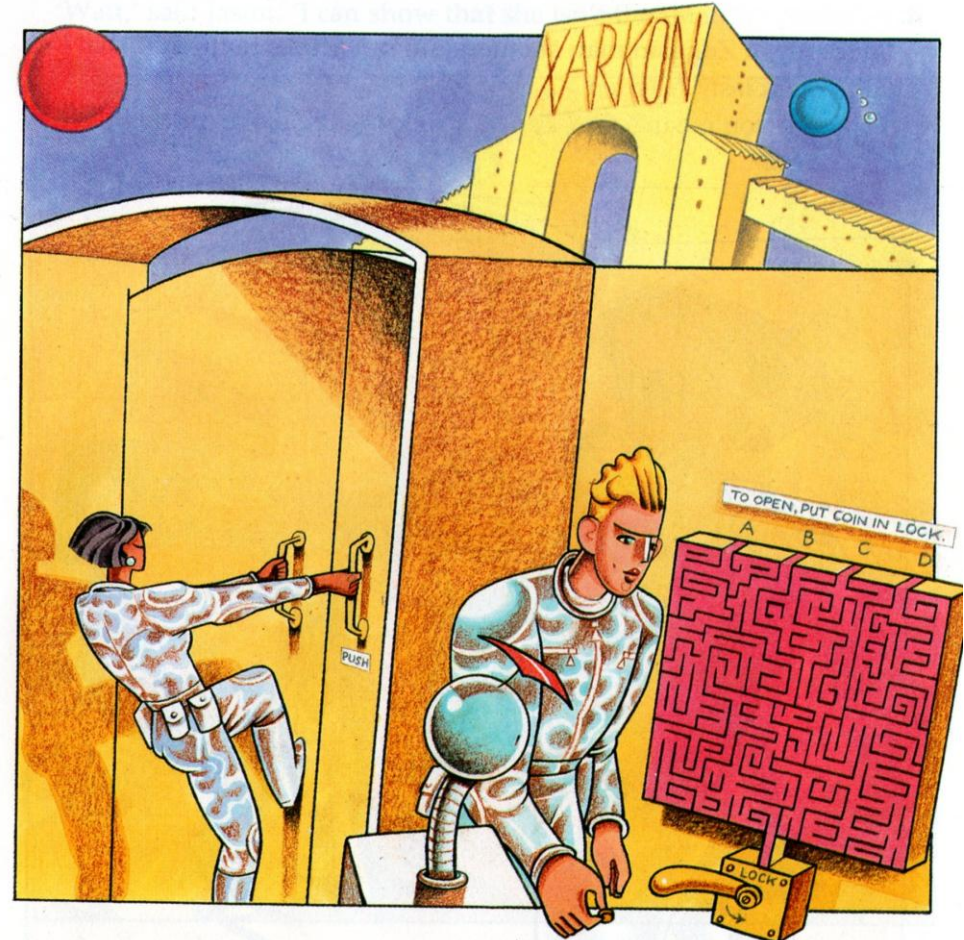
They arrived in Maggon, and soon found the xarkon factory. 'Here's the door,' said Zanya. 'Quick, follow me! No, wait. It's locked.'

'Yes, we know,' said Jason. 'It says, "To open, put coin in lock"'. It's all right. I've got a coin. Hmm . . . but only one.'

'Don't make a mistake, then,' said Zanya.

'Look, do *you* want to do it?' asked Jason, angrily.

'Just hurry up,' Zanya replied.



- How can Jason open the door? Which hole must he put the coin in?

Jason carefully dropped the coin in hole 'B' and waited. Nothing happened.

'Oh no!' cried Zanya. 'I told you -'

But before she could finish, there was a loud noise and the doors opened. Jason smiled and looked at Zanya.

'Sorry,' she said.

The three travellers went inside the huge building.

'Wow! There's a lot of xarkon,' said Zanya, picking up a big piece of it.

Suddenly, a Zoggian man shouted and ran across to them. 'Aha! I've found you at last!' he cried.

'What do you mean?' said Zanya, dropping the stone quickly. 'What have I done?'



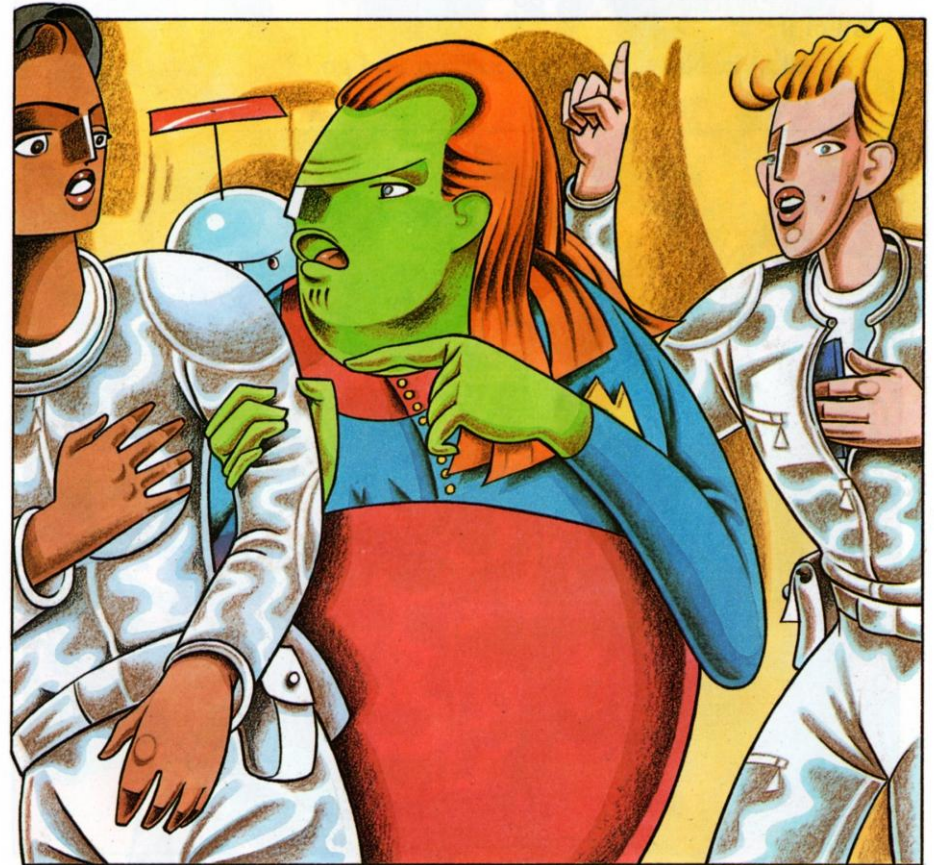
'Don't try to be clever,' said the Zoggian. He held Zanya by the arm. 'I know you're the thief. You've already stolen more than 500 kilos of xarkon this week.'

'That's not true! Jason, tell him I'm not a thief.'

'She's not a thief,' said Jason. 'We've come to buy xarkon, not to steal it.'

'Hmm. I don't believe you. You'll have to come with me, young woman.'

'Wait,' said Jason. 'I can show that she isn't the thief.'



- What is Jason going to show the Zoggian? How does it show that they arrived on Planet Zog today?

'The passports!' said Jason. 'Give him the passports. Look – this stamp shows that we arrived on Planet Zog today. We haven't had time to steal all that xarkon.'

'Hmm,' said the Zoggian, looking at their passports. 'All right, I believe you. You can go now.'

'But we can't go yet,' said Zanya. 'We need to buy some xarkon and take it to Planet Centram. How much is this piece?'

The Zoggian thought for a while. 'How much money have you got?'

'A hundred and twenty-four dollars,' said Jason.

'Give it to me,' said the Zoggian.

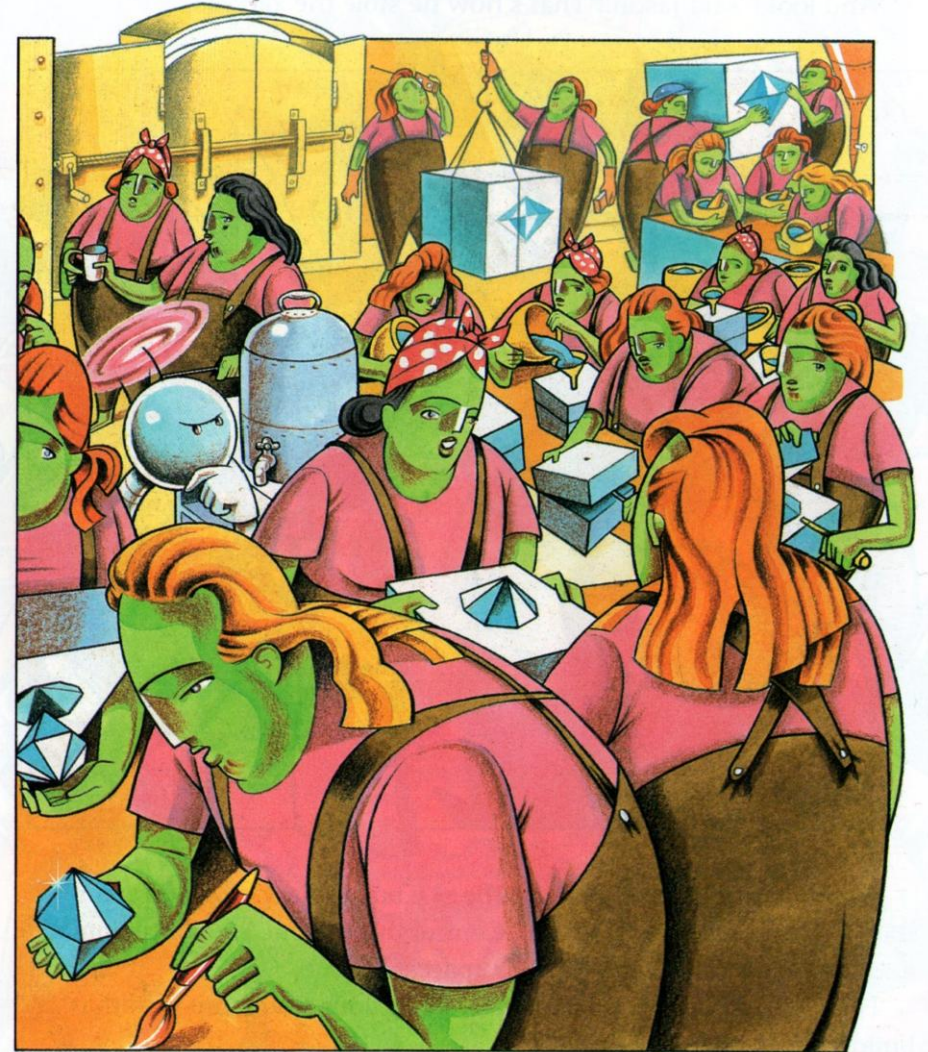
'All of it?'

'Yes, all of it. Now, take your xarkon and go.'



'Well, we've got the xarkon,' said Jason. 'But we can't leave the planet, because they haven't caught the dangerous thief yet.'

'But they will catch him soon,' said IB4E. 'He's here in the factory – and I can see him.'



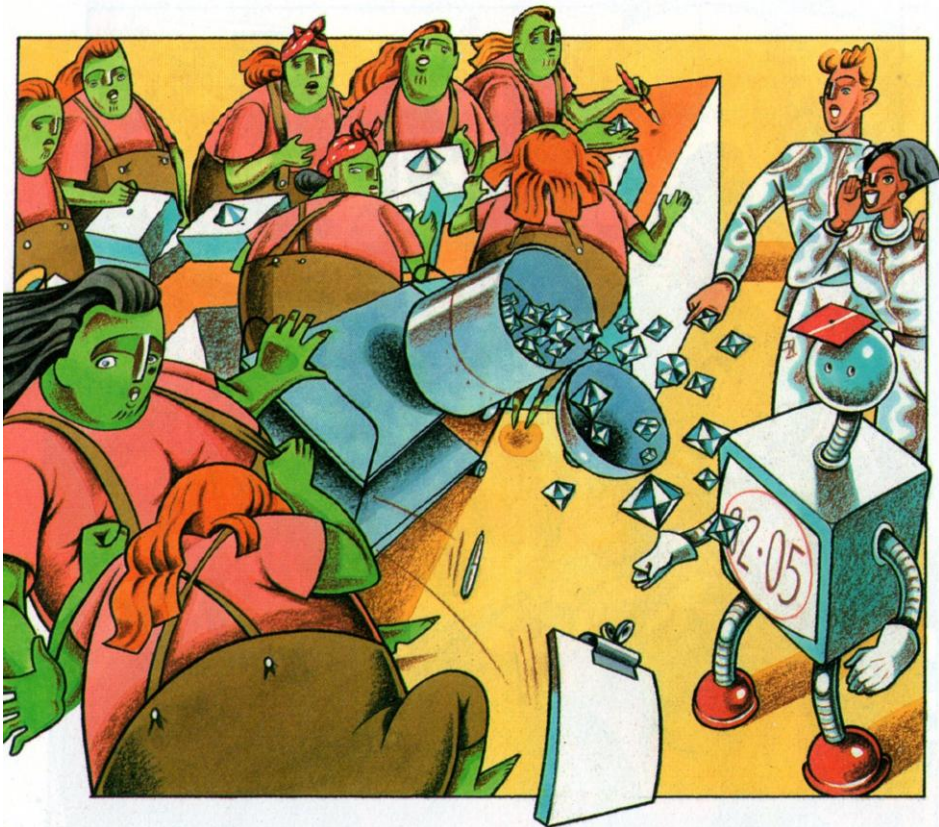
- Look carefully at the picture. Do you remember what the Xarkon thief looks like? Can you find him?

'It's the man who sells drinks,' said IB4E. 'You can see the small black mark below his left eye.'

'Stop that man!' shouted Zanya. 'He's the thief.'

The man tried to run away, but a Zoggian stopped him.

'And look!' said Jason. 'That's how he stole the xarkon.'



Zanya, Jason and IB4E caught the sky bus to Ratvick, and then took the train to Zog Central. At Zog Central they found the policewoman and asked her for the key to their spaceship.

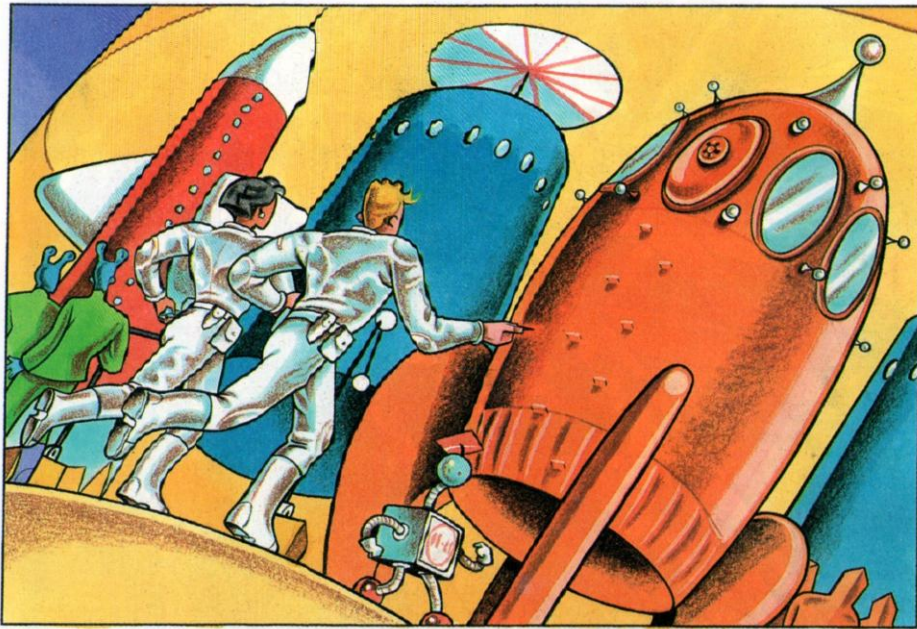
'Here it is,' she said, with a smile. 'And your spaceship is in that building. Somewhere. Good luck.'

'But the building is huge!' said Zanya. 'We'll have to look for hours to find our spaceship.'

'No we won't,' said IB4E. 'This notice will tell us which floor it's on.'



• Which floor is their spaceship on?



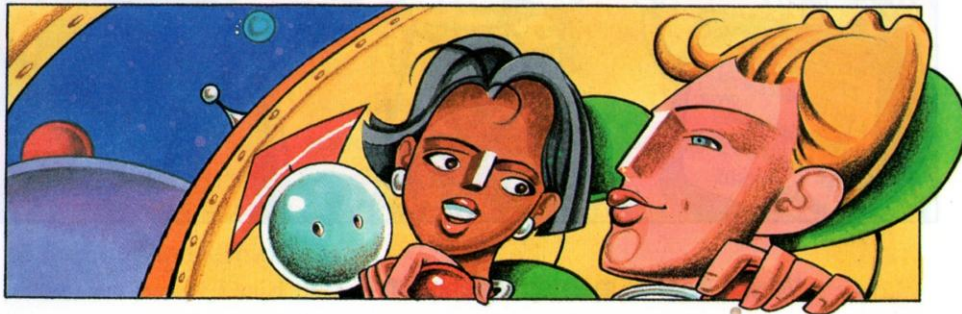
'It's on the third floor,' said Zanya. 'Let's go and find it.'

'And quickly,' said Jason. 'We've only got one hour and forty-four minutes to get back to Planet Centram.'

They found their spaceship a few minutes later, and soon they were ready to leave the planet.

'It's lucky that you remembered about the passports,' Zanya said to Jason, as they left.

'It wasn't luck,' he replied. 'It's called "thinking". It *does* help sometimes.'



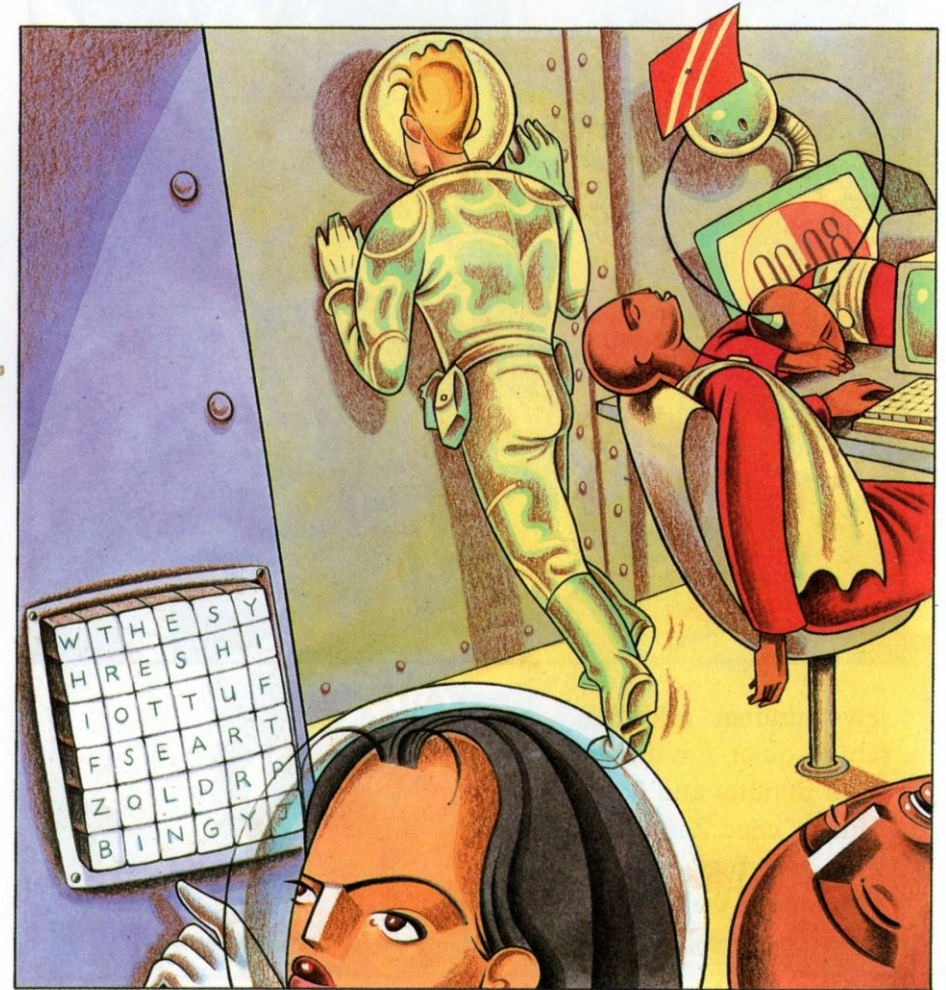
Zanya, Jason and IB4E arrived back on Planet Centram.

'Are we too late?' Jason asked.

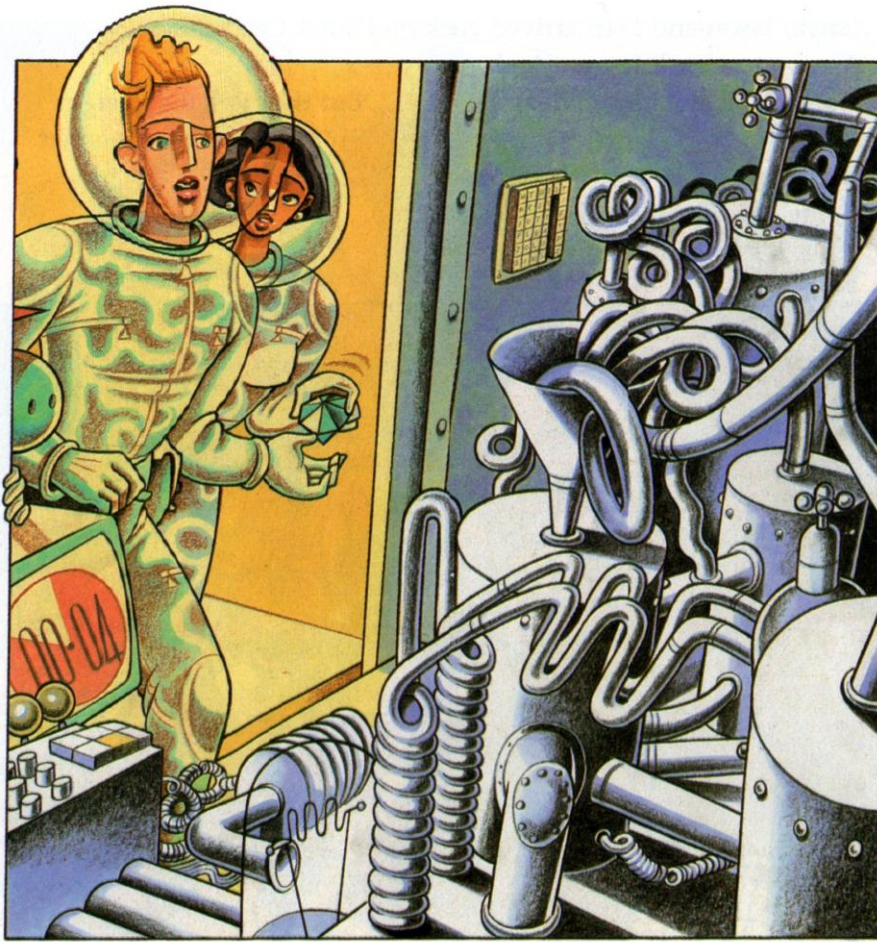
'No, they're still alive,' answered IB4E. 'But they will die in eight minutes and twenty-two seconds – if we don't find the machine that cleans air quickly.'

'Come on – it's in this room,' said Jason.

'Wait, it's locked,' said Zanya.



- Can you find the five-letter word that will unlock the door?



'Five minutes,' said IB4E.

'Sh! Be quiet, I'm thinking,' said Jason.

'Four minutes and fifty seconds.'

'Hurry!' cried Zanya.

'I am hurrying.'

'No, I mean that's the word - "hurry".'

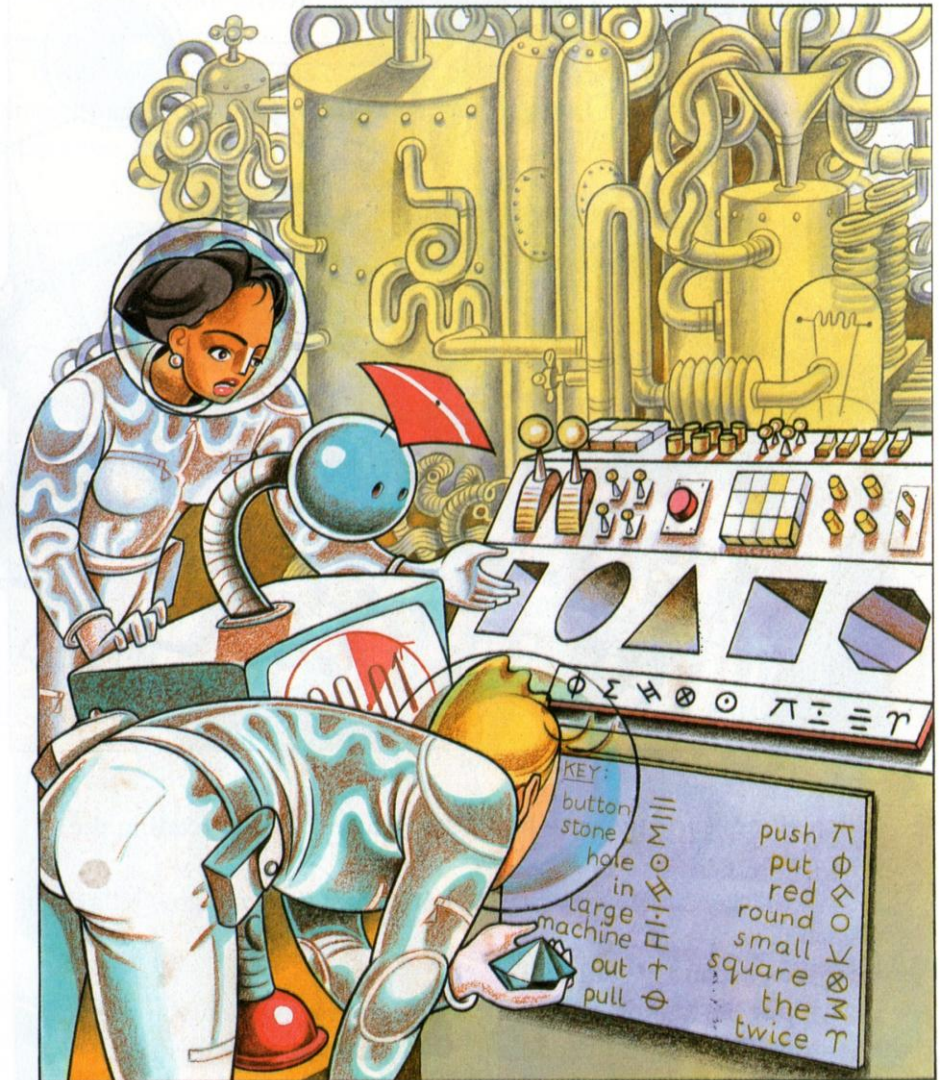
When they pushed the letters H-U-R-R-Y, the door suddenly opened.

'There's the machine,' cried Jason. 'Quickly, give me the xarkon stone. Now, what do I have to do?'

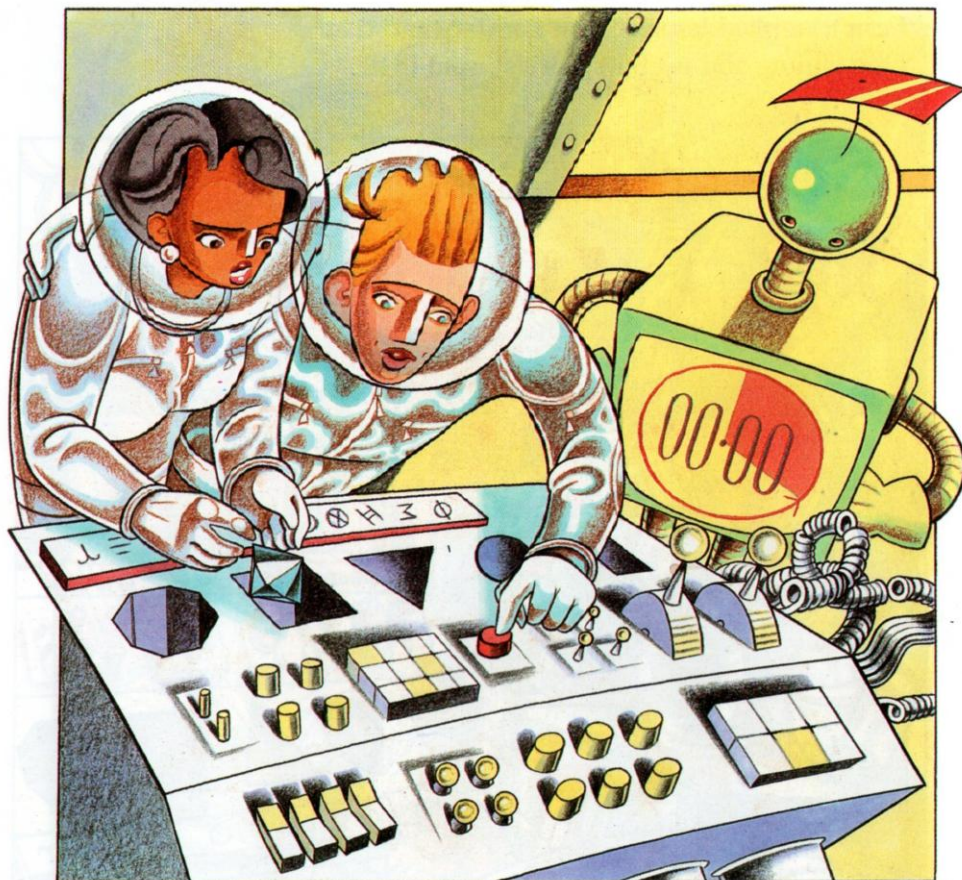
'Read the instructions,' said Zanya.

'I can't,' replied Jason. 'I don't understand them.'

'One minute and twelve seconds,' said IB4E.



• What do the instructions say?



'Put - stone - in - square - hole,' said Zanya, slowly reading the instructions.

'Push - large - button - twice.' That's what it says - now let's do it!' said Jason.

'Eighteen seconds,' said IB4E.

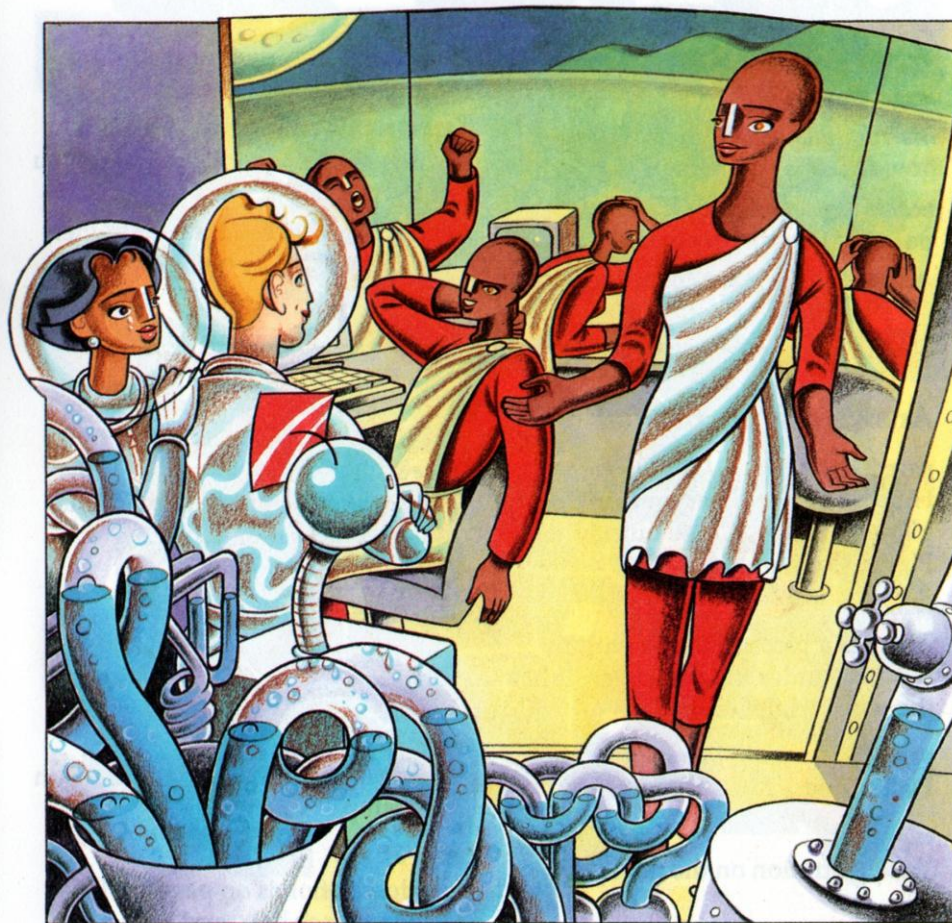
Zanya put the xarkon stone in the square hole while Jason pushed the button. The machine made a loud noise and began to shake.

'I don't think it's working,' said Zanya. 'IB4E, what has Jason done?'

'Look!' said IB4E.

Zanya and Jason looked.

'Everyone is waking up,' said Zanya. 'I've done it!'
 'You mean, "We've done it",' said Jason, angrily.
 Just then, a woman from Planet Centram spoke. 'You have stopped our planet from dying,' she said. 'How can we thank you?'
 'We don't want anything,' said Zanya. 'We were happy to help, weren't we, Jason?'
 'Well, yes. But there is *one* thing,' said Jason. 'Could you write something about the pollution on your planet? Just a few pages - about ten, perhaps?'



Glossary

android a machine which looks like a person

asteroid very small planet

button something you push to turn on a machine

coin round piece of money

computer a machine that holds information and gives answers quickly

gas something that you cannot feel or hold, e.g. oxygen

huge very big

instructions words that tell you how to use or do something

machine something with many parts that move together

map plan of a town, country, etc.

mark (n) shape or spot on something or someone

message information that one person sends to another person

notice (n) information that you put on a wall for people to read

planet something in space that moves around a star

pollution when the air or sea is not clean

spaceship machine for travelling from star to star

stamp (n) writing in a passport which shows when and where you have travelled

unconscious like asleep, but when you are very ill or hurt

Answers to the puzzles

page 3

Help us please. Everyone on our planet is dying. Come quickly to Planet Centram.

page 5

There is a piece of paper with writing, under the computer. It has the word 'Help' on it.

page 7

Planet Zog

page 9

(See illustration on the next page.)

page 11

Planet Zog is behind them.

page 13

They take the train to Ratvick and the sky bus to Maggon.

page 15

The train to Catarax

page 17

Hole 'B'

page 19

The passport: it has today's date on the stamp.

page 21

His description is on page 12. He has long black hair, and he is behind IB4E.

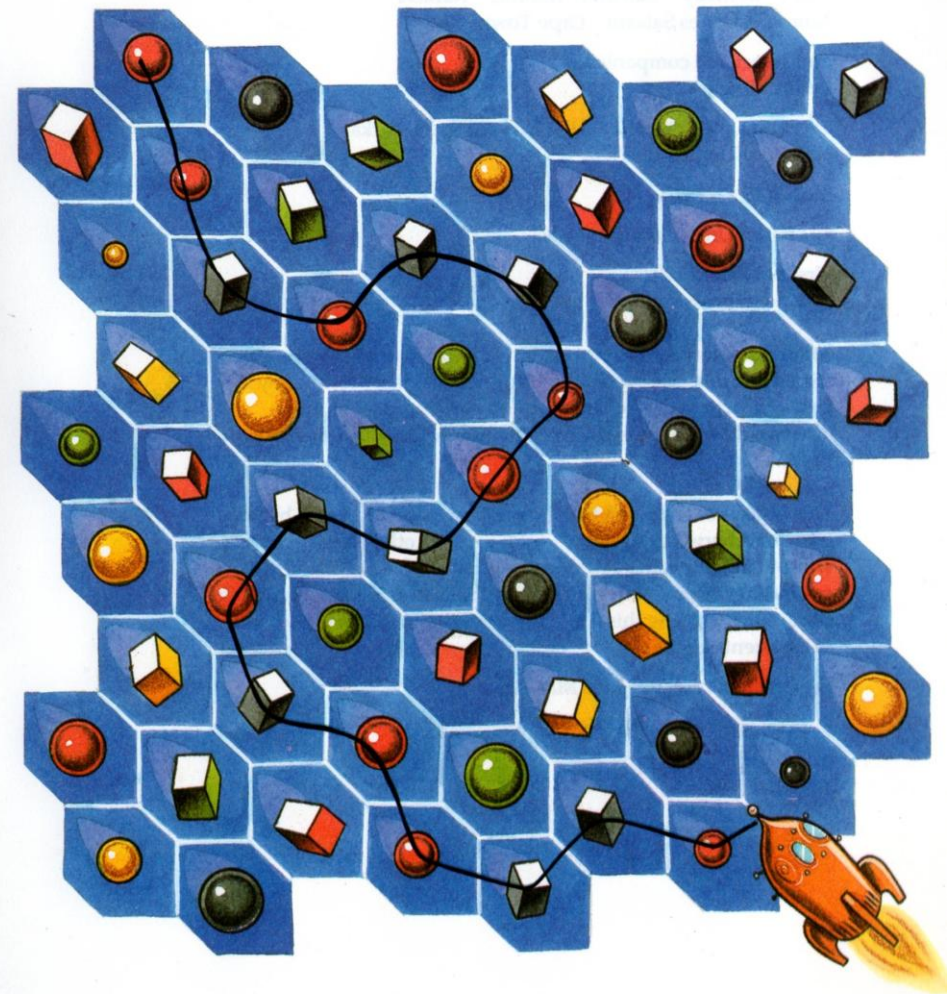
page 23

The third floor

page 25

H-U-R-R-Y: hurry

page 9



page 27

Put stone in square hole. Push large button twice.

Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford Madrid New York

Toronto Melbourne Auckland

Kuala Lumpur Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo

Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi

Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town

and associated companies in

Berlin Ibadan

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of Oxford University Press

ISBN 0 19 422481 3

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First published 1992

Second impression 1994

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Cover illustration by Fiona MacVicar

Illustrated by Fiona MacVicar

Printed in Hong Kong