

'Ready,' I said.

'Breach initiated in three, two...'

Then I stopped hearing it as the translation began. The world I knew vanished from sight and I fell. Thoughts converted into electric impulses, travelling down a narrow band into the secure vault.

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. . . It was a bad one.

I knew it as soon as I dropped in.

Flickering lights, an insubstantial room rendered in two dimensions. Something inhuman was gibbering in the corner, hidden in the dark. I couldn't understand what it said.

The lines of the walls and floor met disconcertingly to form a door.

'Ifrim, can you hear me?'

Crackly static on the line, as though he were coming from somewhere unimaginably distant.

'How is it down there?'

'It's still operational,' I said. 'But I don't know that there's anything salvageable.'

'Do you want to pull out?'

I stared at the door. Four white lines in a black wall. Stared at my hands. Realised I was two dimensional too, a stick figure with crude lines for fingers.

'Mai?'

'No,' I said.

I went to the door. The thing in the shadows gibbered mindlessly. 'Checksum error, four oh four, four oh four!'

own and down, I felt myself sinking.

The outside faded: New Byblos and the skylarks singing in the branches of the olive trees. A soft, warm breeze. The smell of lavender and thyme.

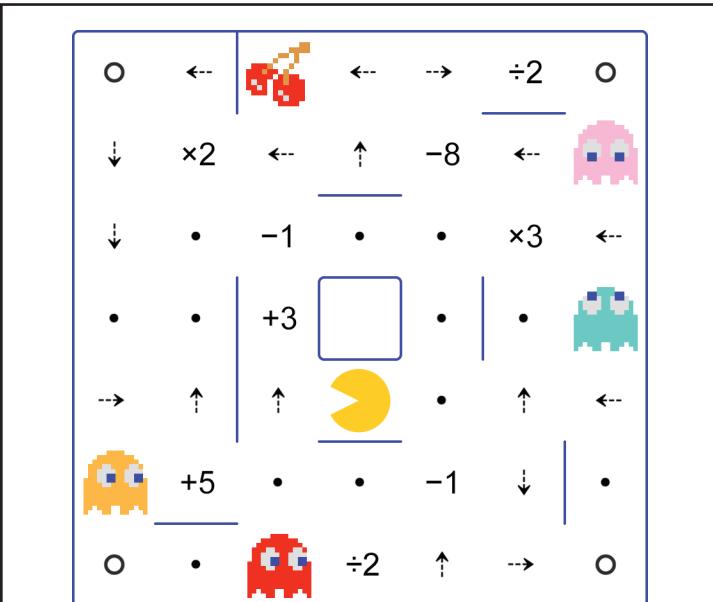
New Byblos in the springtime: outside the window I could see the mountains that surrounded this hidden valley lush with vegetation, could see rock hyraxes and dorcas gazelles as they clambered along the slopes.

Out here the sun shone down as it had since before the first microbes lived and died upon this Earth.

I would miss the sun, I knew, once I was in. I always did.

Ifrim's calm voice at the controls of the dive rig: 'Ready to go, Mai?'

Hearing his voice always made me happy.



Guide Pac-Man through the maze, ending at the cherries. Gobble every dot, number, arrow, ghost and power pellet. You may cross your path and visit spots multiple times. Once eaten, an object is removed from the board.

Dots: Pac-Man must pass straight through and gobble a dot without turning.

Numbers: Pac-Man must pass straight through and gobble each number without turning. Starting with zero, adjust your answer as indicated each time Pac-Man gobbles a number.

Power Pellets: When Pac-Man gobbles a power pellet he makes a 90 degree turn and then gains the power to eat a single ghost. He loses this power when he eats a ghost or an arrow.

Ghosts: Pac-Man must gobble a ghost that he reaches. He may then turn or keep going straight.

Arrows: When Pac-Man reaches an arrow, he may choose to gobble and follow that arrow, or he may move straight through without eating it.



'How big is the Bostrom Field?' I said.

'7.5 to 10.8 variable,' Ifrim said. 'About the size of what a large house would have been back when the vault was first made.'

'Well, great. Anything sentient?'

'You tell me.'

I shrugged and pushed the door.

In the last decades of the time of the Great Excess it was said many miracles had become possible. And as the seas rose and the storms built in savagery, the lords of the last era sought shelter in specially-constructed time vaults, shielding their minds from the coming onslaught of the planet's rage.

There were thousands of them just here in New Byblos. Here, in this lost valley of kings, the caves and shelters housed an uncounted number of old, forgotten pocket worlds. Many had been lost to time and the climate, their technological underpinning destroyed despite their designers' best intents. Some had the internal capacity of a small city, with thousands of thinking minds still inside. Others, like this one, were much smaller.

I stepped out into a maze of shiny white dots. Something whistled through the air at me. I looked up just in time to see a crudely rendered barrel coming at me fast.

I ducked and it smashed into tiny glowing pieces against the wall behind me and vanished.

For a moment, I thought I saw a monkey up there.

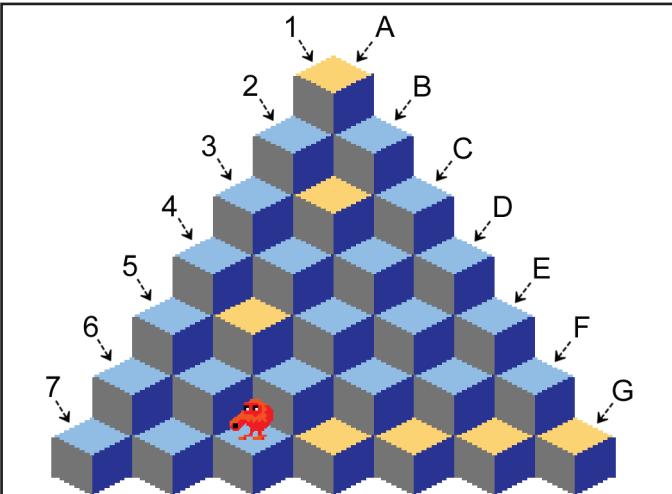
I took a deep breath of cold, stale air and stepped into the maze. I kept a wary eye for any more attacks as I went through it. I wanted to try and find the centre.

It was a weird vault, I thought.

Ghostly shapes came at me from three different sides. They wailed in waka-waka. I dodged through an opening into an inner corridor. Two of the ghoulies followed me in. I tried to lose them by using the right-hand rule but one kept after me. I spotted another break in the wall and dashed through it.

The ghoulie came after me and another materialised on the other side.

I was trapped.



Solve the clues and place the letters of each word into the Q*Bert squares on the indicated diagonal rows. Once you have placed all the words, take the letters on the yellow spaces and anagram them to find the answer to this puzzle.

Diagonally Down Right

- 1) Theron character in 2015 "Mad Max"
- 2) It's a mystery
- 3) Sonic the Hedgehog collects them
- 4) Crafty website
- 5) ___Geo (arcade system)
- 6) ROM used in Dreamcast game console
- 7) Me

Diagonally Down Left

- A) Big eared "Star Trek" race that is not in the...
- B) ... _____ Federation of Planets
- C) Old detergent
- D) Pop of rock
- E) Mantra chants
- F) サ or ナ or ク or 鶴 or キ
- G) A word in this sentence

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Donkey Kong + Q*Bert + Pac-Man