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The Ax
A Story Outline

Old Roy, a grizzled old asteroid miner in the Walter Brennen mold, the last of a dying breed of prospectors, and his Bur-O model mechanical beast of burden, are re-opening an abandoned mine. Guided by his faithful metal divining rod, he turns his rock-ray on a vein of solidified lava. Not knowing what to expect, he clears away enough rock to realize that there is a large alien robot imbedded within. Startled, he and Bur-O head back to their camp. After they leave, a slight humming noise can be heard.

Back at the Beta Orbital Station, the Rangers are testing Q-balls' latest device, a holographic projector to be used for training new pilots. The device,which will be used to project obstacles and targets, has been installed in the Ranger's craft. Niko is the first to get the report from Old Roy about the discovery in the ancient Pie-san system. She is very intrigued by such an archaeological find. And as it seems to be an ancient cyborg, Doc's interest is also peaked. After some egging from his fellow Rangers, Doc finds himself cruising off to Pie-san with Niko, still not sure how he got talked into it.

When they reach the mining colony of Bardo, they locate Old Roy at his camp, in one of the abandoned mining buildings.

Roy explains how he works the old mines that the big firms don't find profitable, and how he found that thing in the mine.

Niko and Doc investigate the mine. Niko begins picking up "bad vibes," but can't yet identify them. Doc begins giving the exposed robot the once over. It's unlike anything he's ever seen; heavily armored, wide array of retractable parts and still in pristine condition, despite the fact that the rock it's embedded in is 20 million years old.

Niko next gets a chance at it. Using her psychic powers, she touches the robot and immediately picks up a strong flash from the past. We are transported back to the planet's ancient past, as Niko relates the tale.

We are at the scene of the last great battle fought on Bardo. The Run-dos have finally vanquished their arch rivals, the Vaspirs. As the leader of the Run-dos basks in his victory, one of his aides reminds him how all through their history the Vaspirs have always managed to re-build from their defeats and rise to plague them again. The Leader says that his scientists are at this moment putting the finishing touches on their supreme creation, the Ax. The Ax was built with the sole purpose of patrolling the Vaspir territory and destroying anyone or anything within.

And it did its job well. So well, that the Ax destroyed the Vaspirs totally, but with but one purpose to its program, it began to widen its boundaries in search of disposible items. It turned on the Run-dos, and destroyed them as well. With no one to stop it, it eventually turned a thriving planet into

a barren asteroid. They learn that the Ax came into its present predicament while trying to take out a newly formed volcano. Trying to attack it, the Ax fell into the molten lava, which cooled and hardened, trapping it until now.

The ramifications of this find startled Doc and Niko. Niko is further startled when the Ax suddenly surges to life and grabs her.

When the Ax grabs Niko, Doc fires his gun at it, but the shots are repelled by the Ax's force field. The Bur-O starts making noises, and this seems to attract Ax's attention, as it drops Niko and blasts the Bur-O with two small rockets. Doc quickly sees if he can use his powers to disrupt the Ax, but his advances are repelled. It is a powerful machine. They escape in the confusion. When the Ax exits the mine shaft, Doc is ready with a neutron bazooka, but it is useless.

The Ax, now annoyed, heads for Doc, who knows a good time to exit when he sees one. But he gets his foot caught in some rubble and can't escape. Niko sees this and psychically lifts him out of danger, just in the nick of time. For a moment, the Ax is stunned and it takes it a moment to compute a response. It finally decides a laser blast is appropriate. But misses Doc and Niko as they disappear behind a boulder. Something seems to catch its attention, and reveals a rocket pack and blasts off, to begin dismantling several old mining buildings.

Back at their crusier, they track the movements of Ax and make their plan. When the Ax was momentarily stunned

by Doc's escape, Doc sensed a brief halt in its circuitry. Doc figures that since the Ax was programed for only one purpose, it might be easily fooled. The machine is, in Doc's technical term, "stupid, really stupid."

Doc rigs up the ship's holographic projector, and projects Niko's image near the Ax. When the Ax strikes with a laser blast, the image is not destroyed, but divides and the Ax finds itself facing two Nikos. He fires rockets at one, then tries buzzsawing the other. Now it's got four Nikos egging it on. Ax begins using all his powers to crush the multiplying figures as Doc frantically keeps the jerry-rigged system operational. Ax suddenly begins to faulter. Seizing the moment, Doc summons all his power to disrupt the weakened Ax and trip a few curcuits. The Ax grinds to a halt.

Niko feels the Ax is an outstanding archaeological find and should be perserved and studied. Doc isn't convince and uses his power to bring the Ax's rocket pack out and launches the monster into space, aimed for the planet's sun. Or has he?