

SSR



RETURN OF THE STAINLESS STEEL COMPUTER



by Ken Ramstead

The bulkhead wall was still smoking from my outlaser as I pranced through the breach I had made to the corridor that led to the comproom. No one in sight. Good. The worst was behind me now, that awful feeling of uncertainty I always got when I hit a space station. What lies behind the next door? A docile taco-jockey or a vicious hired gun bot? Would the next room contain a vacuum trap or a paternity rap? You never knew what to expect so you had to be ready for anything. But I had survived, albeit with a leg wound and minus the good slug thrower that my lovely Angelina had presented me on our anniversary (she had always been the romantic of the family). I had survived; slippery Jim DeGriz, the Stainless Steel Rat who had saved the galaxy at least twice, was at the end of another successful mission. Ah, I could almost count the two million credits in the palms of my hot little hands already. Staring me in the face was the only certain factor in this whole uncertain intergalactic chamber of horrors. All else might be unknown. But not the computer room. I knew what to expect from the Mark 2500.

As I approached the comproom door, I patted the botslaver slung at my side for good luck and brought the outlaser up to firing position. Before I took the last door into the room, I rested a bit, fixing up my leg wound with the first aid kit I carried, and increasing my alertness rating with a fifth of scotch while I was at it, for good measure. The 5-1 odds I knew I would have to face would be considerably shortened now. Not that the Stainless Steel Rat needs to tamper with the odds. All I did was use Paragraph 075 to advantage.

The door opened with ridiculous ease. Even the twins could have cracked this nursery pen. I rushed in, botslaver at the ready, prepared to deal with any conglomeration of dust-collecting rust-buckets the 2500 could throw at me. This was going to be a cin . . . what the? Instead of confronting five clanking metal morons, my gaze was met by a smoke-filled room, nullifying my botslaver and rendering my outlaser inoperative. And out of that smoke-filled chamber came a hail of gunfire . . . coming from the Mark 2500 itself! As I dove for the floor, my arm shattered by a slug burst, I ruefully reflected on how a vital bit of information such as the upgrading of the Mark 2500 had missed the SPI rulebook. . . .

The Return of the Stainless Steel Rat.

from *ARES™ Magazine* issue #10, is one of the better *ARES Magazine* games to have come out for a long while, eminently suitable for solitaire play as well as lending itself to the competitive atmosphere of a two-player game. The Return of the Stainless Steel Rat never fails to award the player with a whole new adventure with every sitting.

Oddly enough, though, for a game whose unexpected situations are a major factor in its popularity, the end game is almost anti-climatic. Unless the intruders have been unreasonably unlucky, they will always survive the computer room combat.

The following addition to the game system is designed to circumvent this, and give that final battle the zing it deserves.



(16.0) Deactivating the computer and winning

Cases:

(16.1) Deactivating the computer
(16.1) The computer is located in box B216. When your character enters this box, roll a die and match the result to the following paragraph number.

Die Roll

Cases

- 1 You have entered the computer room, which you find to be smoke-filled. Three slug-throwers have been installed in this Mark 2500, which you must first put out of action before you deactivate the computer.
- 2 As you enter the computer room, darkness envelops you. But it cannot shield you from the three laser pistols installed in this Mark. The Mark 2500 attacks first, of course.
- 3 Surprise! The computer room has no implanted devices to impede you from deactivating it.

4 The Mark 2500 that you are facing has been installed with an anti-robot slaver device which renders your own Robot Slayer utterly ineffective against the three Bouncers attacking you from the rear far inward, rear middle inward and rear near inward positions. The robots attack first.

5 As you enter the room, you trip an electrical sensor which detonates four Gas grenades, which you must survive before you take on the three hired guns (rear far inward, rear middle inward and rear near inward positions) stationed to protect the computer. The robots attack first.

6 You enter a vacuum-filled computer chamber! Or you almost enter it if you do not pass an Alertness Check. Unless you have a functioning suit at hand, you will not be able to enter the computer room to deactivate the computer. Tough luck, Jim. You had better rustle up a suit somewhere if you want to collect that cool two million credits.

In all cases, you deactivate the computer by simply stating that you are doing so.

In all cases the computer is assumed to occupy the middle of the Tactical Display while Jim, Angelina and any hangers-on enter the room through the Front Far Box. The computer controlled weapons in cases 1 and 2 fire in unison at the target closest to the center of the Tactical Display. In the event of two or more characters or beings occupying the same circle, the being or character with the lowest Alertness Rating will be automatically attacked. In the case of a tie, flip a credit. Likewise the robots in cases 4 and 5 will always move against and attack the character or being with the lowest Alertness Rating.

The Mark 2500 does not hinder movement or block fire. And although the center of the Tactical Display can be occupied by characters or beings, the computer cannot be deactivated until its safeguards are disposed of.

Good luck, all you Stainless Steel Rats out there! ▲