

The Fright Before Christmas

Choose Your Own Adventure

In this game, you are Tweedy Mattison, a brilliant, if eccentric, scientific advisor to the British Department for Extraordinary Affairs, also known as Department X. Your inquisitive mind and flair for solving baffling mysteries is matched only by your ability to get into danger time and again. Fortunately, you are frequently partnered with resourceful police officer May Killan, the perfect person to watch your back in a fight.

You have only one score to keep track of in this game, LIFE. Certain situations will cause you to lose LIFE, such as fights or accidents. You start the game with 6 LIFE. Make a note of your current LIFE at all times. When it drops to zero or below, your adventure is over.

You will be able to call on your friend May Killan to help you in combat ONCE only in the game, using an old-fashioned police whistle. Choose wisely when to call her.



Gadgets

As an agent of Department X, you are equipped with a handful of advanced gadgets which may prove useful in the game. Select any two gadgets from the list below. Each may be used ONCE only.

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Air Mask | A tiny mouthpiece and oxygen cylinder, enabling you to breathe underwater or withstand poisonous gas. |
| Climbing Suckers | Small but powerful suckers which attach to your hands and feet, enabling you to climb sheer surfaces |
| Infra-Red Spectacles | Specially treated goggles which enable you to see in the dark. |
| Mini Laser | A powerful laser the size of a pen, enabling you to cut through solid steel. |
| Photonic Spanner | This handy tool is excellent for opening locks and disrupting electronic devices. |
| Wristwatch Buzzsaw | A small circular saw built into an innocuous timepiece, enabling you to free yourself from the sturdiest of restraints. |

Now read on to begin your adventure...

1

It is Christmas Eve, early afternoon. You are working in your laboratory at Department X headquarters in central London, immersed in your research. Just as you are sure that you're on the brink of a discovery which will turn all of Einstein's stuffy theories on their head, the door to the lab opens. In marches General Gordon, the department's military chief.

"Mattison, I need a word."

His moustache fairly bristles with impatience.

To immediately stop your experiment and respond to the general, go to **69**.

To make the general wait until you have completed your experiment, go to **25**.



2

Not taking your eyes off the beautiful but deadly advancing Femdroid, you back pedal as fast as you can and fish out your old police whistle. Blowing hard, you hope that your friend May Killan is within earshot. You continue to crash backward through the clothes stands, sending dresses and tops flying everywhere. The Femdroid continues to advance at a horrible menacing pace, its head constantly swivelling to keep you in sight. Then with a thump, you realise you've backed yourself into a changing room, with nowhere to run!

But just then something charges into the Femdroid from one side, sending it clattering into a rack of shoes. It's Constable May Killan, looking a little out of breath.

"Girl trouble again Tweedy?" she jokes.

"Oh you know me, some women can't keep their hands off me."

May turns back to the Femdroid which is beginning to regain its feet amid the pile of shoes. Its pretty but blank face plate has come loose, revealing a pair of glowing eyeballs and an inhuman metallic skull covered in circuitry. The reckless police woman leaps toward the robot, stooping to grab a high heeled shoe in one hand. As the Femdroid swings a steel arm at her, May brings the heel of the shoe down hard into the robot's exposed face, embedding it deep in the skull. With a flash of sparks, the Femdroid goes immediately rigid, the light in its eyeballs dimming to black.

May turns back to you and adjusts her uniform.

"That shoe looked like her size. I hope I can trust you stay out of trouble from now on. So if you'll excuse me, I have to report this to the station."

She goes out onto the street to use her radio.

Go to **27**.

3

You clamber to your feet in the darkened storage area in the rear of the department store. A service light on one wall serves to dimly illuminate the high stacks of goods piled in towering rows. You move slowly and cautiously along the ends of the aisles, looking for a way to explore further.

Then you hear something! A thudding, clumping sound getting closer and closer. It's coming from one of the further aisles.

To wait and see what's making the noise, go to **10**.

To turn and run the other way, go to **64**.

4

If ever there is a time to call for help, now is it! You turn and run out of the grotto, the Santanaut hot on your heels, its eyes crackling with power.

"HO HO HO!"

Ducking round behind a stack of jigsaw puzzles, you fish out your old police whistle and blow hard, hoping that your friend May Killan is within earshot. The Santanaut sends the stack of boxes flying with a single swipe, showering you with small fragments of interlocking pictures.

As you brace for its attack, a figure in black and white streaks past you, driving a truncheon deep into one of the robot's electric eyes, which fizzles and goes dark. Constable May Killan turns to face you, puffing from exertion

"Evening Tweedy. Ah, a killer Santa robot, I see," she declares.

"Excellent deduction, Constable May. If you'd be so kind as to finish him off?"

The Santanaut compensates for its partial blindness and strikes at May with a devastating backhand, which she partially dodges. She replies with a spinning kick to the monster's side which does as much damage to her foot as it does the robot's body. May yelps in pain. You distract the Santanaut as best you can, tangling its arms and head in several springy slinkies, and receive a glancing blow for your trouble.

But your distraction was sufficient for May to rally! Seizing a golf club from a sporting goods rack, she batters the robot about the head several times, raising sparks and roars of indignation. Then finally, she thrusts the steel club deep into the Santanaut's chest, fatally short-circuiting it and getting a nasty electric shock herself.

"Bad Santa," she cries weakly.

May slumps to the floor and passes out.

Lose 1 LIFE.

If your LIFE is still over zero, go to **71**.

If not, your adventure ends here.

5

You rest for a while on the gantry, simply lying on your back while you catch your breath. At length, the Argonauts below seem to lose interest and stomp off into the dark recesses of the storage area. Brushing yourself down, you climb to your feet and explore the gantry. There is a door at either end leading into the store proper. One door has a sign saying *Sports* while the other says *Toys*.

To open the Sports door, go to **70**.

To open the Toys door, go to **37**.

6

A flurry of tiny plastic snowflakes fills the air, blinding and choking you.

"HO HO HO!" booms the Santanaut as you struggle for air.

Lose 1 LIFE.

If your LIFE is still over zero, go to **68**.

If not, your adventure ends here.

7

You walk over to the radio and turn it up just as the music ends and an advert plays. A woman's voice chirps in a sing-song tone:

What does every kid want for Christmas? Why, their own AutoMate of course! AutoMate - the radio controlled toy from Autolykos Games! It moves! It beeps! It's AutoMate, the electronic pet that's not just for Christmas! Buy yours now!

You turn the radio off, but the woman's voice is irritatingly insistent and lodges in the back of your head as you ponder your next move.

There is a tiny noise behind you.

Go to **63**.

8

The boy relaxes a little.

"How'd you know my name? No-one knows I'm in here, except -"

"Except your sister Elizabeth," you finish the boy's sentence, "She asked me to find you. She's really worried, Peter."

Peter beckons you closer and whispers in a conspiratorial voice.

"Course she is, but I had to investigate when that shop assistant got killed, didn't I? I'd seen her sneaking stuff off the shelf and into her bag just last week. And guess where she worked? In the toy department right here," he declares with triumph.

"I thought maybe she was killed for stealing, but once I sneaked in here I saw robots all over the place! I think it's an android invasion! I've been keeping still and hoping none of them find me until I can leg it."

You show Peter a safe route out and tell him to find his sister outside. Reluctantly he allows you to take over the investigation. As he leaves, he gives you some parting advice.

"Look out for Santa's breath!"

If you are prompted later to follow Peter's advice, add **10** to the section you are at and go there.

With some trepidation, you make for the toy department.

Go to **37**.

9

You shuffle backward quickly as the Robominion crawls out toward you, and fish out your old police whistle. Blowing hard, you hope that your friend May Killan is within earshot. You pull down boxes of toys before you, trying to keep the horrid dead robot man away from your feet. It numbly clambers over every object you throw down and you find yourself in the middle of an aisle with nothing more in reach.

But just then a foot wearing a sturdy policewoman's shoe delivers a mighty kick to the AutoMate toy clamped to the Robominion's face, dislodging it and sending it straight to the back of a child-size football net across the aisle. It's Constable May Killan, just in the nick of time.

"One-Nil to me!" she grins, and gives you a hand up.

"An excellent second half substitution, if I do say so myself," you reply.

Freed from the AutoMate control, the dead man has collapsed where it is. May turns to the AutoMate itself as it struggles to free itself from the tangled netting. She casually walks over and bashes the robot several times on the head until something inside it cracks.

"What a nasty looking thing. I hope there aren't any more of them about. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to report this to the station."

She goes out onto the street to use her radio.

Go to **17**.

10

You straighten up and prepare to meet whatever is making the thumping sound. As it gets closer you can tell it sounds like heavy footsteps, as if made by someone wearing heavy, metal-tipped boots.

A large figure rounds the corner of the next row, pauses, and then turns to face you. It is a bulky humanoid made entirely of metal in the shape of an ancient warrior with a crested helmet and electric eyes. An ARGONAUT!

Just as you begin to form a plan, the Argonaut strikes out with one steel fist and delivers a crushing blow to your all-too human frame. You collapse to the floor, cursing your over-confidence. As you lose consciousness, you see the Argonaut reaching down for you...

Your adventure ends here.

11

You bound up the powered-off escalator and reach the first floor of the department store, which is dimly lit by a moonlight sparkling through a skylight above.

To the left is the sports department. You can see racks of football kit, bicycles and other equipment. To the right is the toy department. You can see shelves of games, dolls, magic tricks and puzzles.

To explore the sports department, go to **70**.

To explore the toy department, go to **37**.

12

"Sorry, little fellow, 'He who turns and runs away' and all that."

You spin smartly around and rush for the door, hoping to put some distance between yourself and the Roborodent. The high-pitched whine behind you abruptly changes in pitch again as you vault the counter and reach for the door knob. There is a sudden impact on your back and you stumble slightly. You can feel dozens of tiny metal feet digging into your jacket, clamping themselves securely to you.

As you reach up to brush the Roborodent, you feel a sudden sharp jab in your neck, followed instantly by a burning sensation. You fall to the floor crushing the horrible thing beneath you, immobilising it with your own body weight. As consciousness departs, you can only hope that your friend May will find you in time...

Your adventure ends here.

13

"Always worth checking all the angles before barging in through the front," you remind yourself.

Some way down the high street, a side road leads round to a loading bay at the rear of the department store. Large tire tracks through the slush show where delivery lorries have been loading and unloading goods all day. Massive bay doors are even more securely locked than the front doors though.

There is a sound, like something briefly moving, behind some big rubbish bins in the shadows of the loading bay.

To investigate the sound by the bins, go to **45**.

To use the infra-red spectacles if you have them, go to **65**.

To think better of investigating the sound and return to the high street, go to **67**.

14

Santa's Grotto resembles a tiny ice cave made of plastic sheeting and polystyrene ice sculptures. Tiny Christmas lights flicker on and off, and drifts of artificial snow cover the floor and every flat surface. At the back of the grotto, seated on a large wooden chair, is a life-size dummy of Santa Claus, his face frozen in a jolly expression. One arm extends round the back of a small stool next to him.

"The skinflints couldn't even afford a real Santa," you muse, "But I bet that stool's had a few hundred children sitting on it all the same."

Heaped around the seats are dozens and dozens of identical cardboard boxes. The printed picture on the front of each shows a colourful AutoMate toy robot with big friendly eyes, bearing the legend *It beeps! It moves! For kids of all ages! (batteries not included)*.

"That's an awful lot of AutoMates. But I wonder how many more have already been sold?"

To warily search the grotto for clues, go to **55**.

To follow Peter's advice, add the special number to this section number and go **there**.

15

Eventually arriving in Hoddleston, you make your way through snowy streets bustling with people heading home after work, to the Department X field office which also doubles as the local post office. As is to be expected at this hour on Christmas Eve, the shop is closed up, but you have your special Department X key with you, and you open the front door with a cheery tinkle of the bell.

The post office is deserted of course, but you can hear a radio playing in the back room. You call out for the agent but there is no reply.

Walking round the counter and into the back room, you find the agent, slumped on the floor! A drying pool of blood and a strange puncture wound on the back of his neck tell you that he has been dead for at least an hour. And not just dead, *murdered*.

Go to **30**.

16

Not taking your eyes off the quivering Roborodent before you, you fish out your old police whistle and blow hard, hoping that your friend May Killan is within earshot. The sound seems to distract the Roborodent for a second or two, affording you the chance to scramble backward toward the door of the post office.

But the creature seems to recover its electronic wits and streaks forward at speed, its dozens of tiny metallic feet propelling it across the floor. As you brace for its attack, the door behind you bursts

open, the bell tinkling manically. Constable May Killan bursts in, truncheon in hand, almost colliding with you.

"Oh hello May, nice of you to call by. Need some stamps?" you quip.

May rolls her eyes.

"What trouble are you in now, you - oh!"

She sees the Roborodent winding up to attack, and shoves you to one side. The creature seems to have assessed that she is the greater threat, and focuses its camera-eyes on her. With a high-pitched squeal it springs forward, syringe-like proboscis glistening wickedly.

But May is quicker still and lets her martial arts training take over. She spins neatly on one heel, bringing her truncheon up like a rounders bat. As the Roborodent launches itself at where she was just a moment before, May comes around behind it and delivers a sturdy crack across its head section with her police-issue baton. The creature's head shatters like an old alarm clock, spilling gears and electronics across the floor. It is quite dead.

May dusts herself down and helps you to your feet.

"No, that's fine, don't thank me. I just hope that the worst of it's over. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to report this to the station."

She goes out onto the street to use her radio.

Go to **39**.

17

You stoop down to examine the remains of the murderous AutoMate toy. As you suspected, its construction is based on the Roborodent you encountered before, but the design has been adapted to enable the creature not just to attack people, but to latch onto a human being and transform them into a Robominion - a half human, half robot puppet!

"And this has been sold to thousands of children as a Christmas present!" you realise with horror, "But who would do such a thing?"

You locate a small receiver/transmitter buried within the AutoMate's head section and make a few simple adjustments.

"If there's anything else using the same frequency nearby, I should get a ping... ah!"

You can hear a short chorus of muffled beeps from somewhere inside the nearby Santa's Grotto.

Go to **14**.

18

You take a step back to give the girl somewhere to run and she takes the chance. Scrambling past you, she stamps on your foot and turns to blow an impudent raspberry.

Lose 1 LIFE.

Then she runs off round the side of the department store screaming again. You can make out her calling for someone called Peter as she disappears into the snowy night.

There is nothing for it but to return to the front doors on the high street.

Go to **67**.

19

Of course! This is just the job for the mini laser. With some effort, you fish the laser out of a pocket, even though that means having to release the Roborodent, which drops to the floor and quickly rights itself. In the moments it takes to refocus its camera-eyes, you have sighted the pen-sized device on the robotic assassin. The Roborodent squeals and tenses to attack once more.

But with a flip of a button, you activate the laser! A bright, ruby-red ray of coherent light immediately strikes the creature, scoring a deep groove in its metallic carapace. A hiss of evaporating hydraulic fluid leaks out and the Roborodent flips onto its side, spinning around and whining. Eventually it runs out of power and falls still. You give it a cautious nudge with your foot. It is quite dead.

Cross the mini laser off from your list of gadgets.

Go to **39**.

20

"That ain't my name! I'm scarpering!"

The boy starts to run, skirting past you as he makes for the escalator.

He disappears downstairs, leaving you with nowhere left to explore but the toy department.

Go to **37**.

21

You make a thorough exploration of the clothing department, as best you can in the darkness. There is little more to discover here.

"Apart from some truly amazing Christmas cardigans. Look at this one - it's got bobbly snowmen on it!"

However, you do examine a customer information desk by the tills. On the board behind the desk is a display proclaiming *Meet the Staff!* accompanied by photos of each shop assistant grouped by department. You notice that there is a gap where a picture should be in the toy section.

"Did someone leave recently... or did they have a nasty accident?"

You decide to venture upstairs to the sport and toy departments.

Go to **11**.

22

You instinctively slide backward on your bottom as the Robominion crawls on its hands and feet towards you, its dead eyes hidden behind the AutoMate clamped to its face. With one foot you kick at it but the robotic corpse fixes itself on your foot and begins to claw at your shoe leather. You shake your foot violently but it has latched onto you firmly.

With nothing else to do, you hop upright with your free foot and stamp down hard, smashing the Robominion into the floor even as it crawls up your leg, grasping up at you. At last, something inside the animated body breaks, and it relaxes its grip. It drops off your foot and lies quite still on the floor.

Lose 2 LIFE.

If your LIFE is still over zero, go to **17**.

If not, your adventure ends here.

23

You confidently walk over to where the boy is pretending to be a dummy, convinced that there is no threat here. But the moment you approach him unannounced, he lets out a gasp of breath and starts to run, bashing into you as he makes for the escalator.

"You ain't going to catch me, you robominion!"

He disappears downstairs, leaving you with nowhere left to explore but the toy department.

Lose 1 LIFE.

If your LIFE is still over zero, go to **37**.

If not, your adventure ends here.

24

Recalling Peter's advice to beware Santa's breath, you choose to ignore the tempting pile of AutoMates and fixate on the silent Santa model sitting before you.

"Hmm, you seem quiet enough, old chap," you ponder, "But what happens if I do... this?"

To test a theory, you snatch up a polystyrene ice sculpture and place it on the small stool next to the model. There is a sudden whirring sound as Santa powers up. With crushing inevitability, you realise that the Santa dummy is more than a simple model - it is a robotic SANTANAUT! The creature's eyes light up and it rises to its feet with surprising speed for something so solid.

"HAVE YOU BEEN... A GOOD BOY?" its recorded voice booms.

Rather than respond with one of your usual quips, you take a deep breath and stay silent.

The Santanaut fixes you with a blazing robotic stare.

"NO! YOU HAVE NOT!"

And with that, the robot's great chest expands and contracts as it breathes out, expelling a choking blizzard of artificial snow! You congratulate yourself for taking the precaution to hold your breath, without which you would surely have choked on the thick flurry of flakes.

Go to **68**.

25

Gesturing to the general to wait, you turn back to your experiment, adjusting dials and flicking switches, making notes and tapping your nose thoughtfully with a pencil. The general huffs with increasing impatience.

"Damn it man, your blasted tinkering can wait! This is important."

You complete your experiment and place your goggles up on your forehead.

"Sorry, General," you try to mollify the red-faced soldier, "I was on the verge of isolating the frequency of a theoretical dimension vibrating at right-angles to our own. The implications are simply..."

You trail off at the cold look of indifference on General Gordon's face. He gets down to business.

"Pay attention man. One of our field agents has been investigating a spate of inexplicable accidents in the Hoddleston area and has requested scientific assistance. Ordinarily I'd send Dr Solomon - he is our best man after all - but as he's already investigating those reports of alien activity off the coast of Scotland, I'm looking to you to do the best you can in his place. Think you can handle it?"

"Anything old Solomon can do, I can do twice as well in half the time, General. Just let me grab my equipment and I'll be on my way."

"Good. I've already alerted your police contact, Constable Killan. She'll be in the area to provide assistance should you run into any trouble. Now get going. Your train leaves in thirty minutes."

And with that, you board a lumbering train to the sleepy town of Hoddleston, as the wintry snow drifts to earth in the late afternoon light.

Go to **15**.

26

"Let's have a look under here and see if anything's fallen down."

You get right down on the floor to investigate the space under the bottom-most empty shelf. It's too dark for you to see anything in there. You might just have to stick your hand in and feel about.

To use the infra-red spectacles if you have them, go to **43**.

To stick your hand into the darkness under the shelf, go to **58**.

27

Surveying the carnage of the clothing department, you shudder to think what other horrors might lurk here. First that Roborodent at the post office and now the Femdroid!

"There's some unfriendly technology loose in this town tonight. Don't they know it's Christmas?"

The Femdroid bears similar hallmarks of construction to the Roborodent that killed the agent. Clearly the work of the same hand. But to what purpose?

"What didn't someone want the agent to find, and what don't they want me uncovering here?"

To finish your exploration of the clothing department, go to **21**.

To head upstairs to the sport and toy departments before you bump into any other Femdroids, go to **11**.

28

The air mask, of course! You quickly fish it out and slip the stripped-down breathing apparatus over your mouth and nose, drawing in gulps of much needed oxygen.

"HO HO HO!" booms the Santanaut.

Cross the air mask off from your list of gadgets.

Go to **68**.

29

You move through the racks and stands of the clothing department. In the darkness, it feels more like a maze than a shop floor, and you struggle to keep your bearings.

"How in the blazes am I supposed to find a crucial clue like this?" you mutter.

Rounding a tall stack of dresses, you come face to face with someone! With a start, you can't help but let out a small yelp.

The face before you is female and quite pretty. But she does not move.

"Of course, it's just a mannequin!" you chuckle, finally noticing the model's blank plastic face and lifeless glass eyes. "Still, just to be on the safe side..."

To give the mannequin an experimental tap on its hollow head, go to **52**.

To move quickly past the mannequin and continue to explore, go to **21**.

30

The body of the murdered Department X agent lies at your feet. His work desk is covered in newspaper clippings and police reports, while a radio plays softly on a nearby filing cabinet.

To search the dead agent's body, go to **57**.

To examine the papers on the work desk, go to **44**.

To turn up the radio and listen, go to **7**.

31

Of course! This is just the job for the mini laser. Not taking your eyes off the crawling Robominion, you back pedal as fast as you can and fish the pen-sized laser out of a pocket. The dead body with the AutoMate face makes a crude lunge for you, and you manage to roll to one side as it crashes into a dolls house.

But with a flip of a button, you activate the laser! A bright, ruby-red ray of coherent light immediately strikes the AutoMate itself, cutting it completely in half and dropping off the dead man's face. For a few seconds the top half of the toy robot drags itself toward you while the back half lurches about. At length, both halves of the menace lose power and go dead.

Cross the mini laser off from your list of gadgets.

Go to **17**.

32

"Hey, toro," you taunt the strange little creature as you slip off your jacket and use it as a matador would against a bull. A tiny mechanical bull. The high-pitched whine behind you abruptly changes in pitch again and the Roborodent springs up from the floor toward you. But you manage to block its leap with the sturdy tweed fabric of the jacket and bundle it up tightly.

It struggles and scratches incessantly as you wrestle with the thing. The wicked proboscis tipped with toxin jabs up through the jacket just inches from your face and then retracts, like a scorpion's sting. This thing is small and weak, but deadly!

To finish it off with brute force, go to **53**.

To use the mini laser if you have it, go to **19**.

To use the wristwatch buzzsaw if you have it, go to **60**.

33

Desperately, you fling yourself up a pile of crates, boxes and worryingly loose shelving, trying to gain some altitude. A metal gauntlet snakes out from below and barely misses your foot as you haul yourself up higher. You take a moment to look down and see the Argonauts directly below you. Unable to climb themselves, they paw at the air with snapping, hydraulic hands.

You are safe for the moment, but the climb has taken its toll on your aching muscles and you struggle to hang on and avoid falling into the robotic hands of the Argonauts...

Lose 1 LIFE.

If your LIFE is still over zero, go to **61**.

If not, your adventure ends here.

34

"No point in wasting time and valuable equipment on this one," you declare, and apply a sharp elbow to one of the glassed doors of the department store. With a crash and a shower of shards it smashes, tearing your arm slightly.

Lose 1 LIFE.

You reach in and open the door easily, and slip inside before the few remaining people on the street at this hour notice you.

Go to **59**.

35

With shock, you realise that the Santa dummy is more than a simple model - it is a robotic SANTANAUT! The creature's eyes light up and it rises to its feet with surprising speed for something so solid.

"HAVE YOU BEEN... A GOOD BOY?" its recorded voice booms.

"Me? Oh I should say so. No complaints on that score," you blather, considering your options.

The Santanaut fixes you with a blazing robotic stare.

"NO! YOU HAVE NOT!"

And with that, the robot's great chest expands and contracts as it breathes out, expelling a choking blizzard of artificial snow!

To use the air mask if you have it, go to **28**.

Otherwise go to **6**.

36

Arriving in Hoddleston in good time, you make your way through snowy streets bustling with last-minute Christmas shoppers, to the Department X field office which also doubles as the local post office. As is to be expected at this hour on Christmas Eve, the shop is closed up, but you have your special Department X key with you, and you open the front door with a cheery tinkle of the bell.

The post office is deserted of course, but you can hear a radio playing in the back room. You call out for the agent but there is no reply.

Walking round the counter and into the back room, you find the agent, slumped on the floor! A spreading pool of blood and a strange puncture wound on the back of his neck tell you that he doesn't have long to live. You kneel close to the man and make him as comfortable as you can. Weakly, he whispers something to you.

"It was too fast... Don't... try to...run."

And with that, he slips away.

Go to **30**.

37

The toy department is as quiet as the grave. Piles of teddy bears and dollies cover the shelves, and board games and colouring books lie in neat stacks everywhere.

"Nobody's buying the old favourites this year, it seems. So what are kids getting instead?"

The answer may lie in a set of completely empty shelves near a Santa's Grotto. Bright futuristic signs proclaim that the sold-out toy is *AutoMate! Your automatic mate! It's a toy, it's a pet, it's your new best friend! It's AutoMate!*

"They must have a pretty amazing advertising campaign. Pity there aren't any left for me to examine. Maybe if I have a little look around..?"

To get down on your hands and knees and look under the shelves, go to **26**.

To poke your head inside Santa's Grotto, go to **14**.

38

The girl is clearly terrified. She doesn't know who you are or what you want, so you take a step back and plaster on your best 'harmless substitute teacher' expression.

"It's alright! My name is Tweedy - I'm a scientific advisor for the Department for Extraordinary Affairs. Look, here's my identity card."

The girl relaxes a little and doesn't look like she's going to run or scream again just yet. She says her name is Elizabeth and she's really worried about her older brother Peter.

"He heard about that shop assistant from Hamilton's being killed and thinks it's got something to do with the department store itself. He reckons he's a boy detective, so he sneaked in after closing." she snorts.

"How did Peter get inside, Elizabeth?"

She grins and takes you over to where a pile of cardboard boxes conceals a ventilation hatch. The grill is easily removed, revealing a small aperture just large enough for a boy or a skinny scientific advisor.

"You will make sure Peter's safe, won't you?" asks Elizabeth.

"Course I will!" you reassure her with a winning grin. Then you duck down and squeeze through the hatch and into the department store.

Go to **3**.

39

With the threat of the Roborodent over, you bend down to examine the remains. Its construction is extremely advanced, beyond conventional micro-electronics. The device's small but efficient computerised brain has been designed to carry out simple instructions which can be transmitted over radio waves.

You spot something wedged in between two plates of its shell. Carefully prying apart the metalwork, you find that it is a wedge of paper, chewed and tattered, but still salvageable. It's a map of the town! Smoothing it out, you recognise the dead agent's handwriting covering the map, with an area under investigation circled in red ink. *Hamilton's*, a large department store on the high street, is marked alongside the words 'shop assistant'.

It is dark outside, and the snow continues to fall. You resolve to investigate the department store.

Go to **67**.

40

Before the Femdroid can lay a beautifully formed hand on you, you close in, seizing each of its wrists, halting its advance. You can hear its hydraulics straining as its hidden servo motors match your muscles. Locked in a deadly struggle you and the Femdroid crash into racks of clothing, spilling piles of underwear across the floor. The Femdroid slips on some slippers and it stumbles forward, catching you off balance. The two of you fall to the ground with a thump.

The impact has broken your hold on the Femdroid's arms, and she clammers on top of you, fixing a powerful robotic hand around your throat and cutting off your air! As you fight for breath you see the pedestal of a clothing stand to one side, its stubby steel pole jutting straight up. As your vision begins to fade, you just manage to bring your knees up under the looming Femdroid and then heave your legs out, propelling the robot backward!

With a terrible thunk, it falls back onto the steel pedestal pole, impaling it through the chest! The Femdroid struggles violently for some seconds, then slowly winds down, the light behind its eyes going black.

Lose 3 LIFE.

If your LIFE is still over zero, go to **27**.

If not, your adventure ends here.

41

Quietly, so as not to alert the sports models, you fish out the infra-red spectacles and put them on. Where the dummies were dark, indistinct shapes, now you can see quite clearly, albeit in black and red.

Looking over at the two larger models, they appear to be exactly as they appear - inanimate blank-faced humanoid dummies which are no threat to anyone. But appearances can be deceiving, as you have learnt.

The smaller model is a different matter though. Now that you can see under the parka hood, you can see the features of boy, a real living boy. He is looking back at you and trying hard not to move.

Cross the infra-red spectacles off from your list of gadgets.

To approach the boy, go **23**.

To softly call to the boy, go to **54**.

42

The Santanaut hits you with the force of a compact car, sending you flying out the grotto and sprawling into a pile of teddy bears. You scramble to your feet as the berserk robot stomps forward, its eyes crackling with power.

"HO HO HO!"

Reflexively, you fling an armful of teddies at the Santanaut, distracting it. One teddy lodges in the robot's great bearded mouth and is instantly chewed to fluffy pieces by chomping metal jaws. You reach up to a shelf and grab a small colourful wooden box, just as the Santanaut clamps its arms around you in a crushing bearhug. You feel several ribs crack.

Desperately fighting for breath, you wait until the robot opens its mouth to speak once more, and then cram the small box down its artificial throat. From somewhere inside its mechanical chest, you can just make out the tinny sound of a recorded voice: *Half a Pound of tuppenny rice, half a pound of treacle...*

Just as you think the Santanaut is about to break your back, something goes *sproing* deep inside the robot, and its vicelike grip relaxes. Its eyes go dim and its mouth sags open. You slip awkwardly from its embrace.

"Pop goes the weasel, old chap."

Lose 4 LIFE.

If your LIFE is still over zero, go to **71**.

If not, your adventure ends here.

43

You fish out the infra-red spectacles and put them on. Looking under the shelf you can see everything underneath quite clearly, albeit in black and red.

Apart from dust and old price stickers, there's a cardboard box. It is an AutoMate box, torn open at one end. The printed picture on the front shows a colourful toy robot with big friendly eyes, bearing the legend *It beeps! It moves! For kids of all ages! (batteries not included)*.



And wedged behind the box is the body of a human being! It looks like a night watchman for the department store. He is not moving. Perhaps he crawled under the shelves looking for something and got stuck.

"Or maybe he was hiding from someone or something - hey!"

Clamped to the man's face is the AutoMate toy itself. It looks like it's dug into his head. As you watch it seems to sense your presence and comes to life with a series of small clicking sounds, like gears shifting into place. The dead body responds to the AutoMate's direction, stirring from its resting place. With a horrid jerky motion, the ROBOMINION crawls out from under the shelf toward you, the horrid toy robot still affixed firmly to its face!

Cross the infra-red spectacles off from your list of gadgets.

Go to **49**.

44

The papers on the work desk are a variety of cuttings from local newspapers and copies of police reports. Some mention that the number of homeless people on the streets of Hoddleston has dropped dramatically lately, which the council puts down to the onset of winter and people drifting to warmer climes.

Other reports mention several unusual deaths in the area over the last month, ranging from a lorry driver found dead in his cabin to a shop assistant who died at home. The post mortems state that the deaths were all caused by a puncture wound somewhere on the body which introduced a highly toxic compound into the victim's bloodstreams, causing death within a matter of minutes.

Tattered scraps of a local map litter the desk top, but it is clear that only fragments remain. The central portion of the Hoddleston map is missing.

There is a movement at the corner of your eye.

Go to **63**.

45

Cautiously, wary of danger, you creep over to the bins in the shadows of the loading bay. Your eyes and ears strain to catch a sign of what's hiding in the darkness. Closer, closer, you pick your way as quietly as possible through the discarded cardboard boxes and litter until you round the side of the bins and leap out on whatever it is with a loud "Ha!"

Your exclamation is met by a piercing scream! A young girl cowers back from you, looking nervously left and right as if for an escape route.

To reassure the girl, go to **38**.

To let her run off, go to **18**.

46

Determined to find that elusive AutoMate, you stick your hand into the space under the shelf once more and sweep from left to right. At first you find nothing, but then, stretching in further so your head brushes against the bottom shelf, your fingers brush something smooth and cool.

"There you go, my little friend! Come to Tweedy - hey!"

The object suddenly twists and moves of its own accord with a series of small clicking sounds, like gears shifting into place. Then there is a sharp stab in the back of your hand following by a burning sensation. As you lose consciousness, you reach feebly for your old police whistle...

Your adventure ends here.

47

"I don't know you! I'm off!"

The boy starts to run, skirting past you as he makes for the escalator.

He disappears downstairs, leaving you with nowhere left to explore but the toy department.

Go to **37**.

48

Ah, the trusty old photonic spanner! Ideal for deactivating menacing metal models! Not taking your eyes off the beautiful but deadly advancing Femdroid, you back pedal as fast as you can and fish the spanner out of a pocket. The Femdroid swings a steel fist at your head, but you just about dodge the blow, which pulverizes a rack of bowties.

But with a twist of your fingers you transmit the spanner's jamming signal! A low sonic hum pulses through the clothing department, immediately affecting the robot which begins to shudder and move erratically. Its head jerks spasmodically from left and right as each glowing eye moves independently of the other. The Femdroid reaches both hands up to its own neck, and with a heave and a shower of sparks, tears its head right off. The body rocks for a moment and then goes still.

Cross the photonic spanner off from your list of gadgets.

Go to **27**.

49

To fight the Robominion yourself, go to **22**.

To call for May if you have not already done so, go to **9**.

To use the mini laser if you have it, go to **31**.

50

You pray that the mini laser will be enough to halt the Santanaut. You turn and run out of the grotto, the rampaging robot hot on your heels, its eyes crackling with power. As you fish the pen-sized laser out of a pocket, the Santanaut drives a fist into your back, sending you sprawling into a bin full of footballs.

"HO HO HO!"

But with a flip of a button, you activate the laser! A bright, ruby-red ray of coherent light immediately strikes the Santanaut's face, igniting its cotton wool beard and slicing the jolly plastic face right off the steel skull beneath. The robot brings a huge hand up to pat the smouldering flames and soon its entire hand is wreathed in flames.

You tumble unceremoniously out of the football bin and scramble backwards as the burning robot lumbers on, shedding melting polyester clothing as it does so. At length, something vital inside the Santanaut melts, and with a shudder the flaming body crashes to the floor.

Cross the mini laser off from your list of gadgets.

Lose 1 LIFE.

If your LIFE is still over zero, go to **71**.

If not, your adventure ends here.

51

Ah, the trusty old photonic spanner! Ideal for springing uncooperative locks! You fish the spanner out of a pocket and make the necessary adjustments. With a low sonic hum, the handy electronic tool triggers the department store's door lock, which gives a small click as it releases.

You open the door and slip inside before the few remaining people on the street at this hour notice you.

Cross the photonic spanner off from your list of gadgets.

Go to **59**.

52

You can't resist rapping a knuckle against the mannequin's plastic head.

"Knock-knock, anyone at home?" you chuckle, thinking how much the dummy reminds you of an old girlfriend.

Suddenly, the mannequin's head swivels round to face you! Its glassy eyes blink once, then glow with inner power! It is a robotic FEMDROID! The Femdroid's arms and legs move in a swift but jerky motion as it attacks!



FEMDROID

To try to wrestle with the manic model, go to **40**.

To call for May if you have not already done so, go to **2**.

To use the photonic spanner if you have it, go to **48**.

53

The Roborodent struggles free of its confines, but with some effort you manage to hold it at arm's length as its body bucks back and forth with powerful jerking motions, its multiple feet scratching tiny gashes in your arms.

Lose 2 LIFE.

Then, with as much force as you can muster, you swing it by its rear section around and around, finally smashing it against a wall. With a tinkling of broken gears and a squeal of protest, it goes limp and then silent. You drop the broken creature to the floor and give it a cautious nudge with your foot. It is quite dead.

Go to **39**.

54

Rather than walk up to him and spook the boy, you call out to him softly from a short distance away.

What do you call out?

To say *Hey kid*, go to **47**.

To say *Hey Paul*, go to **20**.

To say *Hey Peter*, go to **8**.

55

With great caution, given the nasty surprises you've already encountered tonight, you approach the pile of AutoMate toy boxes. They seem to be exactly as they appear - toy robots that move, make sounds and can be radio controlled. So far, so innocent, but you'd have to open one up to make a full and proper examination of any threat.

You take one out of its box and start to lever the back panel open. But as you do so, there is a sudden whirring sound from very nearby, as something powers up.

Go to **35**.

56

This is just the job for the climbing suckers, you realise, and quickly slip them on, even as the Argonauts bear down on you, their trapped prey. With seconds to spare, you slap your palms onto the sheer wall of the storage area and place your feet likewise. Hand over hand, foot by foot, you clamber up the wall, narrowly avoiding the hydraulic gauntlets of the Argonauts from dragging you down to certain doom.

"See you, suckers!" you crow at the robots below, as you reach the safety of the gantry.

Cross the climbing suckers off from your list of gadgets.

Go to **5**.

57

As the radio continues to chirp away in the background, you carefully search the unfortunate agent's body. You find his Department X identity card and his pistol. It has not been fired. Whatever killed him did so before he could get a shot off.

The nasty puncture wound on the back of his neck suggests that the attack was from behind, and instantly rendered him incapable of fighting back. A blackish discolouration around the wound may have been caused by some sort of toxin, but without a full post-mortem it's hard to tell.

There is a movement at the corner of your eye.

Go to **63**.

58

You feel around the dark space, encountering dust and old price stickers. Then your hand brushes up against something lightweight and made of cardboard. A small box of some sort. You drag it out and blow the dust off the package. It is an AutoMate box, torn open at one end. The printed picture on the front shows a colourful toy robot with big friendly eyes, bearing the legend *It beeps! It moves! For kids of all ages! (batteries not included)*.

"But it's empty. Maybe it fell out under there."

To keep rooting around under the shelf, go to **46**.

To think better of it and have a look in Santa's Grotto, go to **14**.

59

You are in the darkened cosmetics department at the front of the store. Beyond the counters and displays of perfume and make-up you can see mannequins wearing the latest fashions, which must be the clothing department. Over to one side of the shop is an escalator leading up to the first floor, alongside a sign stating *Sporting Goods and Toys*.

To investigate the clothing department, go to **29**.

To investigate the sport and toy departments, go to **11**.

60

Ah, your stylish wristwatch buzzsaw! Just the thing cutting hostile robotic assassins down to size! With some effort, you use one free hand to activate the watch's hidden mechanism, while the Roborodent continues to struggle in your grip, making a nasty mess of your tweed jacket and barely missing your exposed arm.

But with a flick of the wrist you bring the wristwatch buzzsaw down on the creature's metallic carapace! Sparks fly and the air is filled with the teeth-rattling shrill of metal grinding on metal. The Roborodent struggles but within seconds you have cut deeply into its shell, severing a power coupling. The vicious robot goes limp. It is quite dead.

Cross the wristwatch buzzsaw off from your list of gadgets.

Go to **39**.

61

Managing to cling on, you realise that you have reached the level of the gantry on the nearby wall. With a heave of your legs you launch yourself into space and hit the metalwork hard, clinging on to the gantry with all your might to prevent you from falling to your death...

Lose 1 LIFE.

If your LIFE is still over zero, go to **5**.

If not, your adventure ends here.

62

Your trusty photonic spanner, ideal for disrupting cybernetic Santas! You turn and run out of the grotto, the rampaging robot hot on your heels, its eyes crackling with power. As you fish the spanner out of a pocket the Santanaut catches your trailing foot, flipping you into the air. You land painfully in a pile of building blocks

"HO HO HO!"

But with a twist of your fingers you transmit the spanner's jamming signal! A low sonic hum pulses through the toy department, immediately affecting the Santanaut which begins to spin its head round in a full circle, as if sighting multiple targets.

"BAD BOY. BAD BOY. BAD BOY." it spouts incessantly as it strikes at thin air, ignoring you completely. Careening wildly about the toy department, the berserk Santanaut stumbles closer and closer to the balcony overlooking the ground floor until it topples over! There is a terrible, heavy crash from downstairs.

Cross the photonic spanner off from your list of gadgets.

Lose 1 LIFE.

If your LIFE is still over zero, go to **71**.

If not, your adventure ends here.

63

You turn to see a strange creature scuttling out from behind a stack of parcels on the floor. No, not a creature - some sort of mechanical device! It is shaped a bit like an elongated beetle or maybe a

silverfish, but one the size of a dog! Its rounded silvery shell is made up of several jointed sections and it moves on a myriad tiny feet, like a millipede.

As you stare in fascination, you can see that its eyes are a pair of swivelling lenses that open and close like camera shutters. It emits a high pitched whine as it moves across the floor toward you. The whine increases in pitch suddenly as the thing begins to quiver, like a tiny model car revving up. Futuristic writing printed on its shell reveals that this curious creature is a ROBORODENT, and a wicked syringe-like probe jutting from its head section suggests that you have found the agent's killer!

To turn and run for the door, go to **12**.



To brace yourself for its attack, go to **32**.

To call for May if you have not already done so, go to **16**.

64

Choosing not to face the peril, you turn about and run directly away from whatever is making the thumping sound. You make for the far end of the storage area, glancing over your shoulder briefly to catch a glimpse of a large figure emerging some distance behind you. At this range all you can make out is its bulky frame and what appear to be glowing eyes.

With a start, you realise you can hear a similar noise coming toward you from this end as well! It sounds like heavy footsteps, as if made by someone wearing heavy, metal-tipped boots. You skid to a halt, just as another figure emerges from an aisle in front of you. It pauses and then turns to face you. It is a bulky humanoid made entirely of metal in the shape of an ancient warrior with a crested helmet and electric eyes. An ARGONAUT!

Robots in front of you, robots behind you! You take the only avenue left and run down the aisle between the two Argonauts, hoping that there will be some way to escape them at this end of the storage area. But it terminates in a dead end, a sheer wall in front of you leading to a gantry high above, and rickety stacks of goods on either side. Behind you, you can hear twin sets of metallic feet stomping closer.

To try to climb a stack of goods to safety, go to **33**.

To use the climbing suckers if you have them, go to **56**.



MK II ARGONAUT

65

Quietly, so as not to alert whatever is lurking in the shadows, you fish out the infra-red spectacles and put them on. Where the loading bay was nothing but shadows and indistinct shapes, now you can see quite clearly, albeit in black and red.

Looking over at the bins, at first you can see nothing but piles of rubbish and discarded packing boxes. Then you can make out something trying to stay still. It's the head and shoulders of a young girl, hiding behind the bins. It is hard to make out her features at this distance and with the strange colouring of the spectacles, but you can tell she is looking straight at you. She is shaking.

Cross the infra-red spectacles off from your list of gadgets.

Go to **38**.

66

You warily approach the three sports models, hoping that your instincts are correct. As you get nearer, it seems clear that the two larger models are nothing but dummies. But the moment you get close, the smaller model lets out a gasp of breath and starts to run - it's a boy! He bashes into you as he makes for the escalator.

"Hands off bot-brain, I'm legging it!"

He disappears downstairs, leaving you with nowhere left to explore but the toy department.

Lose 1 LIFE.

If your LIFE is still over zero, go to **37**.

If not, your adventure ends here.

67

Although the department store is now closed, cheery Christmas lights and themed window displays sparkle with festive charm. The name *Hamilton's* stands out in green and gold above the glassed shop doors. The street is all but deserted now, with most people at home.

You try the front doors to the shop, but they are firmly locked. There may be another way in though, perhaps round the back.

To simply smash a glassed door and let yourself in, go to **34**.

To use the photonic spanner if you have it, go to **51**.

To try round the back of the department store if you have not already done so, go to **13**.

68

The flurry of snow eventually dies down and the last few flakes drift down to settle on the Santanaut's big red chest.

"BAD BOY!" it roars and raises its steel arms with a whoosh of powerful hydraulics.

It attacks!

To fight the Santanaut yourself, go to **42**.

To call for May if you have not already done so, go to **4**.

To use the mini laser if you have it, go to **50**.

To use the photonic spanner if you have it, go to **62**.

69

Sighing ever so slightly, you halt your experiment and place your goggles up on your forehead.

"Yes, General? What can I do for you? Need a hand wrapping presents for all the good agents?"

The general ignores your sarcasm and gets straight down to business.

"Pay attention man. One of our field agents has been investigating a spate of inexplicable accidents in the Hoddleston area and has requested scientific assistance. Ordinarily I'd send Dr Solomon - he is our best man after all - but as he's already investigating those reports of alien activity off the coast of Scotland, I'm looking to you to do the best you can in his place. Think you can handle it?"

"Anything old Solomon can do, I can do twice as well in half the time, General. Just let me grab my equipment and I'll be on my way."

"Capital. I've already alerted your police contact, Constable Killan. She'll be in the area to provide assistance should you run into any trouble. Now get going. You can take an X-Mobile to get you there in double time."

And with that, you take a sleek departmental X-Mobile to the sleepy town of Hoddleston, as the wintry snow drifts to earth in the afternoon light.

Go to **36**.

70

The sports department is dark and still, lit only by the skylight above. Racks of golf clubs, tennis clubs and football boots line the aisles.

"This is the closest I've been to a pair of football boots since school sports day, and even then I had a note from my parents. Faked of course."

Up ahead in the gloom stands a group of shop dummies. At this distance it's hard to make out details, but the two larger models seem to be wearing shorts and sports shirts, while the much smaller model is wearing a bulky parka jacket and jeans. Its face is hidden by the hood.

To think better of confronting the sports models and try the toy department instead, go to **37**.

To approach the sports models, go to **66**.

To use the infra-red spectacles if you have them, go to **41**.

71

As you recover from the terrible battle with the Santanaut, a strange three-legged robot scuttles out of Santa's grotto. With horror, you suspect that it has transformed from the child's stool next to Santa's chair. Too exhausted to do anything, you watch as the robot draws up before you, a televiewer screen unfolding from its 'head'.

An image of a wild haired man wearing goggles appears on the screen, accompanied by a crackly audio transmission.

This is Dr Ulysses Argo, supreme architect of robotics! Your meddling may have disrupted this part of my operation Mattison, but my clever little AutoMates are even now sitting in Christmas stockings the length and breadth of the country. Hundreds, thousands of automated terrors, just waiting for all the little children to open them up! And when they do, the world will know true fear!

His voice drips with malevolence and the screen goes black.

Can you stop Argo's mad scheme before the AutoMates attack on Christmas morning?

The End!



ARGO