

Welcome to the Medical Clinic at the Interplanetary Relay Station | Hours Since the Last Patient Death: 0

by [Caroline M. Yoachim](#) (2134 Words)

A. You take a shortcut through the hydroponics bay on your way to work, and notice that the tomato plants are covered in tiny crawling insects that look like miniature beetles. One of the insects skitters up your leg, so you reach down and brush it off. It bites your hand. The area around the bite turns purple and swollen.

You run down a long metal hallway to the Medical Clinic, grateful for the artificially generated gravity that defies the laws of physics and yet is surprisingly common in fictional space stations. The sign on the clinic door says “hours since the last patient death:” The number currently posted on the sign is zero. If you enter the clinic anyway, go to C. If you seek medical care elsewhere, go to B.

B. You are in a relay station in orbit halfway between Saturn and Uranus. There is no other medical care available. Proceed to C.

Why are you still reading this? You’re supposed to go to C. Are you sure you won’t go into the clinic? No? Fine. You return to your quarters and search the station’s database to find a cure for the raised purple scabs that are now spreading up your arm. Most of the database entries recommend amputation. The rash looks pretty serious, and you probably ought to go to C, but if you absolutely refuse to go to the clinic, go to Z and die a horrible, painful death.

C. Inside the clinic, a message plays over the loudspeakers: “Welcome to the Medical Clinic at the Interplanetary Relay Station, please sign your name on the clipboard. Patients will be seen in the order that they arrive. If this is an emergency, we’re sorry—you’re probably screwed. The current wait time is six hours.” The message is on endless repeat, cycling through dozens of different languages.

The clipboard is covered in green mucus, probably from a Saturnian slug-monkey. They are exceedingly rude creatures, always hungry and extremely temperamental. You wipe away the slime with the sleeve of your shirt and enter your information. The clipboard chirps in a cheerful voice, “You are number 283. If you leave the waiting room, you will be moved to the end of the queue. If your physiology is incompatible with long waiting room stays, you may request a mobile tracker and wait in one of our satellite rooms. The current wait for a mobile tracker is four hours.”

If you decide to wait in the waiting room, go to D. If you request a mobile tracker, go to D anyway, because there is no chance you will get one.

D. You hand the clipboard to the patient behind you, a Tarmandian Spacemite from the mining colonies. As you hand it off, you realize the clipboard is printing a receipt. The sound of the printer triggers the spacemite's predatory response, and it eats the clipboard.

"Attention patients, the clipboard has been lost. Patients will be seen in the order they arrived. Please line up using the number listed on your receipt. If you do not have a receipt, you will need to wait and sign in when a new clipboard is assembled."

If you wait for the new clipboard, go back to C. If you are smart enough to recognize that going back to C will result in a loop that does not advance the story, proceed to E.

E. Instead of waiting in line, you take advantage of the waiting room chaos to go to the nurses' station and demand treatment. There are two nurses at the station, a tired-looking human and a Uranian Doodoo. The Doodoo is approximately twice your size, covered in dark brown fur, and speaks a language that only contains the letters, d, t, b, p, and o. If you talk to the human nurse, go to F. If you talk to the big brown Doodoo from Uranus, go to G. Also, stop snickering. The planet is pronounced "urine iss" not "your anus."

F. The human nurse sees the nasty purple rash on your arm and demands that you quarantine yourself in your quarters. If you accept this advice, go back to B. Have you noticed all the loops in this story? The loops simulate the ultimate futility of attempting to get medical care. What are you still doing here? Go back to B. Next time you get to the nurses' station, remember to pick the non-human nurse.

G. You approach the Uranian nurse and babble a bunch of words that end in "oo" which is your best approximation of Doodoo language. Honestly, the attempt is kind of offensive. The Doodoos are a civilization older than humankind with a nuanced language steeped in a complex alien culture. Why would you expect a random assortment of words ending in "oo" to communicate something meaningful?

Thankfully, the nurse does not respond to your blatant mockery of its language, so you hold out your arm and point to the purple rash. In a single bite, it eats your entire arm, cauterizing the wound with its highly acidic saliva. The rash is gone. If you consider yourself cured, proceed to Y. If you stay at the clinic in hopes of getting a prosthetic arm, go to H.

H. You approach the human nurse and ask about the availability of prosthetic limbs. He hands you a stack of twenty-four forms to fill out. The Doodoo nurse has eaten the hand you usually write with. If you fill out all the forms with your remaining hand, go to I. If you fill out only the top form and leave the rest blank, hoping that no one will notice, go to I.

I. The nurse takes your paperwork and shoves it into a folder. He leads you down a hallway to an exam room filled with an assortment of syringes and dissection tools. "Take off all your clothes and put on this gown," the nurse instructs, "and someone will be in to see you soon." If you do what the nurse says, go to J. If you keep your clothes on, go to K.

J. The exam room is cold and the gown is three sizes too small and paper thin. You sit down, only to notice that the tissue paper that covers the exam table hasn't been changed and is covered in tiny crawling insects that look like miniature beetles. Sitting down is a decision that has literally come back to bite you in the ass. If you leap up screaming and brush the insects off your bare skin, go to L. If you calmly brush the insects away and then yell for someone to come in and clean the room, go to L.

K. Three hours later, the doctor arrives. You are relieved to see that she is human. You ask her if she can issue you a prosthetic limb. She says no, mumbles something about resource allocation forms, and leaves. If you accept her refusal and decide to consider yourself cured, go to Y. If you scream down the hall at the departing doctor that you must have a new arm, go to L.

L. A security officer comes, attracted by the sound of your screams. Clinic security is handled by a six-foot-tall Tarmandian Spacemite with poisonous venom, sharp teeth, and a fondness for US tax law. If you run, go to M. If you are secretly a trained warrior and decide to kill the Tarmandian Spacemite with your bare hands so you can eat its head, go to N. If you sit very still and hope the Tarmandian Spacemite goes away, go to O.

M. Running triggers the predatory instincts of the Tarmandian Spacemite. Go to Z.

N. You use your completely unforeshadowed (but useful!) fighting skills to overpower the security officer. The head of the Tarmandian Spacemite is a delicious delicacy, salty and crunchy and full of delightful worms that squiggle all the way down your throat. Unfortunately, you forgot to remove the venomous fangs. Go to Z.

O. You sit perfectly still on the exam table, and tiny insects that resemble miniature beetles crawl into your pants and bite you repeatedly, leaving a clump of purple bumps that look suspiciously similar to the scabby rash you had on your arm when you arrived at the clinic. When you're sure the Tarmandian Spacemite is gone, go to P.

P. You have lost an arm and the lower half of your torso is covered in a purple rash. If you decide to cut your losses and consider yourself cured, go to R. If you rummage through the cabinets in the exam room, go to S.

Q. There is nothing in the story that directs you to this section, so if you are reading this, you have failed to follow instructions. Go directly to Z and die your horrible, painful death. Or skip to somewhere else, since you clearly aren't playing by the rules anyway.

R. You sneak out of the clinic and return to your quarters. You search the station database for treatments for your beetle-induced purple rash. There is no known cure, although some patients have had luck with amputation of the affected areas. Sadly, you are incapable of amputating your own ass. Even if you go back to the clinic, the rash is now too widespread to be treated. Go to Z. Or, if you want to see what would have happened if you'd opted to search through the exam room cabinets, go to S. But remember, going to S is only to see what hypothetically would have happened. Your true fate is Z.

S. You rummage through the cabinets and find an assortment of ointments and lotions. If you read the instructions on all the bottles, go to T. If you select a few bottles at random and slather them on your rash, go to T. Have you noticed how often you end up in the same place no matter what you chose? In the clinic, as in life, decisions that seem important are often ultimately meaningless. In the end, all of us will die and none of this will matter. Now seriously, go to T.

T. None of the ointments or lotions do anything for your rash. The Uranian nurse comes in to clean the room and discovers you. If you pretend to work at the clinic, go to U. If you ask for help with your rash, go to V. If you run away, go to W.

(There is no U, much as there is no hope for patients of the clinic. The nurse would have recognized you anyway. Go to V.)

V. The Doodoo from Uranus (seriously, are you in third grade? Stop pronouncing the planet as “your anus”) examines your rash and amputates the affected areas by eating them, neatly cauterizing the wound with the acid in its saliva. You are now a head with approximately half a torso. If you consider yourself cured, go to X. Otherwise, go to Z.

W. You flee from the Uranian nurse but slip on a puddle of slimy green mucus excreted by another patient, probably that idiot slug-monkey that slimed the clipboard. You crash into the wall, and before you can get back up, the Uranian nurse amputates the areas affected by the rash by eating them, neatly cauterizing the wound with the acid in its saliva. You are now a head with approximately half a torso. If you consider yourself cured, go to X. Otherwise go to Z.

X. You are not cured. You are a head with half a torso, and missing several internal organs. Go to Z.

Y. Congratulations, you have survived your trip to the Medical Clinic at the Interplanetary Relay Station! All you have to do now is fill out your discharge papers. You start filling out the forms with your one remaining hand, but you accidentally drop the pen onto the oozing foot of the Saturnian slug-monkey waiting in line behind you. This is undoubtedly the idiot that slimed the sign-in clipboard. You cuss the slug-monkey out with some choice words in French. Choice words because it was rude to leave slime all over the clipboard. French because you know better than to make a slug-monkey angry. You’ve watched enough education vids to know that slug-monkeys are always hungry, which makes them temperamental.

Unfortunately for you, Saturnian slug-monkeys are far better educated than arrogant humans give them credit for. This one is fluent in several languages, including French. It eats you. Go to Z.

Z. You die a horrible, painful death. But at least you won’t have to deal with your insurance company!