

The Introduction

Call me Jack. My full name is Jack T. Ladd but don't ask me what the "T" stands for because you won't get an answer - and a kick in the coconuts often offends. Strange though it seems, it could have been worse. My farther wanted to call me Rudolf Rufus Rupert Rustle Ladd. When I was born he was inspired to open up his copy of the intergalactic first name dictionary and christen me with every name he saw on the first page his chubby fingers stopped at. Luckily, madness isn't genetically transmitted. At least that's what my friend dinky the green goblin says. Anyway, this isn't the point of this story. The point is to tell you how I ended up having to find more money than a major government can squander on babes and cocktails - all within the next 28 days.

The Background

I hope you all know by now that mankind has conquered the stars and colonized the planets of this miserable galaxy. If you didn't know this, get an education. If you did know it, get out of here. I don't need wisecracking smart Alecs like you around. Okay. Apart from anyone whose knuckles trail along the floor, the rest of you can stay. The first thing you need to know about is the federation. All colonized worlds, whether monarchic dictatorships or communist cooperatives, joined the federation of planets a long time ago. A long time, I can't tell you precisely when because I missed that particular history lesson. Okay, I missed all the history lessons- but that's another story, and one that I

5275	0557	6019	7344	9856
0737	6642	1751	1562	9405
0487	8822	2320	9204	5465
3987	9259	9439	2973	2034
9380	2569	1621	4066	0329



wouldn't tell you even if I could remember it. This story concerns the federation, and the way the fed controls everything: trading, commerce and (most important of all) intergalactic taxes. As with all governing bodies, the fed has been devoured from within by bureaucracy. I once wrote a poem about it, but poetry isn't my strong suit and you'd have to break my arm before I repeated it. Anyway, the more bureaucracy there is, the more opportunities you have for corruption. The fed, not to put too fine a point on it, is 100 percent corrupt. All departments vie for power, and all of them use underhand methods to gain that power. The most terrible and underhand of them all is the interstellar revenue decimation service - also known as the IRDS. This is getting a bit heavy already - and it's been over two hundred words since I last had a sub-heading - so I'll tell you more about the IRDS and why I'm in trouble with them later. For now, here's a token sub-title.

The Token Sub-Title

Now that we've got that out of the way, lets get on with the background. I've told yo lse is there? Crime. Everything runs on crime. Every planet has its own u about the federation, and mentioned the IRDS - so what e gangs and its own crime bosses. If you're the kind of person who thinks that crime bosses are trustworthy individuals who love mankind and tiny kittens, you probably believe in free money for all and the importance of integrating hoverbike riders into the mainstream of society. You can trust a crime boss about as far as you can throw him - assuming he won't kill you as soon as you walk through the front door.

1434	3201	4244	2472	3196
5126	6505	5130	0423	9142
5396	1680	4290	5728	5903
4717	1743	2687	5093	8854
0258	0795	0320	9164	9367



Me

But that's enough about the background - let's talk about me. Apart from the obvious (impeccable dress sense, fashionable haircut, lean body, etc), you could say I specialize in the clandestine procurement of valuable items. Some of the more dim-witted and thick-boned officers of the federation police would refer to me as the thief, but that's only because they can't pronounce words with more than one syllable.

And My Opinions On Bars

'Bar' is the most beautiful word on the three planets. Roll it on your tongue, baaaaar, and let it slip down the back of your throat: barrrrr. I'm not normally given apologies, but in this case I'll make an exception. It's a long time since I've had a drink, and after the experience I've just had with the IRDS, I'm heading straight for the nearest watering hole. I'll tell you more about that in a minute - but first you need to know some golden rules about bars:

1) Never challenge a bartender on a federation starship to a game of 'I bet you don't know how to make a leg spreader surprise. ' He'll have you unconscious before you can say' lyz bett uyz dontt gnaw hooooow toooooo mak er . . . 'you have been warned.

2) Try not to get involved in fights. I did have some other advice on bars for you, but to tell you the truth, I can't be bothered. Just keep your nose clean, throat lubricated and act real cool. But I can be bothered to tell

6144	3825	0711	6498	3223
8545	6741	2455	3472	5951
2645	1867	3977	6391	6459
8346	0029	6770	0411	7760
1532	4173	4204	4995	2341



you some more useful information about the kind of people, places and things you might expect to meet. If you're going to help me, you need some inside information. I make no apologies if the following looks like a random collection of ideas knocked together in under 60 seconds - because that's exactly what it is.

Okay, this is what I know:

- 1) Never wear a watch in bed.
- 2) Always wash behind your ears, unless you don't want to.
- 3) If a policeman isn't corrupt, he's stupid. If he isn't stupid, he isn't a policeman.

I never said I knew much did I? Now if you'd have asked about babes or embezzlement . . . But I think that's more less than everything. If I remember anything else I won't reveal it without pre-payment. That's the way the world is.

Crime Doesn't Pay

I said I would tell you about my experience with the IRDS today, and I do not lie. (Except when I don't want to hurt people's feelings, of course. And when it will help my business run more smoothly. And whenever else I feel like it. Come to think of it, I lie most of the time - but in this case I was telling the truth). The IRDS. Despite being the meanest,

5770	1254	5359	3737	2335
9883	4168	2182	9215	2520
8469	3783	7830	9196	8169
7619	2824	4827	5952	2984
1140	3863	0474	8047	4783



lowest, most despicable group of Amino Acids that dared coagulate in human form, they deserve their own sub-heading:

The Interstellar Revenue Decimation Service (IRDS)

Let me tell you about the IRDS. The IRDS is the most powerful and most corrupt federation department there is. They will tax anything that moves, and if it doesn't move they'll slap an immobility tax on it. There is nothing you can do to prevent them discovering how much you've earned, when you earned it, and why you haven't paid anything for six years. Even criminals can't escape. The IRDS has the fastest space ships in the galaxy, a battle fleet second-to-none, and the leanest, meanest group of combat auditors you would never wish to meet. They even tax each other in their spare time. I'll say it again: IRDS. Remember those letters, and remember the threat they pose to the future of free enterprise. IRDS, IRDS, IRDS . . .

Why They Are Important In This Story

Just in case anyone from the IRDS gets hold of this after I reach Tayte, I'll change the names to protect the guilty. In fact, it might be better if I don't mention any names at all. My memory isn't at the best of all times - or is it? I don't remember. I'll begin with the ship. True, it wasn't my ship. I don't know whose ship it was, or why I stole it. Sometimes these things happen and you have no control over the events. Well, okay - that's a lie. I stole it because I needed a ride and fast. Let me explain: the life of a master thief is a life spent on the run. Most of the

1341	0131	2053	0361	6525
6026	9857	5450	1235	7492
5194	1208	5299	3283	6823
0427	7734	9848	3484	0297
8811	5852	9216	7649	5625

times you know whom you're running from, and what will happen to your guts if they catch you. But sometimes you just don't know. Maybe it's that pet dealer on Sirius v, the one who discovered too late that the hamsters you sold him were, in fact, a box of wigs for people with small heads. Maybe it's the florist who ordered a shipment of roses and ended up with a single plastic carton of crushed petunias. It doesn't matter your supplier let you down, or that he was lucky to get anything at all. People remember, and they get angry. Worst of all, maybe it's someone you've forgotten, or even someone you've never met. Sometimes I wake up sweating, dreaming that someone I don't know will try to kill me for something I didn't do in a place I've never visited. Getting back to the subject of the IRDS in a roundabout fashion. Forgive me. I seem to have wandered from the main thread of my story. Today's incident with the IRDS began with the ship. I stole the ship because I needed to escape. I needed to escape because of an unfortunate encounter with a rather irate art dealer on a nearby planet (I won't name names - but it's called bagapoo). Normally I don't move much faster than walking pace, but the fact that this particular dealer's face betrayed a fair pace. It all started when I tried to sell him a painting. No harm in that, you might think. In fact, you would be totally wrong - so leave the thinking to me from here now on.

The Painting

The trouble with art galleries and museums these days is that they are far too well protected. If governments displayed great works of art in pig sheds no one would ever bother to steal them because it would be

7805	4557	7936	5800	7671
4046	0403	7074	5345	7029
4499	6553	2699	7430	8212
5560	9754	6069	4575	9227
1201	7102	0902	6847	6773



two easy. The fact that you have half a dozen booby traps to get past just acts as a challenge to thieves. It's a challenge we can't resist - and that's how I happened to be in possession of an original Athena poster from twentieth century earth. Stupidly I hung on it for so long that I forgot which gallery I stole it from - and you don't have to be a genius to guess which gallery I tried to sell it to. The owner's memory impressed me: Not only did he recognize the poster, he also remembered when it was stolen, the police interview which followed, the rise in his insurance premiums, and where he had left his machete. There are two things, which are very important to me. The first is my reputation, which could have been severely damaged by this incident. The second is my neck.

Fight Or Flight?

Of course, in this situation a thief has the option of standing his ground, brassing it out, bluffing, etc. This is not always the safest course of action - and given a choice between death by a thousand cuts and a sharp exit, I will always choose the latter. I dropped the poster and ran like hell.

The Art Dealer's Fatal Law

As luck would have it, the art dealer had a wooden leg. Trying to pursue me too quickly, he stumbled into a storm drain and fell on his machete. Had he not been wearing chain mail undergarments at the time, he would almost certainly have been killed. I have often wondered in the few hours since then why he was wearing chain mail so close to

8782	3456	9263	8561	5540
3532	0683	8371	9365	3161
5610	1473	3044	7767	1306
6864	4747	5031	2555	7443
1497	5120	3769	2439	7208



his skin. We all have our secrets. Anyway, after that I took my foot off the accelerator and slowed to walking pace. The nearest spaceport was only ten minutes away, and even if the dealer had managed to alert the local heavies to my presence, it was unlikely that they would have the sense to check out the major transport terminals. You'd be surprised at how dim officers of the law can be. Or perhaps you wouldn't.

Customs, And Other Annoying Features Of The Spaceport

I arrived at the spaceport realizing I needed transport and discovering that I had no legal means of securing it. This is not normally a problem but I had this sickening feeling all day that everything that could go wrong, would go wrong. However, I have wisely taught myself to ignore my own intuition. It's about as accurate as a watch with a broken mechanism, no hands and no numerals. And believe me, I know what I'm talking about - I've sold watches like that in the past. Customs officers are the first line of defense any spaceport has to offer. Most people look (and feel) guilty when passing through customs, and end up getting their most intimate articles of clothing searched for an ounce of gerbil nuts. My situation is exactly the opposite. My body realizes that it couldn't even begin to express the amount of guilt I should feel, so I breeze through customs looking like an angel who has never even heard the word 'crime', and probably wouldn't understand it even if he had. Still, it was annoying to pass through without being searched, particularly since (for once) I wasn't carrying any kind of contraband whatsoever. Except for the boiled sweets those away. I could even have eaten them, if necessary. Another thing that annoyed me about this

0477	0293	3528	8803	1866
8248	6333	8530	2863	3005
8443	2246	2616	4782	3942
2855	2656	3128	8929	0566
6072	0012	5666	8456	0973

particular spaceport was that I had the distinct feeling I was being followed. This was stronger than mere intuition, which I have described and mocked above. It was based on the fact that a tall stranger dressed totally in black spent half an hour three yards behind me. Most of his time was devoted to talking into an intercom device fixed on to his lapel - either that or he had a chronic twitch and an aesthetic need to express his opinions publicly. And another thing, when I went to look for a ship to borrow, there were far too many to choose from.

Choosing The Right Ship

Choice lies at the heart of capitalist societies - and it's something that usually appears to the thief, too. However, the thief in a hurry only requires a ship with its hatch unlocked and a warm engine. Confronted by a dozen such craft, I fell into a panic. I missed the unguarded intergalactic cruiser with warp drive and its own bar. I missed the small but super-powerful models with reclining seats, fury dice and food replicators. I even missed the craft with go-faster strips that was hidden behind a cargo freighter. All of these would have given the IRDS a run for their money. What I found was a small twin-engined bucket with no interior decoration, rust where there should have been metal, and a flashing red sign on its main computer console. The sign said 'Danger: Engine Overheat'. However, this craft had several advantages over the others: Its hatch was open, the engines were powered up, it was unguarded and - most important of all - it was the nearest one. Despite what I said before about thieves needing a challenge, it was impossible to resist.

2333	9615	4440	3101	4832
2257	1767	4192	1172	1546
5959	4504	5335	0568	7013
2487	0141	2306	8095	7292
6144	3296	5584	6632	9314

Some Points About Flying Your Own Spacecraft

The major appeal of simple spaceships is that they often have simple controls. This one was no exception. Since the engines were already grumbling, I ignored the button which said start and pressed the one which said move:. I typed in the speed and a random course heading when prompted by the onboard computer, and switched over to autopilot, piece of cake. However, if you're ever tempted to steal and pilot your own craft, let me give you some advice.

- 1) Find one, which has adequate weaponry.
- 2) Find one capable of warp speed.
- 3) Find one, which doesn't look as though a small child could attack it with impunity.
- 4) Find one, which won't be sucked in by the nearest tractor beam.

Why I'm offering this help will become clear in a moment. For now, all you need to know is that as the ship was shuddering and chugging its way out of the docking bay, I looked out of the window. Standing there watching me leave, his mouth active against his lapel, was the tall, dark stranger.

9535	1100	9460	4336	8554
8017	9253	1286	4119	7881
2974	4288	5935	0827	6978
3276	1908	7497	7829	7477
4657	9286	4050	4929	1354

Combat

As soon as I left Bagapoo, I became aware of pirates at coordinates 241/229/3. 5. (For those of you unfamiliar with this notation, they were behind, to the left, and below me.) I could tell they were pirates because they transmitted the following message on all sub-space frequencies: surrender your cargo or face having your eyeballs extracted and your brain liquidized. Thieves relieve you of goods without telling you. Pirates need to boast about it. Naturally, I ignored them and pressed the button, which said Max speed and headed for deep space. The craft maneuvered sluggishly away from its pursuers, a rust panel fell from the overhead console, and the engine overheat sign burnt itself out. A fight ensued. When I say 'fight', I mean that the pirates caught me quickly and started firing immediately, and since I had the kind of weapons onboard that kids get for Christmas, I had to do my best to avoid them. If there's one thing that I respect about pirates, it's this: they stick to their word. When they say they will annihilate you, they don't lie. After a couple of strafing runs they laid into my engines with some serious hardware. I twisted, turned, wriggled, looped and swerved as well as I could, but it was only delaying the inevitable. I made peace with the world, made a mental note to lead a life of virtue and chastity if ever I should escape from this mess, and gave up.

8389	9902	7836	0176	5028
9457	3252	5635	8222	5341
0835	6518	8001	6651	2273
8789	2604	4438	3390	7144
8202	8329	8200	4489	5782



Welcome To The IRDS Orbiting Space Station

The firing stopped. I realized I had been far too hasty about committing myself to a life of virtue and chastity, and quickly reversed the decision. I maneuvered the craft around looking for my pursuers - but the pirates had disappeared. I soon discovered why. In setting the ship a random course for deep space I had been both lucky and unlucky. I was lucky because where I ended up saved my life and scared off the pirates. I was unlucky because my craft's course attracted the attention of the internal revenue decimation service's giant spaceship, exactly the kind of roving vehicle that no one wants to rove in their direction. The phrase 'out of the frying pan into the fire' came to mind.

The IRDS Ship, Briefly Described.

For those of you who've never seen it, the IRDS ship is ugly, dark and very, very big.

The Tractor Beam

The other thing you should know about the IRDS ship is that it is equipped with the most powerful tractor beam in the entire universe. The IRDS like to use its tractor beam, often simply for a laugh. With their speed and firepower, all they need to do is ask people to pay them a visit. But they like the beam. Don't ask me why. I began to think it was a remarkable coincidence that I should bump into the IRDS ship right

6506	0790	8078	4474	1935
6139	9696	2186	4783	6379
8134	1916	6409	2230	3237
7802	1182	2612	8374	1986
5046	3902	0039	6498	7385

here and now. It's a big universe, after all. Then I remembered the tall, dark stranger, and I thought about him as my ship was being pulled inside. He was probably an agent working for the IRDS all along. I should have seen it coming, of course. I've been stupid before, but it's never been quite so costly in the past.

The Henchmen

I don't need much equipment in my business. I tend to travel light: Charm, ego and a good line in distracting guards are usually all it takes. All what I had in my pocket was my wallet (with 56 credits in it - what I wouldn't give for that money now!), someone else's wallet (I forgot whose - I've stolen so many recently), a few credit cards, a ticket to next week's ball game, and a boiled sweet covered in fluff. The boiled sweet was a fond reminder of the last job I undertook. After the IRDS had graciously guided my space bucket into docking bay IRDS/db/517-331/2, I decided there was nothing else to do but play it cool. After all, it could simply be a case of forgetting to offset capital allowance against gross profit. However, almost as soon as I had left the ship an oversized primate in a crimson body suit and a hoverbike helmet signaled that I should follow him. Things weren't looking good - not for me anyway. The primate wasn't one for small talk. I tried to chew the fat, but his vocabulary was limited to grunts and occasional imperatives. When he realized that I wasn't quite the walking carpet he had first mistaken me for, he asked his friend to join us. His friend was called Joe, but if he wasn't the first ape's twin brother then I've never trade gophers over a pint of Tayteale. I tried to engage them both in conversation.

1784	9406	9210	7371	0594
0058	0902	6336	1258	4888
0699	4182	7170	4562	5507
3419	8273	1921	2900	9146
8612	8485	9262	0782	7469

Nice decor I said. Shut up ape 1 replied ape 2 thought about his answer before adding, yeah shut up. I decided to concur but only after an oh yeah? Okay, they might not have heard me but I felt I had gained a moral victory. The apes moved rapidly into the drag the prisoner mode and pulled me virtually all the way to the central interrogation office on the IRDS ship.

The Interview

I'd never been inside the central interrogation office aboard the IRDS ship before, but I'd heard plenty of stories from colleagues about what went on there. What I wasn't prepared for was just how dark it was. I knew there was a thrift drive on in all fed departments, but this was going too far. After tripping down a couple of steps and slipping on a patch of something that felt, smelled and tasted like slime, I managed to struggle into an upright chair. Everything was quite apart from a fluttering sound, which could have been a moth, or someone doing a professional imitation of one. It was too early to tell. I tried to play cool and pretend I didn't know what was going on. It doesn't do any good to reveal too much when you're dealing with trained auditors. They stop at nothing. One minute you can be telling them about how much you like prune flakes on your breakfast cereal, the next they're torturing you for non-declaration of accrued (untaxed) interest on your sister's friends husband died fifteen years ago, or that you don't even have a sister: you have to pay. Remember those words: you have to pay. These twelve letters are the essence of the IRDS. Anyway, my ignorance didn't fool

1682	8378	9352	4112	4719
7380	3573	6263	9037	3026
1663	4557	0926	2313	1814
6505	2832	9334	4907	9494
9281	1211	7287	0667	7721

them. The lights came on and revealed a couple of smooth operators in sharp business suits (the mouth was real, I noticed.) They proceed to accuse me of various felonies and misdemeanors and claimed that I owed them tax on everything I had ever earned. It was all true, of course - but a little respect from the bureaucrats, even as an apply the branding irons, would not go amiss. Politeness costs nothing, after all. I tried to bluff my way through, spouting some excuse about making a living, but it was already too late. The auditors summoned Klepto.

Klepto The Robot

I can't remember what Klepto stands for. The level of imagination in the IRDS just about matches that of a plastic spoon, so it probably doesn't stand for anything. Accountants have never been too hot on acronyms, but give them a calculation involving depreciation of fixed assets and they'll be your friends for life. Klepto was designed by the federation robotics and kitchen technology research unit, and is as proficient a picker of pockets would be pleased to see. With only six metal arms, an impressive whizzing motion and an auto-adjusting hover unit; our friend can remove your entire inventory in a matter of seconds. Which is exactly what happened to me. Almost at the end of the interview, after poring over the contents of my clothing (see the list above), the two auditors engaged in a round of sarcasm to butter me up. I've been better buttered in the past however, and I wasn't about to be beaten with a bit of butter at this time. In the end it made no difference. I expected a fine, and a fine is exactly what I got. It was the size of the sum I owed that

6975	0568	9989	2082	6690
3272	3263	1917	7974	5061
6619	5661	7949	6203	4495
8604	6979	1435	2436	7288
0674	1372	0370	4844	3852

surprised me, though. The tax demand is for more credits than I've ever dreamed of, let alone earned - and all payable within 28 days.

My IRDS Tax Bill

Just so that you have some idea about what we're dealing with here, I've included (among these documents) my IRDS tax bill. Take a look at it. If you haven't had one of these yet, you'll get one soon enough. And before you start to look for the actual amount I owe, forget it. This is privileged information. Besides, I got so depressed I just had to delete it.

Assessment Number:

IRDS 249 Qv/Pp2
H6574838492391 /2 /6

Name:

Jack T. Ladd

Occupation:

Master thief

Age:

Unknown

This statement details relative adjustments made with regard to, and in respect of, the financial accruals resulting from mercantile trading,

8490	0309	1778	4363	0072
9822	9506	8624	9703	3723
4629	7351	5019	3529	2496
1608	6258	2851	4297	8438
0441	5936	8230	9438	5350

felony and other occupations, with due regard to all income earned or unearned, stolen, borrowed or begged for, licensed or unlicensed, whatsoever that income may be, and without prejudicing any further enquiries pursued by the interstellar revenue decimation service and its authorized agents (see form IRDS 817/D995/Pp171936290/Issue 2).

Personal Taxation Allowance: None.

Stellar Insurance Contributions: 85% of total earned profitable income above and additional to ordinary taxation measures as detailed in IRDS 295/f661/wx89456734.

Total Sum Owed: Censored! Date Due: no later than 28 days following the receipt of this statement. No excuses will be permitted. The IRDS chief auditor's decision is final and binding.

Penalties For Non-Compliance: Torture, followed by sale of internal organs, and death. All goods belonging to family and friends become the property of the IRDS for 15 generations following the due date of payment. Well I suppose that's fair enough, isn't it? Never let it be said that they don't give you a fair chance.

The End Of The Interview

Naturally, the auditors kept a copy of the bill for themselves, another six copies for their files, six hundred copies for all the IRDS sub-branches scattered around the galaxy, and eighteen copies for their friends and family. It's a well know fact that the chief form of entertainment for auditors is to spend long evenings comparing particularly stringent tax demands. I couldn't think straight after reading how much I owed. The

8451	1610	2659	7821	5534
1609	3536	4531	4114	8969
9889	5224	0844	8670	1893
3834	4393	3095	2597	9465
8864	3922	2438	1669	3476

moth carried on buzzing around the light, and I'm pretty sure one of the officers performed a passable imitation of a cartoon elephant in a tutu, but I could have imagined it. Stranger things have happened: I once bought a round of drinks. Twenty-eight days! How am I going to raise all that money in the next four weeks?

What I Did Next

I left the interview room in a state of profound shock. This is much worse than ordinary shock, as sufferers of the profound variety will testify, and it often produces symptoms such as nausea, pale complexion, immobility, and an unwillingness to look in the mirror. Fortunately it didn't last long, and I returned to my ship wondering what I should do next. My instinct told me to head for the nearest bar, but as you probably know many space installations have been alcohol free for an obscene number of years now. I can't remember why it happened, or when, or who ordered it, and since it doesn't make much difference to the rest of this story I won't bother to look it up in the ship's logs. The nearest planet to the IRDS ship is TAYTE, a miserable little ball of rock on the outer edge of the Indaway system. It's just the kind of place where I can have a nice, quiet drink and drown my sorrows for a while, so that's where I'm heading right now. Maybe I'll find something there that will help pay off the bill (and maybe I'll find a flying horse that lays golden eggs).

5806	3368	2661	4117	8010
3549	2318	5621	1862	2520
4215	5823	1110	4817	4026
5570	3320	2746	3616	4505
4652	9109	4937	8882	9942

Some Reflections On The Meaning Of Life . . .

It's only a couple of minutes before I'll be guiding this ship in to land at Tayte spaceport, so I'll finish this off quickly with a few salient points:

- 1) If you were in my position, what would you do? Discuss. On second thoughts, forget the discussion and just give me some help.
- 2) Life, the universe and everything: what's it all about, and how much will it cost?
- 3) If life is cheap and crime doesn't pay, why is beer so expensive?

That was hastily written just before docking. You're probably wondering by now why I've written all this. It's a good question, and I'm not sure I should answer it without receiving a large quantity of credits upfront. Jackets don't buy themselves, you know. However, since this message is a cry for help, I can hardly expect you to pay for the privilege. The situation, put simply, is this: if you are reading this message you'll have noticed already that the ship was left unlocked, the engine is still running and there is a bag of boiled sweets in the glove compartment. Take the ship - it's yours. I'm sorry that the bag of sweets is only half-full, but writing is demanding work. If you haven't read this far you're probably a thief, but if you have made it to the end, you're probably the kind of person who cares enough to assist an honest tradesman down on his luck. If so, help me now. I'll be waiting in the

3449	2935	4722	8375	0354
7812	9173	7117	6712	6665
0220	5302	2843	0730	0736
3875	9082	6368	4474	8660
7967	3979	3888	7375	9596

spaceport customs hall, open to suggestions. I can turn my hand to all sorts of business. Anything you need, I can get it.

Don't forget: I only have 28 days to pay off the dept!

Introduction

If you haven't read the background to the game yet . . . Why not? Its Jack T. Ladd's life story, and it took him a lot of time and heartache to write. These things aren't easy, you know. One minute you're earning more money than you can possibly spend in a thousand years, the next you owe most of it in taxes to the IRDS. And don't think you can run away from it all - the combat auditors will find you! However, if you really want to get straight into the game and don't want to bother with the autobiography (despite the blood, sweat and tears our hero expanded in writing it), read on from here. Your task is to help Jack earn as much dosh as possible within 28 days to pay off his tax bill. As you guide him through his adventures you will visit several different planets, meet many important characters (and plenty of silly, trivial ones, too.), solve puzzles, and use dozens of different objects. The information below will tell you how to play the game - but exactly how you raise the cash is for you to discover. And remember: only the tough survive, and only the inquisitive succeed.

7426	5885	6862	6462	8996
5233	3711	3550	7488	1928
4083	1420	8447	2837	7203
6467	3568	0220	1143	0607
0547	9495	3058	6507	9619

The Animation Sequence

An introductory animation sequence will show you a few of the events, which occurred, just before the start of your involvement in the action. After you've watched it, you can press esc to skip it in the future, or simply restore a saved game from the opening menu.

NB: the control method selected for the descriptions below is the mouse for corresponding keyboard functions, see the summary of controls at the end of this section.

A. Playing Area

1. Jack T. Ladd
2. Cursor
3. Character
4. Object
5. Exit

B. Control panel

6. Map
7. Control icons
8. Inventory

This is where the action takes place. There are scores of locations in this game, and you should find the following elements in all of them.

7526	3708	5374	9214	7108
0547	5022	3737	1179	1032
8586	6780	6340	4865	6699
0516	9647	2264	8967	6633
2976	1618	6794	6182	8996

However, there will be several occasions during the game when events overtake you. All you can do is sit back and watch - but make a note of what happens!

NB: On this screen, clicking on the left mouse button activates the currently selected icon, clicking on the right scrolls through all the available icons.

Jack T. Ladd

This man is in trouble, because he owes money and doesn't know how to pay it back. Luckily, however, no one thinks he's worth killing - not even the Henchmen who keep an eye on him.

Cursor

This is used both in the playing area and the control panel. Clicking on the right mouse button scrolls through the available icons, clicking on the left mouse button activates the chosen icon.

Character

There are plenty of other characters in the game, many of them willing to offer information if you ask the right questions. Don't be shy - talk to them all. You never know when they'll reveal that vital clue you've been waiting for . . .

7720	1904	7589	2915	4401
4211	7588	9947	0604	7450
7292	3286	8174	8351	5761
0344	9836	3496	4595	6261
0825	6324	0380	8072	9874

Object

There are dozens of objects in the game, not all of them immediately useful. Watch out for the doomsday weapon! To pick up an item, left click on it in take mode (the closed hand icon). The cursor will transform into the object you have picked up. You can now use this on another character/object, or place it in your inventory.

Exit

Once you have used them, available exits are shown on the map in the control panel. If you don't want to use the move icon then left click on the exit.

Map

This shows an overhead view of your current location. Select an exit on the playing screen and a corresponding arrow appears on the map. When you revisit the location, you can select that exit again simply clicking on the arrow on the map - as long as you are using the move icon. This feature is most useful when you want to travel through locations without stopping, or when you can't immediately see the exit you want in the playing area.

There are three ways to select the various control icons:

With the mouse in the playing area (left click activates the icon, right click scrolls through the available list),

3289	1243	0847	4021	3717
6940	2918	6232	3786	9435
0617	4770	8484	6686	2237
7356	7005	6257	2649	0261
8764	4166	3345	1780	5407

With the mouse in the control panel (left click on the box of control icons to make your choice), or

With the keyboard (See summary of controls, below).

Take

In this mode, clicking on an object in the playing area or in your inventory causes it to be picked up, and your cursor is replaced by a larger version of the object. This item can then be dropped by clicking on the playing area or your inventory. If one object is dropped onto another, the two may be connected. An object can be given to a character by dropping it onto that character.

Use

Clicking with this icon on a part of the scenery or an object allows you to use it. If the item can be used immediately, the effect occurs immediately without further action from you; if the object is usable on another item, the cursor changes to an appropriate using icon. By dragging this icon onto another object, you can make the two interact.

Move

When in move mode, if you click the pointer on a part of the scenery you will walk over to it, and if it is an exit you will walk through it.

2030	5751	2809	4969	4937
0990	9800	1676	8618	5812
0432	7136	0299	0635	6333
6419	9930	4984	7422	9762
1208	8966	2381	3366	8905

Remember that you can also use this mode to click on the arrows on the map, allowing you to move through locations quickly.

Look

This is more specific than scan mode (below), and provides textual information on the objects you examine.

Scan

This allows you to look around the playing area very quickly. Brief information about objects, people and scenery is revealed in a special scan box, which replaces the map in the control panel. NB: When your cursor moves over a recognizable item, the relevant icons you can use on it are animated in the control icons box.

Talk

Dialogue between Jack and other characters in the game is achieved by clicking on the talk icon and using this on the character you want to talk to. This accesses the dialogue screen. Once a character has spoken to you, you are given a choice of replies - and you should left-click on the response you think most appropriate. If the character has a lot to say, you can speed through his/her/its response by clicking on the right mouse button. You will gain most of your information this way - so be patient! In special instances a character may initiate the conversation by walking up to you and talking. In this case you may be able to choose

1982	1370	2769	5044	5913
3735	7613	7556	2937	1453
5765	7143	6880	6690	5882
4846	3084	7843	7325	0838
1402	9247	1698	4699	1699

whether you would like to talk to them or not (allowing you to do something else first), or you may simply be forced to talk to them (taking you automatically to the dialogue screen). Unfortunately, sometimes what you think is not always what you end up saying . . .

Status

You only can only this by left-clicking on the icon in the box in the control panel, or by pressing the space bar. It takes you to the status screen, detailed below.

Inventory

All the objects you have collected are displayed here. To pick one up, switch to take mode and left-click on the chosen item. Don't give your precious objects away freely!

The Status Screen

NB: As with the main game screen, left clicking makes selections, right clicking scrolls through the available icons.

Progress Report

This reveals how much of the game you have completed in percentage terms, along with your rating. You begin as a novice, but you shouldn't stay that way for long!

1307	5254	3792	7634	0929
5630	2358	8306	3468	4747
3407	5045	4519	4023	3702
1888	3819	3998	3948	2396
4652	9660	0249	1493	8217

Options

You can turn the music and sound effects on or off.

Jack T. Ladd

Jack can wear a variety of clothes, store objects in his pockets or use objects on himself.

Load

You have up to 99 loading slots

Save

You have up to 99 saved game slots.

Help

This useful feature gives a summary of the controls, brief hints on how to play the game, and information about the status panel, icons and the help system itself.

Quit

You will be asked if you want to continue, restart or exit dos.

4228	0357	0623	3323	3442
3453	3397	8879	5033	1833
3968	9760	0703	7939	2299
2970	3971	9239	3228	2001
1759	1789	5308	8940	3743

Icon Controls

Left-click on status to return to the main game screen.

Inventory

Selecting the take icon and left-clicking on objects in your inventory allows you to manipulate them. A combination of mouse and keyboard words best: the mouse is quicker for rolling the cursor around the screen, and the keyboard short-cuts listed later make icon selection easier.

Mouse

Left button selects objects (in take or use mode), activates icons, and is used to interact with the background scenery. It is also used to specify locations on the map (in move mode) and for making selections on the status screen.

Right button cycles through the available icons. Speeds through conversations on the talk screen. As a short cut, use the Tab key.

Keyboard

Cursor Keys Move the cursor around the screen

Return Select an object/character or piece of scenery

4209	6270	8342	5580	2196
5492	8100	3820	3902	5613
5809	5532	0172	4522	9410
7564	4785	5551	2992	9238
3946	3207	2905	0140	4975

T	Talk mode
L	Look mode
H	Hand mode (take)
S	Scan mode
M	Move mode
U	Use mode
Space	Go to status screen
Alt-V	Version number
F1	Pause/Un-Pause game
Alt-X, Ctrl-Q	Quit game
Ctrl-J	Joystick mode
Ctrl-M	Mouse mode
Alt-J	Recalibrate joystick

6879	0712	8186	9471	5787
9837	6406	1171	2255	6667
6086	8160	3681	3078	9613
1094	6806	8160	5162	0094
5176	2160	3654	4413	3676

F8, Ctrl-C, Alt Quit innocent

Or Alt-X Jump past cut

ESC Scenes

Joystick

A single analog joystick may be used to control Jack. Plug the joystick into the port on your soundcard and press ALT-J to recalibrate the joystick.

7756	2922	2551	8145	1995
4783	3115	7836	0091	6485
4214	5789	5961	1194	9610
1625	5898	8333	2638	7583
8580	4481	2929	2059	5920

Help! I'm Stuck

This is a guide to the first few steps of your quest. It will give you an idea about how the game works without revealing too much about the puzzles you'll face. You should only read it if you can't figure out how to do anything!

- 1) After the introduction sequence you enter the spaceport customs area. Here you can talk to the official by clicking on the right mouse button until the cursor changes to a mouth, then left clicking on the customs official himself. If you're honest about your trouble with the IRDS, he'll tell you where you can find a pawnbroker to help you raise some cash.
- 2) Use the control icons to interact with your surroundings. Use the keyboard or right mouse button to change the icons and the left mouse button to click on areas of the background. You should be able to pick up your passport with the take icon (the closed hand).
- 3) Switch to move mode (the walking man holding the arrow) then click on the exit on the right of the screen. This will take you outside the spaceport where you can hail a taxi by using the talk (mouth) icon to click on one of the cars as it speeds by. When the car stops, click on the taxi driver himself with the talk icon and you'll strike up a conversation. This reveals some useful information, but won't help you get where you want to go.
- 4) Make sure you've done all you can in the spaceport before leaving. Try all the icons on every part of the screen and see what you can find - you might not get another chance to do anything useful. If you want to go down to the subway, you should discover some useful information about how to reach the trains (and a clue to the objects you'll need to collect).
- 5) Outside the spaceport, select move and click on the left-hand exit. This will create an arrow on the map on the left of the control panel, and

Jack will walk down the ally to the main street. Despite what the customs official told you, don't go into the pawnbroker's straight away - I have a brief look at the other locations first, and then enter the bar. Sit on a bar stool (left click on one of the stools with the use icon) and talk to everyone! You'll find some useful information, which should get you started on your quest, and you may suffer a rather nasty (but useful) experience . . .

NB: Only read the following hints if you want help with some of the more difficult problems in the early part of the game. These clues should mean little to you unless you've tried to solve certain puzzles. .

- Talk to people, but try to charm them first. If charm doesn't work you can be as sarcastic as you like. Try to work out what the other characters in the game are like from their appearance and behavior, and treat them accordingly.
- Return objects to their rightful owners, unless you can find a better use for them. Maps, keys, weapons and money are very handy possessions indeed.
- Some objects have several uses, whether alone or combined.
- Satisfying the pawnbroker is difficult - but it's by no means the end of all your adventures.
- Something soft, something hard and something airy will help you in the art gallery.
- There's a sticky solution to your problems in the bank.
- Try to find an alternative way to enter the zoo. When you do, how you smell might mean the difference between life and death.