

Hephaestus Walk-Through

This document contains four user scenarios written by Philip Tan. Each scenario is designed to highlight a different element of the game experience. The first three scenarios show how the user (Bob) is brought into the game. The last scenario details a the gameplay for a more experienced user, Anna.

New user, 1 minute scenario

After installing the game and watching the introductory animation, the user, Bob, sees a slowly rotating, spaceship view of Hephaestus and its solar system. Text data blurbs periodically appear over the planet, giving information about the planet and the spaceship, reinforcing the feeling that Bob is looking at Hephaestus through a spaceship viewscreen.

Overlaid above this is a menu allowing him to 'Load design and land robot', 'Design and land new robot', 'Deploy existing robot', 'Scrap existing robot', 'Change game options' and 'Quit'. Because this is Bob's first time playing Hephaestus, the game dims the 'Deploy' and 'Scrap' options. He clicks 'Load design and land robot' and the viewscreen changes into a file-open window, with a prominent option on top marked 'Choose a preset robot'. Because Bob has never designed a robot before, the file-open window is largely blank, and he decides to click 'Choose a preset robot' instead.

The game camera 'looks up' then from the ship's viewscreen to reveal a character dressed in a quasi-futuristic, yet businesslike outfit, known as The Aide. He explains that Hephaestus is largely volcanic but possesses a wide range of different terrain, and the robots sent to the surface need to perform a variety of different tasks that will involve customization. He also states that resources are limited aboard the ship and the robot may need to mine for minerals or trade services in order to afford customization. At this

moment, a value of currency appears on the screen, indicating the amount of money currently available to the player. The amount is approximately enough to build and launch three small robots or one large and one small robot, which the Aide mentions.

The camera follows the Aide as he walks over to a high-tech workbench, on which sits four shiny robots. The Aide explains how these prototype robots are based on designs from Earth, and are thus not as sophisticated as robots designed from scratch using technology developed during the long trip from Earth to Rigel Kentaurus. Still, these designs are good starting points and Bob can later customize them using neutral facilities already on the surface of Hephaestus.

The Aide then describes each robot in detail. The Jackrabbit is a cheap, fast scout robot that will not be useful for much other than exploration, given its small chassis. The Mule, on the other hand, is a larger robot that has reasonably good stability and trades speed for capacity. The Beaver is an amphibious robot with inflatable wheels and multiple solar panels for extended range. The Mastodon is burly and expensive but can generate enough torque to hold heavy cargo and to dig its tracks up steep inclines. All the robots have rudimentary mining equipment and a simple scoop to pick up loose material on the ground.

Bob decides that he would like to save money and have a look around the planet first, so he clicks on the Jackrabbit. The Aide picks up the Jackrabbit robot and loads it into a landing capsule specifically designed for entry into the atmosphere of Hephaestus, all the while humming to himself and mentioning some disturbingly affectionate affirmations to the Jackrabbit.

The game camera returns to the viewscreen, which now prompts Bob to register his game as a first-time player. Bob enters his registration information, a user name and a password, which will allow the multi-player server to keep track of his progress from this point onwards. Once he does this, the game connects to the game server and confirms that he has not picked an already-registered username.

Once confirmed, the viewscreen shows a map of Hephaestus. The Aide explains, off-camera, that the image combines both seismic and electromagnetic telemetry from the past 24 hours, revealing actively volcanic areas and zones of high robot concentration on the light side of Hephaestus. The Aide recommends landing near a neutral robot town if Bob is unsure about what to do first. Bob decides to click and confirm a landing zone near a town in the Southern Hemisphere of Hephaestus.

The camera shifts to an external view of the ship, revealing Bob's username, 'Cheesemaster', painted on the outside of the ship. The capsule rockets out of the ship, then extinguishes its slow-burn engine and falls towards the blue planet, gathering speed and glowing red upon contact with the atmosphere. An energetic, orchestral piece of music accompanies a long shot of the capsule streaking through the sky of Hephaestus like a shooting star while the game establishes real-time connections with the game server. Once the connection is complete, the camera shifts to a high-angle shot of the capsule deploying its parachutes, slowing its descent, and finally landing on the planet with a soft bounce. After an awkward pause in the music, the capsule falls apart like a Keystone Cop car, revealing the Jackrabbit inside. The camera rotates behind the Jackrabbit, locking in position in classic third-person view.

Bob has landed on a grassy field on Hephaestus with the town in the distance. He is now ready to begin his explorations.

New user, 5 minute scenario

The screen fills with relevant status information, along with a prompt in the middle that informs that Bob can press 'escape' to 'Abort the diagnostic test', also known as the in-game tutorial. Bob, however, does not know how to play the game, so he elects to allow the tutorial to run. The Aide's voice comes on again, first mentioning that although Bob is still getting used to his controls, other robots in the vicinity may attempt to interfere with his practice. During the tutorial, the Jackrabbit may automatically use jump jets, automatically reclaimed from the capsule, which will allow it to escape from hostile robots.

In addition, an atmospheric electrical storm has knocked out the communication system of the robot for a short while, so it will not be possible to communicate with other robots for a while. This makes it impossible to distinguish friend from foe, thus, the jets will activate when any robot comes into contact with the Jackrabbit.

The Aide asks Bob to test the Jump Jets by hitting 'J', blasting the Jackrabbit several feet into the air and in a random lateral direction, faster than most robots can move on the ground. Once Bob has done this, the Aide begins explaining to Bob how to use the keyboard and mouse to move the Jackrabbit around and change the game camera from over-the-shoulder, spaceship-downwards-zoom and first person view. The Aide also explains that the basic mining and scoop implements require Bob to maneuver the Jackrabbit over the mineral or material in question and press specific keys, hinting at better mining and reclamation options available within the town. The Aide also draws

Bob's attention towards various indicators on the screen that list communication range, battery power, speed, and so on.

At this moment, another player spots Bob and realizes from the capsule wreckage that Bob is a new player. Sensing the opportunity for an easy takedown, the other robot charges at Bob. The moment the two robots touch, however, the Jackrabbit rockets into the air with its automatic jump jets. The Aide mentions that the jets seem to be experiencing some unforeseen problems. Still, the Jackrabbit lands a safe distance away from the hostile player and not any further from the town. The hostile player realizes that chasing down a new player with automatic jump jets is more trouble than it is worth and leaves the vicinity.

The tutorial resumes as the Aide describes the rest of the on-screen indicators and explains where further instructions can be found in the town, as a small inset window shows surveillance images of distinctive locations inside every town. The Aide then declares that the communications system is beginning its reboot cycle, and quickly runs through Bob's controls for communication. Once Bob can talk to other players, the tutorial ends and Bob now has the option to head for the town or some other area of the planet.

Bob decides to try the jump jets again, which suddenly release a lot of smoke but fail to launch him in the air. The Aide's voice comes on again and says that he feared that the capsule engines would not last long. He recommends caution when approaching unknown robots, as they may be hostile to new robots on the planet, or their controlling engineers might just be ornery. Bob turns the Jackrabbit around, noticing that the jump jets are now a pile of black scrap lying on the ground where the Jackrabbit was a few

minutes ago. He moves the Jackrabbit over the scrap and deploys the scoop. An onscreen overlay confirms he has picked up metal scrap.

Bob then decides to return to the capsule, remembering that there would be more metal there. He notices that the Jackrabbit is not moving so quickly. As he approaches the capsule, he realizes that another group of robots reached the capsule first, tearing its remnants apart with blowtorches and articulated arms. Noticing that the robots are all painted similarly and emblazoned with the words 'Destructo-maniacs', Bob wisely turns around and heads towards the town instead.

Bob begins to pick up sporadic text communications from the robots in and around the town as he approaches it, which mostly appear to be requests for information and trade. Bob realizes that the communications are on the 'broadcast frequency', previously mentioned by the Aide. He surmises that the respondents must be sending their replies directly to the requesting robots via coded channels, and considers the possibility of trying to find some sort of eavesdropping upgrade for his robot. However, he first finds the trading post, which is literally a tall post in the middle of the town, surrounded by articulated arms that load and unload cargo from an endless stream of in-game robots.

Going into a vacant space near the trading post, the trading post immediately broadcasts the necessary commands for trading to Bob's communications system, which Bob receives as a series of short text messages. Bob brings up an inset inventory of the Jackrabbit's storage compartment, selecting the scrap metal and clicking the 'Sell' button. An arm from the trading post extends towards the Jackrabbit and removes the scrap metal, crediting a small amount of cash to Bob's currency meter.

Bob leaves the trading post and heads for the upgrade shop, which resembles a garage. Like the trading post, Bob receives instructions as he pulls up to a vacant lot in the shop. He receives a rude shock upon seeing an inset listing of prices for the upgrades. He notes the availability of communications upgrades that not only allow him to listen in to some coded transmissions but prevent eavesdropping on his own coded transmissions. Unfortunately for Bob, they are extremely expensive. Bob decides to stick to his original plan of having a look around the planet, and decides that solar panels might be a good idea. The panels are more expensive than the scrap he sold earlier but since Bob did not spend all his money building and launching the Jackrabbit, Bob can afford one panel easily.

The extra weight of the panel does slow Bob a little, although the Jackrabbit is faster than it was when carrying the scrap metal. Bob notices that if he drives the Jackrabbit at full speed, his battery gauge drops quickly. Staying still in the sun, however, slowly increases the gauge. Through a little experimentation in the fields around the town, Bob figures out how to maintain a speed that is reasonably quick and does not excessively drain his batteries.

New user, 15 minute scenario

Bob decides to head out towards several hills in the south, after remembering how some broadcasts from the town mentioned mining expeditions in the hills. He maintains a steady pace to the south across an undulating field, noticing that if the Jackrabbit goes too fast over the undulations, it becomes a lot harder to control. In particular, when moving at high speeds, the Jackrabbit tends to continue moving in the same direction instead of turning, whereas it is relatively quick and easy to turn when it does not have any forward momentum.

As the hills approach, Bob notices a river over to his right, and changes heading slightly to have a closer look at it. The water is slow moving and the river is wide. However, the color of the ground suggests that the river might have been wider in the recent past and Bob hopes the river will not obstruct his passage further upstream. As he turns towards the hills again, he realizes that the Jackrabbit's thin wheels are making deep tracks in the sandy soil on the riverbank and accelerating becomes difficult. Yet, after spinning the wheels for a couple of seconds, the Jackrabbit wheels eventually catch on the sand and Bob's robot takes off at high speed, wildly. With much difficulty, Bob gets back on the grass and makes a note not to get too close to flood plains without wider wheels.

The Jackrabbit eventually reaches the foot of the hills, which have a gentle incline and are not too tall. However, they have rocky outcrops dotting its largely grassy surface. The wheels of the Jackrabbit tend to accelerate better on the rock than the grass but this makes the Jackrabbit veer left or right occasionally as it tackles the incline. Bob notices his battery is running down although he is maintaining the optimum ground speed. He slows a little, and as he does so, notices a group of robots a little uphill. Some turn towards him, and hail greetings to Bob over the broadcast channel.

Bob responds with a hello, struggling up to their altitude. They have a brief text exchange, as Bob explains he is a new player. One of the players of the other robots introduces herself as Flood, a member of the Monsoon Collective. There are about six other members of Monsoon, although only there are only four of them logged in. The four robots in front of Bob spread out in several directions and lower mining drills from their machines. Bob asks Flood how they know where to mine. Flood responds that there are rumors that this hill holds a vein of iron ore. However, that group that made the discovery has not been active in protecting the find, possibly because no one has found

the richest vein in these hills yet. Monsoon is simply prospecting in a systematic manner. They make a little money from the variable amounts of iron in their samples, so it is not a total waste of time.

Flood suggests not that Bob stay away from the granite protrusions because they will ruin his rudimentary mining equipment in short order, and to concentrate on the soil in between. Bob remarks that they are considerably less hostile than the first robot he met, and Flood replies that Bob not much of a threat to them, being an unaffiliated, new player. Bob asks if Monsoon needs any new members but Flood responds with a negative, although he can help with today's mining. Flood gives Bob a coded broadcast public key that Bob can use at any time. Whenever Bob is within range of a transmission tower, he will be able to hail Flood no matter where she is on the planet, assuming she is logged in. Of course, she may not be within range of a tower herself, making it difficult for her to respond.

Bob decides to start drilling where the ground is undisturbed. As he mines, he notices that his cargo is slowly beginning to fill with iron ore, not soil. He remembers the Aide explaining that the mining equipment automatically separates the ore from soil, maximizing storage capacity. However, the drilling is slow and the soil is rather poor in iron, so Bob moves a hundred meters to the west and drills again. This time, his cargo hold fills faster, although Bob realizes that if he had a larger robot, this would still be a rather slow rate. He broadcasts a message to Flood, who is still within transmission range, that the soil to the west seems richer. Flood and another Monsoon robot head over and begin drilling, verifying Bob's discovery. It is not the mother lode but it will allow them to fill their cargo holds before sundown.

Bob realizes that his solar panel will be quite useless at sundown, which is fast approaching. With a cargo hold full of iron, Bob broadcasts his thanks to Flood and heads down the hill at high speed, although his battery continues to recharge through the solar panel. Bob realizes that it takes considerably more energy to climb a hill than to race down it, although a couple of rough bumps nearly tip his Jackrabbit over and suggest that he should slow down. He arrives at the foot of the hills, noticing that the optimum ground speed is lower than usual but the Jackrabbit is maneuvering much better, probably due to the increased weight of his robot. He turns towards the town and makes his journey back to the trading post.

Seasoned User, 15 minute Scenario

Ana has been playing Hephaestus as part of a classroom activity for a while, and thus, she is already familiar with the world and the workings of the game. She purchases a copy for home use and installs the game, skipping the introductory animation and clicking on 'Design and land new robot'.

The opening viewscreen prompts Ana to register her game, so she enters her registration information but types in her username 'Flood', and password from school. The game connects to the game server and loads up her current amount of game money and her affiliations with the Monsoon Collective, a group of Hephaestus players from her school. However, she does not have any robots designed and stored on her home computer. Thus, she begins creating a robot from scratch.

Once confirmed, the game camera 'looks up' from the ship's viewscreen to reveal the Aide walking over to the workbench, on which sits three different types of chassis. The Aide explains that while the ship does not have the range of customizations available on the planet, multiple functions on the same robot will require a larger chassis. However,

moving a large, heavy robot will quickly drain the batteries and limit the traversal range and speed of the robot. He goes on to describe specific advantages of each chassis but Ana decides that she wants to keep things flexible for her expeditionary robot, clicking on the medium chassis. The Aide stops talking whenever Ana clicks.

The chassis appears on the workbench, and the Aide mentions that until the robot is complete, Ana can always reverse a decision by clicking a 'dismantle last addition' button, which appears on the screen. He also points out the currency meter has decreased with Ana's selection. The camera pans over to three different kinds of engines, the larger of which provide increased torque for increased weight. The Aide explains the merits of the different engines, and Ana selects the largest for maximum power.

In a similar fashion, Ana picks a three-speed gearbox, allowing her to switch between 1:1, 1:4 and 1:10 gear ratios, providing fast movement or raw power when the occasion demands. All-terrain wheels add considerable weight to her robot but the engine has power to spare, and Ana predicts that she will need to traverse all sorts of locations, from marshes to mountains. She also picks a diamond-coated drill and two solar panels for long distance prospective mining. All this power comes at a real cost and loss of cargo space, which means that it will take a long time for her to recoup this money from mining alone.

However, she is fully aware that some of her Monsoon associates have hauling robots, the robot equivalent of dump trucks. Other friends have powerful and fast drilling assemblies, for quick extraction of minerals. Ana prefers exploring to mining, as evidenced by the features of her robot 'Strider'. Her colleagues are quite happy to leave most of the prospective mining to her, especially since hunting for new mineral veins is

generally a hit-or-miss affair. Ana intends to add a Thumper to her Strider as soon as she arrives on the surface, which will allow her detect underground rock patterns using low-frequency sound waves.

For now, however, the Strider is ready. Ana completes the design with a Kevlar shell, decorated with a graphic that she loads off her hard drive so that her teammates will recognize her on sight. For that same amount of money, Ana could have launched two medium-sized preset robots but she knows this design is far more useful for her purposes. She confirms and launches the Strider towards the surface, saving the design on her local drive and introducing the Strider to its first taste of Hephaestus atmosphere.