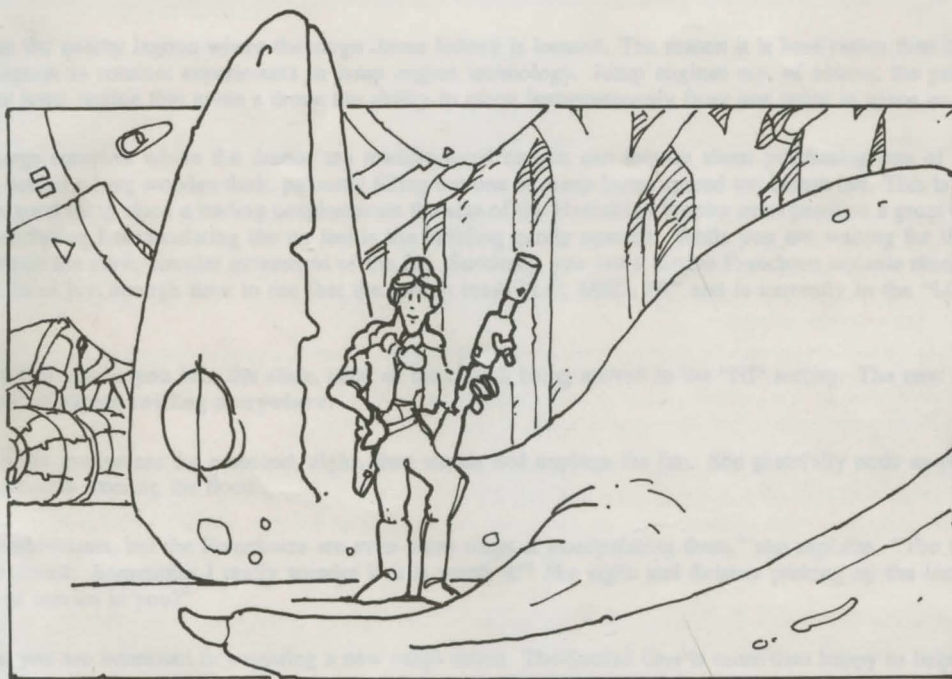


# STAR SAGA: TWO™

# BOOK A

TEXT 1-62



BOOK A

STAR  
SAGA: TWO™

1-800-333-3333



## [001]

Your interphase variometer fluctuates, indicating that Darkwhistle is one of the Dual Space anomalies you are looking for. To attempt to research dual space here, plot the following option:

⟨DPCSFZ⟩ (3 phases) Discuss Dual Space.

⊠ STOP ⊠

## [002]

You travel out to the nearby lagoon where the cargo drone factory is located. The reason it is here rather than in the city is because the Hadrakians use the lagoon to conduct experiments in jump engine technology. Jump engines are, of course, the propulsion system used in cargo drones. It is the jump engine that gives a drone the ability to move instantaneously from one point in space to another.

You enter the large complex where the drones are manufactured so you can inquire about purchasing one of the models. An elderly Settled One is sitting behind a long wooden desk, patiently filling out one of many forms spread out before her. This is one of the things female Hadrakians do best, a good thing since a trading conglomerate the size of the Hadrakian Empire must produce a great deal of paperwork. Over the desk is a large ventilating fan circulating the air inside the building gently upward. While you are waiting for the Hadrakian to look up from her work you watch the slow, circular movement of the fan. Suddenly, you see a furtive Francloon tentacle reaching up to the switch on the fan. Uh oh. You have just enough time to see that the switch reads "LO, MED, HI" and is currently in the "LO" position. But not for long.

"Look out," you yell just as you hear the click, click of the switch being moved to the "HI" setting. The next thing you know you are in the midst of a storm of papers swirling everywhere.

The Settled One sits motionless for a second, sighs, then stands and unplugs the fan. She gratefully nods as you go over and help her collect all of the papers now littering the floor.

"We tried using computers, but the Francloons are even more adept at manipulating them," she explains. "The things we put up with in order to live on their planet. Sometimes I really wonder if it is worth it!" She sighs and finishes picking up the last paper. "Thank you for your help. May I be of service to you?"

You explain that you are interested in acquiring a new cargo drone. The Settled One is more than happy to help you out. She has 5-bay drones for sale. The price of a drone is:

2 Fiber + 2 Warp Core + 1 Super Slip

Note that if you already have a drone and you purchase one now, the CGM will keep only the drone with the greater cargo capacity. For the complete rules on using drones, consult the *Host Guide and Player Reference Manual*.

Go now to the CGM. You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[003]

You approach the planet Mardahl with a little more excitement than on your previous visit. Now you are here on a mission to find the Brotherhood, complete your training and finally reach the end of the Path of Intuition!

You know from the Brothers on Dardahl that the Brethren here are well hidden, even more so than there. You remember that you are to look for the secret signal that will show you the presence of the Brotherhood.

You disembark from your ship and walk over to the main spaceport terminal. After checking the data screen, you see that you have the same options as before.

✧ STOP ✧

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[004]

Your blood freezes in your veins as you realize you have no way to escape from the Clathrans. Snatches of Vanessa Chang's log return to you; torture, murder, mind wiping. You hope you are up to dealing with what is now in store for you. What you really hope is that she was exaggerating.

The Clathrans who have actually captured you say very little about your immediate future. All you know is you are to be taken to a nearby base and interrogated. From the sinister laugh that follows this disclosure, you are sure that being questioned by the soldiers won't be a lot of fun. Nervous sweat breaks across your forehead. You quickly wipe it away before your captors can see it. You have long ago learned that bravery is the ability to act correctly in a dangerous situation rather than the mere appearance of being in control but, still, you don't want to let them see you react. It's a matter of pride.

From the Clathran's brig, you are transported to the base's holding area as soon as you arrive. You overhear that your ship has been brought here as well, taken in tow by the capture vessel. You store this information for future use. From the holding area you will be taken to a cell where you will await the arrival of the interrogation team. You can hardly wait.

The holding area is a large room with no furniture, no windows and only one door. As you are shoved inside, you see that you are the only occupant at this time. The door hisses shut behind you and you are alone. Working feverishly, you make a quick tour of the area, hoping to find something you can make use of to escape. After an hour, you are resigned to the fact that the place is escape-proof. Sitting on the floor, you decide the best you can hope for is simple torture from the Clathrans; the worst, mind wiping. Sighing, you let your head drop into your hands and your mind wander.

Suddenly your head snaps up. Maybe you can escape! By using the training and abilities you have acquired during your travels, you might be able to ambush the Clathran guards when they return for you. Even if the plan fails, you will be no worse off than you are now. Standing, you quickly cross the room and take up position beside the door. For humans, this would be the oldest trick in the book to escape from a cell. You will soon see if the Clathrans are familiar with it.

You stand quietly pressed up against the wall for what seems like an eternity before you hear the striding steps of an approaching guard. The door slides open with a hiss and the soldier steps into the room, eyes searching for the prisoner he is sure is in here. You are in luck as his first glance is away from where you are standing. Taking the split second you have gained for surprise, you pounce. Although Clathrans are not known for their ease of being defeated in combat, you do have your training, the element of surprise as well as the added strength that desperation gives you on your side. It proves to be just enough and the guard falls senseless at your feet. You snatch up his still holstered weapon.

Taking no time to gloat over your victory, you step out into the deserted hall. Another piece of luck! You retrace your steps to the landing area, taking care to check each corridor for occupants before you take it. Several times you are forced to duck into rooms or retrace your steps to avoid detection. Finally, though, you arrive at your destination.

Your ship is here just as you expected. You do not have time to wait for the several soldiers working in the immediate area to go elsewhere since you realize that, at any minute, the alarm over your escape will sound. The ship will be the first place they will look for you. Sliding along the wall, you make your way to the control room.

Here, you stun the soldier on duty and take a quick glance at the panel that controls the landing and taking off mechanisms for the base. A few well placed shots from your weapon disable all but the pad your ship is resting on and you leave the room feeling well satisfied.

Next, you head down to the landing pad, making use of every bit of available cover along the way. This soon becomes unnecessary as your ears are all but shattered by the sound of an alarm. You do not have to be a genius to know that your escape has been discovered. From across the landing field, you see a squad of soldiers emerge and run towards your vessel. Sneaking will do you little good now, so you run out, firing at the two soldiers standing between you and freedom. Both shots score and the two crumple to the ground.

Dashing up the ship's ramp you are greeted by, "Hi, Boss! Can we get out of here now?"

"Lift off!" you bellow as you dive into the control room and strap yourself into the command chair. You feel the welcome thrust of your burners flinging you up into the cold vastness of space. The sound of explosions all around you have you concerned. The base's weaponry! Your ship takes one hit, then another. You desperately maneuver to get enough breathing room to make the jump into hyperspace. If your ship is disabled now, the Clathrans will just recapture you.

It is music to your ears when you hear the sound of the tri-axis drive engine firing, and see the stars fading from the viewscreen.

"Warp drive engaged, Boss."

Good. The Clathrans will be on your tail, but you have enough of a head start that you may be able to lose them. After a mad chase, you finally break away from your pursuers. With nothing left on your viewscreen but the grey mist of hyperspace, you breathe a sigh of relief. You were able to escape the Clathrans this time. You better not press your luck, though. Next time you may not be so fortunate. The Clathrans *will* mind wipe you if they get the chance.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

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[005]

Ultermalen nods in acknowledgment, and says, "Well done. You are prepared for the next phase of your training." He then ushers you through a secret passageway behind the altar and removes his hood, revealing a well-groomed grey mustache and beard. With a slow, deep and monotonic voice, he begins his lecture.

The Lecture: Master of Uncertainty


"You have mastered the dialogues well, and are truly a Worshipful Brother and Master of Righteousness. Now, you shall enter a new order, the Path of Intuition. I remind you that you are still held by your obligations of secrecy, curiosity, teaching and pursuit. Indeed, you have honored them by your very presence at this temple."

"Now, you will begin your proper training of the Way of the Ancients. You will learn many skills, and much of the true nature of your being. Yet, with this mastery, you will also learn humility and gentleness. You have a new and important obligation, that of evangelism. You are to seek out humans worthy of our order, and send them to Margen for training. You are, however, reminded of your obligation of secrecy."

"In this Path of Intuition, as in the Path of Righteousness, there is a dialogue. This ancient Second Dialogue of Mastery is the means by which a Brother learns another's caste. As you advance, you will learn more of the dialogue, and through it, another section of the Ancient's Book of Knowledge."

"The Dialogue is a series of questions and answers. The examiner asks the questions one line at a time. If the proper answer is not given verbatim, then a Brother must stop the examination and go no further."

"The segment of the Master of Uncertainty, your new caste when leaving this temple, proceeds thus:"

Continued 

Examiner: How does one know the way to truth?

Answer: By knowing its very nature.

Examiner: The nature of truth is hidden from all.

Answer: Yet we know it within ourselves.

(Examiner now recognizes you as a Master of Uncertainty.)

Examiner: How then, does one find our nature within?

(You now recognize Examiner as a Master of Uncertainty.)

Answer: I do not know the Answer.

Examiner: You are truly a Master of Uncertainty.

Answer: And I know you to be the same.

"As you have learned in the past, whenever a question is asked of you during a formal examination to which you do not know the response, the precise reply, 'I do not know the answer,' is required. It is a betrayal of trust to engage in an examination in hopes of learning more of the dialogue."

"You are now a Master of Uncertainty. Pass through the door behind me, and your training shall begin."

You spend several days in elaborate physical exercises, discovering with surprise the speed and skill of the temple acolytes. Much time is also spent in a peculiar exercise, where one acolyte is told to insist on the truth of some clearly false statement. You are told to convince the acolyte of the truth. The acolyte continues the false assertion without fail. Each time, the exercise degenerates into a meaningless and frustrating shouting match.

At one point, while shouting rather loudly at your opponent, red-faced in frustration, you feel a sharp and stinging pain. Through your robes, Ultermalen has branded your back with a red-hot iron.

"This is the mark of the Geas of Uncertainty," he says, "If you will continue your training, you must perform an errand for the Brethren. If you succeed, you will be rewarded. However, the task is not without its dangers.

"You must fly to the planet Unaria, land, and find our operatives there, who have information vital to our pursuits. Realize that Unaria has an ongoing feud with its companion planet, Dosia. Those who attempt a Unarian landing may be attacked by the inhabitants of Dosia, sworn enemies of the Unarians."

"And after I survive the landing on Unaria?" you inquire.

Ultermalen smiles, "I like your spirit! After you survive, you must find Brothers Nikki and Renato, Masters of Revelation. We need the latest data from their experiments before we can continue our work here.

"Centuries ago, our colony was started here on Dahl by those who knew of the probable takeover of the galaxy by the Clathrans. We still do not know all the details of the Clathrans' work, nor do we know how to put a stop to it. With your help and some luck, we will learn more of their infernal plans.

"When you have this information, return to our temple. You will have proven your abilities and will advance to the next level of Intuition. You will also be amply rewarded for your efforts."

When you are on the planet Unaria, you may plot this new option:

(CUF7L8) (5 phases) Get Brotherhood data from Masters Nikki and Renato.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

## [006]

Apparently the title "Purplest One" is a holdover from older times when the social rank of Unarians was indicated by the intensity of their purple coloration. Currently, it's just a phrase that means "manager." You can tell because the Purplest One of the Spaceport is actually sort of an off-violet. This doesn't seem to concern him at all.

You arrange a meeting with the Purplest at the end of the next work period. You arrive somewhat early, and have a chance to see him bouncing around the heavily defended space docks, seeing to the refitting of a variety of ships. It seems that the latest expeditionary force against the terrible Dosians has returned slightly the worse for wear. The ships' commanders cheerfully curse at the technicians for being too slow to make repairs while the Purplest cheerfully curses at the ships' commanders for, in his words, "fighting with all the strategy of a two-drofted sprammel in third webbling season." A Unarian cursing sounds something like three cats fighting over a flock of loudmouthed canaries. You notice that the Purplest is one tentacle short of a complete set of four. An old war wound, perhaps?

Seeing that the arranged time has arrived, you approach the Purplest, though he seems likely to be busy for some time to come. "Excuse me," you begin.

"Ah, wait one and three more moments," he chirps in a gruff sort of way. "Let me look you up." He hops over to a control panel that is recessed into the floor, within easy reach of a Unarian's tentacles. He taps a few buttons, and the screen displays a few pages of the sort of written language you might expect cheerful lumpy aliens with four tentacles to have. These are followed by several graphic pictures, including one of several humans and one of an old-fashioned looking spaceship.

"Human?" he chirps, looking from you to the screen.

"Your records are very thorough," you reply as noncommittally as you can. At the same time you say under your breath through your com link to your ship's computer: "See if you can get access to this computer system. I'd like to get rid of those files on humans if it's possible. After I see them, of course."

The Purplest is pleased. He balances on two tentacles and extends the third, managing a convincing handshake. "You wished to know about other humans coming here? Fine, fine, no problem there. Let's see what we can see."

He turns back to the terminal and hits a few more keys. "Let's see. First human vessel on Unaria was — huh. This couldn't be right." He gives the terminal a slap with the side of a tentacle.

"What does it say?"

"The first one listed is only three hundred thirty years ago! Can you imagine? The rest of the file must be missing. Unless your species really is that new to space."

"Well, that's okay," you say, not wanting to give away any more information than necessary. "I don't want to know any farther back anyhow. What ship came here three hundred thirty years ago?"

"Its name was the *Archangel*," says the Purplest. "We list their destination as Outpost. They were very low on supplies when they landed here. They came through the Stargate, so they must have obtained a key from the Dosians. Before that, their last planetfall was Golgotha."

"Golgotha!" So it really does exist, and the Founders really did go there in the quest ship *Archangel*. "Do you know where Golgotha is?" you ask the Purplest.

"Far away, toward the Core. According to their pilot Eric, Golgotha was nearly on the far end of Arm, opposite from Outpost where they were heading."

"How do you know all this?"

"The Spaceport asked such questions of every ship back then. Only recently we stopped doing this, because in times of trouble the pilots become secretive and suspicious and don't want to answer questions. Now we just make them pay for a key and ask no questions. But once we defeat the meddlesome Dosians, the galaxy will be at peace again."

"I see," you say. "Do you know anything else about the *Archangel*?"

"Yes, I do," he says, even more pleased that you find his information of interest. "The ship stayed berthed here over three weeks while the crew worked on some kind of project, some sort of writing down of information. Some repairs were also performed on the ship. In addition, two of the crew stayed behind when the *Archangel* left."

"What?!"

"They didn't stay long; they had arranged to purchase a small ship in exchange for a Flame Jewel and some cargo items. They stated that they needed to travel to Margen to discuss matters with their Brothers, and would rejoin the rest of their crew on Outpost when Vanessa Chang arrived. They took off a day after the *Archangel*."

"Anything else?" you ask.

"Nothing that I'm allowed to tell you, because it's about the doings of other species. Really, you wouldn't believe the complicated little spats some of those aliens can get involved in; we'd end up as depressed as Dosians if we didn't have neutrality laws. Anyway, there was no further contact with any human ships until two hundred ninety years ago. A ship called *Fool's Errand*, a very small ship, stopped here before passing through the Stargate. As far as we know only the single pilot was aboard. The pilot's name was Chang. Stayed only a day, then took off through the gate, bound for the inner arm, she said. That's the last entry in your file — until now, of course. That's odd. Your ship looks pretty elegant, for a race that doesn't get into space much. You interested in selling?"

"No, thanks," you answer distractedly. You are busy doing some quick figuring in your head. Two hundred ninety years ago would put the visit of the *Fool's Errand* about the year 2531, well after the Boundary was set up and Outpost abandoned. Could Vanessa Chang still have been alive then? She would at least have been getting on in years. And why would she have reappeared in the Arm so many years after designing the Boundary?

But Vanessa Chang's later career is not your main concern. You now know that Golgotha is somewhere near the far end of the Arm. This means that you'll almost certainly have to get past the Clathrans in order to find it. You are impressed with how far the Founders went, but it does present certain practical problems. Reaching Golgotha won't be easy.

You thank the Purplest profusely, and he shakes tentacles with you and gets on with his work with just a little extra bounce in his step. Later, back on your ship, you ask your computer about those potentially dangerous data files about humans on the Unarian spaceport computer.

"I couldn't delete the files completely, Boss. They're stored on write-once crystalline media. But I did change the directories so that the computer itself won't remember the files exist. I wouldn't worry so much about it. But then of course I don't have ten quadrillion Clathrans hunting my species down."

"Thanks a heap. Taking cheerful lessons from the natives, I see. Was there anything there that the Purple guy was holding back?"

"No, not really. The ship the two *Archangel* crewmen bought was a small transportation craft, with no cargo space. They bought it from some aliens who the files record as Sirissians, one of many who've used the Stargate on occasion. Most of them have been using it for thousands of years. By the way, the pointless Unaria-Dosia war has been going on for at least that long. The Clathrans haven't used the Stargate at all, at least not in the modern era. Anything else?"

"No, unless you've found Golgotha."

"No, Boss. We'll have to go farther up the Arm, by all indications. That'll put us in Clathran territory for sure."

"Is it worth it?"

"You tell me, Boss."

"Well, if it was just for me, no. And if it were just for the Church, no. But I get the feeling that it's more important than that. It's almost as though Golgotha helped the Founders three centuries ago, and now it's drawing me there for the next step."

"Well, then, Boss, we're just going to have to get there, Clathrans or not."

✘ STOP ✘



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[007]

The panorama of Dardahl on your ship's viewscreen immediately makes you feel more relaxed. This golden glowing world with its amusing race of satyrs and nymphs and beautiful scenery is one of your favorite places to visit. Even your computer enjoys the relaxing environment here.

"Boss, this is one of the few places I can rest my sensors."

"Me too."

If only you didn't have to wear that silly-looking toga.

You land safely and have the same options as before.

✕ STOP ✕

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[008]

The lecture you are about to attend on Chain of Command is given once a week. From the crowd packing its way into the large hall, you begin to think it must be a pretty exciting talk. When you ask a Bluvian on your right, who is crowding her way in through the large doorway at the same time you are, why there are so many people here this evening, she tells you that attendance is mandatory. That explains it.

This lecture, you learn, is one of the few things one needs no rank to attend. It is designed to keep the Bluvians on their toes regarding chain of command, as well as to instruct any visitors to the planet on how the system works. Perhaps it is just what you need in order to function on Gloop.

Finding a seat toward the front of the hall, you settle down and prepare for the lecture to begin. Before you really have time to get comfortable, though, a soldier, after first looking to see what rank (if any) you have, points at you and orders you out of the seat. He outranks you and wants the better view. Sighing, you stand and make your way to the back of the hall.

Soon the lights dim and the speaker comes out from behind the curtain. You are surprised to see that it is a lizard-like robot that looks exactly like a Clathran soldier! The robot begins droning out propaganda about how chain of command is essential to a well-run army. Initiative can destroy the discipline the Bluvians on Gloop have worked so hard to establish. Without approval from one's superiors, one should not risk ruining an operation by taking an action that could bring everything to a grinding halt.

You listen to the rest, but it is essentially the same as what you have already heard. You think that there is an element of truth to all of this — discipline combined with physical and tactical superiority can be a devastating combination. Unfortunately (or maybe not, for you), the Bluvians on Gloop have taken the principle of chain of command to such an extreme that they have trouble just functioning on a day-to-day level. From what you have seen so far, most of their time is consumed with relaying orders either up or down the chain. They have no time to do anything!

Apparently, the Clathrans made an attempt to turn the Bluvians here into an effective army, with disappointing results. When the lecture is over, you return to your ship and sleep on what you have just learned.

✕ STOP ✕

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[009]

As you approach the Shrine, you are once again accosted by the sentry robot. Apparently it has a capacity for recognition because it remembers you from your previous visit.

“Welcome back, master. Please pass through the gates and be welcome.”

The Shrine is as serene as before. You head immediately for the cube. This time you don't just linger near the opening; you walk to the center of the cube and climb one of the ladders down to the floor. You feel the eeriness of the architecture. There's something disconcerting about the chamber. It's not just that the walls and ceiling are covered with cryptically marked controls. Using all sides of a room is normal for zero-gravity architecture, and you should be used to it now. It's not that the cube is dangerous. There is no connection to any power source, and its circuits have no doubt been cold for thousands of years. It's not even the presence of the silent and reverent Qualatharians, who continually pass through and around the ancient construction, that you find disturbing. They show no sign of being resentful of your presence. There's just something about the place you don't like. You are gripped by an unfamiliar sense of claustrophobia, and you have a strong desire to leave.

This time you fight that desire. You make your way to a chair that's oriented in the right direction, and seat yourself in it, as you've seen Qualatharians do occasionally. The chair is not built for someone with your body shape, and almost immediately you feel uncomfortable. Before you have a chance to stand up again, you notice an odd sensation. A tickling begins at the nape of your neck and travels up the back of your skull. You try to reach around to rub the area but your arms will not obey. You strain to regain your feet but to no avail. What's going on?

Directly in front of you, one of the panels of the Shrine comes to life. Overlapping geometric shapes form in colored light on one of the screens. Circuitry hums and textures shift. Another panel glows, then another. The hum becomes a piercing whine, then deepens in tone and intensifies into a rumble.

Your first panicked thought is that the Qualatharians will notice what's happening and become enraged. But they don't react at all. They don't even glance in your direction.

How can they not notice their Shrine coming to life around them? The walls are pulsating with energy. An eerie light emanating from one of the panels in the Shrine plays across your face. You feel a sudden sense of vertigo. The pull of gravity diminishes to nothing, causing you to rise out of your chair and float to the center of the room. The Qualatharians, oblivious, thin out like fading ghosts and disappear. Then the walls of the cube dissolve, leaving you floating in space.

This isn't really happening, you think to yourself. I'm still in the chair, and the machine has been dead for millennia, its power sources severed.

Below you is the planet Qualathara. The whole surface is covered with cities and spaceports, teeming with Qualatharians. Or are they? You look closer. Not Qualatharians. Clathrans.

The planet pulses with life like the beating heart of an empire. Clathran ships fill the orbits, arriving and departing. Their shapes are familiar: monitors, dreadnoughts, transport ships, and others. Is this what the future holds for Qualathara and the rest of the galaxy? No, not yet. What you're seeing is the past, the distant past. The Clathrans rule a star empire that encompasses the galaxy.

But they don't rule it alone. Their masters rule over them. It was the masters that taught them to rule, that gave them the power and skill and efficiency they needed. In return, the masters took away something, in order to guarantee that the masters would always remain the masters, and the servants always the servants. The Clathrans have long since forgotten what they lost. Or so they think. When they recognize it in others, they become twisted with hatred, lashing out to destroy every reminder of their diminishment.

Years pass like the sudden flash of a meteor. The star system is again filled with ships. But this time it's different. The ships are huge vessels, colony ships filled with Clathrans, a million Clathrans in each. The cities and spaceports of the planet below are all but abandoned. Only a few are left behind, to tend crucial systems until the last moments. A star empire is coming to an end. The masters are departing, and taking their servants with them.

The ships move out of the system, forming a vast ring. There they wait, motionless.

From nowhere, a globe of smoky glass the size of a moon materializes in the center of the ring. Inside the translucent sphere are other shapes, outlines only, a thousand impossible geometries. The Clathran ships close in on the sphere and dock at its surface. The millions of Clathran passengers march through the docking ports into the sphere, leaving the empty husks to drift away unnoticed.

The sphere explodes. Energy splashes in all directions, erasing most of the surface of the planet below, spreading further, twisting space, opening a passage. The shapes inside the sphere disappear through the passage and out of existence. Only a single tiny cube remains, inert and aimlessly orbiting. A star empire has ended.

The fifty thousand-year dark age has begun.

On the planet below, only a few survive. They gather in one of their cities and begin to rebuild. Without their masters, whom they will one day remember, perhaps not inappropriately, as gods, they have no aspirations or initiative. They have no desire to reclaim their empire. Instead, they prepare to wait for the masters' return. Over the fifty thousand years that follow, their waiting becomes introspection. They bring the cube to the surface, and begin to worship it. They change. Abandoned by their gods, they in turn abandon the galaxy, allowing countless alien species to develop and evolve, uncontrolled, for the first time in eons. They become the race that you now know as the Qualatharians.

Now, that dark age is coming to an end. The Clathrans have returned, unchanged, out of the past. Finding their empire gone and forgotten, they have begun to rebuild it. The aberrant races who spread unchecked over many worlds will be restored to normal.

But do the Qualatharians understand that their wait is over? How much have they changed in a thousand generations? So far, they've shown no interest in their ancient kin. You can only hope it stays that way. You suspect that the Qualatharians would not be so aloof were it the masters who had returned, and not just the servants.

The cubic chamber is forming again around you. The lights and screens are dull, inanimate. The chamber is silent. The Qualatharian worshippers haven't moved from their positions. Gravity is normal, and you have no difficulty removing yourself from the uncomfortable chair.

You look once more around the cube, inspecting the artifact unobtrusively with your portable instruments. There is no power in the ancient circuits.

Wondering about what you have just learned, you make your way back to the ship.

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[010]

The creature above you has a wing span of well over ten feet. With each stroke you are in danger of having any number of bones broken if you are hit. Twisting and dodging, you must also evade the murderous talons. You are soon panting from the exertion.

"My nest, my nest! I will kill you for trying to rob my nest!"

So that's what the attack is all about. The creature thinks you mean to harm its offspring. You try to communicate with it, to assure it that you have no such intention, but it has limited intelligence and is very single-minded. The attack continues and you are becoming very tired.

Although you do not want to kill the creature, you refuse to become its victim. You use all of your skills and abilities to ward off the attack. It is all you can do to stay alive. You keep trying to forge ahead while steering clear of the talons and wings. Finally you are able to maneuver yourself so that you can make a break for the clearing ahead. At the very least, you will have more room to protect yourself. As you reach the glen, the attack stops.

"The light, make it go away," the harpy cries as it tries to follow you but quickly returns to the darkness and safety of the dense forest. A full moon has risen, and the clearing is well lit with the moonshine. Now you know why the nymph told you to leave early in the day. Apparently the harpy is nocturnal.

Gratefully, you sit down on a grassy knoll. The sound of bubbling liquid makes you look down near your feet. You see a natural cistern filled with a cloudy liquid. You take out your chemical analyzer and run a few tests on the substance.

Well, what do you know! You have discovered a pool of Primordial Soup, a substance with concentrated life force that is a very valuable resource in the space lanes. Fortunately you have an expandable liquid container in your supply pack, which you remove and fill with one unit's worth of the Soup. That is all the cistern holds anyway. If you come back in the future, the cistern may have refilled itself, allowing you to obtain another unit of the valuable liquid.

Go now to the CGM. You may select this option again.

✘ STOP ✘

[011]

You still feel like you have no real direction to take in helping the Hadrakians fight the Clathrans. As you relax in one of the common areas in the rear offices of The Battle Inc., you are glad to see a Settled One enter the room. Judging from the several decorations on her uniform, she must be a highly placed officer in the company.

"Greetings, Human," she calls to you as she heads over to the food and drink area. She asks if she can get you something to eat, but you politely decline. Hadrakians are a civilized race, but their eating habits leave a lot to be desired. Their idea of a good meal is raw meat. When she holds out a cup of their version of coffee, though, you accept. You know the stuff is pretty good, despite its violet color.

"Human, I have heard that you are interested in helping us fight the Clathrans. You are looking for a mission in the war, perhaps?"

"As a matter of fact, I am."

"There is much to be done. However, might I make a suggestion?" When you nod, she continues. "I know a little about your bravery and adventures but I do not see how you have managed to survive so long with such a poorly armed ship. You really need to upgrade your ship further before you are ready to go up against the Clathrans."

Your face flushes red with embarrassment. You had been warned earlier by a male Hadrakian who had even gone so far as to give you his deceased mother's Bosen Beam. You have obviously not done enough to improve your ship's armament for the fight against the Clathrans. You stammer out some poor excuses, quickly finish your drink and leave. Maybe you should take the Hadrakian's advice and improve your ship.

When your ship is ready to oppose the Clathrans, you can bet that the representatives of The Battle, Inc. will be more than happy to give you an important mission in the war.

You may select this option again.

✘ STOP ✘

[012]

You finish the dialogue perfectly, but the statue only says, "Knowledge is very important in life, my child. Read more books and treat others as you wish to be treated." With that, the statue stops moving and resumes its silence. What is going on here? You are sure that this is the right place!

You turn to leave the temple only to bump into a hooded figure. For a moment you have visions of bumping into the avatar of the god of knowledge. The figure beckons you over to an opening in the floor made by a movable stone tile. You've found the Brotherhood after all!

You descend the stairs and introduce yourself to the Brother. His name, you discover, is Almed. It is his week to be the god of knowledge. Your look of complete bafflement makes him laugh.

"You are new here. Allow me to explain."

He goes on to tell you that the Brotherhood lives on Dardahl in the guise of the Dardahlian gods. They help the simple-minded inhabitants in their day-to-day lives in exchange for being allowed to remain on the planet. When Brothers who wish to continue their training visit, they are brought into the secret passages below the temple and shown around. From now on, you will have easier access to the Brotherhood by entering through an unobtrusive side door. You are instructed to look before you enter to be sure no one sees you.

“Do the Dardahlans know that you are not really their gods?”

“Who is to say what a god is? We perform miracles for them and take care of them. They have become child-like after very powerful beings visited them eons ago. We are helping rectify what was done to them at that time. We don’t completely understand what happened, but we help as much as we can.”

Almed guides you past the altar into a hidden chamber. “You have learned your dialogue well,” he says. “The time has come to continue your training. Ours is a difficult and painful craft, but one of great importance in your studies to come. Are you ready?”

“I am ready,” you say, trying to appear brave as Almed escorts you to a corner of the chamber now filled with robed Brethren.

#### The Lecture: Master of Stealth

“You are now ready to learn the rites of the next level of Intuition, the caste of Master of Stealth. You will learn through your efforts a new obligation, that of careful diligence. You must take care that your efforts henceforth in the Brotherhood are unobserved. The reasons for this will be clear in time. But for now, be careful that your participation in the Brotherhood goes without notice.

“The dialogue of Mastery for a Master of Stealth is the same as for a Master of Introspection, except that after being asked the last question, respond as follows:”

Examiner: How can we then find the Way?

Answer: In pursuit of the Nature of Hiding.

Examiner: But its study is full of a danger.

Answer: The danger of Hiding from Self.

(Examiner now recognizes you as a Master of Stealth.)

Examiner: What can be learned from Concealment?

(You now recognize Examiner as a Master of Stealth.)

Answer: I do not know the Answer.

Examiner: You are truly a Master of Stealth.

Answer: And I know you to be the same.

“You are now a Master of Stealth. Let the training begin.”

You are brought into another room, which confirms your deepest concern about Almed’s earlier comments. The room contains a wall covered with devices that appear to be more instruments of torture than exercise equipment. Though you are taught in the classes that the devices are intended to teach flexibility, you are quite certain that your body was never meant to be in the pretzel-like contortions these machines force it into.

While in the midst of a particularly painful deep tissue “massage” on one of the “exercise tables,” you feel a terrible stinging on your shoulder. Sure enough, it is Almed, with a branding iron similar to the one used on Dahl. After holding you down for a few minutes, your “masseurs” take you into the inner temple, where Almed is waiting.

"These past few days have been painful, I know," he says. "I promise you, this has not been without its purpose. Though you have felt great pain throughout the exercises, notice that you are not injured, save the welt I have just given you. As you may have guessed, this is the mark of the Geas of Stealth. Should you choose to continue your training, you must first perform a simple task for the Brotherhood.

"I send you to the planet Hadrak. There, you will find Brother Gretzen, Master of Revelation. Brother Gretzen has been collecting data and intelligence about the Clathran military threat. It is important for us to have this data in order to understand what is happening in the galaxy.

"You will find Gretzen in an office in the basement of Naval Headquarters on the planet Hadrak. He will be in disguise and is employed there as Garbage Controller. Return here with the data he gives you, and we can continue your training. You will be amply rewarded. Go now, Brother, Master of Stealth. Go in peace."

Almed leads you up through the secret door and out of the Brotherhood temple complex. Although you have been subjected to painful prodding, cutting, shoving and splicing of your body in a variety of ways you would have considered horrible, you do feel better than you have felt for some time, except for the blistering pain on your shoulder. You thank Almed for his "lessons" as you wave good-bye. You consider whether or not to continue your training in light of all that has passed.

If you find yourself on the planet Hadrak, you may now plot the following option:

(PFSLZM) (3 phases) Meet with Gretzen and get the data for the Brotherhood.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[013]

"What exactly is Dual Space?" you ask your friend Gloossh.

"I like directness in an alien," the Middle Riallan compliments you, "But even I cannot give you an exact explanation. While we Middle Riallans rely on Dual Space for some of our powers, we are a relatively new race. We did not come into being long, long ago when the Dual Space Interphase was very wide. Only the galaxy's oldest races, such as our ancestors, evolved during that time and therefore live and breathe through Dual Space. Those races really understand what Dual Space is, and could explain it to you much better than I. The best I can give you is a sort of scientific explanation, which may or may not suit your purposes.

"Please go on," you request, figuring a scientific explanation is better than nothing.

"All right, but don't say I didn't warn you. The way I like to think of it, Dual Space is the theoretical dimension of all possible universes. However, only one universe, the one you and I are living in, the one we call reality, actually exists at any given time. Another way to think of Dual Space is as the space of all conceivable *changes* to the real universe.

"Now, one way to change the universe is to alter it physically in some way. For example, you could dump all the cargo out of your ship, and you'd have an empty ship, whereas before you had a full one. Or you could use the muscles in your leg to walk from here to the far end of the latticework, and you'd be over there instead of here.

"However, a change made via Dual Space works differently. A Dual Space change is an actual repositioning of reality in Dual Space, such that the new reality differs from the old one in some way. There is no physical cause of this change; it just happens. For example, you might think about being at the far end of the latticework, and suddenly find yourself teleported there. You used Dual Space to change reality, instead of the muscles in your leg."

"OK, I get that," you interject. "Dual Space allows you to perform a sort of magic to change the way things are. But what's this Dual Space Interphase the historian was telling me about? The Interphase gets narrower and wider, or something."

"Ah, that's where it gets interesting. You see, not all parts of Dual Space are accessible. Some universes you can reach, and some you can't. The ones you *can* reach make up what I call the Interphase. In other words, the Interphase is the set of feasible changes to reality.

"If the Interphase narrows down to nothing, Dual Space is completely cut off. The only possible reality is physical reality. Changes can occur only as the result of direct physical causes, in strict accordance with physical law. As the Interphase widens, Dual Space changes become possible. Mental powers, such as telekinesis and levitation, appear. The wider the Interphase, the greater the variety and strength of these powers.

"The Interphase is not necessarily uniform, however. It can vary from place to place and from time to time. For example, it tends to be wider nearer the Galactic Core than out in the Fringe. Also, we know that it was much wider in the distant past than it is today.

"In addition, the ability to use Dual Space varies from being to being. Generally, the more intelligent the being, the greater its capacity to use Dual Space. However, other factors can enter into it as well, such as physiological structure and training. We Riallans have a pretty fair capability to use Dual Space. You humans can use it too, but to a lesser degree. Your physiology is different. You evolved at a later time, when the Interphase was narrower. Naturally, you are best adapted to live with a narrow Interphase.

"In fact, you might have trouble if the Interphase gets too wide. Your brain might not be capable of functioning properly with too wide an Interphase, just as ours is not capable of dealing with too narrow an Interphase. I would be worried if I were you."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the Interphase has been narrowing steadily for millions of years. Suddenly, it has started to rise sharply. We can tell because our mental powers have become much more potent within the last twenty years. If it keeps rising the way it is now, you may have trouble. Eventually, we'd have trouble too. Our tolerance is higher than yours, but there is a limit. If the Dual Space Interphase gets wider than you can handle, you lose all touch with reality. You go insane."

"Great. Just what I need."

"Well, I don't know if there's anything you can do about it. Perhaps your race can figure out some way to adapt. Genetic engineering, or something. Good luck to you, anyway."

"Thanks."

Gloossh leaves you to contemplate its explanation of Dual Space and the changing universe.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[014]

You return to the drab ball of mud called Cloo. Your survey scans show that nothing is new. The planet is devoid of life. The shattered remains of the colony dome are drifting apart in the mud. You set your ship down in the area where the dome was blasted so you can gather Radioactives profitably.

You have the same option as before.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[015]

Relaxing your mind and body, you ease yourself to the floor of the meditation cubicle in the Hadrakian Shrine. Soon you are drifting in a trance-like state, speculating on the insanity of the human worlds.

Your right arm jerks. Then your heartbeat speeds up, and slows again. Your feet feel warm, then cool, then begin to sweat profusely. It is like someone is test-driving your brain without consulting the operating manual.

"Hello!" you think. "Please stop that!"

"Oh, of course," thinks a voice back at you. "Sorry about that. I've never seen a human brain before, although my name should have meaning to you."

"And your name?"

"I am the God of Klutzed Triumphs, and I am visiting you now to deliver two messages. One, of course, has to do with my name. I can't be more specific about that one. The other message, though, is quite plain: if you need Synthetic Genius, go to the planet Sallion."

"Thank you kindly for the advice."

"Hey, what's a god for?" The contact fades away.

The Shrine Keeper snickers when you tell her the name of your patron. Apparently she's heard of him before.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[016]

Your viewscreen shows you nearing a large, densely-populated, orange-colored planet. Orbiting the planet are many spaceships, satellites, and weapons emplacements. Several of the ships break out of orbit and head in your direction. Each ship has a small ovoid center with twelve long metal tendrils sticking out into space. The ships set up a formation and block your path to the planet.

"Message coming in over the radio, boss," your computer informs you.

"Let's hear it."

"Transmission from planet Zyroth to alien vessel. Transmission from planet Zyroth to alien vessel. Come no closer. Identify yourself. Who sent you here? Someone from Geefle?"

The ships in front of you rotate slightly, aiming their weapons directly at you.

"Yes," you respond more confidently than you feel. "Lord Ruckel sent me to speak with your King about the Clathrans."

There is a long pause. Finally an answer comes.

"On Lord Ruckel's word, we will think about it, alien. Wait for our decision."

You wait, as it turns out, for several days. Your patience is rewarded when the patrol ships give you their reply.

"You may land now, alien. Follow the beacon down. Do not try anything tricky."

You soon find yourself at a busy spaceport in the center of a very crowded, bizarre-looking city. The city is constructed out of big semi-transparent tubes, spheres, and cylinders built one on top of another in a seemingly haphazard fashion. Spoke-like tunnels criss-cross between the tubes. The result is a jumbled collection of shapes and colors that you find very confusing. The spaceport itself is divided into two halves, a civilian half (in which you land), and a military half (which is walled off).



All around are the Zyrans, aggressive meat-eating creatures with bubbly brown skin and weird collections of different body parts. The sticky gook they secrete is everywhere. In fact, now that you've left your ship, you're walking in the gook.

A Zyran comes to meet you, but it keeps its distance. It doesn't want to come near you for some reason. It points to a building that rises high above the other buildings in the city. The building looks like a giant upside-down yellow test tube.

"The Royal Palace," the Zyran says.

So that is where you must go to meet the King. To the right of the palace there is another interesting structure that looks like a huge old-Earth martini glass. It has a long thin stem at its base with a clear, angular dish on top, facing upward to the sky.

"What's the big clear thing next to it?" you ask.

"The Projector of Eternal Peace," the Zyran answers. Then it turns around and leaves. Apparently it doesn't want to keep you company. You are on your own.

Your options are:

(NBYW6T) (5 phases) Go to the Royal Palace and speak with the King.

(MBJWUT) (5 phases) Visit the Projector of Eternal Peace.

(NGY46Q) (5 phases) Hang around the spaceport and see if you can find someone more friendly to talk to.

(MGJ4UQ) (5 phases) Sneak into to the military section of the shipyard.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[017]

Your environmental suit is difficult to maneuver in close quarters, but you don't let that stop you from entering the airlock. Inside is a small (by Clathran standards) room full of hanging space suits. Another door, set in the opposite wall, leads to the interior of the dome. You quickly seal the outer door, cycle the airlock, and strip off your own suit, stowing it out of sight in a corner. No sooner is this accomplished than you hear the inner door opening and the guttural sound of Clathran speech.

"It must be another mechanical failure," comes from your universal translator, as you dive for cover among the hanging space suits. "Why else would the airlock cycle on its own?"

"Nothing showed up on the cameras," agrees a second voice.

Four heavily armed Clathrans enter the airlock. One checks the settings on the outer door, while two others begin poking through the hanging suits. The fourth stands in the center of the room, covering the others with his hand weapon.

You hold your breath as a Clathran sweeps aside the space suit in front of you, gazes blankly through you for a moment, then moves on. Your special abilities have protected you!

"There's nothing here."

"Nothing here."

"This airlock has definitely been opened."

"Very well; we'll make a full report to Central Command. You two stay on guard here. I'll see you're relieved at the end of your shift. And I'll send a technician down to look at the door — I still think it's a mechanical error. After all, the inner door never opened, and there's nothing in here."

"Unless something looked in the outer door and then ran for it."

"Huh! But that's probably just how Central'll think. They see humans behind every rock. This'll mean a Phase II alert for sure; we'll have to mount a perimeter guard and send out some long-range surface patrols." Still muttering, the patrol leader and one soldier head for the door.

You slip through it just before them, ducking to one side and plastering yourself against the wall. The Clathran leader looks right at you as he comes through the door, but his brain fails to register your presence. He and his trooper head off to the right, and you have your first chance to look around.

You stand at the edge of a small city. Large buildings loom ahead of you, joined on many levels by glass-enclosed walkways. You can see Clathrans moving about on the street and crossing from building to building. Large vehicles rumble across the ground, loaded with unknown materials. Overhead, the inner surface of the black dome glows with all the stars of the galaxy. The light of Morikor's sun, so fierce and bright outside the airlock, is somehow filtered out by the dome, leaving only the amplified starlight to illuminate the streets of the city. You have already decided to spend some time exploring, since you won't be able to leave the airlock until the security alert dies down. There is a traffic signpost directly across the street from you. In translation, it gives you the following options:

⟨UB7W8T⟩ (5 phases) Central Computer Records.

⟨ZG24HQ⟩ (5 phases) Intelligence Office.

⟨ZG24HQ⟩ (5 phases) War Room.

⟨UG748Q⟩ (5 phases) Research and Development.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[018]

Nothing happens. The compartments are as inaccessible as ever.

You could keep trying combinations at random, or... you could try using your power of telekinesis. Instead of playing with the dials, you concentrate hard on the compartment doors. In less than a minute, they begin to protrude from the plane of the station walls, and a handle pops out of the left side of each. Voila!

You now have a new option:

⟨XBNWYT⟩ (3 phases) Access the contents of the compartments.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[019]

“The following is a human condition status report, broadcast via subspace by the Institute for Space Exploration, on Para-Para:

“Communications have been lost with New New York, Tokyo, Norstarplex, Konath, New San Francisco, Moiran City, and Belm. Rioting rages in many other large cities, with fires and heavy weaponry causing billions of credits worth of damage. The Space Navy, fleeing their hangars on Endaur just hours before the base was overrun, is now headquartered on Wellmet, but has dispatched much of the fleet to quell disturbances throughout the Home Worlds. Disciples of the Final Church of Man are urging ‘a return to the flock’ for those who have sought solace in the hundreds of new splinter religions. ‘Only through discipline and understanding can we overcome the madness.’ Colonizing efforts chartered by several different corporations since the removal of the Boundary have largely fallen through, although the questors of Atlantis still hope to complete their ship. Meanwhile, on Harvard, afflicted students and faculty have torn down many of the University’s scientific research facilities, including the lab of Professor Strassmann, where the first discovery of dual space and its impact on the human psyche was made. Islands of chaos dot the map of human civilization at this time; we can only hope that things improve.

“End of transmission.”

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[020]

Visiting the market gives you an interesting perspective on Mardahl culture. While you are there you witness at least a dozen duels, each arising from a trivial argument between two of the ostrich-like aliens. The Mardahlians do not fight among themselves, however; they have their androids do it. The golden-skinned servants seem perfectly willing to battle on behalf of their masters, and you watch a number of hand-to-hand and armed encounters. Curiously, it seems that the androids are pulling their punches somewhat, and the damage suffered by the losers is not as severe as might be imagined from the ferocity of the combat. The upper-class Mardahlians seem unaware of this, however, and you wisely choose not to enlighten them.

As on most planets, Mardahl has only one commodity they are willing to trade with offworld visitors; here it is Culture. After checking around for the best price, you learn that they will make the following trades:

- 3 Culture for 1 Munitions
- 2 Culture for 1 Food
- 2 Culture for 1 Medicine

Go now to the CGM. You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[021]

You do not know where the Sirissians get their supply of Diamond Cloth, nor do you care. All you are interested in is seeing how much they want in trade for a unit of the valuable material. Following Oiler 15’s directions to the factory where they take the cloth and make it into the Splorg uniforms, you enter the building and introduce yourself to the factory manager.

“Ah, I have heard of you, Human. Welcome to Nahvahdahbuab’s Uniform Emporium. Here we not only make the fine uniforms used by our talented Splorg players, but we sell them and the rest of the equipment as well. What can I do for you?”

“Actually, I am interested in buying some of your Diamond Cloth and was wondering what price you were asking?”

The Sirissian doesn't answer right away, and when he does, you aren't happy with his answer. "I'm sorry, but that is impossible. We take great pride in our work here and use extraordinary care in selecting only the finest quality material for our uniforms. I can't see letting this high grade material go for some other use, but thank you for coming by."

"Um, er," you say, buying time while your brain cells are firing. "Ah, but I am interested in using them for uniforms. Back where I come from, this game would be an instant success. If, whenever I am free to return to my home, I have everything I need to introduce splorg to humanity, I bet we could get our own teams and such going. Maybe we could even have competitions between our peoples?" You feel a little guilty about this deception, until you realize you do not have to be fibbing. You *could* introduce splorg to the Home Worlds when you return. This even gives you something to look forward to when this mess is over once and for all.

The Sirissian is excited by the prospect. As a matter of fact, he decides that he can sell you Diamond Cloth, for the following price:

2 Crystals + 2 Munitions + 1 Culture + 1 Warp Core

Go now to the CGM You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[022]

You decide your best bet is to dart in between the huge armed vessels and take your best shot at the three troop carriers before the others know you are even here. You carefully instruct the computer on the proper battle plan, take a deep breath to steady yourself, and give the order to head into the convoy.

For the first few minutes things actually go as planned, then your luck changes. The scout ships are small and very maneuverable. As soon as they get a fix on you, they are on your tail. You weave in and out between the large cumbersome troop carriers, dodging fire from the scouts as you let loose your own firepower against the transports. Pulling behind the first of the troop carriers, you lob a few shots into the intake jets, then drop down out of range of the upcoming explosion.

The Clathran ships must have a slightly different engine system than you thought, because the effect of your shot isn't quite what you expected. Instead of a satisfying explosion that cripples the ship, you get a tremendous explosion that blows the entire ship up. Not only is that first carrier destroyed but the second troop transport is so close, it receives the brunt of the explosive force and detonates. Like a chain reaction, the third transport is hit by the force of the second's explosion and erupts into flames as well.

You sit stunned by the havoc you have caused. This is far better than you had ever hoped for. The Clathran escort ships appear to be as shocked as you by the incredible destruction. Before they can gather their wits about them and make mincemeat of you, you order the computer to get you out of there and fast.

"Roger Boss!"

Within seconds, you are safely heading away from the fiery scene. Elated by your incredible success, you give an ear-piercing, "Yeee-haaa!!!"

✧ STOP ✧

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[023]

You are hoping to learn more of the Hadrakians' plans for striking back against the Clathrans and their Survey, but you're not too optimistic when you enter the office and see just one casually (though in the best Hadrakian garish style) dressed Settled One doing what looks suspiciously like leisure reading. Clearing your throat to draw her attention, you offer a greeting and summarize your recent progress.

After thanking you for your report, your host responds in kind, "The Survey appears to be on the move again. The occupied colonies have been somewhat more successful in coping with life under Clathran scrutiny than at first, but our collective resolve has weakened not a whit. We await, patiently, the opportunity to counterattack."

Not much of a briefing this time, you think to yourself. You wonder if the real military personnel of the Corporation are planning something important and keeping it secret. You leave the briefing room and head to the offices where The Battle, Inc. does its strategic planning, in the rear of the building.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[024]

One day, in space, your computer speaks. "I thought we were going to Zyroth, Boss. We haven't found the source of the Core Stone anywhere else."

"Hmmm. We know where Zyroth is now, don't we?"

"Yes we do. I think we should go."

"Old Rurik left you with some conscience software, I see."

"Conscience has nothing to do with it, Boss; I want to know more about the Stone. My mechanical breakdown rate is far below normal, and it's starting to worry me. Something's not right here and I think the Stone is responsible."

"Very well. We'll go to Zyroth as soon as it's convenient."

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[025]

The Wet Repulsion Slab is a square kilometer of solid granite submerged in the lagoon so that its surface is exactly at sea level. The moonless Franclair has only slight tides and very mild weather, and the Slab is therefore always just under water or just above. This, combined with the unusual electromagnetic properties of the water in the lagoon, makes the Slab an ideal location for testing spaceship propulsion systems. As a result, an entire academic industry has grown up around it. There are research buildings, laboratories, power generators, hull works, and the like lining the coast east and west of the actual Slab. Some of the finest scientific minds in the Hadrakian Empire work here, and they are all bent on solving one problem: the inability of animate life forms to travel via jump engine.

It is well known that jump engines work fine with inanimate cargo. A cargo drone equipped with a jump engine can travel instantaneously from one place to another. However, if you put a living creature on board, it arrives at the destination dead. It is frustrating, but no intelligent life form seems capable of travelling by jump engine. The Hadrakians realize that a "survivable" jump engine — one that can carry live beings — would give them a big edge in the war. So, they have been researching the problem intensely.

"It is simple, mechanically," says Professor Nathrasha Whitefur to you, when you arrange an interview. "We know all the components needed to build the survivable jump engine. We know how to physically protect the living being's metabolic processes so they don't break down during the spatial transition. Yet somehow the occupant always dies, and we don't know why. Our work continues on several avenues,

but many of us, including myself, have come to think that there's an important concept missing here. It's as if the occupant of the jump engine field were losing his soul, somehow, and was unable to continue living without it."

"Have you tried prayer?" you ask, semi-seriously.

"Of course. But the gods have been silent, if they know the answer at all."

"What's your best theory?"

"It's crazy, but the soul thing is the best I can do. I think we need to do more work in metaphysics, and less in the physical sciences. We need a receptor for the soul, a matrix to copy it onto while the field operates."

"What sort of receptor?"

The Hadrakian ripples her fur, equivalent to a human shrug. "I think it would be different for different races, and perhaps even for different individuals. I think I might know it if I saw it, but I can't be more specific than that."

"I suppose all you can do is keep working on it."

"Hopefully I will come up with something."

"Well thank you for your time, Professor. Spaceship engineering isn't really my field, but if there's anything I can do to help, please let me know."

"Sure thing. And best of luck with your own work."

✱ STOP ✱

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[026]

"Boss," says your ship's computer, "We're coming out of warp in a few minutes. We're almost at Outpost." Centered in the viewscreen you see the distinct greenish ring of gas that surrounds the system, and in its center a single bright point of white light. The planet is still too far away to see, but you know what it's like: terribly barren, all rock and water, but with a sweet atmosphere and a warm climate.

The planet Outpost has a very unusual natural history. The ring nebula is the remnant of an ancient supernova. The primary star was once an orange sun, but long ago went nova prematurely and became a white dwarf. Before its sun went nova, the planet was probably much like Venus in the Sol system: searing hot with a thick poisonous atmosphere. The nova explosion stripped away that atmosphere, and in the aftermath the planet swept up water vapor and other gases from the system. Now, it orbits just close enough to the white dwarf to have a mild climate and liquid oceans. Its atmosphere is breathable. It is possible that life might evolve here. Complex chemical structures resembling rudimentary microorganisms, able to replicate themselves, already exist in the oceans. But with a white dwarf as its star, the planet doesn't have long to live. In a mere few hundred million years it will be a frozen rock orbiting a dead sun. If life is going to evolve here, it will have to do it in a hurry.

The history of humans on Outpost is equally strange and violent. Three centuries ago, Vanessa Chang used it as a base for her exploration of the Galactic Arm, and had dreams of establishing a full-fledged colony here. When the Expansion era explorers fled from the Arm in the wake of the Space Plague, Outpost became a symbol of their defeat. Later, the mad pirate Silverbeard claimed the planet, and for unknown reasons he fortified it with powerful weapons to prevent anyone else from landing here. Only after you defeated and killed Silverbeard in battle less than two years ago were you able to land on Outpost and learn its old secrets.

You pass through the thin haze of the gas ring, about a light-year away from the planet near its center. Once inside the ring nebula, you can no longer see it. It's actually a hollow sphere of gas, but it's only easily visible edge-on, so from any given direction it appears to be a halo-like ring. A few more minutes under hyperdrive brings you close to the star, and you ease off the drives as the planet comes into view.

You discover that you are not alone. Two other ships are also preparing to land, and you see that three more have already landed. You don't mind, as long as they're human ships, and it appears that they all are.

Only one small area of the planet shows signs of past human presence, and you choose a landing approach that will set you down there. A broad expanse of flat rock serves as a landing field, and there are several old buildings in the area. Farther away are other isolated structures, all remains of various abandoned facilities or projects.

You have been on Outpost before, so you already have some idea of what can be done here. Your options are:

⟨7Z82KH⟩ (2 phases) Look around the spaceport area, which was built and used primarily by Silverbeard.

⟨XZUN2YH⟩ (3 phases) See what might be left of the stolen commodities Silverbeard once kept at the nearby complex of long storage buildings.

⟨7U87K8⟩ (4 phases) Go to an installation several miles away where the pirate used to build his weapons.

⟨XUN7Y8⟩ (3 phases) Go to the ancient hangar where Vanessa Chang's most famous spaceship is enshrined. You hope that some of her log entries are still intact.

⟨9ZV29H⟩ (6 phases) Survey the rest of Outpost's surface to see if there may be other interesting landmarks.

⟨LZM2JH⟩ (1 phase) See what you can find out about the other ships and their pilots.

✧ STOP ✧

[027]

"All right, Boss. No beating around the bush this time, I'm just coming right out and telling you. Just letting you know the bad news with no hemming and hawing. Just being up front and honest. . ."

"Enough already!" you yell when you can't stand it anymore. "What is it? No, don't tell me. Let me guess. We've lost another cargo drone."

"Yep. Those dirty Clathrans have done it again. I really think that we're going to have to stop sending drones to planets which have been occupied by the Clathrans, unless you're willing to accept more losses."

✧ STOP ✧

[028]

The Holoth Flap and Fly Space Construction Yard is located near the back of the Hadrakian city, where the artificial platform ends. At the edge of the platform there is a guard rail to prevent you from falling onto the jagged crystalline rocks below. Beyond the platform, the irregular cavern connects to a maze of caves that wind their way through the mountain.

You see that the ships at the yard are hangared vertically and side-by-side in a sort of gigantic bookcase. This makes sense, since the amount of platform space available to the shipyard is necessarily rather limited. Holots, the bat creatures indigenous to this world, are assisting the Hadrakians in installing weapons and cargo bays on the ships. The bats' long, slender fingers and flying ability are essential in making the shipyard function in such a cramped space. Occasionally you see a Holot fly into the maze of caves behind the cavern and return with a motor or some other part.

In the sales office, you are shown working models of a number of propulsion and weapons systems, most of which you have either seen before or could not accommodate on your ship without major renovations. A few things catch your eye, however.

One is a new close-quarters weapon called an Explosion Stud. It consists of a very powerful directional charge which can be set to go off if an enemy ship comes near your own. Several explosion studs, arranged around the hull of your ship, can make you as dangerous to deal with as a porcupine in a static field.

The second item is a piece of defensive trickery called a Spatial Inverter. This is a clever electro-optical device that effectively inverts your ship's sensor image from your enemy's point of view. As a result, he may think he is aiming his lasers at your engines, but really be directing his fire at your auxiliary lavatory. Don't try this trick while being guided down by friendly landing beacons.

Finally, you see a reasonably common armor device known as a Ship Shield Generator. It's effective enough, you've heard, but by virtue of its familiarity, it may reach obsolescence sooner than you would like.

The going rate for these devices, including installation and finishing by the dextrous Holots, is as follows.

Ship Shield Generator — 1 Tools  
Explosion Studs — 2 Food + 1 Phase Steel  
Spatial Inverter — 1 Fiber + 1 Medicine

As you're thinking about how nice it would be to better equip your ship for combat, you can't help but watch a brand new cargo bay, complete with automated unloader, being installed on one of the vessels in the hangar. You ask what it would cost for a new cargo bay like that one to be added onto your own ship. The Hadrakian saleswoman replies that Cargo Bay Expansions are handled by a different department; you'll have to speak to them to get a price. The option is:

⟨EM3JPU⟩ (3 phases) Inquire about purchasing a Cargo Bay Expansion for your ship.

Go now to the CGM. You may select this option again.

✕ STOP ✕

[029]

The crowd erupts in a chorus of boos and hisses as you best your opponent. Clearly, the gods have no interest in you.

Once the commotion has died down somewhat, a garishly-dressed Arena official steps onto the sand and presents you with the black armband of citizenship on Hadrak. Your recent foe is hauled off the sand to the Enclave infirmary or the morgue (you're not sure which) and you are led away in the other direction, towards the crowd. Within minutes you have received three party invitations for the next week, skills from half a dozen trading corporations, and a pitch from "the best spaceyard in the Empire." Also, you can pray to the Hadrakian gods if you are in need of some inspiration, or contact Naval Intelligence if you want to help out with the war.

It takes you several days to learn your way around the city and evaluate the many invitations you have received. In the end you are left with the following choices:

⟨SVZ92V⟩ (7 phases) Study the economic structure of Hadrak.

⟨PVS9ZV⟩ (3 phases) Travel to "the best spaceyard in the Empire" — Pharoan's Photon Funhouse — for some work on your ship.

⟨J8UK7D⟩ (7 phases) Contact Naval Intelligence and discuss the war.

⟨38PKSD⟩ (7 phases) Go to Darkside, a section of the planet set aside for renegade Hadrakians who have never become citizens in the Arena.

⟨SFZL2M⟩ (3 phases) Walk the Street of Gods and pray to the deity of your choice.

✕ STOP ✕



[030]

## HOW TO PLAN TURN 2

You have already landed on Outpost, so you know there are several options available to you here. When you first land on a new world, you should write down the many options available to you, how many phases they take, and whether or not you can repeat them. We recommend you take a new piece of paper and create a type of planetary log using the format you see below. Your Planet Log for Outpost should look like this:

Planet Log			
Planet Name:	Outpost		
Actions Available:			
Code	Phases	Description	Repeat?
7Z82KH	2	spaceport	
XZN2YH	3	commodities	
7U87K8	4	ship repairs	
XUN7Y8	3	Chang's ship	
9ZV29H	6	survey planet	
LZM2JH	1	meet pilots	

Choosing from the available actions, you decide that first priority is to explore Outpost's surface to look for interesting landmarks. This option will use all the phases you have available for this turn and borrow one phase from your next turn. Your plotting sheet should now look like this:

Plotting Sheet							
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7
TURN							
1	Y	R	L	—	—	—	—
2	—	—	A: 9ZV29H	—	—	—	—
3	—						

## HOW TO ENTER PLOTS FOR TURN 2

Go to the computer and log on. Press A for Action, and select the 6-character code for exploring Outpost's surface; in this case it is 9ZV29H, which can be selected by pressing E.

Note that as soon as you type the first A, the display changes to show the action codes available to you on Outpost. When you are done selecting the action code, the display will revert to the plot editor. This enables you to continue with the rest of your plots. In this case, you have nothing else to enter for this turn.

Don't forget, after each turn of plotting, to press either the Return or F (for Finished) keys to accept your moves, or X to remove any plots with which you are not happy. Otherwise the CGM will never know when you are finished!

## HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 2

When the computer has evaluated your move, it will send you to the appropriate text. Write down the text number(s) it gives you, in this case 470 and 460, then press Return or F to release the computer for the next player. The first text will describe your exploration of Outpost's surface and the second will guide you through your next turn's adventure.

⊗ STOP ⊗

## [031]

Hoping to learn more about Bluvian culture, you agree to go with Thurk and a rowdy crew of really ugly Bluvians to raid a neighboring city. You strap on your best weapons and defenses (some of which impress the Bluvians considerably) and climb aboard a vehicle that looks like a cross between a tank and a flatiron. The massive vehicle glides its way along the ground, supported by a smooth metal bottom surface that, heated almost to incandescence, rides on a thin layer of steam. Its passage leaves behind a ribbon of smooth ground with all of the bumps and wrinkles pressed out of it.

On the way to the “enemy” city, you get your first look at Bloo’s rural areas. The ground, moistened every morning by a drizzle of rain, is covered by a forest of bright blue vegetation. Among the trees you occasionally see marvelously sculpted buildings of carved stone blocks. “Who lives there?” you ask your companions.

“No one does now. We used to live there, before the Clathrans gave meaning to our lives. Our ancestors spent most of their time building stonework, creating art objects, writing twelve-tone music, holding sculpture races, that sort of thing. No one does that any more, fortunately.”

“What do you mean fortunately? That’s a terrible loss.”

“Tragic,” he agrees. “A real shame, what our fathers had to give up. Still, it’s the price that must be paid if we are to be rulers of the galaxy.”

The next day you arrive at the site of your raid. It is a smaller city with few tall buildings. From a distance you see that the natives are engaged in the same activities as always: fighting and smashing things. You wonder if the Clathrans’ robot program might have deteriorated a little. Surely random destructiveness wasn’t their original goal.

Your companions don’t waste any time. You and several others jump off your vehicle as the drivers accelerate and head for the tallest building. The locals team up to drive them off, and a fight breaks out. Some of the locals switch sides, which evens things up a bit, and the building begins to take heavy damage.

“Hold on,” you say. “That building doesn’t have a green tag on it.”

“Of course not,” says a marksman next to you as he tries to pick off locals who are pouring molten lead out of their windows. “This is a raid. Do you think our enemies the detestable inferior alien scum are going to mark all their targets for us when we fight to take over the galaxy?”

It is the first time a Bluvian has ever disagreed with you. You feel as if you have achieved a major breakthrough. The raid itself teaches you very little, though, and you are not inclined to participate. The Bluvians don’t seem to mind. After a day, the battle comes to some indeterminate conclusion, and your group (which seems now to consist of different Bluvians than it started with) commandeers another vehicle and heads back to the city.

You decide to explore the old stone buildings in search of art objects, and you find many of them. You are forced to admit that most of them are pretty hideous, especially the twelve-tone music that your ship’s computer plays for you. Worst of all is a horrible portrait entitled “Bloo Boy.” However, culture is culture, and in almost no time at all you have collected one cargo bay’s worth.

Go now to the CGM. You may select this option again.

✘ STOP ✘

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[032]

Subspace radio transmission from The Battle, Inc.

“To all agents: The Middle Riallans inform us that they will be preparing to join the United Hadrakian Navy in the fight against the Clathrans. A good thing, too. We need all the help we can get.”

✧ STOP ✧

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[033]

The Haunted House is the most popular ride in Mardahland, so the line in which you must wait is very long. Since you love a good scare, though, you are willing. After about two hours you find yourself at the front of the line and you step into the waiting egg car that will carry you through the ride. The seat is not quite built for your comfort, but you manage to perch yourself on it and grab one of the two arm rests for support.

Your car lurches forward and takes you into a dark tunnel. Cold air blows across your face; soft moanings can be heard up ahead. You strain your eyes to see what is coming, but it is too dark. Unknown things occasionally brush against your cheek and you nervously wipe them away. What could be ahead?

Suddenly you hear a loud shriek, lights flash in your eyes, images of wild animals ready to pounce on you from above. . . you scream in terror and drop defensively to the floor of the car, weapon at the ready. Then the room brightens and you laugh at your foolishness. The images were only those generated by the Haunted House, and to think that you fell for it! You feel a little embarrassed.

The rest of the ride is pleasantly frightening, but not as scary as the first room. You do have a strange thing happen to you midway through the ride, though. While you are traveling through a large hall filled with images of unknown horrors, you hear a voice calling to you from the deep shadows, “Brother, this is not yet the place for you. Go to Dardahl and fulfill your training.”

You called out to the voice, but there was only silence to answer you.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

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[034]

The furry natives interest you, so you try to locate their village. You start where you first saw them when you landed and find a well-beaten path leading from your glade into the jungle. Cautiously, you follow it into the cool shade under the thick growth of trees. It goes on for several miles before you come upon your objective, a small village with a dozen or so raccoon-like creatures going about their own business.

Stepping into the clearing, you send the natives fleeing for cover. You had suspected they might react this way from your experience during the first encounter, so you do not get discouraged. Instead, you walk to the center of the village, place an open package of ripe fruit on the ground, take a few steps back and sit down. You wait only a minute or two before one of the natives sticks his nose out from inside a nearby hut. Whiskers twitching, he cautiously steps forward.

Reaching into the fruit package, he pulls out a blue melon and begins munching on it, watching you all the while. Soon, others are tiptoeing out to investigate your gift; fortunately, you have brought enough for all. You decide to make your move.

“Hello,” you say softly. Instantly all chewing stops. “I am a friend and won’t hurt you.” The raccoons look at one another and start nudging one of their number to step forward. It is the raccoon that took the first fruit from the package.

“We are the Roquies. Are you one of the creatures that live past the land of desolation?” You deduce that he is asking you if you are a Clathran, so you tell him no.

“Good,” he exclaims, clapping his little hands in happiness. “We are not friends to them. They are mean and force us to leave when we try to visit. They get upset if we join them in their food house and chase us out with sticks that burn. We do not like them.”

You solemnly agree with your new friends that Clathrans are bad. Once you have gained their trust, there is nothing they will not tell you. In fact, you listen to them chatter about their world for hours. You learn that they have always lived in the jungle in their small villages and they are very happy. They do not really have a government, but they are so simple that they really do not need one.

You ask them more about their dealings with the Clathrans, but they are reluctant to tell about their adventures at the base. If something makes them sad, they do not think about it again. You do learn that they are in the habit of taking odds and ends from the alien base, especially the burn sticks. It's not that they would ever use them to hurt anyone, but they do like the pretty colored light it makes.

You now have a new option:

(XMNJYU) (3 phases) Since they have shown they are able to sneak into the Clathran base, try to teach the Roquies how to spy on the Clathrans.

⊗ STOP ⊗

[035]

After chasing randomly selected amoebae around for a while, attempting to catch or restrain them, you return to your ship to analyze the results.

“They're hard to catch!” you say.

“Indeed,” responds your computer. “Their ability to ooze away makes them very hard to deal with in a hand-to-pseudopod situation. Furthermore, their fluid structure makes it difficult or impossible to harm them with a cutting or penetrating weapon. I think you need something like a net.”

“A net? But wouldn't they just ooze through one of the holes?”

“I mean a variable-aperture net, a 'smart-net.' I've been working on plans for one for a while now. The idea is that if the being tries to escape through one of the holes, that hole constricts to nothing. Either part of the being is sliced off, or it has to pull back. The amoeba has no capacity to cut the net cables themselves, and can dissolve them only slowly. It should work.”

“Very well, let's start.”

The next several days are spent in manufacturing “smart-nets” and testing them on the natives. Eventually you find a combination that works quite well, allowing you to capture and hold disgruntled amoebae for indefinite periods. Your test subjects, who previously had been content simply to ignore you and your efforts while going about their normal gardening, leaf-raking, and animal-tending business, begin to actively avoid you. You desist in your tests before relations break down all together, although you can't help wondering just what it would take to provoke a Wythymite into a violent action.

Go now to the CGM.

⊗ STOP ⊗

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[036]

The Shrine you selected, among the dozens on the Street of Gods, turns out to be as over-decorated inside as out. The acolyte who shows you to your meditation cubicle is decked out in vibrant blues and greens, with gold trim, and the cubicle itself is in a similar color-scheme. Reproductions of famous Hadrakian artwork line the walls, adding to the eye-shattering glare. You are only too happy to dismiss the acolyte and stretch yourself out on the carpeting. As your eyelids drift slowly closed, you notice that the ceiling has also been decorated. This observation only makes you shut your eyes faster.

Your meditation is characterized initially by a swirling blend of colors, tracing no discrete pattern. Eventually, however, things quiet down somewhat, and you find yourself imagining a glittering dress ball, with hundreds of Hadrakians arrayed in their finest costumes. One of the glittering figures drifts closer and closer to you, until you can hear her voice in your mind:

“Greetings, human. I am the Goddess of Creative Vices, the third of those who can speak with you, and I am here to tell you about Crystals.” She gestures, and you see that the centerpiece of the tiara she wears is a huge, irregularly cut crystal, sparkling in the soft white light.

“Yes?”

“There are many crystals like this on the planet Holoth.”

“Thank you for your help, Goddess.”

The dance swirls on.

You may select this option again.

⊗ STOP ⊗

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[037]

The Zyran commodities market is one of the most disgusting places you could ever visit. The place is a disorganized mass of Zyran heads and appendages, and you are up to your knees in the sticky goo the Zyrans secrete wherever they go. Nonetheless, you are able to trade here. The Zyrans will offer you:

- 3 Warp Core for 1 Food
- 2 Warp Core for 1 Phase Steel
- 2 Warp Core for 1 Radioactives

Go now to the CGM. You may select this option again.

⊗ STOP ⊗

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[038]

An attendant brings you into a quiet, comfortable, well-lit room. There are several chairs located in front of old-fashioned computer terminals. After instructing you in the use of the terminals, the attendant leaves you to your research.

You scarcely have a chance to sit down and start browsing through titles like “Duality Considered Harmful” and “Dual Space Complete” when a cough behind you attracts your attention. A robed brother has come into the room and approached you.

“Greetings, Professor Dambroke. We have been expecting you.”

Startled, you can only blurt out. “Who are you?”

“I’m Brother Dikestra; I wrote most of that material on Dual Space. As the leading expert among the Brethren here, I’ve been looking forward to meeting the leading expert from the Home Worlds.”

“I’m hardly an expert on Dual Space,” you reply. “You must be thinking of Professor Strassmann.”

“I assure you, Professor, that we know exactly who you are and why we need to talk to you. Professor Strassmann may know more than either of us about the physical and mathematical manifestations of the rising Interphase level, but you are the ranking authority on the effects of that rise on human beings.”

“Perhaps I am. What of it?”

“You’ve been sent here to find a device capable of measuring the rising Dual Space Interphase. Here it is.” Brother Dikestra pulls a small black box from beneath his robes. “It’s called an Interphase Variometer.”

Great! This is just what you were looking for. He hands you the device, and you see that it is featureless except for a small dial set into the top surface. The red needle on the dial is pointing to a scale ranging from 0 to 100.

“Very interesting,” you comment.

“Yes,” says Brother Dikestra, sinking into a nearby chair. “And very important. The Brotherhood has been studying the benefits of discipline and focus for a long time. We noticed, apparently at the same time as you did, that it was possible for humans to learn paranormal abilities from alien races — levitation, telekinesis, whatever. After reading your paper in *The Harvard Journal of Science*, and comparing your results with our own informal discoveries, we realized that something unusual was going on. For us, as for you, Professor Strassmann’s publication in *Acta Abstrusica* announcing a newly detected form of galactic energy provided important data, and in the end we came to the same conclusions.

“Dual Space is the sum total of all possible realities; the Dual Space Interphase describes the number of those realities open to us at any given time. In the last few years, for whatever reason, the Dual Space Interphase has been steadily widening. As more possible realities are opened before us, humans are slowly gaining the ability to move among them, thus acquiring ‘magic’ or ‘paranormal’ abilities. This directly concerns the Brotherhood, and our goals. We wasted no time in manufacturing our own Interphase Variometers, and in sending for you, the leading expert on the effects of the widening Dual Space Interphase.”

“Sent for me?” Now that you think about it, there has been a subtle manipulation behind all your recent movements.

“Of course. Those that visited you on Harvard may not have realized that they served the Brotherhood. Their employers may not have realized. But somewhere, somehow, there extended a subtle chain of action beginning with my request for your presence and ending with your arrival here. That is the way of the Brotherhood.”

You’re not sure whether you should be flattered or offended, but one thing is certain: you still haven’t seen the whole of the Brotherhood plan.

“And why did you send for me, Brother Dikestra? Surely not just to talk in a wood-panelled library for a few hours. You already know as much as I do about Dual Space and the rising Interphase.”

“More,” says Dikestra. “Stand up and hold the Variometer in front of you, then turn in a slow circle.”

You do as he suggests, watching the red needle on the Variometer. At several points in your circuit the needle seems to flicker upwards before returning to its baseline.

"The rising Interphase is not a uniform phenomenon," you say. "There are some regions of the galaxy where higher Interphase levels prevail."

"Exactly, Professor. With the equipment in my laboratory, which is substantially larger and more sensitive than this little toy, I have identified a number of specific points of increased Interphase across the galactic Arm. These points are unexpected anomalies — places where the Dual Space Interphase is wider than in the rest of the galaxy. My suspicion, which has been partially confirmed by alien traders, is that these sources of heightened Dual Space are the work of artificial devices."

"Dual Space machines?"

"In a sense, yes. Very powerful and perhaps very subtle machines, whose operating principles may be far beyond our understanding."

"And you want me to investigate them."

"Yes, Professor Dambroke. We want you to investigate them. You have the necessary training; you have prior experience in investigating alien worlds; and, your ship is one of the most capable human vessels in the galaxy."

"You know I'll do it. I'm already here to continue my explorations." You wonder if the Brotherhood realizes that their subtle manipulations weren't really necessary. "But tell me what I'm supposed to look for."

"The Dual Space anomalies, of course. I can't tell you exactly where they are or what they'll look like — my information isn't that good — but when you come across one of them, you'll know it. The Variometer will tell you."

"You mean it will fluctuate, like it just did before, when I land on a planet that has one of the anomalies?"

"Exactly. Then all you have to do is spend some time on that planet. Research the place thoroughly and find out as much as you can about what it has to do with Dual Space."

"OK, that sounds reasonable enough. But what am I *really* looking for? What do you hope to gain from my investigations?"

Dikestra sighs, and slumps a little further into his chair. "They wanted me to give you a song and dance about publishing another paper, describing the anomalies. They hoped to appeal to your love of pure research."

"There's no such thing as pure research."

"I know, Professor, I know. Which is why I've made the decision to tell you what we really need. The Brotherhood is looking for a way to counter the rising Dual Space level, a way to narrow the Interphase over specific areas. We hope that by investigating artifacts that raise the Dual Space level, we can discover a way to lower it."

You remain silent for a second, staring at Brother Dikestra and pondering the implications of his words. Licking his lips nervously, Dikestra continues.

"Our social scientists are afraid that a rapidly rising Interphase could lead to civil unrest on the human worlds. Having a way to counter it could be critical."

"I can see that. Just how many Dual Space anomalies will I have to research to get the necessary data?"

"I don't know for sure. But you'll probably have to research at least four anomalies. It won't be easy finding that many."

"But it's for a good cause. Thank you for being honest with me, Brother," you say. "Knowing your plans will make it easier for me to satisfy the Brotherhood. And we can maintain the publication story between us if it would be easier for you; we can even make it a collaboration."

"Excellent, Professor; It'll be a pleasure to work with you. We can talk via subspace radio as you make your discoveries. And you should know that a colleague of mine, Brother Gries, has been doing some work on the effects of the widening Dual Space Interphase on the human mind. You might be interested in speaking to him. He lives on the planet Dahl."

If you wish to see Brother Gries when you are on Dahl, you may plot the following option:

⟨XPNSYZ⟩ (5 phases) Speak with Brother Gries about the effects of Dual Space on humans.

You leave Brother Dikestra and think about your goal as you head back to your ship. You must find and research four Dual Space anomalies, in the hope of eventually building a device to counter the widening Dual Space Interphase. To discover four anomalies, you will have to visit all the planets of the Galactic Arm that you can, possibly even the ones you've been to already. You never know where something interesting might turn up.

With the Interphase Variometer now installed on your ship, you are now ready to begin your search.

*To find out the current Dual Space Interphase level on a scale of 0 to 100, check the Interphase Variometer on your status display.*

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[039]

The three Zyran ships incapacitate your ship. Then they take what they want of your cargo. They know Humans don't taste good, but they talk about grinding you up for pet food. Luckily, that's just their sense of humor and they let you go. After all, says one of them, you might be good for more cargo at a later date.

This adventure took some time, so you lose the rest of your plotted phases for this turn. You may resume your movement next turn.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[040]

Golgotha swings endlessly on its orbit, slicing continuously into the future, a time machine penetrating the veil at the rate of one second per second. In this respect it's no different from any other planet or place, but somehow on Golgotha you are more aware of these things. Time is the commonplace mystery that transcends all others. Even Dual Space is subservient to time.

But not completely. Just as you are not completely bound to your own time. You have memory and knowledge as a finger on the pulse of the past, and you have reason and imagination as eyes into the future. Golgotha too sees into the future, but it sees with many eyes, for in Dual Space all possibilities exist simultaneously. It has no need for imagination, because everything imaginable is already a fact, in one of its countless dimensions. And reason — perhaps it has that. You sense that in the swirl of spreading possibilities there is some pattern less than intelligence but more than randomness, some capacity to distinguish that which is merely conceivable from that which is destined to become real.

In that pattern you have only yourself as a starting point. You center your perspective about your own future and visualize the collective paths from this point and where they lead. You see your ship taking off from Golgotha, flying through space. The paths are tangled and multiform; you will have many decisions to make and only a few points are predictable. You see yourself returning to places you've been.

One loop of one path leads you to the planet Darkwhistle. There, you leave your ship and your body behind and somehow journey back to Golgotha. You see yourself with many questions, and some of them being answered on your journey, but you can't see what the questions or the answers will be.

The paths diverge again, leaving you with only snatches of perception. You see the Clathran survey line, actually a plane of shifting formations of ships, moving in fits and starts across great chunks of space; you see flames in the cities of the Nine Worlds; you see a golden dodecahedron balanced on the edge of a void of its own making. You see battle in high space, Clathrans against ships of many forms. You see the battle end, but which side is victorious? There is no predicting; the outcome is too deeply bound up in your own decisions.



Now you are following many threads, and the pattern is harder to discern. There is madness and death on one hand, sustained war on the other. You see fleets of Clathran and human warships in the Fringe; you see worlds occupied and exploited by both species. You see the cities of the Nine Worlds deserted, the factories silent, smoke dissipating. The visions are incompatible, and you cannot place them in any coherent sequence. You are beginning to lose hold. The future is drawing you away in too many different directions, and the images you try hardest to hold onto, the things that you most love and want to preserve, are the first ones to dissolve into chaos. Your perception splinters into shards, and the shards spin and sparkle against a dark backdrop of stars wherein the dragon is twisting, writhing in its bonds, scattering stars and grinding worlds to dust.

You sense your own mind and identity dividing itself into nothingness as each fold of future breaks every fragment again and yet again. You try to piece the fragments together, but each shard you grasp crumples into smaller shards. You try to reverse the flow, but the currents of the storm drive you onward into regions of ever more intricate turbulence.

Suddenly, against all laws of chance, the shards in their interwoven trajectories assemble themselves into a new pattern, like a perfect crystal forming from the random flux of atoms dissolved in liquid. The pattern surrounds you like a three-sided prism of glass with a different image on each side. There for a moment the turbulence ends; three futures stare past you in different directions, as if defying the infinite paths that led to their formation. You try to put a name on the force that drew them together. Destiny, you decide, or perhaps divinity.

Three futures. You look at the first. You are not surprised by what you see, but that doesn't reduce the horror of it. Clathran ships scour the remains of the human planets, planets that have been sterilized and then pulverized into dust. Every trace of humanity is gone. The aliens are subjugated, each species driven back to its home world and contained there forever. The Clathran survey is completed, all of its obstacles overcome.

You turn to the second future, dreading what you might see. For a moment your hope rises as you see a galaxy aswarm with humanity. Then you look more closely. The suns and worlds are as filled with color as always, but there is only one color of life. Humans fill every inhabitable world; the uninhabitable worlds are gone, their mass converted into great shells in space within which yet more humans live. The energy output of the stars is channeled into the fabricators and power plants that sustain the human population. Plants and animals that serve the needs of the human masters grow frantically in controlled artificial environments, waiting for the harvest. Only a tiny fraction of the living species in the galaxy are so honored; the rest are long gone and long forgotten. You search for any sign of any of the other intelligent species of the galaxy. You find them, isolated within domed enclaves that are no more than giant zoo cages simulating the environments of their lost home worlds. Those with useful talents are permitted to serve mankind, and as a reward they are allowed to breed themselves in greater numbers and share more of the products of human industry. Sometimes there is resistance or rebellion, but it never lasts long. Humans alone are the masters of Dual Space, without limitations. Within this future there is little change from year to year, millennium to millennium; the people are productive but their long term goals are as vague as ever. Perhaps one day the galaxy will rupture like a dying cell and a swarm of a million million million spaceships will emerge, filled with humans and bound for other galaxies to repeat the process on worlds without end.

Horrified, you turn away and confront the last of the three futures. You are relieved to see a galaxy filled with flourishing life of countless varieties. Every world under every sun is unique and fulfilled. Many are home to intelligent beings who build their lives and contemplate their universes in as many different ways as there are questions to ask and minds to ask them. Some worlds, though, are still in the process of forming out of stellar gases and dust; on others, life is only beginning to emerge. Others still are old and dying, their suns growing cold or their masters growing weary, and life comes to an end as often as it begins anew. The tides of nature wash age and decay from the shores of one world and cast it up as hope upon the shores of another, in a cycle as old as time and more beautiful than anything you have ever seen.

And where are the humans in this future? For a moment you cannot find them, but then you see them. There are not many, but there are enough. They wander from world to world, savoring the endless variation, counting the countless forms of perfection. They have changed. They travel not in spaceships but in energy forms of their own devising, skimming the surface of the Interphase in elegant harmony with time itself. They are gentle, using their powers only in the most subtle ways as they tend the many worlds like proud gardeners. Those beings on the planets below that are aware of them call them the Wise Ones or the Keepers or the Gods.

The vision is so compelling that you feel an overwhelming desire to go there, to live among them and leave behind the chaos and uncertainty of the present. You approach the window as if you could pass through it and transport yourself into that bright future. But instead, the pane dissolves around you into its constituent shards, and the shards spin away into the farthest reaches of space and leave you in blackness. For a moment you are frightened, but you realize that everything is black only because your eyes are closed. You open your eyes and find yourself back in the present.

You spend some time thinking about what you've seen and writing down your thoughts. You compare the visions of the future that you had with the discussion you heard among the Founders in your vision of Golgotha's past. Clearly their visions of the future were not quite the

same as yours. For them, the vision of a peaceful and flourishing galaxy must have been a mere glimmer of hope, Brother Eric's slim "third path." If that is true, it means that the Final Church of Man has been successful beyond the Founders' expectations. Three distant futures now stand before you, equally likely. Perhaps your own actions will decide whether the Church's mission will be successful in the end.

And that is frightening, and a bit frustrating. There are still too many questions. What choices lead to which future? How does the Clathran menace affect the outcome? What will happen if the spread of disorder in the Nine Worlds isn't stopped? Are there other "third paths" hidden among the future's many folds? Was there a Seventh Text File that answers these questions?

In the following days you try to repeat your experience. You are not very successful. You see only parts of what you saw before, and nothing new. The flow of time from Golgotha is too intricate for you to master; you can only cast yourself into the flow and see what glimpses are offered you.

You need a way to learn more. Thinking about the problem, you remember the part of your vision where you saw yourself returning to Golgotha — not in your ship, but in a mental journey from the planet Darkwhistle. You reason that Darkwhistle might be the key to the answers you need.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[041]

Even with the map, getting through the complex turns and twists of the maze is hard. The printout of the labyrinth is not meant to make it easy for you to arrive somewhere in particular, it just renders it possible. Frustrated, you keep on trying and are finally rewarded with the sight of a building proclaiming to all the world that it is indeed the Sallion Interstellar Commodities Market.

As you are about to enter the building, you are almost knocked over by two Homeless Ones dashing out through the doors and racing out into the maze. A Settled One calmly watches them leave and, glancing at her watch, makes note of the time. Ruefully, she grins and asks you to forgive the youngsters.

"They are competing in a race to be the first to arrive at a given location across the city. The young ones often forget that courtesy is as important as winning. They will learn this eventually; until then, we must make allowances." She ripples her fur, the Hadrakian equivalent of a human shrug, and asks if she may be of service to you. You explain that you are interested in getting the prices on commodities for trade.

"Ah, I think you will find our selection of Synthetic Genius to be the best in the galaxy. I do not know if you are aware of this, but the Sallies are among the most brilliant of races. Too bad they are not interested in doing much of anything practical. The wasted potential is heartbreaking." She shows you to the office where you can get the requested information and leaves you to your business. After asking the Settled One running the office about the current prices of Synthetic Genius, you find that they will trade for the following:

- 3 Synthetic Genius for 1 Phase Steel
- 2 Synthetic Genius for 1 Radioactives
- 1 Synthetic Genius for 1 Super Slip

Go now to the CGM. You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[042]

You feel drawn to the temple for some strange reason. Perhaps it is a part of yourself telling you that there is something vitally important to your quest within these walls. Maybe you should take the Brother up on her offer to join the order. With all of the dangers facing you in the galaxy today, you may need all the help you can get.

You may select this option again.

✕ STOP ✕

[043]

Golgotha swings endlessly on its orbit, slicing continuously into the future, a time machine penetrating the veil at the rate of one second per second. In this respect it's no different from any other planet or place, but somehow on Golgotha you are more aware of these things. Time is the commonplace mystery that transcends all others. Even Dual Space is subservient to time.

But not completely. Just as you are not completely bound to your own time. You have memory and knowledge as a finger on the pulse of the past, and you have reason and imagination as eyes into the future. Golgotha too sees into the future, but it sees with many eyes, for in Dual Space all possibilities exist simultaneously. It has no need for imagination, because everything imaginable is already a fact, in one of its countless dimensions. And reason — perhaps it has that. You sense that in the swirl of spreading possibilities there is some pattern less than intelligence but more than randomness, some capacity to distinguish that which is merely conceivable from that which is destined to become real.

In that pattern you have only yourself as a starting point. You center your perspective about your own future and visualize the collective paths from this point and where they lead. You see your ship taking off from Golgotha, flying through space. The paths are tangled and multiform; you will have many decisions to make and only a few points are predictable. You see yourself returning to places you've been. Then the paths diverge again, leaving you with only snatches of perception. You see the Clathran survey line, actually a plane of shifting formations of ships, moving in fits and starts across great chunks of space; you see flames in the cities of the Nine Worlds; you see a golden dodecahedron balanced on the edge of a void of its own making. You see battle in high space, Clathrans against ships of many forms, a terrible explosion. You see the battle end, but which side is victorious? There is no predicting; the outcome is too deeply bound up in your own decisions.

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You spend some time thinking about what you've seen. You compare the visions of the future that you had with the discussion you heard among the Church people in your vision of Golgotha's past. Clearly their visions of the future were not the same as yours. Your vision of a peaceful and flourishing galaxy must have been to them a mere glimmer of hope, Brother Eric's slim "third path." If that is true, it means that the Final Church of Man has already had more of an influence on human history than you would have thought. You never thought they were that important.

✠ STOP ✠

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[044]

Cruel though this may be, you are getting tired of being victimized by the jelly-bag aliens. After completing the set-up, you leave the room and wait for a reaction. You feel a pang of remorse a half hour later when you hear the sharp retort of the pen firing and a high-pitched "Yeow" from the unfortunate Francloon. The slimy little alien deserves whatever it gets.

You now have the sense that you are taking charge of yourself. By acting in kind, you are fighting back against a situation over which you formerly had no control. This way is much better! Those Francloons had better watch their step.

You make another tour through the rooms and find even nastier practical jokes awaiting you. One involves arrow-like projectiles aimed at knee height. This wouldn't have killed you but it might have crippled you. Fortunately you heard the humming of the string being released in time to jump and roll safely out of the way. You gather up some of the arrows, as well as the bow device, and take them with you. The next trap is sleeping gas that enters the room after all doors lock, making you a prisoner. You wake several hours later with a pounding headache.

Yet another room has large furry spiders emerging from cracks in the walls when you reach the center of the floor. You are able to sprint to the far door and escape before you are bitten. That's it, though! You are not going to take any more. All thoughts of compassion and not wanting to really injure anyone leave your mind and you set up one heck of a "joke" using the bow and arrows, some slippery glop you find in your clothes, and the bucket which you are still carrying around with you.

You return to the room with the sleeping gas, where the Francloons have not yet had time to set up a new practical joke. Here you design your own trap where an unwary Francloon steps into the room, slides on the slippery stuff placed strategically on the floor and heads for a row of protruding arrows set up along the far wall. While sliding, the bucket falls from atop the door, covering the Francloon's sensory apparatus so it could very well be unaware of the danger toward which it is careening.

You step back and survey your handiwork, nodding in satisfaction at what you see. Sure the alien might be maimed or killed, but so might you in one of *its* next jokes. You feel the need to fight fire with fire and not worry about the other guy. After all, your life is on the line here. Satisfied, you return to the first room and await the outcome of your latest practical joke.

Ten minutes later you hear a high-pitched "Whooh!!!" and a crash, as the bucket rams into the far wall. Moments later Whooger emerges, rubbing its tentacles over a severely bruised and bleeding portion of its body.

"Well, I think you have had more than enough opportunity to observe our lifestyle up close and personal," the alien says, as it places a bandage over its wound. "I thought this building would be a good place to teach you. Now you can understand what it is to be a Francloon, constantly on the lookout for jokes and opportunities to play them on others. You may call us callous, but it is something we have no control over since we are the way we are. You have been an interesting visitor and I thank you for coming. The door is now unlocked and you may leave anytime you wish. I trust that you have been inconvenienced substantially."

You stand there for a minute, speechless. You certainly have been inconvenienced. For one thing, your health has suffered from the many "jokes" that were played on you. However, you also believe you have gained an understanding of the Francloons. You feel sorry for them; their attitude towards life is not a pleasant one. You wonder what really happened all those years ago to make the Francloons the way they now are.

You also realize that you have learned something from your experience dealing with the Francloons. Sometimes you just have to do what is in your own self-interest, even if it means hurting the other guy. This ruthless attitude is not something you would want to dominate your personality, but there are times when you must rely on it in order to survive.

There is nothing more to do here, so you leave Whooger and head back to your ship.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[045]

A collection of small drones and scanning ships clusters rapidly around you, but you manage to cut your way through them for a while. Unfortunately, they have time to call for reinforcements. Soon a whole fleet of destroyers is approaching to meet you head on. You are forced to flee with your tail between your legs. Fortunately the destroyers are slower than you are, so you are able to make good your retreat. In the process, you take a fair amount of damage from enemy fire.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

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[046]

Again you are facing a Hadrakian Settled One, either a visitor from one of the other Hadrakian worlds trying to gain Citizenship, or one who, as a Homeless One, was a renegade who never proved his discipline and commitment to society's rules. These renegades are relatively few in number, but are all the more dangerous because of the life they are forced to lead on the outskirts of civilization. The crowd is not cheering for her as wildly as they usually back a hometown favorite, but you're not sure that's a good thing. Most of the gossip you can overhear from the nearby seats seems to indicate that the crowd is expecting an exceptional fight. You only hope you can give them one.

Go now to the CGM.

⊗ STOP ⊗

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[047]

After determining that you do not need your environmental suit, you step out of the airlock into a gladed area in the midst of the steamy jungle. A rustling in the bushes attracts your attention and you look up in time to see a party of four-foot-tall, bipedal, furry, mammal-like creatures peering at you. They are dressed in simple tunics, evidence that they may be intelligent. Before you have time to greet them, they dash back into the jungle.

You have the following options:

⟨7N8YK6⟩ (4 phases) Gather Fiber from the nearby trees.

⟨XNNYY6⟩ (5 phases) Investigate the local residents.

⟨7M8JKU⟩ (7 phases) Sneak up to the northern hemisphere and spy on the Clathrans.

⊗ STOP ⊗

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[048]

After a somewhat lengthy battle, you score a killing blow, leaving the Zyran vessel defenseless.

"Gotcha, you son of a Betelgeusian burglar beetle!" you exclaim in triumph. "Computer, get me the Zyran bridge on visual."

The tactical battle display on the screen disappears, and the inside of the Zyran ship comes into view. The ugliness of the alien takes you by surprise, even though you've seen Zyrans before. Its jumbled brown heads, legs, and arms move in all different directions, secreting sticky goo. It doesn't seem to mind sitting in the goo.

It opens its mouth to say something.

"Hungry."

"Oh, yeah?" you reply, "Then eat hot plasma beams!"

You let loose a salvo from your weapons, and the Zyran ship blows apart with a satisfying crackle. The image disappears from your screen, leaving a blank field of stars.

Unfortunately, your dinner is now cold.

This adventure took some time, so you lose the rest of your plotted phases for this turn. You may resume your movement next turn.

⊗ STOP ⊗

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[049]

The radar alerts you to the presence of an alien vessel in your immediate vicinity. You ask the computer to identify the ship.

“Sorry, Boss. The configuration of the vessel is unlike any I have on record.”

“Then you don’t think it is Clathran?” you ask. You aren’t sure what you want the answer to be. On the one hand, maybe you can attack and (hopefully) destroy it; on the other, maybe it is more powerful than you and will blow you out of space. Interesting dilemma.

“Positive, Boss, unless they have started flying small single-drive ships that have all the power of a newborn kitten. No, I suspect this ship belongs to an independent trader. Shall I make contact?”

“Sure, why not.”

Within minutes, you find yourself speaking with a strange protoplasm being piloting a slow water-filled ship. After introducing yourself, you learn that the creature is from a planet closer to the galactic Core. The being has come farther than usual to discover new trading markets, since some of the ports nearer its home planet have been blockaded by Clathrans. You tell it about some of the good trades you have discovered in your own travels. In return, the alien tells you that it is headed for the planet Holoth to purchase a few cargo bay expansion units for its ship.

“Thank you for your help, quatropod being,” the blob tells you. You can only assume the term is a polite one.

“Any time, protoplasmic blob,” you reply in a hearty fashion. Your two ships part company and you continue on your way.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[050]

The Wet Repulsion Slab is a square kilometer of solid granite submerged in the lagoon so that its surface is exactly at sea level. The moonless Franclair has only slight tides and very mild weather, and the Slab is therefore always just under water or just above. This, combined with the unusual electromagnetic properties of the water in the lagoon, makes the Slab an ideal location for testing spaceship propulsion systems. As a result, an entire academic industry has grown up around it. There are research buildings, laboratories, power generators, hull works, and the like lining the coast east and west of the actual Slab. Some of the finest scientific minds in the Hadrakian Empire work here, and they are all bent on solving one problem: the inability of animate life forms to travel via jump engine.

It is well known that jump engines work fine with inanimate cargo. A cargo drone equipped with a jump engine can travel instantaneously from one place to another. However, if you put a living creature on board, it arrives at the destination dead. It is frustrating, but no intelligent life form seems capable of travelling by jump engine. The Hadrakians realize that a “survivable” jump engine — one that can carry live beings — would give them a big edge in the war. So, they have been researching the problem intensely.

“It is simple, mechanically,” says Professor Nathrasha Whitefur to you, when you arrange an interview. “We know all the components needed to build the survivable jump engine. A Dimensional Transducer and a unit each of Crystals and Warp Core are all you need to make up the jump engine framework. One unit of Medicines and one of Primordial Soup will protect the physiology of the living occupant of the field. Yet somehow the occupant always dies, and we never know why. Our work continues on several avenues, but many of us, including myself, have come to think that there’s an important concept missing here. It’s as if the occupant of the jump engine field were losing his soul, somehow, and was unable to continue living without it.”

“Have you tried prayer?” you ask, semi-seriously.

“Of course,” she sighs, “But the gods have been silent, if they know the answer at all.”

“What’s your best theory?”

"It's crazy, but the soul thing is the best I can do. I think we need to do more work in metaphysics, and less in the physical sciences. We need a receptor for the soul, a matrix to copy it onto while the field operates."

"What sort of receptor?"

The Hadrakian ripples her fur, equivalent to a human shrug. "I think it would be different for different races, and perhaps even for different individuals. I think I might know it if I saw it, but I can't be more specific than that."

You thank the Professor and take your leave, turning the problem over in your mind. A receptor for the soul? What would such a thing look like? What would it feel like to hold it? You've never seen anything inanimate that affected you like that, except for...

Except for your Flame Jewel.

You hurry back to your ship, and hastily tear down your tri-axis drive.

"Uh... Boss?"

"Don't interrupt me, I'm having a brainstorm. If you want to do something useful, make contact with Professor Whitefur's office at the Wet Repulsion Slab and get a complete blueprint of their most recent jump engine system, including the bio-protective equipment."

"Yes Boss."

At length, you get the drive system completely disassembled (a task you could probably do blindfolded if you weren't so excited) and pull the Flame Jewel out from the center. Gazing into its fiery depths, you feel your enthusiasm reach new heights. You close your eyes, and try to open your mind to the mysteries of the Flame Jewel. The engine room of the *Run Amok* fades from around you; when you open your eyes again, you are looking out through a flickering orange curtain at your own hand, your arm, your body, your self, holding the Flame Jewel, face relaxed and eyes closed. The vision persists for just a second. When you blink, it is gone, and you are regarding the Flame Jewel once more from the outside.

This stone is the receptacle for your soul.

"I've got the plans, Boss."

"Put them on the screen in the engine room." For the next seventy-two hours you scarcely move, as you adapt and work the Hadrakian blueprints to fit your ship. You sleep in short catnaps, you eat food without seeing it; for you, the outside world has ceased to exist. And in the end, you have what you came to Franclair for: plans for a complete jump engine system. With the Flame Jewel included, it might even be survivable.

But there's only one way to find out for sure.

To build the jump engine, you must first have all of the components in your possession, including another Flame Jewel (the present one must be returned to your tri-axis drive system). The complete list of components is:

- 1 Dimensional Transducer
- 1 Crystals
- 1 Warp Core
- 1 Medicines
- 1 Primordial Soup
- 1 Flame Jewel

When you have all of these and are ready to build and test a survivable jump engine, plot the following option:

(9VV99V) (7 phases) Build and test the Survivable Jump Engine

Please make a note of this action code; it is an "unlisted" option, so you will need to enter the code manually when you wish to select it.

❖ STOP ❖



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**[051]**

When you try to run across the enemy side of the field, your opponent realizes what is going on. You would not be running in that direction if you were his ally. He runs after you, using his superior speed to catch you and attack. Soon you are seriously injured. Meanwhile, your ally has found and defeated the other opponent. You bleed in the mud as you watch the remaining two combatants go at it. Your ally eventually wins and crosses the field victoriously. You pass out.

✂ STOP ✂

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**[052]**

The surface of Outpost is dotted here and there with the remains of the weapon systems that Silverbeard built to defend Outpost against his enemies. These were all disabled or destroyed in the battles for control of Outpost. One ruined weapon, a big neutral particle beam generator, is located near the other clustered buildings. The weapon is beyond repair and useless, but adjoining it is a prefab building containing sophisticated tools and test equipment which Silverbeard used for building and maintaining his weapons. In fact, during your previous visit to Outpost, you were able to use these same resources to outfit your ship with stress field and plasma beam weapons.

Looking through the disorganized piles of metal, you find manipulators for delicate work and machine tools for making parts from scratch. The equipment hasn't been used for a while, and some items look like they could use some service themselves, but everything is in reasonable shape. You take a few days to make use of the tools here, fixing and tuning your ship into tip-top condition. Looking over your handiwork, you are proud. The hull is smooth and strong, the engine hums melodiously, and even the food processor is serving up tasty meals instead of the usual glop. Ah, is she a beauty.

Go now to the CGM. You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

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**[053]**

When you ask a Homeless One where you may find the Hadrakian resistance organization, he looks at you in annoyance. He is large, even for a Hadrakian male, with smoothly rippling muscles and very sharp fangs and claws that snick in and out. You get the feeling that he doesn't have the time or patience to deal with you. You are very glad when you pass his inspection; you try to hide your relief while he is snapping out the proper turns you need to make to get to your destination.

After a few wrong starts, you finally manage to find yourself outside a large building located at the outer reaches of one of the spokes that make up the roads in Jewel. The sign above the door reading, "The Battle, Inc." tells you that you have arrived at the proper place.

You pass through the doorway, entering what is obviously a waiting room. Sinking into an oversized (by human standards) chair, you spot a camera aimed at you. You have the distinct impression you are being studied. It is not long before a Settled One enters the room through a door in the rear.

"What is it that you wish here?" she asks.

"I am interested in discussing the war with the Clathrans. It is a subject that is very important to me," you reply in a firm voice.

"Very well, come with me," she says, leading you through the rear door.

✂ STOP ✂

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[054]

You sit on the command chair on your ship's bridge, shoulders hunched forward, brooding. If your best friend could see you now. . . your best friend. How long has it been since you saw your family or friends?

Dark thoughts run through your brain. The incessant hum of your ship's engines vibrates your body just enough that you can feel it in your bones. How long will you have to remain so far from home; how long?

"Boss," the computer calls gently, pulling you from the well of depression you were about to enter. You look up, grateful for the interruption.

"You wanted to know when we reached our destination. We will begin orbit around the planet Ululu momentarily."

"Thanks," you respond. You stand and stretch, feeling the ligaments cracking from their imposed inactivity. You walk over to the forward screen and watch as your ship begins to circle around the third planet in this system. After instructing the computer to run the usual scan on the unknown world, you sit down again, waiting patiently for the data.

You read the report as soon as it is ready and learn that the planet is populated by a race called Sirissians. They also have colonies on the nearby worlds of Sirissi and Takata, with Sirissi being the homeworld.

The physical characteristics of the planet below you indicate the presence of a primarily agrarian culture. This wouldn't be so interesting except that all of the lush vegetation is actually growing in the upper atmosphere, in mid-air. It is hard to believe, but the entire stratosphere, miles high, surrounding the entire planet, is choked full with living, growing plants.

You don't understand how this can work. To begin with, the spherical band of vegetation must block out most of the sunlight, making the surface below dark as night. Where do the plants get water and nutrients, and how are they harvested? These questions merely make you curious. The problem that really has you stumped is that the thick layer of plant life forms such a dense barrier that you don't see how you can possibly land your ship.

Fortunately your scanners are capable of seeing through the vegetation barrier, and you watch the aliens inhabiting the surface below. They have a fascinating appearance, with multiple sensory organs atop stalks which sprout from their "heads." This gives them the look of having a spiked haircut running from the equivalent of ear to ear. The sensory organs are peculiar, too — seven round globes with horizontal slits sitting on top of the head stalks. Each globe apparently performs a different function, although they all seem to be quite similar in appearance. You are truly baffled by Sirissian anatomy. At least it works for them!

The Sirissians are about four feet in height and three feet in breadth. Their cultural mannerisms include a lot of bending at the waist, which looks none too easy given their physical dimensions. Yet this action is essential, from what you can see, to ending conversations and consummating any sort of deal. This gives them a rather clownish appearance in their day-to-day activities and tends to make you think of them as harmless. You haven't come this far by being taken in by appearances, however. You resolve to give this new race the respect you always give the unknown.

You also see that the Clathrans have a small garrison on this planet. The base sends out an occasional patrol into the cities to check on the Sirissians, and that's it. Apparently the Clathrans consider the Sirissians to be a vanquished race and feel little need to expend military power keeping them under control. Since the occupying force is so small, you are not really concerned about being discovered while you are here.

The main spaceport is used quite a bit, not only by ships from the Sirissians' colony planets, but also by ships from other races. The Clathrans don't seem to mind an ongoing trade industry here. That's not like them. Maybe they assume that any ship in the area is either friendly or neutral — or else how would they have gotten here? You pray for them to continue to be so complacent. It certainly makes things easier for you.

Directing your computer to home in on the landing beacon, you make contact with the landing port and get permission to set down. You have the computer question all of the landing instructions because at no time do the aliens indicate there will be a problem getting through the plant belt. You are not so sure of this fact, but the Port Authority assures you there will be no difficulty. So, you direct your computer to follow their instructions but be ready to reverse thrusters if it seems like you are getting into trouble.

“Right, Boss!”

Approaching the layer of vegetation, you brace yourself for the impact which never comes. Somehow, your ship is teleported through the dense living barrier and reappears several thousand feet below. You now find yourself nearing the spaceport.

“What happened?” you ask, confused.

“All I know, Boss, is that these beings have a great mastery of physical teleportation. We passed through the three miles or so of floating plant life with no loss of time or any sort of disorientation. I don’t know a lot about this race, Boss, but I’d say they are far more advanced than they appear. Be careful when dealing with them — we don’t want to get them mad at us!”

You smile at the warning but decide the computer may be right. This could also be the reason the Clathrans, although technically occupying the planet, do not really interfere with the Sirissians’ day-to-day life.

A welcoming committee bobbles over to you and offers assistance in directing you to wherever you wish to go. For a moment, you are too stunned to reply. Each of the aliens has at least one stalk of golden-colored grain protruding from its mouth area. You have a sudden urge to laugh as you imagine the Sirissians all dressed in blue denim overalls with straw hats on their heads.

You explain that you are new to the planet and aren’t sure what activities are available. They bow a few times while conferring in low tones among themselves. Then they turn back to you and give you the following list of options:

⟨HBRWAT⟩ (3 phases) Harvest some Food from the available atmospheric supply.

⟨DBCWFT⟩ (4 phases) Investigate the means by which you were able to teleport through the thick vegetation in the stratosphere.

⟨HGR4AQ⟩ (7 phases) Visit one of the immense sports arenas on Ululu.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[055]

You have been intrigued by the hand weapons the Hadrakians carry here and you stop a Homeless One on the street to ask about them.

“You want to know about this?” The Hadrakian points to his weapon and chuckles. “It’s a mental scrambler — the small version — and I wouldn’t be alive today without it. The gun acts as a generator for neuro-interruption rays which incapacitate different life forms to various degrees. The more primitive the brain, the more effective the mental scrambler is. The weapon is a necessity on this world which, as you may have noticed, is filled with very primitive and very dangerous creatures.

“One of the worst monsters I’ve run into is called the tyranopsor. It stands over thirty feet high and eats anything that moves, or anything that stands still, for that matter. I remember a particularly scary time when I was out on a logging trip with some friends of mine. Two tyranopsors came by and tried to stomp us. We took out our weapons, and boy were we surprised when none of them worked! We’d forgotten to recharge them. Luckily for us, a big brontopsor came by to see what all the commotion was and the tyranopsor decided to fight it instead of us. If it wasn’t for that, we’d have been stomped for sure. Now I always carry two weapons around, just in case. If you are interested in buying one, why don’t you go over to the Gun Shop?”

The Homeless One gives you the necessary directions and, within minutes, you find yourself entering the store. You look around and the place is filled with many different models of the mental scrambler. When the Settled One running the shop approaches you, you ask for the price of a gun and learn that they go for the following:

1 Munitions + 1 Synthetic Genius

Go now to the CGM. You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[056]

You select a Shrine from the Street of Gods and find your way into one of the meditation cubicles. You clear your mind of thoughts and wait, hoping your Revelation ability will encourage a Hadrakian god to tell you something useful.

You wait, and wait, and wait.

Nothing happens.

Eventually you get tired of waiting and leave the cubicle. The Shrine Keeper asks you for the name of the god that visited you.

"I didn't get a Revelation this time," you tell her.

"That's too bad. I'm sorry we couldn't help you today. How long has it been since your last Revelation?"

"Not very long. At most a week or two."

"Well, that explains it. Unless it's been at least two weeks you can't expect anything. The gods like to rest between visits."

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

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[057]

The collector device, you conclude after close examination, measures the width of the Dual Space Interphase. Since leaving Outpost you've had plenty of time to study and learn more about Dual Space. The theory suggests that the width of the Interphase is one of the fundamental characteristics of reality, in some ways more fundamental than physical constants like the gravitational constant or the speed of light. The Interphase represents the range of alternate possibilities that exist alongside reality. In theory, mental powers and certain kinds of technology can change reality in small ways by accessing alternatives existing within the Interphase. If the Interphase widens, a wider range of alternatives become realizable, and reality becomes more changeable. In a theoretical state of extremely large Interphase width, reality could become almost completely subjective and arbitrary. Certainly such an existence would be impossible for life forms adapted to unchangeable laws of nature. But if the Interphase width were to drop to zero, theory suggests that reality would become completely mechanistic, making free will and subjective consciousness impossible. Obviously, the ideal state is somewhere in between.

This concept must have been important to the builders of Aqafa as well, for the device you are examining is designed to record as well as measure the width of the Interphase. The machine's only moving part is a cylinder near the base, about ten meters in diameter, which is divided into a stack of independent rings. The lowest ring rotates so as to make one complete revolution in about five minutes. As it turns to the right past a certain point, a glowing line appears on the ring, erasing the previous recorded line coming around from the left. The line appears to be perfectly straight. A second ring above the first rotates more slowly, making one revolution for every nine turns of the ring below. It too is marked with a glowing straight line as it turns. There are fourteen rings in all, and although the motions of the upper ten are imperceptible, you suspect that each turns nine times more slowly than the one below it. Each records a glowing line.

The lines on the bottom four rings all appear perfectly straight, indicating that the Interphase width is not changing greatly on a time scale of hours or days. However, the fifth and six rings, which record over periods of weeks and months, show a distinct upward trend. The Interphase is definitely widening, slowly but steadily.

Examining the eighth ring, which according to your calculations completes one rotation in about 45 years, you can see that the rise began about twenty years ago. Before that, as the rings above the eighth show, the width had been steadily decreasing, extremely slowly, over the course of thousands of years.

On the twelfth ring, the glowing line extends only about a third of the way around the cylinder. Apparently, this ring has not completed one full revolution since the device was put into operation. You quickly calculate that this means the recorder is about a hundred thousand

years old. Adafa, therefore, has probably been here for at least that long. The Interphase width at the beginning of the recording is high, and decreases slowly and continuously throughout the centuries. The recent increase is the first increase since at least 100,000 years ago.

The presence of the thirteenth and fourteenth rings is disturbing. The line representing the last hundred thousand years is but a tiny fraction of the circumference of the topmost ring. It will take about 24 *million* years for the topmost ring to make one revolution. It seems that whoever made the recorder intended to be around for a while. You wonder what happened to them.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[058]

Hours have passed since you began this cursed battle and you are no closer to victory now than you were at the start. You can feel the crowd getting angry at this lack of resolution. They want a winner and they want one now!

Sure enough, you begin to hear catcalls and booing filtering down from the stands. Try as you might, though, you simply cannot defeat the enemy. You are thoroughly chagrined when the crowd begins throwing rotten food into the Arena. Hunching your shoulders against the putrid onslaught, you see that a side door has now opened where you and your opponent are being waved off the combat grounds. You have no choice but to give up the fight for now.

A huge Settled One grimaces at you from the doorway. "You may try again if you think you are up to it, but I strongly suggest you make some improvements somewhere in your personal arsenal or training."

You realize that she is correct but the tone of voice she uses, so filled with disdain, is embarrassing!

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[059]

Getting down on your stomach, you crawl in a very undignified fashion until you are under the bell-shaped structure. You rise to a sitting position and direct your suit's light up toward the top of the bell. The upper half is filled with a complex network of glasslike filaments embedded with tiny metallic spheres where the filaments intersect.

Rising to a kneeling position, you look around the interior of the lower section. It seems to be empty. You stand upright, intending to meticulously examine each square inch of the structure. Before you reach your full upright position, your head encounters some sort of transparent barrier separating the lower part of the bell from the upper.

GOOOONNNNGGGG!!! Despite the total vacuum of Adafa's cold night side, a deafening sound reverberates in your ears, your head, your bones, your teeth. You feel it in every inch of your body, shaking you to the core. Just when you are sure you can stand it no longer, it continues with the same deafening loudness but, thankfully, you pass out from the ordeal. When you awaken, you awaken into a dream. You are being lifted toward the top of the bell, held paralyzed in a painfully rigid grip. You can't move to see whether you are in the grasp of a mechanism, an energy field, or some sort of internally induced paralysis. The gossamer network is flickering and pulsing with deep red light. A voice is whispering in your mind, but the words are indistinct, as if the whisperer were not talking to you but to someone else.

*Subject observed to . . . multiple anomalies. Do you wish to . . . or continue the standard program?*

Receiving no response after about a minute, the voice continues.

*. . . unmonitored mode. Programmed correctional and precautionary measures . . . be attempted.*

A clumsy psychic hand reaches into your mind and tears out a piece. It's over before you can react to the horror of it.

*initial cycle completed. . . of limited success. Repeating process.*

Helplessly you wait for it to happen again.

*repeating process repeating process repeating process repeating process. . .*

Nothing happens. The whisper fades. The deep red flickering of the filaments suddenly becomes a wild pulsing.

*attentioncannotcontinueinunmonitoredmodeinitiatingshutdown*

Two bright flashes light up the glass webwork, then all goes dark. You feel yourself falling. The dream ends.

You awaken some time later feeling ill and rather badly damaged. You drag yourself out from under the bell's edges.

Laying panting outside the alien device, you take stock of your physical well being, or lack thereof. You have sustained some injury but, what's worse, your mind has been violated and damaged. You feel a decided loss in the area of mental abilities.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[060]

"Fire!" you command and watch in frustration as the Clathran ship manages to evade your shot. So far, both you and the enemy Commander have kept the battle at a stalemate. For each shot you dodge, the Commander does the same for your shots. The score, if anyone is keeping one, is zero to zero. You wonder if this is any way to fight a war.

"Boss, the Clathran ship is breaking away. Should I pursue?"

"No," you respond reluctantly. "It is presumably headed for other Clathran ships. Although we managed to hold this one off, I doubt we could do the same for several vessels. Let it go. There's always tomorrow."

"Sure. Maybe we can beef up our weaponry in the meantime."

This adventure took some time, so you lose the rest of your plotted phases for this turn. You may resume your movement next turn.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[061]

You have heard great things about the recuperative ability of the hospital on Gloo. You would like to verify this yourself with a visit. Unfortunately, as you try to pass through the main doors, you are stopped by a guard.

“Where do you think you are going, pond scum?” he rumbles, after first carefully examining your rank.

“I’d like to see one of your doctors. It’s, um, an emergency. Yeah,” you continue, warming to this theme, “I have to go right in or I could pass on a deadly strain of the, ur, Nievian flu. It’s deadly to all forms of life, you know.”

The guard isn’t even listening to you. He demands to see your orders from a superior officer or he won’t let you into the hospital. Boy, talk about a tough audience! You mumble something about going off to die in peace and back away.

Looking back, you see that only some of the people going through have signed papers. Others outrank the guard and can enter without being stopped. You note that the guard’s insignia is a square with two stripes bisecting it. If you had a higher rank, you could probably get in. Heading back to your ship, you think about this.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[062]

You decide to join the Middle Riallan political discussion group again. Maybe this time you can offer some more helpful advice. You sit silently on one of the rigid bars for a while, listening to the Riallans’ telepathic thoughts.

“The Clathrans have advanced even further since the last time we met. They’re going to conquer the whole galaxy.”

“Maybe if we stay quiet the Clathrans won’t bother us. They seem to do the worst harm to colonizing, spacefaring races, which we’re not.”

“But what about our children in the Fringe, the New Riallans? They have lots of spaceships. The Clathrans are likely to annihilate them.”

“Yes, we must be worried about that. We need the New Riallans to perpetuate our species.”

“Well, there’s the Hadrakians to consider. They’re putting up quite a fight against the Clathran forces. Maybe there’s something we could do to help.”

“I don’t have any great ideas, but I see that our Human visitor has returned.” Several of the gas bags turn in your direction. “Welcome, Human. Do you have any new ideas for us?”

What do you suggest the Middle Riallans do?

- A. Build an army of spaceships to fight the Clathrans
- B. Lay low and hope the Clathrans don’t bother them
- C. Send a courier to the Fringe to ask the New Riallans for help

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[000]

The first thing that comes to mind is the fact that the children are not being treated as individuals. They are being treated as a mass, and that is a mistake. We must remember that each child is a unique individual, and we must treat them as such.

When we think of the children, we must think of them as individuals. We must remember that each child is a unique individual, and we must treat them as such.

I'd like to see one of your doctors. It's not an emergency. Yes, you mention wanting to be there. I have to go right in or I would have to go right out. I have to go right in or I would have to go right out.

The first part of the program is a series of lectures. It is a series of lectures. It is a series of lectures. It is a series of lectures. It is a series of lectures.

Looking back, you see that the program is a series of lectures. It is a series of lectures. It is a series of lectures. It is a series of lectures. It is a series of lectures.

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[001]

The children are not being treated as individuals. They are being treated as a mass, and that is a mistake. We must remember that each child is a unique individual, and we must treat them as such.

When we think of the children, we must think of them as individuals. We must remember that each child is a unique individual, and we must treat them as such.

I'd like to see one of your doctors. It's not an emergency. Yes, you mention wanting to be there. I have to go right in or I would have to go right out.

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