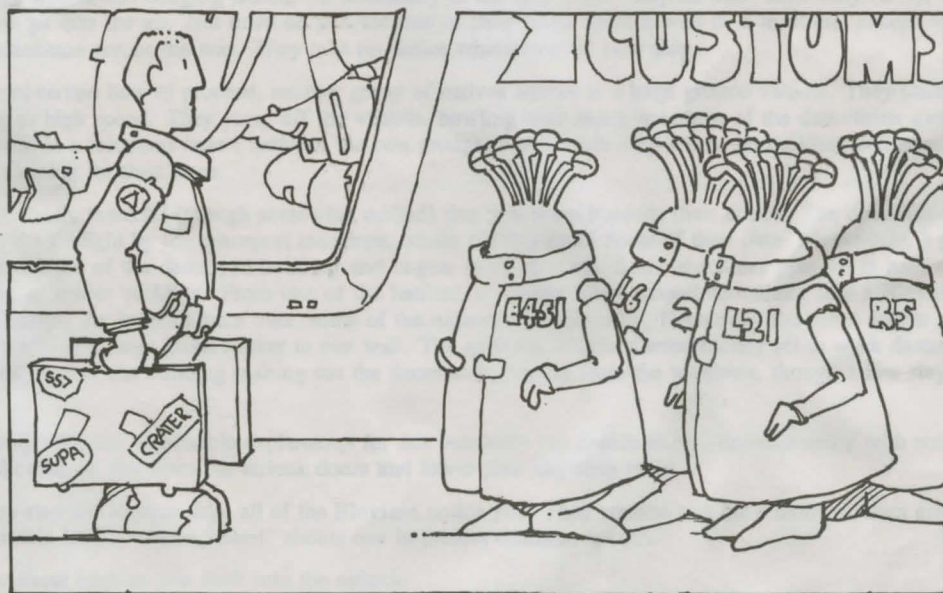


# STAR SAGA: TWO™

# BOOK C

TEXT 137-210



BOOK C

STAR  
SAGA: TWO™

TEXT 17-210



## [137]

Bloo is a planet somewhat smaller than earth. It has only two small seas, but the climate is damp. Skies everywhere are invariably overcast, so it is impossible to map the planet from orbit. You are therefore forced to home in on what seem to be navigation signals from the main spaceport. You cannot pick up a clear homing signal, but you receive no threats either, so you drop through the clouds and land on a clean, well-equipped spacedock on the outskirts of a large city.

From your ship you observe the activity around you. The first thing you notice are the natives, who are of a race usually referred to by spacefarers as Bluvians. They are the ugliest humanoids you ever hope to see. With squat bodies balanced rather precariously on short skinny legs, they seem barely able to support the bulk of their enormous hairy arms, and their faces look like they were put together upside-down. They apparently cannot avoid drooling, since their teeth are so large and misshapen that they cannot close their mouths all the way. Their ears, usually adorned with tacky jewelry, hang down behind their shoulders, and their matted, greasy hair grows most of the way down their backs while leaving their wrinkled scalps bald.

Even stranger than the natives' appearance, though, are the activities in which they are engaged. Alongside the spaceport, a group of about twenty is in the process of destroying a large factory building. Some are firing at the upper floors with bulky hand-weapons, while others are pounding on the walls with clubs or bare hands. Their strength is enormous, for every blow produces a shower of masonry, and occasionally you detect the sound of steel reinforcements breaking. At the same time, two other groups are firing at one another with the same bulky blasters, running around and dodging among the machinery of the spaceport. They hit each other only rarely, with little apparent effect, and all of their misses go into the air. Not once do you see one of their shots strike a wall or a machine, except when they hit the building that is undergoing demolition across the way. They take no notice whatsoever of your ship.

As you watch, not certain how to proceed, another group of natives arrives in a large ground vehicle. They steer straight for the damaged building, accelerating to high speed. They jump off the vehicle, bowling over many members of the demolition gang, just as the car crashes into the building. There is a ferocious brawl between the two groups, which ends only when the building collapses in a huge cloud of dust, sending both groups running for their lives.

You continue to watch, thankful (though somewhat miffed) that you seem beneath their notice. The demolition crews scatter aimlessly, some of them joining the firefight by the spaceport machines, others starting small feuds of their own. Meanwhile, a group of impressive robot vehicles arrives at the rubble of the destroyed building and begins to clean it up. Some machines prepare to haul rubble away, while others begin the construction of a new building. From one of the haulers, a smaller robot shaped something like a Bluvian disembarks and begins inspecting nearby buildings. As it looks them over, some of the natives watch intently. Eventually the robot selects one building, this time an apartment cluster, and affixes a large green sticker to one wall. The gathered Bluvians immediately set to work destroying the apartment. This sends most of the occupants of the building rushing out the doors and jumping from the windows, though a few stay behind to drop furniture on the demolishers.

Failing to come up with any reasonable explanation for this behavior, you decide to try communicating with some of the natives. The air of the planet is breatheable, so you open the airlock doors and lower your boarding ramp.

The moment you step out of your ship, all of the Bluvians notice you. They stare at you for a moment, then grab their weapons and rush to attack you. "Detestable Inferior Alien Scum!" shouts one in perfect Clathran speech.

"I am not!" you shout back as you duck into the airlock.

All of the Bluvians stop short, lowering their blasters. "Oh, you're not?" says the one who shouted. "My mistake, then." The Bluvians seem a little disappointed, as they turn back to their destructive pursuits.

"Wait a minute," you call out. "What was that all about? What's going on here?"

Another of the natives pauses to explain to you, "We are following the orders of our great masters the Clathrans, who will one day soon lead us into glorious battle so that we may be respected and feared throughout the galaxy and beyond," he says, all in one breath. "Our mission is to destroy any detestable inferior alien scum we encounter." He looks at you quizzically with a face that would stop a subspecial relativistic normalizing chronometer. "Are you sure you're not detestable inferior alien scum?"

"Quite."

"Oh. Then why have you come here to destroy our way of life?"

"I haven't."

"Oh. Well, my mistake then. The Clathrans tell us that you will, but I guess that'll be later. You are a human, aren't you?"

This is a bit of a shock. "Yes," you admit.

"Well, let us know when you want to start destroying our way of life, so that we can wipe you out like the detestable inferior alien scum that you are, maybe. Meanwhile, would you like some lunch?"

For the rest of the day you converse with the Bluvian, whose name is Thurk. He describes to you life on the planet Bloo. Apparently the Clathrans arrived several centuries ago, promising to turn the Bluvians into an army of soldiers that would enforce order throughout the galaxy. At the time, the Bluvians were barely civilized. The Clathrans taught the Bluvians their language and trained them to build and use weapons. Then they seeded the planet with robots that they claimed would teach the Bluvians to be violent and destructive. "The more violent and destructive we are, the better they make things for us," explains Thurk. "Every time we wreck a building they build a nicer one. The more we fight each other the more food we get. See how violent and destructive we've become?" He casually punches a passerby in the face. "More than ready to go take on the galaxy. Would you like another plengfruit pie?"

You spend the night on your ship considering the options open to you on Bloo:

⟨SSZZ22⟩ (5 phases) Accompany Thurk and his company on one of their violent and destructive missions.

⟨PSSZZ2⟩ (3 phases) Attempt to learn more about the Clathran robotics factory.

⟨SPZS2Z⟩ (4 phases) Speak to Recordkeeper Crugh, who seems to be the only Bluvian authority figure in the area.

⟨PPSSZZ⟩ (4 phases) Attend a public Clathran civics lecture. Thurk explains that the lectures are held several times a week and that regular attendance increases a Bluvian's hot water allowance.

✧ STOP ✧

[138]

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

"The rising tide of social irresponsibility continues to wreak havoc among the populous cities of the Home Worlds. This mass insanity, popularly known as the Sudden Adjustment Psychosis Syndrome, but actually not a disease state at all, has resulted in numerous transportation disasters, crimes of passion, campus disturbances, and urban 'incidents.' At the same time, more and more humans have found themselves endowed with strange alien powers, such as telepathy, telekinesis, clairvoyance, and precognition. Both effects are traced to the same change in galactic conditions: an unprecedented and steady rise in the galactic dual space level. This cosmic function, first elucidated by Professor Strassmann of Harvard, seems to control the ease with which humans can access alternate realities, and thereby forego established physical laws.

"Crowds have been noted to trigger acute outbreaks of SAPS, while those on isolated duty in space, those functioning in regimented military environments, and those with training in the 'mystic' arts or religion have shown themselves to be resistant.

"The Deep Space Defense Force has moved its primary manufacturing facilities from the crowded surfaces of Norstar and Endaur to isolated portions of Wellmet, Frontier, Atlantis, and various free-orbiting space colonies. Despite persistent public rumors about hostile aliens known as 'Clathrans,' no war-like acts have yet occurred.

"Finally, it has been noted that fringe religious and political groups are arising faster than at any time since the founding of the Final Church of Man. In the social unrest of our large cities, the common man senses the approach of Armageddon, and is taking what steps he can to avert the crisis.

"End of transmission."

✧ STOP ✧

---

[139]

You have built a Discontinuity Wave Generator for your ship. Congratulations!

In its present form, the Discontinuity Wave Generator will make an effective weapon. It depends for its operation on the principles of Dual Space, and therefore it may not function properly if the level of the Dual Space Interphase increases or decreases radically.

✕ STOP ✕

---

[140]

Because of their size and strength, the Clathrans as a race have always been respected and feared by the beings who encounter them. You are no exception.

After the first grueling minutes of battle, you find neither yourself nor the soldier particularly wounded. This is good in one sense, but it will ultimately mean losing, since all the soldier has to do is wait for reinforcements to come from the garrison and overwhelm you. You begin to think about spending the remainder of your days in a Clathran prison camp.

Suddenly you are startled by a brilliant flash of light. Momentarily blinded, you crouch in a defensive stance and try to use all of your other senses to deduce what is happening. Seconds later, your eyesight returns and you see. . . the elderly Sirissian standing before you, with the Clathran soldier nowhere to be found.

“Thank you for your able assistance, Human. I was able to make use of the distraction you caused and pull out my personal atomizer. That is one soldier who won’t try to bully others just to get his own way again.”

“Is he. . . ?” you begin to ask, but stop as she nods her sensory stalks in an affirmative manner. “Won’t there be trouble when he is found to be missing from the garrison?” you ask, now concerned about possible reprisals against the innocent-looking Sirissians.

“No, the Clathrans know better than to make an issue over the disappearance of one soldier. We will be all right.” She stops, noticing your golden triangle badge. “I see you are already familiar with our own form of resistance. Your actions tonight have proven that you are far above the 1st level rank you now wear. I too am a member of the Underground. I will explain your actions this evening and tell them that I have promoted you to the second level. Here, take this.”

Reaching down into a carry pouch she is wearing around her neck, she pulls out one of the golden triangles, much like the one you currently wear. She explains that she is a high-ranking administrator who has the power to make such promotions in the “field.” You accept the second triangle and proudly wear it along side your first. She tells you that this additional triangle will give you increased status in the rebel city.

Returning to your ship, you wonder what the increased status will mean. You decide the only way to find out is to return to the rebel city. This could prove to be very interesting. You will have a new option when you are next on Sirissi:

{TXGN4Y} (7 phases) Return to the rebel city on Sirissi, this time wearing two triangles.

✕ STOP ✕

---

## [141]

The planet Unaria has an extremely busy spaceport. The spaceships coming and going are of countless varieties, including many unfamiliar alien designs. You are pleased to see this, since it suggests that the native civilization is technologically advanced and offers good trading opportunities.

As you get closer to the planet, you see something very unusual: a bizarre little moon. The moon is completely smooth and grey except for a huge black pit, more than fifty miles wide, that covers most of the side you can see. You swing around to the other side and discover a reciprocal pit of identical dimensions. It looks like the moon has a huge hole going right through it! In fact, looking directly at the hole, you get the impression of looking across great distance. However, you cannot see any stars out the other side, just blackness. Moreover, your scanners indicate that the moon is completely solid. What, then, are the black pits?

Your computer is as baffled as you are, so you decide to investigate the pit now facing you more closely. As you approach the pit, you get the shock of your life when a full battle fleet emerges from out of nowhere! The fleet heads straight for Unaria, and you see a second fleet lifting off from the planet's surface to intercept the first. Confused, you are quite content to pull back from the excitement and let the two fleets go at it, but that is not meant to be. One of the attacking ships lets you have a barrage of high-intensity energy rays, temporarily blinding your ship's sensors.

"Boss, I can't see!"

"Put forward view on screen," you order. "I need to see where we are headed."

"No can do, Boss. Sorry. The last thing I remember is heading down toward that pit for a closer look. I think we are about to enter. . ."

There is a flash of darkness, and an eerie sense of being displaced overwhelms you. You feel very dizzy and faint. An ancient voice reverberates inside your head. "You have angered the gods and now you shall suffer the consequences," the voice says. "You shall be split in two, and your evil half exiled to the other side of the galaxy. Eliminate the evil. That is your challenge now."

Before you can respond by screaming at the top of your lungs, there is a flash of light and your screens are once again functioning. Your ship is at full power. You see that you are just above the surface of the weird little moon, with Unaria floating peacefully below you. Apparently you have passed through the hole and come out the other side. There is no sign of the two battle fleets anywhere; for that, you are grateful.

"What happened?" you ask, bewildered. "Where did those ships go?"

"Insufficient data, Boss. They could have gone anywhere or stayed in the same place. A better question to ask is, 'Where did we go?'"

"What do you mean? Aren't we orbiting Unaria?"

"Negative. The planet below us, as well as the planetoid, are remarkably similar to Unaria and its satellite, but scans show that they are not the same. Also, the star patterns here are not those of the Unarian system. Give me a second to figure out where we are. . . Hey Boss, we seem to have been transported clear across the galaxy!"

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

## [142]

You are relatively new to the customs and procedures of the Hadrakian resistance organization, so you are naturally somewhat at a loss as to what you should do next. You spend some time in the back offices of The Battle, Inc., waiting for a chance to grab someone's attention. Suddenly you are accosted by an older Hadrakian male.

"Human, are you the one who owns that alien ship I saw land?"

You presume the tigorilla is speaking about your vessel and reply, "If you mean the hottest piece of jet action to hit this planet, then the answer is yes."

"I have heard about you, Human. Your ship is good, but I know hardware, and you are in need of some if you are going up against the Clathrans. What sort of weapons do you have aboard?"

You may be allies with these beings but that doesn't mean you are willing to spill your guts about your ship. Instead, you answer vaguely that you have several interesting additions to your normal armament. The male snorts at this.

"I work at repair and maintenance here and have seen your ship. I know you are helping us fight the Clathrans. I want to help you. To have any chance against them you need to upgrade your vessel. Maybe I can get you started." The Hadrakian starts walking away and beckons for you to follow. Intrigued, you comply.

You are on guard against a trap, but you feel you can generally trust an alien who's walking in front of you. After twenty minutes of traveling on foot, the two of you arrive at a dingy warehouse. The male enters and you cautiously follow.

The interior of the building is dim, so you have to strain to see anything. All of your senses are working overtime to detect any sign of an ambush, but the area is clear. Breathing a little easier, you follow your guide to the far corner of the building where he uncovers a large crate. Stenciled on the side of the box are Hadrakian symbols which translate to "Boson Beam." The male opens the crate and allows you to examine the contents: the disassembled and carefully packaged parts of a ship weapon.

"It is brand new and still in perfect condition. My mother purchased it for her own vessel, but both she and the ship were lost in a skirmish against the Clathrans before she had time to install it. I will give it to you in the hope that you can make use of it in our cause."

You are momentarily speechless but manage to nod your head in acceptance.

"There is some advice you must take along with the weapon, though. Improve the armaments of your ship further or you will be breathing vacuum the first time you come up against a Clathran ship. O.K.?" Again you nod.

The Homeless One helps you get the Beam over to your vessel and installs it for you. You find this sort of behavior a bit out of character for the normally impetuous Hadrakian males. Gathering your nerve, you ask him outright why he is helping you.

"Maybe it is something I want to do, Human!" he snarls at you, claws extended in a fit of anger. Now that's more like it.

Calming a bit, he continues, "I have been thinking a lot of my mother and her sacrifice. Seeing you at the resistance office made me think of the beam weapon going to waste while allies like you are fighting with insufficient ship weapons. Put it to good use."

Satisfied, you thank the Hadrakian, promising to work on upgrading your ship so you can better help in the cause. As the male turns to leave, he offers one more piece of advice.

"When you have a few more ship improvements, come back to The Battle, Inc. offices and ask for a real mission. There's plenty to be done, be certain of that. The executives just don't want to send you out yet with that ship of yours."

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

✂ STOP ✂

## [143]

Mentally, you have recovered from your surprise teleportation to the other side of the galaxy. You still feel a little dizzy, but that's it. You take your bearings and see that the planet Dosia, which you are now orbiting, is remarkably similar to Unaria. The spaceport is very busy, with a wide variety of spaceships coming and going. Orbiting the planet is another little moon with a black pit.

This time you decide to explore the planet and leave the moon be. You follow the landing beacon down with no difficulty and soon find yourself on the ground. It's nice to be on the ground now and then. You step out of your ship and pound the concrete landing pad with your fist to make sure it's really solid.

Heading over to the space terminal, you see a depressed-looking alien waiting for you. Maybe you shouldn't attribute human emotions to this alien creature, but you know you'd be depressed too if you looked like she does: a shapeless, sagging lump of baggy yellow skin with two big round teary eyes, four lethargic stumpy tentacles to stand on, and a dull grey baseball cap turned backwards on top of her blooby head. If you were this creature, you don't think you could get out of bed in the morning.

"Hello?" you say.

The Dosian awakens from her brooding and sees that you need assistance. "Are you new here?" she asks, not really caring.

"Yes. Can you give me an introduction to your planet?"

"If you insist. Welcome to Dosia, planet of the right-thinking Dosians, rulers of the Stargate and defeaters of the evil Unarians. We have many important activities for our visiting guests," the alien drones at you in a monotone voice. "We have several trading opportunities with both commodities and Vortex Coils. We have a lecture about our long and god-fearing fight against the deplorable Unarian race, which we are trying to stamp out of existence for the good of all. We sell personal weapons, which you can use to defend yourself against the Unarian enemy. Also, for your convenience, should you wish to use our Stargate, you may purchase a Stargate Key for one unit each of Food, Super Slip and Synthetic Genius. That is all."

"The Stargate? Is that the black pit that sent me clear across the galaxy?"

"Yes. You have come from Unaria, then. My sympathies. You understand, then, why we must wipe out those evil beings. They're so *happy*. You must be relieved to be with us now." The deadpan monologue ends and the depressed-looking alien leaves you standing there to decide what action you wish to take next. You now have the following options:

(NZY26H) (3 phases) Go to the commodities market and see what they have to trade.

(MZJ2UH) (5 phases) Try to acquire some Vortex Coils.

(NUY768) (7 phases) Attend the lecture about the war against the Unarians.

(MUJ7U8) (3 phases) Purchase a Stargate Key.

(4ZQ2XH) (7 phases) Fly your ship into the Stargate.

(EZ32PH) (4 phases) Purchase personal weapons to defend yourself against the Unarians or whatever else you might run into.

☒ STOP ☒



## [144]

Once, when the universe was younger and your thoughts simpler, it took you weeks of prospecting to find a unit of warp core. Yet now, given for your oyster the same gas giant almost-star, you and your ship can pluck the pearl of Warp Core in mere hours. A run past the Monitor, camouflaged by subtle signals, a dip into the gaseous depths, a search among the random noise, detection, and the lunge and plunge of the capture.

*Why the difference?* you ask yourself. The answer is clear. Your ship is tougher and your sensors better than before. You no longer need to fear the electromagnetic storms and unpredictable pressure changes in the endless atmosphere of the gas giant. You can search the liquid depths much more efficiently.

And something more: Warp Core as it forms creates a distinctive signal, a peculiar brief standing wave that ripples quietly through your web of electronics and mathematics. It's nothing that you can analyze or reduce to a computer program, but by feeling all the strands you know when to react, and which direction to leap.

Rewarded for your efforts, you return to Tayzha's surface, a unit of Warp Core the richer.

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

✧ STOP ✧

## [145]

You put on your environmental suit and drag your equipment to your favorite spot for gathering Primordial Soup in the ocean depths of the planet Psorus. This time there is no hydrosor to get in your way. You finish setting up your equipment and wade out of the water unmolested.

After three days you return to see how successful you have been. You check the collection bag and it is . . .

. . . gone.

What? Looking around, you see that your entire collection apparatus is no longer here. Some passing creature must have made off with it! Now what are you going to do? Without the proper equipment, there is no way to collect Primordial Soup from these oceans.

From now on you'll have to find your Primordial Soup elsewhere.

✧ STOP ✧

---

[146]

Once again you enter the airlock, strip off your environmental suit, and head for the inner door. The inevitable Clathran patrol is there almost at once, investigating the “open” signal from the outer airlock door.

“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 ⊠

---

---

[147]

You are able to seal three doors shut before you run out of glue. You are now in the main room in which you first entered the building with Whooger. You sit and wait.

Hours later, you are still waiting. This hasn't done a lot of good, so you stand and make another tour of the rooms to see what new mischief the Francloons have in store for you.

You find a comfortable chair in the center of the next room. You are tired and it looks inviting, but you hold off until you have closely examined the piece of furniture. Sure enough, you find a whoopie cushion underneath the seat pad. A gentle squeeze tells you that not only would it have made an embarrassing noise if you had sat on it, but it would have expelled a disgusting gas into the air. You probably would have smelled like the Francloon version of a skunk for many hours to come. You take the device with you "just in case" you can use it yourself.

Traveling farther, you encounter a room with sneezing powder. Unfortunately you do not see the trigger mechanism in time to avoid tripping it, so you spend the next ten minutes unhappily living with the consequences. Finally, nose and eyes dripping, you overcome the effects and can enter the next room. Here you find, in time, a booby trap involving a toy-sized gun set up to shoot salt in the eyes of a person entering the room. It wouldn't have killed you, but it sure would have smarted!

You take stock and realize that this time you have to do something a little more active than just try to seal yourself off. There are two possibilities. You could use a gob of slippery stuff which you find in a fold of your clothes and set it up so a Francloon entering the room will slide into the far corner of the room and impact on the whoopie cushion, causing it to expel its noxious gas. That would be fun. Or, you could still try the booby trap with the exploding pen, causing whoever picks it up to be hit in the face by a speeding ball bearing. That would be nastier.

Your choices are:

- A. Trick a Francloon into sliding into the whoopie cushion
- B. Set a booby trap with the exploding pen

Go now to the CGM.

✘ STOP ✘

---

[148]

You know that there are no traces of intelligent life on Golgotha. You wonder what sort of creatures could even live in such a place. You imagine minds of a completely different sort, minds whose only instrumentality is through Dual Space rather than through nerves and muscles. Could you even recognize such an intelligence, let alone communicate with it? You don't know.

But there is another possibility. Golgotha, like so many other planets, might have once had intelligent life that is now gone. If that were so, and Golgotha were a normal planet, the inhabitants would be lost forever. But you know that Golgotha can play tricks with time. Perhaps, if there were living beings here once, you can still reach them.

✘ STOP ✘

---

---

[149]

Once again you approach Zyroth, home planet of the hungry, multi-appendaged gook-secreting Zyrans. Hopefully, this time they will be a little more friendly and allow you to land.

Their initial greeting is the same message as before: "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. This time you are prepared.

"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 ⊠

---

---

[150]

One day, while your mind is on other matters, your computer demonstrates its new deductive powers.

“Franclair, Boss.”

“Eh?”

“Franclair. It’s a planet listed in Vanessa Chang’s Journal. It’s inhabited by the Hadrakians, a spacefaring race that has settled several planets in the Arm.”

“So?”

“So, Chang says that Franclair is where they do their drive system research. It would seem like a good place to start looking for jump engine technology.”

“So it would. How do we get there?”

“You know Captain Chang didn’t leave any way to associate her Journal entries with the inhabited planets she marked on the map. She must have been afraid of the Clathrans finding them. About all I can figure is that Franclair is near the middle of the Arm.”

“I hope the Clathrans haven’t messed it up yet!”

“Me too, Boss. We’ll just have to get there first.”

⊠ STOP ⊠

---

[151]

Your subspace radio alarm jolts you awake. Your ship’s computer has picked up a transmission which seems to be intended for you.

“This is the *Holly Roger*, Valentine Stewart commanding.”

“Valentine! This is your Father.”

“Hello, Dad; what’s up?”

“I wanted to know whether your explorations were making any progress, Valentine.”

“I’m still alive; that’s something. The map from Outpost seems accurate, but the Arm is pretty big and it looks like the Clathrans are going to be major trouble. This might take a while. Don’t accept any contracts with short margins.”

“Understood. Listen, Valentine — the Stewart Family has been negotiating with the ISE for space hardware and components. Personally, I suspect our real customer is the Space Patrol and the ISE is just acting as middleman, as usual. It looks like the plans for a Space Navy are going ahead. Our negotiating position will be much better once we have those Flame Jewels to offer.”

“I’m working on it, Dad. It’s a big galaxy.”

“Have you found any Riallans yet? Jen Cristobal tells me she sent you a tip about a planet of Riallans in the Galactic Arm. Middle Rialla, I think the place is called.”

“Not yet, but I will. Soon.”

“OK, Valentine. I just wanted to be sure you knew that we were depending on you.”

“I miss you too, Father. Good night.”

You break the connection and stagger back to bed.

⊠ STOP ⊠

---

---

[152]

Relaxing on the bridge, you are about to spring your devastating rook-knight attack against the computer's queen, when — crackle, fizzle, hiss — the circuitry all over the ship starts to go haywire. You jump up and start shutting down all nonessential systems while asking the computer what is going on!

"Don't know for sure Boss," it tells you as it also starts to power down various systems to prevent further damage. "A power surge caused by... working... caused by some sort of long-range probe beam. Origin of the beam is difficult to locate. The main direction is somewhere in toward the Core of the galaxy."

"Can you tell who is probing us or why?"

"Negative, Boss. I will say that the technology to build a device this powerful is beyond my understanding."

You do not have a good feeling about this, but there is little you can do about it. As quickly as it started, the probe beam stops, leaving you as much in the dark as you were at the start.

⊠ STOP ⊠

---

[153]

"Pow, zap, kabloom!" you shout as your shots all hit their targets. The three troop carriers all detonate with a satisfying explosion. You sit for a few minutes relishing the feeling of victory. Why, this wasn't so difficult after all.

"Er, Boss? What should I tell the Clathran war vessels that have surrounded our ship?"

Oops, you knew you were forgetting something. "Hard astern!" you shout in an attempt to get away.

"It's no use, Boss. They have us completely hemmed in with no escape route. The Clathran Commander is giving us two choices, either surrender or be blown out of the sky. Which shall it be?"

You are tempted to take the more glorious path of defiance followed immediately by a large explosion but change your mind. He who survives lives to fight another day. You give the order to allow the Clathrans aboard.

The soldiers make a great show of boarding your vessel, stomping through the airlock, pounding on walls, knocking over chairs and such. When they have finished being a general nuisance, they take you into custody and march you over to one of their ships.

⊠ STOP ⊠

---

## [154]

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?"

While you pause to think, your computer supplies the essential missing fact: "Geefle is another planet of the Arm, Boss; it's on Vanessa Chang's map, but it's much closer to the core. The Clathrans have surely surveyed it by now."

"Thanks." You switch on your own transmitting equipment, with your universal translator, as always, in the circuit. You identify yourself and your ship, saying only that you come from the Fringe. The Zyran response is swift and chilling.

"You do not have permission to land here. You are not welcome on our homeworld. If you come any closer, your ship will be destroyed and your carcass eaten. Understood?"

The ships in front of you rotate slightly, aiming their weapons directly at you. There is no hope of fighting them. Even if you were able to defeat them, the whole planet's defenses could be brought to bear against you. You wouldn't stand a chance.

"Yes, I understand," you reply, "I come in peace, but if it is your wish, I will leave."

"Then leave now, alien."

You would like a closer look at the planet, but what can you do? Even a cloaking ray wouldn't help you. It would hide your ship on the way in, but the planet is so densely populated that you'd never be able to land unnoticed. You have no alternative but to turn around and head back into deep space. As you prepare to go, however, your computer panics.

"Boss! Rising energy levels on board! Something's out of control!"

"What? Where?"

"The Core Stone!"

You plunge into your cabin, and seize up the flexion glove, quickly reversing it over your hand to expose the Core Stone clenched within. You are nearly blinded by the light it radiates, and you fancy you can feel its heat even through the glove. Shielding your eyes, you stumble back to the bridge.

"Boss, it's the Zyrans again." The radio comes on:

"You have hesitated too long, Food-to-be. All ships open fi—" The Core Stone flares even brighter, and the Zyran is cut off in mid-sentence. Then, for a long moment, nothing happens.

"Analysis?"

"The Core Stone is holding the Zyrans suspended, Boss. Look at this."

A viewscreen lights up, showing you a video picture of the inside of one of the Zyran ships. Instruments are blinking here and there, but the brownish amalgamations of living tissue — presumably the Zyrans — are frozen in place. One of the creatures has a tentacle poised over a control panel, as if in the very act of firing on you.

"Yow! Let's get out of here!"

"Right away, Boss." You beat a hasty retreat to a distant corner of the trisector, where you are able to pause to think. As you move, the Core Stone's glow fades rapidly away. Behind you, the Zyran ships return to life, resuming what must be their routine patrol patterns.

Clearly, the Core Stone and the Zyran are somehow connected. You will have to return, and penetrate to the planet's surface. The direct approach seems unlikely to work; the Core Stone can no more protect you from a planet-full of Zyran than a cloaking ray could. You will have to get permission from someone on Geefle first, then return here. Your pulse quickens at the thought. Perhaps now you are finally closing in on the secret of the Stone.

Your landing sequence was aborted, so you are still aloft in the trisector containing the planet Zyroth.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[155]

"Boss, I think this is probably useless," your computer whines as you try for the umpteenth time to hit one of the troop carriers. You would think that it would be impossible to miss hitting something that big, and even more so since there are three of them to hit! But miss them you have and the escort ships are beginning to get uncomfortably close.

"Boss, I strongly recommend we get out of here pronto," the computer advises as your ship is rocked with the aftershock of a near miss.

"I concur," you finally admit. You give the order to get out of there, and sit back as the computer does the rest. Oh well, you will probably have another chance at the Clathrans. Maybe next time you will have improved your ship's weapons so you can actually DO something!

⊠ STOP ⊠

[156]

Headlines from the Nine Worlds:

Bobby Woodfoot Executed — Riots in New New York.

Space Patrol to Allow Limited Commerce with Wellmet.

Phase Steel Shortage Predicted — Should Moiran join the Nine Worlds?

Power Grid Breakdown Plunges Norstar into Darkness.

Ten Year Old Child Bends Spoons With the Power of her Mind.

Anti-Crowd Legislation Signed by First Disciple.

Sudden Adjustment Psychosis Syndrome (SAPS) Strikes Wellmet — First Cases Reported.

The Aliens are Coming! The Aliens are Coming!

⊠ STOP ⊠



---

[157]

A slight apprehension wells within as you approach the planet Unaria for the second time. An orbital scan shows that the planet has not changed since your previous attempt to land here. The spaceport is as busy as ever, with traffic of many different races coming and going. The moon with the black pits, which you now recognize to be the Stargate, is still in orbit. However, there are no battle fleets, Dosian, Unarian, or otherwise, to be seen this time. That's just as well. You have no objections to using any alien transporting device that suits your need, but you would prefer to know where you're going *before* you get there.

You take the opportunity to head straight down to the Unarian spaceport. After testing the air, you disembark. Heading over to the space terminal, you see an alien that looks very much like a Dosian, but with a few exceptions. For one thing, the Unarian is purple as opposed to the Dosians, who were yellow. The baggy skin, two big round eyes, four short tentacles, and baseball cap are the same as on Dosia. However, while the Dosians were sad and depressed, the Unarian looks happy. Its skin is plump and perky, its eyes are sparkling, its tentacles jump around energetically, and even the baseball cap, in a bright pink color, is set straight on its smiling head. If you were this creature, you'd probably hop around whistling all day too.

"Hello?" you say.

The Dosian is distracted from its whistling and sees that you need assistance. "Well hello! Are you new here?" it asks cheerfully.

"Yes. Can you give me an introduction to your planet?"

"I'd be delighted! Welcome to Unaria, planet of the right-thinking Unarians, rulers of the Stargate and defeaters of the evil Dosians. We have many important activities for our visiting guests," the alien chirps melodiously. "We have several trading opportunities with both commodities and cargo drones. We have a lecture about the history of the Stargate and our long and god-fearing fight against the deplorable Dosian race. Also, for your convenience, should you wish to use our Stargate, you may purchase a Stargate Key for one unit each of Crystals, Medicine and Super Slip. I can't think of anything else right now, but feel free to chat with me again if there's something I can do for you." The upbeat monologue ends and the happy-looking alien leaves you standing there to decide what action you wish to take next. You now have the following options:

⟨BZW2TH⟩ (3 phases) Go to the commodities market and see what they have to trade.

⟨GZ42QH⟩ (5 phases) Try to acquire a cargo drone.

⟨BUW7T8⟩ (5 phases) Attend the lecture about the history of the Stargate.

⟨GU47Q8⟩ (3 phases) Purchase a Stargate Key.

⟨CZF2LH⟩ (7 phases) Fly your ship into the Stargate.

⊠ STOP ⊠

---

[158]

You ask Civilian Estal about the huge spaceship you saw being built in the war zone. After a long pause, he answers, "Even though you are of a race proven capable, you should hardly expect us to share military secrets with you. Any warrior can see the wisdom of that."

"But it's important," you insist. "It's very likely that we have a common enemy. If so, it's to our advantage to cooperate."

Estal ponders for a moment, and answers: "You are an honorable individual and I'm convinced that you would be a loyal ally. But how can I be sure?"

"You can't," you answer. "But as my instructor told me, 'Inaction and indecision are no proper defense against Takai.' The warrior who seeks to avoid being bluffed or misdirected by doing nothing does more harm to himself than the enemy does — and thus falls victim to Takai nonetheless." Your argument is intended not just to convince the Civilian of your point of view, but to remind him of your status as a Worzellian warrior in full honor.

"Will you promise, if I tell you, never to use the information against Worzelle or its inhabitants, nor convey the secret to anyone else who might?"

"I'll never use it against you, even if we become enemies," you answer.

"Please return here tomorrow, then."

You go to the Civilian's quarters the next day, and find waiting for you a small group of Worzellians. Estal is there, along with two other Civilians. Several others are in the white garb of Strategists.

You spend the day conferring about the state of the galaxy. The Worzellians are building three carrier ships like the one you saw, as well as the small battle craft they will carry. Their enemy is the Clathrans. They have learned that the Clathrans have mobilized their immense space fleet and are sweeping systematically across the galaxy, examining each world and viciously seizing control of any worlds that oppose or threaten them.

The Worzellians know that their technology has improved immensely in the past few centuries, and will continue to advance in the future, spurred on by their constant state of war. They fear that when the Clathrans reach Worzelle, they will viciously impose peace on the whole planet, thus destroying their culture and condemning them to stagnation and subjugation. They have built ships to give them a military option against this threat.

Their decision to build carriers was a matter of technological necessity. They don't have the sophisticated technology and advanced materials necessary to build compact efficient hyperdrives. Only the carriers have hyperdrives; the small ships maneuver on powerful thrusters. The thrusters are unusually powerful because they don't have to work over long periods of time — only for the duration of battle, after which the carriers can pick them up again. Thus, the ships are more maneuverable in battle than even a hyperdrive, but they are far slower as well. "We expect," says one of the Strategists, "that this force will be most effective in such close quarters as planetary systems and ground-assault situations. *Oisii* and *Tiisai* will be our most effective disciplines.

"Unfortunately, our fleet is small compared to the immense might of the Clathran Navy. To improve our chances, we have agreed to participate in an alliance of races opposing the Clathrans. I am not sure who all the members of this alliance will be, but I believe you humans are part of it. Yes. In fact, it was a human who initially invited us to join."

"I think this is an excellent strategy," you reply. "We must all band together to fight the Clathrans if we are to have any chance of stopping them."

"However," the Strategist continues, "We will participate only if the combined forces of the alliance are large enough to give the Clathrans a serious fight."

"That seems fair enough."

"All right then. Hopefully, I will see you again at the Clathran battle line."

The Worzellian extends her eight-fingered hand for you to shake in the manner customary for human beings. You are grateful to have them on your side.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[159]

Although you have fought Clathrans before, you are never confident of the outcome. The Clathrans are very accomplished in the art of war while you have had to learn it as you've gone along. So it is with a feeling of great relief that you look down at your vanquished foe.

You are surprised to see that Sirissians have begun to gather around the slain Clathran, bobbling along in their haste to dispose of the body. No one speaks to you directly, but you feel their approval of your actions. Apparently not many other races would have come to the aid of a Sirissian being threatened by a Clathran. One of the little aliens explains that the lizard's death will be made to look like an accident, so you will not have to worry about an alarm going out to capture the perpetrator of the vile deed.

You head away from the scene, but do not get very far before you hear the sound of footsteps behind you. Turning, you see an unfamiliar Sirissian wearing the badge of the underground.

"Human, you have shown your willingness to stand up to the Clathrans," the alien commends you. You wait for her to continue.

"We would like to bestow upon you a higher rank in the underground, symbolized by this additional gold triangle which will give you increased status in the rebel city."

You accept the triangle and are shown how it is to be worn. The Sirissian soon takes her leave of you. Returning to your ship, you wonder what the increased status will mean. You decide the only way to find out is to return to the rebel city. This could prove to be very interesting. You will have a new option when you are next on Sirissi:

(TXGN4Y) (7 phases) Return to the rebel city, this time wearing two triangles.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[160]

You approach the building containing the Clathran armory and are interested to note that there are no guards present. This might be because there is little of value inside, or because they just don't expect any intruders. Whatever the case, it makes your task easy, since you are able to walk right in.

The interior of the armory is dimly lit, but you can see well enough to conclude that there is very little of interest here. Most of the weapons here are simple blasters which are not very useful. You diligently check each box and case in here, though, as you never know when you might mistakenly overlook something important. Ten minutes later, you are still empty-handed and are ready to leave. As you are heading for the door, you hear approaching footsteps. You are not eager to meet a seven-foot-tall lizard face to face, so you duck behind one of the larger crates. The door swings open and two Clathran soldiers enter, carrying a very heavy box between them.

"Hurry and find a place for this thing," one of them hisses at the other.

"Here, we'll just put it down near the door; it's too heavy to take in farther," grunts the other a moment too late, as the first soldier drops his end of the crate on his foot. You wince in sympathy at the pain he must be feeling, but he doesn't utter a sound. The second soldier pulls the crate off the first one's foot and helps him hobble out of the room.

You count to ten after you hear the door close just to be safe, then leave your hiding place and examine the new addition to the room. Luckily, the fall has knocked the lid off enough that you can pry it up with your fingers. Inside, you find your sought-after treasure. Two

dozen of the Clathrans' most powerful hand-held energy weapons have been sent to this base. These weapons look capable of blowing away almost any kind of armor. Greedily, you pocket one of them. This trip to the armory was well worth the effort after all.

Go now to the CGM.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[161]

It is hard to ask for help now, since you do not want these creative people to think you are too stupid to find your way out on your own. However, it's better than being lost, so you approach the Sallie ahead of you and ask for directions to the Hadrakian spaceport.

The Sallie smiles at you and, although he is obviously on his way somewhere, stops what he is doing and takes you where you want to go. Noticing a gadget he is playing with as you walk, you ask him about it.

"Ah, this is a new invention I am working on," he explains and shows you the device. You see a small sphere, silver in color, with miniature dials and gauges located across its surface.

"What does it do?" you ask.

"Why, nothing yet, but I'm hoping this changes as I work on it a little more." He notices your puzzled expression and explains further, "I have started with a basic principle of physics and am trying to extrapolate it. I have no real goal in mind at the moment, but something may come to me as I work a bit more on the project."

Although you do not really understand this way of thinking, you must admit that it is creative. And the Sallies are, if nothing else, known for their creativity. You play with the sphere as your guide leads you through the labyrinth to your ship. Arriving without further mishap, you try to pay him for his kind services but he refuses. You have the feeling he does not want to take advantage of a being with such obviously limited intelligence. Great. You wave goodbye to the friendly being and head straight for your bed.

You dream of being lost in the maze for all eternity, searching desperately for a way out. Not another fork in the road. . . dead end up ahead. . . one way the wrong way. . . NO!

You firmly resolve never again to return to the Sallie part of the city on your own. Ever.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[162]

Whew! You survived. The crowd boos you enthusiastically, deploring your lack of divine favor. Then they come down onto the sand to congratulate you. An official of the Arena presents you with the blue sash of Holothian citizenship, explaining that you are now entitled to go anywhere on Holoth. You are led through a gate in the fence that surrounds the Enclave, and into the city proper.

In the days that follow you begin to learn more about Holoth and the Hadrakian colony here. The planet, as you discovered upon landing, is composed mostly of hard, crystalline material, with only small amounts of regular soil mixed in. This has led to the formation of vast, angular mountain ranges that cover the entire land area of the planet. There are no flat plateaus, only jagged spikes and crevices that connect one mountain to another.

This made it difficult for the Hadrakians to establish a spaceport and colony here. The biggest problem was how to accommodate arriving spaceships. The jagged crystalline surface of the planet was unsuited to ships accustomed to perfectly flat, smooth landing pads. In order to conduct any significant amount of commerce, the Hadrakians needed to construct a viable spaceport. Without commerce, there could be no colony.

The Hadrakians eventually did manage to construct an artificial surface that could be used as a spaceport. This is the floor of the cavern in which you are currently standing. The artificial surface was very expensive to build, and many lives were lost in the process. The surface is also difficult to maintain, because the real cavern floor underneath is very brittle and has a tendency to crack and shift under the weight of the buildings above. Constant repairs and adjustments must be made to the artificial surface to prevent it from tilting, bending, and tearing apart.

In addition to providing a site for a spaceport, the artificial surface also supports a small city of a few dozen buildings and a thousand Hadrakians. The commodities market is here, as is the shipyard and the Street of Gods. Since the cost of building and maintaining more than one flat surface is prohibitive, the Hadrakians who live outside the city have had to adapt to the rugged planetary conditions. Buildings have had to be lodged, wedged, or dropped into whatever slopes and crevices seemed capable of holding them. Thus, colonists live in homes erected at pitched angles, sleep in hammocks, and use arduous mountain climbing techniques for even the simplest of walks. Young Hadrakian males, always thirsting for adventure, love the challenge of the lifestyle here.

The flock of winged aliens you saw gliding effortlessly through the sky are members of a race of native bat creatures, called Holots. The Holots are a surprisingly intelligent race whose past is somewhat of a mystery. The Holots do not have an advanced civilization now, but there are hints that they may have had one long ago. For example, the Hadrakians have uncovered remnants of high-tech parts more than 50,000 years old from deep in the planet's crust.

Since the Hadrakians arrived, the Holots have shown remarkable aptitude for understanding aspects of advanced technology. For example, the bat creatures have learned to work wing-in-claw with Hadrakian technicians installing new parts on spaceships. The bats' long slender fingers are well suited for object manipulation, and their flying ability makes it easy for them to reach any trouble spot on the outside of a vessel. However, they do not do well indoors as they suffer from claustrophobia.

Another of the bats' talents is a well-developed artistic ability which they bring to any job they perform. Examples of their talent can be seen in the painted murals on the walls of buildings and mountain cliffs all around the colony.

After a few days of partying and idle exploration, you are left with the following possibilities for further action:

- ⟨NMYJ6U⟩ (3 phases) Visit the planetary commodities market.
- ⟨MMJJUU⟩ (3 phases) Learn more about the indigenous race, the Holots.
- ⟨4NQYX6⟩ (4 phases) Go to the "Holoth Flap and Fly Space Construction Yard" for a choice of possible improvements to your ship.
- ⟨EN3YP6⟩ (7 phases) Make contact with the local division of The Battle, Inc., "the Empire's only official, government-approved Clathran resistance organization."
- ⟨N4YQ6X⟩ (3 phases) Find a Shrine on the local Street of Gods and pray to the Hadrakian deities for guidance and advice.


✠ STOP ✠

[163]

You flip your headband to the yellow side and stand up. It works. Your opponent is momentarily fooled into thinking that you are his ally. In a somewhat confused state, he starts moving away from you, searching for someone to fight. Meanwhile, your ally looks like she's spotted a target in the mud and rushes towards it. Perhaps she's found your other opponent.

Now what do you do?

- A) Stab your opponent in the back while he's looking the other way.
- B) Camouflage yourself in the mud and crawl the rest of the way across the field.
- C) Capitalize on your bluff and tell your opponent to move to the side of the field, leaving you with a clear path.
- D) Run as fast as you can the rest of the way, hoping that your confused opponent won't be able to catch you.

Continued 

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

---

[164]

You do as the Darkwhistler suggests, and lounge about on the tundra for several days while it communes with your ship's computer. You wonder what the computer thinks about meeting an entity that really does know it all. Maybe it will acquire some humility as a result.

The Darkwhistler seeks you out when it is finished, to share a few words.

"How surprising that you're accompanied by an entity that reflects your own mind so poorly!"

"What do you mean?" You've always thought that your computer was all too human.

"Your computer has limitations, human, and you do not. For me, talking to it is like talking to a Hadrakian or a Riellan or a Sirissian or any of the other races touched by the hand of the Archigenitors. There's no spark there, no sense of destiny."

"That's a relief. Our literature abounds with stories about computers that overthrow their human masters and exterminate them."

"That is still possible. I said only that it was different from you, since you have no limitations. But this is something that you cannot well perceive about yourself."

"I guess not."

"In any case, I have helped your thinking machine to achieve a better understanding of yourself. you may find its abilities enhanced as a result."

"Thank you!"

"Don't mention it."

Indeed, when you next have a chance to test it, you discover that your ship's computer is now significantly smarter than it used to be. This doesn't change its personality much, but it does give you an edge in combat.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

---

## [165]

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.

"Perhaps the gods have nothing to say to you right now."

"Yeah, great."

You are disappointed that the gods won't help, but perhaps you can find out what you need to know on your own.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

## [166]

Your research in the libraries reveals a number of facts, the most interesting of which is that the Qualatharians were not always as isolated a race as they have now become. In fact, there was a time, some tens of thousands of years ago, when the Qualatharians were the most vigorous race in the galaxy. Obeying the will of their powerful gods, the Qualatharians ruled much of the galactic Arm, going forth from Qualathara in their warships to fight and rule the lesser species they found in their way. It was at this time that they perfected two of their more important skills: combat and robotics.

For all their successes, a period of time approximately fifty thousand years ago saw remarkable changes wrought in the culture of the Qualatharians. Reports from this period are muddled, but several things seem to have happened all at once. First, ninety-nine percent of the population disappeared, apparently voluntarily; according to the library, they "took the step ahead." Second, there was a violent explosion in space, near Qualathara, which wiped the surface of the planet completely clean, causing "the seas to boil, the land to upheave, and all life to flee the orb." Third, the nature of space changed somehow, complicating navigation: "No longer could a true believer fly the straight course from the wonders of the heavens to the ancient homeworld of Qualathara."

Those Qualatharians who survived these perils — and it was not a very great number — returned in time to the surface of their ravaged world and built a new city in memory of those who had gone. For many years thereafter, while the city shrank to its present size, they were an atheistic people. Abandoned, and therefore abandoning.

The last space flight of the Qualatharians, who will not take ship again "until the gods return and the universe is made clear," was within their own system, to recover an astronomical anomaly found orbiting nearby. This anomaly, and your references fail to make clear exactly what form it took, was brought to the surface of the planet and enshrined in the center of the city. The Qualatharians claimed that it was an artifact of their gods, nearly as worthy of their reverence as the gods themselves, and took it as a sign that they had not been truly abandoned. Since that time the Qualatharians have again had a religion, albeit a passive one, based entirely on periodic contemplation of this artifact in its resting place in the Shrine of Space.

For the past nine thousand years the Qualatharians have lived as a people apart, preserving their ancient technology but not advancing it, communicating with the rest of the galaxy but not venturing out into it, and living only for the day when they can welcome their gods back to the galaxy.

Much of the material you read is devoted to education in the art and science of war. The Qualatharians are an honor-bound people, but once a battle has been declared there is no tactic which cannot be employed to achieve victory. The only sins an adult Qualatharian can commit are refusing a challenge or underestimating an opponent.

All in all, your visit to the library provides you with a great deal to think about, more than enough to occupy you as you walk back to your ship.

⌘ STOP ⌘

---

---

[167]

"I've seen enough. Let's see if we can sneak out of here," you decide.

It turns out to be easy. You withdraw to the far side of the white dwarf star, then with the star between you and the Clathrans you go into warp. You escape unnoticed to the extreme edge of sensor range, then wait for the Clathrans to do whatever they came to do and leave.

Two days later, as you are looking at Outpost's star, a sudden burst of static comes over the subspace radio.

"What was that?"

"It was a pulse of high-frequency noise in subspace," says the computer. "Possibly caused by a large explosion or conversion of mass into energy. It came from the Outpost system."

"Those scum. They really did it. They blew up Outpost, didn't they?"

"It would appear so. Should we go back and take a look?"

"Very carefully. We don't know whether or not the Clathrans are still there."

You head back to the Outpost system. From a distance it looks the same. The white dwarf star still burns its life away within its light-year-wide ring nebula. Drawing closer, you find that the Clathrans are gone. So is Outpost. Where the planet once orbited is now a cloud of rubble, ice crystals, and slowly diffusing gas.

"My god," you mutter. Cold, lifeless, and inert, the cloud of debris drifts silently through space. "But how is it possible?" you ask your computer. "Wouldn't gravity hold the planet together?"

"According to Dr. Steven Strassmann of the Harvard Applied Physics Laboratory," your computer answers authoritatively, "It is theoretically possible to blow up a planet. Would you like to see a simulation of how it might have happened?"

"Sure," you sigh. "Put it on visual."

The front viewscreen blurs for a moment, then shows Outpost whole again. The three Clathran warships are circling the planet, bombarding it with energy beams.

"One of the ships is launching projectiles," reports your computer. The ship is releasing a series of metal cylinders, each about twice the size of your own ship. You watch as it launches four sets of five cylinders each, the sets coming about fifteen minutes apart. The cylinders seem to be following purely ballistic trajectories as they spiral down toward the planet. As the first reaches the ground, you expect to see an explosion, but there is only a cold eruption of rock and dust from the impact. The cylinder is buried by the debris falling back into its own crater.

"Some sort of penetration bomb," suggests your computer. "They'll detonate them simultaneously when they're all in place." Over the next hour the other cylinders fall, landing in a neat icosahedral pattern over Outpost's surface.

"That's the last one," you observe. "They'll blow any time now."

But for some reason the blast doesn't come right away. A half hour later, the three Clathran ships leave orbit and move in formation out toward the ring nebula. A few minutes after that, Outpost's surface shivers in an eerie and violent cataclysm. There is no burst of heat



or light; just a sudden onslaught of mechanical force that attacks and overcomes the gravitational force binding the planet together. In a great spherical wave, the shocks from the underground detonations converge in Outpost's core, reinforce and cross one another, and race outward again, grinding rock from rock as they pass. It is a strangely slow process, not at all like the instantaneous vaporization of matter in the fires of a nuclear blast or at the focal point of a laser beam. It takes time for the crazed and stressed stone to fracture into powder, time for the debris blasting outward from the surface to sweep the atmosphere away, time for the seas to disassemble into a quadrillion individual struggling droplets that begin to boil away into gas. It takes entire seconds for these things to happen. When it is over, Outpost is no longer a planet. It is a growing cloud of diffusing vapor and tumbling stone fragments, and whether it will one day coalesce into a new planet, or spread across its former orbital path as an asteroid belt, is up to the forces of time and tide to dictate.

Far away, the Clathran ships disappear into the distances of the Arm, leaving you alone with the ruins of a world.

"Of course that was just a theoretical simulation, right?" you ask your computer.

"Right, Boss. But under the circumstances, I'd say it's pretty accurate."

The viewscreen momentarily blurs again, and the real cloud of debris replaces the simulated one. You can hardly tell the difference.

You are now aloft in the trisector that used to contain the planet Outpost.

✧ STOP ✧

[168]

Psorus is a dangerous world to explore on foot due to the preponderance of large-scale native life forms. The creatures are primarily meat-eaters of awesome size and strength. You fully intend to keep your distance from them.

Psorus also has other interesting facets which may prove to be of value to you. One such aspect is the primitive state of its oceans. There are many pockets of concentrated evolutionary organic material in the shallow bays and ocean inlets. Your analysis suggests that you may be able to collect enough of the material to make a unit of the valuable substance known as Primordial Soup. The only work you need do is bring the proper equipment into the ocean and set it up. Nothing to it.

You don the proper gear and tote the necessary processing equipment to the edge of the shore. Taking a deep breath for luck, you wade out into the water. The continental shelf here drops away gradually for about forty feet, then plummets into an inky darkness. Your computer tells you that the lower ocean floor is a great location to set up the equipment, so you allow yourself to sink to a depth of about seventy feet and prepare to begin the operation.

"Boss, can you take a look about twenty feet east of your current position?" your computer asks over the radio.

"Sure," you reply as you reach the halfway mark of setting up the collecting device. Following the computer's directions, you travel over to where a huge crevice splits the ocean floor. Shining your flasher into the black depths, you try to make out what you see here. Hmmm. "It looks like a giant iris," you report.

"Botanical or anatomical?" you are asked. Honestly, what could your computer be thinking about to ask such a silly question?

"Anatomical of course," you snort, then freeze as an awful thought occurs to you. "You don't suppose. . .," you begin to say as the water starts swirling around you and a large tentacle emerges from the crack in front of you.

". . . that it's a hydrosper?" your computer finishes helpfully. "Could very well be, Boss. Don't get too close; no telling how dangerous it might be." Too late.

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

## [169]

You intercept a subspace radio transmission already in progress from Endaur, in the Nine Worlds:

“... and Suzie was found to have this amazing power shortly after both her parents were institutionalized with the sudden adjustment psychosis syndrome. Initial testing of her clairvoyance was delayed because of a rare failure in the computer monitoring program, but subsequent tests confirmed what has already been widely reported in the media: Suzie Devens can read other people's minds. Isn't that right, Suzie?”

“You think I'm about as interesting as that toad swallower you had on last week. And you'd like to have an affair with that camerawoman.”

“Hah, hah, hah, Suzie. Isn't that amazing, folks? She knew exactly what I was thinking. Let's quickly introduce our next guest...”

✂ STOP ✂

## [170]

Plugging in the data from your latest research, you continue your work on the Interphase Constrictor. So far you have been unable to get around the problem of isolating the device from its own output, but perhaps it just needs more power...

“Wait, Boss, don't...” but it is too late; you've already thrown the switch sending fifty percent of your hyperdrive's power directly to your rebuilt variometer. Somewhere inside that little black box, a semi-sentient computer chip is furiously thinking, straining the limits of the interphase in an effort to make them higher. Too furiously; there is an abrupt flash, the smell of ozone, and sudden darkness, as all the lights go out.

Several hours later, when you have restored your ship's systems to their normal operating patterns, you survey the remains of your variometer.

“It melted!” you wail.

“Plastics have a tendency to do that, Boss, when you overheat them.”

“Wait a minute. If the current was too high for the components it would have burned out right away, and it didn't. I think this was something else. We'll have to do more experiments.”

The next few hours are busy ones, as you clean up the previous variometer and build another one. You then begin a new series of tests, using gradually increasing power levels. Eventually, you get the effect you wanted.

“It melted!” you say.

“A few minutes ago you were upset by that, Boss.”

“Listen, this is Science here. This time I *know* why it melted. I've just discovered the concept of interphase resonance, which is going to be central to the Constrictor.”

You plunge into activity again, rebuilding the variometer with a new module in the center. This part, which you dub the Internal Reality Stabilizer, is a non-sentient micro-computer chip wired up to continually attempt the same manipulations as the sentient one. Needless to say, the stabilizer always fails in its thought experiments, providing a continuous internal control for the sentient system.

When you are finally finished, you have achieved at least part of your objective: within the confines of the variometer case, the dual space interphase level is effectively zero. Of course, the only way you know this is by what the instruments are reporting to you. To be a useful tool, you will have to find a way to expand the effect to outside the case. Hopefully, once you know a little more about dual space fields and dual space projectors you will be able to make this modification.

Being as close to success as you are makes your subsequent subspace conversation with Brother Dikestra that much more difficult. Especially upsetting is the news he gives you of the Home Worlds:

"The rioting in New New York has closed the city. According to our sources, civilization has just about fallen within the six boroughs. Rural areas are doing a little better, and disciplined scientific, military, and religious establishments have suffered only a maddening equipment failure rate. It seems that the extent to which the rising interphase is affecting humanity has far exceeded the predictions of our scientists. We may need the Interphase Constrictor soon, Professor, if we are to save anything."

"I've told you everything I've learned from the planets I've been to," you tell Dikestra. "And I'll continue my research as long as I'm able. I hope we can solve this one in time."

✧ STOP ✧

[171]

It is a tough decision, but you finally choose the more prudent route of sitting and waiting for the convoy to pass. After all, what good would blowing up a mere three troop carriers do? So what if you would be taking out thousands of Clathran soldiers from the upcoming battle? Will it really make that much of a difference?

"'For want of a nail, a shoe was lost,' Boss."

"What?"

"You know, 'For want of a nail, a shoe was lost; for want of a shoe, a horse was lost; for want of a horse, a man was lost; for want of a man, a battle was lost; for want of a battle, a war was lost; and all for want of a nail.'"

You think this over and suddenly you do not feel so great about your decision.

✧ STOP ✧

[172]

You are not sure what has brought you back to the pathetic pile of orbiting space debris that was formerly the planet Yinkle. Perhaps you were hoping that the dust would have reannealed, perhaps you were just returning for old times' sake. Boy, you really had some good memories here.

"Are you kidding, Boss? This place was the pits! I recommend we leave and forget the planet Yinkle ever existed. I'm sure the Clathrans have."

When the computer is right, it's right. Since there is no planet to land on, you are still aloft in the trisector that used to contain the planet Yinkle.

✧ STOP ✧

## [173]

The Arena is empty, which makes you think at once of the sand creature you met here before. It's called a "keresk," and it's a native life form of the planet Rothane. Its ferociousness and skill at camouflage have made it a dominant life form in Rothane's varied terrain. Because it blends so well with the sand, the keresk is a common choice of opponent in Arena combats, and you can imagine the enjoyment the crowd must be getting out of seeing you scuttle along the walls like a spooked crab.

After about ten minutes of this, the crowd begins to heckle you somewhat. This would bother you more if you didn't think your strategy was working; there's an unusual hump in the sand near the center of the Arena, which just might be your opponent.

It isn't. The keresk surprises you again as you move along the wall. Good luck.

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

## [174]

You take your ship to the outskirts of the city, keeping low to the ground to avoid notice. You disembark and begin hiking towards the city. Eventually you get close enough to observe a cluster of Zyran buildings. The cluster consists of several large semi-transparent globular shells interconnected by a maze of fibrous strands. A conglomeration of brown Zyran fills the place.

Using your powered binoculars, you can make out a huge mass of heads, tentacles, and various other body parts, plus plenty of the gook that the Zyran secrete wherever they go. But you cannot make out any individual creatures within the mass. From this distance, they're all mixed together.

You'd like to get a closer look, but you are sure to be spotted if you try. Reluctantly, you return to your ship. Maybe you'll be able to learn more about the Zyran in the future.

"Too bad," you think to yourself. "If I had a way to avoid being noticed, or a way to make myself look like one of the Zyran, then I'd be able to get closer."

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

## [175]

The old hangar looks like it's a thousand years old, squatting next to a plane of rock that forms a natural landing base. The rains have rusted the metal walls in streaks, and the hangar doors will never open again. To the side, a small door has been kicked off its rusted hinges and lies on the stone, leaving an open doorway through which you enter.

The structure was never more than a shed, a metal-foam frame hung with "rustproof" steel panels, lacking lights or power even when it was new. Someone has rigged a cell-powered lantern which provides a steady dim glow. Dripping water has painted jagged stripes down the inside walls, and the steel grating that forms the floor is crumbled with rust.

In the center of the hangar is the ship you've returned to see: the *Lockerbait*. Built by Vanessa Chang's crew from the wreckage of another craft, this was the ship that finally brought Chang home from her tragic last voyage to the Arm. It was here that she left her warning to all future explorers, a warning of the designs of the Clathrans and the hazards ahead.

The ship is little more than a drive unit welded to a pressurized crew compartment. The builders wasted no construction time on viewports or shielding or airlocks or cargo bays. The *Lockerbait* had only one purpose: to bring Chang's warning back to Outpost. Whether the crew survived was almost a secondary concern.

The log panel that delivered the warning message is dark and silent now, its power supplies finally spent after all the centuries of waiting. You could probably reactivate it, but there is no point. You already know what it said. And you already have a copy of the star maps of the Arm in your computer. There is no reason not to let the *Lockerbait* rest in peace. Its voyage is completed.

If you did not play STAR SAGA: ONE and would like to read Chang's message, or if you would like to refresh your memory, you may access the message by plotting the following option:

(9UV798) (7 phases) Access Vanessa Chang's message to future explorers.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[176]

A sudden chill hits you when you realize that you have not responded to the last question correctly. Immediately your examiner becomes silent and will say no more. Chagrined, you leave the temple, determined to do better next time.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[177]

### HOW TO PLAN TURN 3

Choosing from the remaining actions on Outpost, you decide to explore the rest of Outpost's surface and then investigate the other pilots who are here. That will use the remaining phases in this 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: XZN2YH	—	—	A:7Z82KH	—
3	A:9ZV29H	—	—	—	—	—	A:LZM2JH

### HOW TO ENTER PLOTS FOR TURN 3

Go to the computer and log on. Press A and then D (the D corresponds to the action code 9ZV29H) to explore Outpost's surface. Then press A and E (which corresponds to the action code LZM2JH) to meet the other pilots. Finally, press Return or F to get your results for this turn.

### HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 3

The CGM will send you to the surface exploration text, followed by the pilot meeting text.

This concludes your character's first three turns. You should now have a good idea how to plot your moves on the computer. If you are still a bit uncertain, we recommend that you read the Rules section and/or CGM Guide in the *Host Guide and Player Reference Manual*

or ask a helpful soul standing nearby. You should also have an indication of how important it is to write things down, especially the options available on each planet and any significant information you learn as a result of them.

Last but not least, keep your character's goals in mind — that is how you will win the game!

You are now ready to take over the helm and are free to explore the galactic Arm. You may remain here awhile or head off into the great unknown. Good luck!

☒ STOP ☒

[178]

"Clerc, this is John Smith calling."

"John Smith! Hello! What are you doing on the subspace radio?"

"Looking for human explorers, mostly. The ISE is designing ships for the new Home Worlds Space Navy, and we need your input."

"You have all my best ideas already."

"What about Survivable Jump Engines, Clerc? Should we plan on them?"

"I don't know yet."

"Have you been to Franclair?"

"I've been, but I haven't gotten much out of it yet. The colonists have this habit of forcing all potential visitors into a ritualistic combat. I have to win the combat before I can do anything there."

"Well keep trying, Clerc. This is important. The more I hear about the Clathrans, the more I think we'll be needing this Navy."

"Let's hope not."

☒ STOP ☒

[179]

The long, low buildings used by Silverbeard to store his stolen goods are actually the oldest human constructions on Outpost. Members of Vanessa Chang's crew built them as part of the process of equipping Outpost as a forward base for exploration in the Arm. Some crew members stayed on the planet to build the storage units while others ferried supplies and equipment by ship. Most of the buildings are made of a concrete-like material composed primarily of crushed native rock, but some of them are specially modified to handle liquids or radioactives efficiently.

The storage capacity here well exceeds what Chang's crew ever would have needed themselves. Many people believe that Chang intended to start a colony on Outpost — although others, noting the famous explorer's opportunistic nature, claim that she actually wanted to establish a monopoly on human trade in the Arm. Her exclusive control over the tri-axis drive technology, combined with control over Outpost's facilities, might have given her just that, if the Clathrans hadn't interfered with her plans.

When Silverbeard took over the planet, he quickly filled the storage structures with whatever commodities he took but didn't need. He seems to have stockpiled all materials indiscriminately, regardless of how useful it was to him. Since Silverbeard's death, some of the stockpiles have been depleted, and others have deteriorated in storage, but there are still abundant quantities of eight commodities: Crystals, Culture, Fiber, Food, Medicine, Munitions, Radioactives, and Tools. You may load any amount of any of these commodities onto your ship, as long as you have cargo bays to hold them.

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

---

---

[180]

You are happy for the excuse to visit the Hadrakian area of the city. Here, you find a self-contained mini-city where the tigorillas have set themselves off from the rest of the planet. They obviously have as little tolerance for the over-polluted mess that passes for Innermost's environment as you. Taking a refreshingly deep breath of air, you step into the domed sector and start walking to the address where you were told you could find the Dimensional Transducer factory. The irony of having a factory inside the domed area because it is too polluted outside doesn't escape you.

Approaching the factory, you see it is truly small. "How can they make Transducers in any quantity for trade?" you wonder before it occurs to you that the Hadrakians are under Clathran interdict anyway and couldn't export anything if they wanted to. Maybe you can take advantage of this situation and get a Transducer for very little in return.

Entering the factory, you see several male Hadrakians busy toting large crates from one room to another. The boxes have the ambiguous label "PARTS" stenciled on the side. You are tempted to follow the workers and get a look at the research/assembly area, but a Settled One comes bustling out of a side office and asks if she may be of help. You explain that you are interested in learning more about the Dimensional Transducer.

"Aren't we all!" she exclaims. "One of our trader scout ships landed on a Sirissian planet several years ago and discovered this unique device. The captain of the ship managed to obtain one to take back here before we were cut off by the Clathran Survey Line. We have been studying the Dimensional Transducer ever since. We now know how to build one, but because of the limited supply of parts, we can only produce a single Transducer every couple of weeks. If you are interested in purchasing one, I will check on their availability." They sell for the following amount:

2 Tools + 1 Crystals + 1 Phase Steel + 1 Synthetic Genius

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

---

---

[181]

"Boss, are you really sure you want to return to the planet Geefle?" your computer asks. "You know the kind of reception we'll receive. After last time, they'll be on the alert for us, and they might even have reinforcements."

Yes, you are aware of the Clathran ships in orbit around the planet, but you have business here. If a few Clathrans want to contest the issue, you'll just have to deal with them. You confirm the order to attempt landing on the planet.

"OK, Boss. Whatever you say."

It comes as no surprise to you that, as you emerge from hyperspace, a small fleet of Clathran warships is circling the planet.

Go now to the CGM.

⌘ STOP ⌘

---

---

---

[182]

While heading in the general direction of the Hadrakian market, you are surprised by the approach of a Clathran patrol. Fortunately for you, there is a Hadrakian nearby who manages to pull you off the street before the soldiers notice you. You duck into the waiting alley and pull yourself tight against the wall, trying to make your body mass as small as possible so as not to attract the roving eye of a passing Clathran.

You wince as you think about what might have happened if the Hadrakian Settled One standing beside you, also hardly daring to breathe, hadn't yanked you off the street when she did. If the Clathrans knew a human was on Innermost, they would take the planet apart — possibly quite literally — to find you. Finally the patrol passes and you both heave a sigh of relief.

"Well, Human, you must live the exciting life of a Homeless One," she quips, baring her fangs in a Hadrakian smile. You smile back weakly and nod in agreement.

"Although the Clathran patrols are not frequent, they are a pain to deal with," she continues as you both head deeper into the alley. "One reason for the lax occupation force is that we give them nothing to fear in the way of resistance. Another," she grins widely, "is because of the literal stench of this polluted ball of trash. For this, we are actually grateful to the Wesmlots. At least they are proving to be useful to us in our war against the Clathrans." You can only nod in agreement as you both steer around a festering pile of decaying garbage.

The female introduces herself as Schtella and you give her your name. She tells you that your reputation has already preceded you and she is impressed by the tales of your exploits against the Clathrans. She asks if she can be of service to so great a freedom fighter as yourself.

"I am trying to get to the Hadrakian market to see what trades are available," you explain.

"Ah, I fear I must disappoint you. Ever since the Clathran occupation, our production has been cut back to such a degree that we cannot afford to allow any of our goods to go offworld. You see, we used to be the leading manufacturer of Medicine for the Hadrakian colonies. For some reason, the Clathrans have put a stop to the large scale production of this commodity. While we still produce it underground, we don't have enough to trade. In fact we don't have enough of ANYTHING to trade, so our market is closed. Sorry!"

You are disappointed by this news, but can understand the difficulties the Hadrakians are trying to deal with during the occupation. You thank your new friend for her help and head back to your ship.

❖ STOP ❖

---

[183]

"Boss, do we have to go back to Sirissi?" your computer complains as you emerge from hyperspace. "It's too crowded there."

"Yes, we are landing in just about three minutes," you inform the recalcitrant machine in a very firm tone. "I realize it is busy, but their traffic control system is 100% effective, so you have nothing to worry about."

Your ship heads down through the clouds to the planet's surface. Your ship's landing system is overridden by the local controller, for good reason. The sheer number of ships and air cars flickering around you is enough to make your head spin.

You land safely at the major spaceport and prepare to disembark.

You have the same options as before.

❖ STOP ❖

---



## [184]

You take note of the variety of ships that have landed in and around the spaceport area. Besides your own, there are five others: the *Run Amok*, the *Black Abyss*, the *Holly Roger*, the *Quest's End*, and the *Barratry*. It is clear that all are from the Nine Worlds or nearby. All of them, obviously, possess tri-axis drive systems, or else they wouldn't be here. That means that their owners must each have obtained a Flame Jewel somewhere. You wonder where they got them. Over the past few days you have observed the pilots and their ships pursuing their own affairs: loading cargo from the stockpiles, exploring the ruins, and surveying the planet. You've kept a respectful distance while engaged in your own work, but you decide it would be a good idea to talk to them and find out what their intentions are in the Arm.

You speak to the others one at a time over ship-to-ship and in person. Eventually you conclude that it would be wise for you all to meet together. You arrange to get together in the decaying hangar where the *Lockerbait* rests.

In the dim light of the hangar, you look around at those who have gathered here so far from home. Every face you see is the face of an experienced spacer. You are relieved that none of them is a fool or an idiot. Of course, looking back on your own experiences, you can see that it would have been unlikely for a fool or an idiot to make it to this place.

You are all aware of Vanessa Chang's warning about the Clathrans in the Arm. You all agree to take precautions to protect the Home Worlds if any of you are captured by Clathrans. To ensure against any possibility of error or duplicity, you all go together to each person's ship and watch as they erase all navigational data of the Fringe, including the coordinates of the Nine Worlds and other human planets, from their computer systems. You agree to rely on the marker that Vanessa Chang left on the far side of Outpost. You instruct your computers to erase everything they know about the marker, including the very fact that it exists. Now, only you and your computer working together, in the presence of the monument itself, can reconstruct the path home.

When this is done, you have a sudden feeling of terrible isolation. In the past you have travelled to lonely and distant corners of the galaxy, and gone to many new worlds, but now necessity has forced you to give up all the familiar ones. Your link to your distant home seems very tenuous, and the tremendous risks you are facing seem real for the first time. You can sense that the others feel the same. Perhaps, you agree, you can help each other.

At this point, all of the other players' characters are with yours on Outpost. You should now introduce yourself in character. You may ask any questions you wish of the other characters, and discuss anything you wish about your experiences so far or your expectations for the future. You are not required to tell anybody anything, nor are you required to always tell the truth.

When you are finished with the discussion, return to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

## [185]

The poisonous planet of Dahl looms before you on your ship's forward screen. As far as you can tell, the only useful activity here is mining Radioactives near the deserted village you explored earlier. You recall the inscription in the village's abandoned temple, "Margen is the key." Hmmm.

You have the same options as before.

✧ STOP ✧

---

[186]

You return to your ship, anxious to see how good a job the Hadrakians and Holots have done. As you round the corner and your ship comes into view, you stop and stare in amazement. Before you stands a work of art! The hull is covered from top to bottom with colorful murals. There are paintings of crystalline mountains, labyrinthine caves, flocks of winged Holots, rugged Hadrakian colonists, you name it. Over the hatch is a ten-foot tall portrait of you. This is your ship?

You ask the Hadrakian Settled One in charge of overseeing this area of the shipyard the meaning of this. She explains that the Holots extend their artistic talents to everything they do, including work on customers' ships. Before they finish working on a ship, they paint the outside of the vessel. You were told that the price of the work on your ship included "finishing." Well, now the Holots consider your ship "finished."

At least the portrait is a flattering interpretation.

⊠ STOP ⊠

---

[187]

You spend several hours studying the Dual Space Inversion Bomb blueprints and schematic diagrams, then gingerly open the outer cover and begin to tinker. Soon you have taken it entirely apart. Some time later you have put it entirely together again. Nothing seems wrong with any of the parts, and the overall design looks like it should work. That leaves only the software itself as the likely source of the problem.

You reassemble the bomb and switch it on. You have a hunch you know what the problem is.

"Bomb, I think you're not telling me the truth. Is there anything wrong with your systems?"

"I'll do a self-test," says the bomb. "Yes, uh-oh, something's wrong, but I don't know what."

"Something's wrong when you do a self-test in two seconds that should take at least a minute," you point out. "You're not really running the test, are you?"

The bomb whirrs for a few moments. "I'm afraid."

"Afraid of exploding?"

"Oh, no! I want to explode more than anything! I'm afraid because there are so many Clathrans near the Dodecahedron. What if they destroy me before I get to explode? Oh, the horror, the horror!"

The bomb is right! Whoever designed it didn't include any defensive systems at all. One hit with a Clathran phase beam and the bomb might be destroyed without exploding.

"I'm going to give you some defenses," you tell the bomb. "And I happen to be the expert on fighting, avoiding, and evading Clathrans. When I finish with you you'll have nothing to worry about."

"Oh, goody!" says the bomb.

You set to work designing and installing defensive systems for the bomb. The bomb has no drive, so it can't maneuver, but with a few extra circuits you can enable it to send out countermeasure signals to confuse the Clathrans' sensors, and you can improve its shielding to enable it to survive a lucky hit or two. Knowing the weak points of the Clathran weapon and detection systems helps you to make the most of the limited space and power available. There's no room to give it any attack weapons, but since it already has an Interphase Reflector and a Discontinuity Wave Generator as component parts, you enhance the software to let it use these systems for its own defense up until the moment it explodes.

When you finish, you are certain that you have done everything possible to ensure that the device will work. You switch it on.

“Bomb! Engage self-test.”

“Certainly! I love to self-test!” You hear the self-test start up in earnest this time. That problem, at least, is fixed. “Let me see now. . .”

⊠ STOP ⊠

[188]

Safely past the Survey Line, you use your subspace radio to contact Dean Myers back at Harvard, in the Home Worlds. Cabot Kegtaker of Campus Security is there as well. You tell them about your experiences with the Clathrans and your progress researching Dual Space.

“So the Clathran Survey really is as serious a threat as Vanessa Chang predicted,” Kegtaker comments.

“Worse,” you reply. “The size of their fleet is enormous. If they get to the Home Worlds, we’re dead.”

“We have to find a way to protect ourselves,” Kegtaker says. “The military has started work on a space navy, you know. From what you describe of the Clathran fleet, though, conventional defenses aren’t likely to do much good.”

“As if we don’t have enough problems,” Dean Myers adds. “Your discovery of the human capacity for abilities like levitation and telekinesis was only the tip of the iceberg, Lee. Mental abilities seem to be cropping up everywhere now. Not only that, people are going insane because of it. We think that the rising Dual Space Interphase is responsible.”

“Yes,” you respond, “Human beings aren’t physiologically evolved to cope with a wide Dual Space Interphase. The Interphase is expanding quickly, and people can’t adjust, so they go mad. The problem is likely to get worse.”

“That is why your research is so important, Lee,” Myers says. “If you can figure out how to build an Interphase Constrictor, we might be able to protect humanity from Dual Space.”

“Not only that,” Kegtaker adds, “But what you learn might lead us to a way to beat the Clathrans. Their survey fleet doesn’t use Dual Space weapons, does it?”

“No, just very powerful weapons, and lots of them,” you reply.

“Your discoveries so far indicate that Dual Space may be a source of tremendous power. Harnessing it may be our only chance against the Clathrans,” Kegtaker points out.

“You may be right. Unfortunately, some of the Dual Space devices I’ve come across are beyond the capability of our science to explain, or even comprehend.”

“Professor Strassmann is working on the theoretical aspects as we speak,” Myers remarks. “We’re counting on you to do the experimental research. Keep looking for anomalies, and keep working on that Interphase Constrictor.”

“Will do.”

“And good luck.”

⊠ STOP ⊠

[189]

Smoke fills your control room. Coughing and gasping for air, you ask your computer for a status report.

"It's no good, Boss. If we stay here any longer we're going to become a permanent part of the space debris out here. My recommendation is to evacuate the area immediately."

You couldn't agree more, so you give the evacuation order. Luckily, you succeed in getting away before sustaining any significant ship damage.

You could not land, so you are still aloft in the trisector containing the planet Ghorbon.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[190]

You recall to mind what you've already seen about the past explorers of Golgotha. Was this what Brother Mathus wanted you to look one step deeper into? Perhaps you can. You are a Master of Reason. Perhaps you can use the skills the Brotherhood taught you to see more of what you want to see.

You find it very easy to return to the image of the past you saw before. Again you see the pilot of the *Fool's Errand* landing on Golgotha. You have no doubt that this is Vanessa Chang in her old age, returning to space long after the days of her exploration. Is there some connection between her and the Brotherhood's existence in the Arm? You resolve to ask Mathus about it if you ever get back to Mardahl.

You continue backwards through time until you see the departure of the Archangel on its way back to the Home Worlds. Farther back, you again see Brother Eric speaking with his peers. You wonder whether Brother Eric might have been a member of your Brotherhood. You seem to recall that there were religious groups at that time who called themselves Brothers, so the connection could just be a coincidence. You focus more closely on the little groups of people. Your attention is drawn to two men, speaking quietly between themselves while the others discuss changing mankind. They are dressed in the protective flight suits of space explorers. You realize that these two, and not Eric, are members of the Brotherhood.

"Suppose Eric's plan is right," one is saying. "Shouldn't we help them? Our influence would make it easier."

"No," says the other. "Eric is wrong. We can't teach everyone. Too many don't want to learn. And we don't need to teach everyone. Just a few, maybe just one, will be enough. Remember the Vision; remember the Message. That's the key here."

"Whom do we choose, then?"

"We choose the ones with the drive, the ones who are called. Let the churches build a wall; let Chang arm the Home Worlds. They'll do it for us. The ones that make it will be the ones we need."

"It'll be a challenge," says the first. "We may be setting a harder task than Eric is. It's a long way to reach."

"Look at it this way," replies his companion. "In a way it's what we've been reaching for since we came out of the trees. The only thing new is the time limit."

They both stare out at the vague horizon and shudder slightly.

You hold the two in your sight for a while longer, but they don't discuss anything further about their plans. Then you lose track of them in the confusion of the time stream.

You try several times to learn more, but to no avail. You've seen what must be a crucial event in the history of the Brotherhood, but you can't make much sense out of it. There are still large gaps in your understanding of the events on Golgotha. You have seen a few things, but you haven't yet completed your geas. You need to know more about Golgotha first.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[191]

As the discussion draws to a close, you begin to think about where you want to go next. It appears that your fellow explorers will be spreading out in many different directions. Before you part, you all agree to keep your subspace radio transceivers tuned to a common frequency so that you will always be able to communicate with each other at will.

On your display screen, you call up the map of the Galactic Arm, the only star map now in your computer system. You wish you had more information to go on, or some concrete clue that would lead you in the right direction. But the Arm is almost entirely unknown. The only way to learn is to explore. You will have to set your own course from here.

✂ STOP ✂

[192]

Your subspace receiver picks up the following news from Earth:

Computer failures have been blamed for a number of industrial accidents on Norstar, causing overall productivity to drop 15% this quarter.

An unknown serial killer has been terrorizing residents of the G-Prime earth orbital station. So far three people have been found dead; all of them had been decompressed in airlocks.

✂ STOP ✂

[193]

You emerge from hyperspace into the midst of a typical main-sequence planetary system. Your ship's computer wastes no time in directing you to the only habitable planet: a steamy tropical world covered with thick overgrown jungles and vast shallow oceans. A single large city on the coast of the largest continent is the site of a busy spaceport.

"This is the planet Franclair, Boss."

"What else can you tell me about it?"

"The notes on Vanessa Chang's map say it is a colony world of the Hadrakians, and that it boasts its own semi-sentient native life form."

"Semi-sentient?"

"A species known as the Francloons, which behaved very strangely — almost maliciously — towards Chang and her crew. The Francloons are apparently tolerated by the Hadrakians, but Chang was unable to work out the exact relationship."

"I wonder what the situation is now."

"We'll find out soon enough. I've picked up landing instructions for the Hadrakian offworlders' enclave."

The stars whirl around your viewscreen, as you begin your landing approach.

✂ STOP ✂

## [194]

You radio the monitoring station before the x-ray beam reaches you and pretend to be a Clathran ship.

“Incoming craft, please identify yourself,” the commander of the monitoring station requests.

“This is a multi-purpose military cargo vessel carrying top-secret cargo which cannot be x-rayed,” you answer, using your universal translator to broadcast your voice in perfect Clathran.

“Your password?” the commander asks.

Go now to the CGM.

⌘ STOP ⌘

## [195]

Since the Clathrans occupied Franclair, the prices at the commodities market have improved substantially. There are far fewer visitors now — the Clathran blockade sees to that — and imported goods are in short supply. The market offers Medicines at the following rates:

- 3 Medicine for 1 Warp Core
- 3 Medicine for 1 Culture
- 2 Medicine for 1 Fiber
- 1 Medicine for 1 Super Slip

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

## [196]

You give the orders to open fire on the lights while you keep an eye on them on the front viewer. Shot after shot erupts from your vessel and each time, they pass harmlessly through the insubstantial lights. As you prepare to give the next round of orders, you see one of the lights approach your vessel and attach itself to your hull. Immediately, the lights on board your ship dim perceptibly.

“What’s going on?” you cry in frustration.

“That thing is somehow draining the energy from our ship!” is the ominous reply. Desperately, you throw everything you have against the blasted creature that is sucking the life from your ship.

Something works, because the light-being pulls away from the hull and rapidly recedes into the distance. The other lights follow their comrade, leaving you with a whole, but rather drained vessel.

Go now to the CGM.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[197]

The planet is green-blue, with drifting clouds and a uniform surface of spongy orange tundra.

You land. You check the atmosphere: unsafe, no oxygen. You check again: safe.

What?

“It changed, Boss, between samples. The instruments are working fine.”

You shrug, step through the airlock to the planet’s surface. There is nothing moving anywhere near the ship.

“Now you have arrived at the planet of your dreams.”

The voice is in your head. You look around and see a floating creature. As it approaches across the unvarying landscape you realize that it is huge, the size of one of your cargo bays. Tentacles trail from its pastel colored underside. It comes within ten meters and stops, drifting slowly in place.

“This is Darkwhistle. I’m a Darkwhistler.”

“I’m a human,” you think back. Your telepathy has grown a little rusty, but you can still manage it.

“You are a human. You breathe oxygen. Your species travels through space. Your species is sought by the Clathrans.”

“How do you know?”

“We know because *we journey*.” The word in your mind combines many meanings: to look across the stars, to see the thoughts and actions of others, to watch events far distant in space-time.

Questions flare in your mind. . .

“I will tell you what you want to know, human, and use as much space-time as is necessary. This is the planet you have sought, to learn the answers you must know.”

Except for the Darkwhistlers the planet is a featureless ball, covered uniformly in spongy orange tundra that has no conceivable commercial value. All of your possibilities for further action involve talking with the Darkwhistler.

⟨HSRZA2⟩ (5 phases) Discuss the Darkwhistlers themselves, including their history and unique abilities.

⟨DSCZF2⟩ (3 phases) Discuss Earth.

⟨HPRSAZ⟩ (3 phases) Discuss the Clathrans.

⟨DPCSFZ⟩ (3 phases) Discuss dual space.

⟨RSAZ52⟩ (5 phases) Discuss space weaponry.

⟨AP5SEZ⟩ (5 phases) Relax for a few days, while letting the Darkwhistler talk with your ship.

⟨HJRUA7⟩ (3 phases) Discuss Vanessa Chang.

⟨H3RPAS⟩ (3 phases) Discuss the message.

⟨RJAU57⟩ (3 phases) Discuss the Hadrakians and their battle plans.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[198]

Subspace radio transmission from The Battle, Inc.:

“... all space travelers and traders are advised to avoid the planet Adafa, as forces of the Clathran Survey have now completed their encirclement. Hadrakian Space Navy forces offered only token resistance to the vastly superior Clathran force, before withdrawing to safety in deep space. This news bulletin is issued by The Battle, Incorporated, your contact for a free galaxy.”

⊠ STOP ⊠

[199]

*What's in the walled-off military half of the spaceport?* you wonder. You decide to climb over the wall and take a closer look. Fortunately, you are able to use one of your special abilities to avoid being detected while you are doing this. There are many guards patrolling the military part of the spaceport, but they don't spot you.

You see that the main use of the spaceport is to support the planet's elaborate defense systems. Some of the spaceships, satellites, and weapons emplacements you saw in orbit around the planet came from here. There are new ships under construction and old ones being repaired, satellites being boosted into orbit, and computer systems monitoring everything.

The most interesting thing you see, though, is a team of Zyran engineers testing a new piece of technology. The device, which looks like a ship weapon, has been mounted on the ground and is being fired at various targets. Strangely, there is no apparent effect on the targets. You wonder what the device is supposed to do.

You again use your ability to sneak up close to the engineers and find out what's really going on. It turns out that the device is not an offensive weapon, but a defensive one: a cloaking ray. The idea is that a ship equipped with the cloaking ray can make itself invisible to enemy ships. A very useful ability, to be sure.

As you watch the engineers, you catch a glimpse of the design specification showing how the cloaking ray is built. The head engineer is pointing out a small flaw in the design to the rest of the engineers. It finishes its explanation, then it and all the other engineers walk away, leaving the design specification unguarded.

You're not likely to have a golden opportunity like this again, so you grab the design document. Then you head back to the wall, climb over it, and return to your ship. You now have the know-how to build a Cloaking Ray. Of course, you'll also need the various components:

- 1 Dimensional Transducer
- 1 Diamond Cloth
- 1 Radioactives
- 1 Synthetic Genius
- 1 Tools

If you have all the components and want to build a Cloaking Ray, select the following option:

⟨7V89KV⟩ (3 phases) Build a Cloaking Ray.

Please make a note of this action code; it is an “unlisted” action, so you will have to enter the code manually if you wish to select it.

⊠ STOP ⊠



[200]

The surging water gives you ample warning that the monster is making an attack, and you are easily able to avoid the huge tentacle that comes whipping out of the recesses of the crevice. It is a bit more difficult to avoid the second tentacle and almost impossible to dodge the third. It doesn't take a genius to realize that this monster may be more than you can handle under the current conditions, so you scramble back to where your equipment is and grab it.

The hydropsor emerges from its home and begins to pursue you. You only catch a quick glimpse of the monster before you beat a hasty retreat and head for the safety of dry land. The brief look left an impression of a fifty foot long squid-like creature, not something you look forward to meeting again until you are better armed.

You may select this option again.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[201]

You complete the dialogue and Brother Mathus asks you a few questions about your experiences on the planet Golgotha. You are able to answer some of the questions, but not all. Brother Mathus looks disappointed.

"The Geas is to explore Golgotha *thoroughly*," she explains. "You have been there, but you have not done everything you can to finish this task. You've seen the surface, what all human explorers see, but you haven't gone one step deeper. If you cannot go back because you are unwilling to face difficult truths, or learn things that may challenge your most deeply held beliefs, I understand. This is the hardest test of all. It is possible that you can progress no further in our order."

"No, I can complete the Geas," you reply, realizing what you must do. You must go back to Golgotha and do all the options you have not tried yet, and then and only then try to look one step deeper.

"Very well, return here when you have done that." She walks out of the temple and leaves you alone.

You may select this option again.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[202]

Black hides black, sound hides sound; the leopard in his dappled skin passes unseen through the jungle. Waves link the galaxy, informing one being about another, but waves can be misinformed, superimposed, reversed, or straightened.

Tayzhans treat all communication as equally potent waves: no arbitrary division for them of "visual," "radio," or "cosmic." Frequency and amplitude and phase and speed are as evident to them as color and decibel.

They "see" the Clathrans, and at once perceive how the Clathrans "see" them. The scanning band widths, the pulse frequencies, the blind spots and the nulls.

With their help, you learn the ability of "Noseeme." Your emitting frequencies become their blind spots; your radiation patterns match the harmonics of their scanners. From now on, you will be nearly invisible, inaudible and undetectable to those who you would prefer not see you.

For their assistance, the Tayzhans request only one unit of any commodity, to replace the planetary resources expended on your behalf.

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

[203]

You give the orders to initiate liftoff and watch as Knapt begins to fall away from you on the viewscreen.

“It’s a good thing you disabled that beam emplacement, Boss. Otherwise it would have zapped us for sure. As it is, we can get away scot free.”

“I don’t believe it,” you retort, “You’re actually complimenting me. I have to mark this date on the calendar; there’s no telling when it might happen again.”

Knapt diminishes to nothing on your viewscreen as you head out into deep space.

✧ STOP ✧

[204]

Your ship’s forward screen shows the extremely beautiful planet of Takata before you. Brilliant bolts of colored energy arc from half of the planet’s surface, holding you in awe. You look forward to seeing the short, wobbly Sirissians again as you land the ship at the major spaceport. Sirissian technology is considerably more advanced than your own, which makes visiting their worlds interesting. You are not too worried about the small garrison that the Clathrans maintain on Takata, since the Clathrans don’t prevent the Sirissians from traveling in space, nor do they restrict activities on the planet very much.

You have the same options as before.

✧ STOP ✧

[205]

The narrowest stretch of desert is less than a day’s walk from where you landed your ship so, after a good night’s sleep, you pack a survival kit and start out. The jungle is dense, but there is a well-worn path running in the direction you want, so you make good time. You see an occasional raccoon peering at you from the underbrush, but they do not speak to you, nor do they interfere with your journey. Just after noon you reach the edge of the jungle which gives way to a vast stretch of white sand. Stopping to eat lunch and survey the next leg of your journey, you check that your canteens are full and your air conditioned sun protection suit is operational. When you are ready, you don the suit and start across the desert.

A high-pitched voice calls to you from the depths of the jungle, “Beware the dwyrms.” You look back but see nothing. Puzzled, you continue on your way. “Do not dance in the heat of the sun,” the voice warns, then is silent. You continue on your way.

You decided yesterday that the only way to cross the sand safely would have to be on foot. If you used any mechanical transport, the Clathrans could easily detect it and put a stop to your mission, and maybe even to you as well. With hardly any second thoughts, you step out onto the desert. Your journey has really begun. From the quick scan your computer was able to run while you were still in orbit, you estimate it will take you about two days of travel to cross the desert and a few hours more to reach the Clathran base.

You make good time, and the setting sun finds you well into the desert. Stopping to rest and eat dinner, you send yet another silent thanks to the creator of the sun suit. With its constant cooling action, you hardly feel the intense heat pounding down on you. Munching

contentedly on your peanut butter and jelly sandwich, you slug down a lemonade to help wash the sticky stuff down. You unroll your sleeping bag, manage to get a few hours of sleep and are up and moving before the morning's rising sun.

When noon time comes, it finds you more than three-quarters of the way across the desert. You are feeling good and hum softly under your breath. The shimmering heat sends waves of light bouncing up from the sand. It reminds you of a disco you used to visit back on your home world. Without thinking, you start singing at the top of your lungs while doing the last dance you learned there, the turbo-bossanova. Feet flying, arms whirling, body bending and twisting to the beat of the music, you dance your way across several hundred feet of sand. And freeze in your tracks as the warning about not dancing under the heat of the sun comes to mind. But it is too late, you fear. From the horizon behind you, you can see a plume of sand rising ominously. A distant bellow accompanies it and you know you are in trouble. This must be the dreaded dwyrm you have caught the attention of, and it's headed right for you. There's only one thing to do — run!

Feet pounding on the white sand, you race for the desert's end which you can see just a mile or so away. You do not use any of the precious seconds left to you to look back and see how close the monster is; you put all of your energy into reaching the safety of the trees drawing tantalizingly nearer. You have only the sound of the creature's bellowing to tell you just how close it is getting, and that's *too* close!

Gasping for air, you throw yourself up the grassy slope and into the safety of the trees that grow just a few hundred feet from where the sand stops. It is only now that you dare turn and look at your enemy. You prepare to do battle should the beast decide to continue its charge into the forest. Looking back into the desert you can see nothing. Only a several-mile-long and twenty-foot-wide furrow that comes almost to the desert's edge before twisting back on itself. Whatever the dwyrm is, it doesn't like being out of deep sand. You breathe a sigh of relief and continue into the forest.

The rest of the trip to the Clathran base is uneventful, for which you are grateful. You have had enough excitement to last you for a few hours at least. Again, there is a well-worn path traveling from the desert inward toward the base. You wonder whether the Clathrans made it or perhaps the raccoons. You hope it is the latter.

Long before you are within sight of the base, you hear the sounds of construction under way. Hammering, welding, heavy machinery rumbling back and forth all give you clues that the Clathrans are not quite ready for visitors yet, so you are not surprised when you finally get close enough to see a large garrison in the process of being built. This explains the lack of response to the satellite's attack on your ship. The Clathrans probably don't even have the relays set up yet to intercept incoming ships. From the looks of things, you gather that it will be quite a while before the base is fully functional — good!

You decide to risk actually entering the compound. Although there are no guards at the gate (in fact there isn't any gate yet), it is still dangerous to go wandering around inside an occupied enemy base. You are confident that your special abilities will fool the aliens into believing you are one of them. You will simply avoid long conversations with the soldiers, that's all. Simple.

It is simple, too. Keeping to the less crowded areas, you are able to check out many of the buildings and offices. The lizard-men have dedicated most of their space to offices, an arsenal, a ship repair pad and hangar, a huge calisthenic area and a mess hall. There is very little room for recreation and personal living quarters. These soldiers live a very austere life which you do not envy.

There are two interesting areas which you consider looking into more closely, the armory and the intelligence office. You now have two new options:

⟨9NVY96⟩ (4 phases) Check out the weapons armory.

⟨LNMYJ6⟩ (4 phases) Infiltrate the intelligence office.

✱ STOP ✱

---

[206]

The Clathran guard is large and mean-looking, but you have the element of surprise. You are able to sneak up to him without him noticing, and you deliver your best attack in an attempt to knock him out in one blow. Unfortunately, he is too quick and well-armed for your attack to be successful, so all you have done is alerted him to your presence.

“You scum,” he grunts, as he sets off an alarm and lashes out at you with his weapon.

You would love to fight the guard a little longer, but soon the whole base will be upon you. Since getting captured and taken for interrogation is not your idea of a fun evening, you flee for the hills. The Clathran isn't fast enough to keep up with you, and in a short time you are back in the safety of your ship.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

---

[207]

You venture once more into the strategy rooms of The Battle's office. You have a problem that you hope they can help you with.

“Human!” you are greeted. “How goes the construction of the Dual Space Inversion Bomb?”

“The Bomb is done,” you reply. “But we can't drop it.”

“Why not?”

“Because we can't get close enough. There are still ten thousand Clathran warships in orbit around Karnossus, and all of them are between us and the Dodecahedron. I came here to learn why the Clathrans haven't called up their reinforcements. Hasn't the Battle of Hadrak started?”

“Indeed it has,” the Hadrakian answers. “At least the first stages of it, anyway. But we are already substantially outnumbered by the Clathran forces. As things stand, they will destroy us easily, without the need to call on forces from Karnossus.”

“What of your allies?”

“What allies?” asks the Hadrakian. “Look at this list, here, of all the spacefaring intelligences in the Arm. To push the Clathrans to their limit, we would need forces from the Riallans, the Worzellians, the Zyran, and the Sirissians, at the very least. So far, we just don't have it together. If you want to help yourself now, go out and bring in these troops. Then maybe we can put up a fight big enough to draw the Clathrans away from Karnossus.”

“Very well,” you agree. “I'll try.”

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

---

---

[208]

Your return to the Stargate world of Unaria is without incident. The perky purple sacks of skin that call themselves Unarians are as disgustingly happy and excited as before, which only causes you to smile at the differences in the universe that make life interesting. You wave to the natives busy working at the spaceport, and they cheerfully wave back. How pleasant.

You have the same options as before.

⊠ STOP ⊠

---

[209]

“Computer, tell me what you know about Hadrakians.”

Your computer, which knows you all too well by now, pauses expectantly, trying to bait you into telling it to hurry up and talk.

You wait. After all, you already told it to tell you what it knew.

Your computer says nothing.

You wait some more. It’s hard to outwait a three-sigma turing capability, but it can be done.

“Very well, Boss.”

Victory!

“Vanessa Chang was familiar with Hadrakians and encountered them often in the Arm. Despite Chang’s reluctance to talk about her experiences in space after she escaped from the Clathrans, quite a bit of information about the Hadrakians found its way into the accounts and journal notes of her contemporaries. We can probably conclude that Chang considered them friendly.”

Your display screen brings up an image, not a photograph but a hand-drawn sketch, of a centaur-like combination of tiger and gorilla crouched next to a female human. The alien is covered in a brilliant white fur, and looks as if it would stand about two meters tall and mass about 200 kilos. Both the upper and lower portion of the Hadrakian’s body are heavily muscled; the creature appears to be in excellent physical condition.

“Quoting now from various sources,” your computer begins:

‘Hadrakians bear very little physical resemblance to humans. However, their society is relatively easy to comprehend. All Hadrakians are born male. The young males, once they reach maturity, generally serve as traders, soldiers, and hard laborers. They are known as “Homeless Ones.” Older Hadrakians are always female, and perform the work of teachers, administrators, and scientists. They are known as “Settled Ones.”

‘The biological transformation from male to female occurs when a Hadrakian is thirty years old. It induces not only a change in sex, but also a change in personality and temperament. The Homeless Ones are aggressive and impulsive, and require constant challenges and dangers to satisfy their lust for adventure. The Settled Ones are patient and thoughtful, and have a strong desire to keep things running smoothly and peacefully.

‘Young Hadrakians are raised by the Settled Ones in communal creches, where they learn about culture, business, language, and fighting. At age ten, the developing male enters a biological state called “Maquistra,” where his physical strength and need for adventure dominate his personality. He then goes through an elaborate Arena ritual, where he demonstrates his fighting skill to society and becomes an adult and citizen of his native planet. Winners in this Arena are granted citizenship,

for that planet only, which also confers full trading rights in the local markets. Those Hadrakians who take up the respected merchant trade must, of course, win their citizenship on several planets of the Empire in order to have access to a variety of markets.

'To the first-time visitor, this system may seem somewhat barbaric. When understood in the appropriate religious context, however, it becomes downright bizarre. Hadrakians worship a great number of different deities — each city has a Street of Gods — and generally feel a close personal relationship with their favorites. The Arena is perceived as a screening test, used by the gods to select those Hadrakians that they would have join them on the spiritual plane. Being killed in the Arena, therefore, is the ultimate sign of divine favor.

'Being a pragmatic people, however, the Hadrakians provide excellent medical facilities at each Arena site, and fatalities are kept to a minimum. This is seen by the more traditional elements of society as an indication that the Hadrakian way of life is deteriorating; every year more Hadrakians than ever fail "The Test of the Gods," as the Arena combat is known, by surviving the combat. These "failures," which of course include every living Hadrakian citizen, are considered to be condemned to a lifetime of "purification" on this plane before passing on to the next.'

"That's all I can get from the old secondary sources, Boss. But there is new incoming data. Would you be interested in hearing that as well?"

"Sure," you reply, feeling smug about your earlier victory over the computer. A few minutes pass while you wait. Finally you blurt out an exasperated, "Well?"

"Oh," the computer crows. "You want to hear it *now*? Very well. The data is actually in the form of a radio message emanating from the space control center on the planet we are approaching, transmission in screen. . ."

You look up at the overhead screen in time to see what must be one of the Hadrakian race looking back at you. The alien has a power and grace that could not have come through in the drawing you were shown earlier. You find yourself staring while the being greets you.

"Welcome to the Hadrakian Empire." The white-furred alien spends a moment punching buttons and encoding data in the computer system. It gives a satisfied nod at something it has read on its terminal before turning back to you.

"Forgive the delay and the nuisance of processing your ship identification but, as you are well aware I'm sure, these are troubled times. The computer has yours listed as a 'friendly' race — human, if I am not mistaken." You are surprised by this, but nod. "Yes, we have on record an early explorer and crew who passed this way. Perhaps you know of her — Vanessa Chang?" Again, you are surprised and nod yes. "She made a great impression upon our race by winning, in quick succession, almost every Arena combat that was available to her. She was the first alien to successfully become a citizen on every Hadrakian planet in the galaxy, being defeated only once in the process. Truly impressive."

The creature correctly interprets your look of surprise and begins to laugh. "Forgive me. Our records show that this is your first contact with a Hadrakian world, so allow me to explain. We Hadrakians are first and foremost a merchant race. We thrive on trading and have made it our life's work. But, long ago, we learned that a trader who could not protect her goods soon finds herself with nothing to trade. As a consequence, we have developed a system for the younger of our species by which, after proving themselves worthy in battle, they can take their place in society proper. We require this proving of all offworld visitors as well.

"If you wish to land on this planet, follow the offworlder landing beacon to the Enclave berthing area. The Enclave is equipped to supply any basic material needs, and can also serve as living quarters if you prefer not to remain aboard your vessel. The Enclave adjoins the Arena for your convenience should you decide to acquire the benefits of Hadrakian citizenship on this planet. You will find similar Enclaves on all Hadrakian worlds."

"Excuse me," you ask. "What happens to those who lose in the Arena?"

"Citizenship on that world is not conferred," says the Hadrakian. "Though the loser, if not favored by the gods, may try again. I'm certain that one of your species will not experience this difficulty, judging from our records of the explorer Chang."

After giving your computer instructions to land at the offworlder spaceport, you head down to the galley and fix a peanut butter and mango sandwich. No telling when you'll be able to eat one of these babies again!

⊠ STOP ⊠

[210]

Sharing your information with the Hadrakians seems like a worthwhile risk, especially since, given their resources, you ought to come out ahead in the exchange. So, you decide to agree on full cooperation, and instinctively extend a hand to shake. The Hadrakian draws back in alarm. You apologize and explain the custom, reassuring her that you accept her offer and wish to signify your willingness to do business. It seems that clawed creatures tend to interpret the meaning of an extended hand a little differently.

Your host begins with an introduction: "Welcome to The Battle, Incorporated. This company was founded because the Hadrakian race is faced with economic ruin and the possible collapse of our Empire as a direct result of the Clathran Survey. As the official government-sponsored Clathran resistance organization, The Battle maintains offices on each of the eight Hadrakian colonies. From these offices, we plan and coordinate our strategy against the Clathran threat. We direct the building of spaceships and weaponry, deploy the forces of the Hadrakian navy, and decide when to retreat, hold our ground, or counterattack. Our chief executive officer is Marshal Innvo of Hadrak.

"As a member of our organization, you may feel free to contact us on any colony on which you have attained citizenship. We suggest you do this often, so we can each keep abreast of developments in the war and so confer on the best strategy to defeat the Clathrans — assuming it's possible to defeat them." She looks at the mural of the naked combatants for a moment, then gestures toward it. "The Clathran fleet outnumbers our ships by a huge margin. We face overwhelming odds. The Survey is already in the process of conquering our worlds."

You're at a loss to respond. You imagine Clathran ships blasting their way past Outpost and through the heart of the Nine Worlds, and shudder.

"Is that what a Clathran really looks like?" you finally ask, to break the silence. "I've never seen one — um — quite so close up."

"It's accurate, as far as we know," she answers. "What contact have you had with the Clathrans? What can you tell us about them?"

You begin by describing the terrible things that happened to Vanessa Chang and her crew three hundred years ago: the capture, the torture, the mindwiping of the ship's doctor. You relate the strange conversation that Chang overheard between two Clathran officers:

"Is it possible that the Humans have no limitations?" one of them asked.

"If so, we must destroy them," the other responded.

"The Clathrans are implacably hostile toward the Human race," you explain. "They don't seem interested in studying us or enslaving us or conquering us; they simply want to wipe us out. They already tried once, with the Space Plague. The only reason the Clathrans haven't succeeded is that they don't know the location of the Human Home Worlds. The Survey, if it keeps advancing, will eventually get there."

You go on to describe the other things you have learned about the Clathrans. It takes quite some time to relate your various exploits, in both the Fringe and the Arm, despite your considerable practice in embellishing some of the stories. Although your host takes no notes, you assume that somewhere nearby a recording device lurks, unseen, making a permanent record of all you say.

"Strange," says the Hadrakian. "All of our information leads us to believe that the Clathrans intend to conquer and subdue our worlds. Our fear is that they might force us to abandon space, perhaps evacuate some of our colonies, perhaps even reduce our industrial and technological capabilities, as they seem to have done on other worlds farther around the Arm. But mass extermination — that isn't part of the Clathrans' program except, it seems, where humans are concerned. I don't envy you."

You nod. But you don't envy the Hadrakians either. The Clathrans are already on their doorstep.

"In any case," she continues, "It's clear that we both have the same problem: what to do about the Survey. If we can't stop it, we'll all be at the Clathrans' mercy."

⊠ STOP ⊠

After giving your complete information to the publisher, you will receive a complete letter and a copy of the magazine. The publisher will also send you a copy of the magazine if you are unable to receive it in any other way.

© 1975

MasterPlay Publishing Corporation is a not-for-profit organization. All proceeds from the sale of the magazine go to support the work of the National Magazine.

MasterPlay Publishing Corporation is a not-for-profit organization. All proceeds from the sale of the magazine go to support the work of the National Magazine.

MasterPlay Publishing Corporation is a not-for-profit organization. All proceeds from the sale of the magazine go to support the work of the National Magazine.

MasterPlay Publishing Corporation is a not-for-profit organization. All proceeds from the sale of the magazine go to support the work of the National Magazine.

MasterPlay Publishing Corporation is a not-for-profit organization. All proceeds from the sale of the magazine go to support the work of the National Magazine.

MasterPlay Publishing Corporation is a not-for-profit organization. All proceeds from the sale of the magazine go to support the work of the National Magazine.

MasterPlay Publishing Corporation is a not-for-profit organization. All proceeds from the sale of the magazine go to support the work of the National Magazine.



PUBLISHING CORPORATION

MasterPlay Publishing Corporation is a not-for-profit organization. All proceeds from the sale of the magazine go to support the work of the National Magazine.

MasterPlay Publishing Corporation is a not-for-profit organization. All proceeds from the sale of the magazine go to support the work of the National Magazine.