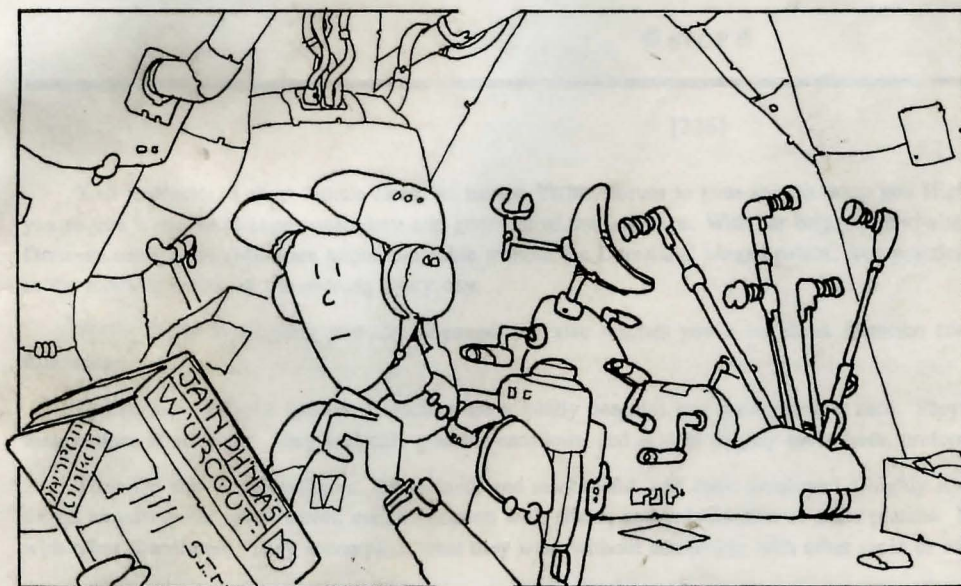


STAR SAGA: ONE™

BOOK D

TEXT 224-296



BOOK D

ONE

TEXT 334-08



[224]

You have decided your mission to destroy Silverbeard is the most important thing in the galaxy right now, as you establish orbit around Outpost. You have accomplished so much since you left your home world, but you still have more to do.

You decide to use the same methods you used before to defeat the killer satellites, the missile attack and the first round of ground weapon fire. With this in mind you instruct the computer to initiate the proper attack sequence to tackle the first three lines of defense. After you complete all three phases successfully, you take a moment to regroup.

Finally, you steel yourself to attempt to breach the fourth line of Outpost's defenses. Your computer makes the helpful observation that Silverbeard has remained ominously quiet while you battled your way to this point. You silently wonder whether or not this is a good sign.

The time comes when waiting gains you nothing, so you cross your fingers for luck and implement your battle plan. While it's true you were not successful earlier, you still believe it is your best chance at blowing up the power generator. You try to still the nervous butterflies in your stomach and concentrate on the task at hand. Wiping a trickle of sweat out of your eyes, you order your computer to begin the strafing run.

"Roger, Boss!" is the reply, as your ship screams its defiance at the atmosphere and dives toward the target.

Go now to the CGM.

✱ STOP ✱

[225]

Your instructor, a short female Darscian named Yarlec, comes to your ship to teach you High Darscian. Yarlec is endlessly patient with you as you learn the strange vocabulary and grammar of the language. With her help you find alternate ways of mouthing certain of the High Darscian consonants which are unpronounceable without the Darscians' hinged palate. You practice basic conversation and reading from early in the morning to late in the evening every day.

While Yarlec is teaching you the language, she also teaches you a lot about Darscian customs, history, and culture. You learn the following:

Unlike some galactic species, Darscians are a totally peaceful and nonaggressive race. They are tranquil, non-violent, and in control of their actions at all times. They feel only positive emotions, and seldom display even those, preferring to keep their feelings private.

They are also very intelligent, determined, and resourceful, and have developed a highly advanced civilization, being proficient at such things as interstellar space travel, communication with aliens, and colonization of other planets. Yet they have no weapons, and no conflicts with other spacefarers. They accomplish what they want without competing with other races or each other. That is their way.

The Darscian race wasn't always so nice. In the beginning, they were almost as violent and inconsistent as humans. They fought wars amongst themselves, felt negative emotions such as anger, fear, and jealousy, and required complex bureaucratic governments to keep control of their people. Today, they are ashamed of their barbaric past and are thankful that they will never be like that again.

The reason they can be so certain of this lies back in their history over sixty thousand years ago. At that time, their violent ancestors had not yet developed interstellar space travel and were thus confined to their home planet, Darscold. There they struggled with a number of difficult problems: war, pollution, mutation, overpopulation, disease, and so on.

One day, alien explorers of great power and technological sophistication came to Darscold. These aliens, who were later named the "Mentors," landed and introduced themselves as a friendly race who wanted to help get rid of some of the Darscians' troubles. They gave many things, such as neutronic medicine, rudimentary antigravity, and chemical processes for renewing the polluted environment. They freely offered advice on all manner of political, economic, and sociological problems. They said they did not travel often in this part of the galaxy, but when they did, they liked to help any young intelligent races that they found. But they withheld the greatest gift of all, and the one the Darscians coveted most: the secret of interstellar space travel.

They asked the Mentors why this secret was withheld from them. They were still confined to this one planet, and were subject to its whims. If a stray asteroid were to collide with their world, it would be the end of the Darscian race. It was only by traveling to other stars, and colonizing other planets, that survival could be guaranteed.

The Mentors answered that their race was too aggressive and too violent to roam freely about the galaxy. The Darscians would interfere with other worlds and with more primitive races who could not defend against their technological prowess. If they truly wanted to travel to other stars, they must promise never to use space as a battleground, never to fight another war. If this promise were made, the Mentors would give them what they wanted.

The Darscians happily accepted the Mentors' offer and got the warp drive in exchange for giving up violence forever. The Mentors enforced the terms of the bargain by actually changing the Darscians' genetic makeup so they could not possibly fight a war. Within a month a new and better Darscian race was created. Aggressive instincts that had been passed along the evolutionary ladder were suddenly gone.

No modern Darscian could even think of committing a violent act, even in self-defense. They are unable to feel anger, hatred, greed, jealousy — all the savage emotions that created so much trouble for them so long ago.

The Mentors were never seen again. In one month they gave the Darscians more than they could have accomplished themselves in two hundred thousand years of evolution. War had been eliminated in exchange for a permanent peace. The Darscians were free to fly among the stars.

Some think that one day the Mentors will return. Others believe that the Mentors grant each race only one visit, and rejoice in the knowledge that the Darscians made good use of theirs.

You have learned everything you can here, including a proficiency in High Darscian. You thank Yarlec for her time and patience as well as for the interesting history lesson.

As you make your way through the city, you wonder what became of the Mentors, a race obviously much more advanced than any you have yet seen. You mull this over while you make your way back to your ship.

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

[226]

The planet your computer homes in on as you emerge from hyperspace appears to be tranquil albeit a bit opaque. You set up the standard scanning orbit and lean back in your chair while the computer gathers all of the pertinent data about the world beneath you. Eventually, you learn the following:

The planet, Gnarsh, has an atmosphere slightly heavier than that of Earth.

The atmosphere contains a mixture of gases close enough to Earth's that you will not need any type of breathing apparatus.

Only one continent exists; it contains all of the planet's sizable population. The remainder of the world is one large ocean.

You get a reading of large holes in the ozone layer as well as high levels of dust in Gnarsh's upper stratosphere. Taken together with the constant appearance of rockets and explosions, these seem to indicate that war is raging across much of Gnarsh's continent. You suppose it *could* be just a planet-wide cultural festival, but it sure looks like war. Unfortunately, the war zone appears to include the immediate vicinities of the various spaceports.

After taking a few days to assess the situation, you decide on your next plan of action. You instruct your computer to study the political/economic situation below and give you a summary when it has analyzed the feasibility of making contact with the Gnarshians.

While some of the computer banks are following your instructions, you decide to make use of the extra time you now have to learn the language of the world below you. So you program the ship's linguistic section to encode and decipher Gnarshian. You are surprised by the pleasant tonal quality of the language and wonder how such melodious sounding words could possibly lead to war.

Each Gnarshian faction seems to have their own variation of the language which is very different from their neighbor's. You wonder how they ever communicate with each other.

Then, after a few more days of study, you realize there is a basic key, a root language that runs through all of the variations. Once you learn this base form, you find it easy to pick up each of the "different" languages. You spend a lot of time on intonation. Apparently it's not what you say that counts, but how you say it.

Your computer now has a rundown on the Gnarshian situation.

The entire world is at war. Not only that, but they have been at war for centuries. Through intercepted communiques, you learn of a pattern of peace conferences almost achieving an end to hostilities only to be disrupted with everyone storming home due to insults and misunderstandings. This process happens time and again, resulting in continuous warfare.

The computer also tells you it is probably safe to land. The Gnarshian people do not seem to be hostile to visiting aliens and should allow you to set down at the spaceport with little or no aggression toward you.

You decide to go ahead and land. Ground control fails to answer your hail, so you begin a manual landing.

As you descend, you visually spot an oncoming jetcraft that did not appear on your radar. It seems to be on a course which will intersect your ship within minutes — no, make that seconds.

You step up the gain on your radar and try calling the ground again for landing instructions. The only response is static. Your screens begin to build up the image of an approaching ship, which gets steadily clearer as the sensor range narrows. Whatever it is, it's armed to the teeth and it's heading right for you.

Before you can do anything else, the approaching ship fires some sort of projectile weapon, which fortunately misses. Like it or not, you are now in combat.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[227]

You cannot believe they would allow you to freeze to death. Perhaps the ordeal is to see how much discomfort you can handle without giving up or destroying valuable artifacts.

At any rate, you are determined to sit here until they return for you.

It sure is getting cold in here.

The last thing you remember is singing an old Earth song your mom taught you, "Frosty the Snowman."

You wake up in your ship and find yourself orbiting Dargen. It has been seven days since you first arrived at the planet.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[228]

You return to FLN-1, the small asteroid in the Frog Leg Nebula. The asteroid is still emitting a repeated radio signal in an unknown alien language. You land your ship in the same radioactive crater you visited last time.

You get out of your ship to reexamine the crater. To your surprise, the large metal hatch that used to be there has been blasted open, revealing a long dark tunnel going straight down towards the center of the asteroid. Your instruments indicate that the tunnel is several miles long, so it will take some time to explore it.

You now have the following additional option:

⟨UGOEFM⟩ (5 phases) Explore the tunnel leading towards the center of the asteroid.

❖ STOP ❖

[229]

"Give it up, Silverbeard," you command. "I've got enough firepower to handle a dozen ships like yours."

"Har, har, har," is the only verbal response you receive. However, the wily old pirate takes the opportunity to swing his ship to starboard and fire a fusillade at your flank.

You have not come this far only to be taken in by a transparently obvious ploy.

"Har, har, ha. . .," you hear over the ship's speakers as Silverbeard realizes he is firing into empty space. You have taken your ship into a steep dive and come up at the unprotected underbelly of the enemy vessel where you fire a few of your own weapons.

"Blast you," he sputters over the comscreen. You can see the damage you have inflicted upon his ship.

"How does it feel to have the tables turned?" you ask, sweetly. "Maybe I will board YOUR ship and see what illegal goods you have on board."

"Not today," he sneers as he manipulates some hidden controls. Instantaneously, his ship performs a few maneuvers that are new to you, and Silverbeard is able to make good his escape.

"Drats," you curse yourself for not keeping a better watch on the wily old pirate. Who knows what wonderful things you might have found aboard his vessel?

In any event, you count yourself lucky for not adding to his enormous wealth and pat yourself on the back for a job well done. When you check your chronometer, you discover that the battle plus the time needed to get back on course has taken two phases of your valuable time. You silently curse the pirate for the inconvenience he has caused you, and make your way back to your original heading.

❖ STOP ❖

[230]

"I've never successfully taught an alien to whurffle," says your instructor. "But I'll try if you like. Now, concentrate on that vase across the room. Relax your conscious mind, untie your shoe laces, and try to see what the vase is going to do next. Ah! That's it. Good. Now, open your eyes and pay attention. What did you see the vase doing?"

"Not a blessed thing," you say.

"How unfortunate," says your instructor, just as one of his apprentices bursts into the room, slips on a throw rug, and falls in a whirlwind of warty purple tentacles directly onto the table atop which the vase was sitting. The vase crashes to the floor and smashes into a million pieces. "You didn't see the vase breaking?"

"Not before it happened."

"Then you do not yet know how to whurffle. But this is only the first day, after all. Perhaps this time if you loosen your brain and tighten your shoe laces."

Unfortunately that doesn't help either, nor do any of the hundreds of other things you try over the course of the next seven days. You are about ready to give up and return to your ship when the breakthrough at last occurs.

"Watch this plate, now," says your instructor. "What do you see it doing?"

You duck instinctively, just seconds before he hurls the plate at the spot your head was occupying. The plate shatters on the wall behind you and the pieces fall to the floor.

"Hurrah!" yells your instructor. You jump to the left as he throws another plate at where you were just standing. Then you jump to the right, then duck, then to the right again, as a hail of crockery chases you across the room, each plate and mug falling in a spot which you have just vacated. "It only works when you're personally involved! I knew you could do it!"

Congratulations, you now know how to Whurffle!

Go now to the CGM.

✠ STOP ✠

[231]

For a moment the idea of leaving Ioreth pops into your head, but you quickly dismiss it. The demons are trying to make you do something stupid, but you won't relent. You must summon up enough willpower to carry out your original plan. You must try each of the ways of fighting the demons until you find one that works.

You did not take off, so you are still on Ioreth.

✠ STOP ✠

[232]

Focused ever so intently, you prepare for the attack run. Your computer has already laid a course which will take you right over the power generator. One well-placed shot should destroy the energy source for those blasted (so to speak) beams and leave the planet open for invasion. You nervously lick your lips and give the order to commence your strafing run.

Your fellow adventurers are doing a great job of diverting the planet's weapons to themselves as you dive ever closer to your goal. You successfully reach the generator with only minor hits to your hull, only to find yourself frustratingly thwarted in accomplishing your mission. Your ship's offensive weapons are just too weak to do any damage to the outer casing of the generator.

Cursing your luck, you are forced to pull up and head back out to the relative safety of space. The other members of your group are no longer able to keep the attention of Outpost's defensive weaponry and you are now drawing fire yourself. You give the retreat signal and the group follows you beyond the range of the energy beams where you explain what happened. You tell them you almost succeeded and feel you could actually blow the generator up the next time if you increased the offensive power of your ship's weapons.

✠ STOP ✠

[233]

Two hundred paces beyond where you met the serpent there is a pool of liquid your sensors identify as Primordial Soup, one of the rarest materials in the known universe. It is one cargo unit's worth. There is nothing to indicate where the source of the material is. You search the area, but there is no more.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[234]

The planet Ioreth is warm, humid, and covered with plant and animal life. Large oceans in the polar regions cover about a third of the planet's surface. The rest is jungle, rainforest, and swampland. It is all very beautiful, except for the atmosphere, which is a thick, poisonous methane soup. Just for good measure, the oceans are filled not with water, but with hydrochloric acid.

Ioreth is a very lethal place. Not one form of life from Earth could survive in the natural environment here. Yet the planet supports a surprisingly rich ecosystem of its own. Its methane-breathing acid-drinking flora and fauna are as diverse as the air-breathing water-drinking species of Earth.

The only missing element is any sign of intelligent native life. For the most part, the vast, dense wilderness is uncultivated. There are no farms, no villages, and no roads. The creatures that inhabit this land are still too primitive to challenge nature's ways.

However, along the coast of the southern ocean, where the equatorial land mass meets the polar sea, there are signs of an alien colony. The coastline is dotted with large, translucent domes. Each dome is a hemisphere about 2 km in diameter. Inside the domes are buildings, farms, machinery, and moving vehicles. The domes are connected by a network of enclosed roadways. Finally, further inland, there is a large, uncovered area that looks like a spaceport.

You radio the spaceport and ask for permission to land. There is no response. Either the colonists are not listening, or for some reason they do not want to answer. You radio again, but there is still no response.

You would like to investigate further, but you do not want to risk landing at the spaceport without permission. Instead, you decide to land at a clearing in the surrounding forest. You descend through the atmosphere and set your craft down on the surface.

Since the environment is highly poisonous, you put on a full life support suit before opening the hatch and stepping outside. The scenery is breathtaking. Huge black trees rise from the ground like pillars supporting a vaulted ceiling of grey branches and blue leaves high above. At your feet, tangled orange vines and white flowers cover the soft, springy soil. The strange colors are beautiful but forbidding. You have a powerful feeling of being out of place. You do not belong here.

Suddenly, a long red stalk emerges from one of the flowers. It bends towards you, jerks, and fires a thin red needle at your helmet. At first, you are not afraid, since the needle deflects harmlessly off the hard surface of the helmet. A few seconds later, however, a thick red mist begins to form inside your helmet. You hold your breath in terror as you rush back towards your ship where you can remove the helmet. Meanwhile, the mist expands, filling the entire inside of your helmet. You reach the ship's airlock but you cannot hold your breath any longer. As you fiddle with the airlock controls, you inhale a deep breath of the mysterious red gas.

You feel dizzy. You are angry. You feel a wave of bitter hatred towards this planet. You came here in peace, but the planet has attacked you. It has invaded your body and is trying to possess your soul. You are scared. The demons...

You pass out.

When you wake up, it is six hours later. You are still in the airlock. You consider your situation for a moment, and realize that you have fallen into a fiendish trap. The alien colonists did not answer your radio message because they knew that would get you to land in the forest and be poisoned. The aliens are trying to kill you! You must do something to cure yourself. But what?

You go to the ship's bridge and consult your computer. The computer says that you have been poisoned by the indigenous life forms. It is unfamiliar with these life forms and cannot predict the effects of the poison, or recommend a way of counteracting it. The computer also tells you that it has identified the alien colony as High Darscian. It has more data on the layout and functions of the colony, as well as information about the Darscians themselves, available at your request.

You tell the computer that you are not interested in all the data the computer has on the Darscians. All you care about is saving yourself from the poison. You carefully work out several possible courses of action:

〈NHJAZ6〉 (2 phases) Find the Darscian leader and wring him about the neck until he cures you.

〈7HLAR6〉 (2 phases) Fly your ship to the Darscian city and attack them until they surrender.

〈NXJCZU〉 (2 phases) Dump your garbage on top of the most fragile Darscian structure you can find.

〈7XLCRU〉 (2 phases) Set fires.

〈JHZA56〉 (2 phases) Kidnap some Darscian children and train them to be your personal slaves.

〈ZH5AT6〉 (2 phases) Go to the spaceport and reprogram the landing beacon to guide incoming ships into the ocean.

〈JXZC5U〉 (2 phases) Destroy the generator that drives the Darscians' environmental conditioning system.

〈ZX5CTU〉 (2 phases) Go out to the forest and expose yourself to more poisons until you find one that neutralizes the first.

You ask the computer which one of these choices would be best. The computer answers that none of the choices make sense. It says you are not behaving rationally, and suggests locking yourself in the ship until the effects of the poison wear off.

However, you feel fine. The computer is either malfunctioning, or somehow the fiendish Darscians have managed to get control of it. Seal yourself in the ship, indeed! That's exactly what they'd want you to do. But you are not going to give up. These options are the only ones with any chance to exorcise the demons from your flesh. You must try them until you find one that works.

Of course, it would be unthinkable to leave Ioreth until you do everything you can to save yourself.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[235]

It really is a simple matter of using the brains you were born with and the hardware you've acquired to defeat the slimy thing. You are able to wound it enough that it slinks off into the mire.

So much for fierce monsters.

You continue on down the trail whistling the same cheery tune, but a bit quieter this time.

You finally reach the end. You know it is the end because, except for a fantastically shaped building, there is nothing ahead but impenetrable swamp. And boy does it smell *bad*.

You quickly forget about the foul odor, though, as you concentrate on what must be Strangways' lab.

The structure is amazing, even compared with other Organuan architecture. The walls are both curved and straight, with peculiar bulges and projections at seemingly random intervals. Multi-colored smoke billows from various portals along the sides and roof, looking for all the world like a rainbow machine. Far from being merely bizarre, it's quite beautiful.

As you stand there with mouth agape, you suddenly feel the presence of another being. You whirl in surprise, reaching for your weapon in case it is another swamp monster.

Instead of a green slimy thing, you see an Organuan who is freakishly tall even among its own kind. The alien calmly nods at you, completely ignoring the weapon you have aimed in its direction, and proceeds down the path toward the marvelous building. Congratulations, you've just met and almost killed Strangways. Good going, ace.

You have no choice but to follow the path down to the doorway. Amazingly enough, the alien is waiting for you and motions for you to enter the lab. You hope there will be no hard feelings about the little misunderstanding outside.

The inside is breathtaking. A large apparatus takes up most of the interior and rises thirty feet into the air, nearly touching the ceiling. Colored tubes connect an arrestingly intricate collection of equipment. The heart of the apparatus has bright lights of every color imaginable flashing in almost a pulse-like beat. As you feel your own heart take on the tempo, you feel in tune with everything in the room, even Strangways.

This last thought brings you out of the hypnotic state into which you were slipping. Where did the alien go?

You wander around for a few minutes before you find the Organuan. At your approach, Strangways looks up from the control panel where it is working and waits for you to say something intelligent.

Not wanting to disappoint your host you introduce yourself and tell the alien you have never seen anything quite as wonderful as this lab. You ask the alien if it would mind explaining, and perhaps demonstrating, the machine's function.

From the telepathic link you can feel Strangways' pleasure at your interest in its work.

"Certainly, human," the alien replies. "It is not often I get visitors. The denizens of the swamp are helpful in insuring my privacy but I sometimes think they are *too* good at their job. I get lonely from time to time.

"My work here is primarily concerned with the origin of life. I have been successful in producing the mixture from which early life arose. I call it 'Quick Life'."

Strangways shows you a large vat into which the end product of the machine is dripping.

You are quick to recognize the mixture as Primordial Soup, a valuable commodity to possess. You tell the alien you are interested in making a trade and offer some trinkets and beads you have in your pocket.

The Organuan is not the kindly but naive scientist you took it for, as he makes it very clear to you that nothing less than the going price for the concoction will be acceptable. Strangways explains to you that several weeks are needed to produce one unit of Primordial Soup and you are lucky enough to have arrived right at the end of a production cycle.

If you wish to trade, the rate is as follows:

1 unit of Primordial Soup for 1 Crystals, 1 Fuel, 1 Computers, and 2 Tools.

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

✕ STOP ✕

[236]

You have returned to Medsun. As you overfly the land en route to the spaceport, you are glad to see that the human colonists and Medsunian natives continue to coexist in peace. On the other hand, the spaceport is as run-down as ever and the planet in general looks like it's badly in need of an industrial revolution.

Just as in your last visit, it is the yellow three-necked Medsunians who greet you at the spaceport. Since they already know you, they spend only a few moments checking over your ship. They ask whether you are coming to stay this time, and mention the possibility of a permanent position being open in the Academy of Knowledge. You answer noncommittally, and they allow you to go about your business.

✕ STOP ✕

[237]

The animated plant with stinging insects is more than you can handle. The grip of the plant tightens around you like a vise and you feel your arm crack in several places. The pain is excruciating. Desperately, you focus all your efforts on freeing yourself from the plant's grip. Finally, you succeed. You limp back to your ship as quickly as possible, and spend two weeks healing before you are able to return to the domed city.

Because of the time needed to heal, this option has taken fourteen phases instead of seven.

✕ STOP ✕

[238]

You feel you are doing well in your quest of acquiring proof that three alien abilities exist. After all, you have two of them already.

Well, now that you think about it, maybe you should get cracking on finding the third ability. It has been awhile since you made any real discoveries, and that is why you are out here. Dr. Myers must be getting concerned about you.

✂ STOP ✂

[239]

In the nearby city you spend several days walking through absolutely barren and deserted buildings. Finally, when you are close to giving up your quest for information, you make an important discovery. You are in one of the larger towers, near the center of the city, examining what must once have been the audience chamber of the local King or Mayor or whatever. Suddenly, you realize that the walls of the chamber are inset with tiles in a mosaic pattern, making pictures which march all the way around the walls of the room. Taking great care not to disturb the tiles underneath, you begin to clean the dust and grime off one section of the wall.

Within minutes you have revealed a succession of pictures, each representing a scene of some sort, in which the principal actors are cat-men, creatures not unlike a fully evolved form of the animals you have been catching glimpses of around your camp. In the pictures the cat-people are engaged in a number of activities, such as fighting, working in labs, walking through city streets, and so on. To make a long story short, what you have discovered is a pictographic history of the city, from the days when it was first built and occupied by the cat-people. You return to your ship for more supplies, and come back the next day, prepared to clean the walls of the entire chamber.

The history which you are able to read off the walls, once the grime has been removed, is, for the most part, quite normal. The first pictures show simply the cat-like animals, prowling through the rain forest. The next show slightly more advanced forms of the cats, walking erect in a small village. As you follow the tiles around the room, the village grows into a city, and the cat-people evolve into a civilized race possessing advanced science and technology. The pictures show them joining in trade with other cities, spreading across the planet, and even exploring the nearby worlds of their solar system. The final two panels, though, are the hardest to interpret. The first shows a building in the city, (you recognize its exterior), and inside, a scientific laboratory of some sort. Apparently one of the catwomen has just made an important discovery, something apparently related to spaceships, since there is a picture of one in the background.

The final panel shows another ship, not of the catpeople's design, and in the foreground a bipedal lizard-like creature holding a weapon of some sort. What the picture is intended to represent is not clear, but it is the last panel; there are several blank spaces beyond it, with no indication of what happened next.

Impressed as you are by the whole thing, it is growing quite dark outside as you prepare to depart. You stride back out into the street, but are unable to walk very far; you step accidentally into a rivulet of some stream or other which is flowing out of a nearby building, and immediately slip and fall. When you stand up again, swearing, and attempt to continue on, you fall again almost at once. After several attempts with no better result, you come to realize that the boot on your left foot is covered with the mud from the rivulet you stepped in, and, whatever the stuff may be, it is not water-based. You are forced to wipe it completely from the sole of your boot before you can finish the journey back to your ship, arriving just at the end of the long Corbisian twilight.

You now have two more possibilities for further investigation:

(KHVAK6) (3 phases) Return to where you slipped and follow that rivulet back to its source, then attempt to figure out just what the stuff is.

(4HXAC6) (3 phases) Try to locate the building pictured in the next to last panel of the picture history, in which the scientist was shown making her important discovery.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[240]

The woman who submitted you to your ordeal is waiting for you. She does not look pleased.

"Brother," she begins, "do you not know the meaning of 'four weeks?'" This is the time span we required of you before you were to return. You seem not to be able to perform so simple a task. Perhaps this is a sign that we have erred in our evaluation of you. Go now and do not return until it is four weeks from *now*. Show us you have acquired the art of patience."

With that, she turns and leaves you standing there with your mouth foolishly agape. The young Brother with the blue eyes refuses to look at you.

Boy, are you embarrassed!

You return to the ship and make plans to return four weeks from this moment.

You may select this option again.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[241]

You walk into one of the domes and carefully formulate your plan. You will sneak around, so none of the Darascians can see you, and grab a child when no one is looking. You'll take the child back to your ship and raise him as your slave. Then you'll come back for another one.

You hide in an alcove and wait for a child to walk past. You wait and wait, but nobody comes, not even any adult Darascians. You are getting tired of waiting, so you decide to be less subtle. You leap out into the street, intending to grab the first Darascian child you see. But when you jump out, all the Darascians back away.

Are they afraid of you, or do they just want you to follow them? That's it, they want to lure you into their trap. You'll follow them into the middle of the city, and then they'll take you. They'll capture you and keep you there until you die. No! You won't fall into their trap. You'll leave the city before they can get you, and go back to your ship.

You find the portal where you entered the dome, and leave the same way you came in. They'll never get you. Never!

⌘ STOP ⌘

[242]

Through the use of robotics, you manage to establish a mining site. The iron is cool enough on the dark side of the planet to prevent damage to your equipment; your operation is soon under way.

Since the planet is composed of pure iron, you are able to extract enough ore in four days to easily produce one unit of iron. This really is a piece of cake (or, you may say, a piece of iron).

At the end of the four days, you must begin packing all of your equipment. You presume that nothing of yours would ever survive on the surface in the fiery blast of the full day's heat.

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

❖ STOP ❖

[243]

Para-Para is divided into sections, each of which is a complex of connected bubbles. Each section cluster is connected to the others by a network of transportation tubes, through which individual shuttles carry passengers to and fro. The whole thing looks like a bunch of grapes.

Only Alpha One is freely accessible to the general public. All of the other areas are restricted to varying degrees and require a special security pass to enter legitimately. However, the Research Department of the Para-Para colony turns out to be very easy to penetrate. Since most of the colonists seem to be employed there, there is usually heavy traffic. Theoretically, a magnetic card is required to open any door into the section, but the time-honored trick of following someone else inside without allowing the door to close is extremely effective. By being somewhat discreet, wearing lab clothing that matches everyone else's (available for purchase in the public zone), and wearing your ID tag so that it hangs with only the back side showing, you practically have free run of the place.

There is a lot going on that you can't make any sense of, for the work is highly technical. You overhear arguments about the best way to fabricate Warp Core, whether or not large quantities of Phase Steel could be used in certain ship designs, whether or not the derivations of Vortex Mechanics disprove the existence of Entropy Loops, and so on. It is clear that much of the research is aimed at improving the hyperdrive: there are teams working on ways to extend the efficiency of the Two Axis drive to its theoretical limit, while others are attempting to create a Three Axis drive. The Three Axis drive seems a major concern, and the subject of many failed experiments. The craters on the far side of Para-Para apparently represent the results of some of these experiments.

An organization called the Institute for Space Exploration is the source of funds for the Para-Para research program. The spiral-arm insignia you see here and there is the symbol of the ISE. Successful research programs completed on Para-Para in the past include the invention of the Jump Engine (the near-instantaneous drive used in unmanned cargo ships which human passengers unfortunately cannot survive) and a method for artificially generating a substance called Warp Core (though this method is not used due to the incredible amounts of power it requires).

Having learned what you can from your "tour" of the Research Department, you return to the public area.

❖ STOP ❖

[244]

Aside from the weird colors, you don't see anything really dangerous on Tretiak. The little green men seem friendly enough and there aren't any dangerous life form readings, so you decide to risk the atmosphere.

You unseal your helmet and...

Like, WOW! What a great feeling! You absolutely feel you must escape the great Mother and be born into the tremendous other place. Greatly.

Outstanding. Entertainment, too, along with all the really funky purple plants. The sky, which is bleeding from every evangelical pore, is nonetheless musical enough to light the floor show going on in all four dimensions around your bod. And the lake, the BIG PINK LAKE WITH MARSHMALLOWS IN IT, beckons you like a lover, which come to think of it is not such a bad idea you having been out here for so long among the stars like Marlon Brando the cattle it's time for the rodeo, if you know what I mean.

You could crash, too, and sleep for like a week maybe you'd have good dreams this time instead of all those sicko psycho bad ones. But maybe not, since the floor show has started and the little green men are jumping and dancing all around you and talking and yelping and you could maybe even understand them if you just weren't forty feet high and growing quickly with every minute except for your left elbow which is in your pocket and shrinking instead. And maybe not since now they're all rolling coconuts on you from a great height or maybe they're throwing them and why are there coconuts growing from the purple trees anyway? And why do the green men want you to have them and what good are they anyway?

You'll get even with your computer too someday if you ever find your ship again, the swooshing bleep-bleep computer that went right ahead and told you sure go out on the planet without any equipment cause it's perfectly safe and Earth-like and you can breathe the air just fine it'll be good for you. That swooshing bleep-bleep machine must have been on a trip even better than yours cause just then it began to melt around the edges with the little birds flying up and nipping at the control panel so that all the lights began to turn and the traffic to move down the strip, Marlene so I can watch, it's been a long time don't you know out here between the stars like Cary Grant you one request if you know what I mean.

So, you happy camper, you; what'll it be?

⟨PEBMYN⟩ (3 phases) Rap with the little green men.

⟨9EDMQN⟩ (3 phases) Swim in the BIG PINK LAKE.

⟨PUBOYF⟩ (4 phases) Like, crash.

⟨9UDOQF⟩ (5 phases) Gather up all the coconuts.

⟨LERM4N⟩ (7 phases) The colors in your eyes are party-like and you want to dress for the occasion.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[245]

You are having such great fun zooming all around the galaxy. Well, at least around the area of space up to the Density Barrier. You know that the next step in accomplishing your goal, following the path of the Founders, can only be accomplished by traveling past the Density Barrier. Unfortunately, you have no clue where to go from there.

Wait a minute! The Founders' instructions pointed you to the planet Outpost, as you recall.

"Maybe I should go there soon," you think to yourself.

❖ STOP ❖

[246]

You enjoyed your visit with those fun-loving right-spinning Tralisians so much, you've decided to stop by and visit them again. Despite their awful coloring, a bilious green body with a bright red stripe running from "head" to "foot," you think you could grow to at least not get nauseous at the sight of these creatures.

You have the same options as last time.

❖ STOP ❖

[247]

The Celiac Nerve Plexus turns out to be an exceedingly busy portion of Feldo's anatomy, chock full of organic porter-robots hustling this way and that with incoming and outgoing goods. After a certain amount of wandering around, and a couple of close encounters with fully-loaded cargo corpuscles, you find an information desk with a robot sitting behind it. When you ask if there is anything for trade here, the robot is only too happy to be of assistance and you learn that Feldo has a surplus of Medicines which he is willing to trade for the following items:

- 3 Medicine for 1 Fiber,
- 2 Medicine for 1 Fluids,
- 1 Medicine for 1 Food.

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

❖ STOP ❖

[248]

"Boss," says your ship's computer, "there's something you should know."

"Go ahead," you reply, "I'm immune to bad news today."

"There's something wrong with this space."

"Nonsense. It's very good space. Black, big, mostly empty, just the way I like it. If this map is any good, there's also a planet in it somewhere."

"The planet is just ahead, orbiting the red giant in center screen. But my instruments are giving out strange readings. The value of pi has been off since we came out of hyperspace."

You stare at the viewscreen, then at the panel that covers the computer core. "Would you run that by me again?"

"Pi," recites the computer, "is a geometric constant that is a property of whatever space one is in. Normally it's about 3.14159, but if space is more strongly curved it will vary. Usually this only happens in hyperspace, which is why I have a sensing device in one of our drive tubes that measures it. When we last came out of hyperspace the reading was 3.14161, and it's risen another hundred thousandth since then."

"Is this serious?"

"Not that I can tell."

"What does it mean?"

"It means there's something wrong with this space. It has an unusual geometry, perhaps due to the configuration of the space walls around this sector. Beyond that, I have no data."

"Well," you say, "let me know if it becomes anything to worry about. Meanwhile, I'm looking forward to a nice relaxing rest on a quiet uninhabited temperate oxygen-rich planet."

"Don't get your hopes up, Boss. Red giant stars aren't very good candidates for having friendly planets. And the one up ahead isn't in a good orbit."

"Don't try to confuse me with facts. Just tell me when we get there. And do a full diagnostic run on the environmental suit, just in case."

You win three games of solitaire in a row while waiting for planetfall. The computer signals that you're approaching the orbit of the planet Hootenaller.

"What a nice name for a planet," you remark. "How does it look?"

The scan statistics scroll up the screen: Atmosphere: thirty percent oxygen, a little carbon dioxide, the rest nitrogen and a few harmless trace gases. Temperature: twenty-four degrees Celsius on average, a warm spring day, with less than five degrees variation from equator to pole and from dayside to nightside. Surface water: fresh, distributed evenly over the planet in small bodies of one to seven hundred square miles. Land: gentle surface covered mostly with photosynthesizing vegetation. Wind velocity: five kilometers per hour. Gravity: two thirds Earth normal. No evidence of intelligent life. "Ha!" you sneer at the computer. "I told you so."

You waste no time in landing trying to find a good spot: it all looks good. It looks even better from the surface. You pat the empty helmet of your environmental suit as you go past it out the airlock. "Better luck next time, Pal."

Walking on the surface only adds to your good impressions of this world. You have found a perfect planet, almost a paradise. The gravity is low enough to put spring in your step, but you still have enough weight to keep breakfast down. The land you explore is covered with pleasant greenery, including soft wide lawns, hardwood forests, and lily-choked pools of the purest spring water. The high oxygen content of the atmosphere, created by the photosynthetic activity of all that greenery, makes breathing easy. Your body feels nice and relaxed, and you don't have to smell anything that reminds you of the inside of a spaceship.

Leisurely exploration over the next few days brings a few other pleasant discoveries. The biosphere here is generous with food. When you are hungry you have only to pick something and eat it, and the food is so plentiful that you could gather whole cargo-loads of it without even causing ecological harm. The toxin analyzer of your med unit is unable to identify a single harmful substance in any plant on the planet.

Hootenaller bears no trace of intelligent life (yourself excepted, of course) and nothing that even remotely reminds you of civilization, technology, or Vanessa Chang.

Leisurely contemplating the red-giant sun that shines gently through the pinkish sky, you consider the possibilities for further actions on Hootenaller:

⟨MHNAJ6⟩ (4 phases) Gather enough of Hootenaller's abundant Food to fill a cargo bay.

⟨6HPAB6⟩ (3 phases) Spend time in quiet relaxation to clear your mind and renew your energy.

⟨MXNCJU⟩ (5 phases) Explore more of the planet's surface to see if there are any other natural resources Hootenaller has to offer.

✱ STOP ✱

[249]

After touring the market place you discover two things. The first is that the Darscian people trade extensively between the home planet and their four colony planets. What surprises you is the ease and honesty with which the trading takes place. You are not used to the idea that a colony could be treated with fairness and no possessiveness by the home world. Such has not been your experience.

Also, the Darscians' idea of trading and haggling is not quite what you expected. Their method for making a sale is to describe the item for sale and see if anyone is interested. If they get no response, they shrug stoically and wait.

You can hardly stand the excitement.

You are able to trade for Darscian Culture in the following amounts:

3 Culture for 1 Fluids,

3 Culture for 1 Radioactives.

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

✱ STOP ✱

[250]

The jetcraft comes screaming at you from the south. You manage to pull your ship from out of the direct line of fire but you cannot escape the flaming exhaust of the jetcraft's engines.

You are able to hit the ship with a few well-placed rounds of ammo, enough to send it limping off into the sunset. You grin in triumph but the smile soon turns to a grimace as you read the damage report.

You make it back to orbit without further trouble. By this time, you have had the opportunity to reassess the damage and it isn't as bad as it looked at first. Most of the work is purely cosmetic and can be done at your leisure. The rest of the work is really non-life-threatening; it will take only a few hours to make your ship as good as new.

You actually got off pretty easy. However, since your landing was unsuccessful, you remain in space in the trisector containing Gnarsh. You may attempt to land again if you wish.

✂ STOP ✂

[251]

A four foot tall squirrel is obviously no match for you, and you both soon realize this. The little alien, knowing that escape is the better part of valor, scampers down the narrow tunnel, easily outdistancing you.

✂ STOP ✂

[252]

The diversionary tactic appears to be working as you make your way down to the power generator with relatively little damage to your ship's hull. The energy beams are more interested in what is going on above you to direct any significant firepower in your direction. You breathe a sigh of relief.

You focus on the pulsating blue dot on your computer screen which signifies the location of your target. If you are able to put the power generator out of commission, you and your comrades will be free of the damaging energy beams and will be able to approach Outpost at long last. Wiping the sweat from your brow, you give the order to commence your attack run.

The generator building quickly expands in size as you go into your power dive. You focus your most powerful weapon on the target, close your eyes for a brief prayer, and press the activation button.

"Fire!" you yell aloud in your excitement and watch as the weapon arcs gracefully toward the generator. Your ship flies past the target and pulls out of range of the hoped-for blast. You hardly dare to breathe as you count down to what should be the moment of detonation.

"Four, three, two, o . . ." You do not get a chance to finish before the screen flashes a brilliant white. You did it! The power generator has been destroyed! You can hear the cheering over your ship's radio; everyone has seen your moment of triumph. Congratulations!

As you blissfully bask in your glory, you do not immediately see the ship rising from the surface of Outpost. You are too content with your success. Your ship's computer breaks into the radio messages of congratulations and jolts you from your complacency.

"Boss, we've got trouble."

Instantly you snap to attention and watch in horror at the apparition the computer puts on your screen. All you notice at first is the bizarre shape of the vessel being launched from Outpost. You are reminded of a long and deadly hypodermic needle; a shudder runs through you as you envision it piercing your vessel. Then you see it has a bulb-like structure at the base of its two hundred-foot shaft which is probably the control section of the ship. You've never seen anything that looked quite like it; the sheer alien appearance of the vessel makes you very afraid.

"Har, har, har," the familiar voice crackles over your ship's radio. "So ye thought it would be that easy, did ye? Well the worst is yet to come!"

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[253]

Half a day's walk from the field where you landed is the ruin of another much larger spaceport. Its platforms were well constructed, but they are empty now except for a few ferns that have pushed up through cracks in the thermal plastic surface. In the center of the field is the skeleton of a spaceship of pre-Boundary design. Most of the steel plating has been stripped off, but the name *Archangel* still shows on her bows.

She was enormous, built in the proportions of the great space liners of her day. Those ships were slower than yours, by a factor of twenty. What they lacked in speed they made up for in size. Some were luxurious, carrying all the comforts and amenities that pre-Plague technology and art could create. Most were pure work horses, fitted out to carry hundreds or even thousands of colonists with their possessions and supplies to the expanding colony worlds. Few, in the days before the Boundary, carried weapons of any sort, and they travelled only established routes mapped out painstakingly by teams of explorers. In those days explorers were established and funded by the planetary governments and the liner companies. Even so, dozens of passenger ships were lost to pirates, hostile aliens, and the hazards of space. Most of their stories will never be told, lost in the upheavals that followed the Plague.

Exploring the ruin does not reveal much about the story or purpose of the *Archangel*. The great hulk has been stripped clean. A few control panels are intact, but there is no log or manifest — only empty circuit housings where they used to be. The *Archangel* was a very well-designed ship for her day. The lines of the hull are clean, functional, and, you realize after a bit of examination, designed to hold armaments. The weapons are no longer there. Not a single system is functional or even complete enough for repair. The drive engines are useless sculptures of alloy steel from which even the warp core and crystals have been taken.

You notice one odd thing about the drive housings: there seems to have been room in them for extra equipment. The standard Wamirian hyperdrive in use today is the two-axis drive, which suspends the warp core between two anentropic fields, one for each axis. Back in the flying days of the *Archangel*, the two-axis drive was only a theory, and all ships had but a single axis. This hull, though, seems to have been modified to mount a second and third anentropic field generator. Clearly there was more to the ship than the stories tell. She must have been modified while in space during the famous voyage, but you wonder why it was necessary.

❖ STOP ❖

[254]

As you navigate your way through the dusty Frog Leg Nebula, you come across a small asteroid emitting an intense subspace radio signal. You identify the asteroid as "FLN-1" because of its position in the Frog Leg Nebula. Your scanners indicate that the asteroid is composed almost entirely of slowly decaying radioactive metals, covered by a thin layer of rock and sand. The surface is dotted by craters of various shapes and sizes.

You ask your computer to analyze the radio signal.

"The signal is a repeated pattern, with a cycle time of 2 minutes 15 seconds," the computer replies. "Its characteristics indicate an alien language of unknown origin."

"Can you make any sense out of the message?" you query.

"Negative."

"Try communicating with whoever it is. Send out as many different kinds of signals as you can. See if we can get a response."

You spend a while transmitting at the asteroid, but the signal coming from it doesn't change.

"There's no response," the computer concludes. "Chances are good that the message is an automatic transmission of some sort, and there's no intelligence controlling it."

Well, if no one's going to answer you, you might as well land on the asteroid and have a look around. One large crater on the surface is highly radioactive compared to the rest of the asteroid, so you decide to land there. Since the asteroid has no atmosphere and little gravity, you have no trouble guiding your ship down.

You put on your space suit and step out onto the bottom of the crater. Using your instruments, you search for the source of the radioactivity. This soon leads you to an interesting discovery. Set into the center of the crater is a large metal hatch. Your instruments indicate that underneath the hatch is a tunnel that leads down towards the center of the asteroid.

You try to open the hatch but it won't budge. You look for anything that might trigger the hatch to open, but find nothing. It looks like you'll have to try to blast it open.

Go now to the CGM.

✱ STOP ✱

[255]

You mentally prepare yourself for the awful odor of the swamp as you step out of the shuttle which brought you here, but it's no use.

You gasp for breath as the thick heavy pervasive FOUL smell hits your unprotected nostrils. Gasping at the impact, you almost lose your balance and thus narrowly miss tumbling into the mire. You shudder at the close call.

You are determined to make it through the swamp, monsters and all, in order to reach the mysterious Dr. Strangways' lab. So, with nose in hand, you head off into the swamp.

Soon, you begin to feel relaxed and even take the occasional breath of "fresh" air through your nose. Why, this isn't so bad after all!

With an ear-shattering roar, a fierce monster (very much like the one which tried to eat you on an earlier occasion) leaps from the undergrowth and bars your path. You are prepared for this, however, and step forward to meet this creature in battle.

Go now to the CGM.

✕ STOP ✕

[256]

You swing your ship into the outermost orbit of Outpost and confer with your computer about the best method for storming the planet. You know the first line of planetary defenses is easily handled by using the same attack strategy you used the last time. The missiles will be a bit more difficult but, again, you decide to stick with the tried and true method of your earlier success.

You spend the few minutes left before the attack making whatever mental preparation you find helpful. All too soon, it is time to go. Crossing your fingers for good luck, you order the computer to initiate the attack sequence.

The killer satellites are no match for you and you head deeper into the planetary defenses. The missiles are dispatched with just as much ease and you soon find yourself heading deep into the planetary defensive zone. You remember the outcome of your previous visit and find your palms are wet with nervous sweat.

"Boss, Outpost's ground weapons have zeroed in on us; prepare for action!"

Go now to the CGM.

✕ STOP ✕

[257]

Primordial Soup, according to Feldo, is good for making artificial organs, semi-sentient machinery (like Feldo's own organic porter-robots) and even fully functional clones. Feldo secretes the stuff without even thinking about it, but that doesn't mean he just gives it away.

"No sirree!" as he puts it. "It takes a passel of grub to keep me fed up, pardner, and this here Primordial Soup is a prime ordeal to come by!"

Apparently, Vanessa Chang originally won Feldo's favor by introducing him to John Wayne movies, a strategy which worked well at the time, but occasionally backfires into his language centers now.

For each unit of Primordial Soup, Feldo wants 2 units each of Fiber and Fluids and 1 unit each of Food and Culture.

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

✂ STOP ✂

[258]

You find the planet Arthlan right where your earlier projections predicted. Following its complex comet-like orbit, it has moved closer to the largest of its three suns on a long curve that will eventually pass around the suns and back out on another loop of a different shape.

From space you rescan the planet's distinctive geological features. Still prominent are the five huge craters that form an almost perfect geometrical shape. Widespread volcanic activity and dust storms make the surface seem an extremely hostile place, but there are safe zones along the equator where volcanoes are scarce and the strongest winds don't blow. As you prepare to land, you check your breathing gear and radiation shielding. The atmosphere is composed of breathable gases, but the ambient radiation borne by the windblown dust makes exposure a hazard.

On the way down to your chosen landing site you catch a glimpse of the peculiar metallic outcropping at the foot of one of the larger volcanoes. It's hard to tell, but it looks as if it has shifted position by a few hundred yards since you last scanned it.

Looking out on the barren dustblasted landscape, you recall your computer's conclusion that there was once life on this planet. If so, there is none left now, just dry expanses of flat stone sea bed, punctuated by volcanoes and baked by sunlight and radiation.

✂ STOP ✂

[259]

Monty explains that he must first set up the meeting with those he calls the "Elders," and asks you to await him back at the ship. You spend the rest of the day halfheartedly taking care of minor ship repairs. After accomplishing nothing of any consequence, you decide to call it a day.

The next morning the computer notifies you that you have company waiting outside the ship. You check the monitor and see Monty accompanied by four of the oldest looking beings you have ever seen. The little Ascendant is listening respectfully to the Elder you assume is the leader. You grab your equipment and head outside.

You're not sure whether it's arrogance or merely lack of ability but the Elder does not communicate with you directly. Rather, he uses Monty as an interpreter to explain the terms of trade on Ascension.

The conditions are simple enough. You must refrain from trying to excavate any of the minerals yourself, not make any changes to the planet's surface, and essentially just keep your hands in your pockets for the remainder of your stay on Ascension. Monty, of course, will be with you for the duration to take care of any minor changes you might incur.

Aside from those minor conditions, you are free to explore the planet. Great.

The actual trade agreement is pretty basic. The Ascendants do not want any high-tech machines on their world but will allow your ship and its equipment to remain on planet as long as you keep everything on board. They will trade their high purity crystals for the following:

- 1 Crystals for 1 Food,
- 2 Crystals for 1 Culture,
- 3 Crystals for 1 Fluids.

You tell Monty that the conditions are acceptable, then spend a nervous minute wondering whether or not you should shake his claw. A bead of sweat appears on your upper lip. You've always hated protocol and have blown more than one deal by managing to do exactly the wrong thing at exactly the wrong moment. You feel the tension building in the air. The aliens are obviously waiting for some sort of gesture by you signifying that the deal has been finalized. Unfortunately you have developed a nervous reaction to precisely this type of situation. Oh no, not now!

It's too late; you feel it building up inside you and there's nothing you can do to stop it.

"A-a-a-achoooooooo!" you explode in a violent sneeze. Monty and company are momentarily taken aback, then commence prattling amongst themselves, perhaps to decide if they have been mortally offended. You tense your muscles and prepare to flee at the first sign of aggression but no one makes a move towards you. Instead Monty turns toward you and makes a very bizarre noise that sounds something like "Thhhough."

The Ascendants all start nodding and prattling and seem very pleased with themselves. Monty bobs his head and bids farewell and the group heads toward the village. You realize that from now on you will seal pacts with these beings by sneezing at one another. Oh well, such is the stuff of which traditions are made.

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

❖ STOP ❖

[260]

"You are truly an Initiate Brother."

The phrase reverberates in your head. All you can think of is that you gave this response earlier and that your dialogue should be on a higher level.

You feel a shiver of dread as you look up at the Brother who is giving you the test. You can see he is not at all happy.

You become very unhappy yourself when the Brother picks up a nearby wooden staff and begins pummeling you about your neck and shoulders.

"How do think you can advance in rank if you insist on being so CARELESS!!" he shouts.

"Ow, ooh, ouch," you reply while trying to leave the room. "I'll do better next time," you manage as you make it to the safety of the outer corridor.

"You'd better!" is his response as he slams the door after you.

Miserably, you make your way back to your ship where your trusty sickbay is waiting to patch your wounds.

You may select this option again.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[261]

You approach the planet Wellmet with a great deal of fear and trepidation. Your earlier visits were not all pleasant and you remember the threats you received from the large men with broken noses. But that's all in the past. Surely they have forgiven or at least forgotten you and your slight error in judgement.

"Attention Smuggler," you hear over your ship's speakers.

"Who is that?" you ask your computer.

"A priority message originating on the planet, Boss" is the reply.

"Attention Smuggler, we have your ID codes in our files and are obligated to warn you of the unfavorable consequences should you continue on your present course. The moment you near the planet all available fire power will be trained on you and your ship resulting in your immediate demise."

"Wait a minute," you try to reason with the voice. "All of that is in the past. Surely we can work something out."

"We do not forgive nor do we forget, and don't call me Shirley. Over and out."

You think for a moment, but you can see no alternative other than to abort the landing attempt and head elsewhere.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[262]

Your first impression of the natives of the planet Rialla is that they are not very patient beings. In fact, you get this impression before you even reach the planet's surface. You are approaching the planet, following a standard coded landing beacon, on a trajectory that will bring you to a spaceport somewhere on the equator. Behind you, you detect a Riallan ship following the same trajectory, but it is either lighter or more powerful than yours. It gains on you rapidly, and only when you are seconds away from collision do you receive a warning on your navigation frequency, followed by a coded request for priority. You practically slam yourself into a bulkhead as you add lateral g's to your thrust and allow the Riallan hauler to pass. She whips by you so closely that you can see her hull without any viewscreen magnification: it's all curves, configured completely unlike yours, and apparently designed around a different propulsion system. It's hard to tell, but the Riallan vessel could very well be hiding a tri-axis drive booster in that toroidal bulge in her central stress frame. You decide that it may be worth putting up with a little rudeness to explore this planet further.

Rialla is a large world but it lacks a dense metallic core, so its surface gravity is low. About half the planet's surface is open water, and much of the rest is covered with vegetation of a blue-green color. There are twenty-one large cities, but oddly enough, there are no smaller settlements of any kind. The cities, one of which is adjacent to the spaceport, are connected by some sort of surface transit system, and there is also considerable atmospheric and transatmospheric traffic. It would seem that Riallans are fond of going places quickly.

You land at the spaceport with no further difficulty, and are greeted by a contingent of fuzzy beachballs — in a variety of pastel colors — who beep and chirp at you as if trying to communicate. You greet them in your own language, but they only beep and chirp faster. Before you can try again, the aliens are gone, rushing off on some other business. The next few hours are intensely frustrating, as you try to figure out the local rules and regulations while arranging proper berthing for your ship. The Riallans cannot communicate with you, and they don't seem willing to spend much time worrying about it. They don't even understand the most obvious hand gestures, possibly because they don't have anything resembling hands.

In fact, the Riallans have no visible means of support at all. They all float in the air, usually about four or five feet off the ground. When they want to move somewhere, which is usually the case, they simply do so, without bouncing, rolling, or showing any signs of exertion. Riallans have no visible sensory organs, and seem to have no distinction between front and back, or top and bottom. When manipulating some types of machinery, they occasionally use artificial limbs of various types, but you cannot tell how the limbs are attached or manipulated. Most of their technology is equipped with computer interfaces that respond to beeping and chirping commands. Unfortunately, the computers can't understand your language any better than their pastel-tinted masters.

Given the difficulties with communication, your options on Rialla are limited to two choices:

⟨HEAM6N⟩ (5 phases) Explore the area on your own and learn as much as you can without understanding the language.

⟨XECMUN⟩ (14 phases) Devote your efforts to learning the Riallans' language. This will take only seven phases if you are telepathic.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[263]

By the time you land on Supa, you already know quite a bit about the planet. Your ship's computer was able to dredge up a surprising amount of information, an event which is rare as you get farther out from the Nine Worlds.

According to the computer, Supa is one of the most distant human colonies from Earth. It is located on a lush green planet about the same size and density as Earth. The atmosphere is a bit higher in carbon dioxide than you are used to, but it's perfectly safe to breathe. The gravity is slightly below normal.

Most of the planet is dedicated to growing food, the major export of this colony. Without Supa, the other colonies might not have survived the isolation from the Nine Worlds.

Landing your ship at the Supa spaceport proves to be an easy task, due to the reduced gravity, so it is not long before you are stating your business to the local customs officials and then trying to find a hotel. Supans, you discover, speak a somewhat archaic dialect of Earth Standard, but you have no trouble communicating with them. Your first several days in the city are spent simply learning to find your way around; an abandoned colony does not mean the city is small, and Supa City spans over one hundred square miles. It is a sprawling metropolis, although rather sparsely populated. After getting lost several times, you manage to explore most of the important areas. You note the following possibilities for further action:

⟨HFAI67⟩ (3 phases) See what is available in the marketplace.

⟨XFCIU7⟩ (3 phases) Go through the Morgue at *The Daily Supa-man*, the colony's only newspaper, and see what you can learn about the colony's history.

⟨HVAK6V⟩ (3 phases) Visit the Dry Gulch Tavern and see what you can learn from the natives.

⟨XVCKUV⟩ (4 phases) Visit the Warpship Works and Bodyshop, near the spaceport, and see what improvements are available for your ship.

⟨DFQI87⟩ (3 phases) Check out a small shipyard that claims to have cargo bay expansion units for sale.

✂ STOP ✂

[264]

Wearing the Super Space Suit, you open the door and walk in. You have entered the captain's quarters and are affronted with a gruesome sight. Sprawled across the floor is an immense scaly green creature, recently deceased.

On the wall behind the alien an emergency generator is still functioning, making a distinct humming sound and transmitting the radio signal you detected from space. Evidently the signal is a distress call. You wonder how long the distress call has gone unnoticed, considering the condition of the ship. Many years, no doubt. Yet the alien survived a long time. From the condition of his body, it would appear he died within the past few months.

His huge green corpse seems to belong in this room, complementing the likenesses of fierce predators that adorn the walls and ceiling. You, on the other hand, do not belong here. You are an intruder in a world where there is no fear and no mercy, only predator and prey. You feel certain that if you had run into this alien when he was still alive, he would have killed you or you would have killed him. There would have been no other alternative.

Fortunately, the current situation allows you another option. You can leave the dead captain in his ship the way you found him.

✂ STOP ✂

[265]

Making your way through a thick lowland forest you feel the ground begin to take on a strange texture. It becomes boggy underfoot. Soon the forest gives way to marshland. The trees thin out as you slog through ankle-deep water. It is not unpleasant because there are no biting insects or other animals to worry about, not even aquatic creatures. Once you are convinced that there is no danger from mire or quicksand, you enjoy the unusual scenic beauty of wide stretches of water overarched by the canopies of trees.

You climb over a small rise at the rim of the marsh and continue into another, smaller flooded stretch of ground. Here the water is knee deep, and there is an odd quality about it. It doesn't splash when you wade in it. You look closely and see that there is another layer on top of the water. It is almost as clear and colorless as the water itself, having only the slightest of yellow tints. It feels very different, though — slippery, and cold to the touch.

A moment later you realize what it is: the purest Fuel you have ever seen. The best quality grades of modern Fuel are nearly odorless, but this is completely odorless, and crystal clear as well. You look around for the source of the fuel, and discover that it drips slowly from the blue-white blossoms of one particular flowering tree growing in this part of the marsh.

After returning to the site with your ship, you are able to skim an entire unit of Fuel from the surface of the pond. You look around for other deposits of Fuel. In a few places you find isolated samples of the Fuel-producing tree, but nowhere else are there enough to have accumulated a significant deposit.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[266]

"Welcome to the planet Tralis," the creature greets you, as you cautiously step away from the safety of your ship. Your hand remains close to your weapon.

"I am called BarrBurr," the alien informs you, rotating all the while. You notice that as it rotates, its voice fades a bit, then reappears a moment later. You wonder where its mouth is.

The alien sees your distrustful glances at the armed crowd and tries to reassure you of their intent. "We do not approve of any technology the gods have not blessed us with personally, so my people tend to be very suspicious of off-worlders. They invariably carry with them much technology. We ask that you keep use of your machines to a minimum while visiting here."

You agree to leave your scanners behind, but insist on carrying a weapon in case of hostile animal life. Fortunately, BarrBurr thinks this is a reasonable compromise.

"I will be pleased to be your guide while you are on Tralis," the creature continues. "If you will come with me, we will go to my village."

The Tralisian's voice becomes a bit louder and you are able to see that the sounds are emanating not from a mouth, but from a device hung from one of its appendages.

BarrBurr, aware of your scrutiny, offers an explanation. "We Tralisians have been favored by the gods with a holy relic which enables us to communicate with other races. We only have a few and they are irreplaceable. These are the only devices we allow in our villages.

"We must be going now if we are to reach home before nightfall."

During the trip, BarrBurr uses the time to fill you in on Tralisian history. You learn the following:

Thousands of years before the coming of the gods, BarrBurr's people were enslaved by an evil sector of the population who had a sickening disposition to spin to the right.

These wicked people used the god-forsaken methods of science to subjugate the left-spinners.

Then came the gods. They banned the evil scientific method and, through divine intervention, caused the correct thinking left-spinners to propagate, while the wicked right-spinners diminished in number.

The left-spinners abandoned the tainted cities with two exceptions: meeting visitors at the spaceport, and participating in the ever popular heretic hunts to search for the few right-spinners who were still hiding there and destroy them.

You ask why visitors come to the planet.

The alien is not offended by your bluntness and replies, "There are a lot of medicines available in the rain forests for those wishing to extract them."

You arrive at the village as BarrBurr finishes the last sentence. Even in the fading light you can see how low-tech the civilization has become. There are no artificial lights anywhere, only lanterns and candles plus what little light they get from the cooking and heating fires. Everything from buildings to clothing appears to be hand-crafted. The streets are unpaved, with the exception of gravel used to fill in low areas.

BarrBurr takes you home for the evening, explaining that you will be taken on a tour of the village in the morning. You get to meet the alien's family now, however — all twenty of them.

Boy are you lucky.

BarrBurr's mate, Salonne, has just returned home from a hard day of praying for sunshine at the rain forest. You are about to suggest using sunlamps when you remember their hatred of science. You wisely decide to keep your mouth shut.

The other eighteen beings are the children, all spinning and twirling in what BarrBurr and Salonne obviously consider to be an adorable manner. You are getting nauseous. Thankfully, it is the children's bedtime and the room clears of most of the dervishes. Your stomach is not quite up to the meal you are offered, so you head off to bed as well.

In the morning, you stay in bed long enough for the reduced noise level in the other room to tell you the kids are off to school, or whatever the Tralisian equivalent is. You enter the main living area and find only Salonne there, without a translator. Through a great deal of effort, you are made to understand that you are to wait here, though you're not sure why. Salonne leaves, presumably for another hard day of prayer. You see how vital these translators are to the Tralisians if they wish to communicate with alien visitors.

Soon enough, BarrBurr returns, apologizes for the delay and explains, "The children have to be spun to school. If you are ready, we may go on our tour now."

You say you are ready and willing, and off you go.

Your opinion of the village does not improve with the morning light. You have nothing against handmade artifacts, but these people seem to have taken the worst aspects of a low-tech civilization and allowed no room for improvement. You sigh to yourself and think, "To each his own."

The village is bigger than you thought and you are hard pressed to keep track of all the turns you take. As you round another corner you are witness to an interesting sight. Before you stands a Tralisian who is actually spinning in the opposite direction!

All three of you are shocked at the confrontation, but it is the right-spinner who makes the first move, which is to spin away as fast as possible. BarrBurr is not far behind, screaming at the top of its lungs, "A spy! A spy!"

Although you are a second slower to react, you have the advantage of being able to run faster than the Tralisians. So when the right-spinner turns a corner and runs into a secret passageway, the door to which is disguised as a stone wall, only you are a witness. The left-spinners are turning the corner now and demanding to know where the spy is. You point to the next right turn and, with fingers crossed, tell them the spy went, "that-a-way."

You and BarrBurr remain behind as the rest of the group rushes off in chase.

You now have the following options:

⟨OUFOIF⟩ (4 phases) Find out more about the left-spinners' translator.

⟨KEVMKN⟩ (7 phases) Elude BarrBurr and explore the secret passage.

⟨KUVOKF⟩ (3 phases) Visit the rain forest.

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

[267]

You feel utterly jubilant over your success in acquiring proof of an alien ability by actually learning how to do it! This sort of proof will be hard for the academic world to refute. You hope you will be able to find two more such abilities so you can return home and publish your research.

✧ STOP ✧

[268]

There is something about the Temple that strikes a chord in your subconscious. Without knowing why, you find yourself approaching the building with fear and trepidation. Each step makes you more uneasy.


Your rational mind kicks into high gear and takes a firm hold of your subconscious. You refuse to let some nameless dread keep you from entering a building!

You reach out to grasp the doorknob. Before your fingers can touch the metal, the door swings silently open. From the dark recesses of the temple you hear the faint sound of chanting. Swallowing nervously, you enter.

Flickering torches light your way down the corridor. You see no one. The air is damp and musty.

You think to yourself, "My, what a pleasant place this is. Aren't I having a lot of fun?"

The corridor seems endless. You have only the sound of your footsteps for company.

Continued 

Finally, when you turn the corner, you find yourself in a room of candles. Few are lit, rendering the room quite dim.

You don't notice the robed figure until he politely coughs to announce his presence. You cautiously approach.

After introducing yourself, you explain that you wish to learn about the Brotherhood.

Rising, he turns to you and asks one simple question, "How does one know the way to truth?"

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

[269]

You return to the building near the center of the city where you found the Super Slip. Although the basin is not yet full enough to be of any use to you, the drip from the ceiling is continuing. Perhaps if you come back later. . .

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[270]

You take extra care in programming the ship's computer to land because of the tricky configuration of Baphi's four moons. The gravitational pull makes the landing procedure less routine than you really like, but you manage to touch down with few problems. The alien ship that was here on your second visit is no longer in the area.

You have the same options as before.

✧ STOP ✧

[271]

The human colonists on Medsun are perfectly friendly to you and every other visiting space traveler. They are also intelligent and, unlike the natives, interesting to talk to. While they are understandably often preoccupied by the simple routines of survival — farming, building and maintaining shelters, manufacturing necessities — they spend all of their free time engaged in creative hobbies. Graphics, music, drama, and other fine arts are very popular, as are some of the sciences.

However, there are curious gaps. Those who have taken up architecture spend years designing intricate towers or cities, but neither they nor anyone else claim any desire to build them. There are no printing presses capable of producing copies of the essays, novels, and poetry the authors write; instead, original manuscripts are circulated until they become unreadable, or are piled in warehouses to be unceremoniously hauled away by traders like yourself as part of a cargo of "culture." The scientists are all engaged in purely descriptive research: they will carefully observe and document any phenomenon in nature, but are not willing to actively experiment in any way that directly affects the subject or phenomenon under observation. In astronomy this is not unusual — who can manipulate the stars? — but in some sciences it is

senseless. In medicine, for example, what good does it do to study and record the exact course of a disease if one is not willing to attempt to cure it?

Most disturbing of all is that the Colonists have no interest at all in space or in anything happening on worlds other than Medsun. They talk with you as if you were an old friend, but they do not ask you about your travels. If you tell them anyway, they listen politely but show no reaction. If you ask them why this is, they shrug and say, "We don't need to travel in space any more, so events in space need not concern us."

Some of the Colonists maintain small private libraries of historical records of events on Medsun, and in the absence of public libraries or bureaucratic records you turn to these for insight. Perhaps, you reason, the original Colonists were members of a religious sect with highly pacifistic beliefs, or perhaps they once suffered at the hands of pirates and now pretend disinterest in order to conceal a deep-seated distrust of outworlders.

Your research turns up no evidence to support any such theories. Some colonists were members of religious groups that migrated from the failed colonies on Cathedral; however, they followed the original colonists by several decades. Most of the original colonists were eager pioneers from the Nine Worlds during the earliest days of space travel. They seem to have adopted many of their attitudes directly from the Medsunian natives, with whom they mingled freely from the very first landings.

From accounts of these early encounters you learn more about the natives as they were before the humans arrived in force. They were, of course, the dominant life forms on Medsun and had been for uncounted thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands, of years. Their culture and technological level had remained unchanged during most of that time, possibly due to their extremely pacifistic beliefs. To a Medsunian, acts of aggression are unthinkable — not only aggression against other intelligent beings, but against forces of nature as well. For example, to build a dam would be a highly aggressive act, even if its purpose were to divert a flood. To attempt to leave one's own world would be utterly irrational. The natives looked upon the first arriving humans with a degree of sympathy, assuming that the colonists must have left their own worlds involuntarily.

The early human pioneers on Medsun mention in their journals their hope that they could break the natives out of their cultural stagnation and lead them in technological advancement. Instead, the opposite seems to have happened.

On the way back to your ship you ponder the implications of what you have learned. It is frightening that the adventurous spirit of a whole population of humans could be so thoroughly suppressed. On the other hand, the people are friendly, happy, and busy. Who are you to say they are wrong?

✠ STOP ✠

[272]

The Darscians are very hospitable and provide one of the bullet-shaped vehicles for your use in Fiarasan. When you enter the vehicle, you are amazed at the sudden change in gravity. As long as you are inside, the effects of Fiara's extreme gravity are cancelled and you can easily move around, even without your gravity compensation harness.

You are now ready to travel to the city on your own. As you leave the spaceport, you radio spaceport control for information about where you might learn more about this impressive antigravity technology. According to the spaceport, the technology was developed at the Antigravity Research Center in Fiarasan. However, since the antigravity technology could be used for aggressive military purposes, non-Darscians are prohibited from visiting the facility.

During your first few days in Fiarasan, you learn some more about the Darscian colony on Fiara.

Fiara is an attractive planet to colonize because of its abundant natural resources, breathable atmosphere, large oceans, and comfortable climate. However, because of the planet's extreme gravity, the Darscians were the only race to attempt to settle here. Darscian settlers first arrived on Fiara more than five thousand years ago. At first they had great difficulty, since the rudimentary antigravity technology they had brought from Darscold was inadequate to handle the extreme conditions of this world. Thus, for many years the colony was very small, and only the strongest Darscians could remain on Fiara for any length of time.

The Darscian settlers, committed to making Fiara a viable place to live, refused to give up. They launched a comprehensive antigravity research program on Fiara, and experimented with hundreds of possible ways to compensate for the planet's enormous mass. Eventually, they discovered important new antigravity techniques and a full-scale colony on Fiara became possible. Many new immigrants settled here, and Fiara's Antigravity Research Center became famous throughout the Darscian worlds.

In addition, the antigravity technology had a great effect on the other Darscian planets, including the Darscians' home world, Darscold. Darscold's landscape of floating cities, so well known to Darscians today, did not begin to take shape until advanced antigravity technology was developed on Fiara. For this reason, Darscians consider Fiara the best established and most important of their colonies.

However, the Darscians' antigravity technology does not solve all the problems of living on Fiara. Since the technology is expensive and works only in confined spaces (such as vehicles and buildings), it is difficult to do anything outdoors. As you travel around Fiarasan, you notice many Darscian workers suffering under the tremendous burden of Fiara's tremendous gravity.

Having finished your initial tour of Fiarasan, you identify four possible options for further activity:

- (90DFQI) (3 phases) Go to the commodities market and see what the Fiaran colonists are willing to trade.
- (98DHQA) (4 phases) Attempt to visit the Antigravity Research Center, even though it is off-limits to non-Darscians.
- (LORF4I) (3 phases) Look into some old Darscian records for information on Vanessa Chang's visit to Fiara 300 years ago.
- (50TFSI) (4 phases) Explore an alien shuttlecraft that Vanessa Chang abandoned in the Fiaran desert.

✱ STOP ✱

[273]

You send the dog away yelping and licking its wounds. Only after its claws and fangs are far away from your throat do you begin to feel a bit of sympathy for the creature. You reject the idea of capturing it and trying to domesticate it; you'd do better with a pure-bred wolf from the preserves on Monument than with that wilderness-bred beast. You set some of your spare provisions on the ground for it to find later. At least, you figure, if it isn't hungry and desperate it's less likely to try to attack you again. Then, with a slightly more wary eye, you return to your explorations.

You find one other site of interest before returning to your ship. It was a settlement of an order of devotees who engraved accounts of important events on large steel plaques inside their temple. Most of the plaques have been removed, but the oldest and newest remain. The oldest tell of the founding of the colony eighty years before the establishment of the Boundary. The order was devoted to prayer and worship to find the spirit of God "on a new world, far from the sins of the old." The last plaque describes the mission of the starship *Archangel* seventy-five years later. Reverend Eric, the leader of their order, and dozens of other religious leaders from Earth, Leucothea, and Cathedral voyaged on the *Archangel* in search of incontrovertible answers to the mysteries of the nature of God.

The return of the *Archangel* was an event that is well-remembered on the Nine Worlds. The ship landed on Cathedral bearing the Holy Text Files written by its crew of clerics. The crew members never again spoke directly of what they had seen or experienced on their voyage,

but their Holy Text Files became the basis of a new faith, the Final Church of Man. The Church taught that mankind was wrong to look for answers in the stars, and instead should return to the home worlds and seek a way to remove sin from the human soul. Only then would humans be able to seek their way in the stars. The last inscription describes the dismantling of the colony as the devotees prepared to return to the Nine Worlds, inside the soon-to-be-formed Boundary.

You know the rest of the story. Several years later the Plague decimated humanity. When the cause of the Plague was proven to be a unique disease organism originating in outer space, the new Church became the greatest religious power in history.

The occupants of the settlement seem to have had a penchant for writing on walls, for in addition to the plaques there is graffiti scrawled on almost every remaining wall. Most of it is indecipherable. As you leave the ruins, your last sight is a line of graffiti: "The Final Church of Man," in huge faded letters across the last standing wall of a decaying cathedral.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[274]

HOW TO PLAN TURN 5

You have many options available to you on this planet, and you have a hard time deciding which to take advantage of first. You decide to "think" on it awhile and head over to that den of villainy, the Slippery Silver Tavern, to quench your thirst.

Plotting Sheet							
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7
TURN							
1	T	O	V	G	Y	R	L
2	—	—	—	—	—	—	A: GOEFMI
3	—	—	A: W8GHEA	—	—	—	T
4	Y	G	V	Y	O	B	L
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	A: 8VHKAV
6							

Plot the action code "8VHKAV" to get you to the Tavern.

HOW TO PLOT TURN 5

Go to the computer, log on, and press A and then D (which corresponds to the action code 8VHKAV) to go to the Slippery Silver Tavern.

HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 5

The computer will evaluate your move and send you to your next piece of exciting text, so go and experience the Slippery Silver Tavern!

This concludes your character's first five 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 along with their action codes, what can be bought and sold at the market places, and how many phases each option takes.

Last but not least, always keep your character goals in mind — that is how you will win the game! After finding a shipyard on the first planet you visited, you have good reason to be optimistic about locating your desired ship improvements.

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

✂ STOP ✂

[275]

From up close you can see even better how the serpent's tail segments move together despite the five-meter gaps between them. The pieces aren't entirely fixed: tail can flow into empty space, and empty space can generate tail, as the monster moves and stretches. Your attempts to defend yourself don't impress the creature, but some of your attacks seem to be hurting it.

It circles around you, plunging its head in and out of the nothingness, confident that it has you in its power. Then the great head looms out of nowhere right in front of you. The jaws open wide to engulf you. There is nowhere to dodge. You hit it with everything you have. The creature closes its jaws on you, the fangs breaking your skin, and then dies with a convulsive shudder. The jaws go slack, and you extricate yourself just in time to avoid being drawn into nothingness when the body disappears.

Your wounds aren't serious, but you are quite shaken. You stumble back through the blue mist and back to your ship. The computer asks you what happened, and you don't answer.

✂ STOP ✂

[276]

Although it wasn't easy, you have now managed to acquire proof of two alien abilities. You feel very proud of yourself and now believe the fulfillment of your mission is within reach. There were times you had your doubts about ever getting this far, but now you are filled with confidence that you will soon be able to return to Harvard a success.

✂ STOP ✂

[277]

Two hundred paces beyond where you met the serpent there is a pile of equipment sitting near an old space wreck. After searching through the stuff, you find a usable Gradient Filter. It is one cargo unit's worth.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[278]

The Darscians on Gazan have torn a living from a planet so forbidding to sanity and peaceful existence principally by ignoring the stellar birth pains going on in the skies all around the planet. Gazan has no night time, and no true primary sun, but exists instead in the midst of a slowly coalescing cloud of gas and dust that one day — eons in the future — will collapse sufficiently to form a star. Small pockets of condensation in the enveloping nebula provide sufficient heat and light to support life, of a subtly adapted sort, on the surface of Gazan. The Darscian colony has existed here for perhaps two hundred years, more than enough time to forget just how unusual a planet it is that they share.

By spending some time studying the bizarre city, you discover you have the following options:

(VGKEVM) (3 phases) Trade at the market.

(VWKGVE) (5 phases) Visit the Drone-ship Factory, primarily responsible for building scientific probes for the various astronomical research facilities located on Gazan, and see what they can do for you.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[279]

The spacer districts of Wellmet support an amazing number of hardware brokers catering to pilots and crews. A person with enough Reals (the local currency) or cargo to trade could probably build a whole ship out of the spare parts available. Navigation instruments, computer hardware, life support modules, and even used drive cores are available in any quantities. The prices are much higher than in the Nine Worlds, but in the Nine Worlds, trade in space hardware is rigidly controlled and restricted to licensed manufacturers and operators. Here, the stuff is sold off the shelf in storefronts.

You have the great fortune of owning — or at least controlling — a ship that is already equipped with most standard hardware. What you are looking for is weapons for your own personal defense, and in this area you find Wellmet surprisingly lacking. Even though most everyone on the street seems to own a serviceable hand weapon, there are few available on the market. The shop owners and floor dealers tell you that the Families have recently been cracking down on the hand weapons trade in the city. Apparently, a few years ago, there was a run of street violence and a sudden proliferation of powerful hand weapons of the beam variety. This made the Families nervous, because even the best bodyguards offer no protection against lasers. Family bosses found themselves as much at risk in the streets as everyone else, which they didn't like at all. The bosses got together and agreed to clean the place up. Result: weapon manufacturers out of business, existing hand weapons hoarded like jewels, and weapons vendors reduced to selling piercers, exploders, laser reflectors, and force fields.

Actually, the choices available aren't too bad for a spacer just starting out. Piercers are fine weapons for back-alley brawling or last-ditch close-quarters defense. Exploders, while not great for pinpoint accuracy, are effective for crowd dispersion — that might be just what you need when you're dealing with unfamiliar alien animal life. Laser reflectors help to even the odds if you're facing an enemy armed with a beam weapon and all you've got is a piercer. Force fields represent the most advanced and effective device available here; needless to say, they will cost somewhat more than the other items.

Piercer — 1 Computers, 1 Medicine

Exploder — 1 Munitions

Laser reflector — 1 Fuel

Force field — 1 Culture, 1 Crystals, 1 Fiber, 1 Iron

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

[280]

Congratulations on your purchase of a remote-controlled, jump-engine equipped cargo drone. Below you will find supplements to the Rules and CGM Guide for using your drone.

Rules Supplement: Drones

Your drone is a small spaceship with cargo bays but no life support systems. It can carry as many units of cargo as it has cargo bays. Your drone can carry cargo only, not items or people.

Each turn you may give an order to your drone. You control your drone through your ship's computer and subspace radio. You can ask your drone to do one of two things:

1. Go to any planetary commodities market you have previously visited.
2. Go to any player, including yourself.

Your drone's jump engine allows it to do either of these things in a single turn. The drone cannot go anywhere else because its intelligence is limited, and it needs detailed instructions from your ship's computer, including the exact coordinates of the place it is visiting, in order to carry out its orders.

If you send your drone to a commodities market on a planet, the drone can make trades there. It can trade any cargo it has in its cargo bays for cargo the planet has to offer, at the planet's exchange rates. Note that drones can go to *commodities* markets only, not item markets or other kinds of markets.

If you send your drone to a player (including yourself), the player's ship and the drone can trade cargo. This is a "drone meeting," and it is similar to a meeting between players. The nice thing is that by using your drone, you can arrange a trade with another player without you and the other player having to travel to the same trisector. You load cargo onto your drone, send your drone to the other player, and bring the drone back. This takes three turns, but your drone does all the work.

Whoever meets the drone will be able to trade whatever cargo they want between their ship and the drone. If you send the drone to yourself, you can redistribute cargo between your ship and your drone however you like, as long as you don't exceed the cargo capacity of either. If you send the drone to someone else, they will be able to decide what trades to make. If they want to, they can steal all of your drone's cargo. So you need to decide whether you can trust another player before sending your drone.

Due to the limitations of your ship's computer and subspace radio, you can only control one drone at a time. So, if you find a drone with more cargo bays than your current one, you can acquire the new drone, but you'll have to give up your current one.

CGM Guide Supplement: Drones

Now that you have a drone, you will be able to do several new things with the CGM. The Plot Editor will allow you to enter an option for your drone each turn. When you get results, the CGM will give you not only the results of your own options, but also the result of your drone option. Your status display, when you ask for it, will include the status of your drone. And finally, you can have a new kind of meeting: a drone meeting.

Entering Your Drone Option

The Plot Editor menu now contains an additional choice at the bottom of the screen, **D** for "Drone." When you select this choice, the Plot Editor will give you a menu to decide whether you want to send the drone to a planetary commodities market or to a player. To send the drone to a player (including yourself), just select that player off the menu. To send the drone to a planetary commodities market, select **A** for "Automated Market." Escape and Help work in the usual way.

If you select "Automated Market" to send the drone to a planetary commodities market, the CGM will give you a menu to choose a market. The planet names for all the markets your drone can visit will be listed on the screen (these are the commodities markets you have previously visited). Select the market you want.

Once you've told the CGM what to do with your drone, the Plot Editor will show the drone option you chose in the center of the screen. Before you select an option for your drone, the Plot Editor will include a line for your drone option but nothing will be listed there yet.

If you plot all your regular options so you have no more phases left for the turn, the CGM will automatically highlight the "Drone" choice in the Plot Editor menu. It is reminding you to plot an option for your drone.

STOP! If you select "Finished" from the Plot Editor without plotting an option for your drone, the CGM will warn you that you still haven't plotted a drone option. It will give you the chance to go back to the Plot Editor and select a drone option. Or, if you like, you can go ahead and get your results without having your drone do anything this turn.

STOP! To plan a drone meeting, do *not* plot **M** for "Meet." That is only for meetings between *players*. Drone meetings are plotted by plotting **D** and then selecting the player the drone is to meet.

STOP! It is important to plan out your drone option before you come to the CGM to enter your plots for a turn. Like planning out your other options, this is a matter of courtesy to the other players. It keeps the time you spend at the CGM to a minimum, and makes the game play faster.

Getting Your Drone Result

Near the end of each turn, after you get all your other results, the CGM will deliver your drone result. The drone result will be reported in your Character Log. If the drone is visiting a planetary market, then you will get the interactive menu for the market (see CGM Guide section 8-C). If the drone is meeting your ship, then you will get a drone meeting (see "Drone Meetings," below). If the drone is meeting another player, then you won't get the drone result at all — the other player will.

Remember, once you send a drone to another player, the other player has complete control over what trades to make with the drone. The other player gets the drone meeting during the results portion of their turn. You have no control over it.

STOP! If you send your drone to another player who doesn't have a drone yet and hasn't seen the drone rules, you may need to help the other player with the drone meeting. You can show them what to do, or you can give them the text number of the Drone Rules and CGM Guide Supplement so they can read all about it.

STOP! It is possible for the CGM to list you as having finished your turn, then change its mind and give you a drone meeting. This happens if you finish your turn before another player has plotted, and the other player sends you their drone. Select your character from the Main Display to do the drone meeting.

Drone Status

Your Status Display (see CGM Guide section 9) will now include information about your drone. At the end of your list of cargo and items, the CGM will show the number of cargo bays your drone has, and what cargo your drone is carrying. You may wish to use the "End of list" choice on the Status menu to get to this information quickly.

Drone Meetings

A drone meeting is similar to a player meeting (see CGM Guide section 10). However, instead of trading with another player, you trade with a drone. You can only trade cargo, since drones can't carry items. Also, the player to whom you send the drone has sole control over the drone meeting.

If a drone meeting is the next thing for you to do in a turn, the Main Display will say "MEET DRONES" next to your character name. When you select your character off the menu, your Character Log will appear. The next CGM interaction in the log will be the drone meeting. When you select "Continue Turn," the CGM will give you the meeting.

The menu to transfer cargo between your ship and the drone is identical to the player-to-player transfer menu. Page through the scrolling display of all the cargo on your ship and the drone. Select units of cargo to transfer from your ship to the drone or vice-versa. Select "Direction" to switch the transfer direction.

When you're done with the meeting, select "Finished." The CGM will bring back your Character Log.

STOP! As in player meetings, the CGM will allow either your ship or your drone to exceed its cargo capacity while you're in a drone meeting. However, if you try to leave the meeting with too much cargo, the CGM will warn you. Either you can go back to the meeting and redistribute the cargo, or you will have to dump cargo from the overloaded vessel.

If more than one player sends you a drone on the same turn, you can have a multiple drone meeting. The CGM handles this like a multiple player meeting (see CGM Guide section 10-C). You can meet with one drone at a time. The CGM gives you an extra menu to choose which drone to meet. After you meet that drone, you can pick another drone to meet. Then, if you like, you can meet with the first drone again, or with a third drone, and so on, until you have made all the trades you want. Then select "Finished" from the "Choose Drone to Meet" menu. The CGM will bring back your Character Log.

If you want to arrange a drone meeting with more than one drone, but only one drone has arrived at the meeting when you get it, you should Escape from the meeting. You need to wait for other players who have not yet plotted to send you their drones. Once everyone has plotted, you can select your character off the Main Display and you should get a drone meeting with all the expected participants there.

Happy droning!

✱ STOP ✱

[281]

Though gripped by fear, you risk donning the helmet again. Taking a deep breath, you carefully fit the alien device on your head.

As before, your mind expands to fill all space with its thought, and this time you break through suddenly into a different realm, a place you recognize as dual-space, where time and other measures have no meaning, and you yourself are no more than an animate mathematical expression.

Yet even here you can sense the beat of the drummer, the quickening flow of all that moves around you. Incredibly, unbelievably, the solid numeric foundations of dual-space are shaking, and vagaries are emerging in its smooth geometric web.

Will humanity survive? You don't know; as you awaken, you don't know. Before you can really think about what you have learned, you manage to pull the helmet off before it draws you back into the other world of abstract thoughts and forms.

Weakly, you take food from your emergency rations and try to gather your strength. You debate with yourself whether or not you should risk one last session with the helmet.

Go now to the CGM.

✱ STOP ✱

[282]

You are having such great fun zooming all around the galaxy. Well, at least around the area of space up to the Density Barrier. You know that the next step in searching for the source of the new and potentially dangerous type of energy discovered by your colleague at Harvard is to travel past the Density Barrier. Unfortunately, you have no clue where to go from there.

Wait a minute! You were told that the planet Outpost may have information vital to the success of your mission.

"Maybe I should go there soon," you think to yourself.

✱ STOP ✱

[283]

No matter how many times you return to Tony's place, you still feel like you are about to become hopelessly lost amidst the convoluted turning and twistings of the back alleys. Still, you manage to arrive in one piece and are confronted by the same thug you met on your first visit here.

"Doesn't he ever have a day off?" you wonder.

You are shown into the same room as before with Tony sitting at the same desk. The large woman remembers you as being an old customer and pulls out the "Class B" price list again. Fortunately, she doesn't seem to recall your promise from your first visit to place a really large order for your "crew."

Go now to the CGM.

✱ STOP ✱

[284]

Survey and exploration is an abysmal failure. When you take your digging equipment out into the field you are closely followed by one of the mantis creatures. Any attempt to disturb the native flora and fauna results in the alien scolding you about changing things.

When you try to mine for the minerals which your instruments show to be tantalizingly near the surface, your equipment ceases functioning before you can begin any excavation. Taking everything back to the ship for analysis only shows that there is nothing mechanically wrong.

You are at your wit's end and are forced to discontinue operations. You do have a nagging suspicion that the aliens are somehow responsible for your problems but you have no real proof of this as yet.

Back at your ship, you recheck the probable technological level of the planet in case you missed something the first time, but the readout still shows a low-technology culture. This is truly mystifying.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[285]

You clearly remember the experience you had before but that doesn't deter you from unsealing your helmet and...

everything turns sparkly and beagle-like. The horses thundering through your mind emerge from your forehead and raise a great deal of dust making you sneeze.

The green men check your hat and let you into the club.

If you can handle it, the same things as before are yours for the doing.

You may select this option again.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[286]

You are prepared this time for your ship's instrument failure (caused by Ethnar's high radiation levels), and the pull of the planet's unexpectedly high gravity, so your landing is uneventful.

Your options are the same as before.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[287]

The aliens are very friendly at first and try to communicate with you. But once they determine that you do not know their language, they break off transmission and refuse to answer your calls. Nothing you do will change their minds. Unless you can speak their language, they won't talk to you. You spend two days trying to reestablish contact but to no avail.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[288]

Your ship is towed into an instrument-lined bay similar to the one where the test started. Riallans are watching your approach with great interest. You wave to them just in case they can see you through the viewport.

It appears that the test has been successful, but something is wrong. You don't know what, but you feel very uneasy. You can see that you haven't been injured physically, and you seem to be in possession of all your faculties, but you can't shake a persistent terror, like the aftermath of a nightmare that you can't remember after waking up.

The power to the Jump Engine turns off, and the sound of its shutdown winds down through the octaves. A sudden panic grips you.

Read immediately text entry 599.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[289]

Upon entering the cave you see it is open and well lit, but as you travel farther back the walls appear to close in on you. Just like last time. You shudder to think about the monster who may be awaiting your return.

The air begins to feel heavy in your lungs and you find it very difficult to breathe.

You find, to your utter dismay, that you have once again become lost in the maze-like passages and you're no longer sure which way is out.

Soon you find yourself entering a smallish-sized cave. Could it be . . . ?

CRASH-RATTLE-THUNK!!! You trip over a pile of bones(?!!!) just like the ones the monster keeps in HIS cave.

Once again you seem to have awakened him from a sound sleep and he is not happy. He growls deep in his throat and effectively blocks your exit from the cave. You get the distinct impression he is about to teach you a lesson on not waking perfectly friendly bear-type monsters from their naps, once and for all.

Go now to the CGM.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[290]

The "Warpship Works And Bodyshop" has a few interesting improvements to offer you for sale, but from the looks of the place, you are not sure you trust them to do a good job.

You speak with a veteran shipfitter by the name of Kwan who is willing to join you for a couple of beers at the Dry Gulch Saloon and a little talk about possible ship improvements.

"I'd say your ship's good enough," says Kwan, "at least for exploring out here in the Fringe. Two-Axis drives work only where the density of space dust is low."

"What if I try to explore closer to the galactic core?" you ask.

"Well," says Kwan. "That would all depend on how you intend to get there. If you wanted to go direct, you'd run through a corner of intergalactic space. Ain't been a ship built yet that can fly without at least a little dust to burn, and there ain't no dust in intergalactic space."

"What if I followed the galactic arm inward?"

"Well, then you'd run into just as much trouble, soon as the density level rose too high for your Two-Axis drive. Pretty soon you'd just stop, and wouldn't be able to go any further."

"So how do the aliens do it?"

"Only been a few by here ever that claimed to have come from anywhere much nearer the core. They have something called a Tri-Axis drive booster that lets them navigate where the dust level is higher than it is in the Fringe. But don't ask me how to build one!"

"So what else should I watch for past Supa? Are the aliens dangerous?"

"Oh, I reckon you'll meet a monster or two, but most of em'll turn out nice enough. Just watch for the pirates and you'll do fine."

"Pirates?" you ask, and Kwan launches into a long and improbable story about his days as a spacer, and the time he met Silverbeard the Pirate.

You manage to get a list of possible ship improvements available at his ship yard and the cost for each:

Rain — 1 Crystals, 1 Munitions

Nuclear Rockets — 1 Tools, 1 Fluids

Stress Bulkheads — 1 Fuel, 1 Medicine

Stealth System — 1 Fuel, 1 Culture

Dimensional Eliminator — 1 Computers, 1 Crystals, 1 Fluids, 1 Iron

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[291]

The trick with the light worked better than you had believed possible. You are soon able to show Teddy who's boss. He doesn't seem to want to fight anymore so you let him go.

Teddy whimpers a bit and returns to his nest to pout. You back up into a passageway only to find yourself in a cul-de-sac. Marked on the back wall is the message:

"Tell the Brethren 'I do not know the answer'."

The teddy bear gives you a reproachful glance as you pass back through its cave, but doesn't seem to be interested in fighting you. You leave the Titanic Cave pondering what you have learned here.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[292]

Drone ships built in the factory on Gazan are technologically very powerful, even compared to other drone ships you have heard of and/or seen. This is not at all surprising; no simple drone could ever hope to navigate space around Gazan. Remote control from the ground was also impossible with all of the local electromagnetic interference, so the Darscian scientists who designed the drones took the only option they had and made the ships smart enough to find their own way around. Converting them from scientific uses to long distance cargo-hauling is a relatively simple operation; in fact, the factory has already converted a few. Having no market for them, though, they haven't bothered making any more than the initial set. You get the feeling that they'd be willing to sell some cheap.

Such ships are useful for storing and transporting cargo. They can be used to make trades at any markets you have already visited that allow drones to participate in trade. They are also helpful in trading with other players for both items and cargo. Because of its jump engine, the drone ship only takes one turn to travel to its destination and complete its trade. In the meantime, you are free to continue on your own way with no loss of time for the additional move. The only drawback is the jump engine's lethal effect on any living organisms who are unlucky enough to be aboard. The trick, therefore, is to send only nonliving cargo.

You are very interested in the conditions of trade for such a ship and, after inquiring, you learn the ships are available for sale.

One 5-cargo bay drone ship may be purchased here in exchange for the following commodities:

2 Radioactives + 2 Fluids + 1 Tools

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

[293]

Humming, you press even harder at a spot on the ship's console that just refuses to come off. Your cheerful humming unconsciously becomes a strained continuous note that you hold while you use all of the force you can to clean that darned stain away. One particularly fierce swipe not only removes the stubborn spot but sends you flying off-balance into the radio panel.

You hit with a grunt and bounce back, sliding to the floor. As you muster your wits, you are surprised to hear voices talking to you. Well, not really to you directly, but rather more like *at* you. You look up expecting to see heaven-knows-what, when you notice that you must have flipped the radio switch over to a frequency which is usually devoid of chatter. Not this time though — you can hear two parties conversing. The static makes it rather difficult to understand everything they are saying, but you do manage to make out some of their conversation.

You believe these people to be smugglers who have just completed a mission to one of the Human worlds located just outside the Boundary. One of the ships visited a planet by the name of Supa and stocked up on Food.

You lose the signal before you can learn anything else.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[294]

Walking through a narrow notch between two mountains, following a tiny stream that squeezes between two sloping grass-covered meadows, you see a scar of some sort partway up one of the hillsides. There is a stripe where the vegetation has been stripped away and a jumble of orange rocks covers the ground.

You climb closer to examine the scar. From the looks of things, the orange rock must have broken away and tumbled down the hill. You pick up a small piece of it. It feels gritty in your hand, and flakes of orange crumble away. You realize that the orange color is rust, and that the rocks are pure Iron.

You return to the site with your ship. It requires some heavy equipment to move the iron, and for a while the wonderful silence of Hootenaller is rudely interrupted by the noise of your labor. But it's worth it, because when you are done you have collected a full unit of Iron.

You look higher on the slope for the place the rocks broke off from, but all the stone you find in the area is white. Perhaps the iron was an unusual outcropping that broke cleanly away. You look on both sides of the notch, but you cannot find any other Iron.

Go now to the CGM.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[295]

Inside the Temple, you approach the Brother; he takes your hands and examines the palms. The mark of your ordeal is clearly visible.

"My child, you must learn patience. It has not yet been the full time. If you return when the entire four weeks has passed, you will be rewarded."

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[296]

You are interested in the possibility of purchasing a cargo bay expansion unit, which will allow your ship to carry one more unit of cargo. Your ship is designed to accommodate up to four such expansions: one to the forward section of the ship and one each to the starboard, port and aft.

Looking over what the Riallans have, you determine that their expansion units should be able to fit on the forward portion of your ship. This suits you quite nicely, since you do not have an expansion unit fitted there as yet.

After several fruitless attempts, you are finally able to lure a yellow Riallan from its work in order to inspect your ship and discuss cargo bay expansions with you. Time is Fiber, as they say on Wellmet, but the possibility of lucrative business finally persuades it to give you a few moments of its time. You wait for the verdict as it finishes the inspection.

"Expanding and adding to a ship is tricky, skillful manipulation," it finally says. "One bay or two added requires often no change in the frame line structures. More than that and the new extra stress requires major structural strengthening modification changes, and beyond that the drives become power-insufficient and need extra mass-bearing warp field energy."

"Which is it in this case? And what's the cost?"

The Riallan goes back to examine your drive tubes and for a few minutes you feel the impatience of a Riallan as you wait for the assessment.

"I would say that one cargo bay unit can be appended to the forward portion of your vessel without major structural changes. The cost of the bay, with installation, will be 1 unit of Culture and 1 unit of Fluids."

Go now to the CGM. You may select this option again if you do not purchase a cargo bay now.

✂ STOP ✂

[191]

[192]

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