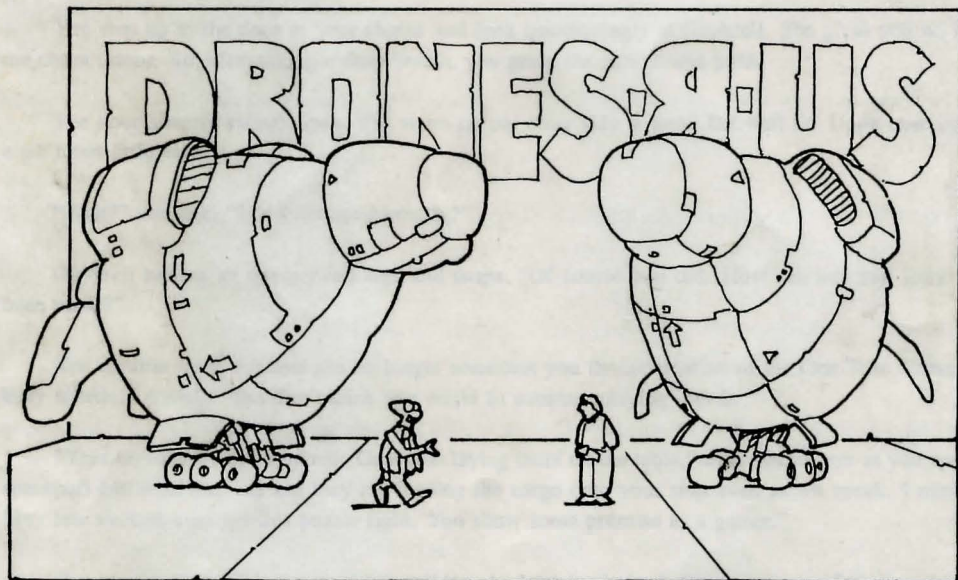


STAR SAGA: ONE™

BOOK L

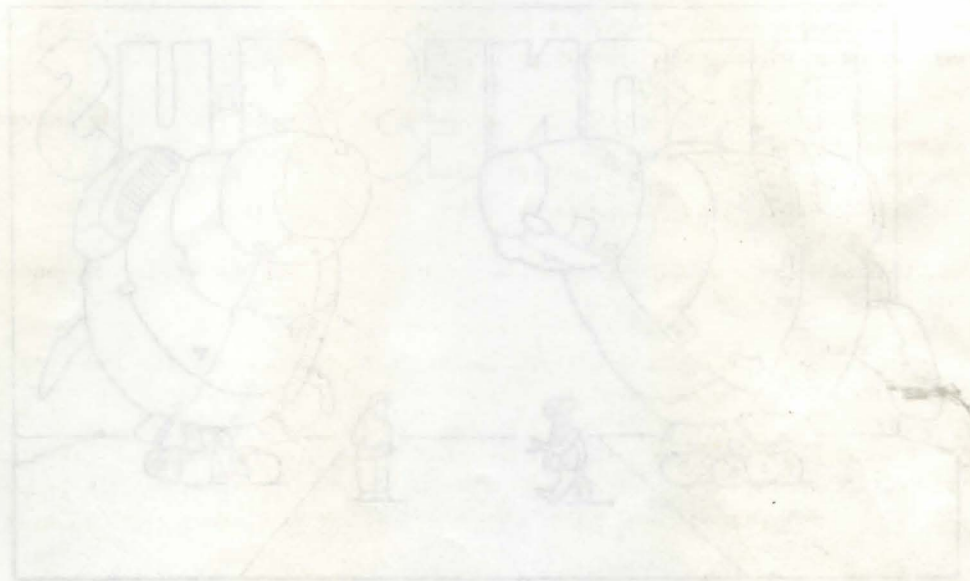
TEXT 756-820



BOOK I

STAR
SAGA: ONE

TEXT 26-820



[756]

The Darscian colonists have had to be very resourceful to survive in Ioreth's poisonous environment. As a result, they have developed an interesting variety of rare medicines and medical technology. They are willing to give you some of these medicines in exchange for the following items:

- 1 Medicine for 1 Iron,
- 2 Medicine for 1 Computers,
- 3 Medicine for 1 Tools.

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[757]

You step up to the door of your choice and look questioningly at Gaykrell. She gives you no indication whether or not you have chosen the correct door. So, after taking a deep breath, you grasp the handle and push.

The door silently swings open. The room on the other side is small but well lit. Upon examination, you discover that the room contains a table but little else.

"Well?" you ask. "Did I choose correctly?"

Gaykrell heaves an exasperated sigh and snaps, "Of course you did. How can any real game player not know that the right choice has been made?"

You assume from this that she no longer considers you the incarnation of the One True Gamer. It's just as well, since you have a pretty busy schedule already. You don't think you could fit constant playing into it.

"Your invoice for the Synthetic Genius is laying there on the table," she informs you as you appear to be content just to stand there. "The spaceport has been notified and they are loading the cargo onto your ship even as we speak. I must be going but I want to say, 'Well done.' Very few visitors ever get this puzzle right. You show some promise as a gamer."

Coming from the Director, you gather this is high praise indeed. She leaves you for an exciting day of fun and games. You pick up the invoice, the reward for your success, and follow her out the door.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[758]

The Institute of Extra-Corporeal Sentience, located in downtown Fredotha, is actually a collection of Darscian scientists dedicated to advancing the science of artificial intelligence. Here you find computer technology on the leading edge of the field.

The very best computers in the galaxy are given the name "Synthetic Genius." By itself Synthetic Genius is useless, but when combined with other common commodities it forms the basis for some of the galaxy's most advanced technological devices.

"Like what?" you ask.

"Like Universal Translators, for one," says the company representative who is trying to sell you some Synthetic Genius. "But there's really no end to what you can do with it; I'm sure you can find many useful applications. Let me just check and see if we have any available for trade right now.

"Hmmm. You're in luck. We do have one unit for sale. Are you interested?"

The asking price for one unit of Synthetic Genius is substantial: 2 units each of Fluids and Radioactives, and 1 unit each of Fiber and Crystals.

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[759]

"Boss, I'm picking up an alien transmission. From what I can understand, the message is being directed to the creature's home base on a planet by the name of Gironde. The sender is requesting a Gradient Filter be made ready and says he found out about their supply on . . . it sounds like Gnarsh. Sorry, I've lost the transmission."

You thank your computer for the information and make a note of what you just learned — it could be very important.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[760]

The principal city of Darscold, where you soon find yourself, is known as Fredotha. You spend several days exploring it thoroughly and in the end come up with the following options for further investigation:

⟨WPGBEY⟩ (3 phases) Trade commodities at the planet's market.

⟨G9EDMQ⟩ (3 phases) Learn something about all the Darscian worlds.

⟨W9GDEQ⟩ (3 phases) Visit the Engineering Guild to find out more about the Gravity Compensators which support the city's buildings.

⟨CPUBOY⟩ (7 phases) Arrange a stay at the home of Clivus, a Darscian who has offered to teach you the art of "Serene Contemplation."

(SPWBGY) (5 phases) Visit the Institute of Extra-Corporeal Sentience and find out about the latest in Artificial Intelligence.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[761]

The city of Wellmet, on the planet Wellmet, sprawls across the land below you. In the previous visits you've made to the city, you've learned to deal with the heavy air traffic around the many spaceports, but you still face the problem of where to land. You decide to drop at the public 'port, as far as possible from the Family-controlled sections of town.

The landing, it turns out, is not easy. You have to wait several hours just to find a suitable approach window. Once down, you have to wait for a full inspection by Customs officials, who poke around your ship squinting and scowling at your cargo and equipment. It seems they are being more thorough and taking more time than usual. Just as you are beginning to wonder what's going on, one of them calls you from outside the main hatch: "Captain, we need you to sign the papers."

You step out of the hatch. A stun beam, aimed from point blank range at the back of your neck, sends you to the ground. Still conscious, but numb from the neck down, you slam into the hard landing deck like a load of Iron.

The men who gather around you are not Customs officers. They wear no uniform at all, but they aren't making any secret of whom they represent.

"Perhaps you didn't read the fine print of your Lanza family contract," says one of the men. He looks like a skinny little runt, but only because the men he's standing next to are twice as big as he is; in fact, he's about twice as big as you. "Jasper, would you be so kind as to inform the Party of the First Part of the seriousness of such a breach?"

One of the bigger men responds, "Couldn't we just tear 'em into the Party of the Second, Third, and Fourth Parts?"


"All in good time" says the first man. "I'm sure the good smuggler here has every intention of setting things right with the Family, despite having had the bad taste to dispose of the original contracted items without delivering them to the agreed agents. Many businesspeople make the easy mistake of failing to pay attention to the small details in a complex agreement, and thereby neglect to fulfill all their obligations. Fortunately, this particular contract has a clause that covers that eventuality, which we will waste no time in putting into effect. Jorge, will you please see to it?"

"No good, Boss," says a man from out of sight behind you. "There's no cargo here worth our hauling."

"That is unfortunate," says the leader. "Since it must now be assumed that there is no way for the Family to recover its original investment, our only recourse would seem to be to encourage others to abide by and complete the terms of their contracts. Jasper, I'll leave to you the task of providing an intense but not fatal example. Smuggler, consider your good fortune that you will be alive after this and do not return to our fair planet or that situation will certainly change for the worse for you."

All of the men turn away, except for two who unhook short blunt clubs from their belts. They proceed to work you over. Thanks to the effects of the stunner, you feel almost nothing, but even so you quickly pass out from shock. You awaken two days later in your ship's medical bay, alone and under intensive myoelectric therapy for severe internal injuries and several broken bones. It takes six more days to heal enough to leave Wellmet.

As you are leaving the planet you promise yourself you will not return; the consequences would be too dire.

Continued 

Because of the time needed to heal, your attempted landing has taken nine phases instead of one.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[762]

The landing coordinates on the planet Frontier are the same as before, so you have no trouble finding the site and setting your ship down. You see the same welcoming committee waiting for you to disembark, including the tall woman who was so friendly last time.

“We are glad to see you again, Runner. A good smuggler is hard to find, so welcome back,” she greets you. “You know the schedule so if you’d like to go over to the Soft Granite Cafe for a bite to eat while you wait, we’ll send you word when your ship is ready to go.”

You thank the woman (you still don’t know her name, but are afraid to ask in case it’s considered bad form — don’t forget that this is an illegal operation!) and decide to take her up on the offer.

You have time for one of the best burgers you have eaten in weeks before you get word that your vessel is fueled and loaded. Heading over to the ship, you see the tall woman in the distance and wave a friendly good-bye. She returns the wave and you enter the ship. You have a new Gradient Filter for very little trouble and you are feeling very satisfied with the universe.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[763]

The Brother leads you to a small niche in the wall where you find a bench, a table and three lit candles. He hands you three sheets of paper and leaves. In the flickering light, you read the following:

The Lecture: Advancing Brother

You have learned your dialogue well. You are now ready to learn the rites of the caste of the Advancing Brother, or the second Level of Righteousness. As an Advancing Brother you will take upon yourself a great and important obligation: that of curiosity. The knowledge of the universe will make itself available to you as one of the Brethren, yet it will be useless unless you truly desire to keep it. By attaining the second Level of Righteousness, you will swear to seek and observe all the knowledge you will find along the Way.

The dialogue of Mastery of the Advancing Brother is the same as that for the Initiate Brother, except that after being asked the second question, respond as follows:

Examiner: How then, does one find which path to take along the way?

(You now recognize Examiner as an Initiate Brother)

Answer: One asks in the way of the Ancients.

Ex.: The Way of the Ancients is a long and treacherous path.

Ans.: Yet it is one I wish to follow.

(Examiner now recognizes you as an Advancing Brother)

Ex.: How does an ancient scry the path?

(You now recognize Examiner as an Advancing Brother)

Ans.: I do not know the answer.

Ex.: You are truly an Advancing Brother.

Ans.: And I know you to be the same.

When you finish reading, you notice the candles are getting very low.

You also note that the mark of the ordeal has disappeared from your palm. While examining your hand you flex your fingers and feel a strange surge of power.

You notice your strength is greater now. You sense this is an inner strength you have attained from your trials and ordeals. You have attained knowledge of your inner self few people are privileged to discover in themselves. You question a passing Brother on this. She confirms your theory and tells you, "This is called the Art of Kothan. You will find it will aid you in times of danger by allowing you to think more clearly, move more quickly, and strike more powerfully."

"You are now an Advancing Brother," she continues. "We can teach you no more, for no Fraternal dialogue beyond the Second Level of Righteousness may be conferred by the high priests of Gen. If you choose, you may travel to the fringe planet of Dargen to learn more. Take what you have learned to the temple of Dar."

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[764]

Two hundred paces beyond where you met the serpent there is a wrecked space ship. You search through the equipment you find there but most of it is hopelessly rusted. However, you do find a unit's worth of Synthetic Genius which you bring back to your own vessel.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[765]

HOW TO PLAN TURN 4

Since Dr. Schottky recommended that you start your new mission by visiting Wellmet, you decide to make that your next stop. Look at the map and plan your best route there. This is how your plotting sheet should look:

Plotting Sheet							
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7
TURN							
1	T	O	V	Y	R	V	O
2	G	L	—	—	—	—	—
3	—	A: SUWOGF	—	—	—	A: GEEMMN	—
4	—	T	O	V	G	B	L
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

You have plotted "T" to take off, then "O,V,G,B,L" to move to Wellmet and land there.

HOW TO ENTER PLOTS FOR TURN 4

Log onto the computer as usual, then plot T to take off from Para-Para, O, V, G, B to travel through the intervening trisectors, and L to land on Wellmet.

Did you remember to hit Return or F at the end?

HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 4

Read the landing text the computer will give you. Since you have successfully landed on a new planet, start a new Planet Log. For Wellmet, it should look like this:

Planet Log			
Planet Name:	Wellmet		
Actions Available:			
Code	Phases	Description	Repeat?
OFFII7	2	market	
8FHIA7	4	weapons	
8VHKAV	1	tavern	
OVFKIV	3	history	
KFVIK7	4	information	

When you have finished with the landing, read the second piece of text the computer assigned you. This will be your final directed walk-through text. Soon you will be on your own!

⊠ STOP ⊠

[766]

The planet is called Arthlan, and it seems to want to play hide-and-peek. Even after you have located its primary, right near the coordinates listed on your star map, it takes you and your ship's sensors several hours to find the planet. The problem is that Arthlan's star is actually a triple star, three suns of different colors and masses orbiting one another around a common center of gravity. To make things even more difficult, the planet's orbit is highly eccentric, more like a comet's than a planet's. The orbit brings the planet close to one star one "year," closer to another the next, and far away from all three in between.

You run computer simulations to see how the planet's orbit changes over a period of time just in case you decide to visit here again. You do not want to spend hours just trying to find the planet. Although you discover there is no real repetition of the orbital pattern, you should have an idea where to look for Arthlan in the near future.

The planetary surface is not a pleasant place, even though its elemental composition is similar to that of Earth. There is no trace of surface water, although many of the large open areas closely resemble dry sea beds, suggesting that there once were oceans. The atmosphere is thin and has a normal nitrogen-oxygen mixture, but is clouded with dust from windstorms and volcanic eruptions. The only evidence of unusual mineral materials you can find is one metallic outcropping near the base of one of the larger volcanoes, which could represent a recent meteor impact or possibly a shipwreck.

You spend two days surveying the planet from space before deciding it is safe enough to land, although you will need protective clothing as well as breathing apparatus to filter out the excessive dust in the atmosphere.

During your orbital survey you find some interesting surface features. The first is the ambient radioactivity level. There is quite a bit of radioactivity inside the atmosphere, but it comes from no single concentrated source. It seems as though all of the crust, as well as the airborne dust, is mildly radioactive. None of the material is as radioactive as uranium ores mined on other worlds, but the low-level radiation is so widespread that the ambient level is high enough to require protective clothing.

The most striking geological feature is a group of five very old craters spread over one side of the planet. Each crater is almost one hundred kilometers in diameter, and they are about five hundred kilometers apart. They look like they could be very large meteor impacts, but they are all the same age and their pattern is too regular. If you drew lines between the centers of the craters they would form five out of the six points of a perfect hexagon.

You choose a relatively calm landing site near the equator, where there are no nearby volcanoes and the dust storms are less frequent. The swirling winds in the upper atmosphere make the landing difficult even with computer assist, but you make it. Soon you have explored the area nearby and become accustomed to conditions on Arthlan.

You find no signs of any indigenous life. However, when you confirm this impression on your computer, the machine suggests that there was life here in the past. Otherwise there would be no oxygen in the atmosphere. Barring unusual crustal chemical processes, for which there is no evidence, free oxygen in a planet's atmosphere usually occurs only as a by-product of photosynthesis by plants.

Your orbital survey and ground exploration have established the following possibilities for further investigation:

⟨HGAE6M⟩ (5 phases) Mine radioactive ore from the planet's crust.

⟨XGCEUM⟩ (3 phases) Explore the giant craters.

⟨XWCGUE⟩ (3 phases) Investigate the cause of the intense volcanism and the significance of the planet's erratic orbit.

⟨DGQE8M⟩ (5 phases) Investigate the metallic outcropping you saw from space.

⊗ STOP ⊗

[767]

When you ask the Blue Squirrellies what you should do with your chitterbang, they very quickly tell you.

They are actually very helpful and you soon find yourself at the Warp Core refinery. Here they are happy to take your raw ore and refine it into usable warp core.

To find out more about warp core you may choose the following option:

⟨T9SDWQ⟩ (1 phase) Ask your ship's computer about warp core.

⊗ STOP ⊗

[768]

After a brief but fierce battle, you and the Patrol ship are much the worse for wear; at least you have the consolation of giving as good as you get. Unfortunately, just as you are about to make your getaway, you notice the Patrol ship has been able to contact reinforcements. Soon you find yourself surrounded. Any further resistance would be suicidal.

Surrendering gracefully, you allow the Patrol to board your ship. They have apparently run a check on your ship because the captain tells you this must be your lucky day.

"Since we don't have any record of your being a previous offender, we'll let you off easy this time," he tells you while glaring at you in a menacing manner. "Don't get any ideas of trying again because I assure you, the consequences of being caught running the Boundary a second time are far more severe."

The Patrol captain then escorts you to the Boundary, making sure you are on the other side before he departs. This leaves you in the trisector containing the Nine Worlds, but outside the Boundary. Further attempts to run the Boundary now would be useless. However, if you can improve your ship's combat abilities, you may wish to try again in the future.

⊗ STOP ⊗

[769]

You don't want to try long-distance travel on Arthlan's harsh surface, so you take your ship on a short transatmospheric hop to the location of the craters. Only after you get there do you realize how big the craters really are. The largest cities of the Nine Worlds, placed inside one of those great circles, would disappear without a trace. The five craters together dominate an area the size of a small continent. They are not deep holes, having been filled in with volcanic rock to a level comparable to the planet's average surface, but the circular rims rise like weathered mountain ranges to an impressive height.

"Computer, what size meteor would you need to make a crater that big?"

"It would depend on the trajectory. Large asteroids are not very rare, and in a system with such a fluctuating gravitational distribution there would be a high probability of impact."

"What is the probability of five impacts in the same area?"

"Far too low, on the order of one in ten to the minus seventy per solar year. That's about equal to the chance of picking one particular atom at random from all the atoms in this galaxy."

"That low, huh? What about alternatives?"

"It's possible that asteroids were deliberately manipulated to collide with the planet, but there is still no evidence of the iridium and other rare metals that asteroids would have left behind. An equivalent amount of energy created in some other way, such as a thermonuclear bomb, could have made this type of crater if released at a moderate depth underground."

"How big an explosion?"

"Difficult to estimate, but probably between ten and one hundred gigatons. And don't ask me how to build a bomb that big; I don't know, and if I did I wouldn't tell you."

You make another short hop and land near the center of one of the craters. From here, the crater walls are too far away over the horizon to be seen. You try to imagine a nuclear fireball big enough to move that much rock. An idea comes to you.

"Computer, how are you at thermonuclear physics?"

"Not too shabby."

"Okay, then. Suppose these craters were made by nuclear explosions. Assume that whatever they used involves a release of radiation proportional to hydrogen bombs, scaled up to the size of these craters. Got that?"

"Okay."

"Now, assume that all the radioactivity on the planet is from the long-lived decay products of those explosions. The question is: how long ago did the explosions happen?"

"That's difficult. It will take a while to determine the best model. I'll let you know."

While the computer thinks, you are struck by another idea. You wait on it until the computer gives its results.

"Boss? I can't give you a very close estimate. The best guesses are in the range of forty thousand to one hundred thousand years."

"Good enough," you reply. "Do you have a good plot of the crater locations?" The computer draws a map projection onto your viewscreen. "Good. Since the pattern looks like a hexagon with a point missing, I want to explore the exact location of the missing point."

Once more you take to the air, landing on a flat rocky plain dotted with vertical lava columns exposed by wind erosion. You set up a base site there and begin a survey of the area.

Two days later you find it. Concealed among a cluster of columns, a metallic cylinder about two meters across emerges from the ground and rises to a height of eight meters. It is clearly artificial, made of an advanced monocrystalline alloy. At the top the cylinder spreads into a horizontal plate that looks like it was once, ages ago, flush with the ground.

“Boss,” says the computer, “I don’t suppose you might consider pretending we never found this and leaving it alone?”

You study the cylinder closely. It looks inert. “You said the explosions would have been underground. That means this is just an access tube. I’ll bet it has some sort of hatch on top.”

By climbing to the top of one of the lava pillars, you confirm that it does. You now have a new option, if you wish to attempt it:

⟨HWAG6E⟩ (3 phases) Enter the metal artifact and examine it.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[770]

In your dream you float above the Milky Way Galaxy. With your hand stretched in front of you, you can trace with your finger the spiral arm on which lie the Nine Worlds. From the Fringe the glowing trail flows inward, making nearly a full turn until it joins with the Core.

The stars of the spiral arm shift and condense, taking on the shape of a dragon coiled in slumber. It rests uneasily, and its fitful movements send streamers of stars swirling. Its head is the Core and its long tail stretches to the tip of the fringe. It is the size of Creation itself, and its undulations span centuries.

Your presence has disturbed the glowing beast. It awakens, uncurling its head and flexing its body petulantly. It yawns, and the inside of its mouth is a great black hole. Then it stretches its neck, opens its jaws, and engulfs in its mouth a huge swath of its own tail. You hear screams as the Earth and the Nine Worlds and the Ghost Worlds alike disappear into the dragon’s maw. You breathe the question to yourself: “Why?”

The dragon answers, “Because I am my own seed and sustenance and the very space I fill. Only I can satisfy my own hunger; only the self that consumes its own self is alive. The part becomes the whole, just as you who are part of me contain all of me within.” The head turns toward you and opens its mouth; it breathes not fire but an annihilating blackness. The black flames reach to engulf you, but at the last moment you feel yourself being pulled back. The dragon recedes to a point in the distance, the bright pupil of an eye full of stars, an intensely glowing eye that stares at you and holds you transfixed.

You blink and try to clear the fog from your brain. You are lying in your ship’s med unit, staring at a round overhead light. A violet Riallan hovers nearby. When it sees that you have awakened, it leaves.

From the med unit’s displays and printouts, you learn that you’ve been in a coma for almost a week. You seem to remember completing the jump and then. . . what? It had suddenly seemed as though you were two different people, in two different places at once, but both of them were you, and one of you was dying. The memory is now blurred, but the shock of experiencing your own death must have all but fried your brain. You would not want to repeat the experience.

You spend two more days recuperating and testing your own performance to be sure the jump has caused no permanent damage. You seem to be in perfect health. The most disturbing thing is the med unit’s estimates, printed out during your coma, of the probability of your

regaining consciousness: it was embarrassingly low. You wonder if your dream had anything to do with your awakening, but neither the Riallans nor your med unit can tell you.

The next day you return to the Space Authority offices. They debrief you on your experiences, seeming a bit disappointed that the test wasn't more successful, but glad that you at least survived. "We don't dare test it with a Riallan until this effect is completely nullified," chirps one to another. "Some aliens like this one can survive it, but no Riallan could stay sane after experiencing that. Undoubtedly the response would be instantaneous sympathetic termination."

In return for your services, the Riallans tell you almost everything you need to know about building tri-axis drive boosters, the devices that will allow your two-axis hyperdrives to function as three-axis hyperdrives in the inner reaches of the arm. What they can't tell you is where to find the parts needed:

- 1 Warp Core,
- 1 Gradient Filter,
- 1 Flame Jewel,
- 1 Iron,
- 1 Crystals,
- 1 Fuel.

If you ever have all these items and would like to build a tri-axis drive booster, plot the following option:

<XMCNUJ> Build a tri-axis drive booster.

Please make a note of this action code; it is an "unlisted" action, so you will need to enter the code manually when you are ready to build a tri-axis drive booster.

Because of the time needed to recuperate, this option has taken ten phases instead of three.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[771]

You never expected to actually see the day when you would have your hands on a third unit of Super Slip. You feel so happy and relieved that you decide to celebrate!

You make the best of the limited resources of party materials on your ship and throw yourself a "Congratulations" party. After a few hours of throwing makeshift confetti and sliding merrily down the corridors (using just a smidge of your precious cargo), you decide to call it a night and get some sleep. It has been a big day for you.

You drop off to sleep thinking, "Soon I'll be able to set everything straight with the contacts on Heaven and make good the Family name of Stewart." You get the best night's sleep you've had in ages.

Then you realize that in order to deliver the stuff to Heaven you'll have to get past the Boundary — and the Space Patrol. You'll need enough ship weapons to outfight them, enough speed to outrun them, or both. It won't be easy. However, if the professional smugglers can manage it, then you can too.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[772]

You enjoyed your visit with those fun-loving left-spinning Tralisians so much, you've decided to stop by and visit them again. Keeping their abhorrence of anything high-tech in mind, you leave your portable scanners at the ship.

You have the same options as before.

✧ STOP ✧

[773]

You are intrigued by the signs of excavation your computer showed at the nearby mountains so you decide to head there.

Approaching the foot of the nearest mountain, you hear the sound of digging. As you get closer to the source of the noise, you tread more cautiously, hoping to spy on whomever is mining.

You are puzzled. You can hear the clanking of a pick or a shovel but you don't see anything. You take a step closer when it occurs to you that the sound is probably coming from. . .

The ground gives way under your weight and you fall into a mine shaft and virtually land on top of a squirrel-like creature. The two of you spend a moment staring at each other in surprise. You barely have time to note that the little guy is wearing a red tunic when he leaps to his furry little feet and attacks you.

You wish you understood the language because he is shouting something at you. It sounds something like, "Chitter tweep chugchug."

You intuitively sense he is not pleased with the interruption and quickly prepare for battle.

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

[774]

You cannot remember battling such a fierce monster. You are wounded and bleeding in numerous places, but you note with satisfaction that Godzilla (as you've begun to think of the monster) has just as many contusions and abrasions.

You're beginning to feel weak and light-headed. Maybe this would be a good time for a strategic retreat. As you back away, the creature doesn't follow you. It probably has had enough as well.

You return to the ship, noting that 5 days have elapsed.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[775]

The woman who submitted you to your ordeal is waiting for you.

"Welcome, Brother," she greets you.

"Good health to you, Brother," you reply courteously.

"A member of the Brethren is always welcome here but I must tell you we have nothing more to teach you or to bestow upon you. Your next goal with the Brotherhood is to travel beyond the fringe to the Core. There you may find more answers. But if you wish only to pray we will leave you to your solitude."

With that, both she and the Brother with the blue eyes depart.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[776]

Some unkind fate has forced you to return to Alkon, a prospect you relish with the same eager anticipation as your annual dentist's appointment. As you fly over the jungle, you remember how backward and uninspired the city looked on your last landing. Glancing out the window as you head down, you see nothing has changed.

While looking out the viewport you think to yourself, "If nothing else, at least the Alkonese are amusing to look at," and you wave to a purple, multi-tentacled, warty being who is assisting you in the docking of your ship.

Your options are the same as before.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[777]

You are embarrassed to admit that a four foot tall squirrel is your equal in battle. You are at a stand-off and are tired from the exertion of the battle. You are beginning to wonder if the green rocks are worth all this and you are thinking of making an honorable retreat.

As you start to make your way back to where the roof had caved in under your feet, you note that the Squirrel doesn't seem interested in following you.

You are relieved because it is all you can do to pull yourself up the incline.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[778]

It's back to Organu for you. Yes indeed, more of those alternately whimsical and annoying telepaths. The planet's two continents look much the same as before, and your landing proceeds without incident.

You are greeted in body and thought by an oversized broccoli stalk (you manage to catch that thought before it slips out). You have the same options as before.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[779]

You haul the alien computer bank up to your ship and pack it carefully in one of your cargo bays.

You now have a unit of Synthetic Genius.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[780]

It had seemed like such a good idea back in the city.

"Visit our leading scientist," the aliens said. "It will be a nice change of scenery for you."

Well, you took their advice and boarded a shuttle headed out to Scientist Strangways' laboratory. So far your only change of scenery has been to go from the tan city walls to the grey interior of the ship. You wish you had brought your camera along.

When the shuttle lands, your eyes meet with some more "scenery." A small dingy little town is your port-of-call and, needless to say, you are unimpressed.

Although Strangways isn't waiting for you (you really didn't expect their top scientist to drop everything to meet you at the spaceport, did you?), you are greeted by something else: a very obnoxious smell that assails your olfactory nerves. You identify the source of the odor rather quickly since you are virtually surrounded by the offending substance.

The town you've landed in has been built on a small island of firm ground amidst a large and incredibly smelly swamp.

Great.

Being the adventurous sort, you are undaunted by this obstacle. You politely confirm your directions to Strangways' lab with one of the natives and just as politely ignore the snickered laughter when you tell the creature that yes, you *are* going out there.

So off you go, slogging through the muck and the guck, what the heck. You've been in worse spots before and probably will be again. Why, you've even been able to accustom yourself to the odor; it's not so bad after all. You stop for a moment to try to smell a rose-like thing by the side of the path but decide it's too much trouble to chase it when the silly thing flies off deeper into the swamp.

You occasionally check the map as you pass the designated landmarks and are assured you're still on the right path. You think how easy this is and start whistling a cheery little tune.

It occurs to you that this is exactly how those horror shows start. The unsuspecting victim is foolishly walking along in a dangerous place without a care in the world. It's then that . . .

A large, ugly, slimy-looking THING rears up out of the swamp and glares at you. Yes, you are now faced with confronting a huge monster with big teeth and long claws. It's just what your mother said would happen if you went out into space. See what you get for not listening to her?

The more you look at the monster, the more you see a resemblance to your Uncle Clarence's dog Jason. As you recall, the bared teeth and loud snarling were all just a front with the dog, so maybe the swamp monster is really a misunderstood creature who craves love and attention.

You take a tentative step forward and hold out your hand while speaking softly. The animal lunges at you and almost takes the appendage off at the elbow. It's time for plan two.

Go now to the CGM.

✻ STOP ✻

[781]

As you navigate your way through the dusty Frog Leg Nebula, you come across a small asteroid emitting an intense subspace radio signal. The asteroid is identified 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 dark tunnel that leads straight down towards the heart of

Continued 

the asteroid. It looks like there used to be a metal hatch that covered the opening to the tunnel, but the hatch has been blasted open. Your instruments indicate that the tunnel is several miles long, so it will take some time to explore it.

Another possibility for action is suggested by the presence of some pretty good radioactive ore in the crater, which you can carry away in your cargo bays.

Your options are:

(EGMENM) (4 phases) Mine a unit of radioactives from the crater.

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[782]

"At least we know they understand Earth Standard," you mutter to your computer. "Send back on the same channel, visuals and all."

"Complying, Boss." The alien's ugly face returns to your viewscreen. If everything goes right your own not-so-ugly face will also appear on his.

"Ahoy the fleet!" you announce arrogantly at the alien. "This is an independent vessel and is bound by no directive or authority that may apply to the inhabitants of Gironde. I demand safe passage beyond this system."

"That is not permitted," intones the alien. "If you return at once to the planet's surface you may be spared."

"You have no cause to threaten. My intentions are peaceful. But I must leave this planet. It cannot sustain my life."

"That is of no concern. The Second Directive must be obeyed."

"In that case, I shall have no choice but to make my way by force. I warn you now, if you should try to . . ."

The alien face sneers. "If you're planning on threatening me, save your breath. We're not falling for that." The screen goes blank.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[783]

The enemy jetcraft roars toward you with weapons bristling. You attempt to evade the craft while firing a defensive salvo and have partial success.

The burst of weapons from your ship is true to the mark and does enough damage that the enemy loses interest in the attack, primarily due to the fact that his ship is on fire and is likely to explode at any minute.

You, however, are in a bit of trouble yourself. The enemy's weapons have inflicted enough damage that you are in danger of imminent combustion. The best course of action is to land as soon as possible and handle any immediate repairs.

With this in mind, you attempt yet another call to the spaceport, this time with success. Following instructions, you land at the spaceport without further incident.

An animate thing, with hundreds of long, thin tentacles sprouting from the area you like to think of as the neck, is there to greet you when you disembark. After a moment's hesitation, you correctly place the being as a Gnarshian and introduce yourself.

The creature tells you its name is "Sherzo" and apologizes for the rude treatment you received on your way planetward.

"You had the misfortune to run into the backward-thinking Staccator whom we must, perforce, try to annihilate. For reasons known only to themselves, these people make vicious attacks on anything that moves."

The little Gnarshian sighs musically and shrugs about a dozen of its shoulders. You are enchanted by the wonderful sounds the creature makes and try not to stare.

Sherzo continues its musical interlude which you translate as, "We do welcome you to the city of Glissandor and would be honored if you will allow us to repair your ship while you are visiting our fair city. Not all of our people are as uncivilized as the Staccator."

You thank the bizarre little alien and go over the list of necessary repairs. Then you get a rundown of possible activities in the city.

As you bid Sherzo farewell, the little creature makes a fascinating wave motion with its tentacles and scurries away.

You find the spaceport to be conveniently located in the heart of the city. You have the following options:

(MGNEJM) (5 phases) Learn more about the war.

(6GPEBM) (3 phases) Visit the local market.

(MWNGJE) (4 phases) See if you can buy any useful weapons.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[784]

The Slippery Silver Tavern is a pleasant sort of place. The management keeps it that way by placing pleasant high strong partitions between the tables and bolting the tables pleasantly to the floor. You seat yourself at the only table that still has room left, preparing to spend a pleasant evening sipping Boundary Breakers and inhaling the pleasant low-level soothing gas that the management provides free of charge via the air conditioning system.

After a short distraction caused by a crewman in an adjacent booth somehow managing, despite the generally relaxed atmosphere of the place, to heave another man clear over one of the partitions, you find yourself engrossed in conversation with the other spacers drinking at your table. They are an odd-looking assortment. After a few minutes exchanging polite conversation and asking each other how business has been and so on, you get the distinct impression that the others are just as inexperienced as you are. A lull in the conversation leads into a quick round of introductions, and you learn the identities of your companions:

- Valentine S — that's all the name you get — is seated to your right and has the voice, attire, and demeanor of a Wellmet native, seeming to know all the local people and places. However, you can usually recognize an experienced pilot, and Valentine isn't one.

- "Professor" Dambroke strikes you as someone possessed of too much knowledge and not enough practical sense. The Professor certainly looks the part — why else would anyone bring a notebook into a Wellmet spacer's bar? — but isn't easy to talk to; you get the impression that everything you say is being analyzed as lab data.

- Corin Stoneseeker would be under the drinking age back in the Nine Worlds, and knows it. The kid reeks so much of curiosity, fear, and inexperience that you wonder if it might be an act. You suspect that Corin has more talent and training kept hidden than the others have showing. Valentine asks Corin, "Is Stoneseeker a surname or a title?" Corin replies that it's both.

- Jean G. Clerc is a person who knows ships from the engine core out. Engineers don't always make good pilots, but Clerc might have possibilities, being about as space-smart as a person from inside the Boundary can be. You wonder what could tempt a skilled engineer to leave the Nine Worlds.

- M. J. Turner is a lean individual who's natural stance is that of being at attention, always ready for action and prepared for anything. You are as interested in what is being left out of this introduction as what is being said.

You introduce yourself as Laran Darkwatch and although you don't make a point of your role as a cleric of the Final Church of Man you can see that some of your new comrades recognize the robes you are wearing.

The seventh person at your table, a tall slim man who looks like he grew up in low gravity, declines to identify himself. This puts a bit of a damper on the conversation, but after a few more drinks the talk becomes freer and you decide that your companions are indeed as inexperienced in spacefaring outside the Boundary as you are.

Stoneseeker stands up and looks around at the other tables. All are filled with men and women hunched over drinks and discussing business: cargo, deals, negotiations, threats. "Looks like they stuck us all at the greenhorns' table all right," Turner observes.

Clerc smiles and says, "So, what do you think it's like out there?"

The conversation changes as everyone realizes the secret is out. Soon you are talking like old friends, not that you ever trusted your old friends much. You discuss your expectations and fears, compare observations about what you've seen so far outside the Boundary, and begin for the first time to make real plans.

At this point, all of the other players' characters are with yours in the Slippery Silver Tavern. You should now introduce yourself in character, ask any questions you wish of the other characters, and discuss any points you wish about your experiences so far or

your expectations for the future. Remember that you're not required to tell anybody anything, and that you may lie if you feel that you should.

Go to the CGM when you are finished with the discussion.

✂ STOP ✂

[785]

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 prattling at you in a scolding manner and replacing everything the way it was before you started.

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 ✂

[786]

Exploring along the base of a low cliff, you discover a crack in the rock that seems to lead to a bigger opening down below. You squeeze your head and arms into the crack and light your lamp. The crack is the entrance to a cave, which itself splits into extensive systems of underground caverns. As this is the first example of this sort of geological process you've found on Hootenaller, you decide to spend some time exploring them.

You are disappointed to find no minerals of any value, though you pass through exquisitely sculpted caverns of vivid colors and beautifully layered stone. As you continue deeper, you become aware of an unpleasant odor. This isn't surprising in a cave, but you realize that it's the first bad smell you've encountered on the planet. The odor grows stronger, and begins to smell strangely familiar. The passageway makes a turn, and your next step splashes in some sort of liquid. You are at the verge of an underground pool, but the liquid doesn't look like water. It is thick and tinted a dark red, and it is clearly the cause of the bad smell.

Recognition dawns, and you realize you have found a large pool of Fluids. You exit the cave, carefully checking the route marks you made on the way in, and return to your ship. After moving the ship to the plain near the mouth of the cave, you unreel a long tube and carry its free end down to the pool. By the time the underground basin is dry, you have drawn up a whole unit of Fluids. You search for other pools in the cave, and for other caves, but you find no more.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[787]

You are met at the door by a Ouabainese who introduces himself as Auvid Shawlynn, an acolyte in the Order of Higher Mental Stimulation. This Order, which is as close as the Ouabainese get to a religious group, is highly revered for work in the gaming field. Auvid greets you warmly and is anxious to show you around. You can tell he is proud of the research done here.

The tour of the Special Institute for Learning is every bit as interesting as you had expected. The entire Institute is dedicated to the serious pursuit of challenging puzzles, something the Ouabainese hold to be of the utmost importance in every aspect of their day-to-day lives.

As you pass through each section of the building, you see that virtually every facet of gaming and other intellectual pastimes is studied in detail. One area of the Institute is dedicated to word puzzles; another is exclusively oriented toward mechanical gadgets which provide intellectual stimulation in some fashion. Still others are involved with things you cannot even begin to fathom. You find it all fascinating.

The area that piques your interest the most is where the Ouabainese are studying the effects of direct mental manipulation on various objects. Auvid is particularly proud of the work done here; this is his specialty. The tour doesn't allow for long stops to be made along the way, since the Ouabainese do not like to be disturbed while they "work," but Auvid tells you that you may return here at the end of the tour if you desire a closer look at the telekinetic section.

If you are interested, you may choose the following option when you have finished your tour of the Institute:

(M9NDJQ) (7 phases) Learn about telekinesis.

While traveling from room to room, you can feel the lure of gaming as a way of life. The Ouabainese have struck an interesting balance between recreational playing and incorporating puzzles into their working lives. In fact, many of the Ouabainese have jobs which require them to play! Their entire economy is based on recreation breaks, and their major industry focuses on designing new gaming concepts.

Finally Auvid takes you into an office and asks you to wait. The Director of the Institute is required to meet every visitor who passes through, as part of the Order's search for the One True Game Player. The legends claim that the "Gamer" will visit their world and give them the Ultimate Game that will provide everlasting challenge and enjoyment. Identifying the One True Game Player is the Order's prime mission, handed down by generations preceding, from the time of the "Visitation" over fifty thousand years ago.

You are pretty certain you are not the one they are waiting for, but you politely wait for the Director to arrive. It doesn't take long.

The outer office door swings open, and in bustles an extremely attractive Ouabainese. "No one of any race or gender could possibly think this being isn't one of the most attractive creatures in the galaxy," you think to yourself.

"I am Gaykrell," she informs you as she sweeps past you on her way to the desk at the far end of the room.

You open your mouth to introduce yourself. "I am. . ."

"I am aware of your name," she says, interrupting you. "I have a very busy schedule and have more games to play today than you could possibly imagine." She continues, "We have only a few minutes to determine your puzzle-solving capability and ascertain whether or not you are the Gamer we have been waiting for, so if you please. . ."

"We have a puzzle we give each visitor to our Institute in order to measure their gaming ability. The One True Gamer will be able to solve this simple puzzle instantaneously. If you will agree to participate in this test and succeed, but are proven not to be the One we seek, we will reward you with one unit of Synthetic Genius. Will you attempt to solve the puzzle?"

Since you know the material called Synthetic Genius is rare and valuable, you are tempted to accept the offer.

“What happens if I fail?” you think to ask.

Scornfully she tells you that nothing will happen except that you will have shown yourself to be, for all intents and purposes, totally without merit in the eyes of the Institute. You think you can handle that, so you inform her that you are ready to solve the puzzle.

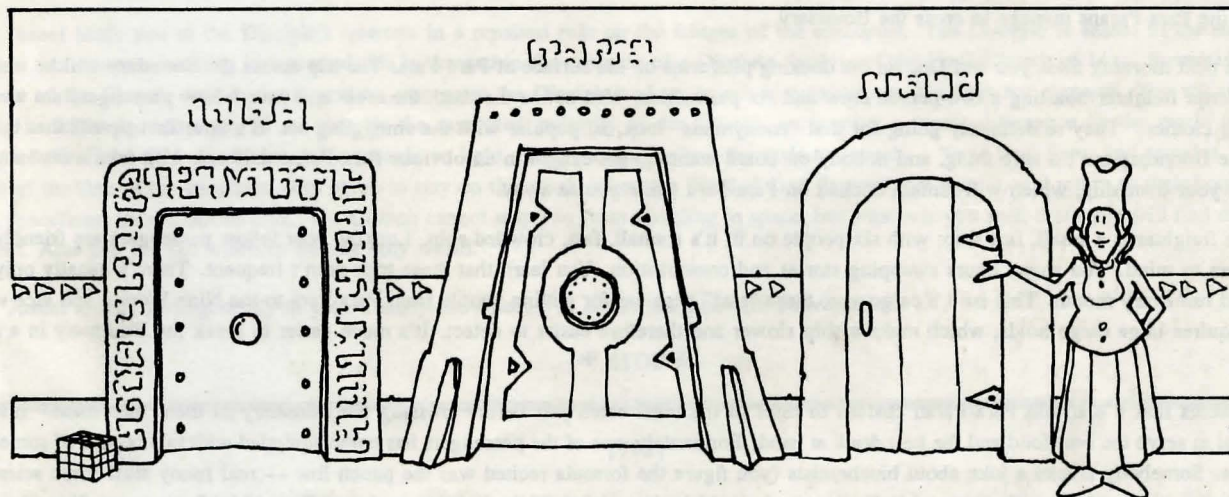
“Fine,” she replies. “We will go down a hallway. At the end of the hallway you will see three doors. All you have to do is choose the correct door. If you choose the correct door the instant you see it, we will want to test you further to ascertain if you are the Gamer. Should you take a moment before choosing the correct door, we will know you are not the Gamer we await, but we will reward you with the Synthetic Genius for correctly solving our puzzle.”

True to her word, she leads you down a corridor which has three doors at the end. The door to the far left is about five feet in height and width. It has elaborate scroll work all around the outer frame. The handle is located in the center of the door and is orb-shaped. It's the kind of door that almost assuredly has something exciting behind it.


The middle door is huge. You immediately think of a vault as you inspect it; the metal plating that composes the door part seems thick and well made. A real treasure could be behind a door such as this.

The third door, located at the far right, is very simple in appearance. It appears to be made of a type of wood. The door handle is long and flat and seems to be made of gold. You feel the obvious contradiction of the opulence of the handle versus the banality of the door itself.

Each of the doors has a sign above it with alien writing inscribed. The inscriptions might be of assistance to someone who could read them; alas, you cannot.



Gaykrell stands beside you as you study the doors. You wonder how you could possibly know which is the correct one. Sighing, she tells you that you are obviously not the One True Gamer. However, there is no time limit within which you must make your choice. Whenever you are ready, you need only choose the following option to try to answer the puzzle of the doors:

Continued 

(69PDBQ) (3 phases) Open one of the doors.

You thank Gaykrell for her time and return the way you came, thinking all the while about what the correct answer might be.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[788]

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.

However, in his haste to take leave of you the little guy appears to have dropped something. You pick up the greenish rock the alien was excavating but see nothing special. Not being the sort to leave anything potentially valuable behind, you tuck the ore safely into a pocket.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[789]

It takes you no time to accept Dr. Peterson's invitation to see "Sundown Road" on Norstar. You wouldn't miss this opportunity to find out how the Para-Parans manage to cross the Boundary.

The next morning finds you and Doc on the docking platforms on the surface of Para-Para. The trip across the Boundary will be made in a nondescript freighter boasting a two-person crew and six passengers. You notice that both the crew and your fellow passengers are wearing "traveling clothes." They're definitely going for that "anonymous" look, so popular with the smuggling set. It's your first tip-off that the trip across the Boundary isn't a sure thing, and nobody on board wants to get caught in an obvious Para-Paran uniform. You take a few minutes to secure your own ship, which will remain docked on Para-Para while you're away.

The freighter is a small, fast ship; with six people on it, it's a small, fast, crowded ship. Luckily, your fellow passengers are friendly and don't seem to mind. You spend hours swapping stories and conversation. You learn that these trips aren't frequent. There's usually only one scheduled run every month. This isn't a cargo van; these "taxi" trips are for getting people from Para-Para to the Nine Worlds and *vice versa*. Cargo requires large cargo holds, which make a ship slower and therefore easier to detect. It's much easier to break the Boundary in a small ship.

It seems that it's an old Para-Paran custom to refer to the meal eaten just before crossing the Boundary as their "last meal." It's also traditional to serve the best food and the best drink at hand. Fortunately, one of the passengers has come equipped with two bottles of something light blue. Somebody cracks a joke about biochemists (you figure the formula recited was the punch line — real funny stuff these scientists, you betcha) and they start passing around little glasses. It could be just a trick of the lighting or the stuff could be fluorescent. You take a sip and pronounce it a stiff drink. The captain and her first mate toast the company. However, when the mate seems ready to take a second glass, the captain vetoes it.

Toast follows toast, and in an attempt to get up from the table, you clumsily knock it over. Everything winds up in a broken heap on the floor except half a bottle of the light blue liquid, which you miraculously manage to salvage. You hide the "miracle" bottle and a few hours later offer it as a surprise present to the first mate.

Just before the ship is about to run the Boundary, the captain asks you if you would be so kind as to fill in for the first mate. She knows it is an imposition, but you are the only pilot among the passengers, and your assistance would be appreciated. You assure her it's no trouble at all.

Crossing the Boundary in this freighter is a lot like crossing the Boundary in your ship — keep your eyes peeled and run like hell — with one important addition: in front of you, on the first mate's screen, is classified Space Patrol information concerning the whereabouts and schedule of each Patrol ship in this sector. No wonder the Para-Parans can cross the Boundary so often without incident. They know beforehand when and where the Patrol cruisers will be. You check the readout carefully, noting that it's dated for this week and that the computer holds records dated for the next two weeks. You have no idea how the Para-Parans get Space Patrol information. Do they steal it? Buy it? Trade for it? Is it just given to them?

The rest of the trip to Norstar goes quickly. The freighter lands with false registration, and no one ever blinks an eye. You and Doc have a great time. "Sundown Road" is everything the critics said it was. When you board the freighter for the return trip across the Boundary, you notice that you and Doc are the only original passengers present. The other four will probably catch a later "taxi;" in the meantime, four new passengers have taken their place. Upon your arrival at Para-Para, you say a fond farewell to Dr. Peterson. You locate your own ship and carry on.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[790]

Josuel leads you to the Disciple's quarters in a repaired ruin on the fringes of the spaceport. The Disciple is seated in the sunlight in front of the structure, writing in a journal. He is dressed in the costume of a Disciple-Acolyte of the Final Church of Man. Surprised to meet a cleric of the Church outside the Boundary, you greet the Disciple and try to ask him questions. He does not respond. You try again, and finally he looks up and says: "I am here by the sanctified authority of the Church, performing a personal penance on the world where the truths of the Final Church of Man were brought to light. Your companion" — he nods to Josuel — "was born here, and remains here as a result of the sins of his ancestors, who chose to stay on this world when the Word of God decreed that men should return to their homeworlds. You, spacefarer, should not be here. The Church cannot stop you from traveling in space, but whatever you seek there you will find damnation instead. And you are not welcome on this holy world."


Josuel shrugs apologetically to you. Clearly the Disciple is not in the mood for conversation.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[791]

When you ask for Dr. Schottky, the receptionist in Logistics asks you to come with him. He escorts you to the entrance to the Lateral Liaison Area. A security guard there takes you through several mirrored corridors to a large office where she announces you, "Doctor Schottky, Captain Turner has arrived."

"Come in, Captain. Come in and sit down. I'm Doctor Schottky, head of Records Acquisition and Alien Artifacts Recovery. We're delighted you could join us. We've really been looking forward to it. Won't you come in and sit down? Make yourself comfortable."

Continued 

Although there's no one else in the room, Dr. Schottky continues to refer to himself as "we." Like his office, Dr. Schottky is large and expansive. He offers you everything from drinks to a full dinner, and when he's satisfied that there really isn't anything else he could possibly do for you, he finally gets down to business.

"We've heard a great deal about you, Captain Turner, but knowing the Admiral, I suppose you know nothing about us. We are the Institute for Space Exploration. For the last three centuries, the ISE has tried to broaden man's knowledge of the galaxy and equip him to explore it. The situation being what it is on the Nine Worlds, it was decided years ago that if we were ever to fulfill our chartered purpose, we would have to relocate outside the Boundary. Here on Para-Para we've continued our research into space drive engines and other necessary technology. Every attempt is made to collect, preserve and categorize information about our galaxy. There are some fascinating things to learn out there, Turner. Here, look at this."

He tosses you a yellow ball. It arcs through the air in slow motion and when you make a grab for it, it deforms a little and zips away from you. It hovers in the air in front of you, bobbing up, down, or sideways each time you try to grasp it, always eluding you. You try going after it very slowly, and that seems to give you some control. You still can't actually touch it. It reminds you of what it feels like to try and chase around a ball of mercury. Eventually you get some control over it by learning to hem it in between your open hands, as if you were squeezing it between invisible springs in the palms of your hands.

"That little gizmo is from an unchartered alien world. We don't have any idea yet how it works. We're not even sure if it's a manufactured item or a natural phenomenon. We can guess that it's some kind of anti-gravity generator, but we don't really know yet. The spacer who brought this to us couldn't speak the native language, so he has no idea what it is. We've sent one of our own exploration vessels out to look into this. Hopefully, they'll bring the answers back with them. There are answers to uncounted questions we don't even know enough to ask yet. Believe me, there's vital information within man's reach if we're not stopped from attaining it. And that brings us to why you're here."

Doctor Schottky continues earnestly, "Someone who calls himself Silverbeard is committing acts of piracy in the galactic Fringe. He's thwarting exploration and making deep space trading even more risky than it is to begin with. At this critical juncture, when so much of science and our understanding of the universe is literally pushed forward by man's physical expansion into the galaxy, at this time when single voyages into the unknown carry with them the future of their race, enemies like Silverbeard become grotesque."

"So that's what I'm here for — to catch a pirate?"

"You'll be doing more than that, Captain. You'll be advancing the causes of science and humanity. Silverbeard is a bigger menace than you think. So long as he's able to stymie mankind's attempts at trade and exploration, he's stopping our progress. He's robbing our whole race of its right to aspire, to seek, to learn."

"And after I rid the universe of this menace, what's in it for me — beyond the gratitude of an entire race?"

"A tri-axis drive."

The Doctor paused for effect, but he didn't have to. You'd heard about the theoretical tri-axis drive years ago at the Space Academy. It would be faster, more dependable, more durable, more desirable than any other hypothesized drive engine.

"We have reason to believe that his ship has one," Schottky continued. "We'll want to examine it of course, but the drive will be yours. And there is a reward, donated by interested parties, payable upon the delivery of his ship."

"You mean his person — Silverbeard himself."

"What? Well... yes, Silverbeard — and his ship!"

The conversation moves on to how much is known about Silverbeard. Forty reported cases, five recent and thirty-five from "the files," establish that he attacks while both he and the victim's ship are in hyperdrive. No noticeable damage has ever been inflicted on his ship.

Silverbeard's ship does use some alien weaponry, although eyewitness accounts hold that Silverbeard himself is human. Inevitably he can outrun and outgun his victims.

Attracting Silverbeard should be easy — just haul valuable cargo on long, lonely voyages in uncharted space. Equipping your ship to enable you to effectively combat him is another matter. Schottky urges you to search out alien technology as a means of improving your ship's capabilities.

Your ship is loaded with some cargo. Although you had been expecting to transfer the cargo to Schottky, he tells you that it's yours to keep; it should start you off and help you to establish a cover identity as a smuggler. As Doctor Schottky has explained, you have been secretly hired by the ISE to apprehend Silverbeard. When you do confront him, however, you will be acting as a private citizen, with no "authority" from anywhere. The ISE will disavow any knowledge of you or this assignment. You will operate as a smuggler, trying to find out as much as you can about Silverbeard through his victims, other smugglers. Eventually, you must find a way to defeat him.

Dr. Schottky recommends that you start by visiting Wellmet, the trade center of the Ghost Worlds. There you can orient yourself and get ready to set out on your own.

When you accomplish your mission, you should return here and repeat the option:

⟨SUWOGF⟩ (4 phases) Contact Dr. Schottky.

Good luck.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[792]

What a battle! Hit after masterful hit, blood flowing from well-placed blows. Too bad it's you being hit and your blood that's flowing.

The monster is just too tough for you. Unless you want to become a permanent part of the ecosystem, you'd better make a hasty retreat.

Fortunately the monster doesn't seem inclined to follow you. It probably isn't very hungry yet, since it didn't get much of a workout just now.

It is 5 days before you are able to limp back to the ship, where you are healed by the wonderful instruments in your sickbay.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[793]

Working together, dividing and confusing their attacks, you soon disable every single one of the battle satellites. With your multiple attacks, the swarming tactic the satellites employed isn't as effective. Meanwhile, your capability to destroy the satellites or disable their robotic brains is more than equal to the task. Since the battle stations can't swarm you, you can attack them a few at a time, and thus maintain the upper hand.

As the last of the satellites goes dead, a new alert flashes on your screen. A cluster of missiles is rising from the atmosphere of Wellmet. On your com link you hear Silverbeard's voice:

"Har, har, har! Ye scurvy bilge rats'll pay for sinking my buoys. Maybe these'll foul your rigging! Har, har, har!"

Another cluster of missiles rises, following the wake of the first. As they rise they spread out in complex patterns, each following the peculiar maneuvering commands programmed into it. Some loop around the far side of the planet, others stream toward you in lethally efficient arcs. These aren't ordinary missiles. They move even faster than a ship on thrusters. You shudder to think that they might be propelled by hyperdrive.

Your force has two choices: to scatter and evade the missiles, or to hold formation and combine the capabilities of all your defense systems. A quick computer analysis shows that combining forces is more likely to be effective in this case. It will allow every ship's defense system a chance to affect every missile. The other alternative, scattering, would inevitably result in each ship being forced to run away from the planet.

As the missiles' widely curved trajectories bring them closer, you begin evasive action, but that will only buy time. It is your other defenses that you're counting on now. The distance closes, and you brace yourself. . .

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[794]

Excited about the possibility of showing the Darscian demons your superiority, you fire up your ship's engines and fly over to the largest, most populated dome. You transmit a message over the radio: "Darscian demons, surrender or be pulverized!" They don't answer, so you let them have it.

Unfortunately, your weapons do not have much effect on the dome. Apparently, the material the Darscians used to guard against Ioreth's environment is also sufficient protection against your ship. Damn those Darscians! They're countering your every move.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[795]

Everything goes black.

You wake up later, apparently still alive, and begin to work on patching up your battered ship. By the end of the week you have repaired things well enough to navigate. You'll have to avoid this particular area of space in the future, unless you improve your ship's offensive and defensive capabilities.

Because of the damages to your ship, the attempted landing has taken eleven phases instead of seven.

✂ STOP ✂

[796]

Having explored a good part of the immediate area and found only orange plants, you decide to find one of the blue streaks you saw from space and see how it differs. You take your ship up to survey a little more, then head for a landing next to a discolored zone.

On foot, you see an end ahead to the orange plant life. There is a blue haze just at the point where the orange color stops. As you proceed you discover that the blue color is the result of an atmospheric phenomenon that looks like a blue fog. Beneath the fog the plants are as orange as everywhere else. You put on breathing gear as you enter the fog.

Inside the fog cloud feels like being inside any normal fog cloud: damp. You figure that the composition of the blue cloud is mostly water. The fog might be the closest thing the planet has to rain. You take a few samples and continue on.

Before you realize it you have come out of the other side of the blue cloud — or rather, the cloud has blown over you. You flinch in the bright sunlight, clear your eyes, take a look around, and flinch again. You cannot believe what you are seeing.

It is staring at you menacingly, its eyes baleful, its long sinuous tail streaming out behind it. Considering its general shape, you would call it a serpent, were it not for the fact that its body is made of disconnected pieces moving in unison. Its tail is fifty meters long and averages three meters thick, but it's not all one piece. What you see is five meters of tail, then five meters of empty space, then five meters of tail, and so on. The tail segments are shaped like short sausages and have scales on all sides, but they move as if they were all part of the same tail: undulations pass from segment to segment as it writhes its body, and some segments float in mid-air, seemingly held there by the arches of the whole body. The head is the most fearsome of all, for it has strong jaws and sharp fangs and a long, flexible tongue that tastes the air continuously.

By the time you take this all in, the creature is already moving in to attack.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[797]

Setting to work with the most likely-looking pieces of twisted and mangled machinery from the center of the dome, you begin an effort spanning several days to reconstruct the hypothetical force field generator which must have been used to support the dome's flimsy structure. You hope to learn enough to build a similar system for your ship.

Several days later you are still studying blasted machine parts, but at least now you know that your guess about a shield generator was correct. Although none of the original parts are presently in working order, you have managed to draw up a set of blueprints that should allow you to build a ship shield generator, if you can gather the necessary components.

You will need one unit each of Phase Steel, Warp Core, Munitions, Fluids, Radioactives, and Fiber. Once you are in possession of all these things, you know that you can assemble a working Ship Shield Generator. When you have all of the components, choose the following option:

(DMQN8J) Build a Ship Shield Generator.

Please make a note of this action code; it is an "unlisted" action, so you will need to enter the code manually when you are ready to build a Shield Generator.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[798]

The tall man, who had listened silently throughout the conversation, suddenly interrupts you. "Do you really want to know what's out here beyond the Boundary?"

You open your mouth to say "no thanks," but Corin has already taken the bait. "Sure. What?"

"Empty space," he answers. "More empty space than you can imagine. And here and there, just often enough to keep it from being totally empty, a star. Now, some of these stars have planets. Maybe one in eighty. More, if you count worthless silica asteroids. Less, if you leave out worthless gas giants. Of course, the stars with planets look the same through a scanner as the ones without. You can only tell by going there, unless you want to observe the same star from a stationary point for a year or so. It's faster to go there: takes maybe two weeks there and back on a careful course. That means a good explorer finds a planet about every three years. Of course, only about one planet in twenty has anything interesting on it, unless you're a geologist or a weatherman. The odds are worse if you're looking for anything that can make a profit in trade. That's why there aren't many explorers these days. Work it out: with a billion stars in the galaxy, there may be millions of good planets — but how are you going to find them?"

"So what's the point?" you ask. "Are you going to tell us we should work for you instead, hauling Iron through the Boundary?"

The tall man smiles. "Not at all," he says. "And not one of you could run the Boundary if your life depended on it. I'm just pointing out that you'll need help. Like these, for example." He drops six objects on the table: small squares two centimeters on a side that scatter light like laser armor.

The professor looks at the sparkling chips. "Computer software?"

"Star maps," says the tall man. "Six of them, each covering one sixth of the region of the galaxy once known as the Fringe. Star maps that any other person in this bar would kill for."

"They'd kill you for trying to swindle them," Turner growls. "I suppose you're going to tell us that these are the lost maps of Vanessa Chang?"

"Of course."

"And expect us to buy them from you?"

"Not at all. They are yours."

Valentine looks the man over as if trying to place his face from the roster of known lunatics. Corin says, "Don't talk stupid. If those were Vanessa Chang's maps you wouldn't be giving them away."

"On the contrary. I have to give them away. Who could possibly afford to buy them?" The tall man leaves the table and walks out of the Slippery Silver.

The rest of you stay at your seats. No one speaks for a few minutes. Then you say: "It's some sort of practical joke. They want to see if they can make us fight over the chips."

"You're right," says Valentine. "Why don't I just take these and get rid of them?"

The Professor catches Valentine's hand in midair. "Not so fast. I think perhaps that I should take them and examine them first. Then I'll let you know if they are of any value."

"Good idea," Clerc points out, "but I believe that the equipment on my ship is more suitable to the task."

Turner signals the bartender. "It's getting a little stuffy in here; would you mind turning up the air conditioning?"

Eventually, you each take one piece at random and arrange to make five copies. After checking the copies against the original and distributing them, everyone ends up with one of the originals and a copy of each of the other five pieces. Thus, you have a "complete" set.

It is very late at night by the time you return to your ship with your shiny wafers. You load them into your computer and request a decryption analysis.

"Most ingenious," says the computer. "Each chip seems to contain the same basic information, but coded in such a way that no one chip can be decoded without each of the other five."

"You mean, without all six chips you couldn't read any of them?"

"I believe I just said that."

"Okay, so what's on it? A message reading 'Fooled you, Sucker?'"

The computer, for an answer, displays a picture on your main viewscreen. It is a star map, showing the locations of forty planets, with detailed coordinates for each.

"Well, gag me with a Warp Core! Is it real?"

"I have no way to ascertain that. It has all the necessary information that a star map incorporates, including orbital motion data for predicting the current locations of planets based on their positions when the map was made."

"When was that?"

"Three hundred seven years ago."

You contact your former companions by ship-to-ship radio and ask what they think of the map. Their reactions are closely guarded. (“... Well, I certainly intend to investigate it, whenever I’ve finished with my current business...” while in the background you hear drive tubes warming up.) Before you part company, you agree to set aside a common skip-radio frequency between your ships. That way you can talk to each other whenever you want (of course, neither you nor they are obliged to answer or give out any information you don’t want to).

If someone hasn’t already done so, break the seal on the document marked “Document Two” and open it. Spread it out on a table or other surface where everyone can see it.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[799]

Entering the Dry Gulch Saloon you notice the sawdust on the floor and the peanut shells sprinkled across the tables. At least the place has atmosphere.

You strike up a conversation with the bartender and spend the next hour or so swapping stories.

Soon you are joined by an old codger who introduces herself as “Shorty.” She listens to you and the barkeep for awhile, then gradually adds her own adventures to the stories that are flying fast and thick through the air.

You listen, fascinated, to what she has to say. Why, if only half of it were true, she would have lived a life filled with more adventures than most people dream of.

Shorty has been to most of the worlds in the immediate area, and even to some farther out. She is willing to give you some hard data on the Ghost Worlds.

You learn the following:

Supa is, of course, an agricultural world, providing all of its own Food as well as the Food for many of the other planets in the area.

Wellmet is probably the most important of the Ghost Worlds, in that it is the center for all of the smuggling activity into the Nine Worlds. Munitions are also available for trade there.

Para-Para is physically an unfriendly place, but the powers that be have built an enormous complex of enclosed cities and work areas; they do some sort of space-related research. You can trade for Fuel there.

Moiran is a seedy colony, with little to recommend it to anyone looking for a place to settle. Their trade commodity is Crystals.

Cathedral is a pitiful colony abandoned by anyone with any sense. Of course, humans being what they are, a settlement still exists there and they will trade you Fiber. The Final Church of Man had some interest in the place a long time ago, but Shorty isn’t sure why.

Crater is a dangerous colony to visit, for they are overly suspicious of anyone who wants to land there. They have Tools for trade and probably something else of value. Why else would they have made their entire colony into a fortress?

Gen is Earth-like in size, but predominantly desert. There are two big cities near the ocean, and some sort of secret Brotherhood that no one will say much about. Their only commodity for trade is Culture.

Bugeye is aptly named, for its insect population is literally innumerable. The human colonies are located only in the polar regions, although there are some bug research projects in the muddy jungles. They are a good source of Fuel, which is traded generously.

Medsun has a human colony as well as an alien race inhabiting the planet. This strange set-up is, for some reason, quite successful — the two races are able to cohabitate with no ill effects. Not at all the norm for humans. They are willing to trade Culture with anyone who lands on their world.

Shorty also has a piece of information about Vanessa Chang that you may find to be invaluable. She has come across a story that says Chang had an alien spaceship she was piloting back to Earth from somewhere out toward the core when she was forced to crash land on a planet called Fiara. Shorty has never been to that world herself to confirm if this story is true or not, but she tells you it may be worth your while to check it out, if you are ever in the vicinity.

☒ STOP ☒

[800]

HOW TO PLAN TURN 2


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

Planet Log			
Planet Name:	Medsun		
Actions Available:			
Code	Phases	Description	Repeat?
EPMBNY	3	market	
UPOBFY	4	history	
AP6BPY	1	museum	
E9MDNQ	6	Academy	

Now you need to judge which of these options, if any, you wish to do. Since this is your introduction, we have taken the liberty of deciding for you. Don't worry — you'll be on your own soon enough!

You decide that information is what you really need right now, so you elect to visit the Academy in the hopes of discovering something of importance to your quest. To do so, plot on your sheet the 6-character code for the Academy. It's a six phase action, so don't forget to mark off the 5 phases you are borrowing in your next turn!

This is what your plotting sheet should now look like:

Continued 

Plotting Sheet							
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7
TURN							
1	T	O	V	G	B	O	L
2	—	—	—	—	—	—	A: E9MDNQ
3	—	—	—	—	—		

HOW TO ENTER PLOTS FOR TURN 2

Go to the computer and log on. Press **A** for Action, and select the 6-character code for the Academy; in this case it is **E9MDNQ**, which can be selected by pressing **C**.

Note that as soon as you type **A**, the display changes to show all the action codes available to you on Medsun. When you are done selecting the action code, the display will revert to the plot editor. This enables you to continue with the rest of your plots. Of course, since you have used up your allotment of phases for this turn, you have nothing else to enter.

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

HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 2

The computer will evaluate your moves and see if you were able to complete them successfully. In this case, you are able to make your way to the Academy. Write down the text number(s) it gives you, in this case **325**, then press Return or **F** to release the computer for the next player. Then read the text and see what's happening to you now!

When you finish your visit to the Academy, don't forget to update your Planet Log with the new option that was offered to you.

Planet Log			
Planet Name:	Medsun		
Actions Available:			
Code	Phases	Description	Repeat?
EPMBNY	3	market	
UPOBFY	4	history	
AP6BPY	1	museum	
E9MDNQ	6	Academy	no
U9ODFQ	9	Phrmm	

Finally, get the second piece of text, number **388**, so that your adventure can continue!

⊠ STOP ⊠

[801]

You are not sure how to begin investigating the red aliens. Your computer analysis of their movements tells you only that a large group of them moved towards your ship as soon as you entered the atmosphere. The creatures swarmed around your craft, flying at speeds ranging from 100 to 300 kilometers per hour, until you crashed. Then they retreated.

It is possible that they attacked your ship because they regarded you as a threat. On the other hand, perhaps they were merely attracted to the energy given off by your vessel. Or maybe it was something else. You just don't know.

In order to learn more about the red aliens, you decide to walk towards the nearest source of red light on the landscape. As you get closer, you can make out a couple of blurry red forms flitting about. You can't see any details of their bodies, since they are moving too fast. You try reaching out with a pole to touch one, but the creature either flies around your pole or right through it, since you don't feel any contact.

You are wondering what else you can do when you notice a much brighter blotch of red off on the horizon. Curious, you start to walk towards it.

After a while, you notice there are more red things flying around. Some are flying this way, and some that way. There are also a few blue things, but not too many. You keep walking. The more you walk, the more red things there are. They're flying up and down now. Up and down and up and down. What's that beeping sound? Now there's a whole stream of them. A big red stream flying down into the ground. All you can see is red. The beeping is getting louder. The red things are flying faster. Louder. Faster.

Wait! That beeping is some kind of alarm. You close your eyes. You stop walking. You try to clear your head. It doesn't work. You can still see the red things. They're flying all around you. You can't get them out of your eyes. You start walking back in the direction you came. There are fewer red things. You keep walking. The beeping gets softer. Then you realize what the beeping is.

The beeping is your space suit's radiation warning. You must have walked directly into an active radiation zone! You are lucky to have survived. In fact, your radiation meter shows that you exposed yourself to a very dangerous dose of full-spectrum radiation. If you had remained in the hot zone any longer, you would have been dead. Somehow, you got so hypnotized by the aliens that you stopped looking at your environment gauges, and almost ignored the radiation alarm until it was too late. As it is, you will have to subject yourself to painful anti-radiation treatment to prevent long-term damage to your nervous and circulatory systems. You are not looking forward to it.

As you walk back to your ship, you begin to make some sense out of the aliens' behavior. Apparently, the planet has large, open deposits of high-intensity radioactives, and the red aliens feed on the radioactive energy. That explains the large number of aliens near the radiation site. It also explains why the aliens surrounded your ship. They were attracted to your ship because of the radioactive energy given off by your fuel exhaust. Perhaps they were even able to feed on your ship's energy. No wonder your ship's energy level was so low.

When you get to your ship, you wonder if it might not be possible to harness the radioactives deposit that you just discovered. After all, if the aliens can feed on your ship's energy as well as their native radioactives, then their radioactives are probably a useful commodity for you. Open deposits of radioactives are not very hard to mine. You ought to be able to extract a unit of radioactives in about three days. To do this, select the following option:

(BOYF9I) (3 phases) Mine radioactives.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[802]

The Storage Station's armor, weapons, and navigation systems all go up together in a most impressive display of cosmic pyrotechnics. You pat yourself on the back for a job well done, although you concede that your ship's combat capabilities were of some assistance. Not surprisingly, the broadcast message has stopped, but in the aftermath of your successful attack, the station's physical structure has managed to remain largely intact. A scan of the interior shows that it can still support a modest weightload. Clearly there is some potential here for material gain; after all, to the victor belong the spoils. If you would like to take a look inside, plot the following option:

⟨GFEIM7⟩ (3 phases) Explore the interior of the wreck.

✂ STOP ✂

[803]

You ask the right-spinner named Shearsy how you can get to the left-spinner village.

Since the alien trusts you not to tell its enemies about what you have learned, it agrees to take you to the village outskirts where they leave their left-spinning children. There you will find a left-spinner to take you into the village.

The trip turns out to be uneventful, and you soon arrive at your destination. Shearsy bids you farewell and tells you that you are welcome at their city anytime. The right-spinner then spins silently off into the jungle, leaving you alone.

You head off in the direction Shearsy indicated, and before long you meet a left-spinner. You believe the alien is surprised to see you, but it is impossible to know, since the creature is not equipped with a translator.

It motions for you to follow.

As you enter the village, another left-spinner approaches.

"I am called BarrBurr," the alien says to you. "I wish to apologize for the misunderstanding we seem to have suffered in the city." Apparently BarrBurr was the "welcoming" leftie who led the club-wielding mob that greeted you on your arrival.

The alien sees your distrustful look and tries to reassure you. "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 who invariably carry a great deal of technology with them. We only wish to ensure that the minimum amount of technology is brought onto our planet. We are sorry you thought we were attacking you."

"All right," you respond. "Maybe we could start over again."

The alien seems to be relieved and asks you to accompany it to its home. You agree.

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. BarrBurr makes a good tour guide, though, and you soon have a good idea of the new options available here.

You now have the following options:

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

⟨KEVMKN⟩ (7 phases) Return to the right-spinners' village.

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

Go now to the CGM.

✠ STOP ✠

[804]

Your return to the poisonous world Ioreth is a smooth one, since you speak High Darscian and know exactly what to do. When the spaceport doesn't answer your radio messages, you figure that their radio equipment is still broken. So, you land at the spaceport and proceed directly to the central dome.

After a quick chat with Erdis, who remembers you from last time, you are ready to go about your business in the city. You have the same options as before.

☒ STOP ☒

[805]

The commodities market is located underground at the spaceport. There, a large confined area equipped with partial antigravity facilitates the handling of voluminous quantities of different goods. Manufactured items are ferried from the city to the market and back on fully-automated trains, while natural resources are transported from Fiara's wilderness on oversized versions of the bullet-shaped vehicle you have been using. A network of conveyor belts and freight elevators crisscrosses the market itself, so goods can be carried to and from spaceships parked anywhere in the spaceport. The system uses as little air transportation as possible, since flying in Fiara's tremendous gravity is difficult and expensive.

The Darscian colonists on Fiara do not have any chronic shortages of essential commodities since they have steady commerce with the other Darscian worlds, especially Darscold. However, they currently have a surplus of fiber, which they are willing to trade for the following:

3 Fiber for 1 Computers,

2 Fiber for 1 Medicine

1 Fiber for 1 Crystals.

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

☒ STOP ☒

[806]

You shut down your hyperdrives, and expect to see the so-called Storage Station Seven in your viewscreen and hear its blaring broadcast over your loudspeakers. Surprise — the satellite is still there, but it's not saying anything. Even though you are not in Kansas, it looks as though it's been hit by a tornado. Apparently someone has saved you the trouble of battling the station again. Of course, they've probably taken the spoils as well, but your curiosity is aroused. A scan of the interior shows that a modest weightload can still be supported. Maybe there'll be a little something left for you. To investigate this possibility, plot the following option:

(GFEIM7) (3 phases) Explore the Storage Station Seven wreck.

☒ STOP ☒

[807]

Money. Para-Para reeks of it. Every gleaming ultra-modern surface sports an obvious, if invisible, price tag. And it reads “unimaginably expensive.” This fabulous underground city, with its rhythmic crystal pillars and translucent walls, its reflective metal curves and high-tech accoutrements, is no mirrored fun house. It’s the ultimate in high-tech and high art. You almost expect to pay an admission fee. It seems so ethereal, so fragile. You wonder how the Para-Parans manage to keep it from shattering when they’re blowing away the other side of their planet.

At Logistics, you’re met with polite efficiency. Employees here wear the familiar spiral arm logo of the Institute for Space Exploration. Who would suspect that the ISE, known on the Nine Worlds as an organization that sponsors a few grant programs and scholarships, was administering a wealthy Ghost World planet?

Para-Para produces fuel, which they will trade as follows:

- 1 Fuel for 1 Computers,
- 2 Fuel for 1 Munitions,
- 3 Fuel for 1 Crystals.

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

✂ STOP ✂

[808]

You have chosen the same landing site that you used when you first visited the planet Ascension. Actually you are hoping the little alien you dubbed “Monty” is still around. You grew to like the alien on your first visit and would like to see him again. Besides, it doesn’t hurt to use the contacts that you’ve already set up.

Monty is the first and only alien to come to the ship. Given the Ascendants’ dislike of change you figure that they just didn’t want to send someone new.

Monty does seem happy to see you, though, and he is willing to help you in the same ways as before.

✂ STOP ✂

[809]

Standing in the middle of the market in Glissandor is like standing in the midst of a multitude of windchimes. You are content to spend a few hours just listening to the beautiful sounds around you, marred only by the occasional sound of fighting in the distance.

You then spend a few hours wandering around the market place seeing what is available for trade. You learn you may trade the following:

- 1 Fluids for 1 Food,
- 3 Fluids for 1 Munitions,
- 2 Fluids for 1 Medicine,
- 2 Fluids for 1 Iron.

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

✧ STOP ✧

[810]

It is soon clear neither side has an advantage and there is a pause in hostilities.

The alien you first encountered manages to spin its way to the front of the line and calls out to you.

"There has been a terrible misunderstanding here. Will you allow me to approach and try to explain?"

You signal agreement and the Tralisian cautiously makes its way toward you.

"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. "I wish to apologize for the misunderstanding we seem to have suffered here."

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, who invariably carry a great deal of technology with them. 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 further hostile action. 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 ⊠

[811]

You decide that a peaceful coexistence is better than all-out war, so you tell Silverbeard to come over and pick up his cargo. He graciously allows you to choose which commodities you are willing to give him.

The entire episode takes two phases before Silverbeard leaves you floating in space with his typical "Har, har, har!"

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[812]

Working together and concentrating your fire you quickly turn the first pair of battle satellites into useless orbiting lumps. Clearly these slow-moving robotic weapons are no match for your combined strength. You move to engage the next pair. They seem to be aware of your tactics and it takes a little longer to put them out of action. By then four more have moved into range, all behaving as if they'd learned something from the destruction of the first few. You alter your tactics, thus catching the next few off guard. But before you're finished with them ten more are moving in on your perimeter. They concentrate all their attacks on you, hypershells and plasma beams coming from all directions. You're forced to make some defensive maneuvers, which means you slacken off your attacks for a while. Seeing this, the satellites move in, and soon you're devoting all your effort and power to defending yourself. You barely manage to retreat with your ship intact.

Your analysis of the battle points to one conclusion: there are too many battle stations concentrating too much fire on too few of you. Your formation attack did succeed in dividing the satellites' strength and taking out the force initially deployed. Nevertheless, when reinforcements converged there were still too many for each of you to handle. Despite your best efforts, you found yourself surrounded by multiple enemies and forced to break off your attack. Perhaps if you had just one more attacking ship on your side. . .

While you work on repairing your sensor systems, heavily damaged in the battle, you consider whom else you might call upon to join your next attempt.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[813]

You sit forward in your chair, listening with every bit of concentration you possess for the next sound.

“Whibble whibble cheep cheep.”

You sit back a bit and pucker your lips, trying to imitate exactly the sound you have just heard, “Whibble wobble cheep cheep.”

“Close, Boss, I think you’ll have it soon.”

“Which one was that?” you ask.

“The Fuzzy Headed Sipper Bird,” is the reply.

“It sure is a tough one,” you comment as you prepare to try again.

“Just a minute, Boss,” interrupts your computer. “I am getting some new data from the program I’m using to decode hidden messages on Vanessa Chang’s map. Would you like to hear the report?”

You answer affirmative and you learn the following:

The substance known as Primordial Soup, although relatively rare, can be found on the planet Organu.

You write this new piece of information down, then get back to more important matters, like the call of the Fuzzy Headed Sipper Bird.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[814]

“Wait just a cotton-pickin’ second, boss. We aren’t going back to Tretiak!”

“Yes we are,” you tell your computer. “Prepare for landing.”

“But the atmosphere will rot your mind and melt my circuits!”

“The Super Space Suit will protect me just fine.”

“But what about me?” You didn’t think your computer had the circuitry to raise its voice.

“Close the door, and don’t breathe in.”

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

You land manually, near the big pink lake you remember from your last visit. You then carefully seal up all of your ship’s external sensors, tell your neurotic computer to go to sleep, and slip outside for a look around.

You don’t really remember what it looked like last time, but some of the features are surely similar. There’s the lake, of course, surrounded by what look like palm trees; there’s the garishly decorated landscape with vegetation in every conceivable color and shape; and there are the little green men who nod and say “hello” as you step out of your ship.

Your options are as follows:

⟨5ETMSN⟩ (3 phases) Talk with the little green men, and see if you can figure out how they know Earth Standard.

⟨LURO4F⟩ (4 phases) Wander down to the lake and try to determine why it's pink.

⟨5UTOSF⟩ (3 phases) Collect the fruit of the nearby 'palm' trees as a source of Fiber.

⟨PAB6YP⟩ (7 phases) Remove your Super Space Suit.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[815]

Trembling, you decide to place the helmet on your head once more. The searing pain you feel is almost enough to part your spirit from the confines of your oh-so-human flesh. With more willpower than you even dreamed you possessed, you manage to keep body and soul together.

You feel your mind expanding across many light years of conventional space, absorbing and becoming one with all that it touches. The cosmic drummer is out there, his beat quickened once more, and all humanity is being swept along in the tidal wave. Your mind is growing powerful beyond all imagining, and you have no idea why, except that somewhere, someone is doing this on purpose, changing the galaxy.

When you awaken you still have no idea why.

It is a full hour before you stop the trembling in your limbs and the heaving in your stomach. The aftereffects are much worse than before but you still feel you have more to learn. Do you dare try the helmet yet again?

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[816]

No matter how many times you visit the swamp, the odor doesn't get any better. You remain undaunted though, and continue on into the swamp. Your weapon is at the ready. No vile, ugly, slimy monster is going to catch you unaware *this* time!

You are noting the various landmarks as you pass by to make sure you're still on the correct path when you spot an interestingly shaped boulder. The huge stone reminds you of a large rock back home that had been shaped like a dinosaur. You would spend hours climbing and exploring that rock, sometimes pretending it was a castle to be scaled, or a fort to be defended, or a real dinosaur to be conquered.

Yes sirree, those were the days all right. Boy, this rock really does look like a dinosaur. You would have had a lot of fun with it as a child.

As you get closer you are thinking, "Boy this really, *really* looks like a dinosaur."

You can almost see it breathing.

It is breathing.

Oops.

The creature opens one monstrous eye and fixes you with a baleful glare. You have disturbed its nap. It is not pleased.

Armed with your wits (and, fortunately for you, your weapons), you prepare to do battle.

Go now to the CGM.

☒ STOP ☒

[817]

The jetcraft screams past you, seemingly from out of nowhere. You do your best to to escape damage from the attack but, between the unknown weapons and the jet flames which lick your ship as you wrench your craft out of its path, you do not fare very well.

Using all of your skill, you pull your ship out of its dive and head back out to space. You watch with apprehension in case the jetcraft decides to make another pass, but it seems to know it has done enough damage and is making its way home.

When you are sure you are safe from attack, you run a full diagnostic scan on your poor ship and brace yourself for the bad news. Finally the results are in. You grimace after reading the bottom line.

Oh well, it could be worse. At least you have most of the parts and tools to do the essential work; the rest of the damage is purely cosmetic.

Because of the repairs necessary, your attempted landing has taken ten phases instead of seven. Since the landing was unsuccessful, you remain in space in the trisector containing Gnarsh. You may attempt to land again if you wish.

☒ STOP ☒

[818]

You refuse to dignify the outrageous demand with a verbal reply. Instead, you swing your ship about and make your intent obvious — you will do battle with the villainous pirate.

You feel confident of your ability to at least defend yourself, even if you do not have the necessary offensive capabilities to actually defeat Silverbeard. You grimly begin firing your weapons.

After a while, you can see that you will not be able to overcome his defenses. Apparently Silverbeard has reached the same conclusion about you, because he fires an intense fusillade at your vessel which turns out to be merely a diversionary tactic. As you are defending yourself against this new onslaught, your enemy takes the opportunity to swing into full retreat.

Using evasive maneuvers that take your breath away, Silverbeard makes good his escape.

“Har, har, har,” you hear over your intercom as the ship disappears beyond detector range.

“Curses,” you mutter to yourself. “I’ll get you yet.” You are feeling like a fool for letting the pirate escape by using such a simple trick. This only serves to increase your resolve to capture Silverbeard and bring him and his ship back to Para-Para for study.

Continued ☒

Although you have not suffered any ship damage, you find you have strayed rather far during the course of the battle. You estimate that you will need an extra two phases to get back on your original course.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[819]

The offensive jetcraft is close enough for you to see down its weapons tubes. You spot the flash as its weapons are activated and wait with clenched teeth to be atomized.

And wait a little longer. Soon your jaws are getting tired from all of this clenching stuff and you loosen up a bit, especially as your attacker pulls up and veers off from the collision course. When the jetcraft turns and begins another strafing run at your ship, you are better prepared. You bring all of your weapons to bear and engulf the enemy in a deadly salvo.

With a satisfying “Boom!” the enemy ship explodes in a million tiny pieces. Although you do not consider yourself the bloodthirsty sort, you feel a great deal of satisfaction at the timely end of your former antagonist.

You run a quick check and, finding your ship undamaged, check to see if the jetcraft has any friends in the neighborhood with whom you will have to contend. The results are negative.

Next you attempt yet another call to the spaceport, this time with success. Following instructions, you land at the spaceport without further incident.

An animate thing, with hundreds of long, thin tentacles sprouting from the area you like to think of as the neck, is there to greet you when you disembark. After a moment’s hesitation, you correctly place the being as a Gnarshian and introduce yourself.

The creature tells you its name is “Sherzo” and apologizes for the rude treatment you received on your way planetward.

“You had the misfortune to run into the backward-thinking Staccator whom we must, perforce, try to annihilate. For reasons known only to themselves, these people make vicious attacks on anything that moves.”

The little Gnarshian sighs musically and shrugs about a dozen of its shoulders. You are enchanted by the wonderful sounds the creature makes and try not to stare.

Sherzo continues its musical interlude which you translate as, “We do welcome you to the city of Glissandor and if there is anything we may do to make your stay more comfortable, please ask.”

As you stand there with mouth agape, the little creature makes a fascinating wave motion with its tentacles then scurries away.

The spaceport is conveniently located in the heart of the city and, after taking some time to reconnoiter, you find yourself with the following options:

⟨MGNEJM⟩ (5 phases) Learn more about the war.

⟨6GPEBM⟩ (3 phases) Visit the local commodities market.

⟨MWNGJE⟩ (4 phases) See if you can buy any useful weapons.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[820]

You eventually make it to the Supra-Chiasmatic Nucleus, although you have a few rough moments along the way; anything as big as Feldo should really provide better directions to guests. The nucleus itself houses a heavily-armored organic computer module — part of Feldo's brain — built around a small bare room covered completely in some soft, gray, material.

"Come in," says Feldo.

You do so.

"Now sit in the center of the room in a comfortable position and relax your mind. I'm going to begin to teach you how to internally reorganize yourself. I have no idea how much you'll be able to learn, nor how useful it will turn out to be, but it ought to be interesting, in any case. Are you ready?"

You nod.

"Then let's begin."

The first few times you shift your heart to the other side you get quite sick, but then you learn the trick of cancelling out certain visceral nerve impulses during the actual shifting, so that in no time you can move your internal organs around with ease between your thorax and abdomen. You decide not to bother with the extremities, since displacement of muscles will tend to make it difficult to get around, but you do spend quite some time working on the head and neck region. Rather than physically transposing the brain with the salivary glands, you learn to shuffle the neural networks themselves around, so that you can suddenly switch your speech centers from the left to the right, or from the cerebral cortex to the ponto-medullary junction. Along the way you also learn to alter your appearance, especially your face, as well as your height and general build. Things like your hair and eye color, your actual genetic make-up, and the effects of poisons prove to be beyond your simple talents. As Feldo puts it:

"Better not mess around too much at the cellular level; you never know what feedback loop you might disrupt."

You have also figured out, during the course of instruction, just what use this will all be to you. Feldo had extruded a pseudopod, and was pointing it from place to place on your chest and abdomen where he wanted you to move your heart. All of a sudden it occurred to you that his pseudopod could be a weapon, and you could be shifting your vitals away from where it was aimed. Thereafter you concentrated on speed, as well as on the ability to form and move bony shields. The final result is a substantial improvement in your defensive capabilities.

You thank Feldo for his help, and begin to make the arduous journey back to your ship, still chuckling over his final words:

"Don't thank me; it's a skill you'll need to have when you grow to be as large as I am!"

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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