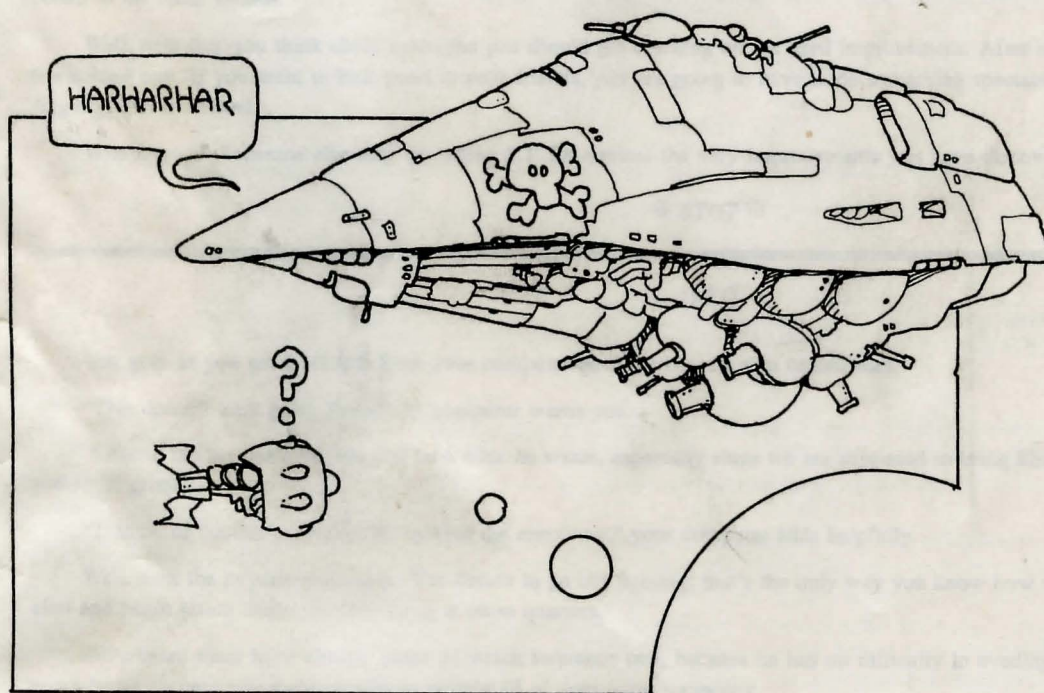
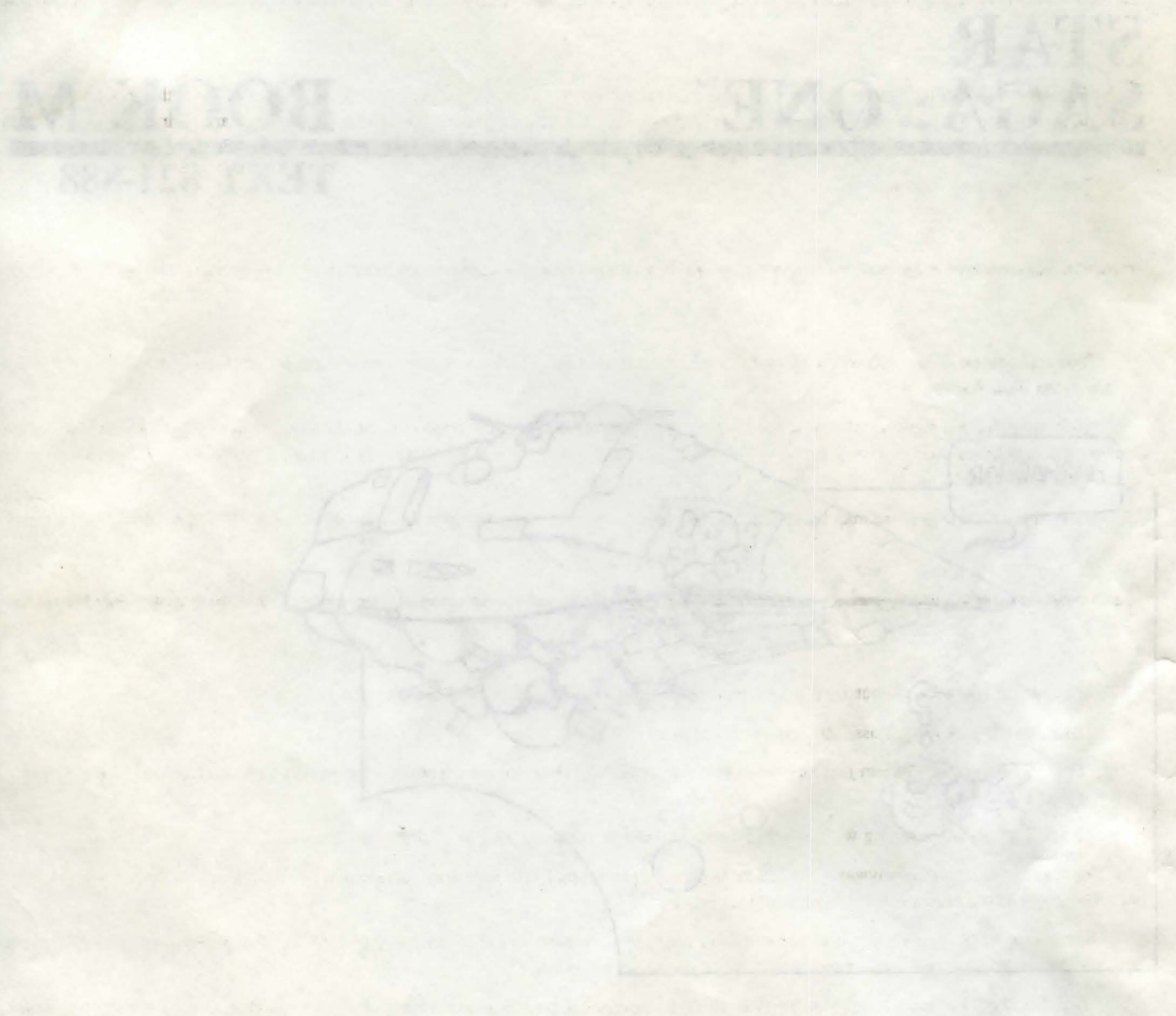


STAR SAGA: ONE™

BOOK M

TEXT 821-888





[821]

You feel no sensation of motion, and for an instant you think that the jump engine has failed to go transspace. Then the stars ahead of you swell up like they were going nova and the star field spreads until it surrounds you on all sides. Somehow you are seeing in every direction at once: your compartment turns inside out and recedes to infinity while the planet behind you collapses and peels away like an empty rind.

Read immediately text entry 567.

✧ STOP ✧

[822]

You feel you are doing well in the quest for your Dream ship since you have two of the three improvements you need before you can return to the Nine Worlds.

Well, now that you think about it, maybe you should get cracking on the third improvement. After all, it has been a while since you got the second one. If you want to look good to your friends, you are going to have to do something spectacular pretty soon or they are going to forget you ever existed.

Who knows? Someone else may be selling S.T. Enterprises the very improvements you have discovered. Where would that leave you?

✧ STOP ✧

[823]

You gulp as you get a readout from your computer on Silverbeard's ship capabilities.

"This doesn't look good, Boss," the computer warns you.

"I know, but we can't let him just take what he wants, especially since we are supposed to bring him and his ship in to the authorities," you reply grimly.


"That is, of course, assuming we survive the encounter," your computer adds helpfully.

Well, darn the torpedoes anyway. You decide to go out fighting; that's the only way you know how to work. So you put the ship on red alert and begin attack sequence two, firing at close quarters.

Silverbeard must have already heard of attack sequence two, because he has no difficulty in evading your shots. He returns fire with a much better success rate and manages to cripple all of your outer weaponry.

"Har, har, har," he chortles evilly as he turns to port, engages his grappling hooks onto your ship, and boards your vessel. You watch helplessly as he rummages through your cargo bays and takes everything of value, while holding you at bay with an enormous blaster. Leaving, he ridicules your attempted resistance.

"I'll never be beaten by the likes of you!" he exclaims as he boards his own vessel. "Har, har, har," he chortles as he heads off into the far reaches of space, free to continue his criminal ways.

Continued 

You have never felt so humiliated in your entire life, losing in battle to an old space pirate like Silverbeard. Your computer reminds you that this man has been the bane of space explorers since long before you came on the scene, and that you have really only just started your mission of putting an end to his terrorism. It doesn't help, though; you still feel like a failure.

"Boss," your computer begins, "I've been examining Silverbeard's ship readouts, and I think we can capture him when we have made some ship improvements of our own."

You ask what would be required, but all your computer can tell you is that you will need more speed and better armaments. There may be other improvements it is not presently aware of that would also be helpful. That is something you plan to keep an eye out for while you are exploring the planets in the Fringe.

You ask for the bad news regarding the ship's damages, and find that not only have you lost all your hard-earned cargo, but you have four phases of repairs ahead of you before you can safely travel. Resignedly, you set to work.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[824]

Listening to your ship's radio makes you feel like you are still connected somehow to humanity, even when all you hear is static. While in hyperspace, it is the only illusion you allow yourself.

Wait! Faintly in the depths of space someone is using their radio. Although you cannot connect with them, you listen anyway. At least you know there is still somebody out there.

There are actually two ships conversing but you are hard pressed to understand what they are saying. The static all but drowns out their voices.

What you can hear leads you to suspect these people are smugglers. You listen in and learn something of interest. One of the smugglers has just returned from the Human world Moiran located outside the Boundary. They have a cargo of Crystals from there that are of very high quality.

You make a note of this information and listen for a while longer. Unfortunately you don't hear anything else of interest.

✂ STOP ✂

[825]

In the end, you are forced to shoot one of the cat creatures with a tranquilizer before you are able to get close enough to examine it. Biologically it is surprisingly convergent with the mammals of Earth, although the differences that do exist are striking. In intelligence it would seem to be about as smart as a well-trained chimpanzee or a clever dog: able to communicate only with its own kind and in a non-linguistic way.

These creatures definitely cannot utilize the facilities of the cities. Perhaps at some time in the future they will have evolved enough to inherit the technological legacy that has been left behind.

✱ STOP ✱

[826]

You reflect on how lucky you have been in getting the necessary three units of Super Slip. You breathe a sigh of relief that the ordeal is finally over.

"Except," you think, feeling a cold chill of fear run down your back, "Except I haven't brought it to Heaven yet!"

You feel sick with worry. What about getting past the Boundary? Are your ship's capabilities good enough to beat the Space Patrol? There's only one way to find out.

✱ STOP ✱


[827]

The Firthians are proud of their biological skills and eager to talk about them. They explain that they have been evolving their bodies through a carefully planned program of selective breeding and genetic engineering in order to facilitate their dream of exploration anywhere and under any conditions.

Only fifty thousand years ago they lived on the bottom of the ocean and their bodies were much less adaptive. They required technological life support apparatus, like the kind you wear, just to travel to the surface of the ocean. When they experimented with space travel, they needed big, bulky spaceships which were very slow and difficult to build, since the ships had to be filled with water under high pressure.

While the Firthians were experimenting with the water-filled spaceships, they were attacked by a race of warlike aliens. The aliens were big, scaly, green creatures traveling in armed spaceships. The attackers were extremely ruthless and seemed bent on completely obliterating the Firthian race. The aliens' battleships easily crushed the Firthians' delicate water-filled vessels. The Firthians were forced to retreat to the bottom of the ocean and abandon space travel.

The experience with the alien invaders made the Firthians realize that they were ill-prepared for the forbidding environment of outer space. To meet the challenge, the Firthians decided on a plan to change their bodies to make them more adaptable. They wanted to be able to live on the surface of their ocean without sealing themselves inside pressurized water tanks and to travel in space with a minimum of life support equipment, in ships that were light, efficient, and fast.

Continued 

Their funny-looking bodies are the product of fifty thousand years of work towards these goals. The Firthians have two completely separate respiration systems, one for water and the other for air. They have special tissues in which they can store a full day's supply of oxygen, so they can spend time in poisonous atmospheres or outer space without having to breathe. They have both a bony inner skeleton, for maneuverability on the ground, and a hard exoskeleton, for protection from radiation, pressure, and caustic environments. Their eyes are located on long, mobile stalks that give them a complete, 360-degree field of view. They have internal sacs where they store waste gases which can be expelled under pressure, allowing them to move around in a vacuum.

They say that soon they will be able to move about in outer space as freely as they walk along the ocean floor or swim on the surface. Their spaceships will be so fast and efficient that no race of warriors will be able to catch them. The Firthians will be able to colonize worlds of all varieties. And their eugenics program will continue, so that each generation of Firthians will be better than the last.

You are so impressed by their biologically engineered bodies that you have them describe every appendage and every organ and explain how it works. You ask them if it might not be possible to build a space suit that duplicates the function of their bodies. Such a suit would be far more versatile than the one you have now.

They tell you that not only is it possible, but that it has already been done. Their genetic engineers have had to make such suits to test out new ideas before programming them into the Firthians' genes. Surely they could design a suit for a human. Of course, it would still be a space suit, not part of your body, but they agree that it would be a lot better than what you're using now.

It takes them only a few days to come up with the design for a Super Space Suit. They're quite proud of it, and assure you that the suit will not only be able to withstand all kinds of environments, it will also be very comfortable. Of course, you'll have to supply the necessary components and build the suit yourself, but the clarity and ingenuity of their design will make this a relatively easy chore. To build the suit, you'll need:

- 1 Primordial Soup,
- 1 Super Slip,
- 1 Food,
- 1 Medicine,
- 1 Fiber,
- 1 Fluids.

When you have all of the above items aboard your ship and you want to build the suit, plot the following option:

<H6AP6B> Build a Super Space Suit.

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 Super Space Suit.

You thank the Firthians for their help and wish them the best of luck when they venture into space again.

❖ STOP ❖

[828]

You decide you would rather trade first before you get sidetracked on anything else, so you direct the computer to take you up to the orbiting space station.

Not only does the station appear to be a model of organization and efficiency, but the very idea of using such a location for trade is attractive to the pragmatic space traveler, sort of a “convenience store” for offworld trading. In fact, it seems strangely apropos for Withel, although you’re not sure why.

Once again the computer is able to speak to the mechanized landing port and you arrive safely. You even get instructions on how to transact any trades you might wish to make.

After you get the “all clear” from your computer on the breathability of the atmosphere, you follow its directions and soon find yourself in a vast corridor lined with trade terminals. Your mind boggles at the amount of trade possible at any given moment should the terminals all be in use. The computer in charge of all this must be amazing!

The directions on the terminal are in easily understood pictographs. Withel has Iron for trade as per the following:

- 1 Iron for 1 Crystals,
- 2 Iron for 1 Medicine,
- 3 Iron for 1 Food.

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

⊗ STOP ⊗

[829]

“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 could 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.

Everything looks the way it did on your last visit. 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.

Continued 

You have the same options as before.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[830]

You cautiously enter the intriguing building and make your way over to the source of the strange humming sound.

You find an elaborate case in which an ornate helmet has been placed. The humming seems to come from a power pack which leads directly to the helmet. Whatever the helmet may do, it is still active.

You carefully pick the helmet up and gingerly place it on your head. For a moment nothing happens. Suddenly you “feel” a bright flash of light inside your head, and you lose all touch with the physical world.

You feel your consciousness expanding throughout the planet. You feel yourself freed from bodily constraints. Within minutes your soul is as one with the planet Baphi, with the tide-racked oceans, the endless carpet of algae, and the hidden volcanos. Relaxed, you feel the planet take you over.

And now you know there’s something not quite right about it all. You sense that something in Baphi is awakening, earlier than it should, in response to something coming from beyond the planet, something like the sunlight which bathes it every day, but from a source far more distant.

You struggle with the feeling, yearn like the rest of the planet for the moment when you can be truly awake. But it does not come; you need more time, or more of the . . . something . . . from beyond the planet.

You reach toward space, but find yourself awake instead, and pondering the meaning of what you have just experienced.

It is not easy, but you manage to remove the helmet before you can be lured back into the seductive dream world you have just left.

Your head is throbbing from the jolt of energy you received and you feel disjointed and lethargic. Although you feel you can learn something very important from the alien device, you are afraid of probable damage your brain is incurring from the helmet. It is not, after all, designed for use by humans.

Go now to the CGM.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[831]

Your curiosity is aroused by this geometric entity. Desirous of a detailed examination, but ever mindful of the tenuousness of your surroundings, you do not descend to the chamber floor but instead use your ability to levitate to float to within arm's reach of the octahedral mechanism.

You study the insides of the octahedron more closely. The mechanism looks almost like a navigation system, or perhaps an experiment in gravitation. It is clearly very sensitive. You describe it to your computer and ask for comparisons.

"It looks like it's configured to sense tidal forces, or the difference in gravitational force between the two spheres. Indirectly, that could give a good measure of a planet's orbital position."

"Suppose this is the trigger to a bomb deeper underground. Why would it be built like that?"

"If the purpose of the bomb were to deflect the planet's orbit, the point of minimum tidal forces could also be the point where a lateral force would cause maximum deflection."

"Why has it never gone off, then?"

"Unknown. It might have been slow to react, and the other five explosions altered the orbit before it had a chance to get the readings it wanted. Or it might have simply failed."

"Could it be set off accidentally? Could my presence here set it off?"

"It's quite possible. I think you are wise not to touch the floor."

You examine the octahedral sensor again, being very careful not to touch any of the support wires. You follow the cables from the sensor and shine your light down the shaft where they disappear. There is still nothing to see, but you can barely hear a faint humming noise. It might just be the air in the tube, but you get the feeling that something is still functioning in the depths below. This makes you even more uneasy, and you float back up the shaft as quickly and silently as you can. Not wanting to push your luck any further, you leave the artifact and close the hatch behind you.

✂ STOP ✂

[832]

You are blindfolded and placed on what sounds like a sandshuttle. After what seems like a day (they fed you three times), you are told to wait 10 minutes and remove your blindfold. Your task, you are told, is to survive until they return. You hear the brothers start to leave but one hesitates. He clasps your arm and says in a clear deep strong voice, "Remember my child, in order to follow the True Path to knowledge, one must first confront, then conquer, one's deepest fears." He releases your arm and turns to follow the others. You are totally alone.

When you remove your blindfold, you note that you have only the clothes on your back and a small canteen filled with water at your side. You appear to be in the middle of the desert with no clear path in sight except the trail of the shuttle which is faintly visible in the sand. You choose to designate the direction it heads in as North.

The only other thing in sight is a huge green plant, which stands well over six feet tall and largely resembles a Venus Flytrap. It periodically opens what appear to be jaws then quickly snaps them shut. It reminds you of something . . . a dimly lit cavern perhaps, with black-robed figures leading you to your doom?

You may:

A) Try to follow the path to the North.

B) Stay and wait for them to return.

C) Examine the plant.

Go now to the CGM.

✕ STOP ✕

[833]

You wake from one of the worst nightmares of your life, drenched in sweat, heart pounding.

You dreamed Silverbeard was after you, and all you had to defend yourself with was a popsicle stick. You hadn't even had time to sharpen the point.

The pirate took one look at your puny weapon and taunted you with his maniacal laugh, "Har, har, har! That's all you have to take me in with? I'll have to utterly destroy you for such audacity."

Reviewing the dream from the safety of the waking world, you decide that it was sent by your subconscious to try to warn you about the inadequacy of your ship's capabilities. After thinking about it, you realize your subconscious is right. If you want to capture Silverbeard, you are going to need a ship that is better than his.

"Hmmm," you think. "Maybe I should do something to improve my ship's weaponry and speed."

✕ STOP ✕

[834]

It doesn't take you very long to discover that the sciences of biology and medicine are not commonly studied in the Riallan cities. There are few symbols in the language relating to body parts or organs, and none at all to express the concepts of disease or injury. With no illnesses, the Riallans have no doctors or medical facilities and very little motivation to study the life sciences.

Riallans do die, however. The closest title you can find to "Doctor" is a string of chirps that translates roughly to "Coroner." There is one such individual in the city, and you decide to pay a visit. Due to another language problem, the Coroner isn't easy to find. When you try to ask, "where can I find the Coroner?" the question translates into a Riallan phrase meaning "Take cover, I am dying," which sends the fuzzy beachballs fleeing in all directions. Finally you work out the problem, and a suspicious Riallan directs you to a dome high in the city.

The Coroner is a fuzzy pastel-green Riallan, somewhat larger than average. When you enter the room, the Coroner is doing something you've never seen a Riallan do before: nothing. It is the first Riallan you've ever seen not rushing somewhere or busy with something or at least waiting impatiently for someone else. You cautiously begin, "Sorry to interrupt you. . .," which is the traditional phrase of greeting in the Riallan language.

"How may I serve you? Are you dying?"

"I hope not," you reply. You explain that you would like to learn about Riallan anatomy.

You spend several hours speaking with the Coroner, who seems uniquely unconcerned about the passage of time. You learn some things about the Riallans that help to explain the way they live.

The Riallan body is too alien for you to gain a concrete understanding of how it works, particularly where respiration and metabolic functions are concerned. It is not hollow or filled with gas; it is composed of water-based tissue just like your own body. However, instead of discrete organs interconnected by vascular tubing, the Riallan body is built of concentric spherical layers, with fluids that perfuse in and out between the layers, and a brain that is evenly distributed throughout the other tissues. The outermost layers can be broken or penetrated by solid objects without harm or discomfort, which allows food to be engulfed and artificial appendages to be partially inserted and manipulated from within. Sense organs are internal; you cannot fathom how they work, but they apparently process the same sorts of signals — chiefly sound and light — that your own senses do.

The strangest aspect of the Riallan organism is the life-cycle. Riallans have no predictable lifespan. Once a Riallan is past its ten-year developmental or "childhood" phase, its probability of surviving each successive day is the same. A young Riallan is no less — and no more — likely to die on any given day than one who has lived for centuries. The average lifespan is about fifty earth years, but the majority live fewer years; in the average, these are balanced by the few who live on for very long spans. In the case of injury, a Riallan either dies instantly or can be certain of complete recovery.

"It is no surprising wonder that most Riallans value time above all else. No one is assured of living through this day, or the next. Each day must certainly therefore be fully utilized."

"You seem different from the others in that regard," you tell the Coroner.

"I am one of the very oldest, which is why I am the Coroner. I can face and confront the concepts of mortality that the younger ones fear and avoid. I have done many things, and I no longer fear incompleteness."

There is one more thing that you are curious about: the ability of all Riallans to float in the air. You ask the Coroner how this is accomplished.

"That is not a question of physiology or anatomy. It is a purely mental cognitive function."

"Are you certain of that? Are you sure it isn't a biological process?"

"A dead Riallan ceases to float. Q. E. D."

"That doesn't prove anything," you reply. "A dead human can't stand upright, but standing isn't a purely mental function."

"It isn't?"

The Coroner offers to prove the point in the only conclusive way: to teach you the skill on a rudimentary level. It will require a week, "if you have the time."

If you have the time, you may plot:

(XAC6UP) (7 phases) Attempt to learn to levitate.

❖ STOP ❖

[835]

You defeat the beast, and after slaying it you cut out its multi-chambered heart and eat it raw, that being the tradition in your dreams. It actually tastes pretty foul, but you know how traditions are.

You also have a problem left over: what to do with the little puce alien? He seems passionately thankful to you for saving him, but you're not sure what to do about this. You try feeding him a little of the monster's flesh, which he likes well enough, and then wrap him up in your shirt and gently rock him to sleep. From this moment on he will be your absolute servant. You will find him useful as a good luck charm, of sorts, in battle.

Other than these minor points, nothing else of interest happens while you are crashed. In fact, you soon wake up to a world much like you remember from before you went to sleep.

Lucky you.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[836]

"Boss," your computer calls to you, interrupting your reading.

"Yes, what is it?" you ask, looking up from your book.

"I have a ship on my screen coming toward us at a very dangerous velocity. I highly recommend that evasive action be taken immediately, if not sooner."

Your computer certainly has a way of getting your attention.

You leap up from your chair, barking orders and making ready for battle.

"Er, Boss?" the computer asks, interrupting a particularly long and efficient-sounding string of commands of which you were, quite frankly, rather proud.

"...load the cannons... What is it now?" you snap.

"The ship has come to a halt alongside us and the captain wants to speak with you."

"Oh, well go ahead, I guess."

Your communication screen comes to life, revealing an elegantly dressed human male with silver hair and a neatly trimmed goatee.

"Greetings. I am the Captain of the ship which is now alongside yours. My ship is, I fear, in urgent need of resupply."

"Resupply?"

"That's correct. Some of my cargo bays have fallen empty. I was hoping you could lend me some assistance."

"What sort of assistance did you have in mind?" you ask suspiciously. You are beginning to get a bad feeling about this...

"Oh, I think three units of whatever commodities you have handy. Your choice, of course."

"Look, I don't mind lending you a hand if you need help but I don't think there's anything else I can do for you."

"It is I who am sorry. I have not explained myself very well, I'm afraid. You see, either you voluntarily give me the cargo or I shall be forced to take it from you — which would be a most regrettable turn of events."

"But that's piracy!" you sputter indignantly.

"Tsk, ts, such nasty language," the stranger chides. "And yet so true; allow me to introduce myself. I am called Silverbeard the Pirate."

He patiently waits for you to decide what you will do — fight or make a "donation."

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

[837]

The first flush of success from defeating Silverbeard is beginning to wear off, and you now feel something is wrong.

After mulling it over, you decide that it is because you are the only person who knows you have accomplished your mission. Maybe you would feel better if you returned to Para-Para and showed them the ship remains.

✧ STOP ✧

[838]

The planet Fiyar is this solar system's most outstanding feature. The sheer size of the thing is enough to pique your interest. You know what they say, good things come in big packages.

The computer readout tells you a lot about the place. First of all, Fiyar is a gas giant, composed mostly of helium, methane, hydrogen and ammonia. These substances are found in all three physical states.

Secondly, since the planet has no real surface to speak of, you are going to have some difficulty exploring. But explore you will, because you know such planets can be treasure troves, especially when it comes to finding fuels.

As you travel down toward the planet's core, you check the computer's analysis of the outer atmosphere. You find the expected gradient from the wisps of gas to the denser gas readings. You even begin to see the occasional solid pass by the ship. Due to the increasing denseness of the atmosphere, you slow the ship's descent and send a probe to test the conditions below.

The information that comes back indicates that the atmosphere is becoming more and more liquid in nature. If this is the case, the ultimate core might also be liquid, with the heat generated from Fiyar's own mass giving the semblance of a star rather than a planet. If this is the case, you are going to encounter some rough weather the farther down you go.

Since landing is not a viable alternative on such a planet, you find a calm weather system and "park" your ship. You begin an in-depth analysis of the immediate area. While the computer is searching for minerals, you spend the time looking for life forms. You cannot begin to imagine what the nature of such creatures would be, but you think it would be interesting to find out.

Although you haven't had any luck in your search, the computer has found several points of interest.

The first find involves an area nearby that is prime for mining fuel. The rich mass will yield a great deal of fuel, which you know to be a valuable commodity in the universe.

The second find involves faint readings of the substance warp core, used in hyperdrives.

You have the following options:

⟨PPBBYY⟩ (2 phases) Mine for fuel.

⟨9PDBQY⟩ (3 phases) Search for warp core.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[839]

You're usually not one to back away from a fight but the odds look just a little too steep on this one. You turn your ship in a graceful underside arc, avoiding blue-green laser bolts across your bow, and accelerate back toward Gironde. The reflectivity of the surface, you hope, will hide you from their sensors long enough for you to make a safe landing.

You make a safe landing. Unfortunately it isn't a good landing. You were perhaps just a little too impatient to set down, and your computer was too busy dodging and scanning to provide much help. The shock is not sufficient to deform your ship's hull but it jars your delicate sensors and a few other critical components. It takes you a few days to make repairs.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[840]

It does not take you long to set up a small refinery. The waste site is a tremendous source of Fluids. In the course of several days you manage to collect one cargo bay's worth and load it on your ship.

For every five phases you devote to Fluid bottling, you will receive one unit of Fluids. The supply is unlikely to run out in your lifetime.

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

[841]

Marking trail as you go, you explore the area for several days, examining the plants, the rocks, the rivers, the soil, and the air itself. It is amazing how such simple elements can combine to produce such a beautiful setting. You feel no pressure to hurry, nor do you fear any danger. The ground is easy to walk on. Always it seems that no matter how dark or thick a forest looks from a distance, there is an easy route through in the direction you are going.

Go now to the CGM.

✱ STOP ✱

[842]

HOW TO PLAN TURN 5

You have many options available to you now. This time you decide to stop off at the Slippery Silver Tavern to quench your thirst first, which will use one phase of your turn. Next, you will visit the market. Your plotting sheet should look like this:

Plotting Sheet							
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7
TURN							
1	T	B	V	O	Y	V	L
2	—	—	—	—	—	—	A: OWFGIE
3	—	—	—	T	Y	O	V
4	B	R	O	B	L	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	A: 8VHKAV	A: OFFII7	—
6							

"8VHKAV" is the action code for going to the Slippery Silver Tavern, and "OFFII7" is the action code for the market. These actions are one phase and two phases respectively, so you can fit them both in at the end of turn 5.

HOW TO PLOT TURN 5

Go to the computer, log on, and press A and then D (the D corresponds to the action code 8VHKAV) to go to the Tavern. Next, press A and then A again (the second A corresponds to the action code OFFII7) to get you to the market.

HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 5

When the computer has evaluated your move, it will send you to the Tavern text. After you have finished at the Tavern, you will be given the market text. Once you have read about the market, you will need to decide whether or not you wish to trade any of your cargo for what they have available here (you should note the trades available on your Planet Log for later reference). When you have decided what you wish to do, go to the computer, just as the text directs you to do, and log on. Your character log shows that you have a Market interaction pending with an asterisk. Press the asterisk key or Return to continue with the market. You now have the opportunity to make your first trade if you so wish. You are never obligated to exchange cargo or items at a market.

Planet Log

Planet Name: Wellmet

Actions Available:

Code	Phases	Description	Repeat?
OFFII7	2	market	yes
8FHIA7	4	weapons	
8VHKAV	1	tavern	yes
OVFKIV	3	history	
KFVIK7	4	information	
4FXIC7	3	family market	

Trades Offered:

They Sell	For
3 munitions	1 fuel
3 munitions	1 radioactives
1 munitions	1 culture
1 munitions	1 iron
1 munitions	1 medicine

Note that you should also add the new option you learned while at the market, namely the Torrence family market.

This concludes your character's first five turns. You should now have a good idea how to plot your moves on the computer. If you are still a bit uncertain, we recommend that you read the Rules section and/or CGM Guide in the *Host Guide and Player Reference Manual* or ask a helpful soul standing nearby. You should also have an indication of how important it is to write things down, especially the options available on each planet along with their action codes, what can be bought and sold at the market places, and how many phases each option takes.

Last but not least, always keep your character goals in mind — that is how you will win the game! Even at this early juncture, you feel that you have made some headway toward finding the long-lost Core Stone.

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

❖ STOP ❖

[843]

You mentally prepare yourself for the battle with Silverbeard. The wily old pirate has a ship well equipped for encounters like this, but you are not daunted. You have made a few improvements to your own vessel, and feel more than able to handle the villain.

The battle that ensues is short but fierce. When the smoke clears (figuratively speaking, that is), you are amazed that either of you survived. From the computer readouts, you can see that both of you are badly damaged.

Unfortunately, Silverbeard's ship is in better shape than yours, and he is able to force his way onto your vessel.

"And now I will get my tribute from you!" he cries in triumph.

You watch helplessly as he transfers all of your hard-earned cargo to his ship, holding you at bay with an enormous blaster. When he is finished, he thanks you for your hospitality. Then with his usual "Har, har, har" he zooms away in his wounded spaceship.

Ruefully, you turn and survey the damage to your own vessel; four phases of repairs are required before you can consider the ship usable in hyperspace. Sighing, you begin the task ahead of you.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[844]

With your Super Space Suit to protect you from the high pressure of the ocean floor, you are ready to travel to Thiros, the Firthians' biggest underwater city. The Firthians lead you to a heavy, rocket-powered vehicle which seats ten passengers. They strap you to your seat and close the hatch. The vehicle begins to move slowly, then suddenly accelerates and shoots through the ocean at high speed. The water inside the vehicle adjusts to the surrounding pressure of the ocean as you go deeper.

After about two hours of traveling, the water rocket slows down and stops. You have arrived at the city. You leave the vehicle and find yourself in a flat clearing on the ocean floor. A dim glow barely illuminates the area, creating an eerie watery gloom. You can just see far enough to make out some more of the water rocket vessels parked in the clearing. In addition, your infrared scanner shows many tall, cylindrical structures rising from the ocean floor around the edges of the clearing.

The Firthians tell you that the cylinders are buildings where Firthians work. The area around the landing field is used for building and servicing the water rockets. Beyond this area, there are many other industrial and residential areas. The city of Thiros has a population of over 30 million Firthians.

The most interesting part of the city you come across is a commercial area devoted to building space ships. Since the Firthians don't currently engage in any space travel, you are surprised to see such a large-scale effort in progress. Moreover, you can tell right away that the ships are pretty advanced.

You ask the Firthians what they are planning to do with the ships. They tell you that they are going to colonize a few nearby planets. They have been planning the operation for years, and they are almost ready. All they need to do is to finish building the ships and complete the next generation of genetically engineered Firthian bodies.

Since the Firthians seem to be more advanced than mankind in both chemistry and biology, you wonder if you might not learn something from their spaceship design. However, when you take a close look at one of the ships, you are disappointed to see that it won't be of much use to you. The ship has manual navigational controls, minimal sensory equipment, primitive computer intelligence, and of course, little in the way of life support equipment. But the worst part is the ship's drives, which can't possibly work. The only thing that looks at all useful is an interesting-looking beam weapon system built into the ship's hull.

When you point out that the ship's drives won't work because they don't have any power source or warp mechanism, the Firthians insist that their drives will work perfectly well. "The drives won't work now," they say, "but as the ambient dual space level rises, the drives will be able to take advantage of the probabilistic energy fields." When you ask them to explain what this means, they show you a whole bunch of math and physics that makes even less sense.

So, you turn your attention to the weapons system. The weapon looks like it would be a welcome addition to your ship, so you ask if you could have a copy of the design. They reply that they would actually like to give you one of the weapons, called a Phase Cannon, rather

than just the design. They have yet to test the Phase Cannon in space, so if you could take it with you and fire at a few practice targets they would appreciate it. That seems like a pretty good deal to you, so you accept their offer.

When you have finished your tour of the city, the Firthians take you back to the landing field. They lead you to one of the water rockets for the trip back to the surface. This time, however, they remove half of the seats to make room for the Phase Cannon system, which they load into the back of the vehicle. The journey back to your ship is uneventful. When you get there, the Firthians unload the Phase Cannon and help you to attach it to your ship's hull.

You take off in your ship and travel high into the atmosphere in order to test the weapon. The Firthians have set up targets on the surface of the ocean for you to shoot at. You spend half a day firing at the practice targets, and discover that the Phase Cannon is very useful for long distance attack. It shoots a very accurate laser-like beam that drills holes through thick shielding.

You radio your test results to the Firthians, who are happy to hear that the weapon works well. They thank you for your assistance, and you thank them for giving you such an effective weapon.

Go now to the CGM.

✱ STOP ✱

[845]

When you have your computer analyze the positions of the blue aliens, you notice a few patterns. First, the blue aliens are mostly stationary. When they first come into existence they move around a bit, but then they come to a stop and stay at a fixed location. Second, the blue aliens appear near groups of red aliens. The red aliens shift around for a while and some blue aliens appear, then the red aliens leave the blue ones behind. Third, there is a long trail of blue aliens marking the path that your ship took through the atmosphere. The blue aliens appeared where your ship went, and stayed there.

One theory to explain this behavior is that when the red aliens get excited, they somehow create the blue aliens. The red aliens are active; the blue aliens are passive. The red aliens swarmed about your ship during your descent, creating the blue aliens. The red aliens eventually flew away, but the blue aliens remained, marking your trail.

On a hunch, you scan the atmosphere to see if there are any other trails of blue aliens similar to yours. Perhaps other ships have crashed here, leaving streaks of blue aliens behind. Sure enough, when the computer displays the scanner results, you can spot several other trails. One of the trails is nearby, so you get in your land rover and drive towards it.

When you reach the spot where the blue trail meets the ground, you discover a crater, where the ship presumably crashed, and a large machine. The machine looks man-made, but it obviously has not been used in a long time. It is covered with rust and many of the parts are corroded through. You examine it more closely. It is some kind of mixer. It has a central chamber lined with positronic membrane, two upper openings with ports for insertion tubes, and two lower openings with ports for extraction tubes. It also has a number of smaller chambers, a compressor, a power supply, and a few manually-operated switches. Offhand, you would guess that it is some sort of fuel processor. Its makeshift construction probably means it was built in a hurry with whatever materials were at hand.

Looking a little further, you find a hinged compartment near the machine's controls. Inside the compartment is a small notebook. The notebook is very, very old — so old that when you touch it, the book begins to fall apart. You decide it would be best to try to read the book without removing it from the compartment.

When you turn the front cover you see that the book is written in a version of Earth Standard. However, because of the notebook's age, the writing is very faded and the dialect is obscure. You are barely able to read it. The book is dated June 4, 2491 A.D., which makes it more than 300 years old.

You spend a day trying to understand as much of the book as you can. Although the best you can do is make out occasional words and phrases, you are able to figure out who crashed here and what the purpose of the machine is. The explorer who crashed here more than 300 years ago was none other than Vanessa Chang. She was traveling in some sort of shuttlecraft and tried to land here to get supplies. She fell victim to the aliens, who damaged the shuttlecraft and caused her to crash. The book doesn't say where Chang's main vessel was or explain why she was traveling in a shuttlecraft.

After repairing the shuttlecraft, Chang and her crew tried to take off but failed. The aliens kept attacking the shuttlecraft and forcing the craft back to the ground. Eventually, the explorers discovered that the aliens were attracted to the radioactive particles in the shuttlecraft's fuel exhaust. The aliens made their way into the ship's power generator, fed on the source of the radioactivity, and damaged the reactor.

Chang's crew solved the problem by processing their fuel so that the exhaust would be less radioactive. They built a machine to do the processing for them. The machine used chemicals that they had on their craft and some minerals salvaged from the planet itself. It took several weeks to get the machine working, but finally they succeeded. The last recorded attempt to take off is on June 29, 2491, after which there are no more notes in the book. Presumably they managed to get off the planet, and never returned.

Since you would also like to be able to get off the planet, and you would prefer not to spend weeks building a new machine, you decide to try to use Chang's machine. The rust won't bother you if you inject the right chemicals into the fuel mixture. The corrosion presents more problems, but you can patch and seal around it. It takes a couple of days to fix up the machine to the point where it might work. You have the necessary chemicals and minerals on your ship. You connect your land rover's engines to the power supply and start it up. It works! In a couple more days, your fuel is processed. Hopefully, you can now take off without being attacked by the aliens.

❖ STOP ❖

[846]

Your landing on the planet Fiara is smoother than last time, since you are a little more skillful in piloting your ship in Fiara's intense gravity.

You fly over the flat landscape, with its five-meter-tall buildings and stunted vegetation and set your ship down at the spaceport in Fiarasan, the planet's principal city. In the distance, a bullet-shaped ground vehicle slowly approaches your ship.

You turn up your gravity compensation harness to the maximum, but the weight is still crushing and you have to crawl to your ship's exit. By the time you make your way to the hatch, the bullet-shaped vehicle has arrived, and several of the four-armed, golden-furred Darscians have emerged to greet you. Since you speak High Darscian, you have no problem communicating with them.

❖ STOP ❖

[847]

You study the insides of the octahedron more closely. The mechanism looks almost like a navigation system, or perhaps an experiment in gravitation. You prepare to set your weight down on the floor when you suddenly have an overwhelming feeling that that would be a dangerous thing to do. Instead, you hold onto the ropes and contact your computer to ask for analysis.

"It looks like it's configured to sense tidal forces, or the difference in gravitational force between the two spheres. Indirectly, that could give a good measure of a planet's orbital position."

"Suppose this is the trigger to a bomb deeper underground. Why would it be built like that?"

"If the purpose of the bomb were to deflect the planet's orbit, the point of minimum tidal forces could also be the point where a lateral force would cause maximum deflection."

"Why has it never gone off, then?"

"Unknown. It might have been slow to react, and the other five explosions altered the orbit before it had a chance to get the readings it wanted. Or it might have simply failed."

"Could it be set off accidentally? Could my presence here set it off?"

"It's quite possible. I think you are wise not to touch the floor."

As soon as the computer says that, you whurffle an image of a violent explosion which would rock the planet out of its orbit and eventually send the unfortunate world into the sun.

Not wanting to push your luck any further, you climb back up the shaft and close the ancient hatch behind you.

❖ STOP ❖

[848]

All the glitter and color! What a shame these dudes don't know the first thing about real entertaining.

Well, you can fix that. You decide to throw a bash of your own. But first, you have to find your ship.

When you can actually remember what it is you are looking for, you find that the aliens have been using the area around your ship as an amusement park, but that's O.K. with you. It just means you won't have to do the decorating yourself.

Humming to yourself, you reach into the main airlock and pull out your really old and out-of-date spacesuit. You can hardly believe it. This is all you have to wear?

You are heartbroken. How can you let your new friends see you in last year's styles?

You dejectedly give up the idea for a party because you don't have a THING to wear!

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[849]

You emerge from hyperspace to find only one planet, Hemindore, circling the system's sun. You set up a scanning orbit and settle back to look things over.

The surface is completely covered by a salt-water ocean; there is no dry land anywhere. However, millions of tall, thickly barked trees rise from the ocean and spread their branches into a dense network. This network of branches is home to a complex ecology of plants and animals.

Included among the tree inhabitants is the planet's dominant and most intelligent life form, a race of monkey-like creatures that resembles humans in many respects. These monkey-creatures travel with ease through the dense foliage using long lanky arms and legs as well as a prehensile tail. They are covered in a dark red fur but appear to enjoy wearing very brightly colored clothes.

The creatures are clearly sentient, and have achieved a respectable degree of technological proficiency. They have built platformed cities within the trees, where they live and work. To travel distances, they use a variety of small flying machines that dart through the gnarled branches with remarkable precision. Though they don't have any vehicles capable of space travel, the maneuverability they have been able to achieve in their flying machines would be an asset in any ship.

There is no obvious way to contact the monkey creatures, since they don't use any form of radio. Ordinary copper cables line the trees, apparently providing all their communications. It strikes you as odd that their communications technology is so primitive given the relatively advanced state of their transportation. In any case, you will have to land in order to talk to them directly.

Setting down on the surface of the planet is out of the question, and the tangled tree branches hardly provide a smooth landing pad. Your computer spots an airfield in one of the creatures' major cities; you will have to try to land there. Unfortunately, to get there you will have to attempt to fly in among the dense branches. You will have to summon all of your piloting skills, and perhaps then some, to execute this maneuver.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[850]

From the scuttlebutt you pick up over the radio, you know time is running out for your Family. You know you need to get more of the substance called Super Slip, and you settle down to work out the best plan for accomplishing this goal.

Finding another source of the stuff is your best bet, but you may be able to trade for some, or perhaps get some more from one of your previous sources. Things look a bit bleak at the moment but surely you can get just one more unit. You have too much riding on this to fail!

❖ STOP ❖

[851]

You are very excited. The probe you sent out to investigate the source of the interference is about to begin reporting back on what it has found.

You ignore the repeated warnings from the computer in regard to the dangerously high temperature readings from the ship's hull. What's a little heat when you may soon make an important discovery?

Here it comes, the moment you have been waiting for — the probe flashes a comprehensive survey of the site in question before it melts into a slag pile. Oh well, the loss of one probe is nothing in comparison to what you will be gaining.

The report says. . . nothing found.

"What do you mean there's nothing out there?" you scream at the now molten pile of metal. "I'm about to become a permanent part of this miserable planet's ecosystem for nothing?"

You frantically program the computer for an emergency blast-off. The beads of sweat on your brow are as much from the increasing heat as from nervous excitement. You can barely breathe while you wait and see if you have ordered liftoff in time.

The fiery sun blasts your ship as you desperately fling your vessel behind the curve of the planet into the safety of the cool night.

Once you are in the comfortable confines of space, you assay the extensive damage to your faithful ship. You are not happy to see the extent to which your vessel has been injured. By all calculations, you figure you will require fourteen days to make the ship spaceworthy. Then again, you consider yourself lucky to have escaped the planet at all.

You grimly turn to the long and arduous task at hand.

Because of the repairs necessary, this option has taken seventeen phases instead of three.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[852]

A Universal Translator would be quite a useful item, considering the number of alien races you are likely to meet in your travels. However, you are unable to build one at this time, since you do not possess all the necessary components.

You may select this option again.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[853]

After you pack up your equipment, you take time for a brief study of where the carnivorous plants are and how far they can reach. Soon, you have a map of a probable escape route between the fronds. You must move quickly since you do not know how fast the plants are able to move over a short period of time. This map has a limited span of usability.

With the equipment safely stowed in your pack, you take a deep breath and run for safety.

You have a close call when one of the plants virtually uproots itself while making a grab for you. It manages to take a bite out of your back pack before you can hack yourself free. You use your weapon as you attempt to escape. The sound of a thud indicates an accurate hit, but you keep running.

You reach the outskirts of the grove and take stock of the damages. The pack took the brunt of the bite and you are dejected to see that the container of sap has been lost to the pod. But look at the bright side. You are only slightly wounded and your equipment is still intact. Better luck next time.

You may select this option again.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[854]

HOW TO PLAN TURN 3

Before the Boundary was built, you have learned, the planet Wellmet was the main center of all exploring activity. You wonder if this is still true. Since you need to get as much information as possible about the galaxy, you decide to make this your next stop. Look at the map and plan your best route to Wellmet. 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	B	V	O	Y	V	L
2	—	—	—	—	—	—	A: OWFGIE
3	—	—	—	T	Y	O	V
4							

You plot "T" to take off from Bugeye and Y,O,V, to move toward Wellmet. This will use the remainder of your seven phases and end your turn.

HOW TO ENTER PLOTS FOR TURN 3

Your plots are all planned out. Go to the computer and log on just as you did for the first two turns. Enter your moves for this turn: T, Y, O, V. You are now winging your way to the planet Wellmet.

Did you remember to press the Return or F key to indicate you are done with your plots for the turn?

Continued ⌘

HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 3

The CGM says your move was a success and it directs you to the next piece of text to help guide you through your adventure, number 486.

✱ STOP ✱

[855]

A Ship Shield Generator would be just the thing to improve your ship's defenses in combat. Unfortunately, you do not possess all of the necessary components for its construction at this time. You resolve to gather the missing items as soon as convenient.

You may select this option again.

✱ STOP ✱

[856]

The door swings open easily against your push. You seem to be expected.

You step into an antechamber. You see no one here so you continue on into the larger room.

In the far corner sits a hooded figure. The robed figure doesn't look up as you approach, waiting instead until you nervously clear your throat before looking up.

The young man sitting before you has the bluest eyes you have ever seen. You have no time to introduce yourself. The young cleric begins to recite The Dialogue.

Go now to the CGM.

✱ STOP ✱

[857]

Again your ship is no match for the Space Patrol cruiser and you are forced to surrender. The crew that boards your vessel is not as pleasant as the last bunch you had as "visitors." The reason for their animosity soon becomes apparent.

"So, smuggler," the captain of the Patrol ship snarls at you. "You decided you were not going to take our earlier warning seriously. We don't like it when people don't pay attention to us. It makes us mad." You guess they have run a check on your ship and discovered this is your second offense.

Turning to his lieutenant, the captain orders her to unload one half of your cargo. "Maybe you'll take our warnings a bit more seriously this time," he snaps at you.

When they are finished, they leave you with instructions to follow them as they escort you out of the area. As you pass through the Boundary, you are warned not to return or you will lose a lot more the next time.

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.

Go now to the CGM.

✱ STOP ✱

[858]

"Hey, Boss," your computer calls to you just as you are adding the last touch of paint to your velvet masterpiece, an oil painting of yourself standing next to your trusty and faithful ship.

Startled, you jump a bit.

"What is it?" you respond irritably. Drats! You smudged your nose and part of the ship's hull.

"I've decoded something new from Vanessa Chang's map. Would you prefer that I wait until you are finished?"

"No, I need to take a break anyway," you answer as you head toward the console. "You may as well show me what you have got."

"Sure, Boss. I found a short coded message that says 'The planet Firthe is a place to obtain Medicine.' That's all for now."

You sigh and head back to your painting after making a mental note of what you have just learned.

✱ STOP ✱


[859]

Wellmet turns below you, a smooth sphere whose surface dwarfs the human settlements that ride upon it. Even the city of Wellmet, home to sixty million people, is no more than a spot on the coast of one of the smaller continents. Looking at the city on the scale of the whole planet, you might think it small, but you would be wrong. There are cities on the Nine Worlds that house more people, but they stack them up in neat towers, while Wellmet spreads horizontally without plan or pattern. The city teems with traffic of all types, including airships and spacecraft of every description that lift and land among the city's many spaceports. You are plotting out a landing approach, not looking forward to yet another traffic-dodging landing on the stark platforms of the public spaceport, when someone on the ground hails you on a direct channel.

"Looking for a place to dock, Smuggler?" says a voice that you recognize as that of Valle Lanza. "There's a spare berth at the Lanza Family spaceyards. I can log up your name and you'll be Downtown goodsie like real business."

"Are you sure it's clear? I can't pay in Family money."

"Course not; runner like you couldn't use Reals for rocket fuel off planet. But you're on the Guest List since you've closed a Lanza contract boundarieside. You're welcome with no probigations. I'll send you a tone." A moment later a guidance signal on a tight private beam locks onto your ship from the Lanza spaceport. You keep your hands on the controls for good form, but it's not really necessary. The port, interacting with your computer, takes care of everything, even directing other traffic away from your path. You set down without a bump on a metal platform polished like a mirror.

Continued 

The Lanza spaceport is the kind of place that makes you want to carry a rag around and wipe off your fingerprints as you go. Everything is cleaner and more expensive than you are. Across the platform you see Valle talking to a guard uniformed in white and metallic blue. The guard is gesturing toward your ship as if he were pointing out an unexplained stain on the floor. After a few words with her, the guard turns away and Valle runs to meet you.

"Hey Boundary driller, scored another nada for the Cadets, eh? Got the good word from Inside; one contract register cleared and a star for my collection. You celebrating tonight?"

"What do you mean, a star for your collection?"

"Brownie points, runner chum. Your rep and mine on the contract; means a lot with six Lanza sibs on the queue and only one game in town. So how about we drop some Reals at the High End Lounge?"

"Well, I really shouldn't. . ."

"Ha! Can't, you mean. I know you independents; carry your money in Fiber loads. So renegotiate; I'll match you slum for slum at the Slippery Silver Tavern. Deal?"

"Okay," you agree. "But log it right now that any contract I sign after I've consumed more than two Boundary Runners is null and void. Copy?"

"Okay, if you want to take the fun out of it."

✱ STOP ✱

[860]

You have no problem getting an appointment to see Director Colmaris. When you call his office, the receptionist tells you to come over right away. Moreover, as soon as you enter the lobby of the fuel refinery's administrative headquarters, you are greeted by the Director's private secretary and ushered upstairs into a plush, penthouse suite.

"A pleasure to meet you at last!" the Director exclaims. "Why, it's been almost twenty years since I last saw your aunt. Never did find that Stone of hers, eh? Well I can see she didn't give up. Sure as the bugs crawl, she said, you'd be here. And you've got that same look in your eye.

"I'll be just a second while I dig up your aunt's things. . . ah, here they are. There's a silver pendant, a flexion glove, and a couple of written notes. The pendant was her lucky charm. Here, let me put it around your neck. There you go. Let's hope it brings you lots of good fortune.

"The glove goes with this note here. You better read it carefully." The note reads as follows:

Dear Questor: Take the flexion glove and put it in a safe place. If you should find the Core Stone, DO NOT TOUCH IT. Put on the glove first. Then pick up the Stone with the gloved hand. Remove the glove with the other hand, turning the glove inside out and enclosing the Stone within the glove in the process. You will then be able to carry the Stone around inside the glove. If you were to touch the Stone with your bare hand, or even through an ordinary glove, its power could paralyze or even kill you. —Cathir(19)

The signature of your aunt Cathir, the 19th questor, is scrawled in pen at the bottom. There is no date indicating when the note was written. You make a mental promise to make sure that the note's contents get added to the collected writings back on Atlantis.

"Let's see," Colmaris continues, "there's one more note. Here it is." He hands you a torn piece of paper with the following message:

Dear Questor: I am giving up my search now after fifteen years. I wish I could continue, but my health is failing and I cannot survive another voyage. Take my only clue; it may lead to something.

I have picked up some skip radio signals coming from the Frog Leg Nebula, located in trisector 133-G. These are new signals; there was nothing when I visited the area eight years ago. Their phase-shift signature is similar to the cryptic patterns in the early verses of the Ancient Writings. Does this mean anything? I don't know, but it's worth looking into. I'd suggest going to the Nebula and looking for whatever is transmitting the signals.

If you don't find anything there, I can only recommend building a Tri-Axis Drive Booster and searching in the Galactic Arm. I've been all around the Fringe and have nothing to show for it.

My blessings to you. May you succeed where I have failed. —Cathir(19)

"I guess that's it," Colmaris concludes. "That's all she left with me. She died a week later. She was a nice person. You'd have liked her."

You can't help thinking how lonely and depressed your aunt must have been when she wrote that note.

"There's one more thing I'd like to help out with," Colmaris adds. "You could use some protection. I don't like to see young adventurers scurrying around naked. Stop by the fourth floor on the way out and pick up some skin armor. It may be a little uncomfortable at first, but you'll appreciate it when it saves your neck. No charge this time."

"Thanks," you reply.

"Finally, before you leave there's something I have to tell you." Colmaris pauses and thinks for a while. "Something strange is happening. There's a lot going on (he waves at the large picture of the galaxy plastered across the wall) that I don't understand. Maybe the stars are just restless, but hey, let's be careful out there."

"OK," you acknowledge, "I will."

The Director's desk buzzes and his private secretary enters with the next visitor. As you leave, your thoughts turn to the clue your aunt left you. A radio signal that matches the cryptic patterns in the Ancient Writings? That really could mean something. There's a theory that the cryptic patterns are a recording of signals from the spaceship of the alien that killed Soulsinger and stole the Core Stone. You'll have to look around in the Frog Leg Nebula as soon as you can. Unfortunately, the trisector Cathir specified as its location is not on your map. Wherever the Nebula is, it must be a long way from home. You know, however, that no journey is too far to successfully complete your quest, and if the Stone is in the Frog Leg Nebula, your aunt's life will not have been wasted at all.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[861]

You are exhausted and covered with blood, most of it your own. Since you refuse to be killed by an oversized teddy bear, you decide retreat is the only intelligent solution. That is if Mr. T. here will allow you to go.

Rather than leave your survival to the whim of the bear, you gather your strength for a series of blows that drive the monster far enough back to give you a running head start down the passage way. Listening intently as you beat a hasty retreat, you only hear the sound of your own footsteps. Mr. Bear has probably had enough excitement for one day.

You spend four days in the Trundling Hospital recuperating. Memories of the battle keep running through your mind. You are willing to bet that with a little more firepower you could defeat the monster. Who knows what exciting treasure you may find next time?

Because of the time needed to recuperate, this option has taken eight phases instead of four.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[862]

HOW TO PLAN TURN 4

You need to finish plotting your moves to Wellmet and then land. Your plotting sheet will look like this:

Plotting Sheet							
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7
TURN							
1	T	R	Y	B	R	L	—
2	—	—	—	—	—	A: FPIB7Y	—
3	—	T	B	Y	V	B	R
4	O	B	L	—	—	—	—
5	—	—					

You need to fly through the orange trisector into the blue one, then land. You will use the remaining phases of this turn as well as 2 of your next turn's phases (we told you borrowing phases would happen often) to land on the planet. Plot "O,B,L."

HOW TO ENTER PLOTS FOR TURN 4

When you are ready, log onto the computer and finish entering your moves to get you to Wellmet, namely O, B, L.

HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 4

Read the landing text the computer gives you. Since this is a new planet, start a separate Planet Log for Wellmet. It will look like this when you are finished:

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	

You will also get your final walk-through text. Soon you will be on your own!

✂ STOP ✂

[863]

Monty arrives and takes you to a commune of Elder Ancients. These, Monty explains, are the leaders of Ascension and they are willing to try to teach you to use the mental shields.

You spend the next ten days listening to one Ascendant or another talk to you about how it feels to use the shield. In turn, the Ascendants want to hear nothing about you or your planet. It seems they are a very self-contained race and have no interest in learning anything new.

Day after day goes by and you are beginning to feel utterly frustrated. All you hear about is shields and the mind-set needed to use them. You think you may be going insane.

Finally, on the tenth day you decide to give up and return to your ship. You look for Monty in order to get him to lead you back but you see that he is attending a lecture on some abstract Ascendant concept so you sit down to wait.

You lean comfortably back against a tree and let your mind wander. It's not surprising that you begin to think about all of the lectures you've just attended and you let your mind wander through all of the instruction you've been given over the past ten days.


Suddenly you feel like a whole new section of your mind has opened up and everything you have tried to learn about shields finally comes together. Of course you can use the shield. It's all very simple really!

You leap excitedly to your feet but as you head toward Monty a stern glance from him reminds you of your surroundings. You sit back down and practice your new ability while impatiently waiting for the lecture to be over.

Monty is pleased and notifies the rest of the community. They all seem happy at your success and watch as you give a few demonstrations of your new talent.

As Monty is accompanying you back to the ship, you invite him in for a celebratory drink of champagne. You aren't offended by his refusal. It serves to remind you that these people are really alien beings who have chosen a way of life that doesn't allow them to experience anything new and foreign.

You spend the rest of the day walking at walls and not bumping into them.

Continued 

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[864]

You return to the ruins of Cathedral. Again, you are amazed at the sheer size of the old cities and how much has been lost to time and decay.

You sift through the rubble but it is easy to see the old cities have long ago been picked clean of any useful artifact. After a short while you feel the hairs on the back of your neck start to prickle. You sense you are no longer alone.

The large and extremely dangerous looking dog has found you once again. Maybe it feels it will be luckier this time. You don't have time to take cover, as the animal has already launched itself at your throat.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[865]

Normally, mining an open deposit of radioactives would be an easy chore. You would simply take your ore harvester to the site and run it for a day or two. The harvester is a simple mechanical device that grinds rock into a fine dust and filters the dust to extract the valuable parts. Since it is an easy matter to separate radioactive compounds from non-radioactive ones, the harvester is particularly well-suited for mining radioactives.

However, the level of radiation is so high at this site that you cannot go there without extra protection from the radiation. In addition, you need a way to prevent the aliens from confusing you so much. To solve these problems, you line the inside of your land rover with two layers of radiation shielding, then cover the viewscreen with a dark opaque panel to block out all light. The shielding will protect you from the radiation, and the dark panel will prevent you from seeing the aliens.

The disadvantage of this approach is that the mining process is a lot more awkward. When you get to the site of the radioactives deposit, you find yourself crouched at the controls of your land rover inside a completely sealed-off cabin. You have to operate the ore harvester entirely by remote control. You can only hope that the instruments are calibrated properly, so you are really getting radioactives and not just a load of air.

The operation takes three days, after which you have one unit of radioactives successfully loaded aboard your ship.

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

❖ STOP ❖

[866]

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 is completely empty.

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

She gives you a withering look. "No, you are obviously not the One we seek. You have chosen incorrectly but we thank you for making the attempt."

From her cold tone of voice you feel as though you have not only embarrassed yourself, but shamed your entire race. And you call yourself a human being!

Gaykrell has nothing more to say to you, so she leaves. You have no reason to remain, so you follow her, feeling miserable indeed.

✧ STOP ✧

[867]

Dressed in your spacesuit, you enter one of the Darscian domes, storm up to the nearest Darscian, and grab him by the neck. The short furry creature squirms and chokes under your firm hold. "Take me to your leader," you demand. You loosen your hold a little bit so the Darscian can speak. The Darscian looks at you and thinks for a while. He seems unsure what to say. Finally, in a calm, controlled voice, he answers: "Ib dosyn fir glztsk."

Frustrated, you realize it is going to be nearly impossible to locate the leader of the colony. All you have is a Darscian colonist who you can't understand and who won't even get upset when you start strangling him. You are so angry, you throw the alien against the wall. That'll teach him to mumble gibberish. Then you leave the dome and head back to your ship. You'll have to try something else.

✧ STOP ✧


[868]

You return to the offices of the Coroner to begin your instruction in levitation. The green Riallan greets you, and begins without ceremony.

"You say you are inadequately unable to rise from the gravitational floor level. Try an attempt as I observe and so perhaps can deduce what errors you make."

The Coroner says nothing more for over half an hour. You stand there and feel ridiculous concentrating as hard as you can on rising from the floor. Finally your instructor breaks the silence: "Explain to me the nature of your efforts so far."

You think about what you've been doing. "I assume that I can control a certain amount of mental force. I attempt to push downward on the floor with this force and lift myself up."

Continued 

"There is a first mistake here. Why do you push directionally downward?"

"So that the reaction will force me to rise, just as the solid floor pushes up against the force of gravity to hold me up now."

"No no no no. Action and reactive action opposites apply to physical forces. In cognitive manipulation it is all the same direction. To move your manipulative appendage to upward, which way do you direct it mentally?"

"Upward."

"Similarly with mental motion force. You want to rise vertically upward, you direct upward. You can't push pressure against the floor surface; you must raise your mental concept image of the floor surface so that you raise aloft upward with it. Now try more again."

You try it, and you're not surprised when the results aren't much different.

"Relate descriptively now again how you're working."

"It's easy to picture in my mind the floor being higher, but it doesn't help. I can't stand on a mental concept of a floor."

"Certainly you do and can. Where else? If I tell you informationally that the floor is three feet below where you stand, do you fall downward? No, your own mental floor position frame is as strong as mine, and you retain altitude."

For two days you work with the Coroner and try to master the skill. It seems you are making little progress. Then your instructor offers yet another approach.

"Artifacts and unnecessary objects are forcing you gravitationally downward. You must remove your devices and objects and outer protective garments." You comply, placing your weapons and gear on the floor. "Now come here and descend." He leads you down a hall to the opening of a vertical shaft. There is a length of cord hanging down it. You climb down into a square hole about ten meters deep and two meters on a side. When you reach the floor, the cord goes slack and drops into the hole with you.

"What's going on?"

"The reason you cannot levitate successfully is you have the peculiar inappropriate capacity to wait with patience. Patience, as I comprehend the principle, is the willingness to wait for what you want even when waiting is unnecessary. I have completed all my goals in life and am privileged to now have patience. You still exert effort to succeed, yet you have patient willingness to fail, and this makes and allows failure. If you will levitate fully upward you must need to not wait." Actually, you cannot understand any of this, because your translator connection is back in the room with your weapons, and all you hear is Riallan beeping. The unit is still connected to your computer, though, so you get to hear a translation of the recording days later.

The Riallan moves out of sight, leaving you alone in the pit. The walls are featureless and smooth. It is far too high to jump and the walls are too far apart to brace between them. You hold the length of cord, but you soon learn that there are no projections anywhere above that you can catch in a loop. You are stuck until the Riallan decides to let you out.

Four days later, you are almost delirious with hunger and thirst. You look up at a slight sound and the Coroner appears above you. You wait for the alien to descend, feeling a bit cheated that it doesn't have a neck to wring. The Riallan floats down toward you, and you reach up to grab it. You are within a few inches when it starts beeping excitedly.

You look down. You are standing in midair at the top of the shaft. The Riallan didn't move down toward you; you have levitated to it. You expect to fall again after looking down, but your feet stay firmly planted in the air.

From there on it's easy. You can never levitate as freely or automatically as a Riallan, but with sufficient concentration you can usually attain a height of a few meters. You're still a bit disappointed that the Coroner has no throat to cut, but you admit that the green Riallan has proven its point.

You recover your possessions and float back to your ship.

Go now to the CGM.

✱ STOP ✱

[869]

This is really embarrassing. Neither you nor the bear can gain the upper hand. Since it is pointless to continue with the stalemate, you start a cautious retreat.

The monster obviously feels the same way you do because, with a heavy sigh of relief, he stands back and watches you go.

As you make your way back to the city, it occurs to you that the bear wouldn't have fought so fiercely unless he was guarding something of importance.

You bet that with a little more firepower you could defeat the animal. Who knows what treasures are hidden in the cave?

You may select this option again.

✱ STOP ✱

[870]

A thin line of unnameable colors defines your trajectory, piercing the center of your mind and extending toward the single point of constancy that still somehow marks your destination. It is all you have; you cling to it desperately as ages and galaxies rush past. You are nearly there. The universe slows in its unwinding like the mainspring of a clock run down. Moments later you are back in normal space.

Read immediately text entry 494.

✱ STOP ✱

[871]

Radioactivity is present in small amounts throughout Arthlan's crust. The problem is extracting the Radioactives in a suitably high concentration. Processing a sufficient amount of rock would take far too long, so you turn to another source: the radioactive dust carried by the powerful winds of the upper atmosphere.

There is one ideal location for trapping the dust: a high mountain range in the northern hemisphere, right at the zone of highest winds. On the highest mountain in the range you set up your processing equipment, a series of baffles and traps that acts as a giant diffusion apparatus, extracting the correct fractions from the wind and allowing the rest to blow past. The system works passively, using the wind to create the large flow of material needed to concentrate the Radioactives.

You observe the equipment for a while to ensure that it's working properly and wait. After 5 days you have collected a full cargo bay's worth of Radioactives.

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

✱ STOP ✱

[872]

You are fascinated by the concept of a planet-sized being and ask Feldo where he came from and how he came to be. The answer amazes you.

Hundreds of millennia ago, Feldo was born on a world farther from your section of the universe than you could imagine. His home planet was a strange and wonderful place, filled with a multitude of life forms that was unequalled anywhere.

The world was called Juliarra, and because of the composition of its core material, it emitted a unique form of radiation. This radiation caused constant viable mutations in the inhabitants, resulting in new life forms every generation. Intelligent beings on Juliarra reveled in the differences among themselves, and looked forward to the changes each new generation would bring.

Feldo was born an oddity in a world where bizarre was the norm, for he showed no discernible differences in his physiology, either visually or experimentally, from his parent. His young life was spent being tested and probed while his family wondered what went wrong.

As soon as he was old enough to leave home, Feldo grabbed a spacecraft and headed out to the unknown. After many thrilling adventures and some downright scary ones, his luck ran out and he was captured by an alien race.

Well, maybe captured is the wrong word for what happened. Feldo was exploring a planet far from his home world when he ran across a family of aliens out on a picnic. The adult members of this race of beings were over fifteen feet tall in height, and their children weren't much smaller. One of the children found Feldo (who was only three feet tall at this time) and wanted to take him home as a pet. The parents thought this was a wonderful idea, so, despite protests in his own behalf, Feldo was taken aboard their ship and placed in a cage.

He had no opportunity to escape since these beings lived in their spacecraft and rarely landed on a planet, except for the occasional picnic. So he lived with these creatures for over a year and was relatively well cared for by them, until something unexpected happened.

For some reason — perhaps it was the new diet, perhaps it was something in the water, or maybe his true nature was finally asserting itself — Feldo began to change, looking like a new type of creature from day to day. He also began to grow — not just a few inches, but at the alarming rate of fifty percent each week.

The parental units of the aliens who had picked him up were very firm in their decision to have Feldo removed from the ship, especially since he was rapidly outgrowing the available space in the vessel. The children were heartbroken, of course, but they could see that something had to be done, and quickly.

Unfortunately the spaceship was nowhere near a planet when this decision was made and there was no time to fly to one so the aliens, with all due apologies, flushed Feldo out the airlock.

Feldo was shocked by this callous treatment and fully expected to pass on to the Great Creator within moments of finding himself in the icy cold void of space. Several minutes passed and much to his surprise, his conscious self went nowhere. Instead he was still floating where he had been dumped just minutes before with body and soul still intact.

"Maybe I need to be a bit more patient," he thought to himself. "This is my first attempt at death so perhaps it takes longer than I anticipated to leave this plane of existence."

So he waited and waited. Finally getting bored, he started looking around for things to do to amuse himself. Eating was the first activity he remembers discovering. His physical form at the time provided him with a type of sail-like apparatus that he could use to scoop up various particles of matter for ingestion into his body. This seemed to provide what he required for sustenance.

Feldo continued to change form, but never to one which would prove fatal in the void of space. He no longer needed respiration or heat to survive, and his food requirements were drastically different than anything known on his home planet. He had no explanation for what had happened to him, so he merely accepted things the way they were and learned to enjoy himself.

Time passed but Feldo didn't notice. He was much too busy learning about himself and trying to control the various changes that occurred in his own body. He found he could manipulate structural alterations within himself, and learned how to propel his still-expanding body through space.

For many millennia, Feldo devoted his attention to eating, growing, and flying through space to explore other solar systems. He rarely encountered other sentient creatures in the vastness of the universe, but he did visit many star systems and explore any worlds he found in orbit. Few planets had anything of value and fewer still had indigenous life. Eventually Feldo became lonely.

He had a dilemma, though. In order to communicate with other beings, Feldo could no longer just land on their planet or enter their spacecraft, as he was much too large. But he couldn't allow an alien of unknown intent or intelligence to land on or in himself, as it might not be safe. So he devised a test to determine whether passing aliens were suitable for visiting his interior. Those beings who showed any signs of hostility were lured inside and eaten. The component parts of their spaceships formed a strategic line of defense to destroy intruders, if necessary, long before they got close to Feldo's vital parts. Soon he was a floating fortress and had little to fear in the known universe.

You are fascinated by the history of so bizarre a creature and thank Feldo for sharing his story with you. You return to your ship thinking about the vastness and diversity of the universe and just how little of it you have actually seen.

✂ STOP ✂

[873]

When you contact your friend Marc and tell him you'd like to meet with him, he seems surprised. You set up a meeting place and wait for his arrival.

Punctual as always, Marc appears and embraces you warmly.

"You're the last person I expected to see!" he tells you as you both sit down for a friendly chat. "What brings you back so soon?"

You explain you were just in the neighborhood and wanted to see how everything was going on Norstar.

"Fine! But I think I should tell you that, although I am happy to see you, it may not be safe for you to be here. The authorities are looking the other way with respect to the 'breakthroughs' we're having here in ship technology because they will eventually benefit as well. They won't look the other way if they hear we actually entertain the person responsible for smuggling the technology into the Nine Worlds. As long as you are going to remain on the other side of the Boundary, you shouldn't visit me here. You could be arrested!"

You can see that Marc is right. Until you have the survivable jump engine technology and plan on staying inside the Boundary for good, you shouldn't come by merely to visit.

You bid Marc farewell and promise to keep in touch via radio. While you plot your next course, you silently wish your home planet good-bye as well. It may be a long time before you see it again.

You may select this option again.

✱ STOP ✱

[874]

Having already explored most of the accessible areas of the city and spaceport, you decide to venture outside to the undeveloped land. There you hope to find clues to why and how the Riallans evolved the way they did.

Escaping from the spaceport proves to be the first challenge. It's not that the Riallans intended to make it difficult; they just happened to build all the exits in places that are nearly impossible for a gravity-bound being to negotiate. Some clever work with ropes and pulleys gets you and your gear safely to the ground, impressing the Riallans, who rarely see such devices.

You are not sure what you expected to find outside — perhaps fuzzy pastel trees that float without trunks high off the ground — but the landscape you face is somehow disappointing. The trees and plants that carpet the boggy valleys would be familiar to any earthling, at least any earthling who grew up during the Jurassic Period. On the rockier highlands the plants are more interesting. Some have interlocking ring-shaped branches that look like they might at any time bring forth a harvest of ripe pretzels, others hug the ground with flexible tendrils and have no roots. You keep your distance from one that has a habit of rolling its broad leaves into thick round tubes and aiming them at you like a thousand little shotguns whenever you come near.

For animal life you find lizards. Just lizards. An amazing variety of lizards, to be sure: small lizards, big lizards (though, fortunately, nothing Jurassic-sized), lizards with multiple tails, long multi-legged lizards that add extra vertebrae and extra sets of feet as they grow, venomous lizards, solitary lizards, communal lizards, spiny lizards, winged lizards, aquatic lizards, phosphorescent lizards, spitting lizards, and burrowing lizards. Many of the lizards are brightly colored, some are exquisitely camouflaged, but none sport anything like the shameless solid pastel colors of the intelligent Riallans. Nor do any show any ability remotely resembling anti-gravity or levitation. The closest thing you find is one species of winged lizard that jumps out of pretzel bushes, using its wings to slow the fall. When you experimentally toss one from a high hill it stiffens helplessly and glides around like a paper airplane until a barrage from a suspicious shotgun tree brings it down.

You find nothing to connect these odd lifeforms to the Riallans of the cities. Either the Riallans evolved very quickly, then wiped out most of their ancestral species, or they are not from this planet at all. Given their spacefaring skills, the second explanation is far more likely. Unfortunately, that also means that there is not much you can learn about them from outside the city. You spend another day looking for exploitable resources in the wilderness areas, but there are none. This planet's biosphere is very young in its evolution — too young to have produced significant fuel deposits — and it is very poor in metals and radioactives. All in all, it's best to leave it alone, just as the Riallans have.

On your way back toward the city, you pass under one of the Riallans' inter-city transportation conduits. It consists mostly of glass tubes suspended between glass columns. Pastel-colored blurs flash by every few seconds in either direction. Only your stop-motion camera can resolve these blurs as ordinary Riallans, shooting through the tubes like pachinko balls at hundreds of kilometers an hour. They use their levitation abilities to keep away from the tube walls, and perhaps to push themselves along as well, for you see no evidence of any other propulsion system.

If the Riallans are from another planet, when and why did they come here? You know you're not going to find the answer out in the wilderness. If you wish to search in the city for a source of historical information, you may plot:

(HQA86H) (2 phases) Inquire where the Riallans came from and why.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[875]

Reading helps you to while away the long hours in hyperspace. Today you are reading an old log entry your computer has on file.

Although you do not know who wrote the entry or what ship the person was on, you still feel a kinship with the human who went out into the void, much like you yourself are doing.

While reading a rather boring paragraph, you come across a bit of interesting information. The writer says that the planet Hemindore has some Phase Steel if you know where to look.

That is a valuable commodity!

Excited, you make a note of the planet's name, but, try as you might, you cannot find out any more about the exact location.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[876]


You guide your ship into a stable orbit around the inhabited planet of Fiara and instruct your computer to contact ground control for a landing flight plan. Next, you perform a planetary analysis which indicates that Fiara is almost twice Earth's size, with an oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere and a civilized alien population of about 100 million. However it is impossible to obtain an exact measure of the planet's gravity as the reading goes off your scale. Fiara's gravitational conditions are so extreme that the atmosphere is severely stratified, with very thin layers at the top and increasingly thicker layers at the bottom. You will have to remember to wear your gravity compensation harness when you leave the ship.

Your computer display registers the flight plan: you will be landing at Fiara's principal spaceport, located in the planet's largest city, Fiarasan. As you begin your descent, you notice Fiara's unusual topographical features. The terrain is extraordinarily flat, containing occasional cracks where the ground has buckled under itself. Even the vegetation surrenders to the gravity and consists mainly of low-lying shrubs with an occasional tree of stunted stature. Your landing path takes you over a city of block-shaped buildings no more than five meters in height. Using a higher magnification, you notice extra reinforcements on the sides of each building.

A gradual descent under these conditions is more difficult than you had expected, and you just manage to prevent a crash landing at the spaceport. In the distance, a bullet-shaped ground vehicle slowly approaches your ship. Merely rising from your seat is a struggle, even with your gravity compensation harness at maximum power. Walking is a greater challenge which requires every bit of your strength and concentration. As you force your right foot forward, you grab at the headrest of your seat for extra support. With each step it becomes more difficult for you to support all of your weight, and you soon drop to your knees and proceed to crawl to your ship's exit.

By the time you make your way to the hatch, the bullet-shaped vehicle has arrived, and several natives emerge to greet you. They are short, golden-furred, bipedal creatures with two pairs of arms apiece. You recognize them as Darscians, a race of very peaceful, non-aggressive aliens discovered by early human explorers more than 300 years ago.

One of the Darscians steps forward and greets you in what you assume is its native tongue, "Npsel uick dgialn pi sggs."

Continued 

"I am from the Nine Human Worlds," you enunciate. "Do you speak Earth Standard?"

There is some chattering among the Darscians. Finally one of them steps forward and, in barely comprehensible Earth Standard, answers that there are Darscian teachers on Fiara who can teach humans how to speak High Darscian. Your lessons will cost one unit of any commodity. If you want to learn High Darscian, plot the following option:

⟨POBFYI⟩ (7 phases with telepathy or a universal translator; 14 phases otherwise). Learn High Darscian.

You must learn High Darscian before you can take part in any activities on Fiara.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[877]

One of your favorite ways to pass the long lonely days in hyperspace is to call up on your ship's computer one of the best books you have ever read, entitled "Sigourney Rambeaux: Autobiography of a Real Time Explorer."

You settle back in your chair and prepare to enjoy several days of reading pleasure. During this time, you learn the following:

There is a planet by the name of Ethnar that Sigourney discovered many years ago. She didn't provide any useful information about the planet except that it was a good source of Fuel.

You are always interested in learning new things, and you make a note of the name of this world for future reference.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[878]

The evasive tactics employed by your ship appear to be working as you make your way down to the power generator with relatively little damage to your ship's hull.

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

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

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

"Four, three, two, o. . ." You do not get a chance to finish your countdown to detonation before the screen flashes a brilliant white. You did it! The power generator has been destroyed! You and your computer both cheer in your moment of triumph. Congratulations!

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

"Boss, we've got trouble."

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

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

Go now to the CGM.

✱ STOP ✱

[879]

You inflict some serious damage on the hostile gun and robot, but unfortunately they injure you as well. You are forced to retreat back to your ship to treat your wounds. At the same time, the alien ship's repair systems begin fixing the damage you caused.

If you want to get closer to the ship, you will have to improve your personal defenses so you can avoid getting hurt.

You may select this option again.

✱ STOP ✱

[880]

No sooner do you come out of hyperspace than your ship comes to an abrupt halt, its path blocked by an asteroid-sized satellite which is broadcasting the following message:

"WARNING! WARNING! YOU ARE TRESPASSING ON THE STORAGE STATION SEVEN DEFENSE ZONE! WARNING! WARNING!"

You do not recognize the technology or materials used to construct the satellite. Before you can even begin to tell your ship's computer what to do next, the satellite is firing at you! Its first shot misses (perhaps intentionally), but the next one might not.

Go now to the CGM.

✱ STOP ✱

[881]

The woman who submitted you to your ordeal the last time is waiting for you. She congratulates you on being such an apt pupil. She now gives you your next lesson.

The Lecture: Worshipful Brother

"You have learned your dialogue well. You are now ready to learn the rites of the caste of the Worshipful Brother, or the final Level of Righteousness. As a Worshipful Brother you will take upon yourself a great and important obligation: that of pursuit. The knowledge of the galaxy must be recorded and understood. It will be your task to go forth and pursue a new Rite of the Brotherhood. You must achieve the first Level of Intuition.

"There will be those who will oppose your path. An advanced student of the Rite, a Brother Chang, followed the Way. You must pursue her path, and proceed onwards beyond the Fringe to the planet Margen. There you will be admitted to the rite of Intuition.

"The dialogue of Mastery of the Worshipful Brother is the same as that for the Masterful Brother, except that after being asked the fourth question, respond as follows:

Examiner: When you yourself asked in silence, how did they respond?

(You now recognize Examiner as a Masterful Brother.)

Answer: The Way is towards the center.

Ex.: The core is in fact the center.

Ans.: And the core is the Way.

(Examiner now recognizes you as a Worshipful Brother.)

Ex.: When you get there, what will you find?

(You now recognize Examiner as a Worshipful Brother.)

Ans.: I do not know the answer.

Ex.: You are truly a Worshipful Brother.

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

"Your mark of ordeal has vanished, for you are now a Master of Righteousness, a Worshipful Brother.

"We have given you the ability of 'quick-speed.' We call it the art of Darthan. This new ability will enable you to evade the blows of your enemies with more skill and precision than ever before.

"You can learn no more of our craft on this planet. You may, if you choose, carry our message beyond the Galactic Fringe to Margen. There, if you prove yourself worthy, you might become an Intuitionist. Then, and only then, will you truly understand the knowledge you carry. Then, and only then, can you understand the knowledge at the Core.

“Worshipful Brother, Master of Darthan, Master of Kothan, Master of Righteousness, I wish you a speedy path. May you find the Way, and the power to retain the Knowledge therein.”

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

✱ STOP ✱

[882]

“Welcome to Tralis,” appears on your computer screen as you emerge from hyperspace.

Startled, you demand to know who is sending you messages.

“Computer.”

Your ship’s onboard computer is quick to respond, “Yes, Boss?”

“Identify the source of last transmission.”

“Working, Boss.” Before a second has passed, the computer has the answer. “Transmission source is the second planet from the sun. The planet is inhabited and the spaceport’s landing beacon has been activated.”

Not being the sort to turn down an invitation, you direct the computer to make two survey orbits, then follow the beacon down and land.

On the first pass around Tralis, you see the planet is quite Earth-like. The land/water ratio is approximately 3:1, the air is breathable and the gravity is just a shade less than Earth-normal. The climate is mostly tropical, with two small polar ice caps north and south.

However, on the second pass you get radiation level readings that could indicate the presence of exploitable resources. The levels aren’t high enough to require protective clothing, but you are interested in seeing if they have affected the indigenous life forms.

Your scan does show something peculiar, though. The planet has surprisingly little evidence of cultivation and population growth, considering their apparent level of technology. Any race that has the sophistication needed to send ships fresh from hyperspace a greeting usually has sprawling cities and heavy radio traffic. Your scan reveals few cities and almost no radio transmissions.

Hmmm.

Before you can come to any conclusions, your ship has touched down in a modern spaceport in the heart of one of the cities.

As you cautiously exit the ship, you are met by a welcoming party of one. But from the looks of the creature, you think one is more than enough.

Before you stands a rotating THING. The creature has facial features (randomly placed in what you consider to be the head area), various appendages (found at odd intervals), and is a bilious shade of green with a red stripe traveling in a continuous, evenly-spaced path down the creature’s body. You note that since the alien is spinning to the left, the stripe appears to be going downward.

You fully believe that the alien would like to greet you if it ever gets the chance, but you are interrupted by the arrival of several dozen more spinners. Unlike their lone predecessor, though, they are all armed with various club-type weapons.

You perceive that you have three options available to you:

(OEFMIN) (7 phases) Calmly try to communicate with the armed horde.

(SEHMAN) (7 phases) Subscribe to the old adage that the best defense is a strong offense and commence battle.

Or, finesse the situation entirely by taking off in your ship and leaving the problem behind you.

✂ STOP ✂

[883]

You are hailed via ship's radio by a passing vessel from the Institute for Space Exploration.

Glad for the company, you take the next couple of hours to chat and exchange information. They in fact are able to tell you something of great import, namely that the plans for building a Ship Shield Generator are obtainable on the planet Ioreth.

You thank them for the information and wish them a safe journey.

✂ STOP ✂

[884]

Medsun, according to the limited information in your computer's Ghost Worlds file, supports one of the oldest and most successful human colonies outside the Nine Worlds. The planet has a stable human-compatible ecosystem, productive oceans, belts of quality crop-producing lands, and a gentle climate. Apparently this has made it very attractive to human colonists, for the file notes that many spacefarers of the post-Boundary era have chosen to retire here. There is only a brief mention of the native "aliens" that also populate Medsun; the description says that they are intelligent and cooperative and that they coexist peacefully with the human colonists.

Considering the planet's large human population, estimated at between five and ten million, you are surprised that your orbital scans reveal no big cities and almost no heavy industry. Instead, the planet is dotted with small towns and villages. In all of the villages, typically-human architecture mixes with triangle-cluster forms that are characteristic of native Medsunian construction. Nowhere is there evidence of segregation or friction. The technology level of both cultures is low. The telecommunications network is primitive, in poor condition, and uses not a single orbital satellite. The roads are adequate only for low-speed vehicles. The electrical power grid, powered by a single large generating plant comprised of old-style inertial fission reactors, is in good condition but would not support more than the most basic power needs for the planet's population. You learn later that the Medsunian natives never developed space travel capability and that the human colonists seem to have no interest in pursuing it. The spaceport where you land, not far from the power plant, is maintained only for the purpose of offworld trade and to accommodate the occasional arriving colonists.

When you disembark you are greeted by a small delegation of Medsunians. They are short, stocky, and alarmingly yellow in color, but their basic form is bipedal and humanoid. Their strangest characteristic is the way their nearly-spherical heads are affixed to their torsos. Instead of a single neck, each Medsunian has three separate round appendages that diverge from the shoulders, then draw back together and attach to the head at three separate places. Each appendage is flexible and extendable, allowing Medsunians to turn their heads in a disconcerting variety of ways.

During the two hours it requires for them to inspect your ship for prohibited cargos and dangerous diseases, you have a chance to converse with the Medsunians. They all speak an old-fashioned dialect of Earth Standard (which they call English), even when talking among themselves. They explain to you the terms for your stay on Medsun: you will be given food, lodging, and necessities free of charge at the spaceport facilities. This generous arrangement is common to most worlds that receive interstellar trade, for two different reasons: to encourage

traders to visit and, on less friendly worlds, to limit the amount of contact between the spacefarers and the natives. The Medsunians request in return that you refrain from violent or overly aggressive behavior, which neither they nor the human colonists will tolerate.

You ask the Medsunians why no human officials are present in their delegation. They tell you that humans do not customarily greet arriving ships because they have no interest in doing so. The trade market, however, is run entirely by humans, as is the power station, which is beyond the Medsunians' technical capabilities. Many other activities are carried out jointly between the two races, such as the administration of the Academy of Knowledge, a nearby research institute devoted mainly to xenobiology and comparative anthropology. However, most of the colonists spend their time living peacefully on the land and creating artistic works.

"You humans have taken very well to life on Medsun," says one Medsunian. "Your creative energy is very great once it is turned aside from hostility and conflict. Between your people and ours, we have made this world a center of culture that is treasured by many races. Aliens come in ships from many far stars to trade for what we create. Only the very best do we keep for ourselves, in a museum north of here which you are of course welcome to inspect."

You thank him, thinking perhaps you may check it out later. First, though, you want to look around a bit more, and you spend a few days mingling with both humans and natives. You find that the human colonists are indeed all peaceably employed, just as the Medsunians said. They have no complaints, and no one seems to be under any pressure to do things they don't want to do.

Nonetheless, you begin to feel uneasy. You don't see what it is about the planet that makes it so popular. The Medsunians are friendly enough, but also unsophisticated and boring. The low-technology culture is adequate for survival but it lacks the comforts and varieties of modern civilizations. Your ship's meal processors alone offer a greater variety of foods than any Medsunian marketplace you've seen. Even the weather on Medsun doesn't live up to its reputation: the climate, while perfect for growing crops, is not very pleasant; it alternates between cold drizzling rain and too-hot sunlight. Worse, the gravity is just enough greater than what you're used to to make you feel tired and lethargic. All in all, you're not in a very good mood as you contemplate your options:

(EPMBNY) (3 phases) Contact the Interstellar Trade Market representatives to learn what products the humans on Medsun are interested in importing or exporting.

(UPOBFY) (4 phases) Examine historical records to try to gain some insight into why the humans on Medsun are so passive and complacent.

(AP6BPY) (3 phases) Inspect the artifacts on display at the museum.

(E9MDNQ) (6 phases) Travel to the Academy of Knowledge in the hope that the researchers there will share their discoveries about the physiologies and psychologies of alien races.

❖ STOP ❖

[885]

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

He trusts you not to tell their enemies about what you have learned and 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, you hear a familiar voice.

"Welcome back," BarrBurr greets you warmly. "I was afraid you had decided to leave our planet without bidding us farewell."

The alien apparently has no idea you have been to visit the right-spinners. Given the circumstances, you believe it's best to leave it that way.

BarrBurr offers to take you to the same places as before.

✧ STOP ✧

[886]

As your drives cycle back and you slide out of hyperspace, Wellmet's sun is already lined up in the center of your viewscreen. Like the first planet you visited, Wellmet is one of the few worlds outside the Boundary whose positions are clearly documented on standard star maps. Thus, among the multitudes of stars and planets that sift through the fringe of the galaxy's spiral arm, Wellmet is easy to find. Your ship, now powered by conventional thrusters, begins to decelerate in a carefully calculated curve that will bring you to the planet at a velocity suitable for making a landing approach.

"We'll be in orbit in six point seven three hours, Boss."

The idea of the computer speaking out loud never ceases to amaze you. It is newly equipped with what it calls a "three-sigma intelligence emulation package," which allows it not only to understand and answer questions in plain Earth Standard dialog, but to volunteer information as well, at what it thinks are appropriate times. Unfortunately, its idea of appropriate times isn't always in agreement with yours.

Six point seven three hours later, you are in orbit around Wellmet. From orbit, the planet looks just like Earth. It has oceans and green vegetation, though there is no evidence of any native animal life. If Wellmet had been the first planet you visited outside the Boundary, you might think that someone was out there prefabricating Earth-like worlds. In fact, Wellmet's remarkable resemblance to Earth is the chief reason it became the focal point of early space exploration and, later, a thriving nexus of interplanetary trade. Even today, after three centuries of isolation outside the Boundary, the name Wellmet is familiar to the people of the Nine Worlds.

Judging from the amount of construction, the human population of Wellmet is about fifty million. Most of the construction is concentrated in a single sprawling city on the north coast of one continent. The city covers a thousand square kilometers, and it teems with activity and

traffic, but it's not a city of high towers and electrified streets. You see clusters of dwellings, factory buildings, transmission towers, and landing pads mixed indiscriminately with animal pens, cultivated fields, open rivers, and power plants. There is no single large spaceport, but instead a variety of private landing and docking facilities scattered across the town, ranging from gleaming automated cargo ports to bare concrete pads. Each facility broadcasts its own instructions and signals on different channels, leaving you in some doubt as to where you should land.

"Can you sort out that babble?" you ask the computer.

"Certainly, Boss. All of the privately owned spaceports are broadcasting their own traffic control instructions, along with conflicting claims as to which of them offers the best location and lowest rates for berthing fees. Some pads are set aside exclusively for ships in the employ of various 'Families,' or trading concerns. These are located on the safest and most efficient approach lanes, of course, and they're warning us to keep off their private property. Finally, there is a public spaceport of sorts, which charges no fees but requires that we force our way through all the other traffic to reach it."

"Forget about the private docks. Whatever they cost, we can't afford it. Can you plot an approach for the public 'port?'"

"No problem. Most of the traffic is old hulks, twice our mass and half our thrust. We can maneuver through it." You do, finding a path in the sky to the spaceport below, cruising past massive cargo ships, big slow converted liners, sleek fast smuggling rigs, and radiation-scarred prospector vessels that bristle with guns like wary old porcupines. You get clearance from the ground to land at one of the empty pads, and with help from the computer, you make a smooth landing.

On the ground, a delegation of spaceport officials meets you as you disembark. They are not unfriendly, and their speech is Earth Standard that is no more heavily accented than your own. They are required to search your ship for contraband cargo. As far as you know, any cargo carried across the Boundary is contraband cargo, but the officials tell you that they care only about certain drugs, weapons, and luxury items that are subject to import duties on Wellmet. You have none of these things on board, so you relax a little. When the officials realize that you've just come through the Boundary, they quickly conclude their inspection and spend some time pointing out the better hotels and trading agents in the area. They reassure you that the security of your ship is guaranteed in the public 'port, and they offer you any assistance you may require in adjusting to life outside the Nine Worlds.

You spend three days exploring the city (which is also named Wellmet), learning as much as you can about the planet and the people. What you find seems a series of contradictions. The people are unfailingly gracious and polite, yet a majority carry sidearms of one sort or another. Most people care more about experience and skills than titles and rank, yet whole sections of streets are off-limits to anyone who is not a member of one of the Families. Almost everyone expresses scorn or contempt for the Nine Worlds and the Boundary, but they admit that without the Boundary and the smuggling trade it generates, Wellmet would not be as prosperous a trading center as it is. The people of the Nine Worlds are referred to as "worms" — except for you, who in choosing to break out of the Boundary have earned their respect. Wellmet, you learn in the end, is a place that lives by its own rules, a gigantic frontier town where one spacer crew might gun down another for short-weighting a cargo load of Fiber, but would turn around and loan the Crystals out of their drives to a hard-luck case who needed them.

Through careful observation and conversation you identify the following options for further action on Wellmet:

(OFFII7) (2 phases) Find out what the best deals are on Wellmet for trading commodity cargo.

(8FHIA7) (4 phases) Spend a few days talking with spacers' supply merchants to find out what sorts of personal armaments you can obtain here.

(OVFKIV) (3 phases) Learn what you can about the history of Wellmet from the records in the Wellmet Public Archives.

(8VHKAV) (1 phase) Stop off at the Slippery Silver Tavern and hear the latest news and gossip from the spacers who frequent the place.

(KFKVIK7) (4 phases) Speak to experienced space traders around the port to learn what you can about navigation, exploration, and the hazards of space.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[887]

A ballistic rocket takes you straight to the North Pole Flyport, where you are met at once by an obsequious official of the Moiran Metal Works. You spend a couple of days touring the complex and hearing all about the wonderful properties of Phase Steel before finally arranging a meeting with a sales rep. He is all business, and in no time you are asking him the key question:

"Do you have any Phase Steel for sale?"

"Just a moment and I'll check our inventory," says the sales rep but doesn't move an inch. You sense he is waiting for something but haven't a clue what you are supposed to be doing.

"Ahemm!" the oily little man says loudly while rubbing his thumb and first two fingers together. It suddenly dawns on you that he wants money in exchange for this information. Without knowing the proper protocol, you try to nonchalantly slip him a bribe. Apparently you have done the correct thing because he smiles a greasy smile and opens a large ledger.

You must have given him more than he expected or he wouldn't be babbling away while he turns the large heavy pages of the book.

"We don't always have a lot of surplus phase steel for sale, you know," he chatters at you. "Our two biggest customers usually purchase everything we produce."

"Oh?" you respond, trying to be casual. "And who might they be?"

"Well of course, there's Wellmet. They buy about fifty per cent of the material."

"And the other customer?" you persist.

"That information is confidential," the salesman replies.

Now that you know who you're dealing with, you instinctively reach for a larger bribe.

"...but I'm sure that you can be trusted. Our other principal customer is the Nine Worlds Space Patrol."

The oily salesman doesn't notice the overwhelming effect his information has upon you. The Space Patrol! That bastion of law and order! How could they be actively involved in Smuggling?

You do not hear what the man is telling you, something about the Patrol being a long-standing customer from the early days of the Boundary. You take a moment to catch your breath and regroup your scattered thoughts. Soon you are able to listen to what the man is telling you.

"I'm sorry to report that we've just sold out the last available unit of phase steel. We will be beginning another production run within a few weeks, though, and should have more Phase Steel to sell in a couple of months. In the meantime, may I show you some of our new copper alloys? They make the finest toilet fixtures in all space. . ."

You decline the offer. You may select this option again.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[888]

Emerging from hyperspace, you are still amazed at the concept of an entire planet dedicating itself to playing as a way of life. Oh well, to each their own.

You are greeted by the same puzzle about the three landing pads as before. You have no trouble in choosing the correct landing pad this time, since you know what to look for. You soon find yourself on the ground.

You have the same options as before.

⌘ STOP ⌘
