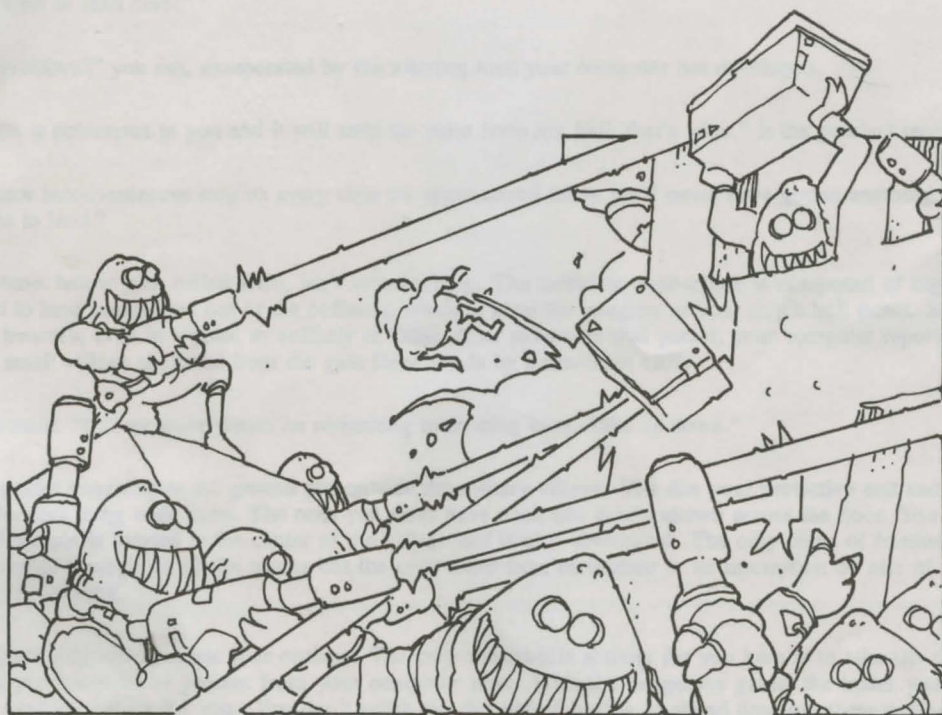


STAR SAGA: TWO™

BOOK B

TEXT 63-136



BOOK B

STAR
SAGA: TWO™

TEXT-F-136



[063]

You pour maximum power into your engines in an attempt to speed past the huge dreadnought and into the clear. Unfortunately, the heavily armed ship has plenty of time to pound you with its powerful weapons as you pass by. Your ship is soon incapacitated. The Clathran captain efficiently boards your vessel and takes you prisoner.

✘ STOP ✘

[064]

"Boss, I don't want to land here!"

"What is your problem?" you ask, exasperated by the whining tone your computer has developed.

"The atmosphere is poisonous to you and it will strip the paint from my hull, that's what," is the petulant reply.

"If we'd let minor inconveniences stop us every time we encountered them, we'd never have gotten anything done. Now let's see if we can find a good place to land."

Actually, the planet below you, called Dahl, isn't very inviting. The turbulent atmosphere is composed of highly acidic and radioactive gases. You will need to land somewhere out of the buffeting winds to keep the integrity of your ship's hull intact. Still, you never know when you may find a real treasure, even in a place as unlikely as Dahl. After several orbital passes, your computer reports that the only sign of life on the planet is one small village sheltered from the gale force winds by a mountain cliff.

"Good," you remark. "I knew there would be something interesting here. Take us down."

The computer guides your ship to the ground just outside the solitary village. You don your protective suit and start looking around. The homes all stand with doors flung wide open. The ones you enter have trash and debris strewn across the floor. You do not see signs of recent habitation. A sort of temple is located in the center of the village and is also abandoned. The only piece of furniture intact is a free-standing candelabrum. You search through all of the rooms but the only other item of interest is an inscription on one of the temple walls. It says, "Margen is the key." Interesting.

You return to your ship and evaluate your options. The only worthwhile activity for you here is to take the ship back up and look into mining Radioactives you know to be present from your computer scan. With the dangerous gases, the better your own personal protection is, the healthier the venture will be for you. You don't relish the thought of having to spend time out there setting up the mining rig. Still, Radioactives are Radioactives.

If you wish to do some mining, you may choose the following option:

{7S8ZK2} (3 phases) Mine Radioactives.

✘ STOP ✘

[065]

The Enclave trading center is a dull and lifeless place. The quiet Hadrakian Settled One who meets you here is patient and answers your questions regarding available trades. When you hear the deals they have to offer, you wonder why they even bother staying open. When she sees your look of disbelief, she smiles, showing her gleaming white fangs, and politely suggests that you obtain your badge of citizenship in the Arena. Then you will be eligible for the much better trading found at their regular marketplace. Until you can leave the visitors' Enclave, you are completely at their mercy regarding trades. For what it's worth, this is what they have to offer here:

1 Super Slip for 1 Munitions

1 Super Slip for 1 Warp Core

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

✂ STOP ✂

[066]

You fly your ship as close as you dare to the Clathran garrison, ready to leave the planet immediately if you are spotted. You land in a field surrounded by trees that will hopefully keep your ship hidden. You'll have to travel the rest of the way on foot.

Carefully, you hike through the wooded area, avoiding the roads. Eventually you reach the edge of the garrison. You cannot enter where you are, since the garrison is surrounded by a force field. The only way in is the gate on the main road.

However, you can see through the force field. Inside, there are Clathran soldiers and technological equipment everywhere. It is a high-tech operation. You see a landing pad for Clathran ships, a sensor array for monitoring space traffic in the area, a subspace radio transmitter, hangars, armories and sprawling living quarters for several thousand Clathrans. The place that really gets your attention, though, is the headquarters building. It contains all the computers for the garrison, and probably a lot of useful information.

Unfortunately, there is no way you are even going to get close to that headquarters building, given your current skills and abilities. If you had some way of making yourself undetectable, you might be able to try sneaking in.

Disappointed, you return to your ship.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[067]

The temple looks as abandoned and empty as the uninhabited village through which you entered. The candles are mostly unlit and the darkness is oppressive. Walking around for a few minutes, you see no one and wonder where the Brothers are.

When you hear a door open nearby, you wait for the Brother to cross the floor to where you are standing. As he approaches, he gives you a short bow.

"Welcome, Brother. We hadn't expected you back yet. Have you been able to get the information we requested?"

You are embarrassed to admit you have not finished your mission. You do not need to say anything, for he already sees the answer on your face.

"Well, it is a difficult task to accomplish."

You nod miserably.

"I recommend that you try again. It may take some time to discover the location of the planet Unaria, but if you keep searching, you may yet prevail."

You take a moment to think about what he has said and you realize that if you keep trying, you can probably succeed in your mission. Once you have the necessary information, you need only to return to Dahl and you will be rewarded.

You may select this option again.

✠ STOP ✠

[068]

Your first thought is to go to the aid of the defenseless bunny, but something holds you back. You remember that each indigenous living being on Rothane is as important to the ecosystem as any other. Both the bunny and panther have a right to exist, and each fits into the scheme of things in its own way. Right now, you sense it is the bunny's time to give up its life to the panther (provided, of course, that the panther can catch its prey). You have misgivings, but you stand still and allow the drama to unfold.

The panther is a young creature, fast and strong. The bunny has quicker reflexes and an aptitude for bursts of speed when the situation requires it, like now. But the panther has gotten too close for the speed of the bunny to be of much use. It is all over in a matter of minutes, and the panther leaves the clearing bearing its prize in its powerful jaws.

A strange sensation comes over you as you turn to leave the clearing. A door opens in your mind, allowing you to feel Deresha once again. You feel the forces of nature around you, and you can get them to cooperate with you if you so command. You think about how nice it would be if a path were to form leading you back out of the forest. Slowly, the vegetation parts and the path is there. As you walk down the path, you feel the power of Deresha in your mind. You can call on her help any time you need it. She has become a part of you... or have you become a part of her?

You now have the ability of Deresha. If you respect the forces of nature, nature will help you in your times of need. The ride back to the city of Jewel is as bumpy and uncomfortable as was the trip out, but you mind it less as you practice tuning in to the many living things you encounter during your journey. Your new power and awareness are bound to be of help in your adventures.

Go now to the CGM.

✠ STOP ✠

[069]

"Take that!" you cry.

"Take that!" comes the Clathran equivalent. Both of your ships rock from the other's firepower.

"Oss-bay, ouble-tray with the ields-shay," your computer warns you in your secret coded language. You quickly work out that there is trouble with your shields. Rats! Just when you've got the enemy on the ropes, you have to weigh the risks of losing your shields completely and being blown to kingdom come over the chance that you can destroy the Clathran vessel. After taking a quick glance at the status screen, you decide the shields are too close to buckling to stay here any longer.

Using the same coded tongue, you instruct the computer to warp out of here at the first opportunity. Before you even get the words out of your mouth, you are thrown sideways against your seat as the ship does just that.

"Sorry, Boss. While you were telling me to leave, an opportunity arose, so I took it!"

"Well done," you manage to say as you right yourself. "Has the Clathran ship made any move to pursue us?"

"No, I think its engines were put out of hyperdrive capacity by our last strike, and a well-placed hit it was, even if I do have to say so myself."

You merely look at the computer console with a grimace at its lack of modesty and do not say a word.

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

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

[070]

Since you are interested in conferring about the war with the Clathrans, you decide to visit the office of "The Battle, Inc." and see what is cooking. Following the directions you are given, you soon arrive outside an unimposing building bearing the sign you are looking for. The door leading in is ajar and you are about to push it open and enter when you are grabbed from behind.

Startled, you relax into deadweight and feel the grip of your accoster slacken. Twisting upward, you easily slip out of the grasp of... a Homeless One.

"What," you sputter, "is the meaning of this?" He grins, an imposing sight of large teeth that you know is not meant to be menacing.

"Forgive me, little one. I only wished to save you from an unpleasant experience." So saying, he pulls you back a bit and kicks the door open from a safe distance.

CRASH! A large bucket of paint, once precariously balanced atop the door, tips over and lands where your head would have been had you entered. The paint color, needless to say, is a disgusting bilious yellow.

"At least they have good taste in colors." the male Hadrakian comments. You glance at his own apparel, electric purple tunic with lime green belt and mauve sash. You wonder who his fashion consultant is.

Thanking your benefactor, you enter the building without further mishap and tell the Settled One at the desk that you are interested in discussing the war. She motions you through to another room.

✧ STOP ✧

[071]

If something impresses your computer, you know it must be well worth looking into. With this thought in mind, you approach a Sirissian at the information counter at the spaceport. You explain you are interested in finding out more about the device used to bring ships safely through the vegetation belt. The acquiescent little alien directs you to an office at the spaceport where your curiosity can be sated. It is called the "Bureau of Passing," and is run by a Sirissian by the name of Chloe.

You follow the directions you are given and soon find yourself in Chloe's office. The little alien welcomes you warmly and asks how she can be of help. You tell her about your curiosity concerning the sudden transition of you and your ship from space above the planet directly to the air space above the landing pad at the spaceport.

"Ah, this is something many ask about when they visit our fair world. Unfortunately it is an area we do not feel comfortable explaining in great detail to all of our visitors. I'm sure you understand." You have the distinct sense that the conversation has ended. The look of disappointment on your face must be so great that even an alien can recognize it, because Chloe stops you before you can leave.

"While it is true I cannot show you how the device of ship passing works, maybe you would enjoy seeing a smaller version, one designed for more personal use," the alien offers. You readily accept.

Taking you into an adjoining office, the Sirissian shows you a small disk two inches in diameter and one half inch deep. It is a deep black in color and doesn't seem to reflect any light. A small depression is evident on one side of the disk.

"This is a very weak unit we designed to help us move pallets of Food to cargo ships. As you may know or have guessed, we on Ululu provide all of the Sirissian worlds with food and have to move a great deal of it every day in order to feed our people. This little transporter will shift several hundred pounds from one location to another about six feet distant. It is not very powerful, but it does come in handy. You can have this one if you like."

You are touched by the alien's generosity and thank her for the item. Reaching into your pocket, you pull out the first thing your questing fingers encounter, a small pocket knife with half a dozen attachments, and give it to Chloe.

"This is often given by one being to another where I come from as a token of friendship. I would be honored if you would accept it from me," you explain. The Sirissian seems touched by the gesture and takes the knife from you, thanking you as well.

Apologizing for having to cut the meeting short, she explains she has a meeting to attend. You understand and leave the office with your new treasure — a personal teleporter.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[072]

You finish your discussion with the Darkwhistler. "You took knowledge from me," sounds the voice in your head. "Now I will take matter from you."

The voice returns an instant later. "You have no matter on your ship. I would like to correct this, but I have given you enough already."

Later on, when you have a chance to check, you discover that you still have five cargo bays filled to the brim with the spongy orange turf of Darkwhistler. Unfortunately, there seems to be no way to remove it.

✂ STOP ✂

[073]

You just have to learn more about the weird and beautiful lightning that arcs across the sky of Takata. You intend to visit the Information Center to learn about the energy, but are sidetracked by the sight of an especially large bolt of energy shooting from the ground not far from the spaceport. Deciding to take matters into your own hands, you head over to the source of the bolt.

Most of the surface of the planet is relatively barren, with a sandy soil covering and sparse vegetation. The land near the spaceport is completely barren; there are no signs of life. So it is easy to see a wide vent protruding several inches from the ground. You approach the vent, wondering if the energy comes from within.

Getting down on your hands and knees, you take a flashlight from your belt clip and shine the beam down into the vent's opening. Whether or not this is the cause of the ground's deepening vibration, you do not know, but you suddenly feel impending danger. You also hear a yelp from behind you and the sound of running feet. As you try to stand and step back from the opening, you feel arms grab you from behind and throw you violently off to the side. Your head strikes the ground sharply and you lose consciousness.

As you come to, you sense light from behind your closed eyelids. Not the sparkling light of the weird energy, but the normal light of the sun. You briefly recall a rainbow reaching out for you as you stood teetering at the vent's edge, but your mind refuses to remember any more. Deciding to risk it, you open your eyes and survey your surroundings.

Your first sight is quite unnerving. It is the sight of several Sirissian sensory stalks peering down at you. Blinking in surprise, you pull away and find yourself falling off the narrow couch you had been resting on and falling to the floor with a soft thud.

"Well, Human. Glad to see you back with us. My name is Jessur. I was worried that the Lectr'Arc had struck before I could pull you to safety!" the little Sirissian exclaims.

Despite your bruises and close brush with possible death, you remember your manners and introduce yourself, thanking the alien for his help. Mom would be proud of you.

"Lectr'Arc?" you ask, "What's that?"

"The very foundation of our civilization," is the reply. "It is the energy that supplies all of the power we require on all of the Sirissian worlds and even beyond. We generate it here, underground."

You rub your still-aching head but continue to question your host. "Do you harness the lightning bolts?" you ask, not recalling any equipment set up to do such a task.

"No, no. The bolts are merely an attractive by-product of the energy we produce. They give a little local color to an otherwise ugly world. The real generators, located deep inside the planet, require occasional venting from the pressure buildup. This venting is manifest in the rainbow bolts we call Lectr'Arcs."

"Now, if you are feeling better, I can show you a part of the power plant that almost consumed you."

"Hunh?" is your clever reply.

"If you had been looking down into the vent when the Lectr'Arc emerged, it would have engulfed your organic shell and transformed you into pure energy. I'm not sure how it would have affected your intellect, since little research has been conducted on the phenomenon, but I dare say you would not have been happy. Fortunately you moved just in time."

You shudder as, once again, you briefly remember the brilliant rainbow reaching out for you. Only Jessur's quick action saved you from. . . who knows what? Rising unsteadily to your feet, you follow your host from his office into the main body of the power plant.

"I had been finishing my tasks and was preparing to leave when I saw you on the scan monitor. Luckily, I was able to dash up to the surface and arrive at the vent before something unfortunate occurred," the alien explains. "Come, let me show you around."

The power generator Jessur shows you is immense. It is not hard to believe it capable of producing enough energy to run an entire planet. When you mention this, the Sirissian laughs.

"This is only a small plant. There are many more, and most are quite a bit larger than this one. The energy output is tremendous."

You ask to see how the energy is produced and learn that the actual generators are too large for you to examine one in its entirety. You look disappointed, so your new friend makes you a generous offer.

“While it is physically impossible to view a single real generator, perhaps I can provide you with the next best thing. Come with me.”

You follow Jessur back to his office, where he hands you a small black box.

“This is a MultiPhase power pack. It is actually a very small generator which we use to produce small light displays similar to Lectr’Arcs. Be warned that they are just as dangerous as the larger energy bolts if the unit is run at full power, but you can get sprays of beautiful lights even at relatively low settings.” The Sirissian turns the unit on and, sure enough, you hear the hum of energy being produced inside the box. Soon, small rainbows are arcing out in a beautiful display.

“You may keep the unit if you wish. I have several here already. If you do not mind, I need to be going. I have several errands to run before the day’s end.”

You thank your gracious host for the gift, thank him once again for the tour and for saving your life, then depart. You return to the ship and spend the next few hours playing with your new toy.

“Boss, what do you have there?” your computer asks. You explain what happened and what the MultiPhase power pack does.

“Er, Boss? Do you have any idea of the power output that thing is capable of? From the initial readings I have been getting, you could easily destroy our entire ship if you turned the power level up to full capacity. I’d be careful with it if I were you!”

Gingerly, you set the device down on the counter, not at all sure you like the idea of having such a thing on board your ship.

“Say, Boss! I have an idea. With a little adapting, I bet we could hook this unit into an external port and use it as a ship’s weapon!”

Enthusiastically you agree to the job. Within a few short hours the work is completed and you have a brand new ship’s weapon at your command, the MultiPhase Torpedo. When used, it fires a bolt of high energy at an enemy ship, utterly destroying it.

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

[074]

You cannot resist the temptation to visit the downed Clathran scout ship, so you head off for the crash site in the morning. The dense underbrush makes it very difficult to travel through the forest, and the constant threat of attacks by any of the numerous carnivores that populate the planet keeps you on your toes.

Finally you arrive at your destination. The sight of a ship’s hull torn to ribbons sends shivers down your spine. The main body cavity of the ship is marginally intact and you enter through one of the larger rents. Inside you see no sign of a corpse. There are strange furrows along the floor as if a giant steel plow had reached into the ship trying to reach something inside.

Almost all of the equipment is damaged beyond use. Running your own scan on the alien ship’s computer reveals a small amount of power in the banks. On a hunch, you try activating the ship’s recorder. A faint hum rewards your effort, then a static-filled voice can be heard. You strain to make out what is being said. . .

“Scout to base, scout to base. Come in, base.”

“Base here.”

“Base, this is scout four zero nine. I’m just leaving Psorus, a primitive life-supporting planet, type seven, colonized by the Hadrakians. There are no real defensive forces here to give us any trouble. However, the colony does attract some space travel; you will need to send a small contingent of monitor stations and dreadnoughts to set up the usual blockade. Also, you may want to have reinforcements ready in case the Hadrakians decide to fight. I’ll transmit my full report shortly so you can determine the most efficient deployment.

“Good work, scout four zero nine. We’ll finish this job from here. You are to proceed immediately back to base to receive your next mission. Karnossus High Command has requested more data on the Hadrakian home world, Hadrak. We are expecting quite a fight there, and it is important to minimize our casualties. Also, there can be no long delays in the Survey, as the Masters require that we have it completed on schedule.”

“Understood, Base. I am returning now. Wait, what’s this? Thing from out of nowhere. . . Some kind of monster. . . Evasive maneuvers! No, it’s got the hull! ARRGGGGHHHHH!!!!”

Silence roars from the speaker, leaving you in a cold sweat. You try to recover more data from the computer, but that’s all that is left. After looking around some more, you leave the ship to its ghosts and return to your own vessel.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[075]

You spend several hours going over the Dual Space Inversion Bomb schematics and block diagrams, then gingerly open the outer cover and begin to tinker. Soon you have taken it entirely apart. It’s pretty obvious how it works. The main components are the Interphase Reflector and Discontinuity Wave Generator. These two devices have conflicting effects on the Dual Space Interphase nearby. When the bomb explodes, both fields will intensify in a sharp pulse which, combined with the action of the Dodecahedron itself, should create an explosion sufficient to destroy the Dodecahedron and much of the Karnossus star system.

The problem is that whoever designed the Bomb didn’t know as much about Dual Space as they thought they did. The Wave Generator is completely out of phase, the Interphase Reflector is misaligned by ninety degrees, the power levels are wrong, the effect of the mass of the bomb casing hasn’t been properly taken into account, and the spherical harmonics of the central Stasis Field are just plain completely wrong.

None of these problems is very hard to fix. In fact, you wonder what sort of total ignoramus *wouldn't* be able to correct such obvious flaws in such a simple system.

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

“Bomb! Engage self-test.”

“Certainly! I love to self-test! Let me see now. . .”

⊠ STOP ⊠

[076]

You stand up and run as fast as you can towards the other side of the field. Unfortunately, the opponent who was searching for you is still in your way. You try to get around him, but he is quicker than you are. He attacks and seriously injures you. Meanwhile, your ally defeats your other opponent. You bleed in the mud as you watch the two remaining combatants go at it. Unfortunately, your ally eventually loses and the victorious opponent crosses triumphantly to your side of the field. You pass out.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[077]

The battle is all but over. Around you are the other vessels of Hadrakian Task Force Four, their energy projectors now silent. Your viewscreens record the final stages of the Battle of Hadrak, as in the distance the ships of the Alliance pursue and destroy the few Clathran survivors. Directly ahead is the one Clathran ship not destroyed or retreating: a specially modified Monitor larger than any you have seen before. The name *Pride of Pekep* is etched along the hull.

During the battle, this ship was the center of the Clathran force, the focus of all the Clathrans' communications and the command center for all their maneuvers. Now, the ship is dark and drifting, its warp fields down, its weapon ports closed.

Perhaps the electronic jamming your Task Force is directing at the Clathran vessel has scrambled its circuits. Perhaps the Clathrans have already abandoned ship. Perhaps some vital onboard system has failed, leaving them helpless. Perhaps the ship is a trap, already programmed to self-destruct.

The risk is worth taking. Winning this battle has bought time for the Hadrakians, but in the final analysis you have beaten only a tiny fraction of the Clathrans' total strength. However, if you can take the command ship and salvage its computer memories, you might gain information that will turn the tide of the Clathran menace for good.

"Prepare to board," says the voice of Admiral Hrothgar, commander of Task Force Four. "Full battle array. Major Whitefang will lead the marines."

You join the sudden swirl of small ships plunging towards the Clathran, finding and guiding your ship to a specific point on the Monitor's spherical hull. You lock on magnetically, then trigger the charges that will blow you an entry port. Within seconds the Clathran ship is breached at a hundred points, and Hadrakian marines are pouring aboard. And a handful of humans, as well.

It's a tough battle, hand-to-hand through the corridors of the giant Clathran ship. You outnumber the enemy ten to one, but he knows the terrain, and he's fighting for his life. Lights are out throughout the ship, and every compartment door is sealed tight and must be forced open. And every compartment contains Clathrans. Some are already dead, caught without pressure suits when you blew the hull; but even the wounded are ferocious fighters. It seems strange to you that so many are unarmed, and that they are scattered so widely through the ship. Surely the Clathrans knew that you would board. Your task would be more difficult if the enemy had grouped themselves more effectively and occupied strategic points, rather than remaining scattered throughout the ship. They are making no effort to escape or surrender — and yet their situation is completely hopeless. You can't help wondering why the Monitor hasn't exploded around you.

You are about to set charges against the door of yet another compartment, when a voice over your suit radio interrupts you. "This way, fellow human. Follow the green lights." A string of dots appears on the corridor wall, snaking towards the center of the ship. You hesitate. Is this a trap?

"The Clathrans are locked in the compartments. You need to reach the bridge now, before it's too late."

It may be a trap, but again the risk is worth it. And so far, all the Clathrans have been locked in the compartments. You thought it was a defensive gambit, but maybe there's another factor here. . .

"Come with me!" You shout to the Hadrakian marines around you. "We're heading for the bridge!" You plunge down the corridor, ignoring the compartments to either side as you recklessly pursue the green lights. The marines follow. No opposition arises.

"Look out," says the voice on your radio. The green lights wink out, and you skid to a halt just short of a branch point in the corridor system, where a few stray Clathrans have established an ambush. Forewarned, you and the marines soon rout them. Then the green lights resume, and you continue your dash for the bridge.

Along the way you encounter some other groups of marines, each led by one of your fellow human travellers. Somehow, you manage to meet and merge without casualties. At length you reach the bridge. In response to instructions from the voice, you split up, and enter simultaneously through four different doors.

There is one Clathran within. He wears a commander's uniform, and he is armed with a laser pistol. Instantly surrounded, he holds his fire. You can see the other members of the bridge crew, each dead of a single laser blast to the chest. The covers have been torn off several

of the central control consoles, as though the crew had spent their last moments desperately trying to repair some malfunction in the ship's control systems.

"Humans," he snarls in Clathran. He stares at you, as though not even seeing the squads of armed and armored Hadrakians with you.

"Surrender your ship, Commander," you order. "You've lost; it's over."

"Humans," he repeats. "It's not over, not at all. But it will be." His voice is so taut with rage that it is almost a whisper. "You don't even know what you've done. We've all lost. Now the Masters will spare no one. When they come. . . you'll wish you had taken my way. . ." He raises his weapon to fire.

"Stop him!" you shout. But it's too late; he's already turned the pistol to his own chest and pulled the trigger.

The ship is yours. Parties of Hadrakian marines, under the command of Major Whitefang, have scoured it compartment by compartment, finding each and every surviving Clathran. Although the Hadrakians offer, none of the Clathrans accepts surrender as an alternative. Many fight to the death, others turn their weapons on themselves. A few echo the Commander's sentiments, suggesting that you might wish to join them in death, before the Masters return.

You stay on the bridge, where you learn the identity of the voice behind the green lights.

"I am Doctor Richard Dighton, a graduate of the New School of Medicine on Harvard and a Board Certified Astrophysiologist. I went to space on the Mnemone, captained by. . . captained by. . ."

"Captained by Vanessa Chang," you finish, hardly believing it yourself. "You're Richard Dighton, the ship's doctor. You were mindwiped by the Clathrans three hundred years ago."

". . . by Vanessa Chang. I was born on Earth, and I trained on Harvard. I do not know the location of Earth. AAAAAAAGH! I do not know the location! It's in the Fringe! That's all I know! I'm a doctor, not a navigator!"

"You're part of the Clathrans' computer. They mindwiped you and killed your body, but your mind escaped into the computer. How long have you waited here?"

"I don't know. Most of the time in storage. Trillions, trillions of nanoseconds. I only escaped in the battle, when the circuits were damaged. You are human; you've come at last. What happened? How did you survive so long?"

"The Clathrans created a plague and sent it to Earth, carried by John Silverbeard, your crewmate. Billions of people died. After that, we stopped exploring. No one even knew."

"It should have killed you all. It should have. They took the knowledge from my brain. They mindwiped me and took everything I knew. I studied alien viruses, I studied human immunity, I knew how to do it, and they took the knowledge from me. My only hope was that someone else, someone who knew even more than I, would find a cure."

"They never found an antiserum, but humans stopped dying from it. There must have been something about immunology you didn't know. Civilization nearly fell, but somehow survived. Vanessa Chang helped lead us back. She established a Boundary, to hide us from the Clathrans."

"She was a wonder, our Captain. Arrogant as hell. Even the Clathrans feared her. I think they feared all of us. 'You have no limitations!' they said. It disgusted them. We didn't fit in anywhere. 'We will tell the Masters about you,' they said. And they did, and then they launched the plague. The plague they got from me, MY plague. Andrew died, he tricked them. But not me. I let them mindwipe me. I KILLED SO MANY!" A snapping noise comes from the mass of circuitry beneath one of the opened panels, and a curl of smoke rises.

You quickly change the subject. "We've beaten the Clathrans. Their Survey is stopped."

"They'll be back. The Clathrans worship the Masters, and fear them. The Masters commanded the Clathrans to survey the galaxy. So, the Clathrans will do it. If they try and fail a thousand times, they will try and fail again. They know nothing but obedience to the Masters. I think the Masters changed them to be like that, long ago. They will change us, too, if we don't stop them. The galaxy belongs to the Masters. No room for random elements, for unplanned expansion, for free will. The Clathrans built the Dodecahedron, you know, because the Masters told them to. The Dodecahedron expanded the Dual Space Interphase, so the Masters' powers would return to them. The Masters gave the

Clathrans the plans and the knowledge, and the Clathrans built the Dodecahedron. These plans, here, in the system." Another console burns out in a little burst of sparks. "Gone now. But they'll have others. Copies."

"The Dodecahedron nearly destroyed humanity. People went insane."

A pause. "Yes, it would do that, wouldn't it? The Clathrans don't even understand Dual Space. They wouldn't even know what the Dodecahedron did. Like aliens without eyes, whom even the brightest light can't blind. Vanessa always thought humans were different somehow. Our minds can move in the Interphase. But no one knows how to control it; it becomes madness. So billions more died. . . I wonder who won?"

"Who won what?"

"Who killed more, me or the Masters' Dodecahedron? It would be nice to know. Ha ha ha." The smell of damaged circuitry is filling the bridge. You wonder if the madness back on the Home Worlds really has killed so many. You don't want to think about it.

"Where are the Masters now?" you ask.

"They're in the Core. They've been waiting there for fifty thousand years, building a new machine to replace the one that blew up when the Interphase dropped too low. The Clathrans are right, you know; the Masters will never tolerate humans. The machine is almost done, and when it is. . . humanity will cease to be."

"A machine in the Core will kill all humans?"

"Not kill. Change. Like the Darscians or the Unarians or the Francloons. Like on Alkon or Medsun or Keros or Zyroth or Darkwhistle. Make us no threat to them. They're on top, and they want to stay. It's their galaxy, after all. What's a few billion humans to them? Who really cares? It certainly never bothered me! And what's one more? Nothing! That's what, nothing! The sequence is locked in. I can't hold it back much longer."

Your psionic powers may be fading, but a sixth sense tells you what's coming next. "Wait! We need your help. There's so much you can tell us!" But greyish smoke is now flowing thickly from the machinery.

"Take the Survey, it'd be a shame to waste it. I'll try to give you the time. Tell the billions I'm sorry. . ." The voice fades away.

A Hadrakian combat engineer speaks up, from the console he's been monitoring. "The whole ship is losing power fast; it's just draining away. Central memory just wiped clean and the reactors are warming up. I think we're looking at a destruct sequence."

"Start evacuating," orders Major Whitefang. "Contact Admiral Hrothgar and let him know we're coming out. Let's move it, troops!" He turns to you and your fellows. "You humans coming?"

A machine hums to life behind you, and begins whirring quietly. Startled, you turn around just as a strip of rainbow-hued plastic spins out of the slot. You snatch it up and run, trailing the fleeing Hadrakians.

By some miracle, you reach your own ship without getting lost in the corridors. "Crash take-off! This thing's going to blow!"

"Make up your mind, Boss. You want to crash or take off?" But your computer isn't really wasting any time; your drives have engaged even before the computer starts speaking.

You are one of the last ones off, and you just make it clear. The explosion destroys the *Pride of Pekep* utterly, along with the closest Hadrakian ship. With it goes the living memory of Doctor Richard Dighton, last of the crew members of Vanessa Chang.

Some hours later, in the company of your fellow humans, you read the strip of optical memory into your own ships' computers. It is a summary catalog of the Clathran Survey, from the Core all the way out to the planet Hadrak. It includes a complete map of the galactic Arm, which matches the one you already had, and also a map of the Paracore, that strange region of space between the Arm and the Core itself. In the Paracore there are many new worlds you have neither seen nor heard of before. The final track of the strip contains a message in Earth Standard, in a dialect some three hundred years old:

"You are humanity and you have no limitations. Good luck in the Core!"

THE END

You have reached the end of STAR SAGA: TWO The Clathran Menace. To explore further, into the worlds of the Galactic Paracore, and the Core itself, you will need STAR SAGA: THREE The Return of the Masters.

This doesn't mean you must end your game now. You may continue to explore the Arm and do any option except fly your ship beyond the edge of the map. You may want to return to planets that you passed through quickly, and try some of the other options. There may be some planets that you never landed on at all; you may wish to explore them. You may also want to build your personal and ship's combat abilities to be as strong as you can make them before going on to the Paracore. However, if you do continue to play, please understand that there will be no new story developments to reflect the defeat of the Clathrans. The fate of the galaxy is still to be decided in STAR SAGA: THREE.

In addition, if you have not yet explored the worlds of the Galactic Fringe, you may be interested in playing STAR SAGA: ONE Beyond the Boundary. You may purchase STAR SAGA: ONE at your local software dealer, or direct from Masterplay Publishing, 8417 Sun State Street, Tampa, FL 33634, (813) 888-7773.

The authors and programmers of STAR SAGA thank you for playing The Clathran Menace. We hope you enjoyed it.

✧ STOP ✧

[078]

For some reason, the computer rooms on almost every civilized world are located in various basements, and Pekep is no exception. You enter one of the spaceport buildings, walk down a ramp and through a set of double doors, and find yourself in a spacious area lined by banks and banks of computers. They are utterly silent, performing their job without the slightest hint of awareness or separate intelligence. You definitely prefer your own computer, which is as much a companion as it is a part of your ship. Of course, the Clathran machines probably don't tell knock-knock jokes in the middle of a combat, either, so maybe they could each teach the other a thing or two.

The center of the area is divided into small cubicles where individual Clathran workers are coordinating intelligence data from arriving ships and entering it into the computer system. Each cubicle has its own computer terminal, and you go from cubicle to cubicle, looking through the open doorways and translating what you see on the various screens.

After a full day of doing this, you have a pretty good idea of what the Clathrans are up to. Most of the data you see is filed under "Directive Two" and consists of various reports on the Survey Line. The reports indicate that the Survey is doing well and is on schedule to reach the Density Barrier (the gradient that separates the Galactic Arm from the Fringe) within a few years. The only real obstacle is the Hadrakians, and the war against them is expected to reach a climax soon. The Clathrans are marshalling their forces so they can bring the brunt of their navy to bear on the Hadrakian home planet. By bringing in massive amounts of firepower, they hope to quickly overwhelm Hadrak's defenses and subjugate the Hadrakian race in short order. There seems to be no question in Clathran thinking as to whether or not the Hadrakians can be defeated; the only concern is how much time and how many Clathran casualties need to be taken in the process.

All this information is rather alarming. It doesn't bode well for you if the Clathrans don't even see the Hadrakians as a serious threat. If the Clathrans can overwhelm the Hadrakians that quickly, it won't be that long before they arrive at the Fringe and eradicate humanity once and for all.

✧ STOP ✧

[079]

“Diamond Cloth on Ululu” is all you hear from the god who visits you in the Shrine, the God of Legitimate Yearnings. Your visitor doesn’t stay with you long enough to chat; he must be busy today. At least you managed to catch his name, which is said by some Hadrakians to contain as much information as his overt statements.

You resolve to try a different Shrine next time. The service here seemed a little rushed.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[080]

You spend more time than you would like dodging and weaving around the Clathran warships orbiting the planet. The good news is that your ship has not been damaged by the enemy. The bad news is that you cannot land without making yourself a likely target for complete annihilation. You decide this would not be a good thing to do, so, with a heavy sigh, you are forced to give the order to leave the area.

Although you are not able to follow through with your plan to land on Geefle, you have to count your blessings. Your ship is undamaged, which is more than most beings can say after tangling with six Clathran war vessels. You also believe that, with a few more upgrades to your ship’s weaponry, you can someday do more than achieve a standoff against the enemy. Not bad for a day’s work.

You did not land, so you are still aloft in the trisector containing the planet Geefle.

✧ STOP ✧

[081]

You are meditating in a Hadrakian Shrine and all is right with the world. You see yourself soaring through space, unfettered. You see yourself and a lover, by the banks of a crystal blue stream. You see fame and fortune and everything that goes with it. You see the universe as you saw it once, with a rosy tint.

“I am the Goddess of Young Urgings,” whispers the voice in your head. “I’m here to help you make the universe that way again.”

“If only you could.”

“What Fate has in store is not for us to know. But I do see that you can find Super Slip on the planet Hadrak.”

“I’ll remember that.”

“Good. Don’t forget me.”

Contact with the goddess does not fade immediately, but lingers, in the form of pleasant dreams and memories from your younger days. When at last your meditation is finished, you are as rested and relaxed as you have ever been.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[082]

For the most part, the planet Rothane is overgrown with lush green vegetation. It has jungles, rainforests, swamps and oceans teeming with plant and animal life. It is not very often that you see such ecological purity, untouched by the hands of technology. You marvel at the natural beauty of it all.

The whole planet would be a pristine Garden of Eden were it not for one very unusual feature. An entire quadrant of Rothane's surface is burned and almost barren. This area is a vast white, lifeless desert. The bald spot makes the planet slowly rotating below you look for all the world like a tonsured monk.

You are quite surprised when your computer announces that the only sign of intelligent life on Rothane emanates from the very center of the dead area. In the middle of the barren desert is a single technologically advanced city. The city has a bustling spaceport, with numerous ships taking off and landing. What a stark contrast with the rest of the planet!

"Who is down there?" you ask your computer before giving instructions on where to land.

"From the brief scan I have been able to run, I would say this is a Hadrakian colony, Boss."

⌘ STOP ⌘

[083]

This time you come to the cave prepared. No mystical hogwash is going to cost you the opportunity to get what you want: Flame Jewels, and lots of them.

You have prepared a tight-fitting blindfold, a long rake, and a heavy black canvas sack. You have also told the local Wythymites that you are going to the cave, just in case.

"If I'm not back in a week, please come get me."

"Certainly we will. It would be unbalancing to have your corpse polluting the natural beauty of the cave. Why do you return if you know the effect the Jewels will have on you?"

"I need to collect more of them, for my . . . friends."

"Of course. We quite understand. Take as many as you want, and distribute them far and wide. Wythym has Flame Jewels to spare." Something about the Wythymites' attitude bothers you. This isn't how they feel about harvesting food.

Nonetheless, you have a profit to make. You find the cave again easily; it almost seems to draw your feet towards it. Approaching the entrance, you set up a motion detector, which will emit a piercing tone if any wild animal approaches. Then you don your blindfold and enter in. You grope your way forward until you are in the main cave. Even without being able to see, you can feel the Flame Jewels all around you. Images dance in your head, and you can feel time slipping away. . .

You drop the rake, and it makes just enough of a clatter to startle you into action. Reaching out with your hands, you sweep Flame Jewels into your bag. Then you reach even further, using the rake to knock Flame Jewels from the walls and drag them towards you. In minutes you have filled the sack. You turn to go.

But where is the entrance? Your head is spinning, and your hands grope wildly in front of you. You encounter a wall, cool and yet fiery, you know it gleams with Flame Jewels. You can feel them seeping into your head, burning you with the inner fire. Struggling to retain your senses, you stagger around the wall, around and around and around. . .

You are there at the big bang, watching the Flame Jewels form. You see them spanning the stars, spanning the dimensions. You see them forming on Wythym, the perfect planet. Flame Jewels make up its core, paradise its crust. The Wythymites are here to welcome you to paradise. This could be your world. You could stay on Wythym and join with the Flame Jewels. They reflect your mind perfectly. They are

you. You are them. You never want to leave. You want to stay, forever and ever in unending crystalline perfection, repeating your pattern infinitely through all the universes of space and time.

Dimly, some part of you that clings to your humanness hears a distant piercing tone, but you are too far submerged in the consciousness of the Flame Jewels to heed it. An interval later the dream begins to fade. Reality returns in a slow painful rush. You are outside the cave, lying on the hard stone where the Wythymites have dumped you. Your blindfold is down around your neck, and you have to shield your eyes from the sun with an arm grown cadaverously thin.

"You tried to desecrate our cave again, human," says an ochre amoeba. "Your body would upset its natural harmony. We had to remove you forcibly."

"Th-thank you," you manage in a whisper. Your lips are dry and cracked.

"We saved your bag," says the amoeba, extending the canvas sack to you. You can feel the force from within it, tugging at your mind. The force grows stronger as you reach out your hand.

"No," you croak. "You keep it." You let your arm fall.

"Take it!" says the amoeba. "Join us here on Wythym forever. There is no harm in the dream of the Flame Jewel. Why do you resist it?"

"It's not for me, thank you."

You return to your ship as quickly as possible. Once there, you take the Flame Jewel from your tri-axis drive engine. Holding it to your forehead, you let the dream come over you. It is strong, and it pulls at you, but you find you can resist it. One jewel at a time, you can handle.

But no more.

* * *

You don't know what to do. You need the Flame Jewels for the Space Navy, but you can't carry more than one at a time without being trapped under their influence. The next morning, when you leave your ship, you find the ochre Wythymite of the day before waiting for you.

"Greetings," you say, warily. You are not sure why he is here. The Wythymites have never before sought you out.

"Greetings, Human. Did you know that your ship did great damage when it landed here?"

"I was aware of that, yes."

"Are you sure you do not want these Flame Jewels?" he says, extruding a pseudopod which clutches your canvas sack.

There must be a thousand of them in the sack. You can feel them from where you are, reaching out to you, to join with your mind and make you one of them, one of this planet forever. You take a step back.

"My people need Flame Jewels desperately, but I am unable to deliver them."

"Would your people hoard them, or spread them throughout the galaxy?"

You think of the fleet a thousand Flame Jewels could build. "They would be spread out."

The Wythymite is silent for a second, perhaps completing some internal conversation. "Then you should have them. Perhaps there is a way for us to deliver them without entrapping you here."

"You would just give them up?" You don't need your economics lessons to tell you that something's funny here.

The Wythymite catches the suspicious tone in your voice, and quickly adds: "For a price, of course."

Your suspicions retreat; bartering you can understand. "What price? And how do I deliver the Jewels?"

"Have your people send an unoccupied drone ship, of the kind you use for moving cargo about. We will load the Jewels and send it back. You can watch the process from a distance, if you wish."

"What about on the other end? How will humans unload the Jewels?"

"You are a resourceful people. I'm sure you can work it out." The amoeba gives a sort of shrug, dismissing the question. Reflecting on what you know about the ISE, you realize he is probably right. Especially if the Jewels go with your warning. Once split up, one to each new drive system, the Flame Jewels should pose no threat.

"Very well. Now what's the price?"

"1 Dimensional Transducer and 1 Insulicon," responds the Wythymite. "And 1 Fiber and 1 Medicine and 1 Super Slip," he adds, when he sees you about ready to accept. Now the price, while fantastically high, seems just about reasonable.

"I'll be back," you respond, accepting. You will have to gather the purchase price yourself; even an organization as powerful as the ISE has never heard of most of it.

"We'll be waiting," says the Wythymite. "Land more carefully next time, will you?"

When you have all the items the Wythymite asked for, return here and plot this option again.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[084]

You return to Tayzha, where dwell the amoebalike beings who think in waves. The Monitor remains in orbit, watching, doing little else. You evade its eyes and descend to the surface.

You have the same options as before.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[085]

Remembering the clue you received on Dahl, you head straight for Derva. You place the chit into the prayer box in front of the statue and step back. Almost instantaneously the statue starts to move! It is an automaton and speaks to you, "Welcome, my child. What do you wish?"

Looking around to make sure you are not being overheard, you whisper, "I am looking for the Brotherhood. I wish to continue my training."

"Then you realize that you must first pass the test. . ."

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[086]

Your return to Qualathara reveals little change in the planet or its inhabitants. You are again met, but not greeted, at the spaceport, and shown unceremoniously to a room in the visitors' quarters. After that, you are pretty much on your own. While contemplating your options, you find yourself wondering about this planet and its Clathran-like inhabitants. The Qualatharians are not harmless, but you don't know what sort of a threat they might pose. They are masters of technology, but have no star ships. They are skilled warriors (at least on the personal level) but have no enemies. What role will they play as the future of the galaxy unfolds? Only time will tell.

You have the same options as before.

✘ STOP ✘

[087]

The spaceport is very busy, considering that the planet is occupied by Clathrans. This is rather confusing. Why should the Clathrans treat the Sirissians any differently from other occupied races? After spending some time thinking about this, you decide there must be more to the quaint little aliens than meets the eye. The innocent, harmless, rotund beings have quite a civilization here, to be sure. From what you have seen, they are an advanced race, perhaps *very* advanced. Could the Clathrans be afraid of them?

These thoughts occupy you as you make your way over to the Cargo Bay Expansion site. On your way, you find yourself flickering in and out of far too many aliens for comfort. Obviously the spaceport is one of the "busy spots" on the planet. Come to think of it, is there any place at all that isn't full to overflowing with beings and transports?

Finally you arrive at your destination. The large hangar that houses the cargo bay business is relatively quiet, at least by Sirissi's standards. You enter the building, phasing in and out of a mere horde of other beings on the way. Stepping up to the counter where countless aliens are being helped, you are also waited upon right away.

Unfortunately, the alien who seems to be in charge of taking orders looks over the blueprints for your ship and informs you that there is not enough available space to install any more cargo bays. Unlucky!

✘ STOP ✘

[088]

You reverse the color of your headband, but your enemies aren't fooled because you are still in your starting corner. It is obvious who is on whose side. Your enemies take the opportunity to advance to the middle of the field. Their superior field position combined with their advantage in strength and mobility is too much for you and your ally to overcome. Eventually, you are incapacitated. You bleed in the mud while both your enemies triumphantly make it across to your side. You pass out.

✘ STOP ✘

[089]

You have a special ability that prevents the Clathrans from seeing you, so you are able to visit any area of the spaceport without fear of being caught. You take your time walking through the large, crowded complex, wandering by the different construction yards, landing pads, passenger areas, and offices, which you may enter at your leisure. The spaceport is very busy because it supports a large volume of military and civilian traffic twenty-four hours a day.

After a few days, you have a pretty good idea of what interesting things you can do here. You can observe the spaceship traffic flow and try to learn something from it; you can watch the spaceport computer terminals and collect information from them; or you can hide in the commissary and eavesdrop on the soldiers' idle conversations. But all these things will take time, and could be dangerous.

You now have the following new options:

- ⟨UM7J8U⟩ (3 phases) Observe the spaceport traffic patterns.
- ⟨YN6YB6⟩ (3 phases) Watch the spaceport computer terminals.
- ⟨QNXYN6⟩ (3 phases) Listen in on Clathran lunch conversations.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[090]

You decide to return to the planet Gloo and instruct your ship to land at the same spaceport as before, located in that sparkling metropolis, Blerghh. As usual, you have to wait several hours until you can get landing clearance. While you are waiting, you wonder how the Bluvians tolerate such an excessive bureaucracy. They must be extremely patient in order to follow the chain of command for every little thing they do. Finally, you are given permission to land. You disembark and wait in line at the alien customs office, eventually collecting your "orders" for this visit.

You have the same options as before.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[091]

The floor of this Shrine is hardwood, and is quite unyielding to your delicate spine. You try it for a few moments, but there's just no way for you to get comfortable. You consider the resting bench for a second, the cubicle's only other piece of furniture, but your better judgement takes over and you head for the door.

Standing in front of it is a beautiful Hadrakian Settled One. (You know at the time that it's a she, and that she's beautiful, but afterwards you are not sure how you knew.)

"Hello," you stammer.

"Hello, Human." Her voice is like a cool breeze on a hot day as it caresses your ears. "I am the Goddess of Gallant Endeavors. Your choosing to help the Hadrakians surely is one. My name is why I'm one of the twenty-six who can speak with you. In fact, I am the seventh one."

"And what is your message?" you ask, attempting to regain control.

"My message is that there are Tools on Middle Rialla."

“Thank you very much.”

“Thank you, Human.”

You report the Goddess’s name to the Shrine Keeper on your way to find somewhere comfortable to lie down.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[092]

You allow yourself to be a dead weight for the guards taking you to the holding cell. As far as they are concerned, you are no more a danger to them than the vegetable you will become after the mind wipe session tomorrow. Sliding into a trance-like state, you gather your remaining strength for a final rally.

Opening your eyes to slits, you watch the corridors pass until you are in one where there are no others but your little party. Summoning all of your strength, you push the two guards into the walls. They are briefly stunned. Not only by the impact but by the fact that you can move voluntarily at all. Turning first to one, then to the other, you deliver vicious blows to their vulnerable body parts leaving them unconscious. Looking around, you see an open door leading to an empty room. Here you stash your victims. You glance upward and note the presence of a large ventilating grill. Why, this could be your highway to the spaceport!

Prying the grate off the opening of the air duct, you heave yourself inside and close it behind you. While this duct isn’t much larger than the sewer pipe, it is far more pleasant to crawl through. Inching your way along, you follow the network of air passages to reach the port where your trusty ship is waiting. Since the base you are on is located on a planet, you decide it will be of little use to try and disable the port’s facilities. There are far too many landing pads to put out of commission before your absence is discovered. No, you will have to risk outrunning the ships you know will pursue you. But that’s what makes life exciting!

You manage to make it to your ship without being detected and, from the lack of alarms, your absence has not yet been noticed. Probably the interrogator is boning up on her “How to Torture” manuals or something like that. Barely able to suppress the groans of pain, you stumble up the entry ramp and stagger into the control room.

“Boss! I thought I wasn’t ever going to see you again! Do you want emergency lift off?”

You think you grunt an affirmative but as you pass out about this time, you aren’t sure. Fortunately your computer is bright enough to work it out and, as you pass into the dreamy world of unawareness, you feel the weight of the thrusters pushing you against the ship’s floor. Later you think you remember feeling heavy shocks of weapons firing upon you and the return shocks of your own vessel firing back. Once you even have the feeling that you are Dorothy in the “Wizard of Oz,” and are being sucked back down to Kansas. All you know is you wake up still on your own ship.

“Hey Boss, welcome back. I managed to get the ship robots to take you to sick bay. You’ll live but you’re still a bit banged up. What did they DO to you down there?”

You don’t feel like talking about it yet, so you ask about the ship’s status.

“Well, I’ve got some good news and some bad news. We got away and are now safely in hyperspace with heavy ship damage. That’s the good news. The bad news is that one of the hits we took shorted out a control bank on the ship regulator portion of my data network. This meant that the cargo bay doors blew. I managed to close off the control room before you suffered any damage but I’m afraid we lost a lot of cargo. You may want to check the status report when you are feeling better and see what’s left of our cargo.”

You groan at this news but realize that things could easily be a lot worse. Somehow, you managed to escape the Clathrans a third time. You really have been extraordinarily lucky — so far.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[093]

The main cluster of structures on Outpost consists of a power station, a landing field, one very large hangar, and some small sheds and service buildings. The power station used to produce energy to run Silverbeard's weapon systems. Most of the station is now inoperative, since you destroyed it in the process of defeating Silverbeard. However, one small generator is still working, and it provides lighting and electrical power for the landing area.

Nearby is a cairn of stones raised in memory of Silverbeard, topped with a shard of twisted phase steel from the wreckage of his last ship. The pirate's body doesn't lie under the cairn; he was buried at sea. The mystery of his strange life and unfortunate death is still unsolved. That he was mad is almost a certainty. But what drove him mad? Was he really, as some evidence indicates, the very same John Silverbeard who was Vanessa Chang's navigator? That would have made him over 340 years old when he died. That doesn't seem likely, but who knows? The original John Silverbeard was captured by the Clathrans and didn't escape with the rest of Chang's surviving crew. His fate alone was unknown; the others either died or escaped. The Clathrans may have done almost anything to him.

Inside the hangar, still untouched, is the framework for a ship Silverbeard had been building. Almost everything else inside has been cleaned out. Soon, you imagine, someone else will claim the hangar and find some use for it. Outpost is yours now, as it was once Chang's and once Silverbeard's. It is still, despite everything, the gateway to the Galactic Arm. You hope fate holds better in store for you than it did for all of the other humans who have dared to pass through that gateway.

❖ STOP ❖

[094]

You pass the test and soon find yourself with Brother Almed, heading down a hidden staircase beneath the floor. Almed asks if you have finished your Geas.

"No, I haven't," you answer.

"Then why have you returned here, Brother?"

"I guess I just wanted to look around and pray," is your embarrassed reply.

"Very well." The Brother nods and continues on his way.

You stop to meditate and light a candle in the Temple. You feel slightly ashamed that you have returned without completing your mission on the planet Hadrak. The Brotherhood needs that data. The threat to humanity is not to be taken lightly.

You leave with a clear head and a renewed desire to complete the Geas and advance to the next step in your training.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[095]

Safely past the Survey Line, you use your subspace radio to contact your father back home.

"I did it, father! I crossed the Survey!"

"Did the Clathrans bother you, Valentine?"

"Uh. . . only a little. And they didn't bother me for long."

"Can you move about freely on the other side?"

"I should be able to manage it. I am an experienced smuggler now, you know, despite your efforts to raise me as a business manager."

"Yes, I know. It's in your genes. Your great great grandfather would be proud. But don't get too cocky. Remember what you're up against out there."

"I will. From what I can tell so far, most of the occupied planets are guarded by Clathran Monitors, but they don't patrol the empty space in between."

"When you can get to Wythym?" Your father's true interest is starting to show.

"Soon, I hope. I know you need those Flame Jewels, and I'll get them as quickly as I can."

"The Stewarts are depending on you, Valentine. Don't let us down."

"No sir!"

✠ STOP ✠

[096]

The swirling water alone is enough to knock you off your feet and send you crashing head over heels toward a large coral reef. Fortunately, you are saved from slamming into the razor-sharp coral edges by the tentacle reaching out and grabbing you in a crushing grip. All right, maybe it isn't so fortunate, especially since the grip is around your chest and is slowly forcing all of the air in your lungs out, as you turn a pretty shade of blue.

"Urrmph," is all you can manage to say as you struggle to free yourself.

"What did you say, Boss? Are you all right? Speak to me!"

Your computer's plaintive cry gives you a fresh burst of energy, and you are able to loosen the death grip of the hydrosor. Using all of your training and abilities, you launch your own attack against the giant beast. The water reptile tries to use more of its tentacles to catch you again, but you are able to evade them. Using your own weapons, you soon have the creature in its death throes. Appendages flailing, the hydrosor sinks down into the crevice which has now become its grave.

You return to the collection site and quickly finish setting up the equipment. Now all you have to do is wait a few days and see what you come up with. There's no guarantee you'll actually get any Primordial Soup; it all depends on the richness of the water that flows through your equipment. However, you have a good chance.

Meanwhile, you gratefully climb out of the water onto the relative safety of dry land. Once back aboard your ship you do a quick study of the beast that almost did you in. You learn that the monsters are very territorial. One hydrosor will stake out a large area of ocean bottom and defend it to the death. The beast you encountered, judging from the tentacle size, was in its prime and obviously considered itself supreme ruler of the watery depths. Now that it is gone, hopefully your equipment will be safe and you will have no trouble going back for your "catch."

The necessary time passes and you return to your equipment to see if you've been successful. Hurrah! The collection bag is full. You load the unit of Primordial Soup onto your ship.

If you want to try to collect another unit of Primordial Soup, you can come back here again. The next time should be easier, since you have already disposed of the guardian hydrosor. Of course, it is hard to say what the chances are of actually "catching" a unit of the rare substance on any given attempt, but it did work the first time. Plot the following option if you want to try:

(FMLJMU) (3 phases) Try to get another unit of Primordial Soup from the oceans of Psorus.

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

[097]

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

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

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

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

✧ STOP ✧

[098]

Dull, dull, dull. Hyperspace is so very dull. You cannot begin to think of anything more mind-numbing than traveling in hyperspace. You are so bored. . .

"Boss?" your computer interrupts your thoughts.

"Yes?" you ask eagerly. Maybe your ship is about to fly down the throat of a supernova, or maybe you are on the verge of running into a planet, or. . .

"I was just wondering if you heard the ship trying to hail us over the radio?"

As it says this, you realize that you have been hearing a faint voice over the speakers but hadn't paid much attention to it because you were so interested in your boredom.

"Translate it and put it on the main audio," you order and sit back to listen to the message.

The caller starts out by hailing your ship directly and asking for you specifically. Although you are a bit hesitant to respond since you are not sure who is doing the calling, you decide to risk it anyway.

“Speaking,” you answer.

“My vessel is under the command of a Hadrakian organization called The Battle, Inc. I understand you are interested in combating a mutual enemy. I strongly suggest you visit one of our offices the next time you are on a Hadrakian world. You and The Battle could be of great assistance to one another.”

“Are you talking about a trade deal, or a military alliance?” you ask the Hadrakian.

“If your interest is currently limited to trading, you will certainly find that becoming a citizen of the worlds of the Hadrakian Empire will offer many new and valuable trade opportunities. As for alliance, I urge that you contact my superiors in The Battle, Inc. Either way, there is opportunity on the Hadrakian worlds for the mutual benefit of both our species.”

The radio becomes silent, leaving you to ponder this odd message.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[099]

Safely past the Survey Line, you use your subspace radio to contact the research center at the Institute for Space Exploration, back on Para-Para, in the Home Worlds. Marc Tremont, your old friend and computer whiz, is there, as is John Smith, a highly-placed official in the ISE hierarchy. You bring them up to date on what you’ve seen of the Clathrans, describing in detail the size and composition of the Survey Line.

“From what you’re saying, the Survey is truly immense,” John Smith comments. “The situation is as bad as Vanessa Chang predicted, if not worse.”

“I’m afraid so,” you confirm.

“This raises some questions as to how to build a space navy that would have any chance of fending them off. What kinds of research would be the most useful?” Smith asks.

“Maybe some kind of exotic defense,” Marc suggests, “Like a really sophisticated computer with the capability to analyze the Clathran sensor frequencies and reflect illusory images in real time. Maybe we could effectively cloak the Home Worlds from view.”

“No, that wouldn’t work,” you answer. “The Clathrans are too thorough. It won’t do any good to make it look like there’s nothing crawling under a rock if they pick up every rock and step underneath just to make sure.”

“I agree,” John Smith says. “Fancy evasive maneuvers and tricks are fine for single ships, but they won’t stop the Survey from overrunning our worlds. We’re dealing with a massive invasion here. Nonetheless, we need some kind of edge. We can’t match the brute strength of the Clathrans.”

“That’s why I’m working on the Survivable Jump Engine,” you remark. “It’s the one technology that none of the aliens have mastered yet, not even the Clathrans.”

“Yes, the Survivable Jump Engine could be critical,” Smith agrees. “You keep working on that, and we’ll do the best we can on the rest of the fleet. Perhaps we can combine forces with some of the other alien races — you mentioned the Hadrakians, for example.”

“I’m working on that, too,” you reply.

“Good. Keep me informed,” Smith says.

“And take care of yourself, Jean,” Marc adds.

“Roger. Over and out.”

⊠ STOP ⊠

[100]

The Bluvian guard at the entrance to the Probability Membrane factory gives you a scare when she scowls at your insignia. Maybe she knows you are an impostor! Visions of being shot at dawn flash through your mind. But she waves you through anyway. Glancing back, you see that she scowls at the person behind you as well; perhaps she just has poor eyesight and needs glasses.

You enter the factory and look around. The place is filled with large, complex machinery and hundreds of Bluvians operating the machinery. Offhand, the technology seems beyond the creative capabilities of the Bluvians. Perhaps the Clathrans helped build it, given that they once had a major presence here on Gloo. But there are no Clathrans here now. Or are there?

Towards the back of the factory, there is an area sealed off by glass walls. A sign at the entrance to the area reads, in big red letters, "DANGER: Probabilistic Variance Zone." Behind the glass walls you see what look like several green-scaled lizard-men carefully working. You'd swear they were Clathrans, except for one thing. Their motions are very precise and repetitive — in fact, too precise and repetitive. You take out your binoculars for a better look, and confirm your suspicions. You are watching several robots that look exactly like Clathrans. The robots are performing their tasks, and have no interest in you or anyone else in the factory. Whew!

After observing factory operations for a while, you make your way to the administrative offices, located in the basement. When you ask the receptionist the procedure for requisitioning Probability Membranes, he gives you a form to fill out.

"If I complete this form, how long will it take to deliver the merchandise?" you ask.

"Oh, you should get it in a year or two," is the reply, "unless you have special orders."

"Well, that's not acceptable. I need these Probability Membranes right away. Let me speak to your supervisor."

The receptionist walks down to one of the offices and returns with a short, heavy-set Bluvian who looks like she just got out of bed. "What is it?" she asks irritably. You explain that you need to get your hands on some Probability Membranes right away, and don't have time to get any special orders. She looks at you with a puzzled expression on her face. "I'm sorry," she says, "but if this is official business we have to go according to section seven point three point two, and there's no way around it. Of course, if you want the membranes for personal use, you can invoke twelve point one point five and get them right away."

"Well, they are for my personal use," you say, being perfectly honest, so I'll invoke twelve point one point, what was it? Five? Yeah. Can I have the membranes now?"

"Of course, twelve point one point five specifies a charge of 2 Fiber, 2 Medicine, 1 Crystals, and 1 Radioactives for each Probability Membrane."

You knew there had to be a catch.

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[101]

You are curious as to how the Middle Riallans build and maintain the huge latticework on which they live. From their daily existence of flying through space and consuming interstellar particles, you do not see any means for gathering or shaping the material from which the giant framework is built. The whole matter has you puzzled.

You follow Ghuuss' directions to the area where trades are conducted and meet with a drab olive-colored gas bag named Benneet who runs the off-world trade center. After introducing yourself, you ask the native about how the Middle Riallans manage to construct their framework home.

"Ah, that is a good question. As you know, we subsist on what is available to us out here in the depths of space. We have no means to land on any planet to gather building material for our structure, but we do have a natural method to obtain this material. Part of our physical metabolic activity is a waste by-product, a rope-like material that, when left in the coldness of space for several weeks, turns into a strong rigid bar. This is what we use to build our world. If the material is heated, it becomes supple again and can be worked into any shape with the appropriate tools."

You try not to think about the details of the production of this material as you inquire as to what trades are available. The Middle Riallans will sell you tools, the very same tools they use to shape their latticework. These tools have special psychic components in addition to the usual physical ones. For example, it is possible to communicate with them telepathically. The exchange rates are as follows:

3 Tools for 1 Medicine
3 Tools for 1 Synthetic Genius

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

✧ STOP ✧

[102]

HOW TO PLAN TURN 3

Choosing from the remaining actions on Outpost, you decide to explore the rest of Outpost's surface and then investigate the other pilots who are here. That will use the remaining phases in this turn. Your plotting sheet should now look like this:

Plotting Sheet							
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7
TURN							
1	Y	R	L	—	—	—	—
2	—	—	A: 7Z82KH	—	A: XZN2YH	—	—
3	A: 9ZV29H	—	—	—	—	—	A: LZM2JH

HOW TO ENTER PLOTS FOR TURN 3

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

HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 3

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

This concludes your character's first three turns. You should now have a good idea how to plot your moves on the computer. If you are still a bit uncertain, we recommend that you read the Rules section and/or CGM Guide in the *Host Guide and Player Reference Manual* or ask a helpful soul standing nearby. You should also have an indication of how important it is to write things down, especially the options available on each planet and any significant information you learn as a result of them.

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

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[103]

You have concluded that the Stargate could prove to be very helpful to you in winging your way across the galaxy. In order to make use of this alien transport system, you must purchase a key. With this in mind, you head over to the Stargate Key market.

The market itself is a small store with all sorts of beautiful things displayed everywhere. When you ask about them, you are told by the sad-looking yellow Dosian who runs the place that everything here is a Stargate Key. The keys come in all sizes, colors and shapes. The buyers choose keys that best suit their fancy.

You ask the proprietor how the keys work. All he knows is that each key is encoded with a sonic transmitter which sends the correct code to the officials at the Stargate. When the officials receive this code, they know that you are a legitimate user and will allow you to pass through the gate.

You select a key shaped like a small furry animal with a wagging tail, and pay the price, one unit each of Food, Super Slip and Synthetic Genius.

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[104]

Strolling down the streets of Cloo, you think to yourself that anarchy is an interesting approach for a society to take. From what you have seen so far, each individual Bluvian is totally free to choose their own job, place of residence, religion, possessions, and so on. There are no laws that govern the way people behave. Of course, this doesn't make for a very well organized colony. When you want to get in touch with someone in particular, like Magnus the storyteller, it can be difficult. The Bluvian people change houses, jobs, store and office locations on a day-to-day basis. How are you supposed to find a single person in all this confusion?

After many hours of walking around the colony, you finally meet someone who will lead you to the storyteller. You accept the offer and follow your new guide to an old house on the outskirts of the domed city. Here, you learn, the family Magnus has lived since the colony was founded. This is very unusual for the people here; now you are even more interested in meeting the storyteller.

Your guide leaves you at the front gate and you thank him for his help. A moment after knocking on the door, it is opened by the first Bluvian who does not make you physically nauseous. Her hair isn't quite as greasy as everyone else's, her teeth are a little straighter, and thank heavens, she uses a strong deodorant that alleviates the body odor somewhat. She invites you inside her surprisingly pleasant home and introduces herself as Magnus the Storyteller. It sounds like some sort of title — you wonder how one gets to be a Storyteller.

When you ask her this question, she laughs and tells you it is hereditary. All of her family have been tellers of tales and keepers of the Bluvian history since the colony on Cloo was started. Since this is just what you are interested in, you ask her to explain.

“Our past is actually very interesting,” she begins. “It starts on our home world, a planet far from here called Bloo. One day, a race of fierce warriors called Clathrans came to our planet. The Clathrans wanted to make us into the perfect fighting machine to help them in their galactic war. They spent many years training us to be violent and destructive, but they were not happy with the results. They did not think we were ready to be part of their army.

“So, they took many thousands of us from Bloo and transported us to another planet, which they named Gloo. There they spent many years teaching us to follow the chain of command. Again, they were not happy with the results. They still regarded us as unfit to be part of their army.

“The Clathrans decided to try one more time. They took several hundred of us from Gloo, and transported us to this small domed colony here on Cloo. Here they taught us to rely on our own initiative, so we would not only be a perfect fighting machine physically, but also be capable of making intelligent decisions as situations demanded.

“Unfortunately for the Clathrans, we learned initiative too well for their taste. We liked making our own decisions, as who would not. Eventually, we decided that we didn’t want to be part of the Clathran army. Why should we take orders from the Clathrans? Disgusted with their failures, the Clathrans finally stopped trying to shape us into a subservient fighting force, and left us alone.

“Ever since, we Bluvians on Cloo have prided ourselves on our ability to make our own decisions. That is why we like anarchy. Each individual is free to decide whatever they want, whenever they want. It’s a great system, isn’t it?”

You don’t judge it worthwhile to try to convince the storyteller otherwise, so you thank her for her time and leave.

✂ STOP ✂

[105]

You make it back to the fringes of the Karnossus system. It’s not the safest place in the galaxy to be, but it’s much safer than going closer. The intense white sun is far away. The Clathran worlds and starship fleets that cluster around it are all but invisible at this range. But you know the Dodecahedron is there, absorbing part of that sun’s energy and driving the Dual Space Interphase ever wider.

Unfortunately, the Clathran fleets are between you and the Dodecahedron. Any attack you attempted would fail, even if you had a weapon that would affect the deadly device. Looking for any weak spot you may have overlooked, you instruct your computer to begin yet another scan of the system.

“Boss, something’s happening,” the computer announces suddenly.

“Have they detected us? Get ready to warp out of here.”

“I don’t think so, Boss. Their formations are shifting around, but not toward us. Communication beams are flashing in all directions.”

You lie low and wait to see what happens. Soon the movement of the Clathran ships begin to make sense. Many of their battle groups are forming up and preparing to move out of the system, toward the Survey Line.

“The communications concern the planet Hadrak, Boss. There’s a battle shaping up there. There are more ships opposing them than they counted on. The Clathrans are calling more force to the front, and the fleets here are leaving.”

“Are they all going to leave?” you ask hopefully.

“Not all at the same time,” answers the computer. “But many of them will. There’s going to be a lot of movement in and out of the system, and a lot of confusion as they redistribute their forces. Eventually, I suspect, ships from the farther parts of the Survey Line will be called back to defend this system. But for a while Karnossus will be vulnerable.”

“Great!” You give silent thanks to all the members of the Alliance, who have won this small victory before the battle for Hadrak has even begun. “Get ready to attack as soon as conditions are optimal,” you command. “We’ve got to destroy that Dodecahedron while we’ve got the chance.”

“Wait, Boss. We don’t have a weapon that’ll work against the Dodecahedron.”

“How can we be sure? Let’s at least try.”

“But if we try and fail, the Clathrans will know what we’re up to. They’ll pull in around the Dodecahedron and no one will ever get another chance at it. We’ve got to get to it with the weapon that offers the best chance of destroying it.”

“What weapon is that?”

“The Dual Space Inversion Bomb that the Hadrakians designed. We have to reach whoever has it and convince them to bring it here right away, or to send it to us.”

“Well, whoever has it better get it here soon. There may never be a better chance.”

You have not landed in the Karnossus system. You are aloft in the trisector containing Karnossus, awaiting the arrival of a bomb.

✂ STOP ✂

[106]

The ISE contacts you on the subspace radio one day:

“Stewart! This is Margaret Ellison calling from ISE headquarters.”

“Hello.”

“We’ve laid our plans for receiving the Flame Jewels, just as we discussed. A cubic parsec of space near Para-Para has been staked out, and the Space Navy is standing by. Will you be requesting the drone soon?”

“I hope so. I’m still trying to meet the Wythymite’s price.”

“Is there anything we can do to help?”

“I’m afraid not. Most of these items are only found in the Arm. It’s just a matter of time, but I hope to be sending you the Jewels soon.”

“Very well, we are standing by for your signal. Ellison out.”

✂ STOP ✂

[107]

The Zyran waste no time taking what they want of your cargo. They know Humans don’t taste good, but they talk about grinding you up for pet food. Luckily, that’s just their sense of humor and they finally let you go. After all, says one, you might be good for more cargo at a later date.

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

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[108]

Like the last time you took this exam, you wake up in the hospital, in considerably worse health than when you started. Citizen Estal drops by to inform you that you failed the test — again. No one said it would be easy. However, your bravery is commendable, and if you wish to try yet again, you may.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[109]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

✂ STOP ✂

[110]

The Dosian people in general are a rather cheerless lot, and the one in charge of the lecture is no exception. Even her yellow coloring looks unhappy and her baseball cap droops pitifully over her eyes.

"How many Unarians does it take to change a light bulb?" you ask her.

Startled, she looks up at you. "What?"

"I said, how many Unarians does it take to change a light bulb? Give up? It takes twenty-one — one to hold the bulb in place and twenty to turn the house. Get it? Ha Ha!"

You stop in mid-chuckle when you see that she is not laughing.

Great furrows appear over her eyes as she seriously ponders what you have just said. Slowly, her whole body begins to tremble and an awful noise comes from her mouth. "Grrraaaaaggghhhh!" she yells and falls over, her body completely rigid.

Dosians come running at the sound and do everything they can to revive her. Finally, their work has some effect and she regains consciousness.

"What happened?" you ask a native standing next to you.

"It sounded like she tried to laugh, which is not a good thing for one of us to do," he replies glumly. "From the looks of things, she had a close call."

"You mean she could have died from hearing a joke?"

The alien shudders, "Don't even use that word in polite society. I see that you are a visitor and probably don't know that humor is deadly to us."

"Why is that?" you ask, curious at this new development.

"I'm not sure, but I think it has something to do with our past. If you want, I can try to explain since it looks like you won't be able to get the normal lecture today."

You sadly agree as you watch the poor Dosian you tried to amuse being carried away. You and your new friend, Twillen, move over to a nearby bench and are seated.

"It all started long, long ago when we were a single unified race," he begins. "We look much as you see us today, except our coloring was a brilliant combination of lavender and yellow. Somehow, we invoked the wrath of the gods, perhaps by daring to venture into space and start colonizing the nearby planets, maybe by developing too much technology — I don't know. Legend just says that we one day found we were beside ourselves, literally, split into two groups, one yellow and one purple.

"The purple group was obviously all of the bad aspects of our personality, now embodied in separate beings. We, the yellow, had gotten all of the noble characteristics of our race and we deemed it necessary to destroy all that is bad and evil by destroying the purple creatures.

"This was easier said than done because, as a test of our convictions, the gods also split our very planet and set our new enemies far away from us. We prayed long and hard, and our prayers were answered. The gods gave us the Stargate, through which we can travel and attack the evil other selves whenever we wish. We also use it to gain revenue by charging visitors a fee to use it. By purchasing a Stargate Key, you can travel through the gate whenever you see fit."

You are curious as to how many races make use of the gate and are surprised by the answer.

"Oh, I think we have seen every known race in this sector of the galaxy, as well as some I have never seen before or since, pass through here, with one exception."

"What's that?" you prod.

"The Clathrans. They are hurt by the Stargate for some reason. I think it has something to do with the actual device used to power the gate, but don't ask me what. I'm not a scientist and I don't think anyone has ever had the nerve to ask the Clathrans what the real story is behind their not using the gate."

You have one more question to ask but are not sure if you should.

"Go ahead," the dour little alien tells you when he sees you hesitate. So you do.

"Why does everyone wear the same sort of hat?"

"Oh, these things? Well, I'll tell you," he lowers his voice and looks around to see if anyone is listening. "We all have a small spot of color on the top of our heads that the gods left to remind us of our mission." He takes the hat off for an instant and you glimpse a purple blot, like a birthmark, on his head.

"We used to wear just about anything imaginable to hide it but, because of the way our heads are shaped, we had trouble keeping some of the hats on. One day, a couple of centuries ago, a ship landed with beings that looked a lot like you. One of them had this sort of hat on that covered a spot on his head where there were none of those strands of protein." You take a moment to deduce that the alien is referring to the hair on your head.

"We all liked it so much that we had them made for everybody and have been wearing them since. Of course, the rotten purple other half all decided to copy us, so they are wearing these, too. From what I remember, they have a spot of yellow on the top of their heads to remind them of the good qualities they lost."

You chat for a while longer, but soon your host has to leave.

"Nice talking with you," he glumly admits as you take your leave. You think over what you have learned as you head back to the ship.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[111]

You have always felt that your sense of direction is one of your best attributes, so you decide to try entering the Sallie residential section of the city. It should be an interesting challenge. After all, this is where the REAL maze is.

As you walk around, you occasionally see a Sallie strolling along through the winding passages, but for the most part, you are alone. Using a computerized mapping device which keeps track of all of your turns, you pass restaurants that serve experimental meals, homes built in all different shapes and sizes, parks full of adult toys and the like. After a few days, you feel ready to return to your ship. Confidently, you turn and begin retracing your steps. Theoretically, by using the mapping device, you should easily be able to find your way back to the Hadrakian section of the city. Unfortunately, this theory doesn't take into account that when you try to retrace your steps, you find that the maze has changed! It's not the same way it was just a few days ago.

You wander around for a while and make some progress, but it is slow going. Ahead there is a fork in the road, and you can see one of the slim natives crossing the street. Should you keep trying to get out of the maze on your own, or ask the Sallie for help?

- A. Try to get out on your own
- B. Ask for help

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[112]

You speed rapidly past the drones and assorted scout ships. Unfortunately, these vessels note your passage, and send word to a whole fleet of Clathran destroyers, which assembles directly in front of you. You have no choice but to turn around and speed back the way you came. Fortunately the destroyers are slower than you are, so you are able to make good your retreat. In the process, you take a fair amount of damage from enemy fire.

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

[113]

You cannot say that you're really looking forward to returning to the planet Cloo. The place is just a drab ball of mud, except for one domed colony of ugly Bluvians. Yet there is something endearing about the colonists' anarchical outlook on life, with each person doing whatever they feel like, whenever they want. So it is with only a modicum of reluctance that you instruct your computer to bring the ship down for a landing.

"You know this is going to make my hull all dirty again, Boss," your computer complains. "I *hate* landing in mud."

"Well you'll just have to live with it," you snap back. Sometimes your computer's nagging gets to be a bit too much. Soon your ship is floating in the mud, and you are safely inside the colony dome.

Your options are the same as before.

✧ STOP ✧

[114]

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

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

✧ STOP ✧

[115]

You have built an Advanced Healing Unit. Congratulations!

This improvement to your sick bay will heal you faster and better than before. Of course, to attain perfect health quickly, a visit to a medical facility on a planet will still be necessary.

✧ STOP ✧

[116]

You find yourself doing something you never expected to do again: opening your eyes. The first sight you see is that of two very human eyes looking back at you. Grunting in surprise, you try to sit up but find that you are too weak to do more than move your head back a scant inch from the man standing over you.

"Peace, friend," he says, gently calming you. "I am Brother Roy." Before you can ask the inevitable question, he reads your mind and is already giving you the answer. "I have learned the ability of Illusion from the mystical order of the Brotherhood. By making myself appear to be a Clathran soldier, I have managed to infiltrate myself as a spy in the Clathran service. In my assignment here I have been able to gather a great deal of useful information. Seeing what was happening to you, I blew my cover to rescue you from certain death. Alas, I fear you did not emerge unscathed."

Brother Roy goes on to explain how he was able to stop the mind wiping session by knocking out your interrogator and turning off the machine. When an opportunity presented itself, he spirited you away from the interrogation area and managed to bring you aboard your own ship, where you now are. However, he was not quick enough to prevent some damage to your mind. Your health is perilously low, and you may have lost one of your special mental abilities, permanently.

At least you are still alive. You thank the Brother for his help.

"If you really want to thank me, find a way to stop the Clathran Survey. Humanity's very existence is at stake." He reminds you of something you cannot forget. Rising, he turns to leave.

"Wait," you call after him. "Is it safe for you to return to the Clathrans? Maybe you should take your chances and leave with me. I think we can break away from the spaceport and evade their offensive weapons."

"By returning to the control room, I can make sure you escape by disarming their alarm system. Wait ten minutes before starting your engines. You will have an easy getaway this time."

"But isn't that dangerous for you? What if you get caught?"

"Don't worry, I have my Brotherhood training to help see me through. Good luck, friend." With that farewell, he departs.

"Hi Boss!" your computer greets you. "I thought you were a goner this time for sure. Lucky for us a human agent managed to infiltrate the Clathran military. I have some bad news to report, though."

More bad news? You wince as you wait for the report.

"While I was waiting on the landing pad, a party of Clathran soldiers came aboard and removed some cargo. Sorry Boss, but there was nothing I could do."

Sighing, you accept the news and tell your trusty computer it was not to blame. Ten minutes pass and you give the order to start the engines. As your ship lifts off from the Clathran base with no sign of trouble, you say a silent thanks to your benefactor and wish him well. Soon, you are well on your way to safety. You strongly suspect that your luck will run out if you are ever captured again.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[117]

You pass through the temple doors and find yourself in the Chamber of Prayer. It is a large room with rows of metal stands holding hundreds of candles located along the walls. Most of the tapers are lit, so you have no difficulty seeing that you are alone in the room.

"Ahem. . ." you hear from behind you. You jump in surprise. Before you can draw your weapon, though, you see that it is a Brother who has startled you. He speaks from the depths of a large hood which completely covers his face.

"Forgive me, Brother," he apologizes. "I did not mean to sneak up on you. I am Brother Ultermalen. You are here for the test."

You have the sneaking suspicion that he knows everything there is to know about you.

"Let us begin. . ."

Go now to the CGM.

✘ STOP ✘

[118]

The historian you speak with is a large round gas bag colored pink on top and grey on the bottom, and it goes by the name of Oompah. Oompah is very accustomed to teaching Riallan history; the alien has been teaching for 250 years! After a long conversation, you learn the following.

These creatures call themselves "Middle" Riallans because they are descended from a mother race that lived closer to the galactic core. There are few details about these ancestral Riallans, just that they existed tens of thousands of years ago when a physical phenomenon called the galactic Dual Space Interphase was very wide. The wide Interphase permitted a sort of magic upon which the ancestral Riallans were very dependent.

Unfortunately, the Dual Space Interphase had been narrowing for a very long time, and it continued to get narrower. The ancestral Riallans feared that they could not survive in a galaxy where the Interphase was too narrow. In desperation, they created a new species of Riallans whose metabolism was less dependent upon the Interphase. The new species migrated to the middle section of the galaxy, and set up their home. These are the Middle Riallans.

The Middle Riallans were able to live in comfort for a long time, because they are not totally dependent upon the Dual Space Interphase. However, they do use the Interphase for some things, notably their psychic powers of telekinesis, levitation, telepathy, and sensaround, just to name a few. Unfortunately, the Interphase continued to shrink to an even smaller size than the ancestral Riallans had planned for. The Middle Riallans began to feel distress. Their psychic powers diminished. It was as if they were going blind.

The Middle Riallans decided that they needed to act as their ancestors had in the face of possible extinction. Since they did not know if the Interphase would become so narrow as to be lethal to them in their current form, they created yet another new race of Riallans. The New Riallans were smaller beings who barely needed the Dual Space Interphase at all. However, unlike the Middle Riallans and their ancestors, the New Riallans needed to live on a planet. They could survive in space for short periods, but their long term needs included planetary air, water, and food.

The Middle Riallans built spaceships for the first generation of New Riallans and sent them to the Galactic Fringe in search of a suitable world. These were the Riallans you met in the Fringe a few years ago. The Middle Riallans are not only their ancestors, but their creators.

It's funny, but lately the Middle Riallans are feeling much better. In the last twenty years, the Dual Space Interphase has reversed its age-old trend of narrowing and has suddenly gotten much wider. In fact, it may even be as wide as it was when the Middle Riallans were first created. As a result, the Middle Riallans now feel as strong as ever.

You are interested in this galactic phenomenon called Dual Space. It had quite an impact on the Riallans' history, so it must be very important. In addition, you are curious about the psychic powers the Riallans have. Oompah introduces you to a friend named Gloossh who will be happy to talk to you some more about these matters if you have the time.

You now have two new options:

⟨J7U87K⟩ (6 phases) Ask Gloossh about Dual Space.

⟨37P8SK⟩ (6 phases) Learn about the Middle Riallans' psychic abilities.

✕ STOP ✕

[119]

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

⟨BYW6TB⟩ (3 phases) Research dual space on Unaria.

✕ STOP ✕

[120]

When you enter the inner office, the first thing you notice is that the combat mural has been replaced. The single image of the Clathran fighting the Hadrakian is now multiple images on several panels, in which Clathrans fight against a multitude of different opponents: short stumpy Sirissians, a Worzellian in battle armor and another in Strategist's robes, multiform Zyran (the artist has made clever use of diffractive materials to create Zyran likenesses that look different each time you look at them), a few big gassy Riallans, and even a fighting Bluvian. Around the edge, looking on, are smaller representations of other aliens: Geefloids, Francloons, Holots, Kerosians, Dardahlian centaurs, Mardahlian ostriches, Darkwhistlers, Unarians and Dosians, Wesmlots, and even a Qualatharian. The Hadrakian warrior still dominates the center, naked as always. Also near the center is a human figure, thankfully clothed, but dressed in explorer's gear instead of a combat suit. Though the battle rages on all sides, the figure stands calmly in front of a spaceship — the only ship in the entire mural — as though gazing out over the landscape of a new world. *Hey, I fought too*, you think to yourself with some indignation. But you're pretty sure your position in the tableau is a compliment.

Three Hadrakian Settled Ones greet you as you enter the room. Although their mood looks brighter than you've ever seen before in these offices, they are still dressed in the familiar red uniforms and still performing their tasks with calm efficiency.

"I'd have thought you'd be celebrating," you tell them.

"Business goes on," says one. "Remember, four of our worlds are still in Clathran hands. Our next moves depend on what they do, so we must watch carefully. Will they withdraw toward the Core or will they attempt to hold their position? Have we forced them to dissolve the Survey, or will they risk maintaining a weakened line? Our own fleets must be repaired without delay. We must make plans to liberate our colonies before the Clathrans avenge themselves on them, if they haven't already. Also, there are the last words of the Clathran commander to consider. Who are these 'Masters,' and what can we expect of them? There's more work than ever. Business goes on."

And so it does. The Hadrakians return to their work without even asking you for a report. Disappointed, you turn to leave.

"Human," says another of the Hadrakians. "Please step into the strategy room in the back. There's something we must ask you to do."

You step through the door. Before your mind can register that the room is filled to overflowing with Hadrakian Homeless Ones, you hear five distinct popping noises, and five streams of foaming liquid pour over your head.

Mobs of Homeless Ones are crowding to be first to thump you on the back (the force of the blow being proportional to the respect in which you are held) and shake your hand (they never have gotten the hang of this custom; they keep trying to shake from side to side). You hear one shout "The funny-looking what's-it-called is here! Now we can PARTY!"

You suspect that your ship's medical unit is going to have a lot of work to do by morning.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[121]

"I am the God of Misdirected Targets," proclaims the voice in your head. You have embarked on another meditation and edification visit to a Hadrakian Shrine.

"May you always guide my opponent's fire," you respond.

"Exactly! I am pleased at your quickness and would like to help you out. Perhaps you would like to know where to acquire Medicines?"

"Certainly," you say.

"The place is Margen."

"Thanks!"

"Don't mention it. And don't forget the name, either: the God of Misdirected Targets."

"I'm sure the Shrine Keeper will find it of use."

"I'm sure that you will, too, if you're the sort who can put one and two and twenty-six together."

With that, your visitation is over.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[122]

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

"Boss, what will we do about the energy beam?" your computer asks. You have been thinking a little about this exact problem and have decided to try forcing your way past it. You do take some precautions against the effect it might have on you should the beam actually strike your ship. With this in mind, you climb into your invaluable Super Space Suit. This has been guaranteed to protect you against virtually anything. You may be about to put it to the test.

"Try to knock it out with our weapons," you order. "If that doesn't work, use evasive maneuvers."

"Roger!"

Your ship fires on the nearest beam site, which brings about an immediate reaction, although not exactly the one you had been hoping for. The enemy weapon doesn't take kindly to being attacked and fires upon you, engulfing your fleeing ship in a stream of energy. You watch helplessly as your ship systems blow, one by one. Fortunately, you have enough power and speed to push you out of range of the weapon before your ship turns into irradiated plasma.

Taking the necessary time to evaluate the damage, you see that your ship has been seriously injured. However, you count your blessings. At least your Super Space Suit protected you from the effects of the ray. There's no telling what might have happened if you had not been

wearing it. As you plot the instructions for the next leg of your trip, you think to yourself that it might be a good idea, the next time you return to this planet, to find some way of protecting your ship from the alien energy beam.

Go now to the CGM.

⊗ STOP ⊗

[123]

Unfortunately, the enemy has the advantage of the first attack and makes the most of it. With a raucous cry, the aeropsor seizes the hull of your ship in its metal-piercing talons and starts tearing a bite out of the side with its beak. Before it can get too far, you manage to fire a salvo of weapons that seek out the beast and distract it. Surprised, the reptile releases your ship and backpedals in the air to reassess the situation. You seize this opportunity to fire another round at the monster, severely wounding it.

It is time to press your advantage. "Evasive action, arm all weapons, bring the ship about and FIRE!" you command. With hands braced against the control panel, you await the outcome of this third salvo. You do not wait long before you see the aeropsor meet an untimely end. All of your actions blended together to form the perfect offense against this formidable foe. You breathe a thankful sigh and allow yourself the luxury of sinking back into your command chair before giving the order to continue on your previous heading, out into the depths of space.

You are lucky to have survived this encounter. As it is, the aeropsor inflicted some serious damage to your ship's hull.

Go now to the CGM.

⊗ STOP ⊗

[124]

Your experience with Golgotha's Dual Space anomaly indicates that your theory of Dual Space will have to be extensively revised. For one thing, a rift this wide in the Interphase couldn't possibly exist, under your current theory, without reducing the entire universe to a state of total subjectivity. Clearly, there must be some force that contains and limits the Golgotha anomaly. Secondly, even contained, such an anomaly should have killed you when you got near it. Something, therefore, is protecting your own mind as well. You wonder if those two influences, the one that contains Golgotha and the one that protected you, might be similar in some fundamental way.

"No, Boss, that doesn't work either," says your computer as it rejects yet another equation. "In fact, I think I see a proof that no stable system can possibly contain a Dual Space anomaly."

"Great," you reply. "That means that what I'm trying to do is impossible. On the other hand, it can't be impossible because I've seen it done. Hold on, I've got it. . . no, that doesn't work either."

You think about it for a few more hours. "What about an unstable system?" you ask the computer.

"That could work, Boss, except that an unstable system must eventually collapse."

"But after how long? After all, isn't a mind an unstable system — thermodynamically, at least? Of course, that must be the answer. Golgotha must have been created by a sentient entity. No. Even better. Golgotha must *be* a sentient entity. And so am I, of course." You begin furiously scribbling equations on the control console, just below the navigation panel. "That's it! The two formulae describe the same system. Thought influences Dual Space, Dual Space allows thought, thought drives mental powers, sentience is Dual Space instability, the Interphase is me, and I'm going completely insane!"

"Uh, Boss? I don't understand what you just said."

"Neither do I," you answer. "But I will. I'm starting to get it, I really am."

⊗ STOP ⊗

[125]

You pause to consider your alternatives for rotating the five dials. Obviously, you need to set the dials to the right five digit number in order to open the doors. The lure of unknown goodies in the compartments awaits you if you get the combination right.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[126]

Brother Mathus seems to be as stunned as you are when you give an incorrect response.

“Come now, Brother,” she chastises you. “I realize that you are very busy but it hasn’t been *that* long since you received this portion of the dialogue! I think the best thing to do is to leave here, study your notes, and return when you feel you can concentrate better on what you are doing.”

You agree and leave the temple without another word. The ride back to the outside world is, strangely enough, in pitch blackness. You have an uncomfortable feeling that the Brothers are trying to forewarn you of the future if you do not finish your training.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[127]

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

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

“Let’s hear it.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Then leave now, alien.”

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

Obviously, if you ever hope to land here, you must get permission from someone on the planet Geefle first. Whether you have already been there or not, a trip to Geefle is in order.

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

❖ STOP ❖

[128]

Panting and sweating, it takes you a moment to realize that you have won! The crowd boos lustily, deploring your lack of divine favor. A gaudily-clad Hadrakian female with lustrous white fur presents you with the lavender badge of citizenship on Franclair and publicly proclaims your worthiness to do business with the Hadrakian citizens of the planet.

You spend a couple of days partying in the Hadrakian city (partying being one of the things the Hadrakians do best) before settling down to the serious business of business. The threat of the Clathran Survey, soon to arrive here, has lent a desperate dance-in-the-face-of-disaster atmosphere to the planet and its many industries. From the information you have been able to gather on the streets, the Hadrakians plan on making a stand here to test the Clathrans' strength. If the Survey Line proves to be too tough, the Hadrakians will retreat as many ships as they can inward to help guard Hadrak, their home world. Exports are at an all-time high, as well as imports of any goods expected to be in short supply after the Clathran interdiction.

The Hadrakian males, or Homeless Ones, are eagerly testing their own strength in preparation for the upcoming battle. Mock duels take place all around you as you explore the city. The young males are tense with anticipation and excitement. You realize that the Homeless Ones look upon the Clathran fight as just another Arena combat for them, something against which to test their prowess.

The older Settled Ones, on the other hand, are doing their best to stay calm. They appreciate the dreadful seriousness of the situation and are trying to save their civilization from destruction. The responsibility is a great burden upon them.

As you tour the city, you realize you have seen none of the indigenous species, the Francloons. Stopping at a nearby restaurant, you ask the Settled One who serves your lunch about them.

"They're not usually this shy, so you should consider yourself lucky. They probably just don't know what to make of your species yet," she explains. "Enjoy it while you can. Many of our citizens rue the moment the natives take notice of them. Except for the Homeless Ones, of course. They see the attention as a challenge even if it lands them in the Hospital." Before you can ask her what she means by this, she leaves. Hmmm.

When you finish your meal, you stand to leave. Kerplut! As you try to take your first step, you find yourself falling flat on your face. Your shoes are stuck to the floor by some kind of goo! Peering beneath the table brings you face to face with one of the natives, which makes a high tittering noise as it regards you. If you didn't know better, you'd swear it was laughing. You take the opportunity to study it more closely.

The alien is a round bag of protoplasm with a collection of sensory apparati at one end and a collection of tentacles at the other. It is about two feet in diameter and moves about by scuttling on whatever number of tentacles are not being used for other things. You extend a hand to it, under the table, but the alien ejects a gas from one end of its anatomy that propels it away from you at great speed. Unfortunately, this gas seems to consist chiefly of sulfur, and you spend the next five seconds gasping for air. Phew!

A Homeless One enters the restaurant in time to see what has happened. Baring its fangs at the fleeing Francloon, the Hadrakian male pulls out a projectile weapon and takes aim at the rapidly disappearing alien.

"No, wait!" you manage to choke out. "Let it go." The Homeless One shrugs and holsters his weapon. You free your shoes from the goo, wondering if the Francloon secreted it there on purpose, and go about your business.

Your investigation of the Hadrakian colony on Franclair turns up many points of interest. A particularly noteworthy site is a wide lagoon located just outside the city. The lagoon has the unusual property that a low grade electric current is constantly flowing through its waters. As a consequence, it is an ideal location for performing various kinds of scientific research. For example, scientists working there have made several breakthroughs in jump engine technology, the propulsion system used by cargo drones.

You now have the following options:

- (BXWNTY) (3 phases) Visit the Planetary Commodities Market.
- (GX4NQY) (5 phases) Check in for a stay at the hospital, which will cost one unit of any commodity, your choice.
- (C7F8LK) (7 phases) Contact the local division of The Battle, Inc., "The Empire's officially sponsored Clathran resistance corporation."
- (57E83K) (5 phases) Travel to a cargo drone factory located at the edge of the lagoon.
- (CXFNLY) (6 phases) Investigate a scientific research facility called the Wet Repulsion Slab, submerged in the lagoon.
- (5XEN3Y) (7 phases) Go to a place where the Francloons like to gather so you can learn more about this unusual race.
- (B9WVT9) (3 phases) Stroll the Street of Gods, and pray to the Hadrakian deities.

✂ STOP ✂

[129]

You approach the planet Mardahl with a little more excitement than on your previous visit. Now you are here on a mission to find the Brotherhood, complete your training and finally reach the end of the Path of Intuition! You know from the Brothers on Dardahl that the Brethren here are well hidden, even more so than there. You remember that you are to look for the secret signal that will show you the presence of the Brotherhood.

Your enthusiasm wanes quickly, however, when you realize that the Clathrans are here ahead of you.

You decide to run a long-range scan on the planet before you get close enough to be in any danger. The data indicates the presence of a Clathran monitoring station and several destroyers in orbit around the planet. In addition, the Clathrans have a small army garrison on the surface. From the looks of it, the Mardahlans didn't put up much of a fight.

The situation is bad, but it could be worse. At least the Clathran presence here is relatively small, which makes it possible for you to try to elude it. There are only a few orbiting spaceships, and the garrison on the ground is confined to a limited area. You decide that with your technology and skill, you have a good chance of being able to pursue your business on the planet without being spotted by the invaders.

You instruct your computer to perform the maneuvers needed to get you down to the surface out of sight of the Clathran forces. With a little care, you are soon safe on the ground just outside the city of Pillonia. You make a cautious reconnaissance of the city, and suddenly realize a fortunate coincidence: you look a lot like the planet's android lower class — close enough to them, in fact, that you can easily pass for a native. Relieved, you broaden your explorations. Your options turn out to be the same as prior to the occupation; amazingly enough, Mardahland is still functioning.

✂ STOP ✂

[130]

You put on your environmental suit and turn off all your ship's systems, including life support. This is very risky. However, it seems to work pretty well. The automated drones and scout ships don't notice you, and you drift silently through them. Nicely done.

Unfortunately, you are now in the midst of the Survey Line forces, and you still have a ways to go in order to make it the rest of the way through. Looming ahead of you is a large stationary Clathran monitoring station equipped with powerful x-ray beams. In only moments more, the beams will be sweeping across your ship.

Checking behind you, you see just a few small drones and scout ships. You can still retreat, if you wish. Or, you can press forward. What do you do?

- 1) Continue to act like an asteroid, doing nothing that might arouse the monitoring station's suspicions.
- 2) Send full power to your engines and speed through the rest of the Survey Line as fast as you can.
- 3) Blast the guts out of the monitoring station.
- 4) Openly establish radio communications with the monitoring station and identify yourself as an authorized Clathran vessel.
- 5) Turn back and retreat the way you came.

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

[131]

You return to the steamy tropical world of Franclair, with its thick overgrown jungles and wide shallow seas. Here, you know, the Hadrakians have a thriving colony despite the interference of the native Francloons. But it isn't easy. The Francloons are constantly playing pranks on the Hadrakians, making for an uneasy cohabitation between the two races, to say the least.

You have the same options as before.

✧ STOP ✧

[132]

After several tries, you have managed to establish a two-way subspace radio link with the Institute for Space Exploration research station on Para-Para. Soon you are speaking with Dr. Amos Schottky, the head of the research efforts under way in the Home Worlds to produce advanced space ships. He asks many questions about conditions in the Arm and the problems of piloting the tri-axis drive on the high side of the Density Barrier. Fortunately, the signal stays clear long enough for you to transmit some of the data accumulated by your ship's instruments during your travels.

"Are you building tri-axis drives now?" you ask Schottky.

"Not yet," he replies. "We have all the technologies in place, but we need Flame Jewels to complete them. None of the synthetic substitutes worked out." You wonder if that means there are new craters on the light side of Para-Para. "But there's likely to be progress soon. Opinion here is growing in favor of building a Space Navy, or at least pulling some of the Patrol ships off station and refitting them for D.D."

"What's D.D.?"

"Deep Defense. The uniforms on Endaur seem to think that 'space navy' isn't a dignified enough name. Anyhow, tri-axis drive capability is the most obvious need but not the only one. To float a navy we'll need to train people for deep-space navigation, weapons and gunners who know how to use them, the best sensor systems, and so on. We're already hiring some of the top-level scum away from the Families just to get some truly spacewise people into the planning. The information you and the other explorers in the Arm can give us is invaluable too."

"It sounds like things are moving fairly quickly," you observe.

"Not as quickly as we'd like. This damned Elcrezis Syndrome is causing delays in the manufacturing end back in the cities. They're losing personnel and equipment at a rate that's starting to make a difference in our production schedules."

"Equipment? What's happening to the equipment?"

"Who knows? All we know is the failure rate on anything more complicated than a corkscrew seems to be ten times higher in the population centers where all the SAPS cases are. Maybe it's just that people haven't been as attentive to maintenance schedules, with all the stress. I don't know, but it's making it hard to keep things organized."

Your receiver emits a squeal of static of a type that forbodes your link is going down soon. "I'm losing contact," you say quickly. "Any last questions?"

"No time. . . try. . . more about Clathrans. . . again later," you hear as the signal fades. "Para-Para out."

⊠ STOP ⊠

[133]

The Hadrakian landing beacon takes you through some serious bad weather. The upper air turbulence shakes the ship like a rattle. The middle air turbulence is, if anything, worse. The lower air turbulence delivers a wallop that sends you reeling against the wall of the bridge. Ouch!

"Boss, you should see this!" your computer calls to you, but you have more pressing matters on your mind at this very moment. "The plant life here is incredible! Just look at the size of these trees! And the flying life forms, why they're huge! But this land creature has to be the biggest living animal on this entire planet, why, it must be over thirty feet tall. I'd hate to be on the business end of those teeth!"

You listen to all of this rhetoric while trying to maintain your balance in a kneeling position. "Can't we smooth out this bumpy ride?" you croak as the ship hits another big thermal drop, causing your stomach to hit the roof of your mouth.

"Just another minute and we'll be below this turbulence, Boss. Sorry the ride is so rough." You moan but do not have the strength to reply further. Sure enough, after that last drop, the landing evens out and you begin to feel much better. You even manage to rise and look out the forward viewscreen to catch your first glimpse of the Hadrakian colony.

While watching the space pad become larger as you approach, you notice the huge creature your computer was babbling about earlier. It IS a monster! You note with some apprehension that it is headed directly toward the colony and is sure to trample the buildings and whatever life forms may be in its way. At the last minute, it stops and veers around the perimeter of the Hadrakian city, leaving all intact. You sigh gratefully and prepare to land.

"What caused the brute to do that?" you ask your trusty computer.

"Let me run a scan, Boss. Just a second." The allotted time passes and your computer answers, "There is some sort of mental scrambling device encircling the colonized area. It has the effect of warding off all forms of native life. We won't be affected since our thought waves are not on the same frequencies as the native reptiles."

How interesting. You allow the computer to set the ship down at the visitors' Enclave and disembark. There is little to see or do in the Enclave, but as you know, you will be restricted to the Enclave until you can earn your citizenship by winning a combat in the Arena.

Before you enter the registration building, you see a crowd of boisterous males heading out into the jungle, armed with holstered hand weapons and primitive saws and axes. You do not know where they are going, but you admire their bravery to leave the protection of the city. They seem to be looking forward to the dangers which await them out there.

You enter the building and fill out the necessary paperwork to register yourself and your ship with the Hadrakian government here on Psorus. The large female behind the counter helps you sort through the reams of forms necessary to do this, and she patiently encodes the data into the computer. Within minutes, she has an available time slot for you to fight in the Arena if you so choose.

You thank her for her time and spend a few minutes looking around the area. There is very little to attract your attention here except a few brochures touting the benefits of a good visit or two to the local Street of Gods. The claim is that the gods really do care and will gladly impart useful, if somewhat cryptic, information to those deserving assistance.

You have the following options:

⟨8NKYD6⟩ (3 phases) Visit the Enclave market.

⟨VN9YV6⟩ (7 phases) Take your chances in the Arena, attempting to win your citizenship on Psorus.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[134]

Of all the races you have encountered thus far in your travels, you find the Sirissians to be among the least comprehensible. You have your suspicions that they are extremely advanced, thus making their motives and actions unclear. You especially wonder why they allow the Clathrans to remain on their planets.

Bit by bit, you hear about an organization of Sirissians who may be willing to help you fight the Clathrans. If the bobbly little aliens truly do have a resistance group, they could come in handy if you can find them and convince them to trust you and the information you bring. Since the fate of your race hangs in the balance, you decide to put in the necessary time to find this Underground.

Approaching a little cafe-style establishment that, you have been told, no Clathran soldier has ever entered, you take a seat and order something to drink that is compatible with your metabolism. When the server brings your drink, you mention the lack of soldiers here and how good it is to be someplace where you do not have to be on the lookout for trouble from them. She asks if you are always this negative about military organizations. You reply that you are only against those that want to wipe out your entire race. The alien swivels his sensory stalks at you (something you are getting used to by now) and leaves. Just as you are about to give up the idea of making contact with the resistance here, another Sirissian seats himself at your table.

"Greetings, Human," he begins. "I understand you are unhappy with some of the guests we allow on our planet."

"Only if they have green scales and red eyes."

"Well, perhaps there are reasons for letting them stay here, reasons that suit the purpose of a group dedicated to fighting the soldiers when the time is right."

"And when will that be?" you ask. "Could I ask these people that question in person?"

"For obvious reasons, they cannot allow just anyone to contact them; they need assurance that those who look for them are really on their side."

"How can they be sure?"

"There is a method of questioning that, although not damaging, is not very comfortable. If the seeker will undergo this, it will help to prove good intentions."

You think this over, then agree. The Sirissian brings you into the back part of the cafe, where a small room is located. Inside the room are many evil-looking devices. You swallow in apprehension over what you have gotten yourself into this time. You take a seat and allow arm and leg straps to be placed on you.

The next several hours are not at all pleasant. You answer many questions as fully as possible, describing many of your adventures and escapades. When you withhold some information, the devices all warn the Sirissians of your omission, but they seem to understand that you cannot divulge everything you know. By the end, you have proven at least your serious intent of destroying the Clathran Empire before they reach your Home Worlds.

"Well, Human, while you have not been totally open with us on some things, we are satisfied that you are a good addition to our own forces. We would like to welcome you to the Sirissian Underground. We have many projects and plans in the works for fighting the Clathrans and would be pleased to assist you from time to time. I am giving you the first level Golden Triangle to signify membership in our group. This badge will allow you access to our rebel city, where you may learn things to help you in your own personal fight."

The Sirissian leaves you to sit and recuperate from your questioning ordeal. You examine the golden badge you have been awarded. It is small, about an inch from the center to any of the three points. Its depth is only about a quarter of an inch, but you believe that the outer shell is housing some sort of mechanism inside. You are tempted to try to open the thing but decide to leave well enough alone. When you are feeling better, you rise and leave the cafe, returning to your trusty ship, thinking about the existence of the Sirissian rebel city.

You now have a new option:

(KXDNCY) (7 phases) Visit the rebel city, home of the Sirissian resistance.

✘ STOP ✘

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You have built a Stasis Field for your ship. In its present form, the Stasis Field will be a very effective attack weapon for your ship. The Field is of limited size, so you can't expect to "freeze" fast-moving enemy ships in stasis for more than a few moments at a time, but those few moments could make a crucial difference.

✂ STOP ✂

[136]

Walking on Knapt's surface is more difficult than you imagined. It takes several hours to cover the distance to the alien building. Tunnels within tunnels within tunnels riddle the surface of this unique world, causing you to detour around mile-wide holes on more than one occasion. Finally, you find yourself standing at the base of the housing for the beam generator.

You approach the nearby beam transmitter with all the caution due such a deadly weapon. While not completely sure what you can accomplish here, you want to get inside the building which houses one of the six points of the total weapon and see what there is to see. Getting in is another matter, though. The beam weapon emplacement is much larger than it appeared from space. The main bulk of it is a cylinder about five hundred feet in diameter and a quarter mile long. Placed in the center is a domed secondary structure where the beam itself comes from. You cannot see any sort of entrance to the building from where you are. Even after circling it, you can't find a doorway.

Finally, on the underside of the building, accessible only when you climb down into a shallow trench located along the outer perimeter, you find an airlock. The mechanism for opening the door is simple; within a few minutes, you are inside. Passing through the inner door, you find yourself in a long grey metal corridor which eventually leads to a room full of electronic equipment. Above you is a reflective dish aimed out through a window in the secondary building.

After a brief, but thorough, examination of the interior, you learn that you are in the control room for the weapon. The cylindrical structure leading away from here is the conduit for the actual beam itself to emerge from the generator, focus on the large mirror device above you, and shoot out to join with the other five beams, creating a lethal energy attack.

You spend several hours studying the weapon in an effort to learn how it works. The tracking and aiming technology alone would be invaluable if you could transfer the knowledge into your own ship's systems. Finally, through hard work, perseverance, plus stumbling onto a chart that explains many of the things you do not fully understand, you become confident that you can adapt the know-how to your weapons system. Looking around to see what else you can find, you recall the need to find a way to actually turn off the beam weapon so you can leave safely.

A few more hours of poking around prove that this wish is impossible. There is a fail-safe device to warn those who installed the weapon here — Clathrans, from the look of the printed material — of a failure in the equipment. The only thing you would accomplish by shutting the beam off is to alert the enemy of your presence on this world. Instead, you try another plan.

From what you have seen, you know you can redirect the beam coming from this generator so it won't properly align with the other five. While this will not save any of the plasma creatures attempting to leave from elsewhere on the planet, it will allow them, and you, to take off from this area. The misaligned beam will open a window where the energy beam will be ineffective against anything leaving the planet's surface. When you have accomplished this, you leave the building and return to your ship. A short time later, you have recalibrated your weapons system according to what you learned inside the beam generator building. Not only have you given yourself a way to leave the planet without being hit by the beams, but you have stolen the Clathrans' advanced tracking and aiming technology for your own use. You are feeling rather satisfied with yourself right now.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

