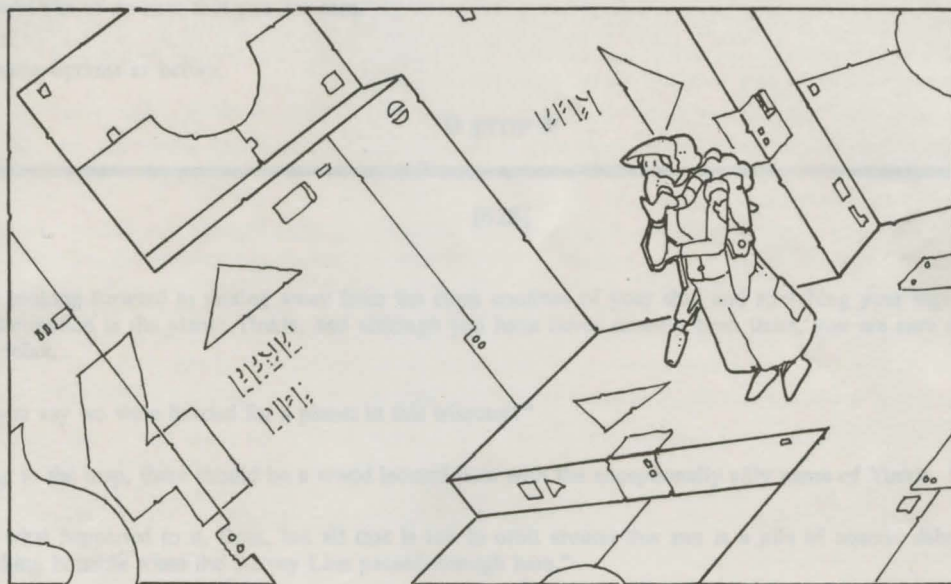


# STAR SAGA: TWO™

# BOOK J

TEXT 627-689



BOOK 1

STAR  
SAGA: TWO™

TEXT 637-439



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[627]

Nothing much has changed on Bloo since your last visit. The natives still seem to spend most of their time brawling and wrecking things. They ignore your ship, just as before, until you step out of it, at which point they attack in a mob.

“Horrible Alien Pestilence!” shouts a particularly ugly Bluvian. Every Bluvian in the area rushes to attack.

“No I’m not!” you shout back, standing your ground.

“Are you quite sure?” one asks rather petulantly as the mob stops their forward rush and just mills about aimlessly.

“Yes,” is your firm reply. “Now go on about your business.”

The aliens all turn back to the building they had been assaulting before your arrival and continue tearing it down. You wander around the city until you find your old friend Thurk, who is leading a group assault on a shopping area. He is delighted to see you and invites you to lunch. Over a green salad, you fill each other in on your latest battles and conquests. When you have finished with your dessert, you begin to think about what you’d like to do now that you are here.

You have the same options as before.

✧ STOP ✧

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[628]

You are really looking forward to getting away from the close confines of your ship and stretching your legs on the surface of a nice planet. Your next destination is the planet Yinkle, and although you have never actually been there, you are sure it is just the sort of place where a person can relax.

“Boss, didn’t you say we were headed for a planet in this trisector?”

“Yes, according to the map, there should be a world located here with the exceptionally silly name of Yinkle. Why do you ask?”

“I’m not sure what happened to it, Boss, but all that is left in orbit around this sun is a pile of cosmic debris. My guess is that the Clathrans did something horrible when the Survey Line passed through here.”

“Do you mean to tell me that an entire planet is missing?”

“It appears that way. Scary, isn’t it?”

You have to agree. Since you have no planet to land on here, you are still aloft in the trisector that used to contain the planet Yinkle.

✧ STOP ✧

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[629]

The guard at the library door barely glances at your insignia before waving you through. You could really get to enjoy the privileges that rank brings. No questions, no demands, and you can get into almost every place on the planet. This is great!

The library itself turns out to be a disappointment. Apparently the Bluvians are not really what you would call scholars. Most of the reading material available here consists of volumes and volumes of old requisitions, daily reports and vacation schedules (Bluvians do get ten weeks of vacation per year — you suspect that this is a major factor in keeping them happy with the current system). You are about to leave when an elderly Bluvian approaches you and asks if he can be of any help.

“I’m interested in reading about Bluvian history. Are there any appropriate books available?”

The librarian beckons you into his office. “There are very few books anywhere on Gloop, but maybe you’d like to listen to the ramblings of an old man.”

You gladly accept; anything is better than going away empty-handed. You sit engrossed, listening to the librarian for hours. He tells you many stories about his youthful exploits which are interesting, but not really helpful. He also teaches you some things about Gloop’s history. Another planet, called Bloo, is in fact the homeworld of the Bluvians. The people on Gloop were brought here as part of a Clathran experiment. The green-scaled Clathrans wanted to develop a race of beings that would be perfect soldiers.

However, the Bluvians took the Clathrans’ teachings on how to obey the chain of command a little too far. Disappointed in how the experiment came out, the Clathrans closed their base and left the planet. “It’s just as well,” the librarian explains, “The Clathrans didn’t understand us. Maybe they’ll have better luck next time.”

“What do you mean, next time?”

“I can’t tell you. It’s a secret.”

Having learned how things work here on Gloop, you know how to deal with that. “Of course you can tell me,” you command, “I outrank you. In fact, I order you to tell me.”

“Well, if you put it that way,” the Bluvian answers, “Of course I can tell you. When the Clathrans left, they ordered a group of Bluvians to come with them. It’s rumored that they took them to a third planet, to conduct another experiment. I don’t think it’ll work out, though.”

“Why not?”

“Like I already said, the Clathrans don’t understand us.”

You nod in agreement. You’re not sure you understand the Bluvians either. The old librarian is becoming tired and has told you everything he knows, so you thank him and take your leave. You turn and wave goodbye but see he is fast asleep. Quietly, you leave his office.

❖ STOP ❖

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[630]

You are frustrated by your inability to land a solid blow on any of the three Zyran ships. Rats! Hours pass and still you and the enemy remain at an impasse. At least your ship is still sound, even if the enemy can claim the same condition.

Finally, almost as if by mutual consent, you and the Zyran vessels start to pull back from each other. Cautiously you retreat, watching to see if they intend to pursue. They are moving just as cautiously, obviously thinking the same about you. Since neither side is intending to continue this fight, you soon are far enough apart for all four ships to go their own way. You fire one last salvo at the enemy before warping to safety.

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

✘ STOP ✘

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[631]

Your instructions say that Brother Gretzen can be found in the office of the "Garbage Controller." You think this a bit odd but head over there nonetheless. You find the office in the basement of one of the largest buildings on Hadrak. The structure houses all of the municipal functions for an entire region of the planet and needs to be immense. After hours of walking, you see the door you are looking for and politely knock.

A small Hadrakian female opens the door. She is a little surprised to see you, but reacts quickly. "How does one know the way to the truth?" she asks.

"By knowing its very nature," you reply.

You continue with the Dialogue of Mastery until you recognize the Hadrakian as a Master of Stealth — and, therefore, probably not really a Hadrakian. Sure enough, the Settled One's appearance changes, revealing the true form of a male Human Brother, complete with hooded robe. "Am I glad to see you," he says, reaching out to shake your hand in greeting. You nod and allow yourself to be pulled into the office. "I have a great deal to report to the Brotherhood." He rummages about through his desk drawers until he finds a computer memory chip which he hands to you. "Take this back to the Brothers who sent you here and you will be well rewarded." You try to explain that you are not doing this for any reward but he interrupts, saying, "I did not mean to imply that you are interested in monetary gain. I only wanted to remind you that the success of your mission will be of great importance to your training."


Before you can reply, a loud whooshing noise nearly deafens you. From a large opening in the ceiling, tons of paper pour into the office. Brother Gretzen takes this all in stride and, seeing the look on your face at the incredible mess, laughs.

"How do you think I get the data needed to send on to the Brotherhood?" he asks. You just shake your head.

"All of the trash from this region of Hadrak is fed into this garbage system. The computers that monitor the trash tubes sort the various waste materials and send it all to the correct shafts for either disposal or recycling. As Head Garbage Controller, I have been able to arrange for the computer to bring the paperwork disposed of by companies I consider important, like The Battle, Inc., here to my office. I then sort through it all and pull important data from the various sheets. The system works remarkably well, as I have retrieved quite a lot of pertinent data for our cause."

You cannot disagree, but you ask why he doesn't just ask the Hadrakians for the information. They seem willing to share everything they know with Humans in the effort to combat the Clathran menace.

"True, they are very open with most of the data. Sometimes, though, there is material they deem to be too sensitive to be released. Other times, they do not think something is important and I do. This way, I am sure of getting everything I need. Of course, if I were to be caught, it would not be good. Hopefully, my Illusion skills would minimize the damage, and I have ways of escaping if need be."

Continued 

You don't know if you agree with the Brotherhood's methods, but you can't deny that they're effective. You have nothing left to keep you here so you bid the Brother farewell. He also wishes you well in your efforts and tells you to journey safely.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[632]

The place to buy Cargo Bay Expansions is not far from where your ship is "parked" amid the mounds of decaying matter. To get there, you have to work your way carefully through and around rotting trash, avoiding the vermin that have adapted their lifestyles to this environment. And THEN you have to keep a wary eye out for the numerous Clathran patrols that make the rounds of the city on a regular basis.

The directions to the sales office indicate that it is buried under a particularly large heap of refuse topped by a discarded billboard touting the taste qualities of a tobacco-like product guaranteed to cause severe lung distress for the entire day not only to the smoker, but to anyone within breathing room, a quality the Wesmlots valued in a product. Following an almost invisible path, you soon find yourself at the entrance to the hidden office.

Upon entering, you see four Settled Ones sitting in a circle, grooming each other. The heavy smog content of the air, as well as the basic dirt and grime in the city, wreak havoc with their usually meticulously clean fur. Their solution, aside from setting up a domed living area in the main part of the city, is to hold grooming meetings where they spend several hours a day getting the filth from the planet out of their hair. You have even seen the impatient Homeless Ones take the time for this activity!

Walking over to this group, you greet them politely and explain you are interested in learning about their Cargo Bay expansion units. One of the Settled Ones, without stopping her activity, shows her fangs in what passes for a Hadrakian smile and informs you they have a great sale going on during the Clathran occupation.

Before you make a decision, you have a question which has been bothering you — how do the Hadrakians get the expansion units ONTO your ship while it is buried under tons of trash? When you bring up this minor detail, the Settled One laughs out loud and offers to show you how they are able to get around the inconvenience of not being able to work out in the open.

"We have a well hidden and very well developed underground network, both in the metaphorical and physical sense. Using the passages below ground which traverse the garbage dump, we are able to reach the different underground landing pads like the one where your ship is, and come up from below to install the item you purchase."

When she takes you to the area beneath your ship and examines the space available on your hull, however, she comes to the unfortunate conclusion that your ship is not able to support any cargo bays in addition to your present complement of 15.

You thank her for her time and take your leave.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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## [633]

You are intrigued by the idea of hatchling Clathrans being raised by strangers and want to see how well this works. Besides, you may learn something interesting about the race, perhaps some weakness you can exploit later. With this thought in mind, you enter the transit corridor that will take you over to the large creche where Clathran eggs are hatched and raised.

The creche area is easy to get into; nobody looks at you twice as you enter the main hallway. There is no directory or floor plan in sight, so you use the tried and true random wandering method. The first area you explore is a classroom section. Here the Clathran children (you really have a hard time accepting that these cold-blooded creatures were ever children) are educated in the areas of history, science, military protocol, reading and writing, fighting skills, strategy and tactics. You assume that this covers all of the topics they believe necessary to produce a well-rounded Clathran citizen.

You sit in on a few of the classes for the younger children and are surprised by how advanced the subject material is for the age group. You begin to get the idea that these aliens might actually be more intelligent than you, which makes you decidedly uneasy. The classes are also run in a very strict manner, with corporal punishment given out often for minor infractions of the rules. There seems to be a system of rank that extends even to the youngest children, based on performance and age, and a rudimentary chain of command is used even in the classroom. Students who are asked a question can in turn pass the question to another of lower rank. The higher-ranking student remains responsible for the correctness of the answer, however, and receives the punishment if the subordinate answers wrong.

Your next stop is the play area. After a few minutes of observation, you decide they are not playing as much as practicing their war game strategies. Small children only a few years old are ambushing and capturing those even younger than themselves and bringing them to the prisoner of war camp on the far side of the playing field. There, those unlucky enough to be caught during this recess must remain for the rest of the play time. The ones that are still free by the end of the period get merit points. You are not sure what merit points are used for, but the children are delighted when they receive them.

Finally, you enter a quiet area of the building. Here the lights are dim and there are fewer adults than in the other sections. The air is very warm; you unbutton your jacket and loosen your collar. The hallway you are now in has three closed doors, presumably leading into three different rooms. They are only labeled by numbers: 1, 2, 3. On a whim, you choose door number two and enter.

This room is even hotter than the hall outside, and the lights are turned down so low that you cannot see very well. In the dim light you see that the room is full of shelves, each of which has its own elaborate climate control system. The shelves are divided into cubicles, and each cubicle contains an egg, resting on a spongy material and surrounded by a webwork of fine fibers.

You have been thinking about trying to strike a blow against the Clathrans somehow and now an opportunity has presented itself. You could, in a matter of minutes, travel up and down the creche section and destroy the eggs, an entire year's worth of the murderous aliens.

You think about it.

A Clathran wouldn't think twice, if they were human babies. And these are eggs. Not even hatched yet. Not really living beings at all.

You think about it some more. A Clathran would have finished the job by now.

But you're not a Clathran.

You leave the room. Thinking that you have had more than enough excitement for one day, you return to your ship.

✠ STOP ✠

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[634]

You try to run as fast as you can to the other side, but you have too far to go. Your enemies converge on you and quickly incapacitate you. They then proceed to attack your ally two-on-one, and disable her as well. You bleed in the mud while both your enemies triumphantly make it across to your side. You pass out.

✘ STOP ✘

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[635]

The monotony of hyperspace does something to stimulate your already overactive imagination. One of the effects is that your dreams are often odd, to say the least. Tonight's dream is no exception. You find yourself walking along a mist-covered ground. All around you are the sounds of war, shells whistling overhead, explosions shattering the air, screams of anguish. The fog parts enough to allow you to see a line of wounded soldiers staggering toward a medical unit of some sort. You are not sure how you know what it is, but this is a dream, so you don't question the knowledge.

Approaching one of the figures, you ask where you are. You try to make out his face, but it is in shadow, and the fog is beginning to roll in again.

"You are on Worzelle, of course," he croaks at you from a throat that is badly damaged. "If you will excuse 'me, I must go through the Advanced Healing Unit to be repaired." After telling you this, he does just that, emerging a minute later in perfect health.

"Wow, that thing is pretty good," you comment as he passes you to return to the fighting.

The alien heads off into the fog, leaving you alone.

✘ STOP ✘

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[636]

Your opponent ignores your demand to surrender. Instead, he lashes back at you with his rope. Before you know it, he has knocked *you* down. Soon you are seriously injured. Meanwhile, your ally has defeated the other opponent. You bleed in the mud as you watch the remaining two combatants go at it. Because of the wound you inflicted on your opponent, your ally has the advantage and eventually wins. You pass out.

✘ STOP ✘

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[637]

You have always been one to follow your hunches, and you have a feeling that the mysterious red glow is important. So, dressed in your ever-so-stylish environmental suit, you leave your ship's airlock and make your way to the center of the latticework structure where you saw the glow earlier.

You enjoy swinging your way from bar to bar along the tinker toy planet. It reminds you of your childhood jungle-gym. Soon your face has a sheen of perspiration from the mild exertion. After about twenty minutes of this, you see the glow coming from deep inside the planet. Changing your direction slightly, you make your way "down" to it.



When you finally arrive, you could not be more surprised at the source of the pulsating glow, although you really could have guessed if you had thought about it for a minute. Floating in a warehouse area, you see a transparent bag containing several dozen Flame Jewels, those exceedingly rare gems which have the unique ability to control the power of a tri-axis drive engine. Even from a distance of twenty feet away, you can feel their hypnotic influence reaching out to you. You avert your eyes to avoid the effect, and in doing so, you see a Riallan hovering nearby.

"Hello," you greet the alien. "I was just admiring your collection of Flame Jewels. Tell me, is it possible to purchase one?" You ask this question on the wild hope that the creature will say yes and you might buy one of the priceless gems.

"Greetings, Human. I am Drossss, keeper of the stores," the dull grey gas bag welcomes you. "Here we maintain supplies which may become necessary to us in the future, but which are not needed at the moment. It is a boring job, but someone has to do it." You would swear that the alien grimaces in wry humor, except that Riallans really have no face to speak of. You suspect that you are able to read this emotion from its telepathic waves and are glad to meet an alien with a sense of humor.

"What do you use the jewels for?" you ask.

"Well, long ago, we needed to outfit a small fleet of ships to send out to the Galactic Fringe. We may need to do something similar in the future, so we are keeping a supply of the Flame Jewels on hand, just in case."

This sounds reasonable, but you are not willing to give up quite so easily. "From the looks of things, you have quite a few in stock. Could I possibly talk you into parting with just one?" You hold your breath while the Middle Riallan thinks it over. Or maybe it is checking to see if it could accommodate your request. At any rate, it finally replies.

"We can part with one for a cousin to Vanessa Chang. We will have to ask a hefty price, though. Perhaps I can be of more help by telling you the name of the planet where we purchased these jewels."

You nod your head eagerly, and the native tells you to visit the world called Wythym in order to obtain more of the gems. Unfortunately, Wythym is in the inner part of the Arm, which could make it difficult to reach. You thank the Riallan for its help.

The Middle Riallans will sell you one, and only one, Flame Jewel for the following amount:

2 Medicine + 1 Culture + 1 Synthetic Genius + 1 Warp Core

If you would like to purchase a Flame Jewel, select the following option:

(JXUN7Y) (3 phases) Buy a Flame Jewel.

❖ STOP ❖

[638]

The lure of a Clathran base, even an abandoned one, is too much for you to ignore. You decide to walk over there and see what you can find.

The building is large and has many entrances, but they are all sealed shut. You search until you find a back door that isn't immediately visible from the street. After a few minutes with a laser, you manage to cut a hole in the steel door large enough to crawl through. Looking around to make sure no one has spotted you, you enter the deserted headquarters.

The corridors are dark and there is no alarm system to warn of your presence. With a flashlight, you begin exploring. Most of the building is just empty offices. You keep wandering, looking for something of interest. Eventually, you come upon a room that you know is important. The large double doors are marked "Communications Center."

You push the double doors open and cautiously enter the Communications Center. A quick glance around shows that the equipment inside is still working. The viewscreens show panoramas of Gloo's spaceports; the radio receivers are hissing with static; and the computers are blinking and humming with full power. You wonder why the Clathrans left all this equipment on. Perhaps they are planning to return here, or can use this center by remote control. You had better watch your step.

You log on to the computer system to see what information you can find. It takes some time before you can figure out how things work. Eventually you come across a file entitled "Progress on the Making of the Bluvian Army." You ask the computer to display the file on the screen.

**TO:** Command Control at Karnossus  
**FROM:** Base Commander at Gloop  
**RE:** Progress on the Making of the Bluvian Army

It seems that our experiment on Gloop has failed as badly as our first attempt on Bloo. In my opinion, this confirms the theory that the Bluvians are resistant to being organized into an effective fighting unit. However, it is also possible, as some claim, that our methods were inadequate.

In this instance, the Bluvians demonstrated that they can indeed learn to follow the chain of command. Thus, we avoided the embarrassing outcome of the original project. However, having been taught to obey the chain of command, it seems that the Bluvians are now incapable of any self-initiative whatsoever. The result is that they operate with such extreme inefficiency that they are useless as a fighting force. The soldiers will request permission for doing absolutely everything, from reloading their pistols to going to the bathroom. They are truly useless.

Again I must point out that the Bluvians are not stupid. In fact, their grasp of the technology we brought to Gloop is impressive. It is reasonable to assume that their behavior indicates neither low intelligence nor a compulsive tendency. Instead, it is a demonstration of a powerful but carefully controlled arrogance which the Bluvians themselves refer to as "thmorg."

The Masters could no doubt overcome this "thmorg" quite easily. However, we have neither the Masters' insight, nor their technology, nor their ability to manipulate reality. Therefore I strongly recommend that we discontinue the Bluvian project. There is no need, as of yet, to worry about the Bluvians becoming any kind of a colonizing threat. Their technological capabilities are still well short of space travel; moreover, their societal structure on both planets lacks any kind of progressive initiative. A third Bluvian experiment, particularly one concentrating on teaching them more initiative, has more potential for harm than good.

Interesting reading. You're certainly glad the Clathrans haven't turned the Bluvians into an army. Under the right conditions, the Bluvians could be quite formidable. You wouldn't want to fight them. You spend some more time poking around the computer system, but you don't find anything useful, so you decide to return to your ship. So no one will know of your little visit, you carefully fix all the damage you did breaking into the Clathran building. "Nice work," you think to yourself.

✠ STOP ✠

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[639]

You tell the Darkwhistler that you are ready to *journey* with him to Golgotha.

"Wait," it tells you. "I must summon the others."

You wait, feeling chill as the Darkwhistlers whisper and mutter among themselves. After a while you realize that more Darkwhistlers are arriving; you feel the presence of many more than you can see. Steadily the number grows, and you wonder whether all the Darkwhistlers will be gathering for the event.

The space grows silent; there is a feeling of oppressive crowdedness and tense expectation.

"One final warning, human," says one. "This thing you call Golgotha has its own purpose for existence. It will not deceive you, but it may destroy you, if that happens to fit its purpose."

"I understand," you reply. You wonder whether or not you really do, but you can't turn back now.

"We begin," says another Darkwhistler, speaking telepathically now. You close your eyes and feel the Journey begin. Through the Darkwhistler's senses you see the Journey rise above the planet Darkwhistle, toward deep space, drawing you with it. You feel a palpable sense of suffocation as you pass beyond the barriers of causality shielding that retain a wider Dual Space Interphase within, like walls retaining the water of a deep still pool. The Darkwhistlers draw on that pool for their survival as you pass deeper into space.

"Why is this *journey* different from other *journeys*?" you ask silently. "I thought it wasn't necessary to cross space when you *journey*."

"That is true. Most *journeys* cancel the distance and bring the destination to us. We dare not do so with Golgotha. We cross space instead."

"So in a way you can escape Darkwhistle's confines after all."

"No. We cannot truly exert any influence here. Only our awareness *journeys*; our minds and bodies are still on Darkwhistle. We can only observe, as in any *journey*."

You cross space at an ever-faster pace. The stars and then the dimensions of space themselves blur into unrecognizability. You are travelling faster than hyperdrive. You have no idea where you are, but the Darkwhistlers seem to know the way. When the stars return, you feel a sense of familiarity. You recognize the stars here. You have returned to Golgotha.

You look at the planet. You can barely recognize it. If Darkwhistle is a quiet pool in Dual Space, Golgotha is a storm. You see nothing that looks like a planet. Instead, vague incomprehensible realities mutilate one another in a continuous writhing. Shapes and colors that don't belong in this universe appear and change and disappear. Matter and energy, and things that are neither, flow and interpenetrate like countless snakes consuming each other and being consumed. You think to yourself, this is the way the universe would look if there were no sane minds to give it form.

"What happened to it?" you ask the host of Darkwhistlers.

"This is as it always is," they answer. "This is its true nature, which you can only see with your awareness alone, without your mind to give it shape. What you see is pure subjectivity with no subject."

"Then what is it? Where did it come from?"

"Perhaps it will tell you."

"Tell me? Is it sentient?"

"Not in itself. You must give it a mind. You must enter the storm and speak to it."

"You said that we can only observe. That we can't exert any influence."

"Not us," say the Darkwhistlers. "You."

You look again at Golgotha through the strange senses of the Darkwhistlers. You can't imagine entering that terrible place. Could you even survive? And what could you achieve?

"It is within your power," say the Darkwhistlers. "We wouldn't have brought you here otherwise. If you would know the future, you must do this."

The Darkwhistlers withdraw farther from the planet, at the same time pushing you slowly closer. You begin to feel trembling changes in Dual Space as you approach the roiling chaos of Golgotha. Closer still, the storm filling your inner sight, you feel yourself being blown randomly through many realities as the Interphase widens toward the singularity.

You stand at the threshold of the chaos. To go farther you need a way to orient yourself. You need to be able to control just one reality and balance it in all the dimensions of Dual Space. The changes swirl around you like random thoughts. How can you respond? You are not here. In the Journey you are a being of thought alone. Since your only weapon is thought itself, you must learn to use it. Chaos and mind, you remember, are similar things. Perhaps your mind can master chaos even as profound as Golgotha.

You begin, slowly, to assert control. Every shift of reality in Dual Space is like a single idea, a suggestion of how things might be different. You only hope is to counter thought with thought, and somehow separate true from false. You forbid the impossible colors, and

you refuse the indescribable shapes. You match Golgotha change for change. You cannot tell whether you are forcing the turbulence away, or learning to follow it. Perhaps it amounts to the same thing. You see Golgotha's shape settle somewhat. The turbulence slows.

You are learning to orient yourself in Dual Space. It is a matter of finding and following the thread of Golgotha's shifting. You find it, stumble, stagger, lose the thread and find it again. You have hold. Slowly you learn its ways and patterns, and you move in Dual Space in synchrony with it. The turbulence disappears, or at least you no longer perceive it, just as a leaf might not perceive the strong wind that blows it aloft.

Then you perceive nothing, except the voice.

"What do you want?" it asks.

"Who are you?"

"I am Golgotha," says the voice. It sounds like a human voice, but it has an odd timbre, a strangely familiar sort of echo in it. An image forms in your mind, in which you are in a room with strangely curved walls. The walls are white and have a soft smooth texture, offset by jagged cracks. There are round openings like windows on one side.

"Are you alive? Why haven't you ever spoken to me before?"

"You never found my mind before," says the voice. "You crawled over me like a microbe listening to the chattering of neurons in a human brain, but you could not see my thoughts. I am not alive. That is your doing. What do you want?"

The image of the white room becomes sharper, and suddenly you recognize it, and you realize why the voice echoes the way it does. You are inside an enormous empty skull. It looks like a human skull. The jaws do not move, but the voice comes from that direction.

"I want to know how to save humanity," you say.

"And what will you sacrifice?" asks the voice.

You don't answer. What does it mean, sacrifice?

"You seem surprised," says the voice. "Why do you think your Founders gave me the name of Golgotha? This is a place of sacrifice. When your Founders came here, did they not sacrifice their most deeply loved truths and beliefs? Did not the explorer Vanessa Chang sacrifice the death and peace she so desperately sought? Have not some of the Brotherhood sacrificed their own humanity to gain what they think is more valuable? I myself have sacrificed here. I was powerful, but here I chose to give up my will and my life. Now, like a necromancer, you have animated the corpse of my mind with your thoughts. There is a price to be paid for such acts, and for such knowledge as you seek. What will you sacrifice?"

"I don't know."

"What? Is there nothing you want more than all else? Nothing in your life that's precious to you? You must be very lonely — lonely and proud, like the Founders and their gods."

The image of the skull disappears and instead you see a three-sided image surrounding you, the image that you saw before on Golgotha, of Humanity's three possible futures. One shows humanity destroyed by its enemies, the second shows humanity subjugating the galaxy by force, and the third shows hope. . .

The third image, the image of a peaceful future galaxy, of myriad diversity and benevolent humanity, shatters into atoms and disappears.

"That is right, Darkwatch," says the voice. "If you wish to save your race, all of your race, you must give up that destiny. That is your sacrifice."

"But why?" you cry. "That's the only one I want. The one the Church has tried to make possible. . . for all these years. . ."

"Observe." The images re-form and shift to the present, all three the same. "You are in conflict with the Clathrans. At this time they are more powerful than you. This you already know."

The image shows a far star orbited by Clathran worlds. Near this star circles a golden Dodecahedron over a kilometer in diameter. It is an immense machine, and its purpose is to increase the width of the Dual Space Interphase throughout the galaxy.

"This is the crux of your future," says the voice. "This is what you must destroy, to save your race."

You see two futures diverge from the single image. In one, the Dodecahedron stands. The Interphase widens, and back on the Nine Worlds humanity suffers. The human mind is not adapted for a universe where subjective reality dominates. Masses of people lose their minds. The cities burn. People die by the thousands, and then by the millions. The horror grows; the tide of death continues to rise over humanity. The deaths number in the billions and climb. Soon almost no one is left alive.

But some are. One in a billion learns to adapt to the higher Interphase. New powers awaken in their minds. They slowly explore their new existence. The Clathrans are of no concern; they finish their survey and conquer the galaxy, but what concern is that to humanity transformed? Slowly, over the eons, the Clathrans will fade away.

This is the vision of the future that leads to peace and harmony. The few humans, now evolved to godlike form, gently take the galaxy as their own, making it a place of endless diversity and unending beauty. But the cost of that future is the lives of countless billions of people, people who are alive and real at this moment, back on the Home Worlds.

In the other two images, an eerie inside-out explosion destroys the Dodecahedron. A battle ensues, pitting the Clathran war fleet against the races of the Arm and the Fringe united to stop the Clathran menace.

If the battle is lost, so is the galaxy. The Survey sweeps through the remainder of the Arm, through the Fringe, conquering all. In due course the Clathrans locate the human Home Worlds and, overcoming the feeble opposition of the Space Navy just as they overcame the Hadrakians' meager resistance, put an end to your species. This is the vision of the future that leads to annihilation.

If the battle is won, the Clathrans' plans are thrown into disarray. The Survey halts for many years. By the time the Survey resumes, mankind is ready to oppose them. But the war doesn't end quickly. There are many battles, some of which lay waste to whole worlds. Neither side can afford to be merciful. Humans and Clathrans alike subjugate those worlds that they can control, and destroy those they cannot. Every living being is pressed into the war, on one side or the other. It is a long time before humanity claims the final victory. This is the vision of the future that leads to human domination.

"Your golden future," says the voice, "springs from the possibility that the Clathrans are victorious. The few who survive later become the benevolent gods of the new galaxy. Opposing the Clathrans leads to the other future. Humanity will become warriors and, ultimately, conquerors. If you would save your race, not just one in a billion but everyone, you must destroy the Dodecahedron. You must accept that humans will dominate in order to survive."

"But the other future is still possible. . ."

"If you allow the Clathrans to continue widening the Interphase and most of humanity to die, yes. I would accept that as your sacrifice instead. Is that what you want?"

You think about it. Is it possible? Could such a decision be justified?

"This has nothing to do with you in either case," you point out, stalling for time.

"That is true," says the voice. "As you have seen. Sacrifice isn't merely something I demand. It's part of the nature of things."

"Then why must I choose now, and tell you my choice?"

"Because I am mostly you. If you don't make a choice here, now, you never will."

The voice is right. And your choice is clear, once you admit it to yourself. The Clathrans must be stopped. The death of billions is too high a price to pay, even for godhood.

"You are wise," says the voice. "And your decision is wiser than you know. Observe."

Once again you see before you the peaceful galaxy of the future. Every world blooms with life. Every planet is different. Every life form is left alone to grow true to its nature. Humans use their powers to drift from world to world, maintaining peace and enjoying the diversity.

You see a world inhabited by small multilegged lizard creatures. They evolve and build cities and civilizations. They build spaceships and begin to explore other worlds. They establish colonies.

Would this not disrupt the peaceful diversity? How dare the lizards interfere with the life of those other worlds! If left unchecked, they would soon overrun much of the peaceful galactic garden. The humans take notice. They come to the lizards' world and gently, oh so gently, make some changes. The lizards begin to fear the sky. They give up space and hide themselves. Their civilization slowly falls again. The balance is restored.

Again and again, on world after world, the balance is restored. Thinking beings are driven to fight among themselves, or expend their energies in senseless superstition, or shun space, just to maintain that balance. In extreme cases, their very powers of thought are taken away. All by the humans, in their effort to maintain harmony.

The pattern seems familiar. You have seen this before. You realize that this vision of the future is no less horrible, no less dominated by mankind, than the other.

"Why?" you ask the voice. "What is it about humans that destines them to either dominate or die?"

"It was not your doing," says the voice. You find yourself back inside the skull.

"Aren't there any other possible futures? There must be a better possibility, a better solution."

"Perhaps, Darkwatch. Defeat the Clathrans, destroy the Dodecahedron, and perhaps you will have the chance to find a different future. The Seventh Text File is not yet written."

The image of the skull fades again, and you are alone. Your ability to orient in Dual Space tells you which way you must move, which thoughts you must think, to disengage yourself again from Golgotha. You *journey* back, step by step, away from the Dual Space vortex at the center of the storm, then out of the chaos and back to where the Darkwhistlers are waiting.

"You were successful," say the Darkwhistlers.

"Yes. I spoke with the . . . what was it, anyway? It said it wasn't alive, but it spoke to me. It said it was once powerful."

"It was once an enemy of ours," say the Darkwhistlers. They will say nothing more about it.

"And I learned that humans really *are* different. But I still don't know just how, or why."

"It was not your doing," say the Darkwhistlers.

"And I learned how to move in Dual Space, in a way. How to know where I am, and where I want to be, in all those dimensions."

"That is well done," say the Darkwhistlers. "It is a very rare power. You have learned the ability of Dual Space Orientation."

There is no further exchange of thoughts as you return to Darkwhistle. When you are back on the ground, and most of the Darkwhistlers have departed, one of them asks you, "What will you do now?"

"I have to stop the Clathrans," you tell them. "And I have to look for another future."

"We wish you well," they reply.

The Clathrans, indeed. Their Survey marches ruthlessly onward, conquering every planet with intelligent life. You recall that survival depended on two things: destroying the Dodecahedron, and winning the battle against the Clathrans in space. Right now, only the Hadrakian fleet is large enough even to slow the Clathrans down. Desperate to save themselves, the Hadrakians will be making a last stand on their home planet against tremendous odds.

You must help the Hadrakians win their war. But what exactly is necessary? How will you be able to make a difference? You know where to find out: at the offices of The Battle, Incorporated. If you go there, the Hadrakians will not be shy about telling you what to do. At the same time, they may know more about this Dodecahedron and what to do about it. With the *Jihad* at your command and all the items and abilities you have gained in your travels, you are a very potent special agent. Perhaps your ability to orient yourself in Dual Space may yet prove crucial to your chances of victory. You resolve to visit one of the offices of The Battle, Inc. as soon as you can.

The future of humanity is at stake.

Your *journey* to Golgotha took longer than you anticipated, so you have been charged 7 extra phases.

Go now to the CGM.

✠ STOP ✠

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[640]

You do not have all the items necessary to build an Interphase Reflector. This is a complex and dangerous device, so it's very important that you use the correct components. Check the status of your ship's cargo, take another look at the engineering plans, and try again.

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[641]

"We've got trouble, Boss!" your computer yells. You drop everything and dash to the control room.

"What is. . . oh oh," you say, as you see what the problem is. A beautiful picture of green, red and orange lights are on your front viewscreen.

"Prepare for attack," you call out as you head for the weapons console.

Go now to the CGM.

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[642]

"Boss, listen to this!" your computer announces excitedly as you travel through hyperspace. The next thing you hear is a conversation you surmise is going on between two vessels such as your own.

"... have orders to leave the planet alone, even if they do know how to build a Discontinuity Wave Generator. We can't use the Stargate either, so cancel the Unaria operation," you hear the occupant of one of the ships telling the other.

"Don't you think it odd that we should allow the beings on Unaria to have such important data? A Discontinuity Wave Generator could be used to who knows what end?"

"Lieutenant," comes the stern reply. "You have your orders. Carry on!"

The transmission ceases, leaving you puzzled over the meaning behind all this.

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[643]

“Dual Space is very simple, human. It is the sum of all possible realities.”

“I know that,” you say, “But what about the Dual Space Interphase?”

“The Interphase is the conduit between the real world and Dual Space. It determines how many alternate realities can actually be reached from any given place and time.”

“And the Interphase has been widening, making more realities possible.”

“Yes, but only very recently. The Clathrans have built a device that is artificially raising the Interphase level. Before that, the Interphase had been narrowing for hundreds of thousands of years. Races like yours which have evolved in the past few millennia have very little appreciation of the possibilities inherent in the manipulation of Dual Space.”

“I have found that in some places, the Interphase is wider than in others.”

“That is true. In the Core the Interphase is always high, and here in our prison on Darkwhistle it is almost infinite. It is even possible to manipulate the Interphase in small regions of space.”

“I am trying to build a device to do just that. I want to narrow the Interphase over a small area.”

“Yes, you would want to do that. Perhaps I can help you out.”

The Darkwhistler proceeds to teach you several important equations and formulae that govern manipulation of the Dual Space Interphase. This knowledge is extremely useful in your work.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[644]

Your journey is interrupted by a nervous announcement from your computer: “Hey, Boss, we’re being scanned again. Short range. It looks like another one of those unmanned Clathran space buoys.”

Damn. The Clathrans are collecting a lot of information about your ship. The buoy is now visible in the center of your viewscreen, a drifting box-shaped hunk of lifeless technology bristling with scanners, computers, and subspace transmitters. The thing also has a laser weapon to defend itself from random space debris.

You consider trying to blast the buoy into bits before it can report whatever information it’s obtained about your ship. However, you’ll have to overcome its defenses first. You may:

- 1) Open fire
- 2) Leave the buoy alone

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[645]

“This flying through space is tedious, Boss. When are you going to finish the Survivable Jump Engine?”

“When I find all of the necessary ingredients. Not only do we need a new Flame Jewel, but we also have to find a Dimensional Transducer, some Primordial Soup, and a unit each of Crystals, Medicines and Warp Core. Some of those things are probably in Clathran space, behind the Survey Line.”

“By the time we get the jump engine built, we’ll already be the meanest ship in the galaxy.”

“With any luck.”

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[646]

You feel your neck crawling with the legs of a million squirming insects.

“Arrgghh!” you shout, wiping ineffectually at your body to remove the horrible sensation.

“Boss, boss, it’s OK,” your computer tries to reassure you as your motions become more frantic.

“There are no foreign creatures on you, Boss. You are feeling the effects of a very powerful probe beam that has penetrated our ship.”

“What is it and what does it want?” you demand to know. At the same time, you are relieved to hear that your ship hasn’t become infested with bugs.

“Can’t tell, Boss. The beam is coming from a tremendously long distance and appears to originate from somewhere near the galactic core. I can’t tell you more than. . . crackle, hiss, crackle.” Your computer has overloaded from the massive power surge caused by the probe beam.

“Nuts!” you exclaim as you rush to power down all of the systems you can in order to keep damage to a minimum. Whatever sent the beam has a lot of power. You wish you knew whether it really meant you harm, or if it just didn’t know its own strength.

Hours later, you have the computer up and working with a minimal amount of damage caused by the probe beam. Since the blow-out, you have not felt any more of the energy the beam emanated, so you feel safe in assuming it has gone for now. Not that there is anything you can do should it decide to return. You question the computer more about the nature of the beam, but neither of you know any more about it than you did at the start. You just have to chalk it up to another of those galactic mysteries you run into from time to time. You can only hope that you will discover the answer to this puzzle somewhere in your travels.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[647]

"Subspace radio contact, Boss," reports your computer.

You turn on the audio channel, and hear: "This is Rurik, of the Atlantian Islands. I'm calling any spacers I can get a beam on. It is necessary that I talk to space pilots about a problem that affects my people." The old man's voice seems stronger, somehow, than it was when you spoke to him last.

"Rurik? This is Corin! What are you doing? How did you get on a subspace transmitter?"

"Corin Stoneseeker? Is it you?"

"Yes, Eldest."

"But how? They told me that subspace communication was random, and that I couldn't choose whom I'd speak to."

"That's true. And we may not have the signal very long. Never mind how — why are you calling for help from spacers? Are the Islands all right?"

"Oh, yes. Don't be alarmed; I didn't mean any kind of emergency. I need information about the planets."

"What for?"

"Remember our last conversation about the future of the Seekers? I had little to say then. But gradually I've come to see you were right. Since you found the Object of the Quest, our young people feel they have little to strive for. Everyone wishes for your success, of course, and our thoughts are always with you. But that's not enough for the young. They want to take action of their own. They feel helpless against the hostile aliens. . ."

"What do you know about hostile aliens?" you ask.

"Everyone knows. Everyone has heard the stories, and even the governments of the Nine Worlds don't try to deny it any more. They only reassure us that the threat is centuries away."

You don't mention your opinion on that subject. Instead you ask, "What are you going to do, then?"

"The Elders have put forth an idea for a way to give our community a new start. There are rumors that the Home Worlds will build a huge Space Navy; some of our youngers might choose that path, if the rumors are true. But most of them won't. We haven't really taught them the sort of discipline that a military career would require. On the other hand, many of our people are former Stoneseekers. They know space travel and they've been to foreign worlds. They believe the people of Atlantis should begin a new colony on a far planet. A secret colony, whose location will be unknown to anyone on the Home Worlds."

"For what purpose?" you argue. "No one's founded a new colony since the Boundary began!"

"That is one reason why. It's a new challenge, one that will allow us to make use of the skills we've learned as Stoneseekers. Also, if the aliens do invade, perhaps they will overlook one small colony."

"And how do you plan to get out of the Boundary? We may have slipped out often enough in our exploration ships, but colony ships are big and slow."

"That may not be a problem. There has been talk on both sides of the Boundary that the laws be changed, and that some ships be allowed to pass."

"Rurik, this idea is crazy. The last thing you want is for a colony to be secret. Do you know how many colonies died after the Plague because their locations were forgotten? A colony can't survive without commerce, unless you find a world with a self-sufficient environment. . ."

"Exactly," says Rurik. "That's what we need, and why I'm contacting space pilots where I can. None of the planets described in the Tale of Worlds are suitable. I ask you: do you know of any suitable planet where we could locate our colony?"

You are tempted to answer with a blunt “no,” but you hesitate. What would be the harm in telling Rurik what you know about planets in the Fringe? Perhaps your people do have the resources to start a successful colony. And if they don’t, they certainly have the wisdom to realize it before plans progress too far. So you describe, briefly, the planets you visited or heard about in the Fringe: Cathedral, Moiran, Ascension, Tretiak, Gironde, Crater, and the rest. Rurik listens very carefully, and asks intelligent questions. You get the reassuring impression that if the Elders do decide to start a colony, it will at least be well planned. Unfortunately, none of the planets you discuss seems completely suitable.

Without warning, the signal fades suddenly. “We’re losing contact, Eldest,” you say quickly. “Do what is best. Give my love to . . . to everyone.”

“Godspeed, Stoneseeker,” he answers into the fading ether. “May Soulsinger’s spirit guide you.”

⌘ STOP ⌘

[648]

You decide to check out the drone market while you are in the area. Getting the directions from a helpful soul at the spaceport, you make your way over to the address you are given. On the way, you see something odd.

A crowd of Unarians have gathered near a large ship. They are all excited about a trip they are about to take, so you approach to see what is going on. The nearest purple alien grabs your arm and asks, “Are you coming? We’d like a few more people to crew the ship and you’d be more than welcome!”

You gently remove your captive limb from the tentacled grasp of the alien and ask where they are all going.

“Why, to Dosia to annihilate some of the glum-faced scum of the universe, where else?” she gleefully tells you, clapping her tentacles together in an alarming manner. The others around you are all jumping about and clapping in excitement as well, since they seem to have acquired a few more willing Unarians to join them in their mission. At least they are a happy group! “We don’t often get the chance since it’s so hard to get enough people together to make a crew for the ship. Everyone’s always got something or other to do, but this time I think we have enough! Yippee! Would you like to join us anyway?”

You try to look regretful when you tell her you have an errand to run and cannot join them on their little escapade. She looks sad for just a second (this is the first time you have ever seen this happen!) but brightens up as a thought occurs to her.

“Then, maybe if you are ever over near Dosia (her nose wrinkles in disgust when she says the name), you can plant a bomb or something and blow them out of the sky!” This cheers her up quite a bit and she heads off to the ship with her friends. You shake your head at such blood-thirstiness and continue on your own way.

You are interested in seeing the selling price of cargo drones here. Even though it is easy to send materials to the other side of the galaxy from Unaria by using the Stargate, drones are still very useful and the Unarians do a brisk business selling them to passing traders.

Entering the drone sales office, you politely wait for the little alien working here to finish with his impromptu dance of joy. Breathless, he does so, then turns to you and smiling broadly, asks if he can be of assistance. Explaining why you are here, you ask to see the merchandise available. You spend the next few hours looking over the drones here and see that the drones for sale have 4 cargo bays apiece. You ask the price for a drone and are quoted the following:

2 Tools + 1 Munitions + 1 Warp Core

The complete rules for drone use can be found in the *Host Guide and Player Reference Manual*.

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

[649]

You are getting to be very familiar with the whole routine of being captured by the Clathrans. You are taken aboard a Clathran ship, with your own ship in tow, hauled off to the nearest military base. Great. So far, you have been incredibly lucky in escaping before you suffered any real dire consequences. This time, though, the Clathrans are taking extra precautions to make sure you don't get away. You don't like the way things are going. You get the ominous feeling that whatever the Clathrans have in store for you, you are not going to be able to avoid it.

When the ship finally lands at its destination, you are unceremoniously dragged from the small cell directly to the interrogation room. It looks like they plan on torturing you right off the bat. You gulp in apprehension. You are pretty sure you can stand up to the torture but you know of no way to defeat the mind wiping machine the Clathrans have been known to use.

Your guards strap you onto a flat table and begin preparing several evil-looking instruments. They are not quite finished when a large ugly female Clathran enters the room. From the deferential attitude of your guards, you suspect that this being has a great deal of authority. She bares her sharp teeth at you in what you hope is the equivalent of a warm smile. Fat chance.

She lovingly inspects each of the sharp instruments in the room before turning to you and hissing, "Welcome Human. We will be getting to know quite a bit about each other in the next several hours. I know I will enjoy it, but I suspect you will not. Perhaps you would just like to tell me the location of your homeworlds right now. It would save us both a lot of trouble."

"You're wasting your time," you say.

"I don't think so. I'm glad you're at least willing to say something, though. It won't keep you from the pain but it is a nice way to start a relationship." She grins in a decidedly evil manner and turns back to her instruments.

"I hope we can meet again later on," you say.

The Clathran turns back to you in surprise. You have the feeling that few of her "patients" ever speak prior to the session.

"Why is that, Human?" she asks, bewildered.

"My family would like to have you at their home. My parents have always wanted matching lizard suitcases."

Angrily she grabs your arm, slicing into your flesh with her sharp claws. "We have put up with your impudent race for far too long. When I have extracted the location of your homeworld from you, we will send the largest fleet we have to utterly destroy your people. You are a blight on the galaxy and should never have been allowed to evolve. An oversight of the Masters, but one we shall soon rectify!"

You feel the fear and loathing her kind has toward humanity and you wonder what the real reason is. The Clathrans are one of the strongest races in the galaxy. Why should they be so afraid of your young race? A ghostly dreamlike voice echoes in the deepest recesses of your mind, "Do you have the message?" It is so soft that you convince yourself you have imagined it. For the present, you have more pressing things to worry about.

The next few hours are some of the worst you could ever envision. The interrogator has made herself a skilled practitioner in the art of inflicting pain upon others. You are barely able to keep from revealing everything you know about the war, your allies, the Nine Worlds. But you do refrain. Using all of the skill and training you have acquired over the years, you manage to hold out against her worst onslaught. For what it is worth, you can see a dawning respect in her face.

After a particularly grueling session, the interrogator leaves the room in disgust. Her parting instructions are for the waiting guards to prepare the mind wipe machine for the next morning. One of the soldiers quietly comments to the other that he has never seen the interrogator fail so completely. "This will reflect badly on her record," he whispers so no one else may overhear. The two of them approach you with more respect than they had for you earlier. Apparently not many beings withstand the ministrations of the interrogator.

You are laying on the table as she left you, with eyes shut. One of the guards reaches over and shakes you to see if you are conscious. You almost feel obligated to put on an even more impressive show by walking out of the room under your own steam but a better idea comes to you. Feigning unconsciousness, you allow the soldiers to grasp you under your arms and drag you out into the corridor and toward the

waiting cell. All during the torture session, you have been trying to make an escape plan. You realize you cannot count on a loose waste tile again, nor can you rely upon a single guard being tricked. Instead you have an alternate plan of action.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[650]

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

(4UQ7X8) (3 phases) Research dual space on Dosia.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[651]

The Wythymites may be weird, but they sure do know their herbs and spices. You spend a few days with the local organic doctors, tasting different concoctions of the native vegetation. Some taste good, some taste lousy, and some just make you sicker. The amoebae are a patient lot, however, and eventually they find a recipe that actually seems to restore your vim and vigor. After a few doses you are fully healed.

"That worked great," you say, "can I have some to go?"

"Certainly not!" respond the indignant oozers. "Allowing our planet's plants to be harvested for offworld export is completely against our principles. But do come back if you ever need healing again."

You wind up wishing that you had asked about the recipe's ingredients before admitting that it worked, but now it seems you have to go along with the Wythymites.

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[652]

Sure, you've probably done sillier things in your lifetime, but you'd be hard pressed to think of one of them now. Ignoring the small voice in your head telling you this may not be such a great idea, you head over to an area where you know the Francloons live. You feel somewhat like a marinated lamb innocently walking into the lion's den.

As you get closer, you notice a marked increase in activity and noise and a marked decrease in the number of Hadrakians on the street. This means the Francloons have a limited audience on whom to play their pranks. You gulp at this thought but resolutely continue onward, keeping alert for potential traps. Eventually, you only see Francloons of all shapes and sizes, all either tricking someone or being tricked. How strange.

One large Francloon approaches you, its tentacles dangling over its baggy body, and you take a defensive stance. The alien stops and laughs at your precautions. "Relax," it tells you in a high squeaky voice. "I am not in my joking phase. It is not often that visitors come to this area. Would you like me to show you around?" Hesitantly you accept its offer and introduce yourself.

"I am Whooger," it says. "Is there anything you are particularly interested in seeing while you are here?"

You explain that you are intrigued by the Francloons and would like to find out a bit about their history. You also say that, at the risk of being rude, you would like to know why they insist on playing such mean practical jokes all of the time. Whooger laughs. It points to a large square building farther down the street and says some of your questions can be answered there. As you both start walking, it begins to tell you about the history of the Francloon race.

“Long ago, our ancestors were a much more serious lot than we are today. Actually, they were out-and-out boring. One day, they stopped all of their frivolous research and experimentation and took a look at themselves. They did not like what they saw. ‘We need more humor in our lives,’ they cried. So, our Francloon ancestors decided to dedicate themselves to making others laugh at themselves, or, at the very least, making people look foolish so all can laugh at them. We have tried to carry on this tradition; I believe we have been successful.” The little alien stops speaking just as you near the large building.

“What’s in here?” you ask.

“Come on in and I’ll show you,” Whooger responds and enters the building first with you right behind. “We have noticed an interesting aspect of our practical joke playing that has us intrigued. It seems we Francloons are somehow compelled to play a joke on someone every thirty minutes or so. This may explain why we have a difficult time accomplishing any long-term projects. Sooner or later, someone pulls something and chaos reigns.” Whooger sounds a bit wistful and you feel a bit sorry for the native. Then a thought occurs to you which makes you uneasy. You look at your chronometer and see that a half hour has passed since you first encountered the alien. You look up to ask Whooger if the joking phase referred to earlier has to do with the thirty minute time limit between jokes but the Francloon is nowhere in sight. Oops.

The door from which you entered is now closed and locked. Looking around at your surroundings, you see you are in a large windowless room with two doors on the wall opposite the main entry door, leading deeper into the building. The floor and walls are bare, there are no tools or furniture to help you escape. Mentally tossing a coin, you leave the room through the door on the right. You explore all of the rooms on the first floor and find that they, too, are empty. Taking the stairs to the second floor, you see more of the same, nothing. Frustrated, you return to the first floor and to the large room you originally entered with Whooger. You are tired, hot and thirsty from your efforts and you refuse to provide the Francloons with any more entertainment.

As you reenter the first room, you see that a wooden chair has been provided for your comfort. This shows you three things: one, you haven’t been abandoned; two, the Francloons aren’t all bad; and three, they don’t mean to torture you, just play a joke on you. Sighing gratefully, you sink into the chair.

CRASH!! The chair breaks into a dozen pieces, landing you on your, well, on the floor. Snarling, you leap to your feet. “What do you want?” you scream indignantly, “I’m warning you, I am a Hadrakian citizen and I’m sure they won’t take well to your kidnapping me. Let me go now and you won’t get into any trouble.” Only silence answers you. You get to your feet and start pacing, trying to think of a way out of this mess. From what you know about them, the Francloons aren’t necessarily violent, just terrible practical jokesters. They have this empty building here for a reason; you have to figure out what that reason is. You decide to retour the building.

The room next door looks as bare as it did on your first time through. Cautiously you enter and SPLAT!!! You land on. . . the floor. . . again. Someone has coated the surface of the floor with a slippery material which caused you to fall. On hands and knees, you manage to exit the room safely after fifteen minutes of ungraceful flailing.

You are back in the first room and the pieces of chair are gone! You are now convinced the aliens have you here for a reason. They might be conducting research on you and how you react, or maybe they are somehow testing you. In either case, you decide that action is now called for instead of passively allowing these things to happen to you.

Upon entering the third room you see a table, chair, a copy of the Francloon Times crossword puzzle and a large fountain pen. You carefully pick up the pen and examine it. You find your hunch to be correct — it is an exploding pen with a sizable charge in the barrel. Satisfied, you pocket the pen and continue into the fourth room. Just as you are about to cross the threshold, you pause. Something isn’t quite right. A moment later, a pail filled with a sticky fluid drops from the ceiling to the spot you would have been standing on if you hadn’t stopped first. Another lucky break! This time, you take the bucket and collect some of the gluey substance. Traveling to a fourth room, you are not able to avoid a booby trap involving ball bearings which slide under your feet causing you, once again, to fall on. . . the floor. Smiling grimly, you scoop up a bunch of the small metal balls and pocket them. You now have two possible plans of action, and you return to the glue room, which has not yet been cleaned up by the Francloons. You could use the glue to seal as many doors shut as possible, while ending up in the first room where the exit is. Hopefully that will protect you from any further harassment. Or, you could booby trap the exploding pen, which

you have now filled with ball bearings as projectiles, so whoever picks it up will be hit in the face by a speeding ball bearing. This could hurt the Francloon lifting the pen, but that's the idea.

Your choices are:

- A. Seal yourself off with the glue
- B. Set a booby trap with the exploding pen

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

[653]

As you scrutinize the map display on your small lower viewscreen for the hundredth time, you wish for the hundredth time that you could tell which of the many points is the planet Golgotha.

"I'm really sorry, Boss," explains your computer. "All the map gives is the coordinates of the planets themselves. The names and information about the planets are listed separately, and most of the information files have either been deleted or were never filled in in the first place. Probably the information files once contained a complete description of each system, including a link to the map coordinates, and Vanessa Chang deleted them for safety. So I can only identify a planet by name if I can scan it and match it to the few items of description still in the files — usually its size and orbital parameters."

"Are there any planets that have any special information or unusual characteristics listed?"

"Well, Boss, there's one item that you might be interested in. The conclusion is pretty tenuous, and it's well below the certainty that I usually require before venturing an opinion, but if you were to override that by ordering me to present the information, I could. . ."

"Out with it," you tell the machine.

"This map we're using is Vanessa Chang's map, but it stands to reason that she didn't explore all these places herself. She must have compiled her map from coordinates given by all of the explorers she knew. Some of these planets were discovered by the Founders. Golgotha is almost certainly one of them, and it's one of the names in the information file."

"Wonderful! That means we know that Golgotha is one of the planets shown on the map."

"But that's not all," says the computer. "The format for the entry for Golgotha is different from most of the others. It's nothing dramatic, just the way the data are arranged — computer details like which symbol represents the decimal point and how many blanks fit between entries."

"But any other planet that's also in that format. . ." you say.

"Exactly. Chances are it would also be a place that the *Archangel* visited."

"And? Are there any?"

"Just one, Boss. Its name is Unaria."

"The *Archangel* must have gone to more planets than those."

"Maybe so, Boss. Maybe they visited some planets that other explorers had already scouted."

"Unaria, huh? I don't suppose you can tell me where that is either."

"Afraid not, Boss. But if I spot it I'll let you know."

✧ STOP ✧

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[654]

You are interested in purchasing a Stargate Key. The Unarian Trade Center, you are told, is where they are sold. Heading over there, you find the correct store and spend a few minutes looking at the different key models. They come in many sizes, colors and shapes. The alien behind the counter cheerfully tells you that they all work exactly the same way. They are different only because customers like variety.

When you ask him how the keys work, he can only tell you that they are encoded with a sonic transmitter which sends the correct code to the officials at the Stargate. When the officials receive this code, they know you are a legitimate user and will allow you to pass through the gate.

You select a key in the shape of a small black cube with funny symbols, and pay the agreed price of one unit each of Crystals, Medicine and Super Slip.

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[655]

When you ask the Darkwhistler to *journey* to Golgotha, it draws back slightly and makes strange sounds. For a few moments it hisses and whispers to itself. Then it approaches and stares at you, as if trying to gaze into your soul.

Finally it speaks: "You have been to the place you call Golgotha once already. You know it is not just a planet. Space and time are strange there. It is a window to many futures, and this alone is dangerous — and yet there are other dangers still. Why do you wish to *journey* there?"

You decide there is no point in telling the Darkwhistlers anything short of the full truth. You describe your quest, starting with the story of the Founders and the Final Church of Man. You explain that you wish to rediscover what the Founders discovered on Golgotha.

"So, then," say the Darkwhistlers, "Why did you not complete your exploration of Golgotha when you were there? Were you afraid the truth would be too difficult to face, after coming all this way?"

"I . . . uh . . ."

"Darkwatch, perhaps you will *journey* with us to Golgotha some time in the future, though the cost will be high. But not before you have learned all that can be learned from the place itself. You have the ability, which we do not, to go there in your physical form. Return there and complete your mission of rediscovery. Learn what your Founders learned. Then, if you still wish to *journey* there, return here."

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[656]

You have returned to the cold barren rock the Clathrans call Morikor, the world where Vanessa Chang was taken after her capture by the Clathrans. According to her log, she managed not only to escape from this wretched world but to damage the fleet of warships being built here at that time. You are proud to follow her here and hope that you will be as instrumental as she was in setting the Clathrans back in their plans for galactic conquest.

Unfortunately, as you learned last time, it is impossible to approach the planet without being blasted by the heavy beam weapons on the surface. The beams have more than enough firepower to fry your ship to a crisp. In order to land, you will need a cloaking device that can make your ship invisible to the Clathran surveillance systems. You have no such device at the present time.

“Uh, Boss. . .” your computer interrupts.

“Oh no,” you reply. “The beam weapons can’t possibly be targeting us already!”

“I’m afraid they are,” your computer answers nervously.

“Then get us out of here!”

You are pressed hard into your chair as the ship changes direction and accelerates away from the planet at maximum speed. Bam! Your ship shakes violently after taking a hit from one of the beam weapons. Bam! Another hit. Finally, you are out of range, and Morikor is fading away on your viewscreen. However, you have taken a fair amount of damage.

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

Go now to the CGM.

✠ STOP ✠

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[657]

The guard at the front door barely glances at you before waving you through. All he needs to see is that you outrank him, and he lets you inside the hospital. You breathe a sigh of relief as you look around the inner foyer for some sort of directory to tell you where things are.

The entire west wall is filled with this sort of data, so you spend several minutes glancing through the services available to you here. You are surprised at the variety and quality of the Bluvians’ medical technology, since in most respects the Bluvians are not very advanced as a race. However, they seem to have learned some things from the Clathrans, from the time when the Clathrans occupied the planet.

In any case, you will be able to spend a few days here and improve your health. You’ve found that a stay at a good hospital is well worth the time despite your irrational fear of medics or machines poking around your body. With this thought in mind, you register with the head nurse and he shows you to your room. You are happy to see it is a single; this is necessary, since otherwise the higher-ranking occupant of the room would always be ordering around the lower-ranking occupant. This wouldn’t be very restful, so the Bluvians simply give each patient their own room. You are not complaining.

After five days of utter peace, rest and relaxation, you leave the hospital feeling almost like new. Whistling cheerfully, you return to your ship and spend the evening playing three-dimensional chess with your computer and win three out of five games. What a great ending to the day!

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

✠ STOP ✠

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[658]

This time you land on a desolate mountain plateau, many kilometers from the nearest habitation. Your touchdown kills two small mammals and a number of insects and slugs, as well as startling a herd of goat-like creatures. But there is no one around to see.

The natives must remember you, though, for when you make your way to the nearest village, they are as mistrustful as ever.

Your options are the same as before.

✧ STOP ✧

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[659]

Snakes again. Six of the slithery, constricting kind. Each more than six feet of muscle long, and eager to turn you into a bulge in their middle. There are stories you have heard of these things eating unwary Hadrakians whole, and Hadrakians are substantially bigger than you are. Well at least you're not unwary. . .

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

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[660]

You wonder if the contents of the storage station's compartments are the same as you left them on your last visit. One can only guess how many travelers are privy to the existence of the station *and* the combination to unlock the bays. It seems unlikely that any self-respecting explorer would pass up the chance to make use of either the space or the cargo here.

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

✧ STOP ✧

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[661]

One day in deep space your radio suddenly comes to life with a most unlikely blare of music: contemporary heavy metal, unless you miss your guess.

"Hello?" says a voice. "Hello? This is Marc Tremont, attempting to broadcast in subspace from the planet Para-Para. Can anyone out there hear me?"

You respond with your name and that of your ship.

"Amazing! I'm actually getting through. How are things in the galactic Arm?"

"How do you know where I am?"

"Um, that's supposed to be a secret, right? I work for the Institute for Space Exploration, you see."

"You're damn right that's secret! Do you want the Clathrans to get me, or what?"

"Sorry, sorry. Things are just a little crazy here, is all."

"I'll say!"

"Actually, they really are a little crazy. Some buddies and I just ran all of last week's tabloids from the Nine Worlds through a trend-interpreting software package, and it showed that violence and hallucinations are up 34% this month. But that's still no excuse for me spilling your beans. I'm really sorry."

"You're forgiven. But be a little more careful with the subspace next time, huh? You never know who might be listening."

⌘ STOP ⌘

[662]

You sleep. You sleep and you dream of the myriad worlds beyond the Boundary. You dream of the wonders you have seen: planet-sized beings, sentient machines and little green men that dance by the shores of a big pink lake. You dream of the Clathran menace, a dragon on a golden leash uncurling to block your passage to the Core. Somewhere beyond the dragon where you know you will be someday, you hear a voice crying softly: "Do you have the message? Do you have the message?"

"My word!" says a much louder mental voice, intruding. "What was all that about?"

"Just a little mental communication that Fate and I have from time to time. I don't know what it means, of course, but Fate's a tough master and I wouldn't want to have her mad at me."

"So it is said," responds the voice, with a chuckle. "I'm only here to tell you that you can get a Dimensional Transducer on the planet Sirissi, if that's of any use."

"I should think it might be. Oh, what did you say your name was?"

"I didn't, but I'm glad to see that you think to ask. My name is quite important, you know. Some things we gods can communicate directly, and others we must pass on more carefully if we wish to avoid trouble with Fate. I am the God of Perfect Explanation, and I've said too much already."

With that, he is gone.

You may select this option again.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[663]

Your return to the poisonous planet of Dahl is far more jubilant than your earlier visit. Now you know what to do to contact the Brotherhood. You land at the planet's solitary village, which is sheltered from the gale force winds by a mountain cliff. As before, the village is abandoned, its homes empty except for occasional pieces of trash. The temple in the center of the village is a deserted place with only one piece of furniture, a free-standing candelabrum in the center of the foyer. You smile when you realize what you must do... grasping the candelabrum at its stem, you rotate it clockwise. The sound of a stone panel sliding back rewards your effort. You have found the secret entrance to the Brotherhood. Congratulations!

You descend the stairway you have just uncovered and pass through an airlock. The sound of human voices emanates from below. The stairway continues, and finally ends at a huge underground cavern bustling with activity. You see spaceships being built, spaceships of all kinds. Partially assembled ship components clutter the floor of the cavern. You had no idea that the Brotherhood was engaged in shipbuilding on such a large scale. The Brethren are normally very seclusive; they don't go winging around the galaxy in numbers.

A robed woman grasps your arm in welcome. "We are pleased to see that you have made it, Brother. We had word that you would be coming. Please come in and share some food."

You accept her offer and are soon seated at a long table filled with tasty treats. When you have had enough time to sample a little of everything, you ask your host about all the shipbuilding. She explains that these ships are not meant to be used as a matter of daily routine. However, the Brotherhood needs to be prepared to act in case of an emergency. It may be necessary to evacuate the colonies in the Arm, should the Clathrans uncover the Brotherhood bases during their dreaded Survey. All the ships will be well armed.

When your meal is over your host leaves you to your own devices. You have the following new options:

(XSNZY2) (7 phases) Visit the *real* Brotherhood Temple, which is down here.

(7P8SKZ) (5 phases) Spend some time with the shipbuilders.

☒ STOP ☒

[664]

Capitalizing on your advantage, you continue firing upon the huge Clathran dreadnought until the ship finally breaks apart into tiny little pieces. This is very satisfying. Unfortunately, it also takes quite a while. The three more dreadnoughts that arrive by the time you're finished are not amused. They surround you, immobilize you, and efficiently take you prisoner.

☒ STOP ☒

[665]

You sometimes wonder if humanity would be able to deal with the crisis of a Clathran Survey in as calm and collected a way as you have seen the Hadrakians organize a resistance in the form of The Battle, Incorporated. You have never seen the rash impetuosity you associate with your own race, that you certainly feel at times yourself, within their walls. On the other hand, you've never seen any of the aggressive Homeless Ones involved in the process.

Your wandering thoughts are brought back to the present by a red-uniformed Hadrakian, who asks for and receives your progress report before going on with her own.

"I have some bad news and some worse news," she begins. Apparently some cliches are universal, you think to yourself. The Settled One continues, "The bad news is that a fourth colony has fallen to the Clathrans. Fully half of our colonies — Innermost, Adafa, Franclair and Psorus — are now under occupation. The worse news is that we are fairly certain that the next Hadrakian colony in the Survey's path will be our very home world, Hadrak. The implications of a successful Clathran attack against Hadrak would be disastrous. If we lose Hadrak, the rest of the Empire will surely fall. Thus, we are mobilizing all of our forces to defend our home world from the advancing Clathran menace. We desperately seek assistance from any quarter."

As visions of glorious space battles dance in your head, you force yourself to remember that the Clathran Survey might be a little bit more formidable than, say, the mad pirate Silverbeard on Outpost a few short years ago. The formal briefing is over, so you leave this room and head towards the corridors and offices in the rear of the building for some strategic guidance.

☒ STOP ☒

[666]

Subspace radio transmission from The Battle, Inc.:

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

✂ STOP ✂

[667]

Worzelle first appears in your long-range scanners as a moderate-sized world of about twice Earth's mass, covered by a thick atmosphere of a color that mimics the red-orange tint of its parent star. Of the four planets in its system, Worzelle is the one closest to the sun; the other three are gas giants that don't appear any more habitable than any of the hundreds of other catalogued gas giants in the galaxy.

As your ship shrugs out of hyperspace and draws closer, you begin to make out more detail. The atmosphere is warm, averaging about 120 degrees Fahrenheit at the surface, and is streaked with plumes and bands of airborne dust. Oceans cover about one-third of the surface. The continents support sparse vegetation but are also flecked with small craters. This is unexpected, since you have detected no unusual concentrations of meteors in this system. The level of radiation in both ground and atmosphere is extremely high.

Despite its hostile environment, Worzelle clearly supports intelligent life. Your ship's readings indicate large amounts of power in use, surface and atmospheric vehicular traffic, scrambled radio and shielded laser communications, and a group of standard orbital/suborbital traffic control satellites.


When you round the planet as directed by the landing beacons, an area of the southern hemisphere comes into view that differs remarkably from the rest of the surface. It is twenty degrees cooler, has no craters and far more vegetation, and is entirely radiation-free. At first it appears that this one region — about one fifteenth of the planet's total land area — could be a colony that an alien race has “terraformed” on an otherwise unlivable planet. However, you soon realize that this is not the case. Without warning, your sensors notice a bright flash near the equator. Your ship's computer, analyzing the spectrum of the flash, reports that it was caused by a crude nuclear fusion explosion. It could be a test — but what kind of idiot race would test nuclear explosives above the ground? You suspect that someone down there is dropping bombs.

Further scanning confirms that, in fact, the entire planet is engaged in surface war. You detect no further nuclear explosions, but there are thousands of smaller chemical ones, along with beam-weapon pulses, laser flashes, chemical fires, and microwave disruptor sweeps. Only the clear area in the south, which is now directly beneath you, appears to be peaceful.

A moment later you get another surprise. Your routine communications protocol turns up Earth Standard as one of the available languages. That means that at least some of the inhabitants below have prior familiarity with Earth Standard, although they pronounce it in a very odd, old-fashioned-sounding way. Thus, you find yourself using your universal translator to translate from Earth Standard 2821 A. D. into Earth Standard circa 2500 A. D.

The Port Captain informs you that you are welcome to land on Worzelle for peaceful trade. She tells you that the area in the south is a fully demilitarized area safe from attack by the planet's warring powers. Therefore it is no surprise when you set down at a modest spaceport facility within a city that does not appear to have been touched by the wars in the surrounding lands. The air is quite clean and breathable, and the buildings are well-kept. The level of technology in the construction is high, perhaps a bit higher than Earth's, and some of the materials are unfamiliar. In the spaceport, only your own ship and a few smaller offworld trading vessels are docked. There is no evidence that the Worzellians have interstellar spaceships of their own, at least not in this facility.

A Worzellian representative meets you at your boarding portal. He stands about five feet tall, and his skin is covered with a bark-like protective layer somewhere between fur and scales. Over this he wears garments made of flexible metal sections that hinge together like chain mail. He has four arms, two on each side, the lower two half again longer than the upper two. Each arm ends in a dexterous eight-fingered

Continued 

hand. The lower arms can be used as hands or, in conjunction with a leg-like fifth appendage, for running. When he's standing still, as he is now, he balances upon his single foot. He has a habit of gesturing with all four arms in confusing ways when he speaks.

In response to your questions, he explains that the global war going on is nothing new. In fact, it is the way that most adult Worzellians have spent most of their time for thousands of years. It is their duty, he explains, to become as skilled in the arts of war as possible "so that when the time comes, we'll be ready." For this reason, Worzellians join together in arbitrary factions and fight a perpetual battle that rages all over the planet. Currently there are four major powers in the battle, the Reds, the Blues, the Greens, and the Gsmargs, and they are about equal in strength, but sometimes new powers arise or old ones die out.

"What are you getting ready for?" you ask.

"No one really knows," he says. "Or maybe they do, but I don't. Most of us don't worry about it. Questions like that cut down your fighting effectiveness, I'm told. Maybe if you ask the Strategists they could explain it more clearly."

The alien tells you his name is Civilian Estal. It takes you a moment to realize that "Civilian" is a title that commands considerable respect here, since there are so few of them. You give what you hope passes for a respectful salute. Estal seems very eager to tell you all about the southern city that you're now in. The main purpose for the city, and the surrounding demilitarized area, is to allow for young Worzellians to be brought up and trained away from the dangerous battlefields. It also serves as a medical oasis, farming facility and spaceport.

"Those buildings there house the Academy where all our soldiers go for Basic Training. Fighters of all four powers study there so no one starts out with any advantages. They'll let offworlders like yourself enroll, too — the Strategists like to spread the art around, the more the better — so if you want to learn something about fighting that won't leave you stranded as soon as somebody comes up with a new weapon, think about giving it a try. It's a wonder how you ever survived without it. There's no cost and no obligation to fight for anyone when you're through. Just be careful in the Final Exam.

"If you're just here for trading we have a market here where we're always looking for food, tools, and the like. Also, if you'd like to use our medical facilities, there is a small charge of one unit of any commodity. You won't be disappointed."

Estal skitters away before you get a chance to ask him about the Strategists, or find out where the Worzellians learned Earth Standard.

You have the following options:

- ⟨SNZY26⟩ (14 phases) Enroll for a two-week session of military arts training in the Academy.
- ⟨SMZJ2U⟩ (3 phases) Negotiate terms for trade at the commodities market.
- ⟨PMSJZU⟩ (3 phases) Use Worzelle's medical facilities to improve your health. You have it on good authority that a visit here is well worth the cost of one unit of any commodity, your choice.
- ⟨JNUY76⟩ (3 phases) Investigate prior historical contacts between Earth and Worzelle.
- ⟨3NPYS6⟩ (5 phases) Seek out the Strategists and find out their role on Worzelle.
- ⟨JMUJ7U⟩ (3 phases) Leave the demilitarized area and explore the war zones.
- ⟨S4ZQ2X⟩ (4 phases) Look into the availability of weapons for personal combat.

☒ STOP ☒

[668]

You hold the mysterious note in your hand as you follow its directions to. . . you are not sure what.

You have no real landmarks by which to orient yourself. You can only trust the directions on the slip of paper your Sirissian interrogator gave you.

As you travel down one of the last streets listed in the directions, you experience a strange sensation. You feel like you have just walked through a cloud of cold mist; the day, once bright and sunny, is now dark and murky. Something has definitely changed. You turn to look back through the last doorway you passed, but you can't even see back through to the other side. You decide to continue on your way.

Finally, you approach the address listed at the bottom of your note. The building is older than most you have seen on the planet, and you immediately take a liking to it. You climb the three stairs which lead you to the front door and stand there, perplexed. You can see no means of letting those inside know there is a visitor outside. You try the door but find it is locked.

Disappointed, you turn to go, but stop when you hear the door behind you opening. You see a Sirissian step back and beckon for you to enter. You hesitate a split second but decide that you'll never learn anything if you back out now, so you step into the foyer. The Sirissian greets you with a nod of his head and heads off down a corridor, motioning for you to follow. You take a deep breath and do just that.

The building is as interesting on the inside as it is on the outside. The ornamentation and paintings are very different from what you have seen in other buildings on the planet, and you like the effect. Your guide silently leads you through the carpeted corridors.

He stops in front of a heavy wooden door, knocks softly and waits for a response. He must have better hearing than you because he opens the door before you hear any response. Your mysterious guide motions you in and then turns to go. Before leaving, you note that he is wearing a gold triangle much like your own. You don't get a chance to ask him about it because he is gone almost immediately. You shrug your shoulders and step into the room.

It's not so much the tassled lamps that overwhelm you, nor the huge stuffed klarth (an animal once found roaming the plains of Sirissi) standing in the corner, nor the hand-woven rugs on the floor. It is the feeling you have entered the realm of an old auntie you had callously forgotten to visit for a long time. This feeling is enhanced when, after looking around the oddly familiar room, you spot the hunched figure of an ancient Sirissian female seated behind a large wooden desk. She seems to be studying you very closely.

"Welcome, Human. I am called Elder 3. Please sit down. I would like to speak with you for a few minutes."

You find a comfortable chair and comply with her request.

"I have heard quite a bit about you," she continues. "You have impressed a few important people. You have been awarded our highest honor, the Golden Pyramid. I will now tell you what it means to wear one.

"Our people have, relatively recently, been overrun by a race of warlike aliens called the Clathrans. I believe you are familiar with them." This is said as a statement, not as a question, so you stay silent and let her continue.

"Few non-Sirissians know what I am about to tell you, and I require an oath of honor that you will not repeat it to anyone."

You pause for a moment, weighing the implications of such an oath.

"If the information does not endanger my own race, I will keep it to myself," is your considered reply.

"Human, that is the only reply anyone of honor can truly give. I accept the condition. Now I will tell you our secret in the hopes that you may one day be of help to us and our cause. For, although we were defeated in battle, we were never conquered. You are now sitting in the midst of the Sirissian Rebellion."

She pauses to let this news sink in. You sit back in your chair, slightly dumbfounded, but still attentive.

"We give the outward appearance of being a race that has been subjugated, while inwardly, we have been planning a rebellion."

"How are you able to do this?" you ask.

"We are a slow and careful race. We do nothing rashly. Each move is made after the most careful and painstaking review. That is why we have been able to keep it a secret. We have an entire city built around us here which the Clathrans have never detected. It is here that we do our planning."

She goes on to explain that the weird sensation you experienced as you traveled toward this building was caused by first being teleported to a secret location and then passing through a protective field. A device called a Cloaking Ray is able to hide their rebel city from the prying eyes of the Clathrans. It is because you are wearing the gold triangle that you were able to utilize the teleporter.

You are curious as to where the city is located and how you got here, but Elder 3 only hints at the answers. From her explanation, you get the impression that you are not really here — not physically, that is. Somehow your "body" is really a projected image which feels solid but is not. The teleporter is a kind of projection unit that sends you on to this world. It works in conjunction with a device called a Stasis Field that is capable of freezing time for a short while. You don't understand all of this but, from your dealings with the Sirissian people, you are not surprised that they are capable of it. At any rate, you can understand why the Clathrans have never stumbled upon the Sirissian Rebellion.

You try to find out more about the rebellion, the actual location of the city you now find yourself in (sort of), as well as other aspects of Sirissian life, but Elder 3 is reluctant to tell you more.

"Forgive me, but you are still somewhat of an unknown quantity with us. If you wish to advance further in the Underground, you will have to show us somehow that you are worthy of our trust." She bids you farewell and you have no choice but to leave.

How can you show your sincerity and trustworthiness? Hmmm. You return to the portal through which you entered the city, feeling the odd tickling sensation once again. You try to see beyond the city walls before you leave but all is dark and murky. Once you step through the doorway, you see the familiar sight of the city you left awhile ago. Pacing along the streets, you try to think of a way to prove yourself to these aliens. Perhaps if you demonstrated your loathing of the Clathran lizard-men in a combat of some sort? That should show the bobbling little Sirissians how you feel about the Clathrans. It might work!

You realize, however, that the population density on Sirissi makes such a plan difficult, to say the least. After some thought, you decide that the Sirissian colony on Takata would be a good place to pursue this strategy. When you are on Takata, you may plot the following option:

(HXRNAY) (7 phases) Seek out a Clathran soldier who needs to be taught a "lesson."

⊠ STOP ⊠

[669]

"Let's see," you mutter under your breath, staring intently at the map of the maze you find yourself in, lost. "If I take this right and that left that will put me. . ."

"At the public restrooms," a voice beside you finishes your sentence. "Is that really where you want to go. . . so to speak?" You turn to the source of the voice and find yourself face to face with one of the native Sallies.

"Actually, I'm trying to get to the offices of The Battle, Inc.," you inform the alien.

"I'm headed over that way myself, I'd be happy to take you there. By the way," he continues, "My name's Quellen." You introduce yourself and are soon on your way with your newfound friend. The trip is not speedy since Quellen makes several stops along the way. One is at a store filled with all sorts of games, where he makes a purchase and stuffs it into his backpack. Another stop is at a machine designed to dispense currency from a person's personal account, which the alien proceeds to do. Between stops, he is chatting with you about his latest research project involving gum, rubberbands, paper clips, and a miniature nuclear reactor. It's all very interesting, but sometimes hard to follow.

Finally you reach your destination. You thank Quellen for the assistance and wish him luck with his latest project. Waving a final farewell, you enter the building where you expect to find the Hadrakian organization called The Battle, Inc. Here you will be able to discuss how the war with the Clathrans is going and what you can do to help.



The Settled One pacing behind the long counter looks up, startled at your appearance. “Yes?” she snarls. You see she is very young for a female and surmise she probably went through the transformation from male to female very recently.

Explaining why you are here, you wait for her to show you where you can go to speak to someone. Finally, after carefully examining your papers, she nods and points to a door against the far wall.

“Go through there and you will find what you are looking for.” This sounds a little ominous, but you don’t think she means you any harm. You follow her direction and pass through the door.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[670]

You are taken into the room of the High Council of the Brotherhood. These rooms have been forbidden to all except those invited for an audience or members of the High Council itself. You are stunned and quite surprised when Mathus, after escorting you to a seat, steps up to the podium and takes her seat on the Council podium. You see a few familiar faces among the members of the Council, including those of Almed and Ultermalen, your former trainers. Several of the council chairs are empty.

“Many men and women have come before us these years, but few have come as far as you. Fewer yet have demonstrated the understanding of our Craft and the promise that you exhibit. Therefore, we give you a task worthy of your skills. Accomplish this, and we will allow you to advance beyond this level. Most acolytes end their training here in this room. You shall have a chance to continue, if you succeed.

“Centuries ago, explorers first discovered the world called Golgotha. What they saw there inspired and horrified them so much that they devoted the rest of their lives to persuading humanity never to travel in space. Among them were the Founders of the Final Church of Man, now the dominant faith of humans living on the Home Worlds. This Church teaches that the human race as a whole must learn to improve itself before venturing further. We of the Brotherhood don’t share that belief. We believe it is necessary only to teach certain individuals about themselves, as we and you have done through meditation and study and ordeal and geas.

“To understand why, you must go to Golgotha. Explore it thoroughly and try to understand what you see. When you have seen all you can of present, past, and future, you must look one step deeper. This will require that you call upon every bit of the humanity that your training in the ways of the Brotherhood has instilled in you. Then, if you have learned well, you will learn more of our purpose. When you have done this, return here, and you will be rewarded. But be warned: few have succeeded in this task.”

“But I’ve already been to Golgotha,” you volunteer.

There is a moment of silence. “Then you already know something of its nature,” says Mathus. “That you could reach it at all is a good sign. But you haven’t learned all that you can there. You must return there as a Master of Reason.”

Your option when you reach Golgotha is:

⟨DMCJFU⟩ (7 phases) “Look one step deeper,” as Brother Mathus instructed.

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

Brother Mathus continues: “When you have done this, return here, and you will be rewarded. But be warned: few have succeeded in this task.”

With that, you are escorted back to the entranceway of the Haunted House. You think about the strange planet Golgotha and the disturbing turbulent Dual Space singularity there. You wonder what new insights you may find there, when you return as a Master of Reason.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[671]

“Boss, I’m not sure I like this planet,” says your computer as you approach Knapt.

“Why, what’s wrong?” you ask. The planet’s surface is extremely jagged and seems to be riddled with small holes. To your eyes it looks airless and barren, but you’ve seen a lot worse.

“Check the range of it,” the computer continues. “It’s deceiving. The planet’s bigger than Jupiter, yet its mass is more like Earth’s. Mercury could fit into the largest of these holes.”

“But it shows as solid,” you observe from the readout your computer has provided. “Recheck the data. A planet that big couldn’t be so light even if it were composed solely of gas.”

“No, it’s solid, all right, Boss. Shall I go in for a closer look?”

“OK, but not so close that we can’t still see the entire world on the viewscreen.” You watch the screen as the planet gets nearer, increasing the magnification at the same time. Now you can see countless holes covering the surface of the planet.

“Is the planet hollow?” you venture.

“Negative, Boss. My guess is that it has a fractal surface.”

“What?”

“A fractal surface. The big caves have smaller caves branching from their sides, which in turn have still smaller caves branching from them, and so on. Watch as I zoom in, see? The caves have caves which have caves, all the way down to the limit of my resolution.” Sure enough, as you watch, the surface becomes so riddled with holes of varying sizes and shapes that there really *is* no surface.

“Think of a sponge, Boss. The density is practically nothing, since almost every point inside the planet is part of a cave. But the surface area can be almost infinite. There could be trillions of square miles of surface, folded about itself all the way down to the planet’s core and back out again.”

“Are there any life forms here?”

“Nothing I can detect yet, but we’re still a bit too far away to tell for sure. There is no atmosphere or water at the surface, though. Wait. . . there’s something moving; I’m getting lots of energy in the RF range. . .”

The viewscreen shifts to a long view of the planet’s horizon. Something is emerging from one of the many caves, a gas cloud or fluid being ejected from one of the holes. It doesn’t act like a cloud, though, for instead of dispersing, it pulls itself together. The cloud is translucent, with flashes of color sparkling from the depths of its interior. The flashes intensify as the cloud consolidates and rises from Knapt’s surface.

The patterns of color are mesmerizing, so much so that you feel yourself falling into a trance. With this altered state comes a clear message emanating from the creature. It is not a message to you, exactly, but a telepathic call of anxiety and dread. You have no doubt that the alien is fully sentient, for you can sense this in the call, nor do you doubt that the creature is expecting to die. Try as you might, you cannot force your thoughts into the alien’s mind to ask it if you may help somehow. Instead, you are doomed to watch the scene unfold.

The cloud-being is following an irresistible urge to rise to the heavens and join with the stars. It knows something will prevent this from happening. It is not afraid of death — no, the tragedy is that its travel into the great expanse of stars will be denied. In just moments, you see why.

From six different points on Knapt’s surface come six blue-white energy beams converging on the alien. In terrible slow motion, the cloud disintegrates into wisps of plasma that soon disperse into nothingness. You actually feel the creature die, not in pain, but in total despair. You need several minutes before you can speak.

“What was that?” you whisper.

“Don’t know for sure, Boss,” your computer replies softly. “Possibly a noncorporeal plasma energy being, not really life as we know it, but definitely intelligent.”

"I can identify the energy that killed the creature, though. It was generated by devices located all along the surface of Knapt and concealed inside many of the caves. My scanners indicate that the beams are locked onto objects rising from the surface of the planet, not on those that might be descending. If you want to land, we will be safe — at least until we try to lift off."

You think about it for a moment and decide that the plasma creatures are too intriguing to pass by, so you give the order to land near one of the beams. If it is going to be a problem in the near future, you may want to examine the beam up close before trying to leave the planet. After several hours of searching, your computer finally locates a place to set the ship down.

You now have the following options:

⟨87K8DK⟩ (7 phases) Examine the beam weapon.

⟨V798VK⟩ (3 phases) Descend deeper into the planet and try to find other plasma creatures.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[672]

The chess board is visible on the computer console and it is clearly your turn.

"Boss," your computer whines. "Aren't you ever going to move your piece?"

"Hmmm, whaa?" you manage to say as you are startled from a comfortable slumber. "Oh, um, I was just thinking."

"Well you have been 'thinking' for over an hour. Could you make your move?"

Sighing, you reach out and put your knight on QR4. With this accomplished, you ignore the chortling sound coming from your computer and sit back in your favorite chair to think some more. Your eyelids close and you begin snoring softly.

You open your eyes and see that somehow you have landed on a Clathran base! In fact, you are standing in the midst of a crowd of Clathran soldiers, listening to vital battle plans being discussed! What luck! Unfortunately, the Clathrans are all mumbling so you cannot hear them. It is at this point you realize you are in the middle of a dream.

You give up on eavesdropping and concentrate on how you are able to walk around undetected amid a throng of alert Clathran soldiers. While this may only be a dream, you have learned that important information can be gathered from your dreams ever since the Dual Space Interphase began widening.

From what you can tell, you have acquired an ability to conceal yourself from your enemies while walking among them. Immediately you are whisked from the Clathran base to a small planet. A signpost standing a few feet in front of you says: "Welcome to the Planet Tayzha." It dawns on you that it is here you can learn about the ability to conceal yourself from your enemies. Once again you are whisked away.

Now you wake up aboard your own vessel to the sound of your ship complaining that you need to make a move with one of your chess pieces. You pinch yourself to make sure this isn't some nightmare, but no, you are back in reality.

"Come on, Boss! How about conceding the loss? You know you are only going to draw out the inevitable."

Reaching out, you move your bishop and are pleased to hear the computer gasp. You will have checkmate in four moves.

The computer starts talking to itself about how impossible this outcome is, and you sit back happily in your chair. You recall your dream about how a person can learn the art of concealment on the planet Tayzha and think that this afternoon wasn't a waste of time after all.

⊠ STOP ⊠

## [673]

During a long space voyage, with only the ever-present danger of Clathran interception to keep you from a state of total boredom, you begin doing some writing. Your plan is to eventually set down a full account of your experiences on Golgotha. Perhaps, you think, you will one day expand it onto a complete history of the Final Church of Man. Assuming, of course, that such a “one day” ever arrives, and you’re around to see it.

As you type the manuscript, you can sense that the ship’s computer is reading it over your shoulder — or the electronic equivalent, since the keyboard and display screen you’re typing on are part of the computer anyway. You remember that the computer wasn’t functional on Golgotha, and therefore doesn’t know much about what you saw and did there.

“Wouldn’t it be easier to dictate, Boss?” says the computer, simultaneously displaying the words on your screen to emphasize the point.

“Not really,” you answer. “It’s going to be very hard to put some of this into words. I’d always be saying things like ‘back up to the beginning of the third to last sentence’ or ‘change that last had to had had.’ It’s easier just to type.”

Five hours and less than three paragraphs later you push the keyboard away in disgust. “It’s just not enough,” you say out loud. You realize that the problem is that you don’t really know as much as you thought about what you are describing. Your visions of the future seemed lucid enough at the time, but when you try to reconcile them with what you know about the present, there’s too much that doesn’t fit together. There’s too much you still don’t know.

“Boss, what does this part mean, where you wrote about Darkwhistle? Did you know Darkwhistle is the name of another planet on the Star Map?”

You had almost forgotten about Darkwhistle, until you came to that point in your chronicle when you saw yourself visiting that planet in the future. Perhaps that is the answer to your problem.

“When I looked into the future on Golgotha,” you explain to the computer, “one of the first things I saw was myself, returning to Golgotha at some later time. But I wasn’t flying on this ship. I was flying there disembodied through space, and I knew that my body was on Darkwhistle at the time. It was something called Journeyming. Maybe there’s something on Darkwhistle that lets you do that.”

“Sounds creepy, Boss. I don’t blame you for not wanting to go there.”

But you realize that you *do* want to go to Darkwhistle. You feel like you’ve learned just the wrong amount on Golgotha: enough to make you uncomfortable, but not enough to give you a clear idea of what to do about the Clathrans or the troubles on the Nine Worlds or the future of the Church. You wonder if the Founders felt the same way when they were writing the Six Holy Text Files. In any case, Darkwhistle offers the possibility of being able to learn more. Perhaps there are beings on Darkwhistle who know about Golgotha themselves, or who can teach you a way to penetrate more of its turbulently concealed secrets.

Perhaps, you realize for the first time, you can go *beyond* the mysteries of the Final Church of Man. Perhaps you can learn *more* than the Founders knew, three hundred thirty years ago.

The possibility is enticing. To pursue it you must go to the planet Darkwhistle.

✂ STOP ✂

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[674]

You are completely baffled by the ‘test’ the mysterious robed figure gives you. It simply consists of the single question, “How does one know the way to truth?” When you stand there for several minutes without giving a response, the robed figure sighs.

Brushing back her hood, she looks deeply into your eyes. “I can see that you have traveled far and have come through many dangerous situations. I must tell you that there are even greater threats to you in the very near future. Will you trust me and let me show you something that could change your life?” When put that way, how can you say no?

You follow her to one of the side doors you passed by earlier. Opening it, she motions you inside, then follows you through. The furnishings are sparse — only two chairs and a desk with a few books on top. She takes one of the seats; you seat yourself in the other.

“The Brotherhood is a noble and ancient order, of which you have probably never heard. We have dedicated ourselves to the betterment of Humanity and our personal self-improvement. This is really too simple a summary of our purpose, but for now it will suffice. We have come to Margen in response to grave danger that threatens all humanity. We do not know enough about it yet to stop it, but with the help of people such as yourself, we may succeed.

“I am giving you the opportunity to join our order and add your abilities and knowledge to ours so that we can save our race. I can tell you no more at this time. I ask only that you think about what I have said. Look through the books here; perhaps they may help you decide.” She stands and leaves you to leaf through the pages of the books on the desk which are filled with accounts of many humans throughout history, famous and obscure, who did something noteworthy to assist their fellow man. You correctly guess that all of these people were members of the Brotherhood.

Joining this mysterious order sounds like a good idea, but you need some time to think. Should you wish to take her up on her offer to join, plot the following option:

{4SQZX2} (7 phases) Become a member of the mysterious Brotherhood.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

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[675]

“So, Boss, are you having a good day?” your trusty computer asks.

You know when the old bucket of bytes has something unpleasant to tell you, and this sounds like one of those times.

“Look,” you say, “just spill it, whatever it is. I’m ready.”

“OK, but you’re not going to be happy.”

“TELL ME!”

“Our drone has been blown to little tiny pieces by the Clathrans.”

“What? We’ve lost our drone again? Are you sure?”

“Positive, Boss. Since the last drone was mysteriously lost, I have kept a constant monitor on this drone. Seconds ago, I received data that a Clathran patrol vessel was approaching the cargo drone. Without any warning, it opened fire, blowing the drone to smithereens. Sorry Boss, but another one bites the dust.”

“Is there any way we can keep the Clathrans from getting to our drones?”

“I’m not sure, Boss. Maybe it would be best to keep our drones clear of Clathran-occupied space.”

✧ STOP ✧

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[676]

Moving around in the war zone on Worzelle (i.e., most of the planet) is extremely difficult, despite all your technology and skill. For one thing, there is always the chance of meeting up with a bomb, mine or projectile intended for someone else. Also, the environment itself is hostile, with high levels of radiation and a scorching temperature. Even though you try not to get in the way of the fighting, sometimes it's hard to avoid. The Worzellians' maneuvers are intricately complex and well-coordinated. Each individual warrior seems uncannily aware of the tactical situation for miles around.

Your scouting leads you inevitably to one location where the patterns of activity don't seem to make sense. In the center of a zone of heavy fighting by all four factions is a large installation surrounded by heavy defenses. None of the combatants ever directs an attack at the installation itself, nor do the installation's defensive weapons ever open fire. Moreover, convoys of surface vehicles flow into and out of the complex, carrying loads of materials such as might be used in a large construction project.

You follow the routes of the convoys, and finally hitch a ride unseen on a convoy vehicle, to get closer to the installation. It is night when you make it inside, and you see what the Worzellians have hidden there.

It is a large spaceship, under construction. It's the largest spaceship you've ever seen, easily bigger than the great liners of the days of the single-axis drive, bigger even than the largest orbiting habitation satellites around Earth. But why would a ship need to be so large? You inspect closer and discover that it's designed to be a carrier, with docks for a hundred or more smaller ships inside. The idea of a space carrier isn't a new one, but you've never seen anyone actually attempt it before. On the other hand, the Worzellians are nothing if not good tacticians, so they must have some reason for building it that way.

You withdraw from the complex, slipping away silently and working your way back to the demilitarized zone. No one there has noticed your absence. After thinking about the possible importance of what you saw, you wonder if it would be safe to ask Civilian Estal about the ship, and whether he might be willing or able to tell you anything. You can try; the option is:

(3MPJSU) (3 phases) Ask about the secret ship.

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[677]

Your Interphase Variometer indicates that this planet is definitely a Dual Space anomaly. However, you have already researched four anomalies — all that was necessary to build the Interphase Constrictor. Additional research might be appreciated by the scientists of future generations, but if there are going to be future generations you have more important concerns for now.

You must concentrate on how to use your new knowledge and technology to stop the Clathrans. If you're not sure how to do that, it might be a good idea to visit The Battle, Incorporated, on one of the Hadrakian worlds. They need all the help they can get, and they may be able to help you in the process.

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[678]

You throw everything you have against the flashing lights. Since you don't know what they are made of, you have to just guess what things might have an effect on them. So far, the answer is nothing.

Your ship is dodging and weaving through the collection of lights, thus far evading any more attacks. You are not sure how much longer you can keep this up, though. Sweat starts sliding down the bridge of your nose as you feverishly tap out the next set of orders on the computer console. You send out yet another wave of weapon fire, hoping the lights will be affected by something you have aboard.

You suddenly feel an odd sensation. Looking up at the viewscreen, you see that the lights have departed.

"What happened? What caused them to leave?" you ask, startled by the suddenness of their disappearance.

"Sorry, Boss, the answer is not known to me. They left as quickly as they came."

You wait at the weapons console for over an hour in case the mysterious lights return. When all is still clear at the end of that time, you sigh in relief, stand and stretch to get the kinks out of your tired muscles. What a day!

"Any damage?"

"None, Boss."

Well at least there is some good news.

✂ STOP ✂

[679]

Lonner is eager to show you around his home. From the moment you encounter the front door, you are eager to see what else he has here. The door itself is a series of puzzles which change from hour to hour. Even Lonner himself has to solve them before he can enter his own house. You are content to stand and watch as he busily solves each puzzle and is finally able to open the door for you.


The front hallway is filled with clocks, clocks and more clocks. Each is different, not only in appearance but in functionality as well. You are startled to see that one or two of them are running backwards! Lonner sees your interest and is pleased. Apparently time is a pet project of his. Ever since he can remember, he has been interested in how time works. Does it flow, or does it bulldoze its way through reality? Can it be manipulated by beings such as ourselves, or is it immutable? When he asks you these questions, you do not have any answers. You are surprised when he tells you that he may have found some answers during his research.

Holding out his wrist, he shows you a chronometer. While you are not really impressed with what you see, since it doesn't look that different from your own timepiece, you try not to let him see your reaction. You like the tall alien and do not want to hurt his feelings, something you sense is easy to do. He does not notice your reaction anyway, because he is busy telling you about time theory and how he has just discovered a way to make it move the way he wants it to, at least for five minutes.

"Think of everything being glued to a section of a long, endless ribbon," he begins, trying to explain his time theory to you. "We are essentially stuck on the ribbon from the moment of our birth, and the ribbon moves, taking us forward in time. I have found a way to make the ribbon act more like a rubber band so we can step either a short distance into the future or the past. Like this. . ." and he does something to his chronometer and disappears.

Moments later, he reappears looking a bit green. "Boy, do I hate that. There's something about this time travel that causes severe nausea. That is why I can't go any farther than a few minutes either forward or backward in time. Anyway, I have been in the future," he tells you. "I know that in precisely thirty seconds, my telescreen will activate but that it will be an incorrect number."

You are a bit skeptical but are willing to give Lonner the benefit of the doubt. What's thirty seconds, anyway? Keeping an eye on your watch as is he, you both count down the time. Sure enough, thirty seconds pass and the telescreen beeps, indicating an incoming call.

Continued 

When Lonner answers it, the person who appears, a male Hadrakian, snarls at you. “What are you two strangers doing at my mate’s home?” he demands to know. It takes several seconds to persuade him that he has reached a wrong number. It is hard to explain ANYTHING to a Homeless One! Finally, he hangs up.

“See?” Lonner asks. “It really works. It’s a great invention, don’t you think?” With this, he removes the chronometer and tosses it onto the top of a large stack of other gadgets he is no longer interested in and starts to show you the rest of his home.

“But aren’t you going to work on the time travel project any more?” you ask, incredulously.

“No, I’m glad to see it works, but now it’s time to move onto something different. I don’t usually spend even this much time on a project. I was just curious to see how far I could take the time travel aspect. Now, I know! Besides,” he tells you in a whisper, “It just makes me too nauseous!”

He has nothing further to say on the topic. You spend the next few hours seeing his collection of unique devices, any one of which could be a gold mine on the space trade market if he wanted to finish it and mass produce it. He isn’t interested in doing this, however. He is constantly moving on to new things, never really completing what he is working on at any given time. All the Sallies are like that. You wonder why.

When you have seen all of Lonner’s wonderful home and are ready to leave, he sees you to the door. On the way, you pass by the large pile of discarded projects with the chronometer sitting right on top of the heap. On an impulse, you ask the alien if you may take the chronometer. Surprised, he thinks about it for a moment, then says “Why not?” Happily, you take your new treasure back with you. Lonner kindly offers to escort you as far as the Hadrakian area of the city so you won’t get lost in the Sallie part of the labyrinth. You accept.

Your new friend takes you to the spaceport and waves goodbye. You walk to your ship, fiddling with your new toy. You find that the stem of the chronometer pulls out and allows you to set the two hands either forward or backward. You decide to move them back as far as they will turn, namely five minutes. You experience a weird sense of disorientation, a feeling of being stretched. You look around you and see something very odd.

You are entering the spaceport gate with Lonner waving you a cheery farewell! You watch as your earlier self waves back and begins playing with the new chronometer Lonner gave you. Your other self spends the same amount of time you did just minutes ago examining the device and, as your five minutes elapse, you see yourself smile jubilantly as you discover the ability to move the hands forward or back. You briefly wonder what will happen to you as your earlier self starts to vanish, but you are too busy feeling unstretched and snapping back into the present.

WHAM!!! You are struck by an overwhelming feeling of vertigo, nausea, dizziness, you name it. Boy, do you feel awful! Staggering into your ship, you are forced to lay down in a cool dark room for over an hour. When you can stand again, you head down to your own work area in the ship. Here, you decide to risk ruining the chronometer (you really can’t stand even the thought of traveling in time again) and you open it up.

Working closely with your trusty computer, you manage to discover what Lonner used to make the device work. The components are all things you can probably obtain for yourself if you want. You also are able to see how these things work together to produce the desired effect of time travel. Whistling in admiration of Lonner’s genius, you jot down many notes on the principle of time travel. As you do so, you are struck by an idea.

“Computer, what would happen if I activated the forward time section simultaneously with the backward time section?”

“Unknown, Boss. I do not have enough data to make a real determination.”

Rats, you were hoping the computer would be able to figure it out. Oh well. You decide to poke around a bit more inside the device anyway. Reaching for the pneumatic microscrewdriver, you instead grab the transfluxion miniwrench. You do not realize your error until it is too late.

“Boss, I wouldn’t do . . .”

An aura emanates from the chronometer, engulfing you, and you freeze.

“Boss, Boss, can you hear me?”

“What are you yelling about? Of course I can hear you, I’m right here, aren’t I?”



“You don’t understand, Boss. You accidentally cross-circuited the backward and forward time mechanisms. I thought you were going to remain in the resulting stasis field forever!”

“What? Explain.”

“Thirty-six minutes ago, you accidentally grabbed the transfluxion miniwrench by mistake. Before I could warn you, the damage had been done. You induced some sort of stasis ray from the chronometer, which held you in its field for the entire time. Finally, it snapped off and you are apparently back to normal.”

A stasis field! You spend the next five hours going over, step by careful step with the computer, everything you did earlier trying to recreate the effect. Finally, you are successful.

“Computer, is there a way to use this device on something other than myself?”

“Sure, Boss. We can build a large Stasis Field generator here on board the ship. Then we can aim it out into space as a projectile weapon. The Stasis Field will hold whatever it snags for several minutes. This is a great ship weapon, Boss. Good going!”

You make note of the necessary components needed to make the Stasis Field, which are the following:

1 Insulicon  
1 Vortex Coil  
1 Phase Steel  
1 Warp Core

When you have all of these components and wish to make a Stasis Field generator, plot the following action code:

**(L8MKJD)** (3 phases) Build a Stasis Field Generator.

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[680]

“Hey Boss, you know I’ve had the whereabouts of the planet Margen spotted for some time now.”

“I know, computer. But I just don’t trust the Dean’s information. Something funny’s going on.”

“But how will you ever find out what it is if you don’t go there?”

Your computer has a good point. “Good point, computer.” You decide to go to Margen when you can.

“We’ll visit Margen when we can.”

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[681]

You go back to the Royal Palace, the building that looks like a giant upside-down yellow test tube. There you are escorted up to the top to meet with the Zyran King. You hope this time you will be more successful in convincing the King to ally with you against the Clathrans.

All of the King's twenty heads nod as you enter the domed throne room.

"You again. What do you have to say this time?"

You update the King on the current military situation: the movement of the Clathran Survey Line, the status of the Hadrakian War, and so on. You point out how important it is for the victims of Clathran oppression to work together. Otherwise, the Clathrans will just continue their Survey, putting a halt to space travel, trade, and colonization. Not to mention totally eliminating whatever races they feel like.

The argument is not only logical, but your Diplomacy ability allows you to state it with great conviction and persuasiveness. Finally, the King is convinced.

"I am afraid you are right. We must work together. These Clathrans have to be stopped."

"Great. Then that's settled. So you'll send your fleet to help the free races of the galaxy fight the Clathrans? I'll let you know when you're needed."

"Yes, by my decree. Assuming the strategic situation looks okay to me, of course. You have my word, Human."

"Excellent," you respond. "You won't regret it. One more thing. Can you get your people to stop attacking human ships now that we're on the same side?"

"As I told you before, I can't promise that. Our scouts out in space are likely to do anything if they're hungry."

You talk with the King a while longer, and it offers you the opportunity to visit one of the Zyrans' shipyards. You are delighted to accept, of course. The option is:

(EB3WPT) (5 phases) Visit a Zyran shipyard.

As you ride back down to the bottom of the yellow test tube palace, you congratulate yourself on a job well done. Who would have thought the Zyrans could become such an important military ally? With them on the same side as the Hadrakians, yourself, and whomever else you manage to round up, maybe you can actually stop the Clathran Survey!

Then again, you better not get your hopes up. The Clathrans will be no pushover.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[682]

The yellowish tinge you notice in the air makes you a bit uneasy as you leave your ship, but your computer assures you it will do no lasting damage. Trying to take small shallow breaths, you make your way through the mounds of putrifying garbage that surround your ship as protective camouflage. You manage to slip several times on decaying organic matter and take the time to widely skirt a pool of thick gunk that seems to take an interest in you as you pass by. This is definitely NOT a pleasant planet!

When you won your Innermost citizenship, the Settled One running the operation, after checking on your credentials, gave you the complex directions to get to The Battle, Inc. With these in mind, you take the first step in finding this very well hidden organization, namely pulling aside a sewer cover and lowering yourself into the murky depths. Gagging on the fetid air, you tiptoe along the slime-covered passages that run under the city.

Following the prescribed turns and twists, you finally arrive at a half-rotted wooden door set in a cul-de-sac. Using the secret knock, you rap on the door, sending wet splinters cascading onto the ground. Maybe you shouldn't be so forceful next time! After a short wait, the door opens, revealing a Settled One who beckons you inside. She waves you toward the back of the small anteroom you have just entered, indicating that you should proceed through a second door.

✂ STOP ✂

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[683]

You decide to take advantage of the chance to inspect the nearest — and therefore probably the safest — of the alien devices. Passing through the domed city, you emerge on Adafa's unprotected surface. The flat plain stretches eerily away in all directions; with no curvature to form a horizon, and no atmosphere to haze your view, you could see all the way to the disk's distant edge if it weren't for the artifacts distributed across the surface. It is difficult to judge distances, or to tell just how large the alien machines really are.

A trickle of sweat tickles its way down your neck and you reach up to wipe it away. Instead, your hand strikes the plastic face plate of your Environmental Suit. Drat! You keep forgetting that you are wearing the darn thing. You spend a few minutes adjusting the temperature inside the suit, then resume your walk. You wonder why the aliens who built Adafa wanted gravity but didn't think an atmosphere was necessary. What kind of creatures were they? Aside from the obvious conclusion that they were one of the most powerful races in the galaxy, you do not know much more about them.

With no new insight into the mysterious race, you arrive at your destination. The alien device is a shiny tapered cylinder about thirty feet in height. The cylinder comes to a blunt rounded point at each end, and has a diameter of ten feet at the widest point in its center. A framework of three intersecting rings made of the same dark metal as Adafa's surface surrounds the cylinder. A quick examination, however, reveals that the cylinder is not affixed to the framework at any point; it hangs suspended in the center. Set into the ground to one side is a small pedestal supporting what looks like a viewing window. The aperture measures two feet square and is placed at an inconvenient height of three feet off the ground.

You crouch down at the viewing window and focus your eyes, through your faceplate, on the image there. You see a crystal-clear picture of a random field of stars, not much different from what you could see by looking up. You look around for any sort of controls. You don't find any, but as you search, the image in the window moves. It zooms in toward a star in the center of the image, then pans downward.

You spot a star with an unusual greenish color. *That looks interesting*, you think to yourself. *I wonder if I can get this thing to look at it closer.* At that moment, the image locks in on the green star and closes on it at a speed that puts your tri-axis hyperdrive to shame. Up close, the star proves to be planetless, and the color just a variation of the main-blue sequence. You decide you'd rather look elsewhere, and immediately the image shifts. The device is responding to your thoughts!

Startled, you look up at the framework. The cylinder, instead of being locked rigidly in place as you would expect of a telescope, is spinning slowly on three axes, tracing out a complex motion.

You turn your attention back to the window. You wonder how far this alien telescope can resolve. Might you be able to see your home planets? Or the Clathran home star system? You concentrate on directing the view toward the Fringe. As the magnification increases, the cylinder above you spins and tumbles silently at a faster and faster rate, until it is an invisible blur. Long before you reach the threshold of the Fringe, the image loses resolution and fades from the screen. The telescope cannot resolve any greater distance. For a moment you're disappointed that you can't focus on the Home Worlds, and an unexpected and long-suppressed wave of homesickness washes over you. Then you realize that the Clathrans, too, would be able to find the human Home Worlds with this device or one like it, if it could resolve that far.

You reverse the direction of the view, looking now toward the inner Arm. You focus on several star systems, but find only barren planets containing no life and no useful resources. You move the view again, and shift closer to Adafa, and suddenly the window is full of Clathran ships, spread across space like a thousand points of dark.

You recognize what you are seeing: it is the Clathran Survey fleet, or a small part of it. The vast armada of ships spans the width of the Arm. Moving in fits and starts, but with smooth efficiency and implacable intelligence, the Survey Line is moving in the direction of the Fringe. No planet along the way will be left unexamined. The scale of the operation is beyond comprehension. Light years separate the closest of the ships, yet the net is always ready to snap shut on any foreign vessel trying to get through, and the military might distributed throughout the survey is sufficient to overcome any amount of resistance by force. On this wide scale you can see little detail, but you can understand how the planar formations of scouts, survey vessels, military support ships, and heavy destroyers coordinate their movements and operations, assuring that no star system goes undetected and no unauthorized ship penetrates the net.

The sight is a humbling one, reminding you that despite your accomplishments so far, you must ultimately face the challenge of stopping an enemy that looks unassailable. Sooner or later, the Survey Line will reach Earth, and humanity might not even have that long.

You spend more time examining star systems in the Arm behind the Survey Fleet, but you find few of interest and none that look important to the Clathrans. There are far too many stars to search at random, and the telescope responds only to mental commands for movement of the field of view. It's not capable of finding specific star systems by name or description. You suspect that the Clathran home worlds are out of its range anyhow.

"Well, now we know one reason why the Hadrakians built a base here," you comment to your computer back on your ship. "That device makes it possible to observe the movements of the Survey Line. They wanted a chance to use it. But there's no point in making the colony too big, because they know all along that the Clathrans are on the way." You describe the strange behavior and operation of the telescope to see if your computer can figure out anything further about it.

"There's nothing in my knowledge base that gives me any clue about this one," replies the computer after long analysis. "In fact, what that telescope does is theoretically impossible according to all the laws of conventional physics. I can only conclude it must be some sort of Dual Space device, using the principles of nonobjectivity inherent in Dual Space theory to resolve images over impossible distances."

"Does that mean this telescope will get more powerful as the Dual Space Interphase widens further?" you ask.

"It seems very probable, Boss."

You get a chill as you wonder what other strange devices on Adafa will increase in power as the Dual Space Interphase widens.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[684]

Dardahlia culture is very free and unstructured. Most of the inhabitants do not have a job to perform every day, primarily due to lack of interest. There are a few exceptions to this, and the job of storyteller is one of them.

You approach the teller of tales with some awe. She is an ancient nymph, wings shrunken with age. She does not act like her flighty sisters. Instead, she sits placidly on a large pillow the people put under a shade tree each morning in her yard. She is meditating when you arrive.

“Have you come to learn, my child?” she asks, opening her eyes. You can see that the pupils are covered with a gray film and you deduce she is blind.

“Yes, Mother,” you make the proper reply.

“Then listen closely. . .” and she begins to weave her story of the Dardahlia natives and their history.

“Many years ago, we were a willful race. We traveled in space, fought violently with each other, and did not honor the gods. That all changed when the gods descended and stopped our weapons from firing. The sky became black and the ground shook with rage. ‘Your technology and wars will only lead to your own destruction,’ they said. ‘To save yourselves, you must lead a simple life.’

“We were terrified. Never before had the world turned against us. We fell to our knees and prayed for forgiveness. Days passed, but still the ground shook and the sky was as black as night. Had the sun deserted us forever? Many died during that time, mostly those who were too proud to change their ways. But eventually the long night faded and the sun began to shine. The land lay quietly and allowed us to dance our thanks on her surface. We sang and celebrated and vowed never to stop.

“During the long night our world had changed. The new day glowed with a golden aura we had never seen before. The aura spread peace and happiness among us. We were no longer driven with a desire to explore space and build complex technology. Instead, we only wanted to play and be merry. The gods had answered our prayers and given us contentment.

“Thousands and thousands of years passed, and the golden aura stayed with us. We played and were content. Our only complaint was that we did not see the gods again. We felt abandoned. We wanted the gods to appear and tell us if they were pleased with our life. But it seemed that no matter how hard we prayed, they remained hidden. We began to wonder if our prayers were being heard.

“But once again our prayers were answered. We no longer doubt the gods, for they have returned, and they approve of what we have become.”

“What do you mean?” you ask, surprised. You have seen many cultures that speak of gods that visited them in the past, but this is the first time you have seen a culture that claims the gods are with them right now.

“The gods have returned but they have taken a different form. They are the pantheon: Jannus, god of the air; Bacca, god of laughter; Mirre, god of the land; Senna, god of light; Derva, god of knowledge; and Plator, god of darkness. They all live here with us and speak to us from time to time. We need only visit the temple, give a tithe, and pray. Isn’t it wonderful?”

With that, she lapses into silence and her eyes close. You ask her a question, but your only response is a soft snore. Her storytelling has exhausted her, so you stand and leave quietly.

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[685]

You position your ship in the center of the solid diamond pond, where the rare mineral is the purest. It takes a while to set up your equipment, but with two units each of Phase Steel and Super Slip and one each of Fiber and Food, you eventually produce what you came here for: Diamond Cloth. This material is valued highly since it is as flexible as regular cloth but, being made of fibers of carbon atoms in their strongest possible bonding pattern, it cannot be scratched, torn, or punctured. It sparkles brilliantly as you load a full unit's worth into a cargo bay.

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[686]

"Hadrakians are one of the more populous races in the Arm, having colonized seven worlds in addition to their own home of Hadrak."

"I know that already. And I know they're in a war with the Clathrans, and I know they're planning to make a last stand when the Survey reaches Hadrak. I know their empire is primarily mercantile, and that they are governed by a 'First Merchant.' I know they're seeking Karnossus, the Clathran base world, and I know they require offworlders to fight in an Arena to earn their citizenship. I even know that they have an organization called The Battle which has set up underground resistance movements on all the Hadrakian planets."

"What do you want to know, then, human?"

"I want to know how the Hadrakians are limited. Why don't the Clathrans hate them the way they hate us?"

"The Clathrans hate humans because their masters told them to. And they hate you because you possess an independence and a potential that the Clathrans had long ago forgotten they'd lost. Both reasons stem from the fact that humans have no limits, no master-imposed racial quirks that will doom them to non-competition. The Hadrakians have two. Either one alone might not suffice, but taken together, the Hadrakians will never challenge the masters for galactic domination."

"What are they?"

"Surely you can guess. What are the two most remarkable features of Hadrakian society?"

You think about it for a moment. "The Arena," you say, "And the friction between the sexes that it represents. And their gods, and the revelations they deliver."

"Exactly. The intractability of the Homeless Ones helps keep much of the population's energy tied up in things like duels and the Arena, rather than expanding outwards. And the foreknowledge provided by divine revelations tends to keep the Hadrakians on an ever safer, ever more stagnant, path."

"A little foreknowledge is a dangerous thing."

"Exactly, human."

"What about the Hadrakians' war plans?"

"For that, we must *journey*."

⊠ STOP ⊠

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[687]

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.

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, but when you prepare to consummate the transaction, the Dosian proprietor notes that you are short of the asking price of one unit each of Food, Super Slip and Synthetic Genius.

You may select this option again.

⊗ STOP ⊗

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[688]

Since the Hadrakians cannot resort to any form of industrialization that causes pollution, they are somewhat limited as to what degree of technological advances they can perform on your ship. It is the case that, if they resort to energy sources that have dirty or toxic byproducts, a planet quake levels the plant. If they try to use nonrecyclable components in any of their construction jobs, a tornado appears out of nowhere and levels the entire area. The colonists quickly learned how to keep the environment clean. Consequently, everything is either biodegradable or reusable here; even the amount of noise is kept to an acceptable minimum.

You spend a few hours studying the Hadrakians' techniques in repairs and checking on the quality of work performed here — you aren't about to let just anyone monkey around with your ship! When you are satisfied that any work done here will meet with your high standards, you tell the Hadrakians to go ahead. They proceed to do a first-class job. In five days, all your ship's systems are in tip-top condition.

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

⊗ STOP ⊗

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[689]

"Corin, is that really you?"

"Rurik! How go the plans?"

"We are beginning to build a ship, Corin, although our destination is still in doubt. Things are deteriorating here. But tell me of the Quest. Have you found the origin of the Core Stone yet?"

"Not even close." Some of the frustration you have been feeling leaks into your voice. "There's a planet called Zyroth that may hold a clue, but the Zyran won't let me land. I'm looking for a colony of theirs called Geefle, that may offer a better chance to make contact."

"I'm sure you'll do well, Corin. If you only persevere." The contact begins to fade. "... luck!"

"Good luck to you too, Rurik."

⊗ STOP ⊗

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
STOP 2

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
STOP 3

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