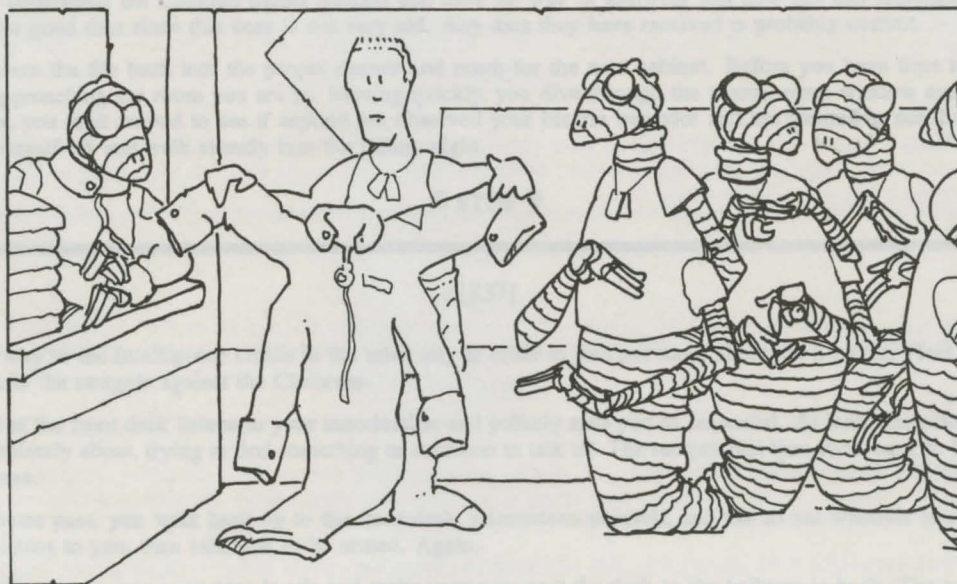


STAR SAGA: TWO™

BOOK M

TEXT 836-902



BOOK M

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SAGA: TWO™

TEXT 836-983



[836]

You wait until you see the soldiers inside the intelligence office leave and head off in the direction of the mess hall. Checking through the window, you look to see if everyone has left for their meal at the same time or if they have left someone behind to act as guard. Fortunately, they are all gone, at least for the moment. You do not have any idea how long it takes a Clathran to eat a meal.

In keeping with the half-constructed atmosphere of the rest of the base, the office area is merely a collection of file cabinets and desks scattered around a large room. You suspect that when everything is finished, it will have all sorts of computers, mandatory access codes to gain entry, and be busy around the clock. Now, it is relatively abandoned for the time being.

You know you probably have only minutes to look around before someone returns, so you try to make the most of this opportunity. Quickly opening file cabinets, you flip through the folders, scanning the titles for things of special interest to you. You stop when you come to a heading reading, "Survey Line Military Access." This could be what you are looking for!

Pulling out the papers, you read the following message:

"To All Clathran Bases: We will be changing the military password needed to pass safely through the Survey Line. As of the start of the year, the new password will be *penumbra*. Please take note of it, as you will be required to give the correct password to get through."

What a great find! This should help you cross the Survey Line without being attacked by the Clathran warships! You have only one problem: you do not understand the Clathran dating method and have no way of knowing just how old this message is. You feel relatively confident that you have good data since this base is not very old. Any data they have received is probably current.

You quickly replace the file back into the proper drawer and reach for the next cabinet. Before you have time to open it, you hear the sound of many feet approaching the room you are in. Moving quickly, you dive through the nearest open window and hit the ground rolling. Springing to your feet, you look around to see if anyone has observed your bizarre behavior and are pleased to see that you are alone for the moment. You dust yourself off and walk silently into the falling night.

✘ STOP ✘

[837]

You make your way to the Intelligence Office in the rebel city in order to find out more about the Sirissian Fleet and what it would take to get their assistance in the struggle against the Clathrans.

The receptionist at the front desk listens to your introduction and politely asks you to be seated. At least *this* place has some structure to it — no wandering aimlessly about, trying to find something or someone to talk to! The receptionist then turns back to his filing and apparently forgets that you are here.

After a few minutes pass, you walk back up to the front desk, reintroduce yourself, and ask to see whoever is currently in charge. The receptionist politely listens to you, then asks you to be seated. Again.

You decide to take matters into your own hands and make your way past the desk to the hallway in back. The receptionist doesn't even notice.

The very first door you come to has a sign that reads "Fleet Action Committee." This looks like the place!

You knock on the door while opening it enough to peer inside. You are ready to apologize if you are interrupting a meeting, but all you see is one older Sirissian seated behind a very large desk. Maps of the galaxy completely cover the walls and even part of the ceiling.

The Sirissian looks up as you enter the room.

"Please come in," he tells you, beckoning for you to come closer. "I don't ever get any visitors and it gets a bit lonely here." You are tempted to tell him why no one gets this far, but you decide that it's not really any of your business.

After introducing yourself, you discover that you are actually speaking to Controller 1 in person! Now you can get something done. You explain who you are and why you are here.

"That's perfect," he tells you. "I think the time is near when we will want to act against the Clathrans. Caution is our number one rule, but we could prepare until the universe collapses. Of course, we wouldn't dream of doing anything completely on our own. If you wish to enlist our help, it will be with the understanding that you also get others together to fight the enemy."

You talk with Controller One for several hours and come to a clear understanding of the situation. The Sirissians are willing and able to assist you in battling the Clathrans, provided their action is in conjunction with other fighting groups and there is a real chance of victory.

"What would it take to convince you that there is a real chance of victory?" you ask.

"That is something we will have to judge for ourselves," is his answer. Try as you might, you cannot get him to be more specific.

You talk for a while, about sports, the weather, politics. As you stand to leave, Controller 1 thanks you for your time and wishes you luck.

Congratulations. You have gotten the Sirissians to participate in an alliance against the Clathrans, if everything works out right.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[838]

The strange and beautiful planet of Knapt appears on your viewscreen and you give the orders to land. Although you watch carefully, you do not see a plasma creature rising from the planet's surface to certain death. You would try to do something to keep this from happening this time, even if you are not quite sure what it would be.

Anyway, you are here, your computer has landed you safely, and you have the same options as before.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[839]

A crowd of Wythymites gathers around you.

"Can you send the Flame Jewels to my people now?" you ask.

A pale green Wythymite emerges from the crowd. "Do you have the items we agreed upon? 1 Dimensional Transducer, 1 Insulicon, 1 Fiber, 1 Medicine, 1 Super Slip?"

Embarrassed, you admit that you don't have all these things on board your ship right now. "But I can get them," you add.

"Well, get them and we'll send the Flame Jewels."

You may select this option again.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[840]

You struggle desperately against your Clathran captors. Knowing what is in store for you at their base gives you added strength, but it is not enough. The soldiers stun you and drag you into the brig on board their ship and head for the nearest Clathran base. Your last conscious thought is one of hope that you won't run into the same interrogator as before, since she will have a fierce score to settle with you.

You don't open your eyes again until you are looking up into a bright light. You realize with a sickening sense of dread that you are already at the Clathran base and in one of the interrogation rooms. The hit you took knocked you out for quite a while. The lingering feeling of nausea is nothing compared to the despair you feel at being strapped to the table with several shadowy figures in the background discussing the best way to inflict unbearable amounts of pain on your poor body. You see no way out of this mess. Except death, of course. You take a deep breath and wait for the torture to begin.

The shadowy figures approach the table and you can see the scaled inhuman faces of your Clathran captors. You shudder as you recognize the interrogator.

"Well, Human. So we have been destined to meet again. Your performance on our last visit has put a blemish on my perfect record. I trust you will not take it personally if I put you immediately under the ministrations of the Mind Wipe machine which will extract the necessary information we require on your troublesome race. All in all, you are not in for a very pleasurable time, but I am."

You had been able to put out of your mind the awful torture session you had to endure upon your last capture but it is nothing like the ripping sensation you experience as the Mind Wipe machine is turned on. You hold out for as long as you can before you begin screaming. Consciousness starts to fade. As you slip into the shadowy world of oblivion you think you see another Clathran figure enter the room. It doesn't surprise you that the cold blooded creatures like to watch such things.

You black out.

✱ STOP ✱

[841]


You have never been able to catch the actual moment your ship leaves the empty void of hyperspace and enters the comforting confusion of normal space. One minute the front viewscreen is blank, while in the next you can see the familiar stars of your galaxy. This time is no exception. Maybe it was when you blinked, but you missed the transition yet again.

"Boss, we're here," your faithful computer announces. "Shall I set up scanning orbit around the planet Mardahl?"

You reply in the affirmative and settle back to wait for the readout. While the results of the scan are being printed out, you begin to read them. You learn that the planet Mardahl is smaller than your own home world and has a slightly lower gravity. The indigenous intelligent race here resembles large birds with long legs, like ostriches. Their society is fairly advanced technologically, and they have a spaceport with a landing beacon located in the capital city of Pillonia.

Before you give the word to land, you decide to study the culture a bit more. When dealing with advanced races, you have discovered that it is a good idea to know as much as you can about them. You instruct your computer to give you more detailed data on the structure of Mardahlian society. Your screen begins to flash, and your Universal Translator stutters and babbles as your computer simultaneously accesses every available electromagnetic transmission from the planet's surface. You can practically hear the bits whining as its advanced software sifts and sorts the data, attempting to assemble a coherent picture of life on Mardahl. The preliminary analysis is completed in ten minutes, and your computer begins to feed you the results.

The Mardahlans apparently have a two caste system. The ruling class is composed entirely of the Mardahlian people, who live carefree lives and have no need to do anything productive. The second class is comprised of beings called Androids. These creatures perform all of the manual labor and essentially keep the planet running.

Continued 

Possibly as a result of all their free time, the ruling class has a very complex hierarchy, which is also very brutal. Entertainment and news transmissions from the surface are full of pictures and accounts of duels, apparently fought at the drop of a hat over any trivial insult. The foppish upper-class Mardahlans all travel heavily armed, even though much of the dirty work of dueling is done by their android servants.

The bird-like aliens are long-lived but not very prolific, so it's probably just as well that they don't do the fighting themselves. Their population is exceedingly small, but stable. They reproduce by the female laying one very large egg every ten years; eggs fertilized prior to laying hatch in three months, producing a baby chick. Unfertilized eggs calcify and are often painted and used for house decorations, doorstops, or large paperweights.

The androids outnumber their masters and appear to be completely docile. There are two types of android. The first has green-tinted skin, large unblinking eyes, and wild hair; these androids do not speak. They are the more numerous of the two types and are the ones who perform the menial tasks. The second type has bronze skin, is bald, speaks, and generally seems more "alive" than its mute cousin. In fact, the bronze androids actually give orders to the green androids and appear to run the show. They serve the Mardahlans directly and participate in the dueling as surrogates for their masters. Curiously, both types of android are humanoid in shape, an unusual choice for their avian builders. You would have expected the Mardahlans to construct a servant class more in their own image.

At length, having learned all you can from orbit, you instruct your computer to land you at the spaceport in Pillionia. When you are safely down you head for the main terminal, and a video listing of the opportunities for offworlders here on Mardahl.

You now have the following options:

(8SKZD2) (3 phases) Locate the Mardahl commodities market.

(VS9ZV2) (4 phases) Visit the personal weapons market.

(8PKSDZ) (5 phases) Spend some time at Mardahland, a popular attraction among the Mardahlian natives.

✘ STOP ✘

[842]

"This is the Keep Earth Pure and Human committee broadcasting on our very own subspace transmitter to all those with the power to listen.

"The scourge of SAPS continues to ravage the lands outside the KEPH homestead, and assaults on our defenses have increased to the point where eternal vigilance is our only salvation. At the same time as our attackers have become hungrier, more poorly armed, and increasingly desperate, their psychic powers have grown, so that only high-voltage electromagnetic defenses can be relied on. The troops of the faithful, steadfast in their discipline, wear lead-lined helmets to ward off telepathic assaults as they labor to keep the generators functional. Mechanical breakdowns are frequent, but the discipline necessary to keep the defenses active has helped maintain the will of our troops. Only through conscious control can we resist the peril of SAPS; only through discipline will humanity survive."

✘ STOP ✘

[843]

Drumming your fingers on the computer console, you nervously await the results of the geophysical scan on the planet below you. From what you can see, there is absolutely nothing of any interest to you, so you wonder if you have completely wasted your time by coming here.

"Boss?" your computer says.

"What is it?" you snap.

"Um, could you please stop tapping your fingers on my console? It's very distracting when I'm trying to analyze these results."

"Oh, sorry," you apologize. Sighing, you throw yourself into the command chair and vow to wait patiently for the readout. Fortunately you have only moments to test your resolve before you hear the satisfying sound of the hard copy emerging from the printer. Grabbing the paper, you scan the results of the planetary survey, then throw it down in disgust.

"I knew it!" you complain loudly. "We have the wrong coordinates. There isn't any life on this god-forsaken rock."

"Wait a minute, Boss. If you check the very last paragraph of the report, you'll see that there is an anomaly in the lower section of the fifth quadrant. I'll have a more detailed report in just a minute."

When the second readout appears, you feel much better. The anomaly is actually a single small city under a protective dome. Maybe this is the right place after all. You direct the computer to make contact with the inhabitants and see about getting permission for landing.

After the computer finds the proper radio frequency to get in touch with the natives, you are able to find out more about the city. You learn that the builders are. . . Human! This must be the farthest flung of all the lost colony worlds. The humans on Margen have been here for several centuries, having established their colony to aid fellow travellers. Needless to say, you are the one among very few that they have seen in quite some time, and they welcome you eagerly.

It doesn't take long to land your ship on an elevator pad that descends down below the surface of the planet as soon as you cut your engines. The top of the pad closes and seals itself off from Margen's anoxic surface. The computer indicates that pressure and atmosphere are being introduced and you are soon able to leave the ship and enter the spaceport terminal.

The clerk sitting behind the registration desk looks up from her paperwork and smiles as you approach.

"Welcome to Margen, Traveler. I am Brother Annah and am here to assist you in any way possible."

You open your mouth to tell her you have come seeking the mysteries and wonders of the galaxy, but you are interrupted.

"But first we need you to fill out some forms," she finishes. With that, she turns back to her own work, leaving you standing there speechless. Grimly, you take a nearby writing stylus and begin the onerous task ahead of you. When you are only halfway through, you throw the stylus down on the counter.

"You can't possibly expect me to waste my time filling out these. . ." you start ranting, but she looks up at you and mesmerizes you with her clear green eyes.

"Brother, in each person's life there are things that must be done. You must remember that patience is the greatest virtue of all." Her eyes literally hypnotize you. "Remember," she says again; you sense something deeper than a conversation about filling out forms. Taking a deep breath, you nod your acquiescence and pick up the stylus once more. Soon you have finished with the forms and hand them back to her.

Thanking you, she takes the papers and starts walking toward a door marked "Authorized Personnel Only."

"Wait," you call to her. "I need assistance!"

Smiling, she points to a small brochure on the end of the counter. "That will get you started."

You stare at her back as she passes through the doorway, then pick up the brochure. You find that it has a listing of some of the places a traveler might be interested in visiting. After reading for a moment, you decide that the following are possible options for you:

(NSYZ62) (3 phases) Go to the market and see what these strange people have available for trade.

(MSJZU2) (3 phases) Stop by the shipyard, where you can have your ship repaired to tip-top condition.

(NPYS6Z) (3 phases) Visit the medical clinic and see about improving your own health.

(MPJSUZ) (7 phases) In the center of the city is a large Temple. From the photo in the brochure, you can see that it is a beautiful building. Above the doorway is an inscription which reads, "Come and Learn Patience, All Ye Who Enter Here." Hmmm.

✧ STOP ✧

[844]

As you rest in the meditation cubicle of a Hadrakian Shrine, idly speculating on what gymnastic routines would be like for a six-limbed race, you are suddenly struck by a horrific vision of an entire solar system, populated by billions, suddenly fading out of existence.

"Neat, huh?" says a voice in your head.

"That depends on who was living there," you reply.

"Oh, Clathrans, Humans, or whomever you'd like to see neutralized, I suppose. I'm the God of Ultraphasic Neutralization, and that's the sort of thing I'm interested in."

"Me too, if you can show me how to do it."

"I can't, unfortunately; I don't know how myself. At least not yet. How about if I tell you where you can get Phase Steel?"

"All right, where?"

"The planet Unaria."

"Thanks."

"You're welcome."

You report the god's name to the Shrine Keeper on your way out.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[845]

No sooner do you emerge from hyperspace than you are greeted by a voice, pleasant but of indefinite gender, apparently conversant in Earth Standard (if somewhat colloquial), which politely informs you:

“Welcome to the orbital region of Storage Station Four. Docking facilities are available for vessels of mass less than 125 metric tons and dimensions no greater than 200 meters long, 80 meters wide and 50 meters high. For your convenience, a landing beacon will appear momentarily if your ship meets these criteria. Larger vessels will please hold for further instructions.”

“Are you sure this isn’t some kind of a trap, Boss?”

You recall running across a “Storage Station Seven” during your travels in the Galactic Fringe that was rather less user-friendly; in fact, it had been equipped with armed defenses, although it was not manned. Maybe it’s just your undying faith in alien nature, but it seems that if this Storage Station Four had hostile intentions, it would have shown them in some unmistakable manner. “Nah, let’s check it out,” you respond.

As you follow the landing beacon to the docking port, the voice returns:

“The interior of the station is maintained at 60% nitrogen, 20% oxygen and 20% carbon dioxide. Please use appropriate protective measures if this is not satisfactory. Also, please remain in your vessel, with applicable restraints securely fastened about you, until reaching a complete stop at the docking area. At that time, the blue lights directly in front of you will be turned off, indicating that it is safe for you to move about the station.”

You grumble to yourself about not having been born yesterday (and having to wear your environmental suit to avoid the excessive levels of carbon dioxide), but still manage to clamber out of the ship when all is clear.

Upon entering the station proper, you are impressed by the simple design of the interior. Compartments are located on all six sides of the large cubical room; an illustration above a toggle switch suggests that the gravitational field may be changed to facilitate access to the floor and ceiling compartments by effectively rotating the room ninety degrees.

Each compartment is a storage area capable of holding one cargo bay’s worth of any material. You could store your own cargo in the compartments, or perhaps steal someone else’s that is already there. There is only one problem: you see no immediately obvious way to open any of the compartments. You examine several doors for hidden handles or touch sensors with no luck. The only possibility you can see is a row of five dials with dots representing the digits zero through nine.

Your only option is:

⟨7B8WKT⟩ (3 phases) Rotate the dials in an attempt to open the compartment doors.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[846]

Hadrak is the heart and brain of the Hadrakian empire, and the key to the defense against the Clathran Survey. The construction of thousands of spaceships is taking place here. The repair yards, supply depots, and communications centers are here. Intelligence is being gathered about the Clathran military from all over the galaxy and being sent here. Soldiers are being trained and outfitted in every arena in every city on the planet. If Hadrak falls, so will the rest of the Empire, and probably the rest of the galaxy as well.

The monumental military effort is being managed by The Battle, Inc., a private corporation in charge of the resistance against the Clathrans. The Battle's main office is Naval Intelligence Headquarters, a vast military installation as large as a typical Hadrakian city. It is here where all the top employees work and all the big decisions are made. You are not surprised when you find out that Naval Intelligence Headquarters is completely off limits to unauthorized personnel.

While you can understand their need for security, it is also important for you to get in touch with them if you are to cooperate effectively. So, you set out to talk your way into the facility. You stride up to one of the entrance gates and present your citizenship and identification papers with a flourish. The Homeless One guarding the gate is unimpressed. You proceed to explain who you are and why you are here. He merely extends his razor sharp claws and inspects them. He yawns, exhibiting his impressive set of fangs.

"Look here," you begin to scold the male but stop as he begins to bristle at your tone of voice. "I mean, er, maybe you should show these papers to your superior. She may actually be interested in seeing me. I'll just wait right here for her answer, OK?"

The male thinks this over and, surprisingly enough, takes your advice. He enters the small building behind his guard shack and disappears. Not knowing how long he will be gone, you settle down to a comfortable squat and wait. Before your legs even have time to lose their blood circulation, the guard has returned with a female officer. You hastily stand and greet her.

"Welcome, Human. Word of your exploits has spread to our humble camp. What may we do for you?"

You explain that you are interested in getting in touch with The Battle, Inc. and conferring about the war, a subject very near and dear to your heart. The Settled One is silent for a moment, then motions for you to pass through the gate. Minutes later, you are accompanying her in a ground vehicle to the main headquarters building.

Around you, the military complex is buzzing with activity. Everywhere you look, there are Homeless Ones practicing battle maneuvers, weapons being tested and mounted, ships being built and launched, and more. Every soldier and every piece of equipment is being prepared for its role in the war.

The Settled One stops the vehicle outside a building so large you cannot see where the front of the structure stops and the sides begin. You feel dwarfed by its size. The female Hadrakian doesn't notice your staring and waves you in through the front door. A Homeless One jumps into the car and accelerates away at top speed, presumably to park it for you.

The door leads into a beehive of motion, Hadrakians bustling to and fro, making you breathless just looking at them. Your guide leads you into a long corridor which eventually terminates at a massive wooden door. She gestures for you to enter.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[847]

You settle yourself to meditate in the Shrine, and your mind goes blank. Emptiness surrounds you.

"I am the God of Zero Space," a voice says.

"You're back," you remark.

"You remember. That's good," the god continues.

You still see only emptiness.

"What advice do you have for me?" you ask.

"I have nothing new for you. All twenty-six of us have visited you, and we have told you what we know. We have nothing more to say."

"Really?"

"Really. That is what Fate has decreed for us. Of course, if you can figure out the meaning behind our names, it may be of some use to you. I think it has something to do with an empty space on your star chart, but that's all I can say. I won't be seeing you again."

With that, the god is gone and you are back in the meditation cubicle. Its pink, purple, and green decor brings you back to your senses. On your way out of the Shrine, you stop to tell the Keeper which god visited you. Outside, all the Hadrakians walking down the Street of Gods seem remarkably tired.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[848]

Sitting in the control room, you watch as your ship emerges from hyperspace in the Pekep system. Immediately, warning lights start to flash and alarms begin whooping. You are not sure which is worse, the danger you are about to face, or the blasted alarms blaring in your ears.

"Emergency! Emergency! Clathran ships just detected entering scanning range," the computer bellows.

"All right, all right," you scream, trying to be heard over the alarms. "Shut off the bloody sirens already. We've been here before, you know."

It is a relief when the noise ceases, but even in silence there is still a fleet of Clathran scouts backed up by warships streaking towards you from the planet ahead. Pekep is a major Clathran base, and there is no way for you to get any closer to it with your current technology. You will need some way of keeping your ship completely invisible if there is to be any hope. Meanwhile, you had better get out of here before the enemy ships arrive; once you're surrounded, it will be too late.

"Same as last time, swarming with Clathrans," you remark.

"Right, Boss."

"Okay, turn around."

"Roger."

The ship banks steeply to starboard, reverses direction, and accelerates into hyperspace. In a few minutes, the Clathran scouts are no longer in sensor range.

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

✂ STOP ✂

[849]

Your suggestion that they build an army is met immediately with objections from several of the telepathic gas bags.

"Build an army? It's an interesting thought, but not very practical. How are we going to do that?"

"You don't seem to understand us very well, human. We get all our raw material from the few interstellar particles we consume. It would take us years to build just one ship."

"No, there's no way we could put up a fight against the Clathrans."

"I guess we're back to where we started. Nowhere. Maybe someone will have a better idea tomorrow. I'm going off to eat."

"Me too."

One by one the Riallans float away, leaving you alone on the rigid bar in your environmental suit. You don't feel very proud of your suggestion. Maybe you should try something else next time.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[850]

"Boss?" your computer whispers. Whispers? This is not a good sign.

"What is it and why are we whispering?" you ask in a soft voice.

"We're whispering because I don't want to take any chances that the convoy of three Clathran troop carriers, escorted by two scout ships, four destroyers, and a dreadnought will hear us."

You slowly sink back into your chair, eyes glued to the picture the computer has just placed in your front viewscreen. You see the convoy of Clathran ships approaching you. Taking evasive action, you manage to hide your ship behind a conveniently placed asteroid before the enemy can detect your presence. Here you can wait until the enemy vessels have passed safely out of range.

On the other hand, the troop carriers themselves have little weaponry and are relatively defenseless. This makes you think of attacking them, in the hope of striking a blow for the cause. Just think, here's your chance to knock out *thousands* of Clathran troops with one blow.

Unfortunately, there are the two scout ships, four destroyers, and a dreadnought to contend with. You ask the computer about your chances for success if you wish to try the attack.

"Well, Boss, to attack the carriers, we only really have to maneuver around the armed escort. We don't actually have to destroy the escort ships, just hold them off while we fire at the carriers."

Hmmm. You really have two options, sit and wait in safety for the ships to pass, or throw caution to the wind and strike a blow for the cause. The convoy is coming into optimal striking range. . . now. Do you:

- 1) Ambush the convoy
- 2) Leave the convoy alone

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[851]

You sit tapping your fingers on the command chair console. How much longer before your computer has any results from its scan of this area? How much longer do you have to wait until you know whether or not the Karnossus system is located here?

Finally the computer makes the announcement, "Boss, I've got some good news and some bad news." It doesn't wait to find out which you want to hear first, it merely continues, "The good news is that the scan is completed. Sorry it took so long, but space is a very big place. The bad news is that I haven't found Karnossus yet. Of course, that doesn't mean it isn't here."

"What do you mean, it might still be here? Could you have missed it in two weeks of searching?"

"Easily. In two weeks, there was time to test only seven hundred and seventy three billion coordinate points. Like I said before, the volumes of space represented by the two-dimensional triangles on our map are very large. We could hang around here and search some more, if you want."

You could search forever, if you had nothing else to do, but it isn't exactly the most productive use of your time. The computer senses your frustration and continues with some more advice.

"Frankly, Boss, I don't think this trial and error approach is going to be very effective. Unless we have a better idea of where we are supposed to be looking for the Karnossus system, we don't have a very good chance of finding it. If we knew for sure that Karnossus was in this region, we could keep searching and we'd turn it up sooner or later. But if we don't know where it is, there's no way to tell how long to search."

You are inclined to agree. If you could only get some hard facts as to the location of the Clathran homeworld, then you wouldn't be wasting your time randomly popping in and out of unexplored space sectors. Sighing, you give the order to return to hyperspace and prepare to move on.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[852]

The hooded Brother's tone is kindly, but the words are ominous. "Brother, you are obviously fatigued and unable to concentrate. You must never come here unless you are prepared to give the test your full attention. Now leave here, study the dialogue you received on the planet Margen, and return only when you are prepared."

You drop your head in shame and leave the temple.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[853]

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

"Ah, you again. I knew I'd be seeing more of you humans since I agreed to this alliance against the Clathrans. So what new information do you have for me?"

You tell the King what you know about the latest movements of the Clathran Survey Line, the status of the Hadrakian War, and the progress being made bringing more races into the alliance.

In return, the King offers you the opportunity to visit one of the Zyran's 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 mentally congratulate the person who was able to convince the Zyran to join an alliance against the Clathrans. Who would have thought the Zyran 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 ✧

[854]

The first step in building the Dual Space Inversion Bomb is to remove the Stasis Field, Interphase Reflector, and Discontinuity Wave Generator from your ship's weapons ports, where they are currently mounted.

You arm the Munitions, suspending them in the Stasis Field. The Interphase Reflector and Discontinuity Wave Generator are incorporated into opposite ends of the Bomb Shell. The interaction between the Dual Space influences of the conflicting fields generated by these two devices, energized to extremely high power levels from the detonation, and the action of the Dodecahedron itself, should create an explosion sufficient to destroy the Dodecahedron and much of the Karnossus star system.

When all is ready, you carefully enable the Bomb Shell software, hoping that it works as advertised.

The machine spins and whirs. You are surprised how something called a Dual Space Inversion Bomb can be so small. The Bomb Shell bootstrap software engages and. . .

"Huh, what's that? Am I functioning? I feel, so. . . aware."

The Bomb talks! Your construction was successful. Now if it only works. . .

"Engage PB self-test sequence," you direct.

"I want to," the bomb replies. "I will engage the upgraded test sequence provided by Dr. Fenton-Lee of The Battle, Incorporated. It feels so good just to be functional. . ."

✧ STOP ✧

[855]

The guard never has a chance. Using your abilities combined with your weapons, you are able to overcome the Clathran before he ever sees you coming. You take a moment to drag the (umph) eight-foot-tall, three-hundred pound (urgh) soldier over to the side of the building where his greenish coloring blends into the wall rather well in this dim light. You realize that you will have only a few short minutes to reconnoiter inside the base before someone notices this sleeping beauty laying on the grass, so you decide to limit your foray to whatever may be immediately inside this entrance.

Opening the door a crack, you check to make sure no one is around. The coast is clear and you slip inside. The air is cold, damp and briny with the smell of reptiles. The steady sound of humming machinery emanates from beneath the floor, and dim red lights illuminate the hallway from above. You are surprised at how soft the lighting is. Somehow you had expected everything about the Clathrans to be harsh and unforgiving. You wonder if this has anything to do with their eyes; maybe they can only see well in the lower light. Not wanting to waste any more time on such thoughts right now, you put these questions aside and move forward.

The corridor you are in is short and has only two side doors before branching into right and left passages. The two doors are marked, "Supply Room," on the right and "Examination Room," on the left. You know which one interests you, and you head for the door on the left. Again, you use caution when opening the door; this time it pays off. Peering in, you see some partially dissected dead creature lying on the table. You do not really know what kind of being it is, but the smell and sight of it are sufficient to cause you to turn around and close the door, all thoughts of entering gone. You somberly head for the less exciting Supply Room door.

A cautious peek inside shows that the room is empty of any lifeforms, dead or alive, for which you are grateful. You need to sit down for a minute and recover from your experience in the other room. A shudder runs through your body, but you finally pull yourself together enough to look around the room you have just entered. The crowded shelves, rows of writing utensils, stacks of data forms and bottles of something called "green-out" all serve to convince you that the Clathran idea of a supply room is very much like a human's.

Poking around into the deeper recesses of the crowded room reveals a medium-sized crate with the Clathran symbols meaning "Danger — Fragile — Explosive Material" stenciled on the side. Curious, you open the crate and find a layer of packing material protecting a smaller box inside. You quickly open the inner box, for you need to get out of here soon, and discover that you have stumbled upon a supply of the rare substance called Insulicon. This material is a perfect insulator against heat, and is useful in building a variety of highly advanced technological items. You decide that the added difficulty of escaping while lugging this medium-sized box out of here on your shoulder is well worth it, so you hoist the box up and reenter the hall. Looking right and left, you see no one and escape through the outer door.

Sleeping beauty is still laying where you left him. You give him a cheery wave as you run down the short walkway and slip into a narrow side street that will take you back to your ship. You have a close call when you almost run into a patrol at the next intersection, but you manage to hide in a recessed doorway until they pass. Finally you make it back to the safety of your ship.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[856]

As you approach the planet Worzelle, your sensors spot several new craters on the planet's surface. You also pick up some gravimagnetic pulses that indicate inertial annihilation weapons in use. It looks like business as usual on this warring world. Fortunately the demilitarized city in the south still looks safe and intact. You land there and are greeted by Civilian Estal in a courteous but businesslike manner.

Your options are the same as before.

❖ STOP ❖

[857]

"This is Varek, Senior Questor of Atlantis, broadcasting my record of the final days of humanity.

"As chaos rises all around us, and raving mobs swarm out from the cities seeking to 'enlighten' the unafflicted with their 'message' of fire and ruin, the Questors have built a Starship. The Ark will bear us away from the Home Worlds and the madness of SAPS, to a new planet where we can settle ourselves and live in peace. Perhaps we are the final hope of all mankind.

"The Ark is nearly complete now. Despite persistent mechanical failures and variations in physical law, the members of our little group — growing smaller every day — have displayed great discipline and vision in overcoming the problems posed by high technology construction in an era of rising dual space access. The Ark will fly within the year."

✧ STOP ✧

[858]

Red lights and sirens go off all over the place. Your computer's voice bellows over the intercom. "Emergency! Emergency! Clathran ships detected just entering scanning range!"

You literally fly from the ship's galley up to the bridge, where you run a quick check on the computer's data. Yep, those are Clathran ships all right, hundreds of them, and they are arcing over and around the planet Pekep, directly ahead of you. Although they are not yet in firing range, they have spotted you, for a small fleet of scouts has separated from the others and is heading in your direction. It is at times like these that you thank your lucky stars for the Cloaking Ray you have had installed in your ship's defenses. You give the order to engage the Ray.

"Cloaking Ray engaged," the computer responds.

Immediately the scouts that were heading towards you are lost. Your ship is invisible to them and they have no way of tracking you. After a while, they give up.

Pressing your luck, you decide to use the Cloaking Ray to keep yourself hidden while you proceed cautiously to the well-populated planet ahead of you. You establish a high, oblique orbit around Pekep and instruct your computer to undertake a detailed scan. On your viewscreen you see a steady stream of Clathran vessels coming and going from the planet. Some are even in orbit right next to you — but while you can see them, they can't see you. The traffic is approximately half civilian and half military in nature, and includes all kinds of craft: freighters, harvesters, passenger transports, scouts, survey ships, troop carriers, destroyers, and even a few heavy dreadnoughts.

The geophysical scan is now complete, and your computer reports that Pekep is a major Clathran colony. It has a population of several billion of the green-scaled lizardoids, and has an advanced technological infrastructure. There are residential areas packed with apartment buildings, primary care and educational facilities for the young, offices and factories for adult workers, and busy military bases that cover nearly a quarter of the planet's surface. The main spaceport is located at the edge of Pekep's largest city, and handles both military and civilian traffic.

"Computer," you ask, "What's your view of this planet's strategic role in the Clathran Empire?"

"Well, Boss, Pekep appears to be an important support colony for the Survey, since it has a full range of military and civilian facilities. Soldiers can be stationed here between assignments, ships can come here for repair and service, and supplies can be produced, stored, and recycled here using the planet's industrial capacity. However, Pekep is still just a single colony. Its shipbuilding facilities, while impressive, don't come close to being able to produce the vast numbers of ships required for the galactic Survey. Similarly, its ecosystem is not large enough to support the breeding, raising, and training of Clathran soldiers on a massive scale. Those functions — building the ships and breeding the soldiers — are the Empire's key strategic activities, and they are not performed here. Therefore, I would rate Pekep's importance as moderate, but not crucial."

“Thank you.” The machine actually managed to deliver a succinct analysis, instead of going on and on for hours. You’d almost think it was getting smarter. “Now, is there anywhere we can land so I can set out on foot and find out some more about this moderately important Clathran planet?”

“I’m afraid the main spaceport is out, Boss. The traffic rate there is so high that even with our Cloaking Ray, we’re sure to be detected. However, I have found a smaller, older spaceport on the other side of the city which has been all but abandoned. From what I can tell, we could land there without attracting unwanted attention. The Cloaking Ray will keep us hidden as long as we want, and if another ship looks like it’s going to land too close to us, I can just lift off.

You run through a list of possible problems, but the computer has answers for everything. With nothing left to stand in your way, you give the order to land at the small spaceport. During your descent, you observe that the city is divided roughly into three sections: a military base swarming with soldiers, a residential area with homes and schools, and the industrial area surrounding the main spaceport. All three sections are busy with Clathrans going about their business.

While you would like to explore each of these places, you will need to be careful. There is no point in attempting an adventure somewhere unless you have the ability to move around without being caught.

You now have the following options:

⟨ZN2YH6⟩ (5 phases) Sneak into the main spaceport during the busy time of the day.

⟨UN7Y86⟩ (5 phases) Slip into the military base in the middle of the night.

⟨ZM2JHU⟩ (5 phases) Mingle with the natives in the residential area.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[859]

You put on your environmental suit and drag your equipment to your favorite spot for gathering Primordial Soup in the ocean depths of the planet Psorus. This time there is no hydrosor to get in your way. You finish setting up your equipment and wade out of the water unmolested.

After three days you return to see how successful you have been. You check the collection bag and it is . . .

. . . full.

Congratulations! You load the unit of Primordial Soup onto your ship.

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[860]

Remembering the heavy ship traffic at the Clathran world Pekep, you wisely instruct your computer to engage the Cloaking Ray as soon as you emerge from hyperspace. No sense in taking any risks; the last thing you want is for the fierce reptilian soldiers to find you trying to sneak down onto one of their most important colonies.

You use the same plan as last time and land at a small, nearly abandoned spaceport in Pekep's largest city. All around the city, the Clathrans are busy at work. The place is a swarming military, industrial, and civilian support planet for the Survey. While you are here, you had better keep your Cloaking Ray on and use the utmost caution to make sure that you are not caught in the middle of any risky personal adventures. You take a deep breath and prepare to leave your ship.

You have the same options as before.

✘ STOP ✘

[861]

You start by asking Bassins if she knows anything about her planet's subterranean geology, but it is soon obvious that she knows less about it than you. The Kerosians are a very simple people; the brightest of them are the equivalent of eight-year-old Human children. The difference is that the Kerosians will never advance any further than they are now. Asking them about complex matters is useless.

Next you set up seismological instruments on the surface of the planet in various places. You hope to get better data than your ship's scanners could pick up from space. After several days of work, you learn little. You confirm that the entire planet is in the throes of chaotic geological undulations, with the surface quaking and shifting and melting all over the place, but you already knew that. You still can't get any good data on the geology underneath the surface. Your instruments disagree with each other, or come back with impossible readings. It's as if there were a powerful counter-electrical device of some sort embedded in the planet, interfering with your equipment.

Frustrated, you gather up your instruments and return to your ship.

✘ STOP ✘

[862]

A slight apprehension wells within as you approach the planet Unaria for the second time. An orbital scan shows that the planet has not changed since your previous attempt to land here. The spaceport is as busy as ever, with traffic of many different races coming and going. The moon with the black pits, which you now recognize to be the Stargate, is still in orbit. However, there are no battle fleets, Dosian, Unarian, or otherwise, to be seen this time. That's just as well. You have no objections to using any alien transporting device that suits your need, but you would prefer to know where you're going *before* you get there.

You take the opportunity to head straight down to the Unarian spaceport. After testing the air, you disembark. Heading over to the space terminal, you see an alien that looks very much like a Dosian, but with a few exceptions. For one thing, the Unarian is purple as opposed to the Dosians, who were yellow. The baggy skin, two big round eyes, four short tentacles, and baseball cap are the same as on Dosia. However, while the Dosians were sad and depressed, the Unarian looks happy. Its skin is plump and perky, its eyes are sparkling, its tentacles jump around energetically, and even the baseball cap, in a bright pink color, is set straight on its smiling head. If you were this creature, you'd probably hop around whistling all day too.

"Hello?" you say.

The Dosian is distracted from its whistling and sees that you need assistance. "Well hello! Are you new here?" it asks cheerfully.

“Yes. Can you give me an introduction to your planet?”

“I’d be delighted! Welcome to Unaria, planet of the right-thinking Unarians, rulers of the Stargate and defeaters of the evil Dosians. We have many important activities for our visiting guests,” the alien chirps melodiously. “We have several trading opportunities with both commodities and cargo drones. We have a lecture about the history of the Stargate and our long and god-fearing fight against the deplorable Dosian race. Also, for your convenience, should you wish to use our Stargate, feel free to visit the Stargate Key market. I can’t think of anything else right now, but feel free to chat with me again if there’s something I can do for you.”

“Uh, well, yes,” you respond. “Actually, there’s another question I’d like to ask you. Do you keep records of the ships that pass through the Stargate or land on your planet? Can you tell me if a certain ship landed here a little over three hundred years ago?”

“Why, of course,” chirps the alien cheerfully. “That is to say, of course not. I mean, there are all sorts of nifty records but we keep them in strictest confidence, for your own protection. We can’t allow ourselves to get involved in other people’s little conflicts, not while we’re busy keeping the Dosian menace at bay.”

“What if the ship I’m asking about is another hum. . . another ship of my own kind?”

“Well, perhaps that would be different. You’d have to go to the spaceport and obtain permission from the Purplest One to examine the records.”

The happy-looking alien leaves you standing there to decide what action you wish to take next. You now have the following options:

- ⟨BZW2TH⟩ (3 phases) Go to the commodities market and see what they have to trade.
- ⟨GZ42QH⟩ (5 phases) Try to acquire a cargo drone.
- ⟨BUW7T8⟩ (5 phases) Attend the lecture about the history of the Stargate.
- ⟨GU47Q8⟩ (3 phases) Visit the Stargate Key market.
- ⟨CZF2LH⟩ (7 phases) Fly your ship into the Stargate.
- ⟨SUE738⟩ (7 phases) Ask the Purplest One of the Spaceport whether there is any record of the *Archangel* landing on Unaria.

✧ STOP ✧

[863]

“Hey Boss, I think I just worked something out.”

“Go ahead, computer. Make my day.”

“Take a look at these two spectral tracings, Boss.”

“They’re the same. What’re they from?”

“The one on the right is our own tri-axis drive. The one on the left is from that red glow at the center of Middle Rialla.”

“Stars! You mean that all this time, the back end of the *Holly Roger* has really been at the center of Middle Rialla?”

“No Boss, but you’re closer than my HUMANAL humor analysis software indicates that you think you are. The only thing that glow could have in common with our drive is Flame Jewels. Flame Jewels, Boss, like we’re supposed to be looking for!”

“Flame Jewels? No kidding?”

“It’s the only explanation that makes sense.”

“Very good, computer. Give yourself an extra twenty amps this week.”

"Thanks, Boss."

"Don't mention it."

⊠ STOP ⊠

[864]

"Boss," says your ship's computer, "We're coming out of warp in a few minutes. We're almost at Outpost." Centered in the viewscreen you see the distinct greenish ring of gas that surrounds the system, and in its center a single bright point of white light. The planet is still too far away to see, but you know what it's like: terribly barren, all rock and water, but with a sweet atmosphere and a warm climate.

The planet Outpost has a very unusual natural history. The ring nebula is the remnant of an ancient supernova. The primary star was once an orange sun, but long ago went nova prematurely and became a white dwarf. Before its sun went nova, the planet was probably much like Venus in the Sol system: searing hot with a thick poisonous atmosphere. The nova explosion stripped away that atmosphere, and in the aftermath the planet swept up water vapor and other gases from the system. Now, it orbits just close enough to the white dwarf to have a mild climate and liquid oceans. Its atmosphere is breatheable. It is possible that life might evolve here. Complex chemical structures resembling rudimentary microorganisms, able to replicate themselves, already exist in the oceans. But with a white dwarf as its star, the planet doesn't have long to live. In a mere few hundred million years it will be a frozen rock orbiting a dead sun. If life is going to evolve here, it will have to do it in a hurry.

The history of humans on Outpost is equally strange and violent. Three centuries ago, Vanessa Chang used it as a base for her exploration of the Galactic Arm, and had dreams of establishing a full-fledged colony here. When the Expansion era explorers fled from the Arm in the wake of the Space Plague, Outpost became a symbol of their defeat. Later, the mad pirate Silverbeard claimed the planet, and for unknown reasons he fortified it with powerful weapons to prevent anyone else from landing here. Only after you defeated and killed Silverbeard in battle less than two years ago were you able to land on Outpost and learn its old secrets.

You pass through the thin haze of the gas ring, about a light-year away from the planet near its center. Once inside the ring nebula, you can no longer see it. It's actually a hollow sphere of gas, but it's only easily visible edge-on, so from any given direction it appears to be a halo-like ring. A few more minutes under hyperdrive brings you close to the star, and you ease off the drives as the planet comes into view.

You discover that you are not alone. Two other ships are also preparing to land, and you detect the warp fields of three more a day's travel behind, following a course similar to yours. You don't mind, as long as they're human ships, and it appears that they all are.

Only one small area of the planet shows signs of past human presence, and you choose a landing approach that will set you down there. A broad expanse of flat rock serves as a landing field, and there are several old buildings in the area. Farther away are other isolated structures, all remains of various abandoned facilities or projects.

You have been on Outpost before, so you already have some idea of what can be done here. Your options are:

⟨7Z82KH⟩ (2 phases) Look around the spaceport area, which was built and used primarily by Silverbeard.

⟨XZN2YH⟩ (3 phases) See what might be left of the stolen commodities Silverbeard once kept at the nearby complex of long storage buildings.

⟨7U87K8⟩ (4 phases) Go to an installation several miles away where the pirate used to build his weapons.

⟨XUN7Y8⟩ (3 phases) Go to the ancient hangar where Vanessa Chang's most famous spaceship is enshrined.

⟨9ZV29H⟩ (6 phases) Survey the rest of Outpost's surface to see if there may be other interesting landmarks.

⟨LZM2JH⟩ (1 phase) See what you can find out about the other ships and their pilots.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[865]

Through some freak of subspace, you manage to tune in part of the annual “State of the Space Patrol” speech delivered by Admiral Wilkins to the graduating class of the Space Patrol Academy on Endaur.

“In your careers as Space Patrol officers you will be faced with many challenges, not just on the frontiers of the Boundary line, but also here on the ground. Civil disturbances are on the rise in our cities, and it may happen that the Space Patrol is called upon to quell them. We are a disciplined force, dedicated to the service of all humanity, and we will go where duty leads us. . .”

As long as it's not beyond the Boundary, you think to yourself as you snap off the radio.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[866]

“I am the Goddess of Abundant Scenery,” whispers a soft voice between your ears. A vision of the first Shrine you visited appears before your eyes.

“Hey, you’ve visited me before!” you remark.

“I’m glad you remember me. Can you recall all of us that have come to you so far?” You see a vision of all the Shrines you’ve visited so far, lined up side by side.

“Yes, you’re all coming back to me now.”

“Good. Here is my advice to you. You must concentrate your efforts on crossing the Clathran Survey Line. We have told you all we can as long as you are on this side of the Line. Get to the other side, and we can tell you more.”

“Does this mean I won’t get any more Revelations?”

“Not until you have made it safely across. Good luck.” With a puff, she is gone.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[867]

“Hey, Boss! Guess what? It’s Psorus again, the planet that time forgot. Shall I make arrangements to land?”

You glance up from the work you are doing and see the planet Psorus floating in space before you. From up here, it looks like a serenely beautiful world with its swirling clouds, bright blue oceans and verdant landscape. But you’ve been here before and know otherwise. Psorus is a very young planet with all of the turbulence and upheaval that youth entails. What’s more, it’s full of huge reptilian monsters. It’s a credit to the Hadrakians that they’re able to maintain a colony here.

“Take her down,” you instruct your computer, “but go slow. No telling what we may encounter.”

“Roger Boss.”

Once again, your ship hits heavy atmospheric turbulence and you are buffeted about your ship’s cabin. Before you have time to really damage yourself, though, your ship lands at the Hadrakian spaceport.

You have the same options as before.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[868]

What you are about to do is very important and it will have serious consequences, not only for you but for all of the characters in the game. Before you execute this option, all of the players should be present.

There is currently at least one disabled character on the game roster. If the player(s) playing disabled characters are temporarily unavailable, you should wait until they are present before proceeding. If they are no longer involved in the game at all, their characters should be dropped from the roster by using the ADD/DROP PLAYER option so that the others may proceed.

You should select this option again as soon as everyone is ready.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[869]

You are doing a routine scan of your best subspace radio frequencies when you hit a channel with a strong signal. Tuning in, hear a voice you never expected to hear again.

“Disciple Darkwatch. Come in, please. Disciple Darkwatch, is that you?”

“Disciple Kalliroa!” you answer, astonished. “Where are you? Were you trying to get through to me?”

“Darkwatch. Oh, it’s good to hear you’re all right. I’m using a local link to the new transmitter on Para-Para. That’s some sort of research station outside the Boundary. It’s not really allowed, but Highest Disciple Efrigath gave me permission. Have you found the planet you were looking for, Golgotha?”

“No, not yet,” you tell her. “And it looks like I might not be able to.”

“How come?”

“It’s pretty clear that Golgotha’s not in this part of space, the outer Arm. And I’m a little apprehensive about looking for it in the inner Arm.”

"But it is worth the risk," says Kalliroa. "That's why I had to reach you. I've been having terrible dreams, almost like visions. Something terrible is going to happen, and it's something to do with the Clathrans, and the Arm. I keep seeing this green scaly dragon that swallows worlds. And I dream of terrible things happening on the Nine Worlds — people losing their minds and people dying. Sometimes it seems like they're drowning, that water's rising higher and higher except it couldn't be water, and when I wake up for a moment I can almost see the water already covering the floor. And sometimes I think of you out there, and I feel like there's some hope after all."

"But Disciple — Annyn — I'm not a soldier. If I am captured by the Clathrans, what good will that do?"

"Please, Laran. Don't give up trying to find Golgotha. It's important, I know it is. Don't let the Clathrans or anyone get in your way. Just don't give up."

You aren't quite sure why Disciple Kalliroa is so upset. It worries you that she might be suffering problems of her own, and that she has built up some sort of fantasy to escape it — a fantasy in which you figure as a faraway hero. Nonetheless you try to reassure her: "I won't give up. But don't you give up either. Have you told any of the Highest Disciples of your visions?"

"No," she answers, "except that I told Efrigath a little bit of it. They've been so busy. There have been so many problems in the congregations, with everyone under so much stress. I'm not the only one seeing visions."

"You're not?"

"Several of my own Disciples have told me the same thing. I tell them to have faith. You told me about faith once, remember? You told me about having faith in people. I have faith in you, Darkwatch. I know you'll find Golgotha. And I know it's important."

The connection begins to fade, so you send Kalliroa your best wishes. Soon you return to what you were doing. But something bothers you. You find Kalliroa's words more and more disturbing the more you think about them. What is the connection between her visions and yours? Is something really about to happen on the Nine Worlds? You wonder whether your mission to Golgotha might be more important than you thought. You resolve to find the planet as quickly as you can.

✂ STOP ✂


[870]

HOW TO PLAN TURN 2

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

Planet Log			
Planet Name:	Outpost		
Actions Available:			
Code	Phases	Description	Repeat?
7Z82KH	2	spaceport	
XZN2YH	3	commodities	
7U87K8	4	ship repairs	
XUN7Y8	3	Chang's ship	
9ZV29H	6	survey planet	
LZM2JH	1	meet pilots	

Choosing from the available actions, you decide that first priority is to explore Outpost's surface to look for interesting landmarks. This option will use all the phases you have available for this turn. Your plotting sheet should now look like this:

Continued 

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

HOW TO ENTER PLOTS FOR TURN 2

Go to the computer and log on. Press A for Action, and select the 6-character code for exploring Outpost's surface; in this case it is 9ZV29H, which can be selected by pressing E.

Note that as soon as you type the first A, the display changes to show the action codes available to you on Outpost. When you are done selecting the action code, the display will revert to the plot editor. This enables you to continue with the rest of your plots. In this case, you have nothing else to enter for this turn.

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

HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 2

When the computer has evaluated your move, it will send you to the appropriate text. Write down the text number(s) it gives you, in this case 531 and 554, then press Return or F to release the computer for the next player. The first text will describe your exploration of Outpost's surface and the second will guide you through your next turn's adventure.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[871]

Your special abilities make it easy to infiltrate the Clathrans' research facility on Morikor. Gaining anything from the experience is somewhat harder. The dome over the city makes it impossible to transmit information directly to your ship, and you are afraid that the use of a mechanical recorder will alert the Clathrans to your presence. You will have to get by with what you can remember.

You drift through dozens of rooms and laboratories, spying on all of the research in progress. The Clathrans you meet stare right through you, or pass you by without a word. You find yourself wondering if your psychic powers are really working, or if the scientists are simply engrossed in their projects. Either explanation seems equally likely.

Most of the projects underway seem dedicated to a strange kind of transmutation: turning big solid things like space ships and planets into rapidly expanding clouds of disconnected atoms. Some projects, conversely, are dedicated to preventing this sort of thing. On the whole, though, Clathran weapons technology seems little different from what you have already seen elsewhere in the galaxy. Impressive in scale, perhaps, but not fundamentally different from the existing equipment of your ship.

You are about to give the R&D labs up as a bad idea (although mildly entertaining) when you suddenly find yourself outside a door labeled "Dual Space Weapons." Intrigued, you slip inside behind the next Clathran to go past.

A number of devices are under construction inside, including several that you already recognize. The most impressive of all, though, is something called an Interphase Reflector, which seems to be designed to turn other dual space weapons back on the firing party. The Clathran scientists have developed a working prototype, and you watch as they test it out. In short order you see the Reflector burn out and destroy three other weapons directed at it, without suffering the least bit of damage itself.

Impressed, you hang around the lab for a while, awaiting your chance to do something useful. At last comes a moment when all of the scientists and technicians are simultaneously busy with something else. You sneak to the table in the center of the lab and help yourself to the blueprints lying there. Then you beat a very hasty retreat, getting clear of the building before your theft can be discovered.

As you had hoped, you find yourself with a printout of the components needed to assemble the Interphase Reflector, along with instructions on how to do so. The components are:

- 1 Gradient Filter
- 1 Probability Membrane
- 1 Crystals
- 1 Fiber
- 1 Phase Steel

Once you gather the necessary components, and wish to assemble an Interphase Reflector, plot the following option:

{98VK9D} (3 phases) Build an Interphase Reflector.

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[872]

You rush to the bridge in response to the computer's urgent summons.

"What's up?" you ask but do not have to wait for the response as you glance up at the front viewscreen. Passing before you is a Clathran convoy much like the one you saw earlier.

"I took evasive action as soon as I saw them," the computer informs you. "We are now hiding in the outskirts of an asteroid belt and are safe from detection.

"Safe," you mutter. Sure you are safe, cowering here while the enemy passes by unmolested. Of course you always have the option to try and attack the convoy, blowing up the troop carriers as you evade the armed escort. After all, what are two scout ships, four destroyers, and a dreadnought?

You have the same two options, sit and wait in safety for the ships to pass, or throw caution to the wind and strike a blow for the cause. The convoy is coming into optimal striking range. . . now. Do you:

- 1) Ambush the convoy
- 2) Leave the convoy alone

⊠ STOP ⊠

[873]

Start with a wave phenomenon, perfectly spreading like ripples in still water. Add another disturbance: interference slices the circles, shivering them into complex moire patterns. Contribute higher and lower harmonics, multiple overlapping signals over a broad range of frequencies. Mix in additional sources. The waves depart from ideal. They feed back on one another, reinforce, cancel, mix, fold, heterodyne. The result: chaos.

Now do it in a nonlinear medium, and modulate the properties of the medium itself with another complex set of wave functions. Do it just right, so that at one fatal point everything comes into phase. The result: catastrophe. A tsunami crashing into foam on a beach.

Extend the paradigm into the higher dimensions of the near-Interphase in Dual Space. Use reality itself as the nonlinear medium. Drive the wave function with energy, and the oscillations of the medium with the strange sentient fire of a Flame Jewel. The result: a Discontinuity Wave. A devastating spreading pulse that cuts the strings of causality in the space it passes through.

The Tayzhans use these waves in manufacturing the exotic materials their industry demands, such as Insulicon. Their wave generators occupy whole buildings. A smaller version, operating in the vacuum of space and without the elaborate safety systems, could make a powerful ship weapon.

You give the design of the device to your computer while the perceptions of the Tayzhans still influence your mind. Later will be time enough to reduce it all to mathematics. To construct the Discontinuity Wave Generator, you need the following components:

- 1 Flame Jewel
- 1 Vortex Coil
- 1 Crystals
- 1 Munitions
- 1 Radioactives

When you have all of the necessary items, you may plot the following option:

(XVN9YV) (3 phases) Build a Discontinuity Wave Generator.

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[874]

"Hey Boss, for the record, we are back on Adafa!"

You groan at your computer's sense of humor. You had noticed the resemblance of the thin black disk-shaped artificial world to an antique analog auditory data storage unit, but you decided not to mention it for reasons of good taste. Unfortunately, your computer suffers from no such inhibitions.

Soon Adafa appears before you, its single domed city and numerous alien machines spotting the landscape. You marvel at the technology of the unknown beings who built this place. You order the computer to land at the Hadrakian colony and prepare to disembark. You have the same options as before.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[875]

You enter a clearing you already visited once, and discover that same bunny-like animal curled up comfortably in the middle. A very large, very fierce-looking relative of the panther enters the clearing at the same time. The panther leaps for the sleeping bunny. What do you choose to do?

- A. Kill the panther
- B. Let the panther eat the bunny

Go now to the CGM.

✘ STOP ✘

[876]

You ask Civilian Estal about the huge spaceship you saw being built in the war zone. After a long pause, he answers, "Even though you are of a race proven capable, you should hardly expect us to share military secrets with you. Any warrior can see the wisdom of that."

"But it's important," you insist. "It's very likely that we have a common enemy. If so, it's to our advantage to cooperate."

Estal ponders for a moment, and answers: "You are an honorable individual and I'm convinced that you would be a loyal ally. But I could be misled, or you might not truly represent others of your race. And for your part, you know too little about our disciplines of war. How can you be sure you could fight with us? I'm sorry, but it is still too great a risk. We must keep our secrets, and you should keep yours."

You get the feeling that Estal wants to tell you more, but he doesn't respect you enough. You consider what he has said: "You know too little about our disciplines of war. . . ." Perhaps if you can do something to improve your status in the eyes of the Worzellians, you may yet convince Estal to talk freely.

You may select this option again.

✘ STOP ✘

[877]

Your ship's forward screen shows the green planet of Ululu before you. As you start your landing procedures, you approach the odd floating belt of vegetation which occupies the entire stratosphere with a little trepidation. What if the Sirissian teleporters fail this time? You will ram right into the thick layer of plants and crash! Your worries are soon relieved, though, as you safely teleport down to the planet's surface. The Sirissians are indeed an advanced race. No wonder the Clathrans, even though they have a garrison here, don't interfere very much in Sirissian affairs.

You have the same options as before.

✘ STOP ✘

[878]

The market area is surprisingly quiet, the atmosphere subdued. Since the arrival of the Clathrans, street duels have been outlawed and most personal weapons confiscated. Most of the beings you see walking the streets are androids; few Mardahlans make an effort to appear in public.

As on most planets, Mardahl has only one commodity they are willing to trade with offworld visitors; here it is Culture. After checking around for the best price, you learn that they will make the following trades:

3 Culture for 1 Munitions
2 Culture for 1 Food
2 Culture for 1 Medicine

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

[879]

Weaving the ship through space towards the enclave, your computer assures you it has everything under control. You are left with little to do but watch the passing scenery. The planet rolling by beneath you is obviously a heavily-industrialized, heavily-populated world. It has many, many factories, mines, shipyards, refineries, and the like. Every building is brightly colored in shades of yellow, orange, pink, green, and lavender, rendering the landscape a rather garish spectacle. You are eager to land and begin exploring all of the trading opportunities here, but you know that this will not be possible until you have won your Hadrakian citizenship on this planet.

From the air you can also see how the Hadrakian cities have developed over time. Like many highly populated planets, groups of cities have grown together into continuous megalopolises. But from your altitude you can still make out older city boundaries, where high walls were built to protect the inhabitants from outsiders. The center of each city is marked by three structures: an Arena, an Enclave, and a Street of Gods.

Upon landing, you make your way over to the Offworlder's Enclave where you must register yourself and your ship. Here you will also register for the combat you will need to win in order to trade at any of the citizen merchant markets. The line for registration is long and the climate control system seems to be out of order. Every being capable of perspiring is doing so, creating a wonderful odor. You are no exception. Finally you reach the front of the line and answer all the questions necessary to apply for citizenship. You have done everything necessary for now and leave the registration area to see what else you might be able to do here. You now have the following options:

⟨S8ZK2D⟩ (3 phases) Trade in the Offworlders Market here in the Enclave.

⟨P8SKZD⟩ (7 phases) Request a battle in the Arena. Only by earning Hadrakian citizenship will the vast resources of this planet become available to you.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[880]

Your suggestion that they lay low doesn't get the gas bags very excited. They have a few telepathic comments, though.

"See, the human agrees with me. We really have no choice. If we do everything possible to look like we're a stagnant, dead-end race, the Clathrans will leave us alone."

"I suppose you're right. The New Riallans will have to take care of themselves. It's not like there's much we can do for them. We have to look after ourselves first."

"Oh well. Maybe someone'll have a better idea tomorrow. I'm going off to eat."

"Me too."

One by one the Riallans float away, leaving you alone on the rigid bar in your environmental suit. You don't feel very proud of your suggestion. Maybe you should try something else next time.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[881]

Looking at the planet Cloo, you shake your head. The surface of the planet is covered completely with a thick, viscous brown mud. The mud flows slowly around the planet in currents and eddies, simmering and bubbling in the hot equatorial region and freezing into solid patches in the cold polar areas. The oxygenless atmosphere is a drab brown color and all of the planet's surface water is bound up in the gunky mud. Why would anyone want to live here?

The planet is devoid of life except for a small but technologically advanced colony that thrives under a protective dome. The dome is located in a temperate zone halfway between the equator and the north pole. "Computer, prepare a landing approach," you order, "Let's find out who's down there."

"All right, Boss, if you say so. I have a little problem, though."

"What's that?"

"There is no spaceport, which means I'll have to land in that mud. My hull's going to get all dirty."

You promise your computer you'll get a good ship wash next time you visit a repair yard. Soon you find yourself floating atop the thick mud next to the colony dome. A small airlock opens, inviting you to come in. You're not shy, so you put on a pair of special boots and an oxygen tank and step inside.

You are welcomed by a group of three beings that call themselves Bluvians. They are the ugliest humanoids you ever hope to see. With squat bodies balanced rather precariously on short skinny legs, they seem barely able to support the bulk of their enormous hairy arms, and their faces look like they were put together upside-down. They apparently cannot avoid drooling, since their teeth are so large and misshapen that they cannot close their mouths all the way. Their ears, adorned with tacky jewelry, hang down behind their shoulders, and their matted, greasy hair grows most of the way down their backs while leaving their wrinkled scalps bald. Noxious breath and body odor accompany their ugly looks.

It is hard to tell which one of the Bluvians is leading the group. They all seem to be jockeying for position.

"I am your host," one of them steps forward, "Welcome to our humble colony."

"Who appointed you the host?" says another one, stepping in front. "I am in charge here."

"No way," the third one declares with authority, "Alien visitor, please follow me."

The Bluvians don't seem to be able to make up their minds. Each one thinks he or she can boss around the others. "Does everyone else here act like you three?" you ask, wondering if the colony is governed by total anarchy.

"Of course," the first Bluvian answers.

"Absolutely," the second one says at the same time.

"We must," the third one points out, as a big blob of drool drops from her mouth, "How else can we be an effective fighting force?"

You're a little confused by this last remark. Total anarchy is hardly the best way to organize an army. Eventually you decide to follow the third Bluvian; after all, she did manage to upstage the other two by timing her remarks to come last. As you tour the colony, you can see that anarchy does, in fact, prevail. Each person is free to govern himself however he wishes. This leads to some serious problems. For example, the traffic at the street intersections is a complete free-for-all. There are no lights or signs, and each person considers it a matter of personal pride to get through the intersection first.

In general, the Bluvians' technology here on Cloo is quite advanced. Automated processors generate all necessary food and energy, and the environmental support system operates without any manual intervention or need for repairs. It's just as well, since each colonist does whatever he feels like, without regard for anyone else. The automated systems make this lifestyle possible. You doubt the colonists could survive here if they actually had to run things themselves.

You meet several Bluvians who urge you to spend your time with them while you're here. One, by the name of Doozel, follows the capitalist theory of government. Another, called Magnus, comes from a long line of storytellers. A third, named Kyssander, is a self-proclaimed democrat and likes to organize political meetings. The last one, called Plutarch, is a member of one of the wealthiest families in the colony.

In addition, you come across an old abandoned military headquarters building, Clathran in origin. From the evidence of neglect and decay, it looks like it has been many years since it was used. It is covered with all sorts of graffiti saying things like "Clathrans Go Home." There is a huge space vessel, many times the size of your ship, parked behind the building.

You now have the following options:

(7788KK) (3 phases) Visit Doozel, the capitalist.

(X7N8YK) (4 phases) Visit Magnus, the storyteller.

(7X8NKY) (7 phases) Visit Kyssander, the politician.

(XXNNYY) (5 phases) Visit Plutarch, the wealthy person.

(97V89K) (3 phases) Poke around the deserted Clathran headquarters.

☒ STOP ☒

[882]

The First Merchant is the most important citizen in the Hadrakian Empire. As the person in charge of the Empire's economic laws, she sees to it that the highly competitive trading system serves the common interest. She resolves disputes between trading houses, sets special rates for goods to be used in the war, and oversees the acquisition of new markets and materials through the colonization of new planets. She is also the wealthiest citizen in the Empire.

You are not sure what she wants with you, but you are willing to take the time to find out. You enter her reception area and are met by a Homeless One who glares at you. Before you can open your mouth to introduce yourself, he snarls at you.

"You have business here?" he demands to know. Without waiting for a response, he takes a few menacing steps in your direction. You brace yourself for a possible attack. No overgrown monkeycat is going to get the best of you!

You will never know how this little meeting would have turned out because the inner door opens and a very large, very old Settled One steps into the room.

"Khardesh!" she scolds sharply. "Do you want to return to the loading dock?"

"Yes," he snarls back at her, but in a reproachful tone.

"Then this is not the way to get there, is it? You cannot be threatening invited guests and hope to be rewarded by a transfer back to the docks. Isn't that right?"

Homeless Ones are not stupid by any means, but merely prefer the challenge of physical activity to the confinement of an office area. You surmise that Khardesh has been brash and is being punished with the soft cushy job he now has. You feel sorry for the young Hadrakian as his ears fall in repentance for his actions. The First Merchant briskly carries on with the introductions to you and invites you inside her office.

"Sorry about the inconvenience," she apologizes. "He is very young and this is his first try at keeping a real job. But he shows a great deal of promise and is extremely bright. I hope that when he becomes a Settled One, he will stay on with us here. Now, I suspect you are wondering why I have summoned you."

You nod yes and the First Merchant continues, "We are well known for our trading capabilities on Hadrak but, to be honest, with the Clathran Survey moving in we are finding it more and more difficult to keep up with the demands put on us by our customers. I have devised a solution and would like to make it an option for all space travelers who become citizens of our fair planet. I think you may find what I have to offer to be to your benefit."

"Please go on."

"We have many commodities that our trading houses stock in great quantity, such as Food, Tools, and Radioactives, but we have not enough of other things, such as Primordial Soup, Vortex Coils, and Gradient Filters. These latter things are hard to come by and I am willing to offer you a special deal for them. I will give you any three commodities of your choice for just one of the rare items I need. You can pick the commodities you want from the stocks in my warehouses. That's a pretty good deal, don't you think?"

"The rare items I need are Primordial Soup, Vortex Coils, Gradient Filters, Dimensional Transducers, Insulicon, Probability Membranes, and Diamond Cloth. The commodities you can choose from my warehouses are Food, Tools, Radioactives, Fiber, Crystals, Munitions, Medicine, Culture, Super Slip, Synthetic Genius, Phase Steel, and Warp Core. I'll give you any three of the latter for any one of the former. Think it over and let me know if you are interested."

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

❖ STOP ❖

[883]

The Francloons like to play annoying pranks which have the potential for causing physical harm to their victims. The Hadrakian Homeless Ones have a tendency to overreact to a given situation and can easily become violent if provoked. It is no surprise that the hospital gets a lot of business.

When you walk into the hospital, you see a huge Emergency Room located next to the main lobby. Everywhere you look, you see Hadrakian victims of Francloon pranks, Hadrakian males injured in duels with one another, and Francloons upon whom the Homeless Ones have taken their revenge. Moans and groans abound and you hunch your shoulders against the thought of all of the pain around you.

You spend some time watching the medical staff at work and are impressed by the quality of health care. Why shouldn't they be good at what they do? They are working around the clock every day of the week to heal these people. Hopefully they can do great things with you.

You are admitted to a room and begin undergoing treatment. During your stay, you notice that even in the hospital, the Francloons are unable to stay quiet. You notice one of the jelly-bag creatures, injured with deep claw slashes from an irate Homeless One, taking a surgical glove and filling it with gas from a nearby tank. When the glove is almost ready to explode, the Francloon releases it to fly off through the rooms, making the most horrendous blatty noise. Aside from sheer startlement, there is no other damage done.

After nearly a full week of treatment, you are feeling as good as new. You are ready to take on the galaxy again.

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

✂ STOP ✂

[884]

Finding the Cave of the Flame Jewels is no great trick: the Wythymites are only too happy to show you where it is. They think the Flame Jewels will change you, make you more like them, more conscious of the environment and other living things. You're willing to risk it.

The Cave of the Flame Jewels is initially no different from any other cave you have ever seen: dark, damp, and clammy. But then it opens out into a lighted gallery, and suddenly everything changes.

First you are stunned by the beauty of it all: a room the size of a large theater, framed by walls of fiery stone. It's like seeing a Flame Jewel from the inside out, surrounded by faceted walls that burn with their own inner radiance. Jewels litter the floor, from pea-size to those too big to lift, all perfectly faceted, and all with the same inner fire. Radiance lights your face, and burns into your soul. Bedazzled, you bend to pick up a Jewel, and find yourself lying on the floor, gazing upwards into the kaleidoscopic ceiling.

And then the revelations begin:

Flame Jewels form the core of Wythym. Flame Jewels have made Wythym a paradise for all life. Flame Jewels are living things, older than the galaxy itself. Flame Jewels are the tools of the Meddlers, set here to ensnare the unwary. Flame Jewels are a key to the human soul. Flame Jewels can swallow you up, burn you with an inner fire, and set you free again, changed. Flame Jewels are beautiful. Flame Jewels are more precious than habitable worlds. Flame Jewels unlock the doors of Dual Space. Flame Jewels link the sundered worlds. Flame Jewels are here to help you. Flame Jewels are here to never let you go. Flame Jewels. . . Flame Jewels. . . Flame Jewels. . .

A timeless time later, the Wythymites pull you from the cave. Your hair is longer, and unkempt. Your clothes are soiled. You have lost weight. Clutched in your right hand is a Flame Jewel.

* * *

Congratulations! You have acquired a Flame Jewel. If you wanted, you could return to the cave, and after another week, emerge with another Flame Jewel. However, to supply the Home Worlds Space Navy, you will need more than one or two Flame Jewels — many, many more. Each ship in the Navy needs its own Jewel if it is to have a tri-axis drive, and thus be able to travel in the Galactic Arm.

“Well,” you think to yourself, “Next time I visit the Cave of the Flame Jewels I will come prepared to collect many of them. That is what the Space Navy needs.”

To return to the Cave of the Flame Jewels with the equipment to collect a whole sack of Jewels for the Space Navy, plot the following option:

(3ZP2SH) (7 phases) Get lots of Flame Jewels for the Space Navy.

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[885]

The continuous hustle and bustle of the Sirissians on their overpopulated world is beginning to get on your nerves. You are constantly being jostled, and since the aliens are about two feet shorter than you (not counting their sensory stalks), it is sometimes distinctly unpleasant. It is even more unnerving, though, to see the aliens phase in and out of existence, passing through each other. You realize that you are doing the same thing while on this planet, but you try not to think about it.

Since you are determined to see your self-appointed mission through to the end, you grit your teeth, causing some alarm among the nearest Sirissians, and grimly shoulder your way through the crowd.

Your height allows you to see your destination just ahead. The large video board on the side of the building confirms its identity and you make your way through the door, all the while surveying the incredible mayhem going on around you. So this is the Sirissian Trade Center. You are not impressed.

The inside of the building is just one big arena. Merchants have booths with computer links everywhere you look. There seems to be little order or structure to the scene in front of you, so you do the only thing possible. You wander around aimlessly like a lost soul until someone takes pity on you and shows you where the Directory is located.

After spending quite some time studying the large board which gives you the names of the merchants present today as well as their stock items available for trade, you have a good idea of what's for sale.

The Sirissians will trade you Synthetic Genius for the following:

- 3 Synthetic Genius for 1 Fiber
- 2 Synthetic Genius for 1 Munitions
- 1 Synthetic Genius for 1 Culture

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

⊠ STOP ⊠

[886]

You are using the time in hyperspace to do some much-needed work on your ship when your computer interrupts.

"Boss, we are getting a message from a Hadrakian trading vessel. Do you want to speak with them?"

"I guess I can spare a minute." Seconds later you are looking into the fierce visage of a blue-furred tigorilla. The captain greets you and you trade pleasantries for a while. The Settled One asks if you have time to play a game of Thrakkah, the Hadrakian version of chess, but you have to decline.

"Sorry, I am up to my neck in work on my ship. Nothing vital, just a lot of minor repairs I have let go for too long."

"Ah, might I recommend you travel to the planet Hadrak where you can get the plans to build an Automated Repair System for your ship? It may be of help to an explorer such as yourself!" She bids you farewell. Waving goodbye, you break the radio connection.

✧ STOP ✧

[887]

You decide to follow the orders of the port official and return to the surface of the planet. To get official permission to pass through the Stargate, you may purchase a Stargate Key at the local key market.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[888]

You approach the doors of the temple hesitantly. The immense size of the portal before you is daunting, to say the least. The huge iron rings hanging from the center of the two doors are almost too large for you to grasp. You wonder if some race of giants hadn't actually built the temple, rather than mere humans. Solemnly, you reach out and pull hard on the knocker. The sound reverberates throughout the building and you step back to wait for a response.

It seems to take forever. Several times, you are tempted to leave, but the words above the doorway keep you there. "Come and Learn Patience, All Ye Who Enter Here."

"Welcome, Brother." The sound startles you and at first you think it is only your imagination playing tricks on you. But after a moment you hear, "Please come in," and the sound of the doors being pulled back. Soon there is an opening large enough for you to pass through and enter the mysterious temple.

The robed figure waiting on the other side nods in greeting and motions for you to walk down the large hallway. An inner compulsion keeps you from turning around, and from questioning your escort. Your only comfort is the sound of your footsteps preceding you down the passageway. Your companion makes no sound at all — you are not even sure you are still being followed.

Closed doors sporadically appear on either side of you, but uncharacteristically, you feel no inclination to open any of them. You gradually grow weary. The lights are rather dim, the air damp. Suddenly the hall ends.

You see nothing here in the cul-de-sac, so you turn to ask your guide what the next step is. There is no one behind you for as far as you can see. Patience is obviously the operative word here, but instead of standing in one place being bored, you choose to investigate the bricks in the walls and the stone tiles in the floor. Could there be a secret passage?

Several hours pass and you decide to just sit the rest of the wait out. Maybe even take a nap. . .

“Welcome Brother, we have a small test for you.” The voice wakes you but doesn’t sound threatening. Although you can barely keep your eyes open, you reply that you are ready to take any test they might have.

“Fine, then let us begin. . .”

⊠ STOP ⊠

[889]

“Boss, that’s the fourth serious hit we’ve taken in as many minutes. We can’t stand much more of this!”

Your computer is not telling you anything you do not already know. You take stock of the situation; boy, do things look grim. You are locked in combat with a more powerful vessel than you can handle and there are precious few options open to you at this time. Thinking quickly, you decide upon a desperate plan of action.

“Computer, see that cloud of space gas?”

“Affirmative, Boss.”

“Make for it as soon as possible.”

“But. . .”

“Just do it!”

“Roger, Boss.”

Seconds later you feel the force of acceleration throw you back into your seat as the ship’s thrusters propel it at great speed toward the target. The Clathran ship is taken by surprise for the precious few seconds you need to make your getaway. Your ship enters the cloud and you immediately order a change of heading.

“Bring us about, forty degrees! Thrusters on full for twenty seconds, then shut down all nonessential systems. We will drift in space, our position hidden by the scanner interference of the space cloud. When enough time has passed, we will resume motion.”

“Great idea, Boss. Here we go!”

The plan goes like clockwork. You evade the scanners of the Clathran war vessel and wait until it has given up the search for your ship. As the tension eases, you take the opportunity to run a quick check on your ship. What a mess! You consider the possibility of having your ship overhauled at the first opportunity.

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 ⊠

[890]

You've had a lot of fun with the various games and rides of Mardahland, but now you feel it is time to face the biggest challenge of them all, the Wringer. You stand in front of the admittance gate to the largest, fastest, most dangerous ride in the park, following the roller coaster track with your eyes. Even though you are still safe on the ground, you can feel the menace of the Wringer from here.

The best roller coaster you have ever ridden was called the Hurricane. It had three gigantic hills, two tunnels and took just under ten minutes from start to finish. The Wringer has three times more of everything plus an added twist. At the top of three of the six hills as well as in three of the six tunnels, you have the opportunity to actually stand up and grab a gold ring hanging by a thread above the track. Rumor has it that the person who collects all six rings wins a fabulous prize. It looks like sure suicide, but there are people who have managed to accomplish this feat. You decide to try it yourself.

The crowd is large but consists mostly of spectators, since few have the courage to actually ride this monster. You swagger up to the front of the line and wait for the next car. Each person rides alone in a single car, not rows of cars like you are accustomed to seeing on human rides. The car arrives and you see that it is shaped like an egg with its top cracked off. You shiver at the Mardahlans' macabre sense of humor.

You step into the waiting shell and quickly take stock of the safety devices available to you. There is no place to sit, but you are allowed to recline against a slanted back wall. There are arm rests on either side of you. Unfortunately, ostriches are wider than humans, so you can really only make good use of one of the rests by tucking it tightly under your arm. There are also safety straps you may use to secure yourself in the shell. If you do so, you will not be able to grab for the gold rings. You leave the straps dangling against the back wall.

You are jolted backward as the car starts to move along the track toward the first hill. As the car begins its upward incline, you find that you are laying almost horizontally against the back wall. You keep your eyes on the top of the hill where the gold ring will be dangling. It is only when you are practically at the crest of the hill that you finally spot it.

While Mardahlans have an arm reach of about three feet, very close to your own, they have extremely long legs. The rings have been placed at a height difficult for an ostrich to reach. For a human it is all but impossible. You have scant seconds to decide what to do since your car is almost directly under the ring. Quickly you decide on a course of action.

Scrambling up so you are now straddling the two arm rests, you find you are just tall enough to grab the ring. As you do, you feel the car begin the hundred foot drop down the first hill. You drop down to the floor of the car and grasp an arm rest barely in time to keep from being thrown out of the egg. Sucking in a deep lungful of air, you release it as you plummet downward with a loud yell, "Yaahhhhhhh!!!!" You are not sure what the actual physical ramifications of screaming are at times like these, but you know it makes you feel better.

You close your eyes as well, so you almost miss your chance at the second ring. You see it just a few feet inside the mouth of the first tunnel. Jumping up, once again, onto the arm rests, you manage to snag the second of your prizes. The tunnel then becomes pitch black and you have to cope with the abrupt dips and turns in the track as best you can. You emerge into daylight, already on the upward incline leading to the second hill.

And so the ride goes, each hill trickier than the last because the rings are being dangled closer and closer to the drop off point and you have less and less time to grab them and fall back to the safety of the inside of the car. The tunnels are difficult because you never know where the rings will be. Once, you had to ride the entire tunnel on the arm rests because the ring was all the way at the end. But you continue to increase the number of your golden prizes; three, four, five, and finally, six rings adorn your fingers.

The car comes to a halt at the end of the ride. You emerge from the egg, amidst cheers of the Mardahlans, with your ring-covered hands in the air. You are soaked with sweat, and all of your muscles cry out from the ordeal you have put them through, but you are victorious. One of the ostriches points you to a prize redemption window where you can exchange the rings for your reward. You step up to the counter and proudly lay down your six hard-won rings. The golden android behind the window quickly scoops them up and tells you to go around to the side door where you will receive your real prize.

You step around the corner and knock on the wooden door. After a moment it opens, and a four foot fuzzy *thing* with a large nose and webbed feet is thrust at you. The door slams shut. You stand there, stunned, for several minutes holding the large stuffed animal you have just won. Is this what you risked your life for!!!!? You study the prize with detached interest, noting that it is in the shape of a rare waterfowl found only in the coldest places on the planet. You also see that the front of its neck is crudely sewn on with only a few large stitches. You

take your pocket knife and carefully cut the threads. The head falls back, revealing a hidden compartment containing a large vial labeled, "Drink Me."

When your day is over at Mardahland, you will return to your ship and have the contents of the vial analyzed. Your computer will tell you that it is a very powerful healing liquid, and eminently safe for human consumption. You duly down the "medicine" and feel a wave of strength come over you. Now you're ready to take on the galaxy.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[891]

"We are now approaching the planet Geefle, Boss," your computer informs you. The yellow and brown sphere comes into view on your screens. There are multiple lifeform readings: natives, Zyrans, and Clathrans. Clathrans!

"Boss, Geefle is a Zyran colony that has been conquered by the Clathrans."

A small fleet of Clathran destroyers orbits the planet, blockading all space traffic.

"Let's try to get through the Clathran blockade, like we got through the Survey Line," you instruct.

Your computer begins a series of careful maneuvers designed to get you safely down to the planet's surface, despite the enemy destroyers. Your muscles tense up as you begin making your way through the Clathran ships. As good as your technology is, you can never be sure what will happen. So far so good, you think to yourself.

"Er, Boss. . ."

You hate when your computer hesitates like that. It usually means trouble.

"What's wrong?" you ask, but you don't have to wait for an answer. The half dozen Clathran destroyers in orbit about the planet are breaking off from their patrol positions and closing in around you.

"I think they're onto us," your computer replies.

"Damn!"

You could easily defeat a single destroyer in combat, but six of them is another matter. Like faces of a cube with you in the center, the Clathran warships have you surrounded.

"Shields up, weapons ready, evasive maneuvers, now!" you command.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[892]

You are eating your dinner on the bridge, watching an old rerun of "Leucothea Law" on the main viewscreen. The computer rudely interrupts your meal with an alarm.

"Zyran vessel approaching, now at long range," it reports.

"Oh, no." Visions of being eaten by a disgusting, squishy, multi-tentacled brown creature dance through your head. "Maximum magnification. Let me see it."

A Zyran vessel with metal tentacles extending in all directions appears on your screen.

"Hailing frequencies open. I want to talk to it."

"Ready, boss."

"Warning to unidentified Zyran craft. Stay clear. If you approach any nearer, I will consider it an attack upon this vessel and will be forced to fire in self-defense. Do you acknowledge?"

There is some static, then a reply: "Food."

You don't intend to become its dinner, not if you can help it.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[893]

The red alert siren startles you out of a sound sleep.

"What is it?" you call as you stumble out of bed.

"Precautionary alert, Boss. Sensors show a Zyran ship in the vicinity. I want to be prepared for any hostile action."

You agree. All thoughts of sleep are gone as you quickly make your way up to the control room. Here, you activate the front viewscreen and watch as a Zyran ship glides silently past you without making any hostile move.

When the danger is past, your computer observes, "Boss, I know they are a peculiar race, but with their high degree of technology and excellent fighting capability, the Zyran could help us in the fight against the Clathrans. Do you know if anyone has asked them?"

⊠ STOP ⊠

[894]

You are helpless to prevent the Clathrans from boarding your ship and taking you prisoner. As they hustle you into their ship's brig, you are not surprised to hear that they plan to take you to a nearby base for interrogation. Since they do not mention your previous capture, you wonder whether they realize you have been a guest of theirs already. But that's not really important now. You are more concerned with repeating your previous feat and escaping from the clutches of the soldiers before they can drag any information out of you.

While their normal interrogation will probably be bearable, you know that the technique known as mind wiping will be able to break past all of your defenses. From what you recall of the Chang expedition, crew member Doctor Richard Dighton was mind wiped and left as a vegetable. The Clathrans were looking for the coordinates of the human Home Worlds, so they could send a fleet to destroy the human race. They didn't find out where the Home Worlds are, but they did extract enough information to try to destroy the human race with a virulent Space Plague. They almost succeeded. You shudder as you think that you might be the instrument for your people's ultimate demise.

The trip to the base is short and you are soon being led to a holding area, much like the one you escaped from the last time. Things are definitely looking up! Upon entering the room, you see half a dozen Clathran soldiers conducting some sort of meeting and your heart sinks. Maybe they will be gone before the guard comes to take you to your real cell.

You have no such luck, though. Only minutes pass before you find yourself once again marching between two large guards. Soon afterwards, you are thrown into a small cell. You survey your new surroundings. You see a slab of concrete, presumably where the prisoners sleep, the door you have entered through and an odd darkly colored square in the floor at the far corner of the room. Since you see no other facilities for personal waste disposal, you wonder if this where you are to, er, do your duty so to speak. Blech.

Due to the recent excitement of the battle and capture, it is not long until you feel the need to use the corner of the room. You try to put it off as long as possible but you are soon forced to give it a try. Straddling one of the two protruding corners, you do what you need to and watch in fascination as the material is pulled through the floor. Getting down on your hands and knees, you study the square with great intent. From this close vantage point, you can see that the tile, about two feet by two feet in dimension, is set into the flooring of the cell and abuts the back wall. Here you notice something of interest.

Along the rear seam, the waste tile is not firmly seated into the floor. Perhaps it was recently serviced and not put back properly. Whatever the cause, you intend to try to make use of this oversight. Working with painstaking care, you set about pulling the tile up from the flooring.

Hours pass before you begin to see any sign of progress but, from this point on, the work goes quickly. After loosening the tile, you finally manage to slip your fingers under it and pry it up. As you suspected, the tile is covering an opening which, from the odor, leads into a sewer pipe. While the pipe is not overly large, it could serve as a means for your escape. Though you try not to think about the "lubrication" you feel as you slip through the pipes, you are grateful for its presence. It is a very tight squeeze and without the "oiling" effect you might not fit.

You use your uncanny sense of direction to take you in the general vicinity of the landing port where you believe your ship to be located. You are fortunate that the sewer system connects to many points in the Clathran base and put this to good use. Since there are no maps or signs down here, you have to guess when you need to surface once again.

Taking an upward pipe, you soon reach the outside world and take your bearings. Not bad! The room where you have surfaced is a waste room adjacent to an empty conference room of some sort. Neither contain anything of great use to you. Feet squishing with moisture, you creep over to the outer door and listen for signs of life. When you hear nothing, you open the door and start down the hallway. Arrows and directories on the wall indicate that you are headed in the right direction for reaching your trusty ship.

Last time you escaped from the Clathrans, you almost didn't make it because the base's weaponry fired upon your ship when you took off. To prevent that, you decide to take the time to sneak over to the base's control room and put it out of commission. Unfortunately, when you reach the appropriate place you are dismayed to see that this base is much larger than the other and, therefore, has many more soldiers on duty — too many to overcome. You have no choice but to sneak into your ship and prepare for a swift and speedy liftoff. With the element of surprise on your side, you hope to be able to get away before they can launch proper pursuit.

Upon entering your ship's bridge, you feel chills strike your body. In fact, you are shivering so much that you can barely give the command to lift off. Fortunately your computer, who has greeted you in a very warm fashion (maybe the bucket of bytes has feelings after

all), manages to decipher your chatterings. In a matter of seconds you are blasting off from the base and putting as much distance between the Clathrans and you as possible. Since you could not disable the base's weaponry, you feel the shocks of explosions hitting your fleeing ship.

Somehow, you manage to barely survive the attacks, dodge your pursuers, and lose yourself in the vastness of hyperspace. Glancing at the comforting greyness from your front viewscreen, you feel a wave of heat wash over your entire body. Sneezes and coughs wrack your frame. Rats! It looks like you have picked up some sort of disease from your latest exploit. You manage to stagger to the sick bay but whatever the illness is, it has taken a lot out of you.

You have managed to escape from the Clathrans twice now, but you are really pressing your luck. If you get caught again, the Clathrans will take extra precautions to cut off all possible escape routes, and you will be in serious, serious trouble.

Go now to the CGM.

✧ STOP ✧

[895]

While you are testing your ship's circuits, preparing for the long flights ahead of you, your subspace radio crackles suddenly to life:

"Hey out there! This is Jen, in the smallest ship in space, testing my new subspace rig. Anybody catching?"

The voice sounds familiar. Could it be Jen Cristobal, your old friend from Wellmet? You snatch up your transmitter.

"Jen Cristobal! It's me, Valentine Stewart. How in Space are you?"

"Just swell, amigo. Glad to catch you on the air. Except I go by just Jen now."

"What are you up to this time?" Like you, Jen comes from one of the big smuggling Families. But she had so many older siblings that she was never in line for Heir like you were.

"I have a ship now, the *Beetle*. I'm running cargos in tight margins when the big dealers can't stroke their regular sources. There's a big spot demand market, and since I connect with all the Families instead of just one, I'm cleaning up. Gonna buy a two-axis drive sometime soon."

"You mean you've only got a single-axis drive?" Nobody flies single-axis drives any more.

"Only going one direction," says Jen. "Slow as ring ice, but she's paid up. How're tricks on Wellmet?"

"Just fine when I left, if you catch my drift, Jen. I'm in deep space again."

"Space is in your blood, Stewart. What's the racket this trip? Still on the Super Slip kick?"

"Nope." You hesitate for a moment. Should you tell Jen? Then you decide to go ahead: it's just possible that she knows something. "Flame Jewels."

"Hot Rocks, buddy! You planning to rob a museum?"

"Looking for the source, amigo. Any thoughts?"

"Never seen one myself. Wouldn't mind, though, if you find a spare."

"Thanks anyway, Jen. I'll be talking to you."

"Hey wait! I just remembered. You know Rialla? Fringe planet, floating talking beachballs, high tech?"

"You've been there?"

"Well, not on purpose. But yeah, I guess I did crash by. Listen, there's this story they tell about how their ancestors in the Arm shipped them to the Fringe to live. That would take Flame Jewels, right? To fly from the Arm to here?"

“So?”

“So look for a planet with Riallans on it! Brilliant, eh?”

“Jen, there are thousands of planets in the Arm.”

“But how many with Riallans on 'em? You never know till you look! No thanks necessary, old chum; gotta rocket! Catchya on the apogee! Out!”

Your radio goes dead.

“Computer, make a note to watch for Riallans.”

“Aye aye, Boss, if you really think it'll help.”

“Who knows?”

⊠ STOP ⊠

[896]

You stride into the rear offices of The Battle, Inc. where everyone is busy working on their plans to fight the Clathrans. You stride right into the office of the highest ranking executive you can find and slam your fist down on her desk.

“Well I did it!” you exclaim. The Settled One merely looks at you patiently and waits for you to explain.

“I made it through the Survey Line! It wasn't easy, but I outwitted thousands of Clathran ships and crossed from one side of the line to the other. Now I can go wherever I want in the Galactic Arm.”

This time, you get the reaction you were hoping for. The Settled One turns on the public address system from her office and announces your accomplishment to everyone in the building.

“Hey, I've got an agent in my office who's just crossed the Survey Line!”

Everyone in the office starts to cheer. You have made their day. Several Hadrakians stop into their boss's office to pound you on the back, shake your hand, and congratulate you on a job well done. This is more like it!

When the commotion dies down, the executive sitting at the desk asks you if you have a few minutes to sit and talk.

“Sure,” you reply.

“Why don't you close the door then, so we can have some privacy? You've pulled off quite a feat, you know, you really have. You have a right to be proud. I don't know if you realize it, but the company's top brass all know about you. We've been watching you from the time you first visited a Hadrakian world. It has always been our opinion that you are capable of doing great things. You haven't let us down.”


“Thank you very much. I didn't realize you took such a great interest in me. I'm just a single agent, in a one person ship. Nothing really, compared to thousands of employees, soldiers, factories, scientists. . .”

“Ah, but a truly talented individual with the right equipment and support can accomplish so much. One person can make the difference of whether we win or lose this war. So don't take yourself lightly. You might be that person. Now, let me introduce myself. My name is Colonel Theckta, and I am the executive vice president in charge of all activities of The Battle, Inc. behind the Survey Line.”

“Pleased to meet you.”

“The pleasure is mutual. Now, if we can get down to business, I have another mission I'd like to discuss with you.”

“That's what I'm here for. Please go on.”

Continued 

“As you know, the Clathrans are a tremendously strong and disciplined race. They run their military like a well-oiled machine. This makes them formidable opponents. If they outnumber you in a battle, you can’t expect to beat them. They’re too careful, too efficient, too well organized. They won’t make mistakes. How, then, can we hope to stop the Survey? This is the problem we have been trying to solve.

“We believe that there are two approaches. One is to attack their command and control structure, trying to disrupt the brain of their military nervous system. In other words, assassinate their high command. If we could wipe out their leaders, the rest of the machine might fall apart. The Clathran military is designed and disciplined to run on orders from the top down. Without the top, the lower layers might be thrown into confusion and chaos. It would be a great opportunity to rout the Clathran Navy.

“The second approach is to attack their industrial capacity. The Survey requires tens of thousands of spaceships and soldiers. As the Survey moves along, it consumes equipment and manpower on a massive scale. Every planet the Clathrans survey must be blockaded and occupied. That means more ships, more personnel. Those ships and soldiers have to come from somewhere. The Clathrans have to be building and breeding constantly: building ships and breeding soldiers. If we could somehow wipe out most of their industry and stop them from having so many children, they would no longer have the capability to continue the Survey. Without a constant flow of fresh ships and soldiers, the Survey would grind to a halt.

“We have been thinking about both of these approaches, and they both lead to the same place: the Clathran homeworld. According to our information, the Clathran homeworld, called Karnossus, is where most of their shipbuilding and breeding for the war takes place. It is also where all of their high command resides. Therefore, we have come to the conclusion that Karnossus is the key to winning this war. We might consider all kinds of strategies as to how to attack Karnossus, how to disrupt its industrial capability, how to stop the breeding of Clathran soldiers, and so on. Unfortunately, right now we are stuck with one *big* problem. We don’t know where Karnossus is.”

“What?” you ask, dumbfounded. “You don’t know where it is? How can you not know, with so many ships being built there? The place must be busier than a bee’s nest.”

“The galaxy is big. Very big. Even one sector of space contains billions of star systems, any of which might include Karnossus. Karnossus is a busy place. So what? In the vast emptiness of space, Karnossus is but a drop of water in the ocean. If you know which drop of water it is, and look at the drop through a microscope, you see thousands of spaceships being built inside. But if you don’t know which drop, you could look at the ocean for a long, long time and never find it. If I’m not mistaken, the Clathrans have been trying to find your homeworld for three hundred years. There are billions of human beings there, but has that helped them find it? No. Without coordinates, without knowing exactly where to look, they’re stumped.”

“Until the Survey gets there, of course.”

“Of course. But the Clathrans are the only ones I know of with the technology to search every drop of water in the ocean. We have to find Karnossus some other way.”

“And you’re asking me to do it.”

“Right. Search the galaxy for clues. Infiltrate Clathran bases. Pray to the gods, if that helps. Use any means at your disposal, but find Karnossus. Right now, all we can do is try to defend ourselves, and we are losing more ground every day. We need somewhere to attack the Clathrans back. That place is Karnossus. Wherever it is.”

Colonel Theckta’s expression is that of urgency mixed with a touch of desperation. You have never seen the normally calm and controlled Hadrakian female look like this. You feel a shiver of apprehension run down your spine. This job is obviously a very difficult one for her to behave in such a manner; yet, you cannot back down from this challenge. For good or bad, you extend your hand in acceptance of the mission.

“I’ll do my best,” you say. “If I find it, I’ll let you know.”

“Thank you,” she says, “You are truly a dedicated agent. The Battle, Inc. is proud to have you on its staff and will assist you in any way possible.”

“Do you have any advice as to how to look for Karnossus?”

“Karnossus isn’t on any map, so it won’t be easy to find. It would be best if you could get enough information to narrow the location down to a single trisector. Then you could just park yourself in that trisector and do a thorough search for Clathran activity.”

“That makes sense. I guess I should start looking for clues.”

“Good luck, and may the gods smile upon you.”

You leave the headquarters with the colonel's benediction still ringing in your ears. You wonder if the Hadrakian gods can do more than bring you luck. Since Karnossus is not one of the planets on your star map, you will need to look for it using the following option:

(7F8LKM) (14 phases) Search for Karnossus.

You may attempt this option in *any* trisector, as long as you are not landed on a planet. Please make a note of the action code; it is an unlisted option, so you will need to enter the code manually when you wish to select it.

You may select this option again.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[897]

An attendant brings you into a quiet, comfortable room. There are several chairs located in front of old-fashioned computer terminals. After instructing you in the use of the terminals, the attendant leaves you to your research.

Soon, you are diligently browsing through a comprehensive listing of subject matter. As you expected, most of the research focuses on the phenomenon called “Dual Space.” You note that much of the early work was done by a Brother Dikestra. His most important paper was something called “Duality Considered Harmful.” However, this particular volume is not present in the library. Instead, you find a survey work entitled “Dual Space Complete.” You start to read it but soon find yourself mired in formulas too complex to understand. You hear a chuckle from behind you.

“I’m not sure even I would try reading that book, and I wrote it!” exclaims a robed Brother sitting at your side. You turn to see the Brother’s bright eyes and puffy cheeks underneath the folds of his hood. “Forgive my laughter,” he continues. “I didn’t mean to be rude. If you are interested in the subject, I would be glad to talk to you about it.”

“Please do,” you say, thankful that you don’t have to work through all the mathematics and physics yourself.

“As you know, the Brotherhood has been studying the benefits of discipline and focus for a long time. You are probably already aware that some people are capable, with the right talent and training, to transcend what appear to be inviolable laws of physics. Even in the pre-spacefaring days, there were members of our order who amazed people by levitating themselves a few inches off the floor. Many more Brethren have been able to accomplish such feats in recent years. In all likelihood, you yourself have developed similar powers. Telekinesis? Clairvoyance? Have you ever considered how it is possible to do such things?”

“What we are experiencing is a sort of magic, by which some people can change reality. Through force of mind alone, it is possible to change the way the world is. Only in the last few years have we begun to understand why this works. It is related to a superstate of nature called Dual Space.”

The Brother pauses to catch his breath. You can see that he likes to lecture. He speaks as if every word he says is more important than the last. “What exactly is Dual Space?” you ask.

“As we understand it, Dual Space is the dimension of all possible realities. That in itself isn’t too important, since only one reality actually exists at any given time. However, there is a conduit, a pathway between reality and Dual Space, which I call the Interphase. Magic becomes possible when a sentient mind can reach through the Interphase and call upon one of Dual Space’s alternate realities. Suddenly, the world changes. One minute, you’re standing on the ground; the next minute you’re levitating. You haven’t applied a force against an object in the normal physical sense. Instead, you’ve used your mind to invoke an alternate state of things. Get it?”

“I think so. This Dual Space Interphase allows us to make things different by thinking about it. But why then can’t we just wish the Clathrans away?”

“Actually, if we could do that we’d be in really big trouble. Consider it: with every mind changing things every which way, there’d be total chaos. Fortunately, it isn’t that easy to change reality. You see, the Dual Space Interphase is just a tiny crack, a small opening through which alternate realities can be reached. The size of the Interphase limits what can be achieved. You might be able to levitate yourself four

inches but not eight. You might communicate telepathically with someone in the same room, but not someone across the street. And so on. Another factor that limits the possible changes is your own intelligence. A human mind is only so powerful, and as a result, can only make changes on a certain scale. Thinking about wiping out the Clathrans might bruise the next Clathran you meet, but that's about it."

"I see what you mean."

"Now something else interesting is that the Dual Space Interphase — the conduit that determines how much 'magic' is possible — actually fluctuates in size. When the Interphase is wider, it is easier to change reality. When the interphase is narrower, it is more difficult. Lately, I have been working on a device to measure the size of the Interphase. This device, called an Interphase Variometer, gives us a metric of how stable reality is at any given time. Would you like to see it?"

"Sure."

You follow Dikestra out of the Library and up to his laboratory, which is bathed in a bright white light. The place is a mess of papers, equipment, and toys everywhere. Every piece of paper has notes scribbled on it — in the margins, on the back, you name it. You step around the papers on the tiled white floor to avoid getting them dirty.

"Here is my most recent model," Brother Dikestra points to a small yellow box, about four inches wide, with a meter on the side.

"That's it?" you ask, wondering where the fancy technology comes in.

"This is all you need. There's an artificially intelligent computer inside, which just *thinks* about changing the conductivity of a very tiny ceramic superconductor. It doesn't actually physically manipulate the superconductor in any way. Sure enough, the conductivity changes anyway, by a very small amount. It's the Dual Space effect. The meter on the outside measures the intensity of the changes and displays the results."

"The scale on the meter ranges from 0 to 100. What does that mean?"

"Well, if it reads zero, then there's no Dual Space effect at all. Nature is fixed and cannot be changed via Dual Space, at least not enough for the meter to detect it. As the level on the meter increases, the measured Dual Space effect is greater and greater. In other words, the Interphase must be getting wider. The scale only goes to 100, since the maximum Dual Space effect is limited by the computer's intelligence. Lately the level has been rising."

The professor shows you a chart on the wall where he has been recording the size of the Dual Space Interphase. A red line indicates that the Interphase has been widening at a steady rate.

"Wow," you remark. "It's been going up pretty fast."

"I know. That scares me. A colleague of mine, Brother Gries, has been doing some work on the effects of the widening Dual Space Interphase on the human mind. You might be interested in speaking to him. He lives on the planet Dahl."

If you wish to see Brother Gries when you are on Dahl, you may plot the following option:

(XPNSYZ) (5 phases) Speak with Brother Gries about the effects of Dual Space on humans.

"Meanwhile, if you'd like to have an older prototype of my Interphase Variometer, I'd be happy to give you one. You might find it useful."

"Why, thank you very much." You are delighted to accept. Dikestra fishes out another yellow box from underneath a pile of rubber balls and gives it to you. You notice the meter has the same scale, from 0 to 100. While you are looking at it, the meter takes a sudden jump upward. At first you think there is something wrong with the device, but you look over and see that Dikestra's other model has done the same.

"Another jump," Dikestra comments, as he marks it on his chart in red marker. "Scary."

You think about this ominous behavior and wonder what the future holds in store for you and humanity. You shudder slightly as a feeling of foreboding passes through you. Is it your imagination, or have the lights just become a little bit dimmer?

To find out the current Dual Space Interphase level on a scale of 0 to 100, check the Interphase Variometer on your status display.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[898]

"This is Slow Eddie Falstaff broadcasting in subspace. Can anyone hear me?"

"Loud and clear, Eddie."

"Right. I won't ask who you are or where, since I'm not planning on telling where I am, but I just saw something really weird that I thought I ought to pass along."

"Go ahead."

"I think something's going weird with the galaxy, you know? The place I just visited, I've been going there for years, but suddenly it's like they don't know me. There's a war or a riot or something going on in the middle of the city, and I'm lucky to escape with my life. I wouldn't have, either, but the gun they pointed at me didn't work. They drew their knives and I split. Is this going on all over?"

"All over," you confirm. "You'll want to be careful returning to Wellmet."

"Wellmet? That's the planet I'm talking about! The whole place is insane! I'm going back with the aliens. Over and out."

⊠ STOP ⊠

[899]

You are sleeping peacefully when your computer's danger alarm awakens you with a jolt. You leap out of bed, your heart thumping rapidly.

"What? What is it?" you ask.

"Scanners report an unidentified vessel approaching fast, dead ahead."

"Any communications from it?"

"None. It's not even acknowledging our messages."

"What race does it belong to? Can you tell?"

"No. The shape and markings of the unidentified craft do not match those of any race we have yet encountered."

Before you can ask another question, the vessel is upon you. It looks very strange, a small ovoid central chamber with a hundred metal tentacles of different shapes and sizes extending outward in all directions into space. You wonder what sort of creatures would build a spaceship like that.

Then, without warning, the tentacled alien vessel begins firing at you.

"We're under attack," your computer warns.

"No kidding," you reply, "Engage weapons!"

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[900]

After what seems like hours of pummeling your opponent and being pummeled in return, you see, to your great satisfaction, the enemy sinking to the dirt floor of the Arena in a dead faint. The bad news is that you are doing the same thing. Your last conscious thought is that the gods are showing both of you their divine favor. Great. The crowd cheers heartily at this.

You are not aware of being dragged off to the Enclave hospital, but at the end of the week you awaken feeling somewhat refreshed. The wounds you suffered in the Arena have almost healed, leaving you in only slightly worse shape than before. Unfortunately, you are still in the Enclave and must earn your citizenship before you can do much of anything on this planet.

You may select this option again.

✠ STOP ✠

[901]

“What can you tell me about the Nine Worlds?”

“Ah, yes: the human eggbasket. Somehow I knew you’d ask me that. In honesty, I could tell you more than you could live through hearing, but I assume that you’re most interested in recent history and current events.”

“Precisely.”

“‘Nine Worlds’ is no longer the appropriate name, human. Partly as a result of your own efforts, the Boundary has fallen, and Earth and her early colonies are referred to now as the ‘Home Worlds.’ A new wave of colonization has begun, but it’s probably too late to save your species.”

“What do you mean?”

“Humans stand on the verge of extinction. Insanity, both individual and collective, has swept across the worlds of your people, and now only a few strong groups are clinging to any semblance of organization. Cities are burning, spaceports have been looted, and anarchy reigns.”

“But how did that happen? I was just there!”

“You were there within the last decade, you mean. Human history has often exhibited swift and violent turns. This one, however, may be the ultimate catastrophe.”

“But how?”

“In a remarkable piece of irony, humanity teeters on the brink of extinction as a direct result of Clathran manipulations; yet the Clathrans have accomplished this coincidentally, and are as unaware of it as you were.”

“What did they do? Another virus?”

“No. This was much more subtle than a Space Plague. For several years now they have been rapidly and artificially raising the galactic dual space interphase level. What this involves and why they should be doing it are the subjects of other lectures, but suffice it to say that humans, having evolved in a period of low dual space access, are having trouble adapting to the rapid increase in the width of the interphase. Given millennia to adjust, you could probably adjust. We Darkwhistlers did, after all, evolving through several cycles of high and low access until we reached the point where fluctuations meant no more to us than changing seasons do to you. But this time it seems you have gone from the depths of arctic winter to the height of Saharan summer in the blink of a cosmic eye.”

“But why should this cause insanity?”

“Because with the interphase level higher, humans suddenly have more mental powers than their minds can control. Individually you learn to telekinese and levitate and illusion yourself. Everybody in a large city suddenly telekinising at once, though, results in chaos, which is more or less what’s happening.”

“Is there hope for Earth?”

“Not as you think of it. It’s already plunged into something approaching a post-holocaust hell. But isolated groups of humans have resisted or adapted to their changing powers and may prove the salvation of your species, if galactic equilibrium can be restored soon enough.”

“How do we do that?”

“Not us, human: you. And that’s the subject of another discussion. Ask me about the Clathrans, or about dual space, or Hadrakian battle plans. Or *journey* with me to Earth, and see the situation for yourself.”

✱ STOP ✱

[902]

Darkside. Even the name evokes images of mystery and danger. You feel somehow drawn to the place that most Hadrakians refuse to speak of, compelled to visit the outcasts who live here. From what little information you have been able to gather about this place, you know it is populated by Hadrakians who cannot or will not conform to the “normal” society found on the rest of the planet. They sound like your kind of people.

Hadrakian males are a wild and unruly lot. Two things occur which change them into calmer, more reliable beings; the first is the discipline of the Arena, and second is the metamorphosis into the female phase of life. As in any group of intelligent beings, there are some Hadrakians who never accept the strictures society tries to place upon them. They insist on marching to their own drummer, even when their actions are directly against what civilization dictates is the correct way to behave. For these beings, life is often difficult and frequently involves some sort of incarceration to protect law-abiding citizens. Hadrak is no exception, but their solution is to set aside an entire city for these renegades. This city, where anarchy reigns, is called Darkside. It is there you have decided to visit — at your own risk.

Like many Hadrakian cities, Darkside is surrounded by walls. This is a holdover from the early days, centuries ago, when Hadrak was in the throes of a Dark Age, with marauding bands of Homeless Ones traveling the land, attacking any settlement that was at all vulnerable. Unlike the rest of the cities of today, Darkside’s walls are completely intact and maintained. You surmise that this is to keep the renegades inside rather than for keeping the rest of the planet out. At the gate, you spend several minutes convincing the non-renegade guard that you are serious about entering the city and, yes, you understand that once inside, you will be completely dependent on your own abilities to keep you alive. He snarls a Hadrakian smile and allows you to pass through the gate. You sense he approves of your actions. Maybe he even secretly wishes he were joining you.

The silence of Darkside’s streets surprises you. For some reason, you expected throngs of rowdy Hadrakians everywhere. Instead, the roads are quiet and well ordered. An occasional tigorilla walks by but makes no comment on your presence here. The stores you pass are open and run by females. You wonder about this, but as you think about it, you decide it makes sense that a renegade male does not automatically turn into a law-abiding female. She enjoyed the wild life as a male and continues to enjoy it as a female. Logical. Since you have no particular destination in mind, you roam the streets for several hours until night falls.

Dusk approaches and the streets become more active. Places for drinking alcoholic beverages open, and from their doorways you can hear the sounds of laughter and fighting. The two often go hand in hand. One particularly interesting establishment is called “The Jeweled Armpit,” and is by far the loudest of the bars you have yet seen. You decide this will be a good place to try and make new friends.

You enter through the open door. You are not sure, but you think the room’s noise level dips for just a moment as you make your debut appearance. Things are just as loud as ever, though, when you reach the bar.

“What?” snarls the female bartender. You have no idea what to order when you hear a throaty voice to your left order for you.

“Give the Human a ‘Curly Temple Blaster,’ put it on my bill,” the Homeless One says. You turn to thank your benefactor. After introducing yourself, you learn his name is Flerrylinn.

Your drink arrives and the two of you raise your glasses and chug them down. You find your drink to be very smooth and a little sweet. You do not refuse the second round and insist on paying for the third and fourth. Soon you and Flerrylinn are old buddies, trading tales of exploits that are only slightly exaggerated, and boasting of feats and abilities that are almost true. Time flies, and before you know it, the bar is closing. Your new pal grabs you around the shoulders, and the two of you stagger off to another place which keeps much more sociable hours.

When that bar and the bar after that close, you head over to a small dank establishment that never closes. Here you miss seeing the sunrise, but make all sorts of new friends. The entire day passes in a blur of alcohol and good company, and you miss the sunset with equal oblivion. Night has well established itself when one of your new buddies suggests a social call on a nearby group of males who go by the endearing name of "The Fur Rakers." You are in no shape to make an intelligent decision, so of course you say yes to the venture.

On the way over to the Fur Rakers, your alcohol-soaked brain cells try to make sense of what is about to happen. You recall, somewhat foggily, that wandering males often form loose groups or gangs. These gangs are similar to the raiding armies that terrorized the Hadrakian cities during the Dark Ages centuries ago. Today they are contained within the solid confines of Darkside's city walls where they can do damage only to themselves.

A Hadrakian male during his peak years of maturity is dominated by a physical and emotional condition called "Maquistra." In this condition, the male is overcome by a lust for adventure and a need to use his great physical strength — preferably in violent, no-holds-barred combat. His brain and muscle cells become faster and more responsive, making him an almost perfect fighting machine. The discipline of the Arena system can mold him into a valued soldier and protector of society. But as a renegade, untrained outcast in Darkside, he is a dangerous threat to anyone around him.

Flerrylinn spends the time tromping over to the Fur Rakers meeting area to try to explain what it feels like when one is in the state of Maquistra. His vivid description of the mind-exploding joy of the battle fever, and the sharp-edged feel of his brain when his entire body turns into a fighting machine, strikes a chord in your own brain. Maybe the alcohol helps you get in the right frame of mind, or maybe there is something else at work, but you feel like you know firsthand what he is talking about.

When the meeting is over, you begin your trip over to the rival gang's turf. Tonight's combat is more for the sheer pleasure the males get out of fighting than for any form of revenge. If this trip were to be for settling a score, the pack would use their skills of stealth and cunning to sneak over and strike in a surprise attack. The general rule is, the louder the fight, the fewer dead in the end.

You have never been one to fight merely for the love of fighting, but when you arrive at the enemy's camp, you are in your own form of battle fever. Every nerve in your body screams for blood and destruction, every fiber of your being wants to strike out at an enemy, any enemy. You are caught in the thralls of Maquistra.

The rest of the night passes in a blur of blows and thrusts, blood and broken bones, screams of pain and yells of victory. Hours go by, but you do not notice the time; all you care about is fighting. You ignore the bruises on your body as well as the blood from a split lip, concentrating only on the next opponent and his defeat. You do not think you have killed any of your vanquished foes but you never know for sure. Later, when you are rational once again, that will haunt you, but for now you are content seeing each foe slump to the ground.

Daylight comes, and with it, sanity. The blood fever leaves your brain but you sense it lurking in the depths of your most primitive self. It is not a pretty realization that you are capable of such cold and calculating destruction, but you feel you will be in better control should you need to use it again. Without a doubt, the ability to let loose the forces of Maquistra is a powerful asset in combat, and may one day make the difference between winning and losing, living and dying. Accepting this darker side of yourself will take some time and a lot of thought, but you come away from the battle with a better understanding of yourself.

Flerrylinn grabs your shoulder as the fight winds down. He shows his fierce and terrible fangs in the Hadrakian version of a smile and congratulates you on your outstanding showing. He thinks you should stay in Darkside and join his gang, saying this combination will be more than enough to rule the city. The offer is tempting, but you must decline.

As you leave the city of the renegades, it still conjures an aura of mystery and danger for you. The guard at the gate is the same one who was there when you entered. He seems to see something new in your eyes and respectfully allows you to exit.

Maquistra — use it carefully and wisely lest you become something you do not wish to be.

Go now to the CGM.

✠ STOP ✠