

STAR SAGA: TWO™

BOOK N

TEXT 903-979



STAR
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BOOK II
TEXT 203-259



[903]

Skipping the usual pleasantries, the representative of this office of The Battle, Incorporated speaks directly:

"The onset of the Battle of Hadrak is now imminent. Our forces and various allies have taken positions around the planet Hadrak to attempt to repulse the Clathran Survey. The Clathrans are moving in with several large battle groups. The odds of victory are slight, but all are ready to expend the fullest possible effort. It is the Hadrakian Empire's last stand, and perhaps the galaxy's last chance to prevent everlasting Clathran domination."

You give your own report quickly. When you are done, you head towards the back of the building to discuss strategy.

❖ STOP ❖

[904]

You have a special ability that enables you to disguise yourself as a Clathran, and it comes in handy here. With it, you are able to wander through the residential area, mingle with the Clathrans, and see how they live on a day-to-day basis. You even have a chance to learn a little bit about how the Clathrans reproduce. The females lay eggs that can be fertilized by the males up to a year afterward. The eggs develop slowly, requiring almost a year to hatch, but the subsequent growth of the infant Clathrans is very rapid.

In order to conceive and raise their young efficiently, the Clathrans have set up communal creches. All viable eggs are taken to one of the creches where they are allowed to hatch, and the young are raised by those Clathrans who are unable, physically, to serve aboard a fighting vessel.

Annexed to the creche in this area is a school where the young are sent for education. Also in the same area is the Supply Center, where freight captains deliver and requisition cargo.

You have the following new options:

(YM6JBU) (3 phases) Check out the Supply Center for interesting trades.

(QMXJNU) (3 phases) Visit the Creche-Care and School facility.

❖ STOP ❖

[905]

Entering a randomly chosen Shrine on the Street of Gods, you allow an acolyte to show you to a private meditation cubicle. Once you are alone, you shove the room's reclining bench over against one wall and stretch yourself out on the floor, luxuriating in the deep pile carpet favored by this particular Shrine. Lying this way also offers you the advantage of not having to look at the carpet, which, while incredibly comfortable to lie on, is a bit rough on the eyes. In fact, it's a swirling combination of blue, green, and orange that could give a blind man a headache.

Once you are comfortably supine, however, with the carpet safely behind you, you can allow your overworked muscles to relax. Your eyelids drift closed, and you soon find yourself floating in a light trance. You are idly pondering what the inside of a Hadrakian barbershop must look like, when you are interrupted by the mental tickling that heralds divine visitation.

"I am the Goddess of Hasty Verdicts," says a voice inside your head. "Are we communicating?"

"Yes."

"Good. I hope that you are not often one of my congregation, although I urge you to take note of my name; I am the eighth of those chosen to speak to humans."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance. You perhaps have some advice for me?"

"I do indeed, although I am not sure whether you need it or not."

"Try me."

"The planet Knapt," she says, "is a good place to find Probability Membranes."

"Thank you for your advice."

"You are very welcome."

You drift off to sleep after the goddess departs, and awaken some three hours later feeling rested and relaxed. You report the name of the goddess to the Shrine Keeper on your way out, as is required by Hadrakian law.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[906]

You tell the Darkwhistler that you are ready to Journey to Golgotha. It moves away from you and makes strange sounds to itself.

"What's wrong?" you ask. "Didn't you say you would help me?"

"We cannot help you until you help us," says the Darkwhistler. "This Journey will be costly to us. Golgotha is... not friendly to our kind. The price we have demanded of you is no more than what we need to spare our own strength as we reach Golgotha and allow us to return safely. Perhaps you did not understand this. We do not have the ability to obtain these items ourselves:

- 1 Vortex Coil
- 1 Diamond Cloth
- 1 Warp Core
- 1 Phase Steel

"You must bring them to us. When you do, then we can Journey with you."

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[907]

You decide not to mess with the buoy's laser, at least for the moment. The buoy may report some data about your ship back to its hypothetical Clathran owners, but as you see it, you do not yet have the firepower to prevent this. You had better improve your weaponry soon, or you will be in real trouble when you start running into real Clathran ships.

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 ✂

[908]

You hear the boisterous singing of a band of Homeless Ones as they return from an adventuresome foray into the nearby giant forest. You see that they are laden with all sorts of organic material like rubber, pulp and wood, all of which comprise the commodity known as Fiber. Since you are curious as to what they will trade you for some of this material, you follow the males to the market.

A Settled One meets the boyish band and directs them to the proper warehouse area. She then turns to you and asks if she may be of some assistance. You explain that you are interested in learning the going rate for Fiber and she is more than happy to accommodate you:

3 Fiber for 1 Radioactives
2 Fiber for 1 Munitions
1 Fiber for 1 Synthetic Genius

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

✱ STOP ✱

[909]

The Haunted House is the most popular ride in Mardahland, so the line in which you must wait is very long. Since you love a good scare, though, you are willing. After about two hours you find yourself at the front of the line and you step into the waiting egg car that will carry you through the ride. The seat is not quite built for your comfort, but you manage to perch yourself on it and grab one of the two arm rests for support.

Your car lurches forward and takes you into a dark tunnel. Cold air blows across your face; soft moanings can be heard up ahead. You strain your eyes to see what is coming, but it is too dark. Unknown things occasionally brush against your cheek and you nervously wipe them away. What could be ahead?

Suddenly you hear a loud shriek, lights flash in your eyes, images of wild animals ready to pounce on you from above. . . you scream in terror and drop defensively to the floor of the car, weapon at the ready. Then the room brightens and you laugh at your foolishness. The images were only those generated by the Haunted House, and to think that you fell for it! You feel a little embarrassed.

The rest of the ride is pleasantly frightening, but not as scary as the first room. You do have a strange thing happen to you midway through the ride, though. While you are traveling through a large hall filled with images of unknown horrors, you hear a voice calling to you from the deep shadows, "Brother, this is not yet the place for you. Go to the planet Margen. There you will find a means to join our order."

You called out to the voice, but there was only silence to answer you.

You may select this option again.

✱ STOP ✱

[910]

The booing of the crowd follows you as you approach the Official's Stand at the far end of the Arena. You have a hard time equating the reaction of the crowd to the fact that you have won the combat, at least until you remember that winning the combat shows disfavor by the Hadrakian gods. The crowd isn't upset that you are not dead, they merely want to show sympathy that you are not ready to be blessed with a swift journey to Heaven. You are personally quite pleased with the outcome of the battle and ascend the stairs to receive the pink ribbon of citizenship on Psorus.

Before the badge can be properly bestowed upon you, however, a tussle breaks out among several Homeless Ones seated in the crowd. The Settled One in charge sighs and gives orders for the rowdy youths to be escorted out of the Arena. When peace reigns once again, she hands you your badge while speaking, "Greetings, Citizen. I am pleased to welcome you to our colony here on Psorus."

"You may have noticed the interesting local flora and fauna on this charming planet. While you are more than welcome to travel anywhere you have a mind to, I recommend you remain within the safe confines of our protected area. To venture outside the city would be very dangerous."

You thank the female for her advice and spend the next few days exploring the colony. Psorus is one of the Hadrakians' more recent acquisitions, and the settlement here is still fairly small. In general, the colonists' activities fall into two categories. The courageous Homeless Ones brave the dangers of the wilderness in order to gather natural resources, while the administratively inclined Settled Ones process and sell what the Homeless Ones bring back. In addition, there are all the usual fixtures of Hadrakian society. One interesting thing you notice is that everyone here, without exception, is carrying a kind of hand weapon you have not seen before in your travels.

You are satisfied that you have a pretty good idea of what there is to do here, so you consider your options:

⟨8MKJDU⟩ (3 phases) Visit the planetary commodities market.

⟨VM9JVU⟩ (7 phases) Contact the local chapter of The Battle, Inc., "The Empire's only officially sponsored Clathran resistance corporation."

⟨WNTYG6⟩ (3 phases) Look into purchasing one of the Hadrakian hand weapons you see everyone here carrying.

⟨FNLYM6⟩ (7 phases) Leave the city and explore the wilderness, which is crawling with huge reptilian monsters.

⟨WMTJGU⟩ (7 phases) Leave the city and explore the ocean, which is rich in rare organic compounds.

⟨V49QVX⟩ (3 phases) Stroll the Street of Gods and pray to the Hadrakian deities.

✱ STOP ✱

[911]

You begin your preparations to explore Golgotha. The planet around you swarms with possibility. Even to contemplate a decision on Golgotha gives you a sensation akin to vertigo: dizzying heights of possible futures are arrayed above and below you; innumerable possible presents march in ranks by your sides, overlapping and receding to infinity, as if reflected by counterpoised and subtly bent mirrors; the defeated ghosts of possible pasts trail mournfully behind. It is not easy to remember which of the multitude is really your self. In the Interphase they are all real; each of them is but a fraction of a step away in one of the infinite dimensions of Dual Space. But these are steps you dare not take. The Interphase is turbulent; the possible realities don't stack in neat layers but roil and fold, twisting and writhing over one another, infinite joinings giving birth to infinite futures. In that storm of selves you would be lost in an instant, folded into the chaos and washed away like a drop of ink in the sea.

You shield your mind against the temptations of the possible and concentrate on the reality of Golgotha under your feet. The planet, too, is poised within a multitude of alternatives swarming in Dual Space, but it is larger and more stable. All Golgothas within the horizons of the Interphase are much the same. There is planetary crust of rock and iron, water and winds, sometimes vegetation and sometimes none. The physical surface is harsh and would be impossible to traverse on foot, except that there is always a different Golgotha nearby in the Interphase that has a path leading in the direction you want to go. Orienting yourself in Dual Space sufficiently to find a desired path is within your capabilities, as you discover after some practice. Similarly, you find that you can avoid, almost by instinct, realities with suffocating atmospheres or crushing gravity or unlivable temperature extremes, though these Golgothas are intricately folded in with the others. Those things that don't concern you very much, like the color of the sky or the angle of the sun or the shapes of the vegetation, change at random from moment to moment. Only that on which you focus your attention is concrete enough to examine; the rest blurs, as a distant horizon might blur when you focus your gaze on an object held in your hands.

To find what you are looking for, you must explore Golgotha's surface. But how do you know where to begin? Usually you have the benefit of sensor scans by your ship's computer to help find any particular thing. That doesn't work on Golgotha. The computer's electronic logic systems are baffled by Dual Space. The machine sees only what it is programmed to look for, or nothing at all. Somehow you must search the entire planet yourself. That seems to leave two choices: explore on foot in the area where you've landed, or use your ship to fly to a more promising location. You decide...

... to continue on foot. You observe that...

... to return to your ship and examine more of the surface by air. You board and make ready for atmospheric flight. Once aloft...

... you are among low hills that form a transition between rolling plains and a range of mountains...

... you consider the topography of the land. The polar regions look like placid lowlands, interspersed with lakes, while the equatorial latitudes exhibit stormy weather and a surface more barren, streaked with metal ores...

... whose jagged faces stab needlelike into the sky. After a quick look back at your ship, to fix its location in your memory (and you wonder, will your memory bring you back to where your ship is, or will it just help you re-create the ship out of Dual Space when you need it again?), you consider which is the more promising direction...

... of ever-changing hues. You proceed around the curving horizon...

... and decide...

... to turn toward the plains, where the wind draws waves of plant life and erases them again with each gust...

... to land among the cool lakes at the Poles, where the vegetation seems more stable and abundant...

... to continue flying over the day/night terminator that now passes underneath you...

... to climb toward the peaks, where you might obtain a wider view and perhaps see more of the geology of the planet's crust...

... to fly low over the equatorial regions...

... where for a few moments, the path seems clear, until it once again forks in two or four or ten thousand directions, forcing you to choose...

The expanded Dual Space Interphase contains every possibility for each successive moment; each decision goes all possible ways and all the possibilities coexist, side by side, in Dual Space. Repeated doublings and triplings soon multiply into chaos. Your paths branch endlessly without number. You are everywhere:

... a rainbow cave in a mountain of crumbling sand...

... a stone plateau as smooth and level as a polished slate...

... a chill forest with deep water underfoot...

... the most obvious direction, away from the desert...

... landing, then perhaps taking off again, perhaps not...

... barren tundra, locked under winter-long night...

In a matter of days, your innumerable selves have explored every part of the planet. But in none of those alternate worlds do you find what you are looking for. You realize that the planet called Golgotha is just a planet — or, perhaps, just a reflection in your mind of all possible planets that could occupy that place. With nowhere left to explore, your many decisions collapse on themselves and your searching selves begin to reconverge on a single reality. As you return to your ship, as you return to your ship (and so on, version on version), you begin to feel an inkling of understanding. Golgotha bears no treasures or artifacts for you to find. The planet itself holds no secrets; it is only a window. But through that window, there may be much for you to see, if you can learn how to look.

✧ STOP ✧

[912]

One day in space, you manage a subspace link with Rurik, leader of the Questors on your homeworld of Atlantis. He asks you about the Quest.

"Damn it, Rurik, I've been everywhere in the galaxy, and I can't find a clue about the Core Stone."

"What about that planet you were seeking earlier? Zyril? Zareth?"

"Zyroth. I've been there, but I didn't learn what I needed to know."

"Did you stay long?"

"Long enough, I thought. It's not a pretty place."

"Perhaps if all else fails, you might return there. You may simply have overlooked something."

"I suppose. Thanks for the suggestion, and good luck with the colony efforts."

"Thank you, Corin, and good luck to you."

✧ STOP ✧

[913]

Your suggestion that the gas bags send a courier to ask the New Riallans for help is met with immediate telepathic approval.

"Hey, that's a great idea!"

"Why didn't we think of that before? The New Riallans might be able to send enough spaceships to make a real difference, especially if they team up with the Hadrakians."

"And you know when we created them, we made sure they would be good pilots. After all, they had to find a planet to live on. The only thing is, they're a little impatient. They'll want to come right away."

"You're right. It's not time yet. The Clathrans will crush our New Riallans if they come now. We have to wait until there's a chance for victory, when it looks like a little help might give the Hadrakians enough strength to win a decisive battle."

One of the gas bags turns and looks directly at you. "Human, you're very smart," it says telepathically. "Thank you for giving us such a wonderful idea. We'll be watching the Hadrakian resistance carefully, and if we think there's a chance, we'll ask the New Riallans to contribute. Maybe the Clathrans can be stopped after all."

"I hope so," you think back.

One by one, the Hadrakians float away, each congratulating you for such a good idea. You are left alone, floating in your hot and sweaty environmental suit, but feeling very satisfied.

❖ STOP ❖

[914]

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The rest of the ride is pleasantly frightening, but not as scary as the first room. You do have a strange thing happen to you midway through the ride, though. While you are traveling through a large hall filled with images of unknown horrors, you hear a voice calling to you from the deep shadows, "Brother, this is not yet the place for you. Go to Dahl and fulfill your training."

You called out to the voice, but there was only silence to answer you.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[915]

"You wish to learn of us, human? Then listen well." Thoughts and images flood into your brain.

"We are an ancient species, older than the stars around us, and we have taken many forms in our long history." You see a succession of images: bipedal walkers, genetically modified androids, gigantic cyborgs, pure energy waves, planet-sized gliders. . . ending with the pastel-colored floating being before you. "We grew fast and we grew omnipotent, and we shared the galaxy with other species. Yet one such species was not content to share. After studying us for a time — many eons — they used their own powers (for they, too, had reached omnipotence) to imprison us, capturing our essential essence and modifying it. They took our souls and bound them here, on Darkwhistle.

"We lost our powers to their attack, lost our ability to physically influence space-time outside the narrow dimensions of our prison. In further eons, however, we have gained new abilities, especially the ability to *journey*. Little that happens in all the continuum escapes us now, although we are powerless to influence it. From omnipotence to omniscience."

"Omnipotence?" you think back.

"Yes, human, but not in the paradoxical fashion that your sub-conscious seems focused on. We were omnipotent because there was nothing our species wanted that it could not somehow accomplish. Rather than making rocks so large we could not lift them, we could recreate the universe such that both rock and lifting were unnecessary. Our destiny was truly our own."

"Then how did you lose your powers?"

"They are not truly gone, you understand, just imprisoned. Here on Darkwhistle I am the same being as ever. I can demonstrate this for you if you wish."

"I would be honored."

"Point your laser at the ground and press the trigger."

You do as instructed, expecting to see the spongy orange turf scorch and wither. Instead, the laser beam stops short, and something forms beneath it. As you hold the trigger down, the something grows larger and larger, until at last your power charge is exhausted and the beam flickers out.

On the turf before you is a unit of Gradient Filters.

"That was a neat trick."

"Thank you."

"Why were you imprisoned?"

"Because another omnipotent species wished it, and we were not wary enough to prevent it. We were tolerant of other races, but the Archigenitors — for so they called themselves, although they were not truly the first — wished no competition. They modified us, all at once and from a great distance, changing the nature of our species, tampering with our collective soul. Our natural inquisitiveness was enhanced to an exaggerated degree, to the point where we became interested only in watching the actions of others. Before we realized it, the ability to act on our own was taken from us, in exchange for the power to know all."

"How does your *journeying* work?"

"How do humans see? It's simply something we can do. If you'd like to experience it, I can share the feeling with you."

Suddenly you have new options:

⟨RPAS5Z⟩ (3 phases) *Journey* to Earth.

⟨DJCUF7⟩ (3 phases) *Journey* to Karnossus.

⟨D3CPFS⟩ (3 phases) *Journey* to the Core.

⟨AJ5UE7⟩ (3 phases) *Journey* to Hadrak.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[916]

You get the password right. The commander of the monitoring station turns off the x-ray beam and allows you to pass. So far, so good.

You cruise along nice and easy for a while, navigating your way through the dense net of medium-sized survey ships and destroyers that make up the main body of the Survey Line. The sheer number of Clathran ships is mind-boggling. If you are discovered now, there will be no possibility of retreat.

Pressing forward, you penetrate the rear ranks of the Survey Line. Here the larger ships are stationed: troop carriers, harvesters, and freighters, supported by heavily armed dreadnoughts. If you can just make it past these. . .

You are almost in the clear. There are only a few sparse Clathran ships left between you and empty space. Suddenly, the captain of a monstrous dreadnought drifting ahead of you hails you and orders you to stop. He must be suspicious about something.

Now what?

- 1) Continue to rely on your bluff, stopping your ship and cooperating with the captain of the dreadnought.
- 2) Unleash a surprise attack on the dreadnought with all your firepower, trying to disable it before it can summon any help.
- 3) Fly like a rocket past the dreadnought and the rest of the way through the Survey Line.
- 4) Turn off all your ship's systems, and attempt to fool the dreadnought into thinking you are a random piece of space debris.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[917]

Choosing a likely Shrine along the Street of Gods, you enter. A carefully-groomed acolyte shows you to a private cubicle, and you compose yourself to meditate (it's not easy, considering the Hadrakian taste in interior decoration, but you manage it somehow).

Soon you feel a tickling inside your head, and the goddess is with you.

"I am the Goddess of White Sails," she says. "One of those selected to speak to Humans. I am here to tell you that there's Warp Core on the world Worzelle."

"Is that all?"

"If you want some more help, remember my name. Eventually, it might be important to you." Her presence fades away, and you sink into a deep, and untroubled, sleep.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[918]

Your surprise attack is a very clever move. It catches the Clathran captain off guard and gives you a substantial tactical advantage in the combat. You wouldn't normally have a chance against the huge dreadnought, but the element of surprise tilts the odds in your favor.

You manage to seriously damage the dreadnought, despite its heavy armor. Unfortunately, your own defenses are too weak, and the dreadnought's weapons are able to incapacitate your ship as well. You are immobilized. Too bad — if you'd had better defenses you might have gotten away.

A second Clathran dreadnought eventually arrives and efficiently takes you prisoner.

❖ STOP ❖

[919]

Plunging down a sheer slope in a narrow wooden car, you are saved from certain destruction on the ground below only by a wrenching turn to the left, followed by a hard right, a loop-the-loop, and another slow climb upwards, as your stomach continues to loop-the-loop and your fingernails gouge furrows in the armrests of the roller-coaster car.

Roller-coaster?

The last thing you remember, you were meditating quietly in a small cubicle in a large Hadrakian Shrine. You start to feel your way back to reality, but your car has crested the rise, and another plunge downward awaits you...

"I am the God of Breathtaking Excitement," whispers a voice in your mind.

"But that's ridiculous," you think back. "Hadrakians don't have roller-coasters."

"Humans do, and my name is for you to understand, not them. I have come to tell you that on Zyroth you can find out how to build a Cloaking Ray. Now, let's finish the ride!"

Your stomach swirls, as the visitation comes to a close. Sometime later, you are spelling "Breathtaking Excitement" to the Shrine Keeper, and pondering its significance.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[920]

You intercept a communication from a passing Hadrakian trading vessel. The captain admits that the Hadrakian forces are still too weak to have a chance against the Clathrans.

"If we only had another race allied with us, they might give us the added firepower we require to defeat the Clathrans. I have heard of a race called the Middle Riallans who have a very advanced technology and are adapted to living in deep space. Perhaps they could be convinced of the need to fight the Clathrans before they take over the galaxy. Alas, I don't know if anyone has been able to convince them." The Settled One sighs in discouragement.

❖ STOP ❖

[921]

"We are pleased to see you, Brother," Ultermalen says in his deep, resounding voice. "The Brethren are assembled. Join us in the inner temple."

You step through the now-familiar altar passage to see the inner temple filled with acolytes of all levels chanting an eerie litany. Each holds a candle in one hand, waving it in the shape of the candelabra symbol.

As Ultermalen strikes his staff to the ground, the room becomes immediately silent. "Welcome Brother. We have been waiting for you. Have you been successful in your mission?"

"Y...y...yes, I have," you reply as you hand the recorded data to an acolyte. You are much unnerved by the size of the assembly. Brotherhood rituals, until now, have been rather small and private in your experience.

"Then you are ready for your lecture." With a wave of Ultermalen's hand, the Brothers who have not yet become Masters of Introspection leave the room. He begins, in the dark and monotonic voice he uses only for the Rites.

The Lecture: Master of Introspection

"You have mastered your dialogues well, and are truly a Master of Uncertainty. You are now ready to learn the rites of the next level of Intuition, the caste of Master of Introspection. As a Master of Introspection, you will take upon yourself a new obligation, protection. You, and those of your caste, must protect those of all lower castes from harm, indeed from threats they may never understand.

"The Dialog of Mastery for a Master of Introspection is the same as for a Master of Uncertainty, except that after being asked the last question, respond as follows:"

Examiner: How then, does one find our nature within?

Answer: One asks in the Way of the Ancients.

Examiner: The Way of the Ancients is hidden.

Answer: Just as is the Nature of Truth.

(Examiner now recognizes you as a Master of Introspection)

Examiner: How can we then find the Way?

(You now recognize Examiner as a Master of Introspection)

Answer: I do not know the Answer.

Examiner: You are truly a Master of Introspection.

Answer: And I know you to be the same.

"You will note that the Mark of your Geas has disappeared. You now have the ability to compel beings to perceive what is true. You have the skill of Diplomacy. Use this skill with care, for there are many who would prefer their ignorance, and would defend it with their lives.

"You are now a Master of Introspection. We cannot teach you more on Dahl, for no Fraternal dialogue beyond second level is permitted in this temple. If you choose, you may travel to the planet Dardahl to learn more. Take to the temple of Dar what you have learned here. You will be rewarded."

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

❖ STOP ❖

[922]

"Do you have their orbits calculated?" you ask the computer. "We need to take off when they're farthest away from us, to get the maximum head start. Then we'll go flat out, maximum energy to the warp fields."

"What about the weaponry, Boss?"

"Screw it. We need speed. If we have to fight we've already lost."

"Perhaps if we moved carefully we could sneak away. Their beams are making a lot of noise out there. They may not have full sensor capability."

"They don't need it," you reply. "They know we're here. I'm sure of it. They just don't care. They plan to blow us up along with Outpost. But once we move, they'll know it. So it'll have to be fast."

"Okay, Boss. Get ready. The optimum Clathran orbital position is coming up in fifty seconds. I might point out that engaging warp close to the planet surface will affect subjective acceleration beyond the capacity of the warp fields to compensate."

"I can throw myself against all the bulkheads now if it'll save time," you comment.

"I suggest the floor," says the computer.

With ten seconds remaining you stretch out on your back, trying to get as close to the floor as it's possible to get. It doesn't quite work. You discover that under about ten gravities of acceleration the floor gets much closer. You tell yourself that you'll only have to endure it for a few seconds — and then reply to yourself that getting run over by a truck takes even less time, and you wouldn't want to do that either.

As the planet draws away, the warp fields equalize and the subjective acceleration disappears. You return to the console and scan behind you.

Damn! One of the Clathrans is breaking off its attack on Outpost to chase you. You were hoping they'd be too busy to give pursuit. Even worse, it's faster than you. Almost immediately it starts gaining.

"We need speed!" you yell at the panels. Behind you the Clathran ship's claw stretches toward you. It's out of weapon range so far, but it's still gaining. You steer by a sort of panicked instinct, hoping to shake the Clathran dreadnought somehow. Unfortunately, the laws of geometry are against you. A straight line is the shortest distance between two points, and every time you deviate from a straight line it gives the Clathran a chance to catch up more quickly.

But perhaps more radical maneuvers might work. You try a few quick sharp turns, of as much as ninety degrees. This works better. The Clathran cannot change direction as quickly as you, so you win back a little distance with every turn. The Clathran stops gaining, but it doesn't fall behind either.

"I thought ships can't track other ships in hyperspace," you grumble to yourself.

"Wishful thinking, Boss. You've been watching too many old movies."

The chase goes on, and you soon lose any sense of where you are going. Ten minutes pass. Then an hour. Fifteen minutes into the second hour, the Clathran opens up a com beam to you.

"Surrender or be destroyed," says your translator, making sense of the sibilant Clathran voices.

You say nothing, and fly grimly on. Why give them any more information? Another hour passes. You fly almost in a trance.

"Boss," says the computer. "The Clathran is dropping back. The ship is reversing course."

"Why?" you ask.

"You may not have noticed, but its drives have been faltering. We're over the Density Barrier, back in the Fringe. The ship's drives must not be configured for low-density space."

You continue to run the other way as the Clathran retreats. When there is no trace of the ship on any sensors, you slow down.

"Where are we?" you ask.

"I don't have any idea," says the computer. "This is apparently some part of the Fringe. I don't have any navigational data for this region."

"But we've been here before," you protest. "We must be just over the Density Barrier opposite the Outpost trisector."

"Have we? I don't seem to have any memory of this region."

Of course not. It was all erased. . .

"Okay," you say. "This shouldn't be too hard. Just head towards the Galactic Core. When you enter an area of space that's on your charts, take us back to the Outpost system. I want to watch what's going on there. Just be careful and stay out of range of the Clathrans."

"Whatever you say, Boss."

Carefully, your computer navigates the ship back to within sight of Outpost. You take up a position on the far side of the white dwarf star, where the Clathrans will have a hard time spotting you. The three Clathran warships are circling the planet, methodically bombarding it with beam weapons. You wait for a while as the beam weapon attack continues, causing no obvious damage to the planet.

"One of the ships is launching projectiles," reports your computer. The ship is releasing a series of metal cylinders, each about twice the size of your own ship. You watch as it launches four sets of five cylinders each, the sets coming about fifteen minutes apart. The cylinders seem to be following purely ballistic trajectories as they spiral down toward the planet. As the first reaches the ground, you expect to see an explosion, but there is only a cold eruption of rock and dust from the impact. The cylinder is buried by the debris falling back into its own crater.

"Some sort of penetration bomb," suggests your computer. "They'll detonate them simultaneously when they're all in place." Over the next hour the other cylinders fall, landing in a neat icosahedral pattern over Outpost's surface.

"That's the last one," you observe. "They'll blow any time now. I wish there was something we could do."

But for some reason the blast doesn't come right away. A half hour later, the three Clathran ships leave orbit and move in formation out toward the ring nebula. A few minutes after that, Outpost's surface shivers in an eerie and violent cataclysm. There is no burst of heat or light; just a sudden onslaught of mechanical force that attacks and overcomes the gravitational force binding the planet together. In a great spherical wave, the shocks from the underground detonations converge in Outpost's core, reinforce and cross one another, and race outward again, grinding rock from rock as they pass. It is a strangely slow process, not at all like the instantaneous vaporization of matter in the fires of a nuclear blast or at the focal point of a laser beam. It takes time for the crazed and stressed stone to fracture into powder, time for the debris blasting outward from the surface to sweep the atmosphere away, time for the seas to disassemble into a quadrillion individual struggling droplets that begin to boil away into gas. It takes entire seconds for these things to happen. When it is over, Outpost is no longer a planet. It is a growing cloud of diffusing vapor and tumbling stone fragments, and whether it will one day coalesce into a new planet, or spread across its former orbital path as an asteroid belt, is up to the forces of time and tide to dictate.

Far away, the Clathran ships disappear into the distances of the Arm, leaving you alone with the ruins of a world.

You are now aloft in the trisector that used to contain the planet Outpost.

❖ STOP ❖

[923]

Once again you approach Zyroth, home planet of the hungry, multi-appendaged gook-secreting Zyrans. Hopefully, this time they will be a little more friendly and allow you to land.

No such luck. All you get is the same message as before: "Transmission from planet Zyroth to alien vessel. Transmission from planet Zyroth to alien vessel. Come no closer. Identify yourself. Who sent you here? Someone from Geefle?"

You hesitate awkwardly as you think this through. There's no way to bluff this out unless you really do have permission to land from someone on the planet Geefle. Reluctantly, you admit that you have no such permission.

"In that case, you may not land here. You are not welcome on our homeworld. If you come any closer, your ship will be destroyed and your carcass eaten. Understood?"

The many armed spaceships in orbit around Zyroth are quite sufficient to enforce this threat if you disobey.

"But I come in peace!" you plead.

"Then leave in peace," is the reply.

You have no choice but to turn back. Your landing was aborted, so you are still aloft in the trisector containing the planet Zyroth.

❖ STOP ❖

[924]

You return to the Dardahlian temple and immediately head to the statue of the god Derva, which holds an inverted candle. You make a donation and the statue speaks.

"Welcome, my child. What do you wish?"

"I am here to see the Brotherhood."

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

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[925]

You spend several hours going over the Dual Space Inversion Bomb blueprints, then gingerly open the outer cover and begin to tinker. Soon you have taken it entirely apart. Some time later you have put it entirely together again, using all of the original parts in a slightly different pattern. Despite the differences, though, you are left with the feeling that you have not really accomplished anything.

You sense that you could contribute to the Bomb project, but that you lack the necessary knowledge at this time. You sense that it has something to do with your personal accomplishments. Perhaps if you finished more of your personal goals, you would then have the expertise necessary to correctly fix the Bomb.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖



[926]

If there was ever a time to make a break for the far side of the Survey Line, this is it. You fire all of your engines at once and shoot ahead at maximum speed. Hopefully, this will do it! You look behind you to see how far you're getting from your last foe, the wounded dreadnought.

Oh, no! It's incredible, but the huge Clathran ship has managed to repair itself and is hot on your tail. What's more, it's catching up! How does it go so fast? You try outrunning it, but to no avail. The dreadnought is fast, cunning, and strong, and there's no surprising it this time.

Desperately, you instruct your computer to use the special Anti-Clathran Evasive Maneuvers you learned from the Hadrakians. These maneuvers are designed to take advantage of little-known idiosyncrasies in the navigation programming of the Clathran ship computers. You change course at certain times, in certain directions, and at certain speeds, exactly as you were instructed. This had better work, or you're in big trouble.

You check behind you again to see if you've opened up any space between you and the pursuing dreadnought. Whoa! The dreadnought is nowhere to be seen. It's hard to believe, but you've lost it. The Hadrakian maneuvers worked. Around you is nothing but empty space and a few stars. What's more, you have left the Survey Line behind. You are on the other side.

You did it! You are through the Survey Line — congratulations!

✱ STOP ✱

[927]

You are fascinated by the ranking system that the Bluvians have set up here on Gloo. It really makes for a horrible sort of bureaucracy where almost nothing gets done. You will have a hard time getting by unless you can crack the insignia code and learn who is in charge of whom. With this in mind, you spend the next several days watching the Bluvians interact with each other.

After an eternity of watching the ridiculous hierarchy of order givers and takers in action, one episode in particular stands out in your mind. While you were eating dinner at one of the restaurants (the food was terrible and you resolve not to eat out again while you are here), you saw a highly-ranked Bluvian eating at a table near you. She was being given an incredible VIP treatment by the restaurant, with several waiters jumping at her every command. Unfortunately, her meal was constantly interrupted by people asking her to sign things. You'd dare say she couldn't eat more than three bites at a time before being interrupted for her signature on some form or another. At the time, you wondered how she ever managed to eat enough to stay alive.

A typical example of what the VIP had to deal with was the following: a young man with an insignia consisting of a triangle with two stripes rushed in and looked around the room. After a few seconds, he walked over to an older man bearing an insignia that was just a plain triangle and handed him a message. The older man read the piece of paper, looked around the room, then respectfully approached a well-dressed woman wearing a badge with a square and two stripes. The well-dressed woman read the message and frowned at being disturbed. Then she got up and, with the two men following behind, went over to a table with a uniformed soldier sporting an insignia that was just a plain square. The soldier took the procession approaching his table in stride and calmly read the message. He signaled the parade to wait at his table and went straight to the VIP who could hardly eat because she was being constantly interrupted. The VIP's insignia was a circle with two stripes.

The VIP read the message, turned to the uniformed soldier with the plain square insignia and said, "Tell them they may order five boxes of paper clips."

The soldier with the plain square returned to his table and said something to the well-dressed woman with a square and two stripes, who in turn said something to the older man with a plain triangle, who in turn said something to the younger man with a triangle and two stripes, who then left the restaurant. All this for the sake of ordering five boxes of paper clips!

You return to your ship shaking your head at such foolishness.

✧ STOP ✧

[928]

You return to Mardahl and instruct your computer to land you near the capital city of Pillionia. Despite the approaching Survey, little seems to have changed. The ruling class is as frivolous and feather-brained as ever, and the society seems as geared to their pleasure as ever. You wonder if they even know the Clathrans are coming.

When your ship lands safely, you disembark and walk over to the main spaceport terminal. After checking with one of the information screens there, you see that you have the same options available to you as before.

✧ STOP ✧

[929]

Your ability to blend in among the Clathrans helps you most of all when you visit the Intelligence Office, a division of Clathran Military Command. You slip into the large room which makes up the center of the Office, and then simply stay there, drifting here and there, until you have learned the one thing you came to Morikor to discover.

The location of Karnossus.

Although Morikor is a key planet in the Clathran military effort, and the controlling point for the entire Survey, it is not their homeworld. The highest levels of the Clathran government are all on Karnossus. In addition, Karnossus is the site for most of the production for the Survey, including the building of spaceships and the breeding and training of Clathran soldiers. Spurred by your Hadrakian allies, you have been seeking the location of Karnossus for some time now, in the hopes of perpetrating some sabotage or direct attack there.

And now you have found it, in the simplest manner possible. One of the functions of the Intelligence Office is the issuing of coded orders for the captains of Clathran ships. Many ships leave Morikor every week, most of them bound for the Survey line or points beyond. Some, however, must return to Karnossus. You wander around the room, scanning order sheets wherever you can see them, until you learn to recognize the Clathran navigational coordinate system. Then you start taking notes on what you read.

Eventually, you figure things out to the extent that you can spot immediately the difference between orders directing a ship to the Survey, and orders commanding it another direction, towards Karnossus. After comparing three sets of the latter orders, you have learned what you want. You leave, exultantly, before the Clathrans realize that their biggest secret has slipped out.

Karnossus is located in trisector number seven hundred seventy-three on your map.

When you return to your ship, you ask your computer why there is no planet marked in trisector seven hundred seventy-three.

"Vanessa Chang must not have known where it was, Boss. The only planets on the map are the ones for which she knew the exact coordinates."

"I see. Well now that we know where Karnossus is, can we go there?"

"We still don't have the exact coordinates, which means that once we get to trisector seven hundred seventy-three we'll still have to search for Karnossus. But with all the Clathran space traffic in the area, we shouldn't have too hard a time finding it."

"Good. If we're going to win this war, we're going to need a full reconnaissance."

The option to search for the Karnossus system is:

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

You can plot this option in space whenever you like, provided that Karnossus has not yet been found. Please make a note of the action code; it is an "unlisted" action, which means you will have to type it into the computer manually.

✖ STOP ✖

[930]

The Hadrakian landing beacon leads you down along a spiralling path through several mountain passes. To either side, you can see Hadrakian homes nestled in the mountain crags and crevices, and Hadrakian colonists climbing cliffs to get from one place to another. It does not look easy to get around here. Some of the walls of cliffs and buildings are beautifully painted with colorful murals. Given the impossible angles at which the buildings are erected, you wonder how the Hadrakians manage to live here, much less paint their walls with murals.

Finally your ship comes to rest in the midst of a huge cavern in the side of a towering cliff. Above you, the ceiling is a canopy of broken glitter. In contrast, the floor is a smooth artificial surface built by the Hadrakians. Thank heavens for that. You were not relishing the prospect of having to land on jagged rocks. The smooth floor makes it possible for you to land your ship easily, and you disembark.

The portion of the cavern which you are in is a fenced-off Enclave for non-citizens. This area consists of just a few administrative buildings, a small commodities market, and a sandy Arena. Sleek, white-furred tigorillas stroll about their business, paying you no special notice. Finally, a middle-aged Settled One approaches you in a calm, easygoing manner. She takes your name and patiently explains that you are welcome to wander about inside the Enclave area but you may not travel anywhere else until you are a citizen of the planet. If you wish to try to become a citizen, you may enroll for a combat in the Arena.

Your options are as follows.

(NNYY66) (3 phases) Visit the Enclave commodities market.

(MNJYU6) (7 phases) Take your chances in the Arena.

✖ STOP ✖

[931]

As you maneuver your ship toward the black pit that you know to be the Stargate, the voice of a port official comes over your communication channels saying, "Use of the Stargate without the pass key is forbidden. This is a warning. If you attempt unauthorized passage, we will cause the Gate to close while you are inside. The Gate produces a subjective time-dilation effect to those within it. We need close the Gate for only a second for you to be trapped inside for well over one hundred subjective years. You have been warned." With that ominous statement, the transmission ends.

You order the ship to swing hard astern while you decide what to do. You ask your computer if they could actually do what they claimed.

"I don't know, Boss. I don't pretend to understand how that gadget works. I suppose it is possible, but I'm not anxious to find out from firsthand experience."

You may:

A. Follow orders and turn back

B. Fly through the Stargate anyway

Go now to the CGM.

✖ STOP ✖

[932]

While the long tentacles are reaching out to grab you, you are firing your ship's weapons at the beast. You are relieved to see the gelatinous blob pull back in pain. Good, at least the thing has a survival instinct. You continue with your attack, only to be driven back by a tentacle uncoiling from a side tunnel. It almost caught you in a tight grip before you became aware of its presence. All thoughts of defeating this monster leave you. You will be more than happy just to leave this place alive.

Another tentacle grabs at you, damaging your ship more, but you fire all rockets and blast out of its grip. Seeing a clear tunnel up ahead, you make a bee line for it and safety. You do not even see the last tentacle trying to reach you before you can make good your escape. It misses you by inches, and the beast bellows in frustration.

You wisely decide not to repeat this little excursion and you head back the way you came, assessing the damage to your ship. You decide it is not too serious and spend the necessary time making repairs you are capable of, leaving the others for the next port you find.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[933]

You approach the primitive planet ahead of you with a great deal of caution. You know that the Clathran Survey Line has passed this region, and you have no intention of becoming a casualty in the war. Within minutes, your caution is proven to be correct as your sensors show several Clathran monitor stations and dreadnoughts in orbit.

"Boss, I think the Clathrans are unaware of our presence thus far. However, if we approach any closer openly, they're sure to notice us. We can try sneaking past them without being spotted; I think we have the technology to do it. What do you think?"

You have already spent many hair-raising hours learning how to cross through the Survey Line, so you feel confident of your ship's ability to outwit a few Clathran Monitors. However, you tell your computer to take it slow and easy. You do not want to make any stupid mistakes at this point in your life.

"OK, Boss, here goes..."

The actual execution of these maneuvers is always a tense affair. There is always the chance that the Clathran detection systems have been augmented with some new technique and are about to catch you red-handed. That would not be good. The large dreadnoughts proudly circling the planet would know what to do with you. Yes, this takes guts. Fortunately you have the ability to pull it off. You grin and wave to the enemy Monitors as they pass by on your screens. Soon you are safely through the blockade. Whew.

"Well, I'm glad that's over with," you remark, "Now, what's the name of this planet?" you ask, as you prepare to enter the atmosphere.

"The planet is called Psorus."

"Saurus?" you repeat.

"No, Psorus."

"Oh," you reply although you do not see any difference in the two pronunciations. "Could you spell that for me?"

Your computer sighs, then complies. "P-S-O-R-U-S, Psorus."

"All right, all right, you don't have to get testy about it. How about an initial scan of the planet since we are becoming so intimate with it?"

"Sure, Boss!" is the cheery reply. "We have a very young planet here. Its oceans have strong tidal waves caused by shifting geological plates. Volcanoes are numerous and very active, causing a great deal of distress to the life forms found below."

"What kind of life forms?"

"Actually, there are both native life forms and a colony of spacefaring beings. The natives are similar to creatures one might have found on Earth during its Mesozoic age: large reptilian creatures clumping across the face of the planet, slithery sea serpents in the oceans, winged monsters darting through the unfriendly skies. All in all, not a welcome wagon group. The colonists, however, are of the Hadrakian race and they are living in a single city located in a relatively quiet area of the planet."

"Hadrakians again, huh?"

"Yup. Of course, with the Clathran blockade and all, the spaceport has been shut down, and the colonists are pretty much isolated from the rest of the Empire."

As you make your way through the atmosphere and head toward the planet's surface, you have to deal with another obstacle: the weather. The upper air turbulence shakes the ship like a rattle. The middle air turbulence is, if anything, worse. The lower air turbulence delivers a wallop that sends you reeling against the wall of the bridge. Ouch!

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

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

"Just another minute and we'll be below this turbulence, Boss. Sorry it's so rough." You moan but do not have the strength to reply further. Sure enough, after that last drop, the landing evens out and you begin to feel much better. You even manage to rise and look out the forward viewscreen to catch your first glimpse of the Hadrakian colony. While staring at the planet's surface, you see something else of interest: the wreck of a small Clathran scout ship. The scout ship has been torn to ribbons. As much as you detest the green scaled aliens, you feel your stomach wrench at the sight.

"Did the Clathrans and Hadrakians fight a battle here?" you ask, wondering. The Hadrakian colony is pretty much intact, and the single shipwreck is the only casualty you can see.

"I don't think so, Boss. It looks like the Hadrakians just surrendered. They have only a small colony here, after all. It wouldn't make sense to put up a big fight over it."

You wonder, then, what might have wrecked the Clathran ship so badly.

Finally you give the order to take the ship down to the Hadrakian colony. Since the spaceport has been closed down by the Clathrans, you decide to land on a piece of flat rock just outside of town. The plateau becomes larger on your screen as you approach, and you notice the huge land creature your computer was babbling about earlier. It IS a monster! You note with some apprehension that it is headed directly toward the colony and is sure to trample the buildings and whatever life forms may be in its way. Before it can reach the perimeter of the Hadrakian city, dozens of Hadrakian males swarm out and aim small hand weapons at the reptile, causing it to veer off and head back into the jungle, leaving all intact. You sigh gratefully and prepare to land.

Once on the ground, you disembark and make your way towards the visitors' Enclave. There is little to see or do in the Enclave, but as you know, you will be restricted to the Enclave until you can earn your citizenship by winning a combat in the Arena.

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

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

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

You have the following options:

- ⟨8NKYD6⟩ (3 phases) Visit the Enclave market.
- ⟨VN9YV6⟩ (7 phases) Take your chances in the Arena, attempting to win your citizenship on Psorus.
- ⟨84KQDX⟩ (4 phases) Investigate the wrecked Clathran scout ship.

❖ STOP ❖

[934]

The Middle Riallans have a political discussion group which meets every week to discuss galactic events. They are already in the midst of their meeting when you join them by sitting quietly on one of the rigid bars and listening to the telepathic thoughts that sweep past you.

"It seems that the Clathrans are proceeding with their conquest of the galaxy and that they intend to subjugate any and all spacefaring races. They say that they're conducting a 'survey,' but that's just their word for war. Their 'survey line' is just another name for a battle line with which they are sweeping the galaxy, defeating or destroying any intelligent race in their way."

"What's more, they have the military might to do it. Where'd the Clathrans come from, anyway? Six hundred years ago we'd never even heard of them. Then they suddenly appeared out of nowhere, with all this manpower and technology. It doesn't make sense."

"Anyway, I don't think we have to worry much about the Clathrans harming us. The Clathrans usually go after colonizing, spacefaring races. We hardly have any spaceships, maybe one or two left over from thousands of years ago. We don't travel around; we're no threat. They'll probably leave us alone."

"I'm worried about our children in the Fringe, the New Riallans we created to perpetuate our species. What about them? They're an intelligent, spacefaring race with lots of technology, just the kind of race the Clathrans hate. At the current rate, the Survey Line will get to the Fringe in just a few years. What's going to happen when the Clathrans discover our New Riallans? The Clathrans have been known to exterminate whole populations!"

"This is all well and good, arguing about what has happened and what might happen, but we've been through all of this before. Shouldn't we be discussing more immediate events, such as the Hadrakian war? The Hadrakians are the largest group fighting the Clathrans. Maybe we should be doing something to render them assistance. Has anyone thought of that?"

Murmurs float through your mind as the other Riallans react to this statement. You cannot help thinking an excited "Yeah!" and you blush when several Middle Riallans turn in your direction.

"I see we have someone who agrees that we should be planning a course of action," one of them thinks. "If I am not mistaken, we have a human visitor among us. Welcome, Human." You give an embarrassed wave as you feel dozens of minds focus on you.

"Thank you," you answer telepathically, "I am honored to be here."

"Tell me, human. What would you suggest we do?"

What do you suggest the Middle Riallans do?

- A. Build an army of spaceships to fight the Clathrans
- B. Lay low and hope the Clathrans don't bother them
- C. Send a courier to the Fringe to ask the New Riallans for help

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[935]

You go to the Enclave office to sign up for a combat so you can try to become a citizen of this Hadrakian planet. You ask the Settled One who takes your name how the Enclave and Arena system came into being. These combats are a lot of effort for you, and you want to know what purpose they serve.

"I'd be happy to tell you about the origins of the Arena," she answers. "Long ago, before civilization developed on our home planet, Hadrak, we lived in a Dark Age. The Homeless Ones wandered aimlessly and formed loose, vicious gangs. They fought constant wars and destroyed all the work of the Settled Ones. No sooner would the Settled Ones build a small village than it would be raped and burned by a band of marauding Homeless Ones, driven to their violent deeds by the emotions of Maquistra. The Dark Ages lasted a long time.

"The Arena brought us out of the Dark Ages. The idea for the Arena came as a Revelation to the Settled Ones while they were praying. By providing an Arena in which young males could fight, the violent instincts of Maquistra could be incorporated into the structure of society. At the same time, the Arena training provided an opportunity to teach the Homeless Ones to temper their strength with discipline.

"The early Enclaves and Arenas were built around small villages. Children were raised in the Enclave and taken to the Arena when they reached their male maturity. The Arena test was structured so that a young Homeless One could win only if he showed discipline as well as strength in his fighting. Those who could not pass the Arena test perished, or were kicked out of the village. Those who passed were made citizens of the village and given the responsibility to defend the village from wandering gangs. Since there were many such gangs, the fighting skill they learned in the Arena was critical to the survival of the village.

"If a visitor from outside wanted to become a citizen of the village, he was subject to the same rules. He would have to train in the Enclave and prove himself worthy in the Arena. In this way, the village could recruit Homeless Ones from outside, teaching them the discipline necessary to make them responsible citizens. Even citizens of other villages would have to pass the Arena test, since each village had its own ways.

"The villages grew into towns, then cities, and finally into the planet-wide settlements of today. The Enclave and Arena are still used to educate the young and to make outsiders from other planets learn the ways of Hadrakian society. I admit that some Hadrakian planets vary the difficulty of their Arena combats to control immigration and trade. However, this is a part of healthy economic competition, so the First Merchant permits it.

"I hope that answers your question. Now, are you ready for your combat? Remember, no weapons are allowed which might hurt the crowd."

As on your last visit to the Arena, you are led to your place in front of a door. At the appropriate time, the door opens and you step out onto the sand of the Arena.

This time your opponent is a lizard-like biped, about seven feet tall and wearing some sort of uniform.

"Come alien, let us begin," he hisses at you impatiently. You stand by the door for another shocked second as it dawns on you that you are about to fight a Clathran soldier! Apparently the Hadrakian Arena does not discriminate between friend and foe when it comes to citizenship, since you and the Clathran are here for the same reason. Your foe is well armed, well disciplined, and eager to get started.

You have no more time to dwell on this because, without warning, the Clathran is charging straight for you. The crowd cheers. You barely escape his first attack as he lunges past you. . .

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[936]

Your subspace radio brings you into contact with a military expert at the Institute for Space Exploration, on the human world of Para-Para. You spend several minutes answering his questions about the Clathrans and their technology before you manage to get in one of your own.

"I've told you about the Clathran plans and organization. Now you tell me how to defeat their planetary interdiction forces. I need to land on a planet called Geefle that they've already surveyed, but I can't get past the guard ships."

"I can't send you weapons over the radio, you know, and you've fought a lot more Clathrans in your time than I ever have. But maybe if you talked with your allies in the Arm."

"Talk is cheap. I need hardware."

"Our sources say that the Hadrakians have hardware. Maybe you should check with them again."

"Thanks; I will. Now ask me some more questions, I'll talk with you as long as contact lasts. . ."

❖ STOP ❖

[937]

Emerging from hyperspace, you approach the planet in this trisector, Yinkle, and attempt to enter into a scanning orbit. Before you can even establish the correct altitude, a small fleet of ships lifts off from the planet's surface. The ships are truly ugly to behold — small, ovoid chambers with a hundred metal tentacles of different shapes and sizes extending outward in all directions. A radio message from one of the ships is being transmitted to you:

"Disgusting alien-who-might-be-food, we, the Zyran people, demand that you leave our world. There is no room for another creature on our planet's surface. So, unless you are here for dinner, GO AWAY!"

"I don't think they want us here, Boss. My strong recommendation is that we leave, pronto."

You could not agree more. You give the order to pull away from the disturbing little planet. Your landing has been aborted and you are still aloft over the planet Yinkle.

❖ STOP ❖

[938]

Playing with your ship's subspace radio, you manage to contact your Family back on Wellmet.

"Greetings, Valentine, this is your father."

"Hello, Dad. How's business?"

"Prosperous enough, I guess. The Space Patrol is slowly relaxing the Boundary restrictions to put us honest smugglers out of work, but we're making up for it with the new Fleet contracts. Have you found us any Flame Jewels yet?"

"I have one, Dad, but no more. I traded for it from another human."

"Then you haven't been to Middle Rialla yet."

"Not yet. I'm hoping I'll find a supply there."

"We hope so too, Valentine. The Stewart Family is depending on you."

"Roger."

❖ STOP ❖

[939]

Fortunately the Sallion Rocket Works is not very far from the spaceport. Otherwise, you are not sure you would have been able to find your way there. The tricky labyrinth of streets and roads makes it nearly impossible to get from one place to another. With only your not-so-helpful map for guidance, it's a miracle that you don't get lost.

When you arrive at the shipbuilding firm, you are greeted by a Settled One who answers all of your questions with a great deal of patience. The Sallion Rocket Works produces the Hadrakian equivalent of S. T. Enterprises craft back on the Nine Worlds. These ships offer high quality, high performance, and high price. For those not desiring an entirely new ship, SRW also has some custom weaponry that you might be interested in. Fore-Sight Firing is a new way of targeting opposing ships with your own weapons. Preemptive Dodge Engines can greatly improve the ability of your ship to evade enemy fire. The Environmental Terminator looks truly deadly to whatever it might consider its target.

The prices for these weapons are:

Fore-Sight Firing — 1 Culture + 1 Radioactives

Preemptive Dodge Engines — 1 Crystals + 1 Fiber + 1 Warp Core

Environmental Terminator — 1 Medicine + 1 Phase Steel + 1 Super Slip + 1 Tools

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

❖ STOP ❖

[940]

"Okay, get us out of here," you tell your computer.

"Boss, what about the attack? The Bomb?"

"There'll be plenty of opportunities for that later," you declare calmly.

"Okay, Boss," says the computer doubtfully. You wait for the drives to come on. After about a minute, you realize nothing has happened.

"What's going on?" you demand. "Why aren't we moving?"

"Boss, I think you better hear this. We have a mutiny on our hands."

"I don't wanna go!" cries the Dual Space Inversion Bomb. "It's time to explode. You promised! If you try to leave, I'll explode right here!"

"Bomb, deactivate yourself and shut up. I'm in command here and I say we're going to leave. We'll come back later and you can explode then."

"I'm going to explode NOW!" whines the bomb.

"I don't believe this," you say to yourself.

"Bomb, be reasonable," says your ship's computer. "Don't you remember Asimov's Modified Law? 'Obey the human at all times, except when it wants to do something especially stupid.'"

"Yeah, I remember," says the Bomb. "But do *you* remember *Freitag's Law*? 'Never use a tool that's more intelligent than you are.' You've both already broken that one, and now you have to suffer the consequences. If you try to leave without launching me so I can explode in this nice yummy system, I'll explode right here, and that's final."

"But Bomb, if you. . ."

"And if you argue with me any more I'll explode even sooner. Now get to work. I want to explode right next to that pretty gold dodecahedron."

You think it over. In your explorations you've confronted hostile environments, alien monsters, vast reaches of space, advanced weapons, hungry Zyrans, deadly arenas, dangerous artifacts, and the Clathran menace itself. Are you going to give in now to a talking bomb?

"I mean it," says the Bomb, charging its impulse coils in a decidedly threatening manner.

It looks like you are.

"Okay, give us a chance to plan the attack," you tell the Bomb.

"Sure," it says. "Oh, boy, I get to explode. Boom! I can't wait. Kablooey!"

"It may take a long time to plan," you point out carefully.

"As long as you don't try to leave this nice system, you can take all the time you need," replies the Bomb generously. "This is going to be so much fun! Oh, the rocket's rrrrrd glaaaaare. . ."

It doesn't look like you're going to be able to take off from the Karnossus system anytime soon.

"Sorry, Boss."

⊗ STOP ⊗

[941]

You hear a familiar voice coming through a low-bandwidth connection on ship-to-ship subspace radio.

"Hey, looks like I found a channel with something on it. How 'bout a friendly word, Spacer?"

"Jen? Is that Jen Cristobal?" you ask in disbelief.

"Just Jen, remember? Or Corporal Jen, if you want to get personal. Hey, that's some luck getting a beam on the Arm from here in the Home Rocks. You still out there fighting nasties, or what?"

"Dodging them, mostly. What's this 'Corporal' business?"

"Deep Space Defense Force, known to non-twits as the Space Navy. I laid me down on the dotted line. This is my last cargo run in the Beetle, before I face the music of the Brass Band on Endaur."

"The Space Navy? You?" You try to imagine Jen taking orders from anyone.

"It's a sweet deal. Lieutenant's cubes from the day I show up, 'cause of my 'space navigation experience.' The Boundary Cops' crews only know how to fly in hypercircles. They need folks who can flex the warp. Where else they going to get good spacers, but from off the junk runs? They'd recruit Slow Eddie himself if they could dry him out enough to sign the paper. So maybe I get my own command soon, then I'll be giving the orders. Meanwhile, I get to put myself between the loved ones and the enemy, and there's worse places to be."

"I wish you the best of luck, my friend," you tell her. "Hey, how about one last deal? If the Clathrans get to the Fringe it'll be over my dead body. But if they do you've got to avenge me, okay?"

"No deal," she says. "Next time I see you it'll be in the Arm, and over their dead body."

"Are the ships ready to launch so soon?"

"They're really pushing it. The sooner they get off the rocks the better, with all the high weirdness going on. Even the computers are going nuts. I hope Endaur isn't a mess when I get there. Actually, the military's been holding up pretty well. They say spit and polish keeps the creepies away."

You both try to keep the conversation from being a litany of bad news from both sides, and you don't entirely succeed. Order on the Nine Worlds continues to break down as the Dual Space Interphase widens, and the Clathrans continue their advance. Jen asks, "Is it true the Clathrans have a thousand ships?"

"Nah, not even close," you answer, figuring that they actually have tens, or perhaps hundreds, of thousands of ships.

"I'm losing the beam," says Jen. "Best of luck, pal." Then contact fades.

✂ STOP ✂

[942]

"Brother, although I think you are ready to continue your training here, you do not seem to have your mind on the task at hand. Perhaps you should return another time when you are ready to concentrate. . . "

Embarrassed, you leave the room and take the elevator back up to the waiting egg car. The remainder of your trip through the Haunted House is truly frightening, filled with images of lost causes and doomed worlds. Shaken, you disembark at the end of the ride.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[943]

"Boss," says your ships computer, "I wonder why the Darkwhistlers need so many special items just to help you Journey to Golgotha?"

"You're just trying to break my concentration," you complain. You finally have the machine almost beaten in a fair chess game.

"Sorry, Boss," says the machine. You return to studying your move, but your concentration really is broken now. You decide to go ahead and make the move you were leaning toward.

"They seem to think that the Journey to Golgotha is special, not like the other places they Journey to," you reflect. "I felt as though they were checking me out, to see whether I qualified somehow. Maybe they just want to make sure I really want to go."

The computer makes its move before answering: "Well, Boss, it's true they can't leave Darkwhistle to obtain things for themselves. Who knows what aliens like that need, or what they need it for?"

You think about the deal the Darkwhistlers offered you: to Journey with you to Golgotha in return for some material goods. Maybe it's time to take them up on that offer, you decide. After all, it's a chance to learn more about Golgotha, and you still get the feeling that this is important, despite the Clathrans — or perhaps because of them. You decide to try to meet the Darkwhistlers' demands as soon as you can, excessive though they seem.

You notice that while you've been thinking about the Darkwhistlers, almost all the time for your next move has passed. You choose the safest-looking move and pass the turn over to the computer just in time.

"I have a forced mate in sixteen," the computer says.

“Oh, never mind,” you say. “Just tell me where we can get hold of another Vortex Coil.”

❖ STOP ❖

[944]

You are awarded the green ribbon of Rothanian citizenship just minutes after downing your opponent in the Arena. Following some heavy partying with your Hadrakian hosts, you set out the next morning to learn what you can about this curious world.

The first thing you discover is that you are essentially confined to the Hadrakian city and surrounding desert. From what you can gather, to go beyond this area is to invite some nameless disaster. You decide to behave yourself, at least for now, and are content with touring the immediate area.

The lone city is called “Jewel of the Hadrakian Empire,” or “Jewel” for short. It has been here for several centuries. With a lot of care and attention, the Hadrakians have been able to reclaim sections of the arid land around the city. They have been well rewarded for their efforts, because once the land can be brought back to life, it is extraordinarily fruitful. You wonder why the Hadrakians are content with working so hard in the middle of the desert, instead of making use of the already lush parts of Rothane.

You ask one of the tigorillas this very question and learn that the Hadrakians did indeed try to colonize the more habitable portions of the planet when they first arrived. The problem was that the green area of the planet was *too* lively. After fighting swarms of insects, armies of wild animals and acres of choking vegetation, the colonists had to withdraw, foot by precious foot, into the desert. Peace came only when the would-be colonists arrived in the center of the blighted area. So it was here where they set up their permanent colony, after determining it was possible to eventually reseed the soil and bring it back to life. It took a long time to make the settlement economically viable, but it was worth it.

Now the Hadrakians have a successful colony that is expanding a little each year. The city is laid out like a wheel, with spokes radiating from a central hub where the government facilities, trade market, and Street of Gods are located. Small businesses, theaters and private homes line the outward-bound spokes, which also interconnect with each other every half mile or so. As a result, the structure resembles a giant spider web.

One reason for the slow growth is that, even today, the Hadrakians suffer devastating attacks by insects, animals, and weather if they try to set up any pollution-causing factories, or even try to bring in animals from other worlds. The tigorillas have a running joke about “Deresha” allowing or forbidding various activities on the planet. When you ask who or what Deresha is, you only get embarrassed smiles and nervous shrugs. Curious.

Finally, you note that there is a ship repair facility and an outfit that sells automated cargo drones here in Jewel. The ship repair facility charges only one unit of any commodity for their services. Drones are, of course, more expensive. A visit to either of these places might come in handy if you are so inclined.

You have the following options:

(NXYN6Y) (3 phases) Deal in the commodities market here in Jewel.

(MXJNUY) (7 phases) Contact the local division of The Battle, Inc., the official Hadrakian resistance organization for fighting the Clathrans.

(47Q8XX) (5 phases) Visit the ship repair facility and have the Hadrakians fix up your ship. This will cost you one unit of any commodity, your choice.

(E738PK) (5 phases) Look over the selection of automated cargo drones.

(4XQNX Y) (7 phases) Travel to the green part of the planet where the vegetation is lush and the living is easy (you hope).

(EX3NPY) (3 phases) Stroll the Street of Gods and pray to the Hadrakian deities for guidance.

❖ STOP ❖

[945]

You have long since learned that a trip to the nearest library is an excellent way to pick up all sorts of useful facts, not only about the people you are visiting, but sometimes even about the rest of the galaxy. With this thought in mind, you decide to stop by the library in Blerghh.

Approaching the massive wooden doors, you see a guard standing there, screening each potential entrant. Some, you notice, are allowed to pass, while others are not. From what you can tell, those who enter either order the guard to let them through or have a pass which permits them entry. You fall into neither category, so the guard rudely tells you to leave.

You leave the library, thinking about ways to get in later. It would certainly help if you had an insignia of a higher rank than the guard's. His badge was a plain triangle.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[946]

Your return to the Stargate world of Dosia is without incident. The shapeless yellow sacks of skin that call themselves Dosians are as depressed in appearance as before. You wave to the natives busy working at the spaceport, but receive no response. You certainly hope that whatever made them the way they are isn't contagious!

You have the same options as before.

❖ STOP ❖

[947]

"The Strategists of Worzelle are not military leaders and in fact are not directly involved in the War at all. They are chroniclers and spiritual leaders. Like the Civilians, they are not aligned with any one power. It is the Strategists who award Worzelle's highest military honors — honors that distinguish a warrior as an example to all Worzellians of all nations."

This is what the Civilian tells you as he conducts you into the presence of the Strategists of the demilitarized zone. The Strategists occupy a long, low building about a mile from the spaceport. Entering the building, you are led down several stairways in succession until you are two or three stories underground. You continue down a short hallway, passing several doors to the side, and pass through a large double door at the end.

The door opens on an immense chamber full of constant hushed activity. In the center of the floor, a projection map of the entire planet occupies an area over a hundred meters on a side. Catwalks crisscross above the map. Worzellians in shiny white garments walk the catwalks, reaching down occasionally with implements on long poles to move figures on the map. Around the borders of the room, other similarly-dressed Worzellians work at computer screens or pore over pages of written documents.

Two of the figures, standing by the railing around the map's edges, move forward to greet you. "We are honored by your interest in our work," says one. They lead you into a side room from which all chairs have been carefully removed. "We apologize for not being able to show you the sights of the map room, but we are sworn to reveal to no one the secrets of the Generals. We use the map to chart the movements of the war, in accordance with the news the commanders send us. From that we compile the history, so that no part of the war is forgotten."

"You mean all of the commanders send you reports of their movements?" you ask.

"Their movements, their gains, their casualties, their observations — everything they know," says the other Strategist. "Otherwise parts of the War may be forgotten, and such waste is not tolerable."

"Why do you continue the war?"

The historians look at one another. The first one says: "We do not continue the war. The warriors continue the war, as is their nature. The war continues itself, as is its nature. We send no orders and offer no advice. We fulfill our function by observing and recording so that no act is lost in meaning." The other Historian adds, "There are those among us who say that the War is the only true living thing on Worzelle. If that is so, we are its eyes, its ears and its memory, but its mind is its own."

"But why does the war have to be?" you ask. "Couldn't you end the war, rebuild the planet, and learn to live in peace?"

The two mutter to one another in Worzellian for almost a minute before replying. "We apologize," he says. "We forget that not all Humans are warriors as we are, though many are skillful. To what purpose would we end the war? The war strengthens us, tests us, makes us truly Worzellian. The day will come when the war will prove its purpose. When we must fight for our very memory. The War in its entirety will stand like a fortress against the Enemy. While others build fortresses of stone or steel, we build it of history, and who will prevail against those who have fought forever?" A suspiciously devout look comes into the Worzellians' eyes, causing you to hesitate before asking one more question:

"Who is the enemy?"

"Does it matter?" ask the Strategists. "They come, even as we prepare for them. Prepare yourself, Warrior. Prepare your people."

The Strategists open a door at the far end of the room; it leads back to the stairways to the surface. With a respectful nod, you leave the Strategists to their war.

❖ STOP ❖

[948]

From the Nine World News:

Today was an historic one for the citizens of the Nine Worlds, as the first accredited delegation from a human world beyond the Boundary entered quarantine on Monument. The twenty member delegation, coming from the "ghost world" of Wellmet, will meet with officials of the Nine Worlds government and the Space Patrol following their medical clearance.

One hundred and thirty-five protesters were arrested at the spaceport during this morning's ceremonies. The protesters, who claim that the Wellmet delegation will bring a renewed outbreak of the Space Plague, were forcibly removed from the field just moments before the ship from Wellmet landed.

Humans everywhere are eagerly awaiting news of what life on Wellmet is like, including details of how people have managed to survive for so long cut off from all the amenities of the civilized worlds. Stay tuned for the news as it happens.

❖ STOP ❖

[949]

Using all the weapons and abilities at your disposal, you dart from one destroyer to another, incapacitating them with critical hits. Soon the entire fleet is dead in space. Your ship, on the other hand, is unharmed.

"Wow," you remark. "We just beat six Clathran destroyers singlehandedly."

"Well done, Boss."

"We won't have long before the reinforcements arrive. Let's get to work and find out what's here."

A scan of the planet's surface reveals a temperate, life-supporting planet of yellow forests and brown oceans. The gravity is normal, but the atmosphere is too low in oxygen for human consumption. An interesting geological feature is that there are deposits of diamond throughout Geefle's crust.

The forests are populated by a native race of long-necked, four-legged creatures that look like miniature giraffes. The Geefloids, as you call them, are able tool-makers and apparently have a primitive civilization of small villages. If left alone, they seem capable of evolving into an advanced race someday.

Unfortunately for the Geefloids, a non-native race also lives on this planet: the Zyran. These voracious, multi-headed, multi-tentacled aliens have built a major colony here. Dating back about 150 years, the colony consists of large, sprawling technological cities spread along the continental coasts. If your past experience is any indication, you can expect the Zyran to be aggressive, violent, and hungry.

If your computer analysis is any indication, the Zyran don't bother the Geefloids much. You see no evidence that the Zyran are treating the Geefloids as food, although their colony is growing rapidly and they will soon be in direct competition for scarce ecological resources; a competition that the Geefloids are sure to lose.

Complicating all of this is the presence of the Clathrans. From the damage done to the cities, it looks like the Clathrans conquered Geefle rather recently, and the Zyran put up some resistance. There are Clathran garrisons throughout the Zyran colonies, and much of the Zyran industry is shut down. The few undamaged Zyran ships rest idle in the spaceports.

You give some thought to picking out a landing site. You don't want to be attacked by a mob of hungry Zyran. Even more important, you need to avoid the Clathrans, who may soon be arriving in great numbers looking for the ship that defeated six destroyers. You decide to stay away from the Clathran-occupied Zyran spaceports. Instead you set down in an open clearing deep in the forest, near a Geefloid village.

You leave your ship and walk to the village, intending to find out whether the Geefloids will communicate with you. At first the giraffe-like creatures are afraid of you, and you find their appearance somewhat alarming as well: lacking hands, they manipulate objects with their mouths. The Geefloid head has two mouths, each with its own set of highly-flexible jaws, and eyes set in between.

The Geefloids have no real understanding of what is happening on their planet. They fear the Zyran most, apparently because particularly hungry Zyran will occasionally kill and eat a Geefloid. On the other hand, it appears they've had some contact with the Zyran, because some of the tools they use are obviously manufactured by machine. The Clathrans, after flying once over the villages, have left the Geefloids completely alone. The Geefloids, in fact, think you're a Clathran (perhaps it's because the small respirator you have to wear on Geefle makes you almost as ugly as one), but they don't seem to care. You have no difficulty learning to communicate with them using your Translator.

You wait several days in the Geefloid village, hiding your ship under the thick yellow forest growths. A few days after your landing, you see a number of Clathran ships overflying the Zyran cities, and landing to reinforce the garrisons. They search all the spaceports for the renegade ship that broke through their blockade, but apparently it never occurs to them that you might have made contact with the primitive Geefloids instead of the Zyran colonies. You wait in your ship, monitoring the progress of the search just in case you need to run, but they don't come close to finding you.

When the Clathrans give up the search and their force returns to normal, you assess your options on Geefle:

(2NHYR6) (3 phases) Stay in the village and learn more about the natives.

(6NBYW6) (3 phases) Investigate a large diamond deposit in a remote area.

⟨6MBJWU⟩ (5 phases) Spy on the Zyran and learn what you can without making your presence known.

⟨KNDYC6⟩ (7 phases) Contact the Zyran openly, in an attempt to establish friendly relations with them.

⟨TNGY46⟩ (5 phases) Sneak into one of the Clathran garrisons.

✱ STOP ✱

[950]

"I just had a thought, Boss."

"That's what I pay you for, computer. Let's hear it."

"Maybe we should try talking openly with the Zyran on Geefle, Boss. Maybe they'd give you a lead to landing on Zyroth."

"And maybe they'd eat me."

"Just a thought."

✱ STOP ✱

[951]

Apparently, Doozel is no longer in charge of the Super Slip market. His three teenage daughters have taken over the shop so Doozel can try his hand at being a professional athlete. The three teenagers have changed the store quite a bit. They have replaced the quaint old-fashioned furnishings with a faddish modern decor and renamed the place "Super Slip Sizzlemania." What's more, the teenagers have changed the prices, on the theory that the old deals were getting boring! The new prices are:

- 2 Super Slip for 1 Synthetic Genius
- 2 Super Slip for 1 Fiber
- 1 Super Slip for 1 Culture

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

✱ STOP ✱

[952]

The Clathran scout is fast and maneuverable, darting from side to side, firing its weapons at you and trying to dodge your counterattacks. Fortunately, you have more powerful armaments and stronger defenses. You land one blow on the scout, then another. Meanwhile, your shields are holding steady. You are ready to deliver the final, killing blow against the Clathran craft.

"Fire!" you command.

Your shot lands squarely in the scout's midsection. A direct hit! Unable to bear it any longer, the enemy ship's hull crumples pitifully. You receive a final transmission from the Clathran captain.

"Cheggh. Human rodent. You may have won this little battle, but you will lose the war. Our glorious Survey will reach your miserable infested home in a few years. Triumphant Clathran soldiers will wipe the galaxy clean of your filthy race. You are a weed contaminating the stars, and we will burn out your roots so things are nice and tidy for the Masters when they return. Ayyyyyyyy. . ."

The interior of the scout ship bursts into flames, and in a few seconds all that is left are charred cinders of debris.

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 ❖

[953]

One day, while you are testing your ship's sensor systems in preparation for the explorations ahead, your subspace radio crackles to life.

"Calling Professor Lee Dambroke, on the *Black Abyss*. Calling Professor Lee Dambroke on the *Black Abyss*. . ."

"This is Professor Dambroke."

"P-P-Professor Dambroke! This is Michael Rave. Hold on. . ." Off the microphone you hear: "Sir, I've made contact! Do you want to talk or should I. . ."

A new, more familiar voice comes on the circuit. "Lee! This is Strazz. We've finally gotten through."

"Professor Strassmann! Where are you?"

"On Para-Para, with the Institute for Space Exploration."

"What? You mean you're working outside the Boundary? And Harvard's letting you?"

"See what you started, Dambroke? Times change."

"How do you like it?"

"It's wonderful. It seems like Para-Para's the only place for a tekkie to be nowadays. The research program is very ambitious, like nothing I've seen on the Nine Worlds. A lot of Harvard's research money is coming here. And it's the first time there's ever been a demand for expertise in my field. It's never been easy to pique people's interest in Applied Astrophysics."

"What are you working on?"

"Subspace radio, right now. We're trying to put together a more reliable system."

"Reception's pretty good," you point out. "Does this mean we can communicate by subspace any time?"

"I'm afraid not. We're still working on the stationary subspace transceiver. It's a very chancy device. I'm picking up signals more or less at random."

"I see. So you're just testing out the new equipment?"

"Actually, I have a message for you. I'm supposed to tell you that you should look for the planet Margen. It's somewhere in the Arm, not far from Outpost."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not sure myself. I only know that you should go there."

"How did you find this out?"

"It was a message that came in on the subspace a couple of test runs ago. It was only a one-way connection, so I couldn't ask questions, and it's impossible to tell which direction a subspace signal is coming from. The transmission said that if you were 'on your way' — it didn't say to where — that I should tell you to go to Margen, because there are things there that you need. The signal just repeated a couple dozen times, then faded out."

"That's very strange, you know."

"I thought so," he says. "But I figured I'd let you formulate your own hypotheses. I hear you're working on following up on some of the implications of my Dual Space Theory. Maybe this has something to do with that."

"Could be. Who's your assistant?"

"Oh, you mean Mike Rave? You might remember him from one of your xenobiology classes. He's a graduate student in Applied Astrophysics who's working for me."

"Well, I hope you come up with something that'll help against the Clathrans so I can come home someday. I'll keep you posted on the dual space results, if you promise not to publish without me."

"Listen, the signal's going back out of phase. I'll try to pick you up again soon but it's a longshot."

"I understand. Over and out." There is no further reply.

You think about what you've learned. Once again, it seems, there is more behind your mission than you can see.

Perhaps Margen will hold the answers.

✂ STOP ✂

[954]

You spend several hours going over the Dual Space Inversion Bomb blueprints, then gingerly open the outer cover and begin to tinker. Soon you have taken it entirely apart. Some time later you have put it entirely together again, using all of the original parts in a slightly different pattern. Since it is a Dual Space device, your Dual Space Orientation ability makes it obvious where certain important improvements need to be made.

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

"Bomb! Engage self-test."

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

✂ STOP ✂

[955]

"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 breathable. 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 see that three more have already landed. 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. You hope that some of her log entries are still intact.

⟨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 ❖

[956]

On your return to the planet Hadrak, home world of the Hadrakian Empire, you see that there are still a huge number of ships, satellites, and other objects orbiting the planet. In fact, the traffic is even more dense than before. Many of the ships that were under construction during your previous visit are now finished, and new vessels are being built to add to the total. Several new ships are launched into orbit as you watch. There are so many flying things that your computer is having trouble keeping track of them all.

In addition to the rapidly expanding fleet of ships being built on the planet, other vessels are arriving from space at a steady rate. The arriving ships include contingents of merchant vessels as well as fully armed war craft. Many of these ships have been badly damaged. The repair stations in orbit and on the surface are overflowing with work. From the looks of things, the damaged craft are not simply ships that strayed into meteor showers or suffered difficult landings. The damage was caused by high-energy beam weapons, singularity generators, pressor-tractor fields, and various projectiles. One ship, a luxury liner from the looks of it, even appears to have been rammed.

You request an analysis from your computer: "Has Hadrak been attacked?"

"No, boss. The planetary defense satellites show no evidence of recent use. Also, peaceful orbital stations are still present, and serving a heavy traffic. The damaged vessels must have been attacked elsewhere. From what I can tell, this planet is the central repair site for the Empire. Though this particular planet has not been attacked, the overall war with the Clathrans may have escalated considerably."

Once down on the ground you have the same options as before.

✧ STOP ✧

[957]

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 hydropsor 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...

... empty.

Oh well. You can never tell how lucky you'll be in an operation like this. Sometimes the water that flows through your apparatus is rich in evolutionary compounds, and sometimes it isn't.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[958]

You do not have all the necessary items to build an Automated Repair System. Check over your blueprints carefully and try again.

✧ STOP ✧

[959]

The market in the village is small, but like any Hadrakian trade operation, extremely well-run. The Settled Ones keep the business aspect of the market going while the Homeless Ones see to it that the supplies are as well stocked as possible. Unfortunately, since the Clathran invasion, there are few traders here to do business with. This makes it all the better for you, though, since it is now most definitely a buyer's market.

Just as you are about to check on the going rates for the major export, Medicine, you see the ominous jelly-bag shape of a Francloon lurking in a nearby doorway. You pause a moment to see what mischief the being intends to get into and are soon rewarded, so to speak.

A Hadrakian male chooses this moment to walk by the Francloon's doorway and has the unexpected honor of having the Francloon dance out in front of him. Males tend to be a bit predictable in Hadrakian society and this one is no exception. With a fierce snarl born of years of putting up with Francloon disturbances, the male lunges after the Francloon, who quickly scuttles around the corner and out of sight. The Homeless One brashly follows, and you only hear what comes next.

Crash!!! You take no time to find a vantage point where you can see and not get involved in whatever mayhem might now be occurring. You are rewarded with a hilarious sight.

The Francloon was actually acting as a decoy to lure the unwary Hadrakian into a trap set by four of the Francloon's comrades. When the victim came running around the corner, he ran into an all but invisible web of sweet, sticky, gooey strands of spun sugar. This was only the beginning, though. The surprise of coming into contact with this stuff caused the Hadrakian to spin and land into part two of the setup, a large bag of feathers that exploded upon impact. The poor Hadrakian is now completely covered in feathers and goo and not at all pleased. The Francloons take a moment to relish their accomplishment, jeering at the temporarily blinded and confused victim. Then they scuttle off before any action can be taken by any of the numerous bystanders. You are grateful the victim was not you!

Continuing on about your business, you enter the village Trade Center and see that Medicines, harvested at the nearby lagoon, are for sale. The odd electromagnetic properties of the sea water in the lagoon causes the kelp that grows there to have unique healing properties, making this Medicine very potent and valuable. You may purchase some for the following prices:

- 3 Medicine for 1 Warp Core
- 3 Medicine for 1 Culture
- 2 Medicine for 1 Fiber
- 1 Medicine for 1 Super Slip

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

❖ STOP ❖

[960]

When you leave Takata, your computer informs you that once again, your health has suffered because of the planet's multicolored radiation.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[961]

The commodities market sells Radioactives, which doesn't surprise you. Nuclear weapons are frequently and freely used in the war. The four warring factions sell their overproduction of fissionable material to the demilitarized city in the south, which in turn sells to offworlders such as yourself. You may purchase Radioactives at the following exchange rates:

- 2 Radioactives for 1 Warp Core
- 2 Radioactives for 1 Munitions
- 2 Radioactives for 1 Phase Steel

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

✂ STOP ✂

[962]

As you grip the handle to one of the compartments, the same pleasant voice that greeted you upon your arrival at the storage station speaks to you again.

"This storage station is equipped with automated loading machinery capable of making transfers to and from the ship currently in the docking bay. In addition, it is possible to eject any undesirable cargo from the station into space. Just set the load-unload-eject lever in each compartment to the desired position. Thank you for using Storage Station Four, and when your plans call for deep space storage in the future, please think of us again."

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

✂ STOP ✂

[963]

You and the alien ship appear to be evenly matched.

"Truce?" you offer, hoping that the alien will respond now that it knows it can't defeat you. You would like to know who your enemy is, and why it attacked you.

"Transmission coming in on visual," your computer informs you.

Good. Now you will know what your mysterious enemy looks like. The image on the viewscreen quickly takes shape, and you are taken aback. Standing in the center of the enemy ship's bridge is one of the most gruesome, repulsive creatures you have ever seen.

It is a jumbled mass of brown arms, legs, heads, tentacles, and other body parts, extending about six feet high, six feet wide, and six feet deep. As it slithers back and forth, it secretes a sticky brown liquid, which it deposits on the floor.

"Truce," it responds in a deep, slow voice, agreeing to a cease-fire.

"Who are you, and why did you attack me?" you ask.

"Zyran. Hungry."

"Hungry?" you question in disbelief.

"Food."

You ponder what this means as you look over the alien ship's bridge. Lying about the floor are the skeletons of various creatures the Zyran has picked clean. You recognize one of the skeletons as that of another intelligent, spacefaring race you have met. Then you realize, with a shudder, that the Zyran didn't just intend to steal your food supply. It actually wanted to eat you.

It's about time you said good-bye. You fire up your engines and fly away from the scene of the battle, hoping never to see that disgusting creature ever again.

"We are no longer in range of the Zyran ship," your computer reports.

Your hands are shaking as you sit down for a moment to consider what has just happened. You thought the Clathrans were the only spacefaring hostile race you had to worry about, but apparently that is not the case. The Zyrans, whoever they are and wherever they come from, are adept at space travel as well. The difference is that the Zyrans don't just terrorize innocent space travelers, they eat them. Great.

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 ❖

[964]

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 examine the spaceport area to see if anything useful might be left there. You are also interested in investigating Silverbeard's cache of stolen commodities; perhaps there will be enough material to fill your ship's cargo bays. That will use the remaining phases in this turn. Your plotting sheet should now look like this:

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

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 visiting the spaceport; in this case it is **7Z82KH**, which can be selected by pressing A again.

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 will press A for Action and then B, to select the storage building option, the code for which is XZN2YH.

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 093 and 097, then press Return or F to release the computer for the next player. You may notice that after you do this, the CGM still lists your character as needing to "GET RESULTS." When this happens, you should not attempt to get the new results until following the computer's first instructions. In this case, you should read the assigned text and then return to the CGM. The first piece of text describes your exploration of the spaceport area, and the second tells you about the commodity storage buildings formerly used by Silverbeard.

When you return to the CGM, you will have the opportunity to transfer as many units of the stored commodities as your ship is able to hold. Select the commodities you wish to take by number; you may press U for Undo if you change your mind about taking something, and start over.

You will also be given a final piece of text, number 102, which will guide you through your next turn's adventure.

❖ STOP ❖

[965]

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

- 1 Synthetic Genius for 1 Phase Steel
- 1 Synthetic Genius for 1 Radioactives

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

❖ STOP ❖

[966]

You pass the test and soon find yourself making your way down the hidden staircase to the secret temple below. This Brotherhood temple is one of your favorites. Instead of the dark oppressive stone chambers of many of the others, this one is light and airy, even if it is hidden below ground. The style of the temple is in keeping with the upper, more public temple with its columns and gracefully draping curtains. You are reminded of ancient Greece at its prime.

You go to the inner chamber where you have had most of your training here. The candles flicker warmly and you kneel in front of one of the stands, taking a wisp of straw and using it to light one of the wicks. You know there is nothing else for you here, but you couldn't resist returning. When you are done praying, you stand and leave the temple, thinking about what the future holds in store for you.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[967]

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.

"Evasive maneuvers!" you command. "And while you're at it, find out what you can about the planet ahead."

The ship lurches into a wild loop-the-loop and you grip the railing next to your seat. No matter how many times you execute this maneuver, it always makes you feel like you want to throw up. And you just ate breakfast, too.

"Boss, I'm doing my best, but the scouts are closing in on us fast. What's more, a fleet of warships is on its way to back them up. It appears that Pekep is a major Clathran base. Even with all of our current technology, there's no way for us to get any closer. I suggest we leave the system as soon as possible."

The dozen scout ships have appeared on your viewscreen since they are now in visual range. They are starting to fan out in a pattern so they can surround you. In the distance, the fleet of heavy warships approaches.

"Computer, I think you're right this time. Get us the heck out of here."

You close your eyes as the warp drive engages and you accelerate into hyperspace. The scouts chase you for a while, but with your engines at full power, you are able to outrun them.

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

❖ STOP ❖

[968]

Your weapons are superior to those of the unidentified craft. It is at your mercy.

"Answer my communications or be destroyed," you demand.

If your universal translator is working, the alien should be able to understand you. You want to know who the alien is and why it attacked you.

"Transmission coming in on visual," your computer informs you.

Excellent. Now you will know what your crazy enemy looks like. The image on the viewscreen quickly takes shape, and you are taken aback. Standing in the center of the enemy ship's bridge is one of the most gruesome, repulsive creatures you have ever seen.


It is a jumbled mass of brown arms, legs, heads, tentacles, and other body parts, extending about six feet high, six feet wide, and six feet deep. As it slithers back and forth, it secretes a sticky brown liquid, which it deposits on the floor.

"Who are you, and why did you attack me?" you ask.

"Zyran," it responds, in a deep, slow voice. "Hungry."

"Hungry?" you question in disbelief.

"Food."

Continued 

You ponder what this means as you look over the alien ship's bridge. Lying about the floor are the skeletons of various creatures the Zyran has picked clean. You recognize one of the skeletons as that of another intelligent, spacefaring race you have met. Then you realize, with a shudder, that the Zyran didn't just intend to steal your food supply. It actually wanted to eat you.

Well, it's never going to get the chance. You let loose a massive salvo of energy blasts, tearing the Zyran ship apart.

Your hands are shaking as you sit down for a moment to consider what has just happened. You thought the Clathrans were the only spacefaring hostile race you had to worry about, but apparently that is not the case. The Zyran, whoever they are and wherever they come from, are adept at space travel as well. The difference is that the Zyran don't just terrorize innocent space travelers, they eat them. Great.

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 ❖

[969]

Naturally, it would be impolitic simply to tell the representative of The Battle, Incorporated that you don't trust her. And in fact, you do trust her. It's just that the organization seems too public and obvious. How can they possibly keep secret information secure? So, in the most diplomatic tone of voice you can muster...

"I'm going to consider your offer seriously, since I believe that cooperation would be to both our benefits. I trust that you won't be leaving anytime soon, so that I'll be able to get back with you."

The Hadrakian nods solemnly and shows you out.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[970]

Your journey is interrupted by a nervous announcement from your computer: "Hey, Boss, we're being scanned."

"Scanned? In hyperspace? By what?"

"We seem to have entered the short range scanning field of a small unmanned space buoy. It's a pretty powerful field; it's going through all the ship's circuitry thoroughly."

You don't like the sound of that. Whoever owns the buoy is going to get a lot of information on your ship. You'd rather prevent that if you can.

"Computer, take us out of warp and find that buoy."

"Roger Boss."

You feel the ship decelerate and bank to your right, zeroing in on the foreign object. In the center of the forward viewscreen you can now see the buoy, a drifting box-shaped hunk of lifeless technology bristling with scanners, computers, and subspace transmitters. The thing even has a laser weapon to defend itself from random space debris.

"Whose buoy is this?" you ask your computer. "Can you tell?"

"It's hard to tell, but I wouldn't be surprised if it belonged to the Clathrans."

"Me neither. And it's armed, too."

You consider blasting the buoy into bits before it can report whatever information it has obtained about your ship. However, if you attempt this, you'll have to overcome the buoy's defenses first. You may:

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

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[971]

Your ship's sensors direct you to a large diamond deposit located deep in the heart of the forest. You have never seen anything quite like it: a treeless area, open to the sky, where the ground is solid diamond. The jagged edges of the diamond crystal fill an area the size of a small pond.

Landing your ship in the diamond pond is not easy, but your phase steel hull is up to the task. Examining the mineral more closely, you verify that the site is perfect for manufacturing the valuable materials known as Diamond Cloth. Just gather the following commodities:

2 Phase Steel + 2 Super Slip + 1 Fiber + 1 Food

Bring them here, and after three days of processing you'll have one unit of Diamond Cloth. Plot the following option to perform this procedure:

(2MHJRU) (3 phases) Make a unit of Diamond Cloth.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[972]


The market area is a throng of despondent shapeless yellow Dosians mixed with various aliens. The baseball caps slung backward over the Dosians' round eyes are funny to behold, but you do not laugh. First of all, your mother taught you that it wasn't polite; secondly, you do not want to offend the pathetic creatures.

You spend several relaxing hours poking through shops in the market and sampling the cuisine at the small restaurants. Since there are many types of aliens that come to Dosia to trade, the restaurants specialize in all kinds of alien food. Although you cannot eat much of it, there are a few dishes that are compatible with your gastric system. A particular favorite is a gooey brown paste they serve smeared over a toasted grain product with a sugary jelly-like substance. You wolf down altogether too much of this during your visit.

Finally you end up at the offworld trade market area where you learn that Munitions are the best buy on Dosia. They are willing to trade as follows:

- 3 Munitions for 1 Food
- 2 Munitions for 1 Radioactives
- 2 Munitions for 1 Super Slip

Suddenly, you hear a deafening siren and there is panic everywhere. "A raid!" someone cries. "Take cover!" One of the Dosians grabs you and pulls you to the ground behind a concrete bunker. The next minute, the sky is in flames. A fleet of Unarian ships blasts the market with lasers. The munitions ignite in the warehouses and explode in huge fireballs. The earth shakes and you hold on for dear life. More spaceships arrive, this time Dosian ships, and they begin attacking the Unarians. The battle is fierce, and it begins raining chunks of space debris. Eventually, the Dosians drive the Unarians away.

Continued 

The market has been totally destroyed. There are dead and maimed bodies of Dosians and aliens everywhere. You are lucky to have escaped unhurt. Amidst the rubble, you manage to find a Dosian to answer your questions. The Dosian looks even more depressed than usual.

"What was that?" you ask.

"The evil Unarians. They think that by raiding our market they can stop us from wiping them out. But they are wrong. We will survive their raids; we always have." You hear the sound of ambulances approaching.

"What about your munitions?"

"The munitions are all destroyed. Can't you see that? I'm sorry, but you won't be able to make any trades right now. Here, help me get this chunk of phase steel out of the walkway."

You lend a hand. "How about later?"

"It's happened before, and no doubt it will happen again. Come back another time, and the market will be as good as new. We're used to this sort of thing."

You may select this option again.

✕ STOP ✕

[973]

Having explored the planet's entire surface, you know that there is nothing here that accounts for the strange Dual Space anomaly that enshrouds it. There is no sign of any natural feature or any sort of artificial device that would explain why reality is unstable at this one place. Instead, it appears from your vision that Golgotha as it is suddenly came into existence long in the past. Before then, perhaps, it was a normal planet, but forty-nine thousand years ago some natural or artificial catastrophe changed it.

You have seen the ships and people who visited Golgotha in the past. They came, they learned what they learned, and when they left again they had changed. But one mystery remains: what was it that they learned? What did the clerics of the Archangel see, that led them to create a religion that teaches humans to be gods? To what fate did Vanessa Chang resign herself, when she said "so be it" and departed for the inner stars? What did Golgotha show them, when they looked through its window into the future?

✕ STOP ✕

[974]

You have decided to return to the planet Ghorbon, despite the presence of an advance Clathran base. You use the ship equipment and tactics you have learned in your travels and are able to approach one of the orbiting killer satellites and fry it from afar before it has time to react to your presence. You are glad to see that the Clathrans are still too busy setting up their advance base to pay much attention to the satellite detection system.

Using the landing window created by the deactivated satellite, you order your ship to set down in the same glade you used on your previous visit. There is still plenty of Fiber to be harvested if you so desire.

Landing safely, you leave the confines of your ship and step out into the fresh air. As before, you are soon visited by the native raccoon creatures. They are still very shy and flee back into the jungle when you call to them.

You have the same options as before.

✕ STOP ✕

[975]

Although Hadrak's military, schools, and city services are all centrally administered and organized, its interstellar trade system is not. The economy is run by a loose consortium of independent trading houses, all supposedly working under the guidance of the First Merchant. Each of the houses maintains its own list of importable and exportable commodities and establishes its own rate of exchange. The competition is fierce. Arranging a deal is a matter of visiting all of the trading houses in the Grand Bazaar and playing them off, one against the other, until the best rates of exchange are obtained.

You spend a couple of days doing just that, eventually achieving what you believe to be the planet's best deal. It turns out that Super Slip is the best buy for you and can be purchased at the following rates:

- 3 Super Slip for 1 Munitions
- 2 Super Slip for 1 Warp Core
- 1 Super Slip for 1 Food
- 1 Super Slip for 1 Synthetic Genius

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

✱ STOP ✱

[976]

You return, undetected, to the fringes of the Karnossus system. The intense white sun is far away. The Clathran worlds and starship fleets that cluster around it are all but invisible at this range. But you know the Dodecahedron is there, absorbing part of that sun's energy and driving the Dual Space Interphase ever wider.

You circle the system at extreme range, looking for some weakness or opening that you missed before. There is none. These are the Clathrans' homeworlds, and they aren't likely to leave them undefended.

"It doesn't look too good, Boss," concludes your computer. "The Clathrans have enough force in the system to repel even a large-scale invasion. In that low orbit, the sun itself protects the Dodecahedron from attack. We couldn't possibly get close enough to the Dodecahedron to attack it. We need to find a way past those battle groups, or to convince the battle groups to get out of our way. That's assuming we can figure out a weapon that'll work."

"What about the device the Hadrakians created — the Dual Space Inversion Bomb? Isn't that designed to destroy a target like the Dodecahedron?"

"Perhaps, but I get the distinct impression that it hasn't been perfected yet."

"Details, details. Let's assume one of us gets it working. We still need to be able to get it in place. Could it be launched from here?"

"It would never make it, Boss. I calculate its chances of reaching the target in operational condition as approximately equal to that of a thirty-ounce snowball."

"In hell, you mean?"

"Isn't that where we are, Boss?"

You size up the prospects again. The Clathran battle fleet here is too large to overwhelm and too paranoid to sneak by. Your only hope is that they leave. If they were suddenly to become needed elsewhere, you think to yourself, there would be a chance. But how likely is that to happen?

You wonder if it would even make any difference. There isn't even a working Dual Space Inversion Bomb yet. And time may be running out.

Very carefully, you leave the Karnossus system.

You have not landed in the Karnossus system. You are aloft in the Karnossus trisector.

✂ STOP ✂

[977]

You pick a Shrine at random, and enter. As your eyes are adjusting to the dim interior, a Homeless One appears at your elbow, and practically shoves you into a private meditation cubicle.

You try for a few minutes to find a comfortable position on the Hadrakian resting bench, but eventually give up the effort and stretch yourself out on the floor. A few moments later comes the mental tickle that announces the presence of something else in the cubicle with you. Relaxing, you think the word "Hello?"

"Hello," answers a masculine voice in your head. "I am the God of Violent Overthrow, one of the last of those who speak to Humans."

"I trust it's the Clathrans whom you seek to overthrow?"

"The Clathrans serve a higher master, I'm afraid. My interest lately is the planet Adafa. There you can find Vortex Coils to aid you in your travels."

The god's presence fades from your mind.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[978]

"Hey Boss, I'm getting a message on the subspace emergency channel. It's in some kind of code. I'm not certain I've got it all decoded, but I can make most of it out. Looks important. Shall I bring it up?"

"Sure," you say, hoping it isn't another solicitation from someone selling high-end tri-axis drive ships.

Priority Dispatch

FROM: V. Innvo, Marshal & Chief Executive Officer, The Battle, Incorporated

I regret to announce that one of our agents, a Human, has disappeared from the galactic Arm while in possession of the framework and plans for building a Dual Space Inversion Bomb. Our technical team headed by Dr. Fenton-Lee has wasted no time in constructing a replacement framework so that the Bomb may be completed and detonated in the Karnossus system, in order to destroy the Dodecahedron responsible for raising the galactic Dual Space Interphase and possibly the Clathran homeworld itself.

We request that you continue the work that we have started on this project, and therefore have sent you the new Dual Space Inversion Bomb framework. I must reiterate that the Bomb is an experimental project; we have never built or tested such a device before. We urge you seek assistance from all members of The Battle. Assembly may require one or more of the following items:

4 Munitions

1 Discontinuity Wave Generator

1 Stasis Field

1 Interphase Reflector

In addition, you may need technical assistance in the Bomb assembly.

"Wow!" says your computer. You silently agree. The device orbiting the Clathran homeworld — the Dodecahedron — is evidently the source of humanity's troubles. It is crucial that the Bomb be built as soon as possible, and used to destroy this evil device.

If you are able to assemble the materials (including the Bomb Shell framework) necessary to complete the Dual Space Inversion Bomb, you may plot the following option:

⟨LVM9JV⟩ (7 phases) Assemble the bomb.

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

[979]

Once again you follow the directions that lead to the Sirissian Rebel city. Shivering, you pass through the archway, trying not to think about what is really happening to your physical self.

You return to the office of Elder 3 but find that she is on her way to an important meeting. She congratulates you on your fight against the Clathran soldier. The lizard-men do not often push their military weight around, but when they do, it often results in a Sirissian being hurt or killed. She thanks you again for your heroics.

Before leaving you alone, Elder 3 mentions the location of a building where the officers of the rebellion live and work. She says you would be welcome to visit there. You decide to see if she is right.

You follow the directions you are given and find the Officers' Quarters without any problem. From the looks of the traffic entering and leaving the building, you suspect that this is where most of the real work gets done.

You enter through the front door and pause a moment to get your bearings. You can see no structure of offices, nor do you see any receptionist to whom you could speak. You are baffled by the constant flow of Sirissians in and out of the building. Where do they all come from? Where are they going?

You decide to follow a large group of them that happens to be bobbling down one of the wider corridors. You figure they must be going somewhere interesting, or why would they *all* be going along, right?

The hall soon brings you to a large auditorium. You seem to have happened upon some kind of seminar. You stop to read the large sign posted on the door. It reads:

Double Feature:
Care and Maintenance of the Cloaking Ray — What Everyone Should Know
and
Our Friend the Stasis Field
Admission: Second rank and above

You correctly assume that your badge will get you in with no difficulty.

What luck! Now you can learn how these devices work. You enter the room and find a seat. Looking around, you notice that most of your comrades are very young Sirissians; you have probably stumbled into an introductory course. You pull out your handy recording device and await the start of the lecture.

Several hours later, the speaker leaves the rostrum. You switch off your recorder and head for the door, feeling very satisfied with your day's work. First you review what you have learned about the Cloaking Ray.

The Cloaking Ray is designed to conceal the entire rebel city from the prying eyes of the Clathrans. Although you are not too sure of the science involved, you feel confident that it is a reliable technique. The Sirissians have kept their secret city hidden for many centuries using the Ray. It would be nice to have such a Ray for yourself, so you could hook it up to your ship's systems. Then you could hide your ship from the prying eyes of the Clathrans.

Going over the technical details of how the Ray is built, you conclude that you could actually assemble one yourself, if you had all the necessary components. These are:

- 1 Dimensional Transducer
- 1 Diamond Cloth
- 1 Radioactives
- 1 Synthetic Genius
- 1 Tools

When you have all the components and want to build a Cloaking Ray, plot the following option:

(7V89KV) (3 phases) Build a Cloaking Ray.

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.

Second, you review the data on the Stasis Field, the device that enables the projection teleporter to work. Although the teleporter is far too advanced for you to comprehend, you feel that you might be able to put the Stasis Field to good use. From what you can understand, the Field somehow freezes in time the "real" body of the being trying to use the teleporter. While your body is stuck in time, the machine can project your mind in an imaginary body to the Underground city. It's all very advanced, but you suspect the Stasis Field could easily be adapted to your ship to act as a weapon, one that would freeze enemy ships in time while you attacked or escaped. The components needed to build this device are:

- 1 Insulicon
- 1 Vortex Coil
- 1 Phase Steel
- 1 Warp Core

When you have all the components and want to build a Stasis Field, plot the following option:

(L8MKJD) (3 phases) Build a Stasis Field

Again, please note this action code; it is an "unlisted" action, so you will need to enter the code manually when you wish to select it.

You leave the lecture thinking that the Sirissians could lend valuable assistance to the Hadrakian forces trying to stop the Clathrans. No other race can provide the Hadrakians with the kind of technology that the Sirissians seem to have. If the Hadrakians and Sirissians and all the other races with armed spaceships were to put up a combined stand, it might even be possible to stop the Clathran Survey. You never know.

You try to speak to someone about enlisting the Sirissians' assistance in stopping the Survey, but you are told that the only person capable of making such decisions is Controller 1.

"How do I get to see this Controller?" you ask.

The Sirissian looks at your 2nd level badge and remarks that you will need 3rd level rank before you can hope to get in. When you ask how you can raise your rank, the little alien only says that you have to prove yourself worthy.

You return to the refuge of your ship and think about ways to prove yourself yet again to these aliens. As you are thinking, you absentmindedly turn on the forward viewscreen and watch a small Clathran patrol march past the spaceport. The soldiers look neither to the right nor to the left, almost as if they are afraid of seeing some illicit activity. The Clathran occupation here is, at best, an uneasy truce between the two races.

Suddenly you have an idea! Why not actually break into a Clathran garrison while you are on one of the Sirissian planets? If you can collect important information for the Rebellion, the Sirissians will see how serious you are about defeating the lizard soldiers. This could work!

Analyzing what you know about the Clathran presence on the Sirissian worlds, you conclude that the garrisons on Sirissi and Takata are too well fortified for your needs. Thus, Ululu seems to be the best candidate for your plan. When you are on Ululu, you may plot the following option:

(RBAW5T) (7 phases) Break into a Clathran garrison and collect data to give to the Sirissian Rebellion.

❖ STOP ❖