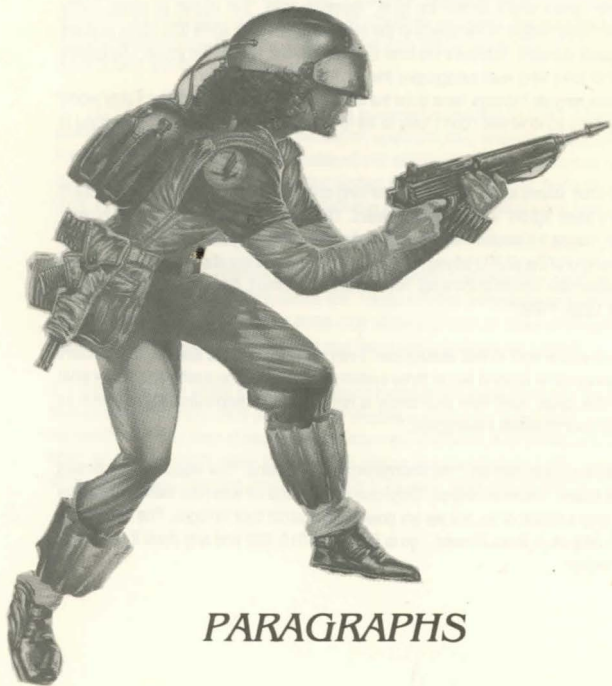


SENTINEL WORLDS 1

FUTURE MAGIC™



PARAGRAPHS

While you're enjoying Sentinel Worlds I: Future Magic, you'll be referring to paragraphs in this book. We know that as a Federation Marine who enjoys the best of challenges, you wouldn't randomly read these paragraphs in search of clues. However, intense interstellar firefights, coupled with breathing alien atmospheres, can impair your good judgement, rendering you totally unable to resist. Fight your best fight here — try not to read a paragraph until you're instructed to do so. You'll get a lot more out of Sentinel Worlds I: Future Magic this way. Once you successfully complete your mission in the Caldorre System, feel free to read the fictional vignettes during your long journey homeward.

1 "Of course I know who's behind the raids," Brennan says, "I've known all along. Every single one of those raiders is the lowest of the low, the kind of vile slime that hates puppies and hunts space bunnies. You know the kind, don't you? Here, let me clue you in: The raiders are the kind of folks who read paragraphs they shouldn't be reading!"

"Now tell me, why do I always have to be the one set up to do the Federation's dirty work? I'm gonna get me a job where I don't have to tell folks not to do what they ain't supposed to do..."

2 The Rancher stares at you and your crew long and hard before answering. "Ranchers and Farmers been fightin' for the last ten years. There's a piece of land we both have a hankerin' for, 'cause it's loaded with Kransite. Folks in the Rouyn system will pay you enough for a lousy handful of the stuff to let you retire. Federation don't know about Kransite and won't recognize either side's claim to the land. You can see for yourself. It's right here on your chart, at Norjaenn 1235, 1108."

3 "I suspect you're right in that assumption. Even my ship, with the latest in fuel-efficient engines, cannot travel beyond two or three systems from here without refueling. From what I can tell of the raider craft, their technology is not particularly sophisticated, not even as advanced as your primitive Interceptors."

4 "The beasts eat our children," the Warhakan leader explains. "Our weapons are useless against their scales. You must help us. They have slain all who venture near them. We believe there to be only a dozen or so, but we are powerless against their ravages. The Federation promised to help us in times of need... go to Caldorre 1012, 622 and slay them if you would honor your word!"

5 "We dig because a great evil persuades us to dig. The evil stands above us like the shadow of the moon. The people dig, but our hearts do not dig. We dig with our teeth clenched, but I say to you: One day the teeth shall bite."

6 "If you want to know about the raiders, I'll let you in on a little secret," says Grager in a low voice. "Most of them do themselves in before you can get one word out of them. But I managed to get a hold of one that had a mind of his own: In a few words, this one was scared. I don't resort to torture, I assure you, but a little persuasion with these types isn't out of line." Grager flashes you a grin, takes a long sip of his cocktail, then continues. "This guy told me that they're equipping their ships with a modified weapons system that has twice the firepower of a Federation starship. That's all I could get out of him. He wouldn't tell me where his base was or whose boots he licked. I showed my appreciation by letting him ride with us: we strapped him to the prow of the ship."

7 "Let's see now... Sentinels, eh? They're supposed to be a bunch of old men in blue robes somewhere on Norjaenn. My grandpa said he saw them once, when he was on a hunting trip. Tried to talk to them, but they just scattered and didn't make a sound. Gramps was a pretty good tracker, but all he found was a few bushes stripped clean of fruit. Not a trace of the old guys. He also claimed that he saw some funny lights in the hills that night, and on a couple of other nights, too."

8 "Forget about the Sentinels, young man. Looky here, I usually don't go in for Fed types, but my daughter, she's just crazy about 'em. I reckon it's the uniforms or somethin'. Anyway, you just relax. Ma will cook us up some nice vittles and we'll sit down and have ourselves a good meal, and then maybe we'll let you two young'uns alone fer a spell."

9 "Before I tell you where to find the Sentinels you must find a way to resolve the differences between the Ranchers and Farmers. Their dispute is tearing our town apart. I stand to lose my livelihood if they keep at each other the way they have been. A lot of folks are in the same boat. An outsider might make them listen to reason, but no one from Tolve can make them sit down together. You stop them from trying to kill each other and I'll help you out."

10 The Rancher scratches his chin and gives you a long, hard look. "Well, I reckon we been fightin' ever since I was a boy... Norjaenn was settled nigh unto a hundred years ago, and the two sides been fightin' at least a third of that time. When the almighty Federation, in its infinite wisdom, decided that this was the place to be, it decided it was the place for both Farmers and Ranchers. So they plopped us down in the same spot, maybe twenty families of each persuasion, and waited to see who survived. Sort of an evolution thing, I reckon. Only problem was both sides survived and now they're fightin' over the same piece of land. Farmers can just up and plant their crops wherever they please, whereas we Ranchers have to stake out a piece of grazing land well-suited to our critters. Farmers won't move, and we can't move, so I reckon we'll just have to fight it out until they either move or we move 'em."

11 "To find the Light, it is necessary that you unlock the Gates of Truth. The Gates are hidden to those in whom the Light is but a dull glow, but to those in whom the Light shines forth, the Gates stand forth with an unparalleled luminosity. There the Masters wait in solitude."

12 The Warhakan stares resolutely ahead. "They are sometimes accompanied by others, not like themselves. They offer to trade with us, but we refuse. With such as they, we will have nothing to do."

13 "Look," he says, "there probably isn't anything in that hunk of spacejunk. I bet you could sift through it until your fingers bled, your knees buckled and all the chrome flaked off your new digital watch and you still wouldn't come up with one stinking clue. But by all means, go ahead, I won't stand in your way."

14 "Yes," she says in a trembling voice, "there is a door to the Tower that's unguarded. It's a loading port of some sort. I can't tell you where it is, but there is someone who knows and who'd be willing to tell you. His..." With a gasp she clutches her throat. You stare in horror as blood streams from her eyes. She staggers for a moment, giving you enough time to step out of the way of her falling corpse.

15 "Kedro? Only a year ago he was just like one of us. But something came over him, sudden-like. Some folks thought it was some space-virus or something, but I never bought that. If you asked me, he just became..." he pauses, tapping his forehead, "well, a little touched."

16 The old man winks at you and nods his head sagely. "Verily, the world is an oyster, thou shalt not want."

17 "Well, I won't do it for charity but I'm willing to make a deal," he says, taking another slug of Red Reactor. "You get me a Federation contract—and make it binding—and I'll get 'em for you, guaranteed. You come here with a signed piece of paper and we'll talk."

18 "If the Federation muscles in and you're not 100% on their side, you don't get no favors. No, I'm not satisfied with the way I've been treated. It's just not fair competition, you know? An advantage is an advantage, I don't care how you look at it. An honest trader like me doesn't stand a chance."

19 "Look, if you continue to read these paragraphs when you're not supposed to, terrible things could happen. You could go blind. Or get white spots on your fingernails. Either way, it constitutes a serious offence to the Artist, who has worked very hard to create this world and wants only your happiness. So if you would PLEASE just follow His rules, this world would really be a better place."

20 "Our paths will cross again some day. It is our destiny. When it does, I hope to be ready for him. For now, he fears me greatly, although with his knowledge of the dark arts his evil master has taught him, he could surely kill me. Yet he fears me. He tried to get me to go with him, to talk to this 'master' of his, but I didn't. He said I had the Light, or some such mumbo jumbo, but I told him I wasn't interested in hearing about it. All I know is that some day he's going to have to face up to the mischief he's created and answer to me, his brother."

21 "I did see somethin' strange, once. They moved at an incredible speed. The cattle were scared, and me and my boys had to do everything we could to keep 'em from bolting. Weird, let me tell you. You could kinda see through 'em, see, only they were a kinda sickly green color. That was back when my wife was still living, an' when we come home, she said we looked like we's seen a ghost or something. All in all, I guess we were purty scared, yup. That was the only time, though.

"Oh, yea, the next 21 is a 45..."

22 Delik lowers his blaster, then returns it to his holster. "Well, you don't seem like the dishonest type, but I don't like someone who goes back on their word and I don't like gettin' snaked. A deal's a deal. I expect the next time we meet you'll have the credits. I don't think I need to threaten a Fed." Motioning to his hired help, he turns and mounts the stairs.

23 You enter the access codes and wait with a little impatience as the computer translates. With a quick flicker a holographic representation of a Tower appears before you. A flashing arrow points to a portal on the south side. Words appear below the image: "2210A2: Security Clearance 'Lanka'."

24 "Yessir, he handed me the Caldorre candy bar and said 'Read the ingredients carefully.' And he emphasized 'carefully' just like that: 'care-ful-ly'. So I opened the thing up and lo and behold there's these numbers scrawled on the inside: 1792,955. I looked up and he was gone, you know, vanished."

25 "Follow me into darkness and know that power is truth! I shall give you the knowledge by which you shall bring the world to its knees and recognize your personal divinity! I hold the reins of the world out to you: do not turn them down. Do not choose destruction when I offer you full life! Do not choose weakness over your right to rule! Do not die for others when immortality lies within your grasp!"

26 "I'm pretty sure he's in these caves," Kann explains. "We were on a three-day drive a week ago, camped out at night when he disappeared. Two of my men saw the kidnapppers carry him off, and swear that the bunch that got him were Farmers. Recognized them by the way they ran. Next morning we checked out the tracks, what was left of them, and sure enough, the prints weren't from any boots a Rancher would wear. I heard a bunch of Farmers, even old Grayper himself, were headin' for Striker Rift, so I put two and two together and figured that's where they were hiding my boy."

27 "If you ask me there's something really fishy going on in that Rift. It seems like Farmers sure are heading there a lot these days, even when there's nothing of value there anymore. Several of us have seen 'em sneaking out there at night. Oh, there's something else weird about all this: we've been picking up strange transmissions over our radios. Stuff I can't understand. I sure don't like hearing what I can't understand."

28 "Well, I don't know if they actively help the raiders, but maybe indirectly. You know, for a little information on the placement of military escorts—you know, like your ship—these merchants get safe passage. It's hard to believe we have such treacherous colonists in our midsts, but they really exist. If there were some way we could catch the whole lot of 'em, we might just bag a few more raiders every month."

29 "The raiders you seek are in an underground colony on the ice planet. Malcolm brought them here from Earth and breeds them for his army. There's a secret chamber within the towers from which you can transport you and your crew into the ice domain. There you will encounter Malcolm and his minions. Beware of the counter-winding stairway! I can tell you no more."

30 "They live in the hills. I ran across them when I was a youngster. I was hiking in along a ledge and lost my footing. When I woke up, I was lying down in a dark cave, with a bunch of old men in blue robes standing around muttering in some foreign language. My leg hurt something awful, and my head didn't feel much better. One of the old guys, his name was Kedro he said, made me lie down and started chanting over me. Before I knew it, my leg stopped hurting and my head stopped trying to explode.

"I've been back twice, but each time Kedro stopped me and told me to go home. He said something about the Light being bright in me, but that he could not teach me. Hell, I never asked him to. But that was all he would ever say. So I stopped going back there."

31 "Why, he is one in whom the Light shines with a fierce, dark intensity that I have never before seen. He is called Malcolm Trandle and he was once a Sentinel. Surely you must not judge the Sentinels harshly by comparing them to Malcolm, for he left their ways for the ways of evil. The Sentinels are the Keepers of the Light. They find those in whom the Light shines brightly and they nurture it. Why, they found me many, many aeons ago, on a far distant world where all have my appearance, but where I was the only one in whom the Light shone brightly. There was another in whom it shone darkly, and him they destroyed.

"In Malcolm Trandle the Light once shone brightly. Once it shone with a radiance that would illuminate a galaxy. But when the Sentinels took up residence on a planet called Earth by its people, Malcolm began to change. A darkness crept into him and he began to treat the poor primitives who lived on that world as cattle and playthings. Before any of the other Sentinels

knew what had transpired, Malcolm had gathered a small army of these pitiful savages and decided that he should be the ruler of the Sentinels. He stole me from the dwelling of Kedro, the leader of the Sentinels, and he stole the Book of Spells as well. You see, although the Light shines brightly in me, I wield it but slightly. Those around me, however, can wield it far beyond their normal capacity. Malcolm feared Kedro as long as Kedro had me with him. And Malcolm feared the Book even more. Ahh, how he feared the Book! So he stole us, and brought us to this Light-forsaken corner of the cosmos.

"The delicious irony of it all, my friend, is that Malcolm stole me in order to increase his power, but it could never happen. He took possession of the planet called Caldorre because he sensed a power here beyond all understanding. The three towers that stand on that planet have stood there since time immemorial. The builders of those towers powered them with a generator of dark Light of immense proportions. What Malcolm did not understand was that as I amplify bright Light, so I destroy dark Light. The dark Light is, how do you say it? Allergic to me. So Malcolm had to hide me away, far away where no pursuit might find me. And here have I lain, for three thousand years and more."

32 "These beasts may be found toward the setting sun, beyond the sky pillars of emptiness where your vessels dock. Here, let me show you on this drawing where they reside..."

A comparison of the crude Warhakan map and Federation charts shows the approximate location of the invasion to be at Caldorre 640, 736.

33 "The Book is a Book of Spells. It is an artifact of the Light that holds the knowledge we lost long ago. The evil one, Malcolm Trandle, the Betrayer, stole the book when he stole our friend the Key of Thor. When we came to retrieve both, Malcolm used a great, dark Light to rob us of our youth and minds. He could not extinguish our minds completely, but our youth is lost to us forever. The Light is bright in you. Perhaps we can teach you what you need to know in order to defeat Malcolm, but we cannot do so without the Book. There are some basic abilities we still remember and which we will impart to you now. By talking from your heart to yourself or to your enemies, you can focus the Light to heal injury to yourself. The power is yours now. You can sense the presence of other users of the Light, or of those in whom the Light shines either brightly or with the dark pallor of evil. The power is yours now. You may probe the minds of others, to know that which they seek to conceal, for the Light illuminates the most obscure reaches of the living brain. The power is yours now.

"In order to teach you more, we must have the Book of Spells. Malcolm has hidden the Book in a special location on the planet Earth. You may reach this location only through a transporter in one of his towers. You must go and retrieve the Book."

34 "We dig to protect ourselves from the evil that surrounds us. We suffer only Letrayal at the hands of the Warhaka. Once we are secure again in our Mother Soil, we shall strike forth with the fury of the storm. The evil shall not escape us, and none shall stand in our way."

35 "Malcolm resides in his battle station. You are now ready to confront him. While his knowledge is great and his power greater, he too has lost his youth. Your vigor should enable you to face him in a duel, much like the one you fought with his puppet Shadar. But this time the stakes will be life and death. You must seek him out with your abilities and then confront him. If you succeed in destroying him, his world will crumble. Remember that the battle station and the population of the towers are but creations of his evil power. They will vanish upon his demise, and you will be destroyed in the ensuing chaos if you remain in his lair. Go now. May the Light serve your needs and may your focus be sharp."

36 "The raiders you seek are the descendants of the Earth people Malcolm brought with him to these worlds. You must capture one of these and bring him before the Gates of Truth. There you will probe his mind to find the entrance to Malcolm's domain. Once you have entered his domain, find the Book by using the ability to seek out users of the Light. Then bring the Book back at once. Do not try to confront the Betrayer now, for his power is too great. Go."

37 "How are the raids ruining me?" Grager gives you a quizzical glance, then stares at his well-trimmed fingernails. "The Caldorre system is my system, gentlefolk. I worked hard for it. I own all trade rights to this system. My family has been a trading family for many generations, since man first reached out to the stars.... Over the years the Gragers grew in influence until, finally, the Federation saw our ability and granted us sole rights in an expansion effort. Our service to the Federation earned us the right to collect a tariff on all commercial shipping to and from the Caldorre System. In return, all commerce is directed towards furthering the Federation's expansion into the Rouyn, Malartic, and Noranda systems. While such an arrangement is not without precedent, it is highly unusual and greatly

coveted by all in my profession. I suspect some of my rivals would like to see me fail in this endeavor, for such failure would spell an end to the Grager trading empire.

"I do not intend to fail, gentlefolk. Even as we speak, my crew is installing better laser turrets on your Interceptor and my programmers are upgrading the software of your ship's computers to help you in your mission. It is the least I can do."

38 Kann stares at you with a steadiness that even you find discomfiting. "They probably removed him entirely from the face of the planet. We were on a three-day drive a week ago, camped out at night when he disappeared. Two of my men saw the kidnapers carry him off, and swear that the bunch of 'em were Farmers. Next morning we checked out the tracks, what was left of 'em, and sure enough, the prints weren't from any boots a Rancher would wear. I heard a bunch of Farmers, even old Gayper himself, were headin' for Striker Rift. It's common knowledge that the Farmers have a secret starbase tucked away in the Shadow Rift. Where he is now I don't know, but there'll be hell to pay!"

39 "They woke us up one night, shrieking and howling. I never saw such a scene in all my life. My Pa grabbed the weapon he kept by his bed and ran out into the darkness. I saw the bright flashes of his shots, but the green forms ignored him. To this day I still don't know what they came for. They didn't touch a thing at the shop. I was frozen, I was so scared. I wanted to run, but I didn't know where I should run to. What scares me still to this day was the eery way my brother stood at the window, as calm as can be. His hand was outstretched, as if making some contact in some weird way. The expression on his face... I suppose that was the beginning of it all."

40 The globe slowly rises, pulsating with a raw energy that completely illuminates your surroundings. "I am the Key of Thor. Tremble before me, vermin! I shall use you and your pitiful mechanical conveyances to fulfill my destiny. We shall go to Norjaenn 1875,1060 where the Sentinels reside, and crush them. You cannot resist my commands. Let us go!"

41 With a wicked smile, Riker presses the green button on the console of his raider craft. You hear the sound of metal grating against metal in the distance, and a muffled scream... "She's all yours, boys" he says with an evil grin, "be sure to take along a spoon."

42 The Gates of Truth stand open before you. Three old men dressed in scarlet robes sit just beyond the threshold. As you cross over, one of the old men smiles at you. That's when you notice that his mouth is filled with several rows of sharp, pointed teeth....

43 Ruawl accepts the proffered bribe and grins. "Sentinels? Yeah I know of them. You Feds don't want to mess with those guys. They look at you sideways and your brain explodes. I saw them stop a cave bear just by sneezing at one, once. Whatever you do, when you find them, shoot first and don't try talking to them until they're subdued. If you can kill one or two of them, then maybe they'll cooperate. If not, you guys are history.

"They can be found at Caldorre 3015, 827. The key thing to remember is that the next 43 is 75..."

44 "Malcolm came to this system in order to increase his powers and extend his reach. For millennia he has studied and plotted, and raised an army of warriors from the few who accompanied him from Earth. The time is not yet right for him to make his attempt at spreading the gospel of dark Light. He needs more time to prepare. When your people began to settle in this system, he perceived that as a threat, felt that his presence would be discovered before he deemed it proper for others to be aware of his existence. First he populated the towers he found here with illusions and service machines in the hopes that Caldorre would become a waystation for spacefarers, a stopping point for refueling. But when your people decided to settle on Norjaenn, it was too much for Malcolm to tolerate. So now he sends forth his minions to wreak havoc on those who wish to dwell here. He hopes to make this system unpalatable for habitation. If he succeeds in driving away those who would dwell here, then he will once again have the freedom to pursue his evil ends. And that would spell disaster for future generations of all sentient beings."

45 Face to face with Lochinvar Avrensis, you begin to wonder if you were wise in seeking him out. He is a huge man, without an ounce of fat to his body. His three bodyguards all carry Neuron Flails and look as if they eat Federation marines for breakfast. "So you boys are trying to stop the raids, eh?" Avrensis says. "Why? What gives you the right to interfere in a private quarrel? This one's between that wimp Grager and me. Doesn't have anything to do with the Federation. We haven't attacked you, just his ships. Bet you don't know how he got the Caldorre trade rights to begin with, do you? Well, it ain't because he's a public servant..."

"Tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to let you boys walk out of here in one piece, this time. But if you cross me again, your mamas are going to be grieving for years. Now you tell the Federation to keep its nose out of this one, and they won't get hurt. If they keep interfering, me and my Keeshan allies are going to escalate this little fracas to a full scale galactic war. I don't think your superiors would like that, if you get my drift. Now scram!"

46 "There's only one way to get to our home base," the raider says, "and that takes a real pilot to pull it off. You've got to start off from on top of Caldorre tower #2 and hyperspace through the Gates of Truth. I can't tell you the exact coordinates for the Gates, they have been programmed into my ship's computer in a language I don't understand. But I think a good computer hacker could get to the info. I can tell the security code for that section of the progr..." Suddenly the raider gasps and blood streams from his eyes and nose. With a gurgling sound, he crumples to the floor at your feet, dead.

47 "Why do I hate Ranchers?" The Farmer spits on the ground. "Those scum killed two of my boys in front of my eyes and the only thing that saved me and the missus was the fact that we were hidin' in the pantry. It was all I could do to stop her from gettin' away from me and attacking those thugs." Tears well up in the old man's eyes. "All my boy did was complain about one of their steers trampling his cat... Them Ranchers think they own the whole planet. They'll see. Pretty soon we'll take care of all of them, every last one." As the old man shrugs and turns to go, a crumpled piece of paper falls out of his back pocket.

As soon as he's gone, you pick up the note and read it. It says: "Meet at the base at Shadow Rift at 0900. Ships are all fueled. This time we take them out." It is signed "Riker".

48 The apparent leader of the beasts stares at you for a moment and then motions for the others to leave. "Welcome, pale ones. We are the Koshol and we have returned to claim our homeland. Many years ago the ones you call 'Warhaka' drove us from our lands. For three generations we have patiently waited for them to cease their vigilance. Now we are striking back. They are treacherous, but we are strong. They must die. You must not interfere, for it is right that they die. It is not needed for you to die. Go and do not meddle in our affairs."

49 "The beasts just were there one morning," the slender Warhakan explains, "we did not see them come or by what means they arrived in our domain. Now we are being invaded!

They are fearsome creatures, much taller than one of the people and with a reptilian cast to their features. They seem capable of devouring one of us without having to resort to any weapons. We have seen them uproot trees with little effort. When one of our people tried to hail them from afar, she was ignored. None dare approach them closely for fear of the possible consequences.

"When your people first came to this world, you said you would aid in settling any disputes that might arise between our races. Now we ask for your aid in helping us stop this unwarranted invasion of our homes.

"One final word of caution: Remember, the next 49 is 53..."

50 "My name is Sheelana," the girl says. "Pa told me it was okay to talk with you. He says a Fed is a good catch, but I don't want to catch anyone. I just want to be with Joshua Kann. Pa won't stand for it 'cause he's a Rancher. But I don't see why we have to hate all the Ranchers. They're not all bad men, and I know they're not doin' the raiding, 'cause I know who is. It's the Sentinels. You can find their base at Norjaenn 979, 522. Remember, the next 50 is 42."

51 The screen of the computer terminal flickers brightly and then goes blank. After a couple of seconds, it comes to life again, this time filled with the image of an alien species you have never seen before. Below the image of the green-skinned creatures is the following text:

"The Keeshan race hails from an unknown part of the galaxy. They are extremely warlike and possess starship technology far beyond that of the Federation. Emissaries to the Keeshan System have returned with their personalities completely erased. Each one has repeated the same message: 'Cease your expansion or face extermination.' Federation behavioral scientists have been unable to reprogram the emissaries.

"What little information we have on the Keeshan exists because of recording equipment on the emissary ships used by the first of our unfortunate employees. The other seven emissaries returned in self-contained drone ships of unknown technology. As of yet, we have been unable to fathom the manner in which these ships function.

"Unable to access additional data without proper security clearance. Password: _____"

52 "We dig for evil. We must find evil. We must destroy evil. Three killing seasons before I have vision. Vision come in sleep. Night star glow with evil. Vision show me evil to lead me

to destroy evil. I leave my father. I leave my people. Few come with me on journey to evil. We hide in silver boat that sails to star. Vision guide me to boat. Boat sail to evil. We find evil here. Evil is down below the earth. Here."

53 "Striker Rift is one of the canyons that some thought was loaded with Kokodite. Once the fools realized that Kokodite could be found in some abundance in the mountains, just lying on the ground, they abandoned the mines they had built and just gathered the stuff wherever they could find it. Let me see, now, that wall chart should show where Striker Rift is.... Yeah, right here. Norjaenn 1169, 677. That's where Grayper and the boys were headed."

54 Just as you turn to walk away from the mysterious craft, a whooshing noise catches your attention. A small hole appears in the side of the craft, widening into a portal through which a good sized human could easily walk. A metallic voice says: "Enter!"

The inside of the vessel is unlike anything you have ever seen. Bank upon bank of flashing lights greet your eyes in every direction. Sitting in the middle of the craft is a green creature you recognize as a Keeshan. Its features are so alien you cannot even guess as to its disposition towards you and your crew.

"Greetings, marines," it says in the same flat, metallic voice. "The time has come for contact. It seems Avrensis has told us a distortion of the fabric in order to have us pursue his goals. He will be treated accordingly for his deceit. It does not pay to deceive the Keeshan. Our mindcouncil wishes to hear of the Federation, for ignorance is not the basis for decisions. You will bring your leaders to Ceyjavik 1022, 767 immediately. We shall await you there."

The Keeshan extends an arm-like appendage towards one of the flashing panels, and suddenly you and your crew are outside the alien ship, which shimmers briefly and vanishes.

55 As soon as you finish typing 'Clytemnestra' into the raider computer, the raider begins laughing. "Fools," he says. "Now we're going just where you wanted to go. Home. When my Master sees I've brought him a handful of Feds, he'll be delighted. I'll bet I get promoted for this one. In case you guys have any illusions about fighting your way through, you ought to know that there are 10,000 combat veterans waiting for you where we're going. So settle back and enjoy the trip, dolts!"

Within a few seconds the small raider vessel begins to tremble and shake. Suddenly you are slammed into the walls as the craft accelerates at an unbelievable rate. "Don't worry," you hear the raider say as you slip into unconsciousness, "you'll wake up soon."

56 The Book of Spells rises to hover near your eyes. "I hold the knowledge of how to defeat your enemies. But the Sentinels hold the power to teach you the knowledge contained within me. We must find them, for time grows short as the evil one's power grows greater.

"When we reach them you will gain the ability to confuse your foes, to sense any being's presence, to make your enemies become your allies, and the ability to nullify your enemies' strengths. But we must reach them first."

With that, the Book moves into your backpack, which strangely feels no heavier.

57 The bloodstained journal is written in a neat, cramped hand:

"The Ice Tigers have begun acting strangely ever since we saw the comet. First they wouldn't eat, then they began eating everything in sight. Normally herbivores, they began devouring Bush Rats and the seal-like creatures that play on the bergs.

"It's been a week since the comet passed and all the fauna are exhibiting signs of aberrant behavior. Just yesterday Nelson Karamatu, the chief botanist, noticed that the kelp beds are growing very quickly, becoming so dense that creatures that normally swim through them with ease are becoming entangled and dying in them.

"I think Karamatu is losing his mind. Today he told me that the kelp is devouring the creatures that become entangled. I am going to recommend that he and Virginia take an extended leave when we get back to the base.

"Last night we lost Slade and Johnson. They went off to explore one of the side tunnels here and never came back. Slade was the minibus pilot. We may be stuck here until a rescue crew can come to our aid. Fortunately, Karamatu knows how to operate the comm equipment.

"Karamatu's dead! He was mauled by an Ice Tiger this morning. We tried to save him, but it was no use. Everything's going wrong. We've lost four of our original crew of nine. Everything down here has turned hostile. I hope we can make it back to the minibus."

There are no more entries in the journal.

58 The Star Pilot's eyes dart about the cramped confines of the spacecraft. "Raiders? I don't know anything about them. I just fly cargo to Malar..." When he sees the log book in your hands he seems to collapse into himself. "Oh what's the use?" he says. "Yeah, I know about the raids. In fact, I fly on some of them, when my turn comes up. Do you have any idea what it's like to work for Grager? Every cargo I fly, he takes a 60% cut right off the top. He does it to every single freighter in this system. So when Avrensis offered us a chance to get back at him and break his stranglehold, a few of us jocks decided 'why not?' We only shoot down the ships piloted by his Sarankhan slaves. We won't hit a ship that has a human pilot. In fact, on the last three raids we've..." A look of horror crosses the young man's face. He claws at his nose and eyes, making a strangled gurgling sound. As blood pours from his eyes, he drops to his knees, then falls flat on the floor, dead.

59 Stepping out of your ATV into the alien landscape, you and your crew are greeted by the sight of seven tall, green, opaque creatures with six limbs. Each of the four upper appendages hold Thermal Casters pointed right at you! "Greetings, marines," the tallest one says. "Welcome to Keesha, and your doom..."

60 The bartender accepts the rather generous tip you offer and says, "Yep, I see some mighty strange types pass through the doors of this place. Why just last week there was that young Kann cub and a pretty young farmer girl here, all dressed up to look like Caldorreans. They didn't fool me, of course. The girl seemed real intent on getting Josh to look at a little brown book she had. I didn't see what the book was, but I did hear her say something about 'taking it to the Masters'. Didn't make a whole lot of sense to me. She also dropped a napkin that had some writing on it. I been keeping it behind the bar to give back to her if she comes in here again. All it says on it is 'the next 34 is 69.'"

61 The Key of Thor rises quickly to hover in the air before your eyes. "I will ride in your backpack. We must find the Sentinels for I know they are here somewhere. Before Malcolm hid me here Kedro and the band of Sentinels from that planet Earth came to rescue me. Malcolm was waiting for them, charged with the dark Light of Caldorre. The blow he dealt them left them helpless, their minds confused forever. I can restore their knowledge, but I must see them to do so. Help me find them so that we can put a stop to the spread of Malcolm's dark Light!

"The Sentinels have the power to wield the Light, just as you do. On Earth, the name the people gave to that power was 'magic'. Have you heard of it? You have it in you, but you clearly do not have the knowledge to wield the Light. Kedro does. The Sentinels do. The Light can let you mend people, it can let you change their nature, it can let you confuse them or strip them of knowledge. It is only through that means that Malcolm can be defeated."

The Key vanishes into your backpack, but strangely enough, the pack feels no heavier.

62 "The beasts may be found towards the setting sun, beyond the sky pillars of emptiness where your vessels dock. Here, let me show you on this drawing where they reside..."

A comparison of the crude Warhakan map and Federation charts shows the approximate location of the invasion to be at Caldorre 1012, 622.

63 "Those ships been comin' and goin' for the last three months, I tell ya. I seen at least thirty of them take off yesterday. They don't fly like any ship I've ever seen. They just sort of raise off the ground a little bit, shimmer for a second like Kansite in the light, then jes' vanish. They don't take up a lot of room, neither. If you want to have a look see for yourselves, jes' go up into the hills. Got a map? Here, right on this point — Norjaenn 1363, 932. Be careful, though, the pilots carry a lot of mean lookin' hardware..."

64 "Bring me the Book of Spells and I'll make you wealthy beyond your wildest dreams," Malcolm says. "You will find it in the Sentinels' caves. Just beyond their dwelling. But be careful, the Sentinels are more powerful than they let on. They have a particularly nasty mind trick that liquefies the brains of anyone they have mesmerized before. And to mesmerize you they need merely glance into your eyes for but a moment. Be sure never to look at them directly. Instead, try to look at their reflections off of a shiny surface. Bring me the Book and the raids will stop."

65 The dials on the time machine flutter while the whole room is filled with a throbbing, pulsating sound, just below the threshold of human hearing. The screen holds an image of an ancient city of tall buildings. It is a depressing vision of metal and cement, with narrow streets covered with antique wheeled vehicles. Crowds of people stand about, staring into windows or crossing the streets. There are many strange names on the windows of the old buildings. One in particular catches your eye — Library of the Congress.

A button, larger than all of the others, seems to beckon. It is marked "Begin Sequence". When you press it, the number 50 appears, flashes for a moment, and is replaced by the words: "the next is ___."

66 "Concentrate all of the Light towards your enemy," the old man says. "Visualize his face, then the space behind his eyes. When his visage is covered by the image of the Light, say his name three times and squeeze the stone as hard as you can. Your enemy will die."

67 As soon as you step through the Gates, you feel a tremendous sense of tranquility. A gentle humming sound seems to fill your mind and all your aches and pains subside. In the distance you see a group of young women in flowing robes approaching. One of them is holding a sign. It reads: "the next 22 is 6."

68 The Book is the Book of Spells. It is an artifact of the Light that holds knowledge that we lost long ago. The evil one, Malcolm Trandle, he who betrayed us, stole the book away when he stole our friend the Key of Thor. When we came to retrieve both, Malcolm used a great dark Light to rob us of our youth and of our minds. We have recovered some of the latter, but the former seems lost to us forever. The Light is bright in you. Perhaps we can teach you what you need to know in order to defeat Malcolm, but we cannot do so without the Book. There are some basic abilities we still retain and I will show them to you now. By talking from your heart to yourself or to your enemies, you can focus the Light to heal injury to yourself, the power is yours now. You can sense the presence of other users of the Light, or of those in whom the Light shines either brightly or with the dark pallor of evil. The power is yours now. You may probe the minds of others, to know that which they seek to conceal, for the Light illuminates the most obscure reaches of the living brain. The power is now yours.

"In order to teach you more, we must have the Book of Spells. Malcolm holds it somewhere in his domain, in what he calls his battle station. You must go there and retrieve the Book."

69 "You fools!" Malcolm screams, "can't you see what you've done? You've freed the most horrible power the cosmos has ever seen. The Sentinels have been held in check by the Gates of Truth since before your race clawed its way out of the primal ooze and began to reach for the stars. Your ancestors called the "daemons" and feared them above all else. And rightly so. They delight in slaughter and mayhem!

"There is but one hope now. Use the Key of Thor, for it has the power to bind them. That's how we managed to get them locked into the stronghold of Truth. You must unveil the Key in their presence and then take them across the Gates. Once there, you will be able to walk back across the threshold while they must remain. Go now and undo the damage you have wrought!"

70 Grayper shrugs his shoulders and puts his glass on the counter. "I just don't know, marine," he says wearily, "I just don't know. Once it all seemed simple but now nothing makes sense to me anymore. When Kann was my enemy, I felt fulfilled, as if I had a purpose in life. Now you tell me that he has never been my foe. Instead, you tell me beware of Avrensis, the same Lochinvar who is godfather to my eldest daughter and who has supported the Farmer cause for two generations. I just don't know who to believe... Go seek him out and ask him your questions yourselves. You will find his stronghold at Caldorre 3015, 827."

71 Upon seeing the tip you left, the waitress grins and says, "Not many marines have that kind of money. You should come here more often." She glances around surreptitiously and then whispers in your ear: "The password is EOS." She smiles, and quickly scurries off to wait on a group of star pilots who appear to be well in their cups.

72 "She's a beauty, ain't she?" the old Farmer says with a gleam in his eye. "I built her myself, from a drawing I saw in a history book. Took me nearly ten years and I had to steal parts from at least thirty tractors before I could make her run right. I think she was called a Panzer. That cannon on the front'll blow a hole the size of a spaceship in just about anything. She hasn't got much fuel in her, but enough to reach Striker Rift. Go ahead and take her, I was gonna use her to teach that Robert Kann a lesson, but I reckon you got more of a need for her than I do right now. And boys... good luck!"

73 The raiders you seek are the descendants of the Earth people Malcolm brought with him to these worlds. You must capture one and use the ability we have taught you to probe the mind of the captive and find the entrance to Malcolm's domain. Once you have entered his domain, find the Book by using the ability to seek out users of the Light. Then bring the Book back at once. Do not try to confront the Betrayer now, for his power is great. Go."

74 Next to the hideously mutilated body you find a single word, written in blood: "Sentinel".

75 As you step outside of the door, your senses are assaulted by two overpowering stimuli: noise and odor. The roar of the primitive combustion-based vehicles is deafening, while the smells of the city make you nauseous. Turning back to look at the time machine, you see to your dismay that the machine is slowly fading away. It appears you will have to find another way to return!

76 Upon seeing the tip you left, the waitress sneers and says, "Thanks big spender. I hope you choke on the ice cubes."

77 "Cave bears lost their appeal for me many years ago," Alex says. "Now I hunt far more dangerous prey. My quarry walks on two legs and kills people just by glancing at them. Soon you will track them as well, for mankind must eventually face the threat of the Keeshan." He turns and walks away from you, back to his ship, where he continues on with his preparations.

78 "Well, I see you've discovered our little secret," Kann says, glancing quickly at Grayper. "I suppose there's no point in pretending any more. The quarrel between the Ranchers and Farmers is just a matter of convenience for both of us. As long as both groups covet the same land, they won't try to expand outwards into other regions of Norjaenn. This planet is rich in a substance called Kansite. To humans, it's not much more than an exotic variety of table salt. To the Keeshan, however, it is a narcotic of sublime proportions. They will gladly trade all of their wealth for just a handful of the substance. Grayper and I have been working a sizeable deposit of Kansite for several years now. It can be found about 12 sectors to the northwest of Tolle. The Federation should thank us for our efforts. The Keeshan are a warlike species, but as long as they are supplied with Kansite, they lose interest in conquest."

79 The interior of the raider vessel is unlike any spacecraft you have ever seen. The bridge consist of a single couch shaped to fit an inhuman form. There are miles of cables and wires coming out from the couch, all leading into a box about the size of small footlocker. Lying in the middle of the couch, seemingly unconscious, is the strangest being you have ever seen. Its body is absolutely transparent, while its internal organs are a deep shade of purple. The raider gestures towards the reclining form and says "Meet my co-pilot. It's a Verashhki, from

the Ringlet Nebula. It navigates better than any shipboard computer I've ever seen and has the ability to blink the ship in and out of normal space. With it at the controls, we can come and go as we please, because we're always here, just not in the same dimension as you Feds. Grager found out about them when he did some trading in that system. He brought a few back and has been having us fly the raids so that he can raise the price of the stuff he exports to Rouyn. I don't mind doing it, because the pay is more for a single raid than I used to earn on half a dozen cargo runs. Besides," the raider says with a laugh, "it's a hell of a lot safer than flying a cargoliner these days."

80 As you begin to slip into unconsciousness, the last thing you remember is Kedro, teeth gleaming, motioning to the others and saying "Come children, it's been so long since we've had a good meal..."

81 The blue light of the terminal casts a dim glow in the darkened chamber. "Accessing" appears in the center of the screen. After what seems an eternity but is in reality a few seconds, the screen clears and the following message appears: "Security Violation. Access denied. Erasing data banks." The captured raider breaks out into maniacal laughter then chokes it back as a look of terror crosses his features. "But Master," he babbles, "I did as you told me. They have destroyed the records. All is ..." he clutches at this face and then screams a short, terrifying scream before he drops to the floor, dead.

82 "The Warhaka lie," the reptilian Koshol Leader hisses. "We have lived here many, many generations. The pale ones arrive two generations ago and seek to destroy the People by hunting and smashing our eggs. Koshol no leave land of hatching. Warhaka must die. If Warhaka leave, Koshol pursue. Egg-smasher always return. Must exterminate. Warhaka flying machine no save Egg-smasher. We go to flying machine home and smash them. Machine home not far. Follow setting sun four day journey."

83 "You have destroyed the Master," the Key exclaims. "Why you must be the new Sentinels! At last! Your coming has long been foretold, you know. That's wonderful, I never much cared for the old Sentinels. They had nasty habits, what with those hideous teeth and their thirst for warm blood.... They could be quite revolting at times, you know. This could be the beginning of a new age! Let's go back to Earth. We can take over the Federation. I know how to get there from the Gates of Truth. The Gates let one travel anywhere if you know the secret. All you really need to know is that the next 83 is 12."

84 The Caldororean looks about the room nervously and then motions you and your crew to a table in a dimly lit corner. "It just won't do to be seen fraternizing with Federation marines," he says quietly. "If my co-workers saw me doing this I'd be cited for off-worlder contact and I might lose my job at the plastic surgeon's. However, I've lost two close friends in these raids and I'd like to see the end to them. The raiders are warping in from the Rouyn system. Their ships are of Malartic construction, and use a special hyperdrive engine that allows them to travel great distances with very little fuel expenditure. You should go see Flock at the changing station of the drydock area for more information. He has spent time in Rouyn and has seen what the Malartic craft can do firsthand. Tell him 'Kronos' sent you..."

85 "There is no Malcolm, you fool!" Kedro says impatiently. "He's just a bogey we made up to placate the Keeshan until the time was right to conquer their planet. Those creatures believe in magic and sorcery, so we created a magician to keep them from trying to investigate the Caldorre system too closely. It worked pretty well until you marines came along and botched it up." Kedro reaches over to the glowing terminal on his right and punches in a code. "Now we have to launch an all-out attack on their planet and wipe out half their population. It's a shame, for they made wonderful servants.

"There, it's done. Within hours there will not be much of the Keeshan homeworld left for the survivors. Now, we must attend to you, my meddling marine friends." Kedro beckons to the other blue-robed Sentinels, who wheel over a large, tubular apparatus. Kedro fiddles with the device for a moment, then points it at you. "Goodbye," he whispers. With a loud pop, the device bathes you in an eerie, red light. Fade to black.

86 The scene that greets you as you enter the small cavern is not for the weak of heart. The Ranchers have lined the cavern walls with grisly trophies of their war with the Farmers. Two of your crew make mewing noises and proceed to lose their lunches when they see the heads mounted on the wall. Now you understand the reports of missing children.

On the table in the center of the room is a Federation chart of Ceyjavik. Just to the north of the bio-research village is a small red dot labelled "HQ". Below it, written in a neat, cramped hand, are the words: "the next 86 is 19."

87 "Dear fellow, we are all creatures of the Light, every blessed one of us! Everything that lives is of the Light. In some the Light shines brightly, in others it casts a gloomy hue. In some

it shines with an intensity that outmatches the stars, while in others 'tis but a feeble glow, barely recognizable to even the most perceptive. It shines brightly in you, dear fellow, and with a radiance that warms my very core. It shines brightly in your friends, but with nowhere near the intensity that I see in you.

"How can one in whom the Light is strong not know of the Light? You mystify me, you do! Can it be that your kind has forgotten? Ah well, that may be for others to explain, for I am not the teacher, I am not the pedagogue."

88 The dying raider looks at you and whispers, "Find Malcolm. He dwells beyond the Gates of Truth. Tell him the Sentinels have returned. He'll know what to do."



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