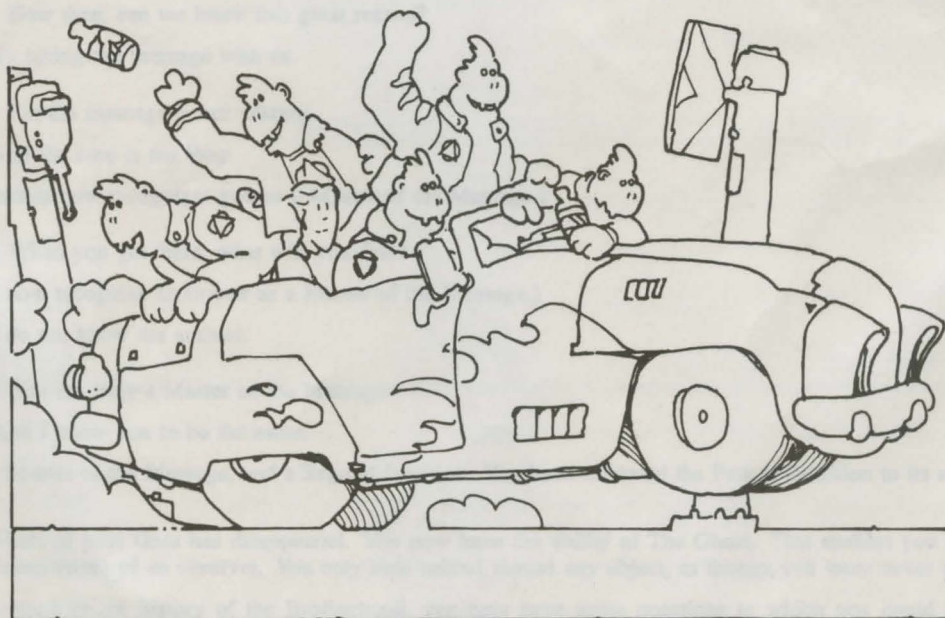


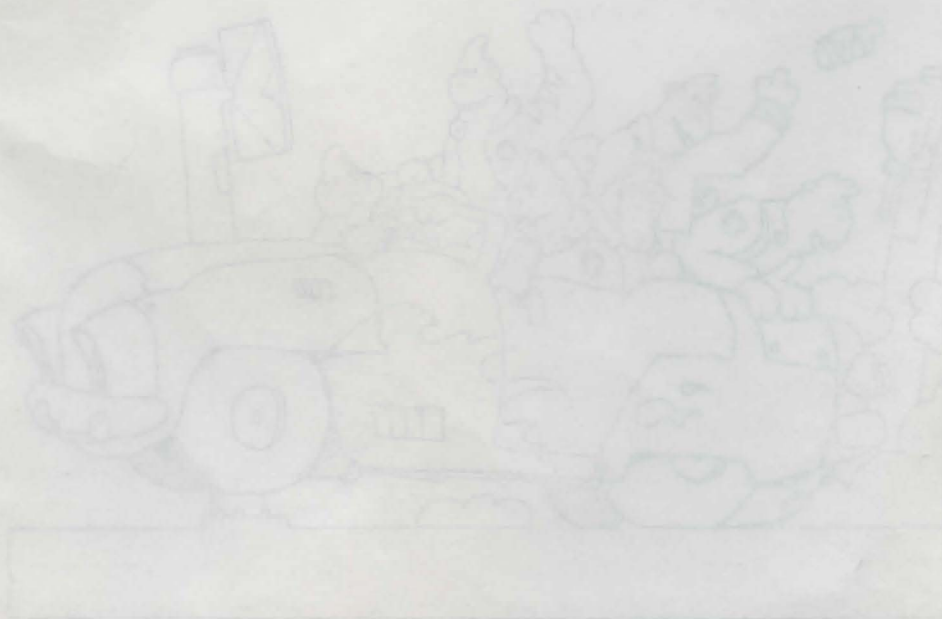
STAR SAGA: TWO™

BOOK F

TEXT 347-425



STAR
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TEXT 74-12



[347]

Mathus seems unsurprised that you got the dialogue right, and greets you with a somber yet compassionate smile. She asks you a few questions about Golgotha, which you answer quickly. She nods approvingly. "Come, Brother," she says, "The council awaits you."

You are led into the room of the High Council of the Brotherhood. Mathus takes her seat at the podium. The other members of the council, including Almed and Ultermalen, wait in silence. As the chamber is sealed, you notice that as before, several of the council chairs are empty. Mathus breaks the silence by asking you to tell about your experiences on Golgotha in detail. The council listens intently to your account, taking occasional notes. When you are done, Mathus steps to the altar and begins to chant:

The Lecture: Master of the Message

"You have done well, and are truly a Master of Reason. You are now ready to learn the rites of the final level of the Path of Intuition, the caste of Master of the Message. As a Master of the Message, your obligation will be that of perseverance. When you leave here, the roads will lead in many directions. Do not let anything deter you from reaching your destination.

"The dialogue of Mastery for a Master of the Message is the same as for a Master of Reason, except that after being asked the last question, respond as follows:"

Examiner: How then, can we know this great reason?

Answer: By taking the message with us.

Examiner: For the message is our destiny.

Answer: And the core is the Way.

(Examiner now recognizes you as a Master of the Message.)

Examiner: When you get there, what will you find?

(You now recognize Examiner as a Master of the Message.)

Answer: I do not know the answer.

Examiner: You are truly a Master of the Message.

Answer: And I know you to be the same.

"You are now a Master of the Message, and a Sage of Intuition. You have followed the Path of Intuition to its end and are finished with its Rites.

"Note that the Mark of your Geas has disappeared. You now have the ability of The Ghost. This enables you to evade notice in many instances simply by being aware of an observer. You may hide behind almost any object, as though you were never there in the first place.

"If you are interested in the history of the Brotherhood, you may have some questions to which you could not find the answers on Dardahl. I will be happy to answer those questions for you. Also, if you have been following our research on Dual Space, you may wish to speak to Brother Libra, who is our top expert in that area.

"Finally, if you wish to continue your training, you must go beyond this place. Here we can teach only the Path of Intuition. However, there remains much to learn. Your obligations will guide you onward. Remember that the message is our destiny, and the core is the Way. Do not forget what you have learned here."

As you are escorted outside, Almed takes you aside. Whispering in your ear so lightly that you can barely hear, he says, "When your work in the Arm is complete, go to the Paracore, to the planet Chee. Seek out the Wisened Sage Zantar. He has seen the Ancients' book. He will guide you in the Way. Sage of Intuition, Master of Righteousness, may you find peace on your way." As you turn toward him to thank him, you see nothing at all. Almed has vanished.

As you leave the temple, you suspect that you may see the High Council again before too long. You now have the following options:

⟨WPTSGZ⟩ (5 phases) Ask Brother Mathus about the history of the Brotherhood.

⟨FPLSMZ⟩ (4 phases) Speak to Brother Libra about Dual Space.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[348]

"I am the God of Inevitable Entanglements," squeals the voice in your head. "Sooner or later, everyone must become entangled, and I am here to ensure that they do it with grace and style."

"Sounds good," you say, noncommittally.

"Everyone needs a function, after all, and my name was chosen to convey a special meaning to you, you know."

"Yes, I know. I get the feeling that you gods are trying to slip one past Fate, somehow."

"We can only reveal what we know," the voice squeals.

"That makes sense. And your revelation?"

"The planet Dahl has Radioactives that you can dig up with your mining equipment."

"Thank you very much."

"Don't mention it," says the god, his squeal trailing off into nothing.

You report the god's name to the Shrine Keeper at the exit door.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[349]

As you await your arrival at your next destination, you find yourself looking at your star map again. Many of the planets now have names attached to them, but none has turned out to be Golgotha. You suspect that Golgotha is far away still.

One of the planets catches your eye: the one indicated as "Unaria." Didn't the computer once tell you something about the planet Unaria being a place the Founders visited?

"Computer, didn't you once tell me something about the planet Unaria being a place where the Founders visited?"

"It seems likely, Boss, just from analysis of the map data. At the very least, I would say that whoever reached Golgotha first — and that was probably the Founders — also was first to discover Unaria. But we've been to Unaria and we didn't find anything having to do with the Archangel or Golgotha."

"Hmmm. Maybe we were too interested in that Stargate to notice." You resolve to return to Unaria soon and try more of the options there.

❖ STOP ❖

[350]

After spending some more time in the Geefloid village, you learn that the Geefloids are excellent craftsmen. The tools they use, which you thought must be manufactured by Zyran machinery, are actually made by the Geefloids themselves. Since the planetary crust contains a high percentage of diamond, they have learned to use the natural abrasiveness of the stone to form tools by grinding materials into shape, rather than by chipping stones as your own primitive ancestors did. Furthermore, using their dual sets of jaws and their close-focusing eyes, they form the shapes with the precision and efficiency of the best milling or fracture-fabrication machinery.

You immediately recognize the value of these tools. Their high diamond content would make them hard to manufacture anywhere other than here. You challenge the Geefloids to try to create some of the more complex shapes that modern tools demand. The natives replicate flawlessly every three-dimensional form you give them. You ask if they might be interested in making tools for trade, in return for other commodities. The Geefloids offer to make you:

3 Tools for 1 Food

2 Tools for 1 Medicine

1 Tools for 1 Fiber

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

❖ STOP ❖

[351]

“Boss, get up here! We have company!”

You drop what you were doing and race for the bridge. “Who is it? One of ours, maybe?”

A blip on the scanning display is already close within your trisector and is converging on the planet. “It’s big, Boss. It’s throwing out warp fields a hundred times the hypervolume of ours.”

“Damn. Get all those hatches closed and get ready to run. Use passive scans only. It might just be passing by. We should be pretty inconspicuous down here.”

“Two more ships coming in, Boss. Behind the first one. They’re the same size. The first one is altering course slightly. It’s definitely vectoring in on this planet.”

You begin to wonder if staying put is a good idea. A planet’s surface is a good place to hide, but you might wind up stuck here if the ships go into orbit. On the other hand, if you take off, you risk detection in flight.

You may:

A. Stay on the planet

B. Take off

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[352]

Safely past the Survey Line, you scan the frequencies on your subspace radio, hoping to find an open channel that will put you in contact with Rurik on Atlantis. Instead, you make contact with a person named Admiral Roland Wilkins of the Space Patrol. Admiral Wilkins is very interested in your description of the Clathran survey fleet, and he asks you many questions about the types and numbers of ships the Clathrans have. He tells you that the Space Patrol is building a Space Navy to defend the Home Worlds against the Clathrans, and that your information is therefore very valuable. From what you've seen, you doubt that any navy the Home Worlds could build would make much difference, but then again, it's better than nothing. Perhaps if the Home Worlds could send a fleet to assist the Hadrakians and other aliens fighting the Clathrans, it might help. Wilkins agrees that this is the best chance, and thanks you again for your help.

Switching off the radio, you reflect on your success making it through the Survey Line. With a single ship, admittedly a well-equipped one, you managed to outwit thousands of Clathran vessels surveying every cubic inch of space, and you are still alive. By any account, this should not have been possible. The Clathran navy should have converged on you and blasted you into smithereens long ago. Unless...

The Core Stone? You have witnessed its power before. Could it have been fixing Clathran sensor readings at zero, freezing enemy visual displays showing empty space, and forcing pursuers to follow a straight course while you zigzag out of view? Some preservation of patterns here and there could have made you mighty difficult to catch. You know the Stone is intelligent. Carefully, you hold it in the flexion glove and feel its energy pulsing through your hand. *If you have been helping me, thank you*, you think.

"Boss," your computer interrupts you.

"Yes?"

"Now that we're past the Survey Line, where do we go?"

"Don't get impatient. When I'm ready, I'll tell you," you snap.

We have to find the planet Geefle, the thought pops into your mind. Yes, Geefle. Perhaps there you can find a way to land on Zyroth. Soulsinger went to Zyroth twenty generations ago. Now you have to finish what he started.

If you can.

✱ STOP ✱

[353]

"Fountain of Life." What an intriguing concept. You are eager to see it for yourself, but when you ask for directions you find the Dardahlans reluctant to give them to you. Finally a young nymph agrees.

"It is a place where only the bravest of us go," she whispers in your ear. Apparently even talking about the place frightens them.

"You must walk there, starting out no later than when the sun is at its highest point in the sky. Travel north along the dirt road leading out of the west gate of the city. Keep following it until it is impossible to go any farther. Then keep going until you reach the fountain."

You are puzzled by these directions. You try to question the nymph but she flutters away. Shaking your head at the strangeness of other cultures, you glance up at the sky. It is only just past high noon, so you make your way to the west gate and begin your journey.

Each footstep sends dust up into the air; you are soon covered by a thin layer over your entire body. You spend the first two hours brushing yourself off from time to time but eventually give it up as a lost cause. Since you always carry a small pack of food and water with you when you travel on a strange planet, you are able to quench your thirst as the need arises. You decide to stop to eat lunch, but soon resume your journey. The road stretches out in front of you for miles. You consider turning back, but decide you have come too far to give up now.

The landscape gradually changes as the miles pass. You started out with rolling fields on either side of you. They gave way to flat ground with an occasional stand of trees. You now find yourself entering a thick forest. With big trees packed closely together. And strange noises

calling down from the high branches. Soon the noises are coming from the middle branches, but you cannot see what sort of creatures are making them. You continue following the road while keeping your eye on the trees and their hidden inhabitants. You have a hard time seeing because of the dim light. The dense foliage is filtering out what little sunlight is left in the day. You curse yourself for not leaving earlier as the nymph directed you to do.

“Shreek!!!” you hear as you feel the wind from quickly beating wings brush your cheek. You jump back, reaching for your weapon, and barely avoid the sharp talons that rake the air where you were just standing. You are under attack by what looks like a mythological harpy!

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[354]

The bomb talks its way through the self-test sequence. “Let’s see, the munitions are functional and in stasis, that’s good. The priming hardware is functional and on safety, that’s good. The Interphase Reflector and Discontinuity Wave Generator are functional and ready to activate, that’s good. System test. . . uh oh.”

“Uh oh? What’s the matter?” you ask.

“Just a little power brownout. I’m kinda’ sensitive, you know. Let’s see, where were we. . . oh yeah, system test checks out. Yep. OK. Great. I’m all together, Boss. Shall I blow up now, or would you like me to wait ten minutes first?”

“Can you hold off for just a little longer?” you blurt out after a gulp.

“Gee, I don’t know. I’d really like to blow up right now.”

“Wait a second, I’ve got just the thing for you to destroy, but it’ll take a while to get there. Wouldn’t you like to blow away a nice big golden Dodecahedron? It’s making more Dual Space than you can imagine.”

“I suppose. I want to go off now, but for a good target I can wait. Just don’t take too long, OK?”

“OK,” you say, hoping you can get to Karnossus in time.

Congratulations, you now have a fully operational Dual Space Inversion Bomb! All you have to do now is get to Karnossus and drop it.

❖ STOP ❖

[355]

The violent geology in the southern hemisphere presents quite a challenge. First there are the hurricanes. Then, the heat storms. Then, the floods. Then, the earthquakes. Then, the volcanic eruptions. Your ship is not enjoying the ride as you head right into the worst of it to find what you are looking for: Phase Steel.

"Boss, I don't know if this is worth it," your computer complains.

"Shut up and drive," you order, "If I want your opinion, I'll ask for it."

Eventually you manage to find a rich vein of Phase Steel just underneath a river of molten lava. "Eureka!" you cry out.

"But that's molten lava!" your computer chimes in. "Do you know what that'll do to the sensor arrays? They'll all have to be recalibrated from scratch!"

"Well, start recalibrating. I want that Phase Steel."

Wearing your full environmental suit with extra heat protection, you climb out of the ship and into the river of red-hot liquid rock. A strong cable tethers you to the ship. You can feel the lava current tugging at the cable, trying to break your lifeline. Carefully, you lower the mining equipment to the bottom of the river. Tending to it carefully for a couple of days, you collect enough of the valuable Phase Steel to fill one cargo bay. Satisfied, you collect your equipment and return to your ship.

"There," you tell the computer as you undress. You are quite pleased with your accomplishment.

"Don't be so satisfied with yourself," it retorts. "For one stupid unit of Phase Steel, you've made quite a mess of the ship."

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

[356]

You are not sure what has brought you here inside these thick stone walls. Perhaps it is a feeling that you are not yet ready to continue your training elsewhere. Perhaps you just need the reassurance which always comes from meditation in the temple. In any case, you are here in the Chamber of Prayer.

The flickering candles cast eerie, yet comfortingly familiar, shadows on the walls. You approach the alcove where a stand of candles is located and kneel on the cushion placed in front. Taking a wisp of straw, you light the tip and hold the flame over an unlit taper. You light a single candle as you pray. You recall your clue for locating the Brotherhood: look for the inverted candle. When you are feeling one with the universe again, you rise and leave the temple. There is nothing more for you here; you have the future to live.

You may select this option again.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[357]

All of sudden, a thought occurs to you, and you pound yourself on the head in frustration.

“How can I have been to Margen and not visited the Temple? I may have missed the whole point of the planet!”

But the stars beyond your viewscreen, unheeding of your question, continue to move quietly in their courses.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[358]

News from home:

An affective disorder called Sudden Adjustment Psychosis Syndrome (SAPS) has been blamed for the sharp rise in nervous disorders and cases of bizarre behavior in cities across the Home Worlds. Examples:

A computer operator on Leucothea, after an argument with a superior, flew into a rage and destroyed one hundred terabytes of data.

A scientist in Slimeyer Biology Lab at Harvard deliberately attempted to release preserved Smallpox Virus; she was stopped in time.

A large construction site on Frontier collapsed, with no injuries; subsequent investigation revealed that the entire construction crew had forgotten to secure the pins that held the floor sections.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[359]

Always in search of good personal weaponry, you get directions from Civilian Estal to the nearest weapons exchange. When you arrive, you are a little bit disappointed at the relatively small selection. Apparently the Worzellians craft most of their weapons individually for their own use. After inquiring as to the price and availability of the items that are of interest, you learn that the Worzellians will sell you the following:

Super Space Suit — 1 Warp Core
Phase Sword — 1 Crystals + 1 Munitions + 1 Phase Steel

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

[360]

You walk the streets with a purpose now, to seek out a Clathran soldier, preferably alone, and teach him a lesson. You are not sure what this really means, but you are confident that you will recognize the situation when you come across it. You try to remain relatively inconspicuous in your search; there's no reason to bring down a whole patrol upon yourself.

A short time later, you find yourself in the warehouse sector of the city. There are very few other beings here, so you are all the more startled to hear a loud piercing noise coming from around the next corner. Cautiously you approach the source of the sound. Turning the corner you see a strange sight.

You have the good fortune to be looking at the back of a seven-foot-tall Clathran soldier. Since the giant lizard has not seen you, the option of quietly leaving, unobserved, is still open. The frail elderly Sirissian who is making the loud shrieking noise which startled you will no doubt be just fine.

However, you decide instead to take an active interest in whatever is going on. No escapee from a handbag factory is going to terrorize little old Sirissians if you have anything to say about it!

"Ahem," you say, clearing your throat. The Clathran turns, probably to see who or what could have made so bizarre a sound.

"I think you are upsetting that elderly being. You should be ashamed of yourself, picking on someone smaller than you," you announce, stepping forward in an aggressive manner.

"Alien, this does not concern you. I recommend you do not interfere," is the lizard's response.

"I am afraid it already is my business," you reply in your coldest tone.

"Then you must die."

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[361]

Wandering further, it begins to get dark and quite cold. You have numerous means about your person to start a fire, and there is a great deal of flammable material about (all of it still attached to growing things). You may...

- A. Build a fire to warm yourself
- B. Shiver in the cold

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[362]

You follow the curl of the galaxy, the lure of the unknown, through the mathematics of the abyss. You emerge at the star system called Tayzha. Gas giants greet you first, four in succession, heating the ecliptical rim like petty overlords on the fringes of their sun's domain. There is an inner planet, though, which must be the one you seek. The Clathrans have been to this world before you. A Monitor hangs in orbit like a brooding eye, guarding the soot-dark skies from all violators.

"What have we got here?" you ask your computer, activating your sensor systems and beginning a scan.

Your sensors sip carefully from the waves emitted by the planet. All information is waves, you think to yourself. The planet in the distance, for example: you will know it by its waves of radio, light, gravity, and heat; by the cycling of its weather systems, its rotation from day to night, the ebb and flow of its inhabitants going about their lives. Even if you touch its soil, you will feel only the probability of contact as the waves of its atomic particles intersect with yours. Your mind converges on concepts of waves as you study the planet. Is this just idle thought, you wonder, or is the planet influencing your perceptions?

Your computer compiles the data: "Inhabitable planet of Delta-Seven class; gravity one point one Gees; climate Earth minus ten, but many, repeat many infrared sources. Carbon combustion, uranium fission, fusion, hyperspace pumps all in use, with recent trace contaminants present. Five, perhaps six ports identified. Heavy sub-ballistic atmosphere travel; zero trans-atmospheric. No activity near the Monitor. What we have is a technologically advanced civilization, under observation by the Clathrans, but apparently with minimal interference."

"Hide us," you command.

There is a lurch, and an illusory slewing of the forward view as your ship's computer flexes its warp fields, shoving space aside and putting Tayzha's tarnished bulk between you and your enemy's weapons.

Your computer reports: "Boss, there's no acknowledgement from the surface. No landing signals, and as far as I can tell no spaceport. That's odd, because the surface is almost completely industrialized. I'm picking up heavy commercial radio traffic on all frequencies. There are core taps in both polar regions, and heavy industrial development uniformly across the surface. In orbit there's a chain of indigenous communications satellites, as well as a Grade III Clathran Monitor Net."

"Take us down. Dazzle the satellites and find a deserted spot."

Your ship responds, leaping urgently to your will. This much you have learned. A flicker on the Monitor's screens, no more, and you, the un-Surveyed, come to the polluted surface of Tayzha.

Jumbled impressions of rooftops and machinery, magnetic trafficways crowded with vehicles. A technological, despoiled landscape. And then you are down, and part of it.

Tayzhans find you quickly, man-sized amoebae of a color like the gray of the sky. They can form wave emitters and receivers in your frequencies, and communication is not difficult. First you talk with them, and then, with their blessing, you roam.

For the Tayzhans, waves are more than messengers of communicated data. Matter and energy, thought and feeling and the processes of life are just different frequencies, different wavelengths, different propagation media. The universe impinges on the individual in waves like the lapping of waters onto a beach; the individual contributes his own overtones and vibrations to the symphony. To throw a stone, to utter a sound, to recall a memory: all just perturbations in the same matrix.

Clathrans do not pursue you, nor do they walk the streets of Tayzha. They know the Tayzhans will not depart, and that is enough. The Monitor watches only for violators from beyond, a filter against discordant notes, a contraceptive to the seed of thought. Tayzhans watch the Monitor, scientists and technicians alike. They know the Clathran frequencies across the myriad bands. Their wave-borne hints tell you that personal electromagnetic invisibility is possible, at a small cost.

The industry produces the things that life needs: matter and energy. Insulicon is one form of matter; it is made and used here, as are Discontinuity Waves, a form of energy. Perhaps there are possibilities for weapons here. The Tayzhans make no such distinction: weapons, like insults, are just hostile communications on particular wavebands.

The Tayzhan government is interested in communications with you, to learn of the galaxy beyond the Monitor. You are the carrier frequency for the information of other star systems.

Wandering, communication, research, and science yield the following avenues for further exploration:

⟨2BHWRT⟩ (3 phases) Rig your ship to draw warp core from the four gas giants of the Tayzha system.

⟨6BBWWT⟩ (4 phases) Accept an invitation to speak with the government.

⟨2GH4RQ⟩ (3 phases) Buy Insulicon.

⟨6GB4WQ⟩ (5 phases) Study the ends and means of Discontinuity Waves.

⟨KBDWCT⟩ (7 phases) Learn from the Tayzhans the ability of concealment.

❖ STOP ❖

[363]

"Bad news, Boss."

When your computer interrupts your evening viewing of *Star Trek MCXXXVIII* with a line like that, you just *know* you're in trouble.

"What is it?"

"Zyran ships approaching. Three of them. From three different directions. They have us surrounded."

"You're right, that *is* bad news. Well don't just sit there, start evasive maneuvers! Prepare the weapons!"

"Yes, Boss. Message coming in on visual."

A disgusting, brown, multi-tentacled Zyran wading in gook appears on your screen. "Cargo," he says. The three Zyran ships take aim at you.

At least they aren't trying to eat you anymore (word must have gotten around that Humans don't taste good). Instead, they're giving you a choice of handing over some cargo, or fighting. Great.

Do you:

- 1) Surrender
- 2) Fight

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[364]

Subspace radio transmission from The Battle, Inc.:

"To all agents: The Sirissians inform us that they will be preparing to join the United Hadrakian Navy in the fight against the Clathrans. A good thing, too. We need all the help we can get."

❖ STOP ❖

[365]

Even as you accelerate toward the enemy, you wonder how you and the *Black Abyss* can be of the most use in this battle. In combat your ship is the equal of most of the larger vessels, which makes it one of the most powerful single-pilot ships in the Arm. But you are a scientist, not a warrior. Your weapons are primarily defensive. Aren't they?

You soon have a chance to find out. A group of Clathran ships, apparently a battle group that's gotten separated from their Monitor ship, moves into your forward octant. Several Hadrakians are in pursuit, and behind you a pair of Zyrans is advancing to cut the Clathrans off. You are right in the middle. You maneuver upwards to get out of the Clathrans' powerful forward line of fire, while slewing around to bring your own weapons upon the enemy's flanks as they pass.

"Computer," you instruct. "I'll handle the flying. Override if there's a threat that I fail to react to. I'm turning over most of the weapon systems to you. Fire where it'll do the most good."

"Okay, Boss. Do you want priority on offensive or defensive systems?"

Your display screens now show another Clathran battle group coming in from starboard, Monitor and all, heading to intersect the pursuit and turn the tables on the Hadrakians. Unless those Zyrans catch up in a hurry, you're soon going to be outnumbered in this vicinity.

"What the hell," you say. "Offensive priority. Let's get them."

"Right, Prof," says the computer. The pursued Clathrans, seeing help on the way, have turned to face their pursuers, leaving you above them and astern. Perfect! You rush in with all weapons on automatic. Your beams lay them open like a surgeon's scalpel, and they bleed air and metal fragments into space. You fold back for another pass. This time they return your fire, having realized that your small ship is a threat to them after all. You are forced to maneuver more sharply, so your computer can't get as steady a shot this time, but by the time you've come around again, one of the dreadnoughts is torn in half by an explosion amidship; another's engines and weapons are dead.

"Did we do that?" you ask the computer.

"Yeah, Boss. Hold on!" Your ship lurches violently as a missile cloud blurs by to starboard. The Clathrans have driven away the Hadrakian task force with heavy losses and they now turn their attention to you. You look to port where the Zyrans should be, and you see that another Clathran battle group has intercepted them. They're holding their own, but they won't be helping you or the damaged Hadrakians. The battle group from the flank is coming into range.

"Damn, there goes the neighborhood" you mutter as you maneuver directly toward the Monitor.

"Boss, what are you doing? We've got to get out of here."

"And go where?" you demand, picking up speed. Flashes and sheets of light surround you, silent messages from other parts of the battle, up close and distant. The Clathrans are using their superior numbers effectively, holding back none of their strength, outnumbering the Allies in every sector. Soon the Allies will be overcome.

"The Monitor's got us in range," warns the computer. Plasma bolts flash around you, and a tractor beam finds a momentary lock on you, causing a sickening lurch and a terrible groan from your engines until you break free.

"Then you'd better hit it first!" you yell back. Your weapons fire in a continuous stream, splashing energy against the Monitor's shields. You maneuver upward and downward, avoiding the crossfire between the Monitor and its battle group. The ship is close enough now that the curve of its hull hangs above you like an upside-down horizon, and you maneuver a course that will almost skim that horizon as you whip past the Monitor. Your shots are beginning to penetrate the Monitor's shields, making small punctures in the hull.

A blast of pure force catches the corner of your warp fields just as you pass your closest approach. You spin at least three hundred sixty degrees; the swirling sky is full of Clathrans. By the time you are back on course, another tractor beam has caught you.

"Fire directly down the beam!" you tell the computer. You see the cabin lights dim as the computer puts all its energy into the counterattack. A large explosion blooms from the surface of the Monitor, and once again you are free.

Free, but trapped. The combined battle groups, you realize, have you pinned near the Monitor. The only thing keeping you alive is the Clathrans' unwillingness to hit the Monitor as they fire on you. Your maneuvering space is running out, and the Monitor's beams are taking a toll on your shields.

You figure the exam's about over, but you're not quite ready to turn in your blue book just yet. "What's the status of the Dual Space Interphase?" you ask the computer.

"Still dropping, Boss. Since the destruction of the Dodecahedron it's been slowly returning to its prior ambient level, which is. . ."

"Never mind," you interrupt as you swerve to avoid a wall of stress fields projected in your path. "Activate the Interphase Constrictor. Put in whatever power you can spare from the shields. Drive the Interphase right to zero if you can."

At first there's no effect. You're not even sure you know what kind of effect to look for. There's nothing in Dual Space theory that says the Interphase width can affect plasma beams or photon missiles. But perhaps closing off the Interphase will make some of the enemy's weapons inoperable, or disrupt some of the minds and machines controlling them.

"Boss, nothing seems to be happening."

You're not certain of that yourself. You feel strange. The firing pattern of the Monitor's weapons seems to be locked in a peculiar repeating sequence that you can't quite recognize. You are finding it easier to maneuver to avoid the threats.

"Is the local Interphase at zero?" you ask the computer.

"No, Boss. We can constrict it just a little further, but I cannot predict the effects on you or myself."

"Go ahead," you order.

You know that something has changed, but you can't quite define what. The scene takes on a dreamlike quality. Each bolt directed at your ship fits into a predetermined sequence. Each countermaneuver you make seems as inevitable as the orbit of a planet around its sun. Fighting is easy. There are no decisions to make, and no surprises to respond to. You maneuver to avoid the next few attacks, as if following a path drawn indelibly ahead of you. You can't see the path; for all you know, it ends in your death not very far away, but you follow it like an animated toy obeying its electronic script.

The nearby Monitor is also caught within the two-kilometer radius of your Interphase Constrictor. The effects of the lowered Interphase on the Monitor are subtle, but in a battle like this they make all the difference. Missile weapons fired at you, normally guided on unpredictable evasive trajectories by intelligent computers, fly in vulnerable straight arcs instead, easily defeated by your defensive systems. The complex beam firing patterns seem to lock onto repeating cycles. Some of the weapons cease fire altogether. Stress fields and tractor beams collapse.

"It's working," you say without emotion. "Can we make an effective counterattack?"

"Computing optimum attack pattern," says the computer in an uncharacteristically flat mechanical voice. You change course to bring you closer to the enemy, avoiding its guns, and when the inevitable moment arrives you order "Fire."

Your weapons blaze. Energy bolts lance toward the Monitor. The Monitor's defenses deflect them and absorb them without difficulty. Of course, you realize. How could the Monitor fail to defend itself against so predictable an attack?

Stalemate. You and the Monitor are locked in hopeless battle like figurines in a clockwork dance.

Then the Monitor's hull is laid open by powerful violet bolts from behind you. For a moment you see the edges of decks and bulkheads inside, as unleashed energy spilled from reactors deep within fills the interior of the ship. A moment later, the Monitor's remaining hull explodes.

"Turn off the Constrictor," you tell the computer. Behind you, you see the Hadrakian force battling the remaining Clathrans, the odds now equal.

"Hadrakian task force is hailing us, Boss." You open the channel.

"What did you *do* to that Monitor, human?" asks a Hadrakian voice. "It was hardly even defending itself." You realize what must have happened: the Hadrakian beam that killed the Monitor was fired from *outside* the radius of the Interphase Constrictor.

"I don't know exactly," you answer. "But I can do it again. I just need to get close to the enemy. Just remember I'm a sitting duck too."

You join the task force, which quickly adapts its fighting strategy to make use of the attack you've discovered. With heavy covering fire from the Hadrakians, you approach Clathran ships, then turn on your Interphase Constrictor. While you are both held not quite helpless in the strange field of zero Interphase, your Hadrakian escort destroys the Clathran. It is a risky but rewarding strategy. With your Hadrakian allies, you move from one battle group to another, taking out Monitors and dreadnoughts, reversing the odds everywhere the Clathrans have the Allies outnumbered or outgunned.

Concentrating on one single target at a time, as the fight goes on hour by hour, you have little chance to assess the overall progress of the battle. Therefore, it is almost a total surprise when your task force looks for a new Clathran ship to attack and can't find one immediately. The battle is turning in your favor. You notice that Sirissian ships have arrived to fight on your side, and so has another small fleet of ships whose design you don't recognize right away. Then it hits you — they look like your own ship! The Home Worlds have sent their Space Navy at last.

With the odds now against them, the Clathrans are soon in retreat. They know that there's no advantage in expending their forces in a losing battle — not when they can regroup and rebuild and attack again with even greater force. But the Allies have at least bought time. The Clathrans may be halted for years, and the Allies will grow stronger too. You help the Allies to secure Hadrak's orbital zones and chase down Clathran stragglers.

Finally there is only one Monitor left in Hadrakian space, and it is damaged and surrounded by an entire Hadrakian task force. You ask the Hadrakians if they need assistance, and they tell you that they plan to take the Monitor intact by boarding it. If they can take it with its computers intact, the information they capture might be the greatest victory of the whole battle. "I'm an expert in alien technology," you offer. "Do you have room for one more in the boarding crew?" The Hadrakians agree readily, so you move your ship into position with the others.

❖ STOP ❖

[366]

It might just be your imagination, but you could swear that the life-sized figures in The Battle's ubiquitous mural, the Hadrakian and the Clathran, have moved just a little bit closer together. As the real-life conflict between the two races draws inexorably closer, so too must the symbolic icons.

A uniformed Hadrakian steps into the room and announces, "Hadrakian forces, directed from the ground by Marshal Innvo and from space by Admiral Szohvb, have taken their battle positions around Hadrak. The commanders have devised a formation that is broad in nature but able to close quickly to meet pockets of heavy fighting. The Clathran Survey, due to arrive shortly, has noted our deployment and is mobilizing several large battle groups in an attempt to overwhelm us. Obviously they have not been fooled by the limited resistance we have put up in the past. It will be a brutal battle, our last stand in defense of our home world.

"The odds look bleak, but if we are defeated, we will take as many Clathrans with us as we can."

You quickly summarize your own progress, and the Hadrakian takes in your report with interest. The briefing is now finished, so you leave the briefing room and head down the corridor in the rear of the building to seek some strategic advice.

❖ STOP ❖

[367]

You are ready and willing to give the cube what it needs — one Vortex Coil. Unfortunately, you are not able to do so, because your ship is not holding any Vortex Coils at the present time. Better luck next time.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[368]

"Boss, we've achieved orbit around the planet Margen."

"Fine, let's tell them we're here and would like permission to land." You are eager to return to the barren world and can barely contain yourself while your ship lands and the space pad descends below ground into its own airlock. Soon the computer tells you that the pressure and atmosphere readings are normal outside the ship's hull, so that you are free to enter the terminal.

You quickly make your way into the spaceport and are pleased to see Brother Annah behind the desk. She smiles sweetly and hands you yet another stack of papers to be filled out. This time you know enough to do what is necessary without complaint. When you finish, she takes the sheets from you and disappears behind the door marked "Authorized Personnel Only."

Your options are the same as before.

❖ STOP ❖

[369]

You are interested in learning more about the Middle Riallan psychic abilities, so you send out the mental call for your friend Gloossh to meet you and give you the promised lesson. You feel the alien's thoughts as it tells you to be at the area where you first met it when you are ready. You have a feeling that the alien knows how much trouble it is for you to put on your environmental suit and that you'll need a few extra minutes to do so. Finally, after much tugging and pulling, you are dressed properly for deep space, and you leave your airlock.

"Have fun, Boss!" the computer cheerily calls after you. You grunt in acknowledgement.

Sure enough, just as you arrive at the appointed place, Gloossh floats in behind you. The alien greets you and tells you to make yourself comfortable as the lesson is about to begin.

"We Middle Riallans have inherited many mental powers from our ancestors, who came from somewhere near the Galactic Core. We have little specific information about the ancestral Riallans, but our legends say that our abilities are childlike compared to theirs. The same holds true if you compare the New Riallans, who migrated to the Galactic Fringe many years ago, with us. We have many abilities that they do not. Life truly is a circle."

Gloossh spends the next several hours demonstrating many of the wonderful things the Middle Riallans can do using only the power of their minds. These things range from the more mundane levitation and telekinesis to something it calls sensaround, which is the magical ability to "see" the physical world in a three hundred sixty degree, three-dimensional sphere, as if one had eyes looking all around at all angles at once.

These abilities intrigue you, and you ask Gloossh if it might be possible to teach them to you.

"Well, levitation and telekinesis shouldn't be too hard; I see you have some talent for them already. Sensaround could be more difficult, as it requires a broader use of Dual Space. But I see no reason why we can't try."

After some exercises in levitation and telekinesis, Gloossh is satisfied that you have them under control. Sensaround is another matter. You spend the next several days trying to sense your surroundings in a more total way than you had ever dreamed possible. It helps that Gloossh can enter your mind and show you what Dual Space techniques you need to use as well as what parts of the brain need to be stimulated. Each night, you return to your ship hurtling in cranial lobes you never even knew existed. Finally, Gloossh tells you that it is time to try for yourself.

Holding your breath, you close your eyes and concentrate on sensing your surroundings. You suddenly get the image of being attacked from all sides by large pillow-shaped objects. Reacting immediately, you twist and turn, emerging from the fray untouched. Looking back to where you were floating just a moment ago, you see a dozen Middle Riallan children giggling as they swarm over to you.

"Very good, Human," Gloossh compliments you. "Not all full-grown Middle Riallans could have gotten out of that storm of children without being touched. I am impressed!"

You cover your embarrassment by playing with the children for a few minutes until Gloossh sends them off again.

"I am even more impressed by your ability to learn this advanced technique after getting a closer look at your mind. You are from a race not quite as old or as evolved as ours and, by all rights, should not be able to use the ability of Sensaround. Yet you can. The widening Dual Space Interphase must be responsible. Interesting. I am afraid, though, that if the Dual Space Interphase gets too wide it would not be good for you. Your brain is not constructed to handle it — you could go insane."

You are troubled by Gloossh's words and think about it as you return to your ship.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[370]

Your ship's alarm siren blares out.

"Unidentified ship on our tail, Boss. It's got some kind of scanning beam that it's got focused on us, and it's closing in, fast."

A wave of fear passes over you as you recognize the ship's alien bird shape. It's a Clathran scout again.

"Incoming transmission on visual," your computer reports.

The Clathran scout captain appears on your viewscreen. He stands seven feet tall and is covered in green scales. His rasping hisses are interpreted by your universal translator.

"Human vermin," he says, "Your race is an insult to the stars. Surrender or be destroyed."

Of course, you have no intention of surrendering. You may, however, either fight or try to get away. The Clathran scout is both fast and well-armed. Do you:

- 1) Fight
- 2) Run away

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[371]

Subspace radio transmission from The Battle, Inc.:

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

❖ STOP ❖

[372]

You are just finishing lunch when the computer announces your imminent emergence from hyperspace. Gathering up your dirty dishes, you place them in the cleaning unit and program the unit to clean, dry and put away the plates and other utensils. Whistling, you make your way up to the bridge.

"Glad you could make it, Boss," your faithful computer quips as you seat yourself in the captain's chair. "We are about to get our first glimpse of the planet Takata. If my initial readings are correct, this should be an interesting sight."

You are about to ask the computer what it means by that remark when your ship enters normal space and the question becomes unnecessary.

The world that appears before you is beautiful. Dazzling colors arc out of the southern hemisphere and into space, making half of the planet look like it is covered with rainbows. You have never seen anything like it before. The colored lights shift their hue and brightness constantly, creating a magical kaleidoscopic show. The northern hemisphere, on the other hand, looks relatively normal.

You wait for the computer scan to explain this unexpected sight and are not surprised to find that Takata is inhabited by an intelligent race of beings. Apparently there is some planet-wide mechanism responsible for the multicolored bolts of energy that arc from half of the planet's surface.

"Computer, what effect do those energy bolts have on living creatures? Is it safe to land here?"

"Computing, Boss. From what I can tell, there is at most a small amount of short-term damage to organic life, but I wouldn't want to live here for any length of time. After a few years, there is probably some cell mutation. I'll have a more comprehensive readout soon."

You read the report as soon as it is ready and learn that Takata is populated by a race called the Sirissians. They also have colonies on the nearby worlds of Sirissi and Ululu, with Sirissi being the home world.

The aliens have a fascinating appearance, with multiple sensory organs atop stalks which sprout from their "heads." This gives them the look of having a spiked haircut running from the equivalent of ear to ear. The sensory organs are peculiar, too — seven round globes with horizontal slits sitting on top of the head stalks. Each globe apparently performs a different function, although they all seem to be quite similar in appearance. You are truly baffled by Sirissian anatomy. At least it works for them!

The Sirissians are about four feet in height and three feet in breadth. Their cultural mannerisms include a lot of bending at the waist, which looks none too easy given their physical dimensions. Yet this action is essential, from what you can see, to ending conversations and consummating any sort of deal. This gives them a rather clownish appearance in their day-to-day activities and tends to make you think of them as harmless. You haven't come this far by being taken in by appearances, however. You resolve to give this new race the respect you always give the unknown.

You also see that the Clathrans have a small garrison on this planet. The base sends out an occasional patrol into the cities to check on the Sirissians, and that's about it. Apparently the Clathrans consider the Sirissians to be a vanquished race and feel little need to expend military power keeping them under control. Since the occupying force is so small, you are not really concerned about being discovered while you are here.

The spaceport is used quite a bit, not only by ships from the Sirissians' other planets, but also by ships from other races. The Clathrans don't seem to mind an ongoing trade industry here. That's not like them. Maybe they assume that any ship in the area is either friendly or neutral — or else how would they have gotten here? You pray for the Clathrans to continue to be so complacent. It certainly makes things easier for you.

Directing your computer to home in on the landing beacon, you make contact with the spaceport and get permission to set down. Energy bolts flash upward into the atmosphere, making the landing process somewhat tricky, but you manage to evade them with only one particularly close call that singes your hull. The computer makes its usual perfect landing, and you step out onto the planet's surface.

A welcoming committee bobbles over to you and offers assistance in directing you to wherever you wish to go. You explain that you are new to the planet and aren't sure what activities are available to you. They bow a few times while conferring in low tones amongst themselves. Then they turn back to you and give you the following options:

⟨H7R8AK⟩ (3 phases) Visit the market and see what they have to trade.

⟨D7C8FK⟩ (4 phases) Visit the ship garage and see if they can “tune up” your trusty spaceship.

⟨DXCNFY⟩ (5 phases) Spend some time investigating the odd energy bolts.

✧ STOP ✧

[373]

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

Finally, it speaks: “Perhaps, Darkwatch, we will *journey* with you to Golgotha at some future time. It is not a *journey* to take lightly. First you must go there in your physical form. You have this ability, though we do not. Take your ship there and learn all you can. Then, if you still wish to *journey* there, return to us.”

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[374]

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

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

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

You update the King on the current military situation: the movement of the Clathran Survey Line, the status of the Hadrakian War, and so on.

“The time is right for the Zyran to join an alliance of the free races in the galaxy against the Clathran menace,” you argue.

The King thinks about it for a minute, then answers.

“I disagree. Come back later if you have something more to tell me, Human.”

You are escorted out. Thinking about what happened, it seems that the problem was not what you said, but how you said it. If only you knew how to be more diplomatic, you might be able to persuade the King. Well, you can always try again.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[375]

"I've got a subspace message for you, Boss."

"Who is it?"

"It's just a one-way message, from Dean Myers back on Harvard."

"Read it out."

"Professor Dambroke, I hope you can hear this message because you may be humanity's only hope. The rising dual space interphase is causing mass insanity here on the Home Worlds. We desperately need the information you have been sent to retrieve. Civilization is falling! Concentrate all of your efforts on the dual space problem."

You wonder if the Dean knows about your dealings with the Brotherhood; you even find yourself wondering if the Brotherhood has put her up to sending this message, to pressure you. Still, the news from the Home Worlds has been getting steadily worse.

"Computer, how many anomalies have we researched?"

"Two. We still have to research two more."

You sigh. "Okay, we'll be visiting one of them soon."

❖ STOP ❖

[376]

Since the Clathrans are already here, you wonder if The Battle, Inc., is still in business. You quickly discover that they most emphatically are. While they are no longer doing business openly, you find they have successfully gone "underground" and are going as strong as ever. You are glad to hear this because you are interested in conferring about the war.

Following the directions you are given, you soon arrive outside the "Franclair Casket Company." You are not positive you are in the right place as you hear the mournful sounds of an organ playing in the background. Still, you are here so you may as well go in.

The doleful looking Settled One smiles sympathetically at you as you enter and asks if she may be of service. Hesitantly, you tell her why you are really here. Immediately, her manner changes to a brisk matter-of-fact attitude and points you to a door marked, "Mortuary, Do Not Enter." Gulping, you pass through.

❖ STOP ❖

[377]

"Boss?" your computer asks, interrupting your newest hobby, glassblowing.

"Hmm?" is all you can say with the glassblower's pipe clenched between your teeth.

"I think we are picking up a message between two ships. Are you interested in listening in on it?"

Of course you are, and the computer knows it, so without waiting for your answer, it begins broadcasting the radio message into the control room.

"... had to choose which race is the strongest in this part of the galaxy? Why the Sirissians, of course. I wouldn't want to make them angry with me for anything. They have so advanced a technology that even the Clathrans are afraid to cross them. Have you noticed that the soldiers won't do anything to stop Sirissian trade? That's because if they provoke the Sirissians too much, they might rebel against the Clathrans. And even the Clathrans can't afford to have that happen, especially now that the Survey..."

The signal becomes too weak to hear the rest of the conversation, but it certainly gives you something to think about.

✧ STOP ✧

[378]

Taking advantage of your opponent's confusion, you tell him to move to the side of the field. Meanwhile, your ally has found the other opponent and they have begun fighting. Unfortunately, your opponent sees the fight and realizes you must be his enemy. He turns quickly and pounces on you. His strength is overwhelming. Soon you are seriously injured. At the same time, your ally has defeated your other opponent. You bleed in the mud as you watch the remaining two combatants go at it. Your ally eventually wins and crosses the field victoriously. You pass out.

✧ STOP ✧

[379]

Morikor.

The mere thought of the planet is enough to make you shiver with dread. This is where Vanessa Chang and her crew were taken by the Clathrans over three centuries ago. Here they were examined, tortured, and ultimately dissected. The Clathrans wanted the location of Earth, so it could be destroyed. Chang and her crew resisted, purging the data from their navigational computer before the Clathrans could discover it. She and three of her crew eventually escaped, fleeing home to warn humanity of its danger.

Morikor. Even the name sounds evil.

Now you are here, yourself. Why? You are not sure. Maybe you can learn something new about the Clathrans that will enable you to destroy them.

All you know for sure is that you are approaching the most strongly fortified planet in the Clathran Empire. You stop and instruct your computer to run a long-range scan, so you can decide whether to risk moving any closer.

When the readout is ready, you sit in your captain's chair and study it. From what the computer can tell, the planet is environmentally hostile. The Clathrans live in big black domes to protect themselves from the airless, cold, barren rock they have made into one of their most important military bases. The domes also serve to keep intruders such as yourself from landing in the cities. They are opened to allow landing only after thorough scrutiny of each vessel. Moreover, they block your ship's scanners, so you can't tell what might be found within. Around

the domes are high-powered beam weapons mounted into the bedrock. This heavy artillery looks quite capable of defending the planet from any kind of invasion, least of all your tiny ship.

You evaluate your chances of being able to land on Morikor undetected. They are not good. You might try to sneak down by turning off all your ship's systems and pretending to be a random meteorite. However, that would be very difficult. At some point, you would have to activate your drives to avoid crashing, and that could give you away. The Clathran surveillance systems are likely to be very good.

It would help if you had some kind of cloaking device that would completely shield you from Clathran detection. Unfortunately, you do not have such a device at the present time.

"Computer, move us in a little closer," you command. "Let's see if we can figure out where the planetary sensor systems are."

"Er, Boss?" your computer interrupts. You just hate that tone of voice — it really doesn't bode well for you at all.

"Yes?" you reply, bracing yourself for the bad news.

"The beam weapons are moving into position to fire upon us."

"Time to go. Maximum acceleration."

"Right, Boss."

You are pressed hard into your chair as the ship changes direction and accelerates away from the planet at maximum speed. Your ship shakes violently after taking a hit from one of the planetary beam weapons. WHAM! Another hit. The Clathrans must have been waiting until you were close to fire; it takes several long seconds of high-speed evasion to escape their weapons entirely.

Finally Morikor fades away on your viewscreen. It's a good thing you aborted the landing when you did; those weapons could have pulverized you into space dust. As it is, you have taken a fair amount of damage.

It seems that in order to land on Morikor you will need some kind of cloaking device for your ship. There are enough weapons on the surface to overwhelm any conceivable defenses; your only hope lies in concealment from the Clathran sensors.

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

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[380]

When you ask the Worzellians about prior contact, they are surprised that you do not already know the story. They direct you to a gallery in a wing of the Academy building that documents the first meeting between Humans and Worzellians three hundred thirty years ago.

It seems that at some time during Vanessa Chang's explorations in the Arm, her ship was being pursued by renegade Hadrakian Homeless Ones. With her ship outnumbered and heavily damaged, she made a crash landing on Worzelle. The pirates were not equipped with air-to-ground assault weapons, so they landed and attacked hand-to-hand. Miraculously, Chang's crew held off the ground assault for two weeks, giving them time to repair their ship. With the ship back in full operation, Chang took off and attacked the orbiting pirate vessels by surprise. The pirates were caught with most of their fighting complement on the ground, and Chang routed them. After another week of repairs, Chang left Worzelle.

Chang's crew never knew the impact that this event had on Worzellian history. At the time, the fifty thousand-year-old war had worn down the Worzellian race. There were no cities, most technology had been forgotten, and the war had deteriorated almost to the level of hand-to-hand skirmishes between small tribes. When the earthlings made their stand, the Worzellians could do little but watch in awe. This was war like they had not seen for centuries. Many of the onlookers realized that they must find a way to restore their war to its original glory.

The site of the battle — now the demilitarized area in the south — was declared a safe zone where all Worzellians could study and research the lost arts of battle. The old technology was reestablished. Factories were built, and a tremendous arms race ensued. Scientists studied the technical manuals that Chang's crew left behind (in return for the Worzellians' small help in the battle). When the practice of raising children in the safe zone became popular, the population rose. The Generals founded the Academy so that children raised outside the war would not be ignorant of the art. With the new industrialization, the many scattered tribes formed pacts establishing ever-smaller numbers of ever-larger powers. Today, say the Worzellians, the war is more intense than ever, and the Strategists are well pleased.

The Worzellians have been waiting for the return of Humans ever since that time. They credit Chang's stand on Worzelle as the inspiration for the revitalization of their entire culture and as the ultimate example of the warlike ideals to which all Worzellians aspire.

✕ STOP ✕

[381]

If you are to defeat the Clathrans, you are going to have to find a way to help the Hadrakians win their war with the Clathran Survey. But how? Perhaps if you visited The Battle, Inc. — the Hadrakians' official government-sponsored Clathran resistance corporation — they could tell you what you could do to help them out.

✕ STOP ✕

[382]

You are meditating in a Hadrakian Shrine when a goddess appears before you. She appears as an immaculately groomed Hadrakian Settled One, wearing clothing of expensive cut and design, and decked out with a small fortune in jewelry.

"Greetings, human. I am the Goddess of Expensive Necklaces, the fifth of those chosen to speak to humans."

"Your name is both pleasant and appropriate."

"Thank you. It is my function, as I'm sure you are aware, to provide you with advice or spiritual guidance which will enable you to help my Hadrakian children. For example, you can find Munitions — lots of them — on the planet Dosia. But be careful of the Unarians when you go there."

Her image fades away as you hastily bid her thanks and farewell. After taking the necessary moment to drop by the Keeper and report the goddess's name, you are soon on your way.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[383]

You get the password wrong.

Your sensors detect Clathran destroyers approaching from several directions. Immediately, you turn around and speed back the way you came as fast as possible. Fortunately the destroyers are slower than you are, so you manage to make good your retreat. In the process, you take a fair amount of damage from enemy fire.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[384]

The colony on Adafa is small and the population low. Still, as you pass an occasional Homeless One, you get the distinct feeling that any amount of room is not enough. Each male Hadrakian exudes an aura of tension and barely-contained power. The short trip to the Vortex Coil warehouse involves passing by three of the restless males, and you are pleased when you finally arrive at your destination.

In sharp contrast, the Settled One who runs the warehouse greets you as if you are the most welcome sight she has seen today. After you explain why you are here, she takes the time to show you the variety of Vortex Coils available.

"We are very fortunate here on Adafa to have such a ready supply of a valuable commodity. As you may know, we are able to salvage the coils from the many alien machines present on our unique little world. The race responsible for building Adafa had an amazing grasp of the principles of science. Each machine we are able to examine adds literally an entire library's worth of data to our knowledge."

The Settled One continues with her lecture as you finish your tour of the warehouse. "We do have to be extremely cautious, though. We have learned the hard way that many of the alien devices are dangerous and react unfavorably to being examined by beings who are curious and unlearned in their properties. We have lost many of our people to the machines' mechanisms." She tosses her maned head, the Hadrakian equivalent of shaking her head sadly.

The two of you approach the front of the warehouse again and she asks if you are interested in making a purchase.

"That depends on what your deals are," you respond shrewdly. She gives you the following price for 1 Vortex Coil:

2 Munitions + 1 Culture + 1 Phase Steel + 1 Tools

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

❖ STOP ❖

[385]

Subspace radio transmission from The Battle, Inc.

"To all agents: The Worzellians inform us that they will be preparing to join the United Hadrakian Navy in the fight against the Clathrans. A good thing, too. We need all the help we can get."

✧ STOP ✧

[386]

You would like to try to make the Dual Space Inversion Bomb work, but you don't *have* the Bomb. In order to perform this option, you need to get the Bomb from whoever has it. If you are not sure how to do this, refer to the "Meetings" section of the CGM Guide in the *Host Guide and Player Reference Manual*.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[387]

The Goddess of Open Receptions speaks to you in the Shrine, and tells you to seek the planet Rothane, because there you will find Food to fill the mouths of the Empire.

"But what does that have to do with Open Receptions?" you ask.

"You must interpret my name in the proper context to understand it," is the cryptic reply.

You resolve to take the god's words to heart as you make your way back to your ship.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[388]

The alien ship's weapons overwhelm you. You try to surrender, but the alien vessel still refuses to acknowledge your transmissions. Instead, it keeps pounding you until your ship is totally disabled. It is all you can muster to keep life support going. If the attack keeps up any longer, it'll be the end of you.

Fortunately, the alien breaks off just in time, apparently satisfied that your ship is sufficiently wrecked. The enemy craft then positions itself with one of its tentacles next to your hatch. The alien is going to come aboard!

You hide behind a console as you wait for the alien to enter your ship. As the hatch slides open, you suddenly feel very scared. What is it that you are about to face?

You seem to wait forever. Finally, you hear some slithering noises, and the alien slides through the hatch and onto the bridge. You summon up all your courage just to look at it. It 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 towards you, it secretes a sticky brown liquid, which it deposits on the floor. It carries several weapons.

Since your only chance to survive is to negotiate with this creature, you step out from behind the console. "Hello," you say, in as confident a voice as possible.

"Food," it answers, in a slow, deep voice. Well, at least you know your universal translator is working.

It moves closer, holding you at bay with its weapons.

"Food," it says again.

"You want some food?" you ask.

"Hungry."

You quickly offer it the leftovers from last night's dinner.

"No," it refuses.

Apparently it doesn't care for leftovers. You punch up a fresh meal on your food processor.

"No," it declines again.

It moves closer. It seems to have something else in mind.

"Who are you?" you ask.

"Zyran. Hungry."

The Zyran moves right next to you and touches your arm with one of its tentacles. The tentacle is hot to the touch and vibrating slightly. It moves the tentacle up and down your arm, leaving drops of the sticky brown fluid on your skin. It hesitates for a moment, then examines your other arm.

"No," the Zyran finally decides, looking disappointed, "Not food."

Thank goodness. You're just not tasty enough. You would suggest a little salt, but on second thought, maybe things are best as they are.

The Zyran moves away from you, slithering back towards the hatch. Apparently it's going to leave. However, just before it exits, it turns towards you again. It gestures toward your cargo bays.

"Food," it orders.

"No, no, you wouldn't want any of that stuff. Not food. Yuck. Ptui."

The Zyran is not convinced. "Open them."

You do as it says and release the locks on your cargo bay doors. The Zyran leaves your ship, and proceeds to maneuver its vessel around to each of your cargo bays, searching for food, and taking what it wants of your commodities.

It then takes off, disappearing from view.

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.

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

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[389]

On your first visit to the Brotherhood temple, you only felt apprehension. Now you actually find a sense of comfort within its walls. You travel the halls without seeing another Brother, but that is all right. Finally, you enter a small candlelit chamber where you take a seat on the floor and meditate. Several hours pass before you feel ready to leave, refreshed from the moments of tranquility you were able to make for yourself here.

You dwell on the message you got from the Brother to continue your training in the Path of Intuition. Reflecting on this and all that you have been through so far, you leave the temple, at peace with yourself for the time being.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[390]

Mentally, you have recovered from your surprise teleportation to the other side of the galaxy. You still feel a little dizzy, but that's it. You take your bearings and see that the planet Unaria, which you are now orbiting, is remarkably similar to Dosia. The spaceport is very busy, with a wide variety of spaceships coming and going. Orbiting the planet is another little moon with a black pit.

This time you decide to explore the planet and leave the moon be. You follow the landing beacon down with no difficulty and soon find yourself on the ground. It's nice to be on the ground now and then. You step out of your ship and pound the concrete landing pad with your fist to make sure it's really solid.

Heading over to the space terminal, you see a happy-looking alien waiting for you. Maybe you shouldn't attribute human emotions to this alien creature, but maybe you'd be happy too if you looked like she does: a plump, perky quivering ball of baggy purple skin with two big round sparkly eyes, four squat energetic tentacles to stand on, and a bright pink baseball cap with the visor on backwards set smartly on top of her smiling head. If you were this creature, you'd probably hop around whistling all day too.

"Hello?" you say.

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

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

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

"The Stargate? Is that the black pit that sent me clear across the galaxy?"

"Yes. You have come from Dosia, then. My sympathies. You understand, then, why we must wipe out those evil beings. They're so *depressed*. You must be relieved to be with us now."

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

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

"What if the ship I'm asking about is another hum... another ship of my own kind?"

Continued ➤

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

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

(BZW2TH) (3 phases) Go to the commodities market and see what they have to trade.

(GZ42QH) (5 phases) Try to acquire a cargo drone.

(BUW7T8) (5 phases) Attend the lecture about the history of the Stargate.

(GU47Q8) (3 phases) Visit the Stargate Key market.

(CZF2LH) (7 phases) Fly your ship into the Stargate.

(SUE738) (7 phases) Ask the Purplest One of the Spaceport whether there is any record of the *Archangel* landing on Unaria.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[391]

You take the opportunity to ask Brother Mathus some questions which have intrigued you for a long time. "I have long wondered about the origin of the Brotherhood," you remark, "What can you tell me?"

She smiles. "It is truly a wise person who seeks to understand their beginning. The Brotherhood is an ancient organization that can trace its roots back to Old Earth. There are some who claim it goes back even further than that, but that is something that only those higher ranking than I could tell you about. We have always been secretive about our presence; only those who were honored with an invitation to join knew of our existence. Very few have turned the invitation down. Many well-known public figures were Brothers.

"The Brotherhood always concerned itself with improving the world, guiding people to peace and freedom, and studying the mysteries of the ages. One of the mysteries is a phenomenon called Dual Space, which may well turn out to be the key to all the others. If you have not already done so, I recommend that you visit Brother Dikestra on Margen, Brother Gries on Dahl, and Brother Libra here on Mardahl to find out what we have learned so far."

You stop Brother Mathus at this point to ask about the famous explorer Vanessa Chang and what finally happened to her.

"Chang was a member of our order of the highest rank," Mathus explains. "She helped us start our colonies here in the Galactic Arm before returning to Earth and setting up the Boundary around the Nine Worlds. Few people know what happened to her after that. In fact, the rest of her story is a secret known only to highest levels of the Brotherhood, so you must guard it carefully.

"The history books say that after accomplishing all her political objectives on the Nine Worlds, Chang mysteriously disappeared. One theory says she committed suicide out of her feelings of guilt for exposing humanity to the Clathrans. Another theory says that she killed herself because she was old and dying from radiation poisoning. Neither is true.

"In fact, she did not commit suicide at all. In her old age, she decided to go back out into space. She secretly built a new ship, named the *Fool's Errand*, and equipped it for one last journey, an all-out attempt to reach the Galactic Core. She installed a powerful self-destruct mechanism in case she ran into the Clathrans again. Then she left the Home Worlds for the last time, never to return.

"On the way to the core, she stopped at Outpost, and at our colonies here in the Galactic Arm. She conferred with the High Council of the Brotherhood and resupplied her ship on the planet Margen. Then she continued onward. We don't know if she made it or not. We never heard from her again.

"Are there any other questions I might be able to answer?"

"Can you tell me how the Haunted House works?"

Mathus laughs. "Of course. We run the entire show from a computerized control room. Using surveillance cameras, we measure the individuals' reactions to each hologram presented. Using this data, we can program projected images that are more and more effective in frightening the person. Of course, we have a limit to how far we will go, since this ride is supposed to be, in the final analysis, fun. Some riders even choose to analyze why they are afraid of a certain image, and are consequently able to overcome many personal phobias this way. Basically, you are most afraid of the dark side of yourself. By coming to terms with this, you can become a better person." She smiles at your bemused expression and leaves the room.

✱ STOP ✱

[392]

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.

Unfortunately, the dreadnought's weaponry is just too overpowering. You can't pierce its heavy armor, and meanwhile, it bashes your defenses into pulp. Your ship is soon incapacitated. Too bad — if you'd had better weaponry the outcome might have been different.

The Clathran captain efficiently boards your vessel and takes you prisoner.

✱ STOP ✱

[393]

You are reading the second to last page of "Who Defenestrated Lyla L'Amour?" when the words disappear from the screen. A buzzing sound comes from the circuitry and a few sparks fly.

"What is going on!" you demand to know.

"Energy surge, Boss! Sorry about that. We are being scanned by an extremely powerful long-range probe beam that originates somewhere toward the galactic core."

"Do you have any more data than that?"

"Not really, Boss. The technology required to produce such a device is far beyond anything we are capable of making. The builders have no regard for the damage they must know occurs when their probe hits a target, so it might be safe to assume that the alien race responsible does not care that it has just blown out several of our computer systems."

The probe fades away before any of your really vital systems (like life support) are damaged. You breathe a sigh of relief. If you ever come across this callous race of beings, you intend to give them a piece of your mind. (An image of you laying face up on a dissection table doing just that makes you gulp nervously.) Well, maybe you can simply explain the error of their ways.

"If the beam's gone, could you put my mystery novel back on the screen?"

"Um, sorry, Boss. That file seems to have been damaged. The last two pages aren't there any more."

On second thought, maybe you could borrow a few Clathran dreadnoughts and blow up their worthless planet.

"If it makes you feel better, Boss, I've completed a thorough analysis of the remaining contents of the book and I can state with near statistical certainty who the perpetrator was."

"Never mind," you grunt. "I'd rather not know."

✱ STOP ✱

[394]

Vortex Coils are made and sold by the Dosian military, so you make your way over to the main navy base. You are interested in finding out what price they are asking for their Vortex Coils and you also want to check their quality. A Vortex Coil is a powerful component used to generate time waves. From what you have heard, a bad Coil is worse than worthless, it's downright dangerous.

You find the base and spend a few hours looking carefully at their stock of coils. When you find one you think is worth buying, you take it over to the merchant, who notes that "You have made a good selection; that is one of our best Vortex Coils." She then gives you the price of the coil:

2 Food + 1 Medicine + 1 Super Slip + 1 Warp Core

She continues, "By the way, are you interested in joining an expedition to fight the Unarians? I've been trying to get a group together for weeks, but everyone is too depressed to go." Her large eyes look up at you, hoping for a positive answer. However, you have better things to do with your time, so you politely decline.

"I knew it," she says with a sigh, her whole body sagging. "No one wants to go right now. I don't understand it. Our last mission was such a success. I guess it'll be a couple of months before I get enough people to stage another attack. What'll I do in the meantime? Now I'm really depressed."

"Don't feel too bad," you say, trying to comfort her. "What's so great about fighting the Unarians anyway?"

"They're much too happy. We have to destroy them," she says with conviction. You get the feeling that there's nothing you can say that will change her mind. She walks away as sad as ever.

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

✂ STOP ✂

[395]

Talons and wings tear at your poor body. It is all you can do to keep the evil creature from killing you. Teeth sink into your cheek and you can smell the harpy's fetid breath. Pain courses through you, all sense of direction leaves you. Returning to a purely animalistic survival instinct, you drop to the ground and manage to crawl slowly back down the path. You do not know when the harpy let up on its attack; all you know is that you have to get back to your ship. You refuse to die on alien soil.

An eternity passes by the time you reach the edge of the forest. By now you are at least able to walk. Slowly and painfully, you manage to make your way back to the ship. All the way back, you keep remembering the harpy. You feel that you have failed in some important way. Maybe, when you are better armed, you will return and finally reach the Fountain of Life, harpy or no harpy!

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[396]

The Sirissians on Ululu do not have an intergalactic market for offworld traders. They do, however, have an abundance of floating food in the sky above you. From what you have heard, they will not begrudge the harvesting of food by the occasional visitor. The only catch is that you have to harvest the food yourself, a risky venture.

One of the repercussions of having all of the planet's vegetation growing above you is that it tends to make the surface of the planet very dark. The Sirissians have compensated for this with artificial lighting, but you still find it difficult to see properly. This could easily explain why, after borrowing a hovercraft to take you and your equipment up to the level of the vegetation, you have a lot of trouble setting everything up. At one point, you are reaching for a dial setting on the harvester when you misjudge the distance to the equipment and start to take the short route back to the ground.

Clutching at the first thing handy, you grab a protruding strut and find yourself spanning the short distance from the ship to the harvesting device with your body acting as an impromptu bridge. From this angle, you have a wonderful view of the distance separating you from the safety of the ground. A cold sweat breaks across your brow. Using all of your strength, you manage to pull yourself back into the ship. After a minute to compose yourself after such a narrow escape, you finish setting the equipment up and turn it on.

Three days pass and you manage to harvest one unit of Food.

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

❖ STOP ❖

[397]

The commodities market is a large circular building located next to the spaceport. Judging from outside, it looks like the building has five times as much office space as warehouse and transportation area combined. Not exactly the most efficient design for a commodities market, but you wouldn't expect anything less from the bureaucracy here on Gloo.

When you get to the door, you are stopped by a guard who checks your insignia and orders. Finding them satisfactory, the guard sends you inside to wait on line for a clerk. Of course, you have to wait quite a long time before it is your turn. The clerk instructs you to fill out a large pile of forms, which takes you even longer. Boy, is this a pain! When you are all done, you are sent to another line to wait for another clerk, who finally gives you a list of trades currently being offered at the market. The Bluvians will trade you:

- 1 Warp Core for 1 Fiber
- 1 Warp Core for 1 Food
- 1 Warp Core for 1 Medicine

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

❖ STOP ❖

[398]

"Boss, I have your toga ready for you. Do you still want green?"

Rats. You were hoping that your advanced level in the Brotherhood would exempt you from Dardahl's toga rule.

"Do I really have to?" you whine.

"Yes, now hurry and get dressed. Winnsa and Pranne are coming out to the ship to welcome you. I think one, or both, have a crush on you."

You slip the short outfit on and leave the safety of your ship's walls. The pretty nymph flutters over to you and greets you with a delicate kiss on your cheek. The satyr, Pranne, grabs you energetically about the waist and swings you off of the ground as a sign of affection. Fortunately neither of the Dardahlans smile (or worse, snicker) at your appearance. You greet them and spend the next several hours enjoying their hospitality. All the while, you are wondering where the Brotherhood is located. You recall the hints you were given on Margen and Dahl; maybe with your advanced training, you will be able to find and use the secret sign.

You have the same options as before.

✧ STOP ✧

[399]

The rear offices of The Battle, Inc. are bustling with activity. You speak with a few of the Settled Ones in their offices, who impress upon you the importance of persevering in your current mission to cross the Survey Line. "Once you're across the line," a high-ranking officer tells you, "Your military usefulness will be greatly enhanced. There are many vitally important missions to fulfill behind the Clathran blockade. You may even be able to find the cause of the widening Dual Space Interphase which is causing your race so much trouble on its homeworlds."

The Hadrakian is right. It is critical that you make it across the Survey Line. With renewed vigor, you spend the rest of the day asking various employees of The Battle for their advice on techniques and tactics for running the Clathran blockade. When you return to your ship, you have compiled the following list of suggestions:

- Get more weapons for your ship (possible leads: Hadrak, Sallion, Dosia).
- Learn more about military tactics (possible lead: Worzelle).
- Find a good shrine and pray to the Hadrakian gods.
- Noisily strike the joints of your fingers against tree fiber.

If you are having trouble making it across the line, you may wish to follow up on these ideas.

You may select this option again.

✧ STOP ✧

[400]

You recall to mind the instructions of Brother Mathus of Mardahl: "When you have seen all there is to see, you must look one step deeper." The instruction doesn't seem to make any sense. What is there to see on Golgotha? The planet exists in a perpetual storm of change. The very landscape alters itself every time you move your eyes. How can any of it have any meaning, if any one version of it is as real as the others?

You ponder the problem over and over, until finally you realize that you simply don't know enough about Golgotha to even begin to solve it. How can you look one step deeper, when you've hardly looked at the planet at all? You decide to learn more about Golgotha itself before trying to complete your Brotherhood geas.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[401]

You try to assemble the Dual Space Inversion Bomb, using the rough blueprints left you by Dr. Fenton-Lee. You pack the necessary components into the Bomb Shell — which you have been told is semi-sentient but which so far has been utterly inanimate — and activate the power supply. You are expecting the Bomb Shell to initiate its self-test program, but nothing happens. It appears that something is missing.

"Computer!"

"Yes, Boss?"

"Read out the list of components needed to build the Bomb."

"Yes, Boss. They are:

- 4 Munitions
- 1 Discontinuity Wave Generator
- 1 Stasis Field
- 1 Interphase Reflector
- 1 Bomb Shell."

"Rats!" you say to yourself. "We forgot something!"

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[402]

Your skip radio brings you the following public announcement from the Nine Worlds, re-broadcast for your information by the Para-Para subspace transmitter:

Fleet Appropriations Bill Passed

The combined government of the Home Worlds announced today the appropriation of one-third of their decennial operating budget for the construction of a Joint Space Navy to protect the human worlds from hostile alien forces. The Navy, to be formed initially from remnants of the Nine Worlds Space Patrol and the Ghost Worlds Defense League, will soon build and operate its own ships from factories and spaceports on Atlantis and Frontier. The government denied that the fleet appropriation was passed in response to recent rumors regarding the Clathrans, a race of lizard-like humanoids believed to dominate the galactic arm.

"No Clathran has ever been seen among the Human Worlds," stated spokesman Miles Pendergast, "And we certainly know nothing of their intentions towards humans." Pendergast went on to attribute the panic-producing rumors to a few unfortunate victims of SAPS, and added that the new government policy of institutionalization and isolation of SAPS cases would bring the rumors to a halt.

❖ STOP ❖

[403]

Although the Clathrans have occupied Mardahl, they maintain only a small garrison. This fact, coupled with your uncanny resemblance to the android servitors of the ruling-class Mardahlans, allowed you to move about the city freely on your earlier visit. You anticipate no problems on this visit.

Your ship lands safely outside the city of Pillionia. After locating an information screen, you see that you have the same options available to you as before.

❖ STOP ❖

[404]

You are not at all surprised to learn that Holoth is the prime source in the Hadrakian Empire of the commodity known as Crystals. You are tempted to head out on your own and gather some of the commodity until you discover that the majority of crystal on Holoth is too fragile to use in most industrial applications. Here, the partnership between the Hadrakians and the native Holots is at its best. The flying bat creatures are well suited to soaring to almost unreachable heights where they gather the highest grade crystal on the planet so they can trade it to the Hadrakians. The Hadrakians, in turn, trade the Crystals to offworlders for other commodities that are in short supply here. You check to see what the going rates of trade are, and learn that the Hadrakians will trade Crystals for the following:

- 3 Crystals for 1 Tools
- 2 Crystals for 1 Phase Steel
- 1 Crystals for 1 Medicine

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

❖ STOP ❖

[405]

"Boss," you hear your computer calling urgently over your com link. "Boss. Please respond."

"I'm here. What is it?" you send back.

"Drop whatever you're doing and return to the ship NOW, Boss! The Clathrans are knocking on this planet's door."

You make your way back to the ship at a dead run. "Do we have any time to finish up here?"

"Boss, we should have been out of this trisector even before I could contact you. Over two dozen Clathran Survey ships are already in the system, and they'll be moving into planetary orbit by the time we get off the ground."

"Then get ready to move." You sit at the controls and activate the drives, as well as all your weapon systems, just in case.

"Any particular heading?" the computer asks, powering up the main viewscreens.

"Whatever takes us out of this system and away from the Survey Line with the least chance of interception."

"Roger, Boss." The computer handles the takeoff sequence automatically while you size up the tactical situation. Your tactical display shows an advance squadron of a dozen Clathran dreadnoughts about to encircle the planet. The Scouts have already arrived and taken up positions in high and low orbital shells. At the edge of your sensor range, but moving up quickly, is the main force of the Survey Line itself: survey ships laden with sophisticated sensors and scanning devices, troop ships carrying fast atmospheric deployment dropships underbelly, additional squadrons of dreadnoughts and cruisers, and a single spherical Monitor, the center of command and communication for the rest, as well as the platform for the largest and heaviest weapons.

With little room to maneuver, you plot the best course possible to get you to safety. It's not the direction you wanted to go, but you don't have time to get choosy. Even now, you can see a Clathran scout ship breaking away from the main formation to intercept you.

"Hang on," you say. "I think we can still get out of this." You are tempted to turn and fight the scout but you can't afford the time. Any combat will only delay you until reinforcements arrive. Instead, you key the drives to maximum power, spread your warp fields, grab hold of a chunk of space and push off hard. No fancy maneuvers or sneaky counterattacks this time; just the brute flat-out speed of a fly who's seen the swatter coming down. You weave and dodge only enough to avoid the Clathran formations. The scout begins to fall away. The dreadnoughts, brooding over the planet below, are reluctant to turn and pursue.

Only when you are at the edge of the system, with the Survey ships behind you, do you activate your defensive systems and begin evasive maneuvers. Your skill and technology proves sufficient to discourage the Clathrans from pursuing you. You eventually find yourself safely out of range of the advancing Survey Line.

You breathe a sigh of relief, then curse out loud. The Clathrans have engulfed another planet.

"So where are we?" you ask, wiping the sweat from your face.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[406]

You approach the planet Psorus 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.

You enter the atmosphere and are buffeted about by the weather for a while before getting through the turbulent winds. You can now see the Hadrakian colony coming into view. The spaceport is closed down, of course, because of the Clathran blockade. While staring at the nearby area, 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."

What, then, wrecked the Clathran scout ship so badly? You shudder as you remember your own close call with the monstrous aeropsor with its vicious talons and sharp beak. Such a creature might well be capable of tearing a small scout ship to shreds. You do not envy the poor scout captain.

Finally, you give the order to take the ship down to the Hadrakian colony. Since the spaceport is closed, you decide to land on a piece of flat rock just outside the city. You disembark and head over to the city on foot.

When you approach the perimeter of the city, you notice that the mental scrambler field that used to protect the city from wandering monsters is now deactivated. Instead, there are hundreds of Homeless Ones standing guard. You ask one of them why they abandoned the scrambler field. In a huff, he replies that the Clathrans forbade its use, since it prevented the Clathrans' orbiting scanners from getting a clear readout of the activity in the city. However, the Homeless One doesn't mind standing guard; he says he and his fellow guards can drive off the big reptiles well enough, and it's actually kind of fun.

You have the same options as before, plus a new one:

⟨84KQDX⟩ (4 phases) Investigate the wrecked Clathran scout ship.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[407]

"Hey Boss, I thought we went to Franclair looking for jump engine technology."

"We did. Too bad there wasn't any."

"But you never visited the place where the Hadrakians are doing the research, the Wet Repulsion Slab!"

A pause.

"You're right, computer, but I won't hold it against you. We'll get back to Franclair sometime soon."

❖ STOP ❖

[408]

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. The clues about the Core Stone lead here, and you need to land to find the answers.

Their initial greeting 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?"

The ships in front of you rotate slightly, aiming their weapons directly at you. This time you are prepared.

"Yes," you respond more confidently than you feel. "Lord Ruckel sent me to speak with your King about the Clathrans."

There is a long pause. Finally an answer comes.

"On Lord Ruckel's word, we will think about it, alien. Wait for our decision."

You wait, as it turns out, for several days. The Core Stone remains quiescent during this time, and you can only hope that it will not complicate your mission. The clues that led you to bring it here are tenuous, but they're the only clues you have.

At length, the patrol ships give you their reply: "You may land now, alien. Follow the beacon down. Do not try anything tricky."

You soon find yourself at a busy spaceport in the center of a very crowded, bizarre-looking city. The city is constructed out of big semi-transparent tubes, spheres, and cylinders built one on top of another in a seemingly haphazard fashion. Spoke-like tunnels criss-cross between the tubes. The result is a jumbled collection of shapes and colors that you find very confusing. The spaceport itself is divided into two halves, a civilian half (in which you land), and a military half (which is walled off).

All around are the Zyrans, aggressive meat-eating creatures with bubbly brown skin and weird collections of different body parts. The sticky gook they secrete is everywhere. In fact, now that you've left your ship, you're walking in the gook.

A Zyran comes to meet you, but it keeps its distance. It doesn't want to come near you for some reason. It points to a building that rises high above the other buildings in the city. The building looks like a giant upside-down yellow test tube.

"The Royal Palace," the Zyran says.

So that is where you must go to meet the King. To the right of the palace there is another interesting structure that looks like a huge old-Earth martini glass. It has a long thin stem at its base with a clear, angular dish on top, facing upward to the sky.

"What's the big clear thing next to the palace?" you ask.

"The Projector of Eternal Peace," the Zyran answers, fingering a piece of jewelry it's wearing. You look closer at the jewelry. It's a small white stone with a black center — a miniature replica of the core stone! What do the Zyrans know about the Stone? You are about to ask when the Zyran turns around and leaves. Apparently it doesn't want to keep you company.

Continued ➤

You are now on your own. Your options are:

⟨NBYW6T⟩ (5 phases) Go to the Royal Palace and speak with the King.

⟨MBJWUT⟩ (5 phases) Visit the Projector of Eternal Peace.

⟨NGY46Q⟩ (5 phases) Hang around the spaceport and see if you can find someone more friendly to talk to.

⟨MGJ4UQ⟩ (5 phases) Sneak into to the military section of the shipyard.

❖ STOP ❖

[409]

Hadrakian Shrine etiquette says that you are supposed to be as quiet as possible while finding your meditation cubicle, so as not to disturb the other patrons (and possibly their divine visitors). When it's as crowded on the Street of Gods as it is today, though, that can be tough. Apparently it's some kind of local holiday, and throngs of Hadrakians are crowding all the Shrines, making it difficult to find an empty cubicle.

At length, having checked every room in the Shrine, and finding none vacant, you sit down for a break at the end of a long hallway. It's very hot where you are, and you're tired from your recent exertions. Your eyes, almost of their own accord, drift slowly closed. . .

A horrible plinking sound awakens you, but there is no one about in the hallway. The noise is coming from inside your head.

"Greetings!" thinks a voice. "I am the God of Xylophone Symphonies."

"Is that what that noise is?"

"I guess you'd have to be Hadrakian to enjoy it," says the god, quelling his soundtrack. "But the name is still symbolic for you."

"I'll think about it," you promise.

"I'm on a tight schedule," continues the god. "What with the crowds and all. I'll just tell you to be sure to visit the Shrine of Space on the planet Qualathara, and be on my way."

Shaking your head once, to clear it of the xylophone symphony, you take your leave of the Shrine, pausing only to tell the Shrine Keeper the name of your divine patron.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[410]

Your subspace radio today brings you a religious broadcast, from someone called Senior Varek, of the cult known as Questors, on Atlantis:

"... and I urge you, my brethren, not to abandon your faith in the ultimate purpose of the quest. Yes, the stone has been discovered, and for this we are glad. But this does not bring to an end our duties; we must still find the ultimate purpose of the stone, and finish the great quest undertaken by our ancestor, Soulsinger, so long ago.

"We must cling to our faith especially in these troubled times, with marriages breaking up and children born out of wedlock, for only through faith can we hope to overcome the perils of the universe..."

There's more, but you're not listening.

❖ STOP ❖

[411]

“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 ✂

[412]

During a long day's space flight, you spend some time looking over your Star Maps. Most of the points that represent planets are now marked with their names. You retrace the path you've followed in your explorations, wondering what kind of figure your future wanderings will trace before you see home again.

You pause when the symbol for the planet Darkwhistle catches your eye. Like a distant dream, you remember a vision in which you once saw yourself returning to Golgotha, not in your ship, but by Journeying from Darkwhistle.

Why would you see yourself doing that? What is there to learn on Golgotha that you don't already know? You remember Golgotha's baffling nature, and the way that it seemed to change to follow your every thought. You realize that seeing it from a different way might tell you much more than you learned before. Golgotha is a place of high subjectivity, a consequence of the Dual Space anomaly that exists there. To see it from a different viewpoint could be like seeing a different planet altogether.

You look back upon the map, once again retracing the parsec-long steps of your journey so far. Perhaps, you think, it is now time to return to Darkwhistle and from there make the Journey to the strange anomaly the Founders named Golgotha.

✂ STOP ✂

[413]

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

(YP6SBZ) (3 phases) Research dual space on Keros.

✂ STOP ✂

[414]

Having knocked your opponent down, you try to sneak the rest of the way across the field, using the mud as camouflage. It doesn't work. Before you know it, your opponent has recovered and he attacks you mercilessly. You are seriously injured. Meanwhile, your ally has defeated the other opponent. You bleed in the mud as you watch the remaining two combatants go at it. Because of the wound you inflicted on your opponent, your ally has the advantage and eventually wins. You pass out.

✂ STOP ✂

[415]

The planet on your viewscreen, Dardahl, is absolutely gorgeous. The beautiful blue and green surface, clean air, pure water, and plentiful flowers, trees, fish, and animals are very inviting. Moreover, the whole planet glows with an idyllic golden aura. You have never seen anything like this aura before.

"Where does that golden glow come from?" you ask your computer.

"Gee, boss, I don't know. There's nothing unusual about the geology of the planet as far as I can see. It sure looks like a nice place to visit, doesn't it?"

"Well, let's not rush down. Put us in orbit for a while and see what else you can find out."

Your computer establishes an orbit for a more detailed survey so you can get the lay of the land before you descend to the surface. You take the opportunity to catch up on your reading, pulling an old copy of "Sigourney Rambeaux: Autobiography of a Real-Time, Real-Space Explorer," from your collection of books. Those old timers really knew what exploring was all about!

Hours later, the computer interrupts your reading. "Er, Boss?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"Nothing serious, really. I just need to ask you what color toga you want to wear."

"What!?"

"On Dardahl, the inhabitants are a bit, er, quaint in their customs. One thing they require of visitors is that they wear togas. It has something to do with their religion from what I can gather. In any case, what color toga do you want to wear?"

It is not beyond your computer to play practical jokes on you, and getting you to wear a ridiculous outfit on a strange world would be a great coup. "Let me see that," is all you can say.

You begin to assimilate the findings in the computer's report. The native race looks like something out of a mythology book. The male Dardahlans resemble old mythology satyrs with their horse-like bodies and humanoid head and chest. They have the mandatory four hoofs used for locomotion, and normal-looking arms and hands located just where they should be, sprouting from their shoulders. The females resemble small humanoids with gossamer wings and high pitched voices. They also tend to giggle a lot. You must admit that they fit in perfectly with their pastoral planet.

Continuing with the profile of the natives, you note that the activities of the Dardahlans are indeed very much like their mythological counterparts. They spend their time playing musical instruments, dancing, singing and, well, other things satyrs and nymphs were well known for. The Dardahlans have no objections to visitors as long as they obey the rules — play, have a good time, don't hurt anyone, and pray to the gods once in a while.

And yes, one of the requirements of landing is that all visitors must wear uninhibiting clothing, specifically the toga. You know when you are licked, so you put in an order for a green toga. At least you have good-looking legs.

Although the Dardahlans aren't very advanced technologically, they do have a landing area complete with directional beacon to guide visiting ships down. Via the radio, you introduce yourself and get clearance to set your ship down.

You are met by a delicate looking female who says her name is Winnsa. She flits over to you and hugs you, her all but vestigial wings shimmering in the sunlight. She is accompanied by a male whose name is Pranne. He doesn't say very much, but just frolics and plays his pipes. Winnsa fills you in on activities available to you here:

⟨BSWZT2⟩ (3 phases) Visit the marketplace.

⟨GS4ZQ2⟩ (5 phases) Talk to a storyteller and learn the history of the Dardahlans.

⟨BPWSTZ⟩ (6 phases) Look for what Winnsa calls the Fountain of Life.

⟨GP4SQZ⟩ (7 phases) Visit the Dardahlian temple.

⟨CSFZL2⟩ (5 phases) Locate the Shaman, who is involved with magic.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[416]

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 investigate Silverbeard's cache of stolen commodities; perhaps there will be enough material to fill your ship's cargo bays. You are also interested in examining the spaceport area to see if anything useful might be left there. 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: XZN2YH	—	—	A: 7Z82KH	—

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 commodity storage buildings; in this case it is **XZN2YH**, which can be selected by pressing **B**.

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 **A** again, to select the spaceport option, the code for which is **7Z82KH**.

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 **585**, 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 storage building text and then return to the CGM.

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 be assigned two additional pieces of text to read after you are through loading commodities onto your ship. The first piece, number 604, describes the spaceport area on Outpost, and the second, number 600, will guide you through your next turn's adventure.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[417]

You intercept a military transmission:

"New Colorado calling Star Base. New Colorado calling Star Base, Endaur. Come in, Star Base."

"Star Base, Endaur. Go ahead New Colorado."

"We are fifteen parsecs, 153 degrees removed from Endaur orbit, broadcasting on secured subspace channel."

"Roger."

"Boundary beacon J7-3267 deactivated. The Boundary is down."

"The Boundary is down. That was the last of them, New Colorado. You're in the Space Navy now."

"Roger. Over and out."

⌘ STOP ⌘

[418]

Nothing happens. The compartments are as inaccessible as ever.

You could keep trying combinations at random, or... you could try using your power of Prescient Choice. Focusing your attention on the five dials, the digits 3 — 8 — 9 — 6 — 2 appear in your mind. Setting the dials accordingly, you stand back and are rewarded by the sound of the collected doors beginning to protrude from the plane of the station walls. As this happens, a handle pops out of the left side of each compartment. Voila!

You now have a new option:

⟨XBNWYT⟩ (3 phases) Access the contents of the compartments.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[419]

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. You perform tests on each part of each subsystem. You think you know what might be wrong. You activate the bomb's semi-intelligent control system.

"Hey! What's going on? How can I explode with half my pieces missing? You clumsy butcher, put me back together!"

"I think I know what's wrong with you," you tell it.

"Then fix it, so I can explode."

"You'll have to help me. You see, the problem is with your Flame Jewel. It's a component of your Discontinuity Wave Generator subsystem."

"What's wrong with it?"

"It's not cooperating," you tell the bomb. "You see, Flame Jewels are a life form. I don't know if they're actually sentient, but apparently this one has enough awareness to realize you plan to explode. It's not fond of the idea."

"How could it not want to explode? What a stupid rock!"

"I'm going to try to convince it. But you'll have to monitor that subsystem from now on. Take direct control, so that it'll function no matter what."

"I can do that. Just set it up on the control switch options." You locate the control mechanism and deduce the proper switch settings. When that is done, you turn your attention to the Flame Jewel. With the new settings, it won't matter if the Flame Jewel is willing to explode or not. But you'll feel better if you can convince it.

You form an image in your mind of why you need the bomb to explode. You visualize the Karnossus star system, teeming with Clathrans, and form a mental picture of those same Clathrans conquering the galaxy and destroying every Flame Jewel they find. Then you imagine the bomb exploding, driving back the Clathrans. Concentrating on this, you stare into the Flame Jewel and wait for its red depths to envelop your mind. The shifting hues draw you in. . .

"Okay, enough waiting. Put me back together now." The Bomb's annoying voice pulls you out of your reverie. You don't know if the Flame Jewel understands anything or not, but you've done all you can. Some things just can't be helped, you think to yourself. You shut down the power, reassemble the components, and switch it back on.

"Bomb! Engage self-test."

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

✧ STOP ✧

[420]

Unfortunately, the enemy has the advantage of the first attack. With a raucous cry, the aeropsor attempts to seize the hull of your ship in its metal-piercing talons and tear a bite out of the side with its beak. Reacting quickly, you manage to get out of the way just in time.

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

✧ STOP ✧

[421]

You spend several hours studying the Dual Space Inversion Bomb blueprints and schematic diagrams, 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. You can't find anything wrong with any of the component parts. The problem must be in the interconnections. If you could observe the bomb in operation, you might be able to tell what's wrong. Unfortunately, observing the bomb in operation would be equivalent to suicide. Unless. . .

You bring out the Core Stone and invert the flexion glove over your hand. Immediately you feel the stone's influence, a powerful field that meshes with and reinforces the patterns around you.

"Bomb, prepare to explode in ten seconds!" you command.

"Oh, goody! Ten. . . nine. . . eight. . ."

You reach out for the Core Stone through your growing rapport and extend its field around the bomb, asserting it with maximum intensity.

"... five. . . four. . . thr. . ."

The bomb stops in midcount. Maintaining the Stone's field, you open the bomb's outer casing again. For an hour you test and probe every signal in its complex circuitry. You discover that the timing of the internal control signals is off, due to the fact that the Bomb was assembled from systems that used to operate independently. You make the necessary corrections. Then you manually reset the logic state to stop the bomb's current countdown and put it back into standby mode. When you finish, you are certain that you have done everything possible to ensure that the device will work.

After reassembling the casing, you withdraw the Core Stone and cover it with the flexion.

"Hey! What happened?" asks the bomb. "I thought I received the command to explode."

"No, just a small malfunction," you lie. "It's fixed now. Engage your self-test."

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

❖ STOP ❖

[422]

You have taken every reading that you can think of to take during your explorations of Keros, and you can't wait to test out your latest conjectures on the workings of Dual Space. The Interphase Variometer confirms that the strange multicolored cube in the heart of the volcano is the source of the Dual Space anomaly here. Given the cube's powers, it is not surprising that the cube is a Dual Space device. The data you've collected provides some clues as to how it might function.

You devise a theory that the cube might sense intelligent minds at a distance by the tiny variations in the Interphase width created within the brain structures of a thinking being. The theory also accounts for how the cube might also influence those minds, by making precise modulations in Dual Space that affect an individual's thoughts. Yes, this theory is quite sound. You dictate an equation for your computer to check out.

❖ STOP ❖

[423]

"I'm terribly sorry," says the Gatekeeper, "but you have responded in a manner no true Qualatharian would have. Guard!"

At the sound of the Gatekeeper's cry, a Qualatharian guard appears out from within the structure, fully armed and ready to deal with any resistance. He ushers you away from the Shrine of Space. You have no thought of trying to fight your way past the guard; you get the feeling it would not be a good idea.

You may select this option again.

❖ STOP ❖

[424]

The trees around your ship are well suited for conversion to Fiber. Unfortunately, they grow so closely together that you are unable to use your ship's equipment to fell them. Instead, you have to use an old hand-held unit to saw through the thick trunks with a laser beam. It is tough going, but you are grateful that the local fauna is leaving you in peace to do your work.

Finally, after four days of backbreaking labor, you have processed enough wood to make one unit of Fiber.

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

❖ STOP ❖

[425]

Brother Gries, a large, agitated man with a stern face, seems to have been expecting you. His office is small, since most of the space in the cavern is now needed for building spaceships. "I heard from Brother Dikestra that you might pay me a visit," he remarks. "Shall we begin?"

"Yes, please. Your work must be very important. Brother Dikestra certainly seemed to think so."

"I can't think of anything *more* important," Brother Gries replies, as he begins taking piles of notes, charts, and graphs from his desk. "I have been studying the possible impact of the widening Dual Space Interphase on the human mind. Do you understand that the wider the Interphase, the easier it is for people to change reality with their thoughts?"

"Yes."

"And you must know that the Interphase has been widening lately. That is why these mental powers have become so much more common in recent years. Bright people have been able to develop psychic abilities. Like yourself, for example."

Suddenly, you feel Brother Gries trying to send you a thought telepathically. "*Can you hear me?*" he is thinking, powerfully.

"*Yes, I can hear you, loud and clear!*" you think back. You feel "tuned in" to the large man across the desk from you. He is on your side.

"*Telepathy is not a natural human skill,*" Gries thinks at you. "*It's only made possible by the Interphase. The Interphase is getting wider, prying our minds open. Try to open your mind wider. Can you? Open it. . .*"

You close your eyes and meditate, allowing yourself to feel something mysterious and unnatural. A surge of energy passes through you, and you feel yourself growing more and more powerful. You see a vision of utopia, a perfect world of peace and joy. You can change the world into the utopia you see. Should you? Maybe you should. . .

"No! It will destroy you!" Brother Gries speaks out loud, breaking your trance. You open your eyes and the energy slowly dissipates. You feel disoriented. You must make an effort to grab hold of reality again. Gries is looking at you. He understands. Lurking behind the power is danger. Great danger.

Gries allows a few seconds of silence, then leans forward in his chair. "You have felt the Interphase as it is now," he comments. "Can you imagine what will happen if it continues to widen?" His eyes open wide, his pupils fixed upon you. "As the Interphase gets wider, more and more people will develop these powers. Average people. People without the discipline and training that you and I have. Soon, a hundred billion people in the Home Worlds will all have mental powers, and they will all be changing reality in an uncontrolled, undisciplined, and even unconscious manner. Imagine it!"

You think about it for a moment, and see what Gries is talking about. "It would be total chaos," you answer. "Everyone's thoughts becoming real all at once. My god."

"Exactly. A teenage kid wishes his car would go faster, and it starts going 500 miles an hour. An inspector thinks a building is a fire hazard, and it spontaneously bursts into flames. A husband and wife get into an argument, and the dinner knife just leaps across the table by itself and stabs one of them. There'd be mental conflict on an unprecedented scale. Mass confusion. Insanity. Psychosis. I think it would mean the end of civilization."

You look at Gries for a long time. You do not want to accept what he is saying. But how can you deny it?

"If that's not enough, think about this," Gries continues. "These high Dual Space Interphase levels are historically unheard of. For millions of years, the Interphase has been getting narrower. Not wider, but narrower. If you had an Interphase Variometer when human beings were evolving fifty thousand years ago, it would barely even have registered. Over the past fifty thousand years, the Interphase level has continued to drop, to almost zero.

"Now, suddenly the level's rising, and fast. In twenty years, the Interphase has regained what it lost over the past fifty millennia, plus a lot more. Just look at this chart." The chart has a blue line marking the estimated size of the Dual Space Interphase level over the past fifty thousand years. The level drops gradually from low to even lower, then suddenly spikes up to its current level.

"Do you think human beings are adapted to survive with such a wide Dual Space Interphase? Of course not. Our bodies are built to live in a world governed by reliable physical laws, not random thoughts. Our minds are capable of reasoning with cause and effect, not arbitrary changes. Forget the confusion caused by billions of minds changing reality simultaneously. If the Dual Space level is high enough, I don't think a single mind could handle it. Even a bright, disciplined mind like yours, out in space and free from the influences of too many other people. Eventually, your mind just couldn't cope. You'd lose track of reality. You'd go insane, like everyone else. We're talking about more than the end of civilization, here. What we're facing is total extinction! The end of the human race." Brother Gries's hands gesture violently.

You think back to the experience you had just a few minutes ago, when you closed your eyes and felt the Dual Space Interphase. You were able to tolerate it, but only barely. In fact, you were lucky Brother Gries snapped you out of it in time. When you did come out, you had some difficulty reorienting yourself in the real world. What if the Interphase had been wider? Maybe you would have been lost in your thoughts forever. You might never have been able to grab hold of reality again. Could this happen, not just to you but to every single human being?

You sit solemnly with Brother Gries, in silence. What he's predicting might actually happen. Humans didn't evolve to live in a galaxy controlled by mental powers. A rising Dual Space Interphase level could eventually cause everyone to go insane.

Eventually you break the silence. "So you think it's only a matter of time?" you ask.

"Yes. Unless we find some way of stopping the Dual Space Interphase from widening any further. That's why our research is so important, desperately important. If we can't stop the Interphase, the Clathrans won't matter. We'll all go crazy."

"It doesn't look good," you reply.

"No, it doesn't." Brother Gries holds his head between his hands.

"But we're doing what we can."

"Yes, we are."

