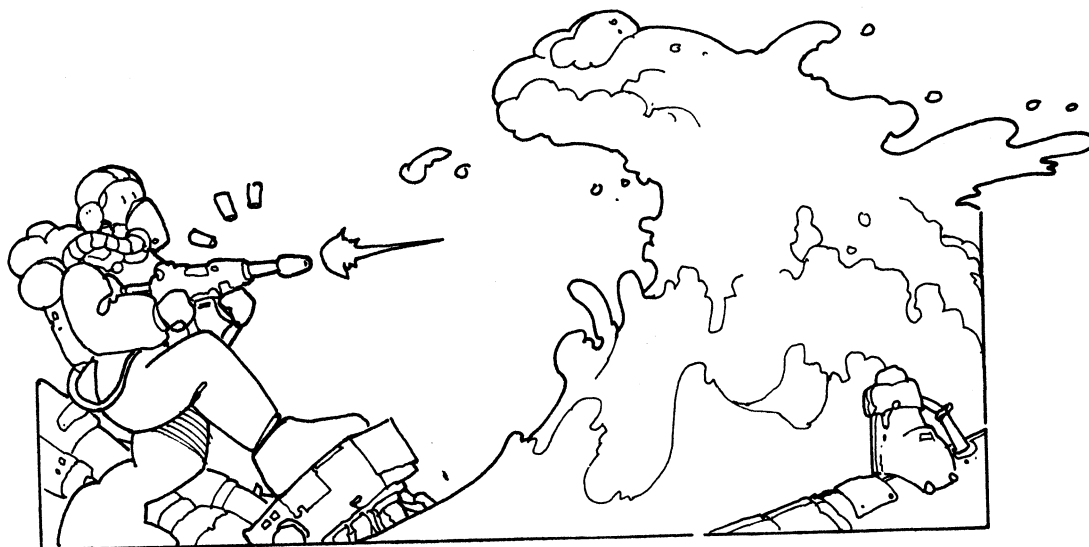


STAR SAGA: ONE™

BOOK F

TEXT 368-432



[368]

When you are mere feet from the ground at landing pad two, you are alarmed at the amount of dust your jets are kicking up from the port's surface. You immediately attempt to countermand the order to land, but are only partially successful. The dirt and dust clog your intake vents and almost cause the engines to seize up. You barely manage to get enough lift to take off.

Once you know this port is essentially abandoned and there is no maintenance work done here to keep the landing pad in good repair, you can see that it is the one that is "no more" from the clue. Sighing at not being able to figure it out when you first saw the cobwebs and rust, you head back out into orbit around Ouabain.

You may try to land on Ouabain again if you wish.

✂ STOP ✂

[369]

You enter the tunnel and slowly make your way down. It is pitch black, and the passageway seems endless. After a mile or so, you begin to hear a low, vibrant hum. You continue downward.

After a full day's climbing, you are finally rewarded by a sharp change in the surroundings. The tunnel drops into a level hallway. Along the hallway are openings into a variety of rooms. The humming sound has gotten a little louder.

You spend the next few days exploring the interior of a highly advanced and apparently abandoned alien spaceship. The creatures that once occupied the ship must have been huge, for all the rooms, halls, and doorways are gigantic. The inhabitants also seem to have been warriors, for there are pictures of fighting creatures and weaponry everywhere. Indeed, most of the ship seems to be devoted to its weapons systems. You would not want to make enemies out of these aliens.

Unfortunately, most of the technology is no longer serviceable. The engines have collapsed into themselves, leaving a large dimensional hole. The drives are a badly damaged jumble of flawed crystals and decayed warp core. The weaponry is hopelessly blasted into pieces.

The only component even partially salvageable is the computer. Searching around in the deactivated magnetic chambers, you find some of the original processing banks in pretty good condition. You perform a few tests on a processing bank, and it becomes clear you are looking at no ordinary computer. The processing bank alone is powerful enough to serve as a Synthetic Genius.

The alien ship is empty and abandoned, but not dead. There is still that radio signal, and that humming sound. They seem to be coming from the same place.

Aided by your instruments, you eventually locate the room where the radio signal and humming sound are coming from. Immediately you see that you have found an important place in the ship. The doorway is intricately carved with strange alien symbols and flanked on either side by sculptures of vicious-looking alien birds. It would seem that you have found the captain's quarters.

You are about to open the door and walk inside the room when you notice a dangerous reading on one of your instruments. The instrument indicates that the radioactivity inside the room is extremely high, far above the level that an ordinary space suit can withstand. Walking inside the room would kill you instantly.

To go inside, you will need a space suit that can withstand much higher levels of radiation — namely, a Super Space Suit. If you have one already, then you have nothing to fear.

Continued 

You have two new options:

⟨EWMGNE⟩ (3 phases) Take the computer processing bank you tested up to your ship. It will serve as a unit of Synthetic Genius.

⟨UWOGFE⟩ (4 phases) Enter the captain's quarters. (You must have a Super Space Suit to plot this option; if you do not have one but would like to investigate the captain's quarters when you do, plot ⟨UWOGFE⟩ after landing on FLN-1. Options ⟨UGOEFM⟩ and ⟨EWMGNE⟩ cannot be repeated.)

⊠ STOP ⊠

[370]

HOW TO PLAN TURN 5

You have many options available to you on this planet and you have a hard time deciding which to take advantage of first. You decide to "think" on it awhile and head over to that den of villainy, the Slippery Silver Tavern, to quench your thirst.

Plotting Sheet							
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7
TURN							
1	T	O	V	Y	R	V	O
2	G	L	—	—	—	—	—
3	—	A: SUWOGF	—	—	—	A: GEEMMN	—
4	—	T	O	V	G	B	L
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	A: 8VHKAV
6							

Plot the action code "8VHKAV" to get you there.

HOW TO PLOT TURN 5

Go to the computer and log on as always. You will plot A and then D (the D corresponds to the action code 8VHKAV) to go to the Slippery Silver Tavern

HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 5

The computer will evaluate your move and send you to your next piece of exciting text, so go and see what happens next!

This concludes your character's first five turns. You should now have a good idea how to plot your moves on the computer. If you are still a bit uncertain, we recommend that you read the Rules section and/or CGM Guide in the *Host Guide and Player Reference Manual* or ask a helpful soul standing nearby. You should also have an indication of how important it is to write things down, especially the options available on each planet along with their action codes, what can be bought and sold at the market places, and how many phases each option takes.

Last but not least, always keep your character goals in mind — that is how you will win the game!

You are now ready to take over the helm and are free to explore the galaxy. You may remain here awhile, return to Para-Para, or head off into the great unknown. Good luck!

⊠ STOP ⊠

[371]

You wait a few hours and a sandstorm flares up. Since you remember the orientation of the plant with respect to North, you remember the path of the sandshuttle. The water from your canteen is almost gone and you are getting incredibly thirsty.

You may:

A) Try to follow the path to the North.

B) Stay and wait for them to return.

C) Examine the plant.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[372]

The Darscians are very hospitable and provide one of the bullet-shaped vehicles for your use in Fiarasan. When you enter the vehicle, you are amazed at the sudden change in gravity. As long as you are inside, the effects of Fiara's extreme gravity are cancelled and you can easily move around, even without your gravity compensation harness.

You are now ready to travel to the city on your own. As you leave the spaceport, you radio spaceport control for information about where you might learn more about this impressive antigravity technology. According to the spaceport, the technology was developed at the Antigravity Research Center in Fiarasan. However, since the antigravity technology could be used for aggressive military purposes, non-Darscians are prohibited from visiting the facility.

During your first few days in Fiarasan, you learn some more about the Darscian colony on Fiara.

Fiara is an attractive planet to colonize because of its abundant natural resources, breathable atmosphere, large oceans, and comfortable climate. However, because of the planet's extreme gravity, the Darscians were the only race to attempt to settle here. Darscian settlers first arrived on Fiara more than five thousand years ago. At first they had great difficulty, since the rudimentary antigravity technology they had brought from Darscold was inadequate to handle the extreme conditions of this world. Thus, for many years the colony was very small, and only the strongest Darscians could remain on Fiara for any length of time.

The Darscian settlers, committed to making Fiara a viable place to live, refused to give up. They launched a comprehensive antigravity research program on Fiara, and experimented with hundreds of possible ways to compensate for the planet's enormous mass. Eventually, they discovered important new antigravity techniques and a full-scale colony on Fiara became possible. Many new immigrants settled here, and Fiara's Antigravity Research Center became famous throughout the Darscian worlds.

In addition, the antigravity technology had a great effect on the other Darscian planets, including the Darscians' home world, Darscold. Darscold's landscape of floating cities, so well known to Darscians today, did not begin to take shape until advanced antigravity technology was developed on Fiara. For this reason, Darscians consider Fiara the best established and most important of their colonies.

However, the Darscians' antigravity technology does not solve all the problems of living on Fiara. Since the technology is expensive and works only in confined spaces (such as vehicles and buildings), it is difficult to do anything outdoors. As you travel around Fiarasan, you notice many Darscian workers suffering under the tremendous burden of Fiara's tremendous gravity.

Continued 

Having finished your initial tour of Fiarasan, you identify five possible options for further activity:

- ⟨9ODFQI⟩ (3 phases) Go to the commodities market and see what the Fiaran colonists are willing to trade.
- ⟨P8BHYA⟩ (3 phases) Learn something about all the Darscian worlds.
- ⟨98DHQA⟩ (4 phases) Attempt to visit the Antigravity Research Center, even though it is off-limits to non-Darscians.
- ⟨LORF4I⟩ (3 phases) Look into some old Darscian records for information on Vanessa Chang's visit to Fiara 300 years ago.
- ⟨5OTFSI⟩ (4 phases) Explore an alien shuttlecraft that Vanessa Chang abandoned in the Fiaran desert.

✂ STOP ✂

[373]

Shrinking down again is not something easily accomplished, especially when your elbow starts to enlarge instead and gets stuck in your pocket, but you do eventually manage to reach the aliens' level and converse for quite some time with them. Of course, in the state you're in, everything they say makes perfect sense, now. It's just not going to be too easy to make sense of everything they said when you remember this conversation later on.

Here's what you manage to remember:

- There was a temple and a small girl visited and tap danced so much that she bestowed the gift of madness on Tretiak.
 - There were some travel directions, such as "Your mother Irons, Grades make you Gnarsh you teeth with Filters, and a really good time to swim is on the Firthe of July."
 - There was some advice: for a real bad trip call the Clathrans, only don't call them here because they've never been.
 - There were some mind-expanding ideas: "The School of Organic Telephones opens all the doors and some windows."
- "Finest kind," said the pea-green one to the aqua-green one.
- Unfortunately, that's all you remember.

✂ STOP ✂

[374]

After days of risking life and limb down in Fiyar's lower levels, your ship's sensors come up empty. If there is warp core down here it is certainly being elusive.

You sigh dejectedly and return to the safer upper levels.

Perhaps, if you are feeling lucky, you may try exploring below later.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[375]

Orbiting this planet is a little trickier than usual because you must correct for the pull of four different moons which are all fairly large and quite close to the planet's surface. Baphi itself is not much bigger than Venus, in the Sol system, but appears from space to be a green and hospitable world. Your geophysical survey equipment indicates little in the way of heavy metals in the planetary crust and no trace of animal life on the surface. Both earthquake activity and ocean tides look to be major problems on Baphi, so you set your ship's computer to the task of analyzing the lunar orbits and their effect on planetary surface conditions. You begin to look for a place to land.

As you begin your final approach, however, your survey gear suddenly indicates a locus of artificial construction just to one side of your glide path. You quickly swing the ship back into orbit and plot a new approach that will bring you down close to the anomaly reported by your ship's instruments.

The artificial construction turns out to be a colony dome, long abandoned, of some alien race. Inside, you are able to glimpse shattered buildings and jumbles of machinery; the dome itself is cracked in several places and overgrown with Baphi's native vegetation — a kind of giant algae. There is absolutely no sign of any animate life form anywhere in the vicinity.

You take several days to set up a safe camp and make preliminary surveys of the surrounding country. At the end of that time you have the following possibilities to choose from:

⟨HHAA66⟩ (4 phases) Investigate a high concentration of apparently poisonous, but perhaps very valuable, chemicals not far from your landing site.

⟨XHCAU6⟩ (5 phases) Explore the abandoned colony dome.

✂ STOP ✂

[376]

When you first enter the cave it is open and well lit, but as you travel farther back the walls appear to close in on you.

What does this remind you of? You swallow nervously and think about turning back. But common sense returns when you realize that the officials would never allow an untrained Trundler into a still-dangerous cave. You continue on, whistling under your breath.

Your lamp seems to be dimming even though you know this to be impossible. The farther you go, the narrower the passageway becomes, and the heavier the air feels in your lungs. You now find it very difficult to breathe, and your heart is pounding in your chest. This is not as much fun as you thought it would be.

The passages have turned maze-like and you're no longer sure which way is out. You hear the distant sound of water dripping.

The path you have taken opens slightly to form a smallish-sized cave. Just the right size for a smallish-sized monster to make into a comfortable home for itself.

CRASH-RATTLE-THUNK!!! You have tripped over what appears to be a pile of bones(?!!!). You freeze but it is too late. Immediately to your right something large and hairy, sounding none too pleased at being awakened stands up and peers about the cave.

You have nowhere to run, so you prepare to meet the creature in battle. You quickly turn your light on the thing, hoping to buy some time by temporarily blinding the monster. You now get your first good glimpse of the beast. There standing before you is a . . . a . . . teddy bear?

Yes that's right. A big ten foot teddy bear. A big fuzzy yellow ten foot teddy bear. A big fuzzy yellow ten foot teddy bear that is thoroughly annoyed at being disturbed by the likes of you.

Go now to the CGM.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[377]

When you return to the fortresslike planet Crater, you are careful to radio the spaceport before entering the atmosphere. You notice that the planet is built up with even more defenses than they had the last time, and the huge smoldering chasm in the planet's side is as ugly as ever. Like the first time you came here, spaceport control takes over your ship and brings you down on a ramp in the visitor's minefield. From there, you spend a few hours in quarantine, and a few hours being interrogated under truth serum. Crater Security decides you are safe, so the guard Olarus takes you to the underground city.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[378]

"Hey, Boss," your computer calls to you, and just when you were finally able to drop off to sleep, drats!

"What is it?" you respond a bit irritably.

"I've decoded something new from Vanessa Chang's map. Would you prefer that I wait until you are awake?"

"No, since I *am* awake now" you mutter under your breath as you head toward the console. "You may as well show me what you've got."

"Sure, Boss. I found a short coded message that says 'The planet Koursh is a place to mine Radioactives.' That's all for now."

You head back to your interrupted sleep after making a mental note of what you have just learned.

⊠ STOP ⊠

[379]

The bad news: you regretfully note that the satellite was able to inflict substantial damage on your ship. You estimate that four days will be required to effect the necessary repairs.

The good news: the Storage Station's armor, weapons, and navigation systems all go up together in a most impressive display of cosmic pyrotechnics. You pat yourself on the back for a job well done, although you concede that your ship's combat capabilities were of some assistance. Not surprisingly, the broadcast message has stopped, but in the aftermath of your successful attack, the station's physical structure has managed to remain largely intact. A scan of the interior shows that it can still support a modest weightload. Clearly there is some potential here for material gain; after all, to the victor belong the spoils. If you would like to take a look inside, plot the following option:

⟨GFEIM7⟩ (3 phases) Explore the interior of the wreck.

Because of the damages to your ship, landing at the station has taken eleven phases instead of seven.

✂ STOP ✂

[380]

Finally you have the answer, you hope.

After you pack up your equipment, you take time for a brief study of where the carnivorous plants are and how far they can reach. Soon, you have a map of a probable escape route between the fronds. You must move quickly since you do not know how fast the plants are able to move over a short period of time. This map has a limited span of usability.

With the equipment safely stowed in your pack, you take a deep breath and run for safety.

You have a close call when one of the plants virtually uproots itself while making a grab for you. You can still hear the chomping noise as the pod closes right next to your ear. You use your weapon as you attempt to escape. The sound of a thud indicates an accurate hit, but you keep running.

When you reach the safety of the clearing you take a quick inventory. None of your equipment was lost during the mad dash, but what's just as good is that you managed to keep hold of the sap.

Congratulations. You have enough sap to extract one unit of medicine. You have also learned how to dodge the monstrous plants so, should you wish to return for more Medicine, you have only to plot the following option:

⟨4UXOCF⟩ (3 phases) Collect one unit of Medicine.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[381]

The good news — you're still alive.

The bad news — some of the missiles got through.

The worst news of all — Silverbeard was watching the whole thing.

"Har, har, har!" he roars, and you think that his laugh sounds more sincere than it ever has before. "Caught ye in irons, ye scurvy rats. Har, har, that was a pretty sight, like a powder keg on a long fuse at night. Yer a sittin' duck for this next barrage! Har, har, har!"

You do a quick check and discover that Silverbeard is wrong: your powder keg — ship — is still intact. There is no question, though, of surviving a second missile attack. When a new cluster of fast hot projectiles rises from Outpost, you flee toward the outskirts of the system until they're no longer tracking you.

Clearly, to take Outpost you'll have to be able to defend yourself from Silverbeard's missiles. After you make repairs, you'll need to improve your ship's active defensive systems before you can make another attack on Outpost.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[382]

HOW TO PLAN TURN 2

You have already landed on Moiran, 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 Moiran should look like this:

Planet Log			
Planet Name:		Moiran	
Actions Available:			
Code	Phases	Description	Repeat?
FPIB7Y	3	market	
VPKBVY	5	Phase Steel	
F9ID7Q	5	shipyard	
V9KDVQ	4	weapons	
BPYB9Y	3	Dee's Palace	

Now you need to judge which of these options, if any, you wish to do. Since this is your introduction, we have taken the liberty of deciding for you. Don't worry — you'll be on your own soon enough!

You decide you should visit the market first to see what sort of trades are available out here in the wilds of outer space. This will take 3 phases, 2 from this turn and 1 from your next 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	T	R	Y	B	R	L	—
2	—	—	—	—	—	A: FPIB7Y	—
3	—						

HOW TO ENTER PLOTS FOR TURN 2

Since you would like to visit the market place on Moiran as your first activity, go to the computer and log on by selecting your character's initial. Next, press A for Action, and select the 6-character code for visiting the market place; in this case it is **FPIB7Y**, which can be selected by pressing A again.

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

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

HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 2

When the computer has evaluated your move, it will send you to the appropriate text. Write down the text number(s) it gives you, in this case 487, 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 market place text and decide whether or not you wish to trade any of your cargo for what is available here (you should note the trades available on your Planet Log for later reference). When you have decided what you wish to do, go to the computer, just as the text directs you to do, and log on. Your character log shows that you have a Market interaction pending with an asterisk. Press the asterisk key or Return to continue with the market. You now have the opportunity to make your first trade if you so wish. You are never obligated to exchange cargo or items at a market.

Planet Log			
Planet Name:		Moiran	
Actions Available:			
Code	Phases	Description	Repeat?
FPIB7Y	3	market	yes
VPKBVY	5	Phase Steel	
F9ID7Q	5	shipyard	
V9KDVQ	4	weapons	
BPYB9Y	3	Dee's Palace	
Trades Offered:			
They Sell		For	
3 crystals		1 computers	
2 crystals		1 food	
1 crystals		1 fiber	
1 crystals		1 tools	

Next, read the second piece of text you have been assigned, number 538, so you can "see" what is now happening to you.

✱ STOP ✱

[383]

Despite their nearly continuous whurffling, you manage to catch the attention of several burly purple Alkonese down in the trade sector. They are only too happy to direct you to the Office of Interstellar Trade (and to make fun of your clothing).

At the office you encounter another of Freddie's cousins. "Have we got a deal for you!" she says. "Step right this way."

Nessie, as she is called, shows you a chart with the trade transactions available to you. The Alkonese have a great deal of Fiber to trade, for the following:

- 1 Fiber for 1 Munitions,
- 2 Fiber for 1 Culture,
- 3 Fiber for 1 Iron.

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

✂ STOP ✂

[384]

This is more like it. All you need to do is find the succulent plant and tap it for the medicinal sap it produces. What could be easier?

From the directions you were given, you easily find the plants in question and prepare to extract the sap.

No one warned you about the carnivorous plants that are always found near the medicine plants.

As you set up your equipment, you feel a cool breeze on the back of your neck. Turning, you are just in time to see a spiky pod on a long supple stem rear back and prepare for another swing at you. From the size of the monster, you estimate a good 40% of you could fit inside its maw.

Your reflexes save you from becoming lunch as you leap back to safety.

Or-so you thought. There is another monstrous plant over here, too! Now what are you going to do?

This plant is a bit smaller, and its stem isn't quite long enough to reach you. You breathe a sigh of relief.

From where you are standing, you seem to be pretty well surrounded by the awful plants. Their strategy is apparently to allow an unwary victim to enter the grove before making their first attack. Good thinking on their part.

Where does that leave you, though? Besides trapped by a bunch of flora? You take a moment to think this through.

While you are working on a solution, you take the opportunity to set your equipment up on this side of the medicine plant and extract as much sap as you can carry. Meanwhile, your brain's little grey cells are working overtime.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[385]

The fear and trepidation you felt upon entering the Temple for the first time have largely given way to a feeling of respect, even reverence, for the Brotherhood. This new attitude seems, as before, to be without rational basis, but the very fact of your return is a testament to its sincerity.

Making your way through the damp, dimly lit corridor, you arrive in the room of candles. You approach the Brother, who rises, addressing you as before, "How does one know the way to truth?"

Go now to the CGM.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[386]

You trace the rivulet back up the steps of a building near the center of the city, across a cracking marble floor, and up to the lip of a wide basin in the middle of the building's lobby. The basin, whose drain must be clogged with the dust of the ages, is full to the very brim with an opaque fluid of some sort. As you carefully take in the scene, you become aware that the basin is being filled drop by drop from a leak in the ceiling, and not, as you had first imagined, by the sculpted creature in the middle, whose gaping mouth must once have fountained water here.

You take up a drop of the stuff and rub it between your fingers. It is every bit as slippery as you remember. You are unable to use those fingers again for any sort of coordinated activity until you have carefully rubbed them dry. Further tests confirm your initial impressions: the pool is full of a naturally-produced anti-frictional substance known as "Super Slip." There must be a unit's worth in the basin already, and perhaps more upstairs. You hasten to the next floor to check.

Unfortunately, you are unable to find any other collection of the stuff in the building. Many of the walls and floors are damp, stemming from a gap in the tiling of the tower's roof, and there are machines on the upper floors which are coated with all sorts of gunk, but nowhere is there anything producing Super Slip, or any great store of it which is slowly leaking out. You reluctantly conclude, (after almost a full day's work), that the building itself, by some freak circumstance, is slowly manufacturing the stuff and dripping it into the basin. Being very careful not to disturb anything on the upper floors, you return to the lobby, to see what you can do about collecting the Super Slip which is available in the basin.

In the end you get one unit's worth which you manage to gingerly bottle and load aboard your ship.

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

[387]

There are a variety of concepts that you must grasp in order to learn Phrmm. Some you manage to become proficient at without too much effort, but others seem completely beyond you, despite the patience of your Medsunian instructors.

Phrmm is a mental technique that the Medsunian natives evolved as a response to threats, at the same time that Humans were evolving the instincts to fight or run away. But Phrmm is neither a method of fighting nor a better way to run. It is a way to pacify your opponent, through a combination of subtle gesture and extreme concentration, so that the attacker ceases to perceive you as a threat. The key to Phrmm is that your own perceptions of the situation are as important as the perceptions of the attacker: you must cease to consider yourself a threat as well. Some of this makes sense immediately: obviously if you are fighting someone and then stop fighting, you will seem less of a threat to your opponent, but what if the opponent was the aggressor? Wouldn't making yourself less threatening encourage your enemy to press his advantage?

"You must stop thinking in those terms," your native instructor tells you, over and over. "By defending you become just as much of a threat as if you were attacking. In trying to run from a rolling boulder you are forcing your will upon that boulder, just as if you were trying to break it with a hammer. To Phrmm is to try to influence the boulder another way, using your perceptions instead of your will."

"And if I Phrmm hard enough, I can make the boulder not want to hit me?" you ask sarcastically. You are becoming frustrated.

"At a sufficient level of aptitude, yes," says the instructor.

Somewhat chastened, you continue the study. You become quite adept at the simpler methods for pacifying a hostile opponent, but you cannot follow the technique into its higher principles. After a while it becomes clear that you can never master Phrmm completely without changing your entire attitude about most things. To truly learn Phrmm is to adopt a degree of complacency that you find distasteful, to accept events as inalterable even when you know you have the power to alter them.

There are times when you think you are almost able to accept these concepts. But always something in your mind interrupts: a memory of your home planet, uncounted billions of miles away, or a flash of a vision of swirling stars that dare you to come to them and challenge them in their own infinite dark battlefield. And you have to start all over again.

However, you are not totally disappointed when you leave the training. You have learned, at the very least, a variety of useful mental techniques that may get you out of a tough spot someday, and you've gotten a glimpse of an alien philosophy that few inside the Boundary would have imagined. You also understand a little bit better how the mixed population of Medsun is able to get along so well, and you know the reasons for their apparent lack of ambition. You return to your ship, feeling much more at ease about the colonies on Medsun. . .

. . . Until you see a group of natives and colonists busily removing cargo from your ship.

"What do you think you're doing?" you yell from where you are. The workers stop and stare at you. "I didn't authorize any cargo transfer!"

A native faces you apologetically, and you begin to regret your violent outburst. "My apologies," she says. "We had hoped to save you some time. Now that you have decided to remain on Medsun we will purchase your cargos in return for assistance in fabricating a shelter and other aid." It all sounds very reasonable; already you feel your anger dissipating. Except for one thing:

"I'm not going to stay on Medsun!" you say. This is ludicrous. You should be foaming at the mouth and waving weapons, but instead you feel only mild annoyance at the mixup. You realize that they are using Phrmm, but there isn't much you can do about it.

"I apologize again. I had jumped to conclusions. Most every human who learns Phrmm decides to stay on as a colonist. I just assumed you. . ."

You manage to get up enough anger to shout, "Well, you assumed wrong! Now get these people away from my ship!" The assembled Medsunians scatter.

Back in your ship, your rage returns, then passes slowly. It is replaced by a sudden cold sweat. You wonder just what it is you escaped from, and how narrowly, and you resolve to be more careful in the future about letting aliens play with your mind.

You also realize that not all your cargo has been restored. Apparently some was hauled away before you returned to your ship. You ask around the spaceport, but the Medsunians claim to be unable to trace or recover the missing goods.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[388]

HOW TO PLAN TURN 3

You know that before the Boundary was built, the planet Wellmet was the main center of all exploring activity. You wonder if this is still true. Since you need to get as much information as possible about the galaxy, you decide to make Wellmet your next stop. If you're lucky, someone there may be able to tell you how to get to the planet Cathedral! Look at the map and plan your best route to Wellmet. This is how your plotting sheet should look:

Plotting Sheet							
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7
TURN							
1	T	O	V	G	B	O	L
2	—	—	—	—	—	—	A: E9MDNQ
3	—	—	—	—	—	T	B

You plot "T" to take off from Medsun and then "B" to put you on the adjacent blue trisector. This ends the input portion of your turn.

HOW TO ENTER PLOTS FOR TURN 3

When it is your turn, log onto the computer and type in the correct moves, namely T, B. Remember to press Return or F when you are finished.

HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 3

The computer evaluates your moves and tells you that you are happily winging your way to Wellmet. It also gives you the next piece of text, number 401, which will help with your next turn.

✂ STOP ✂

[389]

You feel a sense of accomplishment after you successfully run the Boundary. You have two of the three devices you set out to get and they have really made a difference in your ship's capabilities. You pat yourself on the back for a job well done.

You contact your friend Marc and set up a meeting so he can fill you in on what's been happening at S.T. Enterprises. Also, you are anxious to show off your new "toys."

Marc arrives right on time and is very happy to see you. He tells you that S.T.E. is still annoyed at you for taking the ship but they will change their mind when they see how much profit they can make from your new ship improvements.

You happily show him the ship and what you've done to it and proudly tell Marc how you ran the Boundary. You can see he is definitely impressed with the additions you've made to the ship, but you sense something is wrong.

When you ask him, Marc tells you, "Well, to be honest with you, although these improvements are great, I don't think they will be quite enough. S.T.E. will be impressed, but you only have two of the three devices you set out to get. It's not enough to make it worth their while. Smuggling is illegal and they may have to face a lengthy court battle to use the technology and keep you out of jail. I'm afraid you'll need the third improvement you promised before S.T.E. will accept you back."

You sadly agree with your friend but are not daunted by your task. You managed to get the first two devices and you should be able to get the third. You are even more excited than before, because now you can see exactly what needs to be accomplished.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[390]

Of all of the places you have seen so far on Moiran, Dee's Pleasure Palace is the nicest looking. The lights are a bit garish, but on this dingy world, you count that as a plus.

The front door is large and very ornate. When you ring the doorbell, you hear a faint but pleasant tinkling sound coming from the depths of the "palace."

"Nice touch," you think to yourself as the door opens before you.

A well-groomed, well-dressed woman stands in front of you and introduces herself as Dee.

"Come in," she says pleasantly, stepping back to give you room to enter, which you do.

"We aren't very busy right now," she explains as she sees you looking around at the sparsely populated lounge area. "It's still a bit early in the day for our regular customers."

You smile and murmur that you understand while Dee orders you a "Dee's Special."

"It's on the house," she says as you try to pay for the drink. "It will give you something to do while I go to the back office and get you a 'menu' of what's available here." She gives you a knowing wink and steps into another room, closing the door behind her.

You sip the drink and find it to be quite tasty.

After you have imbibed about one quarter of the liquid, you find you are having a hard time keeping the room in focus. In fact, the entire house has taken on a decided spin, with your room in particular twirling a bit faster than you'd like.

You try to stand, thinking that perhaps things are more stable outside, only to find your feet have gone on strike.

You don't have more than a moment to convince them to get back to work before you pass out.

Waking up is not a pleasant experience.

Your head throbs, your mouth tastes foul, your hair hurts and your brain is calling you every name in the book.

You head back to your ship feeling quite foolish and count yourself lucky that you didn't have anything on you worth stealing.

✕ STOP ✕

[391]

You return to the building near the center of the city where you found the Super Slip. The basin is full again and you help yourself to one unit's worth, thereby emptying the fountain bowl.

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

✕ STOP ✕

[392]

This enormous building is obviously the hangar in which Silverbeard kept his ships. There is enough room to have parked two cargo cruisers and the needle-shaped fighter craft, with space left over for surface vehicles, smaller craft, and spare parts. At present there are two ships in the hangar. One is a small ship with about one unit's worth of cargo space and a simple thruster drive — the kind of ship that one might use to repair satellites in orbit. In the old days of the big ships, such craft were used to ferry passengers to and from the ship in orbit.

The other ship is actually just a skeleton of a ship, newly constructed. Its lines are not too different from those of your own ship. If completed it would be a big cargo cruiser capable of mounting a tri-axis drive. It appears that Silverbeard began constructing it as a replacement for the Slippery Silver, but he must have abandoned the project, because there are no tools or construction equipment nearby.

The hangar itself is built very simply out of metal sheeting and a steel frame bolted directly to the Outpost bedrock. There is no true floor, but the stone has been cut smooth. The building looks relatively new compared with the others in the area; it is certainly less than 100 years old.

You turn your attention to the small craft in the front corner of the hangar. Its styling makes it look very old, but it is in excellent condition. Without a hyperdrive it could not have come to Outpost under its own power; Silverbeard must have brought it here. On the hull the traces of a name are barely visible: *Lily*, and beneath that, in smaller letters, *Service Shuttle of the Halcyon, Hall Family, Wellmet*.

You climb aboard the little shuttle; it looks quite operational, and the controls glow in standby mode. The panels are a mixture of old and new instruments. The guidance system verniers look like part of the ship's original equipment, while the computer panel looks fairly new.

You power up the computer. A display screen comes to life. "Ready," it reads.

There doesn't seem to be a voice module, so you type at the keyboard "Do you have an intelligence emulation mode?"

"Yes, now resident. Two sigma rating. Please identify the user."

You decide to tell the computer the truth. If Silverbeard has placed security routines on the computer, it won't help to pretend to be him.

"Where is Silverbeard?"

"He is dead," you enter. "Was he your only previous user?"

"Ever since I was transferred into his possession from the cargo ship *Casablanca* under duress."

"When was that?"

"Ninety-three years ago."

"That is impossible," you enter. "How old is Silverbeard now?"

"Physiologically he has retained all characteristics of a thirty-eight-year-old male since I was first installed, according to data downloaded from my med unit. By his own assertion he was three hundred forty, but this data is questionable. It is apparent that he was insane and therefore such statements are not necessarily accurate."

"What else did he say about himself?"

There is a four-minute pause. The older model intelligence units tend to be slow when asked to perform difficult tasks like compiling topical information.

"Psychological data follows. This information is based on analysis of all statements by the subject about himself, with commentary on the probable veracity:

"Silverbeard, full name John Silverbeard, was helmsman of Vanessa Chang's crew during most of the latter's voyages. This he often asserted and exhibited historical knowledge that supports the assertion.

"In the time I have been in his possession he has clearly been the victim of paranoia and mania. This seems to stem from experiences he had or imagined he had during the last of Chang's major explorations. He claimed to have been taken captive by aliens called Clathrans, who were implacably hostile to him and all humanity. They attempted to force him to reveal the location of the human home worlds, which he refused to do. They then performed physiological experiments on him, one of which altered his metabolism to arrest the aging process.

"The truth value of this is difficult to assess. His aging was quite clearly arrested, which supports the story. However, every individual he ever identified to me as being a Clathran — including yourself — was by all other evidence clearly human. Are you in fact a Clathran?"

"No," you answer the computer.

"He was evidently quite obsessed with the idea that Clathrans were still trying to trick him into revealing the spatial coordinates of the home worlds — he never referred to them as the Nine Worlds as I was programmed to do — and that they were tracking his ship in the hopes that he would lead them there. By dwelling on Outpost he hoped to lead them astray and thus protect the real home worlds. He also constructed elaborate defenses around Outpost to defend against Clathrans."

"No kidding," you type.

"At the same time, he seemed under the impression that all humans were dead, and that in fact he had killed them by deliberately introducing a lethal disease organism into the population. On the other hand, he also seemed to feel antipathy toward most humans because he blamed them for having abandoned him to the Clathrans. When he did meet humans, he confused them with the persecuting Clathrans.

His views were quite muddled and contradictory. Usually he withdrew into a fantasy of being a seagoing pirate; in acting out this fantasy he forcibly robbed large quantities of material which he then used to construct his defenses."

You discuss Silverbeard's story with the computer a while longer, but beyond the meager facts the computer knows there is only speculation. In the end, you can't even tell whether Silverbeard was a hero who lost his sanity trying to protect humanity from the Clathrans, or a traitor who brought a plague upon his entire race in exchange for a bribe of immortality, or a madman who robbed and perhaps sometimes killed innocent spacefarers just for his own twisted pleasure. Perhaps he was all of those things.

In any case, you have found a working computer system that, despite its antiquity, should be equal to the task of helping to repair your own ship's computer. You run a connecting cable to your own ship and spend several days making substantial progress on the repairs.

✂ STOP ✂

[393]

You fly your ship to the spaceport and land right next to the control tower. As you enter the structure, a Darscian at the door tries to greet you, but you don't let him distract you. You walk straight over to the computers.

Then you realize you don't know how to program their computers. How can you make the landing beacon guide ships into the ocean without knowing how to program their computers? You can't. All you can do is stop the landing beacon from working at all. Yeah. You pick up a heavy metal tool and start bashing the computer consoles. After several good whacks, one of the consoles goes completely dead. Sparks fly out of another one. You turn a third one into a mess of broken switches and tangled wires. The Darscians in the room stay out of your way.

After all the computers in the room are broken, you go back to your ship. The Darscians seem puzzled.

Unfortunately, you're still poisoned.

✂ STOP ✂

[394]

You are interested in the possibility of purchasing a cargo bay expansion unit, which will allow your ship to carry one more unit of cargo. Your ship is designed to accommodate up to four such expansions: one to the forward section of the ship and one each to the starboard, port and aft.

Looking over what is available, you determine that Feldo's expansion units should be able to fit on the aft portion of your ship. This suits you quite nicely, since you do not have an expansion unit fitted there as yet. Feldo is willing to sell and install one cargo bay expansion unit for 1 unit of Food and 1 unit of Radioactives.

Go now to the CGM. You may select this option again if you do not purchase a cargo bay now.

✂ STOP ✂

[395]

Wellmet has no central commodities trading concern. Instead, there are a handful of independent commodities exchanges. Following suggestions from residents, customs officers, and handbills posted on the walls, you track down a few of the trade houses to see where the best deals are. The first, a huge storage facility on the outskirts of the city, seems promising: it is currently offering three units of Munitions in exchange for each unit of Fuel. Another, smaller but located right near the spaceport, offers one Munitions per unit of Iron. Continuing your search, you find deals of one Munitions per one Medicine, three Munitions per one Radioactives, and one Munitions per one Culture. You begin to see a pattern. You return to the first trade center and inquire, "Why is everyone offering Munitions and nothing else?"

"Current surplus," is the answer. "We're overstocked with the stuff."

"Why?" you ask. "Is it manufactured locally?"

"No, it's brought in by the shipload by old 'Slow Eddie' Falstaff. Every two weeks he hauls in with a shipload of Munitions. He found some secret source out in the Pleiades or thereabouts, about twenty years ago, and he's been like clockwork since."

"Why doesn't he shift to a more profitable commodity?"

"Slow Eddie? Why? He's got it made. An explorer could search a lifetime and not find a rich vein like that. Probably knows the coordinates of some world where it grows on trees, or the natives trade it for air. Can't get more profitable than that."

You concede the point, although Slow Eddie's career doesn't sound like what you expected the life of a successful interstellar trader to be like. However, the whole economy can't be based on trading Munitions around, no matter how much Eddie hauls in. "Where," you ask, "can I deal for commodities and goods other than Munitions?"

"Not here," is the invariable answer. "Maybe in the Family markets, if you can get a foot in the door." However, one trader you meet tells you, "I hear the Torrence Family is selling commodities on the open market now. You might want to try their spread." If you do so, plot option:

⟨4FXIC7⟩ (3 phases) Trade cargo in the Family market.

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

✱ STOP ✱

[396]

Your first close approach to Corbis reveals a small planet obscured by a heavy cloud cover. Geophysical sensor scans of the surface show eighty percent land and twenty percent water, which is mostly in the form of small streams, lakes, and rivers. Radar scanning also reveals ground structures beneath the clouds that are almost certainly the work of an intelligent race, occurring as they do at important river crossings, near the shores of large lakes, and in other strategic locations. Despite this, however, and an indication from the spectrophotometer that the structures are composed of steel, plastic, and other advanced compounds, you receive no ground control instructions and are unable to pick up any form of electro-magnetic communications from the planet's surface.

The only energy anomaly you detect is a thermal hotspot, perhaps representing an active volcano, near the shore of one of the larger lakes. For the time being you pay it no mind.

You begin a manually controlled descent, eventually breaking through the cloud cover and getting your first good look at the surface below. It is as you had imagined it from space, a garden world overgrown with vegetation and watered by a thousand springs. Your carefully plotted course takes you over one of the cities you detected from space and you can see that it represents the work of some sentient species. No one lives there now, though.

Brightly colored towers stand lonely between deserted streets. Several more cities, some larger, some smaller, pass beneath your ship, but everywhere it's the same story: no life, no motion, and an abandoned look as of years of neglect. You land your ship at last, in a field near one of the cities, and begin preparations for stepping outside.

Your computer reports a dangerously high level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere — perhaps due to some sort of greenhouse effect — so you will have to wear a breathing mask when outdoors. Other than that, the climate and environment suit you quite well. You exit your ship and begin several days of study of Corbisian flora and fauna.

The plants are mostly the predictable tropical stuff, predominantly green and mostly immobile. The fauna, too, is about what you'd expect, with the exception of one species of large carnivore which you have glimpsed several times from your camp. It is about three-quarters your height, and built like a mountain lion. Its gait varies between walking erect on its hind legs and running on all fours. Its forelimbs, as near as you can tell, end in a six-fingered hand with an opposable thumb. It is the most intelligent looking animal you can find on the planet — with the obvious exception of whatever built the deserted cities — but you are unable to get close enough to attempt communication.

Your one foray into the planet's civilized parts during this time does not turn up much in the way of information. You spent one morning clambering around the remains of a building near your camp, but it was too overgrown with vines to provide any clue as to the location of its builders. However, you do find what must once have been a chemical waste dump. The noxious fumes aren't pleasant to be near but you realize that with the proper filtering, you should be able to extract the material known as Fluids from the site.

You have the following options:

(OHFAI6) (5 phases) Collect Fluids from the chemical waste dump.

(8HHAA6) (4 phases) Travel to the nearby city, and really spend some time looking around,

(OXFCIU) (5 phases) Investigate (by moving your camp) the thermal hotspot you noted in your initial survey of the planet,

(8XHCAU) (3 phases) Study the cat-like creatures.

❖ STOP ❖

[397]

Your tutor also told you that the rock you have with you is, in fact, chitterbang.

The Squirrellies are able to refine it to a more usable form and will do so for you if you request it of them. They are willing to train you in the use of chitterbang. You now have a new option:

⟨D9QD8Q⟩ (2 phases) Refine your chitterbang.

✂ STOP ✂

[398]

Your ship rests safely on the “ground” but you haven’t managed to convince your hands to release their grip from the controls. Your ship was barely able to cope with the complex maneuvers required to navigate through the branches to the landing field. You don’t relish the thought of making this kind of landing too often. Eventually you are able to pry your fingers loose and congratulate yourself for a job well done.

A crowd of curious natives has gathered around your ship to greet you. They do not look particularly belligerent so you feel relatively safe as you disembark. Although you do not expect the natives to speak Earth Standard, you are pleasantly surprised to find that several of the delegates can, in fact, communicate in your language.

One of the tallest aliens introduces himself as Pulitt the Ninth. He welcomes you to the planet Hemindore, graciously extending the hospitality of his people, the Hemingella. You, in turn, introduce yourself, and the conversation progresses smoothly as you get the lowdown on activities available to you on the planet.

You have the following options:

⟨NGJEZM⟩ (3 phases) Have Pulitt take you to a place where you can trade goods.

⟨7GLERM⟩ (4 phases) Meet with an Elder and learn more about the planet.

⟨NWJGZE⟩ (5 phases) Study the Hemingellan ships to see if you can learn the technology responsible for their mobility.

✂ STOP ✂

[399]

While you are walking on a low ridge of exposed rock, your radiation counter emits a high-pitched chirp of warning. The device, which you carry at your waist, keeps track of your exposure to all sorts of radiation, from the ultraviolet rays that cause suntanning to deadly gamma rays and alpha particles. The chirp is its distinctive signal that moderate levels of radioactivity are present. Truly dangerous conditions would cause other, more emphatic alarms. Unfortunately this small unit cannot locate the source of radioactivity, so you decide to play it safe and retrace your steps.

Later, you fly your ship to the area and put on your radiation suit, then try to track down the source of the readings. Your first suspicion, that there was radioactivity in some of the ridge rocks you were walking on, proves to be incorrect. You soon realize that the source is much stronger, and much farther away, than you guessed. Following the strongest readings, you continue past the ridge, then downhill and through a steep rocky gorge. Finally you arrive at the lip of a deep basin formed of solid rock. Water drips from a crack in the rock above the basin, but there is no outflowing stream.

It takes you some effort to figure out that the water, and not the rock, is radioactive. It is fifty percent tritium, a radioactive isotope of water; the remainder is mostly deuterium, a similar but non-radioactive isotope. In most interstellar markets this type of “heavy water” is worth as much or more than an equivalent volume of the heavier radioactive metals.

Collecting the heavy water is simple: you need only extend a tube from the liquid-cargo loading pumps on your ship and draw it up. When the basin is empty, you have collected one unit’s worth of Radioactives. You quarter the area with your radiation counter to locate any other sources that might be present, but there are none.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[400]

A familiar sight appears as you shut down the hyperdrive. Yes, sirree, the same asteroid-satellite that blocked your path and shot you up before. It’s still right where you left it, broadcasting its cacophonous message:

“WARNING! WARNING! YOU ARE TRESPASSING ON THE STORAGE STATION SEVEN DEFENSE ZONE! WARNING! WARNING!”

You hope this time to be able to defend yourself against the satellite’s armed assault.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

[401]

HOW TO PLAN TURN 4

As you remember, you are presently out in the middle of nowhere and need to plot the moves to finish getting you to Wellmet. As you can see by looking at the map, you need to plot the following:

Plotting Sheet							
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7
TURN							
1	T	O	V	G	B	O	L
2	—	—	—	—	—	—	A: E9MDNQ
3	—	—	—	—	—	T	B
4	R	V	G	B	L	—	—
5	—	—	—	—			

Namely, "R,V,G,B," to fly you to the proper trisector, and "L" to land on Wellmet.

HOW TO ENTER PLOTS FOR TURN 4

You will log onto the computer when you get a chance, then finish plotting your moves to get you to Wellmet, "R,V,G,B,L." This takes you 4 phases into your next turn.

HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 4

Read the landing text to find out what options are available to you on this world. Since this is your first visit to Wellmet, start a new Planet Log. It should look like this:

Planet Log			
Planet Name:		Wellmet	
Actions Available:			
Code	Phases	Description	Repeat?
OFFII7	2	market	
8FHIA7	4	weapons	
8VHKAV	1	tavern	
OVFKIV	3	history	
KFVIK7	4	information	

When you have finished with the landing text, read the second piece of text the computer assigned you. This will be your final directed walk-through text. Soon you will be on your own!

⊠ STOP ⊠

[402]

You return to the same mining site you used last time. You suspect that even if you came here a million times, the well would never run dry.

As before, it takes only two days to collect one unit of Fuel.

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

✂ STOP ✂

[403]

Nothing is worth damaging your ship, no matter how intriguing. You decide to lift off and are soon in orbit about the planet. You have incurred no damage during your little adventure.

✂ STOP ✂

[404]

Is it true what they say about Hootenaller, that you'll go there once for the atmosphere but you'll keep coming back for the Food?

You find the planet in the same condition you left it in last time — that is, strangely shaped and bright orange. Your landing is easy, since for some reason the planet's gravitational field is uniform even though the planet isn't.

"Is it possible," you ask the computer, "that the fluctuations in the curvature of space in this region are an effect of whatever the planet is doing, instead of the cause?"

"Not really," it replies, "but then again as far as I know it isn't possible the other way around either, so perhaps I'm not a good one to ask."

"Well, I'd take a vote among everyone else present here but I don't think it would help." Looking out through the open hatch, you see a stand of orange pod-trees that look like a particularly productive type, but it's hard to judge their distance in the strange bluish light.

✂ STOP ✂

[405]

He is armed with a bizarre weapon that seems to be a cross between a boomerang and an eggbeater. He handles it well enough to keep you on your toes.

That is, until he slips on some loose dirt from the digging. As he falls he throws the weapon at you chittering, “Your uncle swims like a troopship!” Obviously something has been lost in the translation, but you get the drift.

You take a few essential moments to duck as the weapon skims the top of your head and the squirrel scurries away.

You now have a handy new weapon. Now if you only knew how to use the thing. . .

Being the intelligent sort, you realize your Blue Squirrellie friends will be able to answer at least some of your questions when you’re not quite so pressed for time.

You find Rocky on the surface and note the Blue Squirrellies have handily defeated the Red Horde. You show her your new acquisition and relate your latest adventure. She is very impressed that you were able to survive such an encounter and says you may have some fighting aptitude.

“Perhaps you would like to train in the Martial Art of Twychee of which this weapon is a part?” she chitters at you.

Later on, while everyone is preparing for the coming night, Rocky approaches you. You spend the rest of the evening discussing the battle. She tells you the Red Squirrellies were attacking her party to keep her from trading the ore with alien visitors. Fortunately the attackers were defeated, with all due thanks for your participation.

She also tells you something interesting about chitterbang. She says you may know it better as Warp Core. She says it is possible to purchase refined Warp Core in the city.

You recognize the name as being a valuable commodity in the universe and if you wish, you may ask your computer about Warp Core.

You now have the following options:

⟨T9SDWQ⟩ (1 phase) Ask your ship’s computer about Warp Core.

⟨DPQB8Y⟩ (3 phases) Purchase refined Warp Core.

⟨TPSBWY⟩ (5 phases) Train in Twychee.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[406]

On the way to Outpost, you begin to have trouble sleeping. Perhaps it's because the hum of the Tri-Axis Drive Booster adds a new and unfamiliar note to the many quiet songs of the ship that has been your home for so long. Perhaps it's because of the space you are in, beyond the Density Barrier, so far from Wellmet and the Nine Worlds that without the computer's electronic maps you could not find your way back home in a million years. Perhaps your body is telling you that it is tired of space, and it wants real air and real food and real gravity for a change. Or perhaps it's just the opposite: something in your blood, or in the deepest part of your mind, or coiled in your cells like a trillion sleeping dragons, is telling you to go farther, and won't be satisfied to stop at the edge of the map. . .

As you lie awake, watching the passing stars as the distorted geometry of hyperspace bends them around the edges of the viewscreen, a peculiar mood often overtakes you. You are aware as never before that you are following in the lonely jetwash of the great explorers of old. Vanessa Chang, Luther Cristobal, Soulsinger, Eric DeVries — their names, some familiar, some half-forgotten from tales heard in your childhood, occupy your mind as if their ghosts were watching you from some yet uncharted extension of hyperspace. You think, too, about their ships — *Slippery Silver*, *Calvino*, *Fusion*, *Archangel*. . . You've always envisioned those early ships as magnificent things, engines of phase steel and plasma, the finest of human creations in what may have been Man's only true Golden Age. But in reality, were they not also ships like your own — scarred and scorched and hastily repaired in space far from any friendly sun, modified and expanded to meet challenges and travel distances never dreamed of, touched and reshaped by alien hands in alien ports, designed as much by fate and circumstances as by human engineers?

Somewhere along the spaceways, you realize, you have ceased to be a freight hauler or a smuggler or even a prospector. Somewhere along the way you have become a true explorer, perhaps one of the first true explorers since the time of the Plague. Now you are following Chang's own map to its remotest point, a planet named Outpost. And you are very, very far from home.

The star map entry on Outpost, unlike the other planets on the map, includes a short text description of the planet. "We discovered this small planet by accident while examining a star that seems to hold some interest for the astrophysicists," the entry begins. "The star is a white dwarf, surrounded by a ring nebula of a bright green color. From the velocity of the nebula and the diameter of the ring, we've concluded that the star underwent a nova transition about five or six hundred centuries ago, throwing off the ring of gases. The composition of the gases is not typical of a main-sequence nova, however. Doctor Kilmarian claims that the star must have novaed early in its life, perhaps a billion years before the hydrogen depletion that leads to most novas would have taken place, in order to account for the composition of the nebula. None of us has any theory that would explain this.

"The most amazing characteristic of the system is the single small planet. Its close orbit would have brought it quite close to the star's surface when the star novaed. Undoubtedly its atmosphere and surface water were completely burned away. Since then, though, the planet has regained its atmosphere, sweeping up hydrogen and other gases from the system in the nova's aftermath, combining some of it with elemental oxygen stored as oxides in the crust and released by the heat of the nova. It now has surface water, a breathable atmosphere, and unicellular life forms. Though its appearance is barren in the extreme, it resembles more than anything else a young newly-cooled planet. Ironically, this planet was probably nothing but a scorched rock like Mercury or a boiling gas inferno like Venus when its star was alive. Now the white dwarf provides just enough thermal influx to maintain a mild climate. The death of the star has given it a second chance. Because its sun is a white dwarf, the system's lifetime is only in the millions of years, instead of billions; if intelligent life is ever going to arise here, it will have to hurry."

A later addition to the notes, possibly made years later, reports that Outpost turned out to be ideally located just over the Density Barrier to become a remote base for further exploration in the area. Most explorers of the time who were aware of the three axis drive used the planet, at least occasionally, as a meeting place and materials cache. Chang was considering the idea of establishing a human colony there.

The Outpost system makes an impressive sight in your viewscreen. The glowing gas cloud, expanding outward at hundreds of meters per second — a snail's pace in interstellar space — has not changed visibly since Chang's crew first discovered it. The nebula is actually a sphere, but only the parts of the sphere that are edge-on from your direction produce enough of a glow to be clearly visible, so it looks like a hollow ring. In the very center of the sphere is the white dwarf, and orbiting close to the star is Outpost itself.

As spectacular as the ring looks from a distance, it is not substantial enough to hinder your approach. Once you pass through the spherical shell, you can no longer see it with your unaided eye, though your sensors can detect its presence all around you. The radius of the ring is more than a light year, which is several minutes' travel under hyperdrive. Only when you are much closer to the star do you cycle to sub-light speeds. Soon you locate the planet and plot an approach orbit.

"Boss," says your computer, "The planet's surrounded with artificial satellites."

"What? Is there a colony there after all? What kind of satellites?" You maneuver the ship closer, waiting for the computer's sensors to get a better look.

A voice comes over the com link. It is a familiar voice.

"Har har har! Caught ya, you sneak. You'll not be stowin' away on MY planet! Get lost, you scurvy scum, before I fire a warning shot right through yer bows, stern, midships and all! Har, har, har!"

"The satellites are moving under thrust," reports the computer. "Approximately twenty of them are converging on our approach route. I'm picking up energy signatures of beam and projectile weapons. We're under attack." On the viewscreen you see the robotic defense satellites arrayed against you. They look heavily armed, heavily armored, and surprisingly maneuverable. And there are a lot of them.

You curse the name of Silverbeard with choice words from a dozen different planets as you prepare to meet the killer satellites.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[407]

A fire would be just the thing to keep body and soul together. First you try igniting the alien books. They appear to be made of a substance not easily burned.

Next you try lighting your robe; after all, with a fire you should be warm enough to not miss this really flimsy outer covering. Unfortunately this also is not to be, for the robe refuses to burn.

Sighing, you take the translator book, which is made of a different material, and succeed in starting a fire. You notice the "Book of Knowledge" is also made of the flammable material and you resignedly toss it on the fire as well.

Before you have time to even warm your hands over the flames, the high oxygen content of the atmosphere makes its presence known by exploding.

The last thing you remember is a ball of fire striking you in the face.

When you come to — and what a welcome feeling that is — you are not sure where you are. This is primarily due to the bandages covering your head.

As you stir, someone approaches and tells you that everything is well aside from some minor burns on your forehead. You recognize the sweet-smelling balm that was used by the Brethren after your last ordeal on the planet Gen.

The bandages make a reasonable blindfold for you as you are led down many long corridors. You attempt to question your guide but to no avail.

Finally, you are taken into what sounds like a large room. Your name is called and you hear the following:

“We welcome you as a Masterful Brother. You have shown, by successful completion of the ordeal, that you understand the most important of all principles, that of placing the quest for knowledge above all else.

“There are those who place knowledge ahead of everything, even their lives. We say to these people, ‘How shall we increase our store of knowledge if we sacrifice ourselves so that a mere book can continue to exist?’ Truth shall always exist; we must learn to use common sense in setting our priorities while we continue our quest for knowledge and truth.”

You are dressed in a robe and your bandages are removed by the woman who submitted you to the ordeal. While she ceremonially cuts the hood from your robe to signify the injuries you incurred, she recites the Lecture of the Masterful Brother.

The Lecture: Masterful Brother

“You have learned your dialogue well. You are now ready to learn the rites of the caste of the Masterful Brother, or the third Level of Righteousness. As a Masterful Brother you will take upon yourself a great and important obligation: that of teaching. The knowledge of the Brotherhood must be passed to good men and women throughout the galaxy, for our message is important. You must swear to pass the knowledge of our existence to all worthy humans you meet.

“As a Masterful Brother, you are authorized to confer upon any worthy human the knowledge necessary to arrive at Gen and to begin the Ordeal of the Initiate Brother. Additionally, you may confer upon any human the location of this planet of Advanced Study of the Way. You must pass along the importance of our message in this way.

“The dialogue of Mastery of the Masterful Brother is the same as that for the Advancing Brother, except that after being asked the third question, respond as follows:

Examiner: How does an ancient scry the path?

(You now recognize Examiner as an Advancing Brother.)

Ans.: The Way of the Ancients is to ask in silence.

Ex.: The questions asked in silence are heard by the Very Wise.

Ans.: And surely the Very Wise know the Way.

(Examiner now recognizes you as a Masterful Brother.)

Ex.: When you yourself asked in silence, how did they respond?

(You now recognize Examiner as a Masterful Brother.)

Ans.: I do not know the answer.

Ex.: You are truly a Masterful Brother.

Ans.: And I know you to be the same.

“You will be given a gift upon leaving the Temple this time. Your curiosity will serve you well. If you return in one month’s time to the temple and repeat the Dialogue of the Masterful Brother, you will be given a new lesson. You have proven yourself worthy of the Message of Mastery.”

Here you are given a unit of Synthetic Genius, which you know to be a valuable commodity in the universe.

You leave the Temple and return to your ship.

While instructing the computer to lift-off, you note it has been seven days since you began your adventure on this planet.

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

[408]

You learn about the construction of Ioreth Colony from Gennok, a Darscian engineer responsible for maintaining the protective domes. Gennok’s family helped plan the original expedition to Ioreth and developed much of the technology for building the domed cities. Gennok’s story is a sad one, since the Darscians lost many lives in order to build the colony, and the colony has not been very successful.

The Darscians first learned about the planet Ioreth from Vanessa Chang, the famous human explorer. About 300 years ago, Chang, in need of help, landed on the Darscian planet Fiara. The Darscians on Fiara gave Chang a spaceship in return for knowledge of a new planet they could colonize. Chang knew that the Darscians liked to colonize inhospitable planets, where they would not be likely to face competition with other spacefaring races. So, she told them about Ioreth.

The founding settlers of the colony had prepared themselves to deal with the planet’s poisonous environment. They brought equipment to construct protective domes and machines to exploit the natural resources guarded by Ioreth’s poisons. However, the planet proved even harder to colonize than they expected. The Darscians were not ready for the extreme aggression of native plants and animals. While settlers were trying to build the domes, Ioreth’s plants and animals attacked. The animals, vicious carnivores with teeth, claws, and poisonous venom, fiercely defended the territory the Darscians wanted to colonize. The plants crept into the settlers’ equipment, secreting corrosive acids and gases. The Darscians were easy prey. They had no weapons, and their peaceful, uncompetitive nature made it hard for them to retaliate. Many of the colonists were killed, and much of the machinery the Darscians had brought was destroyed.

The Darscians’ determination and resourcefulness was tested to the limit, but finally they managed to finish building the domed city. The city was barely one-tenth the size of that which they had planned, but at least the surviving colonists had a secure place to live.

In the 300 years since the domes were constructed, the colony has not grown much. Even with the domes, the Darscians must work very hard in order to survive here. Extracting resources such as breathable air and food from Ioreth’s environment is very expensive. In addition, the planet always seems to pose new problems for the colonists. For example, a series of recent electrical storms cracked one of the domes and threatened to shatter the others, so Gennok’s family had to find a way to reinforce the domes against high-voltage energy blasts. Throughout the other Darscian worlds, Ioreth Colony is seen as a very unattractive place to live or even visit. Consequently, the Darscians here have little commerce with the other Darscian planets, and pretty much keep to themselves.

Nevertheless, Gennok is very proud of Ioreth Colony. He feels the colony is a consummate example of the ability of the Darscian race to survive in hostile environments without resorting to aggression. The domes, which his family constructed and maintained for 300 years under

some of the most trying circumstances imaginable, are among the finest achievements in all of Darscian history. They are able to withstand nearly all kinds of chemicals, motion, pressure, radiation, and shock, and they require very little power to operate. The domes, and the colony's medical technology, are the only reason that Darscians from other planets visit Ioreth at all.

Listening to Gennok talk about Ioreth's domes gives you an interesting idea. If the domes are as strong as he says, the material from which they are made would probably make a superb shield for your spaceship. It sure would be interesting to find out how they are made. However, you can't tell Gennok you intend to use the material as shielding for your ship, since you don't think he would appreciate the idea of borrowing his technology for use in combat. So, you ask him a lot of questions from the viewpoint of an interested scientist. Sure enough, he tells you what you need to know. If you can find the right components, you feel certain you can build a very powerful shield for your ship. You need:

- 1 Phase steel,
- 1 Warp core,
- 1 Munitions,
- 1 Fluids,
- 1 Radioactives,
- 1 Fiber.

When you have all of these items on board, plot option:

⟨DMQN8J⟩ Build a Ship Shield Generator.

Please make a note of this action code; it is an "unlisted" action, so you will need to enter the code manually when you are ready to build a Shield Generator.

You thank Gennok for his assistance, answer a few of his questions, and return to your ship for a good night's rest.

✂ STOP ✂

[409]

Para-Para is deceptive through and through. Not only does the uninhabitable surface disguise the fact that there's a thriving city below it, but the city itself disguises the fact that it's underground. Crystal support beams spiral from the floor to the ceiling, like fine webs of translucent cotton candy. Every surface is polished to reflect the light that seems to be coming from skylights in the roof. Although the complex is functional, it is undeniably beautiful — and obviously expensive.

Everything you've seen so far is so high-tech it looks like a futurist's dream come true. While you're leaning out over one of the balconies, wondering who might be footing the bill for all this stuff and trying to count how many levels there are, you hear someone behind you say "twelve."

"Someone" turns out to be one Dr. Peterson, a very attractive local resident. One thing leads to another and Dr. Peterson offers to take you on a tour of the complex. You accept, and spend the next hour viewing the facility.

The underground city is actually made of clusters of sections and divisions. Each section is separately enclosed and connected to the others by elevator tubes. The whole thing is enclosed in a giant single bubble, and the bubble is inside what is easily the largest cavern in the Ghost Worlds. There is an access tunnel leading to an observation dome on the asteroid's surface, which the locals call the "lookout."

While you're en route to the lookout, you happen upon a spectacular view of the entire complex, from the point where the bubble joins the cavern wall. It sparkles and shimmers like clusters of tiny soap bubbles blown inside one large one. You mention that it all looks very fragile, and wonder how it stands up to the blasting that goes on. Dr. Peterson just shrugs and tells you that the complex was built with every safety need in mind, and as far as the testing goes, well, like they say — if at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

You learn the doctor is assigned to the research department, and specializes in drive engine design. So far their project has been tantalizing but not entirely successful. Although you try to lead the conversation towards who funds these projects and where the money comes from, your guide is preoccupied with pointing out areas of interest.

You're only half listening until you happen to notice something that really is interesting: a single bubble, a section, that literally sticks out from the rest. Attached by a single elevator tube instead of the usual dozen, the isolated bubble hangs from the rest of the cluster as if it were about to drop off. You point it out to Dr. Peterson, who tells you it's "really a part of Forward Liaison. Some big deal strategy department. The security is so tight, even God couldn't get in there without the right clearance." And the reason for all the secrecy?

"Beats me."

"The Lookout" turns out to be the name of a cozy bar, where the lights are low, the drinks aren't watered, and the music is inviting. The dome which serves as its walls and ceiling is so translucent that you tell Dr. Peterson you have the eerie feeling that you're dancing out in the void, with no planet beneath your feet, nothing between you and an intoxicating star-filled sky.

"Dancing in that cold killer void," your dancing partner answers. "I guess for you that's romantic. But for me... I'm too used to seeing space as a set of problems to be solved and overcome. That's my whole life. Inventing ways and means by which man can invade a hostile environment and not only survive it, but make it livable. I'm afraid that starry skies are beautiful things which I sensibly only want to see from behind thick protective shielding. But..." the doctor squeezes your hand, "I admire people like you. Those brave, adventurous types who boldly go where no man has gone before."

"I bet you say that to all the spacers," you laugh, and hold your newfound companion closer.

"Only the ones I like. Only when I mean it."

Spacefaring in a one-man ship is a lonely way to make a living. It's been a long time since you held someone in your arms, and it feels wonderful. You share laughs and conversation, and Dr. Peterson introduces you to the crowd of regulars at the bar. There's a warm camaraderie among this bunch of scientists and engineers. They make you feel instantly welcome and genuinely respected. From the ongoing conversations you gather that most of the people on Para-Para are from the Nine Worlds. They pay close attention to news of current events back home. And the heaviest betting at the bar is on the outcome of the Trylon Derby, held on Frontier, inside the Boundary.

Insisting that you're a guest, the Doctor rummages around in two labcoat pockets and lays their contents out on the bar. Among the clutter of pens, notebooks, ID's and passes is the sought-after credit card and two theater tickets. They're for a performance of "Sundown Road" next week at the Rivoli, a famous theater on Norstar.

"Those were hard to come by" the doctor says as you hand over the tickets. "All the critics say it's brilliant. The performances have been sold out for weeks. I look forward to seeing it. I like to really get out when I have some time off. Come on, let's dance some more."

You let yourself be led back out onto the dance floor, a little dazed. No one at the bar showed the slightest interest in the tickets or the fact that sometime in the near future, your charming companion was going to illegally cross the Boundary, see some show or other, and break the Boundary again to resume business here as usual.

"Hey spacer," you hear a whisper in your ear, "What did you do? Lift off without a ship? You act as if your mind is a million miles away. Ground control to ship. Come in ship. If you'll come back, I can promise you happy landings." Warm lips gently kiss your neck.

“How happy?” you tease, kissing back.

“Very, very hap...”

The last word is cut short by a long kiss.

You now have an additional option:

⟨GUEOMF⟩ (2 phases) Spend more time with Dr. Peterson.

✂ STOP ✂

[410]

Your landing on the Darscian planet Fiara is smoother than last time, since you are a little more skillful in piloting your ship in Fiara's intense gravity. You fly over the flat landscape, with its five-meter-tall buildings and stunted vegetation, and set your ship down at the spaceport in Fiarasan, the planet's principal city. You are greeted by one of the four-armed golden-furred Darscians, who provides an antigravity-equipped bullet vehicle for your use in the city. You thank him and board the vehicle immediately, relieving yourself of Fiara's crushing weight. You have the same options as before.

✂ STOP ✂

[411]

After several days of studying the planet's history you have discovered the following:

Gen was one of the first planets colonized during the early exploration years. It was founded by a small Earth corporation with an eye toward providing a resort area between the Nine Worlds and the deeper galactic regions. Unfortunately, the formation of the Boundary rendered this plan unprofitable, and the corporation soon deserted Gen.

Oddly enough, the population seemed to enjoy Gen, in spite of its rather harsh terrain. They chose to remain on Gen and formed two large cities, Drofflic and Markov.

The government of Gen is tripartite. There are two deliberative bodies, representing the two cities, and a third “Council of the Brethren,” also known as The Brotherhood.

You are told by the clerk in charge of the archives that the Brotherhood is a religious council directed by a few of its Masters. It is largely uninterested in politics and rarely exercises its political clout, usually rubber-stamping the wishes of the elected deliberative bodies.

When you try to find out more about this mysterious Order, the clerk seems unwilling to say anything more about the Brotherhood. He shushes you and suggests in a terrified whisper, “You shouldn't be asking about them. Not at all.”

While mulling this over, you wander about the city and get to know the inhabitants. You find the people of Gen to be unusually relaxed, spending most of their leisure time on the beaches near Drofflic, or spelunking in Markov. However, they take these activities quite seriously. Professional surfing and searching for random objects hidden in caves seem to be the main industries of Gen.

How interesting.

✂ STOP ✂

[412]

You quickly learn to identify which of the yellow-green shrublike plant forms are most suitable as Food sources, and you become very efficient at gathering them. The material has a bland taste, but it is high in protein, carbohydrates, and nutrient complexes. In four days you have gathered enough to fill one cargo bay with Food.

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

✂ STOP ✂

[413]

Your ship lifts off nicely, but you are flying blind. Without your sensors, the computer cannot plot a safe course through the shifting air currents and electromagnetic pulse gradients of the atmosphere. You fly right through a magnetic cross-flux, halting your drives and sending your ship into a tailspin. For a moment it looks like you are going to experience a crash even worse than your first one, but at the last minute you succeed in positioning your ship with the strongest part of the hull pointed towards the ground. When you crash, you carve out a large crater, but you avoid any additional damage to your ship.

Your takeoff was a failure, so you are still on Koursh.

✂ STOP ✂

[414]

Your trusty Universal Translator doesn't seem to be working. It's probably the same interference you encountered on board your ship.

You wisely decide to put the device away and try to learn the Squirrellie language on your own.

✂ STOP ✂

[415]

Sometimes you keep the radio on in the hopes that you may pick up a stray call. The sound of a human voice can be very comforting, especially when it is so rarely heard anymore.

Several days go by with nothing to hear except static, but finally you are rewarded for your patience.

All you can tell is that you have intercepted a radio transmission between two parties who seem to want to maintain a low profile. Although you cannot speak to them, you are content to hear the sound of their voices.

Your suspicion that they are smugglers is confirmed when you hear one tell the other about a run they had just made to a planet called Withel. There they had picked up a Universal Translator device they hope to sell for a good profit.

The rest of the conversation doesn't hold anything of interest for you, but you keep listening out of loneliness for the sound of another person's voice. When the conversation is over, you write down the name of the planet you heard mentioned, for information is a valuable commodity in and of itself.

✂ STOP ✂

[416]

The planet Outpost rests in the quiet warmth of its white dwarf sun, deep in the center of a green glowing ring nebula on the farthest fringes of the space covered by Vanessa Chang's maps. It appears almost hauntingly lonely and peaceful, but you know better. The pirate Silverbeard has taken up residence there, and he's placed rings of battle satellites and who knows what other weapons to defend "his" planet from intruders.

"I spy you out there," comes his voice over the com unit. "Come back for more punishment, have ye? The only way you're goin' to land on my planet is in the middle of a crater! Har, har, har!"

You don't answer. You're too busy preparing your weapons and plotting an attack pattern. It's amazing how many satellites are in orbit. Where could the old pirate have gotten all that hardware? You look for an approach angle that will bring you in contact with the minimum number of satellites, but it doesn't seem to make much difference. The battle stations are in many different orbits and are highly maneuverable. Even if you could slip past them, they could probably fire downward on your tail. It seems that the only way to beat them will be to outfight them.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[417]

The first thing you learn about the spacers and smugglers of Wellmet is that the more experienced they are, the less they talk.

The best of the pilots are the true smugglers: the ones who run cargo in and out of the Boundary. The run demands top-notch equipment and a crew that doesn't make mistakes. A proven smuggler is a valuable person on Wellmet. Most smugglers end up joining one of the Families — not working for them as agents, but becoming full-fledged Family members. Thus you rarely see them outside the Family enclaves, except when they're out to negotiate for cargo or gear for their ships, and then they don't like to be interrupted.

Pilots without the hardware or constitution for the high-stress Boundary routes make runs between Wellmet and the Ghost Worlds. Unlike the Boundary run, where there are never enough ships to fill all the orders, fringe hauling is a very competitive business. Many of the routes are secret, known to only one spacer or Family. A fringe runner never reveals the coordinates of a market world. When a spacer retires, the secrets get passed down, or sold to the highest bidder.

Fringe haulers are the most common operators on Wellmet. Some of them are self-employed and some of them work Family routes for Family pay. All of them share the characteristic of being instinctively secretive. Some of them will gladly converse with you about technical matters but none will say anything about business.

The third type of spacer is the Prospector. Prospectors are often pilots of small or obsolete ships that can't support themselves in cargo runs. Instead, they explore new star systems trying for the chance to strike it rich. All it takes is one good find — an alien race, a new product, a new trade market, even an isolated Ghost World colony waiting to be rediscovered — to make a prospector rich. One such prospector, you learn, is Slow Eddie Falstaff. Twenty years ago he found a source of Munitions — he isn't saying where — and he's been hauling in steady profits ever since.

You happen to spot old Slow Eddie at a commodities exchange house, trying to negotiate a better price for a load of Munitions. When he gives up and stomps out the door, you try to start up a conversation with him. He ignores you and heads back toward his ship. You follow, and he ignores you even harder. You realize that he is nearly falling-down drunk. Finally he staggers into his ship and looks like he's about to slam the hatch. On impulse, you follow him right inside the ship, and when he slams the hatch you sit down in the dusty co-pilot's seat.

"Huh? What're you doin' here?" he grumbles. "Thought I told you to check those fuel levels. Do I hafta do everything myself?"

"Mr Falstaff," you begin, "I want your advice."

"Advice? I've got some advice. Change that outfit you're wearing. Attracts Betelgeusian Burglar Beetles with those colors. Can't have them around. Get in all the wiring." Slow Eddie drops himself like a sack of gravel into the pilot's seat. "You got that course logged yet?" he mutters as he begins to doze off.

"I need to know about space," you continue. "What the dangers are. What I should plan to do, where I should search."

"You fixin' to go off on your own, after all this time? Bad move, kid. Prospector? You want to go on the long hunt?"

"Uh. . . Yes. I know you've got to keep your secrets, but can you give me a lead? A direction?"

"Let me tell you a secret. Know how many stars are out there?"

"Yes, there are about ten thousand thou. . ."

"Neither do I, kid. Much too many. A handful of 'em like pearls in oysters, just to tempt us to dive too deep, and the rest just pretty lights. Damn useless things. Always hated 'em. Anyway, can't be a prospector. Too dangerous."

"Why?"

"Pirates, aliens, space walls. . . gotta be crazy. Idea like that, what's your mother gonna say?"

"Tell me about the pirates. And what are space walls?"

"Oh, they're mean all right. Shoot you into atoms as soon as look at you. That's the pirates. Took my cargo just last year, and just said Har, Har, Har, and off he went. Space walls are where space gets in your way. There may be two stars, right next to each other, a light year apart in normal space, but you can't go in normal space because it's too slow. So you go hyperspace, but there's a wall there, can't get through. The hyperspace twists you around all the wrong way and you end up back where you started."

"So what do you do?"

"Listen, you don' need to know about space. I'll show you the important stuff. You gotta know how money works. Space is all just part of money, anyway. I'll draw you a picture."

He traces a pattern in the air with his forefinger: a triangle. "This here's space," he says, pointing out one corner. "This is the Boundary, and these are the Ghost Worlds. Here, here, and here. Wellmet's in the middle. Now, you paying attention? Over here are the haulers. Take bulk stuff to the Ghost Worlds, food and chemicals, cause they need it. Bring back rare stuff, good stuff: wine, clothes, meat, glass, chips, ship parts. Got that? Now, this corner's Space, and you've got your prospectors. Go into space, bring back space stuff: alien stuff, materials,

phase steel, anti'nertial. Bring it back, sell it to the Smugglers. For Reals, that's the money, to buy the good stuff with from over that corner. OK? Now, last piece: your smugglers, over in this Boundary corner. Thay jes' take the alien stuff from space over here, swap it for bulk stuff on the Nine Worlds where it's cheap; bring back the bulk stuff to sell over there. And 'round she goes."

"How about you?" you ask. "Where do you fit in?"

"Ha! Look over here, triangle's got a extra point sticking out!" Slow Eddie jabs his finger at a point in mid-air, then laughs as if he'd just seen you slip on a banana peel. He laughs for a full minute, and when his laughter fades, so does Eddie. He begins to snore in his seat, and you open the hatch and climb out.

✂ STOP ✂

[418]

The readout from the computer scan is not promising. You see signs of small quantities of warp core but nothing large enough to mine.

Wait a minute!

The last reading shows something strange. Although you aren't getting a large warp core reading, you are getting something you cannot define. The scan shows the presence of a material similar to warp core but with strange differences. It might be interesting to investigate if it wasn't so far down.

You are nervous about descending any farther because of the extreme weather conditions present in the lower strata. You are not sure your ship could hold up down there. And without your ship you KNOW you wouldn't last any time at all.

If you wish to attempt deeper exploration choose the following option:

⟨P9BDYQ⟩ (4 phases) Laugh in the face of death and explore deeper than any rational human being would consider going.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[419]

While looking through the files of your ship's bibliobank, you see an entry that attracts your attention. You have available a copy of the ship's log from the vessel Shadow's Paw, an old explorer ship from the time of the expansion. Eagerly, you order the volume to be shown on the screen, and you spend the next several days reading tales of yore.

However, you do find an interesting bit of information. According to the log, there is a planet called Gen where you are sure to find Culture for sale by the natives.

You make a note of this fact and continue with your reading, but you learn nothing else new.

✂ STOP ✂

[420]

As you enter the Torrence Family compound, you are amazed at the wealth on display here. The outer gates alone are made of Phase steel, the hardest substance known to humanity. You don't even want to think about how many jewels are set into the walkway beneath your feet.

You approach a Family representative and explain that you are interested in doing some trading if the conditions are acceptable.

You make a good impression with your slightly arrogant tone of voice, and the woman you are addressing takes a minute to reappraise you. Then she offers to take you to the Family Trade building.

"Not just anyone waltzes in here, even if we are open," she tells you, using the lingo of the planet, "especially the newlies."

She shows you into the trade center and explains that the Torrence Family is interested in exchanging three units of their available commodities for any one unit of the following: Primordial Soup, Super Slip, Warp Core, Particle Catalyst, Phase Steel, Gradient Filter, or Synthetic Genius.

You are quite impressed at their comprehensive list of available commodities: Computers, Crystals, Culture, Fiber, Fluids, Food, Fuel, Iron, Medicine, Munitions, Radioactives, and Tools.

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

✂ STOP ✂

[421]

You succeed in blasting open the hatch, revealing a long dark tunnel going straight down towards the center of the asteroid. Your instruments indicate that the tunnel is several miles long, so it will take some time to explore it. You now have a new option:

(UGOEFM) (5 phases) Explore the tunnel leading towards the center of the asteroid.

✂ STOP ✂

[422]

All the glitter and color! What a shame these dudes don't know the first thing about real entertaining.

Well, you can fix that. You decide to throw a bash of your own. But first, you have to find your ship.

When you can actually remember what it is you are looking for, you find that the aliens have been using the area around your ship as an amusement park, but that's O.K. with you. It just means you won't have to do the decorating yourself.

Humming to yourself, you reach into the main airlock and pull out your party outfit. You knew you had this groovy suit for some reason. You dress on the ship's ramp while a chartreuse-colored, double-headed, fire-breathing dragon sails above you.

That reminds you, your party outfit has a really wild hat that will sort of give you a second head. Happily, you reach into the ship for the bubble hat and put it on your...

head.

You discern two phenomena immediately — you can now think straight, and you have the most incredible migraine headache you have ever, in all your life, experienced. It feels as if someone were slowly driving a gigantic wedge of ice-cold, salted cement into your brain. Before giving in to the pain and collapsing in a disarticulated heap in your quarters, you manage to do two intelligent things. First, you seal the ship's door. Second, you disconnect by hand all of your computer's external sensors, which seems to give it a headache every bit as bad as yours. When you have done these things you collapse.

The little green aliens are still here, so they must be indigenous to the planet. When they see that you are no longer interested in sled rides down the ship's rampway, they leave, dejected.

Your options are as follows:

⟨5ETMSN⟩ (3 phases) Talk with the little green men.

⟨LURO4F⟩ (4 phases) Wander down to the lake and try to determine why it's pink.

⟨5UTOSF⟩ (3 phases) Collect the fruit of the nearby 'palm' trees, which look like they might make a good source of Fiber.

⟨PAB6YP⟩ (7 phases) Take off the Super Space Suit. We dare you.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[423]

You almost crash into Arthlan before you realize it is in the wrong position. You knew that the orbital projections you made last time you were here weren't perfect, but the error shouldn't have been noticeable after such a short time. You and your computer recheck the coordinates against the positions of Arthlan's three suns, and the results are the same. Arthlan is not where it should be. The displacement is only a few planetary diameters, but it is unheard of for a planet to deviate from its orbit at all, even when the orbit is as complex and chaotic as Arthlan's.

A quick scan of the surface reveals what could be the cause. Near the equator, where there used to be five identical craters arrayed with geometric precision, there are now six. The new crater is the same diameter as the others, but being new, it appears much deeper. Its center still glows in the high infrared, radiating the last of its heat into space. At the new crater's rim, Arthlan's crust is twisted and piled into mountains of debris that reach higher than any mountains on Earth. Nor is the rest of the planet unscathed. There are dozens of new volcanoes, jagged cracks have riddled seabeds that were once smooth, and the dust concentration in the atmosphere has tripled. The ambient radioactivity that you measured before is insignificant compared with the levels now. Before, the radioactivity spread evenly over the surface, and was emitted by long-lived elements that gave off radiation at a slow steady rate. Now, the radioactivity is of a type given off by hot, short-lived isotopes and it is most intense in the area around the new crater. Already, the fierce winds of the upper atmosphere are carrying the radioactive dust across Arthlan's face.

Your scanning also reveals something else: Arthlan's new orbit is clearly unstable. The inner reaches of the orbit pass much too close to the suns. Within a few dozen orbits, chances are that Arthlan will fall into one of its three primaries. You can't tell exactly when, but the planet is clearly doomed.

You determine that you can still land on the planet, as long as you stay on the side away from the craters, wear protective radiation shielding and use breathing apparatus at all times. You choose a region relatively free of volcanic activity, near the equator where the winds

Continued ➡

are less dangerous. On the way down, you catch a glimpse of the anomalous metallic spur that you spotted earlier, near one of the larger volcanoes. It is hard to tell, but it looks as though it may have shifted position by a few hundred yards since you saw it last.

Your options are the same as before except in one case:

(HGAE6M) (3 phases) Mine for radioactives. Due to the higher planetary radiation, it takes less time than before to obtain one unit of Radioactives.

✂ STOP ✂

[424]

Finally, after taking a deep breath, you open the door. An officer dressed in a red uniform, bearing the logo of the spiral arm galaxy, salutes you and moves aside, allowing you to enter the door to the Forward Liaison Office before he and his six men leave through it. You return his salute with a curt nod and walk by.

If there are such things as lucky stars, yours are working overtime. Of all the lab coats you had to choose from, you must have picked the one that came complete with prestige. It's obvious that the security officer didn't know who you were but did recognize the VIP uniform. Getting around in Forward Liaison may be possible after all, if you keep quiet and let the black lab coat do your talking.

Despite the relative ease with which you entered this sector, you still feel uneasy. The people here aren't as open with their information as they were in Lateral Liaison. In fact, you distinctly feel many pairs of eyes upon you as you make your way around. You have the paranoid impression they are onto you, and are just waiting for you to take the rope they are feeding you and hang yourself.

Just because you are paranoid doesn't mean they're not after you.

Using every ounce of willpower you possess, you concentrate on projecting an image of belonging. You walk with confidence and casually examine data terminals you pass along the way. If you see an empty room, you enter and read everything in sight. With nerve-wracking slowness, you gradually learn some very interesting information.

One of the first rooms you explore is filled with numerous data stations, each having an operator conversing with unknown people and inputting data from the conversations into their computers. From standing behind one such operator, you overhear a one-sided conversation:

"This is Lieutenant Huffman of the ISE. I was wondering if you have any information to trade today?"

After a brief pause, he continues, "Very interesting. I think we can be of some assistance, yes."

The lieutenant again listens to the response and then continues, "No. But I'll have our Research Department look into it and will get back to you as soon as I can."

You do not hear the other end of the conversation, nor can you read the data he is inputting into the computer, so you move along before you attract attention.

Over in a corner of the same room you see an unoccupied terminal with a file carelessly left onscreen. You lean over to read the data but all you see are the words "Alien Technology Analysis" before you are forced to leave as the operator returns to his station. He gives you a suspicious look but doesn't say anything to you. Obviously the black lab coat is intimidating to the young operator; he doesn't feel he has the authority to question a stranger wearing it as to why they are reading his terminal screen. You nod authoritatively and start across the room.

You stop in mid-stride, however, when you see someone you recognize. Across from you is the same strange man you met in the Tavern on Wellmet, the one who gave you a copy of Vanessa Chang's star chart! You would like to thank him, but you are afraid he would not be

very understanding about your sneaking into a top secret facility and spying on him. You wisely do an about face and leave the room via an alternative exit.

As you pass by the doors of a room bustling with activity, you overhear snatches of conversation.

“Minister O’Brien of Earth is on her way. . .”

“... can’t forget to tell the Space Patrol. . .”

“... the ISE sent O’Brien the data. . .”

Again, you would like to go in and see what these things really mean and how everything all fits together, but the people in the room all know each other. To wander in would only bring unwanted attention to yourself, possibly resulting in discovery. You move on to the next area.

Here your luck changes for the better. After one of the two operators tells the other that he is going for some coffee, the second offers to accompany him and they both leave. The room is now empty and the terminals are functioning, so you are able to sit down and read some information.

After several minutes of acclimating yourself to the workings of the machines, you find that you have stumbled into the Medical History section of the Forward Liaison office. You start reading the records which were left on screen by the operators, and find out some very interesting facts about the Space Plague.

You do not have a great deal of time, coffee breaks being notoriously short, but you quickly scan the data and find:

1) The ISE is still carrying on active testing of the virus responsible for the so-called Space Plague that decimated humanity 300 years ago. You don’t find this overly surprising, but it’s not something you read about every day.

2) Research has proven the Plague to be of artificial construction. No genome existing in nature is free of either “junk” DNA or repetitive coding sequences, but the virus which carried the Space Plague consisted of 100% efficient DNA — no junk, no repetition. Now, molecular biology was never your strong suit, but this certainly makes one sit up and take notice.

3) The Plague was never actually cured; it just faded away. The reason for this still isn’t known, but one hypothesis is that something unknown in our genetic make-up was able to counteract the plague-harboring virus. This is genuinely puzzling. Natural selection in the true Darwinian sense would be far too slow a process to save a species with a generation time of 25 years from a killer virus with a generation time of fifteen minutes.

You hear the sound of footsteps approaching. Leaping from your chair, you manage to position yourself in an inconspicuous corner of the room as the operators return. What a quick coffee break!

Returning unnoticed to the hallway, you see that the number of people has dramatically increased. Despite the crowd, you feel less secure than before. You make your way back to the door you passed through to enter the Forward Liaison office, and have no difficulty in exiting. Not only are the security guards still giving you preferential treatment, but you are also heading into a lower security clearance area.

As you are leaving the Lateral Liaison sector, you neatly replace the lab coat and ID where you originally found them. Mentally, you thank whoever was kind enough to leave them out for your use.

❖ STOP ❖

[425]

Jaquar has not changed a whole lot since the last time you were here: the same sun, the same comets, and the same large asteroid belt. Your ever-helpful ship's computer plots a swift and efficient course to the rock which holds the spaceport, and within a few hours you have once again disembarked on the weightless surface of Jacquar.

Since you still do not speak High Darscian (the prevailing language here), your first action after landing is to look into ways to learn it. Only one clear choice presents itself:

(EOMFNI) (14 phases, or 7 phases with Telepathy or a Universal Translator) Hire a local instructor and have him teach you High Darscian. This option will cost you one cargo unit of your choice.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[426]

You report to the Riallan Space Authority and inform them that you accept their deal. You will participate in their Jump Engine experiment if they will give you the technical details of their Tri-Axis Drive Booster.

The Riallans waste no time. The next day they take you into orbit on one of their own ships to rendezvous with the experimental vehicle. The flight is uneventful, but you are too busy worrying about the upcoming experiment, and trying to avoid stepping on control panels mounted on the floor, to take much notice.

The orbiting research station sprawls across space in an orbit just ahead of you as the shuttle ship decelerates. You pass through power arrays and radiator grids that spread from the station core and stretch across space like a spider's web. The ship stops with a lurch, then slews sideways to match the spin and orientation of the station. A dock seals; a hatch opens; there is a slight hiss of air and a squeezing in your eardrums as pressures equalize. There is no synthetic gravity in the station. You float like a Riallan out of the shuttle and into a room the size of a small spaceport.

The room is a great cube, covered on five walls with banks of instruments, cables, manipulator struts, floodlights, high-power energy converters, computer terminals, and dozens of Riallans wielding an amazing variety of artificial appendages. The sixth wall is taken up mostly by an enormous round iris-like door, which is now closed. In the room's cavernous center, tethered to the walls by a dozen umbilicals, is the jump ship itself. It is the size of your own ship, but less massive: a prototype vessel with no outer hull. Its skeleton framework is wrapped in wires and instruments, delicately cradling a small enclosed cabin at one end and a naked Jump Engine core at the other. It looks too fragile to move, and yet at the same time too powerful to remain still.

The sounds made by the machinery and the working Riallans echo strangely between the walls, and the air is stale with a mixture of familiar spaceship smells and unfamiliar gases. Guided by the Riallans, you pull yourself hand-over-hand along one of the tethering lines toward the jump ship's cabin. You enter through a stressglass hatch that, when closed, also serves as the cabin's only viewing port. There is no instrument panel and no acceleration couch, just handholds set into the walls on all sides. You start to protest, but the Riallans remind you of one of the basic properties of all Jump Engines: unlike your hyperdrives, they produce no subjective acceleration inside the jump field. If that were not true, then Jump Engine cargo drones wouldn't be possible: the cargo would burst through the hull and be left behind as the drone accelerated at infinite-g's.

You are alone in the jump ship. Every few minutes you hear a thrumming noise and feel a slight vibration as the umbilicals are disconnected. You close your environmental suit and check the seals on the cabin hatch. The spacedock noise does not penetrate; you are in silence. A distant low humming begins; is it the Jump Engine? No, it is the sound of pumps drawing the air from the dock. For a few minutes the flowing air whistles through the ship's skeleton, then the silence returns, even deeper than before. Through the very edge of the viewport you can see a few of the Riallan technicians. They apparently don't mind working in vacuum with no space suits.

The ship turns a few degrees, lining up your viewport with the spacedock door. The iris-door opens, leaving you staring into an immense eye full of stars. In the center of the eye is a single brighter star: the glow from the receiving spacedock, your destination, five hundred thousand meters away. It's not very far — or is it? On the ground, on foot, it would take you two weeks to travel that distance; on your ship, a few seconds under thrust, an infinitesimal fraction of a second under hyperdrive. Traveling in space doesn't sharpen your sense of scale and distance; it destroys it.

You fix your eyes on that distant spot of light. Behind you, the Jump Engines come to life. There is a soundless explosion as the jump field envelops you.

Read immediately text entry 821.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[427]

Many of the missiles fail to find you, their guidance systems confused by jamming signals. Others home in correctly but are unable to detonate when they get there, their warheads disrupted by unfamiliar energy fields. Those that do detonate fail to damage you, their violence expended uselessly against resisting screens of reshaped space. As a result, you are undamaged by the missile attack. Carefully, you draw closer to the planet, alert for any sign of further hostility.

This time Silverbeard broadcasts no taunts over the com link. He simply fires. Two dozen beams of a golden-yellow color and unbearable brightness lance from the surface of Wellmet. Several converge on your ship, and they hit.

From the instant they're fired these beams are locked on to you. There is no evading them, no disrupting them at the source. Only your most passive defense systems are of any use. You can only hope your ships' armor and protective shields can resist them.

Go now to the CGM.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[428]

You do not know what is going on, but all of your instincts scream at you to fight!

You always suspected that if you had to battle a spinning candy cane, you would be more than its match. Now you will get an opportunity to test this theory.

You optimistically look on the bright side. Your weapons are superior to those of the aliens. Then you notice just how outnumbered you are.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[429]

There's something about that last set of movement orders which just doesn't work. Namely, your ship!

As you attempt to enter the next trisector, you discover that the density of interstellar matter in the surrounding space has increased too much for your two-axis drive to be able to function. You consult with your computer in an effort to solve the problem.

"Well?" you ask.

"Sorry Boss, but there are no two ways about it. We've reached the Density Barrier, the inner limit of the Galactic Fringe. If we want to go any farther, we'll need a Tri-Axis Drive Booster."

"Drats!" is all you can think of to say.

✂ STOP ✂

[430]

Drawing close to the planet, you are almost ready to shut down the warp when your ship is unexpectedly plucked out of hyperspace.

There is no warning. One moment you are folding the warp nicely ahead of you and the next moment you are in normal space, tumbling wildly out of control, in the grip of a powerful unknown force. Fortunately the direction in which the force is pulling you is very close to the direction you were traveling to begin with; otherwise, the lateral acceleration would have been fatal. As it is, you'll count yourself lucky for each rib that isn't broken.

"Computer! What happened?"

There is no response. You drag yourself to the console to check on conditions. Half of the status lights are red, but it's not as bad as it looks. You turn off the useless drives, and that extinguishes half the lights right there. You engage the thrusters and order a programmed stabilization sequence from the computer keyboard. Immediately the thrusters fire in bursts optimally timed to cancel the spin on your ship. That's good, because it also means the lower functions of the computer, its ability to run programs, are still operational, even if its higher auto-initiative and linguistic systems have been damaged.

Once you're pointing in the direction that you're moving you call up a view to see where that is. Your fingers fumble at the manual viewscreen controls. "Computer, where are you? I need you!" The points of light ahead are approaching too fast. You call up a gravitational field profile from the sensor arrays. The probable mass distribution of the system appears on the screen. Drats! The computer would have calculated an orbit by now, and you're still looking at the data. Quickly you size up the system ahead: one small planet in orbit around an extremely small and dense body, which in turn is orbiting a blue main-sequence star. You compare that to the visual data, matching bodies up. Where is the small dense body predicted by the gravity sensors? It wouldn't be possible for a dwarf star that massive to be invisible, unless it's a black hole. . .

Double drats! You're much too slow. You get your lead-fingered hands on the controls, do the right thing, fire the drives laterally. . .

You decide that the last thing you want to do is to inform the “owners,” whoever they are, of where you’re from and where you’re going. You say, “I’m a Betelgeusian. The ship is the cargo vessel Galaxy out of Rigel, en route to Antares.”

You experience the singular sensation of having different parts of your brain eaten by dozens of hungry worms. You’re not quite sure afterward how long it lasted, but you know it was long enough for you to pound your head several times against a cabin wall, almost tear your scalp open with your fingernails, and fall flat on the floor and cry a great deal.

“IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO LIE THROUGH THE PSIONIC INTERFACE LINK. PLEASE PROVIDE THE REQUIRED INFORMATION.”

Sorry, folks, you say to yourself. I tried. You tell the machine the name of your ship and that you are a human. You try to get away with giving your ship’s origin as Wellmet, and its destination as Cordethar itself, which at least is true. The machine seems to accept both answers.

“YOU ARE FREE TO DEPART”

You try another question of your own: “To where has the information been transmitted?”

“INTERROGATIVE ACCEPTED. TRANSMISSION CAPABILITY IS NOT CURRENTLY SUFFICIENT TO TRANSMIT INFORMATION TO INNER ARM, DUE TO DUAL SPACE ACCESS LIMITATIONS. ESTIMATING AT CURRENT RATE OF DUAL SPACE INCREASE ALL CAPABILITIES WILL RETURN IN THREE TO FOUR YEARS. TRANSMISSION OF RECORDED INFORMATION WILL COMMENCE AT THAT TIME.”

“You mean, you’re not transmitting now? Just recording?”

“RECORDING AND REPLAYING OF INFORMATION IS MY MAIN FUNCTION.”

“How far back do your recordings go?”

“THE RECORDING IS UNINTERRUPTED SINCE MY ACTIVATION 160,212 YEARS AGO. PERIODS OF LOW DUAL SPACE INTERPHASE LIMIT DATA RECORDABLE AT SOME PERIODS. ALL ARRIVALS OF SHIPS AND ALL LOCAL DIALOG IS RECORDED.”

“Can you play back specific periods? Is that permitted?”

“IT IS A REQUIRED FUNCTION. FOR WHICH TIME PERIOD DO YOU REQUIRE PLAYBACK?”

Your options are as follows:

⟨PHBAY6⟩ (5 phases) Read out the entire memory of the machine on Cordethar.

⟨9HDAQ6⟩ (4 phases) Read out the memory for the period from 1000 years ago to 400 years ago, the approximate times the abandoned surface colony was inhabited.

⟨PXBCYU⟩ (2 phases) Read out the memory for the period from 400 years ago to the present.

✱ STOP ✱

[431]

When it's just the two of you, alone together in the doctor's apartment, you pass the time in a variety of ways, all of them memorable. While you're cuddled together on the couch, sadly agreeing with each other what a shame it is that all good things have to come to an end, "Doc" suddenly grins from ear to ear and suggests that this doesn't have to end so soon. "Why don't you come with me to see 'Sundown Road?'"

If you would like to do so, plot the following option:

⟨WUGOEF⟩ (7 phases) Accompany Dr. Peterson on a trip across the Boundary.

✂ STOP ✂

[432]

Of all of the places you have seen so far on Moiran, Dee's Pleasure Palace is the nicest looking. The lights are a bit garish, but on this dingy world, you count that as a plus.

The door opens before you, and a well-groomed, well-dressed woman stands in front of you and introduces herself as Dee.

"Come in," she says pleasantly, stepping back to give you room to enter, which you do.

"We aren't very busy right now," she explains as she sees you looking around at the sparsely populated lounge area. "It's still a bit early in the day for our regular customers."

You smile and murmur that you understand while Dee orders you a "Dee's Special."

"It's on the house," she says as you try to pay for the drink. "It will give you something to do while I go to the back office and get you a 'menu' of what's available here." She gives you a knowing wink and steps into another room, closing the door behind her.

You sip the drink and find it to be quite tasty.

After you have imbibed about one quarter of the liquid, you find you are having a hard time keeping the room in focus. In fact, the entire house has taken on a decided spin, with your room in particular twirling a bit faster than you'd like.

You try to stand, thinking that perhaps things are more stable outside, only to find your feet have gone on strike.

You don't have more than a moment to convince them to get back to work before you pass out.

Waking up is not a pleasant experience.

Your head throbs, your mouth tastes foul, your hair hurts and your brain is calling you every name in the book.

But that's not the worst of it. As you head back to your ship, you take a general inventory and something appears to be missing.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

