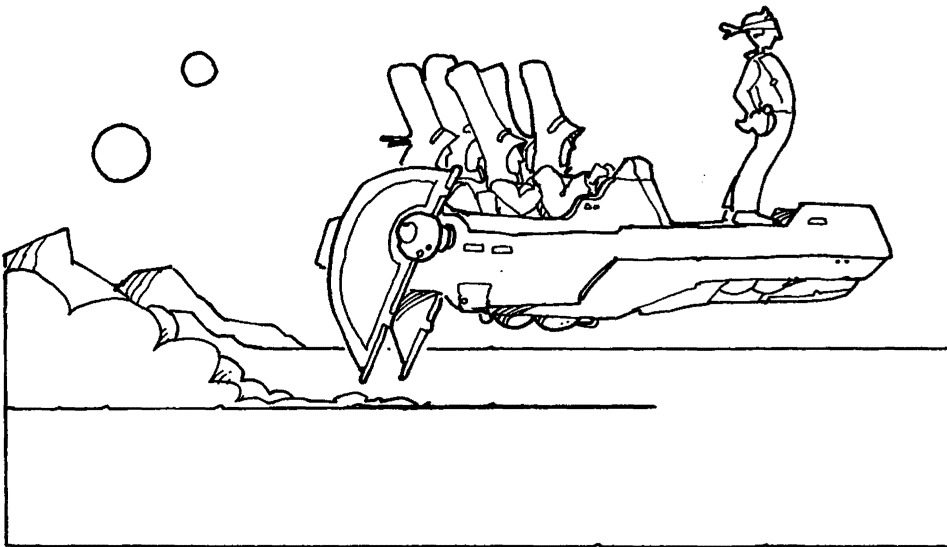


# STAR SAGA: ONE™

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# BOOK A

TEXT 001-073





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**[001]**

The Darscians direct you to the distant spot in the Fiaran desert where Vanessa Chang abandoned a shuttlecraft more than 300 years ago. It is a full day's journey in your bullet vehicle to get there.

The journey is not particularly scenic with the stunted vegetation and long, flat snake-like animals slithering along in the sand. You can see nothing else alive in this vast wasteland. You shudder and hope you won't have to stop for any emergency repairs.

By the time you reach the shuttlecraft, night has fallen. So you park your bullet vehicle and go to sleep, grateful for the comfort of its antigravity.

When you wake up at dawn, you look over the three-century-old spaceship. Even though the craft is half buried in the sand, you can tell it is very unusual, built by no race you have yet encountered. The hull is extremely thick and made from an unfamiliar metallic alloy. Although the outside of the ship has survived 300 years of Fiaran weather, there is no sign of rust or corrosion.

There are several dozen weapon ports, far more than one would think necessary, especially for a shuttlecraft. Unfortunately, none of the weaponry is still intact; no doubt the Darscians destroyed it long ago. The dimensions of the hatch and exterior controls appear to be larger than similar parts of human-constructed vessels, suggesting that the beings who built the craft were about seven feet tall. On the whole, the ship suggests a race of rugged, warlike, technologically advanced beings. If this is what their shuttlecrafts look like, you would not want to run into one of their battle cruisers.

It doesn't look too difficult to get inside, since the hatch is already blasted open a crack. However, when you grab the handle to swing the heavy metal door aside, nothing happens. It's the Fiaran gravity again. Fortunately, you have a jack-like tool with you that ought to help. You position the tool in the crack and crank on it for a while. Slowly, it forces the hatch open further, until the opening is big enough for you to squeeze through.

You crawl into the old alien ship and use a flashlight to examine the dark interior. Like the outside, everything has a tough, aggressive tone. The walls and rooms are designed with many rugged, block-like shapes, and there is no ornamentation at all. The furniture is simple and angular, built for business. The predominant colors are a deep velvet green and a bright blood red. Everything is huge. The helm is as tall as you are. The main consoles, radiating in four directions from the captain's seat, are loaded with controls as big as a man's fist. There are strange markings everywhere, symbols in an unknown alien language that, for all you know, has been completely forgotten in the three centuries that have passed since Vanessa Chang took this ship to Fiara. All in all, there is something violent about the vessel, as if it had fought a hundred wars and is only now silent, taken out of its natural habitat and buried in a desert on a quiescent Darscian planet.

A thorough examination of the entire vessel takes you most of the week since you need to rest frequently in the high Fiaran gravity. You uncover some details about the spacecraft's history.

Despite the vessel's size, it is definitely a shuttlecraft, since it has no warp drive. It was never intended to travel interstellar distances, although Chang and her crew obviously used it to get to Fiara. The journey must have taken years. This is confirmed by the suspended animation tanks in the living quarters, which the humans must have used during the trip.

Since you are unable to read the alien markings, you cannot conclude anything definite about the place where the ship was built or the race that built it. Also, to your disappointment, you are unable to find anything that looks like a ship's log. Chang must have taken it with her when she abandoned the ship. The few scraps you do uncover tell you only that one of the crew members died en route to Fiara, and the others buried him on a planet called Koursh.

If you are ever on Koursh you may want to look for the buried body of the dead crew member. You hope that locating the burial site will not prove too difficult. When you do find it, you may plot the following option:

⟨B8YH9A⟩ (3 phases) Dig for Vanessa Chang's buried crew member.

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

There is nothing more of interest in the shuttlecraft so you pack up and head back to Fiarasan.

✂ STOP ✂

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[002]

As you approach the planet, you feel the familiar butterflies in your stomach. The planet itself is no more than an oversized ball of ice but it is here you will be facing one of the most important tests of your life. You can only pray you are up to the trial.

You land with no interference from the natives. You sense they are waiting to see if you decide to undertake the next step in your training.

While waiting for the ship's landing berth to cycle underground you nervously check all the instrumentation. You finish the task just as you receive the signal to disembark from your ship.

You have the same option as before.

✂ STOP ✂

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[003]

You are embarrassed to admit that a four foot tall squirrel is your equal in battle. You are at a stand-off and are tired from the exertion of the battle. You are beginning to wonder if the green rocks are worth all this and you are thinking of making an honorable retreat.

As you start to make your way back to where the pit wall inclined, you note that the Squirrel doesn't seem interested in following you.

You are relieved because it is all you can do to pull yourself up the incline.

You see the Blues have taken care of the invaders on the surface. Rocky comes over to you to see how you fared.

You tell her of your adventure and she is surprised you managed to survive the attack.

"The Reds are very fierce warriors," she tells 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.

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[004]

Your approach to the Nine Worlds is blocked, as you knew it would be, by the stationary defense markers and cruising ships that make up the Boundary. The markers themselves are armed with automatic-fire energy weapons, pressor beams, and a weak ECM capability. They are arranged in the form of a slightly distended geodesic globe encircling all of the Nine Worlds. The inner surface of the globe is patrolled by a fleet of Space Patrol ships which will respond on a moment's notice to any disturbance reported by the automated systems.

While eavesdropping on smugglers' conversations, you have learned there is only one good way to approach the Boundary. You aim your ship exactly between three markers, turn your engines up to full, and go for it. If you're fast enough or lucky enough, you make it through with no contacts. Otherwise you end up meeting a Patrol ship, which results in a risky combat. Nine Worlds Space Patrol ships are both fast and heavily armed.

You can feel the adrenaline flowing as you line yourself up, mutter a quick prayer, and power up your engines to full thrust. You race past the Boundary markers at breakneck speed. However, it is not fast enough. As you approach the Nine Worlds, a Space Patrol cruiser swings into view dead ahead. It broadcasts a message:

"You have crossed the Boundary in violation of Section One of the Nine Worlds Territorial Protection Act. You are trespassing in a restricted area. Surrender immediately and prepare to be boarded."

Not without a fight, you think to yourself. "Computer! Ready weapons!" you command.

Go now to the CGM.

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[005]

You decide to try a longshot gambit. You figure the alien ships couldn't be having an easy time tracking your ship, not with Gironde scattering starlight and glowing infrared behind you. Perhaps you could make yourself so difficult to track that they will lose you entirely.

Your first step is to cut your drives. Shutting down cold would be best, but just a little too risky if your ploy fails. Instead you cut down to just a few microgravities of acceleration, leaving yourself just enough residual velocity to drift out of the system. The next step is to turn off your life support systems. This will cut down on the thermal emissions from your hull as the outer hull cools to the temperature of space. In your compartment, you can survive for several hours this way. Turning off your deflector screens is more risky, since it means you are vulnerable to micrometeor impacts and unusual stellar radiation, but at your low velocity the risk is minuscule. Finally you turn off all of your sensors except for those that are purely passive listeners, so that no one can find you by homing in on your own detector beams. The black ships are making no attempt to hide themselves, and still show clearly on your viewscreen.

There is one other thing you must turn off: your computer. This is more difficult, but necessary, since the small amount of ordinary radio waves it produces could give you away. It takes several minutes to prepare for a total computer shutdown, since you must carefully set a number of emergency manual controls. When you are ready, you disengage the computer from your console and power it down.

Continued ⌘

At that instant the enemy fleet disappears. Only the stars remain on your screen, exactly as they were.

You swear under your breath, then again out loud. Your mind races. You recall how your ships sensors work: the images picked up are split in half. Half go directly to your readouts and viewscreens. The other half are processed and image-enhanced. . . by your computer. The same for the communication channels. The same for the drive controls. The same for every single solitary system on your ship, right down to the coffee maker! There never was any fleet of black spaceships. Your ship's computer has been displaying false data on your readouts and viewscreens. It could even override your drive controls to simulate the effects of a "hit." Your computer has been playing around with you.

Which means that someone has been playing around with your computer.

Cursing, you turn your drives, sensors, screens, and life support back on. You make a manual landing at the spaceport, ignoring all communication from the ground, your computer still shut down. Inside the spaceport a few curious robots wheel out to investigate what to them must seem a dead ship. You let them wonder as you set to work.

It takes several days to reconfigure your ship's computer from scratch. You spend hours poring over nearly-incomprehensible technical manuals as you root out the damaged routines and modified code that the Gironde computers have implanted in the system. With the help of a small backup computer, powered down and therefore unaffected during your stay on Gironde, you trace down the communications routes by which the false code was installed and add screening routines to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

In the process you learn a great deal about ship's computers and how their sensors, image recognizers, processors, language and personality modules, and control circuits interact to give your ship the capabilities it has. The way that the Gironde intelligences were able to modify the central logic of the system via what were supposed to be mere linguistic symbol-recognition channels is especially interesting. Your computer, when it is repaired, may be able to perform a similar trick against an enemy's computer system in the future. Though the degree of subtlety will not be close to what happened to your own ship, you should at least be able to confuse or disorient unprotected enemy computers if conditions are right.

First, though, you must complete your repairs and put your own safeguards in place. You chuckle when you remember how your computer called you its mobile service unit; you never dreamed it would become the truth.

When you are finished your computer is back to its normal, profusely-apologizing self, and you are confident that it will be resistant to future tampering. However, you get no apologies from the computers of Gironde. When you cautiously reestablish a communication channel, Earth Standard voice only, the systems deny any wrongdoing and claim to have no awareness of the deception. "Why would we perform such a deceitful act," they ask, "when the real Supervisor fleet is out there for all to see?"

If you're going to get any satisfaction on this matter, your only recourse is to plot option:

(BHYA96) (3 phases) Converse with the Core, Gironde's highest computer authority. Since you no longer trust the networks, you'll have to go there in person.

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

## [006]

Cordethar! Your mission has been interesting thus far, and more than a little exciting, but you are pleased to be here at long last. The excitement you feel is greater than anything you have felt before, and you are eager to land. You have learned to not anticipate success before hand, but you feel there is something important waiting for you on the planet circling below.

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. . .

There is a tremendous gut-wrenching lurch and your ship is spinning wildly once again. The jolt of acceleration from the drives is snuffed out before it can even get under way, and the conflicting forces pull the bottom out from under you. You close your eyes, knowing you are doomed.

With that resignation comes an end to panic. Your brain starts working again. Something is holding your ship and pulling it in with much more force than any black hole could exert from a system away. Black holes just aren't that powerful unless they're very close; you can usually orbit them just like you orbit any star.

One step at a time. Re-engage the spin damping program. Don't bother trying to figure out the best angle to set the drives because you can't use the drives under this pull anyway. Now take another look at the system, plot out where you're really going. See? It's working. The ship is already slowing down. The tractor beam is dragging you not toward the black hole but toward the planet. You work the thruster controls with both hands, keeping your ship's attitude in tight trim. If you're going to be dragged to the surface you're going to have to be ready to land on your feet.

In a spare moment you check your current position against your star map. The planet marked in this sector, the one you were headed for, is the one that's now pulling you in. You look around for any sign of whatever might be doing the pulling, but you see nothing except the

planet itself. On the other hand, a tow beam generator strong enough to grab you out of hyperspace at that distance could easily be the size of a small planet.

On the way down you have enough time for a quick scan of the surface. It is a barren cold world with only the most tenuous of atmospheres. Its most unusual geological characteristic is its magnetic field. Most worlds have some sort of magnetic field, sometimes in anomalous multi-poled patterns, but such fields either remain static or change extremely slowly and infrequently. This planet's magnetic field is in a constant state of flux, shifting, oscillating, and swirling almost like the magnetic field of a star's corona.

Even stranger, though, is the star system of which the planet is a part. You have a horrible suspicion that it was assembled artificially. Planets don't orbit black holes, because the supernova that creates the black hole would swallow up the planet. And for that unlikely pair to be orbiting a young blue star — when black holes form from old dying stars — is even more improbable.

On the other hand, you don't like the alternative either. Knowing that someone has the technology to move stars around and send tractor beams across light years won't improve your sleep at night.

You fight for control of the ship as the tractor beam draws you down to the surface. There are ruins spread over half the planet, abandoned powerless structures of metal, and they look reassuringly ordinary. You touch down on bare rock. Your computer is still not answering your voice questions.

"ATTENTION, ALIEN. YOU ARE NOW ON CORDETHAR. IN ORDER TO PROCEED ON YOUR COURSE YOU MUST INFORM THIS UNIT OF YOUR SPECIES AND YOUR VESSEL'S NAME, PLANET OF ORIGIN, AND DESTINATION."

The voice seems to emanate from every surface around you, or from the center of your own brain; it's hard to tell which.

"Who are you?" you call out.

"RECORDED, INTERROGATIVE, 'WHO ARE YOU?' RESPONSE: I AM THE SPACELANES MONITOR FOR THIS REGION. PLEASE PROVIDE THE REQUIRED INFORMATION."

"Why do you need to know?"

"RECORDED, INTERROGATIVE, 'WHY DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?' RESPONSE: MY FUNCTION IS TO COMPILE INFORMATION OF THE SPECIFIED TYPE AND TRANSMIT TO THE OWNERS. PLEASE PROVIDE THE REQUIRED INFORMATION."

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?"

Maybe you can learn what you need to know about the missing Text from this mysterious heap of alien technology. Your excitement mounts.

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 ✂

[007]

From up close you can see even better how the serpent's tail segments move together despite the five-meter gaps between them. The pieces aren't entirely fixed: tail can flow into empty space, and empty space can generate tail, as the monster moves and stretches. Your attempts to defend yourself don't impress the creature any more than your attempts to drive it away.

It circles around you, plunging its head in and out of the nothingness, confident that it has you in its power. Then the great head looms out of nowhere right in front of you. The jaws open wide to engulf you. There is nowhere to dodge. Or is there? A wild, desperate thought seizes you. You've watched the head and tail pass freely into and out of nowhere. You will yourself to move into that same nowhere. A part of your mind that you've never used before bursts open. You feel space twist around you. You flee — you don't know where, just away from the monster. There is a wrenching sensation, and you fall to the ground in the middle of a cloud of drizzling blue fog. Around you are orange plants, and the serpent is gone.

You try for days to duplicate the breaking of the barrier that you achieved during the battle, but without the creature right there, showing you the way and giving you the motivation at the same time, you cannot do anything but contort ridiculously in perfectly normal space. After a while, you can no longer remember the experience very clearly, and you give up trying.

✂ STOP ✂

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[008]

Emerging from hyperspace, you instruct the computer to head for the only habitable planet in the system and to make a survey pass.

According to the charts, such as they are, you see that the planet's name is Tretiak. You have no other pertinent information available to you about this world, so it is up to you to make a planetary survey before landing.

The first orbit gives you the data about the gravity and physical characteristics of the planet. You see that it has a familiar ratio of water to land, roughly 3:1, with the gravity a little lighter than Earth-normal. The readout on the atmosphere shows it to be breathable and harmless. Fine. You instruct the computer to land.

Tretiak offers no landing signal for you to home in on, and there is no evidence of industrialization on the surface amidst the seemingly ubiquitous jungle. You ask your computer to begin a slow descent, while you look for a likely landing spot.

Your eyes stray for a minute from the viewscreen in front of you to the manual data gauges arranged around your control cabin. Noticing an abnormal reading on one of the atmosphere analyzers, you ask your computer for an explanation.

"The atmosphere is perfectly breathable in the human-normal range, with no trace of contaminants or taints."

"Then what about this value?"

"The sky is enormous and we have yet to lay eyes on the naked face of God."

You have no idea what this means, but you are bright enough to realize you have a problem here, so you take action to remedy the situation.

Switching the landing controls over to manual, you safely bring the ship down. The computer is singing in the background, although the actual song doesn't immediately register in your brain until it is too late.

"... the monkey stops to pull up his socks, POP goes the weasel!"

At the word "POP" the computer blows the main hatch, exposing you to the atmosphere.

"Uh, oh," is the last intelligent thing you remember thinking for a good long time.

Like, WOW! What a great feeling! You absolutely feel you must escape the great Mother and be born into the tremendous other place. Greatly.

Outstanding. Entertainment, too, along with all the really funky purple plants. The sky, which is bleeding from every evangelical pore, is nonetheless musical enough to light the floor show going on in all four dimensions around your bod. And the lake, the BIG PINK LAKE WITH MARSHMALLOWS IN IT, beckons you like a lover, which come to think of it is not such a bad idea you having been out here for so long among the stars like Marlon Brando the cattle it's time for the rodeo, if you know what I mean.

You could crash, too, and sleep for like a week maybe you'd have good dreams this time instead of all those sicko psycho bad ones. But maybe not, since the floor show has started and the little green men are jumping and dancing all around you and talking and yelping and you could maybe even understand them if you just weren't forty feet high and growing quickly with every minute except for your left elbow which is in your pocket and shrinking instead. And maybe not since now they're all rolling coconuts on you from a great height or maybe they're throwing them and why are there coconuts growing from the purple trees anyway? And why do the green men want you to have them and what good are they anyway?

You'll get even with your computer too someday if you ever find your ship again, the swooshing bleep-bleep computer that went right ahead and told you sure go out on the planet without any equipment cause it's perfectly safe and Earth-like and you can breathe the air just fine it'll be good for you. That swooshing bleep-bleep machine must have been on a trip even better than yours cause just then it began to melt around the edges with the little birds flying up and nipping at the control panel so that all the lights began to turn and the traffic to move down the strip, Marlene so I can watch, it's been a long time don't you know out here between the stars like Cary Grant you one request if you know what I mean.

So, you happy camper, you; what'll it be?

(PEBMYN) (3 phases) Rap with the little green men.

(9EDMQN) (3 phases) Swim in the BIG PINK LAKE.

(PUBOYF) (4 phases) Like, crash.

(9UDOQF) (5 phases) Gather up all the coconuts.

(LERM4N) (7 phases) The colors in your eyes are party-like and you want to dress for the occasion.

✂ STOP ✂

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[009]

The tri-axis drive is every bit as powerful as you were told it would be. You can feel the thrum of your engine pulsing through your body, like a heart beating all around you.

With this new ship improvement, nothing can keep you from accomplishing your new goal, following the path taken by the Founders in the Galactic Arm.

After thinking about your next step, you remember that the Founders' instructions point to the planet Outpost as the first stop on the way to Golgotha.

With this in mind, you happily return to studying your star charts, looking for clues to help you in your search.

✂ STOP ✂

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[010]

Upon your return to Darscold you cannot help but spend a few moments watching the panoramic vista before you. The beautiful floating orbs that contain the Darscian cities are offset perfectly by the backdrop of the lush green of the vegetation and the clear blue waters.

What a lovely planet.

Your options are the same as before.

✂ STOP ✂

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**[011]**

This time you begin a systematic search of the entire colony, dividing the ground into quadrants and then searching each thoroughly.

You strike paydirt almost at once, uncovering some strange sort of exercise machine, obviously built for alien bodies. Intrigued by its design and its near perfect condition, you attempt to turn it on — and succeed! Apparently it was designed to run on battery power, since the dome has obviously long since been without its own power source.

While you are admiring your success, you inadvertently get too close to the machine, which grabs you up, spins you around, and begins to “exercise” you. Although your anatomy is no doubt substantially different from that of the aliens who designed the machine, the machine doesn’t know that. Your arms aren’t long enough to reach the power switch again, and there seem to be no other controls.

For the better part of an hour you are bent and twisted, prodded and poked, and heated and cooled by the machine, before it at last spits you out. Hastily, you turn it off and bury it again in the rubble.

You approach the rest of your search with a somewhat more careful attitude, but it scarcely matters since you don’t find anything anyway. A final race around the colony (you seem faster all of a sudden), and you head back to your ship for the night.

After some preliminary tests you decide that the alien machine did, somehow, increase your speed. You can now move and react faster than you did before. What luck!

Go now to the CGM.

❖ STOP ❖

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**[012]**

Upon closer examination of the last usable data provided by your computer during your approach to Ethnar, you identify a probable location of a city, so off you go. Before you have gone too far, however, you are surrounded by approximately one hundred squirrel-like creatures.

Your new acquaintances are undoubtedly intelligent because they are carrying projectile weapons, some of which are aimed at you.

Isn’t exploring exciting?

You make a quick verbal entry into your log:

I’ve been captured by a pack of four-foot tall Squirrellies wearing blue tunics. They are pointing guns at me so I’ve decided to go with them.

I’ve noted that the leader has about a dozen of the Squirrellies staying with my ship. The rest of us are headed off into the jungle.

End of entry.

It takes a few days to reach the city. During the journey the leader chirps and whistles at five or ten Squirrellies at a time and sends them off into the jungle. When you finally arrive at your destination, your group consists of yourself, the leader, and a dozen or so followers.

The aliens no longer treat you like an enemy. Through sign language you’ve been able to communicate to a certain extent with the leader and have found out some interesting things.

The reason for the Blue Squirrellies' caution was that they are at war with the Red Squirrellie tribe over mining rights in the mountain range that passes between both city-states. The Blues weren't sure if you were an alien visitor or some sort of spy. They had to be careful, since the Reds are a sneaky lot.

Your physical appearance, coupled with your complete lack of knowledge about the planet, convinced the Blues you were an innocent visitor from another world.

The Squirrellies seem used to aliens dropping by. You gather it has something to do with whatever it is they mine. You make a note to find out about the ore at a later date. Right now you are more concerned with learning to communicate.

Seven days have passed since you left the ship but you have something to show for your effort. One of the squirrellies offered to help you learn their language so now when you chirp, tweet, and whistle at the aliens there is a good chance they will understand you.

You have also found out more about their mining operations. Your tutor was very informative during the course of your studies. The alien told you about a greenish mineral that is readily found in the mountain range bordering their city. The Squirrellies call the ore "chitterbang" and rely upon it as their sole export to visiting aliens.

It may be worth your while to find out more about this mineral. It seems to be quite valuable.

Your options are:

(H9AD6Q) (3 phases) Visit the marketplace.

(X9CDUQ) (7 phases) Go on the mining expedition.

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[013]

"Going to the market" on Ouabain consists of visiting a huge enclosed building where the Ouabainese do all of their shopping and trading. After two days, you come to a conclusion that doesn't surprise you. The people of Ouabain put about 95% of their time and energy into playing. Almost every vendor has half of his inventory tied up in games and puzzles, especially computer games and puzzles.

You are especially interested in a genre of games that allow the players to play the parts of other beings and live out very exciting adventures. No wonder the Ouabainese are such dedicated players — with games of this caliber you would be tempted to spend far more time playing on your own computer. As it is, you succumb to the temptation to purchase one of the exploration games to while away the long hours you spend in hyperspace.

You also note that the Ouabainese have a huge inventory of Computers they are willing to trade to you in any of the following combinations:

2 Computers for 1 Fiber,

2 Computers for 1 Food,

2 Computers for 1 Medicine.

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[014]

Even after donning the robe, you are still on the verge of freezing to death. Nothing is worth this torture and you reach out and touch the emergency button.

Your hostess is standing immediately outside the airlock and opens the door for you.

She escorts you back to your ship in silence.

Finally, as you are ascending the entrance ramp, the woman calls out to you.

"Giving up is worse than choosing incorrectly. If you would try again, return in four weeks time."

You call down to her that you'll think about it, but she is already walking away and makes no sign that she heard you.

You order the ship to lift off while you ponder your next move. You note that seven days have passed since you landed on Dargen.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

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[015]

"She held his hand  
And asked that he understand.  
She had to leave her world with its sun so orange  
To travel. . ."

Hmmm. Now what rhymes with orange?

You are so completely engrossed in the poetry you are trying to compose that it is several minutes before the sound of your computer's voice is able to break through your concentration.

"Boss," your computer calls to you in a *very* loud voice.

"What is it?" you finally respond.

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

"No, I could use a break anyway," you say 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 Rialla is a place to trade for Computers.' That's all for now."

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

✂ STOP ✂

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[016]

The recent records are not extensive, due to the limited current capacity of the machine. Most of them concern the occasional passing of Darscian ships, with a few references to ships of other races you do not recognize. Yours is the first human ship to land here in over 290 years, though a few have occasionally scanned the planet and passed by. The first ship to stop here whose pilot was demonstrably human was Vanessa Chang. The first time she was intercepted passing by, and later she returned of her own accord many times. She used the planet as a place to cache materials. In one recorded conversation you hear her and her crew discussing ideal locations for hiding a supply of Flame Jewels brought back from somewhere in the Galactic Arm; she also stored more mundane materials for later use.

The most dramatic event to occur here in recent times was a meeting three hundred twenty-three years ago between Vanessa Chang and the crew of the human religious quest ship *Archangel*. The *Archangel* had been on Cordethar for several weeks when Chang came limping into orbit in a small, crudely constructed ship named *Lockerbait*. This new ship of Chang's was not at all like the *Slippery Silver*, the large, well-equipped vessel she'd flown on her earlier visits to Cordethar.

The devastating course of the Space Plague on the Nine Worlds set an urgent tone for the meeting. Both Chang and the *Archangel* had just returned from expeditions into the Galactic Arm. Chang's voyage had been an odyssey that had lasted several years, ruined her spaceship, and taken the lives of several members of her crew. The *Archangel* had befallen no such disasters, but Reverend Eric and his crew were apparently just as confused and disturbed by their experiences in the Galactic Arm.

After several days of heated discussion, Chang and the *Archangel* clerics decided that it was critical to arrange a meeting of all human explorers with tri-axis drive ships. Anyone with a tri-axis drive booster had the capability to travel in the Galactic Arm, and Chang and the clerics both considered it essential that all exploration of the Arm come to a halt. They each had their own reasons for this drastic conclusion, but they agreed on it with equal conviction.

Fortunately, Chang knew all the explorers who had tri-axis drives, since she had sold them the Flame Jewels they needed to build the drives. She and *Archangel* sent out a message imploring all explorers capable of crossing the Density Barrier to meet on the planet Outpost. The message said that the meeting was needed to discuss critical matters regarding the future of humanity.

The *Archangel* crew then helped Chang add a tri-axis drive booster to the *Lockerbait*, using some of the materials Chang had cached on Cordethar. Of the rest of the materials in Chang's caches, they loaded whatever they could onto their ships, and destroyed what was left. They were particularly careful to take all the Flame Jewels.

They then left Cordethar, for the last time, heading for the meeting they had arranged on Outpost.

None of the explorers of that period were aware of Cordethar's recording, because the machine was unable to communicate with them. It would bring them to the surface, then let them go after enough had been recorded for later identification. The explorers believed that it was some sort of automatic device that was no longer needed, and they searched for the mechanism but never found it.

✂ STOP ✂

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[017]

You emerge from hyperspace and are greeted by a very strange sight on your computer screen.

“What is that?” you ask in amazement.

“It’s the planet Ouabain, Boss.”

“Yeah, but what are all of those square THINGS covering the planet? Is it safe to land there?”

“Checking,” your computer replies. A moment later you hear a surprising answer to your question. “Boss, the grid-like structures covering most of the planet’s surface appear to be playing boards of some sort.”

Sure enough, as you near the planet and can study the surface better, you see that the strange grids are in fact artificial, and contain various contraptions involved in numerous games. You do not have much time to examine this phenomenon before the computer interrupts your thoughts with another bizarre revelation.

“Er, Boss?” it asks you uncertainly.

“What is it?”

“We are receiving a message from the planet, and I am picking up the spaceport landing beacon. Or, I should say, three landing beacons.”

“Three? A bit much for one small planet but not unreasonable. Put the message on the speakers.”

“Roger Dodger, Boss.”

The message begins, “Greetings visitor. Before you attempt to land, we of the planet Ouabain feel we should first explain our world and our philosophy. After you hear what we have to say, you may decide against landing here.

“We have dedicated our lives to the pursuit of games, puzzles, and other intellectual challenges. In order to continue successfully in this endeavor, we have found it advantageous to interact only with those beings who are of a similar attitude, or at least willing to give a puzzle a try. If this sort of thing does not interest you, we suggest you leave orbit and head off to a more mundane world.

“Should you be interested in our way of life, we have a challenge for you which you must overcome before you can safely land.

“As you have undoubtedly noted, there are three landing beacons in operation. Two of these beacons will lead you to a false landing pad which might prove to be harmful to you and your ship. One of the beacons will lead you safely down to where we will be waiting for your triumphant entry.

“A challenge, however, is not fair without some means of solving the puzzle, so we will give you a clue:

*Below are landing pads three:*

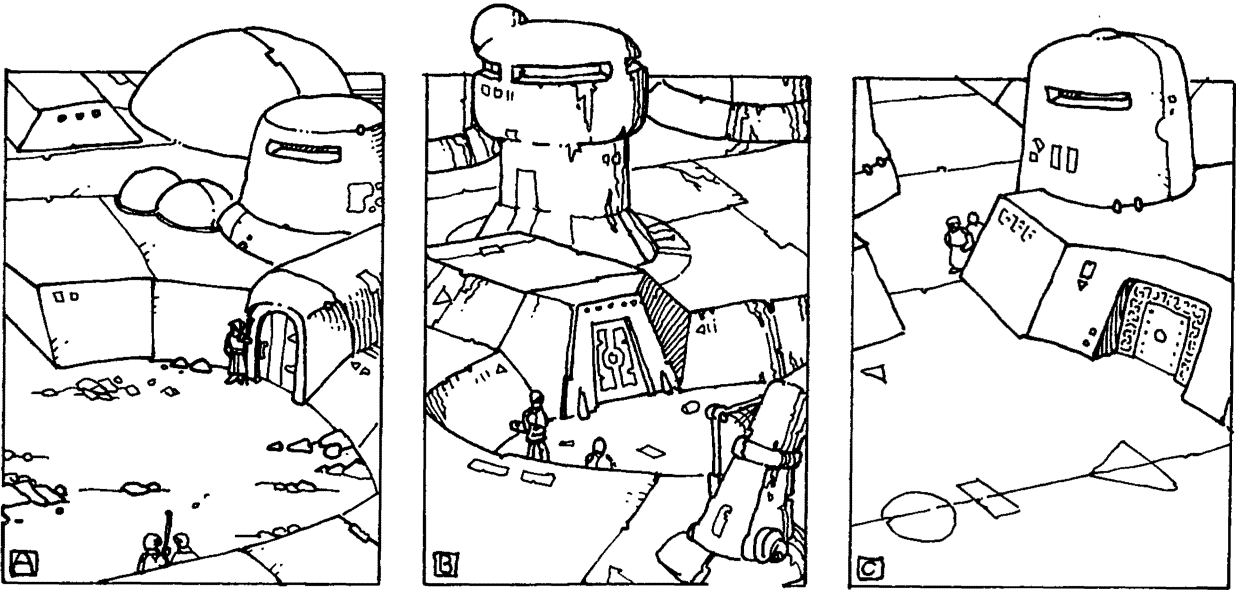
*One has no floor;*

*One is no more;*

*One is the safe place to be.*

“Study the riddle and the pads; we hope to see you soon.”

The voice fades away and you turn to your computer. “What was that all about?” you demand to know.



"I think they are serious, Boss. But they can't intend the puzzle to be hopelessly difficult or they would never get any visitors. I suggest we study the visual images and compare them to the clue they gave us. Perhaps we can deduce at which port we may safely land."

Your computer presents the visual images of the three ports. You study them carefully. The first landing port is to the north of your position. You examine the screen and see that it looks relatively normal. You see people going about their business, presumably the business of allowing ships to land. One possible exception to this otherwise ideal picture is the surface of the landing pad, which seems to be rough and uneven.

The second port is directly below you; it too looks normal. It appears to be a bustling spaceport with attendants and mechanics coming and going. Closer study shows possible rust along the metal portions of the landing pad and even some cobwebs in the far corners. If this is the real pad, they certainly don't keep it in immaculate shape.

The third spaceport, to the south, is almost identical to the other two, the picture of normalcy. You can see nothing suspicious-looking here even after close inspection.

You must now choose on which landing pad you would like to try setting down with your ship.

- A) Landing Pad 1 to the north.
- B) Landing Pad 2 directly below you.
- C) Landing Pad 3 to the south.

Go now to the CGM.

✠ STOP ✠

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[018]

You gulp as you get a readout from your computer on Silverbeard's ship capabilities.

"This doesn't look good, Boss," the computer warns you.

"I know, but we can't let him just take what he wants," you reply grimly.

Well, darn the torpedos, anyway. You put the ship on red alert and begin attack sequence two, firing at close quarters.

Silverbeard must have already heard of attack sequence two, because he has no difficulty in evading your shots. He returns fire with a much better success rate and manages to cripple all of your outer weaponry.

"Har, har, har," he chortles evilly, as he grapples with you and boards your vessel. It's all over in a matter of minutes. He takes all your cargo as you stand helplessly by, watching your hard-earned commodities disappear while Silverbeard holds you at bay with an enormous blaster.

He bows graciously when he leaves, and his ship soon disappears from view.

"Boss," your computer begins, "I've been examining Silverbeard's ship readouts. I think we can defeat him when we have made some of our own ship improvements."

You ask what would be required, but all your computer can tell you is that you will need more speed and better armaments. There may be other improvements it is not presently aware of that would be helpful as well. That is something you plan to keep an eye out for while you are exploring the planets in the Fringe.

You ask for the bad news in regard to the ship's damages and find it will take four phases to put things in order. Sighing, you turn to the task at hand and begin repairs.

Go now to the CGM.

✠ STOP ✠

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[019]

## HOW TO PLAN TURN 5

You take a good look around you before you decide what actions you wish to take. You are bright enough to recognize that one of the best places to get reliable info is at a local watering hole. The Slippery Silver Tavern seems to fit that description, so you decide to use one phase to check it out — and quench your thirst at the same time! Then you will visit the space traders and learn what you can from them, which will use the remaining phases in this turn. Your plotting sheet will 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	—	T	B	Y	V	B	R
4	O	B	L	—	—	—	—
5	—	—	A: 8VHKAV	A: KFVIK7	—	—	—
6							

### HOW TO ENTER PLOTS FOR TURN 5

Log onto the computer, press **A** and then **D** (the **D** corresponds to the action code **8VHKAV**) to go to the Tavern. Then press **A** and **E** (which corresponds to the action code **KFVIK7**) to visit the space traders. Finally, press Return or **F** to get your results for this turn.

### HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 5

The CGM will send you to the Tavern text. After completing “business” at the Tavern, read the text describing your visit with the old explorers.

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 Moiran, or head off into the great unknown. Good luck!

❖ STOP ❖

[020]

You are feeling rather smug about running the Boundary successfully. You send Marc a radio message, set up a safe meeting place and time, then plot a course for Norstar. When you arrive you see Marc already waiting; he is obviously happy to see you. You tell him of your adventures and show him your ship improvement.

Although he is impressed with what you have done to the ship you sense something is wrong. When you ask him, he tells you, “This is a great step in advancing the science of shipbuilding, but just one improvement isn’t going to get you off the hook with S.T.E. Let’s face it, they will be willing to take you back only if they can make enough of a profit. You’ll need the other two improvements you promised to get in order to make it worth their while.”

You see his point and agree. You know there are many opportunities to acquire ship improvements beyond the Boundary, so you bid your friend farewell.

Continued 

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

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[021]

Fortunately you wake up just in time! You were about to be dismembered and eaten.

Unfortunately, you're still on Tretiak.

✂ STOP ✂

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[022]

The Brother advises you to go quietly and in serene peace. He allows you to light one and only one candle along the wall.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

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[023]

What appears to have been a chemical waste dump is located between your ship and the ruined colony. Tests on the materials there show chemicals in high enough concentrations that you believe you can economically extract the commodity known as Fluids from the glop.

With some effort, you find you have purified enough of the material to produce one cargo bay's worth of Fluids.

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

✂ STOP ✂

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[024]

At the shipyards, the Riallans build cargo drones for their own use and for sale. Such ships are useful for storing and transporting cargo. They can be used to make trades at any markets you have already visited that allow drones to participate in trade. They are also helpful in trading with other players for both items and cargo. Because of its jump engine, the drone ship only takes one turn to travel to its destination and complete its trade. In the meantime, you are free to continue on your own way with no loss of time for the additional move. The only drawback is the jump engine's lethal effect on living organisms who are unlucky enough to be aboard. The trick, therefore, is to send only nonliving cargo.

You are very interested in the conditions of trade for such a ship and, after inquiring within, you learn the ships are available for sale.

All drones that the Riallans manufacture have a capacity of five units of cargo. The Riallans are willing to offer you one, for the following price:

2 Culture + 2 Crystals + 1 Medicine.

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

❖ STOP ❖

[025]

The sign over the doorway reads "General Store." This, you have been told, is where everyone does their trading.

"How quaint," you think to yourself, as you open the door and go back about eight hundred years in time.

The floor is covered with what looks like real, honest-to-goodness sawdust. The counters are stocked with gingham cloth, penny-candy, two-penny nails and various other outdated items with which no one but an authentic pioneer would be caught dead.

You make your way over to the sales counter. The ample-looking woman standing behind the antique cash-register(!!) greets you with a reserved hello.

You respond with a smile and inquire about the trade market.

She smiles more warmly now seeing as you may be a real customer, and tells you that Supa has Food available for the following trades:

2 Food for 1 Crystals,

2 Food for 1 Fluids,

3 Food for 1 Fuel.

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

❖ STOP ❖

[026]

Your party of explorers has decided that your mission to destroy Silverbeard is the most important thing in the world right now as you all meet in the outermost orbit around Outpost. You have accomplished so much since you left your home worlds, but you still have more to do. You have recognized that you must work together to conquer Outpost, and you confer to decide upon the best battle plan for overcoming the planet's multi-layered defenses.

You all agree that the same methods you previously used to defeat the killer satellites, the missile attack and the first round of ground weapon fire will probably work again. With this in mind you set up the proper formation and tackle the first three lines of defense. After you complete all three phases successfully you take a moment to regroup.

You all trade compliments on each other's work, to boost morale if nothing else. Finally you steel yourselves to attempt to breach the fourth line of Outpost's defenses. One of you makes the observation that Silverbeard has remained ominously quiet while you battled your way to this point. You each silently wonder whether or not this is a good sign.

The time comes when waiting gains you nothing, so you all wish each other luck and implement the same battle plan you used before. While it's true you were not successful earlier, you all still agree it is your best chance at blowing up the power generator. You electronically "draw straws" for the order of attack and commence your runs.

When your turn arrives, you try to still the nervous butterflies in your stomach and concentrate on the task at hand. Wiping a trickle of sweat out of your eyes, you order your computer to begin the strafing run.

“Roger, Boss!” is the reply, as your ship screams its defiance at the atmosphere and dives toward the target.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

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[027]

You can still hear the Brother telling you that you must face your fears and conquer them. So you grit your teeth and take a trembling step towards the monstrous plant.

Although you would swear you're still a safe enough distance away, the plant swoops down on you with its stem stretched out as far as possible and engulfs you in its gaping maw. You try thrashing about, but only your right arm manages even a partial getaway. Boy, does it look silly dangling from the creature's mouth like a cheap cigarette. You find you can still wiggle your fingers out there but all you can manage is a feeble farewell to a cruel world.

So you calm yourself down and wait to see what will happen next. Surprisingly though, not a lot does happen. You haven't been impaled on any spikes nor is there digestive fluid making short work of you. In fact it's rather cool in here after the hot desert sun. The dampness is refreshing and there's a nectar you decide to taste (why not?), which is delicious. The only part of you that's uncomfortable is your right arm which, try though you might, you can't bring inside the plant. Oh well, you think, maybe the clerics will see your arm and rescue you.

Time passes and you no longer feel the sun on your arm. Night has fallen and you sleep.

More time passes. Your right arm can once again feel sunlight.

Nightfall.

Sunrise.

You feel a painful sensation about your right arm. Shortly thereafter, the plant's jaws open wide as you fall out with a rather unpleasant thud onto the desert sand. The first thing you see are sandled feet all around you. As you look upwards, you breathe a sigh of relief. The clerics have come for you.

You reenter the sandshuttle and are once again blindfolded. Your right arm is throbbing.

When you are led out of the shuttle you are brought to a place where a cool salve is applied to your arm which is then bandaged. The blindfold is still in place when you are directed to place your hand on the shoulder of the cleric in front of you. You are told that if you lose contact with this cleric you will die.

At first all you hear are the echoes of your footsteps as if the passageway is hewn through solid rock; perhaps you are being led to a dimly lit cavern. Gradually, other sounds are heard.

You can tell from the acoustics that you are in a large room. You hear the chanting of a large choir and a low rumbling of a language you do not recognize. When you hear your name called, the blindfold is removed.

You are in a fabulous temple with ceilings one hundred feet high. It is illuminated, brightly in some spots and dimly in others, by one thousand flickering candles placed along the walls.

The Nightmare starts to close in on you. You remain calm.

You are offered a robe similar to those you see around you, except that there is no right sleeve on yours.

The monk standing by your side motions for silence as he unwraps the bandages from your right arm. You note that a green and red tattoo has been engraved on your palm. You feel no pain and your arm seems fully healed.

You are led up the stairs of the golden altar in the center of the temple. A ponderous man at the top takes your right hand and presses his left palm against yours. You notice that he has a tattoo on his palm which is a mirror image of your own.

He then recites the lecture of the Initiate Brother:

The Lecture: Initiate Brother

You have entered a great and ancient order. As an initiate, you have taken upon yourself a great and important obligation: that of secrecy. The information contained herein is knowledge of little use to those who have not earned it by right, yet they will pay dearly for it nonetheless. As an initiate, you must swear to pass along no information pertaining to the brotherhood's rites, unless authorized by Fraternal Law to do so.

You will discover that the brotherhood is structured by castes, or levels. As an initiate, you have achieved the first Level of Righteousness. You may engage in Fraternal discourse with another brother only after he or she has demonstrated membership in the appropriate caste.

You will learn the caste of another by engaging in the Dialogue of Mastery. The dialogue is a section from the Ancient's Book of Knowledge, a tome known completely only by those brethren no longer among us. It is a sequence of questions and answers. The examiner asks the questions one line at a time. If the proper answer is not given verbatim, then a brother must stop the examination and go no further.

As you advance in caste, you will learn more of the ancient dialogue, and will be recognized as, and can yourself recognize, a member of the new caste.

The Initiate Brother's segment proceeds thus:

Examiner: How does one know the way to truth?

Answer: I truly seek the answer.

Ex.: The way to truth is by quietly admitting your innocence.

Ans.: I now know the way.

(Examiner now recognizes you as an Initiate Brother)

Ex.: How then, does one find which path to take along the way?

(You now recognize Examiner as an Initiate Brother)

Ans.: I do not know the answer.

Ex.: You are truly an Initiate Brother.

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

Whenever a question is asked of you during a formal examination, these exact replies are required. If you do not know the correct response, you must reply, "I do not know the answer." It is a betrayal of trust to engage in an examination in hopes of learning more of the dialogue.

You are now an Initiate Brother. Return in one month's time to this place, and speak the Initiate's segment at the temple. You will be rewarded for your patience.

You are led out of the temple, given your original clothing, and now are in the center of Drofflic. You breathe a heavy sigh of relief. It has been seven days since you began the ordeal.

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[028]

Jaquar has quite a trading market and appears to be frequently visited by traders from other Darscian worlds.

When you arrive at the Interstellar Market Office you find Jacquar has Crystals to trade in the following amounts:

- 1 Crystals for 1 Iron,
- 2 Crystals for 1 Fuel,
- 3 Crystals for 1 Radioactives.

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

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[029]

Desperate for an antidote, you leave your ship and grab a handful of the orange vines and white flowers. You take them back inside and look for any red stalks like the one that shot the needle at you. You don't find any stalks, so you mash up the vines and flowers into a light orange paste and start eating it. It tastes terrible, but you eat the whole handful. Hopefully it will cancel the effects of the poison.

Unfortunately, it just makes you sick. You have the worst stomach ache you have ever had. You spend the entire day in the lavatory, vomiting.

⌘ STOP ⌘

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**[030]**

You never realized how much fun eavesdropping could be! You have been listening in on a conversation between two smugglers for the past hour and have thoroughly enjoyed yourself. What's more, you do not feel at all ashamed.

One reason for the lack of embarrassment is that you have picked up some interesting information during the course of the conversation, the most important being the possibility of earning a Gradient Filter for completing a smuggling run, originating on that haven of smuggling, Wellmet.

You are disappointed when the two smugglers sign off, but you feel you have spent the last hour profitably. If you would like to look into the smuggling mission they spoke about, go to Wellmet and plot the following option:

⟨KVVKKV⟩ (3 phases) Look into a smuggling mission on Wellmet.

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

✂ STOP ✂

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**[031]**

The man may be big, but you are smarter and faster. You evade his punches and strike back with a mug of beer in his face, a chair leg to his midriff, and a bottle of whiskey over his head. A cheer rises from the area of the card players as the bully slumps to the floor, dazed but not seriously hurt. Next time he'll think twice before messing around with a space traveler.

The next several hours are spent accepting the drinks the other patrons insist on buying you. Apparently the bully liked to pick on at least one innocent victim a day to work out his aggression. If he couldn't find an offworlder, then a local would have to suffice. This is the first time somebody was able to get the best of the big lug and they love you. Maybe this mud-covered, bug-filled planet isn't such a bad place after all.

✂ STOP ✂

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**[032]**

You wait until the next day before donning your environmental gear and venturing outside the ship. A hundred yards from the ship you encounter a mobile robot that looks like a wheeled dumpster with claws.

"Greetings," you say, holding up your hands in the universal gesture of holding up your hands. The robot stops but makes no other response. You try again: "Take me to your leader." It is the only thing you can think of to say to a robot.

The robot stops dead. Its engines shut down and you are left with silence. You look around like a little boy wondering if he's been caught in the act, then you hurry back to your ship.

"Computer, what happened? Did I startle that robot?"

"No, you confused the system controlling it. The robots here are the unintelligent machines, relatively speaking. It is the computers that are communicative. By talking to a robot you impressed it just about as much as if you'd landed on Earth and struck up a conversation with the nearest tree. They are now asking me whether I would like to trade for a more efficient and reliable mobile unit. I told them I'd consider it."

Of course, the computer is only joking. Its programming would never allow it to consider such a thing. Therefore your decision to conduct business from inside your ship for a while has nothing to do with its remarks.

✂ STOP ✂

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[033]

You feel a sense of accomplishment after you successfully run the Boundary. You are proud of the two abilities you learned and you pat yourself on the back for a job well done.

You contact Dr. Myers and set up a meeting. She arrives right on time and is very happy to see you. She tells you that the University still assumes you are on extended leave and there are no problems on this end. She is anxious to see the proof of the three alien abilities.

You tell her that you only have proof of two abilities and she frowns.

"What's wrong?" you ask her.

"Well to be honest with you, I don't think two abilities will be enough to get us the proper credibility with Harvard. Three is really the number we need."

You sadly agree with your friend but are not daunted by your task. With all of the wonderful discoveries still to be made, one more alien ability should be possible.

You bid Dr. Myers farewell with no second thoughts to mar your leaving. You are even more excited than before, in fact, because now you can see exactly what needs to be accomplished.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

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[034]

Despite the heat, you walk two kilometers from your ship before looking for a comfortable place to lie down. You find an orange lawn made of tiny trees, each fully detailed but as small and as soft as a blade of grass. You lie down on it and begin to relax. You tighten each of your muscles, then let each one go, to release any pent-up tension. You feel your breathing slow, your mind drift free, your eyelids close.

You think about what you know of Hootenaller. Are there alternate worlds, alternate realities, all accessible to one another through dual space? Is every Hootenaller equally real, and dual space just a channel between them?

No, you decide. There may be other worlds on the other side of the dual space interphase, but on this side there is only one universe, only one reality. There is only one real Hootenaller, the one in the center of all the possibilities of the others. Hootenaller, or the space it's in,

is weakened; other realities that shouldn't be possible become possible because they aren't excluded. The fabric of reality has become weak here, and can no longer discriminate between truth and mere possibility.

However, you can. You come from normal space, strong space, and you can force reality back on the planet. Once again you visualize the moving layers, the turning pages of possibility. Once again your vision of Hootenaller dissolves into a blur. You watch in awe as they go past by infinities, and suddenly you despair. How can you tell which is real, out of so many possibilities? By what law can you decide?

A law... somehow that is the answer, but what law? You grasp at memories, everything back to the very first day you arrived at Hootenaller, and suddenly you have it.

The ratio of a circle's diameter to its circumference: pi. Three point one four one five nine. . .

An infinity of possibilities disappears from the layers, leaving a smaller infinity behind. You don't remember any more digits, never knew them to begin with, but now they are there, and you pronounce them in your mind as if they were the word of God.

. . . two six five three five. . .

Below you the microscopic trees melt away. Above you the sun becomes a pale red disk.

. . . eight nine seven nine three. . .

The blur of possibilities begins to sharpen. The stack of alternate worlds is growing thin.

. . . two three eight four six two six four three three eight three two. . .

The stream of digits trails off. It is enough. There are still alternate Hootenallers, but they are all so similar to one another that it will be unnoticeable to you. And there is no end to the digits of pi, anyhow.

As you awaken, there are yellow-green plants around you, low and leafy like sturdy shrubs. The sky is the color of slate. The soil is soft and spongy. You pick a plant and chew on it as you walk back to your ship. You are amazed that you were able to perform such a radical change on an entire planet. Unfortunately, after seeing your creation, you wouldn't mind replacing the dull and monotonous shrubs and plains around you with the bizarre orange and blue landscape that really ought to be just a nap's length away. In your heart, though, you know that the "true" Hootenaller is here, and here to stay.

Oh well, maybe next time you will leave well enough alone.

✂ STOP ✂

[035]

You return to the dock where you last saw Bridger, the Lanza Family member in charge of the smuggling missions, but you learn she is not available. When you ask if there is a "hot pak to fly," you are disappointed to find there is nothing ready to go at the moment.

However, you are told that if you return later there may be something to take inside. You thank the worker and leave.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

[036]

Working feverishly, you soon disable every single one of the battle satellites. With strategic attacks, the swarming tactic the satellites employed isn't as effective. Meanwhile, your capability to destroy the satellites or disable their robotic brains is more than equal to the task. Since the battle stations can't swarm you, you can attack them a few at a time, and thus maintain the upper hand.

As the last of the satellites goes dead, a new alert flashes on your screen. A cluster of missiles is rising from the atmosphere of Wellmet. On your com link you hear Silverbeard's voice:

"Har, har, har! Ye scurvy bilge rat'll pay for sinking my buoys. Maybe these'll foul your rigging! Har, har, har!"

Another cluster of missiles rises, following the wake of the first. As they rise they spread out in complex patterns, each following the peculiar maneuvering commands programmed into it. Some loop around the far side of the planet, others stream toward you in lethally efficient arcs. These aren't ordinary missiles. They move even faster than a ship on thrusters. You shudder to think that they might be propelled by hyperdrive.

A quick computer analysis shows you have two choices: running away, never knowing if you really might have defeated the wily old space pirate; or remaining where you are and seeing how well your defensive weapons hold up against this new onslaught. The intrepid adventurer in you quickly decides on the latter. You instruct your computer to prepare for Silverbeard's second line of defenses.

As the missiles' widely curved trajectories bring them closer, you begin evasive action, but that will only buy time. It is your other defenses that you're counting on now. The distance closes, and you brace yourself. . .

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

[037]

#### HOW TO PLAN TURN 4

You want to finish plotting the trip back to Wellmet, so your plotting sheet should look like this:

Plotting Sheet							
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6	Phase 7
TURN							
1	T	G	R	Y	B	R	V
2	Y	L	—	—	—	—	—
3	—	A: HFAI67	—	—	T	V	R
4	B	Y	R	G	B	L	—
5	—	—	—	—	—		

The moves B, Y, R, G, and B bring you back to the trisector containing Wellmet, and the L lands you on the planet. Follow the L with 6 dashes (including the first 5 phases of next turn) since this is your first landing on Wellmet. Even though it's your home planet, you've never actually landed a spaceship here before.

### HOW TO ENTER PLOTS FOR TURN 4

Log on to the computer and enter your plots just as you have been doing the last three turns. Hit Return or F to indicate that you are done entering your plots.

### HOW TO GET RESULTS FOR TURN 4

Your movement and landing are successful, and the CGM directs you to text which describes your landing on Wellmet. Continue filling out your planet log for Wellmet, just as you did for Supa. It will look like this:

Planet Log			
Planet Name:		Wellmet	
Actions Available:			
Code	Phases	Description	Repeat?
OBFYI9	1	meet Jen	
OFFII7	2	market	
8FHIA7	4	weapons	
8VHKAV	1	tavern	
OVFKIV	3	history	
KFVIK7	4	information	

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

✂ STOP ✂

[038]

“How is everyone holding up?” you ask the computer.

“Very well. At this range the beams have no effect on us. Our armor and screens can easily dissipate the energy.”

The heavy particle beams aren't forcing you away, but you can't go much closer either.

“Can you locate the power source for those beams?”

“Yes, it's on the planet's surface. But it's well out of our range.”

You hold a hasty conference over close com link and agree on a plan. Each of you in turn will try to make a very fast attack run on the power plant that supplies the beams. During each run the others will try to draw the beams' fire as much as possible. Making the run through all the beams will be very dangerous and will almost certainly damage your hull. Each ship will only have one try.

Your computer highlights the location of the power plant as a blue dot on the viewscreen. At random you choose an attack order for your surface runs. You have several different routes to choose from; you look them over and choose one that you think will improve your chances. At the signal, you attack.

Go now to the CGM.

✠ STOP ✠

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[039]

Try as you might, the monster proves to be too much of a match. After you wound each other, you sense the creature is willing to call a halt if you are. You slowly back away, keeping your weapon at the ready. This proves unnecessary when the monster shows no sign of following.

As you return to your ship you note that 5 days have passed. Oh well, maybe your next venture will be more profitable.

You may select this option again.

✠ STOP ✠

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[040]

Once more you are on your way back to Hootenaller. You check the sensor readings and ask the computer, "Any space-time fluctuations so far?"

"None, Boss. All coefficients are unity. I think we've found the real Hootenaller at last." Your computer sounds confident, but you are not as sure. As you approach the pale-green shrub-covered surface you feel in the back of your mind the pressure of endless possibilities. It is as if you can sense around you the infinitely stacked layers of alternative realities, and you are trying to balance on the thin edge of the one you are in. You wonder what other possibilities, what strange and varied Hootenallers, exist on those many layers that impinge on one another across the dual space interphase. Perhaps sometime you will search out those worlds again, but for now, one universe is problem enough.

✠ STOP ✠

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[041]

Dressed in your spacesuit, you enter one of the Darscian domes, storm up to the nearest Darscian, and grab him by the neck. The short furry creature squirms and chokes under your firm hold. "Take me to your leader," you demand. You loosen your hold a little bit so the Darscian can speak. The Darscian looks at you and thinks for a while. He seems unsure what to say. Finally, in a calm, controlled voice, he answers: "I do not own a leader."

"Don't argue with me," you retort. "Just take me to the demon who runs this colony."

"I do not argue," the Darscian responds, unperturbed. "There are no demons here."

Frustrated, you realize it is going to be nearly impossible to locate the leader of the colony. All you have is a Darscian colonist who refuses to do as you say and who won't even get upset when you start strangling him. You are so angry, you throw the alien against the wall. That'll teach him to defy you. Then you leave the dome and head back to your ship. You'll have to try something else.

✠ STOP ✠

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[042]

As on your previous visit to Gazan, following the spectacular light show on your way down to the planet, you land and are greeted at the door of your ship by a four-armed being with golden fur. You greet him in his own language, and rapidly make arrangements for the berthing of your ship. Part of the standard spaceport services, you learn, is an instruction program for your navigational computer which will allow you to enter and leave the space around Gazan more easily in the future.

✂ STOP ✂

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[043]

You have no difficulty in finding out where to purchase personal weaponry. On a planet where war is the primary pastime, there is no shortage of shops that sell armaments. You ask a passing Gnarshian where to get the best prices in town and you are directed to a huge armory near the spaceport.

After touring the area you are satisfied with the quality and variety of weapons available here. The items for sale, along with their respective prices, are as follows:

Pin-Rifle — 1 Tools, 1 Iron,  
Rocket Pack — 1 Medicine, 1 Radioactives,  
Immobilizer — 1 Crystals, 1 Fuel, 1 Munitions, 1 Food.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

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[044]

Your return to Withel reveals nothing new. The landing beacon would still rather beep in binary to your computer, the Withelians are still a horrible mixture of flesh and chrome, and you are able to communicate with them through the use of the translating device.

You have the same options as before.

✂ STOP ✂

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[045]

As your ship crosses over onto a triangle where the density of space dust is too high for your two-axis drive, you hear your brand new Tri-Axis Drive Booster kick in with a satisfying VRROOMM! You are sent hurtling across the heavens with nothing to stop you. You feel good knowing high space density levels will never be a problem for you again.

✂ STOP ✂

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[046]

You cannot prevent the fluid from flowing closer to you, although your weapons seem to disrupt its movements. Whenever you repel parts of it, the rest tries to flow around another way. After a while, the flow becomes less organized, and eventually it separates into ineffectual droplets. By this time, however, it has scalded you several times.

You realize that it wasn't you that attracted the grey slime, it was the metal content of the radiation shielding of your environmental suit. By the time you are back on your ship, the suit is heavily damaged and you are in danger of radiation exposure. You also have a few burns on your skin, wherever the corrosive substance touched, but these are minor. The damage you do to yourself scrubbing the residue away is greater.

Before you can go outside again on Arthlan, you must repair your radiation shielding; this will take you three days. Due to these repairs, this option has taken eight phases instead of five.

✂ STOP ✂

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[047]

The captain's log is stored on a computer built into the wall of the captain's stateroom. After some tinkering with the electronics, you get the computer to play back the record. There are two entries.

Entry One: April 19, 2488 A.D. It has been three days since we escaped from the Clathrans. Miller and Friday have done a great job figuring out how to fly this alien excuse for a spaceship. We now have enough food and air to last us at least until we reach a friendly colony. Unfortunately the medical supplies on board aren't compatible with our metabolism, and I'm worried about Friday's injuries.

We've gotten the recording computer working today, so I'm going to record what we have discovered just in case we don't make it back to civilization intact. Unfortunately we have a lot of work to do to if we're going to get this ship back to Earth in time, so I'll have to be brief.

The news is bad. While we were exploring the inner section of the Galactic Arm, we ran into trouble. We were intercepted by an alien warship that had some kind of interdimensional tractor beam that just pulled us right out of hyperspace and stopped us cold.

My first mistake was made when I assumed we would receive warning from the contacts we were making on the inhabited planets in this sector if there were any hostile races in the area. My second mistake was thinking our ship could handle any threat we came across. I was wrong on both counts.

The aliens, who called themselves Clathrans, were huge ugly green creatures who were vaguely humanoid in appearance with the exception of their claws and scales. They immobilized all of our weaponry and easily boarded our ship, taking us and our vessel prisoner.

Apparently we were the first humans they had ever encountered and they were curious about who and what we were. They studied us intently. They were determined to find out everything they possibly could about the human race, particularly our physiology and our history. I got the feeling that our very existence took them by surprise.

We were brought to a nearby base where their treatment of us was that of laboratory technicians dealing with test subjects. They paid no attention to our attempts at a peaceful and mutually beneficial relationship, being interested only in getting data from us. We became concerned about their motives, and decided not to cooperate. They started using force.

While they were trying to get information from our ship's computer, Andrew Green, our computer scientist, managed to convince them he actually needed to be present at the terminal to demonstrate its functionings. Once in front of the console, he was able to implement the "Omega" program that destroyed most of the data banks before they could react. They retaliated by killing him. Green's actions seemed rash at the time, but later we were to realize that his sacrifice may have saved us all.

Next they took our biologist, Rick Dighton, and, using a technique they called "mindwiping," they took sections of his brain and chemically encoded the information they found there into a computer. He became a vegetable and they allowed his body to die.

Then they took John Silverbeard, our helmsman, away. They said they had other plans for him. We never saw him again.

After they finished studying all the data they'd gotten from us, I overheard their Ship Commander speaking to the Leader of the base. Fortunately for me, no one realized I had a translator implant that allowed me to understand everything they were saying. I shudder to think about how they would have removed such a device if they ever discovered its presence.

Although I don't understand the meaning of some of their remarks, I will reproduce the exact conversation for the record:

"These Humans are unlike any race we know about. Is it possible they have no restrictions?"

"That is not important now. We must devise a method for dealing with them. They must be destroyed. The question is, 'How?'"

"Can't we wait for the Masters to deal with them? It was they who overlooked the humans to begin with."

"No, we do not have time. The humans are too much of a threat. We must do something ourselves."

"The most obvious solution is to destroy their home world. But it must be located way out in the Fringe somewhere. How can we locate it without the proper coordinates?"

"Do not worry, we are working on a method already."

"Very well, when you have formulated the plan, contact me and I will carry it out as quickly as possible."

That was the end of their conversation. The Commander then had us taken to a holding area at the base and left for the evening. During the long hours, one of my crew, the linguist Sheila Donaldson, discovered a possible exit for our escape. We spent the rest of the night feverishly working out a viable plan and by morning we sprang into action.

With a lot of luck and all of the skill we had available we successfully managed to escape the Clathran base in one of their vessels. Before we left, Miller tried to find where they had taken Silverbeard but was unsuccessful. We had to leave without our comrade.

Now we're just trying to get back to Earth as soon as we can to warn people about the Clathrans. I don't know how the Clathrans are planning to destroy the whole human race, but we'd better be ready for it.

This is all I have time to record right now. We have a lot of work to do if we're going to get back in time to be of any help. I will make another entry later if time permits.

I would like to add one thing. If we do not make it back to Earth, I want it on record that I take full responsibility for the consequences. I have nothing but praise for my crew in the face of this extreme danger. They have performed with bravery and honor:

Gerald Cyphus: Weapons

Richard Dighton: Medicine and Biology, killed by the Clathrans

Sheila Donaldson: Communications

Walter Friday: Navigator

Andrew Green: Computers, killed by the Clathrans

Michael Miller: Engineer

John Silverbeard: Helmsman, abducted by the Clathrans

Entry Two: May 14, 2488 A.D. It has been nearly a month since we escaped from the Clathran base. Our trip home has taken us out of the dense space of the Galactic Arm and back into the Fringe. Unfortunately, we have discovered that the three-axis drive of the Clathran ship won't function in the Fringe.

We have been forced to land on the nearest suitable planet, which I have named Gazan. It is a strange and beautiful world located in the middle of a violent, fiery nebula. I am glad we will not be staying here long. The cacophony going on above us is almost too much to bear.

I had been hoping we would run into other explorers by now so we could use their two-axis ships to speed us on our journey home. The time we are losing may prove fatal to humanity. I have been trying to hide the fear and frustration I feel from the rest of the crew but they all know the score. We will need a miracle to save our race from destruction.

Since we can no longer use the tri-axis drive of the Clathran ship, we will have to make the next leg of our journey in its slow, thruster-powered shuttlecraft. Cryogenic freeze will be the only way to survive the long travel time to the nearest friendly planet. Navigator Friday estimates that the trip will take at least two years.

We're plotting our flight path to take us to the Darscian colony of Fiara. I'm hoping that the Darscians can provide us with a real ship to get us back to Earth. Perhaps we can give them information of a new world for them to colonize in exchange for their help. They are the only race I know to be sturdy enough, or perhaps foolish enough, to attempt a colony here.

The preparations for the cryogenic freeze are almost complete. It's funny that, although I have never feared death, I am afraid of this. Death has always been an enemy I could face and overcome, but when I am in that long cold sleep, how will I know if I am still alive? If we miscalculate, we could be frozen for eternity and never awaken.

I have decided to leave most of the ship's equipment here on this barren world and try to return later for it. The defense system will be left on to guard against pirates. Whoever you are, listening to this, I salute your ability to overcome the defenses. But be warned, if I catch you here, you're in serious trouble!

✂ STOP ✂

---

[048]

You are following a small stream down the side of a mountain you had climbed just before, when you hear a rushing noise up ahead. The stream you are following has come to the top of a waterfall a good fifty meters high. Below you the cliff face of the waterfall curves around on both sides to form the steep sides of a valley, protecting a small forest in its stone arms. The trees are an unfamiliar type, so you climb down to look at them more closely. They look very different from the broad-leaved species that dominate the rest of the area: instead of leaves they have a long blue-green fur, somewhat like long pine needles but much thicker on the branches, much longer and finer, and much softer.

Intrigued, you grasp a tuft of the fronds and try to remove it for a closer look. You can't. You choose a single strand and try to pull it free. It's stronger than wire. However, on some lower branches there are some strands that have turned white. These you can pull away, though the strands themselves are still almost unbreakable.

The ground on which you are standing is covered with a layer of fallen white fur. The mat is over a foot thick, and composed entirely of a Fiber that is superior in strength and quality to any synthetic product you've ever seen. You leave the valley and return a few days later

with your ship. It is almost no effort at all to cut the mat into sections and roll the sections into a cargo bay. The mat beneath the trees yields one unit's worth of Fiber. You search for other similar trees but find none.

Go now to the CGM.

✱ STOP ✱

[049]

## HOW TO PLAN TURN 2

You have already landed on Bugeye and 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 Bugeye should look like this:

Planet Log			
Planet Name:		Bugeye	
Actions Available:			
Code	Phases	Description	Repeat?
OGFEIM	3	market	
8GHEAM	3	tavern	
OWFGIE	4	Director	
8WHGAE	5	research	

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 to visit the Director first because you have information which suggests that he may be able to help you in your search. 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	B	V	O	Y	V	L
2	—	—	—	—	—	—	A: OWFGIE
3	—	—	—				

"OWFGIE" is the action code for meeting the Director. This will take up the remaining phase of turn 2 as well as 3 of your phases in turn 3. Borrowing phases from your next turn will happen often and is perfectly all right!

## HOW TO ENTER PLOTS FOR TURN 2

Go to the computer and log on. Press A for Action, and select the 6-character code for visiting the Director; in this case it is OWFGIE, which can be selected by pressing C.

Note that as soon as you type **A**, the display changes to show all the action codes available to you on Bugeye. 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

The computer will take your move into consideration and will send you to the proper text for your visit with the Director. Write down the text number(s) it gives you, in this case **860**, 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 text for your visit with the Director first.

When you return to the computer, as the text instructs you to do, and log on, you will see that you have been given the items mentioned in the text for your visit with the Director. You have also been given you a second piece of text, number **854**, which will help you with you next turn.

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[050]

Your band of adventurers regroup in the outer orbit of Outpost and confers about the best method for storming the planet. You all agree the first line of planetary defenses is easily handled by using the same attack formation you used the last time. The missiles will be a bit more difficult but, again, you decide to stick with the tried and true method of your earlier attempts.

You agree on a starting time and spend the few minutes left before the attack making whatever mental preparation each of you finds helpful. All too soon, it is time to go. Wishing each other good luck, you order the computer to initiate the attack sequence.

The killer satellites are no match for you, and you head deeper into the planetary defenses. The missiles are dispatched with just as much ease and you soon find yourself heading deep into the planetary defensive zone. You remember the outcome of your previous visit and find your palms are wet with nervous sweat.

"Boss, Outpost's ground weapons have zeroed in on us; prepare for action!"

Go now to the CGM.

⌘ STOP ⌘

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## [051]

The spacer districts of Wellmet support an amazing number of hardware brokers catering to pilots and crews. A person with enough Reals (the local currency) or cargo to trade could probably build a whole ship out of the spare parts available. Navigation instruments, computer hardware, life support modules, and even used drive cores are available in any quantities. The prices are much higher than in the Nine Worlds, but in the Nine Worlds, trade in space hardware is rigidly controlled and restricted to licensed manufacturers and operators. Here, the stuff is sold off the shelf in storefronts.

You have the great fortune of owning — or at least controlling — a ship that is already equipped with most standard hardware. What you are looking for is weapons for your own personal defense, and in this area you find Wellmet surprisingly lacking. Even though most everyone on the street seems to own a serviceable hand weapon, there are few available on the market. The shop owners and floor dealers tell you that the Families have recently been cracking down on the hand weapons trade in the city. Apparently, a few years ago, there was a run of street violence and a sudden proliferation of powerful hand weapons of the beam variety. This made the Families nervous, because even the best bodyguards offer no protection against lasers. Family bosses found themselves as much at risk in the streets as everyone else, which they didn't like at all. The bosses got together and agreed to clean the place up. Result: weapon manufacturers out of business, existing hand weapons hoarded like jewels, and weapons vendors reduced to selling piercers, exploders, laser reflectors, and force fields.

Actually, the choices available aren't too bad for a spacer just starting out. Piercers are fine weapons for back-alley brawling or last-ditch close-quarters defense. Exploders, while not great for pinpoint accuracy, are effective for crowd dispersion — that might be just what you need when you're dealing with unfamiliar alien animal life. Laser reflectors help to even the odds if you're facing an enemy armed with a beam weapon and all you've got is a piercer. Force fields represent the most advanced and effective device available here; needless to say, they will cost somewhat more than the other items.

Piercer — 1 Computers, 1 Medicine

Exploder — 1 Munitions

Laser reflector — 1 Fuel

Force field — 1 Culture, 1 Crystals, 1 Fiber, 1 Iron

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

✱ STOP ✱

## [052]

You feel you have accomplished everything you can on the planet Outpost and you prepare for takeoff. As you give the command to engage liftoff thrusters, you note with alarm that virtually every red warning light begins flashing on your control panel.

"Er, Boss?" you hear your computer hesitantly address you.

"What!!!!?" you shout. For some reason, excess adrenaline in your bloodstream tends to increase your volume when speaking.

"We haven't quite finished making repairs. I thought you realized that already. Sorry for alarming you. Everything is OK but we need to take care of a few more systems before we can leave."

You spend a moment or two calming yourself down. You had quite a fright just then! For all you knew, your ship was about to explode.

You check to see what work you need to get done and prepare to plot the proper options.

✂ STOP ✂

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[053]

While in hyperspace, you intercept a radio message between two space rats on a smuggling mission. Most of the conversation doesn't interest you but when you hear the name "Stewart," you listen more closely.

"Heard tell of cold jets for Stewart Family 'cause of the blown pak run," one of the smugglers announces.

"Yeah, the holder's got to be due soon or the Stews will be short much rep."

"Too bad. With no rep, they got no paks to run. I drilled for them before and they were hot jets with me."

They end the conversation shortly thereafter and you shiver with apprehension. From what you heard, you can see that you don't have a lot of time before your entire family's reputation is lost. Without a rep, they are as good as dead, since it will be open season on any Stewart ship or contract. No one will respect either them or their territory.

You vow then and there to set everything straight with the Family and deliver the three units of Super Slip in time to the contacts on Heaven. You need to start by getting at least one unit of the valuable substance.

✂ STOP ✂

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[054]

One by one, the members of your brave party take turns making the dangerous strafing run on the power generator for Outpost's defensive energy beam weapons. One by one, you fail.

As you watch the next run, you notice that the attacking ship actually seemed to have a chance of destroying the generator. Unfortunately, its weaponry was not strong enough to crack the outer protective casing of the power generator. If that ship had been equipped with a more powerful offensive weapon, it probably would have succeeded!

When you have each had a turn at trying to destroy the generator, you see that you can no longer hold the fire of the planet's defensive beam weapons from each other; you must flee if your ships are to escape significant damage.

Defeated for the moment, you all head out to the relative safety of space, just beyond the range of Outpost's weapons.

✂ STOP ✂

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[055]

When the realization of what you have actually accomplished hits you, you have to sit down. You felt you were right about the fantastic technological improvements available beyond the Boundary, but until just this moment, you didn't really believe you could find examples of these advances. Now you have the first of the three improvements you will need in order to return to Norstar in triumph.

You are stunned by the step you have been able to take to improve on the technology of the Nine Worlds. Already your ship is a step ahead of most of the freighters you can find throughout your home system. With just two more ship improvements, you will be better than anything back home!

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[056]

"I am the official of the spaceport," says the warty, purple alien as you disembark from your ship. "I speak your language good, no?"

"No," you agree.

"I recognize your ship as human when you land, so I speak human to you when you unload yourself."

"What do you call this god-forsaken place?" The alien is writhing along on his tentacles now, leading you toward a ramshackle collection of buildings clustered at one end of the spaceport.

"Alkon," says the alien. His voice is extremely thin and reedy, not unlike the sound of a poorly played kazoo. "But is not god-forsaken. We got plenty gods, you see soon, when you visit city."

"That was a city I just flew over? It looked like a section of the jungle collapsed."

"That Alkon City, the great and wondrous. We Alkonese like natural fiber for homes, is cheap and easy to find — just chop down tree. Or else was city dump; which way you land from?"

You point to the south.

"That Alkon City, all right."

Despite the help of the spaceport official, whose name is something very much like "Freddie," you manage to arrange berthing for your ship and a dry place to stay. Freddie, whose duties at the spaceport are apparently not too demanding, offers to show you around the city a little bit; "So I practice my human, learn it better much, eh?" You are on the point of refusing when you realize that without Freddie you will have to attempt to learn the local patois on your own. Quickly changing your mind, you accept his kind offer.

"Oh, offer not kind. I just give free sample, interpreter skill-wise, so that when business start I get inside track on employment option."

For the next several days, therefore, you see the best that Alkon City has to offer, with a free-sample interpreter at your side. At the end of that time you have found a number of options that it might be interesting to pursue, but unfortunately they all involve either employing Freddie full time as an interpreter, or killing a week or two to learn the gestures and gurgles that pass for language here on Alkon. Your choices are:

⟨GGEEMM⟩ (2 phases) Hire Freddie to serve as your interpreter. This costs one unit of your choice of commodity.

(WGGEEM) (14 phases, or 7 phases with a Universal Translator or Telepathy) Learn Alkonese from a local expert (a cousin of Freddie's who needs the work).

⌘ STOP ⌘

[057]

No matter what anyone tells you, space travel is not all it's cracked up to be. The incredible boredom is absolutely mind-numbing. Fortunately, you have available on your ship's computer the wonderful "Encyclopedia of Exciting Explorers." You cheerfully call up volume nine for a few good hours of reading.

Quite some time later, you come across a particularly interesting entry that states: "Iron is freely and readily available on a planet called Yrebe, although the mining conditions might not be much to your liking."

Hmmm. Yrebe, eh. You make a note of the name and head for bed. Gotta get your beauty sleep!

zzz.

⌘ STOP ⌘

[058]

You perform an extensive study of the crust of Arthlan, surveying vast tracts from your ship and landing and exploring where interesting features appear. You wish to learn how the planet formed and why it has assumed the orbit it is in.

It soon becomes clear that those are two entirely different questions. Arthlan started out as a normal planet in a normal orbit, well within the "life belt" orbital zone of its triple primary. This is evident simply from the size and composition of the planet. The process by which inner planets form would simply not allow a planet like Arthlan to start out in a cometary orbit. The dry sea beds indicate two other important pieces of evidence: that Arthlan once had seas, and that it once had the type of continental crustal tectonics that cause sea beds to form. Arthlan is poorer in heavy elements and smaller than Earth, but the planets' early natural histories may have been similar.

It is hard to find any evidence that there was once life on Arthlan, besides the presence of oxygen in the atmosphere. You find no fossils or remains. On the other hand, the planet's present orbit causes it to be repeatedly scorched and frozen as its distance from the suns change, and this could easily have wiped out all traces of life within a very short time. The intense volcanism is another effect of the erratic orbit: when the planet passes close to the suns it is subject to enormous tidal stresses; these can be strong enough to heat the planet's core and cause volcanoes and earthquakes.

You turn your attention to the problem of what might have nudged Arthlan out of its original orbit. Your suspicion falls immediately on the five clustered craters. Would impacts or explosions powerful enough to create craters that size be sufficient to push Arthlan into its current orbit? You investigate the problem on your computer, and the answer is yes. However, the impacts or explosions would have to have happened in a precise way, and at just the right times, when the configuration of the triple sun, the rotational position of the planet, and the positions of outer planets were exactly right.

You look for evidence of how long ago the orbit changed, but the conclusions are unclear. The effects of the orbit on the crust render the normal means of assessing geological age useless. Only the rocks know, and they aren't talking.

✂ STOP ✂

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[059]

Just when you thought it was safe to fly into the Galactic Arm...

Unfortunately, you are unable to build a Tri-Axis Drive Booster at this time. You do not presently possess each of the critical components necessary for its construction. Back to the drawing board.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

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[060]

The interstellar market on Gazan does quite a bit of trading with the rest of the Darscian worlds. Their primary item for export is Iron, for which you may trade in the following quantities:

2 Iron for 1 Food,  
2 Iron for 1 Medicine,  
2 Iron for 1 Tools.

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

✂ STOP ✂

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[061]

Two hundred paces beyond where you met the serpent there is an open pool in the ground, lined with rock. It is filled with a slick-feeling material your sensors identify as Super Slip, a frictionless substance that is highly valued in the galaxy. You find one cargo unit's worth. There is nothing to indicate where it might have come from. You search the area, but there is no more.

Go now to the CGM.

✂ STOP ✂

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[062]

You nervously alight from the shuttle. What awful monsters await you in the swamp this time?

The path seems darker and narrower than you remember. There are more screeches and shrieks coming from the swamp than before, too. Great.

You creep around a particularly nasty-looking bend in the path when all of a sudden you see. . .

Strangways' lab is just ahead.

That was easy.

As you enter the lab, you spot the Organuan working at the control panel. Strangways rises to greet you as you approach.

You exchange pleasantries with the alien for a few minutes, then inquire about the availability of Primordial Soup.

Unfortunately, you have arrived before the end of the production cycle. Better luck next time.

As you return to the ship, you note that 5 days have passed.

You may select this option again.

✂ STOP ✂

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[063]

You effectively deflect and/or dodge the barrage thrown at you by Storage Station Seven. Unfortunately, it is equally effective at avoiding your attack. After a good exchange, you recognize that the effort, at least this time, will not yield any fruit.

✂ STOP ✂

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[064]

The Engineering Guild is located in an impressive sphere-shaped building in "uptown" Fredotha. You stumble around for a while amid a crowd of Darscians doing incomprehensible tasks before encountering someone who can tell you about the Gravity Compensators.

"Ah! I understand now, sir," says the Darscian official with whom you are conversing. "You wish to purchase one of the Compensators, or, failing that, to learn the secret of its operation. Unfortunately we cannot help you with either here. The device itself is only rented by the Guild, from the Institute for Gravity Research on our fellow Darscian planet of Fiara. It's specially adjusted for use on Darscold and will not work anywhere else. As for the theory of how it works — we did not invent the device here so we are not able to divulge its secrets. I can only suggest that you travel to Fiara and ask them if they would be willing to share the information."

✂ STOP ✂

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## [065]

Several of the domes contain large pieces of machinery that operate all day long. You can't be sure which piece of machinery is the generator that drives the environmental conditioning system, but you have a pretty good guess. With an environment like this, they'd need an enormous amount of power to condition all those domes. Therefore, the generator for that power is probably the biggest piece of machinery that they have.

Ready for action, you take some high explosives from your ship and head over to the dome containing the largest piece of machinery. The dome is practically uninhabited, so it is easy to place explosives all around the machine. After planting the explosives, you return to your ship.

So you can get a good view of the fireworks, you lift off in your ship and fly high above the colony. Then you set off the explosives by remote control.

Nothing happens.

You try it again. Again nothing happens.

What's going on here? You know you planted the explosives right. The Darscians must have disarmed them. Those bastards! They've won this battle but you're not finished yet. You'll get them. They'll see. Then they'll regret what they did to you!

❖ STOP ❖

## [066]

Your ship finally rests on the "ground" but you haven't managed to convince your hands to release their grip from the controls. Alas, your ship couldn't quite manage the crazy twists and turns required of it. As a result, you bashed the hull into the thick branches several times. You yourself seem to have made it in one piece, but there is bound to be some damage to the ship. You don't relish the thought of making this kind of landing too often.

Eventually you are able to pry your fingers loose and request a damage report. Thankfully, nothing major is broken. The drive calibrators, sensor feeds, and electrical runners need repairs, and the hull is slightly dented. You sigh and remind yourself that it could be worse. It will take about three extra days to get the ship back into shape.

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.

Because of the repairs your ship requires, landing on Hemindore has taken ten phases instead of seven.

✂ STOP ✂

[067]

You are thoroughly enjoying the freedom you feel as an explorer. The thrill and excitement of discovering new worlds and new civilizations — this is the life!

Except you have a nagging suspicion you are forgetting to do something very important. Hmmm. What could that something be?

Of course! You are supposed to be building a tri-axis drive in order to search for more Flame Jewels. That's your contract.

You think to yourself, "Gee, maybe I should do something to remedy this situation."

✂ STOP ✂

[068]

As you approach the ball of ice known as Dargen, you feel tense and nervous. You have no reason to be uncomfortable here; after all, you have successfully completed the ordeal and shown your worthiness.

Yet you still feel butterflies dancing in your stomach.

You have the same option as before.

✂ STOP ✂

[069]

The Darscians on Gazan have torn a living from a planet so forbidding to sanity and peaceful existence principally by ignoring the stellar birth pains going on in the skies all around the planet. Gazan has no night time, and no true primary sun, but exists instead in the midst of a slowly coalescing cloud of gas and dust that one day — eons in the future — will collapse sufficiently to form a star. Small pockets of condensation in the enveloping nebula provide sufficient heat and light to support life, of a subtly adapted sort, on the surface of Gazan. The Darscian colony has existed here for perhaps two hundred years, more than enough time to forget just how unusual a planet it is that they share.

By spending some time studying the bizarre city, you discover you have the following options:

⟨VGKEVM⟩ (3 phases) Trade at the market.

⟨FWIG7E⟩ (3 phases) Learn about the Darscian worlds.

"According to the local systems, the space fleet is that of the 'Supervisors,' who are related to but not the same as the 'Installers' that placed the first intelligent machines on this planet. The Second Directive is an edict enacted by the Installers that no machine from Gironde may ever leave the planet. The Supervisor fleet is stationed to prevent any disobedience. The Second Directive would not normally forbid a ship arriving from off-planet to leave again, but perhaps the Supervisors mistook you — or possibly me — for a Gironde-born creature."

"When was the last time a Gironde machine tried to escape the planet?"

The computer consults for a moment. "Eight thousand six hundred fifty-five years ago a damaged network controller ordered a spaceship constructed and sent into space with several of its mobile units aboard. The ship encountered the Supervisors, was hit, and crashed on Gironde, somehow landing exactly on the offending computer and destroying it utterly. That was the last instance."

"So that fleet of fifty fully capable ships has remained on guard ever since, for eight thousand years, waiting for another attempt? That's hard to believe. And why didn't we see them on our way in?"

"Perhaps they are automated ships. Perhaps they also patrol other systems and use some sort of automatic alarm to detect escaping ships."

"Nuts," you reply. "There's something fishy going on here."

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[071]

The last time you tried landing here you were accosted by a bunch of weird aliens. You did the only logical thing — you turned tail and ran.

Lately you've been thinking maybe it wasn't your only choice. Maybe this time you will try to stick it out and find out what is going on here. After all, you are a full-fledged adventurer.

Cautiously exiting the ship, you are again met by the same welcoming party of one. You still think one is more than enough.

The creature's constant motion, combined with its its natural coloring, a bilious shade of green with a red stripe traveling in a continuous evenly-spaced path down the creature's body, is enough to make you nauseous.

After stepping away from the ship, you find yourself once again confronted by a crowd of the left-spinners, most of whom are armed with clubs. You have the same options as before.

⌘ STOP ⌘

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[072]

In the city you follow the directions you were given and soon find yourself at the Ethnar Trade Center. Here you meet the smallest Squirrellie you've ever seen. As she prances up to you to introduce herself you notice that her head barely clears your belt buckle. Now that's small.

In a high-pitched voice she says, "Greetings. I am Michee Jacksee. I am here to assist you in the purchase of Warp Core."

Michee informs you that each unit of refined Warp Core you wish to purchase will cost you two units each of Medicine and Munitions and one unit each of Fiber and Tools.

You thank Michee very much for her help.

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

✂ STOP ✂

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[073]

The planet Outpost orbits a white dwarf sun in the center of a vast green ring nebula. It is a distinctive world, a world that survived the explosion of its sun and has since acquired oceans and a breatheable atmosphere. Its waters teem with newly-evolved protozoic life, as if this were a young planet newly cooled rather than an old planet awaiting the final death of its star.

The most important characteristic of Outpost, though, is its location. It is just on the high side of the Density Barrier. For that reason, humans have many times used Outpost as a supply base for interstellar travel. First Vanessa Chang and her crew stored parts and records here. Later, the insane pirate Silverbeard claimed the planet, and backed his claim with powerful defense systems. You've defeated Silverbeard and his weapons, so Outpost now belongs to you. Legacies of those former owners still remain: the huge stockpiles of bulk materials accumulated there by Silverbeard, and the warning message left behind by Vanessa Chang.

Your ship has a Tri-Axis Drive Booster, making it one of the only vessels that can reach Outpost and the Galactic Arm beyond. Once past the Density Barrier, you locate the planet without difficulty, and your landing is uneventful.

✂ STOP ✂

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