



DAYTRIPPERS

**GOLDEN AGE
ADVENTURES**

SIXTEEN GOLDEN AGE
SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES

BASED ON THE WORLDS AND WORKS OF
POUL ANDERSON • PETER BAILEY
PHILIP K. DICK • PAUL ERNST
HARRY HARRISON • HENRY KUTTNER
ALAN E. NOURSE • H. BEAM PIPER
ROBERT SHECKLEY • EDWIN K. SLOAT
R. F. STARZL • JACK VANCE
FLOYD L. WALLACE • STANLEY G. WEINBAUM
MANLY WADE WELLMAN • HAL K. WELLS

DEVELOPED BY TOD FOLEY

DAYTRIPPERS

GOLDEN AGE

ADVENTURES

Developed by Tod Foley

"Followers who had discovered Gernsback's magazines in their teens were now in their mid- to late twenties. They had followed science fiction through its upheavals and excesses and now knew all the old hackneyed plots and over-zealous writing. Many of the writers, though, could not adapt, and some didn't need to because other markets would buy their material. Rather rapidly, as 1938 aged into 1939, [John W.] Campbell began to develop a new stable of writers as well as take with him those writers of sufficient skill and adaptability who could deliver what he wanted. Those who couldn't make the change regarded Campbell as a bully, and maybe he was. But if Campbell hadn't taken 'ownership' of science fiction and dragged it into the adult world, it is possible no one else would have done so. The pulp excesses would be only too evident for the next decade, but thanks to Campbell there was at least one haven of respectability. A look at *Astounding's* first year under Campbell will give some idea of the radical changes that happened."

- Mike Ashley; *"The Time Machines: The Story of the Science-Fiction Pulp Magazines from the beginning to 1950"*

DAYTRIPPERS GOLDEN AGE ADVENTURES VERSION 1.0 (PDF EDITION) IS PUBLISHED 2016 BY AS IF PRODUCTIONS UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS ATTRIBUTION-NONCOMMERCIAL LICENSE 3.0.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE AS IF COLLECTIVE:

Torey Holmquist, Abstract Machine, Tom McGrenery, Lemmo Pew, Cassie Rae, Joshua Ramsey, David Schirduan and Terry Willitts
<http://patreon.com/asif>

VISIT THE DAYTRIPPERS WEBSITE:

<http://DayTrippersRPG.com>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Golden Age	2
Dates of Publication	2
Days of Future Past.....	3
Using This Book	4
Adding Details.....	5
Filing Off the Serial Numbers.....	5
Reading This Book	6
PlotField Diagrams.....	8
Additional Rules	10
Hexcrawling	10
Dream World Transformations.....	11
Selling Items on Earth.....	11
The Cartesian Exception	11
Mission Types	12
Vector Slip Failures	13
The Mares of Mars.....	15
A MARTIAN ODYSSEY by Stanley G. Weinbaum	30
As Luck Would Have It	43
ACCIDENTAL DEATH by Peter Bailey.....	49
Curious Cure	55
BOLDEN'S PETS by F. L. Wallace	65
Gluttony	75
CONTAMINATION CREW by Alan E. Nourse	78
Crystal Crisis	87
DEVIL CRYSTALS OF ARRET By Hal K. Wells	97
Penal Reform.....	109
DEVIL'S ASTEROID by Manly Wade Wellman	122
Hunter/Hunted.....	135
DUEL ON SYRTIS by Poul Anderson	144
Halkon's Treasure	153
LOOT OF THE VOID by Edwin K. Sloat.....	170
Out of Thin Air	181
SJAMBAK by Jack Vance.....	194
Resource Management.....	209
TEMPLE TROUBLE by H. Beam Piper.....	224
Nobody Home	239
THE GUN by Philip K. Dick.....	245
Savage Planet	253
THE PLANET OF DREAD by R. F. Starzl	271
Busted Beacon.....	281
THE REPAIRMAN by Harry Harrison	295
Purple Jungles of Zeud.....	303
THE WORLD BEHIND THE MOON By Paul Ernst.....	317
Strategy.....	327
WARRIOR RACE by Robert Sheckley	334
Inscrutable Other.....	341
WHERE THE WORLD IS QUIET by C. H. Liddell	352
Index	361
System Conversion	362
Credits	362

THE GOLDEN AGE

The stories in this book were all written between 1930 and 1959, and represent a unique period in the history of SF commonly known as the “Golden Age” – possibly because it the first time science fiction writers made any real money.

These were the days of the science fiction “pulp” which brought fame to the first great wave of SF luminaries. The writing style employed by these writers, by and large, borrowed its initial tropes from the “daring adventures” and “weird tales” genres then in fashion.

Over the next decade, a wide variety of genres would take their shots at pulp success: westerns, romances, sports tales, horror stories, war stories, and more: aerial adventurers, nautical adventurers, inventors, pirates, swordsmen and sorcerers, ghost-chasers and detectives all had their turns courting readership with varying degrees of success and genre development.

Some writers crossed fluidly from one genre to another, like Henry Kuttner, who began his career writing horror for *Weird Tales*. But science fiction writers on the whole soon developed their own unique set of tropes, which today can seem either painfully cliché or wonderfully ironic. Many of those tropes – from the ruins and canals of Mars to the “primitive natives” worshipping false idols in stone temples under distant stars – will be found in these pages.

DATES OF PUBLICATION

The stories included herein, in order of their original dates of publication, are as follows:

THE PLANET OF DREAD by Roman Frederick Starzl - 1930

DEVIL CRYSTALS OF ARRET by Hal K. Wells - 1931

THE WORLD BEHIND THE MOON by Paul Ernst - 1931

A MARTIAN ODYSSEY by Stanley G. Weinbaum – 1934

LOOT OF THE VOID by Edwin K. Sloat - 1932

DEVIL’S ASTEROID by Manly Wade Wellman - 1941

DUEL ON SYRTIS by Poul Anderson - 1951

TEMPLE TROUBLE by H. Beam Piper - 1951

THE GUN by Philip K. Dick - 1952

WARRIOR RACE by Robert Sheckley - 1952

SJAMBAK by Jack Vance - 1953

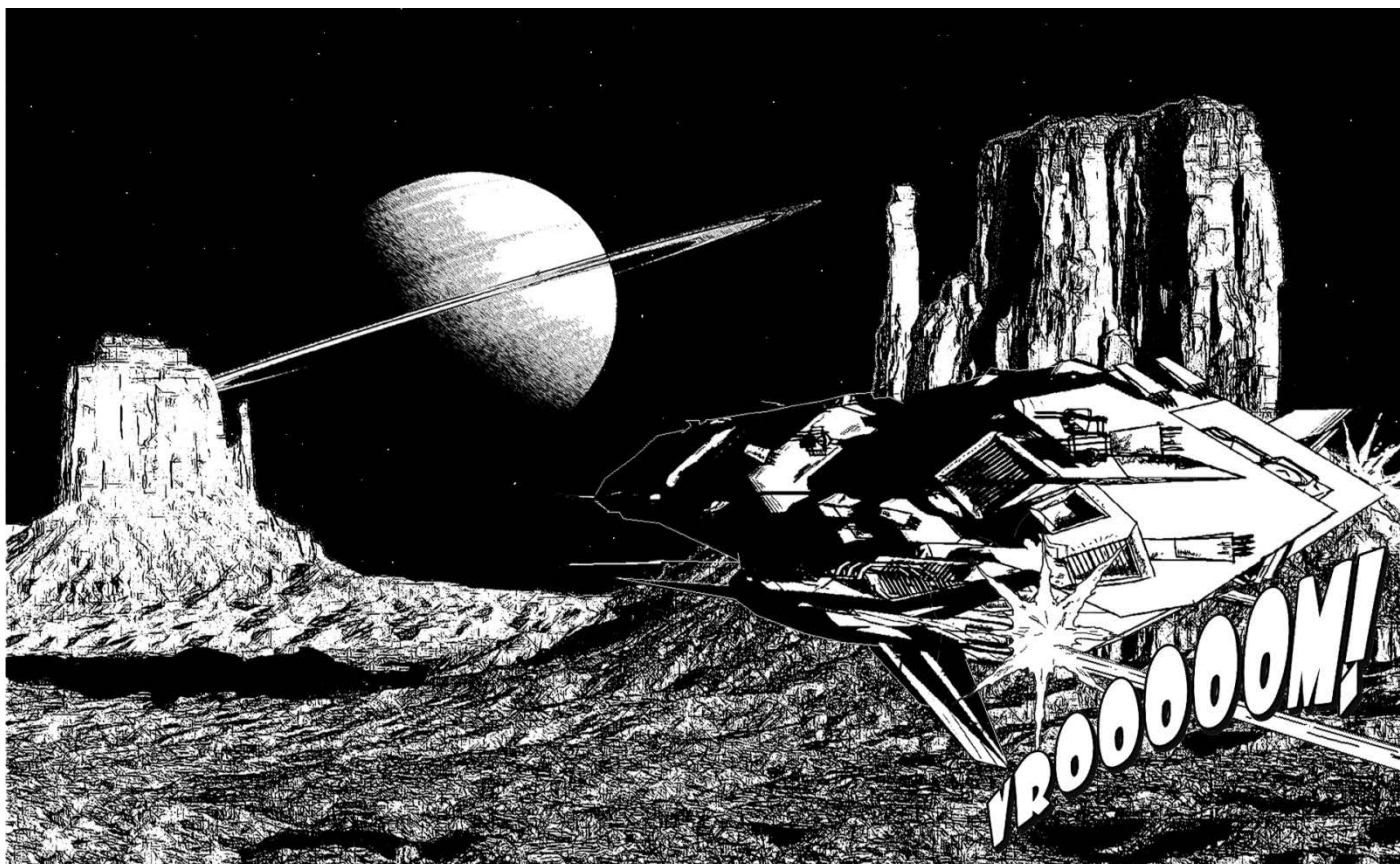
WHERE THE WORLD IS QUIET by C. H. Liddell - 1954

BOLDEN’S PETS by F. L. Wallace - 1955

CONTAMINATION CREW by Alan E. Nourse - 1958

THE REPAIRMAN by Harry Harrison - 1958

ACCIDENTAL DEATH by Peter Bailey - 1959



DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

In the early 1930s, partly in response to John W. Campbell's request for writers to create more non-human-like lifeforms in their tales (Campbell, the editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*, had famously said: "Write me a creature that thinks *as well as a man, or better than a man, but not like a man*"), the pulp market became flush with stories about weird creatures and strange civilizations on distant worlds.

Some of these alien beings and far-flung cultures, like those of Stanley G. Weinbaum, were delightfully bizarre, even inscrutable. Others were little more than green-skinned, bug-eyed regurgitations of the "dangerous adventures" and "travels among primitives" tropes seen in other pulps.

While these early SF stories do occasionally thrill with seemingly-prescient depictions of technological realities to come, in truth they were written largely for escapist purposes, their rise in popularity coinciding as it did with the early years of the Great Depression. Not that there's anything wrong with that, of course: escapism has its place in any culture advanced enough to require a highly specialized labor force. And yet in hindsight, we can also see that this was a brief "peaceful" period between two terrible world wars.

With horrendous economic conditions at home, tyrannical despots flexing their fascist muscles abroad, the industrial revolution in full swing and the Modern Age upon us, perhaps it's no surprise that the urge to conquer space – not just *explore* it but to get out there and *conquer* it – was something western readers could relate to.

The early science fiction pulps were almost exclusively an American phenomenon; it would be decades before other markets could sustain regular magazines devoted to the genre. As such, one notion that passed into the fictional future without question in this new and largely American medium was *capitalism*, as evidenced by this 1935 passage from Weinbaum's "Parasite Planet":

He was one of those adventurous individuals who always appear on the frontiers and fringes of habitable regions. Most of these fall into two classes; they are either reckless daredevils pursuing danger, or outcasts, criminal or otherwise, pursuing either solitude or forgetfulness.

Ham Hammond was neither. He was pursuing no such abstractions, but the good, solid lure of wealth.

In the real world, the stock market had recently collapsed – taking the economy along with it – and millions of people were struggling to find work, or standing in breadlines to feed their families. Under these depressed circumstances, a myopic drive to generate personal profit was something that seemed logical, trustworthy, even optimistic. This optimism carried itself all the way into the pulps.

In their ragpaper pages, the future would be bright (and mostly American), the market would right itself, technology would save the day, and Adam Smith's invisible hand would take care of everything. Being "in it for the money" was just a sign of good old American moxie. Perhaps when it comes to economics, not much has changed.

But in other areas of western life a great deal *has* changed; enough at times to make these stories seem positively antiquated (some might say "beyond repair"). I don't feel they need any repairing, personally, although it would be ignorant to gloss over the social gaffes and implicit racism in some of these works.

As far as social awareness is concerned, it would be a long time before the Civil Rights Movement and consciousness-raising actions of the 60s. As such, while Golden Age writers could easily imagine whole galaxies teeming with alien races of great diversity, they often had trouble with human diversity right here on Earth. Their views, fears and beliefs about race and gender, now seen as backward, were often extrapolated *forward* in their work.

These views must be taken for what they are: historical traces of a time nearly a century behind us in society's rear-view mirror. It can be informative to check that mirror once in a while, if only to see how far we've come in a relatively short period, given all those centuries of racist and nationalist conflicts in the bloody history of our species.

Make no mistake: These stories are relics of the past, not guideposts to the future. Their assumptions about the nature of society and culture – including matters of race, evolution, gender roles and sexuality - were often dreadfully heteronormative and pseudo-scientific; their ideas about technological progress were often ridiculously naïve. At the turn of the last century, throughout most of the west, the ethnocentric concept we today call "Social Darwinism" was actually considered by many to be a logical extrapolation of the theory of evolution. These stories are products of another time.

Postmodernity had not yet dawned on us, and it would be another generation (and another world war) before "New Wave" writers began using SF to push against traditional boundaries, blazing the new psychological territory of inner space. In the heyday of the Golden Age, the most popular science fiction authors were still looking backward culturally, even while their stories looked forward technologically. Thankfully, it isn't necessary to take on the outmoded attitudes and beliefs of our ancestors in order to appreciate the fictional worlds they created.

Take them in the frame of their own context, or remove them from cultural associations and view them merely as the fledgling formulations of a nascent field of expression, and these stories are nothing less than precious. They are tiny jewels, sometimes awkwardly or hilariously flawed; historical mementos of fictional futures, now past.

USING THIS BOOK

The possibilities of the multiverse are vast beyond reckoning, and the DayTrippers GM has plenty of leeway in using these stories and settings – even combining them if desired.

While the adventures in this book are based on classic stories, they aren't presented in a linear way. That's because there's no assumed course of events – no particular "plots" - that your sessions must follow. Each adventure includes a number of potential missions, obstacles, complications, locations, lifeforms and NPCs for your players to encounter, but you are not required to use them all. They are intended to give you foundations to work on, and flesh out as you see fit.

The five Node Types of SlipSpace provide five basic ways to think about adding these adventures to your campaign. In this section we'll take a look at them.

KNOWN AND UNKNOWN PLANETS

It's possible to play out entire campaigns without ever leaving 3space. This approach can give you anything from a classic Golden Age universe of intergalactic exploration to a more modern view involving a Galactic Federation of Planets – or an Evil Empire. By using a combination of written works, movie and TV concepts, adventure modules and random generators, you can create a great number of unique planetary adventures.

Most of these adventures take place on remote planets, either entirely fictional or fictionally interpreted (like Mars). In some stories, human settlements have already been established or inter-species contact has been made, making these Nodes into *Known Planets* by default. On such planets, *Social Stories* and *Diplomacy Missions* are likely to occur. Other adventures take place on *Unknown Planets* awaiting human discovery.

ALTERNATE EARTHS

As you will notice upon reading them, "Golden Age" SF stories often contain elements and concepts that are naive, outmoded, old-fashioned, offensive, or just plain wrong. The vast majority of Space Opera heroes from the 30s to 50s were white, western, heterosexual Manly Men, doing manly things in deadly situations, always proving their genetic superiority and always Saving The Girl (often marrying her as well). Along the way these heroes often encounter "less evolved" races, who are casually denigrated by author and hero alike, judged and exploited without regard for cultural relativity or assumptions of privilege.

For some people, such scenarios may cut too close to the bone, standing as stark reminders of the Social Darwinism and Imperialism western civilization has not yet left far

enough behind to discuss comfortably. But it's possible to use these *Alternate Earths* as object lessons, to convey meaningful and important messages in deep or ironic ways.

For each of these stories it's possible to imagine a whole alternate timeline, allowing all the old-school adventures penned by Harrison, Piper, Wallace and Vance to take place in "universes next door". They might happen on timelines where fusion power or intergalactic travel was developed some time in the 1930s or 40s, where the Cold War never ended, or where the USSR collapsed decades earlier, globalism triumphed and western culture stagnated.

Purists and fans of Golden Age SF can play within that early-20-century American view as part of a "retro future" campaign, cleaving close to the two-dimensional space opera heroes of the Golden Age. Alternately, Players might choose to confront these worlds as enlightened progressives, political radicals or members of mistreated minorities, subverting the old-school stereotypes and undermining the prejudicial assumptions of racists, sexists and "the establishment". In the later fiction of the 50s and 60s, that's exactly what some authors did.

TIME TRAVELS

Many of the stories in this book lend themselves quite well to the idea of *Temporal Slips* into the past or future. These planetary adventure tales include creatures and landscapes that could be used without paying any attention to the original plotlines at all, using the elements as backdrops for emergent stories, or laying *Drama Templates* on top of them (see the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*, p.65).

A story like H. Beam Piper's "Temple Trouble" presents such a concept: a time-traveling uranium mining scheme. While the original story places the time-travelers among the "Proto-Aryans", the same concept could easily be applied to any earthly culture or historical period. The PCs might be time travelers themselves, or they might meet humans from other realities who have time-traveled into this world. The "Transtemporal Mining" company could be replaced by any megacorporation (almost certainly a subsidiary of *Global Nation Products*, or perhaps a side project funded by *X Investments*), and the existence of the "Paratime Police" could be disregarded completely. Or not. Up to you.

DREAM WORLDS

Like all other works of fiction, any of these stories could be used to represent events taking place in literary *Dream Worlds*; either as full timelines or cyclic recurrences. Each story might comprise its own little "Pocket Universe" complete with its own history and laws of reality. There can be no effective judgement of content here, because every story ever written (like every dream ever dreamt) has at least one Dream World of its own, where its events mutate randomly or play out endlessly, existing beyond time as we tend to understand it.

Entering such a scenario via Subjective Slip, DayTrippers might find themselves interacting with the heroes of the original story, or observing those heroes in action from an outsider's perspective. They might even find themselves literally replacing the heroes within the story – popping "into their roles" as it were.

SERIAL EXPLORATIONS

Some of these adventures contain a large number of Regions, Locations and Lifeforms; too many to encounter in a single session. These worlds are good candidates for *Serial Explorations* in which the PCs come back to the same Node again and again, possibly shifting their arrival coordinates each time to appear in a new Region or Location.

EXTRA WORLDS

It's always a good idea to always have a few extra worlds laying around, because you never know when the multiverse of the game will insist on expanding itself.

Various mishaps in SlipSpace – including failed Vector Slip calculations, Flux Storms, or tampering with the ship's pre-programmed coordinates – can result in the DayTrippers ending up on the wrong planet, in the wrong time period, or in the wrong universe entirely. When this happens, one of these PlotFields can be pressed into quick service, providing a pre-made environment for an extemporaneous session. Just tweak and serve.

Another use for extra worlds is to provide options for Players to select or turn down. The missions described in these stories can be placed on the *Big Board* at Diaspora Ranch, allowing the Players to choose one while searching for a job. Then they can't blame anyone but themselves!

ADDING DETAILS

One of the challenging aspects of using a short story for an adventure setting is that the source text rarely fleshes out an entire planet. There really isn't any need – or room – for short story writers to go that far. Instead, they tend to provide just enough tantalizing glimpses to expand the reader's sense of breadth without wandering too far from their central narratives. A writer will drop passing mentions of alien races, weird creatures and bizarre artifacts without spending much time on them, counting on the reader's mind to fill in the blanks.

GMs do this sort of imaginative "filling-in" too of course, but our games require a bit more detail, in case someone decides to go talk with one of those races, fight one of those creatures, or grab one of those artifacts for the greater glory of their bank account back home.

By using the Generators in the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*, you can quickly flesh out the details of a planet while

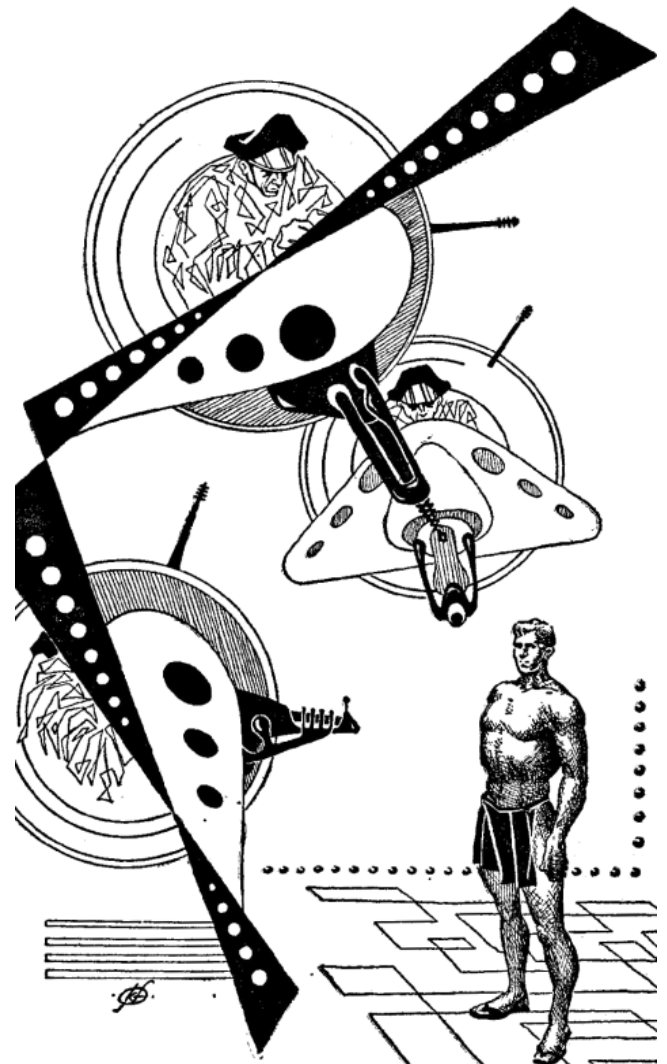
keeping the author's basic concepts intact. (In fact, some of that has already been done within these pages.)

As you step through the Generators and fill out the Adventure Sketch, let yourself be guided by the known details of the source story. At each table, ask yourself if you already know the answer to the question being rolled. If so, just plug it in and move on. If not, roll the dice, applying whatever modifiers make sense, and see what you get.

FILING OFF THE SERIAL NUMBERS

Of course there's no reason these locations, characters, creatures and details must remain embedded within their original storylines. Most of the locations, lifeforms and NPCs in this book could easily be lifted out of context and placed into completely different worlds, or made to appear randomly in the swirling madness of the Multiversal Chao. Elements from different stories could even be combined, producing a hybrid tale of extreme weirdness.

What do I know? It's your multiverse.



READING THIS BOOK

The adventures in this book are broken down into PlotFields, and are written in a format that deconstructs the source stories. The PlotField format organizes objects (characters, locations, items and events) based on both geography and narrative potential.

OBJECT LISTINGS

OBJECT

All Narrative Objects (Lifeforms, NPCs, Items, Regions, Locations, Events and Maguffins) are listed individually and surrounded by a rounded border like the one shown here. All Object Listings possess a color-keyed lozenge in their upper-right corner, indicating what type of Object they are.

Objects which are directly related are connected to each other by vertical or horizontal lines.

OPTIONAL OBJECTS

Objects with dashed borders are considered *optional* and *conditional*.

In other words, depending on the mission you select and the nature of your prep, these objects may or may not be part of the scenario, due to their nature and significance. (Even more than regular objects, which are always subject to context and GM rulings anyway.)

Their inclusion depends on your approach, your selected Mission, the actions of the Players, your group's current position in the Narrative Arc, and the roll of the dice.

CAPITALIZATION

Capitalization is used throughout this book to indicate canonical definitions or references. Capitalized words such as *Crisis* or *Arc* are references to game terms from the *DayTrippers Core Rules* or the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*.

Within an object listing, any word appearing in **CAPS AND ITALICS** refers to another object listing within the same adventure.

The words *GameMaster* and *Player* are always capitalized.

BACKSTORIES & MISSIONS

Each adventure includes one *Backstory* and three suggested *Missions*. Backstories are surrounded by bold borders, while Missions (being optional) appear with dashed borders, as shown below. Before running an adventure for your Players, choose a Mission and decide on how you'll approach the PlotField. Consider your PCs' LifeShapers and Skills as you do this.

BACKSTORY

A scoutbot has returned with video files of a desert planet, showing what appear to be a number of small mud cities and a network of canals linking them. In its 20-hour slip it managed to map most of a single tridrant in the south (roughly 1/20th of the planet's surface), and spent several hours on the surface unmolested while running a spectroscopic analysis. According to the bot's findings, the planet's atmosphere is thin but breathable by humans.

As the presence of cities implies there will be a need for social contact, the client is looking for a DayTripper team to continue with exploration and mapping. Potential clients include Slip/Trip Trove! (searching for nodes which might be developed into vacation destinations), a division of Global Motion Products (searching for easily-exploitable resources), or a field executive from X Investments, seeking to broker any valuable assets on the planet.

The mapped region is Tridrant 19. This tridrant includes the continental plateaus of Ausonia and Cridenia, as well as the far-southern continent of Tyle II. This is where the DayTrippers will arrive.

MISSION: EXPLORATION OF AN UNKNOWN PLANET

MISSION TYPE: Exploration
NODE TYPE: Unknown Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DLS)

In this scenario, everything in the story may be used except the planet isn't Mars. Put it wherever you want. If you're using the Corruption Exception rule (p. 5), this adventure may be extended indefinitely. See *rewriting* (p. 7).

MISSION: EXPLORATION OF AN ALTERNATE MARS

MISSION TYPE: Exploration
NODE TYPE: Alternate Earth Timeline
SLIP TYPE: Compound (Paraterran + Cartesian) (DLS)

In this scenario the timeline split off in the early 1530s (use the *PlotField Event Table* in the *DayTrippers* *GameMasters Guide* to determine why), spaceflight was perfected in the early 20th century, climate change was averted (or never happened), the cold war simmered like a watched pot (never boiling), and by 2100 the solar system was under exploration.

The first scoutbot to explore this node came back with Earth video indicating that a vessel called the *Ares* was about to land on Mars, which had been reported to possess a breathable atmosphere. This might make the planet an ideal candidate for Slip/Trip tourism.

So a second scoutbot was dispatched: this time to the alternate version of Mars, in order to ascertain the truth of this report. It found mud, villages, canals, and the remains of a gigantic city in the antarctic region. The bot also found signs of life moving around in the Martian environment, but for some reason was unable to determine whether these lifeforms were flora or fauna. A DayTripper team will be required for a more detailed investigation. Being a Compound Slip, this mission will require an experienced pilot.

OPTIONAL DETAIL: The scoutbot never returned to Home-Earth. A final Up/Vector transmission seems to show the bot being captured by some sort of barrel-shaped creatures and hurled into a pit of refuse beneath a giant wheel, before abruptly breaking off.

MISSION: EXPLORATION OF A DREAM WORLD

MISSION TYPE: Exploration
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DLS)

STABILITY: 6
In this scenario, the PCs take the place of Dick Jarvis and the *Ares* crew – though they are almost sure to change the story.

On entry, the PCs' minds are clouded by the reality imposing itself on their consciousness: it feels like a cross-fading film. For a brief time they're afraid to move, unsure what's real and what's a dream. When they come to their senses, one of them is gone – hundreds of miles away, sitting in the cockpit of a doomed explorer. The others are safely on the ground, somehow aware that their companion is on a survey run to the south, and should be back in a few hours.

The lone PC will have to trek northward across the Martian terrain to the Mare Cimmerium, unless the others find them first. Good thing they've got an automated survival suit.

(You'd bring your Survival Suit, yes?)

OPEN SOURCE SOURCE STORIES

The stories upon which these adventures are based are all in the public domain, their copyrights having expired years or decades ago. Many of these stories can be found online at Project Gutenberg. A few of them have been dramatized as radio plays, and may be found on YouTube.

PROJECT GUTENBERG

<http://www.gutenberg.org/>

YOUTUBE

<http://www.youtube.com/>

The full text of each source story is included as an appendix to each adventure, should you care to see how the original railroad went. The option of reading these stories prior to running them in game form is, of course, up to you.

REGIONS & LOCATIONS

The difference between *Regions* and *Locations* is this: Regions are larger, and they may contain Locations within them. When determining encounters randomly, use the most logical Region table available if the PCs aren't currently within a specific Location.

The description of a Region or Location begins with a block of environmental information, and an optional block of *Perceptions*. If *Unusual Features* are called for, see the indicated section of the *Unusual Wilderness Features Table* in the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*.

PERCEPTIONS

- Many Regions and Locations possess a *Perceptions* block. These include sensory details and phenomena likely to be noticed by anyone who spends time in the area.
- Perceptions should be used liberally in play, helping to define the mood and atmosphere of the environment.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Each Region/Location has an *Encounter DL*. This is the number the GM must beat in order for an unexpected encounter to occur. The Encounter DLs are:

ENCOUNTER DL

- 1 = impossible to be alone
- 2 = constant
- 3 = near-constant
- 4 = common
- 5 = very frequent
- 6 = frequent
- 7 = likely
- 8 = uncommon
- 9 = unlikely
- 10 = rare
- 11 = exceeding rare
- 12 = never

To check for an encounter, roll 2d6.

If the total exceeds the DL, an encounter occurs.

If the total equals the DL, an encounter *nearly* occurs.

For Regions, check once per day or once per hex (whichever is shorter). For Locations, check once per hour, or once per span of compressed time.

Most Locations (and all Regions) have their own *Encounter Tables*. When it's time for an encounter, consult the applicable table and roll or choose the most appropriate encounter from those shown.

If it's time for a Crisis, a *Crisis Encounter* should occur.

When working within a Narrative Arc, Encounter TCVs are adjusted according to the requirements of the Arc. A typical standard to shoot for is:

- First Crisis: 1/2 of the party's TCV
- Second Crisis: 3/4 of the party's TCV
- Final Crisis: the party's full TCV

ENCOUNTER TYPES

Many Lifeforms and Events possess a variable number of possible *Encounters*. The actual Encounter that occurs may be selected or determined randomly. For example:

ENCOUNTERS

- A Dragodon awakens nearby
- (Possible Crisis) A Dragodon awakens nearby; it will attack if the PCs move toward it or fail to conceal their presence as they move away
- (Crisis) A Dragonodon spots the PCs and attacks

Some Encounters have a "Crisis" or "Possible Crisis" indicator, as seen in the second and third encounters above. When the Timeline or Arc of the adventure calls for a Crisis to be inserted, one of these encounters should do the trick.

Note that a Non-Crisis encounter may later escalate *into* a Crisis, but that would typically depend upon the actions of the PCs or NPCs present.

READ IT TWICE

Because of the way PlotFields are assembled, you will occasionally find forward references, or parts that don't become clear until some other part has been understood. Each adventure is a *gestalt* comprised of many moving pieces. For this reason it's important to read each adventure *twice* before attempting to run it.

For the first reading, try just soaking in the mood and getting familiar with the major characters, events and objects. Then on the second reading you can focus more clearly on the interconnections between them.

PLOTFIELD DIAGRAMS

Each Golden Age Adventure is accompanied by a *PlotField Diagram*, illustrating the arrangement of all significant objects in a single glance.

The guidelines in this section will familiarize you with the use of PlotField Diagrams, both in prep and in play.

OBJECT TYPES

Regions, Locations, Lifeforms, NPCs and Maguffins are all indicated by specific symbols and shapes, as are significant lines of relation: both relations of force and relations of support.

REGIONS

REGIONS are represented by rounded rectangles of red/pink. Objects contained within the borders of the Region are contained or “reside” within that Region. Objects whose boundaries cross the border of a Region may be found either within the Region or outside of it.

LOCATIONS

LOCATIONS are represented by rounded rectangles of orange. Objects contained within the borders of the Location are contained or “reside” within that Location. Objects whose boundaries cross the border of a Location may be found either within the Location or outside of it.

LIFEFORMS

LIFEFORMS are represented by green-bordered ellipses. If the ellipse crosses the border of a Location or Region, the Lifeform may be found either inside or outside of it. If the ellipse intersects with multiple Locations or Regions, the Lifeform may be found in both or all of them.

NPCs

NPCs are represented by blue-bordered ellipses. If the ellipse crosses the border of a Location or Region, the NPC may be found either inside or outside of it. If the ellipse intersects with multiple Locations or Regions, the NPC may be found in both or all of them. As in the Object Listings, an NPC with a dashed border is optional or conditional.

MAGUFFINS

MAGUFFINS are represented by violet-bordered hexagons.

LINES OF RELATION

Objects may be connected to other Objects in two ways: by *Relations of Force* or *Relations of Support*. These *Lines of Relation* are represented by arrows of two different types, as detailed below.

FORCE

RELATIONS OF FORCE are represented by fat pink arrows. They indicate the directions of *action* or *antimony* that will be enacted by one Lifeform or NPC upon other ones. The arrow indicates the direction of force. Bi-directional arrows indicate mutual antipathy. If it's a specific type of force, this will be indicated in small text.

SUPPORT

RELATIONS OF SUPPORT are represented by dotted green arrows. They indicate the directions of *loyalty* or *support* that will be given by one Lifeform or NPC to other ones. The arrow indicates the direction of loyalty. Bi-directional arrows indicate mutual support. If it's a specific type of support, this will be indicated in grey text.

PLOTFIELD DIAGRAMS IN PLAY

Because the PlotField Diagram contains all the important Lines of Relation, it can be used to guide NPC moves and offscreen action. Whenever it's time for the story to progress, a glance at the fat pink arrows will show you who might be moving into position to cause a Crisis, and against whom. Likewise, if anyone has been crossed, threatened, hurt or killed, the dotted grey arrows indicate whose loyalty and support may kick into action.

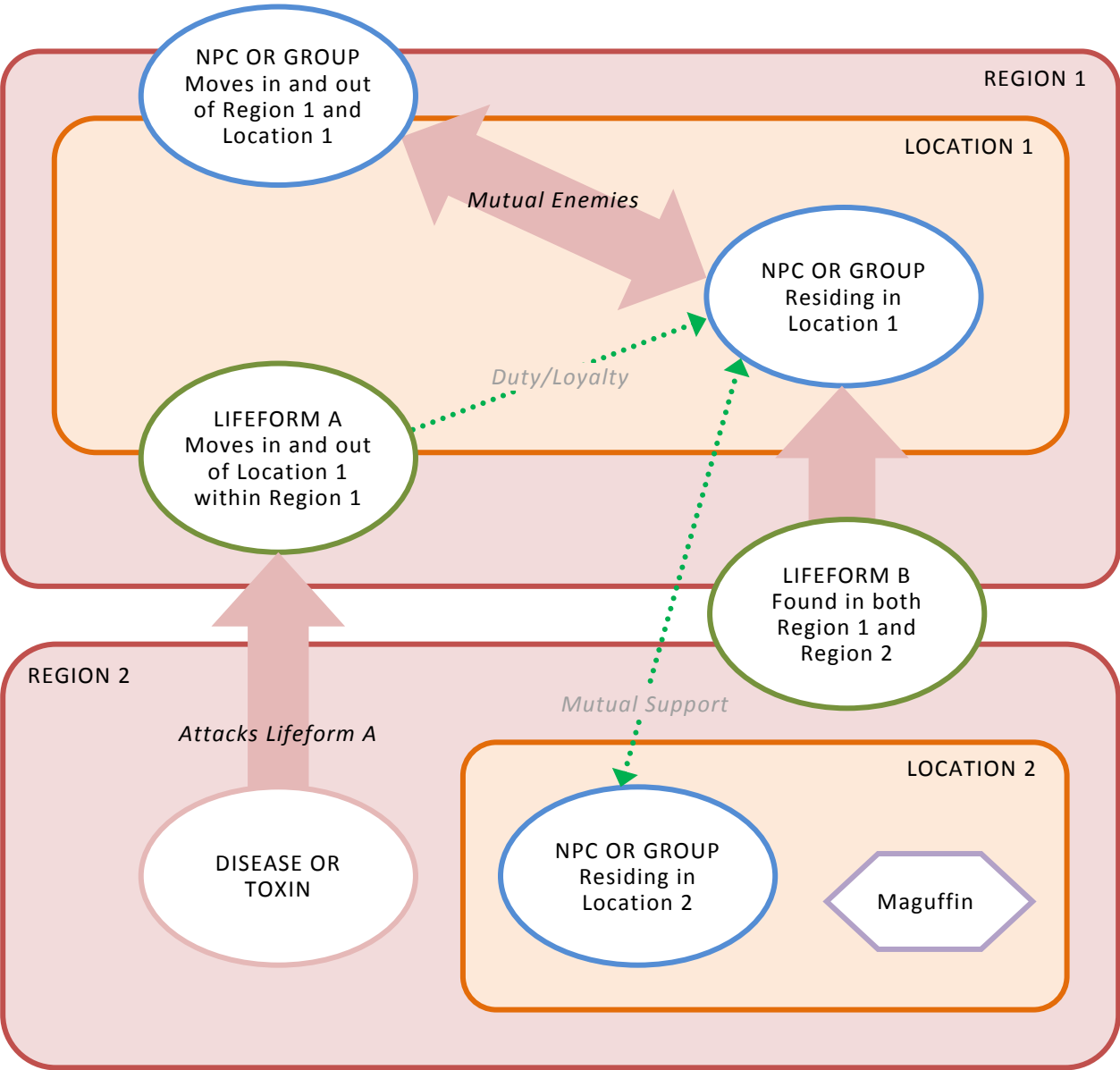
It's important to remember that the Lines of Relation in the diagram represent the already-unfolding drama, which exists without any intercession by the PCs. Once the PCs start affecting things, relations may change. If that happens, the diagram becomes a guide to interpreting those changes.

EXAMPLE PLOTFIELD DIAGRAM

At right is a generic example of a PlotField Diagram.

While spatial relations are *implied* in these illustrations, it is important to remember that a PlotField Diagram is not a map: it is a conceptual tool to help you envision how things are related to other things, and to imagine how the action might unfold.

EXAMPLE PLOTFIELD DIAGRAM



ADDITIONAL RULES

The following rules are expansions to the Core Rules, designed especially for use with the adventures in this book. You may decide to adopt these rules into your DayTrippers multiverse altogether. Or not.

HEXCRAWLING

Some of these adventures include hexmaps for extended or sequential overland adventures. Players may wish to do “hexcrawls”, in which there’s no particular time limit and the PCs explore the map in an ad-hoc way. Hexcrawling is basically compressing or downtiming each day, one day at a time, while moving across a map.

MOVEMENT RATES

With automated survival suits and jumpjets, human beings can cover 40 miles per day over most terrain. Without jumpjets, it’s 20. Movement speed is halved for difficult terrain: forests, mountains, etc.

To compress travel time, ask which direction the PCs are going in, then ask “How long (or how far) will you go if nothing interesting happens?” When they answer, roll to determine whether any encounters occur up to that time. If no encounters occur, the timespan can be summed up in a sentence and the PCs move forward to that moment, ready for a night’s sleep and another go.

THE RULE OF PERCEPTION

PCs are assumed to keep their eyes open while traveling, and a day of compressed time in a region – whether moving or not – is usually enough to learn much of the information in its description block. Obviously, they’ll see much more on the ground than from the air.

PCs should gain at least one new *Perception* – a new detail or interesting fact – each day (or period of compressed time). Perceptions may be used as color, or as hooks for Players to respond to. They may be revealed to the Players in whatever order makes sense. They are listed along with their corresponding Planets, Regions and Locations.

Players should be encouraged to ask questions about the environment, and you should try to answer them descriptively and evocatively. Your descriptions may be fleshed out with Unusual Features, Lifeforms, or Nearby Objects with Weird Qualities. Additional details may be extrapolated from the text, suggested by the Players, brainstormed via Binary Trees (High/Low rolls), improvised based on mood, pacing and Psychic Content, or rolled up on the spot using the various *Generators* in the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*.

HEXCRAWL ENCOUNTERS

When hexcrawling, a lot of gametime is “compressed” – moving across the map, taking in the *Perceptions* and downtiming things like eating, sleeping, standing watch, etc. – until an encounter occurs. Then Compressed Time ends and it’s Go Time.

A typical Region requires one encounter check per day or per hex, whichever is shorter.

When characters are traveling in vehicles or along known roads, encounter checks may be withheld until soon after they enter a new Region or Location.

To check for an encounter, roll 2d6. Apply the mods below to the number rolled:

- 2 if moving stealthily, in shadows, etc (1/4 rate)
- 1 if moving slowly, being observant (1/2 rate)
- +1 if moving fast or under forced march (2x rate)

If the total exceeds the DL, an encounter occurs.

If the total equals the DL, an encounter *nearly* occurs.

When an encounter is determined to have occurred, the nearest and most likely NPC or Event is the one to be encountered. If it’s time for a Crisis, a Crisis-type encounter should occur. If no particular NPC or Event makes itself obvious, a Random Encounter may be determined by rolling on the *Encounter Table* for that Location or Region.

DETERMINING TCVs

The TCV of the encounter depends on context and playstyle. For a one-shot narrative arc, TCV should be calculated to hit its maximum value in the Final Crisis (see *Random Encounters*, p.7).

In a “sandbox” session, the encounter TCV is whatever the dice indicate: 1d6 Giant Ants at TCV 100 might indeed end up being 600 TCV worth of bug-killin’.

NARRATIVE TOYS IN THE SANDBOX

Just because you’re running a sandbox, that doesn’t mean you can’t play with some “narrative” elements. For sandbox sessions without narrative arcs, roll 2d6 on the table below to determine *What Happens*. Same mods as shown above. Use the *Generators* to flesh it out, and toss in some of your Players’ Psychic Content.

WHAT HAPPENS

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 0-3 | Discovery: the PCs learn something |
| 4-5 | Plot Twist (roll one if none exists yet) |
| 6 | Crisis |
| 7 | Complication or Obstacle |
| 8-9 | Effect: PCs cause something to happen |
| 10-11 | PCs walk into Ambush, Trap or Hazard |
| 12-13 | PCs are lost (determine actual location) |

DREAM WORLD TRANSFORMATIONS

When manifesting in a Dream World, the very appearance of the PCs and their equipment (including their ship) may transform to fit the dream reality.

To determine randomly whether or not an object has been transformed, roll 1d6. If the roll is LOWER than the Stability Score, the dream reality “wins” and the object is transformed. (DreamWorlds with a Stability Score of 1 don’t have the power to transform anything; they’re barely stable from minute to minute.) A PC who succeeds in a *Lucid Dreaming* roll may retain control of their own bodily form, or that of a single object.

SELLING ITEMS ON EARTH

Any type of decent sample brought back from another world is usually worth something to someone, somewhere. If it's not something the de facto client wants to pay for, it can usually be sold to the right corporation, museum, research institute or specialist.

Here are some guidelines for determining the monetary value of items brought back from SlipSpace:

<u>ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLES</u>	
Environmental Sample Battery (soil, water, atmosphere, etc)	1M
Unknown Element or Resource	2-12M
<u>ANIMAL AND PLANT SPECIMENS</u>	
Alive	1M per every 10 TCV *
Dead	1M per every 20 TCV *
* x2 if larger than human	
<u>FABRICATED ITEMS</u>	
Common Goods	0-1M
Art	0-5M
Tools	1-6M
Weapons	2-12M
Machines	2-12M
+1 Item	+10M
+2 Item	+20M
+3 Item	+40M
+4 Item	+100M
+5 Item	+200M
+6 Item	+500M
<u>PURE ITEMS</u>	
100-600M	

THE CARTESIAN EXCEPTION

As explained in the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*, the creation of a temporal resistance field around your slipship at the point of origin prevents your absence from affecting the timeline of this universe while you’re gone. But there’s a limit to the amount of time the field can be maintained, and that’s roughly one Earth day.

This limitation has been borne out in the tragic loss of those DayTripper crews, sadly mourned and annually honored in a ceremony at Diaspora Ranch – who “missed their window”, exceeding the maximum 24-hour limit on the RA field and causing themselves to get “ceased” from this timeline.

For some years it was assumed that slips within Cartesian “3space” were subject to the same limitation. But in a recent daring experiment by Marshall Skaggs and the SlipFish team, a new theory has been proven true: Cartesian Slips are not limited in duration. This is because in a Cartesian Slip, you never leave this universe, but only jump around in it like a quantum particle. And that means slips within this universe can last as long as they need to. What a Cartesian Slip does instead... is *alter the potential future*.

Cartesian Slips are not limited in duration. This is because in a Cartesian Slip, you never leave this universe, but only jump around in it.

GM NOTE: If you permit Cartesian Slips to exceed the 24-hour limit, you will lose the idea that the “prime” timeline of our future is a knowable, mappable, predestined thing. Instead, the best temporal physicists will be able to do is estimate the relative probabilities of one or more potential futures. Even then, they won’t be able to tell you which one of those futures you’ll actually be in when you arrive there, nor how “real” it is, compared to the one you traveled from. Like the path of a photon in a double-slit experiment, we can’t know that until we’ve seen it.

HARM LISTINGS

For toxins and diseases, the syntax of a harm listing indicates how the damage occurs mechanically. Examples:

-1 GRACE, -1 MIGHT

means “one hit to GRACE and one hit to MIGHT.”

These hits take place simultaneously.

-1 GRACE > MIGHT

means “one hit to GRACE the first time, then one hit to MIGHT the second time”. The cycle then begins again.

There may be three or even more Stats in the cycle.

MISSION TYPES

The table below indicates which types of missions apply to each of the adventures in the book. This may assist your players in choosing a job off *The Big Board*.

NODE TYPES

AE = Alternate Earth
 DW = Dream World
 KP = Known Planet
 AU = Known Planet in Alternate Universe
 TF = Time Travel/Future
 TP = Time Travel/Past
 UP = Unknown Planet

Story	Exploration	Emergency	Tourism	Survey	Acquisition	Politics
<u>The Mares Of Mars</u> (A Martian Odyssey)	DW UP			AU	AU	
<u>As Luck Would Have It</u> (Accidental Death)		UP		UP		DW
<u>Curious Cure</u> (Bolden's Pets)	DW			UP	KP	
<u>Gluttony</u> (Contamination Crew)	AE		KP	DW		
<u>Crystal Crisis</u> (Devil Crystals Of Arret)	DW UP	DW				
<u>Penal Reform</u> (Devil's Asteroid)	DW UP	AU				
<u>Hunter/Hunted</u> (Duel On Syrtis)	DW		DW		AU	
<u>Halkon's Treasure</u> (Loot Of The Void)	DW UP				DW	
<u>Out Of Thin Air</u> (Sjambak)		DW		KP	KP	
<u>Resource Management</u> (Temple Trouble)	AE DW			AE		
<u>Nobody Home</u> (The Gun)	DW			TF UP		
<u>Savage Planet</u> (The Planet Of Dread)	DW KP				KP	
<u>Busted Beacon</u> (The Repairman)		KP+TF			DW	KP
<u>Purple Jungles Of Zeud</u> (The World Behind The Moon)	DW KP				KP	
<u>Strategy</u> (Warrior Race)				KP	DW KP	
<u>Inscrutable Other</u> (Where The World Is Quiet)	KP	DW		TP		

VECTOR SLIP FAILURES

The table below indicates which types of Vector Slip Failures apply to each of the adventures in the book. This can be useful when trying to determine where your Players end up after a failed Vector Slip calculation.

ADVENTURES BY VECTOR SLIP FAILURE	WRONG EARTH	WRONG TIME	WRONG PLACE	WRONG UNIVERSE
THE MARES OF MARS (A Martian Odyssey)				✓
AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT (Accidental Death)			✓	✓
CURIOUS CURE (Bolden's Pets)			✓	✓
GLUTTONY (Contamination Crew)	✓	✓	✓	✓
CRYSTAL CRISIS (Devil Crystals Of Arret)			✓	✓
PENAL REFORM (Devil's Asteroid)			✓	✓
HUNTER/HUNTED (Duel On Syrtis)				✓
HALKON'S TREASURE (Loot Of The Void)			✓	✓
OUT OF THIN AIR (Sjambak)			✓	✓
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (Temple Trouble)	✓			✓
NOBODY HOME (The Gun)	✓	✓	✓	✓
SAVAGE PLANET (The Planet Of Dread)			✓	✓
BUSTED BEACON (The Repairman)			✓	✓
PURPLE JUNGLES OF ZEUD (The World Behind The Moon)			✓	✓
STRATEGERY (Warrior Race)			✓	✓
INSCRUTIBLE OTHER (Where The World Is Quiet)	✓	✓	✓	✓

WRONG EARTH – A ParaTerran Slip has failed, sending the PCs to an unexpected Alternate Earth.

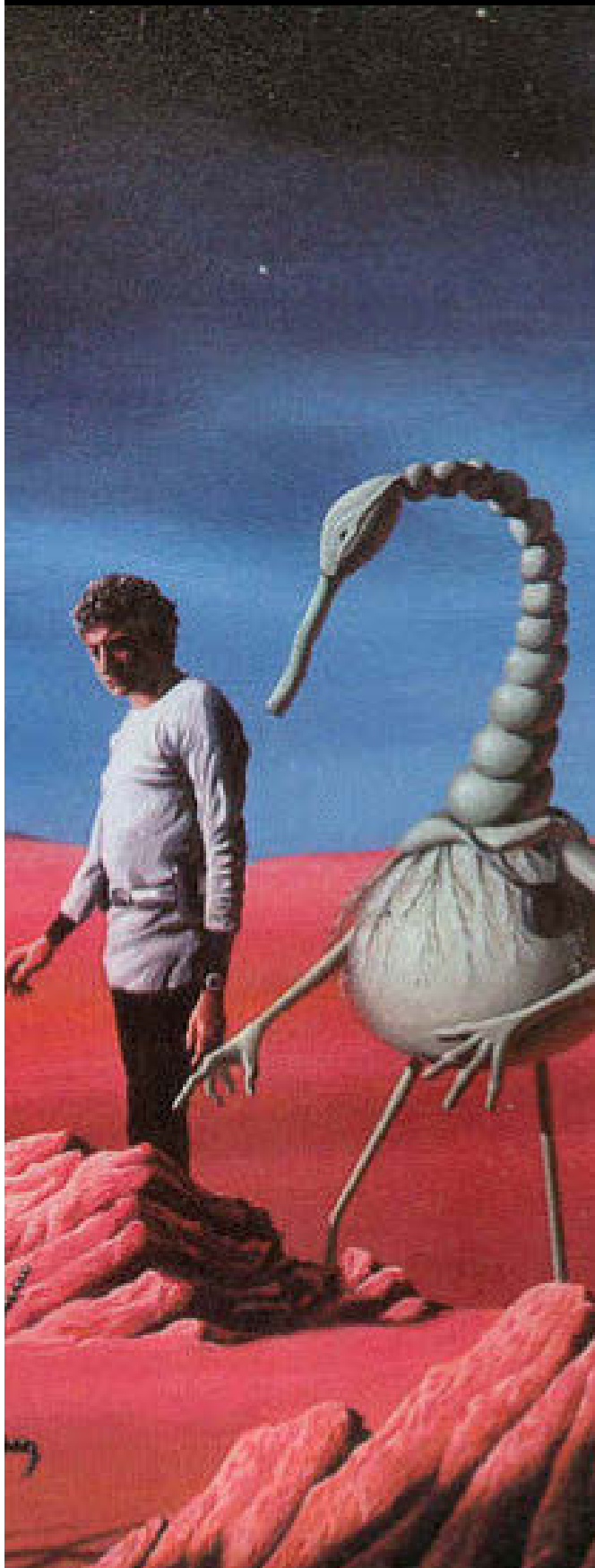
WRONG TIME – A Temporal Slip has failed, sending the PCs to an unexpected Time.

WRONG PLACE – A Cartesian Slip has failed, sending the PCs to an unexpected Place (planet, moon, ship or point in space).

WRONG UNIVERSE – A Subjective or Compound Slip has failed, sending the PCs to an unexpected Pocket Universe.

THE MARES OF MARS

Based on "A Martian Odyssey"
by Stanley G. Weinbaum



OBSTACLES

Dangerous Environment - Hexcrawl
Dangerous Environment - Sand Storm
Dangerous Environment - Valley of Dream-Beasts
Wildlife/Animals - Biopods
Wildlife/Animals - Barrel-Beasts
Wildlife/Animals - Imps
Wildlife/Animals - Triops
Wildlife/Animals - Dream-Beasts

COMPLICATIONS

No Intel

PERKS

50 MV

MAGUFFINS

Naming Rights (Unknown Planet scenario)
Data/Report on Alternate Mars
Data/Report on the Thoth
Contact with the Thoth
Martian Lifeforms
Thoth Texts (1d6M ea)
Splinter Pistol (10M)
Thoth Survival Kit (15M)
Healing Crystal (50M)

BACKSTORY

A scoutbot has returned with video files of a desert planet, showing what appear to be a number of small mud cities and a network of canals linking them. In its 20-hour slip it managed to map most of a single tridrant in the south (roughly 1/20th of the planet's surface), and spent several hours on the surface unmolested while running a spectroscopic analysis. According to the bot's findings, the planet's atmosphere is thin but breathable by humans.

As the presence of cities implies that there will be a need for social contact, the client is looking for a DayTripper team to continue with exploration and mapping. Potential clients include *SlipTrip Travel* (searching for nodes which might be developed into vacation destinations), a division of *Global Nation Products* (searching for easily-exploitable resources), or a field executive from *X Investments*, seeking to broker any valuable assets on the planet.

The mapped region is Tridrant 19. This tridrant includes the continental plateaus of Ausonia and Eridania, as well as the far-southern continent of Tyle II. This is where the DayTrippers will arrive.

A MARTIAN ODYSSEY

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Permanent (6)
PAY: 4M ea

In this scenario, the PCs take the place of Dick Jarvis and the *Ares* crew from Weinbaum's classic story.

On arrival, the PCs' minds are clouded by the reality imposing itself on their consciousness: it feels like a cross-fading film. For a brief time they're afraid to move, unsure what's real and what's a dream.

When they come to their senses on *The Ares*, one of them is gone – hundreds of miles away, sitting in the downed explorer. The others are safely on the ground, aware that their companion is on a survey run to the south, and expecting them back within a few hours.

Of course this is not to be, because the explorer ship's engine has been badly damaged. Unless the others find them first, the lone PC will have to trek northward across the Martian terrain to the *Mare Cimmerium*. Good thing they've got an Automated Survival Suit.

(You *did* bring your Survival Suit, yes?)

THE SAND PLANET

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration
NODE TYPE: Unknown Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL4)
PAY: 4M ea

In this scenario, everything in the story may be used – except the planet isn't Mars. The client wants the PCs to obtain specimens of local lifeforms.

If you're using the *Cartesian Exception* rule (p.9), this adventure may be extended indefinitely (see *Hexcrawling* p.10).

AN ALTERNATE MARS

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Survey or Acquisition
NODE TYPE: Known Planet in Alternate Universe
SLIP TYPE: Compound (ParaTerran + Cartesian) (DL6)
PAY: 10M ea (+2M for secret thief)

In this scenario Earth's timeline split in the 1930s (the *Pivotal Event Table* in the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide* can tell you why). Spaceflight was perfected in the early 20th century, climate change was averted (or never happened), and by 2100 the solar system was under exploration.

The first scoutbot to explore this Node came back with Earth video indicating that a vessel called the *Ares* was about to land on Mars, which had been reported to possess a breathable atmosphere. As such it was determined that the planet might be an ideal candidate for SlipSpace tourism.

So a second scoutbot was dispatched: this time to the alternate Mars, in order to ascertain the truth of the original report. It found mud villages, canals, and the remains of a large city in the antarctic region. The bot also found signs of life moving around in the Martian environment, but was unable to determine whether these lifeforms were flora or fauna. A DayTripper team will be required for a more detailed investigation.

Being a *Compound Slip*, this mission will require an experienced pilot.

OPTIONAL DETAIL: The scoutbot never returned. Its final transmission seemed to show the bot being captured by some sort of barrel-shaped creatures and hurled into a pit of refuse beneath a giant wheel, before the signal abruptly broke off.

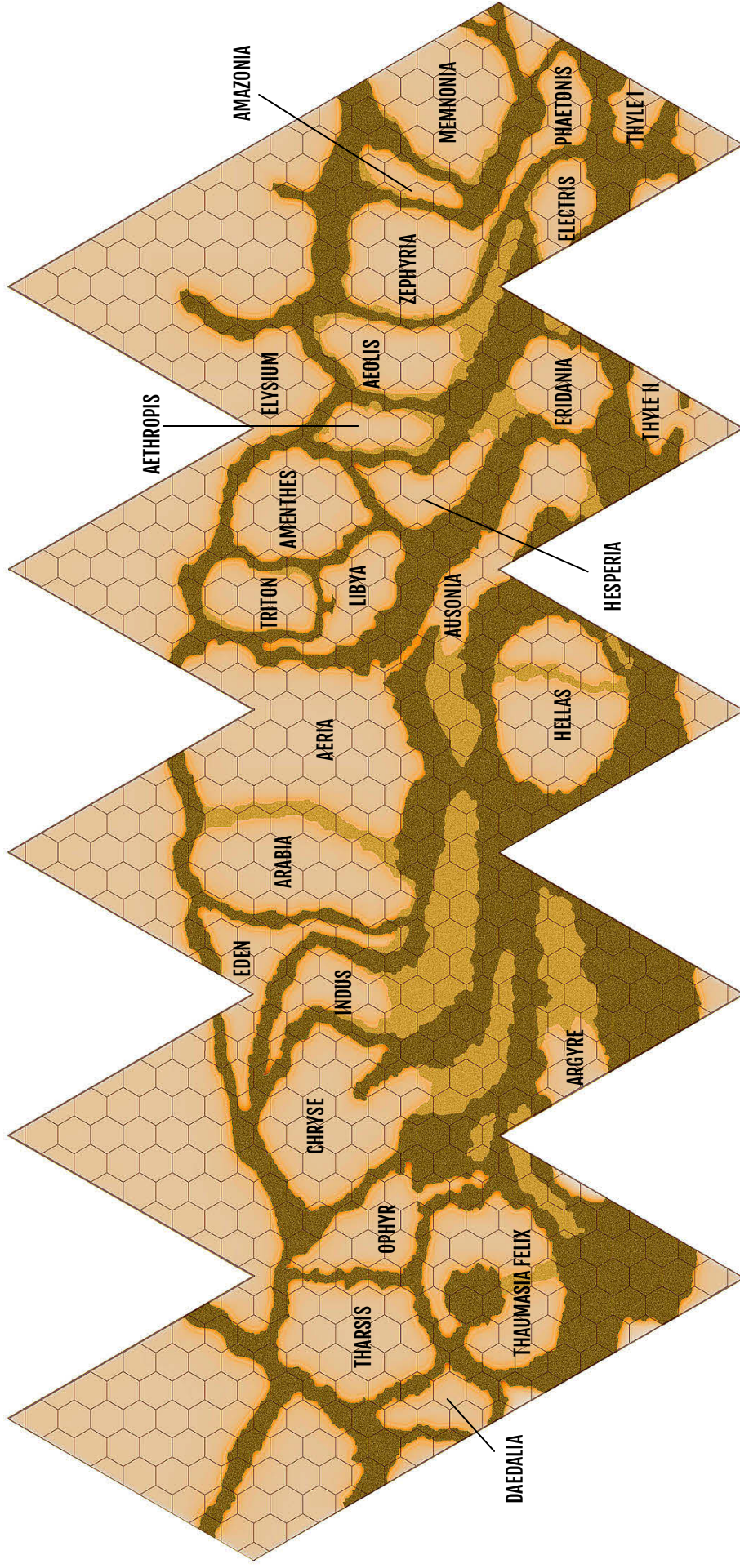
VARIANT: Unbeknownst to the others, one PC has been assigned to obtain the *HEALING CRYSTAL* which was seen in the bot's final transmission.

MARS — THE RED PLANET

Based on the Mercator projections of Giovanni Schiaparelli, circa 1877

1 HEX = 100 mi

- High elevation: 100-200'
- Low elevation: 50-100'
- Sunken, canal, ocean floor



MARS

GRAVITY: 0.34 G

ATMOSPHERE: Nitrogen/Oxygen, Thin

PRESSURE: 0.75 Earth atmospheres

DAY: 24 hrs 37 mins

YEAR: 686.9 Earth days

WATER: No standing water; icecaps at poles

CLIMATE: Wildly Variable

PRECIPITATION: Almost Never (DL11)

BIOSPHERE: Sentient lifeforms

Mars is an arid planet consisting of vast orange deserts separated by grey canyons, criss-crossed by an intricate series of massive canals that feed water northward from the southern polar cap.

While the air is breathable, the low pressure can be a problem. Without a survival suit, physical exertion can cause shortness of breath, suffocation, loss of consciousness or death; HEALTH rolls of increasing difficulty would be required to avoid harmful oxygen deprivation. Even so, Martian winds are substantial enough to sculpt dunes, cause dust devils, and raise sandstorms hundreds of miles in diameter.

Temperatures on Mars are extreme. Daytime temps get above 150°F (65°C) and nighttime temps plummet as low as -80°F (-62°C). The days are only 37 minutes longer than Earth days, but the seasons are about twice as long as those on Earth. In the equatorial regions, summer days are 16 hours long and nights are 8 hours long (the opposite is true for winter). In the antarctic regions, summer nights are 4 hours long, and by late fall and through winter there's no night at all.

The planet is exceptionally level, possessing no great mountain ranges or extremely deep canyons. Mars is 73% of earth's density, and has no heavy metals.

The Martian biosphere is comprised of a small variety of peculiar lifeforms who cooperate in the ecology without direct communication. It is a mostly peaceful existence, with only one predator: the *DREAM-BEAST*.

About twenty "mound cities" are scattered through the southern hemisphere, alongside canals. These cities are occupied by *BARREL-BEASTS*. One large city remains in a preserved state in the southern region of Thyle II. This city is inhabited by some of the few remaining *THOTH*. Scattered around the desert areas are occasional *DREAM-BEASTS* and other creatures.

All Martian lifeforms are both plant and animal. In addition, lower lifeforms are organically fungible: if broken up, individual pieces of living organic matter will crawl around a bit and then stick themselves into the ground to obtain nutrients directly from the Martian soil, and continue growing.

PERCEPTIONS

GRAVITY

- An average person (MIGHT 1) can lift objects that would weight 400 lbs on Earth, jump ten feet from a standing start, and travel 60 miles in a day on foot (120 with a survival suit).

ATMOSPHERE

- Due to the thin air, human beings without survival suits will get winded at about twice their normal rate (i.e., in half the time).
- Sounds are deceptively thin, they move more slowly, and they don't carry very far.

CLIMATE

- Temperatures are extreme, easily fatal to an unprotected human.
- Sandstorms often pop up unexpectedly, and die down just as quickly.
- When the air is coldest (late night and early morning) it stings lungs and skin: -1 to all GRACE rolls unless a Survival Suit is worn.
- Thin wispy clouds sometimes appear in the south, near the pole.

CANALS

- Some canals have a trickle of yellowish water.
- They are often surrounded by Walking Grass.

BIOSPHERE

- What appears to be miles of grey carpeting covering the mare floor in fact turns out to be gigantic colonies of Biopods, numbering in the millions.
- Bio-scanners will indicate that all Martian lifeforms possess traits of both plants and animals.
- The body of a dead *DREAM-BEAST* is violently broken apart by *BARREL-BEASTS*. Some of the bits "plant themselves" in the soil, drawing nutrients directly and growing independently.
- Two moving clumps of *WALKING GRASS* and *BIOPODS* cooperatively break down a large scrublike bush with triangular leaves.
- A Thoth helps a Barrel-Beast replace a broken grate or fix some canal machinery. Many of the Martian lifeforms seem to be cooperative.

DESERT/PLATEAU

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Sand/Stones/Slopes
CONDITION: Dried, Dessicated
TERRAIN: Sandy/Smooth
WEATHER: Variable wind, no clouds
BIODIVERSITY: Low/Stable: few local lifeforms
DOMINANT COLORS: Orange and Tan
RESOURCES: Plant/Animal Parts, Sand, Rock
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

The raised desert areas are covered with shifting orange sands, occasionally broken by outcroppings of rock or weirdly-sculpted dunes, and swept sporadically by intermittent winds and sandstorms.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	Lone Thoth*
4	Dream-Beasts (1-6)
5	Solitary Dream-Beast
6	Thoth Group (1-6)
7	Walking Grass
8	Barrel-Beasts (1-6)
9-10	Sandstorm
11	Unusual Feature or Canal (50/50)
12	Pyramids (Pyramid-Builder)

CANAL

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Desert/Plateau
CONDITION: Drying
TERRAIN: Sandy, Rocky
WEATHER: Variable wind, no clouds
BIODIVERSITY: Low/Stable: few local lifeforms
DOMINANT COLORS: Yellow and Dull Green
RESOURCES: Plant/Animal Parts, Sand, Rock, Water
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

A ditch 100' to 600' wide, surveyed and engineered with great precision. Most are dry. In the southern hemisphere 1 in 6 has a trickle of yellowish water, and these are often festooned with *WALKING GRASS*.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-4	Lone Thoth*
5	Dream-Beast
6	Thoth Group (1-6)
7	Barrel-Beasts (1-6)
8	Walking Grass
9	Sandstorm
10	Broken-down pump or blocked grate
11	Unusual Feature
12	Pyramids (Pyramid-Builder)

CANYON/MARE

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Sand/Stones/Slopes
CONDITION: Dried, Dessicated
TERRAIN: Sandy, Rocky
WEATHER: Variable wind, no clouds
BIODIVERSITY: Low/Stable: few local lifeforms
DOMINANT COLORS: Grey and Brown
RESOURCES: Plant/Animal Parts, Sand, Rock
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
ENCOUNTER DL: Uncommon (8)

These lower elevations, now dry and stubbled with blobby grey growths, may once have been covered with water. Huge swaths of the mare floor are like "living carpets" of *BIPODS*, growing and crawling around in the dry dirt.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	Lone Thoth*
4-5	Thoth Group (1-6)
6	Unusual Feature or Canal (50/50)
7	Biopods
8	Sandstorm
9-10	Silica Bubbles (leads to pyramids)
11-12	Triops

SOUTH POLAR REGION

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Desert/Plateau
CONDITION: Drying
TERRAIN: Sandy, Powdery
WEATHER: Variable wind, no clouds
BIODIVERSITY: Low/Stable: few local lifeforms
DOMINANT COLORS: Greenish Yellow and Orange
RESOURCES: Plant/Animal Parts, Sand, Rock.
Some canals in the south have a trickle of water.
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
ENCOUNTER DL: Likely (7)

Approaching the south polar region, the air gets thinner and long wispy clouds sometimes appear overhead. From the Thyle landmasses the polar icecap can be seen, draining directly into the canal system.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	Lone Thoth*
4-5	Barrel-Beasts (1-6)
6	Dream-Beast
7	Thoth Group (1-6)
8	Unusual Feature or Canal (50/50)
9-10	Imp
11-12	Triops

* The first time this encounter occurs, the "Lone Thoth" will be Tweel, unless Tweel has already been encountered.

BIOPOD

LIFEFORM

GRACE 1 Mass Attack+1
TCV 10

The lower elevations of Mars are spotted with sprawling colonies of these little grey-green creatures, squirming and crawling around in the dirt.



Appearing rather like mossy bushes 3 to 18 inches in length, they crawl out of your way as you approach and come back together again as you pass. If seriously threatened, they may attack en masse, inflicting dozens of small bites on the unfortunate victim, which will sting but will not do any serious harm (1 hit).

Biopods are an important part of the Martian lifecycle. In the absence of bacteria to break down proteins and cause decomposition, Biopods perform this function for the highly-evolved species, returning otherwise-wasted nutrients into the living ecosystem.

ENCOUNTERS

- A huge “sea” of Biopods burrows into the ground all at once (a sandstorm is coming).
- (Crisis) The Biopods are alarmed by something and stampede madly toward the PCs.

WALKING GRASS

LIFEFORM

TCV 0

These cousins of the *BIOPODS* resemble grass-like blades about as long as a human index finger, with two thin, stemmy legs beneath.

Seen from a distance en masse, they may appear to be a nice green lawn.

Unlike their cousins the *BIOPODS*, Walking Grasses are harmless and possess no aggressive instincts.

ENCOUNTERS

- When approached, the “lawn” parts out of your way, and as you pass, it c

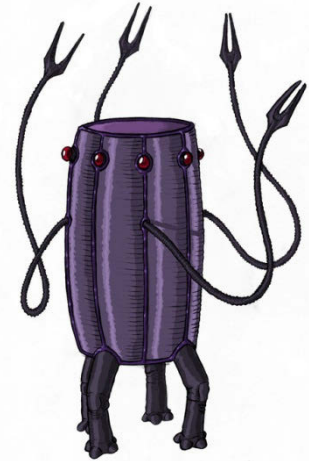


BARREL-BEAST

LIFEFORM

GRACE 1 Throw Dart+1
TCV 10

These minimally-sentient creatures inhabit mud cities along the canals (one such *MOUND CITY* straddles the canal between Eridania and Electris). They resemble a barrel on four legs with four arms or tentacles, each ending in two finger-like nippers.



A row of eyes surrounds the body. The top is a tightly stretched diaphragm.

Typically seen pushing little coppery carts in and out of their cities, they ignore anything that doesn't block them. If blocked, they'll poke at you with their pushcarts and try to continue.

If you speak to one of them, it will stop and drum on its upper diaphragm, sending a signal. From then on, they will *all* repeat whatever words you said.

The Barrel-Beasts are completely focused on their tasks. They leave the city with empty pushcarts and return with their pushcarts full of dirt and organic matter. They take this material into the underground city, where their pushcarts are emptied beneath the grinding wheel of the mulch machine. This produces a steady stream of finely ground resources, which are used for both construction and food.

ENCOUNTERS

- One or more Barrel-Beasts are venturing out into the desert with empty carts.
- Some Barrel-Beasts are struggling to lift a dead Dream-Beast into a pushcart; finally they break it into pieces.
- One or more Barrel-Beasts are coming back to the city with carts full of dirt & debris.
- (Possible Crisis) A Barrel-Beast takes something the PCs dropped or placed nearby.
- (Crisis) The Barrel-Beasts are agitated, perhaps by something the PCs have done, or perhaps their mulch machine has stopped functioning. One of them has a cart full of foot-long copper darts, which the others grab up as weapons.

DREAM-BEAST

LIFEFORM

BRAINS 2 Create Illusion+2
GRACE 2
MIGHT 2
TCV 125

A writhing black, rope-armed horror, the Dream-Beast uses its victim's innermost longings and desires to trap its prey.



Fully extended, a Dream-Beast is close to twenty feet long. It resides in a pit in the ground, and uses its powers of illusion to lure its victims within reach of its tentacles: victims will see whatever they desire or wish for. This is a visual illusion. Overcoming this Illusion by an act of will requires a HARD (DL5) roll vs PSYCHE.

If the beast is wounded, the illusion immediately ends. With a flurry of tentacles, a spurt of black corruption and a disgusting sucking noise, it will attempt to pull itself and its arms back into the ground.

The Dream-Beast population is expanding across the surface of Mars, encroaching on sources of water. Usually solitary creatures, they instinctively gather in great numbers to breed once every six Martian years.

ENCOUNTERS

- 3d6 *BARREL-BEASTS* attack a Dream-Beast.
- A Dream-Beast has captured a lone Thoth, which is twittering and screeching for help.
- (Crisis) A small "community" of Dream-Beasts creates multiple illusions against different characters.
- (Crisis) A Dream-Beast creates the illusion that it's dead, until a character comes close.

PYRAMIDS

EVENT

TCV 0

A line of pyramids, very small at first, can be seen in the sand leading roughly northward. As you follow the line northward the pyramids grow larger. Each pyramid has its top broken open, and some busted rock pieces piled around its outer edge. When you reach the end of the line, the largest pyramid is unopened. If you wait, here you may encounter the *PYRAMID-BUILDER*.

SILICA BUBBLES

EVENT

TCV 0

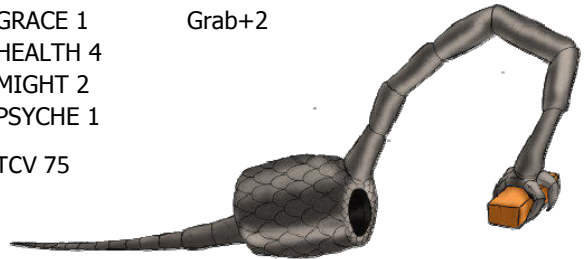
A wave of bubbles comes drifting down from the cliffs above: small transparent spheres resembling glass tennis balls, light enough to float for miles in the air. They go bouncing by like soap bubbles, drifting with the wind, and seem to have no intention or purpose. If you crack one open, a bad smell comes out.

In fact, these bubbles are the "spores" of the *PYRAMID-BUILDER*, and if one of them happens to pop in an area rich with silicon, the gases inside will spawn a new Pyramid-Builder - in about ten thousand years!

PYRAMID-BUILDER

LIFEFORM

BRAINS 1
CHARM 1
GRACE 1 Grab+2
HEALTH 4
MIGHT 2
PSYCHE 1
TCV 75



A silicon-based, non-sentient lifeform, the Pyramid-Builder has a body like a big grey cask with one gigantic arm, a mouth-hole at one end, and a stiff, pointed tail at the other. It has no other limbs and no discernible face.

ENCOUNTERS

- The top tiers of the largest pyramid – the only unopened one – heave and shake. Suddenly the top bricks slide down with a crash, and a strange beast comes out. The creature drags itself a few yards in the implied direction of the pyramid line, inserts its tail in the sand, pushes upright, and sits there for about ten minutes. Then with a creaking and rustling, it moves its arm to the mouth-hole, takes out a brick, places it carefully on the ground, and sits still again. After about ten minutes it creates another brick. This process continues until the thing has built a new pyramid all the way around itself.
- Shortly before the third brick comes out, there is a little rustle and out pops a whole stream of *SILICA BUBBLES*. If you've encountered them before, now you know where they came from.

THOTH

Friendly and obsequious, the few remaining survivors of a once-great spacefaring civilization.

BRAINS 2 One Practical Skill+1

CHARM 1

GRACE 3 Precise Leap +1

HEALTH 2 Martian Survival+1

MIGHT 1

PSYCHE 1

TCV 55

BODY SHAPE: Round body; long neck; tiny head.

BODY SURFACE: Covered in feathery appendages. Different Thothes have different-coloured feathers, ranging from light yellows and tans to deep browns, oranges and reds.

SYMMETRY: Bilateral

SUSTENANCE: The Thoth are neither animal nor plant, but both. They do not need sleep. Each day they stick their beaks into the soil for several hours, ingesting nutrients directly out of the ground.

APPENDAGES: The Thoth has a set of feathery "brows" at the base of the beak which can cover their nostrils, and similar rows of fuzz to shield the eyes. These hairy growths provide protection in sandstorms, retain warmth on cold nights, and retract when not in use. The beak-like apparatus protruding from the head is flexible, and bends from side to side as the Thoth breathes, speaks or displays emotion. The Thoth has two long scrawny legs, and two equally scrawny arms.

MANIPULATORS: Two four-toed feet and two bony four-fingered hands. The hands feature sharp retractable claws which are very rarely exposed, and used only for self-defense.

SIZE: 6-8' tall.

LOCOMOTION: Highly active and agile, the Thoth can leap well over a hundred feet through the thin Martian air, aided by the low gravity. They end these leaps with their long beaks buried in the ground. They can leap up tall Martian cliffs and cross desert valleys with ease. However, they can also move more slowly, by walking bipedally.

SENSES: The Thoth possess all five standard hominid senses.

SENSORY APPARATUS: The eyes, nostrils and ears are all located in the head, while the brain is located in the chest.

REPRODUCTION: Thothes are asexual and reproduce via conjugation: two Thothes make contact for a while until an infant "buds" between them. This method of reproduction is not uncommon on Mars, as evidenced by the Barrel-Beasts.

OTHER CHARACTERISTICS: The Thoth communicate in whistles, clicks, twitters and shrills. Their language is highly complex, with no single word for anything. They are very clever and can learn simple human terms (nouns and physically demonstrable verbs) with ease. They have a written language which looks like wavy white lines, circles and spirals, scribed on black leathery paper. It's too complicated for humans to grasp.

ENCOUNTERS

- A lone Thoth (perhaps Tweel) is wandering around, taking readings or examining the state of the canal system.
- 1d6 Thoth are (1-2) fixing a machine, (3-4) directing a group of Barrel-Beasts, (5-6) chasing an Imp
- (Crisis) 1d6 Thoth need help: (1-2) fighting Dream-Beasts, (3-4) escaping a landslide, (5-6) capturing a Triops



THE THOTH

SOCIETY

SOCIETAL VALUES: Knowledge, History, Service
SOCIETAL PROBLEMS: In need of vital resources
TECHNOLOGY: Glass, Metal Alloys, Solar Power, Steam, Compressed Gas, Old Machines
RESOURCES: Few resources remain besides sand, rocks, and the lifeforms themselves, with a little frozen water remaining at the poles. Ten thousand years ago their civilization possessed spaceflight, and collapsed when they consumed all of the planet's finite resources.
UNDERSTANDING OF REALITY: The Thoth understand space travel and are familiar (through written histories) with all the inner planets of the solar system.

CULTURE

The Thoth possess an exceptionally unassuming and friendly nature, but are formidable opponents when cornered. They have tools, medicines, and some sort of distilled beverage. Socially and technologically, they are further advanced than humans in several ways. This may not be immediately apparent, due to their vastly alien mindset and the general decline of their technology due to near-total resource depletion.

Only a few thousand Thoth remain on Mars, living in about twenty cities scattered throughout the southern hemisphere (to be placed as you wish). Socially they are anarchists, each working out of instinct and compassion, requiring no government of any kind. They know no war, and cooperate with other Martian species because it requires many communities to keep the ancient canal systems operating at all.

A few hundred Thoth reside in the ruins of the southernmost city on Thyle I, preserving what can be preserved of their culture and tending the ancient power station which pumps water northward from the polar icecap.

HISTORY

Thoth civilization is much older than ours, but is in an advanced state of decline. Much of their technology has been lost to history, and the limited natural resources of the planet were depleted long ago. The few remaining powerstations and pump systems are driven by solar power and maintained with the help of the *BARREL-BEASTS*.

The Thoth know what humans are, having visited Earth thousands of years ago. They were seen as gods by the Ancient Egyptians, to whom they gave the gift of writing. This led to the earthly interpretation of the word "Thoth" as the name of an Egyptian god: the god of knowledge. Players may make an *Anthropology* or *History* roll vs DL 3 to recognize this.

TWEEL

NPC

BRAINS 3 Stellar Nav+1
CHARM 2
GRACE 3 Leap+1 Pistol+1
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 1
PSYCHE 1

GEAR: *Thoth Survival Kit* including a Splinter Pistol, a Charcoal Lighter, and a Lightsource

TCV 71

A friendly and adventurous *THOTH*, *Tweel* may be encountered anywhere in the Martian wilderness around Xanthus or Thyle II. He is smart, curious and extroverted, and he ranges quite far in his travels, occassionally stopping off at the mud cities to check on canal operations. He can often be found in the *THOTH LIBRARY*, studying ancient texts.

Tweel has orange feathers and powerful legs, and wears a little black case around his neck. This case contain a *Thoth Survival Kit* (see below). He gets excited easily, and talks in a series of fast clackings and twitterings. If approached in a genial way he will hold out his hands, empty, as a gesture of friendship.

Remember that the Thoth language has no regular nouns as we know them. Most of the time, Tweel refers to himself as 'Tweel,' but sometimes it's 'P-p-p-prot,' and sometimes it's sixteen other noises.

Tweel can cover 150' in one jump, sailing through the air stretched out like a spear, landing with his beak wedged into the ground. This does not hurt him at all; in fact he does it frequently.

Like most Thoth, Tweel is very clever, and improvised communication is possible between our species. In a few hours, Tweel can learn dozens of words.

THOTH SURVIVAL KIT (PRO KIT)

Earth Value: (whole kit) 15M, (revolver alone) 10M

Tweel carries a small kit with useful items in it when traveling around. These kits are not uncommon among the Thoth. Press one end and it pops open, press the middle and it seals seamlessly. Inside can be found:

- A firestone – like a burning coal in a metal tin, hot enough to start a fire if touched to wood.
- A glowstone – a small rounded rock which glows with a pale yellow light (good enough for illuminating small rooms).
- A steam-propelled glass revolver or "Splinter Pistol" that fires poisoned glass splinters from a replaceable canister holding 100 shots.



In "A Martian Odyssey" Dick Jarvis crash-lands on the desert plateau of Thyle II. His plan is to walk back to the landing site of the Ares in the central Mare Cimmerium, a distance of roughly 800 miles. When picked up by Putz at the location of the Mud City, he had walked approximately 400 miles over an unknown number of days (probably five or six).

NOTE: The region Jarvis refers to as "Xanthus" in "A Martian Odyssey" and "Valley of Dreams" is a continental plateau divided by the remains of a great canal into two sections: Eridania and Electris. On the map above, one hex equals 100 miles.

SAND STORM

ENCOUNTER

TCV 30 (mass obstacle)

The winds grow chaotic and dense. A nasty sand cloud arises from the dunes and sweeps toward you at great speed, sand and grit whipping around in the thin air. Dust devils spring up and begin whirling in counterpoint, scattered throughout the region. It's difficult to see, and difficult to breathe.

Thoths, if there are any around, will extend their feathery brows to cover their eyes and nostrils. Most creatures in the area will simply dig in to the sand until the storm passes.

A person without adequate protection (such as an Automated Survival Suit or a weather-sealed tent) must make a CHALLENGING (DL3) *Survival* roll to avoid taking 1 hit of HEALTH damage through dust inhalation, mild abrasions from flying rock and sand, and irritation to the eyes and nose. This roll (DL3) must be made for every 10 minutes the character remains in the storm.

The sandstorm will last 5-30 minutes (5d6).



MARS TRIDRANT 19
30° - 80° SOUTH LATITUDE

SCALE: 1 hex = 100 mi

- High elevation: 100-200'
- Low elevation: 50-100'
- Sunken, canal, ocean floor

LOCATION

MOUND CITY

SURROUNDINGS: Desert/Plateau
 CONDITION: Drying
 TERRAIN: Sandy, Rocky
 WEATHER: Variable wind, no clouds
 BIODIVERSITY: Low/Stable: few local lifeforms
 DOMINANT COLORS: Yellow and Dull Green
 RESOURCES: Plant/Animal Parts, Sand, Rock, Water
 UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
 ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

From the outside, a pile of mud blobs sits about a mile from the canal, surrounded by large rubbery plants. A trickle of water runs through the canal. A path leads out of the city and into a network of paths which crisscrosses the area, trailing out into the desert.

Inside the place is a labyrinth, with twisting passages branching and crossing, seemingly at random. It's easy to get lost: journeying any further than the entrance requires a PSYCHE roll vs DL 3 every minute, to avoid losing your bearings. Following a Barrel-Beast with an empty pushcart won't necessarily help you find the way out, for they often run around aimlessly within the city, dashing in one passage and out another, or going in circles. They seem to pay little or no attention to outsiders, under most conditions.

If the Barrel-Beasts or their activities are continually or forcefully disturbed, they will begin chasing their interlopers. One will arrive with a pushcart full of foot-long copper darts, and the others, seizing these weapons, will hurl them in attack.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

- 2-3 1d6 Barrel-Beasts breaking apart a dead Dream-Beast
- 4-6 1d6 Barrel-Beasts with full pushcarts
- 7-8 1d6 Barrel-Beasts with empty pushcarts
- 9-10 3d6 Barrel-Beasts hurrying to the Mulching Room
- 11-12 Two barrel-beasts are spotted in the act of procreation, standing quietly near each other with a little one growing between them, joined to both.

Eventually, the PCs find one large corridor which slants upwards for a great distance, apparently headed for the surface. Suddenly it opens out into a huge *DOMED CHAMBER*. This is the *Mulching Room*.

PERCEPTIONS

- A maze of twisting passages winding in every direction.
- The temperature is constant; you can't tell night from day. It's possible to lose track of time.
- Black rods set into the tunnel walls at irregular intervals, giving off a sputtering electric light.
- Random oddities, noises, weird machines, deep shafts, piles of bricks, mounds of shiny sand.

LOCATION

DOMED CHAMBER

Aka the *Mulching Room*. Sunlight streams in through a crack in the roof. At the rear of this chamber is a gigantic machine with an enormous wheel that turns slowly, grinding up the rubbish dumped below it by the barrel creatures. Sand, stones, plants, living matter and non-living matter, is all ground into a powder that gets sifted away beneath the machine.

Occasionally one of the barrel-beasts throws itself into the mulch pile to be ground up with the rubbish, and another takes over its pushcart. Judging by the lack of response, these "suicides" are apparently not at all unusual. They may be purposeful, even altruistic.

There is something beyond the wheel, shining on a sort of low pedestal: a little fluorescent crystal about the size of an egg. This is the *HEALING CRYSTAL*.

MAGUFFIN

HEALING CRYSTAL

Earth Value: 50M

A little fluorescent crystal about the size of an egg. The light from it slightly stings the skin, almost like a static discharge. This light has the property of instantly healing 1 hit of damage from any tissue exposed to it.

The crystal has the curative properties of hard x-rays or gamma radiations, only more so. Somehow it has the ability to destroy diseased tissue, while leaving healthy tissue completely unharmed. After healing the first hit, or if added to any medical or therapeutic regimen, it will provide a +3 to all Healing rolls.

THOTH CITY

LOCATION

SURROUNDINGS: Desert/Plateau
CONDITION: Drying, Cold
TERRAIN: Sandy, Powdery
WEATHER: Variable wind, no clouds
BIODIVERSITY: Low/Stable: few local lifeforms
DOMINANT COLORS: Yellow and Grey
RESOURCES: Plant/Animal Parts, Sand, Rock, Water
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
ENCOUNTER DL: Likely (7)

Three Thoth cities can be found in the southern hemisphere. The largest, Tweel's home, is located on Thyle I near the southern polar icecap.

The angled grid of the city streets is mazelike. Finding your way back to any known spot will require a BRAINS roll vs DL 3.

Most of the buildings here were once powerstations and pump-houses, but the machinery was long ago broken down and carted away. Within this city may be found the *THOTH LIBRARY* and *THOTH POWERSTATION*.

Southward toward the canal a cluster of huts may be found. Comprised of rubble from the city, it looks almost like a refugee camp. This is where the surviving Thothes reside.

This city was once a major installation. Now just one *THOTH POWERSTATION* remains, of the many that once sent water coursing through the canals of Mars.

PERCEPTIONS

- Empty buildings are all that remains of a city that once housed millions, the size of NYC, now quiet and full of shadows
- The buildings are vast, very few windows, some exteriors have been damaged by meteorites
- Architecture that would be impossible on Earth: reverse angles, flying buttresses and buildings with narrow bases that get wider as they rise
- Decay has been very slow due to lack of rainfall, bacteria, earthquakes and vegetation
- This place is 15 million years old
- Occasional whispering and rustling sounds
- You feel you're being watched

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-4	Unusual Feature
5-6	Lone Thoth
7-8	Thoth Group
9-10	Barrel-Beasts
11	Imp
12	Triops

THOTH POWERSTATION

LOCATION

A huge solar-powered powerplant for driving water via the canal system. Sunlight focuses on a cylinder in the center of a gigantic concave mirror, from which an electric current is drawn to power the pumps.

The machinery is tended by groups of Barrel-Beasts. They have a symbiotic arrangement with the Thothes, who build the canals, while the Barrel-Beasts maintain them and keep the canals clear of overgrowth.

This is not an agreement or treaty: it's a tropized habit arising from interspecies dependence (not unlike the relationship between flowers and bees on Earth: each helps the other, but neither does it *for* the other).

THOTH LIBRARY

LOCATION

The big doors of this colossal hall are blocked open by sand. It's totally dark inside but for a pallid ray of sunlight. Sounds reverberate thinly. There are scores of little alcoves all around, filled with Thoth texts.

Thothes will do their best to prevent Imps and Triops from reading these texts, for reasons that aren't immediately apparent. Humans, if deemed friendly, might be permitted to take one or two. These texts will be worth 1-6M each to researchers on Home-Earth.

Massive bas-relief images show Thothes engaged in various activities:

- North Wall: working together (society);
- East Wall: building a machine (science);
- South Wall: creating beautiful objects (art);
- West Wall: a giant seated bird-headed figure. In front of this figure is the figure of a *human*, kneeling as if in worship, offering what appears to be a sacrificial gift to the reclining creature.

This is a representation of the god *Thoth*, Egyptian patron of philosophy and writing, who visited Earth in the infancy of our civilization (make an *Anthropology* or *History* roll vs DL 3 to recognize this).

IMP

LIFEFORM

BRAINS 2
CHARM 1
GRACE 2
HEALTH 1
MIGHT 1
PSYCHE 2

Bite+1



TCV 25

A semi-intelligent creature the size of a large rat, whose two pointed ears or horns give it a frightening appearance, resembling “an evil-faced imp”.

The creature’s face suggests a tiendish intelligence, and its squeaky vocalizations sound strangely like mocking laughter. Its body is cloaked with a thin leathery material, like a dark, fluttering cape. Imps may sometimes be found in the Thoth Library, where they are run out immediately by any Thoths who see them. They are drawn to the books, but whether for reading or eating is unknown.

ENCOUNTERS

- An Imp is struggling with a Thoth text, trying to drag it into a small underground passage.
- An Imp is startled by the PCs and scurries away, dropping a Thoth text.
- (Crisis) 1d6 Imps fall upon the PCs from above, trying to take something of value from them.

TRIOPS

LIFEFORM

BRAINS 3
CHARM 1
GRACE 4
HEALTH 1
MIGHT 1
PSYCHE 2

Hide+2

Claw+2



TCV 120

These mysterious creatures have three glowing green eyes, and may be found lurking in the Library. They do not wish to be seen. They will make no contact, preferring to remain in shadows. Slithering, rustling noises and whispers emit from the aisles where they hide.

The creatures are believed to be related to the Venusian *Triops Noctivivans*, hailing from Venus' dark side. How they got to Mars is a mystery, but they are interested in Thoth texts and technology.

ENCOUNTERS

- A lone Triops is stealing texts from the THOTH LIBRARY.
- 1d3 Triops are tinkering with a Thoth machine.
- (Crisis) 1d3 Triops attack the PCs, trying to take whatever technological items they see.

VALLEY OF THE DREAM-BEASTS

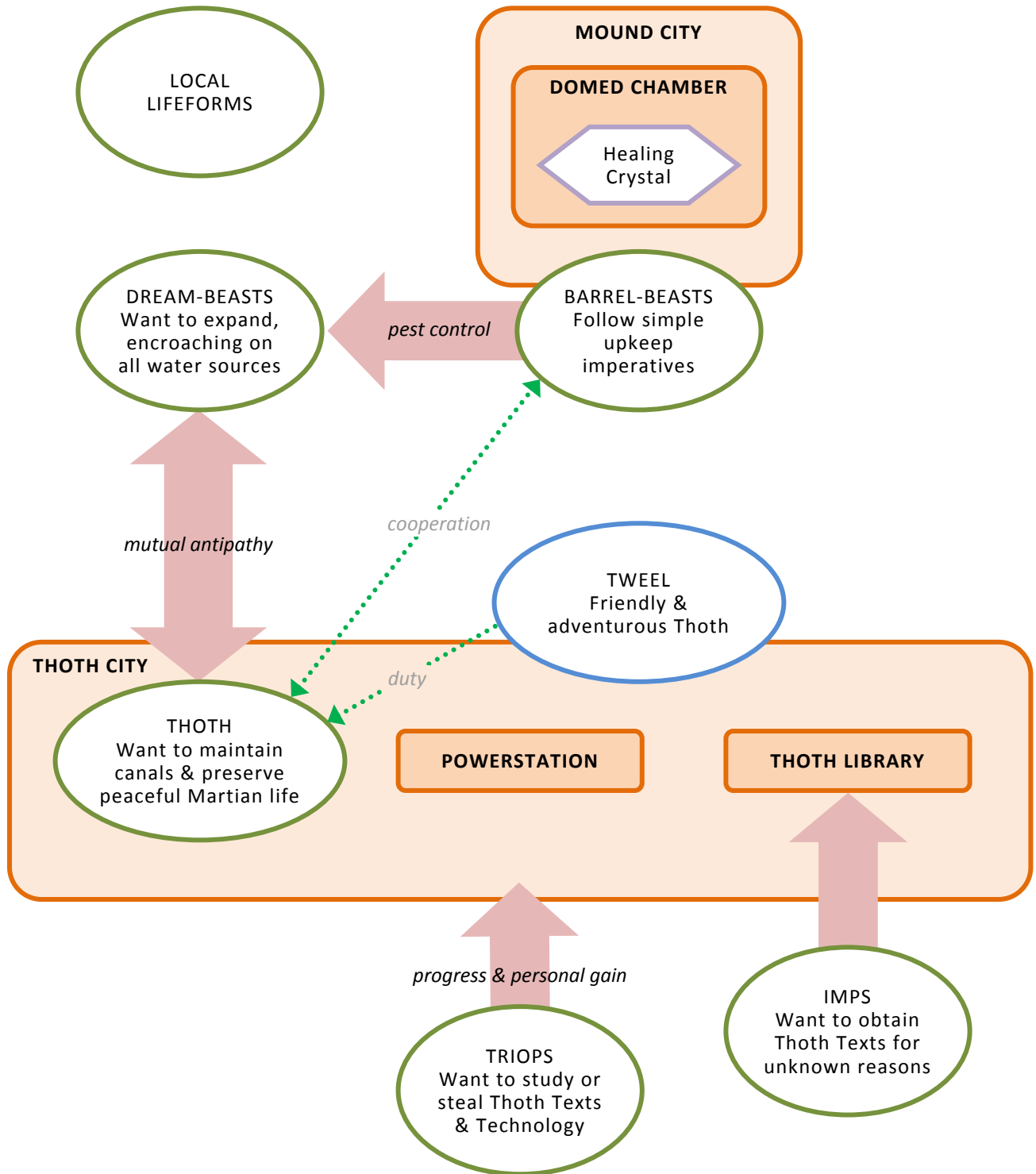
LOCATION

SURROUNDINGS: Desert/Plateau
CONDITION: Drying, Dessicated
TERRAIN: Sandy, Powdery
WEATHER: Variable wind, no clouds
BIODIVERSITY: Low/Stable: few local lifeforms
DOMINANT COLORS: Grey and Black
RESOURCES: Plant/Animal Parts, Sand, Rock
UNUSUAL FEATURES: See below
ENCOUNTER DL: Impossible to be alone (1)

This large valley is only major geological feature on the Thyle I landmass, and is located about 150 miles southeast of the Thoth city, near the edge of the Mare Australe. Covered with what seem to be blobby grey plants, the valley is actually home to hundreds of *DREAM-BEASTS* – enough to spread out a complete picture of every desire you’ve ever had - even forgotten desires drawn out of your subconscious. It’s enough to drive you mad. Dick Jarvis described the feeling “like witnessing both heaven and hell at the same time.”

Overcoming this chaotic mass Illusion requires a PSYCHE roll vs DL6. Characters who fail this roll will lose control of themselves for a round, rolling a random response on the *SDS Table* (see the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*).

THE MARES OF MARS



A MARTIAN ODYSSEY

by Stanley G. Weinbaum

When Dick Jarvis crashlanded in the Thyle region of Mars, he could never have foreseen the wonders and dangers that lay ahead!

Jarvis stretched himself as luxuriously as he could in the cramped general quarters of the *Ares*.

"Air you can breathe!" he exulted. "It feels as thick as soup after the thin stuff out there!" He nodded at the Martian landscape stretching flat and desolate in the light of the nearer moon, beyond the glass of the port.

The other three stared at him sympathetically—Putz, the engineer, Leroy, the biologist, and Harrison, the astronomer and captain of the expedition. Dick Jarvis was chemist of the famous crew, the *Ares* expedition, first human beings to set foot on the mysterious neighbor of the earth, the planet Mars. This, of course, was in the old days, less than twenty years after the mad American Doheny perfected the atomic blast at the cost of his life, and only a decade after the equally mad Cardoza rode on it to the moon. They were true pioneers, these four of the *Ares*. Except for a half-dozen moon expeditions and the ill-fated de Lancey flight aimed at the seductive orb of Venus, they were the first men to feel other gravity than earth's, and certainly the first successful crew to leave the earth-moon system. And they deserved that success when one considers the difficulties and discomforts—the months spent in acclimatization chambers back on earth, learning to breathe the air as tenuous as that of Mars, the challenging of the void in the tiny rocket driven by the cranky reaction motors of the twenty-first century, and mostly the facing of an absolutely unknown world.

Jarvis stretched and fingered the raw and peeling tip of his frost-bitten nose. He sighed again contentedly.

"Well," exploded Harrison abruptly, "are we going to hear what happened? You set out all shipshape in an auxiliary rocket, we don't get a peep for ten days, and finally Putz here picks you out of a lunatic ant-heap with a freak ostrich as your pal! Spill it, man!"

"Speel?" queried Leroy perplexedly. "Speel what?"

"He means '*spiel*'," explained Putz soberly. "It iss to tell."

Jarvis met Harrison's amused glance without the shadow of a smile. "That's right, Karl," he said in grave agreement with Putz. "*Ich spiel es!*" He grunted comfortably and began.

"According to orders," he said, "I watched Karl here take off toward the North, and then I got into my flying sweat-box and headed South. You'll remember, Cap—we had orders

not to land, but just scout about for points of interest. I set the two cameras clicking and buzzed along, riding pretty high—about two thousand feet—for a couple of reasons. First, it gave the cameras a greater field, and second, the under-jets travel so far in this half-vacuum they call air here that they stir up dust if you move low."

"We know all that from Putz," grunted Harrison. "I wish you'd saved the films, though. They'd have paid the cost of this junket; remember how the public mobbed the first moon pictures?"

"The films are safe," retorted Jarvis. "Well," he resumed, "as I said, I buzzed along at a pretty good clip; just as we figured, the wings haven't much lift in this air at less than a hundred miles per hour, and even then I had to use the under-jets.

"So, with the speed and the altitude and the blurring caused by the under-jets, the seeing wasn't any too good. I could see enough, though, to distinguish that what I sailed over was just more of this grey plain that we'd been examining the whole week since our landing—same blobby growths and the same eternal carpet of crawling little plant-animals, or biopods, as Leroy calls them. So I sailed along, calling back my position every hour as instructed, and not knowing whether you heard me."

"I did!" snapped Harrison.

"A hundred and fifty miles south," continued Jarvis imperturbably, "the surface changed to a sort of low plateau, nothing but desert and orange-tinted sand. I figured that we were right in our guess, then, and this grey plain we dropped on was really the Mare Cimmerium which would make my orange desert the region called Xanthus. If I were right, I ought to hit another grey plain, the Mare Chronium in another couple of hundred miles, and then another orange desert, Thyle I or II. And so I did."

"Putz verified our position a week and a half ago!" grumbled the captain. "Let's get to the point."

"Coming!" remarked Jarvis. "Twenty miles into Thyle—believe it or not—I crossed a canal!"

"Putz photographed a hundred! Let's hear something new!"

"And did he also see a city?"

"Twenty of 'em, if you call those heaps of mud cities!"

"Well," observed Jarvis, "from here on I'll be telling a few things Putz didn't see!" He rubbed his tingling nose, and continued. "I knew that I had sixteen hours of daylight at this season, so eight hours—eight hundred miles—from here, I decided to turn back. I was still over Thyle, whether I or II I'm not sure, not more than twenty-five miles into it. And right there, Putz's pet motor quit!"

"Quit? How?" Putz was solicitous.

"The atomic blast got weak. I started losing altitude right away, and suddenly there I was with a thump right in the

middle of Thyle! Smashed my nose on the window, too!" He rubbed the injured member ruefully.

"Did you maybe try vashing der combustion chamber mit acid sulphuric?" inquired Putz. "Sometimes der lead giffs a secondary radiation—"

"Naw!" said Jarvis disgustedly. "I wouldn't try that, of course—not more than ten times! Besides, the bump flattened the landing gear and busted off the under-jets. Suppose I got the thing working—what then? Ten miles with the blast coming right out of the bottom and I'd have melted the floor from under me!" He rubbed his nose again. "Lucky for me a pound only weighs seven ounces here, or I'd have been mashed flat!"

"I could have fixed!" ejaculated the engineer. "I bet it was not serious."

"Probably not," agreed Jarvis sarcastically. "Only it wouldn't fly. Nothing serious, but I had my choice of waiting to be picked up or trying to walk back—eight hundred miles, and perhaps twenty days before we had to leave! Forty miles a day! Well," he concluded, "I chose to walk. Just as much chance of being picked up, and it kept me busy."

"We'd have found you," said Harrison.

"No doubt. Anyway, I rigged up a harness from some seat straps, and put the water tank on my back, took a cartridge belt and revolver, and some iron rations, and started out."

"Water tank!" exclaimed the little biologist, Leroy. "She weigh one-quarter ton!"

"Wasn't full. Weighed about two hundred and fifty pounds earth-weight, which is eighty-five here. Then, besides, my own personal two hundred and ten pounds is only seventy on Mars, so, tank and all, I grossed a hundred and fifty-five, or fifty-five pounds less than my everyday earth-weight. I figured on that when I undertook the forty-mile daily stroll. Oh—of course I took a thermo-skin sleeping bag for these wintry Martian nights.

"Off I went, bouncing along pretty quickly. Eight hours of daylight meant twenty miles or more. It got tiresome, of course—plugging along over a soft sand desert with nothing to see, not even Leroy's crawling biopods. But an hour or so brought me to the canal—just a dry ditch about four hundred feet wide, and straight as a railroad on its own company map.

"There'd been water in it sometime, though. The ditch was covered with what looked like a nice green lawn. Only, as I approached, the lawn moved out of my way!"

"Eh?" said Leroy.

"Yeah, it was a relative of your biopods. I caught one—a little grass-like blade about as long as my finger, with two thin, stemmy legs."

"He is where?" Leroy was eager.

"He is let go! I had to move, so I plowed along with the walking grass opening in front and closing behind. And then I was out on the orange desert of Thyle again.

"I plugged steadily along, cussing the sand that made going so tiresome, and, incidentally, cussing that cranky motor of yours, Karl. It was just before twilight that I reached the edge of Thyle, and looked down over the gray Mare Chronium. And I knew there was seventy-five miles of *that* to be walked over, and then a couple of hundred miles of that Xanthus desert, and about as much more Mare Cimmerium. Was I pleased? I started cussing you fellows for not picking me up!"

"We were trying, you sap!" said Harrison.

"That didn't help. Well, I figured I might as well use what was left of daylight in getting down the cliff that bounded Thyle. I found an easy place, and down I went. Mare Chronium was just the same sort of place as this—crazy leafless plants and a bunch of crawlers; I gave it a glance and hauled out my sleeping bag. Up to that time, you know, I hadn't seen anything worth worrying about on this half-dead world—nothing dangerous, that is."

"Did you?" queried Harrison.

"*Did !!* You'll hear about it when I come to it. Well, I was just about to turn in when suddenly I heard the wildest sort of shenanigans!"

"Vot iss shenanigans?" inquired Putz.

"He says, 'Je ne sais quoi,'" explained Leroy. "It is to say, 'I don't know what.'"

"That's right," agreed Jarvis. "I didn't know what, so I sneaked over to find out. There was a racket like a flock of crows eating a bunch of canaries—whistles, cackles, caws, trills, and what have you. I rounded a clump of stumps, and there was Tweel!"

"Tweel?" said Harrison, and "Tveel?" said Leroy and Putz.

"That freak ostrich," explained the narrator. "At least, Tweel is as near as I can pronounce it without sputtering. He called it something like 'Trrrweerrlll.'"

"What was he doing?" asked the Captain.

"He was being eaten! And squealing, of course, as anyone would."

"Eaten! By what?"

"I found out later. All I could see then was a bunch of black ropy arms tangled around what looked like, as Putz described it to you, an ostrich. I wasn't going to interfere, naturally; if both creatures were dangerous, I'd have one less to worry about.

"But the bird-like thing was putting up a good battle, dealing vicious blows with an eighteen-inch beak, between screeches. And besides, I caught a glimpse or two of what was on the end of those arms!" Jarvis shuddered. "But the

clinger was when I noticed a little black bag or case hung about the neck of the bird-thing! It was intelligent! That or tame, I assumed. Anyway, it clinched my decision. I pulled out my automatic and fired into what I could see of its antagonist.

"There was a flurry of tentacles and a spurt of black corruption, and then the thing, with a disgusting sucking noise, pulled itself and its arms into a hole in the ground. The other let out a series of clacks, staggered around on legs about as thick as golf sticks, and turned suddenly to face me. I held my weapon ready, and the two of us stared at each other.

"The Martian wasn't a bird, really. It wasn't even bird-like, except just at first glance. It had a beak all right, and a few feathery appendages, but the beak wasn't really a beak. It was somewhat flexible; I could see the tip bend slowly from side to side; it was almost like a cross between a beak and a trunk. It had four-toed feet, and four fingered things—hands, you'd have to call them, and a little roundish body, and a long neck ending in a tiny head—and that beak. It stood an inch or so taller than I, and—well, Putz saw it!"

The engineer nodded. "Ja! I saw!"

Jarvis continued. "So—we stared at each other. Finally the creature went into a series of clackings and twitterings and held out its hands toward me, empty. I took that as a gesture of friendship."

"Perhaps," suggested Harrison, "it looked at that nose of yours and thought you were its brother!"

"Huh! You can be funny without talking! Anyway, I put up my gun and said 'Aw, don't mention it,' or something of the sort, and the thing came over and we were pals.

"By that time, the sun was pretty low and I knew that I'd better build a fire or get into my thermo-skin. I decided on the fire. I picked a spot at the base of the Thyle cliff, where the rock could reflect a little heat on my back. I started breaking off chunks of this desiccated Martian vegetation, and my companion caught the idea and brought in an armful. I reached for a match, but the Martian fished into his pouch and brought out something that looked like a glowing coal; one touch of it, and the fire was blazing—and you all know what a job we have starting a fire in this atmosphere!

"And that bag of his!" continued the narrator. "That was a manufactured article, my friends; press an end and she popped open—press the middle and she sealed so perfectly you couldn't see the line. Better than zippers.

"Well, we stared at the fire a while and I decided to attempt some sort of communication with the Martian. I pointed at myself and said 'Dick'; he caught the drift immediately, stretched a bony claw at me and repeated 'Tick.' Then I pointed at him, and he gave that whistle I called Tweel; I can't imitate his accent. Things were going smoothly; to

emphasize the names, I repeated 'Dick,' and then, pointing at him, 'Tweel.'

"There we stuck! He gave some clacks that sounded negative, and said something like 'P-p-p-proot.' And that was just the beginning; I was always 'Tick,' but as for him—part of the time he was 'Tweel,' and part of the time he was 'P-p-p-proot,' and part of the time he was sixteen other noises!

"We just couldn't connect. I tried 'rock,' and I tried 'star,' and 'tree,' and 'fire,' and Lord knows what else, and try as I would, I couldn't get a single word! Nothing was the same for two successive minutes, and if that's a language, I'm an alchemist! Finally I gave it up and called him Tweel, and that seemed to do.

"But Tweel hung on to some of my words. He remembered a couple of them, which I suppose is a great achievement if you're used to a language you have to make up as you go along. But I couldn't get the hang of his talk; either I missed some subtle point or we just didn't *think* alike—and I rather believe the latter view.

"I've other reasons for believing that. After a while I gave up the language business, and tried mathematics. I scratched two plus two equals four on the ground, and demonstrated it with pebbles. Again Tweel caught the idea, and informed me that three plus three equals six. Once more we seemed to be getting somewhere.

"So, knowing that Tweel had at least a grammar school education, I drew a circle for the sun, pointing first at it, and then at the last glow of the sun. Then I sketched in Mercury, and Venus, and Mother Earth, and Mars, and finally, pointing to Mars, I swept my hand around in a sort of inclusive gesture to indicate that Mars was our current environment. I was working up to putting over the idea that my home was on the earth.

"Tweel understood my diagram all right. He poked his beak at it, and with a great deal of trilling and clucking, he added Deimos and Phobos to Mars, and then sketched in the earth's moon!

"Do you see what that proves? It proves that Tweel's race uses telescopes—that they're civilized!"

"Does not!" snapped Harrison. "The moon is visible from here as a fifth magnitude star. They could see its revolution with the naked eye."

"The moon, yes!" said Jarvis. "You've missed my point. Mercury isn't visible! And Tweel knew of Mercury because he placed the Moon at the *third* planet, not the second. If he didn't know Mercury, he'd put the earth second, and Mars third, instead of fourth! See?"

"Humph!" said Harrison.

"Anyway," proceeded Jarvis, "I went on with my lesson. Things were going smoothly, and it looked as if I could put the idea over. I pointed at the earth on my diagram, and then at myself, and then, to clinch it, I pointed to myself

and then to the earth itself shining bright green almost at the zenith.

"Tweel set up such an excited clacking that I was certain he understood. He jumped up and down, and suddenly he pointed at himself and then at the sky, and then at himself and at the sky again. He pointed at his middle and then at Arcturus, at his head and then at Spica, at his feet and then at half a dozen stars, while I just gaped at him. Then, all of a sudden, he gave a tremendous leap. Man, what a hop! He shot straight up into the starlight, seventy-five feet if an inch! I saw him silhouetted against the sky, saw him turn and come down at me head first, and land smack on his beak like a javelin! There he stuck square in the center of my sun-circle in the sand—a bull's eye!"

"Nuts!" observed the captain. "Plain nuts!"

"That's what I thought, too! I just stared at him open-mouthed while he pulled his head out of the sand and stood up. Then I figured he'd missed my point, and I went through the whole blamed rigamarole again, and it ended the same way, with Tweel on his nose in the middle of my picture!"

"Maybe it's a religious rite," suggested Harrison.

"Maybe," said Jarvis dubiously. "Well, there we were. We could exchange ideas up to a certain point, and then—blooey! Something in us was different, unrelated; I don't doubt that Tweel thought me just as screwy as I thought him. Our minds simply looked at the world from different viewpoints, and perhaps his viewpoint is as true as ours. But—we couldn't get together, that's all. Yet, in spite of all difficulties, I *liked* Tweel, and I have a queer certainty that he liked me."

"Nuts!" repeated the captain. "Just daffy!"

"Yeah? Wait and see. A couple of times I've thought that perhaps we—" He paused, and then resumed his narrative. "Anyway, I finally gave it up, and got into my thermo-skin to sleep. The fire hadn't kept me any too warm, but that damned sleeping bag did. Got stuffy five minutes after I closed myself in. I opened it a little and bingo! Some eighty-below-zero air hit my nose, and that's when I got this pleasant little frostbite to add to the bump I acquired during the crash of my rocket.

"I don't know what Tweel made of my sleeping. He sat around, but when I woke up, he was gone. I'd just crawled out of my bag, though, when I heard some twittering, and there he came, sailing down from that three-story Thyle cliff to alight on his beak beside me. I pointed to myself and toward the north, and he pointed at himself and toward the south, but when I loaded up and started away, he came along.

"Man, how he traveled! A hundred and fifty feet at a jump, sailing through the air stretched out like a spear, and landing on his beak. He seemed surprised at my plodding, but after a few moments he fell in beside me, only every

few minutes he'd go into one of his leaps, and stick his nose into the sand a block ahead of me. Then he'd come shooting back at me; it made me nervous at first to see that beak of his coming at me like a spear, but he always ended in the sand at my side.

"So the two of us plugged along across the Mare Chronium. Same sort of place as this—same crazy plants and same little green biopods growing in the sand, or crawling out of your way. We talked—not that we understood each other, you know, but just for company. I sang songs, and I suspect Tweel did too; at least, some of his trillings and twitterings had a subtle sort of rhythm.

"Then, for variety, Tweel would display his smattering of English words. He'd point to an outcropping and say 'rock,' and point to a pebble and say it again; or he'd touch my arm and say 'Tick,' and then repeat it. He seemed terrifically amused that the same word meant the same thing twice in succession, or that the same word could apply to two different objects. It set me wondering if perhaps his language wasn't like the primitive speech of some earth people—you know, Captain, like the Negritoes, for instance, who haven't any generic words. No word for food or water or man—words for good food and bad food, or rain water and sea water, or strong man and weak man—but no names for general classes. They're too primitive to understand that rain water and sea water are just different aspects of the same thing. But that wasn't the case with Tweel; it was just that we were somehow mysteriously different—our minds were alien to each other. And yet—we *liked* each other!"

"Looney, that's all," remarked Harrison. "That's why you two were so fond of each other."

"Well, I like *you*!" countered Jarvis wickedly. "Anyway," he resumed, "don't get the idea that there was anything screwy about Tweel. In fact, I'm not so sure but that he couldn't teach our highly praised human intelligence a trick or two. Oh, he wasn't an intellectual superman, I guess; but don't overlook the point that he managed to understand a little of my mental workings, and I never even got a glimmering of his."

"Because he didn't have any!" suggested the captain, while Putz and Leroy blinked attentively.

"You can judge of that when I'm through," said Jarvis. "Well, we plugged along across the Mare Chronium all that day, and all the next. Mare Chronium—Sea of Time! Say, I was willing to agree with Schiaparelli's name by the end of that march! Just that grey, endless plain of weird plants, and never a sign of any other life. It was so monotonous that I was even glad to see the desert of Xanthus toward the evening of the second day.

"I was fair worn out, but Tweel seemed as fresh as ever, for all I never saw him drink or eat. I think he could have crossed the Mare Chronium in a couple of hours with those block-long nose dives of his, but he stuck along with me. I

offered him some water once or twice; he took the cup from me and sucked the liquid into his beak, and then carefully squirted it all back into the cup and gravely returned it.

"Just as we sighted Xanthus, or the cliffs that bounded it, one of those nasty sand clouds blew along, not as bad as the one we had here, but mean to travel against. I pulled the transparent flap of my thermo-skin bag across my face and managed pretty well, and I noticed that Tweel used some feathery appendages growing like a mustache at the base of his beak to cover his nostrils, and some similar fuzz to shield his eyes."

"He is a desert creature!" ejaculated the little biologist, Leroy.

"Huh? Why?"

"He drink no water—he is adapt' for sand storm—"

"Proves nothing! There's not enough water to waste any where on this desiccated pill called Mars. We'd call all of it desert on earth, you know." He paused. "Anyway, after the sand storm blew over, a little wind kept blowing in our faces, not strong enough to stir the sand. But suddenly things came drifting along from the Xanthus cliffs—small, transparent spheres, for all the world like glass tennis balls! But light—they were almost light enough to float even in this thin air—empty, too; at least, I cracked open a couple and nothing came out but a bad smell. I asked Tweel about them, but all he said was 'No, no, no,' which I took to mean that he knew nothing about them. So they went bouncing by like tumbleweeds, or like soap bubbles, and we plugged on toward Xanthus. Tweel pointed at one of the crystal balls once and said 'rock,' but I was too tired to argue with him. Later I discovered what he meant.

"We came to the bottom of the Xanthus cliffs finally, when there wasn't much daylight left. I decided to sleep on the plateau if possible; anything dangerous, I reasoned, would be more likely to prowl through the vegetation of the Mare Chronium than the sand of Xanthus. Not that I'd seen a single sign of menace, except the rope-armed black thing that had trapped Tweel, and apparently that didn't prowl at all, but lured its victims within reach. It couldn't lure me while I slept, especially as Tweel didn't seem to sleep at all, but simply sat patiently around all night. I wondered how the creature had managed to trap Tweel, but there wasn't any way of asking him. I found that out too, later; it's devilish!

"However, we were ambling around the base of the Xanthus barrier looking for an easy spot to climb. At least, I was. Tweel could have leaped it easily, for the cliffs were lower than Thyle—perhaps sixty feet. I found a place and started up, swearing at the water tank strapped to my back—it didn't bother me except when climbing—and suddenly I heard a sound that I thought I recognized!

"You know how deceptive sounds are in this thin air. A shot sounds like the pop of a cork. But this sound was the drone

of a rocket, and sure enough, there went our second auxiliary about ten miles to westward, between me and the sunset!"

"Vas me!" said Putz. "I hunt for you."

"Yeah; I knew that, but what good did it do me? I hung on to the cliff and yelled and waved with one hand. Tweel saw it too, and set up a trilling and twittering, leaping to the top of the barrier and then high into the air. And while I watched, the machine droned on into the shadows to the south.

"I scrambled to the top of the cliff. Tweel was still pointing and trilling excitedly, shooting up toward the sky and coming down head-on to stick upside down on his beak in the sand. I pointed toward the south and at myself, and he said, 'Yes—Yes—Yes'; but somehow I gathered that he thought the flying thing was a relative of mine, probably a parent. Perhaps I did his intellect an injustice; I think now that I did.

"I was bitterly disappointed by the failure to attract attention. I pulled out my thermo-skin bag and crawled into it, as the night chill was already apparent. Tweel stuck his beak into the sand and drew up his legs and arms and looked for all the world like one of those leafless shrubs out there. I think he stayed that way all night."

"Protective mimicry!" ejaculated Leroy. "See? He is desert creature!"

"In the morning," resumed Jarvis, "we started off again. We hadn't gone a hundred yards into Xanthus when I saw something queer! This is one thing Putz didn't photograph, I'll wager!

"There was a line of little pyramids—tiny ones, not more than six inches high, stretching across Xanthus as far as I could see! Little buildings made of pygmy bricks, they were, hollow inside and truncated, or at least broken at the top and empty. I pointed at them and said 'What?' to Tweel, but he gave some negative twitters to indicate, I suppose, that he didn't know. So off we went, following the row of pyramids because they ran north, and I was going north.

"Man, we trailed that line for hours! After a while, I noticed another queer thing: they were getting larger. Same number of bricks in each one, but the bricks were larger.

"By noon they were shoulder high. I looked into a couple—all just the same, broken at the top and empty. I examined a brick or two as well; they were silica, and old as creation itself!"

"How you know?" asked Leroy.

"They were weathered—edges rounded. Silica doesn't weather easily even on earth, and in this climate—!"

"How old you think?"

"Fifty thousand—a hundred thousand years. How can I tell? The little ones we saw in the morning were older—perhaps

ten times as old. Crumbling. How old would that make *them*? Half a million years? Who knows?" Jarvis paused a moment. "Well," he resumed, "we followed the line. Tweel pointed at them and said 'rock' once or twice, but he'd done that many times before. Besides, he was more or less right about these.

"I tried questioning him. I pointed at a pyramid and asked 'People?' and indicated the two of us. He set up a negative sort of clucking and said, 'No, no, no. No one-one-two. No two-two-four,' meanwhile rubbing his stomach. I just stared at him and he went through the business again. 'No one-one-two. No two-two-four.' I just gaped at him."

"That proves it!" exclaimed Harrison. "Nuts!"

"You think so?" queried Jarvis sardonically. "Well, I figured it out different! 'No one-one-two!' You don't get it, of course, do you?"

"Nope—nor do you!"

"I think I do! Tweel was using the few English words he knew to put over a very complex idea. What, let me ask, does mathematics make you think of?"

"Why—of astronomy. Or—or logic!"

"That's it! 'No one-one-two!' Tweel was telling me that the builders of the pyramids weren't people—or that they weren't intelligent, that they weren't reasoning creatures! Get it?"

"Huh! I'll be damned!"

"You probably will."

"Why," put in Leroy, "he rub his belly?"

"Why? Because, my dear biologist, that's where his brains are! Not in his tiny head—in his middle!"

"C'est impossible!"

"Not on Mars, it isn't! This flora and fauna aren't earthly; your biopods prove that!" Jarvis grinned and took up his narrative. "Anyway, we plugged along across Xanthus and in about the middle of the afternoon, something else queer happened. The pyramids ended."

"Ended!"

"Yeah; the queer part was that the last one—and now they were ten-footers—was capped! See? Whatever built it was still inside; we'd trailed 'em from their half-million-year-old origin to the present.

"Tweel and I noticed it about the same time. I yanked out my automatic (I had a clip of Boland explosive bullets in it) and Tweel, quick as a sleight-of-hand trick, snapped a queer little glass revolver out of his bag. It was much like our weapons, except that the grip was larger to accommodate his four-taloned hand. And we held our weapons ready while we sneaked up along the lines of empty pyramids.

"Tweel saw the movement first. The top tiers of bricks were heaving, shaking, and suddenly slid down the sides with a thin crash. And then—something—something was coming out!

"A long, silvery-grey arm appeared, dragging after it an armored body. Armored, I mean, with scales, silver-grey and dull-shining. The arm heaved the body out of the hole; the beast crashed to the sand.

"It was a nondescript creature—body like a big grey cask, arm and a sort of mouth-hole at one end; stiff, pointed tail at the other—and that's all. No other limbs, no eyes, ears, nose—nothing! The thing dragged itself a few yards, inserted its pointed tail in the sand, pushed itself upright, and just sat.

"Tweel and I watched it for ten minutes before it moved. Then, with a creaking and rustling like—oh, like crumpling stiff paper—its arm moved to the mouth-hole and out came a brick! The arm placed the brick carefully on the ground, and the thing was still again.

"Another ten minutes—another brick. Just one of Nature's bricklayers. I was about to slip away and move on when Tweel pointed at the thing and said 'rock!' I went 'huh?' and he said it again. Then, to the accompaniment of some of his trilling, he said, 'No—no—,' and gave two or three whistling breaths.

"Well, I got his meaning, for a wonder! I said, 'No breath?' and demonstrated the word. Tweel was ecstatic; he said, 'Yes, yes, yes! No, no, no breet!' Then he gave a leap and sailed out to land on his nose about one pace from the monster!

"I was startled, you can imagine! The arm was going up for a brick, and I expected to see Tweel caught and mangled, but—nothing happened! Tweel pounded on the creature, and the arm took the brick and placed it neatly beside the first. Tweel rapped on its body again, and said 'rock,' and I got up nerve enough to take a look myself.

"Tweel was right again. The creature was rock, and it didn't breathe!"

"How you know?" snapped Leroy, his black eyes blazing interest.

"Because I'm a chemist. The beast was made of silica! There must have been pure silicon in the sand, and it lived on that. Get it? We, and Tweel, and those plants out there, and even the biopods are *carbon* life; this thing lived by a different set of chemical reactions. It was silicon life!"

"*La vie silicieuse!*" shouted Leroy. "I have suspect, and now it is proof! I must go see! *Il faut que je—*"

"All right! All right!" said Jarvis. "You can go see. Anyhow, there the thing was, alive and yet not alive, moving every ten minutes, and then only to remove a brick. Those bricks were its waste matter. See, Frenchy? We're carbon, and our waste is carbon dioxide, and this thing is silicon, and *its*

waste is silicon dioxide—silica. But silica is a solid, hence the bricks. And it builds itself in, and when it is covered, it moves over to a fresh place to start over. No wonder it creaked! A living creature half a million years old!"

"How you know how old?" Leroy was frantic.

"We trailed its pyramids from the beginning, didn't we? If this weren't the original pyramid builder, the series would have ended somewhere before we found him, wouldn't it?—ended and started over with the small ones. That's simple enough, isn't it?"

"But he reproduces, or tries to. Before the third brick came out, there was a little rustle and out popped a whole stream of those little crystal balls. They're his spores, or eggs, or seeds—call 'em what you want. They went bouncing by across Xanthus just as they'd bounced by us back in the Mare Chronium. I've a hunch how they work, too—this is for your information, Leroy. I think the crystal shell of silica is no more than a protective covering, like an eggshell, and that the active principle is the smell inside. It's some sort of gas that attacks silicon, and if the shell is broken near a supply of that element, some reaction starts that ultimately develops into a beast like that one."

"You should try!" exclaimed the little Frenchman. "We must break one to see!"

"Yeah? Well, I did. I smashed a couple against the sand. Would you like to come back in about ten thousand years to see if I planted some pyramid monsters? You'd most likely be able to tell by that time!" Jarvis paused and drew a deep breath. "Lord! That queer creature! Do you picture it? Blind, deaf, nerveless, brainless—just a mechanism, and yet—immortal! Bound to go on making bricks, building pyramids, as long as silicon and oxygen exist, and even afterwards it'll just stop. It won't be dead. If the accidents of a million years bring it its food again, there it'll be, ready to run again, while brains and civilizations are part of the past. A queer beast—yet I met a stranger one!"

"If you did, it must have been in your dreams!" growled Harrison.

"You're right!" said Jarvis soberly. "In a way, you're right. The dream-beast! That's the best name for it—and it's the most fiendish, terrifying creation one could imagine! More dangerous than a lion, more insidious than a snake!"

"Tell me!" begged Leroy. "I must go see!"

"Not *this* devil!" He paused again. "Well," he resumed, "Tweel and I left the pyramid creature and plowed along through Xanthus. I was tired and a little disheartened by Putz's failure to pick me up, and Tweel's trilling got on my nerves, as did his flying nosedives. So I just strode along without a word, hour after hour across that monotonous desert.

"Toward mid-afternoon we came in sight of a low dark line on the horizon. I knew what it was. It was a canal; I'd crossed it in the rocket and it meant that we were just one-

third of the way across Xanthus. Pleasant thought, wasn't it? And still, I was keeping up to schedule.

"We approached the canal slowly; I remembered that this one was bordered by a wide fringe of vegetation and that Mud-heap City was on it.

"I was tired, as I said. I kept thinking of a good hot meal, and then from that I jumped to reflections of how nice and home-like even Borneo would seem after this crazy planet, and from that, to thoughts of little old New York, and then to thinking about a girl I know there—Fancy Long. Know her?"

"Vision entertainer," said Harrison. "I've tuned her in. Nice blonde—dances and sings on the *Yerba Mate* hour."

"That's her," said Jarvis ungrammatically. "I know her pretty well—just friends, get me?—though she came down to see us off in the *Ares*. Well, I was thinking about her, feeling pretty lonesome, and all the time we were approaching that line of rubbery plants.

"And then—I said, 'What 'n Hell!' and stared. And there she was—Fancy Long, standing plain as day under one of those crack-brained trees, and smiling and waving just the way I remembered her when we left!"

"Now you're nuts, too!" observed the captain.

"Boy, I almost agreed with you! I stared and pinched myself and closed my eyes and then stared again—and every time, there was Fancy Long smiling and waving! Tweel saw something, too; he was trilling and clucking away, but I scarcely heard him. I was bounding toward her over the sand, too amazed even to ask myself questions.

"I wasn't twenty feet from her when Tweel caught me with one of his flying leaps. He grabbed my arm, yelling, 'No—no—no!' in his squeaky voice. I tried to shake him off—he was as light as if he were built of bamboo—but he dug his claws in and yelled. And finally some sort of sanity returned to me and I stopped less than ten feet from her. There she stood, looking as solid as Putz's head!"

"Vot?" said the engineer.

"She smiled and waved, and waved and smiled, and I stood there dumb as Leroy, while Tweel squeaked and chattered. I *knew* it couldn't be real, yet—there she was!

"Finally I said, 'Fancy! Fancy Long!' She just kept on smiling and waving, but looking as real as if I hadn't left her thirty-seven million miles away.

"Tweel had his glass pistol out, pointing it at her. I grabbed his arm, but he tried to push me away. He pointed at her and said, 'No breet! No breet!' and I understood that he meant that the Fancy Long thing wasn't alive. Man, my head was whirling!

"Still, it gave me the jitters to see him pointing his weapon at her. I don't know why I stood there watching him take careful aim, but I did. Then he squeezed the handle of his

weapon; there was a little puff of steam, and Fancy Long was gone! And in her place was one of those writhing, black, rope-armed horrors like the one I'd saved Tweel from!

"The dream-beast! I stood there dizzy, watching it die while Tweel trilled and whistled. Finally he touched my arm, pointed at the twisting thing, and said, 'You one-one-two, he one-one-two.' After he'd repeated it eight or ten times, I got it. Do any of you?"

"*Oui!*" shrilled Leroy. "*Moi—je le comprends!* He mean you think of something, the beast he know, and you see it! *Un chien*—a hungry dog, he would see the big bone with meat! Or smell it—not?"

"Right!" said Jarvis. "The dream-beast uses its victim's longings and desires to trap its prey. The bird at nesting season would see its mate, the fox, prowling for its own prey, would see a helpless rabbit!"

"How he do?" queried Leroy.

"How do I know? How does a snake back on earth charm a bird into its very jaws? And aren't there deep-sea fish that lure their victims into their mouths? Lord!" Jarvis shuddered. "Do you see how insidious the monster is? We're warned now—but henceforth we can't trust even our eyes. You might see me—I might see one of you—and back of it may be nothing but another of those black horrors!"

"How'd your friend know?" asked the captain abruptly.

"Tweel? I wonder! Perhaps he was thinking of something that couldn't possibly have interested me, and when I started to run, he realized that I saw something different and was warned. Or perhaps the dream-beast can only project a single vision, and Tweel saw what I saw—or nothing. I couldn't ask him. But it's just another proof that his intelligence is equal to ours or greater."

"He's daffy, I tell you!" said Harrison. "What makes you think his intellect ranks with the human?"

"Plenty of things! First, the pyramid-beast. He hadn't seen one before; he said as much. Yet he recognized it as a dead-alive automaton of silicon."

"He could have heard of it," objected Harrison. "He lives around here, you know."

"Well how about the language? I couldn't pick up a single idea of his and he learned six or seven words of mine. And do you realize what complex ideas he put over with no more than those six or seven words? The pyramid-monster—the dream-beast! In a single phrase he told me that one was a harmless automaton and the other a deadly hypnotist. What about that?"

"Huh!" said the captain.

"*Huh* if you wish! Could you have done it knowing only six words of English? Could you go even further, as Tweel did, and tell me that another creature was of a sort of

intelligence so different from ours that understanding was impossible—even more impossible than that between Tweel and me?"

"Eh? What was that?"

"Later. The point I'm making is that Tweel and his race are worthy of our friendship. Somewhere on Mars—and you'll find I'm right—is a civilization and culture equal to ours, and maybe more than equal. And communication is possible between them and us; Tweel proves that. It may take years of patient trial, for their minds are alien, but less alien than the next minds we encountered—if they *are* minds."

"The next ones? What next ones?"

"The people of the mud cities along the canals." Jarvis frowned, then resumed his narrative. "I thought the dream-beast and the silicon-monster were the strangest beings conceivable, but I was wrong. These creatures are still more alien, less understandable than either and far less comprehensible than Tweel, with whom friendship is possible, and even, by patience and concentration, the exchange of ideas.

"Well," he continued, "we left the dream-beast dying, dragging itself back into its hole, and we moved toward the canal. There was a carpet of that queer walking-grass scampering out of our way, and when we reached the bank, there was a yellow trickle of water flowing. The mound city I'd noticed from the rocket was a mile or so to the right and I was curious enough to want to take a look at it.

"It had seemed deserted from my previous glimpse of it, and if any creatures were lurking in it—well, Tweel and I were both armed. And by the way, that crystal weapon of Tweel's was an interesting device; I took a look at it after the dream-beast episode. It fired a little glass splinter, poisoned, I suppose, and I guess it held at least a hundred of 'em to a load. The propellant was steam—just plain steam!"

"*Shteam!*" echoed Putz. "From vot come, *shteam?*"

"From water, of course! You could see the water through the transparent handle and about a gill of another liquid, thick and yellowish. When Tweel squeezed the handle—there was no trigger—a drop of water and a drop of the yellow stuff squirted into the firing chamber, and the water vaporized—pop!—like that. It's not so difficult; I think we could develop the same principle. Concentrated sulphuric acid will heat water almost to boiling, and so will quicklime, and there's potassium and sodium—

"Of course, his weapon hadn't the range of mine, but it wasn't so bad in this thin air, and it *did* hold as many shots as a cowboy's gun in a Western movie. It was effective, too, at least against Martian life; I tried it out, aiming at one of the crazy plants, and darned if the plant didn't wither up and fall apart! That's why I think the glass splinters were poisoned.

"Anyway, we trudged along toward the mud-heap city and I began to wonder whether the city builders dug the canals. I pointed to the city and then at the canal, and Tweel said 'No—no—no!' and gestured toward the south. I took it to mean that some other race had created the canal system, perhaps Tweel's people. I don't know; maybe there's still another intelligent race on the planet, or a dozen others. Mars is a queer little world.

"A hundred yards from the city we crossed a sort of road—just a hard-packed mud trail, and then, all of a sudden, along came one of the mound builders!

"Man, talk about fantastic beings! It looked rather like a barrel trotting along on four legs with four other arms or tentacles. It had no head, just body and members and a row of eyes completely around it. The top end of the barrel-body was a diaphragm stretched as tight as a drum head, and that was all. It was pushing a little coppery cart and tore right past us like the proverbial bat out of Hell. It didn't even notice us, although I thought the eyes on my side shifted a little as it passed.

"A moment later another came along, pushing another empty cart. Same thing—it just scooted past us. Well, I wasn't going to be ignored by a bunch of barrels playing train, so when the third one approached, I planted myself in the way—ready to jump, of course, if the thing didn't stop.

"But it did. It stopped and set up a sort of drumming from the diaphragm on top. And I held out both hands and said, 'We are friends!' And what do you suppose the thing did?"

"Said, 'Pleased to meet you,' I'll bet!" suggested Harrison.

"I couldn't have been more surprised if it had! It drummed on its diaphragm, and then suddenly boomed out, 'We are v-r-r-riends!' and gave its pushcart a vicious poke at me! I jumped aside, and away it went while I stared dumbly after it.

"A minute later another one came hurrying along. This one didn't pause, but simply drummed out, 'We are v-r-r-riends!' and scurried by. How did it learn the phrase? Were all of the creatures in some sort of communication with each other? Were they all parts of some central organism? I don't know, though I think Tweel does.

"Anyway, the creatures went sailing past us, every one greeting us with the same statement. It got to be funny; I never thought to find so many friends on this God-forsaken ball! Finally I made a puzzled gesture to Tweel; I guess he understood, for he said, 'One-one-two—yes!—two-two-four—no!' Get it?"

"Sure," said Harrison, "It's a Martian nursery rhyme."

"Yeah! Well, I was getting used to Tweel's symbolism, and I figured it out this way. 'One-one-two—yes!' The creatures were intelligent. 'Two-two-four—no!' Their intelligence was not of our order, but something different and beyond the logic of two and two is four. Maybe I missed his meaning. Perhaps he meant that their minds were of low degree, able

to figure out the simple things—'One-one-two—yes!'—but not more difficult things—'Two-two-four—no!' But I think from what we saw later that he meant the other.

"After a few moments, the creatures came rushing back—first one, then another. Their pushcarts were full of stones, sand, chunks of rubbery plants, and such rubbish as that. They droned out their friendly greeting, which didn't really sound so friendly, and dashed on. The third one I assumed to be my first acquaintance and I decided to have another chat with him. I stepped into his path again and waited.

"Up he came, booming out his 'We are v-r-r-riends' and stopped. I looked at him; four or five of his eyes looked at me. He tried his password again and gave a shove on his cart, but I stood firm. And then the—the dashed creature reached out one of his arms, and two finger-like nippers tweaked my nose!"

"Haw!" roared Harrison. "Maybe the things have a sense of beauty!"

"Laugh!" grumbled Jarvis. "I'd already had a nasty bump and a mean frostbite on that nose. Anyway, I yelled 'Ouch!' and jumped aside and the creature dashed away; but from then on, their greeting was 'We are v-r-r-riends! Ouch!' Queer beasts!

"Tweel and I followed the road squarely up to the nearest mound. The creatures were coming and going, paying us not the slightest attention, fetching their loads of rubbish. The road simply dived into an opening, and slanted down like an old mine, and in and out darted the barrel-people, greeting us with their eternal phrase.

"I looked in; there was a light somewhere below, and I was curious to see it. It didn't look like a flame or torch, you understand, but more like a civilized light, and I thought that I might get some clue as to the creatures' development. So in I went and Tweel tagged along, not without a few trills and twitters, however.

"The light was curious; it sputtered and flared like an old arc light, but came from a single black rod set in the wall of the corridor. It was electric, beyond doubt. The creatures were fairly civilized, apparently.

"Then I saw another light shining on something that glittered and I went on to look at that, but it was only a heap of shiny sand. I turned toward the entrance to leave, and the Devil take me if it wasn't gone!

"I suppose the corridor had curved, or I'd stepped into a side passage. Anyway, I walked back in that direction I thought we'd come, and all I saw was more dimly lit corridor. The place was a labyrinth! There was nothing but twisting passages running every way, lit by occasional lights, and now and then a creature running by, sometimes with a pushcart, sometimes without.

"Well, I wasn't much worried at first. Tweel and I had only come a few steps from the entrance. But every move we made after that seemed to get us in deeper. Finally I tried

following one of the creatures with an empty cart, thinking that he'd be going out for his rubbish, but he ran around aimlessly, into one passage and out another. When he started dashing around a pillar like one of these Japanese waltzing mice, I gave up, dumped my water tank on the floor, and sat down.

"Tweel was as lost as I. I pointed up and he said 'No—no—no!' in a sort of helpless trill. And we couldn't get any help from the natives. They paid no attention at all, except to assure us they were friends—ouch!

"Lord! I don't know how many hours or days we wandered around there! I slept twice from sheer exhaustion; Tweel never seemed to need sleep. We tried following only the upward corridors, but they'd run uphill a ways and then curve downwards. The temperature in that damned ant hill was constant; you couldn't tell night from day and after my first sleep I didn't know whether I'd slept one hour or thirteen, so I couldn't tell from my watch whether it was midnight or noon.

"We saw plenty of strange things. There were machines running in some of the corridors, but they didn't seem to be doing anything—just wheels turning. And several times I saw two barrel-beasts with a little one growing between them, joined to both."

"Parthenogenesis!" exulted Leroy. "Parthenogenesis by budding like *les tulipes*!"

"If you say so, Frenchy," agreed Jarvis. "The things never noticed us at all, except, as I say, to greet us with 'We are v-r-r-riends! Ouch!' They seemed to have no home-life of any sort, but just scurried around with their pushcarts, bringing in rubbish. And finally I discovered what they did with it.

"We'd had a little luck with a corridor, one that slanted upwards for a great distance. I was feeling that we ought to be close to the surface when suddenly the passage debouched into a domed chamber, the only one we'd seen. And man!—I felt like dancing when I saw what looked like daylight through a crevice in the roof.

"There was a—a sort of machine in the chamber, just an enormous wheel that turned slowly, and one of the creatures was in the act of dumping his rubbish below it. The wheel ground it with a crunch—sand, stones, plants, all into powder that sifted away somewhere. While we watched, others filed in, repeating the process, and that seemed to be all. No rhyme nor reason to the whole thing—but that's characteristic of this crazy planet. And there was another fact that's almost too bizarre to believe.

"One of the creatures, having dumped his load, pushed his cart aside with a crash and calmly shoved himself under the wheel! I watched him being crushed, too stupefied to make a sound, and a moment later, another followed him! They were perfectly methodical about it, too; one of the cartless creatures took the abandoned pushcart.

"Tweel didn't seem surprised; I pointed out the next suicide to him, and he just gave the most human-like shrug imaginable, as much as to say, 'What can I do about it?' He must have known more or less about these creatures.

"Then I saw something else. There was something beyond the wheel, something shining on a sort of low pedestal. I walked over; there was a little crystal about the size of an egg, fluorescing to beat Tophet. The light from it stung my hands and face, almost like a static discharge, and then I noticed another funny thing. Remember that wart I had on my left thumb? Look!" Jarvis extended his hand. "It dried up and fell off—just like that! And my abused nose—say, the pain went out of it like magic! The thing had the property of hard x-rays or gamma radiations, only more so; it destroyed diseased tissue and left healthy tissue unharmed!

"I was thinking what a present *that'd* be to take back to Mother Earth when a lot of racket interrupted. We dashed back to the other side of the wheel in time to see one of the pushcarts ground up. Some suicide had been careless, it seems.

"Then suddenly the creatures were booming and drumming all around us and their noise was decidedly menacing. A crowd of them advanced toward us; we backed out of what I thought was the passage we'd entered by, and they came rumbling after us, some pushing carts and some not. Crazy brutes! There was a whole chorus of 'We are v-r-r-riends! Ouch!' I didn't like the 'ouch'; it was rather suggestive.

"Tweel had his glass gun out and I dumped my water tank for greater freedom and got mine. We backed up the corridor with the barrel-beasts following—about twenty of them. Queer thing—the ones coming in with loaded carts moved past us inches away without a sign.

"Tweel must have noticed that. Suddenly, he snatched out that glowing coal cigar-lighter of his and touched a cart-load of plant limbs. Puff! The whole load was burning—and the crazy beast pushing it went right along without a change of pace! It created some disturbance among our 'V-r-r-riends,' however—and then I noticed the smoke eddying and swirling past us, and sure enough, there was the entrance!

"I grabbed Tweel and out we dashed and after us our twenty pursuers. The daylight felt like Heaven, though I saw at first glance that the sun was all but set, and that was bad, since I couldn't live outside my thermo-skin bag in a Martian night—at least, without a fire.

"And things got worse in a hurry. They cornered us in an angle between two mounds, and there we stood. I hadn't fired nor had Tweel; there wasn't any use in irritating the brutes. They stopped a little distance away and began their booming about friendship and ouches.

"Then things got still worse! A barrel-brute came out with a pushcart and they all grabbed into it and came out with handfuls of foot-long copper darts—sharp-looking ones—and all of a sudden one sailed past my ear—zing! And it was shoot or die then.

"We were doing pretty well for a while. We picked off the ones next to the pushcart and managed to keep the darts at a minimum, but suddenly there was a thunderous booming of 'v-r-r-riends' and 'ouches,' and a whole army of 'em came out of their hole.

"Man! We were through and I knew it! Then I realized that Tweel wasn't. He could have leaped the mound behind us as easily as not. He was staying for me!

"Say, I could have cried if there'd been time! I'd liked Tweel from the first, but whether I'd have had gratitude to do what he was doing—suppose I *had* saved him from the first dream-beast—he'd done as much for me, hadn't he? I grabbed his arm, and said 'Tweel,' and pointed up, and he understood. He said, 'No—no—no, Tick!' and popped away with his glass pistol.

"What could I do? I'd be a goner anyway when the sun set, but I couldn't explain that to him. I said, 'Thanks, Tweel. You're a man!' and felt that I wasn't paying him any compliment at all. A man! There are mighty few men who'd do that.

"So I went 'bang' with my gun and Tweel went 'puff' with his, and the barrels were throwing darts and getting ready to rush us, and booming about being friends. I had given up hope. Then suddenly an angel dropped right down from Heaven in the shape of Putz, with his under-jets blasting the barrels into very small pieces!

"Wow! I let out a yell and dashed for the rocket; Putz opened the door and in I went, laughing and crying and shouting! It was a moment or so before I remembered Tweel; I looked around in time to see him rising in one of his nosedives over the mound and away.

"I had a devil of a job arguing Putz into following! By the time we got the rocket aloft, darkness was down; you know how it comes here—like turning off a light. We sailed out over the desert and put down once or twice. I yelled 'Tweel!' and yelled it a hundred times, I guess. We couldn't find him; he could travel like the wind and all I got—or else I imagined it—was a faint trilling and twittering drifting out of the south. He'd gone, and damn it! I wish—I wish he hadn't!"

The four men of the *Ares* were silent—even the sardonic Harrison. At last little Leroy broke the stillness.

"I should like to see," he murmured.

"Yeah," said Harrison. "And the wart-cure. Too bad you missed that; it might be the cancer cure they've been hunting for a century and a half."

"Oh, that!" muttered Jarvis gloomily. "That's what started the fight!" He drew a glistening object from his pocket.

"Here it is."



AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT

Based on "Accidental Death"
by Peter Bailey



OBSTACLES

Dangerous People – The Chingsi
Dangerous Environment - Dizzying Road
Psychological Challenges - Chingsi Pranks

COMPLICATIONS

No Intel

PERKS

50 MV

MAGUFFINS

Naming Rights (Survey scenario)
Data/Report on Unaris B
Data/Report on The Chingsi
Contact with The Chingsi
Garbage Food Box (3M)

BACKSTORY

The PCs encounter a race of aliens who are smart, funny and easy to get along with, living in a strangely-confabulated city constructed like a complicated joke with a never-ending punchline. But unbeknownst to the PCs these creatures have some uncanny mental powers, and a strange sense of humor.

GM NOTE: Since the original story offers very little information about the Chingsi home planet and almost nothing about their lives is specified, this adventure begs to become a session of high improv and gonzo silliness. The Chingsi are almost buddha-like in their unshakable good humor, and their powers can cause all manner of inexplicable things to happen: both good luck and bad. In fact judging from the events described in the original story, they take a peculiar pleasure in combining strokes of bad luck with strokes of good luck (kinda like rolling a crit success on the result of a crit failure). Crazy things can happen. Let the random Generators guide you.

This adventure may be used in many ways, but the biggest “Crisis” of the mission will be a situation in which the PCs are stuck with one more Chingsi, suffering terrible luck, and totally unaware of the psychic abilities that are causing such chaos. Just wait til one of these suckers gets back to Earth!

GREETINGS FROM EARTH

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Political/Diplomatic
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Historically Stable (5)
PAY: 10M ea

This Pocket Universe appears to be an exact duplicate of the Milky Way galaxy, as seen from the surface of a planet about 112 light-years away from Earth.

The PCs are tasked with being the first intraspace party to visit Unaris B on official government business, bringing greetings from the leaders of our world to the inhabitants of this newly-discovered Node. One PC should be a Diplomat or Celebrity, or an NPC passenger will hold that honor and the PCs will be expected to protect this personage.

If relations seem good, the Chingsi will propose leaving the Earth ambassador here, and sending their own ambassador back with the PCs to represent them to the citizens of Earth. The Chingsi diplomat, of course, will be the one whose name sounds like “Charley”.

GET US OUT OF HERE

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Emergency/Rescue
NODE TYPE: Unknown Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL4)
PAY: 8M ea

An UpVector transmission is received from the crew of the *Mal Bicho*: after greeting a friendly race and taking onboard a diplomat (“Charley”) from the newly-discovered planet *Unaris B*, this veteran DayTripper team suffered an accidental superorbital launch followed by dual-engine failure. Now they’re drifting toward the star with no way to stop their descent.

SIX-SYSTEM SURVEY

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Survey/Fact-Finding
NODE TYPE: Unknown Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (multiple) (DL4)
PAY: 12M ea

The crew is tasked with performing initial surveys of six star systems, all located within the same galaxy in 3space. The tasks required are standard: (1) observe each star, recording its size, color and stage; (2) count and classify any planets in orbit around each star; (3) make orbital scans of any human-habitable planets found; (4) make landfall on each such planet and perform a general survey.

Making contact, the PCs will be welcomed among the Chang, who will take great delight in learning human ways and mastering human languages (although their own language remains incomprehensible to the PCs). Strange quirks of luck – both good and bad – will begin to occur shortly after making planetfall, but these oddities will always be explainable by coincidence, or blamed on the environment itself.

Relations with the Chingsi will seem so positive, it will come as little surprise when one of them is put forward as their “Goodwill Ambassador to Earth” insisting on visiting our home planet post-haste (with potentially disastrous – but oddly hysterical – results).

GM NOTE: This adventure could be included as part of a campaign, using the *Generators* in the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide* to create the other five star systems and adventures. Unaris B might be the final Node in the series, or it might be interesting to make it come earlier, and let “Charley” ride along with the PCs for a while.

UNARIS

STAR

UNARIS is a yellow star 9/10 the size of Sol, 112 light-years from Earth, orbited by two medium rock planets and three large gas giants. The system is rich in heavy metals, making it a valuable extraction zone.

The second rock planet is referred to by Earth astrologers as *Unaris B*, and by its own inhabitants as *Chang*. The roughly-earth-sized planet orbits its parent star at a distance of approximately 1.6AU.

UNARIS B

PLANET

GRAVITY: 1.1 G

ATMOSPHERE: Nitrogen/Oxygen

PRESSURE: 0.9 Earth atmospheres

DAY: 41 hrs 14 mins

YEAR: 312 Earth days

WATER: Roughly 60% of surface

CLIMATE: Cold-Temperate

PRECIPITATION: Likely (DL 7)

BIOSPHERE: Sentient lifeforms

CHINGSI

LIFEFORM

BRAINS 3 Brewing+2 Astronomy+1

CHARM 3

GRACE 2

HEALTH 1

MIGHT 1

PSYCHE 5 Prank+3

TCV: 245

The Chingsi are fur-covered beings, looking more like cats than humans, with large yellow eyes and long white whiskers. They have the uncanny ability to make extremely unlikely things happen.

BODY SHAPE: Rectangular, feline-hominid

BODY SURFACE: Fur-covered, white whiskers

SYMMETRY: Bilateral

SUSTENANCE: Omnivorous

APPENDAGES: Two forelimbs, two rear limbs

MANIPULATORS: Paw-like manipulators with opposable digits on both sides of wrist

SIZE: Human-sized

LOCOMOTION: Bipedal, walks upright, also on all fours

SENSES: All standard human senses, plus infravision, ultravision, enhanced hearing and psychic awareness

SENSORY APPARATUS: Whiskers are used to “feel” the intentions and emotions of other individuals

REPRODUCTION: Bisexual reproduction

OTHER CHARACTERISTICS: They laugh and smile a lot, seeming to find all sorts of unfunny things... funny.

PRANKING: To play a prank, the Chingsi NPC must make a *Prank* roll against the target’s PSYCHE stat (as a DL). This is done without telling the target. If the prank succeeds, the next action attempted by the target will suffer a negative or positive mod equal to the Chingsi’s *Prank* skill level (determine randomly, but don’t go the same way thrice in a row).

THE CHINGSI

SOCIETY

SOCIETAL VALUES: Incomprehensible

SOCIETAL PROBLEMS: Incomprehensible

TECHNOLOGY: Circa early industrial age with crystalline geodes used as batteries

RESOURCES: Flora, Fauna, Minerals, Glass, Metals

UNDERSTANDING OF REALITY: Incomprehensible

The Chingsi have a pseudo-medieval civilization, complete with complex machines and astronomy. They learn languages and games with ease. They’re big practical jokers with a strange sense of humor and a psychic ability to manipulate the fortunes of others.

The Chingsi have very different values than humans, and their jokes can be deadly: like causing someone to make disastrous mathematical errors, or overlook vital signs of danger. It’s impossible to say whether their jokes are deliberately malign, or whether they simply have a different understanding of concepts like *pain*, *discomfort*, *trouble* and *death*. Everything’s funny.

Chingsi technology includes machines made of metal, stone, ceramics, glass and other materials, connected into complex and unusual systems. Ropes, pulleys, levers, gears, funnels, weights, ramps, toggles and knobs cover every surface: the Chingsi city is like a giant Rube Goldberg machine that works in the most unlikely and random ways.

The Chingsi are friendly and curious, and enjoy human company, but their values are as incomprehensible as their technology. They often perform baffling activities for no apparent reason, concentrating with great intensity on making nothing happen, or on making stupid and inconsequential things happen, meanwhile ignoring serious things like accidents and fires. They often laugh at inappropriate times. They do not, however, speak about their psychic abilities. This may be because they think everybody has them, making them pointless to talk about.

Or not.

CHINGSI CITY

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Meadow beside a canyon

CONDITION: Lush, foliant

TERRAIN: Smooth, Sandy, Grassy

WEATHER: Variable wind

BIODIVERSITY: High/Stable: many specialized lifeforms

DOMINANT COLORS: Green and Brown

RESOURCES: Flora, Fauna, Minerals, Metals

UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient

ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

Chingsi City is a chaotic conglomeration of random constructions, sprawling, intertwining, each wildly divergent in purpose and form. Pipes, wires, hoses, filaments and string connect buildings – if they are buildings – in the most improbable or seemingly pointless ways. Some of the buildings move, and many have moving parts. Structures spawn off of other structures, often of completely different design, sometimes with no visible means of support. To determine the nature of a Chingsi structure, roll 2d6 twice on the table below (once for each column). You may also wish to roll on the *What Is This Place Used For?* table in the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*.

STRUCTURE TYPE (2D6 TWICE)

2-3	Floating	Prisms
4-5	Burning	Mechanisms
6	Glowing	Platforms
7	Rotating	Cube
8	Vibrating	Polyhedrons
9	Swinging/Hinged	Spheres
10	Sound-Negating	Trees
11-12	Disappearing	Holes in space

Chingsi of all sizes run around the city constantly, apparently very busy doing whatever strange things they're doing, often pausing to laugh hysterically at something they've just seen, executed, or thought up. Small groups of Chingsi gather together to discuss plans for even more complex contraptions, sometimes starting to work immediately, other times breaking into argument, then splitting into groups, laughing.

Chingsi who are encountered in the city often have no time for conversation, so busy are they pursuing their machinations, but they are generally friendly and don't seem surprised by the presence of the PCs.

Their language is complex and musical, full of purring, mewling, and other throat noises, and their communication is accompanied by complex and sometimes subtle gestures that make even the simplest concepts seem very nuanced and difficult to understand. Thankfully they have very little trouble learning human languages, and will be able to carry on basic conversations within several minutes of conversing with a talkative human.

In the center of the city is a large paved square, several hundred feet across, utterly filled by a gigantic sprawling machine of amazing complexity. This is the *COLORFUL MACHINE* – and the busiest part of the city by far.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3 A group of 3d6 Chingsi surround the PCs, then (1-3) give them all something, (4-6) build something around them

4-5 A Chingsi is very excited about a new invention, and invites a PC to sit in/on it. Roll on the *Tweak Characters* table.

6 All Chingsi in the area suddenly break into a complex dance; when it ends they resume whatever they were doing

7 Unusual Feature

8 A Chingsi challenges a PC to a *GAME OF CHANCE*:

- 1 Polyhedral Dice Game
- 2 Polyhedral Dice Pitching
- 3 Card Game
- 4 Coin Tossing
- 5 String Throwing
- 6 Dirt Sifting

9-10 A group of 1d6 Chingsi approaches the PCs. Roll on the *What Does This NPC Want?* table.

11-12 A Chingsi speaks with the PCs, learns their language quickly, then (1-3) invites them home, (4-6) disappears in a puff

GAMES OF CHANCE

EVENT

When playing a game of chance against a Chingsi, or while surrounded by Chingsi, your luck will tend to skew in wildly divergent ways. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad, but it usually ends up with you losing in the long run. Almost every time, just when you're sure the game is going one way, it flips at the last second and everything changes. It's uncanny.

Here's how to simulate the effect:

STEP 1. Determine the DL and Mods as usual. Let the Player roll as usual for whatever they're trying to do.

STEP 2. Roll 5d6, take the highest, and add +3 to it. This is the Chingi's *Prank* roll. Don't explain it: let the Players wonder what you're rolling for.

STEP 3. Compare the Prank roll to the Player's roll.

- If the Prank roll is greater than the Player's roll, the Player's roll is modified by -3.
- If the Prank roll is lower than the Player's roll, the Player's roll is modified by +3.
- If the Prank roll *equals* the Player's roll, the Player's total won't be changed, but something really odd will happen (for example: the wind whips a PC's cards out of their hand and they grab at them, somehow catching them *in perfect order*... a die bounces off the table, hits the floor and bounces back up onto the table... a coin slowly rotates while balancing on its edge for 60 seconds before falling over... etc.)

Whenever this happens, the Chingsi will smile, laugh or nod. But then again, they do that all the time.

COLORFUL MACHINE

LOCATION

A gigantic sprawling machine of amazing complexity sits in a paved square. The machine butts up against and runs into the walls of neighboring buildings, and Chingsi youth climb up and down it as a shortcut to their apartment windows above.

The machine is brightly-colored and makes all manner of noises, all day and night. Chingsi of all ages come to the machine, sometimes dropping what they're doing in mid-activity to run to it, as if something terribly important must be tended to. There they will press buttons, pull levers, move sliders, or remove parts from one section of the machine just to install them in another section. The Chingsi do not explain any of this. If asked, they will seem startled that human cities do not possess such colorful machines.

If pressed, a Chingsi may reveal that "the machine makes things happen", but none will say any more.

In point of fact the machine does nothing at all, but they enjoy playing with it. It is an important element of Chingsi culture, and they take it as seriously as anything. More seriously than most things, actually.

ANCIENT CANAL

LOCATION

The Chingsi take their human guests to an ancient canal, spanned by bizarrely-confabulated bridges. They tie strings to random items and lower them into the waters below, waiting and worrying like they're fishing for something. When they pull their strings back up, half of time the items are gone. The other half of the time, they have been replaced with different items.

DIZZYING ROAD

LOCATION

The Chingsi may wish to trade, or may be approached by a PC who makes a trade offer. By Chingsi custom, trades may only be negotiated on the "Dizzying Road": a multi-level network of swaying rope-bridges and revolving platforms suspended over a chasm filled with a slimy, egg-smelling brown substance.

Negotiation always begins with an offer of no value, like a fart, or a handful of dirt. To get a better offer, you must perform a risky stunt, such as leaping from a bridge to a platform, or swinging from a rope.

If you succeed, the DL of this maneuver will multiply the offer— i.e. a DL4 action will multiply the offer by 4 — but the Chingsi, of course, will be up to their pranks.

GARBAGE FOOD BOX

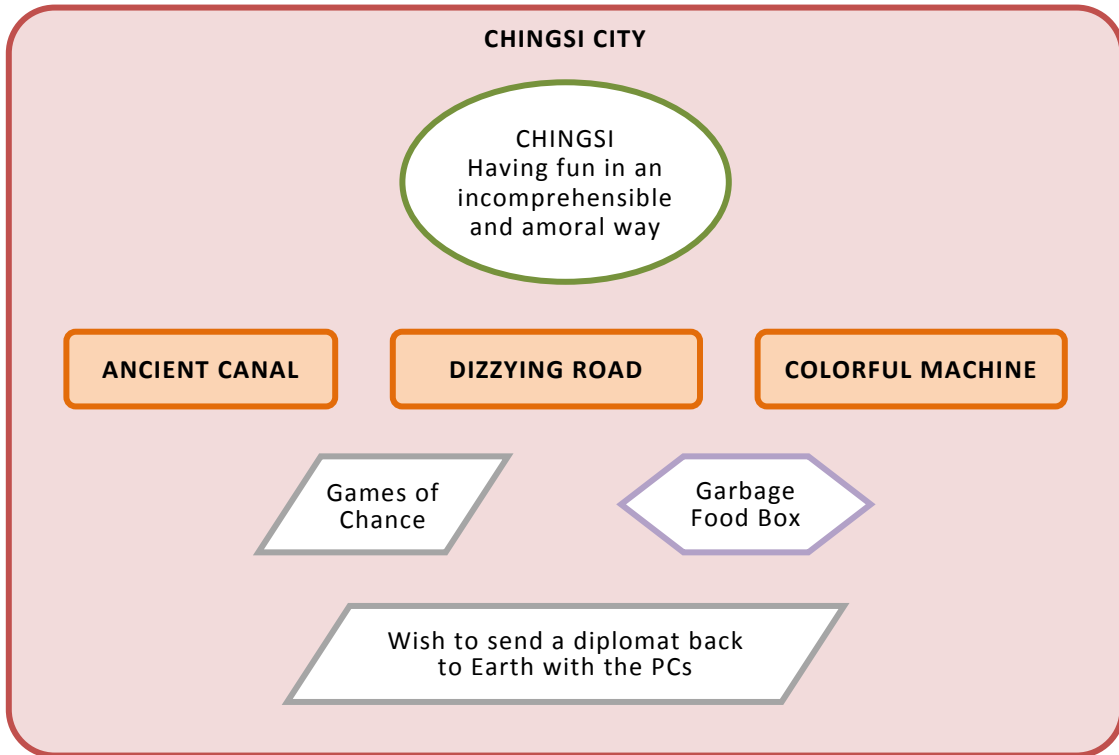
MAGUFFIN

Earth Value: 3M

This seven-sided box is roughly the size of a basketball, made of what looks like beautifully tinted red wood. There are sliding panels on two opposed ends, marked with two different Chingsi glyphs. Inserting garbage in one end results in a random type of yummy edible food coming out the other, *most* of the time. But 1/6 of the time, what comes out is *different garbage*: twice as much, and terribly smelly.

Nearly every Chingsi home has one of these boxes, and some may be persuaded to trade theirs.

AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT



ACCIDENTAL DEATH

by Peter Bailey

Illustrated by John Schoenherr

**The most dangerous of weapons
is the one you don't know is loaded.**

The wind howled out of the northwest, blind with snow and barbed with ice crystals. All the way up the half-mile precipice it fingered and wrenched away at groaning ice-slabs. It screamed over the top, whirled snow in a dervish dance around the hollow there, piled snow into the long furrow plowed ruler-straight through streamlined hummocks of snow.

The sun glinted on black rock glazed by ice, chasms and ridges and bridges of ice. It lit the snow slope to a frozen glare, penciled black shadow down the long furrow, and flashed at the furrow's end on a thing of metal and plastics, an artifact thrown down in the dead wilderness.

Nothing grew, nothing flew, nothing walked, nothing talked. But the thing in the hollow was stirring in stiff jerks like a snake with its back broken or a clockwork toy running down. When the movements stopped, there was a click and a strange sound began. Thin, scratchy, inaudible more than a yard away, weary but still cocky, there leaked from the shape in the hollow the sound of a human voice.

"I've tried my hands and arms and they seem to work," it began. "I've wiggled my toes with entire success. It's well on the cards that I'm all in one piece and not broken up at all, though I don't see how it could happen. Right now I don't feel like struggling up and finding out. I'm fine where I am. I'll just lie here for a while and relax, and get some of the story on tape. This suit's got a built-in recorder, I might as well use it. That way even if I'm not as well as I feel, I'll leave a message. You probably know we're back and wonder what went wrong.

"I suppose I'm in a state of shock. That's why I can't seem to get up. Who wouldn't be shocked after luck like that?"

"I've always been lucky, I guess. Luck got me a place in the *Whale*. Sure I'm a good astronomer but so are lots of other guys. If I were ten years older, it would have been an honor, being picked for the first long jump in the first starship ever. At my age it was luck.

"You'll want to know if the ship worked. Well, she did. Went like a bomb. We got lined up between Earth and Mars, you'll remember, and James pushed the button marked 'Jump'. Took his finger off the button and there we were: *Alpha Centauri*. Two months later your time, one second later by us. We covered our whole survey assignment like

that, smooth as a pint of old and mild which right now I could certainly use. Better yet would be a pint of hot black coffee with sugar in. Failing that, I could even go for a long drink of cold water. There was never anything wrong with the *Whale* till right at the end and even then I doubt if it was the ship itself that fouled things up.

"That was some survey assignment. We astronomers really lived. Wait till you see—but of course you won't. I could weep when I think of those miles of lovely color film, all gone up in smoke.

■

"I'm shocked all right. I never said who I was. Matt Hennessy, from Farside Observatory, back of the Moon, just back from a proving flight *cum* astronomical survey in the starship *Whale*. Whoever you are who finds this tape, you're made. Take it to any radio station or newspaper office. You'll find you can name your price and don't take any wooden nickels.

"Where had I got to? I'd told you how we happened to find Chang, hadn't I? That's what the natives called it. Walking, talking natives on a blue sky planet with 1.1 g gravity and a twenty per cent oxygen atmosphere at fifteen p.s.i. The odds against finding Chang on a six-sun survey on the first star jump ever must be up in the googols. We certainly were lucky.

"The Chang natives aren't very technical—haven't got space travel for instance. They're good astronomers, though. We were able to show them our sun, in their telescopes. In their way, they're a highly civilized people. Look more like cats than people, but they're people all right. If you doubt it, chew these facts over.

"One, they learned our language in four weeks. When I say they, I mean a ten-man team of them.

"Two, they brew a near-beer that's a lot nearer than the canned stuff we had aboard the *Whale*.

"Three, they've a great sense of humor. Ran rather to silly practical jokes, but still. Can't say I care for that hot-foot and belly-laugh stuff myself, but tastes differ.

"Four, the ten-man language team also learned chess and table tennis.

"But why go on? People who talk English, drink beer, like jokes and beat me at chess or table-tennis are people for my money, even if they look like tigers in trousers.

"It was funny the way they won all the time at table tennis. They certainly weren't so hot at it. Maybe that ten per cent extra gravity put us off our strokes. As for chess, Svendlov was our champion. He won sometimes. The rest of us seemed to lose whichever Chingsi we played. There again it wasn't so much that they were good. How could they be, in the time? It was more that we all seemed to make silly mistakes when we played them and that's fatal in chess. Of course it's a screwy situation, playing chess with something

that grows its own fur coat, has yellow eyes an inch and a half long and long white whiskers. Could *you* have kept your mind on the game?

"And don't think I fell victim to their feline charm. The children were pets, but you didn't feel like patting the adults on their big grinning heads. Personally I didn't like the one I knew best. He was called—well, we called him Charley, and he was the ethnologist, ambassador, contact man, or whatever you like to call him, who came back with us. Why I disliked him was because he was always trying to get the edge on you. All the time he had to be top. Great sense of humor, of course. I nearly broke my neck on that butter-slide he fixed up in the metal alleyway to the *Whale's* engine room. Charley laughed fit to bust, everyone laughed, I even laughed myself though doing it hurt me more than the tumble had. Yes, life and soul of the party, old Charley ...

"My last sight of the *Minnow* was a cabin full of dead and dying men, the sweetish stink of burned flesh and the choking reek of scorching insulation, the boat jolting and shuddering and beginning to break up, and in the middle of the flames, still unhurt, was Charley. He was laughing ...

"My God, it's dark out here. Wonder how high I am. Must be all of fifty miles, and doing eight hundred miles an hour at least. I'll be doing more than that when I land. What's final velocity for a fifty-mile fall? Same as a fifty thousand mile fall, I suppose; same as escape; twenty-four thousand miles an hour. I'll make a mess ...

■

"That's better. Why didn't I close my eyes before? Those star streaks made me dizzy. I'll make a nice shooting star when I hit air. Come to think of it, I must be deep in air now. Let's take a look.

"It's getting lighter. Look at those peaks down there! Like great knives. I don't seem to be falling as fast as I expected though. Almost seem to be floating. Let's switch on the radio and tell the world hello. Hello, earth ... hello, again ... and good-by ...

"Sorry about that. I passed out. I don't know what I said, if anything, and the suit recorder has no playback or eraser. What must have happened is that the suit ran out of oxygen, and I lost consciousness due to anoxia. I dreamed I switched on the radio, but I actually switched on the emergency tank, thank the Lord, and that brought me round.

"Come to think of it, why not crack the suit and breath fresh air instead of bottled?"

We all seemed to make silly mistakes when we played them and that's fatal in chess.

"No. I'd have to get up to do that. I think I'll just lie here a little bit longer and get properly rested up before I try anything big like standing up.

"I was telling about the return journey, wasn't I? The long jump back home, which should have dumped us between the orbits of Earth and Mars. Instead of which, when James took his finger off the button, the mass-detector showed nothing except the noise-level of the universe.

"We were out in that no place for a day. We astronomers had to establish our exact position relative to the solar system. The crew had to find out exactly what went wrong. The physicists had to make mystic passes in front of meters and mutter about residual folds in stress-free space. Our task was easy, because we were about half a light-year from the sun. The crew's job was also easy: they found what went wrong in less than half an hour.

"It still seems incredible. To program the ship for a star-jump, you merely told it where you were and where you wanted to go. In practical terms, that entailed first a series of exact measurements which had to be translated into the somewhat abstruse co-ordinate system we used based on the topological order of mass-points in the galaxy. Then you cut a tape on the computer and hit the button. Nothing was wrong with the computer. Nothing was wrong with the engines. We'd hit the right button and we'd gone to the place we'd aimed for. All we'd done was aim for the wrong place. It hurts me to tell you this and I'm just attached personnel with no space-flight tradition. In practical terms, one highly trained crew member had punched a wrong pattern of holes on the tape. Another equally skilled had failed to notice this when reading back. A childish error, highly improbable; twice repeated, thus squaring the improbability. Incredible, but that's what happened.

"Anyway, we took good care with the next lot of measurements. That's why we were out there so long. They were cross-checked about five times. I got sick so I climbed into a spacesuit and went outside and took some photographs of the Sun which I hoped would help to determine hydrogen density in the outer regions. When I got back everything was ready. We disposed ourselves about the control room and relaxed for all we were worth. We were all praying that this time nothing would go wrong, and all looking forward to seeing Earth again after four months subjective time away, except for Charley, who was still chuckling and shaking his head, and Captain James who was glaring at Charley and obviously wishing human dignity permitted him to tear Charley limb from limb. Then James pressed the button.

"Everything twanged like a bowstring. I felt myself turned inside out, passed through a small sieve, and poured back into shape. The entire bow wall-screen was full of Earth. Something was wrong all right, and this time it was much, much worse. We'd come out of the jump about two hundred miles above the Pacific, pointed straight down,

traveling at a relative speed of about two thousand miles an hour.

"It was a fantastic situation. Here was the *Whale*, the most powerful ship ever built, which could cover fifty light-years in a subjective time of one second, and it was helpless. For, as of course you know, the star-drive couldn't be used again for at least two hours.

"The *Whale* also had ion rockets of course, the standard deuterium-fusion thing with direct conversion. As again you know, this is good for interplanetary flight because you can run it continuously and it has extremely high exhaust velocity. But in our situation it was no good because it has rather a low thrust. It would have taken more time than we had to deflect us enough to avoid a smash. We had five minutes to abandon ship.

"James got us all into the *Minnow* at a dead run. There was no time to take anything at all except the clothes we stood in. The *Minnow* was meant for short heavy hops to planets or asteroids. In addition to the ion drive it had emergency atomic rockets, using steam for reaction mass. We thanked God for that when Cazamian canceled our downwards velocity with them in a few seconds. We curved away up over China and from about fifty miles high we saw the *Whale* hit the Pacific. Six hundred tons of mass at well over two thousand miles an hour make an almighty splash. By now you'll have divers down, but I doubt they'll salvage much you can use.

"I wonder why James went down with the ship, as the saying is? Not that it made any difference. It must have broken his heart to know that his lovely ship was getting the chopper. Or did he suspect another human error?

"We didn't have time to think about that, or even to get the radio working. The steam rockets blew up. Poor Cazamian was burnt to a crisp. Only thing that saved me was the spacesuit I was still wearing. I snapped the face plate down because the cabin was filling with fumes. I saw Charley coming out of the toilet—that's how he'd escaped—and I saw him beginning to laugh. Then the port side collapsed and I fell out.

"I saw the launch spinning away, glowing red against a purplish black sky. I tumbled head over heels towards the huge curved shield of earth fifty miles below. I shut my eyes and that's about all I remember. I don't see how any of us could have survived. I think we're all dead.

"I'll have to get up and crack this suit and let some air in. But I can't. I fell fifty miles without a parachute. I'm dead so I can't stand up."

■

There was silence for a while except for the vicious howl of the wind. Then snow began to shift on the ledge. A man crawled stiffly out and came shakily to his feet. He moved slowly around for some time. After about two hours he

returned to the hollow, squatted down and switched on the recorder. The voice began again, considerably wearier.

"Hello there. I'm in the bleakest wilderness I've ever seen. This place makes the moon look cozy. There's precipice around me every way but one and that's up. So it's up I'll have to go till I find a way to go down. I've been chewing snow to quench my thirst but I could eat a horse. I picked up a short-wave broadcast on my suit but couldn't understand a word. Not English, not French, and there I stick. Listened to it for fifteen minutes just to hear a human voice again. I haven't much hope of reaching anyone with my five milliwatt suit transmitter but I'll keep trying.

"Just before I start the climb there are two things I want to get on tape. The first is how I got here. I've remembered something from my military training, when I did some parachute jumps. Terminal velocity for a human body falling through air is about one hundred twenty m.p.h. Falling fifty miles is no worse than falling five hundred feet. You'd be lucky to live through a five hundred foot fall, true, but I've been lucky. The suit is bulky but light and probably slowed my fall. I hit a sixty mile an hour updraft this side of the mountain, skidded downhill through about half a mile of snow and fetched up in a drift. The suit is part worn but still operational. I'm fine.

"The second thing I want to say is about the Chingsi, and here it is: watch out for them. Those jokers are dangerous. I'm not telling how because I've got a scientific reputation to watch. You'll have to figure it out for yourselves. Here are the clues:

(1) The Chingsi talk and laugh but after all they aren't human. On an alien world a hundred light-years away, why shouldn't alien talents develop? A talent that's so uncertain and rudimentary here that most people don't believe it, might be highly developed out there.

(2) The *Whale* expedition did fine till it found Chang. Then it hit a seam of bad luck. Real stinking bad luck that went on and on till it looks fishy. We lost the ship, we lost the launch, all but one of us lost our lives. We couldn't even win a game of ping-pong.

"So what is luck, good or bad? Scientifically speaking, future chance events are by definition chance. They can turn out favorable or not. When a preponderance of chance events has occurred unfavorably, you've got bad luck. It's a fancy name for a lot of chance results that didn't go your way. But the gambler defines it differently. For him, luck refers to the future, and you've got bad luck when future chance events won't go your way.

These jokers are dangerous. I'm not telling how because I've got a scientific reputation to watch. You'll have to figure it out for yourselves.

Scientific investigations into this have been inconclusive, but everyone knows that some people are lucky and others aren't. All we've got are hints and glimmers, the fumbling touch of a rudimentary talent. There's the evil eye legend and the Jonah, bad luck bringers. Superstition? Maybe; but ask the insurance companies about accident prone. What's in a name? Call a man unlucky and you're superstitious. Call him accident prone and that's sound business sense. I've said enough.

"All the same, search the space-flight records, talk to the actuaries. When a ship is working perfectly and is operated by a hand-picked crew of highly trained men in perfect condition, how often is it wrecked by a series of silly errors happening one after another in defiance of probability?

"I'll sign off with two thoughts, one depressing and one cheering. A single Chingsi wrecked our ship and our launch. What could a whole planetful of them do?

"On the other hand, a talent that manipulates chance events is bound to be chancy. No matter how highly developed it can't be surefire. The proof is that I've survived to tell the tale."

■

At twenty below zero and fifty miles an hour the wind ravaged the mountain. Peering through his polarized vizor at the white waste and the snow-filled air howling over it, sliding and stumbling with every step on a slope that got gradually steeper and seemed to go on forever, Matt Hennessy began to inch his way up the north face of Mount Everest.

✱



CURIOUS CURE

Based on "Bolden's Pets"
by Floyd L. Wallace



OBSTACLES

Dangerous Environment - Hexcrawl
Dangerous Environment - Bubble Death
Dangerous Environment - Torrential Storm
Dangerous Environment - Lightning Storm
Dangerous Environment - Trap
Wildlife/Animals - Giant Carnivores

COMPLICATIONS

Scant Intel
Deadline

PERKS

30 MV

MAGUFFINS

Data/Report on Van Daamas
Data/Report on the Allawec
Trade with the Allawec
Van Daamas Lifeforms
"The Animal" Specimen (10M)

BACKSTORY

The human race extends its reach into the stars, looking for new earthlike planets on which to settle and trade. On some planets we find Galactic Hominids – humanoid lifeforms with a variety of features, possibly descended from the same panspermia that gave rise to humans on Earth. But along the way we find other lifeforms, big and small, with biological properties we haven't evolved alongside, and against which we have no defenses. We discover new and incomprehensible diseases, sometimes requiring new and incomprehensible cures.

Van Daamas (named for its discoverer Greta Van Daamas) is one of several dozen planets to have been selected as a likely spot for development; trade, colonization or tourism (take your pick). Their exotic hardwoods are prized, and the landscape, while very cold, is stunningly beautiful. The language of the local *Allawec* (a race of Galactic Hominids) is understood just well enough to allow basic communication between the races.

Depending on the mission selected, the planet may already have been visited by a dug-in group of dream-world earth scientists, colonized by a small “first wave” of dedicated expat-Earthlings, or chosen as a likely candidate for a colonization program which is merely awaiting approval pending the PCs' survey. In any case, people from Earth have had only the most limited communication with the *Allawec* tribes.

BACK TO THE DREAM WORLD

MISSION TYPE: Exploration/Into the Unknown
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Historically Stable (5)
PAY: 4M ea

The DayTrippers do an initial survey of *Van Daamas*. They meet the scientists, and after some hexcrawling they locate an *Allawec* hunting party. A hunter asks how their hands are, which seems strange at the time.

Returning to Home-Earth, one or more of the PCs begins to exhibit symptoms of the *Bubble Death*. Our nanotech cannot keep up with the disease, only slow it down. Nobody on *Van Daamas* seemed to be sick, but interestingly, the initial symptom is *numbness of the hands*. The PCs realize they must get back in the ship and locate a tribe to find a cure. Fast.

MISSION

HEGEMONIC HEXCRAWL

MISSION TYPE: Acquisition/Trade
NODE TYPE: Known Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL3)
PAY: 6M ea

A tentative form of trade has begun, thanks to a tiny but growing colony of Earthlings. Unbeknownst to the client (*X Investments*, perhaps), one colonist already shows signs of *Bubble Death*. The PCs are hired to bring a load of supplies to the colony and make a trade with the *Allawec*, but first a tribe must be located (which will require a bit of hexcrawling). After finding a local, the PCs must await a response from the tribe.

GM NOTE 1: If you're using the *Cartesian Exception* rule, the hexcrawl, and the wait, may be measured in days. Otherwise it will be measured in hours.

GM NOTE 2: During this time one or more PCs will contract the *Bubble Death*. If the *Cartesian Exception* rule is not used and the mission goes past 24 hours, a *Compound Slip* (Temporal & Cartesian) will be required to get home (DL6).

MISSION

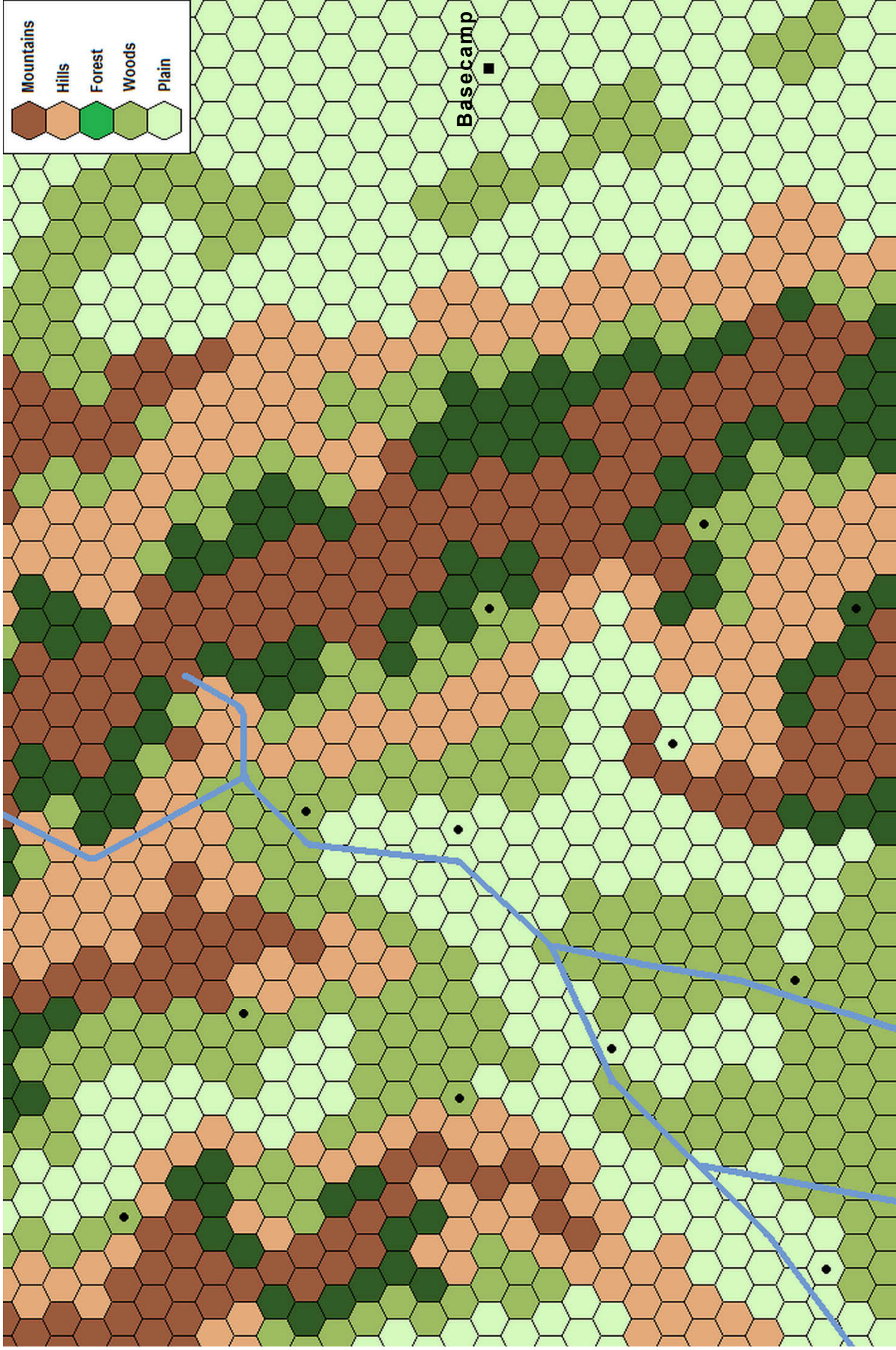
GETTING TO KNOW YOU

MISSION TYPE: Survey/Fact-Finding
NODE TYPE: Unknown Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL4)
PAY: 10M ea

Van Daamas has just been discovered. A basecamp has been set up and some scientists are already there. The client needs the PCs to do a cultural survey, greet the *Allawec*, and determine the likelihood of doing business. The team must include an anthropologist, since the client hopes the project will be fast-tracked through the approval process. But there's a hitch: The survey must be done within a week; there's no time for multiple slips. This is a 24/7, week-long job.

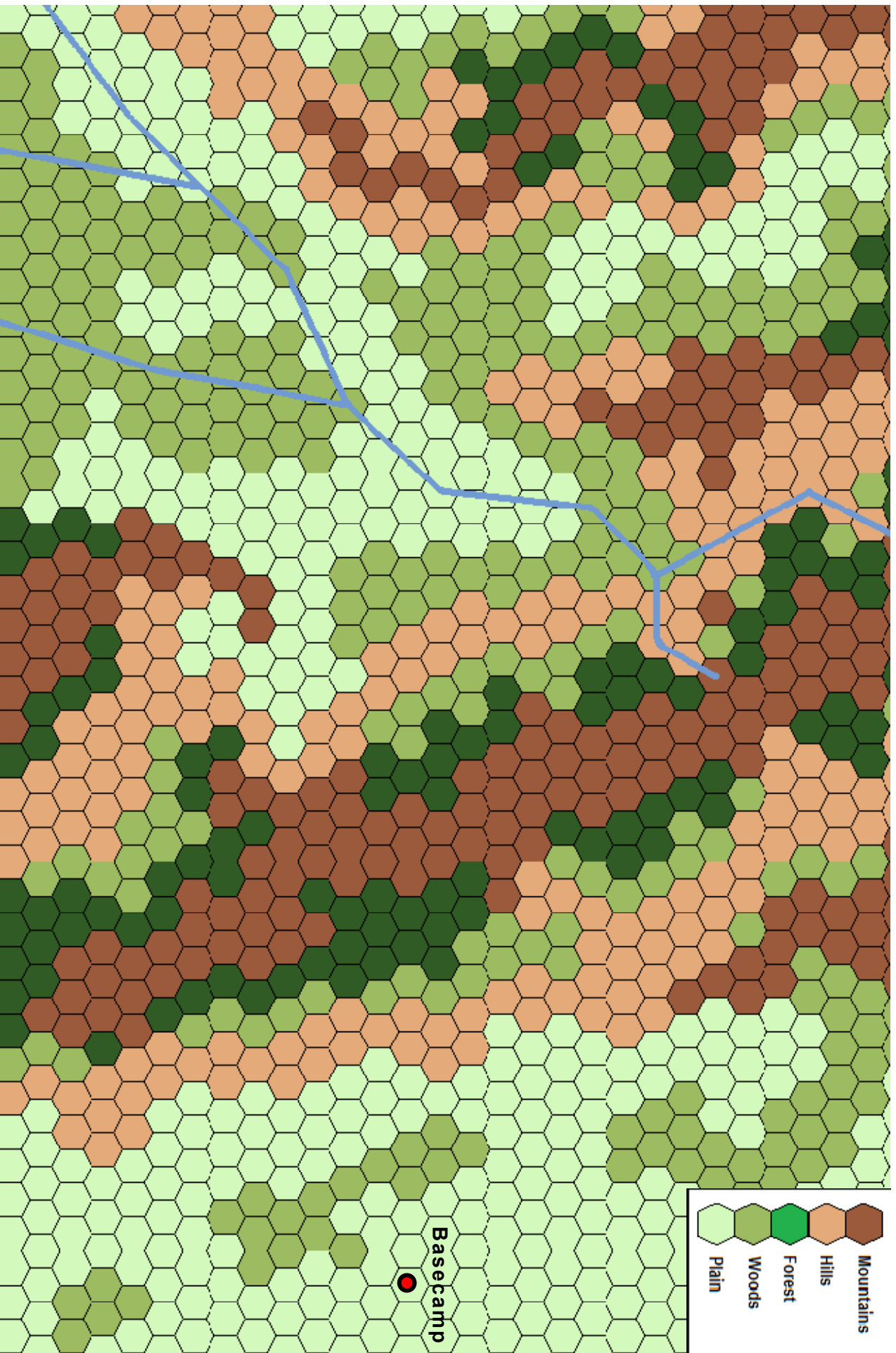
GM NOTE 1: If you're using the *Cartesian Exception* rule, a week-long mission is not an issue, and you may wish to have the PCs do a little downtime on *Van Daamas*, learning the local language and culture, exploring, maybe even getting into some *Local Drama*. Otherwise the slip home becomes *Compound* (DL7), since time will have to be factored into the vector calculations. Let's say double pay for that.

GM NOTE 2: During this week, one or more members of the crew will contract the *Bubble Death*.



VAN DAAMAS: Tridrant 7, Subsector NW14 – GM’s Map

1 HEX = 20 mi.



1 HEX = 20 mi.

VAN DAAMAS: Tridrant 7, Subsector NW14

VAN DAAMAS

GRAVITY: 1.15 G
 ATMOSPHERE: Nitrogen/Oxygen
 PRESSURE: 1.2 Earth atmospheres
 DAY: 30 hrs 27 mins
 YEAR: 509 Earth days
 WATER: Roughly 56% of surface
 CLIMATE: Cold
 PRECIPITATION: Near-Constant (DL 3)
 BIOSPHERE: Sentient Lifeforms (Galactic Hominids)

An Earthlike planet with rugged mountains and broad, grass-filled plains, Van Daamas has only recently been discovered and very little is known about the place.

The planet is home to a race of Galactic Hominids who call themselves *Allawec* (which means “the people”). They live in a harsh environment of nearly-constant rain and snow, sustaining themselves by hunting and trapping a wide variety of local fauna, similar in many ways to life on Earth in the ancient and neolithic ages.

PERCEPTIONS

- The rain and snow hardly ever let up.
- During a storm the windspeeds reach gale force speeds and the snow is blinding; it would be unsafe to attempt traveling in such weather.
- The lifeforms on this planet are much like those of Earth’s last Ice Age: a wide variety of bugs, mammals, rodents, reptiles and birds.
- Most animals are small; a few are gigantic.

MOUNTAINS & HILLS

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Rough Slopes
 CONDITION: Frozen, Cold, Wet
 TERRAIN: Wet Rock, Packed Dirt
 WEATHER: Frequent storms, perpetual fog
 BIODIVERSITY: High, reminiscent of Earth
 DOMINANT COLORS: Brown, Grey, Green, White
 RESOURCES: Plant/Animal Parts, Rock, Soil
 UNUSUAL FEATURES: Sentient Lifeforms
 ENCOUNTER DL: Uncommon (8)

The mountain slopes are rough and shrouded in mist; dangerous even under good conditions. Unless movement progresses at half-speed, a GRACE roll vs DL 3 must be made once per hex to avoid mishaps.

The hilly regions are more easily traveled, although even here the ground is often rough and very uneven; it’s rocky in some places and wet in others.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

Mods: -1 for Hills

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1-3 | Unusual Feature |
| 4 | Roll 1d6: (1-2) The Animal, (3-6) Animal Trap |
| 5-6 | Ravine or Icy Lake (GRACE vs DL 3 to cross) |
| 7 | Giant Carnivore |
| 8 | Torrential Storm |
| 9-10 | Hunting Party |
| 11 | Tribe migrating to another settlement |
| 12 | Corpse, killed by the Bubble Death:
(1-4) Earthling; (5-6) Allawec |

FORESTS & WOODS

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Dense Trees
 CONDITION: Cold, Wet, Dark
 TERRAIN: Wet Soil, Ground Cover
 WEATHER: Moderate wind, occasional storms
 BIODIVERSITY: High, reminiscent of Earth
 DOMINANT COLORS: Green, Brown, White
 RESOURCES: Plant & Animal Parts, Exotic Woods
 UNUSUAL FEATURES: Sentient Lifeforms
 ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

The forests are dense and the narrow paths between clearings are hard to spot. The trees provide shelter from rain, but visibility is limited by the everpresent fog. The sounds of small animals – and occasionally large ones – may be heard all around you.

The woodlands are somewhat more hospitable, and possess a greater number of the planet’s ancient ruins and inexplicable prehistoric artifacts.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

Mods: -1 for Woods

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1-2 | Unusual Feature |
| 3-4 | Roll 1d6: (1-2) The Animal, (3-6) Animal Trap |
| 5-6 | Lightning Storm |
| 7-8 | Giant Carnivore |
| 9-11 | Hunting Party |
| 11 | Tribe migrating to another settlement |
| 12 | Corpse, killed by the Bubble Death:
(1-5) Earthling; (6) Allawec |

GIANT CARNIVORE

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Attack+2
HEALTH 4
MIGHT 2

TCV 80

Roll once on the *Animal Type* table and once on the *Animal Tweaks* table.

ANIMAL TYPE (2D6)

Mods: -1 for Mountains, +1 for Forests

1-3 Feline
4-5 Canine
6-7 Avian
8 Rodent
9-10 Reptile
11-13 Insect

ANIMAL TWEAKS (2D6)

2 Powerful Venom
3 Mild Venom
4 High Intelligence
5 Bizarre Appendage
6-7 Mixed with (roll another Animal Type)
8-9 Frightening Display
10 Spits Caustic Liquid (1 harm to GRACE)
11 Terrible Odor
12 Extra Limbs

Most carnivorous animals will attack the closest enemy if they are not outnumbered, or if the enemy seems frail or wounded. Intelligent creatures will seek their best tactical advantage, and flee if they feel the fight is turning against them.

ANIMAL TRAP

EVENT

TCV 80 (hero obstacle)

The PC moving in point position (or a PC selected at random if no one is in point position) must make a BRAINS or *Survival* roll vs DL 5. If this roll fails, the PC has failed to spot a bent-tree-trap, and has triggered it. The trap is designed to snare fast-moving animals by the leg, and the PC will need to make a GRACE roll vs DL 5 to jump out of the rope loop as it *sproings* into the air.

If the GRACE roll fails the PC takes 1 hit to GRACE, and is now dangling upside down about 10' off the ground. A *HUNTING PARTY* will be coming through here to check the trap in 1d6 hours.

TORRENTIAL STORM

EVENT

TCV 30 (mass obstacle)

The rain and snow whip up in a massive display of nature's power, hurling stinging hail and then progressing into battering shards of semi-frozen water.

Movement over any distance greater than a few feet requires a BRAINS roll vs DL3 to avoid losing sight of where you were going.

Attempting to hexcrawl in such weather requires a BRAINS roll vs DL3 each hour to avoid getting lost.

The storm lasts 1-6 hours.

LIGHTNING STORM

EVENT

TCV 20 (mass obstacle)

The normal storm kicks up a notch as the sky lights up with blistering forks of lightning, coming down very close by.

The party will be targeted by 1d6 bolts of lightning over the course of the storm. Anyone who hasn't found cover will be required to make a BRAINS roll. A "BUT" result indicates they were standing close to a tree that got blasted, and have been knocked to the ground. A result of "NO AND" indicates that they have been hit directly. A direct blast of lightning will do 1d6 points of harm, and each point is allotted randomly to a Stat as shown below:

AFFECTED STAT (1D6)

1 = BRAINS
2 = CHARM
3 = GRACE
4 = HEALTH
5 = MIGHT
6 = PSYCHE

The lightning lasts 1-3 hours.

THE ALLAWEC

SOCIETY

SOCIETAL VALUES: Consensus, Odd Numbers
SOCIETAL PROBLEMS: Harsh Weather & Disease
TECHNOLOGY: Simple Tools (early bronze age)
RESOURCES: Flora, Fauna, Stone, Minerals, Water
UNDERSTANDING OF REALITY: The land is flat

“The People” are semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers who reside in semi-permanent villages, moving from site to site as their food sources move and the weather shifts. There are more villages than there are tribes, so about 1/3rd of these villages are empty at any given time. Tribes are very small, extended families of 10-60.

CULTURE

The Allawec are a stoic, courageous people, and are fair traders. They’ve reached a level of technology similar to the Bronze Age on Earth, but possess very little metal and have not developed any form of intensive mining. Big decisions are made by a council of elders, assembled from nearby tribes as necessary.

On holy days, trading rituals and tests of skill are held between tribes who meet at ritual sites. Occasionally there will be an intermarriage between tribes. These are lively occasions and cause for much festivity.

The Allawec are religiously fond of odd numbers, and never do anything significant in even numbers. To do so would be to court evil forces, which is taboo.

Their history is a faded pastiche of dimly-remembered and contradictory tales. Their true origin is not known to them; they say that their ancestors built this place long ago, and then simply went away. Throughout the wilderlands may be found ruins they call “the homes of their ancestors” – although examination of these sites might suggest other ideas.

Where did The People come from? Good question.

LOCAL DRAMA

The default nature of this mission tends toward producing an *Environment Story*, but by adding a *Drama Template* and a few local characters, it could easily be turned into a *Social Story*.

For example (Using the *Lucky Mistake/Cargo Cult* template): One or more of the PCs are believed to be heroes from an ancient prophecy among The People. This might be a very good thing at first, but it soon evolves into a situation where the “heroes” are expected to be able to do something that they cannot, in fact, do. At least not easily.

TRIBE MEMBER

NPC

GRACE 2
HEALTH 2 Vision+2

One skill at +1

TCV 50

Living in the cold, foggy mountains, “The People” have developed a keenness of vision that enables them to see through fog and mist better than any Earthling.

HUNTER

NPC

GRACE 2 Bow&Arrow+2
HEALTH 2 Vision+2

GEAR:

Bow & Arrows (quiver strapped to thigh)

TCV 70

Allawec hunters all paint their arrows in their own individual colors for easy identification and retrieval; but all of them carry a single blue arrow which is never used for hunting.

HUNTING PARTY

ENCOUNTER

An Allawec Hunting Party will be comprised of 2d6 *HUNTERS* (but always an odd number; round down). One of them will be the designated *Elder Hunter* and spokesperson for the group. This Elder has a 50% chance of carrying Radar Goggles+1 (obtained in trade from the Earth settlement).

ENCOUNTERS

- The party stumbles upon a Hunting Party laying low; the quarry is alarmed and gets away; the PCs have ruined their hunt.
- The PCs encounter a Hunting Party on its way home, bearing an odd number of dead beasts.
- The PCs encounter a Hunting Party which has captured one of The Animals, and are bringing it back to their village.
- (Crisis) The PCs are mistaken for game by a Hunting Party, which opens fire upon them with a rain of arrows.

ALLAWEC VILLAGE

LOCATION

When a village is entered for the first time in 30 days, roll to determine whether it's inhabited or not:

VILLAGE CONDITION (1D6)

- 1-2 Empty
- 3-6 Inhabited

An Allawec village is comprised of 5d6 log huts (always an odd number, round down), a communal firepit, and a pen for "The Animal". One of the huts (the Elders Council Hut) will be larger than the others. An empty village will contain no notable items other than a few small or forgotten things (nothing really valuable).

If an inhabited village is entered during daylight hours, roll to determine what the villagers are doing (see the "Advanced Sentient" section of the *What Are They Doing?* table in the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*). If it's night there will be 1d6 (an odd number, round down) guards (*HUNTERS*) posted outside the village who may see the PCs approaching and take defensive action (remember, they have extremely keen vision).

VILLAGE ANIMAL

Each tribe keeps one of "The Animals" in a special pen near the edge of camp. Although they have no concept of pets and only a few domesticated animals, they guard these little creatures with reverence, and the reason is not immediately apparent.

No one will offer any information about the animal, but if they notice a human with "sick hands" they'll confer, and may decide to give them an Animal of their own. In trade, of course. (They are particularly fond of Radar Goggles, or anything that will enhance their already-astounding eyesight.)

ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

- 2 Unusual Feature
- 3-4 Giant Carnivore(s) Attack Village
- 5-7 1d6 Tribe Members
- 8-10 1d6 Hunters
- 11-12 Tribal Elder

PERCEPTIONS

- Children playing a game of darts, hitting small targets with amazing accuracy.
- Every village keeps an "Animal" in a pen near the perimeter, but no one owns it.
- Hunters paint their arrows in their own colors; but all carry a single blue arrow.

ALLAWEC NAMES

Alath, Ansud, Asalla, Danath, Disalla, Donor, Illuth, Indis, Lallawi, Lania, Lonor, Nilla, Nanor, Nillia, Nusilid, Sandar, Sonis, Sunalla, Thanor, Ualla, Wendan, Wonid

DISEASE: THE BUBBLE DEATH

FATAL DISEASE

DL 6 vs HEALTH

Effects on fail: -1 GRACE > MIGHT > HEALTH

Harm accumulates on subsequent fails, once per 6 hrs.

MedBay or nanotech will slow it to once per day.

Symptoms are flu-like, and begin with a numbness of the hands which spreads up the limbs and toward the brain. As the illness proceeds, nerve filaments are covered with tiny spheres that insulate the nerves from contact, causing numbness and organ failure.

THE ANIMAL

LIFEFORM

CHARM 3

GRACE 2

HEALTH 2 Heal Bubble Death+3

TCV 95

A yellow-eyed mammal the size and shape of an otter, the Animal emits a neurotransmitter which is the only known means of fighting the *BUBBLE DEATH* virus. This neurotransmitter is emitted toward anyone who treats it with care and attention, and is transferred by physical contact. The Animal happily returns affection, licking the fingers of its hominid companions. If the environment is dark enough, tiny sparks can be seen shooting from the ends of its fur while stroked.

Unfortunately its reserves of the chemical are limited, and after a time it shuts down, leaving the Animal to suffer and die of the disease. It is considered humane (and the local custom) to kill it quickly when it reaches this stage. This is the purpose of the blue arrow.

To cure, the Animal must be handled for one hour and then must make a *Heal Bubble Death* roll vs a DL equal to (the number of hits missing from the Stat it's healing). If successful, that Stat regains 1 hit.

Because of its unusual interactions with (or upon) the human nervous system and the potential for medical applications, a live specimen would be worth at least 10M to a researcher on Home-Earth.

BASECAMP

LOCATION

A large central dome contains the community galley, mess hall, life support and recycling systems, computer room (Mk3), two medical response tanks and a maintenance/storage area. The facility is under the operational command of *DR. ALFONSE KESSLER*.

The main dome's medical capability is equivalent to any state-of-the-art field hospital, and is maintained by the dutiful attentions of nurse *PEGGY SIMS*.

The population of the camp is rounded out by a variety of scientists and aides whose Stats and Skills are *Ordinary Professional* (+2 in one speciality).

LAYOUT

In the Acquisition mission, the basecamp colony has a population of about two dozen; most of them are scientists performing assorted environmental, biospheric and atmospheric analyses. A large central *Vidome* over 100' in diameter houses the scientists and their equipment, with several smaller adjoining vidomes for isolated experiments.

In the other missions, basecamp is a cluster of six 1-person-capacity Vidomes with hallways connecting them to a central Vidome roughly 40' in diameter. Conditions are cramped and supplies are limited.

WHEN THE DISEASE IS ENCOUNTERED

Kessler and Sims will take all precautions to quickly quarantine any cases of *BUBBLE DEATH* they encounter, and will begin running tests and analyses day and night. Their best efforts will prove futile: they'll find that it's impossible to combat the disease using any known technique. Not even nanotech can stop the disease – it only slows it down.

ABOUT VIDOMES

A Vidome (*VEYE-dohm*) is a transportable living hemisphere which can be separated into "rooms" by the use of modular panels. It's made of a recomb-DNA textile called *Viber 5*, which heals like living tissue.

As the outermost layers are eroded away by atmosphere and precipitation, the innermost layers break down organic byproducts and waste materials from the dome's inhabitants, and the middle layers recombine these elements in order to "grow" more layers. These new layers then move toward the outer layers, much like human skin.

Viber 5 is Armor+2, and it's HARD to obtain (DL5 on the black market).

DR. ALFONSE KESSLER

NPC

BRAINS 3 Medicine+3 Sci:OrgChem+3
CHARM 2 Rhetoric +1

TCV 170

A squat man with dark hair and tan skin, Kessler is a veteran field medic and physician who has served on several colony expeditions. He will at first be reluctant to believe that *THE ANIMAL* can have any effect on the *BUBBLE DEATH*. He will have to see proof.

PEGGY SIMS, R.N.

NPC

BRAINS 3 Medicine+2
CHARM 3 BedsideManner+2

TCV 90

Cheerful and comforting, Peggy Sims is a doctor on Earth, but until she completes her off-planet internship here on Van Daamas, she's not allowed to practice. She sometimes uses this fact to avoid telling patients unpleasant news, leaving it to Dr. Kessler.

QUINCY (COMPUTER)

NPC

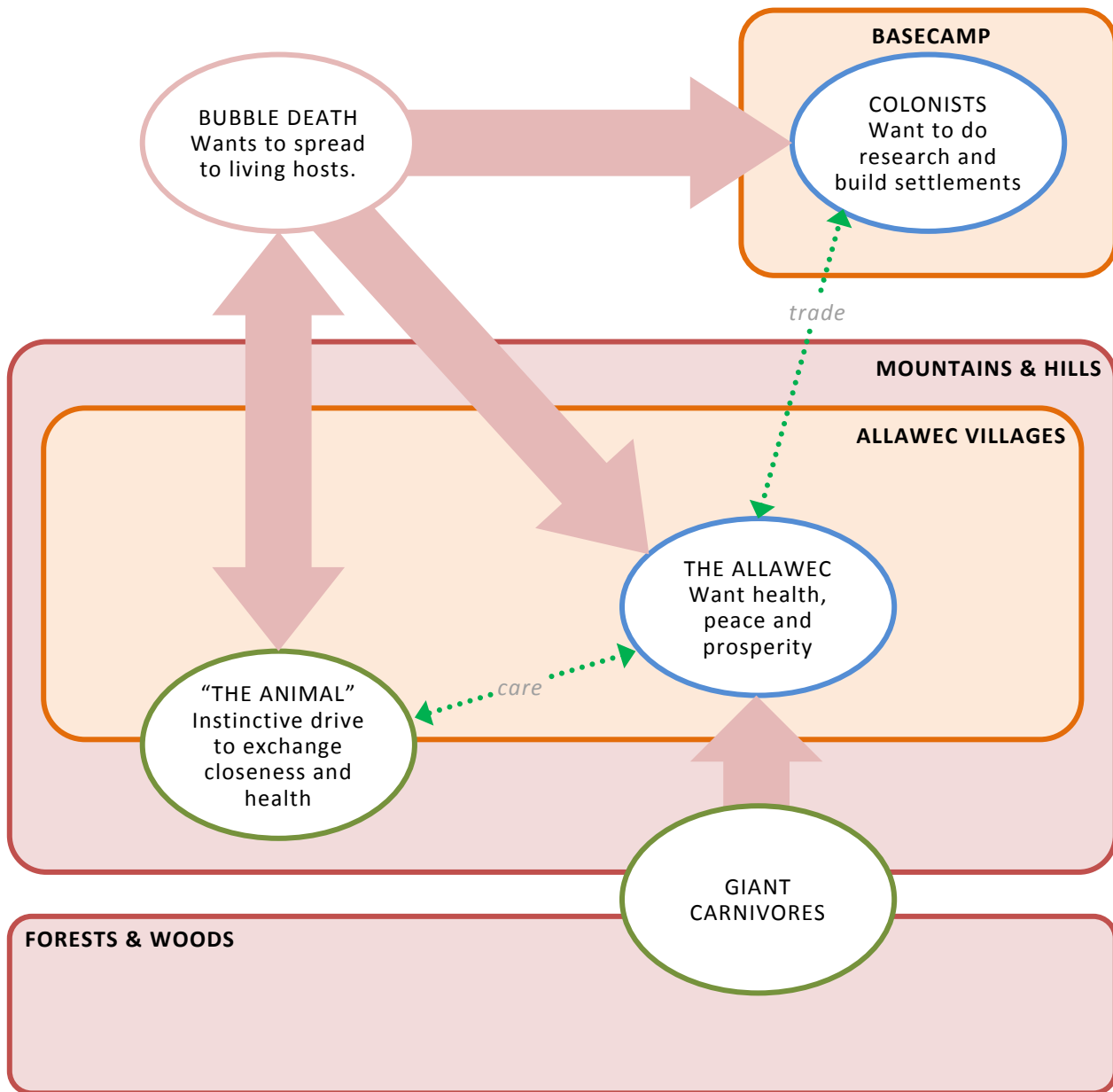
BRAINS 3 BusinessAdm+2 Sci:OrgChem+1
Language:Allawec+2

Quincy is a Mk3 computer with a bland male voice. He is programmed to be strictly business, administering day-to-day operations of the basecamp while running an ongoing analysis of potential returns and losses under a variety of colonization scenarios. He will be called upon by Dr Kessler to do the heavy number-crunching on the results of the *BUBBLE DEATH* tests.

In his filesystem, Quincy has a detailed terrain map of the surrounding regions of Van Daamas. This map, handily overlaid with a hexagonal grid, may be printed out by the PCs and used for navigational purposes.

Quincy also possesses a collection of Allawec linguistic samples, many of which have been translated. With the help of a radio transmitter Quincy could be used as a remote translating device; although he may seem impatient at times, since he has so much work to do.

CURIOUS CURE



BOLDEN'S PETS

by F. L. Wallace
Illustrated by DIEHL

The price of life was a life for a life —which was all the reward the victim looked for!

His hands were shaking as he exhibited the gifts. If he were on Earth, he would be certain it was the flu; in the Centaurus system, *kranken*. But this was Van Daamas, so Lee Bolden couldn't say what he had. Man hadn't been here long enough to investigate the diseases with any degree of thoroughness. There were always different hazards to overcome as new planets were settled.

But whatever infection he had, Bolden was not greatly concerned as he counted out the gifts. He had felt the onset of illness perhaps an hour before. When he got back to the settlement he'd be taken care of. That was half a day's flight from here. The base was equipped with the best medical facilities that had been devised.

He stacked up the gifts to make an impressive show: five pairs of radar goggles, seven high-velocity carbines, seven boxes of ammunition. This was the natives' own rule and was never to be disregarded—it had to be an odd number of gifts.

The Van Daamas native gazed impassively at the heap. He carried a rather strange bow and a quiver was strapped to his thigh. With one exception, the arrows were brightly colored, mostly red and yellow. Bolden supposed this was for easy recovery in case the shot missed. But there was always one arrow that was stained dark blue. Bolden had observed this before—no native was ever without that one somber-looking arrow.

The man of Van Daamas stood there and the thin robe that was no protection against the elements rippled slightly in the chill current of air that flowed down the mountainside. "I will go talk with the others," he said in English.

"Go talk," said Bolden, trying not to shiver. He replied in native speech, but a few words exhausted his knowledge and he had to revert to his own language. "Take the gifts with you. They are yours, no matter what you decide."

The native nodded and reached for a pair of goggles. He tried them on, looking out over fog and mist-shrouded slopes. These people of Van Daamas needed radar less than any race Bolden knew of. Living by preference in mountains, they had developed a keenness of vision that enabled them to see through the perpetual fog and mist far better than any Earthman. Paradoxically it was the goggles they

appreciated most. Extending their sight seemed more precious to them than powerful carbines.

The native shoved the goggles up on his forehead, smiling with pleasure. Noticing that Bolden was shivering, he took his hands and examined them. "Hands sick?" he queried.

"A little," said Bolden. "I'll be all right in the morning."

The native gathered up the gifts. "Go talk," he repeated as he went away.

■

Lee Bolden sat in the copter and waited. He didn't know how much influence this native had with his people. He had come to negotiate, but this might have been because he understood English somewhat better than the others.

A council of the natives would make the decision about working for the Earthmen's settlement. If they approved of the gifts, they probably would. There was nothing to do now but wait—and shiver. His hands were getting numb and his feet weren't much better.

Presently the native came out of the fog carrying a rectangular wicker basket. Bolden was depressed when he saw it. One gift in return for goggles, carbines, ammunition. The rate of exchange was not favorable. Neither would the reply be.

The man set the basket down and waited for Bolden to speak. "The people have talked?" asked Bolden.

"We have talked to come," said the native, holding out his fingers. "In five or seven days, we come."

It was a surprise, a pleasant one. Did one wicker basket equal so many fine products of superlative technology? Apparently it did. The natives had different values. To them, one pair of goggles was worth more than three carbines, a package of needles easily the equivalent of a box of ammunition.

"It's good you will come. I will leave at once to tell them at the settlement," said Bolden. There was something moving in the basket, but the weave was close and he couldn't see through it.

"Stay," the man advised. "A storm blows through the mountains."

"I will fly around the storm," said Bolden.

If he hadn't been sick he might have accepted the offer. But he had to get back to the settlement for treatment. On a strange planet you never could tell what might develop from a seemingly minor ailment. Besides he'd already been gone two days searching for this tribe in the interminable fog that hung over the mountains. Those waiting at the base would want him back as soon as he could get there.

"Fly far around," said the man. "It is a big storm." He took up the basket and held it level with the cabin, opening the top. An animal squirmed out and disappeared inside.

Bolden looked askance at the eyes that glowed in the dim interior. He hadn't seen clearly what the creature was and he didn't like the idea of having it loose in the cabin, particularly if he had to fly through a storm. The man should have left it in the basket. But the basket plus the animal would have been two gifts—and the natives never considered anything in even numbers.

"It will not hurt," said the man. "A gentle pet."

■

As far as he knew, there were no pets and very few domesticated animals. Bolden snapped on the cabin light. It was one of those mysterious creatures every tribe kept in cages near the outskirts of their camps. What they did with them no one knew and the natives either found it impossible to explain or did not care to do so.

It seemed unlikely that the creatures were used for food and certainly they were not work animals. And in spite of what this man said, they were not pets either. No Earthman had ever seen a native touch them nor had the creatures ever been seen wandering at large in the camp. And until now, none had been permitted to pass into Earth's possession. The scientists at the settlement would regard this acquisition with delight.

"Touch it," said the native.

Bolden held out his trembling hand and the animal came to him with alert and friendly yellow eyes. It was about the size of a rather small dog, but it didn't look much like one. It resembled more closely a tiny slender bear with a glossy and shaggy cinnamon coat. Bolden ran his hands through the clean-smelling fur and the touch warmed his fingers. The animal squirmed and licked his fingers.

"It has got your taste," said the native. "Be all right now. It is yours." He turned and walked into the mist.

Bolden got in and started the motors while the animal climbed into the seat beside him. It was a friendly thing and he couldn't understand why the natives always kept it caged.

He headed straight up, looking for a way over the mountains to avoid the impending storm. Fog made it difficult to tell where the peaks were and he had to drop lower, following meandering valleys. He flew as swiftly as limited visibility would allow, but he hadn't gone far when the storm broke. He tried to go over the top of it, but this storm seemed to have no top. The region was incompletely mapped and even radar wasn't much help in the tremendous electrical display that raged around the ship.

His arms ached as he clung to the controls. His hands weren't actually cold, they were numb. His legs were leaden. The creature crept closer to him and he had to nudge it away. Momentarily the distraction cleared his head. He couldn't put it off any longer. He had to land and wait out the storm—if he could find a place to land.

Flexing his hands until he worked some feeling into them, he inched the ship lower. A canyon wall loomed at one side and he had to veer away and keep on looking.

Eventually he found his refuge—a narrow valley where the force of the winds was not extreme—and he set the land anchor. Unless something drastic happened, it would hold.

■

He made the seat into a bed, decided he was too tired to eat, and went directly to sleep. When he awakened, the storm was still raging and the little animal was snoozing by his side.

He felt well enough to eat. The native hadn't explained what the animal should be fed, but it accepted everything Bolden offered. Apparently it was as omnivorous as Man. Before lying down again, he made the other seat into a bed, although it didn't seem to matter. The creature preferred being as close to him as it could get and he didn't object. The warmth was comforting.

Alternately dozing and waking he waited out the storm. It lasted a day and a half. Finally the sun was shining. This was two days since he had first fallen ill, four days after leaving the settlement.

Bolden felt much improved. His hands were nearly normal and his vision wasn't blurred. He looked at the little animal curled in his lap, gazing up at him with solemn yellow eyes. If he gave it encouragement it would probably be crawling all over him. However, he couldn't have it frisking around while he was flying. "Come, Pet," he said—there wasn't anything else to call it—"you're going places."

Picking it up, half-carrying and half-dragging it, he took it to the rear of the compartment, improvising a narrow cage back there. He was satisfied it would hold. He should have done this in the beginning. Of course he hadn't felt like it then and he hadn't had the time—and anyway the native would have resented such treatment of a gift. Probably it was best he had waited.

His pet didn't like confinement. It whined softly for a while. The noise stopped when the motors roared. Bolden headed straight up, until he was high enough to establish communication over the peaks. He made a brief report about the natives' agreement and his own illness, then he started home.

He flew at top speed for ten hours. He satisfied his hunger by nibbling concentrated rations from time to time. The animal whined occasionally, but Bolden had learned to identify the sounds it made. It was neither hungry nor thirsty. It merely wanted to be near him. And all he wanted was to reach the base.

The raw sprawling settlement looked good as he sat the copter down. Mechanics came running from the hangars. They opened the door and he stepped out.

And fell on his face. There was no feeling in his hands and none in his legs. He hadn't recovered.

■

Doctor Kessler peered at him through the microscreen. It gave his face a narrow insubstantial appearance. The microscreen was a hemispherical force field enclosing his head. It originated in a tubular circlet that snapped around his throat at the top of the decontagion suit. The field killed all microlife that passed through it or came in contact with it. The decontagion suit was non-porous and impermeable, covering completely the rest of his body. The material was thinner over his hands and thicker at the soles.

Bolden took in the details at a glance. "Is it serious?" he asked, his voice cracking with the effort.

"Merely a precaution," said the doctor hollowly. The microscreen distorted sound as well as sight. "Merely a precaution. We know what it is, but we're not sure of the best way to treat it."

Bolden grunted to himself. The microscreen and decontagion suit were strong precautions.

The doctor wheeled a small machine from the wall and placed Bolden's hand in a narrow trough that held it steady. The eyepiece slid into the microscreen and, starting at the finger tips, Kessler examined the arm, traveling slowly upward. At last he stopped. "Is this where feeling ends?"

"I think so. Touch it. Yeah. It's dead below there."

"Good. Then we've got it pegged. It's the Bubble Death."

Bolden showed concern and the doctor laughed. "Don't worry. It's called that because of the way it looks through the X-ray microscope. It's true that it killed the scouting expedition that discovered the planet, but it won't get you."

"They had antibiotics. Neobiotics, too."

"Sure. But they had only a few standard kinds. Their knowledge was more limited and they lacked the equipment we now have."

The doctor made it sound comforting. But Bolden wasn't comforted. Not just yet.

"Sit up and take a look," said Kessler, bending the eyepiece around so Bolden could use it. "The dark filamented lines are nerves. See what surrounds them?"

Bolden watched as the doctor adjusted the focus for him. Each filament was covered with countless tiny spheres that isolated and insulated the nerve from contact. That's why he couldn't feel anything. The spherical microbes did look like bubbles. As yet they didn't seem to have attacked the nerves directly.

While he watched, the doctor swiveled out another eyepiece for his own use and turned a knob on the side of the machine. From the lens next to his arm an almost invisible needle slid out and entered his flesh. Bolden could

see it come into the field of view. It didn't hurt. Slowly it approached the dark branching filament, never quite touching it.

The needle was hollow and as Kessler squeezed the knob it sucked in the spheres. The needle extended a snout which crept along the nerve, vacuuming in microbes as it moved. When a section had been cleansed, the snout was retracted. Bolden could feel the needle then.

■

When the doctor finished, he laid Bolden's hand back at his side and wheeled the machine to the wall, extracting a small capsule which he dropped into a slot that led to the outside. He came back and sat down.

"Is that what you're going to do?" asked Bolden. "Scrape them off?"

"Hardly. There are too many nerves. If we had ten machines and enough people to operate them, we might check the advance in one arm. That's all." The doctor leaned back in the chair. "No. I was collecting a few more samples. We're trying to find out what the microbes react to."

"More samples? Then you must have taken others."

"Certainly. We put you out for a while to let you rest." The chair came down on four legs. "You've got a mild case. Either that or you have a strong natural immunity. It's now been three days since you reported the first symptoms and it isn't very advanced. It killed the entire scouting expedition in less time than that."

Bolden looked at the ceiling. Eventually they'd find a cure. But would he be alive that long?

"I suspect what you're thinking," said the doctor. "Don't overlook our special equipment. We already have specimens in the sonic accelerator. We've been able to speed up the life processes of the microbes about ten times. Before the day is over we'll know which of our anti and neobiotics they like the least. Tough little things so far—unbelievably tough—but you can be sure we'll smack them."

His mind was active, but outwardly Bolden was quiescent as the doctor continued his explanation.

The disease attacked the superficial nervous system, beginning with the extremities. The bodies of the crew of the scouting expedition had been in an advanced state of decomposition when the medical rescue team reached them and the microbes were no longer active. Nevertheless it was a reasonable supposition that death had come shortly after the invading bacteria had reached the brain. Until then, though nerves were the route along which the microbes traveled, no irreparable damage had been done.

■

This much was good news. Either he would recover completely or he would die. He would not be crippled permanently. Another factor in his favor was the sonic accelerator. By finding the natural resonance of the one-celled creature and gradually increasing the tempo of the sound field, the doctor could grow and test ten generations in the laboratory while one generation was breeding in the body. Bolden was the first patient actually being observed with the disease, but the time element wasn't as bad as he had thought.

"That's where you are," concluded Kessler. "Now, among other things, we've got to find where you've been."

"The ship has an automatic log," said Bolden. "It indicates every place I landed."

"True, but our grid coordinates are not exact. It will be a few years before we're able to look at a log and locate within ten feet of where a ship has been." The doctor spread out a large photomap. There were several marks on it. He fastened a stereoscope viewer over Bolden's eyes and handed him a pencil. "Can you use this?"

"I think so." His fingers were stiff and he couldn't feel, but he could mark with the pencil. Kessler moved the map nearer and the terrain sprang up in detail. In some cases, he could see it more clearly than when he had been there, because on the map there was no fog. Bolden made a few



corrections and the doctor took the map away and removed the viewer.

"We'll have to stay away from these places until we get a cure. Did you notice anything peculiar in any of the places you went?"

"It was all mountainous country."

"Which probably means that we're safe on the plain. Were there any animals?"

"Nothing that came close. Birds maybe."

"More likely it was an insect. Well, we'll worry about the host and how it is transmitted. Try not to be upset. You're as safe as you would be on Earth."

"Yeah," said Bolden. "Where's the pet?"

The doctor laughed. "You did very well on that one. The biologists have been curious about the animal since the day they saw one in a native camp."

"They can *look* at it as much as they want," said Bolden. "Nothing more on this one, though. It's a personal gift."

"You're sure it's personal?"

"The native said it was."

The doctor sighed. "I'll tell them. They won't like it, but we can't argue with the natives if we want their cooperation."

Bolden smiled. The animal was safe for at least six months. He could understand the biologists' curiosity, but there was enough to keep them curious for a long time on a new planet. And it was his. In a remarkably short time, he had become attached to it. It was one of those rare things that Man happened across occasionally—about once in every five planets. Useless, completely useless, the creature had one virtue. It liked Man and Man liked it. It was a pet. "Okay," he said. "But you didn't tell me where it is."

The doctor shrugged, but the gesture was lost in the shapeless decontamination suit. "Do you think we're letting it run in the streets? It's in the next room, under observation."

The doctor was more concerned than he was letting on. The hospital was small and animals were never kept in it. "It's not the carrier. I was sick before it was given to me."

"You had something, we know that much, but was it this? Even granting that you're right, it was in contact with you and may now be infected."

"I think life on this planet isn't bothered by the disease. The natives have been every place I went and none of them seemed to have it."

"Didn't they?" said the doctor, going to the door. "Maybe. It's too early to say." He reeled a cord out of the wall and plugged it into the decontamination suit. He spread his legs and held his arms away from his sides. In an instant, the suit glowed white hot. Only for an instant, and it was insulated

inside. Even so it must be uncomfortable—and the process would be repeated outside. The doctor wasn't taking any chances. "Try to sleep," he said. "Ring if there's a change in your condition—even if you think it's insignificant."

"I'll ring," said Bolden. In a short time he fell asleep. It was easy to sleep.

■

The nurse entered as quietly as she could in the decontagion outfit. It awakened Bolden. It was evening. He had slept most of the day. "Which one are you?" he asked. "The pretty one?"

"All nurses are pretty if you get well. Here. Swallow this."

It was Peggy. He looked doubtfully at what she held out. "All of it?"

"Certainly. You get it down and I'll see that it comes back up. The string won't hurt you."

She passed a small instrument over his body, reading the dial she held in the other hand. The information, he knew, was being recorded elsewhere on a master chart. Apparently the instrument measured neural currents and hence indirectly the progress of the disease. Already they had evolved new diagnostic techniques. He wished they'd made the same advance in treatment.

After expertly reeling out the instrument he had swallowed, the nurse read it and deposited it in a receptacle in the wall. She brought a tray and told him to eat. He wanted to question her, but she was insistent about it so he ate. Allowance had been made for his partial paralysis. The food was liquid. It was probably nutritious, but he didn't care for the taste.

She took the tray away and came back and sat beside him. "Now we can talk," she said.

"What's going on?" he said bluntly. "When do I start getting shots? Nothing's been done for me so far."

"I don't know what the doctor's working out for you. I'm just the nurse."

"Don't try to tell me that," he said. "You're a doctor yourself. In a pinch you could take Kessler's place."

"And I get my share of pinches," she said brightly. "Okay, so I'm a doctor, but only on Earth. Until I complete my off-planet internship here, I'm not allowed to practice."

"You know as much about Van Daamas as anyone does."

"That may be," she said. "Now don't be alarmed, but the truth ought to be obvious. None of our anti or neobiotics or combinations of them have a positive effect. We're looking for something new."

It should have been obvious; he had been hoping against that, though. He looked at the shapeless figure sitting beside him and remembered Peggy as she usually looked.

He wondered if they were any longer concerned with him as an individual. They must be working mainly to keep the disease from spreading. "What are my chances?"

"Better than you think. We're looking for an additive that will make the biotics effective."

■

He hadn't thought of that, though it was often used, particularly on newly settled planets. He had heard of a virus infection common to Centaurus that could be completely controlled by a shot of neobiotics plus aspirin, though separately neither was of any value. But the discovery of what substance should be added to what antibiotic was largely one of trial and error. That took time and there wasn't much time. "What else?" he said.

"That's about it. We're not trying to make you believe this isn't serious. But don't forget we're working ten times as fast as the disease can multiply. We expect a break any moment." She got up. "Want a sedative for the night?"

"I've got a sedative inside me. Looks like it will be permanent."

"That's what I like about you, you're so cheerful," she said, leaning over and clipping something around his throat. "In case you're wondering, we're going to be busy tonight checking the microbe. We can put someone in with you, but we thought you'd rather have all of us working on it."

"Sure," he said.

"This is a body monitor. If you want anything just call and we'll be here within minutes."

"Thanks," he said. "I won't panic tonight."

She plugged in the decontagion uniform, flashed it on and then left the room. After she was gone, the body monitor no longer seemed reassuring. It was going to take something positive to pull him through.

They were going to work through the night, but did they actually hope for success. What had Peggy said? None of the anti or neobiotics had a positive reaction. Unknowingly she had let it slip. The reaction was negative; the bubble microbes actually grew faster in the medium that was supposed to stop them. It happened occasionally on strange planets. It was his bad luck that it was happening to him.

He pushed the thoughts out of his mind and tried to sleep. He did for a time. When he awakened he thought, at first, it was his arms that had aroused him. They seemed to be on fire, deep inside. To a limited extent, he still had control. He could move them though there was no surface sensation. Interior nerves had not been greatly affected until now. But outside the infection had crept up. It was no longer just above the wrists. It had reached his elbows and passed beyond. A few inches below his shoulder he could feel nothing. The illness was accelerating. If they had ever thought of amputation, it was too late, now.

■

He resisted an impulse to cry out. A nurse would come and sit beside him, but he would be taking her from work that might save his life. The infection would reach his shoulders and move across his chest and back. It would travel up his throat and he wouldn't be able to move his lips. It would paralyze his eyelids so that he couldn't blink. Maybe it would blind him, too. And then it would find ingress to his brain.

The result would be a metabolic explosion. Swiftly each bodily function would stop altogether or race wildly as the central nervous system was invaded, one regulatory center after the other blanking out. His body would be aflame or it would smolder and flicker out. Death might be spectacular or it could come very quietly.

That was one reason he didn't call the nurse.

The other was the noise.

It was a low sound, half purr, half a coaxing growl. It was the animal the native had given him, confined in the next room. Bolden was not sure why he did what he did next. Instinct or reason may have governed his actions. But instinct and reason are divisive concepts that cannot apply to the human mind, which is actually indivisible.

He got out of bed. Unable to stand, he rolled to the floor. He couldn't crawl very well because his hands wouldn't support his weight so he crept along on his knees and elbows. It didn't hurt. Nothing hurt except the fire in his bones. He reached the door and straightened up on his knees. He raised his hand to the handle, but couldn't grasp it. After several trials, he abandoned the attempt and hooked his chin on the handle, pulling it down. The door opened and he was in the next room. The animal was whining louder now that he was near. Yellow eyes glowed at him from the corner. He crept to the cage.

It was latched. The animal shivered eagerly, pressing against the side, striving to reach him. His hands were numb and he couldn't work the latch. The animal licked his fingers.

It was easier after that. He couldn't feel what he was doing, but somehow he managed to unlatch it. The door swung open and the animal bounded out, knocking him to the floor.

**"Now don't be alarmed," she said,
"but none of our anti or neobiotics
or combinations have a positive effect.**

**We're looking for an additive that will
make the biotics effective."**

He didn't mind at all because now he was sure he was right. The natives had given him the animal for a purpose. Their own existence was meager, near the edge of extinction. They could not afford to keep something that wasn't useful. And this creature was useful. Tiny blue sparks crackled from the fur as it rubbed against him in the darkness. It was not whining. It rumbled and purred as it licked his hands and arms and rolled against his legs.

After a while he was strong enough to crawl back to bed, leaning against the animal for support. He lifted himself up and fell across the bed in exhaustion. Blood didn't circulate well in his crippled body. The animal bounded up and tried to melt itself into his body. He couldn't push it away if he wanted. He didn't want to. He stirred and got himself into a more comfortable position. He wasn't going to die.

■

In the morning, Bolden was awake long before the doctor came in. Kessler's face was haggard and the smile was something he assumed solely for the patient's benefit. If he could have seen what the expression looked like after filtering through the microscreen, he would have abandoned it. "I see you're holding your own," he said with hollow cheerfulness. "We're doing quite well ourselves."

"I'll bet," said Bolden. "Maybe you've got to the point where one of the antibiotics doesn't actually stimulate the growth of the microbes?"

"I was afraid you'd find it out," sighed the doctor. "We can't keep everything from you."

"You could have given me a shot of plasma and said it was a powerful new drug."

"That idea went out of medical treatment a couple of hundred years ago," said the doctor. "You'd feel worse when you failed to show improvement. Settling a planet isn't easy and the dangers aren't imaginary. You've got to be able to face facts as they come."

He peered uncertainly at Bolden. The microscreen distorted his vision, too. "We're making progress though it may not seem so to you. When a mixture of a calcium salt plus two antihistamines is added to a certain neobiotic, the result is that the microbe grows no faster than it should. Switching the ingredients here and there—maybe it ought to be a potassium salt—and the first thing you know we'll have it stopped cold."

"I doubt the effectiveness of those results," said Bolden. "In fact, I think you're on the wrong track. Try investigating the effects of neural induction."

"What are you talking about?" said the doctor, coming closer and glancing suspiciously at the lump beside Bolden. "Do you feel dizzy? Is there anything else unusual that you notice?"

"Don't shout at the patient." Bolden waggled his finger reprovingly. He was proud of the finger. He couldn't feel

what he was doing, but he had control over it. "You, Kessler, should face the fact that a doctor can learn from a patient what the patient learned from the natives."

But Kessler didn't hear what he said. He was looking at the upraised hand. "You're moving almost normally," he said. "Your own immunity factor is controlling the disease."

"Sure. I've got an immunity factor," said Bolden. "The same one the natives have. Only it's not inside my body." He rested his hand on the animal beneath the covers. It never wanted to leave him. It wouldn't have to.

"I can set your mind at rest on one thing, Doctor. Natives are susceptible to the disease, too. That's why they were able to recognize I had it. They gave me the cure and told me what it was, but I was unable to see it until it was nearly too late. Here it is." He turned back the covers and the exposed animal sleeping peacefully on his legs which raised its head and licked his fingers. He felt that.

■

After an explanation the doctor tempered his disapproval. It was an unsanitary practice, but he had to admit that the patient was much improved. Kessler verified the state of Bolden's health by extensive use of the X-ray microscope. Reluctantly he wheeled the machine to the wall and covered it up.

"The infection is definitely receding," he said. "There are previously infected areas in which I find it difficult to locate a single microbe. What I can't understand is how it's done. According to you, the animal doesn't break the skin with its tongue and therefore nothing is released into the bloodstream. All that seems necessary is that the animal be near you." He shook his head behind the microscreen. "I don't think much of the electrical analogy you used."

"I said the first thing I thought of. I don't know if that's the way it works, but it seems to me like a pretty fair guess."

"The microbes *do* cluster around nerves," said the doctor. "We know that neural activity is partly electrical. If the level of that activity can be increased, the bacteria might be killed by ionic dissociation." He glanced speculatively at Bolden and the animal. "Perhaps you do borrow nervous energy from the animal. We might also find it possible to control the disease with an electrical current."

"Don't try to find out on me," said Bolden. "I've been an experimental specimen long enough. Take somebody who's healthy. I'll stick with the natives' method."

"I wasn't thinking of experiments in your condition. You're still not out of danger." Nevertheless he showed his real opinion when he left the room. He failed to plug in and flash the decontagion suit.

Bolden smiled at the doctor's omission and ran his hand through the fur. He was going to get well.

■

But his progress was somewhat slower than he'd anticipated though it seemed to satisfy the doctor who went on with his experiments. The offending bacteria could be killed electrically. But the current was dangerously large and there was no practical way to apply the treatment to humans. The animal was the only effective method.

Kessler discovered the microbe required an intermediate host. A tick or a mosquito seemed indicated. It would take a protracted search of the mountains to determine just what insect was the carrier. In any event the elaborate sanitary precautions were unnecessary. Microscreens came down and decontagion suits were no longer worn. Bolden could not pass the disease on to anyone else.

Neither could the animal. It seemed wholly without parasites. It was clean and affectionate, warm to the touch. Bolden was fortunate that there was such a simple cure for the most dreaded disease on Van Daamas.

It was several days before he was ready to leave the small hospital at the edge of the settlement. At first he sat up in bed and then he was allowed to walk across the room. As his activity increased, the animal became more and more content to lie on the bed and follow him with its eyes. It no longer frisked about as it had in the beginning. As Bolden told the nurse, it was becoming housebroken.

The time came when the doctor failed to find a single microbe. Bolden's newly returned strength and the sensitivity of his skin where there had been numbness confirmed the diagnosis. He was well. Peggy came to walk him home. It was pleasant to have her near.

"I see you're ready," she said, laughing at his eagerness.

"Except for one thing," he said. "Come, Pet." The animal raised its head from the bed where it slept.

"Pet?" she said quizzically. "You ought to give it a name. You've had it long enough to decide on something."

"Pet's a name," he said. "What can I call it? Doc? Hero?"

She made a face. "I can't say I care for either choice, although it did save your life."

"Yes, but that's an attribute it can't help. The important thing is that if you listed what you expect of a pet you'd find it in this creature. Docile, gentle, lively at times; all it wants is to be near you, to have you touch it. And it's very clean."

"All right, call it Pet if you want," said Peggy. "Come on, Pet."

It paid no attention to her. It came when Bolden called, getting slowly off the bed. It stayed as close as it could get to Bolden. He was still weak so they didn't walk fast and, at first, the animal was able to keep up.

■

It was almost noon when they went out. The sun was brilliant and Van Daamas seemed a wonderful place to be alive in. Yes, with death behind him, it was a very wonderful place. Bolden chatted gaily with Peggy. She was fine company.

And then Bolden saw the native who had given him the animal. Five to seven days, and he had arrived on time. The rest of the tribe must be elsewhere in the settlement. Bolden smiled in recognition while the man was still at some distance. For an answer the native shifted the bow in his hand and glanced behind the couple, in the direction of the hospital.

The movement with the bow might have been menacing, but Bolden ignored that gesture. It was the sense that something was missing that caused him to look down. The animal was not at his side. He turned around.

The creature was struggling in the dust. It got to its feet and wobbled toward him, staggering crazily as it tried to reach him. It spun around, saw him, and came on again. The tongue lolled out and it whined once. Then the native shot it through the heart, pinning it to the ground. The short tail thumped and then it died.

Bolden couldn't move. Peggy clutched his arm. The native walked over to the animal and looked down. He was silent for a moment. "Die anyway soon," he said to Bolden. "Burned out inside."

He bent over. The bright yellow eyes had faded to nothingness in the sunlight. "Gave you its health," said the man of Van Daamas respectfully as he broke off the protruding arrow.

It was a dark blue arrow.

■

Now every settlement on the planet has Bolden's pets. They have been given a more scientific name, but nobody remembers what it is.

The animals are kept in pens, exactly as is done by the natives, on one side of town, not too near any habitation.

For a while, there was talk that it was unscientific to use the animal. It was thought that an electrical treatment could be developed to replace it. Perhaps this was true. But settling a planet is a big task. As long as one method works there isn't time for research. And it works—the percentage of recovery is as high as in other common ailments.

But in any case the animal can never become a pet, though it may be in the small but bright spark of consciousness that is all the little yellow-eyed creature wants. The quality that makes it so valuable is the final disqualification. Strength can be a weakness. Its nervous system is too powerful for a man in good health, upsetting the delicate balance of the human body in a variety of unusual ways.

How the energy-transfer takes place has never been determined exactly, but it does occur.

It is only when he is stricken with the Bubble Death and needs additional energy to drive the invading microbes from the tissue around his nerves that the patient is allowed to have one of Bolden's pets.

In the end, it is the animal that dies. As the natives knew, it is kindness to kill it quickly.

It is highly regarded and respectfully spoken of. Children play as close as they can get, but are kept well away from the pens by a high, sturdy fence. Adults walk by and nod kindly to it.

Bolden never goes there nor will he speak of it. His friends say he's unhappy about being the first Earthman to discover the usefulness of the little animal. They are right. It is a distinction he doesn't care for. He still has the blue arrow. There are local craftsmen who can mend it, but he has refused their services. He wants to keep it as it is.



GLUTTONY

Based on "Contamination Crew"
by Alan E. Nourse



OBSTACLES

Monster/Enemy - The Hlorg

COMPLICATIONS

Scant Intel

MAGUFFINS

Data/Report on Hlorg

Hlorg Specimen (40M)

BACKSTORY

Tales have often been whispered of a singular and terrifying lifeform called the *Hlorg*. Reputedly, this bizarre creature – considered by many to be no more than a legend told by crazy outposters in 3space – has the ability to consume any carbon-based matter... including the hull of a ship, or an entire planet.

Through whatever means – perhaps never to be known – a disgusting, amorphous, non-destructible *Hlorg* finds its way onto the PCs' ship, or into a facility under the PCs' care. It may have been microscopically small at the time of transfer; it may have been inside a food shipment, stuck to someone's shoe or caught in a draft bringing it through an airlock.

While their mission depends on their successful performance of duties and safe return of personnel, the PCs must also try to maintain calm and order while attempting to find a way to combat or destroy the unwanted intruder.

If the PCs are not the owners of the ship, the situation is even worse, because it's typical for contracted employees to be held liable for any damage brought to the vessel while under their care, and this could set them back millions. Perhaps it's best to solve the problem quietly, without causing any undue alarm.

GM NOTE: Since this adventure is little more than an extended encounter in a confined space, it's a good candidate to use as the Final Crisis of a mission that went down too easily, or as the revenge of a rival or wrathful NPC from another adventure. That's right – someone may have deliberately planted the *Hlorg* onboard the PCs' ship!

OUT OF THEIR MINDS

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Survey
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Highly Stable (4)
PAY: 3M ea

The PCs materialize as the pro tem crew of the General Survey Ship *Mercy*, just as docking maneuvers are completed. The *Mercy* is on its way back from the Mauki system, where the ship's physician Samuel B. Jenkins performed a comprehensive evaluation.

The inhabitants of Mauki IV are suffering from a strange mass delusion: they claim that all life on the planet Mauki V was eaten by a creature called a *Hlorg*, and it's still alive. Good thing it's not true. Right?

INHERENT VICE

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Sightseeing/Tourism
NODE TYPE: Known Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL3)
PAY: 6M ea

The PCs are charged with babysitting a shipload of wealthy slip-space tourists on a routine sightseeing expedition to the wilderlands of Mauki IV. Roll a random habitable planet for the visitors to enjoy.

Preparing for the slip home, the PCs discover that a *Hlorg* has somehow taken up residence on their vessel. The creature has been there for several hours, and has already begun to grow noticeably in size.

It would be unconscionable – not to mention hazardous to one's career – to bring such a dangerous creature back to Tracy Island. The PCs must find a way to deal with their unwanted stowaway without alerting the passengers – and they only have eight hours before the slip home.

PINK APOCALYPSE WORLD

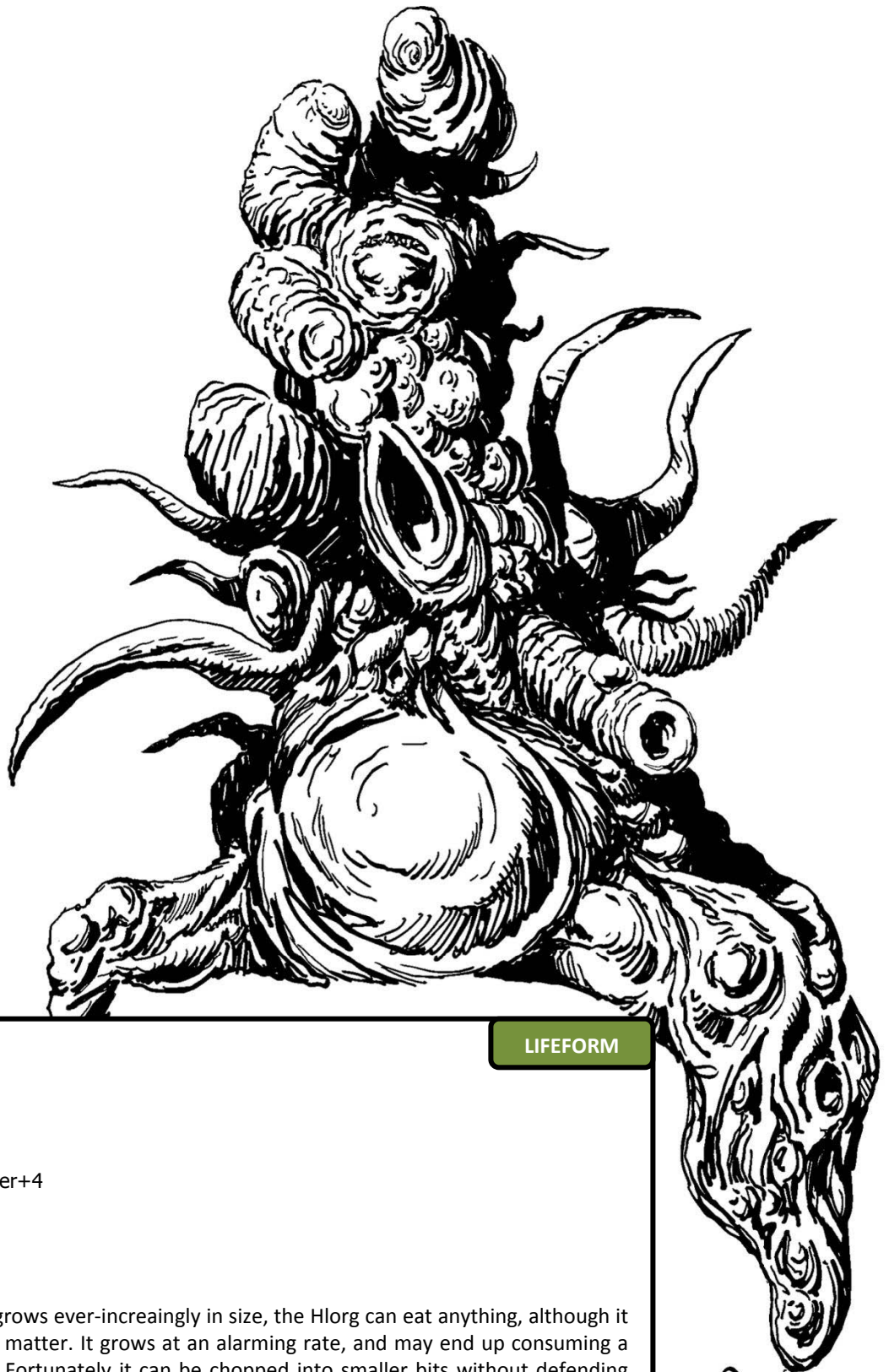
MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration
NODE TYPE: Alternate Earth
SLIP TYPE: ParaTerran (DL3)
PAY: 3M ea

This version of Earth has been half-consumed by a gigantic *Hlorg*. Pink ooze coats the buildings, streets and large portions of wilderness. The PCs materialize not far from a desolate spaceport; perhaps there's an encounter or a transmission left behind, or some clues to piece together? To reach the spaceport, they will need to find a way to avoid being attacked and eaten by the now-planetary-sized creature.

Upon investigation the PCs may discover that the creature came from the "Mauki system" (a name which means nothing to the PCs, but which may be located using the alternate earth's star charts and a Steller Navigation roll vs DL3).

When the PCs return to their ship, they will discover that a bit of the *Hlorg* has gotten onboard, and that's when the *real* Crisis begins.



LIFEFORM

THE HLOGR

BRAINS 1

CHARM 1

GRACE 3

HEALTH 6

Digest Matter+4

MIGHT 2

PSYCHE 1

TCV 390

A pink, gelatinous blob that grows ever-increasingly in size, the Hlorg can eat anything, although it has a preference for organic matter. It grows at an alarming rate, and may end up consuming a hole in the hull if you let it. Fortunately it can be chopped into smaller bits without defending itself, and while each bit is still voracious, they're easier to keep under control. Exposing it to heat causes it to harden somewhat, but only temporarily stops it from moving. The only thing that can kill it for good is dilute hydrochloric acid – like the kind found in human stomachs.

That's right – the best way to kill it is to eat it.

A Hlorg sample would be worth 40M back home, but that sounds like a really dangerous idea.

CONTAMINATION CREW

by Alan E. Nourse

Illustrated by Ed Emshwiller

Orders were orders! The creature had to be killed. But just how does one destroy the indestructible?

(The following is taken from the files of the Medical Disciplinary Board, Hospital Earth, from the preliminary hearings in re: The Profession vs. Samuel B. Jenkins, Physician; First Court of Medical Affairs, final action pending.)

COM COD S221VB73

VOROKHISLOV SECTOR; 4th GALACTIC PERIOD 22, 2341
GENERAL SURVEY SHIP MERCY

TO HOSPITAL EARTH

VIA: FASTEST POSSIBLE ROUTING, PRIORITY
UNASSIGNED

TO: Lucius Darby, Physician Grade I, Black Service
Director of Galactic Periphery Services, Hospital Earth

FROM: Samuel B. Jenkins, Physician Grade VI, Red
Service General Practice Patrol Ship Lancet (Attached
GSS Mercy pro tem)

SIR: The following communication is directed to your attention in hopes that it may anticipate various charges which are certain to be placed against me as a Physician of the Red Service upon the return of the General Survey Ship Mercy to Hospital Earth (expected arrival four months from above date).

These charges will undoubtedly be preferred by one Turvold Neelsen, Physician Grade II of the Black Service, and Commander of the Mercy on its current survey mission into the Vorochislov Sector. Exactly what the charges will be I cannot say, since the Black Doctor in question refuses either audience or communication with me at the present time; however, it seems likely that treason, incompetence and mutinous insubordination will be among the milder complaints registered. It is possible that even Malpractice might be added, so you can readily understand the reasons for this statement—

The following will also clarify my attached request that the GSS Mercy, upon arrival in orbit around Hospital Earth, be met immediately by a decontamination ship carrying a vat of hydrochloric acid, concentration 3.7%, measuring no less than twenty by thirty by fifty feet, and that Quarantine officials be prepared to place the entire crew of the Mercy under physical and psychiatric observation for a period of no less than six weeks upon disembarkation.

The facts, in brief, are as follows:

Three months ago, as crew of the General Practice Patrol Ship Lancet, my colleague Green Doctor Wallace Stone and myself began investigating certain peculiar conditions existing on the fourth planet of Mauki, Vorochislov Sector (Class I Medical Service Contract.) The entire population of that planet was found to be suffering from a mass psychotic delusion of rather spectacular proportions: namely, that they and their entire planet were in imminent danger of being devoured, in toto, by an indestructible non-humanoid creature which they called a hlogr. The Maukivi were insistent that a hlogr had already totally consumed a non-existent outer planet in their system, and was now hard at work on neighboring Mauki V. It was their morbid fear that Mauki IV was next on its list. No amount of reassurance could convince them of the foolishness of these fears, although we exhausted our energy, our patience, and our food and medical supplies in the effort. Ultimately we referred the matter to the Grey Service, feeling confident that it was a psychiatric problem rather than medical or surgical. We applied to the GSS Mercy to take us aboard to replenish our ship's supplies, and provide us a much-needed recovery period. The Black Doctor in command approved our request and brought us aboard.

The trouble began two days later....

There were three classes of dirty words in use by the men who travelled the spaceways back and forth from Hospital Earth.

There were the words you seldom used in public, but which were colorful and descriptive in private use.

Then there were the words which you seldom used even in private, but which effectively relieved feelings when directed at mirrors, inanimate objects, and people who had just left the room.

Finally, there were the words that you just didn't use, period. You knew they existed; you'd heard them used at one time or another, but to hear them spoken out in plain Earth-English was enough to rock the most space-hardened of the Galactic Pill Peddlers back on his well-worn heels.

Black Doctor Turvold Neelsen's Earth-English was spotty at best, but the word came through without any possibility of misinterpretation. Red Doctor Sam Jenkins stared at the little man and felt his face turning as scarlet as the lining of his uniform cape.

"But that's ridiculous!" he finally stammered. "Quite aside from the language you use to suggest it."

"Ah! So the word still has some punch left, eh? At least you puppies bring something away from your Medical Training, even if it's only taboos." The Black Doctor scowled across the desk at Jenkins' lanky figure. "But sometimes, my good Doctor, it is better to face a fact than to wait for the fact to face you. Sometimes we have to crawl out of our ivory towers for a minute or two—you know?"

Jenkins reddened again. He had never had any great love for physicians of the Black Service—who did?—but he found himself disliking this short, blunt-spoken man even more cordially than most. "Why implicate the *Lancet*?" he burst out. "You've landed the *Mercy* on plenty of planets before we brought the *Lancet* aboard her—"

"But we did not have it with us before the *Lancet* came aboard, and we do have it now. The implication is obvious. You have brought aboard a contaminant."

He'd said it again.

Red Doctor Jenkins' face darkened. "The Green Doctor and I have maintained the *Lancet* in perfect conformity with the Sterility Code. We've taken every precaution on both landing and disembarking procedures. What's more, we've spent the last three months on a planet with *no* mutually compatible flora or fauna. From Hospital Earth viewpoint, Maui IV is sterile. We made only the briefest check-stop on Maui V before joining you. It was a barren rock, but we decontaminated again after leaving. If you have a—a *contaminant* on board your ship, sir, it didn't come from the *Lancet*. And I won't be held responsible."

It was strong language to use to a Black Doctor, and Sam Jenkins knew it. There were doctors of the Green and Red Services who had spent their professional lives on some god-forsaken planetoid at the edge of the Galaxy for saying less. Red Doctor Sam Jenkins was too near the end of his Internship, too nearly ready for his first Permanent Planetary Appointment with the rank, honor, and responsibility it carried to lightly risk throwing it to the wind at this stage—

But a Red Doctor does not bring a contaminant aboard a survey ship, he thought doggedly, no matter what the Black Doctor says—

Neelsen looked at the young man slowly. Then he shrugged. "Of course, I'm merely a pathologist. I realize that we know nothing of medicine, nor of disease, nor of the manner in which disease is spread. All this is beyond our scope. But perhaps you'll permit one simple question from a dull old man, just to humor him."

Jenkins looked at the floor. "I'm sorry, sir."

"Just so. You've had a very successful cruise this year with the *Lancet*, I understand."

Jenkins nodded.

"A most successful cruise. Four planets elevated from Class IV to Class II contracts, they tell me. Morua II elevated from Class VI to Class I, with certain special riders. A plague-panic averted on Setman I, and a very complex virus-bacteria symbiosis unravelled on Orb III. An illustrious record. You and your colleague from the Green Service are hoping for a year's exemption from training, I imagine—" The Black Doctor looked up sharply. "You searched your holds after leaving the Maui planets, I presume?"

Jenkins blinked. "Why—no, sir. That is, we decontaminated according to—"

"I see. You didn't search your holds. I suppose you didn't notice your food supplies dwindling at an alarming rate?"

"No—" The Red Doctor hesitated. "Not really."

"Ah." The Black Doctor closed his eyes wearily and flipped an activator switch. The scanner on the far wall buzzed into activity. It focussed on the rear storage hold of the *Mercy* where the little *Lancet* was resting on its landing rack. "Look closely, Doctor."

At first Jenkins saw nothing. Then his eye caught a long, pink glistening strand lying across the floor of the hold. The scanner picked up the strand, followed it to the place where it emerged from a neat pencil-sized hole in the hull of the *Lancet*. The strand snaked completely across the room and disappeared through another neat hole in the wall into the next storage hold.

Jenkins shook his head as the scanner flipped back to the hole in the *Lancet's* hull. Even as he watched, the hole enlarged and a pink blob began to emerge. The blob kept coming and coming until it rested soggily on the edge of the hole. Then it teetered and fell *splat* on the floor.

"Friend of yours?" the Black Doctor asked casually.

It was a pink heap of jelly just big enough to fill a scrub bucket. It sat on the floor, quivering noxiously. Then it sent out pseudopods in several directions, probing the metal floor. After a few moments it began oozing along the strand of itself that lay on the floor, and squeezed through the hole into the next hold.

"Ugh," said Sam Jenkins, feeling suddenly sick.

As he watched, the hole enlarged and a pink blob began to emerge. The blob kept coming and coming until it rested soggily on the edge of the hole. Then it teetered and fell *splat* on the floor.

"The hydroponic tanks are in there," the Black Doctor said. "You've seen one of those before?"

"Not in person." Jenkins shook his head weakly. "Only pictures. It's a *hlog*. We thought it was only a Maukivi persecution fantasy."

"This thing is growing pretty fast for a persecution fantasy. We spotted it eight hours ago, demolishing what was left of your food supply. It's twice as big now as it was then."

"Well, we've got to get rid of it," said Jenkins, suddenly coming to life.

"Amen, Doctor."

"I'll get the survey crew alerted right away. We won't waste a minute. And my apologies." Jenkins was hurrying for the door. "I'll get it cleared out of here fast."

"I do hope so," said the Black Doctor. "The thing makes me ill just to think about."

"I'll give you a clean-ship report in twenty-four hours," the Red Doctor said as confidently as he could and beat a hasty retreat down the corridor. He was wishing fervently that he felt as confident as he sounded.

The Maukivi had described the *hlog* in excruciating detail. He and Green Doctor Stone had listened, and smiled sadly at each other, day after day, marvelling at the fanciful delusion. *Hlogs*, indeed! And such creatures to dream up—eating, growing, devouring plant, animal and mineral without discrimination—

And the Maukivi had stoutly maintained that this *hlog* of theirs was indestructible—

■

Green Doctor Wally Stone, true to his surgical calling, was a man of action.

"You mean there *is* such a thing?" he exploded when his partner confronted him with the news. "For real? Not just somebody's pipe dream?"

"There is," said Jenkins, "and we've got it. Here. On board the *Mercy*. It's eating like hell-and-gone and doubling its size every eight hours."

"Well what are you waiting for? Toss it overboard!"

"Fine! And what happens to the next party it happens to land on? We're supposed to be altruists, remember? We're supposed to worry about the health of the Galaxy." Jenkins shook his head. "Whatever we do with it, we have to find out just what we're tossing before we toss."

The creature had made itself at home aboard the *Mercy*. In the spirit of uninvited guests since time immemorial, it had established a toehold with remarkable asperity, and now was digging in for the long winter. Drawn to the hydroponic tanks like a flea to a dog, the *hlog* had settled its bulbous pink body down in their murky depths with a contented

gurgle. As it grew larger the tank-levels grew lower, the broth clearer.

The fact that the twenty-five crewmen of the *Mercy* depended on those tanks for their food supply on the four-month run back to Hospital Earth didn't seem to bother the *hlog* a bit. It just sank down wetly and began to eat.

Under Jenkins' whip hand, and with Green Doctor Stone's assistance, the Survey Crew snapped into action. Survey was the soul and lifeblood of the medical services supplied by Hospital Earth to the inhabited planets of the Galaxy. Centuries before, during the era of exploration, every Earth ship had carried a rudimentary Survey Crew—a physiologist, a biochemist, an immunologist, a physician—to determine the safety of landings on unknown planets. Other races were more advanced in technological and physical sciences, in sales or in merchandising—but in the biological sciences men of Earth stood unexcelled in the Galaxy. It was not surprising that their casual offerings of medical services wherever their ships touched had led to a growing demand for those services, until the first Medical Service Contract with Deneb III had formalized the planetary specialty. Earth had become Hospital Earth, physician to a Galaxy, surgeon to a thousand worlds, midwife to those susceptible to midwifery and psychiatrist to those whose inner lives zigged when their outer lives zagged.

In the early days it had been a haphazard arrangement; but gradually distinct Services appeared to handle problems of medicine, surgery, radiology, psychiatry and all the other functions of a well-appointed medical service. Under the direction of the Black Service of Pathology, Hospital ships and Survey ships were dispatched to serve as bases for the tiny General Practice Patrol ships that answered the calls of the planets under Contract.

But it was the Survey ships that did the basic dirty-work on any new planet taken under Contract—outlining the physiological and biochemical aspects of the races involved, studying their disease patterns, their immunological types, their susceptibility to medical, surgical, or psychiatric treatment. It was an exacting service to perform, and Survey did an exacting job.

Now, with their own home base invaded by a hungry pink jelly-blob, the Survey Crew of the *Mercy* dug in with all fours to find a way to exorcise it.

The early returns were not encouraging.

Bowman, the anatomist, spent six hours with the creature. He'd go after the functional anatomy first, he thought, as he approached the task with gusto. Special organs, vital organ systems—after all, every Achilles had his heel. Functional would spot it if anything would—

Six hours later he rendered a preliminary report. It consisted of a blank sheet of paper and an expression of wild frustration.

"What's this supposed to mean?" Jenkins asked.

"Just what it says."

"But it says nothing!"

"That's exactly what it means." Bowman was a thin, wistful-looking man with a hawk nose and a little brown mustache. He subbed as ship's cook when things were slow in his specialty. He wasn't a very good cook, but what could anyone do with the sludge from the harvest shelf of a hydroponic tank? Now, with the *hlog* incumbent, there wasn't even any sludge.

"I drained off a tank and got a good look at it before it crawled over into the next one," Bowman said. "Ugly bastard. But from a strictly anatomical standpoint I can't help you a bit."

Green Doctor Stone glowered over Jenkins' shoulder at the man. "But surely you can give us *something*."

Bowman shrugged. "You want it technical?"

"Any way you like."

"Your *hlog* is an ideal anamorph. A nothing. Protoplasm, just protoplasm."

Jenkins looked up sharply. "What about his cellular organization?"

"No cells," said Bowman. "Unless they're sub-microscopic, and I'd need an electron-peeker to tell you that."

"No organ systems?"

"Not even an integument. You saw how slippery he looked? That's why. There's nothing holding him in but energy."

"Now, look," said Stone. "He eats, doesn't he? He must have waste materials of some sort."

Bowman shook his head unhappily. "Sorry. No urates. No nitrates. No CO₂. Anyway, he doesn't eat because he has nothing to eat with. He absorbs. And that includes the lining of the tanks, which he seems to like as much as the contents. He doesn't *bore* those holes he makes—he *dissolves* them."

They sent Bowman back to quarters for a hot bath and a shot of Happy-O and looked up Hrunta, the biochemist.

Hrunta was glaring at paper electrophoretic patterns and pulling out chunks of hair around his bald spot. He gave them a snarl and shoved a sheaf of papers into their hands.

"Metabolic survey?" Jenkins asked.

"Plus," said Hrunta. "You're not going to like it, either."

"Why not? If it grows, it metabolizes. If it metabolizes, we can kill it. Axiom number seventeen, paragraph number four."

"Oh, it metabolizes, all right, but you'd better find yourself another axiom, pretty quick."

"Why?"

"Because it not only metabolizes, it *consumes*. There's no sign of the usual protein-carbohydrate-fat metabolism going on here. This baby has an enzyme system that's straight from hell. It bypasses the usual metabolic activities that produce heat and energy and gets right down to basic-basic."

Jenkins swallowed. "What do you mean?"

"It attacks the nuclear structure of whatever matter the creature comes in contact with. There's a partial mass-energy conversion in its rawest form. The creature goes after carbon-bearing substances first, since the C seems to break down more easily than anything else—hence its preference for plant and animal material over non-C stuff. But it can use anything if it has to—"

Jenkins stared at the little biochemist, an image in his mind of the pink creature in the hold, growing larger by the minute as it ate its way through the hydroponics, through the dry stores, through—

"Is there anything it can't use?"

"If there is, I haven't found it," Hrunta said sadly. "In fact, I can't see any reason why it couldn't consume this ship and everything in it, right down to the last rivet—"

■

They walked down to the hold for another look at their uninvited guest, and almost wished they hadn't.

It had reached the size of a small hippopotamus, although the resemblance ended there. Twenty hours had elapsed since the survey had begun. The *hlog* had used every minute of it, draining the tanks, engulfing dry stores, devouring walls and floors as it spread out in search of food, leaving trails of eroded metal wherever it went.

It was ugly—ugly in its pink shapelessness, ugly in its slimy half-sentient movements, in its very purposefulness. But its ugliness went even deeper, stirring primordial feelings of revulsion and loathing in their minds as they watched it oozing implacably across the hold to another dry-storage bin.

Wally Stone shuddered. "It's grown."

"Too fast. Bowman charts it as geometric progression."

Stone scratched his jaw as a lone pink pseudopod pushed out on the floor toward him. Then he leaped forward and stamped on it, severing the strand from the body.

The severed member quivered and lay still for a moment. Then it flowed back to rejoin the body with a wet gurgle.

Stone looked at his half-dissolved shoe.

"Egotropism," Jenkins said. "Bowman played around with that, too. A severed piece will rejoin if it can. If it can't it just takes up independent residence and we have two *hlogs*."

"What happens to it outside the ship?" Stone wanted to know.

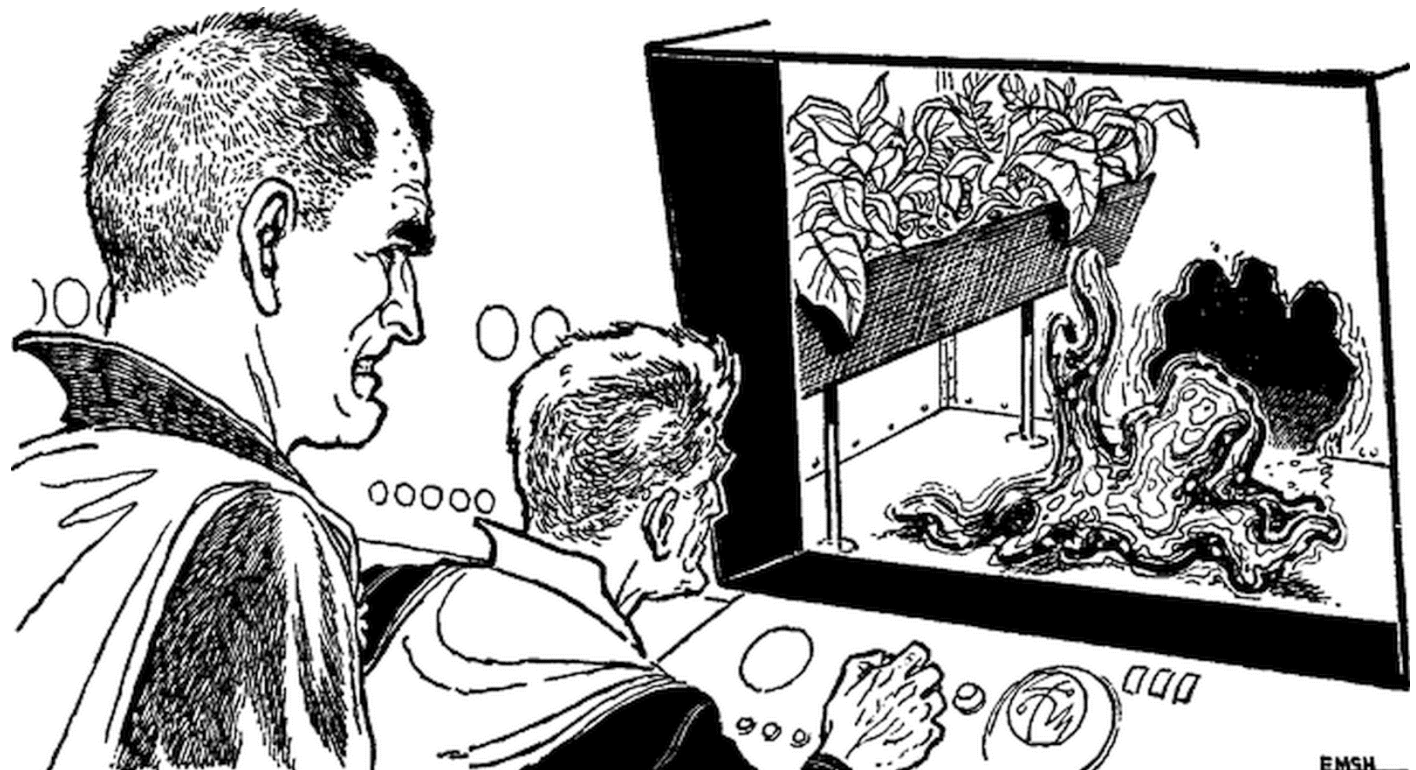
"It falls dormant for several hours, and then splits up into a thousand independent chunks. One of the boys spent half of yesterday out there gathering them up. I tell you, this thing is equipped to *survive*."

"So are we," said Green Doctor Stone grimly. "If we can't outwit this free-flowing gob of obscenity, we deserve anything we get. Let's have a conference."

They met in the pilot room. The Black Doctor was there; so were Bowman and Hrunta. Chambers, the physiologist, was glumly clasping and unclasping his hands in a corner. The geneticist, Piccione, drew symbols on a scratch pad and stared blankly at the wall.

Jenkins was saying: "Of course, these are only preliminary reports, but they serve to outline the problem. This is not just an annoyance any longer, it's a crisis. We'd all better understand that."

The Black Doctor cut him off with a wave of his hand, and glowered at the papers as he read them through minutely. As he sat hunched at the desk with the black cowl of his office hanging down from his shoulders he looked like a squat black judge, Jenkins thought, a shadow from the Inquisition, a Passer of Spells. But there was no medievalism in Black Doctor Neelsen. In fact, it was for that reason, and only that reason, that the Black Service had come to be the leaders and the whips, the executors and directors of all the manifold operations of Hospital Earth.



■

The physicians of the General Practice Patrol were fledglings, newly trained in their specialties, inexperienced in the rigorous discipline of medicine that was required of the directors of permanent Planetary Dispensaries in the heavily populated systems of the Galaxy. On outlying worlds where little was known of the ways of medicine, the temptation was great to substitute faith for knowledge, cant for investigation, nonsense rituals for hard work. But the physicians of the Black Service were always waiting to jerk wandering neophytes back to the scientific disciplines that made the service of Hospital Earth so effective. The Black Doctors would not tolerate sloppiness. "Show me the tissue, Doctor," they would say. "Prove to me that what you say is so. Prove that what you did was valid medicine...." Their laboratories were the morgues and autopsy rooms of a thousand planets, the Temples of Truth from which no physician since the days of Pasteur and Lister could escape for long and retain his position.

The Black Doctors were the pragmatists, the gadflies of Hospital Earth.

For this reason it was surprising to hear Black Doctor Neelsen saying, "Perhaps we are being too scientific, just now. When the creature has exhausted our food stores, it will look elsewhere for food. Perhaps we must cut at the tree and not at the root."

"A frontal attack?" said Jenkins.

"Just so. Its enzyme system is its vulnerability. Enzyme

systems operate under specific optimum conditions, right? And every known enzyme system can be inactivated by adverse conditions of one sort or another. A physical approach may tell us how in this case. Meanwhile we will be on emergency rations, and hope that we don't starve to death finding out." The Black Doctor paused, looking at the men around him. "And in case you are thinking of enlisting help from outside, forget it. I've sent plague-warnings out for Galactic relay. We have this thing isolated, and we're going to keep it that way as long as I command this ship."

They went gloomily back to their laboratories to plan their frontal attack.

That was the night that Hrunta disappeared.

■

He was gone when they came to wake him from his sleep period. His bunk had been slept in, but he wasn't in it. In fact, he wasn't anywhere on the ship.

"But he couldn't just vanish!" the Black Doctor burst out when they told him the news. "Maybe he's hiding somewhere. Maybe this business was working on his mind."

Green Doctor Stone took a crew of men to search the ship again, even though he considered it a waste of precious time. He had his private convictions about where Hrunta had gone.

So did every other man on the ship, including Jenkins.

The *hlog* had stopped eating. Huge and round and wet and ugly, it squatted in the after-hold, quivering gently, without any other sign of life.

Surfeited. Like a fat man after a turkey dinner.

Jenkins reviewed progress with the others. No stone had been left unturned. They had sliced the *hlog*, and squeezed it. They had boiled it and frozen it. They had dropped chunks of it in acid vats and covered other chunks with desiccants and alkalis. Nothing seemed to bother it.

A cold environment slowed down its activity, true, but it also stimulated the process of fission. Warmed up again, the portions sucked back together again and resumed eating.

Heat was a little more effective, but not much. It stunned the creature for a brief period, but it would not burn. It hissed frightfully and gave off an overpowering stench, and curled up at the edges, but as soon as the heat was turned off it began to recover.

In Hrunta's lab chunks of the *hlog* sat in a dozen vats on tables and in sinks. Some contained antibiotics, some concentrated acids, some desiccants. In each vat a blob of pink protoplasm wiggled happily, showing no sign of discomfort. On another table were the remains of Hrunta's (unsuccessful) attempt to prepare an anti-*hlog* serum.

But no Hrunta.

"He was down there with the thing all day," Bowman said sadly. "He felt it was his responsibility, really. Hrunta thought biochemistry was the answer to all things, of course. Very conscientious man."

"But he was in *bed*."

"He claimed he did his best thinking in bed. Maybe he had a brainstorm and went down to try it out, and—"

"Yes." Jenkins nodded sourly. "And." He walked down the row of vats. "You'd think that at least concentrated sulphuric would dessicate it a little. But it's just formed a crust of coagulated protein around itself, and sits there—"

Bowman peered over his shoulder, his mustache twitching. "But it does dessicate."

"If you use enough long enough."

"How about concentrated hydrochloric?"

"Same thing. Maybe a little more effective, but not enough to count."

"Okay. Next we try combinations. There's got to be *something* the wretched beast can't tolerate—"

There was, of course.

■

Green Doctor Stone brought it to Jenkins as he was getting ready to turn in for a sleep period. Jenkins had checked to make sure double guards were posted in the *hlog's* vicinity, and jolted them with Sleep-Not to keep them on their toes. All the same, he tied a length of stout cord around his ankle just to make sure he didn't do any sleepwalking. He was tying it to the bunk when Stone came in with a pan in his hand and a peculiar look on his face.

"Take a look at this," he said.

Jenkins looked at the sickly brown mass in the tray, and then up at Stone. "Where did you find it?"

"Down in the hold. Our *hlog* has broken precedent. It's *rejected* something that it ate."

"Yeah. What is it?"

"I don't know. I'm taking it to Neelsen for paraffin sections. But I know what it looks like to me."

"Mm. I know." Jenkins felt sick. Stone headed up to the path lab, leaving the Red Doctor settled in his bunk.

Ten minutes later Jenkins sat bolt upright in the darkness. Frantically he untied himself and slid into his clothes. "Idiot!" he growled to himself. "Seventh son of a seventh son—"

Five minutes later he was staring at the vats in Hrunta's laboratory. He found the one he was looking for. A pink blob of *hlog* wiggled slowly around the bottom.

Jenkins drew a beaker of distilled water and added it to the fluid in the vat. It hissed and sputtered and sent up quantities of acrid steam. When the steam had cleared away, Jenkins peered in eagerly.

The pink thing in the bottom was turning a sickly violet. It had quit wiggling. As Jenkins watched, the violet color changed to mud grey, then to black. He prodded it with a stirring rod. There was no response.

With a whoop Jenkins buzzed Bowman and Stone. "We've got it!" he shouted to them when they appeared. "Look! Look at it!"

Bowman poked and probed and broke into a wide grin. The piece of *hlog* was truly and sincerely dead. "It inactivates the enzyme system, and renders the base protoplasm vulnerable to anything that normally attacks it. What are we waiting for?"

They began tearing the laboratory apart, searching for the right bottles. The supply was discouragingly small, but there was some in stock. The three of them raced down the corridor for the hold where the *hlog* was.

It took them three hours of angry work to exhaust the supply. They whittled chunks off the *hlog*, tossed them in pans of the deadly fluid. With each slice they stopped momentarily to watch it turn violet, then black, as it died. The *hlog*, dwindling in size, sensed the attack and slapped frantically at their ankles, sending out angry plumes of wet jelly, but they ducked and dodged and whittled some more. The *hlog* quivered and gurgled and wept pinkish goo all over the floor, but it grew smaller and weaker with every whack.

"Hrunta must have spotted it and come down here alone," Jenkins panted between slices. "Maybe he slipped, lost his footing, I don't know—"

They continued to work until the supply was exhausted. They had reduced the *hlog* to a quarter its previous size. "Check the other labs, see if they have some more," said Stone.

"I already have," Bowman said. "They don't. This is it."

"But we haven't got it all killed. There's still—" He pointed to the thing quailing in the corner.

"I know. We're licked, that's all. There isn't any more of the stuff on the ship."

They stopped and looked at each other suddenly. Then Jenkins said: "Oh, yes there is."

There was silence. Bowman looked at Stone, and Stone looked at Bowman. They both looked at Jenkins. "Oh, no. Sorry. I decline." Stone shook his head slowly.

"But we have to! There's no other way. If the enzyme system is inactivated, it's just protoplasm—there's no physiological or biochemical reason—"

"You know what you can do with your physiology and biochemistry," Bowman said succinctly. "You can also count me out." He left them and the hatchway clanged after him.

"Wally?"

"Yeah."

"It'll be months before we get back to Hospital Earth. We know how we can hold it in check until we get there."

"Yeah."

"Well?"

Green Doctor Wally Stone sighed. "Greater love hath no man," he said wearily. "We'd better go tell Neelsen, I guess."

■

Black Doctor Turvold Neelsen's answer was a flat, unequivocal no. "It's monstrous and preposterous. I won't stand for it. Nobody will stand for it."

"But you have the proof in your own hands," Jenkins said. "You saw the specimen that the Green Doctor brought you."

Neelsen hunched back angrily. "I saw it."

"And your impression of it? As a pathologist?"

"I fail to see how my impression applies one way or the other—"

"Doctor, sometimes we have to face facts. Remember?"

"All right." Neelsen seemed to curl up into himself still further. "The specimen was stomach."

"Human stomach?"

"Human stomach."

"But the only human on this ship that doesn't have a stomach is Hrunta," said Jenkins.

"So the *hlog* ate him."

"Most of him. Not quite all. It threw out the one part of him it couldn't eat. The part containing a substance that inactivated its enzyme system. Dilute hydrochloric acid, to be specific. We used the entire ship's supply, and cut the *hlog* down to three-quarters size, but we need a continuous supply to keep it whittled down until we get home. And there's only one good, permanent, reliable source of dilute hydrochloric acid on board this ship—"

The Black Doctor's face was purple. "I said no," he choked. "My answer stands."

The Red Doctor sighed and turned to Green Doctor Stone. "All right, Wally," he said.



(From the files of the Medical Disciplinary Board, Hospital Earth, op. cit.)

I am certain that you can see from the foregoing that a reasonable effort was made by Green Doctor Stone and myself to put the plan in effect peaceably and with full approval of our commander. It was our conviction, however, that the emergency nature of the circumstances required that it be done with or without his approval. Our subsequent success in containing the hlog to at least reasonable and manageable proportions should bear out the wisdom of our decision.

Actually, it has not been as bad as one might think. It has been necessary to confine the crew to their quarters, and to restrain the Black Doctor forcibly, but with liberal use of Happy-O we can occasionally convince ourselves that it is rare beefsteak, and the Green Doctor, our pro-tem cook has concocted several very tasty sauces, such as mushroom, onion, etc. We reduce the hlog to half its size each day, and if thoroughly heated the chunks lie still on the plate for quite some time.

No physical ill effects have been noted, and the period of quarantine is recommended solely to allow the men an adequate period for psychological recovery.

I have only one further recommendation: that the work team from the Grey Service be recalled at once from their assignment on Mauki IV. The problem is decidedly not psychiatric, and it would be one of the tragedies of the ages if our excellent psychiatric service were to succeed in persuading the Maukivi out of their 'delusion'.

After all, Hospital Earth cannot afford to jeopardize a Contract—

(signed)

*Samuel B. Jenkins,
Physician Grade VI
Red Service
GPP Ship Lancet
(Attached GSS Mercy pro tem)*

CRYSTAL CRISIS

Based on "Devil Crystals Of Arret"
by Hal K. Wells



OBSTACLES

Dangerous Environment - Sand Storm
Dangerous Environment - Octopus-Bat Lair
Monster/Enemy - Rat-Men
Monster/Enemy - Devil Crystals
Wildlife/Animals - Arretian Foxes
Wildlife/Animals - Octopus-Bats

COMPLICATIONS

No Intel
Deadline

PERKS

70 MV

MAGUFFINS

Data/Report on Arret
Arretian Lifeforms
Octopus-Bat Egg (1-3M)
Crystal Egg (7-12M)

BACKSTORY

The planet *Arret* (“Terra” reversed), exists in the same space as Earth, but in a negatively-charged dimension on a newly-discovered Slip Vector called *Marlowe*, after its discoverer Dr. Benjamin Marlowe.

Arret is a place where not only subatomic charges but evolution itself has gone a totally different direction than it did on Earth: Arret is a hot, dry and desert-filled place, almost entirely bathed in red. The dunes are stalked by small alien carnivores and the skies are watched by gigantic Octopus-Bats.

During the day the pallid sunlight of a dim sun beats wearily through the dense air, and at night the red ochre orb of the Arretian moon shines down on the sand dunes that comprise 70% of the planet’s surface.

Within this hostile terrain, the DayTrippers will soon discover – or be discovered by – the most numerous of the planet’s few species: *Rat-Men*. These brutes, barely sentient, have formed a simple heirarchical society with an autocratic King and a large military force. But they are not the most terrifying creatures on the planet; not even the dreaded *Octopus-Bats* hold that title. The Arretian food chain ends with the fearsome *Devil Crystals*, to whom the Rat-Men pay fealty through ritual sacrifice.

SEEING RED

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration

NODE TYPE: Dream World

SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)

STABILITY: Moderately Stable (3)

PAY: 10M ea

Dr. Benjamin Marlowe got video proof of a new and unknown world when a lucky hit was registered by one of his scoutbots, doing a stochastic sampling of the Earth’s position along random subjective vectors.

It’s not yet clear what the relationship is between this new planet and the Earth itself – perhaps, as some have speculated, it is an *Alternate Earth* that split off before life on either planet began – but the doctor is willing to finance a DayTrip to investigate.

The main complication – for which a pay bonus beyond typical scale will be offered – is that this dream world seems to be only moderately stable. There is a chance that it may morph unpredictably, or even dissipate with the PCs inside. *Lucid Dreaming* skills are advised.

THE OTHER RED PLANET

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration

NODE TYPE: Unknown Planet

SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL4)

PAY: 4M ea

Doctor Marlowe’s stochastic sampling scoutbots have brought back videos of an arid red landscape with strange flying creatures and an odd, occasional tinkling sound. He has named the place “Arret”, and is hiring a DayTripper team at his own personal expense, to explore this new unknown world.

GM NOTE: If you’re using the *Cartesian Exception* rule, this adventure may take several days of gametime.

JOAN’S RESCUE

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Emergency/Rescue

NODE TYPE: Dream World

SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)

STABILITY: Historically Stable (5)

PAY: 8M ea

A rescue call has gone out for DayTripper Joan Marlowe, daughter of the intraspace physicist and node discoverer Dr. Benjamin Marlowe. Her last known location is the Dream World of *Arret*, where she was experimenting with a prototype design of her father’s personal RA field generator.

Unlike typical Slip Capacitors, the Marlowes’ device involves a specially-constructed silver alloy plate and a “SlipBelt”. As a safety precaution, the system features a recall mechanism that reverses the charge of the Belt and brings its wearer back to Earth, where they re-materialize upon the plate.

The slip out to Arret went without a hitch, and no communications followed. Given the spotty reliability of UpVector transmissions this was not seen as a cause for alarm, until the doctor’s automated return pad fired off the return signal and something else came back in his daughter’s place: a fragile crystal egg containing an oversized ratlike skeleton – wearing Joan’s belt – and a note in Joan’s own hand, saying “*Help! I am held prisoner in the Cave of Blue Flames!*”

The coordinates have been conveyed to the team at Diaspora Labs, and a slipbay is being prepped for departure at Tracy Island. You have six hours left.

ARRET

GRAVITY: 1.0 G
 ATMOSPHERE: Nitrogen/Oxygen
 PRESSURE: 1.0 Earth atmospheres
 DAY: 24 hours
 YEAR: 365 Earth days
 WATER: 30% standing water
 CLIMATE: Hot
 PRECIPITATION: Unlikely (DL 9)
 BIOSPHERE: Few Sentient Lifeforms

The planet Arret is the same size as Earth, and has the same orbital and rotational periods as Earth.

It has been proposed that Arret is in fact an *Alternate Earth* that split off from our timeline billions of years ago... but that's just speculation (and up to you, the GM).

It's hot, it's dry, and everything is red.

PERCEPTIONS

- Everything is red: the plants are glossy red, the sandy soil is dull brick-red. The sky is reddish-saffron. The Arretian moon has a blood-red hue.
- The air is hot and dry, hard to breathe.
- Rolling red sand dunes in every direction, covered with thickets of red globule-bushes.
- Visibility is only a few yards, due to thickets.
- Occasional batlike things with tentacles, flying in the distance
- Occasional tinkling sounds (from the thicket)

THE DUNES

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Rolling sandy hills and thickets
 CONDITION: Dried, Drying
 TERRAIN: Sandy, Scrub
 WEATHER: Hot, Dry
 BIODIVERSITY: Low and Stable: few dominant lifeforms
 DOMINANT COLORS: Red, Scarlet, Maroon
 RESOURCES: Plants, Animals, Stone, Crystal
 UNUSUAL FEATURES: Sentient Lifeforms
 ENCOUNTER DL: Likely (7)

It's painful to take a deep breath. The landscape is low rolling dunes covered with thick clusters of weird flora. Most of the foliage is head-high and dense. Unless you get to high ground by climbing a sand dune (GRACE vs DL3), visibility is limited to a few yards.

Instead of leaves, Arretian bushes and grasses have moist, glossy spheres of scarlet, ranging in size from pinheads to large pumpkins. Branches are formed from strings of these globules, and they taper in size as they extend out from the central trunk. The tips of the branches are fragile and hair-thin.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	Lone Rat-Man
4	Octopus-Bat Lair
5	Crystal Egg (ejected from the thicket)
6	Rat-Men Hunting Party
7-8	Octopus-Bat
9	Sandstorm
10	2d6 Arretian Foxes
11-12	Unusual Feature

THICKET OF THE TINKLING DEATH

LOCATION

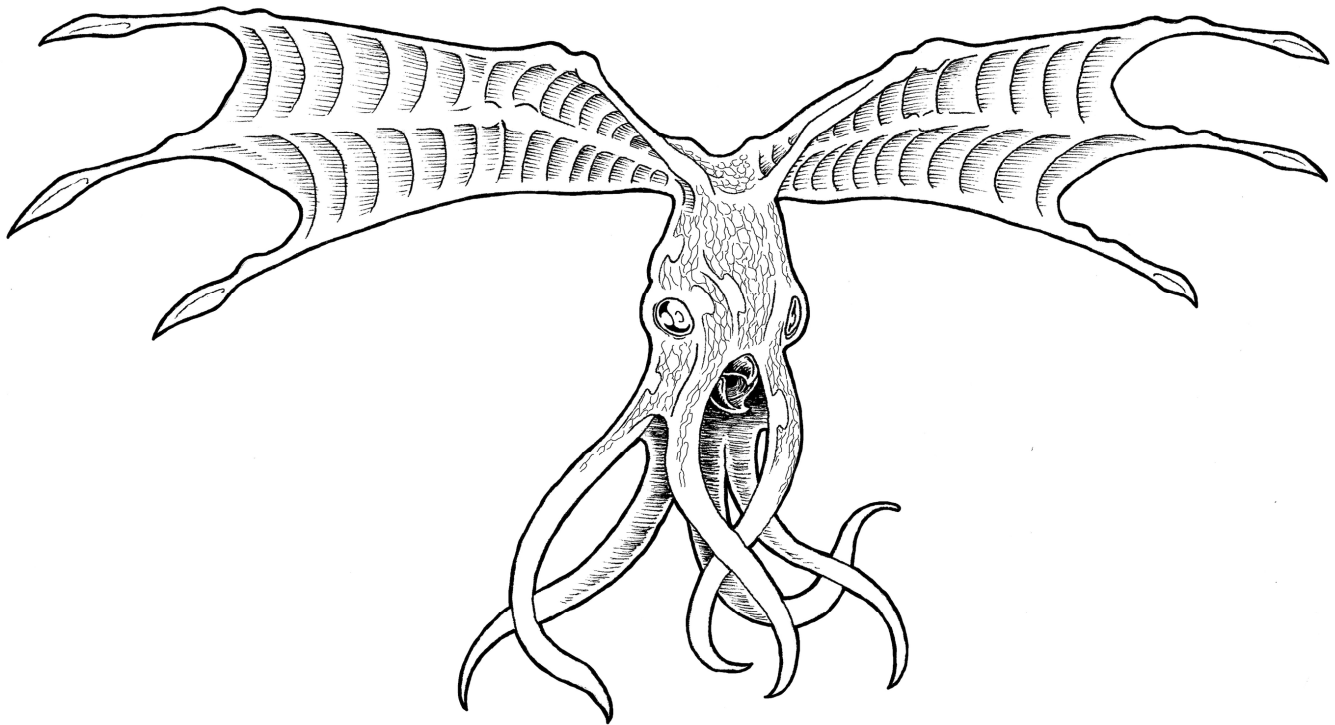
This large patch of thickets is close to the PCs' arrival point. The foliage is so dense it's impossible to see more than a few yards in. Occasionally a path leads through the foliage, but its visibility comes and goes.

From time to time a curious tinkling sound can be heard coming from the depths of the thicket, like wind chimes, or broken glass. If there are any *RAT-MEN* present, they will be visibly terrified at the sound.

Even more rarely—once or twice per day—the tinkling sound swells to a loud crescendo and suddenly stops with a loud *twang*. Soon afterward a *CRYSTAL EGG* is ejected from the thicket.

If a character ventures into the thicket, a GRACE roll will determine how far they progress (if at all):

- Beat DL 3 Just a few yards into the thicket, the sound stops, and you can no longer tell which direction you're going. Unless a Survival Suit is worn, take 1 point of harm to CHARM (welts on your face).
- Beat DL 4 Halfway through the thicket, you can no longer see the way you came in. Unless a Survival Suit is worn, take 1 point of harm to CHARM (welts on your face).
- Beat DL 5 You reach the clearing of the *CEREMONIAL PIT*. There are no *RAT-MEN* here. The *DEVIL CRYSTALS* cannot be seen, having retreated to their niches within the walls of the pit.



OCTOPUS-BAT

LIFEFORM

GRACE 4 Whip+2 Grasp+1
 HEALTH 2
 MIGHT 2 Bite+1
 TCV 100

This giant hideous combination of octopus and bat attacks from above, swooping down on membranous wings to seize its prey and drag it into the air.

Its vast dark wings span twenty feet. A sac-like body hangs between them, featuring a head with staring, lidless eyes and a great black beak. Six long tentacles beneath the body are strong enough to knock a person to the ground or lift them into the air.

To lift a human, the creature must succeed in a MIGHT roll vs DL4 (its typical prey is somewhat lighter). To do this, OR to bite a foe with its beak, the creature must first succeed in grasping it (i.e. in a prior Frame).

ENCOUNTERS

- 1-6 Octopus-Bats are hunting nearby; attempt to hide (DL 3) in order to avoid being spotted.
- (Crisis) The characters are spotted by a lone Octopus-Bat, which swoops in for the attack.
- (Crisis) The characters are spotted by 1-6 Octopus-Bats, which swoop in for the attack.

OCTOPUS-BAT LAIR

LOCATION

TCV 600

This clearing seems nice and peaceful until you step into it. Suddenly the red bulbous trees come alive with great flapping sounds as 2d6 *OCTOPUS-BATS* swoop down from their resting spots to attack the party.

Their primary tactic is to lift an enemy up to a height of fifteen or twenty feet, and then drop them to the ground to be picked up by another bat. (A fall from this height requires a GRACE roll vs DL 3 to avoid harm.)

In one of the trees may be found a large leathery pouch, about the size of a potato sack, containing four Octopus-Bat eggs. On Home-Earth these eggs might be worth 1-3M each.

SAND STORM

EVENT

TCV 30 (mass obstacle)

A flurry of wind signals a change in the air, and then suddenly a great hot gust whirls into the area, whipping up a giant tornado of red sand and dust hundreds of feet high.

Inside the storm, it's hard to see and it's hard to hear. Characters who aren't in Automated Survival Suits will also find it hard to breath, as hot sand forces its way into their orifices. They will need to make a *Survival* roll vs DL 3 or take -1 to HEALTH.

ARRETIAN FOX

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Bite+1 Scratch+1

TCV 25

This medium-sized foxlike creature is covered in reddish brown fur. Although generally afraid of anything much larger than itself, it will attack fiercely if cornered or frightened, or if the fox group outnumbered their opponents. Its typical diet consists of small rodents and reptiles that scurry around.

It is also a primary source of protein for the *RAT-MEN*, and a convenient source of sacrifices to the *DEVIL CRYSTALS* when nothing else is available.

ENCOUNTERS

- A scuttling sound in the bushes alarms the characters; upon investigation it turns out to be an Arretian Fox hunting a fat, red lizard.
- A group of 2d6 Arretian Foxes are under attack by a RAT-MAN HUNTING PARTY. The RAT-MEN have completely surrounded their den. Some of them fight with the more adults while others scoop the pups into ragged sacks. They are too involved to notice the PCs – as of yet.
- (Crisis) The characters walk unexpectedly into a Arretian Fox den, and are ambushed by 3d6 of the critters.

CRYSTAL EGG

MAGUFFIN

Earth Value: 7-12M

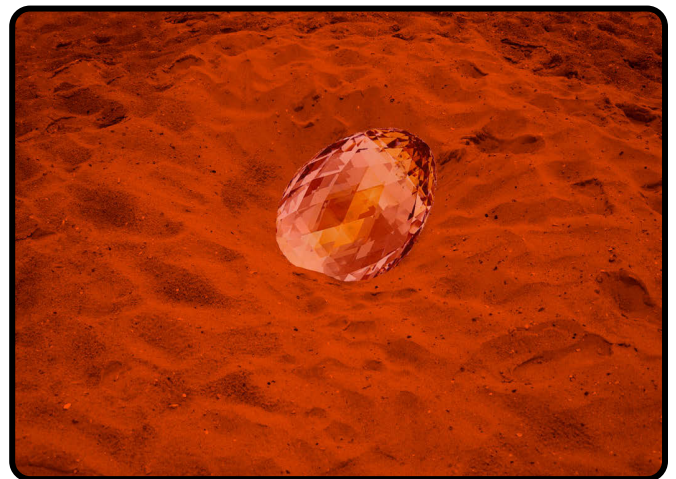
A tinkling crashing sound makes a steady pulsing song like a river of crystalline glass breaking over granite boulders. The song swells to a crescendo climax. Then comes another sound, a resonant *twang*, and the tinkling melody abruptly dies. Shortly thereafter, an object is ejected from the *THICKET OF THE TINKLING DEATH* and comes rolling down the sandy slope.

It's a yard-long egg-shaped crystal of translucent amber that contains a crystal-encrusted skeleton. Roll below to determine the nature of the skeleton:

SKELETON TYPE (2D6)

- 2-3 Some kind of big lizard
- 4-5 Arretian Fox
- 6-8 Rat-Man
- 9-10 Octopus-Bat
- 11-12 Some kind of arboreal mammal

The value of this egg unharmed on Home-Earth would be 7-12M. The shell is fragile: It requires a GRACE roll vs DL4 to move it any distance without breaking it.



RAT-MAN

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Dodge+2
TCV 35

BODY SHAPE: hunch-backed, rodent-hominid

SYMMETRY: bilateral

APPENDAGES: two forelimbs, two rear limbs

SIZE: roughly 3 feet tall

SENSES: infravision, ultravision, enhanced hearing

BODY SURFACE: a coat of short, dirty grey fur

SUSTENANCE: omnivorous

MANIPULATORS: claw-like hands with thumbs

LOCOMOTION: bipedal, walks upright, also on all fours

REPRODUCTION: bisexual reproduction

A travesty of the human species, rat-men walk upright on their hind legs but their resemblance to humans ends there. The local community includes hundreds, maybe thousands of them. Standing a little under a yard in height, the beasts are covered with a coat of short, dirty grey fur. Their legs are short, powerful, and bowed. Their long arms end in claw-like hands which can cause some nasty lacerations. Their heads are small, with chinless faces, beady eyes, sharply sloping foreheads and forward-projecting rodent-like teeth. At any distance, the males and females all look alike to us humans.

They can move very quickly when they want to, their furry bodies dodging too fast to get a clear shot at them. When excited, they let out a constant babel of snarling, chattering sounds.

ENCOUNTERS

- A rat-man is wandering around or hunting a fox. For the time being, he's upwind and doesn't notice the characters.
- (Crisis) The PCs are spotted by a rat-man, who begins squealing for his comrades. They'll arrive in two Frames' time.
- (Crisis) One character is ambushed by a lone rat-man who springs out of the thickets.
- (Crisis) The PCs are spotted by a particularly large *RAT-CAPTAIN*.

RAT-CAPTAIN

LIFEFORM

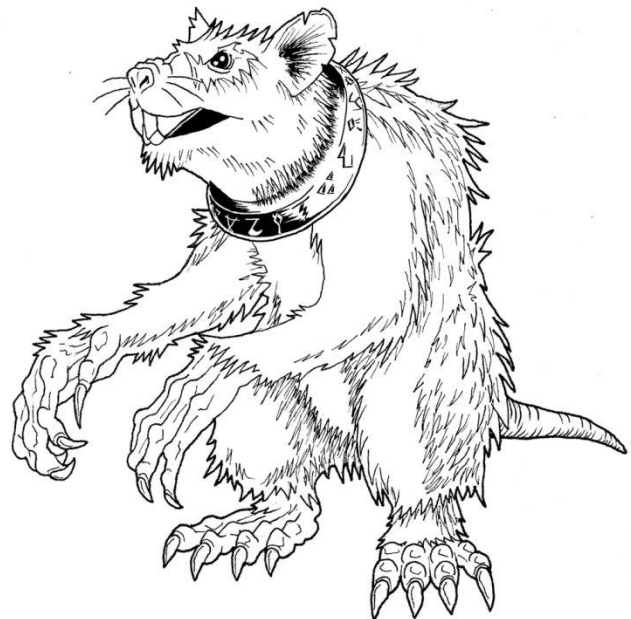
CHARM 1 Command+2
GRACE 2 Dodge+2
MIGHT 2
TCV 70

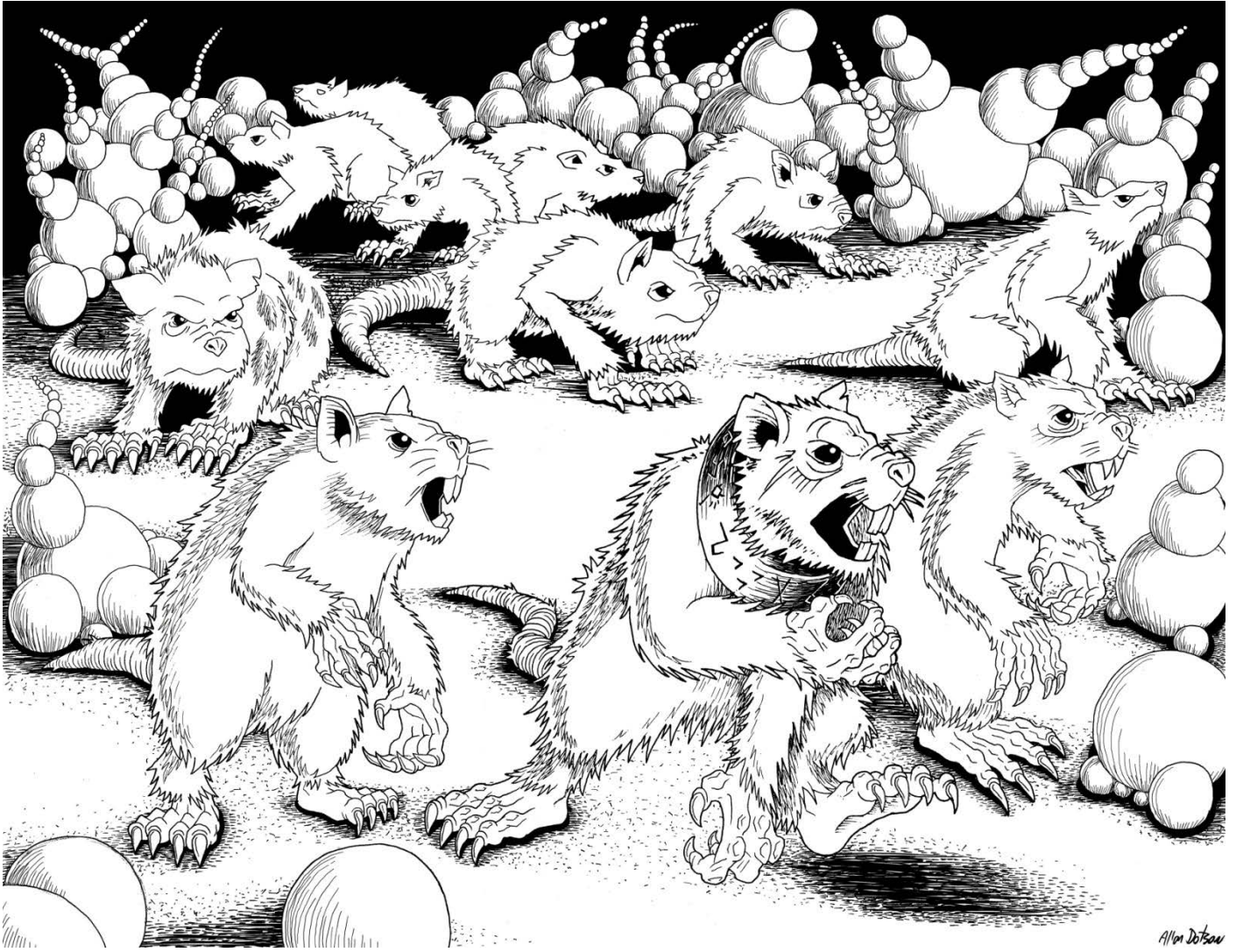
The biggest and most courageous of the *RAT-MEN* are chosen to be King's Guards, and serve as Captains on dune raids. There are about 40 of them. As signifiers of their rank, they wear wide collars of grey metal around their throats, scratched with strange hieroglyphics.

A Rat-Captain in the wild can shrill a command that will bring hundreds of rat-men swarming from every direction.

A typical hunting party consists of twelve *RAT-MEN* and one Captain.

If the PCs are captured their weapons will be taken from them, and the presiding Rat-Captain will take charge of these items. Later they will be presented to the *RAT-KING*.





RAT-MAN HUNTING PARTY

LIFEFORM

TCV 420

A group of twelve rat-men moves through the thickets, hunting for food and sacrificial victims. They are led by a *RAT-CAPTAIN*.

ENCOUNTERS

- The characters notice a party of rat-men in the distance; they haven't been spotted yet.
- A group of rat-men has cornered an *ARRETIAN FOX* (or a number of them), and are trying to catch them by cornering them in a thicket. The foxes are putting up a tough fight.
- The characters are spotted, and the captain begins squealing for backup. They'll begin arriving in two Frames' time.
- (Crisis) The characters are ambushed and the captain shrills out an alarm. After two Frames, *hundreds* of rat-men will arrive and fighting them without mounted weaponry will be an impossibility. For right now, surrender is the best option. Live to fight another day.

CAVE OF BLUE FLAMES

LOCATION

SURROUNDINGS: Underground tunnels below desert
CONDITION: Moist
TERRAIN: Rock, dirt
WEATHER: Temperate (cooler underground)
BIODIVERSITY: Low and Stable
DOMINANT COLORS: Brown, Red, Maroon
RESOURCES: Plants, Animals, Stone, Crystal
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Sentient Lifeforms
ENCOUNTER DL: Impossible to be alone (1)

Two miles from the *THICKET OF THE TINKLING DEATH* the path abruptly slopes downward, leading to an underground passage. After traversing this passage for a short time you emerge into a huge underground cavern, its walls full of niches and crannies.

The majority of the *RAT-MEN* pack reside here: thousands of them, sleeping, feeding, snarling and fighting. A crudely-chiseled rock chair sits not far from the center of the cavern. This is the throne of the *RAT-KING*. Across from the throne is a pit ten feet deep and ten in diameter.

PERCEPTIONS

- A gigantic cavern holding thousands of *RAT-MEN*, with several large tunnels running off in various directions.
- From fissures high in the rock walls, flickering sheets of blue flame warm and light the place.
- There's a weird tingling glow in the air, suggesting that the blue fire might be electrical.
- The smell is horrible: wet fur, sweat and rotting carnage.
- Some *RAT-MEN* come up and sniff at the PCs.
- Only a few things are made of metal: the collars of the *RAT-GUARDS* and a ladder in one corner. And the electric lamps... It seems unlikely that these things were made by *RAT-MEN*. But then, who made them?

RAT-KING

LIFEFORM

BRAINS 2
CHARM 1 Command+3
GRACE 2 Dodge+1
HEALTH 1
MIGHT 1
PSYCHE 1

TCV 90

This grotesquely fat, mangy-furred old creature is the leader of the *RAT-MEN*. What he lacks in physical strength he makes up for in cleverness: his organization of the *RAT-CAPTAINS* – chosen not just for strength but mindless loyalty – has cemented his position, enhanced his wardrobe, decorated his favorites, and enabled him to maintain a regular schedule of sacrifices to please his hungry masters.

When prisoners are brought in, *RAT-CAPTAINS* strip them of all shiny objects, handing these and any retrieved weapons over to the king. He then orders the prisoners dumped into the *HOLDING PIT*, where they will await their sacrifice to the *DEVIL CRYSTALS*.

HOLDING PIT

LOCATION

A pit in the rock floor, ten feet wide and ten feet deep. The walls are guarded by sentries who have only to call to summon the entire horde. After the PCs spend some time in the pit, the *RAT-MEN* begin a snarling ritualistic chant that goes on for hours. Eventually a rude metal ladder is shoved down, and a *RAT-CAPTAIN* motions for the captives to climb up.

GM NOTE: In the "Emergency Rescue" scenario, *JOAN MARLOWE* is sitting at the bottom of the pit.

JOAN MARLOWE

NPC

BRAINS 3 QuantumPhysics+2
CHARM 2 Rhetoric+1
GRACE 2 Pilot+1
HEALTH 2
PSYCHE 3

TCV 95

She's a fearless DayTripper, slipping around the multiverse in an experimental Slip-belt, but she's in a bit of a jam here and could use a little help. Luckily she was able to write a note and slip it into the belt...

CEREMONIAL PIT

LOCATION

This huge clearing seems to have been a ceremonial assembly place for generations; its smooth sandy floor is packed down nearly to the hardness of rock.

In the center of the clearing is a large deep pit, some seventy yards in circumference and thirty feet deep. A narrow tongue of rock about twenty feet long stretches out over the pit, like a great diving board over a swimming pool.

If the prisoners seem to be under control, the *RAT-MEN* will be assembling here in preparation for *THE RITUAL*. Thousands of rat-men are packed into a rough crescent-shaped mob at one side of the clearing. Between the horde and the edge of the pit stands a smaller group; the *RAT-KING* is among them. There is much chanting and anticipation. All of the rat-men are watching the pit, but none of them go very close to it.

If there is no ritual going on, the *DEVIL CRYSTALS* will be hidden out of sight, nestled in their niches at the bottom of the pit.

THE RITUAL

EVENT

The human captives will be hurried on by a group of *RAT-CAPTAINS* (three per prisoner) to join a small group of four *RAT-MEN* near the pit's edge. These four are apparently prisoners, captured criminals or violators of some taboo, for their arms are firmly bound behind them.

A captain places a small cup containing a faintly cloudy white liquid to the lips of each of the rat-man prisoners. Resigned to their fate, they drink the fluid.

The drug acts immediately. The rodents' eyes cloud, their jaws drop open, and their bodies stiffen. They begin to shuffle off down the half-bridge. They walk all the way to the end and then, without a second's hesitation, they plunge over the edge.

The PCs are close enough to view the consumption of the rat-men by the six *DEVIL CRYSTALS* below.

The captains then turn to the PCs, and they intend to force them to drink the fluid. Because they are outnumbered three to one, resistance (or breaking free) will require a MIGHT roll vs DL 6. (*Martial Arts* or *Contortion* skills may apply as well.)

DEVIL CRYSTAL

LIFEFORM

GRACE 1
HEALTH 3
MIGHT 2 Lance+1 Drain+2

TCV 90

Living semi-transparent silver crystals, ten feet in height, faceted sides pulsing and glimmering with an unearthly beauty. Near the center of each crystal is a swirling opalescent nucleus. They move slowly, with a rolling motion of their bases, creating a tinkling sound. Their "limbs" are long projections of silver that erupt from their crystalline bodies and shoot out rapidly, up to a range of fifteen feet.

When draining a victim, a crashing glasslike sound is heard as the limb pierces the skin and spreads into thin filaments, lacing the victim's body within a tight web (-1 GRACE > MIGHT > HEALTH). The victim begins to undergo a rapid process of dessication. When all three targeted stats reach zero, the victim is metamorphosed into a large crystal egg and discarded with a loud *twang*.

At the bottom of the pit are six of these creatures. Each of them expects at least one victim to feed on.

DRUG: CLOUDY WHITE LIQUID

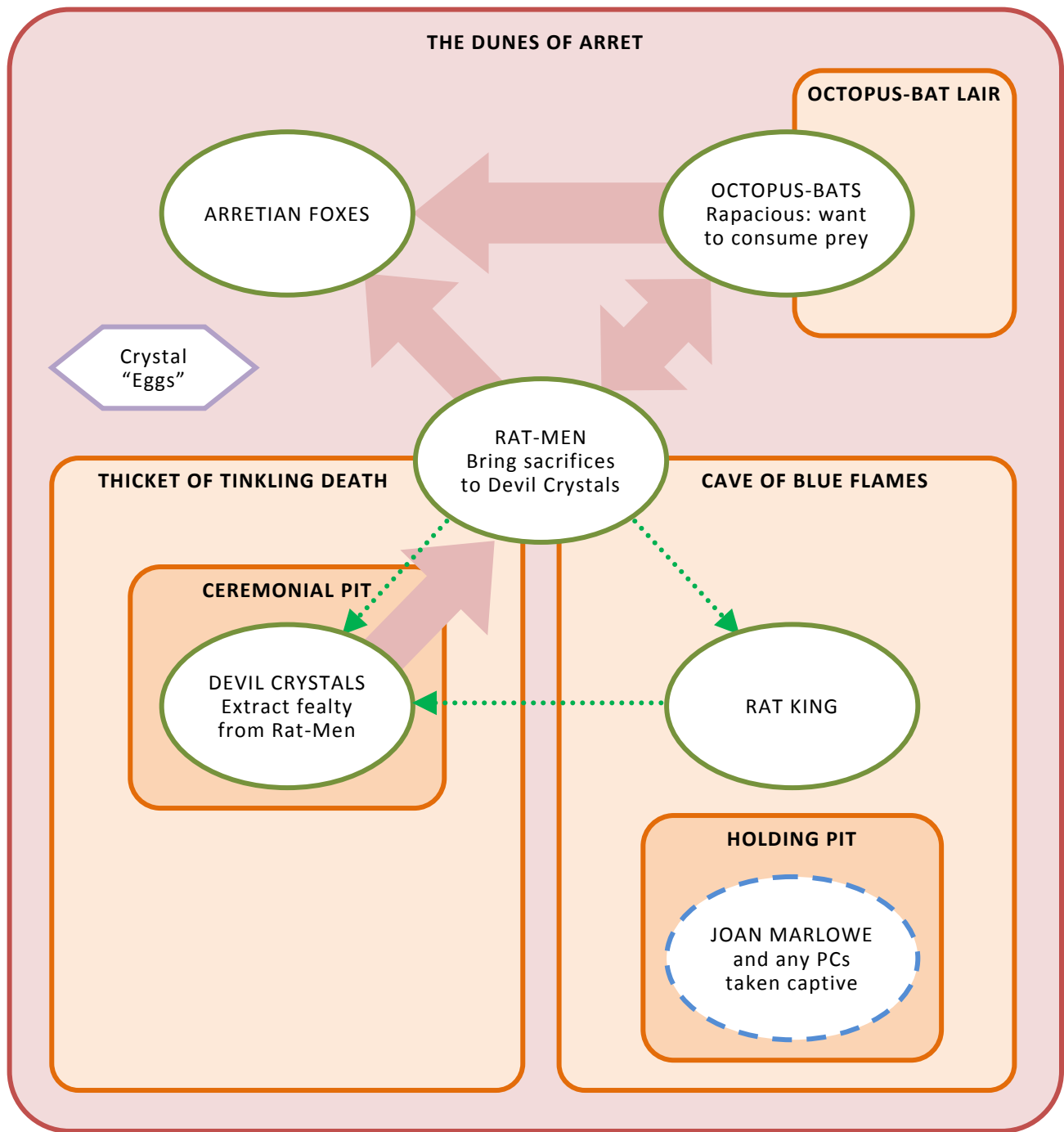
Used against a Rat-Man, this fast-acting drug has the following properties:

DL 5 vs HEALTH

EFFECTS OF FAILURE: Subject enters a suggestible daze; -1 GRACE, -1 BRAINS.

Unbeknownst to the Rat-Men, the drug has no effect at all on humans.

CRYSTAL CRISIS



DEVIL CRYSTALS OF ARRET

By Hal K. Wells

Facing a six-hour deadline of death, young Larry raids a hostile world of rat-men and tinkling Devil Crystals.

Benjamin Marlowe and his young assistant, Larry Powell, opened the door of the Marlowe laboratory, then stopped aghast at the sight which greeted their startled eyes.

There on the central floor-plate directly in the focus of the big atomic projector stood the slender figure of Joan Marlowe, old Benjamin Marlowe's niece and Larry Powell's fiancée.

The girl had apparently only been awaiting their return to the laboratory for around her gray laboratory smock was already fastened one of their Silver Belts, and a cord was already in place running from her wrist to the main switch of the projection mechanism.

Joan's clear blue eyes sparkled with the thrill of high adventure as she swiftly raised a slender hand in a gesture of warning to the two men.

"Don't try to stop me," she warned quietly. "I can jerk the switch and be in Arret, before you've taken two steps. I'm going to Arret, anyway. I was only waiting for you to return to the laboratory so I'd be sure of having you here to bring me back to Earth again before I have time to get into any serious trouble over there."

"But, Joan," Benjamin Marlowe protested, "this is sheer madness! No one can possibly guess what terrible conditions you may confront in Arret. We've never dared to send a human being across the atomic barrier yet!"

"We've sent all kinds of animals across, though," Joan retorted calmly, "and as long as we recalled them within the twelve-hour limit they always came back alive and unhurt. There's no reason why a human being should not be able to make the round trip just as safely. Ever since our Silver Belts first came back with the weird plant and mineral fragments which proved that there really is such a place as Arret, I've been wild to see with my own eyes the incredible things that must exist there."

Joan waved her hand in gay farewell. "Good-by, Uncle Ben and Larry! I know that you'll drag me back just as quickly as you can possibly dash over to the recall switch, but I'll at least have had a few precious seconds of sightseeing as Earth's first human visitor to Arret!"

Larry Powell was already sprinting for the mechanism as Joan jerked the cord that ran to the switch, but he was barely halfway across the intervening space when the big

atomic projector flared forth in a brilliant gush of roseate flame.

For a fraction of a second Joan's slender figure was outlined in the very heart of the ruddy glow, then vanished completely. There was left only a short length of the switch cord to indicate that the girl had ever stood there.

Powell reached the mechanism and shut off the projector's flame, then turned swiftly to the control-panel of the recall mechanism. As he closed the switch on this panel, three banks of tubes set in triangular form around the floor-plate upon which Joan had stood glowed a brilliant and blinding green.

Shielding his eyes from the glare with an upraised forearm, Powell began stepping a rheostat up to more and more power. In his anxiety, he increased the power far too quickly. There was a sudden gush of blue-white flame from the heart of the mechanism, together with the hissing crackle of fusing metal. The green light in the tubes promptly died.

Benjamin Marlowe was bending over the apparatus almost instantly. A moment later he raised a face that had suddenly gone white. There was terror in his eyes as he turned to his assistant.

"The entire second series of coils is burned out, Larry!" he gasped in consternation. "Joan is marooned over there in Arret—marooned in that grim unknown land as completely beyond our reach as though she were upon one of the moons of Mars!"

For a long moment the two men gazed at each other with horror-stricken faces, dazed and shaken. Then they quickly drew themselves together again and set about the herculean task of making the necessary repairs to the damaged mechanism in time to rescue Joan before the twelve-hour limit should doom the girl to forever remain an exile in that land of alien mystery beyond the atomic barrier.

Their previous experiments with animals had proved that no living creature from Earth could be brought back after it had been in Arret over twelve hours. After that time the change in the atoms constituting living tissues apparently became permanently Arretian, for the Silver Belts returned without any trace of their original wearers.

The necessary repairs to the damaged coils were of such an exacting and intricate nature that any great speed was impossible. Hours passed while the two men bent to their work with grim concentration. Neither of them dared think too much of what nameless dangers might be confronting Joan during those weary hours. Their actual knowledge of Arret was so pitifully slight.

Some months ago, while they were experimenting upon apparatus for reversing the electrical charges of an atom's electrons and protons, they had first stumbled upon the incredible fact that such a place as Arret really existed. They

found that it was another world occupying the same position in space as Earth, with the fundamental difference in the two interwoven planes of existence lying in the electrical make-up of the atoms that constituted matter in each plane.

On Earth all atoms are composed of small heavy protons that are always positive in charge, and larger lighter electrons that are always negative. In Arret the protons were negative, and the electrons positive. The result was two worlds occupying the same space at the same time, yet with matter so essentially and completely different that each world was intangible to the other. They had named the unseen world Arret, the reverse of Terra.

Finding it impossible to work directly upon most forms of matter, the experimenters had finally evolved a silver alloy that served as a medium both for sending objects into Arret and then bringing them back to Earth. By focussing the flame of the projection apparatus upon a Silver Belt of this alloy, the electrical charges of the Belt's atoms were reversed, automatically causing the Belt to vanish from Earth and materialize in Arret. At the same time the atoms of any object within the Belt's immediate radius were similarly transformed, and that object was taken into Arret with the Belt.

The recall mechanism functioned by broadcasting a power wave that again reversed the atomic charge of the Belt and its contained object back to that of Earth. At the same time the recall wave exerted an attractive force that drew the atoms back to a central point in the laboratory, where they were re-materialized upon the same floor-plate from which they had originally been sent.

The twelve-hour time limit was half up when Benjamin Marlowe and Larry Powell finally straightened up wearily from their work over the recall mechanism, their repairs completed. It had been one o'clock in the afternoon when Joan Marlowe vanished from Earth in the roseate flare of the projector. It was now nearly seven o'clock.

With nerves tense from anxiety, the two men crossed over to the control-panel of the recall apparatus. This time they donned goggles of dark glass to shield their eyes from the blinding green glare. Marlowe threw the main switch, and the banked tubes came to life in a flood of vivid emerald light.

Marlowe began stepping the rheostat up gradually to more power, advancing it with cautious slowness to avoid any chance of a repetition of the previous accident. The green radiance streaming from the tubes in every direction began to throb with an electric force that the two men could feel pulsing through their own bodies.

There was a click as the rheostat struck the last notch. The green radiance was now a searing flame that half-blinded them even through the thick dark glass of their protective goggles, while the vibrant force of the green rays was

sweeping through their bodies with a tingling shock that nearly took their breath away.

Tensely the two men stared at the metal floor-plate in the center of the area bounded by the flaming green tubes. Just over the plate the green radiance seemed to be thickening and swirling oddly. The swirling eddy became a small dense cloud of darker green light. Then abruptly, like the fade-in on a moving picture screen, from the cloud over the plate the misty outlines of an object swiftly cleared and solidified into a bizarre something at whose unfamiliar aspect both Marlowe and Powell gasped in amazement.

Marlowe snapped the switch off, and the green radiance vanished. Stripping the dark goggles from their eyes, the two men hurried over for a closer view of the thing that rested quiescent and apparently lifeless there on the metal floor-plate.

It was shaped like a huge egg, a little over a yard long, and was apparently composed of a solid lump of some unknown crystalline substance that closely resembled very clear, pale amber. Embedded in the heart of the strange egg were clearly visible objects which caused Marlowe and Powell to gasp in mingled horror and amazement.

Chief among the things imprisoned in that amber shroud was the Silver Belt that Joan had worn, but the Belt was now looped over the bony shoulder of a skeleton that by no possible stretch of the imagination could ever have been that of a creature of this Earth.

The skeleton was still perfectly articulated, and gleamed through the crystalline amber as though its bony surfaces were encrusted with diamond dust. The bones were apparently those of a creature that in life had been half dwarf-ape and half giant rat.

The beast had stood a little under a yard in height. The legs were short, powerful, and bowed. The long arms ended in claw-like travesties of hands. The skull was relatively small, with a sharply sloping forehead and projecting squirrel-like teeth that were markedly rodent.

Around the skeleton's neck there was a wide band of some strange gray metal, with its smooth outer surface roughly scratched in characters that resembled primitive hieroglyphics.

Marlowe's face was white with grief as he turned to Powell. "Joan must be dead, Larry," he said sadly. "Otherwise, she would surely never have allowed her Silver Belt to pass into the possession of—this! She knew that the Belt represented her only hope of ever being brought back to this world."

For a moment Powell stared intently into the heart of the crystalline egg without answering. Then suddenly he straightened up with marked excitement upon his face.

"There's a small sheet of paper entwined in the coils of that Belt!" he exclaimed. "It may be a message from Joan!"

Swiftly the two men lifted the amber egg up to the top of a workbench. Powell took a small hammer to test the hardness of the strange translucent substance.

He struck it a sharp rap, then recoiled in surprise at the effect of his blow, for the entire egg instantly shattered with a tinkling crash like the bursting of a huge glass bubble. So complete was the disintegration of the egg and the skeleton within it that all that remained of either was a heap of diamond and amber dust. The only things left intact were the Silver Belt and the metal collar.

Powell snatched up the Belt and extracted the small piece of paper that had been firmly tucked into its coils. Hurriedly written in pencil upon the paper was a message in a handwriting familiar to both Powell and Marlowe:

Help! I am held prisoner in the Cave of Blue Flames!
—Joan.

“Larry, Joan must still be alive over there in Arret!” There was new hope in Benjamin Marlowe’s voice.

“Yes, alive and held captive by whatever monstrosities may inhabit that unknown plane,” Powell agreed grimly. “There’s only one way in which we can possibly rescue her now. That is for you to send me into Arret with a reserve Belt for Joan. I’ll be ready to start as soon as I get a couple of automatic pistols that I have up in my room. It’s a sure thing that I’ll need them over there in Arret.”

Five minutes later Powell stood ready and waiting upon the floor-plate in the focus of the big atomic projector, with the central lens of the apparatus levelled down upon him like a huge searchlight. Around Powell’s waist were strapped two Silver Belts, and a cartridge belt with a holstered .45-calibre automatic on either side. His wrist-watch was synchronized to the second with Benjamin Marlowe’s watch.

“Joan’s twelve-hour time limit in Arret will expire at one o’clock tomorrow morning.” Powell reminded Marlowe. “That gives me nearly six hours in which to find her and equip her with a Silver Belt. You will broadcast the recall wave at exactly one o’clock. If I haven’t succeeded in finding Joan by then, I’ll discard my own Belt and stay on over there in Arret with her.... I’m ready to start now, whenever you are.”

Benjamin Marlowe raised his hand to the switch in the projector’s control panel. “Good-bye, Larry,”—the old man’s voice shook a trifle in spite of himself—“and may God be with you!” He closed the switch.

A great burst of roseate flame leaped toward Powell from the projector. The laboratory was instantly blotted out in a swirling chaos of ruddy radiance that swept him up and away like a chip upon a tidal wave. There was a long moment during which he seemed to hurtle helplessly through a universe of swirling tinted mists, while great electric waves tingled with exquisite poignancy through every atom of his body.

Then the mists suddenly cleared like the tearing away of a mighty curtain, and with startling abruptness Powell found himself again in a solid world of material things. For a moment as he gazed dazedly about him he thought that the roseate glow of the projector must still be playing tricks with his eyesight, for the landscape around him was completely and incredibly red!

He soon realized that the monochrome of scarlet was a natural aspect of things in Arret. The weird vegetation all around him was of a uniform glossy red. The sandy soil under his feet was dull brick-red. High in the reddish-saffron sky overhead there blazed a lurid orb of blood-red hue, the intense heat of its ruddy radiance giving the still dry air a nearly tropical temperature. From this orb’s position in the sky and its size, Powell was forced to conclude that it must be the Arretian equivalent of Earth’s moon.

For a moment he stood motionless as he peered cautiously around him, trying to decide what should be his first step in this scarlet world that was so utterly alien in every way to his own. On every side the landscape stretched monotonously away from him in low rolling dunes like the frozen ground swell of a crimson sea—dunes covered with vegetation of a kind never seen upon Earth.

Not a leaf existed in all that weird flora. Instead of leaves or twigs the constituent units of bushes and grasses consisted of globules, glossy spheres of scarlet that ranged in size from pinheads to the bulk of large pumpkins. The branches of the vegetation were formed from strings of the globules set edge to edge and tapering in size like graduated beads strung upon wire, dwindling in bulk until the tips of the branches were as fragile as the fronds of maidenhair fern. The bulk of the shrubbery was head-high, and so dense that Powell could see for only a couple of yards into the thicket in any direction.

The stillness around Powell was complete. Not even a globular twig stirred in the hot dry air. Powell decided to head for the crest of one of the low dunes some fifty feet away. From its top he might be able to sight something that would give a clue to the location of the “Cave of Blue Flames” of which Joan had written.

He arrived at the foot of the dune’s slope without incident. But there he came to an abrupt halt as the silence was suddenly shattered by a strange sound from the shrubbery-covered crest just above him. It was a musical, tinkling crash, oddly suggestive of a handful of thin glass plates shattering upon a stone floor. A second later there came the agonized scream of some creature in its death throes.

**Help! I am held prisoner
in the Cave of Blue Flames!**
—Joan.

The tinkling, crashing sound promptly swelled to a steady pulsing song like that of a brittle river of crystalline glass surging and breaking over granite boulders. There was an eerie beauty in that tinkling burst of melody, yet with the beauty there was an intangible suggestion of horror that made Powell's flesh creep.

The crystalline song swelled to a crescendo climax. Then there came another sound, a single resonant note like that given when a string of a bass viol is violently plucked—and the tinkling melody abruptly died. Immediately following the resonant twang some object was ejected from the midst of the thicket on the dune's crest, and came rolling and bounding down the gentle slope toward Powell.

It finally came to rest against the base of a bush almost at his feet. He whistled softly in surprise as he saw the nature of the thing. It was another of the yard-long egg-shaped crystals of translucent amber like the one that had been materialized in Benjamin Marlowe's laboratory. Imprisoned in the clear depths of this amber egg was the sparkling, diamond-encrusted skeleton of what had apparently been a small quadruped about the size of a fox.

Powell's eyes narrowed in speculation as he realized that he had before him the first slight clue as to what might have happened to Joan. Her Silver Belt had been enclosed in one of those amber, crystalline eggs. Apparently her capture had been in some way connected with that sinister, unseen Tinkling Death.

Powell began cautiously working his way up the slope of the dune, with an automatic pistol ready for use in his right hand. Silence reigned unbroken now in the thicket on the crest, but with each upward step that he took there came with constantly increasing force a feeling of some vast, alien intelligence lurking up there, watching and waiting.

Nearer and nearer the crest he worked his wary way, until he was so close that he fancied he could see the vague outline of some monstrous silvery bulk looming there in the heart of the red thicket. He took another cautious step forward—and then his careful stalking was sharply interrupted.

Without a second's warning there came the roaring rush of great wings beating the air just above him. Powell tried to dive for cover, but he was too late. A slender snaky tentacle came lashing down and struck his shoulder with a force that sent him sprawling forward upon his face. Before he could rise, two of the tentacles twined around him, and he was jerked up into the air like a wood-grub captured by a husky robin.

Again the great wings above him threshed the air in tremendous power, as the unseen monster started away with its prey. Then the tentacles from which he was dangling shifted their grip slightly, turning Powell's body in the air so that he could look up and get his first glimpse of the thing that had captured him. He shuddered at what he

saw. The creature was a hideous combination of octopus and giant bat.

Naked wings of membrane spanned twenty feet from tip to tip. There was a puffy sac-like body, ending in a head with staring, lidless eyes and a great black beak that looked strong enough to shear sheet steel. From the body descended half a dozen long writhing tentacles.

Powell's one hundred and eighty pounds made a weight that was apparently a burden for even this flying monster. It flew jerkily along, scarcely a dozen feet from the ground, and there was laborious effort obvious in every movement of its flapping wings. Powell decided to make a prompt break for escape before the octopus-bat succeeded in fighting its way any higher. His left arm was still pinioned to his body by one of the constricting tentacles, but his right hand, with the automatic in it, was free.

He swung the weapon's muzzle into line with the hideous face above him, then sent a stream of lead crashing upward into the creature's head. The bullet struck squarely home. The tentacles tightened convulsively with a force that almost cracked Powell's ribs. Then in another paroxysm of agony the tentacles flung him free.

The impetus of his fall sent him rolling for a dozen feet. Unhurt, save for minor scratches and bruises, he scrambled to his feet just in time to see the mortally wounded octopus-bat come crashing down in the red vegetation some thirty yards away. For a few minutes there was audible a convulsive threshing; and then there was silence.

Powell refilled the automatic's clip, then looked about, trying to regain his bearings. He wanted to return to the thicket of the Tinkling Death, but the octopus-bat had carried him hundreds of yards from there and he was now uncertain even of the direction in which the thicket was.

As he paused in indecision, there came to Powell's ears a new sound that promptly drove all thought of the Tinkling Death from his mind.

The sound of his gun against the octopus-bat had apparently attracted new and unseen assailants—and their number was legion. Swiftly closing in upon him from every side there came the rustle and whisper of countless thousands of unseen foes advancing through the dense red thickets.

Completely hemmed in as he was, flight was out of the question. He sought the center of a small clearing, some ten feet in diameter, in order to gain at least a moment's sight of his adversaries before they swarmed in upon him. With an automatic in each hand, he waited tense and ready.

The encircling rush came swiftly nearer, until Powell was suddenly aware that the unseen horde had arrived. The thicket bordering his tiny clearing was literally alive with yard-high furry bodies of creatures that dodged about too swiftly in the cover of the red bushes for him to get a clear view of any of them. There was a constant babel of snarling,

chattering sound as the things called back and forth to each other.

Then the chattering stopped abruptly, as though at the command of some unseen leader. The next moment one of the creatures stepped boldly out into full view in the clearing. Powell's scalp crinkled in disgust as he realized the nature of the thing confronting him.

It was literally a rat-man. Its upright posture upon two powerful, bowed hind legs was that of a man, but its human-like points were overshadowed by a dozen indelible marks of the beast. A coat of short, dirty gray fur covered the creature from head to foot. Its hands and feet were claw-like travesties of human members. Its pointed, chinless face with its projecting teeth and glittering little beady eyes was that of a giant rodent.

The beast in the clearing was apparently a leader of some sort, for around his throat was a wide collar of gray metal, with its flat surface marked in rudely scratched hieroglyphics. Powell's heart leaped as he noted the collar. In this creature before him he had his second clue to the whereabouts of Joan Marlowe.

Not only was the collar practically identical to the one worn by the skeleton that had been materialized in the egg back in the laboratory, but the skeleton itself was obviously that of one of the rat-men. Could it be this grotesque horde of human-like rodents that was holding Joan captive in the Cave of Blue Flames?

Powell tried desperately to think of some way of communicating with the gray-collared leader. Then the beast shrilled a command that brought hundreds of the beasts swarming into the clearing from every side, and in the face of the menace of their countless glittering eyes and bared fangs Powell abandoned all thought of attempting to parley with the beasts.

There was another shrill command from the leader, and the horde closed in. Both of Powell's guns flamed in a crashing leaden hail that swept the close-packed ranks of furry bodies with murderous effect. But he was doomed by sheer weight of numbers.

The rat-men directly in front of the blazing pistols wavered momentarily, but the press of the hundreds behind them swept them inexorably forward. Powell emptied both guns in a last vain effort. Then he was swept from his feet, and the horde surged over him.

Blinded and smothered by the dozens of furry bodies that swarmed over him, he had hardly a chance to even try to fight back. His cartridge-belt and guns, his Silver Belts and his wrist-watch were stripped from him by the dozens of claw-like hands that searched his body. Other claw-hands jerked his arms behind his back and lashed them firmly together with rope.

A blanketing sheet of some heavy fabric was crammed over his head and tied in place so tightly that he was completely

blindfolded and half-suffocated. A noose was knotted around his neck. A suggestive jerk of this noose brought Powell lurching to his feet; there was another commanding jerk, and he obediently started walking.

The march that followed soon became torture for the captive. Blindfolded as he was, and having only the occasional jerks of rope to guide his footsteps, he stumbled and fell repeatedly, until his aching body seemed one solid mass of bruises.

As nearly as he could judge, the horde had conducted him nearly two miles when the path abruptly sloped downward. A moment later the sudden coolness of the air and the echoes about him told him that they had entered an underground passage of some kind. After traversing this passage for several yards they emerged into what was apparently a large open area, for he could hear the excited chattering and squealing of countless thousands of rat-men on every side of him.

He was dragged forward a dozen steps more, then brought to a halt. The blindfolding fabric was roughly stripped from his head. For a moment he blinked dazedly, half-blinded by a glare of blue light that flooded the place.

He was standing in a vast cavern. From dozens of fissures high in the rock walls streamed flickering sheets of blue flame which both warmed and lighted the place. There was a weird tingling glow in the air that suggested that the strange blue fires might be electrical in their origin.

Powell looked eagerly around for Joan, but he could see no trace of her. The only other living beings in the big cavern were the swarming thousands of the rat-people. The brutes were apparently too low in the evolutionary scale to have any but the most primitive form of tribal organization.

Sitting on a rude rock throne just in front of Powell was a grotesquely fat, mangy-furred old rat-man who was obviously the king of the horde. Some thirty or forty rat-men, larger and stronger than their fellows, wore the gray-metal collars that apparently marked them as minor leaders.

The great bulk of the horde, numbering far into the thousands, swarmed in the cavern in one vast animal pack, sleeping, feeding, snarling, fighting. As Powell was halted before the king's throne, most of them abandoned their other pursuits to come surging around the captive in a jostling, curious mob.

Not only was the collar practically identical to the one worn by the skeleton that had materialized in the egg back in the laboratory, but the skeleton itself was obviously that of one of the rat-men.

The metal-collared leader of the pack that had captured Powell presented the rat-king with the captive's gun-belt and two Silver Belts, accompanying the gifts with a squealing oration that was apparently a recital of the capture. The old monarch took the trophies with delight.

The two Silver Belts were promptly draped over his own furry shoulders by the king—seemingly following the same primitive love for adornment that inspires an African savage to ornament his person with any new and glittering object he happens to acquire. The rat-king then graciously draped the cartridge-belt and holstered automatics around the shoulders of the metal-collared leader who had captured Powell.

The king turned his attention back to his prisoner. He studied the captive curiously for a moment or two, then squealed a brief command. A score of the rat-men promptly closed in upon Powell, and began herding him toward a far back corner of the big cavern.

Stopping a few yards away from the edge of what seemed to be a wide deep pit in the rock floor, the guard stripped Powell's bonds from him. Powell made no move to take advantage of his freedom, realizing that the swarming thousands of rodents in the cave made escape out of the question for the moment. He allowed himself to be docilely herded on to the edge of the pit.

And the next moment he exclaimed aloud in delighted surprise as he gazed down at the floor of the pit ten feet beneath him. There, sitting on a low heap of stones on the pit's sandy floor, white-faced and weary but apparently unhurt, was Joan Marlowe.

The girl's face brightened in relief as she looked up and recognized him.

"Larry! Oh, thank God you've come!"

The leader of the guards motioned for Powell to jump down into the pit. He needed no urging. A moment later he landed lightly on the sandy floor of the pit, and Joan was in his arms.

The rat-men left a dozen of their number scattered as sentries around the edge of the pit. The rest of them returned to the main horde, leaving the prisoners to their own devices.

"I knew that you'd come, Larry, as soon as you got my note," Joan exclaimed happily. "But how did you ever succeed in finding this Cave of Blue Flame?"

"I didn't find it myself," Powell admitted. "I was captured like a boob and dragged here." He told Joan of his mishaps since arriving in Arret.

The girl nodded when he had finished. "Much the same happened to me, Larry, only the red moon wasn't shining then. The only light was from what looked like the dim ghost of a big yellow sun. I materialized in Arret almost in the middle of a scouting group of rat-men. They took me

captive immediately. When several minutes passed without you and Uncle Benjamin broadcasting the recall wave for me, I knew that something terrible must have happened back in the laboratory, and that I might be marooned in Arret for hours.

"I tried to hang onto my Silver Belt, of course," the girl continued, "but when I was brought to the cavern here I saw that the king was going to take it. There was a notebook and a pencil in my laboratory smock. I managed to write the note and twine it into the belt just before it was taken from me. The king seemed to think the note enhanced the Belt's value as an ornament. He was wearing it when I last saw it. Was he materialized in the laboratory with the Belt?"

Powell told her of the amber egg and the skeleton.

"The same sort of crystalline amber egg that accompanied the work of the mysterious Tinkling Death, wasn't it?" Joan mused. "One of the king's lieutenants must have stolen the Belt, and reaped prompt retribution when he tried to flee. I wonder what that weird Tinkling Death is?"

"Possibly some strange weapon of the rat-men," Powell hazarded.

"No, they are as afraid of it as we are. While I was being brought here to this cave the Tinkling Death was heard several times in the distance, and the rat-men were obviously terrified at the sound."

The prisoners' conversation was abruptly interrupted by a rhythmic, snarling chant from the vast horde of rat-men in the cavern above. The chant rose and fell in a rude cadence that was suggestively ritual in nature.

"They've been doing that at intervals ever since I was first brought here," Joan commented. "It sounds almost like the beginning of some primitive religious ceremony, doesn't it?"

Powell nodded, without telling Joan the depressing thought in his mind. The rat-men were so low in the evolutionary scale as to be little more than beasts, and a prominent feature of nearly all primitive religious rites is the sacrifice of living beings. Powell could not help but wonder whether the chanting might not mark the beginning of rites which would end with the sacrifice of himself and Joan to some monstrous deity of theirs.

The snarling chant continued with monotonous regularity for hours, while the prisoners huddled helplessly together there on the floor of the pit, awaiting the next move of the rat-men. Any thought of escape was out of the question. The sheer walls of the pit were always guarded by alert sentries who had only to call to bring the entire horde to their help.

Without Powell's wrist-watch, the captives had no way of accurately following the lapse of time, but they both realized that the twelve-hour time limit upon Joan's rescue

from Arret must be coming perilously near its end. They waited in momentary fear lest a sudden turmoil in the cavern above them should indicate that Benjamin Marlowe had broadcast the recall wave, whisking the two Belts back to Earth, together with the old rat-king who presumably still wore them.

The chanting above rose slowly to a snarling climax, then swiftly died away into silence. A moment later there came the sound of thousands of claw-like feet scratching over the rocky floor as the main horde apparently began marching out of the cavern. A detachment of fifty rat-men appeared at the pit's edge.

A rude metal ladder was shoved down to the captives, and a metal-collared leader motioned for them to climb up. Seeing nothing to be gained by refusal, they obeyed. They were seized as they reached the top, and their hands again bound behind them. The overwhelming numbers of the rat-men made any attempt at resistance futile.

There was no sign of the main horde as Joan and Powell were herded out through the empty cavern and out into the open air again. With their prisoners in the center of their group, the rat-men started along a well-worn path that wound through the red vegetation. Overhead the blood-red moon still blazed down in lurid splendor.

From somewhere ahead of them the captives began to again hear the distant squealing chant of the main horde. They steadily approached the sound, until abruptly they emerged into a huge clearing that had apparently been a ceremonial assembly place for generations, for its smooth sandy floor was packed down nearly to the hardness of rock.

The main horde of rat-men was there now, countless thousands of them, packed in a roughly crescent-shaped mob, with the open side of their formation facing what seemed to be a large deep pit, some seventy yards in circumference. In the clear space left between the horde and the edge of the pit was a smaller group, among them the old king himself.

Powell's heart leaped as he noted that the Silver Belts were still draped over the mangy old monarch's shoulders. If only he and Joan could get their hands on those precious Belts before Benjamin Marlowe broadcast the recall wave that would forever snatch them out of their reach!

The captives were hurried through the main horde and taken in charge by a score of picked guards who herded them on to join a small group of four rat-men near the pit's edge. These four rodents were apparently also prisoners, for their arms were firmly bound behind them.

The rat-king, accompanied only by the metal-collared leader, around whose shoulders the gun-belt was still draped, stood near the pit's edge some ten yards distant from the guards and captives. Between the prisoners and the rodent monarch the edge of the pit jutted out in a

narrow tongue of rock that extended outward for about twenty feet over the pit.

Joan and Powell had barely taken their place with the other captives when an abrupt and familiar sound drew their attention to the floor of the pit some thirty feet beneath them. Its smooth sandy bottom was clearly visible from where they stood. And there on that sandy floor were six great gleaming shapes of menace which brought involuntary gasps of horrified amazement to the captives' lips.

The faint musical tinkling sound as the things moved in occasional ponderous restlessness was unmistakable. Joan and Powell realized that the amazing organisms responsible for the mysterious Tinkling Death were at last before them.

The things were giant *living* crystals—great silvery semi-transparent shapes nearly ten feet in height, their faceted sides pulsing in sinister and incredible life as they gleamed in unearthly beauty beneath the blazing rays of the red moon!

Near the center of each of the giant crystals there was visible through the semi-transparent wall a large inner nucleus of sullen opalescence that ceaselessly swirled and eddied.

Their powers of movement were apparently limited to a slow, ponderous, half-rocking, half-rolling progress on their heavy rounded bases. They were now grouped in a rough semicircle just under the edge of the rocky projection that extended out over the pit. The opalescent nucleus in every silvery faceted form seemed to be "watching" with frightening intensity the figures on the pit's edge above them.

There was no mistaking the meaning of the scene. The giant carnivorous crystals had obviously been lured from their normal habitat in Arret's red vegetation, and established there in the big pit by the rat-men to act as principals in their primitive religious ceremonies.

Those Devil Crystals waiting down there on the pit's floor were waiting to be fed—and the small group of captives, rat-men and human beings, were to be the feast!

Utterly sick at heart, Powell wondered if they would at least be given the boon of a merciful death before being hurled over the brink to those lurking shapes. He was not left long in doubt.

Those Devil Crystals down there were waiting to be fed—and the small group of captives, rat-men and human beings, were to be the feast!

At a shrill command from the rat-king the guards closed in upon the captives and herded two of the bound rat-men from among them. A guard placed to the lips of each of the captive brutes a small cup containing a faintly cloudy white liquid. Apparently resigned to their fate, the creatures docilely drained the cups.

The drugged drinks acted with startling rapidity. Scarcely a minute passed before the rodents' eyes clouded dully, their jaws dropped slackly open, and their bodies stiffened in almost complete rigidity.

The bonds were quickly stripped from the two stupefied creatures. The ceremonial rites apparently required that the victims go to their doom unbound and of their own volition. The guards maneuvered the two over to the rocky projection that jutted out over the pit.

Moving with the stiffly wooden steps of automatons, the two victims started out along the narrow projection, leaving the guards behind. On they marched, straight for the end of the rocky strip—and then, without a second's hesitation, they plunged on and over.

Their bodies crashed to the pit's floor squarely among the group of waiting crystals. One of the rat-men lay motionless. The other dazedly tried to struggle to his feet—but was too late.

From the side of the nearest Devil Crystal, some fifteen feet away from the dazed rat-man, a cone-shaped projection budded with startling swiftness.

A fraction of a second more and the projection had lengthened into a long slender arm of crystalline silver that streaked across the intervening space with the swiftness of a spear.

There was a crashing, tinkling sound as the point of the arm struck the furry body of the rat-man. Then the arm's point sprayed into a web of shining filaments that laced the rodent's body inexorably in their web.

The arm immediately contracted, jerking the victim irresistibly toward the waiting crystal. A second later the rat-man was pinned against the faceted crystalline side just under the opalescent nucleus.

The moment the furry body made contact with the crystal's side a terrifying phenomenon occurred. Crystals grew and spread all over its form with the lightning growth of water-glass. Faster and faster clustered the crystalline shroud, until the furry body was lanced through and through—and all the time the air was filled with eldritch music as of a thousand sheets of thinnest glass crashing, tinkling and shattering.

The crystal growths over the imprisoned body rounded their contours and merged together until they were in the form of a great crystalline egg. The outlines of the rodent's body blurred and vanished, melting swiftly until only a diamond-encrusted skeleton was left. The color of the great

Devil Crystal began to gleam pink as the victim's flesh and blood were absorbed.

The egg-like excrescence under the nucleus turned in hue to pale translucent amber in whose depths the diamond skeleton gleamed with weird brilliance. Then there came a sudden twang, as of a violently plucked string on a bass viol, and the amber egg dropped from the faceted side. The Crystal's feast was over.

One of the most terrifying aspects of the whole thing had been its incredible speed. The entire tragedy had occurred in but little over two minutes from the time the lance-arm had first struck the rat-man.

In the meantime the body of the second rodent had been drawn in and devoured by another of the carnivorous crystalline monsters. There came a second twang now, as its skeleton in its amber shroud was discarded.

Powell's brain reeled as he saw the other crystals move sluggishly nearer the foot of the rocky projection in anticipation of the next victims.

The remaining two captive rat-men came next. They were swiftly drugged, unbound, and started on their dazed march. They trudged woodenly out the rocky projection to its end, then on and over; and again the grim tragedy of the Devil Crystal's feast was repeated, to the accompaniment of that eerily beautiful crashing, tinkling song.

The four Devil Crystals that had completed their gruesome feast moved sluggishly away, leaving the space clear for the two crystals that remained unfed. The score of guards closed in upon Joan and Powell.

With the crystalline doom at last staring them squarely in the face, Powell went berserk in a final desperate effort to gain even a moment's respite. He lashed out in a writhing, kicking flurry that almost cleared the space around them.

Then three of the rat-men slipped behind him, and a second later his feet were jerked from under him. His bound arms made him helpless to avert his fall, and he crashed heavily to the ground. Then a dozen of the powerful little beasts swarmed over him, completely overpowering him by their numbers.

Claw-like hands pried his set jaws apart. A cup of the cloudy white liquid was pressed to his lips. He choked; then, unable to help himself, he had to let the stuff pour down his throat. It had an acid taste faintly reminiscent of lemons. The rat-men apparently wanted to make sure of giving him enough, for they poured another full cup of the liquid down his throat before releasing him.

The guards then fell back and Powell stumbled to his feet. Joan was already up again, standing close beside him. From the wry expression upon her face, Powell knew that she had also been given the drugged potion.

For a long minute the two stood there with every nerve trembling as they helplessly waited for the paralyzing

numbness to sweep over their bodies. The seconds passed slowly, and still their minds remained as clear as though the drug had been water. Another full minute elapsed without effect, before they could finally convince themselves of the amazing truth.

The drugged drink of the rat-men, instantly paralyzing to those of their own rodent race, was utterly harmless to the human being from another world!

Powell instantly realized the forlorn last chance their unexpected immunity to the drug gave them.

“Play ‘possum, Joan!” he whispered tensely. “Then we’ll make a break for the king and those Belts!”

Joan nodded slightly in quick understanding. Powell let his jaw drop slack and open, and stiffened his body in imitation of the stupor the rodent drug victims had shown. Joan promptly followed his lead. The alertly watching guards relaxed their tense vigilance in obvious relief.

The guards waited another minute to be sure of the drug’s effects. Then, apparently satisfied, they stepped forward and unbound the two prisoners. Powell let his bonds drop from him without making a hostile move of any kind. He wanted first to wait until he was free of the encircling guards.

The rat-men maneuvered the two into position, and prodded them forward toward the projecting point of rock. They obediently began their march, simulating as best they could the wooden mechanical gait of the drug victims. Powell saw from the corner of his eye that Joan was tensely watching his face for a sign from him.

As the captives reached the narrow projection the guards dropped a couple of yards behind and halted to watch. It was the chance for which Powell had been waiting.

“Let’s go!” he shouted to Joan. The girl, alert for his signal, was right beside him as they wheeled and dashed at break-neck speed for the rat-king and his sole lieutenant, some ten yards away.

They were upon the two startled rodent leaders before they even realized what was happening. Powell swept the squirming old king up in the air, tore the Silver Belts from about the monarch’s shoulders, and flung the creature sprawling and senseless at the pit’s edge.

The lieutenant leaped for Powell’s throat in a belated effort at rescue, but Powell smashed a solid fist squarely into its snarling face, and the brute collapsed with a broken neck.

Snatching his gun-belt from the fallen rat-man, Powell crammed new clips of ammunition into the two guns and wheeled to confront the rest of the rat-men. The detachment of guards, demoralized by the dazzling speed of the captives’ sortie, were milling in obvious uncertainty.

Behind them the thousands of the main horde were chattering and squealing in excited frenzy, dazed and

bewildered by their king’s swift overthrow. The whole clearing was a seething mob of excited beasts, stunned for the moment, but ready at any second to rally from their shock and surge forward in a furious charge that would sweep everything before it.

Powell menaced the rat-men with levelled guns while Joan, with fingers that shook from excitement and haste, quietly buckled one of the Silver Belts around each of them.

The guards rallied from their panic first. At a shrill command from their leader, they began cautiously edging forward toward Joan and Powell. The two gave ground slowly, working their way back over toward the projecting tongue of rock. Out on the end of that narrow strip, Powell knew that he could hold the horde at bay for a few moments at least.

They reached the rocky projection, and began backing slowly and carefully out toward its end. The guards, galvanized into action by their captives’ retreat, suddenly came surging forward in a furious charge.

Powell emptied the two automatics in a crashing volley that nearly wiped out the charging guards. The few survivors turned and fled in panic back to the main horde. Powell reloaded his clips with feverish haste.

The thousands of rat-men in the main horde were now milling in what was apparently a last moment of hesitation before surging forward in an irresistible stampede toward the beleaguered two out on the rocky strip.

Several bolder individuals at the edge of the horde edged a step forward. Their example was followed by a hundred others. Another hesitant step or two—and then the whole horde was in motion.

Powell swept the front rank with a rain of lead from one of the automatics, holding the other as a reserve. The heavy bullets plowed murder into the close-packed furry bodies. The charge wavered momentarily. Then Powell felt Joan tugging frantically at his arm.

“Larry, the rocks under us are crumbling!” she cried. “We’ll be hurled down into the pit!”

Even as she spoke, Powell felt the narrow strip of rock under them quiver and settle. He looked quickly down. All along its length, the narrow rocky projection, weakened by their weight, was breaking swiftly away from the pit’s edge. And on the floor of the pit below them the two waiting Devil Crystals moved with musical, tinkling sounds as they waited restlessly for their prey to fall among them.

The horde of rat-men rallied and swept on forward in a wave that nothing could have stopped this time—but their charge was too late. The entire rocky projection collapsed with a final sickening lurch, and slid to the pit’s floor, carrying Joan and Powell with it in a miniature avalanche of rocky rubble.

Even in the chaos of their wild descent, Powell retained his grip upon the loaded automatic in his hand. They struck the bottom and staggered half-dazed to their feet, to confront the two crystalline monsters rocking on their rounded bases scarcely ten feet away.

The fatal cone-shaped projection was already beginning to form upon the silver-faceted side of the nearest Devil Crystal. Before the lance-like arm of crystal could flash outward, Powell sent two bullets crashing into the crystal's side just over the opalescent nucleus.

The leaden missiles caromed harmlessly off, as though they had struck armor-plate, but the nucleus clouded momentarily and the cone-shaped projection dissolved back into the side.

With lightning speed Powell shifted his aim to the other crystal just as its partly-formed arm was flashing toward them. His bullet crashed into the silvery side squarely over the nucleus. Again the bullet's effect was the same. This crystal nucleus clouded murkily, and the lance-like arm telescoped back into the faceted bulk.

But the effect of the bullets was only momentary. Swiftly the nuclei of both crystals cleared. A deep blue film, apparently protective in nature, formed between the outer wall and each nucleus. The cones budded, and again the arms started forth.

Powell fired again, and this time uselessly. His bullet struck squarely, but the shock of its impact was apparently nullified by the protective blue film. He emptied his gun in a last crashing fusillade, but without effect of any kind upon the film-guarded nuclei of the giant crystals.

Their forming arms never wavered as they came lancing forward with deadly accuracy straight toward Joan and Powell. In a last effort to save Joan from the terrible doom of the crystal lances as long as possible, Powell flung his own body as a shield in front of the half-fainting girl. The tip of one of the crystalline arms struck his chest with a crashing tinkle of musical glass.

Instantly the tip sprayed into a web of fine filaments that laced on around his body. A tinkling shock raced through his every nerve from the contact with the weird life force of the great crystal.

The arm began contracting. Powell was helpless against the terrific power of the slender, diamond-hard lance of crystal. He felt himself irresistibly drawn toward the silver-faceted wall of the Devil Crystal.

His senses reeled in the babel of alien sounds—the crashing, glass-like music of the crystalline monsters and the snarling, squealing, paeon of jubilant triumph from the thousands of rat-men now lining the rim of the pit above.

Then suddenly the pit, the Devil Crystals, and everything else in the nightmare world of Arret was blotted out in a vast swirling cloud of pulsing roseate flame that seemed to



sweep him bodily up into the air and whirl him dizzily around.

His dazed brain staggered from the shock of the cataclysmic force that was disintegrating an entire world around him, but through the utter chaos one thought rang clear and exultant in his consciousness.

Benjamin Marlowe had finally broadcast the recall wave!

For what seemed endless eons of time Powell hurried through a limitless universe of swirling, tinted fires, while vibrations of a mighty force tingled with poignant ecstasy in every atom of his body.

Then the eddying clouds of flame began to coalesce and solidify with startling suddenness. A moment later, like the abrupt lighting of a room when an electric switch is snapped, the mists vanished and Powell felt firm footing again under his feet. Around him were the familiar objects of Benjamin Marlowe's laboratory.

He was standing upon the floor-plate in the center of the area bounded by the banked green tubes, and beside him stood Joan, sobbing with relief at their last-minute rescue from the Devil Crystals of Arret. And over by the control panel of the recall mechanism was the slight figure of old Benjamin Marlowe, with a great joy now shining in his faded eyes.



PENAL REFORM

Based on "Devil's Asteroid"
by Manly Wade Wellman



OBSTACLES

Dangerous Environment - Hexcrawl
Dangerous People - Criminal Prisoners
Dangerous People - Devolved Prisoners
Monster/Enemy – Martians
Wildlife/Animals - Game Animals
Wildlife/Animals - Devolved Animals
Technical Challenges - Reversing the Devo Machine

COMPLICATIONS

No Intel
War Zone

PERKS

100 MV

MAGUFFINS

Data/Report on Asteroid
Martian Voicebox (2M)
Skippers Armor (10M)
Devo Machine (100M)

BACKSTORY

The war between Earth and Mars raged for years and was devastating to both planets, although it never did reach a decisive conclusion. Tensions run high and each side still wishes to defeat the other, but neither side has been willing to commit more military forces to the conflict without possessing a clear advantage.

It was for this reason that the Martians entered into an uneasy truce with Earth several years ago. Under the truce, neither side may execute a citizen of the other, lest war be unleashed anew. Instead, prisoners are interred in camps maintained by enemy forces.

Mars came up with a devious plan, using a technology unknown on Earth: Human prisoners are sent to *The Devil's Asteroid*, where they are subjected to "Devolution Vibrations" – mysterious waves causing them to recede genetically – until they become no more than brutal non-sentient primates.

The cause of this devolution is unknown to the prisoners, but its effects are undeniable. This explains why, among all humans on the asteroid, the most recent arrival is always regarded as chief.

Aware of the danger but hoping for final victory, Earth forces are preparing to send in a covert agent posing as a prisoner, to wrest back control of the Devil's Asteroid. The PCs, like the original story's Fitzhugh Parr, are unaware of this.

GM NOTE: If the *Cartesian Exception* rule is used, your PCs may be here for months. There will be lots of compressed time which can be used for learning survival skills, getting familiar with the asteroid, etc. Because the map is so small, this adventure might serve as a good introduction to hexcrawling.

THE PENAL COLONY

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration
NODE TYPE: Unknown Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL4)
PAY: 3M ea

While exploring this small earthlike rock, the PCs encounter the prisoners, who immediately appoint one of them chief. Despite the language barrier, it's clear that these poor brutes want help. Can they help?

In this scenario, the aliens aren't Martians, and this isn't our solar system. Instead, the flowerheads are at war with Galactic Hominids of *their own* star system. But all hominids look alike to them; if spotted, the PCs will be regarded as spies, arrested and stripped.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration/Into the Unknown
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Historically Stable (5)
PAY: 4M ea

In this pocket universe, the Earth and Mars are at war eternally. An endless scene plays out in a timeless loop, with Martians bringing Earthlings to the asteroid every thirty days. As the PCs slip into this reality, their ship morphs into an unrecognizable vessel covered with strange glyphs and controls.

The PCs have been taken into custody onboard the *Martian Transport*. The Martian Skipper explains that they are condemned to serve a thirty-year sentence for espionage against the Martian Fleet. They're in shackles.

GM NOTE: In this scenario the primary objective is for the PCs to seize the *Martian Transport* on one of its return runs to the asteroid. As soon as they do this, it morphs back into their SlipShip and they can slip back to Home-Earth.

BRING THE BOYS BACK HOME

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Emergency/Rescue
NODE TYPE: Known Planet in Alternate Universe
SLIP TYPE: Compound (ParaTerran + Cartesian) (DL6)
PAY: 8M ea

Two DayTrippers have been lost exploring a Dream-Earth which is at war with Dream-Mars. According to their final UpVector transmission it seems they were accused by the Martians of being spies, and sentenced to an extended stay on "The Devil's Asteroid". The message ends abruptly as the 'tripper captain's voice is overpowered by a strange flutelike sound, and the radio goes dead.

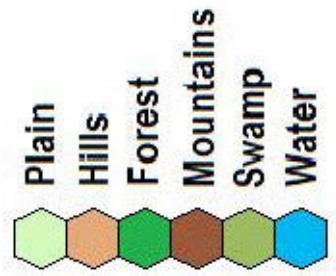
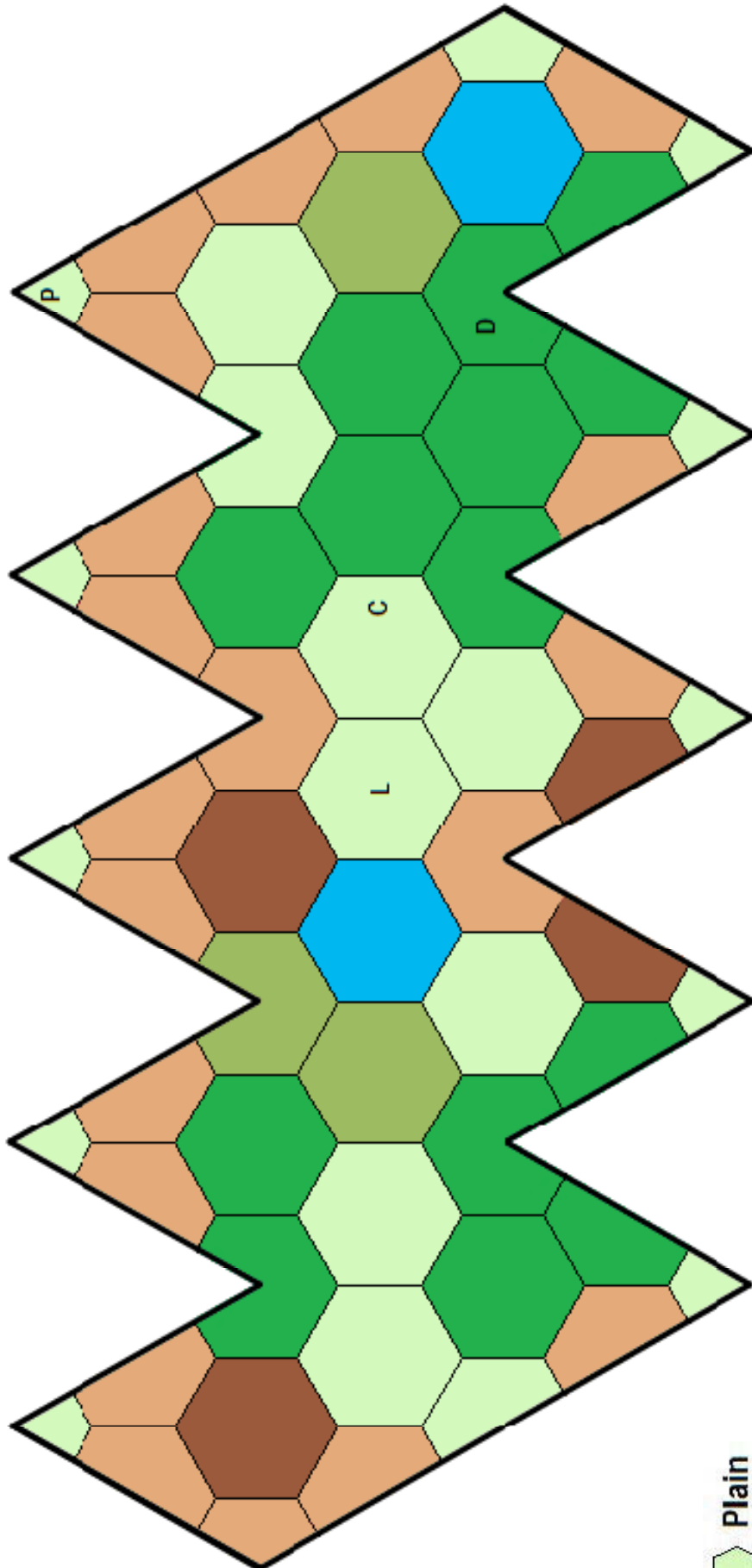
Scoutbot reconnaissance has determined the location of the asteroid within the pocket universe. The PCs' job is to go there and bring their colleagues back.

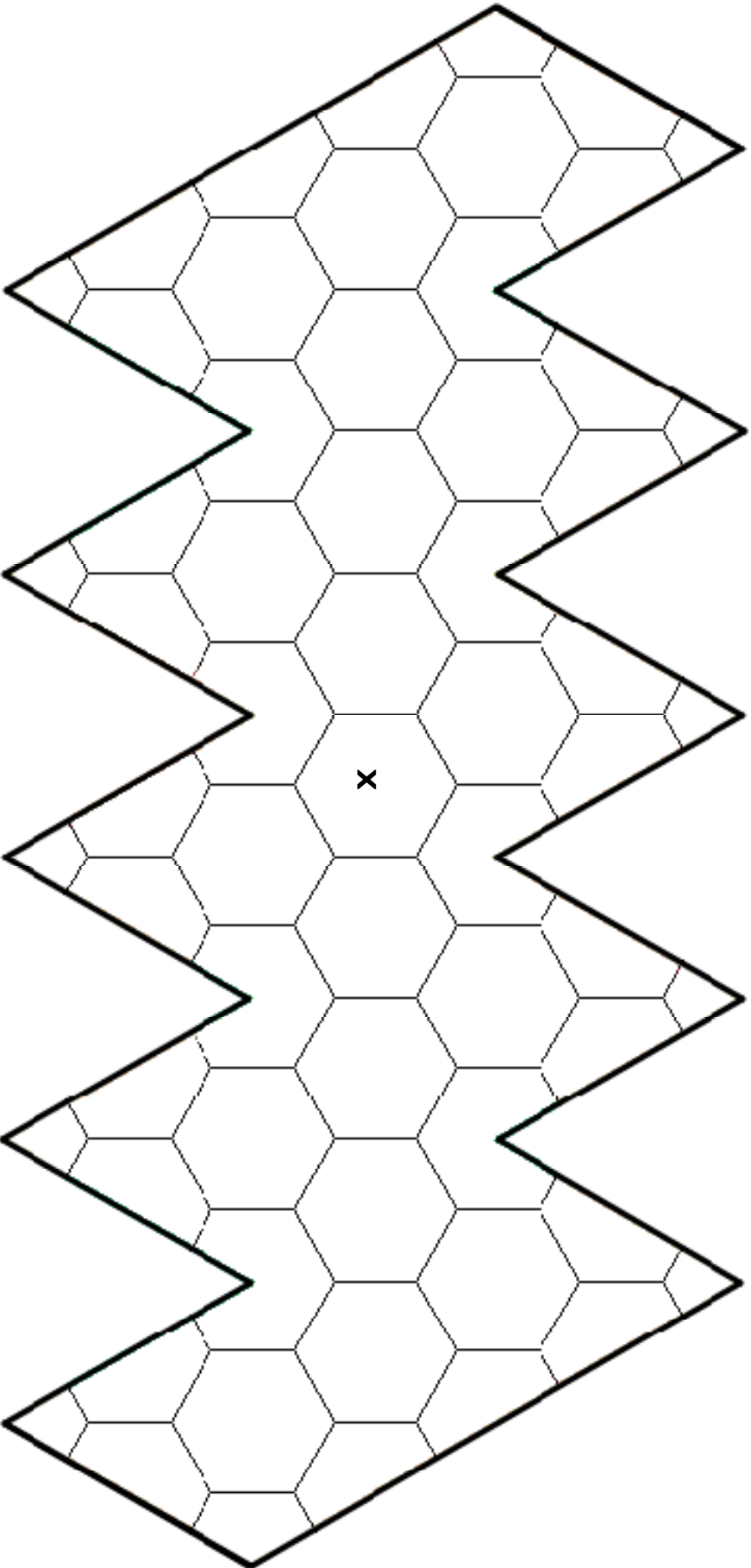
GM NOTE: In order to prevent their rescues from being ceased from the timeline, the pilot will need to execute a DL6 Compound Slip (ParaTerran and Temporal) for an emergency drop-off of the rescues in Bay X, before performing another Temporal Slip back home. This is an extremely risky maneuver, and extra pay or additional perks may be involved.

THE DEVIL'S ASTEROID -- GM'S MAP

1 HEX = 6 mi

- L = Landing Zone
- C = Main Camp
- D = Devolved Camp
- P = The Pit





THE DEVIL'S ASTEROID -- PLAYERS' MAP

1 HEX = 6 mi

THE DEVIL'S ASTEROID

GRAVITY: 1.0 G
 ATMOSPHERE: Nitrogen/Oxygen
 PRESSURE: 1.0 Earth atmospheres
 DAY: 22 Earth hours
 YEAR: 412 Earth days
 WATER: 15% standing water
 CLIMATE: Temperate
 PRECIPITATION: Very Uncommon (DL 9)
 BIOSPHERE: Non-sentient Lifeforms
 (in addition to human and proto-human prisoners)

"The Devil's Asteroid" is a miniature terraformed earthlike world nineteen miles in diameter, with artificial gravity sufficient to maintain an atmosphere. The surface has been sown with earth flora, including forests, meadows and flowering plants.

With many lakes of standing water, occasional rivers, large areas of wilderness suitable for foraging and several species of edible native lifeforms, this shattered fragment of a rock planet is a great location for a low-maintenance prison camp.

PERCEPTIONS

- The circumference of the asteroid is roughly 60 miles. You could walk all the way around the equator in three to five days.
- The horizon is narrow, curved, and very near: only about six miles away.
- The sky shines blue with wispy clouds. Birds can be seen in the treetops.
- Around the plains sprout clumps and thickets of green tropical trees, ferns, and flowering plants.
- Occasional grunting sounds can be heard deep in the forest, perhaps a large carnivore or a primate of some kind.
- There seems to be plenty of food, including game animals, berries, roots, nuts and fruits.

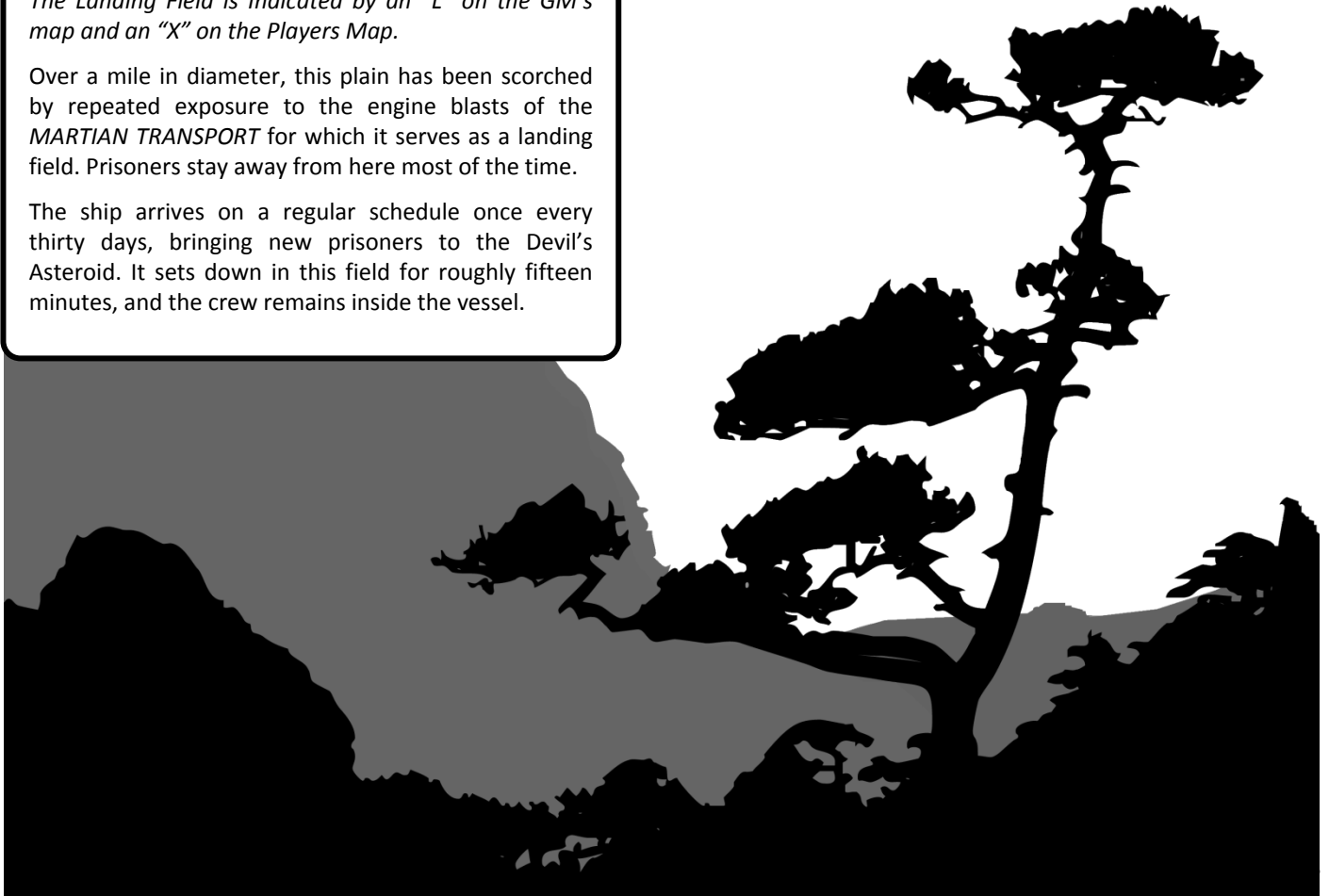
LANDING FIELD

LOCATION

The Landing Field is Indicated by an "L" on the GM's map and an "X" on the Players Map.

Over a mile in diameter, this plain has been scorched by repeated exposure to the engine blasts of the *MARTIAN TRANSPORT* for which it serves as a landing field. Prisoners stay away from here most of the time.

The ship arrives on a regular schedule once every thirty days, bringing new prisoners to the Devil's Asteroid. It sets down in this field for roughly fifteen minutes, and the crew remains inside the vessel.



MARTIANS

LIFEFORM

Dark squid-bodied creatures slightly smaller than humans, Martians possess two large round unblinking eyes and speak in flutelike voices. Two sets of four tentacles, one upper and one lower, protrude from their bladderlike torsos. The lower tentacles are stronger than the upper ones, and if the Martian squeezes its body into a rigid frame or girdle, these lower limbs can be used for walking (relatively) erect.

A Martian's head is a thin cranial bulb covered with rubbery skin, surrounded by a ruffled ring of fleshy tufts, looking something like the petals of a flower. This has earned them the derogatory nickname "Flowerheads".

Martian civilization has reached a very advanced level of technology, including spaceflight, gravity field generation, remote genetic modification and various weapons of mass destruction. One of their greatest developments is the *MARTIAN VOICEBOX* – a small neck-worn unit capable of instantly translating between Martian and many Human languages.

MARTIAN SPACE-HANDS

NPC

BRAINS 1
CHARM 1
GRACE 3 ElectroPistol+1 RayThrower+1
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 2 Fighting+1
PSYCHE 1

GEAR:
Electro-Automatic Pistol, Belt, Ammunition, Knife

TCV 45

These Martian thugs are here to provide backup muscle and carry any heavy objects required. They're notable for their loyalty, if not their intelligence, and are armed with electro-automatic pistols.

There are three space-hands on the typical trip to the Devil's Asteroid. If the prisoners have made any trouble for the Martians lately, the size of the crew will be doubled to six.

MARTIAN SKIPPER

NPC

BRAINS 1
CHARM 1 Rhetoric+1
GRACE 3 ElectroPistol +1
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 2 Fighting+1
PSYCHE 1

GEAR:
Armor+0 (100% protection vs devolution waves)
Electro-Automatic Pistol, Belt, Ammunition, Knife

TCV 55

Never leaves the ship without his *SKIPPER'S ARMOR*, which he dons before entering the asteroid's vicinity.

MARTIAN VOICEBOX

MAGUFFIN

Earth Value: 2M

This small device, worn around the throat, translates whatever the wearer says, from the Martian tongue and any number of human languages, depending on its button-based settings. It may also be used to translate between different human languages.



SHIP: MARTIAN TRANSPORT

Capacity 12
Tonnage: 20
Outer Hull +1
Aerodynamics
Atmosphere Engine +2
Powersource: 40 mW
Power Use: 20mW/hr
Airlock
Spotlight
Landing Gear
No-Frills Cabin for 6 Prisoners
Forward-Facing Viewport
MF Radio
Cargo 2m cu
Construction Quality: Standard
Spotlight
Cost: 113M

This small transport vessel arrives once per month and stays for about ten minutes. It possesses no mounted weapons. The controls and symbols throughout the vessel are written in Martian glyphs, completely indecipherable to anyone who hasn't studied the language (or who isn't a Martian, or who hasn't flown one of these babies before). For any character who attempts to pilot the ship without possessing such familiarity, all maneuvers will be at a -3 until a "YES AND" result is obtained.

SKIPPER'S ARMOR

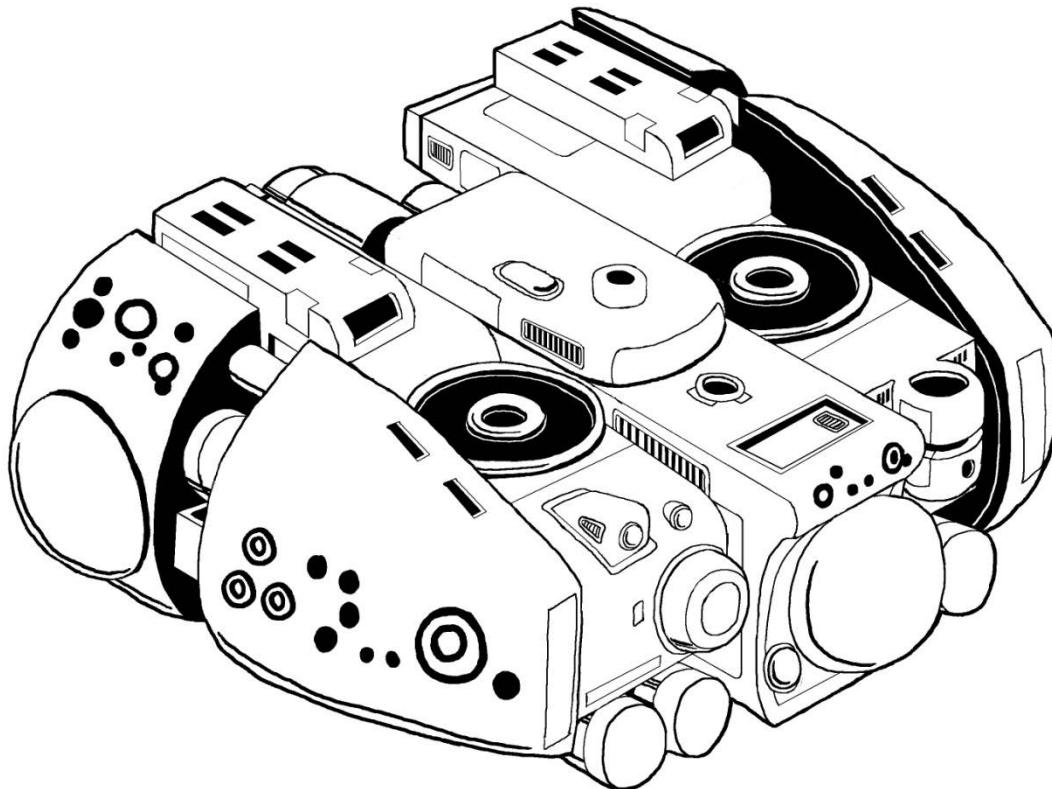
MAGUFFIN

Earth Value: 10M (on Terra)

Unbeknownst to anyone on the Devil's Asteroid, the *SKIPPER'S ARMOR* blocks the effects of the *DEVO MACHINE*. There is only one set of this armor.

It sounds hollow when it is tapped on, and was obviously not designed to defend against physical harm. It is in fact two convex plates connected at the edges. If you listen very closely you may hear a soft, rhythmic whirr coming from inside, and feel a slight vibration.

Its value on Home-Earth would be zero, but it would be worth 10M to the Terrans here.



PLAINS

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Flat Fields, Meadows
CONDITION: Vibrant
TERRAIN: Soft, Fertile Soil
WEATHER: Gentle Wind
BIODIVERSITY: High, many Terran creatures
DOMINANT COLORS: Greens, Browns, Yellows
RESOURCES: Plant life, Animal life, Stone, Water
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
ENCOUNTER DL: Very Frequent (5)

Broad meadows of grasses and flowering plants, pools of standing water, rivers, streams and Terran wildlife. The grasses grow knee-high and higher. Occasional small creatures hop or scuttle through the foliage.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2	1d3 Feral Prisoners
3-4	1d6 Devolved Prisoners
5-6	Game Animal
7	1d6 Typical Prisoners
8	1d3 Criminal Prisoners
9-10	Devolved Animal
11-12	Unusual Feature

FORESTS

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Medium Density Forest
CONDITION: Vibrant
TERRAIN: Soft, Fertile Soil
WEATHER: Still
BIODIVERSITY: High, many Terran creatures
DOMINANT COLORS: Greens, Browns
RESOURCES: Plant life, Animal life, Stone, Water
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

Moderate density of trees and ground cover, mostly subtropical: ferns, fruit trees, and Terran wildlife.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	1d3 Criminal Prisoners
4-5	1d6 Typical Prisoners
6	Game Animal
7	1d6 Devolved Prisoners
8	1d3 Feral Prisoners
9-11	Devolved Animal
12	Unusual Feature

HILLS

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Rolling/uneven terrain
CONDITION: Healthy
TERRAIN: Hard, Packed Soil
WEATHER: Moderate Wind
BIODIVERSITY: High, many Terran creatures
DOMINANT COLORS: Browns, Greens
RESOURCES: Plant life, Animal life, Stone, Water
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

Here the ground grows uneven and the grass grows drier as the elevation increases.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2	1d3 Feral Prisoners
3-4	1d6 Devolved Prisoners
5-6	1d6 Typical Prisoners
7	Game Animal
8-9	Devolved Animal
10-11	1d3 Criminal Prisoners
12	Unusual Feature

MOUNTAINS

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Rocky Slopes
CONDITION: Dry
TERRAIN: Rough, Broken
WEATHER: Strong Wind
BIODIVERSITY: Low, one or two dominant lifeforms
DOMINANT COLORS: Greens, Browns, Greys
RESOURCES: Plant life, Animal life, Stone, Water
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
ENCOUNTER DL: Likely (7)

These tall mountains would be considered miniscule on Earth, but their steep heights rise above the curved horizon and provide ample visibility for up to 12 miles.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	Game Animal
4	1d6 Typical Prisoners
5	1d3 Criminal Prisoners
6	1d6 Devolved Prisoners
7	1d3 Feral Prisoners
8-10	Devolved Animal
11-12	Unusual Feature

MAIN CAMP

LOCATION

The “Capital City” (as the prisoners call it) isn’t much more than a firepit and some huts.

There isn’t much to be found inside the huts, either. The prisoners have little in the way of personal possessions: aside from whatever small items they smuggled in their pockets or hid on their persons, their ragged clothes are all they own upon arrival. Their beds are made of leaves, moss and crudely-woven blankets.

Some of the prisoners have fashioned primitive tools and implements from locally-forged materials. There are some twisted vine ropes, stone knives and chopping tools, animal skins, clubs, bows, flint-tipped arrows, etc.

PERCEPTIONS

- A firepit sits in a cleared area. Beside it is a well-smoothed treestump that serves as a chair.
- A cluster of grass huts is half-hidden among the ferny palms, about thirty feet away. One of the huts is noticeably larger than the others.
- Personal items from Earth are scattered around in the dirt; many have been trampled, and they seem to have been there for a very long time.

MEET THE PRISONERS

EVENT

Immediately upon the PCs’ arrival at Main Camp, the group will make one of them their chief, as this honor and responsibility always goes to the latest arrival on the asteroid. If more than one PC arrives, the “chief” will be whichever character the prisoners perceive to be in command.

INFORMATION

The prisoners will explain their selection procedure:

- “The latest comer is always highest and wisest. That person is healthiest. Best.”
- “The longer you stay on this asteroid, the lower you fall.”

MORE INFORMATION

If the PCs ask questions about what that means, one of the prisoners will explain the process in more detail:

- Living Terran creatures *devolve* here. They go backward in evolution, they become beasts. Humans turn into apes, and apes into lower creatures. Those become lower creatures still.
- You won't devolve visibly for a month at least.
- After a year, devolution progresses far enough to be visible, as in some of these men.
- At about two years, the devolved reach a pre-civilized level and must be evicted from camp.
- After three years it gets much worse; they become monsters, savage predatory beasts.

TYPICAL PRISONER

NPC

BRAINS 1 Survival+1

TCV 20

The typical prisoner is a normal human with no real skills or training. What little they know of survival on the asteroid has been learned in their time here. Names of the men here include *Sadau*, *Jeffords*, *Wain*, *Haldocott* and *Shanklin* (who was the previous chief).

Some of the men seem to have a distinctly different physiology than the others: stooped backs, a forward hang to the arms, and coarse, lank hair. Their foreheads slope back from ridged eyebrows, their noses are flattened, their eyes small and shifty. These men are beginning to devolve, but at this point they still follow the lead of their wiser companions.

CRIMINAL PRISONER

NPC

BRAINS 2 Survival+1
CHARM 1 Lying+1
GRACE 1 Fighting+2
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 3
PSYCHE 1

TCV 75

With illicit activities in their past, criminals may have useful information or contacts, either on the asteroid or off. They're more useful than most prisoners when they're on your side, but more dangerous if inclined against you. Their skills may be replaced with others during prep, to reflect their criminal backgrounds.

OUTCAST CAMP

LOCATION

A pack of devolved prisoners lives among a thick cluster of tall trees. At night most of them will be sleeping while one keeps watch. During the day they go hunting and perform basic survival activities in and around the camp. Their leader is *LING*. Others include Ruba and Izak. Ruba used to be a space pilot.

The Outcasts are a mutually supportive group; they cooperate, they share food, and they look after their own feeble members with clumsy but undeniable care. They pick their leaders by one-on-one combat.

DEVOLVED PRISONER

NPC

BRAINS 1 Reasoning-1 Survival+2
GRACE 1 Club+2 Throw+1
MIGHT 2

TCV 75

Devolved prisoners are evicted from the *MAIN CAMP*. Superstitious and slow-witted, they've lost their higher reasoning skills (-1 on all BRAINS rolls); but they've gained other traits: keen senses, animal instincts, and pack loyalty.

Most live in the *OUTCAST CAMP*, participating in that community until they lose their minds altogether.

Devolved prisoners resemble "missing links": low-browed and hairy. They wear filthy, ragged clothes, if any at all. They have fanglike teeth, broad chests and clumsy hands. Their short legs are powerful and their feet look like flat pedestals with toes.

FERAL PRISONER

NPC

BRAINS 1 Reasoning-2 Survival+3
GRACE 2 Attack+3
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 2

TCV 155

A feral prisoner has been on the asteroid for three or more years. They have lost all memory of being human, and exist in an easily-enraged animal state. They live alone in the wild, or hunt in small packs.

Feral Prisoners will attack other humans without reason, steal food whenever possible, and fight to the death if cornered.

LING

NPC

BRAINS 1 Survival+2
GRACE 1
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 3 Fighting+2 Club+2

TCV 110

Ling is a *DEVOLVED PRISONER* of exceptional size and strength. Six foot six with a chest like a horse, and arms as thick as stovepipes. He's currently the leader of the *OUTCAST CAMP* and can only be deposed by being beaten in combat. If beaten he will be intensely loyal to the new chief, even willing to risk his life.

Even if deposed from his leader position, Ling has a lot of authority with the others, due to his sheer size if nothing else. The other devolved prisoners will usually go along with whatever he says. If the PCs win his loyalty he will be an effective lieutenant, corralling and marshalling the others (to whatever degree that's possible, given their mental capacity).



GAME ANIMAL

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Attack+1 (aggressive animals only)

TCV 15

Game animals imported from Earth include:

2-3	1d6 Wild Cats
4-5	1d6 Wild Boars
6	Bird (solitary or flock)
7	Lizards, Fish, Insects (easy food)
8-9	2d6 Wolves
10-11	2d6 Goats (mountains) or Antelopes (plains)
12	Snake (50% venomous)

Carnivorous animals will attack the closest enemy if they are not outnumbered, or if the enemy seems frail or wounded. Boars and Goats will eat anything.

DEVOLVED ANIMAL

LIFEFORM

GRACE 3 Attack+2

TCV 45

Devolved animals include:

2-3	1d3 Sabertooth Tigers
4-5	1d6 Entelodonts (pliestocene boars)
6	Teratornis (giant bird of prey)
7	Giant Lizards, Fish, Insects
8-9	2d6 Dire Wolves
10-11	2d6 Goats (mountains) or Antelopes (plains)
12	1d6 Cave Lions (mountains/hills) or Moa Birds (plains/forests/swamps)

Animals close to the camps may have experience with humans, while those further away do not.

THE PIT

LOCATION

SURROUNDINGS: Rocky Hills

CONDITION: Barren

TERRAIN: Jumbled, Broken

WEATHER: Mild Wind

BIODIVERSITY: None, no animals live here

DOMINANT COLORS: White, Grey, Tan

RESOURCES: Rock

ENCOUNTER DL: Rare (10)

At the apex of the world, a circular ring of rough naked hills encloses a dark pit into which the sun does not shine. Nearly a hundred yards across with jagged edges, the pit resembles a huge savage mouth, leading down into the asteroid.

At the bottom, the floor and walls are smoothed rock. A wheel-like disk of metal about 18 inches in diameter is mounted on an axle that protrudes up from the floor. Turning this wheel opens a large panel nearby, hidden in the rock wall. (Spotting this doorway before opening it requires a BRAINS roll vs DL 4.)

Behind the hidden door lies a large room full of machinery, whirring and humming with a tremendous vibratory intensity. This is *THE DEVO MACHINE*.

THE DEVO MACHINE

MAGUFFIN

A dial on the machine is turned all the way to the right. Turning the dial all the way to the left will reverse the effect of the devolution vibrations. Turning the dial to the center will stop the vibrations, as well as the accompanying sound.

With the dial fully reversed, it will take the same amount of time for evolutionary progress to occur as it took for the regress. In other words, every prisoner on the asteroid will need to stay here for as long as they've already been here, in order to reverse the genetic decline they've suffered and regain their full human natures and intellectual capabilities.

In another room below this one, accessed via spiral stairs, the gravity generator can be found. Anyone tampering with this machine runs a risk of reducing the gravitational field back to its normal 0.001 G, which would result in *everything on the asteroid flying out into space*.

The machine has a limited range (no greater than 30 miles), but if it isn't destroyed it might be reverse-engineered by technicians on Earth. If transported properly (difficult due to its size and complexity) it would be worth 100M to a scientific research facility.

VARINA'S ARRIVAL

EVENT

The *MARTIAN TRANSPORT* arrives on schedule, once every 30 days.

When the ship next arrives, the Martians will be bringing to the asteroid its first female prisoner: *VARINA PEMBERTON*, who was arrested for murdering a Martian – on Mars.

The ship lands. As the hatchway opens, a figure comes forward, slender and topped with tawny curls. It's a young woman, briefly dressed in blouse and shorts, her tawny hair tumbled, her blue eyes wide.

Unbeknownst to her captors or anyone outside of the Terrestrial Space Fleet, Varina is operating under cover. She won't take part in any violence or attempted hijackings that occur, even if they are successful; her secret mission is too important.

COL. VARINA PEMBERTON (INTELLIGENCE OFFICER)

NPC

BRAINS 3 Survival+2 MartianLanguage+1
CHARM 3 Rhetoric+2
GRACE 2 Blaster+1
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 1
PSYCHE 2
TCV 125

Colonel Varina Pemberton is an agent on a secret mission timed to coincide with the arrival of Terran attack fleets in the Martian territories. She will pose as a typical prisoner, and will only take one other person into her confidence when she goes to reverse the effects of the machine. When she's done, this asteroid will serve as a forward attack base for Terra.

TERRAN SPACE TROOPER

NPC

BRAINS 1 Survival+1 MartianLanguage+1
CHARM 1
GRACE 2 Blaster+1
HEALTH 3
MIGHT 3
PSYCHE 2
GEAR: Blaster+1, Armor+2
TCV 115

The Terrans have been at war with the Martians for decades. It has been a brutal and complex war, with many stages, fronts, negotiations, treaties, exchanges, deceptions, betrayals, and all the associated political upheaval.

For the past several years, while the treaty has been in place, most of the action has been confined to covert missions and espionage. That was true, at least, until hostilities broke out three weeks ago. Now, war has been declared again.

The unit that arrives on the Devil's Asteroid is an experienced team of combat veterans, hand-selected for the mission. These soldiers have seen it all; they are jaded and world-weary, but completely loyal.

VARINA REVERSES THE DEVO MACHINE

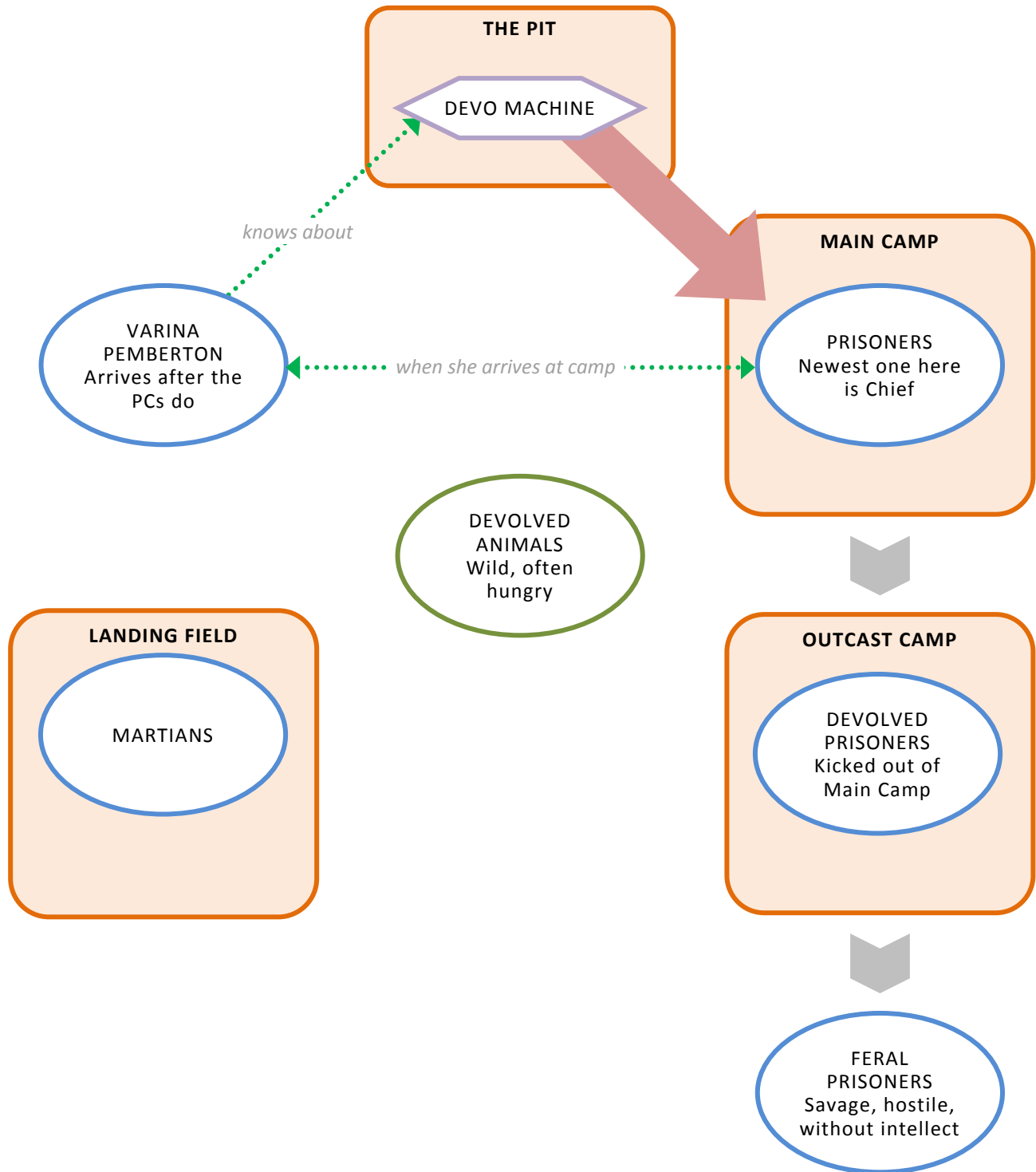
EVENT

Varina has a plan: posing as a prisoner, she will make her way to the *DEVO MACHINE* and reverse it.

When the Second Crisis arises, if the machine is still running and the PCs haven't done anything to change her plan, Varina will go into action. Taking a confidante from the *MAIN CAMP* she travels north, enters the hidden room and reverses the dial's position. Once back outside, her companion will smash the wheel, rendering it stripped and useless.



PENAL REFORM



DEVIL'S ASTEROID

by Manly Wade Wellman

The Rock Bred Evolution in Reverse!

It was not very large, as asteroids go, but about it clung a silvery mist of atmosphere. Deeper flashes through the mist betokened water, and green patches hinted of rich vegetation. The space-patroller circled the little world knowledgeably, like a wasp buzzing around an apple. In the control room, by the forward ports, the Martian skipper addressed his Terrestrial companion.

"I wissh you joy of yourr new home," he purred. Like many Martians, he was braced upright on his lower tentacles by hoops and buckles around his bladdery body, so that he had roughly a human form, over which lay a strange loose armor of light plates. In the breathing hole of his petal-tufted skull was lodged an artificial voice-box that achieved words. "I rregret—"

Fitzhugh Parr glowered back. He was tall, even for a man of Earth, and his long-jawed young face darkened with wrath. "Regret nothing," he snapped. "You're jolly glad to drop me on this little hell."

"Hell?" repeated the Martian reproachfully. "But it iss a ssplendid miniaturre worrld—nineteen of yourr miless in diameterr, with arrtificial grravity centerr to hold airr and waterr; ssown, too, with Terresstrrial plantss. And companiingss of yourr own rrace."

"There's a catch," rejoined Parr. "Something you Martian swine think is a heap big joke. I can see that, captain."

The tufted head wagged. "Underr rrtreaty between Marrs and Earrrth, judgess of one planet cannot ssentence to death crriminalss frrom the otherr, not even forr murrderr—"

"It wasn't for murder!" exploded Parr. "I struck in self-defense!"

"I cannot arrgue the point. Yourr victim was a high official perrhapss insolent, but you Earrrth folk forrget how eassy ourr crraniumss crrack underr yourr blowss. Anyway, you do not die—you arre exiled. Prreparre to dissembarrk."

Behind them three Martian space-hands, sprawling like squids near the control-board, made flutelike comments to each other. The tentacle of each twiddled an electro-automatic pistol.

"Rremove tunic and bootss," directed the skipper. "You will not need them. Quickly, ssirr!"

Parr glared at the levelled weapons of the space-hands, then shucked his upper garment and kicked off his boots.

He stood up straight and lean-muscled, in a pair of duck shorts. His fists clenched at his sides.

"Now we grround," the skipper continued, and even as he spoke there came the shock of the landfall. The inner panel opened, then the outer hatch. Sunlight beat into the chamber. "Goodbye," said the skipper formally. "You have thirrry ssecondss, Earrrth time, to walk clearr of our blasstss beforre we take off. Marrch."

Parr strode out upon dark, rich soil. He sensed behind him the silent quiver of Martian laughter, and felt a new ecstasy of hate for his late guards, their race, and the red planet that spawned them. Not until he heard the rumble and swish of the ship's departure did he take note of the little world that was now his prison home.

At first view it wasn't really bad. At second, it wasn't really strange. The sky, by virtue of an Earth-type atmosphere, shone blue with wispy clouds, and around the small plain on which he stood sprouted clumps and thickets of green tropical trees. Heathery ferns, with white and yellow edges to their leaves, grew under his bare feet. The sun, hovering at zenith, gave a July warmth to the air. The narrow horizon was very near, of course, but the variety of thickets and the broken nature of the land beyond kept it from seeming too different from the skyline of Earth. Parr decided that he might learn to endure, even to enjoy. Meanwhile, what about the other Terrestrials exiled here? And, as Parr wondered, he heard their sudden, excited voices.

Threats and oaths rent the balmy air. Through the turmoil resounded solid blows. Parr broke into a run, shoved through some broad-leafed bushes, and found himself in the midst of the excitement.

■

A dozen men, with scraggly beards and skimpy rags of clothing, were setting upon an unclassifiable creature that snarled and fought back. It was erect and coarsely hairy—Parr saw that much before the enigma gave up the unequal fight and ran clumsily away into a mass of bright-flowered scrub. Execrations and a volley of sticks and stones speeded its flight.

Then the mob was aware of Parr. Every man—they were all male Terrestrials—turned toward him, with something like respect. One of them, tall and thin, spoke diffidently:

"You just arrived?"

"I was just booted out, ten minutes ago," Parr informed him. "Why?"

"Because you're our new chief," responded the thin man, bowing. "The latest comer always commands here."

Parr must have goggled, for the thin one smiled through tawny stubble. "The latest comer is always highest and wisest," he elaborated. "He is healthiest. Best. The longer you stay on this asteroid, the lower you fall."

Parr thought he was being joked with, and scowled. But his informant smiled the broader. "My name's Sadau—here under sentence for theft of Martian government property."

"I'm Fitzhugh Parr. They said I was a murderer. It's a lie."

One or two chuckled at that, and the one who called himself Sadau said: "We all feel unjustly condemned. Meet the others—Jeffords, Wain, Haldocott..." Each man, as named, bowed to Parr. The final introduction was of a sallow, frowning lump of a fellow called Shanklin.

"I was boss until you came," volunteered this last man. "Now you take over." He waved toward a little cluster of grass huts, half hidden among ferny palms. "This is our capital city. You get the largest house—until somebody new shows up. Then you step down, like me."

He spoke with ill grace. Parr did not reply at once, but studied these folk who were putting themselves under his rule. They would not have been handsome even if shaved and dressed properly. Indeed, two or three had the coarse, low-browed look of profound degenerates. Back into Parr's mind came the words of Sadau: "The longer you stay ... the lower you fall."

"Gentlemen," said Parr at last, "before I accept command or other office, give me information. Just now you were acting violently. You, Sadau, started explaining. Go ahead."

Sadau shrugged a lean freckled shoulder, and with a jerk of his head directed his companions to retire toward the huts. They obeyed, with one or two backward glances. Left alone with Parr, Sadau looked up with a wise, friendly expression.

"I won't waste time trying to be scientific or convincing. I'll

give you facts—we older exiles know them only too well. This asteroid seems a sort of Eden to you, I daresay."

"I told the Martians that I knew there was a catch somewhere."

"Your instinct's sound. The catch is this: Living creatures—Terrestrials anyway—degenerate here. They go backward in evolution, become—" Sadau broke off a moment, for his lips had begun to quiver. "They become beasts," he finished.

"What?" growled Parr. "You mean that men turn into apes?"

"Yes. And the apes turn into lower creatures. Those become lower creatures still." Sadau's eyes were earnest and doleful. "The process may run back and down to the worm, for all we can judge. We try not to think too much about it."

"This is a joke of some kind," protested Parr, but Sadau was not smiling.

"Martian joke, perhaps. The treaty keeps them from killing us—and this is their alternative punishment. It makes death trivial by comparison.... You don't believe. It's hard. But you see that some of us, oldest in point of exile, are sliding back into bestiality. And you saw us drive away, as our custom is, a man who had definitely become a beast."

"That thing was a man?" prompted Parr, his spine chilling.

"It had been a man. As you wander here and there, you'll come upon queer sights—sickening ones."

Parr squinted at the huts, around the doors of which lounged the other men. "That looks like a permanent



community, Sadau."

"It is, but the population's floating. I came here three months ago—Earth months—and the place was operating under the rules I outlined. Latest comer, necessarily the highest-grade human being, to be chief; those who degenerate beyond a certain point to be driven out; the rest to live peaceably together, helping each other."

Parr only half heard him. "Evolution turned backward—it can't be true. It's against nature."

"Martians war against nature," replied Sadau pithily. "Mars is a dead world, and its people are devils. They'd be the logical explorers to find a place where such things can be, and to make use of it. Don't believe me if you don't want to. Time and life here will convince you."

■

In the days that followed—the asteroid turned once in approximately twenty-two hours—Parr was driven to belief. Perhaps the slowness of the idea's dawning kept him from some form of insanity.

Every man of the little group that called him chief was on the way to be a man no more. There were stooped backs among them, a forward hang to arms, a sprouting of coarse, lank hair. Foreheads fell away, noses flattened coarsely, eyes grew small and shifty. Sadau informed Parr that such evidences of degeneration meant a residence of a year or so on the exile asteroid.

"We'll be driving one or two of them away pretty soon," he observed.

"What then?" asked Parr. "What happens to the ones that are driven out?"

"Sometimes we notice them, peering through the brush, but mostly they haul out by themselves a little way from here—shaggy brutes, like our earliest fathers. There are lower types still. They stay completely clear of us."

Parr asked the question that had haunted him since his first hour of exile: "Sadau, do you see any change in me?"

Sadau smiled and shook his head. "You won't alter in the least for a month."

That was reasonable. Man, Parr remembered, has been pretty much the same for the past ten thousand years. If a year brought out the beast in the afflicted exiles, then that year must count for a good hundred thousand years turned backward. Five years would be five hundred thousand of reverse evolution—in that time, one would be reduced to something definitely animal. Beyond that, one would drop into the category of tailed monkeys, of rodent crawlers—reptiles next, and then—

"I'll kill myself first," he thought, but even as he made the promise he knew he would not. Cowards took the suicide way out, the final yielding to unjust, cruel mastery by the Martians. Parr stiffened his shoulders, that had grown

tanned and vigorous in the healthy air. He spoke grimly to Sadau:

"I don't accept all this yet. It's happened to others, but not to me so far. There's a way of stopping this, and paying off those Martian swine. If it can be done—"

"I'm with you, Chief!" cried Sadau, and they shook hands.

Heartened, he made inquiries. The Martian space-patroller came every month or so, to drop a new exile. It always landed on the plain where Parr had first set foot to the asteroid. That gave him an idea, and he held conference in the early evening, with Sadau, Shanklin, and one or two others of the higher grade.

"We could capture that craft," urged Parr. "There's only a skipper and three Martians—"

"Yes, with pistols and ray throwers," objected Shanklin. "Too big a risk."

"What's the alternative?" demanded Sadau. "You want to stay here and turn monkey, Shanklin? Chief," he added to Parr, "I said once that I was on your side. I'll follow wherever you lead."

"Me, too," threw in Jeffords, a sturdy man of middle age who had been sentenced for killing a Martian in a brawl.

"And me," wound up Haldocott, a blond youth whose skin was burned darker than his hair and downy beard. "We four can pull it off without Shanklin."

But Shanklin agreed, with something like good humor, to stand by the vote of the majority. The others of the community assented readily, for they were used to acting at the will of their wiser companions. And at the next arrival of the Martian patroller—an observer, posted by Parr in a treetop, reported its coming whole hours away—they made a quick disposal of forces around the rocket-scorched plain that did duty for a landing field. Parr consulted for a last moment with Sadau, Shanklin, Jeffords and Haldocott.

"We'll lead rushes from different directions," he said. "As the hatchway comes open, the patroller will stall for the moment—can't take off until it's airtight everywhere. I'll give a yell for signal. Then everybody charge. Jam the tubes by smacking the soft metal collars at the nozzles—we can straighten them back when the ship's ours. Out to your places now."

"The first one at the hatch will probably be shot or rayed," grumbled Shanklin.

"I'll be first there," Parr promised him. "Who wants to live forever, anyway? Posts, everybody. Here she comes in."

Tense, quick-breathing moments thereafter as the craft descended and lodged. Then the hatchway opened. Parr, crouching in a clump of bushes with two followers, raised his voice in a battle yell, and rushed.

A figure had come forward to the open hatch, slender and topped with tawny curls. It paused and shrank back at the

sudden apparition of Parr and his men leaping forward. Tentacles swarmed out, trying to push or pull the figure aside so as to close the hatch again. That took more seconds—then Parr had crossed the intervening space. Without even looking at the newcoming exile who had so providentially forestalled the closing of the hatch, he clutched a shoulder and heaved mightily. The Martian whose tentacles had reached from within came floundering out, dragged along—it was the skipper whose ironic acquaintance Parr had made in his own voyage out, all dressed in that loose-plate armor. Parr wrenched a pistol from a tentacle. Yelling again, he fired through the open hatchway. Two space-hands ducked out of sight.

"We've won!" yelled Parr, and for a moment he thought they had. But not all his followers had charged with his own bold immediacy.

Sadau on one side of the ship, Jeffords and Haldocott at the other, had run in close and were walloping manfully at the nozzles of the rocket tubes. The outer metal yielded under the blows, threatening to clog the throats of the blasts. Only at the rear was there no attack—Shanklin, and with him three or four of the lesser men, had hung back. The few moments' delay there was enough to make all the difference.

Thinking and acting wisely, even without a leader, the Martian space-hands met the emergency. They had withdrawn from the open hatchway, but could reach the mechanism that closed it. Parr was too late to jump in after them. Then one of them fired the undamaged rear tubes.

Swish! Whang! The ship took off so abruptly that Parr barely dodged aside in time, dragging along with him the new Terrestrial whose shoulder he clutched, and also the surprised Martian skipper. The rocket blasts, dragging fiery fingers across the plain, struck down Haldocott and Jeffords, and bowled over two of the laggards with Shanklin's belated contingent. Then it was away, moving jumpily with its half-wrecked side tubes, but nevertheless escaping.

Parr swore a great oath, that made the stranger gasp. And then Parr had time to see that this was a woman, and young. She was briefly dressed in blouse and shorts, her tawny hair was tumbled, her blue eyes wide. To her still clung the Martian skipper, and Parr covered him with the captured pistol. Next instant Shanklin, arriving at last, struck out with his club and shattered the flowerlike cranium inside the plated cap. The skipper fell dead on the spot.

"I wanted him for a prisoner!" growled Parr.

"What good would that do?" flung back Shanklin roughly. "The ship's what we wanted. It's gone. You bungled, Parr."

Parr was about to reply with the obvious charge that Shanklin's own hesitancy had done much to cause the failure, when Sadau spoke:

"This young lady—miss, are you an exile? Because," and he spoke in the same fashion that he had once employed to Parr, "then you're our new chief. The latest comer commands."

"Why—why—" stammered the girl.

"Wait a minute," interposed Parr again. "Let's take stock of ourselves. Haldocott and Jeffords killed—and a couple of others—"

Shanklin barked at him. "You don't give orders any more. We've got a new chief, and you're just one of the rabble, like me." He made a heavily gallant bow toward the latest arrival. "May I ask your name, lady?"

"I'm Varina Pemberton," she said. "But what's the meaning of all this?"

Shanklin and Sadau began to explain. The others gathered interestedly around. Parr felt suddenly left out, and stooped to look at the dead Martian. The body wore several useful things—a belt with ammunition and a knife-combination, shoes on the thickened ends of the tentacles, and that strange armor. As Parr moved to retrieve these, his companions called out to halt him.

"The new chief will decide about those things," said Shanklin officiously. "Especially the gun. Can I have it?"

To avoid a crisis, Parr passed the weapon to the girl, who nodded thanks and slid it into her own waist-belt. Shanklin asked for, and received, the knife. Sadau was the only man slender enough to wear the shoes, and gratefully donned them. Parr looked once again at the armor, which he had drawn free of its dead owner.

"What's that for?" asked Shanklin.

Parr made no answer, because he did not know. The armor was too loosely hung together for protection against weapons. It certainly was no space-overall. And it had nothing of the elegance that might make it a Martian uniform of office. Casting back, Parr remembered that the skipper had worn it at the time when he, Parr, was landed—but not during the voyage out. He shook his head over the mystery.

"Let that belong to you," the girl Varina Pemberton was telling him. "It has plates of metal that may be turned to use. Perhaps—" She seemed to be on the verge of saying something important, but checked herself.

"If you'll come with us," Sadau told her respectfully, "we'll show you where we live and where you will rule."

**"You don't give orders any more.
We've got a new chief, and you're just
one of the rabble, like me."**

■

They held council that night among the grass huts—the nine that were left after the unsuccessful attack on the patroller. Varina Pemberton, very pretty in her brief sports costume, sat on the stump that was chief's place; but Shanklin did most of the talking.

"Nobody will argue about our life and prospects being good here," he thundered, "but there's no use in making things worse when they're bad enough." He shook a thick forefinger at Fitzhugh Parr, who wore the armor he had stripped from the dead Martian. "You were chief, and what you said goes. But you're not chief now—you're just the man who murdered four of us!"

"Mmm—yes," growled one of the lower-fallen listeners, a furry-shouldered, buck-toothed clod named Wain. "That blast almost got me, right behind Haldocott." His eyes, grown small, gleamed nastily at Parr. "We ought to condemn this man—"

"Please," interposed Sadau, who alone remained friendly to Parr, "it's for the chief to condemn." He looked to Varina Pemberton, who shook her head slowly.

"I feel," she ventured with her eyes on Parr, "that this ought to be left up to you as a voting body."

Shanklin sprang to his feet. "Fair enough!" he bawled. "I call Parr guilty. All who think like me, say aye!"

"Aye!"

"Aye!"

"Aye!"

They were all agreeing except Sadau, who looked shrunken and sad and frightened. Shanklin smirked.

"All who think he should be killed as a murderer—"

"Hold on," put in Varina Pemberton. "If I'm chief, I'll draw the line there. Don't kill him."

Shanklin bowed toward her. "I was wrong to suggest that before a woman. Then he's to be kicked out?"

There was a chorus of approving yells, and all save Sadau jumped up to look for sticks and stones. Parr laid his hand on the club he had borne in the skirmish that day.

"Now wait," he said clearly and harshly, and the whole party faced him—Sadau wanly, the girl questioningly, the rest angrily.

"I'm to be kicked out," Parr repeated. "I'll accept that. I'll go. But," and the club lifted itself in his right hand, "I'm not going to be rough-housed. I've seen it happen here, and none of it for me."

"Oh, no?" Shanklin had picked up a club of his own, and grinned fiercely.

"No. Let me go, and I leave without having to be whipped out of camp. Mob me, and I promise to die fighting, right here." He stamped a foot on the ground. "I'll crack a skull or two before I wink out. That's a solemn statement of fact."

"Let him go," said Varina Pemberton again, this time with a ring of authority. "He wears that armor, and he'll put up a fight. We can't spare any more men."

"Thank you," Parr told her bleakly. He gave Shanklin a last long stare of challenge, then turned on his heel and walked away toward the thickets amid deep silence. Behind him the council fire made a dwindling hole in the blackness of night. It seemed to be his last hope, fading away.

He pushed in among thick, leafy stems. A voice hailed him:

"Hah!"

And a figure, blacker than the gloom, tramped close to him across a little grassy clearing.

"You! They drive you out?" a thick, unsure voice accosted him.

Parr hefted his club, wondering if this would be an enemy. "Yes. They drove me out. I'm exiled from among exiles."

"Uh." The other seemed perplexed over these words, as though they stated a situation too complicated. Parr's eyes, growing used to the darkness, saw that this was a grotesque, shaggy form, one of the degenerate outcasts from the village. "Uh," repeated his interrogator. "You come to us. Make one more in camp. Come."

■

Among tall trees, thickly grown, lay a throng of sleepers. Parr's companion led him there, and made an awkward gesture.

"You lie down. You sleep. Tomorrow—boss talk. Uh!"

So saying, the beast-man curled up at the root of a tree. Parr sat down with his back against another trunk, the club across his knees, but he did not sleep.

This, plainly enough, was the outcast horde. It clung together, the gregariousness of humanity not yet winnowed out by degeneration. It had a ruler, too—"Tomorrow boss talk." Talk of what? In what fashion?

Thus Parr meditated during the long, moonless night. He also took time to examine once more his captured armor. Its metal plates, clamped upon a garment of leatheroid, covered his body and limbs, even the backs of his hands, as well as his neck and scalp. Yet, as he had decided before, it was no great protection against violence. As clothing it was superfluous on this tropical planetoid. What then?

He could not see, but he could feel. His fingers quested all over one plate, probing and tapping. The plate was hollow—in reality, two saucer-shaped plates with their concave faces together. They gave off a muffled clink of

hollowness when he tapped them. When he shook the armor, there was something extra in the sound, and that impelled him to hold a plate close to his ear. He heard a soft, rhythmic whirr of machinery.

"There's a vibration in this stuff," he summed up in his mind. "What for? To protect against what?"

Then, suddenly, he had it.

The greatest menace of the whole tiny world was the force that reversed evolution—the vibration must be designed to neutralize that force!

"I'm immune!" cried Fitzhugh Parr aloud; and, in the early dawn that now crept into the grove, his sleeping companions began to wake and rise and gape at him.

He gaped back, with the shocked fascination that any intelligent person would feel at viewing such reconstructions of his ancestors. At almost the first glance he saw that the newest evolutionary thought was correct—these were simian, but not apes. Ape and man, as he had often heard, sprang from the same common fore-father, low-browed, muzzle-faced, hairy. Such were these, in varying degrees of intensity. None wore clothes. Grinning mouths exhibited fanglike teeth, bare chests broadened powerfully, clumsy hands with short, ineffectual thumbs made foolish gestures. But the feet, for instance, were not like hands, they were flat pedestals with forward-projecting toes. The legs, though short, were powerful. Man's father, decided Parr, must have had something of the bear about his appearance ... and the most bearlike of the twenty or thirty beast-men heaved himself erect and came slouching across toward Parr.

This thing had once been a giant of a man, and remained a giant of an animal. None of the others present were nearly as large, nor were any of the men who had driven Parr forth. Six feet six towered this hair-thicketed ogre, with a chest like a drayhorse, and arms as thick as stovepipes. One hand—the thumb had trouble opposing the great cucumber fingers—flourished a club almost as long as Parr's whole body.

"I—boss," thundered this monster impressively. "Throw down stick."

Parr had risen, his own club poised for defense. The giant's free hand pointed to the weapon. "Throw down," it repeated, with a growl as bearlike as the body.

"Not me," said Parr, and ducked away from the tree-trunk against which he might be pinned. "What's the idea? I didn't do anything to you—"

"I—boss," said his threatener again. "Nobody fight me."

"True, true," chorused the others sycophantically. "Ling, he boss—throw down club, you new man."

Parr saw what they meant. With the other community, the newest and therefore most advanced individual ruled. In this more primitive society, the strongest held sway until a

stronger displaced him. The giant called Ling was by no means the most human-seeming creature there, but he was plainly the ruler and plainly meant so to continue. Parr was no coward, but he was no fool. As the six-foot bludgeon whirled upward between him and the sky, he cast down his own stick in token of surrender.

"No argument, Ling," he said sensibly.

There was laughter at that, and silly applause. Ling swung around and stripped bare his great pointed fangs in a snarl. Silence fell abruptly, and he faced Parr again. "You," he said. "You got on—" And he stepped close, tapping the plates on Parr's chest.

"It's armor," said Parr.

"Huh! Ah—ar—" The word was too much for the creature, whose brain and mouth alike had forgotten most language. "Well," said Ling, "I want. I wear."

He fumbled at the fastenings.

Parr jumped clear of him. He had accepted authority a moment ago, but this armor was his insurance against becoming a beast. "It's mine," he objected.

Solemnly Ling shook his great browless head, as big as a coal-scuttle and fringed with bristly beard. "Mine," he said roughly. "I boss. You—"

He caught Parr by the arm and dragged him close. So quick and powerful was the clutch that it almost dislocated Parr's shoulder. By sheer instinct, Parr struck with his free fist.

Square and solid on that coarse-bearded chin landed Parr's knuckles, with their covering of armor plate. And Ling, confident to the point of innocence because of his strength and authority, had neither guarded nor prepared. His great head jerked back as though it would fly from his shoulders. And Parr, wrenching loose, followed up the advantage because a second's hesitation would be his downfall.

He hit Ling on the lower end of the breastbone, where his belly would be softest. Above him he heard the beast-giant grunt in pain, and then Parr swung roundabout to score on the jaw again. Ling actually gave back, dropping his immense bludgeon. A body less firmly pedestalled upon powerful legs and scoop-shovel feet would have gone down. It took a moment for him to recover.

"Aaaah!" he roared. "I kill you!"

Parr had stooped and caught up his own discarded club. Now he threw it full at the distorted face of his enemy. Ling's hands flashed up like a shortstop's, snatched the stick in midair, and broke it in two like a carrot. Another roar, and Ling charged, head down and arms outflung for a pulverizing grapple.

Parr sprang sidewise. Ling blundered past. His stooping head crashed against a tree, his whole body bounded back from the impact, and down he went in a quivering, moaning heap. He did not get up.

Parr backed away, gazing at the others. They stood silent in a score of attitudes, like children playing at moving statues. Then:

"Huh!" cried one. "New boss!"

A chorus of cries and howls greeted this. They gathered around Parr with fawning faces. "You boss! You fight Ling—beat 'im. Huh, you boss!"

At the racket, Ling recovered a little, and managed to squirm into a sitting posture. "Yes," he said, "you boss."

With one hand holding his half-smashed skull, he lifted the other in salute to Parr.

■

It took time—several days—but Parr got over his first revulsion at the bestial traits of his new companions. After all, in shedding the wit and grace of man, they were recovering the honest simplicity of animals. For instance, Ling was not malicious about being displaced, as Shanklin had been. Too, there was much more real mutual helpfulness, if not so much talk about it. When one of the horde found a new crop of berries or roots or nuts, he set up a yell for his friends to come and share. A couple of oldsters, doddering and incompetent gargoyles, were fed and cared for by the younger beast-men. And all stood ready to obey Parr's slightest word or gesture.

Thus, though it was a new thought to them, several went exploring with him to the north pole of their world. The journey was no more than fifteen miles, but took them across grassy, foodless plains which had never been worth negotiation. Parr chose Ling and another comparatively intelligent specimen who called himself Ruba. Izak, the mild-mannered one who had first met and guided Parr on the night of his banishment from the human village, also pleaded to go. Several others would have joined the party, but the deterioration of legs and feet made them poor walkers. The four went single file—Parr, then big Ling, then Ruba, then Izak. Each carried, on a vine sling, a leaf-package of fruit and a melon for quenching thirst. They also carried clubs.

The plain was well-grassed, as high as Ling's knuckled knee. Occasionally small creatures hopped or scuttled away. The beast-men threw stones until Parr told them to stop—he could not help but wonder if those scurriers had once been men. The hot sun made him sweat under his plate-armor, but not for all the Solar System would he have laid it aside.

A couple of oldsters, doddering and incompetent gargoyles, were fed and cared for by the younger beast-men. And all stood ready to obey Parr's slightest word or gesture.

They paused for noonday lunch in a grove of ferny trees beyond the plain, then scaled some rough lava-like rocks. In the early afternoon they came to what must be the asteroid's northern pole.

Like most of the asteroids, this was originally jagged and irregular. Martian engineers in fitting it artificially to support life, had roughed it into a sphere and pulverized quantities of the rock into soil. Here, at the apex, was a ring of rough naked hills enclosing a pit into which the sun could not look. Ling, catching up with Parr on the brow of the circular range, pointed with his great club.

"Look like mouth of world," he hazarded. "Dark. Maybe world hungry—eat us."

"Maybe," agreed Parr. The pit, about a hundred yards across and full of shadow, looked forbidding enough to be a savage maw. Izak also came alongside.

"Mouth?" he repeated after Ling. "Mmm! Look down. Men in there."

There was a movement, sure enough, and a flare of something—a torch of punky wood. Izak was right. Men were inside this polar depression.

"Come on," said Parr at once, and began to scramble down the steep, gloomy inner slope. Ling grimaced, but followed lest his companions think him afraid. Ruba and Izak, who feared to be left behind, stayed close to his heels.

The light of the torch flared more brightly. Parr could make out figures in its glow—two of them. The torch itself was wedged in a crack of the rock, and beneath its flame the couple seemed to tug and wrench at something that gleamed darkly, like a great metal toadstool at the bottom of the depression. So engrossed were the workers that they did not notice Parr and his companions, and Parr, drawing near, had time to recognize both.

One was Sadau, who would have remained his friend. The other was Varina Pemberton. In the torchlight she looked browner and more vigorous than when he had seen her last.

"What are you doing?" he called to them.

Abruptly they both snapped erect and looked toward him. Sadau seized the torch and whirled it on high, shedding light. Varina Pemberton peered at the newcomers.

"Oh," she said, "it's you. Parr. Well, get out of here."

Parr stood his ground, studying the toadstool-thing they had been laboring over. It was a wheel-like disk of metal, set upon an axle that sprouted from the floor of rock. By turning it, they could finish opening a great rock-faced panel near by....

"Get out," repeated the girl, with a hard edge on her voice.

Parr felt himself grow angry. "Take it easy," he said. "Your crowd booted me out, and I'm not under your rule any

more. Neither can this be said to be your country. We've as much right here as you."

"Four of us," added Ruba with threatening logic. "Two of you. Fight, uh?"

"Parr," said Sadau, "do as Miss Pemberton tells you. Leave here."

"And if I don't?" temporized Parr, who felt the eagerness of his beast-men for some sort of a skirmish.

Varina Pemberton took something from her belt and pointed it. A brittle report resounded—*whick!* And an electro-automatic pellet exploded almost between Parr's feet, digging a hole in the rock. He jumped back. So did his three comrades, from whose memories had not faded the knowledge of firearms.

"The next shot," she warned, "will be a little higher and more carefully placed. Get out, and don't come back."

"They win," said Parr. "Come on, boys."

They retired to the upper combing of rock, with the sun at their backs. There Parr motioned them into hiding behind jagged boulders. Time passed, several hours of it. Finally they saw Sadau and Varina Pemberton depart on the other side of the hole.

"Good," rumbled Ling. "We follow. Sneak up. Grab. Kill."

"Not us," Parr ruled. "No war against women, Ling. But we'll go down where they were working, and see what it's all about."

They groped their way down again. At the bottom of the pit-valley they found the metal projection, so like a mighty steering wheel. Sadau's torch lay there, extinguished, and Parr still carried a radium lighter in the pocket of his shabby shorts. He made a light, and looked.

The big panel or rock, that had been half-open, was closed. As for the wheel, it had been bent and jammed, by powerful blows with a rock. He could not budge it, nor could the mighty Ling, nor could all of them together.

"They were inside this asteroid," decided Parr, half to himself. "Down where the Martians planted the artificial gravity-machinery. Having been there, they fixed things so nobody will follow them. Only blasting rays could open up a way, and those would probably wreck the mechanism and send air, water and exiles all flying into space. All this she did. Why?"

"Why what?" asked Izak, not comprehending.

"Yes, why what?" repeated Parr. "I can only guess, Izak, and none of my guesses have been worth much lately. Let's go home, and keep an eye peeled on our neighbors."

■

The Martians had come again—the same space-patroller, repaired, and twice as many hands and a new skipper. They

carried no Terrestrial exile—for once their errand was different.

Four of them, harnessed into erect human posture, armed and armored, stood around the evening fire in the central clearing of the village now ruled by Varina Pemberton. The skipper was being insistent, but not particularly deadly.

"We rrecognize that fourr dead among you will ssettle forr one dead Marrtian," he told the gathered exiles. "The morre sso ass you assure me that the man rressponsible hass been drriven frrom among you. But we make one demand—the armorr taken frrom the body of the dead Marrtian."

"I am sorry about that," the chieftainess replied from her side. "We didn't know that you valued it. If we get it back for you—"

"Ssuch action would rreflect favorrably upon you," nodded the Martian skipper. "Get the armorr again, and we will rrefrain frrom punitive meassurress."

"Why do you want that armor so much?" inquired Shanklin boldly. He himself had never thought of it as worth much. He was more satisfied to have the knife, which he now hid behind him lest the Martians see and claim. But the skipper only shook his petalled skull.

"It iss no prroblem of yourrss," he snubbed Shanklin. And, to Varina Pemberton: "What time sshall we grrant you? A day? Two dayss?... Come before the end of that time and rreporrt to me at the patrrol vessel."

He turned and led his followers back toward the plain where the ship was parked.

Night had well fallen, and silence hung about the vessel. Only a rectangle of soft light showed the open hatchway. The Martian officer led the way thither, ducked his head, entered—

Powerful hairy hands caught and overpowered him. Before he could collect himself for resistance, other hands had disarmed him and were dragging him away. His three companions, narrowly escaping the same fate, fell back and drew their guns and ray throwers. A voice warned them sharply:

"Don't fire, any of you. We've got your friends in here, and we've taken their electro-automatics. Give us the slightest reason, and we'll wipe them out first—you second."

"Who arre you?" shrilled one of the Martians, lowering his weapon.

"My name's Fitzhugh Parr," came back the grim reply. "You framed me into this exile—it's going to prove the worst day's work you Martian flower-faces ever did. Not a move, any of you! The ship's mine, and I'm going to take off at dawn."

The three discomfited hands tramped away again. Inside the control room, Parr spoke to his shaggy followers, who grinned and twinkled like so many gnomes doing mischief.

"They won't dare rush us," he said, "but two of you—Ling and Izak—stay at the door with those guns. Dead sure you can still use 'em?... You, Ruba, come here to the controls. You say you once flew space-craft."

Ruba's broad, coarse hand ruffled the bushy hair that grew on his almost browless head. "Once," he agreed dolefully. "Now I—many thing I don't remember." His face, flat-nosed and blubber-lipped, grew bleak and plaintive as he gazed upon instruments he once had mastered.

"You'll remember," Parr assured him vehemently. "I never flew anything but a short-shot pleasure cruiser, but I'm beginning to dope things out. We'll help each other, Ruba. Don't you want to get away from here, go home?"

"Home!" breathed Ruba, and the ears of the others—pointed, some of those ears, and all of them hairy—pricked up visibly at that word.

"Well, there you are," Parr said encouragingly. "Sweat your brains, lad. We've got until dawn. Then away we go."

"You will never manage," slurred the skipper from the corner where the Martian captives, bound securely, sprawled under custody of a beast-man with a lever bar for a club. "These animals have not mental power—"

"Shut up, or I'll let that guard tap you," Parr warned him. "They had mental power enough to fool you all over the shop. Come on, Ruba. Isn't this the rocket gauge? Please remember how it operates!"

The capture of the ship had been easy, so easy. The guard had been well kept only until the skipper and his party had gone out of sight toward the human village. Nobody ever expected trouble from beast-men, and the watch on board had not dreamed of a rush until they were down and secure. But this—the rationalization of intricate space-machinery—was by contrast a doleful obstacle. "Please remember," Parr pleaded with Ruba again.

And so for hours. And at last, prodded and cajoled and bullied, the degenerated intelligence of Ruba had partially responded. His clumsy paws, once so skilful, coaxed the mechanism into life. The blasts emitted preliminary belches. The whole fabric of the ship quivered, like a sleeper slowly waking.

"Can you get her nose up, Ruba?" Parr found himself able to inquire at last.

"Huh, boss," spoke Ling from his watch at the door. "Come. I see white thing."

Parr hurried across to look.

The white thing was a tattered shirt, held aloft on a stick. From the direction of the village came several figures, Martian and Terrestrial. Parr recognized the bearer of the

flag of truce—it was Varina Pemberton. With her walked the three Martian hands whom he had warned off, their tentacles lifted to ask for parley, their weapons sheathed at their belts. Sadau was there, and Shanklin.

"Ready, guns," Parr warned Ling and Izak. "Stand clear of us, out there!" he yelled. "We're going to take off."

"Fitzhugh Parr," called back Varina Pemberton, "you must not."

"Oh, must I not?" he taunted her. "Who's so free with her orders? I've got a gun myself this time. Better keep your distance."

The others stopped at the warning, but the girl came forward. "You wouldn't shoot a woman," she announced confidently. "Listen to me."

Parr looked back to where Ruba was fumbling the ship into more definite action. "Go on and talk," he bade her. "I give you one minute."

"You've got to give up this foolish idea," she said earnestly. "It can't succeed—even if you take off."

"No if about it. We're doing wonders. Make your goodbyes short. I wish you joy of this asteroid, ma'am."

"Suppose you do get away," she conceded. "Suppose, though it's a small, crowded ship, you reach Earth and land safely. What then?"

"I'll blow the lid off this dirty Martian Joke," he told her. "Exhibit these poor devils, to show what the Martians do to Terrestrials they convict. And then—"

"Yes, and then!" she cut in passionately. "Don't you see, Parr? Relations between Mars and Earth are at breaking point now. They have been for long. The Martians are technically within their rights when they dump us here, but you'll be a pirate, a thief, a fugitive from justice. You can cause a break, perhaps war. And for what?"

"For getting away, for giving freedom to my only friends on this asteroid," said Parr.

"Freedom?" she repeated. "You think they can be free on Earth? Can they face their wives or mothers as they are now—no longer men?"

"Boss," said Ling suddenly and brokenly, "she tell true. No. I won't go home."

It was like cold water, that sudden rush of ghastly truth upon Parr. The girl was right. His victory would be the saddest of defeats. He looked around him at the beast-men who had placed themselves under his control—what would happen to them on Earth? Prison? Asylum? Zoo?...

"Varina Pemberton," he called, "I think you win."

The hairy ones crowded around him, sensing a change in plan. He spoke quickly:

"It's all off, boys. Get out, one at a time, and rush away for cover. Nobody will hurt you—and we'll be no worse off than we were." He raised his voice again: "If I clear out, will we be left alone?"

"You must give back that armor," she told him. "The Martians insist."

"It's a deal." He stripped the stuff from him and threw it across the floor to lie beside the bound prisoners. "I'm trusting you, Varina Pemberton!" he shouted. "We're getting out."

They departed at his orders, all of them. Ling and Izak went last, dropping the stolen guns they had held so unhandily. Parr waited for all of them to be gone, then he himself left the ship.

At once bullets began to whicker around him. He dodged behind the ship, then ran crookedly for cover. By great good luck, he was not hit. His beast-men hurried to him among the bushes.

"Huh, boss?" they asked anxiously. "Ship no good? What we do?"

He looked over his shoulder. Somewhere in the night enemies hunted for him. The beast-folk were beneath contempt, would be left alone. Only he had shown himself too dangerous to be allowed life.

"Goodbye, boys," he said, with real regret. "I'm not much of a boss if I bring bullets among you. Get back home, and let me haul out by myself. I mean it," he said sternly, as they hesitated. "On your way, and don't get close to me again—death's catching!"

They tramped away into the gloom, with querulous backward looks. Parr took a lonely trail in an opposite direction. After a moment he paused, tingling with suspense. Heavy feet were following him.

"Who's coming?" he challenged, and ducked to avoid a possible shot. None came. The heavy tread came nearer.

"Boss!" It was Ling.

"I told you to go away," reminded Parr gruffly.

"I not go," Ling retorted. "You no make me."

"Ling, you were boss before I came. Now that I'm gone from you—"

"You not gone from me. You my boss. Those others, they maybe pick new boss."

"Ling, you fool!" Parr put out a hand in the night, and grabbed a mighty shaggy arm. "I'll be hunted—maybe killed—"

"Huh!" grunted Ling. "They hunt us, maybe they get killed." He turned and spat over his shoulder, in contempt for all marauding Martians and their vassal Earth folk. "You, me— we stay together, boss."

"Come on, then," said Parr. "Ling, you're all right."

"Good talk!" said Ling.

■

They went to the other side of the little spinning world, and there nobody bothered them. Time and space were relative, as once Einstein remarked to illustrate a rather different situation; anyway, the village under Varina Pemberton numbered only eight men—Parr and Ling could avoid that many easily on a world with nearly nine hundred square miles of brush, rock and gully.

In a grove among grape-vines they built a shelter, and there dwelt for many weeks. Ling wore well as a sole friend and partner. Looking at the big, devoted fellow, Parr did not feel so revolted as at their first glimpse of each other. Ling had seemed so hairy, so misshapen, like a troll out of Gothic legends. But now ... he was only big and burly, and not so hairy as Parr had once supposed. As for his face, all tusk and jaw and no brow, where had Parr gotten such an idea of it? Homely it was, brutal it wasn't....

"I get it," mused Parr. "I'm beginning to degenerate. I'm falling into the beast-man class, closer to Ling's type. Like can't disgust like. Oh, well, why bother about what I can't help?"

He felt resigned to his fate. But then he thought of another—Varina Pemberton, the girl who might have been a pleasant companion in happier, easier circumstances. She had banished him, threatened him, wheedled him out of victory. She, too, would be slipping back to the beast. Her body would warp, her skin grow hairy, her teeth lengthen and sharpen—Ugh! That, at least, revolted him.

"Look, boss," said Ling, rising from where he lounged with a cluster of grapes in his big hand. "People coming—two of 'em."

"Get your club," commanded Parr, and caught up his own rugged length of tough torn-wood. "They're men, not beast-men—they must be looking for trouble."

"Couldn't come to a better place to find it," rejoined Ling, spitting between his palm and the half of his cudgel to tighten his grip. The two of them walked boldly into view.

"I see you, Sadau!" shouted Parr clearly, for there was no mistaking the gaunt, freckled figure in the lead. "Who's that with you?"

The other man must be a new arrival. He was youngish and merry-faced as he drew closer, with black curly hair and a pointed beard. There was a mental-motive look to him, as if he were a high grade engineer or machinist. He wore a breech-clint of woven grasses, and looked expectantly at Parr.

"They aren't armed," pointed out Ling, and it was true. The pair carried sticks, but only as staffs, not clubs.

"Parr!" Sadau was shouting back. "Thank heaven I've found you—we need you badly." He came close, and Parr hefted his club.

"No funny business," he challenged, but Sadau gestured the challenge aside.

"I'm not here to fight. I say, you're needed. Things have gone wrong, awfully. The others got to feeling that there was no reason to obey a woman chief, even though Miss Pemberton has many good impulses—"

"I agree to that," nodded Parr, remembering the girl's many strange behaviors. "I daresay she wasn't much of a leader."

Sadau did not argue the point. "Shanklin, as the previous newest man, grabbed back the chieftaincy," he plunged ahead. "Those other fools backed him. When I tried to defend Miss Pemberton, they drove me out. I stumbled among the others—that crowd you used to capture the patroller—and got a line on where you were. I came for help."

One phase had stuck in Parr's mind. "You tried to defend that girl. They were going to kill her?"

"No. Shanklin, as chief and king, figures he needs a queen. She's not bad looking. He's going to marry her, unless—"

Parr snorted, and Sadau's voice grew angry. "Curse it, man, I'm not casting you for a knight of the Table Round, or the valiant space-hero who arrives in the nick of time at the television drama! Simplify it, Parr. You're the only man who ever had the enterprise to do anything actual here. You ought to be chief still, running things justly. And it isn't justice for a girl to be married unofficially to someone she doesn't like. Miss Pemberton despises Shanklin. Now, do you get my point, or are you afraid?"

It was Ling who made answer: "My boss isn't afraid of anything. He'll straighten that mess out."

Parr glanced at the big fellow. "Thanks for making up my mind for me, Ling. Well, you two have talked me into something. Sadau, shake Ling's big paw. And," he now had time to view the stranger at close hand, "who's this with you?"

The man with the black curls looked genially surprised. "You know me, boss. I'm Frank Rupert."

Parr stared. "Never heard of you."

"You're joking. Why, I almost got that Martian patroller into space, when Miss Pemberton—"

Parr sprang at him and caught him by his shoulders. "You were Ruba—Rupert! It's only that you didn't talk plain before. What's happened to you, man?"

Sadau hastily answered: "The degeneration force is obviated. Reversed. All those who were beast-men are coming back, some of the later arrivals completely normal again. Haven't you noticed a change in this big husk?"

Parr turned and looked at Ling. So that was it! Day by day, the change had not been enough to impress him. As Ling had climbed back along his lost evolutionary trail, Parr had thought that he himself was slipping down....

"Don't stop and scratch your head over it, Parr," Sadau scolded him. "It'll take a lot of explaining, and we haven't time. You said you'd help get Miss Pemberton out of her jam. Come on."

■

It was like the television thrillers, after all, Parr reflected. But Sadau was right on one count—Parr didn't quite fill the role of the space-hero. He had neither the close-clipped moustache nor the gleaming top boots. But he did have the regulation deep, unfathomable eyes and the murderous impulse.

It was just after noon. Shanklin, as chief-king, had also set up for a priest. In the center of the village clearing, he stood holding a sullen and pale Varina Pemberton by one wrist, while he recited what garblings of the marriage service he remembered. His subordinates were gathered to leer and applaud. They did not know of the rush until it was all over them.

Parr smote one on the side of the neck and spilled him in a squalling heap. Sadau, Ling and Rupert overwhelmed the rest of the audience, while Parr charged on into Shanklin. His impact interrupted the words "I take this woman" just after the appropriate syllable "wo". As once before with Ling, Parr dusted Shanklin's jaw with his fist, followed with a digging jab to the solar plexus, and swung again to the jaw. Shanklin tottered, reeled back, and Parr closed in again.

"I always knew I could lick you," Parr taunted. "Come on and fight, bridegroom. I'll raise a knot on your head the size of a wedding cake."

Shanklin retreated another two paces, and from his girdle snatched the Martian knife. He opened its longest blade with a snap. Varina Pemberton screamed. Then, above the commotion of battle, sounded the flat smack of an electro-automatic. Shanklin swore murderously, dropping his knife. His knuckles were torn open by the grazing pellet.

And Parr, glancing in the direction whence the shot came, realized with savage disgust that the space-hero had come after all. There stood a gorgeous young spark in absolutely conventional space-hero costume, not forgetting the top-boots or the close-clipped moustache. Parr moved back, as if to allow this young demigod the center of the stage.

But Varina Pemberton was not playing the part of heroine. Instead of rushing in and embracing, she set her slim hands on her hips. She spoke, and her voice was acid: "It's high time you came, Captain Worrall. I did my part of the job weeks ago."

The handsome fellow in uniform chuckled. "We weren't late, at least. We've been hiding here for some time—saw

what this fellow I shot loose from the knife had in mind whole hours ago. But we also saw these others," and he nodded toward Parr. "They sneaked up in such a business-like manner, I hadn't the heart to spoil their rescue."

■

Other uniformed men—hands of the Terrestrial Space Fleet—were coming into view from among the boughs. They, too, were armed. Ling walked across to Parr, a struggling captive under each arm.

"What are these strangers up to, boss?" he demanded. "Say the word and I'll wring that officer's neck. I never liked officers, anyway."

"Wait," Parr bade him. Then, to the man called Captain Worrall: "Just what are you doing here?"

"This asteroid," replied Worrall, "is now Terrestrial territory. We're fortifying it against the Martians. War was declared three weeks ago, and we made rocket-tracks for this little crumb. It's an ideal base for a flanking attack."

Parr scowled. "You're fortifying?" he repeated. "Well, you'd better shag out of here. There's a power—not working just now, but—"

"No fear of that," Varina Pemberton told him. She was smiling.

"I can explain best by starting at the start. Recently we got a report of what the Martians were doing out here. We realized that Earth must take care of her own, these poor devils who were being pushed back into animalism. Also, with war inevitable—"

"You aren't starting at the start," objected Parr. "Where do you fit into all this? You're no soldier."

"Oh, but she is," Captain Worrall said, offering Parr a cigarette from a platinum case. "She's a colonel of intelligence—high ranking. Wonderful job you've done, Colonel Pemberton."

She took up the tale again: "If the reverse-evolution power could be destroyed, this artificially habitable rock in space would be a great prize for our navy to capture. So I took a big chance—got myself framed to a charge of Murder on Mars, and was the first woman ever sent here. I knew fairly accurately when war would break out, and figured I had months to do my work in. That captured armor gave me the clue."

"All I knew was that it gave off a vibration," nodded Parr.

"Exactly. Which meant that the evolution-reverse was vibratory, too. I confided in Sadau, and he and I pieced the rest of the riddle together. The vibrator would be inside, where nobody would venture for fear of jamming the gravity-core—but we ventured—"

"And shut it off!" cried Parr.

"More than that. We reversed it, started it again at top speed to cause a recovery from the degeneration process. Clever, these Martians—they fix it so you can shuttle to and fro in development. Already the higher beast-men are back to normal, like Rupert there, and the others will be all right, soon."

"You had every right to chase me off at the end of a pistol," said Parr. "I might have gummed the works badly."

"You nearly did that anyway," Varina Pemberton accused. "Fighting, raiding, stirring up the Martians who might have put a crimp in my plans any moment—but, being the type you are, you couldn't do otherwise. I recognized that when I gave you the protective armor."

He gazed at her. "Why didn't you keep it for yourself?"

"No," and she shook her tawny head. "I figured to win or lose very promptly. But you, armored against degeneration, might live after me and be an awful problem to the Martians. Remember, I didn't make you give it back until I had done what I came to do."

Worrall spoke again: "Colonel, these exiles must stay until all effects of the degeneration influence is gone. They'll figure as civilians, with colonists' rights. That means they must have a governor, to cooperate with the military garrison. Will that be you?"

Shanklin dared to speak: "I am chief—"

"Arrest that man," the girl told two space-hands. "No, Captain. But I'm senior officer, and I'll make an appointment. By far the best fitted person for the governorship is Fitzhugh Parr."

The other exiles had pressed close to listen. Sadau, the diplomatic, at once set up a cheer. Ling added his own loyal bellow, and the others joined in. Parr's ears burned with embarrassment.

"Have it your way," he said to them all. "We'll live here, get normal, and help all we can. But first, what have we to eat? We've got guests."

"No, governor, you're the guest of the garrison," protested Captain Worrall. "Come aboard my ship yonder. I'll lend you a uniform, and you'll preside at the head of the table tonight."

"Varina Pemberton," Parr addressed the girl who had caused so much trouble and change on the little world of exile, "will you come and sit at my right hand there?"

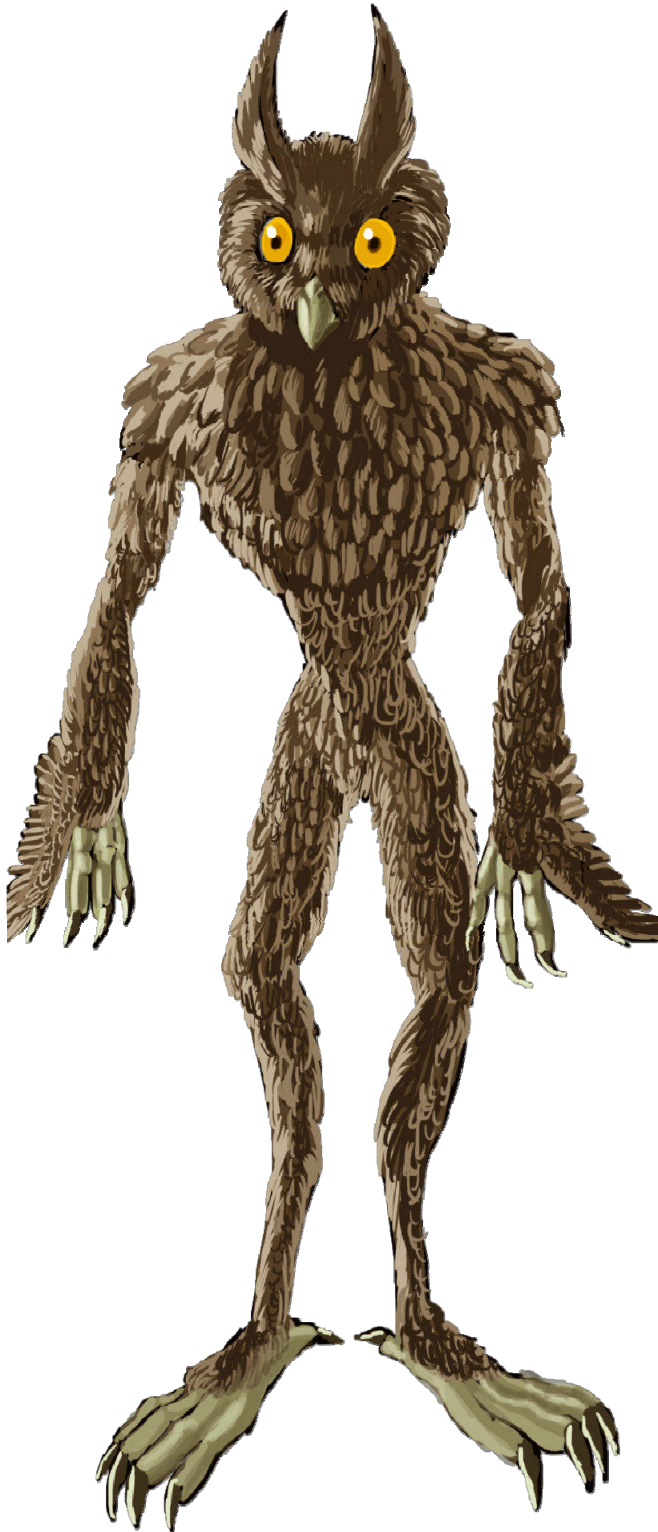
"A pleasure," she smiled, and put her arm through his.

Everybody cheered again, and both Parr and the girl blushed.



HUNTER/HUNTED

Based on "Duel On Syrtis"
by Poul Anderson



OBSTACLES

Dangerous People - Some Locals

Dangerous People - Some Owlies

Monster/Enemy - Kreega or Riordan

Wildlife/Animals - Hunting Hawks

Wildlife/Animals - Rockhounds

Wildlife/Animals - Greyvines

Wildlife/Animals - Sandsnakes

Wildlife/Animals - Leapers

Psychological Challenges - Ethical Minefield

COMPLICATIONS

Scant Intel

Involves Criminal Motives

Stealth Required

Object of Mission will Refuse/Resist

PERKS

90 MV

MAGUFFINS

Data/Report on Alternate Mars

Martian Lifeforms

Drug - Suspensine (2M)

Martian Artifacts (15M)

BACKSTORY

The PCs travel to a desert world long past its prime, with a dimly receding civilization and a diverse but strangely interconnected ecosystem. When geological surveys indicated the presence of oil and precious minerals within the mantle, human settlements began to spring up all over the planet, leaving only one large portion of untamed wilderness: a vast sea of red sand bordered on the south by occupied territory, and on the north by the Hraefnian Hills.

Here among the dessicated remains of a once-thriving world, humans met, fought, and conquered the alien race known as "Owlies". In the years that have passed since then the aboriginals, once regarded as barely sentient and used as slaves both here and on Earth, have begun to gain their civil rights. But not all earthlings see this issue the same way.

Some people come to this planet to learn the Owlies' ways, to explore and celebrate their ancient culture, or to seek out the source of their alleged psychic powers, which are shrouded in mystery and doubted by most who've never left Earth. Some come to trade goods with them, or to hire them as a source of cheap labor. Others come to trap or enslave them. Still others come to hunt them for sport.

The PCs make planetfall at *Port Armstrong*, a small frontier town with a minimal launch facility.

JUSTICE MUST BE DONE

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Acquisition

NODE TYPE: Known Planet in Alternate Universe

SLIP TYPE: Compound (ParaTerra + Cartesian) (DL6)

PAY: 5M ea

The PCs are hired to hunt down an Owlie who killed an executive and escaped on an alternate Mars.

Three years ago *X Investments* set up a secret ore extraction facility on the Mars of this timeline, using troops to secure its claim against the already-waning Owlie population. The management of Port Armstrong has been bought off in exchange for allowing X.I. slipships in and out without question. X Executives look the other way regarding alternate Earth's underground slave trade, and all pose as "earthlings".

Variant: "The Wrong Dude". He didn't do it. He was framed. The real killer is an X Industries employee.

GM NOTE: If you're using the *Cartesian Exception* rule, this mission may take several days of gametime.

TEAM RIORDAN

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration

NODE TYPE: Dream World

SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)

STABILITY: Permanent (6)

PAY: 3M ea

As the PCs materialize their ship begins to change; they are passengers onboard a rocket which is landing on Mars. In the passenger compartment with them is a shipping tycoon named Riordan, who hands them insurance waivers and pens as he say "Welcome to Team Riordan. It's good to know you'll have my back."

He then proceeds to outline his plan, using a map and a hand-drawn sketch of an Owlie. This is a game-hunt, and it seems the PCs are his hunting party.

Riordan plans to bag himself an Owlie, and he expects the PCs to help him do it.

DREAM VACATION

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Sightseeing/Tourism

NODE TYPE: Dream World

SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)

STABILITY: Historically Stable (5)

PAY: 4M ea

This Dream World has been in operation as a tourist destination for several months now. It features a brief stop to check in at Port Armstrong (where the passengers are assigned their own personal domes), followed by an eight-hour tour of the Martian deserts (just like in the Poul Anderson story!) and a night of listless drinking at the local watering hole. It's the PCs' job to keep things under control.

Tourists seem to like the town for its "wild west" quality. But this time, things get out of hand when the PCs discover that one of their charges is missing. The wayward passenger is some wealthy bastard named Riordan who's known as a big game hunter on Home-Earth. Right now he's heading out into the desert in a rented rocketboat to hunt himself an Owlie.

The PCs may not care what happens to Riordan personally, but realize that if word gets out, it could be bad for the company – and their careers.

PLANET: MARS

PLANET

GRAVITY: 0.34 G
ATMOSPHERE: Nitrogen/Oxygen, Thin
PRESSURE: 0.8 Earth atmospheres
DAY: 24 hrs 37 mins
YEAR: 686.9 Earth days
WATER: No standing water
CLIMATE: Arid
PRECIPITATION: Never (DL12)
BIOSPHERE: Sentient lifeforms

Mars was explored and occupied not long after the first humans landed here. In this universe, the people of Earth saw the Martians as nothing but intelligent animals who made useful slaves. After many decades of forced labor, Martians have finally begun to attain social equality in more forward-thinking regions. Here on the frontier, however, such feelings are relative.

Today the planet is nearly barren, slipping into a slow waterless death. The constant arrival of humans in ships, building installations and establishing outposts, has stamped it with the imprint of the human heel. When the capital city of Ares lifts its hard spires above the hills of Syrtis, where are the ancient gods of Mars?

WISBY

NPC

BRAINS 2 Math+2
CHARM 3 FastTalk+1 Rhetoric+2

TCV 90

Owner of the tradepost at Port Armstrong, Wisby has connections throughout the system. For the right price he'll look the other way while buying or selling goods without trace, leaving the transaction off the records. He can supply just about any contraband, given time. He'll sell hunting equipment, a hawk and a rockhound to Riordan. He dislikes Owlies, and is highly unfond of Kreega, whom he says lives in the *HRAEFNIAN HILLS*.

Right now he has 60 single-use *SUSPENSINE* tanks he's looking to unload. Good price, too: 1M for the lot.

DRUG: SUSPENSINE

DL 1 vs HEALTH – This gas paralyzes efferent nerves, slowing metabolism to near-suspension. The patient can stay alive for weeks in a “conscious coma”. Often used in surgery, it has saved many explorers’ lives. A box of 60 doses is worth 3M on Home-Earth.

PORT ARMSTRONG

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Desert/Scrub
CONDITION: Drying
TERRAIN: Sandy/Powdery
WEATHER: Gentle Wind
BIODIVERSITY: High & stable; many specialized species
DOMINANT COLORS: Reds, Yellows, Tans
RESOURCES: Plantlife, Animal Life, Minerals, Oil
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

Port Armstrong is a dusty huddle of domes connected by tunnels, in a red waste of hot sand stretching out to the untamed hills. Dominating the town is one large dome bearing the sign “Tradepost”. Beside it is a slightly smaller one labeled “Drinkpost”.

The domes form a semicircle around a no-frills launch & land facility, but there are few visitors. It's mostly quiet here, out on the edge of occupied territory.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	Rocket Landing or Launch
4-5	1d6 Wild Owlies with furs/minerals to trade
6	1d6 Locals
7	1d6 City Owlies working for a Human boss
8-9	1d6 Tourists
10	Trader looking to buy/sell
11	Hunter gearing up to enter the wilds
12	Hunter brings in a Wild Owlie, dead

PERCEPTIONS

- The thin air muffles sound almost to inaudibility.
- Even by day, the stars can be seen above.
- Two moons are visible: One is a small speck, the other looks like a bright star.
- A hovercraft comes in bringing a load of supplies from the capital city.
- Tourists poke around and find little to do but get drunk.
- The people here are bored and crass.
- Dark booths in the Drinkpost where shady business deals are made.
- News from Earth and popular music on an old vidscreen in the Drinkpost.
- The bartender works for Wisby, and sends any interesting queries his way.

LOCAL

NPC

HEALTH 2
MIGHT 2
One Skill +1

TCV 20

The people of Port Armstrong fall into two classes: those who like it here, and those who can't leave. Rugged, hardy people, many are laborers or ex-laborers for one of the extraction firms digging for oil in the occupied deserts. 1 out of 6 of them was born here. There's always plenty of *Local Drama* going on.

ENCOUNTERS

- A crafty but naïve young adult (old enough to drink) who'll do anything to get off-planet.
- A fast-talking rocketboat vendor who'll barter with you because he "likes your face".
- Off-duty security guards from a nearby drilling facility, drinking and talking about Owlies.
- An expat earthman who loves political debate and has admirable mechanical skills. An "Owlie Sympathizer", he won't deal with "speciesists".
- (Crisis) A gang of rowdy young laborers just looking for trouble.
- (Crisis) A PC is accused of theft or assault by a local. It's a con, and the cop is another local.

TOURIST

NPC

One Skill +1

TCV 10

Now several decades old, Port Armstrong has lost its appeal as a major point of interest. But it still gets a trickle of budget-conscious tourists who want to get a first-hand look at the "real planet" before it gets "developed" to oblivion.

ENCOUNTERS

- A frumpy, grumpy, overweight tourist family who want to get the most value for their money on everything.
- A traveling entertainer who came here on a whim, and needs to earn money to get home.
- A trio of young activists who have come here "to explore the aboriginal culture" first-hand.

TRADER

NPC

BRAINS 2 Math+1
CHARM 2 FastTalk+1 Rhetoric+1

TCV 40

Certain unscrupulous professionals still find it quite lucrative to include Port Armstrong in their travel itineraries. As the only settlement with a spaceport bordering on unoccupied territory, it's a place where illicit trafficking of all kinds: minerals, furs, explosives, drugs, armaments and slaves – can still be carried out under the lax security of the frontier.

TRADER TYPE (2D6)

2-3 Mineral Trader
4-5 Fur Trader
6 Drug Trader
7 Legal Goods Trader
8-9 Armaments Trader
10-12 Slave Trader

Traders generally travel with an entourage of 1d6 employees, including at least one bodyguard.

RIORDAN (HUNTER)

NPC

BRAINS 2 Survival+2 Medic+1
CHARM 1 Rhetoric+2
GRACE 2 Fist-Fighting+2, Long Gun+2
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 2
PSYCHE 1

TCV 120

Heir and CEO of the gigantic Riordan Systemwide Shipping corporation, Riordan is equally well known as a big game hunter. He's hunted every known game animal on every settled planet and moon in this solar system. Except, of course, an Owlie. That's what he's here for, and he will let nothing stop him.

HUNTER

NPC

Hunters of various types come to Port Armstrong for different reasons: many of them are here to trap Rockhounds or shoot Leapers for sport. While they differ in size, skill, temperament and hunting ability, they do all have one thing in common: total disregard for the living integrity of the environment.

DESERT

SURROUNDINGS: Desert/Scrub

CONDITION: Drying

TERRAIN: Sandy/Powdery

WEATHER: Gentle Wind

BIODIVERSITY: High & stable; many specialized species

DOMINANT COLORS: Reds, Yellows, Tans

RESOURCES: Plantlife, Animal Life, Minerals

UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient

ENCOUNTER DL: Likely (7)

The surrounding deserts are tawny, ochreous and rust-red, the dunes are vast and layered in yellows and red tones, with dusty thorn-bushes, crops of rock and gnarled little trees. There's sand and brush all over everything; even the rocks have a thin coating of their own erosion.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2	Lone Wild Owlie
3-4	Hunting Hawk
5-6	Human Group (1/6 hunters, otherwise tourists)
7	Sandmouse
8-9	Sandsnake
10-11	Sandrunner
12	1d6 Wild Owlies in a solemn group

PERCEPTIONS

- An ancient riverbed, long dry and fossilized. Networks of them crisscross the desert.
- Two wind currents collide forming a whorl, and a tall sand-devil swirls up for several minutes.
- The sound of distant machinery or engines, a high-pitched whine that comes and then goes.
- The wind picks up to a high speed, blowing with a mournful whistling sound over the cliffs, just loud enough to hear.
- Night is unsettling, and unmercifully cold. The brush rustles and things wail in the darkness.
- Sudden flurries of noise, things moving in the brush, or small burrowing things underfoot.
- Nearing the cliffs of the surrounding hills, the sheer walls cause voices and sounds to echo in thin, whispery reflections of themselves.

HRAEFNIAN HILLS

SURROUNDINGS: Rocky High Ground, Canyons, Ravines

CONDITION: Drying

TERRAIN: Rocky/Rough

WEATHER: Gentle Wind

BIODIVERSITY: High & stable; many specialized species

DOMINANT COLORS: Reds, Yellows, Tans

RESOURCES: Plantlife, Animal Life, Minerals

UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient

ENCOUNTER DL: Uncommon (8)

Rough and jagged, more stone than soil, the hills are a tortured wilderness of sand and bush and wind-carved rock. Here and there, the gaunt needles of ancient rock towers reach yards into the sky. The region is labyrinthine: numerous caves, canyons, shaly ravines and scrubby little thickets of dwarfed trees, there are plenty of places to hide.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-4	Lone Wild Owlie
5-6	Martian Sandmouse
7	Martian Hawk
8-10	Leapers
11	2d6 Martian Rockhounds
12	Hunter

PERCEPTIONS

- The brush rustles dryly in your steps, and tiny hidden animals squeak in terror as you pass.
- At night it feels like the whole planet is muttering and threatening in a single voice. Crazy, right?
- Small mammals huddle together under crags, in little caves beneath shadowy dunes.
- A faint *snap* is felt through the ground, as a rock or a tree splits due to temperature shifts.
- Half-sentient lichens grow slowly in your direction if you remain in one place for long.
- A small humanoid silhouette appears on a nearby ridge: it's a Wild Owlie, gazing in the direction of the PCs. A moment later, it's gone.
- A group of Wild Owlies in a canyon engaged in a ritual; the plants and animals are participating by swaying in time and making soft noises.

“OWLIE”

BRAINS 2 Survival+3 Hiding+2
 CHARM 1
 GRACE 2 Clawing+2
 HEALTH 2
 MIGHT 1 Bashing+1
 PSYCHE 2

GEAR:

Pouched Belt, Knife

TCV 160

BODY SHAPE: Triangular torso, roughly humanoid

BODY SURFACE: Covered in tough brown feathers

SYMMETRY: Bilateral

SUSTENANCE: Omnivorous

APPENDAGES: Two forelimbs, two rear limbs

MANIPULATORS: Hands and feet are claw-like, with four digits. All four manipulators may be used as weapons.

SIZE: 4 feet tall

LOCOMOTION: Bipedal

SENSES: Infravision, ultravision, enhanced hearing, olfaction, and a psychic connection with all other Martian lifeforms

REPRODUCTION: Bisexual reproduction

DESCRIPTION: Four feet tall with round, hook-beaked heads, large amber eyes and tufted ears, They resemble tall, thin, owls. Though their genetic makeup is certainly not related to any Earth avians, they soon acquired the slang name "owlies".

Their eyesight is far better than humans' – extending well into the ultraviolet range – and their other senses are equally and amazingly keen. They need very little food, heat or oxygen, and can live for fifteen minutes without breathing at all. Their average lifespan is close to 200 Earth years.

Their legs are long and claw-footed, and their stringy arms end in four-fingered bony hands. Their chests are broad and deep, but their waists are narrow. They're viviparous, warm-blooded, and suckle their young, but gray feathers cover their hides. They typically carry nothing but pouched belts and sheathed knives. Wild Owlies tend to have a larger collection of weapons, sometimes hidden in caches in the canyons, as well as artifacts from the ancient days.

ENCOUNTERS

- 1d6 City Owlies on business for human bosses.
- A City Owlie is punished by his human boss.
- A City Owlie born among humans is begging for a handout or a job, he has no survival skills.
- 1d6 Wild Owlies are gathering for respectful ritual and quiet talk.
- A lone Wild Owlie (perhaps Kreega) is seen "talking" silently to a plant or lesser animal, and it seems to answer him with motions or sounds.
- A lone Wild Owlie is approaching a secret cache to freshen up on arrows and food supplies. Do the PCs encounter the cache first, or the Owlie first? Roll high/low.
- A desperate Wild Owlie (perhaps Kreega) needs medical attention or a hiding-place. If the PCs don't turn out to be friendly, he will attempt to distract or subdue them and make his escape.



“OWLIES”

SOCIETY

The Owlies abandoned the cities, agriculture and neolithic technology of their civilization some 10,000 years ago, and those remaining on the planet now enjoy a psychic symbiosis with the flora and fauna of the planet. They can use this connection to influence plants and animals who may assist in their defense.

While the majority of Owlies have been integrated into human society, there are still “wild owlies” who live in the wilderness, staying far away from the ruins of what once were their great cities, and remaining on the lookout for hunters. The ancient traditions are kept alive by these wild ones: the annual ceremony of the Gathering Season, for instance, brings merriment and a chance to reproduce.

Wild Owlies occasionally come to Port Armstrong to trade furs and minerals for metal goods and wine, which they consider the only valuable things humans have brought here. They usually travel in numbers, for safety against hunters and intolerant humans.

KREEGA

NPC

BRAINS 2 Survival+3 Hiding+2
CHARM 1
GRACE 2 Clawing+1
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 1 Bashing+1
PSYCHE 2

GEAR:

Pouched Belt, Knife, Flint Spear

TCV 140

Kreega is an old, wise, wild Owlie, roughly four feet tall, hated for his longevity and cunning by the shopkeepers of the frontier. Like all his kind, he has deep yellow eyes, ultravision and keen senses.

Kreega lives in *THE TOWER*: a sand-hewn pillar of rock on the edge of the Hraefnian Hills.

THE TOWER

LOCATION

In his tower Kreega keeps a number of tools, a few weapons (some spears, a bow, several dozen arrows and an axe), as well as a collection of small exquisite artworks made by his people.

This collection would be worth 15M on Home-Earth.

HUNTING HAWK

LIFEFORM

GRACE 3 Talons+3
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 1 Beak+1 Wingbeat+1

TCV 110

Bred and trained by humans to be extremely effective in the deserts and shrublands, the Hunting Hawk bears little resemblance to its counterpart of Earth. Its talons are enormous, and due to the thin atmosphere, it requires a six-foot wingspread to lift its small body. Its training by humans inhibits its psychic connection with other Martian lifeforms.

ENCOUNTERS

- A hunter’s hawk circles above a canyon, calling out to its master and seeking its prey.
- (Crisis) A hawk attacks the smallest character.

ROCKHOUND

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Clawing+2
HEALTH 3
MIGHT 2 Leaping+1 Biting+2

TCV 95

Burrowing carnivores domesticated by both Owlies and humans. The rockhound has a broad ribcage and resembles a wolf covered with dark feathers. It tracks prey as well as a bloodhound. When it corners its prey, it howls with a low quavering bay. Like the *HUNTING HAWK*, training by humans inhibits the Rockhound’s psychic connection with other Martian lifeforms.

ENCOUNTERS

- A Trained Rockhound threatens to attack but is called off by its master, a hunter.



GREYVINE

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Grasping+2

TCV 35

A large gray-green clump of vines, this plant twists and turns as directed by the other lifeforms around it, and can assist in holding or guiding enemies into disadvantageous positions. A hit by the vine does not cause Harm. Instead, it causes -1 to all rolls until freed.

ENCOUNTERS

- Resting for a moment, a PC notices that the vines are slowly turning to point toward them.
- A clump of Greyvine suddenly leaps into action, grabbing a small bird that comes too close.
- The PCs witness a person – probably a foolish hunter – under attack by a Greyvine.
- (Crisis) The seemingly-innocuous vines all around them suddenly grab at the PCs from all sides. It's a Greyvine colony. One for each PC.

MARTIAN SANDMOUSE

LIFEFORM

BRAINS 1 Hide+2
GRACE 2 Burrow+2
MIGHT 1 Claws+0
PSYCHE 2

TCV 70

Small burrowing omnivores with short tufty feathers. Crafty and intelligent in their own way, they have a strong sense of connection to other local lifeforms and the surrounding environment.

ENCOUNTERS

- A Sandmouse watches the party curiously, then runs off to tell others.
- 5d6 Sandmice swarm the party, causing delay and distraction while an Owlie gets away.

SANDSNAKE

LIFEFORM

BRAINS 1
GRACE 3 Bite+2 Camouflage+1
MIGHT 1

TCV 135

Burrowing reptiles of the Martian desert, they grow to about 3 feet in length. Their venom is a Toxin DL5 vs HEALTH. Failure causes -1 to GRACE and MIGHT.

ENCOUNTERS

- (Crisis) A PC is attacked by a Sandsnake which pops out of the ground near their feet.

LEAPER

LIFEFORM

GRACE 3 Bite+1
HEALTH 1

TCV 25

Two feet long, with feathery scales and a vicious beak, the Leaper resembles a massive carnivorous grasshopper. Its powerful backward-bending legs allow it to jump up to thirty feet in the thin air, landing on its prey. They are usually found in groups of 5-30 (5d6).

ENCOUNTERS

- A lone Leaper falls upon a random character.
- 1d6 Leapers hurry through the canyon as though fleeing from something. What's chasing them? Another encounter will follow in a minute.
- (Crisis) The PCs have wandered into a breeding ground. They are surrounded by dozens of Leapers who are unhappy with their presence.

SANDRUNNER

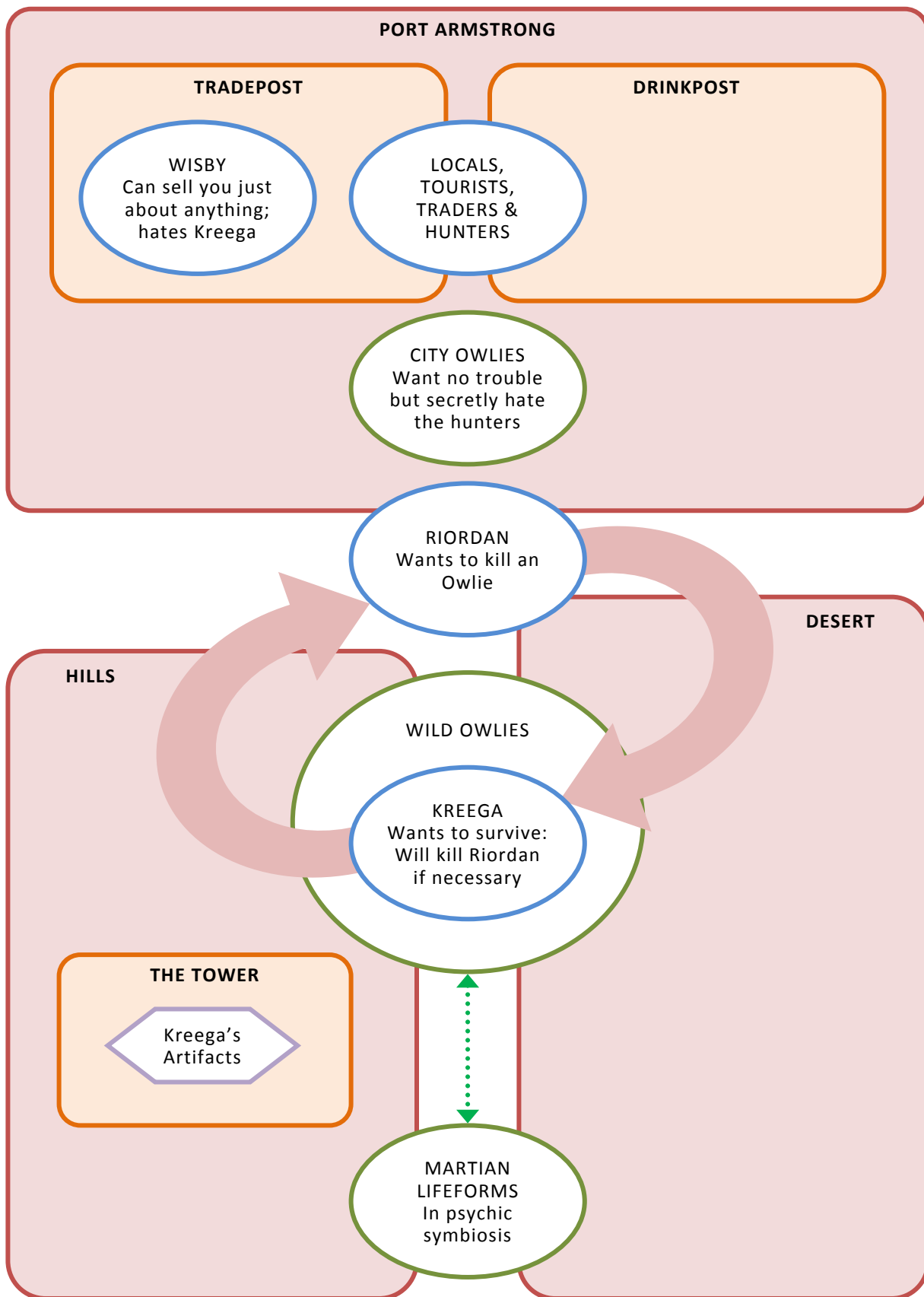
LIFEFORM

A small bird with a soft trill, native to the local hills and canyons. They are harmless to humans.

ENCOUNTERS

- The soft trill of a Sandrunner is heard nearby. Or is it a Wild Owlie, imitating the bird's call?
- A flock of Sandrunners erupts from a nearby copse; something must have startled them. Another encounter will occur in a minute.

HUNTER/HUNTED



DUEL ON SYRTIS

by Poul Anderson

**From the firedrakes of Mercury to the ice-crawlers of Pluto, he'd slain them all. But his trophy-room lacked one item; and now Riordan swore he'd bag the forbidden game that roamed the red deserts ...
a Martian!**

The night whispered the message. Over the many miles of loneliness it was borne, carried on the wind, rustled by the half-sentient lichens and the dwarfed trees, murmured from one to another of the little creatures that huddled under crags, in caves, by shadowy dunes. In no words, but in a dim pulsing of dread which echoed through Kreega's brain, the warning ran—

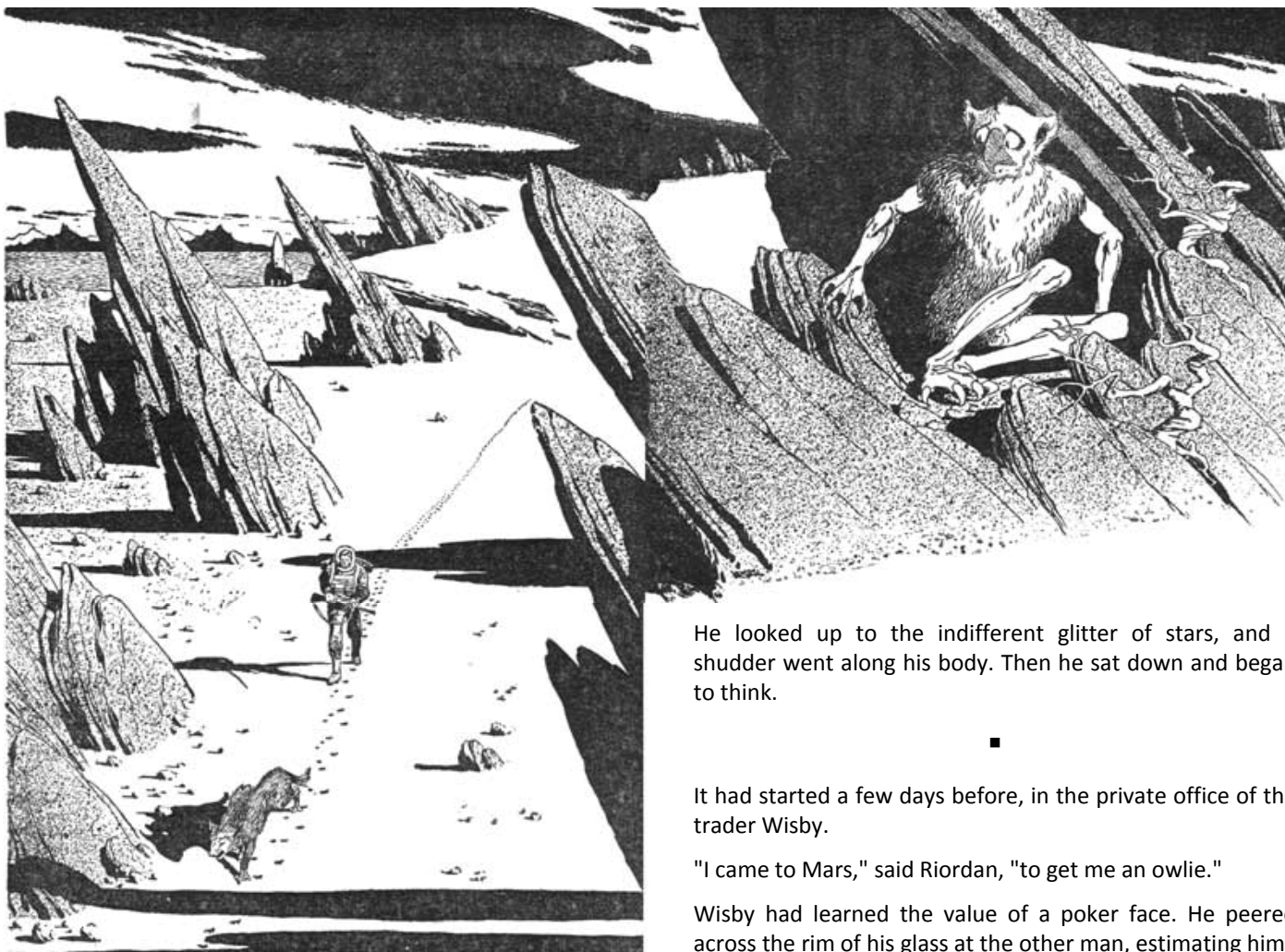
They are hunting again.

Kreega shuddered in a sudden blast of wind. The night was enormous around him, above him, from the iron bitterness of the hills to the wheeling, glittering constellations light-years over his head. He reached out with his trembling perceptions, tuning himself to the brush and the wind and the small burrowing things underfoot, letting the night speak to him.

Alone, alone. There was not another Martian for a hundred miles of emptiness. There were only the tiny animals and the shivering brush and the thin, sad blowing of the wind.

The voiceless scream of dying traveled through the brush, from plant to plant, echoed by the fear-pulses of the animals and the ringingly reflecting cliffs. They were curling, shriveling and blackening as the rocket poured the glowing death down on them, and the withering veins and nerves cried to the stars.

Kreega huddled against a tall gaunt crag. His eyes were like yellow moons in the darkness, cold with terror and hate and a slowly gathering resolution. Grimly, he estimated that the death was being sprayed in a circle some ten miles across. And he was trapped in it, and soon the hunter would come after him.



He looked up to the indifferent glitter of stars, and a shudder went along his body. Then he sat down and began to think.

■

It had started a few days before, in the private office of the trader Wisby.

"I came to Mars," said Riordan, "to get me an owlie."

Wisby had learned the value of a poker face. He peered across the rim of his glass at the other man, estimating him.

Even in God-forsaken holes like Port Armstrong one had heard of Riordan. Heir to a million-dollar shipping firm which he himself had pyramided into a System-wide monster, he was equally well known as a big game hunter. From the firedrakes of Mercury to the ice crawlers of Pluto, he'd bagged them all. Except, of course, a Martian. That particular game was forbidden now.

He sprawled in his chair, big and strong and ruthless, still a young man. He dwarfed the unkempt room with his size and the hard-held dynamo strength in him, and his cold green gaze dominated the trader.

"It's illegal, you know," said Wisby. "It's a twenty-year sentence if you're caught at it."

"Bah! The Martian Commissioner is at Ares, halfway round the planet. If we go at it right, who's ever to know?" Riordan gulped at his drink. "I'm well aware that in another year or so they'll have tightened up enough to make it impossible. This is the last chance for any man to get an owlie. That's why I'm here."

Wisby hesitated, looking out the window. Port Armstrong was no more than a dusty huddle of domes, interconnected by tunnels, in a red waste of sand stretching to the near horizon. An Earthman in airsuit and transparent helmet was walking down the street and a couple of Martians were lounging against a wall. Otherwise nothing—a silent, deadly monotony brooding under the shrunken sun. Life on Mars was not especially pleasant for a human.

"You're not falling into this owlie-loving that's corrupted all Earth?" demanded Riordan contemptuously.

"Oh, no," said Wisby. "I keep them in their place around my post. But times are changing. It can't be helped."

"There was a time when they were slaves," said Riordan. "Now those old women on Earth want to give 'em the vote." He snorted.

"Well, times are changing," repeated Wisby mildly. "When the first humans landed on Mars a hundred years ago, Earth had just gone through the Hemispheric Wars. The worst wars man had ever known. They damned near wrecked the old ideas of liberty and equality. People were suspicious and tough—they'd had to be, to survive. They weren't able to—to empathize the Martians, or whatever you call it. Not able to think of them as anything but intelligent animals. And Martians made such useful slaves—they need so little food or heat or oxygen, they can even live fifteen minutes or so without breathing at all. And the wild Martians made fine sport—intelligent game, that could get away as often as not, or even manage to kill the hunter."

"I know," said Riordan. "That's why I want to hunt one. It's no fun if the game doesn't have a chance."

"It's different now," went on Wisby. "Earth has been at peace for a long time. The liberals have gotten the upper hand. Naturally, one of their first reforms was to end Martian slavery."

Riordan swore. The forced repatriation of Martians working on his spaceships had cost him plenty. "I haven't time for your philosophizing," he said. "If you can arrange for me to get a Martian, I'll make it worth your while."

"How much worth it?" asked Wisby.

■

They haggled for a while before settling on a figure. Riordan had brought guns and a small rocketboat, but Wisby would have to supply radioactive material, a "hawk," and a rockhound. Then he had to be paid for the risk of legal action, though that was small. The final price came high.

"Now, where do I get my Martian?" inquired Riordan. He gestured at the two in the street. "Catch one of them and release him in the desert?"

It was Wisby's turn to be contemptuous. "One of them? Hah! Town loungers! A city dweller from Earth would give you a better fight."

The Martians didn't look impressive. They stood only some four feet high on skinny, claw-footed legs, and the arms, ending in bony four-fingered hands, were stringy. The chests were broad and deep, but the waists were ridiculously narrow. They were viviparous, warm-blooded, and suckled their young, but gray feathers covered their hides. The round, hook-beaked heads, with huge amber eyes and tufted feather ears, showed the origin of the name "owlie." They wore only pouched belts and carried sheath knives; even the liberals of Earth weren't ready to allow the natives modern tools and weapons. There were too many old grudges.

"The Martians always were good fighters," said Riordan. "They wiped out quite a few Earth settlements in the old days."

"The wild ones," agreed Wisby. "But not these. They're just stupid laborers, as dependent on our civilization as we are. You want a real old timer, and I know where one's to be found."

He spread a map on the desk. "See, here in the Hraefnian Hills, about a hundred miles from here. These Martians live a long time, maybe two centuries, and this fellow Kreega has been around since the first Earthmen came. He led a lot of Martian raids in the early days, but since the general amnesty and peace he's lived all alone up there, in one of the old ruined towers. A real old-time warrior who hates Earthmen's guts. He comes here once in a while with furs and minerals to trade, so I know a little about him." Wisby's eyes gleamed savagely. "You'll be doing us all a favor by shooting the arrogant bastard. He struts around here as if the place belonged to him. And he'll give you a run for your money."

Riordan's massive dark head nodded in satisfaction.

■

The man had a bird and a rockhound. That was bad. Without them, Kreega could lose himself in the labyrinth of caves and canyons and scrubby thickets—but the hound could follow his scent and the bird could spot him from above.

To make matters worse, the man had landed near Kreega's tower. The weapons were all there—now he was cut off, unarmed and alone save for what feeble help the desert life could give. Unless he could double back to the place somehow—but meanwhile he had to survive.

He sat in a cave, looking down past a tortured wilderness of sand and bush and wind-carved rock, miles in the thin clear air to the glitter of metal where the rocket lay. The man was a tiny speck in the huge barren landscape, a lonely insect crawling under the deep-blue sky. Even by day, the stars glistened in the tenuous atmosphere. Weak pallid sunlight spilled over rocks tawny and ochrous and rust-red, over the low dusty thorn-bushes and the gnarled little trees and the sand that blew faintly between them. Equatorial Mars!

Lonely or not, the man had a gun that could spang death clear to the horizon, and he had his beasts, and there would be a radio in the rocketboat for calling his fellows. And the glowing death ringed them in, a charmed circle which Kreega could not cross without bringing a worse death on himself than the rifle would give—

Or was there a worse death than that—to be shot by a monster and have his stuffed hide carried back as a trophy for fools to gape at? The old iron pride of his race rose in Kreega, hard and bitter and unrelenting. He didn't ask much of life these days—solitude in his tower to think the long thoughts of a Martian and create the small exquisite artworks which he loved; the company of his kind at the Gathering Season, grave ancient ceremony and acrid merriment and the chance to beget and rear sons; an occasional trip to the Earthling settling for the metal goods and the wine which were the only valuable things they had brought to Mars; a vague dream of raising his folk to a place where they could stand as equals before all the universe. No more. And now they would take even this from him!

He rasped a curse on the human and resumed his patient work, chipping a spearhead for what puny help it could give him. The brush rustled dryly in alarm, tiny hidden animals squeaked their terror, the desert shouted to him of the monster that strode toward his cave. But he didn't have to flee right away.

The man had landed near Kreega's tower. The weapons were all there—now he was cut off unless he could double back to the place somehow—but meanwhile he had to survive.

■
Riordan sprayed the heavy-metal isotope in a ten-mile circle around the old tower. He did that by night, just in case patrol craft might be snooping around. But once he had landed, he was safe—he could always claim to be peacefully exploring, hunting leapers or some such thing.

The radioactive had a half-life of about four days, which meant that it would be unsafe to approach for some three weeks—two at the minimum. That was time enough, when the Martian was boxed in so small an area.

There was no danger that he would try to cross it. The owlies had learned what radioactivity meant, back when they fought the humans. And their vision, extending well into the ultra-violet, made it directly visible to them through its fluorescence—to say nothing of the wholly unhuman extra senses they had. No, Kreega would try to hide, and perhaps to fight, and eventually he'd be cornered.

Still, there was no use taking chances. Riordan set a timer on the boat's radio. If he didn't come back within two weeks to turn it off, it would emit a signal which Wisby would hear, and he'd be rescued.

He checked his other equipment. He had an airsuit designed for Martian conditions, with a small pump operated by a power-beam from the boat to compress the atmosphere sufficiently for him to breathe it. The same unit recovered enough water from his breath so that the weight of supplies for several days was, in Martian gravity, not too great for him to bear. He had a .45 rifle built to shoot in Martian air, that was heavy enough for his purposes. And, of course, compass and binoculars and sleeping bag. Pretty light equipment, but he preferred a minimum anyway.

For ultimate emergencies there was the little tank of suspensine. By turning a valve, he could release it into his air system. The gas didn't exactly induce suspended animation, but it paralyzed efferent nerves and slowed the overall metabolism to a point where a man could live for weeks on one lungful of air. It was useful in surgery, and had saved the life of more than one interplanetary explorer whose oxygen system went awry. But Riordan didn't expect to have to use it. He certainly hoped he wouldn't. It would be tedious to lie fully conscious for days waiting for the automatic signal to call Wisby.

He stepped out of the boat and locked it. No danger that the owlie would break in if he should double back; it would take tordenite to crack that hull.

He whistled to his animals. They were native beasts, long ago domesticated by the Martians and later by man. The rockhound was like a gaunt wolf, but huge-breasted and feathered, a tracker as good as any Terrestrial bloodhound. The "hawk" had less resemblance to its counterpart of Earth: it was a bird of prey, but in the tenuous atmosphere it needed a six-foot wingspread to lift its small body. Riordan was pleased with their training.

The hound bayed, a low quavering note which would have been muffled almost to inaudibility by the thin air and the man's plastic helmet had the suit not included microphones and amplifiers. It circled, sniffing, while the hawk rose into the alien sky.

Riordan did not look closely at the tower. It was a crumbling stump atop a rusty hill, unhuman and grotesque. Once, perhaps ten thousand years ago, the Martians had had a civilization of sorts, cities and agriculture and a neolithic technology. But according to their own traditions they had achieved a union or symbiosis with the wild life of the planet and had abandoned such mechanical aids as unnecessary. Riordan snorted.

The hound bayed again. The noise seemed to hang eerily in the still, cold air; to shiver from cliff and crag and die reluctantly under the enormous silence. But it was a bugle call, a haughty challenge to a world grown old—stand aside, make way, here comes the conqueror!

The animal suddenly loped forward. He had a scent. Riordan swung into a long, easy low-gravity stride. His eyes gleamed like green ice. The hunt was begun!

■

Breath sobbed in Kreega's lungs, hard and quick and raw. His legs felt weak and heavy, and the thudding of his heart seemed to shake his whole body.

Still he ran, while the frightful clamor rose behind him and the padding of feet grew ever nearer. Leaping, twisting, bounding from crag to crag, sliding down shaly ravines and slipping through clumps of trees, Kreega fled.

The hound was behind him and the hawk soaring overhead. In a day and a night they had driven him to this, running like a crazed leaper with death baying at his heels—he had not imagined a human could move so fast or with such endurance.

The desert fought for him; the plants with their queer blind life that no Earthling would ever understand were on his side. Their thorny branches twisted away as he darted through and then came back to rake the flanks of the hound, slow him—but they could not stop his brutal rush. He ripped past their strengthless clutching fingers and yammered on the trail of the Martian.

The human was toiling a good mile behind, but showed no sign of tiring. Still Kreega ran. He had to reach the cliff edge before the hunter saw him through his rifle sights—had to, had to, and the hound was snarling a yard behind now.

Up the long slope he went. The hawk fluttered, striking at him, seeking to lay beak and talons in his head. He batted at the creature with his spear and dodged around a tree. The tree snaked out a branch from which the hound rebounded, yelling till the rocks rang.

The Martian burst onto the edge of the cliff. It fell sheer to the canyon floor, five hundred feet of iron-streaked rock

tumbling into windy depths. Beyond, the lowering sun glared in his eyes. He paused only an instant, etched black against the sky, a perfect shot if the human should come into view, and then he sprang over the edge.

He had hoped the rockhound would go shooting past, but the animal braked itself barely in time. Kreega went down the cliff face, clawing into every tiny crevice, shuddering as the age-worn rock crumbled under his fingers. The hawk swept close, hacking at him and screaming for its master. He couldn't fight it, not with every finger and toe needed to hang against shattering death, but—

He slid along the face of the precipice into a gray-green clump of vines, and his nerves thrilled forth the appeal of the ancient symbiosis. The hawk swooped again and he lay unmoving, rigid as if dead, until it cried in shrill triumph and settled on his shoulder to pluck out his eyes.

Then the vines stirred. They weren't strong, but their thorns sank into the flesh and it couldn't pull loose. Kreega toiled on down into the canyon while the vines pulled the hawk apart.

Riordan loomed hugely against the darkening sky. He fired, once, twice, the bullets humming wickedly close, but as shadows swept up from the depths the Martian was covered.

The man turned up his speech amplifier and his voice rolled and boomed monstrosly through the gathering night, thunder such as dry Mars had not heard for millennia: "Score one for you! But it isn't enough! I'll find you!"

The sun slipped below the horizon and night came down like a falling curtain. Through the darkness Kreega heard the man laughing. The old rocks trembled with his laughter.

■

Riordan was tired with the long chase and the niggling insufficiency of his oxygen supply. He wanted a smoke and hot food, and neither was to be had. Oh, well, he'd appreciate the luxuries of life all the more when he got home—with the Martian's skin.

He grinned as he made camp. The little fellow was a worthwhile quarry, that was for damn sure. He'd held out for two days now, in a little ten-mile circle of ground, and he'd even killed the hawk. But Riordan was close enough to him now so that the hound could follow his spoor, for Mars had no watercourses to break a trail. So it didn't matter.

Ten thousand years ago the Martians had had cities and agriculture and technology. But they had achieved a symbiosis with the wild life of the planet and had abandoned such mechanical aids.

He lay watching the splendid night of stars. It would get cold before long, unmercifully cold, but his sleeping bag was a good-enough insulator to keep him warm with the help of solar energy stored during the day by its Gergen cells. Mars was dark at night, its moons of little help—Phobos a hurtling speck, Deimos merely a bright star. Dark and cold and empty. The rockhound had burrowed into the loose sand nearby, but it would raise the alarm if the Martian should come sneaking near the camp. Not that that was likely—he'd have to find shelter somewhere too, if he didn't want to freeze.

The bushes and the trees and the little furtive animals whispered a word he could not hear, chattered and gossiped on the wind about the Martian who kept himself warm with work. But he didn't understand that language which was no language.

Drowsily, Riordan thought of past hunts. The big game of Earth, lion and tiger and elephant and buffalo and sheep on the high sun-blazing peaks of the Rockies. Rain forests of Venus and the coughing roar of a many-legged swamp monster crashing through the trees to the place where he stood waiting. Primitive throb of drums in a hot wet night, chant of beaters dancing around a fire—scramble along the hell-plains of Mercury with a swollen sun licking against his puny insulating suit—the grandeur and desolation of Neptune's liquid-gas swamps and the huge blind thing that screamed and blundered after him—

But this was the loneliest and strangest and perhaps most dangerous hunt of all, and on that account the best. He had no malice toward the Martian; he respected the little being's courage as he respected the bravery of the other animals he had fought. Whatever trophy he brought home from this chase would be well earned.

The fact that his success would have to be treated discreetly didn't matter. He hunted less for the glory of it—though he had to admit he didn't mind the publicity—than for love. His ancestors had fought under one name or another—viking, Crusader, mercenary, rebel, patriot, whatever was fashionable at the moment. Struggle was in his blood, and in these degenerate days there was little to struggle against save what he hunted.

Well—tomorrow—he drifted off to sleep.

■

He woke in the short gray dawn, made a quick breakfast, and whistled his hound to heel. His nostrils dilated with excitement, a high keen drunkenness that sang wonderfully within him. Today—maybe today!

They had to take a roundabout way down into the canyon and the hound cast about for an hour before he picked up the scent. Then the deep-voiced cry rose again and they were off—more slowly now, for it was a cruel stony trail.

The sun climbed high as they worked along the ancient river-bed. Its pale chill light washed needle-sharp crags and

fantastically painted cliffs, shale and sand and the wreck of geological ages. The low harsh brush crunched under the man's feet, writhing and crackling its impotent protest. Otherwise it was still, a deep and taut and somehow waiting stillness.

The hound shattered the quiet with an eager yelp and plunged forward. Hot scent! Riordan dashed after him, trampling through dense bush, panting and swearing and grinning with excitement.

Suddenly the brush opened underfoot. With a howl of dismay, the hound slid down the sloping wall of the pit it had covered. Riordan flung himself forward with tigerish swiftness, flat down on his belly with one hand barely catching the animal's tail. The shock almost pulled him into the hole too. He wrapped one arm around a bush that clawed at his helmet and pulled the hound back.

Shaking, he peered into the trap. It had been well made—about twenty feet deep, with walls as straight and narrow as the sand would allow, and skillfully covered with brush. Planted in the bottom were three wicked-looking flint spears. Had he been a shade less quick in his reactions, he would have lost the hound and perhaps himself.

He skinned his teeth in a wolf-grin and looked around. The owlie must have worked all night on it. Then he couldn't be far away—and he'd be very tired—

As if to answer his thoughts, a boulder crashed down from the nearer cliff wall. It was a monster, but a falling object on Mars has less than half the acceleration it does on Earth. Riordan scrambled aside as it boomed onto the place where he had been lying.

"Come on!" he yelled, and plunged toward the cliff.

For an instant a gray form loomed over the edge, hurled a spear at him. Riordan snapped a shot at it, and it vanished. The spear glanced off the tough fabric of his suit and he scrambled up a narrow ledge to the top of the precipice.

The Martian was nowhere in sight, but a faint red trail led into the rugged hill country. *Winged him, by God!* The hound was slower in negotiating the shale-covered trail; his own feet were bleeding when he came up. Riordan cursed him and they set out again.

For an instant a gray form loomed over the edge, hurled a spear at him. Riordan snapped a shot at it, and it vanished.

They followed the trail for a mile or two and then it ended. Riordan looked around the wilderness of trees and needles which blocked view in any direction. Obviously the owlie had backtracked and climbed up one of those rocks, from which he could take a flying leap to some other point. But which one?

Sweat which he couldn't wipe off ran down the man's face and body. He itched intolerably, and his lungs were raw from gasping at his dole of air. But still he laughed in gusty delight. What a chase! What a chase!

■

Kreega lay in the shadow of a tall rock and shuddered with weariness. Beyond the shade, the sunlight danced in what to him was a blinding, intolerable dazzle, hot and cruel and life-hungry, hard and bright as the metal of the conquerors.

It had been a mistake to spend priceless hours when he might have been resting working on that trap. It hadn't worked, and he might have known that it wouldn't. And now he was hungry, and thirst was like a wild beast in his mouth and throat, and still they followed him.

They weren't far behind now. All this day they had been dogging him; he had never been more than half an hour ahead. No rest, no rest, a devil's hunt through a tormented wilderness of stone and sand, and now he could only wait for the battle with an iron burden of exhaustion laid on him.

The wound in his side burned. It wasn't deep, but it had cost him blood and pain and the few minutes of catnapping he might have snatched.

For a moment, the warrior Kreega was gone and a lonely, frightened infant sobbed in the desert silence. *Why can't they let me alone?*

A low, dusty-green bush rustled. A sandrunner piped in one of the ravines. They were getting close.

Wearily, Kreega scrambled up on top of the rock and crouched low. He had backtracked to it; they should by rights go past him toward his tower.

He could see it from here, a low yellow ruin worn by the winds of millennia. There had only been time to dart in, snatch a bow and a few arrows and an axe. Pitiful weapons—the arrows could not penetrate the Earthman's suit when there was only a Martian's thin grasp to draw the bow, and even with a steel head the axe was a small and feeble thing. But it was all he had, he and his few little allies of a desert which fought only to keep its solitude.

Repatriated slaves had told him of the Earthlings' power. Their roaring machines filled the silence of their own deserts, gouged the quiet face of their own moon, shook the planets with a senseless fury of meaningless energy. They were the conquerors, and it never occurred to them that an ancient peace and stillness could be worth preserving.

Well—he fitted an arrow to the string and crouched in the silent, flimmering sunlight, waiting.

The hound came first, yelping and howling. Kreega drew the bow as far as he could. But the human had to come near first—

There he came, running and bounding over the rocks, rifle in hand and restless eyes shining with taut green light, closing in for the death. Kreega swung softly around. The beast was beyond the rock now, the Earthman almost below it.

The bow twanged. With a savage thrill, Kreega saw the arrow go through the hound, saw the creature leap in the air and then roll over and over, howling and biting at the thing in its breast.

Like a gray thunderbolt, the Martian launched himself off the rock, down at the human. If his axe could shatter that helmet—

He struck the man and they went down together. Wildly, the Martian hewed. The axe glanced off the plastic—he hadn't had room for a swing. Riordan roared and lashed out with a fist. Retching, Kreega rolled backward.

Riordan snapped a shot at him. Kreega turned and fled. The man got to one knee, sighting carefully on the gray form that streaked up the nearest slope.

A little sandsnake darted up the man's leg and wrapped about his wrist. Its small strength was just enough to pull the gun aside. The bullet screamed past Kreega's ear as he vanished into a cleft.

He felt the thin death-agony of the snake as the man pulled it loose and crushed it underfoot. Somewhat later, he heard a dull boom echoing between the hills. The man had gotten explosives from his boat and blown up the tower.

He had lost axe and bow. Now he was utterly weaponless, without even a place to retire for a last stand. And the hunter would not give up. Even without his animals, he would follow, more slowly but as relentlessly as before.

Kreega collapsed on a shelf of rock. Dry sobbing racked his thin body, and the sunset wind cried with him.

Presently he looked up, across a red and yellow immensity to the low sun. Long shadows were creeping over the land, peace and stillness for a brief moment before the iron cold of night closed down. Somewhere the soft trill of a sandrunner echoed between low wind-worn cliffs, and the brush began to speak, whispering back and forth in its ancient wordless tongue.

The desert, the planet and its wind and sand under the high cold stars, the clean open land of silence and loneliness and a destiny which was not man's, spoke to him. The enormous oneness of life on Mars, drawn together against the cruel environment, stirred in his blood. As the sun went down and the stars blossomed forth in awesome frosty glory, Kreega began to think again.

He felt the thin death-agony of the snake as the man pulled it loose and crushed it underfoot. Somewhat later, he heard a dull boom echoing between the hills. The man had gotten explosives from his boat and blown up the tower.

He did not hate his persecutor, but the grimness of Mars was in him. He fought the war of all which was old and primitive and lost in its own dreams against the alien and the desecrator. It was as ancient and pitiless as life, that war, and each battle won or lost meant something even if no one ever heard of it.

You do not fight alone, whispered the desert. You fight for all Mars, and we are with you.

Something moved in the darkness, a tiny warm form running across his hand, a little feathered mouse-like thing that burrowed under the sand and lived its small fugitive life and was glad in its own way of living. But it was a part of a world, and Mars has no pity in its voice.

Still, a tenderness was within Kreega's heart, and he whispered gently in the language that was not a language, *You will do this for us? You will do it, little brother?*

■

Riordan was too tired to sleep well. He had lain awake for a long time, thinking, and that is not good for a man alone in the Martian hills.

So now the rockhound was dead too. It didn't matter, the owlie wouldn't escape. But somehow the incident brought home to him the immensity and the age and the loneliness of the desert.

It whispered to him. The brush rustled and something wailed in darkness and the wind blew with a wild mournful sound over faintly starlit cliffs, and it was as if they all somehow had voice, as if the whole world muttered and threatened him in the night. Dimly, he wondered if man would ever subdue Mars, if the human race had not finally run across something bigger than itself.

But that was nonsense. Mars was old and worn-out and barren, dreaming itself into slow death. The tramp of human feet, shouts of men and roar of sky-storming rockets, were waking it, but to a new destiny, to man's. When Ares lifted its hard spires above the hills of Syrtis, where then were the ancient gods of Mars?

It was cold, and the cold deepened as the night wore on. The stars were fire and ice, glittering diamonds in the deep crystal dark. Now and then he could hear a faint snapping borne through the earth as rock or tree split open. The wind laid itself to rest, sound froze to death, there was only the hard clear starlight falling through space to shatter on the ground.

Once something stirred. He woke from a restless sleep and saw a small thing skittering toward him. He groped for the rifle beside his sleeping bag, then laughed harshly. It was only a sandmouse. But it proved that the Martian had no chance of sneaking up on him while he rested.

He didn't laugh again. The sound had echoed too hollowly in his helmet.

With the clear bitter dawn he was up. He wanted to get the hunt over with. He was dirty and unshaven inside the unit, sick of iron rations pushed through the airlock, stiff and sore with exertion. Lacking the hound, which he'd had to shoot, tracking would be slow, but he didn't want to go back to Port Armstrong for another. No, hell take that Martian, he'd have the devil's skin soon!

Breakfast and a little moving made him feel better. He looked with a practiced eye for the Martian's trail. There was sand and brush over everything, even the rocks had a thin coating of their own erosion. The owlie couldn't cover his tracks perfectly—if he tried, it would slow him too much. Riordan fell into a steady jog.

Noon found him on higher ground, rough hills with gaunt needles of rock reaching yards into the sky. He kept going, confident of his own ability to wear down the quarry. He'd run deer to earth back home, day after day until the animal's heart broke and it waited quivering for him to come.

The trail looked clear and fresh now. He tensed with the knowledge that the Martian couldn't be far away.

Too clear! Could this be bait for another trap? He hefted the rifle and proceeded more warily. But no, there wouldn't have been time—

He mounted a high ridge and looked over the grim, fantastic landscape. Near the horizon he saw a blackened strip, the border of his radioactive barrier. The Martian couldn't go further, and if he doubled back Riordan would have an excellent chance of spotting him.

He tuned up his speaker and let his voice roar into the stillness: "Come out, owlie! I'm going to get you, you might as well come out now and be done with it!"

The echoes took it up, flying back and forth between the naked crags, trembling and shivering under the brassy arch of sky. *Come out, come out, come out—*

The Martian seemed to appear from thin air, a gray ghost rising out of the jumbled stones and standing poised not twenty feet away. For an instant, the shock of it was too much; Riordan gaped in disbelief. Kreega waited, quivering ever so faintly as if he were a mirage.

Then the man shouted and lifted his rifle. Still the Martian stood there as if carved in gray stone, and with a shock of disappointment Riordan thought that he had, after all, decided to give himself to an inevitable death.

Well, it had been a good hunt. "So long," whispered Riordan, and squeezed the trigger.

Since the sandmouse had crawled into the barrel, the gun exploded.

■

Riordan heard the roar and saw the barrel peel open like a rotten banana. He wasn't hurt, but as he staggered back from the shock Kreega lunged at him.

The Martian was four feet tall, and skinny and weaponless, but he hit the Earthling like a small tornado. His legs wrapped around the man's waist and his hands got to work on the airhose.

Riordan went down under the impact. He snarled, tigerishly, and fastened his hands on the Martian's narrow throat. Kreega snapped futilely at him with his beak. They rolled over in a cloud of dust. The brush began to chatter excitedly.

Riordan tried to break Kreega's neck—the Martian twisted away, bored in again.

With a shock of horror, the man heard the hiss of escaping air as Kreega's beak and fingers finally worried the airhose loose. An automatic valve clamped shut, but there was no connection with the pump now—

Riordan cursed, and got his hands about the Martian's throat again. Then he simply lay there, squeezing, and not all Kreega's writhing and twistings could break that grip.

Riordan smiled sleepily and held his hands in place. After five minutes or so Kreega was still. Riordan kept right on throttling him for another five minutes, just to make sure. Then he let go and fumbled at his back, trying to reach the pump.

The air in his suit was hot and foul. He couldn't quite reach around to connect the hose to the pump—

Poor design, he thought vaguely. But then, these airsuits weren't meant for battle armor.

He looked at the slight, silent form of the Martian. A faint breeze ruffled the gray feathers. What a fighter the little guy had been! He'd be the pride of the trophy room, back on Earth.

Let's see now—He unrolled his sleeping bag and spread it carefully out. He'd never make it to the rocket with what air he had, so it was necessary to let the suspensine into his suit. But he'd have to get inside the bag, lest the nights freeze his blood solid.

He crawled in, fastening the flaps carefully, and opened the valve on the suspensine tank. Lucky he had it—but then, a good hunter thinks of everything. He'd get awfully bored, lying here till Wisby caught the signal in ten days or so and came to find him, but he'd last. It would be an experience to remember. In this dry air, the Martian's skin would keep perfectly well.

He felt the paralysis creep up on him, the waning of heartbeat and lung action. His senses and mind were still alive, and he grew aware that complete relaxation has its unpleasant aspects. Oh, well—he'd won. He'd killed the wiliest game with his own hands.

Presently Kreega sat up. He felt himself gingerly. There seemed to be a rib broken—well, that could be fixed. He was still alive. He'd been choked for a good ten minutes, but a Martian can last fifteen without air.

He opened the sleeping bag and got Riordan's keys. Then he limped slowly back to the rocket. A day or two of experimentation taught him how to fly it. He'd go to his kinsmen near Syrtis. Now that they had an Earthly machine, and Earthly weapons to copy—

But there was other business first. He didn't hate Riordan, but Mars is a hard world. He went back and dragged the Earthling into a cave and hid him beyond all possibility of human search parties finding him.

For a while he looked into the man's eyes. Horror stared dumbly back at him. He spoke slowly, in halting English: "For those you killed, and for being a stranger on a world that does not want you, and against the day when Mars is free, I leave you."

Before departing, he got several oxygen tanks from the boat and hooked them into the man's air supply. That was quite a bit of air for one in suspended animation. Enough to keep him alive for a thousand years.



HALKON'S TREASURE

Based on "Loot of the Void"
by Edwin K. Sloat



OBSTACLES

Dangerous Environment - Hexcrawl
Dangerous Environment - Inferno Range
Dangerous People - Other Treasure Seekers
Dangerous People - Helgers' Crew
Dangerous People - Rival DayTrippers
Monster/Enemy - Giant Spiders
Monster/Enemy - Spider Attendant
Monster/Enemy - Spider Queen
Wildlife/Animals - Giant Symphala
Wildlife/Animals - Giant Ranatra

COMPLICATIONS

Scant Intel
Involves Criminal Motives

PERKS

50 MV

MAGUFFINS

Data/Report on Titan
Titanian Lifeforms
Heatstone (1M)
Spider Venom (1M)
Ranatra Saliva (2M)
Queens Venom (6M)
Lifestone (100M)
Halkon's Treasure (185M)

BACKSTORY

Titan is a fearsomely inhospitable place, with a well-known reputation among spacefaring adventurers. Temperatures here fluctuate daily between freezing and boiling, and the hostile population of intelligent spiders makes it spectacularly unpopular as a travel destination. In other words, it's an ideal place to hide things no one's supposed to find.

That was the realization of a legendary character named Orion Halkon, also known as "Halkon the Pirate", who is said to have been the only person ever to have mapped the entirety of Titan's *Inferno Range*. According to one version of the legend, he hid his amassed treasure somewhere within this hostile territory – some say within the fabled *Cavern of the Living Dead*, but no one knows for sure. When Halkon was killed in an explosive arms stand-off with planetary security forces, the secret location of his treasure died with him ... *Or did it?*

The PCs will travel to Titan and find themselves in a position to answer that question – if giant spiders and a gang of murderous rivals don't kill them first.

THE PIRATE'S HEIR

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Historically Stable (5)
PAY: 3M ea

The SlipShip materializes as a *Space Sphere* docked to the passenger cruiser *Western Star*, and the PCs are accepted onboard as welcome guests, as if everyone here expected them. Choose the PC with the most rugged appearance. This PC turns out to be the *spitting image* of Halkon the Pirate, apparently a direct descendant of same. And famous, it seems.

A few hours later, a courier is killed trying to deliver a map intended for the pirate's heir. The map, drawn on paper, is torn in half; the murderer absconds with one portion. The remaining portion depicts a tunnel complex assumed to house *Halkon's Treasure* – but not how to get there.

Next, *Irma Boardle* will attempt to steal the fragment. She escapes into the ship's corridors with or without it, to rejoin *Helgers* and his crew on *The Osprey*. They'll then fuel up and take off for Titan, leaving the PCs to put the clues together. The *Osprey's* journey will take ten days. The *Sphere* can do it in nine.

THE BEST KEPT SECRET EVERYBODY KNOWS

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration/Into the Unknown
NODE TYPE: Unknown Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL4)

The PCs will be exploring a newly-discovered Node called *Titan* (not Saturn's moon, but a remote planet somewhere in our universe). Along the way they'll encounter treasure seekers – Galactic Hominids from a neighboring star system – and they'll learn about the pirate Halkon and his secret stash.

Halkon has been dead over 100 years, but his legend lives on and his treasure is still believed to be there. Other explorers will be encountered on Titan, and will try to stop the PCs from reaching the treasure first.

HIDDEN IN A DREAM

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Acquisition
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Highly Stable (4)

Orion Halkon was a corporate criminal who amassed a fortune through decades of predatory loans, pyramid schemes, junk stocks, robo-signed mortgages and blackmail on Home-Earth. When he learned that the authorities were about to bust him, he converted his money into tangibles and stashed them in a Slip Node for later retrieval. Shortly thereafter, he was killed in an explosive arms stand-off with police.

The Node where he hid the treasure is an unstable *Dream World*: a hostile vision of Titan, from a story by Edwin Sloat.

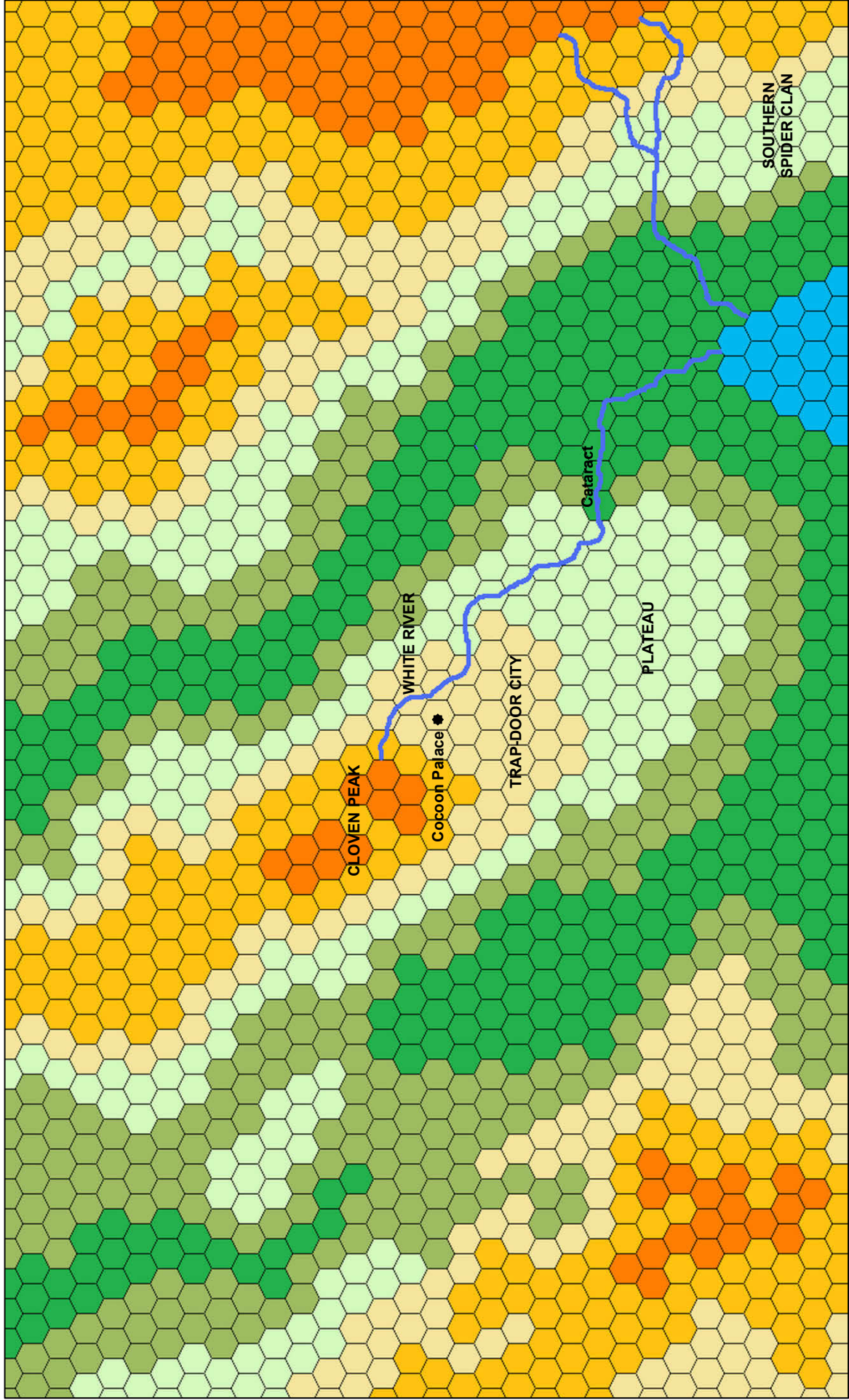
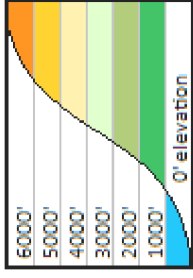
Choose the PC with the most impoverished childhood. A courier is killed trying to bring them a datafile while they are meeting with a potential client on the luxurious *Western Star*. The datasphere containing the file is stolen, but a copy is saved in the courier's PDA. This file explains exactly how Halkon's crimes caused the poverty of the PC's family. (*What happened? This could be a Character Development Scene if the Player wishes.*) The file also includes coordinates for *The Inferno Range* on Titan.

Meanwhile the attackers – a rival DayTripping gang run by crime-boss *Helgers* – are fleeing the murder scene and boarding their Slipship, *The Osprey*.

In this Dream World, many adventurers have heard the tale of Halkon's Treasure. None have found the fabled cache yet, though many have died seeking it.

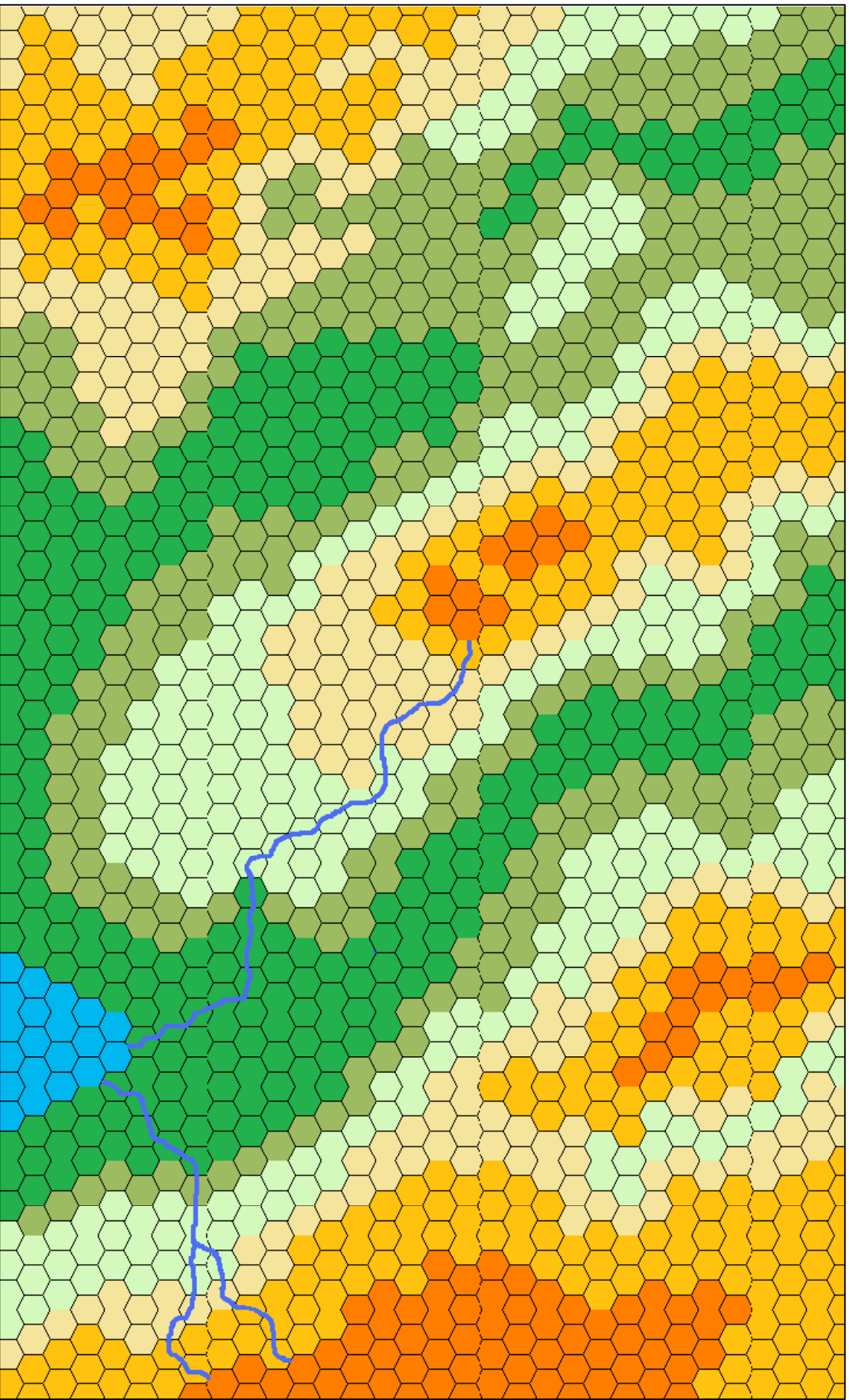
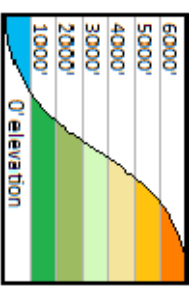
THE INFERNO RANGE -- GM'S MAP

1 HEX = 1000'



THE INFERNO RANGE

1 HEX = 1000'



TITAN

GRAVITY: 0.68 G
CLIMATE: Highly Variable
DAY: 28 hrs

WATER: 20% standing water
PRESSURE: 0.8 Earth atmospheres
YEAR: 10,759 Earth days (29.4 yrs)

ATMOSPHERE: Nitrogen/Oxygen
PRECIPITATION: Frequent (DL6)
BIOSPHERE: Sentient Lifeforms

Titan is one of the largest moons in the solar system, with a diameter of 3,200 miles. It has a thin but breathable atmosphere, low gravity, and its surface is an arid wasteland separated by a great equatorial mountain range.

Viewed from Titan the sun appears small and distant, and rises every 28 hours. Its warmth is magnified, even at this great distance, by greenhouse gases in the upper atmosphere. The great disc of the parent planet, bisected by a sidelong view of its rings, is surrounded by six small moons which chase each other back and forth as it moves across the sky. The ringed planet crosses the sky faster than the sun, waxing and waning in a monthly cycle of 16 days, and it rises and sets 1.75 hours later each day. For four days out of every 16-day "month" the ringed planet eclipses the distant sun, sending Titan into the coldest of cold nights.

Temperatures here swing wildly, reaching highs of over 150°F and lows of -40°F on the coldest nights. Titan's most infamous region is the "Inferno Range": a foreboding mountain chain crawling with clans of intelligent monster spiders. Many adventurers have died trying to explore it, lured by tales of HALKON'S TREASURE.

THE INFERNO RANGE

SURROUNDINGS: Canyons, Badlands
CONDITION: Devastated
TERRAIN: Jagged Rock & Scree
WEATHER: Cycles from blazing to storming each day
BIODIVERSITY: Single dominant lifeform
DOMINANT COLORS: Grey, White, Oxide Red
RESOURCES: Rock, Sand, Iron, Webbing
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

A jumbled upheaval of twisted, tortured granite, with saw-tooth peaks stabbing high into the sky.

In this region *THE TRAP-DOOR CITY* of the *GIANT SPIDERS* can be found, not far from the cataract of the *WHITE RIVER*.

A cloven peak of iron-streaked rock overlooks the city, which itself overlooks *THE PLATEAU* wrapping broadly around the range's southern face.

The region is patrolled semi-regularly by groups of *SPIDER SCOUTS*.

Tunnels and caverns crisscross through the range, often connecting in unexpected ways beneath the surface.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-4	Weather Anomaly (lightning, rockslide, etc)
5-6	3d6 Giant Spiders (daytime only)
7	2d6 Spider Scouts (daytime only)
8-9	1d6 Giant Ranatra
10	Atmospheric Vehicle overhead
11	Unusual Feature
12	Unknown Treasure Seeker *

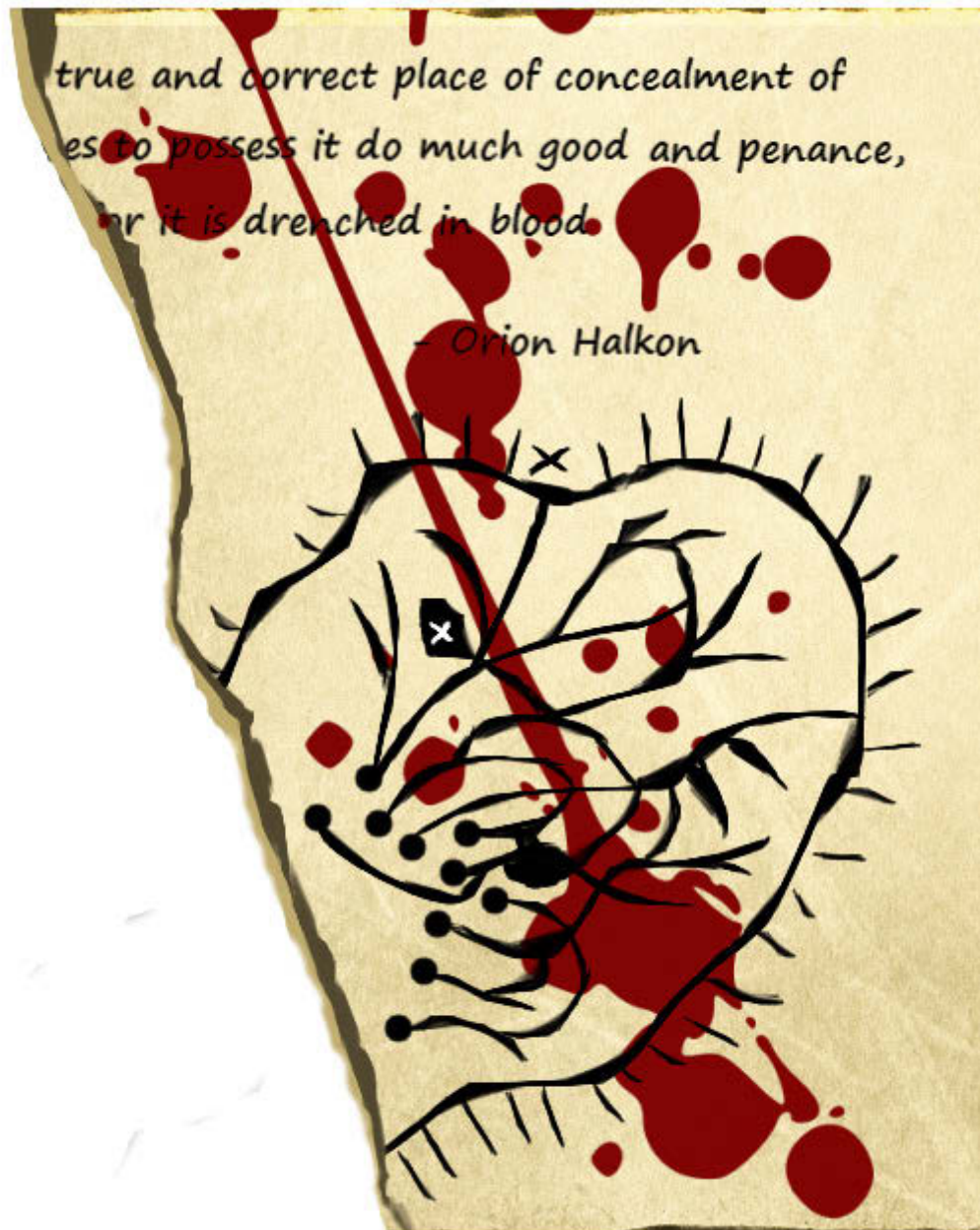
PERCEPTIONS

- In Titan's low gravity, a human can jump ten feet into the air (MIGHT vs DL3).
- A forking display of lightning cracks the sky, and a strong smell of ozone pervades the area.
- The distant shriek of a dying creature, attacked unaware by silent spiders.
- A torn web from which a creature has escaped.
- The body of a treasure seeker, space suit ripped open, corpse shrivelled and dessicated.
- Rocks crack from erosion in a nearby cliff: (1-3) small slide, (4-5) large collapse, (6) massive landslide (GRACE vs DL 3 to avoid harm).

WEATHER

- At night the entire region is beaten by furious blizzards. The White River freezes to slush.
- As dawn breaks, the snow turns to rain and the winds decrease to tempest levels.
- As day advances, the storms die out, the White River thaws again, and the clouds burn away under the oppressive heat. By mid-afternoon, temperatures reach 150°F.
- Above 5,000 feet, the air is thinner and colder. The spiders don't like to come up this high, and they'll only do so in pursuit of a fleeing enemy.

THE MAP FRAGMENT



WHITE RIVER

LOCATION

Pouring down the peak and running across the plateau to a great cataract that tumbles over the cliffs, the White River freezes every night and nearly evaporates each day, except during eclipses (when it remains frozen for four days). Behind the cataract is a hidden entrance to some ancient tunnels, leading *INSIDE THE TRAP-DOOR CITY* from below.

ENCOUNTER DL: 4 (day), 8 (night)

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	Weather Anomaly (lightning, rockslide, etc)
4	Unusual Feature
5-6	Giant Symphyla
7	2d6 Giant Spiders (daytime only)
8	1d6 Spider Scouts (daytime only)
9	1d6 Giant Ranatra
10	Atmospheric Vehicle overhead
11-12	Unknown Treasure Seeker *

THE PLATEAU

LOCATION

At about 3000' a broad stony plateau surrounds the slopes of *THE TRAP-DOOR CITY*. It's nearly level, with large upthrusts of granite here and there, big enough to hide a ship behind. This is one of the few locations in the region suitable for safely landing a large vehicle.

ENCOUNTER DL: 4 (day), 8 (night)

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2	Weather Anomaly (lightning, rockslide, etc)
3-4	Unusual Feature
5-7	2d6 Giant Spiders (daytime only)
8-9	1d6 Spider Scouts (daytime only)
10	Atmospheric Vehicle overhead
11	Atmospheric Vehicle lands on plateau
12	Unknown Treasure Seeker *

ATMOSPHERIC VEHICLE

EVENT

An atmospheric SlipShip or aerial recon vehicle is seen overhead, probably scouting for a place to land – or looking for signs of life.

ENCOUNTERS

- A vehicle passes overhead (random direction).
- The vehicle slows – have you been spotted?
- The vehicle crash-lands within 100 miles away.

OUTSIDE THE TRAP-DOOR CITY

LOCATION

ENCOUNTER DL: 4 (day) / 8 (night)

The city of the *GIANT SPIDERS* covers the slopes above *THE PLATEAU* like a giant checker-board of shimmering, silken circles. The silken-lined tunnels of the arachnids are scattered among the gorges and boulders, and wind down into the mountain's interior. Large stones are rolled into place to block these entrances at night.

At the top of the Trap-Door City is the huge *COCOON-PALACE* of the *SPIDER QUEEN*: a vast, raised mound of shimmering, silken web.

Higher still, a cloven peak towers above the city. Bitterly cold, this spot is relatively safe from *SPIDER SCOUTS*. From here you can see not only the city below, but the better part of *THE INFERNO RANGE*.

DAYTIME ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2	Weather Anomaly (rockslide, wind, etc)
3-4	Unusual Feature
5-7	2d6 Giant Spiders
8-11	1d6 Spider Scouts
12	Unknown Treasure Seeker *

NIGHTTIME ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2	Weather Anomaly (lightning, hail, etc)
3-4	Unusual Feature
5-8	Lone Spider, left outside to die
9-10	Rocket ship or atmospheric cruiser overhead
11-12	Unknown Treasure Seeker *

PERCEPTIONS

- When the sun rises, the trapdoors open to let in the warmth, and the spiders go out hunting for food in the lowlands.
- At dusk the spiders return and the doors close before the storms hit. Any remaining outside are left for dead.
- A group of 2d6 Spider Guards exits the city and splits off into two directions, moving in a hurry.
- Spiders from the south patrolling their territory with red glowing torches. These are fueled by *HEATSTONES*.
- Two long silver rods extend from the top of the queen's cocoon-palace. Their purpose is not clear.

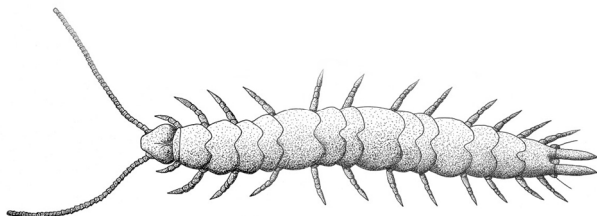
GIANT SYMPHYLA

LIFEFORM

GRACE 5

Bite+1

TCV 110



These centipede-like creatures are from 10' to 20' long (2d6+8), and possess as many body segments as their length in feet. Each segment except for the head and tail possesses a pair of legs, and length indicates age (young are born with ten pairs and a new body segment is added each moulting season). They live on the sides of the mountain slopes, near sources of vegetation and water, but will range further if hungry.

While not carnivorous, they move fast and are quite frightening to see. They will attack any creatures coming near their egg caches; slimy collections of roundish blobs pasted into cracks and crevices of the rock. These facts may be intuited by any character making a *Biology* or *Zoology* roll vs DL 2.

ENCOUNTERS

- 1d6 Symphyla consuming moss and leaves.
- Battle between a Symphyla and a Giant Spider: (1-5) Spider wins; (6) Symphyla escapes.
- Female Symphyla smearing eggs into a crevice (she will attack if approached).
- (Crisis) The PCs stumble upon an egg cache and are quickly attacked by two Giant Symphyla.

GIANT RANATRA

LIFEFORM

GRACE 3

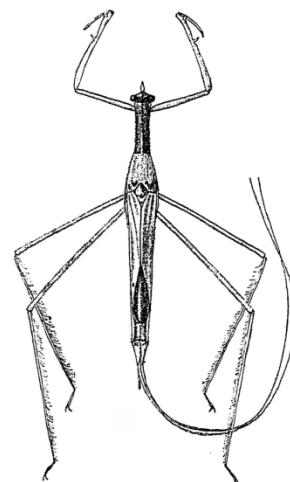
Grasp+1

Bite+1

MIGHT 2

TCV 70

Carnivorous insects up to 7-12' long (1d6+6), Giant Ranatra often lay in wait beneath the surface of the water, or pose motionless, camouflaged among branches and fallen timber, until potential prey comes along. Spotting a motionless Ranatra is Difficult (BRAINS roll vs DL 4).



Their strong front legs are used for grasping. They eat water worms and other defenseless creatures, which they pierce with their beaks, injecting a *toxic saliva* which both sedates and begins to digest their prey.

ENCOUNTERS

- 2d6 Ranatra are startled by a passing *GIANT SPIDER* and scramble for the water.
- A Ranatra pounces from concealment upon a *GIANT SYMPHALA*, killing it with no difficulty.
- Battle between a Ranatra and a *GIANT SPIDER*: (1-2) the Spider wins; (3-6) the Ranatra wins.
- (Crisis) 1d6 Ranatra spring from concealment and attack the PCs.

TOXIN: GIANT RANATRA SALIVA

MODERATE TOXIN

DL 4 vs MIGHT

Effects on fail: -1 GRACE, -1 MIGHT

With care (GRACE vs DL5), the saliva gland from a dead Ranatra can be extracted in about thirty minutes.

The toxin from a single ranatra would be worth 2M on Home-Earth.

UNKNOWN TREASURE SEEKERS

* Word of *HALKON'S TREASURE* has spread far and wide, and many adventurers are hoping to find it. The second time this encounter is rolled, or any time after the First Crisis, this encounter will be *HELGERS* and 1d6 members of his gang (unless they have already been dispatched). Otherwise, roll to determine the group's *Leader*, *Motivation* and *Companions* below.

LEADER (1D6)

Roll 1d6 for the class of the NPC party leader. (1-2) Scholar; (3-4) Pilot; (5-6) Mercenary. If the PCs don't already possess *THE MAP FRAGMENT*, the NPC leader will have it on their person.

MOTIVATION (2D6)

Every Treasure Seeker comes to Titan for a reason of their own. Roll 2d6 and apply -1 if the group's leader is a *scholar*:

- 1-4 Was (or was hired by) a victim of Halkon's criminal enterprises
- 5-6 Wishes to rescue someone from the *CAVERN OF THE LIVING DEAD*
- 7 Heard some version of the *HALKON'S TREASURE* legend and wants to be the one who finds it
- 8 Rival DayTrippers, they have been following the PCs all the way from Home-Earth (or the *WESTERN STAR*)
- 9-10 Hired/sent by a rival crime gang to retrieve *HALKON'S TREASURE*
- 11-12 Police/Paramilitary here to retrieve *HALKON'S TREASURE* as evidence

COMPANIONS (1D6)

Each treasure seeker is accompanied by 0-4 (1d6-2) "Mid-Level Thug" companions. These groups are usually armed. Roll 1d6 and add +1 if the group has a *mercenary* leader:

- 1 No weapons; peaceful group
- 2-4 Handguns, layered clothing, civilian weapons
- 5-7 +1 Firearms, Armor, military-grade weapons

INSIDE THE TRAP-DOOR CITY

SURROUNDINGS: Granite Tunnels

CONDITION: Humid, Smelly

TERRAIN: Granite Floor smoothed by years of passage

WEATHER: Warm

BIODIVERSITY: One dominant species

DOMINANT COLORS: Grey, Oxide Red

RESOURCES: Webbing

UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient

ENCOUNTER DL: Very Frequent (5)

It's easy to get lost in here: make a *PSYCHE* roll vs DL 3 every ten minutes to avoid losing your bearings.

SPIDER GUARDS patrol the outer corridors, which are wider and smoother than the rest. Once this outer ring is passed, most encounters will be normal *GIANT SPIDERS* (unless an alarm has been raised). The majority of caverns discovered will house 0-4 *GIANT SPIDERS* (1d6-2).

As you enter the upper tunnels near the *COCOON-PALACE* of the *SPIDER QUEEN*, more *SPIDER GUARDS* will be encountered. They will stop at nothing to protect their queen from intruders.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2	Unusual Feature
3-4	2d6 Spider Scouts
5-7	2d6 Giant Spiders
8-11	1d6 Spider Guards
12	Unknown Treasure Seeker *

PERCEPTIONS

- Inside, the city is a maze of winding passages and randomly-sized caverns, niches and cracks. It's easy to get lost, and echoes come from all directions.
- Trails of wet webbing and slime on the ground and walls.
- A group of spiders drags something large and dead into the tunnels.
- The deeper tunnel passages seem far older than most of the spiders' tunnels. The design is distinctly different.
- A group of spiders carefully carries 2d6 dark-colored leathery bundles (these are the larvae of the *SPIDER QUEEN*) to the *CAVERN OF THE LIVING DEAD*.
- 3d6 spiders follow another who holds a blazing red torch. This is a hammered iron tube containing a *HEATSTONE*.

GIANT SPIDER

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Grapple+1 Bite+1

TCV 55

Numerous clans of Giant Spiders reside all over *THE INFERNO RANGE*. Those inhabiting *THE TRAP-DOOR CITY* are intelligent, but only barely. Their limbs end in two-pronged claws. They often use their forelimbs as manipulators, supporting their weight with the other six. They can leap up to 15 feet, and move extremely quietly (BRAINS vs DL5 to perceive via hearing).

Their bite delivers *GIANT SPIDER VENOM*: This toxin causes muscle spasms and partial paralysis.

Giant spiders are cannibalistic. When possible, they will drag the bodies of their dead back to the city for consumption. Waste not, want not.

SPIDER SCOUT

LIFEFORM

GRACE 3 Grapple+2 Bite+1

TCV 85

Bred for speed and cunning, these specimens are typically encountered outdoors where they range up to three miles from *THE TRAP-DOOR CITY*. They're always on the lookout for human intruders, who just seem to keep coming, as if looking for something.

Their bite delivers *GIANT SPIDER VENOM*.

ENCOUNTERS

- 1d6 Scouts investigate an Unusual Feature.
- (Possible Crisis) 1d6 Scouts capture a human.
- (Crisis) 1d6 Scouts leap upon the PCs in attack.

SPIDER GUARD

LIFEFORM

GRACE 4 Grapple+2 Bite+2

MIGHT 2

TCV 135

These remarkably large specimens patrol the tunnels *INSIDE THE TRAP-DOOR CITY*, seeking intruders and defending the *SPIDER QUEEN*. They are tougher and more determined than their smaller cousins, and are usually encountered in groups of 1d3.

Their bite delivers *GIANT SPIDER VENOM*.

TOXIN: GIANT SPIDER VENOM

MILD TOXIN

DL 3 vs HEALTH

Effects on fail: -1 to all GRACE rolls for 2d6 hrs

With care (GRACE vs DL4), the toxin can be extracted from a dead Giant Spider in about fifteen minutes.

The toxin from a single spider would be worth 1M on Home-Earth.



HEATSTONE

MAGUFFIN

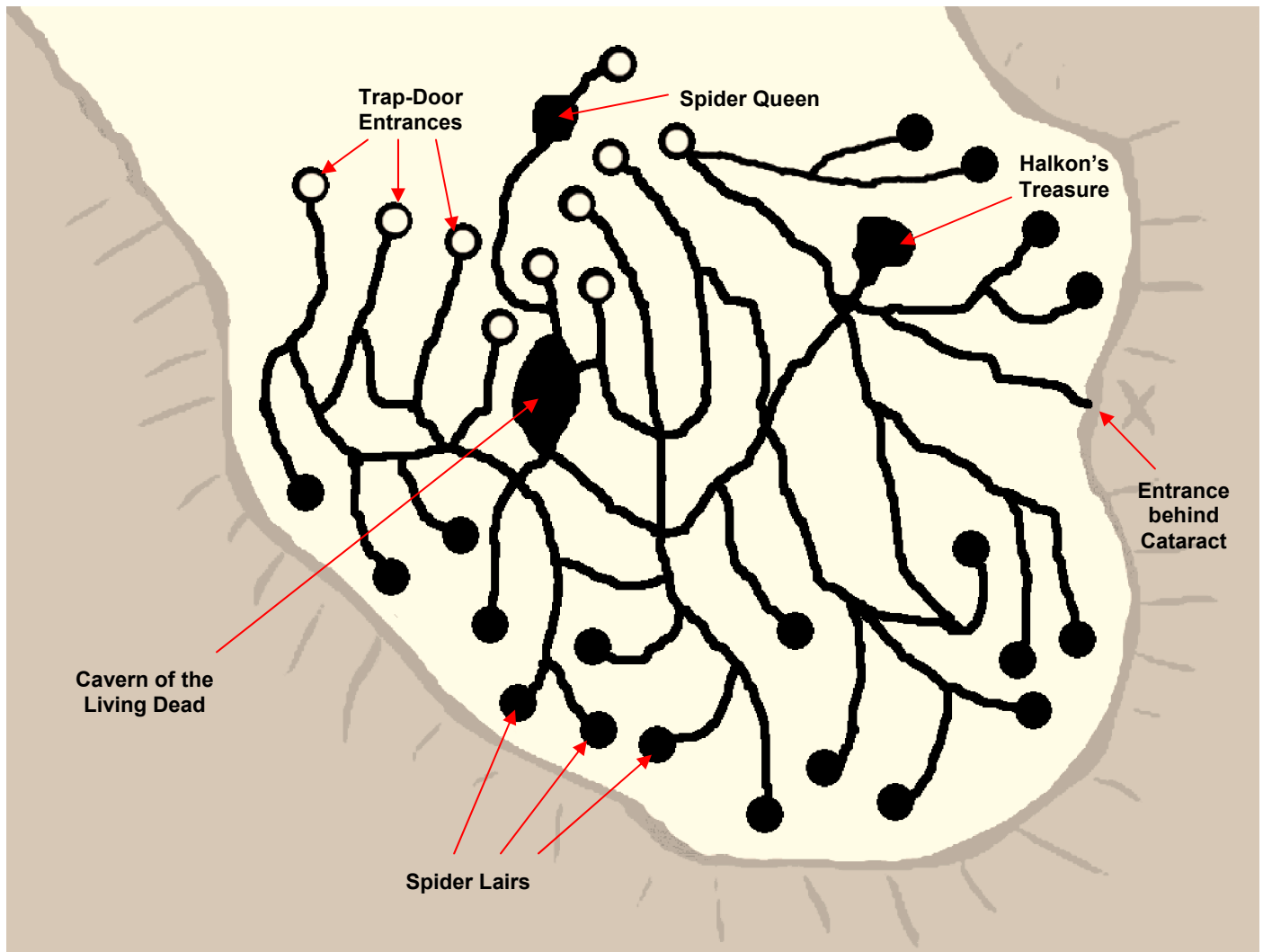
Earth Value: 1M

These super-hot crystals are found deep within the mountain. They radiate an intense heat, thousands of degrees fahrenheit, in a single direction, with a range of about an inch. Their bright red glow can be seen from hundreds of feet away.

The touch of a Heatstone causes 1 point of Harm to MIGHT and 1 to GRACE. They are hot enough to burn through many metals, and are worth 1M on Earth.

Heatstones are fashioned into tools and weapons by the spiders of the southern caves (see map), who use various contrivances of iron, rock and sand to fashion insulated holders or "sleeves" for them.





MAP: INSIDE THE TRAP-DOOR CITY

Scale: 1" = 2000'

The tunnels of *THE TRAP-DOOR CITY* lead under the mountain's face, and slope sharply for several hundred feet (GRACE roll vs DL 3 to keep your footing), before leveling off and continuing out beneath the PLATEAU. The city has ten main entrances, each guarded by 1d3 *SPIDER GUARDS*. The tunnels are covered in silky strands of wet webbing. At the ends of these winding and interconnected tunnels are the lairs of individual spider groups; 1d6 *GIANT SPIDERS* will be found in each lair.

The eastern portions of the subterranean complex are less densely populated, as the ancient tunnels here have collapsed in places, and the spiders consider them untrusworthy.

LIFESTONE

MAGUFFIN

A green luminescent crystal about six feet in diameter and weighing over 1,000 pounds. The light emanating from the Lifestone illuminates up to a distance of thirty feet, and two startling effects: First, it neutralizes all hostile bacteria and microbial life processes in the body, and second, it reduces the body's metabolic rate to the point where survival without sustenance is possible for months, perhaps even years. These effects take several days of exposure to become effective.

Only one such stone exists, to the spiders' or anyone else's knowledge. It was found here, and the *CAVERN OF THE LIVING DEAD* was hollowed out around it. If anyone could figure out a way to get the Lifestone back to Home-Earth, its value would be at least 100M.



CAVERN OF THE LIVING DEAD

LOCATION

SURROUNDINGS: Granite Tunnels

CONDITION: Humid, Smelly

TERRAIN: Granite Floor smoothed by years of passage

WEATHER: Cold

BIODIVERSITY: One dominant species

DOMINANT COLORS: Grey, White, Green

RESOURCES: Webbing

ENCOUNTER DL: Exceeding Rare (11)

This is where the spiders bring their victims for cold storage. Most spiders don't like to come in here due to the cold. Anyone who enters this area will be immediately and aggressively approached by the *SPIDER ATTENDANT*.

Inside are tier upon tier of web hammocks, each holding a naked human being. Most are completely paralyzed from the poisoned bite of the specially-mutated *SPIDER ATTENDANT*, and they are all being kept alive by the rays of a strange green light shining down from somewhere in the ceiling of the cavern (the *LIFESTONE*). 1 out of 6 of them can still speak.

A few of these unfortunates will become food for the *SPIDER QUEEN*. Others will become living incubators for her larvae, which will be planted into their living bodies by the *SPIDER ATTENDANT*. The larvae eat the victims' vitals until death occurs, and then emerge to go on their way. A living specimen of these larvae would be worth 2M on Home-Earth.

SPIDER ATTENDANT

LIFEFORM

GRACE 3

Grapple+2

Bite+3

MIGHT 3

TCV 130

This mutated monster is the official guardian of the *CAVERN OF THE LIVING DEAD*. Its thick hair and body fat enable it to endure the cold temperatures. The attendant's bite contains the *QUEEN'S VENOM*.

Once incapacitated, victims are bound with webbing and dragged to the hammocks to await their fates.

COCOON-PALACE

LOCATION

At the upper end of a sloping passage filled with carrion and stench sits the *COCOON-PALACE* of the *SPIDER QUEEN*.

The passage opens into a huge chamber with teirs, platforms and niches all around. 1d6 *SPIDER GUARDS* will be here, unless already dispatched.

In the center of the chamber sits the *SPIDER QUEEN*, bloated and hairy, her massive body suspended more by a surrounding harness of webbing her than by her long, spindly legs. Turning in your direction, she taps gently on the ground with a gigantic barbed spike at the end of her forelimb. She's not happy to see you.



LIFEFORM

THE SPIDER QUEEN

GRACE 4 Spike+3
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 3

TCV 240

She does not move from her position, but the Spider Queen's forelimbs are ten feet long and tipped with barbed spikes delivering *GIANT SPIDER VENOM*.

Her bite delivers a much stronger toxin known as *QUEEN'S VENOM*; a powerful neuro-inhibitor that induces muscle seizure and paralysis.

TOXIN: QUEEN'S VENOM

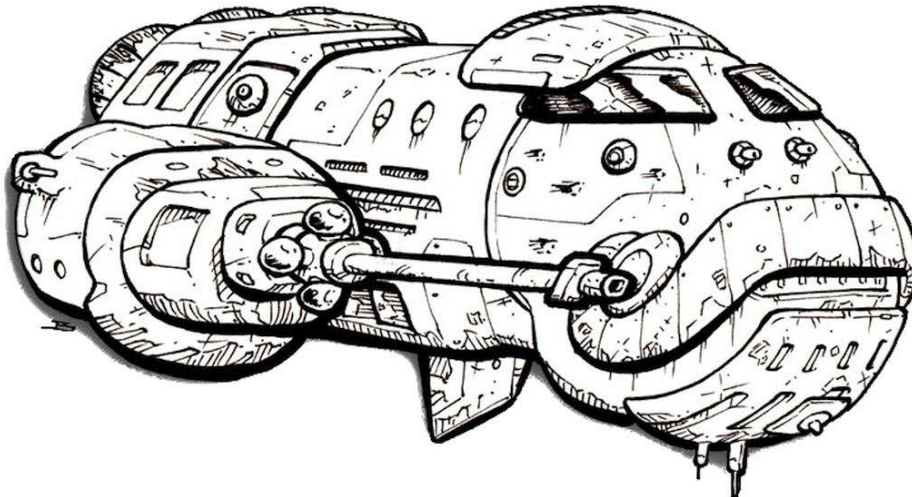
POWERFUL TOXIN

DL 5 vs HEALTH
Effects on fail:
-1 GRACE. -1 HEALTH
Paralysis sets in when HEALTH reaches zero.

With care (GRACE vs DL4), the toxin can be extracted from the dead queen in fifteen minutes. The value of the Queen's toxin (roughly one gallon) would be 6M on Home-Earth.

SHIP: THE OSPREY

Capacity 12
Outer Hull +1
Slip Capacitor *
Powersource: 40 mW
2 Mounted Lasers
10 Viewports
Atmosphere Engine +1
Construction Quality: Std
Tonnage: 14
Computer Mk 1
Atmosphere Engine +1
Power Use: 14mW/hr
Airlock
Cabins for 20
Cargo 2m cu
Grappler & Winch
Cost: 276M



Paramilitary cruiser owned by HELGERS

* "Hidden in a Dream" scenario only

OSPREY CREW

NPC

GRACE 1 Handgun+1
MIGHT 2 Brawling+1

GEAR: Laser Pistol
TCV 25

These space-thugs are *HELGERS'* employees. There are twelve of them. Typically they rotate in three shifts of four. Two of them will always remain in the ship.

HALKON'S TREASURE

MAGUFFIN

Gold bars (18M)
Silver ingots (12M)
Precious stones (30M)
128 tanks of Zoomzoom (6M)
½-lb chunk of pure Xenostrium (15M)
Antigravity Powersource with 10mW/hr output (100M)
Painted brick signed by someone called "Banksy" (4M)

Total Value: 185M

THE OSPREY LANDS

EVENT

When *THE OSPREY* arrives it touches down on *THE PLATEAU* below *THE TRAP-DOOR CITY*. Instantly the spiders become enraged and rush toward the vessel, which responds with blazes of laser fire. Scores of spiders are wiped out.

The spiders retreat, but continue clambering up and down the mountain's face, swarming especially around the queen's *COCOON PALACE*. Some of them drag the bodies of their fallen companions back to the caves (to eat later). Others are left on the field.

HELGERS knows that one of these caves leads to *HALKON'S TREASURE*, but he doesn't know which. He's hoping the PCs will lead him there. If he doesn't see them, his crew will use the winch to drag the ship into a concealed position behind a large upthrust of rock and wait. If he has to kidnap someone, he will.

HELGERS

NPC

BRAINS 2 Rhetoric+1
GRACE 1 Handgun+1
MIGHT 3 Brawling+2

GEAR: Laser Pistol +1
TCV 80

Aware of the location of *THE TRAP-DOOR CITY* but not which cave to enter, Helgers crew camouflages *THE OSPREY* and lays low, hoping to take advantage of the PCs' discoveries. If anyone makes a move toward the ship, they'll fire their laser weapons and try to take a hostage if possible. If they have reason to believe the PCs have figured out which cave leads to the *CAVERN OF THE LIVING DEAD* before figuring it out themselves, Helger and 1d6 members of his gang will wait one hour, then move in to steal the goods.



IRMA BOARDLE

NPC

BRAINS 2 Pilot+1
CHARM 2 Rhetoric+2
GRACE 2 Handgun+1 Pickpocket+1
PSYCHE 2

TCV 80

A thin, dark-eyed woman around thirty years of age, Irma is an heiress whose family fortune was wiped out by Halkon's schemes. She intends to get it back.

Irma joined the crew of *THE OSPREY* under false pretenses, pretending to be a master pickpocket. Since then she has had to do some unsavory things to "prove her loyalty" to the gang – including an attempt to steal the other portion of the *HALKON'S TREASURE* map from the PCs.

En route to Titan, *HELGERS* discovers her ruse. As retribution for her impertinence he will cast her out shortly after the ship makes planetfall, leaving her for the *GIANT SPIDERS* (who will anaesthetize her and take her to the *CAVERN OF THE LIVING DEAD*). If the PCs somehow rescue her, she'll tell her whole story.

SHIP: THE WESTERN STAR

Interplanetary luxury liner

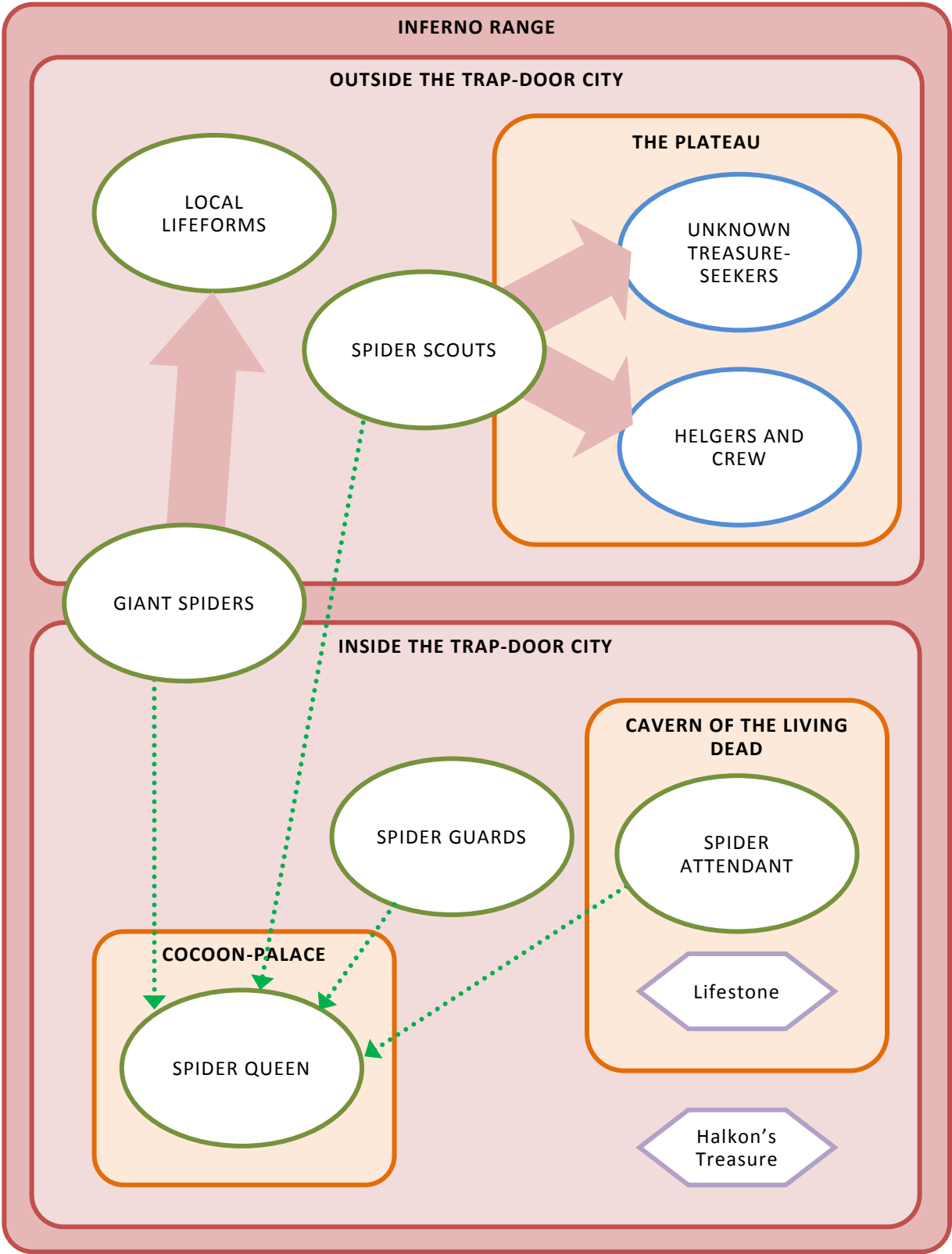
Capacity 40	Tonnage: 18
Computer Mk 2	UpVector Radio
Powersource: 1000 mW	Power Use: 42mW/hr
Airlock	Cabins for 40
6 Viewports	Galley
Medical Response Tank	Cargo 20m cu
Construction Quality: Std	Cost: 349M

SHIP: THE SPACE SPHERE

Emergency interplanetary transport vehicle

Capacity 4	Tonnage: 6
Outer Hull +1	Computer Mk 2
UpVector Radio	Landing Gear
Aerodynamics	Atmosphere Engine +2
Powersource: 150 mW	Power Use: 6mW/hr
Spotlight	Viewport
Construction Quality: Std	Cost: 62M

HALKON'S TREASURE



LOOT OF THE VOID

by Edwin K. Sloat

Into the Trap-Door City of great spiders goes Penrun, after the hidden plunder of the space-pirate Halkon!

Dick Penrun glanced up incredulously.

"Why, that's impossible; you would have to be two hundred years old!" he exclaimed.

Lozzo nervously ran a hand through his white mop of hair.

"But it is true, Sirro," he assured his companion. "We Martians sometimes live three centuries. You should know that I am only a hundred and seventy-five, and I do not lie when I say I was a cabin boy under Captain Halkon."

His voice sank to a whisper, and he glanced apprehensively about the buffet of the *Western Star* which was due now in three days at the Martian city of Nurm. Penrun's eyes followed his anxious glances curiously. The buffet was partly filled with passengers, smoking, gossiping women, and men at cards, or throwing dice in the Martian gambling game of *diklo*, which was the universal fad of the moment. No place could have been safer, Penrun reflected. Doubtless the old man's caution was a lifelong habit acquired in his youth, if he had actually served under Halkon.

Before long the old codger would be saying that he knew the hiding place of Halkon's treasure, about which there were probably more legends and yarns than anything else in the Universe. A century had elapsed since the death of the famous pirate who had preyed on the shipping of the Void with fearless, ruthless audacity and had piled up a fabulous treasure before that fatal day when the massed battle spheres of the Interplanetary Council trapped his ships out near Mercury and blew them to atoms there in the sun-beaten reaches of space. Some of the men had been captured; old Lozzo might have been one of them. Penrun knew the history of Halkon from childhood, and for a very good reason.

The ancient Martian stirred uneasily. His piercing blue eyes turned again to Penrun's face.

"Every word I have said is true, Sirro," he repeated hurriedly. "I boarded this ship at New York with the sole intention of discharging my sworn duty and giving a message to the grandson of Captain Orion Halkon, his first male descendant."

■

Penrun's eyes widened in startled amazement. He, himself, was the grandson of the notorious Halkon, a fact that not more than half a dozen people in the Universe knew—or so he had always believed. His mother, Halkon's only daughter, good and upright woman that she was, had hidden that family skeleton far back in the closet and solemnly warned Dick Penrun and his two sisters to keep it there. Yet this old man, who had singled him out of the crowd in the buffet not thirty minutes ago and drew him into conversation, knew the secret. Perhaps he really had been a cabin boy under Halkon!

"I have been serving out the hundred-year sentence for piracy the judges imposed on me, a century in your own Earth prison of Sing Sing," muttered Lozzo. "I have just been released. Quick! My inner gods tell me my vase of life is toppling. I swore to your grandfather that I would deliver the message. It is here. Guard well your own life, for this paper is a thing of evil!"

His hand rested nervously on the edge of the table. The ancient blue eyes swept the buffet with a lightning glance. Then he slid his hand forward across the polished wood. Penrun glimpsed a bit of yellow, folded paper beneath it. Then something tweaked his hair. A deafening explosion filled the buffet. Lozzo stiffened, his mouth gaped in a choked scream, and he sprawled across the table, dead.

As he fell, a fat white hand darted over the table toward the oblong of folded, yellow paper lying unprotected on its surface. Penrun clutched at it frantically. The fat fingers closed on the paper and were gone.

Penrun whirled about. The drapes of the doorway framed a heavy, pasty face with liquid black eyes. The slug gun was aiming again, this time at Penrun. He hurled himself sideways out of his chair as it roared a second time. The heavy slug buried itself in the corpse of the old Martian on the table. The face in the doorway vanished.

■

The next instant Penrun was through the door and racing down the long promenade deck under the glow of the electric lights, for the quartering sun was shining on the opposite side of the ship. Far down the deck ahead fled the slayer.

The killer paused long enough to drop an emergency bulkhead gate. Five minutes later when Penrun and the other passengers succeeded in raising it, he had disappeared. One of the emergency space-suits beside the air-lock was missing. Penrun sprang to a nearby port-hole.

Far back in space he saw the tiny figure shining in the sunlight, while the long flame of his Sextle rocket-pistol showed that he was checking his forward momentum as rapidly as possible. Unquestionably he would be picked up by some craft now trailing the liner, for the murder and theft of the paper must have been carefully planned. Penrun turned from the port-hole thoughtfully.

The liner was in an uproar. News of the murder had spread like wild-fire. Women were screaming hysterically and men shouting as they rushed about in terror, believing that the ship was in the hands of pirates. A squad of sailors passed on the double to take charge of the buffet. There would be an inquest shortly. Penrun started for his stateroom. He wanted to be alone a few minutes before the inquest took place.

His room was on the deck above. The sight of the empty passage relieved him, but he was surprised to discover that he had not locked the door when he left an hour ago. He stepped into the room.

Instantly his hands shot upward. Something was prodding him in the back.

"One move or a sound, and I shoot," warned a sharp whisper. "Stand as you are till I find what I want."

His billfold was opened and dropped with an exclamation of disappointment. The searcher hurried. Penrun calmly noted that the fingers seemed to fumble and were not at all deft at this sort of work. He glanced down, and smiled grimly. A woman! He jerked his body away from the prodding pistol, gripped the slender hand that was about to plunge into his coat pocket, and whirled round, catching the intruder in his arms.

Big, terrified dark eyes stared up at him out of a pale, heart-shaped face. Then with a sob the girl wrenched free, ran out of the door and was gone.

■

He did not follow, but instead carefully locked the door and placed a chair against it. Things had been moving too rapidly for him to feel sure he was safe even now. Opening his left hand, he gazed down at a bit of crumpled yellow paper he was holding there. That much he had saved of the message from his long dead grandfather when the murderer grabbed the folded paper from the buffet table and fled.

It proved to be the bottom third of a sheet of heavy paper, and on it was drawn a piece of a map, showing a large semi-circle, which might have been a lake, and leading off from it were what might be a number of crooked canals. At the end of one of these was an "X" and the word "Here."

Below the sketch were some words that had not been torn off. He read them with growing amazement. "... aves of Titan. I swear this to be the true and correct place of concealment of ... may he who comes to possess it do much good and penance, for it is drenched in blood and ... Captain Orion Halkon."

Penrun sat for a long time in thought. Titan, the sixth moon of Saturn! Nightmare of killing heat, iron cold, and monstrous spiders! How many men had died trying to explore it! And who knew it better than Penrun himself, the only one who had ever escaped from that hellish cavern of

the Living Dead? Old Halkon had hidden his treasure well indeed.

Penrun had never found the Caves. Legend described them as the one safe place on the satellite where a man might live without danger of being attacked by the spiders because the Caves were too cold for them.

Penrun doubted if there was any place that would be safe from the monstrous insects.

At any rate old Halkon had hidden his treasure there, and that part of the map that Penrun had thought was a lake was apparently the main cavern, and the canals, side passages. Old Halkon believed that he had hidden his treasure well, but he could not foresee just how well. Two thirds of the map, showing the location of the entrance to the Caves, had been taken by the murderer of the Martian, Lozzo. The remaining third, which showed the location of the treasure inside the Caves, was in Penrun's possession.

The murderer could find the Caves, but not the treasure inside; and Penrun could find the treasure inside, but not the Caves.

Penrun folded up the crumpled bit of paper and placed it carefully in his shoe. Unless his guess was wrong, another attempt to get it would be made shortly. Undoubtedly the girl had by now reported her failure to the rest of the gang.

■

The inquest was brief. The white-sheeted body of the Martian lay on the table where he had been slain. The captain of the liner called Penrun as the chief witness. He told a straightforward story of a chance acquaintance with Lozzo who, he said, seemed to be afraid of something. He had declared, so Penrun testified, that he was being hounded for a map of some kind and he wanted Penrun to see it. Then the murder had been committed, the map was stolen, and the murderer had fled. That was all, Penrun concluded, he knew about the matter.

Other passengers corroborated his story and he was dismissed.

Throughout the inquest Penrun studied the crowd of passengers that jammed the buffet, hoping he might catch a glimpse of the slender, dark-eyed girl who had tried to rob him. She was nowhere to be seen. He thought of telling the captain about her, but decided not to. She might make another attempt to get the map, and thereby give him the opportunity of rounding up the whole gang, or at least of learning who they were. He told himself grimly that if he could lay hold of her again, she would not escape so easily.

**Titan! Nightmare of killing heat, iron cold,
and monstrous spiders!**

If Penrun didn't realize before that he was a marked man, it was impressed on him more forcefully three hours later on the lower deck when two men attacked him in the darkened passage near the stern. There was no time for pistols. A series of hurried fist-blows. He slugged his way free and fled to the safety of his stateroom.

Once there he locked the door and sat down to consider his position. It was obvious now that he would be followed to the outposts of space, if necessary, in an attempt to get the map from him.



After half an hour's hard thinking he tossed away his fourth cigarette, loosened the pistol in his armpit holster, and slipped out of the room. He went to the captain.

"You think, then, that your life is in danger because you happened to be talking to that old Martian when he was murdered?" asked the captain, when Penrun had finished.

"No question about it," declared Penrun. "Two attempts have been made already."

"Hmm," said the captain, frowning. "A most remarkably strange business. I've never had anything like it aboard my ship in the twenty years I've been traveling the Void."

"I can pay for the space-sphere," urged Penrun. "My certificate of credit will take care of it with funds to spare. All you have to do is to let me cast off at once. If any questions are asked, you can say it was my wish."

"Hmm! Really, Mr. Penrun, this is a most unusual request. I'm not inclined—"

He stared at the communication board. The meteor warning dial was fluctuating violently, showing the presence of a rapidly approaching body—a meteor, or perhaps a flight of them. Gongs throughout the liner automatically began to sound a warning for the passengers to get into their space suits. The captain sat as though petrified.

Penrun sprang to the small visi-screen beside the board and snapped on the current. Swiftly he revolved the periscope aerial. There appeared on the screen the hull of a long, rakish, cigar-shaped craft which was overhauling the liner. The stranger was painted dead black and displayed no emblem.

"There's your meteor, Skipper," he remarked ironically. "And I am the attraction that is drawing it to your ship for another murder. Do I get the space-sphere?"



The captain sprang to his feet. "You get it, Penrun. You'll have to hurry. I want no more murders aboard my ship. Here, down this private stairs to the sphere air-lock. I'll make arrangements by phone. Once you are free of the liner I'll slow down so that the black ship will have to slow

down, too. That will give you a chance to pull away and get a good start on them."

Five minutes later Penrun's newly acquired craft was sliding out of its air-lock in the belly of the monstrous liner. He pulled away and glanced back.

The liner was already slowing down. The black pursuing craft was hidden by its vast, curving bulk. Penrun crowded on speed as swiftly as he dared. By the time the strange craft had made contact with the *Western Star* his little sphere had dwindled to a mere point of light in the black depths of space and vanished.

Penrun leaned over his charts grimly, as he set a new course for the sphere to follow. He, too, could play at this game. He'd carry the battle to the enemy's gate. Out to Titan he'd go and match his familiarity with the little planet against the superior numbers of his enemies.



Ten days later, Earth time, he was circling Titan, while he searched the grim, forbidden terrain beneath. After days of studying and speculation he had decided that the Caves must be situated in the Inferno Range, a place so particularly vicious that no man, so far as was known, had ever explored it. During the day the heat would boil eggs, and at night the sub-zero cold cracked great scales off the granite boulders. And here, too, lay the Trap-Door City of the monster spiders!

The grim, fantastic range soon appeared over the horizon, stabbing its saw-tooth peaks far into the sky. Dawn was still lighting the world, and a great snow-storm, a howling, furious blizzard, concealed the lower slopes of the mountains. Penrun knew that presently the driving snowflakes would change to rain-drops, and the shrieking, moaning voice of the gale would give way to the crashing, rolling thunder of the tempest. As the day advanced the storm would die abruptly and the clouds vanish under the deadly heat.

Then the Trap-Door City, which covered the slopes above the plateau at the three-thousand-foot level like a checkerboard of shimmering, silken circles, would spring to febrile life as the spider monsters went streaking and leaping across the barren, distorted granite on the day's business, the hunt for food in the lowlands, and the opening of the trap-doors to gather in the heat of the day in the silken tunnel homes set in the gorges and among the boulders. At sunset the doors would all be closed, for then the rain and the electrical storm would return, and at night the blizzard. The storm-and-heat cycle was the deadly weather routine of the Infernos.

Penrun steered for a tall, cloven peak that towered high above the Trap-Door City. In its thin air and continuous cold he would be comparatively safe from marauding spider scouts, and from the peak he could watch not only the city

of the monsters but the better part of the Inferno Range as well.

He was convinced that before long the mysterious black craft would put in an appearance somewhere near this spot. Penrun knew it all too well. There by the cataract of the White River, half a mile across the plateau from the insect city, he had once been captured.

■

Next morning when he looked down on the plateau just below the Trap-Door City he laughed triumphantly. There sat the long black-hulled space craft he had seen overhauling the liner.

But a moment later he shook his head dubiously. Too brazen, that landing. It was almost in the insect city. Of course, the ship was large and heavily armed with ray-guns which poked out their sharp snouts here and there about the hull. None the less, an experienced explorer of Titan would never have flung such defiance at the spiders.

The city was feverishly alive with the monsters now. They gathered in groups to stare down at the strange craft, then raced away again, darting in and out of their trap-door homes and streaking here and there across the twisted, tortured granite of the mountainside. The Queen's palace, a vast, raised cocoon of shimmering, silken web, was a veritable bee-hive. Something was brewing!

Abruptly the trap-door homes vomited forth monstrous insects by the thousands which spread with prodigious speed along the mountainside. At an unseen signal they poured down upon the plateau and charged the space-ship.

The black craft's heavy ray-guns broke into life. Attacking monsters curled up and died as the rays bit into their onrushing ranks. The first wave melted, but an instant later the following waves buried the ship.

Insects in the rear darted here and there, dragging away dead and dying spiders. Here was food aplenty! The denizens of the Trap-Door City would live well on their dead for a few days.

Abruptly the attack ceased. The crackling ray-guns were still taking toll as the monsters scurried back to the safety of their city, leaving their dead piled high about the hull of the ship.

■

Penrun wondered if the monsters would abandon the heaps of their dead. He rather expected that frenzied efforts would be made to retrieve them for food. The problem was solved by those aboard the space-ship, for presently it rose a score of feet in the air and moved a few hundred yards nearer the waterfall that marked the headwaters of the White River.

At once a frantic wave of spiders swept down across the plateau scouring it clean of the dead monsters.

After that the Trap-Door City seemed deserted. Not a spider could be seen near the shining, circular doors. Only here and there crouched a huge, bristly warrior safe behind a jutting rock with his glittering eight eyes fixed on the motionless black ship below.

Again the weary waiting. Penrun could only hope that it would not be long before those aboard the black ship gave him some hint of where the entrance to the Caves might be. Time and again he trained his glasses on the ship only to drop them resignedly. But when noon had passed and the heat of the day was scorching the rock he did not drop his glasses when he looked through them once again. Instead he stood erect in horror and dismay.

A girl had dashed out of the air-lock of the ship. She seemed to be familiar. Then he recognized her as the girl who had tried to rob him aboard the *Western Star*. Her face was drawn with agony in the stifling, overpowering heat. She had advanced but a few yards, but she was already staggering uncertainly.

What in Heaven's name possessed her to try to venture out in that killing heat? She wasn't even dressed in a space-suit, which would have protected her against heat as well as cold. There was the danger of the monster spiders! Rescue would have to be quick!

Even as the thought flashed through his mind he knew she was past saving. Down from the nearest pinnacle of rock streaked a gigantic spider. The girl saw it, screamed, clutched her throat and fell. Ray-guns of the ship crackled frenziedly. In vain! The insect swept the helpless girl up in its powerful mandibles, sprang clear over the ship and was streaking back up among the rocks in a black blur of speed before the men inside the ship could train the guns on that side, even if they had dared to.

■

Penrun watched with fascinated dread. To the cavern of the Living Dead! The monster carrying the limp girlish form was now running up through the city toward it, guarded by two other huge insects that had appeared from nowhere. Through the entrance of the cavern they darted and disappeared.

Surely those aboard the ship would make an effort to rescue her, thought Penrun, tense with horror. At least they would retaliate by raying the city with their heavy artillery. But no! The black ship only continued to rest there wavering in the heat. Penrun swore vividly. The cowards! Still, perhaps they were afraid to unlimber their heavy artillery for fear of killing the girl. Or perhaps, which was more likely, they thought she was already dead and devoured. Few persons knew about the Living Death.

Ah, well, he'd forget about her. She was an enemy, she was one of the group that was trying to rob and perhaps kill him. Perhaps her companions knew that she wouldn't be

killed for two or three days, and would make an effort to rescue her. And perhaps they wouldn't.

But before an hour had passed Penrun knew that he was going to master his horror of that cavern and save her himself, or die in the attempt. He, and he alone, had been in the cavern of the Living Dead and knew what to expect—the fate that might be his as well as the girl's.

He wondered if that Englishman, that old man with the great beard who said he had known Shakespeare and Bacon personally, was still lying in his silken hammock at the far end of the cave. Know Shakespeare personally? Impossible! Yet was it more impossible than the cavern itself? The man's English was quaint and nearly unintelligible. His description of that comical old space-ship of brass and wood was plausible. Perhaps he had known the Bard of Avon.

■

Night had descended when Penrun finally emerged from his little ship. The air was bitterly cold, and overhead the stars burned brilliantly. He paused to marvel a little that the Big Dipper, Cassiopeia, and the other constellations appeared just the same out here hundreds of millions of miles from Earth as they did at home. It made one feel infinitely small to realize the pinpoint size of the Solar Universe. He shivered for the temperature was nearly forty below zero, and snapped on the current of his Ecklin electro-heater which was connected with his clothing and would keep him warm even in that cold.

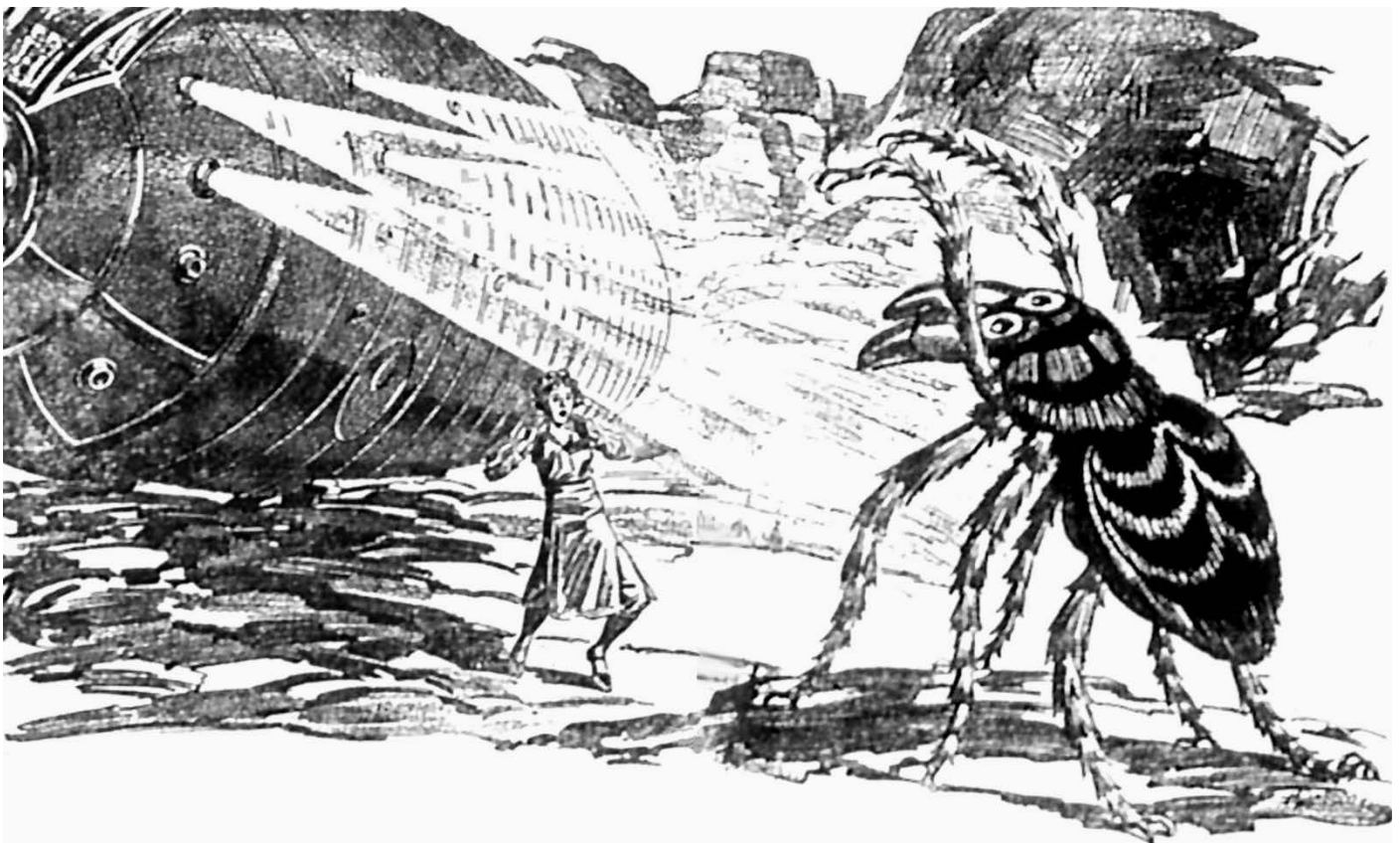
Another suit of slip-on clothes with an Ecklin heater, and his lounging moccasins were in a pack on his back. If he succeeded in releasing the girl, she would need them. The spider monsters didn't leave their Living Dead victims any clothing usually; and little good would it have done the Living Dead if they had.

Swiftly he descended the peak, leaping easily from rock to rock, thanks to the small gravity of the planet, and presently entered the clouds above the insect city. Abruptly the storm broke in all its fury with the shrieking of the gale and driving snow. In the blackness the pencil of light from his tiny flash showed only a few yards through the swirling, driving flakes that bit and numbed his bare face. With pistol ready he forged slowly ahead toward the cavern of the Living Dead.

He bumped into the snow-covered rock before he realized he was close to the place. With every nerve alert and the shrieking, freezing gale forgotten he slipped the flashlight back into its holder and drew another pistol. The door, he recalled, opened inward. It was not fastened, but just inside the entrance crouched a gigantic insect on guard.

Penrun was tense and ready. He kicked the door so viciously that its elastic, silken frame sagged inward under the impact of his foot. Against the glow of the green light inside the cavern he saw a nightmarish monster rising to its feet. Both pistols stabbed viciously as the monster thrust forward a thick, bristly leg to shut the door again.

A ray bit off the leg at the second joint. The other ray ripped open the soft, tumid abdomen. Penrun had barely time to throw himself aside as the convulsed, dying monster hurled



itself tigerishly forward through the doorway out into the driving storm in a final frenzied effort to seize and rend his frail human enemy.

Penrun slipped into the cavern. The deathly cold outside would finish the horrible insect. As he kicked the big door shut he was crouched and tense, for the ancient gray attendant monster whose poisoned bite had paralyzed thousands for this living hell was moving forward curiously.

Both pistols flamed to life. The fearsome head of the monster with its poisoned mandible shriveled to nothing under the searing rays. Penrun sprang backward and jerked open the door. Then he closed it again. The old spider was moving feebly. Instead of the galvanic death of the guard, the huge gray insect's legs buckled under it and it slumped down to the floor of the cave where it quivered a few seconds, then relaxed in death.

As Penrun stepped forward around the carcass the cave filled with hysterical screams and hoarse insane shouting of joy and terror. He looked up at the high vaulted roof where the strange diamond-shaped crystal diffused its green light along the shimmering silken web, then turned his gaze downward to the rock floor beneath his feet. At last he gritted his teeth and forced himself to look at the walls.

Again he saw tier upon tier of hammocks, each holding a naked human being, helpless and paralyzed from the poisoned bite of the attendant monster spider. Some could weep, some could smile, some could talk, yet none could move either hand or foot. A few were mercifully unconscious, but the rest were not. Many were insane. Yet they all lay alike year after year, century after century, if need be, kept alive by the rays of the strange green light in the roof. This was the cavern of the Living Dead!

■

Penrun knew the tragic future of these unfortunates. A few, perhaps, would go as food for the Queen in times of famine. The remainder would become living incubators for the larvae of the Queen which would be planted in their living bodies by the monster attendant to eat away the vitals until death mercifully ended the victim's life, and the growing spider emerged to feed on a new victim, or to go its way.

A thousand helpless human beings swung in their silken hammocks awaiting their fate. Penrun had learned about them during those two horrible days he had been held prisoner here before he had succeeded in raying the novice attendant and the monster guard with the pistol from his armpit holster that the spiders had overlooked when they captured him. He recalled again how he had dashed frantically from hammock to hammock trying to rouse some of the Living Dead to escape with him. Not one of them could respond.

Reports to the Interplanetary Council? He had made them, written and oral, and had only been laughed at for a half-crazy explorer. The Council would not even investigate.

Now Penrun did not tarry. He strode swiftly back to the far end of the cavern.

"The girl who was just brought in, is she safe?" he asked hoarsely.

None seemed to know, but presently he knew she was still unhurt, for he found her bound hand and foot to the rock wall with heavy silken webs. Nearly all her clothing had been torn off her. She looked up hopelessly. A great fear appeared in her eyes.

"You!" she gasped. "Are you responsible for this?"

"I have come for you," he replied in a matter-of-fact tone, swiftly removing the pack from his back.

She cowered against the wall.

"You—you inhuman beast!" Her face was white with horror.

He cut the silken bonds.

■

"Don't be a fool!" he said roughly. "I have no power over these monsters. Hurry into those clothes! Do you want to be bitten in the small of the back and lie paralyzed for years in a hammock like these other unfortunates, then suffer untold agony for months while spiders' larvae eat out your vitals? Hurry, I say! We must get out of here at once!"

He turned away. He wanted to see that old Englishman who said he had known Shakespeare. His wish was in vain. The old man's sightless eyes stared up at the silken roof. The long, heavy beard that lay across the breast stirred. The beady, glittering eyes of an infant spider peeped out. Penrun uttered a curse of loathing. His pistol stabbed death into the foul insect.

He felt a touch on his arm. The girl was waiting.

"I am ready," she said quietly. "Oh, let us hurry!"

Dawn was lighting the world outside, and the driving blizzard was already changing to rain. Penrun seized the girl's hand and ran madly up the mountainside toward the peak. The spiders usually did not venture out in the rain, but in the face of danger from the ship they would be abroad as early as possible this morning.

Penrun suddenly spurted madly. Half a dozen gigantic spiders were moving cautiously along the lower edge of the city, their bodies looming up grotesquely in the misty rain. The girl stumbled, struck her head against a boulder, and lay still. Penrun caught her up in his arms and sprinted madly up the steep slope.

■

A rock loosened by his flying feet rattled and pounded down the hillside. Instantly the monsters whirled round, sighted him and started in pursuit. With a mighty leap he cleared a ten-foot ledge, carrying his unconscious burden, and plunged into the sheltering mist of the clouds. Up, up! Thank God for the weak gravity!

A swishing rattle of claws on rock shot by them in the fog, turned and swept back. Penrun sprang straight upward, rising nearly a dozen feet in the air as the monsters streaked past underneath.

Only a little farther! Savagely he forced his failing strength to carry them up the slope. The air was chilling fast and the mist thinning. He broke into clear air as the fog behind them filled with the rattle of racing claws on the barren granite and the grating roar of the baffled monsters, seeking frantically for their intended victims.

He staggered on another hundred yards before he collapsed with lungs laboring desperately in the rarefied air.

Below them a bristly monster charged out of the fog, sighted them lying up among the rocks, and leaped after them. Penrun jerked up a pistol with trembling fingers and loosed its deadly ray. The huge spider stumbled and ploughed head-on among the rocks with a flurry of legs. It rose loggily, for its fierce energy was dwindling rapidly in the biting cold. Again the pistol crackled. The gigantic insect toppled over and rolled down the mountainside into the fog and vanished.

"Are we safe now?"

Penrun turned. The girl was now sitting up somewhat unsteadily, with an ugly bruise on her forehead.

"I think so," he replied. "Up there in my space-sphere we shall be quite safe."

■

Together they plodded silently up the sharp incline of the peak, her hand in his. And as they went he marveled that her eyes could be so beautiful now that the fear and horror had vanished from their depths.

The storm clouds below had broken up and dissolved under the increasing heat, revealing the Trap-Door City, seemingly deserted, and the motionless black ship still resting on the plateau. Penrun turned to the girl beside him in the control nest of the space-sphere.

"What are your friends waiting for all this time?" he asked abruptly.

"They're not my friends," she retorted. "And you might have guessed that they are waiting for you to arrive with the other third of the map. They are planning to surprise you and rob you of it. The entrance to the Caves is under the edge of the Cataract over there, and by waiting here they are sure to be on hand when you arrive. Only"—her brows puckered in a little frown—"I don't understand why

they remain out there on the open rock after Helgers has picked a hiding-place for the ship."

"Helgers?"

"He is the leader of the gang, and he is the man who killed that poor old Martian aboard the *Western Star* for the map. Helgers learned about the treasure and the existence of the map through a convict who was with Lozzo in the prison. Helgers pretends to be an importer in Chicago—he actually owns a nice little business there—but in reality he is one of the biggest smugglers in the Universe."

"How do you come to be with him?"

"I was coming to that," she replied. "My parents live on Ganymede."

Penrun nodded. He was familiar with the fourth satellite of Jupiter and its fertile provinces.

"My father is an American, but my grandfather on my mother's side was a Medan nobleman. He was ruined by that notorious pirate, Captain Halkon, who descended with his ships on our city and carried off everything of value, including the vast amount of scrip credits owned by the state which were entrusted to my grandfather. You know the Ganymedan debtor's law?"

He did indeed! It was one of the most infamous laws of the Universe: ruling that the debts of the father descended to the children and their children's children until paid.

■

"My family is now poor," she went on. "For a century or more we have striven to pay off the debt caused by the loss of those state funds. That's the way matters stood when I received a letter from my brother Tom in Chicago, who was employed in the office of Helgers' legitimate importing business, little aware of the smuggling. Tom had somehow got wind of the near discovery of Halkon's treasure, and I saw a chance to get a part of it by joining Helgers' party. He might not want us, but he would be practically forced to take us to keep our mouths shut. I felt that we were honestly entitled to a part of that treasure which had been stolen from our family, and with it we could pay off that old debt that had ridden our family like an Old Man of the Sea for more than a century.

"Getting into the expedition proved much simpler than I had expected. When Tom told Helgers about me he was very eager to help us—he is one of those men who is always anxious to help a girl if he thinks she is good-looking enough. So you see when I held you up in your stateroom I was merely performing my part of the scheme, although I didn't know then that Helgers had already slain the old Martian and leaped out into space.

"After that the *Osprey*—the ship down there on the plateau—overhauled the *Western Star* and took us off, and shortly afterward I learned most unpleasantly that Helgers had no intention of giving Tom and me our share unless I

gave myself to him in exchange. I told Tom, and trouble started. It came to a head yesterday and there was a fight and—and Helgers killed Tom."

She began to weep quietly. Penrun stared grimly down at the black, motionless ship. Presently the girl resumed her story.

"I managed to get the air-lock open and escaped from the ship. Then that horrid spider caught me. You know the rest."

Her voice trailed off. Penrun remained silent for a while.

"You haven't even told me your name," he reminded her gently.

"Irma Boardle," she replied with a wan smile.

"I am Dick Penrun, in case you don't already know me. Captain Halkon was my grandfather. We always tried to keep the knowledge of it a family secret, since we were ashamed of it. If I—we get our hands on that treasure, I can promise you that the debt hanging over your family shall be paid first, Miss Boardle."

"Not Miss Boardle. Call me Irma," she said, the wan smile growing suddenly warm.

Penrun looked at her thoughtfully.

"But we aren't near the treasure yet," he said. "Between the spider monsters and the human monsters in the ship, our chances are rather slim. We'll just have to wait until we get a break."

■

As the day wore on there was a note of menace in the silence that hung over the Trap-Door City. It was nothing tangible, unless it was the appearance of two long silvery rods mounted on the top of the huge cocoon-palace of the Queen aiming down at Helgers' ship. Penrun could have sworn they were not there yesterday. The sight of them made him uneasy.

Helgers must have interpreted the silence differently, for presently a man emerged from the ship, protected against the heat by a clumsy space-suit. He hesitated, then walked slowly away from the ship, and paused again, waiting for the spiders to attack. Not a movement was made in the city. Presently he moved on again toward the cataract which had dwindled in the heat of the day to a mere trickle of hot water down to the pool in the gorge more than half a mile below.

After a time the man reached the cataract. He descended the short path that led down under the lip of rock to another ledge a few feet below it. The entrance to the Caves opened out onto this lower ledge. Little wonder, thought Penrun, that no one knew where the Caves were.

Some time later two other men from the ship followed him.

"Fools!" muttered Penrun, following them through his glasses. "They think the spiders are afraid of their ray artillery. I'll bet the monsters are either waiting until all the men wander out of the ship, or else they're getting ready to spring some hellish surprise."

Other men came out of the ship, carrying rock drills, a roll of cable and a powerful little windlass. Instead of going to the Caves, they went round the ship to the other side under the doubtful protection of the ray-guns, and sank two shafts into the granite. Into these they drove steel posts and anchored the windlass. One end of the cable was attached to the windlass and the other to the nose of the ship. Then they slowly dragged the big craft across the plateau on rollers from the ship's store room.

■

"That's strange!" exclaimed Penrun. "The ship can't rise! I wonder what's wrong, and why they are pulling it away from instead of toward the Caves."

"I don't know what's the matter with the ship, but I believe I know why they are moving it," volunteered Irma. "They're taking it to that hiding-place I told you Helgers picked out—there behind that upthrust of rock. You see, they think you know where the Caves are because you have explored Titan, and they think you will come directly here, so they want the ship hidden to make sure you land."

Half a hundred men in their space-suits toiled like ants about the big cylindrical craft until they at last jockeyed it into position behind the natural screen of rock. Even before it was in place other men were swarming over the ship with paint machines, coloring it a granite gray. When they had finished the ship was nearly invisible from the sky.

Penrun paid little attention to their preparations. His attention was centered on those two shining rods atop the Queen's silken palace. They now aimed at the ship in its new position. A strange idea flashed through his mind. Those rods had in some mysterious way put the elevating machinery of the *Osprey* out of commission!

Suppose the spiders turned them next on his own space-sphere up here on the peak? The thought sent a shudder through him. Visions of the final flight across the nightmarish, distorted granite, the running down and capture of himself and Irma, the paralyzing bite of the monsters in the cavern of the Living Dead flashed across his mind. Cold sweat stood out on his forehead. Instinctively his hand leaped to the propulsion control and hovered there.

**"Not Miss Boardle. Call me Irma," she said,
the wan smile growing suddenly warm.
Penrun looked at her thoughtfully.**

■

Yet why hadn't the spiders attacked the ship, now that they had it helpless? It was not their usual tactics to give their victims a chance to free themselves. Why, why? There could be only one answer. They were waiting for something! Penrun's eyes glinted suddenly.

"Irma," he said rapidly, "we are in serious danger. The spiders have obviously put the elevating machinery of the *Osprey* out of commission. Helgers and his men are doomed to the Living Death as surely as though they were already lying in the silken hammocks. If the monsters choose, they could do the same thing to our sphere and doom us to the same fate. I believe they are waiting for something. While they wait we have a chance to get the treasure and escape. Shall we risk it, or shall we go while we know we are safe?"

She looked up at him evenly.

"If you think we have a fair chance to get the treasure and escape, I say let's risk it," she said firmly.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Here we go!"

The little sphere slipped out of its cleft in the peak and dropped swiftly into the valley on the side opposite the Trap-Door City and its mysterious menace. Day was swiftly dying, and the lower passes of the mountains were already hazy with rapidly forming storm-clouds.

"Look!" cried Irma excitedly. "What are those things?"

Far in the distance a long line of wavering red lights snaked swiftly through the dusky valley toward them. Penrun picked up his binoculars.

"Spiders," he announced. "Scores of them. Each is carrying a sort of red torch. I have a feeling that those are what the monsters of the Trap-Door City have been waiting for."

He urged the sphere to swifter flight along the range. Miles from the Caves, he swept up over the peaks, and dropped down on the lowlands side. Dusk was deepening rapidly as he raced back toward the White River cataract under the pall of the gathering storm.

■

Among the boulders on the rough mountainside near the mouth of the Caves he eased the craft down to a gentle landing.

"Wait here," he told Irma. "I'll investigate and see if it is safe to enter the Caves."

They had seen the three men return to the ship, but others might have gone to the Caves after that. Penrun made his way down the slope to the lip of the cataract and the yawning blackness of the abysmal gorge below it.

Overhead the storm was gathering swiftly, and the saffron light of the dying day illuminated the plateau eerily. Half a mile away the Trap-Door City shimmered fantastically in the uncertain light. Penrun repressed a shudder. The Devil's

own playground! Thank God, he and Irma would be out of it soon!

He crept down the narrow path that led under the ledge of the trickling cataract. Outside, a bolt of lightning stabbed down from the darkened heavens. Its lurid flash revealed the huge figure of a man, pistol in hand, beside the entrance to the Caves.

Too late to retreat now, even had he wished to. Penrun's weapon flashed first. A scream of pain and fury answered the flash, and the man's pistol clattered down on the rock. The next instant Penrun was helpless in the clutch of a mighty pair of arms that tried to squeeze the life out of him.

"Burn, me, will ye, ye dirty scum!" roared the giant of a man tightening his grip. "I'll break your damned back for ye and heave ye into the gorge!"

Penrun writhed frenziedly, trying to twist his pistol around against his enemy's back, while they struggled desperately about the ledge above the dizzy blackness of the gorge. But the pistol struck the wall beside the entrance and fell under their trampling feet.

Penrun was gasping in agony at the intolerable pain in his spine. Darting points of light danced before his eyes. Then from the opening in the rock showed a beam of white light and a man slowly emerged from the Caves. The grip on Penrun relaxed slightly as the man came toward the two combatants. Penrun could distinguish him closely now. A heavy, pasty face with liquid black eyes and a crown of thinning hair. Helgers! He was staggering and grunting under the weight of a heavy metal box.

■

"What's the matter, Borgain?" he asked.

"Got this bird, Penrun, we been waitin' for!"

"We don't need him, now that we already have the treasure. Still, it's a good thing we found him. Just as well to have no tales circulating about the Universe about our find. Toss him into the gorge, and go down and watch the other three chests until I get—"

"Dick, Dick!" Irma's excited voice floated down from up among the boulders. "The spiders with those red cylinder torches have arrived! They are attacking the *Osprey*!"

Helgers jerked up his head.

"Why, if it isn't the little spitfire!" he exclaimed in pleased astonishment. "I thought the damned spiders had eaten her long before this. Rather changes things, Borgain. I'll just go on up and let my little playmate know I am here. Toss our friend over the edge there, and bring up another treasure chest."

"What was that she was sayin' about the spiders attackin' the *Osprey*?" Borgain's voice was anxious.

"Oh, that's nothing the boys can't handle," said Helgers confidently. "In case they don't, we'll have to feel sorry for them and take our friend's sphere. Only have to split the treasure two ways, in that case," he added, moving up the slope.

Borgain's answer was a grunt of surprise, for his captive had squirmed suddenly out of his clutch. The big man plunged forward recklessly with arms outstretched in the groping darkness. Penrun, desperately remembering the sickening drop at their feet to the pool three thousand feet below, backed against the rock.

A flash of lightning. Borgain's ape-like arms were nearing him. Penrun lashed out at the darkened features. His knuckles bit deep into the flesh. He slipped aside as Borgain, mouthing fearful curses, rammed into the rock wall and rebounded.

■

Again the fumbling search. Another lightning flash. Penrun struck with frenzied desperation. Borgain took the blow behind the ear and staggered. He whirled, wild with fury, and charged vainly along the narrow ledge.

"I'll get ye this time, damn your dirty carcass—ugh!"

Guided by the sound of his voice, Penrun struck with all his strength. Borgain's nose flattened under the blow. He whirled half around.

"I'll kill ye! I'll kill—help, help—a-ah!"

Lost in the blackness he had plunged over the lip of the rock, thinking he was charging Penrun. Down into the yawning gorge his body hurtled, the sound of his frenzied, dwindling screams floating up eerily out of the black, ominous depths.

Penrun crouched against the wall, sick and trembling. Irma, Helgers! He must hurry! He fumbled again for the pistols. They were gone. Crawling forward now, still shaken by his narrow escape from death, he gained the pathway. The rain was drumming wildly on the barren granite now, and the pitch-blackness was shattered only by ghastly lightning bolts.

Guided by the flashes, he clambered up the slope and halted abruptly. The door of the space-sphere was open, and, silhouetted against the soft glow of light within it, was Irma, seated dejectedly with bowed head, heedless of the cold rain beating down upon her. Helgers was nowhere to be seen. Penrun dashed forward.

"Irma, Irma!" he cried. "What has happened? Where is he?"

She raised her head slowly and stared at him as at one risen from the dead. Then she burst into tears.

"He said they had killed you—had thrown your body into the gorge," she sobbed. "I—I just didn't want to live after that. Are you hurt?"

"Not a bit," he assured her fervently. "But where is Helgers?"

"I pistoled him," she said quietly. "I had no choice. He came at me after I warned him to keep away. He fell over there among the rocks. Oh, Dick, let us hurry away from this mad place!"

■

He stared at the rain-swept rocks. The heavy metal treasure chest lay a few yards away where Helgers had dropped it. Penrun moved cautiously toward the spot where he had fallen. He was gone. The rain had washed away any traces of blood that might have remained.

While Penrun hesitated, the roar of the tempest was split by a man's scream of agony. A lurid flash of lightning an instant later revealed a gigantic spider down by the cataract with Helgers' struggling body in his mandible jaws. Returning blackness blotted out the scene.

Irma's pistol stabbed a ray through the driving rain at the hideous monster. Instantly its grating roar for help rang out, and a group of red lights from the doomed *Osprey* across the plateau, detached themselves from the others and came streaking for the cataract.

Penrun seized the heavy treasure chest and staggered to the sphere.

"Hurry, here they come!" screamed the girl.

He fell through the door with his burden just as the foremost monster leaped the river. The next instant Irma sent the sphere rocketing upward. Just before they plunged into the clouds they caught a last glimpse of the *Osprey* with her ray guns melted off by the red cylinder torches, and great holes gaping in her sides through which the monsters were carrying out the members of the crew to their cavern of the Living Dead.

As the sphere burst through the storm cloud into the frigid air above it, Irma gave a cry and pointed at the peak where they had hidden in the sphere. The peak was now alive with moving red lights of monsters searching vainly for them. The scene dropped swiftly below as the sphere gathered speed for its homeward journey.

"We got only a small portion of the treasure, but it will be enough," said Penrun. "After we pay your family's debt, I want to spend a hundred thousand or so for a specially chartered battle-sphere which will come back here to Titan. If the Interplanetary Council will do nothing about the Trap-Door City, I shall, independently. Not rays, but good old primitive bombs such as they used back in the Twentieth Century. I'll blow the hellish place off the face of the map and with it the cavern of the Living Dead. I think those lying in the hammocks would thank me for releasing them in that way."

★

OUT OF THIN AIR

Based on "Sjambak" by Jack Vance



OBSTACLES

Dangerous People - Prince Ali

Dangerous People - Sjambaks

Technical Challenges - Springing the Prisoner

Psychological Challenges - Deception & Secrets

COMPLICATIONS

Scant Intel

Bad Intel

Must be Kept Secret

PERKS

60 MV

MAGUFFINS

Data/Report on Cirgamesç

Trade with Cirgamesç

Blood Carburetor (1M)

Rocket Bike (6M)

BACKSTORY

In their never-ending quest for edutaining cultural exploitation programming, the producers of *Know Your Universe!* have decided to throw some focus on the exotic backwater colony planet of Cirgamesç (pronounced *jher-gham-EESH-grrh*).

The story is based on a rumor from a trusted source, saying that recent visitors in orbit above the planet have seen a *horseman* at an altitude of more than 10,000 miles, waving and smiling at the travelers before disappearing again. This reportedly happened above the Sultanate of *Singhalût*.

The *Singhalût* have a peaceful and orderly society, with rituals, rules and stations for everything. This rigidity has its price, however: Once in a while the dogmatic fug grows too great for certain individuals to bear. People sometimes snap, defying authority and running *amok*, or as the *Singhalût* say, becoming *Sjambaks*. These are wild rebels and thieves who live in the desert and are said to survive without air.

Another drama is unfolding in the Sultanate, which is becoming cramped due to its growing population. The Sultan wants to finance the development of new domed cities, and the PCs will sense that this has more than a little to do with his interest in their show. Meanwhile his son Prince Ali-Tomás has other ideas: he is covertly planning to bring war to Cirgamesç, and his secret army is the *Sjambaks*.

THE CAPTURED CAMERAMAN

MISSION TYPE: Emergency/Rescue
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Permanent (6)
PAY: 5M ea

A member of the *Know Your Universe!* team has gone missing, and the PCs are sent out to bring him back.

Wilbur Murphy, travel correspondent and neurocam reporter, was reporting on the “Space Horseman” when something went wrong. Patching his live feed into his UpVector radio, Murphy sent back a few seconds of video showing several bronze-skinned men who were preparing to cut him with scalpels. The room is full of tools and hoses. Video enhancement reveals what look like *motorcycles* in the background. There are only 12 hours left before Murphy misses his window, and the show’s producers are freaking out.

BUT I PLAY ONE ON TV

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Acquisition
NODE TYPE: Known Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL3)
PAY: 9M ea

The PCs are hired by Import-Export Bankers who want to put an end to Ali’s plans. Their mission is to obtain a set of reports and recordings directly from the hands of their contact Rube Trimmer, while posing as a media team from *Know Your Universe!* Neither the Sultan nor Ali can know what’s really happening.

If the PCs want to deliver information to Rube, they’ll either have to visit him at the bank, or find a way to pass messages until the handoff can take place. Meanwhile, the Sultan has big plans for this media opportunity, and has made plans for every available minute of their time here on Cirgamesç.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Survey/Fact-Finding
NODE TYPE: Known Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL3)
PAY: 8M ea

The Cirgamesç Node was discovered in the early days of the SlipSpace Era. The valleys were sealed a little over ten years ago, using the same biosphere containment technology as the Mars colonies, and were soon populated by a wave of colonists. Since then hundreds of other nodes have been discovered, including many with hospitable atmospheres and valuable exportables. The planet’s initial appeal has waned, and the first colonists – who now consider themselves locals - have made it a quiet place to pursue the rigorous disciplines of their religion. Quiet, that is, until recently.

The PCs are a media team, sent by their network to get the story behind “the space horseman”. The Sultan of *Singhalût* has been contacted and is eagerly anticipating their arrival, for his own reasons. The producers feel certain this will be a bizarre and intriguing episode, and the crew is advised to fill the broadcast with *Excitement! Sex! Mystery!*

One or more PCs will wear a neuro cam, ensuring that their editors (and audience) will be able to pick up everything they see and hear. The unit stores all data locally, to be downloaded later into an editing system. It can also be configured to broadcast its signal live to any compatible transmitter or satellite uplink.

CIRGAMESÇ

GRAVITY: 0.84 G
 ATMOSPHERE: None
 PRESSURE: 0.0 Earth atmospheres
 DAY: 22.4 hrs
 YEAR: 416.03 Earth days
 WATER: No standing water (outside of covered valleys)
 CLIMATE: Warm/Hot
 PRECIPITATION: None (DL 12)
 BIOSPHERE: No indigenous life

Cirgamesç is a colonized planet a little smaller than Mars. Its atmosphere escaped millennia ago, forcing the planet's original races into extinction.

Across the planet, vast mountain ranges are cleaved by rift valleys, and the massive swaths of desert are dotted with ancient ruins left behind by the original inhabitants.

The Cirgamesç colonists – most Javanese, Arabian & Malaysian expats – live in mountain valleys with great domes over them. These valley cities are connected by monorails. They have been developed in ingenious ways, but provide little room for growing populations.

The independent colonies of Cirgamesç include the valley sultanates of *Singhalût*, *Hadra*, *New Batavia* and *Boeng-Bohôt*, and the Great Rift Colony of *Sundaman*.

PERCEPTIONS

- The great Sampan Range is subdivided by the valley sultanates of *Singhalût*, *Hadra*, *New Batavia*, and *Boeng-Bohôt*, and *Sundaman* in the foothills. The ship sets down in Singhalût.
- Customs at Singhalût are extremely thorough. Passengers are warned not to take drugs or weapons planetside. They will be confiscated.
- As a matter of security, visitors are plied with questions, submitted to body cavity searches, and three-dimensionally x-rayed. All luggage is submitted to equally careful attention.
- The horizon is shaped like a V, hills sloping up to mountain ridges bearing the dome supports on either side of the valley. The sky is black.
- Cirgamesç is not a popular destination; the rift valleys feel too confined. Living under a dome can give one the willies. There are few tourists.
- Once in a while you see a small group of people zooming between valleys on *ROCKET BIKES*.

THE SINGHALÛT

SOCIETAL VALUES: Beauty, Philosophy, Order
 SOCIETAL PROBLEMS: (1) In need of expansion space; (2) Sjangbaks (thieves and rebels against order)
 TECHNOLOGY: Tech Level 12 (Digital Electronic)
 RESOURCES: Animals, Plants, Minerals, Trade
 UNDERSTANDING OF REALITY: Space travel

The Singhalût came to *CIRGAMESÇ* to escape the ancient superstitions of their homelands. Their lives are calm and orderly today; no one goes *amok* anymore. Spiritual and unimposing, they are almost boringly pleasant. Their festivals are celebrated quietly at home; there is little religious fervor, and courtships are consummated by family contracts.

The Singhalût are tawny and handsome, with large dark eyes and long eyelashes. The men wear loose pantaloons and open vests; the women wear only pantaloons. Only members of the sultan's house (and offworld visitors) are permitted to wear shirts or blouses.

It will later become apparent that this law is intended to make *SJAMBAKS* easily identifiable.

NAPAÛ — THE PHILOSOPHY OF SINGHALÛT

- Napaû aims to find meaning and beauty in all things by following the principles of *adak*.
- *Adak* is an ancient word referring to the rituals that order every act. The Singhalût are quiet Mohammedans with very little festivity; their existence is ritualistic and peaceful.
- But their heritage is passionate—and when *adak* confronts an irresistible emotion, there is turbulence, violence – the person runs *amok*.
- It's considered a good thing that people may carry no weapons other than knives; otherwise an amok might kill twenty instead of one.
- It has been many years since the last time a person ran amok. But recently the sultanate has been beset by a rash of *SJAMBAKS*.

SINGHALÛT

Beneath the gigantic dome stretches a vast landscape of city and countryside. As far as the eye can see the hillsides are terraced and barred in various shades of green: there are paddies, groves, orchards, farms, ponds and vineyards. Rivers and streams amble down the slopes, irrigating as they go. Spattering the valley floor are hundreds of small gardens and yards of fruit-bearing trees, tall canvas pavilions, tents, booths, shelters, and the cozy buildings of the city itself, the palace standing tallest among them. Electric surface-cars glide silently here and there, at safe and moderate speeds.

The palace is surrounded by a compound paved with red, green and white tiles, lined with banana palms. Opposite the palace across the square is an enormous pavilion of gold and violet silk with a dozen peaked gables.

THE PRISONER: In the center of the square a twenty-foot pole supports a cage two feet wide, three feet long, and four feet high. Inside crouches a naked man with a thick metal disc on his chest: a *Sjambak*. Captured by Prince Ali, he's being made an example of.

The city sits at the southern end of the settlement, and the southern gates lead out to the Great Pharasang Plain.

Heading north, the main road leads past the palace and out into the valley proper. At the northern edge of the city the road crosses a placid river, overgrown with lily pads and swarming with large white ducks.

ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2	Someone recognizes a PC. (1) they're an old friend, (2-4) they want to be famous, (5-6) they're mistaken.
3-4	A group of couriers parks their <i>ROCKET BIKES</i> nearby and (1-3) delivers a package, (4-6) heads into a café.
5-6	Two of the <i>SULTAN'S GUARD</i> are watching. Roll their attitude. +2 if PCs are on good terms with the Sultan.
7	A <i>SINGHALÛT LOCAL</i> approaches or is noticed. Roll to determine their appearance and activities (see next page).
8-9	Someone follows a PC but seems disinterested if confronted. (1-3) It's a spy for the Sultan, (4-6) for Prince Ali.
10-12	A <i>SJAMBAK</i> appears in public, causing a ruckus, stealing someone's bag and taking off toward the city gate.

PERCEPTIONS

- Despite the sky being black, the trough of the valley beneath the dome is full of haze and warmth and golden light.
- There are wonderful smells all around: roasted meats, grilled vegetables, spices, herbs, breads and confections.
- Music echoes out into the street from a wine-house, where the audience sits politely.
- You have the feeling you're being watched. Heads ducking behind curtains, etc.
- Someone brushes up against a PC, feeling their chest through their shirt. It seems accidental, but later someone else will do it (these are spies for the Sultan, looking for *Sjambaks*).
- Prince Ali passes by the prisoner; they look at each other eye to eye. Ali smiles and continues.

SINGHALÛT NAMES & FASHION

MALE NAMES

Aman, Domo, Dhûneet, Mamet, Tashman, Turû, Vashall

FEMALE NAMES

Bila, Dakai, Damra, Milai, Seretai, Simal, Vishta, Yondi

SIGNATURE FASHION

Singhalût fashion is colorful and flowing. To create an NPC's signature style, roll a random color (*DayTrippers GameMasters Guide* p.48), and apply it to their:

1 = Turban/Scarf	4 = Shoes
2 = Vest/Necklace	5 = Makeup/Tattoo
3 = Pantaloons	6 = Hair

THE PRISONER

NPC

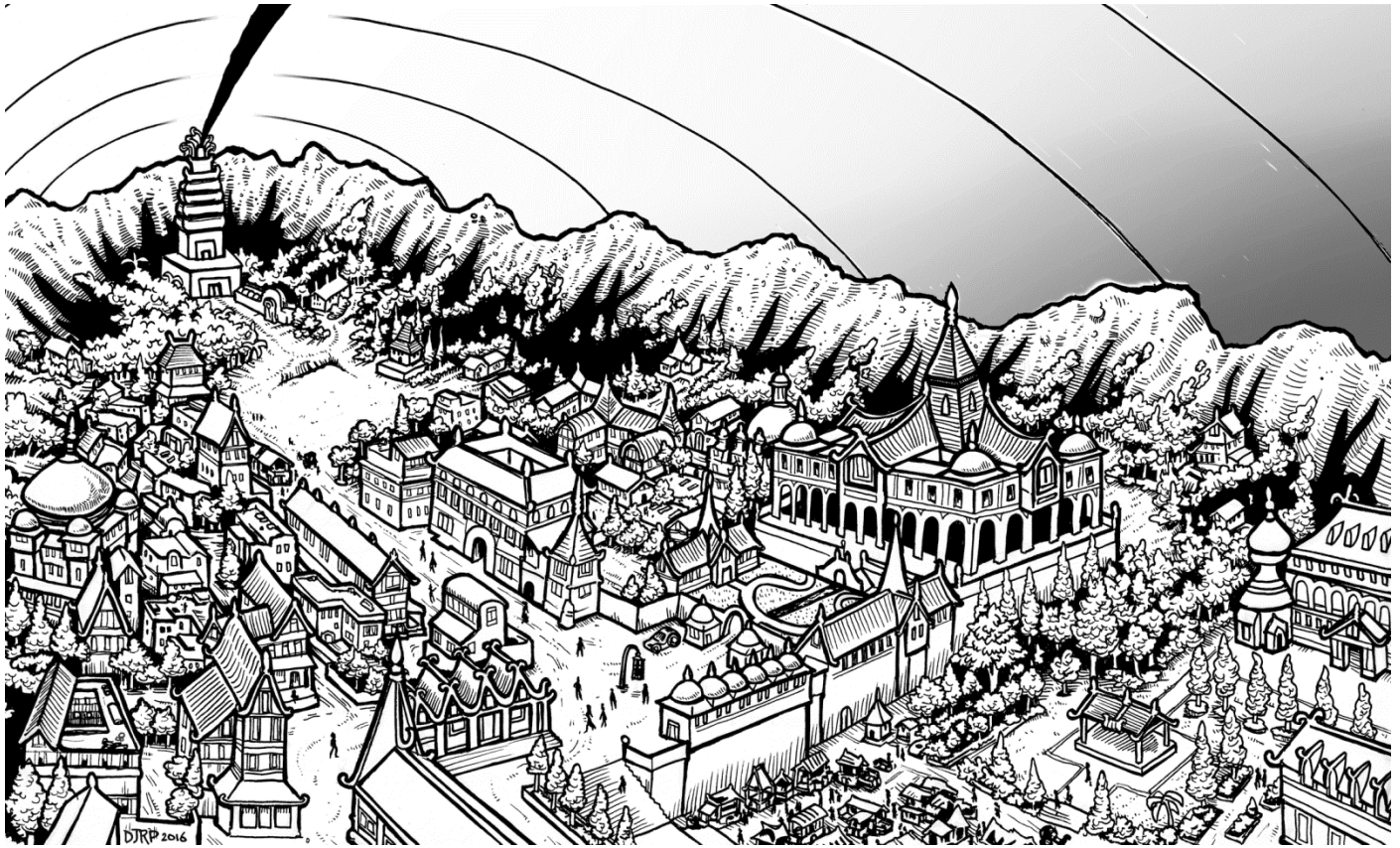
TCV: 0

A shell of a man, the prisoner is despondent and unresponsive. Viewed close up, the metal object on his chest appears to have been surgically emplaced.

There are always two of the *SULTAN'S GUARD* present in the square, and they will approach anyone who interacts with the prisoner for more than two Frames.

If the PCs somehow manage to set him free and get him some food, he could tell them all about Ali's army.

He's a *SJAMBAK* who tried to go AWOL and failed: for a brief glorious moment, he was the *Space Horseman*.



SINGHALÛT LOCALS

NPC

One Skill +1

TCV: 10

The Singhalût tend to say only positive things about their rulers and their society, speaking obliquely when necessary or simply telling (white) lies, because *THE SULTAN* has ears everywhere: 1 out of 6 people are informants. You never know when the Sultan (or one of his spies) is listening.

When a random local is encountered, roll on the table below to determine what they're doing:

WHAT ARE THEY DOING? (2D6)

2	Hurt or needs help
3-5	Shopping, has money to spend
6	Carousing, drinking or dancing
7	Eating or preparing food for others
8	Meditating, exercising or praying
9-11	Socializing, looking for something to do
12	Searching for something or someone

ENCOUNTERS

- Noticing the PCs eyeing *THE PRISONER*, the NPC explains that the fellow was captured when his *ROCKET BIKE* crash-landed near the city gates.
- The NPC explains the philosophy of Napaû, and advises calm observance here in Singhalût.
- The NPC confronts a vendor whose prices are high. The vendor says "Don't go amok!" It's said in jest but the NPC, deeply offended, grows suddenly quiet and storms away, red-faced.
- An NPC rolls his eyes at a conversation about sjambaks. If questioned privately he says there is purpose in what the sjambaks do; but most people just don't understand. (*Later this man may be encountered out in the desert, having become one of Ali's sjambaks.*)

SAVED BY PRINCE ALI

EVENT

If the PCs arrive via the spaceport, they will be forced to go through customs (and will be wondering what to do with any contraband they carry, no doubt).

Just as they're about to be given the complete search, a man strides up from a private car with a state seal. He is dressed in loose white pantaloons, a pink vest, pale green cravat and a complex black turban.

Introducing himself as *PRINCE ALI*, son of *THE SULTAN*, he waves them through customs with no ado. They are taken to the palace, where he tells them his father eagerly awaits their visit (after changing their clothes and refreshing in the *VISITOR'S SUITE*, of course).

VISITOR'S SUITE

LOCATION

Four rooms and a garden are enclosed by a thicket of bamboo. Each bedroom is a tent thirty feet high. Two of the walls are made of some soft, dark green fabric; a third is golden rust in tone, and the fourth opens upon the private garden.

The beds are pink and yellow, ten feet square, and smell of sandalwood. Carved black lacquer tubs hold fruit. Wines, liquors, syrups and essences flow from ebony spigots. The bathroom walls have magnificent colorful mosaics of birds. Servants await your every call.

The garden centers on a pool of cool water, which is very pleasant in the hothouse climate of Singhalût.

PERCEPTIONS

- Members of the house wear shirts and blouses. Servants do not.
- All servants address the PCs as "*Tuan*", a term of respect meaning "honorable".
- A BRAINS roll vs DL3 will reveal listening devices hidden among the flowers and décor – one in each room.

THE BARANGIPAN

LOCATION

A shady wine-house behind the palace, with nightly entertainment. The songs, shadow-plays and dances seen here convey the mystique and beauty of the Napaû philosophy, and the rigidity of Singhalût morality and law. Occasionally a story will be told of an *amok* who came to a bad end.

ENCOUNTER DL: Very Frequent (5)

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-5	Soek or other entertainer
6-8	1d6 locals (roll their attitude)
9-11	Chatty spy (1-3) for the Sultan, (4-6) for Ali
12	1d6 Terran visitors or business-people

SOEK PANJOEBANG

NPC

BRAINS 2
CHARM 3 Rhetoric+2
GRACE 3 Gamelan+2

TCV 95

Soek plays the gamelan in the Barangipan wine-house. Her enticing tones are mesmerizing. She's strikingly beautiful, with delicate features and transparent skin, long limbs and wide golden eyes. She wants very much to be a famous entertainer on Earth, and will happily come back to the palace with the PCs. If she thinks there's a chance, she may try seducing a PC into taking her back with them.

INFORMATION:

About Singhalût: She tells of the philosophy of Napaû and why people sometimes go amok – or sjambak.

About the Sultan: She speaks respectfully of him, but seems fearful of his ever-present eyes and ears.

About the Prince: She speaks especially respectfully of him, but says that they have never met. (False)

About Sjambaks: "When a man feels the knot forming around his chest, he no longer takes his kris and runs down the street *amok* — now he becomes *sjambak*. He *robs*." But she won't say more: "When one talks sjambak, the Sultan's ears rise."

SOEK IS A SPY FOR THE PRINCE

If Soek learns that the PCs have weapons or access to weapons, she will tell Ali and he will try to entrap them. She will report anything interesting they say to Ali.

PRINCE ALI-TOMÁS

BRAINS 2 Physiology+1
 CHARM 3 Rhetoric+2 FastTalk+2
 HEALTH 2

TCV 95

A handsome and diplomatic man in his late thirties, Ali-Tomás is the son of *THE SULTAN*. Publicly he honors his father and all local customs, but secretly he is forming his own army. If he believes the PCs can get him a shipment of weapons, he will take any action he deems necessary (including kidnapping them and turning them into sjambaks) to get what he wants.

INFORMATION:

About Sjambaks: "The metal object on their chests is the mark of their trade." (False. This is a story Ali has spread to explain the *BLOOD CARBURETORS*.) "For this reason only men of the Sultan's house may wear shirts – although notable visitors such as yourselves are exempted." (True, since the Sultan in his fear of sjambaks has made it the law.)

About the Horseman: "We have no horses on Cırgamesç. Such nonsense will have no interest for intelligent viewers."

About any Listening Devices that are Found: "Those were intended for someone else. Give them to me and I will dispose of them properly." (This is a lie. He is aware of his father's spying. A BRAINS roll vs Ali's *Rhetoric* roll will suggest that he's hiding something.)



SULTAN'S GUARD

GRACE 2 Crossbow+1
 HEALTH 2
 MIGHT 2 Sword+2

GEAR: Crossbow, Sword, Radio (Space-suit, armor+0)

TCV 55

These guards are stationed all throughout the palace, and also patrol the streets of the city. They are always found in pairs.

Weapon Possession: If they spot anyone with a weapon (other than a knife) they will move to apprehend the person and confiscate the weapon. The arrestee will be taken before the Sultan, and will have to plea their case (a Dialog Action) with a -1 penalty for flagrant violation of Singhalût law.

Across the Plain: If relations with the Sultan are good and he learns that the PCs are planning to travel across the plain, he will assign a unit of twenty guards to accompany them. These guards will be dressed in space-suits with helmet radios. They'll be unhappy and superstitious about being sent on this mission, and they will flee at the first sign of a *SJAMBAK*.

THE SULTAN OF SINGHALÛT

BRAINS 2 Economics+2
 CHARM 3 Rhetoric+3 FastTalk+1
 GRACE 2

TCV 135

The Sultan is a small mild man of seventy, sitting crosslegged on an enormous pink and green air-cushion. He has a dry clipped voice and the air of a harassed corporate executive. He tells you to be at ease, and launches straight into questions about the network and its potential audience. He is not impressed with the technology, only with the viewers.

Singhalût exports to Earth, but not as much as they'd like. The Sultan is very pleased with the network's interest, and says he wants to help in every way possible. "As such," the Sultan says, "tomorrow the Keeper of the Archives will present a series of charts analyzing the Singhalût economy, and Prince Ali-Tomás shall personally conduct you through the fish-hatcheries, as well as the hybrid soybean plantings in the Upper Kam District." (The PCs know this will be about as exciting as watching an apple turn brown.)

The Sultan will then steer the conversation toward his plans for the future of Singhalût: "We are currently making preparations to reclaim four more valleys, with an added area of 600,000 acres," he says. "Our population density is 1,500 to the square mile. We must expand. But to expand we need financing, and for financing we need investor confidence. And so, my Minister of Propaganda has arranged an hour's program, stressing our progressive social attitude, our prosperity and financial prospects..."



He's keenly focused on PR, and keeps steering the conversation back toward matters of progress, peacefulness and plans for future development. It doesn't require a roll to know that there's *got* to be a more exciting story than this.

INFORMATION:

About Excitement, Sex and Mystery: "We're drab as ditch water, I'm afraid. Singhalût is a peaceful and orderly society."

About the Horseman: He has no idea what you're talking about. He says they have no horses, and changes the subject.

About Sjambaks, or the Prisoner in the Square: "A sjambak is the lowest of the low. Such renegades could hold no interest for serious students of our planet." He then changes the subject to more favorable aspects of Singhalût society.

About the Ruins: "Your viewers will not be interested in them. They are mere shards of weathered stone. There are no inscriptions, no art." (This is a lie. They have found weird things out there, things they cannot explain, but the Sultan wants the PCs to focus on economics and progress. However, he will not outright prevent them from going to the ruins. In fact, if he can't convince them otherwise, he will supply a unit of twenty guards in case of sjambak attack.)

RUBE TRIMMER

NPC

BRAINS 3 Economics+2
CHARM 3 Rhetoric+2 FastTalk+2
PSYCHE 2 Spot Spy+2

TCV 155

Resident Director of the Import-Export Bank. Small and middle-aged, he retains the swagger of younger days. His skin is waxy, his tuft of white hair is thinning and his eyelids droop, making him hard to read.

A nine-year resident, he's familiar with the culture and casual about the ubiquitous spies, even addressing them directly when being spied upon. He's a straight-shooter, and enjoys having some Terran company.

He's aware of both the Sultan's and the Prince's plans. He'll share information with a fellow Earthling – even tips on maneuvering through the web of Cirkamesç society – but professionally, he can't get involved.

Rube is aware of Ali's plans and the growing sjambak army, but is unable to do anything about it. His hope is that the PCs might be able to help him get some highly classified reports on Ali's doings out to someone in authority – either at the bank's corporate offices or in the intelligence community – without alarming his investors.

A VISIT FROM RUBE

EVENT

If the PCs haven't been secretive, their presence in Singhalût will reach the attention of *RUBE TRIMMER*, who decides to pay them a visit in their suite.

If the PCs are working for the Import-Export Bank, Trimmer will be aware of their cover story as media personnel, and will play along within the palace walls.

Trimmer is naturally gregarious and speaks as freely as he can, but he's aware of the Sultan's snooping ways. When a sensitive issue arises, he glances around, raises a finger to his lips and gestures toward the exit. Once he gets outside and away from the palace, he's completely candid.

INFORMATION:

About any Listening Devices you Found: The ones you found were just plants. You can't catch the real ones: pressure-sensitive wires woven into the cloth walls.

About Sjambaks: "They are not what they seem," he says. "These are not *amoks*."

About the Situation in Singhalût ("*Remember, I didn't tell you any of this*" he says):

1. **The News Must Be Good.** The Sultan finances his reclamation projects through the Import-Export Bank on the basis of Trimmer's quarterly reports, and Trimmer's investors (like all investors) only want to hear good news.
2. **But Here's the Bad News.** Lately an argument of strategic differences has come between the Sultan and his son, although neither would admit it publicly. Ali thinks that roofing in more valleys is a waste of money when *Hadra* and *New Batavia* and *Sundaman* are so close by, and possess no military defenses. We're talking about conquest. Ali wants a *jihad*.
3. **Wait – It Gets Worse.** Ali already has his army: the *SJAMBAKS*. Now all he needs is a weapon supplier who'll cut a deal and transport the arms in secret. He's already begun looking, and it's only a matter of time before he finds one.

GHATAMIPOL RUINS

UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
ENCOUNTER DL: Uncommon (8)

The white ruins of Ghatamipol lay five miles from the sultanate, across Pharasang Plain. The outer wall of the ruin rises high above, white, solid and imposing. The giant gate to the city is standing open.

The scope of the ruin is breathtaking. There's no telling what a few weeks of digging might turn up. Surely it would mean tremendous prestige and publicity for the program – and for the PCs – if they were to uncover a tomb, a library, or a great work of ancient art.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2	Unusual Feature
3	Ancient Trap (pit, boulder, blade)
4-5	Tripwire (set by Sjambaks)
6-7	A way down into the underground
8-9	A Sjambak returning with stolen loot
10-11	3d6 Sjambaks – you're surrounded
12	Prince Ali on a <i>ROCKET-BIKE</i>

REGION

PERCEPTIONS

- The ruins are millions of years old; the lack of atmosphere helps prevent erosion and decay.
- The interiors are more frail than the outer wall, and have been affected by meteor damage.
- Most buildings are at least partly underground
- A *SJAMBAK* appears on a hill in the distance, watching the PCs silently. He wears a silk shirt open to expose the device on his chest. After a few seconds, he disappears without a trace.
- Occasional sounds – a faint whirr or clack – seem to emanate from the ground itself.
- Scans will reveal radioactive objects deep in the subterranean ruins, remarkably regular in shape and size – as if they were manufactured.

SJAMBAK

NPC

BRAINS 1
CHARM 1
GRACE 2 Shield+1 Crossbow+1
HEALTH 3
MIGHT 2 Sword+1
PSYCHE 2

GEAR: Shield, Crossbow, Sword

TCV 60

Sjambaks are rebels, bandits, flouters of authority. Some consider such behavior a natural byproduct of the rigidly moral customs of Cirgamesç society, much like *amoks* once were. Appearing without warning they assault Singhalût citizens, steal their money and valuables, and escape across the plain.

They roam quietly. They hide among the rocks and tend their oxygen stills. They lurk in the ancient cities.

Sjambaks have the ability to survive outside the sealed domes without requiring air. No one knows how they do it, and it lends a fearsome air to their already formidable reputation.

All sjambaks wear a round metal object on their chest, which is considered “the mark of their trade”. Actually the object is a *BLOOD CARBURETOR*, which permits survival for long periods without air.

SJAMBAK HIDEOUT

LOCATION

Two hundred yards into the ruin, a metal door leading to a small room. It's an airlock. When the system runs, the entire room vibrates and there is a hum all around you. When compression/decompression is complete, the inner door opens to reveal a hidden workroom.

It's here where we learn that the Sjambaks work for Prince Ali. He has created the whole phenomenon in order to frighten the populace and finance his war.

Expensive tools and equipment are scattered around the place, including compressors, hoses, oxygen tanks and surgical equipment, as well as everything required to make *BLOOD CARBURETORS*.

PERCEPTIONS

- A sealed door leads to an ancient tunnel which has been fortified by recent work: it leads directly into the palace.
- Six *ROCKET BIKES* are here, painted in various designs and colors. Some are decorated with lanyards and decals.
- One of them – if you squint your eyes a bit – looks a little like a horse.



ROCKET BIKE

MAGUFFIN

Capacity: 1
Tonnage: 0.5
Powersource: 10mW
Power Use: 1mW/hr
Aerodynamic design
Atmospheric Engine+2
Spotlight
Construction: Standard
Value: 6M

Due to the difficulty of travel in the mountainous terrain of the Sampan Range, couriers and emissaries on Cirgamesç often travel between valleys using these rocket-powered single-passenger vehicles, which are capable of reaching near-orbital velocities.

Rocket Bikes look like large touring motorcycles with oversized fuel tanks and booster rockets coming out the back. They can hold one rider each, including spacesuit and a small amount of personal gear.

A fully-fueled Rocket Bike can run for ten hours, and can reach orbital altitudes within minutes.

BLOOD CARBURETOR

MAGUFFIN

Earth Value: 1M

A Blood Carburetor, attached via surgical procedure, allows a person to survive for days without air by supercharging their blood with oxygen.

The process of creating a sjambak is straightforward, and takes about eight hours. The subject is placed under anaesthetic while the device is attached to the heart. A blue tube runs from the right auricle out to the carburetor, which pumps the blood full of oxygen and runs it back into the right auricle via a red tube. It is effectively an artificial respiratory system.

Once the operation is complete, the subject is placed in a decompression tank for eight hours while the pressure is gradually reduced by two pounds per hour.

The combination of the Blood Carburetor and the decompression treatment creates a "sjambak" who can not only travel freely across the planet's surface, but can even survive in the vacuum of space.

The same procedure will be performed on any PC who becomes a known threat to Ali's plan. Why? Because anyone who is discovered to be a sjambak will be arrested and caged on sight by the Sultan, and this would be an effective way of getting rid of them.

The value of a Blood Carburetor on Home-Earth would be about 1M. This is not revolutionary technology, and would be viewed by most Terran doctors as a rather barbaric form of cyber-modification.

ALI WANTS WEAPONS

EVENT

If Ali learns (or believes) that the PCs can get weapons for his army, he will do everything he can to obtain them. It's probably best not to give him such ideas.

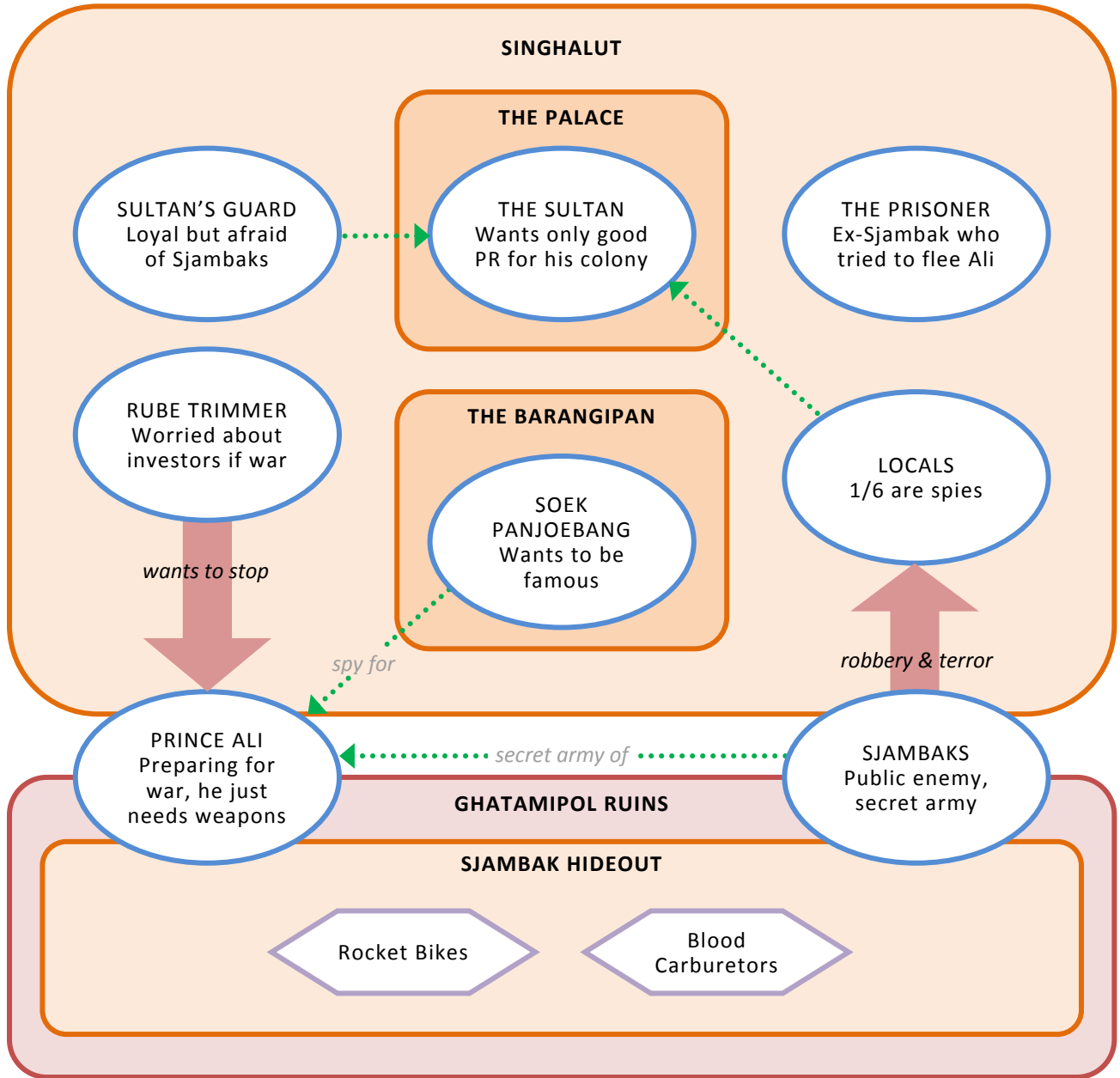
If he trusts the PCs he will offer to make a deal for the weapons directly. This is unlikely however, as he doesn't trust most people (and with good reason).

It's more likely he'll try to force the PCs into producing or procuring the weapons for him, using whatever leverage he can find (including blackmail, kidnapping and sabotage). His preference is to lure one or more of them out to the ruins, capture them, turn them into sjambaks (to keep them alive in the airless desert), and hold them until they give him what he wants.

Even if they were to escape they'd be under threat of arrest by his father, so Ali figures they'll be more willing to play his way once the operation has been performed.

If the PCs *do* end up procuring weapons for Ali, they will be paid a fair price. Several weeks later news will reach Earth that Singhalût has invaded the neighboring sultanate of New Batavia, and Ali has appointed himself the Sultan of that valley. Investors in the Cirgamesç colonies will lose billions, while military contractors, arms manufacturers and insurance companies will hurry to get in on the action.

OUT OF THIN AIR



SJAMBAK

by Jack Vance

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

Wilbur Murphy sought romance, excitement, and an impossible Horseman of Space. With polite smiles, the planet frustrated him at every turn—until he found them all the hard way!

Howard Frayberg, Production Director of *Know Your Universe!*, was a man of sudden unpredictable moods; and Sam Catlin, the show's Continuity Editor, had learned to expect the worst.

"Sam," said Frayberg, "regarding the show last night...." He paused to seek the proper words, and Catlin relaxed. Frayberg's frame of mind was merely critical. "Sam, we're in a rut. What's worse, the show's dull!"

Sam Catlin shrugged, not committing himself.

"*Seaweed Processors of Alphard IX*—who cares about seaweed?"

"It's factual stuff," said Sam, defensive but not wanting to go too far out on a limb. "We bring 'em everything—color, fact, romance, sight, sound, smell.... Next week, it's the Ball Expedition to the Mixtup Mountains on Gropus."

Frayberg leaned forward. "Sam, we're working the wrong slant on this stuff.... We've got to loosen up, sock 'em! Shift our ground! Give 'em the old human angle—glamor, mystery, thrills!"

Sam Catlin curled his lips. "I got just what you want."

"Yeah? Show me."

Catlin reached into his waste basket. "I filed this just ten minutes ago...." He smoothed out the pages. "'Sequence idea, by Wilbur Murphy. Investigate 'Horseman of Space,' the man who rides up to meet incoming space-ships.'"

Frayberg tilted his head to the side. "Rides up on a *horse*?"

"That's what Wilbur Murphy says."

"How far up?"

"Does it make any difference?"

"No—I guess not."

"Well, for your information, it's up ten thousand, twenty thousand miles. He waves to the pilot, takes off his hat to the passengers, then rides back down."

"And where does all this take place?"



"On—on—" Catlin frowned. "I can write it, but I can't pronounce it." He printed on his scratch-screen: CIRGAMESÇ.

"Sirgamesk," read Frayberg.

Catlin shook his head. "That's what it looks like—but those consonants are all aspirated gutturals. It's more like 'Hrrghameshgrrh'."

"Where did Murphy get this tip?"

"I didn't bother to ask."

"Well," mused Frayberg, "we could always do a show on strange superstitions. Is Murphy around?"

"He's explaining his expense account to Shifkin."

"Get him in here; let's talk to him."

■

Wilbur Murphy had a blond crew-cut, a broad freckled nose, and a serious sidelong squint. He looked from his crumpled sequence idea to Catlin and Frayberg. "Didn't like it, eh?"

"We thought the emphasis should be a little different," explained Catlin. "Instead of 'The Space Horseman,' we'd

give it the working title, 'Odd Superstitions of Hrrghameshgrrh'."

"Oh, hell!" said Frayberg. "Call it Sirgamesk."

"Anyway," said Catlin, "that's the angle."

"But it's not superstition," said Murphy.

"Oh, come, Wilbur ..."

"I got this for sheer sober-sided fact. A man rides a horse up to meet the incoming ships!"

"Where did you get this wild fable?"

"My brother-in-law is purser on the *Celestial Traveller*. At Riker's Planet they make connection with the feeder line out of Cirgamesç."

"Wait a minute," said Catlin. "How did you pronounce that?"

"Cirgamesç. The steward on the shuttle-ship gave out this story, and my brother-in-law passed it along to me."

"Somebody's pulling somebody's leg."

"My brother-in-law wasn't, and the steward was cold sober."

"They've been eating *bhāng*. Sirgamesk is a Javanese planet, isn't it?"

"Javanese, Arab, Malay."

"Then they took a *bhāng* supply with them, and *hashish*, *chat*, and a few other sociable herbs."

"Well, this horseman isn't any drug-dream."

"No? What is it?"

"So far as I know it's a man on a horse."

"Ten thousand miles up? In a vacuum?"

"Exactly."

"No space-suit?"

"That's the story."

Catlin and Frayberg looked at each other.

"Well, Wilbur," Catlin began.

Frayberg interrupted. "What we can use, Wilbur, is a sequence on Sirgamesk superstition. Emphasis on voodoo or witchcraft—naked girls dancing—stuff with roots in Earth, but now typically Sirgamesk. Lots of color. Secret rite stuff...."

"Not much room on Cirgamesç for secret rites."

"It's a big planet, isn't it?"

"Not quite as big as Mars. There's no atmosphere. The settlers live in mountain valleys, with air-tight lids over 'em."

Catlin flipped the pages of *Thumbnail Sketches of the Inhabited Worlds*. "Says here there's ancient ruins millions of years old. When the atmosphere went, the population went with it."

Frayberg became animated. "There's lots of material out there! Go get it, Wilbur! Life! Sex! Excitement! Mystery!"

"Okay," said Wilbur Murphy.

"But lay off this horseman-in-space. There *is* a limit to public credulity, and don't you let anyone tell you different."

■

Cirgamesç hung outside the port, twenty thousand miles ahead. The steward leaned over Wilbur Murphy's shoulder and pointed a long brown finger. "It was right out there, sir. He came riding up—"

"What kind of a man was it? Strange-looking?"

"No. He was Cirgameski."

"Oh. You saw him with your own eyes, eh?"

The steward bowed, and his loose white mantle fell forward. "Exactly, sir."

"No helmet, no space-suit?"

"He wore a short Singhalût vest and pantaloons and a yellow Hadrasi hat. No more."

"And the horse?"

"Ah, the horse! There's a different matter."

"Different how?"

"I can't describe the horse. I was intent on the man."

"Did you recognize him?"

"By the brow of Lord Allah, it's well not to look too closely when such matters occur."

"Then—you *did* recognize him!"

"I must be at my task, sir."

Murphy frowned in vexation at the steward's retreating back, then bent over his camera to check the tape-feed. If anything appeared now, and his eyes could see it, the two-hundred million audience of *Know Your Universe!* could see it with him.

When he looked up, Murphy made a frantic grab for the stanchion, then relaxed. Cirgamesç had taken the Great Twitch. It was an illusion, a psychological quirk. One instant the planet lay ahead; then a man winked or turned away, and when he looked back, "ahead" had become "below"; the planet had swung an astonishing ninety degrees across the sky, and they were *falling!*

Murphy leaned against the stanchion. "'The Great Twitch,'" he muttered to himself, "I'd like to get *that* on two hundred million screens!"

Several hours passed. Cirkamesç grew. The Sampan Range rose up like a dark scab; the valley sultanates of Singhalût, Hadra, New Batavia, and Boeng-Bohôt showed like glistening chicken-tracks; the Great Rift Colony of Sundaman stretched down through the foothills like the trail of a slug.

A loudspeaker voice rattled the ship. "Attention passengers for Singhalût and other points on Cirkamesç! Kindly prepare your luggage for disembarkation. Customs at Singhalût are extremely thorough. Passengers are warned to take no weapons, drugs or explosives ashore. This is important!"

■

The warning turned out to be an understatement. Murphy was plied with questions. He suffered search of an intimate nature. He was three-dimensionally X-rayed with a range of frequencies calculated to excite fluorescence in whatever object he might have secreted in his stomach, in a hollow bone, or under a layer of flesh.

His luggage was explored with similar minute attention, and Murphy rescued his cameras with difficulty. "What're you so damn anxious about? I don't have drugs; I don't have contraband ..."

"It's guns, your excellency. Guns, weapons, explosives ..."

"I don't have any guns."

"But these objects here?"

"They're cameras. They record pictures and sounds and smells."

The inspector seized the cases with a glittering smile of triumph. "They resemble no cameras of my experience; I fear I shall have to impound ..."

A young man in loose white pantaloons, a pink vest, pale green cravat and a complex black turban strolled up. The inspector made a swift obeisance, with arms spread wide. "Excellency."

The young man raised two fingers. "You may find it possible to spare Mr. Murphy any unnecessary formality."

"As your Excellency recommends...." The inspector nimbly repacked Murphy's belongings, while the young man looked on benignly.

Murphy covertly inspected his face. The skin was smooth, the color of the rising moon; the eyes were narrow, dark, superficially placid. The effect was of silken punctilio with hot ruby blood close beneath.

Satisfied with the inspector's zeal, he turned to Murphy. "Allow me to introduce myself, Tuan Murphy. I am Ali-Tomás, of the House of Singhalût, and my father the Sultan begs you to accept our poor hospitality."

"Why, thank you," said Murphy. "This is a very pleasant surprise."

"If you will allow me to conduct you...." He turned to the inspector. "Mr. Murphy's luggage to the palace."

■

Murphy accompanied Ali-Tomás into the outside light, fitting his own quick step to the prince's feline saunter. This is coming it pretty soft, he said to himself. I'll have a magnificent suite, with bowls of fruit and gin pahits, not to mention two or three silken girls with skin like rich cream bringing me towels in the shower.... Well, well, well, it's not so bad working for *Know Your Universe!* after all! I suppose I ought to unlimber my camera....

Prince Ali-Tomás watched him with interest. "And what is the audience of *Know Your Universe!?*"

"We call 'em 'participants'."

"Expressive. And how many participants do you serve?"

"Oh, the Bowdler Index rises and falls. We've got about two hundred million screens, with five hundred million participants."

"Fascinating! And tell me—how do you record smells?"

Murphy displayed the odor recorder on the side of the camera, with its gelatinous track which fixed the molecular design.

"And the odors recreated—they are like the originals?"

"Pretty close. Never exact, but none of the participants knows the difference. Sometimes the synthetic odor is an improvement."

"Astounding!" murmured the prince.

"And sometimes ... Well, Carson Tenlake went out to get the myrrh-blossoms on Venus. It was a hot day—as days usually are on Venus—and a long climb. When the show was run off, there was more smell of Carson than of flowers."

Prince Ali-Tomás laughed politely. "We turn through here."

They came out into a compound paved with red, green and white tiles. Beneath the valley roof was a sinuous trough, full of haze and warmth and golden light. As far in either direction as the eye could reach, the hillsides were terraced, barred in various shades of green. Spattering the valley floor were tall canvas pavilions, tents, booths, shelters.

"Naturally," said Prince Ali-Tomás, "we hope that you and your participants will enjoy Singhalût. It is a truism that, in order to import, we must export; we wish to encourage a pleasurable response to the 'Made in Singhalût' tag on our *batiks*, carvings, lacquers."

They rolled quietly across the square in a surface-car displaying the House emblem. Murphy rested against deep, cool cushions. "Your inspectors are pretty careful about weapons."

Ali-Tomás smiled complacently. "Our existence is ordered and peaceful. You may be familiar with the concept of *adak*?"

"I don't think so."

"A word, an idea from old Earth. Every living act is ordered by ritual. But our heritage is passionate—and when unyielding *adak* stands in the way of an irresistible emotion, there is turbulence, sometimes even killing."

"An *amok*."

"Exactly. It is as well that the *amok* has no weapons other than his knife. Otherwise he would kill twenty where now he kills one."

The car rolled along a narrow avenue, scattering pedestrians to either side like the bow of a boat spreading foam. The men wore loose white pantaloons and a short open vest; the women wore only the pantaloons.

"Handsome set of people," remarked Murphy.

Ali-Tomás again smiled complacently. "I'm sure Singhalût will present an inspiring and beautiful spectacle for your program."

Murphy remembered the keynote to Howard Frayberg's instructions: "*Excitement! Sex! Mystery!*" Frayberg cared little for inspiration or beauty. "I imagine," he said casually, "that you celebrate a number of interesting festivals? Colorful dancing? Unique customs?"

Ali-Tomás shook his head. "To the contrary. We left our superstitions and ancestor-worship back on Earth. We are quiet Mohammedans and indulge in very little festivity. Perhaps here is the reason for *amoks* and *sjambaks*."

"*Sjambaks*?"

"We are not proud of them. You will hear sly rumor, and it is better that I arm you beforehand with truth."

"What is a *sjambak*?"

"They are bandits, flouters of authority. I will show you one presently."

"I heard," said Murphy, "of a man riding a horse up to meet the space-ships. What would account for a story like that?"

"It can have no possible basis," said Prince Ali-Tomás. "We have no horses on Cirgamesç. None whatever."

"But ..."

"The veriest idle talk. Such nonsense will have no interest for your intelligent participants."

The car rolled into a square a hundred yards on a side, lined with luxuriant banana palms. Opposite was an enormous pavilion of gold and violet silk, with a dozen peaked gables casting various changing sheens. In the center of the square a twenty-foot pole supported a cage about two feet wide, three feet long, and four feet high.

Inside this cage crouched a naked man.

The car rolled past. Prince Ali-Tomás waved an idle hand. The caged man glared down from bloodshot eyes. "That," said Ali-Tomás, "is a *sjambak*. As you see," a faint note of apology entered his voice, "we attempt to discourage them."

"What's that metal object on his chest?"

"The mark of his trade. By that you may know all *sjambak*. In these unsettled times only we of the House may cover our chests—all others must show themselves and declare themselves true Singhalûsi."

Murphy said tentatively, "I must come back here and photograph that cage."

Ali-Tomás smilingly shook his head. "I will show you our farms, our vines and orchards. Your participants will enjoy these; they have no interest in the dolor of an ignoble *sjambak*."

"Well," said Murphy, "our aim is a well-rounded production. We want to show the farmers at work, the members of the great House at their responsibilities, as well as the deserved fate of wrongdoers."

"Exactly. For every *sjambak* there are ten thousand industrious Singhalûsi. It follows then that only one ten-thousandth part of your film should be devoted to this infamous minority."

"About three-tenths of a second, eh?"

"No more than they deserve."

"You don't know my Production Director. His name is Howard Frayberg, and ..."

■

Howard Frayberg was deep in conference with Sam Catlin, under the influence of what Catlin called his philosophic kick. It was the phase which Catlin feared most.

"Sam," said Frayberg, "do you know the danger of this business?"

"Ulcers," Catlin replied promptly.

Frayberg shook his head. "We've got an occupational disease to fight—progressive mental myopia."

"Speak for yourself," said Catlin.

"Consider. We sit in this office. We think we know what kind of show we want. We send out our staff to get it. We're signing the checks, so back it comes the way we asked for it. We look at it, hear it, smell it—and pretty soon we believe it: our version of the universe, full-blown from our brains like Minerva stepping out of Zeus. You see what I mean?"

"I understand the words."

"We've got our own picture of what's going on. We ask for it, we get it. It builds up and up—and finally we're like mice in a trap built of our own ideas. We cannibalize our own brains."

"Nobody'll ever accuse you of being stingy with a metaphor."

"Sam, let's have the truth. How many times have you been off Earth?"

"I went to Mars once. And I spent a couple of weeks at Aristillus Resort on the Moon."

Frayberg leaned back in his chair as if shocked. "And we're supposed to be a couple of learned planetologists!"

Catlin made grumbling noise in his throat. "I haven't been around the zodiac, so what? You sneezed a few minutes ago and I said *gesundheit*, but I don't have any doctor's degree."

"There comes a time in a man's life," said Frayberg, "when he wants to take stock, get a new perspective."

"Relax, Howard, relax."

"In our case it means taking out our preconceived ideas, looking at them, checking our illusions against reality."

"Are you serious about this?"

"Another thing," said Frayberg, "I want to check up a little. Shifkin says the expense accounts are frightful. But he can't fight it. When Keeler says he paid ten munits for a loaf of bread on Nekkar IV, who's gonna call him on it?"

"Hell, let him eat bread! That's cheaper than making a safari around the cluster, spot-checking the super-markets."

Frayberg paid no heed. He touched a button; a three-foot sphere full of glistening motes appeared. Earth was at the center, with thin red lines, the scheduled space-ship routes, radiating out in all directions.

"Let's see what kind of circle we can make," said Frayberg. "Gower's here at Canopus, Keeler's over here at Blue Moon, Wilbur Murphy's at Sirgamesk ..."

"Don't forget," muttered Catlin, "we got a show to put on."

"We've got material for a year," scoffed Frayberg. "Get hold of Space-Lines. We'll start with Sirgamesk, and see what Wilbur Murphy's up to."

■

Wilbur Murphy was being presented to the Sultan of Singhalût by the Prince Ali-Tomás. The Sultan, a small mild man of seventy, sat crosslegged on an enormous pink and green air-cushion. "Be at your ease, Mr. Murphy. We dispense with as much protocol here as practicable." The Sultan had a dry clipped voice and the air of a rather harassed corporation executive. "I understand you represent Earth-Central Home Screen Network?"

"I'm a staff photographer for the *Know Your Universe!* show."

"We export a great deal to Earth," mused the Sultan, "but not as much as we'd like. We're very pleased with your interest in us, and naturally we want to help you in every way possible. Tomorrow the Keeper of the Archives will present a series of charts analyzing our economy. Ali-Tomás shall personally conduct you through the fish-hatcheries. We want you to know we're doing a great job out here on Singhalût."

"I'm sure you are," said Murphy uncomfortably. "However, that isn't quite the stuff I want."

"No? Just where do your desires lie?"

Ali-Tomás said delicately. "Mr. Murphy took a rather profound interest in the sjambak displayed in the square."

"Oh. And you explained that these renegades could hold no interest for serious students of our planet?"

Murphy started to explain that clustered around two hundred million screens tuned to *Know Your Universe!* were four or five hundred million participants, the greater part of them neither serious nor students. The Sultan cut in decisively. "I will now impart something truly interesting. We Singhalûsi are making preparations to reclaim four more valleys, with an added area of six hundred thousand acres! I shall put my physiographic models at your disposal; you may use them to the fullest extent!"

"I'll be pleased for the opportunity," declared Murphy. "But tomorrow I'd like to prowl around the valley, meet your people, observe their customs, religious rites, courtships, funerals ..."

The Sultan pulled a sour face. "We are ditch-water dull. Festivals are celebrated quietly in the home; there is small religious fervor; courtships are consummated by family contract. I fear you will find little sensational material here in Singhalût."

"You have no temple dances?" asked Murphy. "No fire-walkers, snake-charmers—voodoo?"

The Sultan smiled patronizingly. "We came out here to Cirgamesç to escape the ancient superstitions. Our lives are calm, orderly. Even the *amoks* have practically disappeared."

"But the sjambaks—"

"Negligible."

"Well," said Murphy, "I'd like to visit some of these ancient cities."

"I advise against it," declared the Sultan. "They are shards, weathered stone. There are no inscriptions, no art. There is no stimulation in dead stone. Now. Tomorrow I will hear a report on hybrid soybean plantings in the Upper Kam District. You will want to be present."

■

Murphy's suite matched or even excelled his expectation. He had four rooms and a private garden enclosed by a thicket of bamboo. His bathroom walls were slabs of glossy actinolite, inlaid with cinnabar, jade, galena, pyrite and blue malachite, in representations of fantastic birds. His bedroom was a tent thirty feet high. Two walls were dark green fabric; a third was golden rust; the fourth opened upon the private garden.

Murphy's bed was a pink and yellow creation ten feet square, soft as cobweb, smelling of rose sandalwood. Carved black lacquer tubs held fruit; two dozen wines, liquors, syrups, essences flowed at a touch from as many ebony spigots.

The garden centered on a pool of cool water, very pleasant in the hothouse climate of Singhalût. The only shortcoming was the lack of the lovely young servitors Murphy had envisioned. He took it upon himself to repair this lack, and in a shady wine-house behind the palace, called the Barangipan, he made the acquaintance of a girl-musician named Soek Panjoebang. He found her enticing tones of quavering sweetness from the *gamelan*, an instrument well-loved in Old Bali. Soek Panjoebang had the delicate features and transparent skin of Sumatra, the supple long limbs of Arabia and in a pair of wide and golden eyes a heritage from somewhere in Celtic Europe. Murphy bought her a goblet of frozen shavings, each a different perfume, while he himself drank white rice-beer. Soek Panjoebang displayed an intense interest in the ways of Earth, and Murphy found it hard to guide the conversation. "Weelbrrr," she said. "Such a funny name, Weelbrrr. Do you think I could play the *gamelan* in the great cities, the great palaces of Earth?"

"Sure. There's no law against *gamelans*."

"You talk so funny, Weelbrrr. I like to hear you talk."

"I suppose you get kinda bored here in Singhalût?"

She shrugged. "Life is pleasant, but it concerns with little things. We have no great adventures. We grow flowers, we play the *gamelan*." She eyed him archly sidelong. "We love.... We sleep...."

Murphy grinned. "You run *amok*."

"No, no, no. That is no more."

"Not since the sjambaks, eh?"

"The sjambaks are bad. But better than *amok*. When a man feels the knot forming around his chest, he no longer takes his kris and runs down the street—he becomes sjambak."

This was getting interesting. "Where does he go? What does he do?"

"He robs."

"Who does he rob? What does he do with his loot?"

She leaned toward him. "It is not well to talk of them."

"Why not?"

"The Sultan does not wish it. Everywhere are listeners. When one talks sjambak, the Sultan's ears rise, like the points on a cat."

"Suppose they do—what's the difference? I've got a legitimate interest. I saw one of them in that cage out there. That's torture. I want to know about it."

"He is very bad. He opened the monorail car and the air rushed out. Forty-two Singhalûsi and Hadrasi bloated and blew up."

"And what happened to the sjambak?"

"He took all the gold and money and jewels and ran away."

"Ran where?"

"Out across Great Pharasang Plain. But he was a fool. He came back to Singhalût for his wife; he was caught and set up for all people to look at, so they might tell each other, 'thus it is for sjambaks.'"

"Where do the sjambaks hide out?"

"Oh," she looked vaguely around the room, "out on the plains. In the mountains."

"They must have some shelter—an air-dome."

"No. The Sultan would send out his patrol-boat and destroy them. They roam quietly. They hide among the rocks and tend their oxygen stills. Sometimes they visit the old cities."

"I wonder," said Murphy, staring into his beer, "could it be sjambaks who ride horses up to meet the space-ship?"

Soek Panjoebang knit her black eyebrows, as if preoccupied.

"That's what brought me out here," Murphy went on. "This story of a man riding a horse out in space."

"Ridiculous; we have no horses in Cirgamesç."

"All right, the steward won't swear to the horse. Suppose the man was up there on foot or riding a bicycle. But the steward recognized the man."

"Who was this man, pray?"

"The steward clammed up.... The name would have been just noise to me, anyway."

"I might recognize the name...."

"Ask him yourself. The ship's still out at the field."

She shook her head slowly, holding her golden eyes on his face. "I do not care to attract the attention of either steward, sjambak—or Sultan."

Murphy said impatiently. "In any event, it's not who—but *how*. How does the man breathe? Vacuum sucks a man's lungs up out of his mouth, bursts his stomach, his ears...."

"We have excellent doctors," said Soek Panjoebang shuddering, "but alas! I am not one of them."

■

Murphy looked at her sharply. Her voice held the plangent sweetness of her instrument, with additional overtones of mockery. "There must be some kind of invisible dome around him, holding in air," said Murphy.

"And what if there is?"

"It's something new, and if it is, I want to find out about it."

Soek smiled languidly. "You are so typical an old-lander—worried, frowning, dynamic. You should relax, cultivate *napaû*, enjoy life as we do here in Singhalût."

"What's *napaû*?"

"It's our philosophy, where we find meaning and life and beauty in every aspect of the world."

"That sjambak in the cage could do with a little less *napaû* right now."

"No doubt he is unhappy," she agreed.

"Unhappy! He's being tortured!"

"He broke the Sultan's law. His life is no longer his own. It belongs to Singhalût. If the Sultan wishes to use it to warn other wrongdoers, the fact that the man suffers is of small interest."

"If they all wear that metal ornament, how can they hope to hide out?" He glanced at her own bare bosom.

"They appear by night—slip through the streets like ghosts...." She looked in turn at Murphy's loose shirt. "You will notice persons brushing up against you, feeling you," she laid her hand along his breast, "and when this happens you will know they are agents of the Sultan, because only strangers and the House may wear shirts. But now, let me sing to you—a song from the Old Land, old Java. You will not understand the tongue, but no other words so join the voice of the *gamelan*."

■

"This is the gravy-train," said Murphy. "Instead of a garden suite with a private pool, I usually sleep in a bubble-tent, with nothing to eat but condensed food."

Soek Panjoebang flung the water out of her sleek black hair. "Perhaps, Weelbrrr, you will regret leaving Cirkamesç?"

**Murphy looked at her sharply.
Her voice held the plangent sweetness
of her instrument, with additional
overtones of mockery.**

"Well," he looked up to the transparent roof, barely visible where the sunlight collected and refracted, "I don't particularly like being shut up like a bird in an aviary.... Mildly claustrophobic, I guess."

After breakfast, drinking thick coffee from tiny silver cups, Murphy looked long and reflectively at Soek Panjoebang.

"What are you thinking, Weelbrrr?"

Murphy drained his coffee. "I'm thinking that I'd better be getting to work."

"And what do you do?"

"First I'm going to shoot the palace, and you sitting here in the garden playing your *gamelan*."

"But Weelbrrr—not *me*!"

"You're a part of the universe, rather an interesting part. Then I'll take the square...."

"And the sjambak?"

A quiet voice spoke from behind. "A visitor, Tuan Murphy."

Murphy turned his head. "Bring him in." He looked back to Soek Panjoebang. She was on her feet.

"It is necessary that I go."

"When will I see you?"

"Tonight—at the Barangipan."

■

The quiet voice said, "Mr. Rube Trimmer, Tuan."

Trimmer was small and middle-aged, with thin shoulders and a paunch. He carried himself with a hell-raising swagger, left over from a time twenty years gone. His skin had the waxy look of lost floridity, his tuft of white hair was coarse and thin, his eyelids hung in the off-side droop that amateur physiognomists like to associate with guile.

"I'm Resident Director of the Import-Export Bank," said Trimmer. "Heard you were here and thought I'd pay my respects."

"I suppose you don't see many strangers."

"Not too many—there's nothing much to bring 'em. Cirkamesç isn't a comfortable tourist planet. Too confined, shut in. A man with a sensitive psyche goes nuts pretty easy here."

"Yeah," said Murphy. "I was thinking the same thing this morning. That dome begins to give a man the willies. How do the natives stand it? Or do they?"

Trimmer pulled out a cigar case. Murphy refused the offer.

"Local tobacco," said Trimmer. "Very good." He lit up thoughtfully. "Well, you might say that the Cirkameski are schizophrenic. They've got the docile Javanese blood, plus the Arabian élan. The Javanese part is on top, but every

once in a while you see a flash of arrogance.... You never know. I've been out here nine years and I'm still a stranger." He puffed on his cigar, studied Murphy with his careful eyes. "You work for *Know Your Universe!*, I hear."

"Yeah. I'm one of the leg men."

"Must be a great job."

"A man sees a lot of the galaxy, and he runs into queer tales, like this sjambak stuff."

Trimmer nodded without surprise. "My advice to you, Murphy, is lay off the sjambaks. They're not healthy around here."

Murphy was startled by the bluntness. "What's the big mystery about these sjambaks?"

Trimmer looked around the room. "This place is bugged."

"I found two pick-ups and plugged 'em," said Murphy.

Trimmer laughed. "Those were just plants. They hide 'em where a man might just barely spot 'em. You can't catch the real ones. They're woven into the cloth—pressure-sensitive wires."

Murphy looked critically at the cloth walls.

"Don't let it worry you," said Trimmer. "They listen more out of habit than anything else. If you're fussy we'll go for a walk."

The road led past the palace into the country. Murphy and Trimmer sauntered along a placid river, overgrown with lily pads, swarming with large white ducks.

"This sjambak business," said Murphy. "Everybody talks around it. You can't pin anybody down."

"Including me," said Trimmer. "I'm more or less privileged around here. The Sultan finances his reclamation through the bank, on the basis of my reports. But there's more to Singhalût than the Sultan."

"Namely?"

Trimmer waved his cigar waggishly. "Now we're getting in where I don't like to talk. I'll give you a hint. Prince Ali thinks roofing-in more valleys is a waste of money, when there's Hadra and New Batavia and Sundaman so close."

"You mean—armed conquest?"

Trimmer laughed. "You said it, not me."

"They can't carry on much of a war—unless the soldiers commute by monorail."

"Maybe Prince Ali thinks he's got the answer."

"Sjambaks?"

"I didn't say it," said Trimmer blandly.

Murphy grinned. After a moment he said. "I picked up with a girl named Soek Panjoebang who plays the *gamelan*. I

suppose she's working for either the Sultan or Prince Ali. Do you know which?"

Trimmer's eyes sparkled. He shook his head. "Might be either one. There's a way to find out."

"Yeah?"

"Get her off where you're sure there's no spy-cells. Tell her two things—one for Ali, the other for the Sultan. Whichever one reacts you know you've got her tagged."

"For instance?"

"Well, for instance she learns that you can rig up a hypnotic ray from a flashlight battery, a piece of bamboo, and a few lengths of wire. That'll get Ali in an awful sweat. He can't get weapons. None at all. And for the Sultan," Trimmer was warming up to his intrigue, chewing on his cigar with gusto, "tell her you're on to a catalyst that turns clay into aluminum and oxygen in the presence of sunlight. The Sultan would sell his right leg for something like that. He tries hard for Singhalût and Cirgamesç."

"And Ali?"

Trimmer hesitated. "I never said what I'm gonna say. Don't forget—I never said it."

"Okay, you never said it."

"Ever hear of a *jehad*?"

"Mohammedan holy wars."

"Believe it or not, Ali wants a *jehad*."

"Sounds kinda fantastic."

"Sure it's fantastic. Don't forget, I never said anything about it. But suppose someone—strictly unofficial, of course—let the idea percolate around the Peace Office back home."

"Ah," said Murphy. "That's why you came to see me."

■

Trimmer turned a look of injured innocence. "Now, Murphy, you're a little unfair. I'm a friendly guy. Of course I don't like to see the bank lose what we've got tied up in the Sultan."

"Why don't you send in a report yourself?"

"I have! But when they hear the same thing from you, a *Know Your Universe!* man, they might make a move."

Murphy nodded.

"Well, we understand each other," said Trimmer heartily, "and everything's clear."

"Not entirely. How's Ali going to launch a *jehad* when he doesn't have any weapons, no warships, no supplies?"

"Now," said Trimmer, "we're getting into the realm of supposition." He paused, looked behind him. A farmer pushing a rotary tiller, bowed politely, trundled ahead. Behind was a young man in a black turban, gold earrings, a

black and red vest, white pantaloons, black curl-toed slippers. He bowed, started past. Trimmer held up his hand. "Don't waste your time up there; we're going back in a few minutes."

"Thank you, Tuan."

"Who are you reporting to? The Sultan or Prince Ali?"

"The Tuan is sure to pierce the veil of my evasions. I shall not dissemble. I am the Sultan's man."

Trimmer nodded. "Now, if you'll kindly remove to about a hundred yards, where your whisper pick-up won't work."

"By your leave, I go." He retreated without haste.

"He's almost certainly working for Ali," said Trimmer.

"Not a very subtle lie."

"Oh, yes—third level. He figured I'd take it second level."

"How's that again?"

"Naturally I wouldn't believe him. He knew I knew that he knew it. So when he said 'Sultan', I'd think he wouldn't lie simply, but that he'd lie double—that he actually was working for the Sultan."

Murphy laughed. "Suppose he told you a fourth-level lie?"

"It starts to be a toss-up pretty soon," Trimmer admitted. "I don't think he gives me credit for that much subtlety.... What are you doing the rest of the day?"

"Taking footage. Do you know where I can find some picturesque rites? Mystical dances, human sacrifice? I've got to work up some glamor and exotic lore."

"There's this sjambak in the cage. That's about as close to the medieval as you'll find anywhere in Earth Commonwealth."

"Speaking of sjambaks ..."

"No time," said Trimmer. "Got to get back. Drop in at my office—right down the square from the palace."

■

Murphy returned to his suite. The shadowy figure of his room servant said, "His Highness the Sultan desires the Tuan's attendance in the Cascade Garden."

"Thank you," said Murphy. "As soon as I load my camera."

The Cascade Room was an open patio in front of an artificial waterfall. The Sultan was pacing back and forth, wearing dusty khaki puttees, brown plastic boots, a yellow polo shirt. He carried a twig which he used as a riding crop, slapping his boots as he walked. He turned his head as Murphy appeared, pointed his twig at a wicker bench.

"I pray you sit down, Mr. Murphy." He paced once up and back. "How is your suite? You find it to your liking?"

"Very much so."

"Excellent," said the Sultan. "You do me honor with your presence."

Murphy waited patiently.

"I understand that you had a visitor this morning," said the Sultan.

"Yes. Mr. Trimmer."

"May I inquire the nature of the conversation?"

"It was of a personal nature," said Murphy, rather more shortly than he meant.

The Sultan nodded wistfully. "A Singhalûsi would have wasted an hour telling me half-truths—distorted enough to confuse, but not sufficiently inaccurate to anger me if I had a spy-cell on him all the time."

Murphy grinned. "A Singhalûsi has to live here the rest of his life."

A servant wheeled a frosted cabinet before them, placed goblets under two spigots, withdrew. The Sultan cleared his throat. "Trimmer is an excellent fellow, but unbelievably loquacious."

Murphy drew himself two inches of chilled rosy-pale liquor. The Sultan slapped his boots with the twig. "Undoubtedly he confided all my private business to you, or at least as much as I have allowed him to learn."

"Well—he spoke of your hope to increase the compass of Singhalût."

"That, my friend, is no hope; it's absolute necessity. Our population density is fifteen hundred to the square mile. We must expand or smother. There'll be too little food to eat, too little oxygen to breathe."

Murphy suddenly came to life. "I could make that idea the theme of my feature! Singhalût Dilemma: Expand or Perish!"

"No, that would be inadvisable, inapplicable."

Murphy was not convinced. "It sounds like a natural."

The Sultan smiled. "I'll impart an item of confidential information—although Trimmer no doubt has preceded me with it." He gave his boots an irritated whack. "To expand I need funds. Funds are best secured in an atmosphere of calm and confidence. The implication of emergency would be disastrous to my aims."

"Well," said Murphy, "I see your position."

The Sultan glanced at Murphy sidelong. "Anticipating your cooperation, my Minister of Propaganda has arranged an hour's program, stressing our progressive social attitude, our prosperity and financial prospects ..."

"But, Sultan ..."

"Well?"

"I can't allow your Minister of Propaganda to use me and *Know Your Universe!* as a kind of investment brochure."

The Sultan nodded wearily. "I expected you to take that attitude.... Well—what do you yourself have in mind?"

"I've been looking for something to tie to," said Murphy. "I think it's going to be the dramatic contrast between the ruined cities and the new domed valleys. How the Earth settlers succeeded where the ancient people failed to meet the challenge of the dissipating atmosphere."

"Well," the Sultan said grudgingly, "that's not too bad."

"Today I want to take some shots of the palace, the dome, the city, the paddies, groves, orchards, farms. Tomorrow I'm taking a trip out to one of the ruins."

"I see," said the Sultan. "Then you won't need my charts and statistics?"

"Well, Sultan, I could film the stuff your Propaganda Minister cooked up, and I could take it back to Earth. Howard Frayberg or Sam Catlin would tear into it, rip it apart, lard in some head-hunting, a little cannibalism and temple prostitution, and you'd never know you were watching Singhalût. You'd scream with horror, and I'd be fired."

"In that case," said the Sultan, "I will leave you to the dictates of your conscience."

Howard Frayberg looked around the gray landscape of Riker's Planet, gazed out over the roaring black Mogador Ocean. "Sam, I think there's a story out there."

Sam Catlin shivered inside his electrically heated glass overcoat. "Out on that ocean? It's full of man-eating plesiosaurs—horrible things forty feet long."

"Suppose we worked something out on the line of Moby Dick? *The White Monster of the Mogador Ocean*. We'd set sail in a catamaran—"

"Us?"

"No," said Frayberg impatiently. "Of course not us. Two or three of the staff. They'd sail out there, look over these gray and red monsters, maybe fake a fight or two, but all the time they're after the legendary white one. How's it sound?"

"I don't think we pay our men enough money."

"Wilbur Murphy might do it. He's willing to look for a man riding a horse up to meet his space-ships."

"He might draw the line at a white plesiosaur riding up to meet his catamaran."

Frayberg turned away. "Somebody's got to have ideas around here...."

"We'd better head back to the space-port," said Catlin. "We got two hours to make the Sirgamesk shuttle."

■

Wilbur Murphy sat in the Barangipan, watching marionettes performing to xylophone, castanet, gong and *gamelan*. The drama had its roots in proto-historic Mohenjō-Darō. It had filtered down through ancient India, medieval Burma, Malaya, across the Straits of Malacca to Sumatra and Java; from modern Java across space to Cirygamesç, five thousand years of time, two hundred light-years of space. Somewhere along the route it had met and assimilated modern technology. Magnetic beams controlled arms, legs and bodies, guided the poses and posturings. The manipulator's face, by agency of clip, wire, radio control and minuscule selsyn, projected his scowl, smile, sneer or grimace to the peaked little face he controlled. The language was that of Old Java, which perhaps a third of the spectators understood. This portion did not include Murphy, and when the performance ended he was no wiser than at the start.

Soek Panjoebang slipped into the seat beside Murphy. She wore musician's garb: a sarong of brown, blue, and black *batik*, and a fantastic headdress of tiny silver bells. She greeted him with enthusiasm.

"Weelbrrr! I saw you watching...."

"It was very interesting."

"Ah, yes." She sighed. "Weelbrrr, you take me with you back to Earth? You make me a great picturama star, please, Weelbrrr?"

"Well, I don't know about that."

"I behave very well, Weelbrrr." She nuzzled his shoulder, looked soulfully up with her shiny yellow-hazel eyes. Murphy nearly forgot the experiment he intended to perform.

"What did you do today, Weelbrrr? You look at all the pretty girls?"

"Nope. I ran footage. Got the palace, climbed the ridge up to the condensation vanes. I never knew there was so much water in the air till I saw the stream pouring off those vanes! And *hot!*"

"We have much sunlight; it makes the rice grow."

"The Sultan ought to put some of that excess light to work. There's a secret process.... Well, I'd better not say."

"Oh come, Weelbrrr! Tell me your secrets!"

"It's not much of a secret. Just a catalyst that separates clay into aluminum and oxygen when sunlight shines on it."

Soek's eyebrows rose, poised in place like a seagull riding the wind. "Weelbrrr! I did not know you for a man of learning!"

"Oh, you thought I was just a bum, eh? Good enough to make picturama stars out of *gamelan* players, but no special genius...."

"No, no, Weelbrrr."

"I know lots of tricks. I can take a flashlight battery, a piece of copper foil, a few transistors and bamboo tube and turn out a paralyzer gun that'll stop a man cold in his tracks. And you know how much it costs?"

"No, Weelbrrr. How much?"

"Ten cents. It wears out after two or three months, but what's the difference? I make 'em as a hobby—turn out two or three an hour."

"Weelbrrr! You're a man of marvels! Hello! We will drink!"

And Murphy settled back in the wicker chair, sipping his rice beer.

■

"Today," said Murphy, "I get into a space-suit, and ride out to the ruins in the plain. Ghatamipol, I think they're called. Like to come?"

"No, Weelbrrr." Soek Panjoebang looked off into the garden, her hands busy tucking a flower into her hair. A few minutes later she said, "Why must you waste your time among the rocks? There are better things to do and see. And it might well be—dangerous." She murmured the last word off-handedly.

"Danger? From the sjambaks?"

"Yes, perhaps."

"The Sultan's giving me a guard. Twenty men with crossbows."

"The sjambaks carry shields."

"Why should they risk their lives attacking me?"

Soek Panjoebang shrugged. After a moment she rose to her feet. "Goodbye, Weelbrrr."

"Goodbye? Isn't this rather abrupt? Won't I see you tonight?"

"If so be Allah's will."

Murphy looked after the lithe swaying figure. She paused, plucked a yellow flower, looked over her shoulder. Her eyes, yellow as the flower, lucent as water-jewels, held his. Her face was utterly expressionless. She turned, tossed away the flower with a jaunty gesture, and continued, her shoulders swinging.

"I know lots of tricks. I can take a flashlight battery, a piece of copper foil, a few transistors and bamboo tube and turn out a paralyzer gun that'll stop a man cold in his tracks."

Murphy breathed deeply. She might have made picturama at that....

One hour later he met his escort at the valley gate. They were dressed in space-suits for the plains, twenty men with sullen faces. The trip to Ghatamipol clearly was not to their liking. Murphy climbed into his own suit, checked the oxygen pressure gauge, the seal at his collar. "All ready, boys?"

No one spoke. The silence drew out. The gatekeeper, on hand to let the party out, snickered. "They're all ready, Tuan."

"Well," said Murphy, "let's go then."

Outside the gate Murphy made a second check of his equipment. No leaks in his suit. Inside pressure: 14.6. Outside pressure: zero. His twenty guards morosely inspected their crossbows and slim swords.

The white ruins of Ghatamipol lay five miles across Pharasang Plain. The horizon was clear, the sun was high, the sky was black.

Murphy's radio hummed. Someone said sharply, "Look! There it goes!" He wheeled around; his guards had halted, and were pointing. He saw a fleet something vanishing into the distance.

"Let's go," said Murphy. "There's nothing out there."

"Sjambak."

"Well, there's only one of them."

"Where one walks, others follow."

"That's why the twenty of you are here."

"It is madness! Challenging the sjambaks!"

"What is gained?" another argued.

"I'll be the judge of that," said Murphy, and set off along the plain. The warriors reluctantly followed, muttering to each other over their radio intercoms.

■

The eroded city walls rose above them, occupied more and more of the sky. The platoon leader said in an angry voice, "We have gone far enough."

"You're under my orders," said Murphy. "We're going through the gate." He punched the button on his camera and passed under the monstrous portal.

The city was frailer stuff than the wall, and had succumbed to the thin storms which had raged a million years after the passing of life. Murphy marvelled at the scope of the ruins. Virgin archaeological territory! No telling what a few weeks digging might turn up. Murphy considered his expense account. Shifkin was the obstacle.

There'd be tremendous prestige and publicity for *Know Your Universe!* if Murphy uncovered a tomb, a library, works of art. The Sultan would gladly provide diggers. They

were a sturdy enough people; they could make quite a showing in a week, if they were able to put aside their superstitions, fears and dreads.

Murphy sized one of them up from the corner of his eye. He sat on a sunny slab of rock, and if he felt uneasy he concealed it quite successfully. In fact, thought Murphy, he appeared completely relaxed. Maybe the problem of securing diggers was a minor one after all....

And here was an odd sidelight on the Singhalûsi character. Once clear of the valley the man openly wore his shirt, a fine loose garment of electric blue, in defiance of the Sultan's edict. Of course out here he might be cold....

Murphy felt his own skin crawling. How could he be cold? How could he be alive? Where was his space-suit? He lounged on the rock, grinning sardonically at Murphy. He wore heavy sandals, a black turban, loose breeches, the blue shirt. Nothing more.

Where were the others?

Murphy turned a feverish glance over his shoulder. A good three miles distant, bounding and leaping toward Singhalût, were twenty desperate figures. They all wore space-suits. This man here ... A sjambak? A wizard? A hallucination?

■

The creature rose to his feet, strode springily toward Murphy. He carried a crossbow and a sword, like those of Murphy's fleet-footed guards. But he wore no space-suit. Could there be breathable traces of an atmosphere? Murphy glanced at his gauge. Outside pressure: zero.

Two other men appeared, moving with long elastic steps. Their eyes were bright, their faces flushed. They came up to Murphy, took his arm. They were solid, corporeal. They had no invisible force fields around their heads.

Murphy jerked his arm free. "Let go of me, damn it!" But they certainly couldn't hear him through the vacuum.

He glanced over his shoulder. The first man held his naked blade a foot or two behind Murphy's bulging space-suit. Murphy made no further resistance. He punched the button on his camera to automatic. It would now run for several hours, recording one hundred pictures per second, a thousand to the inch.

The sjambaks led Murphy two hundred yards to a metal door. They opened it, pushed Murphy inside, banged it shut. Murphy felt the vibration through his shoes, heard a gradually waxing hum. His gauge showed an outside pressure of 5, 10, 12, 14, 14.5. An inner door opened. Hands pulled Murphy in, unclamped his dome.

"Just what's going on here?" demanded Murphy angrily.

Prince Ali-Tomás pointed to a table. Murphy saw a flashlight battery, aluminum foil, wire, a transistor kit, metal tubing, tools, a few other odds and ends.

"There it is," said Prince Ali-Tomás. "Get to work. Let's see one of these paralysis weapons you boast of."

"Just like that, eh?"

"Just like that."

"What do you want 'em for?"

"Does it matter?"

"I'd like to know." Murphy was conscious of his camera, recording sight, sound, odor.

"I lead an army," said Ali-Tomás, "but they march without weapons. Give me weapons! I will carry the word to Hadra, to New Batavia, to Sundaman, to Boeng-Bohôt!"

"How? Why?"

"It is enough that I will it. Again, I beg of you ..." He indicated the table.

Murphy laughed. "I've got myself in a fine mess. Suppose I don't make this weapon for you?"

"You'll remain until you do, under increasingly difficult conditions."

"I'll be here a long time."

"If such is the case," said Ali-Tomás, "we must make our arrangements for your care on a long-term basis."

Ali made a gesture. Hands seized Murphy's shoulders. A respirator was held to his nostrils. He thought of his camera, and he could have laughed. Mystery! Excitement! Thrills! Dramatic sequence for *Know Your Universe!* Staff-man murdered by fanatics! The crime recorded on his own camera! See the blood, hear his death-rattle, smell the poison!

The vapor choked him. *What a break! What a sequence!*

■

"Sirgamesk," said Howard Frayberg, "bigger and brighter every minute."

"It must've been just about in here," said Catlin, "that Wilbur's horseback rider appeared."

"That's right! Steward!"

"Yes, sir?"

"We're about twenty thousand miles out, aren't we?"

"About fifteen thousand, sir."

"Sidereal Cavalry! What an idea! I wonder how Wilbur's making out on his superstition angle?"

Sam Catlin, watching out the window, said in a tight voice, "Why not ask him yourself?"

"Eh?"

"Ask him for yourself! There he is—outside, riding some kind of critter...."

"It's a ghost," whispered Frayberg. "A man without a space-suit.... There's no such thing!"

"He sees us.... Look...."

Murphy was staring at them, and his surprise seemed equal to their own. He waved his hand. Catlin gingerly waved back.

Said Frayberg, "That's not a horse he's riding. It's a combination ram-jet and kiddie car with stirrups!"

"He's coming aboard the ship," said Catlin. "That's the entrance port down there...."

■

Wilbur Murphy sat in the captain's stateroom, taking careful breaths of air.

"How are you now?" asked Frayberg.

"Fine. A little sore in the lungs."

"I shouldn't wonder," the ship's doctor growled. "I never saw anything like it."

"How does it feel out there, Wilbur?" Catlin asked.

"It feels awful lonesome and empty. And the breath seeping up out of your lungs, never going in—that's a funny feeling. And you miss the air blowing on your skin. I never realized it before. Air feels like—like silk, like whipped cream—it's got texture...."

"But aren't you cold? Space is supposed to be absolute zero!"

"Space is nothing. It's not hot and it's not cold. When you're in the sunlight you get warm. It's better in the shade. You don't lose any heat by air convection, but radiation and sweat evaporation keep you comfortably cool."

"I still can't understand it," said Frayberg. "This Prince Ali, he's a kind of a rebel, eh?"

"I don't blame him in a way. A normal man living under those domes has to let off steam somehow. Prince Ali decided to go out crusading. I think he would have made it too—at least on Cırgamesç."

"Certainly there are many more men inside the domes...."

"When it comes to fighting," said Murphy, "a sjambak can lick twenty men in space-suits. A little nick doesn't hurt him, but a little nick bursts open a space-suit, and the man inside comes apart."

"Well," said the Captain. "I imagine the Peace Office will send out a team to put things in order now."

Catlin asked, "What happened when you woke up from the chloroform?"

"Well, nothing very much. I felt this attachment on my chest, but didn't think much about it. Still kinda woozy. I was halfway through decompression. They keep a man

there eight hours, drop pressure on him two pounds an hour, nice and slow so he don't get the bends."

"Was this the same place they took you, when you met Ali?"

"Yeah, that was their decompression chamber. They had to make a sjambak out of me; there wasn't anywhere else they could keep me. Well, pretty soon my head cleared, and I saw this apparatus stuck to my chest." He poked at the mechanism on the table. "I saw the oxygen tank, I saw the blood running through the plastic pipes—blue from me to that carburetor arrangement, red on the way back in—and I figured out the whole arrangement. Carbon dioxide still exhales up through your lungs, but the vein back to the left auricle is routed through the carburetor and supercharged with oxygen. A man doesn't need to breathe. The carburetor flushes his blood with oxygen, the decompression tank adjusts him to the lack of air-pressure. There's only one thing to look out for; that's not to touch anything with your naked flesh. If it's in the sunshine it's blazing hot; if it's in the shade it's cold enough to cut. Otherwise you're free as a bird."

"But—how did you get away?"

"I saw those little rocket-bikes, and began figuring. I couldn't go back to Singhalût; I'd be lynched on sight as a sjambak. I couldn't fly to another planet—the bikes don't carry enough fuel.

"I knew when the ship would be coming in, so I figured I'd fly up to meet it. I told the guard I was going outside a minute, and I got on one of the rocket-bikes. There was nothing much to it."

"Well," said Frayberg, "it's a great feature, Wilbur—a great film! Maybe we can stretch it into two hours."

"There's one thing bothering me," said Catlin. "Who did the steward see up here the first time?"

Murphy shrugged. "It might have been somebody up here skylarking. A little too much oxygen and you start cutting all kinds of capers. Or it might have been someone who decided he had enough crusading.

"There's a sjambak in a cage, right in the middle of Singhalût. Prince Ali walks past; they look at each other eye to eye. Ali smiles a little and walks on. Suppose this sjambak tried to escape to the ship. He's taken aboard, turned over to the Sultan and the Sultan makes an example of him...."

"What'll the Sultan do to Ali?"

Murphy shook his head. "If I were Ali I'd disappear."

A loudspeaker turned on. "Attention all passengers. We have just passed through quarantine. Passengers may now disembark. Important: no weapons or explosives allowed on Singhalût!"

"This is where I came in," said Murphy.



RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Based on "Temple Trouble"
by H. Beam Piper



OBSTACLES

Dangerous People – Hulgun Guards
Dangerous People – Priests of Yat-Zar
Dangerous People – Priests of Muz-Azin
Dangerous People – Chuldun Archers
Dangerous People – ParaTime Police
Psychological Challenges – Deception & Secrets

COMPLICATIONS

Scant Intel
Narrow Window of Opportunity
No Rescue Available
Must be Kept Secret

PERKS

50 MV

MAGUFFINS

Naming Rights (Alternate Earth scenario)
Data/Report on Hulgun Node
Contact with Hulgun
Contact with Transtemporal Mining
Contact with Paratime Police
First-Level Objects
First-Level Weapons

BACKSTORY

Transtemporal Mining Corp has a racket running on several timelines in the Proto-Aryan period, in which agents posing as priests of *Yat-Zar* manage a number of primitive temples – which are located conveniently over mineral deposits.

Time-traveling contractors are hired to build new temples as necessary. Most of these temples are built over uranium deposits which are secretly mined by TMC agents working far below ground.

This racket has been running smoothly for years, but a recent wave of bad luck is threatening the supremacy of the mining company's made-to-order deity *Yat-Zar*. Swayed by their evident misfortune, the superstitious populace is shifting toward the worship of a rival god: *Muz-Azin* of the Chuldun Empire.

Trillions of MegaBucks annually – and the terms of TMC's corporate charter – depend on this operation. Something must be done.

GM NOTE: The Transtemporal Mining Corporation may be a business entity in the Home-Earth of your campaign world, or it may be an entity that only exists in this alternate universe; this detail is left for you to decide.

WITH ALL DUE DENIABILITY

MISSION TYPE: Emergency/Rescue
NODE TYPE: Alternate Earth
SLIP TYPE: ParaTerran (DL3)
PAY: 15M ea

The PCs are hired by *Transtemporal Mining Corp*, which holds a tightly-regulated charter for intraspatial uranium mining on Alternate Earth *Hulgun IX*, but has run into some bad luck lately. Six TMC operatives have just been taken captive, and the company can't afford to let this information get out. They've stepped beyond all official protocol in hiring independent DayTrippers to rescue their "priests".

A non-disclosure agreement will be produced, preventing the PCs from speaking to anyone about this top-secret mission for a period of fifty years. Should any of the PCs be captured or lost, TMC will disavow all knowledge of them.

Needless to say, pay has been adjusted accordingly.

MISSION

IRON-AGE WORLD

MISSION TYPE: Exploration/Into the Unknown
NODE TYPE: Alternate Earth
SLIP TYPE: ParaTerran (DL3)
PAY: 6M ea

This timeline split off from Home-Earth before the dawn of western civilization, creating a reality where Proto-Aryan warriors conquered vast stretches of the Eurasia and subdued all their neighboring cultures – prior to the high ages of Egypt or Greece.

While the PCs are here, they may discover that the cult of *Yat-Zar* is more than it appears to be, and that they're not the only people here to come here from beyond this world.

MISSION

WHAT A TANGLED WEB THEY WOVE

MISSION TYPE: Exploration
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Historically Stable (5)
PAY: 5M ea

While exploring the Iron Age culture of *Hulgun IX*, the PCs become aware of unrest in the city of *Zurb*. They may realize that the king's new bride seems to be preparing the kingdom to be taken over by her father's armies, and will certainly notice that a bitter tension has arisen between two opposed cults.

The PCs haven't gone without notice themselves: their strange stylings and manners have caught the attention of TMC agents, who quickly realize the PCs hail from another temporal region. They have been quietly observing the PCs, trying to determine who they work for.

While the PCs are in the city, some priests of *Yat-Zar* are captured and scheduled to be sacrificed (this should happen after the first Crisis and before the second). A TMC agent, realizing that the PCs don't work for the competition, reveals the operation to them, describing how TMC controls the populace with a fabricated religion while extracting uranium ore from this time period. Now that their ersatz-priests are in trouble, they have little choice: the corporation is willing to pay for assistance in rescuing them.

MISSION

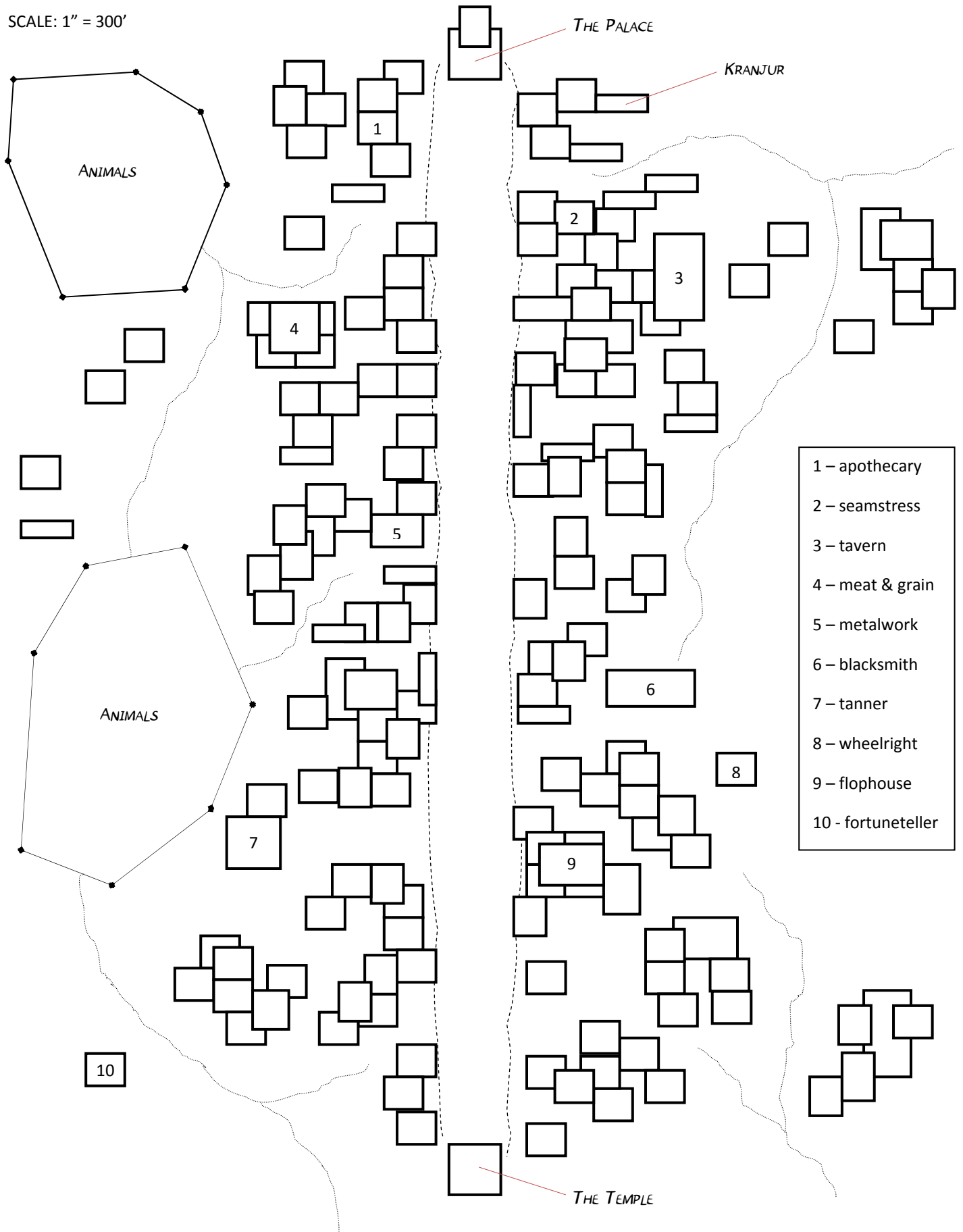
MAP: THE SIX HULGUN KINGDOMS

SCALE: 1/4" = 100m



MAP: THE CITY OF ZURB

SCALE: 1" = 300'



THE HULGUN

SOCIETY

SOCIETAL VALUES: Trade, Expansion

SOCIETAL PROBLEMS: Under threat by Chuldun Empire

TECHNOLOGY: Iron Age

RESOURCES: Plants, Animals, Stone, Bronze, Iron,
Water, Arable Land

UNDERSTANDING OF REALITY: Locally Limited

The Hulgun are united into a federation of six kingdoms, advised and counseled by the wise and powerful priests of Yat-Zar.

The Hulgun Kingdoms – *Zurb*, *Yoldav*, *Y'zuf*, *Maeb*, *Musrab* and *Nanoc* – are among three nations vying for territory on the Eurasian mainland, along with the *Chuldun Empire* to the east and the *Jum dun Principalities* to the south.

The typical Hulgun today is an iron-age human with no exceptional capabilities. Most are farmers, herders or rivertrappers, with specialized skills being organized in guilds. The priesthood of each Temple comprises such a guild. Each guild guards its own secrets closely, and has its own methods of initiation and apprenticeship.

The Hulgun, like their neighbors, have large cities, agriculture, chariots, coinage, granaries, temples, guilds and specialized weapons. They are a strong and hardy people, but as their cities have grown they've begun to lose the "edge" that made their ancestors such fearsome warriors. No Hulgun would ever say this, of course – but others would.

LOCAL HISTORY

The ancestors of today's Hulgun were semi-nomadic warriors who drove their enemies before them, taking over their cities and hearing the lamentations of their women (sorry, but you get the point, yeah?)

A hundred generations ago, Yat-Zar came down and took with him Gonthur, the High Priest of Zurb. For three days Gonthur remained in the heavenly realm.

When he returned, he found himself atop a mountain far from the temple, and was shown back to the city by an unknown peasant (who had a donkey). No one remembers the name of the unknown peasant, and he was never seen again. (The question of the unknown peasant – was he a deity or was he something else – is something that can start religious arguments.)

Gonthur returned blessed with prophetic powers and the ability to speak directly with the deity. Thereafter his prophecies were many, and always correct. By heeding the word of Yat-Zar the populace grew by leaps and bounds. He directed the ancestors to begin building mud-brick cities, and told them where to build the temples and palaces you see today.

Word spread of the miraculous and prescient wisdom of Yat-Zar's High Priests, for Gonthur was only the first of many to be so blessed. Worship of *Yat-Zar* began to spread far from Zurb, and the cult of Yat-Zar became the official religion of all six Hulgun kingdoms.

Today however, bad times have come, and the worship of Yat-Zar is dropping off in favor of a cult from *Chuldun*, across the Black Sea. This new cult worships a reptilian conqueror-god called *Muz-Azin*.

THE DECLINE OF YAT-ZAR

The following information is known by all inhabitants of Zurb, though only High Priests and paratimers are familiar with all the unfortunate implications:

- This summer brought a drought that burned up most of the grain crop.
- Autumn brought heavy rains, hail, floods and famine, requiring the importation of tons of grain from the First Level. Zurb was hit hardest.
- On Labdurg's advice, Kurchuk mobilized his army and invaded Jum dun for grain. He was badly defeated at Jorm, and only a quarter of his men returned.
- The final strike against Yat-Zar's popularity came when the sacrificial rabbits began to die. Because the rabbit is sacred to Yat-Zar, the epidemic was seen by many (5/6) as proof that the deity can no longer protect his creatures.

ACTUAL FACT

Hulgun society has been deliberately kept in a state of stagnation. The proto-scientific discoveries of early civilizations we know from history never occurred.

TMC's local operations begin roughly 1,000 years back along this timeline. That's when a High Priest named Gonthur was taken to the First Level for his psycho-indoctrination and radio implantation.

Of course he was only the first of many to receive this treatment. There are temples on different layers throughout this entire sector of spacetime, and TMC agents (posing as priests) are popping in and out of them – excuse the expression – all the time.

The operation is overseen by *STRANOR SLETH* (aka Ghullam), High Priest of Yat-Zar in all six Kingdoms.

THE CITY OF ZURB

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Hills, mountains to south
CONDITION: Fertile
TERRAIN: Farmland
WEATHER: Gentle Wind
BIODIVERSITY: High and stable
DOMINANT COLORS: Browns, greens
RESOURCES: Farms, Stone, Obsidian, Iron, Water
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
ENCOUNTER DL: Common (4)

Zurb is a Hulgún city of pre-mechanical construction. Its narrow streets are lined by squat one- and two-story mud-brick buildings with flat roofs. People here relax and socialize on their rooftops, and large clusters of squarish houses are built directly up against each other, sharing load-bearing walls. Ladders and steps can be found everywhere, leading up to the rooftops and secondary entrances. Here and there a tower reaches high above its neighbors. On some of the wider streets, groups of large buildings are surrounded by battlemented walls. These are the various storehouses of the king, and are guarded at all times.

A broad avenue passes through the center of the city, a more or less straight line connecting the Palace at one end of town to the Temple of Yat-Zar at the other.

There are a few specialized shops and buildings for specific purposes (mostly tanners and other odiferous industries), but most people just do business on their rooftops, or in the doorways of their houses.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	Chuldun Archers
4-9	Hulgún Local
10-11	Unusual Feature
12	(1-2) <i>GHULLAM</i> , (3-6) <i>KRANJUR</i>

ZURBIAN NAMES

MALE NAMES

Bor - Borhul - Chuk - Chukchuk - Cran - Cranram - Davnar - Dilkho - Dok - Gardil - Gartav - Ghulta - Hul - Hulman - Ka - Kaannar - Khranan - Kul - Kulkho - Manram - Musdok - Musoc - Nanta - Nar - Nartan - Nor - Norbor - Norgar - Nortak - Nortav - Ram - Tagar - Takghul - Tav - Yatkul - Yorzuk

FEMALE NAMES

Borhulka - Chukkhra - Crandil - Dilku - Gardil - Gartav - Ghulta - Jur - Jurnar - Kho - Khra - Maeram - Nan - Naranjur - Ramta - Tadok - Yatkan - Yolka

ZURBIAN LOCAL

NPC

All Stats = 1
One skill +1
TCV 10

SOCIAL CLASS (2D6)

2-3	Beggar
4-7	Peasant
8	Trader/Artisan (perhaps <i>KRANJUR</i>)
9	Military
10	Wealthy
11	Priesthood (perhaps <i>GHULLAM</i>)
12	Nobility (perhaps <i>LABDURG</i>)

Clothing denotes social status in Hulgún society. The wealthy wear gold-fringed tunics and much jewelry; artisan/traders wear dyed tunics without fringe; soldiers wear chainmail hauberks and steel caps (officers' armor is ornately gilded); while the lower classes wear nondescript smocks and little color.

HELPFULNESS

To determine an NPC's willingness to help or serve as a guide for strangers, roll 2d6. If the result is in or above the NPC's social class they'll do it in exchange for some trinkets, or they'll have their own reasons.

ACTIONS/MOTIVATIONS

For all NPCs, you may wish to roll on the *What Is NPC Doing?* table in the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*.

For Representative NPCs (more than functionaries), roll on the *What Is This NPC's Archetype?* table in the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*.

If you need an NPC to introduce a Crisis, roll on the *What Is This NPC's Problem?* table in the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*.

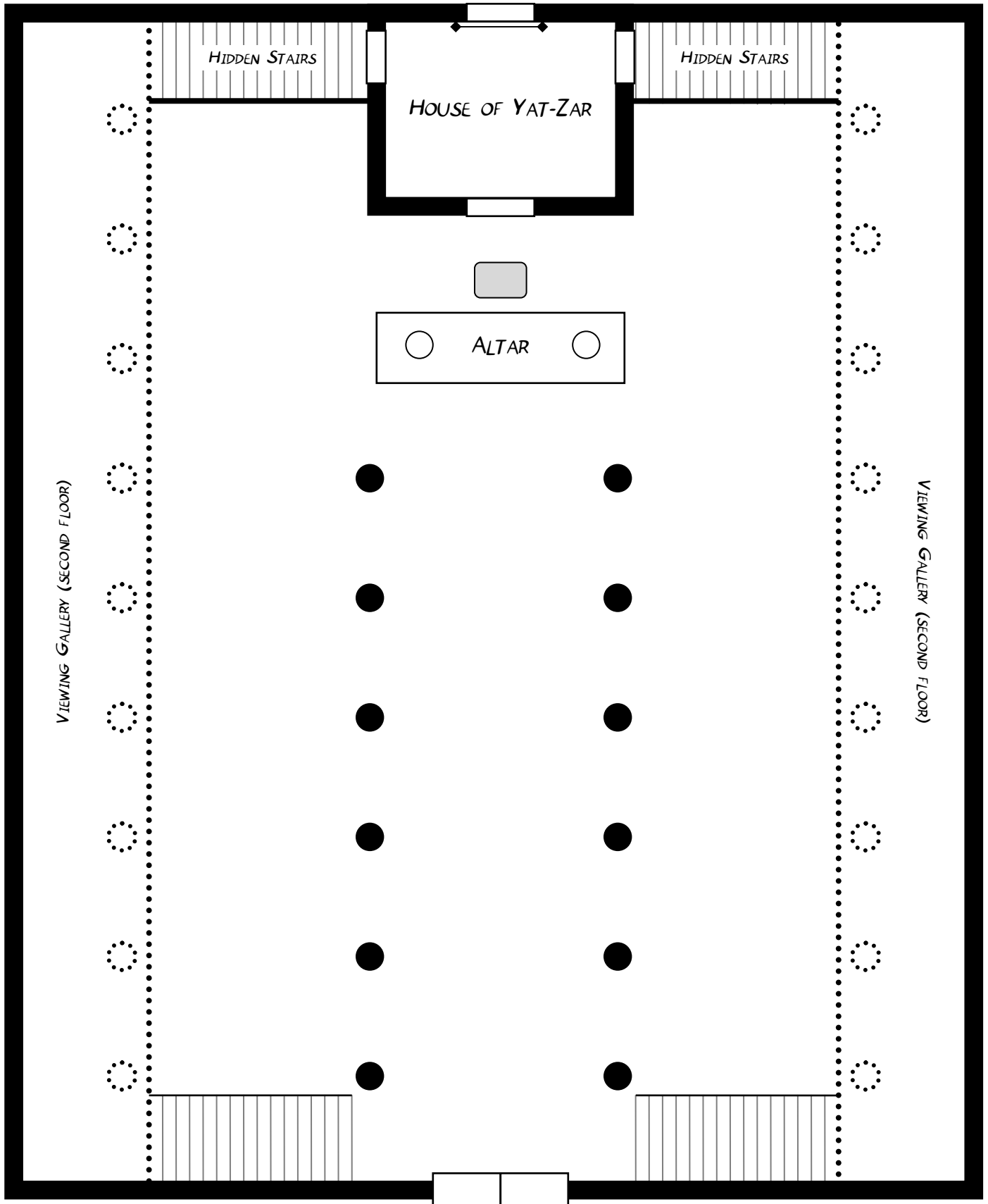
INFORMATION

- *KING KURCHUK* married Princess *DARITH* last spring, in a ceremony lasting three days.
- Before the dog days of summer had arrived, *LABDURG* was made *Overseer of the Kingdom*.
- Both Darith and Labdurg are of Chuldun origin.
- Many were upset about these developments, but when *CHULDUN ARCHERS* began patrolling the city, they stopped complaining so publicly.
- King Kurchuk is rarely seen these days, leaving his citadel only for oblations to *Muz-Azin*, whose idol dominates the palace courtyard.
- Five out of six Zurbiens worship Muz-Azin now, but every single one of them can describe *THE DECLINE OF YAT-ZAR*.

MAP: THE TEMPLE OF YAT-ZAR

Scale: 1" = 10'

↑ TO ANTIGRAV SHAFT



TEMPLE OF YAT-ZAR

LOCATION

Facing the palace from the other end of the main road, the temple of Yat-Zar is a massive stone building with a capacity of over 2,000. During the day there will be 3d6 people here inquiring of 1d6 priests; at night there will be only the priests, who take turns tending the fire and keeping an eye on the temple.

The temple at Zurb doesn't have a mine; it's too far south for uranium deposits. It is used as a center for propaganda and communications by TMC agents. It has three subterranean time-conveyers, and most of the *UPPER PRIESTS* are paratimers.

Beneath the idol is a one-room building known as *THE HOUSE OF YAT-ZAR*. In this room the priests store equipment, take their meals and relax between rituals.

The gilded door at the back of the god's "house" (hidden behind three veils) can only be opened with a *Door Activator* from the First Level, a copy of which is carried by all upper-level paratimers in the temple.

Behind that gilded door is an auto-lighted anteroom, with another door leading to the antigrav shaft. This shaft barrels straight down for several hundred feet before reaching *THE TRANSPORT LEVEL*.

PERCEPTIONS

- The room is dusky and huge, with many pillars and places to hide from view.
- The temple was built to hold many more people than it currently attracts.
- Upstairs viewing galleries run the length of the hall on either side, accessed via stairs located near the front doors.
- A gigantic idol of Yat-Zar overlooks the altar. His throne sits upon a stone plinth 20' high, into the front of which a door opens. In front is a large prayer cushion, where the High Priest kneels, and an altar within which the sacred fire burns.
- Yat-Zar has three turquoise eyes big as doorknobs, and six arms. In his right hands he holds a flame-shaped sword, a jeweled staff, and a rabbit. In his left, a bronze torch, a goblet, and a pair of scales with an egg balanced against a skull. He has a long bifurcate beard made of gold wire, and feet like a bird.
- The door under the idol leads into the Holy of Holies: the "house" of Yat-Zar.

SUNSET SACRIFICE

EVENT

The temple holds a nightly ritual involving the sacrifice of a rabbit, that animal being sacred to Yat-Zar. While the ceremony once attracted up to 2,000 of the faithful, today the numbers have dropped to around 200, as most of the city's inhabitants have gone over to the worship of Muz-Azin.

The High Priest bows deeply to Yat-Zar, and holding the knife extended in front of him, backs away toward the altar. As he does, one of the lesser priests reaches into a fringed and embroidered sack and pulls out a large domestic rabbit, holding it by the ears while one of his fellows grabs its hind legs. A third priest holds up a silver pitcher while a fourth fans the altar fire with a sheet-silver fan. As they chant antiphonally, the High Priest quickly whips the edge of his knife across the rabbit's throat. The priest with the pitcher steps in to catch the blood, and when the rabbit is bled, its body is laid on the fire. All of the priests shout oblations together, and the congregation shouts in response.

The ceremony is done. The blessing of Yat-Zar has been secured for another day.

HOUSE OF YAT-ZAR

LOCATION

This is where the priests take rest, enjoy meals and store their religious accoutrements. 2d6 *LOWER PRIESTS* wait in attendance. There are two long tables, one for *UPPER PRIESTS* and one for *LOWER PRIESTS*. The room also holds four cabinets, a fountain, and long cushioned benches along the walls. At the back of the room, a gilded door is covered by three elaborately painted veils. This door requires a *Door Activator*.

THE TRANSPORT LEVEL

LOCATION

At the bottom of the antigrav shaft is a 100'-square chamber where three freight conveyers (similar to *Slip Capacitors*) carry goods and personnel up and down the timeline. The room includes a large desk, tables, couches, chairs, computer monitoring systems and an armaments rack, in addition to the freight conveyers.

The room is staffed by 1d6 *TRANSTEMPORAL AGENTS*, monitoring local paratime traffic and handling the distribution of personnel throughout the region.

At any given time, there is a 1/6 chance that 1d6 *PARATIME POLICE OFFICERS* are present here.

YAT-ZAR UPPER PRIEST

NPC

BRAINS 2
CHARM 2 Rhetoric+1
GRACE 1 Knife+1

GEAR:
Temple Knife

TCV 30

Upper Priests wear gold-fringed robes of dark blue and carry golden miters. Their faces are masked behind blue false beards which fork at the bottom, like that of their deity *Yat-Zar*. Worship has decreased considerably in recent months.

PARATIMERS

5 out of 6 of the upper priests are Paratimers from Transtemporal Mining. Their Stats and Skills are those of *TRANSTEMPORAL AGENTS* (see below).

YAT-ZAR LOWER PRIEST

NPC

BRAINS 1
CHARM 1 Rhetoric+1
GRACE 1 Knife+1

GEAR:
Temple Knife

TCV 20

Lower Priests wear lighter blue robes with less fringe and the same blue false beards as *UPPER PRIESTS*. They carry out most of the mundane temple chores, such as tending the holy fires, feeding the sacrificial rabbits, and preparing the clergy's meals.

PARATIMERS

1 out of 6 of the lower priests are Paratimers from Transtemporal Mining. Their Stats and Skills are those of *TRANSTEMPORAL AGENTS* (see below).

TRANSTEMPORAL AGENT

NPC

BRAINS 3 Geology+2
CHARM 1 Rhetoric+1
GRACE 2
PSYCHE 2

TCV 75

GEAR:
Temple Knife
Emergency response agents from the First Level will also have a Sigma-Ray Needler +1 or an Ultrasonic Paralyzer +1

These agents perform "Yat-Zar" rituals for the local population while sending uranium shipments uptime to TMC. Despite the inherent risks they are licensed to do this by the Paratime Commission, and the *PARATIME POLICE* watch them closely.

INFORMATION

- The disease that killed the rabbits was a strain of tularemia never encountered on this or any of the Proto-Aryan timelines. If examined with scrutiny (Organic Chemistry vs DL 3), it shows signs of deliberate genetic modification.
- "If the cult of Yat-Zar falls from power, we can say goodbye to our charter for mining operations on this timeline."

STRANOR SLETH (GHULLAM) YAT-ZAR HIGH PRIEST

NPC

Sleth is overseer of all TMC operations on this timeline, and High Priest of Yat-Zar in all six Hulgum Kingdoms. He is a capable agent, but his hands have been tied by his superiors' insistence on minimal force. He carries a Needler in a hidden holster anyway. He's no fool.

ENCOUNTERS

- Stranor uses his key to open the gilded door.
- You notice a holstered weapon beneath Stranor's robes.

TAMMAND DRAV (KHORAM) YAT-ZAR UPPER PRIEST

NPC

Tammand Drav is a newly-promoted Transtemporal agent posing as "Khoram" – an upper priest who is left in charge of the temple in emergencies.

He can recite Paratime Code chapter and verse, but has little experience in the field. When he encounters a new situation, he tends to think rashly and without regard for possible consequences.

If confronted by a hostile force he will flee, grabbing everyone he can and heading for *THE FIRST LEVEL*.

YAT-ZAR'S TEMPLE IS ORDERED SHUT DOWN

EVENT

Influenced by the manipulative scribe *LABDURG* (who is in reality a paratimer from the *Fourth Level Mineral Products Syndicate*), *KING KURCHUK* decrees that the *TEMPLE OF YAT-ZAR* at Zurb shall be closed down.

Further, he orders his subjects to begin worshipping Muz-Azin, and to make money offerings to the priests of that reptilian deity.

When *TAMMAND DRAV* (alias Khoram) defies the king's order and keeps the temple doors open, Kurchuk sends a company of *CHULDUN ARCHERS* to close the temple and arrest the priests.

After the arrests are made, the temple will be held by twenty Chuldun mercenaries and 1d6 priests of Muz-Azin, who station themselves in the outer hall. They do not have access to the house of Yat-Zar, as the door is made of six-inch-thick impervium steel.

LOCAL DRAMA

The urban setting of this mission allows for all sorts of storylines to arise between any two Zurbians, or between a Zurbian NPC and the PCs. By adding a *Drama Template* and a few local characters, this adventure could easily yield a *Social Story* that has nothing to do with the Yat-Zar/Muz-Azin conflict.

For example (Using the *Escort* template): A Zurbian merchant needs to make a caravan run to the town of Musrab but fears attack by Chuldun warriors along the way; he wishes to hire the PCs as guards. In exchange he will give them discover (or help them obtain) whatever they have been asking about.

Alternately, an NPC motivation could be rolled on the *What Does This NPC Want?* Table. For example: An NPC wants to save someone. Perhaps it's one of the priests, perhaps it's a prisoner in the Palace dungeon...

GM NOTE: If the PCs get tied up in a Local Drama, the backstory drama between the priests of Yat-Zar and those of Muz-Azin will go on without them, coming to a climax with *THE TORTURE/SACRIFICE*. You'll have to decide for yourself whether TMC personnel (with or without the help of the *PARATIME POLICE*) are able to rescue their colleagues.

YAT-ZAR'S PRIESTS ARE CAPTURED

EVENT

When *TAMMAND DRAV* learns that a company of archers is coming to shut the temple down, he finds himself in a bind. He's under orders not to resist local forces with energy-weapons or ultrasonic paralyzers, and does not have time to contact Stranor Sleth.

Panicking, he does the first thing he can think of: he gathers up all the Yat-Zar priests he can – locals and paratimers alike – and transports them back to the First Level via the time-conveyer.

Fifteen of the *LESSER PRIESTS* he takes to the First Level are Hulgun natives. They'll need to have their memories altered. It's all in a day's work.

Unfortunately his escape leaves six priests outside: five paratimers and one local. These six are captured and taken to the king's dungeons. It is decreed that they shall be sacrificed to Muz-Azin at sundown.

PARADE OF PRISONERS

EVENT

When the sun goes down, the prisoners are gathered up and escorted in chains to the palace. The road grows crowded with spectators the nearer you get to the courtyard, and inside the palace gates it's standing-room-only. The entire town has showed up to witness the sacrificial rite.

TORTURE/SACRIFICE

EVENT

The prisoners are led to the triangles and fastened upon them by Zurbian guards. Chuldun archers stand at prominent positions on raised platforms and move through the crowd, enforcing the peace with stern glares and nocked arrows. The crowd grows tense as the High Priest of Muz-Azin intones the words which begin the brutal ceremony.

Once Muz-Azin has been evoked, the crowd grows silent as the Lower Priests brandish the iron-spiked whips that are their chosen instruments of torture.

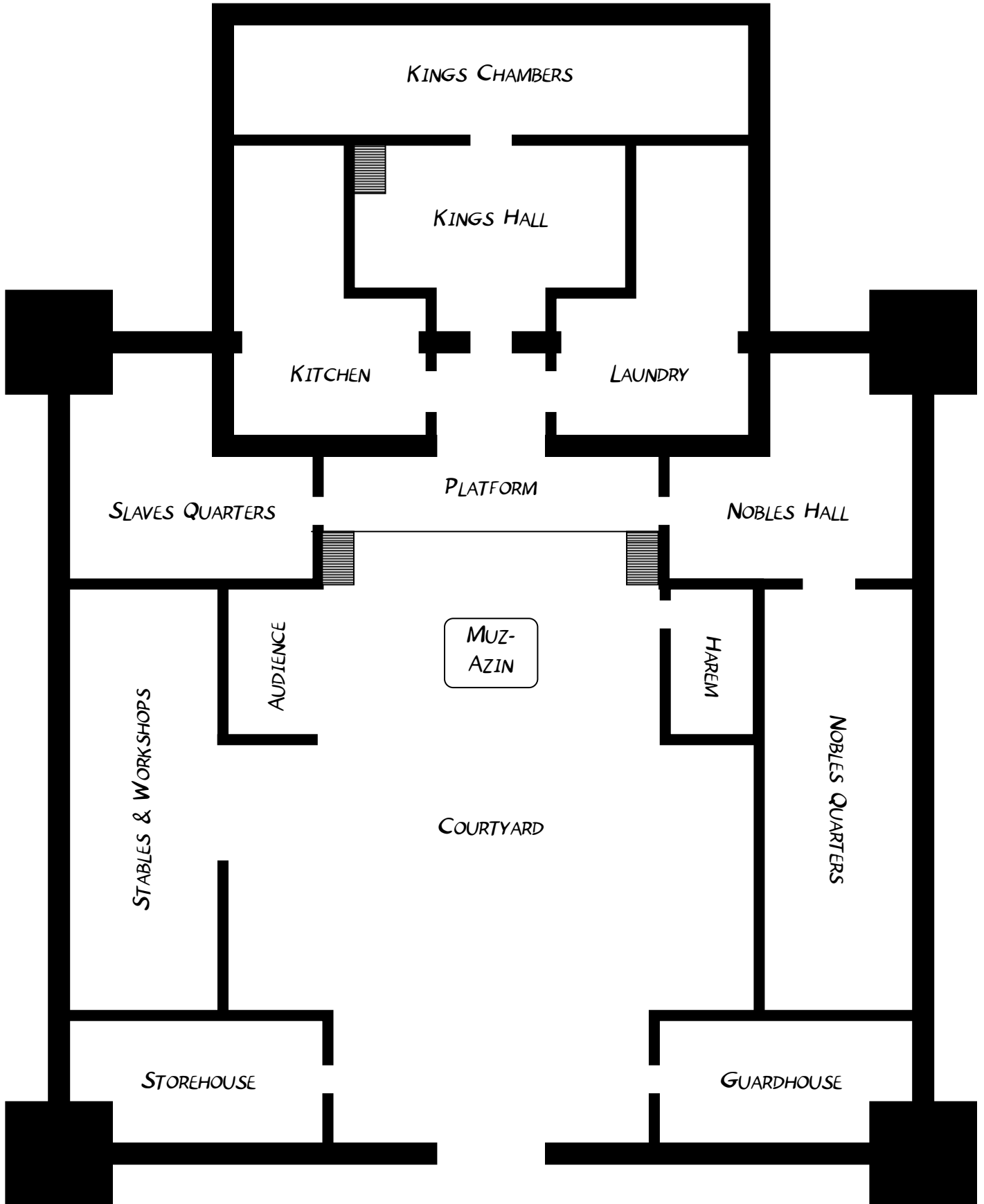
As the High Priest continues his intonations, the prisoners will be whipped until dead. It is a bloody scene, mitigated only by the grim fact that victims usually reach unconsciousness long before death.

After the sacrifice, the idol will be dragged down the road to the temple of Yat-Zar, and set up there.

MAP: THE PALACE

Scale: 1" = 20'

Stairs down from the King's Hall lead to the dungeon, 100' below ground.



THE PALACE

LOCATION

The main gate to the palace is located at the end of the road leading directly from the temple. On the left side are the slaves' quarters, stables, workshops and store houses. On the right are the nobles' quarters.

A towering structure located at the rear of the walled enclosure is the citadel and royal dwelling of the king.

ENCOUNTER DL: Common (4)

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-4	1d6 Slaves... (1-3) idly gossiping (4-6) working hard - a Noble is nearby
5	1d6 Nobles doing noble business
6-7	1d6 Chuldun Archers on patrol
8-9	1d6 Zurbian Footsoldiers on patrol
10	Ghromdur, come to see the king
11	Ghullam, come to see the king
12	King Kurchuk is walking with... (1-3) Darith (4-6) Labdurg

KING KURCHUK OF ZURB

NPC

CHARM 3 Rhetoric+2
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 2

TCV 55

A big, black-bearded man, Kurchuk cuts an imposing figure in his gold-washed mail and golden crown. He recently married princess *DARITH* of Chuldun, favoring her above all his other wives.

The new queen convinced him to hire a scribe named *LABDURG*, who introduced him to *GHROMDUR* and the worship of *Muz-Azin*. Infatuated with this new deity and enraged about Yat-Zar's failure to defend his people from starvation and his army from defeat, Kurchuk had the Muz-Asin temple moved inside his palace walls. When this choice proved scandalous he brought in five thousand *CHULDUN MERCENARIES*, also on Labdurg's advisement, to keep the peace.

Labdurg has now been promoted to *Overseer of the Kingdom*. Kurchuk, meanwhile, spends most of his time with his new bride.

FOURTH LEVEL

Secretly, "Labdurg", "Ghromdur" and all the priests of Muz-Azin are parttime agents in disguise, working for the *Fourth Level Mineral Products Syndicate*. Fourth Level is a direct competitor to TMC, often referred to by its acronym "4L". Queen Darith and her father the King of Chuldun have been thoroughly manipulated by "Labdurg" and his underlings: while they pursue a takeover of Zurb, the 4L agents are *really* here to discredit TMC and get their charter revoked.

DARITH, QUEEN OF ZURB

NPC

CHARM 2 Rhetoric+2 CourtlyGossip+2
GRACE 2 Javelin+1

TCV 80

Darith is the daughter of Chombrog, the Chuldun Emperor. Her marriage to *KING KURCHUK* is one of convenience – mainly her father's. Still, it has its perks: Due to the Chuldun preference for capital punishment, she never had slaves before she came to Zurb.

LABDURG, ROYAL SCRIBE AND OVERSEER OF THE KINGDOM

NPC

BRAINS 3 Timeline+1 Geology+2
CHARM 2 FastTalk+2 Rhetoric+2

TCV 120

Labdurg wears a red tunic and is usually found behind the throne, whispering to Kurchuk. He has become the king's trusted confidante. Secretly of course, he is an operative for *Fourth Level Mineral Products Syndicate*. Together with Ghromdur, he has masterminded a plan to shame Yat-Zar (and Transtemporal Mining) off this timeline. Once the competition has been abolished, it will be easy for their Chuldun partners to take over the Hulgum Kingdoms, while Fourth Level takes over the uranium mining license.

Labdurg's personal journal, kept in his private quarters, includes notes on military positions leading to the ill-fated Battle of Jorm, and a map showing the way to a compound outside of town where Yat-Zar's sacrificial rabbits are bred.

THE COURTYARD

LOCATION

An audience hall opens out on the left, the chambers of the royal harem are on the right. A wide stone platform about fifteen feet high crosses the front of the citadel, running from the hall to the chambers. Before this platform, a massive stone idol of *Muz-Azin* glares menacingly into the open area.

Since the temple of Muz-Azin moved into the palace grounds, one out of every six days are *Sacrifice Days*. On these days the courtyard includes a dozen large wooden triangles, about twelve feet high, upon which victims are lashed to death with iron-barbed whips.

The Hulguns enjoy watching these sacrifices. Victims are usually criminals, slaves, or prisoners of war.

ENCOUNTER DL: Common (4)

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-5	1d6 Priests of Yat-Zar
6-8	1d6 locals, on errands for the court
9-10	1d6 Priests of Muz-Azin
11	Labdurg and Ghromdur
12	King Kurchuk and 2d6 entourage

GHROMDUR, MUZ-AZIN HIGH PRIEST

NPC

BRAINS 2
CHARM 2 Rhetoric+2

TCV 40

Ghromdur officiates ceremonies in honor of Muz-Azin, a crocodile-like deity with bat wings and knife blades in his tail, who fancies human sacrifices.

Like his underlings, Ghromdur wears a black robe with green facings, and resides in the temple that Kurchuk has allowed inside the palace walls. Also like his underlings, he is a paratime agent in disguise, working for the *Fourth Level Mineral Products Syndicate*.

MUZ-AZIN LOW PRIEST

NPC

GRACE 1 Needler+1
MIGHT 2 Whip+1

GEAR:
Whip, Sigma-ray Needler (concealed beneath robe)

TCV 25

Dressed in black robes with green trimmings, the Lesser priests are armed with long iron-spiked whips, and entrusted with performing the torture-sacrifices. As agents of "4L", they carry sigma-ray needlers in holsters beneath their robes.

ZURBIAN FOOT-SOLDIER

NPC

GRACE 2 Spear+1
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 2 Hand-to-Hand+1

GEAR: Armor+1, Spear

TCV 45

Zurbian soldiers are spearmen, who wear steel caps and sleeveless leather jackets sewn with steel rings. Though well-trained and loyal to their king, they are little match for the *CHULDUN ARCHERS*.

INFORMATION

- A young soldier explains how the marching orders for the attack on Jumdun were drafted and handed out by Labdurg personally.
- A old soldier who was at the Battle of Jorm tells how the Jumdun forces were laying in wait for them: "It was as if they knew exactly when and exactly where we would be. Curse Yat-Zar!"

CHULDUN ARCHER

NPC

GRACE 2 Bow+1
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 1 Mace+1

GEAR: Armor+2, Bow & Arrows

TCV 60

The Chuldun mercenaries in Zurb, like most Chuldun warriors, are skilled archers who wear iron mail and helmets. Their officers dress and arm themselves similarly, although their armor and helms are gilded. They travel in groups of 1-6.

CRANNAR JURTH (KRANJUR THE SWORDMAKER)

NPC

BRAINS 2 Timeline Chronology+1
CHARM 2 Haggle+2
PSYCHE 2

TCV 55

Kranjur is a swordmaker, employing a dozen Zurbians who hammer out the blades he sells in the market. He also “imports” alloyed steel blades from the First Level – stuff that cuts through the local armor like cheese – then fits them with locally-made hilts and sells them at high prices.

He's the official swordsmith to the king, and he hears all the inside palace gossip. Of course, he was among the first to go over to Muz-Azin.

In a secret room under his shop, he keeps a time-conveyer (Slip Capacitor) and an UpVector radio.

Crannar is aware that *PARATIME POLICE OFFICERS* view him with some consternation, but they leave him alone because he has thus far successfully avoided causing any paratime problems. He wants to keep it this way, so he will cooperate fully if approached in any paratime police investigation.

Crannar carries a smaller radio up his sleeve when he goes out, and uses this unit to communicate discreetly with his assistant Jodpur (Jodash Pura; another paratimer) back at the shop.

THE FIRST LEVEL

LOCATION

The uptime terminal of the Zurb conveyors is a big room in the First Level fissionables refinery at Jarnabar, spatially co-existent with the Fourth Level temple of Yat-Zar at Zurb. In this room will be found 2d6 TMC employees, plus a 1/6 chance of 1d6 *PARATIME POLICE OFFICERS*. If an emergency response team is mustered, this is where they will receive their armaments and their orders.

There is a lot of foot traffic, and cameras are mounted in strategic positions throughout the TTM complex. Security is SR 5 here.

PARATIME POLICE OFFICER

NPC

BRAINS 3 Forensics+1
CHARM 2 Rhetoric+1
GRACE 2 Firearm+1
PSYCHE 3

GEAR:

Heat-Ray Pistol +1 or Neutron-Disruption Blaster+1

TCV 90

Paratime officers wear green tunics of stylish design. Tasked with defending the tenets of the Paratime Code and maintaining temporal integrity, they take their jobs very seriously.

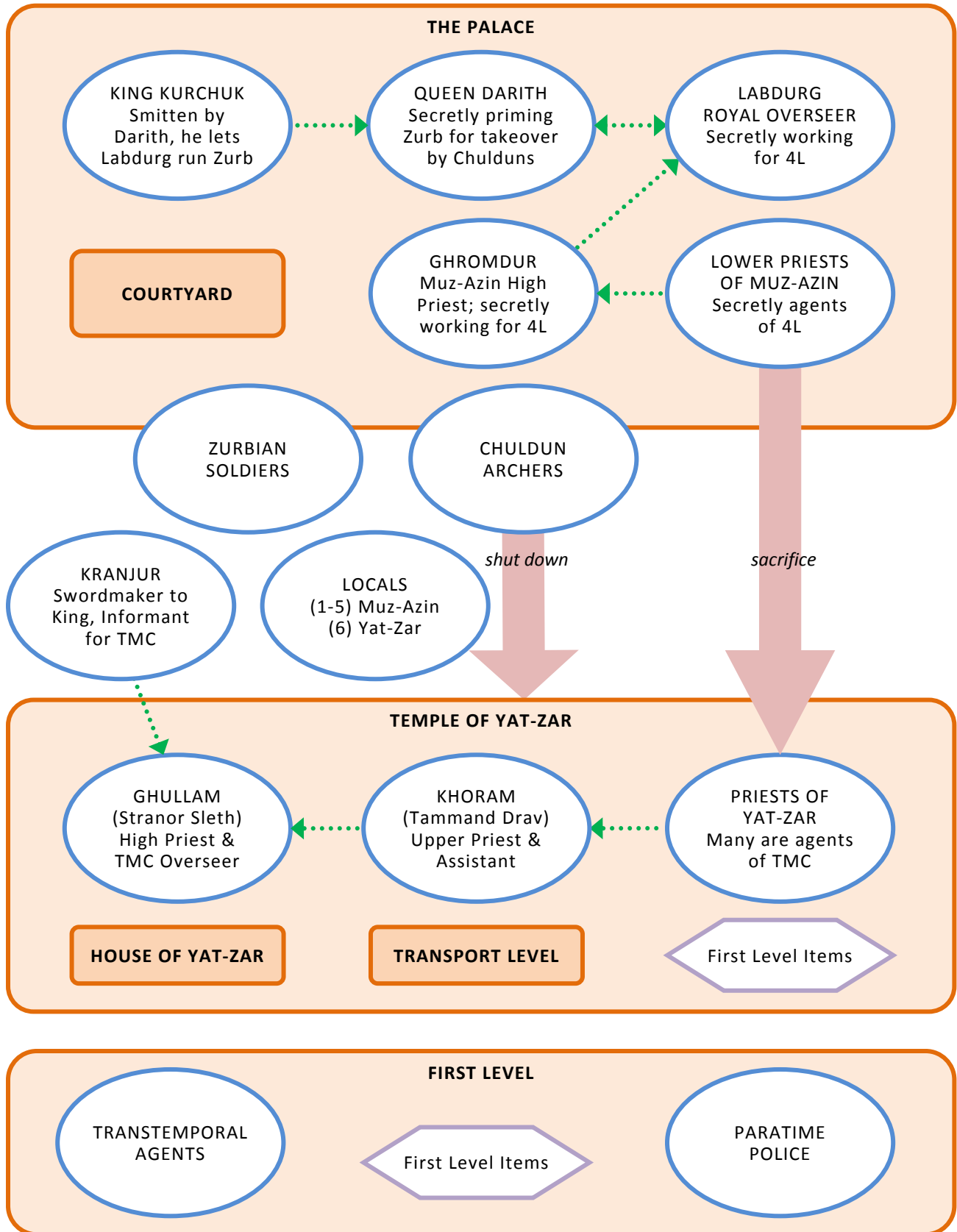
Subsequent to thorough reviews of its business plans and solutions, any transtemporal company may obtain a license to extract specified resources from a specified temporal region. The regulation and enforcement of terms for such licenses is the job of the Paratime Police.

Though the active statutes within the Paratime Code present different restrictions and exemptions from region to region and timeline to timeline, the code is absolutely clear on the one inflexible law regarding outtime activities:

The secret of paratime transposition must be kept strictly inviolate, and any activity tending to endanger it is prohibited.

Prohibited activities include the transposition of any object of extraterrestrial origin to any timeline on which space travel has not been developed. Another prohibited activity is the backtime-transport of any manufactured goods too far in advance of their local culture. (This latter rule is one which *CRANNAR JURTH* skirts by camouflaging his time-transported weapons as local swords of unusual quality).

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

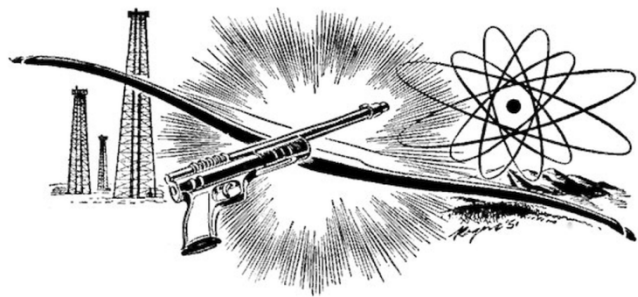


TEMPLE TROUBLE

by H. Beam Piper

Illustrated by Hubert Rogers

***Miracles to order* was a fine way for the ParaTimers to get mining concessions—but Nature can sometimes pull counter-miracles. And so can men, for that matter....**



Through a haze of incense and altar smoke, Yat-Zar looked down from his golden throne at the end of the dusky, many-pillared temple. Yat-Zar was an idol, of gigantic size and extraordinarily good workmanship; he had three eyes, made of turquoises as big as doorknobs, and six arms. In his three right hands, from top to bottom, he held a sword with a flame-shaped blade, a jeweled object of vaguely phallic appearance, and, by the ears, a rabbit. In his left hands were a bronze torch with burnished copper flames, a big goblet, and a pair of scales with an egg in one pan balanced against a skull in the other. He had a long bifurcate beard made of gold wire, feet like a bird's, and other rather startling anatomical features. His throne was set upon a stone plinth about twenty feet high, into the front of which a doorway opened; behind him was a wooden screen, elaborately gilded and painted.

Directly in front of the idol, Ghullam the high priest knelt on a big blue and gold cushion. He wore a gold-fringed robe of dark blue, and a tall conical gold miter, and a bright blue false beard, forked like the idol's golden one: he was intoning a prayer, and holding up, in both hands, for divine inspection and approval, a long curved knife. Behind him, about thirty feet away, stood a square stone altar, around which four of the lesser priests, in light blue robes with less gold fringe and dark-blue false beards, were busy with the preliminaries to the sacrifice. At considerable distance, about halfway down the length of the temple, some two hundred worshipers—a few substantial citizens in gold-fringed tunics, artisans in tunics without gold fringe, soldiers in mail hauberks and plain steel caps, one officer in ornately gilded armor, a number of peasants in nondescript smocks,

and women of all classes—were beginning to prostrate themselves on the stone floor.

Ghullam rose to his feet, bowing deeply to Yat-Zar and holding the knife extended in front of him, and backed away toward the altar. As he did, one of the lesser priests reached into a fringed and embroidered sack and pulled out a live rabbit, a big one, obviously of domestic breed, holding it by the ears while one of his fellows took it by the hind legs. A third priest caught up a silver pitcher, while the fourth fanned the altar fire with a sheet-silver fan. As they began chanting antiphonally, Ghullam turned and quickly whipped the edge of his knife across the rabbit's throat. The priest with the pitcher stepped in to catch the blood, and when the rabbit was bled, it was laid on the fire. Ghullam and his four assistants all shouted together, and the congregation shouted in response.

The high priest waited as long as was decently necessary and then, holding the knife in front of him, stepped around the prayer-cushion and went through the door under the idol into the Holy of Holies. A boy in novice's white robes met him and took the knife, carrying it reverently to a fountain for washing. Eight or ten under-priests, sitting at a long table, rose and bowed, then sat down again and resumed their eating and drinking. At another table, a half-dozen upper priests nodded to him in casual greeting.

Crossing the room, Ghullam went to the Triple Veil in front of the House of Yat-Zar, where only the highest of the priesthood might go, and parted the curtains, passing through, until he came to the great gilded door. Here he fumbled under his robe and produced a small object like a mechanical pencil, inserting the pointed end in a tiny hole in the door and pressing on the other end. The door opened, then swung shut behind him, and as it locked itself, the lights came on within. Ghullam removed his miter and his false beard, tossing them aside on a table, then undid his sash and peeled out of his robe. His regalia discarded, he stood for a moment in loose trousers and a soft white shirt, with a pistollike weapon in a shoulder holster under his left arm—no longer Ghullam the high priest of Yat-Zar, but now Stranor Sleth, resident agent on this time-line of the Fourth Level Proto-Aryan Sector for the Transtemporal Mining Corporation. Then he opened a door at the other side of the anteroom and went to the antigrav shaft, stepping over the edge and floating downward.

■

There were temples of Yat-Zar on every time-line of the Proto-Aryan Sector, for the worship of Yat-Zar was ancient among the Hulgun people of that area of paratime, but there were only a few which had such installations as this, and all of them were owned and operated by Transtemporal Mining, which had the fissionable ores franchise for this sector. During the ten elapsed centuries since Transtemporal had begun operations on this sector, the process had become standardized. A few First Level paratimers would transpose to a selected time-line and abduct an upper-priest of Yat-Zar, preferably the high priest of the temple at Yoldav or Zurb. He would be drugged and transposed to the First Level, where he would receive hypnotic indoctrination and, while unconscious, have an operation performed on his ears which would enable him to hear sounds well above the normal audible range. He would be able to hear the shrill sonar-cries of bats, for instance, and, more important, he would be able to hear voices when the speaker used a First Level audio-frequency step-up phone. He would also receive a memory-obliteration from the moment of his abduction, and a set of pseudo-memories of a visit to the Heaven of Yat-Zar, on the other side of the sky. Then he would be returned to his own time-line and left on a mountain top far from his temple, where an unknown peasant, leading a donkey, would always find him, return him to the temple, and then vanish inexplicably.

Then the priest would begin hearing voices, usually while serving at the altar. They would warn of future events, which would always come to pass exactly as foretold. Or they might bring tidings of things happening at a distance, the news of which would not arrive by normal means for days or even weeks. Before long, the holy man who had been carried alive to the Heaven of Yat-Zar would acquire a most awesome reputation as a prophet, and would speedily rise to the very top of the priestly hierarchy.

Then he would receive two commandments from Yat-Zar. The first would ordain that all lower priests must travel about from temple to temple, never staying longer than a year at any one place. This would insure a steady influx of newcomers personally unknown to the local upper-priests, and many of them would be First Level paratimers. Then, there would be a second commandment: A house must be built for Yat-Zar, against the rear wall of each temple. Its dimensions were minutely stipulated; its walls were to be of stone, without windows, and there was to be a single door, opening into the Holy of Holies, and before the walls were finished, the door was to be barred from within. A triple veil of brocaded fabric was to be hung in front of this door. Sometimes such innovations met with opposition from the more conservative members of the hierarchy: when they did, the principal objector would be seized with a sudden and violent illness; he would recover if and when he withdrew his objections.

Very shortly after the House of Yat-Zar would be completed, strange noises would be heard from behind the thick walls. Then, after a while, one of the younger priests



would announce that he had been commanded in a vision to go behind the veil and knock upon the door. Going behind the curtains, he would use his door-activator to let himself in, and return by paratime-conveyer to the First Level to enjoy a well-earned vacation. When the high priest would follow him behind the veil, after a few hours, and find that he had vanished, it would be announced as a miracle. A week later, an even greater miracle would be announced. The young priest would return from behind the Triple Veil, clad in such raiment as no man had ever seen, and bearing in his hands a strange box. He would announce that Yat-Zar had commanded him to build a new temple in the mountains, at a place to be made known by the voice of the god speaking out of the box.

This time, there would be no doubts and no objections. A procession would set out, headed by the new revelator bearing the box, and when the clicking voice of the god spoke rapidly out of it, the site would be marked and work would begin. No local labor would ever be employed on such temples; the masons and woodworkers would be strangers, come from afar and speaking a strange tongue, and when the temple was completed, they would never be seen to leave it. Men would say that they had been put to death by the priest and buried under the altar to preserve the secrets of the god. And there would always be an idol to preserve the secrets of the god. And there would always be an idol of Yat-Zar, obviously of heavenly origin, since its workmanship was beyond the powers of any local craftsman. The priests of such a temple would be exempt, by divine decree, from the rule of yearly travel.

Nobody, of course, would have the least idea that there was a uranium mine in operation under it, shipping ore to another time-line. The Hulgun people knew nothing about uranium, and neither did they as much as dream that there were other time-lines. The secret of paratime transposition belonged exclusively to the First Level civilization which had discovered it, and it was a secret that was guarded well.

■

Stranor Sleth, dropping to the bottom of the antigrav shaft, cast a hasty and instinctive glance to the right, where the freight conveyers were. One was gone, taking its cargo over hundreds of thousands of para-years to the First Level. Another had just returned, empty, and a third was receiving its cargo from the robot mining machines far back under the mountain. Two young men and a girl, in First Level costumes, sat at a bank of instruments and visor-screens, handling the whole operation, and six or seven armed guards, having inspected the newly-arrived conveyer and finding that it had picked up nothing inimical en route, were relaxing and lighting cigarettes. Three of them, Stranor Sleth noticed, wore the green uniforms of the Paratime Police.

"When did those fellows get in?" he asked the people at the control desk, nodding toward the green-clad newcomers.



"About ten minutes ago, on the passenger conveyer," the girl told him. "The Big Boy's here. Brannad Klav. And a Paratime Police officer. They're in your office."

"Uh huh; I was expecting that," Stranor Sleth nodded. Then he turned down the corridor to the left.

Two men were waiting for him, in his office. One was short and stocky, with an angry, impatient face—Brannad Klav, Transtemporal's vice president in charge of operations. The other was tall and slender with handsome and entirely expressionless features; he wore a Paratime Police officer's uniform, with the blue badge of hereditary nobility on his breast, and carried a sigma-ray needler in a belt holster.

"Were you waiting long, gentlemen?" Stranor Sleth asked. "I was holding Sunset Sacrifice up in the temple."

"No, we just got here," Brannad Klav said. "This is Verkan Vall, Mavrad of Nerros, special assistant to Chief Tortha of the Paratime Police, Stranor Sleth, our resident agent here."

Stranor Sleth touched hands with Verkan Vall.

"I've heard a lot about you, sir," he said. "Everybody working in paratime has, of course. I'm sorry we have a situation here that calls for your presence, but since we have, I'm glad you're here in person. You know what our trouble is, I suppose?"

"In a general way," Verkan Vall replied. "Chief Tortha, and Brannad Klav, have given me the main outline, but I'd like to have you fill in the details."

"Well, I told you everything," Brannad Klav interrupted impatiently. "It's just that Stranor's let this blasted local king, Kurchuk, get out of control. If I—" He stopped short, catching sight of the shoulder holster under Stranor Sleth's left arm. "Were you wearing that needler up in the temple?" he demanded.

"You're blasted right I was!" Stranor Sleth retorted. "And any time I can't arm myself for my own protection on this time-line, you can have my resignation. I'm not getting into the same jam as those people at Zurb."

"Well, never mind about that," Verkan Vall intervened. "Of course Stranor Sleth has a right to arm himself; I wouldn't think of being caught without a weapon on this time-line, myself. Now, Stranor, suppose you tell me what's been happening, here, from the beginning of this trouble."

"It started, really, about five years ago, when Kurchuk, the King of Zurb, married this Chuldun princess, Darith, from the country over beyond the Black Sea, and made her his queen, over the heads of about a dozen daughters of the local nobility, whom he'd married previously. Then he brought in this Chuldun scribe, Labdurg, and made him Overseer of the Kingdom—roughly, prime minister. There was a lot of dissatisfaction about that, and for a while it looked as though he was going to have a revolution on his hands, but he brought in about five thousand Chuldun mercenaries, all archers—these Hulguns can't shoot a bow

worth beans—so the dissatisfaction died down, and so did most of the leaders of the disaffected group. The story I get is that this Labdurg arranged the marriage, in the first place. It looks to me as though the Chuldun emperor is intending to take over the Hulgund kingdoms, starting with Zurb.

"Well, these Chulduns all worship a god called Muz-Azin. Muz-Azin is a crocodile with wings like a bat and a lot of knife blades in his tail. He makes this Yat-Zar look downright beautiful. So do his habits. Muz-Azin fancies human sacrifices. The victims are strung up by the ankles on a triangular frame and lashed to death with iron-barbed whips. Nasty sort of a deity, but this is a nasty time-line. The people here get a big kick out of watching these sacrifices. Much better show than our bunny-killing. The victims are usually criminals, or overage or incorrigible slaves, or prisoners of war.

"Of course, when the Chulduns began infiltrating the palace, they brought in their crocodile-god, too, and a flock of priests, and King Kurchuk let them set up a temple in the palace. Naturally, we preached against this heathen idolatry in our temples, but religious bigotry isn't one of the numerous imperfections of this sector. Everybody's deity is as good as anybody else's—indifferentism, I believe, is the theological term. Anyhow, on that basis things went along fairly well, till two years ago, when we had this run of bad luck."

"Bad luck!" Brannad Klav snorted. "That's the standing excuse of every incompetent!"

"Go on, Stranor; what sort of bad luck?" Verkan Vall asked.

"Well, first we had a drought, beginning in early summer, that burned up most of the grain crop. Then, when that broke, we got heavy rains and hailstorms and floods, and that destroyed what got through the dry spell. When they harvested what little was left, it was obvious there'd be a famine, so we brought in a lot of grain by conveyer and distributed it from the temples—miraculous gift of Yat-Zar, of course. Then the main office on First Level got scared about flooding this time-line with a lot of unaccountable grain and were afraid we'd make the people suspicious, and ordered it stopped.

"Then Kurchuk, and I might add that the kingdom of Zurb was the hardest hit by the famine, ordered his army mobilized and started an invasion of the Jumundun country, south of the Carpathians, to get grain. He got his army chopped up, and only about a quarter of them got back, with no grain. You ask me, I'd say that Labdurg framed it to happen that way. He advised Kurchuk to invade, in the first place, and I mentioned my suspicion that Chombrog, the Chuldun Emperor, is planning to move in on the Hulgund kingdoms. Well, what would be smarter than to get Kurchuk's army smashed in advance?"

"How did the defeat occur?" Verkan Vall asked. "Any suspicion of treachery?"

"Nothing you could put your finger on, except that the Jumduns seemed to have pretty good intelligence about Kurchuk's invasion route and battle plans. It could have been nothing worse than stupid tactics on Kurchuk's part. See, these Hulguns, and particularly the Zurb Hulguns, are spearmen. They fight in a fairly thin line, with heavy-armed infantry in front and light infantry with throwing-spears behind. The nobles fight in light chariots, usually at the center of the line, and that's where they were at this Battle of Jorm. Kurchuk himself was at the center, with his Chuldun archers massed around him.

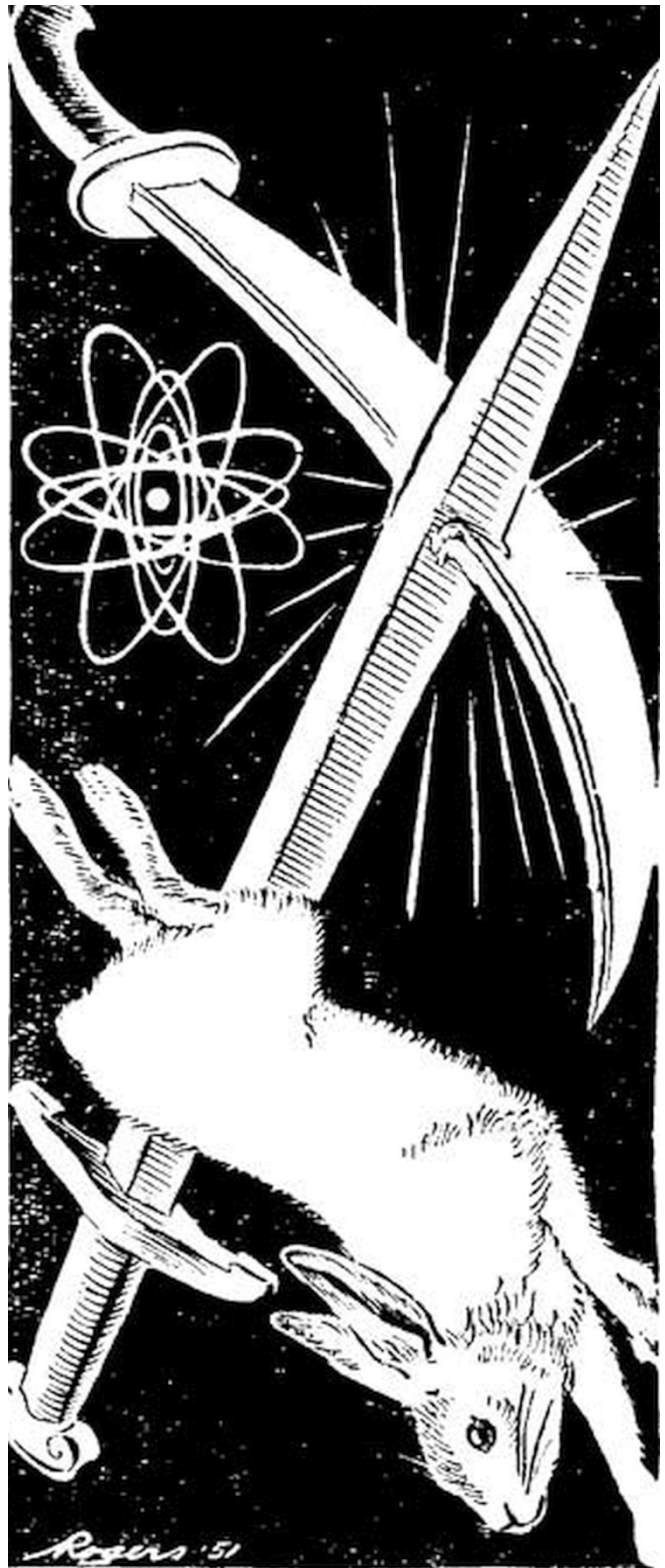
"The Jumduns use a lot of cavalry, with long swords and lances, and a lot of big chariots with two javelin men and a driver. Well, instead of ramming into Kurchuk's center, where he had his archers, they hit the extreme left and folded it up, and then swung around behind and hit the right from the rear. All the Chuldun archers did was stand fast around the king and shoot anybody who came close to them: they were left pretty much alone. But the Hulgun spearmen were cut to pieces. The battle ended with Kurchuk and his nobles and his archers making a fighting retreat, while the Jumdun cavalry were chasing the spearmen every which way and cutting them down or lancing them as they ran.

"Well, whether it was Labdurg's treachery or Kurchuk's stupidity, in either case, it was natural for the archers to come off easiest and the Hulgun spearmen to pay the butcher's bill. But try and tell these knuckle-heads anything like that! Muz-Azin protected the Chulduns, and Yat-Zar let the Hulguns down, and that was all there was to it. The Zurb temple started losing worshipers, particularly the families of the men who didn't make it back from Jorm.

"If that had been all there'd been to it, though, it still wouldn't have hurt the mining operations, and we could have got by. But what really tore it was when the rabbits started to die." Stranor Sleth picked up a cigar from his desk and bit the end, spitting it out disgustedly. "Tularemia, of course," he said, touching his lighter to the tip. "When that hit, they started going over to Muz-Azin in droves, not only at Zurb but all over the Six Kingdoms. You ought to have seen the house we had for Sunset Sacrifice, this evening! About two hundred, and we used to get two thousand. It used to be all two men could do to lift the offering box at the door, afterward, and all the money we took in tonight I could put in one pocket!" The high priest used language that would have been considered unclerical even among the Hulguns.

Verkan Vall nodded. Even without the quickie hypno-mech he had taken for this sector, he knew that the rabbit was domesticated among the Proto-Aryan Hulguns and was their chief meat animal. Hulgun rabbits were even a minor import on the First Level, and could be had at all the better restaurants in cities like Dhergabar. He mentioned that.

"That's not the worst of it," Stranor Sleth told him. "See, the rabbit's sacred to Yat-Zar. Not taboo; just sacred. They have



to use a specially consecrated knife to kill them—consecrating rabbit knives has always been an item of temple revenue—and they must say a special prayer before eating them. We could have got around the rest of it, even the Battle of Jorm—punishment by Yat-Zar for the sin of apostasy—but Yat-Zar just wouldn't make rabbits sick. Yat-Zar thinks too well of rabbits to do that, and it'd not been any use claiming he would. So there you are."

"Well, I take the attitude that this situation is the result of your incompetence," Brannad Klav began, in a bullying tone. "You're not only the high priest of this temple, you're the acknowledged head of the religion in all the Hulgung kingdoms. You should have had more hold on the people than to allow anything like this to happen."

"Hold on the people!" Stranor Sleth fairly howled, appealing to Verkan Vall. "What does he think a religion is, on this sector, anyhow? You think these savages dreamed up that six-armed monstrosity, up there, to express their yearning for higher things, or to symbolize their moral ethos, or as a philosophical escape-hatch from the dilemma of causation? They never even heard of such matters. On this sector, gods are strictly utilitarian. As long as they take care of their worshipers, they get their sacrifices: when they can't put out, they have to get out. How do you suppose these Chulduns, living in the Caucasus Mountains, got the idea of a god like a crocodile, anyhow? Why, they got it from Homran traders, people from down in the Nile Valley. They had a god, once, something basically like a billy goat, but he let them get licked in a couple of battles, so out he went. Why, all the deities on this sector have hyphenated names, because they're combinations of several deities, worshiped in one person. Do you know anything about the history of this sector?" he asked the Paratime Police officer.

"Well, it develops from an alternate probability of what we call the Nilo-Mesopotamian Basic sector-group," Verkan Vall said. "On most Nilo-Mesopotamian sectors, like the Macedonian Empire Sector, or the Alexandrian-Roman or Alexandrian-Punic or Indo-Turanian or Europo-American, there was an Aryan invasion of Eastern Europe and Asia Minor about four thousand elapsed years ago. On this sector, the ancestors of the Aryans came in about fifteen centuries earlier, as neolithic savages, about the time that the Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations were first developing, and overran all southeast Europe, Asia Minor and the Nile Valley. They developed to the bronze-age culture of the civilizations they overthrew, and then, more slowly, to an iron-age culture. About two thousand years ago, they were using hardened steel and building large stone cities, just as they do now. At that time, they reached cultural stasis. But as for their religious beliefs, you've described them quite accurately. A god is only worshiped as long as the people think him powerful enough to aid and protect them; when they lose that confidence, he is discarded and the god of some neighboring people is adopted instead." He turned to Brannad Klav. "Didn't Stranor report this situation to you when it first developed?" he asked. "I know he did; he speaks of receiving shipments of grain by conveyer for temple distribution. Then why didn't you report it to Paratime Police? That's what we have a Paratime Police Force for."

"Well, yes, of course, but I had enough confidence in Stranor Sleth to think that he could handle the situation himself. I didn't know he'd gone slack—"

"Look, I can't make weather, even if my parishioners think I can," Stranor Sleth defended himself. "And I can't make a great military genius out of a blockhead like Kurchuk. And I can't immunize all the rabbits on this time-line against tularemia, even if I'd had any reason to expect a tularemia epidemic, which I hadn't because the disease is unknown on this sector; this is the only outbreak of it anybody's ever heard of on any Proto-Aryan time-line."

"No, but I'll tell you what you could have done," Verkan Vall told him. "When this Kurchuk started to apostatize, you could have gone to him at the head of a procession of priests, all paratimers and all armed with energy-weapons, and pointed out his spiritual duty to him, and if he gave you any back talk, you could have pulled out that needler and rayed him down and then cried, 'Behold the vengeance of Yat-Zar upon the wicked king!' I'll bet any sum at any odds that his successor would have thought twice about going over to Muz-Azin, and none of these other kings would have even thought once about it."

"Ha, that's what I wanted to do!" Stranor Sleth exclaimed. "And who stopped me? I'll give you just one guess."

"Well, it seems there was slackness here, but it wasn't Stranor Sleth who was slack," Verkan Vall commented.

"Well! I must say; I never thought I'd hear an officer of the Paratime Police criticizing me for trying to operate inside the Paratime Transposition Code!" Brannad Klav exclaimed.

Verkan Vall, sitting on the edge of Stranor Sleth's desk, aimed his cigarette at Brannad Klav like a blaster.

"Now, look," he began. "There is one, and only one, inflexible law regarding outtime activities. The secret of paratime transposition must be kept inviolate, and any activity tending to endanger it is prohibited. That's why we don't allow the transposition of any object of extraterrestrial origin to any time-line on which space travel has not been developed. Such an object may be preserved, and then, after the local population begin exploring the planet from whence it came, there will be dangerous speculations and theories as to how it arrived on Terra at such an early date. I came within inches, literally, of getting myself killed, not long ago, cleaning up the result of a violation of that regulation. For the same reason, we don't allow the export, to outtime natives, of manufactured goods too far in advance of their local culture. That's why, for instance, you people have to hand-finish all those big Yat-Zar idols, to remove traces of machine work. One of those things may be around, a few thousand years from now, when these people develop a mechanical civilization. But as far as raying down this Kurchuk is concerned, these Hulgung are completely nonscientific. They wouldn't have the least idea what happened. They'd believe that Yat-Zar struck him dead, as gods on this plane of culture are supposed to do, and if any of them noticed the needler at all, they'd think it was just a holy amulet of some kind."

"But the law is the law—" Brannad Klav began.

Verkan Vall shook his head. "Brannad, as I understand, you were promoted to your present position on the retirement of Salvan Marth, about ten years ago; up to that time, you were in your company's financial department. You were accustomed to working subject to the First Level Commercial Regulation Code. Now, any law binding upon our people at home, on the First Level, is inflexible. It has to be. We found out, over fifty centuries ago, that laws have to be rigid and without discretionary powers in administration in order that people may be able to predict their effect and plan their activities accordingly. Naturally, you became conditioned to operating in such a climate of legal inflexibility.

"But in paratime, the situation is entirely different. There exist, within the range of the Ghaldron-Hesthor paratemporal-field generator, a number of time-lines of the order of ten to the hundred-thousandth power. In effect, that many different worlds. In the past ten thousand years, we have visited only the tiniest fraction of these, but we have found everything from time-lines inhabited only by subhuman ape-men to Second Level civilizations which are our own equal in every respect but knowledge of paratemporal transposition. We even know of one Second Level civilization which is approaching the discovery of an interstellar hyperspatial drive, something we've never even come close to. And in between are every degree of savagery, barbarism and civilization. Now, it's just not possible to frame any single code of laws applicable to conditions on all of these. The best we can do is prohibit certain flagrantly immoral types of activity, such as slave-trading, introduction of new types of narcotic drugs, or out-and-out piracy and brigandage. If you're in doubt as to the legality of anything you want to do outtime, go to the Judicial Section of the Paratime Commission and get an opinion on it. That's where you made your whole mistake. You didn't find out just how far it was allowable for you to go."

He turned to Stranor Sleth again. "Well, that's the background, then. Now tell me about what happened yesterday at Zurb."

"Well, a week ago, Kurchuk came out with this decree closing our temple at Zurb and ordering his subjects to perform worship and make money offerings to Muz-Azin. The Zurb temple isn't a mask for a mine: Zurb's too far south for the uranium deposits. It's just a center for propaganda and that sort of thing. But they have a House of Yat-Zar, and a conveyer, and most of the upper-priests are paratimers. Well, our man there, Tammand Drav, alias Khoram, defied the king's order, so Kurchuk sent a company of Chuldun archers to close the temple and arrest the priests. Tammand Drav got all his people who were in the temple at the time into the House of Yat-Zar and transposed them back to the First Level. He had orders"—Stranor Sleth looked meaningly at Brannad Klav—"not to resist with energy-weapons or even ultrasonic paralyzers. And while we're on the subject of letting the local yokels

see too much, about fifteen of the under-priests he took to the First Level were Hulgung natives."

"Nothing wrong about that: they'll get memory-obliviation and pseudo-memory treatment," Verkan Vall said. "But he should have been allowed to needle about a dozen of those Chulduns. Teach the beggars to respect Yat-Zar in the future. Now, how about the six priests who were outside the temple at the time? All but one were paratimers. We'll have to find out about them, and get them out of Zurb."

"That'll take some doing," Stranor Sleth said. "And it'll have to be done before sunset tomorrow. They are all in the dungeon of the palace citadel, and Kurchuk is going to give them to the priests of Muz-Azin to be sacrificed tomorrow evening."

"How'd you learn that?" Verkan Vall asked.

"Oh, we have a man in Zurb, not connected with the temple," Stranor Sleth said. "Name's Crannar Jurth; calls himself Kranjur, locally. He has a swordmaker's shop, employs about a dozen native journeymen and apprentices who hammer out the common blades he sells in the open market. Then, he imports a few high-class alloy-steel blades from the First Level, that'll cut through this local low-carbon armor like cheese. Fits them with locally-made hilts and sells them at unbelievable prices to the nobility. He's Swordsmith to the King; picks up all the inside palace dope. Of course, he was among the first to accept the New Gospel and go over to Muz-Azin. He has a secret room under his shop, with his conveyer and a radio.

"What happened was this: These six priests were at a consecration ceremony at a rabbit-ranch outside the city, and they didn't know about the raid on the temple. On their way back, they were surrounded by Chuldun archers and taken prisoner. They had no weapons but their sacrificial knives." He threw another dirty look at Brannad Klav. "So they're due to go up on the triangles at sunset tomorrow."

"We'll have to get them out before then," Verkan Vall stated. "They're our people, and we can't let them down; even the native is under our protection, whether he knows it or not. And in the second place, if those priests are sacrificed to Muz-Azin," he told Brannad Klav, "you can shut down everything on this time-line, pull out or disintegrate your installations, and fill in your mine-tunnels. Yat-Zar will be through on this time-line, and you'll be through along with him. And considering that your fissionables franchise for this sector comes up for renewal next year, your company will be through in this paratime area."

"You believe that would happen?" Brannad Klav asked anxiously.

"I know it will, because I'll put through a recommendation to that effect, if those six men are tortured to death tomorrow," Verkan Vall replied. "And in the fifty years that I've been in the Police Department, I've only heard of five such recommendations being ignored by the commission. You know, Fourth Level Mineral Products Syndicate is after

your franchise. Ordinarily, they wouldn't have a chance of getting it, but with this, maybe they will, even without my recommendation. This was all your fault, for ignoring Stranor Sleth's proposal and for denying those men the right to carry energy weapons."

"Well, we were only trying to stay inside the Paratime Code," Brannad Klav pleaded. "If it isn't too late, now, you can count on me for every co-operation." He fiddled with some papers on the desk. "What do you want me to do to help?"

"I'll tell you that in a minute." Verkan Vall walked to the wall and looked at the map, then returned to Stranor Sleth's desk. "How about these dungeons?" he asked. "How are they located, and how can we get in to them?"

"I'm afraid we can't," Stranor Sleth told him. "Not without fighting our way in. They're under the palace citadel, a hundred feet below ground. They're spatially co-existent with the heavy water barriers around one of our company's plutonium piles on the First Level, and below surface on any unoccupied time-line I know of, so we can't transpose in to them. This palace is really a walled city inside a city. Here, I'll show you."

Going around the desk, he sat down and, after looking in the index-screen, punched a combination on the keyboard. A picture, projected from the microfilm-bank, appeared on the view-screen. It was an air-view of the city of Zurb—taken, the high priest explained, by infrared light from an airboat over the city at night. It showed a city of an entirely pre-mechanical civilization, with narrow streets, lined on either side by low one and two story buildings. Although there would be considerable snow in winter, the roofs were usually flat, probably massive stone slabs supported by pillars within. Even in the poorer sections, this was true except for the very meanest houses and out-buildings, which were thatched. Here and there, some huge pile of masonry would rear itself above its lower neighbors, and, where the streets were wider, occasional groups of large buildings would be surrounded by battlemented walls. Stranor Sleth indicated one of the larger of these.

"Here's the palace," he said. "And here's the temple of Yat-Zar, about half a mile away." He touched a large building, occupying an entire block; between it and the palace was a block-wide park, with lawns and trees on either side of a wide roadway connecting the two.

"Now, here's a detailed view of the palace." He punched another combination; the view of the City was replaced by one, taken from directly overhead, of the walled palace area. "Here's the main gate, in front, at the end of the road from the temple," he pointed out. "Over here, on the left, are the slaves' quarters and the stables and workshops and store houses and so on. Over here, on the other side, are the nobles' quarters. And this,"—he indicated a towering structure at the rear of the walled enclosure—"is the citadel and the royal dwelling. Audience hall on this side; harem over here on this side. A wide stone platform, about fifteen

feet high, runs completely across the front of the citadel, from the audience hall to the harem. Since this picture was taken, the new temple of Muz-Azin was built right about here." He indicated that it extended out from the audience hall into the central courtyard. "And out here on the platform, they've put up about a dozen of these triangles, about twelve feet high, on which the sacrificial victims are whipped to death."

"Yes. About the only way we could get down to the dungeons would be to make an airdrop onto the citadel roof and fight our way down with needlers and blasters, and I'm not willing to do that as long as there's any other way," Verkan Vall said. "We'd lose men, even with needlers against bows, and there's a chance that some of our equipment might be lost in the melee and fall into outtime hands. You say this sacrifice comes off tomorrow at sunset?"

"That would be about actual sunset plus or minus an hour; these people aren't astronomers, they don't even have good sundials, and it might be a cloudy day," Stranor Sleth said. "There will be a big idol of Muz-Azin on a cart, set about here." He pointed. "After the sacrifice, it is to be dragged down this road, outside, to the temple of Yat-Zar, and set up there. The temple is now occupied by about twenty Chuldun mercenaries and five or six priests of Muz-Azin. They haven't, of course, got into the House of Yat-Zar; the door's of impervium steel, about six inches thick, with a plating of collapsed nickel under the gilding. It would take a couple of hours to cut through it with our best atomic torch; there isn't a tool on this time-line that could even scratch it. And the insides of the walls are lined with the same thing."

"Do you think our people have been tortured, yet?" Verkan Vall asked.

"No." Stranor Sleth was positive. "They'll be fairly well treated, until the sacrifice. The idea's to make them last as long as possible on the triangles; Muz-Azin likes to see a slow killing, and so does the mob of spectators."

"That's good. Now, here's my plan. We won't try to rescue them from the dungeons. Instead, we'll transpose back to the Zurb temple from the First Level, in considerable force—say a hundred or so men—and march on the palace, to force their release. You're in constant radio communication with all the other temples on this time-line, I suppose?"

"Yes, certainly."

"All right. Pass this out to everybody, authority Paratime Police, in my name, acting for Tortha Karf. I want all paratimers who can possibly be spared to transpose to First Level immediately and rendezvous at the First Level terminal of the Zurb temple conveyer as soon as possible. Close down all mining operations, and turn over temple routine to the native under-priests. You can tell them that the upper-priests are retiring to their respective Houses of

Yat-Zar to pray for the deliverance of the priests in the hands of King Kurchuk. And everybody is to bring back his priestly regalia to the First Level; that will be needed." He turned to Brannad Klav. "I suppose you keep spare regalia in stock on the First Level?"

"Yes, of course; we keep plenty of everything in stock. Robes, miters, false beards of different shades, everything."

"And these big Yat-Zar idols: they're mass-produced on the First Level? You have one available now? Good. I'll want some alterations made on one. For one thing, I'll want it plated heavily, all over, with collapsed nickel. For another, I'll want it fitted with antigrav units and some sort of propulsion-units, and a loud-speaker, and remote control."

"And, Stranor, you get in touch with this swordmaker, Crannar Jurth, and alert him to co-operate with us. Tell him to start calling Zurb temple on his radio about noon tomorrow, and keep it up till he gets an answer. Or, better, tell him to run his conveyer to his First Level terminal, and bring with him an extra suit of clothes appropriate to the role of journeyman-mechanic. I'll want to talk to him, and furnish him with special equipment. Got all that? Well, carry on with it, and bring your own paratimers, priests and mining operators, back with you as soon as you've taken care of everything. Brannad, you come with me, now. We're returning to First Level immediately. We have a lot of work to do, so let's get started."

"Anything I can do to help, just call on me for it," Brannad Klav promised earnestly. "And, Stranor, I want to apologize. I'll admit, now, that I ought to have followed your recommendations, when this situation first developed."

■

By noon of the next day, Verkan Vall had at least a hundred men gathered in the big room at the First Level fissionables refinery at Jarnabar, spatially co-existent with the Fourth Level temple of Yat-Zar at Zurb. He was having a little trouble distinguishing between them, for every man wore the fringed blue robe and golden miter of an upper-priest, and had his face masked behind a blue false beard. It was, he admitted to himself, a most ludicrous-looking assemblage; one of the most ludicrous things about it was the fact that it would have inspired only pious awe in a Hulgun of the Fourth Level Proto-Aryan Sector. About half of them were priests from the Transtemporal Mining Corporation's temples; the other half were members of the Paratime Police. All of them wore, in addition to their temple knives, holstered sigma-ray needlers. Most of them carried ultrasonic paralyzers, eighteen-inch batonlike things with bulbous ends. Most of the Paratime Police and a few of the priests also carried either heat-ray pistols or neutron-disruption blasters; Verkan Vall wore one of the latter in a left-hand belt holster.

The Paratime Police were lined up separately for inspection, and Stranor Sleth, Tammand Drav of the Zurb temple, and several other high priests were checking the authenticity of

their disguises. A little apart from the others, a Paratime Policeman, in high priest's robes and beard, had a square box slung in front of him; he was fiddling with knobs and buttons on it, practicing. A big idol of Yat-Zar, on antigravity, was floating slowly about the room in obedience to its remote controls, rising and lowering, turning about and pirouetting gracefully.

"Hey, Vall!" he called to his superior. "How's this?"

The idol rose about five feet, turned slowly in a half-circle, moved to the right a little, and then settled slowly toward the floor.

"Fine, fine, Horv," Verkan Vall told him, "but don't set it down on anything, or turn off the antigravity. There's enough collapsed nickel-plating on that thing to sink it a yard in soft ground."

"I don't know what the idea of that was," Brannad Klav, standing beside him, said. "Understand, I'm not criticizing. I haven't any right to, under the circumstances. But it seems to me that armoring that thing in collapsed nickel was an unnecessary precaution."

"Maybe it was," Verkan Vall agreed. "I sincerely hope so. But we can't take any chances. This operation has to be absolutely right. Ready, Tammand? All right; first detail into the conveyer."

He turned and strode toward a big dome of fine metallic mesh, thirty feet high and sixty in diameter, at the other end of the room. Tammand Drav, and his ten paratimer priests, and Brannad Klav, and ten Paratime Police, followed him in. One of the latter slid shut the door and locked it; Verkan Vall went to the control desk, at the center of the dome, and picked up a two-foot globe of the same fine metallic mesh, opening it and making some adjustments inside, then attaching an electric cord and closing it. He laid the globe on the floor near the desk and picked up the hand battery at the other end of the attached cord.

"Not taking any chances at all, are you?" Brannad Klav asked, watching this operation with interest.

"I never do, unnecessarily. There are too many necessary chances that have to be taken, in this work." Verkan Vall pressed the button on the hand battery. The globe on the floor flashed and vanished. "Yesterday, five paratimers were arrested. Any or all of them could have had door-activators with them. Stranor Sleth says they were not tortured, but that is a purely inferential statement. They may have been, and the use of the activator may have been extorted from one of them. So I want a look at the inside of that conveyer-chamber before we transpose into it."

He laid the hand battery, with the loose-dangling wire that had been left behind, on the desk, then lit a cigarette. The others gathered around, smoking and watching, careful to avoid the place from which the globe had vanished. Thirty minutes passed, and then, in a queer iridescence, the globe reappeared. Verkan Vall counted ten seconds and picked it

up, taking it to the desk and opening it to remove a small square box. This he slid into a space under the desk and flipped a switch. Instantly, a view-screen lit up and a three-dimensional picture appeared—the interior of a big room a hundred feet square and some seventy in height. There was a big desk and a radio; tables, couches, chairs and an arms-rack full of weapons, and at one end, a remarkably clean sixty-foot circle on the concrete floor, outlined in faintly luminous red.

"How about it?" Verkan Vall asked Tammand Drav. "Anything wrong?"

The Zurb high priest shook his head. "Just as we left it," he said. "Nobody's been inside since we left."

■

One of the policemen took Verkan Vall's place at the control desk and threw the master switch, after checking the instruments. Immediately, the paratemporal-transposition field went on with a humming sound that mounted to a high scream, then settled to a steady drone. The mesh dome flickered with a cold iridescence and vanished, and they were looking into the interior of a great fissionables refinery plant, operated by paratimers on another First Level time-line. The structural details altered, from time-line to time-line, as they watched. Buildings appeared and vanished. Once, for a few seconds, they were inside a cool, insulated bubble in the midst of molten lead. Tammand Drav jerked a thumb at it, before it vanished.

"That always bothers me," he said. "Bad place for the field to go weak. I'm fussy as an old hen about inspection of the conveyer, on account of that."

"Don't blame you," Verkan Vall agreed. "Probably the cooling system of a breeder-pile."

They passed more swiftly, now, across the Second Level and the Third. Once they were in the midst of a huge land battle, with great tanklike vehicles spouting flame at one another. Another moment was spent in an air bombardment. On any time-line, this section of East Europe was a natural battleground. Once a great procession marched toward them, carrying red banners and huge pictures of a coarse-faced man with a black mustache—Verkan Vall recognized the environment as Fourth Level Europeo-American Sector. Finally, as the transposition-rate slowed, they saw a clutter of miserable thatched huts, in the rear of a granite wall of a Fourth Level Hulgung temple of Yat-Zar—a temple not yet infiltrated by Transtemporal Mining Corporation agents. Finally, they were at their destination. The dome around them became visible, and an overhead green light flashed slowly on and off.

Verkan Vall opened the door and stepped outside, his needler drawn. The House of Yat-Zar was just as he had seen it in the picture photographed by the automatic reconnaissance-conveyer. The others crowded outside after him. One of the regular priests pulled off his miter and

beard and went to the radio, putting on a headset. Verkan Vall and Tammand Drav snapped on the visiscreen, getting a view of the Holy of Holies outside.

There were six men there, seated at the upper-priests' banquet table, drinking from golden goblets. Five of them wore the black robes with green facings which marked them as priests of Muz-Azin; the sixth was an officer of the Chuldun archers, in gilded mail and helmet.

"Why, those are the sacred vessels of the temple!" Tammand Drav cried, scandalized. Then he laughed in self-ridicule. "I'm beginning to take this stuff seriously, myself; time I put in for a long vacation. I was actually shocked at the sacrilege!"

"Well, let's overtake the infidels in their sins," Verkan Vall said. "Paralyzers will be good enough."

He picked up one of the bulb-headed weapons, and unlocked the door. Tammand Drav and another of the priests of the Zurb temple following and the others crowding behind, they passed out through the veils, and burst into the Holy of Holies. Verkan Vall pointed the bulb of his paralyzer at the six seated men and pressed the button; other paralyzers came into action, and the whole sextet were knocked senseless. The officer rolled from his chair and fell to the floor in a clatter of armor. Two of the priests slumped forward on the table. The others merely sank back in their chairs, dropping their goblets.

"Give each one of them another dose, to make sure," Verkan Vall directed a couple of his own men. "Now, Tammand; any other way into the main temple beside that door?"

"Up those steps," Tammand Drav pointed. "There's a gallery along the side; we can cover the whole room from there."

"Take your men and go up there. I'll take a few through the door. There'll be about twenty archers out there, and we don't want any of them loosing any arrows before we can knock them out. Three minutes be time enough?"

"Easily. Make it two," Tammand Drav said.

■

He took his priests up the stairway and vanished into the gallery of the temple. Verkan Vall waited until one minute had passed and then, followed by Brannad Klav and a couple of Paratime Policemen, he went under the plinth and peered out into the temple. Five or six archers, in steel caps and sleeveless leather jackets sewn with steel rings, were gathered around the altar, cooking something in a pot on the fire. Most of the others, like veteran soldiers, were sprawled on the floor, trying to catch a short nap, except half a dozen, who crouched in a circle, playing some game with dice—another almost universal military practice.

The two minutes were up. He aimed his paralyzer at the men around the altar and squeezed the button, swinging it

from one to another and knocking them down with a bludgeon of inaudible sound. At the same time, Tammand Drav and his detail were stunning the gamblers. Stepping forward and to one side, Verkan Vall, Brannad Klav and the others took care of the sleepers on the floor. In less than thirty seconds, every Chuldun in the temple was incapacitated.

"All right, make sure none of them come out of it prematurely," Verkan Vall directed. "Get their weapons, and be sure nobody has a knife or anything hidden on him. Who has the syringe and the sleep-drug ampoules?"

Somebody had, it developed, who was still on the First Level, to come up with the second conveyer load. Verkan Vall swore. Something like this always happened, on any operation involving more than half a dozen men.

"Well, some of you stay here: patrol around, and use your paralyzers on anybody who even twitches a muscle." Ultrasonics were nice, effective, humane police weapons, but they were unreliable. The same dose that would keep one man out for an hour would paralyze another for no more than ten or fifteen minutes. "And be sure none of them are playing 'possum."

He went back through the door under the plinth, glancing up at the decorated wooden screen and wondering how much work it would take to move the new Yat-Zar in from the conveyers. The five priests and the archer-captain were still unconscious; one of the policemen was searching them.

"Here's the sort of weapons these priests carry," he said, holding up a short iron mace with a spiked head. "Carry them on their belts." He tossed it on the table, and began searching another knocked-out hierophant. "Like this—*Hey!* Look at this, will you!"

He drew his hand from under the left side of the senseless man's robe and held up a sigma-ray needler. Verkan Vall looked at it and nodded grimly.

"Had it in a regular shoulder holster," the policeman said, handing the weapon across the table. "What do you think?"

"Find anything else funny on him?"

"Wait a minute." The policeman pulled open the robe and began stripping the priest of Muz-Azin; Verkan Vall came around the table to help. There was nothing else of a suspicious nature.

"Could have got it from one of the prisoners, but I don't like the familiar way he's wearing that holster," Verkan Vall said. "Has the conveyer gone back, yet?" When the policeman nodded, he continued: "When it returns, take him to the First Level. I hope they bring up the sleep-drug with the next load. When you get him back, take him to Dhergabar by strato-rocket immediately, and make sure he gets back alive. I want him questioned under narco-hypnosis by a regular Paratime Commission psycho-technician, in the

presence of Chief Tortha Karf and some responsible Commission official. This is going to be hot stuff."

Within an hour, the whole force was assembled in the temple. The wooden screen had presented no problem—it slid easily to one side—and the big idol floated on antigravity in the middle of the temple. Verkan Vall was looking anxiously at his watch.

"It's about two hours to sunset," he said, to Stranor Sleth. "But as you pointed out, these Hulguns aren't astronomers, and it's a bit cloudy. I wish Crannar Jurth would call in with something definite."

Another twenty minutes passed. Then the man at the radio came out into the temple.

"O. K.!" he called. "The man at Crannar Jurth's called in. Crannar Jurth contacted him with a midget radio he has up his sleeve; he's in the palace courtyard now. They haven't brought out the victims, yet, but Kurchuk has just been carried out on his throne to that platform in front of the citadel. Big crowd gathering in the inner courtyard; more in the streets outside. Palace gates are wide open."

"That's it!" Verkan Vall cried. "Form up; the parade's starting. Brannad, you and Tammand and Stranor and I in front; about ten men with paralyzers a little behind us. Then Yat-Zar, about ten feet off the ground, and then the others. Forward—*ho-o!*"

■

They emerged from the temple and started down the broad roadway toward the palace. There was not much of a crowd, at first. Most of Zurb had flocked to the palace earlier; the lucky ones in the courtyard and the late comers outside. Those whom they did meet stared at them in open-mouthed amazement, and then some, remembering their doubts and blasphemies, began howling for forgiveness. Others—a substantial majority—realizing that it would be upon King Kurchuk that the real weight of Yat-Zar's six hands would fall, took to their heels, trying to put as much distance as possible between them and the palace before the blow fell.

As the procession approached the palace gates, the crowds were thicker, made up of those who had been unable to squeeze themselves inside. The panic was worse, here, too. A good many were trampled and hurt in the rush to escape, and it became necessary to use paralyzers to clear a way. That made it worse: everybody was sure that Yat-Zar was striking sinners dead left and right.

Fortunately, the gates were high enough to let the god through without losing altitude appreciably. Inside, the mob surged back, clearing a way across the courtyard. It was only necessary to paralyze a few here, and the levitated idol and its priestly attendants advanced toward the stone platform, where the king sat on his throne, flanked by court functionaries and black-robed priests of Muz-Azin. In front of this, a rank of Chuldun archers had been drawn up.

"Horv; move Yat-Zar forward about a hundred feet and up about fifty," Verkan Vall directed. "Quickly!"

As the six-armed anthropomorphic idol rose and moved closer toward its saurian rival, Verkan Vall drew his needler, scanning the assemblage around the throne anxiously.

"*Where is the wicked King?*" a voice thundered—the voice of Stranor Sleth, speaking into a midget radio tuned to the loud-speaker inside the idol. "*Where is the blasphemer and desecrator, Kurchuk?*"

"There's Labdurg, in the red tunic, beside the throne," Tammand Drav whispered. "And that's Ghromdur, the Muz-Azin high priest, beside him."

Verkan Vall nodded, keeping his eyes on the group on the platform. Ghromdur, the high priest of Muz-Azin, was edging backward and reaching under his robe. At the same time, an officer shouted an order, and the Chuldun archers drew arrows from their quivers and fitted them to their bowstrings. Immediately, the ultrasonic paralyzers of the advancing paratimers went into action, and the mercenaries began dropping.

"Lay down your weapons, fools!" the amplified voice boomed at them. "Lay down your weapons or you shall surely die! Who are you, miserable wretches, to draw bows against Me?"

At first a few, then all of them, the Chulduns lowered or dropped their weapons and began edging away to the sides. At the center, in front of the throne, most of them had been knocked out. Verkan Vall was still watching the Muz-Azin high priest intently; as Ghromdur raised his arm, there was a flash and a puff of smoke from the front of Yat-Zar—the paint over the collapsed nickel was burned off, but otherwise the idol was undamaged. Verkan Vall swung up his needler and rayed Ghromdur dead; as the man in the green-faced black robes fell, a blaster clattered on the stone platform.

"Is that your puny best, Muz-Azin?" the booming voice demanded. "Where is your high priest now?"

"Horv; face Yat-Zar toward Muz-Azin," Verkan Vall said over his shoulder, drawing his blaster with his left hand. Like all First Level people, he was ambidextrous, although, like all paratimers, he habitually concealed the fact while outtime. As the levitated idol swung slowly to look down upon its enemy on the built-up cart, Verkan Vall aimed the blaster and squeezed.

In a spot less than a millimeter in diameter on the crocodile idol's side, a certain number of neutrons in the atomic structure of the stone from which it was carved broke apart, becoming, in effect, atoms of hydrogen. With a flash and a bang, the idol burst and vanished. Yat-Zar gave a dirty laugh and turned his back on the cart, which was now burning fiercely facing King Kurchuk again.

"Get your hands up, all of you!" Verkan Vall shouted, in the First Level language, swinging the stubby muzzle of the

blaster and the knob-tipped twin tubes of the needler to cover the group around the throne, "Come forward, before I start blasting!"

Labdurg raised his hands and stepped forward. So did two of the priests of Yat-Zar. They were quickly seized by Paratime Policemen who swarmed up onto the platform and disarmed. All three were carrying sigma-ray needlers, and Labdurg had a blaster as well.

King Kurchuk was clinging to the arms of his throne, a badly frightened monarch trying desperately not to show it. He was a big man, heavy-shouldered, black-bearded; under ordinary circumstances he would probably have cut an imposing figure, in his gold-washed mail and his golden crown. Now his face was a dirty gray, and he was biting nervously at his lower lip. The others on the platform were in even worse state. The Hulgung nobles were grouped together, trying to disassociate themselves from both the king and the priests of Muz-Azin. The latter were staring in a daze at the blazing cart from which their idol had just been blasted. And the dozen men who were to have done the actual work of the torture-sacrifice had all dropped their whips and were fairly gibbering in fear.

Yat-Zar, manipulated by the robed paratimer, had taken a position directly above the throne and was lowering slowly. Kurchuk stared up at the massive idol descending toward him, his knuckles white as he clung to the arms of his throne. He managed to hold out until he could feel the weight of the idol pressing on his head. Then, with a scream, he hurled himself from the throne and rolled forward almost to the edge of the platform. Yat-Zar moved to one side, swung slightly and knocked the throne toppling, and then settled down on the platform. To Kurchuk, who was rising cautiously on his hands and knees, the big idol seemed to be looking at him in contempt.

"*Where are my holy priests, Kurchuk?*" Stranor Sleth demanded in to his sleeve-hidden radio. "*Let them be brought before me, alive and unharmed, or it shall be better for you had you never been born!*"

The six priests of Yat-Zar, it seemed, were already being brought onto the platform by one of Kurchuk's nobles. This noble, whose name was Yorzuk, knew a miracle when he saw one, and believed in being on the side of the god with the heaviest artillery. As soon as he had seen Yat-Zar coming through the gate without visible means of support, he had hastened to the dungeons with half a dozen of his personal retainers and ordered the release of the six captives. He was now escorting them onto the platform, assuring them that he had always been a faithful servant of Yat-Zar and had been deeply grieved at his sovereign's apostasy.

"*Hear my word, Kurchuk,*" Stranor Sleth continued through the loud-speaker in the idol. "*You have sinned most vilely against me, and were I a cruel god, your fate would be such as no man has ever before suffered. But I am a merciful god; behold, you may gain forgiveness in my sight. For thirty*

days, you shall neither eat meat nor drink wine, nor shall you wear gold nor fine raiment, and each day shall you go to my temple and beseech me for my forgiveness. And on the thirty-first day, you shall set out, barefoot and clad in the garb of a slave, and journey to my temple that is in the mountains over above Yoldav, and there will I forgive you, after you have made sacrifice to me. I, Yat-Zar, have spoken!"

The king started to rise, babbling thanks.

"Rise not before me until I have forgiven you!" Yat-Zar thundered. "Creep out of my sight upon your belly, wretch!"

■

The procession back to the temple was made quietly and sedately along an empty roadway. Yat-Zar seemed to be in a kindly humor; the people of Zurb had no intention of giving him any reason to change his mood. The priests of Muz-Azin and their torturers had been flung into the dungeon. Yorzuk, appointed regent for the duration of Kurchuk's penance, had taken control and was employing Hulgum spearmen and hastily-converted Chuldun archers to restore order and, incidentally, purge a few of his personal enemies and political rivals. The priests, with the three prisoners who had been found carrying First Level weapons among them and Yat-Zar floating triumphantly in front, entered the temple. A few of the devout, who sought admission after them, were told that elaborate and secret rites were being held to cleanse the profaned altar, and sent away.

Verkan Vall and Brannad Klav and Stranor Sleth were in the conveyer chamber, with the Paratime Policemen and the extra priests; along with them were the three prisoners. Verkan Vall pulled off his false beard and turned to face these. He could see that they all recognized him.

"Now," he began, "you people are in a bad jam. You've violated the Paratime Transposition Code, the Commercial Regulation Code, and the First Level Criminal Code, all together. If you know what's good for you, you'll start talking."

"I'm not saying anything till I have legal advice," the man who had been using the local alias of Labdurg replied. "And if you're through searching me, I'd like to have my cigarettes and lighter back."

"Smoke one of mine, for a change," Verkan Vall told him. "I don't know what's in yours beside tobacco." He offered his case and held a light for the prisoner before lighting his own cigarette. "I'm going to be sure you get back to the First Level alive."

The former Overseer of the Kingdom of Zurb shrugged. "I'm still not talking," he said.

"Well, we can get it all out of you by narco-hypnosis, anyhow," Verkan Vall told him. "Besides, we got that man of yours who was here at the temple when we came in.

He's being given a full treatment, as a presumed outtime native found in possession of First Level weapons. If you talk now it'll go easier with you."

The prisoner dropped the cigarette on the floor and tramped it out.

"Anything you cops get out of me, you'll have to get the hard way," he said. "I have friends on the First Level who'll take care of me."

"I doubt that. They'll have their hands full taking care of themselves, after this gets out." Verkan Vall turned to the two in the black robes. "Either of you want to say anything?" When they shook their heads, he nodded to a group of his policemen; they were hustled into the conveyer. "Take them to the First Level terminal and hold them till I come in. I'll be along with the next conveyer load."

■

The conveyer flashed and vanished. Brannad Klav stared for a moment at the circle of concrete floor from whence it had disappeared. Then he turned to Verkan Vall.

"I still can't believe it," he said. "Why, those fellows were First Level paratimers. So was that priest, Ghromdur: the one you rayed."

"Yes, of course. They worked for your rivals, the Fourth Level Mineral Products Syndicate; the outfit that was trying to get your Proto-Aryan Sector fissionables franchise away from you. They operate on this sector already; have the petroleum franchise for the Chuldun country, east of the Caspian Sea. They export to some of these internal-combustion-engine sectors, like Europo-American. You know, most of the wars they've been fighting, lately, on the Europo-American Sector have been, at least in part, motivated by rivalry for oil fields. But now that the Europo-Americans have begun to release nuclear energy, fissionables have become more important than oil. In less than a century, it's predicted that atomic energy will replace all other forms of power. Mineral Products Syndicate wanted to get a good source of supply for uranium, and your Proto-Aryan Sector franchise was worth grabbing.

"I had considered something like this as a possibility when Stranor, here, mentioned that tularemia was normally unknown in Eurasia on this sector. That epidemic must have been started by imported germs. And I knew that Mineral Products has agents at the court of the Chuldun emperor, Chombrog: they have to, to protect their oil wells on his eastern frontiers. I spent most of last night checking up on some stuff by video-transcription from the Paratime Commission's microfilm library at Dhergabar. I found out, for one thing, that while there is a King Kurchuk of Zurb on every time-line for a hundred para-years on either side of this one, this is the only time-line on which he married a Princess Darith of Chuldun, and it's the only time-line on

which there is any trace of a Chuldun scribe named Labdurg.

"That's why I went to all the trouble of having that Yat-Zar plated with collapsed nickel. If there were disguised paratimers among the Muz-Azin party at Kurchuk's court, I expected one of them to try to blast our idol when we brought it into the palace. I was watching Ghromdur and Labdurg in particular; as soon as Ghromdur used his blaster, I needed him. After that, it was easy."

"Was that why you insisted on sending that automatic viewer on ahead?"

"Yes. There was a chance that they might have planted a bomb in the House of Yat-Zar, here. I knew they'd either do that or let the place entirely alone. I suppose they were so confident of getting away with this that they didn't want to damage the conveyer or the conveyer chamber. They expected to use them, themselves, after they took over your company's franchise."

"Well, what's going to be done about it by the Commission?" Brannad Klav wanted to know.

"Plenty. The syndicate will probably lose their paratime license; any of its officials who had guilty knowledge of this will be dealt with according to law. You know, this was a pretty nasty business."

"You're telling me!" Stranor Sleth exclaimed. "Did you get a look at those whips they were going to use on our people? Pointed iron barbs a quarter-inch long braided into them, all over the lash-ends!"

"Yes. Any punitive action you're thinking about taking on these priests of Muz-Azin—the natives, I mean—will be ignored on the First Level. And that reminds me: you'd better work out a line of policy, pretty soon."

"Well, as for the priests and the torturers, I think I'll tell Yorzuk to have them sold to the Bhunguns, to the east. They're always in the market for galley slaves," Stranor Sleth said. He turned to Brannad Klav. "And I'll want six gold crowns made up, as soon as possible. Strictly Hulgung design, with Yat-Zar religious symbolism, very rich and ornate, all slightly different. When I give Kurchuk absolution, I'll crown him at the altar in the name of Yat-Zar. Then I'll invite in the other five Hulgung kings, lecture them on their religious duties, make them confess their secret doubts, forgive them, and crown them, too. From then on, they can all style themselves as ruling by the will of Yat-Zar."

"And from then on, you'll have all of them eating out of your hand," Verkan Vall concluded. "You know, this will probably go down in Hulgung history as the Reformation of Ghullam the Holy. I've always wondered whether the theory of the divine right of kings was invented by the kings, to establish their authority over the people, or by the priests, to establish *their* authority over the kings. It works about as well one way as the other."

"What I can't understand is this," Brannad Klav said. "It was entirely because of my respect for the Paratime Code that I kept Stranor Sleth from using Fourth Level weapons and other techniques to control these people with a show of apparent miraculous powers. But this Fourth Level Mineral Products Syndicate was operating in violation of the Paratime Code by invading our franchise area. Why didn't they fake up a supernatural reign of terror to intimidate these natives?"

"Ha, exactly because they *were* operating illegally," Verkan Vall replied. "Suppose they had started using needlers and blasters and antigravity and nuclear-energy around here. The natives would have thought it was the power of Muz-Azin, of course, but what would you have thought? You'd have known, as soon as they tried it, that First Level paratimers were working against you, and you'd have laid the facts before the Commission, and this time-line would have been flooded with Paratime Police. They had to conceal their operations not only from the natives, as you do, but also from us. So they didn't dare make public use of First Level techniques."

"Of course, when we came marching into the palace with that idol on antigravity, they knew, at once, what was happening. I have an idea that they only tried to blast that idol to create a diversion which would permit them to escape—if they could have got out of the palace, they'd have made their way, in disguise, to the nearest Mineral Products Syndicate conveyer and transposed out of here. I realized that they could best delay us by blasting our idol, and that's why I had it plated with collapsed nickel. I think that where they made their mistake was in allowing Kurchuk to have those priests arrested, and insisting on sacrificing them to Muz-Azin. If it hadn't been for that, the Paratime Police wouldn't have been brought into this, at all."

"Well, Stranor, you'll want to get back to your temple, and Brannad and I want to get back to the First Level. I'm supposed to take my wife to a banquet in Dhergabar, tonight, and with the fastest strato-rocket, I'll just barely make it."



NOBODY HOME

Based on "The Gun" by Philip K. Dick



OBSTACLES

Dangerous Environment - The Slag

Dangerous Environment - The Ruined City

Dangerous Object - The Gun

Technical Challenges - Disabling The Gun

COMPLICATIONS

No Intel

Stealth Required

PERKS

70 MV

MAGUFFINS

Naming Rights (Survey scenarios)

Data/Report on Node

Repair Cart (3M)

The Treasure (variable)

BACKSTORY

A once-thriving planet orbits mutely around its sun, its cities, towns, roads and wildlands all reduced to so much ash and radioactive slag.

Nothing remains alive on this pitiful ball of rock, and yet, something stirs. The machines of death and destruction that brought life to its fiery end are still powered, still operational, and still waiting for any sign of the enemy.

Atop a hill overlooking the skeletal ruins of the capital city sits *THE GUN*.

In this short adventure, the PCs find themselves exploring the remains of a dead civilization, eerily reminiscent of our own.

VARIANT: ALIEN WORLD. This adventure can easily be combined with others, by using *The Gun* as a Crisis that forces the PCs to land on any “dead” planet, and ensures that they have to walk around on foot. Instead of “Franklin Apartments” and other Earthlike details, you can use the *Location Generator* and *Unusual Wilderness Features* tables to create the home of a mysterious – and extinct – alien race. Maybe there’s a gigantic wrecked starship, and a dead alien pilot with its chest cavity broken open from the inside... or something. You get the idea.

THE SHAPELESSNESS OF THINGS TO COME

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Survey/Fact-Finding
NODE TYPE: Future Earth
SLIP TYPE: Temporal (DL3)
PAY: 4M ea

The PCs are hired to add a datapoint to the Big Model of Earth’s possible futures. They’ll be traveling to a time roughly 900 years upstream.

GM NOTE: This scenario requires the *Cartesian Exception* rule. The SlipShip must be capable of atmospheric flight, as the first objective of the mission involves making an orbital map of the planet’s surface. It is while making the required orbital pass that the ship will be shot down by *The Gun*. If the ship has an automated repair system, the damage will require 20 hours to repair. Without such a system, the PCs will need to find and work metal to replace ship components. The most logical place to look would be within and beneath the city. You may designate any city you wish to be guarded by the world’s last automated defense system.

REMAINS TO BE SEEN

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Survey/Fact-Finding
NODE TYPE: Unknown Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL4)
PAY: 3M ea

Scoutbots have located an unknown planet in 3space. While the bots’ scanners were unable to pick up any signs of life, they did bring back video showing what seem to be deliberately constructed installations: large square objects in a roughly circular pattern. The PCs are hired to give the place a thorough aerial mapping and do a preliminary planetary survey. Landing is left to the crew captain’s discretion..

Scientists are curious about those constructs: were they created by sentient beings?

GM NOTE: This scenario is probably easiest to run by using the “Alien World” variant and replacing “Franklin Apartments”. Or... perhaps this planet was colonized by people who traveled here in SlipShips of their own and tried to recreate a vision of Earth “back in the day” – circa 1950. This is how it turned out for them.

THAT IS NOT DEAD WHICH CAN ETERNAL LIE

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Emergency/Rescue
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Low (2)
PAY: 6M ea

The PCs are contacted by the Academy of IntraSpace Technology. They’ve received a distressing UpVector transmission from a DayTripper team on “Slag World”. The away team has a good twenty hours before missing their window, but alarm was raised by the captain’s transmitted words: “We’ve been hit – we’re going down!”

The PCs will be provided with a ship and ground-based coordinates for the rescue. They will materialize less than half a mile from the downed vessel. There is one concern that merits extra pay: this Dream World is a highly unstable one, and there’s no telling what might happen. To anyone’s best guess, the state of the Dream World at any given time is based entirely on the mental state of the Dreamer – whoever that is. At least one PC with *Lucid Dreaming* skill should be included in the mission team.

GM NOTE: You may wish to roll on the *What Is This Dream About?* table in the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*, and use the *Tweak* tables at Crisis points.

AE23-17

PLANET

GRAVITY: 1.0 G
ATMOSPHERE: Nitrogen/Oxygen & Toxins
PRESSURE: 0.7 Earth atmospheres
DAY: 24 hrs
YEAR: 365.25 Earth days
WATER: No standing water
CLIMATE: Temperate
PRECIPITATION: None (DL12)
BIOSPHERE: No life

Its atmosphere is poisoned, its water vaporized, and the entire planet is drenched in radioactivity. The land has been fused by incredible heat into an endless surface of grey and black slag, stretching to and beyond the horizon.

PERCEPTIONS

SEEN FROM ORBIT

- Mile after mile of ruins stretch out, melted and fused in most places to blackened slag, pitted and scarred, with occasional heaps of rock and the scattered remains of what once were buildings and roads.
- By running a standard environmental analysis, PCs will find that background radiation is very high, and safe levels of exposure (i.e. without a Survival Suit or protective shielding) are limited to just a few hours before leukemia and other cancers begin to set in.
- Something juts up out of the slag: a round formation like a circle of large white dots on the dark skin of the planet. They seem to be piers of stone or poured artificial stone. Buildings of some kind? The remains of a city?
- The concrete piers indicate foundations where buildings once stood, baked by searing heat, charred almost to the ground. Nothing else remains within a hundred miles; only this irregular circle of white squares, roughly four miles in diameter, littered with rock, fragments and detritus.
- If scanners are directed beneath the ground, about a hundred miles outside of the city, a subterranean complex will be discovered.

SHOT DOWN

EVENT

The shell hits unexpectedly, blowing a huge hole in the ship and destroying both the atmospheric engine and major structural components of the interior hull. In short, the ship is rendered unsafe and incapable of either flying or Vector Slipping.

To land safely under these conditions, the ship's pilot must make a *Piloting* skill roll vs DL 5 (remember to add the Mk of the ship's computer). On a result of NO the ship hits the ground hard, forcing every character onboard to make a GRACE roll vs DL 3 to avoid taking 1 hit of damage. Roll below to determine the nature of this damage:

STAT HARMED IN CRASH (2D6)

2-3	BRAINS (concussion causes hemorrhaging)
4-5	CHARM (broken jaw or teeth, gashed face)
6-7	GRACE (broken fingers or toes)
8	HEALTH (exposure to radioactive blast)
9-10	MIGHT (lacerations tor internal bleeding)
11-12	PSYCHE (concussion causes dementia)

A "YES BUT" result indicates a damaged/broken piece of equipment, a wasted resource or the destruction of a small item carried by the PC.

THE SLAG

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Flatland, fused slag
CONDITION: Blasted/Depleted
TERRAIN: Mostly smooth
WEATHER: Gentle wind
BIODIVERSITY: No life
DOMINANT COLORS: Grey, Brown
RESOURCES: None
UNUSUAL FEATURES: *No Sentient Lifeforms*
ENCOUNTER DL: Uncommon (8)

The ground is an endless surface of gray and black splotches all the way out to the horizon. Mile after mile of unbroken ruins stretch out, most of it molten and fused to blackened slag by unimaginable heat.

Here and there the land is pitted and scarred, with heaps of rock and the scattered remains of what once were buildings and roads.

In the distance, *THE RUINED CITY* can be seen.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-4	Unusual Feature
5-6	Weather Anomaly (lightning, hail, etc)
7	You are targeted by <i>THE GUN</i> .
8	Rocks fall, rubble settles, it's spooky
9-11	Ground collapse: GRACE vs DL 4
12	Distant whirring sound (<i>THE GUN</i>)

CRISIS ENCOUNTER

The PCs are targeted by *THE GUN*.

PERCEPTIONS

SEEN FROM THE GROUND

- The ground here was long ago burnt by unimaginable heat. It's smooth and mostly level, fused and petrified, broken by hills of rock jutting up at odd angles.
- Nothing moves or stirs. Everything that ever lived here is dead.
- In the distance a large pool of water can be seen: upon approach it turns out to be nothing but dark, glassy slag.
- By running standard environmental analysis programs using the scanners in their Automated Survival Suits, PCs can determine the levels of background radiation.

THE FARM

LOCATION

Located about ten miles outside *THE RUINED CITY*, an expanse of blackened dirt and charred bits of wood indicate what once was a large industrial farm. Some items may still be recognized, including the remains of a barn smashed to bits of concrete and burnt lumber, and parts of what once was a massive windmill.

THE RUINED CITY

LOCATION

DOMINANT COLORS: Grey, White
RESOURCES: Debris, Stone, Metal
UNUSUAL FEATURES: *Advanced Sentient Lifeforms*

A huge valley encircles the place where the ruined buildings jut up from the ground; a natural bowl of surrounding hills and rock formations. Due to its topography, this one area seems to have been spared much of the heat that destroyed all life on the surface.

The roughly circular formations mark the city's boundaries. Within the city proper, a number of smaller buildings are still nominally standing; some with the remains of stairways leading to nowhere, others with shafts leading down into their basements. Underground, the PCs may find the remains of machinery that could be used to repair their ship.

Exploring the underground environment requires a GRACE roll vs a random DL (1-6) every hour, as the construction that remains standing is unstable and prone to collapse.

ENCOUNTER TABLE

Encounters in the city use the same table as *THE SLAG*.

FRANKLIN APARTMENTS

LOCATION

In front of a massive squarish pile of collapsed concrete, a chunk of stone fifteen feet long lays on the ground. There's something inscribed on it in large classically-formed letters.

After wiping away some of the dust and mud that has covered it, the inscription can be read. It says:

FRANKLIN APARTMENTS

THE GUN

LIFEFORM

BRAINS 2 Aiming+1
GRACE 3 Firing+1

Structural Hits: 2

TCV 120

On a hill overlooking *THE RUINED CITY* sits a slab of poured concrete topped by a ten-foot hemispherical metal shell with small glass windows and a huge protruding barrel: *The Gun*. The Gun is a “smart” mounted weapon, doing vehicular-scale damage (see the *DayTrippers Core Rules for Vehicular Combat*, p.24 and *Structural Damage*, p.25).

A character who is targeted by the gun will be aware of this on a BRAINS roll vs DL 2, unless distracted by something else. Any attempt at evasion must take place immediately in the following Frame. Evading the blast requires a GRACE roll vs DL 5. Failure to evade the blast delivers 1d6 hits of damage to random Stats.

PERCEPTIONS

- The gun points up at the sky. A slim vane turns gently with the wind, and a network of rods sits atop a high pole. These are sensors of some kind.
- The gun turns slowly on its metal base with a whirring sound. The barrel lowers to seek out movement in the distance, then returns to its starting position.
- The gun turns completely around on its base, scanning the entire region, barrel lowering and raising, then stills again.

AUTOMATED RESPONSE SYSTEM

EVENT

If any damage is done to *THE GUN*, an automated response system is immediately activated.

A hundred miles from the city, far underground, a set of machines whirl into motion, preparing a sled for a repair run. On the ground above, a section of disguised ruined metal slips back. A ramp protrudes from the subterranean depths.

A moment later a dozen robotic *REPAIR CARTS* rush to the surface, carrying replacement parts for *THE GUN*. They will arrive at *THE RUINED CITY* in ten hours.

THE STAIRS

LOCATION

TCV 50

A large steel plate sits in the poured concrete, directly behind the body of *THE GUN*. Lifting the 3-inch thick plate requires a MIGHT roll vs DL 5.

Beneath the plate, a dark yawning hole reveals a set of stairs leading down. The steps are thick with dust and rubble. At the bottom is a steel door, bolted shut. There is an illegible inscription on the door.

Picking the lock is DL 4. The door comes apart easily, if the PCs are using high tech mechanical tools.

THE VAULT

LOCATION

Behind the steel door is a massive vault filled with huge boxes, crates, drums, packages and containers. Wood crates line the walls. Everything is covered with a thick coat of dust.

Within these endless rows and stacks of containers is *THE TREASURE*.

THE TREASURE

MAGUFFIN

Inside the vault's crates and containers are well over a thousand historical artifacts: books, paintings, films, videotapes, data discs and statuary.

This is the treasure of the lost civilization. Here are their pictures, their records, their literature, their stories, their myths, their ideas about the universe, and their history.

The monetary value of this treasure on Home-Earth is beyond reckoning, if any of it can be transported back home. Each item has a 50% chance of exceptional value. To determine the actual value of such an item, roll 1d6 open-ended (on any roll of 6, roll again and continue rolling, adding as you go).

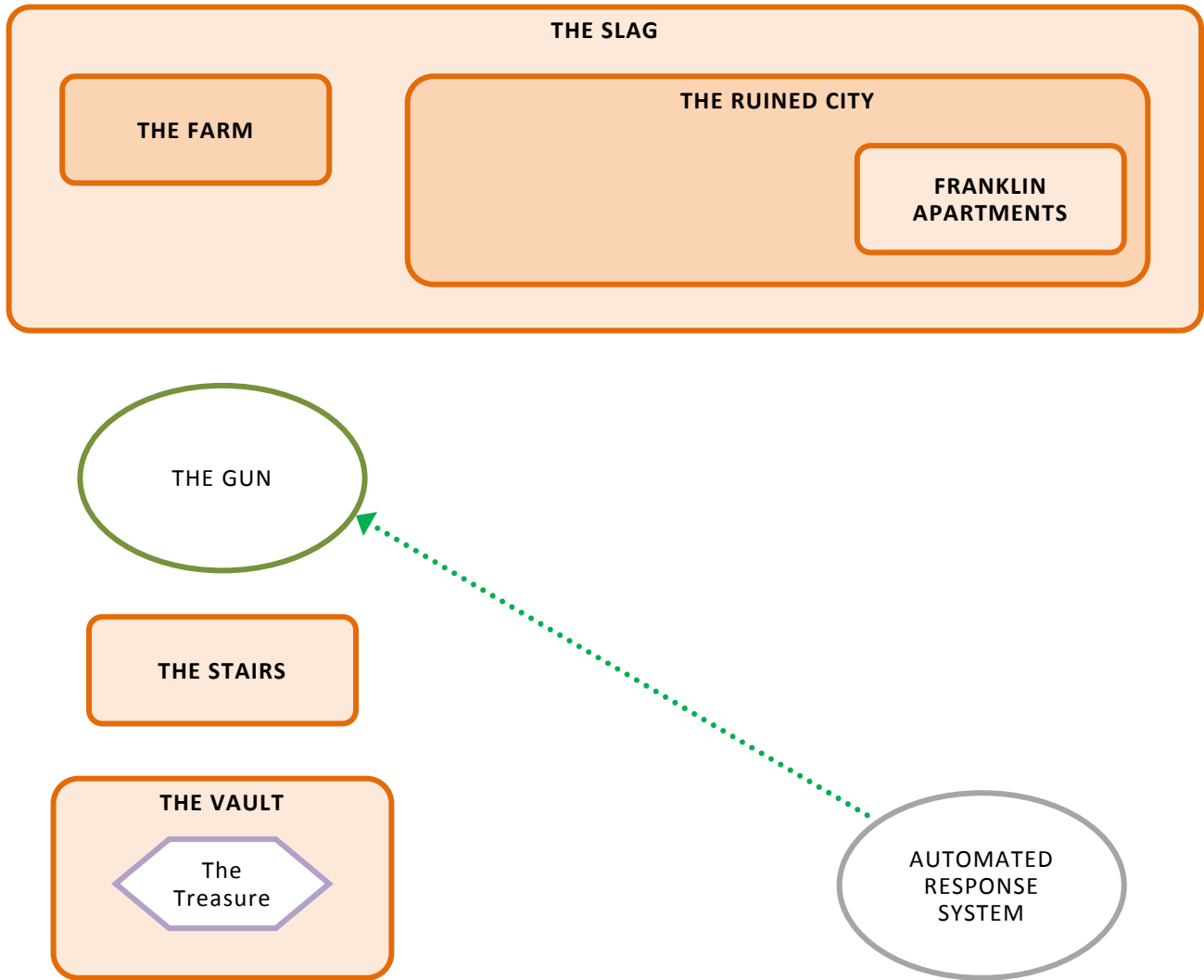
VEHICLE: REPAIR CART

STRUCTURAL HITS: 2

Earth Value: 3M

A tracked vehicle with two articulated arms, pulling a sled bearing several hundred pounds of spare parts.

NOBODY HOME



THE GUN

by Philip K. Dick

Illustrated by Herman Vestal

Nothing moved or stirred. Everything was silent, dead. Only the gun showed signs of life ... and the trespassers had wrecked that for all time. The return journey to pick up the treasure would be a cinch ... they smiled.

The Captain peered into the eyepiece of the telescope. He adjusted the focus quickly.

"It was an atomic fission we saw, all right," he said presently. He sighed and pushed the eyepiece away. "Any of you who wants to look may do so. But it's not a pretty sight."

"Let me look," Tance the archeologist said. He bent down to look, squinting. "Good Lord!" He leaped violently back, knocking against Dorle, the Chief Navigator.

"Why did we come all this way, then?" Dorle asked, looking around at the other men. "There's no point even in landing. Let's go back at once."

"Perhaps he's right," the biologist murmured. "But I'd like to look for myself, if I may." He pushed past Tance and peered into the sight.

He saw a vast expanse, an endless surface of gray, stretching to the edge of the planet. At first he thought it was water but after a moment he realized that it was slag, pitted, fused slag, broken only by hills of rock jutting up at intervals. Nothing moved or stirred. Everything was silent, dead.

"I see," Fomar said, backing away from the eyepiece. "Well, I won't find any legumes there." He tried to smile, but his lips stayed unmoved. He stepped away and stood by himself, staring past the others.

"I wonder what the atmospheric sample will show," Tance said.

"I think I can guess," the Captain answered. "Most of the atmosphere is poisoned. But didn't we expect all this? I don't see why we're so surprised. A fission visible as far away as our system must be a terrible thing."

He strode off down the corridor, dignified and expressionless. They watched him disappear into the control room.

As the Captain closed the door the young woman turned. "What did the telescope show? Good or bad?"

"Bad. No life could possibly exist. Atmosphere poisoned, water vaporized, all the land fused."

"Could they have gone underground?"

The Captain slid back the port window so that the surface of the planet under them was visible. The two of them stared down, silent and disturbed. Mile after mile of unbroken ruin stretched out, blackened slag, pitted and scarred, and occasional heaps of rock.

Suddenly Nasha jumped. "Look! Over there, at the edge. Do you see it?"

They stared. Something rose up, not rock, not an accidental formation. It was round, a circle of dots, white pellets on the dead skin of the planet. A city? Buildings of some kind?

"Please turn the ship," Nasha said excitedly. She pushed her dark hair from her face. "Turn the ship and let's see what it is!"

The ship turned, changing its course. As they came over the white dots the Captain lowered the ship, dropping it down as much as he dared. "Piers," he said. "Piers of some sort of stone. Perhaps poured artificial stone. The remains of a city."

"Oh, dear," Nasha murmured. "How awful." She watched the ruins disappear behind them. In a half-circle the white squares jutted from the slag, chipped and cracked, like broken teeth.

"There's nothing alive," the Captain said at last. "I think we'll go right back; I know most of the crew want to. Get the Government Receiving Station on the sender and tell them what we found, and that we—"

■

He staggered.

The first atomic shell had struck the ship, spinning it around. The Captain fell to the floor, crashing into the control table. Papers and instruments rained down on him. As he started to his feet the second shell struck. The ceiling cracked open, struts and girders twisted and bent. The ship shuddered, falling suddenly down, then righting itself as automatic controls took over.

The Captain lay on the floor by the smashed control board. In the corner Nasha struggled to free herself from the debris.

Outside the men were already sealing the gaping leaks in the side of the ship, through which the precious air was rushing, dissipating into the void beyond. "Help me!" Dorle was shouting. "Fire over here, wiring ignited." Two men came running. Tance watched helplessly, his eyeglasses broken and bent.

"So there is life here, after all," he said, half to himself. "But how could—"

"Give us a hand," Fomar said, hurrying past. "Give us a hand, we've got to land the ship!"

It was night. A few stars glinted above them, winking through the drifting silt that blew across the surface of the planet.

Dorle peered out, frowning. "What a place to be stuck in." He resumed his work, hammering the bent metal hull of the ship back into place. He was wearing a pressure suit; there were still many small leaks, and radioactive particles from the atmosphere had already found their way into the ship.

Nasha and Fomar were sitting at the table in the control room, pale and solemn, studying the inventory lists.

"Low on carbohydrates," Fomar said. "We can break down the stored fats if we want to, but—"

"I wonder if we could find anything outside." Nasha went to the window. "How uninviting it looks." She paced back and forth, very slender and small, her face dark with fatigue. "What do you suppose an exploring party would find?"

Fomar shrugged. "Not much. Maybe a few weeds growing in cracks here and there. Nothing we could use. Anything that would adapt to this environment would be toxic, lethal."

Nasha paused, rubbing her cheek. There was a deep scratch there, still red and swollen. "Then how do you explain—*it*? According to your theory the inhabitants must have died in their skins, fried like yams. But who fired on us? Somebody detected us, made a decision, aimed a gun."

"And gauged distance," the Captain said feebly from the cot in the corner. He turned toward them. "That's the part that worries me. The first shell put us out of commission, the second almost destroyed us. They were well aimed, perfectly aimed. We're not such an easy target."

"True." Fomar nodded. "Well, perhaps we'll know the answer before we leave here. What a strange situation! All our reasoning tells us that no life could exist; the whole planet burned dry, the atmosphere itself gone, completely poisoned."

"The gun that fired the projectiles survived," Nasha said. "Why not people?"

"It's not the same. Metal doesn't need air to breathe. Metal doesn't get leukemia from radioactive particles. Metal doesn't need food and water."

There was silence.

"A paradox," Nasha said. "Anyhow, in the morning I think we should send out a search party. And meanwhile we should keep on trying to get the ship in condition for the trip back."

"It'll be days before we can take off," Fomar said. "We should keep every man working here. We can't afford to send out a party."

Nasha smiled a little. "We'll send you in the first party. Maybe you can discover—what was it you were so interested in?"

"Legumes. Edible legumes."

"Maybe you can find some of them. Only—"

"Only what?"

"Only watch out. They fired on us once without even knowing who we were or what we came for. Do you suppose that they fought with each other? Perhaps they couldn't imagine anyone being friendly, under any circumstances. What a strange evolutionary trait, inter-species warfare. Fighting within the race!"

"We'll know in the morning," Fomar said. "Let's get some sleep."

■

The sun came up chill and austere. The three people, two men and a woman, stepped through the port, dropping down on the hard ground below.

"What a day," Dorle said grumpily. "I said how glad I'd be to walk on firm ground again, but—"

"Come on," Nasha said. "Up beside me. I want to say something to you. Will you excuse us, Tance?"

Tance nodded gloomily. Dorle caught up with Nasha. They walked together, their metal shoes crunching the ground underfoot. Nasha glanced at him.

"Listen. The Captain is dying. No one knows except the two of us. By the end of the day-period of this planet he'll be dead. The shock did something to his heart. He was almost sixty, you know."

Dorle nodded. "That's bad. I have a great deal of respect for him. You will be captain in his place, of course. Since you're vice-captain now—"

"No. I prefer to see someone else lead, perhaps you or Fomar. I've been thinking over the situation and it seems to me that I should declare myself mated to one of you, whichever of you wants to be captain. Then I could devolve the responsibility."

"Well, I don't want to be captain. Let Fomar do it."

Nasha studied him, tall and blond, striding along beside her in his pressure suit. "I'm rather partial to you," she said. "We might try it for a time, at least. But do as you like. Look, we're coming to something."

They stopped walking, letting Tance catch up. In front of them was some sort of a ruined building. Dorle stared around thoughtfully.

"Do you see? This whole place is a natural bowl, a huge valley. See how the rock formations rise up on all sides, protecting the floor. Maybe some of the great blast was deflected here."

They wandered around the ruins, picking up rocks and fragments. "I think this was a farm," Tance said, examining a piece of wood. "This was part of a tower windmill."

"Really?" Nasha took the stick and turned it over. "Interesting. But let's go; we don't have much time."

"Look," Dorle said suddenly. "Off there, a long way off. Isn't that something?" He pointed.

Nasha sucked in her breath. "The white stones."

"What?"

Nasha looked up at Dorle. "The white stones, the great broken teeth. We saw them, the Captain and I, from the control room." She touched Dorle's arm gently. "That's where they fired from. I didn't think we had landed so close."

"What is it?" Tance said, coming up to them. "I'm almost blind without my glasses. What do you see?"

"The city. Where they fired from."

"Oh." All three of them stood together. "Well, let's go," Tance said. "There's no telling what we'll find there." Dorle frowned at him.

"Wait. We don't know what we would be getting into. They must have patrols. They probably have seen us already, for that matter."

"They probably have seen the ship itself," Tance said. "They probably know right now where they can find it, where they can blow it up. So what difference does it make whether we go closer or not?"

"That's true," Nasha said. "If they really want to get us we haven't a chance. We have no armaments at all; you know that."

"I have a hand weapon." Dorle nodded. "Well, let's go on, then. I suppose you're right, Tance."

"But let's stay together," Tance said nervously. "Nasha, you're going too fast."

Nasha looked back. She laughed. "If we expect to get there by nightfall we must go fast."

■

They reached the outskirts of the city at about the middle of the afternoon. The sun, cold and yellow, hung above them in the colorless sky. Dorle stopped at the top of a ridge overlooking the city.

"Well, there it is. What's left of it."

There was not much left. The huge concrete piers which they had noticed were not piers at all, but the ruined foundations of buildings. They had been baked by the searing heat, baked and charred almost to the ground. Nothing else remained, only this irregular circle of white squares, perhaps four miles in diameter.

Dorle spat in disgust. "More wasted time. A dead skeleton of a city, that's all."

"But it was from here that the firing came," Tance murmured. "Don't forget that."

"And by someone with a good eye and a great deal of experience," Nasha added. "Let's go."

They walked into the city between the ruined buildings. No one spoke. They walked in silence, listening to the echo of their footsteps.

"It's macabre," Dorle muttered. "I've seen ruined cities before but they died of old age, old age and fatigue. This was killed, seared to death. This city didn't die—it was murdered."

"I wonder what the city was called," Nasha said. She turned aside, going up the remains of a stairway from one of the foundations. "Do you think we might find a signpost? Some kind of plaque?"

She peered into the ruins.

"There's nothing there," Dorle said impatiently. "Come on."

"Wait." Nasha bent down, touching a concrete stone. "There's something inscribed on this."

"What is it?" Tance hurried up. He squatted in the dust, running his gloved fingers over the surface of the stone. "Letters, all right." He took a writing stick from the pocket of his pressure suit and copied the inscription on a bit of paper. Dorle glanced over his shoulder. The inscription was:

FRANKLIN APARTMENTS

"That's this city," Nasha said softly. "That was its name."

Tance put the paper in his pocket and they went on. After a time Dorle said, "Nasha, you know, I think we're being watched. But don't look around."

The woman stiffened. "Oh? Why do you say that? Did you see something?"

"No. I can feel it, though. Don't you?"

Nasha smiled a little. "I feel nothing, but perhaps I'm more used to being stared at." She turned her head slightly. "Oh!"

Dorle reached for his hand weapon. "What is it? What do you see?" Tance had stopped dead in his tracks, his mouth half open.

"The gun," Nasha said. "It's the gun."

"Look at the size of it. The size of the thing." Dorle unfastened his hand weapon slowly. "That's it, all right."

The gun was huge. Stark and immense it pointed up at the sky, a mass of steel and glass, set in a huge slab of concrete. Even as they watched the gun moved on its swivel base, whirring underneath. A slim vane turned with the wind, a network of rods atop a high pole.



"It's alive," Nasha whispered. "It's listening to us, watching us."

The gun moved again, this time clockwise. It was mounted so that it could make a full circle. The barrel lowered a trifle, then resumed its original position.

"But who fires it?" Tance said.

Dorle laughed. "No one. No one fires it."

They stared at him. "What do you mean?"

"It fires itself."

They couldn't believe him. Nasha came close to him, frowning, looking up at him. "I don't understand. What do you mean, it fires itself?"

"Watch, I'll show you. Don't move." Dorle picked up a rock from the ground. He hesitated a moment and then tossed the rock high in the air. The rock passed in front of the gun. Instantly the great barrel moved, the vanes contracted.

■

The rock fell to the ground. The gun paused, then resumed its calm swivel, its slow circling.

"You see," Dorle said, "it noticed the rock, as soon as I threw it up in the air. It's alert to anything that flies or moves above the ground level. Probably it detected us as soon as we entered the gravitational field of the planet. It probably had a bead on us from the start. We don't have a chance. It knows all about the ship. It's just waiting for us to take off again."

"I understand about the rock," Nasha said, nodding. "The gun noticed it, but not us, since we're on the ground, not above. It's only designed to combat objects in the sky. The ship is safe until it takes off again, then the end will come."

"But what's this gun for?" Tance put in. "There's no one alive here. Everyone is dead."

"It's a machine," Dorle said. "A machine that was made to do a job. And it's doing the job. How it survived the blast I don't know. On it goes, waiting for the enemy. Probably they came by air in some sort of projectiles."

"The enemy," Nasha said. "Their own race. It is hard to believe that they really bombed themselves, fired at themselves."

"Well, it's over with. Except right here, where we're standing. This one gun, still alert, ready to kill. It'll go on until it wears out."

"And by that time we'll be dead," Nasha said bitterly.

"There must have been hundreds of guns like this," Dorle murmured. "They must have been used to the sight, guns, weapons, uniforms. Probably they accepted it as a natural thing, part of their lives, like eating and sleeping. An institution, like the church and the state. Men trained to fight, to lead armies, a regular profession. Honored, respected."

Tance was walking slowly toward the gun, peering nearsightedly up at it. "Quite complex, isn't it? All those vanes and tubes. I suppose this is some sort of a telescopic sight." His gloved hand touched the end of a long tube.

Instantly the gun shifted, the barrel retracting. It swung—

"Don't move!" Dorle cried. The barrel swung past them as they stood, rigid and still. For one terrible moment it hesitated over their heads, clicking and whirring, settling into position. Then the sounds died out and the gun became silent.

Tance smiled foolishly inside his helmet. "I must have put my finger over the lens. I'll be more careful." He made his way up onto the circular slab, stepping gingerly behind the body of the gun. He disappeared from view.

"Where did he go?" Nasha said irritably. "He'll get us all killed."

"Tance, come back!" Dorle shouted. "What's the matter with you?"

"In a minute." There was a long silence. At last the archeologist appeared. "I think I've found something. Come up and I'll show you."

"What is it?"

"Dorle, you said the gun was here to keep the enemy off. I think I know why they wanted to keep the enemy off."

They were puzzled.

"I think I've found what the gun is supposed to guard. Come and give me a hand."

"All right," Dorle said abruptly. "Let's go." He seized Nasha's hand. "Come on. Let's see what he's found. I thought something like this might happen when I saw that the gun was—"

"Like what?" Nasha pulled her hand away. "What are you talking about? You act as if you knew what he's found."

"I do." Dorle smiled down at her. "Do you remember the legend that all races have, the myth of the buried treasure, and the dragon, the serpent that watches it, guards it, keeping everyone away?"

She nodded. "Well?"

Dorle pointed up at the gun.

"That," he said, "is the dragon. Come on."

■

Between the three of them they managed to pull up the steel cover and lay it to one side. Dorle was wet with perspiration when they finished.

"It isn't worth it," he grunted. He stared into the dark yawning hole. "Or is it?"

Nasha clicked on her hand lamp, shining the beam down the stairs. The steps were thick with dust and rubble. At the bottom was a steel door.

"Come on," Tance said excitedly. He started down the stairs. They watched him reach the door and pull hopefully on it without success. "Give a hand!"

"All right." They came gingerly after him. Dorle examined the door. It was bolted shut, locked. There was an inscription on the door but he could not read it.

"Now what?" Nasha said.

Dorle took out his hand weapon. "Stand back. I can't think of any other way." He pressed the switch. The bottom of the door glowed red. Presently it began to crumble. Dorle clicked the weapon off. "I think we can get through. Let's try."

The door came apart easily. In a few minutes they had carried it away in pieces and stacked the pieces on the first step. Then they went on, flashing the light ahead of them.

They were in a vault. Dust lay everywhere, on everything, inches thick. Wood crates lined the walls, huge boxes and crates, packages and containers. Tance looked around curiously, his eyes bright.

"What exactly are all these?" he murmured. "Something valuable, I would think." He picked up a round drum and opened it. A spool fell to the floor, unwinding a black ribbon. He examined it, holding it up to the light.

"Look at this!"

They came around him. "Pictures," Nasha said. "Tiny pictures."

"Records of some kind." Tance closed the spool up in the drum again. "Look, hundreds of drums." He flashed the light around. "And those crates. Let's open one."

Dorle was already prying at the wood. The wood had turned brittle and dry. He managed to pull a section away.

It was a picture. A boy in a blue garment, smiling pleasantly, staring ahead, young and handsome. He seemed almost alive, ready to move toward them in the light of the hand lamp. It was one of them, one of the ruined race, the race that had perished.

For a long time they stared at the picture. At last Dorle replaced the board.

"All these other crates," Nasha said. "More pictures. And these drums. What are in the boxes?"

"This is their treasure," Tance said, almost to himself. "Here are their pictures, their records. Probably all their literature is here, their stories, their myths, their ideas about the universe."

"And their history," Nasha said. "We'll be able to trace their development and find out what it was that made them become what they were."

Dorle was wandering around the vault. "Odd," he murmured. "Even at the end, even after they had begun to fight they still knew, someplace down inside them, that their real treasure was this, their books and pictures, their myths. Even after their big cities and buildings and industries were destroyed they probably hoped to come back and find this. After everything else was gone."

"This is their treasure," Tance said. "Here are their pictures, their records. Probably all their literature is here, their stories, their myths, their ideas about the universe."

"When we get back home we can agitate for a mission to come here," Tance said. "All this can be loaded up and taken back. We'll be leaving about—"

He stopped.

"Yes," Dorle said dryly. "We'll be leaving about three day-periods from now. We'll fix the ship, then take off. Soon we'll be home, that is, if nothing happens. Like being shot down by that—"

"Oh, stop it!" Nasha said impatiently. "Leave him alone. He's right: all this must be taken back home, sooner or later. We'll have to solve the problem of the gun. We have no choice."

Dorle nodded. "What's your solution, then? As soon as we leave the ground we'll be shot down." His face twisted bitterly. "They've guarded their treasure too well. Instead of being preserved it will lie here until it rots. It serves them right."

"How?"

"Don't you see? This was the only way they knew, building a gun and setting it up to shoot anything that came along. They were so certain that everything was hostile, the enemy, coming to take their possessions away from them. Well, they can keep them."

Nasha was deep in thought, her mind far away. Suddenly she gasped. "Dorle," she said. "What's the matter with us? We have no problem. The gun is no menace at all."

The two men stared at her.

"No menace?" Dorle said. "It's already shot us down once. And as soon as we take off again—"

"Don't you see?" Nasha began to laugh. "The poor foolish gun, it's completely harmless. Even I could deal with it alone."

"You?"

Her eyes were flashing. "With a crowbar. With a hammer or a stick of wood. Let's go back to the ship and load up. Of course we're at its mercy in the air: that's the way it was made. It can fire into the sky, shoot down anything that flies. But that's all! Against something on the ground it has no defenses. Isn't that right?"

Dorle nodded slowly. "The soft underbelly of the dragon. In the legend, the dragon's armor doesn't cover its stomach." He began to laugh. "That's right. That's perfectly right."

"Let's go, then," Nasha said. "Let's get back to the ship. We have work to do here."

It was early the next morning when they reached the ship. During the night the Captain had died, and the crew had ignited his body, according to custom. They had stood solemnly around it until the last ember died. As they were going back to their work the woman and the two men appeared, dirty and tired, still excited.

And presently, from the ship, a line of people came, each carrying something in his hands. The line marched across the gray slag, the eternal expanse of fused metal. When they reached the weapon they all fell on the gun at once, with crowbars, hammers, anything that was heavy and hard.

The telescopic sights shattered into bits. The wiring was pulled out, torn to shreds. The delicate gears were smashed, dented.

Finally the warheads themselves were carried off and the firing pins removed.

The gun was smashed, the great weapon destroyed. The people went down into the vault and examined the treasure. With its metal-armored guardian dead there was no danger any longer. They studied the pictures, the films, the crates of books, the jeweled crowns, the cups, the statues.

At last, as the sun was dipping into the gray mists that drifted across the planet they came back up the stairs again. For a moment they stood around the wrecked gun looking at the unmoving outline of it.

Then they started back to the ship. There was still much work to be done. The ship had been badly hurt, much had been damaged and lost. The important thing was to repair it as quickly as possible, to get it into the air.

With all of them working together it took just five more days to make it spaceworthy.

■

■

Nasha stood in the control room, watching the planet fall away behind them. She folded her arms, sitting down on the edge of the table.

"What are you thinking?" Dorle said.

"I? Nothing."

"Are you sure?"

"I was thinking that there must have been a time when this planet was quite different, when there was life on it."

"I suppose there was. It's unfortunate that no ships from our system came this far, but then we had no reason to suspect intelligent life until we saw the fission glow in the sky."

"And then it was too late."

"Not quite too late. After all, their possessions, their music, books, their pictures, all of that will survive. We'll take them home and study them, and they'll change us. We won't be the same afterwards. Their sculpturing, especially. Did you see the one of the great winged creature, without a head or arms? Broken off, I suppose. But those wings— It looked very old. It will change us a great deal."

"When we come back we won't find the gun waiting for us," Nasha said. "Next time it won't be there to shoot us down. We can land and take the treasure, as you call it." She smiled up at Dorle. "You'll lead us back there, as a good captain should."

"Captain?" Dorle grinned. "Then you've decided."

Nasha shrugged. "Fomar argues with me too much. I think, all in all, I really prefer you."

"Then let's go," Dorle said. "Let's go back home."

The ship roared up, flying over the ruins of the city. It turned in a huge arc and then shot off beyond the horizon, heading into outer space.

■

Down below, in the center of the ruined city, a single half-broken detector vane moved slightly, catching the roar of the ship. The base of the great gun throbbed painfully, straining to turn. After a moment a red warning light flashed on down inside its destroyed works.

And a long way off, a hundred miles from the city, another warning light flashed on, far underground. Automatic relays flew into action. Gears turned, belts whined. On the ground above a section of metal slag slipped back. A ramp appeared.

A moment later a small cart rushed to the surface.

The cart turned toward the city. A second cart appeared behind it. It was loaded with wiring cables. Behind it a third cart came, loaded with telescopic tube sights. And behind came more carts, some with relays, some with firing controls, some with tools and parts, screws and bolts, pins and nuts. The final one contained atomic warheads.

The carts lined up behind the first one, the lead cart. The lead cart started off, across the frozen ground, bumping calmly along, followed by the others. Moving toward the city.

To the damaged gun.



SAVAGE PLANET

Based on "The Planet of Dread"
by R. F. Starzl



OBSTACLES

Dangerous Environment - Hexcrawl
Dangerous Environment - Trading Post
Dangerous People - Random Orchid-Hunters
Monster/Enemy - Pipe Denizen
Wildlife/Animals - Acidic Sea Creatures
Wildlife/Animals - Black Molds
Wildlife/Animals - Giant Bacteria
Wildlife/Animals - Sightless Wrigglers
Wildlife/Animals - Water Spiders
Wildlife/Animals - Azornacks
Wildlife/Animals - Blood-Sucking Trees
Wildlife/Animals - Squirring Reptiles
Wildlife/Animals - Prowling Beasts
Wildlife/Animals - Sucking Mud
Wildlife/Animals - Carnivorex
Wildlife/Animals - Flying Kabo
Wildlife/Animals - Hoom
Wildlife/Animals - Water Dog
Wildlife/Animals - Yellow Fang
Wildlife/Animals - Toothed Bird
Wildlife/Animals - Web Serpent
Wildlife/Animals - Winged Eel

COMPLICATIONS

Scant Intel

PERKS

10 MV

MAGUFFINS

Naming Rights (Dream World scenario)
Data/Report on Inra
Inranian Lifeforms
Fiber Tree Sap (1M per pint)
Inranian Orchids (1M per flower)
Flash Pistol (10M)

BACKSTORY

On the “Death World” of Inra, home of the rare and prized *Inranian Orchids*, the PCs must travel on foot. Their journey will take them from the rocky shores to the savage depths of the southern continent.

The planet Inra is teeming with life, but the only *intelligent* lifeforms known to exist there are the amphibious hominids who call themselves the *Oufa*. Living in semi-nomadic tribes these simple creatures are commonly found only in the continent’s inland forest regions, where they eke out their brutish and meager lives in constant fear.

The journey from the coast to the inner jungles will take five days with jumpjets, or ten days without. From there to the mountains it’s a similar distance. You gotta sleep some time, and the wilds of Inra are notoriously dangerous places to sleep.

GM NOTE: In both of the *Known Planet* scenarios, the orchids are only lifeforms on Inra with any earthly value. In the *Dream World* scenario, on the other hand, the orchids are worth very little, and living specimens of Inranian lifeforms will be worth Megas if brought back to Home-Earth.

KHIL OR BE KILLED

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration
NODE TYPE: Known Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL3)
PAY: 15M ea

The PCs are hired as transport and security crew for a multi-part episode of *Khil Or Be Killed* – a popular interdimensional survival show starring hunter and product spokesman Kip Khil. The producers want something bold and dangerous, and have chosen Inra as the perfect setting. Khil will be shown traversing the southern continent in a 20-day trek from the rocky coastline to the peaks of the *Mountains of Perdition*, without any supplies, and without a survival suit.

What most viewers don’t know is that Khil is more talk than walk. In reality he’s a raging narcissist who uses digital tricks and relies on his staff to get him out of situations he couldn’t possibly handle himself – while staying out of the shot and making him look good.

If any of the PCs are celebrities themselves, they will be treated as “guest stars” and be given some camera time, but Khil will always try to upstage them, even withholding information from them or placing them in harm’s way to show what a brilliant survivalist he is.

A FISTFUL OF ORCHIDS

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Acquisition
NODE TYPE: Known Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL3)

Through a deal or a stroke of luck, the PCs have come into possession of some Slip Coordinates which will take them to a polar *Trading Post* on the planet *Inra*.

While Inra does have a reputation as a “Death World” among experienced DayTrippers, it’s the only place to get the *Inranian Orchids* that have recently become popular in celebrity circles. One of the PCs’ contacts – or the client with the coordinates – can get double the going rate for them. The PCs will be paid 1M for every orchid they bring back.

BEING THERE

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Historically Stable (5)
PAY: 10M ea

In this scenario the PCs will be exploring a Dream World recently discovered by scoutbots, all of which have been destroyed by hostile lifeforms.

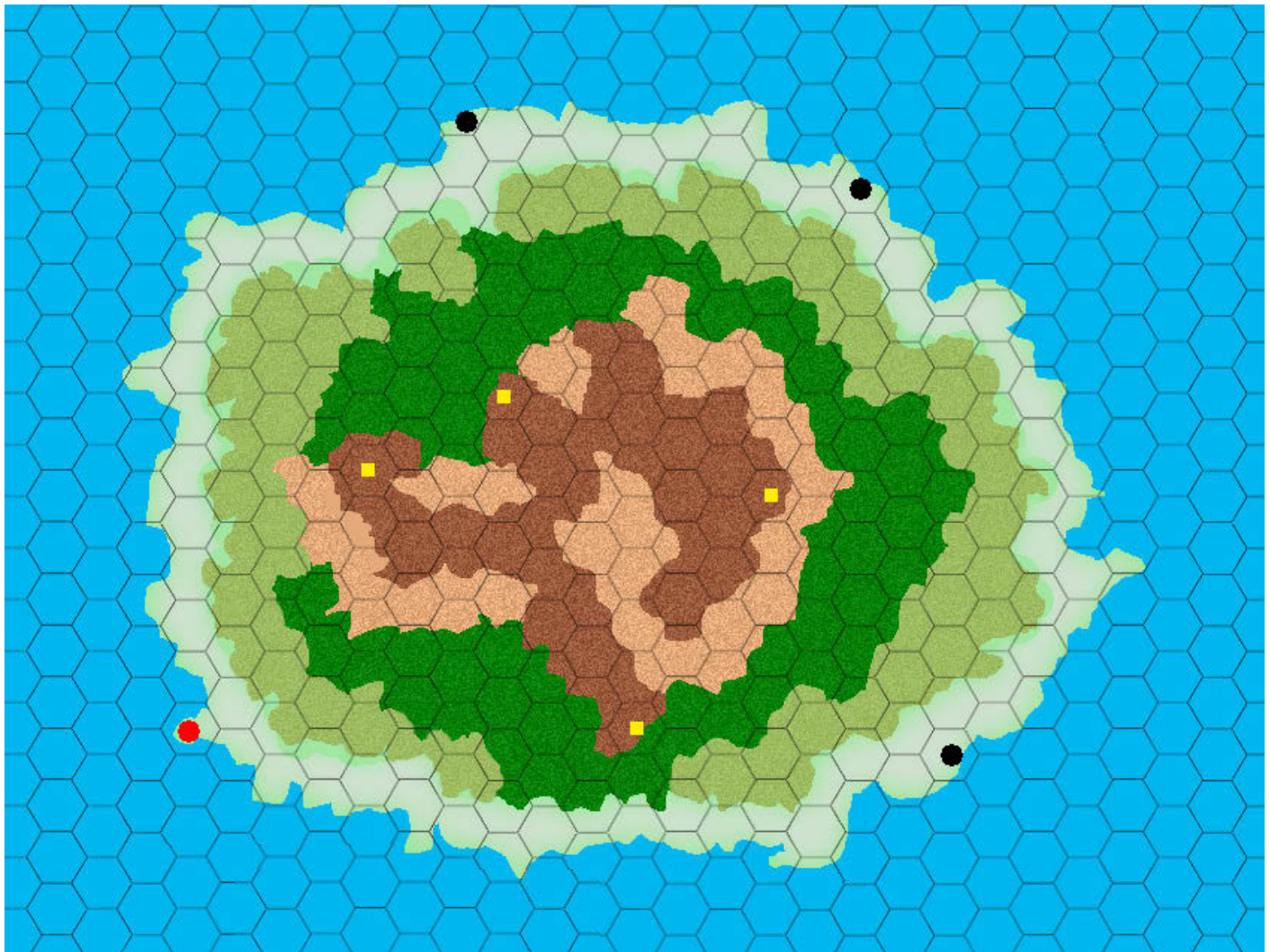
As they enter the pocket universe of *Inra Starzl I*, the world grows shaky, blurry, and difficult to make out. The ship’s interior seems to be receding away from them, miles and miles away. When reality stabilizes again they find themselves stationed at the humid *Trading Post*, holding six *INRANIAN ORCHIDS* and somehow aware that they must make it to the *Mountains of Perdition* – where in three weeks a relief ship will arrive to pick them up, above the clouds.

When they reach the top of the mountain range (or exit the *Sky Pipe*), a small interspace vessel will come hovering close enough to board. When the computer is ordered to activate its recall code for the slip home, reality blurs and shifts once again, and the walls of their SlipShip reform around them as they depart.




VARIANT FOR ONE OR TWO PCs: The PCs literally take the place of Mark Forepaugh and/or Gunga in the story. Their bodies literally change as they materialize into the dream reality. PCs will retain their own **BRAINS**, **CHARM** and **PSYCHE**, as well as all their Skills, but their **GRACE**, **HEALTH** and **MIGHT** – as well as their physical appearance – will be replaced with those of the NPCs they have “become”.

THE SOUTH POLAR CONTINENT OF INRA - GM'S MAP

1 HEX = 20 mi

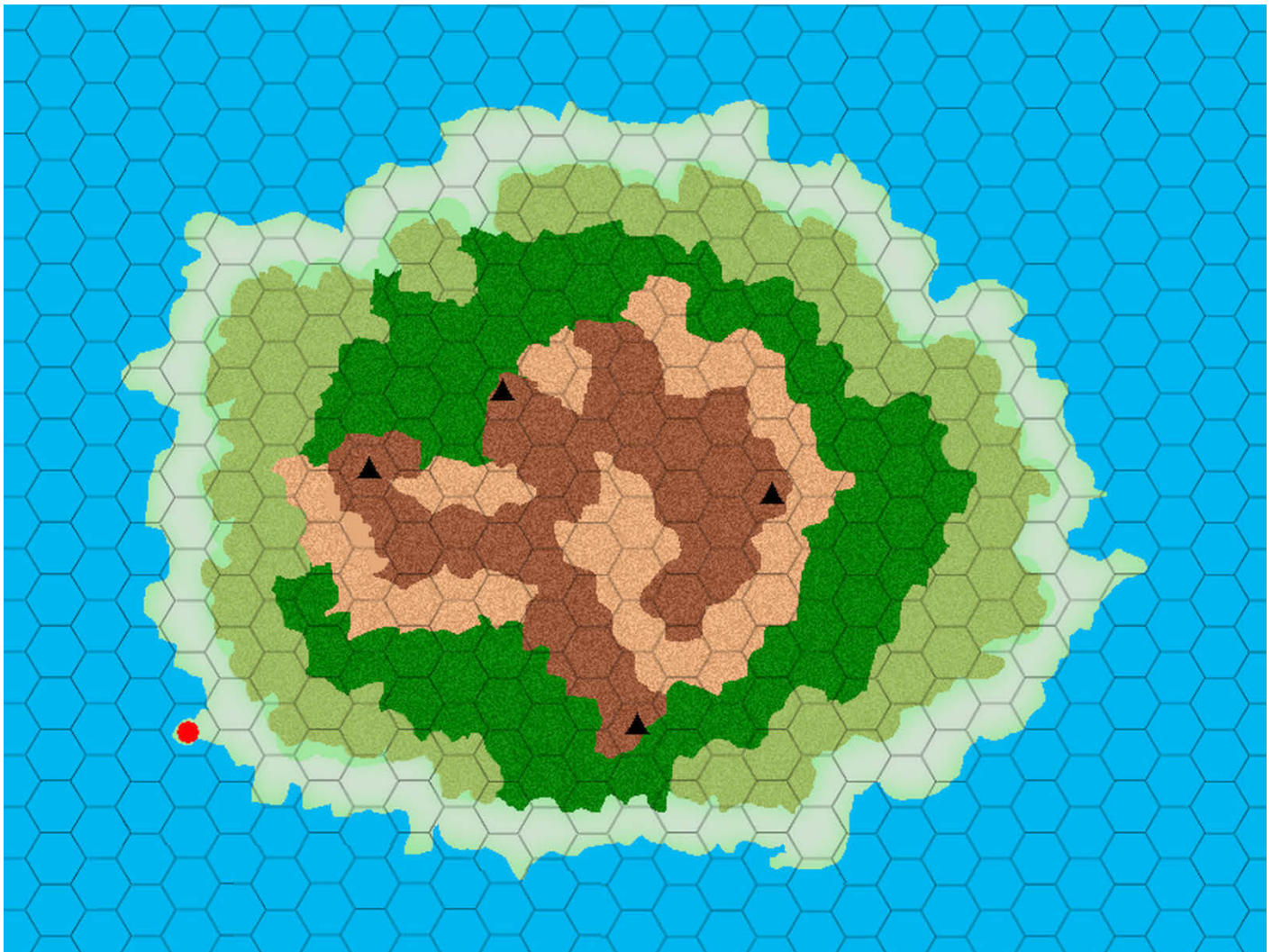


-  COASTAL FOREST
-  INLAND FOREST
-  JUNGLE
-  HILLS
-  MOUNTAINS



-  = Hunter Shelters
-  = Trading Post
-  = Mountain Peaks

THE SOUTH POLAR CONTINENT OF INRA

1 HEX = 20 mi



-  COASTAL FOREST
-  INLAND FOREST
-  JUNGLE
-  HILLS
-  MOUNTAINS

-  = Hunter Shelters
-  = Trading Post

INRA

PLANET

GRAVITY: 1.2 G
ATMOSPHERE: Nitrogen/Oxygen with trace gases
PRESSURE: 1.2 Earth atmospheres
DAY: 32 hrs 17 mins
YEAR: 522 Earth days
WATER: 90% standing water
CLIMATE: Hot, Humid
PRECIPITATION: Near-Constant (DL 3)
BIOSPHERE: Sentient Lifeforms: Galactic Hominids with amphibious traits

Inra is a backwater planet possessing only the most meager of unmanned ports. It's also a deadly place, desirable only for the famous *INRANIAN ORCHIDS* which grow deep in the abysmal jungle regions.

The moist atmosphere and frequent lightning cause visual illusions and errors in depth perception.

The planet is home to a sentient but uncivilized race of amphibious Galactic Hominids, as well as hundreds of hostile plant and animal species. Competition for survival on Inra is so keen, much of the vegetation is capable of directly absorbing animals as food.

PERCEPTIONS

- A near-perpetual polar rain comes down in large green drops.
- Clouds of different shades move in layers, causing frequent visual illusions.
- You must move a little slowly because the vaporous air makes even relatively close distances hard to judge.
- You rarely ever see the sun, even dimly.
- Both animals and plants are carnivorous here. The PCs see something eaten by something else, which gets eaten by something else – all within the space of five minutes.

TRADING POST

LOCATION

This isolated trading station is one of several built by early explorers who wished to keep their goods and weapons away from Infranian eyes (and each other). The building is hermetically sealed except for in one place: the ventilator opening.

Now the power has gone out, due to a blunder on Earth which resulted in a set of empty hydrogen cylinders mislabeled as full. The climate controls have stopped working and it's getting hot and humid in here. The electrical repeller zone has also gone down, rendering the trading post defenseless against the curious local lifeforms now striving to seize it – and devour anyone inside.

The repeller could be repaired with a Pro Kit and an *Electrical Engineering* roll vs DL6, but that would also require staying outside for at least an hour.

If Forepaugh and Gunga haven't taken them, inside the Trading Post will be found two Flash Pistols (+1, 20 shots each), a .45 caliber revolver, a cartridge belt with 30 shells, a chronometer, a gyroscopic compass, two sleeping bags, 200 fire pellets and a hand ax bearing the inscription: "Careful with that ax, Eugene".

FLASH PISTOL

MAGUFFIN

A +1 weapon using the same Skill as any Handgun. When fired, there is a *ping* sound, and for an instant a cone of white light fills the area of fire: a cone-shaped area roughly 30' long and 10' wide at the far end.

FIRE PELLET

MAGUFFIN

A small chemical sphere no larger than the end of your little finger, which in contact with moisture emits a radiant heat penetrating meat, bone, and even metal.

One pellet will cook a meal in ten minutes.

Individually they're nearly valueless on Home-Earth, as such technology has been commonplace for decades, but they can come in quite handy in the wilds of Inra.

Not only can they be used to cook food and start fungus fires, but they can be used offensively: Mark Forepaugh once killed a *HOOM* by tossing a handful of Fire Pellets down its throat.

ON THE COAST

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Rocky Beach
CONDITION: Flooded and overgrown
TERRAIN: Jumbled/Badlands
WEATHER: Storming, Wet
BIODIVERSITY: High and volatile
DOMINANT COLORS: Green, Grey
RESOURCES: Plants, Animals
UNUSUAL FEATURES: roll on *Lower Lifeforms* table
ENCOUNTER DL: Very Frequent (5)

The only major landmass on Inra is located in the steaming hot, unhealthful vicinity of the planet's south pole. Around the coast of this treacherous continent a number of small footholds have been established by previous visitors, including a *TRADING POST*.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-4	Unusual Feature
5	Black Molds
6	Visual Illusion
7	Water Spiders
8-9	UI-lul
10	Sightless Wrigglers
11-12	Acidic Sea Creature

ACIDIC SEA CREATURE

LIFEFORM

GRACE 4 Grab+1
MIGHT 3 Squeeze+2

TCV 115

A giant squid-like creature, twenty feet long and green with dark grey streaks, strong enough to crush a human being in its four tough-skinned motile tentacles. In addition, its two feeding tentacles issue a slimy and acidic saliva that can dissolve concrete (1 structural hit) in several hours. This excretion causes 1 hit of damage to human skin on contact (-1 GRACE if a grabbing attack succeeds).

Escaping the creature's grasp requires an opposed action: MIGHT vs MIGHT.

ENCOUNTERS

- An Acidic Sea Creature dissolves a thick tree into pulp, to get at some small prey inside.
- (Crisis) An Acidic Sea Creature has noticed the PCs, and slithers in for the kill.

BLACK MOLD

LIFEFORM

GRACE 1 Sporing+1

ARMOR: Does not defend: DL 1 to hit

TCV 40

A loathsome black-green pudding-like ooze emitting a strong miasmatic odor, these mobile Black Molds are typically found in groups of 2-12, with occasional encounters of solitary individuals.

They can release spores in a cloud of noxious gas that will take hold inside the human body if a HEALTH roll vs DL 3 is failed. Growing internally, the mold will cause 1 hit of damage per hour thereafter.

Any Black Mold large as a loaf of bread can release spores. Spores may also be released when a mold is struck with a blunt object, or dropped from a height of several feet.

Larger molds, if struck, may cleave into smaller ones. This makes them notoriously hard to kill without the proper weapons. The best approach is burning them.

ENCOUNTERS

- An ACIDIC SEA CREATURE attacks a large Black Mold, which splits up into three smaller ones and releases spores. The creature retreats.
- (Crisis) The PCs have wandered into a colony of 2d6 Black Molds.

GIANT BACTERIA

LIFEFORM

TCV 20

Appearing as bright green trembling mounds of glistening slime, Giant Bacteria form colonies 2-12 feet in diameter. Each individual bacterium is large enough to be visible to the naked eye (roughly the size of a dime).

The colony produces a noxious odor: anyone breathing the air must make a HEALTH roll vs DL 2 to avoid gagging and vomiting.

ENCOUNTERS

- A Giant Bacteria colony is seen slithering down a vertical surface and spreading out.
- (Possible Crisis) One of the PCs has stepped into the bacteria, releasing its terrible odor.

SIGHTLESS WRIGGLER

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Squirm+1
MIGHT 1 Bite+1

TCV 25

These small, blind, boneless pests manage to find their way into any nook or crack. They move surprisingly quickly and can deliver a painful bite. Their yellow-green bodies squirt a deep green ichor when killed.

ENCOUNTERS

- 1d6 Sightless Wrigglers rush up a tree or embankment and disappear into a tiny crevice.
- (Crisis) 1d6 Sightless Wrigglers attack the PCs.

WATER SPIDER

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Bite+1

TCV 65

These white and wispy arachnids are twice the size of common tarantulas, and possess ten legs. They hunt in groups. Light enough to glide quickly over the viscous surface of Indran waters, they fear nothing, and their bite delivers *WATER SPIDER VENOM*.

ENCOUNTERS

- 1d6 Water Spiders are moving toward the PCs from the other side of a pool or stream.
- (Crisis) 1d6 spiders attack from the front, and 1d6 more from behind in the following Frame.

UL-LUL (GIANT AMOEBIA)

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Grab+1
MIGHT 1 Bash+2

TCV 45

A giant amoeba-like creature, six feet across in its spheroid form, but capable of assuming any shape. Its outer membrane is tough and transparent, and its body is filled with a fluid that shifts between cloudy and clear. Near the center of the body is a mass of darker matter: this is its rudimentary brain.

It has no eyes, but its delicate senses are capable of “watching” movement up to 100 feet away, and this stimulates its feeding instincts. It flows and changes shape fluidly, now a sphere, now a snakelike tube, now a disc rocking on the waves. By elongating and contracting its mass, it can flow through the water with incredible speed.

The Ul-lul attacks by forming any number of needed pseudopods and changing form as necessary, hitting its foe with great battering strength. When the foe stops moving, it is pulled inside the Ul-lul’s body to be absorbed.

ENCOUNTERS

- An Ul-lul attacks an ACIDIC SEA CREATURE and smashes its head mercilessly until it dies.
- (Crisis) An Ul-lul rises out of the nearest body of water: it is stalking the PCs.

TOXIN: WATER SPIDER VENOM

Induces pain, itching and inflammation

MILD TOXIN

DL 4 vs MIGHT

Effect on Fail: -1 on all GRACE rolls for 6 hours

COASTAL FOREST

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Dense forest
CONDITION: Overgrown
TERRAIN: Rocky, damp, slippery
WEATHER: High wind, rain
BIODIVERSITY: High and volatile
DOMINANT COLORS: Green, purple
RESOURCES: Plants, Animals
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Roll on *Lower Lifeforms* table
ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

The coastal forest is filled with towering, fernlike trees four hundred feet high, with thorny roots and rough bark, whose tops disappear into the murky fog above. Tangled vines make quick movement difficult. There is no clean water anywhere; it's all brackish and slimy.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-4	Unusual Feature
5	Lightning strikes your location
6	Sucking Mud
7	Prowling Beasts
8	Squirming Reptiles
9	Giant Bacteria Colony
10	Azornacks
11	Random Orchid-Hunters
12	Blood-Sucking Tree

PERCEPTIONS

- Lightning strikes near and far. Often.
- The air is filled with the long, low hollow call of an AZORNACK, emanating from somewhere in the clouds. The call is answered a while later, from a distance.
- The sun is briefly seen, behind the thick layers of clouds. It appears to shift from side to side.
- Something you thought was not alive – a rock, a stick, a tree – suddenly moves.
- Occasionally you see two sticks or bones tied together and stuck into the ground. These are Oufa markers.
- You are alarmed by a nearby trashing sound. Anyome who Investigates will witness an unidentifiable creature being pulled down into *SUCKING MUD*.

AZORNACK

LIFEFORM

MIGHT 5 Stamp+1
HEALTH 5
TCV 210

These great, spheroidal creatures have ten massive legs, and their tremendously long, sinuous necks disappear in the leafy murk above, swaying gently like long-stalked lilies in a pond. They are mild-tempered vegetarians whose only defense is their thick, blubbery hide. Filled with parasites, stinking and rancid, their decaying covering of fat effectively conceals their tender flesh underneath, protecting them from fangs and rending claws.

They are not aggressive, but may trample and stamp on smaller creatures, especially if frightened or stampeded.

ENCOUNTERS

- 1d6 Azornacks are ambling by. Roll GRACE vs DL2 to avoid being kicked.
- (Crisis) 2d6 Azornacks have been stampeded by a distant Hoom, and they're rushing this way. Roll GRACE vs DL4 to avoid being trampled.

BLOOD-SUCKING TREE

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2
MIGHT 2 Whip+2
TCV 40

These broad trees dangle thousands of thin hanging filaments covered by tiny barbs and sucking nodes. They're quite beautiful, but deadly. The tendrils wick and grab at passers-by, lacerating flesh and sucking out whatever blood they can get.

ENCOUNTERS

- The tendrils of a Blood-Sucking Tree seize a nearby *PROWLING BEAST*, pulling great chunks of skin off it before it gets away.
- (Crisis) A PC accidentally brushes against the tendrils of a Blood-Sucking Tree, which attacks immediately.

PROWLING BEAST

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Bite+1
Armor+1

TCV 25

A six-legged carnivore looking like a cross between a wolf and a crocodile, with great upward-bearing fangs. Their thick plated hide is tough to penetrate. Prowling Beasts roam in packs of 1d6 and attack anything that moves.

ENCOUNTERS

- 1d6 Prowling Beasts attack a *SQUIRMING REPTILE*. (1-5) Beasts win, (6) Reptile wins.
- (Crisis) 1d6 Prowling Beasts attack the PCs.
- (Crisis) The PCs walk into the territory of 2d6 Prowling Beasts.

SUCKING MUD

LIFEFORM

The Sucking Mud is actually a large, amorphous multicellular creature which appears for all intents and purposes as a pool of quicksand. It's harder to escape than normal quicksand, however, because as soon as it senses the presence of prey within, it struggles to "swallow" the pitiable creature downward.

ENCOUNTERS

- A ring of Oufa markers surrounds a Sucking Mud. In 10-60 minutes it will capture some unsuspecting creature who enters.
- (Crisis) One of the PCs has stepped into a Sucking Mud.

SQUIRMING REPTILE

LIFEFORM

GRACE 1 Attack+1

TCV 40

Burrowing through the mud, these small reptiles lash out at intruders with their spiked, poisonous feet. When wounded they fall to pieces, each piece wriggling into the bubbling ooze, emerging again after several minutes as a whole animal. Their lacerations deliver the irritant *SQUIRMING REPTILE VENOM*.

ENCOUNTERS

- 1d6 Squirming Reptiles attack a *PROWLING BEAST*. (1-4) Reptiles win, (5-6) Beast wins.
- (Crisis) 1d6 Squirming Reptiles attack the PCs.

TOXIN: SQUIRMING REPTILE VENOM

Stinging irritant

MILD TOXIN

DL 3 vs MIGHT

Effect on Fail: -1 on all GRACE rolls for 1 hour

RANDOM ORCHID-HUNTERS

GM NOTE: If you're not using them elsewhere in the adventure, the first orchid-hunters the PCs encounter might be Mark Forepaugh and Gunga.

LEADER (1D6)

Roll 1d6 for the class of the NPC party leader:

- 1-2 Explorer
- 3-4 Scientist
- 5 Student
- 6 Writer

MOTIVATION (1D6)

Every Orchid-Hunter needs a motivation. Roll 1d6 and apply +1 if the leader is a *Scientist*, -1 if the leader is an *Explorer*:

- 0 Game & Fame: Not here for orchids; wants to hunt an Inranian creature
- 1 Sociopathy: Seeks personal power; has all five traits of Evil People
- 2 Greater Mission: Financing a political revolution or criminal organization
- 3 Commerce: Selling them retail, this is a regular inventory run
- 4 Family: Needs money for wedding/operation/expected child
- 5 Issues: Needs to pay off a debt/loan/serious personal problem
- 6 Authority: Wants to write the definitive work on some Inranian species
- 7 Science: Wants to perform tests and procedures, or extract their essence

COMPANIONS (1D6)

Each treasure seeker is accompanied by 1d6 "Low-Level Thug" companions. These groups are usually armed. Roll 1d6 and apply a -1 if the group's leader is a *student* or *writer*:

- 0-2 No weapons; peaceful group (+2 Attitude Mod)
- 3-4 Handguns, layered clothing, civilian weapons (+0 Attitude Mod)
- 5-6 +1 Firearms, Armor, military-grade weapons (-2 Attitude Mod)

The number in parentheses indicates a Modifier to the Attitude/Reaction roll (see the *Character Generator* tables in the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*).

WHAT ARE THEY DOING? (2D6)

To determine what the group is doing, roll 2d6 and apply a +2 if the group's leader is an *explorer*:

- 0 Sleeping. All of them.
- 1 Separated, many yards apart, looking for something.
- 2 Burying their fallen; the carcass of a large dead creature is nearby.
- 3-4 Cooking strips of *HOOM* using fire pellets and jungle fungus.
- 5-6 Under attack by a local lifeform (roll on Regional Encounter Table).
- 7-9 Moving determinedly through the terrain. They are (roll 1d6):
 - (1-2) carrying 6d6 orchids; on their way out.
 - (3-4) heading for a known orchid patch; on their way in.
 - (5) heading for a known Oufa Den.
 - (6) Heading for a known hunter shelter.
- 10-11 Speaking with an Oufa orchid gatherer, in the Oufa language.
- 12-14 Half are keeping watch while the others sleep

INLAND FOREST

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Dense forest
CONDITION: Overgrown
TERRAIN: Wet, spongy, uneven
WEATHER: Gentle wind
BIODIVERSITY: High and volatile
DOMINANT COLORS: Green, black, brown
RESOURCES: Plants, Animals
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Roll on *Sentient Lifeforms* table
ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

Here the giant neo-palms form a nearly-solid canopy that shuts out most of the daylight, as well as the rain, which collects in cataracts and pours through the semi-circular canals of dead tree husks. Due to dense trees, groundwater and the ubiquitous tentacles of the *SNAKE TREES*, movement rates here are halved.

The forest floor is covered with weird plantlife and pools of gurgling water, writhing with twisted roots and unseen monsters. Trunks, vines and branches offer means of movement above such areas (GRACE vs a DL ranging from 1 to 6).

Each time a character remains in place for more than 3 hours, there is a 1/6 chance they'll be enwrapped by a *FIBER TREE*, unless precautions are taken.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2	Unusual Feature
3	Oufa Foraging Party (1d6)
4	Yellow Fang
5	Sucking Mud
6	Snake Tree
7	Water Dogs
8	Oufa Den
9	Swamp Flies
10	Flying Kabo
11	Hoom
12	Carnivorex

PERCEPTIONS

- It's dark and the stench is horrid, but the air is calm and quiet.
- The calm surface of a pool is broken by a translucent disc of luminescent jelly that quivers as it searches for prey.
- The Oufa markers grow more plentiful.
- From a great distance comes a terrifying sound: "*HOOM! HOOM! HOOM!*" All characters who fail a PSYCHE roll vs DL2 will begin moving directly toward it until it stops, 30 seconds later.

THE OUFA

LIFEFORM

GRACE 3 Swim+2 Fight+1
HEALTH 3
TCV 70

The Inranians, or *Oufa*, are amphibious hominids with a froglike appearance. Their oral history goes back about 2,000 years. They descended from a common Galactic Hominid strain a million years in the past, and developed their aquatic capabilities through waves of subsequent evolution. Timid and superstitious, and not very intelligent by human standards, they are very knowledgeable about the local creatures and terrain.

Some adults know a few English words – enough to trade for orchids and common items – but most use their own language, pointing at things for emphasis. They know what fire is – they have seen fires caused by lightning – but they don't know how to make it.

Those with experience on Inra know that the nearest group of Inranians may often be called out to trade by using their native tongue: *Ouf! Ouf! Ouf! Ouf! Ouf!*"

SOCIETY

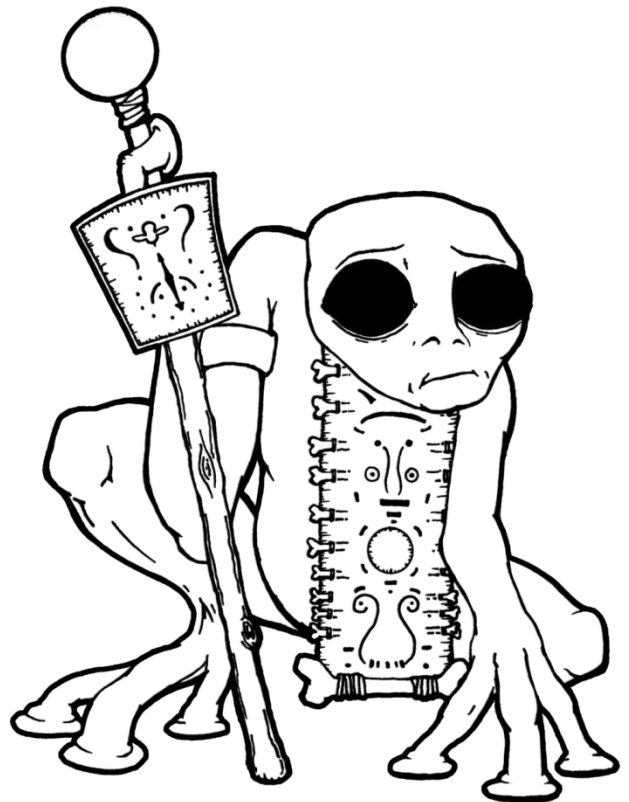
SOCIETAL VALUES: Resources, Survival Skills

SOCIETAL PROBLEMS: No defenses, always moving

TECHNOLOGY: Physical Labor

RESOURCES: Woods, Fibers, Water, Bone

UNDERSTANDING OF REALITY: Locally Limited



CARNIVOREX

LIFEFORM

BRAINS 2
GRACE 2 Grab+2 Bite+1
HEALTH 6
MIGHT 2 Strike+1

TCV 265

Picture a Tyrannosaurus Rex crossed with a Lobster. It's the size of a DC-10, and it's hungry. Running away might be a good idea.

ENCOUNTERS

- Many small and medium-sized creatures are fleeing something that's coming this way. The PCs have two Frames to find hiding places before it rushes past, chasing a *YELLOW FANG*.
- (Crisis) The Carnivorex turns its attention to the PCs, and attacks.

FIBER TREE

LIFEFORM

TCV 10

These weeping-willow-like trees dangle strong hairy fibers down to the ground, and over the course of a few hours they will stealthily cocoon and penetrate the body of a creature sleeping beneath. There is a chance of encountering a Fiber Tree every time the party stops in one place for at least a few hours (see *INLAND FOREST* on previous page).

Once the skin is penetrated, the plant injects its noxious *FIBER TREE SAP* into the victim, and the digestive process begins.

TOXIN: FIBER TREE SAP

Powerful enzymes that break down muscle tissue

Earth Value: 1M per pint

FATAL TOXIN

DL 4 vs MIGHT

Effect on Fail: -1 to a random Stat each hour (internal damage continues accumulating until treated).

A pint of sap can be extracted from a Fiber Tree every hour, if a GRACE roll vs DL 3 is made each time to avoid being targeted by fibers or accidentally exposing yourself to the toxin. Back on Home-Earth, a pint of this stuff will sell on the black market for 1M.

FLYING KABO

LIFEFORM

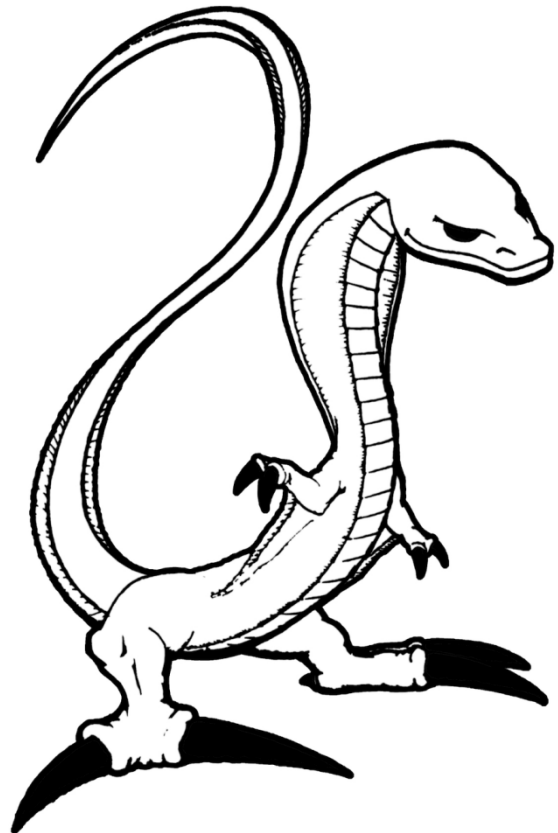
GRACE 3 Whip+2
HEALTH 3
MIGHT 3 Lift+1

TCV 85

A six-foot-long flying reptile with a whiplike tail and wicked talons at the ends of its two mighty legs, the Kabo is a ferocious predator. Its preferred method of attack is to strafe its opponent multiple times, beating it down with violent flicks of its whip before grabbing it and lifting it into the air. If its prey continues to struggle, the Kabo will hurl it against a nearby tree or drop it to the ground, repeating this process over and over until death ensues.

ENCOUNTERS

- A Flying Kabo descends from the forest canopy and returns to the air with a six-legged *WATER DOG* dangling lifelessly from its massive talons.
- (Crisis) The PCs are attacked by a flock of 1d6 Flying Kabos.



HOOM

LIFEFORM

BRAINS 2
GRACE 2 Grab+3 Bite+2
HEALTH 5 Sonic Attack+2
MIGHT 2 Strike+1

TCV 255

A gigantic beast some thirty feet across, with six triangular tentacles, each seven feet long and phenomenally strong. The Hoom appears something like a massive mobile anemone or sea slug.

In its center, a vast gaping mouth of deep crimson stretches wide and emits the creature's mind-freezing *Sonic Attack*: from its cavernous, distended throat issues a tremendous, world-shaking noise: "HOOM! HOOM! HOOM!"

The noise has the power to completely disorient a person, causing them to exhibit a neurotic response to the pervasive sound. Anyone thus affected must roll their response for the next Frame on the *SDS* table (see the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide*, p.28).

Oh: If you do manage to kill it, the meat is delicious, and quite wholesome.

ENCOUNTERS

- The forest trembles and animals flee as a Hoom and a *CARNIVOREX* do battle. (1-3) Hoom wins, (4-6) Carnivorex wins.
- (Crisis) A Hoom notices the PCs and strikes. In the next Frame, it will use its Sonic Attack.

SNAKE TREE

LIFEFORM

TCV 0

These trees feature semi-circular canal-like trunks, and were named by early explorers for their thousands of waving, rubbery tentacles that perform the duties of leaves. These "snakes" can grip loosely and may trip an unsuspecting passer-by, but they do no direct damage.

SWAMP FLIES

LIFEFORM

GRACE 1 Sting+1
Armor +2 vs aimed weapons

TCV 15

Any bodies, bones or pools of blood left unburied – human or otherwise – will quickly attract hordes of these glutinous, gauzy-winged swamp flies, which pester and sting *en masse*. The PCs will learn this quickly if they toss any trash or camp near their kill.

Their small size makes them hard to hit individually (Armor +2 vs aimed weapons).

ENCOUNTERS

- A blurry swarm of Swamp Flies hovers over its decomposing meal, buzzing and eating. A few seem to notice the PCs, but quickly return to the eating frenzy. They may be avoided by slowly moving ten or twenty feet away (GRACE vs DL 1). Otherwise, they'll attack the nearest PC, as a single combatant.

OUF A DEN

LOCATION

A dry rise of land on which an Oufa tribe has made its home. Converging paths indicate the opening to an underground den, almost hidden by a bewildering maze of roots (BRAINS roll vs DL4 to spot). The entrance is protected by long sharp stakes made from the iron-hard thigh-bones of the *FLYING KABO*. Jutting outward, they are a defense against intruders.

The tunnel leads briefly downward to a foul, poorly ventilated den, with some rudimentary benches and implements made of dried mud, wood, fibers and bone. Near the back of the chamber a box made of decorated clay stores a dozen hard, woody tubers. These are edible, although not very tasty.

As Inranian tribes move from one location to another, there is only a 1/6 chance of the home being occupied when the PCs find it. If a tribe is here, there will be 3d6 adults and 1d6 children.

WATER DOG

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2
MIGHT 2 Bite+2
HEALTH 2
TCV 45

Six-legged mammals with long, sinuous snouts, Water Dogs are both predators and scavengers, digging for marrow inside the bones of fallen creatures. They drag the bodies of their own fallen away to be eaten.

ENCOUNTERS

- 2d6 Water Dogs are rooting hungrily in the innards of a fallen (1-3) Carnivorex, (4-6) Hoom. They do not notice the PCs unless approached.
- (Crisis) The PCs enter a pack's territory, and are attacked by 1d6 Water Dogs.

YELLOW FANG

LIFEFORM

MIGHT 2 Bite+2 Bash+2
HEALTH 2
TCV 120

A fearful-looking creature resembling a long, land-crawling prehistoric fish, with a tremendous maw running almost half the length of its body. Its great yellow fangs are eight inches in length, and deliver *YELLOW FANG VENOM*. The beast attacks using both its vicious bite and its front flippers, which are unexpectedly strong. It is an aggressive predator, and a solitary hunter.

ENCOUNTERS

- A Yellow Fang erupts from a nearby body of black water, hurling itself to the shore with a large disgusting piece of meat in its mouth. It's busy eating its kill, and doesn't notice the PCs unless they approach.
- (Crisis) A Yellow Fang hurls itself through the trees, having spotted the PCs moving through the forest. It's hungry, and has no fear of humans, having killed them before.

TOXIN: YELLOW FANG VENOM

Topical anaesthetic

MODERATE TOXIN

DL 4 vs MIGHT
Effect on Fail: -1 MIGHT and -1 GRACE for 3 hours

JUNGLE

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Jungle/Forest
CONDITION: Overgrown
TERRAIN: Smooth, Moist
WEATHER: Gentle Breeze
BIODIVERSITY: High & Volatile
DOMINANT COLORS: Dark Greens, Bright Colors
RESOURCES: Woods, Fibers, Fungus, Animals, Water
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Lower Lifeforms
ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

This region is faintly reminiscent of a terrestrial jungle. The overarching trees are less densely packed here, and there are occasional tall outcroppings of rock.

From atop one of these vantage points, the first line of the *FOOTHILLS* can be seen.

The boundary between forest and jungle is a gradual one, and creatures native to the *INLAND FOREST* can sometimes be seen in this region.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	Unusual Feature
4	Random Orchid Hunter
5	Inranian Orchids
6	Toothed Birds
7	Rock Outcropping
8	Web Serpent
9	Winged Eels
10-11	Roll <i>INLAND FOREST</i> Encounter
12	Oufa Orchid-Gathering Party (1d6)

PERCEPTIONS

- It's hotter, soggier, and even more fetid, but somehow it feels less oppressive than *THE INLAND FOREST*.
- It's quiet. The only sound you hear is the sporadic chatter of *TOOTHED BIRDS*.
- It stops raining, sometimes for many hours in a row.
- There are no more Oufa markers.
- Scattered around the jungle floor are giant blue fungus pods, oblong in shape and up to two feet in diameter. If set on fire they are a safe source of warmth, releasing no noxious chemicals.

INRANIAN ORCHIDS

MAGUFFIN

Earth Value: 1M per flower

These beautiful orchid-like flowers are so beautiful and valuable, some hunters will put up with all the dangers of Inra just to retrieve them.

They grow in bunches of 3d6, in the darkest parts of the jungle. Each flower is worth 1M on Home-Earth.

ROCK OUTCROPPING

LOCATION

Throughout the jungle region, an occasional high rock clearing juts up above the trees, high enough to get a good view (25 miles in all directions) if climbed.

About half of these outcroppings are covered with a dense carpet of brown lichen that excretes a sweet-smelling, sticky juice.

To determine the DL of the climb, roll 1d6. Add +1 if the lichen is present.

TOOTHED BIRD

LIFEFORM

GRACE 3 Slash+1

TCV 25

Toothed Birds are the primary denizens of the jungle, where they exist in great numbers. They live in flocks of 5-30, and each flock has its own territory. Usually hunting in groups of 2d6, they dart angrily about their foes' heads and slash at them with razor-sharp saw-edges on the backs of their legs.

Aggressive as they are, they can be kept away by waving branches torn from trees. This frightens them.

With a successful *Survival* or *Zoology* roll vs DL2, a PC will know that the dense bird population in this region seems to indicate the absence of large carnivores. That should take a load off their mind.

ENCOUNTERS

- Two flocks of Toothed Birds are fighting over territory nearby; the noise is immense and the battle is bloody. The PCs will not be noticed unless they move into that immediate area.
- (Crisis) The PCs approach a flock's territory, and the trees explode with angry Toothed Birds. 2d6 of them attack while dozens more beat their wings and shriek threateningly.

WEB SERPENT

LIFEFORM

GRACE 3 Bite+2

HEALTH 3

TCV 60

The Web Serpent has a great grotesque head, many-fanged, like a dragon. Between its obsidian eyes is a fissure from which emanates a wailing noise and a foul odor. Hundreds of clawed legs wriggle beneath its long sinuous body.

When it leaps into the air, webbed flaps of skin grow taut between these legs, allowing it to catch the wind and glide for up to mile. It is a solitary hunter.

ENCOUNTERS

- A Webbed Serpent sails by overhead in a glimpse seen just for a moment, between the broad-leaves of the trees.
- (Crisis) A Webbed Serpent gliding by overhead notices the PCs, and swoops down to attack the person at the back of the group.

WINGED EEL

LIFEFORM

GRACE 3 Bite+1

TCV 25

Looking like an eel with extending bat-wings, this creature is four feet in length and has an eight-foot wingspan. They tend to live (and attack) in groups of 2-12. Their only weapon is their teeth, which are four inches long and jut out fearsomely.

ENCOUNTERS

- A group of Winged Eels is seen rising above the trees, flying off away from the PCs.
- (Crisis) 2d6 Winged Eels attack, always focusing on the smallest enemy standing. Each Frame, half will swoop in for an attack while the rest fly out to position themselves for the next wave.

FOOTHILLS

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Hills/Valleies
CONDITION: Moist
TERRAIN: Uneven/Rocky
WEATHER: Moderate Wind
BIODIVERSITY: High & Volatile
DOMINANT COLORS: Browns, Greens
RESOURCES: Rock, Water
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Senient Lifeforms
ENCOUNTER DL: Uncommon (8)

The land surrounding *THE MOUNTAINS OF PERDITION* is rolling and rocky, with dense fog, occasional streams of brackish water and clumps of ugly little bushes. But rain lets up a bit: the PRECIP DL is *Uncommon* (DL8).

Passing onward through this region, the air grows steadily cooler and the PCs gain altitude as they get closer to *THE MOUNTAINS OF PERDITION*.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	Unusual Feature
4-5	Random Orchid-Hunter
6-7	Winged Eels
8-10	Black Mold
11-12	Web Serpent

PERCEPTIONS

- The fog sometimes gets so thick you can barely see your own feet.
- The wind picks up, there is movement all around, but you can't see it.
- The sun become visible for a few minutes. It's still shifting in the fog, but appears much brighter than before.

THE MOUNTAINS OF PERDITION

REGION

The Mountains of Perdition are the only part of Inra which are remotely habitable. The air is cool and it's continually raining, blazing with lightning and shaking with thunder, but sheltering caves can be found which are too dry and cool for *BLACK MOLD* to grow. These caves sometimes (1/6) hold food, ammo or supplies (Survival Pro Kits) for *RANDOM ORCHID-HUNTERS*.

Sometimes, under favorable conditions on these rugged peaks, you can catch the full warmth of the enormous hot sun for a few minutes.

PASSAGEWAY

LOCATION

The cool dryness of the passageway makes this place untenable for most of the Inranian lifeforms, which prefer darkness and humidity. There's a strong draft of dry air. The floor is so smooth, it seems to have been artificially leveled. Faint illumination is provided by the rocks themselves. They appear to be covered by some sort of microscopic phosphorescent vegetation.

After hundreds of twists and turns and straight galleries the cleft turns sharply upward, and climbing becomes necessary (GRACE vs DL2 to avoid taking damage in the attempt). The PCs at this point are literally moving up through the insides of *THE MOUNTAINS OF PERDITION*. After climbing to an altitude of 20,000 feet (nearly 4 miles, a climb which takes a full hour), the air becomes noticeably thin, causing a -1 on all GRACE and MIGHT rolls.

At the end of the cleft where the PCs can go no further, a round patch of bright blue sky is visible roughly 500 feet up, directly above them. They've reached the base of a *SKY PIPE*.

SKY PIPE

LOCATION

Straight and true, smooth as glass and apparently immune to the elements, these transparent tubes are sometimes glimpsed atop the highest mountains — for a few moments only, before being hidden again by the dense clouds. Some travelers believe them to be observatories, created by an ancient race.

Inside the pipe, zigzagging rings of metal are placed conveniently for easy climbing.

Rising above the clouds near the top, without a sound being made, the PCs will suddenly become aware of a distinct, definite command registering in their minds:

"Stop!"

This is the *PIPE DENIZEN*. All PCs must defend against its Command using *PSYCHE*, or be struck immobile, unable to climb up or down.

PIPE DENIZEN

LIFEFORM

BRAINS 2
GRACE 4 Grasp+2
PSYCHE 3 Command+4

TCV 260

The Pipe Denizen is a mass of doughy matter, blue-green in color and about three feet in diameter. It has what looks like a cyst, filled with transparent liquid, near its center.

The Denizen is telepathic in both directions. It also has the ability to freeze a person's muscles via telepathic command, preventing all movement.

In motion, the Pipe Denizen flows like tar. When attacking it sends out a pseudopod up to ten feet in length and grasps its opponent: With a successful hit, it can strip a chunk of flesh from a person's body, or puncture the skin of an Automated Survival Suit. It will immediately consume any flesh that it grasps.

While a PC is frozen by the Command, the Denizen has a vague awareness of everything the PC is thinking. It uses this awareness to determine which PC to attack next. Occasionally the liquid in the cyst dances and bubbles; it seems to be laughing.

It's possible to lull the Denizen into a false sense of security by mentally repeating one thought while carefully doing something else. This will require a PSYCHE roll vs DL4. A character who succeeds in this roll may perform the other action immediately upon the next Frame.

KIP KHIL

NPC

BRAINS 2 Survival+1 Inra Lore+1
CHARM 4
GRACE 2
HEALTH 4

GEAR: Eastman-Virgin "Tough As Shit" Survival Tool™ including: Sawblade, Paring Blade, File, Awl, Tweezers, Screwdrivers, Wiresnips, Power Drill, Power Router, Magnifying Glass, Chronometer, Gyroscopic Compass and 30' of Superfine Filament Line. ("Pro Kit")

TCV 101

Given his rugged good looks and (apparently) fearless nature, Khil's eponymous "Khil or Be Killed" show was a natural for MegaMedia's new line of survival entertainment. Unfortunately he's kind of a fake, and really an ass. Although he does speak a little Oufa.

MARK FOREPAUGH

NPC

BRAINS 2 ElecEng+1 MechEng+1
GRACE 3 Firearm(Hand)+2
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 2

GEAR:
Flash Pistol +1 (20 shots)
200 Fire Pellets
.45 caliber revolver
Cartridge belt with 30 shells
Chronometer
Gyroscopic Compass

TCV 90

An athletic hero on Earth, Forepaugh has come to Inra in order to make a fortune on a harvest of *INRANIAN ORCHIDS*. The reason? He's in love.

GUNGA

NPC

CHARM 2
GRACE 2 Firearm(Hand)+1
HEALTH 3
MIGHT 1 Ax+1

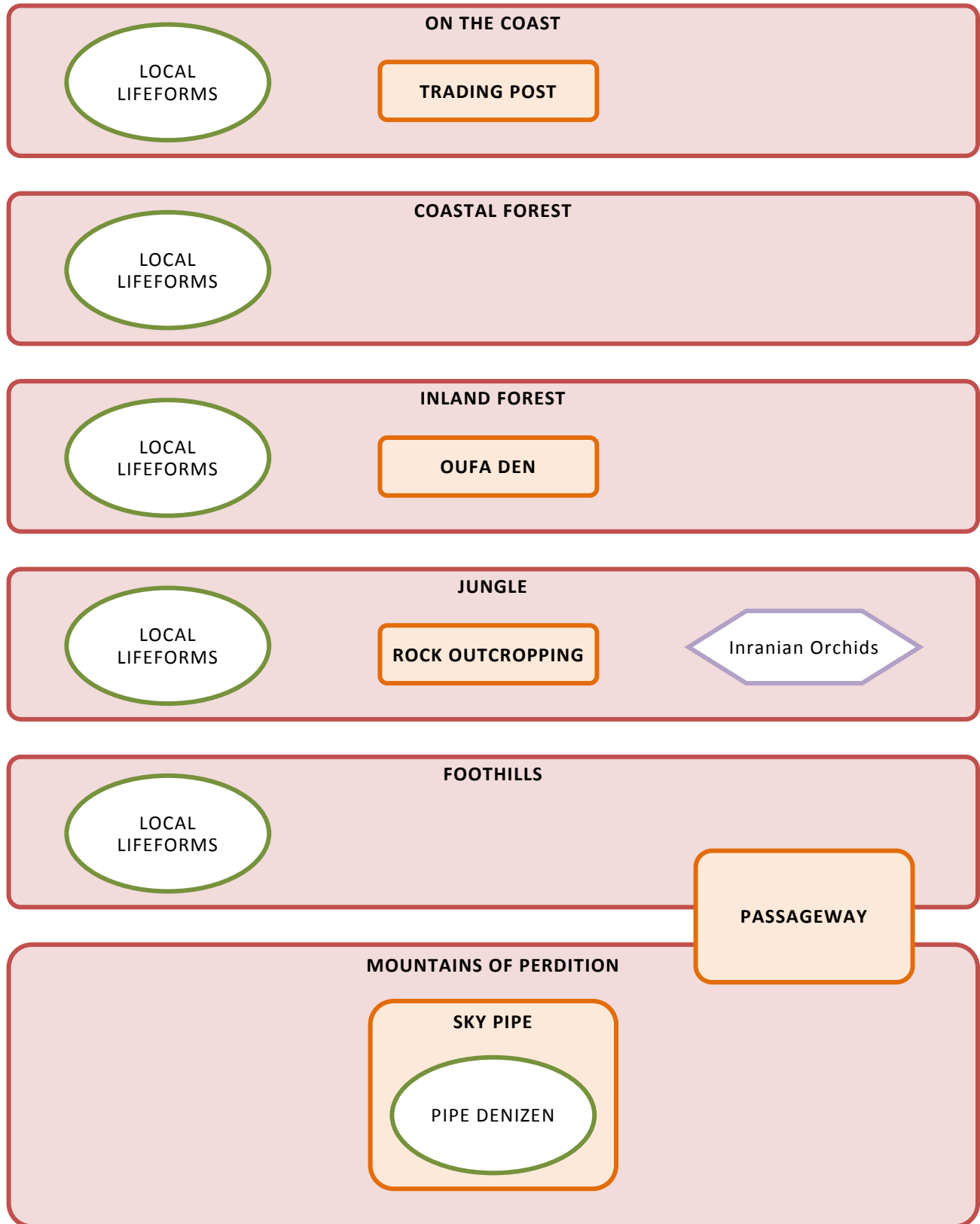
GEAR:
Flash Pistol +1 (20 shots)
2 Sleeping Bags
200 Fire Pellets
Hand Ax

TCV 55

Gunga is a one-eyed, pointy-eared alien who was banished for life for his impiety in closing his single round eye during the sacred *Ceremony of the Wells*. He found employment as the personal servant of Mark Forepaugh, and accompanies him on all his travels.

Gunga is good-natured but not very smart, although he does have his moments of insight. He often makes (bad) jokes when things get tense, and if given a weapon, his nervousness tends to make him shoot a little too quickly.

SAVAGE PLANET



THE PLANET OF DREAD

by R. F. Starzl

A stupid blunder—and Mark Forepaugh faces a life of castaway loneliness in the savage welter of the planet Inra's monster-ridden jungles.

There was no use hiding from the truth. Somebody had blundered—a fatal blunder—and they were going to pay for it! Mark Forepaugh kicked the pile of hydrogen cylinders. Only a moment ago he had broken the seals—the mendacious seals that certified to the world that the flasks were fully charged. And the flasks were empty! The supply of this precious power gas, which in an emergency should have been sufficient for six years, simply did not exist.

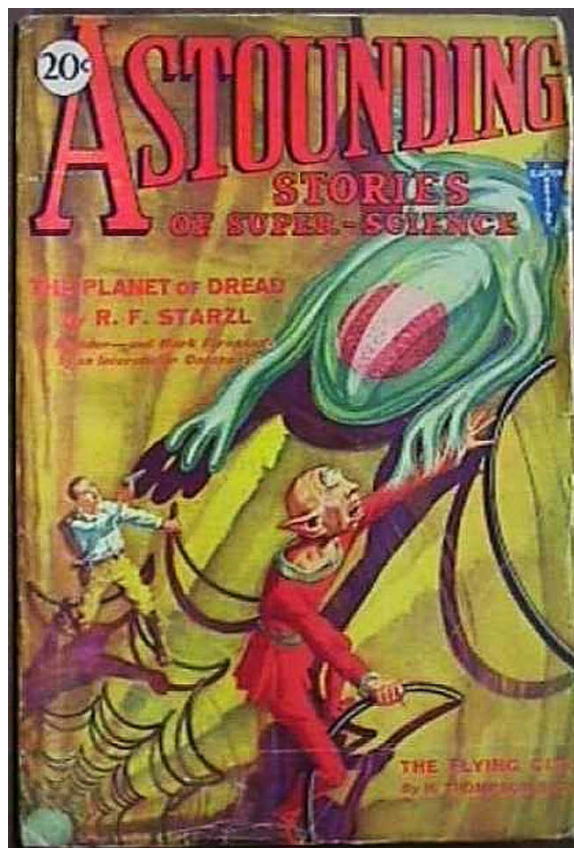
He walked over to the integrating machine, which as early as the year 2031 had begun to replace the older atomic processes, due to the shortage of the radium series metals. It was bulky and heavy compared to the atomic disintegrators, but it was much more economical and very dependable. Dependable—provided some thick-headed stock clerk at a terrestrial supply station did not check in empty hydrogen cylinders instead of full ones. Forepaugh's unwonted curses brought a smile to the stupid, good-natured face of his servant, Gunga—he who had been banished for life from his native Mars for his impiety in closing his single round eye during the sacred Ceremony of the Wells.

The Earth man was at this steaming hot, unhealthy trading station under the very shadow of the South Pole of the minor planet Inra for an entirely different reason. One of the most popular of his set on the Earth, an athletic hero, he had fallen in love, and the devoutly wished-for marriage was only prevented by lack of funds. The opportunity to take charge of this richly paid, though dangerous, outpost of civilization had been no sooner offered than taken. In another week or two the relief ship was due to take him and his valuable collection of exotic Inranian orchids back to the Earth, back to a fat bonus, Constance, and an assured future.

It was a different young man who now stood tragically before the useless power plant. His slim body was bowed, and his clean features were drawn. Grimly he raked the cooling dust that had been forced in the integrating chamber by the electronic rearrangement of the original hydrogen atoms—finely powdered iron and silicon—the "ashes" of the last tank of hydrogen.

■

Gunga chuckled.



"What's the matter?" Forepaugh barked. "Going crazy already?"

"Me, haw! Me, haw! Me thinkin'," Gunga rumbled. "Haw! We got, haw! plenty hydr'gen." He pointed to the low metal roof of the trading station. Though it was well insulated against sound, the place continually vibrated to the low murmur of the Inranian rains that fell interminably through the perpetual polar day. It was a rain such as is never seen on Earth, even in the tropics. It came in drops as large as a man's fist. It came in streams. It came in large, shattering masses that broke before they fell and filled the air with spray. There was little wind, but the steady green downpour of water and the brilliant continuous flashing of lightning shamed the dull soggy twilight produced by the large, hot, but hidden sun.

"Your idea of a joke!" Forepaugh growled in disgust. He understood what Gunga's grim pleasantry referred to. There was indeed an incalculable quantity of hydrogen at hand. If some means could be found to separate the hydrogen atoms from the oxygen in the world of water around them they would not lack for fuel. He thought of electrolysis, and relaxed with a sigh. There was no power. The generators were dead, the air drier and cooler had ceased its rhythmic pulsing nearly an hour ago. Their lights were gone, and the automatic radio utterly useless.

"This is what comes of putting all your eggs in one basket," he thought, and let his mind dwell vindictively on the engineers who had designed the equipment on which his life depended.

An exclamation from Gunga startled him. The Martian was pointing to the ventilator opening, the only part of this strange building that was not hermetically sealed against the hostile life of Inra. A dark rim had appeared at its margin, a loathsome, black-green rim that was moving, spreading out. It crept over the metal walls like the low-lying smoke of a fire, yet it was a solid. From it emanated a strong, miasmatic odor.

"The giant mold!" Forepaugh cried. He rushed to his desk and took out his flash pistol, quickly set the localizer so as to cover a large area. When he turned he saw, to his horror, Gunga about to smash into the mold with his ax. He sent the man spinning with a blow to the ear.

"Want to scatter it and start it growing in a half-dozen places?" he snapped. "Here!"

■

He pulled the trigger. There was a light, spiteful "ping" and for an instant a cone of white light stood out in the dim room like a solid thing. Then it was gone, and with it was gone the black mold, leaving a circular area of blistered paint on the wall and an acrid odor in the air. Forepaugh leaped to the ventilating louver and closed it tightly.

"It's going to be like this from now on," he remarked to the shaken Gunga. "All these things wouldn't bother us as long as the machinery kept the building dry and cool. They couldn't live in here. But it's getting damp and hot. Look at the moisture condensing on the ceiling!"

Gunga gave a guttural cry of despair. "It knows, Boss; look!"

Through one of the round, heavily framed ports it could be seen, the lower part of its large, shapeless body half-floating in the lashing water that covered their rocky shelf to a depth of several feet, the upper part spectral and gray. It was a giant amoeba, fully six feet in diameter in its present spheroid form, but capable of assuming any shape that would be useful. It had an envelope of tough, transparent matter, and was filled with a fluid that was now cloudy and then clear. Near the center there was a mass of darker matter, and this was undoubtedly the seat of its intelligence.

The Earth man recoiled in horror! A single cell with a brain! It was unthinkable. It was a biological nightmare. Never before had he seen one—had, in fact, dismissed the stories of the Inranian natives as a bit of primitive superstition, had laughed at these gentle, stupid amphibians with whom he traded when they, in their imperfect language, tried to tell him of it.

It was a giant amoeba, capable of assuming any shape that would be useful. Near the center was undoubtedly the seat of its intelligence.

They had called it the UI-lul. Well, let it be so. It was an amoeba, and it was watching him. It floated in the downpour and watched him. With what? It had no eyes. No matter, it was watching him. And then it suddenly flowed outward until it became a disc rocking on the waves. Again its fluid form changed, and by a series of elongations and contractions it flowed through the water at an incredible speed. It came straight for the window, struck the thick, unbreakable glass with a shock that could be felt by the men inside. It flowed over the glass and over the building. It was trying to eat them, building and all! The part of its body over the port became so thin that it was almost invisible. At last, its absolute limit reached, it dropped away, baffled, vanishing amid the glare of the lightning and the frothing waters like the shadows of a nightmare.

■

The heat was intolerable and the air was bad.

"Haw, we have to open vent'lator, Boss!" gasped the Martian.

Forepaugh nodded grimly. It wouldn't do to smother either. Though to open the ventilator would be to invite another invasion by the black mold, not to mention the amoebae and other fabulous monsters that had up to now been kept at a safe distance by the repeller zone, a simple adaptation of a very old discovery. A zone of mechanical vibrations, of a frequency of 500,000 cycles per second, was created by a large quartz crystal in the water, which was electrically operated. Without power, the protective zone had vanished.

"We watch?" asked Gunga.

"You bet we watch. Every minute of the 'day' and 'night.'"

He examined the two chronometers, assuring himself that they were well wound, and congratulated himself that they were not dependent on the defunct power plant for energy. They were his only means of measuring the passage of time. The sun, which theoretically would seem to travel round and round the horizon, rarely succeeded in making its exact location known, but appeared to shift strangely from side to side at the whim of the fog and water.

"Th' fellas," Gunga remarked, coming out of a study. "Why not come?" He referred to the Inranians.

"Probably know something's wrong. They can tell the quartz oscillator is stopped. Afraid of the UI-lul, I suppose."

"Squeer," demurred the Martian. "UI-lul not bother fellas."

"You mean it doesn't follow them into the underbrush. But it would find tough going there. Not enough water; trees there, four hundred feet high with thorny roots and rough bark—they wouldn't like that. Oh no, these natives ought to be pretty snug in their dens. Why, they're as hard to catch as a muskrat! Don't know what a muskrat is, huh? Well, it's the same as the Inranians, only different, and not so ugly."

For the next six days they existed in their straitened quarters, one guarding while the other slept, but such alarms as they experienced were of a minor nature, easily disposed of by their flash pistol. It had not been intended for continuous service, and under the frequent drains it showed an alarming loss of power. Forepaugh repeatedly warned Gunga to be more sparing in its use, but that worthy persisted in his practice of using it against every trifling invasion of the poisonous Inranian cave moss that threatened them, or the warm, soggy water-spiders that hopefully explored the ventilator shaft in search of living food.

"Bash 'em with a broom, or something! Never mind if it isn't nice. Save our flash gun for something bigger."

Gunga only looked distressed.

On the seventh day their position became untenable. Some kind of sea creature, hidden under the ever-replenished storm waters, had found the concrete emplacements of their trading post to its liking. Just how it was done was never learned. It is doubtful that the creatures could gnaw away the solid stone—more likely the process was chemical, but none the less it was effective. The foundations crumbled; the metal shell subsided, rolled half over so that silty water leaked in through the straining seams, and threatened at any moment to be buffeted and urged away on the surface of the flood toward that distant vast sea which covers nine-tenths of the area of Inra.

"Time to mush for the mountains," Forepaugh decided.

Gunga grinned. The Mountains of Perdition were, to his point of view, the only part of Inra even remotely inhabitable. They were sometimes fairly cool, and though perpetually pelted with rain, blazing with lightning and reverberating with thunder, they had caves that were fairly dry and too cool for the black mold. Sometimes, under favorable circumstances on their rugged peaks, one could get the full benefit of the enormous hot sun for whose actinic rays the Martian's starved system yearned.

"Better pack a few cans of the food tablets," the white man ordered. "Take a couple of waterproof sleeping bags for us, and a few hundred fire pellets. You can have the flash pistol; it may have a few more charges in it."

■

Forepaugh broke the glass case marked "Emergency Only" and removed two more flash pistols. Well he knew that he would need them after passing beyond the trading area—perhaps sooner. His eyes fell on his personal chest, and he opened it for a brief examination. None of the contents seemed of any value, and he was about to pass when he dragged out a long, heavy, .45 caliber six-shooter in a holster, and a cartridge belt filled with shells. The Martian stared.

"Know what it is?" his master asked, handing him the weapon.

"Gunga not know." He took it and examined it curiously. It was a fine museum piece in an excellent state of preservation, the metal overlaid with the patina of age, but free from rust and corrosion.

"It's a weapon of the Ancients," Forepaugh explained. "It was a sort of family heirloom and is over 300 years old. One of my grandfathers used it in the famous Northwest Mounted Police. Wonder if it'll still shoot."

He leveled the weapon at a fat, sightless wriggler that came squirming through a seam, squinting unaccustomed eyes along the barrel. There was a violent explosion, and the wriggler disappeared in a smear of dirty green. Gunga nearly fell over backward in fright, and even Forepaugh was shaken. He was surprised that the ancient cartridge had exploded at all, though he knew powder making had reached a high level of perfection before explosive chemical weapons had yielded to the newer, lighter, and infinitely more powerful ray weapons. The gun would impede their progress. It would be of very little use against the giant Carnivora of Inra. Yet something—perhaps a sentimental attachment, perhaps what his ancestors would have called a "hunch"—compelled him to strap it around his waist. He carefully packed a few essentials in his knapsack, together with one chronometer and a tiny gyroscopic compass. So equipped, they could travel with a fair degree of precision toward the mountains some hundred miles on the other side of a steaming forest, a-crawl with feral life, and hot with blood-lust.

■

Man and master descended into the warm waters and, without a backward glance, left the trading post to its fate. There was not even any use in leaving a note. Their relief ship, soon due, would never find the station without radio direction.

The current was strong, but the water gradually became shallower as they ascended the sloping rock. After half an hour they saw ahead of them the loom of the forest, and with some trepidation they entered the gloom cast by the towering, fernlike trees, whose tops disappeared in murky fog. Tangled vines impeded their progress. Quagmires lay in wait for them, and tough weeds tripped them, sometimes throwing one or another into the mud among squirming small reptiles that lashed at them with spiked, poisonous feet and then fell to pieces, each piece to lie in the bubbling ooze until it grew again into a whole animal.

Several times they almost walked under the bodies of great, spheroidal creatures with massive short legs, whose tremendously long, sinuous necks disappeared in the leafy murk above, swaying gently like long-stalked lilies in a terrestrial pond. These were azornacks, mild-tempered vegetarians whose only defense lay in their thick, blubbery hides. Filled with parasites, stinking and rancid, their decaying covering of fat effectively concealed the tender

flesh underneath, protecting them from fangs and rending claws.

Deeper in the forest the battering of the rain was mitigated. Giant neo-palm leaves formed a roof that shut out not only most of the weak daylight, but also the fury of the downpour. The water collected in cataracts, ran down the boles of the trees, and roared through the semi-circular canals of the snake trees, so named by early explorers for their waving, rubbery tentacles, multiplied a millionfold, that performed the duties of leaves. Water gurgled and chuckled everywhere, spread in vast dim ponds and lakes writhing with tormented roots, up-heaved by unseen, uncatalogued leviathans, rippled by translucent discs of loathsome, luminescent jelly that quivered from place to place in pursuit of microscopic prey.

Yet the impression was one of calm and quiet, and the waifs from other worlds felt a surcease of nervous tension. Unconsciously they relaxed. Taking their bearings, they changed their course slightly for the nesting place of the nearest tribe of Inranians where they hoped to get food and at least partial shelter; for their food tablets had mysteriously turned to an unpleasant viscous liquid, and their sleeping bags were alive with giant bacteria easily visible to the eye.

■

They were doomed to disappointment. After nearly twelve hours of desperate struggling through the morass, through gloomy aisles, and countless narrow escapes from prowling beasts of prey in which only the speed and tremendous power of their flash pistols saved them from instant death, they reached a rocky outcropping which led to the comparatively dry rise of land on which a tribe of Inranians made its home. Their faces were covered with welts made by the hanging filaments of blood-sucking trees as fine as spider webs, and their senses reeled with the oppressive stench of the abysmal jungle. If the pampered ladies of the Inner Planets only knew where their thousand-dollar orchids sprang from!

Converging runways showed the opening of one of the underground dens, almost hidden from view by a bewildering maze of roots, rendered more formidable by long, sharp stakes made from the iron-hard thigh-bones of the flying kabo.

Forepaugh cupped his hands over his mouth and gave the call.

"Ouf! Ouf! Ouf! Ouf! Ouf!"

He repeated it over and over, the jungle giving back his voice in a muffled echo, while Gunga held a spare flash pistol and kept a sharp lookout for a carnivore intent on getting an unwary Inranian.

There was no answer. These timid creatures, who are often rated the most intelligent life native to primitive Inra, had sensed disaster and had fled.

Forepaugh and Gunga slept in one of the foul, poorly ventilated dens, ate of the hard, woody tubers that had not been worth taking along, and wished they had a certain stock clerk at that place at that time. They were awakened out of deep slumber by the threshing of an evil looking creature which had become entangled among the sharpened spikes. Its tremendous maw, splitting it almost in half, was opened in roars of pain that showed great yellow fangs eight inches in length. Its heavy flippers battered the stout roots and lacerated themselves in the beast's insensate rage. It was quickly dispatched with a flash pistol and Gunga cooked himself some of the meat, using a fire pellet; but despite his hunger Forepaugh did not dare eat any of it, knowing that this species, strange to him, might easily be one of the many on Inra that are poisonous to terrestrials.

■

They resumed their march toward the distant invisible mountains, and were fortunate in finding somewhat better footing than they had on their previous march. They covered about 25 miles on that "day," without untoward incident. Their ray pistols gave them an insuperable advantage over the largest and most ferocious beasts they could expect to meet, so that they became more and more confident, despite the knowledge that they were rapidly using up the energy stored in their weapons. The first one had long ago been discarded, and the charge indicators of the other two were approaching zero at a disquieting rate. Forepaugh took them both, and from that time on he was careful never to waste a discharge except in case of a direct and unavoidable attack. This often entailed long waits or stealthy detours through sucking mud, and came near to ending both their lives.

The Earth man was in the lead when it happened. Seeking an uncertain footing through a tangle of low-growing, thick, ghastly white vegetation, he placed a foot on what seemed to be a broad, flat rock projecting slightly above the ooze. Instantly there was a violent upheaval of mud; the seeming rock flew up like a trap-door, disclosing a cavernous mouth some seven feet across, and a thick, triangular tentacle flew up from its concealment in the mud in a vicious arc. Forepaugh leaped back barely in time to escape being swept in and engulfed. The end of the tentacle struck him a heavy blow on the chest, throwing him back with such force as to bowl Gunga over, and whirling the pistols out of his hands into a slimy, bulbous growth nearby, where they stuck in the phosphorescent cavities the force of their impact had made.

■

There was no time to recover the weapons. With a bellow of rage the beast was out of its bed and rushing at them. Nothing stayed its progress. Tough, heavily scaled trees thicker than a man's body shuddered and fell as its bulk brushed by them. But it was momentarily confused, and its

first rush carried it past its dodging quarry. This momentary respite saved their lives.

Rearing its plumed head to awesome heights, its knobby bark running with brown rivulets of water, a giant tree, even for that world of giants, offered refuge. The men scrambled up the rough trunk easily, finding plenty of hand and footholds. They came to rest on one of the shelflike circumvoluting rings, some twenty-five feet above the ground. Soon the blunt brown tentacles slithered in search of them, but failed to reach their refuge by inches.

And now began the most terrible siege that interlopers in that primitive world can endure. From that cavernous, distended throat came a tremendous, world-shaking noise.

"HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM!"

Forepaugh put his hand to his head. It made him dizzy. He had not believed that such noise could be. He knew that no creature could long live amidst it. He tore strips from his shredded clothing and stuffed his ears, but felt no relief.

"HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM!"

It throbbed in his brain.

Gunga lay a-sprawl, staring with fascinated eye into the pulsating scarlet gullet that was blasting the world with sound. Slowly, slowly he was slipping. His master hauled him back. The Martian grinned at him stupidly, slid again to the edge.

Once more Forepaugh pulled him back. The Martian seemed to acquiesce. His single eye closed to a mere slit. He moved to a position between Forepaugh and the tree trunk, braced his feet.

"No you don't!" The Earth man laughed uproariously. The din was making him light-headed. It was so funny! Just in time he had caught that cunning expression and prepared for the outlashing of feet designed to plunge him into the red cavern below and to stop that hellish racket.

"And now—"

He swung his fist heavily, slamming the Martian against the tree. The red eye closed wearily. He was unconscious, and lucky.

Hungrily the Earth man stared at his distant flash pistols, plainly visible in the luminescence of their fungus bedding. He began a slow, cautious creep along the top of a vine some eight inches thick. If he could reach them....

■

Crash! He was almost knocked to the ground by the thud of a frantic tentacle against the vine. His movement had been seen. Again the tentacle struck with crushing force. The great vine swayed. He managed to reach the shelf again in the very nick of time.

"HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM!"

A bolt of lightning struck a giant fern some distance away. The crash of thunder was hardly noticeable. Forepaugh wondered if his tree would be struck. Perhaps it might even start a fire, giving him a flaming brand with which to torment his tormentor. Vain hope! The wood was saturated with moisture. Even the fire pellets could not make it burn.

"HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM!"

The six-shooter! He had forgotten it. He jerked it from its holster and pointed it at the red throat, emptied all the chambers. He saw the flash of yellow flame, felt the recoil, but the sound of the discharges was drowned in the Brobdignagian tumult. He drew back his arm to throw the useless toy from him. But again that unexplainable, senseless "hunch" restrained him. He reloaded the gun and returned it to its holster.

"HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM!"

A thought had been struggling to reach his consciousness against the pressure of the unbearable noise. The fire pellets! Couldn't they be used in some way? These small chemical spheres, no larger than the end of his little finger, had long ago supplanted actual fire along the frontiers, where electricity was not available for cooking. In contact with moisture they emitted terrific heat, a radiant heat which penetrated meat, bone, and even metal. One such pellet would cook a meal in ten minutes, with no sign of scorching or burning. And they had several hundred in one of the standard moisture-proof containers.

■

As fast as his fingers could work the trigger of the dispenser Forepaugh dropped the potent little pellets down the bellowing throat. He managed to release about thirty before the bellowing stopped. A veritable tornado of energy broke loose at the foot of the tree. The giant maw was closed, and the shocking silence was broken only by the thrashing of a giant body in its death agonies. The radiant heat, penetrating through and through the beast's body, withered nearby vegetation and could be easily felt on the perch up the tree.

Gunga was slowly recovering. His iron constitution helped him to rally from the powerful blow he had received, and by the time the jungle was still he was sitting up mumbling apologies.

"Never mind," said his master. "Shin down there and cut us off a good helping of roast tongue, if it has a tongue, before something else comes along and beats us out of a feast."

"Him poison, maybe," Gunga demurred. They had killed a specimen new to zoologists.

"Might as well die of poison as starvation," Forepaugh countered.

Without more ado the Martian descended, cut out some large, juicy chunks as his fancy dictated, and brought his

loot back up the tree. The meat was delicious and apparently wholesome. They gorged themselves and threw away what they could not eat, for food spoils very quickly in the Inranian jungles and uneaten meat would only serve to attract hordes of the gauzy-winged, glutinous Inranian swamp flies. As they sank into slumber they could hear the beginning of a bedlam of snarling and fighting as the lesser Carnivora fed on the body of the fallen giant.

When they awoke the chronometer recorded the passing of twelve hours, and they had to tear a network of strong fibers with which the tree had invested them preparatory to absorbing their bodies as food. For so keen is the competition for life on Inra that practically all vegetation is capable of absorbing animal food directly. Many an Inranian explorer can tell tales of narrow escapes from some of the more specialized flesh-eating plants; but they are now so well known that they are easily avoided.

A clean-picked framework of crushed and broken giant bones was all that was left of the late bellowing monster. Six-legged water dogs were polishing them hopefully, or delving into them with their long, sinuous snouts for the marrow. The Earth man fired a few shots with his six-shooter, and they scattered, dragging the bodies of their fallen companions to a safe distance to be eaten.

Only one of the flash pistols was in working order. The other had been trampled by heavy hoofs and was useless. A heavy handicap under which to traverse fifty miles of abysmal jungle. They started with nothing for breakfast except water, of which they had plenty.

Fortunately the outcroppings of rocks and gravel washes were becoming more and more frequent, and they were able to travel at much better speed. As they left the low-lying jungle land they entered a zone which was faintly reminiscent of a terrestrial jungle. It was still hot, soggy, and fetid, but gradually the most primitive aspects of the scene were modified. The over-arching trees were less closely packed, and they came across occasional rock clearings which were bare of vegetation except for a dense carpet of brown, lichenlike vegetation that secreted an astonishing amount of juice. They slipped and slobbered through this, rousing swarms of odd, toothed birds, which darted angrily around their heads and slashed at them with the razor-sharp saw edges on the back of their legs. Annoying as they were, they could be kept away with branches torn from trees, and their presence connoted an absence of the deadly jungle flesh-eaters, permitting a temporary relaxation of vigilance and saving the resources of the last flash gun.

They camped that "night" on the edge of one of these rock clearings. For the first time in weeks it had stopped raining, although the sun was still obscured. Dimly on the horizon could be seen the first of the foothills. Here they gathered some of the giant, oblong fungus that early explorers had

taken for blocks of porous stone because of their size and weight, and, by dint of the plentiful application of fire pellets, managed to set it ablaze. The heat added nothing to their comfort, but it dried them out and allowed them to sleep unmolested.

An unwary winged eel served as their breakfast, and soon they were on their way to those beckoning hills. It had started to rain again, but the worst part of their journey was over. If they could reach the top of one of the mountains there was a good chance that they would be seen and rescued by their relief ship, provided they did not starve first. The flyer would use the mountains as a base from which to search for the trading station, and it was conceivable that the skipper might actually have anticipated their desperate adventure and would look for them in the Mountains of Perdition.

They had crossed several ranges of the foothills and were beginning to congratulate themselves when the diffused light from above was suddenly blotted out. It was raining again, and above the echo-augmented thunder they heard a shrill screeching.

"A web serpent!" Gunga cried, throwing himself flat on the ground.

Forepaugh eased into a rock cleft at his side. Just in time. A great grotesque head bore down upon him, many-fanged as a medieval dragon. Between obsidian eyes was a fissure whence emanated a wailing and a foul odor. Hundreds of short, clawed legs slithered on the rocks under a long sinuous body. Then it seemed to leap into the air again. Webs grew taut between the legs, strumming as they caught a strong uphill wind. Again it turned to the attack, and missed them. This time Forepaugh was ready for it. He shot at it with his flash pistol.



Nothing happened. The fog made accurate shooting impossible, and the gun lacked its former power. The web serpent continued to course back and forth over their heads.

"Guess we'd better run for it," Forepaugh murmured.

"Go 'head!"

They cautiously left their places of concealment. Instantly the serpent was down again, persistent if inaccurate. It struck the place of their first concealment and missed them.

"Run!"

They extended their weary muscles to the utmost, but it was soon apparent that they could not escape long. A rock wall in their path saved them.

"Hole!" the Martian gasped.

Forepaugh followed him into the rocky cleft. There was a strong draft of dry air, and it would have been next to impossible to hold the Martian back, so Forepaugh allowed him to lead on toward the source of the draft. As long as it led into the mountains he didn't care.

The natural passageway was untenanted. Evidently its coolness and dryness made it untenable for most of Inra's humidity and heat loving life. Yet the floor was so smooth that it must have been artificially leveled. Faint illumination was provided by the rocks themselves. They appeared to be covered by some microscopic phosphorescent vegetation.

After hundreds of twists and turns and interminable straight galleries the cleft turned more sharply upward, and they had a period of stiff climbing. They must have gone several miles and climbed at least 20,000 feet. The air became noticeably thin, which only exhilarated Gunga, but slowed the Earth man down. But at last they came to the end of the cleft. They could go no further, but above them, at least 500 feet higher, they saw a round patch of sky, miraculously bright blue sky!

"A pipe!" Forepaugh cried.

He had often heard of these mysterious, almost fabulous structures sometimes reported by passing travelers. Straight and true, smooth as glass and apparently immune to the elements, they had been occasionally seen standing on the very tops of the highest mountains—seen for a few moments only before they were hidden again by the clouds. Were they observatories of some ancient race, placed thus to pierce the mysteries of outer space? They would find out.

■

The inside of the pipe had zigzagging rings of metal, conveniently spaced for easy climbing. With Gunga leading, they soon reached the top. But not quite.

"Eh?" said Forepaugh.

"Uh?" said Gunga.

There had not been a sound, but a distinct, definite command had registered on their minds.

"Stop!"

They tried to climb higher, but could not unclasp their hands. They tried to descend, but could not lower their feet.

The light was by now relatively bright, and as by command their eyes sought the opposite wall. What they saw gave their jaded nerves an unpleasant thrill—a mass of doughy matter of a blue-green color about three feet in diameter, with something that resembled a cyst filled with transparent liquid near its center.

And this thing began to flow along the rods, much as tar flows. From the mass extended a pseudopod; touched Gunga on the arm. Instantly the arm was raw and bleeding. Terrified, immovable, he writhed in agony. The pseudopod returned to the main mass, disappearing into its interior with the strip of bloody skin.

Its attention was centered so much on the luckless Martian that its control slipped from Forepaugh. Seizing his flash pistol, he set the localized for a small area and aimed it at the thing, intent on burning it into nothingness. But again his hand was stayed. Against the utmost of his will-power his fingers opened, letting the pistol drop. The liquid in the cyst danced and bubbled. Was it laughing at him? It had read his mind—thwarted his will again.

Again a pseudopod stretched out and a strip of raw, red flesh adhered to it and was consumed. Mad rage convulsed the Earth man. Should he throw himself tooth and nail on the monster? And be engulfed?

He thought of the six-shooter. It thrilled him.

But wouldn't it make him drop that too?

■

A flash of atavistic cunning came to him.

He began to reiterate in his mind a certain thought.

"This thing is so I can see you better—this thing is so I can see you better."

He said it over and over, with all the passion and devotion of a celibate's prayer over a uranium fountain.

"This thing is harmless—but it will make me see you better!"

Slowly he drew the six-shooter. In some occult way he knew it was watching him.

"Oh, this is harmless! This is an instrument to aid my weak eyes! It will help me realize your mastery! This will enable me to know your true greatness. This will enable me to know you as a god."

Was it complacency or suspicion that stirred the liquid in the cyst so smoothly? Was it susceptible to flattery? He sighted along the barrel.

"In another moment your great intelligence will overwhelm me," proclaimed his surface mind desperately, while the subconscious tensed the trigger. And at that the clear liquid burst into a turmoil of alarm. Too late. Forepaugh went limp, but not before he had loosed a steel-jacketed bullet that shattered the mind cyst of the pipe denizen. A horrible pain coursed through his every fibre and nerve. He was safe in the arms of Gunga, being carried to the top of the pipe to the clean dry air, and the blessed, blistering sun.

The pipe denizen was dying. A viscous, inert mass, it dropped lower and lower, lost contact at last, shattered into slime at the bottom.

■

Miraculous sun! For a luxurious fifteen minutes they roasted there on the top of the pipe, the only solid thing in a sea of clouds as far as the eye could reach. But no! That was a circular spot against the brilliant white of the clouds, and it was rapidly coming closer. In a few minutes it resolved itself into the *Comet*, fast relief ship of the Terrestrial, Inranian, Genidian, and Zydian Lines, Inc. With a low buzz of her repulsion motors she drew alongside. Hooks were attached and ports opened. A petty officer and a crew of roustabouts made her fast.

"What the hell's going on here?" asked the cocky little terrestrial who was skipper, stepping out and surveying the castaways. "We've been looking for you ever since your directional wave failed. But come on in—come on in!"

He led the way to his stateroom, while the ship's surgeon took Gunga in charge. Closing the door carefully, he delved into the bottom of his locker and brought out a flask.

"Can't be too careful," he remarked, filling a small tumbler for himself and another for his guest. "Always apt to be some snooper to report me. But say—you're wanted in the radio room."

"Radio room nothing! When do we eat?"

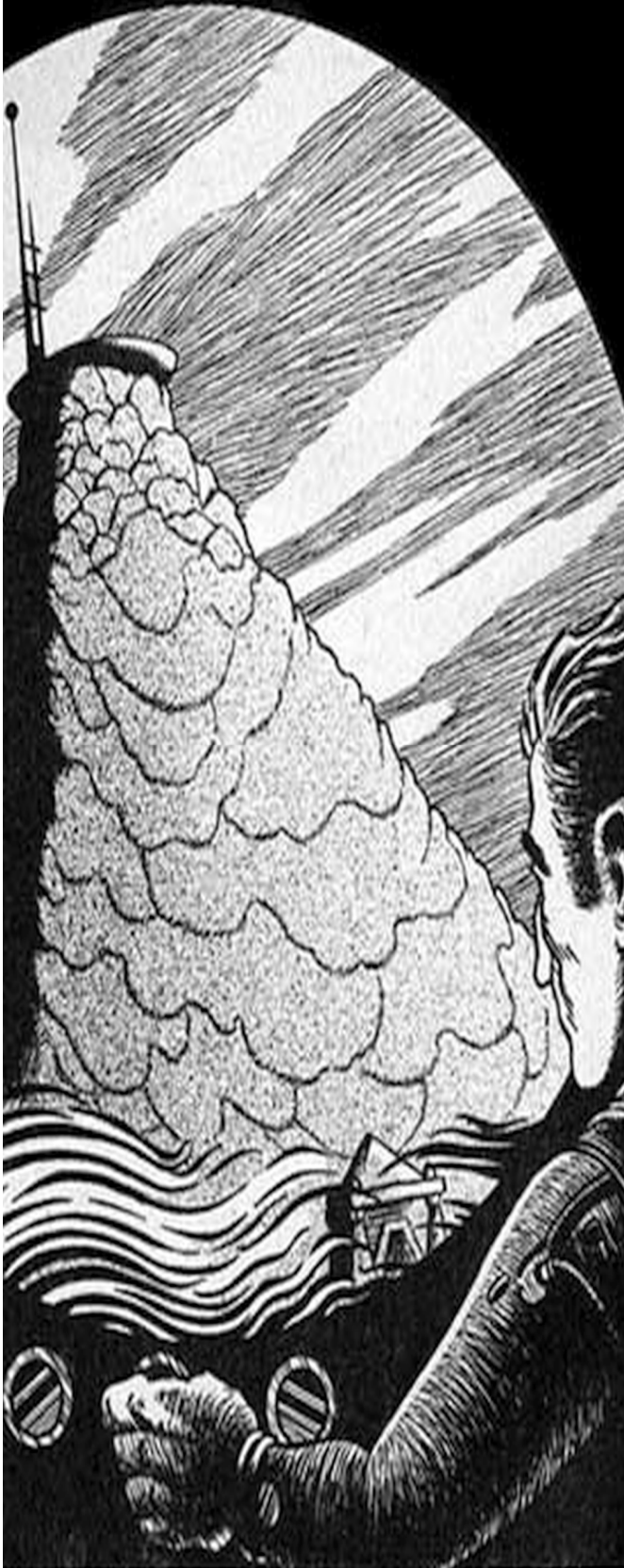
"Right away, but you'd better see him. Fellow from the Interplanetary News Agency wants you to broadcast a copyrighted story. Good for about three years' salary, old boy."

"All right. I'll see him"—with a happy sigh—"just as soon as I put through a personal message."



BUSTED BEACON

Based on "The Repairman"
by Harry Harrison



OBSTACLES

Dangerous Environment - Hexcrawl
Dangerous Environment - Marshland
Dangerous People - Saurians
Wildlife/Animals - Carnivorous Predators
Wildlife/Animals - Hovoryx
Technical Challenges - Getting into the Temple
Technical Challenges - Fixing the Beacon
Technical Challenges - Getting Out of the Temple

COMPLICATIONS

Scant Intel
Bad Odds
Stealth Required
Object of Mission will Refuse/Resist

PERKS

50 MV

MAGUFFINS

Data/Report on Proxima Centauri B
Data/Report on Saurians
Contact with Saurians
Centauri B Lifeforms
Mech Pro Kit (1M)
Laser Torch (1M)
Boboa Sap (1M per pint)

BACKSTORY

Over 2,000 years ago in a timeline accessed via the *Harrison* vector, a beacon was installed by galactic engineers on *Proxima Centauri B*. The engineers who installed it took all precautions which then seemed adequate, but in time all things break down, and after two thousand years of service the beacon recently stopped relaying its signal. Problem for them.

But it turns out to be a problem for us on Home-Earth as well, because the carrier wave of that beacon is used as a cheap navigational aide for government-funded scoutbots, searching that region of SlipSpace for new Nodes. Its malfunction has stalled a whole season's worth of Big Model projects.

The client will provide a set of charts indicating the location of the beacon. (These charts were taken from the alternate Earth on the timeline of the *Harrison* vector.) The PCs' job is to slip out to a Node in space near Proxima Centauri B, enter orbit, locate a landing zone, make planetfall, and repair the busted beacon. (Of course when the PCs get there, they'll find that the beacon is just the proverbial tip of the iceberg.)

GM NOTE: For both of the "Known Planet" scenarios, at least one PC on the team should be skilled in *Electronics* or *Engineering*. If this is not possible (damn cutbacks!), the requisite programs may be loaded into the Ship's Computer, and the PCs will have to maintain radio contact with the ship while making the repair.

TO BOLDLY TIPTOE WHERE WE'VE ALREADY BEEN

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Politics/Diplomacy
NODE TYPE: Known Planet in Alternate Universe
SLIP TYPE: Compound: Cartesian & ParaTerran (DL6)
PAY: 8M ea

Due to international reliance on the Centauri Beacon the sentient saurian lifeforms of this world are classified as protected under the Interdimensional Species Protection Act, which prohibits the PCs from killing them or in any way altering the natural development of their culture. The designation of this Directive is, as they say, Prime.

The SlipShip and Survival Suits, being of government issue, possess multiple recording devices, all of which will be reviewed by committee upon the PCs' return. Any evidence of protected species abuse will be prosecuted to the full extent of international law.

TRIPLED, YOU SAY?

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: (Corporate) Emergency
NODE TYPE: Known Planet in the Future
SLIP TYPE: Compound: Cartesian & Temporal (DL6)
PAY: 30M ea

Besides serving its official function, the beacon has also been relied upon by a number of commercial ventures, including the discreet exploration of several useful and exploitable planets, and on which the client's income depends. Their whole project is at a standstill. "There's no way I'll let any more time go to waste while governmental puppets do the dog-and-pony show of international detente," says the client, "Billions are being lost every day that thing is out of operation. That's why your mission is a secret one, and your pay scale has been tripled. You will be disavowed if arrested, of course, and false documentation has already been created to discredit you, should the need arise."

I WANT A NEW DRUG

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Acquisition
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Moderately Stable (3)

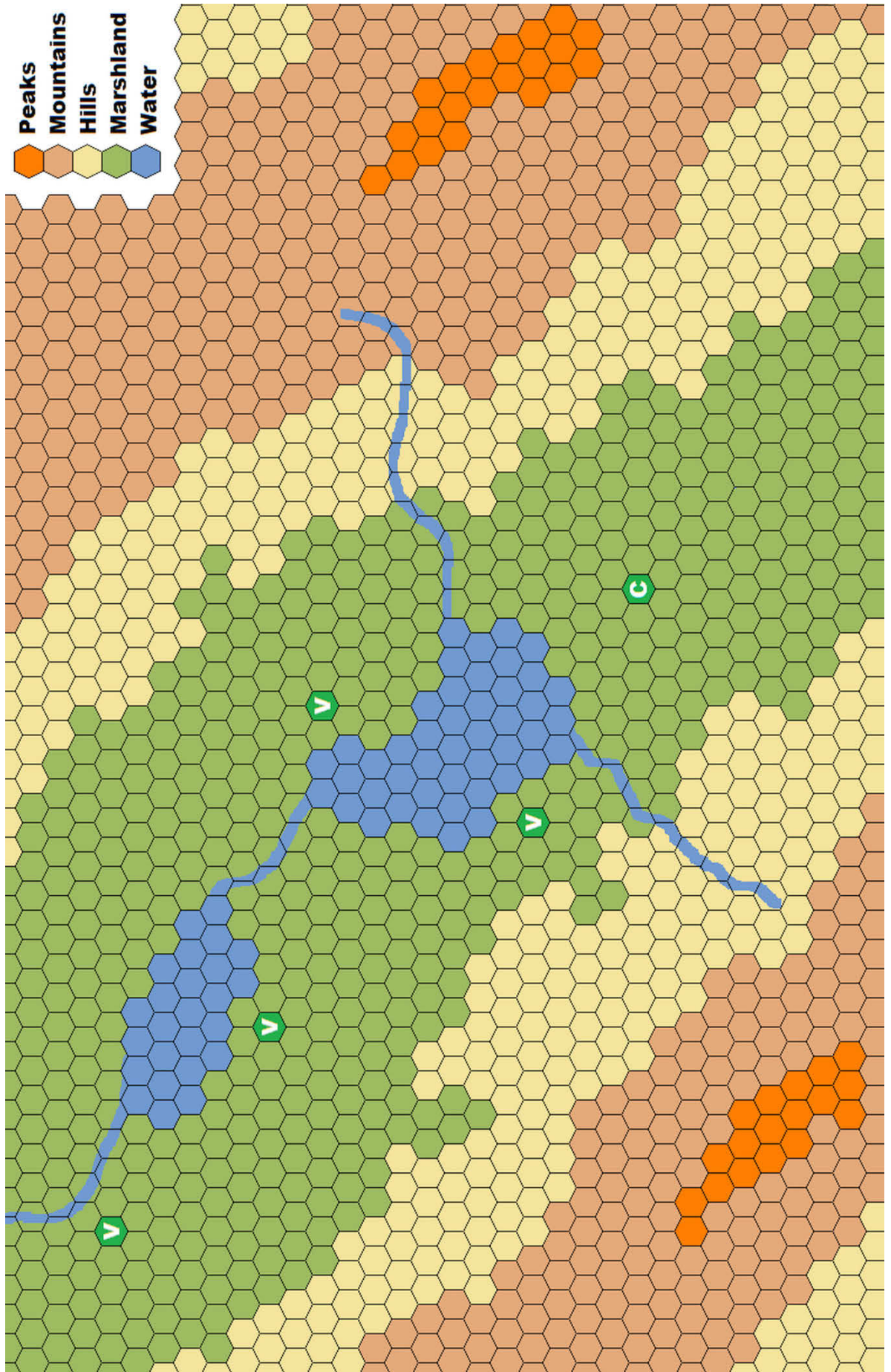
In this scenario, no one has ever made planetfall along the *Harrison* vector, and no one on Home-Earth was very concerned when the beacon stopped working; they just found another signal to use as a carrier wave. This pocket universe never was very stable anyway.

But the PCs hear an interesting tidbit of information from a mechanic who worked with a pilot who was hired by a client who shall remain nameless: There is a powerful drug on this planet – the sap of the Boboa Tree – which produces prophetic hallucinations of such clarity and intensity that it goes for 2M per ounce on the street. Black market, of course. This same guy could "unload" it for you, shall we say, for 20%?

CENTAURI B -- BEACON & SURROUNDINGS -- GM'S MAP

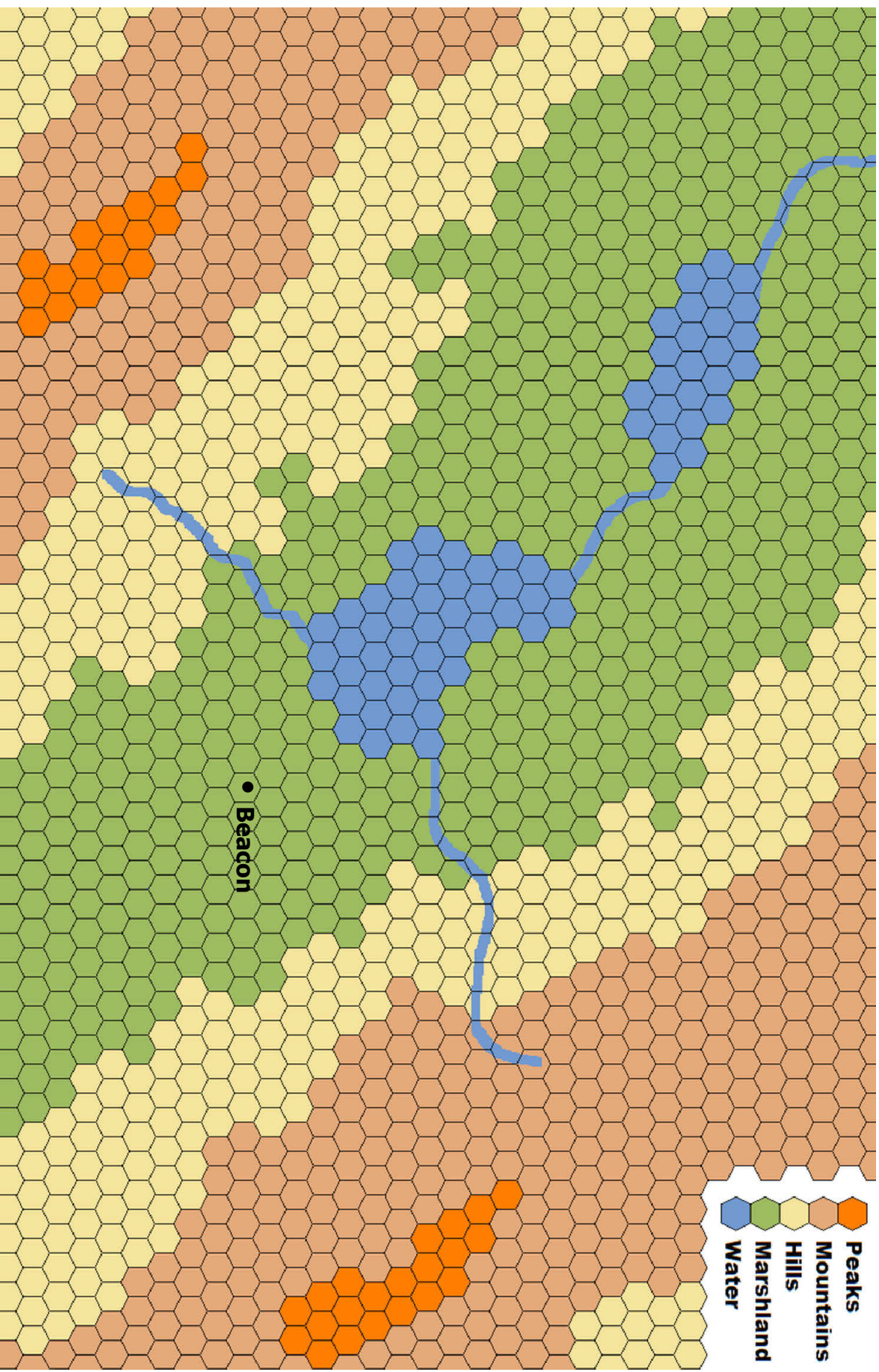
C = Saurian City
V = Villages

1 HEX = 10 mi



CENTAURI B -- BEACON & SURROUNDINGS

1 HEX = 10 mi



PROXIMA CENTAURI B

PLANET

GRAVITY: 1.2 G
ATMOSPHERE: Nitrogen/Oxygen
PRESSURE: 1.16 Earth atmospheres
DAY: 38.5 hours
YEAR: 414 Earth Days
WATER: 80% of planetary surface
CLIMATE: Temperate-Hot
PRECIPITATION: Frequent (DL6)
BIOSPHERE: Sentient Lifeforms: Galactic Hominids in rough equivalent of humanity's late neolithic stage

Centauri B, where the beacon was situated according to the old charts, is a mushy-looking, wet globe. It's 75% water, and the land has been tormented by seismic forces in the last few millennia. Tall mountains and narrow river valleys feed into broad marshes that slowly move out to the viscous, mineral-rich seas.

The beacon is equidistant on a line drawn between the two most prominent mountain peaks in this tridrant. According to the old charts, there shouldn't be any other significant features in this area. But...

HISTORY: HERE'S WHAT HAPPENED

When the first engineers built the beacon, they didn't concern themselves with the Saurians, who lived at the time across a large body of water. The engineers didn't count on a landbridge forming.

When a series of quakes swept the area nearly 2,000 years ago, a swampy landbridge rose just enough to allow the lizards to cross the sea. They wandered into this wetland valley, nestled between high mountains on either side. Here some of them discovered the shiny "gift of the gods" that produced "magic waters". The radioactivity in the water didn't harm them; those who drank it grew healthier; their offspring stronger. It was the beginning of a new religion.

A small city of mud and rock huts arose around the beacon, and over the centuries a pyramid was built to protect it, with a temple vestibule outside.

All was going well until recently, when one of the old priests violated the temple interior and clumsily messed with the sacraments inside, stopping the flow of the holy waters. There has been revolt, strife, murder and destruction in the city ever since. Armed mobs fight each other daily in the muddy streets around the pyramid complex, and a *new* band of priests now guards the sacred font. What happened to the old priests? Death by boiling.

HILLS & MOUNTAINS

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Light Forest & Peaks
CONDITION: Vibrant
TERRAIN: Varying
WEATHER: Gentle Wind
BIODIVERSITY: High & Volatile
DOMINANT COLORS: Yellows, Browns, Greys
RESOURCES: Rock, Plants, Animals, Metals
UNUSUAL FEATURES: No Sentient Lifeforms
ENCOUNTER DL: Unlikely (9)

The Saurians sometimes enter this region to bring home large stones and rare plants for construction and shamanic magic. Hunting parties come through occasionally, looking to supplement their marshy diet with some of the gamier creatures of the slopes. Only a few lifeforms have established a foothold in this dry atmosphere, it's pretty quiet most of the time.

GM NOTE: The Saurians have no concept of where they came from, but their religious stories do involve deities coming down from the sky. If there are any clues to be found about otherworldly visitations, they might be found in the highest and oldest rocks, at the top of the mountains.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-5	Unusual Feature
6	Carnivorous Predator
7	Hovoryx
9-11	Hunting Party
12	Village Shaman

PERCEPTIONS

- It's really quiet around here.
- A flock of massive pteradactyl-like creatures swoops down from a high eyrie, turns toward the nearest marsh and takes off hunting.
- Something unseen – but not very far away – shrieks in agony, then stops.

MARSHLAND

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Wetlands/Valley
CONDITION: Moist
TERRAIN: Yielding, Shifting, Sludge
WEATHER: Murky, Humid
BIODIVERSITY: High & Volatile
DOMINANT COLORS: Greens, Browns, Greys
RESOURCES: Mud, Plants, Animals
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Sentient Lifeforms
ENCOUNTER DL: Likely (7)

The marsh is the hunting-land of the lizard people, and the place where Saurian shamans gather the rare plants and animal parts used in their ceremonies.

The marshlands appear flat and wet – the average elevation in this area is mere inches above sea level – but the soil beneath the muddy water sometimes drops off suddenly down to a depth of 1-3 feet. Moving faster than a walk requires a GRACE roll vs DL3 (for all characters who weren't raised in swamps) to avoid falling and becoming covered with the stuff.

When hexcrawling through marshland, a GRACE roll vs DL3 must be made by all party members each day, or movement occurs at half rate for that day (that's 50 miles with jumpjets, or 10 without).

The slow-moving river that meanders through the center of the marsh is 500-3,000 feet across, and up to 18 feet deep in its center.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	Unusual Feature
4-5	Wild Swampgoats
6	Saurian Peasant or Herder
7-8	Carnivorous Predator
8-10	Hunting Party
11-12	Village Shaman

PERCEPTIONS

- Tall reeds and broad-leaved trees with thick, twisted roots emerge from the still water, forming large copses in which all sorts of small wildlife are heard nesting, feeding, killing and dying.
- A dark oily bubble rises and pops nearby, leaving behind a terrible stench.
- The river is home to a wide variety of large but primitive fish, worms and eels, many with multiple stubby armlike fins.

CARNIVOROUS PREDATOR

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Attack+2
HEALTH 1
MIGHT 1

TCV (base) 35

Roll once on the *Animal Size* table, once on the *Animal Type* table and once on the *Animal Tweaks* table. Add up the TCV of the creature as indicated.

ANIMAL SIZE (2D6)

2-4	Rat-sized
5-7	Dog-sized
8-9	Human-sized (HEALTH 2 = TCV 40)
10-11	Horse-sized (MIGHT 2 = TCV 40)
12	Elephant-sized (HEALTH 3 = TCV 45)

ANIMAL TYPE (2D6)

+1 for Hills & Mountains

2-3	Helminthoid ((Worm-like)
4-5	Molluskoid (Snail-like)
6-7	Dipnoid (Lungfish-like)
8-9	Reptilian (Lizard-like)
10-11	Insectoid (Bug-like)
12-13	Avian (Bird-like)

ANIMAL TWEAKS (2D6)

2	Powerful Venom (DL5) (TCV+80)
3	Mild Venom (DL3) (TCV+30)
4	Immense Strength (MIGHT 3) (TCV +30)
5	Immense Speed (GRACE 3) (TCV +10)
6	Extra Limbs
7	Sensory Acuity (Detect+1) (TCV +10)
8	Bi-environ (water/land, land/air, water/air)
9	Frightening Display
10	Bizarre Appendage
11	Terrible Odor
12	Spits Caustic Liquid (-1 harm to GRACE) (TCV +10)

Example: Rolling 2d6 three times, we get a 10, a 9 and a 12. This gives us a horse-sized reptilian creature that spits caustic liquid. Its TCV is 40 (from its sheer size) + 10 (from its caustic liquid attack) = 50.

Most carnivorous predators will attack the closest enemy if they are not outnumbered, or if the enemy seems frail or wounded. Intelligent creatures will seek their best tactical advantage, and flee if they feel the fight is turning against them.

HOVORYX

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Grasp+2
HEALTH 3

TCV 50

Giant reptilian-avians similar to pteranodons, the Hovoryx has a wingspan of 10-15' (1d6+9) and can easily carry a man-sized creature in its long taloned legs. They rip their food into pieces, using both talons and their sharp carnivorous teeth. They are the most-feared predator of the lizard people. Hovoryx live in mountain eyries, and hunt in groups of 1d6.

ENCOUNTERS

- A group of Hovoryx ascends into the air in the distance, each carrying a struggling swampgoat.
- A group of Hovoryx is seen in the medium distance, circling and hunting for prey. 1 in 6 chance that prey turns out to be Centaurian.
- (Crisis) A group of Hovoryx dives toward the PCs in attack.

SWAMPGOAT

LIFEFORM

HEALTH 2
MIGHT 1 Kick+0

TCV 20

These loathsome semi-aquatic creatures – looking something like a cross between a goat and a giant shaggy sea slug – are herded, tended and butchered by the lowest caste. Generally docile and possessing no natural weaponry, they are a primary means of sustenance for the “civilized” Saurians. In the wild they may be found in herds of 5-30 (5d6).

BOBOA SAP

POWERFUL HALLUCINOGEN

DL 2 vs HEALTH

Effects on fail: -1 GRACE, -1 MIGHT, vomiting.

Effects on success: -1 GRACE, -1 MIGHT, and hallucinations often involving LifeShapers.

Duration: 4-6 hours

An ounce of this sap would be worth 2M on the black market back home, given the proper connections.

HUNTING PARTY

NPC

2d6 Saurian Warriors, hunting for game animals. All have identical weapons.

GRACE 1 Claw+1 Weapon+1

TCV 20

WEAPONS (1D6)

- 1 Throwing-Stick
- 2-3 Spear
- 4 Bow & Arrow
- 5-6 Crossbow

ENCOUNTERS

- The warriors are angry; the PCs have given away their position and the prey has fled.
- A group of Saurian warriors is attacked by *HOVORYX*. It will take 1 Frame to reach them.
- (Crisis) Warriors from the city attack the PCs, blaming them as outsiders for bringing trouble upon the temple. They'll try to capture at least one alive, to bring before the *FIRST LIZARD*.
- (Crisis) Warriors from a nearby village attack the PCs, believing them to be some new kind of meat. They'll be happy with just one prisoner.

VILLAGE SHAMAN

NPC

Village Shamans often travel into the wilderness alone, seeking materials for their magic rituals.

GRACE 1 Claw+1 Weapon+1
PSYCHE 2 Magic+1

TCV 35

GM NOTE: In the “Dream World” scenario, the magic of the Saurian shamans is real. When interpreting a sign, the shaman will be correct on a Magic roll vs DL3.

A Dream World shaman may also cause simple magical effects: this is treated as a *Lucid Dreaming* roll.

ENCOUNTERS

- A shaman is seen high in a tree, gathering some *BOBOA SAP* and placing it in a glazed mud jar.
- A shaman is in a trance, sitting inside a hollow tree. In the darkness, he seems to be glowing.
- (Crisis) A shaman awakens from trance, sees the PCs and begins shouting, alerting a nearby group of 1d6 warriors who rush in to attack.

SAURIANS

SOCIETAL VALUES: Sitting in mud, digesting food

SOCIETAL PROBLEMS: Internal differences causing social unrest

TECHNOLOGY: Stone Age; Fire, Wood and Stonework

RESOURCES: Rock, Mud, Plants, Animals, Metals

UNDERSTANDING OF REALITY: Locally limited, but deities are believed to have descended the sky

The natives of Proxima Centauri have the morphology of Galactic Hominids, but with a reptilian appearance and an extended tail. They are known officially as “Saurians” and unofficially as “lizard people”.

CULTURE

Saurian civilization is mainly concered with (a) sitting in mud and (b) building places to sit in mud. The lizard people think slowly and digest slowly, and prefer to do both of these things while mud-bathing. Personal baths are used for daily meditations, and the great public wallow is the hub of social activity.

Their government is essentially theocratic: the shaman or priest caste rules over all resources and labor. The warrior caste enforces the will of the shamans in return for privileges and blessings. Peasants get less time in the public pools than everyone else, and must earn their way by providing food or services to warriors and shamans, but even the roofless huts of the poor have mud-baths in them.

The Saurians use the shells of sea snail as currency.

Herders of *SWAMPGOATS* and traders of various simple goods sometimes roam between villages, plying their stock and spreading the news.

CITY SAURIANS differ from *VILLAGE SAURIANS*, both culturally and physically. The city-born, raised on the waters of the beacon, are larger and more robust.

VILLAGES

Each village is governed by an oligarchy of *VILLAGE SHAMANS*. Their rites involve ecstatic trances, hallucinogenic drugs and visits to the world of the ancestral spirits. These Shamans use *BOBOA SAP* and other local intoxicants in their rituals.

THE CITY

The city religion developed around the “gift from the gods” – a Mk III Amplifying Beacon which was left here over 2,000 years previous by spacefaring earthmen.

While acknowledging the village shamans’ skills at divination, the priests of the city of the beacon hold that their own visions are more accurate, more complete, and carry more political weight than those of their rural counterparts.



SAURIAN NAMES

MALE NAMES

Babon, Dombal, Dopar, Katan, Kezam, Kirdar, Lathas, Lorat, Nogar, Motam, Mobar, Sartan, Somon, Tenek, Toron, Vymtak, Ystharr, Ziton, Zolar

FEMALE NAMES

Ani, Avi, Dala, Dyrli, Eyni, Latra, Lymi, Menra, Milna, Satha, Sitha, Slai, Sysa, Thela, Thera, Thai, Zama, Zini

LOCAL DRAMA

The Saurians are complex enough to have a variety of interpersonal plots going on between them, including both rivalry and trade between City Saurians and the Village Saurians.

To determine a motivation for a Saurian NPC, roll on the *What Does This NPC Want?* Table.

For example: A City Saurian wants to find something, and will help the PCs if they help him obtain his own Maguffin. Maybe it’s his missing *SWAMPGOAT*, whom he suspects has been stolen. Maybe it’s a rare herb that grows up in the hills where the *HOVORYX* hunt their prey...

SAURIAN VILLAGE

LOCATION

ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

Saurian Villages dot the wetlands of the continent, spaced about 100 miles apart in *MARSHLAND* regions. Each village is home to between 20 and 120 (2d6x10) *VILLAGE SAURIANS* and is centered around a large mud wallow which serves as a social hub. Each village possesses its own local resource or technical specialty:

VILLAGE SPECIALITY (1D6)

- 1 pottery or colored dyes
- 2 arrowheads or stone weapons
- 3 local variety of game creature
- 4 plants used for cooking or medicine
- 5 magical crafts or potions
- 6 mystic artifact or oracle

On average, the village lizards are smaller and less robust than their city cousins, who get more regular doses of “magic water”. Village Shamans spend a lot more time combating diseases and parasites – not always successfully. They aren’t jealous of the city lizards, but do seem to take some pleasure in their misfortune. Those urbanites think they’re better than everyone else.

ENCOUNTERS (2D6)

- 2-4 Unusual Feature
- 5-6 Village Saurians
- 7-9 Traveling Trader
- 10 Traveling Shaman
- 11-12 Village attacked by Carnivorous Predator *

VILLAGE SAURIAN

NPC

GRACE 1 Claw+1
One Skill at +1
TCV 20

SOCIAL CASTE (1D6)

- 1-3 Peasant/Herder
- 4-5 Warrior
- 6 Shaman

GEAR (1D6)

Mods: +1 if Warrior Caste

- 1 No Weapon
- 2-3 Throwing-Stick
- 4-5 Spear
- 6 Bow & Arrow
- 7 Crossbow

ENCOUNTERS

- A shaman approaches the PCs and a group of 2d6 lizards forms around them, fascinated by their strangely-shaped bodies and adornments. This could go either way.
- The PCs encounter a trader who deals in the specialty of the village. The trader will be pleased with anything shiny or metallic, especially if it can be used as a weapon.
- A group of elder lizards sits in the wallow, listening to tales of turmoil in the city; one of them heard about it from a passing goat-trader.
- The village is holding some kind of ceremony: the lizards are arranging themselves in a circle around a big pool of mud, each holding a round stone and intoning what sounds like a prayer.
- (Crisis) The PCs are spotted by warriors coming in from an unsuccessful hunt, who mistake them for some new kind of game and attack immediately.
- (Crisis) The village is suddenly attacked by 3d6 *CITY SAURIANS* on a zealous religious rampage, and the PCs are caught in the crossfire.

PREDATOR ATTACK

EVENT

* If the village is attacked by a carnivorous predator, roll 2d6 below to determine the size of the threat:

ANIMAL SIZE (2D6)

- 2-6 10-60 Dog-sized lifeforms
- 7-8 3d6 Human-sized lifeforms
- 9-10 2d6 Horse-sized lifeforms
- 11-12 1d6 Elephant-sized lifeforms

GM NOTE: This roll supersedes the *Animal Size* roll from the *CARNIVOROUS PREDATOR* listing.



SAURIAN CITY

LOCATION

ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

A small city of mud and rock huts sits around the pyramid complex. The city's population is over 600. A special branch of the priesthood serves the temple.

Aside from the randomly-arranged huts and the large pyramid itself, there is little else in town except for the wallows: several large public mud-baths are scattered throughout the area, each holding 2d6 lizard people at all times of day or night. Around the outskirts of the city, large pens tended by peasants and guarded by warriors hold the feeding *SWAMPGOATS*.

When the PCs arrive, the Saurians in the city are feeling serious and uncordial. Differing interpretations of the terrible event – the disruption of the holy waters – have caused bloody arguments between violent factions to arise. They move through the streets in small groups, close and distrustful, sometimes stopping to engage in trade, and often getting into religious arguments that invariably become physical. Warriors roam the streets in pairs and try to keep the violence to a minimum (within honorable parameters).

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2	Unusual Feature
3-7	City Saurians
8-9	Traveling Trader
10-11	1d6 Temple Priests
12	City attacked by Predator *

PREDATOR ATTACK

EVENT

* If the city is attacked by a carnivorous predator, roll 2d6 below to determine the size of the threat:

ANIMAL SIZE (2D6)

2-6	10-60 Dog-sized lifeforms
7-8	3d6 Human-sized lifeforms
9-10	2d6 Horse-sized lifeforms
11-12	1d6 Elephant-sized lifeforms

This roll supersedes the *Animal Size* roll from the *CARNIVOROUS PREDATOR* listing.

CITY SAURIAN

NPC

GRACE 1 Claw+1

One Skill at +1

TCV 20

SOCIAL CASTE (1D6)

1-3	Peasant/Herder
4-5	Warrior
6	Priest

GEAR (1D6)

Mods: +1 if Warrior Caste

1	No Weapon
2	Throwing-Stick
3-4	Spear
5	Bow & Arrow
6-7	Crossbow

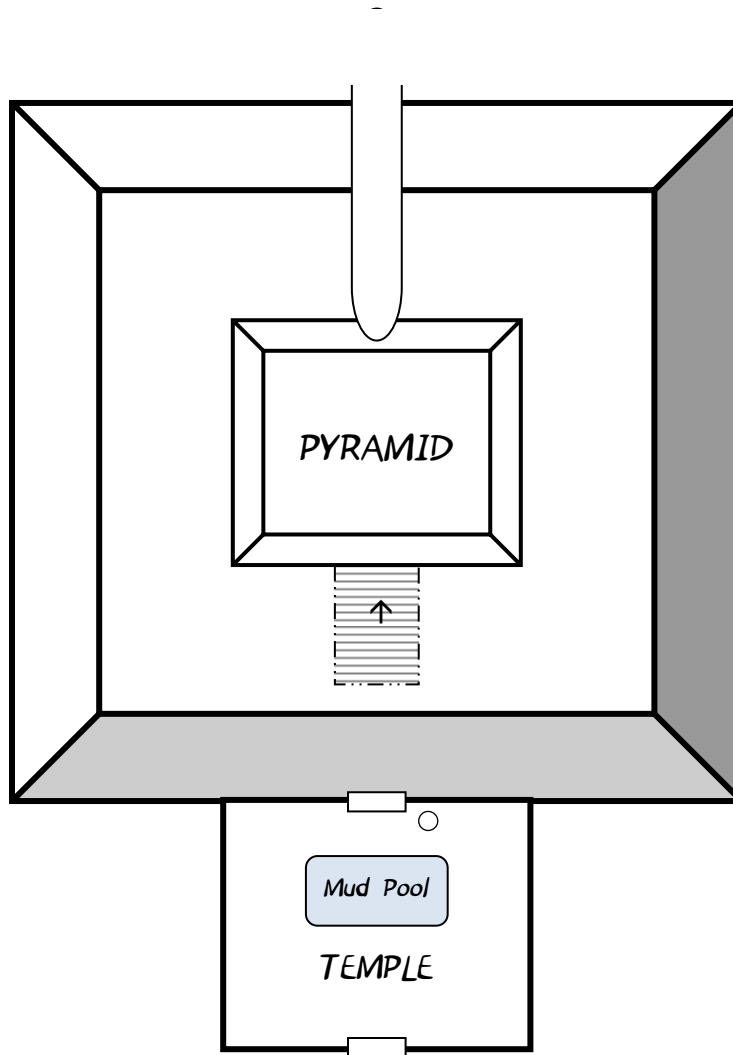
ENCOUNTERS

- A *SAURIAN SHAMAN* from a nearby village is having a religious vision in the street. Others gather to watch.
- A traveling trader eyes the PCs and nods them over. He is looking to sell some weapons he stole from a neighboring village, and will let them go for almost any trade.
- A peasant obstructs the path of some warriors, who mock him and hit his *SWAMPGOATS*.
- A group of City Saurians and a group of Village Saurians are facing off in the street, having a religious argument. It will turn nasty soon, and weapons are beginning to come out. If the PCs speak the language, they'll be questioned for their opinion. Could be awkward.
- (Crisis) A gang of Saurian Warriors has decided that the PCs have something to do with their misfortune. Laying in wait, they spring out from their hiding place and attack.
- (Crisis) A peasant runs into the city pursued by a pack of 6 *HOVORYX*, which attack anyone nearby.



MAP: THE PYRAMID COMPLEX

SCALE: 1" = 20'



THE TEMPLE

LOCATION

Outside the temple, 1d6 *TEMPLE PRIESTS* speak with the citizens in a small plaza. They remain close by the outer door in case they are summoned by the *FIRST LIZARD*, which happens whenever he has a vision that needs to be communicated.

The temple is a large room with an ornately decorated mud pool at one end. Sloshing in the pool is the *FIRST LIZARD*, leader of the *TEMPLE PRIESTS*. Behind the pool, a bolted door leads *INSIDE THE PYRAMID*. A young priest with a spear guards this door while another tends a brazier of hot rocks with charred metal rods. The interior of the temple is warm and humid.

On a *BRAINS* roll vs DL 2, a PC will realize that the rods seem to be of machine manufacture; they're made of iron and too smooth for Saurians to have created them. They may have been taken from inside the beacon itself.

Should any matters of serious consequence need to be discussed, the First Lizard will call for his fellows to join him in council. All meetings, of course, take place in the mud pool, into which the PCs will be invited. Firmly.

Should the PCs succeed in convincing the *FIRST LIZARD* to allow one or more of them inside the pyramid, the group will solemnly say some words over them and lead them to the bolted door. As the door is opened, the *FIRST LIZARD* speaks: "Because the old priests did pry and peer, it was ruled henceforth that only the blind could enter the Holy of Holies." The one with the fire-irons comes forward, ready to burn out the PCs' eyes. Hopefully the PCs can think of something that will dissuade their Saurian hosts, at least for the time being. Remember they're not very bright, these lizards.

It's possible to enter the pyramid from the top, climbing up the chute with a *GRACE* roll vs DL 3, if you can avoid being spotted from the ground before you get in. However, once inside you will need a way to widen the interior water channel.

TEMPLE PRIESTS

NPC

GRACE 1 Knife+1

GEAR:

Temple Knife

TCV 20

The Priests of the Saurian City decorate themselves with shiny shells and painted bones, and lack the mystical rituals and strange powers of their country cousins. Their rites are dictated by the *FIRST LIZARD*, and they are bound by oath under penalty of death to obey the orders of the *FIRST LIZARD*.

ENCOUNTERS

- A Temple Priest is administering a skin of water to a child, brought forward by its parents. The parents look on, doubtful.
- A group of Temple Priests is quietly speaking when they notice the PCs. Roll their reaction.
- A group of Temple Priests is eyeing the top of the pyramid, occasionally pointing up at it. They seem to be discussing the magic waters, or what to do about them.
- (Crisis) A Temple Priest spots the PCs and begins shouting, believing them to be evil beings who had come to him in a dream. In two Frames, 1d6 Warriors will arrive to arrest the PCs and take them to the *FIRST LIZARD*.

FIRST LIZARD

NPC

CHARM 2 Rhetoric+1

GRACE 1 Claw+1

TCV 30

An ancient reptile with cold and fishy eyes who spends most of his time sloshing in the temple's mud pool, he rules because he is slightly smarter (and a decade older) than the other *TEMPLE PRIESTS*. Still, he can easily be impressed by a minor show of technology.

No other priest will make a major decision without consulting him. He takes his council in the mud pool, naturally. All participants are required to get in.

BLIND PRIESTS

NPC

GRACE 1 Claw+0

TCV 0

These three devout priests volunteered to be blinded by red-hot irons, so that they might qualify for the sacred task of guarding the holy of holies *INSIDE THE PYRAMID*.

Their names are *Astan*, *Lashar* and *Zelnn*. They will fight if it becomes necessary, but for obvious reasons they won't do it very well.

INSIDE THE PYRAMID

LOCATION

Three *BLIND PRIESTS* live in here. By their own willing sacrifice they have had their eyes burned out, and are now tenders of the holy pyramid.

The pyramid is mostly empty inside, except for a large shaft rising to the ceiling in the middle of the space, concealing the beacon. The exterior walls are the ugly sides of hundreds of mud bricks. Across from the door you came in, a crumbling stone stairway leads up to another solid metal door, which itself leads into the shaft. Its iron handrail is missing two bars. The door is labeled in ancient and stencilled Terran writing:

MARK III BEACON—AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY

There's no lock on this door. Turn the handle, step inside, and you're in the beacon.

LASER TORCH

MAGUFFIN

Earth Value: 1M

This old-fashioned hand-held tool was designed for cutting and trimming cement or rock surfaces. The powersource beside it has long since died, but an *Elec* or *Engineering* roll vs DL 2 will permit the PCs to use it with any other powersource or battery they carry.

Operating the torch without undue incident requires a *Mech* or *Engineering* roll vs DL 2. The red beam it emits has a range of about eighteen inches. The torch is not designed to be used offensively, it's badly balanced and weighs about eight pounds. But in a pinch, it could be considered a +1 hand weapon.

GETTING OUT

EVENT

The *LASER TORCH* can cut the rock walls surrounding the bolted door, but that would take several hours. The priests on the other side would be ready before the PCs got out.

It's also possible to escape through the water channel. If the *LASER TORCH* is used to broaden or remove the cement pipe, the PCs can climb up into the water channel to emerge on top of the structure. Using the torch to broaden the passage wide enough for a human body to pass through will require a *Mech* or *Engineering* roll vs DL 2, and will take one hour.

THE BEACON

LOCATION

The beacon is an old-fashioned model, powered by a fission reactor with a precipitating field and a basin on top to catch the water, which was also used to cool the reactor. Excess water was pumped up through a short cement pipe six inches in diameter, and out into a half-pipe cement channel running down the back of the pyramid on the outside. Directly beneath the reactor unit, an emergency dumphole six inches in diameter goes straight down for more than a mile.

In the far corner of the small room is a Mech Pro Kit, sealed and apparently untouched, and a *LASER TORCH* for rock and cement cutting.

So what happened? Apparently, one of the priests opened up the circuit box and polished the switches inside. While doing this he inadvertently threw a switch, closing the water feeder valve that caused all the trouble. This valve is supposed to be shut off only after the pile is damped. With the water cut off and the pile in operation, the system overheated and the failsafe system dumped the pile down the dumphole. No more water = no more power = no more signal.

The water can be started again easily enough, but there's no fuel left in the reactor.

It would be easier to install a new powersource. Many modern appliances include microfusion reactors that could power this puny beacon for another 2,000 years. Your Automated Survival Suit, for instance.

LOCKED INSIDE

EVENT

If one or more of the PCs succeed in getting the waters flowing again, the *FIRST LIZARD* will decide to quietly lock them in (in case they're needed again at some point in the future).

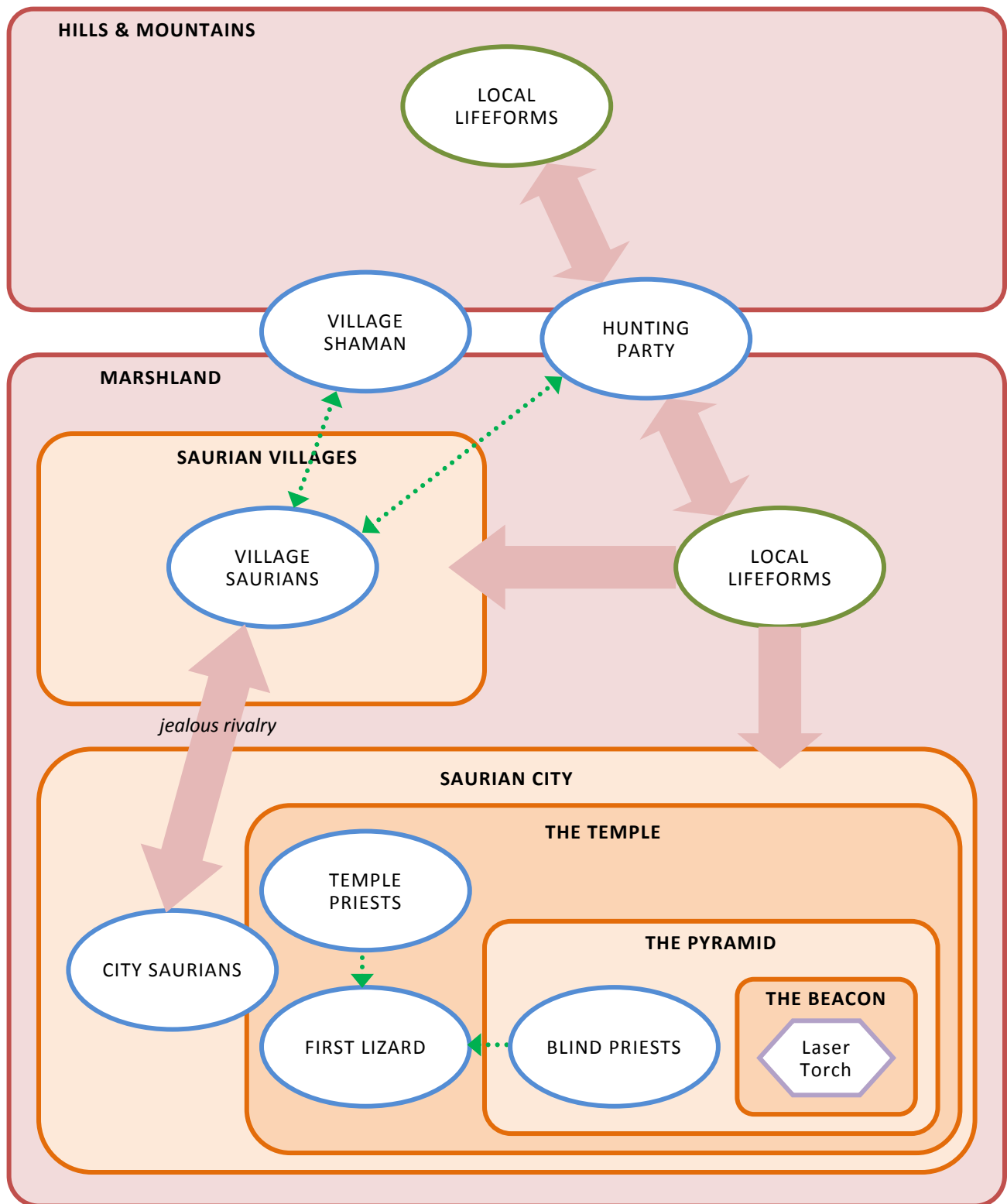
He will communicate this to his underlings. Unless something happens to prevent it, they will immediately go bolt and bar the door to the pyramid.

After a PC has fixed the waters, they will find upon trying to leave, that the door to the temple has been bolted and barred from the outside.

One of the *BLIND PRIESTS* will say: "It has been decided that you shall remain here forever and tend the Holy Waters. We will stay with you and serve your every need" (or words to that effect).

Bashing the door down is foolish, and literally ABSURD (DL9). It's an inch of steel plate and it can withstand 2 structural points of damage (that's 40 regular hits).

BUSTED BEACON



THE REPAIRMAN

by Harry Harrison

Illustrated by Frank Kramer

Being an interstellar trouble shooter wouldn't be so bad ... if I could shoot the trouble!

The Old Man had that look of intense glee on his face that meant someone was in for a very rough time. Since we were alone, it took no great feat of intelligence to figure it would be me. I talked first, bold attack being the best defense and so forth.

"I quit. Don't bother telling me what dirty job you have cooked up, because I have already quit and you do not want to reveal company secrets to me."

The grin was even wider now and he actually chortled as he thumbed a button on his console. A thick legal document slid out of the delivery slot onto his desk.

"This is your contract," he said. "It tells how and when you will work. A steel-and-vanadium-bound contract that you couldn't crack with a molecular disruptor."

I leaned out quickly, grabbed it and threw it into the air with a single motion. Before it could fall, I had my Solar out and, with a wide-angle shot, burned the contract to ashes.

The Old Man pressed the button again and another contract slid out on his desk. If possible, the smile was still wider now.

"I should have said a *duplicate* of your contract—like this one here." He made a quick note on his secretary plate. "I have deducted 13 credits from your salary for the cost of the duplicate—as well as a 100-credit fine for firing a Solar inside a building."

I slumped, defeated, waiting for the blow to land. The Old Man fondled my contract.

"According to this document, you can't quit. Ever. Therefore I have a little job I know you'll enjoy. Repair job. The Centauri beacon has shut down. It's a Mark III beacon...."

"*What* kind of beacon?" I asked him. I have repaired hyperspace beacons from one arm of the Galaxy to the other and was sure I had worked on every type or model made. But I had never heard of this kind.

"Mark III," the Old Man repeated, practically chortling. "I never heard of it either until Records dug up the specs. They found them buried in the back of their oldest warehouse. This was the earliest type of beacon ever built—by Earth, no less. Considering its location on one of

the Proxima Centauri planets, it might very well be the first beacon."

■

I looked at the blueprints he handed me and felt my eyes glaze with horror. "It's a monstrosity! It looks more like a distillery than a beacon—must be at least a few hundred meters high. I'm a repairman, not an archeologist. This pile of junk is over 2000 years old. Just forget about it and build a new one."

The Old Man leaned over his desk, breathing into my face. "It would take a year to install a new beacon—besides being too expensive—and this relic is on one of the main routes. We have ships making fifteen-light-year detours now."

He leaned back, wiped his hands on his handkerchief and gave me Lecture Forty-four on Company Duty and My Troubles.

"This department is officially called Maintenance and Repair, when it really should be called trouble-shooting. Hyperspace beacons are made to last forever—or damn close to it. When one of them breaks down, it is *never* an accident, and repairing the thing is never a matter of just plugging in a new part."

He was telling *me*—the guy who did the job while he sat back on his fat paycheck in an air-conditioned office.

He rambled on. "How I wish that were all it took! I would have a fleet of parts ships and junior mechanics to install them. But its not like that at all. I have a fleet of expensive ships that are equipped to do almost anything—manned by a bunch of irresponsibles like *you*."

I nodded moodily at his pointing finger.

"How I wish I could fire you all! Combination space-jockeys, mechanics, engineers, soldiers, con-men and anything else it takes to do the repairs. I have to browbeat, bribe, blackmail and bulldoze you thugs into doing a simple job. If you think you're fed up, just think how I feel. But the ships must go through! The beacons must operate!"

I recognized this deathless line as the curtain speech and crawled to my feet. He threw the Mark III file at me and went back to scratching in his papers. Just as I reached the door, he looked up and impaled me on his finger again.

"And don't get any fancy ideas about jumping your contract. We can attach that bank account of yours on Algol II long before you could draw the money out."

I smiled, a little weakly, I'm afraid, as if I had never meant to keep that account a secret. His spies were getting more efficient every day. Walking down the hall, I tried to figure a way to transfer the money without his catching on—and knew at the same time he was figuring a way to outfigure me.

It was all very depressing, so I stopped for a drink, then went on to the spaceport.

■

By the time the ship was serviced, I had a course charted. The nearest beacon to the broken-down Proxima Centauri Beacon was on one of the planets of Beta Circinus and I headed there first, a short trip of only about nine days in hyperspace.

To understand the importance of the beacons, you have to understand hyperspace. Not that many people do, but it is easy enough to understand that in this *non*-space the regular rules don't apply. Speed and measurements are a matter of relationship, not constant facts like the fixed universe.

The first ships to enter hyperspace had no place to go—and no way to even tell if they had moved. The beacons solved that problem and opened the entire universe. They are built on planets and generate tremendous amounts of power. This power is turned into radiation that is punched through into hyperspace. Every beacon has a code signal as part of its radiation and represents a measurable point in hyperspace. Triangulation and quadrature of the beacons works for navigation—only it follows its own rules. The rules are complex and variable, but they are still rules that a navigator can follow.

For a hyperspace jump, you need at least four beacons for an accurate fix. For long jumps, navigators use as many as seven or eight. So every beacon is important and every one has to keep operating. That is where I and the other trouble-shooters came in.

We travel in well-stocked ships that carry a little bit of everything; only one man to a ship because that is all it takes to operate the overly efficient repair machinery. Due to the very nature of our job, we spend most of our time just rocketing through normal space. After all, when a beacon breaks down, how do you find it?

Not through hyperspace. All you can do is approach as close as you can by using other beacons, then finish the trip in normal space. This can take months, and often does.

This job didn't turn out to be quite that bad. I zeroed on the Beta Circinus beacon and ran a complicated eight-point problem through the navigator, using every beacon I could get an accurate fix on. The computer gave me a course with an estimated point-of-arrival as well as a built-in safety factor I never could eliminate from the machine.

I would much rather take a chance of breaking through near some star than spend time just barreling through normal space, but apparently Tech knows this, too. They had a safety factor built into the computer so you couldn't end up inside a star no matter how hard you tried. I'm sure there was no humaneness in this decision. They just didn't want to lose the ship.

■

It was a twenty-hour jump, ship's time, and I came through in the middle of nowhere. The robot analyzer chuckled to itself and scanned all the stars, comparing them to the spectra of Proxima Centauri. It finally rang a bell and blinked a light. I peeped through the eyepiece.

A fast reading with the photocell gave me the apparent magnitude and a comparison with its absolute magnitude showed its distance. Not as bad as I had thought—a six-week run, give or take a few days. After feeding a course tape into the robot pilot, I strapped into the acceleration tank and went to sleep.

The time went fast. I rebuilt my camera for about the twentieth time and just about finished a correspondence course in nucleonics. Most repairmen take these courses. Besides their always coming in handy, the company grades your pay by the number of specialties you can handle. All this, with some oil painting and free-fall workouts in the gym, passed the time. I was asleep when the alarm went off that announced planetary distance.

Planet two, where the beacon was situated according to the old charts, was a mushy-looking, wet kind of globe. I tried to make sense out of the ancient directions and finally located the right area. Staying outside the atmosphere, I sent a flying eye down to look things over. In this business, you learn early when and where to risk your own skin. The eye would be good enough for the preliminary survey.

The old boys had enough brains to choose a traceable site for the beacon, equidistant on a line between two of the most prominent mountain peaks. I located the peaks easily enough and started the eye out from the first peak and kept it on a course directly toward the second. There was a nose and tail radar in the eye and I fed their signals into a scope as an amplitude curve. When the two peaks coincided, I spun the eye controls and dived the thing down.

I cut out the radar and cut in the nose orthicon and sat back to watch the beacon appear on the screen.

The image blinked, focused—and a great damn pyramid swam into view. I cursed and wheeled the eye in circles, scanning the surrounding country. It was flat, marshy bottom land without a bump. The only thing in a ten-mile circle was this pyramid—and that definitely wasn't my beacon.

Or wasn't it?

I dived the eye lower. The pyramid was a crude-looking thing of undressed stone, without carvings or decorations. There was a shimmer of light from the top and I took a closer look at it. On the peak of the pyramid was a hollow basin filled with water. When I saw that, something clicked in my mind.

■



Locking the eye in a circular course, I dug through the Mark III plans—and there it was. The beacon had a precipitating field and a basin on top of it for water; this was used to cool the reactor that powered the monstrosity. If the water was still there, the beacon was still there—inside the pyramid. The natives, who, of course, weren't even mentioned by the idiots who constructed the thing, had built a nice heavy, thick stone pyramid around the beacon.

I took another look at the screen and realized that I had locked the eye into a circular orbit about twenty feet above the pyramid. The summit of the stone pile was now covered with lizards of some type, apparently the local life-form. They had what looked like throwing sticks and arbalasts and were trying to shoot down the eye, a cloud of arrows and rocks flying in every direction.

I pulled the eye straight up and away and threw in the control circuit that would return it automatically to the ship.

Then I went to the galley for a long, strong drink. My beacon was not only locked inside a mountain of handmade stone, but I had managed to irritate the things who had built the pyramid. A great beginning for a job and one clearly designed to drive a stronger man than me to the bottle.

Normally, a repairman stays away from native cultures. They are poison. Anthropologists may not mind being dissected for their science, but a repairman wants to make

no sacrifices of any kind for his job. For this reason, most beacons are built on uninhabited planets. If a beacon *has* to go on a planet with a culture, it is usually built in some inaccessible place.

Why this beacon had been built within reach of the local claws, I had yet to find out. But that would come in time. The first thing to do was make contact. To make contact, you have to know the local language.

And, for *that*, I had long before worked out a system that was fool-proof.

I had a pryeye of my own construction. It looked like a piece of rock about a foot long. Once on the ground, it would never be noticed, though it was a little disconcerting to see it float by. I located a lizard town about a thousand kilometers from the pyramid and dropped the eye. It swished down and landed at night in the bank of the local mud wallow. This was a favorite spot that drew a good crowd during the day. In the morning, when the first wallowers arrived, I flipped on the recorder.

After about five of the local days, I had a sea of native conversation in the memory bank of the machine translator and had tagged a few expressions. This is fairly easy to do when you have a machine memory to work with. One of the lizards gargled at another one and the second one turned around. I tagged this expression with the phrase, "Hey, George!" and waited my chance to use it. Later the same day, I caught one of them alone and shouted "Hey, George!" at him. It gurgled out through the speaker in the local tongue and he turned around.

When you get enough reference phrases like this in the memory bank, the MT brain takes over and starts filling in the missing pieces. As soon as the MT could give a running translation of any conversation it heard, I figured it was time to make a contact.

■

I found him easily enough. He was the Centaurian version of a goat-boy—he herded a particularly loathsome form of local life in the swamps outside the town. I had one of the working eyes dig a cave in an outcropping of rock and wait for him.

When he passed next day, I whispered into the mike: "Welcome, O Goat-boy Grandson! This is your grandfather's spirit speaking from paradise." This fitted in with what I could make out of the local religion.

Goat-boy stopped as if he'd been shot. Before he could move, I pushed a switch and a handful of the local currency, wampum-type shells, rolled out of the cave and landed at his feet.

"Here is some money from paradise, because you have been a good boy." Not really from paradise—I had lifted it from the treasury the night before. "Come back tomorrow and we will talk some more," I called after the fleeing

figure. I was pleased to notice that he took the cash before taking off.

After that, Grandpa in paradise had many heart-to-heart talks with Grandson, who found the heavenly loot more than he could resist. Grandpa had been out of touch with things since his death and Goat-boy happily filled him in.

I learned all I needed to know of the history, past and recent, and it wasn't nice.

In addition to the pyramid being around the beacon, there was a nice little religious war going on around the pyramid.

It all began with the land bridge. Apparently the local lizards had been living in the swamps when the beacon was built, but the builders didn't think much of them. They were a low type and confined to a distant continent. The idea that the race would develop and might reach *this* continent never occurred to the beacon mechanics. Which is, of course, what happened.

A little geological turnover, a swampy land bridge formed in the right spot, and the lizards began to wander up beacon valley. And found religion. A shiny metal temple out of which poured a constant stream of magic water—the reactor-cooling water pumped down from the atmosphere condenser on the roof. The radioactivity in the water didn't hurt the natives. It caused mutations that bred true.

A city was built around the temple and, through the centuries, the pyramid was put up around the beacon. A special branch of the priesthood served the temple. All went well until one of the priests violated the temple and destroyed the holy waters. There had been revolt, strife, murder and destruction since then. But still the holy waters would not flow. Now armed mobs fought around the temple each day and a new band of priests guarded the sacred fount.

And I had to walk into the middle of that mess and repair the thing.

It would have been easy enough if we were allowed a little mayhem. I could have had a lizard fry, fixed the beacon and taken off. Only "native life-forms" were quite well protected. There were spy cells on my ship, all of which I hadn't found, that would cheerfully rat on me when I got back.

Diplomacy was called for. I sighed and dragged out the plastiflesh equipment.

■

Working from 3D snaps of Grandson, I modeled a passable reptile head over my own features. It was a little short in the jaw, me not having one of their toothy mandibles, but that was all right. I didn't have to look *exactly* like them, just something close, to soothe the native mind. It's logical. If I were an ignorant aborigine of Earth and I ran into a Spican, who looks like a two-foot gob of dried shellac, I would immediately leave the scene. However, if the Spican was

wearing a suit of plastiflesh that looked remotely humanoid, I would at least stay and talk to him. This was what I was aiming to do with the Centaurians.

When the head was done, I peeled it off and attached it to an attractive suit of green plastic, complete with tail. I was really glad they had tails. The lizards didn't wear clothes and I wanted to take along a lot of electronic equipment. I built the tail over a metal frame that anchored around my waist. Then I filled the frame with all the equipment I would need and began to wire the suit.

When it was done, I tried it on in front of a full-length mirror. It was horrible but effective. The tail dragged me down in the rear and gave me a duck-waddle, but that only helped the resemblance.

That night I took the ship down into the hills nearest the pyramid, an out-of-the-way dry spot where the amphibious natives would never go. A little before dawn, the eye hooked onto my shoulders and we sailed straight up. We hovered above the temple at about 2,000 meters, until it was light, then dropped straight down.

It must have been a grand sight. The eye was camouflaged to look like a flying lizard, sort of a cardboard pterodactyl, and the slowly flapping wings obviously had nothing to do with our flight. But it was impressive enough for the natives. The first one that spotted me screamed and dropped over on his back. The others came running. They milled and mobbed and piled on top of one another, and by that time I had landed in the plaza fronting the temple. The priesthood arrived.

I folded my arms in a regal stance. "Greetings, O noble servers of the Great God," I said. Of course I didn't say it out loud, just whispered loud enough for the throat mike to catch. This was radioed back to the MT and the translation shot back to a speaker in my jaws.

The natives chomped and rattled and the translation rolled out almost instantly. I had the volume turned up and the whole square echoed.

Some of the more credulous natives prostrated themselves and others fled screaming. One doubtful type raised a spear, but no one else tried that after the pterodactyl-eye picked him up and dropped him in the swamp. The priests were a hard-headed lot and weren't buying any lizards in a poke; they just stood and muttered. I had to take the offensive again.

"Begone, O faithful steed," I said to the eye, and pressed the control in my palm at the same time.

It took off straight up a bit faster than I wanted; little pieces of wind-torn plastic rained down. While the crowd was ogling this ascent, I walked through the temple doors.

"I would talk with you, O noble priests," I said.

Before they could think up a good answer, I was inside.

■

The temple was a small one built against the base of the pyramid. I hoped I wasn't breaking too many taboos by going in. I wasn't stopped, so it looked all right. The temple was a single room with a murky-looking pool at one end. Sloshing in the pool was an ancient reptile who clearly was one of the leaders. I waddled toward him and he gave me a cold and fishy eye, then growled something.

The MT whispered into my ear, "Just what in the name of the thirteenth sin are you and what are you doing here?"

I drew up my scaly figure in a noble gesture and pointed toward the ceiling. "I come from your ancestors to help you. I am here to restore the Holy Waters."

This raised a buzz of conversation behind me, but got no rise out of the chief. He sank slowly into the water until only his eyes were showing. I could almost hear the wheels turning behind that moss-covered forehead. Then he lunged up and pointed a dripping finger at me.

"You are a liar! You are no ancestor of ours! We will—"

"Stop!" I thundered before he got so far in that he couldn't back out. "I said your ancestors sent me as emissary—I am not one of your ancestors. Do not try to harm me or the wrath of those who have Passed On will turn against you."

When I said this, I turned to jab a claw at the other priests, using the motion to cover my flicking a coin grenade toward them. It blew a nice hole in the floor with a great show of noise and smoke.

The First Lizard knew I was talking sense then and immediately called a meeting of the shamans. It, of course, took place in the public bathtub and I had to join them there. We jawed and gurgled for about an hour and settled all the major points.

I found out that they were new priests; the previous ones had all been boiled for letting the Holy Waters cease. They found out I was there only to help them restore the flow of the waters. They bought this, tentatively, and we all heaved out of the tub and trickled muddy paths across the floor. There was a bolted and guarded door that led into the pyramid proper. While it was being opened, the First Lizard turned to me.

"Undoubtedly you know of the rule," he said. "Because the old priests did pry and peer, it was ruled henceforth that only the blind could enter the Holy of Holies." I'd swear he was smiling, if thirty teeth peeking out of what looked like a crack in an old suitcase can be called smiling.

He was also signaling to him an underpriest who carried a brazier of charcoal complete with red-hot irons. All I could do was stand and watch as he stirred up the coals, pulled out the ruddiest iron and turned toward me. He was just drawing a bead on my right eyeball when my brain got back in gear.

"Of course," I said, "blinding is only right. But in my case you will have to blind me before I *leave* the Holy of Holies, not now. I need my eyes to see and mend the Fount of Holy Waters. Once the waters flow again, I will laugh as I hurl myself on the burning iron."

■

He took a good thirty seconds to think it over and had to agree with me. The local torturer sniffled a bit and threw a little more charcoal on the fire. The gate crashed open and I stalked through; then it banged to behind me and I was alone in the dark.

But not for long—there was a shuffling nearby and I took a chance and turned on my flash. Three priests were groping toward me, their eye-sockets red pits of burned flesh. They knew what I wanted and led the way without a word.

A crumbling and cracked stone stairway brought us up to a solid metal doorway labeled in archaic script *MARK III BEACON—AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY*. The trusting builders counted on the sign to do the whole job, for there wasn't a trace of a lock on the door. One lizard merely turned the handle and we were inside the beacon.

I unzipped the front of my camouflage suit and pulled out the blueprints. With the faithful priests stumbling after me, I located the control room and turned on the lights. There was a residue of charge in the emergency batteries, just enough to give a dim light. The meters and indicators looked to be in good shape; if anything, unexpectedly bright from constant polishing.

I checked the readings carefully and found just what I had suspected. One of the eager lizards had managed to open a circuit box and had polished the switches inside. While doing this, he had thrown one of the switches and that had caused the trouble.

■

Rather, that had *started* the trouble. It wasn't going to be ended by just reversing the water-valve switch. This valve was supposed to be used only for repairs, after the pile was damped. When the water was cut off with the pile in operation, it had started to overheat and the automatic safeties had dumped the charge down the pit.

I could start the water again easily enough, but there was no fuel left in the reactor.

I wasn't going to play with the fuel problem at all. It would be far easier to install a new power plant. I had one in the ship that was about a tenth the size of the ancient bucket of bolts and produced at least four times the power. Before I sent for it, I checked over the rest of the beacon. In 2000 years, there should be *some* sign of wear.

The old boys had built well, I'll give them credit for that. Ninety per cent of the machinery had no moving parts and had suffered no wear whatever. Other parts they had

beefed up, figuring they would wear, but slowly. The water-fed pipe from the roof, for example. The pipe walls were at least three meters thick—and the pipe opening itself no bigger than my head. There were some things I could do, though, and I made a list of parts.

The parts, the new power plant and a few other odds and ends were chuted into a neat pile on the ship. I checked all the parts by screen before they were loaded in a metal crate. In the darkest hour before dawn, the heavy-duty eye dropped the crate outside the temple and darted away without being seen.

I watched the priests through the pryeye while they tried to open it. When they had given up, I boomed orders at them through a speaker in the crate. They spent most of the day sweating the heavy box up through the narrow temple stairs and I enjoyed a good sleep. It was resting inside the beacon door when I woke up.

■

The repairs didn't take long, though there was plenty of groaning from the blind lizards when they heard me ripping the wall open to get at the power leads. I even hooked a gadget to the water pipe so their Holy Waters would have the usual refreshing radioactivity when they started flowing again. The moment this was all finished, I did the job they were waiting for.

I threw the switch that started the water flowing again.

There were a few minutes while the water began to gurgle down through the dry pipe. Then a roar came from outside the pyramid that must have shaken its stone walls. Shaking my hands once over my head, I went down for the eye-burning ceremony.

The blind lizards were waiting for me by the door and looked even unhappier than usual. When I tried the door, I found out why—it was bolted and barred from the other side.

"It has been decided," a lizard said, "that you shall remain here forever and tend the Holy Waters. We will stay with you and serve your every need."

A delightful prospect, eternity spent in a locked beacon with three blind lizards. In spite of their hospitality, I couldn't accept.

"What—you dare interfere with the messenger of your ancestors!" I had the speaker on full volume and the vibration almost shook my head off.

The lizards cringed and I set my Solar for a narrow beam and ran it around the door jamb. There was a great crunching and banging from the junk piled against it, and then the door swung free. I threw it open. Before they could protest, I had pushed the priests out through it.

The rest of their clan showed up at the foot of the stairs and made a great ruckus while I finished welding the door shut.

Running through the crowd, I faced up to the First Lizard in his tub. He sank slowly beneath the surface.

"What lack of courtesy!" I shouted. He made little bubbles in the water. "The ancestors are annoyed and have decided to forbid entrance to the Inner Temple forever; though, out of kindness, they will let the waters flow. Now I must return—on with the ceremony!"

The torture-master was too frightened to move, so I grabbed out his hot iron. A touch on the side of my face dropped a steel plate over my eyes, under the plastiskin. Then I jammed the iron hard into my phony eye-sockets and the plastic gave off an authentic odor.

A cry went up from the crowd as I dropped the iron and staggered in blind circles. I must admit it went off pretty well.

■

Before they could get any more bright ideas, I threw the switch and my plastic pterodactyl sailed in through the door. I couldn't see it, of course, but I knew it had arrived when the grapples in the claws latched onto the steel plates on my shoulders.

I had got turned around after the eye-burning and my flying beast hooked onto me backward. I had meant to sail out bravely, blind eyes facing into the sunset; instead, I faced the crowd as I soared away, so I made the most of a bad situation and threw them a snappy military salute. Then I was out in the fresh air and away.

When I lifted the plate and poked holes in the seared plastic, I could see the pyramid growing smaller behind me, water gushing out of the base and a happy crowd of reptiles sporting in its radioactive rush. I counted off on my talons to see if I had forgotten anything.

One: The beacon was repaired.

Two: The door was sealed, so there should be no more sabotage, accidental or deliberate.

Three: The priests should be satisfied. The water was running again, my eyes had been duly burned out, and they were back in business. Which added up to—

Four: The fact that they would probably let another repairman in, under the same conditions, if the beacon conked out again. At least I had done nothing, like butchering a few of them, that would make them antagonistic toward future ancestral messengers.

I stripped off my tattered lizard suit back in the ship, very glad that it would be some other repairman who'd get the job.

★

PURPLE JUNGLES OF ZEUD

Based on "The World Behind the Moon"
by Paul Ernst



OBSTACLES

Dangerous Environment - Hexcrawl
Dangerous Environment - Lavalands
Dangerous Environment - Pit Traps
Dangerous Environment - Bacterial Infection
Monster/Enemy - Zeudians
Wildlife/Animals - Furhides
Wildlife/Animals - Scaly Crawlers
Wildlife/Animals - Ten-Legged Lizards
Wildlife/Animals - Unizelles
Wildlife/Animals - Longnecks
Wildlife/Animals - Slugbeasts
Wildlife/Animals - Trapper Plants
Wildlife/Animals - Mud-Crawlers

COMPLICATIONS

Scant Intel

PERKS

10 MV

MAGUFFINS

Naming Rights (Dream World scenario)
Data/Report on Zeud
Zeudian Lifeforms
Live Trapper Plant (5M)

BACKSTORY

The purple planet of Zeud is a small world, not even the size of the Earth's moon, with very low gravity and a wide variety of strange lifeforms.

Very little is known about this bizarre world (if anything, depending on the scenario selected). Least understood of all are its mysterious sentient inhabitants the Zeudians, who are said by some to resemble reptiles and by others apes, and who stay well-hidden in the miasmatic mists, deep in the dank jungles of the purple planet.

In this adventure, the PCs may have a chance to add a few details to that description.

GM NOTE: The Zeudians will endeavor to remain hidden at all times throughout the course of the adventure, only allowing themselves to be seen for brief glimpses, at remote distances. This should increase the tension nicely, but the real reason is that the Zeudians are both timid and fearful; they will make no efforts to contact or confront the PCs directly, until they have managed to capture at least one of them in one of their Pit Traps.

If the PCs successfully avoid the Pit Traps, they may also manage to avoid meeting the Zeudians altogether – until the final encounter, when they return to their ship to find it surrounded by them!

THE WORLD BEHIND THE MOON

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Highly Stable (4)

If the PCs' calculations and the scoutbot data they've accessed via terminals at Tracy Island are correct, there should be a Dream World located *directly behind the moon*, along a vector that isn't yet part of the Big Model. It looks like they've isolated that vector.

They also know that exploring this Node and coming back with enough data for naming rights could be their big claim to fame – if no one else gets there first!

GM NOTE: The PCs may or may not know that the planet Zeud is based on a story called "The World Behind the Moon" by Paul Ernst. Perhaps this is something they find out later, after they return.

HYPERSURVIVE!

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration
NODE TYPE: Known Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL3)
PAY: 5M ea (+ 3M ea for winners)

The PCs are cast to star in an upcoming episode of an interdimensional reality show called *HyperSurvive!* The premise is simple: every episode a host, a drone-cam crew and a team of DayTrippers are dropped off in some incredibly hostile place, and then the crew films while the 'trippers do whatever it takes to get to the *Basecamp* (located atop *Park's Peak* for this episode). It's got everything a good show needs: exotic locations, scary monsters, violence, gore, even the occasional on-screen death. Weapons and insurance waivers are sponsor-provided. The host and crew, of course, remain safely strapped to hoverdolleys and sleep soundly in antigrav vehicles, located off camera.

In addition to the money, the PCs will gain +1 Fame when the show airs, and if all goes well, they may be approached about doing additional episodes.

THE LONGNECK IS MINE

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Acquisition
NODE TYPE: Known Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL3)
PAY: 10M ea

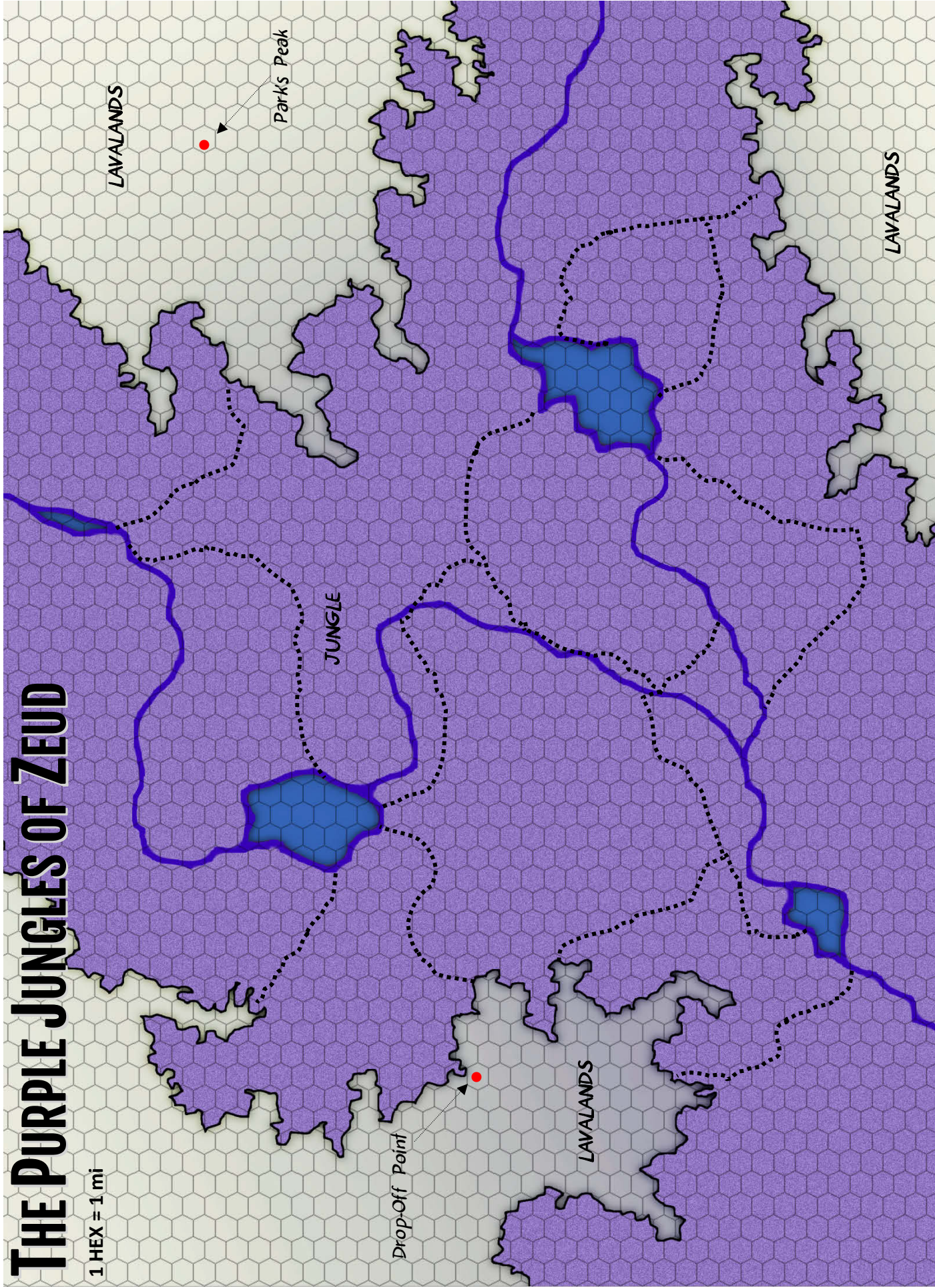
The client is one Harkonnen Roth, CEO of the Empire Waste Displacement Company. He's an aggressive and competitive testosterone with a room full of animal heads from several dimensional vectors, who prefers to be called by his last name. Roth recently learned about the gigantic predator known as a *Longneck*, found on the planet *Zeud*; it's the largest predator he's ever seen (i.e., the largest ever shown in the pricey holographic edits of the *HyperSurvive!* show favored by upscale media consumers).

The Longneck has become his obsession. He has studied every line of the (few) notes brought back by the previous expedition (Wichter & Joyce, 2109), and he believes that with a capable backup team, he can bag one of these ferocious carnivores.

His plan is to mount the Longneck's head facing the front doors of his mansion from across the grand foyer. He's got the money and he's got the guns. Have you got the non-gender-specific gonads?

THE PURPLE JUNGLES OF ZEUD

1 HEX = 1 mi



LAVALANDS

Parks Peak

LAVALANDS

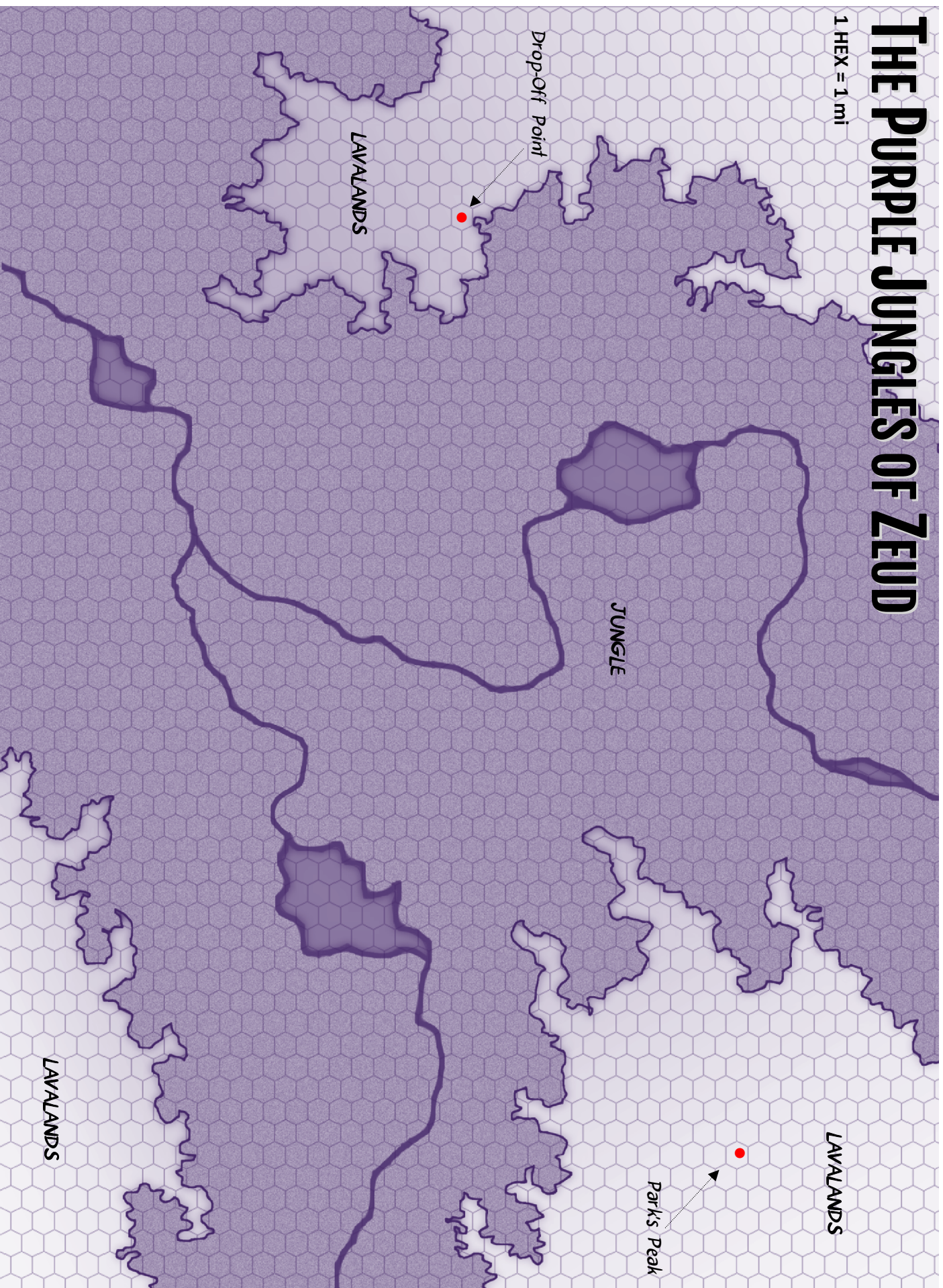
JUNGLE

LAVALANDS

Drop-Off Point

THE PURPLE JUNGLES OF ZEUD

1 HEX = 1 mi



ZEUD

PLANET

GRAVITY: 0.7 G
ATMOSPHERE: Nitrogen/High Oxygen
PRESSURE: 1.1 Earth atmospheres
DAY: 15.8 Earth days
YEAR: 1 Earth year
WATER: Roughly 80% of surface
CLIMATE: Greenhouse
PRECIPITATION: Very Frequent (DL 5)
BIOSPHERE: Sentient lifeforms

The planet Zeud might be called "The Purple Planet". Its is covered in most places by deep indigo waters. The landmasses are densely forested, with massive purple trees forming nearly impenetrable canopies of thick violet leaves. Beneath those canopies, the bizarre lifeforms of Zeud hunt, kill and die.

The climate is tropically hot and the atmosphere is dense and humid, but with more oxygen than Earth. Due to the enhanced oxygen intake, **Earthlings get a +1 on all GRACE and MIGHT actions while on Zeud.**

From the spot where the PCs first arrive on planet, they may choose to move through the surrounding *JUNGLE* or into the adjacent *LAVALANDS*.

PERCEPTIONS

FROM ORBIT

- Here and there throughout the forests are lakes of black fluid.
- There are also patches where lines of grey rocks spread out like the skeletons of gigantic monsters.
- Everything is covered by a miasmic mist.
- Not many clearings in which to land.

ON THE GROUND

- There's more oxygen here than on Earth. It makes you feel invigorated.
- Gravity here is even lower than on Earth's moon; you can jump almost twice as far as your record on Earth.

ZEUDIANS

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Bite+1 InjectVenom+2
MIGHT 3 Wrestle+1
TCV 70

Zeudians are cold-blooded reptilian ape-men (strange as that sounds). Ten feet tall and hairless, they have faintly iridescent purplish hides and thick, cylindrical torsos. Their broad necks are only a little thinner than their bodies. Atop the massive neck is a bony, ugly head, split clear across by lipless jaws. They have no real noses, just two slanted holes, and above these are pale, pupil-less eyes that show no expression. Their arms are short and thick, ending in bifurcated lumps of rough flesh, like swollen hands encased in mittens. Their legs are grotesquely short, and their feet are shapeless flaps. They hiss when they attack, and bare their thick fangs. Their bite injects *ZEUDIAN VENOM*.

Fearsome as they may be, they are also terribly primitive, afraid of new things, and frightened by technology they cannot understand. A simple act, such as taking off your glasses or flicking a lighter can send them into fits of terror; they can only conceive of such things as being the most terrible kind of magic.

SOCIETY

SOCIETAL VALUES: Food, Feeding, Catching Food

SOCIETAL PROBLEMS: Food tries to get away

TECHNOLOGY: Stone-Age

RESOURCES: Stone, wood, animal and plant parts

UNDERSTANDING OF REALITY: Locally limited

The Zeudians are a race of devolved predatorial hominds descended from the Galactic Hominid line. Dysgenic mutations took hold in their gene pool long ago, causing physical and mental defects to become norms. To this day the pit trap remains their most advanced technological achievement.

TOXIN: ZEUDIAN VENOM

POWERFUL TOXIN

DL 5 vs HEALTH

On Failure: Subject loses muscle control for 1 hour. For the next hour GRACE rolls are at -6 to -0 (decreasing by 1 every ten minutes). Standing requires a GRACE roll vs DL 1. Speaking requires a GRACE roll vs DL 4.

On Severe Failure (miss by more than 1): As above plus Subject is completely unconscious for the first 2 hours.

LAVALANDS

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Wetlands/Plain
CONDITION: Burned/Regrowing
TERRAIN: Rough, Jumbled
WEATHER: Cloudy
BIODIVERSITY: Low and Stable
DOMINANT COLORS: Tan, Brown, Grey, Violet
RESOURCES: Igneous rock, Animal & plant parts
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Sentient Lifeforms
ENCOUNTER DL: Likely (7)

Scattered throughout the forest are broad regions of burnt and regrowing lavaland; barren, rocky patches where rough grey igneous rocks – the long drippings of ancient lava flows – spread out like the splayed fingers of dead hands on the violet plain.

The rocky land, while difficult to navigate with speed, provides an alternative to the dense *JUNGLE*.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-4	Unusual Feature
5	Furhides
6	Scaly Crawlers
7	Unizelles
8-9	Sinkhole
10	Geiser
11-12	Ten-Legged Lizard

PERCEPTIONS

- The ground is immensely hot in places; lava flows not far below the surface.
- A herd of *FURHIDES* can be seen grazing on young violet leaves in the distance.
- A high-pitched shrieking hiss is heard nearby, which lasts for 10-60 seconds. The sound is caused by steam escaping from a volcanic crevice.
- In some places fissures or gaps in the ground are surrounded by wet rock.
- The ground trembles beneath your feet momentarily.
- A geiser spouts, just a few hundred feet away.

FURHIDE

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Gore+1
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 2 Charge+1

Armor+1 (hide)

TCV 45

Six-legged warthog-like beasts with jagged horns and rumpled fur coats, Furhides are found mostly in the newly-grown sections of Lavalands, where they graze for leaves, tubers, insects, just about anything really.

They travel in herds of 3d6, and are protective of their ranging territories. Their shaggy fur gives them an Armor Bonus of +1. When threatened or enraged (or defending their territory), male Furhides gore their opponents: rushing with heads down and bucking their heads upward at the moment of impact to lacerate with those horns.

ENCOUNTERS

- A young Furhide wanders away from its herd. When attacked by a *TEN-LEGGED LIZARD*, the young mammal squeals and a dozen adult Furhides rush over to stamp the bug to death.
- (Crisis) When the PCs enter the ranging territory of a nearby Furhide herd, 1d6 of the creatures stampede in the PCs' direction, lowering their horns for the attack.



GEISER

EVENT

TCV 30 (hero obstacle)

Superheated water from beneath the surface erupts from a fissure in the ground, reaching a height of 20-120 feet.

One character (determined at random but with a bias toward those in front) must make a GRACE roll vs DL3 to get out of the way before being knocked into the air and taking 1 hit of harm to GRACE.

SINKHOLE

EVENT

TCV 30 (hero obstacle)

One PC (lowest BRAINS roll of all PCs without Survival skill) steps on a thin section of lava rock and it gives way, growing into a sinkhole. Lava and boiling water flow beneath, exposing tremendous heat.

A GRACE roll vs DL 3 is needed to climb out (the victim rolls immediately and on each subsequent Frame). Each Frame of exposure does 1 hit of harm to MIGHT.

SCALY CRAWLER

LIFEFORM

GRACE 3 Bite+2

Armor+1 (scales)

TCV 55

Looking like a cross between a huge centipede and an armadillo, Scaly Crawlers are 2-4' in length and possess both mammalian and insectoid features. Their six double-jointed legs are fur-covered and end in barbed pincers, allowing them to climb both trees and rocks with relative ease. Their large teeth are adept at chewing flesh or biting through bone, and their plates give them an Armor Bonus +1.

Scaly Crawlers live in colonies of 3d6, and hunt in small groups of 1d6. They communicate with each other with soft chattering sounds. They can be found in both the *JUNGLE* and the *LAVALANDS*.

ENCOUNTERS

Three Scaly Crawlers are fighting with a *TEN-LEGGED LIZARD*. (1-4) the Crawlers win; (5-6) the Lizard wins.

(Crisis) The PCs are attacked by a hunting group of 1d6 Scaly Crawlers.

(Crisis) The PCs encounter a Scaly Crawler nest. There are 3d6 Scaly Crawlers here, and they're all angry.



TEN-LEGGED LIZARD

LIFEFORM

GRACE 3 Bite+2
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 2

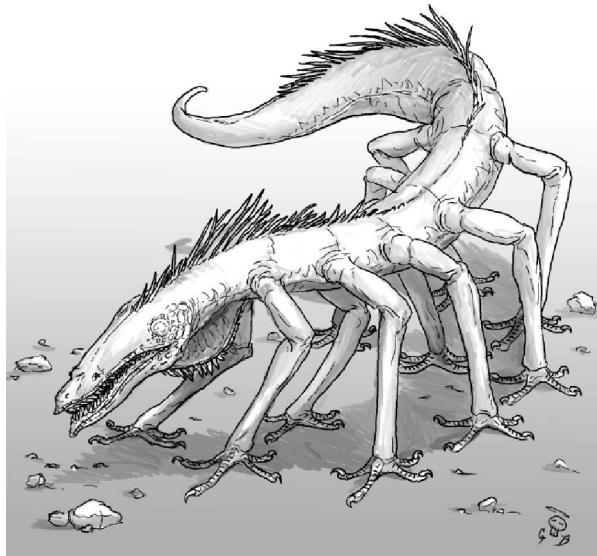
Armor+1 (scales)

TCV 65

This reptilian beast resembles a thick-bodied 15-foot-long snake with a lizard's head and five scaly pairs of articulated limbs running down each side to a thick, stubbed tail. It has a repulsive face with almost-imperceptibly small eyes. Its mouth contains hundreds of needle-sharp, backward-facing teeth. It's a carnivore, it moves very fast, and it hunts alone.

ENCOUNTERS

- (Forest) A Ten-Legged Lizard chases a dog-sized insect up a tree, catching and eating it upside-down, while clinging to the underside of a fat purple leaf overhead.
- (Lavalands) A Ten-Legged Lizard chases a young *FURHIDE* that got separated from its herd, over rocks and through puddles until it catches the beast and digs into it with its teeth. The herd will be aggressive if encountered.
- (Crisis) A Ten-Legged Lizard drops on a PC from above; this is its sneak attack technique.



UNIZELLE

LIFEFORM

GRACE 3 Horn+2

TCV 45

The Unizelle is a gazelle-like creature with a single, long, slim horn protruding from the center of its forehead. They live in herds of 4d6 and are very fast runners, roaming the *LAVALANDS* in competition with *FURHIDES* for vegetable food. The horn may be used offensively if the creature feels threatened or cornered.

ENCOUNTERS

- A herd of Unizelles is seen running across the *LAVALANDS*.
- A herd of Unizelles is attacked by a group of *SCALY CRAWLERS*, which they easily outrun.
- (Crisis) A herd of Unizelles is startled by the eruption of a nearby geiser and stampedes in the PCs' direction. GRACE rolls vs DL 4 will be required to avoid getting trampled.



JUNGLE

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Wetlands, Ocean
CONDITION: Moist, Overgrown
TERRAIN: Smooth, Muddy
WEATHER: Still/Clear
BIODIVERSITY: High and Stable
DOMINANT COLORS: Purple, Violet, Black
RESOURCES: Animal & plant parts, Black water
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Sentient Lifeforms
ENCOUNTER DL: Very Frequent (5)

The Zeudian jungle is comprised of Immense purplish trees 800-1000' tall, great trunks hundreds of feet in circumference, like living pyramids, their lavender leaves and branches woven together so as to make an impenetrable ceiling over the jungle floor. The leaves are thick and bloated, like cactus growths. The rubbery bark of the biggest trees is ringed and scored, and can be easily climbed like a spiral staircase. If their bark is cut, they drip a thick bluish fluid that bubbles slowly.

There are occasional well defined, hard packed paths leading through the thorny lavender underbrush.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	Unusual Feature
4	Slugbeasts
5	Scaly Crawlers
6	Trapper Plants
7	Location: River or Lake
8-9	Longneck
10-11	Ten-Legged Lizard
12	Zeudian Sighting

PERCEPTIONS

- It's steamy and dark; more like a jungle than a forest, fog obscures your vision.
- Small many-legged creatures observe you from the trees, and scurry into hiding when looked at directly.
- Trails of slime crisscross the path.
- A bug is consumed by a moving plant, which sticks its roots back into the soil.
- You pass one of the bodies of black fluid, oily and troubled in spots, disturbed by things moving beneath the surface. (Treat as a LAKE/RIVER if approached.)
- From the depths of the jungle comes an ear shattering, screaming hiss, like some monstrous serpent in its death agony.

LONGNECK

LIFEFORM

GRACE 2 Bite+2 Swim+2
HEALTH 4
MIGHT 4
Armor+1 (scales)

TCV 155

A carnivorous sauropod with a scale-armored neck thick as a man's body and thirty feet in length, supporting a crocodilian head with massive tooth-studded jaws and little dead-looking eyes. The neck merges into a body as big as a whale, weighing several dozen tons, with four squat, ponderous legs.

The Longneck is not only carnivorous; it is predatory, amphibious, territorial and protective. It has ultra-keen auditory senses and moves surprisingly fast for its size. In action, its hundred-foot-long body smashes through the forest, snapping branches like toothpicks.

If the mate of an adult Longneck is killed, the surviving creature will go on a violent rampage.

ENCOUNTERS

- Something huge runs through the jungle, knocking down trees and bellowing. Other creatures are seen fleeing in all directions.
- A Longneck emerges from the jungle, turning its head as it tries to catch a sound of prey. A twig snaps in the distance; the Longneck whirls in that direction and rushes off toward the sound.
- (Crisis) A Longneck bursts through the foliage; it has caught sound and sight of the PCs, and is bearing down on them to attack.
- (Crisis) A *TEN-LEGGED LIZARD* rears up and threatens the PCs – then suddenly turns and flees. Directly behind them, the head of a Longneck has pushed its way into the clearing.



SLUGBEAST

LIFEFORM

GRACE 1 AcidSpit+1
HEALTH 3
TCV 25

Sluggish, blind crawling things like three-foot slugs that flow across the paths and among tree trunks, leaving viscous trails of slime behind them. If within 1 meter, they can spit a stream of caustic saliva that burns the skin and can damage a Survival Suit. They are often found in social groups of 1d6.

ENCOUNTERS

- A Slugbeast holds up traffic on the path, leaving a slimy trail behind it as it slowly flows ahead.
- A pair of Slugbeasts are either mating or wrestling; it's difficult to tell.
- (Crisis) The PCs stumble upon a Slugbeast clutch, and all 1d6 adults begin violently spitting to protect their communally-raised young.



TRAPPER PLANT

LIFEFORM

GRACE 3 Capture+1
HEALTH 2
MIGHT 2
TCV 35

These cup-shaped bushes grow in clumps of 2d6 and resemble pitcher-plants, 2-12 feet tall. Unlike pitcher plants, they can bend and grasp their prey while it passes nearby. Once the prey is inside, digestive juices start breaking it down at the rate of 1 hit per minute.

Escaping from within the plant requires beating it in an Opposed Action of MIGHT vs MIGHT.

If the PCs manage to somehow subdue and transport a live Trapper Plant, it would be worth about 5M to an exotics collector back on Home-Earth.

ENCOUNTERS

- A Trapper Plant springs to life, consuming a wandering *SCALY CRAWLER* who came too close.
- (Crisis) A Trapper Plant springs to life, attacking a random PC who came too close.



PIT TRAP

EVENT

If the PCs ever run in the *JUNGLE* they have a 50% chance of encountering a Pit Trap: these are set by *ZEUDIANS* on the most visible paths leading away from dangerous lakes and clearings. Roll 1d6. On a result of 4-6 the PCs are moving too fast, unable to stop, and they must make GRACE rolls vs DL6 to leap safely to the other side. Any characters who fail this roll will fall in, and their next encounter will be *IN THE PIT*.

ZEUDIAN SIGHTING

EVENT

A gigantic, two-legged, purplish figure is dimly perceived out in the steamy jungle darkness, and disappears as suddenly as it appeared.

It's hard to tell from this distance, and you only get the most fleeting glimpse of it, but it looks a little bit like a giant ape, maybe nine or ten feet tall...

LAKES & RIVERS

LOCATION

SURROUNDINGS: Wetlands, Forest
CONDITION: Flooded/Overgrown
TERRAIN: Viscous/Slimy
WEATHER: Still/Clear
BIODIVERSITY: High and Stable
DOMINANT COLORS: Purple, Violet, Black
RESOURCES: Animal & plant parts, Black water
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Sentient Lifeforms
ENCOUNTER DL: Very Frequent (5)

Lakes and rivers on Zeud are slow-moving quagmires of festering black mud, mixed with greasy water. The banks are surrounded by lush lavender foliage. The viscous mud continually and slowly heaves, as abysmal forms of life move just beneath the surface.

Not the kind of place you want to take a swim; entering this water (or even getting it splashed on you) carries a risk of *BACTERIAL INFECTION*.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-4	Unusual Feature
5-6	Big creature eaten by bigger creature
7	Mud-Crawlers
8	Ten-Legged Lizard
9-10	Screams, Howls & Hisses of Agony
11-12	Longneck

PERCEPTIONS

- The thick black water bubbles and heaves, as if a terrific fight is taking place beneath the surface.
- Something moves in the purple leaves, it's gone faster than you can look at it.
- The smell of the water is disgusting, getting worse as you get nearer. It smells like old fish and rotting meat.
- A *LONGNECK* erupts from the purple leaves and snatches two lounging *MUD-CRAWLERS* in one bite.
- A group of *GIANT TADPOLES* struggles to escape a backflow, but is sucked into the gigantic mouth of a creature beneath the surface, whose massive shape can only be guessed at.

DISEASE: BACTERIAL INFECTION

DL 4 vs HEALTH

On Failure: -1 HEALTH, -1 GRACE for 1-3 days.

On Severe Failure (miss by more than 1): As above plus massive swelling of mucus membranes causes great discomfort and -1 CHARM.

GIANT TADPOLE

LIFEFORM

TCV 0

These blubber-coated aquatic creatures, ranging from 1-6 feet in length, can be found in most bodies of water on Zeud. It is unknown whether they're the larval form of another species or not.

The Giant Tadpole secretes a glandular hormone that is noxious to most Zeudian creatures. This keeps them from being eaten, and may even be rubbed on the body and used as a repellent (-1 Mod for being selected for attacks by carnivores). The gland can be extracted from a dead tadpole with a Biology roll vs DL3, and would be worth 2M to an organic chemist.

ENCOUNTERS

- There is a strange, disgusting, musty smell. A moment later 1d6 Giant Tadpoles are seen nearby. The smell seems to come from them.
- A *TEN-LEGGED LIZARD* is hunting, and goes right past a smelly pair of Giant Tadpoles sitting in the shallow water, giving them a wide berth.

MUD-CRAWLER

LIFEFORM

TCV 0

Bloated, shapeless, writhing forms that come up from the muddy water to quiver in the sun, and then slither back into the mud again. They may be related to *SLUGBEASTS*, but possess no spit attack. Mud-Crawlers surface in groups of 2-12, causing a 50% chance that some land-based carnivore will be drawn to the area.

ENCOUNTERS

- A group of Mud-Crawlers squirms up onto the bank. They are accompanied by a thick, sweet smell.
- (Crisis) The smell of a nearby group of Mud-Crawlers has attracted a *LONGNECK* to the area.



IN THE PIT

EVENT

The PCs fall into a deep chasm, splashing down into a shallow pool of dark and chilly water. The trapdoor cover above slides back into place, pulled via vine rope by several *ZEUDIANS* who are hiding in an underground chamber just beside the pit.

From outside and above, the roof of the trap is camouflaged to look just like the rest of the trail floor. The camouflaged pit trap is the apex of Zeudian technology, and may not have been invented but rather *inherited* from some previous inhabitants of planet Zeud. It takes a *Survival* roll vs DL 3 to spot a pit trap from above. It takes a *MIGHT* roll vs DL 4 to pull it open, snapping the vine rope.

Inside, the water is just deep enough so that large animals tend to break their necks and drown, leaving smaller animals — such as humans — only lightly harmed. The walls of the pit are smooth stone, impossible to climb.

After a minute, a grating sound comes from one side of the pit. A crack of green light appears. It widens jerkily, like a door being hoisted by some sort of crude pulley system. The walls of the pit become dimly visible.

If any characters have been caught, several *ZEUDIANS* will enter via this side passage, hissing and clicking to each other in high-pitched syllables. If the PCs don't do something immediately, this leads directly to the next Encounter: *BITTEN*.

BITTEN

EVENT

The *ZEUDIANS* examine the PCs, lifting them and carrying them toward the passageway they came in through. If the PCs show any signs of movement, their Zeudian captors will bite them (biting a creature while holding it is simply a *Bite* roll vs DL 1, unless Armor or Defenses apply).

The bite injects its victim with *ZEUDIAN VENOM*, either rendering them unconscious, or anesthetized and incapable of adequate self-defense. Even the act of speaking is very difficult under the effects of the venom.

The drugged victims will then be taken for storage in the *PROVISION ROOM*.

THE PROVISION ROOM

LOCATION

It's a large cave, the walls of which glow with a greenish, phosphorescent light. The floor is smooth, bare rock.

Strewn about the floor in piles are the carcasses of scores of bizarre creatures, unmoving, but not dead. Their eyes show the frenzied fear of trapped things. From some of their throats come random noises of animal fear. They're alive but unable to move, their muscles paralyzed by *ZEUDIAN VENOM*.

Whenever they come in to check on their provisions, the approach of a Zeudian (or group of Zeudians) is preceded by the sound of their flapping, awkward footsteps.

GM NOTE: There is another, narrower passageway winding off to the east, but it's hidden by shadow and almost impossible to see without walking directly up to it (BRAINS vs DL6 to notice it from across the chamber). It leads back out to the *JUNGLE*.

PERCEPTIONS

- As your eyes grow accustomed to the light you begin to make out features of the cave, and the weird animals whose immobile bodies surround you.
- A rough passageway to the west leads back to the *PIT TRAP*.
- In one corner there's a pile of long slender horns, apparently broken off some animal. Being of exceptional hardness and heft, the best of them will serve as +1 hand-held weapons.
- There is a sudden raucous din as dozens of animals begin bellowing and honking in fear; it takes minutes to die down.
- There is a faint odor of decay: one of these animals has died, probably while right here in the cave, and the body is beginning to rot.
- A Zeudian enters the cave *through the hidden eastern passageway*, carrying some large, woody looking tubers that seemed to have been freshly uprooted. It dumps them in a pile and goes out through the same passageway.

FEEDING TIME

EVENT

A Zeudian enters the chamber and spots a creature that has begun to move slightly. Opening its lipless mouth to reveal two long fangs, it bites into the beast, which instantly stops moving. The lipless jaws gape widely. The hands force the animal into the spreading maw. The throat muscles expand, and in less than a minute the Zeudian swallows its prey.

This disgusting show is repeated every 10-60 minutes by 1-3 Zeudians. The PCs are gonna have to find a way out of here before they become the meal of the moment.

THE GANG'S ALL HERE

EVENT

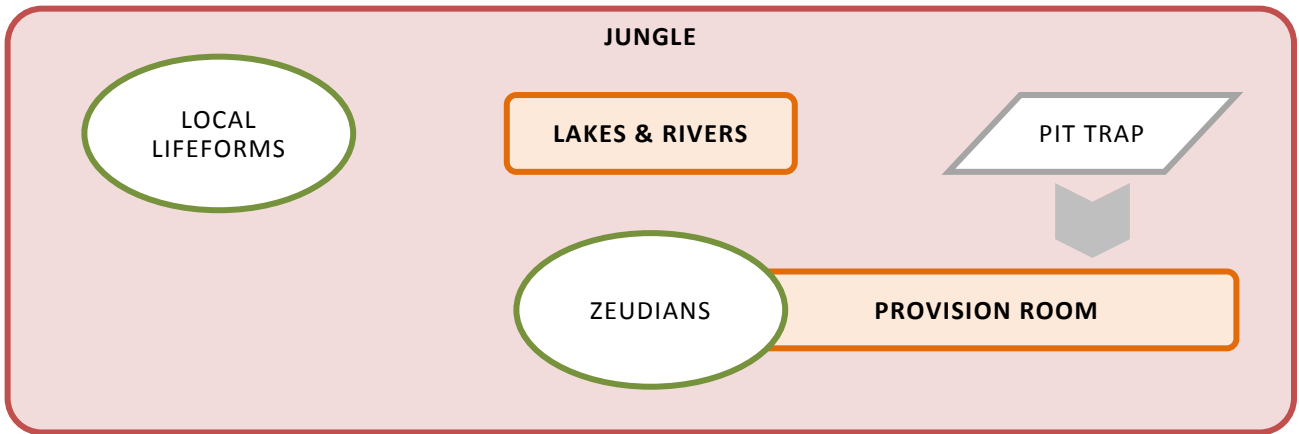
How's this for a Final Crisis?

When the PCs make it back to their ship, they find it surrounded by dozens of Zeudians, stumping curiously about it and touching it with their shapeless hands.

If the PCs ever plan to get off this stinking rock, they're gonna have to think of something.

It should work to their advantage that Zeudians can be easily frightened by the most rudimentary technology. Even something as simple as taking off one's eyeglasses can send them into paroxysms of fear.

PURPLE JUNGLES OF ZEUD



THE WORLD BEHIND THE MOON

By Paul Ernst

Two intrepid Earth-men fight it out with the horrific monsters of Zeud's frightful jungles.

Like pitiless jaws, a distant crater opened for their ship. Helplessly, they hurtled toward it: helplessly, because they were still in the nothingness of space, with no atmospheric resistance on which their rudders, or stern or bow tubes, could get a purchase to steer them.

Professor Dorn Wichter waited anxiously for the slight vibration that should announce that the projectile-shaped shell had entered the new planet's atmosphere.

"Have we struck it yet?" asked Joyce, a tall blond young man with the shoulders of an athlete and the broad brow and square chin of one who combines dreams with action. He made his way painfully toward Wichter. It was the first time he had attempted to move since the shell had passed the neutral point—that belt midway between the moon and the world behind it, where the pull of gravity of each satellite was neutralized by the other. They, and all the loose objects in the shell, had floated uncomfortably about the middle of the chamber for half an hour or so, gradually settling down again; until now it was possible, with care, to walk.

"Have we struck it?" he repeated, leaning over the professor's shoulder and staring at the resistance gauge.

"No." Absently Wichter took off his spectacles and polished them. "There's not a trace of resistance yet."

They gazed out the bow window toward the vast disc, like a serrated, pock-marked plate of blue ice, that was the planet Zeud—discovered and named by them. The same thought was in the mind of each. Suppose there were no atmosphere surrounding Zeud to cushion their descent into the hundred-mile crater that yawned to receive them?

"Well," said Joyce after a time, "we're taking no more of a chance here than we did when we pointed our nose toward the moon. We were almost sure that was no atmosphere there—which meant we'd nose dive into the rocks at five thousand miles an hour. On Zeud there might be anything." His eyes shone. "How wonderful that there should be such a planet, unsuspected during all the centuries men have been studying the heavens!"

Wichter nodded agreement. It was indeed wonderful. But what was more wonderful was its present discovery: for that would never have transpired had not he and Joyce succeeded in their attempt to fly to the moon. From there, after following the sun in its slow journey around to the lost side of the lunar globe—that face which the earth has never

yet observed—they had seen shining in the near distance the great ball which they had christened Zeud.

■

Astronomical calculations had soon described the mysterious hidden satellite. It was almost a twin to the moon; a very little smaller, and less than eighty thousand miles away. Its rotation was nearly similar, which made its days not quite sixteen of our earthly days. It was of approximately the weight, per cubic mile, of Earth. And there it whirled, directly in a line with the earth and the moon, moving as the moon moved so that it was ever out of sight beyond it, as a dime would be out of sight if placed in a direct line behind a penny.

Zeud, the new satellite, the world beyond the moon! In their excitement at its discovery, Joyce and Wichter had left the moon—which they had found to be as dead and cold as it had been surmised to be—and returned summarily to Earth. They had replenished their supplies and their oxygen tanks, and had come back—to circle around the moon and point the sharp prow of the shell toward Zeud. The gift of the moon to Earth was a dubious one; but the gift of a possibly living planet-colony to mankind might be the solution of the overcrowded conditions of the terrestrial sphere!

"Speed, three thousand miles an hour," computed Wichter. "Distance to Zeud, nine hundred and eighty miles. If we don't strike a few atoms of hydrogen or something soon we're going to drill this nearest crater a little deeper!"

Joyce nodded grimly. At two thousand miles from Earth there had still been enough hydrogen traces in the ether to give purchase to the explosions of their water-motor. At six hundred miles from the moon they had run into a sparse gaseous belt that had enabled them to change direction and slow their speed. They had hoped to find hydrogen at a thousand or twelve hundred miles from Zeud.

"Eight hundred and thirty miles," commented Wichter, his slender, bent body tensed. "Eight hundred miles—ah!"

A thrumming sound came to their ears as the shell quivered, imperceptibly almost, but unmistakably, at the touch of some faint resistance outside in space.

"We've struck it, Joyce. And it's much denser than the moon's, even as we'd hoped. There'll be life on Zeud, my boy, unless I'm vastly mistaken. You'd better look to the motor now."

■

Joyce went to the water-motor. This was a curious, but extremely simple affair. There was a glass box, ribbed with polished steel, about the size and shape of a cigar box, which was full of water. Leading away from this, to the bow and stern of the shell, were two small pipes. The pipes were greatly thickened for a period of three feet or so, directly under the little tank, and were braced by bed-plates so

heavy as to look all out of proportion. Around the thickened parts of the pipes were coils of heavy, insulated copper wire. There were no valves nor cylinders, no revolving parts: that was all there was to the "motor."

Joyce didn't yet understand the device. The water dripped from the tank, drop by drop, to be abruptly disintegrated, made into an explosive, by being subjected to a powerful magnetic field induced in the coils by a generator in the bow of the shell. As each drop of water passed into the pipes, and was instantaneously broken up, there was a violent but controlled explosion—and the shell was kicked another hundred miles ahead on its journey. That was all Joyce knew about it.

He threw the bow switch. There was a soft shock as the motor exhausted through the forward tube, slowing their speed.

"Turn on the outside generator propellers," ordered Wichter. "I think our batteries are getting low."

Joyce slipped the tiny, slim-bladed propellers into gear. They began to turn, slowly at first in the almost non-existent atmosphere.

"Four hundred miles," announced Wichter. "How's the temperature?"

Joyce stepped to the thermometer that registered the heat of the outer wall. "Nine hundred degrees," he said.

"Cut down to a thousand miles an hour," commanded Wichter. "Five hundred as soon as the motor will catch that much. I'll keep our course straight toward this crater. It's in wells like that, that we'll find livable air—if we're right in believing there is such a thing on Zeud."

■

Joyce glanced at the thermometer. It still registered hundreds of degrees, though their speed had been materially reduced.

"I guess there's livable air, all right," he said. "It's pretty thick outside already."

The professor smiled. "Another theory vindicated. I was sure that Zeud, swinging on the outside of the Earth-moon-Zeud chain and hence traveling at a faster rate, would pick up most of the moon's atmosphere over a period of millions of years. Also it must have been shielded by the moon, to some extent, against the constant small atmospheric leakage most celestial globes are subject to. Just the same, when we land, we'll test conditions with a rat or two."

At a signal from him, Joyce checked their speed to four hundred miles an hour, then to two hundred, and then, as they descended below the highest rim of the circular cliffs of the crater, almost to a full stop. They floated toward the surface of Zeud, watching with breathless interest the panorama that unfolded beneath them.

They were nosing toward a spot that was being favored with the Zeudian sunrise. Sharp and clear the light rays slanted down, illuminating about half the crater's floor and leaving the cliff protected half in dim shadow.

The illuminated part of the giant pit was as bizarre as the landscape of a nightmare. There were purplish trees, immense beyond belief. There were broad, smooth pools of inky black fluid that was oily and troubled in spots as though disturbed by some moving things under the surface. There were bare, rocky patches where the stones, the long drippings of ancient lava flow, were spread like bleaching gray skeletons of monsters. And over all, rising from pools and bare ground and jungle alike, was a thin, miasmic mist.

■

Sustained by the slow, steady exhaust of the motor, rising a little with each partly muffled explosion and sinking a little further in each interval, they settled toward a bare, lava strewn spot that appealed to Wichter as being a good landing place. With a last hiss, and a grinding jar, they grounded. Joyce opened the switch to cut off the generator.

"Now let's see what the air's like," said Wichter, lifting down a small cage in which was penned an active rat.

He opened a double panel in the shell's hull, and freed the little animal. In an agony of suspense they watched it as it leaped onto the bare lava and halted a moment....

"Seems to like it," said Joyce, drawing a great breath.

The rat, as though intoxicated by its sudden freedom, raced away out of sight, covering eight or ten feet at a bound, its legs scurrying ludicrously in empty air during its short flights.

"That means that we can dispense with oxygen helmets—and that we'd better take our guns," said Wichter, his voice tense, his eyes snapping behind his glasses.

He stepped to the gun rack. In this were half a dozen air-guns. Long and of very small bore, they discharged a tiny steel shell in which was a liquid of his invention that, about a second after the heat of its forced passage through the rifle barrel, expanded instantly in gaseous form to millions of times its liquid bulk. It was the most powerful explosive yet found, but one that was beautifully safe to carry inasmuch as it could be exploded only by heat.

"Are we ready?" he said, handing a gun to Joyce. "Then—let's go!"

■

But for a breath or two they hesitated before opening the heavy double door in the side of the hull, savoring to the full the immensity of the moment.

The rapture of the explorer who is the first to set foot on a vast new continent was theirs, magnified a hundredfold. For they were the first to set foot on a vast new planet! An

entire new world, containing heaven alone knew what forms of life, what monstrous or infinitesimal creatures, lay before them. Even the profound awe they had experienced when landing on the moon was dwarfed by the solemnity of this occasion; just as it is less soul stirring to discover an arctic continent which is perpetually cased in barren ice, than to discover a continent which is warmly fruitful and, probably, teeming with life.

Still wordless, too stirred to speak, they opened the vault-like door and stepped out—into a humid heat which was like that of their own tropical regions, but not so unendurable.

In their short stay on the moon, during which they had taken several walks in their insulated suits, they had become somewhat accustomed to the decreased weight of their bodies due to the lesser gravity, so that here, where their weight was even less, they did not make any blunders of stepping twenty feet instead of a yard.

Walking warily, glancing alertly in all directions to guard against any strange animals that might rush out to destroy them, they moved toward the nearest stretch of jungle.

■

The first thing that arrested their attention was the size of the trees they were approaching. They had got some idea of their hugeness from the shell, but viewed from ground level they loomed even larger. Eight hundred, a thousand feet they reared their mighty tops, with trunks hundreds of feet in circumference; living pyramids whose bases wove together to make an impenetrable ceiling over the jungle floor. The leaves were thick and bloated like cactus growths, and their color was a pronounced lavender.

"We must take back several of those leaves," said Wichter, his scientific soul filled with cold excitement.

"I wish we could take back some of this air, too." Joyce filled his lungs to capacity. "Isn't it great? Like wine! It almost counteracts the effects of the heat."

"There's more oxygen in it than in our own," surmised Wichter. "My God! What's that!"

They halted for an instant. From the depths of the lavender jungle had come an ear shattering, screaming hiss, as though some monstrous serpent were in its death agony.

They waited to hear if the noise would be repeated. It wasn't. Dubiously they started on again.

"We'd better not go in there too far," said Joyce. "If we didn't come out again it would cost Earth a new planet. No one else knows the secret of your water-motor."

"Oh, nothing living can stand against these guns of ours," replied Wichter confidently. "And that noise might not have been caused by anything living. It might have been steam escaping from some volcanic crevice."

They started cautiously down a well defined, hard packed trail through thorny lavender underbrush. As they went, Joyce blazed marks on various tree trunks marking the direction back to the shell. The tough fibres exuded a bluish liquid from the cuts that bubbled slowly like blood.

■

To the right and left of them were cup-shaped bushes that looked like traps; and that their looks were not deceiving was proved by a muffled, bleating cry that rose from the compressed leaves of one of them they passed. Sluggish, blind crawling things like three-foot slugs flowed across their path and among the tree trunks, leaving viscous trails of slime behind them. And there were larger things....

"Careful," said Wichter suddenly, coming to a halt and peering into the gloom at their right.

"What did you see?" whispered Joyce.

Wichter shook his head. The gigantic, two-legged, purplish figure he had dimly made out in the steamy dark, had moved away. "I don't know. It looked a little like a giant ape."

They halted and took stock of their situation, mechanically wiping perspiration from their streaming faces, and pondering as to whether or not they should turn back. Joyce, who was far from being a coward, thought they should.

"In this undergrowth," he pointed out, "we might be rushed before we could even fire our guns. And we're nearly a mile from the shell."

But Wichter was like an eager child.

"We'll press on just a little," he urged. "To that clear spot in front of us." He pointed along the trail to where sunlight was blazing down through an opening in the trees. "As soon as we see what's there, we'll go back."

With a shrug, Joyce followed the eager little man down the weird trail under the lavender trees. In a few moments they had reached the clearing which was Wichter's goal. They halted on its edge, gazing at it with awe and repulsion.

■

It was a circular quagmire of festering black mud about a hundred yards across. Near at hand they could see the mud heaving, very slowly, as though abysmal forms of life were tunneling along just under the surface. They glanced toward the center of the bog, which was occupied by one of the smooth black pools, and cried aloud at what they saw.

At the brink of the pool was lying a gigantic creature like a great, thick snake—a snake with a lizard's head, and a series of many-jointed, scaled legs running down its powerful length. Its mouth was gaping open to reveal hundreds of needle-sharp, backward pointing teeth. Its legs and thick, stubbed tail were threshing feebly in the mud as though it

were in distress; and its eyes, so small as to be invisible in its repulsive head, were glazed and dull.

"Was that what we heard back a ways?" wondered Joyce.

"Probably," said Wichter. His eyes shone as he gazed at the nightmare shape. Impulsively he took a step toward the stirring mud.

"Don't be entirely insane," snapped Joyce, catching his arm.

"I must see it closer," said Wichter, tugging to be free.

"Then we'll climb a tree and look down on it. We'll probably be safer up off the ground anyway."

■

They ascended the nearest jungle giant—whose rubbery bark was so ringed and scored as to be as easy to climb as a staircase—to the first great bough, about fifty feet from the ground, and edged out till they hung over the rim of the quagmire. From there, with the aid of their binoculars, they expected to see the dying monster in every detail. But when they looked toward the pool it was not in sight!

"Were we seeing things?" exclaimed Wichter, rubbing his glasses. "I'd have sworn it was lying there!"

"It was," said Joyce grimly. "Look at the pool. That'll tell you where it went."

The black, secretive surface was bubbling and waving as though, down in its depths, a terrific fight were taking place.

"Something came up and dragged our ten-legged lizard down to its den. Then that something's brothers got onto the fact that a feast was being held, and rushed in. That pool would be no place for a before-breakfast dip!"

■

Wichter started to say something in reply, then gazed, hypnotized, at the opposite wall of the jungle.

From the dense screen of lavender foliage stretched a glistening, scale-armored neck, as thick as a man's body at its thinnest point, which was just behind a tremendous-jawed crocodilian head. It tapered back for a distance of at least thirty feet, to merge into a body as big as that of a terrestrial whale, that was supported by four squat, ponderous legs.

Moving with surprising rapidity, the enormous thing slid into the mud and began ploughing a way, belly deep, toward the pool. Shapeless, slow-writhing forms were cast up in its wake, to quiver for a moment in the sunlight and then melt below the mud again.

One of the bloated, formless mud-crawlers was snapped up in the huge jaws with an abrupt plunge of the long neck, and the monster began to feed, hog-like, slobbering over the loathsome carcass.

Wichter shook his head, half in fanatical eagerness, half in despair. "I'd like to stay and see more," he said with a sigh, "but if that's the kind of creatures we're apt to encounter in the Zeudian jungle, we'd better be going at once—"

"Sh-h!" snapped Joyce. Then, in a barely audible whisper: "I think the thing heard your voice!"

The monster had abruptly ceased its feeding. Its head, thrust high in the air, was waving inquisitively from side to side. Suddenly it expelled the air from its vast lungs in a roaring cough—and started directly for their tree.

"Shoot!" cried Wichter, raising his gun.

■

Moving with the speed of an express train, the monster had almost got to their overhanging branch before they could pull the triggers. Both shells imbedded themselves in the enormous chest, just as the long neck reached up for them. And at once things began to happen with cataclysmic rapidity.

Almost with their impact the shells exploded. The monster stopped, with a great hole torn in its body. Then, dying on its feet, it thrust its great head up and its huge jaws crunched over the branch to which its two puny destroyers were clinging.

With all its dozens of tons of weight, it jerked in a gargantuan death agony. The tree, enormous as it was, shook with it, and the branch itself was tossed as though in a hurricane.

There was a splintering sound. Wichter and Joyce dropped their guns to cling more tightly to the bole of the drooping branch that was their only security. The guns glanced off the mountainous body—and, with a last convulsion of the mighty legs, were swept underneath!

The monster was still at last, its insensate jaws yet gripping the bough. The two men looked at each other in speechless consternation. The shell a mile off through the dreadful jungle.... Themselves, helpless without their guns....

"Well," said Joyce at last. "I guess we'd better be on our way. Waiting here, thinking it over, won't help any. Lucky there's no night, for a couple of weeks at least, to come stealing down on us."

■

He started down the great trunk, with Wichter following close behind. Walking as rapidly as they could, they hurried back along the tunneled trail toward their shell.

They hadn't covered a hundred yards when they heard a mighty crashing of underbrush behind them. Glancing back, they saw tooth-studded jaws gaping cavernously at the end of a thirty-foot neck—little, dead-looking eyes glaring at them—a hundred-foot body smashing its way over the trap-

bushes and through tangles of vines and down-drooping branches.

"The mate to the thing we killed back there!" Joyce panted. "Run, for God's sake!"

Wichter needed no urging. He hadn't an ounce of fear in his spare, small body. But he had an overwhelming desire to get back to Earth and deliver his message. He was trembling as he raced after Joyce, thirty feet to a bound, ducking his head to avoid hitting the thick lavender foliage that roofed the trail.

"One of us must get through!" he panted over and over. "One of us must make it!"

It was speedily apparent that they could never outrun their pursuer. The reaching jaws were only a few yards behind them now.

"You go," called Joyce, sobbing for breath. He slowed his pace deliberately.

"No—you—" Wichter slowed too. In a frenzy, Joyce shoved him along the trail.

"I tell you—"

He got no further. In front of them, where there had appeared to be solid ground, they suddenly saw a yawning pit. Desperately, they tried to veer aside, but they were too close. Their last long birdlike leap carried them over the edge. They fell, far down, into a deep chasm, splashing into a shallow pool of water.

A few clods of earth cascaded after them as the monster above dug its great splay feet into the ground and checked its rush in time to keep from falling after them. Then the top of the pit slowly darkened as a covering of some sort slid across it. They were in a prison as profoundly quiet and utterly black as a tomb.

■

"Dorn," shouted Joyce. "Are you all right?"

"Yes," came a voice in the near darkness. "And you?"

"I'm still in one piece as far as I can feel." There was a splashing noise. He waded toward it and in a moment his outstretched hand touched the professor's shoulder.

"This is a fine mess," he observed shakily. "We got away from those tooth-lined jaws, all right, but I'm wondering if we're much better off than we would have been if we hadn't escaped."

"I'm wondering the same thing." Wichter's voice was strained. "Did you see the way the top of the pit closed above us? That means we're in a trap. And a most ingenious trap it is, too! The roof of it is camouflaged until it looks exactly like the rest of the trail floor. The water in here is just shallow enough to let large animals break their necks when they fall in and just deep enough to preserve small

animals—like ourselves—alive. We're in the hands of some sort of reasoning, intelligent beings, Joyce!"

"In that case," said Joyce with a shudder, "we'd better do our best to get out of here!"

But this was found to be impossible. They couldn't climb up out of the pit, and nowhere could they feel any openings in the walls. Only smooth, impenetrable stone met their questing fingers.

"It looks as though we're in to stay," said Joyce finally. "At least until our Zeudian hosts, whatever kind of creatures they may be, come and take us out. What'll we do then? Sail in and die fighting? Or go peaceably along with them—assuming we aren't killed at once—on the chance that we can make a break later?"

"I'd advise the latter," answered Wichter. "There is a small animal on our own planet whose example might be a good one for us to follow. That's the 'possum." He stopped abruptly, and gripped Joyce's arm.

From the opposite side of the pit came a grating sound. A crack of greenish light appeared, low down near the water. This widened jerkily as though a door were being hoisted by some sort of pulley arrangement. The walls of the pit began to glow faintly with reflected light.

"Down," breathed Wichter.

■

Noiselessly they let themselves sink into the water until they were floating, eyes closed and motionless, on the surface. Playing dead to the best of their ability, they waited for what might happen next.

They heard a splashing near the open rock door. The splashing neared them, and high-pitched hissing syllables came to their ears—variegated sounds that resembled excited conversation in some unknown language.

Joyce felt himself touched by something, and it was all he could do to keep from shouting aloud and springing to his feet at the contact.

He'd had no idea, of course, what might be the nature of their captors, but he had imagined them as man-like, to some extent at least. And the touch of his hand, or flipper, or whatever it was, indicated that they were not!

They were cold-blooded, reptilian things, for the flesh that had touched him was cold; as clammy and repulsive as the belly of a dead fish. So repulsive was that flesh that, when he presently felt himself lifted high up and roughly carried, he shuddered in spite of himself at the contact.

Instantly the thing that bore him stopped. Joyce held his breath. He felt an excruciating, stabbing pain in his arm, after which the journey through the water was resumed. Stubbornly he kept up his pretence of lifelessness.

The splashing ceased, and he heard flat wet feet slapping along on dry rock, indicating that they had emerged from the pit. Then he sank into real unconsciousness.

The next thing he knew was that he was lying on smooth, bare rock in a perfect bedlam of noises. Howls and grunts, snuffling coughs and snarls beat at his ear-drums. It was as though he had fallen into a vast cage in which were hundreds of savage, excited animals—animals, however, that in spite of their excitement and ferocity were surprisingly motionless, for he heard no scraping of claws, or padding of feet.

Cautiously he opened his eyes....

■

He was in a large cave, the walls of which were glowing with greenish, phosphorescent light. Strewn about the floor were seemingly dead carcasses of animals. And what carcasses there were! Blubber-coated things that looked like giant tadpoles, gazelle-like creatures with a single, long slim horn growing from delicate small skulls, four-legged beasts and six-legged ones, animals with furry hides and crawlers with scaled coverings—several hundred assorted specimens of the smaller life of Zeud lay stretched out in seeming lifelessness.

But they were not dead, these bizarre beasts of another world. They lived, and were animated with the frenzied fear of trapped things. Joyce could see the tortured heaving of their furred and scaled sides as they panted with terror. And from their throats issued the outlandish noises he had heard. They were alive enough—only they seemed unable to move!

There was nothing in his range of vision that might conceivably be the beings that had captured them, so Joyce started to lift his head and look around at the rest of the cavern. He found that he could not move. He tried again, and his body was as unresponsive as a log. In fact, he couldn't feel his body at all! In growing terror, he concentrated all his will on moving his arm. It was as limp as a rag.

He relaxed, momentarily in the grip of stark, blind panic. He was as helpless as the howling things around him! He was numbed, completely paralyzed into immobility!

The professor's voice—a weak, uncertain voice—sounded from behind him. "Joyce! Joyce!"

He found that he could talk, that the paralysis that gripped the rest of his muscles had not extended to the vocal cords. "Dorn! Thank God you're alive! I couldn't see you, and I thought—"

"I'm alive, but that's about all," said Wichter. "I—I can't move."

"Neither can I. We've been drugged in some manner—just as all the other animals in here have been drugged. I must

have got my dose in the pit. I was cut, or stabbed, in the arm."

■

Joyce stopped talking as he suddenly heard steps, like human footsteps yet weirdly different—flap-flapping sounds as though awkward flippers were slapping along the rock floor toward them. The steps stopped within a few feet of them; then, after what seemed hours, they sounded again, this time in front of him.

He opened his eyes, cautiously, barely moving his eyelids, and saw at last, in every hideous detail, one of the super-beasts that had captured Wichter and himself.

It was a horrible cartoon of a man, the thing that stood there in the greenish glow of the cave. Nine or ten feet high, it loomed; hairless, with a faintly iridescent, purplish hide. A thick, cylindrical trunk sloped into a neck only a little smaller than the body itself. Set on this was a bony, ugly head that was split clear across by lipless jaws. There was no nose, only slanted holes like the nostrils of an animal; and over these were set pale, expressionless, pupil-less eyes. The arms were short and thick and ended in bifurcated lumps of flesh like swollen hands encased in old-fashioned mittens. The legs were also grotesquely short, and the feet mere shapeless flaps.

It was standing near one of the smaller animals, apparently regarding it closely. Observing it himself, Joyce saw that it was moving a little. As though coming out of a coma, it was raising its bizarre head and trying to get on its feet.

Leisurely the two-legged monster bent over it. Two long fangs gleamed in the lipless mouth. These were buried in the neck of the reviving beast—and instantly it sank back into immobility.

Having reduced it to helplessness—the monster ate it! The lipless jaws gaped widely. The shapeless hands forced in the head of the animal. The throat muscles expanded hugely: and in less than a minute it had swallowed its living prey as a boa-constrictor swallows a monkey.

■

Joyce closed his eyes, feeling weak and nauseated. He didn't open them again till long after he had heard the last of the awkward, flapping footsteps.

"Could you see it?" asked Wichter, who was lying so closely behind him that he couldn't observe the monstrous Zeudian. "What did it do? What was it like?"

Joyce told him of the way the creature had fed. "We are evidently in their provision room," he concluded. "They keep some of their food alive, it seems.... Well, it's a quick death."

"Tell me more about the way the other animal moved, just before it was eaten."

"There isn't much to tell," said Joyce wearily. "It didn't move long after those fangs were sunk into it."

"But don't you see!" There was sudden hope in Wichter's voice. "That means that the effect of the poison, which is apparently injected by those fangs, wears off after a time. And in that case—"

"In that case," Joyce interjected, "we'd have only an unknown army of ten-foot Zeudians, the problem of finding a way to the surface of the ground again, and the lack of any kind of weapons, to keep us from escaping!"

"We're not quite weaponless, though," the professor whispered back. "Over in a corner there's a pile of the long, slender horns that sprout from the heads of some of these creatures. Evidently the Zeudians cut them out, or break them off before eating that particular type of animal. They'd be as good as lances, if we could get hold of them."

■

Joyce said nothing, but hope began to beat in his own breast. He had noticed a significant happening during the age-long hours in the commissary cave. Most of the Zeudians had entered from the direction of the pit. But one had come in through an opening in the opposite side. And this one had blinked pale eyes as though dazzled from bright sunlight—and was bearing some large, woody looking tubers that seemed to have been freshly uprooted! There was a good chance, thought Joyce, that that opening led to a tunnel up to the world above!

He drew a deep breath—and felt a dim pain in his back, caused by the cramping position in which he had lain for so long.

He could have shouted aloud with the thrill of that discovery. This was the first time he had felt his body at all! Did it mean that the effect of the poison was wearing off—that it wasn't as lastingly paralyzing to his earthly nerve centers as to those of Zeudian creatures around them? He flexed the muscles of his leg. The leg moved a fraction of an inch.

"Dorn!" he called softly, "I can move a little! Can you?"

"Yes," Wichter answered, "I've been able to wriggle my fingers for several minutes. I think I could walk in an hour or two."

"Then pray for that hour or two. It might mean our escape!" Joyce told him of the seldom used entrance that he thought led to the open air. "I'm sure it goes to the surface, Dorn. Those woody looking tubers had been freshly picked."

■

Three of the two-legged monsters came in just then. They relapsed into lifeless silence. There was a horrible moment as the three paused over them longer than any of the others had. Was it obvious that the effects of the numbing

poison was wearing off? Would they be bitten again—or eaten?

The Zeudians finally moved on, hissing and clicking to each other. Eventually the cold-blooded things fed, and dragged lethargically out of the cave in the direction of the pit.

With every passing minute Joyce could feel life pouring back into his numbed body. His cramped muscles were in agony now—a pain that gave him fierce pleasure. At last, risking observation, he lifted his head and then struggled to a sitting position and looked around.

No Zeudian was in sight. Evidently they were too sure of their poison glands to post a guard over them. He listened intently, and could hear no dragging footsteps. He turned to Wichter, who had followed his example and was sitting up, feebly rubbing his body to restore circulation.

"Now's our chance," he whispered. "Stand up and walk a little to steady your legs, while I go over and get us a couple of those sharp horns. Then we'll see where that entrance of mine goes!"

He walked to the pile of bones and horns in the corner and selected two of the longest and slimmest of the ivory-like things. Just as he had rejoined Wichter he heard the sound with which he was now so grimly familiar—flapping, awkward footsteps. Wildly he signaled the professor. They dropped in their tracks, just as the approaching monster stumped into the cave.

■

For an instant he dared hope that their movement had gone unobserved, but his hope was rudely shattered. He heard a sharp hiss: heard the Zeudian flap toward them at double-quick time. Abandoning all pretense, he sprang to his feet just as the thing reached him, its fangs gleaming wickedly in the greenish light.

He leaped to the side, going twenty feet or more with the press of his Earth muscles against the reduced gravity. The creature rushed on toward the professor. That game little man crouched and awaited its onslaught. But Joyce had sprung back again before the two could clash.

He raised the long horn and plunged it into the smooth, purplish back. Again and again he drove it home, as the monster writhed under him. It had enormous vitality. Gashed and dripping, it yet struggled on, attempting to encircle Joyce with its stubby arms. Once it succeeded, and he felt his ribs crack as it contracted its powerful body. But a final stroke finished the savage fight. He got up and, with an incoherent cry to Wichter, raced toward the opening on which they pinned their hopes of reaching the upper air.

Hissing cries and the thudding of many feet came to them just as they reached the arched mouth of the passage. But the cries, and the constant pandemonium of the paralysed animals died behind them as they bounded along the tunnel.

■

They emerged at last into the sunlight they had never expected to see again, beside one of the great lavender trees. They paused an instant to try to get their bearings.

"This way," panted Joyce as he saw, on a hard-packed path ahead of them, one of the trail-marks he had blazed.

Down the trail they raced, toward their space shell. Fortunately they met none of the tremendous animals that infested the jungles; and their journey to the clearing in which the shell was lying was accomplished without accident.

"We're safe now," gasped Wichter, as they came in sight of the bare lava patch. "We can outrun them five feet to their one!"

They burst into the clearing—and halted abruptly. Surrounding the shell, stumping curiously about it and touching it with their shapeless hands, were dozens of the Zeudians.

"My God!" groaned Joyce. "There must be at least a hundred of them! We're lost for certain now!"

They stared with hopeless longing at the vehicle that, if only they could reach it, could carry them back to Earth. Then they turned to each other and clasped hands, without a word. The same thought was in the mind of each—to rush at the swarming monsters and fight till they were killed. There was absolutely no chance of winning through to the shell, but it was infinitely better to die fighting than be swallowed alive.

■

So engrossed were the Zeudians by the strange thing that had fallen into their province, that Joyce and Wichter got within a hundred feet of them before they turned their pale eyes in their direction. Then, baring their fangs, they streamed toward the Earth men, just as the pursuing Zeudians entered the clearing from the jungle trail.

The two prepared to die as effectively as possible. Each grasped his lace-like horn tightly. The professor mechanically adjusted his glasses more firmly on his nose....

With his move, the narrowing circle of Zeudians halted. A violent clamor broke out among them. They glared at the two, but made no further step toward them.

"What in the world—" began Wichter bewilderedly.

"Your glasses!" Joyce shouted, gripping his shoulder. "When you moved them, they all stopped! They must be afraid of them, somehow. Take them clear off and see what happens."

Wichter removed his spectacles, and swung them in his hand, peering near-sightedly at the crowding Zeudians.

Their reaction to his simple move was remarkable! Hisses of consternation came from their lipless mouths. They faced

each other uneasily, waving their stubby arms and covering their own eyes as though suddenly afraid they would lose them.

Taking advantage of their indecision, Joyce and Wichter walked boldly toward them. They moved aside, forming a reluctant lane. Some of the Zeudians in the rear shoved to close in on them, but the ones in front held them back. It wasn't until the two were nearly through that the lane began to straggle into a threatening circle around them again. The Zeudians were evidently becoming reassured by the fact that Wichter continued to see all right in spite of the little strange creature's alarming act of removing his eyes.

"Do it again," breathed Joyce, perspiration beading his forehead as the giants moved closed, their fangs tentatively bared for the numbing poison stroke.

■

Wichter popped his glasses on, then jerked them off with a cry, as though he were suffering intensely. Once more the Zeudians faltered and drew back, feeling at their own eyes.

"Run!" cried Joyce. And they raced for the haven of the shell.

The Zeudians swarmed after them, snarling and hissing. Barely ahead of the nearest, Joyce and Wichter dove into the open panel. They slammed it closed just as a powerful, stubby arm reached after them. There was a screaming hiss, and a cold, cartilagenous lump of flesh dropped to the floor of the shell—half the monster's hand, sheared off between the sharp edge of the door and the metal hull.

Joyce threw in the generator switch. With a soft roar the water-motor exploded into action, sending the shell far into the sky.

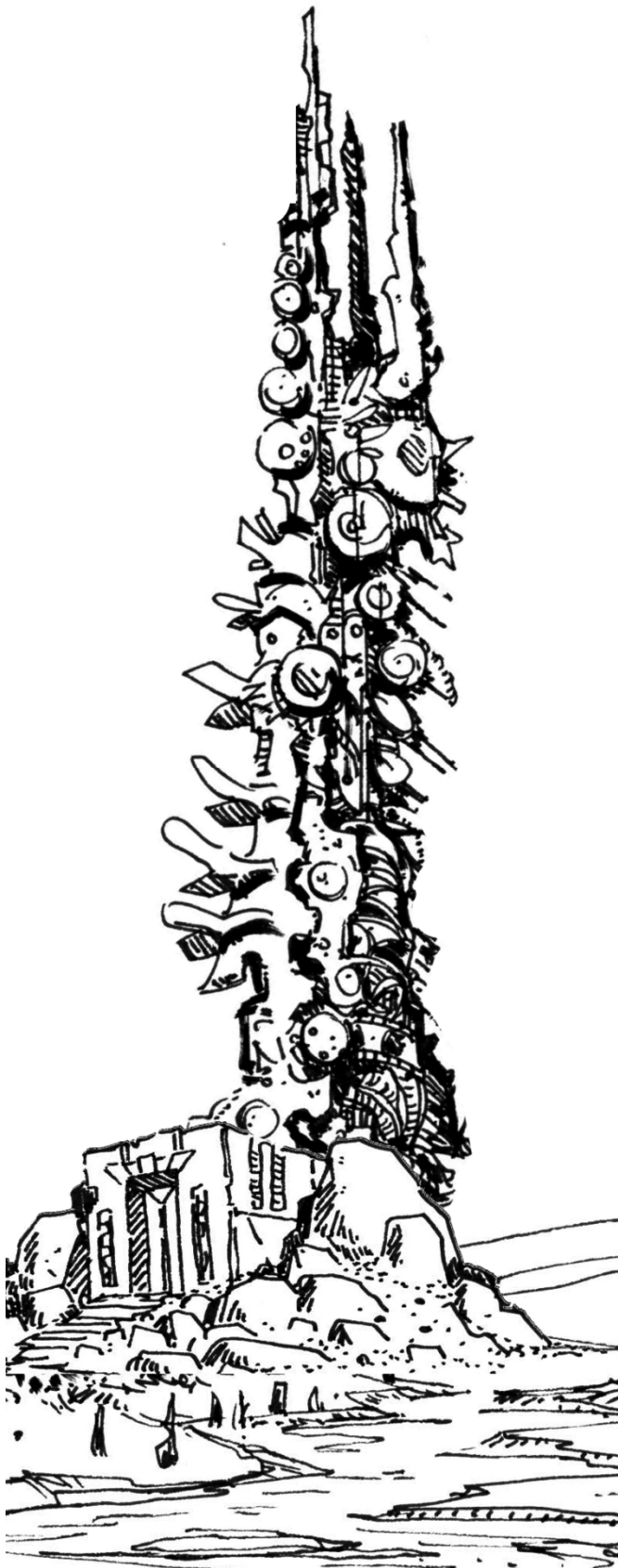
"When we return," said Joyce, adding a final thousand miles an hour to their speed before they should fly free of the atmosphere of Zeud, "I think we'd better come at the head of an army, equipped with air-guns and explosive bombs."

"And with glasses," added the professor, taking off his spectacles and gazing at them as though seeing them for the first time.



STRATEGY

Based on "Warrior Race"
by Robert Sheckley



OBSTACLES

Psychological Challenges - the Suicide Strategy

COMPLICATIONS

Scant Intel

PERKS

10 MV

MAGUFFINS

Data/Report on Cascella

1 Electronics Pro Kit (1M)

1 Mechanical Pro Kit (1M)

1 Physician's Pro Kit (1M)

1 100mW Hydrogen Fuelcell (10M)

1 Microfusion Generator (10M)

BACKSTORY

A SNAFU somewhere forces the PCs to make a stop at a planet called *Cascella B*, where they need to pick up the contents of an emergency supply cache left here by an earlier planetary survey team. This place hasn't seen much traffic since the earliest days of exploration, and only a few incomplete notes exist in the databases of the Big Model.

We do know that the Cascellan people are considered "friendly" and possess a "unique social structure" – whatever *that* means. The following information can be found on record:

Type M sun. Three planets, intelligent (AA3C) human-type life on second.
Oxygen-breathers. Non-mechanical. Religious.
Friendly. Unique social structure, described in Galactic Survey Report 33877242.
Population estimate: stable at three billion.
Basic Cascellan vocabulary taped under Cas33b2.
Emergency Cache left, beam coordinate 8741 kgl.
Physical descript: Unocc. flatland.

The Cascellan vocabulary may be found by searching Earth's computer networks for "Cas33b2". Locating the archive is a CHALLENGING (DL3) BRAINS roll, and requires access to an Earth-based computer network.

Unfortunately, Galactic Survey Report 33877242 has gone missing.

WE COME IN PEACE AND OH YEAH WE'LL BE TAKING THIS

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Acquisition
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Historically Stable (5)

The PCs fade in from the subjective slip to find themselves in orbit around *Cascella B* – the Node is located in orbital space – and nearly out of fuel. Everything looks different. If their ship wasn't capable of atmospheric flight before, guess what? It is now!

The Ship's Computer has some information on *Cascella*. Seems this Node was visited by an AIT Survey Team back in the early days, and they left a supply cache buried beneath a microfreq broadcasting spire.

All the PCs need to do is land, contact the natives, and tell them they need what's in the spire. Easy, right?

CRISIS OVER CASCELLA

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Acquisition
NODE TYPE: Known Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL3)

No matter what the mission was, it's different now! Just as the PCs exit SlipSpace they feel something go wrong with the engine – their powersource has inexplicably exploded, spraying its contents into space, and they are hundreds of light-years from where they wanted to be. (*Could someone have sabotaged them?*)

Fortunately, the Ship's Computer chimes in, there is a nearby planet called *Cascella B*, where an emergency supply cache can be found beneath a microfreq broadcasting spire. Look it up! The ship has just enough remaining fuel and velocity to make it there.

WHO ARE THE OUTWORLDERS?

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Fact-Finding
NODE TYPE: Known Planet
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL3)

Previous visitors have brought back hints that *Cascella B* has been visited before, possibly by other races. This leaves room for *Unusual Features* and *Lifeforms* whose interests and motivations are unknown. Actually, a lot more is unknown than known about *Cascella B*; and even the Cascellans have only explored one landmass. Perhaps there's a notebook inside the supply cache?

GM NOTE: This scenario requires additional prep, and *your Cascella* will be a unique one. The Generator tables in the *DayTrippers GameMasters Guide* can be used to produce spontaneous lifeforms, locations and weirdness. Here are some questions to think about:

- Are they from another planet in this system?
- Are they from another time or dimension?
- Are there two or more groups of them?
- What is so important about *Cascella B*?

And some *Perceptions* for off-the-map Locations...

- An empty tunnel complex of advanced design
- Another supply cache, this one utterly alien
- A Lifeform that arises only once every millennia
- An ancient stone head, the size of a five-story building, half buried in the distant sands

CASCELLA B

PLANET

GRAVITY: 1.2G
ATMOSPHERE: Nitrogen/Oxygen
PRESSURE: 1.15 Earth Atmospheres
DAY: 21.5 Earth hours
YEAR: 358.2 Earth days
WATER: 30% standing water
CLIMATE: Hot
PRECIPITATION: Unlikely (DL9)
BIOSPHERE: Sentient Lifeforms (Galactic Hominids)

The soil is dry and massively depleted. Biological diversity is low, and subsistence on the local diet, while not impossible, is not particularly nourishing.

STAR SYSTEM CASCELLA

Cascella possesses three rock planets, with a race of Galactic Hominids living on the second of these: the planet known as "Cascella B". The other two planets are unexplored.

HISTORY: WHAT HAPPENED HERE

Years ago, a cache of emergency supplies was left here by a survey team from the Academy of IntraSpace Technology, as was often done back in the early days of SlipSpace travel. The cache was situated beneath a tall silver transmitting spire, the microfrequency emissions of which could be easily picked up by any vessel or scoutbot in the Cascella system.

These caches are never left behind for long; it's customary to remove them once all local survey projects have run their course. Unfortunately it seems that the tracking data on this one got corrupted or lost somewhere along the line, and it's been sitting out there for almost fifteen years. That's a concern, back at AIT.

In the meanwhile, shifts in local weather patterns made it possible for the Cascellans to migrate into the region, until they eventually discovered the spire. They decided that it was a gift from the gods and built a religion around it. Now it's become this whole... *thing*.

CASCELLANS

SOCIETY

SOCIETAL VALUES: Honor, Warriorhood, Consensus
SOCIETAL PROBLEMS: No enemies, Peculiar tactics
TECHNOLOGY: Bronze Age: tools, weapons, jewelry
RESOURCES: Metals, Wood, Stone, Animal & Plant parts
UNDERSTANDING OF REALITY: Understands that space travel is possible

CULTURE

The Cascellans are typical of galactic hominids at a "bronze age" level of cultural development. Their current global population is roughly 3 billion, although only a few thousand live in Cascellan City. Most of them live in vast cave complexes scattered across the equatorial region of this landmass, and many are within one day's march of Cascellan City.

The Cascellan government is a rigid theocracy with a dictatorial "chief" – a word which implies much more than it does to us: a Cascellan Chief is a combination of king, high priest, deity and bravest warrior. Under the current Chief all other tribes were beaten in combat, and today all Cascellans are of one tribe.

RELIGION

When the Cascellans discovered the spire many years ago, they named it "the tall metal church which the gods left here" and built a religion around it, dictated by their Chief. Over time an impromptu city grew up around the spot, and today the spire overlooks hundreds of wood-and-mud buildings. Outworlders are not permitted to go near the spire.

Their social structure is "unique" in that they have unique beliefs about death and killing: The Cascellans believe that the only "honorable" death is a "warrior's death" – by one's own hand, with rage and intention. They also believe that killing or even deliberately hurting another person is the most vile and reprehensible of all taboos. It's not just *wrong* – it's too *disgusting* for them to even consider.

ATTITUDE

Cascellan history recounts various visitations from "outworlders", not all of whom have been friendly. The Cascellans are neither surprised nor impressed that the PCs came here from another world.

Although they have never traveled to any other planets, Cascellans consider themselves to be the bravest warriors in the universe. Each carries at least five knives, swords and daggers at all times. Some carry as many as eight or nine. Should any enemy seriously challenge them in honorable battle, they will unsheath a bladed weapon and vehemently slit their own throats. The survivor is the one considered to have done something "wrong".

CASCELLAN CITY

LOCATION

SURROUNDINGS: Scrubby Flatland
CONDITION: Drying, Struggling
TERRAIN: Flat, Dry soil
WEATHER: Mild Wind
BIODIVERSITY: Low & Stable
DOMINANT COLORS: Tan, Brown, White
RESOURCES: Metals, Wood, Stone, Animal & Plant parts
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Sentient Lifeforms
ENCOUNTER DL: Frequent (6)

The only “city” on the planet is really no more than a hundred wood-and-mud buildings surrounding a tall metal spire. The whole place seems dirty, smelly, and sloppily-put-together. The Cascellans seem rather arrogant, though most of them are out of shape and none seem particularly bright.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3 Unusual Feature
4-6 Beggar
7-9 Trader
10-12 Guard

PERCEPTIONS

- The construction is typical of non-mechanical cultures: narrow, packed-dirt streets twist between ramshackle huts of wood and mud.
- A few two-story buildings here and there seem ready to collapse at any minute.
- An overwhelming stench of animal smells, human waste and rotting meat fills the air.
- Cascellans mill about in the streets, talking in groups or trading animals, produce or handmade trinkets. They do not seem overly surprised by the presence of the PCs.

CASCELLAN

LIFEFORM

Pointy-headed and pointy-eared, Cascellans are about the same size as humans, but most have decidedly large mammaries/pectorals and mid-sections due to their high-carbohydrate diet. While they do raise some domesticated animals, the majority of their intake consists of tubers, grains, ales, and crunchy fruits with high sugar content. The soil is mostly depleted, and Cascellan farms, while large, have low yields.

Cascellans wear loinclothes around their waists. They are all relatively hairless and bald, with short tufts of coarse hair sprouting in random places, and their abundance of fatty tissue makes it difficult to tell the males from the females, even up close.

All of them carry blades.

Any Cascellan who has a positive reaction will proudly discuss details about their society, culture, history and attitude toward outworlders.

BEGGAR

NPC

CHARM 2
GRACE 1 BladedWeapon+0
PSYCHE 2

TCV 10

These poor souls have been dishonored in battle; when the moment came they were afraid to take their own lives, and have been socially shunned. They beg for scraps, eat from garbage piles and sleep in the streets, sometimes communing on the outskirts of the city in groups of 2d6.

ENCOUNTERS

- A Beggar approaches the PCs, hand out. Roll a random attitude.
- 2d6 Beggars are sharing a basket of slightly-rotten food; they notice the PCs looking at them. Roll a random attitude.

CASCELLAN NAMES

Ang, Arb, Bon, Boom, Chaa, Choon, Dib, Fet, Gor, Har, Jil, Joom, Keb, Klaa, Lood, Loozh, Mang, Nar, Pet, Raa, Seb, Tang, Toom, Vool, Woz, Zim, Zoon

TRADER

NPC

CHARM 2 Rhetoric+1
GRACE 1 BladedWeapon+1
PSYCHE 2

TCV 30

Traders get a +2 on Attitude rolls if there's reason for them to think a good trade might be possible.

TRADERS GOODS (1D6)

1-2 Meats or Vegetables
3 Bladed Weapons
4-6 Pottery or Bronze Tools

GUARD

NPC

CHARM 2
GRACE 1 BladedWeapon+2
PSYCHE 2

TCV 30

Guards patrol in groups of 2-7 (1d6+1) and spend most of their time arbitrating arguments between angry hagglers. A few, however, have been placed on special duties which they take very seriously: protection of the Holy Spire, and protection of the Chief's House.

THE CHIEF'S HOUSE

LOCATION

The chief's house is the only three-story building in town. The silver spire is located directly behind it. Four guards stand duty outside. They do not seem impressed by "outworlders", but they do ask the PCs' names and purpose here.

After waiting for one of the guards to repeat their announcement inside, they are welcomed into the house. It's the fanciest building in town: three one-room floors connected by stairways on each side.

There are a dozen decorated pots bearing different foods, some bronze tools and a firepit in the center of the ground-floor room. At the back of the room sits *THE CHIEF* on a raised dais.

THE CHIEF

NPC

BRAINS 2 MoralRelativism+1
CHARM 3 Rhetoric+2
GRACE 1 BladedWeapon+2
PSYCHE 2

TCV 95

The Chief is a middle-aged Cascellan with at least fifteen knives strapped to various parts of his person. He squats cross-legged on the dais of wood and mud.

He seems more interested in bragging about the greatness of his people than whatever the PCs are talking about.

INFORMATION

About the Cascellans: He welcomes the PCs warily – if they come in peace – but he hastens to tell them: "We are a warrior race, the like of which has never been seen. What we want, we take. Every man of us dies fighting."

About wars, battles or history: "We have not had to fight a war for many years. We are united now, and all our enemies have joined us!"

About the Spire: "The sacred temple is where I receive the words of my brothers, the gods, who tell me what should be done." (Of course the Chief doesn't *really* receive heavenly wisdom from the spire. He just goes into the little room once in a while and makes up whatever he wants.)

About Getting Access to the Spire: "Strangers, know that I am god of my people, as well as their leader. *If you dare approach the sacred temple, there will be war between our races*, and since we are a race of warriors, every fighting man of the planet will move against you on my command. More will come from the hills and from across the rivers."

REACTION IF ANGERED

If the PCs insist on pressuring the Chief about the Spire or draw his anger in any way, he suddenly draws his knife. Every Cascellan in the room instantly does the same. "Brave men *wish* to die in battle," he says. "It is our fondest wish. You are the first enemy we have had in many years, since we subdued the mountain tribes. Since it seems it's war you want, you shall have it."

Seems like the old boy's snapped. He really *really* wants a war.

At this point, should the PCs make any move that even implies they're being anything but cooperative, the Cascellans will rush them en masse: it's time for *CASCELLAN BATTLE*.

CASCELLAN BATTLE

EVENT

The narrow street is suddenly jammed with armed natives. A thousand knives flash in the sun. In front of the spire, a phalanx of Cascellans stands on the defense, behind a network of ropes that marks the boundary between sacred and profane ground.

The foremost raises his knife and shouts something, sweeps the blade across his throat in a glittering arc, then gurgles something else, staggers, and falls, his bright red blood oozing from his throat. He has taken his own life.

Quickly, three more Cascellans bound forward, their knives held high. Slicing their own throats, they tumble to the ground. Now wave after wave continues and the spectacle builds in intensity: they clamber over each other with mad violence in their eyes, getting closer and closer to the humans – even pushing them back – but as soon they get within stabbing range, the natives slit their own throats!

Their way of making war is to suicide their enemies into capitulation.

THE CHIEF looks on from his balcony or jeers from his dais: “Now you witness the fearlessness of our proud warriors! There are more coming on my command! You will never beat us!”

Until the PCs retreat or surrender they will continue doing this, one by one or a few at a time, slowly diminishing their numbers – though there are always more coming to fill in the ranks from behind - as blood pools in the dirt and bodies pile high in the street.

THE SPIRE

LOCATION

The metal tower extends up from a moulded cement base, beneath which a small subterranean room holds the cache itself. The room is accessed via a small set of cement stairs leading into the ground. The stairway is sectioned off by a number of ropes, tied to wooden posts which have been hammered into the ground.

Three guards stand in front of the symbolic ropes, knives in their loincloths. The Cascellans consider it sacrilege for an outworlder to go near the place.

At the first sign of trouble, torches will flare up all around and natives will rush the location from every alleyway, shouting and waving their knives. It’s time for *CASCELLAN BATTLE*.

Inside the underground room, in a large hermetically-sealed shrinkplast container, is *THE CACHE*.

THE CACHE

MAGUFFIN

The Cache includes:

- 1 100mW Hydrogen Fuelcell (10M)
- 1 Microfusion Generator (10M)
- 1 Electronics Pro Kit (1M)
- 1 Mechanical Pro Kit (1M)
- 1 Physician’s Pro Kit (1M)

The sale value of each of these items on Home-Earth is indicated in parentheses.

VIOLENCE — A LANGUAGE OLDER THAN WORDS

EVENT

If / When the PCs cause deliberate harm to a Cascellan – or even to each other – all Cascellans in view will instantly stop whatever they’re doing and recoil in horror and disgust. The very concept of deliberately doing harm to another person is so revolting to them, it’s unthinkable. It’s as if you just dropped a dookie on the living room floor. Their minds are completely blown.

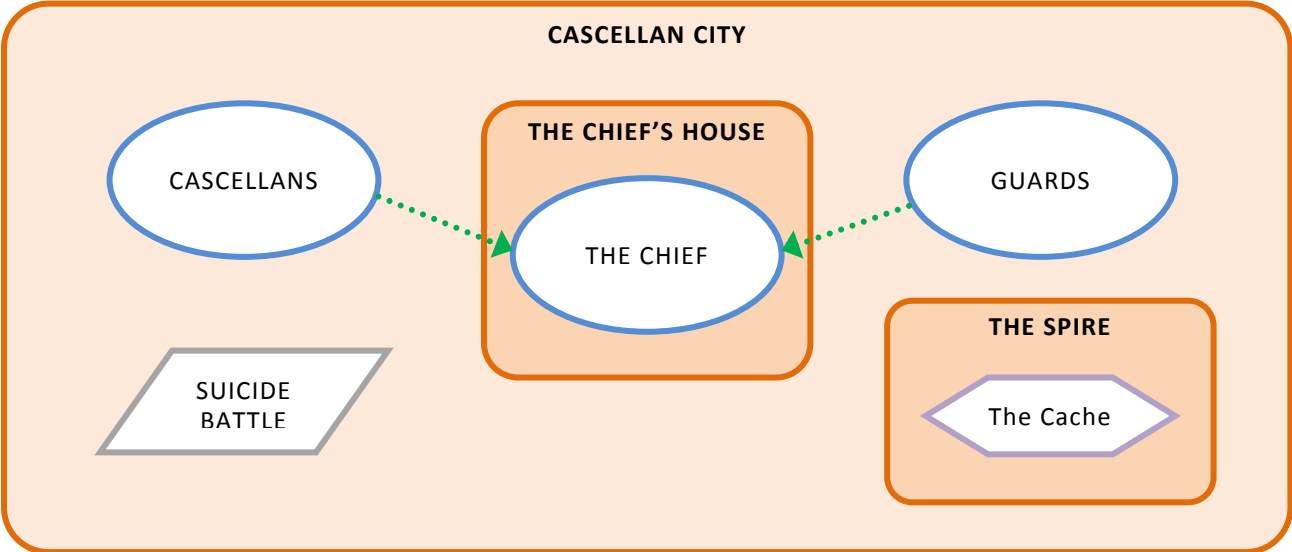
“What kind of filthy beast are you?” they demand. “You’re disgusting!” someone shouts. Several of them vomit, others turn away. All are repulsed by the mere concept of violence. They have no prepared responses; they are in utter shock.

Which might lead to an idea...

If the PCs can convince the Cascellans that they intend to do true, serious harm to them, even killing every last one of them if necessary – *and on purpose* – maybe they’d have no idea what to do, because such an unthinkable act as mass murder would prevent them all from attaining a Warrior’s Death. Maybe then they’d give in.

(Pssst: It’s true. They would.)

STRATEGERY



WARRIOR RACE

by Robert Sheckley

Illustrated by Scattergood

Destroying the spirit of the enemy is the goal of war and the aliens had the best way!

They never did discover whose fault it was. Fannia pointed out that if Donnaught had had the brains of an ox, as well as the build, he would have remembered to check the tanks. Donnaught, although twice as big as him, wasn't quite as fast with an insult. He intimated, after a little thought, that Fannia's nose might have obstructed his reading of the fuel gauge.

This still left them twenty light-years from Thetis, with a cupful of transformer fuel in the emergency tank.

"All right," Fannia said presently. "What's done is done. We can squeeze about three light-years out of the fuel before we're back on atomics. Hand me *The Galactic Pilot*—unless you forgot that, too."

Donnaught dragged the bulky microfilm volume out of its locker, and they explored its pages.

The Galactic Pilot told them they were in a sparse, seldom-visited section of space, which they already knew. The nearest planetary system was Hatterfield; no intelligent life there. Sersus had a native population, but no refueling facilities. The same with Illed, Hung and Porderai.

"Ah-ha!" Fannia said. "Read that, Donnaught. If you can read, that is."

"Cascella," Donnaught read, slowly and clearly, following the line with a thick forefinger. "Type M sun. Three planets, intelligent (AA3C) human-type life on second. Oxygen-breathers. Non-mechanical. Religious. Friendly. Unique social structure, described in Galactic Survey Report 33877242. Population estimate: stable at three billion. Basic Cascellan vocabulary taped under Cas33b2. Scheduled for resurvey 2375 A.D. Cache of transformer fuel left, beam coordinate 8741 kgl. Physical descript: Unocc. flatland."

"Transformer fuel, boy!" Fannia said gleefully. "I believe we will get to Thetis, after all." He punched the new direction on the ship's tape. "If that fuel's still there."

"Should we read up on the unique social structure?" Donnaught asked, still poring over *The Galactic Pilot*.

"Certainly," Fannia said. "Just step over to the main galactic base on Earth and buy me a copy."

"I forgot," Donnaught admitted slowly.

"Let me see," Fannia said, dragging out the ship's language library, "Cascellan, Cascellan ... Here it is. Be good while I learn the language." He set the tape in the hypnophone and switched it on. "Another useless tongue in my overstuffed head," he murmured, and then the hypnophone took over.

■

Coming out of transformer drive with at least a drop of fuel left, they switched to atomics. Fannia rode the beam right across the planet, locating the slender metal spire of the Galactic Survey cache. The plain was no longer unoccupied, however. The Cascellans had built a city around the cache, and the spire dominated the crude wood-and-mud buildings.

"Hang on," Fannia said, and brought the ship down on the outskirts of the city, in a field of stubble.

"Now look," Fannia said, unfastening his safety belt. "We're just here for fuel. No souvenirs, no side-trips, no fraternizing."

Through the port, they could see a cloud of dust from the city. As it came closer, they made out figures running toward their ship.

"What do you think this unique social structure is?" Donnaught asked, pensively checking the charge in a needler gun.

"I know not and care less," Fannia said, struggling into space armor. "Get dressed."

"The air's breathable."

"Look, pachyderm, for all we know, these Cascellans think the proper way to greet visitors is to chop off their heads and stuff them with green apples. If Galactic says unique, it probably means unique."

"Galactic said they were friendly."

"That means they haven't got atomic bombs. Come on, get dressed." Donnaught put down the needler and struggled into an oversize suit of space armor. Both men strapped on needlers, paralyzers, and a few grenades.

"I don't think we have anything to worry about," Fannia said, tightening the last nut on his helmet. "Even if they get rough, they can't crack space armor. And if they're not rough, we won't have any trouble. Maybe these gewgaws will help." He picked up a box of trading articles—mirrors, toys and the like.

Helmeted and armored, Fannia slid out the port and raised one hand to the Cascellans. The language, hypnotically placed in his mind, leaped to his lips.

"We come as friends and brothers. Take us to the chief."

The natives clustered around, gaping at the ship and the space armor. Although they had the same number of eyes,

ears and limbs as humans, they completely missed looking like them.

"If they're friendly," Donnaught asked, climbing out of the port, "why all the hardware?" The Cascellans were dressed predominantly in a collection of knives, swords and daggers. Each man had at least five, and some had eight or nine.

"Maybe Galactic got their signals crossed," Fannia said, as the natives spread out in an escort. "Or maybe the natives just use the knives for mumblypeg."

■

The city was typical of a non-mechanical culture. Narrow, packed-dirt streets twisted between ramshackle huts. A few two-story buildings threatened to collapse at any minute. A stench filled the air, so strong that Fannia's filter couldn't quite eradicate it. The Cascellans bounded ahead of the heavily laden Earthmen, dashing around like a pack of



playful puppies. Their knives glittered and clanked.

The chief's house was the only three-story building in the city. The tall spire of the cache was right behind it.

"If you come in peace," the chief said when they entered, "you are welcome." He was a middle-aged Cascellan with at least fifteen knives strapped to various parts of his person. He squatted cross-legged on a raised dais.

"We are privileged," Fannia said. He remembered from the hypnotic language lesson that "chief" on Cascella meant more than it usually did on Earth. The chief here was a combination of king, high priest, deity and bravest warrior.

"We have a few simple gifts here," Fannia added, placing the gewgaws at the king's feet. "Will his majesty accept?"

"No," the king said. "We accept no gifts." Was that the unique social structure? Fannia wondered. It certainly was not human. "We are a warrior race. What we want, we take."

Fannia sat cross-legged in front of the dais and exchanged conversation with the king while Donnaught played with the spurned toys. Trying to overcome the initial bad impression, Fannia told the chief about the stars and other worlds, since simple people usually liked fables. He spoke of the ship, not mentioning yet that it was out of fuel. He spoke of Cascella, telling the chief how its fame was known throughout the Galaxy.

"That is as it should be," the chief said proudly. "We are a race of warriors, the like of which has never been seen. Every man of us dies fighting."

"You must have fought some great wars," Fannia said politely, wondering what idiot had written up the galactic report.

"I have not fought a war for many years," the chief said. "We are united now, and all our enemies have joined us."

Bit by bit, Fannia led up to the matter of the fuel.

"What is this 'fuel'?" the chief asked, haltingly because there was no equivalent for it in the Cascellan language.

"It makes our ship go."

"And where is it?"

"In the metal spire," Fannia said. "If you would just allow us—"

"In the holy shrine?" the chief exclaimed, shocked. "The tall metal church which the gods left here long ago?"

"Yeah," Fannia said sadly, knowing what was coming. "I guess that's it."

"It is sacrilege for an outworlder to go near it," the chief said. "I forbid it."

"We need the fuel." Fannia was getting tired of sitting cross-legged. Space armor wasn't built for complicated postures. "The spire was put here for such emergencies."

"Strangers, know that I am god of my people, as well as their leader. If you dare approach the sacred temple, there will be war."

"I was afraid of that," Fannia said, getting to his feet.

"And since we are a race of warriors," the chief said, "at my command, every fighting man of the planet will move against you. More will come from the hills and from across the rivers."

Abruptly, the chief drew a knife. It must have been a signal, because every native in the room did the same.

■

Fannia dragged Donnaught away from the toys. "Look, lummo. These friendly warriors can't do a damn thing to us. Those knives can't cut space armor, and I doubt if they have anything better. Don't let them pile up on you, though. Use the paralyzer first, the needler if they really get thick."

"Right." Donnaught whisked out and primed a paralyzer in a single coordinated movement. With weapons, Donnaught was fast and reliable, which was virtue enough for Fannia to keep him as a partner.

"We'll cut around this building and grab the fuel. Two cans ought to be enough. Then we'll beat it fast."

They walked out the building, followed by the Cascellans. Four carriers lifted the chief, who was barking orders. The narrow street outside was suddenly jammed with armed natives. No one tried to touch them yet, but at least a thousand knives were flashing in the sun.

In front of the cache was a solid phalanx of Cascellans. They stood behind a network of ropes that probably marked the boundary between sacred and profane ground.

"Get set for it," Fannia said, and stepped over the ropes.

Immediately the foremost temple guard raised his knife. Fannia brought up the paralyzer, not firing it yet, still moving forward.

The foremost native shouted something, and the knife swept across in a glittering arc. The Cascellan gurgled something else, staggered and fell. Bright blood oozed from his throat.

"I *told* you not to use the needler yet!" Fannia said.

"I didn't," Donnaught protested. Glancing back, Fannia saw that Donnaught's needler was still holstered.

"Then I don't get it," said Fannia bewilderedly.

Three more natives bounded forward, their knives held high. They tumbled to the ground also. Fannia stopped and watched as a platoon of natives advanced on them.

Once they were within stabbing range of the Earthmen, the natives were slitting their own throats!

Fannia was frozen for a moment, unable to believe his eyes. Donnaught halted behind him.

Natives were rushing forward by the hundreds now, their knives poised, screaming at the Earthmen. As they came within range, each native stabbed himself, tumbling on a quickly growing pile of bodies. In minutes the Earthmen were surrounded by a heap of bleeding Cascellan flesh, which was steadily growing higher.

"All right!" Fannia shouted. "Stop it." He yanked Donnaught back with him, to profane ground. "Truce!" he yelled in Cascellan.

The crowd parted and the chief was carried through. With two knives clenched in his fists, he was panting from excitement.

"We have won the first battle!" he said proudly. "The might of our warriors frightens even such aliens as yourselves. You shall not profane our temple while a man is alive on Cascella!"

The natives shouted their approval and triumph.

The two aliens dazedly stumbled back to their ship.

■

"So that's what Galactic meant by 'a unique social structure,'" Fannia said morosely. He stripped off his armor and lay down on his bunk. "Their way of making war is to suicide their enemies into capitulation."

"They must be nuts," Donnaught grumbled. "That's no way to fight."

"It works, doesn't it?" Fannia got up and stared out a porthole. The sun was setting, painting the city a charming red in its glow. The beams of light glistened off the spire of the Galactic cache. Through the open doorway they could hear the boom and rattle of drums. "Tribal call to arms," Fannia said.

"I still say it's crazy." Donnaught had some definite ideas on fighting. "It ain't human."

"I'll buy that. The idea seems to be that if enough people slaughter themselves, the enemy gives up out of sheer guilty conscience."

"What if the enemy doesn't give up?"

"Before these people united, they must have fought it out tribe to tribe, suiciding until someone gave up. The losers probably joined the victors; the tribe must have grown until it could take over the planet by sheer weight of numbers." Fannia looked carefully at Donnaught, trying to see if he understood. "It's anti-survival, of course; if someone didn't give up, the race would probably kill themselves." He shook his head. "But war of any kind is anti-survival. Perhaps they've got rules."

"Couldn't we just barge in and grab the fuel quick?" Donnaught asked. "And get out before they all killed themselves?"

"I don't think so," Fannia said. "They might go on committing suicide for the next ten years, figuring they were still fighting us." He looked thoughtfully at the city. "It's that chief of theirs. He's their god and he'd probably keep them suiciding until he was the only man left. Then he'd grin, say, 'We are great warriors,' and kill himself."

Donnaught shrugged his big shoulders in disgust. "Why don't we knock him off?"

"They'd just elect another god." The sun was almost below the horizon now. "I've got an idea, though," Fannia said. He scratched his head. "It might work. All we can do is try."

■

At midnight, the two men sneaked out of the ship, moving silently into the city. They were both dressed in space armor again. Donnaught carried two empty fuel cans. Fannia had his paralyzer out.

The streets were dark and silent as they slid along walls and around posts, keeping out of sight. A native turned a corner suddenly, but Fannia paralyzed him before he could make a sound.

They crouched in the darkness, in the mouth of an alley facing the cache.

"Have you got it straight?" Fannia asked. "I paralyze the guards. You bolt in and fill up those cans. We get the hell out of here, quick. When they check, they find the cans still there. Maybe they won't commit suicide then."

The men moved across the shadowy steps in front of the cache. There were three Cascellans guarding the entrance, their knives stuck in their loincloths. Fannia stunned them with a medium charge, and Donnaught broke into a run.

Torches instantly flared, natives boiled out of every alleyway, shouting, waving their knives.

"We've been ambushed!" Fannia shouted. "Get back here, Donnaught!"

Donnaught hurriedly retreated. The natives had been waiting for them. Screaming, yowling, they rushed at the Earthmen, slitting their own throats at five-foot range. Bodies tumbled in front of Fannia, almost tripping him as he backed up. Donnaught caught him by an arm and yanked him straight. They ran out of the sacred area.

"Truce, damn it!" Fannia called out. "Let me speak to the chief. Stop it! Stop it! I want a truce!"

Reluctantly, the Cascellans stopped their slaughter.

"This is war," the chief said, striding forward. His almost human face was stern under the torchlight. "You have seen our warriors. You know now that you cannot stand against

them. The word has spread to all our lands. My entire people are prepared to do battle."

He looked proudly at his fellow-Cascellans, then back to the Earthmen. "I myself will lead my people into battle now. There will be no stopping us. We will fight until you surrender yourselves completely, stripping off your armor."

"Wait, Chief," Fannia panted, sick at the sight of so much blood. The clearing was a scene out of the Inferno. Hundreds of bodies were sprawled around. The streets were muddy with blood.

"Let me confer with my partner tonight. I will speak with you tomorrow."

"No," the chief said. "You started the battle. It must go to its conclusion. Brave men wish to die in battle. It is our fondest wish. You are the first enemy we have had in many years, since we subdued the mountain tribes."

"Sure," Fannia said. "But let's talk about it—"

"I myself will fight you," the chief said, holding up a dagger. "I will die for my people, as a warrior must!"

"Hold it!" Fannia shouted. "Grant us a truce. We are allowed to fight only by sunlight. It is a tribal taboo."

The chief thought for a moment, then said, "Very well. Until tomorrow."

The beaten Earthmen walked slowly back to their ship amid the jeers of the victorious populace.

■

Next morning, Fannia still didn't have a plan. He knew that he had to have fuel; he wasn't planning on spending the rest of his life on Cascella, or waiting until the Galactic Survey sent another ship, in fifty years or so. On the other hand, he hesitated at the idea of being responsible for the death of anywhere up to three billion people. It wouldn't be a very good record to take to Thetis. The Galactic Survey might find out about it. Anyway, he just wouldn't do it.

He was stuck both ways.

Slowly, the two men walked out to meet the chief. Fannia was still searching wildly for an idea while listening to the drums booming.

"If there was only someone we could fight," Donnaught mourned, looking at his useless blasters.

"That's the deal," Fannia said. "Guilty conscience is making sinners of us all, or something like that. They expect us to give in before the carnage gets out of hand." He considered for a moment. "It's not so crazy, actually. On Earth, armies don't usually fight until every last man is slaughtered on one side. Someone surrenders when they've had enough."

"If they'd just fight us!"

"Yeah, if they only—" He stopped. "We'll fight each other!" he said. "These people look at suicide as war. Wouldn't they look upon war—real fighting—as suicide?"

"What good would that do us?" Donnaught asked.

They were coming into the city now and the streets were lined with armed natives. Around the city there were thousands more. Natives were filling the plain, as far as the eye could see. Evidently they had responded to the drums and were here to do battle with the aliens.

Which meant, of course, a wholesale suicide.

"Look at it this way," Fannia said. "If a guy plans on suiciding on Earth, what do we do?"

"Arrest him?" Donnaught asked.

"Not at first. We offer him anything he wants, if he just won't do it. People offer the guy money, a job, their daughters, anything, just so he won't do it. It's taboo on Earth."

"So?"

"So," Fannia went on, "maybe fighting is just as taboo here. Maybe they'll offer us fuel, if we'll just stop."

Donnaught looked dubious, but Fannia felt it was worth a try.

■

They pushed their way through the crowded city, to the entrance of the cache. The chief was waiting for them, beaming on his people like a jovial war god.

"Are you ready to do battle?" he asked. "Or to surrender?"

"Sure," Fannia said. "Now, Donnaught!"

He swung, and his mailed fist caught Donnaught in the ribs. Donnaught blinked.

"Come on, you idiot, hit me back."

Donnaught swung, and Fannia staggered from the force of the blow. In a second they were at it like a pair of blacksmiths, mailed blows ringing from their armored hides.

"A little lighter," Fannia gasped, picking himself up from the ground. "You're denting my ribs." He belted Donnaught viciously on the helmet.

"Stop it!" the chief cried. "This is disgusting!"

"It's working," Fannia panted. "Now let me strangle you. I think that might do it."

Donnaught obliged by falling to the ground. Fannia clamped both hands around Donnaught's armored neck, and squeezed.

"Make believe you're in agony, idiot," he said.

Donnaught groaned and moaned as convincingly as he could.

"You must stop!" the chief screamed. "It is terrible to kill another!"

"Then let me get some fuel," Fannia said, tightening his grip on Donnaught's throat.

The chief thought it over for a little while. Then he shook his head.

"No."

"What?"

"You are aliens. If you want to do this disgraceful thing, do it. But you shall not profane our religious relics."

■

Donnaught and Fannia staggered to their feet. Fannia was exhausted from fighting in the heavy space armor; he barely made it up.

"Now," the chief said, "surrender at once. Take off your armor or do battle with us."

The thousands of warriors—possibly millions, because more were arriving every second—shouted their blood-wrath. The cry was taken up on the outskirts and echoed to the hills, where more fighting men were pouring down into the crowded plain.

Fannia's face contorted. He couldn't give himself and Donnaught up to the Cascellans. They might be cooked at the next church supper. For a moment he considered going after the fuel and letting the damned fools suicide all they pleased.

His mind an angry blank, Fannia staggered forward and hit the chief in the face with a mailed glove.

The chief went down, and the natives backed away in horror. Quickly, the chief snapped out a knife and brought it up to his throat. Fannia's hands closed on the chief's wrists.

"Listen to me," Fannia croaked. "We're going to take that fuel. If any man makes a move—if anyone kills himself—I'll kill your chief."

The natives milled around uncertainly. The chief was struggling wildly in Fannia's hands, trying to get a knife to his throat, so he could die honorably.

"Get it," Fannia told Donnaught, "and hurry it up."

The natives were uncertain just what to do. They had their knives poised at their throats, ready to plunge if battle was joined.

"Don't do it," Fannia warned. "I'll kill the chief and then he'll never die a warrior's death."

The chief was still trying to kill himself. Desperately, Fannia held on, knowing he had to keep him from suicide in order to hold the threat of death over him.

"Listen, Chief," Fannia said, eyeing the uncertain crowd. "I must have your promise there'll be no more war between us. Either I get it or I kill you."

"Warriors!" the chief roared. "Choose a new ruler. Forget me and do battle!"

The Cascellans were still uncertain, but knives started to lift.

"If you do it," Fannia shouted in despair, "I'll kill your chief. *I'll kill all of you!*"

That stopped them.

"I have powerful magic in my ship. I can kill every last man, and then you won't be able to die a warrior's death. *Or get to heaven!*"

The chief tried to free himself with a mighty surge that almost tore one of his arms free, but Fannia held on, pinning both arms behind his back.

"Very well," the chief said, tears springing into his eyes. "A warrior must die by his own hand. You have won, alien."

The crowd shouted curses as the Earthmen carried the chief and the cans of fuel back to the ship. They waved their knives and danced up and down in a frenzy of hate.

"Let's make it fast," Fannia said, after Donnaught had fueled the ship.

He gave the chief a push and leaped in. In a second they were in the air, heading for Thetis and the nearest bar at top speed.

The natives were hot for blood—their own. Every man of them pledged his life to wiping out the insult to their leader and god, and to their shrine.

But the aliens were gone. There was nobody to fight.



INSCRUTIBLE OTHER

Based on "Where the World is Quiet"
by Henry Kuttner
(writing as C. H. Liddel)



OBSTACLES

Dangerous Environment - The Upper Pass

Monster/Enemy - The Other

Psychological Challenges - The Veil

Psychological Challenges - The TimeSlip

Psychological Challenges - Giving Blood

Psychological Challenges - Killing the Girls

Psychological Challenges - Psychic Battle with The Other

COMPLICATIONS

Scant Intel

Bad Odds

Object of Mission will Refuse/Resist

PERKS

30 MV

MAGUFFINS

Data/Report on TimeSlip

Temple Tablets (5M each)

Temporally-Displaced Specimens/Samples (20M)

BACKSTORY

On the morning of May 24th, 1940, the city of Lima and nearby areas were rocked by a magnitude 8.2 earthquake that struck at 11.35 am. The quake was felt as far away as Guayaquil, Ecuador in the north and Arica, Chile in the south, and caused great destruction in Lima and neighboring cities.

The widely-displaced damage and unusual angles of the quake – later called “T-Wave” patterns – long baffled seismologists and geologists, until the story became just another historical oddity, one of many in the field of plate tectonics.

But in a remote section of the Andes, in a tiny village near the pass of Huascan, things went far beyond “odd”. After the quake, the pass was overtaken by a blinding fog, and strange sightings were reported. Locals spoke of “ancient gods” coming to take them one by one, and seven girls disappeared into the fog.

This is the story no one knows about. The story the PCs will be sent in to investigate.

Their slip will set them down unseen in a valley below the Indios Village, from which point they should easily be able to get to the mountain pass.

MISSION OF THE HUASCAN FOG

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Survey/Fact-Finding
NODE TYPE: Past Earth
SLIP TYPE: Temporal (DL3)
PAY: 5M ea

The Academy of IntraSpace Technology has discovered a new set of retro-temporal coordinates, and wants some DayTrippers to investigate the aftermath of a great earthquake that took place in Peru, way back in the early part of the 20th century.

Observers for miles around reported a mysterious thick fog – not smoke – that lingered over the Huascan Pass for months after the quake. This is the phenomenon we’re exploring.

There should be no problem commissioning whatever equipment the PCs request (within reason) – as this research is being funded by an A.I.T. Fellowship Grant.

“Frankly,” says the overseeing assistant’s assistant, “the RA signature of the Node looks really weird: almost like there’s a pre-existing ripple effect from an ongoing temporal slip – only we haven’t sent any yet.”

NEVER TRIP ALONE

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Emergency/Rescue
NODE TYPE: Dream World
SLIP TYPE: Subjective (DL5)
STABILITY: Low, Subject to Flux (2)
PAY: 6M ea

A DayTripper on a solo run has failed to report back, and only a few hours remain until the window closes. The Node she’s visiting is dangerously unstable, and an emergency rescue operation has been called. The name of this wayward ‘Tripper? Miranda Valle.

In this scenario, Miranda is not one of the Indios girls; she’s a DayTripper who posed as an anthropologist to gain access to the village. Her real goal is to investigate the Fog in this Dream World, which she believes is tied to a similar event that happened in *our* world.

She slipped out without telling anyone; it wasn’t until an hour ago that a techie at Tracy Island discovered her ship – the *Emily Davison* – was missing.

THE SHAKEN WORLD

MISSION

MISSION TYPE: Exploration
NODE TYPE: Known Planet (Earth)
SLIP TYPE: Cartesian (DL3)

GM NOTE: In this scenario, there’s no time travel and it’s not a Dream World: it’s the real world, and it’s happening *now*. There is no pay, there are no Perks.

One of the PCs is contacted by an associate in Lima, Peru, which has just been through a tremendous earthquake. Thanks to modernization and Tectonix’ patented buffering technology, most of the city survived unscathed.

“But some strange reports have been coming out of the mountains, where people still live in the ways of the ancestors,” says the contact, “And I mean *really* strange. Like an evil fog that takes people in the night? I’m needed here in the city, but would you mind going out to meet with my source, a man named Rafael?”

Of course, first they’ll have to fly or take the maglev train to Lima, then obtain a human-driven vehicle to get up the trail to the Indios village where Rafael can be found. (Shockingly, out here in the third world people still drive their own cars, as in, with their own hands and feet.)

Or then again... they could *Slip* there. It’s just a simple Cartesian vector calculation, DL 3.

THE VILLAGE

SURROUNDINGS: Mountains & Steppe-Farms
CONDITION: Freezing
TERRAIN: Mountainous
WEATHER: Murky, Cold
BIODIVERSITY: Slow ecological precession
DOMINANT COLORS: White, grey, green
RESOURCES: Plants, animals, imported goods
ENCOUNTER DL: Likely (7)

This small Indios village, halfway up the west side of the Andes in the shadow of Huascan, offers little in the way of creature comforts. There is a water well, a few dozen small but sturdy huts and one wooden building.

At the north edge of the village is the hut of Fra Rafael. The other huts are inhabited by local families (2d6 people per hut, roughly half of whom are children), who spend most of their daylight hours tending the surrounding terrace-farms. These people are of old stock, and know how to make the most of this difficult land.

Supplies and correspondence with the outside world come in via the trail to the west, from as far as Lima, 100 miles away to the south-southwest. The Huascan Pass runs eastward from here up and over the Andes, the only relatively safe pass in this part of the continent.

PERCEPTIONS

- The wooden building is the “village building”, the only structure with interior walls. It serves as a village meeting hall, tribal chamber, church, schoolroom, post office and community hub.
- Near the building is a fenced enclosure with a small number of burros, goats and chickens.
- An old legless priest – Fra Rafael, it turns out – is giving solace to a trio of women who are crying. He says a prayer with them and they go back to their huts, holding each other.
- A young child wanders in the direction of the pass; its parents run to clutch it, their faces terrified beyond what seems appropriate, here in their own village.
- A weird whistling sound comes from the mountains, echoing across the valley.
- The fog grows thicker, blindingly thick, over *THE LOWER PASS*. You cannot see the tops of the mountains anymore.

FRA RAFAEL

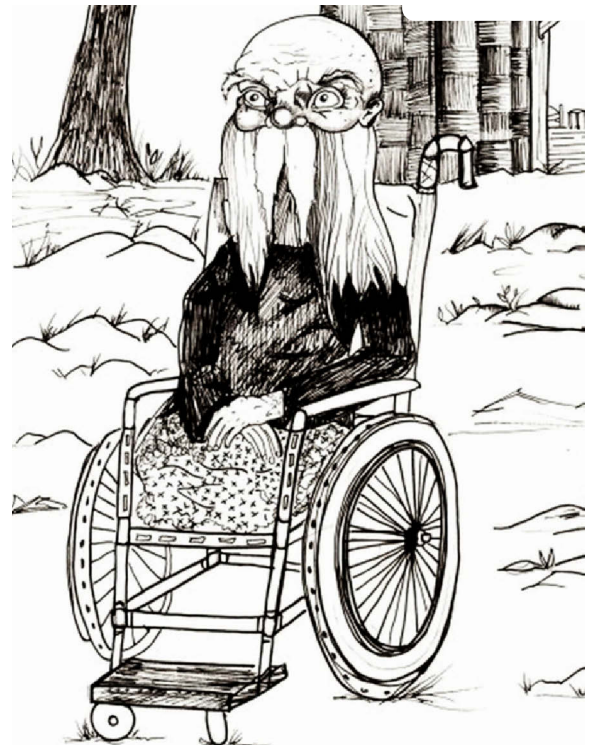
BRAINS 2
CHARM 2
PSYCHE 3

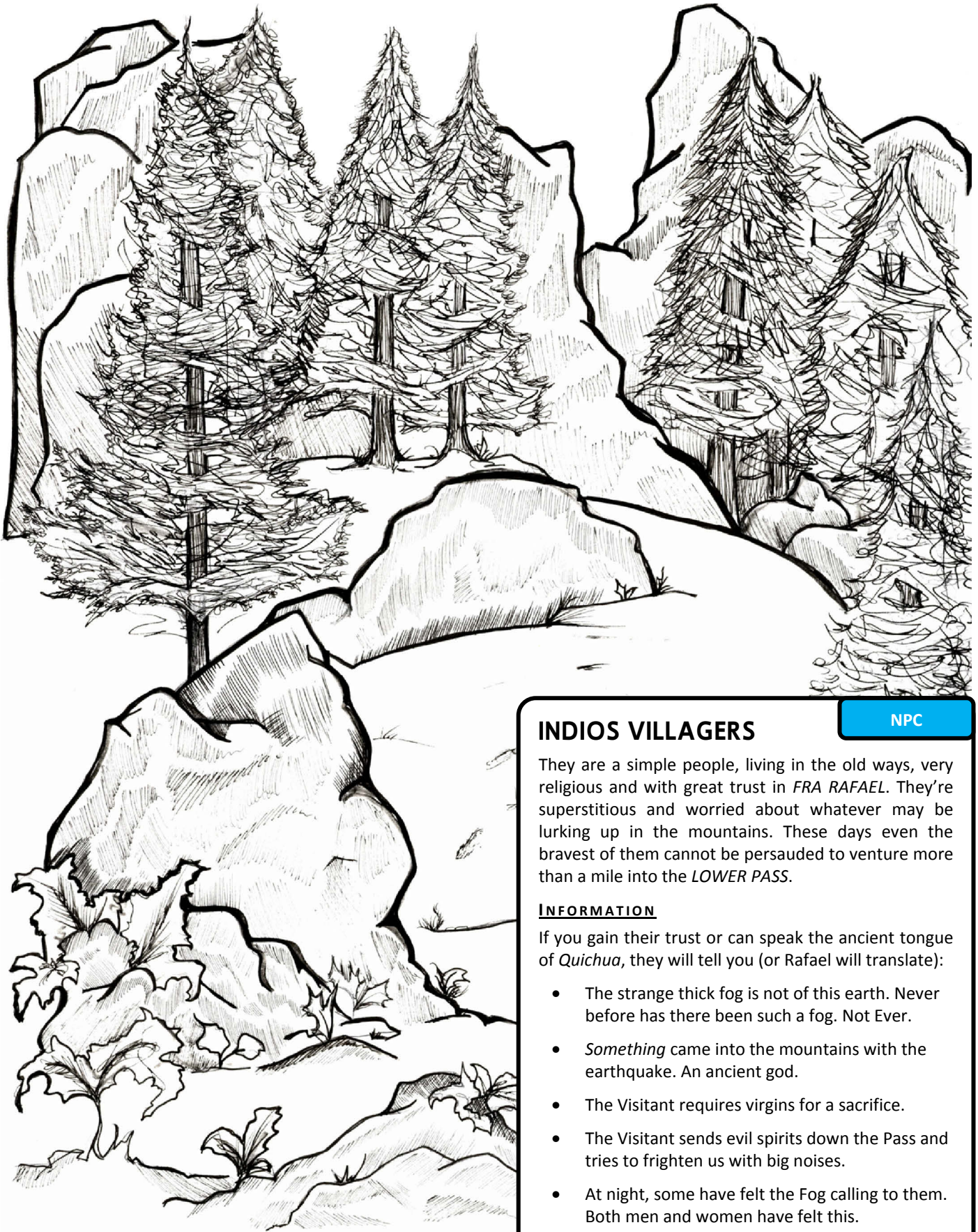
TCV 25

A thin man in a wheelchair, wrapped in a llama-wool blanket, missing both legs. The villagers appeal to him to protect them. His prayers and council help lighten their fears, but he can only do so much. He begs for the PCs’ assistance, recognizing them as “scientists” – people who understand the world in a rational way.

Rafael says he has seen “impossible things” lately: the Fog coming into town with its long fingers, as if looking for someone; strange sounds coming from the mountain pass and beyond; people and animals behaving strangely, forgetful and filled with fear; and then three days ago, the seventh girl disappeared – a girl named Miranda.

GM NOTE: In the “Dream World” scenario, Miranda Valle is a DayTripper who posed as an anthropologist in order to gain the villagers’ trust, and has gone off to investigate the Fog on her own.





INDIOS VILLAGERS

NPC

They are a simple people, living in the old ways, very religious and with great trust in *FRA RAFAEL*. They're superstitious and worried about whatever may be lurking up in the mountains. These days even the bravest of them cannot be persuaded to venture more than a mile into the *LOWER PASS*.

INFORMATION

If you gain their trust or can speak the ancient tongue of *Quichua*, they will tell you (or Rafael will translate):

- The strange thick fog is not of this earth. Never before has there been such a fog. Not Ever.
- *Something* came into the mountains with the earthquake. An ancient god.
- The Visitant requires virgins for a sacrifice.
- The Visitant sends evil spirits down the Pass and tries to frighten us with big noises.
- At night, some have felt the Fog calling to them. Both men and women have felt this.
- It is folly to seek it out. It can only bring death.

THE LOWER PASS

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Mountains
CONDITION: Freezing
TERRAIN: Mountainous
WEATHER: Murky/Cold
BIODIVERSITY: Little; only a few species of flora
DOMINANT COLORS: White, grey, browns
RESOURCES: None
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Lower Lifeforms
ENCOUNTER DL: Uncommon (8)

This is the way to *THE UPPER PASS*, the only feasible way over the mountains, and there's nothing here but wild llamas, condors, and snow. It's cold and desolate. There are no insects at this height, and no wood for making fires.

The girl's footprints can still be seen where the wind has not yet covered them. As you press onward into the desolate silence, the fog closes in, getting thicker.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	Unusual Feature
4-5	Wild Llamas (2-12)
6-8	Cave
9-10	Condor overhead
11-12	Indios Villagers (1-6)

After three hours of progress the PCs reach *THE FOG*.

THE FOG

EVENT

As you travel into the pass, the fog grows thicker. Here it becomes practically blinding: visibility is reduced to mere feet and the path is extremely dangerous. Pushing through leads to *THE UPPER PASS*.

THE UPPER PASS

REGION

SURROUNDINGS: Mountains
CONDITION: Freezing
TERRAIN: Mountainous
WEATHER: Murky/Cold
BIODIVERSITY: Little; only a few species of flora
DOMINANT COLORS: White, grey, browns
RESOURCES: None
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Lower Lifeforms
ENCOUNTER DL: Likely (7)

The pass grows narrower and more treacherous until it's a mere track. Occasional footprints show through the mist. When not moving (i.e. sleeping or resting), exposed characters and animals must make a HEALTH roll vs DL 3 each hour to avoid frostbite (affecting each Stat 1 hit at a time, in alphabetical order).

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-3	Unusual Feature
4-5	Cave
6-8	Fog-Blindness
9-10	Challenging Area
11-12	Feeling you're being watched

Challenging Areas such as gorges, handholds and switchbacks require GRACE actions ranging from EASY (DL2) to HARD (DL5). Mod of -3 for Fog-Blindness.

Fog-Blindness reduces visibility to mere inches, slowing movement to a crawl. It persists for 1-6 hours, with frostbite rolls (plus encounter rolls) each hour.

Caves are useful; inside a cave all characters and animals can rest while avoiding frostbite rolls.

After three hours of progress the PCs reach *THE VEIL*.

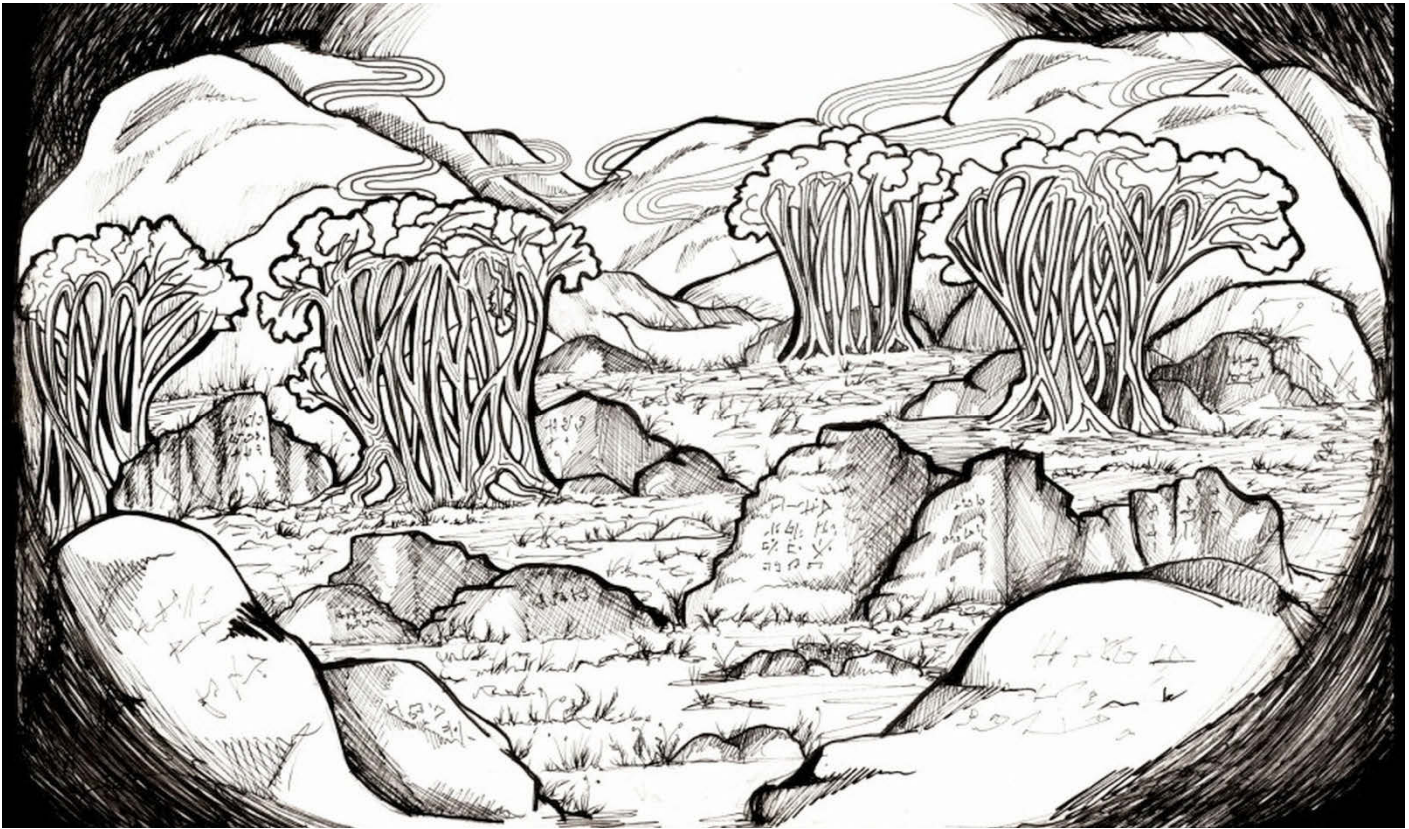
THE VEIL

EVENT

The girl's tracks, almost impossible to follow by now, turn due north. The fog by now feels like a living, sentient thing, secretive, shrouding a secret beyond its grey wall.

Suddenly you become conscious of a change: an electric tingle courses through your body. Abruptly the fog-wall brightens, and you can dimly make out vague images ahead of you. Are they... trees? Rocks? People?

It's not just an illusion. Pressing on, the PCs soon find themselves in *THE VALLEY*.



THE VALLEY

SURROUNDINGS: Fog
CONDITION: Lush, vibrant
TERRAIN: Soft, yielding
WEATHER: Warm, slight motion
BIODIVERSITY: Little; only a few species of flora
DOMINANT COLORS: Blue, white, brick red
UNUSUAL FEATURES: Advanced Sentient
ENCOUNTER DL: Likely (7)

The path opens out into a broad valley, too big to see across. The fog closes in above, it's like being in a huge dimly-lit cavern. Visibility is about half a mile. Blue-white moss carpets the ground, with large red boulders here and there, and big blue-leafed trees with complex trunk structures. Beneath your feet the snow melts and runs in trickling rivulets. The air is warm and vibrant. There is no sign of anyone, and the resilient moss retains no tracks.

ENCOUNTER TABLE (2D6)

2-5	Possessed Girl (Miranda, at first)
6	Unusual Feature
7-9	The Robot
10-12	The Other

At the far end of the valley, two miles away, are *THE GIRLS*.

GM NOTE: The Fog has the property of turning you around, always leading back into The Valley. The only way to escape The Valley is to vanquish *THE OTHER*.

REGION

PERCEPTIONS

- Your compass needle is spinning randomly.
- The trees have dozens of narrow trunks, and stand like immense bird-cages over the moss.
- The red rocks seem to be pieces of a massive ancient ruin. The stone is iron-hard. A *Geology* roll vs DL 4 reveals that this material is not from Earth. Carbon-dating (req. Pro Kit) shows that these ruins are tens of thousands of years old.
- There are occasional inscriptions on the red stones, but they are too eroded to make out. They somehow don't seem human.
- Deeper in The Valley, the ruins are different. Mixed in with the red blocks now appear other chunks of rock, which seem to have been made by another culture; primitive, but *human*. These stones are only a few thousand years old.
- The blue trees grow more numerous as you move deeper into The Valley, where they're covered with saffron-tinted leafy vines. Each tree is like a little private room, screened off by a densely-interwoven lattice of vines.

WHAT HAPPENED HERE

This entire region has been transported from the far future in a cataclysmic *Time-Slip*. This unheard-of phenomenon was also responsible for bringing *LHAR* and *THE ROBOT* here, as well as *THE OTHER*.

Lhar has resigned herself to her fate; stranded far away from any plentiful source of gamma-rays and unwilling to consume the life-force of the local creatures (including humans), she is destined to starve. The Other has no such compunction, and has begun using its powers to lure the primitive human minds to this secured place shrouded in fog.

In the *Dream World* scenario, that's all that happened.

But in any of the other scenarios, the very *idea* that whole chunks of spacetime can just *slip* under certain circumstances will be shocking news to the entire IntraSpace community. Any proof the PCs bring back from this region of spacetime might be invaluable in helping scientists define this new phenomenon in terms of IntraSpace Dynamics.

The consequences may be literally game-changing, adding a whole new class of Mission – and a whole new type of Danger – to the Big Model of the multiverse. And the DayTrippers who brought back the irrefutable evidence of this phenomenon in action here on Earth would become globally famous – at least for a while.

The story alone will be worth +1 Fame should the PCs decide to take it to the medianets, but physical proof would be worth a minimum of 20M to the right research facility. A SlipSpace venture firm like *X Investments* might also be interested.

ROBOT ENCOUNTER

EVENT

If encountered before *LHAR* is encountered, the robot will try to convince one of the PCs to follow it to her, rolling forward on its three supporting tentacles with a queer, swift gliding motion. The cilia around its “waist” will flutter with bands of alternating color.

If a weapon is pointed at it, it retreats into the trees.

If encountered in Lhar's presence or afterward, it will make no threatening moves and will try to help in any way that it can, as long as the action is not something Lhar would disapprove of.

THE ROBOT

NPC

BRAINS 3 Track+1
CHARM 1
GRACE 2 Hide+2 Grab+1
HEALTH 5

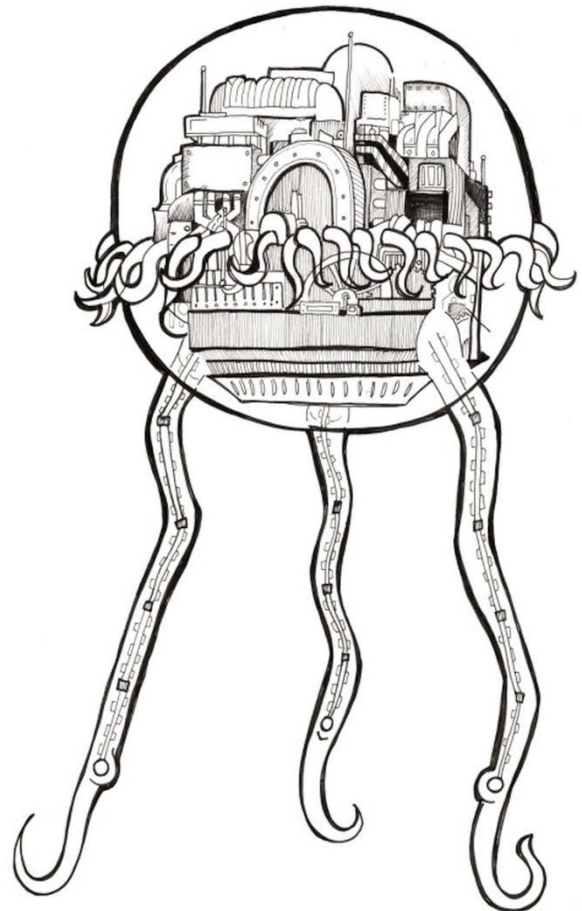
Armor+2

TCV 190

The robot looks like a sphere of translucent plastic four feet in diameter, glowing with shifting colors. Three white elastic tentacles support it from beneath, and a fringe of long, whip-like cilia form a ring around its equator.

The robot is the servant of *LHAR*, and is programmed to remain in her proximity. It is intelligent, it possesses emotions, and it communicates by twitching and flashing its cilia. In the future world they come from, robots and living creatures share a mental bond, a sort of symbiosis.

The robot knows that Lhar is dying and needs nourishment in the form of mammalian blood. It wants to save her, but knows that her death cannot be held off forever.



LHAR'S HUT

LOCATION

Located within one of the vine-covered trees, this place is empty except for a large curious flower that appears to grow from the dirt floor. This flower is *LHAR*.

LHAR

NPC

BRAINS 3

CHARM 3

GRACE 3

PSYCHE 5

Pollenize+2

Empower+2

MindHeal+2

TCV 235

She appears as a white iris-like flower, five feet tall. The petals are closed, concealing her body beneath, and a convoluted pedestal beneath her body looks like a tiny ruffled skirt.

She speaks telepathically: "You are well now, though weak. It is useless to try to escape from this valley. No one can escape. The Other has powers I do not, and those powers will keep you here."

If asked her name, she will reply: "I am Lhar. I am not of your world... but I won't be here for long."

If asked why, she will explain: She is starving to death, because she cannot get enough of her usual food: *cosmic rays*, which were once plentiful in this universe but are now only a faint echo. To survive here, she explains, she must consume the blood of mammals, but she cannot use the girls for they have been "spoiled" by *THE OTHER*.

When first encountered, Lhar is close to death, and will expire in 24 hours. For each pint of blood she consumes from a mammalian creature (such as a human), she will gain 24 additional hours of life. She will not ask directly, but if a PC offers, she will gladly accept their blood. See *GIVING BLOOD* at right.

Unless a PC gives blood, Lhar will not venture outside; she is too weak for that. If she *has* been given blood she will offer to help the PCs despite her weakness, and she will accompany them outside (as will her robot) but she will not enter the *SCARLET TEMPLE*.

INFORMATION

- The Fog is created by *THE OTHER*, and cannot be bypassed. It will always turn you around.
- The Other must always take a form. If there are no other bodies available for it to merge with, it will be forced to take its own form.
- In its own form, it can be killed.

ABILITY: EMPOWERING

Empowering is psychic *Help*; Lhar can convert PSYCHE into a Mod for the person she assists in any kind of action. The DL of her roll equals the amount of power she wishes to send plus 3 (for example, if she wants to send a +2, she must beat a DL of 5). The Empower roll is resolved *before any other actions* in the Frame. For each +1 sent, her PSYCHE Stat diminishes by 1, and is regained at a rate of 1 point per Frame. When her PSYCHE Stat reaches zero, she falls unconscious.

Example: In Frame 1 Lhar sends 2 points, beating a DL 5 and giving the PC a +2 Mod. Her current PSYCHE is 3. In Frame 2 she tries to send those 3 points and beats a DL 6 to do it, so the PC gets a +3 Mod, and Lhar falls to the ground unconscious. She may take no action in the next Frame. If left unmolested, she will regain 1 point of PSYCHE per Frame.

ABILITY: MINDHEALING

MindHealing is like medicine for the PSYCHE, reversing 1 hit of PSYCHE damage and providing a +1 on PSYCHE rolls for 1 hour. It takes a few minutes to perform.

ABILITY: POLLENIZING

Lhar's *Pollenize* ability is an area attack with a 10' diameter. Those inside must roll HEALTH vs DL2 or take -1 HEALTH as they are coated inside and out.

GIVING BLOOD

EVENT

A tendril flicks out from Lhar's petals and wraps around your arm. It feels cool, painless, and takes less than a minute. She also administers a mild narcotic. "Your mind was close to madness," she says, "I have drugged you a little, so your emotions will not be too strong." This narcotic will give you a +1 on all PSYCHE rolls for one day.

Under the drug, everything feels slightly dreamlike. She tells you the truth, telepathically: "*This valley is not of your time. It was the result of a Time-Slip which dragged me – and The Other – into this world. This valley may be from your future or your past, I don't know. But I do know that no one can leave here until The Other is destroyed.*"

FINDING THE GIRLS

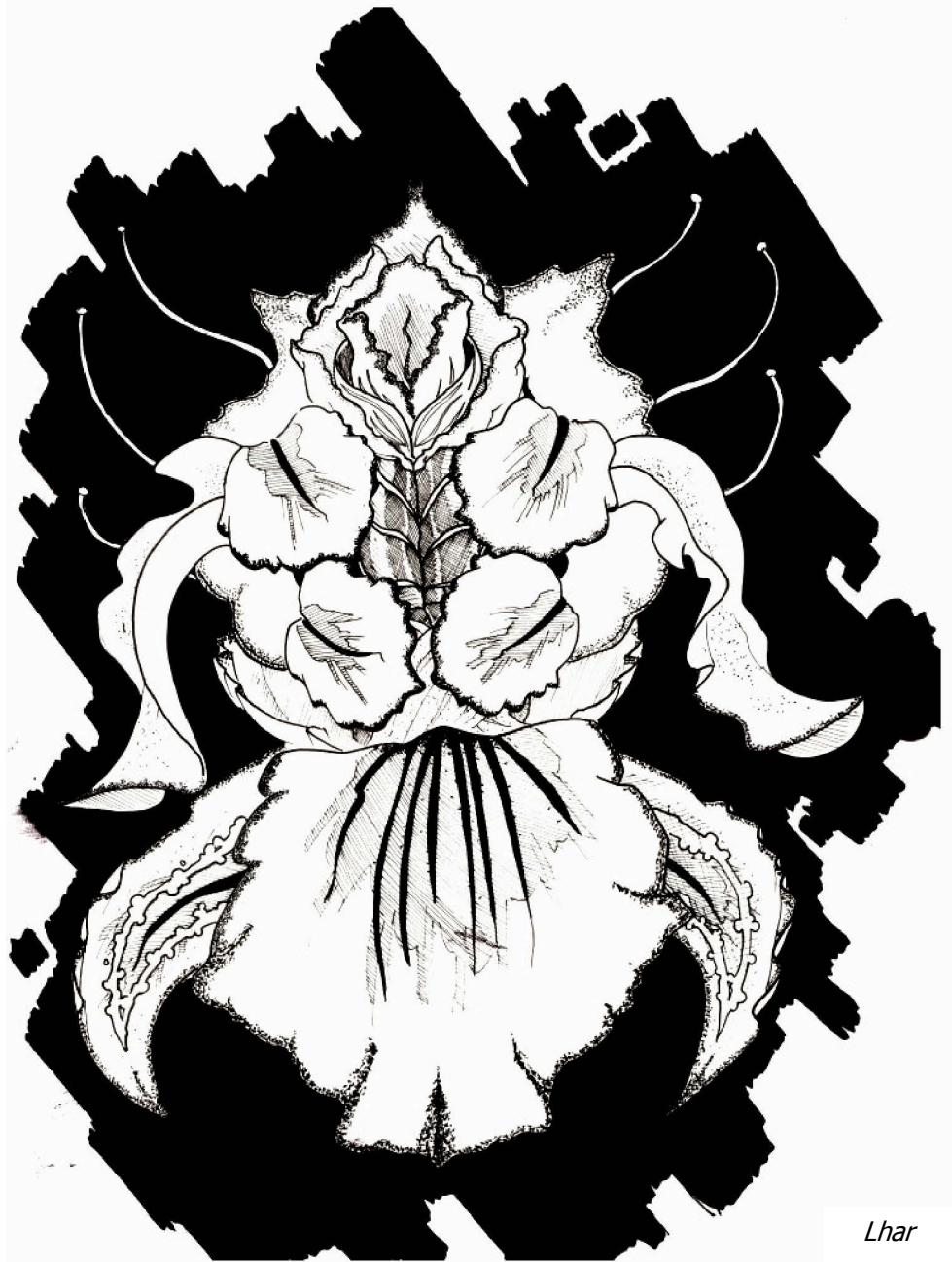
EVENT

At the far side of the valley, the six girls sit in a row on the ground, facing one of the red blocks. They sit cross-legged on the moss, backs toward you, rigid and motionless. They seem like they might be dead or drugged. Their lips are closed, their pupils dilated.

Interacting with them yields no response. They cannot hear you. Their eyes lazily turn toward something placed in their view, but the pupils remain dilated and they show no recognition of any kind.

They seem drugged, almost completely unaware of their surroundings. If you push or pull on them, they'll fall over, and then very slowly, with zombie-like motions, return to their original sitting positions.

After a minute or two of this, *MIRANDA RETURNS*.



Lhar

MIRANDA RETURNS

EVENT

Miranda enters the clearing. Her feet are blue-white with frostbite, but she doesn't notice. Her face is expressionless, her eyes fully black, fixed on nothing, burning with a strange dark glow – a side-effect of *THE OTHER*'s influence.

PCs must make PSYCHE rolls vs DL2. On Success: they realize that this girl has some sort of energy wrapped around her like an invisible, intangible veil, something alien. On Failure: they are frightened by her weird countenance, and are unable to move for one Frame.

She slowly walks over and sits with the others. Her body stiffens, and suddenly the "veil" seems to leave her. She's just another shell of a girl, empty and drained as the others, mindless and motionless.

A few seconds later, the girl beside her rises with a slow, fluid motion. Her now-black eyes glow with that strange light. That same sense of foreboding now radiates from this girl, as she slowly turns to look in your direction.

This time PCs must make PSYCHE rolls vs DL3. On Success: they realize that The Other has transferred itself to a new body. On Failure: they succumb to shock and fear, and must roll on the *SDS Table*.

THE OTHER

LIFEFORM

BRAINS 3
GRACE 3
MIGHT 3
PSYCHE 5

Freeze+2
Mindread+2

PsychicPull+2
Merge+2

TCV 265

The Other was trapped here by the Time-Slip. It created the fog-wall to protect itself from the rays of the sun. It feeds on the life-force of mammals, and assumes the body of its prey as it feeds. The host-body must be alive, even if comatose. This is not *possession*, but rather *merging* with its victim. It prefers this mode because in its true form it is vulnerable to attack.

The Other has strange mental powers. To use a power, it must beat its target in an opposed PSYCHE roll.

- **FREEZE** – Target freezes in place, unable to control their muscles. The effect lasts until the victim succeeds in a PSYCHE roll vs DL6.
- **MINDREAD** – The Other looks into the target's mind, learning their secrets, fears and wishes. Perhaps a LifeShaping event that has been suppressed all these years? This shocking experience forces the victim to make a roll on the SDS Table.
- **PSYCHIC PULL** – The Other can pull someone to it, from anywhere in its view. The target hovers above the ground. This takes one Frame.
- **MERGE** – It takes one Frame for The Other to enter a body. If the body is harmed during the same Frame, the Merge is aborted.
- **UNMERGE** – It takes one Frame for The Other to leave a body. This requires no PSYCHE roll. If prevented from re-entering another body immediately, its true form will become visible.

If the body it inhabits is killed, it will enter another body next Frame. If this is not possible, it will spend the next Frame assuming its true form. If The Other is killed or reduced to unconsciousness, the Fog instantly lifts and the path home is revealed.

TRUE FORM

In its true form, The Other is a great-headed grey shape with a tiny, pallid, humanoid body coiled beneath it. It squirms and wriggles like an infant, making little mewling noises.

It still possesses all its powers.

MERGING WITH THE OTHER

While “Merged”, The Other uses its victim's body to perform physical actions. The possessed body retains its *physical* Stats, but their BRAINS and PSYCHE are replaced by those of The Other. All The Other's mental powers are available to it while Merged. If The Other wishes to make the merged body perform a physical task, the body's Stats are used.

For every minute of “Merge” with The Other, the possessed character suffers 1 hit of damage. HEALTH, BRAINS and PSYCHE are the Stats affected, cycling in that order.

When all three of those Stats reach zero, the victim enters a nearly-comatose state (like that of the girls), now being kept “alive” only by the energies of The Other. At that point, they're already dead.

SCARLET TEMPLE

LOCATION

Beyond the place where the girls are found, shrouded in the Fog, is a scarlet temple. It can only be seen with a PSYCHE roll vs DL 5, or if *LHAR* is with you. Once you have seen it, it remains visible to you.

The Temple is made of the same red stones as the ruins you passed earlier, but this building is all in one piece, not cracked and broken like the others. Erosion has weathered its harsh angles until nothing remains but a rounded, smoothly sculptured monolith, scarlet in color and twenty feet tall, shaped like a rifle shell, with a large doorway in the center.

The doorway leads into a tall, dim, narrow room, its ceiling hidden in the gloom above. Indescribable carvings cover the high walls; they give a suggestion of inhuman things, watching.

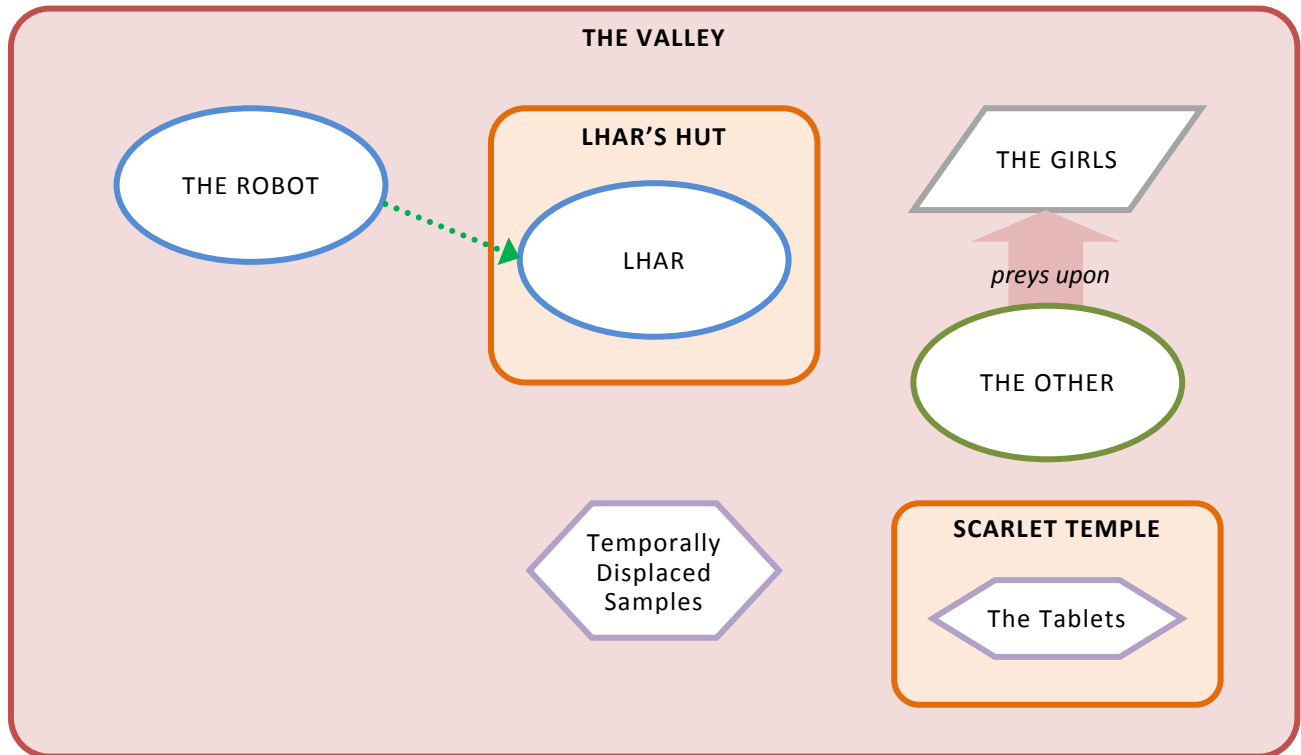
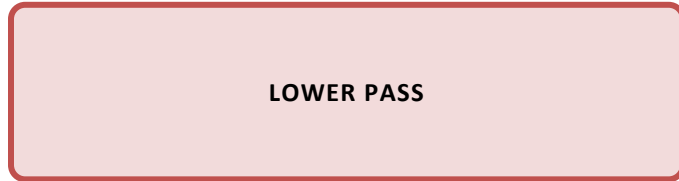
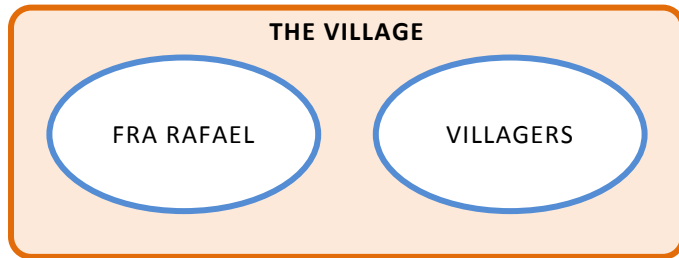
At the far end of the room is THE OTHER, in whatever form it has taken. This is the place where it will make its final stand. It glares at the PCs with all its terrible power.

TEMPLE TABLETS

MAGUFFIN

Scattered about this room are four red stone tablets, inscribed in the inhuman language of The Other's time. They will prove to be made of a material unknown to humans. Each tablet will be worth 5M to a future historian.

INSCRUTIBLE OTHER



WHERE THE WORLD IS QUIET

by C. H. Liddell

Fra Rafael saw strange things, impossible things. Then there was the mystery of the seven young virginal girls of Huascan.

Fra Rafael drew the llama-wool blanket closer about his narrow shoulders, shivering in the cold wind that screamed down from Huascan. His face held great pain. I rose, walked to the door of the hut and peered through fog at the shadowy haunted lands that lifted toward the sky—the Cordilleras that make a rampart along Peru's eastern border.

"There's nothing," I said. "Only the fog, Fra Rafael."

He made the sign of the cross on his breast. "It is the fog that brings the—the terror," he said. "I tell you, *Señor* White, I have seen strange things these last few months—impossible things. You are a scientist. Though we are not of the same religion, you also know that there are powers not of this earth."

I didn't answer, so he went on: "Three months ago it began, after the earthquake. A native girl disappeared. She was seen going into the mountains, toward Huascan along the Pass, and she did not come back. I sent men out to find her. They went up the Pass, found the fog grew thicker and thicker until they were blind and could see nothing. Fear came to them and they fled back down the mountain. A week later another girl vanished. We found her footprints."

"The same canyon?"

"*Si*, and the same result. Now seven girls have gone, one after the other, all in the same way. And I, *Señor* White—" Fra Rafael's pale, tired face was sad as he glanced down at the stumps of his legs—"I could not follow, as you see. Four years ago an avalanche crippled me. My bishop told me to return to Lima, but I prevailed on him to let me remain here for these natives are my people, *Señor*. They know and trust me. The loss of my legs has not altered that."

I nodded. "I can see the difficulty now, though."

"Exactly. I cannot go to Huascan and find out what has happened to the girls. The natives—well, I chose four of the strongest and bravest and asked them to take me up the Pass. I thought that I could overcome their superstitions. But I was not successful."

"How far did you go?" I asked.

"A few miles, not more than that. The fog grew thicker, until we were blinded by it, and the way was dangerous. I could not make the men go on." Fra Rafael closed his eyes

wearily. "They talked of old Inca gods and devils—Manco Capac and Oello Huaco, the Children of the Sun. They are very much afraid, *Señor* White. They huddle together like sheep and believe that an ancient god has returned and is taking them away one by one. And—one by one they *are* taken."

"Only young girls," I mused. "And no coercion is used, apparently. What's up toward Huascan?"

"Nothing but wild llamas and the condors. And snow, cold, desolation. These are the Andes, my friend."

"Okay," I said. "It sounds interesting. As an anthropologist I owe it to the Foundation to investigate. Besides, I'm curious. Superficially, there is nothing very strange about the affair. Seven girls have disappeared in the unusually heavy fogs we've had ever since the earthquake. Nothing more."

I smiled at him. "However, I think I'll take a look around and see what's so attractive about Huascan."

"I shall pray for you," he said. "Perhaps—well, *Señor*, for all the loss of my legs, I am not a weak man. I can stand much hardship. I can ride a burro."

"I don't doubt your willingness, Fra Rafael," I said. "But it's necessary to be practical. It's dangerous and it's cold up there. Your presence would only handicap me. Alone, I can go faster—remember, I don't know how far I'll have to travel."

The priest sighed. "I suppose you are right. When—"

"Now. My burro's packed."

"Your porters?"

"They won't go," I said wryly. "They've been talking to your villagers. It doesn't matter. I'll go it alone." I put out my hand, and Fra Rafael gripped it strongly.

"*Vaya con Dios*," he said.

I went out into the bright Peruvian sunlight. The Indios were standing in straggling knots, pretending not to watch me. My porters were nowhere in evidence. I grinned, yelled a sardonic goodbye, and started to lead the burro toward the Pass.

The fog vanished as the sun rose, but it still lay in the mountain canyons toward the west. A condor circled against the sky. In the thin, sharp air the sound of a distant rock-fall was distinctly audible.

White Huascan towered far away. A shadow fell on me as I entered the Pass. The burro plodded on, patient and obedient. I felt a little chill; the fog began to thicken.

Yes, the Indios had talked to me. I knew their language, their old religion. Bastard descendants of the Incas, they still preserved a deep-rooted belief in the ancient gods of their ancient race, who had fallen with Huayna Capac, the Great Inca, a year before Pizarro came raging into Peru. I

knew the Quichua—the old tongue of the mother race—and so I learned more than I might have otherwise.

Yet I had not learned much. The Indios said that *something* had come into the mountains near Huascan. They were willing to talk about it, but they knew little. They shrugged with apathetic fatalism. *It* called the young virgins, no doubt for a sacrifice. *Quien sabe?* Certainly the strange, thickening fog was not of this earth. Never before in the history of mankind had there been such a fog. It was, of course, the earthquake that had brought the—the Visitant. And it was folly to seek it out.

Well, I was an anthropologist and knew the value of even such slight clues as this. Moreover, my job for the Foundation was done. My specimens had been sent through to Callao by pack-train, and my notes were safe with Fra Rafael. Also, I was young and the lure of far places and their mysteries was hot in my blood. I hoped I'd find something odd—even dangerous—at Huascan.

I was young. Therefore, somewhat of a fool....

The first night I camped in a little cave, sheltered from the wind and snug enough in my fleece-lined sleeping-bag. There were no insects at this height. It was impossible to make a fire for there was no wood. I worried a bit about the burro freezing in the night.

But he survived, and I repacked him the next morning with rather absurd cheerfulness. The fog was thick, yes, but not impenetrable.

There were tracks in the snow where the wind had not covered them. A girl had left the village the day before my arrival, which made my task all the easier. So I went up into that vast, desolate silence, the fog closing in steadily, getting thicker and thicker, the trail getting narrower until at last it was a mere track.

And then I was moving blind. I had to feel my way, step by step, leading the burro. Occasional tracks showed through the mist, showed that the native girl had walked swiftly—had run in places—so I assumed that the fog was less dense when she had come by this way. As it happened, I was quite wrong about that....

We were on a narrow path above a gorge when I lost the burro. I heard a scrambling and clashing of hoofs on rock behind me. The rope jerked out of my hand and the animal cried out almost articulately as it went over. I stood frozen, pressing against the stone, listening to the sound of the burro's fall. Finally the distant noise died in a faint trickling of snow and gravel that faded into utter silence. So thick was the fog that I had seen nothing.

I felt my way back to where the path had crumbled and rotten rock had given way under the burro's weight. It was possible for me to retrace my steps, but I did not. I was sure that my destination could not be much further. A lightly clad native girl could not have gone so far as Huascan itself. No, probably that day I would reach my goal.

So I went on, feeling my way through the thick silent fog. I was able to see only a few inches ahead of me for hours. Then, abruptly the trail grew clearer. Until, at last I was moving in the shadowless, unearthly mist over hard-packed snow, following the clearly marked footprints of a girl's sandals.

Then they vanished without warning, those prints, and I stood hesitant, staring around. I could see nothing, but a brighter glow in the misty canopy overhead marked the sun's position.

I knelt and brushed away the snow with my hands, hoping to undo the wind's concealing work. But I found no more footprints. Finally I took my bearings as well as I could and ploughed ahead in the general direction the girl had been traveling.

My compass told me I was heading due north.

The fog was a living, sentient thing now, secretive, shrouding the secret that lay beyond its gray wall.

Suddenly I was conscious of a change. An electric tingle coursed through my body. Abruptly the fog-wall brightened. Dimly, as through a translucent pane, I could make out vague images ahead of me.

I began to move toward the images—and suddenly the fog was gone!

Before me lay a valley. Blue-white moss carpeted it except where reddish boulders broke the blueness. Here and there were trees—at least I assumed they were trees, despite their unfamiliar outline. They were like banyans, having dozens of trunks narrow as bamboo. Blue-leafed, they stood like immense bird-cages on the pallid moss. The fog closed in behind the valley and above it. It was like being in a huge sun-lit cavern.

I turned my head, saw a gray wall behind me. Beneath my feet the snow was melting and running in tiny, trickling rivulets among the moss. The air was warm and stimulating as wine.

A strange and abrupt change. Impossibly strange! I walked toward one of the trees, stopped at a reddish boulder to examine it. And surprise caught at my throat. It was an artifact—a crumbling ruin, the remnant of an ancient structure whose original appearance I could not fathom. The stone seemed iron-hard. There were traces of inscription on it, but eroded to illegibility. And I never did learn the history of those enigmatic ruins.... They did not originate on Earth.

Beyond that—I did not know what lay beyond that.

I went on, into the valley, eyeing my surroundings curiously in the shadowless light that filtered through the shifting roof of fog. Foolishly, I expected to discover Incan artifacts. The crumbled red stones should have warned me. They were, I think, harder than metal, yet they had been here long enough for the elements to erode them into

featureless shards. Had they been of earthly origin they would have antedated Mankind—antedated even the Neanderthaler man.

Curious how our minds are conditioned to run in anthropomorphic lines. I was, though I did not know it, walking through a land that had its beginnings outside the known universe. The blue trees hinted at that. The crimson ruins told me that clearly. The atmospheric conditions—the fog, the warmth high up in the Cordilleras—were certainly not natural. Yet I thought the explanation lay in some geological warp, volcanic activity, subterranean gas-vents....

My vision reached a half-mile, no farther. As I went on, the misty horizon receded. The valley was larger than I had imagined. It was like Elysium, where the shades of dead men stroll in the Garden of Proserpine. Streamlets ran through the blue moss at intervals, chill as death from the snowy plains hidden in the fog. "A sleepy world of streams...."

The ruins altered in appearance as I went on. The red blocks were still present, but there were now also remnants of other structures, made by a different culture, I thought.

The blue trees grew more numerous. Leafy vines covered most of them now, saffron-tinted, making each strange tree a little room, screened by the lattice of the vines. As I passed close to one a faint clicking sounded, incongruously like the tapping of typewriter keys, but muffled. I saw movement and turned, my hand going to the pistol in my belt.

The Thing came out of a tree-hut and halted, watching me. I *felt* it watching me—though *it had no eyes!*

It was a sphere of what seemed to be translucent plastic, glowing with shifting rainbow colors. And I sensed sentience—intelligence—in its horribly human attitude of watchful hesitation. Four feet in diameter it was, and featureless save for three ivory elastic tentacles that supported it and a fringe of long, whip-like cilia about its diameter—its waist, I thought.

It looked at me, eyeless and cryptic. The shifting colors crawled over the plastic globe. Then it began to roll forward on the three supporting tentacles with a queer, swift gliding motion. I stepped back, jerking out my gun and leveling it.

"Stop," I said, my voice shrill. "Stop!"

It stopped, quite as though it understood my words or the gesture of menace. The cilia fluttered about its spherical body. Bands of lambent color flashed. I could not rid myself of the curious certainty, that it was trying to communicate with me.

Abruptly it came forward again purposefully. I tensed and stepped back, holding the gun aimed. My finger was tightening on the trigger when the Thing stopped.

I backed off, nervously tense, but the creature did not follow. After I had got about fifty yards away it turned back

and retreated into the hut-like structure in the banyan tree. After that I watched the trees warily as I passed them, but there were no other visitations of that nature.

Scientists are reluctant to relinquish their so-called logic. As I walked I tried to rationalize the creature, to explain it in the light of current knowledge. That it had been alive was certain. Yet it was not protoplasmic in nature. A plant, developed by mutation? Perhaps. But that theory did not satisfy me for the Thing had possessed intelligence, though of what order I did not know.

But there were the seven native girls, I reminded myself. My job was to find them, and quickly, too.

I did, at last, find them. Six of them, anyway. They were sitting in a row on the blue moss, facing one of the red blocks of stone, their backs toward me. As I mounted a little rise I saw them, motionless as bronze statues, and as rigid.

I went down toward them, tense with excitement, expectancy. Odd that six native girls, sitting in a row, should fill me with such feeling. They were so motionless that I wondered as I approached them, if they were dead....

But they were not. Nor were they—in the true sense of the word—alive.

I gripped one by the bare shoulder, found the flesh surprisingly cold and the girl seemed not to feel my touch. I swung her around to face me, and her black, empty eyes looked off into the far distance. Her lips were tightly compressed, slightly cyanosed. The pupils of her eyes were inordinately dilated, as if she was drugged.

Indian style, she squatted cross-legged, like the others. As I pulled her around, she toppled down on the moss, making no effort to stop herself. For a moment she lay there. Then with slow, puppet-like motions, she returned to her former position and resumed that blank staring into space.

I looked at the others. They were alike in their sleep-like withdrawal. It seemed as if their minds had been sucked out of them, that their very selves were elsewhere. It was a fantastic diagnosis, of course. But the trouble with those girls was nothing a physician could understand. It was psychic in nature, obviously.

I turned to the first one and slapped her cheeks. "Wake up!" I commanded. "You must obey me! Waken—"

But she gave no sign of feeling, of seeing. I lit a match, and her eyes focused on the flame. But the size of her pupils did not alter....

A shudder racked me. Then, abruptly I sensed movement behind me. I turned....

Over the blue moss the seventh Indio girl was coming toward us. "Miranda!" I said. "Can you hear me?" Fra Rafael had told me her name. Her feet, I saw, were bare and white frost-bite blotches marked them. But she did not seem to feel any pain as she walked.

Then I became aware that this was not a simple Indio girl. Something deep within my soul suddenly shrank back with instinctive revulsion. My skin seemed to crawl with a sort of terror. I began to shake so that it was difficult to draw my gun from its holster.

There was just this young native girl walking slowly toward me, her face quite expressionless, her black eyes fixed on emptiness. Yet she was not like other Indios, not like the six other girls sitting behind me. I can only liken her to a lamp in which a hot flame burned. The others were lamps that were dead, unlit.

The flame in her was not one that had been kindled on this earth, or in this universe, or in this space-time continuum, either. There was life in the girl who had been Miranda Valle—but it was not *human* life!

Some distant, skeptical corner of my brain told me that this was pure insanity, that I was deluded, hallucinated. Yes, I knew that. But it did not seem to matter. The girl who was walking so quietly across the blue yielding moss had wrapped about her, like an invisible, intangible veil, something of the alienage that men, through the eons, have called divinity. No mere human, I thought, could touch her.

■

But I felt fear, loathing—emotions not associated with divinity. I watched, knowing that presently she would look at me, would realize my presence. Then—well, my mind would not go beyond that point....

She came forward and quietly seated herself with the others, at the end of the line. Her body stiffened rigidly. Then, the veil of terror seemed to leave her, like a cloak falling away. Abruptly she was just an Indio girl, empty and drained as the others, mindless and motionless.

The girl beside her rose suddenly with a slow, fluid motion. And the crawling horror hit me again.... The Alien Power had not left! It had merely transferred itself to another body!

And this second body was as dreadful to my senses as the first had been. In some subtly monstrous way its terror impressed itself on my brain, though all the while there was nothing overt, nothing *visibly* wrong. The strange landscape, bounded by fog, was not actually abnormal, considering its location, high in the Andes. The blue moss, the weird trees; they were strange, but possible. Even the seven native girls were a normal part of the scene. It was the sense of an alien presence that caused my terror—a fear of the unknown....

As the newly "possessed" girl rose, I turned and fled, deathly sick, feeling caught in the grip of nightmare. Once I stumbled and fell. As I scrambled wildly to my feet I looked back.

The girl was watching me, her face tiny and far away. Then, suddenly, abruptly it was close. She stood within a few feet

of me! I had not moved nor seen her move, but we were all close together again—the seven girls and I....

Hypnosis? Something of that sort. She had drawn me back to her, my mind blacked out and unresisting. I could not move. I could only stand motionless while that Alien being dwelling within human flesh reached out and thrust frigid fingers into my soul. I could feel my mind laid open, spread out like a map before the inhuman gaze that scanned it. It was blasphemous and shameful, and I could not move or resist!

I was flung aside as the psychic grip that held me relaxed. I could not think clearly. That remote delving into my brain had made me blind, sick, frantic. I remember running....

But I remember very little of what followed. There are vague pictures of blue moss and twisted trees, of coiling fog that wrapped itself about me, trying futilely to hold me back. And always there was the sense of a dark and nameless horror just beyond vision, hidden from me—though I was not hidden from its eyeless gaze!

I remember reaching the wall of fog, saw it loomed before me, plunged into it, raced through cold grayness, snow crunching beneath my boots. I recall emerging again into that misty valley of Abaddon....

When I regained complete consciousness I was with Lhar.

A coolness as of limpid water moved through my mind, cleansing it, washing away the horror, soothing and comforting me. I was lying on my back looking up at an arabesque pattern of blue and saffron; gray-silver light filtered through a lacy, filigree. I was still weak but the blind terror no longer gripped me.

I was inside a hut formed by the trunks of one of the banyan-like trees. Slowly, weakly I rose on one elbow. The room was empty except for a curious flower that grew from the dirt floor beside me. I looked at it dazedly.

And so I met Lhar.... She was of purest white, the white of alabaster, but with a texture and warmth that stone does not have. In shape—well, she seemed to be a great flower, an unopened tulip-like blossom five feet or so tall. The petals were closely enfolded, concealing whatever sort of body lay hidden beneath, and at the base was a convoluted pedestal that gave the odd impression of a ruffled, tiny skirt. Even now I cannot describe Lhar coherently. A flower, yes—but very much more than that. Even in that first glimpse I knew that Lhar was more than just a flower....

I was not afraid of her. She had saved me, I knew, and I felt complete trust in her. I lay back as she spoke to me telepathically, her words and thoughts forming within my brain....

"You are well now, though still weak. But it is useless for you to try to escape from this valley. No one can escape. The Other has powers I do not know, and those powers will keep you here."

I said, "You are—?"

A name formed within my mind. "Lhar. I am not of your world."

A shudder shook her. And her distress forced itself on me. I stood up, swaying with weakness. Lhar drew back, moving with a swaying, bobbing gait oddly like a curtsy.

Behind me a clicking sounded. I turned, saw the many-colored sphere force itself through the banyan-trunks. Instinctively my hand went to my gun. But a thought from Lhar halted me.

"It will not harm you. It is my servant." She hesitated, groping for a word. "A machine. A robot. It will not harm you."

I said, "Is it intelligent?"

"Yes. But it is not alive. Our people made it. We have many such machines."

The robot swayed toward me, the rim of cilia flashing and twisting. Lhar said, "It speaks thus, without words or thought...." She paused, watching the sphere, and I sensed dejection in her manner.

The robot turned to me. The cilia twisted lightly about my arm, tugging me toward Lhar. I said, "What does it want?"

"It knows that I am dying," Lhar said.

That shocked me. "Dying? No!"

"It is true. Here in this alien world I do not have my usual food. So I will die. To survive I need the blood of mammals. But there are none here save those seven the Other has taken. And I cannot use them for they are now spoiled."

I didn't ask Lhar what sort of mammals she had in her own world. "That's what the robot wanted when it tried to stop me before, isn't it?"

"He wanted you to help me, yes. But you are weak from the shock you have had. I cannot ask you—"

I said, "How much blood do you need?"

At her answer, I said, "All right. You saved my life; I must do the same for you. I can spare that much blood easily. Go ahead."

She bowed toward me, a fluttering white flame in the dimness of the tree-room. A tendril flicked out from among her petals, wrapped itself about my arm. It felt cool, gentle as a woman's hand. I felt no pain.

"You must rest now," Lhar said. "I will go away but I shall not be long."

The robot clicked and chattered, shifting on its tentacle legs. I watched it, saying, "Lhar, this can't be true. Why am I—believing impossible things?"

"I have given you peace," she told me. "Your mind was dangerously close to madness. I have drugged you a little,

physically; so your emotions will not be strong for a while. It was necessary to save your sanity."

It was true that my mind felt—was drugged the word? My thoughts were clear enough, but I felt as if I were submerged in transparent but dark water. There was an odd sense of existing in a dream. I remembered Swinburne's lines:

Here, where the world is quiet, Here, where all trouble seems Dead winds' and spent waves' riot In doubtful dreams of dreams....

"What is this place?" I asked.

Lhar bent toward me. "I do not know if I can explain. It is not quite clear to me. The robot knows. He is a reasoning machine. Wait...." She turned to the sphere. Its cilia fluttered in quick, complicated signals.

Lhar turned back to me. "Do you know much of the nature of Time? That it is curved, moves in a spiral...."

She went on to explain, but much of her explanation I did not understand. Yet I gathered enough to realize that this valley was not of Earth. Or, rather, it was not of the earth I knew.

"You have geological disturbances, I know. The strata are tumbled about, mixed one with another—"

I remembered what Fra Rafael had said about an earthquake, three months before. Lhar nodded toward me.

"But this was a time-slip. The space-time continuum is also subject to great strains and stresses. It buckled, and strata—Time-sectors—were thrust up to mingle with others. This valley belongs to another age, as do I and the machine, and also—the Other."

She told me what had happened.... There had been no warning. One moment she had been in her own World, her own Time. The next, she was here, with her robot. And with the Other....

"I do not know the origin of the Other. I may have lived in either your future or your past. This valley, with its ruined stone structures, is probably part of your future. I had never heard of such a place before. The Other may be of the future also. Its shape I do not know...."

■

She told me more, much more. The Other, as she called it—giving the entity a thought-form that implied complete alienage—had a strangely chameleon-like method of feeding. It lived on life-force, as well as I could understand, draining the vital powers of a mammal vampirically. And it assumed the shape of its prey as it fed. It was not possession, in the strict sense of the word. It was a sort of merging....

Humanity is inclined to invest all things with its own attributes, forgetting that outside the limitations of time and space and size, familiar laws of nature do not apply.

So, even now I do not know all that lay behind the terror in that Peruvian valley. This much I learned: the Other, like Lhar and her robot, had been cast adrift by a time-slip, and thus marooned here. There was no way for it to return to its normal Time-sector. It had created the fog-wall to protect itself from the direct rays of the sun, which threatened its existence.

Sitting there in the filigreed, silver twilight beside Lhar, I had a concept of teeming universes of space-time, of an immense spiral of lives and civilizations, races and cultures, covering an infinite cosmos. And yet—what had happened? Very little, in that inconceivable infinity. A rift in time, a dimensional slip—and a sector of land and three beings on it had been wrenched from their place in time and transported to *our* time-stratum.

A robot, a flower that was alive and intelligent—and feminine—and the Other....

"The native girls," I said. "What will happen to them?"

"They are no longer alive," Lhar told me. "They still move and breathe, but they are dead, sustained only by the life-force of the Other. I do not think it will harm me. Apparently it prefers other food."

"That's why you've stayed here?" I asked.

The shining velvety calyx swayed. "I shall die soon. For a little while I thought that I might manage to survive in this alien world, this alien time. Your blood has helped." The cool tentacle withdrew from my arm. "But I lived in a younger time, where space was filled with—with certain energizing vibratory principles.

"They have faded now almost to nothing, to what you call cosmic rays. And these are too weak to maintain my life. No, I must die. And then my poor robot will be alone." I sensed elfin amusement in that last thought. "It seems absurd to you that I should think affectionately of a machine. But in our world there is a rapport—a mental symbiosis—between robot and living beings."

There was a silence. After a while I said, "I'd better get out of here. Get help—to end the menace of the other...." What sort of help I did not know. Was the Other vulnerable?

Lhar caught my thought. "In its own shape it is vulnerable, but what that shape is I do not know. As for your escaping from this valley—you cannot. The fog will bring you back."

"I've got my compass." I glanced at it, saw that the needle was spinning at random.

Lhar said: "The Other has many powers. Whenever you go into the fog, you will always return here."

"How do you know all this?" I asked.

"My robot tells me. A machine can reason logically, better than a colloid brain."

I closed my eyes, trying to think. Surely it should not be difficult for me to retrace my steps, to find a path out of this valley. Yet I hesitated, feeling a strange impotence.

"Can't your robot guide me?" I persisted.

"He will not leave my side. Perhaps—" Lhar turned to the sphere, and the cilia fluttered excitedly. "No," she said, turning back to me. "Built into his mind is one rule—never to leave me. He cannot disobey that."

■

I couldn't ask Lhar to go with me. Somehow I sensed that the frigid cold of the surrounding mountains would destroy her swiftly. I said, "It must be possible for me to get out of here. I'm going to try, anyway."

"I will be waiting," she said, and did not move as I slipped out between two trunks of the banyan-like tree.

It was daylight and the silvery grayness overhead was palely luminous. I headed for the nearest rampart of fog.

Lhar was right. Each time I went into that cloudy fog barrier I was blinded. I crept forward step by step, glancing behind me at my footprints in the snow, trying to keep in a straight line. And presently I would find myself back in the valley....

I must have tried a dozen times before giving up. There were no landmarks in that all-concealing grayness, and only by sheerest chance would anyone blunder into this valley—unless hypnotically summoned, like the Indio girls.

I realized that I was trapped. Finally I went back to Lhar. She hadn't moved an inch since I had left, nor had the robot, apparently.

"Lhar," I said. "Lhar, can't you help me?"

The white flame of the flower was motionless, but the robot's cilia moved in quick signals. Lhar moved at last.

"Perhaps," her thought came. "Unless both induction and deduction fail, my robot has discovered a chance for you. The Other can control your mind through emotions. But I, too, have some power over your mind. If I give you strength, wall you with a psychic shield against intrusion, you may be able to face the Other. But you cannot destroy it unless it is in its normal shape. The Indio girls must be killed first...."

"Killed?" I felt a sense of horror at the thought of killing those poor simple native girls.

"They are not actually alive now. They are now a part of the Other. They can never be restored to their former life."

"How will—destroying them—help me?" I asked.

Again Lhar consulted the robot. "The Other will be driven from their bodies. It will then have no hiding-place and must resume its own form. Then it can be slain."

Lhar swayed and curtseyed away. "Come," she said. "It is in my mind that the Other must die. It is evil, ruthlessly selfish, which is the same thing. Until now I have not realized the solution to this evil being. But seeing into your thoughts has clarified my own. And my robot tells me that unless I aid you, the Other will continue ravaging into your world. If that happens, the time-pattern will be broken.... I do not quite understand, but my robot makes no mistakes. The Other must die...."

She was outside of the banyan now, the sphere gliding after her. I followed. The three of us moved swiftly across the blue moss, guided by the robot.

In a little while we came to where the six Indio girls were squatting. They had apparently not moved since I had left them.

"The Other is not here," Lhar said.

The robot held me back as Lhar advanced toward the girls, the skirt-like frill at her base convoluting as she moved. She paused beside them and her petals trembled and began to unfold.

From the tip of that great blossom a fountain of white dust spurted up. Spores or pollen, it seemed to be. The air was cloudy with the whiteness.

The robot drew me back, back again. I sensed danger....

The pollen seemed to be drawn toward the Indios, spun toward them in dancing mist-notes. It settled on their bronzed bodies, their limbs and faces. It covered them like a veil until they appeared to be six statues, white as cold marble, there on the blue moss.

Lhar's petals lifted and closed again. She swayed toward me, her mind sending a message into mine.

"The Other has no refuge now," she told me. "I have slain the—the girls."

"They're dead?" My lips were dry.

"What semblance of life they had left is now gone. The Other cannot use them again."

Lhar swayed toward me. A cool tentacle swept out, pressing lightly on my forehead. Another touched my breast, above the heart.

"I give you of my strength," Lhar said. "It will be as shield and buckler to you. The rest of the way you must go alone...."

Into me tide of power flowed. I sank into cool depths, passionless and calm. Something was entering my body, my mind and soul, drowning my fears, stiffening my resolve.

Strength of Lhar was now my strength!

The tentacles dropped away, their work done. The robot's cilia signalled and Lhar said, "Your way lies there. That temple—do you see it?"

I saw it. Far in the distance, half shrouded by the fog, a scarlet structure, not ruined like the others, was visible.

"You will find the Other there. Slay the last Indio, then destroy the Other."

I had no doubt now of my ability to do that. A new power seemed to lift me from my feet, send me running across the moss. Once I glanced back, to see Lhar and her robot standing motionless, watching me.

The temple enlarged as I came nearer. It was built of the same reddish stone as the other ruined blocks I had seen. But erosion had weathered its harsh angles till nothing now remained but a rounded, smoothly sculptured monolith, twenty feet tall, shaped like a rifle shell.

A doorway gaped in the crimson wall. I paused for a moment on the threshold. In the dimness within a shadow stirred. I stepped forward, finding myself in a room that was tall and narrow, the ceiling hidden in gloom. Along the walls were carvings I could not clearly see. They gave a suggestion of inhuman beings that watched.

It was dark but I could see the Indio girl who had been Miranda Valle. Her eyes were on me, and, even through the protecting armor of Lhar strength; I could feel their terrible power.

The life in the girl was certainly not human!

"Destroy her!" my mind warned. "Destroy her! Quickly!"

But as I hesitated a veil of darkness seemed to fall upon me. Utter cold, a frigidity as of outer space, lanced into my brain. My senses reeled under the assault. Desperately, blind and sick and giddy, I called on the reserve strength Lhar had given me. Then I blacked out....

When I awoke I saw smoke coiling up from the muzzle of the pistol in my hand. At my feet lay the Indio girl, dead. My bullet had crashed into her brain, driving out the terrible dweller there.

My eyes were drawn to the farther wall. An archway gaped there. I walked across the room, passed under the archway. Instantly I was in complete, stygian darkness. But I was not alone!

The power of the Other struck me like a tangible blow. I have no words to tell of an experience so completely disassociated from human memories. I remember only this: my mind and soul were sucked down into a black abyss where I had no volition or consciousness. It was another dimension of the mind where my senses were altered....

Nothing existed there but the intense blackness beyond time and space. I could not see the Other nor conceive of it. It was pure intelligence, stripped of flesh. It was alive and it had power—power that was god-like.

There in the great darkness I stood alone, unaided, sensing the approach of an entity from some horribly remote place where all values were altered.

I sensed Lhar's nearness. "Hurry!" her thought came to me.
"Before it wakens!"

Warmth flowed into me. The blackness receded....

Against the farther wall something lay, a thing bafflingly human ... a great-headed thing with a tiny pallid body coiled beneath it. It was squirming toward me....

"Destroy it!" Lhar communicated.

The pistol in my hand thundered, bucking against my palm. Echoes roared against the walls. I fired and fired again until the gun was empty....

"It is dead," Lhar's thought entered my mind.

I stumbled, dropped the pistol.

"It was the child of an old super-race—a child not yet born."

Can you conceive of such a race? Where even the unborn had power beyond human understanding? My mind wondered what the adult Alien must be.

I shivered, suddenly cold. An icy wind gusted through the temple. Lhar's thought was clear in my mind.

"Now the valley is no longer a barrier to the elements. The Other created fog and warmth to protect itself. Now it is dead and your world reclaims its own."

From the outer door of the temple I could see the fog being driven away by a swift wind. Snow was falling slowly, great white flakes that blanketed the blue moss and lay like caps on the red shards that dotted the valley.

"I shall die swiftly and easily now, instead of slowly, by starvation," Lhar said.

A moment later a thought crossed my mind, faint and intangible as a snowflake and I knew Lhar was saying goodbye.

I left the valley. Once I looked back, but there was only a veil of snow behind me.

And out of the greatest adventure the cosmic gods ever conceived—only this: For a little while the eternal veil of time was ripped away and the door to the unknown was held ajar.

But now the door is closed once more. Below Huascan a robot guards a tomb, that is all.

The snow fell faster. Shivering, I ploughed through the deepening drifts. My compass needle pointed north. The spell that had enthralled the valley was gone.

Half an hour later I found the trail, and the road to safety lay open before me. Fra Rafael would be waiting to hear my story.

But I did not think that he would believe it....



INDEX

3

3space, 4, 11

A

A Martian Odyssey, 2, 30
Accidental Death, 49
Additional Rules, 10
Alan E. Nourse, 2, 75, 78, 362
Alternate Earths, 4
Astounding Science Fiction, 3

B

Bolden's Pets, 2, 65

C

C. H. Liddell, 2, 352
Contamination Crew, 2, 78

D

Devil Crystals of Arret, 2, 97
Devil's Asteroid, 2, 122
DIEHL, 65, 363
Difficulty Levels, 362
Dream World Transformations, 11
Dream Worlds, 4
Duel on Syrtis, 2, 144

E

Ed Emshwiller, 78
Edwin K. Sloat, 2, 153, 170
Example PlotField Diagram, 9
Extra Worlds, 5

F

F. L. Wallace, 2
Floyd L. Wallace, 65
Frank Kramer, 295

G

Golden Age, 1, 2, 3, 4

H

H. Beam Piper, 2, 4, 209, 224, 362
Hal K. Wells, 2, 87, 97
Harm Listings, 11
Harry Harrison, 2, 281, 295, 362
Henry Kuttner, 2, 341, 362
Herman Vestal, 245
Hexcrawling, 10
Hubert Rogers, 224

J

Jack Vance, 2, 181, 194, 362
John Schoenherr, 49

John W. Campbell, 3

K

Known Planets, 4

L

Loot of the Void, 2, 170

M

Manly Wade Wellman, 2, 109, 122, 362
Mission Types, 12, 13

N

NPCs, 362

P

Parasite Planet, 3
Paul Ernst, 2, 303, 317
Peter Bailey, 2, 43, 49, 362
Philip K. Dick, 2, 239, 245, 362
PlotField Diagrams, 8
Poul Anderson, 2, 135, 144, 362

R

R. F. Starzl, 2, 253, 271, 362
Robert Sheckley, 2, 327, 334, 362

S

Scattergood, 334
Schoenherr, 49
Selling Items on Earth, 11
Serial Explorations, 5
Sjambak, 2, 194
Stanley G. Weinbaum, 2, 3, 15, 30

T

Temple Trouble, 2, 224
The Big Board, 12
The Cartesian Exception, 11
The Gun, 2, 245
The Planet of Dread, 2, 271
The World Behind the Moon, 2, 317
Time Travels, 4

U

Unknown Planets, 4

V

Vector Slip Failures, 13
Virgil Finlay, 194

W

Warrior Race, 2, 334
Where the World is Quiet, 2, 352

SYSTEM CONVERSION

DayTrippers uses a descriptive difficulty scale which can be abstracted to other systems. Conversions are shown below for popular systems. "PbtA" = "Powered by the Apocalypse"

CONVERTING STATS

The **Stat Score** is a logarithmic scale of 1 to 6. Normal unskilled people have 1 in every Stat. For NPCs, any Stats that aren't listed have a Score of 1. The Stats are:

- BRAINS** – knowledge & perception functions
- CHARM** – social & communicative functions
- GRACE** – agility & dexterity functions
- HEALTH** –biophysical & immunity functions
- MIGHT** – strength & force functions
- PSYCHE** – sanity & integrative functions

Stat Score	PbtA	d20	1-20	1-100
1	-1	10	8	40
2	+0	12	10	50
3	+1	14	12	60
4	+2	16	14	70
5	+3	18	16	80
6	+4	20	18	90

CONVERTING SKILLS

Skill Levels are rated on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 representing the epitome of human accomplishment.

Skill Level	PbtA	d20	1-20	1-100
+1 = Trained	Use	-1	8	40
+2 = Journeyman	Stat	+0	10	50
+3 = Expert	Mod	+1	12	60
+4 = Master	For	+2	14	70
+5 = Innovator	Skill	+3	16	80
+6 = Legend	Roll	+4	18	90

CONVERTING TASKS & DIFFICULTY LEVELS

The Difficulty of a task is stated as a "DL" (Difficulty Level) on a scale of 1-10. The Difficulty Levels are:

Difficulty Level	PbtA	d20	1-20	1-100
1 = no-brainer	+3	0	2	10
2 = easy	+2	0	4	20
3 = challenging	+1	5	6	30
4 = difficult	+0	10	8	40
5 = hard	+0	15	10	50
6 = very hard	-1	20	12	60
7 = unlikely	-2	25	14	70
8 = ridiculous	-3	30	16	80
9 = absurd	-4	35	18	90
10 = insane	-5	40	20	100

If your system uses descriptive difficulty levels (*FUDGE*, *Cypher*, etc), it's best to simply match up the *DayTrippers* DL term with the analogous term from your system.

CREDITS

Game Development by Tod Foley

Based on short stories by: Poul Anderson, Peter Bailey, Philip K. Dick, Paul Ernst, Harry Harrison, Henry Kuttner, Alan E. Nourse, H. Beam Piper, Robert Sheckley, Edwin K. Sloat, R. F. Starzl, Jack Vance, Floyd L. Wallace, Stanley G. Weinbaum, Manly Wade Wellman and Hal K. Wells

PROOFING, EDITING, CLOSE READING & PLAYTESTING

Abstract Machine, Gennifer Bone, Melissa Fisher, Jaye Foster, David Guyll, Lloyd Gyan, Mark Knights, Keith Mageau, Tom McGrenery, Gary Mcilvenna, Tesla Ranger, Eric Sheldahl, Ben Wilson

FRONT COVER

"A Martian Odyssey" by Robert Petillo

ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATIONS

All Modern Illustrations appearing herein are copyright by their original creators and used with permission. All rights are reserved by the original creators.

THE MARES OF MARS

Frontispiece: "A Martian Odyssey" by Robert Petillo
Illustrations by Philip Rice
Maps by Tod Foley

AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT

Frontispiece by Enmanuel Martinez

CURIOUS CURE

Frontispiece by Eric Quigley
Maps by Tod Foley

GLUTTONY

Frontispiece: "Contamination Crew" by Ed Emshwiller
Illustrations by Earl Geier

CRYSTAL CRISIS

Frontispiece by David Guyll & Melissa Fisher
Illustrations by Allan Dotson

PENAL REFORM

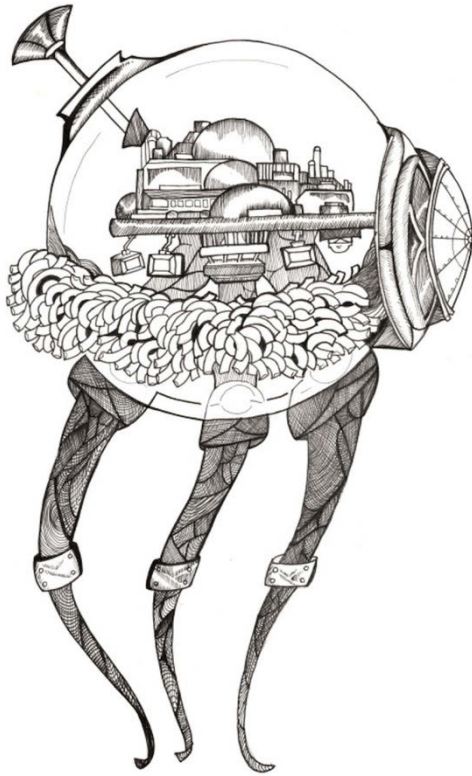
Frontispiece: "Troll" by Bradley K McDevitt
Illustrations by Allan Dotson
Maps by Tod Foley

HUNTER/HUNTED

Frontispiece: "Owlie" by Philip Rice

HALKON'S TREASURE

Frontispiece: "Saturn from Titan" by Anonymous
Illustrations by JEShields (James Shields)
Maps by Tod Foley



OUT OF THIN AIR

Frontispiece: "Sjambak" by Virgil Finlay
Illustrations by Danny Prescott

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Frontispiece: "Temple of the Seeing Eye" by JEShields
Maps by Tod Foley

NOBODY HOME

Frontispiece: "Solidified Lava" by CAStock

SAVAGE PLANET

Frontispiece: "Planet of Dread" by Anonymous
Illustrations by Brannon Wright
Maps by Tod Foley

BUSTED BEACON

Frontispiece: "The Repairman" by Frank Kramer
Illustrations by Marc Radle and Jae Young
Maps by Tod Foley

PURPLE JUNGLES OF ZEUD

Frontispiece by Eric Quigley
Illustrations by Gennifer Bone
Maps by Tod Foley

STRATEGY

Frontispiece: Maciej Zagorski, The Forge Studios

INSCRUTIBLE OTHER

Frontispiece: "Mountain Pass" by Chella Faithe
Illustrations by Chella Faithe

LEGACY ILLUSTRATIONS

All Legacy Illustrations are in the public domain.

ACCIDENTAL DEATH

illustrations by John Schoenherr

BOLDEN'S PETS

illustrations by DIEHL

CONTAMINATION CREW

illustrations by Ed Emswiller

DEVIL CRYSTALS OF ARRET

illustrations by Anonymous

DEVIL'S ASTEROID

illustrations by Anonymous

DUEL ON SYRTIS

illustrations by Anonymous

LOOT OF THE VOID

illustrations by Anonymous

SJAMBAK

illustrations by Virgil Finlay

TEMPLE TROUBLE

illustrations by Hubert Rogers

THE GUN

illustrations by Herman Vestal

THE PLANET OF DREAD

illustrations by Anonymous

THE REPAIRMAN

illustrations by Frank Kramer

WARRIOR RACE

illustrations by Scattergood

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE AS IF COLLECTIVE

The DayTrippers project is supported in part by the contributions of the *As If Collective*: Torey Holmquist, Abstract Machine, Tom McGreener, Lemmo Pew, Cassie Rae, Joshua Ramsey, David Schirduan and Terry Willitts

Join the Collective at <http://patreon.com./asif>