# DRILLER

## FEDERATION BRIEFING

# DRILLER

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## WARRANTY

If Driller fails to load, please return the actual disc or tape only, ensuring it is protected in the post, to the address below and it will be replaced free of charge. This offer does not affect your statutory rights.

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## FULL COLOUR DRILLER POSTERS

These are available on request. Supplied unfolded in poster mailing tube, inclusive of first class postage £1. (Add 50p for each additional poster required) Send cheque or postal order to Driller Poster Offer, Incentive Software Limited, 2 Minerva House, Calleva Park, Aldermaston, Berks. RG7 4QW.



# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 'Driller' Experience!

**INTRODUCING:**

FREESCAPE™

The revolutionary new system designed and developed by Major Developments, the in-house programming & design team of Incentive Software Limited. Freescape represents many thousands of man hours committed to bringing this great advancement in realism to your computer screen. For the first time, your can explore a solid, three-dimensional environment with complete freedom of movement. You can move to any point in 3-dimensional space and then look in any direction and see the view as if you were actually there.

The full perspective of the alien environment, complex gameplay and vast detailed landscape contribute to the uniquely absorbing atmosphere of 'Driller'. We hope you enjoy the experience.

Oh, and good luck!

Ian Andrew

Ian Andrew
(Publisher)

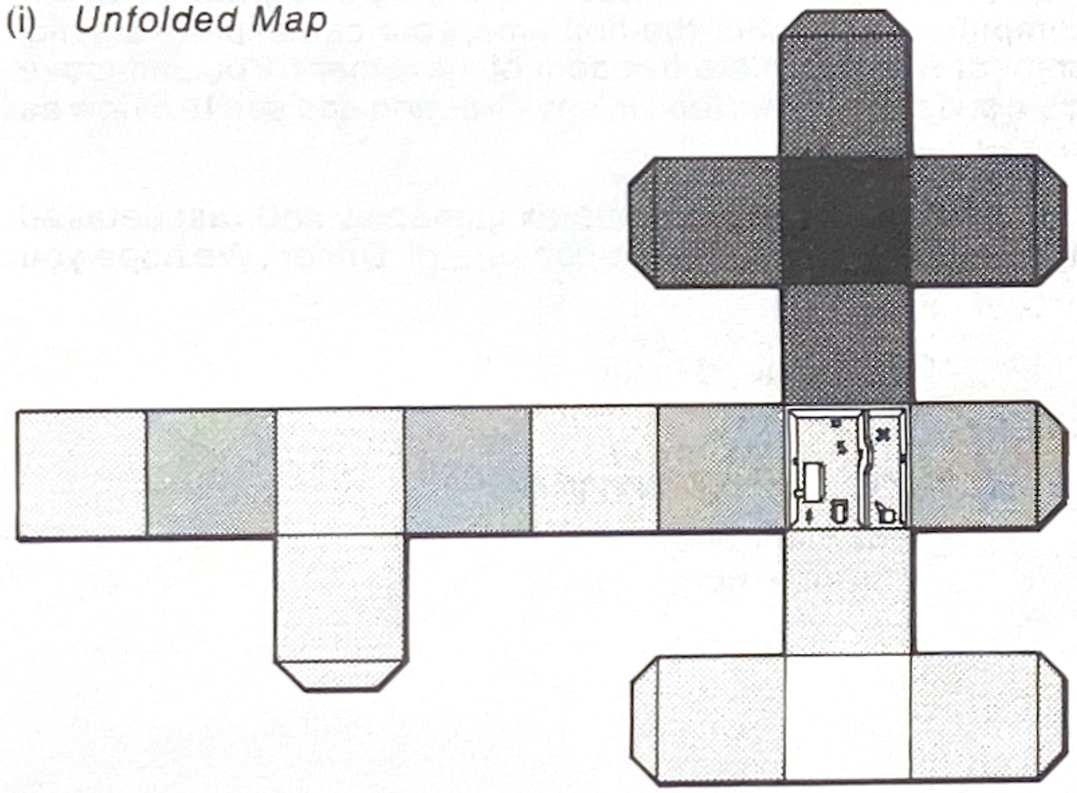
# GETTING STARTED

This package contains:
(i) The tape or disc 'Driller'
(ii) The instruction manual 'Federation Briefing'
(iii) A 3D mapping model of the moon 'Mitral'
(iv) A reference card showing loading instructions and control options

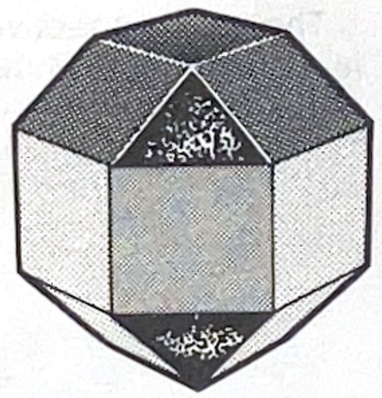
'Driller' is set on an alien moon that orbits another world in a region of our galaxy that 20th century mankind has yet to explore.

Due to the size and the three dimensional nature of the playing area we have included in this package a colour representation of the moon, Mitral. This may be kept flat to aid mapping and orientation in 2 dimensions or alternatively can be built into a 3 dimensional model of the platforms surrounding Mitral. To do this, first fold along each of the score lines including the flaps, then glue or tape each flap in place. Begin with flap "A" affixing this to the position on the black side marked "Affix A", then repeat with B, C etc until the structure is complete.

(i) *Unfolded Map*



(ii) *Completed Structure*



The resulting polyhedral model is a representation of the 18 mining platforms that were constructed over the moon's craterous landscape. You may plot your course over the model and detail it with any notes or diagrams that might help your progress, including buildings, crystals, walls, doors etc. The first platform, the one on which you start, has already been mapped for your orientation. Your start position is shown by the "S". You begin facing in a south easterly direction.

## GETTING STARTED QUICKLY

LOADING INSTRUCTIONS and the CONTROL OPTIONS are given on the enclosed reference card.

To get straight into Driller turn to the section headed "Your Mission" on page 24, where your mission is detailed and you can begin exploration with minimum delay.



# SEVERAL YEARS AGO

The child Lesleigh glared curiously at its teacher. The teacher's single eye shone back, unblinking in the dark recess of the classroom cubicle. The child tapped impatiently on the teacher's sensor, asking for more information, and duly receiving it in a matter of seconds.

Lesleigh was bright, a fast learner, a seeker of knowledge that would take the child from a short youth into a promising adult career. The figure that crouched close to the screen, sitting on its swivel chair, with feet swinging far from the floor, was hungry with an insatiable appetite for fact and theory. The seat spun continuously; Lesleigh could not sit still — not when a lesson was in progress.

# EARTH — A DYING PLANET

Earth is our mother planet that lies in a solar system very far from the Vasculan star.

There are few certainties about Earth and the culture of its peoples, except the memories of the first Elders which are preserved electronically. Legends do, and will continue to prevail amongst the people of Evath as a hope remains of reuniting with their Fathers.

The people of Earth were irresponsible and lacked vision in their abuse of the elements and natural resources of the planet. The soils were raped and starved of nourishment, whilst many of the races and nations divided to develop languages and cultures of their own. Segregation continued throughout every part of each society — the peoples were split and individuals thought only of themselves. The continued dividing of groups and countries led to inner conflict between single people, families, societies and eventually nations. The lack of harmony meant that global law enforcement was an impossibility, and minor quarrels and personal greed led to growing crime and ultimately to war on an epic scale.

The destruction of the world and the termination of their existence seemed the only goals of the majority of Earthlings. Few desired this end, but fewer still saw a solution to the horrifying conclusion.

It was tragic that great amounts of time and wealth were being spent on petty conflicts and large-scale destruction. For all Earthlings possessed a brilliance and genius that only a few Evathians can match. Fortunately, a number used their gift to more beneficial ends —furthering medical progress and physical research. Even the Elders today cannot speak of all the wonders of Earth, for many are sure to have been forgotten. But some of these achievements exist today in our society — the legacy of an advancement in medicine has left us with an extended life-span of over twice the average recorded at Earth's peak, a faster development, and a virtual halt on the outward ageing process.

Some Earth scientists developed bombs they were frightened to use, while others sought a way out. Earth was over-populated and the human race was seeking a new home. Unmanned probes were sent to nearby solar systems and other galaxies. It was years before the closest one returned.

# EVATH — A FRESH HOPE

A probe returned from a long journey to the solar system dominated by the star Vasculan. It brought news, via recorded film and environmental samples, of a habitable planet, not unlike Earth. The new planet was much smaller in radius and had no detectable animal life, only primitive vegetation. Evath, as it was named by a forgotten scientist, was younger than Earth and ideal for sustaining human life as the old planet had done for so long. It was perfect.

There was one drawback. Evath was so far from Earth, that the journey, in any sizeable craft, would take over a century. No crew could live that long, no colony could be established from a ship full of aged, decrepid travellers. Space travel was not as advanced as other branches of science at this time — more money was being spent on missiles and medicine which complemented each other perfectly.

The trip would have to be made utilising the present spacecraft and the problem overcome with the most up-to-date science. After much deliberating, a solution of sorts was decided on. It was not altogether satisfactory, but the scientists were desperate that something should be done quickly. Experiments with cryogenics (whereby a life is frozen, ageing halts completely until defrosting), were not progressing rapidly, but they had come far enough to be able to "freeze" embryos with an 87% recovery rate. It was decided that the first human envoy to be sent to Evath would be a ship of unborn, undeveloped babies.

Discreet enquiries brought forth no shortage of volunteers. Three hundred parents were selected to donate embryos for the voyage; thirty of these were chosen to take their children to the new world. These people were sacrificing their lives for their offspring to be 'born' on Evath. The original parents would grow old, have their children continue the task of overseeing the future race and steer the ship towards the distant planet.

Through generations, the safety and security of these tiny lives was assured as new children were born on the ship, their sole purpose to guard their grandchildren who had not yet been born.

Life on the 'Exodus' was of a high quality. The ship was large enough to accommodate huge sections of Earth culture, science and machinery. But the actual space taken up by the future population of Evath was small in comparison. A smaller section was dedicated to a number of embryos of other living things: animals and plants that would provide food. The guardians ate from stores which had been planned and packed in precise amounts.

And so the 'Exodus' landed on its intended destination. The guardians taught all they had been taught or could remember to their ancestors whose first footsteps were on the soil of Evath ..... and ever since we have awaited the arrival of another ship from Earth.



# THE DEVELOPING NATION

The colony on Evath was slow in developing into a civilised state. After all, it started as a nation of children. And, as such, it suffered growing pains. For a while, chaos threatened to take over, and the new planet looked like it would follow Earth in the development of counter-cultures and segregated, troubled states.

It was left to the oldest colonists, namely 'The Elders', to tighten their control over the unruly settlement. They still held respect over all of their minors, who regarded them as the source of all wisdom and knowledge. All insight and instruction came from the Elders, and peace reigned under their guiding hands.

Years passed, and the Elders died. New Elders were appointed to take their place, and they upheld the traditions and loose laws that had been enforced. But this ruling was not stable within the community, for the new Elders were only equal to everyone else, for they had been 'born' on Evath too. There were no surviving members from the original Elders who had even secondhand memories of life on Earth. There were fierce arguments as to who should rule: would it be the strongest or the most wise? The oldest or youngest? For more than a decade the rules were broken sporadically by almost everyone. The truth was that nobody was sure what the rules were or what was an acceptable code of behaviour.

The Elders had some respect remaining, and with a thinning band of supporters, they did what they hoped would be avoidable — they formed an army. With this army, the people of Evath were conquered again and brought back under control. The new system was stricter, more specific, and bound by a set book of laws. Under these laws, no Evathian could live permanently on either of the other two continents — they were confined to Garistia. All degradation, theft and violence was punishable by death.

This proved to be the shock that brought Evath back to its former promise. And with the return of peace, the Elders slackened their laws slightly. The death penalty was replaced with exile; criminals were banished from the planet, despite the empty continents that graced two thirds of the globe. These criminals were allowed to take with them any of their possessions, but they could never return and their chances of survival were considered negligible. They were nicknamed 'Ketars' as a label of scorn and pity.

Ketars were not pitied for long; a labelled 'Ketar' was banished and forgotten about; by law they could not be talked about by name.

The Elders formed a force that replaced the army and stood for law and order, as well as disciplining the mining interests that were a prime concern on Evath by this time. The force was called "The League" and to join was an honour and a recognition of your skills. Today, life on Evath is controlled by the League, and a large number of the total population have posts within its complicated hierarchy. An elite few obtain admittance to the ranks of the 'Driller Federation' which is the most exclusive League department.

# ENERGY

Man's energy problems came to an end with the fortunate discovery of a new source of power — Rubicon crystals. Not that Man was looking for them particularly, nor were they the result of a dramatic scientific breakthrough. Their discovery was an accident, a fluke of chance; before a human colony was established on Evath — when the first exploration probes were sent to assess the planet's habitable qualities — these translucent red crystals were found in abundance across each of the three continents.

Detailed analysis revealed that they were a prime source of energy, and although this energy was exhaustible, there were enough of them for such considerations to be valueless. This discovery was as important as the discovery of coal, gas and oil on Earth centuries ago. But the difference on Evath was that no or very little mining was necessary when the crystals were lying around waiting to be taken. Rubicon crystals meant that colonisation of Evath could go ahead — the birth of a new world for thousands of people.

The crystals were named both because of their shimmering red colour (ie. their likeness to rubies) and to celebrate the revolutionary step that was being taken in leaving 'home' permanently for the first time.

For years Rubicon crystals were used in every aspect of an Evathian's life, without a full understanding of their structure, compostion and function. Simply no-one understood what they were, how or why they worked. And no-one cared. No-one that is, except a small group of inquisitive scientists who, with as much forethought as intelligence, were aware that this new-found power source was being used irresponsibly. It was true that the huge quantities of crystal still being drawn effortlessly from Evath's crust would last for generations of humanity. But the colony would grow and the planet would eventually be fully populated with many more millions of people, all requiring energy to survive and thrive. It seemed to these scientists that they were the only few who grasped the significance of the colony's continued growth — they foresaw a repeat of the situation which they had left behind on Earth, where the countries were over populated, people starving and the planet's natural resources almost depleted.

The crystals were not as complex or as baffling as the scientists first thought them to be. They discovered that their energy was very like that contained in natural light, i.e. the energy provided by the rays of the sun, Vasculan. It was not long before a process was invented by which Rubicon crystals could be artificially manufactured by the presence of sunlight. Some saw this breakthrough as a disaster for the new planet — Rubicon mining would cease and the tight control the Elders had over the power sources would decline.

Yet what could have been the predicted disaster proved to be quite the opposite. Although mining of Rubicon did indeed slacken, there was no loss of the Elders' control. For the Evathian scientists had apparently stumbled upon the secret of Evath and its remarkable energy source — the star Vasculan that shone on their planet was unique. It alone provided a light that could store its energy in this solid form. This explained in a satisfyingly simple way why no mineral on Earth had ever been discovered with such useful properties. Thus a tight hold was kept on the full secrets of the crystals' power.

With new wealth and a freshly optimistic outlook, Evath's expanding and prospering colony began mining the crust with greater vigour and enthusiasm. The basic and rudimentary techniques that had been needed for the easy obtaining of naturally occurring Rubicon gave way to new methods and equipment that harnessed challenging technology. It was not greatly surprising that Evath harboured a wealth of valuable minerals, which the inhabitants were not slow in exploiting.

Meanwhile, the manufacture of the crystals continued and with experience, new forms of crystal were produced — crystals of different colours, strengths, sizes, shapes and functions. The Evathians had harnessed a power source whose possibilities were literally endless.



# AN INTERLUDE

Lesleigh was twelve years old, already a full-grown adult, and ready to start work for the League. But Lesleigh held a more ambitious hope — the Driller Federation.

Lesleigh's grandfather had been a member of the Federation, but not for long. He continually boasted of his responsibilities, although he never made his job out to be lighthearted or dismissed his role in society. What came as his downfall was an error in the law, a freak mistake of justice that convicted him of a murder of which he was not guilty. He was exiled, branded as a Ketar, and never seen again. Not until five weeks after his banishment did new evidence arise that contested his guilt. It was too late to save him. The law did not allow a person branded as a Ketar to return.

Lesleigh was not bitter or seeking retribution, but instead wanted to become part of the law enforcement and ensure that justice was done in future.

# MITRAL

The twin moons orbiting Evath were named, Mitral and Tricuspid. They were not considered important, and besides, there were three whole continents to explore before travel extended beyond the 'New Eden' that Evath promised.

The Ketars, branded criminals who were banished from the planet, were quick to colonise one of them. The choice was a spur of the moment decision, Mitral was decided upon. There was nothing preventing colonisation of both satellites, except that they had the common sense to push all their resources and energy into the founding of one 'outlaw' colony, which reduced the risks of failure.

Life on Mitral was tough, as one might expect when the community was made up of murderers, thieves and other criminals. There was much crime and dishonesty between the Ketars, until inevitably, a hierarchy was established, with not the oldest, but the strongest and most cunning taking control. They disciplined the others, but did not trust them any more than an Evathian would. So a security system of protection locks, laser deterrents and secret computer networks was built to link each of the sectors and protect the ruling Ketars. The 'lower' classes of Ketars had access to the least buildings on Mitral. Only the leaders had the means to enter the sectors that are found on the lightest and darkest faces, where they lived and kept the control of this vast network.

As each exile made his home on Mitral, the colony grew with the additional supplies that each brought with him. Mining was attempted as an experiment, and not surprisingly, the rock was as rich in precious minerals as Evath. The colony grew, and mining began on a large scale. Because of the soft and craterous surface of the moon, organised mining was difficult. So a huge operation was undertaken to alter the entire moonscape — eighteen platforms were constructed symmetrically around Mitral, flat and sturdy platforms that could withstand great pressure. Through these mining was easy, and on them buildings were erected.

This colonisation took place over many years, for supplies were hard to come by. The Evathians discovered what the Ketars were doing but they did nothing to stop them — Evath was still pure and had enough mining of its own without jealousy of criminals. The Ketars were ignored and permitted their existence, while more were sent to join their ranks.

* * * * *

The Ketars had no real background on Mitral of mining techniques and their inexperience and exhaustive disruption of the moon took its toll. Pockets of gas began to build up inside Mitral, the pressure increasing as more minerals and Rubicon were taken from the rock. The Ketars discovered that something was amiss when minor explosions and fires broke out throughout the colony. They traced the source to the interior of the moon and tried in vain to burn off the gas in a controlled way. But they had neither the tools nor a full comprehension of what exactly was going on inside Mitral, and after a few attempts, they abandoned the moon and landed on one of the unpopulated continents of Evath, hoping to elude the residents. But, before leaving, they set their security system to automatic!



# A MAIDEN VOYAGE

(i)

38th Quasary, 328

Lesleigh Skerrit poured a half glass of milk and replaced the polyform carton in the freeze-locker. After double-locking the protective hatch, the young Law trainee rose and lifted the glass to an eager mouth. The liquid was refreshingly cool, revitalising even. Lesleigh emptied the glass and then dropped it into the sink.

Padding silently across the floor, Lesleigh reached for the light-switch and entered the front room. The kitchen immediately snapped into darkness behind.

Montigue Yarbro smiled at his employee as Lesleigh crossed the room, pulled a chair from beneath the lip of a plastic writing-desk and sat down.

"Pleased to meet you Skerrit," smiled Yarbro, "I've been waiting for this occasion for a long time." He shuffled around in his chair so that he could face the young trainee. "I hope you don't mind us calling at this time; it is quite late."

"No. I don't mind," lied Lesleigh, "I'm not sleepy."

Yarbro yawned, scratched his chin.

"I wish I could say the same. Still, the matter is an important one. We've come to discuss your job, to make you an offer." As Lesleigh's worried gaze shifted to the silent and nodding figure of Trent Hoppe, Montigue's eyes lit in faint amusement. "Don't look so pensive. There's no need to worry."

There was little relief evident in Lesleigh's harrowed expression. "It's just what I've heard, you know, about other students who don't come up to scratch and are dropped from the training programme. I hope this visit doesn't involve me in that way?"

"It doesn't," said Hoppe drily, "On the contrary, the State's guarantee is that all students who pass their final training examinations are automatically accepted into the force."

Lesleigh acknowledged with a wry grin.

Yarbro produced a tidy sheaf of papers and flicked through them briefly. After a few moment's study, he closed the folder and dropped it to the floor, "That is your year report. You seem to have excelled in many areas. Apparently, looking through all the reports this term, you've come out top. Did you know that?"

"No, Sir." replied Lesleigh.

"You've done very well," explained Yarbo. "That's basically why we're here. We've come to make you an offer."

Lesleigh frowned.

"What sort of offer?"

"An offer you can't refuse," laughed Montigue, stroking his moustache. "Or an offer you won't want to refuse."

His grating, slightly weak laugh made Lesleigh feel distinctly ill at ease.

"It is, very simply, a promotion. But a promotion unlike any seen before in the State. You are the first to make such a drastic leap in responsibility." He paused for his words to have the maximum effect on Lesleigh. "You will be promoted from trainee to a member of the Driller Federation or, maybe as you know it, the Elite" explained Yarbro. "This is an unusual situation. It has never occurred before."

Hoppe ground his cigarette into the ashtray and lay back, "Do you accept?"

"Of course," said Lesleigh. "Of course I accept. It just takes a moment to sink in, that's all."

"Actually," intoned Hoppe sombrely, "you had little choice. Your forms have already been filled out."

Lesleigh shrugged.

"I suppose my response is hardly unexpected."

"No," said Yarbro, "We knew you would accept. You have ambition as well as academic and physical promise. Your training report was very comprehensive."

"But why me? I've had no extra training, no Federation training."

"We have decided, this year, to try and encourage the Elders to accept a new recruitment program. This involves removing the most promising candidates from training school each year and placing them in an exclusive Federation programme. The Elders are listening to us, with scepticism admittedly, but they are allowing us to test our idea."

"And if I don't come up to scratch, you won't be able to let the best from next year enter."

"That's correct", said Hoppe, "You see, the Elders are a stubborn bunch. They're opposed to change, and are quite happy to sit back and let everything run smoothly, without mishaps, without disturbance."

"Exactly," said Yarbro, "So you have to prove that the system we are proposing will work."

Failure, Lesleigh realised, would mean a lot of pressure on already weary shoulders.

"When do I start?"

"Tomorrow," said Yarbo, "Come and see me at my office, I'll fix up a uniform etc. There are some forms to be signed, things like that. Then you'll meet some of the Federation and be able to talk with them, discuss the training." He paused. "And then we'll show you what you have to do."

"What do I have to do?"

"Well this is difficult you see. We have arranged a small task for you. It involves a large amount of physical effort but is perfectly simple to complete. The trouble is, though, it is crucial that you succeed. Not just because of the Elders' decision but because of something more important."

"What's that?", asked Lesleigh.

"It involves the Ketars," explained Hoppe. "You might not know this, but they have abandoned Mitral. At first we thought they may have been planning to launch an attack on us but realised that, of course, the idea was pure fantasy. They have few weapons and no fast transport. Naturally, we sent a probe to Mitral to take a look around. It brought back readings, pictures etc."

He paused.

"Combined together, these elements tell a pretty disturbing story," Yarbro said. "You see, the trouble is, the Ketars attempted to mine Mitral. Unsuccessfully, I might add. And that is where the problem lies. Because of their heavy handed efforts, large pockets of gas have built up beneath the surface. They attempted to burn the gas off but then evacuated when it became too dangerous. It is up to us to complete the Job using specialist equipment."

"Why? What trouble is the gas, why did they evacuate?"

"The gas looks set to ignite. If it does, Mitral will, simply, explode. The whole moon will just burst, completely erupt. This explosion will have a disastrous effect on us. Our scientists have calculated that it will destroy the entire continent of New-Asia. Completely."

"Now you might not think that concerns us much," said Hoppe. "But it does. Tests have revealed that New-Asia is rich in Rubicon, just waiting to be mined. It is rich, if not richer than this continent when the first colonists arrived."

Lesleigh breathed deeply, "When is the gas likely to ignite?"

"Not long," said Yarbro, "Our scientists have guessed about two to two and a half weeks. A ship has been built and the finishing touches are being applied. When fully ready, it will take you to Mitral and leave you there. Your task will be to pinpoint the locations where the gas pockets are. Once located, eighteen specially designed rigs will be teleported onto the platforms and the gas burnt out. By then, though, your task will have been completed."

Lesleigh remained silent for a few moments before speaking.

"What about training, what sort of training do I get?"

"You don't need any training," said Yarbro. "Everything you need to know, you have already been taught, it is a relatively simple task."



"Okay", mumbled Lesleigh, "I accept. Just let me come and talk it over in the morning. I'm tired and would like to go to bed."

"That's fine," said Yarbro, rising to his feet. "Here's my office number and the building address."

He produced a scrap of paper and placed it on the desk.

"Nine o'clock tomorrow morning. Okay?"

"Fine. Thanks."

Yarbro smiled and removed his coat from the hanger.

"See you tomorrow then. I won't be in the office but Mr. Hoppe will. He'll take care of you."

Am 39th Quasary, 328

The harsh white glare of Vasculan streamed through half-open blinds, casting a row of flickering bars over the desk, like a cage of light and shadow.

Guarding his eyes, Trent Hoppe assembled his notes coolly, creased the corner and slid them into a predetermined slot in the desktop.

At his side, Lesleigh Skerrit brushed a loose wisp of hair from eyes that were wearied not only from the sunlight. It had been a tiring morning of studying declarations and signing forms.

Hoppe lit a cigarette and replaced the platinum, opal-studded lighter in his trouser pocket. After inhaling and allowing the smoke to curl from his nostrils, he spoke.

"How do you feel?"

"Fine, just slightly nervous."

"Oh, that's understandable. I admit, my first mission wasn't as difficult as yours, but I still suffered in the same way."

He laughed thinly. "You'll get over it. Everybody does." Hoppe puffed on his cigarette for a moment before resuming. "You realise that you leave tomorrow, first thing?"

"Yes, Mr. Yarbro explained the timing; he's going to fetch me a timetable before I leave the office today."

"No, I'll be handling that. I'll get you a copy in a minute," said Hoppe. "But first, how would you like to see the vessel which is taking you there? We had a ship modified specifically to take you and four crew to Mitral. They will leave you there and return the ship safely."

"I'd love to see it; what's it called?"

"The 'Bellastania' or the 'Last Hope' as it has been nicknamed, would you believe? A bit corny, I know, but it wasn't my idea."

Lesleigh paled.

"I don't like to think of me being the last hope."

"Don't worry," reassured Hoppe. "You'll manage, the task is quite simple really." He reached for a grey wall console. "Anyway, as you've probably guessed, this office is only temporary. I had it put together so I could watch over the construction of the vessel. It hangs over the hangar you see."

He threw a switch and a dull hum sprung up.

Lesleigh's ears determined the source of the emission. Eyes automatically flicked to the shutters. They were rising, grating apart. Lubrication fluid dribbled from rusty teeth and spattered onto the grates below. Oily chains tightened within, hidden joints groaned. Artificial light from the hangar beyond barely penetrated the murky glass.

"Take a look," suggested Hoppe as the shutters slowed, the electronic hum faded.

Lesleigh accepted the invitation and stepped towards the window, elbows fell to the desk, eyes peered over the brink. Below, a long way below, lay the 'Last Hope', its metal frame completely filling the entire hangar. Chains dangled from above; dwindling into oblivion hundreds of feet below. Cranes stood silent, metal walkways and supports hung over the dull metal of the vessel.

Tiny, yellow figures scurried here and there. Lesleigh smirked, regarding their movements with amusement.

"What are they doing now?"

Hoppe strode over to the glass and rested his palms against it, eyes pivoting into the void.

He studied their actions for a moment before answering.

"Packing, I think. See those trolleys? They're carrying supplies."

"What sort of supplies?"

"Food, things like that."

Lesleigh watched one particular trolley as it rolled across the hangar, its operator struggling futilely.

"Must be a lot of food," joked Lesleigh, squinting in an attempt to determine the distinctive logo which marked each crate.

"What was that?"

A Skull? And below it a cross? Two crossbones perhaps?

Skull and crossbones? Lesleigh's mind spun.

Skull and crossbones .....

A blur beneath the logo, a word perhaps. A word written in red. And then Lesleigh noticed a gap, very faint but definitely a gap. So there were two words .....

Lesleigh studied the blur intently before the trolley disappeared beneath the belly of the vessel.

Two words and a skull and crossbones. All written in red.

Poison? Maybe, Danger Poison?

Or ..... 'Danger — Explosives'?

Explosives?

Why are they loading explosives aboard?" asked Lesleigh calmly. Hoppe pushed himself away from the glass. "Explosives? I don't know. Are you sure that's what you saw?"

"Yes I'm certain."

Silence.

Hoppe glanced at his watch with deliberation.

"Oh Christ," he muttered, snapping his fingers. "The meeting, I've got to get to the meeting."

He looked at Lesleigh. Their gazes met, locked.

"I'll have to go now," he said. "I'll be late for the meeting."

Lesleigh took the hint. "I'll take a look around, and go and see Johnstone."

"Yeah fine. I'll see you later."

They filed out of the office. Hoppe closed and locked the door behind them.

Lesleigh found Johnstone in the stores. He was enjoying a few moments rest until packing recommenced.

The frantic completion of the vessel over the previous few weeks had certainly dragged the life-force from him. He looked sullen, exhausted.

The ex-scientist brightened, though, when Lesleigh entered. Offerings of coffee, or cigarettes were politely refused.

"Just spending a bit of time with myself," he smiled gazing at the dusty floor. "Never much time for rest these days. Always on the move, on the go."

Lesleigh sat down on the lid of a crate, gingerly, afraid it might not hold the weight.

"How's the packing going?"

"Fine, fine." Johnstone glanced at his watch. "Just a lot of hard strenuous exercise that's all."

He lifted a coffee to his lips and sipped at the steaming liquid.

"To tell the truth, I'll be glad when it's all over."

"Have you got the timetable with you?" asked Lesleigh. "That's what I came for."

"No. Mr. Hoppe said he'd fetch it for me. He's doing it on that copier."

"He's in a meeting just now," said Lesleigh. "I've just left his office."

"A meeting? He never mentioned a meeting to me", muttered Johnstone. "Never mind, there's a lot of surprise meetings cropping up this week. They've always got something new to discuss."



Lesleigh's mind barely heard what Johnstone had said. The connection between mind and body had been temporarily severed.

"Have you any idea why they'd be taking explosives aboard?", asked Lesleigh. "Why explosives?"

"Explosives?" Johnstone looked puzzled. "They wouldn't need explosives, not on a mission like this."

He paused to think, then grinned.

"Oh I know what you mean. Those crates with the skulls on, is that what you've seen?"

"Yeah, I saw someone loading them onto the ship just two minutes ago."

"They're not explosives," explained Johnstone. "Food, simply food. Mr. Yarbro told us he'd be using some old crates for holding food instead of us having to build some new ones. He brought them over this morning."

"How do you know that explosives haven't been left in by mistake?"

"Because he said so. He said they contained food, I believed him."

"So you didn't open them?" Lesleigh asked.

"No!" Johnstone sounded annoyed. "No, I didn't open them. If I went around opening crates that weren't mine, I'd be dragged in for stealing."

He looked away and plucked a cigarette from a leather pouch.

"I'm sorry for sounding ratty," he admitted. "You're bound to feel concerned. After all, I'm not going on the bloody ship."

"It's not that," said Lesleigh. "It's the fact that if an explosive was left in by chance and it, somehow, went off, the ship could be damaged. We'd have to stop. The mission might be postponed, or maybe even cancelled."

Lesleigh paused then continued.

"I must do my best to prevent disaster. I've been selected, chosen."

Johnstone inhaled smoke and then shot Lesleigh a glance.

"You think that the destruction of New-Asia would be a disaster? You do don't you?"

Lesleigh looked bewildered, slightly hostile.

"Of course I do."

"Well I've a better one for you."

He paused.

"I did some research into the size and nature of the blast from Mitral, if it was destroyed. My findings may not be solid fact, solid evidence, but even the slightest sign of disaster I am going to describe to you must be prevented."

"What is this disaster? Does it go further than the destruction of New-Asia?"

"Oh yes, much further," Johnstone continued. "You see, if Mitral did explode, the blast might totally ruin New-Asia but it would also act as a push, like a wave". He put the cigarette to his lips and blew a thin funnel of smoke into the musty air. "You see, Mitral is not too far from us. If it did explode, it would be like, say, a shotgun blast. A blast from short range. True, the continent would suffer badly but the blast would also push our planet, push us away. It would push us out of orbit .... "

"You sure?"

"Pretty sure, mind you're not to tell nobody about this, right?"

"Yeah, Okay."

Johnstone paused to sip coffee.

"And if we were pushed out of orbit, we'd drift away from the sun. The temperature of the planet would drop. In no time at all, we'd all be dead."

Lesleigh rose coldly.

"It's only a theory mind," said Johnstone, smoothing his hair back. "Only a theory."

"I'll come and see you later," said Lesleigh, as soon as I've got the timetable from Hoppe."

"Okay."

Lesleigh staggered weakly from the store room and began to ascend the stairs.

(ii)

Iotania

A bitter wind cast clouds of fine sand into the chill air, like a wave of foaming ocean, whipping dust from the friable soil. The saffron glow of the gibbous moon caused the tiny particles to appear suspended in mid-atmosphere, like frozen fireflies.

The few, water-starved clumps of scrub which dotted the bleak landscape leant submissively in the breeze. Dead leaves curled into the air to be engulfed by the oppressive darkness.

Silence reigned in the valley tonight. Silence and Peace.

Normally, Kirst Ellan would have relished the silence, the peace. But not tonight. Every night of every week, he sat on the same rock. His rock. Listening to the silence. Tonight, though, his routine had been broken, thrown into turmoil. Peace no longer reigned in Iotania.

Montigue Yarbro lit a cigarette, inhaled and blew the smoke into the night.

It was Ellan who spoke first.

"Which force do you represent? Law — the League? Military? Federation?"

"Federation."

Kirst squinted into the valley. "I suppose you've come to find out why we abandoned Mitral."

"No, we've already determined why you left," said Yarbro. "This is an informal meeting, nobody knows it is taking place."

"What do you want to know then?"

"Nothing. I have all the information I need for the time being. I have not come to question you, I have come to make you an offer." Yarbro inhaled the pure air and continued. "I've come to make a deal with you and the Ketar people. A partnership."

"What sort of partnership?" asked Kirst Ellan. "What do we get out of it?"

"Protection and safe accommodation," explained Yarbro. "As soon as you have completed your half of the deal, I will personally supervise the transport of your people to Garistia where you will be safe with me. You will be under military protection."

Ellan thought, but his moment of contemplation produced only the bland question. "What do we have to do?"

"Hijack a ship. I will accompany you but obviously as a silent partner. The act must appear to be your own instigation."

"Which ship?"

"The 'Last Hope'. Maiden Voyage. Its mission is to take one passenger to Mitral and return immediately." He halted for a second. "Whatever happens, the ship must not reach Mitral."

"Why?" Ellan asked. "What is the point of the voyage — what will this 'passenger' be doing on Mitral?"

"The 'point' is to reverse the process which you yourselves started and were unable to stop — the build up of the gas and the destruction of your moon."

"And you don't want that to be reversed?"

"No,"

"Why?"

Montigue Yarbro sighed and breathed deeper. His breath hung in the air and emphasised the dust cloud with drops of steam.

"Well, Mr. Ellan, there are many faults in Garistia today. There is no room for improvement or reform, innovation or invention." He continued. "The problem lies in the system. The framework of our society is very weak, very vague. We follow a set of laws without question, while criminals like yourself are exiled, and in this way we turn our back on our problems instead of facing them.



"To progress, the human race needs to tighten the reins, strengthen the beams, reinforce the ideals. I intend to change all this, to push us one more step up the ladder, past the broken rung, the missing stepping stone. Once there, we will be able to improve. This world will be a better place to live in."

"How do you intend to change all this?" asked Ellan. "The destruction of one ship won't affect anything."

"Oh yes it will." He coughed. "Garistia is ruled over by a board of frail old men, as you know — the 'Elders'. Most respect them and you Ketars despise them of course for your punishment. They are opposed to change and the citizens are complacent under their rule. To progress, Garistia needs a new political system."

"A dictatorship. You wish to be a — dictator?" asked Ellan. "Is that what you want?"

"No, not exactly. I want a dictatorship true, but I do not particularly wish to be a dictator." Yarbro said. "When I realised Mitral was about to explode, I saw my chance. My chance to hold Garistia to ransom. My demands will be that the board is pulled into the streets and executed. A dictator will be appointed immediately," he paused to catch breath. "I have tried to persuade the people in the past that the board is hopeless, that it should be overthrown. All my efforts failed. I may have stirred up the dust but I didn't raise enough tension. Now I have come to the end of my tether. I have to use more violent methods."

"How can you possibly hold the board to ransom?" asked Ellan, "when Mitral explodes, it won't destroy Garistia, it'll destroy New-Asia. Your people will not be affected in the slightest."

"I know. This is the whole point. Once New-Asia has been obliterated, I can then, and only then, hold them to ransom."

He continued.

"You see, the whole of Garistia relies on Rubicon crystals to survive. Everything runs on these crystals. Without these, Garistia would grind to a halt within hours," he explained. "My plan is to halt the production of Rubicon until my demands are met and the board has been executed. It will be a simple task. Each mine is enclosed and suitably defended. We could, if necessary, manage to hold off a small army."

"But," said Ellan. "You could do that already? The explosion could be prevented and you could still have the board overthrown. You don't need Mitral to be destroyed."

"Yes, yes I do. You see, these crystals have now been discovered in New-Asia. When supplies run out, New-Asia will eventually be mined. If I close off all the plants, New-Asia will be crawling with mines in a week. They would not need my crystals. I would have failed."

There was a long thoughtful pause.

Ellan asked, "When do we start? I am sure the rest of the camp will agree to your terms."

Yarbro smiled.

"Good, the hijack will take place in two days. Your men will be provided with weapons, there is a healthy supply in the craft I came in. I will accompany you and five of your men, in the fastest ship you have and we will intercept the 'Last Hope'. After boarding, we will locate and kill the five-man crew immediately. There will be no problems. The trainee we selected for the mission has no experience in these matters."

He continued.

"When the crew are dead, we will head for the stores. Hidden amongst the supplies are several boxes of explosives. These will be placed at a vital section of the vessel. Maybe the bridge. Maybe the engines even. We will set the timers and leave. By nightfall, we will all be in Garistia."

He rose and extended his hand. "I will leave now and return in the morning."

They shook hands firmly.

"I'll look forward to your visit," said Ellan.

(iii)

The titanic vessel, the 'Bellastania', crawled onward through the vacuum that existed between Evath's stratosphere and the moon 'Mitral'. Grime and grease clung obstinately to the battered exterior, refusing to relinquish its cohesive embrace.

The ship also known as the 'Last Hope' was not a gift to the sight; it was neither decorative nor sleek. Merely functional. When it returned to the city Elvira, the Bellastania would be cleaned up, shut down and taken to a hangar where it would remain indefinitely. It was unlikely that its services would ever be required again.

The first day of the voyage had passed uneventfully. After initial hostilities, the crew had begun to warm to each other's company. There had been reservations of friendliness towards Lesleigh, (why should a mere trainee be signed up to handle a situation as delicate as this?), but the crew had begun to approach their responsibilities and Lesleigh's competence simultaneously.

Assured that it was safe to engage in normal conversation, Lesleigh had asked one of the crew, Franc Nailla, to explain the sequence of events that would precede their approach. His explanation had been meticulous and detailed.

The Bellastania was too bulky to land on Mitral's densely-covered platform surface. In anticipation, the designers had fitted a shuttle which would take Lesleigh and the evacuation probe to Mitral and leave them there. The shuttle was programmed to return and dock with the Bellastania automatically. The procedure sounded so simple, Lesleigh only hoped that the manoeuvering of the shuttle was as uncomplicated as Franc had reassured.

The Ketar craft approached the docking station of the larger vessel with caution, frequent bursts from its twin engines maintaining a safe, parallel position. Docking computers from both vessels despatched acknowledgement signals. Communication commenced.

The speed of both vessels began to diminish; they matched and locked.

A necklace of landing lights flickered aboard the larger ship.

On the Ketar ship, the present course was aborted and a fresh one selected. X-axis engines died. Y-axis engines flared.

Slowly the station woke.

The hijack had begun . . .

The Bellastania's bridge was empty, devoid of human life. Not that a human presence was missed.

A whirring fan blew a continuous draught; plastic blades rotated silently behind a metal grille, creating a tunnel of air that curled the sheets of a note pad that was open on the worksurface. A light strip hung from the ceiling to illuminate the abandoned room.

A tiny red rectangle winked; organic life had returned. With a jolt, the exit-hatch rose and Nailla padded inside. He jogged to his station and dropped heavily into a stiff chair backed with the skin of an anonymous beast. He surveyed the hulking banks of silent screens and dormant consoles with professional interest, threw a switch and lay back, a worried look decorating his face.

His eyes flicked to a display above his head. He had been in the canteen enjoying a drink with two fellow crew members when they had heard the noise . . .

An echoing metallic thud followed by several harsh crashes. It was, unmistakably, the sound of the exterior hatch opening. There were only two options available. Both were slightly unlikely but, unfortunately, one of them had to be correct.

The first . . . Someone may have been trying to get out. Very dubious as the shuttle was mounted over the bridge in its own, private dock. Or, someone may have been trying to get in . . .

Nailla had reluctantly suspected the latter, and now, scrutinising the complex docking-display his suspicions were confirmed.

The crew congregated on the bridge. Thea Kell still had a drink in her hands. She placed it on the desk without taking another sip.



Ede Slaye had been repairing a loose ceiling tile in the stores when he'd heard the commotion. Rushing back to the bridge, he collided with Pete Watels. By the time they had reached the bridge, Lesleigh, Kell and Nailla were already there.

Nailla swiftly entered a command into a grey keypad and paused to think. He resumed typing and the sound of the clattering keys rattled both the silence and others' nerves.

Slaye dug a hand into his pocket for a cigarette but found it empty. He considered asking the others, opened his lips, but reconsidered and closed his mouth again.

Thea Kell strode around the console to her station. "What's in the dock?" she asked, settling herself in the chair. The vinyl covering was ice-cold.

"A law ship? Maybe it's a check up," mumbled Slaye, "Have you tried contacting them?"

Nailla forced a weak smile, "I think it's very unlikely. I've despatched warning signals, the usual sort of stuff, and they haven't responded. There's been no attempt to follow normal docking procedure."

"If they're in, the dockcom must have recognised them. They must have communicated somehow to gain access," suggested Lesleigh.

"They could have burned their way through I suppose," said Nailla, "maybe even lasered the lock." He checked the console before him with displeasure. "But we have no damage report to substantiate a forced entry." He continued, "I think we'll be lucky if they turn out to be friendly."

The bridge fell silent. The banging from below had momentarily ceased. Lesleigh glanced at Watels.

"What sort of weaponry have we aboard."

The engineer shrugged.

"No firearms, nothing like that. We're not allowed to carry them in case someone puts a hole through the hull."

Slaye glanced at Lesleigh.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because we may need some form of defence. I mean, they're obviously Ketars, aren't they. Nobody in Garistia is going to complain if we knock off a few Ketars if it will prevent the explosion. This mission is too important to be ruined by a few petty criminals."

"If it is Ketars, how did they get in? They haven't the technology," asked Slaye.

"I can't answer that one.", replied Lesleigh, "But it must be Ketars, it has to be. Mr Yarbro told me that any ship leaving Garistia twenty four hours before or after the 'Bellastania' left port, would be shot down. The ship must have come from Iotania."

"But why hijack us?" asked Thea. "I can't understand why they'd want to. We carry no cargo, nothing valuable anyway."

"Maybe they think we're carrying something important," said Lesleigh, "They obviously don't realise why we're going to Mitral." Slaye smoothed his hair back, "What do we do then? Any ideas?"

"Yep," said Thea, "I have an idea. And we wouldn't even have to go anywhere near them. If it didn't kill them it would at least drive them back into their ship."

"What is it then?" asked Slaye.

"Well we bleed air you see," explained Thea. "This ship has the right facilities for bleeding. It's a simple process, all we do is leak it into canisters and store them until we're reassured they're all dead. We then reconnect the canisters and pump it back in."

"What do we do in the meantime?" asked Lesleigh, "Where can we go?"

"Two choices." interrupted Slaye, "We could, if necessary, hide in the shuttle. It has an adequate air supply. Or, alternatively, we could put suits on and use up the bottled air."

"Alright then," said Lesleigh, "How do we bleed the air?"

Thea said "I'll do it, I've handled it on other vessels before. It's sometimes used to

locate leaks or fractures in the hull."

"Right then.", said Lesleigh, "Watels, you go and get five suits from the lock. Make sure they're all working, no punctures or anything. Then get five bottles and clean the valves. Also check that they're full. If not, top them up. Right?"

"Right"

Lesleigh continued, "Slaye and Nailla you go and open the valves. I'll go and fetch the canisters and carry them up to you. Okay?"

Nailla nodded in agreement, "Okay."

They began to file from the bridge.

They clattered down access corridor #3. Alongside their shadowy figures, oily pipes, steaming tubes and clumps of multi-coloured wires snaked into semi-darkness. The walls were encrusted with plates and riddled with rust.

Nailla stooped beneath a metal outcrop and drew himself into the recess. He reached for the hatch control.

A rectangle of red pierced the darkness as the entrance-hatch rose. Without a sound it lifted into the roof and gave a satisfying click to signify that it was locked in place. Assured that it would not drop as they passed underneath, they bustled inside and Slaye turned to seal them off.

The heat was overpowering as they entered. Steam rose from the thousands of scalding pipes that clung to the walls. A burst of searing steam escaped spasmodically from a ruptured tube and flooded the scorching chamber as the water condensed.

Nailla paused to regain his breath and composure, wiping the perspiration from his brow. "Over there," he gestured at a thin metal slab that lay at the far end of the chamber, shrouded in artificial mist. "That's where you get to the stores," he said, "down the walkway, across the corridor. They're in the next room."

"Right," said Lesleigh as he stumbled towards the hatch, "make sure you loosen all those valves for when I get back. I won't be long."

Acting upon his advice, Nailla reached for the first wheel and attempted to twist it. Even an application of a second hand was no more productive. "This one's jammed," he murmured to himself, moving on to its neighbour. After an initial tug, the second wheel began to spin. He caught it before the valve could snap open and release a spout of scalding fluid. He moved on to the third and repeated the procedure.

Thea Kell closed the hatch after her and walked into the room, surveying the rows of valves, dials and monitors within. She seated herself in an unpadded chair and began to close switches and activate monitors with the ease of someone skilled in the operation of this kind of machinery. Yet she had only performed the operation twice before and neither time had it been under such pressure or strain of urgency.

Her fingers darted over the keyboard, changing the steady flow of recycled water into a steady tide of pure, clean air. She altered the air-conditioning from exhale to inhale mode and leant back to wait.

Pete Watels flinched as the oxygen bottle slipped from his shaking fingers and clattered off the grate, rolling from his exhausted figure. He stooped to retrieve it and lugged it over to where four similar bottles rested against the wall of the store. After a short rest, he approached a glass-fronted locker, one of several that lined the opposite wall. His attempts to determine the contents by simply peering through the murky glass were not fruitful. He resorted to more dangerous methods.

Holding his breath, Watels wrenched the hatch wide, the customary squeal ripping through the corridors and access walkways, a rack of plastic bundles stared out at him; a few hung loosely on their wire hangers. Recognition was immediate and a weak smile sprung to his lips. Pressure suits. He reached up and tugged the first bundle free and tossed it to the floor. Wiping his hands on his trousers, he reached for the second.

With a grin, Lauder unslung the rifle from his shoulder. The three short bursts of gunfire rang loud and clear throughout the vessel.

Lesleigh gripped a handrail and descended the framework staircase, cautious not to slip in suspect pools that had gathered on the steps.



Dim light filtered in from above, reflecting faintly off tarnished rails and unpolished grates. Decaying wooden crates were stacked high to the ceiling; several had toppled and half-spilled their contents.

Lesleigh reached the foot of the staircase and kicked a stray can of tomatoes over the balcony before proceeding, jogging past the vast piles of supplies that littered the expansive store. One hand reached for the hatch-control as its owner glanced behind, wary of lurking shadows.

Kirst Ellan peered around the bend in access-corridor #15 for any indication of life, either hostile or friendly. His eyes probed the passage but nothing stirred. Nothing fled. Nothing sprang.

Sighing he turned the corner, his confidence relying on the rifle he clutched feverishly in both hands. Behind, Wilson and Morton were chatting amiably, their redundant rifles slung over their shoulders.

Ellan relaxed just a moment too soon.

The hatch immediately before him rose smoothly and settled in the ceiling.

His heart skipped a beat.

A figure stepped into the light and then was gone, engulfed by the fleeting shadows.

His finger automatically locked onto the trigger. Pressure was applied. The barrel rocked twice, spitting minute flashes of light into the chill air. Two smoking holes blew in the metal of the hatch. Light from the chamber beyond filtered through the blackened pores.

Without thinking Ellan sprinted down the corridor, booted feet pounding off oily grates. To one side of him, an exit-hatch was just descending.

Lesleigh scrambled frantically into the dingy store and leapt immediately for the crates, feet crunching off the first as the ex-trainee hauled upwards, fingers digging into the wood, feet kicking at the reinforcers. Crates crashed from the top of the stack and exploded messily on the grates far below, as Lesleigh struggled upwards.

Kirst Ellan entered the store and caught sight of the rapidly disappearing figure.

He snapped the rifle into the air.

Smoking splinters erupted as the barrel bolted twice. Slivers of wood and clouds of sawdust pursued Lesleigh down the opposite side of the stack.

Ellan lowered the barrel and fired three wild bursts into the ungainly sprawl of crates before glancing behind.

Wilson and Morton ran into the store, both unhooking their rifles.

"Who is it?" asked Morton.

"Skerrit, I think," replied Kirst. "You go round that side and take a look. I'll watch the hatch." He fired two more bursts into the pile before the rifle registered empty with a loud and distinctive click. He allowed his finger to slacken and defiantly squeezed the trigger once more before tossing the rifle down in disgust.

Wilson stepped around the stack cautiously, his weapon held in front of him. He pulled himself parallel to the adjacent passage and slid his finger over the trigger. The barrel jerked twice.

Lesleigh's fist caught him heavily in the stomach and he doubled up, air whooshing from his lungs.

Morton automatically drew the rifle from his shoulder. His finger snapped over the trigger.

Fingers wrapped around Wilson's hair and jerked him roughly into the shadow of the stack. Unhooking the rifle from his grip, Lesleigh snatched it up and wrapped a finger around the trigger, turning to peer round the corner.

The barrel of Morton's rifle jolted and flared. A multitude of charred, smoking rings appeared in the crate nearest to Lesleigh's head. Sawdust choked the alleyway.

Ellan appeared behind Lesleigh, his figure half-obscured by the dry clouds of sawdust. In his left hand he carried a chain, the links wide and far apart.

It whipped over Lesleigh's head and snapped taut. Ellan immediately dragged both ends together, twisting the links with his fists. Choking, Lesleigh reached for the chain

and locked two fingers between metal and skin.

Morton appeared at the entrance to the alleyway, the stubby rifle held in one hand. Lesleigh's foot snatched it from his grip, sending it clattering to the ground elsewhere.

Lesleigh dropped heavily to bruised and aching knees, vision misting over. Ellan released the chain as he crashed over his victim's back to smack onto the dusty grates. The chain spun from his hand and rolled out of sight.

Lesleigh bent to retrieve the rifle, fingers groping for the strap. Morton appeared in the entrance and lashed out, sending Lesleigh flying, the strap jerking from shaking fingers.

"Get the gun" he snapped.

Lesleigh was up on two feet in seconds, supported weakly by the musty crates. Limbs ached, head ached, neck ached.

Ellan crawled for the rifle, fingers curled slowly around the barrel.

Morton threw Lesleigh a punch and responded by draggng the ex-trainee into the open. The glass screen which overlooked the steaming water tanks stared back at him. Light filtered through the steam-covered plate.

Ellan grabbed the rifle and rose, verifying the gauge. He began to turn.

Lesleigh elbowed Morton in the stomach and lashed out at Ellan, catching him in the stomach. The Ketar gasped, folding over, the rifle hanging limp from his grasp.

Lesleigh lashed out again.

The Ketar exploded messily through the glass, a lethal shower of silvery shards erupting into the steamy air.

Ellan just caught sight of the churning tanks, felt the heat on his skin, before he began to fall.

Morton knelt and snapped a knife from his sock, wielding it, he rushed.

Lesleigh swiftly surveyed the grates for a weapon.

Nothing. Nothing at all.

Dodging the knife, Lesleigh crashed awkwardly against the wall, barely missing the gaping hole in the glass.

Something hissed.

Morton stooped, stumbled and snatched the knife from the grates.

Lesleigh glanced at the wall which his exhausted figure had smashed against. The 'Emergency Landing' case had sprung open. Interior lights had begun to flicker. Inside hung a motionless row of ten red and yellow striped flares.

Morton rushed again. Thinking quickly, a hand reached for the first flare and wrenched it from its protective clip. A finger clicked over the trigger.

Morton slowed, frowned.

The barrel rocked.

The flare whooshed, coughing a trail of dense, purple smoke inits wake. The charge hit Morton full in the chest, the dull explosion sending the knife wheeling from his grip. He staggered against the crates and then dropped heavily, purple smoke pouring from his charred and blackened chest.

Lesleigh allowed the flare to fall before leaning against the metal, gasping for breath.

Lauder released the limp body of Thea and allowed it to slump to the grates. He reslung his rifle and vacated the chamber, closing the hatch behind him.

Lesleigh hurried across the floor of the store and towards the staircase. Without pausing for breath, the ex-trainee began to ascend, leaping the steps two at a time.

A shadow passed over the hatch.

The harsh crackle of gunfire rang throughout the vessel.

Lesleigh halted and stared at the hatch, gasping for breath. Nailla, Slaye? Dead? Maybe even Thea and Watels . . .

At the foot of the staircase, Wilson moved into the light. In one hand he held a knife, he grinned a toothless grin.

Lesleigh glanced at the leering figure and then back up at the hatch. A pair of legs,



fell from the hole as a figure began to ease itself onto the walkway. One hand locked onto the rail, one foot gripped the bar. Lesleigh strained and raised an aching leg onto the metal.

Wilson watched as the shadowy figure vaulted the gap to crash heavily onto the top of the stack.

Lauder dropped from the hatch, unhooked his rifle. Automatically he opened fire, raking the crumbling crates with charred, smoking holes.

Lesleigh fell to the floor in a shower of dust and blackened wood. After lying still for a moment, the figure rose and peered around the corner. Eyes settling on one particular crate. On one particular side. On one particular logo.

The skull and crossbones.

Yarbro fell from the hatch and, regaining his senses, forced the barrel of Lauder's rifle away from the stack.

"Don't shoot," he snapped, "Not in the stores."

Lesleigh reached for the crate, fingers groping for the seal . . . Lauder saw the hand and snatched the barrel from Yarbro's restraining grip. It jolted once, twice.

Two holes blew in the wood. Two wisps of smoke floated from the holes.

Lesleigh backed off, into the shelter of the stack. The crate began to smoke, its brittle, wooden surface steaming then rapidly darkening.

Lauder's boots echoed off the steps as he descended the stairs, the stocky rifle clutched in sweaty hands.

Something flitted into view.

The rifle bolted, punching a steaming hole into the metal of the hatch. Lesleigh elbowed the bemused Wilson out of the way and slid into it, fingers reaching for the control.

The hatch began to rise.

The wood hissed loudly, tiny flames licking the deadly interior. With a gasp, the crate erupted into radiant light, flames shooting upwards and outwards. Large plates of burning wood screamed across the store and exploded off cold metal.

The hatch clicked back into the floor.

Yarbro shouted something inaudible to Lauder and began to haul himself back into the boiler-room.

Lesleigh reached the bridge as the first of several minor explosions rocked the Bellastania. Approaching the console, Lesleigh sank into a chair and stabbed at buttons and switches. Readings and distances were checked and verified. Then Lesleigh rose and braced against the console. The bridge tilted unsteadily and very slowly began to right itself. Lesleigh stumbled towards the shuttle, out of breath.

One finger hit the control and the hatch went up; Lesleigh ducked beneath. Lesleigh scrambled past the 'Emergency Hatch' and dropped hurriedly into another chair, before activating the keypad with surprising accuracy.

Yarbro hauled himself up the swaying corridor as a series ot powertul explosions shook the craft and its contents. He fought to reach the bridge amongst an avalanche of debris.

With a hiss of engines, the shuttle discharged from the dock. Rockets fired once, twice, pulling the sleek vessel from the less impressive Bellastania.

The docking-station crumpled in on itself, bursts of flame from the wreck silent in the void.

The bridge exploded equally soundlessly. Only seconds later the remainder of the vessel followed. Sheets of fiery metal tore into oblivion; beams, shattered ribs and ripped grating separated silently.

Unperturbed, the tiny shuttle streaked towards its destination, leaving a graveyard of smoking wreckage in its wake.

It took Lesleigh only forty seven minutes to reach Mitral. The procedure of landing a shuttle is often fraught with difficulties, but Lesleigh had none, setting down on one of the flat platforms, a man-made plateau.

Lesleigh checked the excavation probe and the pod it contained for damage, but there was none apparent.

The main task was just beginning . . . .

# YOUR MISSION

Evath has two moons, Mitral and Tricuspid. Mitral has been heavily mined by an outlawed people, the Ketars, who have now fled the moon. A vast amount of gas has built up underneath Mitral's surface, and should Mitral explode, thousands of Evathians will be wiped out as Evath is thrown out of orbit. The resulting freeze will wipe out your planet's entire population! Scientists have calculated a meteor is due to strike Mitral in a matter of hours and this alone will cause this disaster.

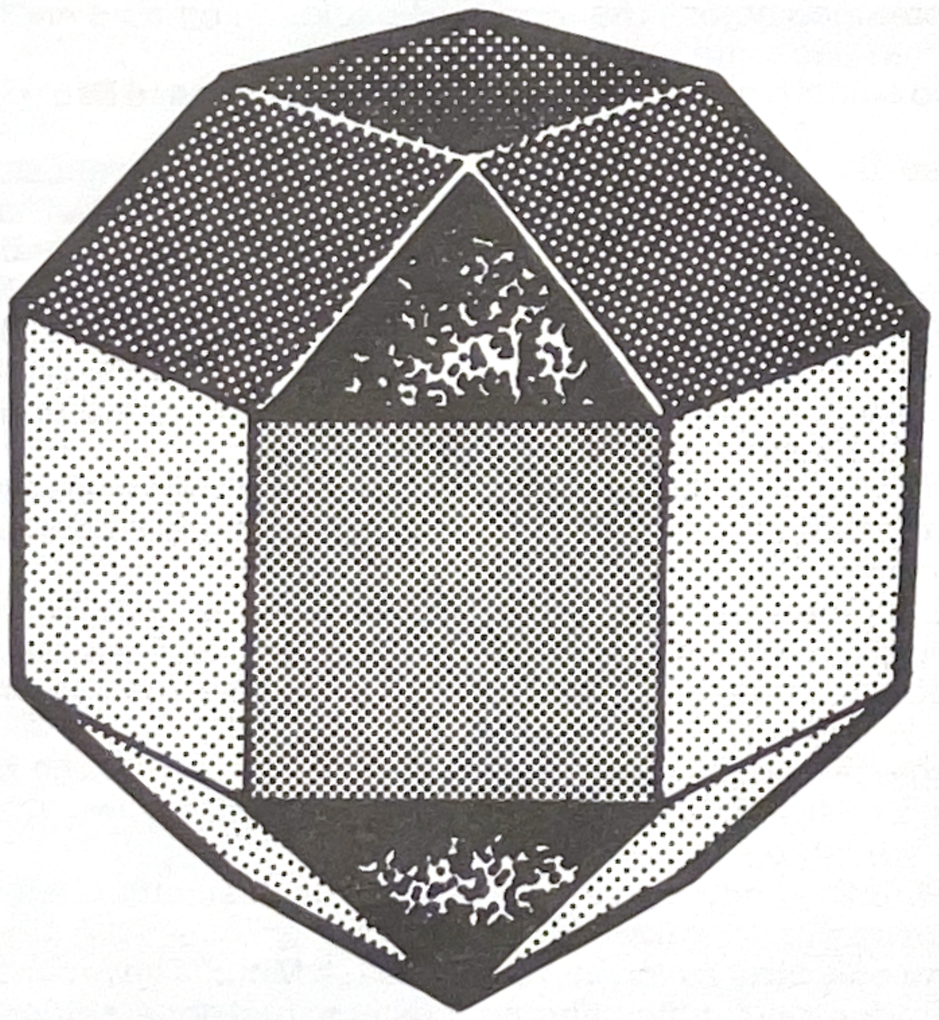
**Your Overall Mission** is to make safe each of the 18 sectors of Mitral by positioning a drilling rig over the gas pockets in each sector before the meteor strikes.

In order to achieve this you will need to:–

(i) Gain access to and enter each of the 18 sectors.
(ii) Determine the gas centre and place the drilling rig on each sector to release at least 50% of the gas below. (Use geological clues, intuition or trial and error for this).
(ii) Locate and absorb sufficient Rubicon crystals for your continuing survival.
(iv) Avoid and/or destroy the laser beacons, and Skanners.

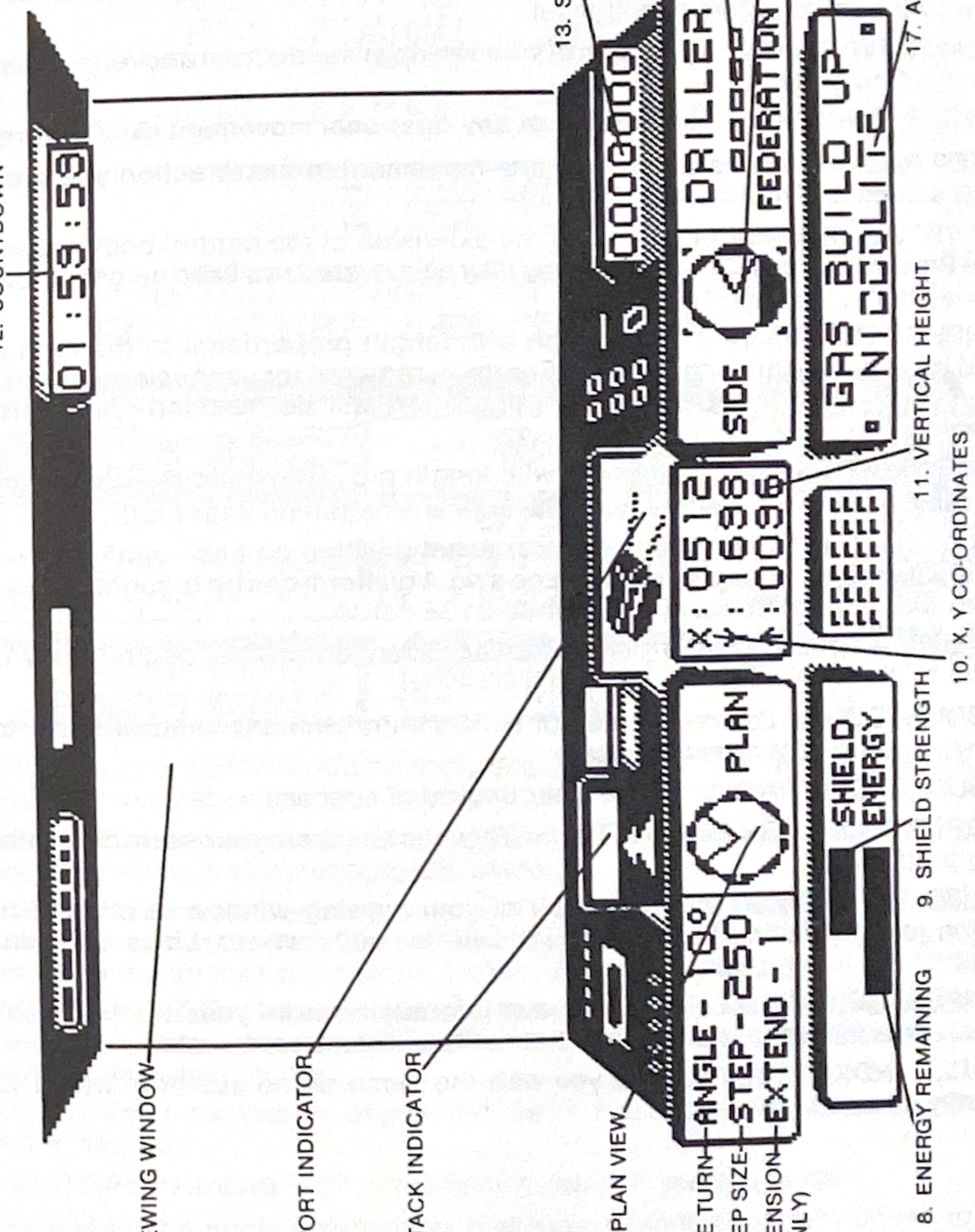
As a sub mission : Amass as high a success rating as possible!

**You** have just landed on one of Mitral's artificial surfaces. You are within your excavation probe. The whole world depends on you . . . you have been chosen . . . it's up to you . . .





## CONTROL CONSOLE



# CONTROL CONSOLE — DETAILS

1. VIEWING WINDOW: A dense and durable Transpex screen providing you with a survey of the immediate surroundings.

2. TRANSPORT INDICATOR: A visual image corresponding to your current mode of transport.

3. MOVEMENT/ATTACK INDICATOR: Arrow on Display — Movement Mode, Cursor and Lasers on Display — Attack Mode.

(NB) It is also possible to fire lasers in Movement Mode, but only to the centre of the viewing window when the cursor is on.

4. PLAN VIEW: Shows the direction of your viewing window from above. ie. lines facing up — heading north.

5. ANGLE TURN: Measures the size of any rotational movement (5-90 degrees).

6. STEP SIZE: Measures the size of one movement in the direction you are facing (1-250 standard distance units (SDUs)).

7. VERTICAL EXTENSION: Indicates the extension of the central body of the probe above the outer tracks. The central body may be elevated to a fixed height. Shows "J" if currently in the reconnaissance jet.

8. ENERGY REMAINING: A bar graph with length proportional to the total energy stored in on board Rubicon crystals. Energy is required for various operations; if this ever reaches zero (no graph visible) your craft will be disabled and you will be stranded.

9. SHIELD STRENGTH: a bar graph with length proportional to the effectiveness of your vehicle's armour. Decreases if damage is inflicted on your craft.

10. X, Y CO-ORDINATES: Pinpoint your exact position on each platform — can be helpful when determining where to place a rig. A platform can be thought of as a grid or square with each side equal in length to 8128 SDUs.

11. VERTICAL HEIGHT: The perpendicular distance from the central body of your vehicle to platform level.

12. COUNTDOWN: Before the meteor strikes Mitral. If the Countdown gets to zero, and even one sector remains unsafe . . .

13. SUCCESS RATING: Indicates your degree of success so far.

14. OPERATION LIGHT INDICATORS: This shows when your current command is being processed.

15. SIDE VIEW: Shows the side view of your viewing window in relation to your position ie. lines facing to the right indicate looking forward. Lines down indicate looking at the moon's surface.

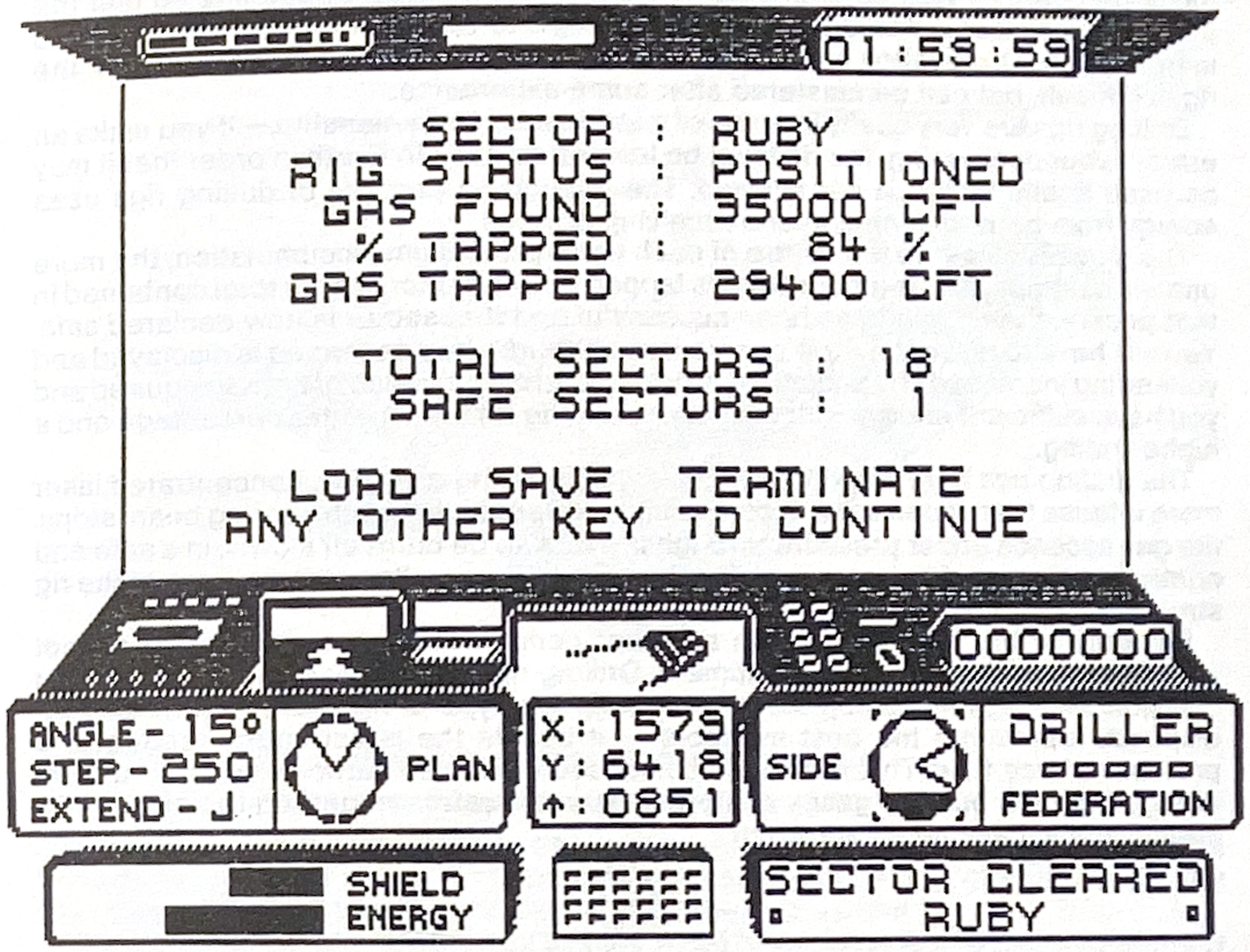
16. MESSAGE DISPLAY: Miscellaneous information from your console computer. Defaults to a message indicating the stability of the current sector.

17. AREA INDICATOR: Provides you with the name of the sector in which you are currently situated.



# INFORMATION SCREEN

When the information screen is accessed, the viewing window is temporarily replaced with the information below:




AREA: Each sector is named to aid mapping and orientation. This displays the name of the present sector.

RIG STATUS: This advises whether a rig is positioned or not. As only eighteen rigs are available, you may only place one rig per sector.

GAS FOUND: The amount of gas found beneath the current sector, shown in cubic feet after the drilling rig is in position. The units are one of the few archaic remnants of half-forgotten Earth usage that still exist in modern Evathian culture.

PERCENTAGE TAPPED: The percentage of total gas you have been able to tap. The nearer the exact gas centre, the greater amount of gas released. 50% or more is needed to render a sector safe.

GAS TAPPED: The total amount of gas that the rig has accessed. i.e. gas found × % tapped=gas tapped.

TOTAL SECTORS: Displays "18" — the total number of sectors to clear.

SAFE SECTORS: The number of sectors that have been successfully drilled to tap over half their total gas volume.

LOAD/SAVE: Retrieve/store your game position from/to tape or disc.

ABORT MISSION: When the odds are too great or time is too short. Emergency only — don't do it!

## DRILLING

To tap the pocket of gas beneath each platform, you must place a drilling rig over it.

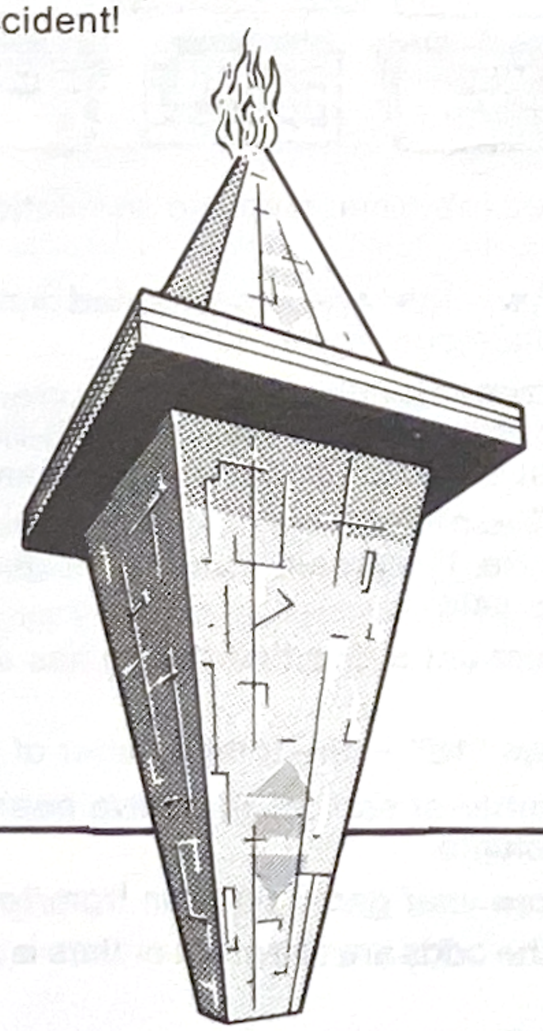
By pressing the appropriate key on your console, a signal is emitted, which informs those on Evath of your co-ordinates. The signal is conveyed by satellite so that the response is almost instantaneous — a drilling rig is teleported to you and materialises in front of your excavation probe within your viewing screen. Exact positioning of the rig is difficult, but can be mastered after some experience.

Drilling rigs are very costly in terms of materials and workmanship — if you make an error in your positioning, the rig must be teleported back to Evath in order that it may be used again. Waste is not allowed. The teleporting process of drilling rigs uses energy from both the sending and receiving devices.

The closer you get to the centre of each underground gas accumulation, the more gas will be tapped. If the amount of gas tapped is 50% or more of the total contained in that pocket, then drilling has been successful and that sector is now declared safe. You will have to leave the rig in position, as although the gas tapped is displayed and your rating increased, it is actually slowly released over a period of time. If required and you have sufficient energy, you can reposition the rig for a greater percentage and a higher rating.

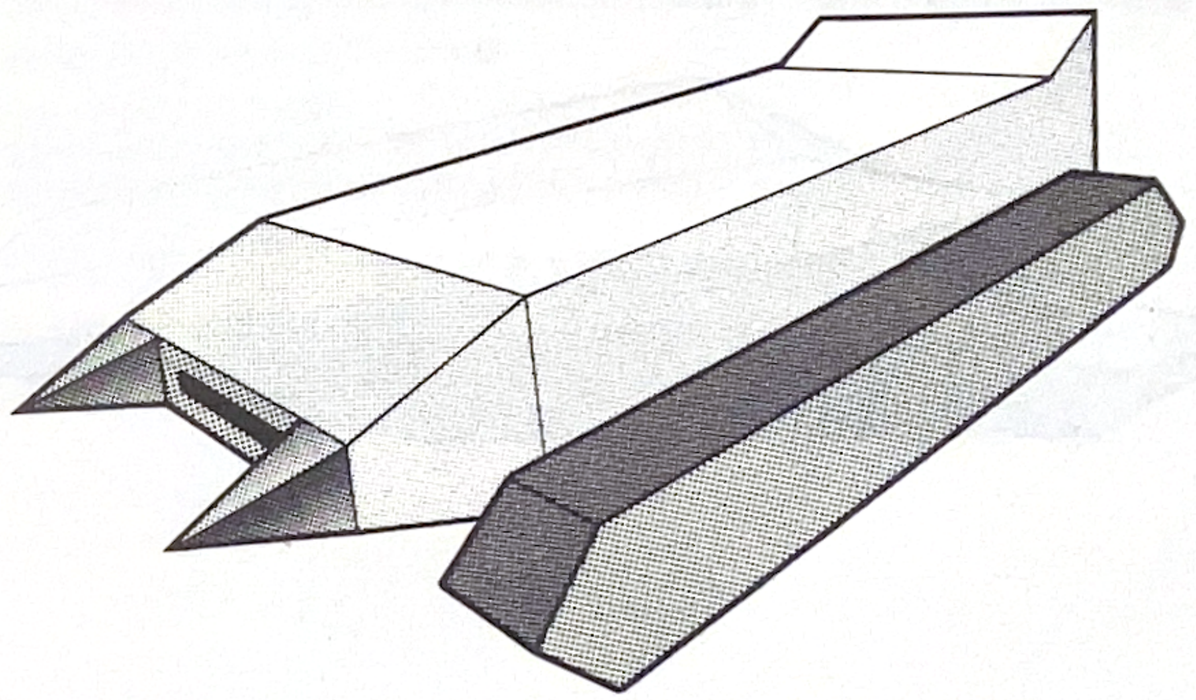
The drilling rigs bore down to the gas deposits using a narrow, concentrated laser more intense than those used in conventional weapons. When the boring beam stops, the gas ascends under pressure through the rock to be burnt off slowly, in a safe and controlled manner. After successful drilling, you will see a flame at the apex of the rig structure.

Because of the high production and replacement costs, the Federation cannot afford to take risks with their equipment. Drilling rigs are not particularly fragile, but collision with high mass objects is damaging. The type of rig that you have at your disposal, represents the best available — it boasts the latest safety feature of a protective force-field. This is a shield composed of icnized particles, which draws its energy from the burning gases and prevents your craft from getting too close to its structure and causing an accident!





## EXCAVATION PROBE



ARMOUR: Durable, heavy-duty platonium/lead alloy plating.

ENERGY: Powerful energy reserves stored in Rubicon crystals.

MOVEMENT: You can travel forwards backwards, turn left or right as well as being able to make 180 degree U-turn. The speed of the probe can be changed by altering the step-size of forward/backward movement, or the angle of turn.

The main body of the probe may also be tilted to either side and it can rotate fully within the outer tracks to enable you to look in any direction. In addition, the main body can be elevated or lowered although your vehicle is not able to leave the surface entirely. Beware! Do not travel off the platform edges without being sure there is another platform to move onto.

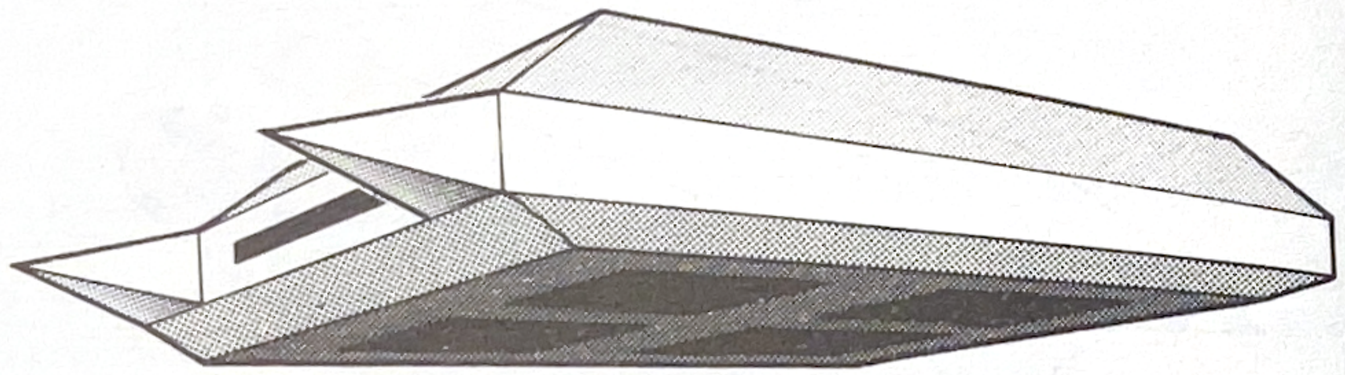
WEAPONRY: The probe is fitted with a quadruple dual action laser system, that is activated from your control console. The cursor acts as a pointer towards which your lasers are targeted when you discharge them. The lasers are concentrated beams of high-frequency light rays that have valuable destructive properties! However, their effect can vary and is not always predictable.

DRILLING: The probe contains the means to transmit teleporting signals to Evath necessary to position drilling rigs — This is the most essential part of your mission, and is dealt with in detail on page 28 (Drilling).

## DOCKING

At least one jet has been left on Mitral by the Ketars and should you locate one, you can transfer into it by simply docking your excavation probe into the underside of the vehicle. If docking is successful, you will now be in control of the jet and your probe will be left. To reverse this procedure, land the jet directly over the probe.

## RECONNAISSANCE JET



ARMOUR: No specialised armoured cover — vulnerable to attack, will not withstand repeated damage.

ENERGY: High energy reserves stored in Rubicon crystals.

WEAPONRY: High Intensity High-frequency quadruple dual action lasers.

MOVEMENT: You will find that the control consoles for both the probe and jet are very similar. The controls and their functions are similar, with a couple of exceptions.

Firstly, the jet is not restricted in vertical movement, so whereas the probe could merely face (or 'look') up or downwards the jet can also travel in these directions. Secondly, Reconnaissance Jets are part of Ketar technology and do not have the necessary transmitter required for rig positioning.

The six jet rocket engines (two at the rear and, four underneath), allow the craft to fly and hover over most of the moon and its buildings. Landing is achieved by simply descending, and it is possible to hover by holding one's position in mid-flight. It is not necessary to continually thrust upwards — the lower engines will do this automatically for you. They were designed and built purely for their use as scouting ships and they therefore are not nearly fast or powerful enough to leave Mitral or to fly over very high structures. The jet engines work by utilising the energy of their Rubicon crystals in conjunction with the sparse atmosphere of the moon. The result is a highly efficient, if limited method of travel. Beware though, the jet relies on the flat surfaces of the platforms for stability, so stay over the structure!



## LASER BEACONS

The Ketar defence system includes various laser beacons that are positioned throughout the platforms of Mitral. It is also believed that beacons are positioned on the actual Moon itself!

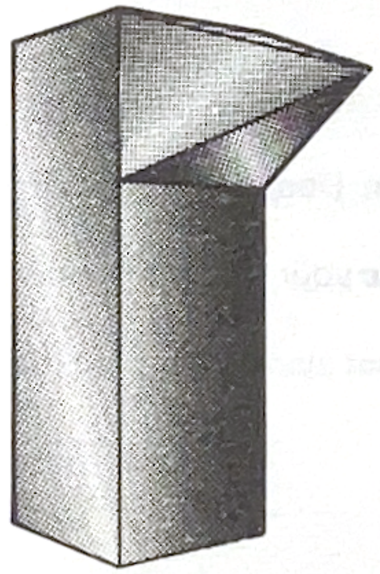
If you are detected within the range of a laser beacon, you will be attacked! Laser beacons fire highly damaging, high intensity lasers — and they do not miss!

If under attack, your options include:

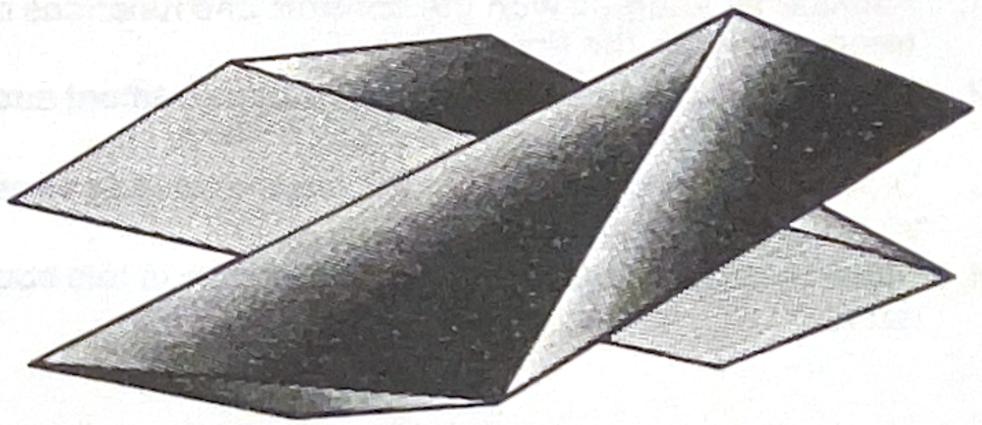
i) Backing off out of range
ii) Making a run for it to get behind the beacon
iii) Shooting the beacon (unpredictable results)

## SKANNERS

Little is known about these except that they orbit Mitral and are likely to be armed.



A typical laser beacon



A Ketar Skanner

## ENERGY AND YOUR MISSION

Whatever transport you are using at a particular time, e.g. probe or reconnaissance jet — your lasers, shield, light and motion are all dependent on Rubicon crystals. However, time and use will decrease your stores of energy and the beam of an attacking laser will decrease the strength of your shield.

The manufacture of Rubicon relies on the presence of sunlight during the process, and for this reason you will find that stores of them are more concentrated on the lightest side of Mitral, the face that is illuminated most brightly by Vasculan. When you reach the dark side of the moon, energy could be in short supply!

The crystals that you will find on Mitral are those intended for the purpose you have in mind. Their stores of energy are easily transferred to the Rubicon you have on board. Just by shooting a crystal relays the energy along the laser beams (which have the same light wavelength), back to your vessel. The storage crystal is usually destroyed thus, and your own are replenished.

There are two varieties of Rubicon crystals that have been left by the Ketars: they are similarly shaped but have different functions:- One increases your total energy count, whereas the other increases the strength of your shield. The process for both is the same because the shield utilises the same energy in another way. Experience will teach you the difference in appearance between the two crystal types.

Be warned that some Ketar technology is alien to you and occasionally standard procedures like these can prove unpredictable. For example, Rubicon crystals are sometimes arranged to alter their overall effect.

## PLAYING HINTS

1. Familiarise yourself with the controls and functions of your vehicle. A good place to do this is on the first sector.
2. Try using all the possible directions of movement and vision. Don't forget you can look under, over and behind many objects.
3. Draw a map of your travels — the more detailed and accurate your map the greater your chances of success.
4. Clues to the puzzles can be found not only in this booklet but also throughout the game.

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