

COMBAT COMMAND™

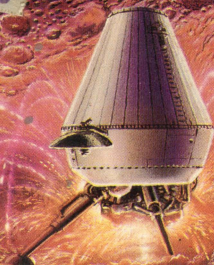
TAKE COMMAND...
IN A NEW ROLE-PLAYING NOVEL

#3

IN THE WORLD OF

KEITH LAUMER'S STAR COLONY

2.45



**THE OMEGA
REBELLION**
BY
TROY DENNING

ACE • 0-441-11536-5 • [\$3.95 CANADA] • \$2.95 U.S.



Revolt!

Gasper draws his pistol. "Put those weapons down and return to your posts," he orders.

One of the mutineers steps forward and says, "Or what?"

Gasper cocks his pistol in response.

"You can't shoot all of us. Me and the boys are taking charge of this tub, now!"

The mutineers advance toward Gasper.

"And who'll be the leader then?" yells one of the security cops. "You? No, thanks. Newlin may be a cold-blooded murderer, but at least he's in His Lordship's service. You're nothing but a pack of hungry dogs, and I don't doubt that you'd turn on us in a minute."

"Have it your way then," calls the mutineer leader. A few moments later, the mutinous crew members rush the security office . . .

THE OMEGA REBELLION

The Combat Command Books from Ace:

COMBAT COMMAND: In the world of Piers Anthony's
BIO OF A SPACE TYRANT, CUT BY EMERALD
by Dana Kramer

COMBAT COMMAND: In the world of Robert A. Heinlein's
STARSHIP TROOPERS, SHINES THE NAME
by Mark Acres

COMBAT COMMAND: In the world of Keith Laumer's
STAR COLONY, THE OMEGA REBELLION
by Troy Denning

COMBAT COMMAND: In the world of David Drake's
HAMMER'S SLAMMERS, SLAMMERS DOWN!
by Todd Johnson
(coming in February)

COMBAT COMMAND TM

IN THE WORLD OF

**KEITH
LAUMER'S
STAR
COLONY**

**THE OMEGA
REBELLION**

BY
TROY DENNING

**WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
KEITH LAUMER**



ACE BOOKS, NEW YORK

The names, places, descriptions, depictions, and other plot elements used in this game are derived from works copyrighted by and trademarks owned by Keith Laumer. These are used under license and may not be used or reused without Keith Laumer's permission.

This book is an Ace original edition,
and has never been previously published.

THE OMEGA REBELLION

An Ace Book / published by arrangement with
Bill Fawcett & Associates

PRINTING HISTORY

Ace edition / December 1987

All rights reserved.

Copyright © 1987 by Bill Fawcett & Associates.

Introduction copyright © 1987 by Keith Laumer.

Cover art by Don Dixon.

Maps by James Clouse.

Illustrations by Todd Cameron Hamilton.

This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part,
by mimeograph or any other means, without permission.

For information address: The Berkley Publishing Group,
200 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016.

ISBN: 0-441-11536-5

"Combat Command" is a trademark
belonging to Bill Fawcett & Associates.

Ace Books are published by The Berkley Publishing Group,
200 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016.

The name "Ace" and the "A" logo
are trademarks belonging to Charter Communications, Inc.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

INTRODUCTION

by Keith Laumer

With Earth's population at ten billion in 2050, and increasing, living space is at a premium. The young must await their parents' demise before inheriting an apartment, which they will even then be sharing with various relatives—or even with total strangers assigned by the government.

Government, to keep order in this high-pressure situation, has become increasingly authoritarian. Strict classification of all people in one of four social classes is rigidly enforced. Many people live an entire life-span without ever venturing outside their tightly-packed living quarters. The police, with wide summary powers, are ever-present, and old-time ideals of personal freedom and individual liberties have perforce been abandoned. The challenge to society is simply to survive.

In this delicately-balanced situation, the news of the discovery of a habitable world has been totally suppressed, since it would tend to upset the equation and thereby the impregnable power of the four magnates known as the Star Lords—who have, however, been able to exploit the new planet, Colmar, while allowing a trickle of emigration.

It is into this explosive situation that our hero, Gasper Newlin, must survive. For years, he has worked as a junkloader in the Hillgrove Production Complex. Because of the intense competition for jobs among people of Gasper's age, the government has imposed strict fairness-in-employment regulations to insure that those who most desire employment have the best chance at securing a job.

On his way to work one day, Gasper encounters a security police ambush. He is immediately apprehensive, not because he has violated any laws, but because a delay might cost him his job. As he is pondering his predicament, a striking,

one-eyed woman comes into view. She is obviously the target of the ambush.

Gasper must choose between warning her about the ambush, ignoring her, or aiding the security police. While he makes his decision, he must bear in mind that if he is late for work, he will lose his job. If he loses his job, the government housing agency will force his family to leave their flat and move into the municipal dormitories.

Gasper's choice will determine not only his future, but the future of an entire off-world colony; this minor episode sets off a string of events that will determine the future of thousands of off-world colonists. Gasper might find himself serving as Security Officer aboard the *Saretta*, one of His Lordship's starships. During the course of his first ten-year journey, he must face a rebel mutiny. Assuming he survives the mutiny, he must also discover why the *Saretta* is carrying a secret arms shipment to Omega. He must also find out why the captain wishes to keep the shipment secret. Is the captain following orders from a corrupt superior? Is he "on the take" himself? Or, incredibly, does he secretly harbor rebel sympathies? Gasper's success at answering these questions—and his reaction to the answers—may mean the difference between liberty and slavery for an entire world.

Or Gasper might return home to find a lieutenant from the security police preparing to evict Gasper's family from their flat. The lieutenant presents Gasper with a simple choice: volunteer for off-planet emigration or lose the flat. Gasper awakes five years later on Omega. Rebels have sabotaged the starship, and as a consequence, the ship has crash-landed on the wrong continent. Gasper is thrust into a leadership position. He must decide whether to lead a mutiny against the ship's captain, or to look for help on an alien world. During the course of his adventures, he will meet a secret battalion of His Lordship's mercenaries and come face-to-face with a bizarre alien that resembles a floating intestine.

Finally, Gasper might find himself unwillingly embroiled in a mutiny attempt aboard the *Saretta*. Should he lead the rebels in an all-out attack against the ship's bridge? Or should he lie in wait for the security team to find the rebel team? His decision will mean the difference between life and death for his fellow rebels—and the difference between freedom and subjugation for Omega!

INTRODUCTION

by Bill Fawcett

You are in command. With a blare of trumpets accented by a hurriedly barked order, it's off to battle . . . well, not exactly in the tangled world of conspiracy of Keith Laumer's *Star Colony*. Marching behind you are the men whose lives depend upon the decisions you are about to make.

The Combat Command series puts you at the head of science fiction's toughest soldiers. In this book you can command Security Cops or Rebels on Earth, on board a giant colony ship, or in a perilous journey across the unknown world of Omega, the *Star Colony*. You have the chance to adventure across the full span of Laumer's imaginative universe.

Combat Command books provide one more chance to read about a well-known science-fiction world and its familiar characters. Each book is also a "game." In each section of this game/book a military decision is described. You are given the same information as you would actually receive in a real combat situation. At the end of each section are a number of choices. As the commanding officer of the security cops or the rebels, you give the orders. The consequences of your decision are described in the next section. When you make the right decisions, morale improves and you are closer to completing your mission. When you make a bad decision, men die . . . men who are not going to be available for future battles.

FIGHTING BATTLES

This book includes a simple game system that simulates combat and other military challenges. Playing the game adds

an extra dimension of enjoyment by making you a participant in the adventure. You will need two six-sided dice, a pencil and a sheet of paper to play along with this adventure.

COMBAT VALUES

In this book, the force you command will consist of either the security cops, in a desperate effort to stop the rebel takeover of the starship, or the rebels themselves. Each force is assigned six values. These values provide the means of comparing the capabilities of the many different military units encountered in this book. These six values are:

Manpower

This value is the number of separate fighting parts of your force. Each unit of manpower represents one man. Casualties are subtracted from Manpower.

Ordnance

The quality and power of the weapons used is reflected by their Ordnance value. All members of a unit commanded will have the same Ordnance value. In some cases you may command two or more units, each with a different Ordnance value.

Attack Strength

This value indicates the ability of the unit to attack an opponent. It is determined by multiplying Manpower by Ordnance (Manpower \times Ordnance = Attack Strength). This value can be different for every battle. It will decrease as Manpower is lost and increase if reinforcements are received.

Melee Strength

This is the hand-to-hand combat value of each member of the unit. In the case of a squad of mercenaries, it represents the martial arts skill and training of each man. In crewed units such as tanks or spaceships, it represents the fighting ability of the members of the crew and could be used in an assault on a spaceport or to defend against boarders. Melee value replaces ordnance value when determining the Attack Strength of a unit in hand-to-hand combat.

Stealth

This value measures how well the members of your unit

can avoid detection. It represents the individual skill of each soldier or the ECM (Electronic Counter Measures) of each spaceship. The Stealth value for your unit will be the same for each member of the unit. You would employ stealth to avoid detection by the enemy.

Morale

This reflects the fighting spirit of the troops you command. Success in battle may raise this value. Unpopular decisions or severe losses can lower it. If you order your unit to attempt something unusually dangerous, the outcome may be affected by their morale level. For example, in a situation where YOU are Teddy Roosevelt and have just ordered the Rough Riders to charge up San Juan Hill, the directions would read:

Roll Two six-sided dice.

If the total rolled is the same as or less than the Rough Riders' Morale value, turn to section 24.

If the total rolled is greater than their current Morale value, turn to section 31.

In section 24, the riders follow you as Teddy Roosevelt up the hill and into history.

In section 31, they have lost faith in you and refuse to attack.

THE COMBAT PROCEDURE

When your unit finds itself in a combat situation, use the following procedure to determine victory or defeat. This system combines a dice roll with the situation itself to determine the casualties on both sides. You roll first for yourself and then for the enemy. The unit you command always fires first unless otherwise stated.

The steps to fight a combat are:

1. Compute the Attack Strength of your unit and the opposition ($\text{Manpower} \times \text{Ordnance or Melee Value}$).
2. Turn to the charts at the end of this introduction that are referred to in the description of the battle. These will be used to determine each side's casualties.
3. Roll two six-sided dice and total the result.
4. Find the Attack Strength of the unit at the top of the chart and the total of the dice rolled on the left-hand column of the chart. The number found where the column and row intersect is the number of casualties inflicted.
5. Repeat for your opponent's side, alternating attacks until all of one side is eliminated, or unless otherwise instructed.

When you are told there is a combat situation, you will be given all the information needed for both your command and the opponent. Also listed are any unusual factors and what effect they will have on the battle. All combats are resolved by a dice roll and the charts included at the end of this introduction.

Here is an example of a complete combat:

Hammer's Slammers have come under fire from a force defending a ridge that crosses their line of advance. Alois Hammer has ordered your company of tanks to attack.

Slammers fire using Chart B.

Locals fire using Chart D with an Ordnance of 3 and Manpower of 12. (This will give them an Attack Strength of "36".)

After three rounds of fire, the local force's morale breaks and the battle ends with their surrender.

To begin, you attack first and roll two 4s for a total of 8. The current Attack Strength of your Slammers is 64.

CHART B**Attack Strength**

Dice Roll	Manpower										
	1-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60	-70	-80	-90	-100	101 +
2	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	4
3	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4
4	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4
5	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	5
6	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5
7	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5
8	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	6
9	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6
10	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	6
11	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	6	7
12	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6	6	7	8

Read down "to 70" in the Attack Strength column until you get to the line for a dice roll of 8. The result is four casualties inflicted on your opponents by your company.

Subtract these casualties from the opposing force before determining their Attack Strength. (Combat is not simultaneous.) After subtracting the four casualties you have just inflicted on them, the enemy has a remaining manpower value of 8 ($12 - 4 = 8$). This gives them a remaining attack value of 24 ($8 \times 3 = 24$). Roll two six-sided dice for the opposing force's attack and determine the casualties they cause your Slammers company. Subtract these casualties from your Manpower total on the Record Sheet. This ends one "round" of combat. Repeat the process for each round. Each time a unit receives a casualty, it will have a lower value for Attack Strength. There will be that many fewer men, tanks, spaceships or whatever firing.

Continue alternating fire rolls, recalculating the Attack Strength each time to account for casualties, until one side or the other has lost all of its Manpower, or special conditions (given in the text) apply. When this occurs, the battle is over. Losses are permanent and losses from your unit should be subtracted from their total manpower on the record sheet.

SNEAKING, HIDING AND OTHER RECKLESS ACTS

To determine if a unit is successful in any attempt relating to stealth or morale, roll two six-sided dice. If the total rolled is greater than the value listed for the unit, the attempt fails. If the total of the two dice is the same as or less than the current value, the attempt succeeds or the action goes undetected. For example:

Rico decides his squad of Mobile Infantry (MI) will try to penetrate the Bug hole unseen. MI have a stealth value of 8. A combined roll of 8 or less on two six-sided dice is needed to succeed. The dice are rolled and the result is a 4 and a 2 for a total of 6. They are able to avoid detection by the Bug guards.

If all this is clear, then you are ready to turn to section 1 and take command. If you'd like another example of play, read on:

You are in command of a ten-man U.S. Army patrol in France, WW II, fall of 1944 . . . (fade to the distant sound of artillery fire.)

1st Squad
2nd Platoon
B Company
29th Division
U.S. Army

Manpower: 10
Ordnance: 4
Stealth: 9
Morale: 10 (after all, we're winning)
Melee: 5

This squad has an initial Attack Strength of 40 (4×10) in a firefight. It has an initial Attack Strength of 50 in a hand-to-hand Melee (5×10).

Your squad is ordered to penetrate enemy lines to determine if a battery of artillery is concealed in the village of

Soissons. There are no known German positions and the front is still fluid. You have crossed into Nazi-controlled territory (and have been directed to turn to section 38).

— 38 —

You have walked a long way since Omaha Beach and your feet are sore. As the squad moves through the last of the pickets, you signal for Corey Roberts to take the point. The trooper frees his M-1 and trots on ahead. The sun has just risen, the air is filled with the acrid odor of cordite from your own artillery. Somewhere, a few miles to the rear, you can hear the roar of a battery firing on some unseen target. Everyone hopes it will distract the Nazis, but knows better.

The next few hundred yards are uneventful. The front is new here and neither side has had time to establish a continuous line. Suddenly Lewis whispers an urgent command and everyone freezes. Up ahead, Roberts is crouched behind a tree and gestures at a clump of bushes a few yards ahead of him.

After a few tense moments you can see the first German as he emerges from the bushes. Moments later, three more follow. All are armed with submachine guns and wear the black uniforms of the SS. They are moving very cautiously. The Germans don't appear to have spotted you.

If you attack the German patrol, turn to section 41.

If you try to remain concealed and let them pass, turn to section 42.

— 41 —

The Americans attack on Chart B.

The Germans fire back on Chart D. Their submachine guns have an Ordnance value of 6, giving them an initial attack strength of 24.

If you win the battle, turn to section 55.

If you are defeated, turn to section 29.

The American patrol attacks first. You roll two six-sided dice and total them. They are a four and three for a total of 7. Looking down the column for an Attack Strength of 40 until you reach the row for dice roll of 7, we see you've killed two of the Nazis.

The reader would then roll for the two remaining Germans' return fire. In this case, you roll a four and a five for a total of 9. Since each German with a submachine gun has an Ordnance value of 6, this gives the two men a remaining attack strength of 12 (2×6). Looking in the 1-20 column on Chart D next to the dice roll of 9, we see they cause one casualty. One man is subtracted from the manpower of the American patrol, leaving a total now of nine men and an attack strength of 36 ($9 \times 4 = 36$), as the Ordnance value of the remaining men never changes).

This completes one round of combat.

A second round is then begun with the Americans again firing first. Two six-sided dice are rolled for a total of 10. Checking on Chart B in the 30-40 column for a roll of ten, we find that this fire was sufficient to kill three more Nazis. As only two remained, the combat is over immediately (there being no return fire from the SS troopers, as they are all dead.) The combat is over and you would turn to section 55.

— 42 —

Roll two six-sided dice. If the total is the same or less than 9, turn to Section 46.

If the total is greater than 9, turn to Section 47.

Here you are trying to remain undetected and so will be rolling against the squad's value for Stealth, which is a 9. Any total except a 10, 11, or 12 would indicate success. If the two dice come up a 5 and a 2 for a total of 7, your patrol will escape detection. You would then turn to section 46 and continue the mission.

You are now ready to assume command. Turn to section 1.

THE COMBAT CHARTS

After you have made a decision involving a battle, you will be told which chart should be used for your unit and which for the enemy. The chart used is determined by the tactical and strategic situation. Chart A is used when the unit is most effective and Chart G when least effective. Chart A represents the equivalent effectiveness of the Sioux at Little Bighorn, and chart F, that of Custer. Chart G represents the equivalent of Classic Zulus with Aseiges (spears) versus modern Leopard tanks. Even a very small force on Chart A can be effective, while even a large number of combatants attacking on Chart G are unlikely to have much effect.

CHART A Attack Strength

	1-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60	-70	-80	-90	-100	101 +
Dice Roll											
2	0	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	5	6	6
3	0	1	2	2	2	3	4	5	6	7	7
4	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	5	6	7	8
5	2	2	2	3	3	4	5	5	6	7	8
6	2	2	2	3	4	4	5	6	7	7	8
7	2	2	3	4	4	5	5	6	7	8	8
8	2	3	3	4	4	5	6	6	7	8	9
9	3	3	4	4	5	5	6	7	8	8	9
10	3	4	4	5	5	6	7	7	8	9	10
11	3	4	4	5	6	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	4	4	5	6	7	7	8	9	10	11	12

CHART B

	1-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60	-70	-80	-90	-100	101 +
Dice Roll											
2	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	4
3	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4
4	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4
5	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	5
6	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5
7	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5
8	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	6
9	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6
10	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	6
11	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	6	7
12	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6	6	7	8

CHART C

	1-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60	-70	-80	-90	-100	101+
Dice Roll											
2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2
3	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3
4	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3
5	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4
6	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4
7	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	5
8	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5
9	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5	5
10	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	6
11	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6
12	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6	7

CHART D

	1-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60	-70	-80	-90	-100	101+
Dice Roll											
2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2
3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2
4	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2
5	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3
6	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3
7	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4
8	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	4
9	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	5
10	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5
11	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5	5
12	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5	5	6

CHART E

	1-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60	-70	-80	-90	-100	101+
Dice Roll											
2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2
5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2
6	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2
7	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
8	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
9	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2
10	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	3
11	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
12	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3

CHART F

[illegible]

CHART G

[illegible]

— 1 —

As Gasper Newlin steps into the Thirty-One Level corridor, he sees a dozen security cops ahead. Although he immediately turns to leave, the lift has already sealed its door and sped away.

Gasper's heart begins to pound. He hasn't committed any crime, but security cops sometimes detain even innocent citizens, and he has little time to spare before his work shift begins. Gasper is a junkloader in the Hillgrove Production Complex. He values his job because, when taken into consideration with those of his brother, father, and cousin, it entitles Gasper and eleven relatives to a three-room flat in the Gradapt Complex. If Gasper loses his job, his family must move into the Municipal Dormitories.

Gasper stands motionless, considering his options. The cops hide behind pillars and in doorways, so that a person approaching from the opposite direction cannot see them. If they have noticed Gasper at all, they show no sign. Gasper cautiously reaches behind and presses the call button for the lift. With luck, Gasper can leave before the cops notice him.

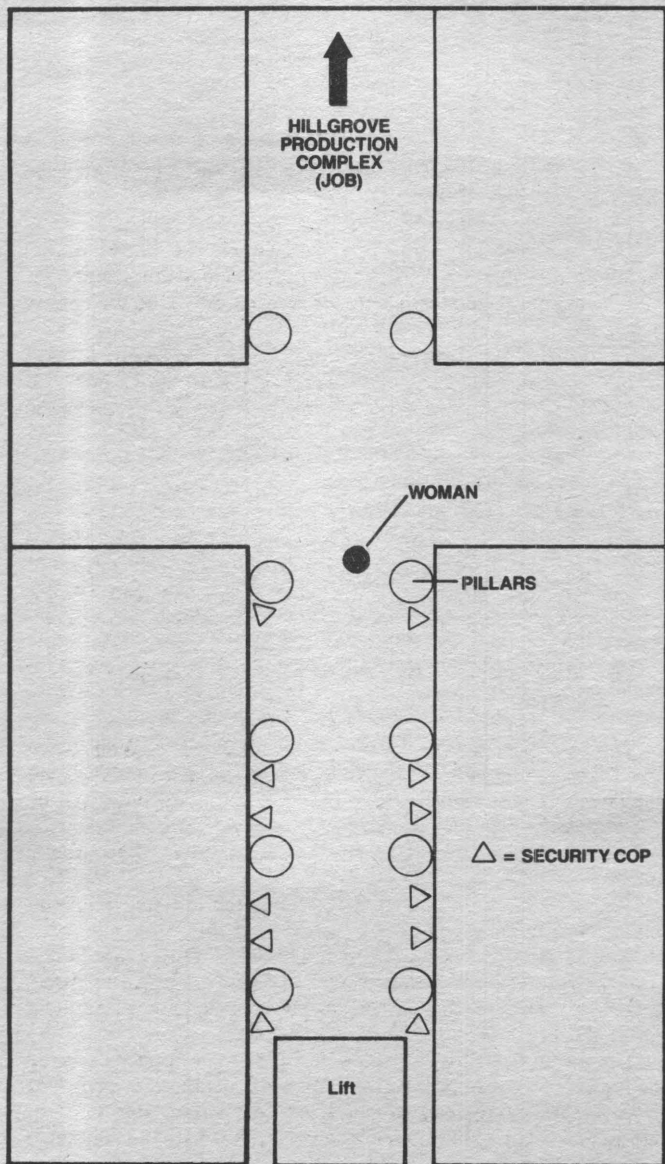
As Gasper nervously awaits the lift, a tall woman with waist-length black hair steps into the other end of the corridor. She carries a large bag slung over her shoulder. A red polyester vest and brown nylon pants only serve to highlight her figure. The black eye patch over her right eye complements the sharp, striking lines of her face.

She smiles and waves at Gasper.

If Gasper warns the woman about the security cops, turn to section 149.

If Gasper ignores the woman, turn to section 2.

SECURITY COP AMBUSH



— 2 —

When Gasper doesn't return the woman's greeting, she frowns and stops walking toward him.

"Is something wrong?" she asks.

One security cop turns toward Gasper, the barrel of his handgun raised to his lips in the universal sign for silence.

The woman hesitates briefly, then says, "Acknowledge, or I'll leave."

The cops jump from their hiding places, their guns leveled at the woman. She starts to turn and run, then thinks better of it and freezes. She drops her shoulder bag to the ground with a heavy clunk.

"Traitor scum!" she hisses at Gasper.

The cop sergeant roughly handcuffs the woman while his men keep her covered. "Don't blame him, Tita," the sergeant growls. "Somebody else set you up. He just happened by." The sergeant turns to Gasper. "Identify yourself, citizen."

Gasper pulls his identity plate from his pocket and gives it to the cop. Behind the sergeant, the other cops begin interrogating Tita.

"Newlin, Gasper," the cop mumbles. "Gradapt 47-2023. Is that correct?"

Gasper nods.

The cop gives the identity plate back to Gasper. "Well, Newlin, Gasper, Gradapt 47-2023, what you saw here today never occurred. If any reports to the contrary circulate, you will be Newlin, Gasper, Transported for Life. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Gasper whispers. Behind the sergeant, Tita spits in a cop's face.

The lift finally arrives. "Here's your lift, citizen. Remember what I said."

Gasper gets into the lift and punches the button for Forty-Two Level. The Forty-Two Level corridor is almost as direct a route to work as the Thirty-One Level corridor. A moment later, the lift doors open.

Ten yards down the corridor, a dozen men openly carrying handguns are running toward the lift. They are probably rebels, Gasper realizes, for the possession of any kind of weapon is punishable by Transportation for Life, or worse.

Section 3

“Hold that lift!” their leader cries. “Does it go to Thirty-One Level?”

Gasper hesitates. He could close the lift and return to Thirty-One Level to warn the cops about this group of rebels. If he does this, the cops might reward him by getting his family a better apartment. On the other hand, they might resent his interference and make good on their threat to transport him.

If Gasper holds the lift, turn to section 150.

If Gasper closes the lift and goes back to Thirty-One Level to warn the cops, turn to section 3.

— 3 —

Gasper closes the lift and punches the button for Thirty-One Level. He realizes he will be late for work, but perhaps the security cops can excuse his tardiness.

When the lift door opens on Thirty-One Level, Gasper sees three security cops, including the sergeant lying on the ground, screaming in agony. Tita, her face bruised and swollen, kneels on the floor. Nine cops stand several feet away, their guns trained on her head.

“Any more of that, lady,” one cop is saying, “and I swear there won’t be enough of you left to interrogate.”

“You’ve got bigger problems than her, fellas,” Gasper interrupts. “A dozen of her buddies are coming down here right now, and they’re playing for keeps.”

The cops look to their sergeant for instructions, but he’s lying on the floor gasping for air.

“Let’s run!” says one cop.

“No, I say let’s ambush ’em!” hollers another.

Gasper kneels down and repeats his warning to the sergeant, who whispers, “Listen to Newlin! He saw them; do what he says.”

If Gasper instructs the cops to run, turn to section 4.

If Gasper sets up an ambush, turn to section 5.

— 4 —

“Me? In command? Are you crazy?” Gasper asks the sergeant. Then he hears the whine of the lift arriving and shouts, “Run for it!”

Without hesitation, the cops begin gathering their wounded. The sergeant gives Gasper his gun, saying, “You may need this to cover our retreat.”

The lift doors open and the rebels emerge firing.

Gasper is temporarily in command of the security cops, who have a usable manpower of 10 (including Gasper) and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart C.

The Discontents have a Manpower value of 12 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart F.

The rebels allow the surviving cops to flee after two rounds of battle. Turn to section 9.

If Gasper and all the security cops are killed, turn to section 29.

— 5 —

“Me? In command?” Gasper says. “Okay. Let’s ambush them. Everybody find a good hiding place, and don’t open fire until I give the word.”

“What about the girl and the wounded?” one cop asks.

“Hide the girl with me. Leave the wounded alone—we’re out of time and they’ll have to take their chances.”

Two cops drag Tita behind Gasper’s pillar. “Nice guy,” she says to Gasper. “Thanks for not leaving me out as buzzard bait, too.”

“No thanks necessary,” Gasper whispers, readying his weapon. “I just want you near me so I can personally pull the trigger if you warn your friends.”

Sections 6, 7

Tita's eyes open wide in astonishment, and Gasper grins inwardly. His words have had their intended effect.

A moment later, the lift doors open. Twelve rebels stand inside, their handguns ready to fire.

If Gasper waits a moment to fire, allowing the rebels to leave the lift, turn to section 6.

If Gasper opens fire immediately, while he has the sure advantage of surprise, turn to section 7.

— 6 —

Gasper resists the temptation to voice the "fire" order, reasoning that the rebels could still close the lift door and escape.

The Stealth of Gasper's security cops is 7. Make a Stealth roll for the group.

On a roll of 7 or less, the rebels fail to notice the cops. Turn to section 8.

On a roll of 8 or more, the rebels notice the cops. Turn to section 10.

— 7 —

"Fire!" Gasper shouts.

The security cops open fire on the crowded lift. Half a second later, the startled rebels return fire, and ricocheting hardshot fills the corridor. Cement chips rain down on Gasper's head, and he hears himself scream in fright. A bullet strikes near his face, filling his eyes and nose with cement dust. He rolls back behind the pillar and wipes his eyes clean, then leans back out and begins to fire again.

The security cops have a Manpower value of 10 (including Gasper), and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart B.

The rebels have a Manpower value of 12 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart D.

After three rounds of fighting, any surviving rebels manage to close the lift door and flee. Turn to section 11.

If Gasper and all the cops are killed, turn to section 29.

— 8 —

The rebels leave the lift and gather around the wounded men on the floor of the corridor. The rebel leader kicks the sergeant. "What happened to Tita?" he demands.

Instead of responding, the sergeant looks in Gasper's direction as if asking why he hasn't opened fire. The rebel leader follows the sergeant's gaze. His eyes bug out as he sees Gasper.

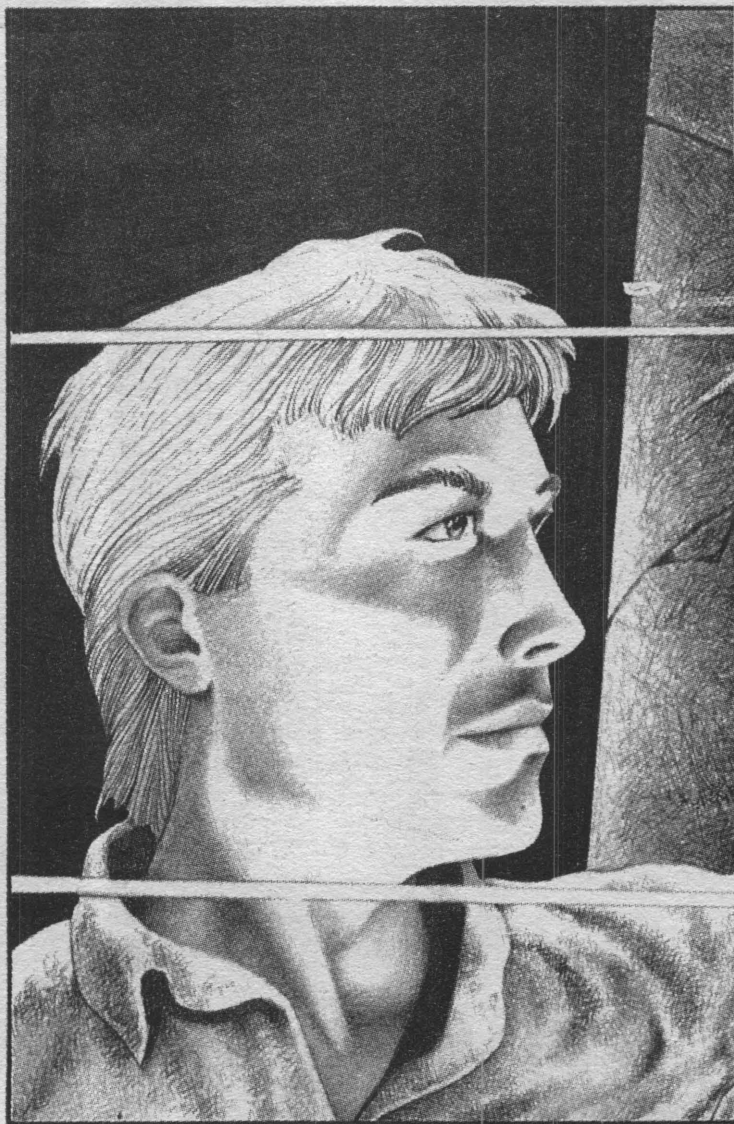
Gasper chokes back the lump in his throat, then yells "Fire!" The cops open fire, filling the corridor with hot lead. A half-second later, the rebels return fire, causing a hailstorm of lethal hardshot.

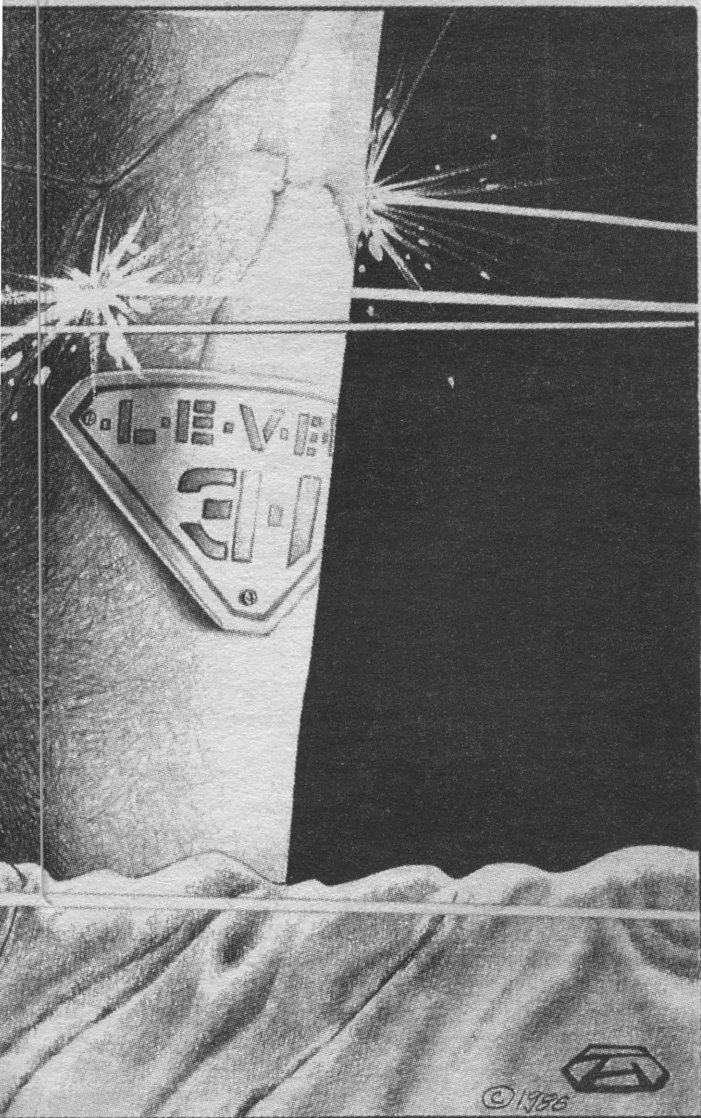
Dimly aware that he is screaming at the top of his lungs, Gasper continues to fire into the mass of rebels. For several seconds, his mind is occupied solely with shooting, screaming, and hoping against hope that the flying lead somehow misses his body.

The security cops have a Manpower value of 10 (including Gasper) and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart B.

The rebels have a Manpower value of 12 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart E.

If Gasper and any of the security cops survive the battle, turn to section 11.





Section 9

If Gasper and all the security cops perish in the battle, turn to section 13.

— 9 —

The sound of gunfire dies away, but the security cops continue to run. "Go home and forget everything. We won't tell if you don't!" yells one cop.

Gasper slows to a walk and wipes his fingerprints off the sergeant's handgun, then throws it into a trash receptacle. The detectives could still do a molecular print on the gun and trace it to him, Gasper knows, but molecular prints are expensive. Given the cop's parting words, it seems unlikely that anybody will push this case hard enough to justify such a search.

His heart still pounding from the exertion and excitement, Gasper jogs toward his job in the Hillgrove Complex. He is already five minutes late, but the foreman has always been friendly and, with a little luck, might not replace Gasper until he is fifteen minutes tardy.

Ten minutes later, Gasper reaches the Hillgrove entrance and pushes his way through the mass of people crowding the gate. He sees his foreman, a burly man named John, just walking into the complex.

"John!" he calls. "It's me, Gasper!"

John turns on his heel. "Gasper!" he barks. "What happened?"

"I got stopped by a bunch of . . ." Gasper hesitates, remembering the security cop's warning to forget everything that happened this morning. "By a bunch of rebels," he finishes.

"Did you report them?" John asks.

"No," Gasper responds. "I was already running late."

"Too bad," John sighs. "If you had, maybe security could excuse your tardy. I'm sorry." John turns to leave.

"Wait!" Gasper screams. "You replaced me already?"

John shrugs. "You know the law regarding class-one labor, Gasper. I had no choice."

"But security can clear me!" Gasper screams.

"Fine. Bring the agent by, and I'll see what we can do," John says. "Otherwise, you might as well go home." John

turns back toward the complex with authoritative finality.

Gaspar drops his head and does not move for five full minutes. Finally, Gaspar mutters, "Well, there's nothing to be done," and walks away.

Turn to section 12.

— 10 —

As the rebels step from the elevator, they see several security cops who did not find adequate hiding places. The leader yells "Ambush!" and the rebels fall to the floor.

"Fire!" yells Gaspar, and the cops pour a hail of hardshot into the corridor. The rebels respond immediately, turning the hallway into a tunnel of whizzing death.

Only dimly aware of his own frightened screams, Gaspar fires round after round at the trapped rebels. At the same time, he prays that none of the bullets striking the walls around his head will find their target.

Gaspar and the cops have a Manpower value of 10 (including Gaspar) and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart C.

The rebels have a Manpower value of 12 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart D.

If Gaspar and any of the cops survive the battle, turn to section 11.

If Gaspar and all the cops perish in the battle, turn to section 13.

— 11 —

The corridor grows eerily silent as the gunfire ceases. Pools of blood begin to flood the area, expanding in great circles from the unmoving bodies on the floor. As the ringing in

Section 12

Gaspar's ears grows more tolerable, he hears the moans and screams of the wounded.

"Hey, what happened to the woman?" asks a cop. Gasper notices for the first time that Tita is gone.

"The little bitch ran off during the firefight," gasps the sergeant still holding his stomach. "It's okay—we weren't supposed to get ambushed." He turns to address Gasper. "You're a natural leader, Newlin. His Lordship certainly has a place in his service for a man like you. How about it?"

Gaspar looks at the carnage in the corridor and feels sick to his stomach. He fears he will vomit at any moment.

"Guarantees a flat for your family as long as you're in the Service, plus a nice little salary for yourself. Why not accept?"

If Gaspar accepts the sergeant's offer, turn to section 14.

If Gaspar refuses the offer, turn to section 15.

— 12 —

On his way home, Gaspar stops at the RecPark to forget about his troubles, but he goes back to his flat after an hour of mindless amusement. He must tell the family that he lost his job. It means moving into the Municipal Dormitories by the end of the week.

When Gaspar opens the door to his flat, a security police lieutenant greets him,

"Newlin, Gasper, Gradapt 47-2023?" the lieutenant asks.

Gasper nods dejectedly.

"Identity plate?" the cop demands.

Gasper digs the plate out of his pocket and hands it over. The cop takes a lighter from his pocket and burns the plate. "You are now Newlin, Gasper, Undesignated, after failing to report for work this morning." The cop puts no emotion into the words.

"Because I was delayed by security business!" Gaspar snaps.

"That has been noted," the cop says. "Which is why I am here. Normally, you would lose this apartment as your family is now below its work quota. However, because of the unusual

circumstances surrounding your case, His Lordship has seen fit to make an exception."

Gasper's heart beats more rapidly. "He has?"

The cop continues, "As you may know, His Lordship's fleet recently discovered, or rediscovered, the planet Omega. In his gracious benevolence, His Lordship has authorized the colonization of this planet under his protection. You have been chosen as a colonist candidate."

Gasper's heart sinks. "Another world?" he asks dejectedly. The cop does not respond. "What are the complexes like on Omega?" Gasper asks. "Are they as overcrowded as we are here?"

"There are no complexes on Omega," the cop responds. "Everybody lives Outside."

Gasper inhales sharply. "Outside! On a strange world! Impossible!"

"If you won't go, I have been ordered to see that you vacate this flat immediately." The cop's voice is even and emotionless, as if he were giving traveling instructions instead of pronouncing a life sentence.

"Of course," Gasper says. "Just let me gather my things and leave a note."

"That won't be necessary," the lieutenant says, taking Gasper's elbow and guiding him out the door. "Your family has been informed, and you won't be allowed any personal gear."

"Must be the Mojave Spaceport," comments the convict sitting next to Gasper on the colonists' transport. The passengers are herded out of the plane onto the desert floor. Gasper immediately feels dizzy and must struggle to overcome his panic. He is Outside, below a brilliant, burning hot sun. The blue sky seems limitless and, aside from the two hundred colonist candidates and their guards, there is not a living being in sight.

A security colonel addresses the candidates. "Listen up! You may qualify for the privilege of being among the first colonists His Lordship will send to the planet Omega. We begin testing immediately."

The colonel leads the way to a forty-foot-long bridge suspended over a deep gorge. The four-foot-wide bridge has no handrails. The colonel points to Gasper and says, "You! You look nervy. Walk across the bridge."

Section 13

Gasper feels sick to his stomach and vomits.

"Are you through?" the colonel asks impatiently. "We're waiting."

His head spinning, Gasper walks to the edge of the bridge and looks down. Although he has never had occasion to judge heights Outside, he feels certain that the distance to the gorge bottom is over one thousand feet.

"What happens if I fall?" he asks.

"You die, most likely," the colonel answers. "And better here than on Omega, after His Lordship has wasted good money on your behalf."

If Gasper crosses the bridge, turn to section 72.

If Gasper refuses to cross the bridge, turn to section 73.

— 13 —

The security cops drop like rocks as the rebels' bullets find their marks. As the last cop falls, Gasper feels a tremendous thud in his left thigh, then his whole leg goes numb. He instinctively drops his hand to the impact point. He feels warm liquid.

Before he can lower his eyes to look at the wound, another bullet hammers his right shoulder, knocking him against the wall. His right hand goes limp and his gun drops to the ground.

By the time Gasper realizes that he has been shot, a third bullet smashes the pit of his stomach, stealing his breath. He tries to scream, for this wound is excruciatingly painful, but barely forces out a moan. He feels as though someone knocked the wind out of him, but he knows that his breath will not return.

Tita walks over and nudges Gasper with her foot. "Looks like I didn't need to warn my friends, Newlin," she says. Tita aims a pistol at Gasper's head. "The Organization doesn't take prisoners, sweetheart."

Gasper's last sight is a muzzle flash.

Turn to section 29.

— 14 —

"You'll guarantee a flat for my family as long as I'm in Banshire's service?" Gasper asks. "What's the catch? Nobody can do that."

"His Lordship can," the sergeant responds. "He owns the bloody complexes, and he takes good care of his boys."

"I'll do it," Gasper agrees.

After offering their enthusiastic congratulations, the cops escort Gasper to Green Sector Headquarters. Here, the sergeant repeats a somewhat overstated account of Gasper's heroism to the station commander.

"So, you sniffed out the ambush and single-handedly saved a squadron of my best, heh?" comments the commander. He opens a folder on his desk and studies its contents for a moment, then looks up at Gasper. "It sounds like you're just the kind of tough nut I need for this special assignment. I hereby commission you by order of His Lordship Banshire as a lieutenant in the Security Corps. Your first assignment will be security chief aboard the starship *Saretta*. You leave in," the commander glances at his watch, "four hours."

"What about training?" Gasper asks.

The commander frowns. "Training? From what Sarge says, you don't need training. You're already tougher than his entire squad." The commander writes out Gasper's orders and gives them to him. "Present these at the gate."

After outfitting him with the bright green uniform of the Security Corps, Sarge takes Gasper to the Kennedy-LaGuardia Spaceport. At the gate, a security cop studies Gasper's orders, then says, "I'll take you to the *Saretta* in my jeep, sir. We haven't much time."

"Good luck!" calls Sarge. "And don't worry about your family. I'll tell them of your good fortune!"

Gasper hesitates before climbing into the guard's jeep. This morning he was a junkloader, and this afternoon he is an officer aboard a starship. Something seems very wrong, he reflects.

"Are you coming, sir?" the guard asks.

"I guess I don't have much choice, do I?" Gasper says. By now his job as a junkloader is gone.

Section 14

The cop drives Gasper to the base of a huge, streamlined skyscraper. Gasper does not realize that this is the *Saretta* until the cop points to a doorway in the base of the building. "Show your orders there, sir."

Gasper numbly follows the instructions. The guard at the door shows him to a private room bearing the title "Security Chief." An hour later, while Gasper is still wondering at the good fortune of having a whole room to himself, the ship engines roar and it lifts off. Gasper realizes that he still has no idea what his duties are.

Twenty minutes after takeoff, someone knocks timidly on his door. When Gasper opens the door, he sees a short, balding man.

"I'm Captain Weingar," the man says. "His Lordship's Navy, and commander of the *Saretta*. I hope I'm not disturbing you."

Gasper shakes his head.

Captain Weingar, appearing somewhat nervous, continues. "I thought it best to make your acquaintance before we take the colonists on."

"Colonists?" Gasper asks.

The captain appears astonished. "Yes, colonists. Weren't you briefed?"

"No," Gasper admits. "I was only hired a few hours ago."

The captain frowns. "So, they slipped me a green cop. I thought so. Nobody likes losing a good man for ten years."

"Ten years?" Gasper shrieks.

The captain nods his head. "Afraid so. Five there, five back. Maybe faster, if we don't have too many problems."

"Exactly what are my duties?" Gasper asks.

"Keep the order," Captain Weingar says. "You command a squad of fifteen men—mostly thugs and convicts themselves." The captain eyes Gasper thoughtfully. "I assume you're tough enough to handle them," he adds hopefully.

"How many colonists are we taking?" Gasper asks.

"About five thousand," Weingar says. "But you won't need to worry about them until we land on Omega. They'll be in coldsleep. There are a hundred crew members, including you and the security boys. For the first year or two, you won't have any trouble. But on voyages like this, there's usually a mutiny attempt near the end. The crew gets bored, sloppy, homesick, or whatever. It'll be your job to put it down."

"Thanks," Gasper says.

The captain slaps Gasper on the shoulder. "You're welcome. I'd better get back to the bridge. We're about to put down at the Mojave Spaceport to start loading colonists. It'll take about four days to put them all into Coldsleep; then we lift off. I suggest you make your farewells to Earth—we won't see her again for a while."

For a former junkloader turned spaceman, there aren't many farewells to make. So Gasper spends the next four days studying the crew, working with his squad, and watching the technicians load sleeping colonists. On the fourth day, he cracks a smile. He recognizes one of the colonists; she wears the same red polyester vest and brown nylon pants. And, of course, the same black eye patch.

"So," Gasper mumbles as he studies the tag on the gurney, "Tita has decided to take her revolution to the stars."

If Gasper disconnects Tita's life support system, turn to section 16.

If Gasper reports the presence of a rebel to Captain Weingar, turn to section 26.

Or perhaps Gasper ignores Tita's presence. Turn to section 39.

Game information: Gasper is now the commander of a squad of security guards. Use the following statistics for Gasper's squad:

Manpower: 16

Ordnance: 5

Stealth: 6

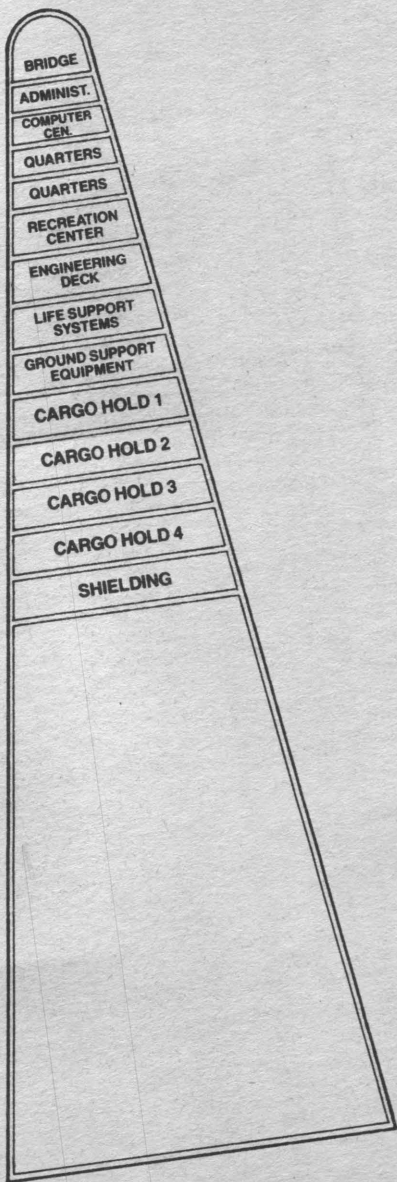
Morale: 7

Melee: 5

You may wish to copy these values on a sheet of paper.

THE STARSHIP SARETTA CUTAWAY VIEW

SCALE: 1 ☐ = 20ft.



— 15 —

"No," Gasper says, "I couldn't do this for any price. Look at this carnage! There are dying people everywhere, and it doesn't bother you at all."

The sergeant looks perplexed. "People die every day. What's the big deal?"

Gasper shakes his head. "I'm sorry. This just isn't for me."

"Suit yourself," the sergeant says. "Just remember, Newlin, Gasper, 47-2023, this never happened. Understand?"

Gasper nods. "I understand, and that's why I don't want to be a part of it."

The sergeant shrugs and walks off. His men quickly follow, and Gasper is soon standing alone in the corridor. A terrible thought crosses his mind: he has forgotten all about his job in the excitement, and the cops have left!

Gasper starts through the corridor at his best run, hoping against hope that his foreman hasn't replaced him yet. Ten minutes later, his heart pounding from exertion and fear, Gasper reaches the Hillgrove entrance and pushes his way through the mass of unemployed crowding the gate. His foreman, a burly man named John, is just walking away from the gate.

"John!" he calls.

John turns on his heel. "Gasper!" he barks. "What happened?"

"I was detained by . . ." He hesitates, remembering the sergeant's warning to forget the morning's troubles. "By a bunch of rebels."

"I hope you reported them!" John says.

"No," Gasper responds. "I was already behind schedule."

"Too bad," John sighs. "If you had, maybe security could excuse your tardy. I'm sorry." John turns to leave.

"Wait!" Gasper screams. "You replaced me?"

John shrugs. "You know the laws for class-one labor. I had no choice."

"But security can clear me!" Gasper yells.

"Fine. Bring the agent by, and I'll see what we can do," John says. "Otherwise, you might as well go home."

Section 16

John turns toward the complex with authoritative finality.

Gasper drops his head and doesn't move for five full minutes. A few chiselers express their sympathy for the misfortune. Finally, Gasper mutters, "Well, there's nothing to be done," and heads home.

Turn to section 12.

— 16 —

"Might as well take care of this problem before she awakens," Gasper mutters. "Tita can only mean trouble."

Gasper orders the technician to move Tita's cart to one side of the corridor. He pauses only a moment before cutting the hoses running into her nose. She immediately begins to cough and choke.

"What are you doing?" the technician screams.

"She's an enemy of the state," Gasper states simply.

Tita begins to stir and her eyelids flutter. She is awakening!

"You're not going to get rid of her that way," the technician says. "The stuff in the tubes keeps 'em down, not alive." He withdraws a length of plastic tubing from his tool belt and stuffs it back into her nose. "Maybe I can put her back under if I work quickly enough."

Gasper draws his pistol. "That won't be necessary."

The technician's eyes pop wide open. "Are you crazy?"

A crowd of technicians and crew gathers around the two arguing men. As Gasper cocks the pistol, the technician steps in front of the sleeping woman.

"She's a rebel," Gasper says. "She is directly responsible for several deaths that I know of."

"That may be the case," the technician says, "but you aren't the judge and executioner."

Captain Weingar pushes his way through the crowd. "On this ship, he is," Weingar snaps. "Your laws have no effect aboard a starship. What I say is law, and I say that Gasper Newlin *is* judge and executioner aboard the *Saretta*."

The captain steps back and studies Gasper respectfully for several moments. Finally he asks, "Well, what are you waiting for?"

Gaspar inhales deeply and aims the pistol at Tita. As he pulls the hammer back, her eyes open sleepily. With astonishing quickness, however, she is alert and fully aware of the situation.

"Please . . ." she whispers.

If Gaspar pulls the trigger, turn to section 17.

If Gaspar does not pull the trigger, turn to section 18.

— 17 —

Gaspar pulls the trigger and the pistol's report echoes through the corridor. Tita lies dead on the hover-gurney. The crew stares at Gaspar in shocked silence, their mouths agape.

"Move it out," Captain Weingar snaps. "This is a colonist carrier, not a luxury liner."

As the crew members move away, they mutter angrily amongst themselves.

"Good job," the captain says half-heartedly. "Shows 'em that they'd better not cross you. Of course, you'd better not put too much faith in any of them."

Subtract one point from the Morale of Gaspar's security team.

The ground crew loads the rest of the cargo without incident. The *Saretta's* mighty engines roar and the immense ship slowly lifts off, her hold filled to capacity with coldsleeping colonists.

The *Saretta* has been in deep space only one week when Captain Weingar interrupts Gaspar's sleep. "Chief Newlin to the bridge," Weingar calls over the intercom speaker. "Security Chief to the bridge."

Fearing the worst, Gaspar quickly climbs into his uniform and grabs his pistol. As he leave his quarters, he meets a dozen crew members running down the corridor. They appear to be armed with knives and clubs. "There's the murderer!" cries one of the men.

Although the path to the bridge is blocked by the men,

Sections 18, 19

Gasper could turn and flee in the opposite direction toward the security barracks.

If Gasper flees to the security barracks, turn to section 19.

If Gasper stays in the corridor and tries to intimidate the crew members, turn to section 21.

— 18 —

“Put her back under,” Gasper says. “I don’t suppose it’s any of my concern if a rebel goes to Omega. Where are you taking her, though? I may want to check up on her during the trip.”

The technician sighs with relief. “Hold 4, space AA-35,” he says. Gasper makes a note. The technician reconnects Tita to her coldsleep apparatus and takes her into the hold.

After the crowd disperses, Captain Weingar shakes his head. “Before you start something next time, think it through and make sure you’re willing to finish it. Otherwise, the crew will think they can push you around.”

Subtract two points from the Morale of Gasper’s security team.

The ground crew finishes loading the colonists the next day. The *Saretta*’s engines roar into life, hurling the starship away from earth and into deep space.

Turn to section 31.

— 19 —

Gasper turns and flees toward the security barracks. As he flees, one of the crew members yells, “He’s going for his crew! We’d better get some more of our people down here!”

As Gasper hoped, his entire security crew is in the bar-

racks. "Look alive, men! We've got a mutiny on our hands!" he calls.

The security crew members jump from their bunks and grab their pistols. By the time the security team is ready to fight, the crew members have gathered in the corridor outside the security office. "Hello in there!" their leader calls. "You security fellows, we've got no argument with you. We're taking over this ship and going to Omega to make a new life for ourselves. Banshire can't track us down once we're there, and with all of the supplies on this tub we ought to be able to set ourselves up pretty comfortable. The only thing standing between us and freedom is that low-life security chief of yours. What do you say, will you join us?"

Make a Morale check for the security team. Roll two six-sided dice.

If the total rolled is the same or less than the security team's Morale value, turn to section 22.

If the number rolled is greater than their Morale value, turn to section 20.

— 20 —

"His Lordship never did nothing for me," says one of Gasper's security guards. "I'll join you!" he calls to the mutineers. One by one, the other guards pledge their loyalty to the mutineers.

Finally, after the last man defects, the mutiny leader steps into the room and asks, "What do you boys want to do about the Chief, here?" He points at Gasper, who is frantically trying to think of a way out of this mess.

"He's no better than Banshire. You saw what he did to that girl in coldsleep," says one of his guards. "I say we treat him the same way."

Seeing that he is doomed, Gasper leaps to the intercom. "Captain!" he calls.

"Chief Newlin?" crackles the response. "Where the devil are you?"

Section 21

Gasper looks at the menacing crowd of mutineers gathering around him. They all await his response with cruel grins on their faces.

"The security office," Gasper says. "The security team has joined the mutiny."

"What?" screams the captain. "This is going to look bad on your record," he threatens.

The mutineers laugh heartily at the captain's concern. "Here now, Chief," says the leader. "Don't you worry about your record. We'll tell His Lordship that you put up a good fight." The leader looks to the guards. "You boys do the honors," he says. "We've got work to do on the bridge."

Gasper cannot survive. Turn to section 23.

— 21 —

Gasper draws his pistol. "Put those weapons down and return to your posts," he orders.

One of the mutineers steps forward and says, "Or what?"

Gasper cocks the pistol in response.

"You can't shoot all of us. Me and the boys are taking charge of this tub, now!"

The mutineers advance toward Gasper.

Gasper has a Manpower value of 1 and an Ordnance value of 5. Because of the close proximity of his targets, Gasper attacks using Chart A. He attacks twice before the mutineers reach him. His Melee value is 6.

The mutineers have a manpower value of 12 and no Ordnance value, so they cannot attack until the third round of combat. During their part of the third round, the mutineers attack using a Melee value of 5. They attack using Chart C.

If Gasper perishes, turn to section 23.

If, by some miracle, Gasper survives, turn to section 24.

— 22 —

“And who’ll be the leader then?” yells one of the security cops. “You? No, thanks. Newlin may be a cold-blooded murderer, but at least he’s in His Lordship’s service. You’re nothing more than a pack of hungry dogs, and I don’t doubt that you’d turn on us in a minute.”

“Have it your way then,” calls the mutineer leader. A few moments later, the mutinous crew members rush the security office.

Gasper’s security team attacks using Chart A. (See end of section 14 for values.)

The mutineers, throwing knives and tableware, have a manpower of 12 and an Ordnance of 2. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper’s security team defeats the mutineers, turn to section 25.

If the mutineers eliminate Gasper and his security team, turn to section 23.

— 23 —

The mutineers charge and Gasper fires into the crowd. Although his bullets find their marks in a few bodies, there are too many more. A dull thud crashes into Gasper’s head. The inside of his cranium explodes in burning agony and Gasper falls unconscious.

Without Gasper to beat off the mutineers, Captain Weingar soon falls and the mutineers take the ship to Omega. On Omega, they establish a pirate colony that preys on the commerce of the struggling world. Eventually, Omega must turn to Lord Banshire for protection. Banshire seizes the opportunity to crush Omega’s colonial government and install

Section 24

his own agent. Within twenty years, Omega is just another part of His Lordship's vast holdings.

Turn to section 29.

— 24 —

The mutineers charge and Gasper fires into the crowd, dropping more than half their number in the first few shots. The remaining men hesitate when they see Gasper's deadly aim, allowing him a precious advantage. Gasper quickly finishes off the last of them.

Gasper then reports to the bridge as Captain Weingar requested. The nervous captain appears extremely relieved to see his chief of security.

"The crew has mutinied," he whines.

"I know," Gasper responds calmly. He then tells the captain of his encounter after leaving his quarters.

"Incredible! Twelve men! His Lordship will surely want to reward you personally for your bravery."

Captain Weingar returns to Terra for a new crew. As the captain predicted, Lord Banshire personally rewards Gasper at a state banquet, naming him chief of security for the Mojave Spaceport. Gasper moves into a house of his own at the spaceport and is able to guarantee that his family has an apartment to themselves for as long as he lives.

THE END

You may return to section 1 and choose another course of action . . . and another adventure.

— 25 —

As the first group of mutineers charges into the room, the security team fires a deadly volley that drops the desperate cutthroats just inside the door. Another six mutineers immediately rush into the room and meet the same fate. The surviving mutineers attempt to flee, but Gasper's security team follows and brings every one of the mutineers to a quick and efficient justice.

Gasper then calls Captain Weingar on the ship intercom.

"Where are you?" Weingar demands immediately. "I told you to report to the bridge."

"I was delayed by a mutiny, sir," Gasper responds. "I have eliminated the responsible parties."

"Oh . . . well," the captain mutters. "That was what I wanted to see you about. You're sure the situation is well under control?"

"Absolutely," Gasper confirms.

"Very well. Report the identity of each mutineer to me as soon as possible and we'll decide whether we can continue the journey."

A day later, the captain calls Gasper into his private quarters. "I'm very disappointed in the way you handled your duties," Weingar says. "We're going to have to return to Terra due to a shortage of vital crew members."

"But they mutinied!" Gasper protests.

"Dealing with mutinies is part of your job," Weingar continues. "And I'm reporting to His Lordship that you performed very poorly."

"I eliminated the mutineers!" Gasper snaps. "What was I supposed to do?"

"I don't know," the Captain whines. "But we have to return to Terra. His Lordship will be extremely unhappy."

"So you're setting me up to take the blame," Gasper hisses.

"My investigations show that your murder of the coldsleep colonist was primarily responsible for this mutiny."

Gasper rises in protest and, as he does, Captain Weingar presses a button on his desk. Four armed security guards immediately rush into the room, their weapons drawn.

"Newlin is under arrest," Weingar says. "Shoot him if he resists."

Gaspar spends the return journey in the *Saretta's* brig. Back on Terra, a formal court of inquiry determines that Gaspar was unfortunately placed in a position of high responsibility without training. It recommends that he be returned to his old job as a junkloader in the Hillgrove Production Complex. Captain Weingar is demoted to the rank of ship's janitor for failing to remedy the situation when he learned of it. And Green Sector Station Commander Webster, who gave the job to Gaspar in the first place, mysteriously disappears before his interview with the board.

THE END

You can return to section 1 and make a different choice, leading to a new adventure.

— 26 —

Gaspar stops the technician taking Tita into the ship. "Where will this woman be stored?" he asks.

The technician nervously refers to his clipboard. "Hold 4, space AA-35, sir."

"Very good," Gaspar notes. "And you are taking her there now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Carry on, then."

Gaspar walks to the bridge, where he finds Captain Weingar. "Sir," he reports, "one of the colonists is a rebel. I recognized her from a previous encounter."

"You're sure, Chief?" the captain asks. "Our cargo is supposed to have been very carefully screened."

"I hope whoever was screening the colonists did a better job than the man who selected me to be your security chief," Gaspar says.

Weingar eyes Gaspar thoughtfully. "I suppose you have a point there. The navy just isn't what it used to be. What danger do you think she poses?"

Gaspar thinks for a moment, then answers, "None, as long as she remains asleep. If she were to awaken, she might be very disruptive."

"Then let her sleep," the Captain says. "It's hard to say what the recruitment boys were thinking when they put her aboard. She might be a spy, or maybe some sociopsychologist thinks the new world needs a rebellious element."

"Very good, sir."

As Gasper turns to leave, the captain adds, "But be sure you know where she is. We'll want to check on her once in a while."

"Hold 4, space AA-35," Gasper answers smartly.

"Well done, Chief," says Weingar. "I think you'll work out just fine."

A day later, the technicians load the last of the colonists, and the *Saretta's* mighty engines roar into life. Shortly after liftoff, Gasper holds a meeting of the security team to establish their in-flight routine for the next five years. At the meeting, one of the older men asks permission to speak.

"Sir," he says, "my name is Larry Franklin. With your permission, I'd like to say a few things."

"Certainly," Gasper says.

"Meaning no disrespect, sir," Larry says, "but you don't strike me as someone who has been around starship security a whole lot. On the other hand, me and some of the boys here have been on starship security details for just about our whole lives. Before you go and foul up security on the *Saretta*, we want to tell you a few things."

If Gasper listens to Larry, turn to section 27.

If Gasper lets Larry know who's boss, turn to section 28.

— 27 —

"Go ahead, Larry," Gasper says. "It's true that I'm new to starship security, and I'd appreciate the benefit of your experience."

Larry smiles at his fellow team members, then says, "We know what the regulations say about ten-hour shifts and daily training exercises and all that, but that stuff's just not necessary on a cake-walk like this . . ."

Gaspar interrupts Larry. "Hold on a minute, Larry. I wouldn't want you to get the idea that just because I value your experience, I'm a pushover when it comes to discipline. We'll do our scheduling and our training according to the book, is that clear?"

To Gaspar's surprise, none of the men seem disappointed. In fact, their faces show a little more respect.

"Yes, sir," Larry grins. "You can't blame a guy for trying."

Gaspar frowns, then says, "Yes I can. I expect more from my number-two man." Larry looks puzzled. "From now on," Gaspar continues, "you're in charge of making sure that we follow procedure to the letter, Mr. Franklin. You are free, of course, to make adjustments to regular procedure as needed, but only after discussing these changes with me. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," Larry says. He barely contains his smile.

"I will hold you personally responsible for any breach of regulations, Mr. Franklin," Gaspar continues.

Larry frowns as he realizes the amount of work Gaspar has just thrust upon him. "Yes, sir," he says.

"Now," Gaspar commands, "get this team set up according to standard procedure. And don't miss a detail!"

"Yes, sir," Larry says.

Gaspar smiles and leaves the room. He has just solved his biggest problem—his lack of training.

Add three points to the Morale of Gaspar's security team.

Turn to section 30.

— 28 —

"I'm the boss here," Gaspar says. "We'll do things my way. Is that clear?"

The security team nods grudgingly, and Larry glares at Gaspar openly.

"Do you have any questions, Mr. Franklin?" Gaspar asks.

"No, sir," Larry says spitefully.

"Very well then. Dismissed." Gaspar orders.

The meeting breaks up quickly. As the security team leaves the office, Gasper hears them muttering among themselves about "green officers" and "upstart punks."

Subtract one point from the Morale value of Gasper's security team.

Turn to section 30.

— 29 —

Eventually, Gasper's death is noticed and, somewhere deep within the Heckman Administrative Complex, clear down on Two Level, a magnetic computer relay shuffles a few electrons. It is duly noted that Gasper's family, which occupies the three-room flat designated Gradapt 47-2023, now has only three working members. Up on Twenty-One Level, a laser-printer automatically prints an eviction order, and the clerk sends a copy to Green Sector Security Headquarters.

A few hours later, four cops bust into Gradapt 47-2023 and inform the occupants that since the Newlin family has failed to meet its work quota, the family must move into the Municipal dormitories. Although Gasper's mother asks for a few hours to gather their things, the cops say they cannot comply. They have a heavy schedule today; they must evict another ten families before the shift ends.

Unfortunately, you were not successful. You may try again—and have a different adventure by turning to section 1.

— 30 —

After the *Saretta* has been in deep space for four months, Gasper decides to make the long journey back to Hold 4 to check on Tita. He goes to the engineering deck and gathers

Section 30

the tools he needs, then uses his security key and a power wrench to remove the access panel. After thirty minutes of crawling and duck-walking down the spiraling accessways, he reaches Hold 4 and opens its access panel.

He drops into the freezing room and makes his way to space AA-35. Much to his surprise, space AA-35 is occupied by a man! He searches the surrounding spaces, hoping that the technician has placed Tita close by. He finds no sign of the Discontent.

Even though he is positive he remembered the number correctly, Gasper checks space AA-35 in all four of the *Saretta's* cargo holds, a process requiring eight hours of crawling through freezing tunnels and accessways. She is not in space AA-35 in any hold.

Gasper asks Larry to come to his quarters and outlines the situation for him over a cup of hot coffee—one of the luxury pleasures his new status as a member of Lord Banshire's Security Corps has earned him.

"So, there's a beautiful rebel with one eye in coldsleep somewhere in the cargo holds," Larry repeats.

"Let's hope so," Gasper says.

"What's the big deal?" Larry asks. "She's not going to do anything while she's in coldsleep."

"If she's in coldsleep," Gasper counters. "Suppose one or more of the technicians loading colonists aboard the *Saretta* belonged to the Organization?"

"That's not unlikely," Larry says, "given the fact that somebody loaded a rebel aboard. But I still don't see what the big deal is—she can't do anything until she awakens, and by that time we'll be on Omega."

"What if she's not in coldsleep?" Gasper asks. "Suppose the technician that loaded her didn't put her out—or only put her out for a short time?"

"I see what you're worried about," Larry says. "She could try to sabotage the *Saretta*."

"Right," Gasper answers. "I want every space in the cargo holds searched for a one-eyed woman."

"But that'll take days!" Larry protests.

"I don't care," Gasper says. "I want that woman found."

Larry shakes his head stubbornly. "Suppose she's awake

and planning to do us dirt? With reduced security details, she stands a good chance of succeeding.”

If Gasper reduces the security details in order to search for Tita, turn to section 32.

If Gasper keeps the security details on full status, hoping to capture Tita in the normal course of duty, turn to section 33.

— 31 —

Shortly after liftoff, Gasper holds a meeting of the security team to establish their in-flight routine for the next five years. At the meeting, one of the older men asks permission to speak.

“Sir,” he said, “my name is Larry Franklin. With your permission, I’d like to say a few things.”

“Certainly,” Gasper says.

“Meaning no disrespect, sir,” Larry says, “but you don’t strike me as someone who has been around starship security a whole lot. On the other hand, me and some of the boys here have been on starship security details for just about our whole lives. Before you go and foul up security on the *Saretta*, we want to tell you a few things.”

If Gasper listens to Larry, turn to section 27.

If Gasper lets Larry know who’s the boss, turn to section 28.

— 32 —

"I don't believe in waiting, Mr. Franklin," Gasper says. "Search the cargo holds immediately."

Larry sighs, "Yes, sir."

Although the men grumble, they begin a hold-by-hold search for a one-eyed, black-haired woman. The difficulty of the search is compounded because in the *Saretta*, like most other deep-space cargo ships, the cargo holds are all but impossible to reach during flight. This discourages looting of the ship's cargo during the long, uncomfortable trips. In addition, the temperature in the *Saretta's* holds is extremely low in order to keep the colonists in coldsleep. This forces the security teams to crawl back into the winding access tunnels every half-hour to warm themselves.

Four days into the search, Larry rushes into Gasper's quarters without knocking. "McDonnell and Lake are missing!" he reports.

Gasper chokes back the impulse to act alarmed. "How long have they been gone?" he asks.

"An hour and a half," Larry says. "They didn't return from Hold 3 for their scheduled warm-up. Their relief, Henry and Epsom, waited a half-hour at the relief station. Epsom then worked his way back to the security office, and Henry remained on post. I came straight to you."

"Have you dispatched a search party?" Gasper asks.

"No, sir. McDonnell and Lake are dead if they haven't returned by now, and I didn't see the sense in sending live men after dead."

Subtract two points from the Manpower value of Gasper's security team.

If Gasper sends two more men into Hold 3 to look for McDonnell and Lake, turn to section 34.

If Gasper leads two men into Hold 3 to look for McDonnell and Lake, turn to section 35.

Or, if Gasper calls off the search, turn to section 37.

— 33 —

"You've got a point," Gasper says. "If she's loose on the ship, she'll show up sooner or later. In the meantime, let the men know that a colonist may be wandering around. Tell them to consider this colonist a threat to the safety of the *Saretta*. They should not hesitate to use force."

"Yes, sir," says Larry.

A few hours later, Captain Weingar calls Gasper to the bridge. "What's this I hear about a dangerous colonist wandering about my ship?"

"It's only an alert, sir," Gasper says. "We're not sure."

"You'd better get sure, mister," Weingar snaps. "Unsure officers don't last long on this ship. Fill me in from the beginning."

"I noticed a rebel being loaded as a colonist back at the Mojave Spaceport," Gasper begins. "I asked the technician where he was putting her. When I checked on her yesterday, somebody else was in her space."

"It could have been a mistake," Weingar says.

"Possibly," Gasper agrees, "but I'm acting on the assumption that the technician was a member of the Organization."

"Good," the Captain says. "Keep me posted." As Gasper turns to leave, the Captain adds, "and one more thing, Newlin."

"Yes?"

"If anything—and I mean anything—goes wrong aboard this ship until you find her, I'll bust you to ship's janitor so fast you won't have time to change your uniform."

"Thanks for your confidence, sir."

Turn to section 36.

— 34 —

"Let's send in another two men," Gasper says. "McDonnell and Lake may be dead, but I'd like to know why. And have the men carry a communications set."

"The com-sets don't work back there," Larry says. "Too close to the fusion engines."

"Then tell them to come back after twenty minutes whether or not they find anything."

Larry carries out Gasper's order. An hour later, he again bursts into Gasper's quarters. "Epson and Henry are missing!"

Subtract two points from the Manpower value and one point from the Morale value of Gasper's security team.

If Gasper leads two men into Hold 3, turn to section 35.

If Gasper sends two more men into Hold 3, turn to section 40.

If Gasper calls off the search, turn to section 37.

— 35 —

"I'll lead two men in there to take a look myself," Gasper says. "Obviously, something's wrong here."

"How about me and Clover?" Larry says.

"Good," Gasper responds. "Let's go."

After an hour of duck-walking and crawling through the tiny accessways leading back to Cargo Hold 3, Gasper loosens the bolts and opens the access panel leading into the dark, stadium-sized room. As he shines his lamp into the hold, he sees that icicles hang from the beams high above the 1,300 sleeping colonists. A thick coat of frost covers their motionless bodies.

"T-t-there shouldn't be any ice in here," Clover chatters. "We've g-g-got a moisture intrusion."

"How will that affect the colonists?" Gasper demands.

"They'll w-w-wake up with colds," Larry says. "Some will have pneumonia."

"Not a good way to start out on a new world," Gasper comments.

Gasper draws his pistol and starts into the dark room, moving very slowly and cautiously over the ice-slicked floor. Ten feet from the entry hatch, he finds several sets of footprints. He follows them into the maze of sleeping bodies. A hundred yards into the room, Gasper finds a wide, trampled area. Footprints lead through the frost in several directions. Gasper picks the direction leading toward the back of the ship and follows it.

Clover screams, "Oh, god!"

As Gasper whirls, he sees Clover staring at a colonist. The body is not covered by the usual layer of frost.

"It's Lake," Clover says. "He's been shot—several times."

Gasper inspects the body. It has been undressed and laid on a gurney as if it were just another sleeping colonist. A line of a dozen bullet holes runs from Lake's upper right shoulder to his lower left abdomen.

"Looks like automatic weapons fire," Larry says. "Where do you suppose automatic weapons came from?"

"More important," Gasper says, "is who's using them."

In reply, a metallic click echoes somewhere deep within the blackened cargo hold.

If Gasper and his men run for the hatch, turn to section 38.

If Gasper and his men stay, hoping to learn more about what is happening in Hold 3, turn to section 41.

— 36 —

As the weeks pass, Larry and Captain Weingar seem unconcerned about the misplaced passenger. Gasper, however, can't get her off his mind. Where could she be? More importantly, what is she doing? Finally, he decides to discuss the problem with Larry.

"I wouldn't worry about it," Larry says. "First, if she's awake, she'd have to come up front. The cargo holds are just too cold for anybody not coldsleeping to survive for long. Second, what's she going to eat? Even if they succeeded in sneaking her aboard, the Organization couldn't have stowed enough food to keep her alive for five years. Third, the environment would drive her mad. Living alone in a dark, freezing room for even a few months is guaranteed to drive anyone crazy."

"If we knew that your assumptions were correct, I would agree," Gasper says. "But can we be sure? And more important, from your point of view, *I'm* not going to sleep until I have some facts—because that means *you're* not going to sleep either."

Larry half-grins at Gasper. "Now that you put it that way, I see your point. Maybe the captain will let us run a statistical security check of all ship functions. If resource is being tapped, it'll show up on the stat-check."

"Why didn't you suggest it earlier?" Gasper asked.

Larry grins sheepishly. "Not standard operating procedure. Besides, we hadn't been in transit long enough for the computers to log enough data to build a pattern."

Gasper goes to the bridge. As usual, Captain Weingar is seated in his command chair.

"Excuse me, sir," Gasper says.

"Go ahead," Weingar says, not even looking up from his computer screen.

"I'd like to do a statistical security check of ship functions," Gasper says.

Weingar's head jerks up. "What for? Have you found something unusual?"

"No, sir," Gasper says. "It would just reassure me."

"Denied," Weingar says flatly.

Gaspar hesitates. "May I ask why, sir?"

"No," Weingar says.

"The check would allow me to determine whether or not the Organization has placed a rebel aboard the *Saretta*, sir."

"Denied," Weingar snaps. "When I say denied, I mean denied, mister."

"My only other alternative is to ignore the possibility of sabotage, sir," Gaspar insists.

Weingar's face flushes with anger. "You'd better learn to let sleeping dogs lie. Dismissed!"

"Yes, sir," Gaspar bites off. He turns on his heel and goes back to the security office, where Larry has already begun to formulate a list of items to check. Gaspar tells Larry of the captain's reaction.

"Sound's like he's trying to hide something," Larry says.

"He couldn't be in the Organization, could he?" Gaspar asks.

"Not likely," Larry answers, "but you never know. I've got a chess partner over in computer operations," Larry continues cautiously. "I could probably get him to run the check for us."

If Gaspar ignores the captain's order and runs the check anyway, turn to section 42.

If Gaspar obeys the captain's order and tries to forget about Tita, turn to section 44.

— 37 —

"Let's call off the search," Gaspar says. "There's no use getting anybody else killed."

Larry sighs in relief. "Yes, sir."

"But there's no denying that we've got a serious problem here," Gaspar continues. "What other steps can we take to find out what's going on?"

"First, we should post some guards outside the entrance to the holds," Larry says. "I've already taken care of that. Second, we should ask Captain Weingar for permission to run

Section 37

a statistical security check of the ship's functions. That will tell us something without putting anybody else at risk."

"Fine," Gasper agrees. "I'll talk to him now."

Gasper goes to the bridge immediately. As usual, Captain Weingar sits at his command console.

"Excuse me," Gasper says nervously.

"Go ahead," Weingar answers, not looking away from the screen.

"I need to run a statistical security check of the ship's functions," Gasper says.

Weingar's head jerks up. "What for? Is something wrong?"

Gasper hesitates a moment. "Yes, sir. Some men have disappeared in Hold 3. We think they're dead, and we have no idea what killed them."

"By His Lordship's blood!" Weingar curses. "What happened?"

Gasper explains that he had ordered a search for the misplaced rebel he saw loaded aboard, and that the men disappeared while looking for her.

"So you think she may be responsible for their deaths?" Weingar asks.

"She does seem to be the most likely cause," Gasper confirms. "But I really can't say until I have the statistical check."

Captain Weingar's eyes drop to the floor. "I'm afraid you'll have to do without the check, Chief."

Gasper thinks he has misunderstood the captain. "Excuse me, sir?"

"I said you'll have to do without the computer check," Weingar says, angrily raising his eyes to meet Gasper's.

"May I ask why?" Gasper inquires.

"No," the Captain states.

"My only other alternative is to wait for something even more serious to develop," Gasper insists.

"Then wait," the Captain says. His face flushes with anger. "Dismissed!"

"Yes, sir," Gasper snaps. He turns on his heel and storms back to the security office, where Larry has already formulated a list of items to check. Gasper tells Larry of the captain's reaction.

"Sounds like he's trying to hide something," Larry says.

"He couldn't be in the Organization, could he?" Gasper asks.

"Not likely," Larry answers. "But you never know. If he is, we're in big trouble."

Gasper does not respond.

"I've got a chess partner in computer operations," Larry offers cautiously. "I could probably get him to run the check for us."

If Gasper ignores the captain's order and runs the check anyway, turn to section 42.

If Gasper obeys the captain's order and waits for something else to develop, turn to section 44.

— 38 —

"Let's get out of here!" Gasper whispers urgently. "We're about to find out what happened to McDonnell and the others, and I don't like it."

"I'm with you," whispers Larry.

The three men run toward the hatch, their feet slipping on the icy floor. Halfway there, the staccato hammering of an automatic assault rifle echoes through the hold. Gasper throws himself to the floor. He slides ten feet, then bangs his shoulder against a gurney.

"Larry?" he whispers.

"Here," answers Larry. "Clover?"

"I'm ok-k-kay," Clover stutters.

"Get a fix on the hatch," Gasper says. "Then throw your lamps as far away as you can and run for it. Our pea-shooters are no match for those rifles."

Clover throws his lamp first. Larry's follows almost immediately. A burst of automatic fire explodes as the lamps arc away. Gasper squeezes off a few rounds in the general direction of the muzzle flashes, then throws his own lamp away and scrambles toward the access panel. More fire erupts from behind him, and he hears the hardshot thud into nearby coldsleeping colonists. He throws himself toward the access panel and slides ten yards along the icy floor.

"Larry?" he calls. "Clover?"

Another burst of fire rips into nearby colonists.

Section 39

"We're okay," Larry whispers.

"Then go for the panel!" Gasper calls. He rises to his knee and fires his pistol toward the sound of the rifle, then turns and runs for the panel.

A moment later, he hears someone scramble into the accessway. "I'm here!" calls Larry. Gasper rushes toward Larry's voice, and a hail of bullets ricochets off the wall in front of him. He stretches his arms out and throws himself toward the hatch.

"Gotcha!" yells Larry. Gasper feels Larry's strong grip on his arms, and Larry pulls him toward the door.

Something crashes behind Gasper, and he hears the dull pop of a bone breaking. "No!" screams Clover. "I've broken my ankle!" Another burst explodes and Clover screams.

If Gasper and Larry go back to save Clover, turn to section 43.

If they cut their losses and run, turn to section 45.

— 39 —

"Better let sleeping rebels lie," Gasper whispers to himself. "A long as Tita's in coldsleep, she won't cause me any problems."

A day later, the technicians load the last colonist aboard and the *Saretta's* mighty engines roar into life. Shortly after liftoff, Gasper holds a meeting of the security team to establish their in-flight routine for the next five years. At the meeting, one of the older men asks permission to speak.

"Sir," he says, "my name is Larry Franklin. With your permission, I'd like to say a few things."

"Certainly," Gasper says.

"Meaning no disrespect, sir," Larry says, "but you don't strike me as someone who has been around starship security a whole lot. On the other hand, me and some of the boys here have been on security details just about our whole lives. Before you go and foul up security on the *Saretta*, we want to tell you a few things."

If Gasper listens to Larry, turn to section 27.

If Gasper lets Larry know who's boss, turn to section 28.

— 40 —

"Let's send in two more men," Gasper says. "Perhaps they'll have better luck than the last pair."

"You're sending live men after dead," Larry warns. "What makes you think that this pair will survive where the others died?"

"You're right," Gasper says. "We'd better send in four men."

Larry shakes his head in dismay but carries out Gasper's order. An hour later, he walks dejectedly into Gasper's quarters. "They're missing," he reports in a tone of voice that says "I told you so."

Subtract four points from the Manpower value and one point from the Morale value of Gasper's security team.

If Gasper leads two men into Hold 3, turn to section 35.

If Gasper sends more men into Hold 3, turn to section 46.

Or if Gasper calls off the search, turn to section 37.

— 41 —

Several more metallic clicks echo deep within the dark hold. "Those are assault rifles!" Larry hisses. His voice shakes with fear.

The staccato roar of automatic fire shakes the hold and muzzle flashes light distant corners.

Gasper and his group have a Manpower value of 3 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart F.

Section 42

Their unknown assailants have a Manpower value of 6 and an Ordnance value of 7. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper and his men perish during the first two rounds of combat, turn to section 49.

If Gasper survives the first two rounds of combat, turn to section 47.

— 42 —

"What could the captain be hiding?" Gasper says. "Let's find out. Ask your friend to run the check."

Larry grins. "Yes, sir!"

Four hours later, Larry returns with a computer printout. "Sorry it took so long," Larry says. "We did it three times to be sure our results were correct."

Larry unfolds a huge sheet of paper and spreads it out on Gasper's desk. Columns and rows of numbers cover it from top to bottom. Gasper studies it in bewilderment while Larry waits. Trying to disguise his ignorance, Gasper says, "So, what's your verdict?"

Larry appears astonished at the question. "Well sir," he says, "our food consumption rate is ten percent higher than expected. In addition, the *Saretta* is using five percent more fuel than allowed by the maximum parameter."

"Go ahead and say what's on your mind," Gasper bluffs. "I'm probably thinking the same thing."

Larry relaxes slightly. "The high food consumption means we've probably got roughly ten stowaways."

"Ten!" Gasper exclaims.

Larry hesitates, then says, "And the extra fuel consumption can be accounted for by postulating that we are carrying two thousand tons of cargo not shown on the manifest." Larry remains quiet for a moment, then adds, "Sir, it looks to me like somebody snuck an armored squad aboard the *Saretta*. Since the captain is trying to conceal that fact, he must know about it. The question is, who is he working for?"

— 44 —

"No," Gasper says. "It's best to let sleeping dogs lie aboard this ship. If Tita causes trouble later, I can always say I did my job."

"You sound like a career man already," says Larry.

Two days later, Larry interrupts Gasper's sleep. "There's trouble in the aft computer room," Larry says. "You'd better come down to the security office."

Gasper quickly pulls on his uniform and checks his pistol. "What kind of trouble?" he asks.

"We don't know," Larry responds. "Somebody sounded a Class One alarm and we haven't been able to make contact. Something has happened to the monitors in the entire aft section of the ship."

Although he does not know what a Class One alarm means, Gasper is too embarrassed at his lack of training to ask. In the security office, Gasper finds his entire team assembled and ready for action.

If Gasper sends two men down to the computer room to scout out the trouble, turn to section 51.

If Gasper leads the entire team down to the computer room, turn to section 52.

— 45 —

Gasper pulls the panel closed and bolts it.

"What about Clover?" pleads Larry.

"He's a dead man," Gasper answers. "No use getting ourselves killed, too."

Larry pushes at the panel. "No way I'm leaving him!" he exclaims.

Gasper grabs Larry's arm. "Leave him!" Gasper orders. "Whoever got Clover has that assault rifle trained on the

If Gasper confronts Captain Weingar with his discoveries, turn to section 48.

If Gasper tries to discover the secret of the stowaways on his own, turn to section 50.

— 43 —

Gasper fires two shots in the direction of the muzzle flashes, then calls "Cover me!" to Larry. Larry immediately squeezes three shots off as Gasper crawls toward Clover.

Two seconds later, Gasper's hand brushes Clover. He grabs Clover's arm and pulls. Clover groans and another burst of gunfire ricochets in their direction. This time, the attacker is so close that Gasper can see her in the strobelike light of the weapon's muzzle flashes. Her waist-length black hair hangs over a heavy parka, and a black eye patch covers her right eye. Tita!

Gasper drags Clover into the accessway and Larry closes the hatch before anyone else can follow. Gasper does not need to inspect Clover's wounds to know that the man is badly injured. "Cover our rear," Gasper says, dragging Clover toward the front of the ship.

Nearly an hour later, Gasper drags Clover onto the engineering deck. He runs to the nearest intercom and calls for the medical officer. Then he issues a general call for security personnel to report to the security office. He and Larry drop Clover off at the infirmary and rush to the security office.

Subtract one point from the Manpower value of Gasper's security team. Add two points to their Morale value.

Turn to section 53.

panel right now. If you open it, we're both candidates for vac burial."

Larry slams his fist against the panel. "Let's go, then!" he snaps.

Gaspar obediently crawls up the accessway. Although the journey requires nearly half an hour, Larry says not one word the entire way.

When they finally reach the corridor, Gaspar jumps out and rushes to the nearest intercom. "All security personnel to security office," he orders. He and Larry then rush there themselves.

Subtract one point from the Manpower value and one point from the Morale value of Gaspar's security team.

Turn to section 53.

— 46 —

"What could be going on back there?" Gaspar asks. "Let's send another four men to investigate."

"That's highly inadvisable, sir," cautions Larry.

"I must know what is happening!" Gaspar snaps. "Carry out my order."

Larry stiffens. "Yes, sir!" he says angrily. An hour and a half later, he returns. "Sir, I must report that the latest party is missing. Sir!"

"How interesting," Gaspar comments.

"Interesting?" Larry shrieks. "You're wasting good men like they were toy soldiers, and you find it interesting?"

Gaspar's mouth opens in disbelief at being addressed so rudely. "Mr. Franklin," he snaps, "must I remind you of your rank?"

"No, sir," Larry hisses. "I am painfully aware of it."

"Good," Gaspar says.

Subtract four points from the Manpower value and one point from the Morale value of Gaspar's security team.

Section 47

If Gasper sends four more men back to Hold 3 to investigate the situation, turn to section 63.

If Gasper leads two men to Hold 3 to investigate the situation, turn to section 35.

Or, if Gasper calls off the search for Tita, turn to section 37.

— 47 —

After a few seconds of combat, Gasper sees that he has very little chance of winning. He throws his lamp as far across the hold as he can. Bursts of automatic fire follow it through the freezing darkness.

"Back to the panel!" he calls. The hammering of automatic fire drowns out his voice. He does not know whether Larry and Clover have heard him, or even if they are alive. He crawls toward the hatch, listening to bullets thud into the frozen bodies of coldsleeping colonists. Occasionally, a muzzle flash lights nearby and he hides until the assailant moves away.

Finally, his knees and hands numbed by the freezing temperature of the floor, Gasper reaches the accessway. He crawls inside and lifts the heavy panel. Bullets ricochet off the walls around him. The attacker is so close that Gasper can see her in the strobeline light of her weapon's muzzle flash. Her long black hair, now caked with strands of ice and frost, falls down to her waist in a tangle. A black eye patch covers her right eye. Tita!

Gasper closes the panel and begins the long journey toward the security office.

If they survived the battle, Larry and Clover await Gasper in the accessway.

Turn to section 53.

— 48 —

Gasper must confront Captain Weingar with what he has found. He gathers the security team and explains to them that he fears the captain is a traitor to His Lordship and that it may be necessary to relieve him of command. The team is skeptical until Larry says that he believes Gasper might be correct.

Gasper leads the security team to the bridge and gives them instructions to wait outside until summoned. Gasper takes a deep breath and walks onto the bridge unannounced. He crosses to the command chair. Larry, half a step behind, carries the statistical security check. Both men rest their hands on their pistols.

"What is the meaning of this?" asks Captain Weingar.

"Why don't you tell me?" Gasper says. "Why are we carrying an armored squadron to Omega? An armored squadron not listed on the *Saretta's* manifest?"

Confusion fills the captain's eyes. "I don't know what you're talking about," he says.

"I ran the statistical security check," Gasper says.

"You're admitting to violation of a direct order?" Weingar says disbelievingly.

"I'm sure His Lordship will find that my violation pales beside the magnitude of yours," Gasper says.

Larry unfolds the printout. "Explain this," he says.

The captain glances at the printout. "I'm not required to explain anything," he snaps. "The Fifth Article of His Lordship's Naval Code gives the captain complete discretionary control of his vessel."

Larry pulls his gun and sticks it under the captain's nose. "As long as the captain acts in the interest of His Lordship Banship. Which we presently have reason to doubt," Larry says. "No offense intended, of course."

"This is mutiny!" the captain exclaims.

"Perhaps," Gasper says. "In which case, you'd do well to answer our questions."

Larry pulls the hammer of his gun back. Weingar stares around the room at the other bridge offices. They are all frozen with indecision and shock. "Very well," he says at last. "What do you want to know?"

Section 49

Larry inches his gun back from Weingar's face, but doesn't put it away. "Explain this," he says pointing at the printout. "We're carrying two thousand tons of extra cargo."

"A special shipment His Lordship wishes to make in secret," the Captain explains.

"What is it?" Gasper asks.

"I'd rather not say," Weingar says. "I've explained your discrepancy adequately."

"What about the stowaways?" Gasper demands.

"Stowaways?" Weingar gasps. "There are no stowaways!"

Larry holsters his pistol and points to the printout. "I don't mean to argue, sir, but here are the figures. Probably ten."

As if to emphasize his point, an alarm buzzer fills the bridge. An ensign quickly silences the alarm and reports, "Code One alarm in computer control. All monitors aft of security are non-functional."

"We're too late!" exclaims Gasper, already running toward the door.

"About that cargo," calls the captain.

Gasper pauses. "Yes?"

"If the stowaways found it, they might have assault rifles."

"Great!" Larry yells. "All we have are pistols!"

Gasper pulls Larry through the door and rejoins his team.

If Gasper sends two men back to scout the situation, turn to section 51.

If Gasper takes his whole team back together, turn to section 52.

— 49 —

A series of incredibly powerful thuds strike Gasper's chest, knocking him back several feet. The midsection of his back strikes a gurney and he falls sprawled over it. His breath will not come, and his chest feels agonizingly cold and numb in several places.

He hears himself scream once, then realizes that he has been shot. He stares into the darkness for what seems like

many long hours. He feels a presence nearby and tries to find it in the darkness. Something tickles his nose and face; he realizes it is a woman's hair.

"This one's gonna be dead," she says as she turns away. It is Tita's voice. He tries to raise his arms to stop her, but finds that he is too weak. He closes his eyes and falls forever from a great height.

Turn to section 29.

— 50 —

Gasper reasons that if the captain smuggled an entire armored squadron aboard, his security team's only advantage is surprise. He elects to investigate the stowaways and the extra cargo on his own. "Where would you hide two thousand tons of tanks and guns?" he asks.

Larry thinks for a moment, then shakes his head. "You couldn't, unless it was attached to the outside after we left planetside."

"That would involve some pretty tricky maneuvering and quite a bit of work, wouldn't it?" Gasper asks.

"It sure would," Larry says. "So it has to be inside somewhere. You wouldn't put it near the engines, or it'd be nothing but a radioactive heap by the time we reach Omega."

"The next section forward is cargo," Gasper says. "And we've been into all of the cargo holds."

"And the section after that is ground support equipment, then life support. You couldn't hide two thousand extra tons of cargo there—not without somebody noticing."

"Then it can't be here," Gasper says.

"But it is," Larry insists. "We checked the figures four times."

Gasper paces the floor several times. "Can you get us a set of blueprints for the ship?" he asks.

"Good thinking," Larry answers. "Coming right up." He leaves the office and returns a few minutes later with a set of prints for the ship's electrical system.

Gasper unrolls the prints and studies them for several min-

Section 51

utes with Larry looking over his shoulder. Finally, he walks away in disgust. "I can't read these things," he says. "You tell me if you see anything wrong here."

Larry continues to study the prints for several minutes. "We're missing twenty feet of storage space in each cargo area," he announces triumphantly. "They've built a false floor in each one."

"Jackpot!" Gasper exclaims.

Larry frowns. "That means they have access to His Lordship's secret cargo."

"Which means they've got us outgunned," Gasper says slowly. "We'd better strike now, before they get organized."

"That might be a small advantage, but even if we surprised them, we'd still be carrying the battle to them on their own ground. And when you're out-gunned, that's not such a good idea. I think we should see if we can take a few men outside to the rear cargo hold to collect some firepower for ourselves. It's dangerous, especially for the people going outside, but it might be our best chance."

If Gasper attacks now, hoping that the element of surprise will carry him through, turn to section 54.

If Gasper leads a group of men to the rear cargo hold to collect some automatic weapons, turn to section 55.

— 51 —

"Nelson and Moore, scout into the aft section and report back," Gasper orders.

Nelson's eyes widen in surprise, and he glances at Moore, who shrugs his shoulders. Nelson grabs a com-set and, glaring at Gasper, says, "Yes, sir." The two men start down the corridor toward the computer center, their pistols drawn. As they go, they hesitantly peek into every room.

Two minutes later, they turn a corner and Gasper can no longer see them.

Make a Morale check for Nelson and Moore. Roll two six-sided dice.

If the total rolled is the same or less than the security team's Morale value, turn to section 57.

If the number rolled is greater than their Morale value, turn to section 56.

— 52 —

"Let's go, men," Gasper says. He leads the way down the corridor, his pistol drawn. At every corner he stops and peers around, expecting a flurry of bullets to cut his journey short.

Around the next corner, Gasper sees a group of men and women ahead. The stowaways fall to their stomachs and open fire with assault rifles.

Larry taps Gasper on the shoulder. "Let's flank 'em," he says. "If a few of us go back to the last cross corridor, we can come down behind them and catch them in a cross fire."

"But that will leave the others at a terrible disadvantage until we get there," Gasper says.

If Gasper takes half his men and flanks the stowaways, turn to section 58.

If Gasper keeps his whole team together and fights it out in the corridor, turn to section 59.

— 53 —

Gasper rushes into the security office, where the remaining members of the security team have gathered. They are dressed and ready for battle.

"We don't have much time," Gasper begins. "Let me begin this briefing by saying that this isn't an ordinary mutiny attempt. We're facing an unknown number of stowaways, probably rebels from back on Terra. Although we don't know what their mission is, we must assume it is to take over the

Section 54

Saretta, or to sabotage it. To compound matters, they have brought assault rifles with them. Needless to say, we have nothing comparable. About the only thing we do know for certain is that several of the stowaways are located in Hold 3."

"Why don't we just open Hold 3 up to the vac?" asks a boyish cop named Kirby. "Suck 'em right out into deep space."

"Good idea," Gasper answers, "except the colonists would go with them."

"How about starving 'em out?" offers the gravel-voiced Axel. "They'll have to come out sooner or later."

"Because whatever they're here to do," answers Kirby, "they'll do it long before they die of starvation."

"Besides which," adds Gasper, "if they get desperate for food, they can always eat the colonists. It's been known to happen."

"I hate to say it, boys," Axel interrupts solemnly, "but it looks like we've got to go in after them."

"The question is, how?" Gasper says. "We've got to rely on one of two tactics: hit quick and hard, before they gather their forces; or use guerilla tactics and hit 'em where they don't expect it, then run and hit 'em again."

If Gasper hits the stowaways before they gather their forces, turn to section 54.

If Gasper uses guerilla tactics, turn to section 61.

— 54 —

"We'd better hit them quick and hard," Gasper says. "Contact the bridge and ask them to turn on the lights in Cargo Hold 1. We'll start there, since it's well forward of the main trouble. With a little luck, they may not have penetrated that far."

"Good idea," says Abrams, a curly-haired man of thirty. "And I'll ask to have off-duty personnel guard the other accessways. That way, we can take the entire team with us."

"Good thinking," Gasper agrees.

Gasper leads the security team into the accessway. After half an hour of crawling through the three-foot-wide tunnel, Gasper reaches Hold 1. He removes the access panel, then carefully pokes his head out and studies the huge room for several long moments. Row after row of coldsleeping colonists lie undisturbed in the room, which is about the size of a football field. Nothing stirs.

Gasper cautiously steps into the room. Nobody shoots at him. He walks all the way to the center of the room before signaling the others to follow. They quickly fan out and inspect the frigid room, their breath creating small clouds of steam. Finally, Gasper gives the room the all clear.

"Hey, Chief!" calls the boyish Kirby. "Look at this."

Kirby has moved a gurney aside and stands over an open hatch leading down into the floor. Gasper shines his light down into the hatch and sees a ladder leading down. He climbs down into the space below the Hold 1 floor. About twenty feet high, it runs the entire length of the cargo hold. The space is filled with hundreds of crates and contains two hover tanks.

Sensing a chance to even the odds a bit, he calls his team down into the room and orders them to inspect the crates.

"An arsenal!" exclaims Kirby. "Man-o-man!"

"Supplies for His Lordship's colonist-breakers, no doubt," says the gravel-voiced Axel. "Unless he's also sending the troops—in which case I'm not anxious to tangle with them."

"I doubt that," Gasper interrupts. "I wouldn't think anybody would be in shape to fight after spending five years in the cargo hold of a starship. Besides, I've got reason to believe our stowaways are rebels." He tells them about seeing Tita loaded onto the ship. "I think they just stumbled onto His Lordships's arsenal the same way we did. Let's see what we can find in here to even the score."

Ten short minutes later, Kirby reports, "Nothing here we can use, sir. Rocket launchers and lasers that would cut a hole the size of Plymouth Rock in the side of the hull."

Gasper nods hopefully toward the hover tanks. "Anything we can cannibalize?"

Kirby shakes his head. "This hold's a dead zero for us."

"Not quite a zero," Axel says, dragging an armful of oversized nylon suits behind him. "These are survival suits—used in the chillier parts of Omega's climate. They may be

bulky, but they'll keep us from dying of the cold before the rebels get to us."

"Thanks," Gasper responds grimly. "We might as well keep warm." He takes a suit and puts it on, then goes to the back of the room. As he expects, he finds another accessway hatch. "No sense going back out, now that we have these things," he says. "I'll go up ahead and have a look. Follow me when you're ready."

Gasper crawls into the accessway and starts toward Hold 2. The suit is so bulky that he is forced to crawl on his belly, with his arms trapped ahead of him and his pistol stuck in his unreachable holster. It seems a small price to pay for the warmth of the suit.

After ten minutes of crawling, he rounds a corner and comes face to face with a dark-haired woman. Like Gasper, her arms are trapped ahead of her. Her eye patch has slid to one side of her right eye, revealing a milky-white eyeball and a deep scar running from her brow to her upper nose.

"Tita!" Gasper exclaims.

"You!" she hisses.

"Give up now," he says, "before we evacuate the cargo holds and the vac sucks you into eternity."

She laughs haughtily. "You can't. If we go, the colonists go. And that would look bad for Banshire's image, wouldn't it? Might even topple his crummy little government earthside."

Gasper reaches out and grabs Tita's wrists. "Then I'll have to drag you out of here."

Tita screams and worms her way forward. She bites Gasper's hand and he releases her. He feels blood ooze from the wound. She scuttles back a safe distance. He tries to draw his handgun and wedges himself in the tiny accessway.

"Don't worry," Tita giggles, "I don't have rabies. At least I don't think I do."

As Gasper struggles to free himself, Tita watches with an amused smile on her face. "Can I ask you a question?" she inquires.

Gasper stops struggling. "Sure, as long as you don't cut my throat in the process."

"Rebels aren't cold-blooded executioners like His Lordship's lackeys," Tita responds angrily.

"No?" Gasper answers. "Then why are you sabotaging this colonist ship? These people don't work for Banshire."

"You're one to talk about protecting colonists," Tita an-

swers sarcastically. "You're carrying weapons to enslave them on the same ship in which you promised to deliver them to freedom."

"What do you mean?" Gasper asks.

"What do you think all the hovertanks and assault rifles are for? Putting meat on settlers' tables?" Tita demands angrily. "His Lordship isn't satisfied with one planet. He wants to have an iron grip on Omega, too. And you're just one of the stupid, hired apes that're going to arrange it for him, that's what I mean."

"Now wait a minute," Gasper says. "I didn't even know about those weapons."

"You do now," Tita challenges. "What are you going to do about it? Help us take over the ship?"

If Gasper agrees to help Tita, turn to section 62.

If Gasper pretends to help Tita and leads the rebels into a trap, turn to section 60.

Or, if Gasper refuses her offer, turn to section 65.

— 55 —

"Let's go back and try for some weapons," Gasper says. "It's our only choice."

"I agree," says Larry. "I'll get everything ready."

An hour later, Larry has zippered Gasper into a spacesuit. Although he is frightened to death, never having been in such a suit before, he tries not to let it show. As he and Larry step into the airlock, Gasper's teeth begin to chatter.

"Here," Larry says. "Let me turn up your heater. If you're cold already, you'll freeze outside."

Despite the fact that his teeth are not chattering because of cold, Gasper allows Larry to turn his heater up. Outside the *Saretta*, Gasper feels extremely exposed. There is nothing but bone-chilling blackness in every direction, with white pin-points hung like tiny memories of light against the dark backdrop.

Gasper steps onto the cargo sled and concentrates upon

watching its railing. Larry quickly moves the sled to the rear of the *Saretta* and opens the hatchway leading into the rear airlock. Gasper rushes inside. "I'll get the weapons," he says over the suit's microphone. "You stay with the sled and report back if anything happens to me."

"Yes, sir," Larry says.

Gasper closes the airlock, allows the atmosphere to balance, then opens the hatch and steps into the corridor. He immediately removes his helmet and goes to the accessway leading into Cargo Hold 4. The suit is so bulky that he must crawl through on his stomach, with his arms stretched out in front of him as if he were diving.

After three minutes of crawling through the accessway, he sees a light shining around a corner. It appears to be coming toward him, so he backs away. Unfortunately, whoever is coming toward him crawls much faster forward than he does backward. Within moments, Tita rounds the corner ahead of him. She wears a bulky nylon suit that, although it looks extremely warm, limits her motion almost as much as Gasper's spacesuit limits his.

"Tita!" he gasps.

Her mouth drops open in astonishment. "You!" she hisses.

"Give up now," he bluffs, "before I have my men come in here and cut you to ribbons."

Tita laughs. "Go ahead." She fumbles about awkwardly and draws a knife from within her sleeve. She holds it out in front of her menacingly. "This is the only thing that's going to do any cutting in here."

Gasper panics and tries to turn around, lodging himself in the accessway.

"Don't worry," Tita giggles, "I don't think I can reach you." As Gasper struggles to free himself, Tita watches with an amused smile on her face. "Can I ask you a question?" she inquires.

Gasper stops thrashing. "Sure, as long as you don't cut my throat in the process."

"Rebels are not cold-blooded executioners like His Lordship's lackeys," Tita responds angrily.

"No?" Gasper answers. "Then why are you sabotaging this ship? These colonists haven't done anything to hurt you."

"You're one to talk about protecting colonists," Tita answers sarcastically. "You're carrying weapons to enslave

them on the same ship in which you promised to deliver them to freedom."

"What do you mean?" Gasper asks.

"What are all the hovertanks and assault rifles for? Putting meat on settlers' tables?" Tita demands.

"Hovertanks, too?" Gasper exclaims.

"His Lordship isn't happy with just one planet," Tita continues. "He wants Omega, too, and you're just the stupid ape to give it to him." She lashes out angrily with the knife.

"Wait a minute," Gasper says hastily. "I didn't even know about those weapons."

"You do now!" Tita challenges. "What are you going to do about it? Will you help us take over the ship?"

If Gasper agrees to help Tita, turn to section 62.

If he backs out of the accessway as quickly as possible, turn to section 64.

— 56 —

Gasper doesn't hear from Nelson and Moore again.

Subtract two points from the security team's Manpower value. Add two points to the stowaways' Manpower value during the next battle.

After twenty minutes, Gasper says, "We'd better go attack them en masse." He leads a charge to the aft section but, although the computer center contains the dead bodies of a few technicians, there is no sign of the stowaways.

"They must have retreated back into the cargo holds," Larry says. "They probably intend to fight a guerilla-type battle."

"Then we'd better flush them out before they prepare themselves for their next attack," Gasper says.

Turn to section 54.

— 57 —

“We’ve spotted the stowaways,” Nelson radios. He is whispering so quietly that Gasper can barely hear his voice. “They’re just aft of the security office. If you send half the crew down alpha corridor, they will engage the enemy head-on. Send the other half down beta corridor and have them take cross corridor three, and we’ll flank them.”

“Why can’t we meet them head-on?” Gasper asks.

“You can,” Nelson whispers. “But they outgun us.”

If Gasper listens to Nelson and tries to flank the stowaways, turn to section 58.

If Gasper concentrates his firepower and meets the stowaways head-on, turn to section 59.

— 58 —

“Let’s flank them,” Gasper says. He leads half the security team down beta corridor, then crosses over to alpha corridor just behind their position.

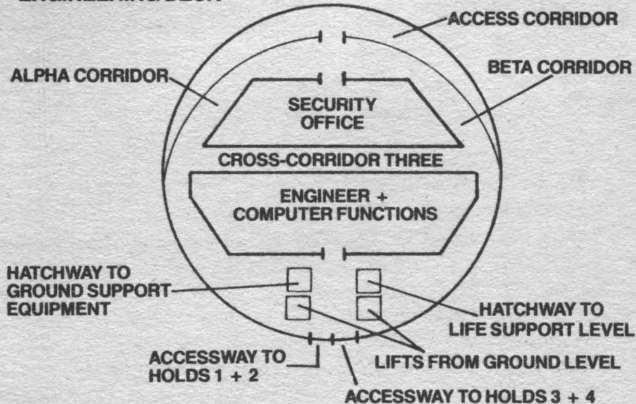
Make a Morale check for the half of the team meeting the stowaways head on. Roll two six-sided dice. If the result is higher than the security team’s Morale value, they fail the check, and surrender to the stowaways. Gasper’s Manpower value is reduced by half. Both sides fight on Chart C.

If the result of the roll is the same as or less than the team’s Morale value, they continue to fight the stowaways.

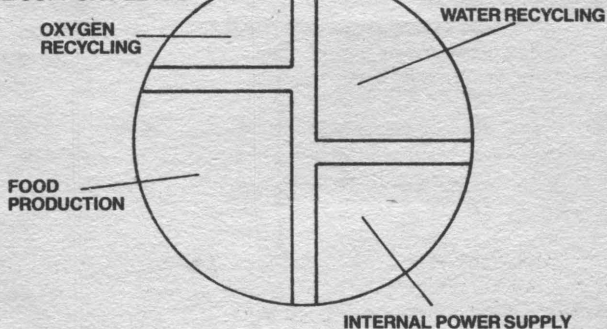
The flanking maneuver catches the stowaways by surprise. Gasper’s security team attacks using Chart B.

The stowaways have a Manpower value of 10 and an Ordinance value of 7. They attack using Chart E.

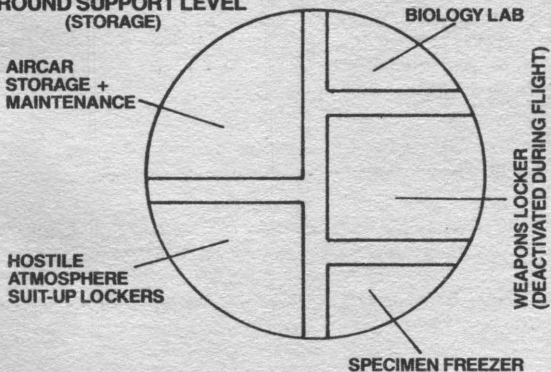
ENGINEERING DECK

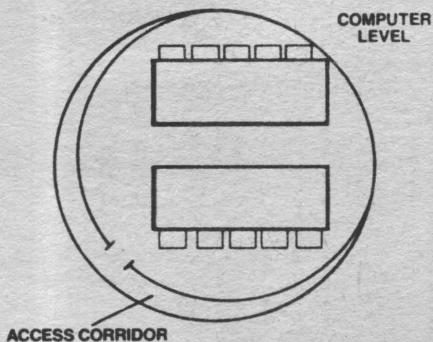
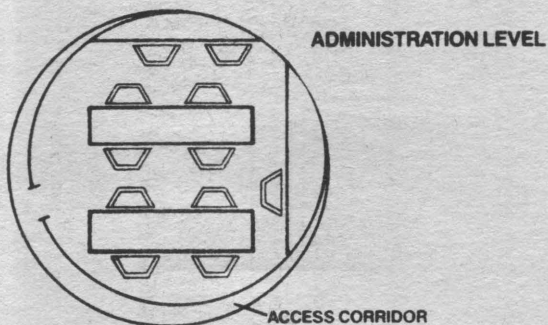
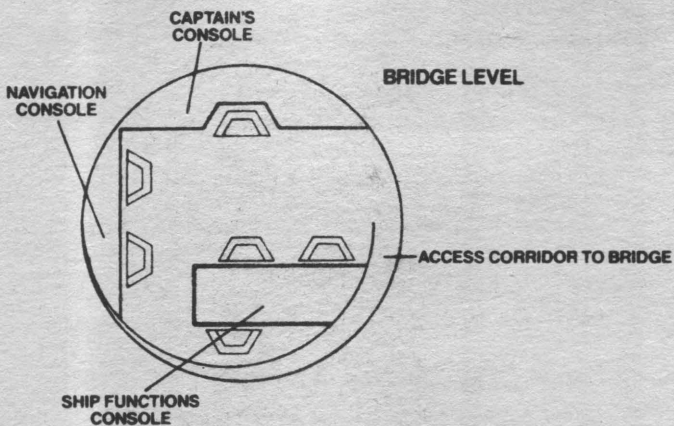


LIFE SUPPORT LEVEL

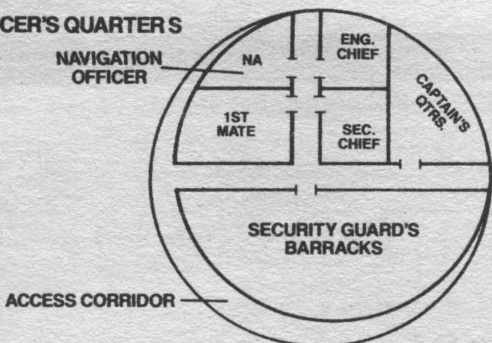


GROUND SUPPORT LEVEL (STORAGE)

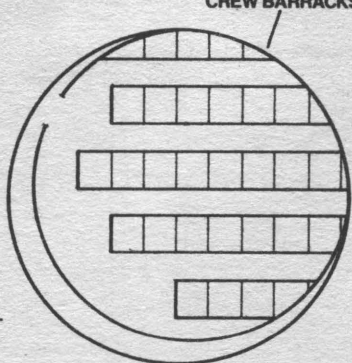




OFFICER'S QUARTERS

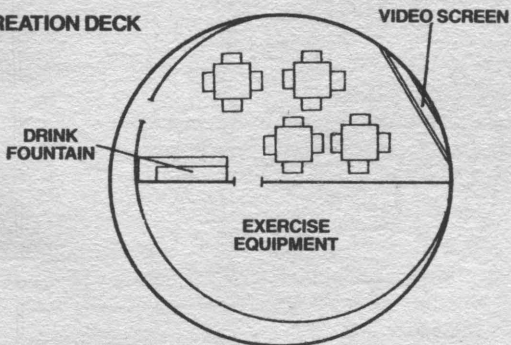


CREW BARRACKS



SCALE: 1 ☐ = 10ft.

RECREATION DECK



If Gasper and his team perish in the battle, turn to section 66.

If Gasper and his team prevail in the battle, turn to section 67.

— 59 —

“Let’s meet them head-on,” Gasper says. “Too many things could go wrong with a flanking attempt.”

Gasper’s security team attacks using Chart C.

The stowaways have a Manpower value of 20 and an Ordinance value of 7. They attack using Chart C.

If Gasper and his team perish in the battle, turn to section 66.

If Gasper and his team prevail in the battle, turn to section 67.

— 60 —

“You’re right,” Gasper says. “What am I doing spending ten years of my life on a starship just so His Lordship can get a little fatter? My men and I will help you. We’ll meet in Hold 3. Bring along some assault rifles for us, and we’ll lead you to the bridge.”

Tita’s mouth drops open in astonishment. “You will?”

“Of course we will!” Gasper says. “Just give us enough time to make our way back there through the accessways.”

Tita’s open-mouthed astonishment turns to a smile. “I’d kiss you if I could reach you,” she says.

“Save it for me,” Gasper says. “We’ll be right there.”

Gasper returns to his men and outlines his plan. They readily agree, as it is their only chance of getting the drop on the stowaways.

A tiresome half-hour later, Gasper and his men emerge from the accessway to Hold 3. Ten rebels, including Tita, stand waiting. As soon as the last of Gasper's men emerges, the rebels offer each man an assault rifle. As planned, Gasper's men take the rifles and drift off into small groups to compare them, carefully positioning themselves in a circle around the rebels.

"Now!" Gasper calls, and his men aim their weapons at the rebels. When they pull the triggers, however, nothing happens. They stand in astonished silence for several long moments, studying the stowaways' sly grins.

Finally, Tita laughs loudly. "How stupid do you think I am?" she asks. "We took the firing pins out just in case you tried something like this."

The stowaways open fire on the astonished security men.

The security men cannot attack until the second round, when they draw their pistols and fight back. They attack using Chart D.

The stowaways have a Manpower value of 10 and an Ordinance value of 7. They attack using Chart C.

If Gasper and his team perish, turn to section 66.

If Gasper and his team prevail, turn to section 67.

— 61 —

"We'd better use guerrilla tactics," Gasper says. "Let's set up hit-and-run operations. We'll make surprise attacks, then run like the devil. Okay?"

"That sounds good," one of his men says, "but only if we do it on our own turf. Why don't we cut back on the oxygen level in the holds and flush the stowaways up here? It shouldn't hurt the colonists while they're in coldsleep, and it'll panic the stowaways."

"Good idea," Gasper says. He calls the bridge and arranges it, then leads his men back to the engineering deck to

Section 62

set up the first ambush. He hides his men behind the machinery and waits.

A few minutes later, the stowaways cautiously open the panels. First one man, then another steps out into the corridor. They all carry assault rifles. As instructed, Gasper's men wait until the fifth man steps into the corridor, then open fire.

Gasper's security team attacks using Chart B.

The stowaways have a Manpower value of 5 and an Ordnance value of 7. They attack using Chart E.

Gasper's men fire twice, then flee on the second round of combat (the stowaways do not get a shot at Gasper's men during the second round of combat).

The stowaways have a total Manpower value of 10. Subtract any of their losses from this value, then continue with this section.

Gasper's second ambush is near the security office. Gasper has placed his men on the interior side of alpha corridor, near cross corridor four. Their instructions are to ambush the stowaways, then flee down the cross corridor to the next ambush rendezvous.

A few moments later, three stowaways walk into Gasper's ambush. One of his men whispers, "I thought there'd be more, somehow."

If Gasper opens fire on the stowaways, turn to section 68.

If Gasper holds his fire and goes to the next ambush, turn to section 69.

— 62 —

"You're right," Gasper says. "I'll lead you to the bridge and order my men to stay out of it. I don't want Banshire to do to another planet what he's done to Terra."

Tita's mouth drops open in astonishment. "You really mean it, don't you?"

"Yes," Gasper says. "I'll meet you in Hold 3 in twenty minutes."

Gasper crawls back out to Hold 1 and says, "Wait here. There's something stuck in the accessway; I'm going to go around to Hold 2 and pull it out. I should be back in no more than an hour."

His men grumble about standing in the cold for so long and ask permission to crawl back to the engineering deck, where they can at least watch the other accessways.

"No! Absolutely not!" Gasper snaps. "Stay here."

Without further explanation, he crawls out the tube to the engineering deck. Here he dismisses the off-duty personnel that were doubling as guards. Then he crawls down the long accessway to Hold 3.

When he opens the hatch, Tita greets him with a long, warm kiss. "Thanks," he says. "I hope we have lots of time for that later. But right now, I've got a set of security guards on ice and I don't know how long they'll stay that way."

His heart pounding wildly with excitement, he takes an assault rifle and leads the stowaways to the bridge. He steps in first, the other ten following.

"We're taking over the *Saretta*!" he announces, his assault gun leveled at the captain.

"I thought as much," a familiar voice says behind him. Gasper whirls to see his security team and several of the ship's officers standing behind the door.

Gasper and the stowaways have a Manpower value of 11 and an Ordnance value of 7. They attack using Chart C.

The security team and the officers have a Manpower value of 12 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart B.

If Gasper and the stowaways perish, turn to section 70.

If Gasper and the stowaways prevail, turn to section 71.

— 63 —

"Send another four men back," Gasper says.

Larry glares at him in disbelief. "Yes . . . sir," he says slowly. He leaves immediately. A short time later, he returns and knocks on Gasper's door.

"Sir," he says timidly. "I need your help. The men won't go."

"What?" Gasper says. He jumps off of his bed and rushes into the hallway, where he meets Larry and the rest of the security team.

"We're sorry, sir," Larry grins. "We thought you'd like the honor."

Each member of the security team raises his gun and shoots the unsuspecting Gasper. He dies before he hits the floor, uttering his last words, "What did I do wrong?"

Turn to section 29.

— 64 —

"You're nothing but modern versions of twentieth-century terrorists!" Gasper spits out as he dislodges himself. He backs out of the accessway, Tita following and vainly swinging her knife. After he pops out of the accessway, he grabs his helmet and runs for the airlock. Tita forces her way into the corridor just as he closes the airlock and secures his helmet. He smiles as the air hisses out of the lock, protecting him from Tita and her knife.

When he clears the airlock, he steps gingerly onto the cargo flat and tells Larry what he encountered.

"We'd better go back to the security office and rethink our strategy," Larry remarks.

"Gladly," Gasper agrees, happy to be anywhere inside the ship again.

Turn to section 61.

— 65 —

“Sorry,” Gasper says. “You can’t convince me that you’re anything but modern versions of twentieth-century terrorists.” He quickly backs out of the accessway.

Back in Hold 1 he says, “We’re blocked up ahead; they’re already grouped in Hold 2. Let’s go back to the security office and rethink our strategy.”

Turn to section 61.

— 66 —

A series of blows strikes Gasper’s midsection, knocking his breath away. He instinctively raises his hand to protect the area and feels a warm liquid. Gasper realizes he has been shot.

He slowly falls to the floor as the battle grows more quiet. When his head finally reaches the floor, he can no longer hear the staccato explosions of assault rifles. A resigned smile crosses his face. It’s over, and he knows he has lost, but at least he is finally at peace.

Turn to section 29.

— 67 —

Although the enemy possesses superior firearms, they are not as well versed in fighting as Gasper’s men. One by one, the stowaways fall as the security men calmly take aim and pick them off.

Tita falls last. Already wounded in the leg, she charges

Section 68

Gasper when her last companion dies. Two shots immediately ring out and strike home in her torso. She slows, then looks at Gasper and attempts to raise her assault rifle.

"You fascist pig!" she gasps. She falls with her gun still chattering.

Shortly afterward, the captain personally congratulates every surviving member of the security team. He assures Gasper that he will receive a promotion for his handling of this difficult situation.

A few years later, the *Saretta* lands on Omega near Prime, the location of the original colonyship landing. Already, the original colonists have built a flourishing city nearby. They greet the new colonists with open arms and grieve for those lost during the terrible battle with the rebels.

After leaving the colonists, the *Saretta* sets down in a distant desert and unloads a darker cargo—eight hovertanks and enough small arms to equip a battalion. Lord Banshire's men use these weapons to harass and to batter the citizens of Omega first into poverty, then into slavery.

As for Gasper and his family: He returns home to find a different family living in his apartment. His family has disappeared without a trace, and he never sees them again. He dies a few months later after contracting pneumonia in the Municipal Dormitories. So much for His Lordship's gratitude.

THE END

If you'd like to try for a happier ending, go back to section 1 and make different choices as you re-read this adventure.

— 68 —

"Fire!" Gasper orders. As his men step into the corridor to fire, Gasper realizes his mistake. A second group of stowaways have come up beta corridor. Instead of ambushing the stowaways, the guards are trapped in a deadly cross fire of automatic weapons.

Gasper's men attack using Chart D.

The stowaways attack using Chart B. (To find their Manpower value, subtract the number of casualties they took in section 61 from 10. Their Ordnance value is 7.)

If Gasper and his men perish, go to section 66.

If Gasper and his men prevail, go to section 67.

— 69 —

"Something's fishy here," Gasper says to himself. He holds the order to fire. A minute later, he is glad he did. He notices that part of the stowaway force has sneaked up beta corridor. His force would have been trapped in a deadly cross fire if he had given the order to attack.

Gasper motions for his men to follow him quietly. He follows the two groups of stowaways to where alpha and beta corridors meet. Just as the two groups rejoin, he gives the order to attack.

Gasper's men attack using Chart B.

The stowaways attack using Chart E. (To find their Manpower value, subtract the number of casualties they took in section 61 from 10. Their Ordnance value is 7.)

If Gasper and his men perish, go to section 66.

If Gasper and his men prevail, go to section 67.

— 70 —

Gasper sees all of the stowaways fall. Tita is the last to go, calling the captain a fascist slaver and spraying the bridge with automatic rifle fire at the same time.

Gasper feels a sharp rap in the back of his head. His head snaps forward and he feels his skull cracking. Everything goes dark.

Turn to section 29.

— 71 —

The stowaways whirl on their ambushers and open fire. Although they sustain heavy casualties, the firefight lasts only a second—every person simply selects a target and shoots. The lucky ones avoid getting shot in return.

Fortunately, both Gasper and Tita are lucky ones. Even before the smell of cordite settles out of the air, Tita gives Gasper a long kiss full upon the lips. “You did it!” she exclaims. Fortunately, other stowaways are thinking of the practicalities. One of them covers the wounded captain with his rifle, and the stowaways are successful in their bid to take the *Saretta*.

A few years later, the *Saretta* lands on Omega. Tita and Gasper, by then married by Captain Weingar, find the legendary rebel Taliaferro Tey and present him with both the *Saretta* and its secret cargo. Tey puts the cargo to good use enforcing the Unification of all the different tribes of Omega, and the colony planet thrives—much to His Lordship Banshire’s great irritation.

As for Tita and Gasper: suffice it to say that they live more or less happily ever after on Omega. However, Tita’s habit of practicing assault rifle target shooting and preaching revolu-

tionary doctrine at dinner parties rubs Gasper the wrong way more often than he admits.

THE END

Feel free to return to section 1 and try for a different adventure.

— 72 —

Gasper takes a deep breath and steps onto the bridge. It sways slightly under his weight. Gasper hesitates. Suppose this is a death trap?

"Come on!" The colonel cries impatiently. "You'll face worse situations on Omega."

"I'm being paranoid," Gasper says to himself. "They just want to find out if I can handle being Outside." He forces himself to step further onto the bridge. It wobbles. He slips. For a long moment, he does not think he can continue. Finally, he thinks about turning around and realizes this would be more difficult than continuing. He takes a deep breath and moves one foot forward, then the other. In this manner, one step at a time, Gasper crosses the bridge.

On the other side, another security cop greets him. "Good job. Follow me to the next test." The cop takes off at a run. Gasper follows.

Two minutes later, with Gasper panting and out of breath, the cop stops in front of a doorway leading into an open-topped building. "This is a maze," the cop says. "You have three minutes to meet me on the other side. If you stay to the right, you should have no problem." The cop runs around the corner of the building.

Gasper hesitates. If this is a maze, why did the cop tell him how to get through it?

If Gasper follows the cop's instructions and stays to the right, turn to section 74.

If Gasper tries to find his own way through the maze, reasoning that the cop's instructions are some kind of trap, turn to section 75.

— 73 —

"I'm not crossing that bridge," Gasper tells the colonel. "It doesn't make sense to risk my life for no reason."

"Good choice," the colonel says. He points to a security cop. "Follow that man."

The security cop leads Gasper to a nearby bus.

Turn to section 76.

— 74 —

"I've got no choice but to follow the cop's instructions," Gasper reasons. "Otherwise, I'll never find my way out of the maze in three minutes."

Gasper enters the maze and places his palm against the right hand wall. He begins to trot. Time after time, the maze reverses on itself and Gasper begins to doubt his strategy. His rib cage hurts from so much running, but he continues to force his legs to move double time.

Finally, panting so hard he can barely stand, Gasper turns a corner and is suddenly out of the maze. The cop stands there waiting. "Not bad," he says. "Two minutes and fifty-five seconds. You show good judgment. Come on, we'll walk to the next test."

The cop leads the way over a small hill at a slow walk. To Gasper's relief, he finds that he catches his breath as he walks. The cop stops in front of a boulder-strewn field that stretches over the top of the next hill.

"This test is easy. It simulates the kind of terrain you're likely to find on Omega. We just want to be sure you can handle the little, everyday hazards of life Outside. You have twenty minutes to walk to the other side of that field, which is only about a mile long. Take your time, and give this to the cop on the other side."

The cop hands Gasper a running stop watch. It shows nineteen minutes and fifty-five seconds remaining.

"There's no way you can tamper with the watch," the cop says. "So if you get into trouble, your best bet is to keep walking."

Gaspar enters the field and begins to walk. To his amazement, he finds that he can walk nearly as fast as he could down a crowded complex corridor. He estimates he will need only about nine or ten minutes to finish the walk.

As Gaspar tops the hill, he sees a man sitting on the ground with his back propped against a rock. The man's ankle is swollen and hideously colored black and blue.

"Thank His Lordship's benevolence," the man says. "You've come just in time." The man holds his stopwatch up for Gaspar to see. He has just over ten minutes remaining. Gaspar inspects his own and sees that he has sixteen minutes remaining.

"I twisted my ankle on one of these rocks," the man says. "I thought I was out of luck until you walked over the hill." The man grabs Gaspar's hand and tries to stand. "If you give me a hand, I ought to make it."

If Gaspar helps the injured man, turn to section 77.

If Gaspar refuses to help because the delay might endanger his own chances of completing the test successfully, turn to section 78.

— 75 —

"It doesn't make sense to send someone through a maze and give them the answer to successfully completing it," Gaspar says. "I'll try to puzzle this out on my own."

Ten minutes later, Gaspar finally works his way through the maze. The cop is feigning sleep on the other side. "Can't follow instructions, huh?" he says. "Well, try to follow me." The cop leads the way slowly to a nearby bus.

Turn to section 76.

— 76 —

Gaspar climbs onto the bus. "Did I make it?" he asks.

"Afraid not," the cop says. "But don't fret; this bus isn't so bad, either. At least you had the guts to try."

Other cops bring men and women to the bus in groups of one to four over the next hour. When it is loaded, one of the cops hops in the driver's seat and says, "You folks are probably luckier than them colonists anyway. They're going to a strange new world with who-knows-what in it. His Lordship is going to give all of you jobs."

The cop drives the would-be colonists four hours through the desert. Just after dusk, he pulls into a well-lit compound set at the base of a mountain. "More folks for the work-camp," he says to the guard at the gate. The guard smiles wickedly. "That's what you folks get for trying to be something you aren't. Now we've got you, and everybody thinks you're on Omega."

The would-be colonists are assigned bunks in a common barracks. The next day, they are taken to their new jobs. Gaspar is assigned the task of putting the firing pin into a model AR-25 assault rifle. He works at this job for the next ten years. He finally dies with two hundred others in a massive riot/escape attempt.

Turn to section 29.

— 77 —

Gaspar takes the man's arm and wraps it around his shoulder. The two of them hobble to the edge of the field in just under seven minutes, allowing them both plenty of time. When they reach the far side, Gaspar is amazed to see no security cop.

The man with the injured ankle stands upright. "Good job," he says. "On Omega, you'll need to help each other

with even the simplest tasks in order to survive." The man points to a river about a half-mile distant. "There's your next test. Take your time walking down there. From here on out, the tests are simply endurance tests, so you'll need to be rested when you start. Good luck."

Gasper walks down to the river slowly. When he arrives, two cops there stick him in a cage and dunk him in the river repeatedly. After twenty minutes of this, they let him out. "Well, you're still alive," one says. "I guess that means you pass."

"Thanks," Gasper chokes, spitting out some of the water he swallowed. He doesn't understand the purpose of this test—and the cops certainly don't explain—but he assumes there must be *some* reason behind it.

The guards point toward a building in the distance. "The last test is in that building, and then you'll go directly to medical processing."

By the time Gasper walks the mile to the building, he has forced the water out of his stomach and lungs. When he enters the building, a pair of technicians strap him into a large cylinder and spin it rapidly for ten minutes. When it stops and the technicians unstrap him, Gasper is so dizzy that he collapses.

"Come on," a technician says, "get up."

Gasper tries, but is unable to keep his legs beneath his body. The technician reaches down and gives him a guiding hand.

"Mary!" her co-worker says, "you know we're not supposed to help them."

"This is a stupid test anyway," she says. "Even on Omega they'll never be stuck in a soup can and spun like a top. And this guy's just too cute to send to the work camp."

"Thanks," Gasper mumbles as he finally regains his feet.

"Well, I guess he would have gotten up on his own, anyway," Mary's co-worker admits. "Go into the room labeled Medical Processing," she says. "They'll prepare you for the journey."

"Then I've passed the tests?" Gasper asks.

"Thanks to your sweetheart," the technician says.

"Thanks," Gasper mumbles to Mary.

"Think nothing of it," Mary says. "Just plant an acre of flowers on the new world for me."

"I will," Gasper says. He turns and enters the room marked Medical Processing. A nurse immediately instructs



© 1986

him to remove his shirt. Gasper does so, and she uses an air-hypo on his right arm. Gasper winces. "Inoculations," she says, as if excusing the injury. She points to the first of a long line of hydro-gurneys. "Take off your pants and lie down," she orders.

Gasper does as instructed. A different nurse uses another air-hypo on his left arm. His thinking grows difficult and fuzzy almost immediately. "What's happening?" he screams.

The nurse leans over him. Her teeth are bared in a grotesque smile and her face seems elongated and unnatural. "C-o-l-d-s-l-e-e-e-e-e-p," she says. Gasper closes his eyes and feels as if he is falling from a very great height.

Turn to section 79.

— 78 —

"I'm sorry," Gasper says. "This is a test. I don't think I should help you."

"Did anybody tell you not to help me?" the man says desperately. "They only said I had to make it, they didn't say I had to do it on my own."

"I'm sorry," Gasper says. He walks quickly away, reaching the far side of the field with eight minutes to spare. There is no cop here to greet him. He sits down to wait.

A few minutes later, the man with the injured ankle walks up to Gasper. "I tried to give you a chance to come back for me," he says. "But I guess you were determined not to help."

"You mean you're part of the test?" Gasper exclaims.

"Yes," the man nods. "I admire your honesty," he says, "but unfortunately, cooperation is going to be more important on Omega than passing tests. Follow me."

The man leads Gasper to a nearby bus.

Turn to section 76.

— 79 —

In his dream, the ground gives way like a feather bed when Gasper strikes it. He has fallen over a hundred miles, expecting to die when he hits the ground. Instead, the earth swallows him, burying him in deep folds of warmth.

The folds begin to squeeze and Gasper chokes. Suddenly, the sun shines hot and bright directly into his eyes.

"This one's coming around," a gruff voice says.

Gasper coughs violently and feels something shoot from his mouth. His lungs burn with the raw sensation of breathing normally again. He blinks several times, then stares up into a penlight.

"How do you feel?" someone asks.

"Terrible," Gasper says. "What happened?"

"You're on Omega," the man answers.

"Omega?" Gasper asks.

"The planet you came to colonize," the man says matter-of-factly.

Gasper's memory returns in a flood. "But that was supposed to take five years!" he exclaims.

"It's been five years and four months," the man says as he unstraps Gasper. "Be careful when you get up—you'll be a little weak at first."

Gasper sits up. He sees that he is in a room perhaps an acre in size. Hundreds—maybe thousands—of gurneys fill the room. He focuses on the nearest gurney. Although the occupant's color has returned to normal, he remains motionless, his eyes vacantly staring at the ceiling.

"What happened to him?" Gasper asks.

The man—Gasper thinks of him as Doc—pulls the motionless man's sheet back. Four puncture wounds run in a row down the left side of his chest. "Rebels," Doc says. "They had a terrible battle in here. Spraying assault rifles everywhere. Almost got you too," Doc adds, pointing at a line of bullet holes in Gasper's gurney.

Gasper stands up, feels dizzy, and collapses. He tries to stand again, but his legs feel like spaghetti. Doc helps him back onto the gurney.

"Didn't you have the centrifuge test?" he asks.

"Yes," Gasper answers. "I failed, but they covered for me."

Doc reaches into his black bag and withdraws a syringe. "Well, you're here now, and we've got work to do. I'll give you a shot—it'll help you keep your feet for the next few hours. Get a good night's sleep, and you'll be okay in the morning."

"Thanks," Gasper says.

"It's a good thing we didn't crash-land worse than we did," Doc says. "If I wasn't around to give you a shot, you'd be no better than a jellyfish trying to walk upright. That's why they have the centrifuge test."

"We crash-landed?" Gasper asks, alarmed.

"Yep. Rebels screwed up the braking system. This planet's got two main land masses: North Continent and East Continent. We're somewhere on the east side of East. Heck of a fix."

Gasper tries to stand and finds that his legs will support him. "What should I do?" he asks Doc.

Doc nods toward the hatch leading outside. "Go out there and see what needs doing."

Gasper leaves the ship and joins thousands of others standing outside on Omega in flimsy coveralls. The ship rests on a vast plain of tundra, cut here and there by steep-sided, deep ravines. Several miles distant, a single copse of trees rises from the barren landscape. The temperature is just below freezing, he estimates.

"Why don't we go get some cold-weather clothes?" he asks the group.

A burly man nods toward a member of the ship's security team. "They won't let us at the ship's stores," he says. "It seems a contingent from the planet was supposed to meet us at our landing site with supplies . . ."

"But we didn't land at the right place," adds another man. His voice carries a bitter edge.

"We'll freeze out here!" Gasper says.

"That isn't the captain's problem," replies the bitter man. "He got us here; that's all he had to do."

A woman interrupts from the back of the crowd. "I say we take what we need!" She pushes her way through the crowd. She has waist-length black hair and wears an eye patch over her right eye.

"Tita!" Gasper whispers. If she recognizes him, she gives no sign.

Section 80

"Don't be a fool," the burly man interrupts. "They'd gun us down like rats. What can we fight with? I say we talk to the captain and get enough provisions to send out a search party."

If Gasper tells the others that Tita is a rebel, thus exposing the fact that she is at least partially responsible for their predicament, turn to section 80.

Or does what Tita says make sense, whether or not she's a rebel? Turn to section 81.

— 80 —

"This woman is one of the reasons we crashed," Gasper says. "Back on Terra, I saw some of His Lordship's men try to capture her as a rebel."

"So that *was* you!" Tita hisses, her eyes narrowed into furious slits.

"She was probably one of the rebels who attempted to take over the ship and got us marooned here," Gasper continues.

"Let's turn her over to Captain Weingar in return for adequate supplies," the bitter man cackles.

"I think not," the burly man says. "Terra is a long way from here. Let's leave Terran business on Terra."

"I can agree with that," Gasper says, "but let's remember that Tita may be more interested in destroying His Lordship's property than in saving our lives."

A murmur of consent runs through the crowd. "What would you recommend?" asks the burly man.

"I say we send out a scouting party," Gasper says. "Wherever we are, we're going to be left to our own resources until we find the main colony. We might find colony outposts over the next ridge, or we might be ten thousand miles from the nearest human being. Either way, we need to define our situation."

A chorus of agreement goes up around the crowd, and Gasper finds himself spontaneously designated leader of the scouting party. He leads a small contingent of people to speak with Captain Weingar. Weingar is so relieved that the colo-

nists have stopped proposing raiding his ship's stores that he immediately agrees to outfit a group of ten scouts with survival gear. He also says that he will provide two air-cars without heavy weaponry. Gasper readily agrees.

Weingar also says he will provide the colonists with the meager supplies sent for their use and volunteers most of his men to help with shelter construction.

Remembering Doc's advice, Gasper waits until the next morning to leave. He chooses the burly man, whose name turns out to be Greg Fremont, as his second in command. Greg suggests that they take Tita on the scouting expedition to keep her from causing trouble at the camp while they are gone. Gasper agrees.

Outfitted in navy-issue survival fatigues and carrying enough food to last a week, Gasper and his two carloads of men start out toward the northwest. They have only been gone for eight hours when they see another air-car approach. Gasper reports the contact to the ship on his communicator, then orders his two air-cars to stop. He steps out to greet the newcomer.

The other air-car approaches to within twenty yards and stops. Although Gasper is no expert on such equipment, he judges it to be more than a hundred years old. A wizened little fellow of indiscernible ethnic origin with a face resembling burnished leather, climbs awkwardly from the car and scuttles forward. He wears a faded uniform of dark green.

"Arrow me to introduce myserf," he says. "I am Kerner-Genaru von Shimo, accredited representative of the Council of One of New Ohio and awr New Terra. On behalf of our great nation, I greet you."

"Thank goodness you found us," Gasper says. "We've got five thousand colonists marooned eight hours to the southeast of here. We need clothing, food, shelter and, if possible, transport to a city."

Von Shimo regards him somewhat disdainfully. "So sorry to hear of indisposition," he says slowly. "Of course, my government wirr be most preased to provide assistance. We have right and heavy manufacturing to a varue of a hundred thousand struggs a week, a furry managed agricurture program rimiting surpruses to ten-year suppy, practicarry infinite minerar resources due to recovery programs in excess of demand, and wirr be most happy to aid coronists so that they may reave New Terra."

"I'm sorry," Gasper says patiently. "Perhaps you don't

Section 81

understand. We're the colonists your government requested."

"My government did not request any coronists!" von Shimo exclaims. "Perhaps you had better accompany me to council chamber to resolve this matter."

Greg walks up to Gasper and whispers, "I don't trust this character. Let's just get rid of him."

Gaspar is now in command of a group of colonists. Use the following statistics for the colonists:

Manpower: 10

Ordnance: 4

Stealth: 7

Morale: 8

Melee: 3

If Gaspar and his group accompany von Shimo to the council chamber, turn to section 82.

If Gaspar simply asks directions to the nearest town and leaves von Shimo, turn to section 84.

— 81 —

"She's right," Gasper says. "The captain is just going to abandon us here, space-only-knows how far from civilization. We'll all be dead within a year."

A few murmurs of agreement sound from the crowd.

"But we can't defeat the ship's crew in a one-on-one confrontation," he continues. "And it would be suicide to attempt it. We've got to come up with a plan."

"How about sending a contingent into the ship to talk with the captain?" says the bitter man. "Once they're inside, they can open few hatches and we'll rush it en masse."

"The crew is armed only with pistols," Tita says. "I know where we can find some assault rifles. I think we should sneak into the ship and get the assault rifles, then attack!"

If they rush the ship en masse, turn to section 83.

If they try to sneak aboard and find Tita's assault rifles, turn to section 85.

— 82 —

“Lead the way to the council chamber,” Gasper says to von Shimo.

Von Shimo bows and says, “Prease to forrow at safe distance.” The old man climbs into his air-car and drives off toward the north. Two hours later, von Shimo suddenly turns his car ninety degrees to the left and drives for twenty minutes. Soon, it becomes apparent that he is steering toward a tiny, run-down building. When they are within twenty yards of the building, von Shimo slams on his brakes and climbs from his car.

“Prease to wait while I check in at fierd office,” von Shimo says. He disappears inside the building. Twenty minutes later, he re-emerges. “Headquarters demands more details of your esteemed personages,” he demands.

“I told you,” Gasper says, “we’re colonists from Terra. We crash-landed on the wrong continent.”

“Do not expect me to berieve such nonsense,” von Shimo says indignantly. “I did not berieve Captain Tey or Fierd Marsharr Grarr when they uttered such nonsense, and I wirr not berieve you.”

“Did you say Tey and Grall?” Greg demands quickly.

“Yes,” von Shimo replies slowly. “They were two schmucks who try to foor Kerner-Genaru von Shimo in same manner and rive to regret mistake.”

Greg jumps from the air-car. “What did you do with them?” he demands, grabbing von Shimo by the collar.

Gasper quickly pries his grip loose. “Who are Tey and Grall?” he asks.

“They were rebels. They hijacked the *Princeton* and forced Banshire to open up Omega to colonization. I’d like to find them.”

Section 83

Greg asks von Shimo, "Can you take us to Tey and Grall?"

Von Shimo studies the man for a moment, then says, "Yes. I take you to them. Prease to forrow at safe distance."

As Gasper climbs back into his air-car, he whispers, "What happened to the council chamber? Maybe this fellow's leading us on a wild goose chase—this doesn't look like any type of field office to me."

If Gasper continues to follow von Shimo, turn to section 86.

If Gasper asks von Shimo to point out the nearest town and abandons him, turn to section 84.

— 83 —

"Let's rush the ship en masse," Gasper says. "A few of us may get killed, but the rest will have a much greater chance of survival."

"I'm with you," says the burly man.

"We'd have a much better chance if we went for the assault rifles," Tita argues, "but I'll help you. I know the ship better than anybody else."

"Okay," Gasper says, "but stay out of combat. You're the only one who knows the ship."

"If you insist," Tita agrees.

Eight others volunteer, and Gasper leads them to the ship. At the hatch, he politely requests an audience with the captain and it is granted. Two security guards lead them into the ship and onto an elevator.

In the elevator, Tita grabs Gasper's hand and squeezes it tightly, then whispers in his ear, "Now!"

"Okay, boys!" Gasper says, attacking the closest security guard.

Gasper is now in command of a squad of mutineers. Use following statistics for them:

Manpower: 10

Ordnance: 0

Stealth: 7

Morale: 10

Melee: 3

Gasper's men take the two security guards by surprise, so the mutineers attack using Chart B.

The security guards have a Manpower value of 2 and Melee and Ordnance values of 5. They attack using Chart C.

If Gasper's mutineers prevail, turn to section 87.

If Gasper's mutineers perish, turn to section 89.

— 84 —

"This guy's crazy," Gasper mutters. He addresses von Shimo. "Excuse me, Colonel-General," he says. "My friends and I no longer wish to follow you. Could you please direct us toward the nearest population center?"

Von Shimo seems very indignant. "You have no choice," he puffs. "You do not wish to engage the entire armed force of New Ohio, do you?"

Gasper pretends to search the vicinity for signs of an armed force. "No, certainly not," he says. "But the only force I see is mine," he bluffs. He motions to his companions to step out of their air-cars, and they do so in a delightfully threatening manner.

"I see your point," von Shimo concedes.

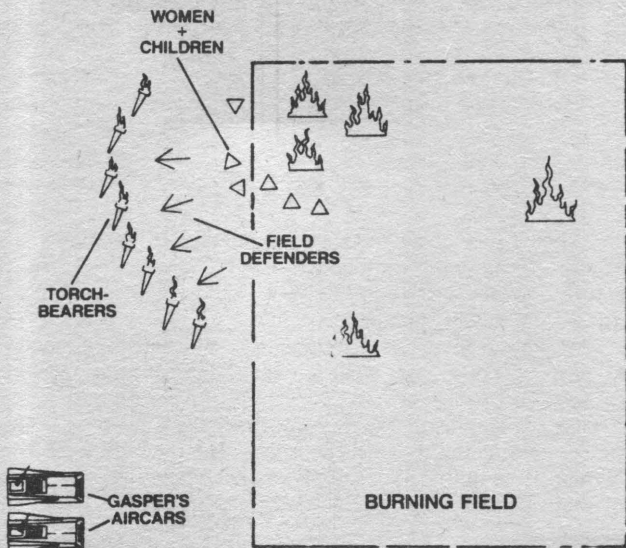
"Now," Gasper continues, "which way to the nearest population center?"

Von Shimo studies the horizon as if looking for landmarks. His eyes come to rest on a column of smoke, then he quickly turns and points in the opposite direction. "That way to very big city named after my own humble ancestors, Shimo-city."

Gasper looks in the direction von Shimo points. He sees nothing to indicate that there is any type of dwelling in that direction. He points toward the column of smoke and says, "Let's go that way, folks."

"Oh, no!" von Shimo exclaims. "You must not! Enemies in that direction. Enemies awr around!"

BURNING FIELD MAP



Gasper smiles. "We'll have to take our chances," he says. He jumps in the car and they leave von Shimo standing in the dust.

Fifteen minutes later, Gasper's two air-cars pull to the top of a small rise. A hundred yards down the other side of the rise, a half-dozen women and children struggle to put out a fire in a crop field while a dozen men fight each other nearby. Eight of the battling men hold torches and wear loose-fitting white clothes. The other four appear to be attempting to prevent the eight torchbearers from reaching the field.

"It looks like somebody could use a little help," Gasper says.

"I'm not so sure it's smart to get mixed up in somebody else's fight on a strange world," Greg says.

If Gasper and his group help defend the burning field, turn to section 88.

If they wait until the battle ends, turn to section 90.

— 85 —

"I like Tita's thinking," Gasper says. "We're going to need some kind of advantage to even the odds with a group of trained soldiers. I say let's sneak aboard and get those assault rifles."

"I'm with you," says the burly man. "My name's Greg, by the way."

"And of course I'll have to go," says Tita. "I'm the only one who knows where the guns are."

"Okay," Gasper responds. "But stay out of combat. You're the only one who knows the ship."

"If you insist," Tita agrees.

Gasper, Tita, and Greg spend the rest of the day selecting eight other volunteers. When darkness falls, the group works its way toward the perimeter of the light spilling from the ship's open hatch. Two guards stand at the entrance.

Section 86

Gasper is now in charge of a group of mutineers. Use the following statistics for these mutineers:

Manpower: 10

Ordnance: 0

Stealth: 8

Morale: 8

Melee: 3

Make a Stealth check for Gasper's mutineers. Roll two six-sided dice. If the total rolled is the same or lower than the mutineers' Morale value, Gasper's mutineers surprise the guards and Melee using Chart B. If the result of the roll is higher than their Morale value, somebody trips and falls on his face, alerting the guards. Gasper's group then attacks using Chart D, but the guards fire once before they close.

The guards have a Manpower value of 2 and Melee and Ordnance values of 5. They attack using Chart C.

If Gasper and his mutineers prevail, go to section 91.

If Gasper and his mutineers perish, go to section 89.

— 86 —

“Lead the way,” Gasper says.

Von Shimo laboriously crawls back into his ancient air-car. “Prease to forrow at safe distance.” Von Shimo speeds off toward the northwest. An hour later, dusk falls and he stops. He unrolls a blanket beside his car and lies down to sleep, completely ignoring Gasper and the others.

Gasper climbs out of his car and approaches von Shimo. “What are we doing?” he asks.

Von Shimo's eyes open wide in surprise. He stares at Gasper in puzzlement for a moment, then an expression of recognition crosses his face. “Excuse bad manners, prease. Quite forgot that I am not arone as usuar. We must sreep; it is dark now.” Von Shimo lays his head back down and closes his eyes.

Greg joins Gasper. "What about Tey and Grall?" he demands.

Von Shimo opens one eye. "Who?" he asks.

"You remember," Greg urges. "Taliaferro Tey and Nat Grall. They came here about twelve years ago. You were taking us to find them," he says.

"Ah, yes," von Shimo says. "Wirr find tomorrow, when it is right." He closes his eyes again. "Prease to excuse, must sreep now."

Gasper and Greg walk back to the others. "We might as well make camp, too," Gasper says.

"Maybe tomorrow we should think about dumping this goofball," says one of the men.

"No!" insists Greg. "He knew Tey and Grall."

"What's so important about those two?" Gasper asks. "We need to find help; we don't need to be particular about who it comes from."

"Trust me," Greg says. "Those are the only two men on this planet who can help us."

If Gasper abandons von Shimo and strikes out on his own, turn to section 84.

If Gasper continues to follow von Shimo, turn to section 92.

— 87 —

Attacking with their bare hands, Gasper's mutineers pummel the surprised security guards into unconsciousness. Gasper takes their pistols and gives one to Tita. "Protect yourself," he says.

Tita nods in affirmation. "There'll be two more guards when the lift opens," she says. "We've got to take them out quickly and quietly—don't fire your pistol."

A moment later, the door opens and, true to Tita's word, two security guards stand outside the door. Gasper and Tita lead the attack.

Gasper and his mutineers attack using Chart B.



The guards have a Manpower value of 2 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper and his mutineers perish, turn to section 89.

If Gasper and his mutineers defeat the two guards in the first round of combat, turn to section 93.

If the two guards survive the first round of combat, turn to section 95.

— 88 —

“Let’s help out the people trying to save their field,” Gasper says. “We could use some friends.”

The two air-cars dart down the hill and stop at the edge of the fight, behind the torch-carrying men. Gasper’s men jump out of their cars and charge into combat.

Gasper and his men attack using Chart B. (See section 81 for values.)

The torchbearers have a Manpower value of 8 and a melee value of 5. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper and his group prevail, turn to section 94.

If Gasper and his group perish, turn to section 89.

— 89 —

Something strikes the back of Gasper’s head, and he feels bone crunch. Surprised, he screams, “What happened?” then grows dizzy. His legs buckle. His eyes close of their own accord, and he feels himself falling forward. By the time his face strikes the ground, Gasper no longer feels any pain.

Turn to section 29.

— 90 —

"You're right, Greg," Gasper says. "We'd better not get mixed up in something we don't understand. We'll wait here until it's over, then see if the winners can help us."

With the defenders outnumbered two to one, the battle ends quickly. Half the torchbearers outflank the defenders, set fire to the field in a few more places, then turn and attack the defenders from a second side. Seeing that their cause is hopeless, the defenders flee.

Gasper's two air-cars slowly move down the hill. Without leaving the car, Gasper addresses the torchbearers: "You fight well."

The torchbearers study Gasper suspiciously. The tallest steps forward, his expression resembling the bland, round face of an ancient Buddha. "What's it to you, Wheeler?"

"Nothing," Gasper says politely. "I'm one of the colonists from Terra. We're marooned about a day's journey to the southeast. I was hoping you could help us."

"Why would a Walker help a Wheeler?" the man demands.

"Perhaps you don't understand," Gasper says. "Our starship crashed about a day's journey to the southeast, and there are five thousand colonists freezing to death."

"Don't believe in the Mysteries," the man comments blandly.

"Well," Gasper asks desperately, "do you know where we could find help?"

"No," the man says firmly.

"Why did you burn the field?" Gasper inquires.

"Because they were Diggers," the man answers matter-of-factly. "Are you going to fight, or what?"

"Why would we fight you?" Gasper asks.

"Because you're Wheelers and we're Walkers," the man answers.

"I'd prefer not to," Gasper says. "Just tell me where we can find help."

"Can't find no help," the man responds. He motions to his men to attack.

If Gasper orders a retreat, turn to section 96.

If Gasper drives his air-car through the group, then attacks, turn to section 100.

— 91 —

Gasper and his mutineers make short work of the two guards, quickly pummeling them into unconsciousness. Gasper takes their pistols and gives one to Tita, saying, "Protect yourself."

Tita nods her head in affirmation, then says, "But we'd better not use these things unless we have to. The noise would set off a ship-wide security alert."

Tita leads the way into the ship and down a wide corridor to the right. She steps in front of a cargo lift, which is only used to move supplies to and from the planet surface. "This goes directly into Cargo Hold 1. I don't know what we'll see when the door opens, so be prepared for anything."

Tita leads the way into the lift, then closes the door behind the mutineers and presses the "Up" button. A moment later, the lift doors open into a room with an area of more than an acre. Two guards stand outside the lift. They lazily turn toward the lift as the door opens.

Gasper and his men attack using Chart B.

The guards have a Manpower value of 2 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper and the mutineers perish, turn to section 89.

If Gasper and the mutineers defeat the guards during the first round of combat, turn to section 97.

If the guards survive the first round of combat, turn to section 101.

— 92 —

"We'll give the old fellow one more chance," Gasper decides in the morning.

Von Shimo rises and throws his blanket into the back of his air-car. "Prease to forrow at a safe distance," he says.

"Where are we going?" Gasper asks.

"To councir chamber," von Shimo answers.

"What about Tey and Grall?" Tita demands.

"We see them, too," von Shimo assures her. "Now, prease to move butt. Dayright burning."

Von Shimo climbs into his air-car and drives off toward the northern horizon. Gasper and his crew scramble to follow. Three hours later, they sight the ruins of a town on the western horizon. Von Shimo suddenly turns toward the ruins.

As they approach, Gasper notes that, although the town is a wreck, the buildings appear to have been knocked down within the last twenty years. They certainly did not fall due to any natural erosive cycle.

Von Shimo stops his car and crawls out of it. He waves his hand politely toward the ruins. "Prease to go to councir chamber in center of great city. Mr. Tey and Mr. Grarr await you there."

"Perhaps you'd care to show us the way," Gasper says cautiously.

Von Shimo bows. "So sorry, but must continue with duties. Am awready behind schedule."

If they go into the town, turn to section 98.

If Gasper interrogates von Shimo, turn to section 99.

— 93 —

Gaspar and his mutineers knock the guards out with a few quick punches. Gaspar gives their pistols to two mutineers, and they stuff the guards into the lift, then jam the door shut.

"With a little luck," Tita says, "nobody will find them for a while. In the meantime, the security office is just ahead. We can stop there and finish arming ourselves, then go to the engineering deck and open the hatches."

"Why not go straight to engineering control?" Greg asks. "We're just wasting valuable time by going for more guns."

If they go to the security office and arm themselves, turn to section 102.

If they go straight to the engineering deck, turn to section 105.

— 94 —

Gaspar and his team jump into the melee from behind the torchbearers. The torchbearers turn out to be exceptionally well trained fighters. They defend themselves with a mixture of karate and street fighting that is potentially deadly. Luckily for Gaspar, however, several of the torchbearers fall before they can put their skills to good use, and he prevails.

"What was that all about?" Gaspar asks one of the field defenders.

A stocky man with a square jaw steps out of the group. "They were Walkers, if it's anything to you."

"Why were they burning your crops?" Gaspar asks.

"Because they were Walkers," the man responds testily.

"You'd best be moving on, Wheeler."

Shrugging off the cryptic explanation, Gaspar decides to change the subject. "We need help," Gaspar says.

"So?" the man says.

"We're colonists from Terra. Our starship crashed about a day's journey southeast of here."

Section 95

"Don't know nothing about the Mysteries," the man comments. "Don't want to, neither."

"There are five thousand colonists freezing to death," Gasper pleads.

"Fine," the man says. He turns to leave.

If Gasper tries to capture the man and interrogates him, turn to section 103.

If Gasper searches the area, hoping to find someone a little more helpful, turn to section 106.

— 95 —

Gasper and the mutineers strike hard and fast, but the guards manage to survive the first onslaught of fists. While one guard battles the mutineers, the other slaps a red button. A siren immediately echoes throughout the ship.

Gasper redoubles his efforts, yelling and screaming like a madman while he attacks. The other colonists, inspired by his ferociousness, also increase the intensity of their attacks. The guards quickly fall.

"We're in trouble now!" Tita says. "We'd better run straight for the bridge and try to take it before they get organized."

"With our bare hands?" Greg asks. "Let's find some weapons first!"

If they search for weapons, turn to section 104.

If they run straight to the bridge, turn to section 107.

— 96 —

Gasper turns the air-car toward the north and shouts, "Let's get out of here! These people are nothing but trouble!"

The air-cars soon outdistance the Walkers. Conversation in his car turns to the hostile behavior they encountered.

"You know," Gasper says, "this society isn't as advanced as I had imagined it would be."

"The most advanced people seem to be at an early agricultural stage," Greg says. "And they seem more concerned with fighting than with advancing their civilization."

"You're right," Gasper says. "It almost seems like their whole civilization is centered around combat. As if fighting is the accepted mode of behavior."

"Unusual for a group of people descended from a society as highly organized as ours," Greg comments.

Gasper notices a plume of dust on the horizon. It seems to be created by a high-speed vehicle. "I wonder who that could be?" he asks. "More important, I wonder whether they're friendly or not?"

"I say we don't trust them," Greg says. "I saw a copse of trees about a mile back. Let's hide and let them pass."

"And do what?" Gasper says. "We've got to find help. Everybody on this planet can't be as crazy and backward as the people we've met so far. And if they've built a vehicle capable of moving that fast, they're part of an organized society—maybe they'll help."

If Gasper orders his men to hide, turn to section 108.

If Gasper attempts to contact whoever is creating the dust plume, turn to section 111.

— 97 —

Gaspar and his mutineers pummel the guards into unconsciousness before the unfortunate fellows know what hit them. The guards have barely hit the floor before Tita trots to the middle of the room.

"The weapons are under here," she calls, reaching down and opening a hatch. She climbs down through the opening. Gaspar and the others follow.

Inside the room, hundreds of crates are stacked. Tita reaches into an open crate and withdraws an assault rifle, then reaches into a nearby crate and produces a clip of ammunition for it.

"What's all this for?" asks Gaspar.

"Supplies for His Lordship's slavemasters," Tita says. "The *Saretta* didn't have room for colonist supplies because it was carrying a secret cargo of weapons for Banshire's Omegan goons."

Gaspar shakes his head. "I don't understand; there's enough equipment here to start a war."

"Or to enslave the population of a world," Tita replies. "Banshire and his ancestors have known about Omega for more than a century. They've been bleeding it dry to solidify their position on Terra. But a few rebels found out about the planet and threatened to blow the whistle unless Banshire opened it to colonization. Banshire agreed, of course, but he is not a fellow to give up easily. He secretly loaded the *Saretta* with arms for his goons here on Omega. He hopes to take over the government of Omega and retain his headlock on the planet. Luckily, rebels back on Terra discovered his plan and sent me to foil it."

Gaspar grabs an assault rifle. "How do I use this thing?" he asks, his voice heavy with determination and anger.

Tita gives everybody a short course in firing an assault rifle, then asks, "Are we ready?"

The colonists nod grimly, and she leads the way to a man-lift. As they enter the lift, she begins issuing instructions. "We'll probably meet a couple of guards at the top of the lift. We've got to take them out quietly before they sound

the alarm, or the captain will seal himself inside the bridge and we'll be stuck."

A moment later, the lift opens. Two guards turn lazily toward the doors to inspect the occupants.

Gasper's mutineers now have an Ordnance value of 7 when they fire the weapons, and their Melee value is raised to 4. They attack using Chart B. They can Melee or fire.

The guards have a Manpower value of 2, an Ordnance value of 5, and a Melee value of 5. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper and the mutineers perish, turn to section 89.

If Gasper and the mutineers Melee and knock the guards unconscious during the first round, turn to section 109.

If the guards survive the first round of combat, or if Gasper's men use their Ordnance value to win the battle, turn to section 113.

— 98 —

"Let's go ahead," Gasper says. "This is the closest thing to civilization we've seen."

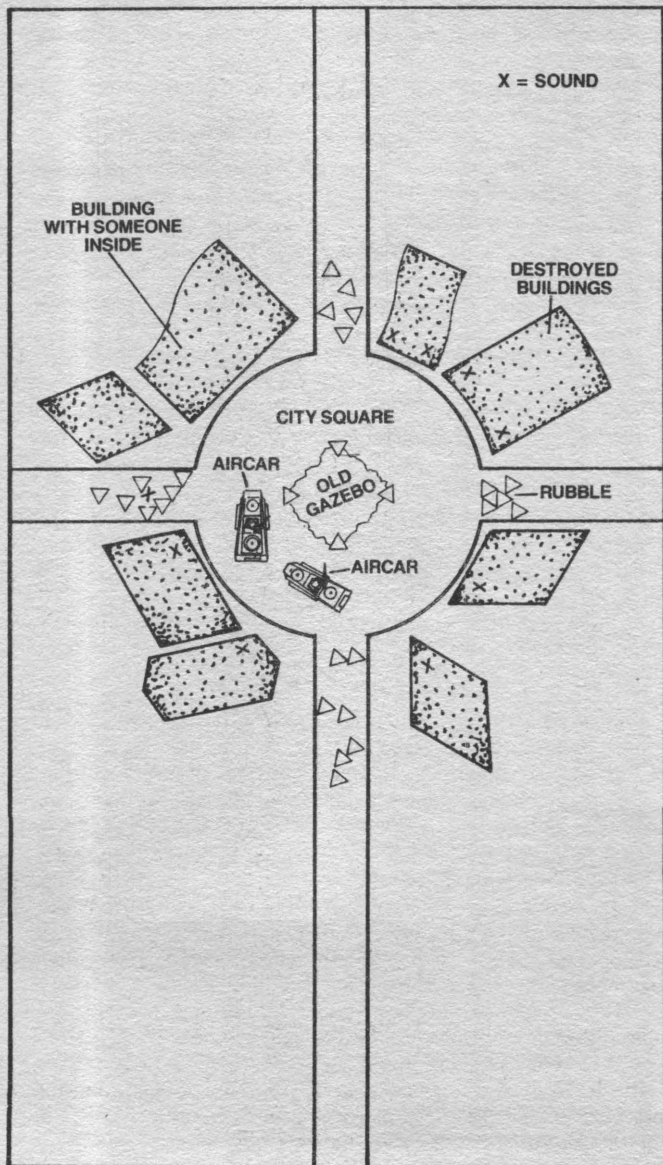
They start down the main street. The deserted buildings rise on all sides like tombstones bearing the epitaphs of a strange and violent nation. As he suspected, the town has been heavily bombed. Gasper feels as though some presence is watching them, despite the fact that not a living thing stirs in the rubble.

About a half-mile into the town, he hears metallic clicks from all around them. Someone darts across a ground floor window to his left. Von Shimo has sent them into a death trap!

If Gasper tells everyone to spread out to defend themselves, turn to section 110.

If he leads a charge into the building where he saw someone move, turn to section 112.

VON SHIMO'S CITY



— 99 —

Gaspar's patience runs out. He grabs von Shimo by the collar and yells, "I've had enough of your bull, you rat-faced liar. Now tell me what's happening on this planet or I'll have my men beat you into a pulp of boneless protein."

"Prease to remove hands from honorabu personage," von Shimo requests.

Gaspar twists von Shimo's collars until the old man begins to choke. "No," he says. "Tell me where this Tey guy is."

Von Shimo raises a spindly hand and points toward the northwest. "On North Continent; prease to join him and other cursed Unificationists. Reave us natives in peace to pursue rife, riberty, and happiness in own manner."

"Where can we find help?" Gaspar asks. "I've got five thousand colonists marooned down here."

"No help on East," von Shimo says. "Enemies awr around. That is nature of East."

Gaspar nods toward the town. "What's in there?" he asks.

"Enemies, naturarry," von Shimo says.

"How far is North?" Gaspar asks.

"Very far," von Shimo says. "Wish it were croser so you could go there quicker."

"How far, exactly?" Gaspar hisses, twisting von Shimo's collar again.

"Six days by air-car," he says. "You presentry on south-east part of East."

"That would be about three thousand miles?" Gaspar asks.

Von Shimo shrugs.

"Too far for five thousand people to walk," Gaspar says resignedly, and pushes von Shimo away. "Don't come around again," he says. "Or there won't be enough left of you to cannibalize."

"Enemies," von Shimo comments. "Enemies awr around." The old man scrambled into his air-car and drives off.

"It sounds like there might be aid on North," Gaspar says. "But it's a long way away, and our chances of becoming lost are terrific. On the other hand, it sounds like we won't find anything on this continent but trouble."

Sections 100, 101

If Gasper travels northwest, hoping to find North Continent, turn to section 114.

If he returns to the ship and reports what he has found, turn to section 117.

— 100 —

We'd better take some prisoners and interrogate them," Gasper says. He turns his air-car toward the advancing men and guns it. The driver of the second air-car follows his lead.

Treat the cars as follows: Manpower 2, Ordnance 8. They attack using Chart A.

After the first round of combat, Gasper's men leave the air-cars and must attack using their normal statistics. They attack using Chart C.

The Walkers have a Manpower value of 8 and a Melee value of 5. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper's group perishes, turn to section 89.

If Gasper's group prevails, turn to section 115.

— 101 —

Gasper and the mutineers strike hard and fast, but the guards manage to survive the first onslaught of fists. While one guard battles the mutineers, the other slaps a red button on the side of the lift. A siren immediately echoes throughout the ship.

Gasper redoubles his efforts, yelling and screaming like a madman while he attacks. The other colonists, inspired by his ferociousness, also increase the intensity of their attacks. The

guards quickly fall, and Tita leads the way to the middle of the hold, where she opens a hatch hidden in the floor. Inside the room below, thousands of weapons are stored in hundreds of crates.

"What is all this for?" Gasper asks.

"No time for questions, we're in trouble!" Tita says. "We'd better run as many weapons as we can out to the other colonists."

"Are you kidding?" says Greg. "They'll seal this ship off tighter than a can of sardines. We'd better run for the bridge and hope we can take it before they get organized."

If they run for the bridge, turn to section 107.

If they try to take weapons to the colonists outside, turn to section 116.

— 102 —

"We need weapons," Gasper says. "It's too risky to continue attacking armed men with our bare hands. Lead us to the security office, Tita."

Tita leads the mutineers to the security office. She stops just outside and signals everybody to get ready. A moment later, they rush through the door.

Inside, two bored security guards sit at a table playing cards.

Gasper's mutineers attack using Chart B.

The security guards have a Manpower value of 2 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper and the mutineers perish, turn to section 89.

If the security guards fall in one round, turn to section 118.

If the security guards survive the first round of combat, turn to section 120.

— 103 —

“Let’s capture this fellow!” Gasper yells, leaping to attack. Gasper’s team quickly follows.

The field defenders react as if they expected this eventuality.

Gasper’s group attacks using Chart C.

The field defenders have a Manpower value of 4 and a Melee value of 4. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper and his group perish, turn to section 89.

If Gasper and his group prevail, turn to section 119.

— 104 —

“Let’s find some weapons!” Gasper says.

“Okay,” Tita says. “Follow me to the security office.”

Tita leads the group down the corridor and around two corners, then stops beside a doorway. “Go in hard and fast,” she says.

Gasper leads the way into the office and meets two security guards just attempting to leave, their pistols in their hands.

Gasper and his group attack using Chart C.

The guards have a Manpower value of 2 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart C.

If Gasper and his men perish in battle, turn to section 89.

If Gasper and his men survive, they arm themselves with weapons from the security office, and consider their options. Turn to section 121.

— 105 —

"Let's go to the engineering deck," Gasper orders. "Our primary objective is get those doors open and the colonists inside. With five thousand people swarming the ship, they'll have no choice but to do what we want!"

"So let's stop talking about it!" says a colonist.

Tita leads the way to engineering control. Outside the door, she stops and says, "I have no idea what we'll find inside."

Gasper opens the door and rushes in, his pistol ready to fire. Inside, four astonished engineers sit at computer consoles.

"What's the meaning of this?" asks one of the engineers.

Gasper sticks his gun under the man's nose. "Open all the hatches on ground level."

"This is mutiny!" the man gasps.

"That's right," Gasper says. "And if I don't hear five thousand colonists screaming in joy within the next five seconds, you'll never know how the story ends."

The man gulps and types something into his computer. Almost instantaneously, Gasper hears a roar of triumph echo from outside the ship.

"What now?" Greg asks.

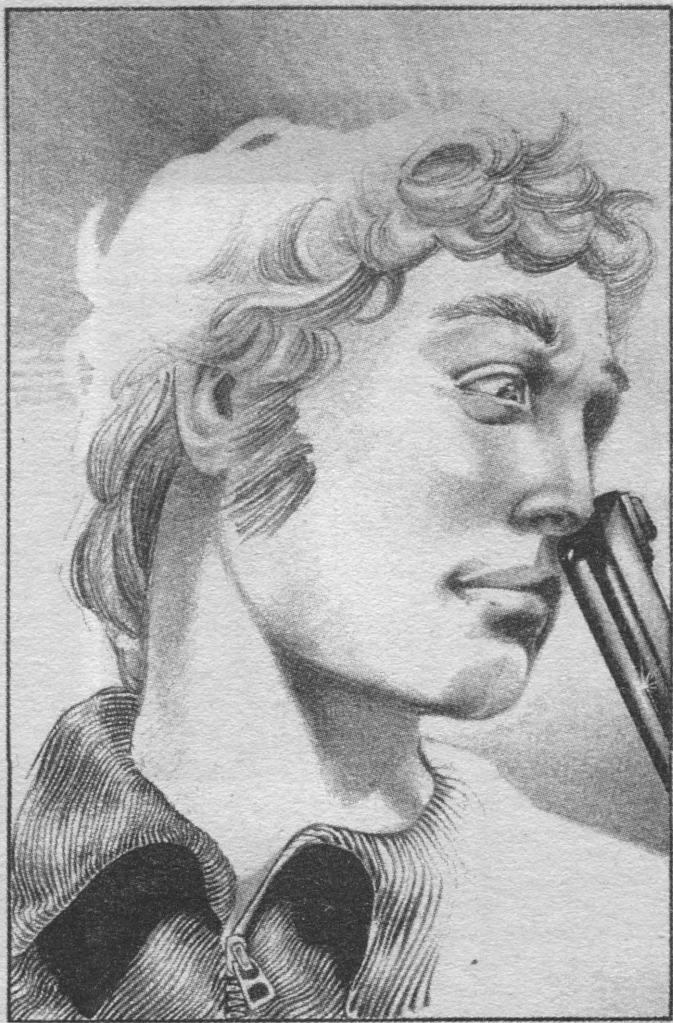
"Try for the bridge," Tita suggests.

"Right," Gasper says. He turns to one of the men who is armed with a pistol. "Cover these gentlemen and shoot them if they move." Gasper turns to go, then stops and addresses the engineer who had opened the hatch. "Lock this door behind us. If it opens before I come back, this fellow will shoot you."

Tita leads the way to the bridge.

Reduce Gasper's Manpower value by one point.

Turn to section 107.



— 106 —

“The heck with that fellow,” Gasper says. “If there’s a field here, there must be a village somewhere nearby. Let’s search the area.”

Gasper leads the way around the perimeter of the field but finds no sign of habitation of any sort. Next, he scours the horizon for a road, a tower, or anything.

“Where do they live?” he asks. Nobody has an answer.

A moment later, Gasper notices a plume of dust on the horizon. It seems to be created by a vehicle moving fairly quickly.

“Well, now,” Gasper says, “that seems to indicate some sort of advanced travel method—which means civilization of a higher form. But is it friendly? Nobody else has been. Maybe we’d better run back to that copse of trees and hide.”

If Gasper orders his group to hide, turn to section 108.

If they go to meet the plume of dust, turn to section 111.

— 107 —

Gasper enters the corridor labeled “Bridge Access.” At the far end, he sees half a dozen security guards armed with pistols standing ready to fight. Behind them, a heavy steel door is slowly closing. Gasper and his team might make it past the door before it closes, but only if they defeat the guards first.

If they fight the guards and try to force their way onto the bridge before the door closes, turn to section 122.

If they retreat around the corner and rethink their strategy, turn to section 121.

— 108 —

"Better duck into the trees," Gasper says. "Everything seems hostile on this planet."

Gasper drives his air-car to the copse of trees, parking it out of sight. To his dismay, the plume of dust seems to be coming right for them. Five minutes later, a heavily armed air-car pulls up in front of the copse. A tall, long-faced man wearing the uniform of a lieutenant in Lord Banshire's marines stands up in front of the air-car.

The air-car adjusts its machine guns, aiming them in the general direction of Gasper's hiding place.

"I say," the man yells. "Come out with your arms raised."

Gasper says nothing. The lieutenant repeats his demand.

"Maybe it's just that crazy old man again," the lieutenant's driver says.

The lieutenant shakes his head. "No, it couldn't be. He was traveling in the opposite direction. Couldn't make it here if he wanted to. They must be from the ship."

The lieutenant sits down in the air-car and fires a burst high into the copse. "The next will be lower," he warns.

If Gasper comes out of the trees and meets the lieutenant, turn to section 123.

If Gasper fights, turn to section 125.

— 109 —

As the lift opens, Gasper and his men rush out and attack the guards with the butts of their assault rifles. The men fall unconscious before they can fire a shot in defense.

"This way to the bridge," Tita says. She leads the way to a corridor labeled "Bridge Access." At the far end of the corridor, two guards stand at attention. As Gasper and his group enter the corridor, the guards' mouths drop open in surprise. They draw their weapons.

"Give up!" Gasper calls, leveling his assault rifle in their direction.

The guards run into the bridge. A moment later, a pair of steel doors slowly starts to close. Gasper runs down the corridor, calling "Follow me!" When he reaches the bridge, there is still a four-foot gap between the steel doors. He dives through and finds himself facing fifteen confused officers and two nervous security guards. The room is utterly quiet, and the captain stares at him as if he is making a very bad joke. The officers reach for their sidearms.

Gasper looks to his left. He sees no colonists. He looks to his right. No colonists there, either. His stomach begins to ache in despair.

"Yes?" the captain asks, staring down the barrel of Gasper's weapon as if it were nothing more than a toy. "Surrender the ship!" Gasper orders in desperation.

The captain cracks a patronizing smile. "Really," he comments.

Gasper raises his gun menacingly. The guards start to train their pistols on him but are distracted by a clamor at the doors behind him and they hesitate. The captain's smile sours into a sick grimace.

"Better wait for us next time," says Tita as Gasper hears the doors clang shut. "You almost got locked in here alone."

"Kill them!" the captain bellows, firing his pistol at Tita. The slug strikes her in the shoulder, knocking her to the floor. Gasper points his gun in the captain's direction and squeezes the trigger. The room breaks into a volley of thunder. The captain dives for cover, his face pale with terror and despair. Computer screens and equipment consoles erupt into dozens of tiny explosions as stray bullets strike unintended targets. Gasper hears bullets whiz past his head as the captain and his men return fire. Gasper sees his enemies scream in anger and fear, but the roar of the battle drowns their voices. He wonders where his own men are positioned, but is too frightened to look. He involuntarily opens his mouth and screams. He cannot hear even his own voice.

Gasper and his group attack using Chart B.

The captain's group has a Manpower value of 17 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart E.

If Gasper and the mutineers perish, turn to section 89.

If Gasper and the mutineers prevail, turn to section 124.

— 110 —

“Spread out!” Gasper yells. “It’s every man for himself!”

As Gasper’s team members leap from the air-cars, the staccato roar of automatic weapons fills the air. Gasper runs for cover, bullets whizzing past his head like angry hornets.

Gasper’s group attacks using Chart E.

The ambushers have a Manpower value of 10 and an Ordinance value of 7. They attack using Chart B.

If Gasper and his group perish, turn to section 89.

If Gasper and his group prevail, turn to section 130.

— 111 —

Gasper decides to meet the dust plume. He turns his air-car in its direction and travels at full throttle for three minutes. As he approaches, he sees that the dust plume is caused by a single military air-car. Two men wearing the uniforms of Lord Banshire’s marines ride in the front seats.

As the air-car slows, one rider trains the car’s machine guns on Gasper’s vehicle. The other stands and addresses Gasper. “Are you from the starship *Saretta*?”

Gasper studies the officer, then slowly says, “Yes. It crash-landed, and we’re stranded.”

“What are its coordinates?” the officer demands.

Gasper hesitates. This is not exactly the type of greeting he had expected.

“If you don’t give me the coordinates, I shall order the sergeant here to open fire,” the officer threatens.

If Gasper gives the coordinates to the officer, turn to section 131.

If Gasper fights the two men, turn to section 126.

— 112 —

Gasper crashes his air-car into the building in which he saw movement. An astonished boy of fourteen or fifteen drops his submachine gun and raises his hands. Tears roll down his cheeks, but he glares at Gasper defiantly.

Gasper jumps out of the air-car and grabs the submachine gun. "Where did you get this?" he asks. The boy refuses to answer.

"That's a Mark IX," Greg says. "It can't be more than ten years old."

"Which means it was sent here after Lord Banshire opened the planet to colonization," adds another man.

The hollow sound of boots running through rubble echoes into the room. Gasper knows that the boy's friends are surrounding the building. He presses the muzzle of the submachine gun against the boy's chest. "How much of this scrawny rat would be left if I pulled the trigger?" he asks. The boy drops his eyes and begins to sob. "Boy," Gasper continues, "I've had just about all I can stand of this planet. If you ever want to grow a beard, you'd better answer my questions. Understand?"

The boy nods his head.

"Where did you get this weapon?" Gasper asks.

The boy points toward the interior of the building. "In the armory."

"Take us there," Gasper says. "And if anything goes wrong, I'll cut you in two."

The boy nods and leads the way down a series of dark hallways. He stops in front of a pair of heavy wooden doors. "The armory is in there. There'll be two guards. They'll kill me if they find out I've brought strangers here. Please let me go."

Gasper shakes his head. "Call them out here."

The boy hesitates. Gasper presses the muzzle of his gun

into the boy's abdomen. He reluctantly calls, "Open the doors, Daniel! McLaw sent me to get you and Nevin. Each of you bring out a case of ammunition and follow me."

"Must be something big, huh?" calls a gruff voice from inside. As the doors start to open, Gasper and his men step out of sight.

"Yes," the boy answers. "Many strangers."

Two men step into the hallway, their submachine guns slung carelessly over their shoulders. Gasper steps into sight, his gun trained on the two men. They start to reach for their weapons.

"I wouldn't do that!" Gasper warns, raising his weapon.

The men raise their hands. "You little coward!" one of the men curses at the boy. "You betrayed us!"

"I'd say he's not the only coward," Gasper says. "You don't look any readier to die than he does."

The men drop their eyes to the floor.

"Now, why doesn't somebody tell me what's going on? Where did you get these weapons?"

"Why should a Squatter tell a Wheeler anything?" spits one of the men.

Gasper raises his weapon menacingly. "Because he wants to live. For starters, what happened to this town?"

The men look at each other as if confused. Finally, the shorter one answers, "The Guardians destroyed it."

"Why?" Gasper asks.

The men look perplexed.

"Okay," Gasper continues, "who are the Guardians?"

The men look even more perplexed. "They're the ones that gave us this stuff," says the tall man. "They told us to use it against our enemies."

"What enemies?" Gasper asks.

The men look at each other, their total confusion evident in their complete inability to reply. The boy answers, "All our enemies," he says. "There are enemies all around. Like you."

"It sounds like every part of this society is at war with every other part," says Greg. "We're not going to find any help here."

"And it sounds like the Guardians are keeping things stirred up," adds Gasper.

"Those weapons definitely look Terra-made," Greg says. "You don't suppose these Guardians are related to His Lordship Banshire, do you?"

"I'd bet an arm and a leg they are," Gasper says. "Let's get back to the ship and report to the others."

After tying and gagging the three Squatters, Gasper's group arms itself with submachine guns and plenty of ammunition. Then they work their way back to the room into which his air-car has crashed.

Gasper opens the door and leads the way inside. As the others follow, Gasper hears several metallic clicks.

"Ambush!" yells one of his men.

"Spread out," Gasper calls. "It's every man for himself!"

As the room erupts in automatic weapons fire, Gasper's men run for the doors and windows. Gasper jumps through a nearby window and flees toward the ruins of a building across the square.

Gasper's group now has an Ordnance value of 7. They attack using Chart D.

The ambushers have a Manpower value of 10 and an Ordnance value of 6. They attack using Chart C.

If Gasper and his group perish, turn to section 89.

If Gasper and his group prevail, turn to section 130.

— 113 —

Gasper and the mutineers strike hard and fast, but apparently not hard or fast enough. Almost before the battle begins, a siren echoes through the ship. Gasper redoubles his efforts, yelling and screaming like a madman. The other colonists, inspired by his ferociousness, also increase the intensity of their attacks.

"We're in trouble now!" someone yells.

"Not if we can take the bridge before they get organized," Gasper yells. "Let's go!" He runs toward the corridor leading to the top of the ship.

Turn to section 107.

— 114 —

“This is a desperate choice,” Gasper says, “but we’re in a desperate situation. Let’s find North.”

Gasper turns his air-car to the northwest and sets the velocity to cruise. Eight hours later, he sees a tiny reflection on the horizon. It appears to be moving toward them.

“An air-car!” whispers Greg. “That means civilization!”

Gasper turns his car toward the approaching reflection. A half-hour later, he stops in the path of a slightly dated air-car. The two men inside wear the uniforms of Lord Banshire’s marines. The marines train their air-car’s machine guns on Gasper’s car.

An officer stands up in the car as it comes to a stop. “Are you from the starship *Saretta*?” he asks.

“Yes,” Gasper says. “We crashed and five thousand colonists are stranded.”

“What are the coordinates?” the officer demands.

Gasper hesitates. He does not like the officer’s hostile tone.

“I shall order the sergeant to open fire if you don’t tell me the coordinates immediately,” the officer threatens.

Gasper sees a line of air-cars approaching on the horizon. A few larger machines appear to be mixed in with the air-cars.

If Gasper gives the coordinates to the officer, turn to section 131.

If Gasper fights, hoping to warn the ship, turn to section 126.

— 115 —

The air-cars cut a wide path through the Walkers, but the survivors jump Gasper and his men with surprising agility. Within seconds, the Walkers have dragged Gasper and his crew from the relative safety of their air-cars. Gasper fights with all of his strength, unable to concentrate on more than the single opponent he faces, who seems amazingly adept at physical combat.

Time after time, Gasper throws a punch only to have it turned aside by a quick movement of his target's hand. A second later, he is shocked to feel his head or his ribs erupt in pain as his tricky opponent kicks him. Finally, however, Gasper resorts to a dirty trick. He pretends to be injured and doubles over screaming. As he had hoped, his opponent relaxes and moves in to finish him off. Gasper stomps on his opponent's foot, then throws his entire weight into a punch aimed at the astonished man's jaw.

The punch connects with a jolt that shakes Gasper all the way to his feet. His opponent stands straight up and cries, "Cheater!" The man's eyes roll back in his head and he falls to the ground.

The rest of Gasper's group win their battles in a similar fashion or by using their weapons, though not without paying a steep price. Those left standing rub bruised ribs and swollen eyes.

Gasper dumps water on his opponent to awaken him.

"What's going on here?" Gasper asks, lifting the man's head by his hair. "Why all the fighting?"

"Because you're enemies," the man answers lamely.

"How can we be enemies?" Gasper asks. "We just got here. We're colonists from Terra."

"Walkers don't believe in the Mysteries," the man says.

"What are the Mysteries?" Gasper asks.

"Trash and rubbish," the man answers. "Nonsense."

"What kind of nonsense?" Gasper presses.

"Ask the Unificationists on North. They started the Mysteries. Claiming men came from the stars. Nonsense!"

"Where can we find help?" Gasper asks, deciding to avoid religious questions for the moment.

"Can't find no help," the man says. "This is East. We're enemies."

"Where can I find friends?" Gasper asks.

"Aren't any friends," the man answers. "Everybody's enemies on East."

"What about North?" Gasper asks. "What about the Unificationists?"

The man smiles. "Yeah, they'd help—if you could get there. But you can't. The Guardians would stop you, and it's too far, anyway."

"Guardians?" Gasper asks.

"They've got wheels, like you," the man says. "They don't like seeing enemies talk. They say that we've got to fight."

Gasper drops the man's head. "Sounds to me like somebody—probably Banshire—is trying to keep things stirred up around here," he mutters. "In any case, it's pretty clear that we're on our own. We'd better return to the ship and report."

Gasper hops into his air-car and drives toward the southeast. An hour into the trip, he sees the reflection of another air-car off to the north. It appears to be trying to intersect his course.

Gasper notes a copse of trees about a mile ahead.

If Gasper tries to hide in the copse of trees, turn to section 108.

If he meets the air-car, turn to section 111.

— 116 —

"We'll arm the colonists," Gasper says. "The captain won't argue with five thousand armed and angry people."

Gasper arranges a work detail to distribute the weapons. A steady flow of assault rifles and grenades soon moves down the lifts and out to the colonists. Minutes later, the ship's loudspeakers crackle. "This is mutiny!" the captain protests. "That property belongs to His Lordship Banshire. If it is not

returned immediately, I shall execute you all as pirates and mutineers."

"He's talking pretty tough for a man outnumbered fifty to one," Gasper says. "Maybe we'd better have a look inside."

Tita leads the way through the apparently deserted ship all the way to the bridge. The bridge is sealed off by a set of blast doors that look as though they could withstand an atomic explosion.

"Well," Gasper sighs, "it looks like a standoff."

Tita nods reluctantly. "At least we have the weapons. Let's sleep on it tonight and we'll deal with it tomorrow. The captain's not going anywhere without his cargo."

"Good idea," Gasper agrees sleepily.

The colonists make their camp a mile away from the ship that night. When morning comes, Tita wakes Gasper. "It's gone!" she exclaims.

"What's gone?" Gasper asks sleepily. He is shivering beneath his modest blanket, and he immediately wants to go back to sleep and forget the hunger pains in his stomach.

"The ship's gone!" Tita says.

Gasper jumps to his feet, forgetting his discomfort. The ship is missing! He turns around in a three hundred sixty degree arc, scanning the horizon. "Impossible!" he cries. "Did our guards hear anything?"

Tita shakes her head. "It just disappeared. No thunder, no lightning, no earthquakes."

"Impossible!" he says. "That was our last link with civilization."

Tita stares toward the northwest. "Maybe *they* can help," she says.

Gasper follows her gaze.

The Ordnance value of Gasper's troops is now 7.

Turn to section 132.

— 117 —

Gaspar returns to the ship to report what he has discovered. Unfortunately, when he reaches the ship's coordinates, he finds only five thousand desperate colonists. The ship has disappeared!

Tita fills him in. "There was some trouble—people were starting to freeze, and there wasn't enough food. The captain said he wouldn't give us any more help, that he had to conserve stores for the journey home. Well, that really set some people off, and a bunch of them charged the ship. The captain and his crew locked themselves inside.

"We spent another miserable night out here, trying to think of a way to get at the ship's stores. When morning came, it was gone. There was no noise, no lights; it just went away!"

"Impossible!" Gaspar says. "Something a thousand feet tall doesn't just float away!"

"Well, it did," Tita says. "Nobody heard anything, and you can see for yourself that it's missing."

"What do we do now?" Gaspar asks. "There's no help on this continent, and that was our last link with civilization."

Tita stares into the distance. "Maybe *they* can help," she says hopefully.

Gaspar follows her gaze.

Turn to section 132.

— 118 —

Gaspar and his crew jump the security guards and knock the unfortunate fellows unconscious within a few seconds. Gaspar quickly arms the rest of his mutineers, then binds the security guards.

"Lead us to the bridge, Tita," he orders.

Tita leads the way to a corridor winding up toward the nose of the ship. "We could use a lift," Tita explains, "but this is probably not as well guarded."

"Thanks," Gasper says. "Stay here."

"I've already shown you the way up," Tita protests. "You don't need to protect me any longer."

"If we fail, you'll have to take command of the colonists," Gasper says. "That's an order."

Tita glares at him angrily but protests no further. Gasper leads the way up the winding corridor at a run. After thirty seconds, he sees two guards standing in front of a large doorway leading into a room filled with electronic equipment and bustling officers.

The guards' mouths drop open in surprise. They draw their weapons.

"Give up!" Gasper orders.

The guards sneer and fire a couple of wild shots in Gasper's direction. He ducks instinctively, then calls, "Follow me!" He rushes up the corridor and past the astonished guards, somersaulting onto the bridge. When he turns upright, he finds himself facing six confused officers. Two nervous security guards stand behind him. The room remains utterly quiet, and the captain studies Gasper as if he is making a very bad joke. The officers reach for their sidearms.

Gasper looks to his left. He sees no other colonists. He looks to his right. No help there, either. His stomach begins to ache in panic.

"Yes?" the captain asks, staring down the barrel of Gasper's weapon as if it were a toy.

"Surrender the ship!" Gasper orders in desperation.

The captain cracks a patronizing smile. "Really," he comments. The captain touches a button on his instrument console, and Gasper hears two heavy steel doors slowly start to close behind him.

Gasper raises his gun tentatively and the guards train their pistols on him. "If I've got to go," he announces, "I might as well take the captain with me."

Footsteps clatter up the corridor behind him, and Gasper hears the rest of his group dive past the closing doors. The captain's smile sours into a sick grimace.

"You'd better not be so fast next time," Tita says as the doors clang shut. "You almost got locked in here alone."

"I ordered you to wait outside!" Gasper protests.

"Too late," Tita replies. "It's all or nothing now!"

"Kill them!" the captain bellows. Gasper points his gun in the captain's direction and squeezes the trigger. The room

breaks into a volley of thunder. The captain dives for cover, his face pale with terror and despair. Computer screens and equipment consoles erupt into dozens of tiny explosions as stray bullets strike unintended targets.

Gasper sees Tita catch a slug in her shoulder. She cries out, then falls to the floor. Although she continues to fire, Gasper sees that she is not strong enough to hold her gun steady. He screams in anger and stands, rushing his enemies and firing angrily. Bullets whiz past his head, but he continues to charge.

Gasper and his group attack using Chart B.

The captain's group has a Manpower value of 8 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart C.

If Gasper and the mutineers perish, turn to section 89.

If Gasper and the mutineers prevail, turn to section 124.

— 119 —

Gasper and his group attack the field defenders and quickly pummel them into submission. Gasper awakens the man he was speaking to earlier.

"Why are you so hostile?" he asks. "You act like we're natural enemies."

"You are," the man answers groggily.

"But we don't want to be," Gasper responds.

The man clasps his hands over his ears. "Don't talk Unificationist garbage to me. The Guardians might hear!"

"Who are the Guardians?" Gasper asks, pulling the man's hands from his ears.

The man studies Gasper suspiciously. "What do you mean, who are the Guardians? They're the servants of the Exalted One, that's who."

"Who are the Unificationists?" Gasper asks.

"Blasphemers. They don't listen to the Guardians any more, running around spouting garbage about working together and building a society," the man answers angrily.

"Sounds like these Guardians are trying to keep this society fractionalized," Gasper comments. "I wonder who they are?"

"Some group that stands to lose a lot of power or money if they unite," one of his men says.

"And if it's not the government on Omega, then it must be some group from Terra. Banshire and his men?" Gasper asks. A chorus of nods greets him. "We'd better go back and report what we've found. We'll find no help on this planet, and we'd better remember who owns our colony ship."

"They probably crashed us way out here on purpose!" exclaims one of his men.

Turn to section 117.

— 120 —

Gasper and his men rush into the security office. The guards react quickly, however, and a tremendous scuffle follows. Gasper lands a devastating blow on the head of one of the burly men, but the brute simply shrugs it off and returns the favor. The force of the blow knocks Gasper halfway across the room. He crashes into a bookshelf and it tumbles down on top of him. He hears an alarm siren begin to whine but is too shocked to comprehend its significance. His attacker jumps him to finish the job, and Gasper is too groggy to defend himself. The burly man raises his fist to strike.

Tita smashes a chair across the man's back and helps Gasper to his feet. "The fight was over, so I didn't think you'd mind if I gave you a hand," she says. The room is a terrible mess, and Gasper notes that his mutineers have taken a few bruises, too.

"Get their guns," Gasper orders. The alarm rings in his ears annoyingly. "We'd better run for the bridge right away; maybe we can still get there before they get organized."

"Follow me!" Tita calls. She leads the way to a winding corridor sloping up toward the nose of the ship. A sign above the corridor reads "Bridge Access—Authorized Personnel Only."

Turn to section 107.

— 121 —

"We'll never get onto the bridge," Tita says. "We'd better think of something else."

"You're right," Gasper says.

The ship's internal speakers crackle into life before he can finish his thought. "This is mutiny!" the captain's voice protests. "Unless you vacate this ship immediately, I shall execute you all as pirates and mutineers."

"How are you going to do that?" Tita shouts uselessly at the speakers.

"He can probably control the ship's life-support functions from the bridge," Gasper answers. "And the ship certainly has external defense systems. I'd say he's in a good position to carry out his threat."

"Then we've got to find a trump card," Tita says. "And I know just the place to look."

Tita leads the way down to the computer center. They find two very frightened technicians attempting to hide behind their equipment. Tita grabs one of the two by his collar. "Remove the launch computer's main circuit board," she orders, waving her gun beneath the man's nose.

The tech nods his head without hesitation and crawls behind a six-foot-tall computer. A few seconds later, he snaps a two-foot-square circuit board out of the computer and gives it to Tita.

"Now give me the spare board," Tita orders.

"Don't!" the second technician orders. Tita threatens him with her gun. "When I want your advice, I'll ask for it."

The first technician crosses to a storage cabinet and brings out the spare board. Tita knocks the board out of the man's hand and shoots it. The board shatters beyond repair.

"How about the second backup?" Gasper asks.

"There is no second backup," the man says nervously.

Gasper cocks his gun. "Don't lie to me. I know starship procedure," he bluffs.

The man swallows hard and crosses the room to a different cabinet. He withdraws another board and gives it to Gasper. After comparing it to Tita's board, Gasper nods. "Let's get out of here."

He and Tita rush out of the computer center and hop into the nearest lift. A few moments later, they reach the ground and run out of the ship. When they reach the colonists, the ship's external speakers crackle into life. "Return those circuit boards at once!" they order.

Gaspar steps out of the crowd and raises the board he carries. "No!" he calls. A roar of laughter rises from the colonists.

"I shall have to resort to violence," the voice from the ship warns.

"And risk destroying the circuit boards?" Gaspar asks. "Go ahead."

"We have others," the ship says.

"Then leave," Gaspar says. "If you want these, you'll have to provide us with food and shelter. Otherwise, you're marooned here forever."

The ship remains coldly silent. Gaspar and the colonists make their camp a mile away that night.

When morning comes, Tita wakes Gaspar. "It's gone!" she exclaims.

"What's gone?" Gaspar asks sleepily. He is shivering beneath his modest blanket, and he immediately wants to go back to sleep to forget the hunger pangs in his stomach.

"The ship's gone!" Tita says.

Gaspar jumps to his feet, forgetting his discomfort. The ship is gone! He turns around in a three hundred and sixty degree arc, scanning the horizon. "Impossible!" he cries. "Even if they did have another board, how could it launch without any of us hearing it?"

Tita shakes her head. "It didn't launch. It just disappeared. No noise, no light, no nothing."

"Impossible!" he repeats. "That was our last link with civilization."

Tita stares toward the northwest. "Maybe *they* can help," she says.

Gaspar follows her gaze.

Turn to section 132.

— 122 —

“Charge!” Gasper calls, firing his pistol. The others follow.

Gasper and his mutineers attack using Chart C.

The guards have a Manpower value of 6 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart C.

If Gasper and his mutineers perish, turn to section 89.

If Gasper and his mutineers prevail within two rounds, turn to section 127.

If the guards survive more than two rounds, but Gasper and his mutineers still prevail, turn to section 128.

— 123 —

Gasper slowly comes out of the trees.

“Are you from the starship *Saretta*?” the officer asks.

“Yes!” Gasper says excitedly. “Have you come to rescue us?”

The officer smiles. “Why yes, we have. What are the coordinates?”

Gasper tells the officer where to find the *Saretta*. The officer relays the information to somebody over his air-car radio, then says, “Lead the way, colonist.”

Gasper happily turns his air-car back toward the *Saretta*. Periodically throughout the journey, more air-cars join them, until a group of twenty air-cars carrying forty men follows Gasper. An hour away from the coordinates, two hovertanks join the caravan. Gasper drops back and pulls up beside the officer he originally met.

“What do you want?” the officer calls.

“Why the hovertanks?” Gasper asks.

The officer grins. "In case of trouble," he answers. The officer will say nothing more on the matter.

When they reach the *Saretta*'s coordinates, Gasper is astonished to see that the ship is missing. The five thousand colonists are camped where he left them, but the starship is nowhere to be seen.

Tita rushes out of the crowd. "Thank the stars you're back!" she exclaims. She regards the officer coldly, then adds, "I thought we'd left His Lordship's rabble back on Terra."

The officer ignores her comment. "What happened to the *Saretta*?" he demands.

"It disappeared," she says.

"Impossible!" Gasper and the officer protest simultaneously.

Tita nods her head. "In the middle of the night. It just disappeared."

The officer whispers something to his sergeant, then turns his attention back to Tita. "Starships don't just disappear. They light up a hundred square miles when they launch. We'd certainly have noticed such a thing."

"There was no launch," Tita insists. "We went to sleep last night and it was there. When we woke in the morning, it was missing. No thunder, no lightning, no earthquakes. Nothing."

The officer's air-cars move into positions surrounding the colonists. Both hovertanks depress their guns so that they can shoot into the crowd.

"What are you doing?" Gasper demands.

The officer steps back, his hand on his sidearm. "Until we find the *Saretta*, you're all under arrest." He quickly retreats to the safety of a hovertank.

Once they are alone, Tita fills Gasper in on the rest of the story. "There was some trouble. The captain got stingy with the food. Some of the people tried to charge the ship and the crew sealed it up tighter than a drum," she admits. "But that doesn't change the fact that it just disappeared—without a trace."

Turn to section 133.

— 124 —

When the cordite settles and the thunder of gunfire falls silent, Gasper looks up and sees that they have captured the bridge. "It's ours!" he exclaims.

His only answer is the moans of the wounded, and then he remembers Tita. He saw her take a hit!

Several agonizing moments later, he finds her sitting behind a desk. She smiles at him weakly. "We did it, huh?"

Gasper nods. "Thanks to you," he says.

"It was nothing," Tita says. "As long as we're free," she adds quietly.

Gasper nods. He notices another bullet hole in her abdomen. "I've got to get help for you!" he says as he starts for the door.

"No!" Tita calls. "I've got something to tell you—then you can call for help." She coughs and blood spills from the corner of her mouth. "Come here," she says. Gasper leans down and Tita holds him close. "Banshire is trying to destroy Omega," she whispers. "This ship—the colonists are just a cover. The weapons hidden in the cargo holds are for his marines—that's why we landed off-target. They'll be coming for them. Stop them!"

Gasper nods his head. "We'll stop them now. We've got the advantage."

"Good," Tita whispers. She kisses him on the cheek and passes out.

Gasper leans her gently against the desk, then rushes to the captain's chair. After a few minutes of experimenting, he figures out how to work the exterior communications speakers and relays the news of the successful mutiny. The roar from the colonists is so loud that it is a full minute before his call for a doctor is heard.

When he returns to Tita, she is still unconscious. He holds her until the doctor arrives. After a quick examination, the doctor picks her up and starts off the bridge. Gasper follows, but the doctor stops him. "I'll take care of her. You've got a colony to get started."

"Will she live?" Gasper asks.

The doctor nods. "If you'll let me get her to sick bay."

Gasper sighs in relief, then turns back to the captain's chair. He begins issuing orders for the defense of the ship against Banshire's marines.

Two days later, Gasper is visiting Tita in the sick bay when the alarm sounds announcing the arrival of Banshire's goons. Gasper rushes to the bridge.

"There's just forty of them, sir," says the duty officer. "They think the crew is still running the ship."

"Good," Gasper says. "Send out a messenger. Let them know who runs the ship, and tell them we've already unloaded the weapons. Then invite them to camp here tonight."

The duty officer grins. "Yes, sir."

A few minutes later, the duty officer returns. "I carried the message myself. They said they'd rather not stay, if it's all the same to us, sir. They mentioned something about having to get back to their homesteads up on North and denied being Banshire's boys."

"Do you believe them?" Gasper asks.

"I do now, sir," he replies. "I think we can get down to the business of being colonists."

A month later, a scouting party from the *Saretta* finally contacts the prime Omegan colony on North Continent. Taliaferro Tey gives them an enthusiastic welcome and sends a rescue party across East Continent. Within six months, all five thousand colonists who arrived aboard the *Saretta* are safely and relatively comfortably trying to scratch a living from Omega's barren soil.

The weapons Lord Banshire sent are very much appreciated during the stormy years of Omega's Unification, especially fighting off certain groups of off-world cutthroats that wish to plunder this new world.

THE END

To go on another adventure with Gasper, return to section 1 and make new choices as you go.

— 125 —

“There’s only two of them,” Gasper says. “Let’s take ‘em!”

Gasper and his group attack using Chart C.

The officer and sergeant have a Manpower value of 2 and an Ordnance value of 8. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper and his group survive, turn to section 129.

If Gasper and his group perish, turn to section 89.

— 126 —

“There’s only two of them,” Gasper says. “Let’s take ‘em!”

Gasper and his group attack using Chart D.

The officer and sergeant have a Manpower value of 2 and an Ordnance value of 8. They attack using Chart C.

If Gasper and his group survive, turn to section 129.

If Gasper and his group perish, turn to section 89.

— 127 —

Gasper and his mutineers unleash a withering attack on the guards, quickly defeating the stunned men. Gasper leaps over their bodies onto the bridge, where he faces six officers.

“Fire!” calls the captain.

A volley of thunder rolls through the room as bullets rip into equipment and men alike. Gasper dives to the floor and rolls for cover. He notices his men charge onto the bridge just a moment later.

Tita charges through the door last, just before it slams closed. A bullet strikes her in the shoulder, knocking her back into the steel doors. She slumps to the ground and rolls away. A second later, bullets whiz past Gasper’s head so fast and furious that he cannot spare time to look after her.

Gasper and his men attack using Chart D.

The crew has a Manpower value of 6 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart C.

If Gasper and his men survive, turn to section 124.

If Gasper and the mutineers perish, turn to section 89.

— 128 —

Gasper and his mutineers attack ferociously, but the guards hold them off until the steel doors close.

Turn to section 121.

— 129 —

The marines open fire with the devastating machine guns mounted in their air-car. Hardshot the size of hummingbirds rips into Gasper's air-car, leaving holes the size of apples. Gasper quickly realizes that they cannot survive such withering fire for long. He jumps from his air-car and charges the enemy vehicle, dodging and leaping as he goes. The others follow suit.

His plan pays off, for though the guns are devastating, they are not easily aimed. The bullets fall two or three feet behind or ahead of Gasper. He soon manages to neutralize the lieutenant, and he never knows who got the sergeant.

When the smoke clears, the lieutenant lies badly wounded in the bottom of his air-car. Gasper cradles the man's head. "There's not much I can do for you," he says.

The lieutenant's eyes show surprise. "You mean you'd try?" He coughs.

"Sure," Gasper says. "But I'm no doctor."

The lieutenant nods. "Thanks. You colonists are pretty decent sorts." He pauses, debating something in his mind. "Banshire wants Omega," he whispers. "He will stop at nothing. Get back to your ship—there's more where I came from, and they want the cargo." He closes his eyes.

"What cargo?" Gasper asks. The lieutenant does not respond.

Turn to section 117.

— 130 —

Gasper runs into the ruins, bullets thudding into the rubble around him like rain in a thunderstorm. He sees an open doorway ahead and dives through it blindly. He falls down a flight of stairs and strikes his head. His mind goes black.

When he awakens, all is quiet. He crawls back up the stairs and looks out into the morning light. His air-car remains

parked where he left it, and there is no sign of the enemy. He has no idea how long he has been unconscious or what happened to the rest of his men during the battle.

He cautiously steps from the doorway. A ragged man lies sprawled at its entrance, a gaping wound in the back of his head. One of his own men lies directly behind the enemy, the weapon that took the ragged man's life still clutched in the colonist's stiff hand.

Gaspar walks the bloody battlefield. All of his own men lie dead and stiff in the rubble. He counts ten of the enemy. He is the only survivor.

Gaspar trembles at the terrible sight and climbs into his air-car. "I guess we'll find nothing but trouble on this planet," he says. The whisper of the wind is the only answer.

Reduce Gaspar's Manpower value to one point.

Turn to section 117.

— 131 —

Gaspar tells the officer where to find the *Saretta*. The officer relays the information to somebody over his air-car radio, then says, "Lead the way, colonist."

Gaspar turns his vehicle back toward the *Saretta*. Periodically throughout the journey, more air-cars join them until a group of twenty vehicles carrying forty men follows Gaspar. An hour away from the *Saretta*, two hovertanks join the caravan. Gaspar drops back and pulls up beside the officer.

"What do you want?" the officer calls.

"Why the hovertanks?" Gaspar asks.

The officer grins. "In case of trouble," he answers. The officer will say nothing more on the matter.

When they reach the coordinates, Gaspar is astonished to find only a group of milling colonists. The *Saretta* is gone!

The officer pulls up beside Gaspar. "Where is it?" he demands.

Gaspar studies the horizon in bewilderment. "I-I don't know."

The officer issues a command and the air-cars encircle the

colonists. The hovertanks depress their guns so that they can fire directly into the midst of the camp.

Tita rushes toward Gasper. "Thank goodness you're here!" she says.

"What happened to the *Saretta*?" the officer demands.

She studies him with cool contempt. "It disappeared in the night," she answers testily. "I thought we had escaped Banshire's rabble," she adds, glaring menacingly at the young man.

The officer ignores her insult. "A starship does not just disappear quietly into the night. What did you do with it?"

"Don't be ridiculous," Tita spits. "How could we pilot a starship?"

The officer steps back. "Until we find the *Saretta*, you're all under arrest." He quickly retreats to the safety of a hovertank.

Once they are alone, Tita fills Gasper in on the rest of the story. "There was some trouble. The captain got stingy with the food. Some of the people tried to charge the ship and the crew sealed itself inside. In the morning, it was gone. No thunder, no lightning, no earthquakes. It just disappeared."

Turn to section 133.

— 132 —

A caravan of air-cars approaches from the northwest. A murmur of excitement runs through the mass of colonists. Calls of "We're rescued!" and "We're saved!" rise from the edge of the camp.

As the cars draw closer, they spread out and encircle the camp. Gasper notes that two hovertanks bring up the rear of the caravan. One of the air-cars separates from the caravan and moves slowly toward the group. Gasper quickly walks out to greet it, motioning for Tita to keep the others back.

The air-car stops twenty feet from Gasper, and an officer wearing the uniform of His Lordship's marines stands up in the front seat. "Are you from the starship *Saretta*?" he demands.

"Yes," Gasper answers. "Have you come to rescue us?"

The officer smiles. "Why yes, we have."

"What are the hovertanks for?" he asks.

"In case of trouble," the officer responds. "Where is the starship?"

Gasper hesitates. "It disappeared. Last night."

The officer studies Gasper in astonishment. "Disappeared?"

Gasper nods his head. "I'm afraid so. Without a trace."

"Impossible!" the officer protests. "Starships don't just disappear into the night."

"This one did. No noise, no light, no earthquakes. It just wasn't there this morning."

The officer places his hand on his sidearm. "Starships don't disappear. What did you do with it?"

"Don't be ridiculous. Do you really think a bunch of colonists could pilot a starship?" Gasper snaps.

"Until we find the *Saretta*," the officer says, "all of you are under arrest." He quickly retreats to the safety of the hovertanks, and Gasper returns to the group to report what happened.

Turn to section 133.

— 133 —

"I don't like it," Gasper says. "These fellows aren't acting like any rescue party I've ever heard of. And isn't Omega supposed to have an independent government?"

"Yeah," agrees a burly man called Taylor. "So how come they're wearing His Lordship's uniforms?"

"Maybe I'd better explain something," Tita says. "I'm not a colonist . . . not really. I'm a rebel."

A murmur of astonishment circulates through the nearby crowd. "She's the one they're after!" cries a woman. "Let's give her up and get ourselves rescued!" A chorus of agreement runs through the crowd, and a few people tentatively move in Tita's direction.

"Please!" she screams. "Let me finish! Then you can turn me over to Banshire's apes, if you still want to."

Taylor and Gasper step between Tita and the crowd, push-

ing the more aggressive people away. "Let her finish!" Gasper orders.

The murmur dies and Tita continues. "The *Saretta* wasn't a colonist ship."

"Then what are we, canned sardines?" calls a man near the rear of the crowd.

Tita ignores the man and continues. "Banshire and his ancestors have known about Omega for at least a hundred years. They've been bleeding it dry to maintain their position back on Terra. About ten years ago, a group of rebels discovered the planet and blackmailed Banshire into opening the planet to colonization. He had no choice but to agree, but he's not a good loser.

"He's determined to destroy the government of Omega and take it over himself. To that end, he's been smuggling marines to the planet aboard merchant ships for several years. But he hasn't been able to equip them yet. That's where the *Saretta* fits in. Banshire hid eight hovertanks and enough small arms to equip a battalion of men aboard her and used the colonists as a cover for a heavy transport mission to Omega.

"The rebels found out about his plan. My mission is to make sure that those weapons don't reach Banshire's goons."

"It's a pretty story!" calls the man in the rear again. "But I say we turn her over to the marines. How do we know she's telling the truth?"

"Do you really think forty marines came here to rescue five thousand colonists in twenty lousy air-cars and two hovertanks?" Tita yells. "They're here to get the weapons and they couldn't care less about you."

"It's none of our concern!" says the woman in front.

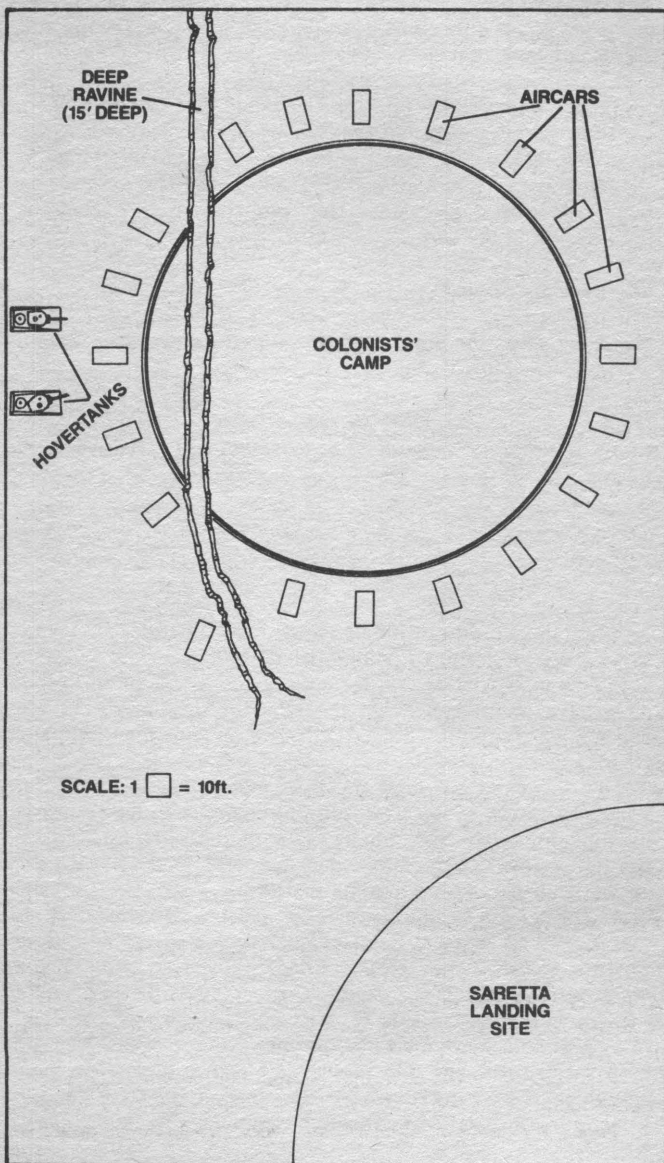
"You're wrong!" responds Taylor. "I came here to start a new life, not to continue the old one under Banshire's boot. There aren't supposed to be any marines here on Omega, and I say we get rid of them!"

A mutter of agreement runs through the crowd. Gasper holds his arms up, signaling the crowd to be quiet. "I think Tita's telling the truth," he says. "And that means that, at best, these marines will leave us here to starve. The question is, what are we going to do about it?"

"Rush 'em!" calls the man in the rear again. "Kill the bloodsuckers!"

"That's very noble," calls Taylor. "But they have hovertanks

SITUATION MAP



Section 134

and heavy machine guns. We'd better rely on stealth and skill, and take out those hovertanks before we try anything else."

"There's only forty of them!" objects the woman. "Why wait for them to make the first move? What guarantee do we have that they won't open fire before we can do anything?"

"We have no guarantee at all," yells Tita, "except the fact that the ship is still missing. They probably won't execute us until they find the ship."

Study the situation map.

If Gasper gives the order to rush the marines, turn to section 134.

If Gasper gathers a smaller strike force to attack the hovertanks using stealth and surprise, turn to section 135.

— 134 —

"Pass the word to rush them when I say 'charge,' " Gasper says. "We've got them outnumbered."

Five minutes later, Gasper notices that most of the colonists have pressed close to the edge of the camp and are eagerly watching him. He takes a deep breath, then bellows, "Charge!"

Five thousand colonists move as one expanding body toward the circle of air-cars surrounding them. The marines remain ominously quiet in the face of the charge. For one terrible second Gasper thinks that they will actually reach the circle of air-cars before the marines resist.

As Gasper reaches the ravine, the marines fire. It sounds as though a thunderstorm has suddenly broken over the barren tundra. Thousands of bullets pelt the colonists, leaving jagged holes and spreading red stains where they strike. Men and women fall on either side of Gasper, screaming in pain and fear. And still the human wall of colonists presses on.

Gasper jumps into the ravine and pauses to assess their casualties. Many more people lie dead and dying on the frozen tundra than he had imagined; perhaps one out of every

five colonists is a casualty. He estimates that, although the price will be heavy, they should be able to reach the air-cars.

Most surviving colonists on this side of the battle have jumped into the ravine. The thunder of nearby gunfire has ceased, although it seems more intense on the other side of the camp. Nobody appears anxious to leave the ravine, and hundreds of questioning eyes are trained on Gasper. "It's too late to turn back now," he mutters. He scrambles toward the top of the ravine, waving his arm for the others to follow.

The crowd surges up the ravine reluctantly, a few brave men and women urging the less eager over the top. Gasper reaches the top of the ravine just ahead of the crowd. Half a dozen air-cars have pulled up to point-blank range. Gasper can easily see the men aiming the machine guns.

As the crowd climbs over the top, the machine guns open fire. The sound deafens Gasper. He watches his human wall tumble back into the ravine. Those still struggling to climb out of the ravine are toppled backward by a rain of bodies. Gasper quickly sees that this plan of attack is hopeless and jumps back into the ravine.

If Gasper surrenders, turn to section 136.

If he tries to regroup and escape, turn to section 138.

— 135 —

"We'd better rely on stealth," Gasper says. "Get me nine more volunteers. We'll try to sneak down the ravine tonight, then circle around and capture the hovertanks."

An hour later, Taylor reports back with eight other volunteers.

"Do any of you know how to operate a hovertank?" Tita asks. The men all shake their heads. "I do," she says. "I guess that makes me volunteer number ten."

"Okay," Gasper says reluctantly. "But stay out of combat, if there is any. You're much too valuable to lose."

"I can fight as well as any of you!" Tita protests.

"I don't think that's the point," says Taylor. "Even the best soldier gets killed. If you get killed, who will operate the hovertank?"

Tita reluctantly agrees. They spend the rest of the day memorizing hand signals and trying to rest. When evening falls, the marines start to scan the no-man's-land between the camp and the air-cars with searchlights. Gasper and the others study the pattern of the light covering the ravine area for over an hour. Then they smear their faces and hands with mud and crawl toward the ravine on their bellies, ignoring the bone-chilling cold creeping into their bodies.

When they reach the edge of the searchlights' pattern, they stop. Gasper waits for the light to pass over, then crawls as quickly as he can to the ravine. He makes it with a second to spare. The others follow his example, one at a time. Three minutes later, they are all lying safely in the bottom of the ravine.

Gasper leads the way down the ravine, resisting the urge to run. A few minutes later, he hears two men talking.

"I swear something moved down there!" one says.

"You're seeing things, Barnes," says the other. "The colonists are camped back over there."

Gasper risks moving a little further ahead. He sees two marines standing on the edge of the ravine, looking down into the shadows ahead. Whatever they're talking about, it's not them. He breathes a sigh of relief.

"I guess you're right, Jonesy," Barnes says. "This planet gives me the creeps, that's all. Besides, it's too dark down there to see anything, and I'm sure as heck not going to climb down just to get a better view."

The two men turn back to face the colonists' camp, stamping their feet and blowing on their hands to ward off the cold.

Gasper gives the signal to move ahead silently.

Gasper is now in command of a group of eleven volunteers, including himself. Because Tita has been ordered to avoid combat, she does not count in their Manpower value. Use the statistics below for Gasper's volunteers.

Manpower: 10

Ordnance: **

***Gasper's volunteers are armed with whatever weapons Gasper has been able to collect so far. For example, if Gasper successfully captured pistols from the security office aboard the Saretta before it disappeared, they are armed with pistols. The Ordnance values for weapons Gasper could have collected are: nothing = 0; pistols = 5; assault rifle or submachine gun = 7.*

Stealth: 9
Morale: 9
Melee: 3

Make a Stealth check for Gasper and his volunteers. Roll two six-sided dice. If the total rolled is the same or less than the volunteers' value for Stealth, turn to section 137.

If the value rolled is greater, turn to section 139.

— 136 —

"We'd better surrender," Gasper says. He takes off his shirt and carefully climbs to the top of the ravine, then waves it back and forth without showing himself. The firing eventually subsides.

"What do you want?" calls an officer.

"To surrender!" Gasper replies.

"Very well," the officer says. He sounds slightly disappointed. "Come out of the ravine and line up. You'll be shot at the first sign of a disturbance."

Gasper and the other surviving colonists slowly climb from the ravine. The marines direct them into a tight ring surrounded by the air-cars and hovertanks. Gasper estimates that there are less than a thousand colonists left.

"Now then," the officer says callously. "Where is the Saretta?"

"I don't know," Gasper replies.

"Come now," the officer urges. "Piracy carries an automatic death sentence. If you return the starship immediately, I am prepared to forget that it was missing."

"Listen to yourself!" Gasper yells. "You sound as though I stuck the thing in my back pocket!"

"Do you have a better explanation?" the officer asks.

Gasper drops his gaze. "No."

"Then please return it promptly."

"I can't!" Gasper snaps. "It's gone."

The officer addresses the rest of the colonists. "Listen up!" he yells. "If any of you can return the starship, please

Section 137

do so immediately. Otherwise, I shall have to execute you all."

A nervous murmur runs through the crowd.

"Ten . . ." the officer counts. "Nine . . . eight . . ."

People begin to cry and moan.

"Seven . . . six . . . five . . ."

"Can't you see that we don't know anything about it?" Gasper cries. "A thousand people don't want to die over the stupid thing."

"Four . . . three . . . two . . ."

"Are you enjoying this?" Gasper screams.

The officer grins. "One . . . fire!"

The machine guns rattle, and Gasper is dead before he hits the ground.

Without the weapons aboard the *Saretta*, however, Banshire's marines fail to overthrow the Omegan government. It eventually grows strong enough that Banshire abandons any hope of dominating it, and the Omegan people live in freedom ever after.

THE END

If you'd like to try for a happier ending for Gasper and the colonists, or a new adventure, return to section 1.

— 137 —

Gasper and his volunteers sneak past the guards. Ten yards down the ravine, someone asks, "Are you safe now?" The voice is clear and loud, not even a whisper.

Gasper turns back to his volunteers. "Ssssshhhhh!" he urges. They stare at him uncomprehendingly.

"I (we) am (are) over here," the speaker says out loud. "In front of you."

Gasper whirls back around. Something resembling a floating intestine hangs in the air directly ahead. Its dull-glistening skin shines eerily in the starlight. Gasper backs away in fear and almost shrieks.

"Don't worry," the thing says. "I (we) am (are) not dangerous. And if you go back, the marine-units will catch you."

Gasper freezes. He feels the others stop directly behind him and hears one or two gasp in fear.

"Who . . . what?" he stumbles.

"Please, do not speak out loud," the intestine says. "The marine-units will hear. I (we) sense that they mean to do serious harm to you. Your thoughts are sufficient."

"Telepathy?" Gasper asks aloud.

"Yes!" the alien says. "Just think. Try it."

Gasper thinks his next question. "What are you?"

"I (we) am (are) the Mancji, the original inhabitants of this planet. I (we) am (are) what you call aliens."

Gasper remembers the sentries. "Maybe we can carry on this, uh, conversation further down the ravine. Out of harm's way, as it were."

The Mancji floats down the ravine a quarter-mile. "Is this sufficient?" it inquires. "I (we) do not know the sensitivity of your monitoring apparatus."

"Much better," Gasper responds.

"I (we) know you have many questions, Gasper-unit," the Mancji says. "But I (we) have made a terrible mistake as I (we) always do when trying to help in your affairs. If this mistake is not quickly rectified, I (we) sense that your marine-units will exterminate your colonist-units."

"What is this mistake?" Gasper inquires.

"Sensing that the Saretta-being was causing distress between your colonist-units and your crew-units, I (we) moved it."

"Moved it?" Gasper thinks. "How?"

"Like this." The Mancji responds by floating upward.

"You telekinesed it?" he asks.

"More like teleported," the Mancji responds, "if I (we) understand the concept correctly. The spatial rearrangement was instantaneous. It is now buried deep within Omega. Should I (we) bring it back? Would that correct the mistake?"

"That might help," Gasper answers, "but the cause of the distress is rooted in conflicting interests between the . . . uh . . . marine-units and the colonist-units."

"This distress is not unusual?" the Mancji asks. It twists slightly in the air, as if gesturing with its ropelike body.

"Unfortunately, no," Gasper responds. "It is caused by some units trying to dominate other units."

"This is not healthy?" the Mancji inquires.

"Not for the majority of the units," Gasper responds.

Section 138

"Sometimes we must rebel against these dominator-units."

"Rebel?"

"Fight. Destroy."

"Ahh, yes," the Mancji returns. "Like fighting diseased cells."

"Sort of," Gasper confirms. "Will you help us?"

"Perhaps," the Mancji responds.

If Gasper asks the Mancji to return the ship, then attacks the hovertanks while the marines are distracted, turn to section 140.

If Gasper asks the Mancji to teleport the hovertanks into his control, turn to section 141.

— 138 —

"Time to regroup and run for it!" Gasper says. He passes the word to try to escape. Unfortunately, the hovertanks start to drop artillery shells into the ravine before he can put his plan into action. The deep trench is quickly turned into a death trap.

Gasper survives by hiding under the bodies of his fallen comrades until nightfall. After dark, he crawls along the ravine bottom, being careful not to make any noise. He pauses for a rest after an hour.

"Are you safe yet?" asks someone.

"Who's there?" Gasper whispers, preparing to run.

"Don't speak," the mysterious speaker says. "Think."

"Huh?" Gasper asks.

"Think. Try it."

"You mean telepathy?" Gasper thinks.

"Exactly."

"I'm either unconscious or dead," Gasper thinks.

"Neither," responds the mysterious speaker. Something resembling a floating intestine drifts into Gasper's view. He screams and starts to climb out of the ravine.

"What's wrong?" asks the intestine. "Are they coming after you?"

Gasper slumps to the ground. "It's no use, I'm dead," he mumbles. "This is just a nightmare."

"I (we) am (are) the Mancji, not a nightmare," the intestine offers politely. "I (we) am (are) the original inhabitants of this planet. I (we) am (are) what you think of as an alien."

"Great," Gasper says.

"I (we) sense that you are despondent. I (we) must apologize, for it is my (our) fault."

"Huh?" Gasper asks.

"Sensing that your Saretta-being was causing distress between your colonist-units and crew-units, I (we) moved it. This created even greater distress between your marine-units and your colonist-units, which resulted in the destruction of all the colonist-units except yourself."

"I'm the last one?" Gasper asks.

"Yes," the Mancji responds. "I (we) am (are) deeply sorry. Perhaps if the Saretta-being were returned to the marine-units, they would forgive you?"

"No!" Gasper insists. "Don't do that. Where is it, anyway?"

"Deep inside the planet."

"Good, leave it there," Gasper says.

"And what about you, Gasper-unit? Surely you will perish without the aid of the marine-units?" the Mancji asks.

Gasper laughs. "It doesn't matter. I'm the last colonist-unit, so there's no hope anyway. The marine-units would just speed up the process."

"I (we) am (are) truly sorry for the loss of your other units," the Mancji says. "Perhaps you would be welcomed in another hive of colonist-units?"

"Another hive?" Gasper asks, perking up. "Where?"

"Very far away, but I (we) could contact them. Would this aid you?"

"Would it aid me? It would be great!" Gasper shouts.

"Then I (we) will contact them." The Mancji disappears.

"Where'd you go?" Gasper asks.

There is no answer for seven days, and Gasper begins to believe he hallucinated the entire meeting. On the eighth morning, Gasper decides to start walking—he doesn't even care in which direction.

As he steps from the ravine, however, he sees an air-car coming straight toward him. He jumps back into the ravine and hides, but the air-car pulls up just above his hiding place. A huge man wearing red overalls steps from the car. "Anybody here?" he calls. "I've been driving for over a week to find you, so quit wasting time." Gasper steps from his hiding

Section 139

place. "Hi, I'm Nat Grall," the stranger offers. "The Mancji said you were worth saving for some reason. Hop in, we've got a long drive back to Prime."

On the way back, Gasper tells Nat of his adventures. The big man seems only mildly impressed, but does comment that "It's probably just as well that the marines didn't get His Lordship's weapons." Gasper lives out the rest of his life as a free man on the new planet, Omega.

THE END

To try for a different adventure, return to section 1 and make some new choices.

— 139 —

As Gasper and his volunteers try to sneak past the sentries, they almost run into something resembling a large intestine floating in the air ahead of them. Somebody screams.

"See," yells Barnes, "I told you there was something down there!"

"Quit your yapping," orders Jonesy.

A light dances across Gasper and his men. "There they are!" hisses Barnes. The large intestine floats into the circle of light and both Barnes and Jonesy scream. Barnes drops his light and the two men back away.

"I (we) am (are) sorry I (we) startled you," says somebody.

The intestine drifts in front of Gasper. He backs away and tries to go around it.

"What is wrong?" It is the intestine that is asking.

Gasper hears the sound of many men running in his direction. "Excuse me," he says, trying to avoid touching the thing, "but we're about to have a heck of a battle here."

"Battle?" the alien inquires.

Gasper realizes that he hears the intestine's side of the conversation inside his own mind. "You're using telepathy!" he says.

"Quite," the intestine responds.

The staccato roar of automatic weapons fire interrupts them.

"Gasper!" calls Tita. "Quit talking to that flying worm-nest and get over here! They're coming."

"Excuse me," Gasper says to the intestine. He goes to the edge of the ravine with the rest of the volunteers.

Gasper and his volunteers attack using Chart C.

The marines have a Manpower value of 12 and an Ordnance value of 7. They attack using Chart E.

If Gasper and the volunteers perish, turn to section 142.

If Gasper and the volunteers prevail in this battle, turn to section 143.

— 140 —

"Could you return the ship over there?" Gasper asks, pointing at the center of the camp. "And have it descend from the sky very slowly, so that it will hold their attention."

"It's the least I (we) could do," the Mancji answers.

A second later, the Mancji disappears. Gasper looks up into the sky and sees a large shadow starting to descend toward the camp.

"Come on," he says. "I'd say we have about three minutes before they notice that thing."

He and the volunteers sneak a little further down the ravine, then leave it and crawl toward the hovertanks. When they are within thirty feet of the tanks, they see a dozen marines posted around the nearest tank. Gasper motions for everybody to remain still. A minute later, a marine calls, "Hey, what on Omega is that?" He points toward the slowly descending starship.

"It's the *Saretta*!" someone answers. "But it's coming in without power. Impossible!"

All marine eyes are turned toward the starship. "Now!" calls Gasper.

Gasper and the volunteers attack using Chart A.

Section 141

The marines have a Manpower value of 12 and an Ordnance value of 7. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper and his volunteers perish, turn to section 147.

If Gasper and his volunteers prevail, turn to section 144.

— 141 —

“Could you teleport one of those hovertanks over here?” Gasper asks. A second later, a hovertank is parked on the edge of the ravine.

“For Pete’s sake!” Tita calls. “We’d better hurry; it’s going to take some time to activate this thing.”

Tita leads the way into the hovertank. Gasper climbs in directly behind her. She begins issuing orders about starting engines and activating targeting systems.

Taylor, who is watching things topside, calls down the hatch, “Hey, get this baby fired up! The other one is coming this way!”

“Get down here and close the hatch!” Tita orders. “We’re about to start shooting.”

Gasper and his volunteers now have a hovertank. It has a Manpower value of 10 and an Ordnance value of 10. It attacks using Chart C. If the hovertank takes ten hits, it explodes.

The marines also have a hovertank. It has a Manpower value of 10 and an Ordnance value of 10. It attacks using Chart C. If it takes ten hits, it explodes.

If Gasper’s hovertank explodes, turn to section 145.

If the marines’ hovertank explodes, turn to section 146.

— 142 —

The marines open fire with their assault rifles, spraying hardshot along the top of the ravine with deadly accuracy. Gasper and his volunteers hunch down below the edge, occasionally trying to sneak a potshot.

The alien intestine drifts over next to Gasper. "I (we) have caused this conflict," it informs him. "I (we) saw that Saretta-being was causing distress between your colonist-units and your crew-units, so I (we) removed it."

"You moved the starship?" Gasper exclaims. Bullets whiz past his head, and he hears another volunteer scream.

"I (we) am (are) deeply sorry. Perhaps if I (we) returned the Saretta-being, the marine-units would forgive you."

"No!" Gasper yells. "This isn't your fault. If it didn't happen here, it would have happened somewhere else. And with the weapons aboard the *Saretta*, the consequences would be much worse."

"Such conflict among your units is common?"

"Yes," Gasper answers. A bullet strikes his shoulder, knocking him down the ravine. His shoulder is numb. Blood oozes down his chest.

The intestine floats down the slope. "But the marine-units will soon eliminate your volunteer-units."

"Probably," Gasper agrees. "But they mustn't find the starship!"

"You accept your own eradication in order to insure an abstract occurrence during another temporal period?"

"Just promise you won't give them the ship!" Gasper hisses.

"Amazing!" the intestine comments.

A group of marines steps up to the top of the ravine and sprays the interior with gunfire. Several slugs rip into the intestine, and a brown, mudlike liquid oozes from the wounds.

Gasper receives its last telepathic message, "???"

He tries to roll out of the line of fire, but feels several slugs rip into his body. Dull aches throb through his torso, then he

grows very cold. He closes his eyes and feels as though he is falling.

THE END

To try for a more pleasant ending to Gasper's story, return to section 1.

— 143 —

Gasper signals his men to remain quiet, then orders them to hide just below the rim of the ravine. The marines cease firing when it becomes apparent that nobody is returning fire.

"What's the big idea?" growls someone.

"We saw a bunch of colonists down there, Sarge," says Barnes. "They had some kind of giant worm with them."

Sarge shines his light into the bottom of the ravine. It falls on the floating intestine.

"What is that thing?" he cries.

"It's the colonists' worm," answers Barnes.

"I don't see any colonists with it," the Sarge says. "You sure you weren't imagining things?"

"They were there!" Barnes insists. "Jonesy heard 'em scream."

"I heard someone scream, all right," Jonesy says. "But it didn't sound exactly human."

"Let's have a closer look at that thing," the Sarge says. "Come on, men."

When the marines start over the edge of the ravine, Gasper and his volunteers attack. Taken by surprise, the marines resist weakly and quickly fall.

After the battle, the floating intestine drifts over to Gasper. "I (we) am (are) deeply sorry."

"What are you?" Gasper interrupts.

"I (we) am (are) the Mancji, the original inhabitants of this planet. I (we) am (are) what you consider an alien. I (we) have made a terrible mistake, as I (we) always do when trying to help in your affairs. Sensing that the Saretta-being was causing distress between your colonist-units and your crew-units, I (we) moved it."

"Moved it?" Gasper asks. "How?"

"Like this," the Mancji says as it floats upward.

"You telekinesed it?" he asks.

"More like teleported," the Mancji responds, "if I (we) understand your concept of spatial displacement correctly. The spatial rearrangement was instantaneous. It is now buried deep within Omega. Should I (we) bring it back? Would that alleviate the distress between the marine-units and the colonist-units?"

"It might help for a while," Gasper responds. "But the distress is rooted in conflicting interests between the marine-units and ourselves."

"This distress is not unusual?" the Mancji asks. It twists slightly in the air, as if gesturing with its wormlike body.

"Unfortunately, it is quite common," Gasper answers.

"It is caused by some units trying to dominate other units."

"This is not healthy?" the Mancji inquires.

"Not for us," Gasper responds. "Sometimes we must rebel against these dominator-units."

"Rebel?"

"Fight. Destroy."

"Ahh, yes," the Mancji returns. "Like destroying diseased cells."

"Sort of," Gasper confirms. "Will you help us?"

"Perhaps," the Mancji responds.

Gasper's volunteers collect the marines' weapons. They now have an Ordnance value of 7.

If Gasper asks the Mancji to return the ship, then attacks the hovertanks while the marines are distracted, turn to section 140.

If Gasper asks the Mancji to teleport a hovertank into his control, turn to section 141.

— 144 —

Gasper attacks the nearest marine from behind. The man slumps to the ground before his eyes ever leave the descending ship. Several other volunteers have similar successes, and

Section 144

the marines' force is substantially reduced before they realize they are in battle.

The remaining marines turn and attack tentatively, as if they cannot believe the colonists have flanked them. Sporadic bursts of gunfire light up the night. Gasper runs toward the nearest hovertank. A tall marine jumps in front of him. Gasper crashes into the sturdy fellow, who pushes him back with such force that Gasper nearly falls. Without giving him time to recover his footing, the marine strikes Gasper across the face with the butt of his assault rifle. Gasper falls to the ground, his cheek already swelling. The marine raises his rifle to shoot and smiles sadistically. Gasper's heart beats wildly against his ribcage.

The marine's smile suddenly turns to open-mouthed astonishment, then he screams. Gasper seizes the chance to roll out of the man's line of fire. He sees Tita standing behind the marine, a bloody bayonet in her hand.

"Come on," she says. "It's going to take a little time to activate the hovertank, and we didn't capture both of them."

Tita leads the way into the hovertank, Gasper close behind. She begins issuing orders to flip switches and activate targeting systems. Gasper pokes his head out the hatch. "Hurry up," he calls. "The other hovertank is turning our way."

"Get down and close the hatch!" Tita calls. "We're about to start a real firefight."

Gasper and his volunteers now have a hovertank. It has a Manpower value of 10 and an Ordnance value of 10. It attacks using Chart C. If the hovertank takes ten hits, it explodes.

The marines also have a hovertank. It has a Manpower value of 10 and an Ordnance value of 10. It attacks using Chart C. If it takes ten hits, it explodes.

If Gasper's hovertank explodes, turn to section 148.

If the marines' hovertank explodes, turn to section 146.

— 145 —

The first of the enemy's shells rocks Gasper's hovertank. A deafening "clang!" echoes through the interior, and the shock wave knocks Tita halfway off her seat. Smoke and fire belch into the tank through the tiny air vents. Tita yells something at Gasper, but he cannot hear her. He puts his hand to his ear and feels the warm trickle of blood. His eardrums have burst! Another explosion rocks the hovertank, and the interior lights black out.

Gasper feels the hovertank recoil as Tita fires at the marines. A second later, another explosion rocks his hovertank. They have been hit yet again! This time, however, a series of small explosions follows the large one. Gasper feels the floor grow hot, then the tank rumbles. The last thing he feels is the sensation of flying through the air.

THE END

If you're unhappy with the way this story ended, go back to section 1 and try again.

— 146 —

Tita loads and fires the first shell. Gasper sees it strike home through Tita's view port. A ball of flame envelops the enemy hovertank.

"We did it!" he screams. "Let's turn this thing on the air-cars—that ought to scatter the marines."

"Not so fast," Tita says. "Look."

Gasper looks out the port. The enemy tank is still in one piece—and swinging its turret in their direction.

"Load!" Tita calls.

The enemy gun belches smoke and flame. Half a second later, an explosion rocks Gasper's tank. Smoke seeps into the hovertank through the viewing ports and vents. The air temperature rises five degrees. Gasper pulls the automatic loader

handle. The gun ejects its spent casing and slides another shell into the breech. Tita activates the targeting computer and the turret swivels two inches.

The hovertank recoils as the mighty gun fires the shell. Gasper does not wait to see if the shell has struck home—he pulls the automatic loader lever immediately. The spent casing clangs to the floor. Gasper risks a glance out the window. The other tank is engulfed in flames, but its gun barrel is still trained on Gasper's hovertank. It belches flame once more.

This time, the explosion is deafening. Gasper's ears ring painfully. Tita activates the targeting computer and the turret swivels back and forth as the hovertank rocks. Gasper sees Tita yelling, but he cannot hear her words. Finally, the hovertank stops rocking and the computer locks on target. The hovertank fires and recoils, and Gasper pulls the automatic loading lever. He does not even look to see what happened to the other tank.

A second later, the expected return shot has not come. His hovertank fires and Gasper loads another shell. They fire four shots like this before Tita gives the thumbs-up signal. Gasper looks out the view port. A thick column of smoke and flame obscures the enemy tank.

Tita swings the turret in the direction of an air-car and activates the targeting computer. The hovertank recoils and the air-car explodes. By the time they destroy two more air-cars, the marines are running. Tita lobbs a few shells after them, then signals for Gasper to stop loading. When they climb from the hovertank, even Gasper, with his ringing ears, hears the crowd cheering.

The next morning, the colonists send a well-equipped expedition to find North Continent. Gasper and Tita stay behind to organize the temporary camp. A few hard weeks later, a fellow named Nat Grall shows up with supplies for the new colonists, and an orderly evacuation schedule is established. Gasper and Tita live more or less happily, but certainly freely and in liberty, on their new world.

As for Captain Weingar and His Lordship's weapons—they never see the light of day.

THE END

If you'd like to go on another adventure with Gasper, return to section 1.

— 147 —

Gasper attacks the closest marine and the unfortunate fellow slumps to the ground never knowing what happened. The other volunteers are not quite as effective, however. Although they sustain a few casualties, the marines respond to the surprise attack like trained professionals. They break into firing teams and counterattack.

Before he knows quite what has happened, Gasper and his volunteers are retreating back toward the ravine. Gasper runs from fleeing volunteer to fleeing volunteer, trying to rally them. "If we run now, we're dead!" he cries. Eventually, with the help of Tita and Taylor, he rallies what remains of his force. They turn and charge the marines once again.

This time, the marines greet them with a wall of hardshot. Gasper feels bullets strike him in the chest, shoulders, and head. The force of the blows knocks him onto his back. Although unable to move, he sees Tita and Taylor meet similar fates, then he closes his eyes and sinks into blackness.

The marines recover the weapons aboard the *Saretta* and leave the colonists to starve. Without any type of aid, the poorly prepared colonists fall prey to Omega's harsh climate within a year.

With the weapons provided by Lord Banshire, the marines take over the colonial government. Twenty years later, Omega is just another part of His Lordship's vast holdings.

THE END

Not a pleasant prospect, is it? To find a happier ending to the story, return to section 1 and make new choices.

— 148 —

The first of the enemy's shells rocks Gasper's hoversuit. A deafening "clang!" echoes through the interior, and the shock wave knocks Tita halfway off her seat. Smoke and fire belch into the tank through the tiny air vents, leaving an acrid smell.

Tita yells something at Gasper, but he cannot hear her. He puts his hand to his ear and feels the warm trickle of blood. His eardrums have burst! Another explosion rocks the hoversuit, and the interior lights black out.

Gasper feels the hoversuit recoil as Tita fires at the marines. A second later, an explosion rocks his hoversuit. They have been hit yet again! This time, however, a series of small explosions follows the large one. Gasper feels the floor grow hot, then the tank rumbles. The last thing he feels is the sensation of flying through the air.

The marines recover the weapons aboard the *Saretta* and leave the colonists to starve. Without any type of aid, the poorly prepared colonists fall prey to Omega's harsh climate within a year.

With the weapons provided by Lord Banshire, the marines take over the colonial government. Twenty years later, Omega is just another part of His Lordship's vast holdings.

THE END

To find a better fate for Gasper and the colonists, or a new adventure, return to section 1.

— 149 —

Several security cops turn toward Gasper, their handguns raised to their lips in the universal sign for silence. The lift chime rings behind Gasper, and he hears the doors open. He backs into the lift, frowning and shaking his head from side to side. The woman stops in her tracks and turns to run. The

security cops jump from their hiding places, half of them chasing the woman and half coming for Gasper.

The lift doors close just as shots begin to ring out. Gasper punches the button for Forty-Two Level. His heart beats rapidly and his stomach aches with fear. He realizes that the fear he harbors is irrational; the security cops could not possibly have identified him in such a short time. His greatest problem now, he tells himself, is that the Forty-Two Level route to work is five minutes slower than the Thirty-One Level route; he just might be late.

The lift doors open on Forty-Two Level. Ten yards down the corridor, a dozen men carrying handguns run toward the lift. They are probably rebels, Gasper realizes, for only rebels would dare carry weapons openly.

"Hold that lift!" the leader cries. "Does it go to Thirty-One Level?"

If Gasper holds the lift for the rebels, turn to section 150.

If Gasper closes the lift door and goes to Fifty-Three Level, turn to section 151.

— 150 —

Gasper presses the hold button, and the rebels rush into the lift. They all perspire heavily and gasp for breath. Gasper presses the button for Thirty-One Level, and the lift doors close.

"If you're looking for the one-eyed woman," Gasper says, "the security cops are chasing her down on Thirty-One Level."

"It was stupid to stay in the lift," the rebel leader remarks. "Now the cops will think you're one of us."

Gasper shrugs.

The rebel leader reaches into his jacket and withdraws an extra pistol. "You'll need this," he says. "Point it at the cops and pull the trigger—but for Pete's sake, don't hit one of us!" He hands the gun to Gasper.

The weapon feels heavy in Gasper's hand. A knot of anticipation twists his stomach. Whether he likes it or not, he

reflects, he is now a rebel—that is, if he survives the upcoming conflict.

“You know the territory,” the leader says. “You take command.”

“Me?” Gasper squeaks. “I’ve never been in a gunfight!”

“Neither have we,” responds the leader.

Gasper sighs. What seemed like a foolish adventure a short time ago now feels like an awesome responsibility. “Okay,” he says. “They were chasing the girl when I stepped back into the lift. That means most of their attention is going to be focused in the other direction, but they might have left one or two men to guard the elevator—especially if they’re expecting you fellows.”

“Let’s hope not,” the leader comments.

“In any case, when the doors open, let’s have everybody come out shooting. Then we’ll take off down the hall and, with any luck, we’ll catch them from behind.”

Before the leader can voice his consent, the lift doors open. Everybody fires a shot, but there are no security cops waiting. The staccato sound of automatic weapons fire echoes down the hall.

“She must be cornered!” says the leader.

Gasper leads the way down the hall, expecting to feel hot lead strike his body at any moment. Finally, he turns a corner and sees the backs of twelve security cops. The one-eyed woman crouches behind a barricade of trash barrels. She holds a smoking submachine gun in her hands.

Gasper ducks back around the corner and outlines the situation for the rebels.

“Your plan’s working so far,” the leader says. “Let’s get ‘em!”

Gasper is now in command of a group of twelve rebels. Use the following statistics for them:

Manpower: 12

Ordnance: 5

Stealth: 8

Morale: 9

Melee: 5

The rebels attack using Chart B.

The security cops have a Manpower value of 12 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper and the rebels wipe out the security cops, turn to section 152.

If the rebels' Manpower value is reduced to four men or less during the battle, turn to section 153.

— 151 —

Gasper quickly closes the lift and punches the button for Fifty-Three Level. He realizes he is going to be even more tardy for work, but if he gets himself killed by getting involved in a conflict between rebels and security cops, his job won't matter. Besides, if he hurries, he still has a chance of reaching the gate before the boss replaces him.

When the lift doors open, Gasper takes off at a sprint. The Fifty-Three Level corridor is crowded, so Gasper spends a considerable amount of time and energy dodging and weaving through the mass of people. Ten minutes later, he reaches the Hillgrove entrance and pushes his way through the mass of people crowding the gate. His boss, a burly man named John, is just walking into the complex.

"John!" he calls. "It's me, Gasper!"

John turns on his heel. "Gasper!" he barks. "What happened?"

"I got held up by rebels," he says.

"Did you report them?" John asks.

"No," Gasper responds. "I was already running late."

"Too bad," John sighs. "If you had, maybe security could have excused your tardy. I'm sorry." John turns to leave.

"Wait!" Gasper screams. "You've already replaced me?"

John shrugs. "You know the Fair Labor Act, Gasper. I had no choice."

"But I saw some security cops!" Gasper screams.

"Fine. Bring one of them by, and we'll see what we can do," John says. "Otherwise, you might as well go home." John turns toward the complex with authoritative finality.

Gasper drops his head and does not move for five full

minutes. Finally, he mutters, "Well, there's nothing to be done about it," and turns away.

Turn to section 12.

— 152 —

The rebels jump around the corner and open fire on the security cops. At first, the cops have no idea what is happening. As their fellows drop, the surviving cops simply intensify their fire at Tita.

Finally, the cops realize that they are being attacked from the rear. Several cops turn and fire at the rebels. Gasper ducks back around the corner, hardshot whizzing past his head.

"They're sitting ducks!" yells the rebel leader. "Great plan."

"Since when do ducks shoot back?" Gasper asks.

He and the leader lean around the corner and pull their triggers. Two more cops drop, then Tita unloads a burst from her submachine gun that makes the survivors duck their heads. With Tita keeping them pinned down, Gasper and the rest of the rebels pick off the last of the cops with ease.

Tita wades through the smoky hallway toward Gasper and the rebels, her submachine gun held carelessly in her left hand. "Hi," she says. "Lucky for me you fellows happened along."

The leader smiles. "I'm sorry we were as late as we were. Half an hour before the rendezvous, we found out that a stoolie had spilled his guts to Banshire's boys. We had to pick up a few guys."

Tita smiles at Gasper. "I like this one the best," she says playfully.

"Sorry," the leader says. "He's just a citizen. At least he was until a few minutes ago. Now, I'd say he's a fugitive."

"Fugitive?" Gasper protests.

"You betcha," Tita says. "Banshire's boys are sure to do a molecular scan on this whole area. They'll know the identity of everybody involved within three days. Welcome to the Organization!"

The rebel leader nods his head. "It's like I said in the lift—you're a rebel now, like it or not. And I'm going to give you your first assignment as a rebel. You are to protect Tita here at all costs—even your own life. Do whatever she orders and ask no questions. She's on a mission of the utmost importance to the Organization."

"And if I refuse?" Gasper asks.

"Don't," Tita says. "You're much too handsome to fall into Banshire's hands."

Gasper shrugs his shoulders. "Okay, boss. What do we do now?"

Everybody hides their weapons and Tita leads the way to the subway. On the subway, she explains the rest of their mission. "We're going to the Newark airport. I've arranged to sneak us aboard a transport flight."

"To where?" Gasper asks nervously.

"You'll see," she says.

At the airport, Tita leads the rebels to a freight gate. A guard opens the gate without speaking and the rebels scurry inside. Tita confers quietly with the man and then leads the way to one of the ancient jet planes. Gasper breathes a secret sigh of relief—at least their destination is on the North American continent. If they were going overseas, they'd take a transcontinental rocket.

Tita loads them into the cargo hold and tells them to remain quiet. Several hours later, the plane takes off. Even though it is the first time he has ever flown, Gasper quickly falls asleep in the dark hold. The rapid current of events over the past few hours has worn him out.

When Gasper awakes, the plane has already landed. Although its cargo door is opened, the rebels are still huddled inside the hold. The sun is beating down harshly upon the plane, and the hold has grown stiflingly hot.

"Where are we?" Gasper whispers.

"Mojave Spaceport," Tita answers. "We'll get out of here after dark." She pulls a canteen out of a nearby box. "Have something to drink."

Gasper gulps the water eagerly, then settles back to wait in the terrible heat.

Fourteen hours later, an hour after the sun has gone down, Tita finally climbs out of the cargo hold. Gasper and the others follow her cautiously, their pistols cocked and ready to

fire. Tita points toward a tower of lights rising off the desert floor. A tiny rumble rolls from the tower.

"That is the starship *Saretta*," she whispers. "Your mission is to sneak me aboard it."

"That doesn't look like any starship I've ever seen," says one of the rebels.

"It's ten miles away," Tita answers. "The nose stands nearly a thousand feet off the ground."

Nobody answers.

"They're preparing to launch it tomorrow," she says. "The noise you hear is an engine test; luckily for us, that will continue all night. Nobody will hear the gunfire when we meet the guards."

"How many guards?" Gasper asks.

"I don't know," Tita answers. "But they'll be armed with assault rifles, I'm sure." She starts toward the starship.

An hour and a half later, the roar of the engine test is so loud that the rebels have all stuffed bits of cloth or paper into their ears. The roar still hurts.

Tita suddenly motions for everybody to hit the dirt. Gasper crawls up next to her. A hundred yards away, six men wearing the uniform of Lord Banshire's marines stand in a circle. They are passing a pad of paper from hand to hand, writing messages.

Gasper scratches a message in the sand, "Sneak past?"

Tita nods her head. Gasper returns to the others and points toward the guards, then begins crawling. The rebels nod their heads in understanding and follow suit.

Make a Stealth check for the rebels. Roll two six-sided dice.

If the number rolled is equal to or less than the rebels' value for Stealth, turn to section 159.

If the number rolled is greater than their value for Stealth, turn to section 156.

— 153 —

Gasper and the rebels step around the corner and open fire on the security cops. Although a few of the cops fall to the sneak attack immediately, the others respond as if they were expecting it. Most of the cops turn and fire at the rebels,

while one or two keep Tita pinned down behind her trash cans.

The cops' greater combat experience shows immediately. The first volley of fire knocks out a quarter of Gasper's firepower. He and the rebel leader duck back around the corner, then try to sneak potshots at the cops. Each time Gasper sticks his head around the corner, bullets ricochet off the wall near his head.

In the meantime, the cops pick off rebels with frustrating accuracy, and the rebel survivors soon flee. A few seconds later, the staccato fire of the one-eyed woman's submachine gun ceases. Gasper risks sticking his head around the corner long enough to see two security cops dragging her away. She is clearly still alive, for she is kicking and screaming.

A flurry of shots forces Gasper to duck back behind the corner.

"They've got her!" Gasper exclaims. "They're taking her down Thirty-One Corridor toward Hillgrove."

"Follow me," the leader says. "I've got a getaway team up on Thirty-Three Level. We'll use them to ambush the cops down the way."

The leader takes off at a sprint for the lift. Three minutes later, Gasper and the leader are running down Thirty-Three Corridor toward a gang of roughs. When they pass the group of youths, the rebel leader calls, "Draw your weapons and follow us!" The hoodlums obey.

"Effective disguise!" Gasper comments, puffing.

"No disguise," the leader answers. "If I wasn't in such a hurry, I wouldn't trust them behind me."

They come to a stairway, and Gasper leads the way down, almost jumping from flight to flight. When they reach Thirty-One Level, he throws the door open and runs into the corridor fearlessly. The hoodlums follow close on his heels.

It's only a second before the security cops show up. "Don't hit the woman!" calls the leader.

Gasper's group has a Manpower value of 8 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart C.

The security cops have a Manpower value of whoever is alive after the fight in section 150, and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart B.

If Gasper's group perishes, turn to section 154.

If Gasper's group prevails, turn to section 155.

— 154 —

The cops open fire immediately. Bullets whiz past Gasper, finding their marks in the bodies of the young gang members. Gasper squeezes the trigger of his pistol repeatedly but has little success in scoring a hit. Finally, he runs out of ammunition and ducks into a doorway.

There is nobody to ask for more bullets, so he decides to take a desperate chance. Gasper leaps into the corridor and charges the cops, hoping against hope to surprise them and squeeze some advantage out of the situation.

The security leader smiles as Gasper runs toward him, then raises his pistol and takes aim. The man's forearm twitches, then Gasper sees the muzzle flash. He hears a bone crack and feels something strike his forehead.

Turn to section 29.

— 155 —

The cops freeze in their tracks. "Where'd they come from?" demands one.

Gasper raises his pistol and fires in response. The corridor erupts into deafening gunfire. Hardshot ricochets along the walls as if the corridor were a wind tunnel. Gasper stands his ground and continues to pick off security cops. Not to be outdone by his courage, the hoodlums charge headlong at the cops, who quickly decide to leave.

Tita walks down the corridor and smiles at Gasper. "You're a pretty crazy fellow," she purrs.

Gasper, who is beginning to shake, tries to smile in response. "J-j-just new at this sort of thing."

"Well," Tita says, "you did well. Your next assignment is to protect me. I'm on a mission of the utmost importance to the Organization."

"I'm not exactly a rebel," Gasper says.

Tita studies the carnage in the hallway. "You are now, like it or not. Gather up any of the others who can walk and follow me."

Everybody hides their weapons, and Tita leads the way to the subway. Once they are on the train, she explains a little more. "We're going to the Newark airport. I've arranged to sneak us aboard a transport flight."

"To where?" Gasper asks nervously.

"No questions," she responds coldly.

At the airport, Tita leads the rebels to a freight gate. A guard opens the gate without speaking, and the rebels scurry inside. Tita confers quietly with the man, then leads the way to an ancient jet plane. Gasper breathes a sigh of relief—at least their destination is on the North American continent. If they were going overseas, they'd take a transcontinental rocket.

Tita loads them into the cargo hold and tells them to remain quiet. Gasper, exhausted by all of the excitement so far that day, immediately falls asleep. He barely notices the plane take off.

When Gasper awakens, the plane has already landed. Although its cargo door is open, the rebels are still huddled inside the hold. The sun is beating down harshly upon the plane, and the hold has grown stiflingly hot.

"Where are we?" Gasper whispers.

"Mojave Spaceport," Tita answers. "We'll get out of here after dark." She pulls a canteen out of a nearby box. "Have something to drink."

Gasper gulps the water eagerly, then settles back to wait in the terrible heat.

Fourteen hours later, an hour after the sun has gone down, Tita finally climbs out of the cargo hold. Gasper and the others follow cautiously, their pistols cocked and ready to fire. Tita points toward a tower of lights rising off the desert floor. A tiny rumble rolls from the tower.

"That is the starship *Saretta*," she whispers. "Your mission is to sneak me aboard it."

"That doesn't look like any starship I've ever seen," comments one of the youths.

"It's ten miles away," Tita answers.

"Oh, man," grumbles a kid, "and I bet we have to walk."

"That's right," Tita says. "Now listen close. The noise stands nearly a thousand feet off the ground. That gives you

an idea of the scale we're dealing with. They'll launch it tomorrow—the noise you hear is an engine test. Luckily for us, that will go on all night; nobody will hear the gunfire if we have to fight the guards.”

“How many guards?” Gasper asks.

“I don't know,” Tita answers. “But they'll be armed with assault rifles.” She starts toward the ship without further comment.

An hour and a half later, the roar of the engine test is so loud that everybody has stuffed paper or cloth into their ears. The sound still hurts.

Tita suddenly motions for everybody to hit the dirt. Gasper crawls up next to her. A hundred yards away, six men wearing the uniform of Lord Banshire's marines stand in a circle. They are passing a pad of paper from hand to hand, writing messages.

Gasper scratches a message in the sand. “Sneak past?”

Tita nods her head. Gasper returns to the hoodlums and points toward the guards, then begins crawling. The others nod their heads in understanding and follow suit.

Make a Stealth check for the rebels. Roll two six-sided dice.

If the number rolled is less than or equal to the rebels' value for Stealth, turn to section 159.

If the number rolled is greater than their value for Stealth, turn to section 156.

— 156 —

Halfway there, one of the guards turns toward Gasper and points excitedly. The others unsling their guns and start gesturing wildly. The muzzle flashes of their automatic weapons inform Gasper beyond a doubt that his group has been spotted.

Gasper and his group attack using Chart C.

The guards have a Manpower value of 6 and an Ordnance value of 7. They attack using Chart C.

If Gasper and his group perish, turn to section 157.

If Gasper and his group prevail, turn to section 158.

— 157 —

Gasper rises to one knee to fire. He immediately regrets this mistake. Four slugs rip into his chest. He spins to the ground and falls upon his back. For several minutes, he is aware of nothing but the stars in the sky and the roar of the starship's engines.

Finally, a man wearing the uniform of a marine stands over Gasper. He smiles and says something inaudible, then raises his pistol and fires.

Turn to section 29.

— 158 —

Gasper starts firing at the marines, crawling closer as he shoots. His first shot finds its target, and a marine falls. Two more fall immediately afterward. Gasper continues to crawl forward, targeting his pistol on the muzzle flashes of the automatic weapons. Marine after marine falls until the last one is cut down.

Gasper and the others make sure that all six marines are dead, then continue walking toward the starship.

Turn to section 159.

— 159 —

Half an hour later, the *Saretta* rises before the rebels like a solitary skyscraper. The earth trembles in anticipation of the mighty ship's liftoff.

A few wooden shacks, recently constructed and apparently not intended to stand long, are scattered around the base of the ship. Occasionally, a technician wheels a gurney into a door at the base of the starship. After studying the situation briefly, Tita grabs Gasper by the shoulder and motions for him to follow her into one of the buildings. She turns to the others and waves them away.

Gasper and Tita sneak through the night to the building's door. Immediately after a technician leaves the building, Tita grabs Gasper by the wrist and enters it. Inside, they stand in a plain wooden hallway. The walls are insulated with noise baffles, and the engine noise is only a dull roar, although the floor vibrates.

"What are they doing?" Gasper asks.

"It's a colonyship," Tita responds. "They're putting people into Coldsleep and loading them aboard. I'm going to stow away. You're coming with me."

Gasper shakes his head. "We got you here; that was the deal."

Tita shakes her head. "I'll need your help. Besides, what are you going to do here on Terra? You're an outlaw."

Gasper does not respond.

"The freedom of the Omegan colony depends on the success of my mission," Tita almost shouts. "And besides, don't you want to see the new world with me?"

Gasper shrugs his shoulders. "I guess you're right."

Tita smiles and leads the way into the next room. Five women wearing the white gowns of lab assistants labor over operating tables. They look up curiously.

"We were told to report to Nurse Harrow," Tita says.

One of the women, her face covered by a surgical mask, nods her head. "Oh, yes!" she croons. "The governor's niece. I've been expecting you. This way."

Gasper gives Tita a strange look and follows her to the nurse's work station. "Take off your clothes," the nurse

says. She motions the nervous Gasper to get up onto the table. "You'll awaken several months into the voyage," she says. "We've hidden cold-weather survival gear for your team in space CC-100 of your hold. Got that?"

The woman holds up an air-hypo. "Repeat it," she says.

"CC- . . ." The woman pricks Gasper with the hypo. "Ow!"

"One hundred," the nurse finishes for him.

Gasper's thinking grows difficult. "What's happening?" he asks. The nurse leans over him. Her face seems elongated and unnatural. "CC one hundre-e-e-e-e-e-e-d-d-d-d-d," she says. Gasper closes his eyes and feels as though he is falling from a very great height.

In his dream, the ground gives way like a feather bed when Gasper strikes it. He has fallen over a hundred miles, expecting to die when he hits the ground. Instead, the earth swallows him, burying him in deep folds of cold.

The folds begin to squeeze and Gasper chokes. Suddenly, the sun shines hot and bright directly into his eyes.

"Wake up, sleepy-head," says a comforting voice.

Gasper coughs violently and feels something shoot from his mouth. His lungs burn with the raw sensation of breathing normally again. He blinks several times, then stares up into a flashlight.

"How do you feel?" asks a woman's voice. It's Tita.

"Terrible," Gasper says. "What happened?"

"We're in transit," she says. "You're the last to come around. Put this on."

Gasper feels a heavy suit laid across his body. His memory returns in a flood. "But we were supposed to sleep for months!"

"Three months and four days, so far," says a man. Gasper struggles to see him, but it is too dark.

He slips into the heavy jumpsuit, then shivers as he realizes how cold he is. "How are we going to survive in this?" he asks. "I'm freezing."

"It'll get a little better as you come around," Tita says, "but we won't have to stand it much longer. We're going to take over the ship."

Gasper whistles. "Can you fly one of these things?" he asks disbelievingly.

"That's not the point," Tita responds. She helps him off his gurney. "Watch your feet, it's slippery."

Gaspar and the others pass the next three days getting to know each other and walking between rows of Coldsleeping colonists. Although Gaspar feels weakened, he is amazed at how rapidly his strength returns. By the fourth day, he is jogging through the dark, frozen hold and doing push-ups. By the fifth day, he is desperately bored.

"How long are we going to wait?" he asks. "I'm as scared as the next man, but I say we get this mutiny on the road—before we go crazy in this frozen cave!"

"Which way is the front of the ship?" Tita responds angrily. "We don't even know that. I suggest we explore our environment before we unleash our pop-guns."

"You mean you don't have a map of the ship?" Gaspar exclaims. "I thought you had this thing organized."

"I did the best I could!" Tita snaps.

"Hold on," interrupts Kershaw. Although he has the face of a boxer, Gaspar has already learned to respect Kershaw for his careful thinking and patience. "You weren't around when we planned this thing, Gaspar, so you don't know how difficult it was to put together. But you're right about one thing—none of us expected to be shoved into a cargo hold and locked up tight. Maybe we should have thought about it, but we didn't. Tita and I have been walking this hold for over a week now, and we haven't found sight of anything that looks like a hatch. It appears we're stuck in here."

"Great," Gaspar sighs. "For how long?"

"Five years," Tita answers quietly.

"What?" Gaspar shrieks. "Five years? We'll go crazy!"

"That won't be a problem," Kershaw says evenly. "We'll starve long before that."

"I don't believe it!" Gaspar shrieks. "I save her life, and look what she does to me!"

"At least you'll die free," Tita snaps.

Gaspar shines his light in her face and growls. A moment later, the absurdity of the situation strikes him and he says, "I suppose we could eat a few of the colonists."

They all break out in tension-relieving laughter. Finally, Kershaw says, "Look, if there's an emergency in flight, the crew must have a way to get back here. All we need to do is find it. We obviously haven't found it so far because we're looking for a hatch. Instead, it's got to be something like an air vent or a garbage-way. I propose we start a methodical

search of the entire hold. We'll examine every piece of metal on every wall, and we'll find a way out of here."

"Agreed!" Gasper responds. "Now let's eat. All this talk about starvation has made me hungry."

After a sparse meal of dried rations, Kershaw assigns each person to search specific quadrants of the walls and even the ceiling and the floor. Gasper is assigned to search the floor. He starts in the far corner and begins shining his flashlight over every square inch of the icy floor.

Eight hours later, he reaches the middle of the floor. He pushes his thousandth gurney aside and nearly faints with excitement. A hatch is located squarely beneath it.

"Bingo!" he yells. "I've found a hatch."

The others scurry over. Gasper opens the hatch and jumps down through the opening into another room below. It is about twenty feet high and the same size as the cargo hold. It is filled with hundreds of crates. Gasper opens one of the crates and finds a dozen assault rifles.

"Hardshot!" he exclaims. "There are thousands of weapons here."

Kershaw jumps down and opens a case. "Field rations! At least we won't starve."

"The rations I can understand," Gasper says. "But why do they need all these weapons? There's enough firepower here to equip a battalion."

"How rough is Omega?" Kershaw asks. "Is there a war going on?"

Gasper shakes his head. "They wouldn't send colonists to fight a war, unless they wanted to lose."

"And if they wanted to lose, why provide all this equipment? It doesn't make any sense."

"But think about how well this hold is hidden," Gasper says. "We would never have found it if we weren't desperate. They're smuggling this cargo!"

Tita ushers the remaining rebels down into the secret hold and shuts the hatch. She starts handing assault rifles to each rebel. "We've just solved the problem of how to get out of here," she says. "There's company in the main hold."

Tita briefly instructs the rebels in the use of assault rifles, while Gasper gets a boost up from Kershaw to peer into the main hold and observe the company. Two men have entered the hold from an access panel bolted onto the far wall. They are carefully inspecting each colonist.

Section 160

Gasper is now in command of ten rebels (not including Tita, who does not participate in any battles). Use the following statistics for these rebels:

Manpower: 10

Ordnance: 7

Morale: 9

Stealth: 9

Melee: 5

If Gasper orders the rebels to ambush the two men, turn to section 160.

If Gasper remains in hiding, hoping that the two men will leave before discovering signs of the rebels' presence, turn to section 161.

— 160 —

"They're bound to find signs of our activities," Gasper says. "We'd better attack." He instructs the rebels to turn off their lights and make their way toward the two men inspecting the colonists. "Open fire when I do; we can't let those two escape, or we'll have the entire crew down here after us."

The rebels nod, then silently leave the hidden hold and crawl toward the two men's lights. As Gasper inches along the freezing floor, he hopes he is doing the right thing. After all, the crewmen's absence is bound to be noticed eventually. On the other hand, they have shown the rebels the way out of the hold, and Gasper is eager to grasp this opportunity.

When he is within ten feet of the men, Gasper stops.

"Hey, McDonnell!" calls one of the men. "This gurney is empty!"

"It is?" answers McDonnell in disbelief. "Note the number and we'll report it to the chief."

Gaspar flicks off his rifle's safety. Nine soft clicks tell him that the other rebels have done likewise.

"Did you hear that?" McDonnell asks.

"Yeah," answers the first man.

Gaspar opens fire.

Gaspar and the rebels attack using Chart D.

The two crewmen have a Manpower value of 2 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart E.

If the two crewmen survive the first round of combat, turn to section 166.

If the two crewmen perish during the first round of combat, turn to section 164.

— 161 —

“We’d better leave those guys alone,” Gaspar mutters. “If we take them out now, the whole crew will come down here.” Gaspar returns to the hidden hold. “Let’s stay very quiet. Perhaps they’ll miss any sign of our presence.”

Fifteen minutes later, Gaspar hears one of the men say, “Hey McDonnell! This gurney is empty.”

“It is?” McDonnell answers in disbelief. “Let’s go back and report that to the chief. I’m getting cold, anyway.”

The two men leave via the same access panel from which they entered, taking the time to seal it back up. Gaspar and Kershaw immediately cross the hold and inspect the access panel. There is no sign of the panel except a narrow seam.

“No wonder we couldn’t find a way out!” Kershaw exclaims. “It’s bolted from the inside.”

“Great,” Gaspar says. “What do we do now?”

“Wait,” Kershaw suggests. “They’ll be back to take a closer look.”

Two hours later, the buzz of a power wrench echoes through the hold. Gaspar gathers the rebels, and they move toward the access panel. The panel clangs to the ground, but Gaspar does not see the lights he expected. A second later, the hold lights come on.

“Get down!” Gaspar hisses.

The rebels drop to the floor immediately. Sixteen security guards rush out of the access panel, their pistols drawn.

Section 162

Gaspar flicks his safety off and gives the signal to attack.

Gaspar and the rebels attack using Chart B.

The security guards have a Manpower value of 16 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart D.

If Gaspar and the rebels prevail, turn to section 162.

If Gaspar and the rebels perish, turn to section 163.

— 162 —

Gaspar squeezes the trigger, and a burst of hardshot finds its mark in the security guards. The hold erupts into gunfire. Bullets whiz past Gaspar's head and ricochet off gunneys, occasionally thumping into the body of a Coldsleeping colonist.

Gaspar signals his men to spread out and move up. He hopes to keep the security guards bunched together. As they advance, Gaspar pours a relentless stream of automatic weapons fire into the guards. Although the guards attempt to return the fire, their pistols are no match for the rebels' assault rifles. Eventually, they retreat toward the accessway.

Gaspar stands and charges, spraying the access panel with fire. "Don't let them leave!" he calls. The other rebels follow Gaspar's lead, and the security guards fall in the resulting hail of hardshot.

After the battle, Gaspar gathers the rebels. "This is it," he says. "If they don't know already, they'll know we're here before long. We'd better move now."

"Agreed," says Tita. "And I'm coming this time."

"No," Gaspar says. "I'm supposed to protect you—not drag you into a firefight."

"How do you know I'll be safe back here?" she argues. "They might open up this whole place to the vacuum."

"You've got a point," he says. "You can come, but stay out of the firing line."

"Agreed," she says.

Gaspar leads the way into the access tunnel. Barely three

feet high, it winds upward toward the nose of the ship at a steep angle. It is filled with pipes and ducts. "Now I know why we haven't seen much of the crew," Gasper says. "This is impossible to move through."

"They must make the holds difficult to reach to keep the crew out of the cargo during long voyages," Kershaw says. "I'll bet things can get out of hand after four or five years aboard a starship."

After forty-five minutes of crawling and duck-walking, the accessway opens into a room. The access panel has been removed, and a man stands outside. As the rebels work their way toward the opening, the man looks down the tunnel.

"Is that you, Chief?" he calls.

"Yeah," Gasper answers. "Give us a hand."

The man leans inside. Gasper greets the surprised fellow with the muzzle of his assault rifle. "Now back up very carefully and very slowly. If you so much as sigh, I'll pull the trigger."

Gasper and the rebels crawl out of the tunnel. The surprised man, who has the name "Kirby" stitched above the pocket of his jumpsuit, leads the rebels up a spiraling corridor toward the bridge. After five minutes of climbing the steep incline, he stops. "It's just around the bend. There'll be about five officers on the bridge," he whispers. "If it's all the same to you fellows, I'd just as soon they didn't see me leading the way."

Gasper sneaks a peek around the bend. As Kirby promised, a doorway leads into a room bustling with ship's officers. Two bored guards stand outside the doorway. Gasper dismisses Kirby, then flicks off his rifle's safety. The other rebels prepare themselves, too.

After taking two deep breaths, Gasper charges up the corridor toward the bridge doors.

Gasper and his rebels attack using Chart B.

The crew have a Manpower value of 7 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper and his rebels perish, turn to section 167.

If they prevail, turn to section 169.

— 163 —

Gaspar squeezes his trigger and a burst of hardshot sprays the wall above the security guards' heads. They immediately fall to the floor and spread out, returning the rebels' fire with amazing accuracy. Gaspar orders his men to spread out as well, hoping to keep the guards bottled up near the access panel.

Gaspar's plan backfires. One by one, his inexperienced rebels fall prey to the deadly aim of the well-trained guards. The staccato rattle of assault rifles slowly dies, while the single reports of the guards' pistols grow dominant. Gaspar decides he must take a desperate chance. He jumps to his feet and charges toward the access panel, spraying lead everywhere.

Something strikes his right thigh and knocks his leg from beneath him. Before he hits the ground, he feels two more blows—this time into his torso. As warm liquid begins to ooze down his chest, he finally realizes that he has been shot. Gaspar closes his eyes and falls into the final cold sleep.

THE END

Feel free to return to section 1 and try again.

— 164 —

The rattle of automatic fire echoes through the dark hold. A few seconds later, all is quiet. Gaspar walks over to the dead crewmen.

"Put them on gurneys," he orders. "Maybe we can disguise them as colonists."

"That was almost too easy," Kershaw says. "Let's get ready for the next batch. They'll probably send a couple of men down to investigate when these guys don't show up."

"What?" Tita exclaims. "You want to wait for them here? I say we go after the bridge now, while we have the element of surprise on our side."

If they wait in the hold, turn to section 168.

If they go for the bridge, turn to section 165.

— 165 —

"Tita's right. Let's go for the bridge," Gasper says. "There's no sense giving them a chance to get organized."

"I'm glad you agree," says Tita. "I'm coming with you this time."

"No," Gasper replies sternly. "I'm supposed to protect you, not drag you into a firefight."

"I'll stay out of the way," she says. "But I'll be safer with you than back here. Once they know what's happening, they might open the cargo holds to the vacuum."

"You do have a point," Gasper agrees.

Gasper leads the way into the access tunnel. Barely three feet high, it winds upward toward the nose of the ship at a steep angle. It is filled with pipes and ducts. "Now I know why we haven't seen much of the crew," Gasper says. "This is impossible to move through."

"They must make the holds difficult to reach to keep the crew out of the cargo during long voyages," Kershaw says. "I'll bet things can get out of hand after four or five years aboard a starship."

After forty-five minutes of crawling and duck-walking, the accessway opens into a room. The access panel has been removed, and a man stands outside. As the rebels work their way toward the opening, the man hears them and looks down the tunnel.

"Is that you, Chief?" he calls.

"Yeah," Gasper answers. "Give us a hand."

The man leans inside. Gasper greets the surprised fellow with the muzzle of his assault rifle. "Now back up very carefully and very slowly. If you so much as sigh, I'll pull the trigger."

Gasper and the rebels crawl out of the tunnel. The surprised man, who has the name "Kirby" stitched above the pocket of his jumpsuit, leads them along a rising, spiraling

Section 165

corridor toward the bridge. As they pass a doorway, he brushes against a red button.

"What was that?" Gasper asks.

"Nothing," Kirby answers nervously.

A siren begins to whine throughout the ship. "The alarm!" Gasper calls. He takes off up the corridor at a dead run, dragging Kirby roughly along. As he passes each intersection, Gasper peers down the long corridors, expecting to see a group of security guards bustling toward them. He sees nothing, and that worries him.

Finally, he rounds a bend in the corridor and comes face to face with eight security guards. They begin firing immediately. Gasper steps back around the corner. "There ought to be more than eight guards," he says. He presses the muzzle of his rifle against Kirby's chest. "You've already crossed me once," he hisses. "How many guards are there on this ship?"

"Sixteen," Kirby answers.

"That means five are coming up behind us somewhere," Gasper says. As if confirming his speculation, five security guards round the bend behind Gasper. "We'll have to fight our way up to the bridge," Gasper says. "Unless you know a better way, Kirby?"

The frightened man shakes his head.

Gasper and the rebels attack using Chart C.

The security guards have a Manpower value of 13 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart B.

If Gasper and his men prevail, turn to section 170.

If Gasper and his men perish, turn to section 167.

— 166 —

Gasper's burst ricochets off the wall and ceiling above the crewmen's heads. They immediately drop to the floor and toss their lights into the hold. Without turning on their own lights, thus making themselves targets, the rebels cannot see the two men.

The rebels cautiously move toward the last spot where they saw the two men, firing at any sound ahead of them. Gasper hears a scream near the access panel and runs toward it. When he arrives, he realizes he is too late. The access panel is back tightly in place. He switches his light on. A trail of blood leads into the accessway.

Two hours later, the buzz of a power wrench echoes through the hold. Gasper gathers the rebels and they move toward the access panel. The panel clangs to the ground, but Gasper does not see the lights he expected. A second later, the main hold lights blink on.

"Get down!" Gasper hisses.

The rebels drop to the floor immediately. Fifteen security guards rush out of the access panel, their pistols drawn.

Gasper flicks his safety off and gives the signal to attack.

Gasper and the rebels attack using Chart C.

The security guards have a Manpower value of 15 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper and the rebels prevail, turn to section 162.

If Gasper and the rebels perish, turn to section 163.

— 167 —

As Gasper rounds the bend, he squeezes his trigger and hardshot spews up the corridor in front of him. The security guards retreat toward the bridge, then the pair of steel doors slowly begins to close. "Hurry!" Gasper calls. He charges faster. The muzzle of a gun peers around the corner. Gasper sees it flash too late, then feels the slug strike him in the chest. He slumps to the ground, unable to draw breath.

The other rebels hesitate, and the guards pick them off at leisure.

THE END

Give Gasper another chance for a happy ending. Return to section 1 and make some new choices.

— 168 —

"Let's wait," Gasper says. "I bet they send a couple of more guys down here to investigate." Tita stomps off toward the rear of the hold, but everybody else expresses agreement.

Two hours later, the buzz of a power wrench echoes through the hold. Gasper gathers the rebels, and they move toward the access panel. The panel clangs to the ground, but Gasper does not see the lights he expected. A second later, the main hold lights blink on.

"Get down!" Gasper hisses. The rebels drop to the floor immediately. Fourteen security guards rush out of the accessway, their pistols drawn. Gasper flicks his rifle safety off and gives the signal to attack.

Gasper and the rebels attack using Chart B.

The security guards have a Manpower value of 14 and an Ordnance value of 5. They attack using Chart D.

If Gasper and the rebels prevail, turn to section 162.

If Gasper and the rebels perish, turn to section 163.

— 169 —

Gasper opens fire as he rounds the corner. The guards fall immediately. The other rebels surge past him onto the bridge, spraying lead as they go.

On the bridge, the officers are just starting to reach for their weapons. "Don't!" Gasper orders. "You don't stand a chance, and I'd hate to tear up this place with automatic weapons fire." The officers accept his advice, and the rebels disarm them.

Afterward, Tita explains her mission to Gasper. "A few years ago, a group of rebels blackmailed His Lordship Banshire into opening the planet Omega to colonization."

"Blackmailed? How?"

"Banshire had known about Omega for years," Tita backtracks. "He'd kept it secret in order to bleed its resources and solidify his hold on Terra. The rebels discovered this and threatened to publicize what he had done unless he organized a colonization program for the planet. With the overpopulation problem on Terra, Banshire would have been ruined—probably torn limb from limb—if what he had done became common knowledge. So he agreed.

"But Banshire's not a good loser. He decided to try to take over Omega's government forcefully. To that end, he's been sneaking marines onto the planet every time he sends an envoy vessel. He's got a whole battalion on Omega now, which would be more than adequate to overthrow the government—if they had the equipment."

Gasper looks at the assault rifle in his hands. "The equipment that we found?" he asks.

Tita nods. "There are also eight hovertanks somewhere on board. To make a long story short, the Organization discovered Banshire's plan and assigned me to make sure that those weapons never reached the marines. We've succeeded."

"We sure did," Gasper says.

Five years later, under threat of death, Captain Weingar

lands the *Saretta* near Omega's capitol. Tita and Gasper take great pride in presenting Taliaferro Tey, Nat Grall, and the other planet leaders with not only five thousand new colonists but the means of protecting them from His Lordship's sinister plans. In return, Tita, Gasper, and the other rebels receive homesteads on a free planet.

THE END

To try a different adventure, return to section 1.

— 170 —

Gasper orders two rebels to cover their rear, then concentrates his firepower on the guards between the rebels and the bridge. As he had hoped, two men with automatic weapons prove sufficient to keep the five guards in the rear pinned down.

He steps around the bend and fires a burst. The guards retreat a little further up the corridor. Another rebel steps around the bend and fires a burst, and the guards retreat further up the corridor. In this manner, Gasper and his rebels force the guards all the way to the bridge.

When they reach the bridge, Gasper is disappointed to see that a pair of steel doors seal it from the rest of the ship. He orders the rebels to concentrate their fire on the guards. The guards begin to fall quickly, and the survivors panic.

As Gasper hoped, one guard palms a speaker key set into the wall beside the doors. He pleads with the captain to open the doors. Although the captain hesitates at first, Gasper intensifies the pressure on the guards and Captain Weingar finally yields to their request. As the doors crack open, Gasper calls "Charge!"

The rebels rush the bridge, pouring into it on the heels of the guards. When the guards turn to defend themselves, the rebels have them covered. "You'd do just as well to give up now," Gasper says. "And we can all avoid a lot more bloodshed." The officers, seeing that their cause is hopeless against the rebels' automatic weapons, reluctantly agree.

Afterward, Tita explains her mission to Gasper. "A few

years ago, a group of rebels blackmailed His Lordship Banshire into opening the planet Omega to colonization."

"Blackmailed? How?"

"Banshire had known about Omega for years," Tita backtracks. "He'd kept it secret in order to bleed its resources and solidify his hold on Terra. The rebels discovered this and threatened to publicize what he had done unless he organized a colonization program for the planet. With the overpopulation problem on Terra, Banshire would have been ruined—probably torn limb from limb—if what he had done became common knowledge. So he agreed.

"But Banshire's not a good loser. He decided to try to take over Omega's government forcefully. To that end, he's been sneaking marines onto the planet every time he sends an envoy vessel. He's got a whole battalion on Omega now, which would be more than adequate to overthrow the government—if they had the equipment."

Gaspar looks at the assault rifle in his hands. "The equipment that we found?" he asks.

Tita nods. "There are also eight hovertanks somewhere on board. To make a long story short, the Organization discovered Banshire's plan and assigned me to make sure that those weapons never reached the marines. We've succeeded."

"We sure did," Gaspar says.


Five years later, under threat of death, Captain Weingar lands the *Saretta* near Omega's capitol. Tita and Gaspar take great pride in presenting Taliaferro Tey, Nat Grall, and the other planet leaders with not only five thousand new colonists, but the means of protecting them from His Lordship's sinister plans. In return, Tita, Gaspar, and the other rebels receive homesteads on a free planet.

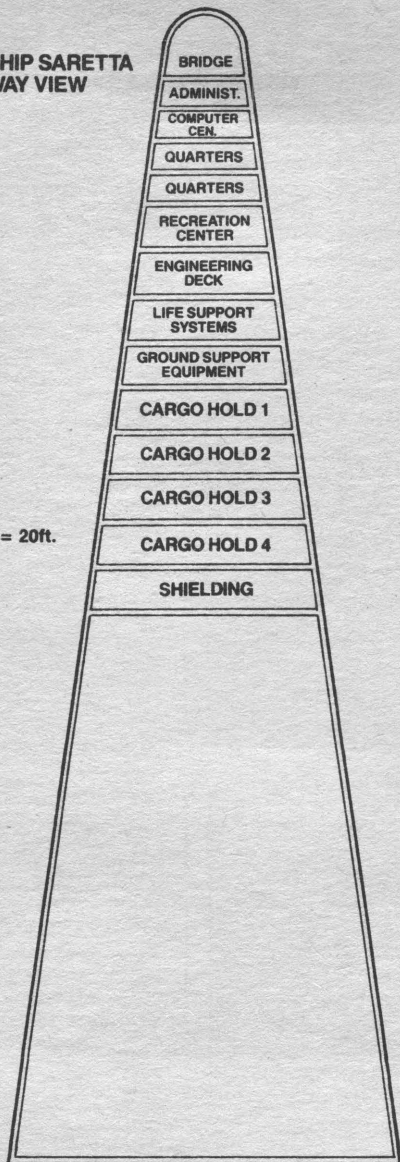
THE END

To adventure again with Gaspar, return to section 1 and choose a different path.

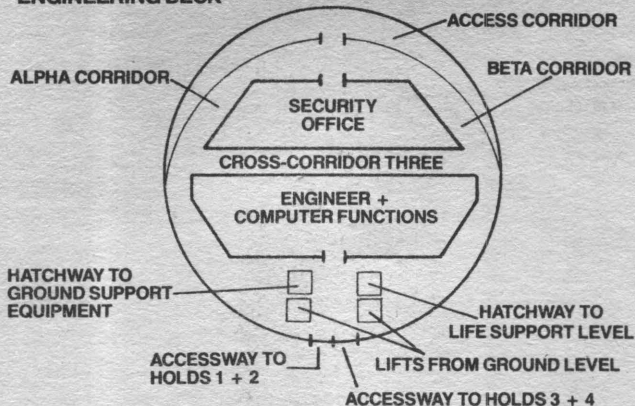
APPENDIX 1

THE STARSHIP SARETTA CUTAWAY VIEW

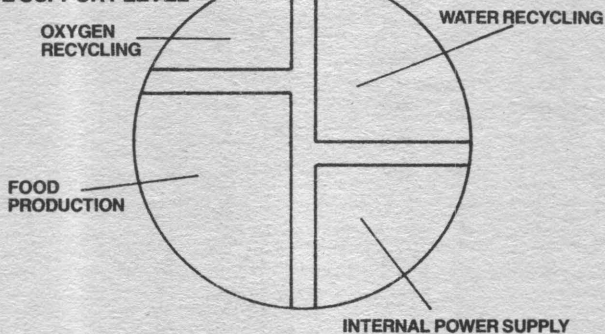
SCALE: 1  = 20ft.



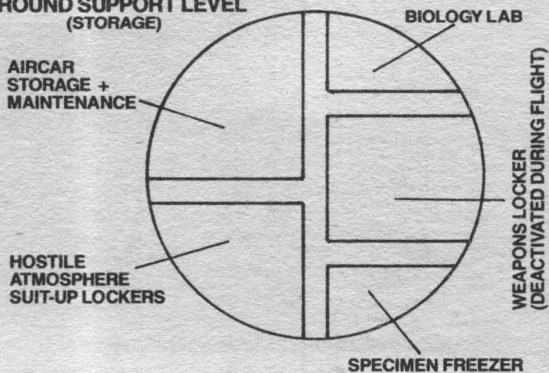
ENGINEERING DECK

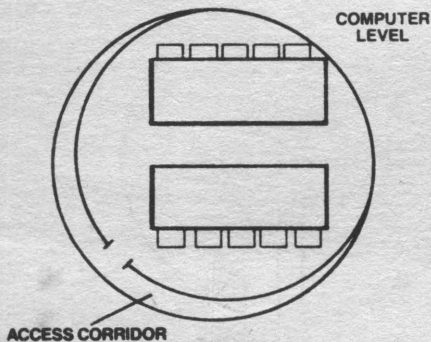
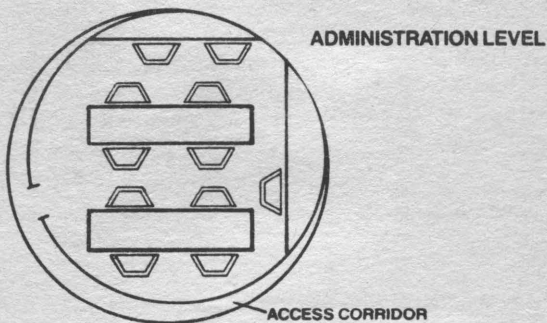
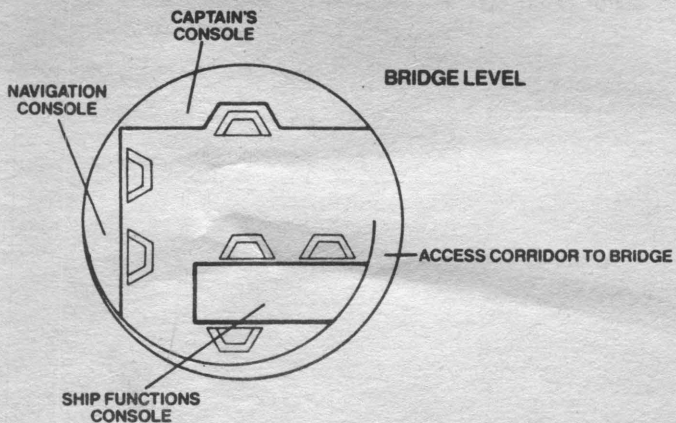


LIFE SUPPORT LEVEL

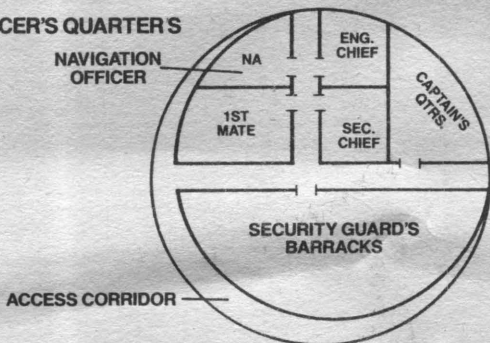


GROUND SUPPORT LEVEL (STORAGE)

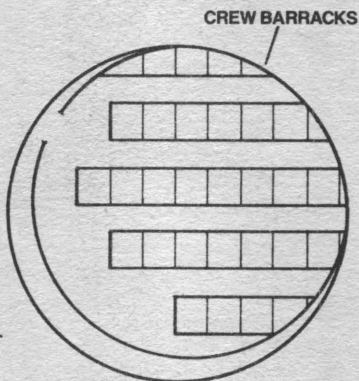





OFFICER'S QUARTERS

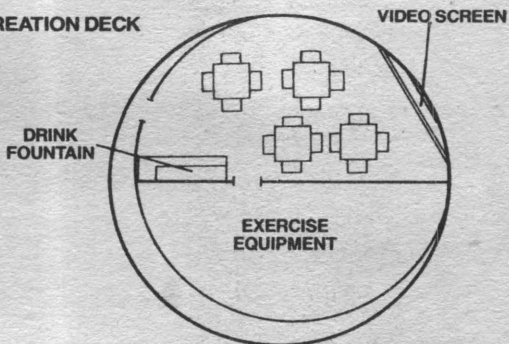


CREW BARRACKS



SCALE: 1  = 10ft.

RECREATION DECK

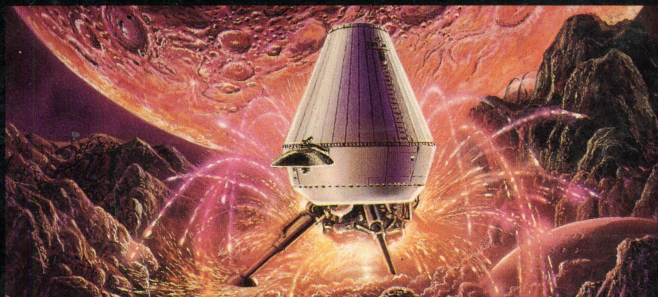


CHOOSE YOUR SIDE IN THE OMEGA REBELLION

You are Gasper Newlin, a junkloader in the Hillgrove Production Complex. Suddenly fate lands you between rebel and government forces. A split-second decision will determine your loyalty—and plunge you into the heat of battle!

So, what will it be? Will you command rebels on daring raids against the government? Or become a security officer yourself? You must choose. But be warned, ahead lies either the blood-stained life of an outlaw—or the responsibility for a force of security cops fighting fierce rebels.

“VERY CLEVER!” —KEITH LAUMER



COMBAT COMMAND™

ROLE-PLAYING ADVENTURES IN THE
WORLDS OF YOUR FAVORITE AUTHORS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
KEITH LAUMER



ISBN 0-441-11536-5