StarCrystal I

MERTACTOR

THE VOLENTINE GAMBIT
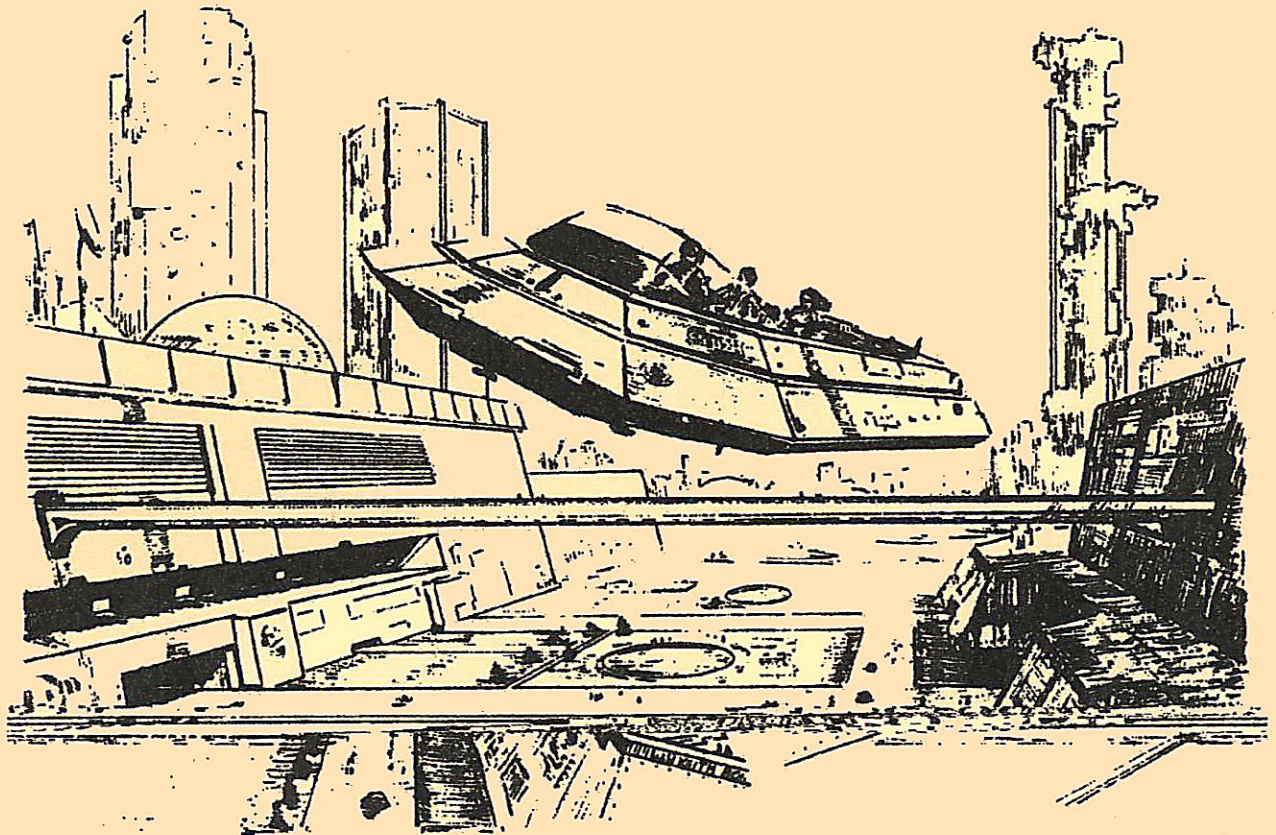
by Jim Long

STARCRYSTAL
Episode I
Mertactor: The Volentine Gambit

by

Jim Long

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SECTION I: ADVENTURE

Introduction

This booklet and the accompanying computer software contains one complete *Traveler* adventure designed to be played solitaire. The computer serves as a referee. No additional materials are necessary to successfully resolve this adventure. Knowledge of Basic *Traveller* is useful but not required.

"Mertactor: The Volentine Gambit" is the first episode of the *Starcrystal* Campaign, a complete set of *Traveller* adventures in District 268 of the Spinward Marches. Each episode is playable independently or as part of a campaign, where the consequences of your performance in prior episodes carry over into the next.

For those who are not familiar with *Traveller*, basic mechanics are presented in the Appendix. It is sufficient to understand that *Traveller* is an internally consistent science fiction universe that has been developed and detailed since Game Designers' Workshop published the first set of *Traveller* books in 1977. Contact with the system will teach most of what you need to know. Study the background and documentation contained in this booklet. You are at no greater disadvantage than anybody who has ever started his or her first game of *Traveller*.

STANDARDS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Dates: Dates used in this adventure correspond to the Imperial Calendar, which counts years from the founding of the Imperium. Dates are further expressed by the consecutive numbering of days within the year. For example, the first day of the year 1107 is 001-1107, while the last day is 365-1107. The adventure begins on 117-1112; the day after the Far Trader "*Arax House*" makes planetfall at Mertactor Down Starport.

Place: The adventure takes place on Mertactor (0707 B262732-B), which is situated at the trailing edge of the District 268 Subsector, which in turn is a rimward region of the Spinward Marches Sector, which is located at the spinward fringe of the Imperium.

The Planet: Mertactor is a small world with a turbulent but otherwise satisfactory atmosphere, relatively light gravity, and very great mass. Shallow oceans and coastal wetlands cover about 20% of the world's surface. Ridges, forested and jungle areas rimming the oceans account for 8% of the surface. The rest of Mertactor is a self-perpetuating desolation known as the "drisk."

The human population numbers under fifteen millions, virtually all of whom live in and around the contiguous underground and surface complexes at Rassad, Wind Harbor, and Mertactor Down Starport. The Class B starport includes an orbital facility of extraordinary design and efficiency.

A technological level of B prevails on Mertactor. This level is typical for the Imperium, but high for a frontier location.

Except for a brief period of anarchy followed by a religious dictatorship, Mertactor has been governed since its colonial era by a stable, self-perpetuating oligarchy. Few laws are codified on Mertactor, but an elaborate system of custom is in place. Offworlders leaving the starport are advised to behave in the most civilized and conservative manner possible.

CHARACTERS

This adventure is designed to be played with a single *Traveller* character that occupies the narrative point of view of the player. This player-character may be the ex-Scout character supplied with the adventure, or a character created on the CITIZENS character generator program and transferred to this adventure according to the instructions contained in CITIZENS. A different character and equipment set with different skills and a different profession can significantly alter the course of play, though not necessarily for the better.

Skills: No specific skills are required for success in this episode of the *Starcrystal* Campaign, but expertise in one or more personal weapons is desirable. Other skills that may be useful include Brawling, Computer, Electronics, Hunting, Mechanical, Recon, and Survival.

Air/raft skill is necessary for the character to travel from the starport area to where the investigation begins. If the

character does not have Air/raft or Grav Vehicle skill then the system will arbitrarily assign Air/raft-0, indicating a minimum proficiency which will help the character get airborne, perhaps navigate well enough to reach the destination, and maybe get back to civilization without being killed in a traffic accident. Since the air/raft is the only available transportation, characters without air/raft skill begin with a handicap.

Gender: Whether a character is male or female necessarily matters, but is not crucial to the course of play except in local cultural circumstances, which do not occur on Mertactor. Any character is playable as either sex, except for the tendency for starship pilots and gunners to be female. (Note, however, that this impression may be an artifact of faulty observation rather than a statistical event.)

Pre-Generated Character: A suitable character is supplied with the adventure and described below. An explanation of the character's skills and characteristics and how they relate to the game is presented in the appendix.

Name: (Player Character)
UPP: 78B977
Service: ex-Scout, 5 terms
Age: 38
Skills: Electronics-3, Mechanical-1, Air/raft-1, Vacc Suit-1, SMG-1, Pilot-1, Jack-of-All-Trades-2
Possessions: SMG, Blade
Money: Cr 3,000
Comments: The ex-Scout owns a submachine gun and ammunition, a blade, cloth armor, and miscellaneous personal belongings. A 4mm Gauss pistol is among the ex-Scout's possessions, but is not owned.

Non-Player Characters: During the course of the adventure one or more of these non-player characters (NPC) may be encountered by the player-character (PC) as patrons, adversaries, allies, or neutrals, according to the story line and the context within which the NPC appears. These descriptions are a rough guide. An NPC will not necessarily be encountered during a given adventure.

Name: Jamal Ito
UPP: 577BAA
Service: Bureaucrat
Age: 87
Skills: Administration-5, Leader-2, Liason-2, Instruction-1
Money: Cr unknown
Comments: Represents the Ito family on Mertactor's ruling council as well as being the Director of Mines and mineral projects for DerBonne Merchants, L.I.C., on Mertactor.

Name: Sandra Nakura Warren
UPP: 869877
Service: Merchant Captain
Age: 47
Skills: Pilot-1, Navigation-2, Leader-1, Engineering-1, Forgery-1, Ship's Tactics-2, Snub Pistol-2, Gunnery-1, Cutlass-2, Brawling-1
Money: C r 40,000
Comments: Captain Warren is the owner of the Type A2 Far Trader Starship *"Arax House."*

Name: Cyrano Wedge Nakura
UPP: 558965
Service: Diplomat
Age: 42
Skills: Liason-3, Interrogation-2, Carousing2, Carbine1, Computer-1, Dagger-1
Money: Cr unknown
Comments: Very little is known about this man. He tends to little bits of business for various corporations and interests as a freelance representative.

Name: Kaitlin Kai Nakura
UPP: 687AA6
Service: Other
Age: 34
Skills: Computer-1, Auto Pistol-2, Brawling-1, Leader-1, Demolition-1, Streetwise-2, Dagger-0.
Money: Cr 12,000
Comments: She is a native Mertactan employed as a public relations specialist by DerBonne Merchants, primarily to interact with the Nakura Family.

Name: Rosco Thacker, a.k.a. "Thumper"
UPP: A97576
Service: ex-Marine 5 terms
Age: 38
Skills: Blade-5, Rifle-1, Brawling-1, Cutlass-1
Money: Cr minimal
Comments: Mr. Thacker is an employee of DerBonne Security Services.

Name: Dwir Anastocia
UPP: A8EA8C
Service: ex-Marine Lt. Colonel, 3 terms
Age: 33
Skills: Gauss Pistol-3, Gauss Rifle-2, Streetwise-2, Interrogation-2, Blade-2, Forgery-1, Bribery-1, Brawling-1, Recon-1, Vacc Suit-1, Battle Dress-1, Demolition-1, Instruction-1, Computer-1
Money: Cr 30,000
Comments: No Awards or decorations. No military record.

SCORING

Episodic Goals: Do the job for Baron Edkos Volentine, get paid for high passage off Mertactor, and go home. You don't have to actually recover the artifact. All you have to do is look around. You could waste the entire weekend poking around the DerBonne facility, enjoying the scenery, and visiting the nearby Sephir Temple, once a minor tourist attraction and not without points of interest. Nobody is going to travel all the way out from Rassad just to hassle you or to discover whether your search is enthusiastic or indifferent... right? Silly you.

When you're ready to leave the adventure, get into the air/raft and head back to Rassad. However, be aware that returning to Rassad much in advance of three standard days without tangible results would be bad form, incompetence at best, and possibly criminal, depending on the equipment and services Baron Volentine had made available or you had used. There are 72 hours before you are due back at the "Arax House." Use them.

For campaign purposes, the bottom line is to take possession of the artifact known as the Starcrystal and escape with it in the air/raft back toward Rassad, but without wounds or disease requiring medical attention. Episode 2 begins before Episode 1 ends, so it is important to gather useful information and equipment. Figure out what has happened on Mertactor, and what is about to happen. Objects taken in this episode are portable to the next episode, but within realistic constraints of weight and displacement.

Points are awarded for certain objects taken into the character's possession and the discovery of vital information. Points for information are awarded if the character encounters that information, regardless of whether the player recognizes the discovery as important.

The Job Opportunity

FAR TRADER

The "Arax House" is a thirty-three year old 200-ton type A2 Far Trader presenting Imperial registry out of Glisten/Glisten. This ship is owned by Captain Sandra Nakura Warren, a native and resident of Mertactor/District 268, and for the last twelve years has been operated under exclusive contract to DerBonne Merchants, L.I.C. of New Rome/Glisten. Capable of jump-2, "Arax House" has seen extensive service coreward into the Sword Worlds, in addition to common carrier duty on the Spinward Main connecting Mertactor and Glisten. Cargo capacity is 61 tons. Each of her two hardpoints mounts a triple turret heterogeneously fitted with beam laser, missile rack, and sandcaster.

Pressed into Naval courier service from a distant coreward leg of her route during the Fifth Frontier War, "Arax House" served in Regina and Jewell Subsectors and eventually participated in the relief of Lanth, delivering under fire a crucial resupply for the third battalion of the Rassad Lift Regiment, a native Mertactan unit. Enormous attrition among Scout/Courier vessels required that "Arax House" be committed to communications duty. She successfully avoided interception with a fighting withdrawal on two occasions, and supported Patrol Cruiser "Dunbar Glows" in a boarding engagement near Forboldn. During the action "Arax House" sustained a 12-meter laser strike across the ventral port aspect while the PC "Dunbar Glows" was lost with all hands.
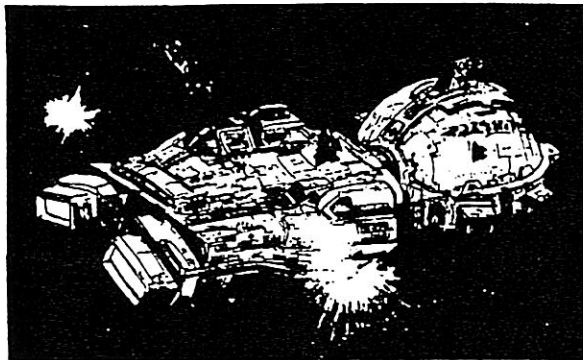
The breached cargo bay was patched inside a fleet tender at naval expense. "Arax House" was released from duty and sent homeward with a commendation and a service code appended to her identification beacon, along with the first news that the Fifth Frontier War had been stalemated and Mertactan units would be among the first to stand down. The DerBonne Marketing Department suggested that the laser strike not be painted over until the patriotic evidence had been displayed throughout the DerBonne service area.

DerBonne Merchants has great confidence in the performance and enduring profitability of this vessel and crew. Her service record has been consistently satisfactory. Passenger accommodations are above average for a Far Trader. The cuisine is excellent, typical of Mertactan service. Two of the crew can actually cook. The ship has earned a reputation worth protecting and preserving.

Consequently, when Captain Warren announced the unexpected layover on Mertactor, the delay was accepted as unfortunate but unavoidable.

FAR TRADER DOWN

Reportedly the last annual inspection and overhaul somehow failed to expose the imminent and now present failure of magnetic couplings throughout the maneuver drives and gravitics. Replacement parts are available in Rassad, but the service personnel and facilities of Mertactor Down Starport are fully occupied for the next nine days. Engineers employed by DerBonne Merchants will be shuttled from Mertactor Orbital Starport to do the job, which should take two or three days.

The ship is unable to lift, not even in an emergency. Normally, she would be tugged underground, but the parking and service bays are full, and attempts to bribe some space open have failed. "Arax House" must remain immobile in a surface revetment. On Mertactor, this condition engages a tangle of laws and customs, and triggers an astonishing bump in insurance premiums.

Passengers are expected to disembark and not reoccupy their staterooms until notified. Crewmembers whose presence is not required during repairs are asked to vacate the ship. Passengers will be contacted on the PIG when repairs are completed, when liftoff is rescheduled and at hourly intervals until liftoff is achieved.

Until then, have a nice weekend.

SCOUT ON THE ROPES

Astonishing. It's raining rocks on Mertactor, just like the ship's Library Program said it might. The rocks aren't much, just dust and grit and the occasional pebble, but they are coming from the advertised direction. The near horizon over the mountains surrounding Wind Harbor Basin and the starport is black and red and orange and impossibly active. Somewhere on the other side of this small planet a drisk storm is dying out. The residue is falling here. Few of the thousands of people in the starport are entertained by the rain, but for you at least the layover on Mertactor is no longer a total loss. You have seen something new.

Mertactor Down Starport is jammed with people. The transportation and communications overload created by the Fifth Frontier War two sectors coreward has reached Mertactor. The port authority is crowded. The public transportation ramps are crowded. The bars and hotels and wonderful restaurants are crowded. Sullen, unhappy people are lined up twenty deep for a chance at the freshers. Customs is impossible. They are digging through every bit of gear presented, searching for weapons and contraband. People back in the lines are falling asleep.

Half the people in the starport are trying to leave the extraterritorial boundaries and go home. The other half are trying to secure outsystem passage and continue towards home. You might try to get a room and meal, but everybody else has the same idea. You don't have any money to spare anyway, and it's a cinch you'll have to come up with the extra Cr2000 to convert your middle passage on "Arax House" to high passage, either that or get bumped from outgoing flights for the next month. No doubt the square meter of pavement that you have staked out next to a retaining wall will seem to shrink as the weekend wears on.

Just when you are beginning to think things couldn't get worse, they do. Here comes a pair of goons in combat armor, swaggering through the crowd, armed and curious but not in a hurry. The short one spots you. She taps the side of her helmet and gestures for you to stay put, as if there was someplace else you could get to.

The tall one does the talking. "If you're the Scout who came in yesterday on that A2 what tossed her couplers, then Baron Edkos Volentine requests that you attend a personal audience. Would you care to store your gear and come with us?"

Both are armed with automatic shotguns, just the thing for crowd control in a busy starport. The request is not much of a request. You're off to see the Baron.

THE BARON

The news is not entirely bad. You shared passage with Baron Volentine since Glisten. He is a corporate director of DerBonne Merchants. The man is gregarious, educated, and entertaining. He had been good company on the trip, having a good time, traveling to Mertactor to meet his brother, another Baron Volentine. They were going to do something important, although the Baron never explained what. If people in combat armor come around to pick you up, then better on behalf of someone you know isn't already mad at you.

The goons are wearing insignia of DerBonne Security Service. Starport customs waves the group through without a second glance. Outside an air/raft is waiting to whisk you over the congested ground traffic to DerBonne's Rassad offices. The driver has to be a lunatic. He doesn't even notice the rain.

THE BARON'S PROPOSITION

"My brother, Baron Aramis Volentine, was murdered. His body was found on the landing zone serving the environmental shelter where he was working, about a hundred kilometers north of here. DerBonne employees discovered the body during a weekly supply mission. That, plus several other reasons I cannot discuss, prevent me from fully trusting the staff available to me locally."

"Aramis was an ethnologist. He had a professional interest in the Sephir Temple, near where he was killed, and in several religions practiced in that area from time to time during Mertactor's... ah... sometimes-obscure history. My family is native to Mertactor, though Aramis and I were born on New Rome, so he could maintain a dispassionate interest in the sometimes-fanatic behaviors of our ancestors. Mertactor has always had a share of lunatics, which seem to have been more unbalanced than those found elsewhere. Religion is a delicate matter. I'm sure you are familiar with the situation on Pavabid. Mertactor was once controlled by a group known as the Sendi Mai, as vicious a group of extremists as you can possibly imagine."

"Aramis had a curious idea - that fanatic or cultist religious movements in the Imperium have tended to originate on worlds with a hydrographic percentage of less than 30%.

Perhaps something about a desert or desolation plucks a murderous chord somewhere deep within us, somewhere very basic and very human. I rather tend to agree with Aramis' hypothesis - probably something about being dirty and thirsty all the time."

"Be that as it may, several months ago I received an xboat message and image transmission from him requesting that we meet on Mertactor to take possession of an artifact in which my family has had a passing interest for several generations. During the course of his ethnological studies, Aramis either located the artifact or actually took possession of it. I rather suspect the former, as the image transmitted was indistinct, as if recorded from a photograph. The object is associated in oral history and family traditions with the Sendi Mai religion that I mentioned a moment ago. The Sendi Mai followers were wiped out over a hundred years ago. There was no hope of locating anything of theirs on the drisk, but something could have been preserved in the jungle, as was the Sephir Temple site."

"The artifact is known as the *Starcrystal*. Of course, I don't know whether it is actually a crystal, or a jewel, or what... but it is definitely an example of early Mertactan craftsmanship and art. A number of chains support the crystal, a necklace or headband sort of affair. As I said, the image was indistinct. As you have no doubt seen or read by now, the people here are marvelous jewelers and metalworkers. There's no way to determine the historical or monetary value of this piece without actually recovering it. Now that it is known to exist, I feel that the effort is worthwhile. Aramis certainly thought so."

"Your value is that you are an offworlder with no ties to Mertactor. Mertactor natives can be trusted absolutely, but only regarding each other. During our brief travel together, I found you to be a competent individual. I have no particular reason to trust you, but neither do I have any reason to distrust you. I know that the ship we arrived on is undergoing repairs which will last a couple of days, enough time for you to go out to the shelter where my brother's body was discovered and to have a look around. See if you can pick up the trail on which Aramis was interrupted. Find the Starcrystal if you can. Get it back to me here in Rassad. In return, I will pay Cr 20,000 and provide the high passage on "Arax House" you will need to continue your trip home."

"Are we agreed?"

Without a high passage ticket, you realize you'll be stuck on Mertactor for months, being bumped off every ship leaving port by every person willing to pay extra just to keep going. Securing passage the rest of the way home would be a fine reward for working three days which were going to be wasted anyway. Furthermore, a Baron is always a useful person to make happy. What could go wrong? Of course, you'll have to spend three days in the boondocks because it would be bad form to come back early and empty-handed, but a pressurized shelter is a good place to rest and the Sephir Temple is probably an interesting place to see, a real tourist attraction. And who knows what the Baron might pay if you turn up with the Starcrystal? And if the Baron would pay that much, who knows how much somebody else might pay? You don't have any reason to cheat the Baron – yet – but it's an option to consider. Of course you agree.

Baron Edkos Volentine smiles. "Welcome to Mertactor."

THE POLICE REPORT

Subject Baron Aramis Volentine, an ethnologist representing a noble family with established economic and cultural ties to Mertactor, was discovered on the landing zone of a DerBonne Merchants pressurized shelter located in the jungle immediately southwest of the Sephir Temple at the base of North Ridge. Subject had been stabbed 32 times. Wounds in chest and abdomen arranged in concentric circles. Tendons of arms and legs severed by deep laceration. Time of death estimated in the neighborhood of 108-1112.
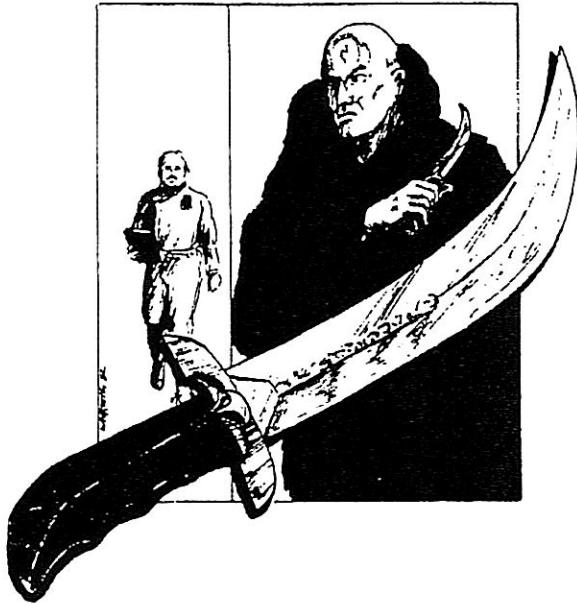
Occupants of a DerBonne air/raft delivering supplies discovered subject. These native Mertactans must remain under minimal suspicion. They individually attest to the honor of the other. Of course, if all were Sendi Mai then they would not be able to fail such oaths. In passing, note that the ritual aspects of this murder must not be exposed to public speculation. Any reference to the resurgent practice of Sendi Mai or to any of the similar murders within the last several years must be avoided.

These are the three DerBonne employees involved.

Kaitlin Kai Nakura is a public relations specialist who states that she accompanied the others to enjoy the ride and visit the Sephir Temple for the first time.

Cyrano Wedge Nakura, an employ of DerBonne Operations Group, through which offices the resupply of the DerBonne shelter would have normally been arranged.

Rosco Thacker is employed by DerBonne Security Services, and offered no explanation for his presence in the air/raft. Naturally, DerBonne would not be expected to comment on their security requirements in this area. Mr. Thacker is also known to this office as "Thumper."

It is worth noting that subject's youngest sister, Alesia Lai Volentine, was killed three years ago leading the rescue attempt mounted from M.O.S. when the Subsidized Liner "Sharron Dale" fell from parking orbit and suffered catastrophic reentry into the atmosphere. Volentines have lived here for a very long time. It is not in our interest to acquire a reputation for allowing Volentines to be killed here as well.

Note: Although the Police Report fails to mention it, a monel rod found on the body of Aramis Volentine was returned to his brother, the Baron Edkos Volentine, and has been made available to the Imperial Scout hired to investigate the younger Volentine's untimely demise.

PREPARATIONS

Baron Volentine arranges for your personal gear and weapons to be delivered from storage at the starport. In addition, he supplies a Gauss pistol, a large-scale map of the general area, and a copy of the police report concerning his brother's death. You are given formal permission to use food supplies and any equipment found at the shelter, including the computer. Unfortunately, the computer's key was not among Aramis' personal effects recovered from the body and returned by the police. Baron Volentine is certain the computer files will contain Aramis' field notes and perhaps a clue to the motivation behind his murder. It is not impossible that his work had somehow given unintentional but nevertheless mortal offense.

Ordinarily, a military fire team from DerBonne Security Services would accompany a jungle or forest investigation, but Baron Volentine cannot entirely trust his local employees. He has been gone from Mertactor too long to absolutely rely upon family loyalties. Natural trust may have been Aramis' fatal error, or it could have been unnatural distrust. Aramis had had neither bodyguard nor colleagues nor companions.

Furthermore, the Baron has hired transportation for the trip of approximately 100 kilometers out to the shelter site. You are to take an air/raft from Fast Eddie's Rassad Rentals, instead of attracting attention by using a DerBonne air/raft without a DerBonne pilot. Pilots are responsible for their vehicle, almost to the point of personal property. Even a noble would give serious offense by merely suggesting, much less insisting, that any pilot relinquish their vehicle to an offworlder. In the course of such things, the pilot would naturally obtain satisfaction from the stranger, a headache anybody could live without and few would be likely to continue living with for very long.

While Fast Eddy's crew moves an air/raft out to his seedy, dusty LZ you take the opportunity to browse a nearby PIG terminal and spend a handful of credits for hardcopy of useful screens. Then down into the revetment. A hot breeze whistles around in the revetment well, stirring up dirt and litter.

Time to go to work.

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SECTION II: BACKGROUND

Animals

In *Traveller* animals are described and ordinarily identified in terms of behavior, weight, and modes of interaction with adventurers. A 4-kilogram flying gatherer on Mertactor (any of several thousand Tiziar species) little resembles Terran flying gatherers (Ducks, for example) but both organisms exhibit similar behaviors and are thus equivalent in game terms. The Andrax is Mertactor's 100-kilogram killer which behaves like a big killer on Terra, but does not in any other way resemble a shark, being in fact a bipedal quasi-arboreal semi-intelligent creature suggestive of genetic interaction between a striped leopard and - because of a rather unique jaw structure - a chainsaw. However, the interaction of andrax and sharks with adventurers is as equivalent as ducks and tiziari.

Beck's Beast is an important facet of Mertactor's history. The animal is a genetically engineered Terran hippopotamus, a food factory, designed to eat Mertactor's mineral and metal packed vegetation and turn it into forms easily digested by humans. Beck's Beast is acknowledged as an Ancient artifact, and circumstantial proof that a human colony had been transplanted to Mertactor by the Ancients, though no evidence of that colony exists.

The animal contains glands specifically adapted to removing minerals and trace elements from vegetable matter, and isolating those materials from the animal's musculature. The animal's droppings are of such high metallic content that they are actually worth harvesting.

Terran cats are extinct on Mertactor, but Terran rats have thrived. Over thousands of generations on this low gravity world, they have developed into remarkably intelligent creatures averaging twenty kilograms in size. These wild rats, often known as "Mer-rats" on Mertactor, can be dangerous, but occupy an important part of the forest food chain. Trained rats are herded down jungle trails eaten or bruised through the root systems by Beck's Beasts and used by hunters to trigger a Scylitha ambush. If the rat pack starts dwindling then danger is at hand. Rats are an important feature of the remarkable Mertactan cuisine.

The Tilok Lizard is another curious facet of Mertactor wildlife. These are small (under 1kg each) carnivore/scavengers, which swarm throughout the root systems of the jungle and forest, rapidly consuming any dead animal matter that hits the ground. Tiloks can be found in enormous quantities anywhere other animals are found. Hunters are fond of providing a spectacular show for tourists by killing a rat and throwing it as far as possible down a trail to trigger the Tilok swarm which engulfs the corpse moments after it hits the ground. The Tilok feeding frenzy can be observed from very close range, as the creatures simply will not.bite humans, alive or dead, unless someone is silly enough to stick a hand into a feeding mass.

Animals on Mertactor are much more intelligent than usual. There are very few major species, all contending for similar resources and all territorial in the extreme. The food chain is simple and uncomplicated, and thus vulnerable. All wildlife on Mertactor is protected by law and by custom. Only licensed hunters may take Beck's Beast for food. Andrax may be killed in self-defense, but as far as is known, this has never been successfully accomplished.

Scylitha are specially protected because of the extraordinarily beautiful horn masks covering their face. Scylitha masks have found extensive ceremonial use since the colonial era, and are considered collective treasures owned by Family. Ideally, the Scylitha can be taken only in self-defense, but licensed hunters will trigger an ambush attempting to get a flank shot. The mask is so important that native Mertactan hunters have died defending against a frontal attack rather than deface the mask, through which the animal is vulnerable only to a rifle shot or arrow placed through an eye socket. About twenty years ago, an albino Scylitha was taken with a laser carbine equipped with electronic sights and bore-sighted down a trail known to be part of the animal's territory. One hunter died in the ambush and two others were killed leading the creature into the carbine's fire line. The albino mask was sent to the Emperor as a token from the people of Mertactor.
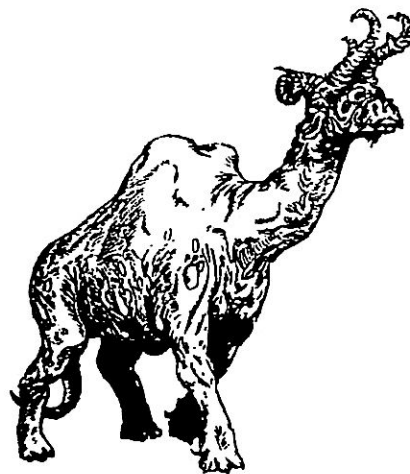
Biologists have not been able to reconcile Mertactor's narrow ecosystem with the geological age of the planet. There simply has not been enough time for what convincingly appears to be native wildlife to have evolved naturally, yet except for Beck's Beast there is no evidence of engineering or transplantation from other worlds. Similarly, the passive plant life is too complicated for the timespan involved, and the territorial, aggressive plant life is too complicated for any time span. Mertactan trees seem to spend most of their time trying to kill each other, while Mertactan animals seem to be consciously balancing each other's populations. However, the lack of an obvious or accessible explanation does not mean that an explanation does not exist. It does mean that biologists have been slow to generalize from the Darrian contention about Mertactor's geology and origins to a similar explanation of Mertactor's flora and fauna.

Mertactor

Terran traders, Solomani immigrants, and light fleet elements following up the defeat of the First Imperium by the Terran Confederation first established Colonies on Mertactor between -2000 and -1750. The small population almost perished during the collapse of interstellar commerce and communication during the Long Night, and endured regular attrition by Mertactor's environment until the colony remnant was securely established in the Wind Harbor Basin and Rassad's growing underground residential areas. A small segment of the population followed a nomadic existence out on the drisk, but did not participate in the mainstream of Mertactor history.

Modern Mertactor society is rooted in the colonial hardships. The people lived close together in the safest place on the planet, rather than following the normal colonial practice of dispersing the population to prevent destruction by a single disaster. Extensive, detailed genealogies were set up and maintained, originally to diminish the genetic casualties inevitable to intermarriages among a small, isolated population, then later as an enduring institution of unity. Everybody on Mertactor seems to know each other. Cousins are acknowledged so far out that a native could choose to be associated with literally half the families on the planet.

Internal affairs are handled entirely by family representatives. The few laws codified on Mertactor deal with extreme behaviors, such as murder, and with protecting animal life. Property, marriage, manners, and other civil matters are handled through the family. The most unusual example is the provision made by the Imperium for Mertactor natives serving in the Imperial armed forces. Instead of being assigned to whatever unit needs replacements, a Mertactan volunteer is automatically assigned to the Rassad Lift Infantry/Mertactor's Own Imperial, regardless of where that unit happens to be in action. The regiment is 100% native Mertactan. Its battle record is phenomenal, but the few times it has been caught in a disaster have been planetary tragedies on Mertactor, as heavy casualties repeatedly touch every family. A battalion being rotated home is cause for widespread celebration, bordering on anarchy.

A self-perpetuating Council handles external affairs. Concerned mainly with the starport, offworlders, commerce, the disposition of the Rassad Lift Infantry, and with interstellar relations, the Council meets when an occasion arises and constitutes what amounts to the planetary government. Membership on the Council is entirely voluntary. A native who feels so moved can ordinarily obtain a seat upon petition to one of the families. Seats change hands when a member hands the seat over to another native. A Council member may retire out of boredom, or a desire to do something else, or to give honor to a friend or relative. There are many examples of children sitting in Council, as well as natives given a seat on their deathbed and then immediately returning it, a last token of honor and respect.

Mertactor is known for many things, but to the ordinary Imperial citizen it is renowned for a truly remarkable cuisine. Fully 3% of the chefs serving the Imperial Household are native Mertactans. The rather high mineral and metallic content of the native plant and animal life led to the development of light and heavy sauces of every imaginable nuance to accentuate or obscure flavors as called for by the occasion and the chef's inclinations. Heavy marinades were developed which, in effect, predigested meat otherwise difficult for humans to use. The closeness of extended families in fact living near each other and in practice enjoying each other's company created many occasions for feasting and partying. When a family banquet could reasonably expect to seat 3,000 people, food management and preparation became a subject of much attention. Children start learning to cook as soon as they are able to wield a knife. Mertactan natives grow up with an unnatural familiarity with edged tools and weapons - knives, cleavers, boning blades - everything associated with butchery and cutlery.

The strategic importance of Mertactor has been obvious since the publication of the First Survey in 420. The original measurements were discounted as erroneous, but they were correct. Mertactor is a very small world, about 3200 kilometers in diameter, with gravity of .82, holding a light but
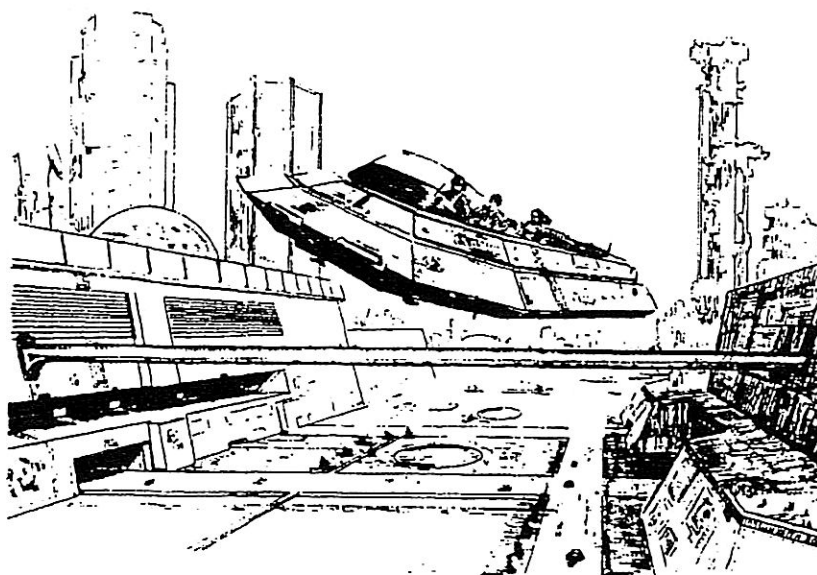
standard atmosphere, and rotating once every 14 hours. The bottom line is enormous mass. Mertactor is made of abnormal concentrations of metals and heavy elements. Most importantly, the geological age of the world appears to be about 325,000 years, far to short a period to account for atmosphere, plant life, animal life, or anything. Yet the dating is not wrong. Something else about Mertactor is wrong.

If it were not for the drisk storms, Mertactor would have long ago been developed into the largest open pit mine in the Imperium. The apparently random and regular occurrence of these storms has so far rendered economic exploitation of Mertactor's surface economically marginal at best.

It is worth noting that neither District 268 nor Mertactor are members of the Imperium, yet most Imperial maps and charts are gerrymandered to include Mertactor within the Imperial borders. The xboat route from Glisten/Glisten terminates at Mertactor, but there is every reason to believe that an uncharted, unpublicized route continues from Mertactor across District 268 and into the rimward regions of Five Sisters Subsector and the many naval bases maintained there. The only other xboat route into Iderati/Five Sisters and the core/trailing corner of Five Sisters makes a stop in Sword Worlds territory, no doubt an inconvenience to both parties. A deepsite meson gun dedicated to planetary defense is located somewhere within the Rassad Ridgeline. The Imperial Scout Service base at Mertactor Down Starport ordinarily maintains dozen-scout/courier ships. A Company of Imperial Marines is stationed at the starport. The Imperium is prepared to defend Mertactor, although the last military action in the system was fought nearly 500 years ago.

After the Second Frontier War and the following Civil Wars, the Imperium occupied several Sword Worlds systems. In the Battle of Narsil (628), after the wholesale destruction of Narsil's armed forces, a Sword Worlds admiral escaped with several squadrons of new ships and took up commerce raiding against the Imperium. Years later, his squadrons were cornered by an Imperial fleet covering Mertactor and defeated in what is called the Battle of Mertactor. The only reason the Sword Worlds squadrons were caught was that they happened to jump into the Mertactor system, where the Imperials had been waiting - not to catch a bunch of commerce raiders but rather to protect Mertactor. So far, the Imperium has been subtle in its regard for Mertactor, but as soon as the problem of the drisk storms is solved the benign neglect will end. The Navy can be expected to take Mertactor apart layer by layer, transport it across District 268 to the shipyards at Iderati, and turn the planet into battle squadrons.
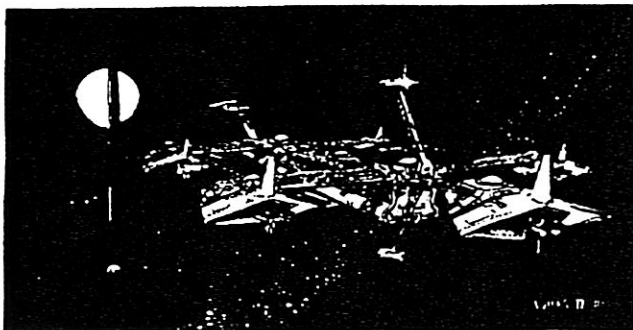
The Darrian Expedition

After the First Frontier War, around 611, the Darrians obtained permission to establish a research station on Mertactor to investigate the nature of the drisk storms in particular and the planet and its star in general. The Council granted permission on the condition that the Darrian findings be published first on Mertactor, and that native Mertactor corporations supply the Darrian base. Since the Darrians had carefully chosen representatives descended from Solomani traders, just as were the native Mertactans, an agreement was quickly reached. While Imperial scientists were studying the First Survey, scratching their heads, and wondering how Mertactor could be so dense and be only 300,000 years old, the Darrians had already gone to work.

The mission was headed by a Darrian Navy Lt. Commander named Sisera Barak, who established the research station and maintained good relations with the natives through the services of a bright young merchant named Wadi de Edkos.

The men were well matched in ambition, intellect, and ancestry (mostly Terran), while dissimilar enough to entertain and inform each other. They became close friends.

Barak verified that Mertactor was a very young planet. He discovered some of the highest concentrations of minerals and heavy elements in the Spinward Marches. He concluded that the concentration should have been greater, but that drisk storms had reduced the planet's surface. Analysis of the drisk failed to reveal heavy elements in the predicted quantities. Either the elements weren't there, or they had been removed. Baral's discovery of the role played by the drisk storms was directly related to and coincided with stories about colonial Mertactor told to him by Wadi de Edkos. Most importantly, the storms never struck the jungle and forested areas behind the ridgelines, only rarely struck the Elotal Sea, and occasionally reached into the populated areas of the Wind Harbor Basin. This was curious. Out on the drisk, the appearance of storms appeared to be an entirely random event, without meteorological precursors. One moment a column of the atmosphere was normal, the following moment it was turbulent, then in the next moment there was a storm.

Barak contended that the entire planet of Mertactor was an Ancient artifact, an example of planetary engineering. The Ancients were perfectly capable of undertaking such an experiment just to see if it could be done. Barak proposed that they tugged a core into orbit then coalesced material literally sucked from Mertactor's star around the core in order to quickly create a concentration of heavy elements which could be easily mined and exploited. The event, if it happened that way, was either natural or induced. Either the Ancients were able to time the third nova of Mertactor's star and be ready to take advantage of the opportunity, or the star was put to work when the Ancients were ready to build Mertactor. Both explanations were so ridiculous that Barak was confident his findings could be published anywhere in the Imperium and be totally disregarded, except of course among the Darrians.

The drisk storms, Barak proposed, were created artificially by a deepsite Ancient base which used gravitics to create the storms, and that the storms were a method of strip mining the entire surface of the planet. That storms never strike the jungle and only rarely hit the ocean or populated mountain regions suggests that the Ancients did not want to jeopardize transplanted humans more than necessary. The present day survival of Beck's Beast has long been a hint of Ancient intervention on Mertactor, but Barak's hypothesis was so improbable that it was filed away and forgotten, just as Barak had expected.

The young merchant, Wadi de Edkos, was the only person on Mertactor who noticed the timing of Barak's report to Mire/Darrian. About 614, a Darrian Scout/Courier arrived to take Sisera Barak and his research back home as quickly as possible. The rest of the Darrian Expedition dismantled the base and were transported home within the year.

By 615, the Second Frontier War had begun and the Zhodani were advancing through Querion Subsector toward Darrian. Wadi de Edkos and the corporation which eventually became DerBonne Merchants became wealthy during this period. By 619, the Zhodani were voluntarily withdrawing from Querion without a fight. The Darrians had come up with something very dangerous and very impressive. Wadi de Edkos made the correct connection that it had something to do with Mertactor.

Wadi de Edkos and Sisera Barak remained friends, though older now, hardened and scarred by war, did business together, prospered, and could trust each other when it came time to store some fragile merchandise. Some eight to ten years after the Second Frontier War, Wadi de Edkos returned to his native Mertactor. He brought a message. He would be back... in about five hundred years. Everybody he talked with took him very seriously. They believed, and they began to wait. So did the Darrians, although in time the Darrians almost forgot why. The native Mertactans, however, the people of Sendia, the Sendi Mai, knew why they were waiting.

The CAT HAT

Developed by Ling-Standard as an inexpensive alternative to the dedicated computer interface implant, the CAT HAT is a recent product which has most often been used by the Imperial Scout Service and various scientific disciplines to assist in making field observations and transmit those files to a dedicated computer. CAT HAT itself is an acronym for "Cybernetic Assisted Thought, Heuristic Analog Transmitter," one of those rare designations with favorable marketing consequences.

The CAT HAT is a useful compromise, giving up the surgical implant's performance, expense, and psychological hazards while providing more flexible access than voice or keyboard. The CAT HAT is based on a theory of consciousness rather than neuroanatonmy. This theory holds that the engram, the basic unit of human memory, is very large rather than very small, that memory is not a matter of storage but rather recreated on the spot by immediate stimuli (which may be a memory), and that changes in the neurological and - to a very limited extent - electrochemical composition of the brain can be detected by sensors sited over the frontal lobes, over Wernicke's Area, and over Broca's Area. The use of certain drugs can enhance CAT HAT performance by decreasing the chemical variability in the brain to within narrower parameters, but the side effects are not worth the benefit.

Only one person at a time can use the CAT HAT dedicated to a given computer. Before another person can use the CAT HAT, a calibration program must be run while wearing the CAT HAT to adapt the device as much as possible to the electrochemical nature of the person's mind being calibrated.

The most basic CAT HAT operation is to open files created with the CAT HAT. There is a natural associative lock on such files, so that another person using the CAT HAT cannot open the files unless after having recreated the experience of the individual whom created the original files. In one sense, this lock is very secure. In another, it is not. Any user can obtain a directory by wearing a calibrated CAT HAT and thinking or saying "ACCESS COMPUTER DIRECTORY."

CAT HATS used in field observations are ordinarily equipped with a camera that allows a SCAN function. The user observes an object, requests a SCAN, and the computer transmits a close estimate of the objects dimensions and mass.

The device is well suited to recording or transmitting leisurely observations, a daydreaming situation that leaves the consciousness free to interact with the CAT HAT. If the activity is unfamiliar, stressful, or complicated, then performance will quickly degrade. The first loss will be the ability to communicate with the computer. Next will be the loss of the computer's ability to communicate with the user.

The operating range of a CAT HAT is about five kilometers, although proficiency quickly degrades within that parameter. Less than two kilometers is a reliable distance. Most users will find themselves treating the CAT HAT as a household appliance, doing their computer work while wandering around tending to idle chores and doing computer work without actually having to be in front of the computer.

SECTION III: APPENDICES

Appendix A: Introductory Traveller

BASICS

Assumptions: As science fiction, *Traveller* posits some basic notions that define the universe in which it takes place. First are the practical realities of fusion energy and faster-than-light travel. The speed of interstellar communications is therefore limited to the speed of travel. Consequently, enlightened feudalism is a viable structure to maintain the fabric of an interstellar government and society, much depending upon personal loyalties and initiatives to carry out and defend that society over distances which prevent consultation with or direct supervision by higher authority. The Third Imperium exists as a generally benevolent, tolerant government which promulgates few specific policies, maintains trade, communications, and cultural exchange among worlds, and actively controls the space between worlds rather than controlling the worlds themselves.

Perhaps the most basic *Traveller* assumption is that human behavior has been consistent and is likely to remain so. Ordinary citizens will remain ordinary, being no more influenced by interstellar travel than modern Americans are by intercontinental travel. Inevitably, however, there will emerge a new kind of citizen, one who will take advantage of the opportunity to indulge an inclination so basic and so human that it cannot be distinguished from the myriad hearts in which it has risen since the dawn of time - to become starfarers, to travel in a universe which was made for us to discover.

Universal Personality Profile: The basic characteristics of a *Traveller* character are expressed in a specific sequence using hexadecimal (base 16) numbers known as the Universal Personality Profile or UPP for short. The values 0 through 9 are represented by normal Arabic numbers; the letters A through F represents values between 10 through 15, respectively. Listed as a string of six values, these characters always refer to a *Traveller* character's strength, dexterity, endurance, intelligence, education, and social standing.

Damage absorbed by a character as a result of combat or environmental attrition is recorded by de-incrementing the first three (physical) values of the UPP. Damage is inflicted in the same units in which the UPP characteristics are reduced to zero, at which point the character is unconscious. When two are reduced to zero, the character is seriously injured and requires medical attention. When all three physical characteristics are reduced to zero the character is dead.
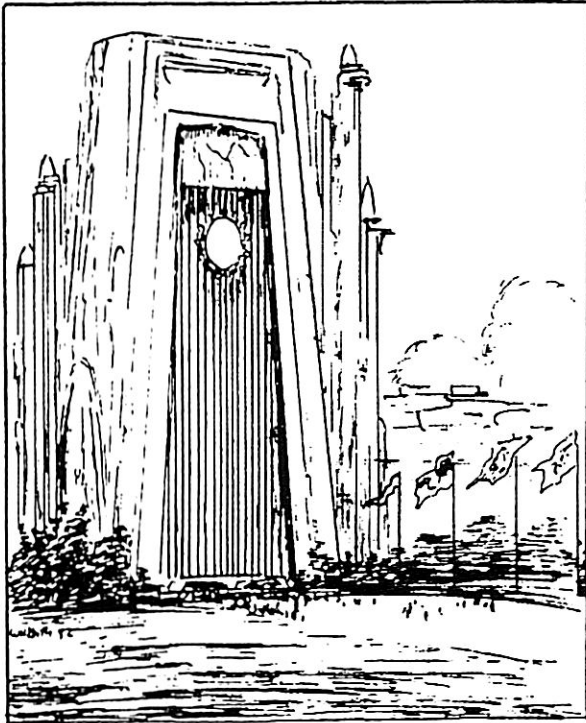
Appendix B: Character Skills

OVERVIEW

What follows are a summary of skills excerpted from *Traveller* Book 1, and how those skills may relate to the course of play with the ex-Scout character in the *Starcrystal* Campaign.

## PLAYER CHARACTER SKILLS

Electronics-3: "The individual has skill in the use, operation, and repair of electronic devices. The person is considered handy in this field, with the equivalent of a green thumb talent. This skill includes the repair of energy weapons. Generally, the skill is applied in an attempt to understand, repair, assemble, or operate electronic items. Complex electronic items may also require a certain level of education of a very high intelligence; many devices also require some degree of dexterity."

Level-3 is a high measure of any skill, and in the campaign will prove most useful in attempts to repair broken or malfunctioning electronic equipment. This skill will also help in the recognition of electronic equipment for what it is and what it does.

Mechanical-1: "The individual has skill in the use, operation, and repair of mechanical devices. The person is considered to be handy in this field. This skill is specifically excludes the field of engineering; it does include non-energy weapon repair. Mechanical expertise allows a character the ability to operate mechanical devices easily, as well as to repair them quickly and efficiently. Success in any mechanical enterprise is also affected by such variables as tool availability, personal strength and dexterity, education, and the situation."

Mechanical skill will often be useful to repair non-functioning objects or equipment, and in ease of identifying machines and making them work. The ability to repair weapons may be useful.

Pilot-1: "The individual has training and experience in the operation of starships and large interplanetary ships. This skill encompasses both the interplanetary and interstellar aspects of large ship operation."
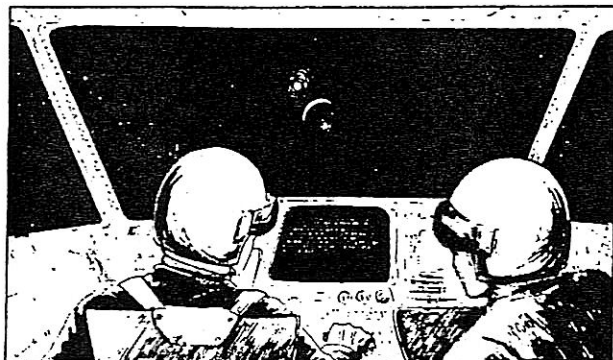
As Pilot skill applies only to space travel, it will not be used while adventuring on Mertactor. However, Pilot skill will prove handy when it comes time to leave Mertactor, especially if it has to be done in a hurry.

Vacc Suit-1: "The individual has basic skill and training in the use of the standard vacuum suit (space suit), including suits for use on various planetary surfaces in the presence of exotic, corrosive, or insidious atmospheres."

Mertactor's breathable atmosphere won't be leaving any time soon. Vacc Suit skill is not used in this episode.

Air/raft-1: "The individual is skilled in the use of the air/raft vehicle, in its safe and efficient operation, and to some extent its maintenance."

An air/raft is the only means of transportation from Rassad to the DerBonne shelter where the investigation begins, and the only way to get out of the jungle and back to civilization.

SMG-1: "The individual is skilled in the use of a submachine gun as a personal weapon, the maintenance and repair of this weapon, and its safe handling."

The submachine gun is comparable to contemporary models such as the Israeli Uzi. Skill in a weapon increases the chances of hitting a target, enables more efficient handling, and avoids the many disadvantages associated with attempting to use an unfamiliar weapon. During the course of an episode, a character may have the opportunity to acquire a variety of different weapons. Personal skill has to be a consideration in when or whether to use those weapons.

Jack of All Trades-2: "The individual is proven capable of handling a wide variety of situations, and is resourceful in finding solutions and remedies. This skill is a general ability which may be applied to nearly any endeavor, allowing the character to at least attempt activities which would ordinarily be impossible due to lack of skill or expertise."

The referee has some latitude in deciding which actions a character may attempt with at least a token chance of success. The absence of a creative human referee to actively participate in the course of play is partially compensated for by a character with this skill at this level, which allows the character a legitimate attempt at the broadest possible variety of activities. The skill contributes little toward actual chances for success. There are many human activities which the uninformed individual literally has no idea how to even begin. This skill at least confers the opportunity to try within the rules, and was arbitrarily assigned to the ex-Scout character is an attempt to balance a complicated environment against a limited set of skills.

Appendix C: Starcrystal Campaign

The *Starcrystal* Campaign is completely playable as a standard *Traveller* adventure without the computer. Mertactor is an interesting place to visit (and will soon become more so), with many opportunities for employment and intrigue for a group of adventurers knocking around District 268 with nothing better to do.

Exploration and development of the drisk's mineral wealth is a dangerous assignment but one that pays often and well. Companies are always looking for teams willing to undertake missions onto the drisk. Newcomers are often assigned to rescue attempts.

The underground sections of Rassad have been under construction since the colonial era. Remodeling and new construction is always uncovering "lost" areas that require surveying and exploration before work can proceed. Natives don't care for the work, so offworlders are welcome.

Offworlders leaving the starport are encouraged to behave in the most civilized and conservative manner possible. Breaking Mertactor law is difficult because the few codified laws address only the extremes of behavior, but intricate family and cultural customs provide ample opportunity to produce deadly friction.

Several Broadsword class mercenary cruisers operate out of Mertactor Orbital, and may be a source of employment for a group that can provide references from a native or from a Family Center.

An interesting job always available to offworlders is wandering through the forest and harvesting Beck's Beast droppings. Local refineries pay well, but only by the ton. When your grandchildren ask, "What did you do in the Fifth Frontier War?" you can say "I shoveled dung on Mertactor."

Appendix D: Library Data

A

Air/Raft: A small, open flying vehicle that uses solid state gravitics for lift and propulsion. Cruising speed is about 100 kph, but is vulnerable to wind effects. The craft weighs about four tons, has a low load capacity, and handles poorly. Simple controls cause the craft to hover, land, and move. Basic instrumentation indicates speed and direction.
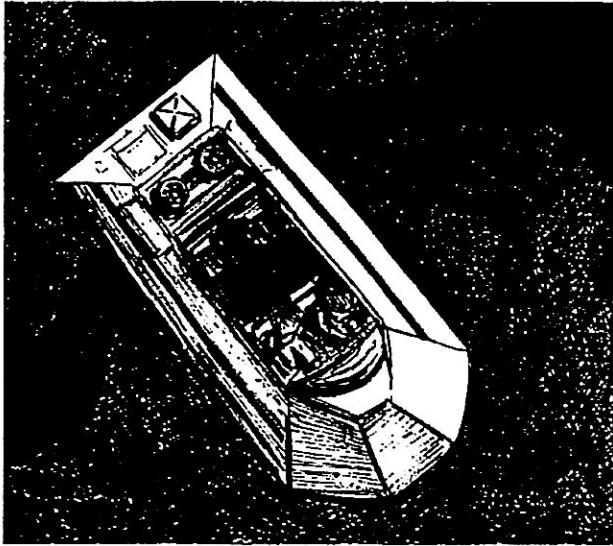
Ancients: Collective name given to a race of intelligent, non-human beings that inhabited locations throughout this portion of the galaxy about 300,000 years ago. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Ancients destroyed their own civilization during a war that lasted about 2,000 years.

The Ancients are regarded as responsible for the dissemination of Humaniti when they transplanted genetic stock from Terra to at least 40 worlds across a span of 360 parsecs. Many other Terran plant and animal forms were transported at the same time. There are no clear explanations for this practice, but much of what the Ancients did appear strange.

D

Directions, Galactic: Familiar conventions of direction do not easily apply to descriptions of locations within a galaxy. North, South, East, and West are not descriptive of the relationships among stars lying within the galactic plane. Instead, the following concepts have come into widespread use: Toward the galactic core is coreward. Away from the core is rimward. The direction in which the galaxy rotates is spinward, while the opposite direction, against the galaxy's rotation, is trailing.

District 268: Subsector N of the Spinward Marches Sector. Contains 32 worlds with a population of 2.4 billion. Created in 810 as an Imperial Protectorate. Membership in the Imperium is pending. The Imperial bureaucracy is present on Mertactor, and the Scout Service maintains several bases throughout the subsector.

Drisk: Vernacular, meaning "without worth" or "value beyond measuring" depending on context. Alternately, the self-perpetuating desolation which covers most of the surface of Mertactor.

E

Ethnology: The study of the classifications and subdivisions of Humaniti, their origins, characteristics, distribution, as well as linguistic and physical classification.

F

Fifth Frontier War: The most recent of the border wars that have erupted at irregular intervals ever since the Imperium came into contact with the expanding Zhodani Consulate. Sword Worlds forces, by coordinating with the Zhodani in opening attacks, achieved initial territorial gains before suffering major reversals at Lanth. Following the pattern of previous Frontier Wars, Imperial and local forces fought a protracted holding action before the arrival of major Imperial fleet elements that enabled a sustained counter-offensive that re-established the status quo.
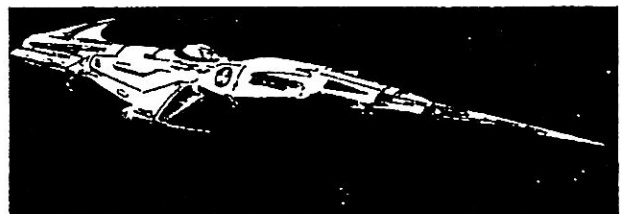
G

Gram Munitions: The primary contractor for ordinance and military equipment (especially grav and tracked armor) used by combined Sword Worlds forces. Ordinarily, each world in a Sword Worlds alliance raises and equips its own units then places them under a unified command. Gram Munitions produces equipment to fill out depleted or under-strength units, for export to client states, and trade for strategic materials and services which benefit the Sword Worlds as a whole. Gram Munitions is seen as a step toward the permanent unification of the Sword Worlds Subsector.

L

Lanthanum: A rare earth element, the first of the inner transition metals. Vital to the construction of the inner coils of interstellar jump drive units, and thus of enormous strategic importance. For years, the Imperium has attempted to control the discovery and distribution of Lanthanum, as well as the price. The presence of Lanthanum on Mertactor in abnormal concentrations is a continuing influence of Imperial policy in District 268.

M

Mertactor: (0707-B262732-B) Nominal subsector capital of District 268. Not actually a member of the Imperium, although for decades Imperial maps and charts have depicted the gerrymandered border which includes Mertactor within the Imperium. Mertactor has been the object of considerable scientific and political interest ever since the First Survey was published in 420.

P

PIG: Originally an acronym for the Planetary Information Grid common to high tech worlds (especially those with a dispersed population) where global communications and access to common information are a necessary facet of society.

PIG has entered the vernacular to describe any public database of broad utility, especially the dumb terminals maintained by the Traveller's Aid Society at Class A and Class B starports.

The Mertactor PIG is a commercial utility supported by families, donations, subscribers, and providers of services. There is a charge for access, and additional charges for hardcopy. However, a regularly updated News Service is broadcast without charge from Mertactor Orbital Starport or via landlines to personal computers capable of reception.

Prancer Foil: An aerodynamic embellishment to parking revetments at Mertactor Down Starport. On the occasions when drisk storms reach into Wind Harbor, starships caught in a surface revetment are partially protected by the prancer foil, which helps vector storm winds and debris away from the horizontal and maintains a high pressure area above the hull which helps prevent the ship from being lifted from the revetment and blown away by the storm.

R

Repatriation Bond: The employer of mercenary units deposits sufficient funds in offworld escrow accounts to pay for middle passage (including medical care when necessary) for each hired trooper to leave the world in case the employer's cause is lost. Repatriation Bonds do not include heavy equipment, although personal weapons are allowed against the middle passage baggage allowance.

The Repatriation Bond is the core of a system that works well. The Imperium encourages the hiring of mercenaries because the introduction of high technological military units into a local conflict tends to produce a quick decision, which limits the economic disruption of a long war. Locals have no reason to slaughter mercenaries who will logically surrender if caught in an untenable situation. Mercenaries will not inflict atrocities that will dishonor the unit or jeopardize the repatriation bond. Opposing mercenary units will, if possible, maneuver to capture prisoners and destroy equipment, rather than inflict unnecessary casualties.

Sendi Mai: An obscure religion practiced from about 650 to 850 by Mertactor families inhabiting forest areas along North Ridgeline. Adherents claim to have seen the Gates of Heaven. Sendi Mai is an extinct faith.

Sendi Mai Suppressions: From 848 to 850, civil and family authorities acted to eliminate the practice of the Sendi Mai religion from Mertactor society, in response to violence, torture, and mayhem perpetrated by the Sendi Mai. The suppression was successful. Sendi Mai ceased to present a threat to society.

Solomani Hypothesis: The widely accepted theory that all Humaniti originated on Terra, and that all human races native to other worlds in fact arise from stock transported there by the Ancients, for reasons unknown. The theory explains the large number of independent human races within the Imperium without recourse to the far-fetched concept of "parallel evolution."

Space Gas: Idiomatic expression for the oral traditions and stories which offer plausible, sometimes obscene, and not necessarily accurate explanations of how certain aspects of the universe came to be a certain way. Space Gas has acquired status as a performing art, a form of popular entertainment traditionally presented aboard starships to pass some of the time spent in jump space. A popular Space Gas story in the Spinward Marches is "How the Scylitha Got a Mask."

Strephon: Forty-third emperor of the Imperium. Born 1049. Coronation 1071. (UPP 768ABF)

Sword Worlds: A loose interstellar confederation of worlds settled between -400 and -200 by Solomani exiles and Terran traders and colonists. The region has always been at odds with the Imperium, and during the five frontier wars has allied with the Zhodani against the Imperium, uniformly to the Sword Worlds' detriment. The present government was established in 852 on Gram, and survives by according individual worlds independence regarding internal affairs and expecting cooperation regarding interstellar affairs which affect the region as a whole. The Sword Worlds are so-called because most of the systems in that subsector were named after famous edged weapons from Terran history and mythology.
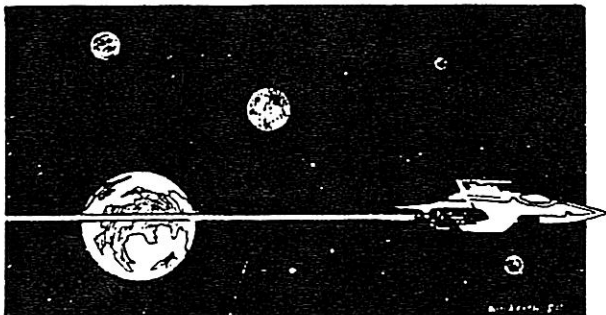
Tiziar: A 4-kilogram flying gatherer native to the coastal wetlands of Mertactor/District 268. Nearly a thousand subspecies have been noted and more are presumed. Tiziari move freely about the planet, even over the desolation of the drisk, yet still exhibits the extreme territorial behaviors which characterize all life on Mertactor.
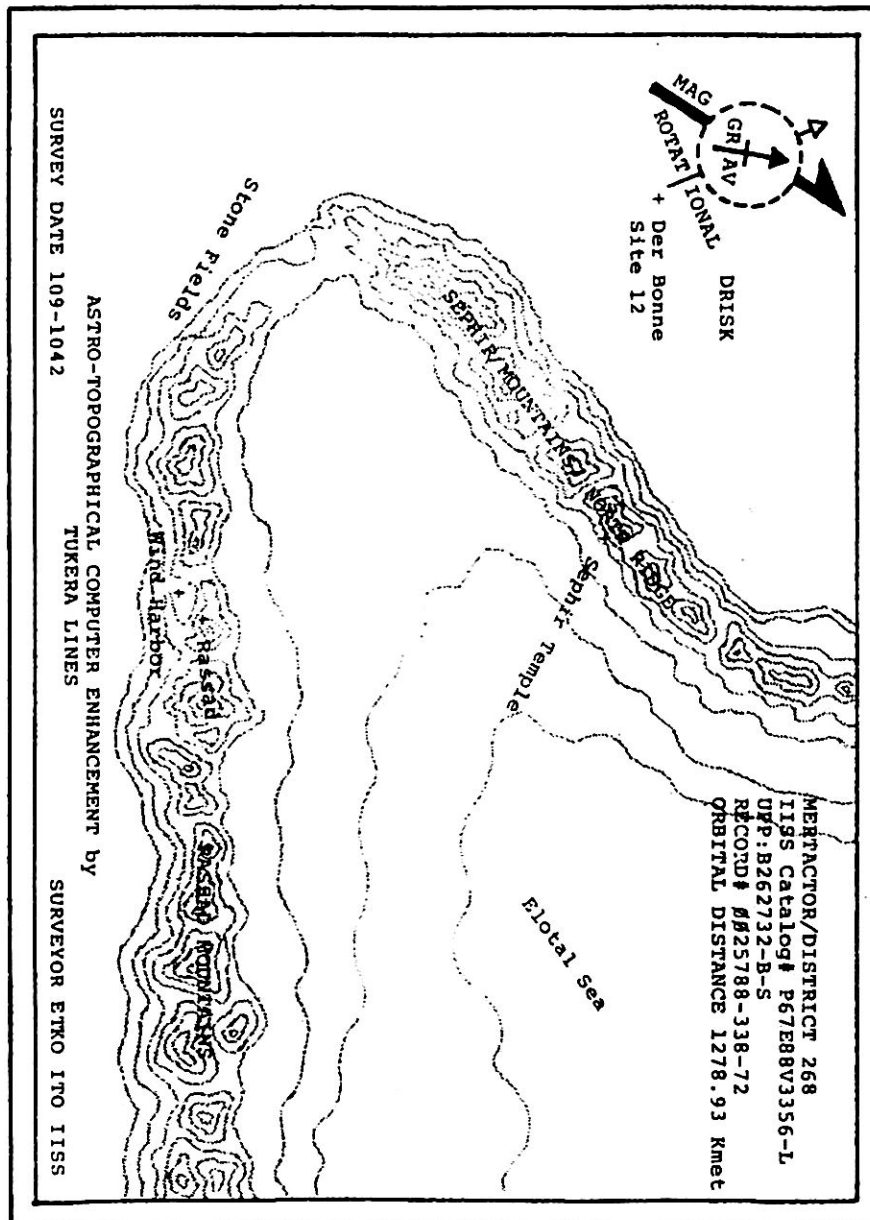
V

Volentine Hypothesis: An ethnological contention that religious or cultic practices of extreme or fanatic persuasion, in general, tend to originate on worlds with a hydrographic percentage of 20% or less. For purposes of the hypothesis, fanatic behavior is narrowly defined as the willingness to do murder or torture on behalf of one's beliefs. The Volentine Hypothesis has not gained broad acceptance among ethnologists and cultural psychologists, but neither is it regarded as without merit. Further research is necessary to verify the hypothesis or expose it as erroneous.

W

Wind Harbor: The second largest population center on Mertactor/District 268. So named since the colonial era for the conveniently positioned ridgelines and basin which shelter the area from drisk storms for most of the year, and which helped the original colonists to survive long enough to move underground into the Rassad facilities. Application has been made for Imperial assistance in closing off the remaining 15 kilometers of open terrain exposing Wind Harbor to the hazardous facets of Mertactor's environment.

Windslide: An environmental event encountered on Mertactor and associated with drisk storms. The combination of low gravity, high velocity winds, and highly variable pressure systems creates storms often accompanied by an avalanche-moving horizontal to the terrain. Most of the destructive force of a drisk storm is contained in the windslide, and has much to do with the self-perpetuating nature of the drisk desolation.

Appendix E: Map

MERTACTOR/DISTRICT 268
IIGS Catalog# P67E88V3356-L
UPP:B267232-B-S
RECORD# ØØ25788-338-72
ORBITAL DISTANCE 1278.93 Kmet

DRISK

+ Der Bonne
Site 12

MAG

GR AV

ROTATIONAL

Sephiv Mountains

Sephir Temple

Elotal Sea

Stone Fields

Wind Harbor

Hassad

Onedo Mountains

ASTRO-TOPOGRAPHICAL COMPUTER ENHANCEMENT by
TUKERA LINES

SURVEY DATE 109-1042

SURVEYOR ETKO ITO IISS

28

Appendix F: Operating Instructions

GETTING STARTED

Important: The "CAPS LOCK" key *must* be engaged for the program to process properly. Before inserting the program disk and turning the power ON, press the CAPS LOCK key. Leave the CAPS LOCK key engaged while running the Starcrystal program.

Components: This *Traveller* text adventure book, and a software diskette containing the zipped Apple images that comprise the game.

The first thing to do is to unzip the images onto a blank diskette. Play the game using the disk with an Apple emulator.

Startup Screen: The menu below follows a brief title display:

1. START A NEW GAME
2. RESTART A SAVED GAME
3. SAVE GAME IN PROGRESS
4. SAVE CHARACTER TO TRANSFER DISK
5. FORMAT A BLANK DISK
6. RESUME GAME

Type the number of the activity you want the system to do. When further steps are necessary to complete a choice, then prompts will be presented until the process is complete.

After the menu choices have been made, the system will display:

"ENTER A NEW CHARACTER (Y/N)."

Unless you have the "CITIZENS" Character Generator program that creates new characters that can be entered into this adventure, then enter "N" and press RETURN.

If you press "Y" and RETURN and don't have a CITIZENS character disk, the system/emulator will hang and you'll have to restart.

This version of Starcrystal is playable on any Apple emulator. It was originally intended for the Apple-IIe, Apple-IIc, and Apple-II+ with language card. An 80-column display is preferred, but not necessary.

COMMUNICATING WITH STARCRYSTAL

"Mertactor: The Volentine Gambit" is a text adventure. The screen display presents written descriptions of the environment, objects, characters, and actions that comprise the course of play. The player participates in the text environment by typing ordinary English sentences describing a course of action to be made in response to the situation described in the screen display. The computer processes the instructions, updates the screen display according to the results of those instructions then waits for the player's next commands.

The screen display is divided into two parts by a horizontal line. The top part of the display contains a description of the character's surroundings, visible objects, visible animals, and other visible characters. The bottom part of the display contains commands entered by the player and the system's responses to those commands.

It is important to note that the system will not call for your attention every time it changes something in the top display, nor does it require input to make changes. Depending upon the circumstances, the system does not always remain static, waiting for your next command.

Basically, to enter a command you type a sentence in plain, simple English describing what you want your character to do.

A single entry of commands and sentences can be a maximum of any 160 characters and spaces.

Starcrystal will accept multiple sentences (under 160 characters in length) in a single command as long as the sentences are ended with a period. An alternate method of accomplishing the same thing is to use the word "THEN."

For example, "Get the shotgun. Put the meal in the oven. Open the pantry." is the same as "Get the shotgun then put the meal in the oven then open the pantry."

Starcrystal accepts multiple direct objects conjugated with the word "AND" or with commas. For example, "Get the shotgun, the shotgun magazine, and the blade."

It is important to distinguish among objects by using the adjectives the system uses with those objects, especially when multiple examples of similar objects are within reach. If the system calls an object for example, "RED HAT," it is to distinguish this hat from other hats.

Be careful about using adjectives to distinguish among objects. It is not difficult to remove an empty clip from a weapon, and then reload the weapon with the same empty clip.

Similarly, the system treats READ and EXAMINE commands differently. EXAMINE (with a specified object) will tell you what the object looks like, and maybe what it does. READ (with a specified object) will tell you what any writing on the object says.

For example, "EXAMINE THE SHOTGUN." The system replies, "THE SHOTGUN IS A DRUM-FED AUTOMATIC WEAPON LOADED WITH TEN ALTERNATING ROUNDS OF SHOT AND SHELL, AND CAPABLE OF BLOWING AWAY ANYTHING THAT GETS CLOSE."

Similarly, "READ THE SHOTGUN." The system replies, "MADE IN HONG KONG."

MOVEMENT COMMANDS

Movement can be within a location or between locations.

Movement within a location is accomplished by entering the direction you want the character to move: North, Northeast, East, Southeast, South, Southwest, West, Northwest, Up, or Down. (These direction commands may be abbreviated N, NE, E, SE, S, SW, W, NW, U, or D.)

Movement between locations is accomplished with the commands "EXIT" or "ENTER," along with a specified direction. For example, "EXIT NORTH." Movement between locations also occurs when the character is next to an exit and is given a simple movement command in the direction of the exit.

Use EXIT to move quickly. Use directional commands to wander around within a location to examine things in detail or take advantage of range or cover in combat.

If you want to quickly reach an object without having to wander around trying to get close enough to pick it up, then use the command GO TO THE (specified object). For example, "GO TO THE SHOTGUN."

GENERAL COMMANDS

QUIT. Returns you to the top menu. Use this command when you want to save a game position. Up to five positions can be saved on the disk.

INVENTORY. Lists all visible objects upon the character's person, but will not list any objects which are inside pockets, holsters or scabbards (unless the object is visible within those holders).

STATUS. Displays the character's current Universal Personality Profile (UPP), as explained in this adventure book (manual).

TIME. If the character has access to a timekeeping device, such as a wristwatch or wall-clock, the TIME command will display the elapsed number of Standard hours since the adventure began. The last two digits are minutes. Preceding digits represent hours.

COMPUTER COMMANDS

The commands ACCESS, CALIBRATE, and SCAN are used with the computer functioning as an object within the game. These commands must ordinarily be followed by the name of the object or computer file to which the command is meant to apply. For example, ACCESS PHONE NUMBERS.

COMBAT COMMANDS

The commands DRAW or READY along with the name of the weapon you want drawn or readied will initiate the combat system. If you don't specify a weapon, the system will READY the weapon in your hand. For example, "READY SMG," or "READY SHOTGUN" are legitimate commands.

The command RUN (with a specified direction) is an attempt by the character to break off from combat and run away. For example, "RUN NORTH."

The command EVADE is an attempt to open the range between the character and the opponent. A direction may be specified but is not necessary. EVADE assumes that the character is rational and will use all available cover. The system recognizes cover within a location. EVADE down a corridor is much more dangerous than EVADE on a jungle trail.

The command ADVANCE is an attempt to close the range between the character and the adversary. A direction may be specified, but is not necessary. ADVANCE works like EVADE, assuming that the character will use cover.

The command ATTACK initiates or continues hand to hand fighting. The ATTACK command will use as a club any object which happens to be in the character's hand. Sometimes this is necessary, but on other occasions it is a good way to wreck a delicate weapon.

The command SNAPSHOT (with a specified target) is a quick, unaimed shot or burst fired without regard for accuracy. A READY weapon must be in hand before a SNAPSHOT can be executed. The example that immediately comes to mind is "DRAW. SNAPHOT."

The command FIRE (with a specified target) is a deliberate, aimed shot or burst which sacrifices quickness for accuracy, even to the point of tracking a moving target. A READY weapon must be in hand before a FIRE can be executed.

THE VOLENTINE GAMBIT

The planet is Mertactor/District 268 of the Spinward Marches, located at the fringe of the Imperium. The assignment is simple and profitable – recover a flashy artifact recently taken from a representative of DerBonne Merchants, L.I.C., and return it to Baron Edkos Volentine, a corporate director. You've got two days before your passage home, the Far Trader *"Arax House",* is loaded with cargo and ready to leave. There's not really enough time, but it couldn't hurt to look around – the Mertactor outback is supposed to be fairly scenic, and you might get lucky. Baron Volentine could be a useful man to make happy.

"Gambit" is a term for chess, an ancient Solomani pastime, describing the early sacrifice of a pawn in exchange for a long-term positional advantage. Baron Edkos Volentine had many pawns on Mertactor to choose from, but guess who got the job?

Welcome to Mertactor.

STARCRYSTAL is a solitaire text adventure series based on the *TRAVELLER* science fiction role-playing game system. Each episode is playable separately or in sequence as a solitaire *TRAVELLER* campaign. **"Mertactor – The Volentine Gambit"** features five non-player characters, 200 locations, 380 interactive objects, and incidental graphic support. Playing time is 10-50 hours. The package contains a program disk, a data disk, and this booklet of documentation and *TRAVELLER* background information. The game is absolutely playable by those who are not familiar with the *TRAVELLER* system.

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