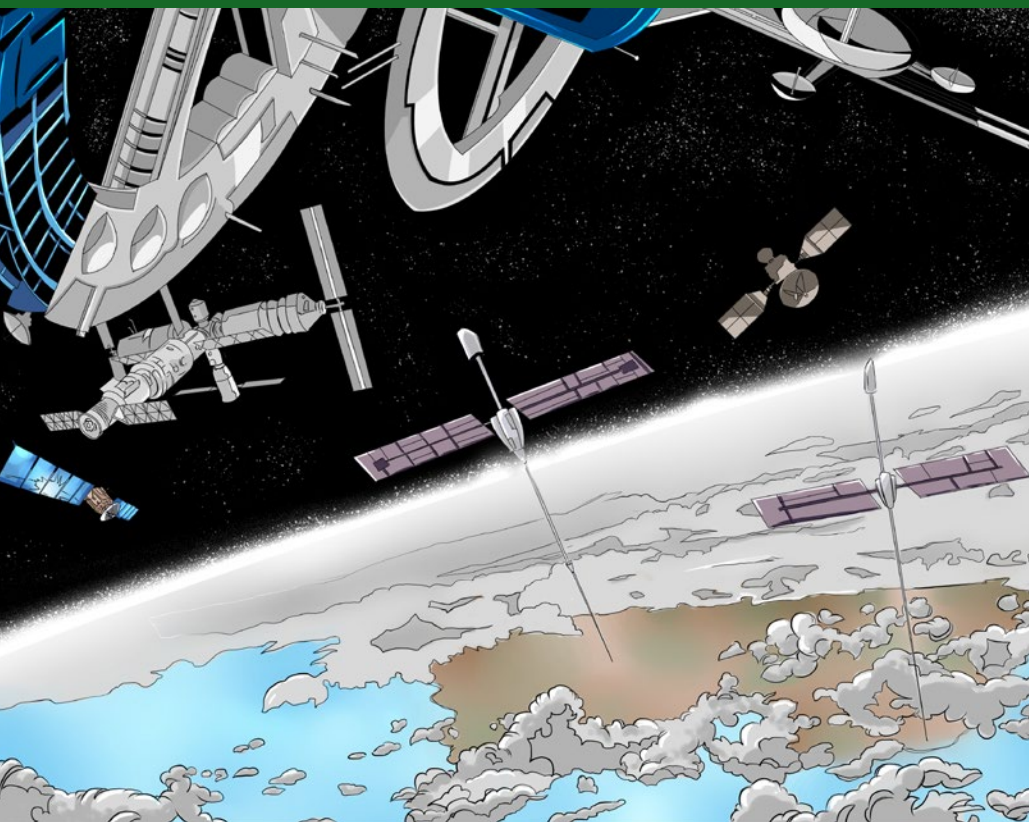


The Virosa Accord

BY JACOB RODGERS



COLOR ART *Indi Martin*
Ellis Goodson
Giacomo Marchesi
Phil Stone
Kier Lyles
MAPS *Mike McCarthy*
EDITING *Russ Morrissey*
LAYOUT *Xanditz*

A rescue crew made contact with a strange alien, a member of a race with powerful psychic abilities and even more powerful psychic weaponry. Now you're on a diplomatic mission to these dangerous strangers.

LEAVING THE NEREID SECTOR

The Virosa Accord begins in the Nereid Sector and follows from the action in *The Last Survivor* (see EONS, Issue 30) and *Harvester Moon* (see EONS, Issue 52). The Nereid sector is the frontier for the Union Worlds but this mission will see the characters go beyond the frontier and into uncharted and alien space.

If this is your first visit to the Nereid Sector, know that it is a place where prospectors, merchants, and less savory sorts call home. The occasional Union patrol-ship makes the rounds, but when you're on the frontier often there's no time to wait for higher authorities.

Advancement Level. The Nereid Sector is at AL 9 or so. Ships use standard FTL drives, with most ships capable of speeds from FTL-5 to FTL-8. Only Union ships (and some alien craft) are faster, and not by much.

The Plot of The Virosa Accord

The characters will be invited to be part of the First Contact team to meet the Virosa officially. They'll have a chance to interact with the leads of the mission, as each tries to convince the heroes to their viewpoint. The pacing of the game is critical, as the players must feel that interacting with the political factions of the Union and the Virosa is the primary challenge of the adventure. It is a more cerebral adventure than the ones that have preceded it.

When the characters arrive on the Virosa homeworld, a radical faction of the aliens strikes, throwing the proceedings into chaos. The party will need to negotiate with various factions in order to make some sort of peace and get off the planet.

Themes of The Virosa Accord

This adventure focuses strongly on competing ideas. While there are deadly threats to the characters to contend with, *The Virosa Accord* is

MANY VOICES

During the course of the adventure, you as the GM will be called to roleplay out several NPCs, perhaps at the same time. There's a couple of different ways to handle this. Firstly, you can just try to limit the interactions between the NPCs by having that NPCs bat at each other by asking questions to the characters. For example, Inspector Woensel might say to them "Representative Smith constantly urges caution, but the Virosa are one of the most advanced species we've ever encountered out here! What do you think we should do?" That way it's clear that he has a disagreement with Smith, but also keeps the players directly involved in the conversation.

Another gambit is to ask the players to stretch themselves by also playing a NPC. This often works well if the NPC's approach differs from the player's regular character. For example, asking the player of the pacifist of the group to play Admiral Badelt might be fun for everyone. Be wary, because this can lead to a player arguing against themselves.

primarily about which *idea* will achieve victory. And it's not just the Virosa that are divided; the Union representatives that the characters will be dealing with also have their own goals. No matter what the players decide, they will have made both friends and enemies before the adventure concludes.

A secondary focus in *The Virosa Accord* is given to the idea of world-building. If the players have previously played through *The Last Survivor* and *Harvester Moon* then they have had many hints about the nature of the Virosa. Now they will have a chance to interact with the aliens on their own terms and learn more about their evolution and culture.

Previous Adventures in the Nereid Sector

It's expected that the characters will have had several adventures before playing through this one, most notably both *The Last Survivor*. So it's expected that the party will be higher than Grade 5, preferably somewhere in the neighborhood of Grade 8. If this isn't the case, pay careful attention to the sidebars as they will help in scaling down the adventure.

If the heroes did not play through the previous adventures in this series but you'd still like to run *The Virosa Accord* then simply have them have heard of the events in the Nereid Sector, summarized at the very beginning of this adventure.

BOUND FOR WETHOME

The adventure begins aboard Admiral Badelt's flagship, the *U.S.F. Resolute*, a modified *Endeavour* class cruiser that's been upgraded for frontier military service.. If you played through *Harvester Moon*, being on the *Resolute* is a natural consequence of the ending of that adventure. While it's possible that the characters might still access to their personal ship (if it's small enough to fit in the cruiser's bay), they are part of an official Union expedition to meet the Virosa and will find themselves constrained to the government's plans.

You might begin the adventure with the characters already onboard ship, or might need to get them on the ship (perhaps being picked up at Orchid Station). You might, if time is constrained, open the adventure with the commission meeting directly.

Otherwise, you can give the players a chance to explore the ship a bit. Once they begin to meet the remainder of the time, the political maneuvering will begin.

Aboard the *U.S.F. Resolute*

The Union Space Forces Modified-*Endeavour* Class Cruiser *Resolute* is a military ship, despite the USF's pretenses to being a peace-keeping arm of a larger political entity. The characters are official guests of the Union and will find that crewmembers are responsive to their questions... to a point. Queries about the basics of the cruiser's operations or requests to be pointed in the right direction deliver immediate responses. Attempts to get information about off-limits areas of the ship (which includes areas like the hanger bay, ship's weapons and sensor pods, but also areas like the crew weapons lockers) or information from the crew about their mission beyond "we're escorting you and the rest of the First Contact team to the Virosa homeworld" will be *Strenuous* [21] CHA check. Any failures will be met with a request to direct their questions to Badelt. A second failure will see the characters escorted directly to the Admiral's presence. It requires at least three successes for the heroes to learn anything of value in a particular area. See below:

- ❖ Accessing the Hanger Bay allows the party to see the Diplomatic Shuttle. They also will see a wing of fighters. Those who make *Challenging* [13] INT or LOG checks will deduce that they're configured for ground assault operations.
- ❖ Those who try to get access to the weapons systems will find (if they can succeed at a *Strenuous* [21] LOG (*computers* or *gunnery*) check) that they're programmed for a variety of ship-to-shore actions, along with a more traditional defense array.



- ❖ Those who examine the sensor pods and make a *Strenuous* [21] LOG (*computers* or *tactics*) check find that they're configured again for operations near a planet. The characters might even find a number of experimental sensor packages that are designed to pick up psionic or psitech emissions. (This last tidbit applies only if your setting has a high level of psionic activity in it.)
- ❖ Those who manage to break into a crew weapons locker (requiring a *Challenging* [13] AGI or LOG check) will find several pistols and at least two carbines and one rifle of the most appropriate kind for shipboard operations in your setting. Unless countermeasures are taken, the theft of these weapons becomes general shipboard knowledge in 1d4 hours.

The various things that the characters might discover might make them consider Badelt a danger to the Virosa. If they confront him, he asks them what different tactics they would advise? He says that he doesn't want to fight the aliens but he must be prepared for the worst case scenario. He is being honest, although Investigator Woensel (see **The Commission Meeting**, below) is taking extra precautions behind the Admiral's back... if she remains unchecked, the crew are very likely to respond militarily to the smallest provocation.

The characters are housed in make-shift quarters, two to a room. While they have more privacy than most of the crew, it's still tight quarters all the way round. The ship runs on its own internal clock, and it might take some time before the characters are used to the cycle of watches, drills, and regimented meal-times. And the atmosphere leaves something to be desired... it's been a long time since any fresh air was delivered to the spaceship.

The Commission Meeting

Assuming the heroes haven't gotten themselves in hot water, after a day or two to acclimate to the shipboard routine, the characters are called to an official meeting. This is a commission meeting, so that the various Union representatives can meet each other and learn a little bit more about their mission.

The meeting participants consist of the characters and:

Admiral Tomas Badelt, an older human male who has made his career with the USF. He's not much for small-talks, and often speaks in a direct manner without much adornment. He takes his duties very seriously, and considers the safety of his crew more important than almost anything the Virosa can offer.

Investigator Ecta Woensel, a middle-aged female human who represents the Union Authority (part of the executive branch of the Union). During the course of the meeting she will often express interest in the Virosa, especially about their evolution and psionic powers. However, this curiosity is a mask; her superiors have made it clear that they consider the Virosa to be a potential rival and worry that the aliens are too powerful to control.

Representative Sainar, a Venetian male of unknown age who was sent by the Union Assembly. He will often initially express caution about the Virosa but anyone who spends time talking with him will soon get the sense that he wishes to use this First Contact to further his own career.

The Admiral will open the meeting, reviewing the current state of affairs with the Virosa. If the

characters played through *The Last Survivor*, they'll be asked to summarize that adventure. The focus will be on Caper, whom Badelt refers to only as 'the alien individual'.

Investigator Woensel will then summarize what they've been able to learn from Caper:

- ❖ The Virosa at the time of Caper's expedition controlled a large territory, with at least 30 systems under their direct control. This territory lays outside of surveyed space, and Caper's expedition was the first one towards the vicinity of the Nereid Sector.
- ❖ Long-range scans and analysis of astronomical records indicate that over the many many years that Caper was in cryostasis Virosa controlled space shrank considerably. Most places that Caper knew about were only ruins or had been conquered by another species (most often Ogrons).
- ❖ Virosa are closer to terrestrial plants than animals, but they don't actually belong in either category, since they're truly alien. They seem to be a social creature, using their spores for both communication and defense.
- ❖ The production of servitors seems to be an adaptation of their reproductive strategy. To produce normal Virosa offspring an exchange of spores is required. But individuals can also produce the servitors asexually and they function as extensions of the Virosa instead of separate individuals.
- ❖ The Virosa seem to be highly psionic. Whether this is a by-product of their spore communication system or a defensive mechanism that they evolved is an open question.
- ❖ Questions about Caper and why the alien is not on the First Contact mission will be deflected... Investigator Woensel will simply say that Caper was not available for the mission (the absence of Caper can be as innocuous or as sinister as you wish, depending on your view of the Union and its problem-solving abilities).

Finally, Representative Sainarr will outline the current situation and the goals for the First Contact. Using information provided by Caper, the Union was able to establish long-range communication with the Virosa. They've agreed to a meeting, on a 'representative world of their Empire'. However, based on the information from Caper, it's highly suspected that the meeting location is actually the Virosa homeworld. This means that there's even more opportunity than it first seemed... instead of a powerful force equal to the Union, the Virosa may need help rebuilding and might become productive members of the Union itself.

Other voices might voice concerns that the entire thing is a trap, or at least some sort of ruse. After all, the Virosa have powerful psionic abilities and they are trusting the word of one of the aliens that this would even be the homeworld. Perhaps Caper and the Virosa leadership have been in secret communication the entire time...

The meeting will end with the Admiral announcing that they will soon be making for the Virosa homeworld. If your setting uses some sort of FTL then this is fairly normal... Caper has provided sufficient information for the computers to plot a course. If your setting relies on Jumpgates then Caper has directed the *Resolute* to an ancient and inactive gate on the edge of the Nereid Sector. The ship will beam a series of signals to the gate, which will activate it. In any case, the Admiral will tell the characters that they have a few days before they arrive.

Private Thoughts

Once the commission meeting concludes, there will a stretch of time before the *Resolute* arrives at the Virosa homeworld. The characters will find themselves approached, either as a group or as individuals, by each of the other commission members. Each will express to the party their concerns and try to influence the heroes.

Admiral Badelt: If the party members were serious and cautious in the meeting, he will commend them on their good judgement. If they were more optimistic or seemed not to understand

the gravity of a First Contact with a starfaring species with unfamiliar weaponry and abilities then he will try to convince them of the need for scepticism. If the characters threaten hostilities with the Virosa, he will correct the other way...he'd like the best results, but he's planning — only planning — for the worst case. If they gain his trust, he will caution them that **Representative Sainar** might be thinking more of personal political gain than what is best for the Union as a whole.

Investigator Ecta Woensel: The Investigator will want to ask more questions of the party, even if they were extremely detailed in their answers in the commission meeting. If they have the logs from the *Selkirk* they might be able to stave her off for a little while, but sooner or later she will have more questions. A *Challenging* [13] INT or CHA check will let the characters know that she seems more interested in weaknesses than strengths.

If the characters expressed caution in the meeting, she will encourage them to be prepared for anything. She will even raise the idea that when dealing with psionics there's a chance that they might only get one chance to defend themselves and they might have to strike preemptively in order to achieve success. If the heroes tell Woensel that they believe the Virosa to not be dangerous, she'll first allow for the possibility, but then soon announce that such thoughts are dangerous and deluded. The strong must remain strong and the weak must serve.

Representative Sainar: The Representative will be the last to call upon the party, and the one most apt to listen rather than to speak. But he still has his goals. He will ask the characters what they think will be required for success. If they start speaking of dangers or preemptive violence he will be abhorred. He insists that there is every chance that this First Contact will be very peaceful. He reminds the characters how alien the Virosa are, but that there's more to be gained by working together instead of at odds. If they agree with him, then he will caution against both Admiral Badelt and Investigator Woensel. In his mind, there two stances are only a hair's width apart and very dangerous.

After these last private meetings and the characters doing anything they'd like to accomplish before arriving at the Virosa homeworld, they arrive at a planet that is green and blue, cloaked by heavy cloud cover over most of it, but within environmental parameters such that a small breathing apparatus will be all that is required to survive.

Around the planet is a cloud of micro-satellites, similar to other inhabited worlds. There are also skyhooks that are designed to allow the more efficient transport of goods and people to orbit. There are several starship construction facilities in geostationary orbit, however even a cursory scan indicates that it has been a long time since they've seen use.

THE WELCOMING COMMITTEE

The *Resolute* soon establishes communication with the Virosa. They are instructed to land the diplomatic shuttle at one of the smaller spaceports. And efforts to use one of the skyhooks or to use transporters (if your setting possesses such technology) are rebuffed. The Virosa cite 'security concerns' and diplomatic protocols. They will allow personal weapons and armour, but nothing larger.

The spaceport is high in the northern hemisphere and consists primarily of a series of mag-rails built into a mountain-side and a series of pusher lasers that also assist with vehicle take-off. There are limited landing facilities, one of which the diplomatic shuttle is assigned to. The Virosa provide a course that will allow the pilot of the shuttle to make a *Routine* [10] AGI (*piloting*) check to steer through the satellite cloud. The course avoids any of the skyhooks as well.

Scans of the Virosa world will automatically detect the presence of a very strong magnetic field and a higher than average presence of ferrous metals. The landscape is somewhat wild, with stark mountains silhouetted against plains below. cursory scans reveal that most of the Virosa inhabitation is within the equatorial band and this spaceport is far outside that zone.

A note on the Virosa and gendered language:
Virosa individuals are referred to as 'it' and

associated modifications of that pronoun. This is a function of their reproductive strategy not fitting into a binary gender system (it is sexual in the sense that genetic contributions from two or more Virosa are required to create a new individual but any Virosa can donate the material and any Virosa can spawn the new individual). Use of this pronoun is not a value judgement on the species.

Planetfall

Once the shuttle lands, a group of Virosa approaches the shuttle. They each ride personal skiffs... each craft is about five feet in diameter, with a raised central circular area and a railing where the Virosa stand. On each of the skiffs, there are several pseudo-avatars (see the Virosa entry at the end of this adventure for more information) standing on the edge of the skiff. The skiffs use the magnetic field to hover a few inches over the ground. They do not carry any obvious weapons.

One of the Virosa makes a show of cautiously approaching the landing party. An unseen speaker in its skiff comes to life, producing an obviously artificial voice that sounds familiar.

"We have used your data-libraries to produce this device. We understand that you communicate by using pressure waves in the atmosphere. Can you understand this transmission?"

Once the group has indicated that it does, you may continue the conversation... you might want to remind the players every once in a while of the in-line translation occurring, but otherwise you can ignore it for the moment.

The lead alien introduces itself as Counsellor Pleasant of the Third Line by Dark Muskgrove.

Pleasant then introduces the others, focusing mostly on Security Administrator Vigilant and Accordance Member Forthright. Extraordinarily paranoid players might insist on a complete check of all of the skiffs and all of the Virosa. Vigilant and Forthright will not be happy about this, but Pleasant will convince them that it is acceptable. Once the heroes begin to check over Forthright, see **For the Safety of the Virosa!** for its reaction.

Security Arrangements

As the characters and the Virosa descend from the mountain-side landing facility, Counsellor Pleasant describes the facility and the surrounding countryside. The Virosa do not like heights, but find that the mountains produce ideal conditions for their mag-drive launch systems. The party will see more evidence that this facility is quite old, though it does seem to be well maintained.

As Pleasant talks, the characters will start to see creatures drifting by in the skies above them. They are nearly transparent, with long tentacles trailing behind them. Pleasant will identify them as Medusa, and indicate that they use a combination of biological processes and the magnetic field to fly and orientate themselves. He'll assure that they're not dangerous in small numbers, and that the Virosa have ways of sending them away.

Pleasant continues to talk about the facility, even as the party leaves it behind. The Counsellor then begins to tell the characters about the farmland beyond, where there are deep fields of standing water and much vegetation. Virosa come to these lands when they are not otherwise engaged, to "breathe the food deeply". As he talks, the number of Medusa continues to grow, and they begin to float lower to the ground.

The Virosa now tend to interrupt themselves, and seem easily distracted. A *Routine* [10] INT check alerts characters to an increase in the spores emanating from the Virosa... they are trying to psionically drive the Medusa away. Finally, Security Administrator Vigilant speaks through the translator: "They're riled up... something has got them spooked and they're likely to attack. We have a few weapons with us, but you may need to defend yourselves if they persist."

The Virosa skiffs are armed with laser rifles, and Admiral Badelt has a blaster pistol. Vigilant fires several warning shots, but the Medusa continue to gather. They attack, with at least two Medusa for each character and more that the Virosa will be occupied with. **GM Note:** If you'd like to challenge your players a little more, have the Virosa weapons fail in mid-combat. In this case, The Protectionists sabotaged the weapons to appear to have a full charge in addition to sabotaging the recharge packs.



MEDUSA

Medium non-sentient invertebrate (4d6)

STR 4 (3d6)	AGI 10 (4d6)	END 6 (3d6)
INT 3 (2d6)	LOG 3 (2d6)	WIL 4 (2d6)
CHA 2 (1d6)	LUC 0 (0d6)	REP 0 (0d6)

HEALTH 20

MELEE DEFENSE 14; **RANGED DEFENSE** 14;
MENTAL DEFENSE 14

SOAK 0; **VULN** piercing, slashing, electricity

STATUS IMMUNITIES none

INITIATIVE 5d6 **PERCEPTION** 4d6

FLY+ 6; **CLIMB - JUMP -**

CARRY 10 lbs.

ACTIONS 2

NATURAL DAMAGE 2d6+3 **REACH** 10' (tentacles)

Tentacle 4d6 (2d6+3 poison damage; reach 10')

Psionic Attack. The Medusa can use one action to make a 4d6 mental attack against a target within 30 ft. Success moves the target one step along the Mobility status track as the Medusa forces the target to remain still."

After the combat concludes, there are only minor injuries to the Virosa. Vigilant orders several of the pseudo-avatars to recharge the skiff blasters, but then will speak out-load again: "This is dangerous! Most of the recharge packs are drained... whoever was responsible for this is in big trouble." If the characters suggest to Vigilant that it may be treachery, the Security Administrator will first resist and then admit that there are factions within the Accord that do not agree with the ideal of making contact with the Union.

Characters that inquire about the Virosa actions before the combat began will remind Pleasant and Vigilant that their attempts at psionic repulsion of the Medusa failed as well. Characters with the appropriate skills can make a *Demanding* [21] LOG or INT check to deduce that the Medusa must have been under some sort of psionic control. If the characters bring this up with the Virosa, another *Demanding* [21] check with an appropriate deduction skill will reveal that Forthright is hiding something. See **For the Safety of the Virosa!** If they begin to push him on this issue.

On to the Accord

Although the Virosa are clearly shaken by the treachery of their uncharged weapon packs, they resolve to press on. Pleasant explains that there's a mag-train line that they can reach with a few hours of travel, and there's supposed to be a diplomatic train waiting for them there.

As the party continues to descend the mountain, each of the other commission members will take the time to softly voice their opinions to the player characters. Their approach will be determined by how they were treated by the characters before they arrived at the Virosa planet. Badelt is not surprised by the presence of factions within the Virosa government, but Sainar is distraught by the news. As for Woensel, she'd like to take off and nuke the site from orbit.

After a couple more hours of travel, the party can see the elevated mag-line railway. It is a thin strip of metal on raised supports, surrounded by barren plains as far as the eye can see. There is no

diplomatic train waiting at the automated boarding platform. Before they can react, Accordance Member Forthright will attack, see the following section.

For the Safety of the Virosa!

The section might be triggered by the characters becoming suspicious of Forthright. Otherwise, it is triggered when the party reaches the train tracks. A powerful wave of mixed emotions... fear and patriotism washes over everyone... ask the players to roll INITIATIVE. Pleasant has an INITIATIVE of 20, and Forthright has an INITIATIVE of 15.

On its turn, Pleasant will position itself between Forthright and the party. On Forthright's turn, its skiff explodes, killing it and Vigilant immediately. The skiffs of Vigilant's escort also explode. Each character takes 2d6 HEALTH damage. Pleasant is seriously damaged by the explosion. You might also elect for one or more of the other commission members to be killed in the explosion... a GM that wants to introduce complications might have the PCs' strongest ally killed, while a GM that wanted the players to have an easier time might have their strongest opponent slain.

Characters that beat Forthright's INITIATIVE might attempt to disable the bombs, however each is programmed to respond to the psionic trigger and there's not much chance that the party will be able to deal with all of the explosives in time. Perhaps if they do have success then more of the Virosa are spared, or Pleasant's injuries are less severe. Several servitors mill about... their owners are dead and they are nearly mindless on their own.

Once the smoke clears, Pleasant will probably have mortal injuries. It will spend its time sending psionic messages to the party. The first message warns against using communication devices... someone has carefully planned this and letting them know that they've failed will surely bring even more resources to bear at killing the offworlders. It also sends a vision of a stone temple in a musky swamp, and some sense of how to find it... this is **The Ancient Grove** and a sacred place to the Virosa. It communicates that there are both allies and enemies along the way, but if they can reach it,

they will be accepted by the Accord. Then, if you're feeling appropriately melodramatic, Pleasant dies. Or, he might not, especially if the characters have been working to save him. The remainder of the adventure will have occasional notes to consider if Pleasant is present.

If Forthright's suicide bombing fails utterly, there is still a pall on the proceedings. If Forthright is still alive, it will need to be ceaselessly guarded. Communication is impossible, since any effort will draw the attention of the Protectionists. Vigilant will propose that it and its troops remain here to guard Forthright, while Pleasant and the party head toward civilization.

Of course, each of the party's advisors will have their own interpretation of events and will be glad to share it with the characters.

On the Run

The most pressing need that the heroes will likely have to answer is how they intend to reach the Ancient Grove. Players that decide to call for a shuttle to pick them up will have to fight off another attack by a **Protectionist Patrol** (see below) before they can be rescued. If you have transporters in your setting, perhaps the strong magnetic fields of the planet plus the interference from mag-rail means that the party needs to get a designated place before they can beam out. Thus, they can be attacked by the Protectionists en route. Folks planning to use transporters to reach **The Ancient Grove** should also see that section about the defenses present.

The players might decide to make use of the various remains of the skiffs in order to make a transport that would allow them to make use of the mag-lev railway. This will be a *minor challenging engineering task*, although the characters might make use of some technobabble and do a science to make things go faster. The resulting transport is necessarily open-air and can't travel at the full speed of the rail-line but is faster and easier than walking.

There are a number of servitors wandering around... some are damaged and will expire soon, but some seemed to have come through the explosion intact. The players might recall that the

Virosa control these with ease, using them as both additional manipulators and sensory organs. A psionist can make a *Strenuous* [25] PSI (*Psychic Suggestion*) in order to take control of the alien creature. Once this is successful, the psionist can give the servitor simple orders and receive sensory input from it as normal. The servitor must remain within 30 feet of the psionist, or the link will need to be reestablished.

Either by Pleasant's directions or transmitted memories, the party will know that they will need to head south-west to reach the grove. The rail-line runs north-south, so they might follow it or use it in order to head south first and then head west. If they head south-west, head to **The Observatory** below. If they follow the rail-line south to Dusthead, then go to **The Tourists** (see below).

The Observatory

If the party decides to leave the mag-line and travel in a direct route towards their goal, they will always have the mountain range to their right-hand side. Soon enough, the mountains draw close again, and as night is coming the characters can see the outline of a small outpost.

Like most Virosa locations, it is a single level with mostly open areas. There are many pools, with a thick scum of algae on top of the water. In the center of the facility is a tall tower, marking it as different from other habitations. If Pleasant is available, it will tell the party that this is a Virosa Observatory and its occupants are likely to be friendly.

Despite this information (or if they do not have access to it), players may elect to be cautious. They will notice that the facility seems to be growing more active... night-time is work-time for the scientists, and Virosa leave the pools and begin to move towards their designated stations. The characters will notice some skiffs and many servitors, but no weapons. There is a spore-cloud throughout the facility, the consequence of a large number of Virosa here for long periods of time.

As long as the characters make anything resembling a non-violent approach to the facility, they will be greeted warmly by the Virosa. If



Pleasant or its translation gear is not available, then someone will need to establish psionic contact with the aliens. Representative Sainar will volunteer if necessary. He won't materially misrepresent the Virosa, since these scientists will be excited about alien contact.

The leader of the facility goes by the name Lover-of-Stars. It will readily talk to the heroes, and it's unlikely that the characters will need to use skills, unless they press on the political situation:

- ❖ This facility is an observatory, with a large optical telescope. The scientists have been excitedly keeping an eye on the *Resolute* ever since she arrived.
- ❖ The Virosa here believe that the party represents client species that have come to pay homage to the Virosa high command. If pressed (a *Challenging* [13] CHA check with any appropriate skills allowed), the scientists will admit that most Virosa are aware that their star empire is much reduced and they were untrusting of the cover story.

- ❖ Lover-of-Stars is shocked by any reports of Forthright's suicide attack. If pressed (another CHA check as above) then it will admit that there are various factions of the Virosa that might take such action... the Traditionalists and the Protectionists are both possible.
- ❖ Lover-of-Stars belongs to a faction called The Explorers. They believe that the Virosa should once again explore space. They take no position on whether or not the Virosa should be leaders or followers of others.
- ❖ If the characters report Forthright's psionic message, then Lover-of-Stars will identify (correctly) that the party must be hunted by the Protectionists.
- ❖ Lover-of-Stars can provide a place to rest and clean water for the party. It does not have anything that the party would consider immediately edible.

It's possible that the players might want to technobabble a way to communicate with *The Resolute*. This is possible... the observatory does have laser rangefinders that are used in experiments involving the moons of Wethome. With precise aiming and a power upgrade, the characters could "tap" on the *Resolute's* navigational shields. Making this arrangement is a *minor difficult computers* task, with at least one check needing to be made with *Engineering* instead.

Due to the primitive communication method, only a short message (140 character or less) can be sent. Then the *Resolute* can flash her shields to provide a response. It takes some time to send the message (it will need to be repeated until someone on the bridge notices the regular fluctuations of the shield) and some time for the ship to rig up a response. So only a single transmission and reply can be done tonight.

If the characters decide to stay at the observatory, then a **Protectionist Patrol** will find them the next day. Similarly, if they have the *Resolute* send a rescue craft, then it's likely that a Patrol will intercept the landing. This isn't to punish the players, just to keep excitement flowing and to make sure there's a consequence

for them attracting attention. If your setting has transporters, then it's likely that the heroes can beam out without attracting undue attention.

The other representatives of the Union will want to talk to the player characters once they leave the observatory... Badelt is impressed that there are some among the Virosa who are looking upwards and outward, and Sainar agrees. But Woensel can only speak about the threat that the Protectionists bring.

The Tourists

If the party decides to follow the rail-line (or make use of it by some sort of techno-babble solution), they will remain on the flatlands, with the mountains receding to the west as they travel south. After some travel time (a day or more if walking, a few hours if using the mag-lev), they will approach the town of Dusthead.

Like most Virosa living areas, the buildings of Dusthead are single-story and seem to be mostly communal in nature. They do have retractable roofs... they are closed most of the time to keep the dust from the plains out, and only opened when it rains. Most of the pools here are inside buildings, with skylights to make sure that enough sunlight reaches the inside.

Perceptive characters will soon realize that there are many more buildings in the town than there are Virosa. Dusthead was a boom town, built up during the time of the building of the spaceport and the mag-lev line. Now it is usually a quiet and sleepy township, where Virosa who wish to see what dry hardship looks like come and visit. There are a number of tourists in town right now, hoping to catch a glimpse of the alien visitors. The government has indicated that a number of aliens will be visiting to pay tribute to the Virosa.

Most of these tourists cluster around Accordance Member Hopefinder. It is newly elected and has attracted attention (and controversy) by stating publicly that free-movers like the aliens should be considered the equals of the Virosa.

How the party approaches the town will determine who they meet and when. The safest thing is for them to actually arrive in full daylight

and make a big deal about it. Then the various Protectionist agents in town will not be able to act openly. If they try to sneak in or around the town, then it's likely that a Protectionist Assassin (see below) will attempt to strike at them.

Otherwise, they will need to establish communication with the Virosa. If Pleasant or its translation gear is present then this is trivial. Otherwise, someone will need to make psionic contact with the aliens. If necessary, Representative Sainar will volunteer if necessary. He won't materially misrepresent the Virosa, since most town-folk will be excited about alien contact.

The mayor's name is Town-healer. It welcomes the party to Dusthead, but has little answer for any of their concerns. Even news of Forthright's betrayal will not provoke a strong response, just a response that such political concerns are beyond the mayor of a small town. The truth is that the mayor has Protectionist leanings but won't directly act on them.

Soon enough, Hopefinder and its retinue will appear. Hopefinder is ecstatic to meet the characters. It might inadvertently cause offense in its overly wrought attempts to be diplomatic. While it regards free-movers as philosophically equal, it simply doesn't have any experience with meeting aliens and it might step on the characters' toes, either figuratively or literally.

Careful direction of Hopefinder's ramblings will provide the following salient points:

- ❖ The Virosa have been told that the aliens are here to pay homage to the power of the Virosa. It will ask how well-known the Virosa are in the wider galaxy.
- ❖ Hopefinder believes strongly that free-movers are equal to the Virosa. It has never met a free-mover before, however.
- ❖ Hopefinder's faction has been called The Ambitionists. They want the Virosa to set aside conceits and step back onto the galactic stage as equals, not overlords.
- ❖ Hopefinder will admit that there are a number of factions within the Accord. It will say that if it speaks in the Accord then it could get its faction and The Explorers to agree to further meetings.

- ❖ If the characters press Hopefinder (a *Difficult* [16] CHA check that can use any appropriate skills) then it will admit that both the Traditionalists and the Protectionists will oppose further meetings with the Union. The Traditionalists because they will want to be in control, and the Protectionists because they want the isolation of Virosa to continue. Proof of the Protectionist attacks could embarrass their Accordance members into abstaining from voting.

Once the party is done with Dusthead, they will need to continue south for some time to reach the equatorial zone. They can acquire fresh water and other supplies from Dusthead. In the equatorial zone, they will then need to head west. These areas are highly populated. Their best bet is using Hopefinder and travelling publically to The Ancient Grove.

Sainar is ecstatic to meet Hopefinder, and joins it in discussions of new trade possibilities. The other representatives of the Union will have less to say about the politician, and more to say about the threats of the Protectionists.



VIROSA PROTECTIONIST ASSASSIN

Medium sentient psionic semi-mobile plant-like lifeform mounted on maglev skiff (7d6)

STR 4 (2d6) **AGI** 2 (1d6) **END** 14 (4d6)
INT 12 (4d6) **LOG** 12 (4d6) **WIL** 4 (2d6)
CHA 4 (2d6) **LUC** 0 (0d6) **REP** 0 (0d6)
PSI 14 (4d6)

HEALTH 40

MELEE DEFENSE 10; **RANGED DEFENSE** 10;

MENTAL DEFENSE 14

SOAK 4 (natural armor)

STATUS IMMUNITIES Drowsiness, Fear, Tiredness

INITIATIVE 4d6

SPEED 1; **CLIMB** 1; **JUMP** 0

CARRY 180 (max lift 200 lb);

ACTIONS 2

NATURAL DAMAGE 1d6+2 (tentacle) **REACH** 5'

Laser sniper rifle 5d6 (3d6 heat damage; range 35)

Skills *combat* 1 (1d6), *biopsionics** 6 (3d6), *telekinesis** 1 (1d6), *telepathy** 3 (2d6), *perception* 6 (3d6), *tactics* 6 (3d6), *rifles* 3 (2d6)

Non-mobile. Virosa cannot have a **SPEED** greater than 1.

Psionically-Controlled Skiff. A Virosa mounted on one of these skiffs has a **SPEED** of 10 (this is personal **SPEED**, not vehicle **SPEED**). The Skiff has a **SOAK** of 5, a **DEFENSE** of 10, and a **HEALTH** of 25.

Spore cloud. Virosa use their spores for feeding, psionic projection and reproduction. A Virosa can elect to have its spores feed aggressively and indiscriminately. Any characters exposed to such a spore cloud take 1 **HEALTH** damage per turn.

Pseudo-avatars. Virosa are capable of producing pseudo-avatars, which are smaller versions of themselves that have manipulator tentacles and locomotion tentacles. A Virosa can only control a number of pseudo-avatars equal to its **INT** dice pool, and they can only be controlled within the spore cloud (about 30 feet in diameter).

Protectionist Patrols

If the characters stay too long in a remote location, or attract attention to themselves by trying to communicate to the *Resolute* or other actions then the Protectionist

faction will zero in on them. The Protectionists do not want to be reasoned with, they have a deep and abiding fear of aliens taking control of the Virosa homeworld.

A typical patrol will have as many Virosa as there are player characters, with perhaps one or two more for the NPCs to deal with.

VIROSA PROTECTIONIST PATROLLER

Medium sentient psionic semi-mobile plant-like lifeform mounted on maglev skiff (7d6)

STR 4 (2d6)	AGI 2 (1d6)	END 14 (4d6)
INT 12 (4d6)	LOG 12 (4d6)	WIL 4 (2d6)
CHA 4 (2d6)	LUC 0 (0d6)	REP 0 (0d6)
PSI 14 (4d6)		

HEALTH 40

MELEE DEFENSE 10; **RANGED DEFENSE** 10;

MENTAL DEFENSE 14

SOAK 4 (natural armor)

STATUS IMMUNITIES Drowsiness, Fear, Tiredness

INITIATIVE 4d6

SPEED 1; **CLIMB** 1; **JUMP** 0

CARRY 180 (max lift 200 lb);

ACTIONS 2

NATURAL DAMAGE 1d6+2 (tentacle) **REACH** 5"

Laser rifle 4d6 (2d6+3 heat damage; range 20)

Skills *combat* 1 (1d6), *biopsionics** 3 (2d6), *telekinesis** 1 (1d6), *telepathy** 3 (2d6), *perception* 3 (2d6), *tactics* 3 (2d6), *rifles* 1 (1d6)

Non-mobile. Virosa cannot have a **SPEED** greater than 1.

Psionically-Controlled Skiff. A Virosa mounted on one of these skiffs has a **SPEED** of 10 (this is personal **SPEED**, not vehicle **SPEED**). The Skiff has a **SOAK** of 5, a **DEFENSE** of 10, and a **HEALTH** of 25.

Spore cloud. Virosa use their spores for feeding, psionic projection and reproduction. A Virosa can elect to have its spores feed aggressively and indiscriminately. Any characters exposed to such a spore cloud take 1 **HEALTH** damage per turn.

Pseudo-avatars. Virosa are capable of producing pseudo-avatars, which are smaller versions of themselves that have manipulator tentacles and locomotion tentacles. A Virosa can only control a number of pseudo-avatars equal to its **INT** dice pool, and they can only be controlled within the spore cloud (about 30 feet in diameter).

THE SECRET MASTERS

Once the party reaches the equatorial zone, they will be drawing close to the Ancient Grove. This is a sacred place for the Virosa, held to be the birthplace of the species. It is deep within a swampland that has been designated a Planetary Reserve. Access to the area is strictly controlled and there is a shielded boundary wall that encompasses the area. There is only one official entrance, although a *Strenuous* [25] *LOG (Computers)* check with a hand-held scanner (or a *Difficult* [16] check with shipboard scanners) will reveal a smaller access-way that is used for maintenance.

There are two probably ways for the characters to reach the Ancient Grove. They might rely on the publicity and open support of both The Explorer faction (if they made contact with Lover-of-Stars) and The Ambitionists (if they met Hopefinder). If they have solid evidence of the Protectionist attacks against them then there's no chance for the Traditionalists (who control access to the Ancient Grove) to prevent them to visit it for "historical" or "cultural" reasons.

Otherwise, the characters might sneak into the Planetary Reserve, searching for the Ancient Grove. In this case, do a 6-dice fast countdown. On each step of the countdown, the heroes can make a Challenging [13] *LOG* check to find their way to the grove. Once they've accumulated three successes they've made it to the grove. If the countdown ends before then, they've been discovered by a Protectionist Patrol (despite the grove being controlled by the Traditionalists, they're willing to allow the Protectionists access, especially if they solve the 'problem' that the party represents).

Once the patrol has been dealt with, start a 4-dice fast countdown with the same rules.

Heroes that have access to transporter technology will find it impossible to beam into the grove directly, due to heavy spore cloud and the psionic energy fields. They can beam into the reserve, in which case they use the above rules to find the grove.

The Ancient Grove

This is a swamp, surrounded by trees that are similar to mangrove trees, with knobby knees that just rest out of the water. Medusa surround the grove, but are mostly peaceful (if you need to add a final threat, a powerful Protectionist psionist could rile them up again). In the very center of the swamp is a giant pulsating thing, looking nothing like more than a gigantically wide Virosa. While it is at least twenty feet tall, it is over sixty feet in diameter.

This is not a primordial mother/father for the Virosa, despite what the characters may initially think. Instead, it is a pseudo-avatar servitor especially grown for one purpose... the religious rites of the Virosa. It is surrounded by priests. Fortunately, the levitating skiffs and other advanced equipment (including weapons) are not allowed here.

Pleasant (or its psionic echo) will urge the heroes to rush toward the creature. It will explain that it is possible to use it as a transmission hub, to share visions with all of the Virosa. Making it past the priests requires a *Challenging* [13] AGI check (characters can use any appropriate skill).

Once they make contact with the Transmitter Servitor, it will begin to interface with them. This will take a while, and is very dangerous. For each character that chooses to interface with the servitor, set aside a personal slow countdown pool of four dice.

Each round that contact is made, make an END test. For the first round, this begins at *Routine* [10] for any character that has a positive PSI score and *Challenging* [13] for other characters. Each round that the character remains in contact, the difficulty goes up one step. Then roll that character's personal countdown pool. If they succeeded at the END test and at least one 'six' was rolled in the countdown then they can share a memory with the Virosa. The Virosa will care most about memories involving their species... Caper, Pleasant, Forthright, Vigilant, and any other Virosa will be the most effective. Memories of the Harvester

Moon will be impactful as well. False memories fail automatically, and cause the character 1d6 HEALTH damage from the psionic strain.

If the character reaches the end of the countdown pool before withdrawing from the Transmitter Servitor they are killed outright as the strain of the interface proves too much for their alien mind. **Provide plenty of warning ahead of time... each END test failure should be accompanied with descriptions of the alien thing probing the hero's brain.** A character can elect to take 2d6 HEALTH damage in a round in order to replenish one die to their personal countdown pool.

Heroes that choose not to join with the Transmitter Servitor can be kept busy fighting off the priests that are trying to remove them from the sacred place. None of the other representatives will be willing to risk themselves to join with the alien being.

The Accords of Virosa

At a certain point, either the characters will have accomplished their goal and transmitted their chosen memories, or have died trying to do so. If you've had the entire party die in a noble cause, you can summarize this, but it will be much the same.

After the heroes have been removed from the Transmitter Servitor, a large force of Traditionalists will enter the Ancient Grove. In deference to their beliefs, they do not have weapons... but that doesn't mean they're unarmed. They use their powerful telepathy to indicate that the party needs to accompany them to the Accord, the legislative body of the Virosa.

The results of this meeting will be determined by how the heroes have acting during this mission, and what memories they have shared. See the next section for guidance.

If the heroes violently resist, there are way too many Virosa for them to successfully fight. You could play it out round by round, but you can treat the Traditionalists as an unending supply of

Protectionist Patrols that will use Psi-Blast (6d6 vs. MENTAL DEFENSE, 4d6 psionic damage, costs 16 PP) each round until the characters are defeated.

The Endgame

The meeting with the Accord is, if the heroes used the Ancient Grove, mostly a formality. The following sections give some suggestions, but you'll want to tweak things to fit the exact course that your characters piloted through *The Nereid Trilogy*.

If the heroes treated Caper honorably, had good dealings with the Virosa that they met, and befriended either Lover-of-Stars or Hopefinder, and agreed mostly with Sainar, then the Virosa agree to meet Union diplomats as equals, and will likely join the organization as a junior member... they have been humbled by the free-movers kindness and openness.

If the heroes treated Caper as an enemy, agreed mostly with Woensel and fought most of the Virosa they encountered, then the Virosa see the Union as an enemy. Depending on their personal negotiation skills, the characters might be left alive to carry back a message of war. Otherwise, they are the first casualties of a long and bloody process.

If the heroes had mixed experiences with the Virosa they've met (perhaps harming Caper, or fighting someone on Wethome that could have been a friend) but have been cautious in their approach, and agreed mostly with Admiral Badelt, then the Virosa make conciliatory speeches, but plan to strengthen themselves as they delay meetings with Union diplomats.

Furthermore, the memories that the characters shared will inspire some of the factions:

If they shared the memory of looking at the Resolute at the observatory, this inspires both the Traditionalists to build new warships and the Explorers to build new science craft.

If they shared the memory of Caper steering the Selkirk to Orchid Station or in the rescue effort in the asteroid belt, then the Ambitonists will continue to gain political power as they can remind everyone that being equal to the free-movers does not mean they cannot contribute to the Union.

If they shared the memory of Forthright's fear-filled suicide cry, the Protectionists face a set-back in the Accord. Now everyone understands that they govern from a position of personal fear instead of patriotism.

If they treated the Transmitter Servitor with reverence, or at least one hero gave their life in order to send out positive memories of the Virosa, then the Traditionalists find themselves softening their stance as being naturally superior to the free-movers.

This is the end of the Nereid Trilogy. Your heroes might use these events to spring-board into many more adventures in the Nereid Sector or with the Virosa or with the psionic weaponry that they will once again begin to research. But today they have either made a new friend for the Union, or a new enemy.

