

FOR SCIENCE FICTION RPGs

BIG TROUBLE

— On A Little Planet —

BY A.J. BRADBURY

MODULE 1 Introduction

This scenario is designed for use with any of the leading SFRPGs - *Traveller*, *Star Trek*, *Space Opera*, *Star Frontiers*, etc., though this isn't the only reason why no player stats are included. To judge by some of the letters appearing in the leading RPG magazines, many Referees and GMs are still locked into a mental straightjacket which makes them try to run any printed game straight off the page - which is a big mistake - or to reject such scenarios because they don't fit into the current game (which is just as daft).

Although the scenario produced here is complete within itself, it is designed to be a source of ideas rather than a finished unit, and is particularly unsuitable for 'unedited use', so to speak. On the contrary, anyone wishing to use this material is strongly advised to read through the entire text before (a) making any and all additions/deletions he/she thinks necessary, and (b) rolling up character points which will tailor the scenario to the preferred game and style of play, and the experience of his/her players. This scenario should ONLY be read by referees - NOT by players.

And now, having got those few thoughts off my chest, let the action commence.

It is assumed that the PCs will start the adventure either on a rest planet or on a relatively unimportant interstellar flight. They will be contacted by 'Headquarters' (which will vary from game to game, of course) and ordered to report as quickly as possible for an urgent briefing.

MODULE 2 The Briefing (1)

Once the players have been gathered together, they will be asked to take a single spacecraft out in order to act as a guard of honour for an interstellar 'schooner' which is bringing in an ambassador from an important outer planet. They will be warned of only two possible sources of trouble attached to this mission:

(1) The ambassador, from one of the outer worlds, is known to be an inveterate tourist. That is to say, there is nothing he likes less than simply travelling directly from point A to point B without making at least half a dozen stops along the way. The players are warned that they must not allow this at any cost, as the ambassador is due to address a crucially important

meeting on a fixed date. This meeting cannot be postponed - except under very exceptional circumstances - without causing serious political upheavals.

Note:

The need to deliver the ambassador to his destination on time is actually only one small part of the mission - as we will soon see. Still, the importance of carrying out this small task successfully (and without offending the ambassador, of course) is all that should be impressed upon the players for the moment - so as to catch them off guard when the real action starts.

(2) A second reason for keeping the ambassador on course is concerned with a newly discovered planet which lies not far off of his flight path. The Federation / Imperium / or whoever are currently negotiating with some of the more enlightened leaders on the planet in order to be allowed to mine a portion of its rich mineral deposits. These negotiations are very close to completion, but full consideration has to be given to the people of this new world - a strange and superstitious race who call themselves the URTHYKNOI. Sudden visits - by anyone - could set the whole process back for years.

The Briefing (2)

A complete rundown on the URTHYKNOI (pronounced ER - THICK - NOY) is still not available. Existing list of facts is as follows:

(1) The URTHYKNOI people are on the small side compared with human beings - the average height is just under five feet, when they stand on their hind legs, or about three feet from ears to the ground when they're 'on all six'.

(2) As the last note suggests, the URTHYKNOI have six legs positioned at the shoulder, waist and hip. The front legs double as arms, though they show a fair amount of dexterity in their feet as well. The middle pair of legs seem originally to have served the sole purpose of supporting immature youngsters during travel. As they have progressed, technically, a split has appeared between those who regard these arms as obsolete (and refuse to use them for anything except their original purpose - or not at all), and those who see them as an adaptive bonus and who have learned to use them as a second pair of arms.

(3) The seemingly trivial question of what

to do with their central pair of arms is actually a central feature of URTHYKNOI life - not least because the main political parties are identified by their attitude towards this question. The more progressive faction (the people who are willing to negotiate for the mineral rights) support the use of all six limbs and are therefore known as the 'sixers'. Their opponents, not surprisingly, are known as the 'four only' party (both names are only rough translations from the original 'high Urthyknoi' language, of course).

(4) Those members of the four only who are known to be aware of the negotiations haven't shown much enthusiasm for the project - but neither have they openly opposed it. It is essential that any dealings with the Urthyknoi take this situation into account and that everything (within reason) is done to avoid antagonising the members of the 'four only'.

(5) Whilst there is no single religion shared by all of the Urthyknoi, it is known that many 'four only' supporters also belong to the 'wind from beyond' cult (again this is only a rough translation of the original title).

Followers of 'wind from beyond' share certain ideas found in the polynesian 'cargo cults' here on earth. For example, whilst no visitor has been openly attacked, Urthyknoi cult members have made clear their contempt for the visitors from the federation/imperium/etc. by refusing to meet with them or accept any tokens of goodwill (ie. diplomatic bribes).

The attitude of the cultists has intrigued the two or three anthropologists who have been allowed to make brief visits to the planet because it seems to be completely at odds with one of their central beliefs: That 'He who was sent' will come on the 'Winds from beyond' with many men and with many gifts for the Urthyknoi who have faithfully worshipped him. The only member of the Urthyknoi who ever openly commented on this point simply insisted that: "The true 'He who was sent' will make himself known beyond doubt when he comes".

(6) The Urthyknoi are known to have certain, limited, telepathic powers, though their exact nature isn't known.

MODULE 3 The Mission - Part 1

The players should be expecting to meet up with the ambassador's space

schooner shortly after it passes Greyp (pronounced Gree-lyp) the home planet of the Urthyknoi. In fact they will intercept a mayday call from the Ambassadorial craft several hours before they reach the rendezvous.

The call will make it clear that the ship is about to make a landing on Greyp, but everything else is hopelessly garbled. Even if a recording of the message is re-run with computer enhancement, etc., it will not be possible to tell why the ship is being forced to land or whether the Captain is expecting to make a regular landing or a crash landing. Fortunately, the downed ship is carrying a rescue beacon, operated on one of the regular emergency channels.

Locating the ship, once they reach Greyp, shouldn't present any difficulties for the players. The big question, of course, is: having found the ship, how should they go about rescuing the ambassador and his crew? If the players don't see this as much of a problem, the referee should emphasise the delicate nature of the investigations, and the fact that the appearance of two alien spacecraft in quick succession, might well be interpreted by the xenophobic members of the population as something closely resembling an invasion! At this point, the players might feel that their best bet is to contact HQ for instructions as to how they should proceed. This action will turn out to be an extremely bad idea, as it will hasten the onset of the events described in Module 7.

If on the other hand, the players decide to save time by sending down a search party immediately, they will walk straight into the situation described in Module 4.

MODULE 4

At Home with the Urthyknoi

The ambassadorial spacecraft has landed approximately half a mile north of a small town. The town itself consists primarily of rows of dwellings built into the many banks and small hillsides in the area - a method of construction which leaves half of the habitation effectively underground, and half sticking out from the line of the slope with something that looks vaguely like a thatched roof. If the landing party set down close to the town, they will immediately be surrounded by the local population, who will try to drag them off to the regional governor - who lives 5-6 miles away in the opposite direction from the downed ship.

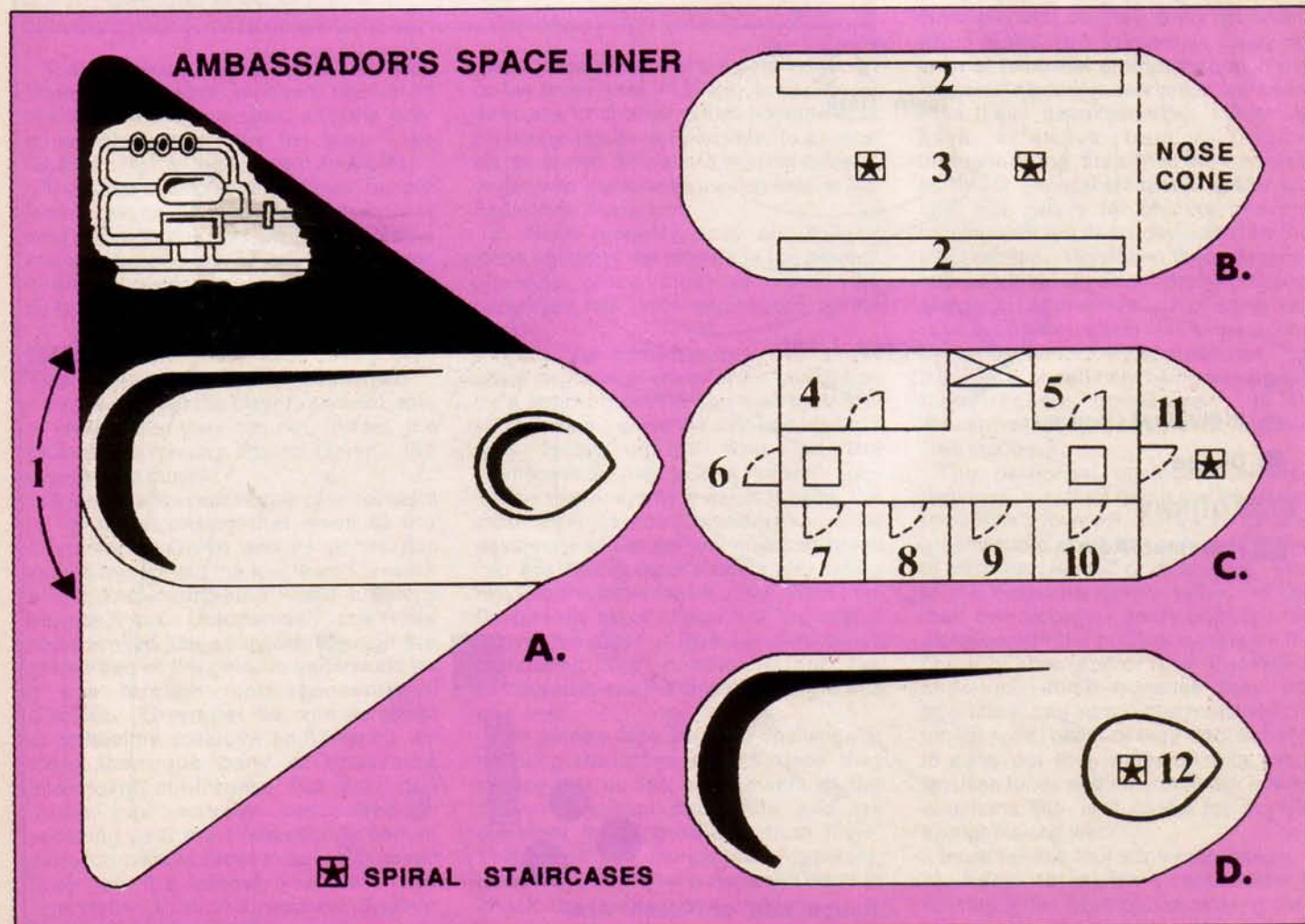
Close observation of the Urthyknoi, and a bit of logical thought, will enable any of the players to spot that all the creatures have thin, almost hairless arms at 'waist' level, which almost certainly means that they must be supporters of the 'four only' school. This in turn, should suggest that there is a fair chance that they a) don't like outsiders, and b) are probably very superstitious. On either, or both counts, they obviously need to be handled with great tact in order to avoid what could blow up into a major incident.

In this situation, the players' best move is to accompany the Urthyknoi voluntarily

to the regional governor's home where they will be dealt with more sympathetically. If, on the other hand, the players try to resist - and especially if they try to use weapons of any sort - the Urthyknoi will swiftly disable them with implements not totally unlike electrical cattle prods. The effect of these implements is to temporarily scramble the central nervous system, thus causing the victim to collapse in a helpless heap. These effects are short-lived (10-15 minutes depending on size, weight, constitution, etc.) and, though unpleasant, have no serious side-effects for a normally healthy person.

Either way then, if the players enter the Urthyknoi town, they will end up visiting the regional governor. The big difference is that, if the players resist the invitation to visit the governor, then they will be taken to him in chains, and he will be far less helpful than if they go there voluntarily.

If on the other hand, the landing party sets down close to the ambassadorial craft, they will find that the ship is totally undamaged - it has made a near-perfect landing on the reasonably smooth, though unprepared landing site. Unfortunately, there is no sign of the ambassador, his staff, or the crew, and no clue as to where they have gone. (A diagram of the ship and a map of the landing area and village are given in module 5.) The landing party can either return to their ship, or move to the nearby town - with the results described above.



MODULE 5

Ambassador's Space Schooner and Forced Landing Area The Space Liner

The four illustrations show; an aerial view, with detail of one wing-mounted drive (a); the storage deck (b); the main passenger deck (c) and the upper deck navigation area (d). The numbered areas are as follows:

- A1). Two wing-mounted star drives.
- B2). Fuel holders (Approx. half empty).
- B3). General storage area. Note the two spiral staircases leading to the main deck. Entrance to this area is made through the hinged nose section.
- C4). Ambassador's Quarters.
- C5). Captain's Quarters.
- C6). Crew's recreation area.
- C7 & C8). Crew's quarters.
- C9 & C10). Ambassador's staff quarters.
- C11). Ambassador's work/leisure area.
- D12). Navigation Deck - room for Captain or first officer and three crew members at any one time.

MODULE 6

The 'Wind from Beyond' Temple

When the players are eventually brought before the Regional Governor, and assuming that they haven't antagonised everyone in sight, they will learn that the ambassador's staff and crew have already arrived in the regional

capital - but not the Ambassador. It seems that the local headman, who is also a priest of the 'Wind from Beyond' cult, has decided that the ambassador is, in fact, 'He who was sent', and has had him taken off to the nearby 'wind from beyond' temple to await the arrival of the High Priest from the cult's main temple.

The inner section of the temple is regarded as absolutely sacrosanct, and whilst strangers might be permitted in the outer court, any attempt by the players to go further will meet the total resistance by the Urthyknoi (who would rather die than see their temple desecrated). The ambassador is actually suffering from severe shock and is very unlikely to try to escape from the alcove on the left of the high altar, where he has been made to sit in the ritual 'throne', a standard feature of all 'wind from beyond' temples (reserved, of course, for 'He who was sent').

By the way, in case someone gets the idea of making a back 'door' assault on the temple to catch the Urthyknoi off guard - there is no back door, and no back windows either. The temple is - as befits such a rural area - comparatively spartan. It is built of something that resembles 'wattle and daub' or dwellings. It follows the traditional pattern, but not with the exactness seen in the stone temples in the cities, and some larger towns. The sections of the temple are as follows:

(1) **The Main Gate** - about eight feet high and six feet across the face of each gate. The gates are kept closed at all times (except on the three special days celebrated by the cult members each year), but they are only locked at night, and only then if no-one is on duty.

(2) **The Outer Court** - a grassed-over area with stone-flagged paths leading to the inner temple. the public rooms and the two 'offices'.

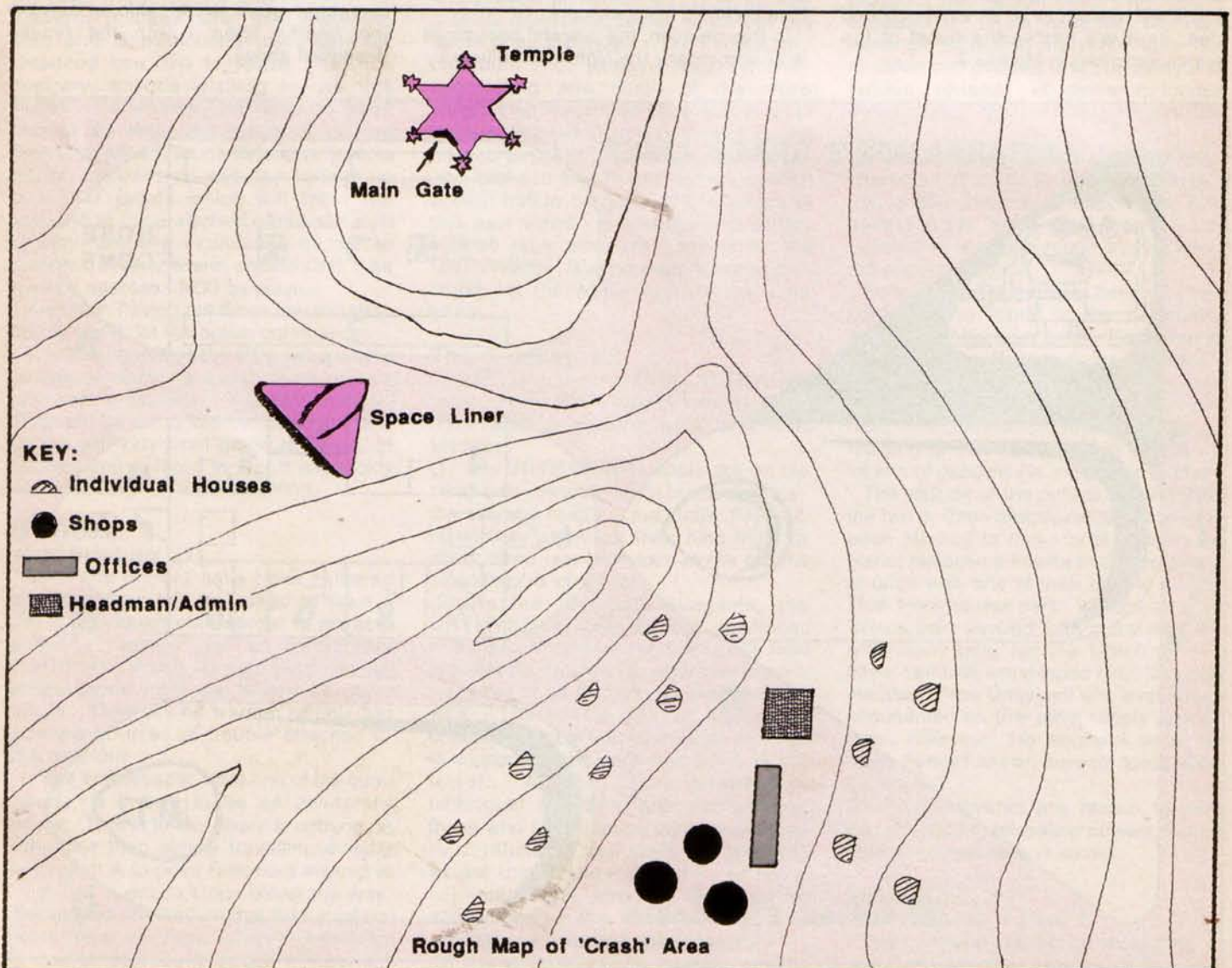
(3) **Public Rooms** - it is impossible to explain the exact purpose of these rooms without entering into a full blown description of the rituals of the 'wind from beyond' cult. Suffice it to say that quite a number of the townspeople will be moving in and out of these rooms as long as, and whenever the temple is open.

(4) **Priest's Room** - for all practical purposes, this room can be seen as the equivalent of the vestry in an English church.

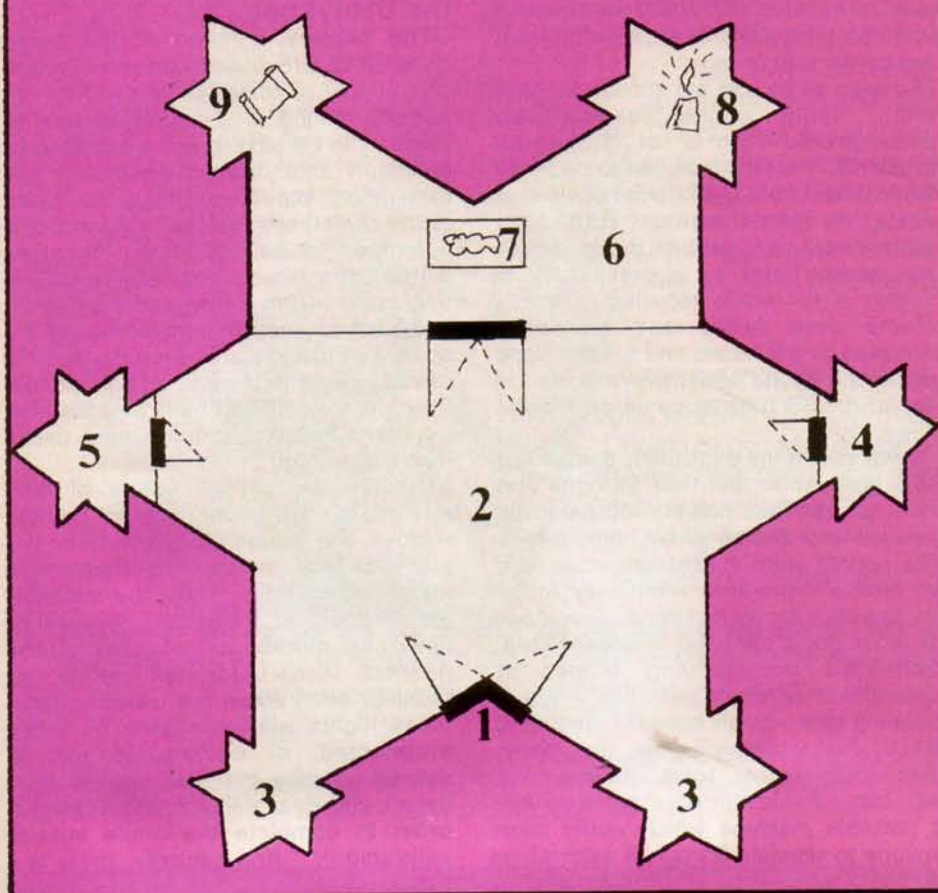
(5) **Guard Room** - this room is used by all of the officials of the temple, in fact, including half a dozen guards. Only two guards will be present at any given time as they work a shift system.

(6) **The Inner Temple**

(7) **The High Altar** is a plain stone block above which hovers a small cloud-like object which signifies the unknown 'Beyond' from which 'He who was sent' will come.



The Temple of The "Wind From Beyond" Cult



The temple is always in semi-darkness. There are four small windows, high up on the wall behind the altar, and the only other light comes from the lamp - the 'Eternal Lamp' in the alcove marked (8)

The second alcove in the Inner Temple is occupied by the Throne of "He who was sent". This 'throne' (9) - little more than a straight-backed chair made of iron-wood and Beethp-skin - is presently occupied by the kidnapped Ambassador.

MODULE 7

The Mission - A Complication

Sooner or later the players should begin to realise that they are not, in fact, the only aliens running around Greyp. But who are the others?

Given its abundant supply of minerals, it is hardly surprising that news of the discovery of Greyp and its riches has spread throughout the length and breadth of the known universe - and probably beyond it too. Unfortunately, this news has travelled just as quickly through the grapevines of the galactic underworld as it has through more conventional channels. Greyp has become an object of unhealthy curiosity and avarice for more than one band of unsavoury interstellar cut-throats, but only one group has actually succeeded in sneaking past the Federation/Imperium patrol cruisers in order to set up a covert base on the planet surface - the *Interstellar Craft Appreciation Society* (the 'Incas' for short).

As can be seen from the detailed report on the Incas (see module 8), their primary aims are to subvert entire governments or, where this is not possible, to at least stir up armed revolutions against governments who insist on remaining loyal to the Federation/Imperium.

In some respects, they are several steps ahead of the players in the present situation since most of what has happened has been engineered by the Incas.

Firstly, the ambassadorial was forced down because of drive failure brought on by a jamming device invented by Incas' R&D section. Once the ship had landed it was Incas agents who led the townspeople out to the 'crash' site. These same agents - whilst leading the mob against the 'Invaders' - took advantage of the general chaos to break into the ambassador's cabin and tattoo him with the sacred mark of the 'Wind from Beyond' (a cloud shape like the object above the altar in the temple) which convinced the headman that the ambassador was the long awaited 'He who was sent'.

The players face a unique challenge in handling the Incas agents since they occupy the bodies of members of the native Urthyknoi population and are therefore indistinguishable from them. This is not an impossible problem, however, though the players will need to attack the 'root' of the problem, so to speak, rather than just dealing with

symptoms. Naturally the Incas agents will hold those positions which will do them the most good - as guards at the 'Wind from Beyond' temple, for example. As long as they survive, there is NO way that the players can hope to reach the ambassador to save him. Once the agents have been removed, however, if players can reach the ambassador without causing a general free-for-all in the process then they should be able to remove the tattoo without too much difficulty, thus removing the biggest barrier to the successful completion of their mission.

MODULE 8

The Incas

The Incas title is, of course, intentionally misleading - though not entirely so. The purpose of the organisation is to subvert the governments of the planets within the Federation / Imperium on a gradual basis, at the same time setting up a rival confederation headed by the Incas. The title of the society is designed to divert suspicion from their true purpose when, as they frequently do, they visit the many 'less advanced' planets - supposedly in order to trade for hand-made goods, works of art, etc. to be sold on the richer, inner planets.

Naturally the Incas do buy and sell craft to maintain their cover, but most of their journeys are primarily concerned with placing agents, arranging secret negotiations, arms smuggling and the like.

The Incas already control several of the outer planets, so they enjoy an income which allows them to maintain a very high level of technical progress (though their 'subjects' seldom if ever enjoy any benefit from these developments). They also have extensive training facilities throughout the area that they control - partly for general weapons/space craft drill, but mainly for officers and men training with the items developed by their R&D section. Very often these items are not weapons, as such, though they are always for aggressive use of some kind. One such item which has only recently been released for widespread use - and one which is certainly being used by the Incas agents on Greyp - is the 'Personal Displacement' machine (see module 9).

The personnel of Incas has been recruited from throughout the Federation/Imperium. However, unlike some other organisations, it is not composed entirely of criminals (wanted or otherwise). Many of the Incas are simply self-exiles from their own society - some because they disagree with the political system on their home planet and/or the Federation/Imperium, some because they want adventure, and some (of a more scientific turn of mind) because they want to be free to carry out their research with almost limitless funds and no one to ask irritating questions like 'is it useful for anything except making war?'

Incas fall into four main categories:

a). **Administration** - responsible for running Incas itself plus supplying aid in the running of any of the planets under

their control. The decision to 'aid' an Incas-controlled planet rests with the admin. branch - Not the people of the planet in question.

b). **Research & Development** - this branch is responsible both for devising/making/ testing and supplying new items, and for the maintenance of all existing equipment throughout the Incas organisation.

c). **Combat** - the armed branch of Incas aids R&D in testing new weaponry, as well as using it whenever necessary to enforce Incas's power. Combat is primarily concerned with straight-forward 'conventional' physical operations, though it does occasional work with and/support operations mounted by 'Special Services'.

d). **Specialised Scanning Services** - the last and most secretive branch of Incas. The SSS branch fields all of Incas' spies and agents (ie. spies work in unfriendly territory, agents work in neutral or friendly territory.) The senior members of the SSS are constantly on the look out for new recruits with unusual powers. It was one such recruit who gave R&D the idea for the personnel displacement machine.

Finally, whatever their motives for joining Incas, its members will have been steadily (and completely without their knowledge or consent) brainwashed in order to instill perfect loyalty to the organisation. This knowledge, should it ever leak out, would be very upsetting (to put it mildly) for many members of the organisation - possibly even leading them to desert. It should be pointed out, however, that like all efficient brainwashing, the treatment includes instruction to the effect that the victims should never believe that they have been brainwashed. So, if the players want to 'turn' one of the Incas, they will have to do more than just grab one of the enemy and explain that he/she has been indoctrinated.

Module 9

The 'Personal Displacement' Machine

The notion of building a 'personal displacement' machine came as a result of the recruitment into 'specialised services' of a young Malathurk (the secondary race of the planet, Aerabius IXg) named **Iyubi Sarognii**.

For some strange reason (no amount of research has yet discovered anything as simple as a straightforward genetic cause), the Malathurks occasionally produce a youngster who shows some degree of ability towards 'personal displacement' (ie. the ability to transfer one's personality into another body). In some cases, this ability fades away as the young Malathurk grows towards maturity, in others the ability can only be applied to individuals from Aerabius IXg (of any race). But once in a while - a very long while - a Malathurk comes along who can transfer him/herself into, and dominate, any other sentient being within range. Iyubi Sarognii was the first Malathurk to show the ultimate degree of displacement ability in six generations.

Sarognii's parents, only too well aware of the Vartiera's dislike of any signs of undue talent amongst the Malathurks, concealed Iyubi's skill from everyone except an old sage, who, though having only a very limited ability himself, helped Iyubi to develop his ability as far as it would go (The Vartiera are the dominant race on Aerabius IXg.)

As soon as he was old enough to leave home, Iyubi chose to join an 'underground' group of Malathurk dissidents. His timing proved to be pretty near perfect (from Iyubi's point of view, at least), as Incas agents started to infiltrate various Malathurk groups only a few months later as a preliminary to inciting a full scale rebellion. Iyubi's talents were swiftly and accurately assessed by the Incas, and it wasn't long before the young Malathurk was on his way to a SSS training camp on Piograt Minor.

It was during the particularly demanding SSS graduation test that Sarognii first tried to use his powers of personal displacement away from his home planet. The results were impressive, especially for Iyubi's instructors when they found out exactly what he had done. Never one to let a good thing go unappreciated, Sarognii's commanding officer at specialised services sent him - with a covering letter - to his opposite number at R&D. Just under one year, and many, many experiments, tests, dummy runs, etc., Incas 'backroom boys' came up with a portable machine which would allow anyone to simulate Sarognii's astonishing ability.

There will be at least three Incas agents (using Urthyknoi bodies) in the vicinity of the town and/or the temple at any one time, with an Incas ship within radio distance at all times. The Incas agents are, of course, making use of the personal displacement machine - and are therefore subject to one major limitation - they cannot move more than 9.76 Trossards (equal to 3 Earth Miles) away from the place where their original bodies are being stored, during the period of displacement. If they go even a few yards beyond this limit, the host body will become progressively weaker as the Incas invader loses strength. After approximately 25-35 minutes outside the communication limit, the Incas invader will lose all power and die - a couple of minutes later, the host's body will be restored to its normal state, but with no knowledge or memory of the invasion it has suffered (but the players won't necessarily know about that!) The players have little or no chance of distinguishing the invaded Urthyknoi from their normal colleagues, so the Incas agents can only be incapacitated by finding their real bodies. These can be hidden (in their pale grey, tubular storage capsules) anywhere the referee chooses, given that they are unlikely to be more than three miles away from either the town or the temple.

Incidentally, whilst the Urthyknoi, being a low-tech society, are unlikely to find the Incas' Storage Capsules - let alone damage them - one of the agents will almost certainly (as a matter of policy) try

to visit the hiding place at every second or third day to check that everything is OK.

Module 10

The Death Trauma of the Urthyknoi

The primary purpose of the Incas invasion of Greyp was motivated by the rich supply of minerals which they are already mining in a couple of remote areas. The kidnapping of the ambassador is simply intended to discomfort the Federation/ Imperium through the failure of the conference that the ambassador is supposed to be attending. In other words, the Incas aren't particularly interested in the ambassador as such, and have no plans to harm him except if a change of circumstances means that it is advantageous to them to do so. Indeed, they feel strongly that he is best left alive - a living 'P.O.W.' is much more useful than a dead one!

Despite the limited scope of their operations, the Incas must, of course, remove the mined minerals from the planet surface - probably by 'short range' matter transmitters. Once the materials are on board an Incas ship, they will be flown as quickly as possible to the nearest Incas-controlled planet for refining, etc. When the mission starts, these flights will have gone on totally undetected, of course, so this is something else that the players must detect and deal with for themselves, in order to complete the entire mission satisfactorily. And naturally, there is a catch.

In anticipation of the moment of the discovery, the Incas transporters carry half a dozen kidnapped Urthyknoi each - including the son of the headman of the town where the ambassador's space schooner set down. These hostages aren't really aware of what they are being used for - they are literally just going along for the ride. Any attempt to interface with an Incas ship will be met with a message concerning the presence of the Urthyknoi. In case any of the players take the attitude that a few Urthyknoi more or less isn't going to make much difference one way or t'other - especially when they are to die far from their own planet and with no-one on Greyp any the wiser - the Incas will, if pushed, supply a second piece of information.

From what the Incas say (and they are, in fact, telling the truth) every member of the Urthyknoi race has the gift of thought transference - but only at the moment of death! This ability - known as the 'Death Trauma of the Urthyknoi' - means that they can transmit a thought picture in great detail and clarity for just a few seconds at the moment of death, and over the vast distances to be received by a special sub-committee of the High Council of Greyp. So, if an Incas ship is attacked and damaged or destroyed by the players, then, if only one Urthyknoi is killed as a result of that attack, it will certainly pass that information back to the High Council of Greyp - and bang go any chances of signing a peace and trade treaty!