The future – the way it used to be!

VOLUME 4: A Final Look at the Starman Series

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THE STARMAN SERIES

by Michael D. Cooper

MUTINY ON MARS

THE RUNAWAY ASTEROID

JOURNEY TO THE TENTH PLANET

DESCENT INTO EUROPA

and the short stories
"The Flight of the *Olympia*" and "The City of Dust"

THE LOST RACE OF MARS

and the short story
"The Orphans of Titan" (originally titled "SETI")

DOOMSDAY HORIZON

and the short stories
"A Matter of Time" and "Return to Europa"

THE HEART OF DANGER

and the short story "The Eight Treasures"

THE LAST COMMAND

with additional material
including a summary of *The Lost Tomorrow* *

"The Infestation of Sulphur Creek"
published in Volume II of "The Mysterious Traveler"

* The full text of the novelette,
The Lost Tomorrow,
appeared as a serial in "The Starman Chronicles"
and is available only through the
Starman web site at www.StarmanSeries.com

The Starman Team

dedicates this book to

MARK McSHERRY and VALERIE KRAMER

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INTRODUCTION

It is virtually certain that *The Starman Archives, Volume 4* is the very last entry in the Starman saga. It is offered to our readers about a year after *The Last Command* was published. Our sales figures show that, after the Starman Team purchases its own copies, maybe only a dozen readers are interested enough in these volumes to place an order.

Like the three volumes of Archives that preceded it, this book provides a wealth of background information and "behind the scenes" looks at the creation and development of the Starman books. Unlike the other volumes, this one includes reflections on the conclusion of the Starman saga.

There is material here from the earliest months of the Starman Team's work. Other material in this volume has appeared before, either in the Inter*Stellars or on the Starman message board. This material is now organized and set forth in a systematic fashion.

But most of what is here will be new to the few diehard readers who will acquire this volume. The exchanges among the team members as they produced the Starman serial *The Lost Tomorrow* and the last three books are excerpted and included. Plot ideas and summaries of unpublished stories are revealed for the first time.

Perhaps of greatest importance for the overall saga is the section simply titled "The Death of David Foster". The idea of the main character's death as a logical necessity was there almost from the beginning[1], and the first draft of the chapters that were later to be called "Victory Forever" and "The Uncreated Light" were written in the spring of 2002—just two years after *Assault On Mars* was completed and in the early stages of the writing of *The Lost Race of Mars*. However, having David Foster die at the end of the story was neither an easy nor obvious decision. This final volume of the Starman Archives sets forth the reasoning behind this bold choice along with the Team's doubts, an alternative possibility that was considered, and finally its full commitment to this dramatic conclusion to the saga.

Jon Cooper, Mike Dodd, and David Baumann met over dinner at a restaurant in Charlottesville, Virginia on Friday, October 11, 2002. On that occasion, in

[1] See the brief plot summary of *The Last Command* in Section I of this volume.

an intense discussion that lasted long after the dishes had been cleared away, they finally made the commitment that the Xenobot menace could only be eradicated forever through the sacrificial death of David Foster. The very next morning, we gave our presentation at the Series Book Convention organized by Mark Johnson, and released *The Lost Race of Mars*. The significance of the decision we had made the previous night would still not sink in for a few more months.

The Team members did not disagree with one another over how to end the saga[2], but came to the decision by consensus and with a measure of reluctance. Other endings were considered, but all other possibilities fell far short of our ideal. We realized that there was no other ending that could better express the theme of the Starman saga.

From that date, the death of David Foster was kept a closely-guarded secret. Only a dozen people, closely involved in the unfolding of the series, were made privy to how the story would end. The writing of the books produced after that date was characterized, for the authors, with a marked poignancy. David Foster's funeral, described in *Doomsday Horizon*, was not only a ploy of that particular story, but also anticipated the real death that would come two books later.

On January 15, 2005, Steve Servello posted his review of *Doomsday Horizon* on the Starman message board, and made the amazing observation:

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Zip's funeral is held and it is a wonderful one,
brilliantly scribed by David. When Zip Foster really
does die eventually, he will certainly receive a top-
notch farewell. This we now know.
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Steve's post was most gratifying. We believe that providing the funeral two books before it was needed was one of our brightest moments! The readers of *Doomsday Horizon* were given a reprieve when David reappeared in the latter half of that book, but we knew that the funeral was, in a way, real. Zip would really die in *The Last Command*, but the flow of the story would not allow for describing the funeral at that time.

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[2] In fact, in eight years of working closely together, the members of the Starman Team **never** had any serious disagreements whatever.

The development of Zip's character from *Doomsday Horizon* forward was directed toward his final selfless act. He became gradually more independent from the other two Starmen. Tension built up in him, and the weight of the burdens he carried increased. It was he who warned against underestimating the Xenobots. Zip's relationships with Kristina Bethany and the three members of his family were carefully explored—especially in the first two chapters of *The Last Command.* His "rash" behaviors in *The Heart of Danger* were intended to lead to his final quick decision to go on his own to the Luxan moon. Impulsive as that act may have appeared, the story unfolded to show that there was no other course that could have saved the ships of the Solar Alliance, and therefore the civilizations of the Solar System.

Two and a half years after the October 2002 dinner meeting, the last chapters of *The Last Command* were read aloud to a select group by the light of a kerosene lantern in the Anza-Borrego Desert on Thursday evening, May 19, 2005. Even then, the hearers were literally sworn to secrecy until the book was published and distributed that summer.

If any reader has been angered or disappointed by how the Starman series ended, we have not heard about it. Those who have shared their reaction have been moved, impressed, and perhaps even changed by it.

David Ethel wrote:
What a finish! ... I can say that the ending was very satisfying.

Mark McSherry wrote:
Just finished reading the last chapters of The Last Command. Right now I don't quite know what to do or say... Other than to simply stand up and loudly clap my hands in applause.

I. ORIGINAL PROPOSED TITLES AND PLOT SUMMARIES

In the beginning, back in 1999 before the first book was written, the Starman Team envisioned 23 stories in what we then called "the David Foster series". Below are the titles and summaries of the original 23 books. Although the Starman series eventually weighed in at only eight books, it did retain the central plotline of the original 23.

When the list was first made available, Jon Cooper wrote *Editor's Note: The following is a brief summary of the events of each title. For those interested in writing any of these books, more detailed information is available. We kept the information brief here because we didn't want to spoil the entire series for our readers!*

1. Assault on Mars
2. The Runaway Asteroid
3. Journey to the Tenth Planet
4. Descent Into Europa
5. Operation Luna
6. The Lost Race of Mars
7. The Fight For Uranus
8. The Secret of the Asteroids
9. Project Orion
10. The Search for the Xenobots
11. The Caves of Mercury
12. Trouble on Titan
13. Danger at L5
14. The Children of Neptune
15. Moonquake!
16. The Rings of Saturn
17. The Venus Project
18. The Starlight Maneuver
19. Star Station One
20. Voyage to Polaris
21. The Door to Yesterday
22. The Return of Mars
23. The Last Command

1. *Assault on Mars*

When the series opens, new Starman David Foster is on Mars for his first assignment. Pirates from the Asteroid Belt, in a sudden attack, take control of the Martian settlements. Aided by a number of treacherous colonists, the pirates blockade the mines in the Asteroid Belt, vital to Earth's well-being and for which Mars is the primary supply post. The pirates also withhold from Earth the medicines which only Mars supplies. Unless Earth hands over control to the pirates, human civilization in the Solar System will suffer grievously.

Not having faced hostilities in nearly a century, Earth is ill-prepared for any defensive action. However, new Starmen Joseph Taylor and Mark Seaton are called on to make a secret entry into Mars and team up with David Foster, who alerted the authorities to the full situation before being forced to go into hiding. Equipped with a new, experimental, and top secret antimatter drive, the two Starmen and their undercover partner, Steve Cliff, enter Martian airspace disguised in *The Spud Peeler*, a decrepit cargo ship. Their assignment is to find David Foster, sabotage the pirates' communications network and weaponry, and allow the forces of Earth to land safely and free Mars from the assault by the pirates.

This book introduces David Foster and his companions, tells how they become a team, and presents the world of the Starmen—filled with adventure and beauty, supported by the best current and theoretical science, and showing that good triumphs over evil.

2. *The Runaway Asteroid*

Angered by the defeat of their plans of conquest, the defeated conquerors direct their secret asteroid base on a collision course with Earth. The pirates are certain that the asteroid will hit Earth and destroy it. Everything is in their favor: not only is the asteroid naturally very dark and practically impossible to spot against space, but the ancient Martians outfitted it with a sheathing device that makes it impossible to spot via radar. No one will see it until it is practically on top of Earth, and by then it will be too late to divert the hundred-mile-long asteroid—and the Earth will be destroyed!

3. *Journey to the Tenth Planet*

Starlight Enterprise made an astonishing discovery: Pluto is *not* the most distant planet in the Solar System. Long hidden because of its bizarre orbit

but discovered by records found on the ancient asteroid base, SE decided to send an expedition to explore it.

Because of the immense distance between the new planet and Earth (close to ten billion miles), SE places the Trio and a crew in a new experimental spaceship powered by a new kind of fission-fusion breeder reactor.

The goal of the expedition is to establish a base there to explore what is thought to be one of an ancient race's jumping-off points to other Solar Systems. The three Starmen are on board as part of the crew. Trouble hits the ship almost as soon as it leaves orbit, and continues to plague it all the way there. When the ship lands and the base is founded, a dangerous mutiny sweeps the crew. Who is trying to stop the expedition, and why? Is there any truth in the rumor that the Tenth Planet holds the secret to interstellar travel? The Trio race against time to find out — before it's too late!

4. *Descent Into Europa*

A probe to Jupiter's moon Europa reveals that a substance found on Europa is useful for forming the hybrid multidimensional materials necessary to create the interstellar drive discovered on the Tenth Planet. Starlight Enterprise is very interested, and so dispatch an experimental high-tech spaceship, capable of acting as an undersea submarine to explore and perhaps colonize this dangerous underwater region. The three Starmen, accompanied by a small gathering of experts, explore the area and try to learn what happened to the vanished crew members of a prior expedition that landed many decades ago. They also try to get to the bottom of rumors that there is life on Europa, and none of it is hospitable…

5. *Operation Luna*

For centuries, Earth assumed that the Moon was dead. No life forms were ever discovered on it; no ruins or relics from any old civilization were ever found buried. As a result, the Moon was classified as an uninteresting site and no one ever bothered to explore it carefully.

Then one day a Starlight-owned mine on the Moon opened up a new level, and found a large complex of tunnels—artificial tunnels, complete with the alien machinery that carved them out. The news rocked the Solar System: someone had been living on the Moon!

Starlight Enterprise dispatched the three Starmen, along with an exploratory team, to examine the tunnels and see where they lead. The tunnels are old and treacherous, however, and it turns out that they are not the only ones

interested in uncovering their secrets. The stakes are raised extremely high when the exploring Starmen discover a chamber containing what are apparently mummies of an alien race…

6. *The Lost Race of Mars*

After examining the ancient ruins on the Moon, Starlight has decided to send another expedition to Mars. SE Labs finally remembered that the three Starmen came across a mysterious old man while trekking across the desert in *Assault on Mars*. Could the ancient race still be alive?

The new expedition quickly gets into trouble when it accidentally comes across a vast illegal operation that is engaged in the production of a highly illegal hallucinogen more dangerous and deadly than cocaine. The operators of the syndicate have a huge interest in seeing that the Trio never returns to tell their story. The chances of the Trio are slim — or are they? The Trio engages in a race against time to find the lost race of Mars before the Syndicate finds them!

7. *The Fight For Uranus*

Starlight Enterprise wants to start development on a new hybrid fusion drive with enough power to drive a ship to the stars. To work on their drive, though, they need a to build a research station on a planet that has access to enormous quantities of hydrogen—and the distant planet Uranus is the only location in the Solar System that fits the bill.

SE decided to send a ship to establish a colony and research station on the surface of the planet, and they send the Starmen along to help. As is well known, the surface of Uranus proves incredibly hostile — but not as hostile as certain special interests that want to make certain that Starlight Enterprise never develops FTL technology. Who are these people, and how are they sabotaging the works? The Trio rushes to find the answer to these secrets and save planet Uranus from nuclear destruction!

8. *The Secret of the Asteroids*

It has long been known that the asteroids have many secrets. Many asteroid miners have reported strange sightings and odd happenings. Some curious machines have been found. Odd stories abound; old men who have lived in the asteroids all their life have had many curious experiences. When an asteroid miner stumbled onto Mars and claimed to have discovered an enormous alien starship, SE decided to get to the bottom of the rumors.

They dispatched the three Starmen to go with the asteroid miner and examine seriously the reports of the strange happenings in the Belt.
The task of the Starmen is hampered with the asteroid miner suddenly disappears. Tracing him proves difficult: the Belt is a big place, and is filled with criminals and pirates of every type. The Starmen soon discover that the alien ship has some incredible powers, and are plunged in a race against time to find it before a vast criminal syndicate discovers it and puts it to its own purposes…

9. *Project Orion*

Equipped with a large supply of mineral from the Europan colony, data from the colony on Uranus, and information from the Martians on how to build a good faster-than-light propulsion system, Starlight Enterprise has begun constructing an interstellar ship named *Orion* in the Sahara Desert. The project is under tight security, but evidently not tight enough: classified secrets are leaking out of the project and experiments are failing for unexplained reasons. Things began to get serious when a top scientist and one of the Trio suddenly disappear. Who is behind these things? Does this tie in with the vast Sahara reclamation project that is going on? Are the enemies human, or are they receiving help from the hostile civilization that destroyed the Martians many millennia ago? The book comes to a climax when the powerful hybrid reactor becomes unstable and threatens to explode—and the explosion would pack enough power to vaporize the entire station and turn the entire Sahara into glass!

10. *The Search for the Xenobots*

Centuries ago, a race of alien beings invaded the Solar System. They were repulsed, but only at the cost of destroying the Martian civilization. Now the Xenobots are returning, and are still as warlike as ever—their plan to destroy Earth's new starship Polaris was defeated by only the narrowest of margins.

It is known that the mysterious Xenobots are plotting some disastrous new plan. They must be stopped, but first they must be found—but no one knows where their hidden base is. The clues to this mysterious race are scattered all over the Solar System, and lead the Starmen on a wild chase through the swamps of Venus, to the station at Ceres, to Titan, and finally back to Earth itself. Just where are they located, how do they tie in with the supposedly defeated renegade pirates hidden in the asteroids, and why are

they so interested in Professor Clive's solar research station? The Starmen must discover the answer soon, and time is running out!

11. *The Caves of Mercury*

With the Xenobots temporarily defeated, the Starmen turn their attention to a local mystery. It has long been known that the broiling planet of Mercury had an extensive underground network of caves. As of yet only a very preliminary exploration has been made, so the famous three Starmen are sent in to explore. They are accompanied by some Titanians, scientists, and by a group of Martian scientists who want to find what they think was an ancient Martian outpost buried somewhere deep in Mercury.

The planet quickly proves more hostile than anticipated—incredibly hostile. Hot magma, poisonous corrosive gases, and intense radiation are only part of the problem. The intense electromagnetic radiation constantly fouls up their suits, and much of their equipment won't work. To compound the problem, it is soon clear that the ancient Martians put up an elaborate security network around their city intended to keep all comers out. It is a race to see if they can penetrate the elaborate Martian defenses—or even make it back to the surface alive!

12. *Trouble on Titan*

For several years, the native inhabitants of Titan have lived in peace with the residents of Earth. Trade had sprung up between the two races, and Titan has become home to a booming colony. When the Titanians were discovered, the race was somewhat primitive, but they have caught on quickly—very quickly, in fact: most of their society has caught up to the space age, and the Titanians are already designing a first-class starship.

Someone, however, is stirring up trouble on Titan. Resentment is growing against the men of Earth, and Starlight wants to know why. Who would want to cause trouble between them and the humans? The three Starmen had better find out—and soon, for already the aliens are breaking relations with Earth, expelling all humans, and refusing any human access to Titan…

13. *Danger at L5*

The space station at LaGrange Point Five at Earth is of great importance to the Solar System. First built and launched by Jerry Rigg in the early 21st century, the station has grown and expanded until it is a major point of commerce and industry.

The station at L5 is in grave danger, however. For some unknown reason, the fusion reactors are no longer working correctly: no one can keep them online, and the finest minds in the Solar System cannot figure out why. At the same time, the plant that provides a livable atmosphere for L5 is also failing, and for equally obscure reasons.

The three Starmen are sent in to investigate. What is destroying the L5 station? Is it some strange quirk of space, or is someone making a deliberate attempt to destroy L5? The Starmen have got to find out, and quickly, for if the problem is not solved soon L5 will have to be evacuated — and destroyed!

14. *The Children of Neptune*[3]

Starlight Enterprise sends a large research ship to Neptune, with the Starmen and a large crew of scientists and researchers. Some of the scientists will test some newly-developed equipment, metals, and "active shielding" that are very useful on cold, extreme places with high gravity. SE plans to use this equipment in deep-space colonization and mining. Other scientists will conclude several decades of research on an antigravity procedure with a thorough test in the field. Neptune is selected, as it is the last planet in the Solar System which has not been visited by humans. It is suitable for the tests, and the Starmen are charged with exploring and mapping the eighth planet, with its amazing extremes and harsh environment.

The first but temporary landing site is Triton, a moon of Neptune, in order to do some careful, detailed, and close-up investigation of the planet before attempting a manned landing. After determining that they can land safely, they do so and the different groups begin to work. As the others are conducting the experiments, the Starmen begin the process of exploration and discovery.

Much to their surprise, they find evidence of a previous landing. There are some tools, some prints, some signs of digging, etc. A cursory examination shows that these signs, although few, are scattered all over the planet. This shows that they were not made by any native intelligent inhabitants (of which there are none), but by visitors. They are dated at more than 20,000 years in the past. As the primary purpose of the exploration goes on, speculation runs off and on throughout the book: Who visited Neptune first? Who were its first children?

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[3] This title was selected as a tribute to the Dig Allen series, which was the original inspiration for the Starman series. *The Children of Neptune* was the title of the seventh book in the Dig Allen series, but was never written.

15. *Moonquake!*

The citizens of the Moon were flabbergasted one day when a minor seismic disturbance shook the pole. The scientists at Starlight were taken by surprise, for the Moon was geologically dead: there couldn't *possibly* be earthquakes on the Moon!

That didn't keep it from happening, though, and soon afterward it happened again—and again. Soon the scientists started getting worried, for the moonquakes were getting more and more severe. All that was needed was one good quake and all the citizens on the Moon would be dead—and that quake could come at any time…

16. *The Rings of Saturn*

Water is in great demand in the Solar System. Human beings cannot survive without it, and yet few planets have a good supply. Earth has an enormous supply of water, but Earth's high gravity makes exporting large quantities of it impractical. Starlight Enterprise wants to expand its operations and begin terraforming other planets, but before it can do that it needs a large supply of water that is easy to get to and easy to ship.

It turns out that such a supply exists: the rings of Saturn are very, very rich in water. Setting up a base in the rings to get the ice and shoot it off to the rest of the Solar System should be an easy task, especially with an indigenous race already living at Saturn. There shouldn't be any trouble—but when the Xenobots find out about the operation, they start making trouble of their own…

17. *The Venus Project*

Buoyed by its successes on Mars, Mercury, and Uranus, Starlight Enterprise is attempting its boldest effort yet: the terraformation of Venus. Millennia ago, Venus had a habitable atmosphere, but the Xenobots destroyed it in the great interstellar war. Now Starlight wants to go back and, with the help of the ancient Martians, rebuild its shattered atmosphere.

Terraforming Venus is not easy. The best minds in the Solar System have worked out a plan, but it requires ingenuity, hard work, luck, and some ancient, top-secret Martian technology. Starlight also knows that Venus is not the only enemy they have to fight: the Xenobots have a strong interest in seeing Venus remain uninhabitable, certain criminal elements would like to get hold of the field technology of the Martians, and still others on Earth would like to see the ancient Martians destroyed. The three Starmen, accompanied by a host of experts and an army of engineers, attempt to do the

impossible and surmount the odds—and this time it looks as though Venus will win!

18. *The Starlight Maneuver*

The Xenobots are becoming alarmed at the recent successes by the Earth and Mars alliance. Earth and Mars are getting stronger and stronger. Mars has been terraformed. Venus has been terraformed. Mercury is being mined. The Asteroids are colonized. If the Xenobots don't do something quickly, Earth will gain access to the stars and will almost certainly wipe them out. It is very clear who is behind Earth's growing power: the one and only Richard Starlight. If he were removed, they reasoned, the rest of the Solar System would crumble very easily. They determined that Richard Starlight must die, and he must die soon…

19. *Star Station One*

Earth's first interstellar starship *Polaris* is almost complete, and its crew is being picked out. Soon the starship will be launched to the stars—and if it works, a host of others will follow.

In view of future events, Starlight Enterprise has decided to set up a spaceport on the distant planet of Pluto. The planet is certain to become a major stopping point in the future; it will be the Solar System's gateway to the stars.

In the final few months before the launching of the ship, SE sent a crew of engineers, along with the three Starmen, to the cold and distant planet Pluto to set up a spaceport there. The Starmen had some qualms about going, for the base at Pluto is certain to become a key resource in the near future. The Xenobots were certain to oppose the creation of the base, and do all that was in their power to stop it. The Starmen requested that a fleet of battle cruisers be sent to protect them, but SE declined: they were certain that since the Xenobots had been expelled from the Solar System (in *The Search for the Xenobots*), they would not be a problem. It turns out that the Starmen were right…

20. *Voyage to Polaris*

Earth's first starship is finally complete. She has been tested, outfitted, and manned. Her destination: the star Polaris, which seems to hold special significance (for an unknown reason) in ancient Martian records.
The ship is launched, and when out in deep space it creates a wormhole, which it enters. Sustaining the wormhole proved to take far more power than

had been expected, though, and the wormhole collapsed before the ship could leave. The result: while the ship still made it to Polaris, she was very badly damaged.

The crew managed to land on the planet specified by the Martians, and examined their ship. Most of the ship proved to be repairable, but the spacedrive and hybrid reactor were a total loss. The crew and Starmen were stranded!

There was still a chance, however: the planet held a vast, crumbling city built by the ancient Martians. It was believed that there might be a couple of starships hidden somewhere in the ruin; perhaps, if they could be found, enough parts could be gathered to build a working one and fly home. Trouble develops when the Xenobots discover their presence at Polaris, and send hordes of troops to find and capture them. They must somehow evade their captors long enough to discover the ships and fly home. They must act quickly, for if the Xenobots grow tired of searching for them, they may decide simply to destroy the entire city—and them with it!

21. *The Door to Yesterday*

At the end of Voyage to Polaris, David Foster is captured by the Xenobots and the rest of the expedition returns home without him. SE and the other two Starmen are desperate to find some means to rescue him. Now that the ancient Martians are on the point of emerging from their underground cities, the ancient documents become vital not only for reestablishing the planet, but for learning more about the Xenobots. Frantic for information so that they can effect a rescue, the Starmen scour the documents available to them.

They are stunned to the point if amazement, which gradually turns into desperate hope, when they find that the ancient Martians had a legend that, somewhere "way out in the Oort Cloud beyond the solar system, where the comets are born" there was something called the Door to Yesterday. This device, according to the legend, was created by an unknown intelligence that lived in an unknown system, and slowly drifted through space for millennia until it landed deep inside the Oort Cloud and was held there. The legend has it that the device was very hard to locate and, once found, very hard to use (it was disguised as something else, perhaps) but it had the power to move the user into the past or future.

The legend of the Door as a time machine causes the Starmen to see time travel as a desperate gamble to go back in time to a point before David was

captured and avoid the circumstances that led to his capture. They determine to make the attempt to find and use this legendary device, if it exists. The Xenobots' human spies learn of this gambit, and inform their bio-metallic masters. Of course the Xenos want the device very badly for their own purposes as well as to thwart the rescue, and it's a race to see who can find it first, in the dark unexpected and unexplored Cloud the unexpected abounds. The Xeno ship sheathes itself from the beginning and tracks the *Star Ranger II* closely to the point where the *Star Ranger II* initiates Wormhole Drive and is drawn into the vortex of the beginning of the wormhole. The Starmen are unaware of the other ship until it is too late. The presence of the second ship throws off the WD calculations seriously, so the point of destination is short of the Oort Cloud—thus precipitating the race to the Door through normal space outside the Solar System.

22. *The Return of Mars*

The Starmen return from the Oort Cloud, and are greeted with cheers by the worried men at home. They return to the study of the ancient Martian documents so that they can locate the home of the Xenobots—and the only way to do that is to recreate the ancient Martian networks and cities. Soon, the ancient cities are uncovered and re-inhabited. The enormous fleets of ships come out of hiding and are rebuilt and enabled. Ancient bases, battle stations, warships, satellites; with the help of Earth and the Martians, soon their civilization is rebuilt and re-inhabited.

This rebuilding of Mars does not go without notice. The Xenobots are aware of the danger of a combined Earth and Mars, and go all-out to stop them. Explosions, sabotage, and an attempt to create ill-feeling between Mars and Earth are all desperately attempted.

David, held captive at the extra-solar Xenobot headquarters, learns of a desperate plan to invade the Solar System and, using small satellites, to destroy the hybrid antimatter power stations. If the power stations can be made unstable, they will not only wipe out most of Earth and Mars but also destroy their power supply—making them easy prey for the invading Xenobots. Using all his skill, David sends a message to Earth. The message must be received in time, and Earth must find a way to stop them, for the entire Solar System hangs in the balance.

23. *The Last Command*

At last, Earth and Mars are ready to go out and defeat their enemies, the Xenobots. With everything in order, the President makes a formal declaration

of war and sends out the combined fleets of Earth and Mars against the alien invaders—and the second interstellar war begins.

The battle wages far and wide. While the Xenobots are more numerous and cover many star systems, they are very weak; their ships and armaments cannot begin to compare with those of Earth. They have had many centuries of years of battle experience, however, while Earth has never fought an interstellar war. It is a close battle—very close—and after a while it looks as though the experience and fierceness of the Xenobots just might give them victory. The early gains of Earth begin to erode, and a sudden raid vaporizes the outpost on the tenth planet. Something will have to happen—and that something comes through David Foster.

David, who was captured by the Xenobots in *Voyage to Polaris*, has been held prisoner in the capital city. The Xenobots largely ignored him; they looked upon him as a bargaining piece—a hostage—if they ever got into trouble. When the war began, however, a group of Xenobots who were unhappy with the tyrannical home rule rescued him. They could not return him to Earth, for they had no means of leaving the planet—but they could use him here at home. They heard of his exploits when the pirates took over Mars, and they had him head up similar underground efforts here.

At first David's efforts are somewhat limited, for there is little that he can do in the tightly-controlled capital. One day, however, he discovers a priceless secret: the ships in the fleet are powered directly by the sun! The Xenobots were never able to harness fusion or antimatter, and instead developed a device that could mine the sun for energy. That explained why they always lost battles held in deep space: cut off from their power source, they were like sitting ducks.

After hacking into a central computer, David discovered that the ships couldn't mine stars directly: they could only mine the stars after establishing a small space station in orbit around that sun. The bulky equipment on the station mined the star; the warships then tapped into the station. If these solar stations could be destroyed, the Xenobots would lose their energy source and would be forced to surrender.

Acting on this information, Earth located and destroyed the Xenobot energy stations orbiting their star, and the stations orbiting other stars controlled by the Xenobots. The battle then moved to the Xenobot home system, where David was held captive. The power station there was tightly protected; Earth was unable to reach it. Earth was equally unable to break through or conquer their army; while they could prevent them from leaving, they couldn't destroy them—and if they didn't, it was only a matter of time

before they came back even stronger than ever. Someone from the inside was going to have to destroy that final power station, and that someone could only be David.

It was painfully obvious, however, that it was a suicide mission. It would be very difficult—practically impossible—just to get to the station. Whoever got to it, though, had to destroy it as quickly as possible, or the Xenobot troops would come storming in. Once the station was destroyed, however, one couldn't leave (as all their ships are powered through that station!)—and with no power, the fields would collapse and the station would explode, killing all on board!

II. EARLY IDEAS

The following are stray notes that we wrote as plot elements that could eventually be worked into the overall saga. Some were and some weren't.

THE MARTIAN TYRANNY AND THE WIND PEOPLE

In A.D. 2048 the Fall[4] was well under way. The governments of the world were in shambles; every day brought news of yet another terrorist attack or nuclear detonation in some part of the world. A major, unprecedented world collapse began that left no corner of the world untouched. People wondered whether the human race would even survive.

Earth became unable to send any more supplies to Mars, so the few people remaining on Mars packed up in a spaceship and returned home. Many people, however, refused to accompany them: they had become so disgusted with Earth's society and so concerned over Earth's future that they decided to stay on Mars and stick it out themselves. No one believed that they could actually succeed: the society on Mars was still a very primitive state.

As the years went by on Earth people wondered at times how the colonists on Mars were faring. Things gradually got better on Earth, to the point that in 2091 humans were able to return to Mars. To their surprise, they found that a few pioneers still lived on Mars—but they had changed. How had they survived?

When the last spaceship lifted off Mars and sailed away to Earth, the society on Mars divided. One group of people, disgusted with Earth society, abandoned Eagle City and left to the Martian desert to try to stick it out in small colonies of a few families each. They wanted to live off the land and try to survive on their own, away from anyone else.

The other group of people decided to remain in Eagle City and use the equipment Earth had left behind to survive and rebuild civilization. They stayed behind because they were upset with the authoritarian nature of Earth's government: they wanted to do their own thing without being under anyone's authority. They were confident they could run things better on their own.

The group that remained in the city did well at first. The crater in Eagle City was quite habitable: there was some land suitable for growing crops, and

[4] We later called this era "the Collapse".

there was enough machinery and spare parts left behind to keep the city running. Many began to think that living without Earth would be easy: Mars had everything they needed to survive.

To keep law and order the colonists organized a government and placed a man named Darl Vincent at its head. To keep a balance of power, Vincent was forced to share power with a local council, appointed by the citizens of Eagle City: Vincent had charge of enforcement but the local council was in charge of legislation.

This proved to be a bad mistake: Vincent was not a man that could be trusted with power. Once Vincent had control of the city's armed forces he used it to establish a ruthless dictatorship. Anyone who opposed Vincent's rule was systemically destroyed: Vincent had control of everything. Vincent controlled agriculture, the power supply, the medicine supply, everything.

The people who opposed Vincent's rule and was unhappy with systematic oppression decided to go underground. They began to dig a complex tunnel system deep under the crater floor. To keep it from being stumbled upon by Vincent's men they laid it hundreds of feet below the surface of the crater. At the bottom of this tunnel system was a miniature city in which people could live in relative peace.

From this secret base of operations the tunnel people began to launch a guerrilla war against Vincent. The war did little real damage to Vincent but it annoyed him and took his attention off of oppressing his people.

What finally did Vincent in was when a critical part in the city's fission reactor failed and there were no replacements. Vincent ordered that the reactor be rebuilt to where it didn't need the part: the city needed power and the fission plant was the only way to get it. The plant was restarted, and within hours it blew up, taking most of Eagle City with it. Most of the city's citizens had long ago been forced into the tunnel system, so those in the tunnels lived: but the city aboveground was in shambles. The people who were in the tunnels made their way to the surface and then spread out over the surface of Mars, throwing their lot in with the Wind People.

When the people of Earth returned to Eagle City, they found it abandoned and destroyed. Large portions of it were radioactive. Since large portions of Earth were also radioactive, men had learned how to deal with and neutralize radiation: they were able to clean up the 'weak' radiation and make Eagle City habitable once more.

The Wind People had fared differently. Many of them died, but they didn't all die out. Some were lucky and managed to harness Mars to survive. They erected wind turbines to harness the Martian wind to make electricity. They

lived near the Martian canal and sea system and used it for their water supply. They found a way to grow crops in the deserts of Mars.

No one knows how the Wind People were able to do all that they did. The plants they developed were proven to be unknown to science when men from Earth returned to Mars in 2091. How were they able to develop such an efficient system of survival in such a short period of time? Even their language had changed to some extent: they had new words in their vocabulary and had evolved a strange form of pseudo-English.

The Wind People aren't talking, but many think that the Martians helped them. Perhaps the Martians had a hand in developing their technology system and in giving them the special plant the Wind People grew. The Wind People surely knew of the Martians: the discovery of the vast decimated Martian cities was no surprise to them—some Wind People have even been found living inside the ruined Martian cities. They knew of the Martians long before Earth people did. Perhaps the Martians and the Wind People became friends. The Martians might have sent out some of their men, one by one, to the Wind People's various colonies to help them out.

The Wind People have not entirely died out: some still live scattered over the face of Mars. They harm no one and interact with no one: they have grown accustomed to living alone and prefer it.

COMMUNICATIONS AND INTERPLANETARY NETWORK

In the mid 22nd century, interplanetary communication is made possible via a complex interplanetary communications system (called the IPN—Inter-Planetary Network). To communicate between planets, data is sent from the surface of the planet to satellites in orbit. These satellites then beam the information on a tight laser beam into another satellite far away in deep space, which bounces it to another one until it has reached its destination. The whole system is synchronized via a complex computer network.

To give an example: say that you were on Earth and wanted to call someone on the Moon. Orbiting satellites overhead would pick up your call, relay it to equipment on the moon, and in a matter of seconds you would be connected via a 'relay' satellite in Earth orbit. There would be a few seconds time delay because of the distance of the moon from the Earth, but communication would still be nearly real-time.

On the other hand, say you wanted to call Mars. Mars is too far away to allow real-time communication, so when you dialed your number, the

computer network would ask you to record your message after the tone. Once your message was recorded, the computer network would determine the best possible route to send your message, and then would start sending it from one satellite to another. If Mars happened to be on the other side of the Sun, routing a path could be quite complicated.

A similar system works in the asteroid belt: a network of small satellites receives incoming laser messages and then relays them, one satellite at a time, through the belt to the one called.

The process is also similar on spaceships: when a person on a spaceship wants to send a message, computers on board the spaceship send the message to the nearest satellite, which then reroutes it and beams it to its intended party.

With the development of real-time transmission (RTT) via tachyons around 2150, however, this scene suddenly changed as real-time communication anywhere in the solar system was suddenly possible. By 2155 (around the time of The Starlight Maneuver) enough satellites had been converted to allow RTT to virtually any location in the solar system.

BUILDING MATERIAL ON MARS

In the 22nd century, most buildings on Mars are made out of—brick! In the 20th century scientists discovered that the most practical and feasible building material for settlements on Mars is brick. Bricks are easy to make, for the building material is scattered all over the Martian surface in the form of Mars' famous red dust. To build bricks out of Martian dust, all you need to do is take finely ground soil, wet it, put it in a mold under mild compression, dry it, and then bake at 300-900 degrees Celsius. Usually scrap material is added to the bricks for cohesion, and the bricks are dried at 200 C before baking to recover the water put into the bricks. Bricks are a high quality yet very cheap building material: just what Mars needed.

For mortar, simply take the red dust of Mars, wet it and then dry it, and—without having to do anything else—you have a material half as strong as Earth concrete. Even roofs can be built out of bricks, so long as the bricks are kept under tension.

Eagle City, then (along with the other cities of Mars) are cities of brick: vast red cities sitting on a vast red plain. The older, more rundown section of the city is built of crumbling brick buildings, covered with red brick dust and the red dust of Mars.

COMMBEAMS—SECRET COMMUNICATION VIA MASER

The interplanetary communications network that links the planets together operates on laser beams—beams invisible to the naked eye. A tightly focused laser beam is very efficient and wastes little energy; it is also very hard to spot.

The weaponry division of Starlight Enterprise has not overlooked this fact, and has designed special equipment to take advantage of the stealthy nature of laser beams. It is simple for an orbiting spaceship to beam down a laser message to a person on the surface of the planet, without anyone knowing a message was sent at all. Moreover, a laser permits broadband data transfer: enormous amounts of data could be transferred with little power, little interference, and very high speed.

The most difficult part of the operation is aiming the beam: it's not easy to hit a target with a laser a few miles wide while thousands of miles away in space, traveling at a high speed. Usually some other method of communication—such as a radio beam—must be used to 'link' the two parties together and get precise coordinates before the laser system can be switched on. This, however, allows for detection and greatly reduces the stealthiness of the transmission.

Some research has even been done on jamming laser beams, with somewhat limited success. SE has proven that it's possible to set up an interference field over an area to the point where a maser beam is garbled beyond recognition—and that by measuring the interference field itself the target of the beam can be located. Setting up an interference field, however, is a tough job that requires a lot of equipment and a lot of energy; it is still largely experimental technology.

SPACECRAFT PROPULSION

Spaceship propulsion has gone through several stages since the 20th century. In the 21st century, most spaceships were powered by nuclear fission—a somewhat dangerous but powerful design. Some of Thomas Starlight's early lunar ships were nuclear fission ships.

Fission, however, soon gave way to nuclear fusion. Thomas Starlight pioneered in this area: it was a breakthrough in nuclear fusion propulsion that allowed him to colonize the moon and found Starlight Enterprise. Fusion gave Tom the edge he needed to make lunar mining possible; it was the backbone of his company.

The first nuclear fusion process Tom designed was a tritium fusion reaction, using tritium extracted from sea water. This process worked well, and powered nearly all spaceships during the late 21st century and early 22nd century.

Tritium fusion, however, has drawbacks: for one thing, it releases radioactivity. Around 2125 a way was discovered to harness helium-3 from the moon for nuclear fusion. The helium-3 nuclear fusion reaction is more efficient and produces more energy than tritium fusion—and most importantly, the reaction is not radioactive. Helium-3 is very hard to fuse, requiring temperatures in excess of 1 billion degrees C (as compared with 100 million degrees C for tritium fusion), but it was worked out.

By 2150 when the series begins, helium-3 fusion is an old, trustworthy design. Ships running on helium-3 fly right next to those running on tritium, for the tritium reaction was never abandoned. However, a new technology is coming out: antimatter. In 2151 the three Starmen flew the *Spud Peeler* to Eagle City, crossing the distance between Earth and Mars in only 3 days with the help of an advanced antimatter drive. After this highly successful demonstration, antimatter drives began to appear on the scene: first exclusively in high-end SE ships (such as those used by Starmen) but later on other ships as well. By 2160 antimatter is still a very high-end method of propulsion: it hasn't become cheap yet by any means but it is not unheard-of.

HOW THE ASTEROIDS ARE MINED

By the 2150s, the asteroid belt had a large population of miners. The two companies that dominated the asteroid mining scene were Starlight Enterprise (SE) and Nolan Mining Enterprise (NME). NME had larger asteroid holdings, but SE dominated in the equipment industry: no one could make better equipment than SE.

Gigantic machines, hundreds of feet tall and thousands of feet long, did most of the actual asteroid mining itself. Powerful atomic beams generated by nuclear power plants deep within the machine sliced off pieces of the asteroid and brought it in for processing. Once inside, the chunk of asteroid was crushed up and the various metals were refined. The refined material was then separated and loaded into cargo containers, which are then launched via electromagnetic rails toward their intended destination.

The mining process still requires many highly trained personnel. The machines themselves are very complicated affairs requiring dozens of men to

run and to keep it operational. Mining colonies need maintenance workers, technicians, people to run the machines, people who can find the best ore seams, people to run the electromagnetic rails, etc. The life support system inside the colony must be kept up; supplies must be brought in and ore must be shipped out.

Mining colonies are usually very large affairs, with several hundred workers living in a city embedded deep within a central asteroid. The asteroid acts as home base, directing operations, providing living quarters, and so forth. Miners are then temporarily farmed out in shifts to smaller nearby asteroids, and use the large equipment to refine ore. Usually each colony has four to twelve working mining machines at any one time. The miners live in specially built spaceships for the duration of their working period, then they return to home base for a period of rest. The colonies are designed to hold entire families and act as cities, so that families are not broken up for long periods of time.

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Entries inspired by Starman #2: *The Runaway Asteroid*

THE AIRBOTS

The airbots were developed in the mid 22nd century as an improved version of the Reconobots. The squat, short Reconobots were powerful, but they had a problem in that they were slow and needed level ground—while they were suitable for cities and crowd control, they were not very useful at chasing fugitives or at acting over rough, varied terrain—an in zero-gravity environments they were not useful at all.

To overcome these obstacles, the airbot was developed. The airbot was a light cylindrical device, roughly the size of a basketball. It was coated with a highly reflective finish, built to disperse any laser shots that might hit it. The airbot was built for low-gravity environments—outer space or the Asteroid Belt was perfect, although larger, more heavy-duty versions were adapted for use in planets.

The airbot could fly via a powerful compressed-air system that could keep it in the air for several hours. An advanced neural network enabled it to steer and fly itself in three-dimensional space. The device was equipped with the same ‘passive’ technology as the reconobots, the difference being that the airbot kept its rays on a tight beam (which was designed to save power, as well as only disable one person at a time instead of all in the local area).

The way the airbot worked is that it was simply given an order (Hunt down X, Y and Z) and then let go, and off the device went to find those people and zap them. It was nearly impossible to avoid a airbot, since they are incredibly fast and maneuverable—and shots with a laser don't phase them. If they are hit with a conventional firearm (i.e. a pistol or shotgun that fires lead or metal) that could destroy them, but the airbots are very flexible and it would take a number of shots to destroy them—plus the airbot's computer guidance system could easily avoid all but the fastest bullets.

In terms of capturing individuals and rendering them powerless, the airbot is the most advanced and dangerous tool on the market.

UNMANNED SUPPLY STATIONS

These stations were first established back in the days when Thomas Starlight was first setting up mining operations in the Asteroid Belt. Tom realized that the Belt was a huge, dangerous place: if a ship got into trouble, it would be nearly impossible to help them in time: ships were slow in those days, and the ships were more fragile and hence prone to damage by micrometeors.

Tom realized that Starlight Enterprise did not have the resources to really mine and search the Belt: he decided that the best way would be to work through a bunch of independent miners, who would search for the metal, mine it, and send it to SE for processing. Over time, a relationship developed between SE and these independent miners: SE supplied equipment, training and technical support, and the independent miners fanned out over the belt, setting up small colonies and mining the rock.

So, with a view in mind for safety (in case something happened in the vast reaches of the Belt and urgently needed supplies) and the assistance of these miners, SE established independent supply posts all over the Asteroid Belt, each a day or two's journey from the next. These emergency outposts were stocked with food, supplies, and some repair equipment for common ship malfunctions. The rations weren't exactly tasty (they were designed to last for long periods of time), but there were plenty of them and they did prolong life. SE also put in radios and sleeping quarters so stranded miners could live in the colonies and radio for help.

About once a year, SE sent out men to check all the supply stations to see if they were still functional, needed supplies, or whatnot.

THARSOS

Part I: Early History and Development

In the beginning, Mars had three satellites: Phobos, Demos and Tharsos. When the Martians were first learning rocketry, they made it their goal to land on the largest and most distant of their moons -- and that was Tharsos. Over the years, as Mars became more and more a spacefaring, exploring planet, they continued to build on Tharsos and it began assuming more importance.

Because of the light gravity of Tharsos, the Martians established their buildings and settlements on the satellite all underground. Soon the complex on Tharsos became quite large: the Martians found it was more efficient to use Tharsos as a port to Mars: interplanetary ships, built in space, would dock at Tharsos and then other, smaller personnel ships would ferry crewmembers between Tharsos and Mars.

So Tharsos grew to become a large complex; a large city, filled with hangars and shops and power plants and all a bustling city would need.

Then one day the Martians discovered the interstellar drive: they found a way to avoid the light barrier and build ships capable of travelling to other stars. At the same time, the Martians found a much more efficient method of nuclear power generation, giving the Martians nearly unlimited energy. The Martians set about building starships, and soon they were exploring neighboring star systems.

Then one day the Martians decided to tackle a project -- perhaps the biggest challenge they had ever attempted. The Martians were few in number and didn't have enough personnel to build an inhabited base at every planet they visited. What they wanted to do was build a gigantic city in space -- a city that they could take with them on their voyages to the stars. This city could act as a home base while they explored various star clusters, and would enable them to travel deep into the heart of the galaxy.

The Martians realized that they already had a city in space, of sorts: they had their large complex on Tharsos. Why not try to convert their moon Tharsos into a starship? It would be a project of fantastic size and scope, utterly beyond anything they had ever attempted. It would be one of the wonders of the galaxy.

So they decided to try it. The Martians poured out all their science and skill into overhauling Tharsos. They build a power plant miles wide, far larger than anything they or any other race had ever attempted. They modified their spacedrive and gave it enough power to accelerate a rock 40

miles wide to 75% of the speed of light. At the last they installed the Martian hyperdrive and created the largest FTL starship ever designed.

The internal details and resources put into Tharsos was incredible. Even after Tharsos was finished, they were not sure how they were able to accomplish a task of such immensity. Tharsos had millions of miles of wiring; countless thousands of computer chips; and systems without number. The Herculean task took more than one hundred years to complete, and when the last system was tested and found to work the Martians held the largest celebration in their history.

So the Martians began using Tharsos as their city in the stars: they outfitted it with thousands of the best brains of Mars and sent it on a long voyage to the heart of the galaxy. Tharsos was stocked with decades worth of food and supplies, and had the resources necessary to colonize planets, establish bases, manufacture nearly any item the Mars economy could produce, and if necessary grow more food.

Then, after the final crewmember was aboard and the last speech was given, Tharsos left the Martian sky and streaked off toward the galactic core.

Part II: The Xenobots and Tharsos

The crew on board Tharsos made many amazing discoveries on their epic journey through the stars. They found hundreds of lifeless planets, each with an alien beauty of its own; they discovered many new life forms, some intelligent and others not; they established bases and colonies, and added much to their store of knowledge. The Martians were awed at the variety of the galaxy: each planet and star system they visited had a unique beauty of its own. At each point Tharsos stopped to investigate they uncovered new wonders and mysteries.

As the years wore on, Tharsos flew closer and closer to the heart of the galaxy, a place where stars grew thick and dense and the sky was a blaze with color. There at the galactic core the Martians made the discovery that altered their history: they encountered the Xenobots.

The history and story of the Xenobots is told elsewhere; all that needs to be recounted here is that the Martians met the Xenobots and did not like what they saw. The Xenobots were a fierce, cruel race bent on destroying and enslaving all races and planets they came across. The Martians decided to

fight against the Xenobots and try to free the alien races that the Xenobots had enslaved.

The Martians launched a battle against the Xenobots, and succeeded in defending the Titanians against them. However, the battle was much fiercer than the Martians had counted on; the Xenobots were a force to be reckoned with, and would not easily be overcome. So the Martians took the Titanians home with them (for their home planet had been vaporized by Xenobot warships) to regroup and discover a way to break the Xenobots' power.

So Tharsos made its journey back to the planet Mars, where it resumed its place as the planet's third satellite. There the Martians spent a long time discussing the Xenobot threat and trying to discover a way to overcome them. They designed new weapons systems and defense systems, they created entire new classes of powerful warships, and they also converted their beloved Tharsos into a warship of tremendous power.

The Martians were preparing for war, but war came to them before they expected it: one day a vast array of Xenobot fighters suddenly swarmed into their solar system and began decimating Mars. The Martians later found out that when Tharsos had flew home from the galactic core, it left behind a trail -- a trail that lead the Xenobots right to their doorstep. It took the Xenobots a long time to reach Mars, for they had not perfected the hyperdrive to the extent the Martians had, but they eventually reached it and launched an attack.

The Martians were completely surprised; they were able to drive the Xenobots out of the solar system with the vast array of weaponry they had gathered, but not before the Xenobots had completely destroyed Mars and turned it from a lush planet into a dead planet, incapable of supporting life. The Martians became extremely angry and pursued the Xenobots, relentlessly pressing them back to their home planet.

Tharsos was the key that enabled the Martians to defeat the Xenobots. The Xenobots didn't have anything remotely comparable to it; even their largest and most powerful ships were helpless against it. Where before Tharsos had been used for peace, it was now used for war: its energies were turned against the Xenobot hordes with great effectiveness. By the end of the war Tharsos had completely destroyed the Xenobot fleet and had turned all the Xenobot bases into vast pools of molten metal. The Xenobots were turned from a master of races into a poor, helpless race pinned on a single planet without any science of any kind.

Part III: Earth and Tharsos

After the war, the Martians went into hibernation. The Xenobots were defeated, but the Martian planet was vaporized: Mars was not even habitable anymore. The Martians no longer had the strength to rebuild, so they suspended themselves in their vast underground cities.

The Martians also suspended Tharsos. Tharsos was their pride and joy, so they carefully shut down its systems and stabilized it so that it could rest for thousands of years without decay. All the delicate equipment was packed away in crates; the food stores and other perishables were sealed toward the day when they might be used again.

They decided that it would not be wise to keep Tharsos in Martian orbit: someone might find it and make use of its destructive energies. Instead, they hid it deep inside the Asteroid Belt and cloaked it in such a way that it would be virtually impossible to find either by sight or by radar.

On top of this, the Martians were careful to bar access deeper than the fifth floor. In the top five floors of Tharsos were things such as barracks, atmosphere controls, propulsion controls -- the normal routine functions that enabled Tharsos to act as a base. Below the fifth floor were the controls for the weaponry and hyperdrive, as well as a fleet of powerful warships -- the things that made Tharsos a deadly battleship. If someone discovered Tharsos and used it as a base, there would be little harm done: but if someone got hold of its destructive capabilities the results could be horrifying. Therefore, the Martians carefully blocked access deeper than the fifth floor and put up strict access controls blocking the way to any part of the base that might be used for fighting. Some later learned how to access part of the lower levels, but no one ever gained access to Tharsos' war capabilities until the Martians unlocked those areas.

So the Martians slept, and Tharsos rested with them for a long, long time. Then one day a man by the name of George St. George discovered Tharsos, who started a series of events that eventually caused Tharsos to fall into Lurton Zimbardo's hands who nearly destroyed the planet Earth with it. In a series of events detailed in The Runaway Asteroid men from Earth were able to wrest the asteroid away from Zimbardo and keep it from hitting the planet.

The men from Earth carefully repaired the damage to the asteroid that Zimbardo and his men had caused, and carefully placed it in an orbit around Earth. Scientists from Earth staffed the asteroid and explored it and tried to

discover its secrets. So for a number of years Tharsos served as a space research station for the planet Earth.

Then one day the Martians came out of their hibernation cities and began repopulating their cities. The nations of Earth learned the history of Mars and became aware of what Tharsos truly was. Earth decided it would be appropriate to return Tharsos to Mars, so they carefully piloted it back into Martian orbit and returned it to the race of Martians.

The Martians, in turn, were extremely grateful to get it back: they were not expecting to ever have it returned to them. The Martians restaffed it and reactivated all of its systems, showing Earth what the true power of the satellite was.

The war engines of Tharsos came in handy once again: the Xenobots again launched a war against the solar system, but this time the solar system was ready. Earth and Mars together launched a campaign to defeat the Xenobots once and for all -- and Tharsos led the campaign as the flagship.

SMALL RACES

On the Cereians

In the days of the League of the First Races the League explored many star systems and placed Gates in nearly every planetary system in the galaxy. Then the Great War came and wrought destruction throughout the civilized stars. Much information and history was lost, for the League had not established a central library with which to record everything that was known.

Before the First Races that had survived the war confiscated the Stones and left the galaxy, they decided to place machines throughout the planetary systems to collect and chronicle all knowledge. That way, should there ever be another War, everything would not be lost.

To this end the First Races developed a race of small robotic men, later named the Cereians after men from Earth discovered them living on the asteroid Ceres in the Asteroid Belt. The Cereians were designed in a crudely humanoid fashion and were one or (at most) two feet tall. They were programmed to be defensive, not offensive: the First Races did not want the Cereians to launch a war of conquest. With this in mind they made them weak: radiation, explosions, or anything else that could wreck destruction can easily destroy them.

The desire of the Cereians is to discover and store knowledge. They constantly scour the solar system for new pieces of knowledge and history to

place into their vast databanks. The Cereians have no desire to explore or colonize except inasmuch as it helps them meet their goal of discovering new knowledge. The First Races made them very protective of their libraries and reluctant to let anyone access to them.

The Cereians as much as possible try to stay hidden from other life forms in the solar system. The First Races gave them a very powerful cloaking system that makes them impossible to spot by any science less than that of the First Races. At the same time, however, they are programmed to give help to any needy traveler -- or society -- who might happen to get into trouble. They give access to their libraries to others only when they see a definite need, and they try to keep as much of their knowledge secret as they can. They are librarians for the First Races, not for the galaxy: after the War the First Races were leery of letting any society getting access to all known knowledge.

No one save the First Races knows where the Cereians' central repository of knowledge is. The Cereians have data terminals through which they can enter and retrieve data, but these are terminals only: the true repository (which doubtless has several backups in other faraway locations) could be thousands of light-years away. Each Cereian, then, has access to all their stored knowledge.

The Cereians, being robotic, have no need for airtight bases but are comfortable in a complete vacuum. They communicate with each other via radio communication in a special binary language, but are capable of learning and using voice communication if the system requires it. The Cereians get their energy from a nuclear disintegration process: all they need is a few pounds of raw mass (any mass will do) to keep them functioning for quite some time.

The Cereians are not without a sense of beauty: they seem to enjoy things like plants and have rooms with Earth-like conditions in which they grow various aquatic plants. The Cereians reproduce very slowly: since they are historians and have no drive for colonization, there is no need for them to reproduce in masses. The population of any one Cereian base fluctuates some over the years but by and large it stays the same.

The Cereians almost seem sentient sometimes: they have been noticed to enjoy a form of recreation. The Cereians have developed a complex land vehicle resembling an Earth 4-wheeler that they like to use to go careening around asteroids and planets. The Cereians seem to enjoy speed. Some claim that each Cereian has a different personality: some are more open and friendly than others.

All Cereians, however, are highly protective of their history files. If a hostile force tries to force control of their library, the Cereians have been known to react violently. The Cereians are generally peaceful, but experience has shown that it is not wise to try to force access to their library files. Their bases and even their construction is fairly simple, but in the library they have access to schematics to fantastically powerful devices -- and if the need arises they will draw upon that store of knowledge to defend themselves.

In the Solar System, the Cereians are found in bases scattered around the Asteroid Belt. The Cereians live deep underground and cloak their dwellings very well. It was a great surprise to the entire solar system when the Starmen discovered a huge Cereian city deep within Ceres: it amazed everyone that the Cereians could have had such an extensive city there for so long without Earth ever getting wind of it. The Cereians are not sighted often, but at certain times (for they can be caught off-guard -- their cloaking equipment takes energy so they only run it when absolutely necessary, and they are not all-seeing) someone might sight one. Many miners have tales of Cereian sightings and Cereian exploits; some claim that they have even seen hosts of Cereians out deep within the asteroid belt flying around in small antigrav ships, just enjoying the ride.

The Titanians' Legend and History

In the book Journey to the Tenth Planet the Starmen stop over on Titan for repairs and restocking while on their way to the Tenth Planet. While they are there the Starmen hear the legend of the Titanian history for the first time.

The Titanians, they find out, are not native to Titan. Long ago they inhabited a cold, distant planet (much like Titan) orbiting some other star. One day, however, a warlike alien race came to their system and started decimating their planet. They would have been destroyed had not another, kind alien race came to their rescue. This other alien race could not overcome the power of the warlike aliens; instead, they took the Titanians off of their native planet and brought them to Titan. They engineered Titan to be like their home planet: they gave it the same atmosphere. Titan, however, was too cold: so this other alien race built a series of heated caves underneath the surface of the planet which the Titanians lived in.

Soon after the Titanians had been moved to their new location the peaceful aliens stopped coming to Titan. No one knew what happened to them. Some speculated that the warlike aliens invaded and destroyed their planet, but no one knew for sure. Records were hazy anyway: the Titanians did not study history and didn't keep very good records.

When the Titanians showed them their caves, they brought them to a monument built by the peaceful alien race as a gift to the Titanians. On the monument the Starmen saw something familiar: the “planet with the 3 moons in a triangle” symbol. They didn’t remember until later that they had seen the same symbol on their NPACs. When they went to the 10th planet and saw it they thought back to the Titanians -- and in Descent Into Europa they saw the symbol again. It wasn’t until The Lost Race of Mars that they finally pieced everything together.

The Martians, on one of their exploratory trips, happened across the Xenobots. Once they learned about them they tried to save as many races as they could and relocate them to safer planets. The Titanians were one of these races: they brought them to their home solar system and built Titan for them. Soon after this, though, the Xenobots invaded the solar system and destroyed Mars, and the Martian-Xenobot war erupted. The Xenobots were driven off, but the Martians were decimated: they no longer returned to Titan.

XENOBOT NOTES

Part I: The Beginning

In the beginning of all things, before there was anything, there was Elohiym. Elohiym always was and always will be; He is the Mighty One, called Supreme and the Creator by those He has made. Elohiym rules all, for He is all-powerful: there is nothing beyond Him, no hidden wisdom He is unaware of. Nothing can exist apart from Elohiym, for He sustains all things. In the beginning Elohiym created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness covered the face of the deep. And the Spirit of Elohiym moved over the face of the waters.

Then Elohiym said, let there be light: and there was light. Elohiym created the dry land and seas: He populated them with plants and every creature that moves along the ground. Elohiym filled the sky with birds, and the seas with swimming creatures.

In the heavens Elohiym created the stars: He fashioned the blue giants, the red dwarves, black holes, and comfortable yellow stars such as our own. Around some stars Elohiym placed planets; others He fashioned into multiple star systems. Some planets Elohiym created were habitable and He placed life upon them; others He fashioned with a magnificent desolation. Elohiym

created stellar galaxies, galactic clusters, and quasars, and filled the universe with His awesome creations.

When His creation was ready Elohiym created sentient beings and populated His creation with them. Each race had its own talents. Some of His creatures He gave great wisdom; others He gave great skill. These races He scattered all over the universe, and when He was done He looked it all over and called it Good, for it was good. It remained good until His creatures fell away from Him and plunged His creation into chaos and evil. But Elohiym did not let His creation die: when it fell away He had mercy on it and set about to restore things to their former state. But that story is told elsewhere.

Part II: On the Lucians and the War of the First Races

The wisest of all the sentient beings Elohiym created were the Lucians. The Lucians were among the First Races—the elite group of civilizations that discovered the art of space travel long before anyone else. The First Races put even the Martians to shame, for while the rest of the universe was still chipping away at pieces of flint to make arrowheads the First Races were experimenting with antigravity and spacetime.

The age of the First Races was so long ago that no one remembers who they were; little has survived from that period. The few grains of knowledge we do have come from the Cereians, the galaxy's robotic historians—but the Cereians did not come into being until the First Age was over.

We do know that long ago, at the very dawn of time, the Lucians and a handful of other civilizations (perhaps three or four; it is so long ago everyone has forgotten) all discovered interstellar space travel. These civilizations decided to band together and form the League of the First Races. Since the Lucians were the wisest and most advanced of the First Races, they were unanimously chosen to be head of the League.

The desire of the League of the First Races was to explore the galaxy; in their early years they spent several centuries scanning every star in the galaxy. While they found many fascinating things their search failed to discover what they most hoped to find; the First Races found no other technological societies.

When their search failed, they decided to begin the construction of an intergalactic starship that would give them access to neighboring galaxies. The First Races had a tremendous desire to explore the unknown: when they had completed the exploration of their own galaxy they longed to explore the billions of others that filled the Universe. Each race felt that other galaxies were filled with living creatures, just like their own: if they could just cross

the mighty intergalactic gulf they would find more races to add to their Council.

The research that the First Races conducted was fruitful: after a span of many years they succeeded in creating the Stones. Little is known today about the Stones. The Stones did not look powerful; each looked like a rough, irregular stone small enough to fit in the palm of a human hand. However, their construction belied their looks: each was a highly intricate artificial device that acted as a catalyst for the generation of fantastic amounts of energy.

With the Stones, the First Races had the energy they needed to warp spacetime. With this energy they created portals in spacetime which they called Gates. Each Gate (except for the most powerful gates) was powered by a single Stone. The Stone gave the Gate enough power to bend spacetime to the point where one could travel a hundred thousand light-years simply by stepping through a doorframe.

Once the Gates were invented the First Races no longer needed complex and cumbersome starships. Instead, the League placed Gates all over the galaxy and used them as portals to transport them wherever they wished to go. One Gate still exists today on the asteroid Juno inside the Asteroid Belt; however, the Stones that powered the Gate are no longer there. (As related in The Stones of Juno: #3, Masters of the Stones, the Starmen returned the Stones to the Custodian of the League after the Stones nearly destroyed the solar system).

The Stones offered tremendous power to those who knew how to use them, and the Lucians were well skilled in the art. The Lucians spent many years studying the Stones, trying to find a way to synchronize the output of multiple stones and increase their output to the point where they could be used to build an intergalactic Gate.

During their research the Lucians discovered that one could do many things with the power of the Stones—things well beyond interstellar travel. A creature armed with the Stones could do almost anything: with the proper equipment he could assume near-godlike power. The Stones enabled instantaneous transportation to any place in the galaxy; one who bore a Stone could overcome anything not protected by another Stone. Instantaneous transmutation of the elements became easy. War became one-sided, for no battleship or defense system could stand in the face of one who bore a Stone.

The immense power the Stones offered began corrupting the Lucians. They started using the Stones to assert more authority over the First Races

and to increase their standing in the League. The other members of the League, concerned over the change in the Lucians, tried to reason with them and stop them. This made the Lucians angry, and they began tyrannizing the League and spreading trouble.

Eventually the other First Races realized that the Lucians had become completely corrupted; unless they did something soon the Lucians would overwhelm the galaxy and crush it with a heavy hand. The Lucians depended completely upon the Stones for their power: if the First Races could destroy the Stones held by the Lucians their offensive capabilities would be reduced to zero.

Thus the War of the First Races began. The Cereians tell us that the war was bitterly contested: the Lucians could harness the Stones better than the other First Races and this acted greatly to their advantage. When the war was over, however, the power of the Lucians had been crushed: they were driven off their fortress planets and reduced to a poor, primitive society incapable of harming anyone else.

The First Races took away all the Stones in the galaxy that they could find. The League acted with great care: they visited all the gates, scanned all the planets the Lucians held, and confiscated the treasure hordes of the Lucians. The First Races were concerned that if they missed a single Stone and the Lucians got it, war could break out again: the Stones were too dangerous to leave lying around the galaxy.

The League did a good job, but they did not find all the Stones. When the Lucians saw that the battle was going against them and they might lose the war, they deposited well-hidden caches of Stones all over the galaxy. The League found most of these caches, but not all: as related in The Stones of Juno: #1, The Search for the Stones, men from Earth found a cache of three Stones hidden on the asteroid Juno. These three Stones were later returned to the remaining survivor of the League. It is hoped that those are the last three Stones of the Lucians—but it is a wide galaxy with deep secrets that only Elohiym knows.

After the War of the First Races had ended the galaxy was in shambles. Many of the civilized planets of the League had been vaporized; entire star systems and star clusters had been reduced to dust by the intense fury of the Lucians. The surviving First Races were heartbroken: rather than stay and rebuild they chose to abandon the galaxy. The Cereians do not record how the First Races managed to cross the intergalactic gulf; they only know that

they left and were never seen again. Perhaps they still survive today and live in some faraway galaxy; we will probably never know.

The only member of the League who still remains in the Galaxy is the Custodian of the League. The Custodian chose to remain in the galaxy when the rest of the League left on their trek across the universe. He is an old creature; no one is quite sure how old—yet he does not look aged, only wise. He still lives on the capitol planet of the League and takes care of it, hoping that one day the call of home will bring the League back. When the Starmen met the Custodian in The Stones of Juno: #3, Masters of the Stones, the Custodian told them that one day, the League will return home. It will be a long time yet, he said; many stars will come to rest before they return. But they will we back, and he will be there waiting for them.

Part III: Rise of the Xenobots

The First Races believed that the War had shattered the Lucians beyond repair: in this they were wrong. Somehow the Lucians managed to survive as a race and rebuilt their culture. The memory of their previous grandeur was only a dim memory to them: all they knew was that they had once ruled the galaxy but had been crushed. The Lucians became a bitter, angry society: instead of developing their own resources they mutated into a parasitic society that lived completely off the labor of others.

After a time they came to identify alien life with their downfall; they remembered vaguely that a league of alien races had crushed them and they decided to take revenge by annihilating everyone they came across. The Lucians sought to take revenge on the races they thought had destroyed them. After a time their lust for revenge so consumed them that they began to exist only for war: they hated everyone and only wished to destroy all life.

To this end they searched through the galaxy for alien life to pillage and destroy. Whenever they found an alien race they destroyed their planet and stole their technology. The Lucians became such a bitter, hateful race that they could not even keep peace among themselves; they fought as much with each other as they did with those around them.

This is partly why they developed and constantly wore their mechanical cloaks: if they showed weakness for a single moment their life would be quickly ended. After the War of the First Races knowledge of their true form was lost, for no one ever caught a glimpse of what they looked like under their mechanical shell.

The cloaks they developed were marvelous things. Since they never allowed themselves to be captured alive no one ever discovered the true extent of their capabilities, but some things were discovered. The cloaks can see any color of the spectrum, and can harness x-rays to see through objects. They have a radio system enabling radio communication (although not faster-than-light hyperspace radio). The cloaks have a complex computer system that enables their wearers to network together to share information and, for a limited time, can even mass together and act as a giant single organism. The cloaks have a sheathing capability that can hide them from radar. The cloaks can support life in a vacuum, underwater, and in incredibly hostile environments.

Eventually the fallen Lucians became known galaxy-wide as the Xenobots. The term Xenobot came from their robotic appearance. It is a combination of the Greek word "xenos," for stranger or alien, and the modern word "robot." The Xenobots are literally an alien biological organism surrounded by an electronic shell. No one knows where the biological part of a Xenobot ends and the mechanical part starts; the Xenobots wore their shells for so long that they mutated themselves into cyborgs.

The Xenobots did not develop their metal shell technology themselves. Since the Xenobots hate each other they were never able to team together and engage in advanced scientific research. Everything they know they stole from someone else. Even the technology the Xenobots possess they don't fully understand: it simply works, and they leave it at that.

To get resources for their civilization, the Xenobots became asteroid miners and developers. During their conquest of races they acquired gigantic machines to do the work of exploring Asteroid Belts, hollowing asteroids out and refining their metal. Some of the ancient Xenobot mining machines still exist today in the Asteroid Belt between Mars and Jupiter; the better preserved ones have been repaired by asteroid miners and are used today to mine asteroids. The Xenobots' activities in the Asteroid Belt actually helped Earth colonization: in many ways they cleared out the rubble and paved the way for later settlements.

The Cereians have speculated that way the Xenobots finally found the home system of the Martians was through the Asteroid Belt: one of their robotic probes found a rich load of asteroids in this solar system. When the Xenobots came to investigate, they found their nemesis the Martians already living in this solar system—but I am getting ahead of myself.

The Martians discovered the Xenobots on one of the Martians' early deep-space expeditions. The Martians had developed interstellar travel some time before and had launched a series of expeditions to the galactic core to see what was there. Eventually one of the Martians' deep-space probes entered Xenobot territory, and contact was made.

The Xenobots never controlled many stars: while they were terrible in battle they were also terrible among themselves, and spent as much time fighting each other as they did fighting external races. This fact saved many civilizations; it both kept Xenobot expansion to a minimum and allowed the alien races a chance to relocate and escape while the Xenobots were busy fighting among themselves.

The Martians learned quickly that the Xenobots were a hostile, vicious race: the Xenobots attacked and tried to destroy every Martian ship that they encountered, no matter what the odds. The Martians were not a warlike race, but they decided to take precautions in their own solar system and on Mars itself, just in case the Xenobots should invade. They believed there was only a slim chance of this, as the Xenobots lived near the galactic core and Mars was near the tenuous galactic edge, but the Martians were not ones to take chances.

The Martians seriously underestimated the Xenobots: they did not realize the extent they were willing to go to make war. After the Martians made contact with the Xenobots the Xenobots launched an all-out campaign to find the home of the Martians and destroy it. Eventually (and possibly the Asteroid Belt near Mars played a role in this) the Xenobots located Mars itself and launched an all-out war against it.

While the Martians had prepared for an invasion they had not prepared for anything near the size and ferocity of the Xenobot army. The Xenobots swept in through the solar system and in their first wave they destroyed the atmosphere of Mars, pillaged its surface, and almost entirely wiped out the Martians. The angry Martians hit back hard at the Xenobots, and in the fierce Battle of the Asteroid Belt the Martians turned back the Xenobots before they could reach Earth and repelled them out of the solar system.

The Martians then took their moon Tharsos, converted it from a space station into a warship, and used it as their flagship to attack the Xenobots. The Martians fought so fiercely and bitterly against the Xenobots that they overwhelmed them and utterly defeated them. They destroyed every Xenobot outpost they could find in the galaxy; the only Xenobots that remained after the war were a few on what the Martians thought was their home planet.

Part IV: The Return of the Xenobots

The Martians did not know the history of the Xenobots; they thought that simply defeating them and isolating them on a poor outpost on one planet would be sufficient to eliminate their threat. The First Races did the same but the Xenobots rebuilt; after the Martian-Xenobot war the Xenobots rebuilt yet again, although it took them many thousands of years. This time, however, the Xenobots remembered what Mars had done to them, and as soon as they could they started searching for Mars again.

This time the Xenobots had a hard time, for the Martians had gone into suspended animation deep within their planet. The Xenobots kept looking and biding their time, waiting until they could relocate the Martians and get their revenge.

The Xenobots were not as powerful this time, for they had lost nearly all their technology in their war with the Martians. They never regained nuclear fission, fusion, or antimatter; instead, they obtained their energy through mining stars. All their ships, bases, and cities were powered through their star mining process. The technology was very powerful and gave them fierce warships, but there was a problem: they could only use those ships inside star systems that had a star mining station in close orbit around the star. The Xenobots could warp between stars via a wormhole, but if the star they warped to lacked a star mining station their ship instantly went dead. The Xenobots did possess a few ships that could work on a nuclear process, but they were extremely inefficient and weak.

In fact, the main power source for all Xenobot colonies is stars. The Xenobots didn't develop this technology themselves; they stole it from a race they conquered. The race had a simple technique: they placed a small space station in extremely close orbit around whatever star they wanted to tap. The space station directly mined the star's energy and transmitted it over a faster-than-light hyperwave band.

Embedded in each Xenobot spaceship and planet is a power receiver. The receiver establishes a link to the space station, and the station then pipes the energy to the waiting receiver. The Xenobots never understood how the device worked or how it generated its power; all they knew was that it worked, and that was enough for them. Occasionally there was trouble: whenever their star station was destroyed it sent a shockwave back that vaporized all objects that was harnessing start station power. There were colonies that were completely vaporized when the star station it was depending on blew to pieces. This, ultimately, proved to be the Xenobots downfall: when Starman David Foster destroyed the space station in orbit

around the Xenobots home star in Starman #23: The Last Command, the resulting shockwave destroyed every planet and Xenobot ship in the system —and that was the last of the Xenobots.

Part V: Earth and the Xenobots

After the Martians had vanquished the Xenobots, the Xenobots became filled with a bitter rage. Instead of seeking to destroy all races, as had been their previous goal, they only wanted to destroy one: the Martians. Before they could destroy them, though, they had to find them first—and since the Martians had gone into hibernation there was not a trace of them to be found.

On one of the Xenobot scouting missions, the Xenobots came across the solar system. Since they did not find the Martians they were not particularly interested in it. In fact, had it not been for Robert Nolan of Nolan Mining Enterprise contact between Earth and the Xenobots (and hence, the second Martian-Xenobot war) might have been put off for several centuries.

To cover the entire galaxy, the Xenobots decided (for a time) to put off their hostilities amongst themselves and band together. Their numbers, however, were not large enough to send a man to every single star system: instead, they decided to send drones out to every corner of the galaxy. If the drones found something interesting, the Xenobots would then investigate in person.

When the Xenobots' robotic drone entered the solar system, it located the Asteroid Belt and sent word back to home base. The Xenobots then dispatched a warship to the Asteroid Belt to explore it.

The Xenobots were not particularly impressed with the Asteroid Belt. It was rich in minerals, but not rich enough for their purposes: also, it was much too far away from the core of their galaxy. They were about to leave when Robert Nolan contacted them.

The warship entered the section of the Asteroid Belt that was the territory of Nolan Mining Enterprises. Robert Nolan immediately recognized it as an alien starship, and he went in person to the ship and made contact with the Xenobots.

The details of the conference between Robert Nolan and the Xenobots are unknown today. Only Robert Nolan was present at that first conference, and (as related in Starman #18: The Starlight Maneuver) Robert Nolan has vanished and is presumed dead.

It seems that Robert Nolan struck a deal with the Xenobots: the Xenobots would supply him with scientific technology and know-how, and in return Robert Nolan would help them establish a presence in the Solar System. This

transaction was carried out: Nolan began supplying the Xenobots with men and building a secret space station to be launched in close orbit around the Sun, and the Xenobots began feeding Nolan advanced scientific secrets.

No one is sure of Nolan's motives. Some speculate that he had no idea that the Xenobots were such an evil race, and that he was simply trying to set up a beneficial mutual exchange with an alien race—but if this is so, why didn't he tell anyone of his encounter? Others claim that Nolan knew all along what the Xenobots were really like but was simply trying to steal their technology—that he had no real plans of actually helping the Xenobots.

Whether he was initially on the side of the Xenobots or not, what happened is obvious to all. When the Starmen began reviving Mars, the Xenobots—thanks to Robert Nolan—were there in person to watch, and at last located their missing nemesis. As related in Starman #10: The Search for the Xenobots Robert Nolan almost succeeded in building the Xenobot solar space station: he fought bitterly against the Starmen who tried to destroy it. Had the Starmen failed, the Xenobots would have flooded into the solar system before it was ready, and the war would have been disastrous.

As it was, the Xenobots were kept out of the solar system until it was too late: the combined forces of Earth and Mars were too strong for them. As in the previous war, the Xenobots found themselves on the defensive. The battle was fierce, but slowly they were crushed back until they were isolated around one star. The forces of Earth and Mars could not break through the Xenobot forces guarding that star, but they did not have to, for David Foster was already inside Xenobot territory. When David Foster blew up the solar space station he destroyed the last of the Xenobots and freed the galaxy from their menace forever.

THE KEY TO THARSOS
Subject: The Key to Tharsos
Date: Fri, 11 Aug 2000 15:08:12 -0700 (PDT)
From: Jonathan Cooper
To: David Baumann, Mike Dodd

Dear Team,

When Fred [Woodworth] pointed out the problem with the laser and the flawless crystal, an idea for a story popped into my head. I wrote it down,

and here it is: a rough plot outline for the lost Starman adventure #2, the key to Tharsos. I don't know if we'll ever use it or not, but I thought I'd write it down; it couldn't hurt! It's there if we need it. =)

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THE KEY TO THARSOS
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a Lost Starman Adventure
#2 in the series

8/8/2000

BACKGROUND

After the war with the Xenobots, the Martians decommissioned Tharsos and hid it inside the Asteroid Belt. They took precautions to hide it well. Their precautions went beyond simply hiding it. They were afraid that some other hostile power might gain hold of Tharsos and use it as a warship -- for as a fighting machine, Tharsos had no parallel. Tharsos had some of the mightiest engines, strongest power plants and fiercest weapons that the galaxy had ever seen. When the Martians designed Tharsos, they tied everything together in a central core unit. This core was something like a storage medium in that it gave Tharsos' central computers the data necessary to run the asteroid and the huge power plants, but there was more to it: this central unit was also a machine. The central computers would send a request to the central unit, asking that the warp engines be engaged, and the central unit would carry it out. The Martians called this device the Key to Tharsos. Without the Key, Tharsos was simply another asteroid base. When Tharsos was decommissioned, the Martians took care to make it look like simply another asteroid base. They hid and encoded the deeper levels of the asteroid that held the weaponry, warp drives, gravity control, and its huge power plant. On the upper levels they put simpler machines: a simpler power plant, a sublight drive, a sheathing system. (It was this smaller power system that was fried in TRA.) Those who saw it might be impressed, but what they were seeing was a fraction of what Tharsos was truly capable of. The Martians removed the Key from Tharsos and hid it. They hid it well: they didn't want anyone to come across it. Even if someone did find it, it wasn't likely they would recognize it, or know what it could be used for. To use the Key one had to have knowledge of Tharsos, and to use Tharsos fully one had to have

the Key: the two went hand in hand. The Key though was unique: it was designed specifically for Tharsos in the heyday of Martian civilization. The capability and machines that made the Key were no longer available: if the Key was lost, then the advanced capabilities of Tharsos were lost forever.

After the Key was hid, centuries passed. Eventually the Starmen parachuted onto Mars and liberated it. Tharsos was rescued, and the men from Earth restored it and saved it from destruction. The men from Earth, however, had no idea of its true capabilities, for without the Key the extra levels to Tharsos were inaccessible. Soon [right after #11: THE CAVES OF MERCURY] Mars decided it was time to reveal the secret. The secret had been held for long enough: Tharsos could now be restored and used against the renewed Xenobot menace. So, at the proper time Mars went to retrieve the Key and turn on Tharsos -- but the Key was gone. Gone! The Martians hunted for it, but they couldn't find it. They were at a complete loss. Where could it be? Rather than tell the Earthmen and risk having the Xenos find out that Tharsos was useless (for the Xenobots still feared Tharsos), they kept it a secret.

Then one day...

SUMMARY

Book starts out in Chapter 1, with the above scene taking place. Some Martians get together in a Martian city, shortly after getting back from Mercury in book #11. They have a conference, in which Tharsos' true capabilities and the Key is explained for the younger Martians that weren't around back then. They decide to give the Key to the Earthmen (who have possession of the asteroid) and help them bring it back to life so they could battle the Xenobots.

The Martians go to retrieve the Key, and find it gone. Gone! They can't believe it. They search high and low for it and find it nowhere. At the end of chapter 1 it states that the Martians continued to search for the Key as the years rolled by, but they found nothing. They grew discouraged. Then one day...

Chapter 2 starts right after #19 (STAR STATION 1) ends. The Starmen have returned home after a harrowing mission, and they're visiting Mr. Vly's home. They have a discussion just like old times. Mr. Vly shows them some more of his rock collection (some really gorgeous and amazing crystals he's

had for years, which he gathered from all corners of the solar system -- the Moon, Mars, the Asteroid Belt, etc.) and they talk about old times.

Mr. Vly tells them that he's had some trouble: outsiders are interfering with him. He's had some break-ins recently, and wasn't sure why: they came in but didn't steal anything. The Starmen decide to help him out.

They soon find themselves in deep waters. Powerful forces are behind the attacks on Mr. Vly: they seem to think he has something very valuable that he's hiding from them. Mr. Vly can't imagine what it is. After some harrowing experiences, the Starmen start to piece together some clues: they learn about the Key to Tharsos, that some men from Earth know about it and are hunting for it, and that everyone thinks Mr. Vly has it.

Finally after many red herrings and adventures, the Starmen conquer their foes, but they still don't understand. The enemies were so positive that Mr. Vly had the Key -- but if so where is it?

The Starmen ask Mr. Vly if he's sure he doesn't have any other artifacts from Mars. Vly off-handedly said that he's sure; the only other artifact were the six dirty rock pillars he had mined off of Mars long ago. They were large things, 10 feet wide and 30 feet tall: he used them as supports in his main room. He said they weren't particularly pretty (just a dirty gray color) but they were the hardest things he had ever seen: not even a high-powered laser could chip off a piece so he could analyze it.

All the Starmen had seen them countless times. They wondered: surely the Key to Tharsos was a small piece of machinery. It couldn't be -- surely... It was. The ancient Martian engineers came in and recognized it at once. They carefully took the pillars out, carefully joined them end on end, and took the protective coating off: and there it was. It really was a complicated electronic machine, but they had disguised it to look like an ordinary rock. The Martians hid it as pillars inside one of their old cities, thinking no one would bother them. Mr. Vly saw them, recognized them as odd and took them home.

In the last chapter, the Martians had begun to reinstall the Key. It was a complex task: it would take a long time before Tharsos was ready to run again. But now it was only a matter of time before Tharsos was ready, and the war on the Xenobots could begin! [As a matter of fact, the job was finished in #22, THE RISE OF MARS. One of the Martian engineers made a remark mentioning this story and the job it was to find it; we just drop a reference to this 'lost' story. Once Tharsos was converted, Earth surprised Mars by giving it back to Mars, and in the last chapter of THE RISE OF

MARS there is a beautiful ceremony when Earth formally hands back Tharsos, and Tharsos is seen again -- the final point of the triad of moons, rising over the rebuilt Martian capitol. Mark thought the scene was oddly familiar, then it hit him: he had seen it before, in the Chamber on Tharsos.]
BLURB

Thousands of years ago, the Martians used the incredible power of Tharsos to defeat the power of the Xenobots. After the war was over, the Martians decommissioned Tharsos and cloaked it. As a protection against misuse, the Martians removed the irreplaceable Key to Tharsos and hid it, leaving Tharsos toothless. Centuries passed, and eventually the 22nd century arrived. Mars decided it was time to reactivate Tharsos, so they went to retrieve the Key -- but it was gone! A furious search ensued, but no trace of the Key was found. The Martians tried to keep its disappearance a secret, but eventually the enemies of Earth learned of its disappearance, and sought to find it.

Soon a desperate race against time ensued to see who could find the Key first. The Key alone had the power to unlock the power of Tharsos -- and whoever controlled Tharsos controlled the mightiest warship the galaxy had ever known!

BEFORE THE MARTIAN WAR[5]

7/6/01, By Jon Cooper

The date was in mid-April. Normally, the man thought, it would have been springtime: the birds would have flown north again from their habitation in the southern marshes, the deep green forests would have sprouted leaves, and the snow would have melted. An exquisite peace would have reigned over the land, when once again the warm sun had ended another snowy winter. Yet a few more weeks, and the schools would have ended their session, the shops would have closed, and the masses would have moved to the beaches to enjoy the all-too-brief springtime. Life would seem fresh again, as the planet woke up from its winter dream and living creatures emerged once more.

Normally, the man thought, all that would take place -- but not anymore. All that was over now. The winter had ended, but the planet would never see

[5]This outline was the inspiration for what later became the short story, “The Eight Treasures”.

spring. The flowers which once brought such beauty and joy were all gone now, victims of the unimaginable ferocity of the invasion. There were no more birds, no more animals, and for that matter no more oceans either, since the invaders had completely destroyed the atmosphere and vaporized the planet's vast oceans with beams of intense light.

Their planet was gone, he thought: gone forever. There would be no more seasons: there could be no more life on the surface. Men might live on it, but it could only be deep underground in protective caverns: the ability to sit on the surface and breathe air had been ruthlessly taken away, and could never be restored.

"They didn't even *want* anything," he thought sadly. The invaders who had leveled his planet -- who had taken away its life, its atmosphere, its oceans, its peace -- didn't even want anything the planet had to offer. They didn't want its minerals, or cities, or peoples, or riches: they didn't come to steal -- they only came to destroy. There was nothing they left alone: they ruthlessly fried every portion of the planet, leveled all the cities, vaporized the infrastructure, and sent the planet's space station and orbiting satellites spiraling down to the surface where they were smashed into pieces. They showed no pity or mercy and did not stop to take anything: they simply destroyed.

That is why he was here -- deep inside a spaceship hidden away in the Asteroid Belt. The huge room he was inside was a beehive of activity: workers were scurrying around, hurriedly installing machines and configuring precision instruments. Gigantic steel beams were being erected and welded into place, while huge tanks, pipes, and wires were being installed. The room was huge to begin with, but even it was becoming cramped by the addition of more equipment.

The spaceship wasn't meant to be a warship. His planet had no quarrel with anyone orbiting some distant star: they had been happy to simply explore space as technology had permitted and coexist with whatever races happened to be out there. The spaceship he was now on was intended to be space station, meant to soar between the stars and study different planets. It hadn't been designed with war in mind, but things are often used for purposes never dreamed of by their builder.

The ship was in the process of being refitted to serve in the war against the invaders. As the man leaned against the balcony and watched the beehive of activity below, he thought back to the events of the previous weeks. They had had no inkling of the coming attack, right up to the time when the alien

ships filled the sky and began vaporizing the planet. They had known about the incredibly hostile race which had attacked them, but they had no idea that race knew where they were from, and they never dreamed they would simply invade.

As a consequence of their lack of foresight, their planet had been leveled and turned into a corpse. Now, the planet was fighting back as hard as it could. This ship, intended to function as a space station, was being overhauled. More atomic plants were added; advanced weaponry was installed, complete with powerful missiles and lasers. The invaders had decimated his home world, but they had not decimated its people or their will to live.

When he looked out through a nearby glass window (which he knew would be removed soon for security purposes), he saw a faint line of flashes far, far away at the rim of the Belt. That was the front line of the war: right at this moment, huge machines were clashing with each other as his race fought valiantly to push the invaders out of the star system and back to the place they came from. Soon this ship would join the warriors at the front and give them a much-needed reprieve.

He knew that the enemy had nothing on the scale of this ship. The enemy had some powerful weapons, but the ship's power plant alone was far larger than any ship the enemy could throw at them. No weapon he had seen or heard of in the galaxy could fight against a ship 45 miles long and 25 miles wide: the power output of this single ship surpassed all the power generators the enemy had put together. Most races quailed at the thought of driving an object a single mile wide through hyperspace; none but theirs had the ability to send entire moons to the stars.

The ship had originally been a moon, but it had been converted and used for interstellar flight. Now, Tharsos was about to be used as a weapon: a weapon on a scale the galaxy had never seen before.

As the man gazed out the window, he thought grimly that the Xenobots had started the war, but his race would finish it. He would see that the Xenobots paid for demolishing Mars and destroying it beyond hope of restoration. They might have destroyed his homeland, but they would never again wage their insane war of destruction against all life in the Universe.

III. THE PLOT SUMMARIES OF THE LOST TOMORROW AND THE LAST THREE PUBLISHED STARMAN BOOKS

These three emails show were the idea for the serialized Starman novelette, *The Lost Tomorrow*, came from.

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2002 6:50 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper; Mike Dodd

Dear Jon and Mike,

One thing that just occurred to me--when we first started putting this series together, I was a little saddened that it would all be set in the future, since I really enjoyed the series books that were set in the 1930s, etc., like Wyckoff's, the original Hardys, etc. All of a sudden I realized that 22nd century Mars feels a lot like that time! We're really creating a world and a culture that can draw on the best of almost any series we want. Troy Nesbit's desert stories, Tom Quest adventures, Rick Brant's science adventures, Ken Holt's cerebral mysteries, Tom Corbett's space jaunts, etc. Even the Wind People add the 1930s feel to the story a little bit. It's really fun!!

_____

From: David Baumann
Sent: Tuesday, April 30, 2002 11:40 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper; Mike Dodd

Dear Jon and Mike,

You know -- now that you mention it -- if you ever wanted a Starman story that did take place in the 1930s, we could do it. ... If you wanted a story set in a small town in the central plains of America during the winter of 1932 we could come up with a right good one.

Neat idea! It would make a fine short story--how about if the theme is that the Starman have to try really hard not to change anything that might blow the future. Or they could look for Harry Tanwick. Or they could track down the Starlight family and its original name.

_____

From: David Baumann
Sent: Tuesday, November 28, 2002
To: Jonathan Cooper

Dear Jon,

I was thinking along the other day, minding my own business, when I suddenly was hit with a plot idea. I think it has possibilities: I don't know where it would fit into the series but it would be a fun book to write.

The basic idea I had was this: somehow, an experiment with a tachyon-based transporter system goes wrong and sends a tachyon beam where it shouldn't have gone. Tachyons can travel through time as well as space, and this particular beam went into the past and altered it -- superficially, it did something to where Thomas Starlight died as a child....

Hmmm. Much as I like time travel stories, somehow they don't seem to me to fit into the series book genre. I like the premise, though, and will have to let it simmer for a bit. We have established the wormhole concept in "A Matter of Time," even if that story is the least plausible of our tales.

I think this could be a fun book to write! There could be a struggling 1930s culture in 2154: David, you could have your old-fashioned adventure. It would be interesting to show what happened when no one stepped forward to make a change and how very different the future could have been.

That could be a good spiritual statement too! The more I think about it, the more the idea grows on me.

*In terms of telling the story, it might be interesting to tell it in a serial format! What if a chapter or two of this book was released one-at-a-time over the course of a dozen Inter*Stellars or something. We wouldn't be writing the entire book at once; only a chapter here and a chapter there over the course of a year or two.*

Now I like that idea a lot!

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These are the plot summaries produced by Jon Cooper, from which David Baumann wrote the stories that were eventually published.

The Lost Tomorrow

This story was intended at first to be rather whimsical—a lighthearted interlude in the Starman series and not integral to it. It first came about when David confided to Jon how much he liked the novels by Capwell Wyckoff. These were written in the 1920s and 1930s, and convey the feel of that era with moving effectiveness. David wistfully said that someday he'd like to try his hand at a story set in the 1930s. Jon proposed a Starman "time travel" or "parallel universe" story to serve that purpose. The plot summary below was the result.

Still planning that this would be a tongue-in-cheek Starman story, David even began the tale with the words, "It was a dark and stormy night..." However, within a short time, *The Lost Tomorrow* became a serious story with a place in the overall scheme of the Starman saga.

Segment #1

[Editor's note: in some ways I see this story as a postscript to the Starman Series. The story begins long after it has ended, possibly long after the Starman Series II has ended, and in the beginning I think it would be neat to drop a few hints about what has happened in all those years afterward. It is a little unusual to do that when the series is only half over but I think it could work – it would give our readers something to think about.
At first I wanted the story to begin on Mars, but I realized that if we did that then we would ruin the story for DH since it would show that the whole thing was just a hoax. Given that, I decided to change it to start on some faraway distant planet and not really give any details about what has happened. I also decided to change it and not give a starting date, and just say that Joe was in his early 70s. Our readers won't know what has gone on with Earth or if Joe is still in the 31st century, which is nice.]

The story begins when Joe Taylor is in his early 70s. Joe and an old friend of his (who we haven't met before) are having dinner late one evening on a space station orbiting a huge purple gaseous planet known as Larson's Folly. Joe was still a Starman, and was a highly respected one: he had a long history and was a living legend. Time had not changed him very much; he still had the same fire and humor he always had.

It had been a while since Joe Taylor and this friend of his had been together, and they spent some time reminiscing over the events of the past few years. Joe had been part of an expedition to the ancient cities of the First Races that still existed on planets overseen by the Janitor, and they had been working to find out what had happened to the First Races that had left the galaxy and where they went. Joe felt that the reason the First Races left the galaxy after crushing the Lucians was not at all clear; there was evidence that they left to get a new start, but something had gone wrong and he wanted to know what it was and how they were doing today.

His friend told him that he had been serving on a border patrol, guarding against the enemies of the free world and trying to keep them at bay, and that some odd things had been going on. He described how several times his radar detected the presence of large objects but upon investigation nothing was there – and yet it still showed up on his radar. He suspected that local disturbances in space was messing with his readings and that he was picking up signals from craft that were there thousands of years ago – which Joe thought was ludicrous.

Joe told his friend that his tale was pretty amazing, but it couldn't hold a candle to something that happened to him more than 40 years ago. Joe then began telling his story, which our readers won't quite know if it is true or not…

The story starts deep in the heart of Tharsos, about a year before Zip's funeral (or so Joe says) in the mid 2150s. By this time, Joe, Mark and Zip Foster know Tharsos well and are able to converse with the Benefactors in their own language thanks to all the training they have had.

In order to get an edge over the encroaching Xenobot threat, the three Starmen had been working on a very cool machine the Benefactors had found thousands of years ago: a tachyon transporter. The Benefactors told the Starmen that it was a Lucian artifact; they had found it on their great galactic expedition and had brought it back and learned how to use it. The machine (which was a rather large device) worked by somehow converting matter into tachyon particles and then transporting it to the intended destination, where the matter fell out of the tachyon stream (or something like that, the Benefactors told Zip) and rematerialized, without the aid of any machinery on the other side. The machine had nearly unlimited range; it could transport a person anywhere in the galaxy. The Benefactors thought that it could transport a person to other galaxies as well, but they hadn't tried it because they had no way of getting a person back from another galaxy (the machine could only transport people one way). The Benefactors also said that it was a huge improvement over their own wormhole transport device, since it didn't require nearly as much energy and there were no worries about a wormhole collapse like the one that got the starship Orion into trouble in *Project Orion*. [Here we have our little jab at an untold story!]

At this point Joe's friend interrupts, saying he had never heard of such a device and it sounded incredible: it was more like magic than science. Joe said that he would explain why he had never heard of it, and it did sound incredible: maybe it worked on faith, trust, and pixie dust but it did work. To get back to the story:

The Benefactors had used this transport device from time to time and offered the Starmen on a ride on it. They wanted to take the Starmen on a trip to the Galactic Core, to the planet that they thought was the home of the Lucians, who later became the Xenobots. They would arrive instantaneously and would be there a few months, during which time ships from Mars would be flying toward the planet. Once they got there they would begin their trip home.

The Starmen, of course, were excited about the possibility. Before they were transported, though, the Benefactors wanted to do a test run on the machine with just the three Starmen to get it configured for them for the long trip. They decided to transport the three Starmen from Tharsos (which was in orbit around Mars) to SE's office in the rebuilt Atom City [or whatever name catches your fancy] on Earth (about a hundred miles from New York City, which was destroyed in the Collapse). Once they were zapped there, the Benefactors would use their wormhole transporter to fetch them back to Mars, and then they would begin their journey to the Galactic Core.

The three Starmen stepped onto the platform. The Benefactors threw some switches, activated some settings, and pressed a button. The three Starmen caught a very brief glimpse of a series of explosions and a very surprised group of Benefactors before it all faded…

…and they appeared in a very different room. They expected to materialize in the Starlight Enterprise office building, but instead they were in a memorial or museum of some kind – or what might have been a museum a hundred years ago. The room was old and broken down; the glass in the windows was broken and a layer of disturbed dust covered the floor. A weak ray of sunlight poured through the broken windows and lit up the room the Starmen were in. The Starmen were disoriented; Joe said that something must have gone wrong because this obviously was not the SE office building.

They heard voice behind them, ordering them to turn around and keep their hands high in the air. As they turned around, they saw a gang of half a dozen men (dressed in 1930-ish clothing), each holding an ancient submachine gun, aimed right at them.

Segment #2

The man who seemed to be their leader walked up to them and asked them who they were and what they thought they were doing here. The three Starmen identified themselves and demanded to know what they thought they were doing, holding up three Starmen and risking the wrath of Richard Starlight and Starlight Enterprise, who knew they were here. The man said he knew nothing about any Starlights but that the Starmen were in a lot of trouble. He said that they were lucky they materialized a week early: lots of important people still remembered they were coming and would stop at nothing to get them.

As he marched the Starmen out the door, the Starmen saw that the whole area was overgrown. The museum complex was very nice, but it was obviously old and hadn't been kept up in a long time. The leader of the gang said that he wasn't going to take any chances with the Starmen: they might be on the level or they might not, but they were too dangerous to trust until more was known about them. He was going to take them to a place where they would be safe and could be interrogated.

Zip couldn't figure out what had happened to the city. They were supposed to be at the heart of a great city; instead they were in a rugged, overgrown forest. Zip suspected that the tachyon transporter had malfunctioned somehow and had set them down somewhere else; where, exactly, he didn't know – perhaps South America. If they could get away from this gang of thugs they could raise SE on their compads and get away from this band of lunatics.

Another thing Zip didn't understand is the way they were treated. They weren't searched and they weren't handled roughly, but they obviously weren't going to be let go. Zip wondered what was going on.

He asked the leader again what he thought he could gain by holding them like this, and that SE would start looking for them immediately and would doubtless find them, but the man wasn't talkative. He said they would have to wait until they were safe in the compound.

They never made it to the compound. As they were driving along on a narrow, bumpy dirt road, (the Starmen had been loaded into a truck) they were attacked by a biplane flying overhead. In the confusion and all the rest, the Starmen were able to get away and fled into the woods. The group that had captured them had enough on their hands with the strange old-fashioned fighter that was attacking them (which looked a lot like a biplane to the Starmen) and weren't able to chase the Starmen, who decked out their guards and ran for it.

The Starmen were soon quite a distance from the place where the attack had occurred. They were walking downhill, away from the area where they had first materialized. They didn't quite know where they were going, but they did want to get away from whoever was chasing them and get some time to breathe.

After the Starmen had escaped, they tried to raise SE with their compads and failed. They didn't understand it: their compads should have worked no matter where they were – and they weren't being jammed; it was as if SE wasn't there at all. They couldn't raise the L5 space station or the SE

operation on the Moon. They also couldn't connect to the internet; none of their communications devices were getting a response at all.

They decided to hike toward the nearest town to see what they could find out. The only problem with this was that they didn't know where the nearest town was. As they hiked somewhat aimlessly through the woods they came across a river. They decided to follow the river for a while on the grounds that cities were often build near rivers, and where there was a river there may be a city downstream – or perhaps if not a city, a road that would lead to a city.

The Starmen followed the river downstream. After a while they came across some interesting devices, laying deep in the woods and rusting into oblivion. It looked as if there had been a war fought here some time ago; shrapnel and other pieces of torn metal were scattered in the underbrush.

One particularly interesting find was the hull of an old fighter jet. The jet didn't look like anything they were familiar with, and in fact it looked pretty old-fashioned. It seemed like it had been in the woods for at least a decade or two, as the rain had beaten upon it. Most of it had been destroyed and there was no interesting equipment on it. The craft did have some insignia on it, but it was not one the Starmen recognized. The Starmen were not familiar with the country that flew it; they had never seen an insignia of that type before. They were puzzled by the damage: it looked like it had been riddled not with lasers but with bullets.

Much more ominous was something they saw in the distance, over some hills: a nuclear crater. They could tell that it had been some time since the bomb had gone off and the underbrush had started to return, but it looked like this planet had gone through a nuclear war in its recent history and vast portions of the countryside had been destroyed. It looked mighty bad.

The Starmen speculated that perhaps they were on a different planet altogether, but they didn't think that was too likely since everyone here spoke English – and if the tachyon transporter malfunctioned and sent them to some other, random planet it was very unlikely that they would find themselves on an Earth-like planet.

The most likely explanation was that the machine had been hijacked – their attackers had said something about how they were 'expected' – and that they were sent to some other planet that had been colonized by pirates and were being held captive, possibly for ransom or something. Something had gone wrong and they materialized before they were expected, thus allowing some other faction to kidnap them first. They didn't know how these factions were able to compromise the top-secret tachyon transporter or even how they

were able to understand it, but they'd leave that for later: the first step was to find out where they were and find a way to get back to Earth.

Occasionally, while the Starmen were walking around, they heard an aircraft drone low overhead – much to their surprise, a propeller-driven aircraft. Since the woods were dense, they were able to take shelter and hide. They speculated that someone was looking for them from the air, although it seemed hopeless – even with the Starmen's red uniform it would still be tough to spot them from the sky.

After much walking they did, at last, come to a town. The town was a small, somewhat old-fashioned town; it was as if the town had been lost in the woods during the past hundred or so years. It didn't look too promising, but they decided to explore it. At the town they should be able to call someone or find a spaceport or at least find out where they were.

By the time the Starmen made it to the midst of the town it was dark. The night was clear, and they looked at the stars – and found that they were evidently on Earth, in the northern hemisphere. No other planet had a starry sky like Earth did. This, of course, was not promising at all: how could they be on Earth, in the northern Hemisphere, near New York? Their compads should have been able to reach someone, and they weren't being jammed; in fact, they weren't picking up any radio signals at all. Maybe they were just broken or had been damaged during the tachyon transport, although that didn't seem likely. What was going on?

By then they had made it to the city, and they were surprised: it looked old, run-down, and like something straight out of the 1930s, but yet with a twist here and there of the 21st century. Their uniforms attracted some attention, but no one paid much attention to them or seemed to be very friendly.

The Starmen walked by a newspaper vending machine – something they hadn't seen in their lifetimes before, except in a museum – and stopped to look at the headlines. The machine took coins, which the Starmen thought was bizarre: metal or paper currency hadn't been used in fifty years; it was phased out long ago. The paper (which looked new) was dated March 21, 2163 and was the paper for New York, NY – a city that had been wiped out by a nuclear weapon more than a hundred years ago.

Segment #3

The three Starmen couldn't figure out what had happened. The stars (which they took a long look at as soon as the sun went down) told them they were on Earth, and people did speak English, and the tachyon transporter should have transported them to Earth – but this was not the Earth they remembered. The date was right, but the planet was wrong. There shouldn't be a New York City, but there was; there should have been a Starlight Enterprise, but there didn't seem to be; and the technology was more than a hundred years behind the times. Something drastic had happened and they had no idea what it was.

About this time, as night was getting along, an old man who was walking along came up to the machine and bought one of the newspapers. He was an elderly, sort of talkative man who looked at them and their uniforms a bit curiously, asking what the uniforms were for and what the logo was. When he was told that they were Starmen's uniforms and the logo was that of Starlight Enterprise, he said he had never heard of it but that he'd be glad to hire a couple "astronauts" and asked them if they were a veteran of the Martian wars, and then said that they looked too young for that.

The Starmen explained that they had been lost in the woods and asked where they were. The man replied that they were in New York City on March 21, 2163 at a little after 7 pm. Seeing that the Starmen were somewhat at a loss, the old man offered them some jobs, saying he thought it would be handy to have around some people who actually knew what they were doing. He explained that he ran a gas station just down the road.

Not having any other plans for the moment, the Starmen accompanied him back to the gas station. Once there, they entered it, and saw that they had entered into a trap: the same men that had met them upon their arrival were standing there, and they were all heavily armed.

The men quickly took them to the lower reaches of the gas station, down a secret elevator of some sort. Once they had reached the lower level, the man invited the Starmen to have a seat and then began doing some explaining.

The man said that they didn't have a lot of time to go into detail, because other factions had already been alerted to their arrival and would no doubt descend upon the city soon to find them. He was just glad that he had met them first. He didn't want to hurt them; he just wanted to get them away to a safe point, and the place they were at was safe for the moment.

He told the Starmen that he believed they were from an alternate future. He said that way back in 2034, a nearby science lab had detected a tachyon pulse aimed right for that spot. The tachyon pulse was highly complex and obviously of intelligent and alien origin, and as time passed it grew stronger. This made big news, and a huge city sprawled around it and an industry formed to analyze the beam and find out where it was coming from.

The find had shifted the entire focus of society: it was proof that there was a highly advanced, alien civilization out there in outer space and that they were interested in Earth. Since Earth was showing signs of unrest at the time, people speculated that if they could just find the source of the beam they could find a race that would solve all their problems. A few unscrupulous elements mixed in; a very brilliant scientist by the name of Reuben Ridger advocated finding the source of the beam in order to take the technology that was behind it and rule the world. Reuben moved to that town and focused all his efforts on that tachyon beam, and after ten years discovered that it was the backwash of a transport beam – evidently something was being transported and would materialize. He even gave the date at which point it would materialize, which he calculated based on the growing strength of the beam as materialization grew closer: March 28, 2163.

While he had been doing his studies, turmoil had spread and governments had begun collapsing – the Collapse had begun. The first city to be hit was the city that had been constructed around the tachyon signal; it was blown into oblivion. All that remained was the museum that had been erected around the tachyon pulse, which was located a good many miles outside the city on land that had been declared a World History site. Other cities had been nuked after that, and the world had never really recovered; it was still in a state of turmoil. Reuben Ridger and his family all lived in that city and died during the first attack, and no aliens or anything else were ever found.

When he saw that the Starmen were human, he watched them after they escaped, and found that they didn't understand what was going on. He thought they had had some sort of accident, and transmitted a tachyon beam into the past – a beam they were inside. That disrupted the past and dumped them into this new tomorrow. He suspected that the tomorrow they were from was a better one, since the capability of transportation via tachyon beam was far beyond anything his present could imagine.

The man explained that many factions on the planet badly wanted the Starmen for different reasons. Some wanted them for the advance scientific

knowledge it was supposed they carried. Others wanted them as hostages, to blackmail the society that sent them here. At any rate, the Starmen were wanted all over the planet, and only the fact that they arrived a week early had saved them. The question now was, what did the Starmen intend to do now that they were here?

The society the Starmen found themselves in was in shambles. After the Collapse it had rebuilt to some extent, but no leader arose to define it. When space travel started again, a fierce war erupted between Earth and Mars and in the early 2110s a nuclear war erupted between the two planets. Much that had been rebuilt was lost yet again, and both planets were plunged into darkness. Most of the 2160s was still mired in the 1930s; there was a little 22nd century technology left but it was in the hands of the powerful, who used it to try to conquer as much of the planet as possible. It was a time of wars and rumors of wars, and the group was hoping the Starmen knew how to end it.

The Starmen settled down for the night to think about it; they would have a meeting in the morning and then move out.

All this, of course, gave the Starmen quite a lot to think about. It looked like when they transported, something went wrong with the tachyon pulse and sent a pulse back into time – it was speculated that tachyons could travel through time. That signal was picked up by a research lab and made big news – big enough to attract the attention of Reuben Ridger, who thought he could find the source of the signal in order to wreck even greater havoc. His family Tom moved with him, and the city became a fantastic target and was nuked, while New York City was spared since it was no longer interesting. Thomas Starlight died, SE was never founded, and the world's other visionaries all perished when that city was hit. No one pulled the world out of the collapse and it was still feeling its effects today.

There was no telling what the Xenobot situation was in this new future, but Earth had evidently not attracted their attention since it was barely a civilization at all. Earth had obviously never come into contact with them.

There was only one thing to do. It was possible to block a tachyon pulse; if it wasn't, they would travel on forever and ever in the beam and you would never be able to read them or stop at your destination. They had to find a way to get to Tharsos, where equipment existed that could work with tachyons, and send another signal back in time to cancel out the one that had changed the past. The tough part was finding a way to get to Tharsos: it was evidently in the Asteroid Belt, still undiscovered. Earth was working on building a

space fleet and they suspected that Earth had made more progress than the old man knew.

They did, however, have their compads, and their compads contained enormous amounts of data – data on antimatter, on spacecraft mechanics, on fusion reactors, on everything the 'other' 22nd century knew. They also had their knowledge of the Benefactors. If they could find a way to get to Mars, perhaps the Benefactors could help them get to Tharsos, and then they could try the tachyon transporter again to put the future back to the way it used to be.

When the morning came, the Starmen explained that they knew of some ancient technology on Mars that could possibly put an end to the fighting and restore peace. They asked if there was a still way to get to Mars, and they were told that one group of rebels had a small spaceport in what used to be Florida. It would be difficult to get from where they were to Florida, but if they could manage it and if they could get ahold of a spaceship they could probably reach Mars with it. At any rate, they didn't have any better ideas, so they started off.

After getting dressed in period clothing, they boarded up into what looked like ancient 1930s cars (their van had been destroyed earlier) and began riding over rough, barely paved roads to a hidden airfield. When they got to the airfield they saw not jets, but old-fashioned biplanes. The man explained that, with a loss of industry and infrastructure, propeller-driven biplanes were a lot easier to build, and they were really the only aircraft that civilization offered. A few bosses had jets, but they didn't last long; they were pressed into service for their endless wars and ended up getting shot out of the sky.

So they got in their biplanes and took off for Florida. The Starmen got the hang of flying them fairly quickly; they weren't like what they were used to but they had enough flying experience to allow them to figure them out. Things got rough when a storm came up; the winds were high and the craft weren't able to fly above the storm, and it got tossed all about. It was really pretty harrowing.

In the end it proved more than that: lightning struck the plane they were in and fried its engine. The engine died and the plane began to fall to the ground…

Segment #4

The Starmen braced themselves for a crash-landing. They tried to volplane the craft down to the ground, and they made for a clearing, but the landing didn't go quite as well as they had hoped: they hit with a crash that destroyed a good bit of the plane. There were a few cuts and bruises and things but only minor injuries, and everyone was thankful.

No one was quite sure where they were, and it was pouring down rain. They built some shelters out of trees and things and managed to get some fires going in an attempt to dry out, and then they waited for the storm to end.

While they were waiting, the Starmen turned on their compads and tried to see what radio frequencies they could get. There were a few transmissions going around, and the group discovered that the Starmen's arrival had not gone unnoticed and that a thorough search was going on to try to find them. Hysterical stories about two-headed monsters wielding death-rays and blowing up half of town were mentioned and everyone was warned to be on their guard against these intruders from another planet.

The rain eventually let up, and the group began hiking through the forest. The forest stretched on and on and on; no development had occurred here for more than a hundred years due to all the wars that had gone on and there was nothing but wilderness.

When night came, the stars were out and the Starmen used their compads to get a fix on the stars and find out where they were located. It turned out that they were about a hundred miles north of where they wanted to be; they were in for quite a walk. They estimated that it would take about a week to reach their destination, and walking seemed to be the only choice.

They did have some supplies with them, although not a lot. During their hike they made shelter as best they could, and the Starmen used their survival skills to find food to eat and build shelters. The library stored in their compads was occasionally helpful, but for the most part the Starmen relied on their survival training. The men that came with them were armed, and they held a watch during the night. Occasionally at night they heard planes drone overhead, but they saw no one and didn't encounter anyone during their hike.

The hike was unexpectedly difficult. North America didn't have nearly as many people living in it in this alternate future, and much of the woods was deeply overgrown. There was a lot of dangerous wildlife around; the

group had some narrow escapes with bears and had to be vigilant against snakes. The countryside had regained much of its former wilderness, and it was difficult to hike across.

Every so often the group came upon an old, abandoned piece of infrastructure. Buried deep in the woods and covered with rust and forest growth was what looked like an old, decayed chemical plant of some sort. A brief look around it didn't reveal a whole lot, but it was another indication of the sad state of affairs. Society had been wracked with wars upon wars and there was no peace to be seen; instead of rebuilding, factories were abandoned for lack of men and raw materials and were left to rust away into oblivion.

The Starmen had a bit of a scare when Mark was trapped in one of the rooms he was investigating. A large metal container of some sort fell and crashed against the door, trapping him inside. There was nothing Mark could do to help from the inside; he had to sit and wait for the group outside to give him a hand. They eventually did just that. They didn't have a lot of tools with them, but they were able to make some tools out of the rusting machinery around the plant, and Zip found an axe and a crowbar hidden away in a closet behind a row of barrels.

While Mark was locked inside, he rummaged through the room. There wasn't a whole lot there, but there were a few crumbling manuals and logs stacked against a bookshelf. Mark guessed that even pillagers – if any had even found this place – had no use for monthly status reports, and the people who had left this place to rot didn't care about them either.

Mark began reading them and started picking up little bits of history. The plant had been abandoned thirty years ago, after the war between Earth and Mars had destroyed the economy and left both planets in ruins. The heart of the war lied in resources: Earth had few available resources and Mars had quite a few, and Earth wanted what Mars had. There were resources to be had on the moon, but Thomas Starlight was the one that had found a way to get at them and harnessed them. It looked like since he was not there to lead the pack, everyone's eyes instead focused on Mars, where Earth had invested considerable infrastructure prior to the Collapse – and which they thought would be easy pickings. A war had erupted, and the intense hatred both sides had for the other (for they seemed to have no leader to unite them) led to the devastation of both planets. It was a sad thing: instead of ending in 2090, the Collapse was still very real in 2163.

At last, after a challenging hike, they reached their destination. They found the small village that was on the outskirts of the spaceport, and the spaceport itself was not too far away. Now came the difficult part: how were they to get in and find a way to go to Mars?

The Starmen decided to start by looking around the area and seeing what they could discover. They made their way to the spaceport, which was enclosed by a fence topped with barbed-wire. They looked through and were amazed at what they saw: sitting on the spaceport along with several ordinary ships was a Xenobot ship, just like the one Mark and Joe had flown during *Doomsday Horizon*. So Earth *had* made contact with the Xenobots in this future! That did not bode well for the fate of Earth.

The question now was, how were they to get on a spaceship and take it to Mars?

Segment #5

The Starmen and the group talked it over that night and formed a plan. The obstacles were plain: there were the guards, the patrols, the barbed-wire fence, and possibly the Xenobots as well. They had to find a way to elude the patrols, get past the guards, get over the fence, and then get a spaceship – preferably an empty one.

[If you have a better idea than this, feel free to use it!]

So the Starmen came up with an idea: they decided to prey upon the fear of these "visitors from Andromeda" that seemed to be so rampant. The Starmen cleaned up as best they could and put back on their old Starman uniforms. They separated from the group that had came with them, telling them to go to such-and-such a clearing and wait for them. The Starmen then marched right up to the gate with the guards guarding the compound and in a stern tone demanded to be let in, saying they were Xenobots from Phyloxin and would pulverize them with their killer mind-rays if the guards did not open the gate immediately. The guards looked at them dazedly, and the Starmen took that opportunity to lay them both out with their karate techniques. They quickly grabbed the guard's weapons, opened the gate, and then raced to the Xenobot starship, which they had earlier scanned with their compads and found to be empty. A cry was raised and they were followed, but warning shots from the three Starmen kept them at bay.

The Starmen quickly boarded the ship, and Joe managed to get it off the ground. After stopping to pick up their friends, they took off into the sky.

There was immediate trouble on board the ship because the interface was not what Joe was used to. It was similar to that which Joe had piloted before, but it wasn't at all the same. Joe managed to get the crate lifted off the ground, and as he applied the thrust there was an explosion and a lot of alarms went off.

After reading some panels, Zip discovered that the ship had been landed for repairs. One of the engines had been developing some trouble and they wanted to get it fixed before it blew. When Joe applied full thrust to it, the engine couldn't handle it and shattered, breaching the hull in a few places. While part of the crew went to patch the hull and seal off that part of the spaceship, Joe struggled to get the ship into the sky and avoid his pursuers.

The only competition he had immediately was an old wooden biplane, and the ship he was in outdistanced it handsomely.

As soon as they lifted off into the sky and attempted to enter Earth orbit they picked up a tail: someone was following them. They tried to increase speed, but their tail increased speed to match – and the Starmen had no weaponry on their system with which they could fight. (They suspected that the ship they were in had pretty decent weapons, but they had never been able to figure out where they were or how to use them.) It followed them as they left Earth orbit and entered a trajectory that would bring them to Mars, and then the ship that was following them vanished – it disappeared off their radar. The Starmen knew it was still there, but they couldn't see it – and their tail, whoever it was, had made that point.

The Starmen knew that the ship they were in could make outstanding time, but with one of the engines blown its top speed was much reduced from what it was capable of. It could really have moved if there was a solar power station in the neighborhood, but there wasn't – and Zip was glad of that. The sad part was that the hyperspacial drive was not working: it seems that when Joe had ignited the engines it blew out a lot of circuits and they had no way to repair them. They would have to take the long way to Mars; it would mean three weeks of travel but it couldn't be helped.

The journey to Mars was long, uneventful, and boring. The Starmen spent a lot of time talking amongst themselves and with the others with them, discussing how different this new future was and speculating whether they would be able to change it back to what they were used to or if they would be stuck in this unpleasant alternate tomorrow. They also spent a good bit of time keeping close watch on their ship, making sure that everything was all right and working in good order.

As they approached Mars, they began discussing what to do to throw the tail they obviously had but couldn't see. They decided that their only possible course of action would be to set down inside Eagle City Crater – the only place they knew for sure had a breathable atmosphere – and then try to enter the tunnels underneath the city. Once they were in the tunnels, they would try to lose their adversaries and find their way to Imlah Taltani.

They decided to split up. The three Starmen had taught the rest of the team how to fly the Xenobot ship. The plan was for the ship to land and the Starmen to get out, and then the Xenobot ship would take off again and head off into the desert. The Starmen would try to contact the Benefactors and would get back in touch with the crew on the ship via their compads and let them know what they had found out.

The Starmen managed to enter Mars orbit; they found Eagle City Crater and landed in the outskirts of the city. The three Starmen quickly got out and ran into the city as the ship that had brought them to Mars lifted off and soared back into the sky.

The Starmen were surprised at how desolate Eagle City was. The city was a rough, unkept place: the buildings were broken down and in ruin and there was no sign of any life at all. The Eagle City they knew was a thriving, growing place; this one was dead and empty, and had been dead and empty for a long time. It was a vast ghost town.

As the Starmen began hurrying toward the city, they saw a cloud of dust about half a mile away: the alien ship was landing, and they were about to have company.

Segment #6

The three Starmen and their friends hurried into the decrepit city, trying to find reference points. The city was very different from the Eagle City they knew, for this City had been the victim of a fierce war not long ago and was ferociously savaged, and finding entrance points into the tunnels underneath was going to be challenging. They knew roughly where the entrance points should be; they decided to find the building above where entrance points should be and then get in that way.

They quickly descended into the maze of the city. The ship took off moments after it landed, but the Starmen suspected that it had dropped off a troop of people to hunt for them while the ship itself chased after the ship

that had brought them to Mars. This suspicion was quickly borne out, but the people tracking them made no attempt to actually catch up with them. It was obvious what they were doing: they were waiting for the Starmen to lead them to wherever the Starmen were going. Their pursuers seemed highly trained and organized: the Starmen did their best to throw them off and loose them as they worked their way deeper into the city but they never seemed to manage it for very long. The Starmen knew they had to lose them, and so they came up with an idea: the three of them split up and headed to different access points.

When they split up, their pursuers were caught off-guard. In the few moments before their pursuers scattered, the Starmen ran down alleyways and temporarily got out of sight. Mark managed to find a tunnel and disappeared before their pursuers could find him; Zip and Joe doubled behind their pursuers and lost them. They entered tunnels as well and began racing to the one tunnel that led to Imlah Taltani, where the three expected to meet.

Aboveground, the pursuers realized that they had lost the Starmen, and suddenly feared what would happen if the Starmen were allowed to escape. They contacted their ship (which had been furiously chasing the Starmen's ship and giving those on board a hard time – they were doing their best to outrun it and outfly it but they were just not crack pilots like Joe) and had it return to Eagle City (much to the relief of the ship it had been pursuing, which took this opportunity to get out of sight).

The ship, once it returned, began razing the ruined Eagle City flat, firing its weapons at it in an attempt to collapse any underground tunnels. The tunnels in which the Starmen were located began shaking, but they were deep underground and it did them little harm – until the ship fired some sort of amazingly powerful (and possibly nuclear) weapon, which wiped out the entire city and sent the Starmen flying down the tunnel, a cloud of dust following them. It was obviously impossible to go back up: the tunnels at the top had all been collapsed.

The three Starmen eventually made it to the long tunnel that acted as an entrance to Imlah Taltani. They pressed their hands on the secret spot that made the door open – and nothing happened. They pushed at the wall, pounded it, pressed it, and tried to pry it open: nothing worked. They were definitely at the right place (although it looked different and depressing without the Tunnel People and Uneven Steven's carvings) but the door would not open – and there was no way to get back to the surface.

The three Starmen began wandering in the tunnels, trying to find a way to get back to the surface. The tunnel system was definitely different: it was obvious that the Tunnel People, which did not exist in this future, had extended and expanded the original tunnels. The passage to Imlah Taltani was a very old one, and it must still exist in this future, but maybe the passage connecting it to the tunnel system was new, or maybe something else had changed. The tunnels had been inhabited before the Collapse and the Benefactors would still have built the connection to keep an eye on the human race, but maybe they built it somewhere else. If that was the case, then it must be in this general area; they had to explore it and find it – and fast, before their air and lights ran out.

The situation looked pretty bad, and was pretty bad. They were in a tight spot, and they knew it, and they knew that there was no one here who could possibly help them.

So they began a systematic search. They knew the means the Benefactors normally used to hide their tunnels and where (and how) they normally hid the entrance triggers, and that enabled the search to go faster.

A few hundred yards further down the tunnel, the Starmen found another passageway that was new to them – or at least, that's what they thought. They followed it, and it seemed to lead to nowhere, which excited them. They searched it carefully and one of Joe's searches for the entrance worked: the wall slid aside. The three Starmen stepped into it, and a few yards down they saw the familiar long tunnel that stretched toward Imlah Taltani.

Segment #7

The long tunnel was there, but there was no ship waiting at this end – which wasn't surprising, considering that the Benefactors weren't expecting anyone. Zip knew what to do, though, since he had done this many times before: he opened a secret recess in the wall – which was right where he was expecting it – and entered a code that would cause a ship to automatically leave Imlah Taltani and come streaming towards him. It did: about ten minutes later the ship appeared.

Zip was a little surprised that no Benefactors had materialized with it, since he knew the request for the ship must have caught their attention. They had to be watching him; perhaps they were waiting to see what he did. Zip and Mark and Joe entered the ship, and Zip piloted it through the tunnel to Imlah Taltani, where the three of them debarked – and there they found five

armed Benefactors waiting, one of which was Jogren and all of which they knew.

The Starmen spoke to them in Ahmanyan, which surprised the waiting Benefactors. It took some time, but the Starmen explained who they were, what they were doing, how they got there, and so forth, and used their compads and their knowledge of Imlah Taltani to show them that they were on the level. It took some doing, but the Benefactors eventually believed them and decided to help them, explaining that the Xenobot threat was enormous and the Benefactors didn't have any hope of resisting them. If they could help them restore the future, that would definitely be a good thing – but the problem is they didn't know how to use a wormhole transporter, since that technology was lost a long time ago. Zip said that wasn't a problem: as long as they had the device handy he could use it, since it was standard technology in his 2163.

The Starmen were able to activate the Benefactor's wormhole transporter, get it working, and get it pointed to Tharsos, which indeed was in the asteroid belt. They weren't able to get it locked onto the position that held the tachyon transporter, but they could transport into the hangar. They were given space suits by the Benefactors, since Tharsos was turned off and it had no atmosphere, and a message was sent to the Benefactors that were on Tharsos to alert them that the Starmen were coming. The transporter was activated, and the Starmen stepped across to the hangar on Tharsos.

The hangar looked very different from what they remembered. They remembered how it first looked when they were brought aboard it when Zimbardo was controlling it, and then how it looked after SE took charge of it and placed it in Earth orbit. It used to be a hive of activity, with scientists and Ahmanyans bustling about, but now it was cold, dead, and empty. It was obvious that no one had been here in thousands of years.

The Starmen made their way to the elevator, and entered the access sequence they knew so well that would bring them deep into the heart of Tharsos. They had been instructed to go ahead and head toward the tachyon device; the Benefactors that were on Tharsos would meet them there – and they did. The machine hadn't been used in a long time, and it took the Starmen some time to put it back together and get it operational once more.

They eventually got the machine running once more, and the Starmen once again stepped onto the machine's platform. They had done their best to rig the machine to send out a pulse that, when the Starmen entered the beam, would cancel out the earlier one. The Starmen should rematerialize right

there on Tharsos, with everything put back as it was. The button was pressed, the machine was energized, the materialization begun –

– and the Starmen found themselves standing on Tharsos, surrounded by a very different group of people – the same group they were surrounded by when the experiment first began. The tachyon machine was malfunctioning; circuits were exploding and smoke was pouring out of it – just as had been the case when they left. The Benefactors were a little surprised to see them rematerialize on the platform, and said that the machine must have malfunctioned – at which point all the Starmen burst out laughing.

Joe told his friend at the café that they wrote a very interesting report about it, which was filed away somewhere at SE headquarters. Richard loved hearing about it, as did the Benefactors, and after all was said and done the Benefactors destroyed the tachyon transporter machine (which had pretty much destroyed itself in that malfunction) in order to prevent anything like this happening again. His friend said that he didn't believe a word of it, and Joe laughed and said he was free to do exactly that.

As the two were leaving the restaurant, Joe caught sight of an elderly, distinguished man who had just entered the restaurant – evidently he was part of a group that was attending an obscure conference of some sort. Joe looked at him a bit oddly, as if he had seen the man somewhere before, and then shook his head and stepped outside. His friend (who was a bit behind Joe) watched the man hang up his hat and coat, and caught sight of the man's nametag, which he was still wearing, and gasped when he saw that the man's name was the same as the leader of the thugs that had protected the Starmen in Joe's story. He even looked like the man Joe had described, and he was the right age. He said no, it couldn't be – surely Joe just saw him earlier, or maybe knew him when he was younger, or something…

Book I: The Doomsday Problem[6]

Note: I would recommend that this book be divided up into two separate books, with book 1 being entitled "The Doomsday Problem" and book 2 being entitled "The Starlight Maneuver." Book 1 is where the Xenobots give infiltration their best shot and the good guys are beaten back and seemingly defeated at each turn. In book 2, even though things look bleak, it's quite the opposite: book 2 gives the feeling that the good guys are going to win – it's a victorious, glorious part in which the good guys are confident that they can win despite overwhelming odds. In book 2 it is the bad guys that are nervous and frightened, although they don't quite know why.

Book's theme: This story is about the clash of two civilizations: the Xenobots, which is old and advanced but decaying, and Earth, which is new and not as advanced but is alive and has a heart. The Xenobots have better technology, but they don't understand it, can't fix it, can't experiment with it, and have lost a great deal of their personality and individuality. They are seriously declining, and in another couple centuries they will vanish of their own accord – they will have collapsed from within and cease to be a sentient race. (It's sort of like Zimbardo's decline, only it's happening over thousands of years, but the end product is the same.) Earth, on the other hand, is alive and thriving: it has been rebuilt after the collapse and it has vigor. This is why Earth can fight against the Xenobots and why they believe (all through the story) that they will win: they understand their technology and have a will to fight and a cunning about them that the Xenobots don't have.
This book is an interesting study on good versus evil. Evil in this case has been evil for so long that it has taken a tremendous toll on them; this book shows what the Xenobots were once like (when they were the Lucians and had astonishing power) and how they fell and where they are today. Good in this case is young but it is alive and courageous and is just really good, and it is able to overcome evil.

Prologue (note: NOT chapter 1)

The three Starmen (and their parents) are at Mark's parent's ranch, camping in the wilds of Montana; all their families are with them at the ranch

[6] This is the book that eventually became *Doomsday Horizon*.

and, after a few days, the Starmen headed out into the woods while the families remained together and visited. The sun is setting and it is late summer. Everything is beautiful, peaceful and quiet. The Starmen have had a long rest; a lot has happened since LROM [see the references that are scattered throughout this manuscript; they've gone through at least two other adventures and the Starlight children have returned] and are enjoying nature. All around the ranch is thick forest, and there is a large serene lake nearby. No other dwellings are around for miles. The Starmen aren't expected back for work at SE for at least a week.

While the Starmen watch the sunset and exchange pleasant banter, three small black cylindrical devices work their way through the deep forest to their campsite. These devices blend in perfectly with the trees and the Starmen do not notice them at all. After getting quite close, each one maneuvers until they have the Starmen lined up in their line of sight. Then, silently, all three of them shoot out a dart. The dart contains a very fast-acting drug that knocks the Starmen out. In seconds, the three of them are lying on the ground unconscious; they don't even know what hit them. The black devices hover motionless in the air for a few minutes to make sure that the Starmen are truly unconscious, and then they radio their master that they have accomplished their job.

Editor's notes to the prologue: I would love to see this book take place a year or two after LROM and refer to a number of "untold adventures" or maybe even drop a few hints! It would be fun to act as if this was book eight and refer to some adventures that had never happened. They could discuss their adventure in the caves of Mercury or their desperate fight on the lunar plains or mention the problems that nearly destroyed the L5 space station. It might be an interesting thing to do, especially if we're going to go back and "fill in the gaps" with other books.

Chapter 1

Blackness – all is blackness and darkness. Mark Seaton feels as if he is trapped in an eternity of blackness. No thoughts reach his mind; he has no input from his senses. Mark struggles upward, trying hard to reach the surface.

Slowly, Mark starts hearing voices. [These are the voices of his captors; Mark has briefly drifted back to consciousness and is hearing them. This

passage also serves as a hint to our readers that more may be going on here than we are letting on.] The voices are low and intent. Sounds reach him, but they seem to have no meaning. As the darkness clears Mark begins listening to the sounds. There is not one sound but several – several voices. Once, long ago, Mark remembers that he knew how to attach meaning to the sounds.

As the darkness in Mark's mind clears further he begins to understand the sounds. One sound is a song: someone in the background is humming the tune to "Three Blind Mice." Someone else is arguing; Mark can't quite understand. A sixth, he said: no, Mark realizes, they're saying it's not a sixth. Mark senses that something is wrong: something is not a sixth when it should be. A voice responds that it won't matter; it's close enough. There is uneasiness and tension in the voices. Then, everything goes black again…

Mark wakes up. The mist is gone from his mind – gone as a shadow flees from the approaching sunlight. Mark is in a small room lying on an uncomfortable hard table, surrounded by strange advanced medical equipment. The room is empty, aside from him. The architecture and coloring of the room is strange to Mark: it's unlike anything he has seen before. Where is he? What happened? The last thing Mark remembers is camping in Montana with Zip and Joe. Mark suddenly looks around: just where are they? Where is everyone? Mark almost calls out, but then thinks better of it. Something must have happened – something very serious. He begins to get worried.

Mark slowly slides off the table and stretches. He feels weak; his muscles aren't responding the way they should. He has a slight pain in his upper right arm. Mark notices that the gravity is familiar: judging from that, he must be on the moon. But where was he?

Mark is tempted to examine the room's equipment but decides that the first thing to do is see if there is anyone around. He has to find Zip and Joe. The room has one door, which was slightly ajar. Mark walks up to it slowly, then opens it and looks outside. He noticed that he had trouble walking; it was as if the gravity was off. Mark staggered for a minute until he relearned how to walk.

Outside the door Mark sees a long hallway. The hallway is old, dusty and barren: it's as empty as can be and looked like it had been deserted for centuries. A pale, weak light filtered down from several ancient ceiling lights. Mark spotted six doors down the empty passage. Most of the doors were shut, but Mark saw two doors far down the hall that were also slightly ajar. Curious, Mark shuffled down the hallway and peeked in the first door.

There was Joe! Joe was laying down on the table in a room that looked identical to his, deep in sleep. Mark peeked in the door beside it and found a room almost identical to the room which held Joe, but it was empty and looked as if it had never held anyone. Zip was nowhere to be found. Mark felt Joe's pulse and saw that he was alive. Almost immediately he began to stir, and soon Mark had Joe on his feet.

After making sure that both were ok, the Starmen decided that the first thing to do was try to radio someone and see what was going on. A quick search revealed that Zip was nowhere to be found: the other rooms were either empty or barred. Judging from the gravity of this place, somehow they had been transported from Montana to the Moon and they had no idea how or why. The Starmen searched their rooms for their suits but they could not be found. Mark, however, spotted his compad in a nearby cabinet. Joe's compad could not be found, nor could their weapons or other personal belongings.

Mark opened his compad, turned it on, and tried to contact SE. All he got was static. Mark tried a number of frequencies and even scanned all known bands, but all he could get was static. His radio could not pick up any frequencies at all.

Joe shrugged and suggested that maybe they were deep underground and couldn't pick up a signal. Mark said that was probably the case, but as he was putting away his compad his eye caught sight of the date and he gasped.

The date on his compad read March 28, 3118.

Chapter 2

The Starmen could not believe what the date said; they couldn't possibly have been transported 900 years into the future. There must be some mistake. Maybe the compad was broken or maybe someone had altered the date on it, but it just wasn't possible.

A cold chill went down Mark's back. Was it possible? he wondered. Mark said that it might be possible, as research into suspended animation had been going on for some time, and the Benefactors had evidently mastered the technology. They decided to try to explore a little bit more and see if they could find any more evidence.

Down the hall, there was another room, and in the room was a large glass window. Looking out the window, the two Starmen saw the familiar desolate gray landscape of the Moon – and just above the horizon they saw a large planet. Instead of seeing a lush blue planet, though, the planet was dark and devastated. The part of the planet that was in shadow was glowing faintly

green. It was obvious that the planet had been roughly, violently destroyed, and that the destruction had taken place a long, long time ago.

Mark and Joe could not believe it; for a long time they just stood there and looked at the planet through the glass window.

Since there was nothing else to do, they decided to explore the base and see what they could discover, hoping that there would be some clues regarding what had happened and how they got to where they were.

The two Starmen decided to start with their individual rooms. The medical equipment was still running, but there was very little writing on it, and what little writing there was tended to be highly cryptic – a jumble of strange acronyms. They were able to find a date readout on one monitor and it matched the one on their compads.

The two Starmen then stepped out into the hallway. The hallway only had six doors. Three doors led to their own individual rooms. One large solid door evidently led to a hangar, but a passcode was required to open it. The fifth door was likewise securely barred (Mark suspected, from the warnings on the door, that it led to the power reactor), but the sixth door was not. That room had various bits of alien-looking furniture, all covered with dust, alongside some strange alien devices. One of the devices, which was sitting on a desk, looked something like a holder for a round mirror but with the mirror gone. It looked something like this:

The moment the Starmen entered the room that device activated itself. A hologram appeared in the area enclosed by the ring of the device. An old man in some sort of alien uniform appeared. After a moment, he began speaking.

"If this message is being played," he said, "then all has been lost and our great gamble failed. We set the stasis chambers that held the two Starmen to awaken them a year after we left this base for a raid into Xenobot territory. The raid was to take place on March 28, 3117. If you are those Starmen and the base is deserted, all has been lost and we will never return. The hope of all mankind now rests completely on you.

"I have a long story to tell you. Long ago, during your time, you two Starmen and Zip Foster worked wonders in the solar system. It was even rumored that you had made contact with the long-lost race that had created the pirate's asteroid. Shortly after your adventure on Mars with the Banjoman, however, you vanished from time. You disappeared from history until just a few years ago, when I and my party uncovered your bodies in stasis.

"I do not know why you were placed in stasis. Perhaps someone wanted to put you out of the way for a while and then you were lost in the ensuing events. Perhaps you were captured by the Xenobots and were placed into stasis to be brought back to their central star system but then in the aftermath of the invasion you were left behind. Or perhaps it was your destiny: perhaps some unknown person suspended you, knowing what was about to happen and suspecting somehow that your day would come far in the future. At any rate, we found you here in this base some years ago and were awed to find you still alive.

"You see, Starmen, a few days after you were last seen the Xenobots invaded the solar system in full force and destroyed everything. Earth was vaporized: while the planet remained, all life on it was decimated and it was rendered uninhabitable. The oceans were boiled away, the ground was scorched, and the atmosphere was vaporized. The pirate's asteroid was blown into pieces during the first surprise attack and with it went the last hope of resisting the Xenobots. Humanity was utterly crushed. All that remained was a small band of people hidden away in the asteroid belt that the Xenobots somehow had missed.

"After crushing the entire solar system, the Xenobots left and we slowly rebuilt. We stayed hidden, deep in the bowels of the moon, desperately afraid that we would attract the attention of the Xenobots. We had very little to build with, but over the past centuries we have slowly developed to the point where we believed we had a fighting chance. The odds were enormous, though, and we realized that we were betting everything on success. If we failed, there would be no one left.

"When we discovered you we realized that perhaps we had hope after all. You, Starmen, have been out of touch for nine hundred years; you know nothing of the latest advances. It would take years to train you to be effective in our space force and we did not have years: we knew that war with the Xenos was very soon at hand, for we could not remain hidden for much longer. However, you do have one enormously valuable asset: you are from the 22nd century and you wield enormous power there.

"We realized that if we awakened you immediately and you fought with us, you could do little good: we could not take the time to train you before our invasion and if we lost, your lives would be lost in vain. We decided instead to use you as our ace in the hole: if all was lost you were to be awakened and sent back in time to change the past.

"You see, Starmen, a few years ago we found a time machine that had been created by some alien race destroyed long ago by the Xenobots. We

studied it as time permitted and believe that we know how to use it. We took the time machine and connected it to one of our starships. All we would have to do is fly the ship into deep space and activate the time machine, and then – if it worked – we would have been transported back in time.

"But changing the past is fraught with risks. It looked like we had a good chance to destroy the Xenobots once and for all. What if we went back in time and failed? We might not only be unable to defeat the Xenobot invasion but we might also bring about the ruin of the small group that survived. Changing the past might be impossible or the success of the immediate Xenobot invasion might be inevitable. We did not want to run the risk of losing all we had gained.

"When we found you, we knew what we could do. If we succeeded then we would return and reawaken you and you could join our society and help us rebuild. If we failed, you could take the machine and go back in time: with your clout and knowledge of the society that built the pirate's asteroid, perhaps you could change the past. If we failed there would be no longer any reason to be afraid to go back in time since you three Starmen would be the only human beings left alive in the Universe.

"We have set the time machine to take you back to a point just after you disappeared. We did not dare to return you before that point. You will therefore have only a few days in which to work. Gather the forces of Earth together immediately, contact the lost race, and have them arm the pirate's asteroid. We do not know where Zip Foster is – he was never found – but perhaps you can find him. Maybe some of Earth's population could be evacuated to a safe haven. Earth was caught by surprise, but you – and you alone – can change that.

"The starship with the time machine in it is in the hangar, down the hall, third door on the right. Once you are out into space you can activate the machine. We have made the controls of the starship be as close to your own controls as possible, so everything should be familiar. You'll need to enter the passcode 141592653 to get into the hangar. I know that you can do it.

"Starmen, you are our last hope. If you do not find a way to change the past, no one will."

With that, the message faded out.

Chapter 3

The two Starmen were absolutely stunned. The message matched the condition of the planet they saw out the window, but they were amazed that

the invasion came so quickly and that it had been so devastating. They knew that the invasion was only a matter of time, but they thought they had a window of at least a few years before it arrived. The Xenobots must have somehow discovered that their long-lost enemy was on Mars and invaded immediately – and if that happened, they all knew that there would be no escape from the solar system. The worst had happened, and now only Joe and Mark were left.

They didn't know if they could change the past or not, but it looked like their only chance would be to give it a try. The time machine might work, or it might not, but it was their only chance. It might not be possible to stop the Xenobot invasion since it happened so quickly, but perhaps a few people could be hidden away or something; maybe the Benefactors would have some ideas.

There seemed to be no doubt that what they heard was reality. The devastated planet on the sky, the familiar gray landscape, the dates on their compads, the holographic generator, the complete lack of any radio signals – it all fit together much too well.

One question, though, bothered them: what had happened to Zip?

After a few minutes Mark shook himself. "We're not going to learn anything standing here. The first thing to do is to head out to the hangar and take a look at the spaceship that we're supposed to fly back in time. We'll need to spend some time getting acquainted with it. After that, we can make our plans."

Joe agreed, so they went to the hangar door, entered the passcode, and stepped into the hangar. The hangar was quite large, but was very dim and dusty. The air seemed strangely stale. A pale, weak light filtered down from square ceiling lights far above them. In the middle of a hangar was a sleek, futuristic ship that was easily three times as large as their Star Ranger. The ship looked incredibly powerful. Joe thought to himself that if he really was in the 32nd century, that is the sort of ship he would expect to see.

The two Starmen boarded the ship, which had its power already turned on, and they explored it very carefully. In the back of the ship was a series of powerful engines, seemingly rated for FTL travel, and a very powerful fusion reactor of advanced design. In one room, set aside, was a complex-looking device that, according to the various signs and writing on it, was the time machine. The machine was dotted with alien writing, underneath which was taped the English translation. Mark examined it carefully.

"This looks like the real thing," Mark said. "It seems to connect directly to the warp drive and draws a pretty heavy power output from the fusion reactor. It seems to work by altering the wormhole that is created when the FTL drive is engaged: instead of warping to a distant star, it somehow alters it to warp to a different time."

Joe looked at it thoughtfully. "I've heard claims all my life that time travel was possible in a spinning universe. This would certainly be the way to do it."

Mark sighed. "Yes, it would. I never imagined I'd be going back in time, though – and I certainly never imagined circumstances like these! I don't know what we can possibly do but we'll have to give it a shot."

The three Starmen explored the rest of the ship and found a number of cabins, equipment rooms equipped with spacesuits, a galley well-stocked with food, and other things. Everything looked in order: they did not find anyone else. There seemed to be a lower floor to the ship – it was certainly big enough – but they couldn't find a way to access it. Mark said that it probably just held fuel or something but Joe wasn't so sure; he said that there could be a dozen people hidden down there with a year's worth of supplies and we'd never know it. Mark admitted that that was true, but they had no tools and no way to enter that part of the ship and so there was no use worrying about it.

Joe looked at the time machine and sank deep in thought. Could the past be changed? More to the point, could they change the past? He was deeply troubled.

Editor's note: what if the ship they come across is Mike Dodd's old Xenobot fighter? We haven't used it so far and this would be a terrific place to add it; we could just use it instead of coming up with an entirely new design – plus, Mike has already drawn it so we have ready-made illustrations.

Chapter 4

The Starmen spent the rest of that day and all the next day going over the base minutely, but they discovered nothing new. They replayed the message given by the alien device several times but they could not get it to play a different message and they were unable to figure out how to use it to record their own messages. They were able to understand the workings of the alien ship easily enough but they were not able to alter the time machine or get it to point to a different date – somehow the return date had been locked.

The FTL part of the drive fascinated Mark. “It works by creating a wormhole,” he explained. “All we have to do is get a little bit away from a planet or other large gravity field, plug in our coordinates, and the ship can take us wherever we want to go. The range seems to be pretty powerful; the ship seems to be able to zip us between stars as far apart as five hundred light years. Making the holes takes a lot of energy but the drive can supply more than enough. It seems pretty simple. I’m sure there must be a lot involved but it isn’t hard to use!”

Joe spent a good deal of time examining the flight controls of the ship. The controls were remarkably easy to use: they had evidently been designed for a person used to the sort of ships Joe flew. Joe tapped into the central computer system and was pleased to find that most of the files were in English. The few that were not in English were encoded in a very strange language that Joe had never seen – even the letters were completely alien. He didn’t think that the Benefactors made the ship; it must have been made by some other alien race. Joe told Mark that he felt confident that he could handle this ship and control pretty much any part of it. “The ship has an outstanding interface, Mark: it is remarkably easy to use! This is the way ships ought to be designed. Why, a child could almost fly this ship! The warp drive bit is a little more complex – I don’t completely understand it – but then we won’t have to use it. All we need to do is take this ship out into space, go a little ways from the Moon, and then activate the time machine, which has already been set up. No FTL jumps are necessary.”

Mark suggested resting and then taking off the next day, but Joe stopped him. “There is still one door we haven’t opened, Mark, and I’d like to see what’s behind it. If I’m going to return to the 22nd century, it would be nice if we could bring a bit of the 32nd century back with us! It’s very strange that these people didn’t leave behind any bits of technology for us to take back at all: no advanced weapons, no technical designs for warp drives, nothing. If we’re going to go back in time and defeat the Xenobots, we’re going to need some pretty good fighting machines to do it with. There must be that sort of thing behind that door: surely they wouldn’t send us back empty-handed.

“I think with the tools we’ve found on board the ship we could force it open – it would just be a matter of drilling a hole through it. We’d want to be wearing spacesuits – there’s no telling what the air is like – but there’s also a chance that Zip might be behind that door.”

The two Starmen had already checked out the spacesuits, and they seemed to be fine. They were very close copies to what the Starmen were used to and they seemed to work just fine. Oddly, the air in them was

perfectly fresh. Joe said that he thought that there was a little droid secreted somewhere in the base that made periodic checks of the equipment and kept things fresh. “You have to admit, Mark, that you wouldn’t just leave your ‘ace in the hole’ in suspended animation with no one on hand in case anything went wrong! There’s probably a little hole in the wall somewhere that the droid stays when he isn’t needed, and if an emergency comes up with a piece of equipment he slides out and takes care of it.”

Mark and Joe took some of the tools and went to the back part of the ship. “You know, it really is strange that they didn’t leave behind any weapons,” mused Joe. “You would think that they could have at least spared us a late-model 29th century nuclear disintegrator. We’re going to have to unscrew some things and cannibalize some parts, but it shouldn’t be too hard and we can put it all back when we’re done. The object of this game is to make a laser cannon that we can use to fry a nice hole in the door lock so that it won’t be so stubborn about not opening.”

Mark and Joe set to work and after a couple hours they had a rough model. The model wasn’t exactly elegant or streamlined, but they were confident that it would do the job. Joe was a little uncertain about its power or the strength of the door but they decided to give it a shot. The two Starmen carried the bulky contraption out into the hallway, pointed it at the offending door, and fired it.

The result was immediate: the metal flared white-hot and instantly vaporized, taking with it most of the door. Molten metal began dripping but quickly cooled. Joe was pleased, saying that the metal must have been a lot weaker than he thought! “You would think after a thousand years you’d learn how to build stronger doors than that. Oh well; it’s open.” There was no great gush of air from the door; the gauges on their suits told them that the air in the place was fine.

A weak, weird light streamed from the door, but the end of the passage could not be seen. A metal staircase spiraled down. “Let’s go,” said Mark as he turned on his flashlight and stepped through the hole.

Chapter 5

Mark and Joe slowly descended the long steel staircase. At the bottom they found a passageway extending in several directions. Mark picked a direction and they started exploring.

The two Starmen seemed to be in a vast underground laboratory of astounding beauty. The race that built it was very advanced: they saw the ruins of gigantic machines whose purpose was beyond their imagination. “I can’t begin to tell you what these things do, Joe,” said Mark, “but I have a feeling that even if we did know we wouldn’t believe it.” Mighty engines laid in ruins beside what appeared to be atomic assemblers, capable of reducing matter to plasma and then rebuilding it into whatever one desired. Doorways stood in the middle of rooms and Mark speculated that the doorways could connect to other doorways, perhaps in other star systems, and enabled one to cross the vast reaches of space simply by stepping through a doorway onto another world.

The beauty of the underground realm was incredible. The hallways were painted with murals depicting a gorgeous but alien landscape, dotted with cities that were more beautiful and awesome and yet ancient than anything Mark had ever seen. The beauties of time and space filled the laboratory and made Mark yearn for home.

The power plant that powered the area was unlike anything Mark had ever seen. The room itself was bathed in a deep, rich blue light. In the center of a room on the floor was a strange machine that exchanged a sea of blue particles in a beam of light with a receiver on the ceiling. Somehow, the exchange provided an immense amount of power. Mark speculated that the machine tapped into zero-point energy or the fabric of space itself to create power, but there was no way to tell.

In the main part of the vast laboratory, Joe walked up to a panel on the wall and tapped on it. The panel glowed to life, but the language on it was totally alien. Joe shook his head. “Maybe I’m mistaken, Mark, but I don’t think this was built by any civilization we have ever known. The remnants of Earth certainly didn’t build this! My guess is that they found it and then left it here as a memorial to whatever race was here first.”

Mark looked deep into one of the murals. “But who could they have been? The Benefactors were a great race but they had nothing like this. I’ve never heard of any remnants of any alien race ever being found on the moon.”

Joe shook his head. “Maybe the race came after the Xenobot invasion. Maybe it’s a race we have never heard of. I just don’t know, Mark. Too much has happened in the past nine hundred years and we know too little about any of it.”

Mark and Joe looked around. “Is there anything you see here that we could take with us, Mark?” Mark shook his head. “Not really. Most of this stuff is too large to lug upstairs, even if it was in working order. I haven’t really seen anything small, have you? We can take a lot of pictures, but I think that’s about it.”

Joe suddenly remembered something. “Wait – I do seem to remember seeing a few diamond-shaped things in a lab. Remember that? There were four of them, lying on a table, next to some sort of complicated machine. Perhaps we could take those back with us. They looked like ordinary diamonds, but I have a feeling that they were being used in an experiment of some sort, and they might be special.”

Mark nodded. “I remember now – and wasn’t there a book there? The language in it certainly wasn’t English, but we could take it with us anyway. Go get them, Joe, while I start taking pictures. Even if they aren’t anything special, I don’t see any harm in taking them with us. If what the man in the hologram said was true, there isn’t anyone left here anyway but us, and I don’t think those rocks are going to do anyone any good where they are now.”

While Mark began taking pictures of the whole scene with his compad, Joe ran back down the long corridors into the room where he remembered the diamonds were. Joe saw that there were five diamonds lying on the table. Four of them were placed on one end, and a fifth was in a holder of some kind. A machine that looked like a transmitter was aimed at the diamond. Opposite the diamond was a strange square device, covered on the side toward the diamond by a highly reflective material. Joe looked at the setup for a moment and began thinking: a signal was passed through the diamond and hit the reflective panel on the machine… could the crystals actually be some sort of data recorder? Could they hold information? Joe slid the diamonds, the holder, and the transmitter into the bag he was carrying, and then he eyed the large square machine. He tried moving it, but it wouldn’t budge, no matter how much force Joe applied to it. It was staying where it was.

Joe walked back to find Mark and showed him the things he had been able to retrieve from the lab. As Mark opened his mouth to say something, they suddenly heard a loud crash, followed by the sound of breaking glass and a hissing noise. Mark and Joe whirled around and saw a monstrous cloud of green gas rushing toward them from one of the passageways. The two Starmen hesitated for a moment, and then broke out running toward the

staircase. “I don’t know what that gas is composed of or what made it break,” Joe said, “but I don’t want to say around and find out if it is dangerous!”

Editor’s note: the green gas was released by the bad guys, who thought the Starmen were on the verge of discovering something they didn’t want them to discover and wanted to hurry them along and make them leave.

Chapter 6

The Starmen made it up the stairs without incident. The green gas, however, continue to slowly climb up the stairs toward them, and it seemed to be eating away at the staircase itself. The Starmen decided that then was a fine time to take the ship and leave the base: they didn’t want to stay around and have the gas start eating them. They knew that they weren’t the cause of the breakage – or were they? What had held the gas, and where did it come from?

The Starmen quickly boarded the ship, shutting the door that separated the hangar from the hallway. They hoped that the door would hold the gas back for a while, although they had a feeling the door wouldn’t hold out forever: whatever that gas was, it had the ability to eat through solid metal.

The Starmen boarded the ship and closed the ship’s airlock. Joe had figured out earlier how to open the hangar door, and he used the controls to open the door and fly the ship out of the hangar. Outside the hangar doors, the Starmen saw the vast gray landscape of the moon. They quickly gained altitude and began to fly into space. Far below at the base they heard a series of explosions; something was eating that base alive. It sounded as if the base itself was self-destructing – something the Starmen found disturbing. If they had forgotten anything, they surely weren’t going to be able to go back and get it.

As the ship was flying out to deep space where they could engage the ship’s drive and – hopefully – travel back into time, they discussed their plans. The only apparent course of action the two Starmen had open to them was to take the ship back in time and try to take the past. They couldn’t reset the date and go back farther, so they had to live with just a few days warning. The wisest course of action, they decided, was to bring the ship to Richard Starlight, tell him the whole story, and let the wise minds at Space Command – as well as the Benefactors – decide how to counter the threat. “If it is true,” said Mark, “we’ll have to immediately fly to Mars and warn the Benefactors.

In this ship, it should be possible to reach Mars in a matter of minutes – or we could just use Tharsos to make the jump."

"At least we won't be sitting ducks now!" said Joe. "There might not be a whole lot we can do but we can certainly do something."

Before heading into deep into the interplanetary space between the planets, the Starmen decided to take the ship down to the planet below and take a look at it. Joe was able to really make the ship move fast, and in a matter of twenty minutes they were flying the ship over the planet. The extent of the devastation was extraordinary: vast regions were blasted in pieces and there were large sections where the crust of the planet had been shattered. The atmosphere was long gone and the radioactivity level was high. Huge craters littered the planet. The scarring was so bad that it was almost impossible for the Starmen to recognize any of the planet's features at all. There was clearly nothing left on the surface, and it would never be habitable again.
[Note: this image would make a terrific cover scene!][7]

Chapter 7

The Starmen, of course, were quite upset. Their worst fears had been realized. Mark said that that settled it: it looked like the story they had been told was true after all. Things looked very, very bad. Joe asked Mark if he could take the ship away from the planet and fly into the interplanetary void – which is where they would need to be to make the time jump.

Mark nodded, then said to wait a moment while he got some pictures: pictures of Earth in the 32nd century would speak volumes about the consequences of failure and was something that SE would definitely want to see.

Mark sighed, looked out over the planet, and wept silently. Joe waited silently, awaiting the order to press the button and make the attempt to take the ship back in time. Mark took out his compad and was about to take a picture when a look of incredible surprise covered his face.

"Joe! Joe! Look at this! Look at this!" He held up the compad and pointed to it wildly. Joe looked a bit puzzled. "Ok, so I see your compad. We've already noticed that the date on it is different. What's gotten ahold of you?"

Mark tried to calm himself. "Joe, the compad is still working! It's on! How could the batteries have lasted nine hundred years?" Joe shrugged.

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[7] This is indeed what we chose for the cover.

"They probably replaced the batteries for us, knowing that we'd need the compad."

Mark shook his head. "Joe, the compad has been left sitting in the base for an entire year. You know that the batteries wouldn't last that long! These compads draw so much power that they've got to be replaced regularly."

Suddenly the force of what Joe was saying hit him. "You're right! But – but what about that planet up there in the sky? Could they have replaced it with stronger batteries than we had before?"

Mark looked crestfallen, then Joe's eyes widened. "Is it just me, Mark, or has something funny happened to the stars?" Mark looked up and through the window. "What do you mean, Joe?"

"Well, where are all our constellations? I don't think I've ever seen stars that looked like these. What's that constellation there? And that one? This isn't what you normally see when you're flying from the moon. Something is wrong, Mark. You're right! Something is wrong. Wait a moment; let me —" and Joe began working feverishly at the control panel.

Mark looked at the stars as new hope surged through him. "The stars! Oh, man. How could we have forgotten? How could we have been so stupid? We were so caught up in emotion that we forgot the obvious, didn't we? Joe, take a reading and find our position."

"Hold on a second – I'm almost…" Joe muttered. The computer made a series of beeps. "Ah, ok. Done. Now for our position…" Joe hesitated a moment… "I've got it now. The computer claims that we are just out from the Moon but I'm not buying it anymore! That is the only position the ship is giving me, but I bet it's wrong! I know it's wrong."

Another thought hit Mark with full force. "The gravity! Joe, we both thought something was wrong with the gravity: the gravity felt like the Moon's but it didn't feel right. Joe, take a reading of the gravity."

Joe bent over the controls. "It says that the gravity is exactly what it's supposed to be, but I'm not sure I believe it anymore. It looks like someone has tampered with this ship to make us think that we're in the solar system when we are clearly not."

Mark looked very upset. He shuddered. "Oh, we came so close. Do you realize what would have happened? We would have gone straight to the Benefactors. They would have came out into the open, based on our advice, and the Xenobots would have found them right away and pounded them – and us – right into the ground. Our last hope would have been destroyed. We came a hair's breath from disaster.

"Look how easy it was! All they had to do was place us in suitably-decorated rooms with a ship that fit the part. They tampered with our compads, left a suitable message, tampered with the controls of the ship, and then left. By placing us in some alien star system they could almost guarantee that their ruse would work. We're trained to fly by the controls, and since the controls of the ship agreed with what we had been told we would have trusted them."

"This ship then," said Mark, "is probably of Xenobot make. The Xenobots likely gave it to one of their Earth henchmen, who set everything up. The time machine is most likely phony. The drive would have taken us right back to Earth."

Joe spoke up. "Um, Mark, are you sure that we were left alone? If I was the man behind this, I would want to stick around to make sure that everything went according to plan."

"That's very clever of you, and we're eternally grateful for telling us that Ahmanya is Mars," said a voice behind them. The two Starmen whirled around and saw a group of heavily armed men standing behind them, weapons armed and ready.

Chapter 8

Zip Foster was panting heavily, crouched behind a row of rusted barrels deep in the rusted canyons of the old New York City. This was the city that was home to so many people, up to that day in 2149 when Reuben Ridger had planted a small nuclear warhead on Ellis Island, blowing the Statue of Liberty and the entire harbor to kingdom come. Much of the city survived, but no one would live there after that. The city remained a ruin, with giant metal buildings towering overhead and slowly decaying [ed. note: didn't we mention a scene like this in LROM? This is a great place to use it!]. When Starlight had revived civilization, Earth chose not to rebuild this and other vaporized cities but instead left them as a testament to the hatred and greed that had consumed them. They were living memorials to the evils of men in the hopes that people would see them and remember. The city was no longer a harbor anyway; the nuclear winter that had followed the worldwide devastation had dropped ocean levels and the coast was now several miles away. *[Ed. note: This is another interesting thing to add; it shows that the world is different, that the nuclear war had consequences, and that some of the repercussions were still being felt after a hundred years. It also gives the books an interesting 'feel' – somewhat otherworldly.]*

The city was combed with guards – guards, Zip knew, who were looking for him. The city was a perfect place to hide: few ever came here and there were many good hiding places. Few ever hid here because of lingering traces of radioactivity, and because of the eerie feel of the city – not to mention a reverence for the dead.

He and his two fellow Starmen had been captured the week before by a band of cunning and evil Earthmen. The dart that had hit Zip had not penetrated his suit very well, and as a result Zip only got a mild dose of the knockout drug and was only out for a few hours. Zip had awoken while his captors were flying the three Starmen and their families to their secret base in the heart of the ruined city, and when they had carried the unconscious Starmen off the plane Zip had broken for it and ran and managed to escape. Over the past week he had led a desperate life of hiding, trying to find a way to contact help but not succeeding. It pained Zip deeply that he was unable to rescue his two fellow Starmen; he saw them taken away in an enormous ship and flown off – to where, he didn't know.

Zip's captors had been searching desperately for him. Zip knew the city well and had been able to evade them, but he was having trouble obtaining supplies and knew that he wouldn't be able to hide for much longer. Zip had to make a break for it. Zip knew what he had to do, but it would be dangerous, and the chance of success was slim. He knew that, thanks to the knowledge he now had, his enemies would never let him get away…

[Editor's note: a tough part in this section is what to do with the families of everybody. In the prolog, all three families had gathered together at Mark's ranch in Montana, and everyone was kidnapped all at once. Mark and Joe were shipped off, but as a precaution Zip was 'let go' by the bad guys in hopes of tracing him to the Benefactors just in case Mark and Joe didn't work out as planned. When Zip escaped and found out what they were doing, they decided to eliminate him – but he fooled them. The question is, where to the families fit in? Zip somehow must have gotten a message to them and then used them to make it look like he was dead when he wasn't, and to use his dad (with that new suit that will allow him to go back into space) to distract the bad guys. It's something we'll have to deal with.]

[Second note: it wasn't enough for the Xenobots to know that the Benefactors were on Mars; they had to know where on Mars they were located – but why? Why couldn't they just invade? This could be a mystery even to the Starmen. They get a few hints that the Benefactors had something that the Xenobots badly wanted destroyed – maybe some ancient,

overpowering weapon but they don't find out what it is. When the bad guys are caught before they can call in the forces and destroy that unknown and the Xenobots find that their ruse failed, they decide to just throw everything they have at the Benefactors.]

Thirty minutes later, the guards in the building the bad guys were using as an air traffic control tower began shouting and pointing. "Look – there!" Their leader, who was in the tower at the time, looked where the guard was pointing and saw a figure in a red Starman uniform run across the street, which had been converted into an airfield, toward a large sleek rocket which was lying wheels-down on the street. The figure was seen running up to the platform and was then lost in the maze of steel and iron that surrounded the ship.

The guard started barking out an order over the airfield's intercom system, and the leader encouraged them, saying that he must not be allowed to escape, but that at all costs he must be returned alive and not harmed; he ordered the ships to force him down. Troops began to pour out, but in just moments the engines of the ship ignited and the ship began lifting off the launchpad. A man running the communications monitoring section of the air traffic control tower grew pale. "He's contacted Starlight Enterprise! He made it through our radio jamming! He's given them the location of our base and asked for emergency action against us! What should we do?"

The leader stood immobile and watched the craft as it lifted off the launchpad. Shots rang out as other craft began shooting at it. The ship turned in the narrow canyons and was pursued. One ship, in an attempt to disable the craft, got a shot at the engines. The engines immediately burst into flames and the ship plowed into the street below and exploded into a million pieces. *[Note: this flight scene needs to actually look good and be challenging. It almost looks like the ship will then escape, then wham and it's all over.]*

When the leader saw this, he said "We're all ready to go; let's get out of here before Starlight shows up."

With that, men began streaming out of the base in an orderly fashion, boarding several starships. The men had been planning to desert the base for weeks and had already emptied it; the leader knew that it would only take a few moments for all of them to board the starships and lift off. The leader, though, was not going with them; he had another plan. While everyone else hurried to their starships the leader descended deep into the base. He knew that Space Command would arrive within moments, far too quickly for his men to escape, and he did not want to be caught with them.

Even though his original plan had been shattered when Zip found out their secret and thus had to be killed and their second plan had failed when Mark and Joe realized the hoax before they made it to Mars, there was still hope. SE, he knew, would search the base thoroughly; they would find the evidence linking Ahmanya to Mars that he had just received moments before via FTL radio, would believe that their cover was blown, and would act accordingly – and thus ensure their and mankind's downfall.1

Five minutes later a fleet of Space Command ships arrived. They quickly forced down the ships that had managed to leave the base and took full possession of it. Everyone surrendered, but no one knew where the leader was, and the best search by Space Command completely failed to turn him up. The leader had vanished.

In the depths of the city some distance away from the scene, a shadowy figure watched the SE ships take command of the base. *[This is Zip, by the way, but we want the reader to think that it's the bad guy's leader, or something like that.]*

Chapter 9

Richard Starlight, who is on the Moon in his office at the time, is immediately radioed and is told what happened. Richard is vastly upset. He tells the crew on Earth, which had taken possession of the base, to continue investigating while he got some things moving on the Moon – he wanted to get an investigation rolling and contact Space Command and other authorities to see how this could have happened and how the bad guys could have had such a large operation in such a prominent place without anyone finding out about it.

The man in charge of operations at New York City [the Rock? Jesus Madera?] captures the various bad guys that are there but can't find the head one. He also can't find the families of anyone involved; no one knows where they are. He does find that a certain area of the base is heavily guarded and secured with a very strong door, and he gets a team going to open the door to see what is beyond it. *[Beyond it, of course, is that evidence that was planted by the bad guys to get the good guys to blow their cover. Do we want to bring in Folding Jim again with his equipment to try to get some readings? Might be a neat thing to do – a good tie-in to DIE – plus a logical thing to do. Jim could find various pieces of equipment and a few security systems that need removing.]*

That night, the room with the strong door is leveled. The guards are lured out of the room and the vault is destroyed. The good guys believe that it was an attempt to destroy the evidence and get rid of the entire SE squad that was present; they don't understand how the perpetrator was able to slip through their fingers.

The next day, Richard Starlight is contacted in his office and told that fifty million solars have been withdrawn from SE's account via Zip Foster's identity [remember, the Starmen can withdraw whatever they want from SE. Zip withdrew funds to purchase a ship to get to Tharsos, but since he couldn't tell Richard he was alive Richard – and our readers – thought that it was the bad guys who were behind them]. Richard belatedly realized that he had not terminated Zip's account and that, with Zip's demise, SE had been a ripe target.

After locking down Zip Foster's account, Richard decided that it was time to go down to the surface and visit the site; maybe he could learn from that what to do next. Richard gave the orders and then left his office.

In the corner of his office, a tall bushy plant wavered and then disappeared, revealing the form of a Xenobot. [The Xenobot had used holographic technology to disguise itself as a plant, but it couldn't move and retain the illusion. It would be nice to vividly describe this plant and put the description in Richard's office in the prior five books!] The Xenobot shuffled across the floor, went through a doorway, and disappeared.

Chapter 10

The group of henchmen that had surprised Mark and Joe quickly subdued them both: they were hopelessly outnumbered and they knew it. The henchmen told them that they were hoping that the Starmen would lead them right to the Benefactors because it would save time, but that it really didn't matter: they had made brain scans of them and could use equipment given them by the Xenobots to extract their memories. It would only be a matter of time now, and at any rate they now knew, thanks to the Starmen's conversation, that the Benefactors were on Mars! They would be found quickly enough. *[This actually isn't true and the henchmen know it: they are counting on the Starmen escaping and leading them (via the tracking devices they placed on the Starmen) directly to the home of the Benefactors.]* The Starmen were then placed in the ship's bring and left alone.

Mark was furious. The Starmen had fallen into enemy hands so easily and they had given the entire game away. A group of thugs had easily been able to do what the Banjoman and the entire planet of Mars had failed at. It was a devastating blow. There was no hope of escaping from their jail cell: the door was solidly held in place not by an ordinary lock but by a powerful electromagnetic field. It would take more force than Mark cared to think about to break the field and open the door. The thugs were clearly taking no chances that the Starmen would find a way to pick the lock or force the door.

All at once they heard the ship's drive engage. The ship shuddered, and there was a high-pitched whining sound. The warp drive had been engaged and they were traveling through the wormhole.

Abruptly, the sound changed: it began to waver and falter. A series of small, distant explosions was heard. There was a deafening noise and the ship shuddered violently.

Joe grinned. "Yes! Yes yes **yes**!" Mark looked at him strangely, and the lights suddenly went out.

Joe explained. "As soon as we realized that we were not in the future at all, I quickly altered some of the ship's settings. I fixed it so that if a wormhole attempt was made, the drive would overload and short-circuit before it could complete the passage. I also quickly changed it so that the ship would sustain a fair amount of damage – hopefully enough for us to escape. I took a chance that the thugs wouldn't look any deeper than to make sure that the ship was still pointed toward Earth, and they didn't. It was a bad risk, but I didn't have very much time and at all costs their information must not get back to the Solar System."

Mark was immensely relieved. "You're smarter than I am, Joe," he said. "I was caught completely off guard. Now at least we have a fighting chance of stopping them from ever reporting. Let's get out of here and go do some damage!"

Chapter 11

Their jail door had been held in place by a very strong electromagnetic lock. When the power went out the door became easy to open. The ship was pitch black and they could hear nothing. The Starmen tried to feel their way away from their cell.

After a few moments the emergency lights came on. Joe noticed that their cell door was locked again, but they had already escaped so it didn't

matter. The Starmen decided to head towards the rear of the ship, where the engine was: perhaps they could pick one person off and take his weapon. If they could get ahold of the engine room they might be able to take over the ship, although there was no telling how much damage Joe's ploy had done.

With their memories of the ship fresh from their detailed exploration of it just a few hours ago, the Starmen carefully made their way towards the rear of the ship. As they got closer to the engine compartment they heard chaos: metal was groaning, men were shouting, and sirens were going off. Keeping a sharp eye out for any thugs, they crept into a small side passageway near an air vent leading into the engine room to listen to the conversation.

The Starmen discovered that Joe had severely damaged the ship. When he shorted out the drive he melted boxes upon boxes of delicate electronics. No one knew where the ship was or if it could be repaired. The thugs evidently had little knowledge of how the ship's drive worked, which was not surprising since it was of completely alien design. They didn't think that the drive itself was damaged but they weren't sure how they were going to replace the equipment that controlled the drive. They could make a new connection between the drive and the power plant and repair the power plant but after that they were at a loss.

Someone spoke up and asked if the Starmen would know how to repair things, since they were highly trained. That sounded like a good idea to them so someone went off to get them from their cell. Mark realized that their escape would be noticed very shortly and that once it was noticed it would only be a matter of time before they were captured again. What were they to do?

Mark thought rapidly. At all costs, the information they possessed must not get back to Earth. They could stay hidden for a while – perhaps long enough to put this ship's FTL drive and radio out of commission for good. The ship had a lot of supplies in it, and while Mark didn't know where they were, they could perhaps fly to some planet and survive there. He had to disable the ship.

As Mark and Joe were quickly forming plans concerning how to hide and what they could do to ruin the ship's FTL drive for good a voice suddenly spoke over the intercom. The voice addressed the Starmen, noting that they had somehow escaped from their cell. The voice told the Starmen that their escape didn't matter because they had gleaned enough from the Starmen's personal conversations before the Starmen piloted the ship off the alien moon to learn that the Benefactors were on Mars and from Mars. That is all the Xenobots wanted to know. He had radioed that information to the Xenobots

some hours ago and they had already received it. It would only be a matter of time now before they invaded, and Earth would have no advance warning at all.

The voice further pointed out that if the Starmen disabled the ship they would lose their only chance of warning Earth before the invasion took place. It was in their interest, then, to come out and help them. If they were lucky they might make it back to the solar system and be able to warn Earth of the invasion. It was entirely up to them.

Chapter 12

Mark was flabbergasted. He couldn't believe it, but yet at the same time he could. What the voice said made perfect sense; he wish he had thought of it sooner. He had to take the chance now.

The two Starmen emerged from their hiding place and walked into the engine room. It was as if they were expected: no one acted surprised or pointed weapons at them. The foreman walked over to them and explained to Mark what the problem was, and soon they were deep in a discussion as to how to remedy the problem.

Joe was puzzled: their reaction didn't make any sense. Shouldn't they be upset at the Starmen? Perhaps, Joe realized, they knew that they had already won and for that reason were in a good mood: they had accomplished their mission and outsmarted them all. That was not a comforting thought.

Two days later, Richard Starlight was surveying the scene of the ruined base which was discovered in the heart of New York City. He was vastly upset. The night before, a shadowy man had snuck into the base and blew up a large portion of it. No one had been killed and the portion of the base that had been destroyed was not particularly important, although it had not yet been thoroughly explored, but the fact that someone could come into the heavily-guarded base and attempt to level it with all the SE employees inside was chilling. He believed that only the vigilance of the guards, who had spotted the shadowy man briefly but had been unable to capture him, had prevented the figure from blowing up the entire base in their faces. On top of all this, three Starmen had disappeared and the Peruvian rebels they had captured had refused to tell him what had happened.

"It's bad," he confided to Jesus Madera. "Very bad. We don't know how they were able to capture the Starmen. They were under close guard in Montana, yet they disappeared just like that. We do know that Zip escaped,

and video footage shows him boarding that rocket and taking off – " here Richard stopped.

"And our own radar shows that craft being blown to pieces," finished Madera. "Zip's remains – come to think of it, were there any remains?"

Richard shook his head, explaining that the craft had incinerated when it had hit the ground and that there was almost nothing left of it, save for a few samples that had been tested for Zip's DNA and confirmed that it was Zip who had died. Zip's funeral was to take place in a few days on the Moon.

Richard looked over the base. "What does it all mean, and what was the purpose of it all? I don't understand. Where are Mark and Joe right now? Where are their families? How could everyone just disappear like that?"

Richard wondered if he would ever know; his world was crashing down around him. Richard shook his head and told his men to continue their efforts.

Meanwhile, a shadowy figure *[Zip, of course, but we want our readers to think that it's the bad guy]* was walking down an alleyway in the Aquapolis, deep under the sea and late at night (should make for a great scene!). He figured that would be the last place anyone would look for him. He had taken a high-speed underwater rail line from New York to the Aquapolis; it had stopped at a few floating cities in the Atlantic but he didn't get out.

He knew that he desperately needed to get back into space; he couldn't do very much here but his spaceship was out of his reach. He knew that David Foster's bank account connection to SE may still be open, and there was an access terminal in Aquapolis – one of the few places there was one that wasn't heavily guarded. All he had to do was get into the account and withdraw the money; he could then take a shuttle back to the coast of Florida, purchase a ship, and be off. He hated to think what would happen if he was caught, but he decided to take the risk.

Chapter 13

Over the next few days the Starmen worked with the thugs to repair the ship. Mark spent most his time in the engine compartment, repairing the damage done to the drive's control unit. Joe spent his time in the navigation console, determining their exact position in deep space (the accident had thrown them off to who-knows-where instead of being at Earth) and working out the intricate calculations necessary to bring them back to the solar

system. The Starmen knew that they were being watched, despite the appearance of laxity on the part of the thugs, and knew that they were going to have to come up with something if they were going to escape their clutches.

Each Starman began formulating his own plan. Joe quietly altered a few decimal places in his calculations with the intent that, instead of coming out in deep space, they would come out very close to Mars. His intent was to crash-land the ship in the Martian desert, with the hope that in the confusion he could escape long enough to warn the Benefactors of their impending doom. There was no telling how long they had before the Xenobot invasion began.

Mark's plans centered around placing small hidden devices in the circuitry of the ship that would begin causing problems the moment they emerged from hyperspace. Although they never had a chance to discuss their plans privately, he knew that Joe had something up his sleeve. The thugs probably knew it too, but Joe was the only one on board who was capable of plotting their return path so they were forced to trust him.

Mark and Joe were helpful, but not too helpful. Instead of using their full knowledge they repaired the ship in such a way that it had to be watched every minute. Since they knew much more about the ship than the thugs did they could explain the problem away as a result of missing tools or something. If every hand was needed to watch the ship – including the Starmen – then that meant that fewer people could be on guard to prevent the Starmen from escaping. It was a dangerous ploy.

The repairs of the ship took about a week. As that week was drawing to a close, the Starmen knew that they only had another few hours, at most, before they tried to return home: there were a few more repairs but not many.

Joe was just beginning to get nervous when disaster struck. He was in the control room when sirens began going off. A quick glance at the radar showed what had happened: a fleet of Xenobot ships had emerged from hyperspace! The Xenos were rapidly closing the distance and had already began firing at them. Things were looking very very bad.

Chapter 14

On the moon, a very solemn funeral was being held for Zip Foster.[2] Every single Starmen (with the exception of Mark and Joe, whose whereabouts were unknown) attended the service, which was held in the special graveyard on the moon where all special spacemen or Starmen were

buried. [Our first gathering of all the Starmen! A good chance to describe the sort of people they are.] There were no remains of Zip's to bury, but the service was very moving. [Here is where you put in your funeral message, David!] The attendance was enormous, the room was packed, and the service was broadcast over the entire solar system. Everyone's attention was focused on Zip, and all the important people had come to his service on the Moon. Zip had done a lot for the solar system and his actions were not forgotten.

While the service was going on, action was taking place elsewhere. In the control room of Tharsos, which was in Earth orbit and lightly guarded at that moment due to the intense focus on Zip Foster's funeral, alarm bells suddenly rang, indicating that an unauthorized craft had entered the area. The craft had contacted the Tharsos computers with its own machines and knew the secure access codes, but refused all attempts at voice or video communication, saying that its microphone and video camera was not functional.

The director in the control room frowned. "I don't like this at all. Tell the craft to hold its position and we'll board it."

The operator relayed the message, then got wide-eyed. "The craft is moving, sir! It is moving at an incredibly high speed toward the asteroid. I think it's trying to come in!"

A hectic few minutes followed. A few warning shots fired by the protective fleet around Tharsos went wild, and the director became concerned when he found that the ship was transmitting some sort of signal that was interfering with the nearby firewasps' directional computers ("We can't quite get a fix on it sir; our targeting computer has no data to work with."). As the ship got closer to Tharsos the red-alert was sounded and the protective fleets on board Tharsos was launched. The ship evaded the shots of the protective fleet in a series of slick maneuvers and dived under the asteroid to the back side. By the time the protective fleet got there the ship was nowhere to be seen. Records showed that the ship had not left the area but the most extensive searches could not locate it. *[Zip had piloted the ship inside one of the side entrances, not through the main cavern.]*

Chapter 15

Later that day, after the funeral, Richard held a meeting with the top men of SE and Space Command. The bushy tree that had been in Richard's office (which was actually a Xenobot in disguise) was resting against one of the walls, a fact that Richard thought was a bit odd but he didn't worry about it.

Things were going very badly for them. Zip Foster had been killed, Mark and Joe were missing, and a hostile craft had gained access to Tharsos almost effortlessly. Something had to be done – but what?

The meeting was unfruitful; no one could offer much of a suggestion, except for keeping a sharp eye out – they just didn't have any data to work with.

The meeting adjourned, and Richard filed out. Richard was walking back to his office when a figure jumped out of the darkness. Richard turned, and the figure began running. Richard turned a corner to follow the figure, whom he suspected did not belong there, and as he ran down the corridor he suddenly felt a strange sensation. Looking around, he saw that, somehow, the corridor had not led where he expected, but instead he was at some strange, alien place. Richard turned around and saw a wall directly behind him; the corridor was gone.

A voice called out to Richard. "It's good to see you again!" Richard turned, and came face to face with Zip Foster. Beside him were several Benefactors.

Zip (who was sick and definitely not feeling well) explained that he had survived the ship's crash in New York because he was not on it; he had controlled it via radio, the same way he did the Star Ranger when the Banjoman was after him. Zip did not radio his survival to Richard because he had overheard a conversation in NYC that spoke of the existence of a shape-changing Xenobot planted somewhere in SE HQ. Zip didn't know who he could trust; he didn't want to risk spilling the beans to Richard only to find out that the person he was talking to wasn't really Richard at all – plus, he thought he had a better chance of making it through the enemy's lines if they thought he was dead. Therefore, Zip went into hiding, bought a ship, and flew it into outer space, since his own ship was on Mars being rebuilt. Zip used his Starman knowledge to make it inside Tharsos, where he made contact with the Benefactors and began laying plans – for what, Richard would be informed shortly. Richard had been pulled from the Moon via an ancient technology the Benefactors had just remastered after working on it for two years since it was rediscovered in Return to Europa: wormhole transport. The Benefactors established a wormhole portal in one of the hallways at SE's lunar base. Zip then lured Richard through it, and voila! He was here. A quick scan proved Richard to be a human, and not just any human, but the real Richard.

Zip's family was also on board Tharsos [or whatever we decide]. When Zip escaped he discovered that the families had all been placed in stasis and

were shipped to an empty asteroid in the Belt, to be held for some reason he didn't hear; he guessed that he would have too, if he hadn't escaped. When Zip finally made it to Tharsos he alerted the Benefactors of their location and Zip arranged a rescue. Zip had no idea where Mark and Joe were, and he was greatly concerned.

Richard was then led into another room, where Zip and the Benefactors began telling him their plan. The plan was risky, the plan was dangerous, the plan very well might fail, and if it did and the Xenobots learned what they were seeking then all would be lost, but they had to give it a try.

Chapter 16

Many light-years away, Joe slammed the ship into overdrive and began evasive maneuvers to get away from the incoming fleet of Xenobots. The ship had some weaponry of its own and Joe began trying to use it: he managed to disable a few Xenobot fighters but there were just too many of them.

The thugs, meanwhile, were panicking. Their leader was a mass of nerves. Mark asked him why on earth their friends would attack them like this and the leader explained nervously that maybe they thought this ship was an enemy. Mark was finally able to get from him the fact that the Xenobots did not provide this ship: they stole it from the Xenos and modified it for smuggling purposes. The leader had sold the information regarding the Benefactors to the Xenobots for a high price, but it looked like, instead of holding up their end of the bargain, the Xenobots were going to blast them out of the sky.

Mark shook his head; he could have told them that the Xenobots weren't trustworthy. Still – he had a hard time believing what was going on. What if this was just another ruse – another trick to put the Starmen off guard? The attack came at a convenient time: had it occurred a few days before there would have been no hope of fleeing at all. And how did the Xenobots locate them in deep space, far from any star?

The ship was reeling from blasts by the Xenobot's lasers and sparks were flying. Mark could not take the chance that it was all just a trick: he had to make it back to Mars. He began yelling out orders, telling the thugs to stay in the engine compartment and help them keep the power flowing while he was going up to the navigation console to assist Joe.

Mark made it upstairs and told the thugs in the control room that they were needed in the engine room: every hand on board had to begin

immediate work on the repairs. What was going to take hours to repair before now had to be done in a few minutes before they were blown out of the sky. Mark said that he was going to help Joe avoid the Xenobots just long enough to engage the hyperdrive.

For the next hour, Mark and Joe managed to keep the ship out of reach of the Xenobot ships. Their radar had warned them in time of the danger, and their evasive maneuvers kept the ships at bay – but they were closing in. The thugs radioed up from the engine compartment that Joe could try to launch into hyperspace now and Mark told him to go for it: they couldn't hold out much longer.

With some trepidation, Joe pressed the button that sent the ship into hyperspace.

Chapter 17

With an enormous groan, the ship blasted into a wormhole. Mark realized that he had no proof that the Xenobots would not follow him: he only hoped that they had no way to track ships through wormholes. The ship creaked and groaned and the power meters fluctuated far into the red zone.

After what seemed like an eternity, the ship emerged from the wormhole into deep space. Directly in front of them was the planet Mars, already less than 10,000 miles away, and they were approaching it at a speed of 40,000 miles per hour on a direct collision course. Joe turned the ship and put on all the breaks he could. The resulting G-forces flattened the Starmen into their seats, and they heard more sparks fly and more steel break and give way. Pandemonium reigned.

As soon as he could, Mark spoke up. "All the thugs are in the back of the ship," he said. "Joe, can you crash this ship in the desert? We might be able to escape after all. Head for the SE base at the pole; if we can crash near there we might be able to get SE to pick us up."

"Ok!" said Joe. "We're coming in mighty fast – much too fast! It's going to be a rough, hot landing. Hold on!"

The ship streaked through the atmosphere at a blinding speed. The hull became red-hot and the temperature inside the cabin began rising. The ship slowed down, slowly but surely. Joe knew that the ship couldn't hold together for much longer: he couldn't risk taking another orbit. He had to bring it down, and bring it down now.

Joe piloted the ship down onto the desert, and just at that point the engines finally gave out with a thunderous roar. The ship hit the ground with

amazing force and yet held together. All power went out, although small explosions kept occurring. The last thing Joe saw on the radar screen before they went down was that they were less than 50 miles from the SE Mars Base and that SE had scrambled a host of ships that were heading this way at high speed.

"We can't risk going through the airlock," Mark said hurriedly. "That's at the back of the ship and it's sure to be guarded." With that, Mark lifted a piece of equipment and threw it hard against the cockpit glass. The glass shattered and the Starmen leaped out through the broken windshield and ran for cover.

Joe, with his compad in hand, immediately radioed SE and told them that he needed help ASAP. SE replied affirmatively, and just at that moment the SE jets screamed overhead. Joe breathed a sigh of relief: it was good to be home.

Chapter 18

Mark was seated at the SE Mars base. It had been only hours since he and Joe had crash-landed the ship onto the desert floor. All the thugs had been rounded up and they were in jail, pending trial. For the time being they had all been placed under suspended animation so that they could not talk to anyone – not that it mattered, though, since their findings had already been broadcasted far and wide. Mark and Joe were still holding out on the hope that the radio bit was just a bluff and that no one was told, but they couldn't take that chance. For now, though, they were still going to keep the home of the Benefactors secret, on the slight chance that they didn't know – and besides that, they still weren't sure what was going on. If knowing about Mars was all they wanted, why did they let the Starmen escape so easily? Things didn't add up.

Thanks to Joe's terrific piloting, the ship they had crashed into Mars was in great shape. A crew of SE technicians had taken it to the Mars SE base and were studying it. It had some frame damage that needed repair, but they thought that they could make it fly again relatively soon – and that they could also use it to travel to other stars. The news would have overjoyed everyone if the thought of impending, almost certain doom wasn't hanging over their heads.

The technicians discovered that the ship had on board the special engine that drew energy from the sun via a solar power station (if there had been

one, that is). Mark had seen one earlier in LROM and now, at last, they had one to study.

The two Starmen were talking to Konig at Mars base (Richard had been returned hours after he disappeared, and he hadn't even been gone long enough for anyone to notice his absence, but he was on the Moon and it would have taken him weeks to get to Mars so Konig did the interview). Konig said that their tale sounded incredible, but there was no doubt about it: the ship had suddenly appeared on their radar screens and had obviously just appeared from hyperspace. No one could doubt their tale or the images they brought back with them on their compads. Konig didn't have any idea what the planet was that had been blasted (probably a relic of a previous Xenobot encounter with intelligent life) or the owners of the alien base. The relics they brought back from it (the diamonds and the miniature transmitter and the diamond holding device) had survived the journey and were being studied by SE scientists, and the Benefactors would be brought in to see if they knew anything.

The pieces, Konig realized, were beginning to fall together. Now he realized why they had been kidnapped. He told the two Starmen about the Peruvian base and about Zip Foster, and they were deeply saddened (since no one knew yet that he was still alive). The pieces were falling together; it was a very clever ruse on the part of the Xenobots – but yet something didn't quite add up.

"Did it ever seem strange to you," Konig said, "that the group had no technical experts on board?" Mark said that he hadn't really thought about it. Konig leaned back in his chair and looked into space.

"Something strikes me as very strange about all this. Someone went through great lengths to capture the two of you, bring you to an alien world, and make you think that you were in the future. It took quite an organization to put all that together, and yet look at the mistakes they made! The compads looks obvious – a little too obvious. The problem with the stellar constellations is also obvious. They must have known that there was at least a chance that you'd see through it, but yet they seem to have made no backup plans. They didn't have any experts on board. No one was upset when you escaped, and the Xenobot fleet appeared at exactly the right moment to give you three the chance you needed to escape. It doesn't add up."

Mark's brow furrowed. "What are you suggesting, sir?"

"I'm suggesting that they let you escape! They had hoped that you would fall into their trap, but when you didn't they had a backup plan that involved

letting you two go. You were meant to think that you had escaped on your own and overcome them, but I think that was intended from the moment you saw through their charade."

"But why? Why would they do that? It doesn't make the least bit of sense!"

Konig shook his head. "I don't know; there is a piece to this puzzle that we're missing. We're not seeing everything yet. I think, though, that our enemy has something deeper up his sleeve. Watch your step and be very, very careful."

Chapter 19

Mark and Joe were in the desert, speeding above the desert floor in a fast ship provided to them by SE. Their own ship, the Star Ranger, was still being repaired. It had been severely damaged in LROM and while it was almost complete after two years of work it still wasn't quite ready. SE had taken the time to install a new antimatter drive on the Star Ranger, the first of its kind to be installed on any ship (except for the Spud Peeler). It would make the Starmen's ship the fastest one in the solar system.

The two Starmen were speeding toward Final Ilien. They knew there was a large Benefactor base there and they wanted to get in touch with the Benefactors immediately.

"The Benefactors have got to be told," Mark repeated to Joe. "They haven't been expecting any trouble, but they have to be brought up to date. We don't know where the Xenobots are, we don't know how to resist them, we don't know how to capture them back, we're in a state of serious first-class panic – the Benefactors have got to be told what happened. Maybe they'll have a plan."

"If not," said Joe, "then we could all be dead by nightfall."

"I wish we were on Tharsos," said Mark. "That might have been a better place to aim for. I know we've sent a radio message and will try to contact them, but I can't help but think that that would be a better command center – to say nothing of being an easier place to find and contact the Benefactors! But we're on Mars, and Imlah Taltani (which can be accessed through the underground tunnels in Eagle City just as was done in LROM) is the only Martian base that I know I can find. There's no hope of finding the other one we visited in the canyon; it would take a Martian to find that."

The Starmen landed their craft at the spaceport and made their way to the Lizard's Watering Hole, where they stopped in briefly to get the latest news

from the McTaggarts. Beyond that, they entered into the underground tunnels (meeting the Tunnel People, of course) and made their way into the secret tunnel that led to the Benefactor's base. Mark (having a head for languages) remembered the password that Saadervo had used to open the door, and they opened it and began walking the length of the passage. They did not notice that behind them a group of men were following them, tracking their every move.

After walking a few minutes they came to the small, brightly lit room. There were no ships in the slips, but that wasn't surprising since they knew they weren't expected. They had a feeling that when they opened the portal an alert of some kind was sent to Imlah Taltani and that some Benefactors would be here soon with a ship that would take them down the passage to the ancient city, and they said so aloud. They sat down in the room to wait, but they didn't have long to wait until something happened: a soft bell sounded. Mark got up to investigate and discovered, by means of a display panel in the wall, that four heavily-armed thugs had just entered the tunnel and were walking toward the room. Mark had a feeling that they weren't Benefactors and that somehow, their movements had been traced – which suddenly made everything fall into place: they were deliberately let go so that they would lead the Starmen right where they wanted to go!

Chapter 20

Mark and Joe were armed, and they positioned themselves to take advantage of the situation. When the men entered the room, the Starmen jumped them. A brief fight ensued, and before they knew what hit them the four thugs were on the floor moaning in pain. The Starmen found a way to secure them, and after a while one of them (the leader) started talking.

The leader told them that they were too late to warn anyone; while they had him captured they had lost the war. There were Xenobots not too far away and they had tracked him into this tunnel, just as he had tracked the two Starmen, and now that they knew how to access the Benefactor's base they would immediately dispatch a force to do so. Within minutes a force of Xenobots would invade the compound and there wasn't a thing the Starmen could do about it. The massive Xenobot fleet was being readied for the invasion, and in a few days a massive fleet would appear inside the solar system – a fleet Earth could never hope to resist. All that was delaying it was

this last attempt to destroy that one important item the Benefactors had, and once that was gone the invasion would commence.

The man explained that what he really wanted all along was not to know that the Benefactors home was Mars – he had suspected that after the Starmen's previous adventure with the Banjoman. He needed to know where on Mars they were located in order to find that weapon and wipe it out. He explained that the Benefactors had found a way to nullify the Xenobot's solar power source, and since they depended on it they had to get rid of it before they could invade.

The group had kidnapped the Starmen and implanted tracking devices in them. Zip had gotten away before they could do that to him, but they managed to shoot him down as he was escaping. The plan at first was to make the two Starmen think that they were in the future, so that when they came back they would spread the word that the Xenobots invaded and make the Martians come out on their own – at which point the Xenobots really would invade. When that failed, they decided to let the Starmen go and use the implanted tracking devices to see where they went when they visited the Ahmanyans – which they were sure to do. As it turned out, though, that was not necessary. The leader had been able to gain access to Tharsos and find the secret out through a Xenobot agent.

A noise sounded, like an oncoming train, and soon a craft appeared through the tunnel. Its door opened and a host of Benefactors came out – as well as Zip Foster.

Chapter 21

Jogren told the others with him to carry the prisoners. While they were being rounded up and carted off, Mark and Joe were briefed. It was explained to them that the Benefactors knew what was going on because Zip had warned them and they wanted to know what the Xenobots were really after – plus they wanted to lure them out of hiding. The Xenobots were hoping to catch the Benefactors off-guard, but that wasn't going to happen: they had been warned and were prepared. Fighting them off directly would mean the start of war between the Benefactors and the Xenobots, but it could not be put off any longer. The age of hiding was over: it was time to come out and fight.

When a Xenobot force came out of the Asteroid Belt a while later, a fleet of ancient starships owned by the Benefactors – and led by a rearmed Tharsos – met it in space. A fierce battle ensued, and the Xenobots were put to the worse. They were chased all the way back to their hideout in the Asteroid Belt. The Benefactors overwhelmed the Xenobots, who escaped into hyperspace and left their base behind. Upon landing, it was taken custody of and examined, and much would be learned from it.

Chapter 22

The three Starmen, who had accompanied the Benefactor's expeditionary force to fight the Xenobots, were at the Xenobot's asteroid base talking with them. The small presence of Xenobots that were based in the Asteroid Belt had been driven out (although it was thought there were still more around, especially in the neighborhood of Neptune), but at a high cost: the Benefactors had come out of hiding and without question a full Xenobot invasion would begin soon. They didn't know how long it would be before it began, but it wouldn't be long, and when it came the consequences would be devastating.

The Benefactors at one time did have a weapon that could seriously disrupt the Xenobot's solar power station, and that – along with Tharsos – was instrumental in their first victory. The secret to that weapon, though, was locked away somewhere in their vast archives, and the people who knew how it worked were in suspended animation. They could be awoken, but it would take years to do so and more years to build and test the device, and they did not have years – at most, they had a few months.

The Starmen were upset. They had been expecting the invasion in a number of years, not in a number of months; what could possibly be done? Jogren acknowledged that it looked hopeless; they didn't have enough time to awaken their people, rebuild Mars, or even transfer technology to Earth for Earth to use in a new fleet of battleships. An entirely new plan would have to be formed; the problem would have to be tackled not by brute force, as they would have done before, but by cunning and wisdom. Earth now had the ability to get at the Xenobots: maybe they could find a way. The Xenobot's Achilles heel was their solar power technology: everything depended on it, and if there was a weakness it would be there.

Joe asked Jogren about the planet they had been taken to earlier. Jogren said that it was most likely a Lucian base, judging from the pictures that had been brought back – and the Lucians were the ancestors of the Xenobots.

Book II: The Starlight Maneuver[8]

[possible cover scene: Starlight Academy in the South Pacific, a beautiful floating island!]
[It should be explained in the forward or something that this is a direct continuation of the story that was began in book six.]

Chapter 1

A great council was being held on Tharsos. Present was Richard Starlight, leader of SE; Robert Nolan, leader of NME [feeling much better but still trying to rebuild NME], the Rock, Richard's assistant; the President, leader of Earth; commander John Lewis, leader of Space Command's armed forces; Jogren and Saadevro, leaders of the Benefactors; the Janitor of the First Races; and Steven Hoshino, for technical advice. The three Starmen were also there since they had been intimately involved in the conflict between the Benefactors and the Xenobots. The goal was to bring together the leaders of the solar system to decide what to do about the encroaching Xenobot menace. Everyone knew that the invasion was just months away, at most; the council had to find something to do about it.

The Janitor was an odd man. He was tall, and very old; he had been born near the dawn of time and remembered the First Days. He was dressed in a long red robe and had a long white beard, which came down to a nice point. He was not a member of the Elders of the First Races, but had been their janitor, sitting in on their meetings and cleaning up after they had left. He was the only member of the First Races still in the galaxy; all the others had left after the First War against the Lucians. He had remained behind to maintain their planets, in the hopes that one day they would return. Zip had talked with him before the meeting started and learned all of this then. [This description of him is important; it is a reference/tribute to another series I enjoyed.]

The Benefactors said that the strength of the Xenobots was great; they had bases in tens of thousands of star systems and could muster an army of hundreds of thousands of ships, each of which was powerful enough to overcome the combined forces of Earth. Mars had not had the time to rebuild, and while they had a few powerful ships mothballed on Mars, they did not have enough, even with Tharsos, to overcome an army of Xenobot proportions.

[8] This is the book that eventually became *The Heart of Danger*

Since they could not overcome the army, and since they could not possibly sabotage bases in ten thousand star systems, their only hope was to somehow keep the Xenobots out of the Solar System. The Xenobots depended on their solar power station to feed energy to their ships; it was a technology the Xenobots had developed when they were the Lucians, long before they fell from the supercivilization they had been, and was the only one they had kept since that time. If the forces of Earth and Mars could keep them from building that station, all would be well. Earth, then, should concentrate on monitoring space around the sun and making sure that no solar power station was created. The Benefactors had detailed information on how the stations worked and knew roughly where they had to be located.

The Janitor spoke up and said that there was another alternative, and one that was more likely to work. The Janitor said that he had been looking at the crystals that Mark and Joe had returned from what must have been an ancient Lucian base, and he said that they were very versatile machines; during the First War (which took place near the dawn of time) they had been used as a sort of hyperspatial wall, to keep enemy vessels from traveling though hyperspace into their realm. The device worked by distorting and disturbing hyperspace to where a reliable wormhole could not be established; the crystals were used to generate the interference. Dr. Steven Hoshino, the fellow who had made the gravity detectors in TRA, was given the assignment of looking into building such a device from the crystals, and the Janitor said that he would try to see if he could find any scientific documents from the ancient days that could help him. Hoshino also said that his men were studying the method the ship Mark and Joe had captured used to retrieve power from the orbital solar station, and said that there might be some possibilities there.

In the end, after much debate, a course of action was decided. The Janitor was going to look for documents to help Hoshino. Hoshino was going to examine building a 'wall in hyperspace,' examine the crystals for other uses, and continue studying the ship Mark and Joe had so brilliantly captured. Earth was going to work secretly with Mars to get as many ancient Martian ships working as they could.

A spy team was being sent to the Xenobot home world, via the pirate network Zip had managed to crack [make a reference here to a book entitled 'Xenobot Infiltration' – an in-between book that goes between book six and seven!], to gather information. The paramount question to be answered: all information that could possibly be gathered was to be gathered about the Xenobot solar power stations. In the meantime, caution had already been

thrown to the wind; since the Xenobots knew about the Benefactors there was no reason for them to stay in hiding, so they were beginning to work with Earth more publicly – but they were still staying out of the public eye due to all the difficulties widespread public knowledge of their existence could cause.

All was not hopeless; they still had a chance. The key was to get the war fought on their terms – terms they could win on – and that meant fighting the Xenobots at their weak point: the solar power station.

The Xenobot spy in SE HQ was booted, by the way, and Richard was given an ancient Benefactor device that could identify nearby Xenobots.

The invasion was likely to come, but it would take some time – how much time, they didn't know exactly, but they would try to send out some spies and find out. The invasion could be as far off as a year or two or as close as next week; they just didn't know. The Benefactors said they had done very little scouting of Xenobot territory; they mostly had just tried to mislead them – but they would send out some forces and see what they could discover.

Before the meeting broke up, someone mentioned the greegles – what about them? The Benefactors said that they didn't have a lot to do with the affairs of those around them, but it would be worth a try to go and contact them. Adamant was a long way from Tharsos, but the Benefactors could use their wormhole transporter to transport them from Tharsos to Final Ilien, and from there they could take a ship out. It would mean a delay for the Starmen, but since the greegles were incredibly powerful and resisted the Xenobots during the last war then it was worth talking with them.

Chapter 2

The three Starmen are transported via the wormhole transporter device to Final Ilien. Their spaceship the Star Ranger was docked at a spaceport orbiting Earth, so they took another fast ship (which was already sent and was waiting for them at Final Ilien) out to the Asteroid Belt. They contacted Montezuma Vly and found out that George St George was with him at the moment; he invited them to come on and visit him and so they did.

Vly wasn't sure if the greegles would be cooperative or not. He did get the greegles willing to talk with the Starmen, and the Starmen set down on Adamant to talk with the little metal creatures. The discussion wasn't very fruitful: the greegles just weren't willing to help out. They were on a mission to record scientific knowledge and historical events, and they had been set

out on that mission by the First Races themselves; they weren't going to interfere with history, they were just going to record it.

Besides, they said, the Xenobots were not a threat; they had been decaying for thousands of years and in 187.63 years they would cease to be a sentient species and would no longer be a civilization at all. If Earth could just stay out of their way they would collapse of their own accord. They had fallen a great deal since they were the Lucians, the greatest civilization in the galaxy…

The Starmen realized that they weren't going to get any help from these creatures, so they said fairwell to Vly and George St George and headed back to Mars, where they went to Final Ilien and (after saying farewell to the Teagardens and the Boones) went back to Tharsos.

Chapter 3

The Starmen are flying toward Starlight Academy to attend a gathering of all the Starmen. Starmen are not usually soldiers, but they did represent the best and brightest that the solar system had to offer and in this case they were being called upon to defend the solar system. They were going to have a meeting together to decide how they could best help and where they could best be used. A meeting of all the Starmen was a rare thing.

The Star Ranger had been repaired and was in beautiful shape: she was faster than ever and handled better than the old craft. Since the old craft had survived and was still able to fly when it had been overhauled, the Starmen decided to keep the old name.

The Starmen landed at the Starlight Academy spaceport after a beautiful flight over the ocean and met a number of colleagues and old teachers (such as Dr Dukas, who Joe referred to in AOM), including the Starlight children, who had just returned from a mission to the Outer Planets (they had rematerialized about a year before this book started). They walked through the Academy, remembering what it was like when they attended it a few days ago and reminiscing about events that had happened during their training. The mood was not one of fear of impending doom but of courage: hope was building that the solar system was going to overcome the encroaching menace. The Xenobots would not find it easy to establish a solar power station; Earth already knew that with Tharsos they were able to keep ordinary Xenobot ships at bay. In order to invade the Xenos needed that solar power station, and the Xenobots no longer had a force in the solar system with which to do it.

Early the next morning the Starmen attended the great meeting. Since they were some of the only Starmen who had dealt personally with the Xenobots and the Benefactors, they gave a presentation and talked about the threat. It was decided to break the Starmen up into a number of groups, based on personal experience. Some were given the task of aiding Earth in guarding the Sun and keeping it free of solar power stations. Another group was given the task of watching the Asteroid Belt and other areas and making sure that the Xenobots did not secretly enter the solar system and reestablish a presence. Others were given the task of working with Earth and the Benefactors to establish a defense network. Another squad was going to use the new wormhole technology to infiltrate the Xenobot star systems and act as spies to find out all they could about the solar power transfer technology – plus anything they could discover about the invasion plans and timing.

After the meeting, the group broke up and left to begin work. Zip, Mark and Joe were going to all be on the team that infiltrated the Xenobot star systems because they had dealt with them before and had experience: some Benefactors (who had also been at the conference) were going to join them. The Starmen were a team of seven people that were going to infiltrate the Xenobot star system; the other four members were two Benefactors whom they had not met before, Yancy Dufaure (a new Starman), and Kathryn Mullaney, the female Starman that Zip had ran unto during TRA.

They began their training right there at Starlight Academy; they would need a lot of training in some of the Benefactor's cloaking technology as well as in undercover techniques. Since the Starmen had not acted as spies before, they weren't taught in covert techniques, but they were going to have a crash-course.

In other parts of the university, work had begun on using the crystals to establish a hyperspatial shield. It was tough going because so little was known about them; SE's top scientists were investigating the crystals, the Janitor was looking for more information, and the Benefactors were searching their archives but so far little had turned up. Lots of work was being done on a host of fronts to combat the encroaching menace.

[Note: David, from this point on building a timeline might help!]

Chapter 4

Four days had passed. In those four days, the Starmen learned that all sorts of things had gone on: SE had (at enormous cost) seriously ramped up production of fighter spacecraft (not to combat the Xenobot horde, but to combat any normal Xenobot fighters that might enter and try to establish a presence by which to build the solar power station), a defense network of satellites to guard the Sun was under construction, and all the Starmen had completed their crash-courses (which were too short but time was of the essence – no one knew how much time they had) and scattered throughout the solar system by way of the wormhole transporter nexus on Tharsos. Tharsos was being used heavily these days: since it could travel faster than light it was being used to transport urgently needed people and materials. It would take two weeks before the Sun's new satellite defense network was completed (which was being manufactured off Mercury under difficult conditions; Mercury was chosen because SE had a small base there and because it was so close to the Sun that they didn't have to spend another five weeks to get the craft to the Sun after they were built) and another week to fully deploy it. A fleet to guard the Sun was on its way; ships were on their way from Earth, the Asteroid Belt, and Mars. The first ships would get there in three weeks, the same time that the defense network was deployed; over the next couple months more ships would arrive. A month from now the first new warcraft from SE would roll off their production lines in the asteroid; they would be deployed throughout the solar system where they thought it was best to place them.

The past two years since LROM ended had seen great strides in engine propulsion. The antimatter engine that had been used in AOM was appearing in the new warcraft SE was building, and that tremendously cut down on the time to travel throughout the solar system. It wasn't nearly good enough to counter the FTL ships the Xenos had, but it was a step in the right direction. Since antimatter was still scarce, despite the production rigs SE had built that surrounded the sun, a number of ships were using other new, innovative drives such as the one featured in the craft that took the Starmen to JTP.

There was some concern about SE's fleet of warcraft that they were building. *[This issue has been raised by our readers and we do need to address it. We may need to simplify this a bit but I wanted to fully address it here; maybe a public meeting or something in the book could deal with this issue.]* The public, of course, had been informed about the entire situation and was ramping up for war, and many good people worried that SE's

ownership of very powerful starships armed with hyperatomic and antimatter warheads was a bad thing. SE would shortly have more firepower in space than all of Space Command put together. SE was building them because they had the know-how: no one could built spacecraft the way SE could, and they had long been the major supplier for Space Comamnnd. SE had also long had a small fleet of its own, which it had used to guard against rogue pirate attacks in the Asteroid Belt and things of that nature; since it was a large interplanetary organization the public had gotten used to the idea that they would have a few weapons, but now the concern grew serious.

Space Command simply did not have the budget to purchase all the ships SE was building (military budgets had been very small until AOM happened, and even after that politicians had been slow to raise them), and SE was too powerful for the government to simply commandeer the craft. SE manufactured its spacecraft in the asteroid belt, away from any real political jurisdiction; they owned the asteroids they built the craft at. There was also the sticky issue of who would own the craft: would it be Mars or Earth or the Moon, and what about the Benefactors?

SE pointed out that if they lost this war, nobody would be around to complain and the issue would be moot. If they won the war, then the ships would be gradually sold to Space Command and the others would be converted to some other type of craft. For now, a large and powerful fleet was left under the control of Richard Starlight because he was trusted: all the various jurisdictions trusted him and did not trust each other, and they knew he was capable. People still wondered if Richard would really disband his army once the war was over, but they left it at that.

Tharsos was also being overhauled and prepared for use. The Benefactors called it the Xenobot's bane, and so it was: it would definitely be seeing use in this war, but much needed to be prepared before it could be flown and used in battle again.

Work had begun on the hyperspatial shield with what limited knowledge SE's scientists had been able to gather from the Benefactors and the Janitor. The lab work was being done in SE's base in North Africa, where hyperspatial experiments had been going on for quite some time. [This base is the same one where the Polaris is constructed in the book Project Orion.]

So far no new Xenobot ships had been detected, but they knew that wouldn't last.

Chapter 5

The Starmen and the rest of their team gathered together their gear and were loaded on-board Tharsos, since all the training they had time to receive had ended. Tharsos was still not ready to be flown, but it was getting there: the SE crew on it was being evacuated and the Benefactors were getting it ready to fly again. They estimated that in a week they would be able to leave. During that week they stocked the ship with supplies and the Starmen spent that time studying with the Benefactors and learning all they knew about the Xenobots.

The Benefactors had sent out some probes to find out all they could about the star systems the Xenobots had control of, but it would take several months before they returned due to the vast distances involved between the solar system and the territory controlled by the Xenobots. They would not wait for that information to return but instead would set out in a week after the probes; they would receive the information in deep space not far from Xenobot territory and would make their battle plans there.

There were an enormous amount of SE scientists and other personnel on-board Tharsos, which at the time was in Earth orbit, examining and studying the craft. When Tharsos was preparing to leave, all those personnel were evacuated; the Benefactors didn't want to bring any extra personnel along on what was going to be a dangerous and hazardous journey. The FTL drive in Tharsos hadn't been activated and used for decades, and there were all sorts of ancient systems that were going to be reactivated for the first time since the Xenobot-Benefactor war.

There were a few problems that they ran into when they started up the asteroid and got it sailing again, but they were able to overcome them.

When Tharsos left Earth orbit a week later, the Starmen were surprised to find out that they were headed for Titan. The Benefactors explained that they needed to pick up something very important there, and they didn't want word of it to leak out before they were ready. The journey to Titan would only take a couple hours (some of which was spent getting into space away from traffic so they could make the jump through hyperspace) and since they were underway they explained.

As the Starmen knew, Tharsos was missing a very important part – the 'key' to Tharsos. While some of the systems would work, other powerful systems seemed to be missing a critical element. The Benefactors explained that when they hid Tharsos in the asteroid belt they took a certain large

memory core that held information regarding the operation and control of the ship's long-range hyperspatial jump system and weapon systems and hid it on a certain well-hidden and protected base on Titan. This was to guard against Tharsos being seized by an enemy power and used to level star systems: without that key the damage they could do was limited.

Tharsos arrived at Titan without incident, and they set down at Elijah Base. The Benefactors proceeded to go outside; they took a shuttlecraft and headed out alone into the gloom. Zip wanted to go with them, but the Benefactors said that until the Xenobot menace was removed it was better if they kept some secrets to themselves. They were going to retrieve the key in the craft and bring it directly to Tharsos, and once that was done they would return and pick up the Starmen. It would take them around three to four hours to retrieve the key.

Zip took some time, while they were there, to visit Kristina Bethany, who was there and was surprised to see him. He also visited Jack and Jill, who were at home at the time. Jack and Jill immediately wanted to go along, and when the Benefactors returned after successfully retrieving the key they agreed to take them, saying that they might prove useful. They did prove useful in doing errands and repairing equipment on board Tharsos and things of that nature, but they didn't actually go on any away missions.

Deep inside the planet Uranus, a Xenobot warlord sat in hiding with his own band of Xenobot troops. He had thought that it would be a good idea to establish a secret presence inside the solar system – at a place the Earth people could not get at due to the planet's terrific gravity – and he was right. He was an ambitious Xenobot, and thought that if he could establish that solar power station, he could use it to rise in the Xenobot chain of command and show up the lax generals who had allowed the Xenobots to be cast out of the solar system. When Tharsos (the bane of the Xenobots) left, he thought that the time was at hand to launch a force and establish the station. He told his soldiers to begin preparations to launch a cloaked fleet to the Sun; they would arrive in three weeks, and Tharsos would not be back for at least five.

Chapter 6

Two months passed. Tharsos was in deep space, tens of thousands of light-years away from Earth and not near any star system. Tharsos traveled in jumps: they would make a jump through a wormhole, in which they would travel for a few weeks, and then they would leave it and remain outside for a

few days while they recalculated and prepared another wormhole. The Benefactors explained to Zip that Tharsos, due to its immense nuclear power plant, could create wormholes a thousand light-years long, but no longer; once a wormhole was exited they had to take the time to create another one, and that took time: specifically, the larger the wormhole the more time it took. It was a tricky thing to make one and it had to be done right, otherwise the consequences could be severe and they might not make it through.

They did receive news regularly from Earth over the tachyon transmitter (RTT), one of which had been installed on Tharsos. The defense of the solar system was shaping up well: the defense network around the sun had been established, a new fleet from the asteroid belt had arrived and joined the Space Command ships to guard the sun, a space station was under construction around the sun to monitor it and defend it, and ships were being scattered around the solar system at strategic points to keep an eye out for Xenobots.

The Benefactors had also taken some of their powerful FTL warships out of storage and were teaching talented Starmen and Earth pilots how to fly them. The Benefactors were short-handed: they had in suspended animation millions of highly-trained individuals, but it would take years to revive them. The process had begun, but they knew that the war would come before they were awake, and so they trained Starmen in the use of their equipment.

A waiting game had begun, and the eyes of the solar system were on Tharsos and what it might discover.

It was at this time that Tharsos received information from the deep-space probes and other preliminary forces they had sent out. The details were understandably sketchy, but the information was helpful and chilling all the same. It turned out that the Xenobot home world was still a year's journey away, even at the speed that Tharsos could travel via its wormhole drive, but the Xenobots had been amassing forces at a certain star system a week's journey from Tharsos' current location for two years now. It seemed that ever since LROM, the Xenobots had become very suspicious of Mars and had spent immense energy drawing all its forces together, arming them, and amassing them at a group of star systems that was only two months' journey away from Mars. The force was incredibly immense.

Rather than try to tackle that star system, the people on Tharsos decided to go to a system close to it that had a Xenobot garrison and a solar power station but that was lightly guarded – a minor star. They hoped to gather information there that would prove critical to Earth's defenses.

On board Tharsos a few days later, Tharsos arrived at the outskirts of a small Xenobot star system. This system was picked because it had an Earth-type planet in it, which had been terraformed long ago by the Lucians. The planet was covered in ruined cities, cities that were once inhabited but were emptied during the First War and were then forgotten about and left to crumble. [This city is a terrific place to show what the Xenobots had once been but were not any more]. There were some Xenobot outposts on the planet, but not a lot, and there was a Xenobot power station orbiting the sun.

The Starmen were being dropped off to find out as much as they could about the power station. It was tempting to try to use Tharsos to capture it, but the Benefactors had never been successful at trying to capture one: each time they tried the Xenobots always managed to destroy it before they could get it. They thought that perhaps the stations had some sort of auto-self-destruct mechanism in them but they weren't sure.

The plan was to drop off the spy team on the planet and then see what they could learn. Tharsos would remain in orbit at the edge of the solar system (where it would be unnoticed) and would monitor events. After a week, the team would contact Tharsos and would be pulled out, and Tharsos would then either head back to the solar system or form new plans. The expedition was being equipped with enough food to last a month, just in case something went wrong, but they would not last longer than that. The food was a special Martian dish that was small but extremely nourishing.

That night they were going to celebrate and relax; the next morning the danger would begin. *[David, if you want to describe the celebration, go right ahead! I'd love to read it…]*

That night, back in the solar system, the Xenobot commander on Uranus received an encrypted communication from the Xenobot home world about his plan to create a solar power station (it had taken a month for the message to get halfway across the galaxy even by tachyons and another month to receive a response), and it was met with approval. A lot depended on that solar power station: the Xenobots could not invade without it. On the Xenobot's nearby star systems, massive work was being done. Thousands of ships were having their final touches added on hangars on the ground, and hundreds of thousands more were being worked on in spacedocks in deep space, and on a dozen planets throughout the galaxy the scene was the same. A huge fleet was being prepared, and within a short time it would be launched – and the Xenobots were confident that it would win by an

overwhelming margin. They had to have that power station, though: a lot depended on it.

The commander replied that his forces would reach the sun in 14 hours, and he was confident that they would be able to hold off Earth's forces long enough to get the station operational. He had a trick up his sleeve and he thought that he had a fighting chance.

The next morning, deep inside Tharsos, a secret mission is about to be launched. A group of Ahmanyans are standing with a small, select squad of men in a good-sized room. In the room is a small, unobtrusive platform. To the eye, the platform doesn't look special at all, but it is actually a wormhole transporter, capable of transporting whatever object is on it many millions of miles. The device takes a lot of power to run, but then Tharsos has a lot of power to spare.

The Ahmanyan in charge says a few words to the group, and then they are ready to go; they would appear in a small clearing outside the Xenobot fortress and would have to work their way inward from there. With a flick of a switch, space bent, and the group was gone.

Chapter 7

The group appeared safe and sound in the clearing. They were all wearing a modification of the Benefactor's cloaks, but they had on some sort of visors that enabled them to see each other and remain in contact over a series of encrypted frequencies. The group hiked toward the fortress, scanned it, and decided to break up into two small groups (one of Mark, Zip, Kathryn, and a Benefactor; one of the rest of the team) and approach it from some different angles. Their goal was to make it through the base's rather lax defenses to the spaceport and then get a ride on a ship heading toward the solar power station (ships regularly docked and left the station). Once they were on board they planned to use scanners given them by the Benefactors to scan the station, get the specifications, and then leave. They had to be careful though: their cloaks were not perfect and they had to be very cautious about moving about.

Back at Earth, a group of dots suddenly appeared on the radar on the new SE space station orbiting the sun. The radar was the same gravity-detecting radar that had been used to find the runaway asteroid; a net had been established around the sun to detect any cloaked Xenobots. It saw the

approaching fleet while it was still a million miles away from the critical solar-power-station point, and an alarm rang out. A group of firewasp fighters near that area (plus some of the Benefactor's own ships, since there was no longer a reason to hide them) were dispatched by Commander John Lewis (who had been stationed near the Sun since that was the most critical area to defend) to deal with the threat.

Moments later, another Xenobot fleet appeared on the opposite side of the sun. When ships (the fleet of twelve, commanded by Benjamin Bennett) were dispatched to deal with them, yet another fleet appeared in still another direction. The director began to worry: they were fast running out of ships. He didn't understand where this horde could have come from.

To Commander Lewis' horror, he saw that as new Xenobot ships began to enter the radar range they released an enormous cloud of rather large debris that clogged the radar. The Xenobots were also using EMP weapons to wipe the probes out of the void, but the probes had been better shielded and the EMP was having a minimal effect. The director cut in the computer to filter out the debris, and that helped.

On the battlefront, a fierce battle was under way and it went on for a number of hours. As one group would be fought off, the starships would go to another area to assist a fight there. One particular Earth ship commanded by Derf Bors, however, was crippled in the fight and had to stay behind in a debris area while the other ships went to help out another ailing fleet. This ship floated on minimal power while the crews (which consisted largely of the people Derf had worked with on board the Starventure, such as Gray Bennick) worked to try to restore the engines, when its captain suddenly noticed something: one large Xenobot freighter in the debris had not been destroyed but came to life. Large panels began floating out of it and he saw that the construction of something was beginning. When the captain tapped into the battle radar he noticed that the construction wasn't showing up: it was being filtered out by the automatic filter! He realized that that had been the Xenobot's intention: to flood the Sun with distracting fights, release a lot of debris, and then in the cloak of the debris erect their station.

The captain tried calling the main command post, but – like the rest of his ship – his long-range communications had been knocked out. The captain would have to find a way to deal with this situation himself, and he had to do it fast.

Chapter 8

With people feverishly working on the communications unit to find a way to get a signal back to the command post, Derf began working on a plan to stop the Xenobots in their tracks. He saw them out there, working on the outpost, and he suddenly came up with a plan: if the Xenobots could use the debris as a cloak, then so could he. The ship had a shuttlecraft and some missiles: he could load them up in the shuttlecraft, maneuver through the debris (hiding in floating chunks) with the craft, place the missiles around the station, go a safe distance, and detonate them.

So that's what he did. It was very risky, challenging, hair-raising work, but he finally positioned them and detonated them. The station's construction was devastated – halted in its tracks. The resulting explosion showed on the command center's radar, who immediately sent ships out to investigate, and they rounded up the rest. [Ed. note: we'll want to describe all this in a lot more detail, of course; the scene where he floats through the debris field could be very hair-raising and exciting!]

The Xenobots were driven back; those that could retreated back into space and headed back for the Uranus outpost. The gambit had failed; the Xenobots would have to try something else in order to establish the power station they needed so badly.

At Space Command, the Xenobot garrison on Uranus was discussed. The threat at Uranus was different because Space Command had no way to get at the Xenobots at Uranus; the gravity on that planet was tremendous and the winds were fantastically fast and no equipment had ever been built to wage war in an environment like that. SE's resources were currently spread all over the solar system defending it; they had invested trillions in their defense network. With this in view, Space Command didn't want to distract SE from its primary mission of defending the Sun, and Robert Nolan offered to take on the task of finding a way to fight against the Uranus garrison, saying that his men had been doing antigravity and other research for a long time and thought they could handle it. Space Command gave them a free hand at it and NME set to work, and it took them a while but they were at last victorious and defeated the Uranus Xenobots. That story, however, is for another book and we won't go into it here.

[Note: I do have planned out a book entitled Fight for Uranus, and I have a fairly good plot outline for it. I would recommend saying something

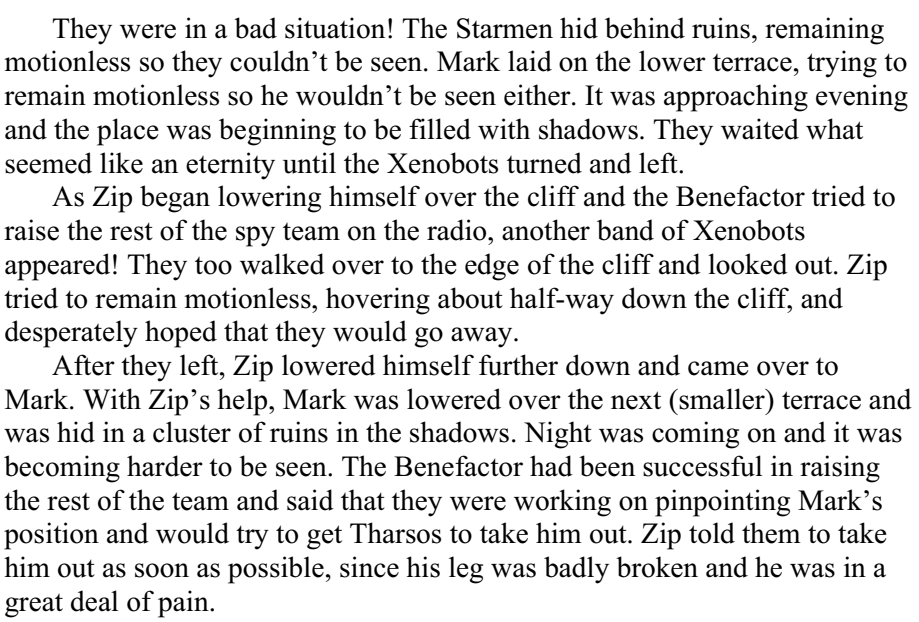
along the lines of what I said in the summary and adding a footnote that we really do have a story for this but rather than shorten it and put it in here, where our readers wouldn't get the full flavor of it and where it would distract from the overall book, we are going to wait and tell that story in a complete volume later on. Thus, we make room for yet another lost tale!]

Chapter 9

Back on the Xenobot's remote star system, Zip, Mark and the Benefactor were walking through the ruined city. It appeared that the Xenobots had established a garrison in a city that was mostly ruins; they had not bothered to restore anything but merely used the city's streets and flat areas.

The Starmen were walking through the ruins when tragedy struck: Mark slipped on a loose, unstable rock and fell over a ledge and over a cliff, falling twenty feet and – in the process – breaking his leg. As Zip looked about to find a way to get down and retrieve him (and move him off to a place of safety) a number of Xenobots ambled up the walk to look over the vista: they had evidently heard something and had come to investigate.

Rather than describe the area, I'll let these pictures tell how things were arranged:



They were in a bad situation! The Starmen hid behind ruins, remaining motionless so they couldn't be seen. Mark laid on the lower terrace, trying to remain motionless so he wouldn't be seen either. It was approaching evening and the place was beginning to be filled with shadows. They waited what seemed like an eternity until the Xenobots turned and left.

As Zip began lowering himself over the cliff and the Benefactor tried to raise the rest of the spy team on the radio, another band of Xenobots appeared! They too walked over to the edge of the cliff and looked out. Zip tried to remain motionless, hovering about half-way down the cliff, and desperately hoped that they would go away.

After they left, Zip lowered himself further down and came over to Mark. With Zip's help, Mark was lowered over the next (smaller) terrace and was hid in a cluster of ruins in the shadows. Night was coming on and it was becoming harder to be seen. The Benefactor had been successful in raising the rest of the team and said that they were working on pinpointing Mark's position and would try to get Tharsos to take him out. Zip told them to take him out as soon as possible, since his leg was badly broken and he was in a great deal of pain.

After Zip stopped talking with Tharsos, the Benefactor, standing on the upper ledge, told Zip to duck – that still more Xenobots were coming, and this time there were twenty of them hurrying along with equipment! Zip guessed that they had somehow overheard part of his conversation – maybe they detected the radio waves, even if they weren't able to pinpoint them or discern what was being said – and they were coming to investigate. Zip was afraid that if he remained there they would find Mark, who couldn't move around very well, so he decided to work with Kathryn to lead them away from Mark. Kathryn and Zip began doing this while the Benefactor stood by, but moments later Tharsos created the wormhole and took Mark out – and boy, that sure got the Xenobots attention! They called out the cavalry when that happened and Kathryn and Zip realized that they were in a bad spot.

Chapter 10

While running away and trying to stay out of sight (Zip had the bad feeling that the Xenobots could see through their cloaks), Zip raised the rest of the team. He discovered that they had found a way into the spaceport, and Zip, Kathryn and the Benefactor dodged through sewers and dark streets and eventually made it close to the station. By this time their pursuers were on their tale and the spy team realized that their cover had been blown. The Benefactors said that they would do what they could to hamper the base's communications and try to throw things in disarray; Kathryn said that he would try to distract his immediate pursuers so that Zip could board a starship.

The Benefactors said that they had a good idea what ship to board: a certain ship had been making regular trips and, from what they could tell, was being readied to make another trip.

The two made it inside the hangar, and while Kathryn was leading their quarry away Zip managed to get on-board the ship. About twenty minutes later (after one of Kathryn's ruses had lost the quarry and she had began hiking back out into the woods to the point where they had first landed) the ship took off and began climbing into the sky. Zip had found a safe place on it to hide; he had some supplies and was just going to wait. He had seen a number of arachnoids walking around looking for something; now he knew where those odd radar-elusive machines had come from.

The spy team decided that it was time to get out of there: they hadn't learned everything they wanted but they had discovered a few things and they knew that their presence had not gone undetected. A serious team would

soon be arriving and a dedicated search would begin. They met at their original point, and Tharsos created a wormhole and took them out.

Meanwhile, Tharsos tracked the ship Zip was on. They watched it clear orbit and head into space – but when it was a little ways into space it suddenly engaged its hyperdrive and vanished – and no one knew where it was going. The Xenobot starship was gone.

Chapter 11

Back on Earth, things had gone very well, as was discussed in a meeting at SE HQ on the moon. The defense of the sun had held: the Xenobots were driven off and were trapped on Uranus, where NME was preparing to wage a campaign against them. Earth put the planet under watch and place a radar network around it. They reestablished their guard around the sun and continued preparations for war.

SE's scientists in their African base continued work on the hyperspatial shield. Steven Hoshino told the group at the meeting (via a video-link; he didn't want to leave the research station for the time it would take to get to the moon) that they had learned a lot about hyperspace and were well under way to creating their hyperspatial shield. The Benefactor's data banks had been very helpful and they hoped to have a prototype of some sort within a few weeks.

On another front, the disassembly of the Xenobot fighter that Joe and Mark had captured earlier was going very well. The group had discovered that the fighter actually did not have a steady link to the power station; instead, the fighter contacted the station over the tachyon band when it needed more fuel. When the station was raised, the fighter became stationary and a very thin wormhole connection was established between the fighter and the solar power station. A stream of antimatter was sent over this connection, and acted as a fuel for the craft; once the craft was fully fueled it terminated the connection and went about its business. The station was only contacted when fuel was needed. More work was going to be done along these lines to more fully understand how the entire situation worked.

During the meeting a message came in from Tharsos; a connection was made over the RTT system. The leader of Tharsos explained what had happened to Zip and that while some information was gathered, the expedition had so far failed. There was some heavy discussion, and in the end they told Tharsos to try to find out what had happened to the ship Zip

was in. If they couldn't trace it, they were to make another attempt to enter a solar power station, and if that failed they were to return to the solar system.

They thought Zip might try to contact them, but since he didn't have a tachyon transmitter on him it would be difficult: he would have to find one of the Xenobot's and redirect the frequency and use it.

Chapter 12

At first Zip didn't know anything had gone wrong, but when they made the hyperspatial jump Zip realized that something was badly wrong and that they weren't going to the solar power station after all. Zip knew there wasn't anything he could do about it and decided to stay calm and see what happened.

The ship made its way to a crowded Xenobot star system; Zip saw that space was filled with an unimaginable number of ships. This must be one of their command centers, he thought. Zip had with him a crude translator the Benefactors had put together for him that could turn the Xenobot's speech/communications into English, and he decided to use it when he had a chance to see what he could find out.

Moving about was very difficult because the corridors were crowded with Xenobots and robots roving here and here. There were starships everywhere: small ships, large ships, ships of unbelievable size. Zip was able to gather that the invasion fleet was being readied, and that there were dozens of bases like the one he was at throughout the galaxy that were being readied to be sent out. The fleet was amassing at the Xenobot's home world, and from there it would be sent out to Earth.

[This is another good place to point out the Xenobot's decay. There were ships here and machines, but Zip soon realized that the Xenobots' knowledge of them was fairly limited. Some machines, when they broke, were just tossed out; the Xenobots didn't know how they worked – they could only manufacture them through some sort of automated process – and they couldn't fix them. Some areas of the base were just abandoned; the Xenobots were either indifferent about repairing them or were unable to do so. They were clearly a race in decline – still very powerful, but dying, just as the greegles had said.]

Zip knew that Tharsos was likely to stay around and try to find him, but he suspected that they would have limited success. He could try to raise them, but he knew that his chance of being taken out amidst the fantastic fleet that surrounded him was pretty slim – plus it was going to be difficult to

access one of those terminals. He decided to try to hitch a ride to the solar power station, do what he came to do, and then see if he could get back. His big concern was food; he only had a month's supply and when that was gone he was going to be in trouble.

Zip couldn't monitor the communications as well as the Benefactors had been able to do it on board Tharsos, but he did see a large station in orbit around that system's large red sun [why not throw in some different type of star?] with ships regularly leaving it. Zip got over to where the hangar was that had ships regularly leaving it and, with some trepidation, boarded it. This time it did take him where he wanted to go! Soon the gigantic station was in sight, and he was slowly approaching it…

Chapter 13

After Zip boarded the station, he did a bit of exploring. He eventually discovered that he was not, after all, at the solar power station; this was something altogether different. It took him a while and some hair-raising near-misses, but he eventually found out what was going on. [The bulk of this chapter deals with Zip's trying to find out what is going on, exploring, finding a way to get food, etc.]

The Xenobots were constructing a gigantic wormhole transporter – that's what this station was. At first Zip thought that the Xenobots had invented it and his judgment about their decline was wrong, but then he realized that the Xenobots had just pulled up the plans for this incredible device on their files they had from the ancient days and were using it. Nowhere was a small version of this machine: there were no small wormhole transporters like the Benefactors had – in fact, this was the only one he had seen at all in Xenobot territory.

Outside was an extra solar power station. When the wormhole transporter was complete, it would create a wormhole leading from the Xenobot solar system all the way to Earth's sun. The wormhole would be fragile and wouldn't last for very long, but it would last long enough to squeeze the station through. The station would thus suddenly appear around the Sun, fully operational and able to fend off any attackers by drawing on the Sun itself for energy. The invasion fleet would then invade and it would be all over for Earth and Mars!

Chapter 14

Zip knew, once he found that out, that he had to warn Earth. He had to get the message there and tell them to get Tharsos over to where he was as soon as possible: Tharsos might have a chance of breaking through the Xenobot's defenses and destroying the wormhole transporter. It would be gutsy, but they had a better chance of destroying it here than they did of destroying it once it was around the Sun. Zip also realized that Earth's days were numbered: how long could they keep the Xenobots out? It would only be a matter of time, but they could use that time to find a way to build that hyperspatial shield – or something.

Zip, through a number of hair-raising diversions and other tricks, did manage to get a terse message off to Earth warning them of what was about to happen. It wasn't easy: he had to tap into their computers, lure the Xenobots out of the RTT room, and send the message; the Xenobots burst in before he had escaped from the room and there was a fight in which he got injured but he did get away. However, warning had been raised: Zip realized that, injured as he was, he was going to have to find a safe place to hide or he was going to be in trouble. He saw a number of airbots fly past, and he knew they were looking for him…

Chapter 15

Meanwhile, Tharsos was steaming toward the great Xenobot star cluster where all the warships were gathered (which was the same place that Zip had been transported to). Plans were being made: while Tharsos did not come armed with a fleet and ready for war, Tharsos could do a lot of damage. They felt that they had the element of surprise; they doubted the Xenobots would suspect a frontal attack, and they might be able to destroy the transporter before it was used. They knew that it would be a risky thing but it had to be tried.

They didn't know if they would be able to pull Zip out or not, but they were going to give it a try…

Zip, meanwhile, had made it on board one of the large spacecraft situated in the hangar. He found a pretty good hiding place and spent all of his time hiding in it, barely getting out. He could tell that the search for him was intense; the Xenobots knew that somewhere they had an intruder and they were aiming to find him. Zip tried to avoid attempting to raise Tharsos for

fear of being detected; he knew that if Tharsos was in the area it would become obvious by the commotion it raised and he would have his chance then.

Chapter 16

The day came when Tharsos did steam into the area. Things were tense as Tharsos sat at the edge of the Xenobot home world's solar system; they armed themselves and made a jump deep into the system's inner defenses. Alarm was immediately raised, and Tharsos began using its power to break through the defenses.

The ship that Zip was on suddenly lifted out of the hangar and flew into space. Zip verified that Tharsos really was out there; he could see it dimly through a small window. He was amazed that he couldn't contact it: he tried to reach it but suddenly realized that his signal was being jammed; something about the ship was stopping his signal from leaving. He could see Tharsos out there – safety – but he had no way to get there.

It was a tough fight, but Tharsos was cutting through their defenses and aiming toward the wormhole transporter. When the Xenobots saw that, they did something very unexpected: they activated it. In moments, the wormhole transporter turned on, and there was a brilliant light; then the solar power station was gone – it had been transported.

Chapter 17

The Benefactors, while listening in on what had been going on, realized that the station had already been mostly completed; they had just been waiting to move the station until after their fleet was in the Solar System. Since the station was being attacked, they thought it would be wise to go ahead and move it.

The Benefactors realized that there was a chance that the station's transport had failed; since the station wasn't quite complete, maybe it had been destroyed in transit. They pushed on and were able to vaporize the transporter (which was just a big machine, not a station or anything), and then turned and left. The entire fight with Tharsos being there only took about fifteen minutes; by the time alarm was raised and the fleet had been lifted off the ground to combat Tharsos, Tharsos was gone.

Tharsos had been unable to rescue Zip; they tried to reach him but couldn't get through. They were heartbroken: they knew he had to be nearby but they couldn't get through the interference.

Zip saw the station vanish, then saw Tharsos vaporize the transporter and leave. He watched all this with a heavy heart: he knew his ticket home was gone now for good, and he had a feeling that the transporter had been demolished too late.

He didn't have long to think, thought: his ship suddenly went into hyperspace, and the entire fleet was leaving the Xenobot home world. It was ahead of schedule, but the Xenobots decided to go ahead and invade with the fleet they had; the other ships would meet them en-route to Earth.

Chapter 18

Meanwhile, Tharsos had contacted Earth and found out that the transfer had been successful; the solar power station had been erected and was in orbit around the sun. Earth's fleet was trying to destroy it, but it was protected by some sort of shield and they couldn't penetrate it. Scientists were studying it to learn what it was doing in hopes of finding a flaw somewhere, but they were at a loss as to what to do.

Tharsos sped back home, sending along word that the Xenobot fleet seemed to have left and was on its way. Earth would have to come up with something fast because an invasion fleet was about to arrive on their doorstep; it would arrive in eight weeks, whether they were ready or not.

Scientists in North Africa continued work on the hyperspatial shield. They thought they had a machine that would work, but they weren't sure; they had no idea how the Xenobot wormhole technology worked and they couldn't be sure that their machine would work on their craft. They hoped it would work but they just didn't know. A lot of them weren't even sure if the device they had spent so much time on was even possible…

Chapter 19

During the seven weeks while the fleet was en-route, Zip spent his time examining the ship he was on, taking readings, and so forth. He had a wild plan in mind; he didn't know if it would work but he was going to try it. Zip

found a way to tap into the ship's communication and FTL system; he thought that he could send a message once they arrived. He only hoped that Earth would have time to act on it.

After the seven weeks had passed, a hundred thousand miles outside of Mars, a gigantic fleet began appearing. As the seconds ticked by, thousands of Xenobot ships poured into the Solar System. The ships held their position in space (relative to Mars) as the fleet grew larger and larger and larger – larger beyond belief.

By this time, Tharsos had returned, and Earth had created the best defense it could, which really wasn't much…

In the heart of Tharsos (which is where the hyperspatial-wall device had been placed), Steven Hoshino was hurriedly working with a group of Ahmanyan scientists to finish some connections on a machine he had been working on. When he finished the connections, he threw power over to the machine and tried to activate it. The machine turned on, but little happened. Steven had hoped that the machine would prevent the Xenobot ships from entering the solar system in the first place by causing a disturbance in hyperspace – something like causing air turbulence that prevents ships from taking off into the air. However, the Xenobot ships appeared to overcome the hyperspatial turbulence generated by the machine (if it really was generating any, and he doubted it; he didn't think the concept of how the device was supposed to work was really understood and knew in his heart that it would take generations to perfect the machine) without any trouble.
That is when Steven suddenly received that message from Zip.

Chapter 20

After a period of three hours, the entire Xenobot fleet had assembled off Mars. The fleet was enormously large, and began moving ominously, closing in on the planet. The thousand ships that Earth/Mars had been able to prepare looked ridiculously small, and they knew it.

When Steve received the message from Zip, he had Tharsos suddenly do a bit of engineering. It took a couple very tense hours, but he finally had what he wanted. The Xenobots were charging their ships after the long journey to Earth; the solar power station was sending all of them power via wormhole connections. Steven's plan was to create a wormhole connection of his own

to the solar power station, and then use that connection to tap into the station's grid. His hope was to get the station to alter the type of power it was sending out to all the ships to something very dangerous and explosive. Steven turned on his machine and began tinkering. At first nothing happened, but then —almost instantly, every power plant in every space ship in the Xenobot fleet exploded, destroyed by the out-of-control power beam.

During the chaos, Zip ran to the hangar, got in a small ship (not powered by a power beam) and flew it out of the hangar. Moments later, the Xenobot ships began disappearing from space; they had activated their emergency power sources and were returning back to the Xenobot home solar system.

Chapter 21

The fleet is cleaned up, the heroics of Zip is rewarded, the Martians come out, and a long period of peace begins. The Xenobots are completely defeated: Tharsos is able to travel to all the star systems they control (a couple dozen) and use Hoshino's machine to wipe out all their solar power stations. The Xenobots are left to rot on their planets, this time being carefully watched. The Benefactors predict that the Xenobots will never arise again, since they have decayed so badly since the last war – plus, they're being watched this time. They are no longer a threat.

A new dawn in the solar system has emerged. No longer worried by the threat of war, a new era of peace can begin. The Benefactors come out in the open and start work seriously rebuilding Mars. The millions of suspended Ahmanyans are awoken (at least, the process is started). With the hyperdrive, the exploration of stars (and old Ahmanyan bases) can begin. It is a new era: an era free from worried of impending invasion. The dawn has finally returned, and the long night is over.

1 By explaining this here, suspense is heightened considerably. If SE finds this evidence (which they don't, because Zip blows it up – Zip realizes what is going on), they are toast. If Mark and Joe make it back to the solar system and tell SE, they are toast too. The reader hardly knows what to root for; things are looking really bad. It's a great situation – talk about suspense!

2 We have to have a funeral: not having one would seem highly disrespectful, and it's a nice touch. Having one also will drive the final nail into the coffin: after a funeral our reader will finally believe that yes, Zip is really dead. It's very convincing. They'll have no idea that the person who took advantage of the

funeral to get on Tharsos is Zip himself! If we make Zip deeply loved and make our readers miss him, they'll forgive us when they get to the end of the book and find out he's still alive.

The Starlight Maneuver (revised version)

A David Foster Starman Adventure

Cover scene: Starlight Academy in the South Pacific, a beautiful floating island!

It should be explained in the forward or something that this is a direct continuation of the story that was began in book six.

Theme note: I would really love to see a theme of constant danger and suspense. The battle is coming, and absolutely everything depends on the successful defense of the Solar System. If they lose this, there is no tomorrow – and the enemy will go far to ensure that they will indeed lose. The prologue is meant to set the tone of the book and give the reader an idea what is coming.

Prologue

In thousands of star systems, countless artificially-intelligent androids worked on countless ships. These androids, built thousands of years ago by the ancestors of the Xenobots, had worked for the Xenobots for generations, repairing their cities, building their machines, and servicing themselves. Now they were building a fleet: an incredibly massive fleet.

The fleet was being built on planets and in orbital space docks, in the heart of star systems and in deep space itself. The size of the fleet was immense: nothing even approaching its size had been constructed since the days of the First Races. Hundreds of thousands of ships, each of which was stronger than anything Earth could build, had already been built and hundreds of thousands more were being built.

The purpose of the fleet was clear and direct: it was simply to wipe out the Ahmanyans and their allies. The Xenobots had underestimated the Ahmanyans once; they would not do so again. In a matter of months the fleet would be launched, and the end of the war would come at last.

There were few Xenobots left – less than 8 million in the galaxy. Their vast empire was an empire of intelligent machines, which the Xenobots used to govern the empty, devastated star systems they held. The Xenobots had decayed to the point where they could not hold on to their empire without

these – but their machine servants were incredibly strong. They could build ships, maintain cities, and act as soldiers. They were very ancient, and very strong.

As a test, one massive starship a mile long entered a star system with three long-deserted and dead planets. Using its hyperspatial drive, it flew from planet to planet. At each one it effortlessly launched one antimatter missile at it, then left just after launching the missile but just before the missile hit. The planet erupted into flame and ash; in a titanic display of radiation the planet exploded. When the smoke cleared three planets were gone – replaced by a very small amount of floating rock and debris. It then went to the star of the system and launched one more device, this one a bit larger, at the star, and then left. Moments later, the star erupted into a titanic flame; it went from a normal star to a supernova, and then began collapsing in an unthinkable burst of energy into a black hole. The shockwave would destroy anything within billions of miles, and the star itself – and everything in that system – would be history, with the devastation spreading at the speed of light.

Weapons like these had not been seen since the war of the First Races, but they had been dusted off. One of these ships alone could devastate a star system in minutes; soon there would be uncounted thousands of these off the shore of Mars.

Chapter 1

A cluster of Ahmanyan scientists are hovering over a still figure. The figure is dressed as royalty and is lying on a complex table of some sort, with tubes and things all over the place. Computer gadgets with scrolling screens fill the room, and status monitors abound. The room is silent – silent with anticipation.

This moment has been awaited for thousands of years, and it has at last arrived. After the fifth Starman book took place, the Ahmanyans began the years-long process of awaking those placed in deep suspended animation. The first one to begin the process was the son of the one who had been their king ages ago, during the first war.

His father had died in the defense of Ahmanya long ages ago, when the Xenobots launched their surprise attack against the Ahmanyans. His son rallied the Ahmanyans and led them to victory at the Xenobot home world. After the victory, he was placed into suspended animation. All the others were already suspended, but he chose to wait until Ahmanya's future was

secure. He was to lie there until Ahmanya was green once more and had been rebuilt, but the times had changed. He was needed once more, to once again lead Ahmanya to victory over the Xenobots.

Awakening him (and the others) had been a long, tedious process. While the science was known, no one had ever been awakened after being in sleep for so long. Everything had to be done exactly right: there was no room for error, and there was no possibility of trying again if something failed. Slowly, over a period of several years, his systems were revived; the pieces began to work again, and the time had come to awaken him. There would be much to explain to the new High King, for the world he was about to enter would not be the world he was expecting, but that could be done in time – if he awoke.

The last piece was put into place, and the last lever was thrown. Now was the moment of truth: they would see if their king would awake or if he was lost to them forever. Long seconds ticked by as they waited to see what would happen. Then, Izmaka's eyes opened, and he spoke.

Chapter 2

Six months later and millions of miles away, a conference was being held. The location was Tharsos, and the time was just days after Mark and Joe had returned with the Xenobot ship and the Xenobots had been driven back from their attempted attack on the Asteroid Belt. The Doomsday Horizon adventure has just ended, and there was no time to waste.

The security of the conference was unbelievable. Armed and highly trained Ahmanyans watched over every level of Tharsos. Tharsos itself had been cloaked, moved out of Earth orbit, and traveled to an undisclosed location. High-tech, miniature robots patrolled the corridors, looking for any unauthorized personnel. The massive power plant had been activated, and the power was being used to generate a hyperspatial shield to protect Tharsos from entrance via a wormhole device. Tharsos was not the only place under a secure lockdown; the entire solar system was on a state of heightened alert.

Entrance from the outside was being carefully guarded: a sophisticated network of sensors could detect particles as far away as a hundred thousand miles that were no bigger than a dime. Even if the particles did not show up on radar due to some sort of cloaking device, their gravity disturbance could be detected. Another rarity: Tharsos was now fully equipped with a wing of fully-armed, advanced Ahmanyan fighters, as well as a wing of Starlight Enterprise fighters designed after Ahmanyan plans. A strong hyperspatial

shield was in place, and after the guests arrived it would protect the asteroid from any unauthorized entry.

Down below, the guests for the conference were beginning to arrive. High King Izmaka and his sister were already on board and had been on board for several days. They were in a separate part of the asteroid, preparing for the meeting. At specific times, the wormhole transporter was used to retrieve the other guests.

First, Richard Starlight boarded Tharsos, followed close behind by Zip, Mark, and Joe. After they were on board John Lewis (leader of the Space Command armed forces) boarded, then Steven Hoshino. Jogren and Saadevro were next, and last was the President. [Perhaps throw in Robert Nolan as well?]

These men represented the leaders of the Solar System. They were gathered together for a purpose: to plan for the defense of the Solar System against unimaginable odds. The course of action they would decide upon over the next few hours could very well decide the fate of all.

They had a little trouble getting them aboard; for some reason there was some interference – as if something was messing with the wormhole connection – and they had to adjust the machine to compensate for it. It wasn't critical, but it was a little annoying. *[This was not interference; you'll find out what is going on in a little bits.]*

After the last person had come aboard, another one arrived – this one by his own accord. The Janitor of the First Races had agreed to come to the council, to offer what knowledge he had toward solving the common threat. Few aboard had ever met him, and having him and the High King there gave the conference an air of solemnity.

The Janitor was very different from the rest of the group. He was tall, and very old; he had been born near the dawn of time and remembered the First Days. He was dressed in a long red robe and had a long white beard, which came down to a nice point. [David, I know you have your own ideas about what he should look like, and I say go with them! They sound good to me.] He was not a member of the Elders of the First Races but had been their janitor, sitting in on their meetings and cleaning up after they had left. He was the only member of the First Races still in the galaxy; all the others had left after the First War against the Lucians. He had remained behind to maintain their planets, in the hopes that one day they would return. Zip had talked with him before the meeting started and learned all of this then.

So the meeting began. It started with some footage the Ahmanyans had gathered from a cloaked satellite a few months ago. It showed a single star cruiser completely devastating a star system: within minutes it had blown up all the planets and collapsed the star in a horrible display of energy. [Refers to what we saw in the prolog.] This sets the tone of the meeting: it makes it clear what they are facing and what will happen if they fail.

It was clear to all that they could not meet the Xenobots head-on, especially armed with weapons like that. Reports from other Ahmanyan probes launched into the Xenobot star systems indicated a massive fleet of hundreds of thousands of ships, scattered across at least ten thousand star systems. There was no hope of building a better fleet for centuries; fighting ship against ship was not the answer. If they tried that there would be no contest.

The only potential weak spot they saw was the fact that they depended completely on a series of incredibly old solar power stations to power all their devices. Without those devices, the Xenobots would have no power, and their ability to fight would disappear. However, even the Ahmanyans at the height of their power were never able to capture a power station – at the one occasion when they managed to penetrate one, it self-destructed. It would take time to learn how to defeat these stations, and time is one thing they did not have.

A thousand feet away, in the central control room, an alarm rang out. The radar detectors had noticed a fleet of four Xenobot ships decloaking ten thousand miles off Tharsos. Somehow, Tharsos had been spotted – perhaps during the wormhole transfer.

This caused an immediate shock. How had they been spotted? They had gone to an undisclosed location and had contacted nobody. They went through extreme measures to make sure they wouldn't be spotted. Why…?

Then it hit the commander. The interference! The Xenobots must have erected some weak hyperspatial shields of their own around the solar system, and when they grabbed people through the shields, all the Xenobots had to do was triangulate their position by figuring out what shields they disrupted and bang: they knew where Tharsos was, at the one time when it held every critical person in the Solar System. They were now going to throw everything they had on it in a bid to kill everybody at once. It was a horrible nightmare. They should have known something was wrong; it had been too long since they were in a war and they had grown careless.

Alerting the conference without disturbing it (those in conference were disturbed but knew they could do nothing to stop it; it must be left to those running the control systems), alarms rang out throughout the asteroid. The commander in charge of security thought a moment, wondering the best way to deal with the threat. Should he send out ships? He decided against it, and instead directed a heavy electromagnetic pulse toward the ships. When the pulse hit the ships, he saw them flee the pulse and vanish back into hyperspace. Each side now knew the other was aware of its presence; now, he knew, there would be a battle – but he would be alert.

Back in the conference, it was pointed out that since finding a way to disable the power stations was their only hope they had to find a way to buy time. If they could manage to keep the Xenobots out of the Solar System, they might have the time to find a potent weapon to use against the power stations. In fact, they had to keep them out: if even one ship made it in all would be lost.

At this point the Janitor spoke up. He mentioned the crystals the three Starmen had obtained from the Lucian base, and said that in his day crystals of those type had been used in a hyperspatial defense system. The Ahmanyans had the ability to defend a small asteroid, but the Lucians could defend an entire star system. The key was in disturbing hyperspace just the right way, so that a wormhole could not remain stable long enough to be useful. The Ahmanyans already understood this technology to some extent; all they would have to do is learn to take this to the next level, and he could provide them with some help in the form of documents.

The peace in the control room did not last long. Soon a series of alarms rang out, as eight fleets of eight Xenobot ships each materialized a thousand miles off Tharsos. The captain was amazed, wondering where these ships were coming from and that the Xenobots had so many ships that didn't depend on a solar power station. A horrible thought struck him: did the Xenobot ships no longer need a power station? He saw (with only mild relief) that they weren't as powerful as those that did need the station, but having to worry about sixty-four of them was something else. The Xenobots were serious.

He realized he had to move Tharsos – this location was no longer secret, and the resistance was fierce. He gave the order to begin charging the ship to make the jump, and also sent out twenty-four Ahmanyan and SE ships to meet the invaders. At the maximum charging rate, it would take roughly

thirty minutes before Tharsos could make the jump; they would have to hold off the enemy that long. He bitterly wished that Tharsos had already been charged and was ready, but they had been so intent on keeping the hyperspatial shield strong to prevent unauthorized entry that they had not been able to spare the energy.

Within moments, a bitter firefight had started outside, with ships blasting each other left and right in what became an incredibly complicated 3d battlefield. The battle to destroy Tharsos had begun.

Chapter 3

Below, in the conference room, the discussion was continuing. Dr. Steven Hoshino said that he could offer his assistance and research teams, and that with the aid of SE, the Ahmanyans, and the documents that the Janitor would produce, he felt that creating a defense shield was a feasible task. It offered the best hope of delaying the battle until they were ready to meet it. He also said that he would research the method in which power was obtained from the solar power station; if that could be disrupted then attacking the station itself would not really be necessary.

In the meantime, more time could be bought by making sure the Xenobots did not establish a solar power station orbiting around the sun. They had reason to believe that the fleet that entered the Asteroid Belt was pretty much all the Xenobots had that did not need the station; they had a much larger fleet, of course, but it had to have a station in close orbit around the sun. All resources possible must be directed toward defending the sun and making sure that station never appeared, and all agreed about this.

The battle above Tharsos was going well: he saw that the two dozen ships from Tharsos were gradually pushing back the Xenobots. Then his blood turned to ice as he saw more warning bells going off: the Xenobots were attempting to penetrate the hyperspatial shield guarding Tharsos, and were making headway in collapsing it!

Now that Tharsos was charging its generators in order to make a jump, some power was being diverted from the shield, and the Xenobots were taking advantage of this. Over and over, a wormhole to Tharsos was made and was collapsed before it could fully form by the hyperspatial shield, and each time the wormhole lasted an instant longer as the Xenobots fed more power into it.

He hesitated, wondering if he should divert the power back to the shields (which would make it much longer before Tharsos could leave), when another sixty-four Xenobot ships appeared, this time behind the ring of Ahmanyan and SE fighters. (The shield did not extend beyond Tharsos; there was not enough power to do that.) The fighters from Tharsos were now trapped between two fleets of Xenobot fighters, and quickly began taking a beating.

The commander looked on helplessly. If only they had the key to Tharsos installed! Then he would have more than enough firepower to wipe out all those ships. As it was, they hadn't had a chance to go and retrieve it, and he was deeply regretting that now. Why had they been so lax? If Tharsos was destroyed now the only real weapon Earth and Mars had would be gone.

He looked at the clock: ten more minutes before Tharsos could make a jump through hyperspace! He had to find a way to buy ten more minutes – but he doubted the fleet from Tharsos that was outside would last that long. The ships, strong as they were, had already begun to take heavy damage.

The commander had noticed that the Xenobots were trying to penetrate the field around Tharsos at specific intervals, so he came up with a plan. In-between one of the intervals (which he suspected were caused by the Xenobots charging a power source to get sufficient power to make an assault), he diverted the power from the shields to get ready a tremendous EMP. After directing his own ships (over a secure channel) to move, he threw the EMP at the Xenobots. With the power of Tharsos behind it, it did terrific damage to the fleet: it didn't knock it out, but it threw it into disarray as the ships tried to get back into order.

Rather than fighting them, he ordered his ships back on board. No one was guarding Tharsos from the outside now, but the Xenobots were more wary: they hesitated to get within EMP range again for fear of having another blast knock them senseless. However, that didn't mean they had let up on their attack; instead, they formed a sphere around Tharsos. Three minutes, the captain thought.

Then they fired – all of them. At a thousand miles their lasers were pretty harmless, but their missiles were not: a hundred and sixty-four missiles were streaking toward Tharsos – then, a minute later, another hundred and sixty-four. The Captain saw that the first barrage would hit thirty seconds before he could leave (though the second barrage would miss altogether), so he powered up the missile defense system (a series of lasers on the surface of Tharsos that could lock on and fry the guidance and ignition system of incoming missiles). It began locking on and destroying them, but there were

too many coming and he did not have a good angle on some of them. He knew that they were all nuclear weapons, and if even one of them hit – …

He desperately tried to move Tharsos out of the way; he fired an EMP pulse, and he disabled many of them – but not enough. With twenty-eight seconds on the clock he saw four weapons approach Tharsos, and when they were five miles off they exploded. A terrific shock threw everyone in the room out of their chairs; outside was an explosion to end all explosions. Warning sirens wailed, lights flashed – and then the wormhole drive engaged and they were gone.

Chapter 4

Dozens of light-years away, Tharsos reappeared – a mess. Four huge gaping holes, each more than two miles deep, were gouged in its surface. As solid as the interior was built, a lot of damage was done: walls had collapsed, some ceilings had collapsed, and the tunnel leading to the interior hangar had collapsed as well. While the jump had been successful, it had blown a lot of circuits and melted a lot of machines due to damage done by the weapons that hit Tharsos.

Thankfully, while there were broken bones and other injuries, no one was killed, and the craters – deep as they were – had not touched the interior. The Ahmanyans had built deep and well; they knew what might happen in battle and built their city at the very heart of the asteroid and did what they could to make it structurally secure. Tharsos would definitely need repairs, though; it was out of action for now, and that was bad. They had been caught off-guard, and shown that even a small fleet of non-power-station ships could do devastating damage.

Hours later, while cleanup was still under way (it would take weeks to finish) the conference was drawing to a close. It was decided that (in view of the recent attack), Tharsos should immediately go and get the key needed to awaken her dormant, incredibly powerful defense systems. Hoshino should begin his work immediately with the other scientists. The Janitor would go find his documents.

While all this was going on, the three Starmen were to go back to Starlight Academy to train the other Starmen in what they knew, as well as maybe pick up a few new things themselves. They would only have a week, for after that week was over Tharsos would be re-armed and would begin a spying expedition to the heart of the Xenobot empire, and the three Starmen

would be on her. It would be a dangerous mission, but it was absolutely critical that the solar system find out how much time they had left until the Xenobots invaded and what weakness (if any) the solar power stations held, and Tharsos was the only vehicle that had any hope of infiltrating the Xenobot star systems. Tharsos would still be damaged when it left, but repairs could be done while it was under way, and they had no time to lose – they had to use what they had at hand.

Just before the conference was dismissed, someone mentioned the greegles. The Janitor said that the greegles were very uncooperative; he had tried to talk with them but they were unwilling to help. All they would say was that the Xenobots were not a real threat; they had been decaying for thousands of years and in 187.63 years they would cease to be a sentient species and would no longer be a civilization at all. If Earth could just stay out of their way they would collapse of their own accord. They had fallen a great deal since they were the Lucians, the greatest civilization in the galaxy. The greegles would be of no help; they would have to do this on their own. This, of course, was no help; they did not have 187 years.

So the conference was dismissed. A course of action had been decided: whether it would be successful was still to be determined.

Chapter 5

The Starmen are flying toward Starlight Academy to attend a gathering of all the Starmen. [Here we can put in a notice about the Starlight logo: it can be on the side of a building or somewhere on campus – big and bold, in a place where our readers can't miss it.] Starmen are not soldiers, but they did represent the best and brightest that the solar system had to offer and in this case they were being called upon to defend the solar system. They had all been called together by Richard Starlight so that the three Starmen could address them and give them an idea what they were facing. At the same time, each Starman there was to be given their own mission, which would be critical to the survival of the solar system. Each had a role to play, and this was their opportunity to learn some background before they were sent out into the field.

The Star Ranger had been repaired and was in beautiful shape: she was faster than ever and handled better than the old craft. Since the old craft had survived and was still able to fly (kind of) when it had been overhauled, the Starmen decided to keep the old name.

The Starmen landed at the Starlight Academy spaceport after a beautiful flight over the ocean and met a number of colleagues and old teachers (such as Dr Dukas, who Joe referred to in AOM), including the Starlight children, who had just returned from a mission to the Outer Planets (they had rematerialized about a year before this book started). They walked through the Academy, remembering what it was like when they attended it a few days ago and reminiscing about events that had happened during their training. The mood was not one of fear of impending doom but of courage: hope was building that the solar system was going to overcome the encroaching menace.

Early the next morning the Starmen attended the great meeting. They were not used to giving lectures, but after being introduced they gave the talks they had prepared and discussed the things they had gone through, what was ahead, what the Xenobots were like, what techniques worked, and which ones didn't. They weren't sure how useful all of this would be to the other Starmen, since they had no way to know what missions were to be assigned to them, but they felt that giving them a lot of knowledge would help regardless of the situation.

Security (which SE was just now beginning to take seriously, and was not yet very good at) was very tight for the meeting, complete with hyperspatial shields, but to the surprise of everyone nothing happened. There were no attempted attacks or anything like that, so they relaxed somewhat. The lectures went well; there were a number of intelligent questions, and after lecturing all morning they broke for lunch (the session was to continue after lunch and last for the remainder of the day).

So all the Starmen filed off to the cafeteria, where they sat down to eat. Since it was crowded, the three Starmen went up to the second-floor balcony to eat, and that is when trouble started.

A fellow dressed in a Starman outfit came up to them, thanked them for the talk, and asked them for their autograph. When he handed them the pencil, he dropped it, and when Zip bent over to pick him up the fellow grabbed Zip, flipped him, and attempted to throw him over the balcony. Zip was caught completely off-guard, and before he was really aware of what was going on he felt himself flying out into space.

Zip reached out, grabbed the balcony railing, and tried to stop himself from falling. The momentum was too great, but he did slow his fall and straighten out; he was able to somewhat control it, and instead of falling he dropped. He hit the ground, and felt a sharp pain in his right angle. Then he saw something else: the fellow who had attacked him had swung over the

balcony himself and was in the process of landing on the ground, drawing a laser, and aiming it at him.

Chapter 6

Despite the pain, Zip darted into the nearest building – the dorms. He knew that security would catch up with this lunatic soon (they were probably already in motion), but he had to stay alive until they did. He wondered who on earth that person was and how he got in; he realized that although he knew all the Starmen, he didn't recognize this fellow, and therefore he probably wasn't a Starmen. His attacker had made a bold move: this wasn't the sort of attack SE was expecting.

His pursuer was already in the building after him, taking shots at him. Zip dodged, sped up, and turned a corner. He knew where he was going, and was hoping he could get there in time – the gym would give him some options, and maybe a weapon to use. He did make it there, but in vain – the door was locked.

The dorm was empty. School was not in session at the time, and whoever was on campus was attending the lecture and was not in the dorm. Zip knew he was in trouble; none of the doors here would be opened, and there were few places to hide. (At this point, maybe 30 seconds had elapsed since Zip went over the balcony.)

As Zip was running down the hall, he broke the glass protecting a fire ax and grabbed it. He went into the stairwell and used the ax to block jam the door; he then opened a window in the stairwell, went out it, and began running for cover down the walkway. His pursuer, meanwhile, was behind him; he had been delayed a bit by the ax but the generous use of his laser had persuaded the door to open. (Perhaps 50 seconds had elapsed since Zip was thrown over; his ankle is starting to kill him.)

As Zip was running down the path between buildings headed for cover, he felt his ankle give way; he had run on it too long and it could not take the strain. Zip at last fell, and went sprawling down on his face.

At this the pursuer drew his laser and prepared to fire, and never saw the SE security guard who was nearby jump him. It had taken them seventy seconds to find this person and get to him, and that had come very close to being too long.

Half an hour later, Zip was in the medical ward having his badly swollen ankle taken care of. It wasn't broken, but it definitely felt like it to Zip. The

person who had been chasing him was in custody; he had taken the place of the custodian that day and had slipped through security. It looked like he had never passed through security; instead, he appeared on campus through a wormhole that was engaged before the shield was erected and since he looked just like the old custodian and had his ID card no one asked any questions. It was chilling to think that the bad guys had wormhole devices; they were clearly working with the Xenobots, and the Xenobots clearly had a presence in the solar system.

It was a clear attempt on Zip's life, and they felt that the Xenobots were behind it: they were still trying to take out what they felt were the leaders of the resistance in the Solar System. Zip had just been an easy, high-profile target. Security was being beefed up, but by this point Zip didn't have fond feelings for the effectiveness of SE security.

In other parts of the university, work had begun on using the crystals to establish a hyperspatial shield. It was tough going because so little was known about them; SE's top scientists were investigating the crystals, the Janitor was looking for more information, and the Benefactors were searching their archives but so far little had turned up. Lots of work was being done on a host of fronts to combat the encroaching menace, but so far they had nothing to show for it but four huge craters in the side of Tharsos.

Chapter 7

Four days later, Zip's ankle was recovering, but he was still definitely not well. During those four days the three Starmen had received a few additional crash-courses: the Ahmanyans had a few things to say about the Xenobots (strengths, weaknesses, and how to deal with them in combat), and while four days was much too short it was all the time they dared to spend.

During those days, the rest of the solar system had not been idle. Tharsos had made the journey to the secret location where the Key to Tharsos was kept and had retrieved it. The key was successfully installed, and now Tharsos was ready for anything: if they were attacked by those same ships again they would decimate them this time. Space Command, meanwhile, was working with the Ahmanyans to defend the Sun and keep it free of any Xenobot power stations. Besides positioning ships at strategic points, they also positioned watches at other key locations in the solar system – and that doesn't even mention the sensor satellites that were released all over the place to keep an eye out.

Starlight Enterprise, meanwhile, was focusing on building more starships with which to fight the Xenobots. The Ahmanyan scientists had been working with the SE scientists to build plans that SE could use to put into production for several years now, and the fruits of these were becoming evident. A new SE facility on Mercury, finished just weeks ago and incorporating new high-speed automated manufacturing techniques utilizing nanobot fabrication, could build a powerful starship of Ahmanyan design in just a few days time. A few more nanobot fabrication plants were being constructed on Mercury (which was a good place due to its high concentration of metals), and more were in the works in other locations around the solar system. All this was running into a good deal of money, but SE was very well off and, for the most part, could afford it. Nanobot fabrication was particularly cheap; it was completely automated and, since nanobots could reproduce themselves, all they really needed were raw materials – and, thanks to Thomas Starlight, they owned Mercury so they had all the materials they needed. Nanobot fabrication had completely changed manufacturing by reducing nearly all costs to nothing.

At the same time that all this was going on, though, SE's new fleet was being discussed in various political capitols around the globe. There were factions that pointed out that the fleet SE was building was fantastically powerful, and that they only had SE's word that the Xenobot threat was even worth mentioning. SE, they said, may very well be trying to build a fleet just to take over the solar system and establish their own rule. Few people listened to them, but they did notice that it would soon be difficult or impossible to resist SE. At the same time, they did believe that the threat was serious, and they knew that they could not afford to pay for a fleet of that size on their own. The issue simmered down, but it did not go away and was not forgotten. *[This issue would become huge in book nine; it's being set up here.]*

So far no new Xenobot ships had been detected, but they knew that wouldn't last. Everyone knew they were just biding their time. All the people in the solar system knew what was coming, and they were preparing: the asteroid belt (where the Xenobots had entered last time) was a virtual ghost town, and people were leaving Mars like there was no tomorrow. The only problem was there was simply no safe place to go.

Chapter 8

The Starmen and the rest of their team gathered together their gear and were loaded on Tharsos, since all the training they had time to receive had ended. Tharsos was ready to go: preparations had already been made and the ship could leave at any time.

Since the conference had ended the Benefactors had sent out some additional probes to find out all they could about the star systems the Xenobots had control of, but it would take several weeks before they could expect to get any data back from them. They would not wait for that information to return but instead would go ahead and set out, using the data gathered from the previous probes: it would be nice to have more information, but they felt that what they had would be adequate for now.

So, without a lot of fanfare, the great asteroid Tharsos sailed off into the depths of space. Its intended destination: the nearest Xenobot-held star system. It would take about two weeks to get there (the Xenobot home world itself was at least six weeks away), and they would use that time to prepare for the mission and to repair the damage done to Tharsos. The repairs that remained would be interior; the exterior craters had already been patched by bringing in other asteroids and using the raw materials from it and some nanobot labor. Tharsos couldn't afford to have four huge weak spots. (They hated to take Tharsos out of the solar system at all, but they had to; it was the only vessel that even had a chance of surviving in the wild of interstellar space.)

One other addition to the journey: they decided to take the Titanians Jack and Jill along with them on the trip. Jack and Jill had volunteered, and the Starmen felt that they could be useful during the mission since they were so small and could easily get into tight places. They had proved useful during the mutiny on Mars; Zip thought they would prove useful now. Kathryn Mulaney was also coming along; she had been assigned to help out on this voyage. Four Starmen were being sent deep into Xenobot territory.

Deep inside the planet Uranus [we're setting up book eight here], a Xenobot warlord sat in hiding with his own band of Xenobot troops. He had thought that it would be a good idea to establish a secret presence inside the solar system – at a place the Earth people could not get at due to the planet's terrific gravity – and he was right. He was an ambitious Xenobot, and thought that if he could establish that solar power station, he could use it to rise in the Xenobot chain of command and show up the lax generals who had

allowed the Xenobots to be cast out of the solar system. When Tharsos (the bane of the Xenobots) left, he thought that the time was at hand to launch a force and establish the station. He told his soldiers to begin preparations to launch a cloaked fleet to the Sun; they would arrive in three weeks, and Tharsos would not be back for at least five. Now was the perfect time to attack; the solar system was all but unguarded.

Chapter 9

Twelve days passed. Tharsos was in deep space, tens of thousands of light-years away from Earth and not near any star system. Tharsos traveled in jumps: they would make a jump through a wormhole, in which they would travel for a few days, and then they would leave it and remain outside for an hour or so while they recalculated and prepared another wormhole. The Benefactors explained to Zip that Tharsos, despite its immense nuclear power plant, could create wormholes only so long, but no longer; once a wormhole was exited they had to take the time to create another one, and that took time: specifically, the larger the wormhole the more time it took. It was a tricky thing to make one and it had to be done right, otherwise the consequences could be severe and they might not make it through. There were stories told of early test vehicles that didn't quite make it through a wormhole and ended up with parts spread over a trillion light-years and smashed beyond recognition.

They did receive news regularly from Earth over the tachyon transmitter (RTT), one of which had been installed on Tharsos. The defense of the solar system was shaping up well: the defense network around the sun had been established, a new fleet from the asteroid belt had arrived and joined the Space Command ships to guard the sun, a space station was under construction around the sun to monitor it and defend it, and ships were being scattered around the solar system at strategic points to keep an eye out for Xenobots. Things were going well, and so far there was no sign of the Xenobots.

Tharsos was headed toward a nearby star that held a small Xenobot garrison and a solar power station that was lightly guarded – a minor star. They hoped to gather information there that would prove critical to Earth's defenses. They were already getting some preliminary reports from probes; soon they would be able to see it for themselves.

A few days later, Tharsos arrived at the outskirts of a small Xenobot star system. This system was picked because it had an Earth-type planet in it, which had been terraformed long ago by the Lucians. The planet was covered in ruined cities, cities that were once inhabited but were emptied during the First War and were then forgotten about and left to crumble. [This city is a terrific place to show what the Xenobots had once been but were not any more]. There were some Xenobot outposts on the planet, but not a lot, and there was an old Xenobot power station orbiting the sun. There were few Xenobots here, but a number of intelligent machines, and some other dinosaur-like life forms. The atmosphere was heavy in neon, and the lightning storms that struck it lit up parts of the planet's atmosphere like a huge neon sign. It was gorgeous, but sinister at the same time. They wondered how the atmosphere had become that way – whether it was natural or if the Xenobots had done something to it.

Chapter 10

The game plan was pretty straightforward. There were four Starman aboard (the trio plus Kathryn), and they were seen as indispensable: there was no way they were going to use them to search for information. The Starmen were irreplaceable and in high demand, especially right then. Instead, the heads at Space Command had cooked up another plan that would hopefully eliminate a lot of risk.

Starlight Enterprise had designed a series of intelligent machines of all sizes – some man sized, some the size of a bumblebee. These could be sent into enemy territory disguised as insects or beasts or something – or even outfitted with Ahmanyan cloaking devices – and could gather information that way. They could even tap into computer networks and download information, for the Ahmanyans knew how to interpret Xenobot files.

These machines could not work via tachyon transmission for two reasons. First, the tachyon equipment could not be miniaturized enough: there was no way they could fit a receiver and transmitter on a dime. Second, even if they could, the Xenobots had tachyon detectors and would immediately notice what was going on. It was far less likely that they would notice radio transmissions: to them they would just be so much more natural electromagnetic radiation. SE had cooked up a good system that was almost undetectable: by using a pseudorandom frequency shifter the signals would just appear to be background noise.

These machines would be sent into enemy territory, and would relay information (both visual and data feeds) to a small command post on the planet, a good distance away from the city. The machines would be mostly autonomous and would be networked with each other, allowing them to act as a unit. They would be monitored and controlled from the command post, and from there orders would be given to the units as interesting tidbits arose. A command post was necessary because, since radio waves were being used, control m Tharsos was impractical: it would stay outside the star system and as such would be way too far away to control anything via radio signals.

The command post would be manned by the four Starmen and the Titanians. They would be located in a forested area and would be in constant touch with Tharsos. The Ahmanyans had plotted the location of the tachyon detectors and had established a relay station outside that range; the Starmen would radio messages to the relay station, and it would beam them to Tharsos. They would send messages once per hour on the hour, and if any danger arose Tharsos would take them out immediately via wormhole transfer.

The mission was to find a way to access the solar power station, or at the very least, the computer systems on it. They wanted to find out everything they could about it so they could study it and find a way to defeat it, in the hopes of using this technique to destroy the Xenobot power base in their own star systems.

On paper, the plan looked good; it remained to be seen what would happen when it was put into practice.

The expedition was being equipped with enough food to last a month, just in case something went wrong, but they would not last longer than that. The food was a special Martian dish that was small but extremely nourishing.

That night they were going to celebrate and relax; the next morning the mission would begin. *[David, if you want to describe the celebration, go right ahead! I'd love to read it…]*

Chapter 11

That night back in the solar system, the Xenobot commander on Uranus received an encrypted communication from the Xenobot home world approving of his plan to create a solar power station. A lot depended on that solar power station: the Xenobots could not invade without it, and on the Xenobot's nearby star systems massive work had been done to get the invasion ready. Thousands of ships were having their final touches added on

hangars on the ground, and hundreds of thousands more were being worked on in spacedocks in deep space, and on a dozen planets throughout the galaxy the scene was the same. A huge fleet was being prepared, and within a short time it would be launched – and the Xenobots were confident that it would win by an overwhelming margin. They had to have that power station, though: without it, an invasion was impossible.

The commander replied that his forces would reach the sun in 14 hours, and he was confident that they would be able to hold off Earth's forces long enough to get the station operational. He had a trick up his sleeve and he thought that he had a fighting chance, especially since there was no way Tharsos could return from its away mission in time to do any good: once the station was established, the invasion could commence and end before the Ahmanyans on Tharsos even heard about it. By the time they returned it would be much too late.

The next morning, deep inside Tharsos, a secret mission was about to be launched. The crew selected to go down to the neon planet below (which was discussed in the last chapter) was in a good-sized room – the wormhole transporter room. In the room is a small, unobtrusive platform. To the eye the platform didn't look special at all, but it was actually a wormhole transporter, capable of transporting whatever object is on it many millions of miles. The device takes a lot of power to run, but then Tharsos has a lot of power to spare.

The Ahmanyan in charge says a few words to the group, and then they are ready to go; they would appear in a small clearing outside the Xenobot fortress along with their equipment and would have to proceed from there. With a flick of a switch, space bent, and the group was gone.

The group arrived without incident, and soon set up a rough kind of camp. Kathryn opened up a small box and let out a swarm of what looked like bumblebees; they were actually networked machines, and they swarmed out and established a defense perimeter around the camp, forming a circle with a radius of 1500 yards. If anything got within a mile they would know about it and would relay the information. Meanwhile, they could remain quiet and undetected, appearing to be mere insects – but more solid and sturdy than any stone. No counter defense network of the Xenobots was detected by the bees, which either meant there wasn't one or it was too good for them to find.

Since anything might fly overhead and spot them, they established camp in the woods. The information from the network and the other machines was being fed to a laptop computer Mark was carrying. A connection was made just fine; they began to get data in realtime. The video streaming technology was working; the frequency shifts were flawless.

It was now time to deploy the combatants. Zip opened up another crate filled with more devices that looked like insects, and they were soon flying off to the city. They didn't bring any larger machines; they would send these out first and see what they would find.

The machines sent to the city seemed to work well. They scattered over the area and soon had a detailed map of the nearby ruined city, which sprawled over a hundred square miles. It must have been a real gorgeous place at one time, but the Lucians had left it long ago and now little was left. Only 14 Xenobots could be found in it; the rest of the population was made up of some sort of semi-intelligent android, and there were thousands of those. They didn't seem too observant, or at the very least, they didn't notice the new bugs.

Each of the six monitored part of the situation. Jack and Jill kept watch over the defense perimeter to make sure nothing hostile was approaching. The four Starmen each controlled a fourth of the insects, via four laptop computers, and guided them on a mission of exploration. They were mapping out infrastructure and wiring and looking for a computer terminal of some kind.

This took hours. In the maze of ruined glass, steel, stone, and marble, there were all kinds of wires, but most of them were dead. There were skyscrapers, but they seemed to be empty or non-functional. They followed the androids, but they seemed to move without purpose, or with some purpose they couldn't grasp. It was as if they had no overseer: nobody was giving them orders so they wandered purposelessly. The Xenobots didn't seem to care.

It wasn't until the next morning that they got their break. One of the group spotted a working data terminal, and they were able to maneuver their bug into position and get it to interface with it electrically. It took a while before they found a protocol that worked (the Ahmanyans had supplied them with the many different ones they knew the Xenobot used, and they had to try one after another), but they eventually hit on one and was soon inside the Xenobot computer center.

Joe quickly found what they were looking for. It seemed that in one area of the city was a spaceport, and the spaceport had one ship that made regular

runs to the solar power station. There were no direct communication links to the station, and there was no information about the power station in the network – probably for security reasons. What they would have to do is get some bugs inside the spaceship that went to the station. Keeping in touch with the bugs would be tricky; they'd have to contact Tharsos and rig up something that could follow the ship and stay in radio contact with it, since RTT wouldn't work and the bugs would soon move out of range.

While they were discussing it their network suddenly started going dead: the bugs closest to the terminal died first, and then the later ones. Open-mouthed, the Starmen watched their entire network die – and then their defense perimeter got hit. Jack tried to shut it down, but it was too late: within minutes their perimeter went down, then their laptops were fried.

Jack yelled that a computer virus had traveled from the Xenobot network onto their bugs, and from there it ate their entire network. He added that it probably also raised the alarm and the Xenobots were likely on their way immediately.

Zip opened his compad and tried to raise Tharsos, but failed. The relay station was gone too – and they had no RTT equipment with them. They were stranded and in grave danger, and had no way to call for help.

Chapter 12

Back at Earth, a group of dots suddenly appeared on the radar on the new SE space station orbiting the sun. The radar was the same gravity-detecting radar that had been used to find the runaway asteroid; a net had been established around the sun to detect any cloaked Xenobots. It saw the approaching fleet while it was still a million miles away from the critical solar-power-station point, and an alarm rang out. A group of firewasp fighters near that area (plus some of the Benefactor's own ships, since there was no longer a reason to hide them) were dispatched by Commander John Lewis (who had been stationed near the Sun since that was the most critical area to defend) to deal with the threat.

Moments later, another Xenobot fleet appeared on the opposite side of the sun. When ships (the fleet of twelve, commanded by Benjamin Bennett) were dispatched to deal with them, yet another fleet appeared in still another direction. The director began to worry: they were fast running out of ships. He didn't understand where this horde could have come from.

To Commander Lewis' horror, he saw that as new Xenobot ships began to enter the radar range they released an enormous cloud of rather large

debris that clogged the radar. The Xenobots were also using EMP weapons to wipe the probes out of the void, but the probes had been better shielded and the EMP was having a minimal effect. The director cut in the computer to filter out the debris, and that helped.

On the battlefront, a fierce battle was under way and it went on for a number of hours. As one group would be fought off, the starships would go to another area to assist a fight there. One particular Earth ship commanded by Derf Bors, however, was crippled in the fight and had to stay behind in a debris area while the other ships went to help out another ailing fleet. This ship floated on minimal power while the crews (which consisted largely of the people Derf had worked with on board the Starventure, such as Gray Bennick) worked to try to restore the engines, when its captain suddenly noticed something: one large Xenobot freighter in the debris had not been destroyed but came to life. Large panels began floating out of it and he saw that the construction of something was beginning. When the captain tapped into the battle radar he noticed that the construction wasn't showing up: it was being filtered out by the automatic filter! He realized that that had been the Xenobot's intention: to flood the Sun with distracting fights, release a lot of debris, and then in the cloak of the debris erect their station.

The captain tried calling the main command post, but – like the rest of his ship – his long-range communications had been knocked out. The captain would have to find a way to deal with this situation himself, and he had to do it fast.

Chapter 13

With people feverishly working on the communications unit to find a way to get a signal back to the command post, Derf began working on a plan to stop the Xenobots in their tracks. He saw them out there, working on the outpost, and he suddenly came up with a plan: if the Xenobots could use the debris as a cloak, then so could he. The ship had a shuttlecraft and some missiles: he could load them up in the shuttlecraft, maneuver through the debris (hiding in floating chunks) with the craft, place the missiles around the station, go a safe distance, and detonate them.

So that's what he did. It was very risky, challenging, hair-raising work, but he finally positioned them and detonated them. The station's construction was devastated – halted in its tracks. The resulting explosion showed on the command center's radar, who immediately sent ships out to investigate, and they rounded up the rest. *[Ed. note: we'll want to describe all this in a lot*

more detail, of course; the scene where he floats through the debris field could be very hair-raising and exciting!]

The Xenobots were driven back; those that could retreated back into space and headed back for the Uranus outpost. The gambit had failed; the Xenobots would have to try something else in order to establish the power station they needed so badly.

At Space Command, the Xenobot garrison on Uranus was discussed. The threat at Uranus was different because Space Command had no way to get at the Xenobots at Uranus; the gravity on that planet was tremendous and the winds were fantastically fast and no equipment had ever been built to wage war in an environment like that. The situation would have to be dealt with, but it would take time, and they had no time or resources (or technology) to spend on it now. They would keep an eye on the planet, though, and make sure that no more Xenobots emerged from the planet.

[Note: The story of how Uranus is won is told in Starman #8, Terror from Space. The Uranus problem is introduced here; it is solved in the next book.]

Chapter 14

The Starmen and the Titanians had been running for hours. Their compads had some functions built in and they could use them as a crude detection network, but that's not what they were designed to do. They knew they had to find a way to hide until Tharsos realized something was wrong and found them. They had no way of knowing of the Xenobots had been alerted. They did know that they had to find a good place to hide.

The Starmen had a few weapons – some lasers, some grenades, and a few other things. They couldn't hold off an entire planet, though. Their laptops did have RTT built in but they had been fried by the virus. They wondered why Tharsos hadn't contacted them, and hoped that the virus hadn't spread to Tharsos and left it drifting dead in space. They suspected it might have, since Tharsos should have taken them out the moment the RTT link was broken, and the Starmen did have their compads with them and could be traced that way.

The Starmen were walking through the ruins of the city, trying to find a safe place to hide and stay out of the way. Zip's ankle was still bothering him, but he ignored it; they had to find shelter. They had walked in the

direction of the spaceport, with the idea that maybe they could somehow grab a ship and high-tail it to Tharsos. It wasn't much of a plan, but it was all they had to work with. What else were they to do?

The Starmen were walking through the ruins when tragedy struck: Mark slipped on a loose, unstable rock and fell over a ledge and over a cliff, falling twenty feet and – in the process – breaking his leg. As Zip looked about to find a way to get down and retrieve him (and move him off to a place of safety) a number of the semi-intelligent machines ambled up the walk to look over the vista: they had evidently heard something and had come to investigate.

Rather than describe the area, I'll let these pictures tell how things were arranged:

They were in a bad situation! The Starmen hid behind ruins, remaining motionless so they couldn't be seen. Mark laid on the lower terrace, trying to remain motionless so he wouldn't be seen either. It was approaching evening and the place was beginning to be filled with shadows. They waited what seemed like an eternity until the Xenobots turned and left.

As Zip (with Jack on his shoulder) began lowering himself over the cliff, another band of semi-intelligent machines appeared! They too walked over to the edge of the cliff and looked out. Zip tried to remain motionless, hovering about half-way down the cliff, and desperately hoped that they would go away.

After they left, Zip (and Jack with him; Jill stayed with Kathryn) lowered himself further down and came over to Mark. With Zip's help, Mark was lowered over the next (smaller) terrace and was hid in a cluster of ruins in the shadows. Night was coming on and it was becoming harder to be seen – although the neon sky kept lighting up in brilliant displays of light.

At this point hope struck: Zip got a call over his compad and it was from Tharsos! They told him that they'd had a lot of computer problems; they got hit by the virus and it took them hours to get back online. Tharsos was now cloaked and orbiting above them; they had been searching for them and located them when the Xenobots began communicating about a disturbance in the ruins (Tharsos had tapped into the communications.) Tharsos said they were working on getting an exact fix on them so they could take the whole team out.

Zip told them to take Mark out first, since his leg was badly broken and he was in a great deal of pain. He needed medical attention. Zip also said to

take him out last; he was near the spaceport and, if they could send him a new package of bugs, he could drop them in the spaceship going to the solar power station. The Ahmanyans didn't like him taking the risk but they agreed it was worth the chance. (He couldn't let them fly on their own; they'd have to be guided – and they flew slowly at that – and he was in too much danger to do that. It was safer to drop them in the ship himself and take things from there.)

After Zip stopped talking with Tharsos, Joe, standing on the upper ledge, told Zip to duck – that still more semi-intelligent machines coming, and this time there were Xenobots with them! Zip guessed that they had somehow overheard part of his conversation – maybe they detected the transmission, even if they weren't able to pinpoint them or discern what was being said – and they were coming to investigate. Zip was afraid that if he remained there they would find Mark, who couldn't move around very well, so he decided to work with Kathryn to lead them away from Mark. Kathryn and Zip began doing this while Joe stood by, but moments later Tharsos created the wormhole and took Mark out (and left the bugs for Zip) – and that sure got the Xenobots attention! They called out the cavalry when that happened and Kathryn, Joe and Zip (and the Titanians) realized that they were in a bad spot.

Chapter 15

While running away and trying to stay out of sight (Zip had the bad feeling that the Xenobots could see through their cloaks), Zip raised the rest of the team. He discovered that they had found a way into the spaceport, and Zip, Kathryn and the Joe dodged through sewers and dark streets and eventually made it close to the station. Tharsos wanted to take them all out but couldn't; they were being jammed, and were trying to find a way to override the jamming. For now Kathryn and Joe were trying to lead the Xenobots away from Zip so Zip could have a chance to plant the bugs on the spaceship. It looked like it was working: the spaceport was all but deserted.

The two made it inside the hangar, and while Kathryn was leading their quarry away Zip and Jack managed to get on-board the ship. Zip quickly hid the bugs and turned to leave, and then the door slammed shut and the ship began to lift off! Zip was trapped on board: the ship had lifted off.

Zip raised Tharsos and begged them to do something quick – he had to be taken off this ship. Realizing things were desperate, the Ahmanyans overrode a bunch of security settings and in a huge rush of power grabbed

Joe and Kathryn, who were under fire and about to be killed. Sparks were flying and systems were melting down, but they went to grab Zip – and at that moment the ship Zip was on turned on its hyperdrive and vanished. It did not go to the solar power station; instead it went somewhere else – somewhere far away. Zip was gone.

Chapter 16

Back on Earth (who had no idea anything had gone wrong), things had gone very well, as was discussed in a meeting at SE HQ on the moon. The defense of the sun had held: the Xenobots were driven off and were trapped on Uranus, where NME was preparing to wage a campaign against them. Earth put the planet under watch and place a radar network around it. They reestablished their guard around the sun and continued preparations for war.

SE's scientists in their research base continued work on the hyperspatial shield. Steven Hoshino told the group at the meeting (via a video-link; he didn't want to leave the research station for the time it would take to get to the moon) that they had learned a lot about hyperspace and were well under way to creating their hyperspatial shield. The Benefactor's data banks had been very helpful and they hoped to have a prototype of some sort within a few weeks.

On another front, the disassembly of the Xenobot fighter that Joe and Mark had captured earlier was going very well. The group had discovered that the fighter actually did not have a steady link to the power station; instead, the fighter contacted the station over the tachyon band when it needed more fuel. When the station was raised, the fighter became stationary and a very thin wormhole connection was established between the fighter and the solar power station. A stream of antimatter was sent over this connection, and acted as a fuel for the craft; once the craft was fully fueled it terminated the connection and went about its business. The station was only contacted when fuel was needed. More work was going to be done along these lines to more fully understand how the entire situation worked.

During the meeting a message came in from Tharsos; a connection was made over the RTT system. The leader of Tharsos explained what had happened to Zip and that while some information was gathered, the expedition had so far failed, and failed badly. Mark was injured and out of commission and Zip Foster was lost, with no hope of return. He could be anywhere and had no hope of survival. There was some heavy discussion,

and in the end they told Tharsos to at least try to find out what had happened to the ship Zip was in. If they couldn't trace it, they were to make another attempt to enter a solar power station, and if that failed they were to return to the solar system.

They thought Zip might try to contact them, but since he didn't have a tachyon transmitter on him it would be difficult: he would have to find one of the Xenobot's and redirect the frequency and use it.

Chapter 17

Zip immediately knew that he was in bad shape: he was lost in enemy territory. He kept his head, though: Jack was with him and, from what his compad told him, he was on a completely automated ship. There was nothing alive on board, and there weren't even any of the semi-mechanical machines. Zip didn't loose hope: while this ship wasn't going to the solar power station, maybe it was going to another one. At the very least, it might appear at another planet like the one he just left, and the planet he just left was in total disarray with few Xenobots. Maybe he'd survive – although the chances weren't good.

Zip quickly found out that there was no RTT equipment on board, so he couldn't call for help. He'd have to wait until he found some, and then he could call for help. Zip knew there wasn't anything he could do about it and decided to stay calm, stay hidden, and see what happened with the assistance of Jack.

The ship made its way to a crowded Xenobot star system; Zip saw that space was filled with an unimaginable number of ships; this was not a backward star system. This must be one of their command centers, he thought. Zip had with him a crude translator the Benefactors had put together for him that could turn the Xenobot's speech/communications into English, and he decided to use it when he had a chance to see what he could find out. The ship he was on had gone to a very large space station in very close orbit the sun. The station looked like it was dozens of miles wide, and it probably was. Zip wondered if he had possibly made it to a solar power station at last. If he had, he could do what he came to do, and then possibly call for help and leave. At the very least, if he did learn anything he had to find a way to send that information to Earth.

The main occupants of the base seemed to be machines, although there was an occasional Xenobot. Zip found that moving about the base was very difficult because the corridors were crowded robots (though Xenobots were

very few) roving here and here, and here Jack was of immense help. There were starships everywhere: small ships, large ships, ships of unbelievable size – most of them in terrible repair. Zip was able to gather that the invasion fleet was being readied, and that there were dozens of bases like the one he was at throughout the galaxy that were being readied to be sent out. The fleet was amassing at the Xenobot's home world, and from there it would be sent out to Earth.

[This is another good place to point out the Xenobot's decay. There were ships here and machines, but Zip soon realized that the Xenobots' knowledge of them was fairly limited. Some machines, when they broke, were just tossed out; the Xenobots didn't know how they worked – they could only manufacture them through some sort of automated process – and they couldn't fix them. Some areas of the base were just abandoned; the Xenobots were either indifferent about repairing them or were unable to do so. They were clearly a race in decline – still very powerful, but dying, just as the greegles had said.]

Zip knew that Tharsos was likely to stay around and try to find him, but he suspected that they would have limited success. He could try to raise them, but he knew that his chance of being taken out amidst the fantastic fleet that surrounded him was pretty slim – plus it was going to be difficult to access one of those RTT terminals. He decided to try to find a way to hitch a ride to that star system's solar power station, do what he came to do, and then see if he could get back. His big concern was food; he only had a month's supply and when that was gone he was going to be in trouble.

Chapter 18

Zip and Jack did a bit of exploring. He eventually discovered that he was not, after all, at the solar power station; this was yet again something altogether different. It took him a while and some hair-raising near misses, but after he was able to access a Xenobot computer terminal and let Jack do a little magic with it he eventually found out what was going on. [The bulk of this chapter deals with Zip's trying to find out what is going on, etc.]

The Xenobots were constructing a gigantic wormhole transporter – that's what this station was, in fact. At first Zip thought that the Xenobots had invented it and his judgment about their decline was wrong, but then he realized that the Xenobots had just pulled up the plans for this incredible device on their files they had from the ancient days and were using it.

Outside was an extra solar power station. When the wormhole transporter was complete, it would create a wormhole leading from the Xenobot solar system all the way to Earth's sun. The wormhole would be fragile and wouldn't last for very long, but it would last long enough to squeeze the station through. The station would thus suddenly appear around the Sun, fully operational and able to fend off any attackers by drawing on the Sun itself for energy. The invasion fleet would then invade and it would be all over for Earth and Mars! The Xenobots had not been able to build a solar power station the Solar System, but that would soon no longer matter.

[In terms of how the base looked: imagine a large doughnut. The solar power station was in the middle of the doughnut, in the hole; the wormhole transporter was the doughnut itself.]

Chapter 19

Zip knew immediately that he had to warn Earth. He had to get the message there and tell them to get Tharsos over to where he was as soon as possible: Tharsos might have a chance of breaking through the Xenobot's defenses and destroying the wormhole transporter. It would be gutsy, but they had a better chance of destroying it here than they did of destroying it once it was around the Sun. Zip also realized that Earth's days were numbered: how long could they keep the Xenobots out? It would only be a matter of time, but they could use that time to find a way to build that hyperspatial shield – or something. Even if this one failed, another one might succeed – and he had no way of knowing if this was the only station they were building. He suspected that it wasn't.

Zip, through a number of hair-raising diversions and other tricks [you handle these things so much better than I do so I just leave them to you!], did manage to get Jack inside a message center and used him to send off a terse message off to Earth warning them of what was about to happen. It wasn't easy, and Jack's expertise was valuable: they had to tap into their computers, lure the Xenobots out of the RTT room, and send the message. However, warning had been raised: Zip realized that, injured as he was (his ankle was not improving), he was going to have to find a safe place to hide or he was going to be in trouble. He saw a number of airbots fly past, and he knew they were looking for him…

Zip did not mention the fact that he was on the very station he had just begged Tharsos to destroy. Zip would have to find a way off this station immediately; if he didn't he would very likely be in grave trouble.

Chapter 20

Meanwhile, Tharsos (just a few days away) was steaming toward the great Xenobot star cluster where all the warships were gathered (which was the same place that Zip had been transported to). Plans were being made: while Tharsos did not come armed with the Earth/Mars fleet, it could still do a lot of damage, especially in a surprise attack. They felt that they had the element of surprise; they doubted the Xenobots would suspect a frontal attack, and they might be able to destroy the transporter before it was used. They knew that it would be a risky thing but it had to be tried. The plan was to use their wormhole transporter to appear very near the base, let the base have it, and then leave.

They didn't know if they would be able to pull Zip out or not, but they were going to give it a try…

Zip, meanwhile, had made it on board one of the large spacecraft situated in the hangar. He found a pretty good hiding place and spent all of his time hiding in it, barely getting out. He could tell that the search for him was intense; the Xenobots knew that somewhere they had an intruder and they were aiming to find him. Zip tried to avoid attempting to raise Tharsos again for fear of being detected; he knew that if Tharsos was in the area it would become obvious by the commotion it raised and he would have his chance then. He fervently hoped that a ship would leave, but so far no more ships had arrived and no more ships had left. If a ship didn't leave soon he might have to commandeer one, and he knew how long he would survive if he did that…

Chapter 21

A few days later, Tharsos did steam into the area. Things were tense as Tharsos sat at the edge of the Xenobot home world's solar system; they armed themselves and made a jump deep into the system's inner defenses. Alarm was immediately raised, and Tharsos began using its power to break through the defenses.

The ship that Zip was on suddenly lifted out of the hangar and flew into space, along with a great many others, most of which were either unmanned (like Zip's) or manned only with a few semi-intelligent machines. Zip verified that Tharsos really was out there; he could see it dimly through a small window. He was amazed that he couldn't contact it: he tried to reach it

but suddenly realized that his signal was being jammed; something about the ship was stopping his signal from leaving. He could see Tharsos out there – safety – but he had no way to get there. He also noticed that the ship he was on was headed to Tharsos to attack it. He had to find a way to stop his ship dead in the water: he knew what would happen to it if it did attack Tharsos, and the people on Tharsos had no way of knowing he was on board.

The fight was tense, and didn't last more than ten minutes. Zip, with Jack's help, was able to shut down the fighter he was on, although it was tense – he just knew that he was minutes away from being fried. Tharsos fired at ships all over the place, and did do significant damage to ships ahead and beside him in the formation. Zip relaxed – and then Tharsos began firing strange pulse that seemed to just disintegrate the enemy ships. The effect weakened the further a ship away was from Tharsos. Zip now had to get his ship alive again and run for it – ships all around him were being broken up. He almost made it, and then he got caught in the crossfire and Xenobot fire badly damaged the ship he was on. Most of the ship was just gone; the power was out, all systems were dead, and the air was leaking. If he got hit now it was all over.

Meanwhile, Tharsos was making progress. It had indeed surprised the enemy and appeared behind the enemy fleet, which was located in the far reaches of the star system, not in its interior. It would take a good fifteen minutes for them to get to the scene of the battle, and by then Tharsos would be gone.

The ships guarding the solar power station put up a fierce fight. They hammered Tharsos with some sort of energy weapon, using a star as their power source. Tharsos evidently had some kind of shield, and it glowed brightly as the energy splashed onto the shield. Zip could see that Tharsos was taking a beating: it had craters gouged in its sides and the shields seemed to be dying.

Zip then saw Tharsos break through: the defense of the wormhole transporter went down and the enemy fleet was suddenly cast into disarray. To his astonishment, at that instant the wormhole transporter was activated: in a huge flash of light the nearby solar power station disappeared – it had been transported. Tharsos' weapon blasts hit the transporter just instants too late; the station was destroyed, but the harm was done. No one had realized that the wormhole transporter had been completed!

Chapter 22

The Benefactors, while listening in on what had been going on, realized that the station had already been mostly completed; they had just been waiting to move the station until after their fleet was in the Solar System. Since the station was being attacked, they thought it would be wise to go ahead and move it.

The Benefactors realized that there was a chance that the station's transport had failed; since the station wasn't quite complete, maybe it had been destroyed in transit. They pushed on and were able to vaporize the transporter (which was just a big machine, not a station or anything), and then turned and left. The entire fight with Tharsos being there only took about ten minutes; by the time alarm was raised and the fleet had been lifted off the ground to combat Tharsos, Tharsos was gone (though pretty damaged).

Tharsos had been unable to rescue Zip; they tried to reach him but couldn't get through. They were heartbroken: they knew he had to be nearby but they couldn't get through the interference.

Tharsos had sustained some damage – in fact, some pretty serious damage. Besides the cosmetic damage to the surface (in the form of craters), a number of systems had been knocked out. The power generator was in especially bad shape, and a lot of the surface-based defense systems (such as the anti-missile lasers) were gone. The worst part was that Tharsos could no longer make large jumps through space: it would have to sit somewhere (and not very far away, either) and be rebuilt. This meant that it could not even begin the voyage home for another two weeks, minimum – and by the time it did get home there would probably be no home to go to. If Tharsos could make it back to the solar system it might be able to destroy the solar power station, but now that was impossible. They had taken a gamble, and it had failed badly.

Zip saw the station vanish, then saw Tharsos vaporize the transporter and leave. He watched all this with a heavy heart: he knew his ticket home was gone now for good, and he had a feeling that the transporter had been demolished too late – it had already done its job. Plus, if that wasn't enough, the ship he was on was now in pieces, and he had no way of going anywhere. He was adrift in space – a piece of space debris.

He noticed, by looking out the window, that he wasn't the only ship in that shape. A lot of ships were damaged, some worse than others. Tharsos had made quite an attack and left ruin in its wake.

After a little while he saw activity outside. A series of incredibly large ships were going through the debris and damaged vehicles, and other, smaller ships were pushing the damaged vehicles into this vehicle. It looked like they were doing a cleanup and salvage operation; they were trying to gather up all the pieces, possibly for repair. The remains Zip was inside was one of the pieces gathered; there were many, many others.

Once Zip was inside the larger ship, he quickly left the ruin he was in and went to find a better hiding place. He noticed that this ship was larger than it looked; besides having a lot of ruined ships, it had whole layers of new ships, armed and ready for war. He guessed that he was on some sort of transport, and that the Xenobots used ships like this to transport their fleet from system to system.

Some taps into the computer system (by now they had a lot of experience doing that) revealed some interesting information. The ships being carried in the transport (which were not small) were very powerful, but they relied on the solar power station and could not go very far without it. This large transport, though, didn't need it; it had some sort of massive atomic reactor that provided all the power it needed.

What typically happened, then, was this: when the Xenobots wanted to take over a new star system, they transported in a solar power station. Once that was in place, they loaded up their ships in these transports (they had thousands of them, each one a third the size of Tharsos), and the transports took them to their destination. Once there, the transports emptied their cargo and the mayhem started.

While Zip was mulling this information over he felt the ship power up and move. He knew what had happened: his ship suddenly went into hyperspace, and the entire fleet was leaving the Xenobot home world. It was ahead of schedule, but the Xenobots decided to go ahead and invade with the fleet they had; the other ships would meet them en-route to Earth. Zip figured it would take two weeks to get to Earth from their current location.
He fervently hoped that Tharsos would be able to destroy the solar power station before they got there. He had no way of knowing that was impossible.

Chapter 23

Meanwhile, Tharsos had contacted Earth and found out that the transfer had been successful, despite their attack; the solar power station had been erected and was in orbit around the sun. Earth's fleet was trying to destroy it, but a hyperspatial shield protected it and they couldn't even come close penetrate it. Scientists were studying it to learn what it was doing in hopes of finding a flaw somewhere, but they were at a loss as to what to do. Things looked really grim.

Tharsos (which was still under repair; the damage had actually been worse than they expected, for many of the very ancient systems had become fragile with age and didn't show it until used in the battle) noticed the fleet leaving, ad let Earth know that disaster was on its way. Earth would have to come up with something fast because an invasion fleet was about to arrive on their doorstep; it would arrive in about two weeks, whether they were ready for it or not.

Scientists in North Africa continued work on the hyperspatial shield, using the crystals Mark and Joe had brought back, and that was especially urgent now that the solar power station had been established. They thought they had a machine that would work, but they weren't sure; they had no idea how the Xenobot wormhole technology worked and they couldn't be sure that their machine would work on their craft. They hoped it would work but they just didn't know, although they were pretty sure it would. It was their only hope: that fleet could not be allowed to enter the solar system.

Chapter 24

The day at last arrived. The fleet of 4,872 transports was only one jump away from entering the Solar System. They charged up their batteries one last time to make the last jump. They then tried to engage their drives – and failed. They tried again, this time with more power, and they failed again. The ships could not get through.

The Xenobots, however, did not give up. Instead, they began probing, finding out how far the shield stretched. They found out that it only extended for a single light day (the distance light can travel in a day) around that star system. Very well, then: the ships recalibrated and transported to the edge of that shield.

Then, to Zip's horror, the ships charged up their batteries again and started a different drive. The ships were moving, faster, faster, and faster. They weren't traveling by wormhole: they were flying along, and hit a top speed of a third the speed of light. Given time to speed up and slow down, they would appear in the skies of Mars in five days. The shield had worked, but it failed in its primary purpose. No one knew the Xenobots had the capability to travel that fast in real space!

Zip, using the RTT equipment he had tapped into on the ship, let Earth know what happened. Earth would have to think of something else, and they were rapidly running out of time.

Over the next five days Zip was busy – very busy. He tapped into computer terminals and fed data back to Earth. He studied readouts and conferred with scientists. Zip wanted to destroy the transports, but he couldn't: he couldn't break into the critical control systems, and even if he could manually destroy this one ship there were thousands of others, and it would make no difference.

Zip tried many things. Disabling the power systems failed; he couldn't access that. Self-destruct failed: there didn't seem to be a self-destruct mechanism. Spreading a computer virus failed: they couldn't find a way to infect the transports. They were rapidly running out of time.

Chapter 25

The fleet had now entered the Oort cloud; it would be close enough to the solar system to begin using its solar power station within an hour. Once it got to that point, all was lost.

Then Steven Hoshino, who had been working with Zip over the past few days, suddenly received a message from Zip.

Zip had at last been able to tap into the information regarding download energy from the solar power station. He sent to Steven the information Steven had wanted: how the energy is transported through hyperspace. Somehow the shields didn't bother it, and Steven had wanted to know why. Now he saw how it worked, and he wondered if he could disrupt it.

The shields normally worked by disturbing space just enough to make it impossible for a stable wormhole to form. However, the solar power station built a different kind of wormhole – one very long and thin, and one that rapidly rebuilt every few microseconds. The hyperspatial shield had no effect

on these. It had not been designed to deal with anything like that; those were generally considered useless.

What Steve did, with very little time left, was alter the way the shield worked. It wouldn't collapse these new holes, but it would make them unstable and alter the energy contained in them. His hope was to get the station to alter the type of power it was sending out to all the ships to something very dangerous and explosive.

Steven turned on his machine and began tinkering. At first nothing happened, but then when the transporters crossed into the solar system — almost instantly, every power plant in every space ship in the Xenobot fleet (which were still on board the transports) exploded, destroyed by the out-of-control power beam.

During the chaos, Zip ran to the hangar, got in a small ship (not powered by a power beam – the fleet did bring ships that weren't controlled by it) and flew it out of the hangar. Moments later, the Xenobot transports turned tail and ran; they had activated their emergency power sources and were returning back to the Xenobot home solar system. The fleet was decimated.

Chapter 26

The fleet is cleaned up, the heroics of Zip are rewarded, the Ahmanyans come out, and a long period of peace begins. The Xenobots are pushed back for the time being: they have no way to invade the Xenobots at the moment, but the solar power station orbiting the Earth's sun is gone (it was destroyed in the energy backwash) and thanks to Zip the Xenobots cannot invade or reestablish another one. The future is clear: SE needs to build a great many probes with the device Hoshino and Zip designed, send them into the Xenobot star systems all at once, and use them to take down their power grid. Once their power grid is gone, the Xenobots weaponry would be dead and all would be well.

Zip doubted it would be that easy: the solar power station put in orbit here could be defeated, but the Xenobots had many of these (some quite old) and they may not all work the same way. He did not feel that the threat was over, although he knew that Earth and Mars would be in relative safety for the time being. The dawn was beginning to arrive at last; the long night was beginning to end.

The Last Command

Chapter 1

David Foster is wandering through the streets of Amundsen City on the Moon late at night. It's a quiet night: most people long ago went to sleep, and David encountered few people. It was a peaceful time, and David was using the peace to do some thinking.

More than a year had taken place since XI had ended, and that year had its share of adventures – everything from battles at the bottom of the Pacific to a harrowing search on a planet wandering in deep space, far from any star, that was inhabited by swarms of incredibly dangerous firewasps.87 During that time two important things had happened: every Xenobot-held star system in the galaxy had been located, and the manufacturing of the Earth fleet had been completed. The Lucian mining ship the three Starmen had brought back home had been decoded; its technology had been adapted for use in other machines. The terraformation of Mars was well under way; Mars was becoming green again, and was now ruled by the High King of Ahmanya. All was ready, and the time had come: Earth was going to make its attempt.

As he wandered through the streets of the city alone, deep in thought, he ran into George St. George – or rather, GSG ran into him. Zip was surprised to see him, and GSG explained that he had been looking for Zip. He told Zip that a great many people had been leaving the asteroid belt over the past year: everyone thought that was where the Xenobot invasion was likely to begin, and they didn't want to be there when it happened. GSG, like many others, went to the moon to see what would happen, and he decided to look up Zip and see how he was doing. It had been a long time since they were together battling Zimbardo.

Zip asked him how Vly was doing, and GSG said that Vly was still in the Asteroid Belt, hanging onto his home. Vly said that GSG had a lot of confidence in the Starmen: if anyone could do something, they could – and if they failed, it didn't really matter where he was so he might as well hold onto his home. He wasn't going to leave.

Zip told him he was glad to see him, and the two began to talk about the upcoming threat. Zip said that everyone knew the power of the Xenobots was overwhelming: in a direct conflict there was no hope of victory. They had routed the Xenobots in their first attempted invasion of the solar system

simply because they had found a flaw in their solar power station technology; it was not because Earth had somehow grown stronger.

Everyone also knew that, by this point, Earth was going to launch an attack on the Xenobots within days. The Xenobot's weakness was their complete reliance on their ancient solar power stations, designed during the days when they ruled the universe as the Lucians: Earth was going to launch an attack to take them all out. Once they were gone, the basis for Xenobot power would be destroyed, and Earth could handle what little was left with the fleet SE and Ahmanya had built over the past few years – or so the theory went.

There was a sense of confidence in the Solar System, but there was little in Zip Foster, and GSG asked him what he was thinking. Zip told him that it sounded too easy: he doubted the Xenobots would be destroyed that easily. It's true that they had not attempted another invasion in the past few years, but who is to say why? Perhaps they were biding their time. The odds were overwhelmingly against Earth, and Zip knew it: it was much more likely that Earth would fail and that the real future would closely resemble what Mark and Joe had been led to believe in DH.

What Zip knew – but could not tell GSG – is that Earth planned to launch their attack against the Xenobots within 24 hours. He looked over the city as he and GSG walked in it, and he wondered: would it still be there a year from now? Would he still be alive to walk its streets? Was he about to see a new era of peace or the end of civilization? He didn't know – but GSG was there to provide some comfort, just as he had before.

Chapter 2

Twelve hours later, the three Starmen found themselves on board Tharsos, at an undisclosed location in space. All was in readiness: it was time to resume the ancient Ahmanyan-Xenobot war.

Much had happened in the previous years. The ancient Ahmanyans had been awoken from their long sleep, and they were now ready for battle. Old fighters that had seen action in the first part of the Ahmanyan-Xenobot war had been refurbished and made ready to fight again, and Richard Starlight (acting jointly with Space Command, despite NME's actions in the previous book) had, via his manufacturing plants on Mercury, built many more ships similar to them to join in the battle. The Solar System had been defended with hyperspatial shields and ships and sensors as much as could be done. It

had all been very expensive, but everyone knew that if they lost this war civilization would be over.

The strategy today was simple. Over the past year, using the gigantic interstellar freighter designed and built in XI, Earth and Mars had quietly deployed forces a single hyperspatial-jump away from every star controlled by the Xenobots, with Tharsos (and other ships) left behind to guard the Solar System. Each of those forces included a number of completely robotic ships with one purpose: they were designed to enter the Xenobot-held star system and disrupt the beams coming from the solar power stations in such a way as to destroy both the station and the ships using that station. Earth had been waiting to launch its attack until every ship was in place, and last week the final ship had made it into position.

The attack was now going to go forward. Each robotic ship was built with the capability of jumping directly into the Xenobot-held star systems. The systems were protected by shields, but that didn't matter: Ahmanyan scientists had figured out how the Lucian ship the three Starmen obtained at the beginning of XI worked, and they were able to both build engines that could pierce the Xenobot shields and build shields that were not subject to being pierced by that method. Xenobot technology had not changed in centuries and people thought it was highly likely that this device would work, and that they would have no trouble launching a surprise attack and making it inside the systems.

Once inside the systems and within range, the probes would activate their programming and jam the waves in such a way that the stations (and the ships connected to them) would become unstable and explode. The entire invasion would be launched at once, and it would take no more than two hours to finish the procedure.

If this was successful, every Xenobot power station would be destroyed and the vast majority of their fleet would be decimated. The remaining ships would still have to be dealt with, and that is what the other Ahmanyan-SE forces near those star systems were for.

On the word, a RTT signal was sent to the fleets to commence the invasion. Within moments, the invasion had begun: now they simply had to wait and see what happened.

Chapter 3

At first everything looked like it was going very well. The robotic ships sailed right into the star systems unopposed and undetected, and they did

their business. The effect was immediate: in every case but one the solar power station erupted and was destroyed.

It wasn't until the manned Earth forces entered those star systems to mop things up, however, that they began to realize something was wrong. The solar power stations were destroyed, yes, but that was all: every single star system appeared to be abandoned. There were Xenobot bases in these systems, to be sure, but it appeared that they had been abandoned some time ago – perhaps several years ago. There was nothing to mop up: Earth had leveled installations that were already empty. As far as they could tell, not a single Xenobot ship was destroyed.

While it was good to get rid of those other power stations, people wondered where the Xenobots had gone – and they soon found out. The one star system that had remained intact and untouched by the robotic probe (which could not make it inside the system and was unable to penetrate the shield around it) was an ancient star system – one originally held by the Lucians and one that the Janitor later confirmed to be the original home planet of the Lucians.

They looked into the situation more closely, and found out something: it appeared that every single star system held by the Xenobots had been abandoned, and all of the Xenobot forces and men had been moved to that one star system. They soon figured out why: that particular solar power station evidently operated on a very different (and very ancient) design, and Earth's attempts at jamming or destroying it did nothing at all.

This was a whole new wrinkle, and it wasn't a good one. Inside that one solar system (based on things like nearby telescopic observation and energy signatures) was something close to a million ships – each of which was incredibly powerful and backed up by that untouchable solar power station. There was no way to take on that one star system by force, and there was no way they could send in a probe and destroy the station – for whatever reason, it seemed to be immune to those sort of attacks.

For now, the Ahmanyan-Earth forces continued to scour the systems they just invaded, to both make sure that they were truly free of Xenobots and to see if any clues that might help them were left behind.

It was then time to go back to the drawing board. The Xenobots were now holed up in one star system, and there were two very important questions to ask: what were they doing in there and how could they be defeated?

Chapter 4

What Earth really needed was data. How did this new shield work? Could they get a glimpse at what was going on inside that star system? Could they find out what was going on? They decided to send out a few robotic probes to see what they could see, run a few experiments, and maybe learn some things.

They already knew that, for whatever reason, they could not send a ship into that star system via wormhole transfer. So, then, (and all this took several months) they designed and deployed a series of robotic probes with a very fast non-FTL drive (traveling at, say, 5/8 the speed of light), sent it as close to that star system as they could get it, and had it fly the rest of the way. Since they thought that it was very likely that the Xenobots would guard that star system well, they made quite a few of these and had them enter that star system from all directions.

All of the probes built were purely robotic probes: there was no need to send a person into that star system. All they wanted at this point was information, and a machine could gather that just fine.

The probes were sent out. They were carried most of the way there via one of the large interstellar transports built on book nine, so it only took about a week to get to that star system. Once there, they were unloaded and began traveling using an ultra-fast antimatter drive.

As was expected the Xenobots were on guard and began destroying the probes almost immediately, but a few of them avoided detection long enough and penetrated deep enough (some of the probes were traveling at speeds very close to the speed of light) to return some useful data.

The data was not encouraging. Zip recognized the photos that were returned immediately: the Xenobots were building another transporter, like the one he had visited earlier, to zip a second solar power station to Earth.

Chapter 5

Further examination of the data proved Zip right. What the Xenobots had done was fairly simple: when they realized that their technology had a flaw, they all withdrew to the one star system that used a different technology that did not have that flaw. Once there, they realized that all they had to do to defeat Ahmanya was get a copy of the solar power station orbiting this star system around the Sun: Earth couldn’t touch it and the invasion would go

along just fine. The easiest way to get a copy of it there was to build another one of those transporters that worked so well before and transport it that way.

It was clear from the photos that the construction of both the second solar power station and the construction of the new transporter was still very much under construction; however, they had no way of knowing how long it would take until the construction completed. The plan the Xenobots had was a very good one: all they had to do was wait a little while longer and then all would be over.

This put Earth in a very bad place. What were they going to do now? They could not invade that star system by force; their few ships would be overwhelmed almost instantly. Even if they did invade, what would they do? The heart of the problem was that power station, and they had no way to get to it, examine it, and find a way to defeat it. Yet, each moment they waited, their doom drew a little closer. It was only a matter of time before the Xenobots came back…

Chapter 6

As the discussion continued, Zip began to realize that there was only one answer: a team would have to be sent inside that star system to infiltrate and destroy the solar power station. If the station was destroyed all the Xenobot ships would go with it and the war would be over. If the station survived then it was only a matter of time before the Solar System was turned into so much dust.

Sending in machines was out of the question. After Reuben Ridger used primitive androids to destroy much of the word in the 2040s, no one dared to research artificial intelligence – the mere thought of it brought back to mind the horror of the Collapse. AI did exist in Zip's day but it was extremely primitive and it would be of no use here. The Xenobots might have advanced killer androids, but they were little more than that themselves. The Ahmanyans had nothing like that and Earth did either.

Since a machine could not go and do the job, a person – a team of people – would have to go. This assignment could not afford to fail, so they would send the best team they possibly could. This meant sending Starmen – the elite force of the galaxy.

Which Starmen would they send? They would send the Starmen that had battled Xenobots for years, the Starmen that had once penetrated the Xenobot defense, the Starmen that was said to be the greatest Starmen of all time.

They would send him, Mark, and Joe – and they would be sending them on their last mission.

Once again Zip found himself wandering the streets of Amundsen City, late at night. The council had not yet arrived at a decision but he knew they would soon. Zip knew that they could not refuse – indeed, he would never dream of refusing – but the cost was high. He knew this would not be like the previous times. Everything rested on this, but he knew that for him and his friends there would be no way out.

Even if they could penetrate the Xenobot solar system and board the solar power station, there would be no way of escape. There was no way out this time: this, he thought, would be the end for him and his friends. When they leave the Solar System they will not be coming back. The Council might try to convince them otherwise but he knew better.

Zip looked up at the starry sky, filled with a glorious host of flaming points of light. So many stars, he though: so many places I never got a chance to visit, never had the opportunity to explore. He could not see the star that the Xenobots held so tightly, but he knew where in the sky it was located.

He remembered back to his Academy days, when he and his friends were first granted the rank of Starman and debated whether they might live to see the FTL drive developed. Soon that very drive would take him to that star he could not see – into a battle Earth could not win.

His compad beeped; it was a message from Richard Starlight. The time had come, he thought: it was the beginning of the end.

Chapter 7

Two days later, a great fleet departed from the Solar System and headed off into the depths of space. The fleet was composed of 35,000 powerful FTL ships, built by the combined labors of Starlight Enterprise and the Ahmanyans, using a combination of old and new technology. The fleet was made up of nearly every vessel of any magnitude that was in the Solar System, and was manned by a host of skilled Earthlings and Ahmanyans.

The defense of the Solar System was held by Space Command, which was guarded by a few ships. Approximately 200 ships were left behind: not nearly enough to discourage a serious attack, but no one believed the Xenobots would mount such a thing. They had no need to: the Xenobots already had a perfect plan, and all they had to do was be patient. Earth was

running a powerful hyperspatial shield and the same equipment that disrupted the last solar power station was still in place, but everyone knew it was futile. The real hope was in the fleet that was headed toward the Xenobot star system: the lives of every person living rested on the success of this fleet.

At the head of the fleet, leading the way, was Tharsos. Tharsos has been fully armed, fully repaired, and was ready for battle, bearing the most lethal weapons available. On board her was, among many others, Richard Starlight and the three Starmen – and the Janitor of the First Races. The leader of the fleet was, of course, the High King of Ahmanya: for the second time he was leading the forces of Ahmanya into battle against her ancient enemy.

One special guest who was coming along was Allen Foster, Zip Foster's father. He had been treated by the Ahmanyans and much of the radiation damage that still lingered in him was healed, thanks to ancient treatments the Ahmanyans had developed. Due to this Allen had – for the first time since his expedition to Titan – left the Moon. He was going with the fleet into battle, and he would be flying one of the new powerful, advanced SE fighters. He was in space again, in his element, and he was excited about it.

A plan had been devised. The Janitor had a priceless piece of information: the Xenobot home world was not an ordinary planet but was a vast machine – a nexus of worlds. Inside it were countless thousands of wormhole gates, linking the planet to countless thousands of other star systems throughout the galaxy.

The Janitor explained that long ago, the First Races had devised a way to automate the colonization of the galaxy. What they did was build a series of intelligent space probes and dispatched them among the stars; when they reached a planet they would use its resources to terraform it, build cities via robotic droids, and build a wormhole gate that linked it back to a central nexus. The probe would then visit another star system – and the planet it just terraformed would begin building other probes. After a while thousands of planets had been terraformed and settled, waiting for living beings to move in, all linked through a central nexus.

This nexus had been built by the Lucians, who were the masters of space-time manipulation. A wormhole requires a fantastic amount of power to generate, but the Lucians found a way to easily generate that much power. They created the nexus of worlds and powered the gates, but the power they controlled soon went to their heads and they used their power to launch a war against the other First Races in an attempt to control all. They were defeated.

Their nexus, however, remained, and was in the vast hollow interior of the Xenobot home world – for, though the Xenobots had long forgotten it, that planet had been the home of the Lucians. The Xenobots no longer went into the interior of their world and no longer accessed its vast network; they had an ancient fear of it, memories of something gone wrong, a superstition and fear.

Much of the network had died, but some of it still remained – and it could be used to access the Xenobot home world, if the hyperspatial shield guarding that star system was shut down.

The plan was this: the three Starmen would go with the Janitor to a gate that the Janitor believed would take them to the Xenobot home world. The massive Earth fleet would attack the planet that housed the hyperspatial shield generator and knock it out. Once it was knocked out the Starmen would transport to the heart of the Xenobot home world, reprogram a gate to point to the solar power station, board it, take it out, and then return through the gate. Once the station was taken out the Xenobot ships would be destroyed and the power of the Xenobots would be broken once and for all.

Chapter 8

On the third week out from Earth, the three Starmen said goodbye and left with the Janitor of the First Races. It was a sorrowful farewell, for everyone knew they may never meet again.

The Janitor did not use the wormhole transporter on Tharsos to leave; he had his own transporter and used it to transport the four of them to his own world. No one knew how it worked and the Janitor did not provide any details, save that it was just as useless against a hyperspatial shield as the one on board Tharsos.

The world the Starmen found themselves on was a vast one, filled with huge, towering cities and unbelievably majestic landscapes. The Janitor explained that it wasn't his home world; it was just one of the many that he maintained, in the hopes that one day the First Races would return.

As they walked down its empty streets, the Janitor told them that this world and many others were maintained by a system of automated drones: they clipped the hedges, repaired the roads, and kept everything in good shape, in the hope that one day the masters of the city would come back. He would not say if he thought that day would come, but the Starmen knew he had waited a long time.

They entered a building set aside a little from the others, and inside it they found a wormhole gate. The Janitor explained that this gate did not link to the Xenobot home world itself, but instead to a halfway point – to the world that did have the link. What they would do here is learn about the gate: he would show them how to reprogram it. With that, he handed them some small handheld machines and they set to work. They only had a week to master the technique before they would have to use it in practice – and there would be no chance of a second try if the first try failed.

Chapter 9

A week went by. To everyone on the fleet it seemed like an eternity. It was the calm before the storm: everyone knew what they were going into and that there was nothing they could do but wait until they arrived. Everyone knew the risk involved and the stakes, and there was somber mood about. So much depended on so many uncertainties, but they had to try – for if they did not try they knew they would fail.

The journey to the Xenobot-held star was completely uneventful. Richard knew that the Xenobots must know they were coming, but – as he expected – they did nothing to slow the journey. The Xenobots, he reflected, knew they were going to attack their star system and knew that their own forces were strongest there; why not wait for them to attack? They had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

The day came when the fleet arrived; it would enter the Xenobot star system the next morning. That night Richard Starlight gave a speech, telling the men what they were fighting for, that the time of the Xenobots had ended and that they were there to end their reign of terror and secure freedom for their sons and daughters.

The odds were against them, and the forces of the Xenobots were strong, but the Xenobots had a flaw: they could not fight with the passion of men. The Xenobots were cold, and all but dead: they were as much machine as flesh and they had all but lost the ability of independent thought. All they had left was hate. They would battle with the cold calculation of a machine; not with the fiery passion of men battling for their loved ones. Now was not the time to quail in terror, but to gather up courage and make one last stand for the free peoples of space.

The day dawned. The hour came: the fleet dropped out of hyperspace. On the word, the fleet engaged their antimatter drives and headed into the enemy's star system. They would soon either meet victory – or their doom.

Chapter 10

Zip, Mark, Joe, and the Janitor were standing in a dusty stone room. They had walked through the gate on the Janitor's planet a few moments ago and were facing another gate, currently holding an interference pattern. This was the gate that linked to the Xenobot home world, currently located some 1,000 light-years away.

The three Starmen had learned a great deal about the operation and modification of these gates; they could reprogram them expertly and knew how to manipulate them.

They knew that the Earth fleet would engage the Xenobot fleet within the hour. If they were successful, the interference pattern would vanish and the Starmen would have the chance – however brief – to step across space into the vast nexus. Now they could do nothing but wait – wait and hope.

The Earth fleet was now very close to the Xenobot star system; they would enter it within moments. They were not going in blind, though: there was a method in their madness.

From the Xenobot perspective, it looked as if they were suddenly invaded by a fleet composed of millions of ships. Ahmanyan ships poured in from every direction, firing powerful disintegration beams and disrupting the fabric of space. Asteroids were blasted into dust and the spaceways were jammed, preventing communication.

As the battle raged the Xenobots began to realize that many of the ships attacking them were virtual ships – images of light – and that only a few ships were doing all the damage. The problem was, which ships were real and which ships were not? The Xenobots began attempting to find the real invasion fleet.

Meanwhile, the real fleet – cloaked by the fleet of light, courtesy of the Ahmanyans and many custom-built drone ships – worked their way to the hyperspatial shield. Approximately 5,000 ships were scattered throughout the edges of the star system in order to give the phony fleet a sense of realism; the rest were concentrated on penetrating the defense network around the shield.

The shield – located on a planet near the interior of the star system – was heavily protected, and the battle around it was fierce. It was located approximately a billion miles from the star, and thus a billion miles from the solar power station they were so concerned about. The ships were currently a billion miles away from this station; it would take them several hours to get to it. The only good news was that neither side could use their FTL drive as long as the shield was functional, so Xenobot ships scattered far from the fleet would take a long time to join in the defense.

The battle was fierce, and it would take hours to see what would happen. It was going to be a long day.

Chapter 11

Back in the Solar System, everyone knew what was going on. It was common knowledge that the battle would be joined that day, and that by the end of the day the fate of all would be decided. People wondered what the outcome would be. For the first time, the mind of everyone was on events taking place in a system far away, around a star no one could see from Earth without a telescope. It was a sober day, a calm day. There was no news, and there could be no news; the fleet was out of range of tachyon communication and it would be days before anyone knew what happened. Yet this was the day when all would be decided.

While the three Starmen waited they talked with the Janitor about what would happen if the Xenobots won, and if it would be possible to go back in time and change what happened. The Janitor said that no one had ever found a way to go back in time: even at the height of the power of the Lucians such a thing could not be done.

It was, he said, possible to go forward in time: a simple way would be to travel very close to the speed of light, at which point time will slow down. If a ship went a fraction under the speed of light and traveled at that speed for a while a thousand years could pass on Earth and only a second would go by for those on board the ship – and there were other ways of doing it. The First Races had used this technique before to travel into the future but once in the future it was impossible to go back – or even send a message back.

No, whatever happened this day would happen – and it could not be changed.

Then, suddenly, it happened.

Chapter 12

In the Xenobot solar system, the Xenobots suddenly did something no one expected: they dropped the hyperspatial shield! In minutes the entire Xenobot fleet was centered around the Earth fleet, using their FTL drives as best they could to attack their enemy.

The Xenobots had decided that it would be best to lower the shield for a few minutes in order to relocate their fleet to drive off the attacker. With this in mind they did so – and that gave the Starmen their chance.

The moment they saw the gate open the three Starmen (in their spacesuits) jumped through it. They were immediately in a dark room, a room they sensed was vast; but where were they? The gate they came through could not be seen.

They checked the machines the Janitor had given them and discovered that they were indeed on the Xenobot home world – so they must be inside the fabled nexus. Zip lifted up a light and turned it on high so they could see where they were, and they all gasped.

A billion miles away, the Earth fleet fought furiously for its own survival. There was no deceiving the Xenobots now: they knew where their enemy was and they were trying to unleash all their weaponry on the forces of light.

The battle was fierce, but only so many ships could attack each other at once: if too many ships fired at once they risked destroying each other. The Ahmanyans, though, were masters of camouflage: the fleet had the power to mask and change their own shape, and within minutes they morphed to look exactly like the Xenobot ships. The Xenobot tachyon communication system was jammed, so the Xenobots could not talk with each other to verify who was who, while the Ahmanyan/Earth fleet communicated via the shifting radio frequency method – something the Xenobots had little experience with. The Ahmanyans further confused things by projecting images making it look like real Xenobot ships were attacking other real Xenobot ships.

The battle became chaotic, as the Earth fleet tried to create havoc and turn the Xenobots on themselves while trying to stay alive. The Earth fleet knew they could not survive for long, and they were taking terrific damage, even with Tharsos at their side: they were just trying to buy time, hoping against hope that the Starmen would be able to destroy the station before they all died.

Chapter 13

The Starmen were standing in a vast room – a very vast room. Imagine a circular room thousands of feet high with a pillar at the center, soaring up three hundred feet off the ground. The Starmen were standing on this pillar, and they could see space far above them, far around them, and that the floor was a long way down. It was as if they were in the center of a vast room – a room long disused.

The light Zip carried illuminated for a thousand feet around them, but that was all it could do – and it was unable to reveal the walls and the ceiling, though they could vaguely see the floor below them. The platform they were on had a railing around it – a very ornate one – and at their feet was a carving of stars in stone.

What took their attention, however, were the gates – hundreds upon hundreds of them, appearing to hover in the air; thin circles of what appeared to be steel. Zip had no idea how they were suspended. They were all dead.

Zip turned down his light, took up the machine the Janitor had given him, and worked with it. The Starman soon learned that the network was off: there was no power to the system. They had to use one of these doors to get to the solar power station, but they first had to power the doors – and they had to locate the station, for their locators could not find it.

Working quickly, the Starmen traced wiring and circuitry and found a staircase leading off the pillar they were on and down toward the ground. They found a doorway at the bottom of the pillar and walked inside, where they found what they were after: a control room.

At this point they hesitated. It appeared that the Xenobots were preoccupied and had not discovered them, but once they turned this on they were sure to get someone's attention! This would not go unnoticed. It would not take them long to reprogram a gate, but they had to have the coordinates – and that is one thing they did not have, for they could not pinpoint it this far underground.

So the Starmen came up with a plan. Mark Seaton, the master of machines, would stay at the foot of the pillar and, when the word was given, turn on the system. Zip Foster, who had proven most adept at reprogramming a gate, would be standing by a gate located near the floor of the room; as soon as the power came on he would reprogram the gate. Joe Taylor, meanwhile, would find a way to the surface of the planet and get the coordinate of the power station. Once he had it he would pass it on to Zip.

Mark would turn on the system, Zip would reprogram the gate, and then Zip would go through it, followed by Mark and Joe. They would rather have all gone with Joe but they knew it could not be that way.

So Joe began climbing a long staircase, headed steeply upward, wondering what he would find at the surface.

Chapter 14

Up in space, the battle continued to rage. It was not going well for the forces of Earth: they were scattered and damaged, dodging and fighting and trying to evade being destroyed. There was much confusion and the Xenobot fleet had been damaged, but there were so many of them and so few Earth ships that it was only a matter of time. They knew that they could not last another hour against this onslaught. The worst part was that they had no idea if the Starmen had been able to reach the Xenobot home world or not: all they had to go on was the hope that the Starmen were still alive.

Joe Taylor, who held a track record at Starlight Enterprise, put it to good use here: he ran like he never ran before. This planet was small and the gravity was light, so Joe was able to cover distance remarkably fast.

The tunnel was pitch dark, but Joe's suit helmet was equipped with night-vision technology; looking through the helmet, to him, made things appear as if they were in broad daylight. A small radar map on his helmet told him that there was nothing nearby, but that a mile ahead was a massive door – a shut door. Joe kept running.

Below, Zip Foster stood by a gate, waiting for word from Joe. He looked over the room and was once again impressed by what he saw. The Ahmanyans could do beautiful work, but this was beyond them: the elegance was beyond anything he saw and reminded him of the pictures Mark and Joe had brought back from the moon orbiting the devastated planet.
These people were masters of space, he thought, and masters of beauty. He saw, carved in the stone floor and in the elegant steel that made up the gates, beautiful images of landscapes and star systems and barren planets. At one time this race loved exploration. I wonder what happened? What made them turn? He wondered what it must have been like in those days and wished he could have seen them.

At last, Joe reached the door. He tried his locator one last time and saw that it still failed: it could vaguely see the power station but couldn't get a good fix on it. Joe grimaced: he would have to open the door, and that would be sure to raise some trouble.

Joe used his tool to scan the door. As he guessed, it was an airlock, but he couldn't see what was on the other side. There was nothing for it: he would just have to open it.

So Joe located the control panel on this side of the door and, with trepidation, opened it.

Chapter 15

Joe Taylor found himself at the bottom of a deep, dark well. It was as if he was at the bottom of a shaft, a circular shaft several hundred feet in diameter and that stretched up for miles. At the bottom of the shaft, on his level, were six doors, spaced equally apart and exactly like the door he had just opened. Thirty feet up were another six doors, followed by another six doors thirty feet above those. The wall of the shaft, as far up as he could see, was filled with doors. The chamber the three had entered was evidently not the only one; it was just one of many. And how many shafts like this one are there? Joe wondered. He didn't wonder why the Xenobots didn't want to come down here: there were so many doorways, linking to so many worlds; who knew what was out there?

Joe saw that in the center of the room was a little raised circular platform with some controls – an elevator. With some trepidation Joe walked onto it and pressed a button, and the elevator began rising – and rising fast.

Within five minutes, Joe reached the top level and stepped off the elevator into another room. He thought that he was probably at least five to ten miles higher than he had been.

When he stepped into the room he realized that he was actually at the top of an observation deck – an observation deck with glass walls. He could see out over a vast Xenobot city below: a city decaying, dying, filled with ruins and yet crawling with life. It was a dank, murky, swampy planet, filled with pockets of gas and a yellow, murky sky that blotted out the sun. It was a place of darkness and shadows, with a foul atmosphere. Joe was glad he didn't have to breath it; he wouldn't survive. He estimated that he was about a thousand feet above the city.

Working quickly, Joe got a fix on the station. He then sent a radio message to Zip with the coordinates – and not a moment to soon, for the Xenobots had spotted him.

As soon as Zip got the message he yelled at Mark, and Mark quickly got to work. He had already analyzed the circuitry and knew what to do; the Janitor had showed him a machine like this before. Mark turned it on, and the room lit up brilliantly.

In fact, it did more than that. Every single wormhole gate simultaneously came on, and the space in the room became filled with gates to thousands of other star systems. Zip looked in awe as he saw gorgeous landscapes, vast seas, rugged plains, alien cities; it was an incredible wealth of worlds. The walls of the room had become alive; they turned from drab stone into a gorgeous three-dimensional depiction of a gorgeous nebulae in deep space. It was a breathtaking room.

Wasting no time, Zip quickly reprogrammed the gate. A hallway appeared before him and, wasting no time, Zip jumped through it.

At the same time, far above him, Joe was riding the elevator down the shaft while hordes of Xenobots flew after him. Realizing he was in trouble, Joe jumped off the elevator and through an open doorway, leading down another shaft. Joe had noticed that when Mark activated his room, all of them became alive: the entire nexus became live at once.

The Xenobots were firing furiously, hideously angry that anyone had penetrated to their inner sanctum. The elevator Joe was on moments before blew up in a blaze of fire. Joe leaped down the stairs, trying to get away from his adversaries. Joe was trapped.

Mark leaped out of the control center and ran to the door Zip just opened, but he was too late: the entire room went dead. Mark realized that the Xenobots must have cut the power once they realized the nexus was live. He vainly tried to reactivate the door but it was no use: it would not come on again. Mark was trapped, with no way out, and no way to follow Zip.

Chapter 16

To Zip's surprise, he found himself standing on the top of a high mountain, overlooking a vast city below. The sun was setting in the distance; evening was coming. The lights of the futuristic city at his feet twinkled, but

Zip had a sense that the city was empty – and had been empty for a long time.

This is not the power station, Zip thought. Where am I?

A voice broke into his thoughts, calling his name – not an audible voice but one in his head. Zip turned around and saw a tall figure behind him, dressed in flowing robes. Zip recognized the figure at once: he was the same type of being depicted on the walls of the base that Mark and Joe had been trapped in during DH. This being was a Lucian – and Zip knew that he was not just a projection but the real thing. Thoughts reeled through Zip's head: weren't the Lucians defeated?

The Lucian spoke to Zip, and told him that he had intercepted Zip and brought him here to talk with him. Zip wondered how anyone could intercept a wormhole gate and the Lucian said that there were ways: he had designed those gates and knew how to use them.

The Lucian told Zip that he had brought him here to talk with him. He had met Zip before, more than once, while disguised; the Ahmanyans fancied themselves as masters of light but the Lucians took the art to greater heights long before the Ahmanyans knew anything about the subject.

The Lucian (who seemed to be in no hurry) told Zip that he was the last one of their race left. Long ago, his race had achieved enormous power; they were the most powerful race in the galaxy. When they reached a height greater than any of the First Races their hearts grew proud and they made a bid for ultimate power: they wanted to control all things. Only a few Lucians refused to join this mad rush to war, and they were all dead now – all but him.

He had watched the war from afar and saw his kindred defeated, and he watched as they mutated into the Xenobots and forgot their ancient heritage. He watched them scrabble to make a living in areas they use to dominate, and he saw them lose their cognitive abilities and become bent on destroying all life forms, in a mad quest to get their revenge.

The Lucian told Zip that he had been watching the conflict between Ahmanya and the Xenobots, and he said he knew the time of the Xenobots had come to an end. It would mean the end of his race – but his race had ended long ago. He had been watching Zip, for he knew that one day Zip would be the one who would finally defeat the Xenobots.

The Lucian told Zip that the vast city he saw below was once the capitol of the First Races – a vast network of planets reaching to the farthest reaches of the galaxy. They had achieved much, but they grew proud and now there was nothing left of any of them.

He explained that the First Races would not be coming back. After the war had ended the First Races saw that the galaxy was in shambles and so they sent out their robotic probes to clean up the mess and repair the planets. They saw that it would take 300 years to do this, so they build a transporter that could take them into the future. The idea was simple: the entire First Races would take this transporter 300 years into the future, and in an instant the galaxy would be repaired and their lives could resume.

What they did not know was that a Lucian (not him) had survived, and tampered with the transporter. When the transporter was activated the First Races were transported – and caught in time. No time was passing for them, but they would never fall out of the tunnel; they would remain in transit until the Universe ended.

Before that Lucian died, he took the planet that housed the transporter and, when he found he could not destroy it, he instead turned it into an incredibly inhospitable place – a place that Zip's people would one day discover and call Larson's Folly. He doubted that anyone would ever pierce its secret; it would remain a mystery for all time. He doubted that anyone would ever find a way to the heart of that planet and rescue the First Races.

The Lucian said that he was telling Zip all of this because it was time for him to leave this universe (he was very old) and soon it would be Zip's people who reigned over the Universe, and they had the potential to surpass all the First Races. He wanted Zip's people to know what had happened so that, when they reached this height, they would remember what had happened to those who came before them and would be watchful. Zip, he predicted, would be a mighty leader; he urged Zip to pass this message on when he returned.88

With that, he let Zip go – and Zip found himself on the power station.

Chapter 17

This is it, Zip thought. I'm finally here. Zip was standing in the hallway of the power station. Zip noticed that this power station was actually a little different from the other one he had been on: this one was embedded into a small asteroid that orbited the star.

Zip ran. His radar showed him that there were dozens of semi-intelligent androids around, and within moments they knew of his presence. Zip's radar and equipment had already scanned the base (as soon as he got in) and mapped out the hallways. Zip was fully armed and knew what he had to do.

He quickly discovered that the core of the base was down below, in the basement – the lowest floor of the base. He ran toward it, using his powerful laser weapon to fry open the doors in his path. Behind him the androids fired at him; their lasers diffused against his laser shield. He knew they would soon get out heavier armaments.

Throwing a grenade behind him, Zip collapsed a tunnel to keep the androids from following him – just to delay them a little while. He knew the Xenobots would be desperate: they had to stop him.

As Zip ran down another hallway he saw more androids coming at him. He pulled out his laser and fired – and his laser malfunctioned! It made a strangled crisping noise and smoke started pouring out. His laser was dead, and that was the last weapon he had. A quick glance around showed no other weapons within grasping distance. Zip now had to fight his way through unarmed.89

Zip ran for his life down the stairwell, heading down, down, down. He saw that the androids – and some Xenobots – were coming for him, but his options were limited. Below, barring his way to the last corridor that led to the basement, were several Xenobots – and he had nothing to fight them with.

Quickly glancing at his compad, Zip saw that he had a choice. If he went down another hallway, he had a chance of getting to a nearby escape pod, which he could use to get into space, and possibly make his escape – but the power station would remain intact. He tried raising Mark and Joe, but he couldn't get through: someone outside was jamming all the frequencies and no messages could be sent or received.

Zip decided to abandon that for now and tackle the Xenobots that were in his way. There was only one electronic door leading to the place he needed to go and the Xenobots were standing squarely in front of it. How was he to get them away? He couldn't stay here long; androids from other parts of the station were rapidly making their way toward him.

Then Zip got his idea. Zip was in a spacesuit, of course: he could not survive in the Xenobot atmosphere that permeated this station and the planet he had just left. The Xenobots, meanwhile, were not – and there was a window at the bottom of the stairwell.

Zip took his ration box from his suit and hurled it at the window with all his might. It bounced off, but the Xenobots saw the motion and automatically fired a barrage of lasers that the box. As a result the wall was blown open and

the air immediately stared rushing outside into space – and dragged the Xenobots with it. Zip saw this coming and was holding on for dear life.

Meanwhile, after this happened, all the emergency airlock doors in the stairwell clanged shut, cutting it off from the rest of the base. Within a minute the air was gone from the airlock and Zip was left alone. He knew that the Xenobots would override it shortly, but he had some time to work with.

Zip ran down to the bottom of the stairwell. The door that protected the interior of the asteroid was a weak door and had been blown off with the change in air pressure; there was no air in the interior anymore. Zip ran down the stairwell.

Zip ran down about a thousand feet and he then came to the room he was looking for. The room was empty save for banks of machines, working silently.

Zip quickly looked them over. There was much he didn't understand here, but he knew more than he otherwise would because the writing was in ancient Lucian – the same type of writing and the same language that Zip had found on the ship he and his friends had brought back during XI. Zip soon discovered that he could destroy the station by destabilizing the antimatter beams being sent to the ships: it would destroy the station, but it would do so instantly, giving Zip no time to escape.

All Zip had to do was turn some levers, disconnect some wires, and then destroy a thin crystal tube. Zip grimaced. If he had his laser with him – and it was working – he could set it by the tube, time it to explode, and leave before the station erupted, but his laser was dead. He had nothing with which he could create a timed explosion, and he knew too little of ancient Lucian to find a better way to destroy the station. He could not even call for someone to transport him out or for aid: all communications were being jammed by the battle raging outside.

One thin glass tube, Zip thought. Just one tube, separating the Xenobots from complete victory – or utter defeat. Breaking it would seal the defeat of the Xenobots for all time – but it would also seal the fate of one Zip Foster, who would be instantly pulverized in a fantastic outpouring of radiation.

There was only one thing to do. Zip worked with the machines, overriding them, altering them. Moments later the base erupted in a flame of light, and it was gone; the solar power station was destroyed, and it took with it every Xenobot ship in space. The battle was over.[90]

1 *There were few Xenobots left, and much of their empire was manned by machines with simple AI. These are not advanced Terminators but something simpler and not as bright. Much of the Xenobot space fleet consisted of either completely automated fighters or fighters manned by machines. The Xenobots had been around for a long time; they knew how to build such things, and so they did. I want to make a distinction between the Xenobots and Earth: the Xenobots themselves are half-machine and have given over much of their lives to other machines, and nearly everything they have is either automated or decayed or dead. Earth, on the other hand, is quite different.*

2 *By automated I am picturing a ship that is entirely machine, governed by some central (and limited) AI. It has vast weapons but is weak in the brain department. Most of these have no androids inside running things; they are run by the computer itself. I thought this idea made sense and was a little creepy as well.*

3 *At the moment, at least. As time goes on this will change.*

4 *The best the Xenobots had – their flagship. This is contrasted with the Ahmanyans, which had Tharsos. I picture the Xenobot ships as being ugly and rusty: they had long ceased to care about aesthetics.*

5 *A gram of antimatter could completely vaporize all of Earth. Such a missile is well within the realm of possibility.*

6 *What a way to start the book off! I wanted to make it clear what was coming and what would happen if Earth failed. This starts the book off on the right note: the threat is presented clearly and up-front.*

7 *Which needs to happen before Doomsday Horizon takes place. There isn't time to do this after Doomsday Horizon, since TSM begins just days after DH.*

8 *A critical scene! We can't forget the High King of Ahmanya. He is the one that will lead the forces of Earth and Mars into battle against the menace presented in the prologue.*

9 *Thus giving DH time to take place. I know we didn't mention this in DH but where would we have mentioned it? The Ahmanyans might have been keeping this event close to themselves during the whole DH episode as a precaution; the High King would have been weak and needed medical attention. It is a bit of a stretch not to have mentioned this in DH but as it was we forgot about it. I don't think it's too bad or would really have altered anything in DH.*

10 *They would want to waste no time after DH!*

11 *These exist today; NASA can track bolts in Earth orbit. Tharsos would certainly have this ability.*

12 *Not new fighters, but old ones – refurbished fighters from the ancient days. SE would begin manufacturing new copies of these but not until XI – they have to have time to build the manufacturing plants first.*

13 *Robert Nolan would not be here; his company was shattered and his employees had become renegades. I don't know if the President needs to be here or not; it just seemed that in an event like this you would want the leader of Earth, the leader of Mars, and the leader of SE, as well as some military people.*

14 *This was not mere interference, as it turned out.*
15 *David, I know you have your own ideas about what he should look like, and I say go with them! They sound good to me.*
16 *Refers to what we saw in the prolog.*
17 *Setting things up! Here, we see they have no manufacturing capacity. This changes by XI.*
18 *Outside the hyperspatial shield that guarded Tharsos. It only extended so far into space.*
19 *This battle is here because it made sense to me: I could see the Xenobots trying this. At the time they had a strong presence in the Solar System and had the resources to do this. I thought this also spiced up the meeting a little bit: just reading a meeting is a little boring, but a meeting punctured by battle scenes is more interesting. It gets things off to a good start, shows the Xenobots are serious, and shows that the threat is real.*
20 *It took a lot to move Tharsos through hyperspace; she had to charge for a while before she could jump. Since she had just arrived at this location she wasn't ready to make another jump – that would take time.*
21 *Another theme: the Xenobots constantly try to destroy Tharsos. They remembered the Bane of the Xenobots.*
22 *He did later bring them back and they were able to build the shield, but not until XI.*
23 *This is not to say that the greegles play no role. They actually do, as is discovered in Chapter 3 or 4 of XI.*
24 *Here we can put in a notice about the Starlight logo: it can be on the side of a building or somewhere on campus – big and bold, in a place where our readers can't miss it.*
25 *Whatever you think of here is fine with me! I just threw something out; I'm sure you can come up with a better idea. I imagine you will rewrite the entire scene to make it really cool. All the fight scenes in this summary are just placeholders: do what you think best! They're not actually serious suggestions.*
26 *Another plot thread. You can be sure that NME will be heard from again.*
27 *Another plot thread: I wanted to show SE's security as at first being lax but growing stronger as the series goes on.*
28 *I wanted to show the capacity of the Solar System growing gradually. Manufacturing plants are being built here; later they will start to churn out ships.*
29 *NME wants to destroy SE. They want to ferment unrest, hoping that SE and Space Command/Earth will get into a fight and NME can emerge the victor. We're setting up events that take place in book nine.*
30 *This would be the last time the Titanians appear in the series; I thought they could use one more appearance.*
31 *I thought it was high time she got a role in the series!*

32 *No one realized the Xenobots had a base on Uranus. This caught even the Ahmanyans by surprise. It also sets up the battle for Uranus that takes place during TFS.*

33 *The RTT devices are becoming much more common; they are starting to become standard equipment.*

34 *We'll need to research the science behind this, but I think a planet like this would be very cool! The planet would have a heavy atmosphere (and thus be dark), a lot of electrical storms, and each bolt would light up vast parts of the atmosphere in brilliant displays of shifting light. This was one of Mike Dodd's ideas and I think it's a cool one. What a visual!*

35 *One thing that always bothered me about series books is the insane risks the characters took: so many times a lot of the risk could have been eliminated if the characters had used their head. Here I tried to show SE being cautious and acting sensibly – and yet there is still danger, as SE finds out.*

36 *NME has these too, and they will use them later. This helps set up a scene in TFS.*

37 *Though obviously an alien forest! Methinks there may be more to these trees than one would expect. What if we have here trees that can move? This is an old idea in fantasy and I think it's time to bring it into the realm of sci-fi.*

38 *This is important. Zip is going to be in Xenobot territory for a long time and he will need something to eat. I'm picturing here some sort of high-density food – a sci-fi version of lembas bread.*

39 *The menace on Uranus makes its first appearance!*

40 *This could just be a simple tachyon transmission; the Xenobots use them and at this point tachyons are not being jammed.*

41 *Another Dodd idea, and a good one! We'll want to find out what gas is dense enough for these, but this is a possibility – and a unique sci-fi idea.*

42 *This is a reality; I have heard that such things exist. You can also burn out a hard drive this way. This is setting up a scene in TSM.*

43 *Their compads were not RTT enabled: the equipment couldn't be miniaturized that far.*

44 *I have never been a fan of automated filters.*

45 *We'll want to describe all this in a lot more detail, of course; the scene where he floats through the debris field could be very hair-raising and exciting! I thought it best to leave the details to you, since whatever you come up with would be better than my ideas. I'm not very good with these kind of scenes.*

46 *Uranus, of course, will be dealt with in Part 2: TFS.*

47 *This seemed much more reasonable to me than assuming there was a constant connection! Something like this might actually be somewhat plausible: it's similar to the SE Spud Peeler scenario (satellite around the Sun generating antimatter) with a twist.*

48 *This is to be expected. Virtually all of the Xenobot ships were automated; very few were manned by Xenobots.*

49 *Since their language and writing was known to the Ahmanyans producing such a thing would not be hard.*

50 *This just seemed like a good place to have Zip wander around and do some reflecting, perhaps some thinking on what the Xenobots used to be. At one time – a time long past – they shared Zip's desire to explore. I have no real idea what to put here but it seems like a good place for a quiet, emotional scene.*

51 *As it turns out, this is not the real Xenobot home world. It is the current Xenobot capitol, but their actual planet of origin is somewhere else. This is discussed in The Last Command.*

52 *As deep as the Xenobot hyperspatial shield would allow them.*

53 *At this point there are some tens of thousands of ships, but that is all: the Xenobot fleet is still somewhat scattered around the Solar System. This doesn't change until The Last Command.*

54 *I like this twist! This puts the reader in a real spot: the reader wants Tharsos to win but yet wants Zip to survive, and Zip is on a ship in the midst of the battle! This should put 'em in fits.*

55 *Lasers alone would be pretty ineffective against Tharsos (especially if Tharsos had "active shielding" a-la-JTP), so I would image the Xenobots would be throwing some sort of particle weapon at Tharsos. Tharsos could deflect these by some kind of magnetic field that would keep the particles at bay.*

56 *Not to repeat what happened earlier, but this would happen in a battle.*

57 *Not that it matters, but I imagine this base would be almost empty at the time, since everyone would be in space fighting.*

58 *Tharsos was damaged pretty severely, and this is an important plot point – in fact, part two (TFS) centers entirely around this. It needs to be set up here.*

59 *This just seems like a good spot for an emotional scene. I have no idea what emotional scene to put here, so I just put something there. If you have a better idea by all means use it!*

60 *It may be a good idea to combine Chapter 22 with Chapter 23. I'm not sure.*

61 *These time intervals were put there for my own use; I wanted to make sure all the events were lining up correctly and that things weren't happening too quickly or too slowly. The whole book takes place within four days, which makes it the shortest Starman tale yet!*

62 *There is a new tone now. The ancient threat had been dealt with for the time being, and there was confidence that the Xenobots would be utterly defeated. People are more relaxed.*

63 *In the Solar System the Ahmanyans now had the upper hand – and they no longer feared reprisals from the outside. They wanted the Solar System clean so that they no longer had to worry about internal enemies – only external ones.*

64 *More setup for book nine (XI): NME is trying to ferment unrest. There is not a lot they can do until SE becomes armed, but SE is now becoming armed. At the moment few will voice their concerns too loudly, not after SE saved them and not while Uranus is being battled, but that will change once the garrison on Uranus*

has been defeated. Until then NME is working in the shadows, waiting for their chance. This needs to be brought out somewhere, to lay the foundation for what will happen later.

65 *The first NME-Xenobot tie-in! I wanted to show the two in league.*

66 *When the summary talks about a message being sent from Uranus, this is how it is done. When it talks about a message being sent to Uranus, the NME satellite sends a message on a tight maser beam to Uranus. Trying to stop that beam would be like trying to stop a single ray of light, when you don't know where the light is coming from or that it's dangerous.*

67 *This is why they hadn't tried to use Tharsos on the problem before: it was still being repaired.*

68 *This, of course, is critical to the plot. If Tharsos was still in action they could use it to fry the base and we would have no story. Therefore, Tharsos needs to be taken out of action, and I thought this was a good way to do it. I'm sure it will catch our reader by surprise! They won't be expecting this.*

69 *Another critical plot point. If they hadn't left they could just repair the system and our plot would be gone.*

70 *NME, of course, had a lot to do with this, as is later explained.*

71 *Miners can be an unpredictable, independent lot – a little like Montezuma Vly! They aren't always happy to see every stranger or official.*

72 *This is a very critical point!*

73 *Since there were so few Xenobots, they would never put one on a ship when there was no need – especially on a mission like this, when they expected heavy losses. Zip had run into these automated ships before, in TSM.*

74 *The Xenobot plan was simple: have Zip hesitate, which would give the Xenobot enough time to shoot both Zip and Joe. They couldn't break the shield but they could contact NME, have them deliver some sort of nuclear weapon, and blow the whole asteroid up. However, things didn't go as planned, and when they didn't the Xenobot decided to simply escape and fight another day – just as they did in TSM.*

75 *I know; we need a good reason for this. I'm sure we can come up with something.*

76 *Here the greegles play their part in the tale!*

77 *A reference to an unpublished story!*

78 *Starlight Enterprise has beefed up its security systems! Here we show the fruit of their labors: the attack is soundly defeated. This may be a first in series book history: I don't think that Tom Swift's security fence ever kept anyone out.*

79 *The Solar System did have a wormhole shield in place that could prevent any wormholes from being made, but it took a lot of power and there was no reason to run it when there was no danger. FTL technology was very useful, and they only wanted to turn something like that on when they knew they were in danger. The Solar System did have an early warning system in place, which had been built over the past few years; if any ships started appearing or any enemies (based on outside intelligence) began their way toward the Solar System, the*

shield would go up. For now, though, there were no signs of danger and so the shield was left down to allow FTL to be used. The primary defense of the Solar System wasn't this shield, anyway, but was the technique they had developed to destroy solar power stations – and that was always ready on a moment's notice, should one appear. (It should be noted that critical installations or secure places were protected against wormholes at all times.)

80 *This is another plot thread we needed to tie up! Can't forget about this.*

81 *Total US electrical usage today is 0.450 terawatts. The average nuclear plant can produce 0.004 terawatts (4,000 megawatts). By 2040 the US hopes to have nuclear fusion plants operating with an output great enough to power all of the US and Canada combined, which is a thousand times greater than what power plants can be done today. By 2160 it's not unreasonable to think that another leap equally large could be made.*

82 *I researched this. To make even a tiny wormhole, spanning a small distance (3 feet), would take the total power output of 10 billion stars for one year. I'm hoping that the Benefactors found a much more efficient way to do this than the brute-force approach I read about. It must be said, though, that these wormhole devices do not break the laws of physics.*

83 *If you like, we can change the departure time and have enough time for them to go and visit the Lizard's Watering Hole. I don't think it would hurt anything and it might be a nice touch.*

84 *And he lied when he said this, although no one knew it at the time*

85 *I researched this, and I'm not kidding: an impact by a large freighter moving at, say, 300,000 mph would be devastating. The shockwave alone would be unthinkable.*

86 *Actually, NME was being put on: nothing of any kind was happening. They were just stringing NME along so they could defeat NME once and for all.*

87 *More untold adventures! Feel free to modify or add your own.* □

88 *The Lucian thought Zip would survive; he was wrong. He didn't foresee what happened. This is the only way I could think of to explain what happened to the First Races in such a way that the reader knows but no one else does.*

89 *Is this a way to build suspense, or what? Incidentally, this is what the Lucian didn't see: he had no way to know Zip's laser was about to malfunction. Zip was now in trouble.*

90 *You've already written these scenes, David, so I decided not to go into detail here. What you have is great!*

IV. HIGHLIGHTS OF SELECTED STARMAN TEAM EMAILS DURING THE WRITING OF THE LOST TOMORROW AND THE LAST THREE PUBLISHED STARMAN BOOKS[9]

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, January 02, 2003 1:45 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Thursday

Dear Jon,

Good morning. You're doubtless reading this while I'm still sleeping, although I am getting up at 5 a.m.—8 a.m. your time. I'm writing it at 1:35 a.m. your time.

> It is done! ... I am at
> last very happy with #6 and #7 and am done with it. I'm sure we will discuss
> it and alter it and all the rest, but my work on the plot summary is
> complete. I finally have a really good story for book #7: I think you will
> like it....
> This revised version has been sent! I finally had a chance to finish my
> work and I've put in all the other ideas I've had. I have felt very blessed
> recently; it is as if God opened the windows of Heaven and gave me a clear
> mind and lots of ideas. I really had little idea what to do with book 7, but
> suddenly it was all clear and it just flowed. ...Book seven was the easiest book to
> plot I've ever done; it was just all there all at once.

Ah, inspiration! That's the way it works! Usually a good sign. That's what happened to me when I first wrote the germ of the idea that became JTP two years later. I took a quick look at your summary while I transferred the

[9] Jon Cooper does not keep copies of his own emails. Therefore nearly all of the entries in this section are from David Baumann. However, in most cases the context of the message should be clear, as David usually quotes the email he's responding to.

file to my working folder. It looks very exciting indeed! A worthy successor to LROM! Good work, Jon!! I am now inspired myself to get writing!

> > I'd like to charge right into TDP[10] first and post something on the message
> > board that the writing has begun, announce that we're doing 6 and 7 > together
> > with close release dates, and ALSO announce that we're serializing yet a
> > THIRD new Starman story.
>
> That sounds really outstanding! It's terrific, a great idea, and I'm all
> for it. It sounds exciting to me, and I think our readers will like it. I've
> been worried about keeping them entertained while 6 and 7 are under way and
> I think this will do it.

Good. I'll write something to post as soon as I get a real start on TDP. I hope to do that within a week.

> > Maybe we could even sell subscriptions to the entire serial so we don't
> > have to collect checks with every issue.
>
> I like this idea a lot! Maybe what we could do is offer both: you can get a
> subscription to all the segments for $30 or you can buy them for $5 apiece,
> with a warning that there will be seven of them or something like that.

Exactly what I meant.

> Since they just have part of a story and little else it might be a good idea
> to charge $4 or $5 a segment instead of $7; that might encourage more people
> to get it, as sales of the I*S have been a bit weak.
Good idea. Once I take a glance at your summary of TLT I'll know how many

[10] Our abbreviation for *The Doomsday Problem*.

sections we'll need and we can plan a system for releasing it. I'll send something to you for approval before it goes up on the message board. We will probably want to alert all our customers and not just the eGroup.

> > I suggest that the serial be in a different format from the I*S, and not
> > really BE an I*S.
>
> I agree! I've been thinking along the same lines and think you're right.
> I'll have to see if I can think of a good name for the serial — hmmm...

Many blessings!

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, January 03, 2003 11:12 AM
To: Jon Cooper at Starman; Mike Dodd
Subject: Two Items

Dear Jon and Mike,

Jon, how wedded are you to having the title of book 6 be *The Doomsday Problem*? I should re-read the summary, especially since you've rewritten it, but TDP as a title doesn't quite grab me by the throat. I wonder if a title such as *The Xenobots Retaliate* would be exciting. TXR is not a serious suggestion, but something like that—like "The Empire Strikes Back." At the end of LROM and RTE we definitely set the stage for a Xenobot retaliation: something BIG is going to happen; I think the title of Book Six should reflect that in a big way. If we come up with a huge title, we can release that a couple of months before sales begin, and drum up business.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Sunday, January 05, 2003 6:40 PM
To: Jonathan cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: The Starman Series: answering Jon's abundance

Dear Jon and Mike,

I have an hour or two this afternoon and have used it to prepare working files for *The Doomsday Problem* and *The Starlight Maneuver*. I am therefore ready to begin writing the first draft; that'll be the next stage. I also emailed Valerie Kramer and asked if she would be our editor again. Now I have a few moments to answer all of Jon's emails of the previous week. Here you go!

> > 1) Jon, how wedded are you to having the title of book
> > 6 be The Doomsday Problem? I should re-read the summary...
>
> I wouldn't die or be offended if it was changed, but it should be noted
> that in the 1stBooks reprints, book six is indeed listed as The Doomsday
> Problem in the front of the book. Of course, we change title listings all
> the time, but I just wanted to throw that out.
> The reason I chose that as the title is because, to me, it fit the story
> well. ...

I've gone ahead in my notes and used TDP as the title, but I still have the feeling that the title should grab, perhaps even alarm, the reader more. Doomsday is a great word, perhaps even suggestive of Biblical themes, and I like it for that reason. I still need to reread the summary, which (obviously) I will be doing before starting the writing.

> > At the end of LROM and RTE we definitely set the stage for
> > a Xenobot retaliation: something BIG is going to happen...
>
> Yes, we did, but I think the way we did it we made our readers think that
> the deck was stacked in favor of Earth. I really don't think our readers
are
> expecting the Xenobots to come in and invade — they still don't know that
> Mars = Ahmanya. I would love to see their illusion remain in place until

> they actually started reading Chapter 1 of book 6...
Precisely why I'm thinking that a title that connotes disaster would make the readers gasp, especially if the cover illustration is a ruined city with smoking green fumes, over which a Xenobot fighter hovers.

> > I think the title of Book Six should reflect that in a big
> > way. If we come up with a huge title, we can release that a
> > couple of months before sales begin, and drum up business.
>
> That's true! So, what are your suggestions? As you can see I have put a lot
> of thought into the title, but I'm certainly open to changing it!

I really need to reread the summary before shooting off my mouth again.

> So, here is my proposed draft of the first chapter for the eighth Starman book. What do you think? I want to know because if I'm going the wrong way I
want to know before I invest a lot of time into it and build a book around it...
> I have to say that I like this plot — it has interesting potential. It makes a lot of sense.

It appeals to me too. In fact, it sounds so logical that it is disturbing.
It even sets the stage for a second Collapse, since corporate greed in the multinational corporations set off the Collapse in the 21st century.

> What I am wondering is whether I am getting out of my league. Is this too complicated? Is it too political and arcane? I wanted to know your opinion before I spent more time working on the idea. I've been looking for a source of conflict to drive the next segment since the Xenobots are gone, and this seemed like the most likely answer...

I might find it difficult to write about corporate evil. It would be a challenge, but certainly possible. I felt somewhat the same way three years ago when we first started writing AOM. I always feel a little apprehensive whenever I set out to begin a new book.

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, January 10, 2003 12:00 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Re: Mooncoin lake

Dear Jon,

It is so nice to finish a draft of something, go to bed, and then wake up in the morning and find your response. I really look forward to it! It is nice to be back in production.

> I like it, I like it!! It's a real blessing to be reading a new Starman
> manuscript again. Your writing gets better each time, David: what you sent
> me is just outstanding.[11]

Thanks! I'm glad you like it.

> I could easily visualize where the Starmen were in
> Montana and the rugged beauty of the scene all around them.

The paragraph that describes the sunset is taken about 75% from a chapter in The X Bar X Boys on Big Bison Trail. I compressed parts of about three pages
into one paragraph. That part of the X Bar X Boys book describes the country
a day or two away from the X Bar X Ranch by horse. It is another of our subtle tributes to another series, especially fitting in this case since I've implied in "Return to Europa" that Mark Seaton is a tenth-generation descendant of the X Bar X Boys, and that his grandparents' home is actually the X Bar X Ranch. Not too many people have read the fifth Inter*Stellar, so no one has picked up on that yet. It's not hidden too deeply, though, for the knowledgeable reader. So when it came time to describe the terrain in the Prologue, it seemed natural to go to a book in which it was already described!

> The airbot scene was terrific; I love the way you handled it. There is

---

[11] This was the first prologue of *Doomsday Horizon*.

just one thing I would change, and that is that Zip's arrow hit him through his clothing, not in the neck.

Actually I re-read the entire summary of TDP after I drafted the prologue (as I've promised to do during the past week so as to be able to mull over a new title), and noted that Zip was shot through the clothing. Therefore, where Mark was the one who groans "Ooh" when they're hit, I changed that to
Zip. Do you want me to make it more specific in the prologue that Zip's projectile hit him through clothing—or at least not in the neck? I will do that.

> I love the way the chapter ended! '...in a language not heard on Earth for
> more than 12,000 years.' Very very nice! Chilling, while not really
> explaining anything.

Right. The only language the readers know that hasn't been spoken on Earth for 12,000 years is Ahmanyan. That'll REALLY throw a red herring into the story. As the next chapters progress, they'll be asking, "Was it the Ahmanyans who captured them? Are there evil Ahmanyans?" Of course, later
I'll point out that it was some sort of Xenobot language.

> I'm thinking over ideas for the Starman computer game; I don't have time
> now to go into it but I'll try to e-mail you guys later.

Great.

> A quick note — I was rereading the prolog of book 6 and I've got a
> question: where did the information on mooncoin lake come from? I think
> that's pretty neat, myself — the legend and everything fits very nicely
in
> with the theme of book 6 and 7. Just why -is- the legend a year less one
> day? It's really fascinating.

I totally made it up on the spot. It probably is not logical, since the Moon doesn't take 28 days precisely to circle the Earth. I don't know it's exact orbital time, but if I can find out somewhere I can work that into the legend.

More later.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, January 10, 2003 12:19 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Cc: Valerie Kramer, Korners
Subject: Re: Mooncoin lake

Dear Jon, Mike, and Valerie,

[Jon]
> > A quick note — I was rereading the prolog of book 6 and I've got a
> > question: where did the information on mooncoin lake come from? I think
> > that's pretty neat, myself — the legend and everything fits very nicely in
> > with the theme of book 6 and 7. Just why -is- the legend a year less one
> > day? It's really fascinating.

[David]
> I totally made it up on the spot. It probably is not logical, since the Moon
> doesn't take 28 days precisely to circle the Earth. I don't know it's exact
> orbital time, but if I can find out somewhere I can work that into the
> legend.

Blast! It won't work. I did a little research and the orbit of the moon is approximately 27.3 days. Even at thirteen cycles that leaves more than TEN days at the end of the year. I'll have to puzzle about that and see if I can devise a legend that makes more sense. Maybe Valerie will have an idea.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, January 10, 2003 1:27 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Cc: Mike Dodd
Subject: Re: Mooncoin

Dear Jon and Mike,

> Did you know that there is a real place called Mooncoin in Ireland?

Yes. I ran across the word a few weeks ago somewhere in something I was reading about Ireland, liked it, and cached it for Starman use.

> "Mooncoin" means 'Quin's meadow'; there is even a Mooncoin County. You can
> find out more about it here: http://www.mooncoinparish.com/

Thanks!

> As I said, I like the entire mooncoin legend business — it sets exactly
> the right tone in the beginning of the book.

We'll come up with something. I want it to fit in with the storyline, but not give any credence to superstition. It'll take some thought.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, January 10, 2003 4:08 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: More Title Ideas

Dear Jon and Mike,

Here are some more ideas for titles for the sixth Starman book.

Under Attack!
The Edge of Doomsday
The Dawn of Doomsday
The Dawning of Doomsday
Doomsday Horizon
The Tortured Planet

The Tortured Planet was the name of the third book in C. S. Lewis' space trilogy after he abridged it. I have a copy of it. The title of the unabridged text is *That Hideous Strength*. *The Tortured Planet* (meaning Earth) is a better title for the full text, in my opinion, following *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*. If we don't use it now, we could use it later, if you guys like it.

My personal preference so far for Starman Six is *Doomsday Horizon*. It retains the original word in Jon's initial suggestion, which I like for Biblical reasons, among other reasons. It suggests the beginning of a threat, but a threat that is still far off yet inexorably coming closer; also a threat which is still somewhat unclear. Seems to match the tone of the book. What do you think?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, January 10, 2003 4:46 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Need Two More Titles

Dear Jon and Mike,

We have been unofficially calling the second Starman segment "The Xenobot Wars." I like that, and now think we need a title for the first segment, and then we should make these titles official. So far I'm thinking of "Search for the Benefactors," but that theme only emerges in the fourth book. Is there a theme across all five books that can give us a fitting title? Like "Search for the Truth" or what have you.

Then we can list our titles as

THE FIRST SEGMENT: Search for the Benefactors
[five novels and five short stories]
THE SECOND SEGMENT: The Xenobot Wars

We also need a title, and soon, for the magazine we'll be using for our serial. "The Starman Serials" might work, but it's not too clever. Titles like "Analog" and "Argosy" are good. I'd like to see something along that line. Any ideas?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, January 10, 2003 5:10 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Terror From Space

Dear Mike and Jon,

TERROR FROM SPACE[12]

> Now that is a really resounding title! It sounds so retro sci-fi; that really could be the name of a series book.

I think so too. I especially like the retro-sci-fi feel to it! I just got my new copies of The Lensman Series in the mail today, and I'm feeling really retro right now!

> The only possible drawback from using it in the series is that it's very close to the name of the 1958 film 'Terror from Beyond Space'.

That sure didn't stop us from using the term Starman! Let's hang on to that title. I'm sure we'll find a place for it. I doubt any 1958 fans would complain.

Starman serial newsletter title: how about "The Event Horizon"? Too much like Doomsday Horizon, no doubt. Is there a mathematical or astronomical symbol we could use, such as the symbols for pi or infinity? Maybe "The Sigma Papers", to suggest summation. How about "The Astrogazer"?—

[12] A title suggested by Mike Dodd

another of Mike's ideas that already has a history in our series. Personally, that's my favorite: The Astrogazer.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, January 10, 2003 5:51 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: DH

Dear Jon,

> I love it, David! *Doomsday Horizon* — it's beautiful, it fits, it works,
> it's exciting and provoking and mysterious. Let's do it! Book six is now
> DH - *Doomsday Horizon*. Very good!

Great. I'm glad you like it. I do too. I hope Mike is okay with it. I've already changed all my files to make Starman Six into *Doomsday Horizon*.

In confidence (until we're ready to release the title publicly), I told Leslie Owens what we'd decided. She's part of the reading group, you remember. She said:

> I like it. It's got the "excitement" and "mystery" elements in the title
> that would make me pick up the book to see what it's about.

That's what we want!

Do you think we need to keep the title confidential, or shall we post it on the message board?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, January 10, 2003 6:10 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: DH

> Once nice thing we could do, since The Lost Tomorrow takes place decades
> after DH, is make little references to it in TLT! ... Maybe an off-hand mention about Zip Foster's funeral; nothing very
> clear. Could be a great way to build up some suspense without really saying
> very much of anything.

WOW!!!! I'd say that would do it!! Good idea!

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Saturday, January 11, 2003 9:45 AM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Saturday morning

Dear Jon and Mike,

> > Starman serial newsletter title: how about "The Event Horizon"? Too much
> > like Doomsday Horizon, no doubt.
> I think you're right — it's a clever title but two Horizons, especially so
> close together, is probably too much.
>
> > Is there a mathematical or astronomical symbol we could use,
> > such as the symbols for pi or infinity? Maybe "The Sigma Papers",
> > to suggest summation. How about "The Astrogazer"?—another of Mike's
> > ideas that already has a history in our series. Personally, that's my
> > favorite: The Astrogazer.

> I think it's a good title, but it doesn't really reach out and grab you —
> the average person would probably think it had something to do with
> astronomy. I think we can do better.

Let's keep our thinking caps on.

> > > Once nice thing we could do, since The Lost Tomorrow takes place decades
> > > after DH, is make little references to it in TLT! ... Maybe an off-hand
> > > mention about Zip Foster's funeral; nothing very clear.
> > WOW!!!! I'd say that would do it!! Good idea!
> Then let's do it! Writing TLT is going to be a lot of fun — I can hardly wait!

I made a note in the summary to include a remark like this. It'll appear in the first segment.

From: David Baumann
Sent: Saturday, January 11, 2003 9:48 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: How's This?

For a subtitle for the First Segment, how about "Light in the Darkness"? It suddenly hit me that that was the theme we picked for the entire series, and it's the Bible verse I selected for the huge book I sent you two with the whole first segment in it. It seems to apply to all the situations the Starmen encountered from AOM to LROM.

Hence,
THE STARMAN SERIES
The First Segment: Light in the Darkness
The Second Segment: The Xenobot Wars

_____
From: David Baumann
Sent: Saturday, January 11, 2003 10:54 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: The magazine; Valerie

Dear Mike and Jon,

How about if we ask the egroup for suggestions for a title for the magazine that'll serialize the novelette? Prize for winning suggestion can be a free subscription. I've given it some thought today and came up with a few ideas, none of which really appeal to me, such as Tharsos, Orbit, or even an Ahmanyan word like Allamah (applause) or Imlah (community). Or I could make
up a new Ahmanyan word that means "Starman," or even "light" or "starlight."

Valerie Kramer will be visiting my area in the first week of February. We'll set up a time to meet. That'll be great!

David

_____
From: David Baumann
Sent: Sunday, January 12, 2003 3:57 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Doomsday Horizon

Dear Jon,

> I ran the title 'Doomsday Horizon' by Kristi and she
> thought it didn't make any sense.

Actually I kinda wondered a little about that myself, although Doomsday Horizon is a name for the horizon, just as Jordan River is a name for a river. It is a bit obscure, perhaps. How about "Doomsday on the Horizon"? Leslie, however, liked DH very much.

> She did like Mike's 'Danger from Space'

> quite a lot although book 6 really isn't about danger from space — book
> seven, maybe, but not book six. I just thought I'd throw that out.

Mike's title was Terror From Space. The second Tom Corbett book is Danger in
Deep Space, so there's a similarity there—I do not think that is a problem. How about "Danger Above!" <joke> I could go with Terror From Space for Book
Seven. I'm looking forward to it! An adventure that includes Mercury and Uranus will be outstanding!

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Sunday, January 12, 2003 4:00 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Light in the Darkness

Dear Jon,

> > For a subtitle for the First Segment, how about "Light in the Darkness"?

> I like it! I think that it works. My only caution is that it isn't very
> exciting: it doesn't rise up and grab you and make you think wow, I've got
> to check this out. Just something to think about.

We don't expect the segment titles to sell the books, though; it's really just a descriptive title for us and maybe established readers. On the other hand, who knows what the future holds? Shall we keep thinking and see if we can do better, then?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Sunday, January 12, 2003 7:16 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Doomsday Horizon, Follow-up

Dear Jon,

> > I ran the title 'Doomsday Horizon' by Kristi and she
> > thought it didn't make any sense.
>
> Actually I kinda wondered a little about that myself, although Doomsday
> Horizon is a name for the horizon, just as Jordan River is a name for a
> river. It is a bit obscure, perhaps. How about "Doomsday on the Horizon"?
> Leslie, however, liked DH very much.

Actually, the more I think about it, the more I like simply "Doomsday Horizon." It wasn't just Leslie who liked it when she first heard it, so did both you and I. "Doomsday on the Horizon" suggests a particular point on the
compass from which doomsday is coming, and other directions are safe. "Doomsday Horizon" suggests that regardless of whatever direction one turns,
doomsday is approaching. That, I think, is the impression we want in the book. How does that sound? We could, perhaps, ask Valerie how she likes the
title. I'll email her.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Sunday, January 12, 2003 8:09 PM
To: Jon Cooper ; Mike Dodd
Cc: Valerie Kramer
Subject: Revising the Legend of Mooncoin Lake

Dear Jon, Mike, and Valerie,

Since the falsity of a 28-day moon cycle ruined the legend I was growing about Mooncoin Lake (as I was certain it would), I made up another legend. How will this do? (Yes, I checked all the dates on a cool web site I found). (Also, Valerie, I made it clear that the orange river is reflecting the sky and not glowing with hideous pollution. Thanks for pointing that out!)
Let me know what you all think. It does mean that the story is set a full year after the first draft. In our time frame, blue moons occur in December 2153 and August 2156. I had previously set the story in September 2155. This means that more than three years have passed since the events in LROM, and two and half years since the return from the second trip to Europa. Obviously this implies also that the Starmen will be between 22 and 30 during the years of the second segment. Everyone okay with that?
Mike or Valerie, on a night with a full moon, where will Venus be at sunset?
Valerie, regarding the airbots' antigravity capability—good question, except that we already introduced these machines with that capability in *The Runaway Asteroid.* We didn't, however, say that they were noiseless at that time. Perhaps these particular versions are the Xenobots' improved versions. How's that, ya'll?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Sunday, January 12, 2003 11:30 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Terror From Space

Dear Mike and Jon,

> Mike's title was Terror From Space. I could go with Terror From Space for Book
> Seven. I'm looking forward to it! An adventure that includes Mercury and
> Uranus will be outstanding!

The more I think about it, the more I like "Terror From Space" as a title for book seven. It works, it fits, it sets the tone, it grabs the reader—especially a reader who's read book six—it has a venerable history (shades of the 1958 movie and the Tom Corbett book), it's "retro," and it suggests the Xenobots. I assume Mike likes it since it's his idea. What do

you think, Jon?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, January 13, 2003 10:48 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Cc: Mike Dodd
Subject: Monday morning

Dear Jon and Mike,

> You know, we might not be dividing up the series right. Books one to three
> are really the Pirate Segment; they deal with Putnam and Zimbardo. Books
> four to seven are about finding the Benefactors and the consequences of
> that. The third segment is probably book eight to the end of the series, in
> which the Solar System prepares for war.

Hey, you're right! Maybe we ought to just forget about segments and just number the books as we've been doing, without dividing them up into segments. We've said until we're blue in the face that we're telling one long story anyway. How about that?

> > "Doomsday Horizon" suggests that regardless of whatever direction one turns,
> > doomsday is approaching. That, I think, is the impression we want in the
> > book. How does that sound?
>
> Let's keep it — I think your reasoning is sound, and it is a gripping
> title. *Doomsday Horizon* it is!

Great. Nice to have that settled.

Oh, more on a book set on Uranus. I guess I forgot about the Dig Allen book because I was thinking of stories that are scientifically plausible, which LCOU definitely is not. Still—what an omission!!

> > In our time frame, blue moons occur in December 2153 and August 2156.
>
> Which reminds me — how does all this check out against the new calendar
> they're using in 2150? There's a good question for a math major!

Ah, right. Actually, that won't be so hard to figure, since the number of days in a year, of course, will be the same whether we use the World Calendar or the Gregorian Calendar as we do today. I'll make the change. Thanks for pointing that out! That may mean that there won't be a blue moon that month, though. That'll REALLY be hard to figure out! I might just ignore the change in calendar and hope nobody notices.

> > The more I think about it, the more I like "Terror From Space" as a title
> > for book seven.
>
> I think it's a great title too, but remember that the Uranus/Mercury
> adventure is book eight, not book seven.

Oh, right. Boy, I'd better get these books written before my brain dessicates completely.

> > It occurs to me that, while you've gone into some detail about The Collapse and the era between the present and the era of the Starmen, you've never given us a name for that era. The Revival? The 2nd Renaissance? The Space Age?
> The Diaspora?
>
> Another good idea! What do you guys think?

I don't think any of those suggestions works, except maybe the Revival, but it would be good to have a name for the era. Usually, though, I think, ages are named once they've passed. Not always, though. I could go either way.

Back to DH today!

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, January 13, 2003 11:03 AM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Cc: Valerie Kramer
Subject: Re: Blue Moons

Dear Jon, Mike, and Valerie,

> Looks great, David, but I don't think it takes into account the 22nd
> century calendar! Things have changed, you know...

Great observation, Jon. I worked it out and it resolves a little easier than I thought. 2156 is a leap year; therefore, in the World Calendar, Leap Day occurs between Saturday, June 30 and Sunday July 1. Keeping that in mind, if
you figure the equivalent of the dates, in our current calendar full moons fall on August 1 and 30, 2156, but in the World Calendar they fall on July 1 and 30. So if I just change August to July, the story line should work. It's too complicated for me to see if there are other, subtle computations that have to be made to make sure that's right. However, since Joe's birthday is September 17, that part of the passage will have to change, but that'll be easy. I'll do it all before getting on to the real Chapter One this morning.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, January 17, 2003 11:12 AM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Chapter 2 and Rewrites

Dear Jon,

> I think you did a good job on it. That second part probably does need to
be
> broken up a little somehow; it's a long monologue — it's necessary but a
> few reactions on the part of the Starmen or something would be great.

My intentions exactly. It'll just take a little time to add that and I didn't have the energy to concentrate enough last night when I got to the end of the chapter.

> I like the way the story is shaping up! It's going along just as I had
> hoped. It's going to be good!

I'm glad you like it.

> I do see that you've made a few changes but I think they make
> sense and go along with the spirit of the story.

Good.

> One thing we'll want to be careful
> of, though, is not to make the situation too logical: we want out readers to
> have vague doubts about what is really going on.

Okay, I get it. That'll be hard. We want to create doubts without making it look like bad writing or bad plotting. The bad guys' ploy has got to be sufficiently convincing to the Starmen that they are not immediately disillusioned. They need to be convinced at first, then have second thoughts later. Right?

> By the way, what does Valerie think of the story so far? I'm curious; just
> wondering what she thought of it.

She hasn't responded to chapter 2 yet, but her comments on the prologue and chapter 1 have been mostly technical: change a word here or there, etc. She hasn't mentioned anything about the story line—no "wows" or "heys" yet. I've been including, with each chapter, the relevant portion of the summary so that she can see how the story develops. She doesn't have the entire summary, so she's seeing the story the way a reader would. I think she is enjoying it that way, but it does make it difficult for her to give an overall appraisal this early.

> Wow, you've been doing a lot of writing! I like it: the changes are good
> and everything makes sense. The prologue is being rewritten quite a bit

but
> I think it's better for it — it's a great way to start the sixth book,
and
> the legend was worth the trouble it took to work out the details.

Glad you like it. It is a little different, writing this way—without a given deadline in mind. It's better—less pressure and it's easier to go back and fix details in previous chapters so that they match what is written later. That is, when I write chapter 2, what emerges can mean that I have to go back and fix things in the prologue and chapter 1 so that everything is consistent. It's easier to do without a deadline, and somehow I think I'm writing faster than before.

I've scheduled the first meeting of the Reading Group for February 8. By then I ought to have at least 6-8 chapters done. They're all eager to come together again. We haven't met since last July when I finished LROM.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, January 17, 2003 9:20 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: chapter 2

Dear Jon,

> When I was writing the summary I had the Starmen at first not be sure
> whether to believe it or not. They wavered in their belief, based on data
> gathered, right up until they took the ship up to the surface. ... It was
so easy to
> prove that they weren't really in 3118: all they had to do was take the
ship
> to the surface and look around. That is what made them uneasy: it was too
> easy to disprove.
> I placed the base deep underground and gave it no windows so they
wouldn't
> know right at first. They may be in the present and just too far

underground
> to send and receive signals — or they might really be in the future. As the
> ship rose through the tunnel to the surface the Starmen grew more confident
> that they really were in the present, and our readers (thanks to careful
> writing!) were right there with them, and then pow: there was a devastated
> moon and Earth. Everything was destroyed. It was a terrific psychological
> moment: they really were in 3118 and all really was lost. It would hit our
> readers hard because they would be thinking that it was all just some sort
> of trick — they would be as astonished as the Starmen.

Actually I think this is a great scenario! I like it a lot! But the summary I'm working from had the Starmen looking at the Earth right after they woke up. At the end of chapter 2 I've included the portion of the summary I'm working from. Am I working from the right version of the summary??

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, January 17, 2003 10:08 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Cc: Mike Dodd
Subject: Let's Declare a Winner

Dear Jon and Mike,

It looks as if we're not going to get any more suggestions for names for our serial/fanzine. How about if we look at what we've got and find a winner? Today I bought three reams of some really cool paper for it, so we'll be ready to print when the time comes.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Saturday, January 18, 2003 10:28 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Re: Let's Declare a Winner

Dear Jon and Mike,

> So David, your favorites are:
> Trans-Steller Tales [Trans*Stellar Tales]
> Starman Archives [Starlight Archives]
> Starman Chronicles [seconded by Glenn P.]

> Anyway, my favorite choies are (in no particular order):
> Inter*Stellar Adventures
> Lost Horizons
> Annals of the Starmen
> Starman Chronicles
> Farthest Frontier
>
> What about you, Mike?

Looks as if Jon and I both like The Starman Chronicles. I'm happy to go with that. It fits.

Tomorrow I have an incredibly busy day, but it will end with the drive to the mud cave with Dan and Katie. We'll camp out under the stars with (probably) no one around for ten miles in any direction. I'll take my camera and laptop, and expect to have lots to show you when I get back on Monday afternoon. I plan to fix up chapter 2 to bring it in line with the intended summary. Then back to writing chapter 3 on Thursday.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Tuesday, January 21, 2003 9:18 AM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Tuesday Morning

Dear Jon and Mike,

> That summary, by the way, went through all sorts of transformations.
> Originally the three Starmen were there together, along with men who were
> posing as men from the future, and the Starmen found out what was going on
> and had to find a way to escape. I toyed with that for a while but decided
> in the end that the effect and atmosphere was better if they were there
> alone: there could be this creepy, otherworldly feeling. Then I got to
> thinking that it might be more interesting if Zip wasn't there; one would
> wonder what happened to Zip and you could build suspense that way — plus
> you could have Zip out there doing something else to save the day, and that
> is when the plot started to fall in place. It's rather unusual to have the
> first five chapters of a novel only have two characters (the main characters
> at that) and no one else — I just thought the approach I ended up taking
> worked better.

It'll be excellent!

> Can you think of any other series books in which the first five or six
> chapters only have the main character and his pal? It's different, but it
> works!

Can't think of one. It's a good storyline.

> Sounds like a lot of fun! I hope you had a great time — I imagine it is a
> lot warmer there than it is here! I look outside and see snow and ice on the
> ground...
>

It wasn't snowy or icy, but it rained during the night! I slept in the car—Dan and Katie thought it was fun and stayed in their sleeping bags outside. We awoke to wind, but it died down an hour or two after sunrise. When I was leading them through the mud cave, Dan said, "This place definitely feels like another planet!"

> [Mike] To choose between theses very good
contenders
> is difficult.....But I think STARMAN CHRONICLES is the best for the purpose.

[Jon] > Well then, let's go with Starman Chronicles and announce a winner!

Good! Let's do it. I assume you'll put a post on the message board, Jon.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Tuesday, January 21, 2003 10:48 AM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Re: Tuesday Morning

Dear Jon and Mike,

This week I will be purchasing the canvasses for my son Nick and myself for painting the cover illustrations for the next two Starman books. We'll get started on that work before long.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, January 23, 2003 9:26 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Cc: Valerie Kramer
Subject: Addition to DH Prologue

Dear Jon, Mike, and Valerie,

Something important got left out of the prologue to *Doomsday Horizon*[13]. I added the following section. I'm sure you'll agree it's vital.

Question: is "perigee" the right word here? Literally translated from the Greek, it means "the point on the orbit closest to earth." What I want is the term that means the point on the orbit closest to the sun.

David

"There's Venus," said Mark. Zip and Joe paused in their work and turned to look into the western sky. A bright point of light gleamed over the ruddy clouds on the horizon.

"And there's Nyx," said Joe, pointing to a bright spot in the high southern sky, "three months past its perigee—a sight that hasn't been seen from Earth for 6,127 years, if you believe Dr. O."

"Kathryn's still there," said Zip. "Remember when we ran into her in Yellow City?"

"Mullaney's hard to miss, Zip."

"I wish we could have gone with her and seen Nyx again," said Mark wistfully.

For a moment the three Starmen stood silently, staring into the heavens. A clear sky above promised a night filled with stars.

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, January 30, 2003 8:49 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Cc: Mike Dodd
Subject: Logarithmic locaters

Dear Jon and Mike,

Valerie noted that the numbers I'd picked to show location in the destination through a wormhole couldn't possibly work if they were to be accurate. She suggested, if I use a set of numbers, that they have to be logarithmic, so as to decrease in accuracy over distance, and therefore we

[13] The fact that the tenth planet would now be located within the Inner Planetary system and visible to the naked eye.

had to make sure that the destination is always in the vacuum of space. I have adapted her comments into the following exchange. Let me know what you
think.

She further suggested that I make the numbers into our birthdays or some other cute inside joke. Therefore the numbers are 13 (M is the 13th letter of the alphabet), 0802 for the eighth day of the second month and 1957 for Mike's birthday. Same with Jon.

So do I have your birthdays right? Mike Feb. 8, 1957 and Jon Feb. 21, 1980?

David

"It's set for the day Colonel Hoskins told us they'd picked for our return," whispered Mark. "Guess we're supposed to arrived at six in the morning. And these other indicators might determine the location." A row of light blue numbers glowing on a second small screen read
1308021957.1021021980.0430071948.
"Possibly. Three axes, maybe. Have to be logarithmic, though, right?" said Joe doubtfully.
"Yeah. With that few numbers, accuracy will deteriorate with increased distance traveled. Wormhole travel with this mechanism must put the ship in the vacuum of space close to its destination but not on the surface of a planet. Otherwise, it'd be too easy to come out of hyperspace and find oneself coexisting with a mountain or something."
Joe nodded knowingly.
The panel was dotted with alien writing, beneath which the English translation was affixed. Mark examined it carefully. Minutes passed.

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, January 31, 2003 10:13 AM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Re: Chapter 4

Dear Jon and Mike,

> There is just one thing, and
> when I read over the summary I realized that I wasn't very clear — but
> fortunately this won't be too hard to change.
> It's true that they can't get to the lower half of the Xenobot ship.
> However, as I envisioned it, they can't even find a locked door: there's
no
> visible way to get to the ship's lower half.

So do they do anything but take note uneasily that they can't get into the bottom of the ship, or do they try to get into it?

> The door the Starmen burned down in the summary was not in the ship but
in
> the base itself.

Ah! That explains a lot! I was WONDERING why all this really neat stuff
they
find in chapter 5 was located in the SHIP! Sure, that'll be easy to fix.

> I really enjoyed Joe's meal! Man, that is quite a meal. Impressive!

It's a real drink. I make it myself and enjoy it. It's like spicy V8 juice.
If Fred Woodworth were producing a second edition of "Fine Dining," he could put in that scene. I have to go back to that scene and actually add some FOOD to it! I only mentioned their drinks.

> I also like the jokes Joe has cracked so far in the book; they're very
good. The
> characters are becoming alive! I like it.

Great. I hope Joe isn't too inconsistent here: I've got him raging when he gets the news about the attack, then telling jokes in the next chapter. In

between he is both irritable and funny at the same time. Does it come across as inconsistent or is it okay as is?

And the READING GROUP finally launches into this story a week from Saturday—the 8th, Mike's birthday! My goal is to finish two more chapters by then, so that the last part of DH they hear will be when the ship emerges from the passage and the Starmen see the ravaged Earth! What a scene!! We'll
get some reaction then, for sure! And Valerie is on her way down to southern California even as I write. She and I will meet on Tuesday. I'll take some photos and send 'em to you.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, February 06, 2003 8:58 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: timeline question

Dear Jon,

For the sake of the timeline, how long do you figure that the Starmen were asleep? In the text, I mentioned that they had "several days'" worth of beard. They were attacked at Mooncoin Lake on July 30—the blue moon of 2156. What date did they wake up?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, February 07, 2003 10:31 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: timeline question

Dear Jon,
> Two days, maybe three at most, ought to do the trick!

Thanks!

Your excitement about the way DH is shaping up has really given me a lift. We're a good team.

I asked Valerie, by the way, how she liked the story so far, and she said that it's a real page-turner! She is most curious to find out just where we're going with it. Good signs all around. We'll see what the Reading Group says tomorrow.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Saturday, February 08, 2003 9:09 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: DH dedication

Dear Jon and Mike,

Mary Doman had a good idea for the dedication for DH. How about special people who have been involved in flight from the beginning, since 2003 is the 100th anniversary of Kitty Hawk? We could dedicate it to the memories of Orville and Wilbur Wright, other heroes of flight, right up to those who have died in space travel—Grissom, Chaffee, one other whose name escapes me; the Challenger crew; and the Columbia crew. No doubt Mike could come up with good list for us to use.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Wednesday, February 12, 2003 10:23 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: The Starman Chronicles

Dear Jon,
Tomorrow I'll begin writing TLT. I think DH is at a decent stopping place

for a week or two. If we want to distribute the first issue of The Starman Chronicles in March, it's about time to get started on it. I've already prepared the format for the magazine. It'll need an illustration for the cover too, which I'll have to ink.

So I guess we're ready to make the big announcement that our readers can place orders for subscriptions. Of course, this'll go to all our readers and not just those on the message board, right?

How about $30 for one subscription and $50 for two, $60 for three, $65 for four, with a fifth copy thrown in for free?

More later. I'm under a tidal wave of emails and other work, but hope to answer all emails tomorrow.

Blessings!

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Wednesday, February 12, 2003 11:22 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: The Starman Chronicles

Dear Jon,

> 1) Will we offer sales of individual issues or do you have to buy the lot?

I suggest that individual issues be available at $5 each.

> 2) How long will these issues be and will they have anything in them besides
> the first segment of the story?

I'm planning on putting the story first in the magazine, rather than last as in the I*S, but the last few pages will have material similar to an I*S. The length will vary, depending on how long the story segment is, but I estimate

that each issue will be about 30 pages long—very roughly—and will probably
be longer. However, I'm not planning on filling it out so that it will reach 48 pages as the I*S was.

> 3) How often do we plan to release these?

Every two months, predictable and dependable: March, May, July, etc. Each segment will have a "discussion question" or two at the end so that readers can post comments on the message board. From those posted comments we can
tweak the story if we want. That is, we have your summary and don't need to waver from that, but if someone comes up with a really neat comment, if you want to move the story in a different direction or if we want to add something to the story, we can do it.

> Also, will this story always be available only as individual issues (except
> maybe for our own bound author's copies) or will at one point we release
> this story as a complete book? If our readers know that this is the only way
> to get it, they may be more willing to go ahead; otherwise they might wait a couple years and get the bound version.

Because of the high cost of producing books, I suggest that we plan to release this only in TSC. However, if something comes up in the future that makes a book feasible, we should have the option to do that. I suggest that we advertise now by saying, "Currently we have no plans to release TLT in a book format. It is most likely that TLT will only be available in TSC." It would be a good idea to be able to offer back copies, too. Say someone clues into the offer in October and wants to buy back issues. That'll be fine, but only at $5 per copy, not the subscription price. We should add that the discounted subscription price will only be offered up to March 8th, or something—after that, TSC will only be available at $5 each.

These are all suggestions, of course. How does it sound?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, February 13, 2003 7:20 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Cc: Mike Dodd
Subject: Re: More response to TSC

Dear Jon and Mike,

> Just wanted to let you know that as of 3pm today we have gotten one letter....
> We may need to do some rethinking about our customer base and the way we
do
> things. Last month we sold six whole books. This month we have not sold a
> single one - not one. It's not good.
> This is just something to keep in mind; we'll see how things actually turn
> out. I know that a lot is going on right now in the world and that you can't
> expect everyone to drop everything and dance in the streets at our
> announcement, but we have released 10 stories so far and even accounting for
> everything the response we've gotten to TSC today is awful - way way awful.

Probably people aren't ordering TSC because they ARE dancing in the street over the announcement. Doubtless those who are not dancing are so overwhelmed with their good fortune that they are sitting stunned before their computer screens, their screen savers passing unheeded before their glassy eyes. On the other hand, they haven't had much time to respond yet either. Hard to conceive, but maybe some people have jobs or other annoyances that take up their time when they'd rather be reading Starman and browsing our site.

On a serious note: here is the beginning of TLT. Let me know what you think.
Maybe if you wait a couple of days and then send out a brief follow-up to our constituents and include the first section of TLT, it'll engender a

response.

But I agree. If we get minimal response no matter what, then we rethink our position.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, February 13, 2003 7:43 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: TLT

Dear Jon,

I just remembered that it is your intention that TLT not include any information that can set a date for the story. Therefore I altered the first footnote to say "the future" instead of "the 22nd century." But I also put into the text that Caedmon and his daughter Ellarine are in charge of Starlight Enterprise. I really like that touch, but it does date the story to the end of the 22nd century. What do you think? Will it really ruin DH to have TLT datable? I can always move Caedmon and Ellarine later in the tale so that people receive it after they've already read DH.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, February 13, 2003 7:45 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Cc: Mike Dodd
Subject: Re: Initial response to the release of The Starman Chronicles

> We may want to consider a minimum order threshold: if we don't
> even get 20 orders then we just won't go ahead with it or something, and I
> can hold the checks and just not cash them.

Not a bad idea. If we don't enough interest, we can turn TLT into Starman number 11 or something. I do like the story and I like how it begins. If

sales and interest are plummeting, we can save money by issuing Starman #6 and 7 in one volume.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, February 13, 2003 8:36 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Blowing People Away

Dear Jon,

If this doesn't do it, I don't know what will:

Suppose we send out a message to our constituency and post it on the MB as well, containing excerpts of the exchanges you and I had on DH (without giving anything away, of course—just that you're so pleased), the response from the Reading Group, similar excerpts from today's exchanges about TLT,
then a couple of exchanges about where is everybody and did LROM hit with a
thud, and finishing off with the notation that TSC got only a by-the-way blip on our radar screen. Then see what happens. We could close with a musing about giving up and selling our entire package to the Xenobots if nobody on Earth is interested in our wares.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, February 17, 2003 11:17 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: More on TLT

Here you go, men. Some slight revisions to what I sent before, and some new material. I got them to the point where Joe begins his story. Shouldn't have any difficulty finishing the first segment this week. The first issue of TSC

will be ready in plenty of time for its shipping date in mid-March.

Let me know what you think. Note that I have used the term “Solar Unit.” What I mean is the distance across the solar system.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Tuesday, February 18, 2003 11:08 AM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Re: More on TLT

Dear Jon and Mike,

> Sounds great! I read it over this morning and I really like it. It keeps
> getting better and better! The story told by Joe’s friend (who has a great
> name, by the way) is exactly what I had in mind. Very eerie! I like it. I
> also like the extra details you added (that the Captain was from Norway, for
> instance).

Ingrid Thronson is a real person who is actually Norwegian. I’ll see if I can get a photograph of her tonight.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, February 20, 2003 7:38 AM
To: Mike Dodd; Jon Cooper
Subject: Malda

Dear Mike and Jon,

Did you two notice that the planet that Owsley Robbins is on, which is a Solar Unit away from the event horizon of the galaxy core’s black hole, is Malda? Do you remember that this is the planet from which the Titanians

come? Will that work for the story? I don't remember right now precisely where I placed the Xenobots' planet, but I do recall that Malda was in the neighborhood, so that means that the Xenobots' planet has to be not too far from the galaxy core.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, February 20, 2003 7:44 AM
To: Mike Dodd; Jon Cooper
Subject: Delians

And did you notice that I added a race to the list of sentient peoples in TLT? Regarding the ship that Owsley Robbins scoped at the event horizon, he
said, "it doesn't match the template of any ship in space today-Ahmanyan, human, Maldan, Xenobot, Delian, or any other race!" Is that okay?

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, February 20, 2003 9:55 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Cc: Mike Dodd
Subject: TLT Segment One, First Complete Draft

Dear Jon and Mike,

Here you go. It's 3,700 words long—not quite the length of a standard chapter and a half. At this rate the story's final length will be roughly half the length of a standard Starman book. I've pasted the first segment into my template for the first issue of The Starman Chronicles, and it comes to about 16 pages. These pages are the same size as a Starman book. That means that the complete tale will come to about 112 pages, which confirms that it'll be about half the length of a normal Starman tale.

By adding some supplementary material, I can bring TSC to 32 pages. That can
be our standard length. I envision each issue having one illustration which

can be put on the cover. That means that the complete TLT will have seven illustrations.

How does all that sound? If you have any other suggestions for the Points to Ponder and Discuss, naturally, let me have ‘em.

> This just in! I thought I would pass it on, since it brings up an
> interesting point: all that pressure on Uranus could easily lead to very
> high temperatures, and that is something that will definitely affect our
> Uranus book. This is a fact we might want to keep on file for future
> reference.

Beautiful. I’ve heard about the greater planets having a plethora of diamonds, and was hoping we could work that into our tales at some time.

> April laughed at me the other day when I told her that I had already
> started work on the summary for the ninth Starman book, and that I know how
> it goes and just need to write it all down. She said that our readers had
> just barely read the fifth Starman book and I had, in my mind, already
> finished the ninth and was mulling over the tenth and last one. LROM seems
> almost like ancient history to me; I am far beyond it.

I know what you mean, but you’re much farther ahead than I. I’m only immersed in book six.

> In some cases I am very far beyond it. You know Joe’s search for the lost
> First Races that is mentioned in TLT? Well, I actually have that search
> plotted out in my mind; I have some ideas as to what happened to them and
> why they left and what sort of adventures Joe and Co. could happen while
> looking for them. I really don’t think that we will ever write those
> stories, but it is good background detail for TLT if we need any of it.

Excellent. I’d like to hear more.

Done for now. Next week I’ll try to get a chapter or two of DH done, and the week following put TSC#1 out.

Jon, do I need to prepare the advertising blurb for TSC that we talked about one or two weeks ago? I've got a very rough draft, but I can prepare a polished text next Monday.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2003 9:16 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: The Starmen's families

Dear Jon,

I'm getting ready to write chapter 7 of DH, and note the query in there about what to do about the Starmen's families. I haven't read through the rest of the summary recently, but suppose we do nothing about them? Here's the reasoning: the bad guys wanted the Starmen, so they snatched them in Montana. The families are miles away in the Seaton farmhouse. They are left there to make the report that the Starmen have disappeared. They are left in the situation that they believe that the Starmen have been taken, killed, or otherwise disappeared—which is true.

Somehow, later, Zip manages to contact them to correct the false impression, but in the first few days they are genuinely bereaved. Perhaps the "funeral" scene is where he could actually alert his father to his survival.

I think that if we have the families somehow snatched and so forth from the beginning, it'll look contrived. Am I missing something essential to the plot that appears later in the summary?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2003 9:27 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: The Starmen's families

I just skimmed the rest of the summary and, unless I missed something, I don't see a plot element that needs the families. Suppose we just let them grieve until they learn that Zip and the others are alive. It'll help provide a convincing description if I can place them in the funeral.

From: Mike Dodd [mailto:Mike Dodd]
Sent: Monday, March 03, 2003 9:36 PM
To: david@starmanseries.com
Cc: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: First Part of Chapter 7

Dear Jon and David,
The first part of 7 looks very
good....rather depressing, but I know that is on purpose. I was almost taken aback by Zip's "breaking in " to steal food....but since it was food that belonged to his captors...that makes it OK.
The description of New York is great.....it gave me PLANET OF THE APE type chills....once again New York City is the FORBIDDEN ZONE!
Perhaps we can have just the flame part of the Statue of Liberty somehow survive the vaporization....and it gets blown a great distance away....and is now a protected shrine or icon of freedom. (this survival can be explained by the bomb having gone off near the base.)[14]

Mike

From: David Baumann

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[14] A great idea that shows really well how Mike Dodd contributed to the stories. Unfortunately this idea got lost and was never used.

Sent: Friday, March 07, 2003 10:52 AM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Friday Morning

Dear Jon and Mike,

> Really really excellent, David! I really like what you have done with this chapter.

Good. I liked it too.

> One small thing we may want to add in this chapter (I hope I didn't
> miss it): Zip stays in hiding and acts as if he is dead and all the rest
> because he overheard a critical conversation. ...

Ah, that makes more sense. I didn't catch that in the summary, and I was wondering about the line toward the end that said that Zip would destroy the information about Ahmanya. I can put this scene in the place when he is in hiding in the warehouse. Not a problem.

> Couple other great points: I like the electronic tracking! That was great.

Umm, good! What electronic tracking?

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, March 07, 2003 11:25 AM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Re: DH #7

Did you guys notice that in this very long chapter there is almost no conversation? That's one of the things that made it hard to write, kinda like the cave scene in *The Caves of Fear*. There are many pages without any conversation at all.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Saturday, March 08, 2003 10:48 PM
To: Jon Cooper; dbaumann; Mike Dodd
Subject: Re: DH #7

Dear Jon and Mike,

> One small thing we may want to add in this chapter (I hope I didn't
> miss it): Zip stays in hiding and acts as if he is dead and all the rest
> because he overheard a critical conversation. He overheard their whole plot:
> that Ahmanya had been liked to Mars, that they were going to let SE know
> this so that the Ahmanyans would panic and come out so they could spot them
> for sure, what Mark and Joe were up to, and the Xenobot spy in Richard's
> office, plus references to "others". That is why he's hiding.

Will this do? To fit it in and make it logical, I had to rearrange a few sections of chapter 7, but the words are the same.

This was the day he had determined to escape his captors for good. The need to escape had suddenly become urgent. Just last night he had overheard a conversation that shocked and alarmed him. He had moved silently down two flights of wooden stairs from the loft where he had been holing up, and listened to the words that drifted up to him from the ground floor. When he heard the word "Ahmanya," he had tensed up. What came next turned his blood to ice water.

"...message came in this morning from Paul. The other two Starmen finally spilled the beans. Ahmanya is Mars!"

"No kidding! Mars?"

"Makes sense, doesn't it, now that you think about it? I never would've guessed, but now that we know, it all falls into place."

"So what's the plan now?"

"We'll let it leak to Starlight that their secret is out; I expect that they'll run right to the Ahmanyans. That'll cause a panic and bring 'em out into the open–then we'll know for sure just where they're hiding. The metal bucket concealed in Starlight's office will prob'ly be the first to know where they are. Retaliation'll be swift then, you can bet your last solar!"

"What about the two Starmen?"

"Guess their usefulness is about finished, but what happens to 'em now isn't my decision. The others will have to tell us what they want done with 'em."

Not for a second did Zip consider that Mark and Joe had knowingly or willingly revealed the most valuable secret in the Solar System to their enemies, but somehow they had learned it just the same. He doubted that the news would bring the Ahmanyans into the open, but it might. And the news that there was a Xenobot in Richard Starlight's office was beyond belief! Zip's heart was consumed with despair, but the crushing setback turned into the iron of resolve.

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, March 13, 2003 7:33 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: 1B Review Copy

Dear Jon,

A major Starman milestone has been achieved. Leslie and I have just finished binding the very last copy of AOM. Yes, the binding of the whole print run is now COMPLETED! What a relief. What labor. 465 altogether, of which Fred did the first 90 or so.

At present, we have precisely 18 copies left of the first edition of AOM. This is after you, Mike, and I have our copies. (You don't have any left for sale do you—or do you?) You mentioned that we should hold onto these for special distribution. So I will. I guess we should decide together what happens to these.

David

From: David Baumann:
Saturday, March 29, 2003 8:14 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Reading Group

Dear Jon and Mike,

Wow. They really loved the way DH is going. They had a few questions, the most important one being, "Wouldn't the base in old New York have a router so that whenever a message came in from the ship in hyperspace it would automatically be transferred to the Xenobots?" I just said, "No, they don't." Is that a point, however, that will need an explanation? None of them wondered whether we'd really had Zip bite stardust in DH—they just wondered how we were going to get him out of the scrape. I imagine that all our readers will feel that way, in spite of the Big Line in TLT, segment one. They may have doubts (because we have been unpredictable in the past), but they won't really think that Zip is dead. I'd expect that.

At the end, I offered to read to them the last chapters of *The Last Command* so they'd know how the series ends. I told them that it would alter their perception of the series irrevocably and they should consider it seriously. After some debate, all four decided to stay and hear the End of the Starman series—sworn to absolute silence, of course. Here, Zip really DOES die, of course. When I was finished reading, two of them were weeping openly (Mary Doman and Mark Bennett), and ALL thought it was the perfect consummation to the series. We have a definite winner here!

DH is a worthy successor to LROM, and TLC is a magnificent wrapup! We are hitting our stride here.

David

From: David Baumann:
Tuesday, April 08, 2003 9:58 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Three Questions

Dear Jon,

Good morning. I skimmed the rest of the DH summary last night and have a few
questions that need answers before I move into the final stretch:

1) I don't remember seeing anywhere where Richard Starlight follows up on his meeting with Zip. Just that the Ahmanyans return him to the Moon. Now realistically, if I were Richard, I would immediately contact Zip's family and give them the good news. And if there is no security need, Zip's survival would immediately be widely broadcast. Who gets the good news and
when should it be revealed? I envision a scene in which Zip and Richard are brought back to Richard's house, Zip sleeps, and Richard calls the Fosters over to his house without telling them why, then shows them Zip sleeping.

2) You have the scene where Oritz Konig on Mars is the one who reasons through Mark's and Joe's captivity and discerns that they have been released on purpose. However, since this is five years after TRA, Konig has been back
on the Moon for at least three years—his stint on Mars after TRA was set at two years. He has already been described as taking part in Zip's funeral. Do we need to introduce another character who is head of SE security on Mars? Should it be a "good" person from Space Command in Eagle City? Someone who's
replaced the slothful individual we had in LROM?

3) How about if we have a brief scene in which Gene Newman announces to Richard that Gyrd Gyrdsson has been captured? Maybe SE motion detectors or
personnel detectors of some kind located him as he was trying to walk out of the city. Or maybe he could be captured in a shipwreck that had been at the bottom of NY harbor but was revealed when the ocean drew back. Something
like that.

David

From: David Baumann:
Monday, April 14, 2003 9:58 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Cc: Valerie Kramer
Subject: Next Chapter

Dear Jon, Mike, and Valerie,

Here is the next chapter. I don't know if I'll have time to get another one done this Thursday since it's such a busy week for me, but if I can I will. Next week I will have plenty of free time and can get several more written. It's very good to see light at the end of the tunnel. It'll be great when the first draft has been completed!

Jon, in the summary you had the bad guys tell Mark that they had stolen the ship from the Xenobots and then outfitted it. As I was writing, that seemed implausible to me. We've presented these guys as being fairly bumbling and unable to repair their own ship. Also, they need to be cooperating with the far more able force that came up with the whole fabrication that led to the Starmen's capture in the first place. So I altered what McTorney told Mark a little bit so that it is consistent with all that needs to be done and all that has already been written. I suspect that what McT. told Mark is pretty close to the truth. McTorney's frightened at this point, and the Starman has earned his grudging respect—besides being the only one on the ship who can give the Xenobots a fight. Anyway, see what you think about the revision of the tale he tells.

I also closed the chapter with the scene we wrote about in which Zip's family finds out that he's alive.

David

From: David Baumann:
Sunday, April 20, 2003 10:37 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Tying up DH loose ends

Dear Jon,

Blessed Easter to you! All my church services are behind me now and they were all glorious! What a great few days! But it will be so good to have some time off. I'm taking Monday and Tuesday off completely, Wednesday

afternoon if I can, and Thursday afternoon as usual. I ought to be able to get two or three chapters done this week.
I think I have just the right person to be in charge of security at Mars Base. How about Mika Watanabe? She won't be a retired female sumo wrestler, but she can be something that'll remind our message board readers of the recent April Fool's Day post.

Let me know what you think.

David

From: David Baumann:
Monday, May 19, 2003 11:32 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Chapter 20

Dear Jon,

> I read the chapter you sent. It is magnificent!

Glad you like it. It felt much better to me too. I see now that I cannot write well when I am tired. Two chapters a day at the most.

Attached is a little something I drafted this evening, reworked from a couple of emails we exchanged in early April. I propose it for an Afterword to DH. Let me know what you think[15].

Last chapter on Thursday! As I read your summary of chapter 21, I note that you had the discussion between Jogren and the Starmen take place on the Xenobot base in the Asteroid Belt. With your permission, I'd like to move that setting to a lonely place on Ahmanya—kind of as a parallel to the opening scene in Montana. It'll give me a chance to close with a scene of beauty—stark and empty like their future, yet full of potential too.

David

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[15] Jon liked what I sent and these items did indeed become the Afterword to *Doomsday Horizon*.

From: David Baumann
Monday, May 19, 2003 11:36 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Unintended parallels

> a cool new Jogren. I
> like this new slang characteristic he has! He definitely has a sense of
> humour, and I like it.

It just occurred to me that we have three Ahmanyans who are key figures, and
they are developing parallel personalities to the Starmen. Jogren could become a parallel to Joe. Saadervo is rather reserved like Zip—that comes out in DH 20 pretty clearly. And Stenafi is attuned to beauty and adventure like Mark. Stenafi, however, is warmer than any of them. Mark is warm but it
is hidden—sensitive might be a better word than warm. At the end, you will recall, Stenafi and Mark pair up. This parallel development was completely unintended by me.

David

From: David Baumann:
Tuesday, May 20, 2003 8:42 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Chapter 20

Dear Jon,

> I like it! It's a great way to end the book - a nice final note, so to
> speak. The only thing I would change is that the Xenobots actually do invade
> soon; ...

Right—but at the end of LROM it was thought that the Xenobots would NOT

invade soon, and this is what the reader could assume throughout DH. So even
THAT is something that was thought to be true but turns out not to be. I'll rewrite that portion of the Afterword, but will have to do it in a way that doesn't tip off too much about TSM. Maybe this is what Valerie meant when she wrote about "corkscrew" surprises and readers' "whiplash."

By the way, there is a major but subtle mistake in DH: Valerie didn't find it—I had to point it out. I can't think of a way to fix it, but maybe you can. Or we can leave it and hope no one notices it. When they make Richard's
office cold in order to bring the Xenobot spy out, they forget that the Xenobots handled the cold of Nyx just fine. They are subject to cold only when their "suits" or "casings" are broken. That is not the case in DH.

Did you notice in DH#20 that I gave a hint of how long Ahmanyans live? Saadervo says that this battle is taking place ninety generations after the great war. That was over 12,000 years before. That means that Ahmanyans live
about 135 years. I assume that lower gravity and a more wholesome, less stressful, lifestyle will give them a longer lifespan than ours. I also assume, and have implied it in other texts, that the human lifespan has increased slight from what it is today. Maybe really old people will make it to 110 or thereabouts, where today 100 is pretty old but not too uncommon. Normal human lifespan might be about 90. Sound okay?

Someone may question why Tharsos appeared relatively late in the battle. I have an explanation that will come out in DH#21.

By the way, Joe's exclamation in DH#20, "Sulphur and salt!" comes from the book of Deuteronomy. I'll attach all my Writer's Notes for DH to this email. I don't think that I'll be revising that much if at all, now that we're down to the denouement.

David

From: David Baumann:
Wednesday, May 21, 2003 8:53 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Mark; the Xenobot spy

Dear Jon,

> > By the way, there is a major but subtle mistake in DH...
>
> This actually occurred to me, and I didn't mention it because there is
> actually a good explanation. ...
> An astronaut can survive the near absolute-zero of space, but if you dunked
> that astronaut in a vat of liquid nitrogen he'd freeze virtually
> instantaneously. It's just a question of the amount of mass that is at that
> temperature.
> So, we're safe!

That explains why the liquid nitrogen would terminate the unfortunate metallic creature, but it doesn't explain why he would be smoked out of the base of the Mercury globe by the cold. If they can move about on Nyx, I don't think that the lowering temperature in the office would affect him at all. Perhaps we have to rethink how he is located. Something other than turning the entire office into a refrigerator. We've already said that a scan won't detect him. We don't want the humans to engage in a search for him that takes any time since, for all they know, he might be able to retaliate with some kind of hideous weapon, not to mention tip off his superiors. They have to locate him and disable him instantly.

David

From: David Baumann:
Thursday, May 22, 2003 12:44 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Feedback and supercold

Dear Jon,

A late-night response before beguiling the sandman.

> We had Folding Jim's comment and Mark McSherry's comment, but other than
> that we really haven't had anything. I've sort of gotten use to it: I think
> the stories are being enjoyed, ...

I think so too. The small amount of feedback we've had has been all good, and would be worth it even if we had only a few fans.

> Think about it: the Ahmanyans
> have been at war with them, in some form or another, for 12,000 years. By
> now surely they would have a way to detect these creatures ...

Sounds good. I will miss the scene with the liquid nitrogen, but I can write something just as dramatic with the technology you described. But would this
be a "magic" weapon that could be used anytime anywhere with completely guaranteed results and no ability to resist? That was Valerie's observation about the wormhole. We don't want the weapon to be like that acid that will eat through anything.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, May 22, 2003 2:16 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Getting the X spy

Dear Jon,

How about if we have Richard and crew leave the office as already written, but when he leaves a "technician" goes in to do some work. This will be, in fact, Sotik, the Ahmanyan who is an expert in wave technology. He has already been established on Tharsos in the chapter in which Richard is snatched. Sotik uses sophisticated Ahmanyan technology to locate the spy, then he operates the deep freeze. The humans can watch via telescreen, as has already been put into the chapter.

> To keep the Xenobots out of the complex in the future is simple: all they
> need is a copy of that Ahmanyan device that disrupts wormholes. This device,
> too, works both ways: it stops not only Xenobot wormholes but Ahmanyan ones
> as well. I think it could also be overpowered: much like a radar jammer, if
> you threw enough power at it you could get a signal through.
> The Xenobot spy would be frozen solid, the shield would be raised, and all
> would be well for the time being.

This is how I imagined it, although I didn't go so far as to imagine that one could overwhelm it with enough power. Guess one could, though. Does that make humans and Ahmanyans vulnerable to Xenobotic power? We don't have to answer that one for DH.

David

From: David Baumann:
Thursday, May 22, 2003 6:07 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Cc: Valerie Kramer
Subject: chapter 21

Dear Jon, Mike, and Valerie,

A red letter day. Here is the CONCLUSION to Doomsday Horizon. I know it's
still a little rough, but that's the nature of first drafts. The entire book comes out to a total of about 51, 300 words.

In some ways, this book took longer to write than any of the others. LROM took five months almost to the day, and this one took almost five months, but it's much shorter. The others took about three months. This one, however, was interrupted by writing the end of The Last Command and putting
together The Starman Chronicles and The Lost Tomorrow. If it hadn't been for
those, it would have taken about thre or three and a half months to write DH.

David

From: David Baumann:
Saturday, May 24, 2003 7:13 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: RG

Dear Jon,

The Reading Group just left, and gave DH high thumbs up. They caught lots of small glitches that are easily fixed, so I've got some rewriting to do. One is that we almost had a "tied up Tibetan." The five guys whom the Ahmanyans

capture in their chamber are wired for communication with their boss, but when they are captured, no one ever hears from them again. “Wouldn’t that have tipped off their boss and his superiors?” asked somebody. Easily fixed, as are all their comments, but the RG really earned its books this time.

But overall, great story! They loved it. I should be able to get the fixed up version to you and Mark Monday or Tuesday. Then on to the artwork.

David

_____

From: David Baumann:
Monday, May 26, 2003 2:58 AM
To: Valerie Kramer; Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Getting the X spy

Greetings, Valerie,

> Would it be possible for the tachyon box (or some other device) to listen
> for communications so that they KNOW the spy has reported before causing
it
> to chill out? They only need to know a communication has been completed
- not what was said.

Good idea. The Reading Group had a lot of suggestions for improvement and clarification, but your suggestion is one they missed.

> You spoke of the Xenobot “collapsing” but that would be pretty collapsed
> from normal. If these beasties are really mechanical life forms, I see no
> reason to assume they are all identical. This could just have been a
smaller
> unit used for spy work. That could raise some fascinating implications
for
> Xenobot culture. What status would various types of devices have? Would
> there be snobbery? etc. :)

The Xenobots are not entirely mechanical—they only use mechanical means for

protection, communication, and life-support. They have declined as a race to the point where the actual organism cannot exist without the artificial "case," but in this instance we are assuming that they are able to take on different cases according to need. This particular individual is wrapped in a cylinder that can change shape from spherical to elongated tube—different from the shapes they had in JTP; however, the organism itself is the same. The spy is smaller than what the humans encountered on Nyx. No explanation is provided in the text.

Best regards,

David

From: David Baumann:
Thursday, May 29, 2003 1:21 AM
To: Mark McSherry; Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Doomsday Horizon, P-1st Half Chapter Seven

Dear Mark and Jon,

Your most thoughtful question was about the presence/absence of wildlife in old New York. I have changed that paragraph to read as follows:

It was most probable that his captors, whoever they were, didn't have the manpower to search for him effectively. He was dependent on them, however, for they had the only trustworthy food and water within at least a hundred miles. Water was in short supply in the wide environs of old New York and, when present, often poisonously contaminated with mutated microorganisms. That kept wildlife to a minimum. Even if he attempted to walk to the nearest habitation, it would take him at least five days, and he assumed that his enemies could detect any electronic activity within a radius of many miles–especially if they were watching for it. Zip couldn't flee without risking starvation and thirst, he couldn't use his laser to hunt, and he couldn't use his compad even to tell time without revealing his location. It didn't take him long to conclude that his only way of escape was to steal a ship. It was a dangerous and bold plan, and not too certain of success. If he laid low for a few days, the guard would relax. He'd even wait twenty–four hours to search for food and water.

Good thinking! You will find that feral dogs do exist, however. I am finding it very gratifying that your comments often anticipate future events in the story—as you will see when you continue to read.

You're doing a fantastic job, Mark, improving *Doomsday Horizon* measurably. I look forward eagerly to your next comments.

David

From: David Baumann:
Thursday, May 29, 2003 1:35 AM
To: Mark McSherry; Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Doomsday Horizon, P-1st Half Chapter Seven

Mark, your connecting the fact that it was Zip who got the reduced dosage of drug
and that he was the only one who said, "Ooh" when the darts hit shows a fine reading eye indeed. The connection was deliberate, and I am amazed that you found it.

Further: we said in the paragraphs that you just read that Zip believed that it was too risky to use any electronic equipment at all for fear of detection; yet a little farther on we have him scare off a pack of dogs with a couple of low intensity laser blasts. He then quickly leaves the scene (unstated: so that any resultant search party would miss him). He takes the risk for two reasons: it's his best bet for fighting off the dogs, and he plans to be gone within an hour or two so that concealment is less important. Is this plausible to you? Valerie was content with it, but it might be better to mention that a search party went out but failed to find him. I welcome your ideas.

David

From: David Baumann
Friday, May 30, 2003 12:11 AM
To: Mark McSherry
Cc: Jon Cooper
Subject: A Sixth...

Thanks for your comments on chapter 8, Mark. Just had time for a quick read-through and will consult the text in their light tomorrow morning. I do want to put you out of your misery, however, regarding the mysterious words,
"a sixth...," that Mark overhears when he is mentally drifting and that you have mentioned several times—it has no important significance whatever. Jon, who wrote the line, may correct me on this if I missed it.

David

From: David Baumann
Friday, May 30, 2003 1:29 AM
To: Jon Cooper; Mark McSherry
Subject: Re: A Sixth...

> It does have a significance! It's important. ...
> The moon's gravity is one sixth that of Earth. The thugs were upset because
> the gravity on that moon wasn't one sixth that of Earth; it was close, but
> not exact, and it concerned them.

Ah, so THAT's what it means! Well, we'll think of someway to get that in there.

David
From: David Baumann:
Friday, May 30, 2003 3:20 PM
To: Mark McSherry; Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: A Sixth...

Dear Mark and Jon,

> What does the image of the 'Underbird'
> sinking to the bottom of the European sea signify? And what about Mark's
> final, interrupted thought ['Funny, I don't even...] before "...he
glided
> into complete unawareness."?

These items are to indicate that Mark is under the influence of a somnolent drug. He is confused and incoherent. The "I don't even..." would have gone on "care that I don't understand where I am," or something like that.

The image of the Underbird was Mark's last view of that special craft. Just as it spun lazily, under no power, into a vast darkness, so now Mark's consciousness is likewise twisting into unawareness. His last conscious thought is of that image, as his unconscious realizes what is happening to him.

These sentences in DH mean no more than that. Merely descriptive.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, May 30, 2003 3:22 PM
To: Mark McSherry
Cc: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: A Sixth...

> David will do a better job but this is my suggest for incorporating it
into the paragraph—-
>

> “Another thought hit Mark with full force. “The gravity! Joe, we both
> thought something was wrong with the gravity: the gravity was like the Moon’s but it didn’t feel quite right, remember? We thought it was [slightly
> greater than a sixth... “ Mark paused as a vague remembrance of an
> overheard argument briefly registered in his memory, then he continued,]
> “because we’d been asleep or were hungry. Joe, take a reading of the
> gravity!”

Excellent idea! Thanks Mark for yet another stellar suggestion.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Sunday, June 01, 2003 6:05 PM
To: Mark McSherry; Jon Cooper
Subject: Revisions of DH through chapter 14

Dear Mark and Jon,

Magnificent insights, both, into the flow of the text. I echo Jon in expressing our pleasure that we appear to have struck the right balance in the tightrope writing we’ve had to do.

I revised the scene where Zip leaps out of the Brown Crab. Your suggestions were excellent, Mark, and I followed them down the line.

As far as how Zip was able to take control of the Brown Crab, I just added a sentence or two to Zip’s explanation to Richard, as follows:

“Yes. Fortunately the Brown Crab was an old ship with a simple control system. It wasn’t difficult to take command of it with a Starman’s compad, but it was much more difficult to fly by remote control, since this time since I didn’t have a helmet. I had to fly the ship through the screen on my compad. ...”

The key here is that, by calling it a “Starman’s compad,” it implies that Starmen’s compads have some “extras” without having to explain what they are.

I think now that my revisions are up to date through chapter 14. Only seven more chapters to go. More surprises, ahead, Mark. Don't take your seat belt off yet. I assure you that there are shocks in store right up to the very last line of the narrative. Right, Jon?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, June 02, 2003 2:30 AM
To: Mark McSherry
Cc: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Revisions of DH through chapter 14

[Mark wrote]
> If you could discreetly mention that the Brown Crab was indeed a SE-built
> ship somewhere in the text prior to Zip's conversation with Richard the
> reader is much less likely to cry Foul! when he discovers how Zip was able
> to escape and control the Brown Crab from a distance.
(I'm assuming Luke is an employee of SE)—-It's an old ship-prob'ly one of ours built two dozen years or more ago. I can't tell much about it yet from these pieces, but the equipment I do recognize comes from about the '30s, I'd say. Lotta DNA in it."

Good idea. The latter is where I put it. I also made it specific when Zip explains to Richard. (Luke is indeed an employee of SE.)

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, June 02, 2003 11:53 AM
To: Jon Cooper; Mark McSherry
Subject: Getting Our Minds on Straight

Mark wrote:
> > Aren't Joe Taylor's parents now on the Moon. They were at the
> funeral—-Less

> > than 24 hours before Joe and Mark crashed the Xenobot ship on Mars.
>
> You're right again! They were there during the funeral. I don't know where
> my mind has been! I keep missing all these significant finds... I'm glad
> you're catching them! :)

I'm glad Mark is catching them too. I'm certainly not. I fixed the text of the Prologue again that just generally says that Joe's parents couldn't be in Montana with the others.

Jon wrote, regarding the revision of the Sotik/Richard conversation:
> It looks really good now! I like it. The addition of the gravity particles
> is nice; I think it makes sense!

Good. Got something right, then.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Tuesday, June 03, 2003 4:04 AM
To: Mark McSherry
Cc: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Doomsday Horizon, 17-18

Dear Mark,

> 2nd Paragraph—-" "Where's Scarlet?" asked Commander Shaw, referring to
Richard's famous red parakeet. The large birdcage near Richard's desk was empty." There's that parakeet again! I give up! What's so special about a parakeet on the Moon? :-)

There is no such thing as a red parakeet. According to Jon, parakeet experts have been trying to breed pure red parakeets for many years and always failing. It's obscure. One of Jon's private insertions, just as I have mine. For example, Jon came up with the "Harry Tanwick VII" joke in *Descent Into Europa*, and the reader's competition that went with it. The Starman series has lots of things like that in it. Unfortunately, I don't think we have a

list of them all. Anyway, about Scarlet, we're assuming that sometime between now and then, some parakeet breeder has succeeded, and Richard Starlight has a true, pure red parakeet. I would never have caught this; you'd have to be a parakeet expert to grasp the significance. I only mentioned Scarlet in this chapter since I assume that Richard wouldn't want to risk his parakeet in case Sotik's cryoacoustic machinery drifted into her direction.

> Very moving tribute to Dr Shoemaker. And to a future kindred spirit- Zip's father.

Thanks. This was Mike Dodd's idea. He wrote us an email a month or so ago and suggested that someday we put three things into the Starman series: a tribute to Gene Shoemaker, a character on the Moon who has an "Earthshadow"
just as one can have a moonshadow on Earth, and a woman named Agena—named
for some early rocket probes. I put all three of these into chapter 18.

Mike has been all but gone from Starman labors for about a year and a half. We hear from him very rarely, although all key emails are copied to him. DIE
was the last book where Mike had a major role—he designed the mantaship and
did many of the illustrations. He and Jon and I met for the first time in person in October 2001 and discussed a lot of things then for *The Lost Race of Mars*, and he took us to Belle Isle in the James River in Richmond, Virginia. Belle Isle had the abandoned iron foundry that got a lot of print in LROM, including an illustration. But after that, Mike faded almost completely away—except for the convention in Charlottesville last October. I think
he also represented us at a convention that Ed Pippin put together not long after. LROM was mostly Jon and me, and DH almost entirely so. Jon and I are
grieved—it is for this, in part, that I put together the article on Mike in one of the Inter*Stellars, following up on your description of him as "the ever-elusive Mr. Dodd."

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Tuesday, June 03, 2003 4:54 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mark McSherry
Subject: Xenobot Community

Dear Jon and Mark,

Jon wrote:
> the Xenobots are sort of
> communal beings - they are always in contact with each other, and each
> always knows the state and doings of the others. Being an ancient race, they
> long ago mastered the art of using tachyons to communicate and send and
> receive messages with ease.

I would add that they are able to do this not like highly advanced beings but rather like ants or bees whose individuality is sacrificed for the sake of an amorphous whole—that is, they have declined rather than grown in the meanings of both individuality and community.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Wednesday, June 04, 2003 1:25 AM
To: Mark McSherry
Cc: Jon Cooper
Subject: Jogren and Steve

> 1st Paragraph, 4th Sentence—-" I learned the word 'lout' when I listened to
> Mr. Steve Cliff conversing with you once when he was in the Asteroid Belt
> complaining about louts who were troubling him in some fashion." Does this
> refer to an event in AOM. Has Steve ever meet Jogren since? If this
> conversation had to occur during their desert trek in AOM, the above
> sentence reads like Jogren heard Steve use the word 'lout' while Steve (and Jogren) were in the asteroid belt.

> Perhaps I'm missing something...

In a recent revision, I changed "listening" to "monitoring." The Ahmanyans learned English first from the Wind People, but that contact was minimal. They refined their English by monitoring conversations that were "public," i.e. not personal or encrypted. Jogren, who among Earthmen had only met Steve Cliff, Mark, and Joe, monitored their conversations occasionally as a way to deepen his understanding of the language, in addition to what he learned from Stenafi and other English-speaking Ahmanyans. This is only hinted at in LROM.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Wednesday, June 04, 2003 2:20 AM
To: Mark McSherry
Cc: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Doomsday Horizon, 19-20

> I haven't kept track of the time-line for 'Doomsday Horizon', but did this attack occur on August 17- the very date Colonel Raymond Hoskins stated on
Page 38 (Last sentence of 1st complete paragraph) in his taped message?

Whenever I write one of these books, I keep a file called "Writer's Notes" that explains many things, such as a glossary of characters and terms, sources of words, etc. It also includes a timeline. I checked that file and the attack did indeed occur on August 17! However, that was a complete coincidence! I hadn't even noticed it until you pointed in out, Mark. What a great reader you are! What an eye for detail! In Colonel Hoskins' message, I just picked August 17 at random—not too soon and not too late.

I think that *Doomsday Horizon* may be the book compacted into the shortest amount of time. It takes only 19 days from beginning to end.

As far as the fixing the glitch about the locator beacon implanted in the Starmen, how about if all it does is tell the bad guys where they are. As the text says, there are several teams planted on Mars, especially Eagle

City, to follow and intercept the two Starmen, and Moze's team gets the luck of the draw. Suppose their "dispatcher," who is monitoring the Starmen's whereabouts and simultaneously keeping in touch with the five louts, tells the five that the Starmen are approaching the confluence. Then Moze has a listening device that he employs once the Starmen get within hearing range. He himself overhears the opening of the portal with the word "sapin," then uses it to take the louts though it as before. If that's plausible, it wouldn't take too much rewriting to make it work.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Wednesday, June 04, 2003 11:05 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Length of Tales

Dear Jon,

> > I think that Doomsday Horizon may be the book compacted into the shortest
> > amount of time. It takes only 19 days from beginning to end.
>
> How long does AOM take? Is it as long as that? It takes place in a pretty
> short amount of time, too...

AOM takes 22 days; DH takes 20 days (not 19 as I said above). But AOM is 22
days only because we start with the pirates assembling in the Asteroid Belt on July 2, although the action on Mars begins on July 4. The action of the story line is actually July 4-24 or the same as DH.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, June 05, 2003 12:42 AM
To: Mark McSherry; Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd; Valerie Kramer
Subject: Last Crack at Doomsday Horizon

Dear Jon, Mike, Mark, and Valerie,

Jon wrote the summary. I wrote the words. The Reading Group had monthly input. Valerie had input chapter by chapter. And finally, once the first draft was finished, Mark read it without preknowledge of the storyline. All of our readers have had a vital part to play in putting the text together, each saw it from a unique point of view, and each made significant contributions to improving the tale.

Attached you will find the draft as it now stands, after everyone has had a first crack at it. I send it on to you now for your last crack. There are a good number of changes from the first draft, many small but a number of them large, thanks to what you all have noted.

If you can return your comments to me by the morning of Monday, June 16, I would appreciate it. I will then spend that week putting together the FINAL DRAFT. That will then go to Jon who will format it for the publisher. While you all are reading, I will be doing the illustrations.

Thank you, Valerie and Mark, for your time, dedication, expertise, and willingness to help. You are both magnificent people. Jon and I know that your labor is considerable. We hope that you find the project as rewarding as we do.

Blessings,

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, June 05, 2003 12:48 AM
To: Mark McSherry
Cc: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Doomsday Horizon: 21-Afterword and Re: Sapin

Dear Mark,

> And the revelation at the end does a great job balancing the book. The other
> two major revelations in DH occurred roughly at the 1/3 and 2/3 points in
> the book. The disclosure that ends DH is the perfect counter-point. And also
> the perfect spring-board to Starman #7!

Thanks!

> I am sure that it was no coincidence on the part of Michael D. Cooper that
> Mark -in his thoughts- just prior to Jogren's final disclosure, compared
> the Lucians to angels... And the reader, when he encounters Jogren's last
> sentence can't help but be haunted by one final thought—- My! How far they
> have fallen...

As you know, the last portion of the last book in the Starman series has already been written. I wish I could share it with you now, but it would spoil it for you. One member of the Reading Group has already regretted that he agreed to hear it when I gave the members the choice to hear it or not several weeks ago. But it still moves even me each time I read it. The final resolution is something far beyond the Starman Team's imagination when we began work nearly five years ago. It took us over four years to come to a climax that we all agreed with. The two year wait for The Last Command, I hope, will be worth it. Believe me, the major revelations that have been made thus far in the series pale in comparison to the final resolution.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, June 06, 2003 12:25 AM
To: Mark McSherry
Cc: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: DH: Thoughts On Chapter 11

Dear Mark,

> I'd also like to mention a thought concerning Chapter Eleven. Is this the
> first time in the six Starman books that Richard Starlight has set foot on
> Earth?

In The Runaway Asteroid (beginning on page 152) he met in a group with the
President, and that was on Earth, although at an undesignated place. This is the scene where Robert Nolan first appears. At that time, we had no idea that RS was the grandson of Reuben Ridger, or even that there WAS a person named RR. (To be frank, when I invented the "R" sign on the tea set, I had no idea what it meant! That only came out with LROM!)

> It must have been particularly gut-wrenching for him to return to old
> New York— And to witness the handiwork wrought by his grandfather a century ago.

Wow again. I didn't even think of that, but you're totally right. I think you know more about the series than I do, Mark. Maybe I should make a note of that in the text of DH.

> It is hard to imagine the torrent of emotion then that he must of felt as
> (in the last short paragraph describing his brief stay on Earth) "
> Richard looked away, sighting along the avenue into the distance. "
> Richard's trip had changed nothing; the funeral for Starman David Foster
> would go on as planned.
>
> This is very powerful stuff.

Thanks!

I got a start on the painting for the cover today, and I must say that, after not having painted in oils for about 15 years, I am pleasantly surprised at the result so far. I think it'll be a powerful cover if it turns out okay. It'll take about a week to complete since I have to do it in layers and let each layer dry before the next installment.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Saturday, June 07, 2003 8:03 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Site of Starlight Academy

Dear Jon,

I had an idea. When I had that dinner a couple of weeks ago with Douglas Gresham[16], he was talking about the time when he was a farmer in Tasmania. Tasmania, as you may know, is a large island off the southeastern coast of Australia. DG mentioned that the southern part of Tasmania is basically unexplored, even today. It has forest so thick that it is often a severe challenge, if not impossible, to tell where the ground is. No one can get into the interior—or wants to.

Now, how about if Starlight Academy were located there, or maybe had an outpost there? I still like the idea of having the Academy be a floating city in the south Pacific, but the appeal of southern Tasmania is strong too. Maybe we can do both somehow. Any ideas?

David

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[16] Stepson of C. S. Lewis

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, June 09, 2003 11:29 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Monday Morning

Dear Jon,

Subject: RE: Site of Starlight Academy
> This is easy! A number of Universities have multiple campuses; Marshall
> University (the place I went to school) had one in Huntington and one in
> Charleston. Perhaps they have a branch in Tasmania for training purposes
or
> something like that.

Great. Let's keep Tasmania in our memory banks, then. It'll be good to have something in the series that came directly from Douglas Gresham. Maybe we could send him a set of Starman books at some point[17].

Subject: RE: DH frontispiece
I like it! It turned out very well - it will be a terrific frontispiece. You did a good job on it! could you make a copy of the image (using a copy machine or something) and then just place that in the mail to me in a large manila envelope? When I get it I can scan it and tweak the image until it's just right.

I'm glad you like it. I had an entire afternoon suddenly free yesterday and actually finished four of the internals. Today I'll do more and might even get a start on the oil painting for the cover. Sure, I can make a good photocopy of all the illustrations. Might be better anyway since I do the originals on tracing paper so I can lay it over the photographs and get the proportions right before inking it.

Have a good day. It's slightly misting here right now—the kind of weather I love, and I have most of the day for doing illustrations.

Coincidentally, I had breakfast this morning with Bill Rowley, the model for Joe Taylor, and have lunch with Micah Snell, the model for Mark Seaton. These are the two guys in the "Old Mill" photo.

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[17] We never did. Eventually Starlight Academy became a massive artificial and movable "island" in the South Pacific.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Wednesday, June 11, 2003 10:43 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Final Stretch

Good morning, Jon!

> I can understand that, but look at it this way: you are the best artist we
> have right now, and I think that your artwork is pretty good. We actually
> have characters with faces this time!

Yeah, and THAT was a risk. I only felt confident enough to try it from photographs. One good thing is that I showed the illustrations to the Reading Group and they all liked them a lot. Mark Bennett even said that the one of Sotik was his favorite—the one I thought was the worst! Well, the illustrations'll do! My son Nick just said that he'd like to do the illustrations for the next book—he actually changed his mind and said twice recently that he wanted to do some illustrations for DH, but by that time it was too late. I still want to do the cover of TSM, but if he does the internals, I'll be happy. I told him we'll be starting on TSM in a month or so.

> At last, our readers will get to see
> what their characters look like, and that is certainly a great step ahead.

One person last night said, "I'm glad to see what Richard Starlight looks like after all this time!"

> I agree that it would be nice to
> get a highly trained professional to handle the artwork, but that is just
> not going to happen.

Right. Have you seen Benjamin Hoff's "The House on the Point"? —his adult
rewrite of "The House on the Cliff"? I wrote a review of it for the

Galloping Ghost a few months ago. Whatever else one can say about the story,
the artwork is fabulous!

> > P.S. I note sadly that Mike has had almost no input on
> > this tale. ... The Starman Team is functionally down to two.

> I noticed that as well, and it is sad - he is definitely fading out of the
> team, and it is a sad thing to see. We do have some great assistants, but of
> course none of them are Mike Dodd... This sort of reminds me of Hal Goodwin
> / Peter Harkins, and how Peter helped with the first few books and then left
> after that. It looks like we're going through something similar; the books
> will still be good but they won't have that Mike Dodd twist to them.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, June 23, 2003 3:33 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: A milestone

Dear Jon,

I just got some junk mail at home addressed to "Starman Team"! We've made the big time at last.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, July 04, 2003 3:20 PM
To: Jon Cooper; April Cooper
Subject: Further Reflection on Ahmanyan Grief

Dear Jon and April,

I've given some thought to adding a section to "The Uncreated Light" to show Ahmanyan reaction to David Foster's death, and realized why I didn't put it in at first. By the end of the series, the Ahmanyans have been fully revealed to the people of Earth and have no reason any longer to remain in hiding from the Xenobots. They are full allies in the defense of the Solar System and the fleet that has driven the Xenobots back to their own star system is an alliance of both Earthmen and Ahmanyans. Therefore, when the news flashes among the warships of the fleet, the Ahmanyans are included. When we get to the point in *The Last Command*, the reader will know this, and will therefore know that when the news goes public, it goes also to the Ahmanyans at the same time it goes to the Earthmen.

If we want to have a specific reaction from Saadervo, Jogren, and Stenafi, that is another question—however, I delayed putting them into the chapter until the end, so that their place in the tale is when they tell of the coming renewal of Ahmanya rather than in reaction to the sad news—or else they'd be in the chapter twice, which is an honor I reserved only for the two Starmen. I wouldn't mind, however, putting them in twice if you'd like to see that, but I think it might be a bit redundant. We've got reactions from key people in Zip's life: Mark first, then Joe, his parents, Kristina Bethany, and Kathy (now about 23 years old). Richard Starlight is only implied, since he is back on the bench where he'd told the Starmen about his grandfather Reuben —an emotional watershed for him.

I suggest that we wait until we get to the actual writing of *The Last Command* and see how it all turns out. The third chapter of LROM (the revelation of Mars as Ahmanya) was written 2-3 years before LROM was written, and by the time we got there it needed some rewriting, of course, to make it fit into the story as it had developed. We could see then how the last chapter looks and what kind of tailoring it'll need.

Does that sound okay?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, July 11, 2003 2:14 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Fight Scenes

Dear Jon,

> I have to admit that you've really spoiled me....
> The Starman Series has definitely raised my standards. Are we the first set
> of series books to do this sort of thing? It has changed the way I look at
> fight scenes. When I'm reading a Tom Swift book and see Bud clobber someone,
> I think no no no - that's not how it's done at all...

Early this year when Fred Woodworth and I were debating whether it was worth putting out another Review, I offered him four ideas for articles. One of them was "Fight Scenes in Series Books." I thought sure he'd leap at that one, but he didn't—he preferred a decade by decade commentary on series books of the 20th century (hence my inquiry to you some time back about input on the theme in the Tom Swift books). That was the one that would be the most work and least interesting to me of the four. (My other two suggestions were commentary on Capwell Wyckoff for his 100th birthday last February and something on Tom Swift—who has never appeared in any Review!

Hal Goodwin did rewrite a fight scene in a Vicky Barr book and I managed to get that into my clutches for about $3. He had a good sense of reality for fights and is probably the best I've read in the genre, but I do think that Starman comes across best of all. My training helps a lot, of course, but I've never been involved in a real street fight and things are done differently in that arena. Still, I think we prefer the almost bloodless, controlled martial confrontations than no-holds-barred, eye-jabbing, brass knuckling, knife-wielding, dirty trick fighting that is closer to reality.

That verges on the obscene. Yup, I think we set the standard—realistic but not violent.

I changed one scene in DH—the one where Zip escapes from the guys carrying
him on the stretcher—because the first technique I had Zip use had a potential to do some real damage to one of the guys. The only scene that really has some questionable aspects to it is when Joe knocks over the blowhard in DH in the Ahmanyan port in the Eagle City tunnels, and whaps his
head as the dude kisses the floor. That would more than knock someone silly. Joe was not nice then—he'd have been better just to let the guy fend for himself as he approached the floor. Even Mark had a reaction when he smacked
the android's head on the deck in LROM.

The scene in *Rocket Jumper* where some guy flies into a cactus bothers me too. You can just picture teenage boys of the 1960s reading that and going, "OooOOOooo!" but it's one of those things that's not funny when you think about it later.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, August 11, 2003 9:54 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: The Starlight Maneuver

Dear Jon,

I had an idea about the beginning of TSM. I haven't read your summary yet, so maybe you've already got this scene somewhere. It seems logical to me that as soon as LROM ended or shortly after, the Ahmanyans would revive their king and several other leaders. They know that the Xenobots are on the move and they need their leadership and major scientists ready to aid in the defense. What do you think? Nothing is said about it in DH, but when TSM begins, maybe they should be in place, or almost in place. If you agree, I already have a good title for chapter one: The Return of the King.

What do you think?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Tuesday, August 12, 2003 12:02 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: TLT Observations

Dear Jon,

I'm really on a roll. I haven't written any new material, but I'm flowing with the momentum of having written the next segment and have done a lot of
other preparatory work on the story—just because I can't put it down. One thing I did was count the words so far. The segments have had, in order, 3,755, 4,584, 5,543, and 5,517 words, for a total so far of 19, 399 words. In only four segments, that's approaching half the length of AOM. The way it's going, TLT will be about 30,000 to 33,000 words—about two-thirds of our regular length for a novel. That's about what we estimated. It is quite different, though, writing a serial, The word use is dense. The whole story so far has only taken up a day and a half.

One of the Marshal South novels—the entire thing—takes place between evening and dawn of the following day—about twelve hours. That's the densest writing I've ever run across. Wow.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, September 12, 2003 3:03 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Title of the L5 story

> the "working" title of this story is "Plight of the Bumblebee".

I like it. Fully descriptive of the action and sets the tone right away that this is a humorous story. There are series books that were humorous—those by Leo Edwards, among others—so even this builds on another venerable series book tradition. Great!

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, September 12, 2003 7:55 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Starmen's Middle Names

Dear Jon,

I was putting together a brief description of the Starmen my father can use when he does the painting, and took the information from our first big document, "Introducing the Starmen." I noted that we have given middle names
to Zip and Joe (Leland for Zip to honor Hal Goodwin, and Lindholm for Joe to
honor Neil who provided his Canadian background), but not Mark. How about
Samuel, to honor Sam Epstein?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, October 23, 2003 9:52 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Not an error but a logistical problem

Dear Jon,

In AOM and thus far in MOM we have said that in 2151 there are only 56 Starmen. We have also said in MOM that only one to three are made Starmen in
each graduating class. But in DH on page 83 we said that there are 156—and

that apparently doesn't count Allen Foster, who is sitting with his family. Since that number is in print already, and we are currently writing MOM, I think we should increase the number of Starmen in MOM from 56 to 143. Okay
with you?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, November 17, 2003 7:54 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Codes in Starman

Dear Jon,

> Here you go! I've attached the summary for the latest Starman short story,
> The Ultimate Code. It's sort of a sequel to The Plight of the Bumblebee, and
> is in the same vein. Let me know what you think of it! I sure had fun
> plotting it. It's a simple idea, but very satisfying. I imagine it's not the
> sort of code story you expect!

Very cute! Maybe it can be put in the same production at POTB whenever we
get around to it.

> > Today, great strides planned on MOM. I have a WHOLE WEEK to work
> > on it without distraction or interruption!
>
> Wow - fantastic!! Sounds outstanding. I can hardly wait to have the next
> installment!

If you want me to send you what I've got so far, let me know. I thought that, since there is so much detailed reworking of existing text, that I'd just send it all at once when it was done.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, February 09, 2004 11:06 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Cc: Mike Dodd
Subject: Re: Monday morning

Dear Jon and Mike,

> So: why write four more Starman books? No matter how quickly we
> write them we both know that by the time we would get them done our entire
> audience will have evaporated. Why not write just one more, end it, and move
> on? We could just skip books 7, 8, and 9, and write book #10 next - The Last
> Command. End the series there and wrap it up.

Hmm. The idea is attractive. VERY attractive. How about writing one more book, but making that a doozy—all four remaining stories into one that could be longer than LROM. I'd be happy with that. I would even get my energy back knowing that I was working on the last book and would pour everything I had into it. The cover could be my father's painting and Mark Montgomery's artwork could be used as a major internal somewhere. I'd really
like to go out with a huge bang. The series cries out for its climax, and all of our work so far has been pointing in that direction. We have to do it—even if only six people read it we have to do it.

And if API or some other thing suddenly turns the whole show around, we could easily keep going if we felt like it. Getting several months' start on one last lollapalooza would not at all be wasted time if we changed our minds and decided to go back to the original plan.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, February 09, 2004 11:36 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Cc: Mike Dodd
Subject: Re: The plan is forming...

Dear Jon and Mike,

> LET'S DO IT! Ooh: I like it - I like it a lot. One more book, then:
> that is our plan. This next title (The Warriors of Light?) will be our last
> one, then, and will have everything in it.

Good title. The Warriors of Light. It could even have four parts, using the titles we had before, or maybe something else. Whatever you want to do, Jon. But let's tie up all the loose ends—the First Races, Larson's Folly, etc. Let's put in Mike's swamp and jungle scenes, etc. I'm already energized.

I already feel enormously better. The end is in sight and it's looking magnificent!

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, February 09, 2004 7:34 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Re: The plan is forming...

Dear Jon and Mike,

[Jon]
> One last volume to rule them all.

<laughs>

[Mike]
> Wow! The end of The STARMEN as we know them.....the death of

Zip.....It's all so scary to me.....just how many years in the future will the NEXT generation be.....and I certainly hope we can have a "pilot" type person in the next group(to replace Joe, who could fly anything)....Can we introduce my idea for a Japanese female Starman (Toshi Murakoshi....great name , huh?)

Totally.

[Jon]
> I've been working on the summary for THE WARRIORS OF LIGHT. It's shaping
up,
> but boy does it have a long way to go: ...
> How long do we have before we start writing? What were your plans,
> David?

Take your time. I'd like at LEAST a month's break before I unlimber my fingers again. It needs to be good, so take your time. Maybe even two months—that'll be Easter.

[Jon]
> if we decide to write Starman: TNG we
> can make it whatever we like. I know what you mean about it being
> irreversible, but it's not that bad: we are leaving room to go back and
> write more "classic" stories, since we've referred to adventures we
haven't
> written. There is always room for more stories if that is what we want to
> do!

Right. We're not really changing the story. We're only changing how we've chosen to release it. It's the same story and the same ending we came up with almost a year ago. And we can always go back and write other Starman stories. In fact, I think that's a distinct likelihood.

[Jon]
> Our customers are leaving, though: each book sees fewer
> sales and already the sales are pitiful. Our audience is deserting us and
if
> we wait much longer we won't have anyone left to read our books. If our

> audience comes back after we write this book and we become reenergized and
> decide to write some more, I am sure we can find a way!

Amen.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Wednesday, February 11, 2004 9:45 AM
To: Jon Cooper; Mike Dodd
Subject: Another idea

Dear Jon and Mike,

We mentioned in our Big Announcement that we plan to put Book One and Book Two out eventually, in addition to The Warriors of Light, which is really Book Three. Now it occurred to me that it would not be difficult at all to prepare these first two books for publication. If we have the money (and we probably do or will), how about putting Book One out in about June and Book Two out in about October? This would mean three Starman books in 2004, since MOM is coming out very soon. That might keep some interest up and certainly prepare people for Book Three a year from now.

Of course, probably few people would buy them since they already have these stories, but some would, and we would certainly get our free copies and I'd buy a few extra. It doesn't really matter too much that these books wouldn't get us 100 or 300 customers; what would matter is that they'd be available and then, when people buy Book Three, the entire trilogy could be available without waiting. We don't expect a huge influx of customers for these books no matter when they're ready. And we could surprise ourselves. Book Three would then be the real conclusion to the saga since the other books were already out there. It would also show customers what Book Three will look

like. Books One and Two could have extra features like maps, timelines, glossary, etc.—suitable portions from the Writer's Notes. Like a deluxe edition of The Hobbit or The Lord of the Rings.

With the intense work on Book Three that I suspect will happen, I could probably use the break anyway to put these books together. It would certainly heighten my own excitement about putting Book Three together. And
with no Inter*Stellars, etc., to work on there wouldn't be any distractions. In one of them we could even put Plight of the Bumblebee as a new story, perhaps only to be released in that context!

If you like the idea, then Books One and Two will need titles. I think that the Light theme should be expressed in all three books. Overall the Starman Saga could be known, maybe unofficially, as the Trilogy of Light. Book One could be something like The Searchers for Light. Book Two could be The Defenders of Light. And Book Three, of course, is The Warriors of Light. Or it could be "the Light" rather than merely "Light." Other ideas for titles?

What do you think?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, February 13, 2004 10:18 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Friday evening

Dear Jon,

I wonder if this day sets a record for the most emails between the two of us in a twelve-hour period.

> Shall we do this for both large volumes (that is, have all the short
> stories in appendices in the back)?

Return to Europa fits properly between LROM and DH, and really needs to be

there. TLT could be at the end of the volume, although it fits well also between RTE and DH. TLT does mention the Ahmanyan tachyon transporter, and
that device plays a part in RTE, and the contrast between the tachyon transporter and the wormhole transfer device (as shown in TLT) is good to have in mind when we bring Zip back from the dead in DH. However, it's not
vital and, as we've already agreed, we could even leave TLT out completely. We can think about it and decide later. There's plenty of time. However RTE must be between LROM and DH.

> > Also, even though I named SETI, I haven't ever really cared
> > for that title. I think it needs a better name.

> The name SETI certainly doesn't reach out and grab you but I
> honestly can't think of a better name.

Maybe something with the acronym DAD[18].

> Thinking up titles to go with stories
> is not something I am good at:

I'll work on it. Chapter titles for some reason seem to come to me very quickly, but book and story titles are harder to devise. Again, we've got time.

> I would much rather come up with a title and
> then create a story.

I think that's how Harriet Stratemeyer Adams worked too. Her father devised lots of titles (I have a long list of X Bar X Boys titles that sound fascinating but were never used) but generally he worked a plot first. I think that HSA, however, usually came up with titles and then stories to match them.

> I don't know what to call it. I'd be tempted to call it Deep Space
> One if there wasn't a Star Trek series called Deep Space Nine. Somehow "Trip

[18] Laughingly suggested as a match to MOM—*Mutiny On Mars*

> to Titan" just doesn't cut it. Maybe we could call it Saturn something. What
> good, gripping words start with the letter S? Hmmm. Maybe Crisis on Saturn?
> The Saturn Setback? The Breakthrough? Discovery? The Challenge of Saturn?
I
> have no idea - no idea at all...

There are two themes: the radiation disaster and the discovery of the Titanians. The encounter with the Titanians is the overwhelmingly most important theme: it's the account of the first meeting with intelligent extraterrestrial life. Too bad we can't call it The Children of Neptune. Perhaps The Children of Titan. The Space Orphans. The Orphans of Titan (TOOT). In the Shadow of Saturn.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Saturday, February 14, 2004 9:49 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Renaming SETI

Dear Jon,

> > Too bad we can't call it The Children of Neptune.
> > Perhaps The Children of Titan. The Space Orphans.
> > The Orphans of Titan (TOOT). In the Shadow of Saturn.
>
> Those all sound find to me! I knew you could do it; I'd be happy
> with any of those.

I think I like TOOT best. "Children" could sound patronizing. "In the Shadow
of Saturn" is melodramatic since the shadow is really where any eclipse would be and there's nothing about that in the story. "Space Orphans" is kinda retro, as Mike would say, and would be my second choice. "The Orphans

of Titan" is more specific; it places the story on site. Also, I like the acronym TOOT. "Orphans" isn't quite accurate, since they're really refugees,
but I think it's poetically accurate. We speak of the "mother" planet, "mother Earth," and if one's home planet were destroyed, one could be an "orphan." The Ahmanyans' care for them is a New Testament virtue, to "care for orphans and widows," etc. And a stunning parallel that I only now realized: the Ahmanyans' great ship, Tharsos, was late returning to Ahmanya in the first Great War (and therefore too late to prevent the destruction of Ahmanya) because it had rescued the Maldans from the destruction of their own planet and was bringing them to Titan. In other words, Ahmanya died so that the people of Malda might live.

"The Orphans of Titan" it is, then.

Have a great weekend—between jobs.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Wednesday, April 14, 2004 11:43 PM
To: Jon Cooper; Valerie Kramer
Subject: Re: TSM, prologue

Did we state somewhere that they didn't have antimatter before? I don't remember that, but I could have easily forgotten it.

I don't think we mentioned it at all. But if they had it before, why did they not use it before, e.g. in the battle at the end of DH. Now, I haven't read the summary for some time so I don't know what's ahead in TSM.

It's true that a single bomb wouldn't turn a planet into dust, but that isn't quite what I had in mind. Imagine combining a stream of antimatter with the ability to make wormholes. What this weapon would do is size up a planet and, using small wormholes, saturate it with antimatter - making the stuff appear, evenly spread out, all throughout the planet itself. What you would have is the equivalent of millions of small but quite powerful bombs, which

should do a fine job of reducing the planet to dust. It would be a fairly sophisticated device.

Very cool. I've never seen anything like that in scifi literature.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, April 15, 2004 6:28 PM
To: Valerie Kramer; Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: TSM, prologue

Dear Jon and Valerie,

I think that Jon's intention in the prologue is to show that the Xenobots have some very big weapons. I doubt that it's important that we define precisely what they are or how they work, although if we could that might add to the effect, but too much detail will dilute rather than support the effect. Jon wants weapons big enough to destroy planets and even a sun. Maybe destroying a star is not necessary if we can't support the plausibility of the act, but the removal of planets is pretty impressive.

Maybe what would be better is if the Xenobot experiment does to a planet the same kind of thing as what they did to Ahmanya 12,000+ years earlier. I could describe that well enough and then add some new stuff to show that it's "new and improved." We've already got the destruction of planets in LROM and DH, though—Starman #5 and #6. I don't think it would be wise to overemphasize the same phenomenon in TSM, Starman #7, or even blowing planets off could become "ho hum."

So how about if the Xenobot ship lets fly several dozen small bombs through hyperspace, like a swarm, which then rip the planet. We could have only one planet in the system. Then I could describe the shock wave destabilizing the star but not blowing it into nova state. Or we could even make this one of the newly-discovered "extra-solar" planets and not have a star involved at all. Lemme know what you think.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Tuesday, April 20, 2004 9:42 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Chapter One

Dear Jon,

Beautiful! What a chapter; I really like it!

Thanks! Your summary indicated that Izmaka was the first to be rejuvenated and so there was a lot of nervousness about whether the process would really work or not, but remember that the elder was actually the first to be rejuvenated. So I made the nervousness not about whether the process would work, but about what Izmaka would think when he opened his eyes.

I hope to get chapter two done on Thursday. Then, next week, I'll be in the mountains from Sunday evening through Saturday morning. My goal then is a chapter a day, Monday through Friday. That'll get us through chapter 7, or one fourth of the book!

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, April 22, 2004 10:01 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Aargh! Another Change to TET

Dear Jon,

I was setting up work on chapter 2 of TSM and suddenly realized that something has to be changed in "The Eight Treasures". In chapter 1 of TSM we say that Prince Izmaka led the Ahmanyan attack on the Xenobot home planet. That means he has to be the commander aboard Tharsos in TET! Rather than work on TSM chapter 2 tonight, I'll have to fix up TET. Besides I've been sitting at this terminal most of the day and I'm now too tired to write. Fortunately I have a WHOLE WEEK off next week.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Sunday, May 02, 2004 5:19 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: Suggestions!

Dear Jon,

I read the chapters you sent me last night and I thought they were truly excellent!

Thanks. I developed a new method for writing. Instead of sitting down and writing an entire chapter in first draft at one sitting, now I sit down several times and write a few hundred words. That way I don't get tired or bored with it. When I'm tired, I stop. I can often pick up in an hour or two and start with fresh energy. I'll try to maintain this method. It may mean I can write more frequently for shorter periods, and not have to wait until Monday and Thursday to write big chunks. I used this method last week and it worked well. Last time I zoomed through a lot of chapters in a week, they really needed a lot of refinement. These chapters do too, but for much smaller reasons.

** Pleera: what an excellent character! She is a job well done: she fits the role well.*

Well, that's your beautiful and articulate sister. I'm sure I told you that before: Pleera=Apreel=April. I sent the first three paragraphs of chapter 2, in which Pleera debuts, to April, and she was extremely pleased with the character!

** Kateri Whitecloud: what a great addition! A nice touch.*

Kateri is Mohawk for Katherine and is pronounced GAH-duh-lee, although it's probably best pronounced Kuh-TEHR-ee. Kateri Tekakwitha was a convert to Christianity about 300 years ago. Whitecloud is the last name of an Indian family that was a member of my church briefly a number of years ago. I doubt that Kateri and Whitecloud actually go together. I know a native

American priest—maybe I'll ask him if he can suggest a good name to go with Kateri, just as Father Wilfredo gave us the name Madera-Cruz.
** The scene with Vly and the koalangs was most excellent! Wow. Great job! It's great to have Vly back in action. Cool! I like Saadervo's reaction to the koalangs - good thinking!*

That came to me as I was writing—actually I'd almost finished the chapter before I realized I had to put that scene in. When I visited Fred Woodworth a year ago, he started off with a threat to Howard[19] about the stew-pot again, so I put that in. Then I realized that Saadervo had never seen an animal. After that, the scene wrote itself. Sometime we'll have to have a scene in which the koalangs are introduced to *Imlah Taltahni*.

I also like the inside Vly references: the mechanical calculating machine was a nice touch.

Fred Woodworth all over again.

I'll take all your suggestions, and Valerie's too, and rewrite the four chapters today and/or tomorrow.

** Zip is going to Saturn with a crew of two. Are any Ahmanyans going along? Zip knows that the Key is located off Saturn but where, exactly?*

Oh yes, the details of that will emerge in the next chapter. Ahmanyans are definitely going. I'll make that clear earlier when Richard gives Zip his assignment.

** How did Vly call out to the greegles? Isn't that asteroid airless? How could they hear him?*

Oh, they'll all in suits and communicating by radio. The greegles are attuned to the radio. I'll make that clear too.

** Did we ever explain what the greegles were for or why the Janitor could command them?*

I think there was something about that in LROM. Check out pages 263-264.

---

[19] One of his seven cats

Stenafi's information is echoed by Saadervo in TSM when he says that it has been several lifetimes of his people since they've had contact with the *alzenta*. This doesn't explain why the Janitor could command them, but it does say that they were made by the First Races.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, May 07, 2004 9:04 PM
To: Valerie Kramer
Cc: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Final Touches

Dear Valerie and Jon,

Jon, Valerie and I have had a couple of exchanges on some details of chapter 2-5, and I think I've got everything solved. (I hope those aren't famous last words.) Since we were just hashing over a couple of scenes, I didn't want to fill up your inbox with our musings, but now that I'm at the end, I'm copying you on this so that you can see what we were mulling over and the solutions I am proposing. I look forward to your response.

One issue was the Janitor's temperature of 200° F. I said that I wanted it hotter but wanted to keep the lifeform within the boundary of liquid water. Valerie suggested that sulfur could be used, and I leaped at that idea and moved the number up from 200° to 600°. The passage now reads:

"Yes, Starman Foster, the cold places," said the Janitor, answering Zip's thought. "On my home planet, so close to the beginning fires of creation, a temperature of 600° is balmy. Please forgive my apparent aloofness, but I keep distant for your own safety."

The explanation of a sulfur-based organism will come later in the story.

Valerie wrote:
Watch out for degrees C vs F. (and keep in mind you may be selling to readers in places where degrees C is more commonly used.) ... Bottom line, 600F should be ok as far as I see.

My response:
Yes indeed, the F and C confusion is a concern. The Starman Team debated this issue early in the devising of the series. I agree completely with what Valerie wrote about what would be a good base of measurement, but we decided to stay with current American usage just because it is familiar to our readers. If we ever become world-read, we may have to go metric. (I wonder what happened in the Rick Brant and Ken Holts when they were translated into other languages.) At least time is now measured by a cosmic constant (using a Cesium atom as I recall).

The other issue was the flight of Tharsos to the Asteroid Belt and whether the Xenobots could trace it there. Connected to that was the fact that no one knew how the Xenobots had found Tharsos in the first place. Only Pleera had an idea, but she's unconscious at the moment. Valerie and I batted a number of possibilities around and she even had a couple of good suggestions for dialogue. I have combined her ideas into the following new scene, which is placed at the beginning of the chapter called, "ADAMANT."

From: David Baumann
Sent: Saturday, May 08, 2004 7:00 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Cc: Valerie Kramer
Subject: The Reading Group

Hi, Jon and Valerie,

The Reading Group just left and everyone liked the story very much. Very few
observations or corrections, though there are a few and all minor—mostly clarifications. I also read "The Eight Treasures" to them. (Valerie, I think I sent you this new short story, didn't I?) It looks as if we're pretty much on track with the way the story is developing. I should be able to address all their comments at one sitting. Then, on Monday, a new chapter.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Friday, May 14, 2004 11:05 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: Chapter 6

Dear Jon,

What can I say? It's a terrific piece of work! I'm impressed – it is a very well-written chapter and I was sad to see it end. It flowed very smoothly and captured the plot very well – things are moving right along.

Thanks, Jon. I really do get energized and gratified by your positive comments and praise. Even when you offer suggestions and point out errors, you do so gently and positively. Your commentary is a pleasure to read and I always look forward to receiving it.

Obviously I decided to break this chapter into two, since adding the trip to Titan would have made it a very long piece. The next chapter will be the journey to Titan, picking up Jack and Jill, meeting Kristina, and taking on Kathryn Mullaney.

I believe I have found the knowledge the greegles had that is most needed for the present. It has all been placed into these two creatures.
Very good idea! I was wondering how the exchange would work and I see that you've solved it.

Right. Now I have to figure out just what it is that these two greegles are carrying! Any ideas? What will happen with the crystals that Joe brought back? Maybe it's in the rest of the summary, but I don't recall at all and haven't read it for a time.

I saw that you even brought Pleera back!

Oh yes, she'll be a recurring character. Did you notice that Sseran is also mentioned? She's the one who's the chief engineer or something in *The Lost Tomorrow*. One of the Starmen stuns her by saying, "We were friends in the tomorrow we come from." So here she is in the mainline saga. I think that our readers will not be able to complain that we are leaving females out now.

In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if someone sometime complains that we've got too many!

David

From: David Baumann:
Friday, May 14, 2004 1:08 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: Chapter 6

Dear Jon,

> Now I have to figure out just what it is that these two greegles are carrying! Any ideas? What will happen with the crystals that Joe brought back?

Well, when I read the passage I assumed it meant that the information was in their memory – that it, it was in them, not in something they were carrying. You could just ask them and they'd tell you whatever you needed, or perhaps they could just put it on a disk for the Starmen. That ought to do it.

That's my thought too. The Janitor will have to read what's in there and give the information to the Ahmanyans who can then make it generally available.

As far as the crystals: didn't we discuss this earlier? I thought we were going to have them read (which doesn't involve destroying them or anything) and then use the information contained in them to – what was it? Capture a solar power station, maybe? I know we talked about this. Didn't we?

We probably did, but I don't remember. They have to have some kind of information available to the First Races in the beginning that the defenders can use now. It needs to be something important enough to warrant all the effort to get it from the greegles and to explain to the reader in some satisfactory way why we brought the greegles into the story in the first place. At the same time, it can't solve all the problems, either.

If we didn't then we can just pick something! These crystals could contain the protocols necessary to connect to the Xenobot network, so that when they

do get to enemy territory they can send in a microbug to deactivate the system that automatically destroys the solar power station.

Well, that sounds good.

David

From: David Baumann:
Friday, May 14, 2004 7:23 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: The crystals

Dear Jon,

I've been thinking about this and I remembered some things. In the original version of this tale the crystals were power sources, not data devices: they were catalysts that could be used to extract zero-point energy, and Stephen Hoshino used them to build a wormhole shield for the entire Solar System – supposedly preventing the Xenobots from entering. In the end of the book the Xenobots tried to get in but failed, so they instead warped to the edge of this shield and then used their drives to accelerate to within a fraction of the speed of light, thus enabling them to get into the Solar System anyway. I liked this because of its surprise factor: the readers thought the problem was solved and them bam – the Xenobots found a way around it. We may want to consider a modification of this idea or just discard it – it's up to you.

That's fantastic! We can still do that! CDs today can carry photos, videos, music, and word files. Why couldn't crystals do all that and more? In TET we already say that even the Ahmanyans' crystals can carry all kinds of data. Let do it! You'll need to give me a summary of what zero-point energy is and just what will be going on scientifically in this scenario, and I'll put it into the story.

David

From: David Baumann
Monday, May 17, 2004 11:58 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Progress on Seven

Dear Jon,

Here's number 7 about halfway done. I haven't even read this myself—it's just a rough first draft. I'm sending it in this state just so you can see where I'm going with it. The chapter will end when they arrive at the rings of Saturn and set out to locate the Key.

The director of Elijah Base, Dr. Aaron Couper, is named after your brother.

I'm finding that writing material this far into the saga is sometimes more time-consuming than it's been before, because I have to keep referring to previously published material to make sure I get the information right, e.g. Kristina Bethany's appearance, the dating of certain events, the appearance of Elijah Base and the home of the Titanians, Kristina's job description, Sseran's description when she first appeared in TLT (there was none, which was a help), and so forth. Anytime someone in the series goes to some place that's been mentioned before, research is called for. The previous chapter on Montezuma's Castle required the same thing. For the sake of continuity and to minimize mistakes, then, the writing is taking longer than before to produce the same amount of text. However, whenever they go to a new scene, the writing can go much faster.

I'm learning now how easy it was for the books of the Stratemeyer Syndicate to have glaring errors from one book to another, especially if they changed authors.

David

From: David Baumann:
Tuesday, May 25, 2004 12:13 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Most of Chapter 8

Dear Jon,

Here is about three hours of work—a very rough first draft which I have read myself yet, although I did brush through a portion of it and post it on the message board. We haven't had a progress report for some time.

The chapter has one more scene to go, but it's getting late and I don't have time to complete it tonight. You can see where I'm going with the chapter, though. A chunk of the time of writing was taken up with doing research on Saturn off the web. A lot of the information comes from about six websites I consulted as I was writing. I want to do the same with Uranus before writing the final scene in the chapter, and that's why I'm not up for it now.

If you read Robots of Saturn, pages 61-64 you'll find a lot of familiarity with the attached—on purpose, of course. One really weird thing is that, when I got them ready to descend into the rings, I thought of sleds. Then when I turned to ROS, I saw they were using sleds there too. I don't know if it was a coincidence or an unconscious memory. I haven't read ROS since the summer of 1998. Either way, it's another nice tribute to another series.

David

From: David Baumann
Tuesday, May 25, 2004 9:59 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: TSM

Dear Jon,

I am curious about the title of *The Starlight Maneuver*. I've glanced through the rest of the summary. What is the maneuver that Starlight gets the credit for? Is it a maneuver of SE or of Richard Starlight or who?
David

From: David Baumann:
Tuesday, May 25, 2004 11:06 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: TSM

In all honesty we should probably get rid of the title and pick a different one, but I've been fond of that title for some time. ...

Well, let's see where we are when the book is finished.

I suspect that *Tom Slade in the Haunted Cavern* has a history such as the one you described for TSM. *Haunted Cavern* is a decent story, but there's no sign of a cavern, haunted or otherwise, anywhere in the book! I suspect that the title was written and a summary drafted, then the story was changed but the title remained. Editors, as you probably know, choose titles more often than authors do.

David

From: David Baumann:
Saturday, May 29, 2004 9:25 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: TSM or ?

Dear Jon,

I've skimmed through the rest of the summary for TSM and have a few thoughts about coming up with a more fitting title. The crux of the matter seems to be a Xenobot attempt to establish a solar power station around our sun. Everything hinges on that. That's also the main strategy of the good guys—to prevent that from happening by learning everything they can about the solar stations, even by capturing one if they can. So how about

THE SOLAR THREAT
THE BATTLE FOR THE SUN
THE SOLAR DECEPTION
THE SUN AT STAKE
THE POWER OF THE SUN
THREAT TO THE SUN
THE IRON SOLARSPHERE

Just a few thoughts, but you can see where I'm going. What do you think?

David

From: David Baumann
Sunday, May 30, 2004 5:24 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: TSM or ?

Dear Jon,

In addition to
THE SOLAR THREAT
THE BATTLE FOR THE SUN
THE SOLAR DECEPTION
THE SUN AT STAKE
THE POWER OF THE SUN
THREAT TO THE SUN
THE IRON SOLARSPHERE

how about

THE DEFENSE OF THE SUN
THE SUN PARASITES
THE SOLAR PARASITES
SURPRISE ATTACK ON THE SUN
REPULSING THE SOLAR PARASITES
THE SOLAR MANEUVER (close to what we've got!)
SOLAR BATTLEFIELD
THE SOLAR BATTLEFIELD

Really getting wild here, but maybe something will come up.

David

From: David Baumann:
Tuesday, June 01, 2004 9:15 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Tuesday Morning

Dear Jon,

Hmmm. A lot of good suggestions here but none of these really reach up and grab me. Are there any titles that you are specifically leaning toward? Nothing has jumped out to me yet; I'm still thinking about it. I'm sure there is a good book title for us somewhere out there!

These appeal to me most, but as you say, there's not one yet that leaps out.
THE SOLAR THREAT
THE BATTLE FOR THE SUN
THE DEFENSE OF THE SUN
THE SOLAR BATTLEFIELD
Let's keep working on it.

From: David Baumann
Thursday, June 03, 2004 12:32 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: A Thought on TLC

Dear Jon,

You pointed out in our Wednesday morning telephone call that *The Last Command* only has fifteen chapters and might not be able to stand alone as a book if we publish the last four novels separately. Two possibilities come to my mind. One, we could combine it with XI to make one long book. Two, don't forget that the last book will have a good number of pages dedicated to appendices. We'll want to put in a complete timeline, a number of authors' notes, a complete section on the Ahmanyan language, the complete glossary,

etc. That material alone could make TLC a full length book. I suspect, and hope, that the emotional climax will cause readers to want to learn more and stay with the series—i.e., keep reading more and more even though there's no more "story." Hence, the appendices will be an important part of the book. I think an afterword will also be a vital part of the saga, after the appendices. We wrote a pretty good and long introduction that appears in the front of MOM; a good afterword will be just as needed. We will need closure, even for ourselves.

David

From: David Baumann
Thursday, June 03, 2004 4:35 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: Thursday Midday

Dear Jon,

That cover painting has had a strange saga. We originally wanted a shot of the Academy for book 7, so I wrote in that lengthy scene where the Starmen gear up for war. ... I'm sure we will be able to find a good place for it; it shouldn't be that hard. We'll think of something!

Well my goodness! How about doing what Sam Epstein did? We can write the scene back into book 7! It should be easy to put in a few pages early in the book, maybe just before the Starmen head out to Tharsos. We've already laid the scene in MOM, so not a whole lot of description would be needed. Then Mark's painting could be used for #8 or #9. Is there a scene in one of them that would fit his illustration?

Robert Two Bulls finally got back to me on a good name for Kateri Whitecloud, by the way. I'm going with Kateri Tegakwitha. Definitely Christian and definitely Mohawk.
Now there is an authentic name! What does it mean?

It's actually the real name of a real person—one of the earliest converts to Christianity of the Iriquois peoples. I have become interested in her biography and have a booklet about her. When I was in Ontario last

September I visited a shrine there to one of the earliest missions to the Indians (seventeenth century) and there was information about her there. Kateri (Mohawk for "Catherine") was her baptismal name. Her birth name is not known. She died when she was 24 but is now on the verge of being recognized as a saint in the Roman Catholic Church. An Episcopal church (mostly Oneida Indian congregation) in Green Bay, WI has a statue of her that I've seen. The usual spelling is Tekakwitha, but Robert Two Bulls sent me the web site on her name; "Tegakwitha" is an alternate spelling. I'm using it so that it's an obvious tie-in to those who will know, but not a total identification. This is the web site. It doesn't tell much about her—just her name, although the meaning of "Tekekwitha" is given. http://www.tekakwitha.org/Tekakwitha/Namex.html If you're interested, doubtless a lot of information will come up on a search if you just enter "Kateri Tekakwitha."

David

_____

From: David Baumann
Friday, June 04, 2004 9:06 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: Chapter 9

Dear Jon,

> Well my goodness! How about doing what Sam Epstein did? We can write the scene back into book 7!

That would be fine with me! Might be a good way to handle it, actually.

Great. We've got that solved. I'll put in a page or two at the beginning of chapter 2.

I think that Mike's painting would work well for #8; there are some scenes where Zip Foster has to deal directly with the Xenobots, and I think we could make the cover work. This would leave us with wanting a cover for book 9 and 10, but I think we could work that out. I may be able to rework the cover I did for Trilogy #2 and get it to work for book 9, which would just leave us with needing a cover for book 10.

Sounds excellent. I'm sure we'll need the time to ponder on the cover of number 10. It'll have to be smashing.

"She who puts all things in order" – definitely a good choice. I'm glad we did this extra bit of research to pick out an authentic name: it's definitely worth the effort!

Right. I'll have to think of a good way to bring that explanation into the story.

Chapter 9 is good – no surprise there! I enjoyed it. One thing I forgot to mention earlier – the reference to TLT was nicely done!

Thanks. A lot of little things, as we've noted before, just come up in the course of the writing and make lots of sense.

The bot is nice too: not really menacing, but definitely a cause for concern.

This will turn out not to be anything really important. I put it in because the summary mentioned artificially intelligent machines. I can see the device as a kind of wandering recorder or explorer that now has no one to report to. I'm thinking of it as a friendly, tame, but stray dog. The landing party will find it in a central data gathering place that is no longer operational. They'll be relieved and will then muse on what the machine was. They will find a few other artificially intelligent machines like "dumb greegles."

This book is shaping up very differently from what I had expected; it's very loosely based on the summary. ... you've transformed it into something a little more thoughtful and atmospheric, and I think it's a good thing. I'm really looking forward to seeing where you are going to take the story and work things out: I'm sure it's going to be good.

Well, the first few chapters needed some departure from the summary, as we agreed before, but I'm trying to get the story back on track with the summary. I don't want you to think I'm just ignoring the summary, even if you like the result. The "bumblebees" that you've got in the summary will appear soon and they are very cool!! The Xenobots' conclusion that Tharsos is in their space seems rather obvious—in fact, the Reading Group mentioned that right off ("Wouldn't the Xenobot warlord conclude that if Tharsos

disappeared it was going to Omega Centauri?"). However, they will not be able to find it. It's a big place and a gravitational footprint is very small. They will only search close to home. Remember it took the warlord a week or so to find Tharsos in its own Asteroid Belt.

Only one thing in the summary gives me pause, and that is Zip's disappearance and hiding in a Xenobot ship. We had something roughly similar happen in DH ("Where's Zip?") and that's how TLC winds up too. In one way, that's Zip's personality and these two episodes lead up to the Big One—in another way, we don't want readers to say, "Oh, there goes Zip getting lost again." It'll take a little skill to make each episode unique and believable.

David

From: David Baumann
Friday, June 04, 2004 11:13 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Zip and Ted

Dear Jon,

I do see the similarity to DH, although it's pretty vague: everyone knows in this case what happened to Zip and how he is doing, and the situations are quite different. It doesn't have to be just Zip, though: if it makes more sense for it to be all three of them or some other combination then let's go for it! As for TLC – I don't think it winds up with Zip getting lost, exactly. The three Starmen are sent on a mission while the fighting is going on and they find a way inside the solar power station; it's just that Mark and Joe work to hold off the Xenobots while Zip goes to destroy the station. It's a different situation entirely: nobody is lost or captured.

Remember that I am not familiar with the rest of the summaries. I have only skimmed them and that was a while ago. It makes writing easier if I'm "on the edge" of knowledge—it adds to the suspense if I feel it myself. There are some drawbacks to that method too, of course, since I can goof on a particular scene (as I did big time in the first draft of LROM) or raise questions to you that are answered clearly in the summary. Overall, I think

that being the “odd man out” fits Zip’s personality more. Now that we know how the saga ends, I’m laying a lot of little pointers or anticipations along the way. (Did you note a chapter or two ago how Kathryn Mullaney interpreted Joe’s feelings to the others? I’m developing her personality to be a good match for Joe.) Having Jack with Zip will be different. Maybe an Ahmanyan could join Zip. I’ll familiarize myself with the rest of the summary of TSM before going too much farther.

David

From: David Baumann
Friday, June 04, 2004 6:09 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: TSM or ?

How about

RED STARLIGHT
LIGHT OF THE RED SUN
FORAY INTO ENEMY TERRITORY
IN THE LIGHT OF THE RED SUN
UNDER RED STARLIGHT

Some of these have that “retro” feel that Mike likes. The “red starlight” is the ancient sun around which the neon planet revolves. I could play up the “red sun” description in the book and make it a major theme. Red also might suggest Zip’s hair, and Starlight retains some of the original title. Red is also a danger color.

Are we getting close?

David

From: David Baumann
Saturday, June 05, 2004 9:04 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: TSM or ?

Dear Jon,

Wow, this is definitely getting closer. I like “In the light of the red sun” myself - it has a cool feel to it. Which one do you like? I think that one of these would work pretty well.

I like both of these best, about equally.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE RED SUN
UNDER RED STARLIGHT

The first one is a little long and the second feels more “adventuresome” than “ominous.” But I think length is okay, so if you agree, let’s go with IN THE LIGHT OF THE RED SUN, probably LRS for short. Have we got it now? I’m happy with it.

Or how about IN THE LIGHT OF A RED SUN? “THE” or “A”? Or maybe UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE (or A) RED SUN. What’s your preference?

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Saturday, June 05, 2004 9:23 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: TSM or ?

I actually prefer “THE” - it sounds more definite, sold, seems to have a better ring to it. What do you think?

My thoughts too. So...
UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE RED SUN or
IN THE LIGHT OF THE RED SUN?

David

From: David Baumann
Saturday, June 05, 2004 9:56 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: TSM or ?

I like “IN”, myself. How about you?

Both work, but I kind of prefer UNDER. It implies weight and oppressiveness. I just added these lines to chapters 8 and 9:

Suddenly the asteroid emerged from hyperspace. A stunning planet appeared on the screen directly in front of them. Everyone gasped. **The light of an ancient, red giant sun cast its dull glow onto the planet.** One place on the orb was alight with electric fire that snapped and broke in a vicious, raging, orange-red lightning storm.

and

[Pleera’s report:] “There are no Xenobot ships sailing in this star system. **The red sun is very old and may have consumed one or more planets in its enlargement. The neon planet is the innermost of four and the only one of its size. The other three are gas giants.**

and [when the landing party appears on the stone field]

“Quiet,” observed Saadervo, who was among the landing party.
“And hot,” added Raffon Dorn, another of the Ahmanyans. He was checking the instruments. “126° right here, and it’s still early morning.”
Zip stared up in awe at the vast red sun that was boiling up over the eastern horizon. The bottom-most part of the rim was still concealed by the forested hills, but the giant ball of ruddy fire that was visible appeared horrifyingly large and heavy. Nearly one fourth of the sky was filled with its disk. He had a feeling that it was going to fall on him.
“Check for any animal life nearby before we begin to explore,” said Saadervo. **His words brought Zip back to the task at hand.**

What do you think?

David

From: David Baumann
Sunday, June 06, 2004 8:49 AM
To: Jonathan CooperSubject: Re: TSM or ?

Dear Jon,

> I like "IN", myself. How about you?
Both work, but I kind of prefer UNDER. It implies weight and oppressiveness.

I've thought about it overnight. I think one is IN light but UNDER something. So how about either IN THE LIGHT OF THE RED SUN or UNDER THE RED SUN? I like URS because it is more oppressive. "In the Light" could imply something good and we want to imply something inimical and threatening. However, since the "Light" that one is "In" is "of the Red Sun," that moves one on into the threatening side of things. Kind of gives a mixed message, though. Therefore I prefer URS—short and fully threatening.

Your thoughts?

David

From: David Baumann
Sunday, June 06, 2004 6:20 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: URS!

Dear Jon,

> ... how about either IN THE LIGHT OF THE RED SUN or UNDER THE RED SUN? ...
Under the Red Sun would work pretty well, I think - it's short and

threatening. It does seem more menacing than being "in the light" of something! ...So I guess I am warming to the title! Let's go with it.

Excellent. ("Warming to the title" could be a pun.) The more I thought about it, the more I liked it too. I was hoping you'd have a similar feeling about it. At last—we have our title!!

The only thing that slightly bothers me about this title is that the whole episode at this planet is important but not unduly so, although really the book pivots around what happens here: ...

Excellent again. With that vision I think I can even tie the various scenes in the book together under that theme. It'll be great. I'd like to post something on the message board about it.

David

From: David Baumann
Monday, June 07, 2004 12:17 PM
To: Valerie Kramer
Cc: Jon Cooper
Subject: Re: Chapter 9

Hi Valerie,

Absolutely fantastic! Thanks! The material on neon and the flora and fauna in such a setting are particularly excellent! You are really putting your stamp on this book! [Jon, I'm copying you on this message because of the following paragraph. Valerie has made some fantastic suggestions for the neon planet which you will see later today after I work them into the chapter. She also asked why the Ahmanyans had so little experience with animals. My response below, once I'd finished it, seemed worth sharing with you.]

The reason that Ahmanyans are not used to animals is that there haven't been any on Mars since the Xenobots ruined their planet. The waking Ahmanyans only know them by histories but haven't seen any. Only a few Ahmanyans in this age have been "revived" from suspension—for them, animals would not be strange; the others are descendants of the original guardian families. It

didn't occur to me that this unfamiliarity with animals was significant until I got to the scene where Saadervo sees Montezuma Vly's koalangs; then I realized that this was a major event. The usually self-sufficient Ahmanyan was suddenly at a complete loss.

The waking Ahmanyans always had the capacity for space travel but didn't use it much—certainly not interplanetary travel. Shortly after the ruination of Ahmanya they made a few forays to Earth and also visited the Asteroid Belt, but no Ahmanyan had been to Europa, though they knew about the city there. It took the people from Earth, with their adventuresome spirit, to re-energize and inspire the Ahmanyans to "get with it." The Ahmanyans on this jaunt to the neon planet are just as "green" as the Earth people when it comes to interplanetary or wormhole travel.

Pleera is presented as "not having the customary Ahmanyan patience" (as she says somewhere herself); she is putting a spin on the reality. "Ahmanyan patience" is really "Ahmanyan passivity." It is described that way in the Appendix to LROM. Pleera is a real go-getter, which is why she became the commander of Tharsos. She is quite a fireball—very non-typical of Ahmanyans, male or female, and therefore a treasure to them.

David

From: David Baumann
Monday, June 14, 2004 11:41 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Chapter 10, first half

Dear Jon,

Got about halfway through the next chapter today. As usual, at this point it's a very rough draft, but you can see where I'm going with it. The speech by Raffon Dorn is quite rough, and the information it presents could be done in another way. I don't want to have too many "conferences," "conversations of discovery," or "informational meetings" in the book. That gets boring if it's done too much, but I'm not quite sure how else to present the information. The content, by the way, is what Valerie suggested. I asked her what flora

and fauna would look like on a neon planet with electrical storms, and she came up with what RD says. I like it!

Let me know what you think!

David

From: David Baumann
Tuesday, June 15, 2004 10:30 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: President

Dear Jon,

One detail I thought of when writing URS. The President appears in the meeting on Tharsos. He's the same person who appears in MOM, which is set in 2151. I did a quick calculation of years and realize that, if the election process is the same in the mid-22nd century as it is today, then he must have been elected in 2148. That means he was re-elected in 2152 and therefore cannot run in 2156—the year in which our current story is set. Therefore there will have to be another President who will be inaugurated in January 2157. Just something to keep in mind. Of course, we can change the process if we want to.

Have a great day!

David

From: David Baumann
Friday, July 02, 2004 11:07 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: URS and ?

Dear Jon,

This does bring up a question: do we still want to write four more Starman books? It would not be hard to modify URS and end the series there; we

could replace the last half of URS with TLC and bring things to a close. I'm not saying this would be the best way to handle things; I'm just saying that if it is all getting to be too much we can end things here on a satisfying note and close. The other books we have planned are good but they're not worth killing yourself over. It's up to you: you're the writer!

Something like this has actually passed through my mind. Let's see what the results of the stress echo test are before we decide. I wouldn't want to end with URS, but if necessary maybe we could reduce and combine the last three books into one big one like LROM, with appendices. If we need to, the appendices could be made available online the way you did the Starman Appendices last year. Thanks for the offer. Let's hope we don't need it but let's keep it in mind. Other reasons than my energy level may suggest that course of action too, i.e. how many orders we get for MOM and especially URS.

David

From: David Baumann
Friday, July 23, 2004 10:36 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: Chapter 13

Dear Jon,

At last! The complete MOM is in the hands of AWB! Great work, Jon!

Wow! A lot of very cool additions – the second half of the chapter is very well put together.

I'm glad you like it. The occasional "council" scenes we have in the saga are difficult for me to write. They serve mostly to give the reader certain necessary information and there is no action; it's a challenge to make them exciting. Valerie acknowledged receiving it but said she won't have time to read it for a day or two. I think it will need a little improvement. I wonder if we ought to have an Ahmanyan present at the council. Your thoughts?

Very nice tribute to Valerie Kramer!

Tim Parker too!

I like Deck 45 – boy, now that's something I would like to see.

I've had that scene in mind for a long, long time—many years. I don't even remember where it first came from. It may have been a dream or maybe an idle, daydreamy meditation from long ago. It suddenly came to me as being right for this scene.

The plot is exactly what I was looking for: everything is moving along nicely! They see the threat on Uranus and are wary but can't really do anything about it at the moment. The Xenobots have been sized up well, and a trifle underestimated: later on in the book they will discover that the Xenobots are every bit as formidable as they had feared.

Shades of DH, that always kept the reader jumping. Whenever a character says something, can the reader take it as true or is the character mistaken?

I had forgotten all about the Xenobots hiding on Neptune; that was a great reference to add. Glad you thought of it!

Thanks. It shows a pattern with the Xenos.

Reading Group is tomorrow. I only have two chapters to read. That's disturbing too. I need to finish URS. August should be an easy month for writing. I really want to get it done, and I'm writing at only half my usual rate, or less.

David

From: David Baumann
Friday, July 23, 2004 10:19 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: Chapter 13

Dear Jon,

Valerie sent me her comments on chapter 13. There was only one—we conclude the chapter by saying that the Xenobots can't send behemoths through hyperspace in the same chapter in which they had just done so. She suggested a solution which will be easy to make. They don't have the power to go far. Tharsos, however, which goes through wormholes yet is run by Ahmanyans who appear to know less about hypertravel than the Xenobots, zips around hyperspace easily. The solution is the amount of energy it takes. Tharsos has the Key, now, so can go far.

She was also quite flattered at being included as a character. I told her that what we can't pay in money we pay in immortality.

David

From: David Baumann
Friday, July 30, 2004 12:35 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: URS Thoughts and the UltraWeapon

Dear Jon,

The day after the Reading Group, Leslie sent me a few thoughts that came to her after the chapters about the fight near the sun had sunk into her a little. They're all good and I will make some changes, but here's one you and I need to address together:

** It does seem a little too convenient that the good guys weren't hurt with all the explosions going on - not really believable that only a hole in a guy's uniform was the only bad result of that day's fighting.*

I wonder how long we can keep up our rule of not having any death in the saga. We've already allowed for the demise of a few Xenobots—in Richard's surprise attack in LROM. Maybe it's time that we had a few casualties on our side as well. Such things do take place, although rarely, in the best of the classic books too. Death is a part of life and adventure and therefore part of reality, and now that we're getting into the crux of the Xenobot war, it would be real strain not to have any losses on the good guys' side. We've already mentioned that a few ships have been lost. If we're going to do it, this scene would be the right place for it. The last Xenobot shuttle that tries to locate and shoot its attackers can have a couple of successes before Bennick and his partner disable it, and it blows off into hyperspace. What do you think?

Also, I thought of a cool weapon that we might bring into play: an apparatus called the UltraWeapon that blows a mini-black hole into an enemy ship. We can describe the entire ship being drawn into the event horizon and slowly imploding. We can have Hoshino or somebody devise the idea, then have a foray of good guys go out to "capture" a mini-black hole from some known place and bring it back in a special device like a vacuum bottle, then launch it and release its constraints. We might even use such a thing to destroy the Xenobots' home planet at the end. It's a weapon that could only be used once, of course, like what the Xenobots did to Azemir and couldn't repeat. What do you think? "Doc" Smith did something similar in the Lensman series, in which the good guys developed the capacity for moving entire planets through hyperspace. They found an unhabited planet that was moving at a velocity completely opposite to the enemy planet so that the two planets' relative velocity was the speed of light or something, then moved the uninhabited planet through hyperspace directly into the orbit of the enemy so the two planes collided at the speed of light. Wowee. If we use it, I'd suggest that it be used not against a Xenobot ship or even solar station, but against their home planet itself[20]. The final destruction needs to be complete and utter—a judgment. We have already mentioned at least twice that the Ahmanyans resisted destroying the Xenobots utterly, but at the end of TLC, I think a judgment needs to be final. What do you think?

David

[20] As it turned out, this is what we did.

From: David Baumann
Thursday, August 12, 2004 3:16 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Almost Ready

Dear Jon,

Almost done with the two chapters. I've read and revised them up to the last 500 words or so. I'll do that after lunch and then send 'em on to you. I really like them. I've inserted a few things that will anticipate major action ahead.

Yesterday Mary Doman and I were discussing the characters' middle names, and we came up with Kathy Foster's full name. What do you think of Katherine Wind Foster? Wind could be her mother's or grandmother's maiden name, but it also is suggestive of the Holy Spirit and may provide an intimation of what Kathy will be like as a young adult.

Also have another new name for a character: Andor Vornado. While I was on retreat this weekend, a young man named Andor Molnar was present. He gave me permission to use his name in the series. I was going to use Molnar until I noticed a room fan that had been manufactured by a company called Vornado. Bingo!

David

From: David Baumann
Friday, August 13, 2004 9:44 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: Two New Chapters

Dear Jon,

The Ireland story: what a nice touch! I really like it.

Thanks. Eamon O'Gorman is a real person and a real RC priest and really Irish. He and I have been good friends for more than twenty years and have breakfast each month. Last month over breakfast when we were talking about

Starman, he actually said those very things that I quoted. He's a Starman reader.

Kathryn and danger: nice touch! I hadn't thought of that, but you're right – it adds to the story.
Mark has a very cool suit! I like that – great thinking! How cool.
Joe kicks the mechanical spiders: a very nice scene! I'm glad to see them back again.
A holographic diversion! Very neat idea.
These are the kinds of things that come up in the course of the writing—details that one usually wouldn't think of ahead of time.

Zip's argument with Tharsos on what to do was well done! I like it.

Thanks. It's our first human/Ahmanyan "disagreement." Karax seems to me to be a rather "by the book", humorless guy. That's why Pleera gasps when Zip challenges him—no Ahmanyan would do so. It also points up the contrast between Ahmanyan caution and human boldness. These qualities were mentioned in the appendix to LROM, but it's the first time they've come out in the saga in a particular incident.

The sudden closing of the Xenobot warship door and its launching implies that the Xenos were aware of Zip's entry and are trying to "capture and deliver" him. In the summary, I think that they are not aware of his entry. Is that right? Will deliberate capture and launch figure into the story? Perhaps the Xenos on the neon planet can tell headquarters that they're delivering a captive and that they suspect that Tharsos is in their space. Remember that headquarters suspects that Tharsos is in Omega Centauri somewhere and they're searching for its gravitational footprint. We haven't made use of that fact yet, although it's stated somewhere earlier in the book.

David

From: David Baumann
Thursday, August 19, 2004 2:14 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: URS Summary

Dear Jon,

if we alter the plot so that the Xenobots on the neon planet are AWARE of Zip's presence on their craft instead of having him just be caught in a chance liftoff, that will have implications for the next chapter. If the Xenos on the neon planet think they are delivering a captive, what happens when Zip comes out of hyperspace will be different from how the summary is now written. If you've got some ideas how to resolve that, let me know.

I actually don't have a copy of the summary with me, and I wrote it so long ago that the details are hazy. What is supposed to happen next? This shouldn't be too difficult to solve: Zip has had experience with Xenobot craft by this point (i.e. DH) and should be able to sabotage it or something so it doesn't land where the Xenobots intended and can then escape, and at that point we can be back in line with the summary. That is probably what Zip would actually do: if he wasn't in control of the ship he'd want to make sure it didn't go where the Xenobots wanted it to.

David

From: David Baumann
Thursday, August 19, 2004 2:43 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: URS Summary

He doesn't have a lot of good options at this point; this is the sort of place where I would say in the summary "Zip escaped" – which isn't too helpful. What are your thoughts?

I suspect you're about to see hand-to-hand combat between Zip and two or three Xenobots. That crowbar ought to be able to make an impact even on a Xeno.

From: David Baumann
Monday, August 23, 2004 9:01 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Ideas

Dear Jon,

Here's a list of the ideas I had while I was away for the weekend.

We have six short stories. "The Flight of the *Olympia"* and 'The City of Dust" were printed in DIE; "The Eight Treasures" will appear in URS. "The Orphans of Titan" (then called SETI) appeared in LROM. Only "A Matter of Time" and "Return to Europa" have not appeared in any published book. How about if we include them with TLC? Also, the introduction to TLC can provide the overall timeline for the entire Starman saga. We can even include the summary of *The Lost Tomorrow* with directions on how people can order the complete text in the Chronicles—which are basically print-on-demand fanzines and will be available as long as I feel there's a need. This way all of the short stories will appear somewhere in a book. In fact, we could put these stories into the version of DH we'll offer through AWB. I like that better.

For TLC, how about revising it in these ways? In the climactic ending, instead of two Starmen (Mark and Joe) making the landing, how about if it's three: Mark Seaton and Joe and Kathryn Taylor. That'll show that Joe and Kathryn got married. Also the flight to Kilindra Forest where the last scene takes place can come from the newly-dedicated David Foster Spaceport in Eagle City.

Early in TLC we could include a scene in which people of Earth are shipping huge amounts of seeds, animals, etc. to Mars. That is, in URS the Ahmanyans decide to hasten the awakening of their planet and appeal to Earth for help. Then in TLC we could include a cruise on Mars over cultivated lands and various menageries where animal breeding programs are taking place. We can also describe massive "seeding" programs in which spacecraft drop soil nutrients and so forth like the crop dusters of old. It might be nice also to have a scene with Ahmanyan children playing outside. With these scenes early in the book, they could be at risk in the last Xenobot war.

We should also awaken and mention Princess Kennatha and the reuniting of the Ahmanyan royal family. Izmaka is already introduced in URS, but returned to Ahmanya early in the tale. At the end of URS the awakening could be in process.

There's other stuff, which I'm putting into URS right away, namely: when Zip enters the Xenobot spacecraft, it will be totally dark. The Xenos have no eyes and need no light. Zip uses only his suit lights. It is a symbolic scene as well as actual. Also, after the ship takes off, he'll muse about the place of his leadership and once again being cut off from his companions. It'll be an anticipation of the final sacrifice in TLC. He will have a sudden memory of the empty canyons of NY when he was remotely controlling Turp's ship in DH, and will have a sharp pang of loneliness and longing. You'll see. I think I can write that part tonight.

I also have a photocopy from Marge Avery of an article that appeared in Catholic Digest August 2004, called "It's Time to Ask the Tough Questions —Biotech: How Far Should We Go?" It's about the temptation to go to cyborg life, among other related issues. It provides an excellent Christian overview of the moral issues. I can draw from it to describe the downfall of the Xenobots—how they degenerated from the Lucians to sentient mollusks. I don't know where to put that yet—maybe Jack can figure it out and tell Zip while they're together in URS.

What do you think?

David

From: David Baumann
Friday, September 17, 2004 11:30 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Timing Glitch in URS

Dear Jon,

I working on some details in existing URS text this evening, I suddenly realized that we have to move the story a year back—from 2156 to 2157. We have the Xenobots' trial of the planet-breaker in the prologue, and mention

that they are determined not to be foiled again as they were when they sent an armada against Ahmanya at the end of DH. That means that they need the time to prepare their weapons, etc., in Omega Centauri before Tharsos is sent there. We'd had the prologue of URS before set in February 2156; however, DH itself doesn't occur until the summer of 2156. Therefore the Xenobots' foray to the end of the galaxy must take place well after the summer of 2156.

So I have gone briefly through the entire extant text of URS to move everything back a year, so that it takes place in 2157.

Without thinking about it in detail, I don't think it changes the story line. Right? Any ideas or problems?

David

From: David Baumann
Monday, September 27, 2004 11:16 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: The Two Chapters

Dear Jon,

I'm glad you liked the chapters. I did too. I expect to get another chapter done today and another on Thursday. We're charging right along now.

the timespan is much more compressed than what was in the summary but that is fine: I think what you have is tighter and better than the summary. I think it works!

It suddenly occurred to me while writing that it would *have* to be compressed because Zip has no source of oxygen. He has to live only on what he had in his storage system. I just made up the three-day amount to give him a little time, but I don't see him being able to draw oxygen from any Xenobot source. Also, I checked the symptoms for oxygen deprivation with my son Benjamin, who does mountain climbing and knows about what happens at high altitudes, so that should be accurate. We'll see if Valerie agrees.

I had another wild idea about our last two books. The covers we have selected for them work—the three Starmen with a portion of Starlight Academy behind them for THOD and Mark Montgomery's watercolor of Zip in darkness with Xenobots in the background for TLC. However, they could also work if we reversed them! And I think that would be better. The dark one fits very well for the chapter I just wrote for THOD, and the one with the three Starmen might be more fitting for TLC. I could easily switch over to TLC the scene in THOD that I wrote especially for that cover. I think it might be better to have the dark scene be the cover for a book called "The Heart of Danger", and somewhat interesting (in a positive way) to present the portraits of the Starmen for the first time on the last book. Seeing the words "The Last Command" would be fitting over the three faces. What do you think?

David

From: David Baumann
Monday, September 27, 2004 9:08 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Alterations in THOD

Dear Jon,

Now that we are close to the end of THOD, I realized we had a major glitch. Instead of writing a new chapter today, I fixed it. The timeline showed that it had taken three months or so for the Janitor and allies to figure out the crystals and how the data they contained could be used to make a shield around the Solar System. That left them about three days to get it operational before the huge armada of Xenobots tried to invade. So I reduced the three month research time to one month, leaving about two months for Dr. Vornado and Tharuji to get the shield operational. That meant I had to move some chapters around, divide one into two, and change all the time references I could find that were connected to the events. I think we're in good shape now.

David

From: David Baumann
Thursday, October 14, 2004 1:37 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Ending THOD

Dear Jon,

Having finished the draft of chapter 22, I returned to the summary and the last four chapters. I realized that I/we have departed from the summary somewhat, as has often happened once the writing gets under way and details emerge—such as Zip's limited oxygen supply. That means that the climax of THOD may need to look a little different from the summary. I have assumed that, just as Tharsos did, the Xenobots figured out that there was a hypershield around the Solar System. Zip and Jack won't learn that until later; chapter 22 ends with Zip being confused about that.

The Xenos then, like Tharsos, decided to jump as far as the Oort Cloud, and plan to speed through the shield as the summary states. However, since it became necessary to limit Zip's supply of oxygen, the time for the last chapters had to be compressed. Zip and Jack have already escaped from the Xenobot freighter, not later as the summary states. This means that they do not any longer have access to realtime transmission or hypertravel. They're virtually stranded in the Oort Cloud. Fortunately, at this point we also have Tharsos in the Oort Cloud.

Therefore, with this situation at the close of the recent chapter, I suggest that the summary move in this direction: Zip and Jack work on the beacon and get it to operate. Tharsos finds them and rescues them. In the meantime, the Xenobot armada crosses the hypershield and attempts then to hyperjump to the Inner Planets. Apparently they decide not to worry about Zip because they don't want to delay their attack on Earth and Mars.

Tharsos, having located Zip and Jack—who are left far behind when the Xenobot armada—still inside the freighters—sets forth at one-third light speed—figures out the Xenos' ploy and transmit it to Earth. But Earth and Ahmanya, being smart, have already prepared for this eventuality and have actually layered the hypershield like an onion to slow down the armada. The Xenos have to break through three shields, with one to go before they can

actually enter Inner Planetary space. The fourth shield, however, is different. It is the real punch. The first three have served mostly as decoys. (This is a real karate technique, by the way—strike at your opponent three times and let him block you. That makes him feel overconfident and causes him to underestimate you. Then, the fourth attack begins like the first three, but shifts suddenly at the end, having drawn the opponent's block away, and completes the strike in the spot that has become vulnerable because the opponent has opened it in order to perform the now-useless block.)

The fourth shield contains antimatter dust as well as a hypershield, and when the armada crosses it, many of the ships are stripped down by the antimatter dust and disintegrate. Tharuji and Dr. Vornado and their team have not been able to destroy the solar power station, but learned to exploit it to create the antimatter in conjunction with the crystals. We already set the stage in MOM that antimatter can be created by SE by drawing upon solar power—coupled with the crystals, the Xenos' power station can magnify this capability manyfold. [Which raises a question: in MOM we have the Xenos supplying antimatter bombs to the Banjoman. Yet we never have them use antimatter bombs at any other time in the saga. Do we need to address this? If so, how?]

Not all Xenos are destroyed, of course, since not all cross the fourth barrier at the same time. Those just behind the front lines, however, are moving so quickly (one-third light speed or whatever the summary says) that they cannot avoid the shield. Most plow into the antimatter dust and are lost. Many hundreds, however—those at the back of the armada—are able to enter hyperspace at near-light speed before entering the cloud and return to Omega Centauri. Only about a tenth of the fleet survives.

Tharsos and other allied warships then pursue these freighters and engage them in battle in their own system. It is a tough battle. The allies begin with an advantage because the Xenobot warfleet is contained inside the freighters! They cannot fight until they leave the freighters, but they are being hammered as they attempt to do so. The allies do not expect to win, but only intend to do great damage to the Xenobots. They withdraw when they begin to suffer more casualties than they are comfortable with. The Xenobots, however, are pounded.

The last chapter is pretty much as the summary states. The allies keep close watch on Omega Centauri, and send repeated sorties into Xenobot space to

keep them on the defensive. The tide of the Xenobot War has turned, however, and victory seems assured. There will be other battles, and they will be referred to in the first chapter of The Last Command, but they will not be described in detail.

How does that sound? Make any improvements you want, and then we'll drive into the home stretch of THOD.

David

From: David Baumann
Thursday, October 14, 2004 11:57 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: New THOD Chapter

Dear Jon,

> Another excellent chapter! I enjoyed reading it. I had already read
> the first half of it (I think you sent it earlier, although there were a few
> changes) but the second half was definitely new to me. I think it's pretty
> good! It's quite exciting and is well-written. The description of the
> wormhole shield is quite good, and I like the way that Tharsos finds out
> about it. Well done!

Thanks!

*> * Tharsos did not seem to be damaged in any way, but I know it took quite a beating during the fight that happened the previous day. This is something*
> we might want to address.

I thought about that, and think it might be preferable to downplay the damage they sustained. First, having Tharsos damaged does not advance the plot—it's not really necessary. We also had Tharsos seriously damaged in a Xenobot attack earlier in the book, and this would be a repeat scene. This time they have the Key, which can change things. Also, they were definitely able to hypertravel once the heat got too intense in the battle in Omega Centauri. In the previous chapter I just had them smoking a bit with relatively minor damage. What do you think?

*> * The fight inside the transport ship was quite good, but it almost seems*
> too easy - the Xenobots did nothing to stop them. We might want to make it
> seem a little more challenging; perhaps have the Xenobots mount a
> counter-attack or something like that.

Sounds good. I also need to clarify how Zip pilots the ship. I have him giving orders to Jack, but at this point Jack is inside the shoulder pack. Zip gave orders before when Jack was inside a Xenobot shell but doesn't need to this time. I think I need to have Zip pilot the ship for the escape. He's too passive if he's just giving orders.

I'm glad you like the replotting for the ending. I'll fix chapter 22 today and then see how far I get on 23. With the replotting, I may be able to finish the book in three rather than four chapters.

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Thursday, October 14, 2004 9:21 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: The End of THOD

Dear Jon,

I have woven the original summary and our revision of it together to create a new working outline for the rest of THOD. I've even named the chapters. After "Into the Oort Cloud" we will have

23. The Xenobot Invasion
24. To Dust You Shall Return
25. Defeat in the Field of Stars

Epilogue: Dawn

Subject to revision, of course, but that's where the remaining work will begin. We're at a little more than 60,000 words now, so I estimate that the entire book will be about 70,000-72,000 words. I have no reason to think that I won't be able to finish it in two weeks. In fact, considering the commitment I've made to the Reading Group, I *have* to do it. I'm looking forward to it!

It'll be great to be at the end of another book. This one has taken longer to write than any other story, but I think it's good.

I've also been getting a number of ideas for TLC already. Can't wait to get going on that too.

David

From: David Baumann
Friday, October 15, 2004 11:33 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: The End of THOD

Dear Jon,

The revision really looks great! I like this a lot better - it has more excitement and danger to it. Well done!

It was your idea, followed by my writing. We make a good team.

23. The Xenobot Invasion
24. To Dust You Shall Return
25. Defeat in the Field of Stars
Epilogue: Dawn

Ooh, what great chapter titles! How exciting. Very well done! I like them. I think they'll be good!

Thanks. "The Xenobot Invasion" was the closest I could get to using the omitted title, *The Xenobot Infiltration*. "To Dust You Shall Return" is, of course, from Genesis 3, and also part of the liturgy for Ash Wednesday. On that day, we place ashes on each worshiper's forehead with the words, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

> I've also been getting a number of ideas for TLC already. Can't wait to get going on that too.
Me either! I think it will be outstanding – a true glorious finish to a great series. The end is in sight!

Yes. A year from now we will have finished the saga. It's a good feeling. One of my ideas for TLC is the opening scene. You have Zip walking through the streets of Amundsen City. How about if we have him flying a small shuttlecraft among the clouds on Earth somewhere? I always enjoy seeing the tops of the clouds whenever I'm flying, picturing them as fairytale landforms with valleys, mountains, pillars, arches, etc. We can have Zip enjoying the same fantasy as he zooms around, thinking that the end of the Xenobots is in sight and he is on top of the world. Then he can land somewhere and meet George St. George, as the summary says, and the story goes on as in the summary.

I also picture a council where humans and Ahmanyans debate the extinction of the Xenobots. The Ahmanyans say that they have faced this question before, when the defeat of the Xenos was imminent, and refused to exact the final obliteration. It is not in the Ahmanyan nature to be vindictive. Humans respond that because the Ahmanyans had failed to wipe out the Xenos 12,000 years earlier, they had grown back and caused the current crisis. Thus, it is not vindictiveness, it is exterminating an irredeemable menace, etc. Some humans can't wait to wipe them out, and others are moved with pity. Then the First Races show up and take the decision out of their hands. "It is not for you to decide such matters," they say. "The First Races were given this authority, to exact judgment on behalf of the Maker. You will witness the destruction of what was once Luxa, but it will be done by the hand of the First Races."

The Maker has not been mentioned since chapter one of LROM. The First Races, in this case, are like the Oyarsa of Mars who claimed to have authority to take life in C. S. Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet*. He is, in fact, something like an archangel given responsibility from Maleldil.

Also, at one point you said that you knew what had happened to the First Races and where they had gone and why. They are also the ones who did something to Larson's Folly and made it so inhospitable. This might be the place to reveal that information. So what *is* the answer about the First Races?

David

From: David Baumann
Friday, October 15, 2004 10:01 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: The End of THOD

Dear Jon,

One thing we want to be cautious of is having our readers ask "Wow, why couldn't this First Race guy show up earlier and just wiped out the Xenobots?" There has to be some reason why he had to wait until Earth reduced them to nothing.

Right. How about the Lucian crystals? They provide new technology. We've already established that the Janitor is not a technician, which could explain why he couldn't have wiped out the Xenos before. However, with the crystal data and Ahmanyan and human help, he can make the "soap bubble" that will carry the black hole to Luxa.

One thing we need to be cautious of is messing up our timeline. The First Races cannot appear in TLC because when The Lost Tomorrow took place they were still missing and no one knew what happened. TLC, then, cannot resolve the situation.

What we can do is have the Janitor, as the representative of the First Races, pronounce judgment on their behalf.

What do you think?

Very good. That is actually what I meant—when I spoke of the "First Races", I meant the Janitor as their ambassador, and the Lucian who appears in TLC. Just those two. Details to emerge as TLC unfolds.

David

_____
From: David Baumann
Saturday, October 16, 2004 9:24 PM
To: Mark McSherry
Cc: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: Prologue and Chapter One

Dear Mark,
Great observations, Mark, as usual. I will increase the population of *Imlah Taltahni* a little. Great catch. I'd never have thought of it.

Looking at Page 2 of THOD, is there only one book left after THOD in the Starman Series- "The Last Command"? Will that be it?

Well, yes. We're keeping this confidential until THOD comes out. The Starman series will consist of eight books, six short stories, and one serial. Jon and I are getting very tired after more than six years of almost nonstop work on Starman in our free time. Our customer base is diminishing, having dropped from about 250 to roughly 100 in about three years. We don't think we have enough money or customers to sustain the series for three more books. As you have no doubt noticed, it has taken me longer to write THOD than any other book—more than six months. It only took me five to write LROM, which is almost half again as long.

The transition from THOD to TLC is easy and logical. Although *Terror From Space* (book eight) and *The Xenobot Infiltration* (book nine) are fully summarized and great stories, we have decided to forgo them—at least for now. It is possible that they can be written later and they will fit into the saga beautifully. But the flow of our energy and creative insights right now go from THOD directly to *The Last Command*. Ideas for TLC are already abundant. We think that TLC may be our masterpiece, and our focus is already on that book now. In some ways, we just can't wait, literally, to get it produced.

You will find *Terror From Space* and *The Xenobot Infiltration* at least referred to in THOD. THOD is in two parts, as you have no doubt noticed. Part II is called "Terror From Space" and chapter 23 is called "The Xenobot Invasion!"—which is the closest I could get to using the book title we reluctantly laid down.

Our goal now is to have *The Last Command* finished by next May. In fact, we'll let you in on a secret. We're planning on a climactic, final meeting of the Reading Group sometime in May 2005 when the last four chapters of *The Last Command* will be read aloud to a select group of invitation-only ultra-fans. We are not limiting that group to the current three-member Reading Group. The Averys, Valerie Kramer, and a few local fans will be invited. Jon and his sister April are planning on coming out from Knoxville and Ohio. We'd like to invite you to come also. We'll take two or three days for talking and visiting local Starman sites, including the actual mud cave and the Anza-Borrego Desert, the inspiration for 22nd century Mars.

Those who accept the invitation will be given the e-text of *The Last Command* up to the last four chapters, so they will be aware of the complete story before the dramatic final reading. The listeners of the climactic reading will be literally sworn to secrecy, since the last chapters (mostly drafted already) will be extremely intense and powerfully moving. Nothing in those chapters can be allowed to leak out until the book is published and distributed.

So we hope you will be able and willing to set aside some vacation time or something and join us in May. The date will be set before too long so you can plan ahead.

In the meantime, we're drawing THOD to a close with a climax that we think will be very satisfying, and yet still contain unresolved tension.

Cordially,

David

From: David Baumann
Friday, October 29, 2004 1:08 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: The Future

Dear Jon,

It's not too early, I think, to wonder about the future of the Starman Team after TLC is out. We can surely put out one more Appendix, or maybe two. They'll certainly contain the summaries of TFS and XI. We've got to try to find a publisher for the last three audiobooks if API doesn't come through. We want to try to find a commercial publisher for the books. Just for fun, and without any pressure behind it, we might produce a short story or two now and then, and distribute them to our remaining constituency. We might comprise a directory of all of our Starman fans the way I did the Rick Brant Directory in 1998. Maybe we can come up with a plan that will help us unload some of our extra copies of books two through five. Other possibilities will no doubt emerge. I'd feel a real loss if, once everything were done, I only exchanged one email a month with you and sent you a Christmas card.

In working on TLC, I listed eleven appendices for the end of the book. Then I reduced it to six with the other five designated for another Starman Appendix. The six are:

an Afterword
our files on The Death of David Foster
a complete Timeline
a complete Starman Glossary
a complete file on the Ahmanyan language
Starman Statistics

The other files I had thought of but suggest that we put in a separate Starman Appendix are:

Christian Theology Central to the Starman Saga
How Science Validates Starman Series
Highlights from the Starman Message Board, Articles, and Interviews
References to Classic Series Books in the Starman Series
Writer's Notes for the entire Starman Series

You can probably think of other things. Maybe:
Real people and places we used
Maybe even what will happen to the Starman characters after TLC

We could even ask our readers to ask any question they want and we could come up with answers. (Will Mark and Stenafi have children? Will there be Ahmanyan Starmen? Etc.)

Short stories could include the re-emegence of the First Races, etc. Lots of possiblities. Time will tell and the Lord will provide.

David

From: David Baumann
Saturday, October 30, 2004 7:29 PM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: Reading Group

Dear Jon,

Man, is my throat sore! A lot of reading—two hours and 45 minutes worth, but we got to the end of THOD. Very few criticisms offered, which is a good sign. I caught a number of typographical errors and smoothed over a few glitches.

Only comment of substance was that the blowing away of the Xenobot armada in seconds by the antimatter wall happened too quickly after all the buildup. I responded that I didn't see any alternative. The Xenobot fleet has long been established as overwhelmingly larger than the alliance's fleet, so a big decimation was the only possible plan, and it had to be virtually instantaneous. I don't it's worth changing. The big battle is going to be against the remaining Xenobots and that's the subject of TLC.

I did notice that we have to dispose of the Uranian Xenobot base, and the Janitor should have an appearance somewhere at the end. Other than that, I think we're okay except for whatever small things may still emerge from Mark's reading and your final read-through.

David

From: David Baumann
Monday, November 01, 2004 9:20 AM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: Re: The Future

Dear Jon,

We've had, I think, three new members in the past few weeks, and membership on the board is at an all-time high. Since the notifications only mention people's emails and not their names, I have no idea who they are or where they're coming from, but they're coming must mean something.

One thing to consider: I would rather not have the Uranus bit cleared up completely in this book. I think it's good to mention that there was some action there (that they were moving toward dealing with the situation) but, since we do have a book that talks about how they dealt with it, it may be better to add a line to TLC to mention how it was cleared up.

Good point. All I said in THOD is that Starman Yancy Dufaure laid seige with 100 warships to the Uranian Xenobot outpost. Nothing more than that. Is that okay?

One thought: you may want to consider having the Appendices consist of things relating to the events in the Starman books, and leave commentary on the books to another Appendix. It's sort of like Return of the King: it was packed with information on the story, but it didn't get into commentary and behind-the-scenes. We may want to move our files on the Death of Zip to a separate Appendix – just a thought.

Actually it was our files on The Death of David Foster that gave me the idea for the appendix, and that event is going to be the hugest part of the TLC, I'm sure. I'm guessing that it will be something people will want to know about. Maybe we can ask the few who know how it ends what they think: should that file be included or not? We can even decide after the Big Reading Group next May—we could have an "audience" reaction time. I could go

either way. Certainly stuff like the overall timeline, glossary, Ahmanyan language, will be suitable. We've got a lot to choose from.

Two other thoughts: is a summary of TLT going to be in TLC? Will it be part of the Appendix? Also, in the timeline, should we include the events of TFS and XI in timeline form, just to mess with our readers? It might be fun to do.

I have the summary of TLT in the beginning of TLC, but it could be placed anywhere. Putting TFS and XI into the timeline is a good idea.

More later!

David

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, November 15, 2004 4:51 PM
Subject: THE BIGGEST STARMAN EVENT EVER!

Dear friends of the Starman series,

The Starman Team announces that the last book in the Starman series, *The Last Command,* is now under preparation. We are moving directly from *The Heart of Danger* to *The Last Command. The Heart of Danger* should be orderable through American Web Books within two or three weeks, with probable delivery early in 2005. *The Last Command* will be completed by next May, with distribution estimated for summer.

The Last Command is the climactic book of the Starman saga. As of this date, only ten people know how it will end. They have been sworn to secrecy, since the end packs quite a wallop. When the first draft was read to the Reading Group more than two years ago, two of them had tears pouring down their faces when the reading was completed.

NOW the Starman Team invites all who receive this announcement to a HUGE READING GROUP experience on

Saturday, May 21, 2005 in Placentia, California. At that time, the last four chapters of *The Last Command* will be read aloud to all those who are present. Once again, those who come will be sworn not to reveal the ending until the book is distributed. I hasten to add that even those who have heard the first draft of the ending will find many changes to it from what they have heard before. When May 21, 2005 comes around, only Jon Cooper and myself will be acquainted with the final text.

All who accept this invitation will be provided in advance with electronic copies of *The Last Command* except for the last four chapters, so that they will be fully up to date with the story line when they gather for the final reading. Of course, we require that those who receive the electronic copy keep it confidential until the book is distributed.

Jon Cooper and his sister April will be among those present for the reading—Jon from Knoxville, Tennessee and April from Ohio. They are arriving on Wednesday, May 18. During the time of their visit, I will lead a group of interested persons to the site of the actual mud cave in the Anza-Borrego Desert, where an overnight camp will add to the experience. Special Starman readings and other entertainments will be a part of this field trip. Reservations will be needed for this expedition.

If you are interested in being present for the HUGE READING GROUP and the unveiling of the climax of the Starman saga, please hit “reply” to this email and let me know. You will be kept informed of future developments.

David Baumann

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, November 15, 2004 9:11 PM
To: Jonathan Cooper
Subject: The BIG READING

Dear Jon,

Valerie Kramer suggests that the BIG READING be at the mud cave, if all the logistics can be worked out. I think that's a fantastic idea!! I think we should go to the mud cave on Thursday, and anyone who wants to come along can do so. Then I can read the four chapters under the night sky beside the campfire. Not everyone could do that, of course, but I wouldn't mind reading the chapters again on Saturday, and I'm sure that those who DO go on Thursday wouldn't mind hearing them a second time. What a neat idea, eh?

David

June 23, 2006

Dear David,

I imagine that it's highly unusual for three guys to work together the way we have for eight years now without ever having a major disagreement.

That is something that really amazes me. I've worked with other people on other projects and have never seen things go as smoothly: even among the best of people there are invariably disagreements, as people have different visions, and the leader has to put their foot down and enforce a given point of view. Maybe that is why most creative people prefer working alone: they just can't work with others very well because people's tastes and viewpoints are so different.

I just cannot believe that three people who met as haphazardly we did just happened to get along this well and just happened to form an amazing team that just happened to do some amazing things; that just doesn't happen in real life. I cannot escape the conclusion that God picked us out, brought us

together, and blessed – in amazing ways – our efforts. It's as if God *intended* the Starman Series to happen all along, and brought it about exactly as He had planned – which, really, is rather comforting, I think.

It's impossible to say whether or not anything further will come of the series. Yet, it seems inescapable that God can certainly bring other things to pass, just as He has brought the Starman Series to pass – and if He doesn't then that says something too. As you said a long time ago, perhaps we were destined for small things – but even so, the fact that we were destined to even exist is a source of amazement for me.

—Jon Cooper

V. UNWRITTEN STARMAN STORIES

PLOTTER'S SUMMARIES OF TWO UNWRITTEN STARMAN BOOKS

The Heart of Danger takes place in the fall of 2157. *The Last Command* begins on March 11, 2160. The Starman Team had planned two additional books in the series, to be set during this two and a half year span of time. These books were called *Terror From Space* and *Xenobot Infiltration.* They recounted further attempts by the Xenobots to thwart the growing human-Ahmanyan alliance, and the gradual turning of the tide in favor of the alliance.

We decided to trim the title listing down by omitting these two titles for two reasons. First, we no longer had enough money or fans to make writing more books feasible. We learned that one phenomenon of series books is that each volume sells fewer copies than the one before, especially if one is telling an ongoing story as we were. Our customer base began in 2000 with about 320 readers, so from the beginning we couldn't afford to lose too many customers and still keep the project cost-effective. At the beginning of 2005, our dependable customer base had dwindled to about 120. We doubted we could maintain this number for the two additional years it would take us to reach *The Last Command* if we produced these two books.

Second, although we thoroughly enjoyed writing the saga, doing so has been exhausting. We work the writing into our spare time, and like most people we are busy with families and demanding work. Over the seven years of this project, many elements of our personal lives have been postponed, set aside, or not given sufficient attention. Eventually, we simply became too tired to write more books in the series.

It is quite possible to move directly from *The Heart of Danger* to *The Last Command,* with very little change in the overall plot. Nevertheless, for any readers who may be interested, we want to provide the summaries of the unwritten books. Jon Cooper wrote the summaries before *The Heart and Danger* came into its final form, so some details in what follows are not consistent with the seventh Starman book as published.

Terror from Space

Originally planned as Starman #8
Title suggested by Mike Dodd
Basic plot draft by Jon Cooper

Chapter 1

DAY 1
7:30 a.m.

The book opens on one of the vast green plains of Ahmanya, where a group of friends are strolling around and talking. A group of scientists had just finished extensive repairs on Tharsos and were looking forward to a well-earned vacation. Tharsos had received quite a bit of damage in the previous book [*The Heart of Danger*] and required some repair work – work that would have taken much longer had the Ahmanyans not had access to three of the brilliant engineers who worked under the masters who built it long ago. These engineers, who had been placed in suspended animation, had been awakened about a year before and their expertise was immensely valuable in restoring Tharsos to its original condition.

After working so hard and bringing the repairs to a state of completion, they decided to take a camping trip out into the asteroid belt. They had been sleeping for thousands of years and it felt good to be alive again; much had changed in that time and they wanted to go exploring and see what there was to see. They were scheduled to return in three weeks.

Their plans were simple, but vague. They were going to Yellow City on Ceres by wormhole transfer, and after that they were going to get a SE spaceship (already reserved and waiting for them) and set out. After that, they had no firm plans: they were just going to go exploring.

7:45 a.m. Arrive Yellow City

So the little group set out. They arrived at Yellow City, got into their spaceship, and set out. Before they left, they contacted Mars, letting the folks know that they arrived safely and that everything was fine. They told them that they hadn't decided on a destination yet, but that once they got where they were going they'd let the folks back home know where they are in case anything unexpected arose. They said that they were rejoicing over the defeat of the Xenobots and were looking forward to a relaxing vacation.

9:45 a.m. Depart Yellow City
9:55 a.m. Xenobots' message sent to Uranus

A few hours later (at 9:45 a.m.), the spaceship left orbit around Ceres and set out into the depths of space. Unbeknown to them, their departure did not leave without notice: a dark, cloaked craft watched them leave under cover of a jumble of asteroids. It noted the path they were taking and calculated where they would arrive. It sent out an encoded, undetectable message – a message aimed straight at the heart of Uranus.

Chapter 2

[General overview of the status of the solar system; list of precautions that had been taken; explanation of progress that had been made; sets the tone for the story]

An impressive Xenobot army was assembled outside one of the moons of Uranus. A long, hard period of tracking by the humans and Ahmanyans had found all the other Xenobot bases in the solar system and destroyed them, and there was only one known outpost left – the one on Uranus. Ancient Ahmanyan technology had been put to good use; equipment was placed all over the solar system to detect FTL jumps, and detectors were also used that could spot the peculiar space-time distortions made by the Xenobots' engines. On top of this, tachyon detectors were placed at strategic points, and tachyon particles were one of the Xenobots' main methods of communications.

The system was not foolproof. Earth suspected that the Xenobots had found another, though poorer method of communication and were avoiding using tachyons. While they could detect the major Xenobot ships, they knew that certain smaller, stripped-down, non-FTL ships could not be detected. They could do much by regular radar scanning and just picking out what ships they knew should be there and what ships were anomalies, but the Xenobots could not be completely eliminated. What they could do is ensure that only small, weak, lightly armed craft could roam the Solar System, and that they did. They knew their system had holes, for the solar system was too big to be completely monitored, but it was a good system and it served them well.

The one Xenobot output left was located deep in the heart of Uranus, far out of reach of any of their equipment. All else was safe, save for that one base. Earth had erected a series of hyperspatial shields, capable of disturbing space-time in such a way as to make it very difficult to create a wormhole

except through the predetermined gates (Earth, after all, had wormhole devices of their own and wanted to use them). No Xenobot army could come zipping in without that solar power station, and there was no longer a chance of one being established – the Solar System was too well guarded. No one could zip in, no stations could zip in, no fleets could invade.

This base on Uranus, though – that presented a problem. Having a base in the Solar System gave the Xenobots a place to work from. Who knew what they were doing deep in the heart of that planet, or what they were working on? Without that central base of operations, the group-conscious Xenobots would fall apart, and the Solar System would be free to rebuild and meet the challenge that faced them. They had to find a way to remove that base, but it was not easy.

The problem, of course, was that the base was located deep in the heart of Uranus, far out of reach of any of their equipment. Earth had no equipment capable of flying through the thousand mile-per-hour winds and surviving the titanic, crushing atmospheric pressures. Earth knew they were in there and they kept them pinned on the planet, but they knew they had to find a way to penetrate to the base and remove it. SE, over time, had built up an impressive FTL fleet armed with Ahmanyan technology (a fleet that was growing every day thanks to the plants on ore-rich Mercury), but they were of no use on Uranus.

Richard Starlight had devoted much R&D work toward finding a solution, as had Robert Nolan. SE and Space Command had a large array of forces centered around Uranus and had built a large base on one of the moons. So far they had not found a way to penetrate deep into the base but they were hopeful that they would eventually find a solution – and hopefully soon rather than later.

10:00 a.m. Ship departure
10:40 a.m. Ship destruction

Today SE tried sending out another ship – an advanced robotic cruiser that they hoped would be able to withstand the hostile atmosphere of Uranus. The cruiser was launched from the moon and entered the planet's atmosphere. Things looked pretty good at first, but after it reached a certain level, systems began malfunctioning and a strong storm surge tore the craft to pieces.

The forces of Earth stared out at the planet, gazing at it and wondering how they were ever going to penetrate the Xenobots' defenses…

10:10 a.m. Xenobots' message arrives on Uranus
10:50 a.m. Second message sent out

Meanwhile, a certain message had been received in that base hidden deep in the heart of Uranus, protected by unimaginable atmospheric pressures. After it was received, it was duly processed and another message was sent out, to another cloaked Xenobot vessel near the spot where the scientists' ship was going.

The knowledge and reach of the Ahmanyans was vast, and there was little the Xenobots could do without attracting their attention. While the power of the Xenobots was great outside the Solar System, it was weak inside it, and if they sent a FTL-capable ship anywhere in the Solar System it would immediately be detected and attacked. However, the Xenobots had found a loophole: certain unarmed ships without FTL drives or wormhole transporters could maneuver undetected. While these ships could not do very much, there were a few things they could do, and the Xenobots intended to use them…

Chapter 3

The three Starmen, meanwhile, were on Tharsos, which was in orbit around Mars at the time. After *The Heart of Dangerr* had ended, they remained on board to help with repairs and to give the Ahmanyans all knowledge and insights they had gathered about the Xenobots while in Xenobot territory. Zip had quite a bit to tell them (he learned a lot during his extensive stay in their system), and they found it valuable.

11:30 a.m. Meeting starts
12:15 p.m. Meeting ends

A meeting was held on the base on the moon of Uranus, and the Starmen and the folks on Tharsos joined it via a secure RTL frequency. They decided to use Tharsos at Uranus to help flush out the Xenobots. Their own efforts weren't doing any good at all; they needed something a lot more powerful and they thought that maybe Tharsos could help.

The Ahmanyans told them that Tharsos would be ready for the trip within a few days, and that they would redouble their efforts to bring it back to its peak.

11:10 a.m. Xenobots' message received
11:45 a.m. Xenobot ship reaches asteroid, scans it
12:15 p.m. Descends to the asteroid

Hours earlier, the Xenobot ship near the destination asteroid of the Ahmanyan scientists received its message from Uranus. It altered its trajectory and was soon at the lonely rock to which the Ahmanyan scientists were traveling. It orbited the rock for a while, scanning for anything interesting, and then it began its descent…

12:45 p.m. Xenobot ship leaves asteroid
5:30 p.m. Ahmanyan ship arrives

Half an hour later, the ship left the asteroid with its entire crew, minus one, aboard and its mission accomplished. After relaying a message back to Uranus, they slithered back into the darkness to wait and see what would happen, for the ship bearing the Ahmanyan scientists was scheduled to arrive in about five hours.

Chapter 4

6:45 p.m. Tharsos' departure
7:05 p.m. Tharsos arrives at Uranus
7:15 p.m. Tharsos enters stable orbit
7:15 p.m. Tharsos begins charging capacitors

That evening, Tharsos was readied for the trip to the outer planets. The Starmen and everyone else got ready for a jump, and Tharsos zipped over to Uranus. Over the past few days they had discussed their strategy, and decided to use Tharsos to launch a direct attack on the base. Tharsos had a fantastic bank of power plants, and they wanted to channel that power into a laser and then use it to fry the base deep in the atmosphere. Earth had some ideas as to where the base was located, and Tharsos confirmed their observations.

Once Tharsos was in orbit, the ship began using its power plant to charge up its capacitors. What they wanted was an immensely powerful laser blast, and so they began pouring the output of the power plant into a bank of capacitors, so that when they were full they could release a titanic blast of energy – one they expected would be powerful enough to instantly penetrate the Xenobots' shields and melt their entire base. It would take about twelve hours for the charging to be complete, and until it was done the asteroid orbited the planet silently.

7:45 p.m. Xenobots board Tharsos, battle begins
8:15 p.m. Battle ends

That is when things went wrong. While they were charging up, something totally unexpected happened: a group of six Xenobots materialized on board Tharsos. The Ahmanyans later found out that at their Uranian facility the Xenobots had an impressive power plant of their own, and they used it to overpower the Ahmanyans' wormhole jammers and get a group through. The Ahmanyan power plant was far bigger than the one on Uranus, but since more than 98% of its power was going toward the capacitors and not the ship's shields the Xenobots were able to get through.

Once they were on board a titanic battle began, with the Xenobots zipping here and there, causing trouble, and the Ahmanyans ruthlessly tracking them down. The shields were vastly strengthened after they appeared and the Xenobots were defeated, but not until they had done a critical piece of damage: they managed to get into the computer core of Tharsos and crack its crystalline data bank.

Chapter 5

8:30 p.m. Damage assessment
8:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Attempt to contact/locate scientist party

With its data bank cracked, Tharsos had a serious problem. The data bank, known as the Key to Tharsos, had in it the information necessary to make Tharsos work. Without it, they couldn't discharge the capacitors, and they only had limited control over the entire asteroid. Thanks to the immense security precautions guarding it the Xenobots were only able to crack it, not destroy it, but the crack was serious enough.

They had to repair the ship as soon as possible. They knew that the Xenobots couldn't know the attack was a success (they had jammed the Xenobots' communications and the Xenos were unable to get any messages out) but they were still in serious trouble, especially if the Xenos launched any surprise attacks.

The people they needed to repair the structure were the very people who had just gone on a vacation into the Asteroid Belt. They tried raising those scientists, but to no avail: there was no answer on their compads and their compads could not be located. They seemed to have just stepped out into nowhere – they were nowhere to be found. They had not reported in after arriving at their destination, and nobody knew where that destination was…

9:00 p.m. Emergency council
10:00 p.m. Council ends
11:00 p.m. Starmen finish getting their things together

DAY 2
Starmen rest until 6:00 a.m. for the wormhole to charge
6:00 a.m. Starmen leave Tharsos

An emergency council was convened, and they decided to send the three Starmen out to search for the scientists. The rest of the Ahmanyans would work on repairing the crack as best they could, while Starlight Enterprise continued its research and Space Command continued keeping the Xenobots at bay. This plan was agreed upon, and the Starmen got ready to leave at once for a journey into the wilds of the Asteroid Belt.

The Starmen got their things together, and after getting a few hours' sleep (during which no action could be taken anyway, since they had to wait until the wormhole transporter charged) they left via SE's wormhole transporter, which they had established at their base. (The one on Tharsos was out of commission thanks to the crystalline crack.) Once the Starmen arrived at Eagle City, they got the *Star Ranger* and headed out to Ceres.

6:30 a.m. Message sent

Meanwhile, the Xenobots on Uranus sent out yet another message, this time to Kathy Foster's compad. The message, which was encoded to sound just like Zip Foster's voice and with his voice signature and ID, told Kathy that Zip would be in Yellow City in about 6 hours and asked her to be there so that he could see her when he arrived. He told her to use SE's wormhole transporter on the Moon (since she was on the Moon at the time) and that if she had any trouble, Richard Starlight would be glad to clear it for her use.

Chapter 6

Noon Starmen arrive at Ceres
12:10 p.m. Leave ship, search for clues
4:00 p.m. Conclude search for clues

The three Starmen found themselves in Yellow City on Ceres, deep in the heart of the asteroid belt, just 6 hours after leaving Mars. They had taken the wormhole transporter to Mars, and from there they picked up their ship

(the *Star Ranger*) and flew to the Asteroid Belt. They could have reached the belt quicker by direct transfer, but they knew they would need a fast ship on their search and the *Star Ranger* was the fastest ship the solar system had to offer.

Ceres is where the missing scientists had last been seen and this was where their search was to begin. The Starmen asked around and discovered that they had indeed been there and taken a SE ship out into space. (The folks had been trying to raise the ship for hours now with no response; it could not be raised.) The Starmen got the ID number of the ship, and they made their way to the radar command center on Ceres. Once they were there, they tracked down the radar logs that were made on the day they disappeared and found that the ship did appear.

From what they could tell, once the ship set out it began traveling into a remote and little-used section of the asteroid belt. Its progress could be tracked up to a point, but eventually the ship entered a region of space that was not under close and constant radar surveillance – a deserted region of space. There were some radar units in place out there, but they didn't have sufficient resolution to spot a single ship, so they were of little help.

What the Starmen would have to do is go out to that region of space and start exploring. There weren't a whole lot of settlements out there, but there were a few, and perhaps someone had seen the ship go by…

10:30 a.m. Kathy arrives at Ceres
10:45 a.m. Kathy gets second message
1:00 p.m. Kathy told to board the Star Ranger
1:10 p.m. Kathy falls asleep

The three Starmen, of course, had not asked Kathy to arrive and so they did not look for her after they docked at port. Instead, they immediately left their ship and set out to look at the radar maps, and they were gone for a number of hours.

Meanwhile, Kathy had managed to make it to Yellow City. Since she was the sister of the famous Zip Foster, the crews manning the wormhole transporter weren't at all reluctant to let her use it and didn't even ask for clearance. When she arrived, she went to the port and asked about the *Star Ranger*, and found that the three Starmen had picked it up from Mars a couple hours before and were on their way. She decided to go out and shop until they arrived.

While she was shopping, she received yet another message. This time she was told that the ship would be docking at such-and-such an hour, but that

Zip had a few business matters to attend to first. She was asked to board the ship at a certain time, and that if they weren't there just to go ahead and get on the ship and that the Starmen would be arriving later.

So, when that time came she boarded the ship. No one was there, so she just got in one of the cabins and waited. She wasn't there long until she started feeling very sleepy, and soon she feel asleep, not realizing that the mosquito that had bitten her a half-hour earlier was no mosquito at all, but a Xenobot device designed to knock her out for a number of hours. So she slept…

Chapter 7

4:05 p.m. Starmen return to the ship
4:10 p.m. Starmen leave Ceres, contact outposts to ask for help
7:30 p.m. Starmen guess at the ship's destination

The *Star Ranger* rocketed toward that little-explored region of the Asteroid Belt. They contacted the outposts in that region one by one and managed to get the radar logs they needed. Some of the outposts had been friendly and some were definitely not friendly at all, but they all complied with their request.

Once they had the logs, they began poring over them. Since each base had limited radar capabilities, the logs were not sufficient to cover every square inch of space. However, the ship they were looking for did appear on one of them, and while it didn't show its destination it did show enough information to enable them to make some educated guesses.

In the section of the ship's orbital path that showed up on the log, it showed the ship maneuvering in a certain direction and making some other course changes, including slowing down. Based on this information, they guessed that the ship had landed on one of a small cluster of asteroids.

8:00 p.m. Starmen discover Kathy
8:30 p.m. Starmen contact the authorities

The *Star Ranger* began flying toward that small cluster of asteroids, and four hours after leaving Ceres they reached them. During those four hours they contacted Tharsos and SE via RTT and gave them a full report on what they had discovered so far.

While zipping through space, they passed a number of odd asteroids. Some asteroid miners, probably with a great deal of time on their hands, had taken great pains to carve the asteroids into amazing and beautiful sculptures,

some finished and some unfinished. There were a number of these scattered around the Solar System, and they were truly a sight to behold. Some were even painted – a few in beautiful colors, and a few others in truly far-out colors.

While on route Zip and Mark lay down in their cabins to get a few hours' sleep, and that is when they discovered Kathy. They were immensely surprised to see her, and after waking her they asked her what on earth she was doing on their ship. She explained what had happened and showed the messages she had received, and the Starmen became concerned – they had certainly never sent them.

Who had sent these messages, and why? Why would someone go to such great lengths to get her on the ship, and what was the point? Who could have known that the Starmen would be arriving at such a precise time?

The Starmen didn't know what to do. They didn't have the time to turn around and take her back, but they didn't want to take her and expose her to danger either – and at the same time they wondered just how safe she really was. They contacted SE authorities, and they said they would look into it. For now, there was nothing they could do but continue on toward that lonely cluster of asteroids.

11:30 p.m. Arrival at asteroid cluster, begin search

After they reached the cluster of asteroids, they began picking up the radioactive debris trail left by the rocket – nothing big, just enough of the normal debris from the ship's engine to let them know they were on the right track and that the ship had passed through several days ago.

They began a slow and intensive radar scanning of each asteroid. One by one they scanned the five asteroids in the cluster, with no results: no bases, no life signs, no ships, nothing.

DAY 3

5:30 a.m. Starmen's search ends

Then they hit paydirt.

Chapter 8

Head of security thinks things over

Back at SE HQ on the Moon, the head of security was beginning to put a few facts together. Someone had effortlessly tracked the Starmen to Mars, to

Ceres, and then to their final destination, and someone had also effortlessly managed to get Kathy to meet them and go along. How had this been done?

Working backwards provided some clues. Once the *Star Ranger* left for that cluster of asteroids, it would be easy to track where it was going by its trajectory. Once the *Star Ranger* left Mars, it would also be easy to track. If someone was watching the *Star Ranger*, they could easily see that it was going to Ceres. They could then forge a message to Kathy, telling her to be there and gambling that she'd be allowed to get through. That would not be too hard.

What it looked like is that the person knew *why* the Starmen were going to Ceres. It was as if the person knew they would find what they were looking for and wanted Kathy to go along when they left, but they wanted to make sure the Starmen didn't leave her behind. The only group that would know where the Starmen were going would be the group that had somehow removed the Ahmanyan scientists from view; they would know why the Starmen were suddenly leaving and where they were headed. They would know what to expect the Starmen to do and what the results would be; they would know how to get Kathy into the ship during that narrow time window.

The question is, why? The Xenobots, somehow, must be behind it. They would be expecting the crystalline data core to be damaged, after sending in the raid; they would be expecting the scientists to be needed and would therefore remove them from circulation; they could detect the *Star Ranger* as it left Mars and figure out where it was going, just as they could detect the Ahmanyan ship and figure out where it was going. But why go through all that trouble for Kathy Foster?

So many vital pieces of information were missing. What awaited the Starmen out there in the darkness of space?

5:45 a.m. Star Ranger lands
6:20 a.m. Ship found
6:50 a.m. Wormhole transporter discovered

On the largest asteroid, some 15 miles in diameter, they picked up signs of some sort of settlement or inhabitation. Encouraged by this, they tried to contact the settlement, but got nothing – no response. So they decided to land their ship and go exploring.

After picking out a suitable landing spot, they landed the ship. There was some discussion about what to do, since Kathy was with them. They decided to leave one person at the ship with her (a good security precaution at any rate) and have the other two explore the small settlement. They sent a

message to SE (although they had a hard time getting through – there was a lot of interference) saying that they found a base, that no people were to be seen, and that Mark and Zip were going to go exploring and leave Joe behind. After hanging up, Joe complained that they did that last time [in *The Lost Race of Mars*], and that it had led to no end of trouble – Joe ended getting captured and the *Star Ranger* was toasted. Mark laughed and said he'd be glad to stay behind, then, and Zip thought that would be fine.

So Zip and Joe headed outside. They entered the airlock of the base, and found it had a decent atmosphere. The rooms were all empty, though – didn't look as though there were anything to see.

Then they walked into another room and found a large hangar, complete with the spaceship they had been looking for! However, there was a problem: the ship was turned off. They managed to turn it on and enter it, but the ship had been off for a while and there were no crewmembers aboard – and no evidence concerning where the people on board had gone. There were no signs of foul play, but then there were no signs at all.

Their search uncovered one other thing: in the basement of the small base was a tunnel that went into the ground a few hundred feet. At the bottom of the tunnel was a small room, apparently empty except for a ring of metal embedded into a stone wall. As they approached it, it began to glow, and the stone in the center of the ring space wavered and displayed a picture of a beautiful green valley!

Chapter 9

7:00 a.m. Zip and Joe step through the wormhole

Zip immediately radioed Mark and (after having some trouble raising him) told him about the discovery. The Starmen thought that it must be some sort of wormhole transporter, triggered to turn on if anyone approached it.

At this point, they weren't sure what to do. They tried to examine it, but there didn't seem to be anything to see – it was just an empty room. They didn't see anything dangerous about the image on the other side of the wormhole. There was nothing to do but try stepping through it: they were the ones sent out to find these people, they were alert (if tired), and they had on their spacesuits. So, they stepped into it, and when they did they received a shock – something zapped them, and they felt themselves falling as everything went black…

7:05 a.m. Mark gets fake message

Back on board the ship, Mark is left wondering what happened. He heard Zip contact them saying he was going to step through, and Zip promised to radio back and let them know what had happened. A few minutes went by and there was no message, and then all at once a message did come through, saying that the wormhole was fine, that the valley really was on the other side, and that Zip thought it would be safe for him to join him.

What curled his blood is that the voice he heard giving the message *was his own*.

Immediately, Mark realized what had happened. The wormhole was a trap: the Xenobots somehow used it to get the Ahmanyan scientists and now they had Zip and Joe. They tapped into their communication beam and heard Zip say he and Mark were going down, so they prepared a fake communication using Mark's voice, not realizing that Mark had agreed to stay in the ship at the last minute. Zip had done the transmitting since they left the ship and Zip had not mentioned Joe being with him, so they had no way to know that Mark had actually stayed behind. Had they used Zip's voice instead, Mark may very well have stepped through the wormhole into… he shuddered.

Now, though, what was he to do?

7:15 a.m. Xenobot ships leave Uranus
7:35 a.m. Ships appear off Mercury
7:50 a.m. Ships engage in battle
8:05 a.m. Ships destroyed
8:10 a.m. Missile destroys tunnel

Millions of miles away, sensors began going off at the Space Command space station orbiting Uranus. A fleet of a dozen Xenobot ships was leaving Uranus and heading out into space. Space Command rallied its forces and met them head-on, inflicting damage but not enough damage – while they destroyed six of them, six made it into hyperspace and vanished. The leader of the Space Command forces now knew for certain that the Xenobots knew they had disabled Tharsos: had Tharsos been active and working those 12 ships would never have had a chance. Beyond the damage those six ships would do, the Xenobots now knew that Space Command's primary offensive weapon was out of commission…

In twenty minutes, the ships appeared a million miles away from Mercury. Five of the ships headed straight for the planet, and the forces guarding Mercury were awoken. There was a defense base – a strong one –

guarding the planet, and the radar network showed that the five ships were headed straight for the large underground SE plant that SE was using to manufacture its best FTL fighter craft, destined to be used in the upcoming Xenobot war. There was no question what the Xenobots wanted to do: they were going to take out that plant.

Space Command engaged the five craft, but the Xenobots were not interested in a fight: they zipped on toward the plant. In the end they were destroyed, but not before several volleys of missiles were fired. The few missiles that made it through were more than enough; they detonated inside the mile-long tunnel leading underground and caused it to collapse. No personnel died and the people in the plant were safe (the missile just destroyed the shaft leading to the plant), but it would take at least two weeks to dig the tunnel out, and more time to repair the equipment damaged in the blast.

In the meeting that took place after the event, SE decided to put more resources on Mercury to guard it to ensure that no fighters could get through in the future, and add a better missile defense. It would be costly, but it had to be done: the Xenobot base on Uranus gave them a great place to work from, and until they were removed from it they would have to be on their guard. Who knew what was in that base or what they were building? If only they could get rid of that base…

Chapter 10

7:45 a.m. Starmen awake

Zip and Joe find themselves in the gorgeous valley that they saw through the gate. They felt pretty sore, and realized that they have fallen slightly down a hill. Neither of them is seriously hurt.

The sky above them was filled with beautiful white, fluffy clouds. They were at the bottom of a gorgeous valley, stretching on for miles. A gentle stream flowed through the valley, and the stream was surrounded by beautiful willow trees. There was an aura of peace and harmony here.

The Starmen, however, had no idea where they were. They suspected that they had traveled a great distance, possibly to some other planet. The scientists – were they somewhere on this planet? They saw their ship above, and they knew they were going on vacation, but no one seemed to know about the wormhole transporter in this region of space. The Ahmanyans had certainly not known about it, or they would have mentioned it. Had the scientists been abducted? If so, by whom? The radar scans showed no signs

of foul play and no approaching ships. What had drawn them to this strange place, wherever it was?

The Starmen tried their compads, but they weren't able to raise anyone. They seemed to have shorted out – something about the travel through the gate had zapped them. They checked their other electrical equipment and found that it seemed to work fine; it was just the compads that had suffered. Upon examination, they found that the batteries seemed to have been melted: whatever happened when they went through the gate fried the batteries really well and caused them to generate a power surge that burned out their compads. Their suits, which used a different kind of power source, worked just fine.

They did have their suit radios with them, and they tried them out. They could talk to each other, but they couldn't talk to anyone else – either no one else was broadcasting, or people were receiving their broadcasts and remaining silent.

What were they to do? They began by searching for the gate that brought them there, and they found it – but it was off, for it was just a ring of metal embedded in a stone wall. There seemed to be no way to turn it on: wherever they were, they were trapped, with no way to call anyone. Who knows how far they could be from Earth?

7:45 a.m. Mark considers his options
8:15 a.m. Ship goes back into orbit

Back on board the *Star Ranger*, Mark was trying to figure out what to do. (This could be a conversation with Kathy, perhaps.) He tried to raise SE, but got no response; all bands were jammed. Even RTT was jammed, and Mark knew that Xenobots had to be responsible. He didn't know how they could possibly be jamming it, especially since the Ahmanyans had gone to such great lengths to keep an eye out for them, but who knew what they were up to now? Even if he were to receive a signal he couldn't trust it, not after all the phony messages he had been receiving.

Mark could not contact anyone on any frequency. He knew that a lack of communication would eventually raise suspicion, but even then he wondered how long it would take before it would, and if the Xenobots wouldn't fake some sort of communication to make it look as if everything were fine.

He could make a run back to Ceres, but was that what the Xenobots wanted? It would take hours to get back, hours to get help, and hours to return. Who knew what would happen in all that time? Earth had its hands full; what could they do that he couldn't?

Mark stopped to ponder. What kind of help did he need? He needed to find out where that wormhole transporter went. Come to think of it, it was a pretty strange device – where was it getting its power supply to operate? It had to have a power supply somewhere. What was this base on the asteroid for, anyway? Did the Ahmanyans really know nothing of this place, or did they just think it unimportant? He remembered that in their haste to get here they told SE about their location but they didn't ask the Ahmanyans to do a historical analysis of it and see if they had anything in their files.

Mark needed more information – especially about this asteroid. He decided to take the ship back into space and do some more detailed scanning. Once he discovered everything he could about the asteroid, he would examine the data; then, after he pored over that and had checked out the base himself, he might know better what questions needed answers – and how to answer them.

Chapter 11

8:45 a.m. Zip and Joe stroll through the valley
9:25 a.m. Discovery of the house
10:05 a.m. Discovery of the Xenobot

Zip and Joe continue to walk through the valley, uncertain about where they are. The valley is beautiful, however, and peaceful – it was a lovely place to visit. They didn't see any animals, but they may have just been in hiding.

After walking down the valley for a way they came to a clearing, and what appeared to be an old, rustic building set in the side of the hill. The building had a distinct Ahmanyan look to it, and it looked very old – as if it had been there for a long time.

Curious, the Starmen walked up to it, but when they were still a couple hundred feet away they suddenly ran into a solid object. Looking closer, they discovered what looked like a sort of plastic/glass dome – something very solid and smooth, and almost (but not quite) invisible. It wasn't a field of some sort; it was some form of solid matter, much too smooth and high to be climbed.

The Starmen walked all around it, and found that it formed a circular barrier around the house – a very solid kind of barrier. They tried shouting through it and knocking on it, but there was no response, and they could not tell if there was anyone in the house or not.

The Starmen got out their laser pistols and tried shooting it, but it had no effect: from what they could tell, their lasers barely warmed the surface of the dome. There seemed to be no way to get through it.

As the Starmen were walking around, they suddenly noticed something: a hundred yards away, hidden in the tall grass, was a Xenobot watching their every move.

8:45 a.m. Asteroid scanning continues
9:45 a.m. Mark realizes the data anomaly
10:00 a.m. Mark begins examining the data

Mark and Kathy, meanwhile, continued scanning the asteroid. After a few hours of detailed scanning and surface mapping, he realized that the data he was getting back was very odd. The asteroid seemed to have a standard iron/stone composition, but it was far too light for its mass – it didn't have nearly as much gravity.

A light went off in Mark's head. Could the asteroid not be solid at all, but *hollow*? Could the valley the Starmen saw not be a thousand light-years away but be *inside the asteroid*? What if the wormhole just transported someone inside the asteroid? If this was the case, could there be another entrance – a normal entrance?

Starman Seaton began looking for it. He already had a very good high-resolution map of the surface and the subsurface rock structure, and the *Star Ranger* was programmed to continue scanning until the mapping was complete; now he just had to find that other entrance.

9:30 a.m. Message sent to Richard
9:50 a.m. Richard receives it
10:05 a.m. Richard calls Stephen

Back at the heart of Uranus, another message was sent out by the Xenobots. This message was sent to Richard Starlight, encoded to sound and look just as if Zip Foster had sent it. In the message, Zip reported that no progress had been made on the search for the Ahmanyan scientists and they had encountered no trouble, but that the research was ongoing and they would keep him posted of any new developments.

When Richard received the message, he wondered what he was going to do. He couldn't spare anyone else to search for the scientists, and neither could the Ahmanyans; the Starmen were the best he had any rate and if there was anything to find they would find it. Yet, what was he to do? His best efforts had failed to penetrate to the base on Uranus, and with the highly

successful attack on his FTL starship production plant he now knew that all his other defense factories were equally open to attack.

Was there another way to get at the base on Uranus? He decided to make a call to Stephen Hoshino.

Chapter 12

10:10 to 10:20 a.m. Joe and Zip talk things over
10:20 a.m. Zip begins looking further

Zip looked out at the Xenobot, hiding in the grass across the field. What was it doing there? He and Joe sat down to talk things over.

The Xenobots had to be responsible for everything that had happened. They must have known where the scientists were going, and rigged up something to happen so that after they got here they couldn't go back. Being Xenobots, once they had the scientists trapped here their normal response would be to kill them.

The Xenobots also knew that the three Starmen were mortal enemies of the Xenobots, and very dangerous enemies at that. Yet, the Xenobot just hovered in the grass. It must know that they were there, and it must know who they are; it had every chance to get at them, yet it did nothing.

The Starmen looked at the lovely Ahmanyan house and began to do some thinking. This place must have been an old Ahmanyan resort of some kind, and the scientists wanted to visit it and see if it was still there. Being the brilliant scientists they were, they would know that the Xenobots could be after them and would take precautions.

What if, after they arrived, they saw what had happened after they walked through the wormhole gate and took precautions? The scientists could very well be in that house, protected on the other side of that strange transparent wall. The Xenobot intended to kill them, but he was outsmarted and was left outside powerless to take any action.

Suppose the Xenobot was waiting for the Starmen to do something and cause the Ahmanyans to lower the wall? The Ahmanyans might very well know they were there but be unable to help them, since lowering the wall would allow the Xenobot inside. The Xenobot could be leaving them alone to watch and see what they do, and perhaps take advantage of their options.

The Starmen did not see how they could hope to collapse the wall. If they could somehow disable the Xenobot, the wall might come down on its own and, if the Ahmanyans really were inside, they might be able to form a plan. At any rate, the Xenobot was dangerous and had to be removed.

The question was, how do you disable a Xenobot with little more than your bare hands?

At this point, Zip remembered something: you can always win if you can control the rules. Zip and Joe decided to look around a little bit more and see if there was a way they could alter the rules of the conflict to be in their favor.

12:10 p.m. Zip hits his head on the sky
12:35 p.m. Zip finds the door
1:00 p.m. Zip comes up with his plan

Zip and Joe continued climbing up the side of the mountain where the cabin was located. They wanted to do two things: get a better view of the whole valley, and see what was on the other side. They continued climbing, until suddenly the unexpected happened: they hit their heads on the sky.

This was a total shock to them. They started feeling around, and found they could climb no farther: it was as if there was an invisible barrier preventing them from continuing up the mountain. Had they reached another transparent plastic barrier?

The Starmen hunted around, looking for a clue, when they found one: an artistically-hidden door. They entered it, and found something that immensely surprised them.

Inside the room was a host of equipment, and (thanks to their knowledge of Ahmanyan) they were able to figure out what was really going on. They were actually inside an asteroid – a beautifully terraformed asteroid, called a "pocket world" – and this was the environmental control system, complete with an artificial gravity generator. They were not uncountable trillions of miles from home, but were just a few miles away from their ship. He could actually see their ship orbiting the asteroid, and from what he could tell Mark and Kathy were still inside it, safe and sound. He was glad they hadn't walked through the gate as he had.

As Zip looked over the controls, an idea began to form. Zip decided that it was time for a slight change in the environment.

Chapter 13

4:30 p.m. Hoshino arrives at the moon orbiting Uranus
7:00 p.m. Serious activity begins, work continues

On the other end of the solar system a period of intense activity had begun. Massive work was being done in one of SE's lunar stations on a moon

orbiting Uranus. Steven Hoshino had taken the wormhole transporter to Uranus and was directing the work, being aided by a host of Earth and Ahmanyan scientists.

A plan had been hatched. Since a direct attack would not work, what about a wormhole attack? The Xenobots had a wormhole jammer around their base at Uranus, but the Ahmanyans also had equipment that could be used to overpower the jammers, just as the Xenobots had overpowered the ones guarding Tharsos. Tharsos had still not been repaired, but Hoshino was working at the SE base to build another wormhole transporter, backed by some powerful equipment. The hope was simple: overcome the jamming equipment and send in a few well-chosen and powerful weapons, capable of disrupting the base and forcing the Xenobots to leave the Solar System.

It would take some time to finish this, but at last they had a promising track to work on.

1:00 p.m. Mark finds his tunnel
1:20 p.m. Mark goes outside

Meanwhile, Mark's careful analysis of the asteroid was beginning to pay off. A couple hundred yards away from the apparently abandoned base, carefully concealed, was another tunnel – one that appeared to extend deep into the heart of the asteroid. Mark was expecting this find: the Ahmanyans would be expected to have some sort of fail-safe system just in case their main airlock system failed.

Mark took the *Star Ranger* back down to the asteroid and landed it beside the abandoned base. He told Kathy that he was going to go outside and do some exploring; he was going to see if the tunnel really went as deep as it seemed to and if it were passable. He told Kathy to ignore any transmissions, because he wasn't going to send any, and to ignore anyone who asked for access. Mark was going to put a passcode on the door, and he knew what it was: only an imposter wouldn't be able to enter.

So, Mark gathered up some equipment he thought he would need and left the *Star Ranger* to go look for the secondary access tunnel.

1:35 p.m. Zip begins messing with the gravity grid

The Xenobot, Zip noticed, was still in the same place as he always had been. Zip looked at the controls once more and winced; he fervently hoped that what he was about to do wouldn't damage the pristine valley too much. He was going to be careful, but there was no good way to immobilize a Xenobot.

What Zip realized was that the gravity grid could be customized to be more intense in one place than it was in another. So, first, he pressed a button that removed the gravity field altogether from the whole interior of the asteroid, making it feel as if there was no gravity at all.

The Xenobot remained immobile.

Zip had Joe sneak out and prepare for Phase II of the plan.

Chapter 14

1:35 p.m. Mark reaches the tunnel
1:40 p.m. Kathy notices the approaching Xenobot ship
1:45 p.m. Kathy manages to get the Star Ranger to leave the surface
1:50 p.m. Kathy directs it on an intersection course

Thanks to the low gravity of the asteroid, Mark was able to reach his destination within ten minutes. The tunnel was concealed with the traditional Ahmanyan cloaking technology, but now Mark knew how to open it. Taking out a special device, he turned on it on and had it generate a special beam of yellow light. After shining it on the right spot, the door opened, revealing a long and dark tunnel. Mark stepped into the tunnel, took out another device, and began taking some readings.

It was at this point that Kathy noticed something was wrong. Kathy was in the *Star Ranger*'s control room at the time, monitoring Mark's progress, when she heard an alarm go off. She saw that the radar was giving off an alarm of some kind – something about a ship approaching.

Kathy had some spaceship training and her older brother Zip had showed her a few things, but the *Star Ranger* was a new vehicle to her and she wasn't completely familiar with it. After a few false starts, she pressed the right button and got an ID on the approaching vessel. Her blood ran cold when the approaching ship was identified as a small Xenobot flyer, equipped with a crew of four. The Xenobots were flying straight toward her and would be arriving within ten minutes.

Kathy immediately tried to raise Mark on the communication system, but she couldn't get through – there was too much interference, which she suspected was deliberate. She had no way to warn Mark: what should she do? She couldn't just sit there, and Mark would likely not know what was going on until it was too late.

Kathy then looked over the control board, wondering what she should do. She was able to pilot a spaceship, but the *Star Ranger* was very advanced

and had all sorts of features she knew nothing about. Still, she couldn't just sit there and let the approaching Xenobot blast her and Mark into atoms.

Nervously, Kathy took the ship back into space – easy enough – and then activated an automatic defense program. She aimed it on a course to intersect with the oncoming Xenobot ship and tried to figure out how to get the *Star Ranger*'s weapon system to lock onto it.

1:45 p.m. Mark notices the Star Ranger leave

Meanwhile, Mark felt the ground shake under his feet and stepped out of the tunnel to see what was going on. He was shocked to see his ship leave the surface, until he saw the approaching Xenobot ship coming over the horizon. He instantly knew what had happened: as soon as he left the ship the Xenobots (waiting in the darkness) had honed in to attack, and Kathy was doing the best she could to fight them off.

Mark tried to raise the ship on his compad, but he couldn't get through – the interference prevented any contact. He could only hope that Kathy could figure out how the ship worked in time…

1:45 p.m. Joe shoots the Xenobot
1:45 p.m. Zip begins throwing the Xenobot around
2:00 p.m. Zip keeps throwing him around

With Zip still in the control room, Joe walked down the mountainside until he was in reasonably good cover, got a clear line on the Xenobot (which was on the other side of the artistic house) and shot at it.

At this point, the Xenobot rose up and shot back – nothing serious, just a warning shot. It didn't appear very ruffled.

Zip noticed, and decided to ruffle its feathers some more. He reversed the gravity grid in the space close to the Xenobot, making the floor the ceiling and vice versa. The Xenobot began to fly in the air for a few hundred feet, and then Zip slammed it in reverse again (making the floor the floor once more), but with a difference – he amplified the gravity field to be twenty times normal, and he altered the angle, causing the Xenobot to slam into the side of the spherical wall guarding the Ahmanyan house.

Zip continued to battle the now-damaged Xenobot. Each time the Xenobot tried to go toward him, he would mess with the localized gravity, forcing the Xenobot to correct, and he slammed him into the wall again and again and again. The Xenobot got off a number of shots and scored holes all around the door, but he could never get close. Since the grid was localized,

only limited damage was done to the pristine environment, which Zip was sure the Ahmanyans would appreciate.

However, the Xenobot was still alive and kicking, despite all the hard knocks. Zip didn't dare let him go now, and he didn't know how much longer he could keep this up until something gave way…

Chapter 15

2:00 p.m. Kathy continues fighting the Xenobots

Meanwhile, Kathy kept trying to fight with the Xenobot ship. The ship was a slow one, not nearly as responsive as the *Star Ranger*, but Kathy wasn't very familiar with the ship she was flying. She did manage to hit it a few times and thought she may have damaged it, but she couldn't bring it down or drive it away. She managed to keep it away from the asteroid but the Xenobots were too good at their evasive maneuvers to allow her to get a good, clear shot at them. The Xenobots had tried to fire at her, but the shots weren't very powerful ones and inflicted only limited damage.

2:05 p.m. Xenobot contacts Zip

While Zip was desperately trying to hammer the Xenobot into submission, he suddenly received a radio message from it over the asteroid's intercom system. The Xenobot said that Kathy was in the *Star Ranger* trying to fight against the Xenobots and was losing, and that Mark was immobilized on the surface. The Xenobot offered Zip a bargain: let him go, and he would have the Xenobot ship leave his sister and his friend alone.

Zip noticed out of the corner of his eye the dogfight that was going on in space above him, and he realized that the Xenobot was probably right – judging from the flight pattern, that most likely was his sister flying it, and she was definitely no match against the Xenobots.

In an instant, Zip realized why the Xenobots went to such great lengths to get ahold of his sister: they wanted to use her against him. He figured that part of their plan had been foiled when Mark and Kathy had not stepped through the gate, but now they had their second opportunity.

Zip had only an instant to decide what to do.

2:05 p.m. Kathy defeats the Xenobot ship

At that instant, the Xenobot ship hesitated as it listened to the Xenobot inside the asteroid. That is all Kathy needed: she at last got the ship in her

sights and hit it good. The Xenobot ship spiraled, seemingly out of control, and made a rough crash landing onto the asteroid below.

2:05 p.m. Xenobot leaves

When Zip saw his sister defeat the Xenobot, he hesitated just for a moment. That was all the Xenobot needed: he raced in a high arc toward the wormhole gate and slammed through it, activating it just moments before leaving and turning it off as soon as he made it through. On the other side, it plowed straight through the metal ceiling into open space (allowing the air inside the base to escape into space), flew in an arc toward the downed Xenobot ship, and was inside it just 30 seconds after Zip hesitated.

The ship, damaged though it was, still managed to leave the surface of the asteroid and fly off into space. Kathy chose not to pursue her prey; she instead landed the ship beside the now-damaged base.

Chapter 16

2:10 p.m. Mark reboards the Star Ranger

Mark, a bit shaken, climbed on board the *Star Ranger*. He praised Kathy for what she had done, and he checked over the ship and found it to be in fine shape. He told her that the tunnel was still in good condition, thanks to her; the Xenobots had not been able to land and damage it, and he and Kathy should be able to access the interior through this tunnel.

2:10 p.m. Zip wonders what happened
2:25 p.m. Zip finds the Ahmanyan scientists

Inside, Zip is still wondering what happened. He saw the Xenobot leave, and on the radar he saw the Xenobot board the ship Kathy had shot down and leave into space. It looked as though Mark, Kathy, and the ship were fine, but the Xenobots got away. At least they had driven them from the interior.

Zip restored the gravity grid to normal and went outside. There had been some turmoil, but for the most part the garden was fine – there wasn't anything a little cleaning and some repair work couldn't fix.

They walked down to the hut and found that the shield was now down! They walked up to the door, and before they could knock on it the door was opened to them. They had found the missing Ahmanyan scientists.

3:30 p.m. Zip walks with the scientists to the gate to see if it is still working
3:40 p.m. Group leaves to go look at the door to the tunnel
4:00 p.m. Group arrives at the tunnel

The scientists explained that when they arrived, they were surprised by the Xenobots, who shorted out the gate or did something to it so that they couldn't leave. They managed to get inside their house and erect the shield (which they said was composed of nanobots – a sort of mechanical, powered material), but they couldn't leave. They couldn't contact anyone, either: their communications were all being jammed.

After resting for a while, the group went to examine the wormhole gate. The scientists said that they had built it as a sort of airlock, but the Xenobot that left had shorted it out and now it could no longer be used without extensive repairs – and they did not have the necessary tools to repair it. They said that there was another way out (a long tunnel), but that the Xenobot had fused the airlock closed, and they didn't have with them a good way to open it.

Still, they went to look at it. It was located at the back of a small complex of buildings, which were hidden under the mountain and accessible only through an artistically hidden door. When they reached the complex and opened the door, Zip was astonished: Mark was there waiting for them!

Chapter 17

4:45 p.m. Group reaches the surface of the asteroid
5:00 p.m. Star Ranger leaves
9:00 p.m. Star Ranger reaches Mars
9:30 p.m. Kathy returns home
9:30 p.m. Starmen and scientists reach Uranus

Mark explained. He said that he had found the tunnel and walked down it and reached the bottom, where he found the outer airlock functional but the inner one fused. After closing the outer airlock, he used some equipment he brought with him from the *Star Ranger* to open the inner one, and he was about to go looking for Zip when Zip walked up.

The group could no longer reseal the inner airlock (for it was forced open), so instead they sealed another door in the complex, which would prevent the atmosphere from escaping into space. They then walked up the tunnel to the surface, boarded the *Star Ranger*, and the whole group headed back toward Mars at high speed (and, of course, radioed the good news to SE

and Uranus on their way back). Once they were there, Kathy (gladly) went back home, and the rest took a wormhole transporter to Uranus!

10:20 p.m. Starmen are debriefed
10:45 p.m. Starmen retire for the night

Once the Starmen reached Uranus, they got a good night's sleep – something they definitely needed after the tough adventure they just had. While they were sleeping, the Ahmanyan scientists put their knowledge to good use: they began work on repairing the crack in the crystalline data core, and also helped find a way to channel the immense power of Tharsos to the device Stephen Hoshino was building. On the morrow they would begin trying to penetrate the Xenobots' defensive shields.

Chapter 18

DAY 4
3:50 p.m. Power linkage complete
4:20 p.m. Testing begins

On the following afternoon, the power linkage between Tharsos and SE's new wormhole transporter was completed, and it came time to run the test. At this point, they stopped to think for a while about what they should do. Should they go ahead and try to rout the Xenobots now, or should they wait until Tharsos was repaired? The Ahmanyan scientists told them that the data core could be repaired, but it would probably take a month or two – it was delicate and painstaking work, and would require great care.

Earth had little idea what the Xenobots had in their base down below and were hesitant to strike with their most powerful weapon offline, but at the same time they could not take two more months of Xenobot pillaging and destruction (as they had done on Mercury). If the Xenobots had something very powerful hidden away, wouldn't they have used it already and not waited so long?

A series of antimatter charges were prepared. The hope was to damage seriously the base below on Uranus, to the point where its shield generators would fail and the atmosphere would crush it. The Xenobots would likely survive and get out in their ships, but they would face a stiff fight with the forces of Earth and would (so they hoped) be pushed out of the Solar System.

With a mixture of trepidation and excitement, the antimatter chargers were placed in the machine and the device was turned on. At first, nothing

happened, for the signal was jammed, but the power kept growing, and growing, and growing, until…

4:35 p.m. The breach is made
4:45 p.m. Xenobots begin leaving the planet

Wham! All at once, the charges were gone; the shields were pierced and the charges appeared near the Xenobot base and were detonated. Depth scanners showed that the base was seriously damaged, and Xenobot fighters began pouring out of the planet. Not just one fighter, or two, or three, but dozens, and the dozens soon turned into a hundred, and then the number kept growing. They had flushed them out, and they were leaving the planet before the planet tore them apart, but they had seriously underestimated the force on Uranus!

All the sudden Space Command fervently wished that Tharsos was not offline.

Chapter 19

5:00 p.m. The battle begins
8:00 p.m. Xenobots leave and the battle ends

A battle ensued, and it was a fierce fight. There was a squadron of 50 SE FTL ships around the planet, and another 35 Space Command FTL ships around the planet, plus 150 non-FTL ships. The alarm was raised, and the Ahmanyans sent in ships from Mars and other ships were sent in from other parts of the Solar System.

Still, the Earth craft were outnumbered: they had about 100 FTL craft against more than 200 of the enemy's. They kept the craft pinned around Uranus, though, and their years of training and earnest desire for victory helped them inflict damage on the Xenobot fleet. Three years ago they would not have had a chance, but in the past three years SE had learned a great deal from the Ahmanyans, and SE had new tools to work with.

The battle raged fiercely for three hours, until – all at once – the Xenobots decided they had had enough, and they fled the Solar System at a high speed. Once they were out of range of the wormhole jammers, they jumped – jumped deep into the galaxy and were gone. They were not defeated, but they left to come again and fight another day.

Chapter 20

9:00 p.m. Reflections

After the battle ended, there was a time for reflection. Much had changed over the past three years, and there was now a growing feeling of hope. The Xenobots had been found and routed; their last base in the Solar System had fallen, and in a pitched battle the Xenobots had fled. They were still a terror from space, but now Earth could defend itself. It no longer feared a sudden overwhelming invasion; now it was the Xenobots that had to worry. The tide was turning.

Earth could not invade the Xenobots yet; its 100 FTL ships were a mere pittance beside the hundreds of thousands controlled by the Xenobots. But Earth was building, Mars was rebuilding, science was advancing: great things were afoot, and there was hope. It would be a few years before they could step out and meet the Xenobots head-on, but that time was approaching.

Xenobot Infiltration

Originally planned as Starman #9
Basic plot draft by Jon Cooper

Chapter 1

The three Starmen are on an asteroid, vainly trying to get a door open. Above them they see five ships; they know that there is another one under the asteroid that they can't see. The ships are massive Starlight fighters; they are of a new design, and at the moment they were saving the Starmen's lives.

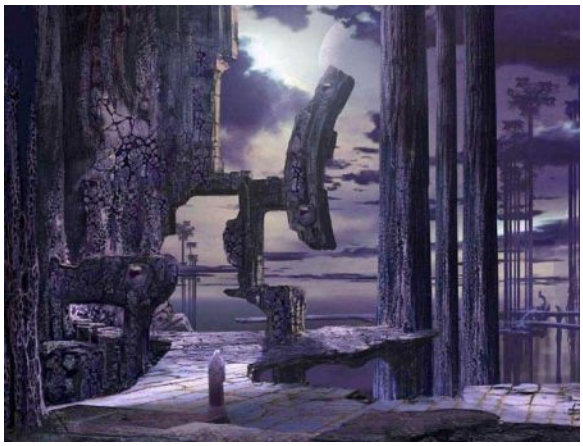
A large fleet of Xenobot ships, flying a few thousand feet outside the ring of five SE ships, was raining lasers down on the asteroid but could not penetrate the shield that was protecting it. The SE ships were acting as nodes for an active shielding system; each ship was extruding part of a wall of force, and together the ships covered the entire asteroid. The wall was being erected to save the Starmen from getting fried by the Xenobots. They could not hold up for long (the active shielding was a huge power drain), but for now it was holding. The colors above would have made a fascinating light show if it weren't for the fact that it was so deadly and the stakes were so high.

The Starmen at last managed to get in the door, which led into a drab, poorly lit concrete base filled with old rusted pipes and other assorted machines. They closed it behind them and ran down the long corridors. They knew exactly where they were going: they took a left turn, a right turn, a giant leap through space, and another right turn. After a few moments they began to be pursued, but not by anything living: a series of vicious Xenobot attack androids began to shoot at them. Their shots went wild, but they kept coming, and the shots were of sufficient power to melt the walls. Joe threw a grenade down a hall that took down the only corridor to where they were going; he knew that wouldn't stop them

for long, but he hoped it would be enough time. The grenade did indeed bring down the corridor, and they continued racing along.

They at last made it to the room they were trying to reach – a room filled with pipes, gadgets, machines, and an odd-looking portal embedded into the far wall. They radioed their lead ship above them that they had made it and to proceed with plan. Three minutes later, the SE ships launched a volley of antimatter missiles at the asteroid, and before the missiles hit the asteroid the SE ships engaged their hyperdrives and vanished. The Xenobots then poured through, but it was too late: the missiles hit the asteroid and blew it into pieces. The resulting explosion severely damaged the Xenobot fleet, and the Starlight ships were gone.

Chapter 2



Meanwhile, the three Starmen were on a vast, purple world. Ancient ruins ascended for thousands of feet, built out of ornate stone and metal - alien ruins, built for a purpose lost in the mists of time. Two soft, glowing moons dotted the deep blue sky. It would only be dark for a few hours, but they would not be here long enough to watch the sunrise.

Once again, the Starmen knew where to go. The transport had been successful; there were few ways to get to this planet, and the path through the automated Xenobot colony (which they had just left) was one of them. The Xenobots had not known this, but

they would realize soon enough what they were after and what they were doing, and they did not have long.

As they walked through the maze of ruins, they came to the section they were looking for. There was an odd room, with a circular floor covered in strange, alien symbols. Zip knew this room by heart; he expertly walked an odd path across the room, and when he and his friends got to one central panel it began descending into the ground - for it was a secret elevator, leading to a secret part of the city. After reaching the bottom, they stepped off the elevator and pressed a button on the wall. The button caused the elevator to raise and reset the puzzle; it would appear as if they had never arrived at all.

They began walking down another path. Zip asked Joe if the artifact they had picked up at the Xenobot base they were just at was intact; Joe looked at it and said that all was well. As they hurried along they heard an odd sound behind them. They knew exactly what it was: the sound of a Xenobot wormhole being opened. Zip had hoped that by using the secret passage he would delay them for a bit, but evidently the Xenobots knew this place well (if not its significance) and were prepared to instantly zip to the intruders and take them out.

Joe motioned for the other two Starmen to hurry along, and he meanwhile shot at the Xenobots and hurried along a different corridor. The two Xenobots quickly followed him, shooting. Joe, however, was ready; when the Xenobots turned the corner they passed a proximity device he had placed there, causing another explosion that sealed the door (though it wasn't enough to even harm the Xenobots). Meanwhile, he was in another passage, and he caused the part of the wall separating the Xenobots from him to collapse as well, leaving them sealed in. Joe then took out a little device that was built to disrupt the formation of wormholes; he set it down in the passage and hurried along. The trapped Xenobots would be out in a few minutes, and given the energy level the Xenobots were using to try to defeat that anti-wormhole device it wouldn't last for very long, but they hoped it would give them enough time.

Joe raced down a set of stairs and gave a flying leap over a gully, and landed safely on the other side. He quickly joined up with Zip and Mark, who already had in their possession what they were after: another small artifact, secreted in a box hidden in the wall.

They had one more task. After climbing a long metal ladder leading up into a tunnel arching high into the ceiling, they reached another small stone

room. Zip took out a portable energy supply and placed it in a socket in the wall, and a series of lights came on a panel. A message then came up, and Zip looked at it blankly. That message had not appeared in their training; so far everything had gone perfectly, but he had no idea how to get rid of it, and the people who understood it had died centuries ago. Zip took out the power pack and inserted it again, a little differently; this time the message he was expecting came up - but he heard commotion below. Quickly, Zip pressed a button and then placed the artifact he had taken from the Xenobot base into a slot; the machine lit up in the sequence he was hoping to see.

While Zip pressed the necessary buttons, Joe cut the ladder down and slid the large stone trapdoor shut. Zip then hit a button, ran over to the platform where Joe and Mark were located, and threw a device toward the machinery, which hit the floor and rolled to one side. They then vanished into a wormhole - and a moment later the device went off, sending a large EMP that short-circuited the ancient wormhole transporter. The Xenobots poured into the room a few minutes later, but there was nothing to be found, and no way to further track the Starmen.

Chapter 3

The Starmen now found themselves at their intended destination: inside the airlock of a gigantic abandoned starship, hidden deep in a remote region of the galaxy. They were in an airlock, and a door was in front of them - a door with a lock. Mark tenderly took out the artifact he had taken from the previous base (not the Xenobot one) and inserted it into the hole. A series of lights appeared; Zip pressed one, and the door slid open.

Zip heaved a big sigh. They could relax, for the time being; they had made it.

Joe suggested that it would be a good idea to let the folks back home know what had happened. Zip agreed, and Joe tried to raise them on a RTT

device he had brought, but with no luck. Zip said that Joe probably didn't have enough power/range to send a signal this far, and suggested they try to find the communications room and give it a go from there.

The three Starmen then took out a map they had been given and consulted it. They used it to find the communications room of the starship, and they took out another guidebook. Using it, they turned on the ancient equipment and got things humming again.

Joe managed to raise Earth, and he did get Richard Starlight, who was delighted to see them. Joe told them that things had gone well; they had managed to make it to the 3014 sector fine, the raid on the Xenobot base was successful, they had found the artifacts they needed, and with a little trouble they had been able to get to their destination and get inside it. Things appeared to be working, he said, although they hadn't checked everything out yet.

Richard told them that they probably had the Xenobots' attention, and that they should be extremely careful. Zip asked him if the second part of the plan was in place yet, and Richard said that the fleet was still trying to break through the barrier the Xenobots had erected. Zip asked if they should change their plans as a result, and Richard said no - just continue on schedule; the ships would be there when they needed them.

So he signed off, and they decided to get something to eat and rest up a bit.

The Starmen were on board an ancient Xenobot mining ship. The ship was absolutely huge; its purpose was to take an asteroid, slice it into pieces a few thousand feet wide, and then process those pieces and extract the metal from them. The ship had a fantastic power supply and a vicious set of lasers; it could cut an asteroid several miles wide into small pieces without even seeming to exert any effort.

The machine was very old, and represented the days before the Xenobots and the Ahmanyans first encountered each other. The Xenobots had lost this technology during the war, and their current mining vessels were nowhere near as powerful. This ship was possibly the last one of its kind; it had remained serviceable because of an automatic system of droids (equipped with a fairly sophisticated AI system) that repaired it if anything went wrong (a holdover from the Lucians).

The Ahmanyans had discovered the ship some time ago, but it took them a while to find a way to access it. That was why the circuitous route they took was necessary: they had to make a few stops to pick up the pieces they

required to unlock the ship. Now that they were inside, the Starmen had a mission to accomplish.

Learning to use the ship was not as difficult as it seemed. They had obtained something akin to an ancient user's manual from the greegles (courtesy of a bit of arm-twisting done by the Janitor of the First Races), and while everything was in the ancient Xenobot language (different from the modern one), they could look at the manual and get a sense for what was going on. Now, before the Xenobots showed up, they had to get the ship running and use it to accomplish what they were sent here to do.

Their next mission was simple: to take the ship home.

Chapter 4

The trio got the ship up and running (it was in good shape, having been maintained by a series of mechanoids), and managed to program in the coordinates to bring it back home. They powered it up, engaged the engines, and entered a jump through hyperspace back to their own solar system. They made it safe and sound – and that was the amazing thing, because at the time *the solar system was being protected by a hyperspatial shield!*

This is where the reader finds out the purpose of all this. The ship was a very ancient one, and it used a different kind of hyperspatial jump generator – one that the Xenobots no longer had and had evidently forgotten about, but that could easily get through certain kinds of hyperspatial shields. They had heard that such a thing existed, and at last they found it. They sent the Starman trio to get it, and they did.

They held a meeting on the Moon at SE, and in the meeting the way to the Xenobot home world (which before was impossible to access due to the hyperspatial shields guarding it) was clear. All they had to do was find out how this ship worked (no easy task, to be sure), and then build a series of probes that used this technology. The probes would be dispatched through hyperspace into the thousands of Xenobot star systems, and when they were there they would activate their solar power jamming technology that would destroy the automated power stations orbiting the stars. In one swift move they could eliminate the Xenobot power source and cripple their enemy, making it impossible for them to invade, attack, or continue to be a threat.

Or so they hoped. If any Xenobot star systems were defended by a different type of shield, or if the solar power stations were different and immune to jamming, then they were in trouble. They could never defeat the

Xenobots in a head-on attack, and this was their only real option, so they were going to pursue it.

The probes, of course, would not have the fuel to make it to those far-off solar systems on their own. They would have to be carried into positions using a massive freighter of some sort – an interstellar space transport ship. The Ahmanyans had designed just such a craft long ago, and SE had started work constructing it at a secret base on Earth. A dozen of these craft would be built if the first one proved successful, and they would be used as ferries to transport the ships and other vessels to protect them to their destination. The idea was to establish little fleets nearby (but well outside) all the Xenobot star systems, with a few protecting vessels to guard the probes. The little fleets would be in minimal danger: at this point SE's FTL fighters were superior to the Xenobot fighters that did not depend on the solar power stations, and the ships that did depend on them could not function very far away from those stations.

While they were working on this, Richard Starlight brought the three Starmen into his office and began to debrief them, and they started telling him everything that had happened in the mission and what they had learned.

Chapter 5

Meanwhile, a group of about twenty men is assembled in a base deep inside the heart of a mountain, far from civilization. The base is small but interesting: not only is it self sufficient via its own small nuclear reactor and large food and water supplies, but it also has a hangar large enough to store a fleet of half a dozen advanced fighter aircraft – not to mention a number of other, more powerful weapons. The location was secret, known only to a handful of people.

The group was getting its final instructions before being let go. The leader was rehashing the plan they all knew.

He explained to them that the goal of the mission was to steal the Starlight Enterprise datacore located at the small facility about a hundred miles south of where they were. Every night Starlight Enterprise backed up all its data to half a dozen computer centers, located both on Earth and on other planets, to guard against a catastrophic computer failure. One of these computer centers was nearby, which was not an accident – the base of these men was deliberately placed near a computer center.

The Starlight database was of interest because SE had something no one else did: they had the plans, courtesy of the Ahmanyans, for an interstellar freighter. This freighter, and others like it, had been used by the Ahmanyans ages ago to transport thousands of their own ships through a wormhole to the heart of the galaxy, where the Xenobots resided. Without this transport the Ahmanyans and Earth would have had great difficulty transferring their smaller ships (which could only make smaller jumps and had limited range) to a place where they could fight the Xenobots – or, if a way could be found through the Xenobot hyperspatial shield, directly into the Xenobot star systems. No one outside SE knew if a way to pierce the Xenobot's hyperspatial shields had been found, but if a way *was* found it would be located in the data core.

The technology to make this transport was beyond anything Earth could hope to build for a very long time. The engine alone on one of these monsters was eight stories tall, and it powered a freighter nearly three miles long. The Ahmanyans, knowing the power of this vessel, entrusted the plans only to Starlight Enterprise, and they had stored the knowledge in their database while they worked on building the craft.

Certain parties within Nolan Mining Enterprise [more on NME later in the summary; see the beginning of Chapter 8 for details] badly wanted the plans for that ship. They knew that they could never hope to build it on their own, and they also knew that without it they could never hope to defeat Starlight Enterprise and reign in their stead. Thus, the plan had been hatched to steal the data core located at this nearby, lightly guarded outpost: once they had it they could build a copy of this ship on their own.

The plan was crude, but effective. First, a team of twelve would set out in two heavily armored trucks, headed toward the fenced compound. About two hours after they left (thus giving them time to get close to the compound), a team of pilots was to fly the fighter jets, which themselves were almost completely invisible to radar, low over the terrain to avoid being seen. While these jets were flying, a series of missiles would be fired at the data center.

The idea was that the missiles would hit the SE defensive aircraft that sat on the ground, destroying them. This would raise an alarm, but before anyone could emerge from the building the fighter jets would fly overhead and rake the landing pad with gunfire, preventing anyone from leaving the building. There was no desire to injure anyone; they wanted the plans for the ship but they did not want to raise the wrath of SE by attacking their

employees. Stealing data was one thing; attacking their employees was another, and they remembered what had happened to the Banjoman.

Everything would happen fast. Within seconds of the missile strike the fighters would be overhead, and within seconds of the emergence of the fighters the trucks would be at the gate. The trucks would ram right through the fence, and a team would jump out and throw a grenade at the door to the separate building that actually housed the data they were after. (They knew that no one was in the building; it was unmanned.) The door would be blown off, they would rush in, get the data, rush out, and dive into the forest. A helicopter would be waiting nearby to take them to a spaceship, with which they could make good their escape.

The entire operation, from the time the first missile hit, would take less than two minutes. Starlight Enterprise would be caught completely by surprise and would be unable to respond; by the time they could raise the alarm and get someone to the deep, forested area at which they were located it would be much too late to do anything about it.

Chapter 6

The men got into their trucks and jets and began making their way toward the Starlight Enterprise base. The base was a small one; it had one small building where a couple people lived, another, even smaller one where the data was stored; a small control tower; and about four ships located on the nearby runway. A barbed-wire fence surrounded the small compound, which was housed on about eight acres. It looked quiet and peaceful.

When everyone was in place, the missiles were launched. They streaked toward the compound – and then everything went horribly wrong.

When the missiles were launched, they were seen by the radar network surrounding the SE base and triggered an alarm. Within moments a host of things happened.

First, a laser hidden in the forest near the compound raised out of the forest. Within moments, it locked on the incoming missiles and fried them all; their burned, charred remains fell harmlessly onto the forest below. The four fighter jets immediately took off without pilots; they were automatic drones, controlled by a sophisticated AI system. A door opened in a nearby hillside, and a squadron of fifty jets flew out to intercept the incoming fighters. Seeing the fifty jets, the fighters piloted by the bad guys tried to flee,

but they were hopelessly outclassed and had no hope of getting away. There was nothing to do but surrender.

Either not fully realizing what had happened or still wanting to get the data, the people in the truck plowed through the fence – or they tried to. When their truck rammed into the fence, an intense EMP went off, frying all the electronics they had with them. The truck died and could not be started. Someone threw a grenade at the door, and it soared through the air and landed in front of the door. It exploded with terrific force, kicking up dust and creating a small crater in front of the door – but the door stood solid and looked barely affected.

Security guards began pouring out of the nearby building – dozens upon dozens of them. The bad guys looked at the guards agape, astonished at their presence. They suddenly realized that they had been badly uninformed about the security precautions of this base and were outclassed. Realizing their hopelessness, they surrendered after a very brief fight.

Back at the base in the mountain, the leader saw how overwhelmingly badly everything had gone. The entire attack had failed, and failed miserably: it was a complete rout. Scared, the leader boarded his getaway craft and soared into the sky, headed for an asteroid in space some millions of miles away.

His relief began to grow after he saw that he was not being followed. Either SE had not found the base, or they had not connected it with the attacks, or he had just not been seen, but as the hours passed he began to relax. He was even more relaxed, though still upset at the utter failure of the entire raid, three days later when he arrived at his asteroid – the lonely asteroid, floating in deep space between Venus and Earth, on which he had built his secret hideaway. It wasn't very large, but it was out of the lanes of normal traffic and no one passed by.

The man landed his spaceship on the asteroid and entered his base under the surface of the asteroid. He took off his spacesuit and walked into the small library there to check his mail and see what had been going on.

After he took a few steps into the library, he heard a voice behind him say "That stunt you pulled wasn't very funny, mister." His blood was chilled, and when he whirled around he almost passed out.

Standing in front of him, between him and the door, were three Starmen. He recognized them as Mark Seaton, Zip Foster, and Joe Taylor; Zip Foster was standing slightly in front of them. The sight of the Starmen terrified him – not only because they had invaded his supposedly secret compound but also because of their reputation. Zip Foster was legendary: he was the one

that had been attacked by the Banjoman with the entire forces of the planet Mars and had won. He had fought against the Xenobots and won when they tried to infiltrate the Ahmanyans and trick Mark and Joe. He had penetrated deep into Xenobot territory and come back on one of their own ships and lived to tell about it – and here he was, standing in front of him, obviously not amused and filled with wrath.

Zip Foster repeated to the badly scared man that he was not amused at the horrific attack he had leveled against Starlight Enterprise. Zip told him that it was the largest attack ever leveled solely against Starlight Enterprise with the intent of espionage, and SE was not happy. Zip told him that SE knew he was responsible, knew how to get him if they wanted him, and were watching him. Zip's final words were for him to watch his step and change his ways, because next time SE wasn't going to be so nice.

They walked out of the library. The man was dazed, and then ran out of the library door to talk to Zip and plead with him. As he raced into the hall, he saw a momentary shift in space, and then all was calm. The Starmen were gone – gone, he knew, through a wormhole[21] – Ahmanyan technology. He was scared – very scared.

He sat down. He had a lot of thinking to do. It was time to restart from scratch – or was it? He would have to think.

Chapter 7

A great distance away, Zip, Mark and Joe were in the heart of Tharsos, which was in the solar system at the time but was about to leave on an important mission. They were talking with Richard Starlight, who was standing nearby. They had just walked through the wormhole onto the

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[21] The Solar System did have a wormhole shield in place that could prevent any wormholes from being made, but it took a lot of power and there was no reason to run it when there was no danger. FTL technology was very useful, and they only wanted to turn something like that on when they knew they were in danger. The Solar System did have an early warning system in place, which had been built over the past few years; if any ships started appearing or any enemies (based on outside intelligence) began their way toward the Solar System, the shield would go up. For now, though, there were no signs of danger and so the shield was left down to allow FTL to be used. The primary defense of the Solar System wasn't this shield, anyway, but was the technique they had developed to destroy solar power stations – and that was always ready on a moment's notice, should one appear. (It should be noted that critical installations or secure places were protected against wormholes at all times.)

platform, and the wormhole had been shut down, leaving them on Tharsos. Richard was talking with an Ahmanyan about Zip's mission.

Zip told Richard that everything had gone as planned; they had scared that man into next Tuesday. Joe said that they wished they had brought him in instead and arrested him, but Richard replied that in the end that would cause more harm than good. They needed him free for now because they weren't done with him: he was involved in a larger plan against SE that SE was still trying to uncover, and he was their only lead. Joe said that he knew that, but he was still nervous. Starlight Enterprise was taking a big gamble, and if something went wrong there would be consequences.

Twelve hours passed. The Starmen relaxed on board Tharsos and rested; they slept through the night and awoke the next morning refreshed. Richard said that everything was ready to go and that they could return to Earth.

The Starmen and Richard walked back to the wormhole transporter. Zip said that they wished they could reproduce those transporters because they were so useful. The Ahmanyan replied that his technicians had been working on it, but that device was incredibly complicated and so far they had been unsuccessful in reproducing it or even understanding all its intricacies again. It had been many thousands of years since they had been manufactured, and much had been forgotten in that time and much had been lost in the first war with the Xenobots. Today only four of them still existed that were in working order: one on Tharsos, one at *Imlah Taltahni*, one on Europa, and one that had been given to Starlight Enterprise for its use. One day they hoped to make others, but they knew it would be quite some time before that happened.

The Starmen took the transporter to a Starlight Enterprise base. They appeared deep inside the base (whose location is unknown to the reader, save that it was on Earth). The base was a hive of activity, and rightly so: the gigantic engine for the intergalactic transport was being built here. Hundreds of scientists, both men and Ahmanyans and even some Titanians, were working on building it. Much work and testing needed to be done before it would be ready to be transported into Earth orbit, where the body of the spaceship was being built. Once the testing was successful, the engine could be mass-produced and made on a larger scale, but the first one had to be made pretty much by hand.

The engine was being built here under tight security. Building it in space had been considered, but not only was it much harder to secure space but there was at the time no space station that could offer the tools, ranging from

particle accelerators to immensely powerful test reactors, that this base could. This base also had the advantage of space: there was plenty of room for scientists and for construction. Room aboard a space station would have been cramped, but here there was room to spare. There was no civilization around for hundreds of miles, and they had all the space they needed.

Richard called the Starmen into his office. He said that he had a few last-minute things he needed them to do, and then they could begin their mission.

Chapter 8

The attack on Starlight Enterprise created a public sensation, but it was a strange thing because some of the publicity was *against* Starlight Enterprise. By this time NME was a rogue company; it had broken away after the Beowulf Denn incident in which he destroyed the space station, and the employees Denn had corrupted had fled into the Belt and other remote places to act as an outlaw company and plan their revenge. Robert Nolan had been unable to rebuild his corporation: there was little left of it.[22]

Forces inside NME had contacts with those in the press and in the governments of Earth, and they pointed out that SE was getting increasingly powerful. A debate sprang up on Earth: one camp of people was against SE and wanted to see them "brought under control" and the other was for SE and wanted to see them continue the work they were doing. The debate grew fervent: some thought that SE should be dismantled, its assets taken over by Space Command, and that Space Command should be the ones in control of the armed forces of the Solar System. Others pointed out that doing that would be disastrous: the Ahmanyans trusted only SE, Space Command had no experience running a large corporation, and that action would be highly illegal anyway – you could not just seize a company. They said that destroying SE would be certain to hand the solar system over to the Xenobots.

Richard had to go to a meeting with various officials to talk the matter over. In the end they decided to let SE go on as it was, but it was clear that there was unrest, and that NME was going to do all it could to increase that sense of unrest.

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[22] This is some of the stuff that happened between book five and six, in that three-year interlude.

Chapter 9

The Starmen once again found themselves at the spaceport at Eagle City, having gone there via SE's wormhole transporter. This time they were in the office of the captain of the *Ares*, one of Starlight Enterprise's large cargo ships, reviewing their mission.

Richard Starlight had told them that they knew that someone was out to destroy Starlight Enterprise if they possibly could, and they of course wanted to stop that. They had a tip that those people were interested in the cargo that was going to be shipped on the *Ares* and they might try to hijack the ship. Richard wanted the Starmen to be on board just in case that happened, and to see if they could learn anything about their attackers.

Richard had told them that an important piece of equipment for the special Ahmanyan space freighter they were building had been constructed on Mars with Ahmanyan help, but that it was too large to be sent via wormhole transporter. It would have to be transported via one of SE's largest space freighters, and that meant that a FTL freighter (which SE had very few of) could not be used since they were not large enough. SE was tempted to heavily guard the *Ares* since its cargo was so important, but they were afraid of doing that, thinking that guarding the craft excessively would draw attention to it – and they had seen via the Mercury incident in *Terror from Space* what the Xenobots could do when they were determined. Instead of heavily guarding it, then, they wanted the Starmen to go along, just in case something did happen.

The only person who knew in advance that the Starmen would be there was the captain whom they were talking to at the moment. The captain was not an SE employee but instead was a Space Command employee, specially selected for this job. Once on board the craft the crew would, of course, find out, but the communications coming from the craft would be heavily controlled and no mention of their presence would be made.

In the event of an attack, an automatic warning system was rigged to trigger an alarm via RTT. A series of FTL ships built by SE that were maintaining their distance would then pounce on the scene and mop up any fighters/hijackers. There was little real danger involved: SE did not want to take a chance of losing that cargo or seeing it damaged.

In order to hide the presence of the Starmen, they were transported to Mars via a wormhole transporter SE had at its Sahara base station. The captain marveled at this technology and asked why it wasn't used more often, and the Starmen explained that there were only four of these transporters,

three of which were used by the Ahmanyans for their own purposes. SE's only one was at their Sahara base, and it could not be used frequently: even SE's powerful nuclear generator at the station, which was a thousand terawatt plant[23], still took five hours to recharge[24] before it could be used again. Tharsos could use its transporter at will since its atomic pile was measured in miles, not feet, but SE did not yet have that luxury.

The Captain told them that the *Ares* was due to be launched in about an hour, and that they could go ahead and board the ship while he attended to the various things that had to be done before takeoff. With that he said he had some duties to attend to, and he left the room, and the Starmen boarded the ship.

Chapter 10

The Starmen's quarters were on the lower decks of the *Ares*. The three of them shared a small, rather dingy room that was beside a lot of other small, dingy rooms. The cargo ship was a good one, but the rooms weren't first-class.

The Starmen spent part of their time in their cabins keeping to themselves, traveling around talking with the crew, and generally keeping an eye on things. For about a week things went just fine; nothing unusual happened and in fact things were pretty boring.

That, though, was just a temporary condition. It was about a week into the journey during one of these expeditions outside their cabin that alarms suddenly rang out and the power on board the ship failed. A series of muffled explosions followed, and a siren began to ring out.

The Starmen, who were in the hallway at the time talking with another crewmember, started running toward the source of the explosions.

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[23] Total US electrical usage today is 0.450 terawatts. The average nuclear plant can produce 0.004 terawatts (4,000 megawatts). By 2040 the US hopes to have nuclear fusion plants operating with an output great enough to power all of the US and Canada combined, which is a thousand times greater than what power plants can be done today. By 2160 it's not unreasonable to think that another leap equally large could be made.

[24] I researched this. To make even a tiny wormhole, spanning a small distance (3 feet), would take the total power output of 10 billion stars for one year. I'm hoping that the Ahmanyans found a much more efficient way to do this than the brute-force approach I read about. It must be said, though, that these wormhole devices do not break the laws of physics.

Everything was in chaos for a few moments and the Starmen had little idea what was going on. Emergency lighting came on, but the main lights were still out and they knew something was wrong.

While the Starmen were still working their way upstairs, power flickered back on and a message went out over the intercom. The message, which was given by the Captain of the vessel, explained that the ship had been boarded and taken over for the time being, for purposes unknown. Everyone was to remain in their cabins and stay as calm as possible. The men only wanted to take the ship's cargo and then they would be leaving.

While they Starmen had been expecting this, they were still very surprised. The *Ares* (like all other spaceships) was wired from stem to stern with all sorts of protections – warnings if another ship got close, automatic notifications if anything bad happened, etc. If a hijacking occurred or power went out or anything, a data link would be broken and the authorities would be instantly notified and things would start to happen. Space was big and vast but it wasn't easy to hide this far from everything, and before they could hope to make their escape a fleet would descend upon them. No successful hijacking had occurred in the past 50 years, and it had been almost as long since one had been tried. The Starmen had been expecting something a little more clever.

Zip guessed that the crew had been compromised (although he didn't see how that could have happened) and had taken steps to ensure that word of it wouldn't get out until long after they were gone. He knew what they were after: they wanted that engine component. They must have been tipped off somehow that it was on board and knew that it was almost entirely unguarded.

All these thoughts went through his mind like a flash, and he knew he had to find a way to stop them. The solution suddenly hit him: the ship had maintained a constant radio link with Mars since it had left, and the Starmen – being Starmen – knew how that worked and where it was located. All he had to do was destroy that link and the cavalry would be on this ship within moments – possibly faster. (Zip knew that SE was trailing the ship and would be on the ship like a flash if something went wrong, but he had a bad feeling that the bad guys had done something to prevent SE from knowing anything bad had happened, and Zip somehow had to get a warning out. Zip knew that something should have happened by now and hadn't, and he was right.) The other fellows could try to get away but it would be a lost cause. Even if they tried to restore it by some other means it would be interrupted for a moment,

and that is all it would take to set off the alarm. That is, as long as they hadn't corrupted the other side…

It was worth a try. The Starmen moved like a well-oiled machine: they knew exactly where to go and what to do. Zip headed down the hallway, followed by Mark and Joe, and they made their way to a certain obscure power junction located on the wall. All they had to do was destroy it and the signal would fail.

When they got close to it they came across something unexpected: the junction had two people near it, talking – hijackers, Zip thought by the way they were guarding the box.

Chapter 11

Fortunately, Zip knew that he had the support of the written-bys, and he knew that the author was not going to let him down.

He was right. The junction box was located in the guts of the ship – the part of the ship filled with pipes and wires and ducts and grills and so forth. Zip decided to crawl carefully along a large pipe (ventilation, by the looks of it) that went directly over where the men were standing. Mark would hide nearby in the shadows while Joe distracted the guards by making a noise and getting their attention. When they were distracted, Zip would jump them from above and in the confusion Mark (who was nearby) would join in. It was a risky thing to do with two armed guards but it had to be done.

The plan was put into operation and Zip jumped the two guards from above. Shocked, the guards were knocked off their feet, giving Zip a great opportunity to knock their weapons out of their reach. Mark joined in, but the bad guys showed no willingness to fight: faced with trouble, they fled, and they fled fast. That is, one guy fled; the other one had been knocked cold and was lying on the deck.

Zip hesitated a moment, then turned and fired a laser he had grabbed from the guards at the box, melting it on the spot. The wires shot out sparks and – to Zip's surprise – the ship plunged back into darkness. Zip turned to try to find the bad guys who were running away, but now they were lost in the dark. He should have chased them and taken them out first and let Joe (who was just now coming up to join them) take care of the power box, but he didn't realize it would plunge the whole deck into darkness.

He wondered what the bad guys were going to do, and he didn't have to wait long to find out. One of the bad guys made it to an intercom somewhere on board the ship and blurted out that there was an emergency: Zip Foster

had just jumped them and blown out the power junction box on the deck. He repeated in a frantic voice that Zip Foster was on board and that the mission had to be aborted immediately – SE was probably on the way that instant.

The reaction startled the Starmen. Within minutes the pirates had left the ship, boarded their original vessel, and left as fast as their ship could carry them. They found out later that the hijackers had not transferred the engine component to their own ship: they had just gotten the vault open to where it was stored and in their haste to leave left it behind (it would have taken a while to move it as it was pretty large).

The pirate vessel managed to disappear. By the time SE arrived, which was just five minutes later, the hijackers had been long gone. No one could explain how they left or why radar networks didn't pick them up, but they vanished. They did find out that, based on the way the hijacker's ships disappeared, that they were FTL ships – and FTL ships were very hard to come by, and there was no way to trace an FTL ship through space.

From interviewing the one pirate that Zip had managed to capture they learned that the crew was pretty nervous about the whole operation anyway. They knew that the only people on board guarding it were the Starmen and that they had been waylaid on route to the ship, but they were still nervous about attacking SE. No one had ever attacked SE and gotten away with it, and the last attempt made to get SE's datacore had been a spectacular failure; they were afraid that was going to happen again. These hijackers were not men of great courage, and they did not like facing men who were.

So SE carted the hijacker away, and the *Ares* continued to plow on toward Earth.

Chapter 12

The damage to the junction box that Zip had destroyed was slowly repaired, and the lights began coming back on. However, the Captain (and he lied when he said this, although no one knew it at the time) said that it did more damage than had been originally estimated, and they had to keep a close watch on the ship's control rockets – it was becoming harder to steer, as if the part of the ship's computer that handled navigation was starting to give out.

Things were fine for another week. (It only took two weeks to reach Earth, thanks to the ship's antimatter drive.) When they were close to Earth, however, the Captain announced that the ship's navigational computer had become unstable and that it would not be possible to land the ship on Earth –

or even to establish an Earth orbit. The ship could not be steered: it was on a collision course with Earth, and nothing could be done about it.

Zip was horrified: if a ship of this size were to hit Earth, it would be worse than a nuclear detonation. Anything within a thousand miles of this ship was going to be pulverized,[25] and who knew where it was going to strike? This was shaping up to be a huge disaster – the first disaster of its kind. It would be *bad*.

The *Ares* began to be evacuated, and the Captain initiated some procedures to cope with the situation. A large store of antimatter was on board, and the Captain set in motion a routine to neutralize it, but to leave some on board. The idea was that they could detonate the remaining antimatter before the *Ares* entered the atmosphere. This could cause the *Ares* to explode into small pieces that would burn up in the atmosphere; very little of it would hit the ground and a devastating impact would be prevented, although the *Ares* would be lost as well as the equipment she was carrying – but that was lost anyway.

So the crew was evacuated, and the Captain was left on board to initiate the destruction sequence before he left. The last person (besides the Captain, who was still on board) to leave was Mark, and before he got on one of the lifeboats he went back to the engine room to see what was going on, and if the Captain needed assistance. There was still one lifeboat that had not been left, and it had enough room for both Mark and the Captain.

When Mark got to the engine room he didn't see the Captain, so he began to look at the various monitors. What he saw surprised him: nothing the Captain said had been true! The ship could still be steered just fine; nothing was wrong with the ship, its thrusters, or its navigational computer. In fact, it looked like the Captain had inserted a program that made it look as if things were bad and had fooled the crew into thinking that the ship had to be evacuated.

As Mark was about to do something about it, the Captain walked in. When the Captain saw that Mark was wise to what was going on, the Captain knocked him out with some sort of knockout gas (or whatever). The Captain then destroyed a lot of the control equipment, killed the reactor, left Mark in the ship, and left.

When the Captain got back to one of the lifeboats, he had his boat leave; the other lifeboats had already left. Zip and Joe asked where Mark was, and

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[25] I researched this, and I'm not kidding: an impact by a large freighter moving at, say, 300,000 mph would be *devastating*. The shockwave alone would be unthinkable.

the Captain said that he was with him, and they left it at that. Everyone was accounted for, so no one worried. (At the time, the Captain was planning to fake trouble with his lifeboat, land at a remote place, and then get conveniently "lost" with the help of some of his cronies – so no one would find out that Mark wasn't with him. At the time Mark had rattled him and he wasn't thinking clearly; he just knew that if his identity were uncovered he would be in trouble. The Captain had little courage and was in full-panic mode.)

So the ship was abandoned as it careened on a collision course with Earth, with Mark Seaton on board!

Chapter 13

Mark woke up, dazed, a little later. He struggled, and was able to break out of the closet. The ship was silent; what happened? Then he remembered... He looked the ship over. The drive was dead, unable to move the ship at all, the controls were smashed, and he was locked on board the ship – a ship headed for a fierce crash-landing on Earth and that was going to explode in mere moments!

On the ship, the Captain had destroyed the communicator equipment and Mark's compad was also gone, so he had no way to contact anyone. No one knew he was on board, and there was no way he could radio for help.

Mark used his head. He went to the engine room and found a computer that was still working, and he quickly rerouted some of the control functions. The Captain had lost his head when he saw Mark and he hadn't done a thorough job in his haste; Mark was able to regain some control over the ship and stop the antimatter explosion, although it took some precious time. He tried to move the ship into a gentler angle so it wouldn't burn up in reentry.

When the time came for the ship to detonate and it didn't, people began to get very worried. Why wasn't the ship exploding? The ship *had* to be destroyed: if it crashed into Earth it could easily wipe out a major population center. The Captain (who was alone in his lifeboat, although no one knew that) told the crew he was going to ask SE to shoot it down; there was still some time left to destroy it. No one objected; after all, why would they object?

Mark began a drastic maneuver to slow the ship – it piled on a lot of G forces (though not too many, since the *Ares* was far enough from Earth and moving slowly enough to where he had some room to maneuver) but it had

to be done. Mark also slightly changed the orbit of the ship so that the ship would hit the atmosphere at a lower angle.

Zip and Joe noticed that the *Ares* was beginning to turn! It was leveling out, entering the atmosphere correctly, as if it intended to land. At this point they wondered what was going on, and they decided to ask Mark what his opinion was, since he was the engine expert. They called the Captain, but the Captain suddenly wouldn't respond to their queries.

At this point they began to wonder about this Captain. They contacted SE, just as SE was about to destroy the *Ares*, and relayed their suspicious that something here wasn't right. They pointed out that the *Ares* was being maneuvered intelligently, that it look as if it weren't going to crash with a devastating impact, and that things would be fine; did SE really want to destroy the ship carrying that critical engine component if they didn't have to? SE then tried to raise the Captain, but he couldn't be raised.

At this point the lifeboats had begun to enter the atmosphere themselves. They were aiming for the Sahara base – the place the *Ares* was supposed to land. All except for the Captain: his ship was rapidly moving away, as if it were going to land somewhere else. Of course, his trajectory could easily be tracked, and SE (now highly suspicious) was arranging to meet him when he landed.

No one knew what was happening on board the *Ares*. Zip wondered where Mark was, and had a bad feeling that Mark was on board. He fervently hoped that was not the case.

Chapter 14

Finally, Mark calculated the landing course; he thought he could get the ship to land in the ocean. He knew he wouldn't be able to land the craft; he had gotten part of the trajectory right, but the Captain had destroyed too many controls and he wouldn't be able to make a soft landing or slow down enough to make a soft crash landing (if there were such a thing). An ocean landing would be better, especially since the oceans were big and he wouldn't have to worry as much about hitting someone on the ground; the compartment he was in was airtight – it had to be, for it held the ship's nuclear reactor. The compartment was also sturdy; it might survive. People would be waiting for him down below, or so he hoped; they couldn't do much to get him out of the ship (the wormhole transporter SE had was not charged, Tharsos was in a different star system, and the one the Ahmanyans

had on Mars was too far away to be used in a pinpoint extraction on a ship going as fast as Mark's was) but they could help him.

Mark plugged the changes into the ship, lay down on a special cot he had prepared, and braced himself. When the ship entered the high-G force maneuvers, the ship's hull strained — and the forces took its toll on Mark. Mark strained to stay conscious as the G-forces briefly soared to 9 G's.

Zip, watching from the lifeboat, saw the ship maneuver in order to enter the atmosphere; perhaps Mark was at work. Then the ship hit the atmosphere and glowed cherry-red. Joe watched open-mouthed as the ship's wings glowed red and literally melted off the ship. The ship was undergoing a tremendous temperature increase; it was melting before their eyes.

SE, of course, was arranging to meet the ship when it landed. At the moment it was headed for a remote spot in the Pacific Ocean, but they could be there within moments of the craft's landing.

Inside the ship, the air was heating up. The reactor chamber, however, had been built to keep tremendous heat inside: it could also keep heat outside. The active shielding helped as well; it blocked out a lot of the radiation and kept the room together.

When the ship was deeper into the atmosphere Mark heard a terrific whistling sound – the sound of the remaining hulk of the ship (badly damaged) flying through the atmosphere at hypersonic, then supersonic speeds. The ship slowed, then slowed further – then impact came.

Mark blacked out.

Chapter 15

The ship hit the water and broke into a myriad pieces. Some pieces floated; the heavier ones, such as the one Mark was in, sank. SE managed to rescue it. Mark was recovered, and was found (unsurprisingly) in critical condition. He spent several weeks in the hospital recovering from injuries he sustained in the crash landing.

Mark had to be kept unconscious/asleep for several weeks, and Zip (and everyone else) was dying to know what happened. Everyone suspected the Captain was at fault, and they had him in custody. He had, of course, tried to escape, but that was useless: when he landed the police were there to greet him (orbital trajectories are easy to predict), and he had been held in custody. They could not prove that he had sabotaged the ship, although they strongly suspected he did; what they did know is that he said Mark was with him

when he obviously wasn't. At the very least, they had him for the attempted murder of Mark Seaton.

If Mark Seaton recovered and remembered what happened, he would be able to testify about what had occurred on board the ship and incriminate the Captain – and a Starman's testimony was very respected. SE was trying to comb through the wreckage, but it wasn't in the best of shape.

The engine component the *Ares* had been carrying was in fairly decent shape. It was definitely banged up and would need some repairs, but it had been crated well and Mark's "soft" landing had prevented it from being pulverized. The repairs on this component would put SE behind schedule a little bit, but things could have been far worse.

In terms of public relations, NME had been hoping (and maybe we can have a scene explaining this) that SE would be hit hard here, since one of their ships nearly wiped out a major population center. They had hoped SE would be painted as a dangerous company and that this would push public sentiment over the edge toward disliking and distrusting SE.

Instead, Space Command was now in trouble, since one of their own had tried to hijack the ship (they were certain he was the insider that had made the attempted hijacking possible) and then use it to ruin SE's reputation and possibly kill millions of people. This actually suited NME just fine: Space Command was not evil, but they did have a few bad apples in their ranks and the Captain had been one of them. Space Command was distrustful of SE, but this was to be expected: SE was hugely powerful and (especially after the satellite incident in LROM) relations had been strained. Space Command really was worried that SE would grow drunk with power.

This incident made Space Command look really bad, and it put them in quite a spot. NME quietly used this to build resentment in Space Command against SE, the idea being to widen the rift between them to where the two might fight each other – and then NME could emerge the victor.

Meanwhile, Mark continued to lie unconscious, and many waited for the story he would tell when he awoke.

Chapter 16

Of course, NME did not simply let Mark lie in the hospital and recover. While they did not particularly care about the Captain, they did see this as a good opportunity: if they could make it look as though Space Command had killed Mark to keep him from telling his story, this would certainly widen the rift between SE and Space Command and might push the two organizations

over the edge, especially if Space Command thought it was being wrongly blamed for the death of a Starman.

With that in mind, NME sent in an operative to get rid of Mark. The plan was very simple: Mark was being given several IVs. All the operative had to do was go into a closet, swap a normal IV bag with one containing a poison that looked like the normal substance, and leave. The doctor would come along, take an IV bag that he thought was fine, and administer it to Mark. It seemed to be foolproof.

What they did not count on was the SE security team. Mark was not being held in a normal hospital, but in a military hospital, and not just anyone could walk in. The hospital did not use passwords or ID cards, but fingerprints and iris scans. If NME had someone inside the hospital they could have done it that way, but they didn't.

So NME hatched a plan. A few years earlier they had provided the Banjoman with androids: humanlike androids, to be used as a security force. They had even built one for him to use as a duplicate Steve Cliff. Building humanlike androids was a horrible crime: it was an unthinkable offense to make an android to pass off as a human, but that didn't bother NME. What they did was covertly get ahold of the iris pattern and fingerprint of a lower employee that had access to the hospital, and they then built an android to match this person. (They didn't need a brain scan since he didn't have to replace that employee; they only wanted enough to get inside the building.) The android was given a matching iris and fingerprint, so it would be able to access the hospital with no problem.

They watched until that employee left the hospital, and then they sent in their android, armed with the IV bag. The android would be able to walk right in, replace the bag, and leave; it would take no more than five minutes and would be effortless.

So, late at night, two henchmen waited in their car outside the hospital while their android stepped out of the car and walked up to the building. The car stayed outside, parked, and waited.

Chapter 17

The android made it into the building just fine. Zip and Joe were in the lobby, waiting to talk with Mark's doctor about Mark's condition; the android walked right past them and the two Starmen thought nothing of it. Why would they? He was just another hospital employee.

Walking along, the android came to a security door that separated the waiting room from the place where the patients were kept. The layout was as follows: beside the door was a table, and behind the table were security guards. Some guards were seated, watching monitors; others were standing. All were armed. Beside the door were armed guards as well.

The android walked up to the door and looked into the iris-scanner, which accepted the identity. Right after this, though, alarms began going off, and the guards moved like lighting. Realizing something was wrong, the android turned to leave, but it was too late: it was gunned down on the spot, and soon it was just a mess of parts on the floor.

Zip stood up in shock, and the guards were also in shock at seeing an android: they had never seen one before – although they were swiftly moving to secure the area and send out an alert to get anyone who might have delivered the android. Joe realized that the X-ray scanner hidden beside the door must have scanned the android and given the shocked guards a picture of metal wheels inside it instead of human flesh, and so they shot it down. Whoever sent it must not have realized that this hospital had an X-ray scanner that scanned everyone who entered; they got careless. (After the LROM incident, many places of security – SE, at least – had implemented these to make sure they were never fooled by androids again.)

Zip and Joe were already moving outside; they knew the guards would take care of the remains of the android. By sprinting outside they saw a very sleek, very fast car tear out of the parking lot and head toward the exit, and they instinctively guessed that the people in that car were the people they were after.

Racing down to the lot, the two Starmen got in their own very fast sports car open-top convertible and tore after the bad guys, with Joe (the pilot) driving. They knew that the police were already sending out a dragnet and setting up roadblocks to stop these people, and that helicopters would be on the way in moments. How did these people expect to get away? Zip suspected they had a backup plan and he wanted to be as close to them as possible to see if he could stop it.

The car the two Starmen were in was only a few minutes behind the car they were chasing, and they soon acted to close the gap – the Starmen had a *very* powerful car, as would be expected of a Starman. It was late at night so fortunately few people were on the road, and the car ahead of them violated practically every known traffic law in an attempt to get away. The driver was

driving like a real nut, and soon he got on an open stretch of highway and floored it.

The Starmen were right behind him, zooming along at speeds well over 120 mph. They heard sirens and knew that the police were close, but the Starmen were closer. It had been no more than five minutes since they left the hospital; the car chase had only been going on that long. Suddenly, right on the highway, a wormhole opened: the bad guys' car shot through it and the Starmen – closely tailing them – shot through it just moments later, and then it closed, leaving behind a badly puzzled security force that had no idea where the two had gone.

Chapter 18

Joe was shocked, and nearly crashed the car into a turn. They realized what had happened: the car they were chasing must have radioed for help, and someone provided a wormhole to help them. There was no wormhole shield in operation along highways, so there was nothing there to block it; the only reason the Starmen had gone along was because they had been at the right place at the right time.

Zip yelled at Joe that he was going to find out where they were at via the GPS sensor in their compad and would raise help, and that Joe was to keep trying to follow that maniac. Joe could tell that the driver was not happy that he was still being followed. Joe wondered, as they sped wildly along, why they didn't create another wormhole, and then figured the people they work for must be limited in the same way as SE's wormhole transporter: it takes a long time to build up a charge.

The car Joe was chasing was headed toward downtown, and he didn't like that: driving downtown at 130 mph is just not safe. Zip yelled that they were in New Los Angeles in California, outside what had been Los Angeles (before LA was nuked in the Collapse); he had notified the authorities and they would try to get someone on the scene but that it would probably take at least fifteen or twenty minutes to get organized.

However, the car they were chasing wasn't interested in driving along like a nut for another twenty minutes. After nearly crashing headlong into the lobby of the Bank of Commerce and wiping out a row of garbage cans (among other things), the car headed back onto the interstate. It jumped lanes to get into a construction zone and stared heading up a ramp (a good 60 feet off the ground) that was still under construction, at a speed of at least 90 mph.

Zip yelled at Joe to watch it: that ramp had not been completed, and the end of it was 60 feet off the ground. The road just quit: there was a drop-off, and nothing underneath. If they kept on after the car they would be launched into the air and killed.

To their astonishment, they saw the car run through the barriers and blockades and run *right off the road into the air*. They then saw what was happening: the car had ejection seats equipped with parachutes! The car went on and crashed into an empty place in a public park, starting a fierce blaze; the bad guys parachuted to safety and took off on foot. Meanwhile, the Starmen were a quarter mile away, watching everything and having no way to get down there quickly and follow them.

The Starmen were at a loss as to what to do. Their only option was to get back in the car and tear down the road, taking the quickest way down to the spot where they saw the parachutes drift to a landing (and their compads would tell them the quickest way via the GPS sensor). It was two in the morning so few people were around.

By the time they got down there five minutes later they were surprised to see a police car already in place! The Starmen drove up to it and the officer said that he had witnessed part of the chase; he knew what was going on via Zip's radio transmissions, and had happened to be patrolling the area. Some local, helpful citizens were helping out, and the bad guys location was pinpointed in an old building: they had been seen going in, but they had not been seen going out and the exits were being watched. The bad guys might have gotten away had it not been for the watchful eyes of a few citizens and for an alert police officer.

While other officers were guarding the blazing wreckage and while the fire department was on the way to put out the blaze, Zip and Mark and the other officer approached the large building. Equipment and men were on the way that would make it easy to find the people in this building (remote sensing equipment, robotic sensor drones, etc.), but they knew these two people were resourceful and might have something up their sleeve. They figured that the men (or women) were definitely armed and would be dangerous. So, using citizens to keep an eye on things until the rest of the backup police crew arrived, they kept an eye on the building, wondering what was going on inside.

Chapter 19

In the Asteroid Belt, events have been happening. Shortly before the android left for the hospital with the two operatives, an individual from NME got in touch with some folks at a nearby Space Command base. The people at NME had decided that this would be a good opportunity to create a war.

They knew in advance that the android ploy would most likely fail, but they let it go ahead because they wanted to use it to finally push SE and Space Command into conflict. They contacted the asteroid belt section of Space Command just before the incident occurred and warned them that SE was about to frame Space Command and make it look as though they were trying to kill Mark Seaton, the idea being that Space Command would be further discredited and SE would then take the chance to remove Space Command from all positions of power on the grounds that their Starmen were in danger – just as they had done in LROM.

The only way to avoid this, NME whispered, was to launch a pre-emptive strike. SE had key positions in the Asteroid Belt: if Space Command took these over and launched a surprise attack, SE would not be able to respond and Space Command could take back the power that was rightfully theirs. These words were whispered into the ears of some commanders who NME knew to be corrupt and soft; people who would be likely to listen.

The words were spoken in person: some NME operatives were at the Space Command asteroid facility and told them. When, a few moments later, news that "an incident" had occurred at the hospital housing Mark Seaton and that no details were available, Space Command decided to act, and told the NME people to leave the base because "operations" were about to commence.

This suited NME fine, so they left – and saw starships begin to leave the base. The communications being exchanged seemed to indicate that they were on a mission.

At this point NME was very pleased. Space Command was about to launch an attack against SE, and SE was distracted at the moment taking care of Mark Seaton. Now would be the perfect time to exert some of its own influence. They contacted their own people and told them that all had gone well, and that Operation Roaring Lion could commence.

NME knew exactly what to do. They had a good idea where Space Command was likely to strike, and they got out their own fleet of FTL ships (which they had built in secret from technology stolen from SE) and sent

them out into space. There, they would wait to hear reports of Space Command seizing control of SE operations, and they would begin to do the same thing – supposedly in the name of Space Command. As the two fought against each other, they would weaken each other, and then NME could finish them both off and seize control – and there would be no one strong enough to withstand them.

NME had its own technologies, including a wormhole transporter obtained from their alliance with the Xenobots. They were about to put all these things to use.

Soon word came from one of their "friends" in Space Command. The attack had begun: police had started raiding SE installations, forces had started to attack SE installations all over the Solar System, and so forth. The war had begun.

Upon hearing this, NME moved in to make the kill. It was now only a matter of time. The leaders at the NME HQ gave the command to invade. The first target was the SE datacore backup in the asteroid belt.

Chapter 20

The NME FTL fleet of ships began to engage its drives to warp to the asteroid holding the SE datacore. The first attempts at travel failed, which puzzled them. They reconfigured their jumps to appear about a thousand miles from the asteroid and they then made it through fine. The fleet appeared, and saw the asteroid, which appeared to be guarded by only a few SE ships – a robotic unmanned drone type, apparently.

They moved in for the attack, and launched an attack on the ships. It was only after they began their attack that they saw another fleet move into position – a fleet of SE and Space Command ships, jointly guarding the asteroid (they had been hiding behind a nearby asteroid). The two were *not* at war with each other, but instead jointly attacked NME and began to decimate their fleet. NME tried to warp out, but their FTL engines would not respond: some type of jamming was going on.

Back at NME headquarters, they began to see that something had gone badly wrong. Soon after they realized this they saw that something else had gone wrong: their HQ was being stormed, and their security systems had been breached.

They tried to leave the base, but it was in vain: all their escape routes had been blocked and the base was covered with Space Command troops, assisted by none other than the three Starmen, who had linked in from Earth via a wormhole. (NME's HQ was guarded by a wormhole shield, but the Space Command troops had blown it up before landing on the asteroid housing NME's HQ.)

The mop-up was fast, smooth, and complete. Zip told the NME folks that they miscalculated badly: the reports they heard that Space Command had begun hostilities were phony – just as phony as the operative who gave them. Space Command was a close friend of SE's, and when NME began to approach them Space Command played along to see if they could find out where NME was located. All they needed was for NME to incriminate themselves and bring their fleet out of hiding and Space Command would mop them up, as they had just done.

When word came in from the attack, it was good: NME was completely routed, and the SE and Space Command ships had won the day.

Later, while talking over things among themselves, the reader found out what happened at that building. It seemed that when the bad guys inside it saw they were cornered, they surrendered and spilled the beans. Their compads showed what NME was about to do, and gave the critical details SE and Space Command were missing. Thanks to the three Starmen, they had those details in time to make good use out of them – and, thanks to the wormhole transporter, the three Starmen were able to go along on the raid at NME HQ and put their knowledge to good use.

The commanders that NME had whispered things to were double-agents, working for SE, not NME. NME was history, and would no longer be a threat – and would definitely no longer be supplying androids.

Had NME accomplished its job, they might have won: both SE and Space Command would have been weakened to the point where neither could have resisted NME. In the resulting devastation no rebuilding could commence, and the Xenobots would have plenty of time to attack and devastate all life forms.

As it was, though, there was hope. The large interstellar freighter was completed, and it proved to be a success. The ship the Starmen had recovered in the beginning of the book was deciphered and its technology implemented in the drones SE had built. Everything was now in place for the great war, and this time it would be Earth and Mars together that invaded the Xenobot

home worlds – not the other way around. Mars had been rebuilt, and all were ready.

The story continues in *The Last Command*…

This short story was never written. However, Jon plotted the tale, boiling the story down from one of the unwritten titles from the initial list of 23 books.

The Plight of the Bumblebee

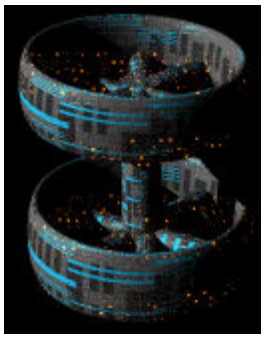
Formerly entitled *Danger at L5!*
One of two options for serialization in the next Starman Chronicles

Segment 1

The date is March 13, 2153. *The Lost Race of Mars* is in their recent past, and only about a month ago did the Starman team return from their *Return to Europa*. They had spent a short amount of time on the Moon, and had visited their families and rested from their labors.

On this fateful morning Richard Starlight got an urgent call from William Damon,[26] the aging (he's in his mid-70s) director of the massive L5 space station, pleading for immediate assistance and that he would send some Starmen to help him out. The director said he couldn't explain the problem over the airwaves but said that it was highly urgent and demanded immediate attention, and that the safety of Earth was at stake.

Concerned, Richard contacted the three Starmen (the only Starmen who were handy, and they were handy since they were on a rest leave at the time), quickly briefed them via phone/compad on what little he knew, and sent them off. Soon the Starmen [who had *not had time to put on their trademark uniforms]* were flying at top speed toward the L5 space station in a temporary craft that Richard had loaned them (their *Star Ranger* was, of course, still being repaired).



[Note: I'm giving you this information as background to the station. It doesn't have to all be explained in this segment; I just want you to be able to picture what L5 is like. You can drop bits and pieces of this information into the narrative as you see fit.] The L5 station

[26] A nod toward Wakefield Damon in the Tom Swift Sr. series – a slightly off-balance, eccentric character who goes around blessing everything in sight. Mr. Damon was probably in his 70s in the latter part of the Tom Swift series.

was a truly massive space station: aside from Tharsos (which might not count) it was the largest space station in the solar system. The station (which was home to more than 30,000 people) was located at LaGrange point 5 and was shaped like a giant spoked wheel (well, see the illustration). In order to create a sense of artificial gravity, the station rotated just fast enough to simulate 1 G. Most of the people and equipment was located on the wheel section of the station, with the spokes serving primarily as elevators and access tunnels.

The station was primarily a research station and docking port. Some ships (especially cargo ships) could not land on Earth and could only travel in space, and they would dock with L5 to load cargo from Earth and unload cargo from other planets. All sorts of cargo, ranging from refined ores slingshotted from the Asteroid Belt to food (L5 grew some food on its own but still had to import some items, especially meats), found its way to L5. L5 was also a good place to get repairs done on your ship, to pick up a job, or to catch a flight to another planet (all the major spacelanes went through L5). It was a growing, bustling place and was a gorgeous sight. There was often a lot of traffic around it.

So, the Starmen approached this station (which everyone simply called L5, although it was sometimes called the space wheel due to its odd shape). They hailed the station, and were contacted by a flight controller named Ted Scott[27] who told them that they were expected, and to proceed immediately to dock 9. Navigating the ship to dock with a rotating space station is tricky, and Joe let the navigation computer handle that on its own.

After docking, the Starmen were greeted by a couple security guards (a Mr. Howard, a Mr. Fine, and a Mr. Howard),[28] who proceeded to take them to the station director's office. Along the way they passed all sorts of people, scurrying around inside the halls and accessways of the station. Part of what they saw was quite beautiful: the station was not cluttered but was designed with an open feel, with trees (some of which Zip was sure were artificial), light streaming down from above, and so forth. This part of the station didn't seem cramped.

The artwork in the station was interesting. Down this one hallway were all sorts of pictures of space stations, as they appeared on the covers of old science fiction books.[29] It was a pretty neat display. The hallways themselves

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[27] A nod toward the Ted Scott series. Ted Scott was a famous airman.

[28] The last names of the Three Stooges

[29] Here's a good place to describe the cover of *Tom Swift and his Outpost in Space* (without naming the book's title!)

were not called hallways, but were given road names: Paris Road, Rockies Lane, Honolulu Avenue, Pacific Street, etc.[30] It helped keep the hallways and corridors less confusing.

When the Starmen finally got to the director's office, he ushered them in and had them sit down. The director had quite an office: it was filled with bookcases, pictures of expeditions to the interior of Africa,[31] and so forth. A few models were in a case along the wall: a rifle of some sort, an old motor-cycle, an airship, and a submarine.[32] The Starmen (after briefly taking in his office) wanted to know the nature of the emergency: just what was going wrong? The Starmen hadn't seen signs that anything was unusual in the station: everything looked normal, and no one seemed to be panicking.

The director (who seemed to be a bit on the neurotic side, though he was quite capable) said that he had reason to believe that the Xenobots had infiltrated the station and were using it as a base of operations. Their goal, he said, was to create a nanobot swarm to release on Earth, that would multiply, cover all the oceans, and then boil them away.

Briefly wondering if the director had lost his mind, Zip asked what led him to believe this. The director said that starting about a week ago, the station had begun doing strange things: he heard a strange voice sing songs over the intercom late at night (singing *Away Down Yonder with Davy Jones*, no less!),[33] he heard distant rumblings that didn't seem to have a source, and he had reports of shadowy figures moving around in unauthorized areas – areas in which no one was supposed to be. Hangar doors would open and close on their own, and sometimes authorization codes would simply cease to work. Something was messing with the station, and he knew it could be up to no good.

Joe, while looking over his office, glanced at a nearby table and saw two black sci-fi paperback books, entitled *Planet of Nightmares* and *Chaos on*

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[30] Taken from titles of Ted Scott books: *Over the Ocean to Paris*, *Over the Rockies with the Air Mail*, *First Stop Honolulu*, *Across the Pacific*.

[31] Mr. Damon took many trips to Africa with Tom during the Tom Swift Sr series.

[32] From various Tom Swift Sr titles: *Tom Swift and his Electric Rifle*, *Tom Swift and his Motor-Cycle*, *Tom Swift and his Airship*, *Tom Swift and his Submarine Boat*.

[33] This is the song Tom and Bud sang to the Navy submarine when swimming under the Atlantic in *Tom Swift and his Aquatomic Tracker*. Also a nod to *2001: A Space Odyssey*, in which HAL 9000 started singing *Daisy* when it began losing its mind.

Earth.[34] He wondered if oddball books like that had had any impact on the station director's imagination, but decided not to mention anything.

Zip said that he understood that strange things had been going on, and wanted to know why he thought Xenobots were involved. The station director said that these things had never happened before in the history of the station, and that just before he called them one of his security officers had made a startling discovery: they had found *self-replicating nanobots* – something no one had ever seen before. A technology like that *had* to come from aliens, and it had to be up to no good. Why –

But whatever the station director was going to say was lost when the station suddenly lost all power. The lights went out, and it became dark – *very* dark.

When the emergency lighting system did not come on after a few seconds, the director got worried. The Starmen turned on their suit lights to provide illumination, and the station director tried to raise help – but the lines were dead.

The Starmen managed to force open the door, and (at the urgent request of the director) decided to head toward the power plant (which was nearby) to see if that was the source of the problem. They left a light with the director (who had managed to find a flashlight), and the director said that he would stay in his office, since the emergency power had to come back on soon.

It took the Starmen a few moments (using maps on their compads) to get to the power plant. Almost as soon as they got there the lights came back on, but that was all: the other noises of the station (elevators, phones, generators, atmosphere blowers) were silent.

When talking with folks at the power plant (and especially to a foreman everyone simply called Rick),[35] they soon found out why. Somehow the computer system running the station had failed, and shut down all the systems stationwide. (That is why the emergency power didn't come back on: everything was just shut down and there was no "failure" per se.) The folks at the power plant had managed to bypass the computer system and get the lights on, but they were having a lot of trouble getting the other systems to work since they were so tied to Eliza.

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[34] *Planet of Nightmares* was the title of the last Tom Swift III book; *Chaos on Earth* was slated to be the next title, and while it was written (and I have it) it was (fortunately!) never published.

[35] A nod to Rick Brant, brilliant scientist and inventor.

The Starmen saw that there were mechanoids everywhere in the station. [A mechanoids, normally called a drone, is a little R2D2-type machine: it doesn't look remotely human, but it can get around and do some basic tasks. Some are built for heavy lifting, some for getting into tight areas, etc. They have limited intelligence and limited AI.] Mark asked about them, and a fellow said that L5 was being modernized: as of a month ago the old station control system was being replaced with an advanced AI unit called Eliza, and that these mechanoids were taking over various functions in an attempt to make L5 more self-sustaining. The mechanoids (which were commonly called drones) could do all sorts of simple tasks, such as go out into space and repair a broken conduit, or move a heavy object from one place to another. The mechanoids received their orders from Eliza, and then used their own simple AI to find a way to carry them out.

Since getting power back to life-support was a very pressing issue, the Starmen offered to help the able men there get the station to work again. After a little work the crew discovered the problem: a power surge had overloaded a fuse, and that in turn had corrupted Eliza's data banks. They didn't know what had caused the power surge (which had been a pretty large one) but they would investigate that later.

The foreman called to a drone (one of the mechanoids) and said "Hey, GR9104.[36] I want you to extract Eliza's data core, bring it to the lab, and see that it's repaired." The drone acknowledged (it could talk in a very basic computerized English) and scurried off to another room, where it began to extract the data core.

Zip looked a bit puzzled, and told the foreman that he thought only Eliza could give commands to the drones. The foreman said that usually that was true, but they would also take verbal commands. Zip saw the drone effortlessly remove the data core (which was about the size of a thermos), place it securely into a crevice in its chest (it opened up a panel, slid it in, and closed the panel), and then scurried off down the hallway.

Joe watched it go off and consulted his map. He looked at Zip, puzzled. The foreman, noting their concern, asked them what was wrong. Joe told them that the station repair lab was the other way – that the way the drone was going was to the nearest hangar. The foreman turned purple and shouted at the Starmen to go fetch that drone! If they didn't get that core fixed in four hours they'd have to start evacuating the station.

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[36] GR is for *Tom Swift and his Giant Robot*; 9104 is the G&D number at the bottom of the spine of that book.

Even as he was talking they heard the noise of a hangar door opening, and they knew that the drone was already heading out into space…

Segment 2

The Starmen ran down the hall and (with some help from another drone) managed to get the automatic (and now non-functional) airlocks open. Once inside, they powered up their ship, had the drones open the hangar door manually, and then they were flying off into space.

Of course, it wasn't as easy as that. There was real pandemonium all through the station, and they had to fight their way through crowds (armed with flashlights) to get to where they were going. The crowds were not panicking, but they were murmuring unhappily, and Zip hoped that the director would soon send someone out to talk with them. He heard one old fellow say that he just knew everything would go to pieces if you ever put a computer in charge, and this just goes to show that…

Once in space the Starmen had some trouble spotting the ship with the drone in it because they had no idea what ship had been parked in the hangar the drone had used, and they had no good way to contact anyone on the station and find out. Joe looked at the flight paths of the ships and Mark did some scanning, and after a little bit they found a ship with no one on board and which had a path that would indicate it had left from L5 not too long before. They tried to raise the ship, but had no success: the ship was not responding. This further led the Starmen to believe that the ship was the one with the drone: while other ships were unmanned, those ships would respond to challenges and identify themselves.

As the Starmen tracked it, they noticed that some other ships were beginning to leave the L5 station.[37] They hoped that they would be able to get the data core back in time to prevent the station from being evacuated.

The ship they were chasing began moving incredibly fast. It became clear that the drone was in a hurry: Zip figured that by the time the drone got to Earth there would not be a drop of fuel left – the maneuvers the drone was doing were extremely fuel-costly. The Starmen couldn't afford to follow the drone at the pace it was going: even if they had the fuel they couldn't withstand the G-forces. They considered radioing Earth for help, but they realized they had no idea where the drone was going to set down or what it was doing. They would have to wait and see.

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[37] The bad guys!

While they were flying to Earth, they discussed what was going on. They all agreed that the director was a little paranoid (I mean, come on: self-replicating nanobots boiling away the oceans?) and that some of what had been going on were probably just glitches in Eliza. Still, the presence of the replicating nanobots was intriguing: Zip knew research was being done in that field and that some companies were close to achieving that, but he had never actually seen it. SE, he knew, was mostly a high-energy and equipment company, not an electronics firm: it wasn't engaged in nanobot research.

They wondered what was going on. There very well could be Xenobots at the bottom of this, and perhaps they were tampering with Eliza. The Xenobots would certainly have mastered nanobot technology, and it could be used with great devastation. By sabotaging the data core (if it was sabotage) they could force the evacuation of the station and perhaps take it over – no doubt about it. The only question is, what was going on with the drone? The drone hadn't destroyed the core, but it was taking it somewhere – but where?

By tapping into SE's radar system, they were able to watch the drone land, and saw that it landed – surprisingly – on the outskirts of a tiny town called Crestwood,[38] Maryland. Joe said he doubted the drone had the programming to pilot a ship, and probably directed the ship to go along on its pre-programmed course – and the ship could have been set up to travel there already. The drone was just going for a ride.

The Starmen managed to land on a field near the city, right next to the ship the drone had used. They discovered that the ship was empty and the drone was gone. The question was, where had it gone? It shouldn't be too hard to spot: drones were quite expensive and were only used by large companies in delicate situations, and were never seen just wandering around town.

So the three Starmen began trying to track down this drone. Given that the drone was here in this small town, where was it likely to go?

A street named Maple Street[39] ran by the field. They headed toward it, and then began walking down the streets, and they saw a boy riding his bike.[40] They called to him and asked him if they'd seen a drone walk down

[38] of Brains Benton fame

[39] First street mentioned in the first Brains Benton book, *Mystery of the Missing Message*. It's mentioned on line 2 of page 9.

[40] Brains Benton and his pal always rode around on bikes in the series.

the street recently. The boy looked at them as if they had lost their minds,[41] and pedaled off.

The Starmen kept asking around, but evidently no one had noticed a drone walk down the street in broad daylight. Everyone thought the Starmen were crazy, or playing a prank on them or something. Given the response they were getting, Joe asked Zip if he could start telling folks they were from the year 10253 AD[42] and were chasing one of Professor Norwin's[43] dangerous killer robots, since he thought the folks here might believe that, but Zip nixed the idea.

The town was quite small, and soon they spotted something that grabbed their interest: a train station! Of course: the drone very well might make for a train station to leave town. As they ran up to it, they just saw the drone board the high-speed train (a sleek monorail, actually – the *GForce 3000*)[44] that was sitting at the station. The Starmen immediately ran up to it and tried to board the train, but the conductor stopped them, asking for a ticket. The Starmen told him that they were the three famous Starmen and were chasing a runaway drone, who had just stolen the data core to the L5 space station. They had to recover the core before the station had to be evacuated, and it was a national emergency.[45] The conductor (who thought they were talking nonsense) said that was fine by him but they couldn't board the train without a ticket. Zip said what about the drone, and the conductor said that the drone had purchased a ticket, and so he was let on board the train. They didn't have anything against drones in this here town.

Feeling crazy, Zip sent Joe to purchase three tickets. Joe went up to the window and asked for three tickets. The lady at the window asked where he wanted tickets to, and Joe said he didn't care – just give him three tickets. The lady said that she had to know where he wanted to go – the computer wouldn't let her not specify a destination. Joe said ok, where does this train go? The lady told him it went "to lots of places". Joe, frustrated, said ok, they wanted a ticket to the Aquapolis. The lady then poked at the computer and said that there was a problem with the line and that he'd have to wait a few

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[41] The Starmen didn't have a chance to don their uniforms before they left, so they look just like ordinary people. In this tiny town not much gets around, and besides, you don't expect the people you run into to be famous people.

[42] The number Golden Press placed on the top of the spine of *Robots of Saturn*.

[43] Professor Noryn (with a y) invented the M-Robots that were in the Dig Allen book *Robots from Saturn*.

[44] A nod to *Tom Swift and his G-Force Inverter*

[45] Can you imagine walking up to someone and telling them this? Can you imagine someone believing it? It's going to sound like nonsense – and it does.

minutes. Then lady told him that if he wanted to get to the Aquapolis, this wasn't the right train to take: he'd have to change trains later down the line and head in the opposite direction. Joe said that was ok: the longest way there was the shortest way back. The lady gave him an odd look.

A few minutes later the lady said ok, all she needed was payment. Joe (by now very antsy) said he could pay with his compad using the Starman account, and the lady said that they didn't accept those: he would have to use a card. Joe looked at her like she was crazy: how could they not accept payments via compad? She said that it was company policy, and was he going to pay or wasn't he?

The line behind Joe was growing, and they were beginning to murmur at him. Joe realized he hadn't brought his smartcard with him when he left the moon that morning and so yelled over at Zip. Zip came over and brought his out, and the lady took it and ran it through. It accepted the smartcard, and she gave Joe the three tickets.

They then ran to the conductor and boarded the train. He took their tickets, let them on, and they boarded.

Segment 3

Exhausted, the Starmen began looking around for the droid. They asked a few people if they had seen a droid go by, and they were told that no, of course not – did they look like they were out of their minds? Where did they think they were – at L5?

The train smoothly began to move along and soon it was off, purring along at 550 mph. The Starmen didn't know where it was going, and found out that it was headed to New Spindrift – a vast floating city off the coast of New Jersey.[46] From there the train was headed over to London via a transatlantic rail line (which stopped at several floating cities in the mid-Atlantic), so the Starmen would have to change trains at Spindrift to get to the Aquapolis – if that's where they actually wanted to go.

The Starmen kept wandering around, going from car to car trying to find the droid. The conductor came by and told the Starmen they would have to sit down: they were causing a disturbance, and besides no one was supposed to be walking around while the train was in motion. The Starmen tried to explain that it was a national emergency, and the conductor just said that if they kept causing trouble he'd have to call security and have them restrained.

[46] I don't think I need to footnote this!

Frustrated, the Starmen took a seat, and Zip kept scanning the train with his compad. He at last was able to get a fix on the drone: it was seated in the next car, about sixty feet away. Zip then asked the conductor if he could move to another car, explaining he had found the droid, and the conductor said no: Zip didn't have a ticket for 1st class and that was a first class cabin.

Zip felt extremely frustrated. He asked the conductor if he could upgrade, and the conductor said no: that had to be done at the station. Zip told the conductor there would be trouble, and the conductor serenely told Zip that it was all right: he should just take a couple aspirin and relax, before men in white coats came and took them away.

Zip raised Richard Starlight on his compad and told him what was going on and asked what he should do. Richard told him that the situation was L5 was not growing any better since they left it an hour ago: they *had* to get that core back from the drone, no matter what it took. He said that he could arrange for people to be at the Spindrift station to intercept the drone (and to help out the Starmen), and that until then they should just sit tight and monitor the situation. The train was only going to take another 20 minutes to get to its destination, so they could just sit tight – but to keep Richard updated.

So the Starmen waited. They watched the countryside go by, kept an eye on the drone via their compad, and waited. As they were waiting a man across the isle suddenly came over and started talking to them, explaining that he was a life insurance salesman and had a great deal on a new policy. The Starmen said that they weren't interested, but he would not be told no: he kept going on and on about having extremely low rates and that didn't the Starmen think they should take care of their loved ones? How would they satisfy their debts if they were to suddenly die?

Mark tried to explain that they were Starmen and had carte blanche and did not have any debts, but this did not faze the salesman. When it was clear that the salesman would *not* go away, Joe told him that he was glad the salesman had came along: usually life insurance salesmen steered clear of Starmen. It was strange, Joe said: salesmen didn't want to have anything to do with insuring people who spent their life infiltrating Xenobot planets and catching madmen bent on global destruction. Why, in fact, at this very moment they were trying to track down a deranged robot in an attempt to stop a Xenobot power ploy…

At this the salesman looked at them a little askance. A little boy across the isle piped up, saying that those three tried to board the train without a ticket with some story about aliens taking over a space station, and that they

had been bent over their compad pretending they were CIA agents. The salesman then murmured something or another and slunk away.

The Starmen then realized with a start that, while the insurance salesman had been bothering them, the train had stopped moving! They rushed to a window and saw that the drone was beginning to leave the train!

The Starmen then tried to exit the train, and ran into yet more trouble: there was a crowd blocking both exist to the car they were in. One side was held up by a man struggling with his briefcase, and the other side was blocked by a rather large lady talking in a loud voice to her companion about how *awful* these trains were and how *pushy* everyone was and how things were so much *better* on other lines.

The Starmen tried to push their way through, but the crowd would not cooperate: no one was moving and they shot the Starmen dirty looks. Zip finally had it, and he forced open a window and dived out, with Mark and Joe following him. The conductor had a fit, but he could do little more than wave at them while they ran across the platform.

The Starmen ran through the crowd, and soon spotted the drone. They also spotted something else: a group of men were closing in on the drone, and those men were *not the Starlight Enterprise security force that had been sent…*

Segment 4

The Starmen, hurrying over to the other track but still much too far away to do anything, watched as this other group of three men suddenly jumped on the drone. The drone, though, was ready for them: right before they jumped it suddenly took off and flew over their heads to the other side of the track. This surprised the Starmen until they realized the drone's purpose: it had been built to be handy inside a space station, and so it would have been built with some flight capabilities. It probably had a nuclear power plant for a battery, so unfortunately its battery would not die down.

By this time the Starmen had made it to the scene, and since the drone was out of reach these three men jumped the Starmen instead. They were no match for the Starmen, though, and the Starmen made short work of them.

This, though, led to other problems. As soon as they jumped these three guys and had them defeated the police came in, blowing their whistles and arguing. The Starlight Enterprise support personnel were nowhere to be seen, and the police believed that the Starmen had just assaulted three perfectly innocent human beings. The Starmen knew that they were in trouble: they

saw the police just seconds away and were afraid that by the time they worked everything out the drone would be long gone.

This time, though, Joe had an idea. He quickly whipped out his compad and told the police that they were undercover Starmen and that these men were dangerous agents bent on global destruction. He pointed to the drone trying to board a train and asked them in an undercover voice when the last time was that they saw a drone trying to board a train? Joe said hey, help us get this drone and then we'll discuss this whole case over a cup of Jalapeno coffee.

That made sense to them, so they rounded up the three men the Starmen had decked while the Starmen went after the drone. It was only at this point that they realized they didn't have a plan: what were they going to do when they actually got to the drone? They couldn't shoot it.

So they walked up to it and asked it, politely, what it thought it was doing. The drone said it was taking the damaged data core to Holtville (a floating city)[47] per Rick's order to be repaired. Mark asked why there, and the drone said that Rick had not specified a repair station and since a scientist at the Holtville electronics plant had built the data core in the first place, that was the most logical place to take it to be repaired.

Zip, getting an idea, told the drone that the data core could only be repaired on the station. The drone said that that was illogical: there was no power on the station, and even though there was a repair booth there it would be useless since there was no power with which to get the backup! Holtville was only thirty minutes away via high-speed rail, and since a data backup was on site the repair could be done within half an hour, and the drone could be back on the station with an hour to spare.

Zip realized that the drone had a point, and he couldn't think of anything to say.

At that point, the Starlight Enterprise security crew finally showed up, explaining that they had been delayed in traffic and done the very best they could to get there. They told Zip that they would explain things to the police, and Zip said that, for lack of anything better to do, they would ride with the drone to Holtville.

And that is how Zip, Mark, Joe, and a drone happened to be riding to Holtville that day via a high-speed train, and none of them had much to say.

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[47] Named in honor of Ken Holt.

Things went without a hitch: the drone got there, the core was repaired, the four of them took a ship from Holtville to L5, the core was inserted, it worked, and power was restored.

After things were running again and they were properly thanked, they asked what was the deal with the three men they had jumped at the station. The director explained to them that they had been conducting nanobot experiments on board the station for a certain electronics company, trying to assemble nanobots that could replicate themselves. They weren't supposed to be doing this on-board since they didn't have a license, and instead of getting one they decided to hack into Eliza and modify its programming so that they could get the power they needed.

When they hacked into the system, though, it made the system begin to do odd things – and that's why all that odd behavior had been going on. The nanobots that had been found belonged to this outfit – a few of them had escaped their lab. What had caused the meltdown was when they tried to draw more power than Eliza could handle: that burnt out the fuse and the data core.

Thanks to this, he said, they would add better security to the Eliza system, they would see that the three goons were properly punished, and they would make sure that if Eliza ever went down they had a way to keep things running without that system.

So the Starmen went home. It had been an interesting day.

Jon plotted this short story after being inspired by an exchange with Valerie Kramer about how exciting tales with codes and ciphers can be. The story was never written.

The Ultimate Code

An L5 Starman Adventure

The Setting: This story opens two or three months after *The Plight of the Bumblebee* (POTB) ends. It's sort of in the same vein as that story, although not quite. As in that adventure, the story centers around the L5 space station and its eccentric director, William Damon. (If we could come up with a few more stories like this we could publish them all in a little booklet! These two L5 stories make the start of a good collection.)

The date is sometime in May of 2153. LROM is in the past, and DH is still far in the future. The Starmen have just recovered from their last L5 adventure when – wouldn't you know it – Richard Starlight gets another call from William Damon, the director of the L5 space station. The director is generally competent, but he can be given to mighty leaps of imagination, and Richard tends to take his dire warnings with a few grains of salt – especially after what happened last time.

Anyway, the director said that they had received a coded message that their new computer system, the Eliza, couldn't decode. Eliza was the most advanced computing machine on the planet, complete with the best AI money could buy, and the director said that if it was having trouble they had a problem. The director was very concerned; he told Richard that what they did know had ominous overtones and involved a sensitive mission to the outer planet. He was afraid that Xenobots might be involved and that if they didn't find out what was going on there might be dire consequences.

So Richard, who was in his office at Starlight Tower at the time, called up his three Starmen, who were busy on Tharsos taking some courses in the Ahmanyan language. (At the time Tharsos was in Earth orbit.) He explained the situation and asked them if they could go to L5, calm down the director, and find out what was going on. He told them that he doubted the situation was serious, but it was impossible to tell with what he knew, and he would feel better if his Starmen could look into it and see what was going on.

Zip, having vivid memories of what happened last time, asked him if there wasn't someone else who could handle it; they had a mission coming up and needed to know as much Ahmanyan as possible, and this would take away valuable learning hours. Richard said he knew that, but he didn't have any other Starmen around and anyone else he had available to send didn't have the Starmen's knowledge of the Xenobots. He needed someone who knew what they were doing, and that meant them.

So the three Starmen agreed to go and they took a ship from Tharsos to L5. (They didn't take the *Star Ranger* since it was still being rebuilt.) They arrived at L5 and were once again greeted by the three security guards that met them last time – Mr. Howard, Mr. Fine, and Mr. Howard. They ushered them quickly to the director's office, down the same path they traveled before. (L5 looks just as it did in POTB; no need for me to re-describe it all here in this summary.)

Once they arrived in the director's office (which looked just as it did in POTB), the Starmen were taken out of the office and into a nearby conference room. The conference room already had two other people in it, which the director identified as the bases top cryptography experts. He wanted the best minds around to work on this problem, and he had them. There was another person in the room, whom the Starmen guessed (correctly) that he was the director's assistant.

The room had a very large aeroscreen (or whatever we decided to call them! Glowscreen? Beamscreen?) against one wall, and a beautiful conference table in the center. Mr. Damon took his seat and, after stationing the three security guards outside the room and giving strict orders that he was not to be bothered, motioned for his assistant to explain the problem.

The assistant cleared his throat and (while using the Beamscreen to illustrate his talk with pictures and diagrams) explained that four months ago a ship called the *Luna Merchant*[48] had set out for the planet Neptune[49]. The expedition was a simple one-man affair, led by a Dr. Maxie Bayard[50]. Dr. Bayard had made his fortune in supercomputer development and, at the age of 39, decided to explore the planet Neptune, a place that had long captured his fascination. Neptune had seen no major scientific expeditions since the planet's discovery and had largely been neglected in favor of exciting developments on Mars and Titan. Dr. Baynard believed that Neptune was

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[48] Name of the ship that went to Uranus in the last Dig Allen book

[49] A tribute to the unpublished Dig Allen book, *The Children of Neptune*.

[50] The first name of one character and the last name of another from the Dig Allen book *Robots of Saturn*.

long overdue for a serious expedition, and he furthermore believed that, based on some data gathered by autonomous SE probes, there may have been life in or around Neptune at some point which altered the natural gravity field of Neptune.

What he had done, then, is equipped his ship with a special supercomputer he had built with a sophisticated and highly experimental kind of artificial intelligence. His plan was to take his ship all the way to Neptune and use its supercomputer to do analysis of gravity fields, radio emissions, and other things like that. He hoped to return with conclusive proof that Neptune was once visited by a previously unknown alien race.

The three Starmen already knew all of this. They had been briefed on the operation some months ago and knew a few things the assistant didn't – that, for instance, the expedition had received some SE funding, was bringing along some experimental SE equipment, and also had several Titanians as passengers.

The director impatiently ordered his assistant to get to the point, and he did. He said that two days ago they had received a note from Dr. Baynard, which was addressed to his sister Melissa Nova[51]. The note had caused immediate concern, for they were not expecting to receive any transmissions from the expedition for some time; the ship wouldn't arrive at Neptune for another six months and, according to calculations had only barely had time to cross the orbit of Saturn.

At this point Mark broke in and asked them why they were messing with a message that was intended to reach this guy's sister – after all, the note wasn't sent to them. The director told Mark that the message *had* been sent to them: it was sent directly to the L5 space station and was simply addressed to 'Melissa Nova.' Since there was no Melissa Nova living at the L5 space station the message was analyzed by Eliza to figure out what to do with it, who decided that the message was in code and so notified the director.

Here the cryptographer took over. He explained that immediately after they received the message and realized that it was in code, they fed the message back to Eliza in the hopes of having the message decoded. If anyone could decode the message, Eliza could: the level of computing power in her circuits was staggering.

They had quickly discovered that the message could not be decoded by ordinary means. It was not a substitution cipher. It did not seem to be encoded with any sort of modern encryption scheme. They tried cracking the

[51] The name of one of my cousins.

message with keys, and no key was found that gave the message any sort of sense.

Joe broke in and asked them if they had tried looking up the code in the latest issue of the World Almanac[52]. The cryptographer, not realizing Joe was joking around, said that they had tried dictionary lookups, literary reference lookups, and parsing through all known bodies of text to look for possible references that might give the message some meaning; everything had failed.

Zip looked a bit surprised and said he didn't know Eliza could do all that in a few days. The director said that they'd had to put a stop to all the other research Eliza was doing and focus all her power on this one problem – as well as a few computer grids on Earth. They'd wanted a quick answer because they were growing concerned; what was Baynard trying to tell them?

Zip asked why they didn't just radio him and ask, and they explained that they'd tried that but hadn't received a response. Baynard didn't have a very good radio system on his craft and a lot of times it didn't work, and very likely his radio system had died. In fact, Baynard's lack of response had concerned them and made them more convinced than ever that something ominous was in the air.

The cryptologist continued, and said at this point they had a brainwave. Baynard obviously encoded this message himself, on his own computer. He must have meant for it to be decoded and understood, and thus used a scheme that would probably mean nothing to his enemies but something to the people at L5 who would receive it.

With that in mind, they started going over the message again and fed Eliza a series of new instructions. At this point – finally! – the director had the message displayed on the screen so the Starmen could read it:

From: Dr. Maxie Baynard
To: Melissa Nova
Timestamp: 05/19/2153 02:08:24 AM MST

x

Zip looked astonished. *That* was the message? The director nodded triumphantly, and said that is why they had such a hard time trying to decode it – they didn't have much to go on. He felt confident, though, that his cryptographers were going in the right direction, and motioned for them to continue.

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[52] I'm sure I don't need to explain this reference!

He said that at first, they believed that the message had been cut off before it was finished, and that X was just the first letter – standing for, maybe, Xenobot. Then they looked at the rest of the message and, based on Eliza's analysis, began to believe that perhaps this was indeed the entire message.

The big break came when the cryptographers noticed that the time zone used in the message was MST – Mountain Standard Time. Before Baynard took his trip he lived at L5, which worked on Greenwich Standard Time. He had no reason to use Mountain Standard Time unless he was trying to communicate something, and they believed he was.

Here the cryptographer really started to get enthused. They said that once they realized that MST had to stand for something else, they fed MST into Eliza and asked her what she thought it meant. The cryptographer said that Baynard had always been interested in nuclear physics, especially fusion mechanics, and that when Eliza pointed out that MST also stood for Madison Symmetric Torus (a type of reactor used in fusion research) they got excited. Could Baynard be actually talking about nuclear physics?

At this point everything started falling together. They asked Eliza if there was any significance in the timestamp, and she pointed out that the timestamp on the message (2:08:24) was interesting. Two to the third power is eight, and eight times three is twenty-four. The appearance of two threes was intriguing – it could be argued that the date was the product of a mathematical formula. Could Baynard actually be talking about formulas for the containment of plasma in a MST reactor?

Could these top-secret formulas be in danger? The 'x' was telling: could the x stand for Xenobot, and could the Xenobots be threatening these plans – and Baynard got wind of it?

Futhermore, the message was addressed to a Melissa Nova. This was especially telling: nuclear fusion is what makes stars work, and stars can go nova. The missing Nova could be a hint at the meaning of MST by bringing to mind the idea of a star.

At this point they thought they had gotten to the meat of the message. Baynard, out in deep space, had stumbled across a plot to steal the secret of nuclear fusion from a reactor by the Xenobots – either that, or (which was more likely) the Xenobots was plotting against a nuclear fusion reactor. What they didn't know – and wanted the Starmen's help with – were two things: was Baynard warning of an imminent attack against a nuclear fusion reactor by hostile aliens or had he discovered something more sinister?

Joe had been staring at the message for a few minutes, not paying much attention to the director. He asked if a connection could be made to Eliza and if he could ask it a few questions about the code. The director said that would be fine, and motioned for the assistant to make the connection, and he did; the Eliza system soon appeared on the screen.

First, Joe asked if Melissa Nova had lived on the station at the time his brother left on the expedition. Eliza said yes, she did. Joe then asked if she had any plans to move at the time, and Eliza said that she had been planning on moving to New Placentia, CA but she didn't yet have an address at the time the expedition left.

Joe then asked what sort of person Baynard was – specifically, was he a light-hearted person who enjoyed a good joke? Eliza responded that he was known for his plays on words and, while serious during work, he was known to joke with those close to him.

At this point Zip and Mark started to understand where Joe was going, but the rest of the people in the room were lost. The director asked what in space Joe was getting at, but Joe said to just wait – he almost had it.

Joe's last question was to ask where the sister was located now. Eliza said that her address could not be found; she had moved to California but from there left to a location in China and left no records Eliza could access concerning her present location. Joe asked if this was why Eliza had not forwarded the message on to her and Eliza said yes, it was.

Joe then turned to the group and announced that he had solved the problem and knew exactly what was going on. He said that in order to verify his solution, though, he would have to talk with Melissa. He chided the cryptologists for not going to her first; she was the key (pun intended) to the whole problem.

The director pointed out that Eliza couldn't find her and asked what he intended to do. Joe said it was simple: he was going to use the ghost-to-ghost network[53]. The director looked at him as if he was insane and asked what ghosts had to do with it, and Joe just laughed and told him that he must have read all the wrong books when he was a child[54].

Joe nodded to Zip, and Zip explained that what they would do is call up some friends they had in New Placentia. They, in turn, would call other friends, who would call other friends, until they found somebody who knew where Melissa Nova lived. In a short amount of time an exponential number

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[53] A reference to a number of Three Investigator books

[54] A reference to *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* – C S Lewis says this very thing about Eustace.

of calls (all local, Joe noted, and so not likely to run up any phone bills) would be placed, and they would find her quickly. This was faster and easier than getting something placed in the news or starting an official manhunt, and more likely to work.

The three Starmen placed their calls, gave their contact information, and then set back to wait. They told the director that they were going to walk around the station and visit some friends of theirs who lived there; when they got a response they would be back. They assured the director that everything was fine and he would soon have his answer.

Before they left the room, they took a piece of paper, wrote down something on it, and placed it in a sealed envelope. They asked the three guards to watch over it while they were gone, and told the director that they had written on that piece of paper what they thought the message meant. With that, they left.

Three hours later the Starmen were back in the conference room, and they had a live video feed with Melissa Nova. Their 'ghosts' had turned the trick, and they found out that she had relocated to a town in China to teach English[55]. They had been able to reach her via cell phone and were lucky enough to work out a live video feed via a webcam connected to a computer.

The Starmen (while the other people in the room watched expectantly) explained to her the message they had received and the trouble they had delivering the message, and that they were sorry it was delayed. They told her that for the benefit of certain parties they wanted her to explain to them what the message meant, because it had the whole base in an uproar of theories. With that, they sent her the message.

She got it, read it, and (to the immense surprise of the director) immediately burst out into laughter. It took her a while before she could calm down. When she managed to calm down she explained.

It seemed that when her brother was about to leave, she asked him to send her a letter when he passed the orbit of Saturn – which was further out than anyone in their family had ever been. Her brother, she said, had done exactly that: he sent her the letter 'x'. He might have sent her 'y' or 'm' or 'q' or 'z' but he just picked x at random. That's all it meant – that, and that he must be alive and well and still in good humor.

She said that she imaged he'd send another message in a few days, and that he was just allowing for some time for the message to be delivered. She asked if they couldn't send the next message (which would undoubtedly be longer and more detailed) to her directly, without delay.

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[55] A nod to a friend I have in China who is doing that very thing right now.

The director at this point turned purple and asked how he was supposed to know that. She said that he wasn't, because the message wasn't sent to him, and that's what he gets for reading other people's mail.

With that, the Starmen thanked her, and she logged off. The director took the sealed envelope, opened it, and threw it down on the table: the Starmen had been exactly right.

He staggered and asked them how in space they could have known. Joe laughed and said hey – that's what he would have done. With that, they said they had some language lessons to attend and left, but not before warning the director to try to avoid reading other people's mail.

And with that they left.

Valerie's comments after the story was plotted:

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Hi Jon!

Wow!  You sure worked fast to put that together so
quickly!

I enjoyed it.  The "X" had me going a bit... I thought
maybe he'd sent her a kiss. :)

I did catch a few references you didn't note (though I
presume they were intentional):

1) Eliza - name of a famous program that simulated a
psychiatrist

2) Mr. Howard, Mr. Fine, and Mr. Howard - Can't be
anyone but the Three
Stooges, Moe Howard, Larry Fine, and Jerome (Curly)
Howard.  (Evan's father, Searle Kramer, wrote 12 of the
scripts for the Three Stooges episodes.)

3) "Damon" is "Nomad" backwards and could be a tribute
to the first Star
Trek movie but I think that's pretty far-fetched. Just
thought I'd mention it. :)

4) Wasn't there also a "Maxie" in one of Heinlein's
stories?  I can't place it offhand.
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5) Taking a supercomputer with AI to Neptune is awfully reminiscent of Kubrik's 2001 and the trip with HAL to Jupiter.

6) New Placentia - reference to David's location

Other notes:

1) A bit hard to understand why Baynard would have such poor radio equipment on board.

2) We still don't know why he used MST time

3) We already have cellphones with built-in cameras. I should think they all would by 2153.

4) I don't see what different signifigance, if any, it would have had if he'd sent her "y", "m", "q", or "z". Of course I think he should have sent "L". No, not because of "L Chahda" though that's good too. Because it wasn't Christmas and he didn't want to send her no L. (Noel). <Groan>.

Enjoy!

Valerie

VI. WRITER'S NOTES FOR THE STARMAN SERIES[56]

References to Classic Series Books

a partial list

The Starman Team included many references to classic series books in its stories. Sometimes these were obvious and sometimes they were minor mentions or steals just plugged in without comment. The list below is nowhere near complete since the author didn't write down every reference he used. The purpose behind this practice was to give a tribute to the genre of series books from the classic era, to indicate that that Starman Team was fully aware that it was building upon the work of others, and maybe above all to have fun.

Eben Adar, the eccentric electrical genius in *The Disappearing Floor*, Hardy Boys #19 (original text version), is mentioned in that capacity in *The Last Command.*

Harry Tanwick, whose name appeared in the same Hardy boys book, *The Disappearing Floor*, is the ancestor by six of the benefactor in *Descent Into Europa.*

Temple Manley is recognized as the founder of the ranch in Montana that has been in Mark Seaton's family for several generations. Temple Manley is the founder of X Bar X Ranch in the series of that name. This reference shows that Mark Seaton is descended from the Manleys.

Owsley Robbins, Joe Taylor's friend in *The Lost Tomorrow,* is a character in a short story by Capwell Wyckoff.

invisible enemy is a descriptive term in *Descent Into Europa*, and a tribute to the fourteenth Ken Holt mystery

[56] As David wrote the Starman stories, he always kept a files of notes. These provided a record of esoteric information about sources of names, events, descriptions, and other details that appeared in the Starman tale. Here are excerpts from some of this material.

galloping horse is a descriptive term in *Descent Into Europa*, and a tribute to the ninth Ken Holt mystery

The X Bar X Boys at Triangle Mine, the seventeenth book in that series, provides a beautiful description of the out-of-doors that is the basis of the scene in which Mark Seaton and Joe & Kathryn Taylor admire a waterfall in the last chapter of *The Last Command.* There are several other places in the Starman saga that draw upon scenes in other series books.

Jonathan Blaine, the young boy who asks the Starmen for their autographs in *Descent Into Europa*, is the name of the main character in Hal Goodwin's *The Feathered Cape* and the source of Hal's pseudonym as the author of the Rick Brant series.

The frontispiece in *Doomsday Horizon* is a combination of the covers of Ken Holt's *The Mystery of the Invisible Enemy* and the Hardy Boys' *The Secret of the Old Mill.*

The illustration in the sixth segment of *The Lost Tomorrow* is copied directly from an illustration in the second Dig Allen book, *Captives in Space*.

Karax and Cynia, two characters first introduced in *The Heart of Danger*, are named after cities in Robert Heinlein's *Red Planet*

Timeline For The Last Command[57]

March 11-May 4, 2160; spring 2161

Day 1 [Sunday, March 11]
Zip and Kathy on Earth

Day 2 [Monday, March 12]
Zip's surprise birthday party on Moon; visit at home with George St. George
Robert Nolan reviews his company's work on Ahmanya

Day 21 [Sunday, April 1]
Robotic probes initiate the attack on Xenobotic holdings

Day 22 [Monday, April 2]
The leaders on Tharsos realize that the Xenobots are building another wormhole transporter
Saleh visits Adamant and calls Montezuma Vly to join him

Day 25 [Thursday, April 5]
The Janitor fails to destroy the Xenobots' weapon by tachyon bomb

Day 26 [Friday, April 6]
The Janitor visits Tharsos with the bad news

Day 27 [Saturday, April 7]
The Starmen begin to look for pocket worlds

Day 30 [Tuesday, April 10]
The Starmen meet with Richard Starlight; Kathryn Mullaney appears

Day 32 [Thursday, April 12]
Zip and Allen talk in the Olovandan orchard

Day 36 [Monday, April 16]
Zip, Mark, and Joe begin test their spacesuits

Day 38 [Wednesday, April 18]
The Starmen enjoy a feast with the closest friends

Day 40 [Friday, April 20]
The Janitor takes the Starmen and transports them to Luxa

Day 44 [Tuesday, April 24]
The Starmen transport to Luxa, are trapped;
The alliance's armada invades the Xenobot system;
The Second Xenobot War is fought.
Zip makes desperate dash to Luxa's moon, destroys the Xenobot fleet and himself
First Races annihilate Luxa with a black hole

Day 47 [Friday, April 27]
Kathy Foster grieves on Mars

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[57] The timeline for the entire Starman series up to the beginning of *The Last Command* is presented at the beginning of that book. Of course, the timeline for that last book is not included. It is provided here for the first time.

Day 54 [Friday, May 4]
Allen and Elizabeth Foster grieve at home

2161

May 20	Kathy Foster created a Starman, ten years to the day after her brother
Late spring	Starmen visit Ahmanya

NOTES FOR *THE LAST COMMAND*

Here are a few notes that Jon and I jotted down as I was writing the first draft of the text. Most of these notes are Jon's, which he provided in response to questions I asked so that I could understand the storyline sufficiently and write the text so that it would make sense.

If all the Xenobots have is a wormhole shield, then they have the advantage since their ships can move up to one-third light speed and the alliance ships can't. Alliance ships depend on wormhole travel, not moving through normal space. If the shield were turned off, the alliance could send bombs to the torus, etc. Therefore the Xenobots need to have the shield up. Therefore the alliance must have the shield down. That's the Starmen's job.

The Xenobots allow alliance probes into their system on purpose to show the alliance what they are facing, to show the strength of their defense. Also to see the torus and solar power station. First Races tell the alliance that there are no "foci" to these items and therefore they can't be destroyed remotely—there is nothing for a tachyon bomb to latch onto. The doorway opens onto space, not another room. Tachyons, moving FTL, need a solid target or a place. The torus and power station do not appear to be solid—a defense against the tachyon transfer never seen before. Most unsettling to the First Races and therefore to the alliance. [In fact, the reason that they do not appear to be solid is that they are unreal! They are holograms, made from captured Ahmanyan ships in previous war. No one thinks of this solution.]

Bringing down the wormhole shield, then, becomes vital since it will allow wormhole travel to the alliance.

The Starmen are sent to Luxa heavily armed.

The apprehension in the alliance is **not** due to their not knowing what they are facing; it's due to the fact that they **do** know what they are facing. The Xenobots have a million ships; the Ahmanyans have maybe twenty or fifty thousand. They are outnumbered by something like 20 to 1. On top of that, the Xenobot ships are fed by an unending stream of energy: they are not going to run out of fuel, and they can use energy weapons (lasers, etc.) as if they were going out of style. The Earth fleet has weapons as well but they had to use up a good bit of power to travel all the way across the galaxy; they

have energy but not the unlimited stream that the Xenobots has to throw at them.

There is great apprehension because they know they can't win. If they don't invade, the Xenobots will establish their power station, their fleet will enter the solar system, and it will all be over. They squeaked by in THOD simply because they managed to prevent the Xenobots from using the station to move their fleet; instead, they had to use transporters to move the ships and that did them in. An antimatter barrier isn't going to work this time: they have to destroy the station.

But that is a hopeless task. There is no way at all that their handful of ships, armed with a limited supply of energy, could possibly overcome a fleet of a million ships armed with limitless energy. It's not going to happen. They have to try because the moment that power station is activated the war is over and their planets are toast. But there is no real hope that they could succeed.

Both sides can talk via RTT, and all ships on both sides are equipped with it.

Neither side has tachyon transfer capability.

When the alliance enters the hypershield area, the fleet is attacked by a few Xenobot ships that had been in hiding. Sheathing no longer helpful since gravitational footprint detects ships. Hidden on a few asteroids and space rubble. EMPs but Tharsos takes them out, with others. Try to englobe Tharsos but fail.

The Janitor was going to leave the gate open, and the Starmen could use that to escape. They even had RTT device so they could talk with the fleet and coordinate their movements. However, the moment they entered the Nexus, something completely unexpected happened: a tachyon shield went up. It was a one-way trip, but the Starmen didn't know it until they arrived.

Why then all the good-byes and fears that they are going to their death?
Can remain in place but be toned down a little bit.

In other words, the Nexus was intelligent: it sensed intruders and so it (a) raised the shields (thus cutting off any hope of returning the way they came), and (b) sent out an alarm. As it turned out, the alarm was sent to the people

who built the Nexus, and since they are no longer around it didn't do any good, but the shield is there all the same. They can't contact anyone, they can't leave, and – worst of all – they can't even use the gates in the Nexus to get to the power station since they all work via tachyon transport! They have a problem.

Keep in mind that the Nexus there was built by the Lucians, and the Lucians were at war with the First Races. Any attempted access by the First Race would most definitely be seen as problematic and, at the very least, would trigger some alarms. It is just that, since the Lucians are gone, there is no one around to receive the alarm messages. There is no way the Lucians would want the First Races (their enemy) to transport to the heart of their planet, and while the shield itself may no longer be on, the warning system would still be in place.

What it does know is that the transmission came from a planet known to be home to the First Races, using technology from the First Races, and is therefore most definitely a hostile transmission.

The solution? Find the power source of the planet and kill it; the wormhole shield will go down. They can then find a gate in the Nexus that works via wormhole travel (there could possibly be a combination of the two gates, or maybe a backup gate in case something went wrong) and use it to reach the power station.

The Starmen arrive inside Luxa by tachyon transfer, and as an unexpected consequence the tachyon shield and alarm go up. The Starmen's escape is cut off. The Janitor returns to Tharsos after the tachyon link is broken to tell them the news.

The Starmen do track down the power source and figure out how to disable it. Mark and Joe set about to do the work and Zip goes to the surface to contact Tharsos by compad. He will connect with Mark and Joe down the passage by "line of sight" compad transmission.

The tachyon alarm can actually reach the Xenobots on the surface of the planet, but they don't recognize it. However, they do figure out eventually that some invader is inside the planet.

Mark and Joe shut down the power plant and kill all power to the wormhole shield – that is what the Janitor trained them to do. Starmen bring down the wormhole shield and the alliance ships draws near to Luxa via wormhole and attack the torus and solar power station, and then discover that they are illusory! [In fact, they are holograms, made from captured Ahmanyan ships in previous war. No one thinks of this solution.]

The battle in space begins in earnest. Zip sees it happening. He sets a time and provides coordinates so that Tharsos can remove the three Starmen from the interior of the chamber. He begins to climb back down, but is prevented from doing so. The alarm has set the Xenobots searching, discovering, and finally coming after the Starmen. Zip is trapped on the surface.

Mark and Joe, inside Luxa, are scooped up by wormhole transfer and get back to Tharsos. They get aboard the *Star Ranger*, join up with Kathryn Mullaney who's been waiting for them, and they launch from Tharsos to join the battle.

The First Races tell Tharsos that they're ready to destroy Luxa, and Tharsos tells them not to do so until the Starmen are safe.

The real solar power station has been disguised as an asteroid circling the planet—built inside the way Tharsos had been. Always on the maps, never suspected. Zip finds out while he's on the surface. Steals a ship and flies there, determined to disable the solar power station and so disarm the Xenobot fleet. Uses compad to tell Tharsos. Message takes a few minutes to cross space, since it is not RTT. The asteroid/moon is within the tachyon shield.

Zip tells Tharsos he will shut down the power station and not to shoot down his ship. He is pursued by Xenobots. Tharsos receives message and determines to attack the asteroid, but can't because Zip's whereabouts are unknown. Send message asking him where he is. Takes too long to arrive.

Zip, meanwhile, reaches the power station and gets inside, followed by Xenobots. The Xenobots are in close pursuit. Zip finds out that he can't escape—at least, not in the time available to him. The Xenobots are outside scrambling to get in. He turns the wheel.

Writer's Notes, TLC

Chapter 1

Zip's rumination on the evils of war is based on a line from J. R. R. Tolkien in a letter written to his son Christopher in letter #64, *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*.

Zadok Cohen is suggestive of a Jewish high priest. Zadok was the name of a priest under King David in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 8:17 and 1 Kings 1:8, 26, and 32) and Cohen is the Hebrew word for "priest".

Beulah O'Brian was a comical name invented by Robert Haas, a friend of mine in the mid-1960s.

Alanthus Highboy is the name of the cook in *Don Sturdy on the Ocean Bottom.* He is a native of Cameroon as a tribute to Sharon Biggs, a member of my church and a missionary in that country from August 2004 to May 2006.

George St. George's find of a thorium asteroid is a tribute to *Rip Foster Rides the Gray Planet*.

For the background to Mark and Joe's discussion about the cinnamon-flavored onions, see *The Heart of Danger*, chapter 7.

Chapter 2

Robert Nolan's ship, the *Nova*, is a symbol of his own renewal. *Nova* is Latin for "new".

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Saleh is an anagram of the puzzling word in the psalms, Selah.

Saleh's description of the planet where the First Races are held in stasis makes it clear that it is the planet later known as Larson's Folly, described in *The Lost Tomorrow*.

Chapter 5

From Valerie Kramer, regarding escape velocity on the glass asteroid:

The basic gravity equation is F = (G * M1 * M2) / (d ^ 2). Assume the mass is proportional to the radius (volume = 4/3 * pi * r ^3) and bearing in mind that the d-squared in the denominator changes with the size of the mass as well, I figure that the force difference is roughly proportional to the radius. If Earth's escape velocity is 7 miles/sec = 25,200 miles/hr then the escape

velocity of a 1 mile radius rock is about 1/4000 of that or about 6.3 miles/hr – not much more than a fast walk!

Chapter 6
The description of the upgrades of the Starmen's spacesuits comes from an article by NASA called "High-tech spacesuits eyed for 'extreme exploration'."

Chapter 7

Chapter 8
Tin is white and liquid, melting at 449° F
Cadmium, silvery, melts at 609° F
Lead, bluish, melts at 621° F
Joe's line, "Enjoy the light while you've got it," is reminiscent of Jesus' words in John 9:4

Chapter 9
Gahan Furman is named for A. L. Furman, editor of many Teen-age Library books.

Chapter 10
Chapter title, "Out of the Darkness", is the title of the book by Clyde Tombaugh about his discovery of Pluto
Zip's memories of the train station in Cleveland come from Valerie Kramer's childhood memories of a train station in Cleveland as posted on the Rick Brant message board on December 7, 2004. She mused then that they would have been nice in a series book. I immediately copied them for use in *The Last Command* as a "thank you" to her.

Chapter 11
The paragraph that begins, "The Ahmanyan craft revolved once each second, …" is drawn from a paragraph in *Of a Fire on the Moon* by Norman Mailer, a story about Apollo 11. The passage was added at the suggestion of Mike Dodd.

Chapter 12
Sent by Mark McSherry on April 4: '*It's at the first LaGrange point*, he said to himself. *I think it's at the point. I just don't have time to measure where*

the LaGrange point would be for a binary star system. But that's got to be the Luxan moon that the Janitor told us about—but it's not in an orbit! It's at the first LaGrange point! That means it's always facing the star. And that must mean…'

In Chapter 13 (Page 9), the reader learns that the Luxan moon was "…about thirty miles long and fifteen wide."
I wonder if such a small object would be visible to Zip from the surface of Luxa. The Earth-Sun L1 Point is at a distance of about 1 million miles (4x the distance to the Moon) from the Earth in line with the Sun. The Luxa-'Large-Yellow-Sun' L1 Point would be at a comparable distance.
http://www-istp.gsfc.nasa.gov/Education/wlagran.html

There was a discussion on the Tom Swift Group last month concerning just this point. In 'Tom Swift and the Phantom Satellite' a 30-mile wide satellite goes into Earth orbit a distance of 50,000 miles from the Earth's surface. The group determined that an object of that size, viewed from the surface of the Earth, would only have an apparent diameter of about .069 the diameter of a full moon. (It would take 14.5 Nestrias placed side-by-side on the Moon's equator to reach from the west to east lunar limbs).

The general formula is
N(Number of Full Moons) = (114.6 * D(Diameter of observed object)) / R
(Distance away from Observer) = (114.6 * D) / R

Using that formula, where the diameter of the Luxan moon is 30 miles and guessing that the L1 point is 750,000 miles away, gives N = .004584. Or dividing .004584 into 1 equals 218. It would take 218 Luxan moons placed side-by-side on the Moon's equator to reach from the west to east limbs.

I not saying to change anything; I'm just pointing it out. But I doubt very much that such a small object could be seen by the naked eye at such a distance, but am willing to concede the point; You do refer to it as "…a black speck" and as "…a tiny black dot".

David's response:

Your comments on the Luxan moon and its visibility from the LaGrange Point 1 are terrific. I think I will leave the text as is, however, since making it more plausible will either mean moving the LaGrange in closer than it possibly can be or making the moon much larger than it should be. I based its measurements roughly on the dimensions of Phobos, which is visible from the surface of Mars in spite of its small size. Phobos is, of course, much closer to Mars than the Luxan moon is to Luxa. I didn't specify the actual distance from Luxa to its moon, and will just leave it hazy. It's vital that Zip be able to travel the distance in the short time allotted to him, per the minute-by-minute timeline. Maybe the best thing to do would be simply to eliminate the information that Zip suspects that it's located at the LG point. The text itself does say that he's merely guessing, anyway—he hasn't time to figure it for sure. Maybe we can just assume he's wrong.

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

From "The Eight Treasures": "What were the Eight Treasures? I write with pride. The genetic code of all animal and plant life with organic samples. The encoded and miniaturized text of all Ahmanyan literature. The sum total of all Ahmanyan scientific knowledge. The full account of Ahmanyan history. The complete repository of Ahmanyan musical heritage. The full library of Ahmanyan visual arts. The history of peoples and languages, with genealogies. And archival statements from nearly every Ahmanyan living at the time the Eight Treasures were assembled."

Jenny is named for Jenny Owens, the middle daughter of Tim and Leslie Owens. She delights in helping people.

The Hidden Garden*, the restaurant where the Starmen enjoy a luxurious dinner, is named after one of my favorite books about prayer,* The Hidden Garden of Prayer*, by Edward Sedding, SSJE.*

Mark's dream is taken from pages 34-35 of *The Renaissance of Wonder in Children's Literature*, by Marion Lochhead. It is itself a quote from *Lilith*, by George MacDonald. Mark's perception that the world is about to break open is taken from the last chapter of *Lilith*.

Is it springtime on Ahmanya when it is springtime on Earth in June 2161? Yes. On November 12, 2152 the Starmen visited Final Ilien on their way to Europa. It was autumn then. In June 2161, about 3140 Earth days have passed. The Martian year is 687 Earth days long. That means that it has been a little more than four and a half Martian years since the Starmen's visit to Final Ilien. It is therefore springtime on Ahmanya in June 2161.

Description of Mark and Joe's approach to the meeting place with the Ahmanyans is adapted slightly from *The X Bar X Boys At Triangle Mine*, pages 68-69.

"In all truth, our long winter is past and spring has returned. After more than twelve thousand years, our sorrows are over and gone. After more than a hundred lifetimes, Ahmanyan flowers appear again on the face of the planet; the season of singing has come."
Adapted from The Song of Songs 2:11-12a

The closing line, **AND THE END ALSO OF THE STARMAN SERIES**, is adapted from the last line of *The Magic Talisman*, by John Blaine, manuscript version.

GLOSSARY
Of Lesser People, Places, And Things
In The Starman Series: Full List

References to short stories are indicated by italicized letters in parentheses

Adamant	Asteroid near Montezuma's Castle, TRA
Adar, Eben	20th Century electronics genius, THOD
Agrologists	Scientists who study plant growth and development *(TET)*
Ahmanya	Benefactors' name for their home planet, DIE, LROM
Anh, Strich	one of the men who took the Starmen into custody, TLT
Airbot	An armed, robotic flying sphere for locating fugitives, TRA
Alexandra	A member of the SE production team, JTP
alzenta	Ahmanyan for greegles, LROM
Amundsen Base	The spaceport in Amundsen City, TRA
Aquapolis	Undersea city off the southern coast of Florida, dedicated to research, DIE
Arachnoid	spider-shaped robot, LROM
Armstrong Forest	The huge tract of forest in the heart of Amundsen City, JTP
Arndt, Iris	Navigator of the exploratory vehicle aboard the *James Nathan (TOOT)*
Astrogazing	The hobby or pastime of viewing the heavens
Avery, Stephen	Asteroid miner who discovered the greegles on Adamant, DIE
Avidroid	Birdlike semi-intelligent robot, THOD
Aviles, Cambria	Zip's navigator on the *Star Ranger* on the journey to Mars, MOM
Az	harvester for the Banjoman, LROM
Azemir	Ahmanyan name for the original fifth planet, LROM
Bando	communications expert among the renegades, DH
Banjoman	The man in charge of producing flilox on Mars, TRA
Barneveld, Sherry	First baby born in the 22nd century, JTP
Battlesphere	Ahmanyan two-seater warcraft, THOD
Baumann, David	Assistant custodian at Starlight Academy, MOM
Beamscreen	Computer display of pure photons assembled in air, MOM
Bellar, Peter	Forge's second-in-command in the desert, LROM
Bartrin, Jemno	leader of a brutal gang, TLT
Bennett, Benjamin	Captain of the *Ignis* and commander of a Space Command fleet of twelve, TRA
Bennick, Gray	Mechanical engineer on the *Silverfire,* DIE
Bethany, Kristina	Cultural sociologist at Earthbase on Titan, JTP
Bethesda	site of community of herbalist nuns, LROM
Beulah's Place	A restaurant in Amundsen City, TLC
Bishop City	Undersea city near Bermuda, DH

Blake	Pirate crewmember under Lather, TRA
Blaine, Jonathan	Six-year-old boy who asks the Starmen for their autographs in Flamingo Spaceport, DIE
Bob	secretary to Mayor Edmund Warner, LROM
Bolcher	Pirate leader under Lurton Zimbardo; one of the five lieutenants, TRA
Boneyard	See *Field of Obsolescence*, MOM
Bonny Swan	SE spacecraft *(RTE)*
Boone, Emily	Inhabitant of Final Ilien; married to Gabriel, DIE
Boone, Gabriel	Inhabitant of Final Ilien; married to Emily, DIE
Bors, Derf	Captain of the *Starventure*, JTP
Brandow	small town far northwest of Eagle City, LROM
Break's Knob	huge boulder in forest near Mark's grandparents' ranch, DH
Bronk, Dennis	Chemical engineer in charge of the NME exploration team, JTP
Brown Crab	five-seater spacecraft, DH
Buckeye	small town, TLT
Caidin, Martin	Navigator aboard the *Starventure*, JTP
Cardigan, Ellis	Ship's recorder aboard the *James Nathan (TOOT)*
Carley	assistant among the renegades, DH
Chamber	Room in the pirates' asteroid which simulates beautiful landscapes, TRA
Chathna	Ahmanyan warrior from Olovanda, TLC
Coaticook	Joe Taylor's birthplace in rural Québec, DH
Cohen, Zadok	Chief assistant of master ioneer Jesus Madera-Cruz, TLC
Collins, Agena	Space Command liaison to SE, DH
Collins, Crag	Starman, MOM
Couper, Aaron	Director of Elijah Base, THOD
Compad	Small personal communications device, JTP
Conrad, Captain	Captain of the *Olympia (TFO)*
Cooper, Jon	Assistant custodian at Starlight Academy, MOM
Cosmological Reference Book	Book used to locate heavenly bodies
Coxhead, Ralph Q.	Executive Director of Aquapolis, DIE
Crane, Link	mechanic at Thomas Outbase *(AMOT)*
Crass	Pirate leader under Lurton Zimbardo; one of the five lieutenants, TRA
Crassendoog, Ira	old man in Buckeye; ally of Roos Jones , TLT
Crossfield, Scott	Scientist in Aquapolis, DIE
Curry, Elizabeth	Maiden name of wife of Allen Foster *Nathan (TOOT)*
Cynia	Sister to king Izmaka, THOD
Da	Delian stellar engineer, TLT
Dan	Crewmember under Derf Bors; killed by Xenobots, THOD
Datatile	Item the size and shape of a clipboard that contains huge

	amounts of information, MOM
Dathan, Mrs. Susan	Mr. Forge's secretary, LROM
De Koven, Quentin	Commander of the flagship *St. George* of Earth fleet, MOM
Decker, Eleanor	Starman hoping to make first wormhole journey *(AMOT)*
Deefer, Toby	mechanic at Thomas Outbase *(AMOT)*
Delians	race known in the late 22nd century, but not earlier, TLT
Denn, Beowulf	Chief Assisting to Robert Nolan, TRA
Dewdney, Derek	Richard's navigator on SE warship, LROM
Dirk	Friend of the McTaggarts, MOM
Doak	assistant among the renegades, DH
Dodd, Mike	Head of custodial services at Starlight Academy, MOM
Domoli	Abandoned Ahmanyan city on Europa *(RTE)*
Donna	Crewmember under Derf Bors; killed by Xenobots, THOD
Dufaure, Yancy	Top space pilot for SE; pilot of *Silverfire,* DIE
Dukas, Dr.	Professor at Starlight Academy, MOM, DIE
Duncan, Frank	SE electronics technician aboard the *Starventure*, JTP
Dyar, Neal	Starman stationed on Mercury, DH
Earth Defense League	organization allegedly formed to fight Xenobots; ploy of enemies, DH
Eckman Warehouse	criminals' food storage site in New York, DH
EGV	electric ground vehicle; see also *popper*, LROM
Elder, The	an Ahmanyan, LROM
Elijah Base	The base on Titan, named after the spacecraft piloted by Earthmen when they first encountered the Titanians, JTP
Elijah, Father	priest at Bethesda, LROM
Elm	gunner among the captors, DH
Endra	Ahmanyan word for Earth, TLT
Epstein, Benton	Commander of Starlight Academy in 2150, MOM
Essington, Katie	Celestial biologist aboard the *Silverfire,* DIE
Excelsis II	Robotic explorer with artificial intelligence *(TFO)*
Final Ilien	Oldest settlement of the Wind People, DIE
Forrester, Evelyn	Chef's assistant aboard the *Starventure*, JTP
Field of Obsolescence	Plain on Mars where discarded spacecraft are stored, MOM
Final Ilien	Last Teagarden homestead *(COD)*
Firewasp fighters	Small, very fast and highly maneuverable SE spacecraft, TRA
First Races	The first created peoples of the Universe, LROM, DH
Five Acre Meadow	site in Armstrong Forest, DH
Fleet of Twelve	Largest normal fleet in the Space Command panoply, TRA
Flilox	An illegal hallucinogenic narcotic produced from lichen on Mars, TRA, LROM
Folding Jim	see *Zeavin, James, DIE*
Frost	Foreman; one of Troy Putnam's pirates, MOM

Furman, Gahan Earthman with specialty in communications, TLC
Garrison Building Building in Eagle City, LROM
Garvey, Henry, Dr. botanist in Sulphur Creek *(TIASC)*
Gasmen Nickname for Roos Jones's enemies, TLT
Gebbeth, Maury Pirate leader under Lurton Zimbardo; one of the five lieutenants; pilot of the *Tartarus*, TRA
Gene Newman Senior technician in the control center under Zimbardo, TRA
Gibson Commander of the spaceport in Eagle City, LROM
Gillian owner of *Wind's End*, LROM
Glass, Alison dispatcher at Starlight Seneca, DH
Gloria The spaceship which took Lee High Eagle to Mars in 2014, TRA
Gold, Aaron Ship's physician and medical researcher, JTP
Golden, Mel Technician in Eagle City flight control tower, MOM
Golliwogs Pets enjoyed by lonely spacemen, TRA
Gordon one of the Banjoman's security personnel, LROM
Gorge, the Vast crack in stone on Titan where life-support machines are located, JTP
Gray Fleet The elite pirate ship captains under Troy Putnam, MOM
Grayson radiation detectors search instruments that leave atomic residue, LROM
Greegles Mythical dwellers in the asteroids; small metal humanoid figures, TRA
Gresham, Dana reporter in Eagle City , LROM
Gripp, Mr. Pirate official in charge of supply depot and refinery, MOM
Gruffydd, Ceinwen SE's manager on Tharsos, DH
Gyrdsson, Gyrd leader of the renegades in old New York, DH
Hadley, Melissa master communications technician at SE Seneca, DH
Hall of Crystals A meeting place in the new Ahmanya where knowledge is preserved, TLC
Hawks, Luke, Dr. geneticist in Sulphur Creek *(TIASC)*
Heather Waitress at "The Everglades" restaurant in Flamingo, Florida, DIE
Heflin, Jack Alias for Steve Cliff, MOM
Henry ally of Roos Jones, TLT
Herchenroeder, Matthew Physician aboard the *Silverfire,* DIE
Hidden Garden, The Luxurious restaurant in Eagle City, TLC
Highboy, Alanthus Chef at Beulah's Place, TLC
Hilda, Sister Guestmistress in community at Bethesda, LROM
Hod Forge worker in Brandow, LROM
Hol Ahmanyan name for Phobos *(RTE)*
holoport "talking ring," able to convey messages by hologram, DH
Hoshino, Stephen Earth's pre-eminent astrophysicist, TRA
Hoskins, Raymond, Col. leader in Earth Defense League, DH

hostis	The characteristic tree of the deep forests of old Ahmanya, TLC
Hroswitha, Sister	Physician in community at Bethesda, LROM
Huss, James	Pirate patrol leader, MOM
Ignis	Space Command lead warship, TRA
Ilien	Original Teagarden homestead *(COD)*
illunas	Ahmanyan word for the luminous lichen in the wilds of Mars, LROM
Imlah Taltahni	"Refuge of Twilight"—Ahmanyan city, LROM
Iron Maiden	NME space craft that secretly followed the *Silverfire* to Europa, DIE
Izmaka	Prince of Ahmanya, LROM
Jacksie	Friend of the McTaggarts, MOM
Jam	another assailant against Mark and Joe, DH
James Nathan	The dumb-bell shaped ship in the Deep Space Expedition of 2130 *(TOOT)*
Janitor	Guardian, historian, etc. for the First Races in the current age, LROM, DH, THOD, TLC
Jenner, Jeff	Smuggler in asteroid traffic; partner with Lurton Zimbardo, TRA
Jenny	Kristina Bethany's robotic attendant, TLC
Jett, Major	retired officer, Space Command, resident *(TIASC)*
Jewell, Rebecca	Planetary geologist aboard the *James Nathan (TOOT)*
Jimmy	Local citizen who joined pirates, MOM
Jock	driver for the Banjoman, LROM
John	Engine room technician for NME, JTP
Johnny	controller among the captors, DH
Johnson, Caleb	Second-in-command to Allen Foster aboard the *James Nathan (TOOT)*
Johnson, Cora	Chief ioneer aboard the *James Nathan (TOOT)*
Johnson, Mark	upright citizen of Eagle City, LROM
Jones, Frederick	Police captain in Seven Leaves, LROM
Jones, Mickey	Miner; head of the colony on the western edge of the Martian Sea, MOM
Jones, Roos	leader of the men who took the Starmen into custody, TLT
Jude	assistant among the renegades, DH
Karax	Guardian of Olovanda, THOD
Kennatha	Princess of Ahmanya, LROM
Kerrel, Lee	Rebellious NME employee aboard the *Starventure* JTP
Kilindra Forest	One of several planted forests in new Ahmanya; *kilindra*=resurrection, TLC
Kimball	Smuggler in asteroid traffic; partner with Lurton Zimbardo, TRA

Kinley, Damien	Professor who works in artificial intelligence *(TFO)*
Kitsualuk, Noah	Eskimo crewman aboard the *Silverfire,* DIE
Koalang	Cuddly, koala-like animal; pet for isolated spacemen, TRA
Krafft, Erica	Scientist in Aquapolis, DIE
Kramer, Val	Commander Lewis' chief researcher, THOD
Kuznika	Settlers (the Wind People), LROM
Lamdo	Ahmanyan name for Europa *(RTE)*
Larson's Folly	sixth planet in the Marcanto system, TLT
LaTanya	Major Jett's daughter *(TIASC)*
Lather	Pirate leader under Lurton Zimbardo; one of the five lieutenants, TRA
Lawrence, Dwight	head of security at Thomas Outbase *(AMOT)*
Lewis, John	Commander at Space Command in Amundsen City, MOM
Leyden, Rebecca	NME astrophysicist, JTP
Lily	Montezuma Vly's partner, TRA
Linda	Miner at the colony at the western edge of the Martian Sea, MOM
Lizard's Watering Hole	Saloon owned and managed by the McTaggarts, MOM
Locomotors	Small, self-contained propellers for underwater travel, DIE
Logan Creek	waterway bordering Five Acre Meadow, DH
Lorry	Smuggler in asteroid traffic; partner with Lurton Zimbardo, TRA
Lucians	Original name of the race that became the Xenobots, DH
Lux Mundi	Richard Starlight's personal spaceship, TRA
Luxa	Xenobots' home planet when they were the Lucians, DH
Mack	Pirate on patrol in Eagle City, MOM
Macmillan, Major	Official at Space Command in Amundsen City, MOM
Malda	Name of the Titanians' home planet, LROM
Manley, Temple	Mark's Seaton's 19th century ancestor *(RTE)*
Marcanto	a star about two-thirds of the way across the Milky Way galaxy from Earth
Maria, Sister	Mother of the Bethesda community, LROM
Marks-Owens, Mary	Fleet commander of SE ships, TRA
Marston	Original name of Eagle City *(COD)*
Mary Sue	One of the rescue ships during the *Olympia* disaster *(TFO)*
Maura!	Supreme Ahmanyan exclamation, THOD
McTaggart, Donal	Proprietor of *Lizard's Watering Hole*; husband of Doris, MOM
McTaggart, Doris	Proprietor of *Lizard's Watering Hole*; wife of Donal, MOM
McTorney, Paul	captain on the Xenobot ship, DH
Mendoza, Mariano	"Manny"; project manager at Thomas Outbase *(AMOT)*
Meteorologines	the machines that govern weather in Armstrong Forest, LROM
Michael Adams	SE space craft from Ganymede, DIE

Mike	Traitor in the flight tower at Eagle City, MOM
Mikel	Ahmanyan man, pilot of the crew that retrieved the sixth Treasure; fiancé of Yenl *(TET)*
Mole	Miner at the colony at the western edge of the Martian Sea, MOM
Molly	Shuttlecraft belonging to Aquapolis, DIE
Montezuma's Castle	Name of crescent-shaped asteroid where Montezuma Vly lives, TRA
moolafentori	Martian plums *(RTE)*
Moonbus	A motorized vehicle for traveling on the moon, MOM
Mooncircle Lake	small, circular lake near Mark's grandparents' ranch, DH
Morris	A population center in the north wasteland of Mars, TRA
Moze	an assailant against Mark and Joe, DH
Mtalan	Ahmanyan name for Nyx *(RTE)*
Muallem, Tanya	officer in charge of Tharsos during David Foster's funeral, DH
Mullaney, Kathryn	Starman one year ahead of Zip, Mark, and Joe, TRA
Namon, Dr.	Benefactor on the Asteroid, LROM
Nathan, James	U.S. President martyred during the Collapse *(TOOT)*
Needle, the	Observation deck at Starlight Academy, MOM
New Emmaus	Settlement on Mars, TRA
New Ilien	Second Teagarden homestead *(COD)*
New Washington	Capital city of the United States, TRA
Newman, Gene	See *Gene Newman*
Nolan, Robert	Founder and chairman of Nolan Mining Enterprise, TRA
North, Averette	Retired woman in New Emmaus on Mars; married to Marshal, TRA
North, Marshal	Retired man in New Emmaus on Mars; married to Averette, TRA
Nova	Robert Nolan's personal spacecraft, TLC
Nsedna Zar	"Diamond of the South"; Ahmanyan city, located in the planet's southern hemisphere *(TET)*
Nskao	Great-grandmother of Stenafi, THOD
O	The astrophysicist who discovered the tenth planet, JTP
O'Brian, Beulah	Owner of Beulah's Place, TLC
O'Gorman, Eamon	Roman Catholic priest in Ireland, THOD
Olancha	Ahmanyan name for Quaoar *(RTE)*
Oliver	Communications Officer on the *Olympia (TFO)*
Olovanda	Ahmanyan name for city inside Tharsos *(RTE)*
Olympia	Largest luxury space liner in 2110 *(TFO)*
Omega	NME exploratory ship aboard the *Starventure*, JTP
Orion	Command ship for the Solar Guard, THOD
Oskay, Mandy	Member of Teagarden's community; medic, LROM
Ossëan	Ahmanyan name for Tharsos *(TET)*

Paboom, Yarrow	operations manager at Thomas Outbase *(AMOT)*
Pallas Avenue	street on which Starlight Eagle City is located, LROM
Pan	one of the renegades in Eagle City, DH
Parfitt, Jonathan	NME planetary geologist, JTP
Parker, Timothy	Captain in the Solar Guard section of Space Command, THOD
Petrescu, Marian	Technician aboard the *James Nathan (TOOT)*
Pleera	Ahmanyan commander of *Ossëan*, THOD
Planetsphere	A Xenobot construction for use in gas giants, THOD
Pletcher, Sarah	Navigator aboard the *Silverfire*, DIE
Pocket world	large cavity inside an igneous asteroid *(RTE)*
Popper	electric ground vehicle; see also *EGV*, LROM
Poppy, Gerald	One of six crewmembers on *Tartarus*, Zimbardo's escape ship, TRA
Prester, Marjie	One of the Tunnel People, wife of Richard, MOM
Prester, Richard	One of the Tunnel People, husband of Marjie, MOM
Putnam, Troy	Captain of the pirates, MOM
Qazilbash, Urooj	Pakistani woman; classmate of David Foster, MOM
RRFC System	Rapid Random Frequency Change System, used to keep compad transmissions secret and untraceable, JTP
Raffon Dorn	Ahmanyan crewmember on *Ossëan*, THOD
Randy	citizen of Eagle City, LROM
Razzy	pilot among the renegades, DH
Reconobot	Armed robot used for locating fugitives, TRA
Register of Peoples	A listing similar to a census, TRA
Relcon	small town north of Eagle City, LROM
Reuel	Pseudonym of Sotik in Starlight Tower, DH
Ridger, Reuben	leader of nuclear terrorists in 2040s USA, LROM
Ridger, Rose	wife of Reuben Ridger, LROM
Ripling, Paul	Technician in Eagle City flight control tower, MOM
Robbins, Owsley	friend of Joe Taylor, TLT
Sa Zomne	*Bolt of Fire,* Saadervo's battlecraft, THOD
Saadervo	Ahmanyan; governor of *Imlah Taltahni*, LROM
Sabbath George	See *George St. George,* TRA
Saleh	A Lucian, TLC
Sando Suan Vu	Fortress of Certain Hope; one of the fifteen Ahmanyan refuges *(TET)*
Sandy	wife of Thomas Starlight, LROM
Santilla	High King of Ahmanya; killed in war, LROM
Sats	Small, unmanned electronic satellite observers, TRA
Saunders	Rebellious NME employee aboard the *Starventure*, JTP
Sayer, Michael	One of the Tunnel People, former thief, MOM
Schnorbus, Stephanie	Master Chef aboard Space Station Zane, TLT

Seaton, Jenn	Mark's grandmother *(RTE)*
Seaton, Micah	Mark's grandfather *(RTE)*
Sentinel	Montezuma Vly's spaceship, TRA
Seven Leaves	small town on Mars, home of Andrew Forge, LROM
Shaw, Major Alvin	Official at Space Command in Amundsen City, MOM; Commander in DH
Sheol	"the Pit"; core of Thomas Outbase *(AMOT)*
Shideler, Fay	security person in Eagle City spaceport, LROM
Silver Cloud	One of the ships in Lurton Zimbardo's fleet, captained by Lather, TRA
Silverfire	SE spacecraft for Europa mission, DIE
Sim Sala Bim	SE official in Yellow City on Ceres, TRA
Sione	Ahmanyan woman, on the crew that retrieved the sixth Treasure *(TET)*
Sisters of St. Hildegard	the monastic order of herbalists, LROM
Slant, Graham	Pirate leader under Lurton Zimbardo; one of the five lieutenants; one of six crew members on *Tartarus*, Zimbardo's escape ship, TRA
Slideway	Moving sidewalk in Amundsen City, JTP
Snell, Adam	SE planetary geologist, DIE
Solar	Measure of money, TRA
Solar Guard	Space Command's cooperative venture to defend the sun from the Xenobots, THOD
Solar Unit	a measure of distance; diameter of the Solar System: 7,350,000,000 miles, TLT
Sonarvision	Instrument that allows crewmembers on a ship to see their surroundings in the dark, DIE
Sotik	an Ahmanyan, LROM
Space Station Zane	research outpost and way station in orbit about Larson's Folly, TLT
Speed	Pirate on patrol in Eagle City, MOM
Spelford	Pirate crewmember under Lather, TRA
Spud Peeler	Cargo freighter used to enter Mars, MOM
Sseran	Leader of the Ahmanyans on Olovanda, TLT
St. George	Flagship of Earth fleet, MOM
St. George, George	Asteroid miner who first discovered the Pirates' Asteroid, TRA
Stagnum, Tony	One of six crewmembers on *Tartarus*, Zimbardo's escape ship, TRA
Stann, Edna	Head of planetary science at Starlight Academy, MOM
Stansby, Charles	prospector, LROM
Star Bower	Floral waterpark aboard Space Station Zane, TLT
Starhope	research city in parallel Earth, TLT

Starkley, Jonas Shipbuilder *(TFO)*
Starlight, Caedmon Richard and Jan's 19-year-old son *(AMOT)*
Starlight, Ellarine daughter of Caedmon Starlight, TLT
Starlight, John Richard and Jan's 24-year-old son *(AMOT)*
Starlight, Michaela Richard and Jan's 17-year-old daughter *(AMOT)*
Starlight, Veronica Richard and Jan's 24-year-old daughter *(AMOT)*
Starman's Privilege Prerogative of a Starman to take precedence over normal operations, MOM
Starventure The spacecraft the Starmen take to Nyx, JTP
Stenafi an Ahmanyan, LROM
Stepanovich, John Technician in Eagle City flight control tower, MOM
Stoutheart Henry's spaceship, TLT
Stubb Pirate worker under Lurton Zimbardo; oversaw the manufacturing center, TRA
Sturgess, Wynn Pirate in charge of the main guard at the control tower, MOM
Sulphur Creek village in arid portion of southern Mars *(TIASC)*
Suncatcher Starlight Enterprise spacecraft, LROM
Suncrest Name of an Ahmanyan shuttlecraft based on Tharsos *(TET)*
Sunis Northern city on prefire Ahmanya *(TET)*
Sweet Bubble Tea House, Ltd. shop in Buckeye, TLT
TDS Tetrahedral Defense System, THOD
Tanwick VII, Harry Huge donor to Richard Starlight's Special Projects Discretionary Account, DIE
Tartarus Lurton Zimbardo's private ship, TRA
Tayan Ahmanyan child, LROM, THOD
Teagarden, Amanda Wife of Colin *(COD)*
Teagarden, April Daughter of Colin and Amanda; twin to Renee *(COD)*
Teagarden, Colin Early pioneer on Mars, twin to Kevin *(COD)*
Teagarden, Cristina Daughter of Kevin and Cynthia *(COD)*
Teagarden, Cynthia Wife of Kevin *(COD)*
Teagarden, Daniel a Wind Person, LROM
Teagarden, Jenny Daughter of Kevin and Cynthia *(COD)*
Teagarden, Kevin Twin brother of Colin *(COD)*
Teagarden, Molly Daughter of Kevin and Cynthia *(COD)*
Teagarden, Renee Daughter of Colin and Amanda; twin to April *(COD)*
Tegakwitha, Kateri Robert Nolan's second-in-command, THOD
Tempest Starlight Enterprise fleet ship, TRA
Tetrahedral Defense System four-point solar satellite system, THOD
Thalassa, Stavri One of the tunnel leader, and their unofficial leader, MOM
Tharuji Ahmanyan chief engineer for the TDS, THOD
Thomas Outbase outlying research center for Starlight Enterprise *(AMOT)*
Thronson, Ingrid Commander of Space Station Zane in orbit around Larson's Folly , TLT

Timon	Ahmanyan child, LROM
Tintau, Mr.	Pirate official, MOM
Tony	one of the renegades; an Australian, DH
Torbin, Evan	chief engineer at Mars Base, LROM
Torrez, Cathy	Cook aboard the *Silverfire,* DIE
Trandon, "Sledge"	mechanic at Thomas Outbase *(AMOT)*
Treadgold, Nicholas	Chef of the *Starventure*, JTP
Truesilver	an alloy of silver noted for elegance, TLT
Tunnel People	Citizens of the secret tunnels under Eagle City, MOM
Turpin, Randall	"Turp"; free-lance errand boy in New York area, DH
Ubuntu, Desmond	manager of Starlight Enterprise, Eagle City
Underbird	Starmen's name for their mantaship, DIE
Uneven Stephen	Stone carver; one of the Tunnel People, MOM
Unicorn's Well	Restaurant and social center in Eagle City near the launching pad, MOM
Valerie	SE five-seater Martian shuttlecraft, DH
Veloso, Monica	Space traffic controller in Eagle City, DIE
Verderber, Wilbur	Chief Manager of Mars Base, THOD
Vigilant Warrior	Spaceship used by Starman to explore asteroids, TRA
Vintager	experimental spacecraft equipped with wormhole drive *(AMOT)*
Vixa	Tayan's koalang, THOD
Vly, Montezuma	Reclusive asteroid miner, TRA, DH
Vornado, Andor	Stephen Hoshino's first assistant, THOD
Waldo	assistant to botanist in Sulphur Creek *(TIASC)*
Watanabe, Mika	head of SE security at Mars Base, DH
Westcott	Population center near the equator on Mars, TRA
Will	Senior technician in the tower of Eagle City, TRA
Wind People	The few people who remained on Mars during the Collapse, and lived by harnessing the wind, MOM, *(COD)*
Wind's End	restaurant in Eagle City owned by Gillian, LROM
Withers, Bernard	One of six crew members on *Tartarus*, Zimbardo's escape ship, TRA
World Calendar	Reformed calendar adopted January 1, 2101, JTP
Yellow City	The major population center on Ceres, TRA
Yenl	Ahmanyan woman, on the crew that retrieved the sixth Treasure; fiancée of Mikel *(TET)*
Yoshimoto, Laurel	Starman, MOM
Zack	Member of a pirate patrol in Eagle City, MOM
Zane, Space Station	*see* Space Station Zane, TLT
Zeavin, James	Planetary geologist aboard the *Silverfire;* nicknamed "Folding Jim", DIE
Zimbardo, Lurton	Pirate leader who escaped with seven others when the rest of

	the pirates were captured, MOM; leader of pirate band after Troy Putnam, TRA, JTP
Zootz, Lloyd	crony of the Banjoman, LROM

GLOSSARY
Of Lesser People, Places, And Things
In The Starman Series: By Title
in story order

The Eight Treasures

Agrologists	Scientists who study plant growth and development
Mikel	Ahmanyan man, pilot of the crew that retrieved the sixth Treasure; fiancé of Yenl
Nsedna Zar	"Diamond of the South"; Ahmanyan city, located in the planet's southern hemisphere
Ossëan	Ahmanyan name for Tharsos
Sando Suan Vu	Fortress of Certain Hope; one of the fifteen Ahmanyan refuges
Sione	Ahmanyan woman, on the crew that retrieved the sixth Treasure
Suncrest	Name of an Ahmanyan shuttlecraft based on Tharsos
Sunis	A northern city on prefire Ahmanya
Yenl	Ahmanyan woman, on the crew that retrieved the sixth Treasure; fiancée of Mikel

The City of Dust

Final Ilien	Last Teagarden homestead
Ilien	Original Teagarden homestead
Marston	Original name of Eagle City
New Ilien	Second Teagarden homestead
Teagarden, Amanda	Wife of Colin
Teagarden, April	Daughter of Colin and Amanda; twin to Renee
Teagarden, Colin	Early pioneer on Mars, twin to Kevin
Teagarden, Cristina	Daughter of Kevin and Cynthia
Teagarden, Cynthia	Wife of Kevin
Teagarden, Jenny	Daughter of Kevin and Cynthia
Teagarden, Kevin	Twin brother of Colin
Teagarden, Molly	Daughter of Kevin and Cynthia
Teagarden, Renee	Daughter of Colin and Amanda; twin to April

The Flight of the *Olympia*

Conrad, Captain	Captain of the *Olympia*
Excelsis II	Robotic explorer with artificial intelligence *(TFO)*
Kinley, Damien	Professor who works in artificial intelligence
Mary Sue	One of the rescue ships during the *Olympia* disaster

Oliver	Communications Officer on the *Olympia*
Olympia	Largest luxury space liner in 2110
Starkley, Jonas	Shipbuilder

The Orphans of Titan

Arndt, Iris	Navigator of the exploratory vehicle aboard the *James Nathan*
Cardigan, Ellis	Ship's recorder aboard the *James Nathan*
Curry, Elizabeth	Maiden name of wife of Allen Foster
James Nathan	The dumb-bell shaped ship in the Deep Space Expedition of 2130
Jewell, Rebecca	Planetary geologist aboard the *James Nathan*
Johnson, Caleb	Second-in-command to Allen Foster aboard the *James Nathan*
Johnson, Cora	Chief ioneer aboard the *James Nathan*
Nathan, James	U.S. President martyred during the Collapse
Petrescu, Marian	Technician aboard the *James Nathan*

A Matter of Time

Crane, Link	mechanic at Thomas Outbase
Decker, Eleanor	Starman hoping to make first wormhole journey
Deefer, Toby	mechanic at Thomas Outbase
Lawrence, Dwight	head of security at Thomas Outbase
Mendoza, Mariano "Manny"	project manager at Thomas Outbase
Paboom, Yarrow	operations manager at Thomas Outbase
Sheol	"the Pit"; core of Thomas Outbase
Starlight, Caedmon	Richard and Jan's 19-year-old son
Starlight, John	Richard and Jan's 24-year-old son
Starlight, Michaela	Richard and Jan's 17-year-old daughter
Starlight, Veronica	Richard and Jan's 24-year-old daughter
Thomas Outbase	outlying research center for Starlight Enterprise
Trandon, "Sledge"	mechanic at Thomas Outbase
Vintager	experimental spacecraft equipped with wormhole drive

Mutiny On Mars

Aviles, Cambria	Zip's navigator on the *Star Ranger* on the trip to Mars
Baumann, David	Assistant custodian at Starlight Academy
Beamscreen	Computer display of pure photons assembled in air
Boneyard	See *Field of Obsolescence*
Collins, Crag	Starman
Cooper, Jon	Assistant custodian at Starlight Academy
Datatile	Item the size and shape of a clipboard that contains huge amounts of information
De Koven, Quentin	Commander of the flagship *St. George* of Earth fleet
Dirk	Friend of the McTaggarts

Dodd, Mike	Head of custodial services at Starlight Academy
Dukas, Dr.	Professor at Starlight Academy
Epstein, Benton	Commander of Starlight Academy in 2150
Field of Obsolescence	Plain on Mars where discarded spacecraft are stored
Frost	Foreman; one of Troy Putnam's pirates
Golden, Mel	Technician in Eagle City flight control tower
Koalangs	Pets enjoyed by lonely spacemen
Gray Fleet	Elite pirate ship captains under Troy Putnam
Gripp, Mr.	Pirate official in charge of supply depot and refinery
Heflin, Jack	Alias for Steve Cliff
Huss, James	Pirate patrol leader
Jacksie	Friend of the McTaggarts
Jimmy	Local citizen who joined pirates
Jones, Mickey	Miner; head of the colony on the western edge of the Martian Sea
Lewis, John	Commander at Space Command in Amundsen City
Linda	Miner at the colony at the western edge of the Martian Sea
Lizard's Watering Hole	Saloon owned and managed by the McTaggarts
Mack	Pirate on patrol in Eagle City
Macmillan, Major	Official at Space Command in Amundsen City
McTaggart, Donal	Proprietor of *Lizard's Watering Hole*; husband of Doris
McTaggart, Doris	Proprietor of *Lizard's Watering Hole*; wife of Donal
Mike	Traitor in the flight tower at Eagle City
Mole	Miner at the colony at the western edge of the Martian Sea
Moonbus	Motorized vehicle for traveling on the Moon
Needle, the	Observation deck at Starlight Academy
Prester, Marjie	One of the Tunnel People, wife of Richard
Prester, Richard	One of the Tunnel People, husband of Marjie
Putnam, Troy	Captain of the pirates
Qazilbash, Urooj	Pakistani woman; classmate of David Foster
Ripling, Paul	Technician in Eagle City flight control tower
St. George	Flagship of Earth fleet
Sayer, Michael	One of the Tunnel People, former thief
Shaw, Major	Official at Space Command in Amundsen City
Speed	Pirate on patrol in Eagle City
Spud Peeler	Cargo freighter used to enter Mars
Stann, Edna	Head of planetary science at Starlight Academy
Starman's Privilege	Prerogative of a Starman to take precedence over normal operations
Stepanovich, John	Technician in Eagle City flight control tower
Sturgess, Wynn	Pirate in charge of the main guard at the control tower
Thalassa, Stavri	One of the Tunnel People, and their unofficial leader
Tintau, Mr.	Pirate official

Tunnel People	Dwellers in the secret tunnels under Eagle City
Uneven Stephen	Stone carver; one of the Tunnel People
Unicorn's Well	Restaurant and social center in Eagle City
Wind People	The few people who remained on Mars during the Collapse and lived by harnessing the wind
Yoshimoto, Laurel	Starman
Zack	Member of a pirate patrol in Eagle City
Zimbardo, Lurton	Pirate leader who escaped with seven others when the rest of the pirates were captured

The Runaway Asteroid

Adamant	Asteroid near Montezuma's Castle
Airbot	An armed, robotic flying sphere for locating fugitives
Amundsen Base	The spaceport in Amundsen City
Banjoman	The man in charge of producing flilox on Mars
Bennett, Benjamin	Captain of the *Ignis* and commander of a Space Command fleet of twelve
Blake	Pirate crewmember under Lather
Bolcher	Pirate leader under Lurton Zimbardo; one of the five lieutenants
Chamber	Room in the pirates' asteroid that simulates beautiful landscapes
Crass	Pirate leader under Lurton Zimbardo; one of the five lieutenants
Denn, Beowulf	Chief assistant to Robert Nolan
Firewasp fighters	Small, very fast and highly maneuverable SE spacecraft
Fleet of Twelve	Largest normal fleet in the Space Command panoply
Flilox	An illegal hallucinogenic narcotic produced from lichen on Mars
Gebbeth, Maury	Pirate leader under Lurton Zimbardo; one of the five lieutenants; pilot of the *Tartarus*
Gene Newman	Senior technician in the control center under Zimbardo
Gloria	The spaceship which took Lee High Eagle to Mars in 2014
Greegles	Mythical dwellers in the asteroids; small metal humanoid figures
Hoshino, Stephen	Earth's pre-eminent astrophysicist
Ignis	Space Command lead warship
Jenner, Jeff	Smuggler in asteroid traffic; partner with Lurton Zimbardo
Kimball	Smuggler in asteroid traffic; partner with Lurton Zimbardo
Koalang	Cuddly, koala-like animal; pet for isolated spacemen
Lather	Pirate leader under Lurton Zimbardo; one of the five lieutenants
Lily	Montezuma Vly's partner

Lorry	Smuggler in asteroid traffic; partner with Lurton Zimbardo
Lux Mundi	Richard Starlight's personal spaceship
Marks-Owens, Mary	Fleet commander of SE ships
Montezuma's Castle	Name of crescent-shaped asteroid where Montezuma Vly lives
Morris	A population center in the north wasteland of Mars
Mullaney, Kathryn	Starman one year ahead of Zip, Mark, and Joe
New Emmaus	Settlement on Mars
New Washington	Capital city of the United States
Newman, Gene	See *Gene Newman*
Nolan, Robert	Founder and chairman of Nolan Mining Enterprise
North, Averette	Retired woman in New Emmaus on Mars; married to Marshal
North, Marshal	Retired man in New Emmaus on Mars; married to Averette
Poppy, Gerald	One of six crewmembers on *Tartarus*, Zimbardo's escape ship
Register of Peoples	A listing similar to a census
Sabbath George	See *St. George, George*
Sats	Small, unmanned electronic satellite observers
Sentinel	Montezuma Vly's spaceship
Silver Cloud	One of the ships in Lurton Zimbardo's fleet, captained by Lather
Sim Sala Bim	SE official in Yellow City on Ceres
Slant, Graham	Pirate leader under Lurton Zimbardo; one of the five lieutenants; one of six crew members on *Tartarus*, Zimbardo's escape ship
Solar	Measure of money
Spelford	Pirate crewmember under Lather
Stagnum, Tony	One of six crewmembers on *Tartarus*, Zimbardo's escape ship
St. George, George	Asteroid miner who first discovered the Pirates' Asteroid
Stubb	Pirate worker under Lurton Zimbardo; oversaw the manufacturing center
Tartarus	Lurton Zimbardo's private ship
Tempest	Starlight Enterprise fleet command ship
Vigilant Warrior	Spaceship used by Starman to explore asteroids
Vly, Montezuma	Reclusive asteroid miner
Westcott	A population center near the equator on Mars
Will	Senior technician in the tower of Eagle City
Withers, Bernard	One of six crew members on *Tartarus*, Zimbardo's escape ship
Yellow City	The major population center on Ceres

Journey to the Tenth Planet

Alexandra	A member of the SE production team
Armstrong Forest	The huge tract of forest in the heart of Amundsen City
Astrogazing	The hobby or pastime of viewing the heavens

Barneveld, Sherry	First baby born in the 22nd century
Bethany, Kristina	Cultural sociologist at Earthbase on Titan
Bors, Derf	Captain of the *Starventure*
Bronk, Dennis	Chemical engineer in charge of the NME exploration team
Caidin, Martin	Navigator aboard the *Starventure*
Compad	Small personal communications device
Cosmological Reference Book	Book used to locate heavenly bodies
Duncan, Frank	SE electronics technician aboard the *Starventure*
Elijah	The spacecraft piloted by Allen Foster in the Deep Space Expedition of 2130
Elijah Base	The base on Titan, named after the spacecraft piloted by Earthmen when they first encountered the Titanians
Forrester, Evelyn	Chef's assistant aboard the *Starventure*
Gold, Aaron	Ship's physician and medical researcher
Gorge, the	Vast crack in stone on Titan where life-support machines are located
John	Engine room technician for NME
Kerrel, Lee	Rebellious NME employee aboard the *Starventure*
Leyden, Rebecca	NME astrophysicist
O	The astrophysicist who discovered the tenth planet
Omega	NME exploratory ship aboard the *Starventure*
RRFC System	Rapid Random Frequency Change System, used to keep compad transmissions secret and untraceable
Parfitt, Jonathan	NME planetary geologist
Saunders	Rebellious NME employee aboard the *Starventure*
Slideway	Moving sidewalk in Amundsen City
Starventure	The spacecraft the Starmen take to Nyx
Treadgold, Nicholas	Chef of the *Starventure*
World Calendar	Reformed calendar adopted January 1, 2101

Descent Into Europa

Ahmanya	Benefactors' name for their home planet
Aquapolis	Undersea city off the southern coast of Florida, dedicated to research
Avery, Stephen	Asteroid miner who discovered the greegles on Adamant
Bennick, Gray	Mechanical engineer on the *Silverfire*
Blaine, Jonathan	Six-year-old boy who asks the Starmen for their autographs in Flamingo Spaceport
Boone, Emily	Inhabitant of Final Ilien; married to Gabriel
Boone, Gabriel	Inhabitant of Final Ilien; married to Emily
Coxhead, Ralph Q.	Executive Director of Aquapolis
Crossfield, Scott	Scientist in Aquapolis
Dufaure, Yancy	Top space pilot for SE; pilot of *Silverfire*

Essington, Katie	Celestial biologist aboard the *Silverfire*
Final Ilien	Oldest settlement of the Wind People
Folding Jim	see *Zeavin, James*
Heather	Waitress at "The Everglades" restaurant in Flamingo, Florida
Herchenroeder, Matthew	Physician aboard the *Silverfire*
Iron Maiden	NME space craft that secretly followed the *Silverfire* to Europa
Kitsualuk, Noah	Eskimo crewman aboard the *Silverfire*
Krafft, Erica	Scientist in Aquapolis
Locomotors	Small, self-contained propellers for underwater travel
Michael Adams	SE space craft from Ganymede
Molly	Shuttlecraft belonging to Aquapolis
Pletcher, Sarah	Navigator aboard the *Silverfire*
Silverfire	SE spacecraft for Europa mission
Snell, Adam	SE planetary geologist
Sonarvision	Instrument that allows crewmembers on a ship to see their surroundings in the dark
Tanwick VII, Harry	Huge donor to Richard Starlight's Special Projects Discretionary Account
Torrez, Cathy	Cook aboard the *Silverfire*
Underbird	Starmen's name for their mantaship
Veloso, Monica	Space traffic controller in Eagle City
Zeavin, James	Planetary geologist aboard the *Silverfire;* nicknamed "Folding Jim"

The Lost Race of Mars

Ahmanya	Ahmanyan for Mars
alzenta	Ahmanyan for greegles
Arachnoid	spider-shaped robot
Az	harvester for the Banjoman
Azemir	Ahmanyan name for the original fifth planet
Bellar, Peter	Forge's second-in-command in the desert
Bethesda	site of community of herbalist nuns
Bob	secretary to Mayor Edmund Warner
Brandow	small town far northwest of Eagle City
Dathan, Mrs. Susan	Mr. Forge's secretary
Dewdney, Derek	Richard's navigator on SE warship
EGV	electric ground vehicle; see also *popper*
Elder, The	an Ahmanyan
Elijah, Father	priest at Bethesda
flilox	drug made from luminous lichen
Garrison Building	building in Eagle City
Gibson	Commander of the spaceport in Eagle City

Gillian	owner of *Wind's End*
Gordon	one of the Banjoman's security personnel
Grayson radiation detectors	search instruments that leave atomic residue
Gresham, Dana	reporter in Eagle City
Hilda, Sister	Guestmistress in community at Bethesda
Hod	Forge worker in Brandow
Hroswitha, Sister	Physician in community at Bethesda
illunas	Ahmanyan word for the luminous lichen in the wilds of Mars
Imlah Taltahni	"Refuge of Twilight"—Ahmanyan city
Izmaka	Prince of Ahmanya
First Races	The first created peoples of the Universe
Janitor	Guardian, historian, etc. for the First Races in the current age
Jock	driver for the Banjoman
Johnson, Mark	upright citizen of Eagle City
Jones, Frederick	Police captain in Seven Leaves
Kennatha	Princess of Ahmanya
Kuznika	Settlers (the Wind People)
Malda	Name of the Titanians' home planet
Maria, Sister	Mother of the Bethesda community
Meteorologines	the machines that govern weather in Armstrong Forest
Namon, Dr.	Benefactor on the Asteroid
Oskay, Mandy	Member of Teagarden's community; medic
Pallas Avenue	street on which Starlight Eagle City is located
Popper	electric ground vehicle; see also *EGV*
Randy	citizen of Eagle City
Relcon	small town north of Eagle City
Ridger, Reuben	leader of nuclear terrorists in 2040s USA
Ridger, Rose	wife of Reuben Ridger
Saadervo	Ahmanyan; governor of *Imlah Taltahni*
Sandy	wife of Thomas Starlight
Santilla	High King of Ahmanya; killed in war
Seven Leaves	small town on Mars, home of Andrew Forge
Shideler, Fay	security person in Eagle City spaceport
Sisters of St. Hildegard	the monastic order of herbalists
Sotik	Ahmanyan
Stansby, Charles	prospector
Stenafi	Ahmanyan
Suncatcher	Starlight Enterprise spacecraft
Tayan	Ahmanyan child
Teagarden, Daniel	a Wind Person
Timon	Ahmanyan child
Torbin, Evan	chief engineer at Mars Base
Ubuntu, Desmond	manager of Starlight Enterprise, Eagle City

Wind's End	restaurant in Eagle City owned by Gillian
Zootz, Lloyd	crony of the Banjoman

The Infestation at Sulphur Creek

Garvey, Henry, Dr.	botanist in Sulphur Creek
Hawks, Luke, Dr.	geneticist in Sulphur Creek
Jett, Major	retired officer, Space Command, resident
LaTanya	Major Jett's daughter
Sulphur Creek	village in arid portion of southern Mars
Waldo	assistant to botanist in Sulphur Creek

The Lost Tomorrow

Anh, Strich	one of the men who took the Starmen into custody
Bartrin, Jemno	leader of a brutal gang
Buckeye	small town
Jones, Roos	leader of the men who took the Starmen into custody
Crassendoog, Ira	old man in Buckeye; ally of Roos Jones
Da	Delian stellar engineer
Delians	race known in the late 22nd century, but not earlier
Endra	Ahmanyan word for Earth
Gasmen	Nickname for Roos Jones's enemies
Henry	ally of Roos Jones
Larson's Folly	sixth planet in the Marcanto system
Marcanto	a star about two-thirds of the way across the Milky Way galaxy from Earth
Robbins, Owsley	friend of Joe Taylor
Schnorbus, Stephanie	Master Chef aboard Space Station Zane
Solar Unit	a measure of distance; diameter of the Solar System: 7,350,000,000 miles
Space Station Zane	research outpost and way station in orbit about Larson's Folly
Sseran	Leader of the Ahmanyans on Olovanda
Star Bower	Floral waterpark aboard Space Station Zane
Starhope	research city in parallel Earth
Starlight, Ellarine	daughter of Caedmon Starlight
Stoutheart	Henry's spaceship
Sweet Bubble Tea House, Ltd.	shop in Buckeye
Thronson, Ingrid	Commander of Space Station Zane in orbit around Larson's Folly
Truesilver	an alloy of silver noted for elegance
Zane, Space Station	*see* Space Station Zane

Return to Europa

Bonny Swan	SE spacecraft
Domoli	Abandoned Ahmanyan city on Europa
Hol	Ahmanyan name for Phobos
Lamdo	Ahmanyan name for Europa
Manley, Temple	Mark's Seaton's 19th century ancestor
moolafentori	Martian plums
Mtalan	Ahmanyan name for Nyx
Olancha	Ahmanyan name for Quaoar
Olovanda	Ahmanyan name for Tharsos
Pocket world	large cavity inside an igneous asteroid
Seaton, Jenn	Mark's grandmother
Seaton, Micah	Mark's grandfather

Doomsday Horizon

Bando	communications expert among the renegades
Bishop City	Undersea city near Bermuda
Break's Knob	huge boulder in forest near Mark's grandparents' ranch
Brown Crab	five-seater spacecraft
Carley	assistant among the renegades
Coaticook	Joe Taylor's birthplace in rural Québec
Collins, Agena	Space Command liaison to SE
Doak	assistant among the renegades
Dyar, Neal	Starman stationed on Mercury
Earth Defense League	organization allegedly formed to fight Xenobots; ploy of enemies
Eckman Warehouse	criminals' food storage site in New York
Elm	gunner among the captors
Five Acre Meadow	site in Armstrong Forest
Gruffydd, Ceinwen	SE's manager on Tharsos
Hadley, Melissa	master communications technician at SE Seneca
Glass, Alison	dispatcher at Starlight Seneca
Gyrdsson, Gyrd	leader of the renegades in old New York
Hoskins, Raymond, Col.	leader in Earth Defense League
holoport	"talking ring," able to convey messages by hologram
Jam	another assailant against Mark and Joe
Johnny	controller among the captors
Jude	assistant among the renegades
Logan Creek	waterway bordering Five Acre Meadow
Luxa	Xenobots' home planet when they were the Lucians
McTorney, Paul	captain on the Xenobot ship
Mooncircle Lake	small, circular lake near Mark's grandparents' ranch

Moze	an assailant against Mark and Joe
Muallem, Tanya	officer in charge of Tharsos during David Foster's funeral
Pan	one of the renegades in Eagle City
Razzy	pilot among the renegades
Reuel	Pseudonym of Sotik in Starlight Tower
Tony	one of the renegades; an Australian
Turpin, Randall	"Turp"; free-lance errand boy in New York area
Valerie	SE five-seater Martian shuttlecraft
Watanabe, Mika	head of SE security at Mars Base

The Heart of Danger

Adar, Eben	20th Century electronics genius
Avidroid	Birdlike semi-intelligent robot
Battlesphere	Ahmanyan two-seater warcraft
Couper, Aaron	Director of Elijah Base
Cynia	Sister to king Izmaka
Dan	Crewmember under Derf Bors; killed by Xenobots
Donna	Crewmember under Derf Bors; killed by Xenobots
Karax	Guardian of Olovanda
Kramer, Val	Commander Lewis' chief researcher
Maura!	Supreme Ahmanyan exclamation
Nskao	Great-grandmother of Stenafi
O'Gorman, Eamon	Roman Catholic priest in Ireland
Orion	Command ship for the Solar Guard
Parker, Timothy	A Captain in the Solar Guard section of Space Command
Planetsphere	A Xenobot construction for use in gas giants
Pleera	Ahmanyan commander of *Ossëan*
Raffon Dorn	Ahmanyan crewmember on *Ossëan*
Sa Zomne	*Bolt of Fire,* Saadervo's battlecraft
Solar Guard	Space Command's cooperative venture to defend the sun
TDS	Tetrahedral Defense System
Tegakwitha, Kateri	Robert Nolan's second-in-command
Tetrahedral Defense System	four-point solar satellite system
Tharuji	Ahmanyan chief engineer for the TDS
Verderber, Wilbur	Chief Manager of Mars Base
Vixa	Tayan's koalang
Vornado, Andor	Stephen Hoshino's first assistant

The Last Command

Beulah's Place	A restaurant in Amundsen City
Chathna	Ahmanyan warrior from Olovanda
Cohen, Zadok	Chief assistant of master ioneer Jesus Madera-Cruz
Furman, Gahan	Earthman with specialty in communications

Hall of Crystals	Meeting place in the new Ahmanya where knowledge is preserved
Hidden Garden, The	Luxurious restaurant in Eagle City
Highboy, Alanthus	Chef at Beulah's Place
hostis	The characteristic tree of the deep forests of old Ahmanya
Jenny	Kristina Bethany's robotic attendant
Kilindra Forest	One of several planted forests in new Ahmanya; *kilindra*=resurrection
Nova	Robert Nolan's personal spacecraft
O'Brian, Beulah	Owner of Beulah's Place
Saleh	Lucian

Vocabulary Not Used

When Galileo turned his telescope toward Saturn in 1610, even he was amazed. The planet looked nothing like others in the solar system. Through 17th century optics, Saturn appeared to be one bright star closely flanked by two dimmer ones — a blurry suggestion of the planet's magnificent rings. What Galileo did next was nearly as unusual as Saturn itself. He wanted to tell everyone what he had seen, but he also wanted to keep his work secret while he studied the puzzling planet. So, he published his discovery in code: *smais mr milmep oet ale umibunen ugttauir as*. Unscrambled, the anagram means "I have observed the highest planet tri-form."

These code words, or forms of them, would be excellent for Ahmanyan vocabulary!

ahntahr	ahn-TAR	sincerity
ahntahrmna	ahn-TARM-nuh	affection (related to *ahntahr*)
fea	FAY-uh	love (verb)
fean	FAY-ahn	beloved
adahr	ah-DAHR	
adrias	AH-dree-ahss	
mvaya	mm-VIE-uh	
voldolek	vahl-DOE-leck	
enseh	ENN-seh	
adyool	ah-DYOOL	
vento	VENN-toe	
daym	dame	
parayo	pa-RAY-yo	
palataka	pah-lah-TAH-kuh	
elthen	EL-thenn	
agar	ah-GAHR	
agazei	AH-guh-zay	
didalai	dee-dah-LIE	
gamer	gah-MEHR	
bomos	BOE-moss	
dikazo	DEE-kah-zoe	
ermas	EHR-mahss	
kathopsei	kah-THOPE-say	

kathizo	kah-THEE-zoe
meno	MEH-noe
mastrakinos	mah-strah-KEE-noss
pagain	pah-GA'een
plax	plax
rixa	RIX-uh
vixa	VIX-uh
thahn	thahn
thenn	thenn
frain	FRA'een
ayin	AH-yinn
telemo	TELL-eh-moe
alayn	ah-LAIN
rayra	RAY-ruh
shanak	shah-NACK
wakor	wah-KORE
nekor	neh- KORE
festoi	fess-TOY
osed	OH-sedd
zazin	ZAH-zinn
prail	prayl
a'nbanta	ah-nn-BAHN-tuh
ncapa	nn-KAH-puh
nyana	NYAH-nuh
ardath	AHR-dath
espero	ESS-pear-oh
kayem	KAY-emm
aatra	AAH-truh
aano	AAH-no
vaza	VAH-zuh
wan	wahn
tolka	TOLL-kuh
tyeltee	TYELL-tee
tyessee	TYESS-ee
mahssolka	mah-ss-SOLE-kuh
suan	swahn
di	dee

NUMBERS ONE THROUGH TEN

loon	loon	one
ti	tee	two
zaka	ZAH-kuh	three
mis	miss	four
gosa	GO-suh	five
nim	nihm	six
ba	bah	seven
kal	kahl	eight
man	mahn	nine
tenkra	TEN-kruh	ten

Proper Names

PEOPLE

Cynia	SINN-yuh	Sister to Izmaka
Izmaka	izz-MAH-kuh	Ahmanyan Prince, later King
Jogren	JOE-gren	
Karax	CARE-ax	Guardian of Olovanda
Kennatha	keh-NAH-thuh	Ahmanyan Princess
Kuznika	kooz-NEE-kuh	Settlers (the Wind People)
Mikel	MY-kell	
Nskao	nn-SKAH-oh	Great-grandmother of Stenafi
Pleera	PLEE-ruh	Commander of Ossëan/Tharsos
Raffon Dorn	raff-ahn DORN	
Saadervo	saah-DEHR-vo	
Santilla	sahn-TILL-uh	Ahmanyan High King
Sione	see-OH-nee	
Sotik	so-TEEK	
Sseran	ss-SEHR-ahn	
Stenafi	steh-NAH-fee	
Tayan	TIE-uhn	little girl in Imlah Taltahni
Timon	TIE-muhn	little boy in Imlah Taltahni
Sseran	ss-SER-ahn	physicist in Olovanda
Vixa	VIX-uh	Tayan's koalang
Yenl	YEH-n'l	

PLACES

Ahmanya	ah-MAHN-ya	Mars
Azemir	AH-zay-mere	the original fifth planet
Domoli	doe-MOE-lee	abandoned Ahmanyan city on Europa
Enkrina	en-KREE-nuh	Pluto
Endra	ENN-dra	Earth
Hol	haul	Phobos
Imlah Taltahni	IM-lah tall-TAH-nee	Refuge of Twilight
Lamdo	LAMB-doe	Europa
Malda	MAHL-duh	the Titanians' home planet
Mtalan	mm-ta-LAHN	Nyx
Nsedna Zar	nn-SED-nuh ZARR	city; "Diamond of the South"
Olancha	oh-LAWN-chuh	Quaoar
Olovanda	oh-low-VAHN-duh	City on Tharsos
Ossëan	oh-SAY-ahn	Tharsos
Sunis	SOO-niss	northern city in pristine Ahmanya

Vocabulary: Ahmanyan To English

ahntahr	ahn-TAR	sincerity
ahntahrmna	ahn-TARM-nuh	affection (related to *ahntahr*)
ajuni	ah-JOO-nee	guardian
alati	ah-LAH-tee	plural "be" (imperative)
allamah	ah-LAH-mah	word used for applause or to express approval or pleasure
alto	ALL-toe	I am (form of *alati)*
alzenta	all-ZEN-tuh	greegles
anhallo	ahn-HALL-oh	belonging to; native of
banna	BAN-nah	please (request)
basor	ba-SOHR	deep, strong, lasting
byela	BYAY-lah	from
chendro	CHEN-dro	who
dala	DAH-la	come (imperative)
dantra	DAHN-truh	to pass through; to enter
dianda	die-AHN-duh	treasure
donor	doe-NOHR	close (imperative)
e	ehh	to, toward, in the direction of
ekon	EH-konn	strong, powerful, dignified
eleh	eh-leh	exclamation like "hey!"

emmaino	eh-MA'ee-no	Greetings! (used among close friends)
fea	FAY-uh	love (verb)
fean	FAY-ahn	beloved
fenna	FENN-nuh	illuminate (imperative)
feo	FAY-oh	live; be alive
feotra	fay-OH-ruh	the living
fornlimwa	forn-LIMM-wa	hidden, secret place
hostis	HOSS-tiss	the characteristic Ahmanyan tree
ilien	EE-lee-enn	house, shelter, family dwelling; implies a close community
illunas	eel-LOO-nahss	bioluminous lichen
imlah	IM-lah	refuge
imna	im-na	emphastic possessive
ja	jah	that, so that
katelu	kah-TELL-oo	planet
kilindra	ki-LINN-druh	resurrection
kuzen	KOO-zen	to settle
malatira	mah-lah-TEE-rah	(a word connected with another to show desire)
maura	MAH-ruh	supreme Ahmanyan exclamation
me-aht	MEE-aht	go
mellifla	MELL-i-flah	hot cider of *moolafentori*
mellis	meh-LISS	farewell (used among close friends)
melisso	meh-LISS-oh	friend
moolafentori	moo-lah-fenn-TOE-ree	delicious fruit resembling plums
nsedna	nn-SED-nuh	diamond
ntef	NN-teff	red
ohn	own	not (negative imperative)
pandaka	pawn-DAH-kuh	citizens; native inhabitants
pennaio	pen-NAH'ee -oh	bring
prenta	PREN-tuh	descend (imperative)
puol	POO-ohl	bond, as in friendship
romthaia	rome-THIGH-uh	fall back
sando	SAN-doe	fortress
sapin	sa-PEEN	open (imperative)
sa	sah	fire
si	see	my
ssi	SS-see	mine
somnora	somm -NOR-uh	the dead

soross	so-ROSS	again
suan	su-WAHN	certain
tal	tall	child
tali	tah-LEE	children
talil	tah-LEEL	little boy
talitha	tah-LEE-thuh	little girl
taltahni	tall-TAH-nee	twilight
tanmanna	tan-MAH-nuh	greetings (formal)
tiono	tee-OH-no	to hope
varna	VAR-nah	shy
vu	voo	hope
wollen	WOE-lenn	people
yekmor	YECK-more	enemy
yis	yiss	where
zanin	ZAH-ninn	sail
zar	zarr	south
zomne	ZOM-neh	bolt
zomtor	ZOM-tore	receive
zten	zz-TEN	gift

Words Uniquely Ahmanyan

hostis	HOSS-tiss	tree found only on Ahmanya
imna	im-na	emphatic possessive
malatira	mah-lah-TEE-rah	a word connected with another to show desire
mellifla	MELL-i-flah	hot cider of *moolafentori*
moolafentori	moo-lah-fenn-TOE-ree	delicious fruit resembling plums

Vocabulary: English To Ahmanyan

applause, word used for	*allamah*	ah-LAH-mah
affection (related to *ahntahr*)	*ahntahrmna*	ahn-TARM-nuh
again	*soross*	so-ROSS
be (plural imperative)	*alati*	ah-LAH-tee
belonging to; native of	*anhallo*	ahn-HALL-oh
bolt	*zomne*	ZOM-neh
bond, as in friendship	*puol*	POO-ohl
boy (child)	*talil*	tah-LEEL
bring	*pennaio*	pen-NAH'ee -oh

child	*tal*	tall
children	*tali*	tah-LEE
certain	*suan*	su-WAHN
citizens; native inhabitants	*pandaka*	pawn-DAH-kuh
close (imperative)	*donor*	doe-NOHR
come (imperative)	*dala*	DAH-la
(the) dead	*somnora*	somm-NOR-uh
deep, strong, lasting	*basor*	ba-SOHR
descend (imperative)	*prenta*	PREN-tuh
diamond	*nsedna*	nn-SED-nuh
enemy	*yekmor*	YECK-more
fall back	*romthaia*	rome-THIGH-uh
farewell (used among close friends)	*meliss*	meh-LISS
fire	*sa*	sah
fortress	*sando*	SAN-doe
friend	*melisso*	meh-LISS-oh
from	*byela*	BYAY-lah
gift	*zten*	zz-TEN
girl (child)	*talitha*	tah-LEE-thuh
go	*me-aht*	MEE-aht
greegles	*alzenta*	all-ZEN-tuh
greetings! (used among close friends)	*emmaino*	eh-MA'ee-no
greetings (formal)	*tanmanna*	tan-MAH-nuh
guardian	*ajuni*	ah-JOO-nee
hey!	*eleh*	eh-leh
hidden, secret place	*fornlimwa*	forn-LIMM-wa
hope (noun)	*vu*	voo
hope (verb)	*tiono*	tee-OH-no
house, shelter, family dwelling; implies a close community	*ilien*	EE-lee-enn
I am; form of *alati*	*alto*	ALL-toe
illuminate (imperative)	*fenna*	FENN-nuh
lichen, bioluminous	*illunas*	eel-LOO-nahss
live; be alive	*feo*	FAY-oh
(the) living	*feotra*	fay-OH-ruh
not (negative imperative)	*ohn*	own
open (imperative)	*sapin*	sa-PEEN
pass through; to enter	*dantra*	DAHN-truh
people	*wollen*	WOE-lenn

planet	*katelu*	kah-TELL-oo
please	*banna*	BAN-nah
receive	*zomtor*	ZOM-tore
red	*ntef*	NN-teff
refuge	*imlah*	IM-lah
resurrection	*kilindra*	ki-LINN-druh
sail	*zanin*	ZAH-ninn
settle	*kuzen*	KOO-zen
shy	*varna*	VAR-nah
sincerity	*ahntahr*	ahn-TAR
south	*zar*	zarr
strong, powerful, dignified	*ekon*	EH-konn
that, so that	*ja*	jah
to, toward	*e*	ehh
treasure	*dianda*	die-AHN-duh
twilight	*taltahni*	tall-TAH-nee
where	*yis*	yiss
who	*chendro*	CHEN-dro

Vocabulary: English To Ahmanyan

BY PARTS OF SPEECH

NOUNS

applause, word used for	*allamah*	ah-LAH-mah
affection (related to *ahntahr*)	*ahntahrmna*	ahn-TARM-nuh
beloved	*fean*	FAY-ahn
bolt	*zomne*	ZOM-neh
bond, as in friendship	*puol*	POO-ohl
boy (child)	*talil*	tah-LEEL
child	*tal*	tall
children	*tali*	tah-LEE
cider (hot) of *moolafentori*	*mellifla*	MELL-i-flah
citizens; native inhabitants	*pandaka*	pawn-DAH-kuh
(the) dead	*somnora*	somm-NOR-uh
diamond	*nsedna*	nn-SED-nuh
enemy	*yekmor*	YECK-more
fire	*sa*	sah
fortress	*sando*	SAN-doe
friend	*melisso*	meh-LISS-oh

gift	*zten*	zz-TEN
girl (child)	*talitha*	tah-LEE-thuh
greegles	*alzenta*	all-ZEN-tuh
greetings	*tanmanna*	tan-MAH-nuh
guardian	*ajuni*	ah-JOO-nee
hidden, secret place	*fornlimwa*	forn-LIMM-wa
hope (noun)	*vu*	voo
house, shelter, family dwelling; implies a close community	*ilien*	EE-lee-enn
lichen, bioluminous	*illunas*	eel-LOO-nahss
(the) living	*feotra*	fay-OH-ruh
people	*wollen*	WOE-lenn
planet	*katelu*	kah-TELL-oo
plums, Martian	*moolafentori*	moo-lah-fenn-TOE-ree
refuge	*imlah*	IM-lah
resurrection	*kilindra*	ki-LINN-druh
sincerity	*ahntahr*	ahn-TAR
treasure	*dianda*	die-AHN-duh
tree, uniquely Ahmanyan	*hostis*	HOSS-tiss
twilight	*taltahni*	tall-TAH-nee

PRONOUNS

where	*yis*	yiss
who	*chendro*	CHEN-dro
	plendro	PLEN-dro

VERBS

be (plural imperative)	*alati*	ah-LAH-tee
bring	*pennaio*	pen-NAH'ee -oh
close (imperative)	*donor*	doe-NOHR
come (imperative)	*dala*	DAH-la
descend (imperative)	*prenta*	PREN-tuh
fall back	*romthaia*	rome-THIGH-uh
go	*me-aht*	MEE-aht
hope	*tiono*	tee-OH-no
I am; form of *alati*	*alto*	ALL-toe
illuminate (imperative)	*fenna*	FENN-nuh
live; be alive	*feo*	FAY-oh
love	*fea*	FAY-uh

not (negative imperative)	*ohn*	own
open (imperative)	*sapin*	sa-PEEN
pass through; to enter	*dantra*	DAHN-truh
receive	*zomtor*	ZOM-tore
sail	*zanin*	ZAH-ninn
settle	*kuzen*	KOO-zen

ADVERBS

again	*soross*	so-ROSS

ADJECTIVES

belonging to; native of	*anhallo*	ahn-HALL-oh
certain	*suan*	su-WAHN
deep, strong, lasting	*basor*	ba-SOHR
my	*si*	see
mine	*ssi*	SS-see
red	*ntef*	NN-teff
shy	*varna*	VAR-nah
south	*zar*	zarr
strong, powerful, dignified	*ekon*	EH-konn

INTERJECTIONS

farewell (used among close friends)	*meliss*	meh-LISS
greetings! (used among close friends)	*emmaino*	eh-MA'ee-no
hey!	*eleh*	eh-leh
please	*banna*	BAN-nah
supreme Ahmanyan exclamation	*maura*	MAH-ruh

PREPOSITIONS

from	*byela*	BYAY-lah
to, toward	*e*	ehh

CONJUNCTIONS

that, so that	*ja*	jah

SPECIAL VOCABULARY

emphastic possessive	*imna*	IM-na
a word connected with another to show desire	*malatira*	mah-lah-TEE-rah

Rules

plurals are made either by adding “n” or “i”
    melisso, melissan
    tal, tali

plurals that refer to a group of people may end with “a”
    alzenta, pandaka, kuznika

adding “ta” to a number is equivalent to adding “th” in English
    nim (six), *nimta* (sixth)

imperatives are achieved by merely saying the verb, as in English

infinitives

subjunctive: add “e” prefix and “n” suffix
    feo (to live); *effen* (might live)

to show affection or intimacy, add *ni*
    fean, feanni

for adverbs, ad *ki* to a verb
    varna, varnaki

Distinctive Features of Ahmanyan

the use of the initial double letter (e.g. *sseran*) that lengthens the initial sound
the use of the double consonant (e.g. *Mtalan*)

One Source For Characters' Names

Friday, April 21, 2006, in an email from David to Jon:

My spam filter gets most spam, but I still get a dozen or so spam emails a day. One neat thing is that many of the spammers' names on their alleged return email are really cool. They'd be great for Starman characters: how about Dulce Lobato, Sora Foreman, Knox Breland, Finbarr Ross, Chevonne Fitch, Mahaloth Aubert, Obelisk L. Peace, Concepcion J. Adams, Garland Ray, Lettice Yarnel, Okhotsk J. Calumniates, Abner Figgs, Dominic Boggs, Medina Casandra, ... And these are since just last Saturday, e.g. less than seven days' worth. If we WERE going to write another short story, you can bet your boots that we'd be obliged to some spammers for some characters' names. [Others that came later: Noela Graybill, Maynard Mayo, Junior Temple, Christina Posey, Solomon Temple]

Monday, April 24, 2006, from Jon to David:

I hadn't even thought of that! You're right – those are pretty cool names. How creative: using spam to your own advantage!

Montezuma Vly

A Tribute by David Baumann

The Starman Team dedicated *The Runaway Asteroid* to Fred Woodworth, the designer, publisher, and most prolific writer of "The Mystery and Adventure Series Review". The first issue of this undeniably peerless fan magazine for series book enthusiasts rolled off his presses in 1980. At the time of this writing (July 2006), Fred has produced 39 issues in 26 years.

With the concurrence of Jon Cooper and Mike Dodd, I wrote the dedication to Fred in the second Starman book, and lauded this amazing person as

a rare and gifted individual who practices
generosity in a world of acquisitiveness,
courage in a world of indifference,
honesty in a world of opportunism, and
personal responsibility in a world of buck-passing;
an artist and craftsman
few in this era know how to appreciate;
who has done as much as any and more than most to
advance the cause of series books;
and whose genius has abundantly proven that the
books deplored by librarians of a previous age
are treasures that shaped several generations and
made their readers better people.
To Fred Woodworth of Tucson, Arizona,
the series book world owes a debt
that can never be paid.

I first wrote to Fred in October 1996 on the recommendation of an acquaintance, thus beginning a correspondence that now fills more than six inches of space in my filing cabinet—with letters that have made me laugh out loud or on rare occasion moved me to tears. They are evidence of a friendship that I value more than I can describe. Knowing Fred has changed

my life very much for the better—not just because I have enormously benefitted by our series book contacts, but much more because Fred is a man of principle and... well, because he's the kind of person I described in the dedication above.

As anyone who reads the "Review" knows, Fred does not distribute his contact information easily. Nearly everyone who wants to correspond with him must do so through a P. O. Box. In the "Review" he has written,

No telephone, no "e-mail", so either write or don't communicate with me at all.

So when it came time to create and develop a character in the Starman series who was somewhat reclusive, highly distrustful of authorities and officialdom and brasshats (and for good reason), and yet incredibly principled and creative, I decided to base him after Fred Woodworth. Thus, in *The Runaway Asteroid*, the character of Montezuma Vly was born. He appears several times later in the series and finally, all unknowingly, plays a critical role in the conclusion of the saga.

There are a good number of characters in the Starman series based on real individuals to one degree or another, but in the case of Montezuma Vly, the identification with Fred Woodworth is as complete as I can make it. After I'd written the first appearance of this character (see *The Runaway Asteroid*, pages 43-55), I sent the first draft of this section to Fred to see if he would object. Fortunately, he didn't. In fact, he was pleased. Gratified by his response, I plunged ahead.

Vly became an important character, playing a unique role in the Starman saga as it unfolded. Many of Fred's virtues became those of Montezuma Vly —a wry sense of humor, a passion for independence, deep loyalty in friendship, broad-mindedness without the slightest compromise of principle, amazing generosity without any thought of personal reward, a dedication to justice, and a scorn for mediocrity shown by his willingness to take on numbing drudgery for the sake of excellent quality in whatever he does.

With a few minor changes, the descriptions of Vly's workshop and Vly himself match those of Fred's printshop in Tucson and Fred himself. Offset printing presses became rock polishing machines, cats became koalangs,

Fred's companion Iris became Lily. Just about everything else is true-to-life: the shelves of books, the boxes of bolts and machine parts, the scarcity of chairs for visitors in a crammed workspace—even the crystal ball.

Even the name "Montezuma Vly" has a real, albeit stretch-of-the-imagination connection to Fred. As one drives south on the state road toward the Anza-Borrego Desert, the site of the actual mud cave, one comes across Montezuma Valley Road. The name of the road is abbreviated Montezuma Vly. A few miles beyond this intersection is where Fred spent the first two to three years of his life. The instant I saw this sign, I knew that I had found the name of the character who operates out of the banana-shaped asteroid not far from Ceres that I called "Montezuma's Castle".

Fred himself observed that one could have paid $100,000 to some think-tank, and not come up with a better name.

In *The Last Command*, Montezuma Vly comes into his own. Although not much recognized by other human beings, and certainly not credited by them to any extent, the First Races discern the greatness of the man and reward him for services he had rendered simply by operating out of his own high understanding of virtue.

At length, Vly spoke up. "Saleh, if I may ask— why did you bring me here?"

The Lucian turned toward the miner. "I asked you to come so that I may give you a gift." He returned to his examination of the greegles, but his voice continued inside Vly's mind. "You are the friend of the greegles. You are the only friend they have had in the ages of their vigil. Few people indeed have seen them, but in recent times many have heard of them. All but one considered how they may exploit them. Even the Ahmanyans, who found them millennia ago, were interested only in the information they could glean from them. They learned little. You alone accorded them dignity. They are only machines, but you did not know that until recently. Though they did not need it, you protected them. And for that, they protected you once from your enemies."

Vly, stunned with the extent of the Lucian's knowledge, remembered the time he had called on the greegles when Lurton Zimbardo's ships had attacked his crescent-shaped asteroid, and the greegles had sent the pirates scuttling away in short order. Four of their five ships had been cut into scrap. Vly had scavenged many valuable supplies from the debris of that encounter. The miner smiled with the memory. Suddenly Vly was overcome with a sense of overwhelming inequity. A keen discomfort washed through him.

The Lucian, having made his way back toward the entrance to the chamber, turned toward Vly again. For the first time, the two men looked eye to eye. Vly was riveted with the encounter. "Montezuma Vly," came the Lucian's words, "do not think that, because I am of the First Races, I am exempt from showing courtesy or gratitude. The obligation of virtue is laid upon all sentient beings, the greater and the lesser alike— perhaps the greater most of all. And your race is by no means the least of the creatures." ...

Then Saleh the Lucian explains to Vly the tragedy endured by his own race, that most of his fellows (and the brightest and most courageous of them) had been captured eons before in a time stasis which was itself protected against incursion by an artificial and formidable, endless storm. He ruminates that

there is no way to release them. At that time, Vly's empathy emerges. The Lucian concludes,

"Perhaps, perhaps when the Xenobots have been vanquished, the storm's intensity will diminish. I do not know the extent of their powers. But even if it is so, it will be impossible to release the captives. They must remain caught until time itself ends."

"Saleh," said Vly after a long pause. His voice was more tender than perhaps it had been for many years. "You have said yourself that you are not omniscient. Maybe a way can be found to release the First Races."

The Lucian looked up. "I will not deny it, Montezuma Vly." He smiled. "Now I will give you your gift." He looked around. "One of these greegles will become your own. I will prepare it so that it will serve you in many ways for all the time that remains to you. And then, most of the rest of these will accompany me back to the home of the First Races."

The illustration at the end of chapter 4 of *The Last Command* is a rendering of the above scene. The likeness of Montezuma Vly is taken from a photograph of Fred Woodworth.

When he saw it, he wrote,

I have to smile every time I look at that illustration you sent from "The Last Command". Yes, the artist has captured the bulgy eyes and froggy lips of yours truly most aptly. Help! I'm imprisoned in a series book! There are worse fates. Thanks. Seriously. I'm glad to see that ol' Montezuma Vly comes off so well, too. I'll do my best to model my behavior on his. And no, I have no objections. What a saga!

And so in the Starman saga it was that a humble human being, simply going about his business and interfering with no one and wanting no one to interfer with him, becomes one of the most honored of men. Even then, he is hardly aware of the gift bestowed on him—because he is that true a man.

I can think of no better way to show appreciation to a very good friend and most admirable man—Fred Woodworth.

To subscribe to
"The Mystery and Adventure Series Review",
write to:

Fred Woodworth
P. O. Box 3012
Tucson, AZ 85702

VII. WHERE SCIENCE VALIDATES STARMAN SERIES

The Starman series has a lot of scientific principles that underlie the stories. A few are rather fantastic but still have a basis in current theory, even if the theory is marginal.

Some of our undergirding principles include the theory of the Nemesis (a brown dwarf star that orbits our sun billions of miles away), antimatter drive, the conjecture of a planet that once orbited between Mars and Jupiter, the existence of a tenth planet, water ice at the south pole of the Moon, an ocean on Europa and the possibility of life in it, water ice close to the surface of Mars, and that Mars was once wet and fertile.

Some scientific principles we know aren't true. In such cases we ask the reader to "suspend disbelief" for the sake of the story. These include breathable air contained inside a crater with a high wall, the notion that the asteroid belt is dense with rolling rocks, an artificial gravity grid, time travel through expanding the influence of a black hole (our most fantastic premise), a figure-8 orbit that is many millions of miles long, light cloaks that provide virtual invisibility, and the terraformation of Mars in a mere span of 150 years.

Much to our surprise, more than a dozen articles appeared online or in newspapers during the time of the writing of the Starman series, in which various hypotheses in the saga were verified or at least given serious credence in the scientific world. These became so astonishing to us that we kept of file of them. Each entry below came to our attention **after** its premise had appeared in the Starman series. (Some, but not all, of the material below appeared in the Inter*Sellars.)

Genetically Modified Earth Plants Will Glow From Mars

by Paul Kimpel
May 8, 2001

In what reads like a story from a 1950s science fiction magazine, a team of University of Florida scientists has genetically modified a tiny plant to send reports back from Mars in a most unworldly way: by emitting an eerie, fluorescent glow.

The plant experiment, which is funded by $290,000 from NASA's Human Exploration and Development in Space program, may be a first step toward making Mars habitable for humans, said Rob Ferl, assistant director of the Biotechnology Program at UF.

To create the glow, the team will insert "reporter genes" into varieties of the plant, which will express themselves by emitting a green glow under adverse conditions on Mars. Each reporter gene will react to an environmental stressor such as drought, disease or temperature. For example, one version will glow an incandescent green if it detects an excess of heavy metals in the Martian soil; another will turn blue in the presence of peroxides.

In *Assault On Mars*, following input from Mike Dodd, a field of luminous lichen was made a part of the story.

Humans on Europa: A Plan for Colonies on the Icy Moon
By Don Lipper
June 6, 2001

"All these world's are yours, except Europa. Attempt no landings there."

—David Bowman, *2010: Odyssey Two*

Forewarned is forearmed in science fact and science fiction when it comes to Jupiter's icy moon Europa. Frigid and ice-covered, Europa is believed to harbor a giant liquid ocean beneath its crusty arctic surface, a primordial sea whose tidal motions are driven by Jovian gravity and warmed by intense radiation given off by the giant planet.

Yet despite the planet's fearsome environment, members of the Artemis Society, a private venture dedicated establishing a permanent, self-supporting community on the Moon, also have set their sites on the creation of a human colony at Europa.

Gravity and magnetic data collected by the NASA Galileo orbiter over the past five years have provided increasing evidence that an ocean exists underneath Europa's uniform 5 to 62-mile thick coat of ice. The possible ocean on Europa may contain more liquid water than all the oceans on Earth combined.

A search by the Starmen for an ancient colony of aliens who visited Europa has been the theme of the fourth Starman book since its inception nearly two years ago. The last part of the third Starman book includes this paragraph:

"On their own authority and under Zip's leadership, the Starmen will decide to make a search for the Benefactors' primary base in the Solar System. The story will be told in the fourth volume of the Starman saga, **DESCENT INTO EUROPA.** The vast, lightless oceans of this Jovian moon, crusted with tumbled ice sheets several miles thick, are deeper by far than any oceans on Earth. Do they hold the secret of the Benefactors' presence in the Solar System?"

Dark Planets May Orbit Strange Nearby Objects
By Robert Roy Britt
June 8, 2001

Huge, cold, lonely and of fuzzy origin, brown dwarfs came into significantly sharper focus today when researchers announced that the failed stars with the strange name may harbor planets, a privilege previously reserved for real stars. The finding raises hopes for a planet, albeit a frigid and dark world, orbiting a brown dwarf near our Solar System.

The evidence came in the form of dust disks found around a host of brown dwarfs. These objects are typically 10 to 70 times more massive than Jupiter and are similar to stars but never had enough mass to trigger the thermonuclear fusion that powers a real star. The brown dwarfs in the study are free-floating, meaning they do not orbit another star.

Journey to the Tenth Planet begins with the discovery of a planet which circles a brown dwarf and the Sun in a figure-eight pattern. The idea was Mike Dodd's, which he put forth over six months ago, based on an actual theory that a brown dwarf star called the Nemesis is connected with our sun.

Remember the airbot in *The Runaway Asteroid*? This reconnaissance instrument was introduced on pages 97-98 of that book. This article appeared in Toronto on October 21, 2000:

Backpack Drone Peers Behind Enemy Lines

A hovering spy craft only 23 centimeters across could soon be flying behind enemy lines to conduct surveillance, or darting about inside buildings to help police find hostage-takers. Micro Craft, an aerospace development company in San Diego, California, last week successfully tested the miniature vehicle. It consists of little more than aducted fan that rotates inside a protective cylinder. The fan is pitched at an angle so that its wash counteracts the slight spin the fan imparts.

"It performed great. It's very stable," says program manager Allen Zwan. Even in high winds, the 1.4-kilogram craft managed to take off, hover, and move around at slow and medium speeds.

A small two-stroke petrol engine drives the fan. This provides enough lift to get the craft off the ground and allow it to hover and move from side to side. To travel at top speed, the vehicle turns sideways so that the fan points almost horizontally and the aerofoil-shaped edges of the duct provide lift. It can fly for about an hour on the 200 grams of fuel it carries.

The aircraft was developed with funding from the U. S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). The idea is that soldiers will carry the small, lightweight reconnaissance aircraft in their backpacks. A remote controller tells the drone where to go and how fast to fly. On-board electronics keep the craft flying, adjusting the speed of the fan and the angle of the control vanes.

The test vehicle last week carried a video camera that transmitted images back to the ground. But it could also support communications relays, or even a laser that would "paint" a target with light to guide in missiles from larger craft.

Starman fan Tim Owens emailed the following item. This article recently appeared in *USA Today*.

Mini-devices may soon replace combat scouts;
Tiny vehicles could save lives
by Andrea Stone

Unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). The military is close to fielding miniature unmanned aerial vehicles that could eventually render the combat scout as obsolete as the horse cavalry. Pentagon engineers are working on a range of micro aircraft and backpack-sized vehicles for short-range surveillance now conducted by U. S. ground troops.

These UAVs, some as tiny as 6 inches in diameter, would let small units look over the next hill or around a city block without putting advance troops in harm's way. The military has made development of unmanned aerial and underwater vehicles a top priority.

The new generation of UAVs can be launched by one person and are controlled by satellite guidance systems.

Micro air vehicle (MAV). The Army's tiny MAV is a mechanical eye that can fly to a spot up to six miles away and "perch and stare" for weeks. Shaped like a coffee can, it comes in several sizes—the smallest weighs one pound and measures 6 inches in diameter. It flies up to 100 mph and carries video, infrared, acoustic and metal-detecting sensors that can alert soldiers to enemy movements.

Compare the UAV and MAV to "the dragonfly" in *Journey to the Tenth Planet*.

Starman Team Anticipates Fact in China

Here is the beginning of a front-page article in the *Los Angeles Times*, January 27, 2001: "Call it the ultimate test of Internet freedom: the world's largest state security network deployed to police cyberspace in the most populous nation on Earth, where the number of online users is growing exponentially. The outcome will dictate how one-fifth of mankind relates to a technology that many are convinced owns the future. Most of those watching the struggle unfold in mainland China believe that the sheer growth of online

users in the country—expected to top 100 million well before mid-decade—will eventually overwhelm even the most comprehensive authoritarian effort to regulate the Internet."

Compare the above with this part of "Introducing the Starman Series" we wrote more than a year before the article appeared:

Political unrest in China, often subdued in the latter half of the 20th century by force or by fear, was never completely obliterated. In the first decade of the 21st century, the leadership of China was a council mostly comprised by very old men. Their successors, although still hoping to retain power in a Communist government, realized that the old ways would not succeed, and that it was merely the sheer size of their nation that maintained its position as a world power. They knew that they would have to allow foreign investments into the nation if China were not to become isolated from the rest of the world. These foreign investments eventually brought in the ways of the wider world, including **a reasonably efficient computer network and internet communications**. **A controlled press was no longer possible, or even conceivable.** Eventually a crisis of leadership brought about a bloodless coup. After a brief period without leadership, and somewhat to the alarm of Western business interests, in 2021 the Chinese people restored the Emperor.

MARS—YOU KNOW, THE GREEN PLANET

The Lost Race of Mars postulates that the fourth planet was at one time lush, beautiful, and wet. The following stories were released when the book was about half written:

(CNN) — Mars soil gives hints of green planet
April 5, 2002 Posted: 3:15 PM EST

By Richard Stenger

A reexamination of data from a 1997 mission to Mars suggests that the surface contains chlorophyll, a discovery that could bolster prospects of finding life on the planet.

Chlorophyll, the molecule that plants and algae use to convert sunlight into food, gives all photosynthetic organisms on our planet their distinguishing green color.

A NASA team plans to share their preliminary findings early next week during an international conference of astrobiologists, or scientists who study the possibility of life beyond Earth.

The researchers, Carole Stoker and Pascal Ashwanden, both work at NASA's Ames Research Center in California, which is hosting the Second Astrobiology Science Conference from April 7 to April 11.

An online abstract of their presentation, titled "Search for Spectral Signatures of Life at the Pathfinder Landing Site," summarizes their report.

The pair performed a spectral analysis of Pathfinder photographs to identify chemicals in the vicinity of the NASA probe, which landed in the Ares Vallis region of Mars in July 1997.

The study turned up six potential chlorophyll hot spots. "Two intriguing cases occur in small areas on the ground near the spacecraft," the report summary added.

ALSO, MARS THE WET PLANET

Newspaper article in the Los Angeles Times, May 29, 2002, by Usha Lee McFarling: Odyssey Probe Detects Vast Ice Deposits on Red Planet

… "extensive deposits of ice in a thick layer two feet beneath the surface" have been discovered, "... in the mid-latitudes. Closer to the [south] pole, where it is colder, the ice layer was found just one foot below the surface ... helping solve the mystery of where the planet's once extensive bodies of water may have gone.... The ice may have supported life in the past when the planet was warmer and water flowed on the planet's surface. ... They have detected trillions of gallons of ice—more than twice the 75 trillion gallons of water that fill Lake Michigan.... The massive canyons, dry lake beds and ancient shorelines on Mars indicate that the planet was once covered with water."

There's more, saying things such as that they expect to find up to twice as much more water with further exploration, and that they are trying to find out what happened to "the rest of the water we think Mars once had."

Remember the "invisibility cloak" that appeared in the short story "The Flight of the *Olympia*" and *The Lost Race of Mars*? Even the Starman team thought it was a bit far-fetched, but a recent news story had the headline:

JAPANESE SCIENTIST INVENTS "INVISIBILITY CLOAK"

The article says, "It is the brainchild of Professor Susumu Tachi who is in the early stage of research he hopes will eventually make camouflaged objects virtually transparent." To read more and see a photograph, use the link provided by reader Mark McSherry:
http://www.ananova.com/news/story/sm_747591.html

In the second segment of "The Lost Tomorrow," which appeared in the previous issue of *The Starman Chronicles*, Starman Mark Seaton theorizes that the Starmen had landed in a parallel universe. Far edge of science fiction? Perhaps, but according to some, the science behind it is respectable physics.

The following is an excerpt from an article that appeared on the website ufoskeptic.org. Thanks to Mary Doman for the reference.

Higher Dimensions in Superstring and M-Brane Theory

Within the past few years physicists have begun to theorize that our universe might actually be a three-dimensional "membrane" (four-dimensional if you add time following the dictates of special relativity) that lies within a much higher-dimensional super-space (or super-spacetime)….

All particles and forces are confined to the "membrane" that constitutes our four-dimensional spacetime universe... except for gravity. …

It has been thought that 90 % of the matter in the Universe must consist of dark matter. But the extradimensional ideas of modern superstring and M-brane theory have begun to open yet another possibility: that there is no dark matter within our Universe after all; rather that the gravitational force of matter in adjacent membrane-universes is spreading out and spilling over into our universe. In other words, entire other universes might exist a tiny

fraction of an inch away from our Universe in one or more extra dimensions. We cannot see these universes because their photons of light are stuck to their membrane-universe just as our photons are stuck to our membrane-universe, but gravitational forces can reach from one membrane-universe to another.

As wild as these ideas sound, they are respectable concepts in modern physics. … Moreover, there is no reason to think that if other parallel universes were to exist, they could not harbor habitable planets.

On top of this, *The Los Angeles Times* published an article on the topic as well. It appeared on the front page on May 17, 2003 (shortly after the second segment of "The Lost Tomorrow" was sent out to our subscribers). The Starmen quote it in the third segment of *The Starman Chronicles*.

Concealing Radio Transmissions in Enemy Territory

In *The Heart of Danger*, Dr. Stephen Hoshino says, "We'll use a pseudorandom frequency shifter, of course, so the signal will appear to be only background noise." The concept was in Jon Cooper's summary. Valerie Kramer observed:

You might want to read over the information on "Spread Spectrum" radio signals at http://www.sss-mag.com/ss.html. To quote one paragraph from that site, "Spread Spectrum uses wide band, noise-like signals. Because Spread Spectrum signals are noise-like, they are hard to detect. Spread Spectrum signals are also hard to Intercept or demodulate. Further, Spread Spectrum signals are harder to jam (interfere with) than narrowband signals. These Low Probability of Intercept (LPI) and anti-jam (AJ) features are why the military has used Spread Spectrum for so many years. Spread signals are intentionally made to be much wider band than the information they are carrying to make them more noise-like."

NYX

From Space.com

Wed June 21, 2006

The International Astronomical Union has officially christened Pluto's two newest moons Nix and Hydra. The tiny satellites were discovered by the Hubble Space Telescope last May and are believed to have been formed from the same giant impact that carved out Charon, Pluto's larger satellite, discovered in 1978. The names were proposed this spring by the team that discovered the satellites. Before the satellites received their official names, they were called P1 and P2. In Greek mythology, Nyx was the goddess of the night and the mother of Charon, the boatsman who ferried souls across the River Styx into the underworld ruled by Pluto. The IAU changed the spelling to "Nix" after the Egyptian spelling of the goddess to avoid confusion with two asteroids that had already been named "Nyx."

VIII. CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY CENTRAL TO THE STARMAN SAGA

Madeleine L'Engle wrote, in *Walking on Water*, page 157:

"I often seek theological insights in reading science fiction because this is a genre eminently suited to explorations of the nature of the Creator and creation. I'm never surprised when I discover that one of my favourite science-fiction writers is Christian because to think about worlds in other galaxies, other modes of being, is a theological enterprise. What is this universe like? What are its possibilities? How deep is space? Why is there so much suffering? What does it mean? What if…"

C. S. Lewis wrote this about his science fiction trilogy. He wrote it in a letter to a friend after the publication of *Out of the Silent Planet*:

"You will be both grieved and amused to hear that out of about 60 reviews only 2 showed any knowledge that my idea of the fall of the Bent One was anything but an invention of my own. But if there only was someone with a richer talent and more leisure I think that this great ignorance might be a help to the evangelisation of England; any amount of theology can now be smuggled into people's minds under cover of romance without their knowing it."

J. R. R. Tolkien wrote (in his Letters):

"Lord of the Rings is about God, and His sole right to divine honour." Also, when Frodo "failed" at the crack of doom, Tolkien wrote, "The Other Power then took over: the Writer of the Story (by which I do not mean myself), 'that one ever-present Person who is never absent and never named.'"

"I am a Christian (which can be deduced from my stories)" "I actually intended [LOTR] to be consonant with Christian thought and belief." And "The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. The religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism."

IS THERE A RELIGIOUS MESSAGE IN THE STARMAN SERIES?

Yes.

It is not the authors' first intention to make the series a subtle tool for "preaching." Rather it is first of all that the books be enjoyable to people across the spectrum of belief, but we do have something to share. We're taking a little-traveled road in the series book field by putting philosophical and religious matters into the books, but even this has some precedents in the series book world. Putting these issues in our stories rather than ignoring them makes the stories closer to reality. After all, no matter what any given reader's personal convictions may be, everyone does have some kind of philosophy of life, and each person's philosophy is refined by encountering others' philosophies. The authors believe that ignoring that fact of life in a series book would keep it at a shallow level, and we don't find that satisfying either to read or to write. The creators of the Starman series are well aware that we are building upon a venerable history and are dependent upon the giants who have preceded us; at the same time, we do not hesitate to break new ground or set new precedents.

It has been made clear from the first advertisements for the Starman series that the writer, David Baumann, is an Episcopal priest. Jon Cooper and Mike Dodd are also Christians. It should not be a surprise that there are some Christian images in the books, but they haven't been placed furtively to sneak Christianity into the story. They're there because, as any author should who cares about producing a good book, the writer draws upon what he knows best and uses the images and symbols with which he is most familiar. If he wrote about something of which he was ignorant, the book wouldn't be realistic or convincing.

Like Hal Goodwin (who wrote the Rick Brant series) and Sam Epstein (who wrote the Ken Holt series), David draws upon his own skills and experiences to produce the Starman books in a conscious choice to aim for good quality. Although his work as a priest and pastor is definitely done in a Christian milieu, it also involves just a lot of experience with people in the various crises of their lives and how they relate to one another, solve problems, reason, and feel. The images are there for the same reason that Hal wrote

about New Caledonia and Sam wrote about journalism: writing is at its best when the author writes about what he knows.

Long experience has helped David to gain insight into how people reason, feel, and act in times of struggle, challenge, depression, anger, etc. These are the things the reader will find in the Starman series—in *Assault On Mars*, there are flippant but dependable and courageous Steve, analytical and occasionally depressed Zip, Joe who uses humor to hide uncertainty, open-minded Mark leaning toward credulity. In *The Runaway Asteroid,* there are treacherous Zimbardo, fearful Gene, simple but good-hearted St. George, independent and principled Vly. In *Journey to the Tenth Planet*, there is the brilliant but unbalanced O. The ways in which these persons handle life is not solely a religious matter, but because of David's profession he discerns and understands them in people, and describes them in the terms most familiar to him.

Overall, the Starman series is about personalities, relationships, and choices that are developed through the telling of an adventure story. The subtlety of the religious side is not out of duplicity but because it is natural to the writer's imagery—as Hal Goodwin wrote of science and travel, and Fran Striker wrote of respect for primitive peoples. David uses images and symbols. Some of the villainous names in *Runaway Asteroid* are obviously symbolic: Slant, Gebbeth, Withers, *Tartarus*, Crass, etc. The name O in *Journey to the Tenth Planet* symbolizes a person who is both complete and empty. We think such use of symbolism adds to the tale rather than distracts from it.

In more than a few cases, the characters in the books are based on real people. Many of the places are real places. Hal Goodwin used the same techniques and it brought terrific verisimilitude to the Rick Brants. In Starman, there are insights into people's way of thinking and feeling. In *The Runaway Asteroid*, there is a minor character named Jesus. It should be obvious that the name is to be pronounced Hay-soos, and he is also based on a real person—a guileless and confident individual. At one level in the story, he is a Christ-figure, but we think not in any way that would interrupt the story, offend the unbeliever, or make the unwary feel that he has been waylaid.

The broad-stroke message in the Starman books is that light will always conquer darkness, good will conquer evil. The message is stated several times in different ways in each of the books. It is a message common to all people of good will. The fine-stroke theme of the books is to extol basic virtue—true pleasure, honor, integrity, loyalty, patience, respect, endurance, resourcefulness, etc. We express these things in Christian terms because that's how we know them best, but these virtues are common to good people of various faiths or none.

After reading *Assault On Mars*, one correspondent shared with us his reaction to the religious issues:
"The writers, clearly alive to potential controversy, have gone out of their way to address this issue with care and sensitivity. None of the religious allusions that I found affected the plot in any way, and they were sufficiently infrequent as to pose no more than an occasional minor annoyance to one who might find such an agenda distasteful. And although I most definitely count myself among the latter audience, I feel compelled to applaud the writers' approach, which took such pains to emphasize the STORY, and which never, not even once, ever compromised the plot in order to point a moral."

INTRODUCTION TO THE STARMAN SERIES

prepared for Claire Wong who placed an inquiry

THE ORIGIN AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE SERIES

In the summer of 1998, a team of three fans of the classic children's series books of the 1950s made contact with one another through a web site dedicated to the Tom Swift Jr. series. The three of us—Jon Cooper, Mike Dodd, and David Baumann—found that we had not only a common interest in such books, but a combination of skills that had the potential to produce a similar series in our own day. We began a collaboration that eventually created a new series for readers in the twenty-first century, books in the genre of Tom Swift Jr., Tom Corbett, Dig Allen, Rick Brant, Ken Holt, and other juvenile series that were popular fifty years earlier.

We refer to ourselves as the Starman Team, and write under the pseudonym "Michael D. Cooper"—a combination of our three names. The Team is well aware that the golden age of series books ended in the late 1960s.

Nevertheless, perhaps against the odds, the Team wanted to create a series of stories both reminiscent of that age and appealing to contemporary readers. Like the classic books, there is no foul language and no extreme violence in the Starman series. Although the series is painstakingly up to the minute with scientific facts, discoveries, and theories, it is not merely "science fiction." It is designed to encourage the human mind and spirit and extol the virtues of courage, honesty, and good-heartedness. The lead characters follow a philosophy that life is good, the creation is exciting as well as beautiful, hope is reasonable and worthwhile, and the spirit of adventure is worth pursuing.

WHO IS THE SERIES FOR?

Our readers include older children, from about the age of ten and into the teen years. However, most of our readers are adults, including a Ph.D. level chemist and retired NASA scientist. The books are written at an advanced juvenile level. Children who are good readers, or those who wish to become good readers, as well as adults enjoy the stories.

CHRISTIANITY UNDERGIRDS THE STORIES

The three members of the Starman Team found early in our friendship that all of us are Christians. We determined that, although it is not our first intention to make the series a subtle tool for "preaching," the books we produced would be undergirded by a strong commitment to Christian orthodoxy. As we write, we are guided primarily by John 1:5—"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."

Our first intention is that the books be enjoyable to people across the spectrum of belief, but we do have something to share. We're taking a little-traveled road in the series book field by putting philosophical and religious matters into the books, but even this has some precedents in the series book world. Putting these issues in our stories rather than ignoring them makes the stories closer to reality. After all, no matter what any given reader's personal convictions may be, everyone does have some kind of philosophy of life, and each person's philosophy is refined by encountering others' philosophies. The authors believe that ignoring that fact of life in a series book would keep it at a shallow level, and we don't find that satisfying either to read or to write. The creators of the Starman series are well aware that we are building upon a venerable history and are dependent upon the giants who have preceded us; at the same time, we do not hesitate to break new ground or set new precedents.

We have made it clear from the first advertisements for the Starman series that the writer, David Baumann, is an Episcopal priest, and that Jon Cooper and Mike Dodd are also Christians. It should not be a surprise that there are some Christian images in the books. The broad-stroke message in the Starman books is that light will always conquer darkness, good will conquer evil. The message is stated several times in different ways in each of the books. It is a message common to all people of good will. The fine-stroke theme of the books is to extol basic virtue—true pleasure, honor, integrity, loyalty, patience, respect, endurance, resourcefulness, etc. We express these things in Christian terms because that's how we know them best, but these virtues are common to good people of various faiths or none.

But we ourselves are convinced, without apology, that Christianity is true and that any other philosophy or religion falls short of the truth as it is in Jesus. The basic and essential beliefs of the Christian faith are at the heart of the saga: the fall, the pervasiveness of sin, fear and love, forgiveness, mercy, sacrifice, redemption, resurrection, judgment, and salvation.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE SAGA

Though the series is intended to fit into the genre of the classic series books, from the beginning the Starman series was not envisioned as a sequence of unrelated adventures like those of the classic era; rather, the Starman Team first roughed out an epic spanning a period from the moment of creation to the distant future. The Starman series, though made up of a set of separate adventures, actually tells one long story that continues from book to book. The saga takes place during the 2150s, a short but intense span of time that sees a host of momentous events in the epic.

During these years, the people of Earth gradually learn the true history of the Solar System and take their part in the second defense of the Solar System against its ancient enemy. This defense begins in *Assault On Mars* and continues on an expanding scale in the subsequent books. The real enemy is not even identified and encountered until the third book. Although there are many clues in the first four books, the full history of the Solar System is not revealed until the fifth book, the gripping conclusion to the first segment in the Starman saga.

We created a plausible history before the first book opens in the mid-21st century. We hypothesize that at the end of the 20th century, the world economy was booming. Within two decades, however, most multinational corporations had overreached themselves and a severe, global depression set in, unprecedented in scope. All efforts to counter it failed. Governments fell and the infrastructure of the planet decayed, initiating the worst period in human history. The age became known as the Collapse, and was characterized by worldwide violence, terrorism, and unrestrained criminal opportunism.

But the 21st century ended with a glimmer of hope. The concepts of stewardship, accountability, and mutual responsibility revived. Thomas Starlight founded Starlight Enterprise in 2089, committed to rebuilding the Earth and its culture. Initially a company dedicated to finding new sources of energy, it quickly became known for high ideals, philanthropy, and interplanetary ventures.

In the early 22nd century, Starlight Enterprise produced its first Starmen. The Starmen were the gifted and highly trained venturers of Starlight Enterprise. With their exploits, a new age of exploration and discovery began. Earth had not seen such a time for more than six centuries, when Columbus, Magellan, Drake, and others had set sail to discover new worlds.

The Starman Series chronicles the adventures of three Starmen: David "Zip" Foster, Joe Taylor, and Mark Seaton. These three are not overt Christian believers, but are rather presented as good and heroic young men who, in the course of their ventures, are inquirers and searchers for truth. As the saga unfolds and the climactic confrontation between good and evil approaches, so do the young Starmen come to discern the true purpose and meaning of life.

The consummation of the series will take place in the last volume, *The Last Command*, which will chronicle the vast interstellar war that pits Earth and her allies against a monstrous tyrannical alien force. All other entries in the series lead up to this climactic story.

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY FOUNDATIONAL TO THE STARMAN SAGA

General Notes:

- The Ahmanyan hierarchy is based on servanthood, not power
- Human culture in the 22nd century assumes that racism, etc. is a curious thing of the past
- The 22nd century is a "morning," even Edenic, world, renewed after the Collapse, although of course still tainted by sin
- Evil is real and great, but nonetheless is overcome
- Evil came into the cosmos through rebellion and fall from grace (the Lucians)
- Names, especially in *The Runaway Asteroid*, employ Christian symbolism
- There are specific Christian people in the stories, such as George St. George and the Sisters at Bethesda
- There is a sense of adventure, even quest
- There are frequent incidents awe, and occasionally a sense of the numinous
- Virtue is upheld: courage, love, patience, goodness, harmony

General Themes:

- Sacrifice—e.g., The Ahmanyans' entire planet; David Foster; the people of the lost tomorrow
- Resurrection— e.g., Ahmanya undergoes a "resurrection"
- Detachment from worldiness— e.g., George St. George
- Longing— e.g., Mark seeks the "uncreated Light" and recognizes archetypal beauty; protagonists look for fulfillment, truth, beauty, and joy; the cosmos is beautiful and ordered
- Triumph against overwhelming odds
- Battle—clear battle lines between Good and Evil
- Choice and Responsibility with eternal consequences—e.g., Gene Newman, Lurton Zimbardo, Beowulf Denn, others; even Allen Foster

List of specific Christian references in the first six books of the saga:

Assault On Mars

1. The cross imposed on the Starman logo.
2. The comment by Richard Starlight, "[my father] took a name to signify light in the great darkness, as stars are points of light in the darkness of

space. Maybe overwhelming darkness, but still characterized by light, the inspiring light of beauty and adventure, which the darkness cannot overcome" is deliberately reminiscent of John 1:5. The teaching sets the theme not only for *Assault On Mars*, but for the entire Starman series.
3.Thomas Starlight is presented as a visionary in contrast to the literally-minded Apostle of the same name, who nonetheless had deep faith which was brought out by a spiritual trial. Thomas Starlight is also a man of mystery, presented as choosing to have no beginning, symbolically born without ancestry (suggestive of Melchizedek in Genesis 14:17-20, who is himself anticipatory of the Messiah as noted in Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews 7).
4.Mark rejoices in the "treasures of the cosmic darkness," a phrase echoing Isaiah 45:3.
5.The description of the "fullness" of space and the beauty of the heavens at the beginning of "Shot Down!" is intended to convey a sense of the numinous—the mysterious Presence of God, reminiscent of Moses at the burning bush. It is dependent upon the description of space in C. S. Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet* (1947). Some of the imagery is dependent upon a written meditation by Marge Avery of Placentia, California.
6.The line, "Light which is light's living spring" is a quotation from an ancient hymn composed by St. Ambrose of Milan (340-397), in which he addresses Jesus as "O Light of Light, light's living spring."
7.The poem "Come Home," written by Marge Avery, is expressive of the desire for union with God, referred to in the poem as "the Beloved."
8.Reference to Thanksgiving Day in Amundsen City.
9.Stavri Thalassa says "a few words" over the meal the Tunnel People share.
10.The angel fish in Commander Lewis' aquarium is to be suggestive of a sign of peace and angelic protection, which moves symbolically "upward."
11.Bread and wine, the focus of the meal enjoyed by the Tunnel People and the Starman team, are consciously suggestive of the Bread and Wine of Holy Communion, seen here almost as viaticum: the "Food for the Journey" as the recipients go into battle—as Stavri Thalassa says, "Tonight we go out to do battle, and we will come back victors!"
12.Marin Asta wine is intended to suggest the word Maranatha, a Christian exclamation in New Testament times and used by Paul. It is an Aramaic word with a double meaning: "Lord, come!" and "The Lord is coming!" (1 Corinthians 16:22)
13.The *St. George* is the name of the flagship for the Earth fleet which liberates Mars. It is named for the Saint who fought the dragon and won.

The Runaway Asteroid

1.Lurton Zimbardo's personal spaceship is called *Tartarus*, an old word for "hell"

2.George St. George is called Sabbath George as a sign of his beliefs, and is the first overt Christian believer in the Starman series

3.When the Starmen first meet George St. George, he is reading *Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*

4.Attitude of George St. George on being taken captive is based on Philippians 4:11-12

5.George St. George's meeting with his men at the end of Chapter 5 is suggestive of prayer

6.The President mentions David and Goliath

7.City on Mars is called New Emmaus, based on Luke 24

8.George St. George comforts Zip with words reminiscent of St. Paul: "each has a gift"

9.Stephen Hoshino named for Stephen Hawking and Tomihiro Hoshino—the latter being a Christian evangelist in Japan

10.Richard Starlight's personal spaceship is the *Lux Mundi*, Latin for "light of the world"

11.David Foster's aunt and uncle are named Clare and Francis, after the Saints of Assisi

12.George St. George urges David to examine the Latin behind "confidence," so that he will learn that its real meaning is "with trust (or faith)"

13.Gene searches for his (flash) light in the darkness when fleeing from Zimbardo

14.Zimbardo leaves the asteroid with crew of five; six men reminiscent of the 666 in Revelation, the number that falls short of the perfect "7" and is multiplied three-fold

15.Jesus Madera-Cruz is a deliberate Christ figure; an ioneer in the 22nd century being a parallel to a carpenter in the first century; Madera is the Spanish word for "wood" and also connotes "strength"; Cruz is the word for "cross"; his name therefore means "Jesus of the strong, wooden cross"

16.The ship Lee High Eagle used to fly to Mars in 2014 is called *Gloria*—Latin for "glory"

17.At the time Gene is sentenced, his situation is improved by the intercession of Jesus Madera-Cruz, reminiscent of the description in Hebrews of Jesus who "ever lives to make intercession for us"

Journey to the Tenth Planet

1.Armstrong Forest is described as a "pristine paradise," and is intended to be reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. It is patterned after Butchart Gardens in Victoria, British Columbia, and is designed to contrast sharply to the frozen, dark, and fear-haunted tenth planet described as a "frozen hell."

2.The quotation Zip makes to Kathy in Armstrong Forest is taken from the earliest versions of George MacDonald's book, *The Princess and the Goblin.* The pertinent passage is:

> "There was once a little princess who—"
> "But, Mr. Author, why do you always write about princesses?"
> "Because every little girl is a princess."
> "You will make them vain if you tell them that."
> "Not if they understand what I mean."
> "Then what do you mean?"
> "What do you mean by a princess?"
> "The daughter of a king."
> "Very well, then every little girl is a princess. . ."

3. "Still waters" in chapter two comes from Psalm 23.

4. Allen Foster's ship *Elijah* named after the prophet who ascended in a fiery chariot

5. Kathy prays at the end of chapter 5.

6. Kristina Bethany is named for the town in which Martha, Mary, and Lazarus live, the friends of Jesus who showed a ministry of service and prayer.

7. In chapter 17, Joe says, "there are more of us than there are of them," reminiscent of Elisha's words to Gehazi in 2 Kings 6:16

8. Description "a sound like many waters" in chapter 17 is reminiscent of the voice of God in *Revelation*

Descent Into Europa

1.Robert Nolan is described as a "fallen man" in chapter one.

2.The line "The wind wrapped them in its wings" in chapter 7 is taken from Hosea 4:19.

3.The account of the abyss uses Biblical images to present the boundary of damnation—e.g., a bottomless pit, a sun the color of blood.

4."He swerved neither to right nor left" is reminiscent of Isaiah 30:21.

5.The battle between Nolan and Denn is a loose parallel to David and Goliath.

The Lost Race of Mars

1.Quotation on title page is Job 4:7-8
2.Mrs. Dathan named after Dathan and Abiram, the two rebels against Moses.
3."windows of the soul" based on teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6:22-23
4."It was night." Line at end of chapter 10 reminiscent of John 13:30
5.The sun stands still for Richard Starlight in chapter 20 the way its stood still for Joshua
6.The Ahmanyan word for "little girl" is *talitha*, the same as the Aramaic Jesus used in Mark 5:41
7."Timon," the name of the Ahmanyan, boy, is from Acts 6:5
8.Bethesda taken from John 5:2, where it is the pool in which healing may occur
9.The Sisters' chant is from the proper for the third Sunday after Easter:

Psalm 66:1-2, with alleluias added:

Be joyful in God, all you lands; *
sing the glory of his Name;
sing the glory of his praise.
Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! *
because of your great strength
your enemies cringe before you.

Doomsday Horizon

1.A world without "corruption or sorrow" in chapter 5 is suggestive of Eden.
2."Come, and you will see," said by Richard Starlight at the end of chapter 15, is suggestive of Jesus' words to Andrew in John 1.
3.Sotik's pseudonym "Reuel" in chapter 18 means "Friend of God"; Exodus 2:18. (This is also a tribute to John Ronald Reuel Tolkien.)
4.Joe's exclamation in chapter 20, "Sulphur and salt!" is taken from Deuteronomy 29:22, where the words describe a powerful divine judgment.
5.In chapter 21, the rivulets that grow swifter and deeper are reminiscent of the stream that flows from the Temple into the Dead Sea in Ezekiel 47; the name "Luxa" is from the Latin *lux*, or light, and the Lucians, referred to as "angelic," are reminiscent of Lucifer, the light-bearing archangel who fell and became Satan

NOTE: David didn't make notes on the Christian symbols in *The Heart of Danger* and *The Last Command*, but they abound in both books.

From: David Baumann
Sent: Monday, July 21, 2003 1:09 AM
To: Jon Cooper
Subject: The Last Command

Dear Jon,

You'll recall that when I put The Starman Saga together I chose a Bible verse for each book. Today I ran across a great one for *The Last Command*. What do you think of Job 38:19-20?

Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness, that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home?

Job 38:19-20

Kind of an application of "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it," when the Ahmanyans and humans "take the light" to the dark world of the Xenobots, and conquer.

David

_____

Dear David,

That is the perfect verse for that book! Man - it works perfectly. I like the way it has several layers of meaning; you can interpret it in a number of ways and it still fits. Definitely the right verse to use for the grand finale!

Have a great day!

—Jon Cooper

IX. HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE STARMAN MESSAGE BOARD

The Starman Backdrop: Theism & Orthodox Christian Theology
The Starmen's Martial Arts Training
Race and Gender in the Starman Series
The Starmen's Personalities
The Starmen's Tears
Scientific Plausibility in the Starman Series
Sense of Place and Place of the Senses
The Failures of the Starmen, Especially Zip Foster
Ahmanyans, Animals, And Passivity
The Ahmanyan Character
First Races, Ahmanyans, Humans, And Xenobots

THE STARMAN BACKDROP: THEISM & ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

David Ethell has asked about the presuppositions or backdrop to the formation of the Starman universe, and wonders whether our occasional references to "millions of years" in the books assumes adherence to belief in some form of evolution, theistic or not. It is not an easy question to answer and I hope that this posting will not tax the patience of the readers. Before I share my response to David's question, a brief review of how the Starman Team writes is in order.

Jon Cooper develops a plot outline and sends it to Mike Dodd and me. By email, we discuss it a bit and then bring the outline into an agreed form—usually not much different from Jon's initial proposal. Mike frequently throws in amazing plot twists, "out of the box" suggestions, and scientific undergirding and rationale. (Mike has a wonderful gift of combining both book-solid scientific accuracy and a phenomenal imagination!)

From this outline I write the first draft of the text, chapter by chapter, and send each portion to Jon and Mike for their comments as soon as it is written. They make numerous suggestions; in the course of this process other readers associated with us (basically family and friends) also examine the draft and make comments and suggestions, many of which we take.

This is all by way of saying that the first time any "in depth" formation of the text gets done, it is done by me. (That's why I'm making the initial response to David's question.) Therefore, the primary, visible contours of the presuppositions behind the text come from me, although the final text is a decision by the three members of the Starman Team in consensus.

Regarding the weight of the creation/evolution controversy in the published Starman books, when I drafted a line referencing the passage of "millions of years," one or two of the readers who go through the text as it is developing questioned whether this implies a commitment to a belief in evolution. In most such cases, the Team decided to alter the text to read something more general like "eons" or "ages." It is not the intention of the Starman Team to take a strong position in our stories on the theory of evolution (theistic or not) or creationism and the various schools of these issues. We want the stories to be readable and acceptable to readers of various convictions on the matters without anyone feeling that his or her conscience or convictions are being dismissed.

In previous exchanges on this message board, we pointed out that the Starman series is not a scientific textbook—it is a story that we hope is based on the best of current scientific knowledge but which ventures plausibly into the realm of fiction. Similarly, the Starman series is not a theological treatise —it is a story that we hope is based on solid philosophical underpinnings but which ventures plausibly into the realm of fiction. We have made clear that all three Starman Team members are Christians, so our philosophical world-view is based on Christian theology; we've also made it clear that it is not our goal to use the Starman series as a sneaky means of proselytizing. We don't hide our Christian conviction, but neither do we wave it around like a flag; we're simply writing a story and drawing upon what we know best to do so.

I am the only one of the three who has made known his denominational affiliation. As an Episcopalian of the high church or Anglo-Catholic

tradition, I am a Catholic—that means I hold the unchanging faith of the undivided Church whose essential tenets are expressed today in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and similar historic Churches whose roots go back unbroken to the time of the apostles. Having stated that, from here on, then, I am expressing only my own positions—I cannot speak for either Jon or Mike on this subject, other than to say that we discussed the question David asked as we were formulating the series and the three of us have agreed upon a fitting approach to the series. Jon and Mike, of course, are welcome to clarify or correct what I am posting.

When I write the Starman series, the backdrop from which I draw is my belief that all truth comes from God who is the Creator of all that is. Anything that can be shown and proven to be true, I acknowledge, whatever its immediate source, as having its ultimate source in God. Since 2+2=4 everywhere in the Universe, even though it is not stated anywhere in the Bible I believe that this mathematical principle is an attribute of the natural order from creation and comes from God.

The conviction that all truth comes from God and that no provable truth, whatever its source, can really contradict the Bible, came early in the history of the Church. One of the first exponents of this position was Clement of Alexandria who died in the early third century. As a solidly orthodox Christian, he taught that the philosophies of the Greek culture did not need to be rejected utterly, but rather found their correction and fulfillment in Christianity. Around the turn of the twelfth century, Anselm of Canterbury wrote about "Faith Seeking Understanding"—that is, he taught that faith cannot be threatened by secular discoveries, but seeks to know more and understand better by observation of the natural world. In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas said much the same thing when the writings of Aristotle, Plato, and others were rediscovered in the Western world. Aquinas taught that there are many true things that can be learned from observation in the world, but that there is some knowledge that can come only by revelation from God. In essence, I think this means that he understood that science and religion are not adversaries, but partners in declaring and upholding truth—and that there is an Absolute nature to truth. Revelation is inherently logical and consistent with all other knowledge, but all other knowledge finds its fulfillment in what is revealed.

Although I have a Master's Degree in theology, my undergraduate background (UCLA) is in Mathematics, with a leaning toward physics. I still read physics books for fun, especially the writings of Stephen Hawking. I do not see a conflict between science and faith. To state it briefly, I think that science can answer the questions How, When, What, and Where. Faith answers the bigger questions Who and especially Why. To put it another way, science learns only by empirical observation and measurement. Nothing in those endeavors gives any information about the "meaning" of what is observed and measured. Scientists who, for example, try to explain that they have shown that there is no need for God are talking about something of which they are ignorant. But when scientists speak about something they know—namely science—I listen.

When science suggests that the Universe is about 15 billion years old; that it may have begun in an instant of enormous energy; and that the building blocks of matter are assembled in certain ways that make life possible, I think that the evidence points that way and I accept these conclusions as likely without seeing any kind of contradiction with the teaching of the Bible. If later discoveries make better sense—such as when Einsteinian physics expanded upon Newtonian physics—I will accept these new discoveries. They are not matters of ultimate meaning or salvation— ultimate meaning only comes from God by revelation.

Regarding Darwin's theory of evolution—well, I really don't know much about it and I suspect that only a few truly know in detail what he hypothesized. I don't want to mirror scientists who declaim on matters faith, and pretend I have any authority on scientific matters when my specialty is theology. In the past, the Church made this error when it rejected the discoveries of Galileo and Copernicus. With that disclaimer, I'll go so far as to say that I don't think that Darwin suggested that human consciousness or the soul gradually developed from instinct or whatever awareness the higher animals may have. I am willing to be corrected by those who know Darwin better than I. Darwin himself stated his premise, I believe, as a "theory"—that is, an "educated guess"—willing to be corrected. All good scientists should do so. My understanding is that most scientists today recognize that there are many flaws and gaps in the theory. But whether or not Darwin said that human consciousness or the soul gradually developed from whatever awareness the higher animals may have, this is NOT what I believe.

In short—and FINALLY to answer David's question directly—I believe that scientists have made a convincing case for the age and structure of the Universe but (as most scientists themselves say) they haven't got it all right; I believe that all life was and is created by God, and especially that human beings were created by God—that there was no time when a humanoid animal like an ape was an ape one day and evolved on its own steam into an ensouled human being the next. I believe in the revelation through Jesus Christ that there is one God, who is an indivisible Trinity of Persons in one divine Nature; and that God the Son became fully human, whose perfect love, shown in his death and resurrection, opened the kingdom of heaven to those who were in exile through sin and death. I believe that God is the Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is, and that in the power of invincible love and joy he made the atoms and galaxies and everything in between; that he is the Giver of life, and fills all things while remaining separate from the Creation. I hold to every tenet of the Nicene Creed as affirmed in the fourth century by the undivided Church and traditionally interpreted straight through into the 21st century.

And from these convictions, with the support and general agreement of my partners Jon and Mike, I flesh out the world of the Starmen in a way that, I hope, is accessible and exciting to people of different convictions within Christianity, different religions, or none.

THE STARMEN'S MARTIAL ARTS TRAINING

A post on the message board from a reader:
> I really enjoyed reading LROM! There were many things that were
> fantastic, but I'll focus on just one aspect, here. I loved the fight scenes
> because I am a first-year karate student and could actually identify several
> of the techniques and how they flowed into each other. This leads me to two questions.
>
> 1. What kind of self-defense training do the Starmen receive? How does
> this training compare to current martial arts training?

The Starman Team hasn't discussed this in detail, but we take it as a given that training at Starlight Academy includes rigorous physical education. Since martial arts training at its best is deeply holistic, this is the preferred

course in phys ed at the Academy—especially for those who are Starmen material. Not every student will become a Starman (*Descent Into Europa*, page 78), and in one case a candidate who was qualified turned down the invitation (*The Runaway Asteroid*, page 183). However, those who DO become Starmen must be highly proficient in martial arts. Classical martial arts training sticks to its roots, but also easily adapts to the time and culture in which it takes place. Therefore, although the externals of training in Starlight Academy may be different from training today, I think that the internal side of the training will be little different.

> 2. How has handheld energy ray weapons in the 22nd century impacted
> self-defense techniques? Are energy ray guns inherently more accurate because
> there is no recoil? Through training is it possible to toughen the body to
> the effects of energy ray guns, at least against low, nonlethal settings?

Good question. Not being a gun guy, I can only guess at the accuracy/recoil connection. I assume that accuracy would depend at least as much on technique and the skill of the shooter as on the absence of recoil. Today's weapons, in skilled hands, can be quite accurate. As far as martial training, the body can be trained to absorb blows or other invasive techniques in a way that does not incapacitate the victim as much as those without training, and mental acuity and "single-mindedness" in the face of attack or danger are a normal part of classical martial arts training. These qualities would be present in the Starmen. Remember how Zip was able to escape from his attackers in *Assault On Mars* in spite of being wounded by a laser blast. He did not succumb until he was in the tunnels out of a position of risk. But check out his attitude and determination in that situation in *Assault On Mars*, pages 76-77, for example. Of course, as today, anyone who gets hit with a lethal weapon is going to come out on the short end, whether it's a large caliber bullet or a laser pulse.

RACE AND GENDER IN THE STARMAN SERIES

I think that as soon as race becomes an issue in just about ANYTHING—whether for or against a given race—the point's been lost. Anyone who wants to do so can claim that he or she has been discriminated against, and we realize that this can be a major factor in today's culture. But I think that

the point isn't race, it's discrimination. In the world of the Starmen (like that of Star Trek), we are presenting a world that is BEYOND racism and BEYOND sexism. In the series book world, I think we are unique, though the matter of race in the future is occasionally addressed. "Blake Savage" (i.e. Hal Goodwin, author of the Rick Brants) in his single volume story, *Rip Foster Rides the Gray Planet*, presents a character in the future who is one of only 17 remaining pure blooded Hawaiians. Sam Epstein, author of the Ken Holts, made it a point never to present a villain with a foreign-sounding name —though a number of his secondary heroes had such names.

As we have pointed out before, especially in the second Inter*Stellar, in the 22nd century, none of these things is an issue any more than feudalism is an issue today. It's no more than curious history. Just about no one in the world of the Starmen is able even to UNDERSTAND the question of why anyone would think that another person is inferior just because he or she is different.

We are presenting, as best we can, an "ideal" world. This is the main reason why the Collapse is built into the Starmen's world and is frequently referred to—it made it possible for the Starman Team to "recreate" the world as we wanted it for our series. The people of the late 21st century "came together" in the same way the people of the US and the wider world "came together" after the terrorist attacks and put aside the partisan issues that usually divide people. In the US it lasted a few months. In the Starmen's world, after the horrific worldwide trauma of the Collapse, we are presenting the change as being lasting. In short, we are not writing to address the problem of racism; we are writing as if it had been long solved and then forgotten. This is one of the main "messages" of the Starman series. In the Starman world, there is simply no such thing as racism or sexism.

We know, of course, that this is not the world of today, so people are going to raise the issues that have been raised; discussing them on the message board is precisely what the message board is for. But it seems to me that any kids, or parents of kids, who will not read a book because its main characters are white has a much bigger problem than the Starman series can address. This is the kind of attitude that creates the very problem we are trying to overcome. In such a case, these kids are not being exposed to a series that presents the very world in which "people like them" are respected and included—and they don't want to read the books just because the "people like them" are not number one?

The photos of the Starmen on the web site? They are only approximations of the Starmen's appearance—our models for the characters and guidelines for future artists. People may be surprised as these actual guys' backgrounds. Our model for "Zip Foster," for example, lived his entire life up to college in rural Indonesia among native people, where his parents and three brothers were the only "whites" for a long way. As Jon Cooper has pointed out, the Starmen are generally presented as Caucasian for a reason that, basically, was beyond our control. Further, we have never specifically explained what "race" these guys belong to, other than human. We didn't care. As the Starman series develops and other Starmen are brought into the story line, they will be just as representative of humanity as the rest of our characters have been. As we've indicated, a female Starman has already been introduced[58].

Advance notice: the Benefactors finally appear in The Lost Race of Mars. I expect that a lot of readers are going to be VERY surprised when they discover what race THESE people look like[59]! —and they are presented as, in Zip's words in LROM, "the kindest people we've ever heard of." When one of the Benefactors explains their history to the Starmen, she says, "Usually we lived in peace, but in the far past, occasionally the kingdoms went to war with one another. In time we learned to live without conflict. We worked together and developed the science necessary for space flight, …" And nobody in the Starmen's world CARES what the Benefactors look like. The word "race" is used pretty frequently in the Starman series, especially in the fifth book—and it ALWAYS refers only to inhabitants of planets. In other words, in the Starman series, there is only the HUMAN race. We've presented our world like that from the beginning.

THE STARMEN'S PERSONALITIES

Jon Cooper put up a few polls on this site recently, one of which asks which Starman is the reader's favorite. It is informative to me that three of the eight respondents to date checked "there's a difference?"

---

[58] Kathryn Mullany became a major character in the latter books.

[59] African—Egyptian, specifically. The model used for Stenafi was of African and Native American heritage.

It was stated by two or three of our earliest readers that the Starmen were not sufficiently differentiated in Assault On Mars. Since then, I have made an effort to distinguish between them better. Consider the following:

Zip Foster is presented in the "official" world of the Starmen as being analytical, tending toward being a bit anxious (note how often his brow is "furrowed"), and able to pull facts together and make a decision without losing the ability to follow a "hunch." He has been shown several times as not responding to a joke, to show that he might be a bit too serious. He does have a deeply tender side, however, but it comes out only when he is with his family. He dearly loves his little sister. Of the three, only Zip has been shown at home with his family. This was done as a means of showing this side of his personality, an essential but concealed part of how he acts when "on duty." The only time (so far) we have seen these two sides of him come together is when he "lost control" for a moment at the time of the failure of the active shielding in Journey to the Tenth Planet. He tries hard to keep these two sides of himself separate, but cannot do it very well-hence the only time we've seen them joined was in a moment of weakness. Bringing them together as a strength lies in the future. Because of this, the budding romance with Kristina Bethany leaves him both excited and confused.

Joe Taylor is always ready to do his duty and do it well, but is too ready with a joke. His inclination toward humor might be a bit of a shield to protect some emotional vulnerability. He sometimes makes jokes at the wrong time. Where Zip protects his vulnerability with seriousness, Joe protects his with humor. Joe is the one who talks the most, but is the one who has revealed the least about himself. On rare occasion, he can be surprising.

Mark Seaton is the mystical one. He is always the one who notes first how beautiful a setting is. He is entranced with the splendor of the stars, and is the first to note that stark, thoroughly inhospitable environments like the terrain of the tenth planet can be stunningly beautiful. He doesn't talk much, but he has a wry sense of humor which is rarely expressed; when it is, his humor is subtle. (Remember his remarks about the "Martian gophers" in Assault On Mars.) Mark listens well and does his job without complaint or mistake. When he does talk, it is usually to the point. He is somewhat self-effacing, but can be excitable. He is not emotionally vulnerable, but his emotions are outward directed—way outward. It is difficult to imagine him with a romantic interest.

To see how all three temperaments meld, consider the scene in The Runaway Asteroid when the Starmen tried to find the way out of the room in which they were sealed. (Pages 90-93)

Using logic, it was Zip who had the idea that there had to be a way out. Mark picked up on the idea right away. Joe didn't contribute to that conversation, but went along with the suggestion. Joe, being too literal-minded, couldn't figure out where the panel might be and just checked the wall over and over again. He finally urged Mark to check the floor while he kept going over the wall. It was Mark who found the panel. He immediately shared that knowledge with his partners; he has a strong sense of teamwork.

Joe needed a hint to see the panel. Once he saw it, he impulsively tried to open it by simple manipulation and failed. Mark, being open to new ideas, figured out how to open the hidden panel, using both logic and a mystical temperament. (The method he used, by the way, is an actual martial arts technique.)

Zip praised him for it, but didn't waste much time doing so. He turned immediately to the next task. Joe then leaped in again, ready to manipulate the wires to open the door. Zip stopped him by using his analytical mind to assess whether there was danger in plunging ahead thoughtlessly.

In this single scene, then, we see Zip being a leader (not without flaws) and showing his analytical method of thinking. We see Mark using his heart as well as his mind. Joe is impulsive and somewhat easily frustrated. But ALL THREE were necessary to get the door open.

From Mary Doman
Thanks for taking the time to give us your excellent character sketches. One of the objections I always had to series books when I was a kid, was that the characters were pretty much interchangeable. The only differences between them seemed to be gender and/or physical characteristics. To me, they were just "talking heads " meant to move the story along...there was no difference in how they thought or spoke or acted.

The Starmen are definite individuals, and I am enjoying getting to know each one of them as they reveal themselves through their thoughts and actions.

From David Baumann
What is also interesting is how the three Starman interact with each other—reinforcing each other's strengths while countering the excesses. Joe and Mark are there to buoy up Zip when he grows despondent. When Mark starts to wax mystically on some subject the other two can bring him back to reality. And the laid-back Joe is forced to stick to the business-at-hand by the intentness of his teammates. All of which contributes to their growing maturity - and seasoning - as individuals and as a team.

THE STARMEN'S TEARS

A post from a reader:
> Lurker for a few weeks, not much going on so, first post.
> Ok, I'm not bashing ok, I'm just giving an opinion: The
> Starmen cry too much. Once or twice in the whole series
> at a meaningful spot maybe, but it seems to happen every
> book, sometimes multiple times in the same book. Please.

From Jon Cooper
Now that is something I hadn't seen before! I went through the books and made a list of all the times one of the Starmen cry, and this is what I came up with:

[NOTE: This list has been updated from the list in the original post, and now goes through the sixth Starman book instead of the first four. David's comments have likewise been slightly altered to include the sixth book.]

ASSAULT ON MARS
- none

THE RUNAWAY ASTEROID:
- Zip, memories of the nuclear war, possible destruction of Earth imminent
- Mark, Vly's crystal display
- Joe, when the asteroid was about to hit Earth
- Zip, when meeting his sister again

Journey to the Tenth Planet:
•Zip, upon discovery of the radiation leak
•Zip, upon meeting Kristina
•Zip, after the mutinous fight on board the Starventure
•Joe, upon sight of the holograms of the Benefactor's ships on Nyx
•Mark, after seeing Zimbardo's madness

Descent Into Europa:
•Joe, after his trick with the water balloon (definitely not tears of sadness though)
•Zip, after Mark discovered the octopi on Europa knew Titanian

The Lost Race of Mars:
•Zip, when he learns that Ahmanya is Mars, and was destroyed by the Xenobots
•Zip, when he names Tharsos
•Mark, when he remembers that the Collapse caused the death of four billion Earth people

Doomsday Horizon
•Joe, when he talks to Mark about how they had been tricked and failed the Ahmanyans' trust

When they are all put together like that it does seem like quite a stack! It's obvious that the Starmen are not stoic, strong men who have no emotions at all but are actually fairly soft-hearted. It's an interesting question: how should Starmen behave? Should they pull themselves together, or not? Of the three, Zip seems to be the softest. Does anyone have any thoughts on this?

From Mary Doman
A few personal observations.

> *The Runaway Asteroid:*
> *- Zip, memories of the nuclear war, possible destruction of Earth imminent*

My Dad STILL cries occasionally over guys that he saw killed or lost during WWII, and that was 50+ years ago...he cried then, too, and he's no wuss. So do a lot of the vets from the "greatest generation" and Vietnam and Korea and the Gulf. I think Zip had a good reason to cry here.

> - *Mark, Vly's crystal display*

Something of this magnitude and beauty would bring tears to ANYONE who had an ounce of feeling!

> - *Joe, when the asteroid was about to hit Earth*

If having your planet about to be destroyed doesn't bring tears, what does it take?!

> - *Zip, when meeting his sister again*

Watch military guys who come back from a tour of duty, peacetime or war, or who come back from being POWs. PLENTY of tears!

> *Journey to the Tenth Planet:*
> - *Zip, upon discovery of the radiation leak*

Remember Star Trek's "Wrath of Khan"...Kirk totally lost it when he knew Spock was going to die!

> - *Zip, upon meeting Kristina*

So maybe Zip has the soul of an artist...is that unheard of in a warrior?

> - *Zip, after the mutinous fight on board the Starventure*

Tears under duress...ever seen any of the documentaries about guys in WWII or Vietnam. Yup, tears!

> - *Joe, upon sight of the holograms of the Benefactor's ships on Nyx*

"Close Encounters of the Third Kind"...remember the reactions of the folks on Devil's Mountain to their first view of the "mothership"?

> - *Mark, after seeing Zimbardo's madness*

Tears of compassion, and probably fear.

> Descent Into Europa:
> - Joe, after his trick with the water balloon (definitely not tears of sadness though)

Brings back memories of some DARN good practical jokes at college...and later (like last night from my sis!).

> - Zip, after Mark discovered the octopi on Europa knew Titanian

Zip is solving one of the greatest puzzles of the Solar System, reaching deep into the collective memory of the human race and its longings...ever cry at a movie, even though you knew it wasn't real, because it touched something personal or "human"?

> The Lost Race of Mars:
> - Zip, twice and Mark, once (I can't tell you why, of course!)

As part of the reading group, I can tell you it seems justified to me.

> When they are all put together like that it does seem like quite a
> stack! It's obvious that the Starmen are not stoic, strong men who
> have no emotions at all but are actually fairly soft-hearted.

Do we want unfeeling, uncaring "robots" out there in space...we have them...they're called Xenobots! I wouldn't give 20 cents for a warrior without caring and feeling (heck, in the second "Terminator" movie, the big draw was that the Terminator "grew" human).

> It's an interesting question: how should Starmen behave? Should
> they pull themselves together, or not? Of the three, Zip seems to be
> the softest. Does anyone have any thoughts on this?

They're together when it counts, right? What more can we ask? I think the 50s style of two-dimensional characters who existed only to serve the mystery is frankly, well....BORING! Give me an "Alan Alda" type, any day!

From David Baumann
> > The Starmen cry too much. Once or twice in the whole series at
> > a meaningful spot maybe, but it seems to happen every book,

> > sometimes multiple times in the same book.
> > Please.

From Jon Cooper
> Now that is something I hadn't seen before! I went through the
> books and made a list of all the times one of the Starmen cry, and
> this is what I came up with...

It seems to me that one other person did mention this a while back, but I appreciate the comment and am impressed that Jon did the research and surprised at the result. It does make quite a list!

The tearing-up scenes are not part of Jon's summaries, so I plead 100% blame/credit for this part of the Starman series. First off, believe me that I have no intention of creating Alan Alda-type characters!! My intention was show that the Starmen do have emotions and can express them without compromising their manhood—I cannot improve on Mary Doman's response, other than to emphasize that in the right circumstances strong men can (and should) express emotions, including those that call for tears. In none of those scenes do any of the Starmen "lose control" except when Zip is taken by surprise at the radiation scene in Journey to the Tenth Planet and his discovery of the history of Ahmanya in The Lost Race of Mars. In every other reference, the Starmen show emotion, but it is brief and controlled.

I intend to show that the Starmen are believable as fully human characters. In the series, they evidence a variety of emotions such as joy, excitement, apprehension that sometimes even crosses the border into fear, frustration, depression, and anger. (Allen Foster, Zip's Foster really brought this out in Journey to the Tenth Planet.)

I intentionally created the character of Kathy Foster so that Zip, who in his role as Starman leader is mostly analytical and decisive, could show his tender side. She is younger than Zip by ten years so that "sibling rivalry" would not enter into their relationship. With a child he can show tenderness and love without feeling vulnerable. (With Kristina Bethany he is awkward.) I can't think of any other way in which the lead character could "let his soft side out" than to express love to a child. Kathy is the symbol for Zip's family and, more symbolically, for the family life he doesn't have and can't have as a Starman on duty.

Although in the 1950s the philosophy of "real men don't cry" was common, I personally believe that this is unhealthy. The Starman series is willing to break new ground when it seems good to do so, and I think that this is one of those situations—but if they are coming across as Alan Aldas, then I haven't done it well. I've no intention of presenting them as softies. The Starmen should be realistically but idealistically masculine. They should be strong, dependable, honest and honorable, capable, courageous, and other things that series book heroes should be—but also flawed. They don't solve all their problems alone, they make mistakes and errors in judgment. They should be fully men. To my way of thinking, real men are strong and gentle, dependable and tender, just and compassionate. I try to present the Starmen as heading in that direction.

In *The Lost Race of Mars*, I can tell you that there are three fight scenes in the book (there are only two in the previous four books together!!), and these fights scenes are detailed and action packed!

In the fourth short story, "A Matter of Time," a woman takes out three big guys all by herself. (I don't think the men cry when they hit the deck, but I could write that part in.)

From The Dot
>The Starmen should be
> realistically but idealistically masculine. They should be strong,
> dependable, honest and honorable, capable, courageous, and other
> things that series book heroes should be—but also flawed. They
> don't solve all their problems alone, they make mistakes and errors
> in judgment.

Thank you for putting the "but also flawed." in. I have read quite a few G. A. Henty books and became disgusted with the perfection of the main characters (that and the fact that they were almost cookie cutter plots . . .). Aside from the crying ;) I think they have been portrayed fairly realistically.

From Glenn P.
> Aside from the crying ;) I think [the Starmen] have been portrayed fairly realistically.

I agree. Although this is still something that only the authors can answer, one thing they need to consider, if "realism" is their goal, is: "How often do REAL people cry?" I think you'd have to agree that while occasions for tears are not unknown, they are rather uncommon in real life.

From David Baumann

It should be pointed out that the Starman don't really cry—they "tear up" or their eyes glisten for a moment. That's not the same thing as having tears pour down your face while you sob. As my wife points out, "tearing up" means having feelings that you are trying to control—this is what I intended in writing those scenes, and it is a rather common masculine characteristic, whether the feelings are those that produce tears or other feelings not associated with tears.

Keep in mind also that for the Starmen, "real life" means being in situations that are very emotionally demanding—much more than what ordinary folks experience—so they are likely to sample the palette of feelings more than most. In The Lost Race of Mars there are several scenes that, in my opinion, have enormous emotional impact that few people are ever likely to encounter.

SCIENTIFIC PLAUSIBILITY IN THE STARMAN SERIES

The Starman Team does not hesitate to break new ground when it wants to do so. There are many things we have done for the first time, to the best of our knowledge, in the series book genre.

The recent excellent exchanges over science, etc. have been most helpful and enlightening. The Team was not aware of all of the scientific inaccuracies, implausibilities, and impossibilities, but we were aware of many of them. We are trying, deliberately, to walk the line between scientific accuracy and telling a story—and not just telling any story, but telling a story THE WAY STORIES FELT IN THE 1950s. We WANT the stories to feel like the fifties, but with the science of the early 21st century. This means on the one hand a ridiculously-heavily packed asteroid belt, but also computer technology to traverse it. We take the science seriously, but do not feel bound by strict accuracy; our errors will sometimes be deliberate and sometimes

not, but we try to make sure that they will never be the result of stupidity or carelessness.

Our philosophy of writing and our methodology are really rather complex, now that I think about it, and consistent. After having set that as our background, we really do just press the accelerator into the carburetor! (Thanks, Tom!! You're such a neat guy!)[60]

We also hypothesized the Collapse in the mid-21st century to serve several purposes: one purpose was to provide us with a kind of "escape hatch" from having to satisfy a lot of assumptions of our own time. We could just assume, when we wanted to, that 22nd society had changed enormously because of the Collapse. That frees us from having to use the current terminology for designating asteroids, for example, or following the projected train of discovery of Martian probes.

We accept the recent hypothesis that there is water on Mars in the northern hemisphere just under the surface, but add to that the preposterous notion that there was a primitive people who lived there. We suggest the completely implausible notion of a solid hologram, but leave that to "future science." We try really hard to avoid the scenario of "science explains all via a deus ex machine," but also leave just enough mystery of what a very advanced race like the Benefactors could do.

Personally, I think that our scientific foundation and plausibility are just below the standard set in Rick Brant—whose science was one generation ahead of its time and not a century and a half, and whose author (unlike the Starman Team) was a NASA scientist. I am eager to be corrected, but I think we are more realistic than Tom Corbett (in many ways, not least because we are fifty years later than he in the amount of scientific knowledge we have to draw from), Dig Allen, and certainly Tom Swift Jr.

If we put TOO much attention to scientific accuracy, we will not have enough mystery left to work with if we want to write an exciting story. The scientific commentary in the past day or two, had we known about all the issues that have been raised, would certainly have changed the way we wrote the existing books. (For example, one fan, Dan Henton, is a Ph.D. chemist,

[60] Tom Davis had advised us, whenever anyone criticized the way we wrote or the message we wanted to present, just to "press the accelerator into the carburetor".

who provided for us the vision of methane rain and snow on Titan; without his input the scene would have been very different and less convincing.) We learn as we write. Mike Dodd, who is our science advisor as well as plot-twister, is an amateur—yet extremely knowledgeable in the fields upon which we draw.

In short, when we create our stories we draw on three tools: the anchor of realistic science, the sail of imagination, and the rudder of our message. If any one of these takes over or gets out of balance, the ship won't "go."

OVERALL, all our readers should know that we are NOT really writing a science-based series. The science is often left deliberately nebulous (for example, what we are doing with artificial gravity) so that we don't get too anchored with scientific detail. The series is really about RELATIONSHIPS and CHOICES in the context of the eternal, mythic battle between LIGHT AND DARKNESS. The images, the characters, the plots, the unfolding of each volume and the gradual revelation of the entire saga are all under THAT top priority, in which the Xenobots and Benefactors are the background combatants.

This theme or message was focused, for example, in Lurton Zimbardo who always chose darkness; in his five underlings in Journey to the Tenth Planet who chose darkness until the last minute; and in Gene Newman, who chose light after darkness (his name is "Eugene"—Latin for "new beginning"—and whose last name "Newman"—New Man—was not revealed until his encounter with the good guys). The theme is now unfolding in the narrative of Robert Nolan—watch what happens to him! —for he is a "sleeper" whose tale (envisioned by the Team three books ago) suddenly becomes dramatically critical in *Descent Into Europa*!

I hope that I will be able to finish writing the first draft of *Descent Into Europa* by the end of the year. It is about two-thirds finished now. Then it will have to be read by others and then rewritten. Then it will go to the publisher. As soon as the manuscript leaves my hands, others will take over the production of the book and I will begin writing the fifth book. (There are, in fact, several scenes already written—parts of this book are a year and a half old.) Jon Cooper's summary alone is half as long as Assault On Mars. THIS BOOK CARRIES OUR GREATEST CHALLENGE AND EXCITEMENT! We have been waiting TWO YEARS to put this one

together. It will tie up all loose ends, resolve all sub-plots, and solve all mysteries. We consider the first five books the real Introduction to the Starman series. Once the Starman pentology has been produced, the REAL heart of the series can get launched.

SENSE OF PLACE AND PLACE OF THE SENSES

From Mark McSherry
One of the strengths of the Starman books—in my humble opinion—is the sense of place as well as predicament in the telling of the stories. The Starman Team has enough confidence in their work to take time to leaven the plotting with descriptive accounts of both locale and environment. And, by drawing on all five of the reader's senses while doing so, enriches the tale by adding a depth that lingers in the memory long after the telling.

I knew the Series could be something special while reading AOM. The trek across the Martian landscape to Eagle City, which takes up the middle portion of the book, is exciting in and of itself. But the journey, especially after meeting up with Jogren, takes on a leisurely, almost lyrical quality as the earthmen land-sail across a snowy plain, then work their way on foot through the maze of the mud caves, till finally kayaking the Martian Sea. It is writing such as this, and there are other examples throughout the entire series, that transcends the boys'-sf-adventure series genre that the Team seeks to emulate and pay homage to. It is a style that could almost be called Tolkienesque. Likewise, as an example in *The Lost Race of Mars*, the exotic setting of the villain's desert refuge is visualized in a manner resembling Middle-Earth locales imagined by that inimitable don.

From Jon Cooper
Thank you! Your review of *The Lost Race of Mars* was also very thorough; I really enjoyed reading it. I haven't had a lot of time to post on this board recently thanks to all the work I've been doing (this week and last week are probably the busiest weeks I've had this year) but I have been paying attention. Thanks for taking the time to let us know what you thought of LROM: it is just amazing what we learn from these reviews. Hearing our reader's comments really does help us write these books: among other things, they help us see our stories in ways we hadn't seen them before. I have to give David Baumann the credit for the Tolkienesque quality of the Starman

books. David is the one that writes those descriptions and that thinks them up in the first place: they're not in the summaries. David adds dinners and peaceful scenes and reminisces and other things of that nature to the books, and it definitely enhances them; the conversation you refer to, including the entire location it takes place at, was David's idea. This is why it takes all three of us to write the Starman Series. Without David, the books wouldn't have those Tolkienesque scenes. Without me, a lot of the plot and excitement wouldn't be there—that's the sort of thing I tend to add. Without Mike, the books would be much more ordinary; there would be (among other things) no Xenobots and no Benefactors. I know books aren't usually written by three people, but the Starman Series really does take the three of us, and I think it's much better because of it.

From David Baumann

Thanks, Mark, for your thoughtful and insightful comments. The fact that you found it "Tolkienesque" is highly gratifying, since JRRT is my favorite author, and I believe that his saga is in a class of its own, above all other fiction.

> *by drawing on all five of the reader's senses while doing so,*
> *enriches the tale by adding a depth that lingers in the memory*
> *long after the telling.*

You're the first reader to mention this fact, but it is indeed deliberate. I think that reading should be sensual (in the best sense of the word)—that is, it must appeal to all five of the senses. The reader should be able to feel cold or warmth or the walls pressing in, taste the food, smell the smoke, hear the sudden clap of thunder, see the sunlight, etc. I think a story should be a "full immersion" experience for the reader.

> *The trek across the Martian landscape to Eagle City, which takes*
> *up the middle portion of the book, is exciting in and of itself.*

As we've pointed out before, our series includes an innumerable amount of references or connections with previous series. Some are very subtle and (unfortunately) we haven't even kept track of them all. The trek was intended to be reminiscent of the trek Tom Corbett and friends made on the red planet in Stand By For Mars! —my personal favorite scene in the eight Tom Corbett books.

> It is writing such as this, and there are other examples throughout
> the entire series, that transcends the boys'-sf-adventure series genre
> that the Team seeks to emulate and pay homage to.

I'm glad you see it that way. It's not intended by any means to be plagiarism, but rather building on, or perhaps building with, the abundant material that exists in the classic books. With that material and much of our own stuff, we want to create something that feels familiar but is quite new.

THE FAILURES OF THE STARMEN, ESPECIALLY ZIP FOSTER

From Neil Lindholm
Well Jon, I finished the book today. I dislike criticism, especially when the object being criticized is a labour of love but hey, we are all friends here, right? :) So here goes.

I hate to say it but the book did not improve upon a second read. I followed the story better the second time as I had no clue what was going on during my first read. Not too exciting and Heinlein did it better. KIDDING! Anyway, what really turned me off the book was the personalities of the characters. The Starmen are an elite force, handpicked from the best the Earth has to offer. Why are they such crybabies? It starts off with Zip's collapse during the emergency. When his skill is needed the most, he gives up and becomes a liability to his teammates. Why would they ever trust him again in a stressful situation if he just gives up? While there is a disaster going on, he just sits there and sobs.

The scene with Allen Foster was pointless. What was he trying to get across? It serves no purpose other than shock value.

I found the initial scene with Kristina somewhat offensive. When I meet someone in a wheelchair, I don't start crying or asking them what happened. It is none of my business. I have a friend in a wheelchair and the last thing he would want is pity or someone crying over his condition. The scene reinforced what an emotional wreck Zip is.

When the crewman insults Zip a while later, does he assert his command and put a halt to it? Nope, he starts to cry again. He needs the captain to bail him out. As a leader, he would not be trusted.

It goes on an on. When Zip is not bawling, Joe is crying over an alien ship and Mark is crying over Zimbardo. Zip's emotional instability seemed to be contagious. Why would Zimbardo, a towering presence and natural leader, totally lose it in captivity while his fellow pirates some out if the ordeal more or less unscathed? It doesn't match his previous personality.

The scaring of the Xenobots by means of holograms didn't ring true as well. This is an advanced race, but even though their rays travel through their visual enemies and nothing they do can stop them or their ships, they still don't realize that they are attacking holograms? If I shot at someone and the laser beam went right through them, I would be suspicious.

To be honest, not a very enjoyable read which didn't improve the second time. I realize that this book is an anomaly as the other books in the series are great. I hope this starts a discussion about the merits of this book as many of the readers must have had a different take on this volume. Or maybe not.

From Jon Cooper
Neil,

> Well Jon, I finished the book today. I dislike criticism,
> especially when the object being criticized is a labour
> of love but hey, we are all friends here, right? :) So
> here goes.

Right! No problem at all. It's good to get more feedback! We like a good, solid, honest response. Thanks for the review, Neil!

> I hate to say it but the book did not improve upon a second
> read...

I'm not too surprised! A lot of your objections goes back to the emotional nature of the Starmen: we see these breakdowns as signs of characters who are growing. The Starmen, as you noted, have fewer of these as times goes by and in book six they have none at all, even though had the events that

happened to them in book six happened around the time of book three, they would all have had severe nervous breakdowns. I imagine this is mostly a matter of opinion here.

> The scene with Allen Foster was pointless. What was he trying to get
> across? It serves no purpose other than shock value.

This I can disagree with! It wasn't pointless. To quote from Starman Appendix volume 5:

"I've given some thought to your response to Neil Lindholm when he said that he couldn't get into JTP and that that the failure of the active shielding was just tacked on. You noted that the scene was necessary to bring about the collapse of Robert Nolan, which would be a major theme in DIE. The failure of the active shielding was also necessary for other parts of the plot: the Starmen had to land on Titan, thereby meeting Kristina which led to their being shown the base the Benefactors had made when they delivered the Titanians to their new home. From that they learned the history of the Titanians, and saw the 3-moon logo again. Seeing the 3-moon logo changed their perception about many things, and prepared their way for the landing on Nyx and exploration of the abandoned base there, and eventually set the stage for the entire story of DIE. If the failure of the active shielding hadn't happened, none of these other things would have taken place either. They would have seen the 3-moon logo on Nyx, but its significance would have escaped them. They needed to know that the Benefactors were the people who brought the Titanians to our Solar System and that they were the people behind the 3-moon logo. For these reasons the failure of the active shielding was absolutely essential to the plot, both for JTP as well as DIE and eventually LROM."

As David said, the whole bit with the active shielding was necessary to push Robert Nolan over the edge. When the shielding failed that was bad enough, but what really did him in was when Allen Foster went on national TV and humiliated him. Nolan was not a very solid character: he had lived his live in Richard Starlight's shadow, and this was his big chance to get ahead - and not only did it fail, but Allen Foster - a famous hero – really let him have it. This left him open for Beowulf Denn to lead him astray in book four, and book four is a result of this. Without the Allen Foster scene Nolan would not have gone over the edge. To quote from Starman Appendix Vol 2:

"Robert Nolan's besetting sin would come from always being in Richard's shadow, no matter the reality of his own success and wealth-hence, jealousy and envy. Addressed properly, that would lead him to growth in charity and true rejoicing in his own impressive achievements and Richard's with equal joy. But if he gives in to the temptation, it would lead, as it does in DIE, to treachery, deceit, and smoldering secret anger and hatred. Nolan wants control as a way of making himself "feel good about himself." That's why he blew up, even at the President, in TRA. When his objection wasn't followed he felt personally rejected and humiliated, especially when he was later proven wrong. Then he tried to make up for it with an apology and the generous act of donating the decoy freighters. That helped him a lot to move in the right direction. Then his REALLY BIG PLOY for fame and FINALLY COMING OUT ON TOP AND LOOKING GOOD was the active shielding in TRA-his own personal invention. When that failed so publicly and when the public was already against him, he was tottering on the edge of the abyss. Then when Allen Foster blew his stack on live, public television, Robert collapsed. He was ripe for the little nudge over the edge from Beowulf Denn. That's why Denn's words summarized ALL OF THESE THINGS, twisted the truth about Richard Starlight, and offered the ANSWER to Nolan's deepest fears and angers: power, supremacy over Richard, revenge, and a way to look good publicly, all at the same time. Nolan's decision to choose evil was an easy one at that point-but a decision he would never have made at any other time. Beowulf Denn's timing and method were perfect."

Is it wrenching? Yes, it is, and I even remember objecting to David about this. Here's what he said (a quote from Starman Appendix vol 1):

"Well, keep in mind that that scene was SUPPOSED to be wrenching. It has to cause the collapse of Robert Nolan, which is the main reason it's in there. It also indicates the results of radiation poisoning, which intensifies and focuses many other scenes, such as David's emotional outburst on the ship, his reaction to Mike Saunders' accusation after they leave Titan, Kathy's sobbing out her prayer, etc. I think the intensity is just what we need. It's placed in the book to be after David's outburst on the Starventure and before his reaction to Saunders' accusation."

I understand that you object to it, but can you understand why it is there and why we thought it is necessary? It was a critical link in the chain that pushed Robert Nolan over the edge.

> I found the initial scene with Kristina somewhat offensive...
> The scene reinforced what an emotional wreck Zip is.

Zip was pretty fragile emotionally, but as you noticed, that changed as time went on. We're trying to show a character slowly growing: he's got flaws and he's got problems, but they are gradually disappearing. By the way, we did run that scene by Kristi (the person Kristina is based on) and she had no objections. She thought it was fine, and so we went with it.

> Why would Zimbardo, a towering presence and
> natural leader, totally lose it in captivity
> while his fellow pirates some out if the ordeal
> more or less unscathed? It doesn't match his
> previous personality.

This is because he had already lost it earlier: he went over the edge in TRA when he decided to throw the asteroid at Earth in an attempt at killing everyone just before he abandoned it. From there it was just a downhill slide as evil ate away at him. Once again, to quote from Starman Appendix vol. 5:

"Our entire premise for Lurton Zimbardo is that he was demon possessed. In drawing his character, I researched and followed the classic symptoms very closely in describing his condition and progression into evil throughout the 3 books. His "journey" into evil and the followers he controlled are very, eerily similar to that of Osama BL. If this premise is correct, then an all-out war is the desired goal of such evil possessed persons. In TRA, when the followers discerned LZ's true bent toward evil, they were shaken-some to repentance (Gene), most to fear and looking out for "number one" (the smugglers and other pirates), and a few to further fanatical obedience (the last five). When Zimbardo's final hinges came unglued, then the last five turned back. It was all very carefully drawn up."

(I know, I know, volume 5 hasn't been released yet. I'm still working on it; we'll try to release it before too long.) So that is what happened to Zimbardo, and that is why he acted as he did. Evil persons, in our opinion, do not stay at

a constant level: they either grow and reform or they become more evil and depraved until nothing is left of them.

> they still don't realize that they are attacking holograms? If I
> shot at someone and the laser beam went right through them, I would be
> suspicious.

The idea was that these were "solid" holograms - Star Trek style. I read book three so long ago that I don't remember if we mentioned this or not. Didn't one of the characters run into a holographic tree? Maybe I was just imagining this.

> I hope this starts a discussion about the merits of
> this book as many of the readers must have had a different
> take on this volume. Or maybe not.

So do I! You bring up some great issues. To be honest, few people have let us know what they think of this volume; I don't really know what the "average" opinion is. A good discussion of this book - or the topics it brings up - would be a good thing.

You can also see why I wanted to release the various volumes of the Starman Appendix! It gives a glimpse into our thought processes, and why we included the scenes that we did, and what themes we were trying to work out. It can be fairly interesting.

From David Baumann
Great comments, Neil, and really very much appreciated. Yes, really! I think that Jon has made some good responses to the points you raised, so I will just add a couple of other observations.

Yes, the holograms in JTP were solid. The Xenobots did not see their laser beams pass through them; what they saw was that their lasers had no effect. This was intended to frighten them. Keep in mind, as is revealed in LROM (two books later), that the Xenobots are deeply afraid of the Benefactors, and this event was a "new" one in their experience in their battle against their "ancient enemy." What the holograms could NOT do was fire back. The Benefactors' technology could create holograms more advanced than what we can create, and there is evidence for this is TRA (the hologram room) and

JTP (another hologram room, introduced just before the Xenobot attack). Further references are found in LROM, and in Doomsday Horizon you will find still further references to the Ahmanyans' ability to use light in this fashion. (This ability also appears in the final segment of The Lost Tomorrow.) The Ahmanyans are, in fact, masters of light.

Regarding Zimbardo's "demon possession": one doesn't have to believe in it for the story to make sense. A reader who thinks that demon possession is totally idiotic and a medieval superstition can still enjoy the story—I just used classic descriptions of such a thing that form a consistent set of data. Jon's statement that we believe that evil people either grow or continue to decline rather than stay the same is very good. Throughout TRA and JTP, Zimbardo declines and never goes back; his colleagues make other decisions at different times. One of the themes in the Starman series is personal responsibility and choice, both in the heroes and the villains. No major character stays the same—all of them either grow and mature, or decline and fade. Some do so rapidly; others do so slowly. By the time we get to Doomsday Horizon, for example, the over-emotional side of the Starmen is pretty much past history. To be honest, this is in part due to the criticism that several readers have made to this part of the story in the early books. We do want to put out a good product and our readers' comments, criticisms, suggestions, and reactions help us to do that. We listen and we chart our course accordingly.

Finally, regarding some of the points you raise that you found less than satisfying, I can just plead guilty. All I can say is that we are still laying the groundwork for further developments in the story. For example, Allen Foster's inordinate anger and other unresolved feelings about his radiation burns are directly connected to Zip's "losing it" in JTP when he is irradiated. Zip does improve in DIE and LROM. It is, in many ways, a drawback that we are telling one long story in this series, because a scene that is unsatisfying in one book may not find its fulfillment until a book that may not come out for several years. I hope that our readers will be patient; they still may not be satisfied at the end either, but nearly everything you mention has, in fact, a well-considered place in the overall story.

(For a fairly detailed set of exchanges on the Starmen's crying, you might also check the set that began with message 766 on this message board.)

Thanks again for your comments! We are very pleased when someone takes the time to give us a careful analysis of our books.

From Mark McSherry
>Well Jon, I finished the book today. I dislike criticism, especially
>when the object being criticized is a labour of love but hey, we are all
>friends here, right? :) So here goes.

>I hate to say it but the book did not improve upon a second read. I
>followed the story better the second time as I had no clue what was
>going on during my first read.

Neil, I did a year ago what you're doing now. Prior to the release of LROM I re-read the first four Starman books— one following immediately after the other. My opinion of JTP improved greatly during the second read-through— Many of the concerns you mention seemed to resolve themselves. There is little doubt that the Starman Team was attempting to 'push the envelope' in terms of character development (especially with the boy's series book genre) both for the 'good guys' and the villains.

>Anyway, what really turned me off the book was the
>personalities of the characters. The Starmen are an elite force,
>handpicked from the best the Earth has to offer. Why are they such
>crybabies? It starts off with Zip's collapse during the emergency. When
>his skill is needed the most, he gives up and becomes a liability to his
>teammates. Why would they ever trust him again in a stressful situation
>if he just gives up? While there is a disaster going on, he just sits
>there and sobs.

Events (beginning with AOM) have thrown these three newly-commissioned Starmen (only days after putting on the Starman red) 'into the fire' before they've had a chance to be 'broken in' to their responsibilities. In AOM Zip is on Mars carrying out his first (rather hum-drum) assignment while Joe and Mark are sitting back on the Moon waiting for their first tasks as Starmen. Then the pirates attack... The youth of the Starmen can be a great asset, but such exuberance can also lead to emotional lapses (or excesses); modulation will come with more experience (seasoning)...Zip's mettle (along with Joe's and Mark's) had been proven in Books' One and Two. Zip's collapse (after

the break-down of the active shielding) was exceedingly brief—And only seconds later, Zip was helping Mark pull a dazed crewmate out of danger
>The scene with Allen Foster was pointless. What was he trying to get
>across? It serves no purpose other than shock value.

The first time I read this scene I was shocked too— There was little forewarning— I expected, perhaps, a heated exchange of words but not what followed...But Allen Foster's emotional outburst helps set the stage for events in DIE. Knowing this probably tempered my reaction to that scene on the next reading. And the tension between Allen Foster and Richard Starlight doesn't entirely go away in the later books...

>I found the initial scene with Kristina somewhat offensive. When I meet
>someone in a wheelchair, I don't start crying or asking them what
>happened. It is none of my business. I have a friend in a wheelchair and
>the last thing he would want is pity or someone crying over his
>condition. The scene reinforced what an emotional wreck Zip is.

I didn't see it that way, Neil - even after the first reading. Zip is obviously smitten-at-first-sight with Ms. Bethany. It is only after two pages of conversation with Kristina, during which Zip falls deeper under her spell, that he realizes she is sitting in a wheelchair. I found his reaction, which was only momentary, perfectly understandable. And Kristina's disarming response to Zip's awkwardness only reinforces the attraction he (and the reader) feels toward her.

>When the crewman insults Zip a while later, does he assert his command
>and put a halt to it? Nope, he starts to cry again. He needs the captain
>to bail him out. As a leader, he would not be trusted.

In this incident, Zip's immediate reaction is anger; he is about to deliver a crippling blow when Joe stops him with one word. Then the captain intervenes. Zip is quietly ashamed...There is no sobbing. Only Mark and Joe notice Zip's glistening eyes. Obviously, Zip's emotions have been rubbed raw by the continual reminders of what happened to his father nearly a generation ago. And, just as obviously, there are issues here unresolved for both father and son...Issues that will slowly be worked out as the Series continues— As in 'Doomsday Horizon'.

I enjoyed reading your honest appraisal of JTP. Of all the books, this one is the most experimental in the Starman Series— especially for a series which seeks to relate 'an epic tale told in the classic series book style'. And, perhaps, the most problematic— Which also makes it one of the more interesting to discuss... :-)

I'll save my comments about Zimbardo and the holograms for another post. And I'm looking forward to your comments about DIE.

From David Baumann
> I just got to that part in the fourth book today and I agree that it is
> a glaring error. One member in training fails a test and is forever
> denied a position as a Starman yet another member totally collapses at
> his first command crisis and receives no reprimand. ... Training
> is where these defects are (hopefully) found.

Actually this is a mighty good observation! No has made this connection before, and it is, at best, an anomaly that has not been addressed, if it is not simply a real honest-to-goodness glitch. Yancy Dufaure was denied the offer of being made a Starman because of a panicky lapse during training. (I can't agree that he was forever denied the position.) However, Zip's "phobia" regarding radiation burns would certainly have been known during his training. He may not have lapsed in an actual situation as Yancy did, but he was obviously not "cured." The possibility of exposure to radiation is quite likely common in space flight, which would have made Zip a high risk individual. One can only guess how this aspect of his psyche was addressed in his formative years in the Academy—perhaps it would make a good subject for a short story sometime[61].

I suspect that what happened is that he didn't "mess up" in any way during his training, but when it came time to offer the position of Starmen to certain Academy graduates, the discussion around the table regarding David Leland Foster was probably rather heated. Some would have held forth that, because of his known fear of radiation he ought not to have been made a Starman until he'd been proven in the field, while others said that in spite of his known fear of radiation he had not buckled under their testing. He may have

[61] This exchange eventually led to the scene in the first chapter of *Mutiny On Mars*, the rewritten version of *Assault On Mars*, in which the decision to admit Zip to the rank of Starman is vehemently contested for the reasons Neil raised.

been approved by the skin of his teeth, and as a compromise was assigned to a virtual "desk" job on Mars as his first assignment—no one suspecting that the assignment would put him directly in the line of action.

In the adventures on Mars and later the Asteroid Belt (AOM and TRA), Zip proved his leadership capability and pulled together the Starman Team. Perhaps that allayed any reservations about his ability, and the lapse aboard the Starventure was a surprise to everyone—followed up by his surge of anger when he was insulted by the future mutineers after they'd left Titan. Perhaps after he returned to Earth at the end of JTP he was allowed to head up his personal expedition to Europa in place of an assignment, since certain persons at SE who had had reservations about him before may have raised objections again—and for good reason, in spite of his successes overall and, by this time, fame. Remember that the adventure in DIE was not an assignment for SE but a personal quest funded by discretionary funds and not the company coffers.

For now, most importantly, I must reiterate that this side of Zip's character was long foreseen by the Starman Team, and is an absolutely vital part of the saga for a reason that has not yet been published. When that reason becomes public, I think all doubts about the propriety of Zip's fear will be laid to rest[62].

AHMANYANS, ANIMALS, AND PASSIVITY

June 7, 2004

Answering a question raised by Valerie Kraemer

The reason that Ahmanyans are not used to animals is that there haven't been any on Mars since the Xenobots ruined their planet. The waking Ahmanyans only know them by histories but haven't seen any. Only a few Ahmanyans in this age have been "revived" from suspension—for them, animals would not be strange; the others are descendants of the original guardian families. It didn't occur to me that this unfamiliarity with animals was significant until I got to the scene where Saadervo sees Montezuma Vly's koalangs; then I

[62] This, of course, was Zip's ultimate self-sacrifice in *The Last Command*.

realized that this was a major event. The usually self-sufficient Ahmanyan was suddenly at a complete loss.

The waking Ahmanyans always had the capacity for space travel but didn't use it much—certainly not interplanetary travel. Shortly after the ruination of Ahmanya they made a few forays to Earth and also visited the Asteroid Belt, but no Ahmanyan had been to Europa, though they knew about the city there. It took the people from Earth, with their adventuresome spirit, to re-energize and inspire the Ahmanyans to "get with it." The Ahmanyans on this jaunt to the neon planet are just as "green" as the Earth people when it comes to interplanetary or wormhole travel.

Pleera is presented as "not having the customary Ahmanyan patience" (as she says somewhere herself); she is putting a spin on the reality. "Ahmanyan patience" is really "Ahmanyan passivity." It is described that way in the Appendix to LROM. Pleera is a real go-getter, which is why she became the commander of Tharsos. She is quite a fireball—very non-typical of Ahmanyans, male or female, and therefore a treasure to them.

David

THE AHMANYAN CHARACTER

David Baumann wrote:
We definitely have bad humans, weak First Races, and the totally depraved Xenobots, but there are no "bad" Ahmanyans. This was deliberate on my part. A discussion on this subject might be worthwhile if anyone is interested.

Mark McSherry responded:
I am one who is (very) interested.

The answer:
Well, to start with, I certainly had no intention of suggesting that the Ahmanyans are an "unfallen" or "sinless" race. This is not the case. Their history (see the appendix at the end of LROM) reveals that in their early history they had actually gone to war against one another. I think I wanted to present them as having been so beaten down by the first Xenobot war that

they had simply settled for a state of passivity, perhaps even racial depression. If they were to be generally subject as a race to a certain category of sin, I suppose it would be sloth—indifference to matters of eternity and spiritual issues. They were wrapped up in their losses. Stenafi recognizes this, or at least implies it, in her conversation with Tayan on pages 311-312 of THOD. The revelation of Ahmanyan history in LROM (the chapter called "A Refuge in Twilight") shows this also. Horribly tragic as it is indeed, the Ahmanyans are "self-absorbed" about it. Saadervo defers to Stenafi to tell the tale. It is revealed shortly after that that Stenafi had been so absorbed in her own grief that she had "forgotten" for a moment that Earth had gone through a similar planet-wide trauma. (This incident, by the way, is the first time that anything like "personal sharing" occurred between Stenafi and Mark.)

Nevertheless, Stenafi is presented as having more "fire" in her than most Ahmanyans—it is for this reason that she is ultimately drawn to Mark. Of the three Starmen, Mark is the one who is most "like an Ahmanyan", as he himself mused on one occasion. This is what makes these two compatible. It is also why Mark is both attracted to her and amazed at the attraction almost to unbelief, as described in the dinner scene in The Hidden Garden in the last chapter of TLC. He needs his friends, Joe and Kathryn, to affirm his romantic relationship with an Ahmanyan. When we see Stenafi at the last, her attraction and commitment to Mark are already complete. We do not see her dealing with her emotions as she discovers that she is attracted to an Earthman. There are only a few lines in the last two books where her growing awareness of her attraction to him is presented, and they are very, very subtle. I doubt that a reader would catch them for what they are, although I had the matter in mind as I was writing. Read the paragraph that begins in the middle of page 144 of TLC, for example.

Saadervo is formal. His "warm" side only comes out when he meets with Montezuma Vly and is given a baby koalang. Jogren grows a sense of humor but he does not start out that way. The three major Ahmanyan characters are Stenafi (who matches Mark); Jogren who matches Joe; and Saadervo (who parallels Zip—both being "analytical" and "emotionally guarded", whose emotions only come out when they can show affection in a safe way: Zip to Kathy and Saadervo to the koalang).

Pleera appears late in the saga—she first appears in THOD, the second-to-last book. However, of all the Ahmanyans, she is presented as the one who is most "human-like", yet without sacrificing any sense of her definite Ahmanyan characteristics. She has an innate sense of humor and can even make a joke in the face of danger. Her conversation with Zip in THOD when Zip is drifting down river toward the Xenobot spaceport reveals that. She is also passionately emotional when she feels responsible for Zip's apparent loss when Tharsos attacked the torus in THOD. This emotional outburst is unusual for an Ahmanyan. Pleera also is the one who encouraged Allen Foster when he first came aboard Tharsos. (I suppose everyone knows that Allen Foster's name is a tribute to Dig Allen? That was Jon's idea.) She also provided an intimate but chaste kiss for each of the three Starmen before they were taken by the Janitor to his home planet. And somewhere, I think, there is a discussion about her in which she is described as a "treasure" of Ahmanya because of her personality. I've forgotten whether that is a part of the saga or something I wrote about her elsewhere[63].

Throughout the saga we see the Ahmanyans (beginning with Jogren in MOM) grow gradually from an almost isolationist attitude to one of warmth and increasing confidence. That is, they grow gradually out of their sloth into engagement. They needed the Earthmen to inspire this change. They knew this inside themselves, although probably without being able to identify it clearly. This is why Stenafi, in the very beginning of LROM, is so eager to have the Ahmanyans reveal themselves to the Starmen, and she chafes when she is told to wait. We begin to see the change in them in Doomsday Horizon. Long before the saga begins, we see the attitude of isolationistic self-protectiveness in the Ahmanyans. They do not reveal themselves to the Earthmen during the time of the humans' Martian settlement in the early twenty-first century—they only reveal themselves to the Wind People after the mass exodus from Mars back to Earth, and only then to guarantee the Wind People's survival. (This episode would make a good short story sometime[64]. It is a critical moment in the Starman saga—the first time after the scourging of Ahmanya that the Ahmanyans make themselves known to

[63] It was in an email to Valerie Kramer, later posted on the message board. Its text is found in the previous section, "Ahmanyans, Animals, and Passivity".

[64] This short story was almost written for this issue of the Starman Archives. Jon and David decided reluctantly not to proceed with the idea. We thought that, over the year of rest and inactivity, we had perhaps lost the skill to write up to the standard that we wanted.

another race. The debates in the refuges were tense. They had to weigh the risks of self-revelation versus allowing the refugee humans to die.)

Stenafi grows more in warmth than any of the Ahmanyans, but only because she is “hurried along” by love. Only in the last pages of the last chapter of the last book do we find any Ahmanyan showing any kind of overwhelming personal passion, when Stenafi shows her complete commitment to Mark in a romantic way.

Strayed a bit from the original subject of ”bad” Ahmanyans. When their racial passion revives, and when the sleeping millions are brought back to the surface, there will definitely be many challenges for them all. Selfishness, fear, overwhelming grief (remember that none of the “sleepers” had seen Ahmanya devastated, except the few that were aboard Tharsos), isolationism, questioning of authority, distaste for humans, and other negative qualities will emerge, to be sure.

David Baumann

FIRST RACES, AHMANYANS, HUMANS, AND XENOBOTS

January 19, 2006

At last! An entry on the message board, the first for a long time.

David Ethel wrote:
> What a finish! ... I can say that the ending was very satisfying.

Thank you, David.

> Now to my questions or “critiques” if you could call them that:
> 1) Why didn’t the Lucians just destroy Luxa with the singularity at the outset?

Jon has answered this question already, but I’ll add more to the answer. In writing about the First Races, I tried to give the impression that they were not technologically very aware. The appendix to TLC says a bit more about this

—the technicians and scientists among the First Races are in stasis on Larson's Folly. The few members of the First Races who are still active were distant and essentially uninvolved with the Xenobot menace until they were brought into it by circumstances. First there was the Janitor, who didn't appear until THOD. Then Saleh only appeared in TLC. To create the singularity, the First Races needed the information in the greegles, and for them, gathering and using this information, much less applying it, was not their skill.

Eons earlier, the Xenobots (when they were still recognizable as the Lucians) were the most powerful of the five First Races. They had, in essence, won the war with the other First Races. The small group of active members of the First Races at the time of the Starmen were, basically, refugees. They could not have prevailed against the Lucians until the latter had declined into Xenobots and kept going on the path of decay.

By that time, the Ahmanyans had encountered them and taken on the battle. The Ahmanyans, although not First Races, were at that time technologically superior to the active First Races. Although they lost their home planet, in the first Xenobot war the Ahmanyans were the winners and the Xenobots the losers. Only when the second Xenobot war was imminent and humans became involved, did the stakes get to be very high once again. At that time, but not before, the First Races stepped in. They were relatively weak (and I hope I made this clear in the story) but they also felt partly responsible for the crisis. In fact, they DID have a unique role to play, simply by virtue of being the peers of the Xenobots/Lucians. This also was expressed in TLC.

In short, it was actually the virtue of the human-Ahmanyan alliance that caused the active First Races to get involved—latecomers, but with an essential part to play. They were somewhat reluctant to do so, not least because of their lack of technological expertise. It is for this reason that Richard Starlight's and Izmaka's insistence that they wait to launch the black hole was particularly difficult for them. They weren't sure they could "hold it" for very long, and if the hyperbubble "broke" early, it would destroy the active First Races.

As is the case in much of the Starman saga, the real adventure takes place in the minds of the participants. What were the First Races thinking? What was their motivation, their weaknesses, etc. From these things actions emerge. At

the end, we had four major players: 1) The Xenobots whose decay I hope was thoroughly described throughout the series, with its result of moral vacuity, lust for survival at all costs, and generally "psychopathic" behaviors. 2) The active First Races had the dignity of their standing in the Creation, but they could still become "weak", and did so. They weakened in virtue and lost confidence—they abdicated into silence and became bystanders in the face of an implacable foe. They are less culpable for their fall than the Xenobots since they "slid" into that position, and obviously did not "fall" very far from their first glory. However, the Xenobots actively chose it and, like Lurton Zimbardo, pursued it into oblivion. 3) The Ahmanyans rose to prominence and developed an attractive culture and ethos, based on beauty, harmony, etc. Their dedication to "light" is a "symbol" as well as a fact in the story. (See the appendix to LROM for more information on that.) However, the destruction of their planet brought their survivors to passivity. Their exercise of mercy at the end of the first Xenobot war was well intentioned but somewhat misplaced. It allowed for the return of the Xenobotic menace. Yet it was not a "fault" of the Ahmanyans, i.e. they were not wrong to show mercy. At the end, it was only the First Races who had the authority to "speak the final word" against the Xenobots, i.e. destroy them. 4) The human element became vital to the mix because the humans motivated the Ahmanyans and also brought a "fighting spirit" to the final encounter. The place of the Wind People, Tunnel People, and others have all those elements in common, though they use them differently.

The human-Ahmanyan alliance is key to the ultimate triumph. As Jon pointed out, had the First Races acted unilaterally to suck Luxa into a black hole, it would have effected very little. The human-Ahmanyan alliance was essential. Human "fiber" and "oomph" and willingness to act heroically had to be blended with Ahmanyan serenity and artfulness for the good guys to "win". This is ultimately signified in Robert Nolan's being the one to preside over the rebuilding of Ahmanya and the eventual "union" of Mark Seaton and Stenafi. The fact that that union could take place is one way of pointing out that humans and Ahmanyans are essentially one race, one people.

One thing that might be considered "missing" from the above list is that there are no "bad" Ahmanyans anywhere in the saga. We definitely have bad humans, weak First Races, and the totally depraved Xenobots, but there are

no “bad” Ahmanyans. This was deliberate on my part. A discussion on this subject might be worthwhile if anyone is interested[65].

> 2) Why couldn’t the Ahmanyans detect earlier that the torus was a hologram?

I think Jon answered this pretty well. One “quirk” we put into the series is that both sides use their enemy’s weapons against them. It is touted several times that the human-Ahmanyan alliance used Xenobotic weapons against the Xenobots, but the alliance never thought that the Xenobots could do the same. The fear, verging on terror, that the Xenobots had for the Ahmanyans was set out in JTP in the scene where Mark creates golden soldiers and battleships out of holograms. Remember that the Ahmanyans are the ONLY race that had conquered the Xenobots. That created the intense hatred in the Xenobots for the Ahmanyans, but also produced a powerful measure of fear. The fact that they would use an Ahmanyan weapon in the war just never occurred to the good guys. This is in addition to Jon’s answer, that the alliance never really got a good look at the torus until it was too late anyway.

> Thank you so much, gentlemen, for the past five years of reading. I remember well a young man in my church lending me the first three books in the series almost 5 years ago. I devoured them in a weekend and have enjoyed the series ever since. These are seven books that I will greatly enjoy reading with my children and passing down to them some day.

You’re welcome again, David. It was a great pleasure to bring the Starman series into existence.

By the way, if you only have seven books, you’re missing one!

David Baumann

[65] See the above section.

SELECTED POSTS BY READERS

Date: Wed, 13 November 2002
From: Mark McSherry
Subject: More *The Lost Race of Mars*

Probably the main reason there have been few posts concerning TLRoM is that no one wants to inadvertently spoil the book for those who have yet to read it. Concerning the revelations in Chapter Three of TLRoM—- I'm not too proud to admit that I was fooled. All the evidence certainly pointed elsewhere. And before I had time to fully absorb the ramifications of the first revelation[66], BAMM!—- Several pages later there is the astonishing disclosure concerning Tharsos[67]! Congratulations to the Starman Team for coming up with a new riff on a very old SF theme!

Having read TLRoM and then the short story, 'Return to Europa', in Inter*Stellar # 5 —with its startling revelation in the last two pages[68]— I believe it is safe to say that the Starman Series, and the Starman universe, has now undergone a major paradigm shift. —- That over-used phrase from the high-tech internet boom of the '90s when every new piece of computer hardware, software and internet business model would change the world as we knew it-(Hey! Let's sell dog food over the internet!!!). It certainly looks like the term Starman is now truly apt.

Daniel Routh's post on the message board in early June 2003 after he had read *Doomsday Horizon*:

This book flowed marvelously—I felt as though it was a real magnet pulling me along irresistibly. The plot was always unexpected—a good change of pace. And it kept me constantly thinking and emoting as I followed the varied

[66] That the long-sought Ahmanya is actually devastated Mars.
[67] That Tharsos is actually Mars' former third moon.
[68] That Ahmanyans once had the capacity to travel by hyperspace

story lines. Excellent job! What especially caught my attention, though, was how the series uses such old science fiction clichés so effectively. I mean, *Martians*?—and also *an extra-planetary threat to the earth*? I believe that is the most over-used plot in the solar system. But I would say that by God's grace you have used them successfully. I would describe the series this way: Intense and moving. The Starman series infuses new life into such old clichés as Martians and world-destruction. In the authors' world they awake, breathe, and tremble.

X. THE DEATH OF DAVID FOSTER

"It is not only an ending;
it is an illumination as well."
Jonathan Cooper, February 23, 2005

In the many files and folders on the computers of the Starman Team, with plot ideas, drafts, figures, publicity material, biographical information, and many others, there is one called "The Death of David Foster". It is abridged and reproduced here.

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Here are selected emails between Jon and me when we were ruminating on the end of the Starman series.

Email exchanges between
Jon Cooper and David Baumann
probably March and April 2002

From Jon Cooper
You know, David, I've been thinking about how to end the last Starman book, and some thoughts have occurred to me. ... I would like to know what happened to Zip - know how his life ended and why and when, ... I would also like to see Zip's end as being heroic: something to remember, something fitting for a Starman, something that does great good, a sacrifice reflecting that of Christ's, something that shows what it means to be unselfish and to love your neighbor.

From David Baumann
Sounds good. I like it. I think so too. And if we put together some more Starman books after *The Last Command* but that chronologically take place before that book, it will add real poignancy to the tales we tell, since all the readers will know that his time is limited. I still remember the newspaper front page on November 23, 1963—the day after the assassination of President Kennedy—with a picture of him waving jovially to the crowd. The caption was "one minute to live." We can do something similar with Zip Foster. It can be fantastic.

From Jon Cooper
Absolutely. I thoroughly enjoyed the last vision of Frodo Baggins in *Lord of the Rings*. That was better than *The Last Battle.* We can do something very similar for Zip Foster. I wish that the last chapter of the Starman Series - the epilogue, maybe, could be a dream. I've imagined Mark dreaming after Zip died giving the Xenobots the last blow that ended their threat forever, dreaming of Zip entering a beautiful place and a new life. I really liked the last chapters of the Chronicles of Narnia *(The Last Battle):* they were encouraging. In a very real sense, Zip would not be losing anything: he would be gaining everything, just as we both will when our time comes. There is so much I would like to portray, so much I would like to do with all this.

From David Baumann
When *Assault On Mars* was written, we already knew the great scene that would appear in *The Lost Race of Mars*, five books away. Now we're in the same place. I might even write the last chapter of *The Last Command* in the next month or two, while the image is still sharp and the vision is fresh[69].

From Jon Cooper
That sounds like a very good idea! We have no urgent deadline to finish *Doomsday Horizon*, so writing the last chapter of *The Last Command* now would be fine and is probably a very good thing to do, before the scene fades. Remember writing the big scene in *The Lost Race of Mars* before book one came out? This is something similar, although much deeper. If you see in your mind how it should work and are gripped with a powerful scene, then by all means take some time to write it and save it: the moment of inspiration is the time to write it. We're not in a hurry.

From David Baumann
The Last Command is something that was almost determined from the beginning of our work, though we didn't consciously know it at the time. I tell you, if this really is the direction we go, it'll make my writing much more focused. I know now that I have only four books to prepare Zip for this sacrifice. The whole thing with his sister, coming to grips with his emotions, and all that will have to lead in the right direction now. Perhaps his sacrificial death can effect healing in his father, too—Allen certainly retains a lot of anger over his own radiation damage. There are a lot of loose spiritual ends

[69] The first draft of the death of David Foster was written in April 2002.

we can tie up. It can be magnificent—the death of Zip can bring about a lot of healing in various people.

From Jon Cooper
Yes, we definitely can, and it will be powerful. The last vision of Frodo is a good model and a powerful scene; that is definitely more along the lines of what we would do in the Starman series. The series is leading up to this event, slowly but surely, and it is definitely worth doing. In some ways I think we are moving series books to a new level: we are adding a sense of depth they did not have before and are grappling with issues that series books generally left alone.

I remember when I first plotted the 23 books and got to the last book, my first inclination was to have Zip die in the last chapter: it seemed like what ought to happen, although I didn't know why. Over the past few weeks all of this has solidified and become more clear, until it crystallized in the e-mail I sent you last night. The series does seem to be moving in that direction and I agree: it would have a very powerful impact and would definitely focus our efforts.

From David Baumann
In a way, we're setting them up for it: in *Doomsday Horizon* we have Zip's death believed and then reprieved. Our readers will be taken by enormous surprise to have it occur again and NOT be reprieved.

From Jon Cooper
They will indeed! It will catch them by surprise; in *Doomsday Horizon* we let them off the hook, and in all of series book history the main character had always survived. Yet, I don't think we will be drowned in complaints: Zip's sacrifice is a very fitting ending to the series, and I think we are approaching this correctly and with care.

There are a lot of loose ends to be tied up, and it is amazing that we are thinking about this now, while there is still time to do it and work everything out. We would not be having this discussion if I hadn't been inspired to plot books 6, 7, 8, and 9 and begin work on book ten and then came to the question of how to end it. The inspiration has been very strong recently, and it has been a blessing.

Are we in agreement, then? Shall we proceed? I think this is a powerful thing to do and is exactly the right way to go: it does tie up many loose ends in the series and provide a powerful, moving ending in a way that nothing else could. It will be challenging, but it will be very, very good.

From David Baumann
I just thought of something else. Remember it's Mark who peeps in on Lurton Zimbardo at the end of *Journey to the Tenth Planet*, once he is isolated from the others, and is horrified to see the disintegration of a human being. Now the final chapter of *The Last Command* can be a parallel to that, but this time it'll be vision of the completion of a human being into glory. We've been grooming Mark as the mystical Starman—we've also said, as early as *Assault On Mars*, that he is looking for the uncreated Light. In the last chapter of *The Last Command* he will, at last, see it when he sees Zip enter it.

Email exchanges between
David Baumann and Jon Cooper
February 22-23, 2005
when the writing of The Last Command *was coming to completion*

From David Baumann
Well, Jon, so far only you and I know that, with chapter 10, the breaking of the Starman fellowship has occurred. The farewells between Joe and Zip, and later between Mark and Zip, are their last. Joe will never hear Zip's voice again. Mark will hear it only once.

From Jon Cooper
Very true! I read this e-mail before I read Chapter 10, so I had your comments in mind while reading it. Knowing what was going on added a lot of depth to the chapter: it really is a sad thing. I don't think I would be expecting what was coming if I was reading the book cold because the scene is so casual: there's nothing in it that would make you think that this is the end. Unless for some reason our readers already think that Zip is going to die (which I strongly doubt) I don't think they will see it coming. It should come as a complete surprise.

From David Baumann
I hope so. I still can't read those last chapters without being deeply moved. I hope that our readers will have the same reaction, but I don't think it could ever be quite as intense for them as it is for the authors.

Believe me, it was pretty emotional writing this chapter, knowing that Zip would be dead before noon. In this chapter I presented Zip as almost abrupt in his manner. He is intent upon the task and almost heedless of danger. That will lead right into his impulsive, but necessary, action to fly to the Xenobot moon. TLC is drawing to a close, as is the Starman series. It's bittersweet.

From Jon Cooper
It certainly is. I see why Zip is behaving this way and I agree: it makes sense. It is indeed a bittersweet moment – triumphant, and sad, and moving all at once. Yet, at the same time, this is clearly the way the series has to end: it is simply where everything has been leading to, and I think our readers will see that.

From David Baumann
Maybe. The members of the Reading Group see that, but I suspect there will be a few readers who will be quite upset and maybe even angry. Maybe our gathering in May[70] will give us an indication of how people will react. Even if people are angry, I think they'll eventually understand and agree.

From Jon Cooper
I imagine this is so. There may be some people who are upset (and then again, there may not be) but even if they are all upset I wouldn't change it. This is indeed how the series ought to end: it's very fitting and deeply moving. I will be watching with anticipation to see what our readers think of *The Last Command.*

It's hard for me to tell how I would feel about it if I wasn't a part of the process. Had Rick Brant or Ken Holt died at the end of their finale books I definitely would have been moved: those books would have become even more special, and it would have had a big impact on me. Once you become attached to the characters it is hard to see them go. Definitely bittersweet.

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[70] The final reading event where the ending of the Starman series would be revealed to those who came together for that purpose

From David Baumann
Yep, there's a risk. I think we're doing the right thing and it'll be very powerful. The fact that Ahmanya comes back, Mark and Joe end up very well, Kathy becomes a Starman, and Allen is healed of his anger will all be immensely powerful. We've broken new ground in he series book world before, but nothing like this. We're showing that goodness will triumph, but at a price. The title of the chapter in which Zip dies really says it all: "Victory Forever".

From Jon Cooper
I really love that chapter title! It does indeed say it all. The ending is immensely powerful. This is one of those series where the last book redefines the series in unexpected ways. It is not only an ending; it is an illumination as well.

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This material was first assembled into a single file in the spring of 2003, when *The Lost Tomorrow* was in its earliest stages and *Doomsday Horizon* was less than half finished. It had taken more than four years for the Starman Team to decide that David Foster would die at the end of the saga, yet we also recognized that the implications had been there almost from the very beginning.

The meeting of the Starman Team in Charlottesville, Virginia took place on October 11, 2002, the day before we released *The Lost Race of Mars*. We discussed various ways to end the series and came down to two possibilities. David would be grabbed by wormhole transfer after the Xenobot fleet is destroyed and before the solar power station evaporates. Or he could die. Having Zip die was obviously risky. We didn't want readers to feel cheated after they had plowed through all the books. Yet it seemed right. Once decided, we never doubted that it was right although it did take several months for the decision to "hit home" for us. Based on an existing rough draft, I wrote the scene in which Zip dies shortly after the decision was made. It was written quickly, almost as fast as the words would come, and after that revised only slightly. It moved me deeply each time I read it aloud or alone.

Authors come to identify with their characters. Killing one off is traumatic. It was especially so for me since all three Starmen are extensions of myself. Yet from *Doomsday Horizon* forward everything pointed toward the ending. David's funeral in *Doomsday Horizon*, his growing solitude and aloofness even as Joe and Mark mature in their personalities and partner up with others. Although the signs were there earlier, Joe finally connects up with Kathryn Mullaney in *The Heart of Danger,* and Mark (who realizes that he "thinks like an Ahmanyan" in *The Heart of Danger*) unconsciously anticipates his eventual, unprecedented human-Ahmanyan union with Stenafi.

Underlying this is the assumption that humans and Ahmanyans are, in fact, one species. Saleh tells Montezuma Vly in chapter 4 of *The Last Command* "Though the First Races who yet live are unable to conquer [the Xenobots], it is your race that can, and will." He uses the term "your race" to refer to both humans and Ahmanyans.

David Foster, however, goes in a different direction. Like Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*, Zip must "give up" in order that others may "own". In the last books Zip was continually burdened, never relaxing, never able to let go.

In the first chapter of *The Last Command*, there is a significant conversation between Zip and his beloved sister Kathy.

"You're not paying very much attention to me, David," Kathy reproved him mildly. "You're preoccupied."

The Starman turned toward his sister and smiled broadly. "I'm sorry, Kathy," he said. "I *am* preoccupied."

"You're *always* preoccupied, or something," Kathy complained. "You need to enjoy each day as it comes. Uncle Frank and Aunt Clare went to a lot of trouble for your birthday, and they're so excited to see us! When we leave tonight, they should feel completely happy that we came, and not wondering what's wrong!"

"You're right," David said, looking down at the ground, abashed. He turned back up to look into her grinning face and brushed a snowflake off her cap. "I'm just so tired all the time.

Many scenes in the saga anticipate the final sacrifice. For example, consider what David says to Karax in *The Heart of Danger*:

"Starman," returned the Ahmanyan. "I am not forbidding you to take on this task. I speak merely out of concern for your safety. What you propose is extremely perilous."

"Some would say foolhardy, you dope!" Zip recognized Joe's voice in the background, and smiled.

"I recognize and am grateful for your concern for my safety, my friends, but now someone must act boldly for the safety of us all."

Consider Zip's reflection later inside the Xenobot ship with Jack in the same book.

He was surrounded by people who were trying to kill him. He felt vulnerable and exposed to the merciless hatred of countless enemies. He shivered. A sharp pang of loneliness and longing came through him. He felt the acute separation from his partners, Mark and Joe, and wondered if perhaps he had let them down by plunging headlong in his determination to board the Xenobot ship.

More than one person had tried to talk him out of it, including Karax. He hadn't yielded, and now he'd put Jack's life at risk

Consider Zip's desperate need to warn Tharsos of Xenobots' horrific plan in the same story, yet his neglect to think of his own escape until it was too late.

The redheaded Starman's radiation sickness and fear of radiation that stirred up so much controversy on the message board, especially from Neil Lindholm, the scene with Zip's breakdown (much mitigated in the final version from the first draft), and Allen Foster's eruption in *Journey to the Tenth Planet* were all vital for the ending. Neil's cogent observation and the subsequent discussion on the message board led to the addition of chapter one in *Mutiny On Mars*, where reservations are brought up about David's suitability—all were absolutely essential to leading up to the climactic scene where all finally falls into place. David's sacrifice heals many things, including his own father's hurt and anger.

After Laurel Yoshimoto, who became a member of the Reading Group as *The Heart of Danger* was being written, heard the ending read to her, she

said softly: “I knew that someone would have to get hurt. The end would not be happy for everyone.”

Kristina Bethany’s loss is not spelled out, but is left to the imagination. A suggestion from April Cooper led to the scene in the last chapter in which Kristina’s robotic assistant Jenny muses on grief and love.

A number of special scenes were introduced into *The Last Command*. As they were being written, Jon and I reflected many times on their significance for the coming climax.

From the first chapter, here is the last time David and Kathy see one another:

“Tell mom and dad hello for me, and have a happy birthday tomorrow, brother,” said the Starman’s sister, “and you make sure you’re here next year when I graduate!” she added with mock sternness. “I’m hoping to be created a Starman!”

David smiled at his sister with fondness and looked directly into her eyes. “You know that even a planetful of Xenobots can’t keep me from being here!” he whispered. He kissed her on the cheek and she kissed him back, and then Kathy turned and hurried toward the terminal. She didn’t look back. Slowly, almost unwillingly, David reentered the cockpit of the *Dart*.

David and his father Allen have had a strained relationship throughout their lives. In the beginning of chapter 7, there is a rather feeble but sufficient attempt at rapprochement.

With those words, Zip had expended his reserves of emotional expressiveness. His speech had come out of him without effort or forethought, and now he didn’t know what else to say. He felt uncomfortable. He turned his attention back to the boat and glided it into a patch of soft sunlight. When father and son spoke again, long minutes later, it was about mundane things. But both felt better.

Allen’s return to space was the only thing that could have led him to see and accept where he had fallen short over the years. Though he actually “did” nothing, his presence aboard Tharsos during the Xenobot War was essential to the story. Significantly, it was Pleera who had the necessary words for Allen.

"I, uh…I have to admit I'm somewhat daunted by the technology of this spacecraft, Pleera. Even the Starlight shuttlecraft that brought David and me here was something new to me." He lowered his voice. "I'm afraid that I won't have much to contribute to the effort."

"Starman Foster," she began.

"Please call me Allen," he interrupted.

"Very well, Allen," she said. "Don't underestimate yourself. The anticipation of your arrival gave enormous encouragement to us here. We know that you do not have current training, but that can, and will, be overcome. Your presence has already boosted morale. Even before you stepped through that portal, you contributed to the success of this mission."

Again, it is Pleera who provides the bold but entirely fitting and necessary closure to the Starmen's departure from Tharsos—which is also the last time David will see anyone else of his own race—other than his two friends, of course.

Allen Foster had seen fit to say his final words to his son in private, and was not present for the actual departure. Only Izmaka, Richard Starlight, Commander Lewis, and Pleera were with the Starmen.

"Good luck, Starmen," said King Izmaka. He approached the three and, one at a time, laid his hands on their shoulders. His deep eyes looked into those of each of them, conveying courage and confidence.

Commander Lewis shook hands firmly with each one. Richard Starlight similarly shook their hands. He was smiling, but that he could do so only with an effort was evident. He felt keenly that he might be looking at them for the last time.

Finally Pleera approached them. "Peace and wisdom to you," she said in a strong but quiet voice. "And success." Upon the lips of each she conferred a kiss.

"Well, nothing can top that," said Joe, breaking the over-solemnity of the moment. "I'm ready to go now."

As the tension built, Jon and I took note of the last momentous moments of departure. They were written almost to be understatements so that their poignancy would be recognized only after the fact. Here is the scene in which Joe says goodbye to Zip forever.

"Okay, then. That's our plan," nodded Zip. "The hypershield will be down within an hour, and our fleet will let the Xenobots have it. They'll be in for a big surprise. Their power stations and torus will turn to dust before they know it! And Tharsos can rescue us by wormhole and we'll be in the *Star Ranger* before lunch!"

Mark looked doubtful. "You sound awfully confident, Zip, for one who's been so guarded about the Xenobots up to this point."

"Well… I know it won't be that easy, but I'm hopeful. Besides, I don't see any other way. Do you?"

Mark and Joe both shook their heads. A sudden feeling of dread shot through Joe. *So far it all seems too easy,* he thought. *It can't last.* He shook the feeling off, determined to concentrate on his task.

"Well then, I'm off," said Zip. "Good luck, Joe." They clasped hands. Then Joe opened his toolkit. Mark set his backpack down next to Joe and accompanied Zip back to the central chamber.

It is a little different when Mark and Zip part. Mark, who is more sensitive to great moments and is sometimes even prescient—at least when it comes to others, not himself—is strangely reluctant to let Zip go quite as easily as Joe did. The actual departure is not out of the ordinary, but Mark can't quite take his eyes off of Zip.

"Good luck, Zip," said Mark as the redheaded Starman began to ascend the steps. In moments he had reached the ledge. Zip stepped gingerly onto the platform of metal set with railings that hovered over the drop. It remained solid as he put his weight onto it. He looked for controls, and found them on a panel set into the railing.

These can't be too difficult to figure out, he thought. He experimented carefully, and in moments felt the slab begin to rise.

"It's working," he said to Mark. "I'm going upward."

Mark continued to gaze after the platform until long after it had disappeared into the darkness, beyond the reach of his light. He turned off his own suit lights and saw a tiny halo of light spilling over the square of metal. As the minutes passed, it became smaller and smaller. Mark lay on his back so he could continue to look upward without straining his neck. When the light

vanished, he checked his watch. Zip had been gone four minutes.

The last communications Zip has with Mark are strained and unclear because of the difficulty of compad exchanges through the narrow shaft, and the exchanges Zip has with the officials on Tharsos are deeply hampered by time delay. Zip's detachment from humanity grows until it is complete. With his customary rashness and lack of attention to his own safety, he leaps into action on a course that he believes—rightly—is the only one that can save the day.

He threw the detector down and raised his compad.

"Starman David Foster calling Richard Starlight!" he nearly shouted. "I have located the Xenobots' solar power station! It is on the Luxan moon! There is no doubt!" His words tumbled out. "I am taking a Xenobot shuttlecraft to the moon where I will disable the power station! The Xenobot fleet will soon be powerless—if I am successful! I will launch in less than two minutes! I will contact you later to tell you where and when to send a hypertransfer beam to bring me back to Tharsos! Foster out!"

The Starman ran to the Xenobot shuttlecraft, selected one, and leaped inside. Within a minute he had blasted off from the surface of Luxa.

"Foster out!" are the last words that Zip speaks to his fellows.

The Final Reading Group

Several months of anticipation preceded the fever-pitch caravan to Tapiado Canyon in the Anza-Borrego Desert in southern California for the dramatic reading of the climactic last four chapters of *The Last Command.* It was Thursday, May 19, 2005.

In the end, ten people were part of the expedition. The previous day Jon Cooper, his sister April and brother Mike, and their cousin Ben Farmer had flown into Los Angeles International Airport where David Baumann met them. Michael Allison, a NASA scientist from New York flew in on a later flight and took a cab to David's home in Placentia where he met the rest of us. The next morning these six were joined by Mark and Benjamin Bennett and Leslie Owens of the Reading Group, and we drove in two cars to the old gold rush town of Julian where we met Diana Lindsay who lives north of San Diego and is one of the most knowledgeable people regarding the Anza-Borrego. She has even written books on the subject.

The ten of us continued the journey for another hour or so, dropping from the mountain range where Julian is located to the desert floor east of Julian, then passed by Ghost Mountain where Marshal South's "experiment in primitive living" took place 1932-1946. We finally arrived in mid-afternoon at the canyon where the large mud cave is found. For Michael Allison, April, and Ben, it was their first visit. Sadly, Valerie Kramer who had had the idea that the reading take place at the mud cave and who had been invited to come down for it, was not able to be present.

Michael Allison provided his take on the experience in the preface to *The Last Command*:

> Responding to a notice on their web page of a "major Starman conference" to be convened last May, I found myself invited to David Baumann's reading of the final chapters . . . out under the stars of California's Anza-Borrego Desert! I did not know what I had let myself in for that day . . . climbing the rock-strewn trail of an 800 ft. mountain in bake-oven heat, squeezing by flashlight through the very mud-cave tunnels we read about in *Assault on Mars*, I think I may have qualified for astronaut training. I was privileged to meet, among the other impressive members of this august desert

company, a young college student represented in the books by Commander Pleera of the Starship *Ossëan*[71]. I did my best to keep up with her as we *charged* a towering hill of slippery granulated mud at about a 70° incline, wondering that I didn't fall and break my fool neck, this to witness the coming desert sunset against the caves. That night, enjoying our fire-roasted wieners and a katabatic rush of refreshing desert wind, we gazed upward at a waxing gibbous Moon high overhead, paired on that date with bright Jupiter no more than 4° away, then gathered round a kerosene lamp in rapt attention to David's reading of the last four chapters of the book you hold in your hands. It is of course not for me to spoil it. But let me assure you that the characters, the ideas, the integrities, and the steadfast hope you'll be reading in this book are as real as those possessed by the writers and their interwoven community . . .

After we set up camp and explored the mud caves, we cooked dinner. When darkness had completely fallen and a near-full moon was riding in the sky, the ten of us sat in camp chairs around a low campfire. David lit a kerosene lantern, set up a CD player (powered by batteries), opened a three-ring binder than contained the last four chapters, and began to read aloud. From time to time, following prompts he had placed in the text, he inserted a CD into the player and provided eerie music to accompany the reading.

An hour and forty minutes later, he read, "The End—and the end also of the Starman series", and closed the binder. For about a minute no one spoke. Jon and David were a little nervous about how the audience would take the account of Zip's death, but no one objected, and all thought it was fitting.

Surprisingly, it wasn't until several days later we realized that we had not taken any photographs of the event.

Two days later, in a classroom at David Baumann's church, the reading was repeated to an audience of 21, with the same reaction—a rich silence, and then commendation. Reactions from those present eventually inspired a few changes and additions to the chapters, and then the book was sent to the publishers. A few weeks later, *The Last Command* was in the hands of its readers.

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[71] Jon Cooper's sister April: April—plirA—Pleera.

“It takes courage to face death. Only one who is alive can die. Aliveness is measured by the ability to die. One who is fully alive is fully able to die. In the peak moments of aliveness we are reconciled with death. Deep down within us something tells us that we would die the moment our life reached fulfillment. It is fear of death that prevents us from coming fully alive.”

Brother David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B.
[Order of Saint Benedict]

The minute-by-minute timeline

As I was writing the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of *The Last Command*, I kept a notepad handy so I could keep track of the events and time them to the minute. Action was taking place on several fronts: Joe and Mark were battling the Xenobots deep in the well, Zip was on the surface of Luxa, and the fleet of the Solar Alliance was fighting for its existence against the englobement of the Xenobot armada. Zip could communicate only with Tharsos by time delay. With so many things happening at once, it was vital that it all make sense and fit together. Above all, it had to be shown that Zip's death was absolutely necessary and not just a tragic mistake that could have been prevented had chance worked another way.

The notepad became quickly marked up in a convoluted fashion, but here is the final version:

9:00 Zip leaves Mark and Joe, begins ascent to surface of Luxa
9:10 Zip reaches surface of Luxa, calls Mark; takes 10 minutes to travel the well
9:11 Zip's first call to Tharsos, asks for wormhole rescue at 9:50
9:12 Hypershield goes down, Tharsos initiates attack
9:17 Xenobots begin descent of the well in three stages; ten minute trip
9:21 Zip calls Mark to warn him about Xenobots
9:21 Tharsos receives Zip's first call
9:22 Tharsos responds to Zip's first call, agrees to rescue
9:22 Zip's second call to Tharsos, asks for his own wormhole rescue on surface
9:24 Hypershield goes back up
9:25 Alliance is englobed by Xenobots
9:26 Tharsos calls Zip with the bad news about the hypershield
9:29 Third platform of Xenobots reaches bottom of well; battle begins
9:32 Zip receives Tharsos message agreeing to rescue
9:32 Tharsos receives Zip's second call
9:33 Tharsos returns Zip's second call, saying they cannot rescue any of the Starmen
9:36 Zip receives news from Tharsos that hypershield is back up
9:40 First Races deliver message to Tharsos that they are ready to destroy Luxa
9:43 Zip receives news from Tharsos that they cannot rescue the Starmen

9:44 Zip figures out that solar power station is on the Luxan moon
9:47 Zip's third call to Tharsos, tells them he's going to steal a ship and go to the moon
9:48 Joe and Mark blast hypershield mechanism; hypershield goes down for good
9:50 Mark and Joe are rescued by wormhole; one Xenobot comes with them
9:51 Battle inside Tharsos' transfer station; Xenobot blasts hypertransfer apparatus
9:51 Zip takes off for the moon
9:52 Janitor vanquishes Xenobot; Starmen sustain needle laser burns
9:57 Tharsos receives Zip's third message, realizes it cannot bomb moon
10:00 Izmaka orders two hundred firewasps to the Luxan moon
10:02 Battle in the vicinity of the moon begins
10:07 Zip reaches the moon
10:12 Izmaka gives First Races the "go ahead" on the destruction of Luxa
10:16 Mark, Joe, and Kathryn launch the *Star Ranger*
10:20 *Star Ranger* clears Tharsos' airlock, wormholes to Luxan moon
10:20 Zip begins to turn the wheel
10:21 *Star Ranger* reaches vicinity of the Luxan moon, sees it disappear.
10:26 Hyperbubble arrives near Luxa, disgorges black hole

The First Guess How the Saga Would End

As has been stated several times, Mark McSherry was our "cold" reader for the last few books. That is, once we came to a near-final draft of a book, we sent the entire file to him to read "cold". He had been given no inkling in advance of what the book was about and could read it straight through rather than chapter by chapter over a period of months. Mark's comments were always extremely helpful.

In the case of *The Last Command*, at first we did not send Mark the dramatic last four chapters. Then we reconsidered that idea and asked Mark if he would indeed like to read the ending before others did. He thought about it for a while and then accepted the invitation. He had already read chapters 1-11.

Before we sent him the last four chapters, Jon sent him this message:

March 30, 2005
One question before you begin: how do you expect the book (and therefore the series) to end? What do you see happening in the last four chapters?

Mark sent us back this astonishing response:
To tell you the truth, I don't know! It seems as if the Team has written themselves into a box with no way out. :-) The Xenobots appear to have the upper hand and to hold all the cards; to win the War they now just need to play those cards properly. But I suspect the three Starman will somehow find a way to obflisticate, exflunct, and finally ramsquaddle the Xenobots.

But will all the 'good guys' survive that final victory? No. This is portended in Chapter One when Zip tells Kathy that "...I just see the utter stupid waste of war, not only material waste but moral and spiritual! It is so staggering to those who have to endure it. It always has been, no matter what the poets say, and always will be, whatever the propagandists tell us!" So even for the victorious, nothing will be the same again... Shades of the Ahmanyan-Xenobot Wars from 12,000 years ago.

The first few chapters of TLC that relate to Zip give the impression of a 'dead man walking'--- a soldier who senses that his days are numbered, who is melancholy and easily distracted by the smallest of details--- I'm thinking

particularly of the third from last paragraph of the first scene in Chapter Two. Michael D. Cooper plants the seeds of doubt early; the reader wonders if "The Last Command" could, indeed, refer to David Foster.

Or, perhaps, it could refer to Allen Foster? Either way, I suspect that by the end of TLC the father/son relationship (and conflict) will be resolved---permanently.

So I sent Mark the last four chapters, and said:
The last chapters are attached. I suggest that you find a time, Mark, when you can read all four of them at one sitting where you will not be disturbed.

The next day, Mark had read the four chapters and sent us this message:
April 1, 2005
Dear David and Jon,

Just finished reading the last chapters of "The Last Command". Right now I don't quite know what to do or say... Other than to simply stand up and loudly clap my hands in applause.

What to compare the thrill of finishing TLC to? Eleven years old sitting in a theater watching the Star-Child gazing from orbit upon the orb of the Earth with the fanfare from "Also Sprach Zarathustra" blaring in my ears. Or several years later, watching the final moments of "Casablanca", as Humphrey Bogart suggests to Claude Rains that "...Louie, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Like 2001 and Casablanca, the final chapters of TLC have set up a resonance in my synapses that is still reverberating long after the actual reading. And I won't get much sleep tonight either due to the mental frisson you've induced in my head. :-)

The scene that started my eyes to water was where Kathy tells the Sister that she is going to become a Starman--- "I have to now. Next May I will march through the line. I will see the hologram of Starman number 212, my brother, and he will be smiling at me." And tears to flow as she runs through fields

and meadows to where "...Richard Starlight is sitting on a bench by the lake, watching the fishermen cast their nets."

While I feel a sense of sadness, the over-riding sensation is one of joy; I believe that reading the Starman Series has made me a better person. That my consciousness has been elevated. And my spirit made more robust.

Thank you!

Mark

Could Zip's Death Have Been Avoided?

In the summer of 2005, the book was finally published and sent to our readers. After a while responses began to dribble in. Much to our surprise, the reactions from readers was minimal. The responses we received were moving, but there were very few of them.

Thayne Harmon, one of our very first readers, wrote:
Was it the only choice David could have made, I don't know.

I responded:
What we had to do in writing this scene was the following: First of all, we had to determine that the outcome was what we wanted to present. We seriously discussed several other options, including a last-second wormhole rescue and even writing two alternative endings and putting both into the same book. When we gulped and said that we really did want the series to end the way it did, then we had to write it in such a way so that the death was absolutely necessary. It had to mean something, it had to be worth something. It had to determine the outcome of the Second Xenobot War—it couldn't be just a tragic mistake. Because of that, I prepared the very detailed timeline of events. It was not easy, and called for some very intricate figuring. The timeline included the time it took to exchange information by compad. Each person making a decision—Zip, his friends, Izmaka, the First Races—had to make the best decision they could given the information they had at the time the decision had to be made.

Everyone knew where Zip was, but only Zip knew that the Xenobots were pounding on the door and that he had only seconds to act before the war would be lost. Even if he hadn't pulled the switch, the Xenobots at the door would have gotten him but then nothing would have been achieved. Everyone else may wonder why Zip made the choice he did and what options he might have had, but Zip himself knew that he had no choice but to do what he did if the Solar Alliance was to win the war. Even the "near miss" in the First Xenobot War was taken into account. The Ahmanyans could have exterminated the Xenobots at that time, but out of pity did not do so. Their extermination this time had to be complete—yet the Lucian said that it was not for the Solar Alliance to enact the final destruction on their enemies. For moral reasons, the First Races had to do so. The First Races played a part in the rise of the Xenobots, as Selah himself said, and therefore they must be the ones to ensure their final destruction.

The event horizon on a black hole does not extend very far from its surface—at least, not the one we introduced into the story. The Xenobots' moon would not have been immediately affected by the destruction of the planet. This was carefully researched too. In fact, Valerie Kramer did the research for me well over a year ago, not knowing why I was asking her the question—though she's smart enough to have guessed, but she never asked.

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Here is an undated document that provides one possibility on how David Foster could have survived.

David Foster Lives!

or, how we can save David from the Xenobots

It all boils down to tachyons. RTT allows faster-than-light communication through tachyons; two machines interchange tachyons and bingo: you have communication. Well, suppose someone built a tachyon transporter??

The candidate for building it would be (of course!) Stephen Hoshino. He would have had a natural interest in tachyons; perhaps he was one of the theorists whose theories led to the construction of RTT. Hoshino might have even begun speculating on other uses for tachyons.

After book #5 when the Martians were discovered, Hoshino took a trip to Mars to talk with the Martians and see what they did with tachyons. Hoshino learned that the Martians knew of tachyons, but they had never harnessed them in any way (their hyperspace radios worked on a totally different principal). Hoshino discovered, however, that the Martians had drawn up plans for a transporter but couldn't get it to work because electrons didn't move fast enough.

Hoshino and the Martian scientists, then, launched on a joint-venture to combine tachyon technology with transporter technology. The experiments did not go well; there were some early successes, but also some dramatic failures. Therefore, when the Martian-Xenobot war was launched there was a tachyon matter transporter, but it was unreliable (especially at such extreme distances as several light-years). They decided to use it when David was in the Xenobot star station -- and it worked! David was saved.

Here is how we would work it out in the series:

#4 *Descent Into Europa*: Someone mentions that one of Hoshino's old papers on tachyons led to SE's development of RTT, and that Hoshino is an expert on tachyons.

#6 *Operation Luna*: Someone mentions that Hoshino has gone to Mars for a scientific conference; no one's sure on what but it has something to do with a matter transporter.

#13 *Danger at L5*: Hoshino announces he's working at SE on a matter transporter that uses tachyons. SE is supplying the equipment, etc; Hoshino is supplying the theoretical background and expertise.

#16 *The Rings of Saturn*: At first SE considers using Hoshino's tachyon transporter to move water from Saturn to Venus. However, Hoshino's transporter fails spectacularly in a demonstration. Hoshino and the Martians go back to the drawing board.

#22 *The Return of Mars*: Hoshino and SE finally have a tachyon transporter that works, but it's not reliable. Sometimes it works fine and zaps things across billions of miles instantaneously; other times it doesn't do anything or returns gibberish. SE installs one on Tharsos and one on Mars, but they're too unreliable to use.

#23 *The Last Command*: David is given the order to go to the Xenobot core and detonate it. Earth says they know it's dangerous, but they'll try to use a tachyon transporter to pull him out. David agrees to try it, and makes his way to the core. The date: July 4, 2158.

David pulls out his RTT walkie-talkie, calls Earth, and says he's ready. He ignites the chain reaction, blowing the station -- but the tachyon matter transporter pulls him out.

Well, it pulls him out, but the explosion messed up the tachyons and turned his energy pattern into shambles. David's pattern is stored in a computer. It's an absolute mess; they have the readings on the explosion, but they're not sure how to reverse the damage and rebuild David. Time is running low: the pattern can only be sustained in the computer banks for so long before it is lost. Things look bleak: David's pattern has been blown clear to kingdom come.

But they rebuild him. The other two Starmen, with Jogren and Hoshino, team together and manage to reverse the destruction. They test it -- and David rematerializes! David is safe, and the Xenobots are gone.[72]

[72] Of course, we decided not to use this scenario.

XI. STARMAN STATISTICS

Assault On Mars was first offered for sale in early July 2000. Six years later, with the project all but finished, here are our cumulative sales figures:

Assault on Mars (handbound and AuthorHouse editions)	532
Mutiny on Mars (AuthorHouse and AWB editions)	198
The Runaway Asteroid	420
Journey to the Tenth Planet	379
Descent Into Europa	373
The Lost Race of Mars	324
Doomsday Horizon (AuthorHouse and AWB editions)	335
The Heart of Danger	173
The Last Command	202
Starman Archives, Volume 1	21
Starman Archives, Volume 2	19
Starman Archives, Volume 3	19
Quest for the Light (all versions)	37
Warriors of the Light (all versions)	42
The Seven Starman Chronicles (including 65 complete sets)	461
The Five Inter*Stellars (23 complete sets and 52 incomplete sets)	277

Total number of books sold: 3,074
Total number of fanzines sold: 738

Bank balance as of June 30, 2006: $1,701.87

The books published by AuthorHouse—*Mutiny On Mars* and *Doomsday Horizon*—cost more to produce than income we received from the sales. *The Lost Race of Mars*, so beautifully printed by Friesens, never came close to paying for itself.

Jon and David still have several cartons of books 2-5 sitting in their garages. We don't know what to do with them.

XII. THE END AT LAST

June 20, 2006

Dear David,

The Archive volume looks good! I see that it is still a very rough draft but I like the table of contents and think that this will be a fine volume – a fitting end to our library of Archives. This really covers all of the material that we're interested in.

Another comment: did the other Archive books have a title? All book 1 said was "Volume 1: A look at the first three books of the Starman Series". This one could simply say "Volume 4: A look at the last three books of the Starman Series".

Take care!

—Jon Cooper

_____

Dear Jonathan,

Another comment: did the other Archive books have a title? All book 1 said was "Volume 1: A look at the first three books of the Starman Series". This one could simply say "Volume 4: A look at the last three books of the Starman Series".

"A look at the last three books of the Starman Series" doesn't quite cover what we're doing in Volume 4, since there is other material in there besides the last three books. How about calling it "a final look at the Starman series"?

David

_____

Dear David,

"A look at the last three books of the Starman Series" doesn't quite cover what we're doing in Volume 4, since there is other material in there besides the last three books.

That's true! "A final look at the Starman series" is definitely better. Good idea!

I've been reading over the final volume of the Starman Archives and I have to say it's very moving. It had been a while since I had looked at any Starman material, and I was just amazed; we really put together a fine series – one much finer than I had realized. The detail, and depth, and layers of feeling are just way more than anything I would have expected. There is so much I had forgotten.

The series just turned out very well – God blessed us tremendously in terms of the quality of what we produced. Wow. God has most definitely blessed this project above and beyond anything I would have expected. Who would have thought?

Did you see that one eBay listing where someone mistook the Starman Series for a 1960s sci-fi series? I think that says it all right there.

_____

Dear Jonathan,

I've been reading over the final volume of the Starman Archives and I have to say it's very moving. It had been a while since I had looked at any Starman material, and I was just amazed; we really put together a fine series – one much finer than I had realized. The detail, and depth, and layers of feeling is just way more than anything I would have expected. There is so much I had forgotten.

Yes indeed. I think that in a few years we'll be able to read it ourselves with at least a measure of "newness". I glance through once in a while even now and read things I had completely forgotten.

David

June 21, 2006

David,

I have saved 6,449 Starman e-mails – and that just counts messages from you and Mike[73], and excludes all Starman eGroup messages. The earliest one I have is from March 24, 2000.

I'm about to start forwarding some of them to you – just the ones that I thought may be of interest. If you start getting odd e-mails from the past, that's what is going on!

Yes indeed. I think that in a few years we'll be able to read it ourselves with at least a measure of "newness". I glance through once in a while even now and read things I had completely forgotten.

That's probably true! I think that the Epsteins got to that point eventually as well. Really, though, it hasn't been that long since we stopped writing – in some ways we really haven't completely finished yet. The end will probably come when Archives #4 is released; I don't see anything else happening after that, with the possible exception of a movie deal[74].

I've gone through a couple thousand e-mails and separated out about 260 pages worth of e-mails that look interesting. These e-mails cover DH, THOD, and TLT, along with a few other points of interest. They do not cover the Americana saga or MOM (there really wasn't that much on MOM anyway) or TLC (which is kind of already covered in what you've got).

I haven't gone through these to filter them; there may be pieces in them that we don't want published. They do need to be appropriately formatted and sorted, which will definitely take some time.

I will leave the rest up to you. There may just be a few here that you'd like to reprint, or you may want to print more than just a few of them; I don't really know. There is just so much material in my files that it is

[73] As mentioned before, Jon does not keep copies of the emails he sends

[74] At the time of this exchange, a well-known and well-connected Hollywood personality was "shopping" the Starman series to a variety of producers. A friend had lent him the entire series and he was quite taken with it.

completely overwhelming: there is no way I could ever duplicate what I did with the original three Archive volumes. We have exchanged a *lot* of messages.

—Jon Cooper

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June 22, 2006

Dear David,

Right. I had forgotten too. It's amazing all the work we did.

It really is. While I was going through the reads it looks like we were writing DH and TLT and MOM and doing the audio book summaries all at the same time, while trying to grapple with how we wanted to print the books and what the future of the series was going to hold *and* whether David Foster was going to live or die. It was insane. 6000+ e-mails in 6 years averages out to around 3 e-mails *every single day for six years*. That is a *lot* of communication. We did so much work that it would take months just to categorize it all.

No wonder we got tired. I can't imagine how we did it all now and still kept our lives going.

I can definitely see why we got tired, though; I mean, how could we not? If this was our full-time job and that was all we accomplished it would *still* be impressive. I wonder now if this is why we are so burnt-out and tired; we've worked ourselves right into the ground. Looking back, I can't imagine how we pulled it off; I certainly don't think I could do it again.

It is gratifying that we now have all of the material in one file. Now it's just a matter of editing and formatting.

Yup! I wouldn't say *all* of it; there were hundreds of e-mails I skipped over, and there were a few thousand I didn't even get to. We've got a lot of it there, though – definitely enough to make a satisfying book.

—Jon Cooper

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Dear Jon,

Yep. By “all” I meant “all that we’re going to use”. I did make one more addition: I concluded Archives Volume 4 with a selection of our email exchanges of the last couple of days. That’s how the volume will end. Seems like the best way.

David