

COMBAT COMMAND™

TAKE COMMAND...

IN A NEW ROLE-PLAYING NOVEL

#5

IN THE WORLD OF

JACK WILLIAMSON'S THE LEGION OF SPACE



THE LEGION AT WAR

BY

ANDREW KEITH

1-53395 (CANADA) • \$2.95 U.S.
1-53395-1 (U.S.) • \$2.95 U.S.

Direct Hit!

"Flag, this is *Defiant*," he says. "Enemy ships pursuing. They'll reach your position soon. Too many for us to stop. . . ." He rubs ineffectually at the blood on his face. "There's more of them than anyone thought. We took a grazing hit, with one geodyne damaged and fifty men killed or wounded. Admiral, we can't fight them." It's clear that *Defiant*'s captain knows his ship is doomed.

"Energy pulse from target 027," a voice calls from somewhere behind the battlecruiser's captain. "They're getting ready to—!" With a blinding flash of light and the sound of melting electronics, the transmission ends abruptly. *Defiant* has been hit again, this time fatally.

"Pax Eternal," the communications technician mutters again. Ulnar drops his eyes to the planning tank, where the computer is already updating the symbols. The one representing *Defiant* is fading from powerful battlecruiser to lifeless hulk.

What next? What decisions must be made to save . . .

THE LEGION AT WAR

The Combat Command Books from Ace:

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

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

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

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

COMBAT COMMAND: In the world of Jack Williamson's
THE LEGION OF SPACE, THE LEGION AT WAR
by Andrew Keith

**COMBAT
COMMAND**™
IN THE WORLD OF
**JACK
WILLIAMSON'S
THE LEGION
OF SPACE**

**THE LEGION
AT WAR**
BY
ANDREW KEITH

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JACK WILLIAMSON



ACE BOOKS, NEW YORK

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

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

THE LEGION AT WAR

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

PRINTING HISTORY
Ace edition / April 1988

All rights reserved.

Copyright © 1988 by Bill Fawcett & Associates.
Introduction copyright © 1988 by Jack Williamson.

Cover art by Don Dixon.

Maps by James Clouse.

Illustrations by Todd Cameron Hamilton and James Clouse.

This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part,
by mimeograph or any other means, without permission.
For information address: The Berkley Publishing Group,
200 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016.

ISBN: 0-441-11431-8

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

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

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

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Commander Jay Kalam, Admiral-General Hal Samdu,
Giles Habibula . . . and the men of The Legion of Space.

INTRODUCTION

by Jack Williamson

It's a long time since 1933, when I wrote a serial novel I called *The Legion of Space*. That was in the middle of the Great Depression. Times were hard for nearly everybody. Certainly for me. I had been writing science fiction for several years, selling enough of it to let me go on writing science fiction, but the magazines that bought my stories were running into trouble. I had spent the summer before riding freight trains to tour a little of the West.

By fall a couple of delayed checks had come in, money enough to enroll at the University of New Mexico. I recall it as a fine year. The school was small then, and I made good friends. Most of them were anthropologists. Visiting the Indian pueblos with them, watching ceremonials, I got my first glimpse of other cultures, their different beliefs and ways of life.

In 1933 I had gone home from the university with only six dollars left, but an idea for *Legion*. One of my best courses had been a lecture series on "The Great Books," by a great teacher, Dr. George St. Claire. He told us how the Polish novelist, Sienkiewicz, looking for characters for his historical novels, had borrowed the three musketeers from Dumas and Sir John Falstaff from Shakespeare.

If that had worked for past history, I thought it might do as well for the future. Reading Dumas, I had thrilled at the daring exploits of his musketeers. I didn't know Shakespeare so well, but Falstaff's speeches soon gave me Giles Habibula. (Shakespeare, I might add, was the same sort of borrower; Falstaff himself, the old soldier with more courage for talk than action, came from the *Miles Gloriosus*, a stock figure in the theater for two thousand years before Shakespeare transformed him into a real human being.)

Luckily, I could live for nothing on the family ranch, doing a few chores to help pay for my keep. I spent that six bucks for paper and typewriter ribbons and wrote *The Legion of Space*, sleeping and working in an old building with a tarpaper roof. That was before air-conditioning, and I used to work stripped to the waist.

Those summer days were long. I did one chapter each morning, another in the afternoon. Three weeks for the first draft, three more for another—I had been sending stories out in first draft and selling most of them, but the Legion had become something special.

In those days, when the term "science fiction" still bewildered most of my friends, there was no book market for it unless you had already made a name from writing something else. I had hoped to sell the story to the old weekly *Argosy*, which was publishing such heroes of mine as Max Brand, Edgar Rice Burroughs, A. Merritt, but *Argosy* said no. Part of the reason, I think, was that they didn't like stories to contradict one another. My superweapon, AKKA, had destroyed the moon, which they wanted to preserve for other authors.

My best market had been *Astounding*. Its publisher had gone bankrupt, but a stronger firm, the old Street and Smith, soon brought it back to life. Luckily again, when they decided to publish serials, I had *Legion* ready. They ran it, and readers seemed to like it. One fan tabulated comments from the letter columns that ran in the back of the book and found that Giles Habibula had been the most popular character in the magazine during the 1930s.

I'm delighted that he's still alive. When you look back at titles of the best-selling books of fifty years ago, most of them are long forgotten. Somehow—thanks, I guess, to Shakespeare—old Giles had been remembered. All told, I have written four more stories in the series, the latest is about a girl who grows up to be "The Queen of the Legion." The books have stayed in print in several languages. My Italian publisher is just bringing out a four-volume boxed edition.

I'm delighted with the way Andy Keith has continued the history of the Legion through another century in *The Legion at War*. This game form, like the orbital satellite and the station in space and the robot explorer, is another exciting new invention since 1932. The game lets the player become

an officer aboard his own space fleet, making his own battle commands.

The Legion stories—including all those that will be invented by players of the game—are “space opera.” The term derives from “soap opera” and “horse opera”—that, of course, was a name for the old films of cowboys and Indians in the American West. Some writers I know don’t like their work called space opera; they want it to be Literature. Capital L. Myself, I’ve never denied the name. I’ve enjoyed writing space opera. A lot of people like to read it. A lot more, I think, will enjoy commanding their battlecraft of space in *The Legion at War*.

I like to defend space opera. The best of it—if not necessarily the Legion books—can even be called literature. When I came across the theory of the epic in college literature classes, it struck me that some of the great pulp writers had a good deal in common with Homer. Without claiming that Max Brand’s Westerns are destined to live forever, I can see strong similarities to such hallowed classics as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

Those great Greek epics, like the Norse sagas, the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, Vergil’s *Aeneid* and the myths of many other people, all tell the adventures of some folk hero. Often he’s the legendary founder of his race or his nation. He’s always drawn larger than life, armed with wits, courage, and sometimes extraordinary powers which he uses to defend great causes. His world is large; his noble missions carry him to unknown frontiers, often beyond. His victories are not for himself, but for a great family or a proud race or all humanity. If he dies, his death is a noble sacrifice.

Odysseus, for a fine example, was a man of craft and courage, equally skilled with words and his bow. Returning from victory in the Trojan War, he met and defeated such monsters as the Cyclops and the enchantress Circe. He wandered the half-known fringes of his world and even visited the underworld. Home at last, after twenty years away, he proved his strength and skill by stringing his old bow and slaughtering the horde of suitors who had been trying to seize his wife and his kingdom.

At least in theory, epic is an oral art, older than the art of writing. It originated as a way of preserving unwritten records, the history and beliefs that had to be saved because they carried the spirit of the nation or the people. The metric form

made it easy to memorize. Mastering his art, the epic bard learned patterns of words that he could choose and vary to fill out the meter and fit whatever story he had to tell.

In print by such pulp masters as Max Brand, "horse opera" shows striking similarities. It tells and retells the story of the American West, the drama of a great continent conquered and a proud nation founded. The settings are vast. The values are good and evil, sharply etched and simple. The hero fires a deadly gun. Even his horse is heroic.

If the folk epic was an oral art, pulp was akin to it. Brand was famous for pounding out 4000 words a day, so many that he sold them under twenty-odd pen names—his real name was Frederick Faust. Those millions of words were printed with no revision, in pulp magazines usually no more permanent than the chanting of a bard.

Brand had wanted to be a poet. Looking at his stories, I noticed that long passages of his prose scanned like iambic verse. He repeated patterns of words not very different from the epic similes. His landscapes were vast, his characters heroic enough, his villains sufficiently evil to deserve what they got.

On film most horse operas were cheap Grade B productions, shot in a few days for very little money, but John Ford did better with *The Iron Horse*, the story of the first railroad to cross the continent, and his great classic, *Stagecoach*—his original is better by far than any remake.

I like to think of science fiction, or at least the most popular sort of it, as the epic of a technological age. The hero is heroic; sometimes he saves the world. His mental powers may seem supernormal. More commonly he depends upon his mastery of future science and engineering. Though his alien enemies are seldom magicians, they are armed with their own superscience—I think it was Arthur Clarke who pointed out that really far-out science can't be told from magic.

In the history of American science fiction, Edgar Rice Burroughs prefigures the themes of space opera. Tarzan, brought up by apes in a mythical Africa, has every trait of the epic hero. John Carter crosses space, if only by wishing to, and wins his own kingdom on Mars. Burroughs was no scientist, but he wrote with the speed of a reciting bard, and his tales still grip the reader.

E. E. "Doc" Smith followed with his own brand of space opera. It was my own admiration for his *Skylark of Space* that led me to try doing my own, but I think it was John W.

Campbell who did more than anybody else to mold American science fiction into the epic shape I think it has.

Campbell began writing as a rival of Smith, both of them hammering out space operas that look pretty crude to most of us now. He soon learned to do better, with more care for character and style, and truth to his own optimistic vision of a magnificent human future in space. Editor of *Astounding/Analog* from 1937 until he died in 1971, he shaped science fiction through its Golden Age, sharing that vision with a whole generation of such able writers as Heinlein, Sturgeon, de Camp, and del Rey.

Epic has always been optimistic; even when the hero dies, he dies victorious. Campbell liked forecasts of progress toward a great human destiny—he never cared much for aliens in space. Much of the best science fiction shares that same theme. Clarke's *The City and the Stars* shows mankind surviving for another billion years. Gordon Dickson is still at work on his ambitious "Childe Cycle," a series of novels about human evolution. The list of hopeful dreams could go on and on.

There are, of course, pessimists too. C. P. Snow saw us divided, a culture of science in conflict with a culture of tradition. I think science fiction reflects that division. The scientists are making the future; they understand and welcome it. The traditionalists, on the other hand, have their emotional stakes in the past; they tend to distrust the scientists and fear future change.

Great science fiction has come from both cultures, but space opera clearly belongs to the culture of science. In spite of all the pessimists, its epic appeals are still alive, in countless new novels, in the reruns of *Star Trek*, in the *Star Wars* films.

The world is vastly changed since I wrote that first Legion story in 1933. Men have actually walked on the moon, and such robot explorers as the Mariners, the Vikings, and the Voyagers have gone a lot farther. But the mythic human values that informed those old epics still matter to us. You'll discover them again in this game, as you command your Legion fleet in a desperate defense of the League of Worlds against a brand-new set of utterly evil alien invaders, the ruthless Ka'slaq.

Good hunting!

—Jack Williamson

INTRODUCTION

by Bill Fawcett

You are in command. With a blare of trumpets reverberating off the towering ships that surround you, it's off to battle with civilization's most valiant defenders, the Legion of Space. Marching into their ships are your men, trained spacemen, whose lives depend upon the decisions you are about to make.

Combat Command books provide more than just another chance to read an exciting military adventure featuring the Legion of Space. You could simply "read" this book, tracing a route through the sections, but these books are also a "game" that lets you make the command decisions. This book is divided into sections rather than chapters. In each section of this game/book a military situation is described. Your choices actually write the book, both the story and the ending being determined by the combat decisions you make.

A careful effort has been made to make these adventures as "real" as possible. You are given the same information as you would receive in a real combat situation. At the end of each section you'll find a number of orders you may give your men. The consequence of the choice you make is described in the following section. When you make the right decisions, you are closer to successfully completing your mission. When you make a bad decision, men die in their shattered spaceships . . . men who are not going to be available for the next battle.

FIGHTING BATTLES

This book includes a simple game system that simulates combat and other military challenges. Playing the game adds an extra dimension of enjoyment by making you a par-

ticipant in the adventure. You will need two six-sided dice, a pencil, and a sheet of paper to "play" along with this adventure.

COMBAT VALUES

In this book the force you command will consist of a legion of spaceships. Each ship is assigned five values. These values provide the means of comparing the capabilities of the many different military units you'll encounter. These five values are:

Manpower

This value is the number of separate fighting parts of your force. Each unit of Manpower represents one man, one ship, or whatever is firing. Casualties are subtracted from Manpower.

Ordnance

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

Attack Strength

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

Melee Strength

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

Stealth

This value measures how well the members of your unit can avoid detection. It represents the individual skill of each soldier or the ECM of each spaceship. The Stealth value for your unit will be the same for each member of the unit. You would employ stealth to avoid detection by the enemy.

Morale

This reflects the fighting spirit of the troops you command. Success in battle may raise this value. Unpopular decisions or severe losses can lower it. If you order your unit to attempt something unusually dangerous, the outcome may be affected by their morale level.

THE COMBAT PROCEDURE

When your unit finds itself in a combat situation, use the following procedure to determine victory or defeat.

1. Compute the Attack Strength of your unit and the opposition, (Manpower \times Ordnance or Melee Strength)
2. Turn to the charts at the end of this book that are given in the description of the battle.
3. Roll two six-sided dice and total the result.
4. Find the Attack Strength of the unit at the top of the chart and the total of the dice rolled on the left-hand column of the chart. The number found where the column and row intersect is the number of casualties inflicted by the unit for which you were rolling.
5. Repeat for each side, alternating attacks.
The unit you command always fires first unless otherwise stated.

When you are told there is a combat situation, you will be given all the information needed for both your command and their opponent.

Here is an example of a complete combat:

Hammer's Slammers have come under fire from a force defending a ridge that crosses their line of advance. Alois Hammer has ordered your company of ships to attack. Your ships have an Ordnance value of 8 and you have a Manpower value of 8 ships.

Slammers fire using Chart B.

Locals fire using Chart D with an Ordnance value of 3 and Manpower of 12 (this gives them an Attack Strength of 36).

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

CHART B

Attack Strength

Dice
Roll

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

Read down the 60-70 Attack Strength column until you get to the line for a dice roll of 8. The result is four casualties inflicted on your opponents by your company.

Subtract these casualties from the opposing force before determining their Attack Strength. (Combat is not simultaneous.) After subtracting the four casualties you just inflicted on them, the enemy has a remaining Manpower value of 8, ($12 - 4 = 8$). This gives them a remaining Attack Strength of 24 ($8 \times 3 = 24$).

Roll two six-sided dice for the opposing force's attack and determine the casualties they cause your Slammer's company. Subtract these casualties from your Manpower total on the record sheet. In this case they caused one casualty, giving the Slammers a Manpower of 7 for the next round of combat. This ends one "round" of combat. Repeat the process for each round. Each time a unit receives a casualty, it will have

a lower value for Attack Strength. There will be that many less men, spaceships, or whatever firing.

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

SNEAKING, HIDING, AND OTHER RECKLESS ACTS

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

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

If all of this is clear, then you are ready to turn to section 1 and take command.

TIME

Time is a key factor in this war. You will be told in days how much time each action takes. Be sure to keep a record of the total time that has elapsed, on a sheet of scrap paper.

THE COMBAT CHARTS

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

CHART A

Attack Strength

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

CHART B

1 -10 -20 -30 -40 -50 -60 -70 -80 -90 -100 101 +

Dice Roll	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	4	
3	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	
4	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	
5	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	5	
6	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	5	
7	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	
8	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	6	
9	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	5	6	
10	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	6	
11	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	6	7	
12	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6	6	6	7	8	

CHART C

	1	-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60	-70	-80	-90	-100	101	+
Dice Roll	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2
3	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	3
4	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	3
5	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4
6	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	4
7	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	4	5
8	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	5
9	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5
10	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	5	6
11	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	6
12	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	6	6	7

CHART D

	1	-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60	-70	-80	-90	-100	101	+
Dice Roll	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	2
3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
4	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
5	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3
6	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	3
7	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	4
8	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4
9	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	5
10	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	5
11	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5
12	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	6

CHART E

1-10 -20 -30 -40 -50 -60 -70 -80 -90 -100 101 +

Dice

Roll

CHART F

1 -10 -20 -30 -40 -50 -60 -70 -80 -90 -100 101 +

Dice

Roll

CHART G

1-10 -20 -30 -40 -50 -60 -70 -80 -90 -100 101 +

Dice

Roll

SHIPS OF THE LEGION

Fleet Morale: 9

You may choose to allocate hits to any ship which is involved in the battle. For damage purposes treat a battle cruiser as two destroyers (i.e., it takes two hits to destroy one) and orbital fortresses as four. A single hit does no damage to either of the larger ships and will be repaired if the ship survives the battle. Any battle cruiser which has received one hit must receive the next hit allocated to battle cruisers.

Battle Cruiser

Ordnance: 4

Stealth: 9

Destroyer

Ordnance: 2

Stealth: 9

Orbital Fortress

(treat for hits and calculations as 4 destroyers)

Ordnance: 8

Stealth: none

The orbital fortress should only be included in battles where the Legion fleet is directly defending a planet. It can only be used if a defensive formation is chosen.

Ka'Slaq Ships

Attack Ships

Ordnance: 3

Stealth: none

Planetoid

Ordnance: 6

Stealth: none

Treat as 4 attack ships for damage.

— 1 —

Top Secret

From: Jon Damor
Commander, The Legion of Space
To: Vice Admiral David Ulnar
Commanding Ninth Defense Squadron

Upon receipt of these orders your squadron will proceed to the Orion frontier to seek out hostile alien forces of unknown origin believed heading toward the territory of the League of Worlds. The Ninth Defense Squadron is hereby required to conduct a reconnaissance in force against these aliens to determine their nature, origins, and intentions. You are authorized to engage them in combat at your discretion, but the delivery of recon information to Legion Sector Headquarters is of utmost importance.

Alien forces, identified from intercepted ultrawave messages as "the Ka'slaq," fired upon a lightly armed exploratory mission near the System S.C. 170 two weeks ago, destroying four of five vessels, among them the *Discovery*. Last reported positions and courses will place the aliens at Thule in eight to ten days. The Ka'slaq are presumed to be hostile to all League forces.

Effective this date you are appointed Acting Sector Commander to coordinate frontier defenses and operations in your sector. Admiral J. T. Merros has been assigned as C.O., First Defense Fleet. Upon his arrival you will transfer authority as Sector Commander to him and integrate your forces.

Jon Damor
Commander of The Legion of Space

Personal Message

From: James Star
To: David Ulnar

Dave:

Commander Damor brought Dad the news about the mobilization orders, and he said he'd enclose this message with the official word to you. They won't pass the whole truth on through channels, so I'd better give you the full story.

Section 2

Those aliens out there are trouble, maybe the biggest trouble the Legion's tackled since the Cometeers. They shot up a flight of survey cruisers; only *Pioneer* got out, and she was crippled so badly it took a week to reach a port and a working ultrawave relay to warn us. The League Senate met the same day and agreed to bring in the Keeper of the Peace—that gives you an idea of how serious it is.

But when Sis tried to use AKKA, *nothing happened!* She says there's some kind of mental power, like a shield, that protects the aliens from her weapon.

You know, as I do, that AKKA depends on the Keeper's mind to operate. Stephen Orco could do the same thing because he knew the secrets of AKKA and could cancel out the Keeper's power. So these Ka'slaq either know about AKKA or have some other mental or physical powers we cannot comprehend. They say an attempt to use the other "ultimate weapon," the geofractors at contra-Pluto, was blocked by a force screen!

Maybe now you can see how critical things really are, Dave. If we can't beat these guys in a fleet action—and you've got to wonder if we have a prayer of that, with everything else that's gone wrong—we're in *trouble*. "A mortal lot of it," as old Giles Habibula would have said.

So *be careful*. And try not to let Merros get to you—I know he's not been your best friend in the service. But they can't spare Commander Damor, Dad, or Admiral-General Derron yet, and Merros has the seniority. He's a good man, even if he does get rabid when he hears the name "Ulnar."

I can't say it often enough—*be careful*. And good hunting.

Your friend and kinsman,
James Star

Upon completing this section, go to section 2.

— 2 —

Vice-Admiral David Ulnar, commanding the Ninth Defense Squadron on the Orion Frontier of the Star League, reads his new orders for the third time with a growing unease. Star's enclosure has made it clear that the Legion of Space is about to face the most awesome opponent since the attack of the Cometeers

nearly a century and a half ago, and Ulnar is the man who must meet them first. Though his grandfather married a granddaughter of the legendary John Star, the Ulnar name is still associated all too strongly with the Purple Throne and with Eric the Pretender, who sold out his own people to the alien Medusae in his mad quest to claim an empire. Loyal men with the Ulnar name have been paying the price ever since, and anything short of total success will call forth all the old suspicions and accusations of David Ulnar's head.

Even the Legion plays the game of politics. Ulnar has been ordered to fight the aliens, and his decisions can win or lose the campaign. But Merros, long-time enemy and rival, stands ready to step in as Ulnar's superior. If he fails, David Ulnar is a scapegoat, another failure in a long line of traitors and incompetents; such is the reputation of a once-proud family. But if he succeeds, Merros can claim the credit. For a time Ulnar considers resigning his command, but that, too, would tarnish the family name still further.

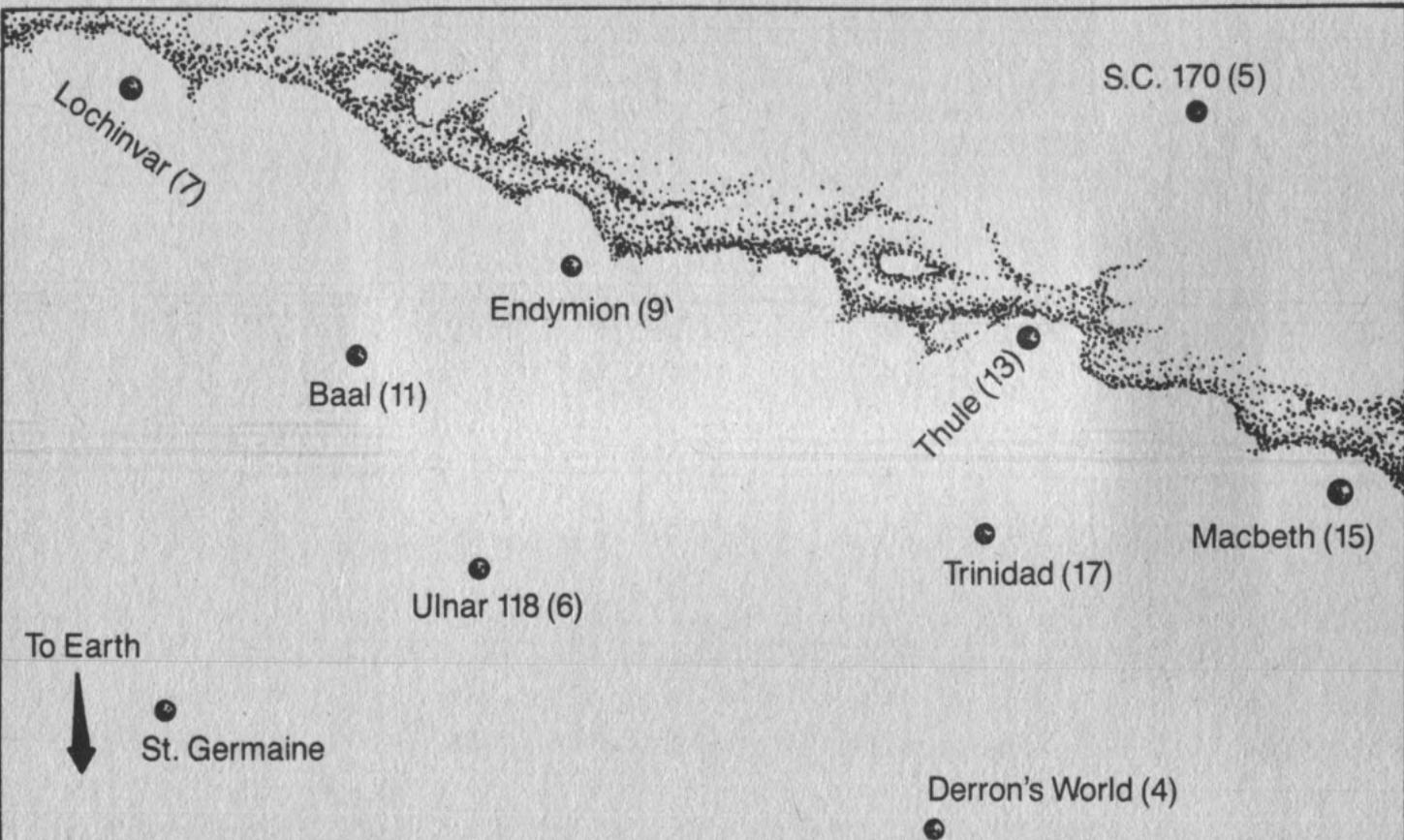
He calls up a computer record of the ships at his command and a star chart of the frontier worlds threatened by the aliens. Here at the main Legion base of St. Germaine, Ulnar's Ninth Defense Squadron stands ready. But there are at least five frontier worlds in easy range of S.C. (Star catalogue) 170, where the Ka'slaq have already struck. What is his best response to their threat? How should he deploy to meet them?

Examine the map. Each named world is a League colony or a planet explored by humanity. Worlds where ships are initially stationed are noted; only by visiting a planet in person can Ulnar add the ships there to his own force or order them to move in any way. When the story opens, Ulnar commands the squadron at St. Germaine and can order it to move to any of the named systems. He can also order ships under his command to split off and garrison other systems, where they must remain until he personally reattaches them to his main squadron.

Information on the various planets can be obtained by going to the section numbers located in parentheses on Map 1. If Ulnar wishes to move the entire force under his command to a specific world, the entry for that planet gives further instructions for subsequent sections or events which follow.

If Ulnar wishes to strengthen other garrisons by detaching ships from his fleet, record the number and types of ships detached

NINTH SECTOR



and note these additional garrisons on a sheet of scratch paper for later reference. Garrisons may help worlds to hold out against the aliens if Ulnar's fleet is not present to defend it. Ulnar must still choose a destination from among the named worlds for himself and whatever forces he keeps under his command.

If Ulnar decides to look up further information on the forces at his disposal, go to section 10. When you are familiar with your command, go to section 3.

— 3 —

Studying the situation and reviewing both forces and options at his disposal, Ulnar realizes that St. Germaine is the key to the entire sector. If the planet were to fall, the loss of the geofractor complex in the star system would cut his fleet off from Merros and the incoming reinforcements and effectively isolate the Ninth Defense Squadron. Moreover, the military and governmental administration centers and the large planetary population all need to be protected. St. Germaine's position makes it possible to respond to whatever reports come in regarding alien movements if the Ka'slaq fleet does not choose to concentrate on this vital target.

The admiral issues his orders accordingly, posting the ships of the Ninth Defense Squadron retained under his command, and the vessels of St. Germaine's permanent garrison as well, in strategic positions to spot alien incursions and report to his own central reserves. The Legion settles down to await further developments.

The worst part of any defensive campaign is the agony of waiting, and the weeks that follow remind Ulnar of the old saying, "Hurry up and wait." Incoming merchant ships and regular ultrawave messages from the garrison commanders and other authorities on the frontier worlds all bring nothing but routine news. The Ka'slaq threat seems to have vanished as suddenly as it first manifested itself.

Then it happens—the first sign of trouble. The ultrawave signal from Endymion comes in faint and weak, as if the power supplies there are uncertain or a huge high-gravity field is creating interference in the transmission. But despite the fading and

Section 3

surging waves of interference that break up his words, Captain Don Larno of the *Audacious* gets enough of his message across to tell Ulnar everything he needs to know.

" . . . to HQ, Endymion garri—HQ . . . alien ships . . . hundred or more . . . from . . . frontier. Garrison out . . . to hold them until . . . forcements. . . . Like a giant planet . . . mobile . . . death ship . . . Cometeers. Repeating: Endymion garrison to . . . spotted alien . . . a hundred . . . coming in from beyond . . . tier. Outnumbered, but we'll try to hold . . . send reinforcements. Most targets cruiser size, but one is like . . . planetoid, except it's mobile . . . a death . . . worse than the comet. . . . Repeating . . . "

But it repeats no further; after the second version of the message, the power from the Endymion communications station fades out for good.

In the face of this message, Ulnar once again ponders the proper dispositions to meet the Ka'slag threat. Captain Larno said he'd try to hold until reinforcements arrive, but the admiral cannot be sure that Endymion can hold out. The squadron can rush to Larno's aid, but risks allowing the aliens to penetrate deeper. But if Ulnar continues to wait at St. Germaine and the Ka'slaq choose a different destination, another world may fall while the Legion waits idle. Can Ulnar outguess the invaders and block their attack?

If Ulnar chooses to remain at St. Germaine, go to section 12.

If Ulnar chooses to go to Endymion, go to section 20.

If Ulnar chooses to go to Baal, go to section 18.

If Ulnar orders his ships to travel to S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If Ulnar chooses to go to any other destination, go to section 14.

Ulnar is free to detach ships to strengthen other garrisons, as before. He is also free to take the mobile elements of the St. Germaine garrison with him when he departs, adding those ships to his squadron. Go to section 10 for a review of the garrisons at various worlds, remembering to add any forces already detached from Ulnar's squadron.

On a piece of scratch paper, note the fact that twenty days have elapsed waiting at St. Germaine.

— 4 —

Derron's World is a small, recently opened colony in the first stages of settlement. Discovered by Mors Derron during his exploration of the frontier region sixty years ago, the planet is notable as a mineralogical treasure house. Exploitation of the planet's natural resources, which include substantial deposits of precious metals, industrial-grade gems, and radioactives, is expected to make the colony self-sufficient (and highly profitable) in a very short time.

Currently only about five hundred colonists are on the planet, most of them miners sent to open the world prior to the arrival of other settlers. Despite its vast potential value to the League, Derron's World is not yet considered an important colony since even the equipment necessary to exploit it has not been entirely deployed. There is no Legion garrison to defend the system, and no major facilities of strategic, economic, or political significance are located in the system.

If Ulnar orders the ships under his command to travel to Derron's World, go to section 25.

If the admiral remains undecided and wishes to review his available options further, go to section 8.

— 5 —

S.C. 170 lies outside the bounds arbitrarily established for the League of Worlds. Ken Star first surveyed this Class G star system during his third exploration of the Orion frontier and noted it as a likely prospect for future expansion. However, development along the Orion Frontier has been slow, and the planet has not yet been scheduled for settlement or development.

The computer record does not contain the latest information on S.C. 170, but briefing material included in Ulnar's orders does. Five lightly armed exploratory vessels—*Pioneer*, *Discovery*, *Humbolt*, *New Horizons*, and *Cook*—were dispatched to conduct

Section 6

a detailed survey of S.C. 170 as the first step toward opening the planet to new colonists. Three months into their mission the ships were attacked with provocation by the alien Ka'slaq. Only *Pioneer* escaped, having suffered severe damage in the process. *Discovery* was crippled and taken in tow by two of the alien ships, so presumably the Ka'slaq have access to all of her computer files as well as any information known to the survivors captured on board. Whether or not they possess the means to translate and act on this data is unknown, but a worst-case assumption must be accepted until evidence to the contrary turns up.

Presumably S.C. 170's planets have been occupied by the invaders, and elements of their fleet may well be present there. It is also possible that the hulks of the Legion expedition's ships remain and might contain more information regarding the aliens, but this is uncertain.

If Ulnar decides to take his fleet to S.C. 170 to investigate the alien attack firsthand, go to section 30.

If Ulnar remains undecided and wishes to spend more time reviewing his options, go to section 8.

— 6 —

Ulnar 118 was first surveyed by Lars Ulnar, Admiral Ulnar's famous grandfather, in company with the equally renowned Ken Star during an early sweep of the region. A harsh wilderness world with a hellish environment, this planet circles a Class F star at a distance too close for human comfort.

Although it lies deep inside the League frontier, Ulnar 118 has never been settled. The planetary surveys yielded no signs of worthwhile resources, and the extreme heat, fierce winds, and dust-swept rocks make it a poor candidate for settlement. Thus, even though the world is technically classed as a marginally Earthlike planet—with native plant and animal life of sorts, and an oxygen atmosphere—it has always been regarded as a "poor relation" among the worlds of the Ninth Sector.

If Ulnar decides to visit this deserted, hostile world, go to section 63.

If Ulnar remains undecided and wishes to review his options further, go to section 8.

— 7 —

Lochinvar is a flourishing colony world on the edge of League space, and one of the first planets in the sector to be explored and settled. The original expedition, out of Farhaven in neighboring Sector 8, was commanded by John Samdu, younger son of the great admiral-general of the early days of the Expansion.

Samdu's colony was established as a haven for rugged individualists who resented the commercial exploitation of Farhaven (settled a few years earlier by Samdu to escape overcivilized Earth). For many years the colony remained small, self-isolated, and fiercely independent. Even the discovery of luxenite crystals, the beautiful gemstones that subsequently became a major trade item, was at first suppressed in hopes of preserving the planet's isolation from other worlds. It wasn't until the Great Plague thirty-one years ago, when the population declined by seventy percent in one year, that the old traditions of self-reliance broke down. Calls for medical aid, imported food, and other assistance attracted League attention to Lochinvar, and shortly thereafter word of the gems leaked out. Waves of fortune-hunting colonists quickly filled the void left by the Plague, although many of these succumbed to the lingering remnants of the disease themselves.

The colony has since diversified, although the luxenite crystals remain the major source of off-world wealth. A stable if still somewhat underpopulated planet, Lochinvar is important as the lateral communications link to Sector 8. Legion ships are stationed there, as well as a small ground force to protect the League communications station and the Medical Research center, one of the largest such facilities along the frontier.

If Admiral Ulnar orders the ships under his command to Lochinvar, go to section 25.

If he wishes to review his options further, turn to section 8.

— 8 —

Ulnar shuts off the computer summary of the sector and rubs his eyes, tired and more worried than ever. With the entire sector threatened by the alien armada and only a handful of ships to meet them with, he cannot be sure what to do. Should he rush to Thule, where the enemy is reported to be heading, or Baal, the most heavily populated world in the sector? Do the Ka'slaq know about the mineral wealth of Derron's World? Perhaps they are lingering around S.C. 170, where their first attack took place.

Though the commander's orders are supposed to be classified, news like the Ka'slaq invasion can't be kept secret for long. If Admiral David Ulnar is seen as indecisive in the face of this crisis, it can't help but injure the morale of his men. The Ulnar reputation, still so poor despite the redeeming heroism of men like John Star (born on Ulnar) and David's grandfather Lars, is to blame for the delicate state of the men's morale. Uncertainty, hesitation, defeat—any one of them can be a problem. Hotheads like Commodore Benbo, the recon wing commander, would be quick to exploit the slightest weakness on his part.

With a sigh Ulnar leans forward again to flick on the computer screen and resume his work. He knows that he must start issuing decisive orders soon. Once more he plunges into reports and summaries, knowing well that his decision could be crucial to the safety of League and Legion alike.

Continue to examine material, and plan to take action. Map 1 is consulted as before. (See section 2) Each time that this section is chosen, however, there is a chance of trouble. Roll two six-sided dice.

If the total rolled is the same or less than the fleet's Morale value, there is no ill effect and the decision process continues uninterrupted.

If the roll is greater than the fleet's Morale value, go to section 24.

To review the dispositions of Legion forces in the Ninth Sector, consult section 10.

— 9 —

Endymion is a small colony world near the edge of the League frontier, most notable for its extensive port facilities. The planet is a major scout base, the jump-off point for expeditions into the unknown. The settlement of Endymion is less than fifty years old and primarily centers on the port and base complexes.

The Endymion colony is protected by a small Legion garrison, mostly made up of recon ships not currently employed for exploratory voyages. The garrison commander there, Captain Don Larno, is the son of the colony's governor-general, and a former protégé of Ulnar's, who can be counted on to back up his admiral in any situation.

Ulnar can also note that the five ships ambushed at S.C. 170 originally came from Endymion. The capture of one of them, *Discovery*, in the Ka'slaq assault suggests that they might look upon Endymion as a major target.

If Ulnar decides to shift his fleet to Endymion, go to section 16.

If Ulnar remains undecided and wishes to spend more time reviewing his options, go to section 8.

— 10 —

Legion Space Forces

Ninth Sector

Vice-Admiral David Ulnar, commanding

Ninth Defense Squadron, battle wing (St. Germaine)

7 battlecruisers

Valiant (flag of Vice-Admiral D. Ulnar)

Dauntless

Intrepid

Legionnaire

Vigilant

Protector

Avenger

Section 10

Ninth Defense Squadron, recon wing (St. Germaine)

10 destroyers

Corsair (broad pendant of Commodore N. Benbo)
Freedom
Kalam
Star
Fox
Voyager
Hawk
Juno
Gorgon
Rama

St. Germaine Garrison (St. Germaine)

2 battlecruisers, 2 destroyers, orbital fortress

Endeavor (BC)
Triumph (BC)
Lightning (DD)
Wotan (DD)

Baal Garrison (Baal)

3 battlecruisers, 2 destroyers, orbital fortress

Dreadnought (BC)
Glorious (BC)
Defiant (BC)
Lancer (DD)
Anthar (DD)

Lochinvar Garrison (Lochinvar)

2 battlecruisers, 1 destroyer

Invincible (BC)
Steadfast (BC)
Mongoose (DD)

Endymion Garrison (Endymion)

1 battlecruiser, 5 destroyers

Audacious (BC)
Avernus (DD)
Reiver (DD)
Arrow (DD)
Falcon (DD)
Dragon (DD)

Thule Garrison (Thule)

3 destroyers

Viking (DD)
Hind (DD)
Iris (DD)

MacBeth Garrison (MacBeth)

2 battlecruisers, 1 destroyer, orbital fortress

Pride (BC)

Heroic (BC)

Ranger (DD)

Trinidad Garrison (Trinidad)

4 battlecruisers, 5 destroyers

Remise (BC)

Shield (BC)

Sentinel (BC)

Courageous (BC)

Buccaneer (DD)

Javelin (DD)

Hopeful (DD)

Dart (DD)

Memnon (DD)

Orbital fortresses are immobile defense complexes defending specific worlds. Although well-armed, their lack of maneuverability means that they cannot effectively engage enemy forces in concert with mobile ships. They are a line of defense to be used separately from mobile ships and cannot be moved between star systems without the use of massive geofractors.

Destroyers are lightly armed, fast ships designed for reconnaissance duties and the exploration of new planets. Their combat role is customarily a screening one, protecting the heavier elements of a squadron until they are ready to strike a decisive blow, or covering a fleet's withdrawal from battle.

The battlecruiser is the standard fighting ship of Legion fleet. Well-armed but comparatively slow, battlecruisers deliver the decisive blows in combat. They also carry contingents of ground troops to restore order on troubled planets and launch surface assaults against the Legion's enemies.

After reviewing these forces, return to the section you came from. Remember to keep track of forces that have been detached from or attached to the groups listed here. A separate sheet of scratch paper should be used for this purpose. Ulnar is always free to detach ships to his present location or absorb garrison ships (not orbital fortresses) into his mobile squadron while in the garrisoned star system. Be sure to also mark off garrison ships when they are destroyed.

— 11 —

Baal is a major colony world of the Ninth Sector. It has the largest population of any of the planets of the region and is the oldest settlement as well. Circling a Class G star at a distance of 89 million miles, Baal has a warm climate which, coupled with a dense, humid atmosphere, supports extensive agriculture. For the most part it is a quiet, pastoral world, but it does feature extensive commercial interests because of its importance as "bread-basket of the Ninth Sector."

As a major hub of the agro trade, Baal's commercial shipping facilities are excellent and its volume of space traffic impressive. Although St. Germaine was chosen as the sector capital over Baal, the planet's value cannot be underestimated. A substantial Legion garrison is maintained there, although three months ago several Baal guardships were transferred to Trinidad to deal with local civil disturbances there.

Currently, League civil space engineers are busy installing a geofractor system in the outer reaches of the Baal system to facilitate transport of the planet's produce to other worlds, including the overpopulated planets of the Inner League.

If Ulnar chooses to move his main fleet to Baal, go to section 43.

If Ulnar remains undecided and wants to spend more time reviewing his options, go to section 8.

— 12 —

Reports on the fall of Endymion begin to filter in within hours of Larno's original report. A few merchant ships and other private vessels on the fringes of the system were able to escape, but none of Larno's outnumbered garrison had a chance. Ultrawave messages, traveling faster than light but still slow over interstellar distances, only gradually unfold the story of the Ka'slaq onslaught.

They came in fast, and in force. Some reports speak of hundreds of ships, each of them identical in size, speed, and

devastating weapons. Sweeping into the system at a speed impossible for any human-built ship to match—not because of engineering problems, since geodyne drives could tear up the light-years that separate the stars, but because no human pilot could have handled the precise maneuvers and sudden vector changes these invaders took as routine—the Ka'slaq descended upon Endymion without even pausing to get their bearings. Their every action made it plain they knew every detail of the colony and its defenders.

Larno's tiny squadron did its best, but it was a handful of ships against a horde that easily outnumbered and outgunned the Legion's defenders. No accounts of his actual attack on the main body of the Ka'slaq fleet reach Ulnar's flagship. An ultrapulse scan picked up a single large object the size of an asteroid or small planet in the heart of the enemy fleet, and Larno plunged into the midst of this overwhelming force. Before all contact was lost, Ka'slaq systems all over the star system broke off their attacks for a time, but it wasn't long before they returned with even more ruthless energy than ever.

Endymion was not just attacked, it was devastated, systematically and without the least mercy. Each city, each town, each homestead was blasted by weapons more powerful than the strongest Legion vortex gun. The ruthless campaign of destruction targeted the human colonists with a precision that could only have stemmed from total familiarity with the computer files captured on board the *Discovery*. One report records that the Ka'slaq annihilated one town as its terror-stricken inhabitants were in the middle of a message of surrender. Except for a few lucky ones in fleeing ships, no one in the Endymion system was spared.

And again the aliens, having overwhelmed their opponents, have disappeared from view. Are they still around Endymion? Or have they decided to strike at some other colony? A destroyer operating out of Baal picked up ultrapulse blips on his long-range scanners between Endymion and Baal, but was this the enemy fleet or some natural phenomena? The fate of Endymion makes clear the total inhumanity of the Ka'slaq, and Ulnar is well aware that their campaign of terror has to be stopped before they destroy another hapless planet. But where will they go next? Where should he try to bring them to battle? And is there any hope for his squadron even if he does meet up with this implacable foe?

Section 13

If Ulnar chooses to remain at St. Germaine even after these new reports, go to section 45.

If Ulnar chooses to go to Endymion, go to section 20.

If Ulnar chooses to go to Baal, go to section 50.

If Ulnar orders his squadron to S.C. 170, go to section 30.

If Ulnar chooses to go to any other destination, go to section 44.

Roll one die and add the number of days shown to the time already spent at St. Germaine.

— 13 —

Thule is a small, recently settled colony near the edge of the League's Ninth Sector frontier. Barely a year old, the settlement is primarily a research outpost coupled with a pioneering team's first-phase landing port and survey center. Legion ships have been assigned to Thule to provide assistance for the settlers in opening up the planet to mass colonization.

The planet is the second of a dim, cool class K star, and it has a chilly climate. However, early surveys discovered that an indigenous animal species, dubbed the tundra bison, was potentially valuable as a food source and export item for human colonists. Plans now project the large-scale establishment of ranches and a ranching industry that should rapidly convert the fledgling colony into a going concern, profitable to commercial and governmental interests alike.

Ulnar's records and reports show that the Ka'slaq ships were on course for Thule from S.C. 170 when a Legion ship last tracked them. Though not an important planet by League standards, it would seem that the world may be the most likely target of further enemy operations in the near future.

Cross-references in the base computer files show that Dr. Maja Benbo, director of the research station on Thule, is the sister of Ulnar's second-in-command, Commodore Nils Benbo.

If Ulnar chooses to take his forces to meet the expected Ka'slaq occupation of Thule, go to section 25.

If Ulnar remains undecided and wants to spend more time reviewing his options, go to section 8.

— 14 —

Ulnar issues his new orders, marshaling the ships of the Ninth Defense Squadron for a shift to the star system he believes will next come under Ka'slaq domination. Glad to be doing something—*anything*—after the long wait at St. Germaine, the men of the Legion set out in high spirits to foil the alien attack.

By leaving St. Germaine, the squadron puts itself out of direct communication with the other worlds of the sector. Ultrawave messages to and from fast-moving ships are difficult to send over interstellar distances, where an error of a fraction of a degree can hurl the signal trillions of miles off course away from the intended recipient. As a result, the admiral receives little in the way of new information about events at Endymion during his voyage. One brief message from the base at St. Germaine makes it clear, though, that the Endymion colony has been lost. Full reports will await the admiral when he reaches his destination.

Consult the Travel Time Chart. Cross-index Ulnar's point of origin (St. Germaine) with his intended destination; the number given on the chart is the number of days it will take his squadron to reach that world. Add this number to the time spent waiting at St. Germaine before the Endymion report came in.

If the total time spent is thirty-five days or less, go to section 22.

If the total time amounts to thirty-six days or more, go to section 27.

— 15 —

MacBeth, like Baal and St. Germaine, is a sizable and diversified colony. It is a hospitable planet, third from a Class G star, with a climate much like Earth's. Settlement on MacBeth goes back five decades, and the colony is only slightly behind St. Germaine in population.

The MacBeth colonists were initially drawn from the ranks of the PSP (Pan-Stellar Peace) movement, which was at the peak of its support in that period. Members of the PSP group sought to completely lay aside violence and war as an instrument of League policy. Although their political power was strong, it wasn't sufficient to achieve true disarmament (which, among other things, would have required the complete suppression of the secret of AKKA on which the League was founded). They did, however, obtain exclusive rights to settle MacBeth as a model colony run along completely utopian lines.

Following the crop failures ten years ago, food riots and the short-lived coup of Jol Nolar caused the MacBeth colonists to request Legion intervention. After Nolar's dictatorship was eliminated, a Legion garrison was permanently established in the MacBeth system to help the colonists make a smooth transition to a less utopian but more successful social structure.

The planet has no major military bases or other League facilities. It has little real strategic value, but the population of the planet and its trade ties to the Fifteenth Sector make it a world of some importance in Legion planning.

If Ulnar chooses to move his forces to the MacBeth system, go to section 25.

If Ulnar remains undecided and wishes to review his options further, go to section 8.

— 16 —

Although reports suggest Thule as a likely target for the Ka'slaq fleet, Ulnar has to take other factors into account. The capture of one of five ships at S.C. 170 suggests the possibility, at least, that the aliens have access to the computer records that ship carried. If so, Endymion's prominence as an exploratory base—and the point of origin of the human expedition—makes it a much more likely military target than Thule. At any rate, Endymion offers a better position for covering other vital worlds in the region than most of the other possible destinations.

With this in mind Vice-Admiral Ulnar issues his orders, assembling the ships he needs for the eighteen-day voyage from St. Germaine to Endymion. Ponderous battlecruisers and darting, agile destroyers move slowly out of orbit, cut in their faster-than-light geodyne engines, and speed toward their destination at a pace hard to understand or even imagine.

Eighteen long days in interstellar space pass with maddening slowness. The nature of ultrawave communications makes it difficult to receive more than fragmentary information from any of the worlds of the Ninth Sector; an error of a degree or two in the alignment of transmitters can throw a message at a point light-years from the intended recipient, and the excessive speeds of the geodyne-powered ships makes it even harder to get an accurate fix. In effect, the fleet is cut off from outside contact, from information, orders, or warnings from the star systems that are Ulnar's responsibility. If the choice he has made is wrong, Ulnar won't learn about it until his ships actually reach Endymion and sort through the messages already relayed there, because ultrawave communications are much faster than ships, and they operate efficiently between the predictable orbital coordinates of individual worlds.

As they approach Endymion the ships train their ultrawave receivers ahead; the closer they get, the more chance they have of picking up messages. But the receivers don't pick up any intelligible transmissions—only a steadily increasing and disturbing kind of ultrawave static. One day out from Endymion this static begins to show distinctly artificial patterns and pulses. When the squadron is nearly two hours from planetfall, the static lifts long enough for a weak, fuzzy signal to come through from the garrison.

Section 16

“Endymion garrison to HQ, Endymion garrison to HQ. We have spotted alien ships numbering a hundred or more, coming in from beyond the frontier. Garrison outnumbered, but we'll try to hold them until you can send reinforcements. Most targets are cruiser size, but one is like a giant, mobile planetoid. It's some kind of a death ship, even worse than the Cometeers. Repeating . . .” The message plays again before being swallowed up in static.

“Detector status!” Ulnar rasps from his flag display at the rear of *Valiant*'s bridge.

“Ultrapulse radar systems jammed by interference, Admiral,” a young officer replies quickly. “Teleperiscopes operable, but at this range—”

“Get those ultrapulse units working, Captain,” Ulnar orders. “We have to see what's going on!”

Captain Sammis, his sharp features set in a dour frown, nods. His stiff bearing and gruff orders to his bridge crew convey his dislike of having the admiral spell out his duty. Ulnar ignores him. Don Larno, captain of the battlecruiser *Audacious* and commander of Endymion's tiny garrison squadron, is facing a vastly superior enemy on his own, and Ulnar is impatient to come to the aid of one of his most loyal friends. Nothing else matters.

“Ultrapulse display coming on line now, sir,” the same young officer reports.

The tactical tank beside Ulnar's position comes alive with a confusion of faint lights and traces, some flickering madly. Distorted by ultrawave interference, the signals are poorly defined and could be false readings. Still, the picture they paint is grim.

A handful of yellow readouts represent the positions of the six ships of Larno's squadron, still over an hour away at the fleet's best speed. They are almost completely surrounded in the planning tank by red-colored blips, most of them somewhat smaller than a Legion battlecruiser. One fuzzy blob of light can only be Larno's “mobile planetoid.”

And Larno's ships, a battlecruiser and a handful of destroyers, are formed up like an arrow streaking right toward the huge vessel.

“Can we raise the *Audacious*?” Ulnar asks.

Sammis gestures to the crewman manning the communications station. Like a well-oiled machine, *Valiant*'s bridge crew works

together with effortless efficiency, with very little chatter and few spoken orders.

Minutes pass, and the symbols in the display tank continue to creep inexorably together. Ulnar opens his mouth to give vent to his impatience.

But Sammis beats him to it. "Wish there was a way to get around the ultrawave time lag," he mutters.

Embarrassed at forgetting something so basic to space travel, Ulnar checks his impatience and concentrates on the planning tank and the smooth, perfectly coordinated movements of each of the enemy ships. No Legion fleet could ever hope to duplicate such absolutely precise maneuvering. Larno's ships don't stand a chance against such teamwork.

"We have contact," the communications technician announces suddenly.

"Patch me in," Ulnar orders. At the crewman's nod, Ulnar turns toward the plotting tank and speaks into the microphone on the console near him. "Audacious, this is Flag. Break off the action, Larno . . . break off. You can't fight a whole fleet for an hour or more!"

There is another interminable wait as Ulnar's words, converted into the faster-than-light medium of ultrawave signals, race through space toward Larno's ships. Over these comparatively short distances there is less trouble in aiming messages, but they still take several minutes to cross the distance between the two battlecruisers. Ordinary radio messages, at this range, would take weeks.

Finally Larno's relaxed voice, almost unrecognizable against the background of static, breaks the silence. Ulnar knows he is hearing the voice of a man resigned to death.

"Audacious to Flag. Negative on your request—"

"It's not a request, damn it, it's an order!" Ulnar cuts in loudly before he realizes his words won't be heard aboard the other battlecruiser for several more minutes. Seething, he picks up the thread of Larno's message again.

"Can't fight them all, but we can't run either—those beauties are *fast*. My best estimate says that planetoid thing is some kind of flagship. If we can get in a couple of good shots with the vortex guns . . . well, it's all we've got. I can't fight dogfights with a hundred ships and expect to do much of anything."

There is a long pause, and for a moment Ulnar thinks Larno's transmission is done. Suddenly Larno's voice cuts in again, flat and emotionless. "Dave . . . tell Kay—"

Section 16

All at once a shriek of melting electronics cuts off his words. Ulnar doesn't need to see the fading light in the planning tank to know that Larno and the *Audacious* are gone. Don Larno's last message to his wife would never be finished.

Two other Legion ships vanish from the display at the same time. The tiny garrison squadron is falling apart under the enemy onslaught. For a moment Ulnar thinks the enemy ships on the display are becoming uncoordinated in their movements, but suddenly draw back into flawless formations and proceed to destroy the other ships of Larno's squadron. The cloud of Ka'slaq craft seem to coalesce around the larger vessel like a swarm of insects around a lantern. But as the last of the Legion destroyers vanishes from the display, the alien fleet begins to spread out once more, some closing on Endymion's undefended globe, others remaining clustered around the slow-moving planetoid. Another wave, perhaps a third of the total enemy force, turns on a new course—directly toward Ulnar's squadron.

Ulnar hunches forward in his seat, his mind racing furiously. Caution battles a thirst for vengeance as he contemplates the possibility of engaging the Ka'slaq here and now. Larno's force was overwhelmed; if the same fate overtakes Ulnar's squadron now, the whole of the Ninth Sector is opened up to the aliens. But the need to strike a blow in Larno's name is almost too strong to ignore. As the enemy ships close with incredible speed, Ulnar is well aware of the responsibility that hangs over his head like a sharpened blade, threatening not only himself and the men who serve in his handful of ships, but the entire League and Legion who lie behind them.

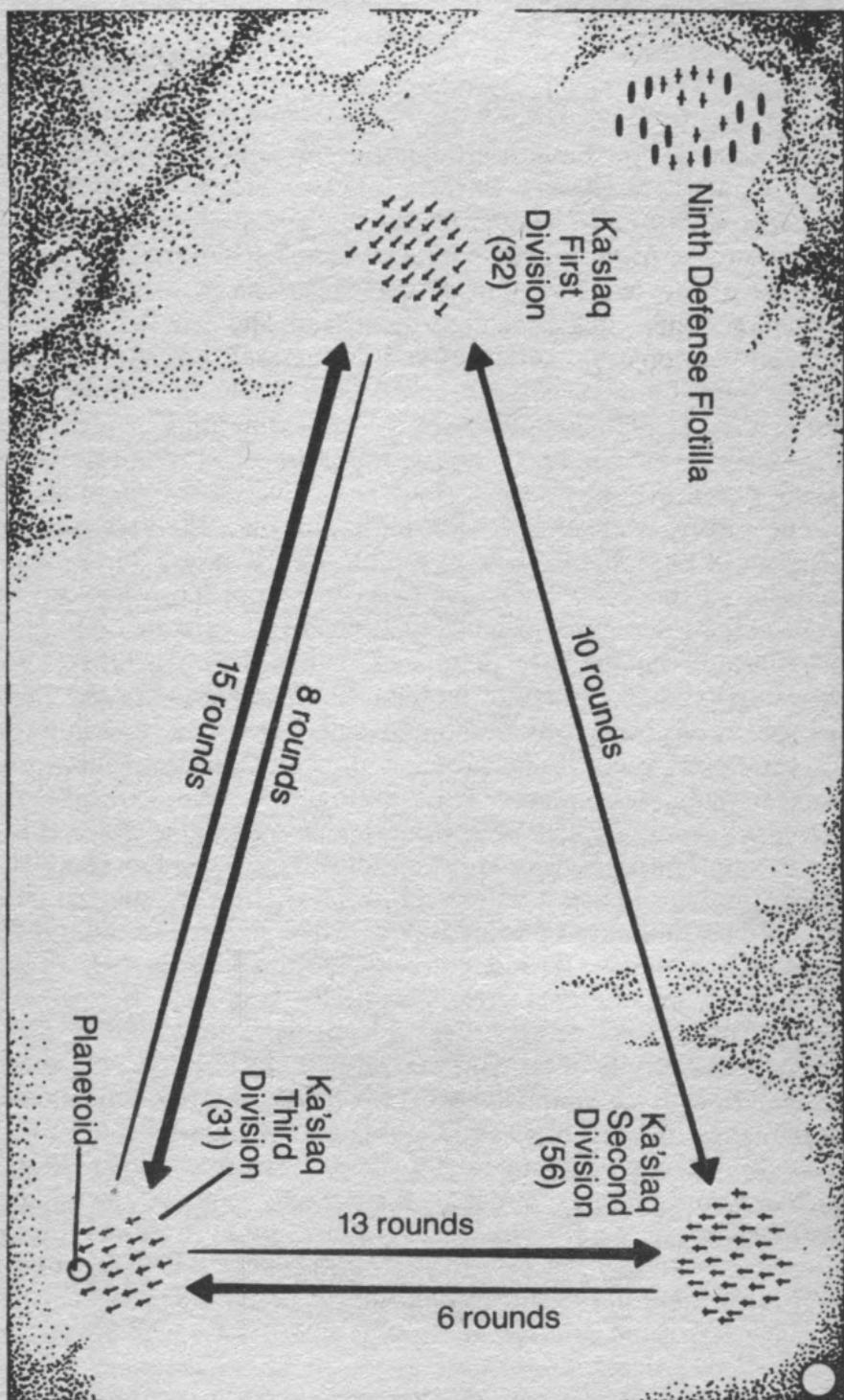
If Ulnar orders the squadron to engage the enemy fleet, go to section 21.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to avoid the enemy fleet but attack the planetoid, go to section 23.

If Ulnar orders his ships to avoid the enemy fleet but attack the alien force approaching Endymion proper, go to section 26.

If Ulnar orders the Ninth Squadron to stand its ground and defend itself, go to section 28.

If Ulnar orders his command to withdraw, go to section 32.



BATTLE OF ENDYMION

— 17 —

Trinidad is the biggest troublespot of Ulnar's Ninth Sector. Fifth planet of a Class F star, the planet's highly eccentric orbit makes for extreme changes in climate and geography over the course of one of the planet's long "years." The human colonists planted on the world a decade ago were forced to settle under immense domes that protected them from the worst dangers of radically variable temperatures and dramatic changes in the level of the planet's seas between summer and winter. Some dome cities are undersea complexes in the hottest months of periastron and isolated, land-bound outposts in the midst of a barren tundra when winter sets in.

The settlers were drawn to Trinidad by the discovery of great deposits of exploitable mineral wealth, easily mined during some portions of the year, because of the accelerated process of erosion which goes hand in hand with the harsh climate. Although the world is not heavily populated, it has drawn a fairly large influx of colonists pursuing golden opportunities. But the rapid expansion of the colony combined with the hostile environment to completely outstrip the progress of scouts and pioneers looking for possible threats to the community. As a result, the colonists are entangled in a strange and inexpiable war with a native intelligence whose very existence had been unsuspected.

These aliens, known as the Snow Devils among the humans, are a monstrous race of spiny bipeds who estivate throughout the periastron period of Trinidad's orbit and emerge on the surface during the long, bitter winter. Despite the handicaps of spending significant portions of each year asleep, the Snow Devils have a sophisticated civilization. But the careless destruction of a sleeping vault and its slumbering occupants by human miners has earned their implacable hatred. As a result, for the duration of each winter period Snow Devil attacks against human colony domes pose a serious threat to the settlers—and to the mining work. Diplomacy has failed totally, but a stubborn refusal by the League government to abandon the world has led to the continuation of the intermittent war.

A sizable force of League ships is maintained at Trinidad all year round. During winter they assist the colonists against Snow Devil attacks, and the summer is spent in efforts to locate Snow Devil lairs and so spot their probable bases for the next cam-

paign. A proposal to neutralize these lairs has been blocked in the League Council as being nothing short of genocide.

Currently, it is the hot periastron summer period on Trinidad, which means that the ships can be spared from their duties there to serve with Ulnar's fleet if the need arises.

Trinidad's resources could make it an important strategic target. The Legion cannot discount the possibility that the Ka'slaq might seek some kind of alliance with the Snow Devils. Their fleet could well need the support of a technological civilization, and they could choose to support the Ka'slaq as the best weapon against the human interlopers who have so aroused their fury.

If Ulnar decides to order his ships to travel to Trinidad, go to section 25.

If Ulnar remains undecided and wishes to review his options further, go to section 8.

— 18 —

There are several other planets in immediate danger, but no one world is as important as Baal. The key planet of the sector, with its large population and major trade links with other key planets, Baal is the obvious next choice for a Ka'slaq assault if they know anything about the League. The assault on Endymion suggests that the Ka'slaq knew, presumably from records or captives aboard the lost *Discovery* at S.C. 170, that Endymion was the nearest Legion port and base.

Convinced that Baal is the best choice for the Ka'slaq, Ulnar knows it will take both luck and speed to win the race and bring the Ninth Squadron to the defense of Baal. The Ka'slaq are closer, but if they linger around Endymion, the Legion ships might just reach the planet in time to block the enemy advance. No time can be spared; Ulnar issues the orders that will set the squadron in motion at last with scarcely a pause to consider the dangers of the situation.

Accelerating out of orbit, the Ninth Squadron gathers speed as the great geodyne engines run up to their maximum output. Using their power to distort the very fabric of space itself, the ships slide past the speed of light to velocities no human mind

Section 18

could grasp, and shape their course for Baal. But even at these awesome speeds it is an eleven-day journey from St. Germaine to Baal, and that leaves plenty of time for plans, doubts, and second thoughts.

The fleet is cut off from any but the briefest of contacts with the worlds of the sector. Ultrawave transmissions between planets are easy enough because the coordinates of each are well-known and relative motions comparatively low, but the uncertainties of speed and distance between moving ships make communications difficult. Even an error of a degree or two in antenna alignment can cause a transmission to miss the intended recipient by trillions of miles. Except at fairly short ranges or under unusual circumstances, it is almost impossible to broadcast substantial messages to or from a moving ship in interstellar space.

Thus, Ulnar has very little to go on as he lays his plans during the voyage. Except for Larno's first message, he has no information on events at Endymion and no way of knowing what to expect at Baal. But as the squadron finally draws near its destination, it makes contact and begins updating information relayed over the past eleven days from the base at St. Germaine to Baal, as well as news gathered locally.

The word from Endymion is grim. None of Larno's ships escaped, but a few merchant vessels on the fringes of the system were able to watch what happened before they fled. The Ka'slaq onslaught was fast, utterly ruthless, and totally devastating. There were at least one hundred ships (Larno's original estimate, and probably the most accurate), although some reports speak of several hundred, all identical in size, speed, and bearing incredibly powerful weapons. The ships swept into the system at a speed no human ship would have dared maintain (not because human ships couldn't move that fast, but because human pilots couldn't handle the precise maneuvers and sudden vector changes the invaders evidently regarded as routine), and closed in on Endymion almost before anyone was aware of their presence. Their actions made it clear that the Ka'slaq knew every detail of the Endymion colony and its defenses.

According to the reports, the large body of enemy cruisers was followed by one other object, which ultrapulse scans reported as a huge, slow-moving structure the size of a planetoid or small moon. Larno's scanners must have picked up the same data, because the last reported act of the tiny garrison force was a headlong rush into the heart of the enemy fleet, aimed straight at

the huge object. The threat was enough to draw off some of the Ka'slaq ships, which closed in on Larno's force with inhuman accuracy and wiped out all the ships before they could either reach the large target or break off and flee. But the slackening attack didn't die away for long; soon the aliens were back in force. There was nothing left to stand in their way.

The Ka'slaq didn't just overawe the helpless colony—they systematically devastated it. Endymion's cities and towns were reduced from orbit without the slightest trace of mercy or a single offer of acceptance of quarter. One town was apparently destroyed even as the inhabitants sent a panic-stricken message of total surrender. Ka'slaq weapons, more powerful than the best vortex guns in the Legion's arsenal, picked off inhabited areas one after another, from the largest town to the newest homestead. It was clear that the aliens had a detailed summary of human habitation on the planet, which made it even more likely that the Ka'slaq had cracked the computer files aboard the captured *Discovery*. A few lucky colonists escaped in merchant ships, but no human escaped from the holocaust at Endymion.

No one knows what happened there; the Ka'slaq might have remained, or they may have moved on to new conquests.

They have not yet taken Baal, although patrol ships operating away from the colony in the direction of Endymion have sent in some disturbing reports. Ultrapulse scans have picked up fuzzy images at the very limit of detection range on a course toward Baal. Some kind of previously unknown ultrawave band static has also been detected in that direction, prompting the captain of the battlecruiser *Defiant* to follow up the reports with a personal reconnaissance. Evidently Ulnar has arrived in time, but just barely . . . if, indeed, these reports are of enemy ships and not more refugees or some other anomaly unconnected with the Ka'slaq.

By the time the squadron makes orbit around Baal, the static reported by the patrols is noticeable to everyone and has begun interfering with communications and ultrapulse scans. The scanners still work, but they aren't very reliable. Several blips have appeared swooping toward the planet, but the distortion makes it hard to gather more than the most basic ideas of speed, headings, and size. Two ships—the destroyer *Anthar* and the battlecruiser *Defiant*—are overdue and still out of contact, and everyone in the squadron is growing increasingly concerned about the situation.

Section 18

"Ultrapulse reports two friendly ships at the limit of detection range," an officer announces.

Ulnar, feigning calm by sipping from a mug of coffee, hands it to a steward and swivels his seat to command a view of *Valiant*'s tactical planning tank, where ultrapulse data is translated by computer to readouts. Moving at maximum speed, the two yellow blips are identified as a battlecruiser and a destroyer. Ulnar watches as the computers update the information and transponder signals identify the two vessels: *Defiant* and *Anthar*, as everyone hoped.

A ragged cheer starts from the crewmen on the bridge, but it dies away quickly. Ultrapulse scans show a whole phalanx of blue-covered lights, representing unknown and presumably hostile ships, closing fast on the two Legion vessels. Ulnar needn't see more to know that the Ka'slaq have arrived.

"*Defiant* on line, Admiral," the communications technician reports.

"Put it through." Ulnar turns to face the microphone and comm screen on the Flag command console. The screen flickers to life, broken up by static but revealing the strained features of a young captain with a scorched uniform collar and a bleeding gash across one cheek.

"Flag, this is *Defiant*. Enemy ships pursuing. They'll reach your position soon. Too many for us to stop." The captain rubs at the blood on his face. "There's more of them than anyone thought. We took a grazing hit, with one geodyne damaged and fifty men killed or wounded. Flag, Admiral, we can't fight them. . . ."

The captain begins to ramble, his confused words and dazed expression making plain his anguish and fear. *Defiant*'s captain knows his ship is doomed.

"Energy pulse from target 027," a voice calls out from somewhere behind the battlecruiser's captain. "That means they're—" With a flash of light and the sound of melting electronics, the battlecruiser is hit again.

"Pax External," someone on *Valiant*'s bridge mutters. Ulnar drops his eyes to the planning tank, where the symbols that represent *Defiant* as a battlecruiser under power are fading out. Something there still returns a faint ultrapulse echo amidst the lifeless hulk drifting silently through space.

Almost as if an afterthought, an anticlimax following the death of the *Defiant*, the smaller dot that represents the destroyer winks out a few moments later. The Ka'slaq destroyed the smaller ship

so thoroughly that no trace remains to bounce back ultrapulse signals.

Ulnar stares at the tank for a long minute, watching thirty blue symbols creep toward the squadron, and, behind the Legion's protective shield, Baal. Two more ships are gone, and the implacable aliens continue their remorseless advance. Ulnar wonders for a moment if it would be better to fight and die or flee and face the shame of running without a fight.

Then, as he stares down at the planning tank, Ulnar feels a dawning resolve. He knows what he should do and how to make it work. All that remains is to give the necessary orders.

If Ulnar decides to attack the Ka'slaq fleet, go to Section 33.

If Ulnar decides to remain near Baal to defend it from attack, go to section 37.

If Ulnar decides to abandon Baal, go to section 41.

— 19 —

St. Germaine has the second largest population of all the League worlds in the Ninth Sector. Fourth planet of a Class F star, it has a cool, pleasant climate which has attracted extensive settlement from Inner League worlds. First surveyed by the exploration team headed by Ken Star and Lars Ulnar, it continues to support a Legion defense complex and scout base. The Ninth Defense Squadron is headquartered at St. Germaine.

As capital of the Ninth sector and center for both League and Legion activities in this segment of the frontier, St. Germaine has an important place in the strategic planning for Legion military operations in the Ninth Sector. It is the major military bastion of the area, with significant ground- and space-based defenses. A geofractor complex ties St. Germaine to Earth and other inner worlds, making the planet the main link for military, exploratory, and commercial traffic connecting the frontier with major League planets.

Section 20

If Ulnar orders the ships under his command to remain on station at St. Germaine and await further developments, go to section 3.

If Admiral Ulnar remains undecided and wishes to review his options further, go to section 8.

— 20 —

Ulnar is well aware of how slim Don Larno's chances of survival are at Endymion. Even at the maximum possible speed, the Ninth Defense Squadron cannot reach Endymion in less than eighteen days. Against a fleet numbering a hundred ships or more, the beleaguered garrison had little hope of survival, barring some kind of miracle. Now Ulnar regrets his caution in keeping his reserves at St. Germaine; if he had been closer to the frontier, there might have been a chance of helping Larno in time.

Ulnar thinks his best move now is to descend on Endymion in force. If the Ka'slaq are still in the system, the Legion can catch them and exact a measure of revenge. And if the main fleet has gone on, the squadron can interrupt their supply lines and draw back the main Ka'slaq strength from wherever it attacks next. Lingering in the back of Ulnar's mind is the faint, irrational hope that the Endymion garrison might somehow survive, an impossible hope, perhaps, but the Legion was dedicated to making miracles happen.

Ulnar wastes no more time. Issuing the necessary orders, he waits in his private office as *Valiant* breaks orbit around St. Germaine, followed in turn by the other ships of the squadron. Under the space-twisting energies of their geodyne engines, the Legion's vessels hurtle from their base and gather speed rapidly, freed from the restrictions of inertia and Einsteinian physics by the local distortion in the fabric of the universe created in the bowels of each ship.

The days pass slowly. Cut off from contact with the worlds of the Ninth Sector, the squadron exists like a separate universe. Ultrawave communications are not hampered much by interstellar distances, but a target the size of a spaceship moving at velocities far in excess of light is hard to pinpoint, and harder

still to hold in an ultrawave beam. The seemingly endless time that passes en route to Endymion gives everyone aboard too much time to reflect on everything they've heard about their enemies.

In the final few hours of the approach to Endymion, Admiral Ulnar assumes his bridge position overlooking *Valiant*'s tactical plotting tank, where the ship's computers interpret ultrapulse scans and other sensor information and translate these into a simulation of space around the flagship. The tank has remained clear of anything except natural objects—stars, dust clouds, interstellar debris—throughout the voyage, but now, with Endymion only three hours away, an unknown blip registers on ultrapulse. Unpowered and apparently lifeless, the unknown object still bounces back echoes characteristic of a spaceship or other artificial structure.

Cautiously, Ulnar orders one of his ships to move closer for a direct inspection. On teleperiscope the object proves to be a battered, drifting spaceship, a human-designed vessel identified from shipboard files as a private yacht. A boarding party is sent to the yacht. Their report suggests that the vessel was near a massive explosion, a near miss that tore most of the major structural members apart through the force of expanding gases buffeting the yacht, an effect one expert from the party likens to being "on the fringes of a newborn supernova." A weapon that could induce such an effect is far beyond the vortex guns of the Legion ships.

The boarding party learns that the yacht was a private courier in the service of Endymion's colonial government. On board are detailed accounts of everything the ship's crew could collect regarding the fall of Endymion before they were themselves destroyed.

If Ulnar has had no previous information regarding what happened at Endymion (aside from Don Larno's initial message), and he wants to review the information on board the courier/yacht, go to section 42.

If Ulnar waited to receive information about Endymion before leaving St. Germaine and he wants to review it on board the courier/yacht, go to section 46.

If Ulnar chooses to ignore the information contained on the courier/yacht, go to section 51.

On a piece of scratch paper note that eighteen days are used up in the voyage.

— 21 —

"Open Fleetcomm to all ships," Ulnar orders. "Patch it through to my board." Eyes on the planning tank, the admiral runs through everything he has seen and heard so far. If the Ka'slaq have a weakness, it is up to him to find and exploit it.

"On Fleetcomm, Admiral," the communications technician tells him.

Ulnar switches on his microphone. "Flag to Ninth Defense Squadron. Prepare for battle." He pauses, examining the moving lights in the tank that represent enemy ships closing on the squadron at high speed. Ultrapulse interference still makes things uncertain, but there are at least thirty enemy ships on the way, maybe more.

But the Ka'slaq have divided their forces, their first major mistake. Ulnar knows that a divided foe can be defeated in detail where a united one can be too strong to fight.

"We will attack the nearest enemy ships on my signal," the admiral continues. "Formation and battle orders to follow. Stand by."

Clicking off the microphone, Ulnar leans forward to study the tank. The attack formation his ships adopt could be decisive in the battle to come. He has only minutes to decide and marshal his ships for battle.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to adopt a wedge formation, go to section 55.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to adopt a cone formation, go to section 60.

If Ulnar orders the light destroyers to form a screen ahead of the battlecruisers, go to section 65.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to disperse and fight independently, go to section 70.

— 22 —

The fleet is in a stable orbit around the planet as Ulnar goes through the accumulated reports relayed from St. Germaine. They tell the story of Endymion, and as the tale takes form, the admiral begins to realize just how much danger the League and the Legion face from their evil foes.

None of the ships of Larno's garrison force escaped from the battle at Endymion, but a few merchant ships and other private vessels were able to get away and bring back their impressions of the planet's end. The Ka'slaq assault was fast and merciless, and the only ships that had much of a chance were the ones already near the edge of the system.

Larno's report of a hundred enemy ships is the lowest estimate Ulnar hears; the refugees report varying numbers, but all agree that the Ka'slaq armada was immense. Most also agree that ultrapulse scans showed a very large object moving slowly and purposefully in the wake of the alien cruisers. But it was the cruisers that made the biggest impression, all identical in size and speed and each one armed with weapons far more powerful than a Legion vortex gun.

The cruisers were able to carry out maneuvers no human pilot could hope to duplicate. All accounts emphasize their tight formations and high-speed turns, attributable to the Ka'slaq race's superior mental and physical abilities.

Larno's last battle was fought without witnesses. One transmission, punched through massive ultrawave interference, said that the garrison ships were forming to attack the large planetoid object, which Larno thought might be the alien flagship. The Ka'slaq broke off most of their other operations shortly afterward and closed in around Larno's last reported position; the Legion ships never came back.

But the Ka'slaq did. When their cruisers had finished with Larno, the aliens orbited Endymion. Then, without a trace of compassion or a single demand for surrender, they began to bombard the helpless colony. Their attacks showed familiarity with the planet; every town, every homestead on Endymion's surface was systematically wiped out. One town was destroyed even as its leaders pleaded for their lives and asked to be allowed to capitulate. These reports make it clear that the Ka'slaq, having

Section 23

captured the *Discovery* at S.C. 170, were able to crack the ship's computer files and translate the information they contained.

With the flight of the handful of refugees who escaped the destruction of Endymion, there is no more news of the Ka'slaq. Who can tell where they will strike next?

If Ulnar orders his squadron to remain in its current position, go to section 71. Mark seven more days off your time record.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to travel to Endymion, go to section 53.

If Ulnar orders his ships to Baal, go to section 58.

If Ulnar orders his ships to Ulnar 118, go to section 63.

If the admiral orders the squadron to S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If Ulnar's orders send the squadron back to St. Germaine, go to section 74.

If the squadron is given orders to any other destination, go to section 73.

— 23 —

As he absentmindedly rubs his chin, Ulnar considers the events of the last hour. Don Larno's doomed attack had stood no chance of success, but it pointed the way for the Ninth Squadron. Larno had a reputation for solving problems with an almost instinctive grasp of priorities and probabilities. Admiral Ulnar was sure he had done so again.

Two things stand out about Larno's failed thrust toward the enemy: The Ka'slaq had called in all of their outlying ships to stop the Legion force, and there was a short time when the Ka'slaq fleet's superb coordination seemed to fail. These two points suggested that the giant ship or asteroid might be a sensitive point to be exploited by the Ninth Squadron.

“Open Fleetcomm to all ships, and patch it through to me,” Ulnar orders, his determination and tactical insight becoming firm.

"On Fleetcomm, Admiral," the communication technician responds quickly.

The admiral casts a last glance into the tank as he switches on the microphone on his console. "Flag to Ninth Defense Squadron. Prepare for battle."

The readouts in the tank are still uncertain from ultrapulse interference, but he can be sure of at least thirty ships in the force closing on his squadron. Between twenty and thirty more are spread around the planetoid, approximately a half hour away. Ulnar nods in sudden decision, drawing a quizzical look from Captain Sammis. They have to follow up on Larno's last insight. He flicks on the microphone again.

"All vessels, Stealth mode. Repeat, Stealth mode. We will evade the nearest alien ships and close on the large object at grid 320. Formation and battle orders to follow. Stand by."

Stealth mode is a chancy tactic at best, given everything Ulnar has seen of Ka'slaq technology. But if the squadron can jam the alien ultrapulse scans, Ulnar's command can swing out of the path of the attackers and slip past them.

"It has to work," Ulnar says softly, drawing another look from Sammis. "It *will* work."

Roll two dice and compare the result to the squadron's Stealth rating.

If the roll is less than or equal to the rating, go to section 52.

If the roll is greater than the rating, go to section 62.

— 24 —

If Commodore Benbo and the Corsair are with Ulnar's squadron, go to section 31.

If Benbo's Corsair has been detached to any other station, go to section 40.

— 25 —

Making up his mind, Ulnar reaches to his desk communications button. "Bridge, this is Ulnar. Inform the squadron that we will be breaking orbit by 1630 hours. Duty officer, begin preparations. Get me Captain Sammis."

Valiant's sharp-featured captain comes on the intercom screen moments later to receive Ulnar's orders from the squadron. He seems surprised at the destination the admiral has chosen, but characteristically accepts the orders without argument.

At the appointed time the ship seems to come to life as the great geodyne engines power up and thrust *Valiant* out of orbit around St. Germaine. The rest of the squadron follows suit. Gathering speed, it points toward its destination and hurtles outward at speeds made possible by space-twisting geodynes.

The admiral has chosen his destination, and he and his ships are committed. Perhaps, he tells himself more than once during the journey, it is a blessing that the squadron can't receive information from St. Germaine or the other worlds of the sector. The vast distances of interstellar space and the unimaginable speeds of ships under geodyne drive make it almost impossible to align antennas and transmit ultrawave messages to a squadron in interstellar space. Thus, although ultrawave communications are much faster than ships, they can be used between planets (with well-known coordinates and relatively slow speeds) much more effectively than to or from vessels.

Effectively, the Ninth Defense Squadron is out of touch until it reaches its destination and can collect messages relayed from HQ during the voyage. Ulnar and his men have no idea what might await them, but already Ulnar has a growing feeling of dread as he goes over the strategic situation again and again throughout the long voyage.

Consult the Travel Time Chart. Cross-index Ulnar's point of origin (St. Germaine) with his intended destination. The number given on the chart is the number of days it will take his ships to reach the chosen planet. Note this number for future reference before proceeding to section 22.

— 26 —

Ulnar rubs his jaw anxiously. His eyes are on the planning tank while his mind runs through calculations of strength and speed. Now that Larno's garrison has been wiped out, Endymion stands helpless before the Ka'slaq assault. About half the alien fleet, as many as fifty ships or more, are closing fast on the planet. At maximum speed the Ninth Squadron might intervene in time to protect the planet, if they can evade the ships already rushing toward them at high speed. The safety of the colony is Ulnar's highest priority right now.

"Open Fleetcomm to all ships," Ulnar orders. "And patch it through to me." As the communications technician complies with the order, Ulnar continues to study the tank. They'll have to use Stealth mode, jamming ultrapulse scans to avoid detection while dodging the aliens detached to deal with the squadron. Given the advanced Ka'slaq technology, the tactic is risky at best, but it's the only chance they have to save Endymion.

The technician finishes his task. "Fleetcomm open, Admiral," he says.

Switching on the microphone on his console, Ulnar issues his orders.

"All ships, this is Flag," he begins. "Prepare for battle. Set course for planetary flyby over Endymion." He pauses, then continues with forced steadiness. "All vessels to adopt Stealth mode. We will evade the nearest enemy ships and engage the aliens over Endymion. Formation and battle orders to follow. Stand by."

The die was cast. Now the Legion's men and ships would test their mettle against the Ka'slaq.

Roll two dice and compare the result to the squadron's Stealth rating.

If the roll is less than or equal to the rating, go to section 52.

If the roll is greater than the rating, go to section 62.

— 27 —

The squadron reaches its destination after a long, tedious flight, entering orbit around the planet in good order. There is no sign of a Ka'slaq incursion, and Ulnar worries that he has made a wrong choice. As Ulnar wades through the stack of reports beamed here by ultrawave, he soon has his worst fears confirmed. Not only has Endymion fallen to Ka'slaq raiders, but Baal, the most heavily populated planet in the sector, has as well. Overcoming his anger, Ulnar forces himself to scrutinize each report carefully in hopes of uncovering clues to the alien fleet's abilities, intentions, and weaknesses.

These reports tell much more about the power of the Ka'slaq than they do about weaknesses or opportunities the Legion might exploit. In both cases, the survivors who managed to make coherent observations were most impressed by the speed, coordination, and awesome power of the alien ships. The primary Ka'slaq vessel is described as being about the size of a cruiser, smaller than Ulnar's fighting ships, but armed with weaponry far superior to the Legion's vortex guns. These ships are capable of sustained high-speed maneuvers in extremely tight formations beyond the capability of any human pilots, giving the Ka'slaq a vast advantage in rapid battle movement. Only the cruiser-type ship was noted in reports from Baal and Endymion, although ultrapulse scans showed another gigantic moving object which was probably Don Larno's planetoid.

None of the warships in either of the garrisons escaped the Ka'slaq onslaught. Larno's ships were annihilated as they attempted to punch through the enemy battle lines to threaten the larger object. The ships at Baal, on the other hand, were caught scattered. As testament to the power of the alien guns, there are descriptions of the *Defiant*, a battlecruiser that was reduced to a powerless, lifeless hulk by a single well-placed shot.

Battle tactics adopted by the Ka'slaq differed markedly in the two engagements. At Baal the aliens seemed locked into a rigid plan of battle. Their initial dispositions changed very little as the fighting developed, and some Ka'slaq ships remained out of the fighting even as others were forced to engage in major duels against pockets of resistance among the garrison

ships. Although the aliens responded quickly to changing situations on an individual basis, they showed little tendency to support one another through radical changes in deployment or formation.

Endymion was a different kind of fight. Here, the alien fleet acted and reacted almost as one. Near the climax of the action, as Larno's ships surged toward their huge target, the Ka'slaq cruisers seemed to abandon all other targets to mass all their strength against the Legion. The disparate nature of alien actions in the two battles disturbs Ulnar as he reads about them.

If the battles were fought differently, they were exploited in almost identical fashion. Once every fighting ship of the planetary garrison was destroyed, the target world was encircled by a large force of Ka'slaq cruisers and bombarded. In both cases this orbital bombardment was systematic, thorough, and utterly merciless. With an obviously precise knowledge of the layout and organization of the two human colonies, the aliens directed the awesome power of their annihilator guns against the planetary surfaces. They knew the location of every inhabited area of each world, from cities and towns down to individual homesteads, and they destroyed them all. There are accounts from Endymion of one town being reduced to slag even as the inhabitants tried to surrender to their conquerors. The only ones to escape from either world were the crews or passengers aboard a handful of merchant ships already near the fringes of the systems when the attacks began. The ships were able to bring back some word of the assaults, but the remoteness that allowed them to avoid the Ka'slaq also obscured the details of these engagements.

Two planets, one of them a thriving colony world with over a hundred million inhabitants, have fallen to the ruthless assault of the alien Ka'slaq, and through it all, Ulnar's actions have proven worse than useless. If his next choice goes no better, more of the people he is pledged to defend may die. Pain and guilt twist Ulnar's features into an anguished frown. He reaches for the communications switch to issue new orders to the squadron. This time his orders must be right.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to go to Endymion, go to section 53.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to Baal, go to section 66.

Section 28

If Ulnar sends the squadron to Ulnar 118, go to section 63.

If Ulnar issues orders to move the squadron S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If Ulnar gives orders to return the squadron to St. Germaine, go to section 74.

If the squadron receives orders to go to any other destination, go to section 73.

If the squadron remains at its present location, go to section 71.

— 28 —

“I want Fleetcomm open to all ships,” Admiral Ulnar orders. “Put it through to my board.” Ulnar watches the planning tank, balancing the computer readouts against everything he has learned about the Ka’slaq. He must find a weakness to exploit in the battle ahead.

“You’re on Fleetcomm, Admiral,” the technician informs him.

Ulnar switches on the microphone at his station. “Flag to Ninth Defense Squadron. Prepare for battle.” Pausing, he examines the enemy dispositions again. The Ka’slaq have divided their forces, a mistake he could take advantage of. If the squadron can deal with the thirty-odd ships closing first, the Legion might be able to deal with the other two alien divisions in turn. “We’ll let them come to us,” Ulnar continues. Perhaps Larno’s attack had attracted the main strength of the enemy. “Formation and battle orders to follow. Stand by.”

Ulnar shuts off the microphone and leans forward to study the tank. He has a matter of minutes to assemble the squadron to fend off the enemy.

If Ulnar orders the ships to form a defensive globe, go to section 57.

If the squadron is ordered to adopt a defensive cylinder, go to section 67.

If Ulnar orders the light destroyers to screen the battlecruisers, go to section 65.

If Ulnar orders the destroyers to take refuge behind a battlecruiser screen, go to section 81.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to scatter and fight dispersed, go to section 70.

— 29 —

With Admiral Merros dead, his fleet shattered, and Ulnar's squadron no longer capable of offering resistance, the Ka'slaq fleet orbits St. Germaine and subjects it to the same devastating bombardment as Endymion and Baal already suffered. Apparently invincible, the aliens continue their drive into human space, spreading destruction and devastation in their wake. Star League scientists advance many theories to explain the single-minded campaign of annihilation the Ka'slaq pursue, but no one can be sure of their purpose. Xenophobic and genocidal, the Ka'slaq exterminate the inhabitants of dozens of planets as they plunge deeper and deeper into the Star League.

Another Legion fleet meets them near the Solar system, but is no better prepared than the last one. Brushing aside all opposition, the Ka'slaq bombard Earth and the other planets around the Sun. The Legion had triumphed over the Medusae, the Cometeers, the treachery of Stephen Orco, and the malice of the evil Basilisk, but against this power, they proved impotent. Over the years to follow, humanity slowly delines to extinction, hunted ruthlessly by the aliens from beyond Orion. The story of mankind eventually ends.

David Ulnar's name is remembered in the twilight years. Refugees from St. Germaine passed on the story of his campaign, portraying him as a coward, a traitor, and an ineffectual incompetent. Before the last human colony falls, his name has surpassed those of his infamous ancestors, the Lords of the Purple Hall, and even that of Eric the Pretender, as mankind's greatest betrayer. For although Vice-Admiral Ulnar never actually collaborated with the foe, all of his efforts in the campaign against the Ka'slaq are seen as a betrayal of the Legion's trust. It

Section 30

is a failure Ulnar himself felt as he died, fighting to the end but incapable of stopping humanity's alien scourge.

Because Ulnar failed to find and exploit the weaknesses of the aliens, the campaign was lost. To try again, go back to section 1 and start over. Good luck!

— 30 —

Contemplating everything he has learned so far, Ulnar finds himself thinking more and more of S.C. 170, the system where all the trouble started. The place where the Ka'slaq first appeared might provide information that would help Ulnar defeat the aliens. Moreover, he reasons, a blow at S.C. 170 might threaten the Ka'slaq supply lines back into whatever region they came from. If so, that could blunt their advance into the Ninth Sector and buy more time for Merros to prepare.

Satisfied that his reasoning is sound, Ulnar issues his orders. Within minutes *Valiant* comes alive as her geodyne engines lift her out of orbit around St. Germaine. The other ships of the squadron follow her lead and gather speed as the space-twisting engines alter the laws of inertia and Einsteinian physics around each of the Legion warships. Setting their course outward, they begin the long journey out of League space toward the world where four vessels have already been lost.

The journey is a long one, twenty-six days in all, even at the unimaginable speeds achieved in interstellar travel, during which the squadron is out of contact with any of the League worlds. Although ultrawave transmissions are even faster than the ships themselves, interstellar distances and velocities make it almost impossible to keep antennas aligned to exchange meaningful amounts of data. Only at short ranges, or between planets where positions and relative speeds are easily calculated and compensated for, can interstellar contact be effectively maintained.

The long voyage gives Ulnar plenty of time to brood and reconsider. What is happening in the sector as his squadron pushes toward its destination? Was his decision the right one?

If Ulnar decides to stop at Thule instead of going all the way to S.C. 170, go to section 79. This trip takes twenty-two days,

which should be noted on a piece of scratch paper. Morale drops by 1 point.

If Ulnar chooses to stick to his original decision, proceed to section 54.

— 31 —

Ulnar's desk communicator buzzes. He thumbs the accept call button, and his star chart and planetary readouts are replaced by the image of an angry, saturnine man with a livid scar across his left cheek. Commodore Nils Benbo, one of the youngest wing commanders in the Legion, is an outspoken hothead who loves action and military display. Benbo wastes no time in pleasantries.

"I've heard about *Pioneer*, Admiral. When do we get under way for Thule?"

"Back off, Nils," Ulnar tells him. "When I'm ready to issue some orders, I'll tell you. Until then, stay where you are and keep your ships ready for action."

The commodore's face flushes darkly. "It's plain enough that Thule's the next enemy target! It's closest to where *Pioneer* was attacked, and the report said the aliens were heading there. What more do you need, a signed invitation and a road map?"

"I told you, Commodore, *back off*," Ulnar repeats harshly.

"That's easy for you, *sir*. I've got a sister on Thule, and I don't plan to let you throw her life away. *My* squadron is breaking orbit in one hour for Thule, whatever you decide."

"Who's in command here, Nils?" Ulnar demands.

"The recon wing will obey me. You can *accept* it or not, as you wish, but I'm going to Thule. So will you, if you know what's right." The screen goes blank.

Ulnar realizes Benbo isn't making idle boasts. His popularity with his own wing is on par with his popularity with Admiral Merros, Benbo's mentor and patron in the Legion. Short of ordering an attack on his own light forces, Ulnar hasn't much hope of bringing Benbo to heel.

Damn him, Ulnar thinks bitterly. The man's aggressiveness makes him a brilliant recon wing commander but an untrustworthy subordinate. Ulnar's options are to fight him (almost unthinkable), ignore him, back him, or join him. No matter



what, Ulnar is bound to lose face. And if Benbo uses his connections against him, Ulnar stands to lose even more.

If Ulnar chooses to try to stop Benbo from going to Thule, go to section 34.

If Ulnar decides to ignore Benbo and allow him to go to Thule but does not wish to join him at this time, go to section 40.

If Ulnar decides to travel to Thule with the Ninth Defense Squadron, go to section 35. However, the morale of all ships in Ulnar's sector drops by 1.

Ulnar can also choose to back Benbo by ordering the entire recon wing to Thule, but he must still choose a destination of his own. Go back to section 8.

— 32 —

Ulnar rubs his chin nervously. He scans the information displayed in the planning tank with worried eyes. Even though the Ka'slaq have split their forces, Ulnar doesn't like the odds. Even if he defeats the first attack, there are enough aliens at hand to destroy his ships before they can escape. Larno's ships were overwhelmed so quickly . . . can the Ninth Squadron expect to do better?

"Open Fleetcomm to all ships and patch it through to me here," Ulnar orders curtly. He doesn't like the decision he feels compelled to make now; Merros will certainly see it as cowardice. But the safety of Earth's first line of defense is more important than Ulnar's personal feelings or reputation.

"Ready on Fleetcomm, Admiral," the communications technician tells him.

Ulnar switches on the microphone at his elbow and tries to make his tone as cold and remote as possible. His words are difficult to force through his dry throat. "All ships, this is Flag," he says reluctantly. "Withdraw at once . . . repeat, withdraw at once. This isn't the time or the place for a showdown." But it will be soon, he promises himself wordlessly. "Adopt Stealth mode and disperse for a general withdrawal. Stand by for further orders."

Section 33

Stealth mode uses ultrawave and ultrapulse generators to jam the enemy's tracking systems. If it doesn't work, the superior speed and maneuverability of the Ka'slaq ships will make withdrawal impossible. Given the way the aliens are jamming the squadron's equipment, Ulnar wonders how well they can deal with the Stealth mode transmissions. Ulnar believes Stealth mode is the squadron's only hope of escape.

Roll two dice and compare the result to the squadron's Stealth rating.

If the roll is less than or equal to the rating, go to section 52.

If the roll exceeds the Stealth rating, go to section 62.

— 33 —

“On Fleetcomm,” Ulnar orders the communications technician. As he waits, Ulnar sizes up the situation from the planning tank.

Despite the disruptive static on ultrapulse frequencies, the computers estimate that the aliens have thirty to thirty-five ships in a curving wall, sweeping inexorably toward Baal. They are keeping perfect formation, but their dispositions seem entirely concerned with an attack on the planet. The giant planetoid vessel from Endymion is nowhere in sight. Unless the Ka'slaq are setting some kind of trap, Baal is facing only a part of their strength.

“Fleetcomm ready and patched to you, Admiral,” the technician tells him.

Ulnar nods once and keys in his microphone. “Flag to all ships. We're going to attack. Prepare for battle. Stand by for formation orders.”

If Ulnar orders the squadron to adopt a wedge formation, go to section 80.

If Ulnar orders the ships to adopt a cone formation, go to section 85.

If Ulnar orders the destroyers to provide a screen for the battlecruisers, go to section 90.

If the admiral orders his ships to scatter and fight dispersed, go to section 95.

— 34 —

Angrily, Ulnar attempts to raise Benbo again, but the wing commander refuses to accept his calls. The young upstart seems intent on deliberately provoking more trouble. Ulnar considers threatening Benbo and his men with violence, but he dismisses the idea at once. The squadron's battlecruisers wouldn't fire on the destroyers, and Benbo's men know it. The days when members of the Legion would turn their guns on one another are dead and gone, with Eric the Pretender and the android Orco.

Ulnar realizes he has very little way to enforce his authority. As long as Merros backs his youthful protégé, Benbo won't have to worry about repercussions for disobedience.

“Damn politics!” Ulnar says aloud, smashing his fist against the top of his desk.

Perhaps Merros would place discipline ahead of his feud with Ulnar. A slim chance, but it's Ulnar's only hope of backing Benbo down. He reaches for the intercom, then hesitates at getting involved with Merros. Suddenly resolve wells within him.

If Ulnar asks Admiral Merros to stop Benbo, go to section 77.

If Ulnar reconsiders and decides to order the squadron to accompany Benbo to Thule, go to section 35. However, the Morale of Ulnar's ships drops by 2 due to his display of indecisiveness.

If Ulnar reconsiders the call to Merros and allows Benbo to take his wing to Thule unopposed, go to section 40.

If Ulnar backs Benbo by formally ordering him to Thule, but does not accompany him, detach the whole recon wing in the usual manner, go back to section 8 and choose a destination.

— 35 —

Ulnar stares at the blank monitor, his mind in turmoil. He doesn't see any way to stop Benbo, and once on his own, the hotheaded commander would be unlikely to rejoin Ulnar voluntarily. Removing the recon wing to Thule would rob the battlecruiser wing of a valuable advantage; light ships were essential for scouting, for screening the heavier ships as a battle developed, for delivering the first strokes of a battle as well as the final shots of a hell-for-leather pursuit.

Unable to bring Benbo to heel, Ulnar feels he must give in to his blackmail. Reluctantly, Ulnar reaches for the desktop communications switch once again, resigned to joining Benbo on his voyage to Thule.

Proceed to section 79. Note that the trip to Thule will take twenty-two days.

— 36 —

From his station on *Valiant*'s bridge, Ulnar studies the tactical planning tank. The computers deep in the flagship's core, analyzing ultrapulse scans and other sensor data, record no trace of activity in the system. Neither human ships nor Ka'slaq cruisers are exposed by the squadron's long-range probes. The system appears dead and deserted, but Ulnar knows better than to trust appearances. Perhaps alien ships are lying in ambush somewhere near Endymion, or maybe they have a method of hiding from ultrapulse scans.

Unwilling to expose the entire squadron to a trap, Ulnar passes orders to the squadron's light destroyers, the recon wing. "Investigate Endymion for signs of life, human or alien," he tells the chosen captains. "But at the first sign of trouble, withdraw. The battle wing will cover you."

The destroyers dart ahead while Ulnar and the rest of the squadron watch and wait.

Proceed to section 64.

— 37 —

“Patch me in on Fleetcomm,” Ulnar orders the communications technician. He glances around the bridge once before turning his attention back to the planning tank beside his flag console. Waiting for the crewman to comply, he tries to size up the situation.

The ship’s computers, interpreting as much as they can through a haze of disruptive static, have estimated enemy strength via ultrapulse scans; they report between thirty and thirty-five enemy ships. That’s a far cry from the hundred cruisers from Endymion. Nor is there any sign of the giant planetoid object here. The Ka’slaq have divided their fleet and sent only a fraction of their total force against Baal—a significant fraction, but a fraction nonetheless. That gives the Legion a chance to fight on more even odds for a change.

“On Fleetcom, sir,” the technician says.

Keying in his microphone, Ulnar weighs his decision carefully before speaking to the captains in the squadron. “This is Flag to all ships. Prepare for battle. The squadron will adopt a defensive posture; let’s make them come to us. Stand by for formation and battle orders.”

By standing on the defensive, they can disrupt the enemy formations more easily. They form a perfect, curved wall sweeping down on Baal in formation, seemingly oblivious to anything but the planet.

He pauses for a long moment, still contemplating the tank. Finally, he reaches for the microphone again.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to form a defensive globe, go to section 78.

If Ulnar orders the ships to adopt a defensive cylinder formation, go to section 83.

If the admiral orders the squadron’s destroyers to form a screen ahead of the battlecruisers, go to section 90.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to allow the orbital fortress around Baal to take the first wave of enemy attacks, go to section 93.

Sections 38, 39

If they should deploy into Phalanx and attack, turn to section 88.

If the squadron is ordered to scatter and fight dispersed, go to section 95.

— 38 —

From his station on *Valiant*'s bridge Ulnar studies the tactical planning tank. Deep inside the bowels of the flagship computers analyze and interpret ultrapulse scans and other sensor inputs, but they can detect no sign of activity in the Endymion system. Neither human nor alien ships appear to be moving in space, and the planet seems as devoid of life. Though appearances can be deceiving and a trap is always a possibility, Ulnar would rather keep his ships together. If the Ka'slaq spring a trap, they'll find the Legion ready for action.

"All ships to proceed on a flyby of Endymion," he orders over the Fleetcomm communications hookup. "Stay alert, and notify Flag of any anomaly. Deploy full sensor arrays and transmit reports on flyby completion." He pauses. "We're here to learn what we can . . . not to fight. Avoid battle if possible. Engage only on my orders."

Forming into a tight group, the ships drop toward Endymion. Tense and ready for anything, the men of the Legion wait to see what the planet holds in store for them.

Proceed to section 64.

— 39 —

Ulnar issues orders to hold the squadron at St. Germaine. It is a solid, conservative plan, not flashy by any means, but by far the best way to keep the squadron intact and in a position to guard the base and geofractor link, the linchpins to the sector's hope of survival.

But he reckons without one complicating factor: the hotheaded

commander of the squadron's recon wing, Commodore Nils Benbo. Benbo is a protégé of Admiral Merros and a popular leader among his wing's destroyer captains. He and Ulnar have clashed before. Only minutes after Ulnar issues his orders, the commodore places an angry call to the admiral.

"What's this nonsense about staying in port?" he demands without preamble as Ulnar accepts his call. As usual, he ignores every military courtesy, a habit he can afford to indulge in because of his patronage from Merros. "Endymion's been destroyed. We have to take some kind of action!"

Wearily, Ulnar reminds his subordinate of the time lag involved. It's been two days since Larno sent his message. It will take eighteen more days to get the squadron to Endymion. "Or would you rather we just chose a world at random and risked missing the Ka'slaq entirely?" he concludes, growing angry.

Benbo looks disgusted. "So you'll write the campaign off just like that! An excuse to stay here, where it's safe!"

"Another word, Commodore," Ulnar says coldly. "Just one more word and even your patron won't save you from a court-martial. You have my orders. They're final."

"Are they indeed, *sir*?" Benbo responds with an unpleasant smile. "I'm getting ready to file a report with Admiral Merros. Are you sure you want to sit and do nothing? I'm sure the admiral would prefer that the squadron make some kind of attempt to stop the aliens. Baal's our most important colony—I vote we shift the squadron there. It's the only reasonable thing to do."

"When this is a democracy," Ulnar shoots back, "I'll consider your vote."

"Ah, but it *is* a democracy, Admiral. But Admiral Merros carries all the votes." Benbo smiles again, even more unpleasantly than before.

Benbo's threat, Ulnar realizes, is far from an idle one. He pauses for a long moment before replying, knowing that he is staking everything on his answer to the young commodore's blackmail.

If Ulnar backs down and orders the squadron to go to Baal, word of Benbo's manipulation of Ulnar circulates quickly. Ulnar's reputation with his men suffers, reducing the Morale value of the squadron by 1 point. Go to section 82.

If Ulnar stands by his decision, turn to section 49.

— 40 —

A discreet knock interrupts Ulnar again. "Enter," he barks irritably, switching off the computer monitor and rubbing his eyes.

The crewman's uniform bears the symbol of the communications section. "Message capsule for you, sir." Ulnar takes the finger-sized spool from the technician with a gruff word of thanks. The crewman leaves the cabin as Ulnar drops the spool into a receptacle on his desk and punches up the message.

As he suspected, the message is from Admiral Merros on Earth. Ultrawave communications link planets, but though they could pass messages at many times the speed of light, the ultrawave signal was far from instantaneous. Over interstellar distances it could take days or even weeks to transmit information or orders.

But the League's geofractors, once so hideously misused by the evil criminal who had called himself the Basilisk, could move objects (although not ultrawaves) over vast distances in an instant. They could be used to move things almost anywhere, but the safest use of geofractors required a unit on each end of the trip. So a world like St. Germaine was connected to other geofractor-equipped planets, and it was practical to send tapes or couriers back and forth between these when ultrawave messages would be entirely too slow. It was a pity the Ka'slaq had some sort of defense against geofractors; every graduate of the Legion Academy knew how awesome a weapon a geofractor could be. The Basilisk had proven that.

Admiral Merros always reminds Ulnar of a basilisk. As his taped image forms on the screen, Merros turns his malevolent stare directly into the camera. There is something snake-like in his thin, drawn features and dry skin; his wispy hair and sunken eyes add to the serpentine image. Old before his time, he is still energetic when he wants to be and decisive when he has to be. Energy and decision always characterize the admiral's dealings with people he doesn't like, as Ulnar has discovered more than once.

"Vice-Admiral Ulnar," Merros begins, licking dry lips with a quick flick of his tongue. "I have had several complaints of inactivity and indecision on your part. Obviously you have an insufficient grasp of the gravity of the current situation.

"Having seen the same reports you received, I fail to see how you can have any cause for uncertainty," the tape continues. "The alien armada is reported on course for Thule. Plainly that is the best place for our forces to meet them. May I strongly suggest that you deploy the bulk of your fighting forces to that star system at the earliest possible instance? As an alternative, of course, you may wish to step down from your command and allow an officer with a better grasp of strategic imperatives to take command in the Ninth Sector. I'll leave it to you to judge the most expedient choice." Merros pauses and offers a cold, cheerless smile. "And you can be sure, Admiral, that I will be taking a keen interest in your handling of your duties. Message ends."

Ulnar stares at the screen even after it goes blank. Damn Merros! And damn Nils Benbo, whose hand is all too clearly in this. The last thing Ulnar needs is this kind of ill-considered order from Admiral Merros. But the man is his superior, and Merros's orders leave him little choice.

Or do they?

If Ulnar complies with the admiral's order, go to section 79. The trip takes twenty-two days; note this on a piece of scratch paper for future reference.

If Ulnar decides to defy orders by remaining at St. Germaine or going to any world other than Thule, return to section 8 and select a destination. However, if the destination Ulnar ends up at is a planet still under League control and not threatened by the Ka'slaq at the time of Ulnar's arrival, go from the section that records the squadron's arrival directly to section 125, rather than following the regular choices for the section in question.

— 41 —

"Put me through on Fleetcomm," Ulnar orders.

The curving wall of Ka'slaq ships is moving inexorably across the planning tank, and Ulnar stares at them with the fascination of a helpless bird watching a predatory snake. There are only about thirty alien ships, with no sign of the rest of the fleet that

attacked Endymion or of Larno's planetoid ship. Where were they? Ulnar senses a trap, and he doesn't intend to fall into it. Even if he's condemned as a coward, Vice-Admiral David Ulnar isn't going to throw away his command in a hopeless cause. The specter of the shattered *Defiant* looms fresh in his mind, stiffening his resolve to keep the squadron intact and wait for a better time to strike.

"Fleetcomm patched through to your board, Admiral," the communications technician says quietly.

Ulnar nods briskly and switches on his microphone. "Flag to all ships. The squadron will withdraw on my signal. Repeat, all ships are to avoid engaging and withdraw. Switch to Stealth mode. Further orders to follow. Stand by."

Ulnar sees the angry glances from crewmen around *Valiant*'s bridge; even the usually phlegmatic Sammis looks disgusted. But, angry or not, they comply with his orders. Ulnar ignores their reaction. Right now the squadron's duty is to remain intact and look for an opening to exploit later.

"Engaging Stealth mode," the captain reports. "Ultrawave and ultrapulse jamming signals in operation."

The admiral acknowledges the information with a vague gesture. Now comes the real test—would the jamming work? If the squadron can't elude the Ka'slaq, they will fight whether they want to or not. The next few minutes will decide their fate.

Roll two dice and compare the result to the squadron's Stealth rating.

If the roll is less than or equal to the rating, go to section 97.

If the roll is greater than the Stealth rating, go to section 100.

The records on board the yacht give Ulnar information about what happened on Endymion. Dispatched from the planet even as Larno's ships were engaged in their desperate fight to the death, the ship contains information collected at the planet's scout base as well as supplemental observations recorded by the

crew as they fled the system. An abrupt and ominous end to these shipboard observations comes shortly after the crew noticed the lone Ka'slaq cruiser pursuing them at a speed even their powerful geodynamics couldn't match.

Speed is one of the hallmarks of the Ka'slaq. Their first appearance at Endymion was totally unexpected, and the alien ships swooped down on their prey in tight-formation, high-speed maneuvers no human pilot could have hoped to duplicate. The reports here bear out Larno's transmission that there were a hundred or more enemy ships in the attacking fleet, and they also confirm the presence of some larger object, never actually seen, but showing up plainly on ultrapulse scanners. The cruisers made up the real threat of the Ka'slaq assault, each identical in size, speed, and powerful armaments.

Larno's last fight was not witnessed by any of the people who contributed to the courier's records, but some of the reports suggest that the garrison drove into the heart of the enemy fleet to try to reach the large object. The Ka'slaq ships gathered around the battle site, concentrating all their power on the Legion ships; nothing more was heard of the Legion ships thereafter. But the Ka'slaq came back, and they proceeded to reduce the Endymion colony.

Their subsequent actions made it clear that they knew everything they needed to know about the colony, down to the location of the smallest, newest homestead. This could only mean that the *Discovery*, reported captured at S.C. 170, has yielded up its computer files to the aliens. Using their powerful energy weapons—each of them far more powerful than Legion vortex guns—the Ka'slaq bombarded the planet's surface in a ruthless, systematic campaign on eradicate any sign of human habitation on Endymion. They neither offered quarter nor accepted surrender, destroying one town even as its helpless inhabitants broadcast their agreement to capitulate unconditionally. With the exception of a few ships—and many of those were probably dealt with in the same fashion as the courier itself—no one escaped from the holocaust on Endymion.

There is nothing in the yacht's files to suggest whether the Ka'slaq are still in the system or not, and no clue as to their ultimate purpose or immediate plans.

Transferring the data to his files, Ulnar turns to Captain Sammis and orders the squadron to resume its previous course and speed toward Endymion and gather more information.

Proceed to section 51.

— 43 —

The population, commercial value, and central location of Baal are major factors in Ulnar's decision. He perceives the colony to be crucial to the defense of the entire sector, and the need to shift his squadron to Baal is obvious. The admiral issues his order accordingly.

Soon *Valiant*'s powerful geodynes begin to hum with barely suppressed power, lifting the battlecruiser slowly out of orbit ahead of the rest of the Ninth Squadron. Twisting the very fabric of space around each of the vessels, the geodynes accelerate them to unimaginable speeds through realms where accepted physical laws have been suspended. Setting the course Ulnar has ordered, the squadron steers for Baal.

The voyage from St. Germaine to Baal takes eleven days, and throughout that time the squadron is cut off from contact with the rest of the universe. Ultrawave communications link planets with each other and can contact ships across short distances, but a ship is an infinitesimal target across interstellar distances, and moves at such high speeds that it is almost impossible to maintain contact. Ulnar hears nothing of events in the sector as the squadron plunges on toward Baal. It is a tense time, for no one knows what to expect upon their arrival. Doubts assail the admiral, forcing him to realize just how much his decisions can mean to the future of the League. A wrong choice could cost the lives of innocent colonists.

As the squadron draws near to Baal, it is plain that the worrying has been for nothing. There is still no news of the Ka'slaq fleet, and the only thing to do is wait. Now that he has chosen Baal as his temporary base, Ulnar knows he has to stay with it; jumping from world to world without a clear-cut purpose is worse than useless, and bad for morale as well.

Another nine days pass at Baal before news comes in. A wavering, static-broken message from the commander of the garrison at Endymion finally reaches Ulnar. Don Larno is an old friend and protégé of Ulnar's, a reliable man with a flair for solving problems and inspiring subordinates and superiors alike. But the message he sends is far from inspiring.

“ . . . to HQ, Endymion garri— Alien ships . . . hundred or more . . . from . . . frontier. Garrison out . . . to hold them until . . . forcements. . . . Like a giant planet . . . mobile . . .

death ship . . . Cometeers. Repeating: Endymion garrison to . . . spotted alien . . . a hundred . . . coming from beyond . . . tier . . . outnumbered, but we'll try to hold . . . send reinforcements. Most targets cruiser size, but one is like . . . planetoid, except it's mobile . . . a death . . . worse than the . . . Repeating . . ."

But there are no further repetitions; the Endymion communications station fades out shortly thereafter.

Endymion is eight days from Baal at maximum geodyne thrust, which leaves scant hope of actually reinforcing Larno's garrison in time to do any good. Ulnar, going over the message again and again, debates the best course to follow. Should he try to support Larno, or would his ships be better employed somewhere else? Whatever Ulnar does now, he must act for the best good of the League and the Legion, and he must choose correctly if he is to carry out his duty effectively.

If Ulnar chooses to go to the aid of the Endymion colony, go to section 53.

If Ulnar orders his ships to Ulnar 118, go to section 63.

If Ulnar orders the ships in his command to S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If Ulnar chooses to return with the squadron to St. Germaine, go to section 74.

Should the admiral wish to remain at Baal, go to section 61.

If the squadron is given orders to proceed to any other destination, go to section 73.

Ulnar makes his choice and begins to issue orders. The destination he has chosen seems a likely target for Ka'slaq attention, and he is determined to beat them to the punch. Led by the *Valiant*, the squadron boots out of orbit and accelerates away from St. Germaine. Urged forward by space-twisting geodyne

Section 45

engines, the ships defy the laws of inertia and Einsteinian physics as they leap across the light-years at a speed beyond human ken.

The squadron exists in isolation, unable to communicate effectively with St. Germaine or any other League world. Ultrawave messages are ten times faster than ships carrying information between the stars, but a ship in flight is so small and moves so fast that it is almost impossible to maintain contact except over comparatively short ranges. Transmissions between worlds are easier, because the relative speeds and current positions of antennas on each end are simple to calculate. But a ship or a squadron in deep space might as well be in a separate universe for all the contact it can make with worlds or distant vessels.

Without information to go on, Ulnar spends the long days of the voyage struggling with doubt and concern. He has no way of knowing how events are developing at Endymion or elsewhere, and if he has guessed wrong concerning the next Ka'slaq target, there will be more destruction, more deaths on his conscience. But the journey must continue until the squadron reaches its goal and makes contact with the outside once again.

Consult the Travel Time Chart. Cross-index Ulnar's point of origin (St. Germaine) with his chosen destination, and add the number shown to the number of days spent previously at St. Germaine. Note this total time spent on a piece of scratch paper for future reference. Then go to section 71.

— 45 —

If Commodore Benbo and the Corsair are with Ulnar's squadron, go to section 39.

If Benbo's Corsair has been detached to any other station, go to section 49.

— 46 —

As Ulnar skims through the material relayed from the wrecked ship's records, he finds nothing he hasn't heard from other sources, but the material he examines does confirm the reports collected before the squadron's departure from St. Germaine. He files the material with the other reports and clears his computer screen.

"Order the squadron to resume previous heading, Captain," he tells Sammis curtly. "We will proceed to Endymion now."

Proceed to section 51.

— 47 —

By some miracle the squadron manages to elude the alien fleet and escape from Endymion. They are alive and ready to take steps to ensure no repetition of Larno's disaster.

Later, when he has more time, Ulnar ponders the full implications of what he found at Endymion. There were some anomalies that deserved attention: the ultrawave static that seemed random sometimes but quite deliberate at others. The repeated pulse that the computer transphonated as "Ka'slaq"—was that the name of the race, as the survey team first assumed, or was it something more? What caused the alien ships to lose coherence in their maneuvering after the squadron went into Stealth mode?

For now, Ulnar turns his attention to other matters. He must set a course out of harm's way and yet move to protect the sector from fresh assaults.

"Incoming message, Admiral," the weary communications technician tells him. "From the merchant ship *Errant Night*. It's a high-density pulse transmission, coming in at five hundred to one." HD pulses crammed a lot of information into a short ultrawave burst. Few merchant ships bothered with that sort of transmission; they left it to Legion technicians and spies.

Ulnar has the pulse tape slowed to an understandable playback speed and takes time to skim through it while he thinks about destinations and plans. The merchant ship, unnoticed near the

Section 47

fringes of the system, has been watching the Ka'slaq in the aftermath of the squadron's withdrawal, and the things they were seeing weren't pretty. Not by a long shot.

With Endymion left totally undefended, a large group of Ka'slaq cruisers moved into close orbit. Then they began the next phase of their attack, a concerted bombardment of the helpless colony. Their targeting was precise, suggesting that they were intimately familiar with every aspect of the human settlement—proof that the Ka'slaq capture of the *Discovery* near S.C. 170 had been followed by penetration and translation of that vessel's computer files. The aliens knew the location of every town, every homestead on the surface of Endymion. Their bombardment systematically destroyed each of these. One town was obliterated even as it tried to surrender.

This proof of Ka'slaq savagery is all the admiral needs to strengthen his own determination to resist the enemy. They must not be allowed to spread their campaign of terror and destruction deeper into human space. Switching on the computer terminal at his bridge position, Ulnar begins to consider his options.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to remain at Endymion, go to section 99.

If Ulnar wishes to move the squadron to Baal, go to section 58.

If the squadron is ordered to Ulnar 118, go to section 63.

If the admiral orders the squadron to S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If Ulnar chooses to return to St. Germaine, go to section 74.

If he gives orders to go to any other destination, go to section 73.

— 48 —

Hoping either to block the next enemy attack or to get a better clue to their further intentions before committing the squadron to another voyage, Ulnar decides to remain in orbit and see what happens. It is another tedious wait, hard on the squadron's crews and on Ulnar himself. But without information, strategic decisions are reduced to little more than guesswork. Caution and care are Ulnar's watchwords.

At last word comes in, but it's the worst information imaginable. The Ka'slaq have struck again, and in striking they have overwhelmed the most populous colony in the sector. Baal has fallen to the alien fleet.

According to reports broadcast by refugees, the alien attack on Baal was more in the nature of a raid than an all-out onslaught, but it was a raid that reduced the colony as completely and as ruthlessly as Endymion had been. Only about thirty Ka'slaq cruisers were reported, as opposed to the hundred or more said to have been involved in the first encounter of the invasion. Moreover, there was no sign of Larno's huge planetoid ship. Evidently only a portion of the alien strength was turned against Baal, but it was enough.

The garrison was caught dispersed. Trying to get the earliest possible warning of an attack, patrols were flung out to search the volume of space in the direction of Endymion. After some ambiguous readings of moving vessels and some odd ultrawave static, the patrols were stepped up, but the garrison ships had too much territory to cover. Two of them—the battlecruiser *Defiant* and an escorting destroyer—made contact with a phalanx of enemy cruisers and were destroyed as they warned the colony. *Defiant* was reduced to a wreck by a single well-placed shot from the Ka'slaq annihilator guns.

The Ka'slaq assault on Baal followed a whole different tactical pattern as compared to their attack of Endymion. They showed little of their previous flexibility and responsiveness, keeping rigidly to a single formation as they closed on Baal. As ships of the garrison rushed into battle, a very haphazard engagement developed. But the aliens lent one another very little support; some of the Ka'slaq cruisers encountered heavy resistance, while others, in easy supporting range, never fired a shot during the whole approach to Baal. Having taken measure of their human

Section 48

foes, the Ka'slaq perhaps saw no need to use their full capabilities. It didn't make any difference to the garrison. The ships at Baal fought hard and held on with feverish tenacity, but in the end superior numbers and superior weapons defeated them.

Once the garrison, including Baal's powerful orbital fortress, was wiped out, the aliens repeated the Endymion atrocity. Orbiting cruisers began the systematic elimination of inhabited sites on the colony's surface. They spared no one and nothing. After the colony was devastated in this merciless style, the Ka'slaq raiders boosted out of the system again. They did not even pause to search out the merchant ships that had escaped.

If Ulnar is not at St. Germaine, but receives these new reports and decides to stay at his present location longer, go to section 71.

If the squadron is ordered to Endymion, go to section 53.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to Baal, go to section 66.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to Ulnar 118, go to section 63.

If S.C. 170 is Ulnar's destination, go to section 68.

Should Ulnar issue orders to return to St. Germaine, go to section 74, (if the squadron is not already there).

If the squadron is ordered to any other destination, go to section 73.

If the squadron is already at St. Germaine and Ulnar decides to remain in orbit there, go to section 115.

— 49 —

A crewman is admitted to Ulnar's cabin late in the evening. "Message capsule for you, Admiral," he tells Ulnar apologetically. "It's just through the geofractor from Earth, from Admiral Merros, sir." The man is young, diffident . . . more like a schoolboy than a warrior. Had the heroes of the great days of the Legion ever been like this youngster? It seemed almost impossible.

"Thank you, Lomis," Ulnar acknowledges, proud of himself for remembering the man's name. "Dismissed."

Lomis leaves, relieved. As the cabin door closes silently behind the crewman, Ulnar slips the capsule into a receptacle at the computer station across from his bed. Switching on the monitor, he keys in a playback order and leans forward to see what his hostile superior has sent through the instantaneous matter transmitter from the Legion base at the New Moon orbiting the Earth.

The screen lights up with an image of Admiral Merros, neat and impeccably dressed as always. With a slender frame, narrow face, and sparse white hair, he looks like a corpse decked out in a dress uniform for burial.

"Reports have reached me," Merros says without preamble, "of your continued inactivity in the face of the recent reports of alien attacks at Endymion. I find your refusal to take an active part in the defense of the squadron a totally inexplicable dereliction of duty which shows a want of initiative or sufficient resolve to carry out your orders." The older man pauses, his sunken eyes glaring into the camera with a mixture of indignant outrage and smug satisfaction at the way Ulnar has set himself up for a fall.

"Our strategic planners believe that an attack on Endymion must surely herald an invasion of Baal, the nearest major population center. I believe there are those among your own officers who believe the same, even if you are too blind to see it. Therefore, I am officially ordering you to move your squadron to Baal to defend it against any Ka'slaq incursion. Moreover, you are required to take active steps against the enemy wherever they may be encountered. Further inaction on your part shall certainly be grounds for remedial action on the part of the Legion High Command. I trust, Admiral, that I have made myself clear? Message ends."

The screen goes blank, leaving Ulnar to switch it off and sink

Section 50

back into his chair with a sigh. Merros will watch him like a hawk, eager to catch a hated upstart in a breach of duty. As Ulnar feared from the start, the deck is stacked against him. No matter what David Ulnar does or doesn't do in the days and weeks ahead, Merros will be waiting for any excuse to intervene; any mistake will be enough.

It isn't a position Ulnar enjoys, but he must either accept the admiral's orders or be ready to face the man's anger over the slightest disobedience.

If Ulnar decides to comply with the admiral's order, go to section 50.

If Ulnar defies orders and remains at St. Germaine, go to section 125.

If Ulnar defies Merros to go to Endymion, go to section 20.

If Ulnar defies Merros and orders the squadron to S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If Ulnar defies Merros and goes to any other destination, go to section 44.

In the case of any defiance of orders, the first contact with a Legion garrison following Ulnar's disobedience will lead to section 125 (rather than the usual choices open at that location), unless Ulnar's squadron engages in a battle with Ka'slaq ships prior to the time that it reaches a garrisoned planet.

The fall of Endymion endangers several other planets, of which Baal is the most important. With its sizable population, its commercial value, and a position of obvious strategic value in the interior of the sector, Baal strikes Ulnar as being the obvious next target of the alien fleet.

It will take speed—and no small amount of luck—to beat the Ka'slaq to the planet. Ulnar can't help but berate himself for waiting for the detailed reports on Endymion; he begrudges

every hour wasted. The admiral issues the orders that will send the Ninth Defense Squadron to Baal. As he goes through the steps to get the ships moving, he silently prays that the action won't end up being too little, too late.

Pushed out of orbit by their mighty geodyne engines, the ships of Ulnar's squadron follow the *Valiant* away from the planet and set their course for Baal. Twisting the fabric of space and sweeping aside the normal physical laws that govern velocity and inertia, these engines carry the Legion across interstellar space at a speed the human mind could neither imagine nor comprehend.

The voyage takes eleven days, and during most of that time there is no chance of communication between the squadron and the worlds it protects. Although ultrawave messages can speed through space in a tenth the time it takes a ship to travel an equivalent distance, the technology is far more useful for sending information between planets than it is for maintaining contact with moving vessels. Individual ships are such minuscule, fast-moving targets over interstellar distances that it is virtually impossible to keep up a link for any length of time. Planets have much lower relative speeds and have positions calculated so carefully for any portion of their orbits that communication involving them is relatively easy. Moving ships, like the Ninth Squadron en route to Baal, are easier to contact when they are comparatively close by or moving very slowly.

Ulnar spends the whole time out of touch with the rest of the League. As the ships speed through deep space, the Ka'slaq might strike again and kill more unprepared civilians. Will Baal still be a human colony when the squadron reaches it, or will it share Endymion's fate? Or are other worlds under attack even as Ulnar leads a wild-goose chase to a quiet, unthreatened planet? Only time will tell.

Add eleven days to the total number accumulated waiting at St. Germaine, and note the new total somewhere for future reference.

If the new total is thirty-three days or less, go to section 69.

If the new total is thirty-four days or more, go to section 76 instead.

— 51 —

The shattered hulk of the yacht drops astern, and the squadron approaches Endymion at last. As the Legion ships near their goal, they turn all their facilities to keeping watch for a sign of danger. But there is nothing, no echo on ultrapulse scans and no message on ultrawave from friend or foe. The squadron, closing in on the star system, seems to be alone, and Ulnar imagines the dangers and traps that might lie ahead. Could the Ka'slaq have simply destroyed the colony and moved on? If so, why? Why attack if they did not want mankind's planets or resources?

Perhaps a closer look at Endymion will tell them something more. Something worthwhile.

If Ulnar orders light ships from the recon wing to investigate the planet more closely, go to section 36.

If Ulnar orders the entire squadron to close on Endymion, go to section 38.

— 52 —

“Stealth mode, Admiral,” Sammis tells him. “Ultrawave and ultrapulse generators on feedback setting, maximum output.” Green lights on Ulnar’s console report compliance by the other ships in the squadron.

“Thank you, Captain,” Ulnar acknowledges, his formal tone matching his subordinate’s grave manner. Sammis was a stickler for proprieties on the bridge.

The other officers and crewmen in the control center are quiet, hunched over their consoles with every nerve focused on their duties. The tension in the air is almost palpable; they all know what is at stake. Larno’s fate is a grim reminder of what could happen in battle.

Minutes drag by. Given the speed and maneuverability of the alien forces, running is out of the question. The Stealth mode system is the squadron’s only hope of eluding the enemy. The

next few minutes will determine the fate of the Ninth Defense Squadron.

An ultrapulse operator breaks the silence. "Drawing away, Sir," he says hoarsely. Ulnar looks back at the tank and nods once.

"Confirmed," someone else says. "The jamming has thrown 'em off!"

A ragged cheer goes around the bridge, cut off abruptly by Sammis. "As you were!" the captain snaps. He turns toward Ulnar. "We seem to be dodging them, Admiral," he reports unnecessarily.

"So it seems," Ulnar replies gruffly, his eye still on the tank. Is it just his imagination, or are the alien formations looser, less coordinated?

"I'd swear those bastards look *confused*," someone else comments audibly. "They look like a bunch of dogs casting around for a scent."

"Quiet there," Sammis says angrily. He looks offended at the breach of discipline.

But Ulnar is happy to hear the talk; it confirms his own observations. Whatever else the squadron has done, it may have uncovered an important fact about the Ka'slaq. Not only had the aliens lost track of his ships, but it seemed as if they were actually having trouble operating in the vicinity of ships under Stealth mode. A slow smile spreads across Ulnar's face. He turns back to his console and prepares for the next step in the campaign against the alien invaders.

If the squadron is to attack the aliens around Endymion, go to section 102.

If the squadron is to attack the alien planetoid and its defenders, go to section 112.

If the squadron changes its course to attack the first alien division (the ships they have just eluded), go to section 122.

If the squadron withdraws from Endymion, go to section 47.

— 53 —

It may be too late to do the colonists at Endymion any good. But the devastated colony world may well be the key to the campaign. For one thing, it might contain a clue to the aliens and their purpose. Perhaps their forces are still concentrated there, which would allow the Legion to strike a blow against them before they have a chance to threaten another world. If the Ka'slaq have already moved on, a threat to their channels of communications could induce the aliens to turn back, thus sparing their next target from sharing Endymion's fate.

With all these possibilities in mind, Ulnar orders *Valiant* to lead the squadron back into deep space once more. Again the mighty geodynes focus their space-warping energies to thrust the Legion's ships across the light-years. Their destination is Endymion, but no one can be sure what else they may find, aside from a ruined world and a dead colony.

Along the way the squadron encounters a wrecked yacht drifting in space, its hull torn apart by the nearby explosion of some powerful weapon. The hulk obviously attempted to escape from Endymion's ruin but failed. Records on board supplement but do not significantly change the information Ulnar has already gathered on the colony's loss.

Consult the Travel Time Chart. Cross-index the squadron's point of origin with its destination (Endymion). The result is the number of days the new voyage takes. Add this number to the number accumulated in the previous journey(s) the squadron has undertaken. Record this number for future reference and then proceed to section 51.

— 54 —

The ships of the Legion's Ninth Defense Squadron approach their goal, the distant world designated by the catalogue number S.C. 170. Straining every sensor and scanner to detect some sign of alien activity, they advance cautiously to the outer fringes of the system. There is no sign of danger, no trace of any artifacts

or vessels that might belong to the Ka'slaq. There isn't even a sign of the lost survey ships. S.C. 170 seems completely deserted.

Appearances can be deceiving, Ulnar knows, but he is beginning to think this journey has been a mistake. Not only does the main fleet appear to have moved on, presumably into League space, but they evidently don't have a supply line to threaten. This makes Ulnar's whole strategy invalid.

But perhaps this judgment is too hasty, Ulnar tells himself hopefully. A closer look at this system might turn up something the long-range scans have failed to uncover. From his station on *Valiant*'s bridge, Ulnar issues orders feverishly to follow up on this faint hope.

If Ulnar orders the destroyers in his squadron (if any are available) to scout the system, holding his battlecruisers in reserve, go to section 56.

If Ulnar orders all the ships in his command to mount a reconnaissance into the system, go to section 59.

— 55 —

"Flag to all ships," Ulnar says, the microphone on. "Adopt standard wedge formation and attack the enemy." He touches a combination of pads on the flag computer console and watches as his monitor begins scrolling through the detailed battle orders for the squadron. It is one of dozens of deployments Ulnar has worked out over the past days in space, and it is being transmitted to every ship in the squadron at once.

In the three-dimensional planning tank, the yellow lights representing the Legion ships draw together into a tight formation and begin changing course. Now they are closing fast with the blobs of blue that mark the enemy formation. Lighter ships are in the lead, while the battlecruisers, *Valiant* among them, are shown farther back in the broader section of the wedge. The alien cruisers form a loose globe, the perfect target for a well-used battle wedge. But Ulnar knows how effective the Ka'slaq are in responding to threats; he's seen too much evidence of their ability to maneuver and coordinate attacks effectively.

Minutes pass slowly as the two forces come together for a

Section 56

decisive clash. Ulnar sees the two distant Ka'slaq forces changing course to back up their first wing and knows he must win quickly or not at all.

"Contact in five minutes," someone reports.

"Weapons ready," an officer adds, reporting to the captain. Ulnar tries to shut it all out, to concentrate on his task. Admirals do not handle ships, he reminds himself with a hint of wistfulness. His job is to handle the whole squadron, to make sure that it works together, as he's seen the aliens do.

The resolution of the battle is governed not only by the formation already chosen, but also by which of the enemy groups is engaged first. Find out the division that fights initially by following the guidelines presented below.

If the squadron is attacking the closest group of enemy ships, the Ka'slaq First Division is engaged first.

If the squadron is remaining on the defensive, the Ka'slaq First Division is engaged before the others.

If Ulnar has ordered the squadron to move to shield Endymion from attack, the Ka'slaq Second Division is engaged first.

If the squadron has been sent against the alien planetoid, the Ka'slaq Third Division will be the first group to be engaged.

If the squadron attempts to elude the nearest alien force but failure of Stealth mode movement brings it to battle anyway, the Ka'slaq First Division will be engaged first.

To resolve the battle of Endymion, Ulnar can choose to fight a conventional space battle by going to section 130.

If Ulnar prefers to try using the squadron's Stealth mode during the actual battle, go to section 135.

"Flag to recon wing," Ulnar says, speaking into the Fleetcomm microphone at his station on *Valiant*'s bridge. "Investigate S.C. 170 for signs of enemy activity. Do not, repeat, *do not* engage enemy vessels encountered unless absolutely necessary." Destroyer captains begin acknowledging his orders, and the lighted

symbols that depict their ships begin to separate from the main bulk of the squadron's battlecruisers.

Ulnar is reluctant to divide his force, but if there is a trap waiting somewhere in the system, he would rather flush it out with something less than his entire squadron. Destroyers are designed for this sort of work. The Legion's ace in the hole is the battle wing, which Ulnar can bring up quickly to support the destroyers.

He reminds himself that that plan is the textbook solution to an uncertain situation like this one. His concern now is that the Ka'slaq haven't read any of the same textbooks. The apparent lack of a supply line or base here has made him begin to doubt that this alien armada can be overcome by conventional means at all.

The only thing he can do for now is sit back and wait, hoping the recon wing uncovers something worthwhile.

Proceed to section 75.

— 57 —

"All ships, this is Flag," Ulnar begins again, reopening the Fleetcomm channel once more. "Form defensive globe and stand by for action. Recon wing to retire within the globe." The admiral's fingers dance over the keyboard on the console before him, punching in the combination that brings the Flag computer into the Fleetcomm link and calling up a string of detailed battle orders. On his monitor Ulnar watches a scrolling readout of vectors, positions, and speeds that will tell each captain in the squadron how to deploy his ship for the conflict ahead.

This is only one of many preprogrammed deployments Ulnar has put together since the squadron left St. Germaine. The battle orders on his monitor are being repeated on the bridge of each vessel, while the Legion captains translate them into actions to place every ship in battle readiness.

In Ulnar's planning tank the yellow lights that represent his ships are creeping slowly to form a new pattern, reflecting the slow redeployment into the new positions he has assigned them.

Section 57

A defensive globe is considered the ideal formation for the employment of strictly defensive tactics, giving ships the maximum support against almost any kind of attack. The globe's effectiveness against the Ka'slaq, though, remains to be seen.

The clash of fleets is inevitable, but it won't necessarily be quick. Even at tremendous speeds it takes time to span the vast distances involved in a space battle. Minutes pass at a crawl while yellow and blue lights draw nearer with agonizing slowness. It is the hardest part of battle—this period of watching and waiting before the ships actually join in combat. Ulnar has the worst role of all; other officers and men have jobs to concentrate on during the approach, jobs that help take their minds off their fear. Ulnar's job is to concentrate on those worries, to try to anticipate the difficulties and dangers before they happen and plan ways to overcome them all.

The movements of the other two Ka'slaq divisions recorded by the tank, for instance, must be considered. Those two Ka'slaq forces have changed course to reinforce the division already closing on Ulnar's tight-knit globe of battlecruisers. If the Legion can't defeat the initial alien wave quickly, these newcomers will boost the enemy's strength to overwhelming levels. Against those numbers Ulnar's forces won't stand much more of a chance than Don Larno's in their fight to the death.

The resolution of the battle is governed not only by the formation already chosen, but also by which of the three enemy groups is engaged first. Find out the division that fights initially according to the guidelines below.

If the squadron attacks the closest group of enemy ships, the Ka'slaq First Division is engaged first.

If the squadron remains on the defensive, the Ka'slaq First Division is engaged first.

If Ulnar decides to move the squadron to shield Endymion from attack, the Ka'slaq Second Division is engaged first.

If the squadron is sent against the alien planetoid, the Ka'slaq Third Division is the first to be engaged.

If the squadron attempts to elude the nearest alien force but is brought to battle anyway, the Ka'slaq First Division is the first force engaged. This happens if Stealth mode fails while the squadron tries to escape this force (for whatever reason).

To resolve the battle at Endymion, Ulnar can choose to fight a conventional battle by going to section 130.

If Ulnar would rather try using the squadron's Stealth mode tactic during the actual battle, go to section 135.

— 58 —

With the fall of Endymion, several other worlds are vulnerable to alien attack. Of them all, Ulnar fears most for Baal. Its population, commercial value, and strategic position in the very heart of the sector all combine to suggest that this vital world could become the next Ka'slaq target. Angry at himself for already being outguessed in his every move, Ulnar vows not to choose wrong again. The admiral issues his new orders, and the Ninth Squadron boosts under geodynes for Baal.

It's a long trip, and Ulnar can't help but be concerned. If the Baal colony is the next Ka'slaq target, Ulnar could easily be too late to help. Will the Legion find a flourishing colony, or a world reduced to a lifeless desert by the power of the Ka'slaq?

Consult the Travel Time Chart, cross-indexing the squadron's planet of origin with Baal, the intended destination. Add this number to the time accumulated previously in traveling and/or waiting.

If the new total is thirty-one days or less, go to section 69.

If the new total is thirty-two days or more, go to section 76 instead.

— 59 —

Seated at his command console on *Valiant*'s bridge, Ulnar masters his initial indecision. He didn't bring the squadron all the way to S.C. 170 to waste the effort in half measures. As long as there is even the slightest chance of finding Ka'slaq ships, a base, even some trace of their passage, it is vital to investigate more closely. He has the duty communications technician open up the Fleetcomm channel so he can pass orders to the whole squadron.

"All ships, this is Flag," he begins. "Proceed at maximum speed on a standard hyperbolic approach past the system's primary. All scanners to maximum sensitivity." He pauses. "Stay alert, and notify me of any unusual readings or signs of alien activity. This is a recon mission, and if there is some sign of trouble, I want all ships to disengage and withdraw as quickly as possible. Avoid battle unless absolutely necessary, or on my orders."

Forming into a tight, wedge-shaped formation, the ships of the Ninth Squadron drop toward the star, scanning the system for anything out of the ordinary. Ulnar wants his force kept close together, determined not to fall into the cardinal error of dividing his squadron in the face of a possible enemy ambush. Ready for whatever they might find, the men of the Legion turn their full attention to S.C. 170.

Proceed to section 75.

— 60 —

"All ships, this is Flag," Ulnar continues after a few more minutes studying the planning tank. "Adopt standard cone formation and attack the enemy."

Sweeping his fingers over a series of keys on the console before him, Ulnar activates the Fleetcomm computer link. His monitor shows a scrolling list of orders governing the position and function of each ship in the squadron. One of dozens of

tactical plans worked out by Ulnar during the recent voyage, it is being relayed to each vessel in his command.

The yellow lights that represent the squadron's ships begin to rearrange themselves, slowly but with great precision and determination. The cone begins to form with the battlecruisers at the base and the lighter ships forming the rim. In the battle to follow, the lighter ships will have the most vital job, englobing the alien force while the battle wing holds their attention. The Ka'slaq, in a loose defensive sphere, are well-deployed to block the cone, but with luck and the Legion's well-known fighting spirit, the cone englobement tactic could make short work of the aliens.

The distance between the two forces is still wide enough to leave the combatants several minutes before the battle can be joined. Watching the slow tracks of lights in the tank, Ulnar wonders what his opposite number might be thinking right now. What is the Ka'slaq leader like? Is he worrying about the lives soon to be lost in battle, about service politics and the consequences of defeat? Or were the Ka'slaq so alien that they had nothing in common with Ulnar and his men?

"Closing to contact," someone reports. Ulnar continues to study the tank intently, looking for a weakness, a way to clinch a quick victory. But all he sees are the traces that show the other two alien forces beginning to turn in support of the first wave. Time favors the Ka'slaq, and unless Ulnar can win a quick victory, the squadron will soon be outnumbered and overwhelmed, just like Don Larno's garrison ships.

The resolution of the battle is governed not only by the formation already chosen, but also by which of the three enemy groups is engaged first. Find out the division that fights initially according to the guidelines below.

If the squadron attacks the closest group of enemy ships, the Ka'slaq First Division is engaged first.

If Ulnar decides to remain on the defensive, the Ka'slaq Second Division is engaged first.

If the squadron is sent against the alien planetoid, the Ka'slaq Third Division is the first to be engaged.

If the squadron attempts to elude the closest alien force, but is brought to battle anyway by failure of the Stealth mode tactic, the Ka'slaq First Division engages first.

Section 61

To resolve the battle at Endymion, Ulnar can choose to fight a conventional battle by going to section 130.

If Ulnar instead decides to use the squadron's Stealth mode tactic in the actual battle, go to section 135 instead.

— 61 —

Glumly, Ulnar contemplates his choices. Endymion is too far away for him to save Larno or the colonists from the Ka'slaq armada. Rushing in without further information would be little short of suicide. But it seems equally foolish to shift the squadron anywhere else without good reason. The same factors that brought Ulnar to Baal continue to hold true, and until he learns of some other possibility to the contrary, the admiral realizes he is best off remaining right here.

More information about Endymion trickles in over the next several days, relayed by merchant ships that escaped the disaster that engulfed the system. They tell a horrible story; Endymion has not just been captured by the alien Ka'slaq, but utterly destroyed.

The attack developed with startling speed. From the reports Ulnar reads, it seems clear that the Ka'slaq have a significant advantage over their human opponents in speed—not because of any superiority in technology (the enemy uses geodynes of roughly the same capabilities as those aboard Legion ships), but because Ka'slaq pilots are capable of conducting high-speed, tight-formation maneuvers no human pilot could hope to duplicate. This is but one of several significant advantages displayed by the alien armada in their assault.

Another is numbers. As Larno's original report indicated, the aliens had at least a hundred ships. Some stories are obviously wild exaggerations, but Larno's figure is borne out by the vast majority of the other observations that reach Ulnar. No one else was actually close enough to the action to see the mobile planetoid Larno spoke of, but many accounts noted a moving object that showed up on ultrapulse scans as an immense artifact the size of a small moon. The actual fighting was carried on by cruiser-sized vessels, larger than a Legion destroyer, but smaller than *Valiant* and her sister battlecruisers, and armed with annihi-

lator weapons that far outmatched the heaviest vortex guns of the Star League.

Larno's last fight left no human survivors, and no one actually witnessed the battle at firsthand. The last transmissions to punch through some weird, previously unknown kind of static or jamming put out by the alien ships reported that Larno intended to form up his ships into a tight wedge and drive toward the planetoid. The Ka'slaq ships responded to his threat by breaking off their other attacks and closing in on the garrison, surrounding and overwhelming them. Ka'slaq cruisers returned, went into orbit around Endymion, and proceeded to destroy the colony completely.

From the way they prepared and launched their orbital bombardment, it was clear they knew a great deal about the colony. The Ka'slaq knew the location of every town, installation, settlement, even the smallest homesteads, evidence that they had managed to translate the computer files on board the captured *Discovery*. Every center of human habitation on Endymion was bombarded by Ka'slaq annihilator weapons. The colonists were not even allowed to surrender; one town was devastated as it broadcast an offer to capitulate on any terms the conquerors cared to name. The attack was systematic, ruthless, and utterly complete. Except for a handful of people on ships far enough away to avoid alien notice, no one escaped this holocaust.

These reports show all too clearly the character of the Legion's opponents and the fate awaiting any world they succeed in dominating. With this evidence of Ka'slaq intentions and evil at hand, Ulnar takes time to review his options and position. He knows he has to stop the alien armada before it can strike again.

Roll one die and add the indicated number of days to the time accumulated in the campaign.

If Ulnar chooses to remain at Baal, go to section 69.

If Ulnar chooses to travel to Endymion, go to section 53.

If Ulnar orders the ships in his command to Ulnar 118, go to section 63.

If Ulnar chooses to travel to S.C. 170, go to section 68.

Section 62

If Ulnar chooses to have the squadron return to St. Germaine, go to section 74.

Should the admiral order the squadron to proceed to any other destination, go to section 73.

— 62 —

“Stealth mode, Admiral,” Sammis reports formally. “Ultrawave and ultrapulse generators are on feedback setting, maximum output.”

“Thank you, Captain,” Ulnar acknowledges, matching his tone.

Around him *Valiant*’s bridge crew is quiet, hunched over their control consoles as they focus all their attention on their work. The tension in the air is almost palpable. Everyone knows what is at stake; they’d seen Larno’s ships snuffed out by the aliens. Would the newcomers fare any better?

The waiting drags on. Given the enemy speed, it would be impossible to outrun the Ka’slaq. Stealth mode is the only alternative, the only hope of dodging the alien attack. The next few minutes will determine the whole nature of the battle . . . and probably the fate of the Ninth Defense Squadron.

“They’re matching us,” an ultrapulse operator says at last. “Jamming isn’t working, damn it! They’re swinging around to engage.”

Ulnar looks into the tank, seeing the truth in the crewman’s words as he takes in the changing dispositions. Stealth failed. Hastily he thumbs the microphone to issue new orders, hoping against hope that there is still time to meet the enemy in some kind of battle order. “All ships, this is Flag. Formation change. Formation change. Prepare for enemy attack!”

As Ulnar frantically issues new orders for a defensive formation, something in the planning tank catches his eye. The Ka’slaq ships are closing inexorably, as before, but their formation seems looser, their maneuvers and response times slower. What is happening—and why? The admiral shakes his head abruptly. There is no time for more analysis; it is essential that the Legion prepare to fight.

Roll two dice and compare the result to the squadron's current Morale level.

If the roll is less than or equal to the Morale value, go to section 28.

If the roll is greater than Morale, go to section 72.

— 63 —

Acting on a hunch, Ulnar has been devoting a lot of thought to the planet that bears his family name. Ulnar 118 is uninhabited and rarely visited, easily ignored by strategic planning as a worthless piece of rock that isn't worth fighting for. But the admiral can't help but wonder if this is really true.

Even in the aftermath of victory a fleet has to have time and resources to refit and consolidate. If the Ka'slaq have the files from the captured *Discovery*, they know that Ulnar 118 is one place they can recover from battle without much risk of interference from a human fleet. And the deserted world lies at the very doorstep of the sector base at St. Germaine, an ideal place from which to strike the next logical blow of the war once the Ka'slaq are ready to resume the campaign.

Ulnar thinks that the planet is worth a look. Although the captains in his squadron all seem startled by the decision, he frames his orders accordingly. Soon the ships are in motion again, plunging through interstellar space toward the planet explored by the admiral's famous ancestor.

Consult the Travel Time Chart. Cross-index the planet of origin with Ulnar 118, the squadron's destination, to find the duration of the voyage in days. Add the resulting number to the previous accumulation of time spent waiting or traveling in the course of the campaign. Note this new total for future reference. Then go to section 103.

— 64 —

The scanner reports pour into *Valiant*'s computer banks, but as Ulnar sifts through them, he grows increasingly dismayed and irritated. The reports are negative, consistently and frustratingly negative. There is no sign of life in the Endymion system, either human or alien. The planet itself is uninhabited, the colony's towns and settlements blasted to ruin. But the Ka'slaq fleet has gone on, leaving behind neither garrison nor base. Ulnar's expedition has been in vain.

Then Ulnar comes to one report that might, perhaps, be worth following up. One of the destroyers has discovered and plotted an orbit for a hulk, a wrecked starship of nonhuman design. Presumably it is a Ka'slaq cruiser destroyed by Larno's garrison during its last defiant struggle. Thorough examination of the wrecked ship may help the Legion's scientists discover more about the opposition.

Ulnar leans back in his command chair, brow furrowed in concentration. His ships could investigate the wreck or they could take it in tow; either way will slow them down. Is it a clue worth following up?

If Ulnar decides to have the wrecked Ka'slaq cruiser investigated, go to section 104.

If Ulnar decides to ignore the cruiser and leave Endymion, go to section 136.

— 65 —

"Flag to all ships," Ulnar says, switching on the Fleetcomm microphone again. "Recon wing, form screen and prepare to engage. Battle wing, adopt close formation and await my signal to attack."

The admiral enters a combination of letters and numbers through the keyboard on his console, bringing the Flag computer into the Fleetcomm link and calling up a preprogrammed string of battle orders. The monitor shows the scrolling readout of vectors,

speeds, and positions that will guide each ship of the squadron into place, one of many plans Ulnar has prepared since leaving St. Germaine. Captains on each vessel in the squadron are reading the same information and translating the data into orders preparing their individual commands for action.

The yellow lights in the planning tank creep slowly into a new pattern, mirroring the slow movement of the Legion ships to their assigned places. A destroyer screen is a risky formation to adopt against an enemy as powerful as the Ka'slaq, but it offers advantages. If the destroyers can hold the aliens back, Ulnar can bring up his battlecruisers for a decisive blow at just the right time to turn the tide. If necessary, the destroyers can also be sacrificed to cover the withdrawal of the heavier ships if things get bad.

Minutes pass with painful slowness as yellow and blue lights slowly converge, hurtling toward one another at incredible speeds, kept apart by the sheer vastness of space itself. Waiting is the hardest part of a space battle, especially for an admiral. Other officers and crewmen have their own jobs to do, but Ulnar's role is to consider every variable, every fear.

Right now, fear twists his guts as he sees the farthest two alien forces altering course toward the squadron. Time favors the Ka'slaq now; if Ulnar doesn't quickly overcome the first enemy force, the other two will soon close in and bring their superior numbers into play against the Legion. If that happens, his ships will have little more hope of surviving the onslaught than Don Larno and his garrison had.

The resolution of the battle is dictated not only by the formation already chosen, but also by which of the three enemy groups is engaged first. Find out the division that fights initially according to the guidelines given below.

If the squadron attacks the closest group of enemy ships, the Ka'slaq First Division is engaged first.

If Ulnar decides to remain on the defensive, the Ka'slaq First Division is still engaged first.

If Ulnar moves the squadron to shield Endymion from attack, the Ka'slaq Second Division is engaged first.

If the squadron moves to fight the force around the alien planetoid, the Ka'slaq Third Division is first to be engaged.

If the squadron attempts to use Stealth mode to elude the

Section 66

nearest aliens but are brought to battle because Stealth fails, the Ka'slaq First Division engages first.

To resolve the battle at Endymion, Ulnar can choose to fight a conventional space battle by going to section 130.

Ulnar can also choose the more unorthodox approach of using Stealth mode during the actual battle; if so, go to section 135.

— 66 —

The loss of Baal is a serious blow, not only to the Star League, but to David Ulnar personally. He feels the deaths of all those people keenly. His inability to stop the alien armada before it could descend upon the helpless colony condemned those settlers as surely as any death warrant.

Baal is gone, but Ulnar is drawn to the planet. Perhaps the aliens are there, preparing for their next move. If so, a sudden attack by the Ninth Squadron might take them by surprise. And even if the Ka'slaq are no longer in Baal's star system, Ulnar hopes to find clues there regarding Ka'slaq intentions or limitations.

At his command, the squadron sets out. The ships lift from orbit, set their course, and once again leave behind the relative security of a planetary system for the lonely chill of interstellar space.

Consult the Travel Time Chart, cross-indexing the planet of origin with Baal, the destination world. Add the duration of the voyage given from the chart to previously accumulated time spent in the campaign and record this amount for future use. Then proceed to section 76.

— 67 —

"Flag to all ships," Ulnar continues a few minutes later. "Formation order: adopt defensive cylinder. Detailed battle orders follow by computer link. Stand by." As he speaks, his hands move over the keyboard on the console before him. The combination Ulnar punches hooks the tactical computer into his Fleetcomm ship-to-ship network, sending to the rest of the squadron via computer a string of orders detailing speeds, vectors, and positions to be adopted by the squadron in forming the cylindrical deployment he has chosen.

Now Ulnar watches the plan unfold in the tank as the yellow lights representing the Ninth Squadron crawl slowly to arrange themselves in a new pattern. The defensive cylinder is supposed to be a solid, flexible defensive formation that brings the entire firepower of a squadron into action, but it can be disrupted by a well-organized attack. Ulnar has no illusions about the quality of the opposition, but his outnumbered squadron needs to bring as much strength as possible to bear if the enemy is to be thrown back.

Ship movements in the planning tank are slow and deliberate. Even at geodyne-induced speeds, the vessels preparing to clash are maneuvering through a vast battlefield. Waiting can be the worst part of a battle in space, although the officers and men have duties to distract them from their fears—with one notable exception. David Ulnar's duty demands that he concentrate on every possible problem and threat and plan reactions to them before the battle is joined. At times like this Vice-Admiral Ulnar would gladly trade roles with the most junior spaceman on board.

Symbols in the tank attract his attention. According to computer interpolations of sensor information, the farthest two divisions of Ka'slaq ships have altered course. Projections of their new vectors show that they will join the first attack wave soon after the battle is joined. The squadron will have to defeat the First Division before the other two divisions arrive or the Legion stands no chance of winning.

The resolution of the battle is determined by the formation already chosen, as well as which of the three alien forces is

Section 68

engaged first. Determine which division fights first by following the guidelines given below.

If the squadron attacks the closest group of enemy ships, the Ka'slaq First Division is engaged first.

If Ulnar remains on the defensive, the Ka'slaq First Division is still engaged first.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to shield Endymion from attack, the Ka'slaq Second Division is engaged first.

If the squadron is sent to fight the enemy near the alien planetoid, the Ka'slaq Third Division is the first group to be engaged.

If the squadron attempts to use Stealth mode to elude the nearest aliens but are brought to battle because Stealth fails, the Ka'slaq First Division engages first.

To resolve the battle of Endymion, Ulnar can choose to fight a conventional space battle by going to section 130.

Ulnar can also choose the less orthodox alternative of using Stealth mode during the actual battle. Go to section 135.

— 68 —

The Ka'slaq pose a threat to humanity's Star League, a serious menace made even more deadly by the mystery that surrounds the aliens. Their invasion into League space could well prove impossible to turn back.

"If only the Legion knew more about them!" Ulnar mutters angrily.

The aliens first appeared at S.C. 170. Perhaps there are clues on S.C. 170 concerning the Ka'slaq's intentions and weaknesses, Ulnar reasons. There might even be information aboard the wrecks of the human expedition destroyed there.

There may also be some strategic value to a visit to the distant planet. As the scene of the first Ka'slaq assault, the system is the logical location for an alien base or supply link. If so, an attack on a sensitive point in the rear of the alien advance would draw the Ka'slaq back to defend it.

Could S.C. 170 be the answer to all their problems? Ulnar

allows himself the luxury of hope as he issues the necessary orders. Within hours the Ninth Squadron is under way, the pervasive hum of the geodynes filling the *Valiant* and her sister ships with purpose.

It is a long way to their new destination. Cut off from the League by the problems of interstellar communications, the voyage gives everyone too much time to brood. But the die is cast. Ulnar forces himself to ignore his doubts and to maintain an air of confidence befitting an admiral.

Consult the Travel Time Chart. Cross-index the squadron's port of origin with its intended destination (S.C. 170) to find the length of the journey and add this amount to any time already accumulated from previous sections. Record the new total on a piece of scratch paper for future reference, and proceed to section 54.

— 69 —

"All clear, Admiral. No report of alien activity," the duty officer says as Ulnar enters *Valiant*'s bridge. His bored tone speaks volumes. Since their arrival at the colony world, the days have rolled by tediously without a trace of the Ka'slaq. Ulnar is beginning to wonder at the wisdom of his decision. While the squadron waits idle at Baal, the alien armada could be almost anywhere.

But Ulnar is not yet ready to admit error. The Ka'slaq could still come, and if he feels foolish sitting in orbit here, he would feel more foolish still if he left, only to have the aliens arrive after his ships are out of contact and range. He crosses the bridge to the Flag console, the admiral's position for monitoring squadron activities in or out of battle, and sinks into his seat with weary resignation. The wait hasn't done his confidence any good.

"Patrol status?" he asks the duty officer. Ulnar is already calling up the relevant information on his monitors, but he prefers to get his briefings from a man rather than a machine, an idiosyncracy the flagship bridge crew has become accustomed to.

"Four ships deployed on long-range patrols, Admiral," he is

Section 69

told. "Two of them are five minutes overdue for check-in, but—"

"That's nothing unusual," Ulnar finishes for him. He glances at the monitor readout and takes note of the two ship names. "Communications, patch my board through and raise *Defiant* and *Anthar*. Perhaps we can instill a sense of proper timing in them."

"Aye-aye, sir," the technician answers, oblivious to the admiral's sarcasm. Suddenly, one hand to his earphone, the technician stiffens and swivels to face Ulnar. "Pax Eternal," he mutters, a perplexed look on his face.

"What is it?" Ulnar asks quietly.

"Static, sir, on the ultrawave channels," comes the reply. "I've never heard this kind of static. There's a *pattern* to it, Admiral."

Ulnar bends over his own board and turns up the volume on his speaker to the crackle of an unfamiliar form of ultrawave static. Textbooks claim that ultrawave static is not possible.

"... *Defiant* . . . Mayday . . ." Tiny, distant, almost overpowered by background noise.

Ulnar whirls on the duty officer. "Call Captain Sammis to the bridge," he orders curtly. "And sound the call to general quarters."

While Sammis prepares the ship, Ulnar places the rest of the squadron on guard, but without more information, there isn't much they can do. The static grows worse and begins to affect the ultrapulse tracking system and communications. Scanners and ship-to-ship contact remain usable but are unreliable.

Finally, the tension is broken by another report. "Ultrapulse shows two friendly ships at the limit of detection range," an officer announces.

Ulnar, feigning calm by sipping from a mug of coffee, hands it to a steward and swivels his seat to command a view of *Valiant*'s tactical planning tank. There, ultrapulse data is translated by computers to symbols. Two yellow blips identified as a battlecruiser and a destroyer appear at the edge of the tank, moving inward at maximum speed. The computers identify the transponder signals of these two newcomers, updating the readouts to show that they are, as everyone hoped, *Defiant* and *Anthar*.

A ragged cheer starts from the bridge crew, but it dies away as another computer update supplements the previous one. Not far behind those two ships, and gaining fast, are a whole phalanx of

blue-colored lights representing unknown, presumably hostile ships. The Ka'slaq have arrived.

"*Defiant* on line, Admiral," the communications technician reports.

"Put it through." Ulnar turns to the microphone and comm screen on the command console. The monitor flickers to life, broken by static. Between bursts of distortion, the strained features of a young captain with a scorched uniform collar and a bleeding gash across one cheek appears.

"Flag, this is *Defiant*," he says. "Enemy ships pursuing. They'll reach your position soon. Too many for us to stop. . . ." He rubs ineffectually at the blood on his face. "There's more of them than anyone thought. We took a grazing hit, with one geodyne damaged and fifty men killed or wounded. Admiral, we can't fight them. . . ." It's clear that *Defiant*'s captain knows his ship is doomed.

"Energy pulse from target 027," a voice calls from somewhere behind the battlecruiser's captain. "They're getting ready to—" With a blinding flash of light and the sound of melting electronics, the transmission ends abruptly. *Defiant* has been hit again, this time fatally.

"Pax Eternal," the communications technician mutters again. Ulnar drops his eyes to the planning tank, where the computer is already updating the symbols. The one representing *Defiant* is fading from powerful battlecruiser to lifeless hulk.

As an anticlimax to the death of the *Defiant*, the smaller dot representing the destroyer *Anthar* winks out altogether a few moments later. The Ka'slaq destroyed the smaller ship so thoroughly that nothing large enough to bounce back ultrapulse symbols is left.

Ulnar stares into the tank for long minutes, watching thirty-odd blue symbols creep toward the squadron, and, behind them, Baal. Two more ships are gone, and the implacable aliens continue their advance. He wonders for a moment if it would be better to fight and die or flee and face the shame of running without a fight.

He feels his resolve hardening and begins mentally framing the orders to carry out the decision he has made.

If Ulnar decides to attack the Ka'slaq fleet, go to section 33.

If Ulnar decides to remain near Baal to defend the planet from attack, go to section 37.

If Ulnar decides to abandon Baal and withdraw, go to section 41.

— 70 —

"All ships," Ulnar says, activating the Fleetcomm microphone once more. "This is Flag. Disperse and prepare to engage. Repeat, disperse for battle. Orders coming on-line." His fingers tap in a quick code on the Flag computer console in front of him, hooking the computer to the Fleetcomm transmitter and calling up the preprogrammed battle orders stored there. Lines of information scroll across the monitor, giving precise vector and positioning information for each ship in the squadron, and Ulnar's readout is repeated on the bridge of each ship. The captains stand ready to translate that data into action, preparing each individual vessel for the battle to come.

In the planning tank the yellow lights that represent Legion ships creep slowly into a new pattern. The ships are scattering to form an extremely loose and irregular wall to meet the aliens. It's a dangerous formation to adopt against an enemy as well-coordinated as the Ka'slaq, but perhaps it will divide the tight alien groups and even the contest.

Battles in space take time to develop since the size of the battlefield slows actions to a crawl. The minutes go by like hours, and Ulnar's wait is hardest of all. Officers and crewmen throughout the squadron at least have duties that distract them from waiting and worrying.

Suddenly the scanners detect changes in the vectors of the two distant Ka'slaq divisions. The alien divisions are moving toward the squadron to support the nearest alien ships. Ulnar's squadron must win quickly if it is to win at all, or the Ka'slaq strength will grow to overwhelming levels.

The resolution of the battle is determined not only by the formation already chosen, but also by which of the three alien forces is first to be engaged. Determine which alien division fights first by following the guidelines given below.

If the squadron attacks the closest group of enemy ships, the Ka'slaq First Division is engaged first.

If Ulnar decides to remain on the defensive, the Ka'slaq First Division is still the first to engage.

If the squadron is ordered to shield Endymion from attack, the Ka'slaq Second Division is engaged first.

If Ulnar has the squadron fight the enemy near the alien planetoid, the Ka'slaq Third Division will be the first group they engage.

If the squadron attempts to use Stealth mode to elude the nearest aliens but are brought to battle because Stealth fails, the Ka'slaq First Division engages first.

To resolve the battle of Endymion, Ulnar can choose to fight a conventional space battle by going to section 130.

Ulnar can choose a less orthodox alternative, using Stealth mode during the actual battle. Go to section 135.

— 71 —

Admiral Ulnar is unwilling to leave the system, feeling that little purpose will be served by moving without a clear idea of enemy intentions. The Ninth Squadron remains in orbit, awaiting orders. Ulnar studies incoming information and news for clues about what to do next.

Add one day to the total number of days in the campaign thus far.

If the new total is thirty-three days or less, and no League planets have fallen yet, go to section 22.

If the new total is thirty-four to forty-five days and only one League planet has fallen, go to section 48.

If the new total is forty-six to fifty-five days and no messages have been received from St. Germaine, go to section 98.

If the new total is fifty-six days or more, go to section 121.

If none of the conditions noted above apply, go to section 107.

— 72 —

“Enemy closing fast,” the ultrapulse operator announces dispassionately. Ulnar curses inwardly. His improvised formation orders are nowhere near complete, and the other ships are reacting too slowly. He thinks fleetingly of how useless the tactical planning computers really are in a case like this; they are only as good as the programs stored within them, and they can only provide battle plans for situations that have been worked out in advance. Without a prepared program, Ulnar is reduced to human speeds. *How do the Ka’slaq react so fast and so smoothly?*

Fingers dancing on the computer keyboard, he cancels his previous orders and quickly enters new instructions.

Proceed to section 70.

— 73 —

The latest developments worry Ulnar. He reexamines enemy movements up until now, but can find no real pattern. He projects the dangers to the sector; from that he chooses his destination. He hopes to forestall an enemy thrust, *and add ships in the local garrison to his force.*

The geodynes hum to life, and the squadron sets out once again. As always, the voyage is long, and the lack of news does nothing to ease tensions. Eventually the ships of the Legion approach their goal. Ulnar prepares for the worst while hoping desperately for the best. He needs a break that will turn the campaign in his favor at last.

Consult the Travel Time Chart. Cross-index the planet of origin with the destination world to yield the duration of the voyage in days. Add this to the time spent in previous stages of the campaign and note the new total.

If the new total is thirty-three days or less, go to section 91.

If the new total is thirty-four to forty-five days, go to section 89.

If the new total is forty-six to fifty-five days, go to section 98.

If the new total is fifty-six days or more, go to section 121.

— 74 —

Ulnar is beginning to regret leaving the base at St. Germaine. He tells himself again that the capital is the best place to concentrate his ships in view of the most recent developments. And the geofractor complex there is the sector's one link with the League's inner planets and the larger fleet Admiral Merros is assembling. St. Germaine is the logical target for the next Ka'slaq thrust, and its strategic importance makes Ulnar's decision an easy one.

Issuing orders to the squadron, Admiral Ulnar begins to feel better about the situation. The Legion ships set their new course and let their geodyne engines thrust them out of orbit and into deep space. As before, the passage is a long one, with plenty of chances for uncertainties and doubts. Eventually Ulnar's ships approach their home base again, slipping into orbit with quiet precision. Ulnar is already busy catching up on the news in preparation for the next moves of the campaign.

Consult the Travel Time Chart by cross-indexing the planet of origin with the squadron's destination (St. Germaine). Add the result to the number of days already accumulated from previous voyages and note the new total.

If Endymion is the most recent planet attacked by the aliens, go to section 48.

Otherwise, go to section 115.

— 75 —

Ulnar goes through the reports from the ships engaged in the sweep through the S.C. 170 system, staying up to date on their findings. The scouting run proves to be a major disappointment; there is no trace of the Ka'slaq fleet and no sign of a base or a depot anywhere in the system. Ulnar's hope that S.C. 170 would exercise a strategic pull on the Ka'slaq leadership has been thoroughly dashed by the lack of significant discoveries here. Now Ulnar is worried; this long-range strike at the Ka'slaq rear was his one chance to draw the aliens away from the Star League, and now that it has failed, the sector is sure to suffer the ravages of war on a grand scale.

But depressed though he is by these thoughts, Ulnar is quick to notice one item that could have a far-reaching impact. One of his destroyers did find signs of the Ka'slaq passage: the hulk of a cruiser-sized vessel of totally nonhuman design orbiting at the fringes of the system's asteroid belt. The cruiser is powerless, though the reason is undetermined. The vessel could furnish League scientists with more information on the aliens.

Ulnar's one concern is time. Even if they tow the hulk, the squadron will be slowed considerably. Does the information it might hold make the investment in time worthwhile?

If Ulnar decides to have the wrecked Ka'slaq cruiser investigated further, go to section 104.

If Ulnar decides to ignore the alien ship and leave S.C. 170, go to section 138.

— 76 —

Approaching Baal, the ships of the Legion turn all their sensors toward the star system in an effort to discover what, if anything, is still happening there. Scanners and ultrawave communications bands remain obstinately silent. By the time the fleet reaches the outer fringes of Baal's system, it is clear that the colony is not going to respond. There is no sign of any activity.

"Appearances can be deceiving," Ulnar says to Sammis, *Valiant*'s hawk-featured captain. "We may turn up something worthwhile by taking a closer look." But behind his optimistic mask, Ulnar begins to suspect that he was wrong in choosing Baal. If the Ka'slaq have struck and moved on without leaving a garrison behind, the squadron's trip here has been completely wasted.

But Ulnar can't be sure without a closer look. From his station on *Valiant*'s bridge he begins issuing orders to examine the system more closely.

If Ulnar orders the destroyers in his squadron (assuming he has destroyers available) to scout the system while the battlecruisers are held back in reserve, go to section 111.

If Ulnar orders all the ships in the squadron to move into the Baal system in a reconnaissance in force, go to section 116 instead.

— 77 —

Ulnar composes himself and reaches for the intercom again. "Bridge. This is Admiral Ulnar. Prepare a courier boat to carry a message to the geofractor complex."

"Bridge, aye-aye," the duty officer responds, unsurprised.

Switching off, Ulnar turns back to his computer and communications desk. It takes only minutes to create a message capsule for Admiral Merros. A small, spindle-shaped object, the capsule contains a brief video recording of Ulnar stating the Benbo case, including transcripts of the commodore's message. Ulnar is requesting disciplinary assistance.

The capsule is the only practical way of communicating with Merros back on Earth, but even as Ulnar turns it over to a courier, he can't refrain from feeling gloomy. Chances are that Merros will back Benbo, not him. By now the hot-tempered commodore may well have sent his own version of the confrontation. After the courier leaves, Ulnar tries to get back to work, but he expects more trouble to come.

Proceed to section 40.

— 78 —

“Flag to all ships,” Ulnar continues, reopening the Fleetcomm microphone. “Form defensive globe. Recon wing to take shelter within the globe.” He punches in a combination on his computer keyboard; battle orders for each ship begin to scroll across his monitor, and simultaneously the Fleetcomm hookup relays them to each of the other vessels in the Ninth Squadron.

In the planning tank the yellow symbols that represent the squadron’s ships begin to shift slowly into the globe formation Ulnar has ordered, their relative positions reflecting those of the actual ships around *Valiant*. With a defensive globe, Ulnar reasons, he can maintain the closest possible support for all the ships under his command and thus offset the Ka’slaq coordination.

Movements are slow despite the incredible speeds possible; space battlefields are infinite. The fleets draw together slowly, deliberately, but with the inevitability of two juggernauts set in motion against one another.

Although the Ka’slaq have an advantage in numbers, Ulnar’s squadron has every chance of defeating them if handled properly. A failure now would be a crippling blow to the defense of the Star League.

To resolve the battle of Baal, Ulnar can choose to fight a conventional battle by going to section 120.

If Ulnar prefers to use the unorthodox tactic of employing Stealth mode during the actual battle, go to section 128.

— 79 —

Twenty-two days pass during the voyage to Thule. By the end of the journey everyone aboard is hungry for news and concerned about what they might find at Thule. The fear that the Ka’slaq might reach Thule first and overwhelm its small garrison is a common topic in *Valiant*’s wardroom.

At last the squadron comes back into communications range, and those fears are quickly laid to rest. Although Thule and its

garrison are both intact, the news is not all good. Early transmissions from the colony relay word of the fall of Endymion to the alien armada. This trip has proven to be a wild-goose chase after all, one that could cost the League and the Legion dearly.

But the time the squadron is in orbit around chilly Thule, Ulnar is already collecting detailed reports of the Ka'slaq invasion at Endymion. He needs to formulate a new strategy quickly if he is to stop the aliens from penetrating deeper into the League.

Proceed to section 22. Mark forty-four days off your time record.

— 80 —

"All ships, this is Flag," Ulnar continues, speaking into the Fleetcomm mike once more. "Adopt standard wedge formation for an attack on the enemy." He runs his fingers over the Flag computer keyboard in front of him, calling up detailed battle orders for the squadron and hooking the computer into the Fleetcomm transmission. The preprogrammed description of vectors and positions governing the squadron's movements scrolls across his monitor slowly, and it is repeated aboard each other vessel under Ulnar's command.

The three-dimensional planning tank shows yellow lights marking the positions of each Legion ship. These begin to shift slowly as the ships assume their proper places, forming into the wedge-shaped pattern Ulnar has selected for the coming battle. With the destroyers forming the tip of the wedge and the battlecruisers clustered behind, the squadron is ready to fly like an arrow into the phalanx of loosely-deployed Ka'slaq vessels. The wedge will bring a great deal of Legion firepower to bear in a concerted attack, although the flexible Ka'slaq fleet might find it easy to engulf and surround the compact formation.

Time passes slowly, with the opposing ships drawing gradually but inexorably together. It takes time, even at the high speeds possible under geodynes, to cross the volume of space. The Ka'slaq are maintaining a rigid formation, as if they don't know or don't care about the Legion ships thrusting like a spear toward the center of their phalanx.

Ulnar focuses on the planning tank and the Flag console. Victory is essential, for a defeat here could have catastrophic consequences.

To resolve this battle using conventional tactics, go to section 120.

If Ulnar chooses the unorthodox use of Stealth mode during the actual battle, go to section 128.

— 81 —

Ulnar switches on the Fleetcomm microphone once more. "Flag to all ships," he begins. "Battle wing, form phalanx and prepare to engage. Destroyers will retire behind the battlecruiser screen and remain out of combat." His fingers dance quickly over the keyboard on the console before him, entering in a combination that brings his Flag computer into the Fleetcomm hookup and calls up a set of detailed battle orders. His monitor begins to scroll through a readout of positions, vectors, and speeds for each ship in the squadron to adopt. This program is only one of dozens Ulnar has prepared during the outward voyage. Now relayed through the Fleetcomm net, it is being repeated on each of the other vessels, where the squadron's captains are busy translating these guidelines into orders preparing their commands for the action to come.

The idea of a heavy screen, a battlecruiser phalanx, is comparatively new and untried, but Ulnar's memory of the quick destruction of the destroyers in Larno's garrison has left him with little respect for the fighting abilities of light ships against Ka'slaq cruisers.

Despite the awesome speeds achieved by ships under geodyne drives, space battles are slow to develop because of the size of the battlefield. This gives Ulnar every opportunity to watch, wait, and worry: Where the other officers and men have jobs to keep them distracted, Ulnar's job is to study the situation and concentrate on all the problems that might arise.

Suddenly the other two alien divisions change course and move in to reinforce their comrades. If Ulnar doesn't win quickly,

the Ka'slaq will have reinforcements. If that happens, the Ninth Squadron would be hard-pressed to survive.

The resolution of the battle is decided by not only the formation already chosen, but also by which of the three enemy groups is engaged first. Determine the division that fights initially according to the guidelines provided below.

If the squadron attacks the closest group of enemy ships, the Ka'slaq First Division is engaged first.

If Ulnar decides to remain on the defensive, the Ka'slaq First Division is still engaged first.

If Ulnar moves the squadron to shield Endymion from attack, the Ka'slaq Second Division is engaged first.

If the squadron is ordered to move against the enemy force around the alien planetoid, the Ka'slaq Third Division is first to be engaged.

If the squadron attempts to use Stealth mode to elude the nearer alien force but is brought to battle because Stealth fails, the Ka'slaq First Division engages them first.

To resolve the battle of Endymion, Ulnar can choose to fight a conventional space battle by going to section 130.

Ulnar can also choose the more risky and unorthodox approach of utilizing Stealth mode during the actual battle: Go to section 135.

— 82 —

Ulnar knows he can't win in a battle of wills with Benbo, not when Admiral Merros is certain to be waiting for a good excuse to relieve Ulnar of his command. A showdown would end with the Ulnar name dragged through the mud again, and with some useless appointee—maybe even Benbo—installed in Ulnar's place. A good officer knows when to retreat, even if it costs him the respect of some of his men.

"Very well, Commodore," Ulnar says at length. "We'll try it your way. But if your guess is wrong and the aliens don't strike at Baal, you'd better hope for a glorious death in battle,

because I'll make your life so miserable you'll wish you were dead."

Ulnar breaks the connection angrily and begins to revise his orders. By the time he's ready, he can see advantages in falling in with Benbo's plan. Perhaps, he tells himself as he reaches for the communications panel, Benbo's temper will be worth something after all.

Proceed to section 50.

— 83 —

"All ships, this is Flag," Ulnar continues, switching the Fleetcomm microphone on again. "Form cylinder and prepare for defensive combat. Battle orders are on the computer link." He switches the computer into the communications network and calls up the appropriate tactical instructions. As he finishes, a scroll of vectors and positions begins to unwind on his monitor, showing the data being received by captains on each ship in Ulnar's squadron.

In the planning tank yellow lights begin to move, showing Legion ships redeploying in obedience to orders. The cylinder is a good defensive formation, utilizing the squadron's whole combat strength in the best possible way. Unfortunately it can be easily disorganized and overwhelmed by a determined assault. Ulnar hopes his ships can keep the formation intact in the battle ahead.

The battle takes time to develop, with ships closing at a crawl. Ulnar tries to tune out all the distractions of *Valiant*'s bridge, focusing all of his attention on his control console and the planning tank where the engagement is beginning to unfold. A victory for the Legion is essential to the defense of the sector. Success could score a major blow against the invaders, but failure could spell the end of everything for the defenders.

To resolve the battle using conventional space combat tactics, go to section 120.

If Ulnar prefers to use the more unorthodox approach of using Stealth mode to partially conceal his ships during the battle, go to section 128.

— 84 —

The battle has an unreal quality to it, as if it were just another simulation in the planning tank. It is hard to realize that each of the lights that flickers and fades out on that screen represents the death of a whole shipload of men, some of them friends or acquaintances, and all of them leave behind families, friends, loved ones.

The detached, analytical side of his mind registers the losses the squadron is suffering. Even though the Legion is fighting back with spirit and resolution, Ulnar can project the situation through to its conclusion. If he doesn't take action, the squadron will eventually be overwhelmed.

"Flag to all ships," he orders at last. "Discontinue the action. I say again, discontinue the action." He keys in the confirmatory computer-signalled battle order before continuing. "Break off and withdraw. Regroup at rendezvous point seven. All ships are to withdraw at once."

The Legion ships begin to peel off and accelerate, using Stealth mode to cover their attempted flight. As *Valiant* pulls away from the battle, Ulnar notices that Stealth mode jamming coincides with a loss of coordination in the alien fleet. He nods with satisfaction, but continues to keep a close watch on the tank. Stealth mode is not infallible, and the aliens can still outrun any of his ships. It will take several minutes to determine whether this retreat will actually carry them to safety.

Roll two dice and compare the result to the Stealth value for the Legion ships. If the result is greater than the value, return to the preceding section and resume combat resolution.

If the result is less than or equal to the Stealth value, go to section 94.

When the squadron attempts to withdraw at the end of a round in which no enemy ships fired on it, go to section 94 automatically. No Stealth roll is needed. This will normally occur after one Ka'Slaq force is destroyed and before another is engaged.

— 85 —

"Flag to all ships," Ulnar continues, speaking on the Fleetcomm circuit again. "Adopt standard cone formation and prepare to attack. Battle orders coming through on Flag computer hookup." He keys in the alphanumeric code that places his computer on the Fleetcomm circuit and calls up one of the dozens of preprogrammed sets of combat instructions stored in its files. The monitor above the keyboard comes alive with scrolling readouts of vectors and positions, information relayed at the same time to the bridges of each ship in the squadron.

The planning tank's yellow lights, depicting Legion vessels, begin to move in response to Ulnar's orders. The battlecruisers are assembling at the vortex of the cone, with the destroyers spreading out into a wider circle ahead of them. Against the Ka'slaq phalanx the cone formation will be hard-pressed to carry out its usual function of englobing the opposition, but Ulnar believes that it can be effective in carving the alien fleet into manageable chunks and defeating them in detail.

Ulnar focuses on the planning tank, blocking out the activity on the bridge around him. Slowly the two groups of ships are closing the gap. A Legion victory at Baal might not drive the Ka'slaq out of the sector altogether, but it would be a moral and strategic victory for the hard-pressed Star League. But if Ulnar and his squadron are defeated here, it could be a blow from which the Legion might never recover.

Ulnar can choose to fight a conventional space battle at Baal by going to section 120.

If Ulnar decides to fight while under the cloak of Stealth mode, go to section 128.

— 86 —

Reports filter to Admiral Ulnar's station on *Valiant*'s bridge from each of the ships of the Ninth Squadron, keeping him current on the progress of their sweep through the Ulnar 118 star system. Unfortunately, the reports aren't much use. There's no trace of enemy activity—virtually no sign that they have ever been here.

Evidently Ulnar's hunch about the system was wrong. Discouraged and irritable, the admiral scans the information over and over again. Finally he begins to consider new options in light of this failure and the rest of the strategic situation as he knows it. He cannot afford to choose wrongly again.

If he decides to remain at Ulnar 118, go to section 152.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to return to the base at St. Germaine, go to section 74.

If the squadron is ordered to Baal, go to section 58.

If Ulnar orders his ships to travel to Endymion, go to section 53.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to move to S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If any other destination is selected, go to section 73.

— 87 —

It is a long, hard-fought battle. Although the Ka'slaq manage to inflict heavy damage to the squadron, Ulnar's ships hang on. Eventually the battered survivors of the Ninth Defense Squadron realize that they have run out of alien opponents. The last of the enemy cruisers vanish in the atomic fire of the squadron's vortex guns.

But ahead, looming like a small planet, is the last gigantic Ka'slaq ship, Larno's planetoid. It is no asteroid, no natural

formation somehow made mobile. The Ka'slaq mother ship is an immense artifact, a dizzying assemblage of angles, planes, and soaring towers. Through the entire battle it has not fired once, and even now it seems slow and unable to defend itself. This lumbering target remains an enigma, and, to Ulnar's mind, a threat.

The admiral leans forward in his seat, studying a computer projection of the alien mother ship on his monitor screen. He has scored a victory, but as long as this massive structure remains intact, that victory may only be an incomplete triumph.

If Ulnar orders his squadron to fire on the Ka'slaq planetoid, go to section 143.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to attempt to board the alien station, go to section 114.

If Ulnar does nothing about the planetoid, go to section 147.

If the admiral attempts to communicate with the alien leaders, go to section 172.

— 88 —

“This is Flag,” Ulnar continues a few moments later, the Fleetcomm microphone switched on again. “Battle wing, form battlecruiser phalanx and prepare to engage. Recon wing, deploy behind the phalanx. Destroyers are to remain out of combat. Battle orders coming.” The admiral enters an alphanumeric code that brings the computer into the Fleetcomm net and calls up one of his prepared lists of deployment instructions from the computer’s storage files. He watches the monitor readout information on vectors and positions; the other captains in the squadron are picking out the instructions that apply to them and translating these into the commands that will prepare their vessels for actions.

The orders are carried out efficiently, although Ulnar suspects the destroyer captains, an unruly lot at best, are reluctant to comply. Yellow lights depicting Legion ships in the planning tank move into new patterns that reflect Ulnar’s chosen deploy-

ment. Ulnar is relieved; he doesn't feel the destroyers have much of a chance in battle against the Ka'slaq, and the battlecruiser screen is specifically intended to protect light ships in such circumstances.

However, that plan will deprive him of the entire Recon wing when the shooting starts, and Ulnar can't help entertaining second thoughts. Ignoring the temptation to tamper with a delicately-balanced situation, Ulnar concentrates on trying to predict enemy moves and project suitable responses to them. The battle for Baal could be a turning point in the war, a chance for the Legion to inflict an important check on their opponents. But if Ulnar loses, the battle could spell the end of the Legion of Space and the Star League.

Ulnar can choose to fight a conventional space battle at Baal by going to section 120.

If Ulnar decides to use less orthodox tactics and adopt Stealth mode during the actual fighting, go to section 128 instead.

— 89 —

Reaching their destination, the officers of the Ninth Squadron anxiously search for news of the Ka'slaq.

If Endymion is the only League world that has been attacked by the invaders, go to section 48.

Otherwise, go to section 107.

— 90 —

“All ships . . . Flag calling all ships,” Ulnar says, the Fleetcomm circuit open again. “Recon wing, form screen and stand by to engage the enemy. Battle wing, adopt close formation and await my orders to attack.”

Ulnar hooks the tactical computer into the Fleetcomm network

Section 91

and calls up his preprogrammed battle orders with a few quick strokes on the keyboard. A monitor screen shows the instructions scrolling upward, as it does on every ship in the squadron.

The tactical planning tank's yellow lights, representing Legion ships, begin to shift, reflecting the redeployment of the actual ships into the positions Ulnar has allocated. By creating a screen of destroyers, Ulnar hopes to tie down the Ka'slaq cruisers long enough to give his battlecruisers a chance to choose the best moment to counterattack them. This kind of formation can be risky when the enemy is as powerful as these aliens. But the Legion fields good ships, tough crews, and officers with the courage and determination to see the fight through.

The minutes drag by. Officers and men run through the last prebattle checklists and preparations. Ulnar tunes them out, his attention channeled to the Flag command console and the planning tank itself. The Star League cannot afford to lose at Baal. A win here could be the turning point in the war. But failure could spell the end of Legion and League alike.

To resolve a conventional space battle, go to section 120.

If Ulnar chooses the unorthodox use of Stealth mode during the battle, go to section 128.

— 91 —

Reaching their objective at the end of a long voyage, Ulnar and his men immediately search for fresh information on Ka'slaq activities in the sector.

If no League worlds have yet been attacked, go to section 22.

Otherwise, go to section 107.

— 92 —

Ulnar watches the planning tank in horror as Ka'slaq annihilators pick off Legion ships one after another. Although the squadron is able to mete out its fair share of destruction, the odds are against them. The aliens have too many advantages—superior technology, better cooperation and coordination, above all, superior numbers. The Ninth Defense Squadron gives a fine account of itself, performing its duties in the very best traditions of the Legion of Space. But their supreme effort is still too little to turn the tide against the Ka'slaq.

As ship after ship goes down before the might of the Ka'slaq, David Ulnar knows what it is to face total disaster. He tastes fear and almost welcomes it, for it is the last thing Ulnar has left to tell him he is still alive.

With most of the other ships in the squadron destroyed and *Valiant*'s defensive screens glowing from the titanic energies of Ka'slaq beams, the admiral thinks with curious detachment about the future. Will Merros, so stolid and unimaginative, pay heed to any of Ulnar's reports? Can he draw the conclusions Ulnar himself is only now really beginning to understand? And can he learn to apply new tactics in time to prevent disaster? The pieces of the puzzle are growing obvious to Ulnar, too late to help him.

The alien planetoid ship, the stories of alien performance during attacks on Legion ships, the superb battle coordination displayed by the Ka'slaq, even the mysterious static draw together in Ulnar's mind. He can see now how to stop the Ka'slaq, but he knows all too well that he has no hope of passing on his solution to anyone who can use it. He is too late.

Valiant's overstrained defenses glow brighter under the Ka'slaq onslaught. Finally, deep in the bowels of the battlecruiser, circuits whine under an intolerable overload. With a shower of sparks and a cloud of acrid smoke to mark their passing, the defense fields fail. Instants later annihilator beams tear through the flagship.

The ravening energies engulf the bridge, consuming Ulnar and all the others manning the dying ship. David Ulnar's last thoughts before his fiery death are of duty . . . to himself, to his family, and to the Legion he served with body, soul, and life itself.

"All ships, this is Flag," Ulnar continues, speaking on the Fleetcomm channel again. "Withdraw to planetary orbit and maintain opposition maneuvering." He pauses before continuing. "Flag to Baal Space Defense Station. Channel alpha six." He switches channels quickly and watches as colors on the monitor screen swirl briefly before coalescing into the head and shoulders of an elderly officer wearing the insignia of a Legion commandant.

"Alpha six," the officer growls. "Commandant Rovin."

Rovin—that explained the man's air of perpetual hostility. Old for his rank, Rovin's career had faltered after his brutal mistreatment of rebel troops at Alborak nearly two decades before. He had the reputation of being utterly fearless, as well as having a short temper and a long-standing grudge with the politicians who rejected his harsh but successful policies and condemned him to a dead-end career in charge of posts usually reserved for up-and-coming youngsters.

After today, Ulnar tells himself, Jak Rovin will be a hero . . . alive or dead.

"Commandant, I intend to use your fortress as an anvil," Ulnar says quietly. "I want you to draw the Ka'slaq into assaulting your defenses, then keep them occupied. When the time is right, we'll join in and break them."

Rovin is no fool; he knows the aliens' reputation by this time. But he just nods, a grim smile on his face. "As you wish, Admiral. I'll pretend they're commanded by the Board of Inquiry from Alborak." His tone isn't bitter; in fact, he sounds relieved, glad to be back in action at last and to distinguish himself before he dies. The screen clears abruptly. The waiting game begins.

It takes time to marshal the squadron, organizing it into a compact body in a tight orbit around Baal. The essence of Ulnar's strategy is to make it seem as if the Legion has withdrawn, using the planet to shield his ships from the enemy until they are committed. Rovin and various posts on the planet's surface keep the admiral updated. After a long and tense wait, the word comes in. The orbital fortress is under attack.

Begin resolving the battle at Baal by pitting 10 Ka'slaq cruisers (firepower 3 each, attack value of 30) against the orbital fortress. The fortress fires once per round on Chart C. The aliens fire each round on Chart D. At the end of any round Ulnar can order his ships to attack, withdraw, or hold fast.

If he decides to attack, go to section 33. If the squadron is ordered to withdraw, go to section 41. If it holds fast, continue to resolve the battle as before.

If the orbital fortress is destroyed before Ulnar orders an attack, the squadron must either launch an attack, defend itself, or attempt to withdraw. An attack is still resolved in section 33. A withdrawal is handled in section 41. If the squadron defends itself, go to section 37.

Ka'slaq ships are replaced each round out of the total force of 34 ships in their attacking flotilla. Only 10 ships attack in any given round. When no more ships are available as replacements, reduce this number as further losses occur. If by some miracle the fortress eliminates all of the alien ships without Ulnar's help, go to section 146.

Once events cause the battle to move to another section of the text, the fortress can never be used to screen the squadron or participate in any sort of combat for the remainder of this battle.

— 94 —

Hard-pressed by the alien fleet, the ships of the Legion fight with all the determination and skill that can be expected of the Star League's finest. But it isn't enough. The Ka'slaq are too powerful, too well-coordinated, and Ulnar knows that the battle is already as good as lost. Can the squadron pull out before it disintegrates, or should it keep on fighting and go down in the annals of the Legion as the stalwart warriors who fought and died heroically in a lost cause?

Ulnar doesn't want to be a dead hero. Stabbing the Fleetcomm microphone's switch savagely, he orders the squadron to withdraw. Under the cloak of Stealth mode, which distorts ultrapulse

Section 95

scans and ultrawave communications, the squadron breaks off and begins to retreat.

Ulnar watches the scanners closely, trying to make sense out of the chaos Stealth mode imposes on the squadron's own tracking systems. But the enemy seems even more confused by the jamming. After a long, tense wait, an ultrapulse operator straightens up and says, "I think we've lost them."

His words are quickly confirmed. A wave of cheering sweeps around *Valiant*'s bridge. Ulnar wishes he could join in, but he has other things to do, other decisions to make. It's his job to make sure that this check doesn't cost them the whole war.

Reduce the morale of all surviving Legion ships by 1. Go to section 47.

— 95 —

"This is Flag, calling all ships," Ulnar continues over the Fleetcomm microphone. "Disperse and prepare for battle. Repeat, disperse for engagement. Battle orders coming on-line." Ulnar enters in the alphanumeric combination that summons up the preprogrammed list of battle orders from the tactical computer and feeds them into the Fleetcomm network. He watches the instructions scroll across his monitor, knowing that the captains of each ship under his command are watching the same data and preparing their vessels for battle according to his orders.

Valiant's planning tank show the slow scattering of Legion ships as they obey these instructions, the yellow lights drawing apart. By dispersing his ships, Ulnar is deliberately sacrificing the advantages of mutual support and concentrated firepower that most formations are intended to promote. It offers the one chance he can see, though, of forcing the alien ships to break their own formation up, which might help combat the advantages of speed and coordination they enjoy. But Ulnar doesn't kid himself: It's a dangerous way to tackle an enemy as good as the Ka'slaq have proven to be.

He has plenty of time to contemplate his decision, to raise and discard alternatives, flaws, and doubts. The bridge crew runs through their final checklists, while Ulnar tunes out everything but the planning tank and the Flag command console. This battle

is crucial to the war effort; success would give the Legion a significant boost in morale and strategic position.

To resolve the battle at Baal using conventional tactics, go to section 120.

Ulnar can also choose a more unorthodox approach, using Stealth mode during the actual battle. If he chooses to do so, go to section 128.

— 96 —

The destroyers dart into the system, falling toward the star as fast as their geodyne engines can carry them. The admiral watches their progress on the planning tank and listens on ultrawave to the chatter between ships.

Then, abruptly, Ulnar's attention is drawn to static building on the ultrawave channels. Before Ulnar can shout a warning or an order to break off, the destroyers are under attack. Just as Ulnar had feared they might, the aliens detected his ships approaching the system and shut down their ships so completely that they escaped all notice—until the trap was sprung.

The destroyers are outnumbered by the aliens. Their scanners report a fleet of seventy or more cruisers as well as the huge ultrapulse echo that must be the planetoid ship seen at Endymion.

There is no way the destroyers can escape. Ulnar asks himself if he should allow them to fight alone and be destroyed, or should he try to help them by committing the battle wing to support them? Neither alternative looks promising.

If Ulnar chooses to withdraw, go to section 170.

If Ulnar decides to support the destroyers, it will take 8 combat rounds for the battlecruisers to arrive. During that time the destroyers fire once per round on Chart D. The Ka'slaq have a total of 74 ships but launch their attack with only 15. Each round, they fire on Chart A. Any Ka'slaq ships lost are replaced back up to the initial figure of 15 as long as they have more ships in reserve. Their planetoid ship does not participate in the battle. When the Legion's battle wing arrives, they break off the

Section 97

action long enough to let the surviving destroyers join these reinforcements.

Once this happens, go to section 151 if Ulnar orders his ships to attack the aliens.

If the squadron stands on the defensive, go to section 156.

If the reunited squadron tries to withdraw, go to section 170.

— 97 —

“Ultrapulse and ultrawave generators to feedback setting, maximum output,” the captain orders curtly. As his instructions are obeyed and confirmed by technicians at posts all around *Valiant*’s dimly lit bridge, Sammis nods slowly. When the last station finally checks in, he turns to Ulnar. “Stealth mode, Admiral.” Green lights on Ulnar’s command console report compliance by the rest of the squadron.

“Thank you, Captain,” Ulnar responds.

Silence falls over the bridge. The next few minutes will determine whether the squadron fights or escapes.

The waiting continues. Ulnar begins to feel optimistic; in the planning tank, alien ships are already dropping out of the tight formation and veering off in unexpected directions. The alien fleet is rapidly degenerating into a confused rabble, an effect far out of proportion with the disappearance of the Legion squadron from the alien scanners. There is more to the Ka’slaq confusion than just the loss of their opponents.

“We’ve lost them!” an ultrapulse technician cries. A wave of cheers sweeps the bridge, but the captain’s gruff orders quickly silence them.

“Stealth mode successful, Admiral,” Sammis announces pompously, bringing a smile to Ulnar’s lips.

Valiant has eluded them, making clear inroads into the Ka’slaq organization. Ulnar shifts his attention back to his own console, ready to make the next move in this dangerous game of human chess against the alien commander.

If the squadron changes its course to turn and attack the Ka'slaq force it has just eluded, go to section 33.

If Ulnar continues the withdrawal as originally planned, go to section 117.

— 98 —

A message from St. Germaine changes the complexion of the war.

“Merros to Ulnar. There has been no other sign of the aliens. Our strategic planners estimate a ninety-plus percent probability that St. Germaine will be the next Ka'slaq target. I have assembled a fleet at St. Germaine and require the presence of your squadron here. Return to St. Germaine as soon as practicable Merros, commanding defense Fleet, ending message.”

Ulnar must weigh duty against his own ideas about where the aliens will strike. The safe course is to return to St. Germaine as ordered; Merros is in charge now and bears the responsibility as well as the authority for future actions. But Ulnar has little confidence in Merros, and his conscience would not be assuaged by duty and obedience if Merros were wrong and Ulnar right about the next Ka'slaq target.

If Ulnar returns to St. Germaine with the squadron, consult the Travel Time Chart and add the time used for the journey home to the accumulated total for the rest of the campaign. If the new total is fifty-four days or less, go to section 140.

If the new total is fifty-five days or more, go to section 121.

If Ulnar disobeys orders and remains at his present location, go to section 121.

If Ulnar disobeys orders and moves to a different location, go to section 73.

— 99 —

Admiral Ulnar studies the situation carefully and comes to the conclusion that his withdrawal from Endymion was premature. With the devastation of the colony, the Ka'slaq have total control of the system. If the aliens follow conventional strategic thinking, they are likely to create a base for themselves in the conquered system before they moved on. Since they have seen the Legion run, the Ka'slaq are likely to be complacent and not about to immediately seek further conflict.

Or are they? Ulnar hesitates. Perhaps they are even now preparing an ambush to discourage new visitors. After a few minutes Ulnar reaches for the Fleetcomm microphone once more. The squadron has had time to regroup and recover; it's ready to pay the enemy a second visit.

Add one day to the accumulated time consumed by the campaign so far.

Ulnar chooses to send his destroyers (if any are available) to scout out enemy positions around Endymion. Go to section 36.

If Ulnar decides to send the entire squadron to the system in a reconnaissance, go to section 38.

— 100 —

“Ultrapulse and ultrawave generators to feedback setting, maximum output,” Sammis orders curtly. As his instructions are confirmed from technicians at their posts around *Valiant*'s bridge, the flagship's captain nods slowly to himself. Finally, as the last station checks in, he turns to Ulnar. “Stealth mode, Admiral,” he announces formally. Green lights on Ulnar's command console proclaim compliance by the other ships.

“Thank you, Captain,” Ulnar responds.

Silence falls over the bridge. The next few minutes will determine whether they will fight or escape.

The waiting continues. But as Ulnar watches the planning

tank, he makes his own predictions. He hopes fervently that the tracking crew's estimates will contradict his own observations. But they don't.

"They're matching us," a crewman says, defeat heavy in his voice. "The jamming's not working . . . they're still closing in on us."

Ulnar reaches hastily for the Fleetcomm mike and the computer keyboard. Without a preprogrammed plan to cover the precise situation, some fast improvisation and adaptation will be necessary. He must regroup the squadron for a fight.

Ulnar's side has one advantage: The alien ships don't seem to be responding as fast or as effectively as Ulnar expected. Their formations are looser, their maneuvers and response times slower and more hesitant. And they seem to be showing a marked reluctance to deviate from their original headings. It may be enough to make the difference between meeting them in formation and having to scatter and fight without organization or coordination.

Roll two dice three times, noting each of the three totals as separate numbers.

If any of these three rolls yields a result less than or equal to the Morale value of the squadron, go to section 37.

If all three rolls are greater than the squadron's Morale value, go to section 101.

— 101 —

"Enemy ships are closing fast," an ultrapulse operator reports. Whispering a curse, Ulnar swivels his chair to face the planning tank and takes in the situation with a hasty glance. He won't have time to complete his hastily composed formation orders, given the chaos reigning in most of the squadron's ships. Lacking proper coherence, demoralized by failure, the squadron is not able to react quickly enough. The lack of backup battle orders to cover every contingency adds to the confusion. Ulnar finds himself wishing that his vessels could operate with the elegant efficiency displayed by the aliens.

Shaking his head, Ulnar rejects the thought. Clearing the computer of his improvised battle orders, Ulnar sends new general instructions via the computer hookup.

"Flag calling all ships," he says. "Cancel previous orders. Scatter and fight dispersed. Prepare to engage the enemy!"

Proceed to section 95.

— 102 —

The squadron continues under the cloak of Stealth mode, pushing on toward Endymion and the alien detachment already entering orbit there. They seem oblivious to Ulnar's approach, which is just how Ulnar wants it. Perhaps the Legion has a chance to avenge Don Larno after all, he thinks hopefully.

Staring into the planning tank, Ulnar reads the symbols there with practiced ease. He plans to reveal a surprise or two that should have quite an impact on the Ka'slaq. Smiling in anticipation, Ulnar turns to his command console and prepares to issue his orders.

If Ulnar decides to attack the aliens, go to section 21.

If Ulnar wants to stand on the defensive and make the Ka'slaq come to him, go to section 28.

If the admiral loses his nerve and decides to withdraw while he has the opportunity, go to section 32.

— 103 —

Lacking a League colony or even a communications station to record and relay messages, there is no way of telling the situation to Ulnar 118's planetary system. This makes the squadron's job tricky. The admiral suspects that the aliens may use the world as an advanced base, but the only way to find out is to actually check into it.

As the squadron arrives on the fringes of the system, Ulnar assumes his battle station at the Flag command console on *Valiant*'s bridge. Long-range scans of the region have revealed nothing of interest, but scans from this distance are usually unreliable, unlike evidence gathered by ships sweeping the system on a detailed reconnaissance probe.

After careful consideration Ulnar prepares to issue the orders to launch that probe.

If Ulnar orders the squadron's destroyers to scout the Ulnar 118 system, go to section 123.

If the admiral orders the entire squadron to probe the Ulnar 118 system together, go to section 131.

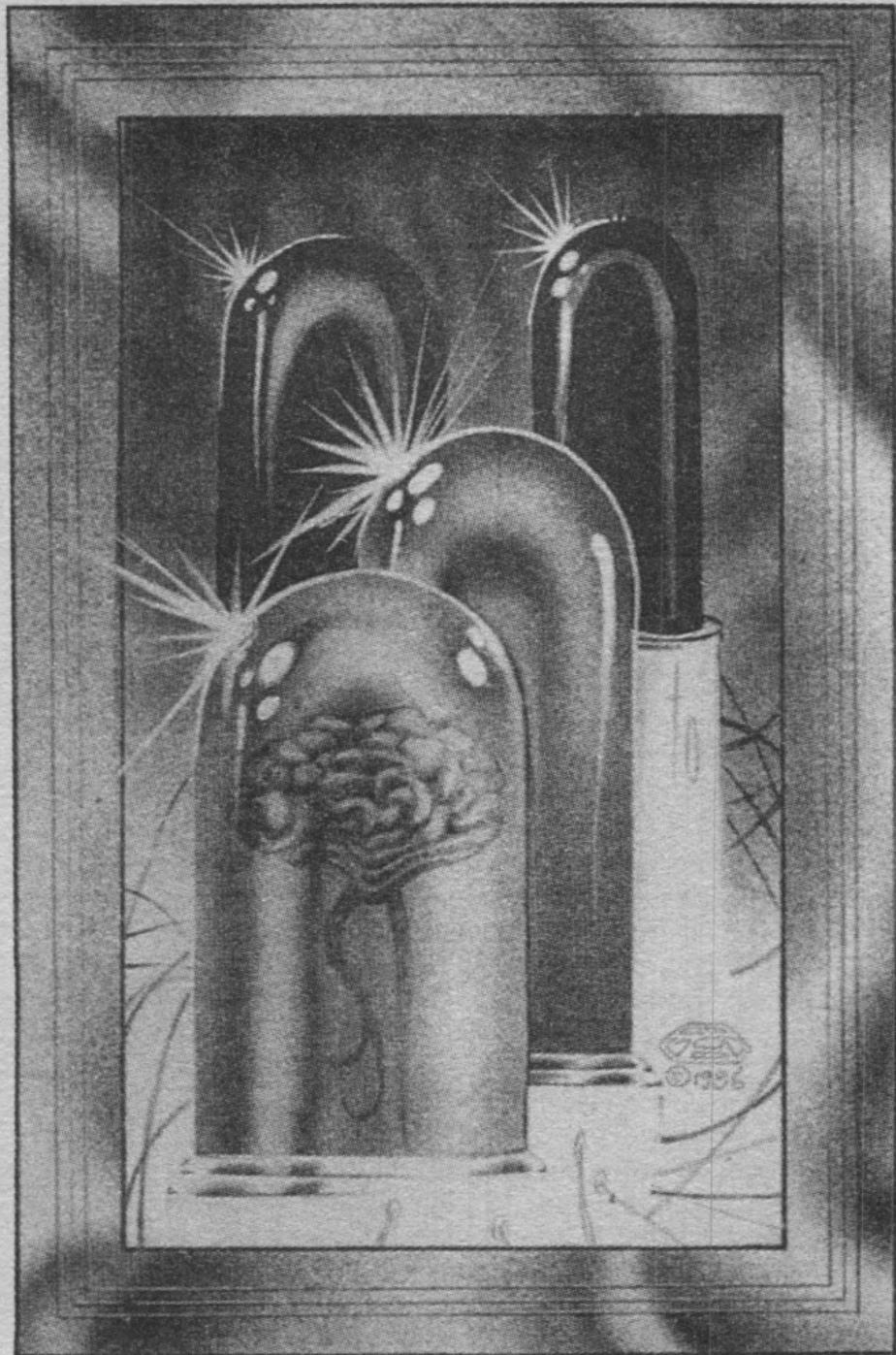
— 104 —

Weighing delay against knowledge of Ka'slaq capabilities, Ulnar decides to investigate the wrecked alien cruiser. Shortly, shifts of trained technicians and intelligence officers are involved in an organized examination of the alien vessel.

The final analyses in his hands, Ulnar smiles in satisfaction. These findings explain a great deal about the aliens and suggest ways to use their own strengths against them. Ulnar's concern is that when Merros arrives to take command, the conservative admiral may not be willing to accept the recommendations Ulnar's people have compiled. They call for highly unconventional tactics, and "Bulldog" Merros has never been known to consider the unorthodox.

The squadron's researchers have concluded that the Ka'slaq armada is not crewed by ordinary living beings at all. Instead the ships are controlled by a combination of sophisticated technology and transplanted living brains from an alien organism (believed to be an oxygen-breathing, multilimbed race with tentacular appendages), housed in life-support tanks on board their ships. Many brains are assigned to each vessel, where they are hooked up as cyborg controllers to operate every aspect of the shipboard systems. The brains aboard a single cruiser share a collective consciousness, making each individual vessel a formidable opponent in battle.

Section 104



These "living machines" communicate via ultrawave just as human ships do, but they can exchange information and orders at the speed of thought. This accounts for their impressive displays of coordination and close-formation maneuvering. However, because their telepathy is conducted on ultrawave channels, it should be possible to jam their communications through the use of the Legion's Stealth mode technique, which uses ultrawave and ultrapulse signals to confuse enemy tracking systems.

Further, the Legion research team has tentatively identified the planetoid structure as a sort of flagship, where a vast collective intelligence directs the fleet as a whole. If so, the planetoid is responsible for every major strategic and tactical decision made. Thus, the elimination of this central core would effectively disrupt the Ka'slaq armada.

The reports are less certain of alien motivations or intentions. The size of the planetoid suggests that it could carry not only military resources, but a body of ordinary, living alien civilians. Such life forms might be necessary as a source of replacement brains for the armada. One intelligence officer, going on admittedly slim data, has theorized that the cyborg brains rule the entire Ka'slaq civilization with ruthless efficiency, probably having lost most emotional traits as a result of their bodiless forms. If they have come as refugees from some natural disaster far off across space (which seems distinctly possible, since a command ship this large and slow is impractical if the aliens are a raiding party or conventional war fleet), their intentions may be genocidal. Seizing planets suitable to their kind, these dispassionate machine beings would probably have no compunctions about exterminating the present inhabitants.

Even if these suppositions don't hold up, Ulnar has learned enough to fight the Ka'slaq on more even terms. Now he must apply this knowledge effectively.

If the cruiser was discovered at Endymion, go to section 136.

If the cruiser was discovered after the fall of Baal, go to section 137.

If the cruiser was discovered at S.C. 170, go to section 138.

If the cruiser was discovered at Ulnar 118, go to section 139.

Section 105

If the cruiser was discovered after a Legion victory at any world, go to section 169.

In any event, add the roll of one die to the number of days consumed so far in the campaign before proceeding further.

— 105 —

The ambushers close fast, giving Ulnar's ships very little time to react. Before the last captain is able to confirm his position in the squadron's formation, the first annihilator beams tear through the vacuum, projecting the fury of a matter/antimatter reaction into the Legion's battle lines. The battle of Ulnar 118 has begun.

Map #4 shows the relative positions of the two forces, although it is not integral to the resolution of the battle. Resolution of combat varies according to the formation adopted by the Legion, as noted below.

Wedge: The Legion destroyers attack on the first round of Chart D. They may not attack again so long as battlecruisers are available, although combat losses can always be taken from either wing. After the first round, battlecruisers fire on all subsequent rounds on Chart C.

The Ka'slaq begin with 5 cruisers (total combat strength = 15). They fire on Chart A. After all fire is exchanged, the Ka'slaq receive 10 more cruisers each round (combat strength = 30) to add to their surviving forces, until all 74 cruisers have been committed to battle and/or lost.

Cone: Roll one die. The Legion battlecruisers fight for this number of rounds, firing on Chart D and suffering any losses inflicted by the enemy. After these rounds have been completed, roll another die and fight with destroyers on Chart D for this number of rounds. Continue alternating in this fashion for the remainder of the battle.

Ka'slaq cruisers fire on Chart A. They begin with 10 ships (total combat strength = 30). After all fire is exchanged, the Ka'slaq receive 10 more cruisers each round (combat strength

= 30) to add to their surviving forces until all 74 cruisers have been committed and/or lost.

Globe: Legion battlecruisers fire every round on Chart C. Destroyers can only fire or suffer losses if all the battlecruisers are first eliminated: Destroyers use Chart D if they have to engage.

The Ka'slaq receive 5 more cruisers (total combat strength = 15) to add to their surviving forces until all 74 cruisers have been committed and/or lost.

Cylinder: Legion battlecruisers fire on the first round of combat, using Chart D. The destroyers fire on the same chart on the next round, and the two wings continue to alternate in the same way until the battle is over. Losses are taken by the wing that fired during the round.

The Ka'slaq begin with 10 cruisers (total combat strength = 30). They fire on Chart B. After all fire is exchanged, the Ka'slaq receive 5 more cruisers each round (combat strength = 15) to add to their surviving forces until all 74 cruisers have been committed and/or lost.

Heavy Screen: Legion battlecruisers fire on Chart C and take all losses inflicted by the Ka'slaq. If all the battlecruisers are eliminated, the destroyers can begin fighting using Chart D.

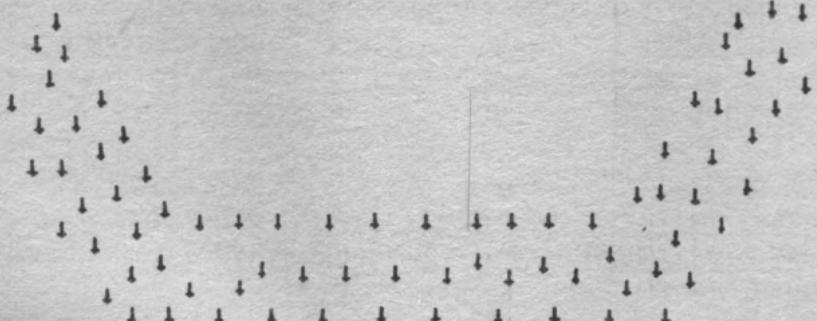
The Ka'slaq begin with 10 ships (total combat strength = 30). They fire on Chart B. After all fire is exchanged, the aliens receive 5 more cruisers each round (combat strength = 15) to add to their surviving forces until all 74 cruisers have been committed and/or lost.

Destroyer Screen: Legion destroyers engage first, using Chart D and suffering all losses inflicted by the enemy. They continue to fight until the battle ends, the Ka'slaq eliminate all of the destroyers, or Ulnar launches a special attack using the battlecruisers.

The battle wing can launch a special attack once during the battle, providing they have not engaged already and there are still destroyers in the screen. The special attack allows two rolls on Table A during one round, using the battlecruisers. Thereafter the battlecruisers continue to fight, firing once per subsequent round on Chart B. The same chart is used if the battlecruisers are drawn into the battle (through the loss of all the destroyers) before their attack can be launched. Surviving destroyers still in

Section 109

Ninth Defense Squadron



Ka'slaq Planetoid

BATTLE OF ULNAR 118

inflicted by the enemy. After these rounds have been completed, roll another die and fight with destroyers on Chart D for this number of rounds. Continue alternating in this fashion for the remainder of the battle.

Ka'slaq cruisers fire on Chart D. They begin with 10 ships (total combat strength = 30). After all fire is exchanged, the Ka'slaq receive 10 more cruisers each round (combat strength = 30) to add to their surviving forces until all 74 cruisers have been committed and/or lost.

Globe: Legion battlecruisers fire every round on Chart C. Destroyers can only fire or suffer losses if all the battlecruisers are eliminated first, and they use Chart D if they must engage.

The Ka'slaq begin with 10 cruisers (total combat strength = 30). They fire on Chart E. After all fire is exchanged, the Ka'slaq receive 5 more cruisers each round (combat strength = 15) to add to their surviving forces until all 74 cruisers (combat strength = 15) have been committed and/or lost.

Cylinder: Legion battlecruisers fire on the first round of combat, using Chart D. The destroyers fire on the same chart on the next round, and the two wings continue to alternate in the same way until the battle is over. Losses are taken by the wing that fired during the round.

The Ka'slaq begin with 10 cruisers (total combat strength = 30). They fire on Chart E. After all fire is exchanged, the Ka'slaq receive 5 more cruisers each round (combat strength = 15) to add to their surviving forces until all 74 cruisers have been committed and/or lost.

Heavy Screen: Legion battlecruisers fire on Chart C and take all losses inflicted by the Ka'slaq. If all the battlecruisers are eliminated, the destroyers can begin fighting. They use Chart D.

The Ka'slaq begin with 10 ships (total combat strength = 30). They fire on Chart E. After all fire is exchanged, the aliens receive 5 more cruisers each round (combat strength = 15) to add to their surviving forces until all 74 cruisers have been committed and/or lost.

Destroyer Screen: Legion destroyers engage first. Using Chart D, they suffer all losses inflicted by the enemy. They continue to fight until the battle ends, the Ka'slaq eliminate all of the

Section 109

destroyers, or Ulnar launches a special attack using the battlecruisers.

The battle wing can launch a special attack once during the battle, providing they have not engaged already and there are still destroyers in the screen. The special attack allows two rolls on Table A during any one round, using the battlecruisers. Thereafter, the battlecruisers continue to fight, firing once per subsequent round on Chart B. The same chart is used if the battlecruisers are drawn into the battle (through the loss of all the destroyers) before their attack can be launched. Surviving destroyers still in action when a special attack is launched can only fight again if all the battlecruisers are destroyed.

Throughout the entire action the Ka'slaq fire once per round on Chart D. They begin with 10 cruisers (total combat strength = 30). After all fire is exchanged, the aliens receive 5 more cruisers each round (combat strength = 15) to add to their surviving forces until all 74 cruisers have been committed and/or lost.

Dispersed: Legion destroyers attack on the first round, firing on Chart C. Battlecruisers fire on Chart B on the next round, and the two wings continue to alternate fire thereafter until all of one wing's ships are lost; then the survivors fire every round. Losses are taken from whichever wing fired in the current round.

The Ka'slaq begin with 20 ships (total combat strength = 60). They fire on Chart E. Each round, after all fire is exchanged, roll one die and add that number of cruisers (each one with a firepower of 3) to the surviving engaged forces until all 74 cruisers have been committed and/or lost.

In all cases reduce the total number of alien ships available (but not the initial numbers) by the number of cruisers eliminated by destroyers prior to the main battle, where applicable.

Resolve the battle according to the game rules, within the guidelines provided above.

The squadron can attempt to withdraw at the end of any combat round. To resolve a retreat, go to section 118.

The squadron may be required to attempt a retreat. At the end of any round in which the Legion loses more ships than do the Ka'slaq, roll two dice and compare the result to the squadron's Morale value. If the roll is greater than the Morale value, go to

section 118. Results less than or equal to this value have no effect, so retreat remains voluntary.

If the squadron continues to fight until all Legion ships have been destroyed, go to section 92.

If the Legion ships eliminate all of the Ka'slaq cruisers, go to section 87. This is the only situation in which the alien planetoid ship can actually be attacked. The ship remains uninvolved in the battle until all defending cruisers have been eliminated.

— 110 —

The united squadron plunges into the star system, every scanner and sensor array reaching out to examine Ulnar 118, its planets, and the vast empty tracts of space that surround and separate them. Looking around *Valiant*'s bridge, Ulnar is aware of the air of tense expectation that fills the whole control center. On the flagship, and on all the other vessels of the squadron, the men of the Legion are eager to fight the enemy. If the Ka'slaq are here, the admiral will have his hands full controlling them. And if the aliens aren't here, the blow to morale will be a severe one. Ulnar has already made mistakes; if he is wrong about Ulnar 118 now, his authority over these men will be weaker still.

"Mass detectors report objects bearing 163 by 092," a crewman reports.

"Verified," an ultrapulse operator adds. A series of lights in red appear in the holographic tank. A few crewmen look up expectantly.

"Asteroid belt," Captain Sammis remarks.

Ulnar nods. "The bearing's correct," he replies.

"Probably just random junk," the captain continues. He pauses. "Of course . . ."

"If you were going to hide a fleet," Ulnar says, picking up the thought, "an asteroid belt is the best place to do it."

"Concentrate scanning on those objects," Sammis barks to the bridge crew. "I want them analyzed down to the last atom!"

Thinking back over Endymion and Baal, Ulnar swivels toward the communications console. "Anything odd on ultrawave?" he asks.

Section 111

The operator shakes his head, uncomfortable at the admiral's direct attention.

"First approximations coming in," another scanner technician announces. "Nearest object. Composition: metallic. Ultrapulse echo indicates a regular shape. Temperature and radiation levels anomalous . . . it's definitely an artifact."

"I'm getting energy surges at bearing 163 by 092," another technician chimes in.

The ultrawave operator puts a hand to his ear. "Static, sir. Regular patterns—it's not natural either."

With a great show of nonchalance, Sammis turns to Ulnar. "Admiral, we have found the aliens."

In the planning tank red lights rapidly switch to blue on all sides. The Ulnar 118 system is an elaborate trap, and the Ka'slaq have sprung it perfectly. Now Ulnar must attempt to keep his squadron from being overwhelmed by seventy or more ships.

If Ulnar orders his squadron to attack the enemy, go to section 151.

If Ulnar instructs the squadron to stand on the defensive, go to section 156.

A withdrawal is not possible at this time. The Ka'slaq will be able to get in at least one round of combat first. Retreat during combat may still be possible.

— 111 —

"Recon wing, this is Flag," Ulnar says, speaking on the Fleetcomm circuit. "Destroyers to deploy sensor arrays and probe the Baal system. Scan for any sign of activity, human or alien, and report the presence and location of any vessel. All ships of the battle wing will remain in reserve." He pauses, rubbing his forehead briefly. "Don't try to be heroes; this is a scouting mission, not the charge that wins the war. Avoid battle if possible, unless you hear different from me."

Admiral Ulnar breaks the communications link and settles back into his seat. He had struggled long and hard with his conscience before deciding to send in the destroyers by them-

selves. Splitting his forces in this manner worries him, but the possibility of an ambush wiping out the entire squadron in a single blow worries him even more. This way he can preserve a few options if the enemy attack his ships. He can support the destroyers or withdraw his battlecruisers intact as the situation dictates. But he doesn't relish the thought of leaving the recon wing.

In the planning tank the symbols representing the squadron's destroyers slowly pull away from the main body of the squadron. Watching them begin their plunge starward, Ulnar finds himself wishing he could be with them. It would give him something to do besides watch them fly on perhaps their last mission.

Proceed to section 126.

— 112 —

The squadron continues under the cloak of Stealth mode, pushing on toward the mysterious alien planetoid and the Ka'slaq ships clustered around it like drones. They seem totally oblivious to Ulnar's approach, which is just how Ulnar wants it. Perhaps the Legion has a chance to avenge Don Larno, he thinks hopefully.

Staring into the planning tank, Ulnar reads the symbols there with practiced ease. For the battle ahead he plans to reveal a surprise or two that should have quite an impact on the Ka'slaq. Smiling in anticipation, Ulnar turns to his command console and prepares to issue his orders.

If Ulnar decides to attack the aliens, go to section 21.

If Ulnar wants to stand on the defensive and make the aliens attack the squadron, go to section 28.

If Ulnar loses his nerve and decides to withdraw while he has the opportunity, go to section 32.

— 113 —

In the planning tank a handful of Legion ships show the characteristic fuzzy patterns of vessels in Stealth mode and begin to split off from the main body. But the majority of the squadron doesn't change course at all, and the Stealth generators remain off. They continue to steer straight for the core of the ambushing alien fleet.

Ulnar curses silently. "Flag to all ships," he spits. "Repeating orders. Withdraw immediately. I *repeat*, withdraw!"

Sammis is beside him, the sharp angles of his face holding a mixture of diffidence and grim determination. "They won't respond, Admiral," he says quietly.

"Why not?" Ulnar demands. "What's wrong?"

"There was talk of this during the last passage. They plan to fight. Whether you want to or not."

"Do you know what the penalty for mutiny is, Captain?" Ulnar asks.

"There are higher duties, Admiral."

"And *Valiant*? Do you plan to fight against orders, as well?"

"I would rather fight under orders, sir," he says reluctantly.

"That's no answer."

"It's all the answer I can give you, Admiral." Sammis is clearly determined to carry out this strange mutiny. He leans past Ulnar and switches on the microphone. "All ships, Flag calling. Cancel previous orders. Stand by for new instructions."

He switches it off again. "Who should issue those orders, Admiral?" he asks evenly.

If Ulnar chooses to change his instructions and order an attack, go to section 151.

If Ulnar relents and orders the squadron to adopt a defensive formation, go to section 156.

If the admiral refuses to acknowledge this mutiny and does not change his withdrawal order, go to section 181.

— 114 —

Ulnar studies the computer's graphic simulation of the gigantic alien ship. Scans have pinpointed a powerful source of ultrawave signals located in a complex of towers and domes extending over an area almost a mile across. The computer has assigned an eighty percent chance that the main control center for the vessel is somewhere within this large area. The admiral cannot find any other obvious targets within easy reach; the ship's geodynes are buried somewhere deep in the core of the structure, and the purpose and layout of the rest of the planetoid is unclear.

He could order a bombardment, but that could reduce the control center to slag, condemning the beings aboard the alien vessel to death. Just retribution, perhaps, for the destruction the Ka'slaq had caused, but Ulnar was reluctant to go that far. The aliens might not revere life, but the Legion had higher standards.

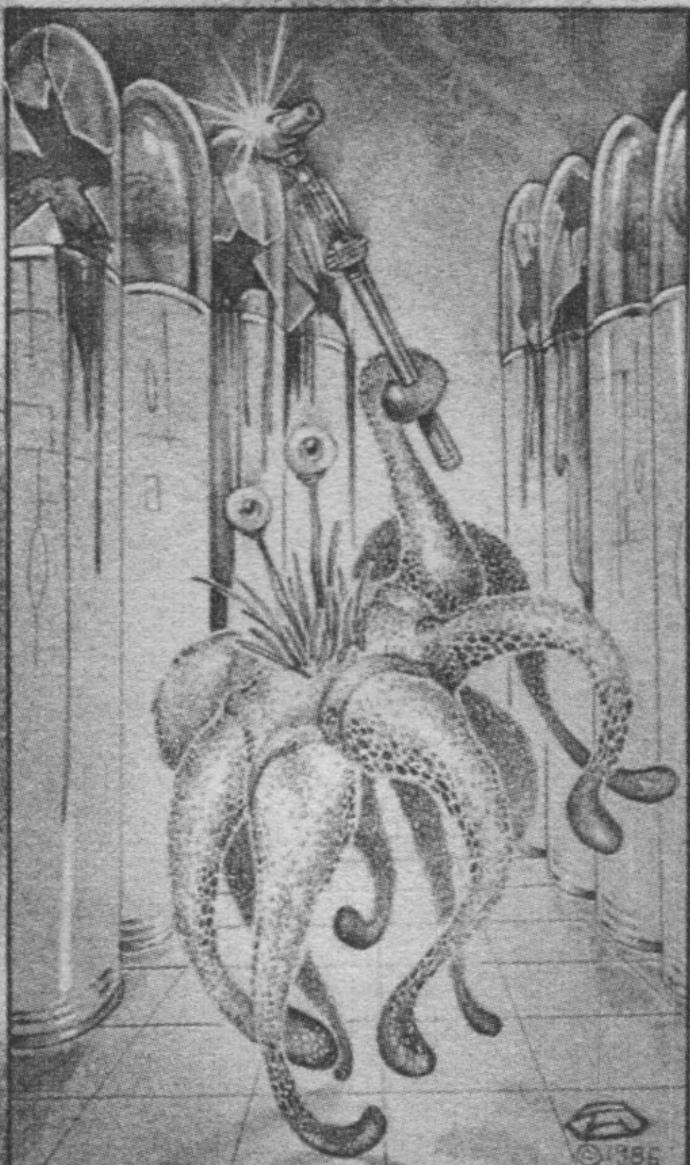
Ulnar must ensure that the huge structure has no more power to harm the Legion or the Star League. He intends to secure the vessel by sending men on board. In his tired mind he likens his plan to sending a swarm of mosquitoes to land on an elephant, but he can see no other way to secure the alien vessel without destroying it. He begins to issue orders.

The battlecruisers close in first, ready to unleash a bombardment at the first sign of trouble. But the alien ship does nothing, and soon troops in space armor issue onto the surface of the structure. Seeking a way into the area identified as a command center, they use proton drills to open a hole in the hull, then disappear into their improvised doorway.

Listening to the ultrawave circuit the boarders are using, Ulnar can follow their progress into the heart of a wondrous chamber, a room so large that it might be an open prairie on a planet's surface. Inside they find row upon row of tanklike containers filled with liquid and living tissues. The medical officer refers to them as brains. These brain tanks are connected to a complex array of circuitry: miles of wires, computer boards, and instruments of unknown purpose, all of them evidently controlled by the bodiless creatures in the nutrient tanks.

The boarding party also finds a race of multilimbed beings similar in appearance to starfish. Ten tentacular appendages are

Section 114



© 386

used for motion and manipulation. Wielding crude clubs, these aliens have burst into the command center and begun smashing the brain tanks. One of their number, speaking through a translation device, tells the Legion party that his people have endured the tyranny of these "masters," an oligarchy of brain-machine hybrids whose emotionless rule has relegated the race from which they sprang to slavery. In the crisis that accompanied the loss of their cyborg-controlled cruiser fleet, the rulers relaxed their control over the slave race, allowing a long-smoldering rebellion to burst into flames at last.

With Legion aid, the aliens can be liberated from this tyranny; the threat of the Ka'slaq invasion can be put to rest for all time.

Proceed to section 171.

— 115 —

Ulnar feels that little purpose would be served by moving again; in his mind, St. Germaine is still the best place to anticipate further Ka'slaq advances. He is fairly sure that the aliens will attack here sooner or later. The Ninth Squadron remains in orbit, awaiting the word that will send them into action once more. Meanwhile, the admiral studies incoming news and information in hopes of discovering a clue that will help him decide how to defeat the aliens.

Add one day to the total accumulated number of days in the campaign so far.

If the new total is less than thirty-six days, go to section 124.

If the new total is thirty-six through forty-five days and Baal is the last place where the Ka'slaq were seen, go to section 127.

If the Ka'slaq were last seen somewhere else, go to section 124.

If the new total is forty-six through fifty-five days, go to section 119.

— 116 —

“Flag calling all ships,” Ulnar says, speaking on the Fleetcomm circuit. “The squadron will conduct a reconnaissance of the star system. Deploy all sensors and scan for any activity. Report any contacts to me at once.” Ulnar licks his dry lips before continuing.

“This is a scouting mission. Battle is to be avoided unless there is no way out or you receive orders to the contrary from me. I want no heroes, so stick to the mission and stay out of trouble.” There were the usual number of hotheads in the squadron, and Ulnar wants them to know just where they stand *before* they start for Baal.

The admiral gives the necessary orders to send the whole squadron plunging into the star system, then leans back in his chair and closes his eyes momentarily. If his worst fears are right, the Ka’slaq may have set an ambush somewhere in the system. It has taken all his resolve to hazard the squadron this way. Though he has never been a believer in dividing his forces unnecessarily, Ulnar can’t help but wonder if it would have been better to follow the standard doctrine and employ the recon wing destroyers to scout separately from the main body.

Valiant and the rest of the squadron all gather speed together as they plunge toward Ulnar 118. Everyone knows they are committed now. If the Ka’slaq are here, the squadron will discover them soon.

Proceed to section 126.

— 117 —

Clear of Baal, the squadron escapes disaster. But the cost is high, in morale as well as in lives. The retreat from Baal is a defeat, pure and simple, and even though the squadron is preserved to fight again, Vice-Admiral David Ulnar feels like a traitor to his commission, his planet, indeed to the entire human race. Merros will undoubtably feel the same when the news reaches him.

Staring at the ceiling of his cabin a few hours after the

reassembly of the squadron in the fringes of the Baal system, Ulnar thinks back over the Ka'slaq assault and its aftermath. After the retreat of Ulnar's ships, the planet's defenses had proven unequal to the alien onslaught. The orbital fortress, commanded by the bitter but stubborn Commandant Rovin, held out for a long time after its offensive weapons were silenced, but eventually determination and Legion traditions were overcome by sheer firepower; without the orbital fortress, the linchpin of the colony's defenses, Baal was unable to mount any kind of resistance.

The final ultrawave messages from Baal would haunt Ulnar until he died, filled with the final recriminations of doomed people. As at Endymion, the Ka'slaq had settled into orbit to launch a savage bombardment against carefully selected targets. From the tenor of the last transmissions it was likely that Baal had been reduced as completely and as ruthlessly as the earlier colony.

Ulnar has retired to consider his next move. With Baal destroyed, the aliens threaten a number of other planets. Which will be their next target? And where was the bulk of the Ka'slaq fleet while their detached flotilla was attacking here? If Ulnar allows another planet to fall to the invaders, the sector will collapse completely. And so, too, will the Star League's hopes of holding the aliens along the frontier. To protect the Earth from the fate that has overtaken Baal, Ulnar has to outguess his enemies and stand against them. There is no other choice.

If Ulnar chooses to remain at Baal, go to section 167.

If he decides to have the squadron return to St. Germaine, go to section 74.

If the admiral orders his ships to Ulnar 118, go to section 63.

If the squadron is instructed to travel to S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If Endymion is selected as the squadron's next destination, go to section 53.

Should the admiral issue orders sending the squadron to any other destination, go to section 73.

In any event, reduce the squadron's Morale value by 1 point.

— 118 —

The ships of the Legion put up a desperate resistance to the superior numbers of their enemies, but for all their determination and spirit, they are outmatched. Ships are consumed by the fireballs of induced antimatter reactions from the touch of Ka'slaq annihilators, and their darting cruisers drive deep into the Legion battle line. Finally Ulnar can take no more of it.

"Flag to all ships," he orders at last. "Discontinue the action. Repeat, discontinue the action." The computer is signaling the same order as he speaks, confirming his directive. "Break off and regroup at rendezvous point six eight. All ships are to withdraw immediately. Message ends."

He knows the fireaters among them will resist his order, but even the most hotheaded captain in the squadron will recognize their situation is hopeless. Sure enough, the Legion's ships begin to sheer off and pick up speed while Stealth mode jams enemy tracking systems to help them escape. The Ka'slaq ships seem confused by the jamming, breaking formation and casting about like bloodhounds searching for a scent. There is no guarantee that Stealth mode will mask the squadron's retreat, but Ulnar can see that there is a good chance. A few more minutes will tell them for sure.

Roll two dice and compare the result to the Stealth value for the Legion ships. If the result is greater than the value, return to the battle resolution process as before.

If the result is less than or equal to the Stealth value, go to section 174.

— 119 —

The massive geofractor complex in the St. Germaine system provides a link to the rest of the League, a matter-transport network that allows items large and small to be transferred instantaneously across countless parsecs. The geodesic technology of this ultimate achievement is understood little better today

than it was in the time of Dr. Eleroud, the genius who discovered the principle, but geofractor complexes have played an important part in opening the stars to humanity.

Now those same geofractors are being harnessed to defend the Star League. Although their potential as weapons has been defeated by the science of the Ka'slaq, these long-range transporters work to funnel in ships, supplies, and men to defend St. Germaine from attack.

Now, as Ulnar's squadron finishes final refitting and resupply chores at the Legion orbital base, the geofractors bring a magnificent new ship into existence nearby. She is the *Pax*, the newest and largest battleship in the Legion, twice the size and firepower of *Valiant*, and the pride of the Star League. On board, arriving to take personal command in the battles to come, is Admiral J. T. Merros.

Although Merros and Ulnar have been on bad terms for years, they have no need to cooperate closely at St. Germaine. Ulnar retains control over his old squadron and the mobile elements of the St. Germaine garrison, which Merros has formed into a reserve. There are three other squadrons of equal size assigned to front-line defenses, ready to go into battle when the aliens arrive. Ulnar isn't happy with the arrangement. His squadron has been closer to the aliens than any of these newcomers, and ought to be more qualified to deal with them, but he knows enough to avoid protesting openly. For the moment, Ulnar and his squadron concentrate on efficiency and preparedness, and keep out of their new leader's way.

Ulnar dutifully files reports and recommendations based on the data his ships have collected, calling attention to those elements of each encounter on record that might provide a clue to Ka'slaq weaknesses. Merros, however, seems more concerned with having the proper reports of inventories, personnel changes, and requisitioned equipment.

Then the Ka'slaq arrive.

The first warning is from lightly armed picket ships posted on the fringes of the system. Their detection apparatus notices the ultrawave disturbances first, and four separate ships promptly relay a warning to the fleet. Admiral Merros reacts promptly, ordering his three front-line squadrons to break orbit immediately and set course toward the area of the disturbance. Ulnar and his squadron receive curt orders to remain in the vicinity of St. Germaine and await further orders.

Called to *Valiant*'s bridge out of a sound sleep and a pleasant

dream of home, Ulnar has trouble believing the orders. He sits heavily in the chair at his command console. The full impact of what Merros is doing hits him and he feels years of anger and frustration boiling up all at once.

"Pax Eternal!" he says, the words loud in the sudden silence that descends on the bridge. His clenched hand slams down on the console. "Get me Admiral Merros," Ulnar continues to the communications technician. "And hurry!"

Merros had been exuding confidence in his messages and news broadcast appearances these last few days. He commanded one of the largest forces ever assembled by the Legion of Space, a force that included several new and powerful vessels. Confidence, and contempt for David Ulnar, was making Merros sally forth against the enemy with nearly a quarter of his ships held back so far from the battle that they would be totally useless. Ulnar knew what the aliens could do; Merros would need every ship at St. Germaine to have a hope of success.

"Admiral Merros," the technician says. Ulnar's monitor lights up to show the narrow features and wispy white hair of the admiral.

"What is it, Ulnar?" the older man asks irritably.

"Admiral," Ulnar begins, trying not to let his anger show. "About your orders for the reserve squadron . . ."

"Well?" Merros snaps as Ulnar hesitates.

"Sir, based on everything I've seen of the Ka'slaq, I feel we cannot afford to underestimate their abilities. I believe my squadron should be employed in the battle line—"

"You've had your chance to stop the aliens, Ulnar," Merros responds maliciously. "Now you'll obey orders and stay out of my way! You will remain at St. Germaine as instructed, and that is final! Ending message." The screen goes blank before Ulnar can reply.

There is silence on the bridge. All eyes are on David Ulnar. Most of them have seen the battle orders Merros has already issued; he's sending his ships against the Ka'slaq in a battlecruiser phalanx, with orders to engage the enemy cruisers in a straightforward, conventional battle. He seems to have taken no notice of past clashes between Ka'slaq and human ships, ignoring every anomaly, every clue to their strengths and weaknesses, and every recommendation Ulnar and his officers have submitted to him. Ulnar knows, as surely as if he had already watched it played through, that Merros has no hope of winning.

Ulnar knows by now what Don Larno knew when the aliens

first appeared at Endymion. The Ka'slaq planetoid or mother ship is the real key to the invading fleet. As long as it remains out of combat, the enemy is secure. And conventional tactics have no chance against the coordination and power of the Ka'slaq. Merros doesn't seem to realize this, and he is about to throw away the last chance the Legion has for a victory in this war.

That leaves David Ulnar with a painful decision to make. Every impulse of a long and dedicated career urges him to obey orders, to let Merros call for assistance as or when he needs it. But another part of him wants to ignore Admiral Merros and take the squadron into battle against the alien planetoid ship, to save Merros and the ships he commands from certain disaster. The wrong choice could ruin Ulnar's career, lose the battle and St. Germaine, and even shatter the whole Star League. But it is a choice Ulnar must now make.

If Ulnar decides to take the safe course and follow the admiral's orders, go to section 154.

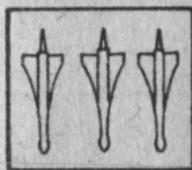
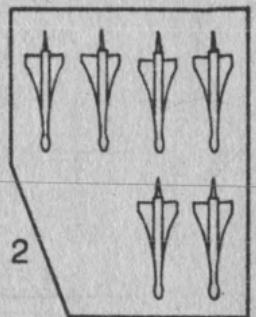
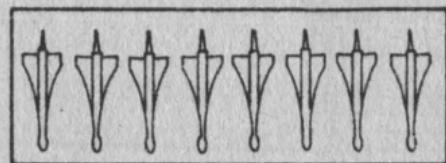
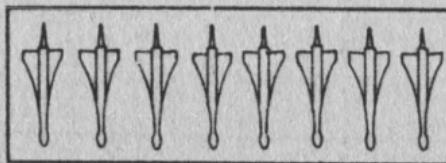
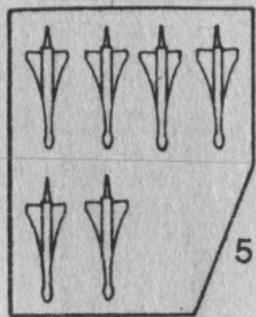
If Ulnar disobeys Merros and leads his squadron into battle against the alien planetoid, go to section 176.

If Ulnar chooses to withdraw from St. Germaine rather than standing and awaiting the battle's outcome, go to section 164.

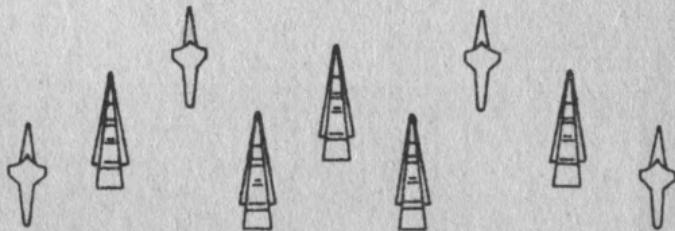
— 120 —

The ship symbols in the planning tank draw slowly together and begin shifting color as they come within combat range. Ulnar adjusts the scale of the tank to show a close-up of the battle. Suddenly the tank comes alive with new symbols that record the energy discharges of Legion vortex guns and Ka'slaq annihilators. It's far too late now for second thoughts; the battle for Baal has begun.

The map shows the deployment of the alien ships. They are formed into a rigid phalanx, and throughout the engagement they deviate from this formation and their assigned missions only if actually in battle with Legion ships. They are divided into six groups, as shown.



KA'SLAQ



Ninth Defense Flotilla

If the Legion ships have adopted a defensive formation (globe, cylinder, battlecruiser screen), the force they engage first will be chosen randomly by the roll of one die. The enemy attackers are found by using the sector number on the map.

If the squadron is formed in a wedge, cone, or destroyer screen formation, Ulnar chooses any one of the enemy groups to fight against.

A dispersed squadron must spread out to engage the entire enemy flotilla. Ulnar may allocate his ships in any manner desired, provided each of the six sectors is engaged by at least one Legion ship. If this option is in use, the resolution of the battle is conducted under a special set of guidelines, described later, which differ somewhat from the standard methods of combat resolution.

Normally, though, only one enemy force is engaged at a time. Once the Legion is matched with an opponent, resolve the battle conventionally. The Legion fires first with whichever wing is eligible to fire; then the Ka'slaq cruisers fighting them return fire. One exchange of this kind is a combat round.

The Legion forces include all of Ulnar's ships, plus the Baal garrison. However, one battlecruiser (Defiant) and one destroyer (Anthar) are deleted from the garrison before the battle, and Baal's orbital fortress cannot engage in a conventional space battle. Ka'slaq forces attack in the numbers shown for each group. If the aliens suffer casualties due to combat with the orbital fortress, their losses are subtracted from group 3 first, then group 4, then group 2, then group 5, and so on. A group must be completely wiped out before losses can be taken from another group. If there are groups reduced to zero ships, they are not eligible as targets for battle. Roll again when random assignment matches the squadron with such a group. Each Ka'slaq cruiser has a firepower of 8.

Wedge: Legion destroyers attack on the first round on Chart C. They may not attack again so long as battlecruisers remain available, although combat losses can be subtracted from either wing. After the first round, battlecruisers fire for the remaining rounds on Chart B. Ka'slaq cruisers use Chart C.

Cone: Roll one die. The Legion battlecruisers fight for this number of rounds, firing on Chart C and suffering any losses inflicted by the enemy in response. After these rounds are completed, roll another die and fight with destroyers on the same

Section 120

chart for this number of rounds. If necessary, continue alternating in this way until the end of the battle. The Ka'slaq cruisers fire back on Chart B.

Globe: Legion battlecruisers fire every round on Chart B. Destroyers can only fire or suffer losses if all the battlecruisers are first eliminated; they use Chart D if they must engage. The Ka'slaq cruisers fire each round on Chart B.

Cylinder: Legion battlecruisers fire on the first round of combat, using Chart C. The destroyers fire on the same chart on the next round, and the two wings continue to alternate in the same way until the battle is over. Casualties are absorbed by whichever wing has fired in the current round. The Ka'slaq use Chart B for their attacks.

Heavy Screen: Legion battlecruisers fire on Chart B and take all losses inflicted by the Ka'slaq. If all the battlecruisers are eliminated, the destroyers can enter the fray, firing on Chart D. The Ka'slaq cruisers fire on Chart B.

Destroyer Screen: Legion destroyers engage first, using Chart C and suffering all losses inflicted by the aliens. They continue to fight until the battle is over, the Ka'slaq eliminate all of these light ships, or Ulnar launches a special attack using the battlecruisers.

The battle wing can launch a special attack once during the battle, provided they have not suffered any losses and there are still destroyers left to cover them. The special attack allows two rolls on Table A during one round, using the battlecruisers. Thereafter the battlecruisers continue to fight, firing once per subsequent round on Chart B. The same chart is used if the battlecruisers are drawn into the battle (through the loss of all the destroyers) before their attack can be launched. Surviving destroyers still in action when a special attack is launched can only engage again if all the battlecruisers are destroyed.

Throughout the entire action, the Ka'slaq cruisers fire once per round on Chart B.

Standard Battle Notes: When any of the formations detailed above is used (but see *Dispersed* below), the engagement is limited to the Ka'slaq group in contact with the squadron. The

Ka'slaq do not receive reinforcements. If all the ships of a given *Ka'slaq* group are eliminated, the squadron can engage another group if (and only if) it is in wedge, cone, destroyer screen, or heavy screen formation. Cylinders and globes cannot engage additional *Ka'slaq* groups after the first force is eliminated.

Each group is engaged separately, but in the same formation. A destroyer screen can have only one special attack in the whole battle no matter how many groups are fought. *Ka'slaq* groups cannot be attacked until the previously encountered force is completely eliminated, and only one unit at a time can be involved in battle. Dispersed squadron formations are handled differently, as discussed below.

Dispersed: One or more ships are deployed against each enemy group. During each combat round one exchange of fire is conducted with each of the six *Ka'slaq* sectors, beginning with #1 and proceeding in numeric order to #6. In each of these exchanges the Legion fires first, choosing which type of ship (destroyers or battlecruisers) will fire and take losses there. Not all engagements need to use the same ship types. Legion battlecruisers fire on Chart C, destroyers on Chart D. *Ka'slaq* in all engagements use Chart B.

If all *Ka'slaq* ships in a given group are eliminated, all Legion ships engaged against them may shift to any other part of the battle where vessels of both sides are still fighting one another. If the *Ka'slaq* eliminate all opposing Legion ships in a sector, they may not be attacked again.

Resolve the battle as discussed above, using standard game rules with the described modifications.

The squadron can attempt to withdraw at the end of any combat round. To resolve a retreat, go to section 141.

The squadron may be required to attempt a retreat. At the end of any round in which total Legion ship losses exceed the total of *Ka'slaq* losses, roll two dice and compare the result to the Morale value of the squadron. If the roll is greater than the Morale value, go to section 141. Results less than or equal to the Morale value have no effect, leaving retreat a voluntary, not mandatory, action.

Section 121

If all Legion ships are destroyed in battle, go to section 92.

If there are any Ka'slaq sectors containing ships not engaged by the Legion, at any time on or after 20 combat rounds have passed, go to section 166. Note that this happens automatically once the fighting is concluded when the Legion ships are in globe or cylinder formation, since they cannot attack any group after the first combat is resolved.

If the Legion succeeds in wiping out all of the Ka'slaq ships before the aliens can accomplish the provisions of the paragraph above, go to section 146.

— 121 —

Ulnar has made a fatal mistake. While he keeps his ships waiting on the wrong side of the sector, the Ka'slaq assembled near St. Germaine launch a ruthless attack on the sector capital. Although Admiral Merros has assembled his battle fleet, it is outmatched. Perhaps with Ulnar's squadron or the specialized knowledge of combat against the aliens it has acquired during the campaign, the Legion might fare better. As it is, Ulnar's squadron survives intact . . . but it can do no good. The decisive battle is already under way, and nothing Ulnar can do now will alter the battle or retrieve the situation after the inevitable defeat of Admiral Merros.

Under ordinary circumstances David Ulnar would be court-martialed on charges ranging from gross negligence to deliberate disobedience of orders to cowardice in the face of the enemy. As it is, no court is likely to try him, because a Ka'slaq victory will probably mean the reduction of the human race through the same type of merciless devastation already directed at Endymion and Baal. In all likelihood Ulnar won't face a court, but when the Ka'slaq finally catch and kill him, he will die knowing that any surviving pockets of human refugees are likely to revile him as a bigger traitor than Eric the Pretender.

Go to section 159.

— 122 —

Under the cloak of Stealth mode the squadron eludes the alien ships sent to attack them. As Ulnar watches their tracks in the planning tank, he pays close attention to the way Stealth mode seems to hamper their coordination. The tight formations and flawless cooperation between ships, the whole essence of Ka'slaq superiority, seems to have vanished.

Ulnar grins wolfishly. With this unexpected advantage he has a weapon worth using. Perhaps now the Legion will have a chance to avenge Don Larno and his men. At any rate, it offers a chance to strike a telling blow against a confused, disorganized foe. Ulnar switches on the Fleetcomm microphone.

“All ships, this is Flag,” he says. “Cancel previous orders. We will turn on the nearest enemy division, after all. They’re in for the surprise of their lives.”

He stares into the planning tank, reading the symbols there with practiced ease. For the battle ahead he plans to teach the Ka'slaq a lesson in Legion fighting skills they won’t soon forget. Still smiling, he turns back to the command console and prepares to issue his orders.

If Ulnar decides to attack the aliens, go to section 21.

If Ulnar wants to stand on the defensive and make the enemy attack the squadron, go to section 28.

If the admiral reconsiders again and orders his ships to move to the defense of Endymion, reduce the squadron’s Morale value by 1 and go to section 26.

If Ulnar reconsiders yet again and orders the squadron to move against the alien planetoid, reduce the squadron’s Morale value by 1 and go to section 23.

If the admiral loses his nerve and decides to withdraw while he has the opportunity, go to section 32.

— 123 —

“This is Flag,” Ulnar begins, speaking on the Fleetcomm command circuit. “Recon wing, investigate the star system. Deploy sensor arrays and scan for enemy ships or activity. Squadron battlecruisers are to remain in reserve. Avoid battle if possible, unless I order otherwise. This is a scouting run, not a chance to play hero.” Too many of Ulnar’s destroyer captains were more interested in glory than common sense.

Sending in the recon wing alone had been a difficult choice to make. It is never wise to split a squadron when there is a chance of enemy attacks, but Ulnar is painfully aware that this one squadron is all that can defend the sector until Merros mobilizes. If there is an ambush in the star system, he can’t afford to let all of his ships be overwhelmed. Such cold, calculated sacrifice of men’s lives doesn’t do Ulnar’s self-image any good, but it’s the kind of choice a good leader must steel himself to make.

The tactical planning tank shows the squadron’s destroyers pulling away from their heavier consorts, bound inward on their mission. Ulnar gives a brief, silent prayer that they will all return safely.

If the total time elapsed in the campaign so far amounts to less than thirty-six days, go to section 86.

If the total time elapsed in the campaign is from thirty-six to fifty days, go to section 96.

If the total time consumed thus far by the campaign amounts to fifty-one or more days, go to section 106.

— 124 —

No fresh information has come in thus far. The Ka'slaq have attempted no new attacks, to Ulnar's knowledge. With no further data to go on, Ulnar's options seem more like shots in the dark than reasonable possibilities, but he must make a decision. What should the squadron do now?

If Ulnar decides to remain at St. Germaine, go to section 115.

If Ulnar wants to have the squadron visit S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If the squadron is ordered to travel to Ulnar 118, go to section 63.

If Ulnar's orders are to travel to the Baal system, go to section 58.

If the admiral chooses to send the squadron to Endymion, go to Section 53.

If the Ninth Defense Squadron is ordered to any other destination, go to section 73.

— 125 —

By violating orders, Ulnar places himself in a dangerous position. He is gambling everything—his career, his honor, the much-maligned family name, and, above all, the safety of the Ninth Sector and of the Star League itself—on knowing better than Admiral Merros. It is essential that the gamble pay off; success is the one sure justification for any act, even disobedience.

But the days stretch on with no sign of the Ka'slaq fleet. However, word of disasters elsewhere arrive, along with Admiral Merros's displeasure at his subordinate's disobedience. Vice-Admiral David Ulnar is ordered in no uncertain terms to lay down his command in favor of the next-highest ranking officer in

the Ninth Squadron. Ulnar is to take a fast courier ship to the geofractor complex at St. Germaine, and from thence to the Solar system. While he faces a Court of Inquiry into his conduct, the new squadron commander will continue efforts to slow down the Ka'slaq so Merros can assemble his fleet for decisive action.

The Legion encourages dedication to ideals rather than to individuals, and Ulnar's officers are too well-trained to consider ignoring Merros. For Vice-Admiral Ulnar the war against the Ka'slaq is over. It is no consolation to the ex-squadron commander that his replacement lacks the imagination and the talent to exploit the weaknesses he has perceived in the aliens' tactical capabilities. While Ulnar watches disaster unfold, the ultimate triumph of the Ka'slaq is virtually guaranteed because Ulnar discounted the possibility that his enemies in the Legion might be more dangerous than the alien Ka'slaq.

Go to section 159.

— 126 —

Reports from the squadron keep Ulnar updated on the progress of the sweep through the Baal system. They confirm the complete destruction of what was once the largest, most thriving colony in the Ninth Sector, but they also dash the admiral's hopes of finding Ka'slaq here. There is no sign of their fleet, their planetoid ship, not even a suggestion that they have a base or depot here. Baal is dead, abandoned, and the whole basis of Ulnar's strategy has died with it.

As he reaches a low point in self-confidence and composure, he notices something he overlooked before. One of his destroyers has located a vessel of decidedly nonhuman design drifting in orbit, unpowered and apparently lifeless. His men believe it to be a Ka'slaq cruiser wrecked during the battle with the Baal garrison. Undoubtedly, Legion scientists could use it to discover more about the opposition.

Leaning back in his seat, Ulnar contemplates the report. Whether his ships investigate the wreck in the Baal system or tow it and examine it on the way to their next destination, a thorough probe of the alien cruiser will slow the squadron down by several days.

Can his researchers learn enough about the Ka'slaq to justify a delay? Ulnar needs to consider the facts carefully before he gives the word.

If Ulnar decides to order the wrecked Ka'slaq cruiser investigated further, go to section 104.

If Ulnar chooses to ignore the cruiser and leave Baal, go to section 137.

— 127 —

The survey ship *Serendipity*, registered to the prestigious Derron Foundation, is commanded by a stubborn skeptic who has always struck Ulnar as the stereotypical, slightly shady merchant skipper; he never seems quite at home in command of a mobile laboratory. Most private survey ships would stay quietly in port during a crisis like the Ka'slaq invasion, but Rik Joval's ship simply ignores the crisis and carries on.

Ulnar is too involved in strategy to be overly worried about a single vessel, so *Serendipity* is the last thing on his mind—until the message comes in. Ulnar is on *Valiant*'s bridge at the time.

“Derron Foundation vessel *Serendipity* to Ninth Defense Squadron,” the ultrawave message begins, a wavering, badly-regulated signal. “Ship in danger. Holed in four places, geodynes out. Losing air. Encountered hostile ships . . . dozens of them. Attacked . . . heavy damage. Using last power reserves for transmission. Location of alien fleet is Ulnar . . . Ulnar 118. Power fading . . . Good luck, Legion . . . hope yours is better than ours . . .”

The message was transmitted days ago. A ship as badly damaged as *Serendipity*, in an uninhabited star system occupied by a hostile fleet, could not have survived. Ulnar hopes Joval used his remaining power to self-destruct, a cleaner death than the slow agony of losing air, heat, and light in a drifting coffin.

Joval's dying gesture gives Ulnar a lead on the Ka'slaq. How should Ulnar use it?

If Ulnar is currently at St. Germaine and wants to remain there, go to section 115.

Section 128

If he is at Baal and the colony there is intact, go to section 144 and remain in orbit.

If he wishes to remain in orbit anywhere else (including Baal if the colony there has fallen) go to section 71.

If Ulnar wishes to travel to St. Germaine, go to section 74.

If the admiral orders the squadron to Ulnar 118, go to section 63.

If Ulnar decides to travel to Endymion, go to section 53.

If Ulnar instructs the squadron to travel to S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If the squadron is ordered to visit Baal, go to section 58.

Should the admiral choose to take his ships to any other destination, go to section 73.

— 128 —

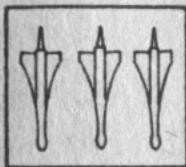
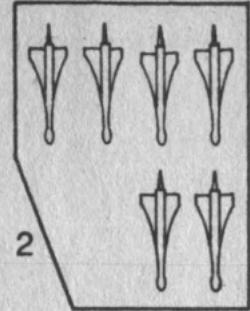
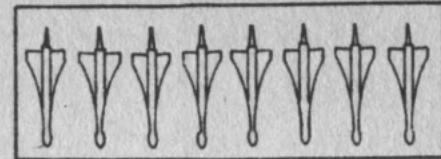
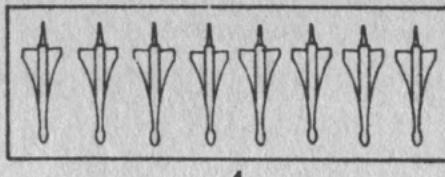
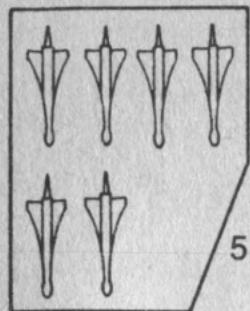
Ulnar switches on the Fleetcomm microphone one last time before the squadron comes within combat range of the aliens. "All ships, Flag calling," he says. "Engage Stealth mode during combat. I say again, use Stealth mode when fighting. Good luck to all!" Even though this unorthodox tactic will hamper the coordination of his own ships, Ulnar is sure that it will cause even more havoc to the alien flotilla.

The battle for Baal is under way!

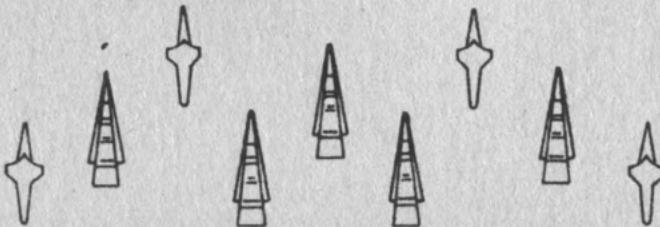
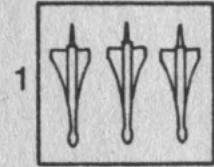
The map shows the deployment of the alien ships. They are formed into a rigid phalanx, and throughout the engagement they deviate from this initial formation, and from their assigned missions, only if actually in battle with Legion ships. They are divided into six groups, as shown by the map.

If the Legion ships have adopted a purely defensive formation (globe, cylinder, battlecruiser screen), the force they engage first will be chosen randomly by rolling one die. The enemy

Section 128



KA'SLAQ



Ninth Defense Flotilla

attackers are found by using the sector/group number on the map.

If the squadron is formed into a wedge, cone, or destroyer screen deployment, Ulnar chooses any one of the enemy groups to fight against.

A dispersed squadron must spread out to engage the entire enemy flotilla. Ulnar may allocate his ships in any manner desired, provided each of the six sectors is engaged by at least one Legion ship. If this option is in use, the resolution of the battle is conducted under a special set of guidelines described later, which differ somewhat from the standard methods of combat resolution.

Normally, only one enemy force is engaged at a time. Once the Legion is matched with an opponent, resolve the battle conventionally. The Legion fires first with whichever wing is eligible to fire; then the Ka'slaq cruisers fighting them return fire. One exchange of this kind is a single combat round.

The Legion forces include all of Ulnar's ships plus the Baal garrison. However, one battlecruiser (Defiant) and one destroyer (Anthar) are deleted from the garrison before the battle. Baal's orbital fortress cannot engage in a conventional space battle. Ka'slaq forces attack in the numbers shown for each group. If the aliens suffer casualties due to combat with the orbital fortress, their losses are subtracted from group 3 first, then from group 4, group 2, group 5, and so on. A group must be completely wiped out before losses can be taken from another group. If there are groups reduced to zero ships, they are not eligible as targets for battle. Roll again when random assignment matches the squadron with such a depleted group. Each Ka'slaq cruiser has a firepower of 8.

Resolution of combat varies according to the Legion formation in use, as shown in the sections that follow.

Wedge: Legion destroyers attack on the first round on Chart D. They may not attack again so long as battlecruisers remain available, although combat losses can be subtracted from either wing. After the first round, battlecruisers fire for the remaining rounds on Chart C. Ka'slaq cruisers use Chart E.

Cone: Roll one die. The Legion battlecruisers fight for this number of rounds, firing on Chart D and suffering any losses inflicted by the enemy in response. After these rounds are completed, roll another die and fight with the destroyers on the same

chart for this number of rounds. If necessary, continue alternating in this way until the end of the battle. The Ka'slaq cruisers fire back on Chart D.

Globe: Legion battlecruisers fire every round on Chart C. Destroyers can only fire or suffer losses if all of the battlecruisers are first eliminated. They use Chart E if they have to engage. The Ka'slaq cruisers fire each round on Chart D.

Cylinder: Legion battlecruisers fire on the first round of combat, using Chart D. The destroyers fire on the same chart on the next round, and the two wings continue to alternate in this way until the battle is over. Casualties are absorbed by whichever wing has fired in the current round. The Ka'slaq use Chart D for their attacks.

Heavy Screen: Legion battlecruisers fire on Chart C and take all losses inflicted by the Ka'slaq. If all the battlecruisers are eliminated, the destroyers can enter the fray, firing on Chart D. The Ka'slaq cruisers fire on Chart D.

Destroyer Screen: Legion destroyers engage first, using Chart D and suffering all losses inflicted by the aliens. They continue to fight until the battle is over, the Ka'slaq eliminate all of these light ships, or Ulnar launches a special attack using the battlecruisers.

The battle wing can launch a special attack once during the battle, provided they have not suffered any losses (as long as there are still destroyers left to cover them). The special attack allows two rolls on Table B during one round by the battlecruisers. Thereafter, the battlecruisers continue to fight, firing once per subsequent round on Chart C. This chart is also used if the battlecruisers are drawn into the battle (through the loss of all the destroyers) before their special attack can be launched. Surviving destroyers still in action at the time of a special attack can only fight again if all the battlecruisers are destroyed first.

Throughout the entire action the Ka'slaq cruisers fire once each round on Chart D.

Standard Battle Notes: When any of the formations detailed above is used (but see *Dispersed*, below), the engagement is limited to the Ka'slaq group in contact with the squadron. The

Section 128

Ka'slaq do not receive reinforcements. If all the ships of a given Ka'slaq group are eliminated, the squadron can engage another group if (and only if) it is in wedge, cone, destroyer screen, or heavy screen formation. Cylinders and globes cannot engage additional Ka'slaq groups after the first force is eliminated.

Each group is engaged separately, but always in the same formation. A destroyer screen can have only one special attack in the whole battle, no matter how many groups are fought. Ka'slaq groups cannot be attacked until the previously encountered force is completely eliminated, and only one unit at a time can be involved in battle. Dispersed squadron formations are handled differently, as discussed below.

Dispersed: *One or more ships are deployed against each enemy group. During each combat round one exchange of fire is conducted within each of the six Ka'slaq sectors, beginning with #1 and proceeding in order to #6. In each of these exchanges the Legion fires first, choosing which type of ship (destroyers or battlecruisers) present will fire and take losses there. Not all engagements in a given combat round need to use the same ship types. Legion battlecruisers fire on Chart B, destroyers on Chart C. Ka'slaq vessels in all sectors use Chart D.*

If all Ka'slaq vessels in a given group are eliminated, all Legion ships engaged against them may shift to any other part of the battle where vessels of both sides are still fighting one another. If the Ka'slaq eliminate all opposing Legion ships in a sector, they may not be attacked again.

Resolve the battle as discussed above, using standard game rules with the described modifications.

The squadron can attempt to withdraw at the end of any combat round. To resolve a retreat, go to section 141.

The squadron may be required to attempt a retreat. At the end of any round in which total Legion ship losses exceed the total of Ka'slaq losses, roll two dice and compare the result to the Morale value of the squadron. If the roll is greater than the Morale value, go to section 141. Results less than or equal to the Morale value have no effect, leaving retreat a voluntary action.

If all Legion ships are destroyed in battle, go to section 92.

If there are any Ka'slaq sectors containing ships not engaged by the Legion (after 20 combat rounds have passed) go to section 166. This happens automatically once the fighting is concluded when the Legion ships are in globe or cylinder formation, since they cannot attack any group after the first combat is resolved.

If the Legion succeeds in wiping out all of the Ka'slaq ships before the aliens can accomplish the provisions of the preceding paragraph, go to section 146.

— 129 —

The jaws of the trap are closing rapidly, and Ulnar has very little time to organize the squadron for battle. He examines the planning tank for a few seconds before he finally makes his decision. He swings back to the command console and switches on the Fleetcomm microphone again.

"Flag to Ninth Squadron," he says. "Adopt standard wedge formation and attack the enemy."

With hardly a pause, the computer comes on-line, feeding a list of preprogrammed vectors and positions to the rest of the squadron. Ulnar watches the data scroll across his monitor screen. On the console green lights begin to flash, signifying that the ships are receiving and complying with his orders. The holographic display in the planning tank begins to shift as the ships start to move into position.

In theory the wedge formation is a perfect solution to the Ka'slaq trap; it will keep the squadron in a tight, mutually supporting group that could push through the enemy's wall of cruisers and either escape or turn back to continue the battle. But the Ka'slaq have proven that textbook theories aren't always valid, and Ulnar knows that he is taking a risk. If the aliens englobe his compact formation, the Legion ships will face a serious problem.

The battle is developing too fast to allow much time for second thoughts. The wedge is still forming up as the blue lights in the tank close in. The Squadron is committed now; its fate rests entirely on its skill in battle.

Section 130

To resolve this battle using conventional tactics, go to section 105.

If Ulnar chooses the unorthodox use of Stealth mode during the actual battle, go to section 109 instead.

— 130 —

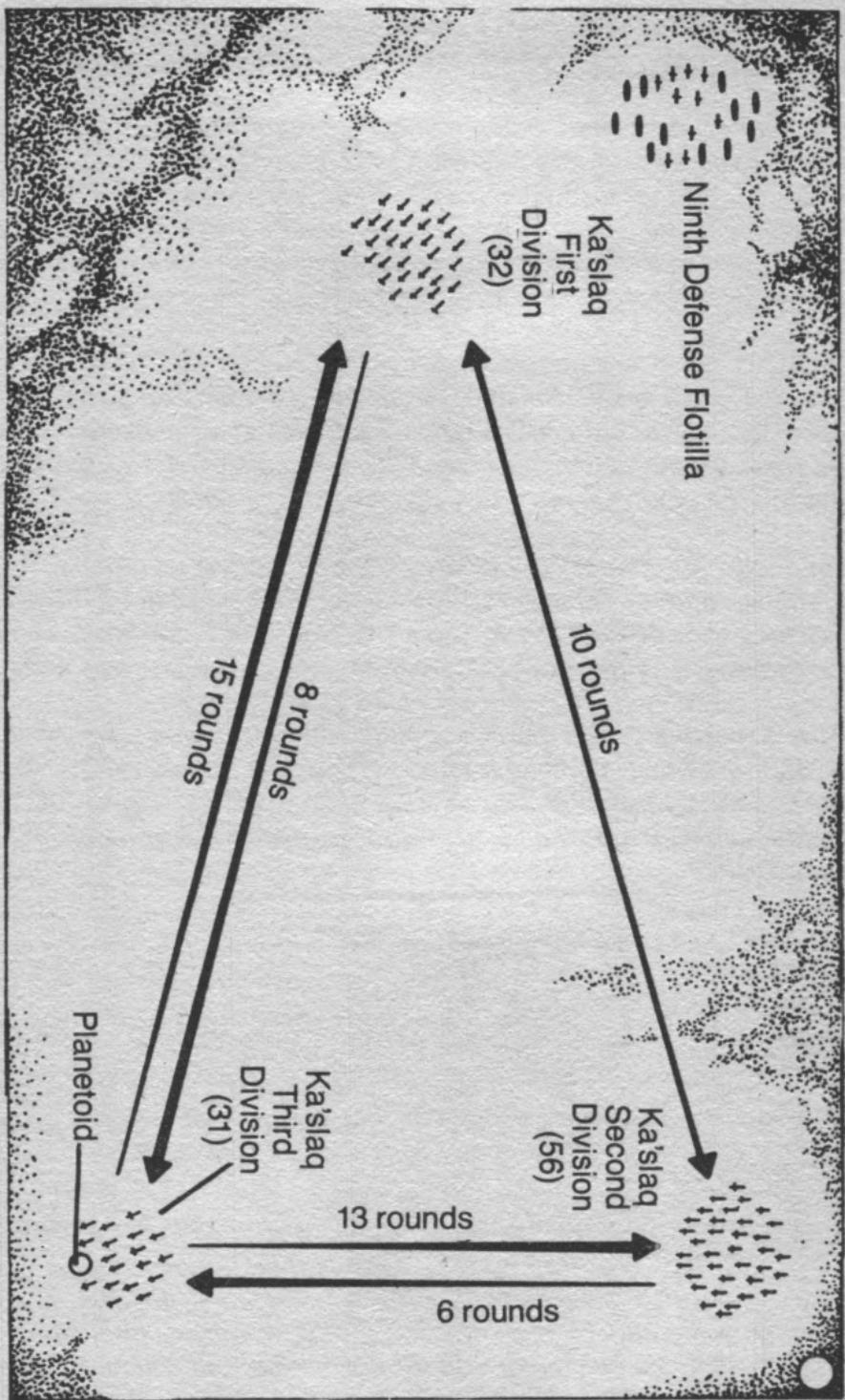
The two forces close in on one another, and Legion vortex guns flare with blinding light in a challenge quickly answered by the massive antimatter-induction explosions set off by the Ka'slaq annihilators. Battle has been joined!

The nature of the battle depends on the formation adopted by the squadron and on the forces they are fighting first. Study Map 2 for the initial deployment of alien forces.

When the battle first begins, the Legion ships face the Ka'slaq division noted in the previous section. The arrows on the map show how long it takes for the other two divisions to come up as reinforcements. A combat round is one attack by each side; after fire has been resolved, determine how many rounds have passed, and, if appropriate, add any Ka'slaq reinforcements shown as due. The Ka'slaq divisions always move to reinforce a division involved in battle as quickly as they can.

To resolve the battle, Legion ships fire first, followed by return fire by any surviving Ka'slaq ships. Either the Legion destroyers or the battlecruisers (not both) will fire in a given round; all Ka'slaq cruisers fire in every round. The Ka'slaq planetoid never fires and cannot be fired upon. The formation adopted by the Legion ships governs which ships fire when and the firing charts used by each side. Each Ka'slaq cruiser has a firepower of 8.

Wedge: Destroyers attack on the first round on Chart C. They may not attack again as long as any battlecruisers remain, but they can suffer losses if the Legion commander so desires, sparing the battlecruisers. After the first round, Legion battlecruisers fire during each round of combat on Chart B. The Ka'slaq cruisers generally use Chart C, but any time the Third Division is engaged, they use Chart A.



BATTLE OF ENDYMION

Section 130

Cone: Roll one die. The Legion battlecruisers bear the fighting for this number of rounds, firing on Chart C and suffering all losses inflicted by the enemy. After the last of these rounds, roll another die and resolve this number of rounds using the destroyers instead. They also fire on Chart C and absorb any losses inflicted during this period. Continue alternating in this way until the battle ends. The Ka'slaq cruisers generally use Chart B, but they use Chart A if the Third Division is among the forces engaged.

Globe: Legion battlecruisers fire every round on Chart B. Destroyers can only fire or take casualties if all battlecruisers have been destroyed; they use Chart C. The Ka'slaq cruisers generally use Chart C, but they use Chart A if the Third Division is among the elements currently involved in the battle.

Destroyer Screen: Legion destroyers engage first using Chart C. They continue to fight, firing and taking all losses inflicted by the enemy until all of them are destroyed or until the battle wing launches a special attack.

The battle wing can launch a special attack once during the battle, provided they have lost no ships (and there are still destroyers available.) The special attack allows two rolls on Table A during one round, using the battlecruisers instead of the destroyers.

After the special attack has been launched, or if the battlecruisers take losses before they have a chance to launch the special attack, the battlecruisers fire once each round on Chart B and take all further casualties. Surviving destroyers can only be engaged again if the battlecruisers are wiped out.

Throughout the entire action Ka'slaq cruisers fire each round on Chart B. However, if the Third Division is among the ships engaged, they use Chart A instead.

Cylinder: Legion battlecruisers fire on the first round of combat, using Chart B. The destroyers fire on the next round on the same chart. On subsequent rounds continue the same alternation as long as both types of ships are left. Ships lost to enemy fire in a given round are taken from the ranks of whichever wing fired.

The Ka'slaq fire each round using Chart B, but if the Third Division is involved in the battle, use Chart A instead.

Heavy Screen: Legion battlecruisers fire on Chart B and take all ship losses inflicted by the Ka'slaq. If all battlecruisers are eliminated, the destroyers can begin firing and taking losses; they fire on Chart D.

The Ka'slaq cruisers fire each round on Chart C, but if their Third Division is among the forces engaged, use Chart A instead.

Dispersed: Legion destroyers attack on the first round, firing on Chart D. Battlecruisers fire on Chart C on the next round, and the two wings continue to alternate fire until all of one wing's ships are eliminated; thereafter, the survivors can fire every round. Losses are taken from whichever wing fired in the same round.

The Ka'slaq fire once each round on Chart C, but if their third Division is involved in the fighting, they use Chart A instead.

Resolve the battle according to the game rules, using the guidelines given above.

The squadron can attempt to withdraw at the end of any combat round. To resolve a retreat, go to section 84.

The squadron may be required to attempt a retreat. At the end of any round in which Legion losses exceed Ka'slaq losses, roll two dice and compare the result of the Morale value of the squadron. If the roll is greater than the Morale value, go to section 84. Results less than or equal to the Morale value have no effect, making retreat voluntary.

If the squadron remains engaged until all Legion ships have been eliminated, go to section 92.

If the Legion ships eliminate all of the Ka'slaq cruisers in the division they first engage before any enemy reinforcements come, they may choose to continue the battle, or they can withdraw. To continue the battle, simply go on with combat resolution against the next wave of aliens. To withdraw, go to section 84.

Should the squadron manage to eliminate every Ka'slaq cruiser in all three alien divisions, go to section 87. This is the only

Section 131

situation in which the alien planetoid can actually be attacked. There is no time to organize an assault on this structure before reinforcements can come up if there are other Ka'slaq ships still present in the star system.

— 131 —

“Flag to all ships,” Ulnar begins, speaking on the Fleetcomm command circuit. “The Ninth Squadron will investigate the star system. Deploy sensor arrays and scan for enemy ships or activity. Battle is to be avoided except on my order, or as absolutely necessary.”

Ulnar is sure the Ka'slaq are near, and he does not intend to make any mistakes. Conventional doctrine calls for him to send the squadron's recon wing into the system while his battlecruisers stay out of danger, but he has too much respect for the aliens to consider dividing his squadron and allowing them the chance to defeat it in detail. He would rather expose all of his ships to the risk of an attack, and thus have the strength and flexibility to turn back the enemy, than send his ships into danger piecemeal and perhaps have them all destroyed before his people could react.

Valiant and the rest of the Ninth Defense Squadron gather speed as they plunge toward Ulnar 118, every officer and crewman tense with expectation. Ulnar can only hope this reconnaissance in force won't end in disaster.

If the total time elapsed in the campaign so far amounts to thirty-five days or less, go to section 86.

If the total time elapsed in the campaign so far comes to thirty-six through fifty days, go to section 110.

If the total time consumed thus far by the campaign amounts to fifty-one or more days, go to section 106.

— 132 —

The Ka'slaq trap is closing around Ulnar's squadron, leaving the admiral little time to organize his ships. Studying the planning tank, he quickly weighs the possibility before making a final decision. Then he swivels his chair to face the command console. He switches on the Fleetcomm microphone before moving both hands to the flag computer keyboard, where swift, practiced movements call up the plan he has chosen.

"Flag calling Ninth Squadron," he says as he punches in the coded combinations needed to bring the computer into the Fleetcomm network. "Cone formation. Repeat, adopt cone formation, and attempt to englobe the enemy. Target coordinates to follow."

The computer takes over. On Ulnar's monitor screen the prepared list of vectors and positions appears, scrolling upward as it is transmitted to the other ships of the squadron. Almost immediately they begin to acknowledge the instructions, and Ulnar turns back to the planning tank to watch the squadron shift into the cone formation he has ordered.

A cone is a tricky formation to use when outnumbered and an unlikely choice to adopt against an ambush. But Ulnar isn't striving to escape; he wants to turn the tables and annihilate at least part of the enemy fleet while it is within his grasp. Then the squadron can run or continue to fight, but in either case the aliens will feel the strength of the Legion before it is all over.

The battle develops quickly, without the usual waiting that makes time for doubts and uncertainties to shake a commander's self-confidence. The cone is barely stabilized when the Ka'slaq cruisers begin their final approach. Ulnar has no time for second thoughts, no opportunity to consider the alternatives. The squadron is committed now.

To resolve the battle of Ulnar 118 using conventional tactics, go to section 105.

If Ulnar chooses the unorthodox use of Stealth mode during the actual battle, go to section 109 instead.

— 133 —

The destruction of the Ka'slaq mother ship marks the end of the invasion crisis. Thanks to Ulnar and the Ninth Defense Squadron, the alien threat is over. Merros, of course, grabs the lion's share of the credit, but Vice-Admiral Ulnar is not totally ignored. His part in the victory draws attention and praise from people high in the Legion, officers whose opinions matter. Even though Merros gets the adulation and public acclamation, Ulnar gets the rewards that really matter—promotion, recognition, re-assignment to a post where his skills and experience count. Any attempt his erstwhile superior makes to block his progress is killed quietly, so that even Ulnar hears no hint of doubt or scandal.

League scientists are frustrated by the loss of the alien vessel. From the remains of wrecked cruisers a sketchy picture of the enemy emerges, but there are many gaps to fill in. The aliens were led by an artificial life form, an organic/machine clique that controlled all facets of the Ka'slaq war effort by a direct interface with their ships and weapons. They were totally self-sufficient, with a race of ordinary life forms kept aboard the mother ship but excluded from any important function in society. Their sole purpose was to perpetuate the cyborg oligarchy by providing new brains at need. The cyborgs, linked by ultra-wave communications, and transmitting orders and ideas at the speed of thought itself, were capable of amazing military feats, but the brain/machine combination was heartless, soulless, incapable of emotion or compassion. In the end it was this lack of feeling that really destroyed them, along with inherent weaknesses in the machine interfaces. But it was a close battle.

The Legion of Space triumphed over their most dangerous foe since the days of the Cometeers. For a time, at least, the Star League can continue to flourish in peace and prosperity . . . until the next threat arises to endanger humanity once more.

Although the Legion has won a victory, its triumph is marred by the fact that so little real information on the aliens survived the loss of their mother ship. This may cost them some day, should they be forced to fight similar enemies without a full understand-

ing of what motivates them. Still, the Legion's success is better than the fate they might have met if fortune had gone against them.

To try to achieve a more complete victory, go back to section 1 and play again. Good Luck!

— 134 —

Ulnar has little time to organize an effective defense; the Ka'slaq trap is fast closing around his ships. He weighs the possibilities quickly, eyes focused on the moving lights in the planning tank, before he comes to a decision. Swiveling his chair to face the command console, the admiral switches on the Fleetcomm microphone. Both hands begin moving over the keyboard to summon up the battle orders he has decided upon.

"Flag calling all ships," he says with studied calm. "Form globe and prepare for enemy attack. Battle orders on-line now."

He stabs a final button on the keyboard, and the computer takes over. His monitor screen lights up with a readout of ship vectors and positions which are being transmitted simultaneously to the entire squadron. The other ships acknowledge his instructions at once. Ulnar turns back to the planning tank to watch as the squadron shifts into a defensive globe formation.

The globe is the best formation to use against a superior enemy, according to the textbooks. It is particularly useful against an opponent's attempt to surround the defenders, providing equal, all-around firepower. The Ka'slaq trap is a perfect example of the situation globes are supposed to counter best. Ulnar finds himself hoping sardonically that the Ka'slaq have read the same textbooks.

He doesn't have much time to worry since the battle develops more quickly than most. The globe is still settling into final form as the enemies begin to close in. Ulnar's ships and men are committed to battle.

To resolve the battle of Ulnar 118 using conventional tactics, go to section 105.

If Ulnar chooses the unorthodox use of Stealth mode during the actual battle, go to section 109.

— 135 —

As the two forces close, Ulnar switches on the Fleetcomm microphone to give one last order. "All ships, this is Flag," he says quietly. "Engage Stealth mode during battle. Repeating, engage Stealth mode during battle. Maintain Stealth mode until further notice. Good luck!" It was a tactic that would hamper the squadron's coordination somewhat, but Ulnar was sure it would hurt the superb Ka'slaq synchronization even more.

Vortex guns flare with blinding light, signaling the opening of the Legion bombardment. Moments later the hellish fires of antimatter-induction explosions unleashed by the Ka'slaq annihilator guns answer the challenge. Battle has been joined!

The nature of the battle depends on the formation adopted by the squadron, and on which enemy force they have chosen to fight first. Study Map 2 for the initial deployment of the alien divisions.

When the battle first begins, the Legion ships face the Ka'slaq division noted from the previous section. The arrows on the map denote how long it takes for the other two divisions to come up as reinforcements. A combat round is one attack by each side. After firing has been resolved, determine how many rounds have passed and, if appropriate, add any Ka'slaq reinforcements shown as due. Ka'slaq divisions always move as quickly as possible to reinforce a division that is involved in battle.

To resolve the battle, Legion ships fire first, followed by return fire by any surviving Ka'slaq ships. Either the Legion destroyers or the battlecruisers (not both) will fire in a given round; all Ka'slaq cruisers fire every round. The Ka'slaq planetoid never fires and cannot be fired upon. The formation adopted by the squadron governs which ships fire when and the firing charts used by each side. Each Ka'slaq cruiser has a firepower of 8.

Wedge: Destroyers attack on the first round on Chart D. They may not attack again as long as any battlecruisers remain, but they can take losses during any round even though they cannot fire, thus sparing the battlecruisers at the Legion commander's option. After the first round, Legion battlecruisers fire on each subsequent combat round, using Chart C. If all battlecruisers are lost, surviving destroyers can engage again using Chart D.

The Ka'slaq cruisers use Chart E, but if their Third Division is among the forces engaged, they use Chart D instead.

Cone: Roll one die. Legion battlecruisers bear the brunt of the combat for this number of rounds, firing on Chart D and suffering all losses caused by the enemy. After the last of these rounds, roll another die and resolve this number of rounds using the destroyers (also firing on Chart D) instead. Continue alternating in this way until the battle ends, losing ships from whichever wing is currently permitted to fire.

The Ka'slaq use Chart E to fire unless the Third Division is part of the enemy force currently engaged, in which case they use Chart D.

Globe: Legion battlecruisers fire every round on Chart C. Destroyers can fire or take casualties only if all battlecruisers have been destroyed; they use Chart D. Ka'slaq cruisers fire on Chart E, but if their Third Division is among the alien forces currently involved in the conflict, Chart D is used instead.

Destroyer Screen: Legion destroyers engage first, using Chart D. They continue to fight, firing and taking all losses inflicted by the enemy until all of them are destroyed or until the battle wing launches a special attack.

The battle wing can launch a special attack once during the battle, provided no battlecruisers have yet been lost (that is, the destroyers have not been totally eliminated). The special attack allows two rolls on Table B during one round, using the battlecruisers instead of the destroyers.

After the special attack has been launched, or if the battlecruisers take losses before they have a chance to launch the special attack, the battlecruisers fire once each round on Chart C and take all further casualties. Surviving destroyers can only be engaged again (on Chart D as before) if the battlecruisers are eliminated.

Section 135

Throughout the entire action, Ka'slaq cruisers fire each round on Chart E, but if the Third Division of Ka'slaq ships is involved in the battle, Chart D should be used instead.

Cylinder: Legion battlecruisers fire on the first round of combat, using Chart C. The destroyers fire on the next round on the same chart. On subsequent rounds continue the same alternation as long as ships of both types remain. Ships lost to enemy fire in a given round are taken from the ranks of whichever wing fired.

The Ka'slaq fire each round using Chart E. If the Third Division is involved in the fighting, use Chart D instead.

Heavy Screen: Legion battlecruisers fire on Chart C and take all ship losses inflicted by the Ka'slaq. If all battlecruisers are eliminated, the destroyers can begin firing on Chart E and take all further losses.

Ka'slaq cruisers fire each round on Chart E, but if the Third Division is taking an active part in the battle, Chart D should be used instead.

Dispersed: Legion destroyers attack on the first round, firing on Chart C. Battlecruisers fire on Chart B on the next round. Thereafter, these two groups continue to alternate fire in the same way. Obviously if one group is completely eliminated, no alternation is possible and the surviving force fires on every round. Losses are taken from whichever wing fired in the round.

The Ka'slaq fire once each round on Chart E. If their Third Division is actively participating in the engagement, Chart A should be used instead.

Resolve the battle according to the game rules, using the guidelines given above.

The Squadron can attempt to retreat at the end of any combat round. To resolve a retreat, go to section 84.

The squadron may be required to attempt a retreat. At the end of any round in which Legion losses are greater than those of the Ka'slaq, roll two dice and compare the result to the Morale value of the squadron. If the roll is greater than the Morale value, go to section 84. Results less than or equal to the Morale value have no effect, leaving retreat voluntary.

If the squadron remains engaged until all Legion ships have been eliminated by the aliens, go to section 92.

If Legion ships eliminate all of the Ka'slaq cruisers in the division, they engage first, prior to the arrival of reinforcing divisions. The squadron can either continue the battle or withdraw from the action. To continue the battle, simply go on with combat resolution against the next enemy wave as before. To withdraw, go to section 84, as above.

Finally, should Ulnar's squadron somehow manage to eliminate every Ka'slaq cruiser from all three divisions, go to section 87. This is the only situation in which the alien planetoid can actually be attacked. There is no time to organize an assault on this structure before reinforcements can come up if there are other Ka'slaq ships still present in the star system.

— 136 —

The squadron accelerates away from Endymion, leaving behind the shattered hulk of the Ka'slaq cruiser. Where should it go next? Endymion holds no advantage now, and it seems unlikely that the aliens will return here. Where will they strike? The answer David Ulnar comes up with could spell the difference between victory or defeat in this war with the faceless enemy from Orion.

If Ulnar decides to remain at Endymion, go to section 71.

If Ulnar decides to have the squadron return to St. Germaine, go to section 74.

If the squadron receives instructions to go to S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If Ulnar orders his ships to travel to Ulnar 118, go to section 63.

If the admiral orders the Ninth Defense Squadron to any other destination, go to section 73.

If Ulnar orders ships to Baal, turn to section 58.

— 137 —

The squadron accelerates away from Baal's central star. The wrecked Ka'slaq cruiser drops farther and farther astern. Where should Ulnar take the squadron now? It seems unlikely that the aliens will return to Baal. Ulnar must decide where they are likely to strike next or devise a strategy for stopping their thrust into Star League territory. His choice may make the difference between triumph and total destruction for the entire human race.

If Ulnar decides to remain at Baal, go to section 71.

If Ulnar decides to have the squadron return to St. Germaine, go to section 74.

If the squadron receives instructions to go to S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If the admiral orders his ships to travel to Ulnar 118, go to section 63.

If Ulnar wants the squadron to go to Endymion, go to section 53.

If the admiral orders the squadron to any other destination, go to section 73.

— 138 —

Boosting away from S.C. 170, the squadron leaves the shattered hulk of the alien cruiser drifting in solar orbit behind them. Ulnar must now decide where his ships will best be employed. S.C. 170 yielded few clues and even less strategic value. It seems improbable that the aliens will return. If the Ka'slaq drive into League territory has developed during the squadron's sojourn at this distant planet, the Legion must deploy properly or the war will surely be lost.

If Ulnar decides to remain at S.C. 170, go to section 71.

If Ulnar decides that the squadron should return to St. Germaine, go to section 74.

If the squadron receives instructions to travel to Ulnar 118, go to section 63.

If Ulnar takes the squadron to Baal, go to section 58.

If the admiral orders his ships to Endymion, go to section 53.

If the squadron is given orders to travel to any other destination, go to section 73.

— 139 —

The squadron leaves the hulk of the Ka'slaq cruiser drifting in orbit around Ulnar 118 and accelerates away from the star. Finding no sign of the alien fleet at Ulnar 118 after all, Ulnar must determine where the Squadron can best be employed. Was the alien cruiser an advanced scout for a fleet that hasn't arrived, or was it left behind when the main armada set out for a new destination? Where should Ulnar post his ships now to stop the Ka'slaq invasion?

If Ulnar chooses to remain near Ulnar 118, go to section 152.

If Ulnar orders his ships to return to St. Germaine, go to section 74.

If the admiral instructs the squadron to travel to S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to Baal, go to section 58.

If the admiral's orders send the squadron to Endymion, go to section 53.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to any other destination, go to section 73.

— 140 —

Despite his doubts, Ulnar cannot disobey Admiral Merros over vague suspicions or hunches. His duty is to follow the admiral's orders and return to St. Germaine. Without evidence to the contrary, he must base his decision on that duty.

At Ulnar's command, *Valiant* boosts out of orbit on a new voyage, the rest of the squadron trailing the flagship. The Ninth Defense Squadron plunges through interstellar space once more, headed for St. Germaine.

Aboard each vessel there is mounting excitement. Everyone knows the voyage is leading to the climax of this war, the final confrontation between human and Ka'slaq. When the opposing fleets meet next, their clash will decide the fate of the Star League. No one seems willing to admit that this could also be the squadron's last trip, but by the time it reaches St. Germaine, the tense, expectant mood is evidence that each man aboard has made his peace with himself and his deity.

They arrive at the Sector capital to find the system preparing for invasion, bristling with new defenses and new ships. At long last the final phase of this struggle for survival is about to begin.

Proceed to section 119.

— 141 —

The squadron puts up a fierce fight against the Ka'slaq flotilla. It is an odd battle; the aliens seem utterly indifferent to the humans except when actually attacked, and there is none of the precise coordination and tight mutual support that Ulnar was expecting. The attackers might have been a different race from the victors of Endymion. Still, their weaponry is taking its toll against the ranks of Ulnar's command. He admits to himself that the enemy will wear the Ninth Squadron down. And if the squadron is wiped out here, nothing else stands between the sector and the Ka'slaq fleet.

At last he gives the orders. "Flag to Ninth Squadron," he

says reluctantly. "Discontinue the action. Repeat, discontinue the action." The computer signals the fail-safe withdrawal code simultaneously to confirm his words. "Break off and retreat. Regroup at point one nine. Pull out immediately. Message ends."

One ship after another acknowledges his instructions. In the tank Legion blips grow less distinct, simulating the output of ultrawave and ultrapulse jamming by ships attempting to escape under the cloak of Stealth mode. The Ka'slaq ships seem to lose interest in the humans as contact is lost, resuming their arrow-straight course toward Baal like machines programmed to ignore everything but their goal. There seems little doubt that the squadron will escape them.

Roll two dice three times and compare the results to the Stealth value of the squadron. If any one result is less than or equal to this value, go to section 117.

If all three rolls exceed the Stealth value, they will be attacked by the Ka'slaq. Return to the section you read immediately before this one.

— 142 —

Ulnar focuses his attention on the planning tank, swiftly weighing the possibilities. He has little time to prepare the squadron to meet the Ka'slaq trap closing around his ships. Every vessel will be needed, making his decision a simple one. The admiral swings his chair around to face his command console, flicking on the Fleetcomm microphone. While his hands move over the computer keyboard to call up his chosen battle orders, Ulnar frames his instructions and begins to speak.

"Ninth Squadron, this is Flag. Adopt cylinder formation and prepare for enemy assault. Battle orders coming . . . now."

He keys in the last digit of the code to bring the computer into the Fleetcomm network, and the machine takes over. He watches the orders scroll across his monitor for a moment, repeating the vector and position data being sent to the other ships. As the squadron begins to acknowledge, Ulnar turns back to the planning tank to watch as the formation takes shape.

The decision to use a cylinder was a hard one to make.

Weaker than a globe in terms of overall structure, the cylinder is a compromise formation that allows the squadron's destroyers to contribute their firepower to the battle. Like all compromises, its virtues are also its weaknesses; Ulnar hopes those weaknesses won't prove disastrous. At least the destroyers will give him sufficient strength to meet the aliens on less disadvantageous terms.

He doesn't have much time to dwell on his uncertainties, since this battle is developing more quickly than most engagements. The squadron is committed now, and only the battle itself can determine its fate.

To resolve the battle of Ulnar 118 using conventional tactics, go to section 105.

If Ulnar decides to use Stealth mode during the actual battle, go to section 109.

— 143 —

Ulnar studies the computer's graphic simulation of the alien mother ship. Scans have pinpointed a powerful source of ultrawave signals located in a complex of towers and domes extending over an area almost a mile across. The computer has assigned an eighty-six percent chance that the main control center for the vessel is somewhere in this area. The admiral can find no other obvious targets; the planet ships' geodynes are buried deep in the giant vessel's structure, and the rest of the huge artifact defies analysis.

"Cut off the head," Ulnar mutters, "and the body can't survive."

"Admiral?" Sammis, standing nearby, raises a quizzical eyebrow.

Ulnar doesn't answer him directly. Instead he leans toward the Fleetcomm microphone. "This is Flag," he says slowly. "The Ninth Squadron will attack the alien complex. Bombardment coordinates coming on-line." He shifts the flag computer read-out on the target into the network and enters positioning orders for the ships in the squadron. Soon the Legion is ready to deliver the final blow.

"Commence bombardment . . . now," Ulnar orders at last.

Flaming balls of pure energy, like miniature suns, streak from the vortex guns of the squadron's remaining ships, raining down on the surface of the huge mother ship. They create an eerie false dawn over the target area, followed by a chain of explosions across the area identified as the control complex. The heat and unchained atomic energies of these opalescent spheres is devastating; huge towers and soaring spires crumble and melt, while vast, glassy craters and jagged fractures spread over the surface of the structure. As the intense bombardment continues, surges of ultrawave static alternate with heartrending cries for mercy and assistance.

"The masters are gone," one transmission announces, using League Anglic. "Please, you've destroyed them. . . . We had no choice but to obey them. Don't—"

But the message ends in an electronic shriek of overloaded, melting circuitry.

Horrified, Ulnar orders the bombardment stopped, but his instructions come too late. The explosions continue rippling along the surface of the alien ship, spreading outward from the original target area in chain reaction. The squadron witnesses the death throes of a ship, and perhaps an entire civilization.

"Pull back," Ulnar orders, reading a warning from the computer's correlation of sensor readings. "It's going to blow." The tiny squadron accelerates away from the doomed mother ship. As the squadron's geodynes strain, a final liberation of energy somewhere in the heart of the alien structure shakes it with a last, agonizing earthquake.

The end is an implosion—a collapse of the ship's structure into a central pit of antimatter fire. The energy released is awesome, and for a few minutes, the alien craft radiates heat and light like a new star.

The Legion barely wins free of the catastrophic end of its enemies. Behind them the radiance begins to fade, lacking the energy or mass to burn longer.

The war with the Ka'slaq is over.

Go to section 133.

— 144 —

No further information has arrived to help Ulnar make a decision. Having held the aliens at Baal, he is reluctant to leave the colony exposed. But as long as he stays, the rest of the sector is open to attack. Word of such attacks may be on its way even now.

Where will the squadron be best employed? Ulnar needs that answer if the Legion is to follow up the success at Baal. But the continued silence, the total disappearance of the alien invaders, has the ominous air of the calm before a Ka'slaq storm.

If Ulnar chooses to remain at Baal, go to section 149.

If the admiral orders the squadron to leave Baal, choose a destination and go to section 180.

— 145 —

With little time to organize the squadron in the face of the fast-closing Ka'slaq trap, Ulnar knows he has to act quickly. He studies the planning tank, weighing the possibilities as he strives to find the best way to buy time. He nods in satisfaction before swinging around to face the command console. One hand flicks on the Fleetcomm microphone even as the other taps in the first codes on the computer keyboard to call up the prepared plan he has selected.

“Flag to all ships,” he says, continuing to peck at the keyboard. “Recon wing, establish destroyer screen and engage the enemy. All battlecruisers to assemble behind the destroyer screen and counterattack on my order.”

The computer takes over. The monitor reads out the battle orders as they are transmitted to the other ships across the Fleetcomm channel. Green lights on his board flash as individual captains acknowledge his instructions. Ulnar turns back to the planning tank and watches the squadron reorganize according to his plan.

The destroyer screen may buy him time. Though they are

poorly matched against the alien cruisers, Ulnar hopes the destroyers will hold on while he studies the enemy attack and picks the right moment to mount a counterthrust of his own. The battlecruiser attack should temporarily turn the tide—if the destroyers can hold long enough . . . if the battle wing attack is perfectly timed. Too many ifs, perhaps, but the plan is still the squadron's best hope.

The battle is starting faster than most engagements. Ulnar doesn't have time to order a different formation or worry about his choice. The Ninth Squadron is committed.

To resolve the battle of Ulnar 118 using conventional combat, go to section 105.

If Ulnar decides to use Stealth mode during the actual battle, go to section 109.

— 146 —

It is an odd battle. The Ka'slaq flotilla drives straight forward, ignoring the Legion ships. Unless actually fired upon, the aliens pay no attention to Baal's defenders, and the cooperation they displayed in their attack on Endymion is conspicuously absent here. As Sammis, *Valiant*'s captain, comments at one point: the enemy ships are rushing toward the colony with the single-mindedness of a poorly trained animal.

Their strange behavior makes Ulnar's work easy. Concentrating on each portion of the enemy fleet in turn, the squadron makes short work of them. The men of the Legion find that the battle is easily won, at no real losses by the defenders.

When it is all over, though, Ulnar realizes that this victory may not be the turning point he was counting on. True, the Legion proved they could handle the Ka'slaq, and the men were elated with their success. But this was only one part of the Ka'slaq fleet; their force at Endymion was more than triple the flotilla the Legion just disposed of. And there was no sign of the planetoid; Ulnar is certain it's the key to the war.

Moreover, the alien behavior at Baal was disconcerting. They were ruthless, fearless, and utterly contemptuous of death. The Ka'slaq work together with awesome efficiency, or totally ignore

one another in a berserk rush to their objective. Ulnar does not like the unexplained differences between the alien actions at Endymion and those at Baal. Why did they enter the latter battle so poorly coordinated? How can Ulnar duplicate these conditions again? Until Ulnar can answer these and other questions, he won't be able to share in the general euphoria over the outcome of the battle.

He has one lead, though. In the aftermath of the fighting, one of the battlecruisers came across the shattered hulk of a Ka'slaq cruiser drifting in interplanetary space. It had been blasted open by a grazing hit from a vortex gun, but was intact enough to yield useful information. It would take time to have the technical and scientific experts go over the wreck, but it might be worthwhile.

If Ulnar remains at Baal or takes the captured cruiser in tow, it will delay him six days to investigate it right away. If he adopts this course, go to section 104.

If Ulnar leaves the cruiser at Baal, go to section 169. He can have local experts look at it there and send their reports to his next destination. This saves time, but if anything goes wrong, Ulnar may lose any knowledge the ship contains.

In any event, raise the squadron's Morale value by 1 point.

— 147 —

With the alien fleet gone, the Ka'slaq ship is a viper with its fangs pulled. Ulnar feels safe in ordering the squadron to watch it, blocking any aggressive moves the survivors may try. It's up to the League Council to decide what to do with the monstrous vessel now that it seems unable or unwilling to continue hostilities.

But if Ulnar prefers to ignore the alien vessel, it shows no willingness to ignore him. Within an hour of the battle's end, haphazard ultrawave signals emanate from several parts of the ship. The messages are fuzzy and confused, with stilted language that almost certainly comes from a translation device. They

purport to come from a faction of rebels on board, self-proclaimed slaves fighting against the tyranny of their masters.

They ask for aid from the Legion. If they don't get technical help, they say, their rebellion will destroy the huge ship, though they don't explain how. As they begin to give coordinates for a Legion landing, the signals suddenly go dead.

If Ulnar decides to bombard the alien vessel, go to section 143.

If Ulnar chooses to send troops on board the ship, go to section 114.

Should the admiral attempt to open negotiations, go to section 172.

If Ulnar does nothing in response to the message, go to section 163.

— 148 —

The Ka'slaq trap is beginning to close, leaving Ulnar little time to prepare the squadron against them. He scans the planning tank, weighing the possibilities and discarding impractical plans. Finally, he reaches a decision and turns from the tank to the computer keyboard and the Fleetcomm microphone. He switches it on and moves his hands to the keyboard.

"Ninth Squadron, this is Flag," he tells them. "Battle wing, from phalanx and prepare to engage. Destroyers retire behind the battlecruiser screen. All destroyers will remain out of combat."

As he finishes, he stabs one last button to bring the computer into the Fleetcomm circuit. Then the machine takes over. Ulnar nods in satisfaction as the readout of vectors and positions scroll past on his monitor screen, as they appear on the bridges of all the other ships. Green lights on the console signal acknowledgments. The admiral's attention is back on the planning tank and the shifting lights that show the squadron taking up the positions he has ordered.

By holding back the destroyers, a sizable fraction of his strength, Ulnar is taking a calculated risk. But the light-armed destroyers are ill-matched against Ka'slaq cruisers; screened by

Section 149

the battlecruisers, they have a chance to escape and warn St. Germaine of the alien fleet if everything goes wrong.

Once the orders start going out, there is no way to change them. The squadron is committed, and the battle already getting under way before the battlecruiser screen is fully assembled.

To resolve the battle using conventional tactics, go to section 105.

If Ulnar chooses the unorthodox use of Stealth mode during the actual battle, go to section 109 instead.

— 149 —

With no new information to go on, Ulnar feels he must continue guarding the Baal colony from the threat of a renewed Ka'slaq thrust. Baal still seems a likely place for the aliens to seize before they continue deeper into the sector. If so, Ulnar plans to be ready to stop them again.

Add one day to the total time consumed in the adventure so far. Mark this on your scrap paper.

If the new total of time passed is less than or equal to forty-five days, and the last sign of the Ka'slaq was at Baal, go to section 127.

If the new total is forty-six days or more, go to Section 98.

If the Ka'slaq were not last at Baal, and the total time since the start of the adventure is forty-five days or less, turn to section 144.

— 150 —

With the alien trap closing fast, Ulnar has to act fast if he is to prepare the squadron to block the Ka'slaq thrust. Examining the planning tank, he quickly weighs the alternatives before making his final decision. Then he swings back to face the command console, stabbing savagely at the Fleetcomm microphone to switch it on.

"Flag to all ships," he says urgently. "Scatter and engage. All ships will disperse for combat. Do not await battle orders."

Ulnar swings back to watch the planning tank as the Legion ships begin to spread out in a cloud. By dispersing, more ships will have a chance to win free and the Ka'slaq will have to break up their own formation to deal with his maneuver. But it also means his ships are moving out of supporting distance to fight on their own.

Ulnar is tempted to change his mind, to call back the squadron and try to improvise some standard formation. But there isn't time for second thoughts now; this battle is developing much faster than most, and the Ka'slaq will soon be on top of the diffused squadron. The squadron is committed, and the next hour will settle things, one way or another.

To resolve the battle at Ulnar 118 using conventional space battle tactics, go to section 105.

If Ulnar chooses the more unorthodox use of Stealth mode during the fighting, go to section 109.

— 151 —

The alien ambush is well laid, and they have a large fleet available. But Ulnar doesn't allow their numbers to shake his determination. The Ka'slaq want a battle at Ulnar 118, and the admiral intends to give them one. On his terms, not theirs.

"Put me on Fleetcomm," he orders, his eyes on the holographic tactical display in the planning tank. Moments later, at

Section 152

the communications technician's signal, he switches on his microphone.

"All ships, this is Flag," he begins, speaking precisely and evenly. "We will attack the enemy. Prepare for battle, and stand by for formation and combat orders." Ulnar can imagine a few of his captains grinning as they hear his instructions; some of them have been impatient for a chance to fight the aliens.

There are at least 70 alien ships in the Ka'slaq fleet, most of them clustered to guard their huge planet-sized vessels. An attack at such odds is a risk, but Ulnar is ready to cast caution to the winds. The invaders will pay dearly for the damage they have caused.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to adopt a wedge formation, go to section 129.

If Ulnar orders his ships into a cone formation, go to section 132.

If Ulnar orders his destroyers to screen his heavy ships, go to section 145.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to disperse and fight without a coherent formation, go to section 150.

If Ulnar orders the Legion ships into cylinder formation, turn to section 142.

— 152 —

Although nothing has turned up to support Ulnar's original suspicions, he is reluctant to leave the star system. This is a good place to mount an attack on St. Germaine, and the admiral is convinced that the Ka'slaq will appear eventually. He plans to be here when they do.

Add one day to the total time consumed in the adventure thus far. Note the new total.

If the new total is less than thirty days and no worlds have fallen to the invaders, go to section 22. If a world has fallen already, roll two dice; a result of 2 or 3 requires a turn to section 167. Otherwise go to section 108.

If the new total is between thirty-one and fifty days and only one world has been reported as attacked, go to section 48. If two worlds have fallen, roll two dice and add the number of days that have passed since day thirty-one. If the result is 12 or more, go to section 168. Otherwise go to section 108.

If the new total is fifty-one days or more, go to section 98.

— 153 —

Ulnar's hand reaches out to the Fleetcomm microphone switch. "Flag calling all ships," he says. "Form standard wedge. Proceed at full speed against the enemy. Make the large enemy vessel in their rear your final target."

He sweeps his fingers over the flag computer keyboard and nods approvingly as the monitor screen lights up with the scrolling readout of his chosen vector and position orders. As the other ships begin acknowledging their compliance, Ulnar swivels to watch the planning tank. The squadron, closing on the almost stationary Ka'slaq reserve at maximum speed, is also beginning to shift formation to assemble the wedge. Like a knife blade, the ships of the Legion prepare to thrust into the heart of the alien position.

Larno's tiny force used a wedge at Endymion, trying like Ulnar to reach that planet-sized vessel shielded by the Ka'slaq reserve. The wedge is a good formation for penetrating an enemy battle line; it concentrates firepower and focuses a squadron's whole strength at a single vital point. But, as Larno had discovered, a wedge is easy to surround and annihilate when the enemy has superior numbers. Ulnar hopes his force will be strong enough to avoid Larno's fate.

As usual, it seems to take forever to approach the enemy fleet. Ulnar's success or failure here can spell the difference between triumph or disaster in the war against the Ka'slaq. For Merros, fighting against overwhelming odds; for St. Germaine and its

Section 154

helpless population; for the very survival of the Star League and humanity itself, the burden rests squarely on David Ulnar's shoulders as the clash of fleets begins.

To resolve a conventional battle, go to section 161.

If Ulnar uses Stealth mode in the actual battle, go to section 173.

— 154 —

In the end, duty is something Ulnar is unable to reject, not after a lifetime in the service of the Legion. The squadron has been ordered to wait in reserve at St. Germaine, and that is precisely what Ulnar plans to do.

Combat is joined along the fringe of the St. Germaine system. The Ka'slaq have more ships than expected—nearly two hundred in all. Either an alien reserve was hidden inside their huge mother ship, or they were capable of manufacturing and crewing new vessels as needed. Even the losses they suffered against Legion ships in previous encounters doesn't seem to have affected them.

Reports take several minutes to travel back from the battle lines. Ulnar can't help now; Merros has seen to that. All the Ninth can do is listen to the messages that cross the system and try, from the meager information these can give them, to piece together a full picture of what is happening.

The news isn't good. The situation deteriorates faster than anyone predicted. Ka'slaq cruisers swarm around the outnumbered ships of the Legion, using their annihilator beams to carve up the battle line faster than Merros can order his beleaguered fleet to regroup against their brilliantly executed strikes. Suddenly Merros isn't coordinating anything any more; the battleship *Pax* and all hands aboard are lost after receiving the devastating fire of ten Ka'slaq cruisers in a perfectly timed combination.

With the loss of *Pax*, command in the St. Germaine system falls to Ulnar once again, but he cannot control a battle seventeen minutes (or three hours, by ship) away. Local commanders attempt to salvage what they can, but the loss of their proud flagship hastens the inevitable collapse of the Legion defense. In

the rout that follows, a few ships shift to Stealth mode and escape, but most go down fighting. A few sacrifice themselves by ramming enemy cruisers.

Ulnar is left in charge of the Ninth Defense Squadron, facing overwhelming numbers, with the sector capital at his back and the fate of the Star League in his hands. He knows the battle is lost. There is no hope now, nothing to cling to. All that is left to him is the choice of how he meets the final disaster.

Subtract 3 points from the squadron's Morale value.

If Ulnar wishes to fight the alien fleet, go to section 177.

If Ulnar wants to withdraw from St. Germaine, roll two dice and compare the result to the Stealth value of the squadron. If the result is less than or equal to this value, go to section 178. If the result is greater than the Stealth value, go to section 177 instead.

— 155 —

Ulnar takes his time pondering the decision. Making his choice, the admiral reaches out to tap the switch that turns on the Fleetcomm microphone.

"All ships, this is Flag calling," he says. "Form cone and increase speed to maximum. Englobe the enemy ships and maintain attack until further notice."

His fingers dart across the Flag computer keyboard. In seconds the monitor screen lights up to show the scrolling readout of his chosen vector and position orders. Nodding approvingly as the other ships begin acknowledging the instructions, he swivels back to watch the planning tank. The Ka'slaq reserves are almost stationery, while the Ninth Defense Squadron presses toward them at maximum speed. The Legion ships begin to shift their formation into the open-mouthed cone called for by Ulnar's commands.

Cones are intended to allow a fleet to surround an enemy force. Against superior numbers in a well-managed phalanx, it is a risky proposition at best, but a carefully selected plan that Ulnar hopes will disorganize the Ka'slaq. In striving to avoid being encompassed, a defending fleet often scatters too far and

Section 156

leaves an opening for the attacker. If this happens here, it will help offset the Ka'slaq superiority.

If it fails, Ulnar may end up shattering his own fleet instead.

As always, the minutes drag out into hours, but the squadron closes the gap steadily. This battle is the crucial one, the fight that will end it all one way or another. If Ulnar loses, so will Merros; St. Germaine will fall and the route to the inner worlds will be open. The Star League might never recover. But if Ulnar wins and helps Merros hold on, they might just end the Ka'slaq threat for all time.

To resolve the battle using conventional tactics, go to section 161.

If Ulnar uses Stealth mode in the actual battle, go to section 173.

— 156 —

The alien ambush is well laid, and they have a large fleet available. But the bulk of their cruisers seem to be grouped to defend their planet-sized consort, well away from the scene of their attack. If the Ka'slaq are concerned enough about security to hold back some of their strength, it may be possible to face them in manageable groups—perhaps to defeat them.

“Put me on Fleetcomm,” Ulner orders, studying the holographic tactical display in the planning tank. In moments the communications technician signals him, and the admiral leans forward to switch on his microphone.

“All ships, this is Flag,” he begins. “Prepare for battle. We will adopt a defensive stance and let them come to us. Stand by for formation and combat orders.” There would be a few captains who would rather attack than stand back and defend themselves, but Ulnar was sure the prospect of a good fight would be enough for most of them.

There are at least seventy Ka'slaq ships out there, but with luck, most of them will hold back for awhile. If they don't, they will make short work of the Ninth Squadron. But it is a calculated risk Ulnar is willing to take as long as there is a chance at winning today.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to adopt a globe formation, go to section 134.

If Ulnar instructs his ships to adopt a cylinder formation, go to section 146.

If Ulnar orders his destroyers to screen the battlecruisers, go to section 145.

If the admiral orders the squadron's destroyers to retire behind a screen of Legion battlecruisers, go to section 148.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to disperse and fight without a coherent formation, go to section 150.

— 157 —

Ulnar considers all the options carefully before he finally reaches for the switch that turns on the Fleetcomm microphone.

“Ninth Squadron, this is Flag,” he begins. “Recon wing, form destroyer screen and move forward to engage the enemy. Battle wing, form on *Valiant* and attack on my signal.”

As he speaks, his fingers move deftly across the Flag computer keyboard. The monitor screen comes to life to show the scrolling readout of vector and position orders that match his plan. Ulnar gives an approving nod as ships begin to send acknowledgments. He swings his seat back to watch the planning tank. The Ka’slaq reserves wait, almost stationary, while the Ninth Squadron drives toward them at maximum speed. Without pause the Legion ships begin to shift their formation, the battlecruisers dropping behind a loose wall of destroyers.

The destroyers will be outmatched, of course, but their job is not to win the battle. The Recon wing’s job is to force the enemy to engage, to throw in reserves, to become thoroughly committed before the battlecruisers launch an attack that, properly timed, may settle the battle. The risks that go with the formation center around how long the destroyers can hold. If the screen collapses too early or if Ulnar doesn’t time the battle wing’s attack perfectly, the squadron will be in very bad shape indeed.

As always, the minutes pass very slowly. The squadron closes the gap steadily. Ulnar is staking everything on this gambler's throw; if he wins here, it will give Merros the opening to beat the main Ka'slaq fleet. But if the squadron is defeated, Merros, St. Germaine, the Star League itself will be in a hopeless position.

To resolve the battle using conventional tactics, go to section 161.

If Ulnar uses Stealth mode in the actual battle, go to section 173.

— 158 —

With most of the Ka'slaq fleet concentrated against Merros, the Ninth Defense Squadron is faced by alien ships held back as a reserve to protect the immense mother ship. Although this reserve still outnumbers his force by a fair margin, Ulnar is happy enough with the odds. As long as the main Legion fleet holds out, his ships have a fighting chance. And his knowledge of enemy weaknesses gives the humans an edge in this final confrontation.

So the crucial battle is joined, the darting Ka'slaq cruisers working their way into the Legion battle line only to be met by determined, heroic human opposition. Ulnar is fighting not only the aliens, but the clock; Merros cannot hold out forever. As the hard-fought battle proceeds, it becomes clear that the Legion is gaining the upper hand. One after another the alien ships vanish, consumed by the atomic suns of vortex guns.

Finally, the weary survivors of the Ninth Squadron realize no more cruisers are left to challenge them. The Ka'slaq reserve has been defeated, although ultrawave traffic makes it clear that fighting continues between the two main fleets. Exultant messages from the Legion battle line also make it clear that the aliens are trying to break off and retreat, but Merros and his captains are hounding their opponents and maintaining the pressure. Victory is within mankind's grasp.

Ahead of Ulnar's battered squadron looms the Ka'slaq mother ship. It is thousands of miles across and all gleaming metal, soaring towers, angles, planes, domes, and projections totally

alien to the human eye. It has not fired once during the whole battle. It seems unwilling or unable to defend itself, and moves too slowly to run. It is enigmatic but still vaguely threatening, with room inside for a hundred more battle fleets bigger and better-armed than the one now falling before the admiral's attacks.

Ulnar leans forward over his command console, calling up a computer projection and analysis of the alien structure on his monitor. The Ka'slaq fleet is no longer an immediate concern, but now he must follow through on the victory he has won and deal with this last bastion of alien power.

If Ulnar orders his squadron to bombard the Ka'slaq mother ship, go to section 143.

If he orders boarding parties to secure the alien structure, go to section 114.

If Ulnar endeavors to open communications with the Ka'slaq leadership, go to section 172.

If Ulnar does nothing, waiting for Admiral Merros to assume responsibility for the mother ship, go to section 147.

— 159 —

Confident of victory, Admiral Merros assembles a fleet around St. Germaine to stop the relentless Ka'slaq advance. His is the largest collection of warships ever gathered under the command of a single officer wearing the green uniform of the Legion of Space. Although Merros believes his force more than capable of dealing with the invaders, they, too, have increased the size of their fleet. When they meet near the edge of the St. Germaine system, the Ka'slaq have vastly superior numbers. Merros draws little useful intelligence from Ulnar's reports and suggestions, so the Legion's defenders can do nothing in response to the alien advantages of coordination and tactical precision.

If Merros thinks of Ulnar at all, it is with scorn. His greatest regret is the waste of a fine fighting squadron under the incompe-

tent command of a man unworthy of the Legion. By ignoring Ulnar's last reports and suggestions, Merros seals the doom of his fleet. When the battle is finally joined, the superb Ka'slaq fleet cuts through the Legion defenses with barely a pause. Merros himself dies on board his flagship, the great battleship *Pax*. In the wake of his death, his squadrons break and scatter and the Ka'slaq emerge triumphant.

Proceed to section 29.

— 160 —

Ulnar makes his choice. He reaches again for the switch that controls the Fleetcomm microphone.

"Flag to Ninth Defense Squadron," he says. "All ships, scatter and fight dispersed. Repeat, all ships will disperse for combat. Do not await battle orders."

In effect, Ulnar is handing the battle to the squadron's captains to fight. Some might call it a renunciation of authority or accuse him of moral cowardice. But Ulnar knows his is a good squadron, unruly sometimes, but capable, experienced, and dedicated. The men understand what this battle means to the Legion and the Star League, and will fight all the harder for being given some independence.

The Ka'slaq, whose success seems to depend so heavily upon coordination and central control, might have more trouble handling a scattered enemy fighting according to the dictates of individual initiative instead of stilted formations and centralized command. So Ulnar is hoping as he turns his gaze down into the planning tank, where the ships of the squadron are moving apart like an expanding cloud as they continue to plunge at maximum speed toward the enemy reserves.

By dispersing, Ulnar guarantees that none of the ships will be in a position to support each other, which may cost lives later. But an unorthodox approach seems most likely to yield results. This battle is crucial; the survival of Merros's Legion fleet, of St. Germaine, of the whole League could depend on a victory in the next hour or two.

The minutes tick by, and the squadron closes steadily on

the almost stationary Ka'slaq reserves. Whether heading toward victory or defeat, the men of the Legion of Space are ready to fight.

To resolve the battle using conventional tactics, go to section 161.

If Ulnar uses Stealth mode during fighting, go to section 173.

— 161 —

The Ninth Defense Squadron drives forward at full speed, aiming straight at the alien mother ship. But between the Legion ships and their target lie the Ka'slaq cruisers, sleek and deadly. Ulnar hears Sammis give the order to open fire; the ship shudders perceptibly as the vortex gun unleashes the first ball of atomic fire into the heart of the alien fleet. The eerie light of Ka'slaq annihilator beams lance out in return, and the climactic battle is under way.

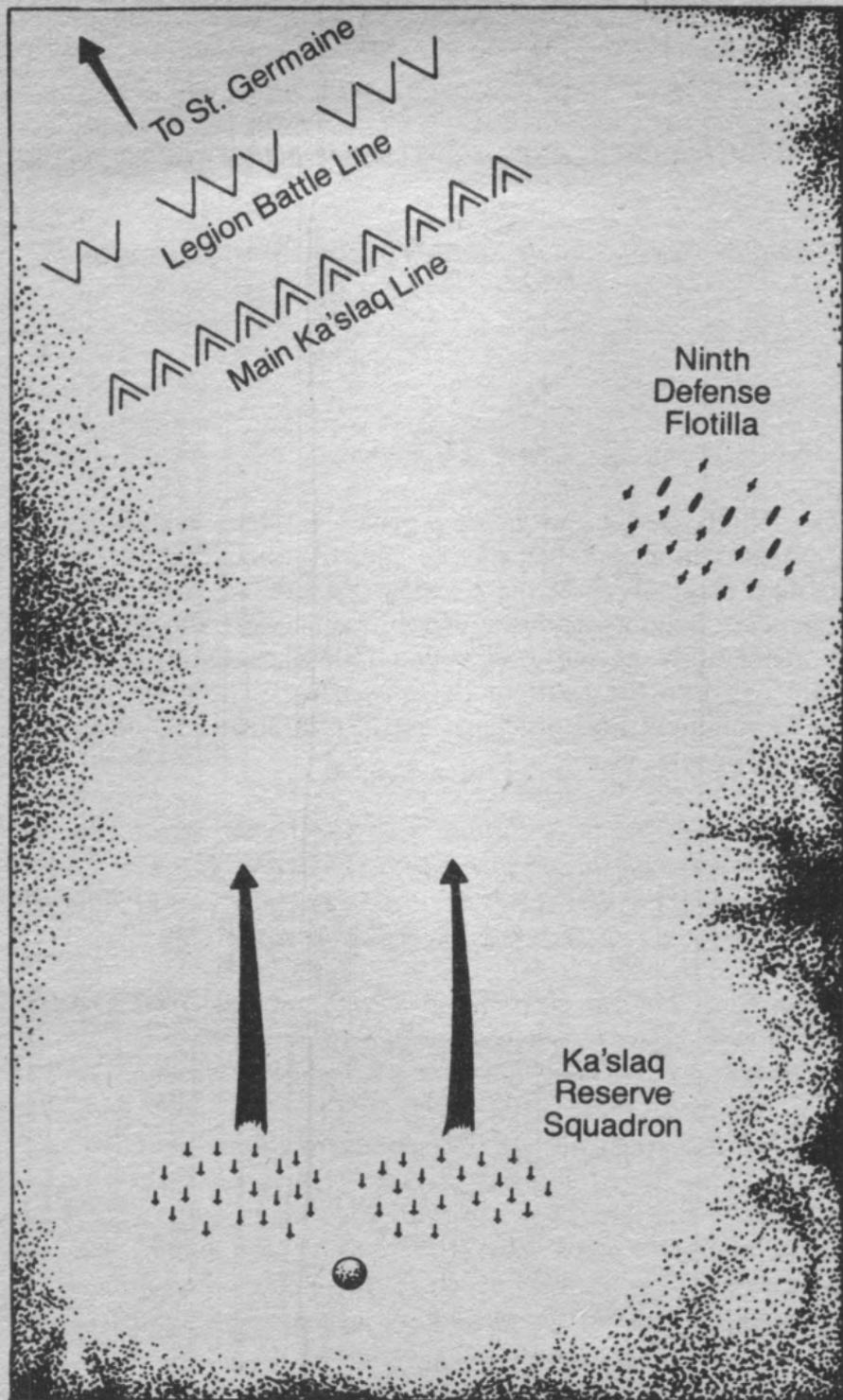
The map shows the basic situation at St. Germaine, although it plays no direct role in the formulation of battle tactics.

Resolution of combat varies according to the formation adopted by the Legion, as described in the sections that follow.

Wedge: The Legion destroyers attack on the first combat round, using Chart C. Thereafter, they may not attack again as long as there are battlecruisers available, although combat losses can always be taken from either wing. After the first round, battlecruisers fire on all subsequent rounds on Chart B.

The Ka'slaq begin with 25 cruisers. They attack each round on Chart A. Keep a record of total Ka'slaq casualties suffered over the course of the battle; at the end of each round, if a roll of two dice is less than or equal to the accumulated number of Ka'slaq casualties, an additional 17 cruisers are added to the Ka'slaq force. After this second group appears, no more Ka'slaq reinforcements are available, so losses need not be tracked further or appearance die rolls made.

Section 161



Cone: Roll one die. The Legion battlecruisers fight for this number of rounds, firing on Chart C and suffering any losses inflicted by the enemy. After these rounds have been completed, roll another die and fight with destroyers on Chart C for this number of rounds. Continue alternating in this fashion for the entire battle.

The Ka'slaq begin with 30 cruisers. They fire each round on Chart A. Keep a record of total Ka'slaq casualties accumulated over the course of the battle; at the end of each round, if a roll of two dice is less than or equal to the total number of alien ships lost, an additional 12 cruisers are added to the Ka'slaq force. After this group appears, no more Ka'slaq reinforcements are available, so losses need not be tracked further or appearance die rolls made.

Destroyer Screen: Legion destroyers enter the fighting first, using Chart C and suffering all losses inflicted by the enemy. They continue to fight until the battle ends, the Ka'slaq eliminate all of the destroyers, or Ulnar launches a special attack with his battle wing.

The battlecruisers can launch a special attack once during the battle, providing they have not fired already and there are still destroyers in the screen. The special attack allows two rolls on Chart A during the first round (only) of battlecruiser attacks. Thereafter, the battle wing continues to fight, firing once per subsequent round on Chart B. The same chart is used if the battlecruisers are drawn into the battle (through the loss of all the destroyers) before their attack can be launched. Surviving destroyers still in action when a special attack is launched can only fight again if all the battlecruisers are destroyed.

Throughout the entire action, the Ka'slaq fire once per round on Chart A. They begin with 20 cruisers. Keep a record of total Ka'slaq casualties suffered over the course of the battle; at the end of each round, if a roll of two dice is less than or equal to the accumulated number of alien ships lost, an additional 22 cruisers are added to the Ka'slaq force. After this second group appears, no more Ka'slaq reinforcements are available, so losses need not be tracked further or appearance die rolls made.

Dispersed: Legion destroyers attack on the first round, firing on Chart C. Battlecruisers fire on Chart B on the next round, and the two wings continue to alternate fire thereafter (until all ships

Section 161

(in one wing are lost; then the survivors fire every round). Losses are taken from whichever wing fired in the current round.

The Ka'slaq begin with 30 ships. They fire on Chart B. Keep a record of total Ka'slaq losses accumulated over the course of the battle; at the end of each round, if a roll of two dice is less than or equal to the total number of cruisers lost, an additional 12 cruisers are added to the Ka'slaq force. After this group appears, no more alien reinforcements are available, so losses need not be tracked further or appearance die rolls made.

Resolve the battle according to the usual game rules, within the framework provided above. Track the total number of rounds of combat as they pass, as this can be of crucial importance.

Voluntary withdrawal from the battle is possible only if the squadron's morale permits it; the do-or-die traditions of the Legion and the crucial nature of the battle make the other captains unruly and difficult to control. At the end of a round Ulnar can retreat only if a two-die throw is less than or equal to the squadron's current Morale value. If the roll exceeds this value, no retreat is possible and the battle continues as before. To retreat, go to section 162.

However, after 30 combat rounds, the defeat of Admiral Merros releases over a hundred Ka'slaq ships from the main battle line. If this happens, go to Section 182.

If Ulnar's squadron fights until all Legion ships are destroyed, go to section 159.

If the Legion ships manage to eliminate all of the alien cruisers before the 30 rounds are fired, go to section 158. Note that this is the only way in which Ulnar can attack the Ka'slaq mother ship; it cannot be brought to battle until all the defending vessels have been wiped out.

Note that Ulnar is never required to retreat from the battle at St. Germaine.

— 162 —

The main strength of the Ka'slaq armada is committed against the Legion fleet; they outnumber Merros by a wide margin. But they have retained enough ships around the immense, planet-sized mother ship to guard it from a strike like Ulnar's. The fighting is furious; Ulnar's men fight like demons, but their opponents are no less determined and no less skilled in the arts of war. For a time it seems an even fight, but an even fight works in the long run against the Ninth Defense Squadron. In the distance the Ka'slaq are overwhelming Merros, and when they finish with his ships, Ulnar will be trapped and crushed. Meanwhile he watches ship after familiar ship vanish in the fury of matter-antimatter reactions.

The battle is a lost cause; Ulnar can see that. His squadron can fight and die, or it can pull out and perhaps, by remaining intact, pose some future threat to the Ka'slaq. At length, unable to keep watching his command being torn apart by the enemy, Ulnar gives the word to retreat.

The officers on *Valiant*'s bridge are horrified by his decision. It is only with the greatest reluctance that Sammis gives the orders to pull out of the battle, cloaked by Stealth mode and followed by equally reluctant crews in the other surviving ships.

Roll two dice and compare the result to the squadron's Stealth value.

If the result is less than or equal to this value, go to section 178.

If the result is greater than the Stealth value, return to the battle and continue resolving it as before.

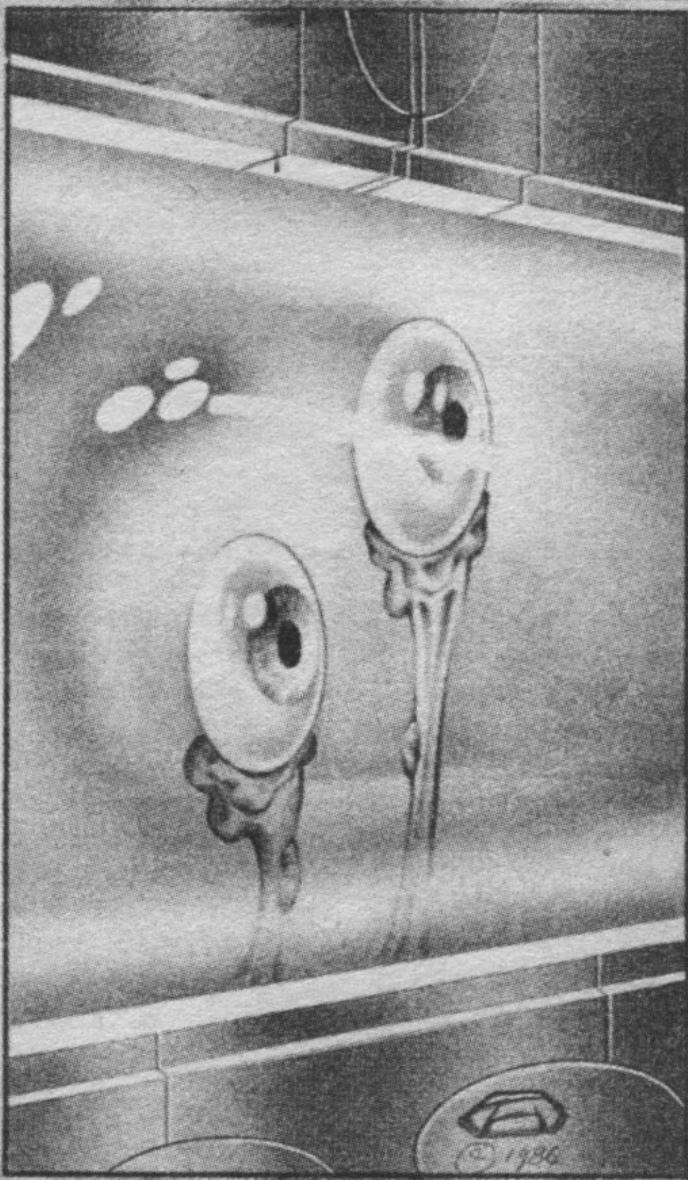
They hear no more messages from the alien vessel; outwardly, it shows no sign of life or activity. But sensing instruments trained on the structure do detect trouble on board. Wildly varying fluctuations in environmental conditions, surges and sudden failures in power supplies, inexplicable bursts of ultrawave static . . . something has gone badly wrong aboard the vessel, and Ulnar grows increasingly disturbed as he remembers the message requesting technical assistance. Has he allowed caution to become paranoia, and thus condemned innocent lives as well as guilty ones to certain death?

His worst fears are confirmed from two sources almost simultaneously. First, the sensor readings prompt *Valiant*'s computer to begin issuing a warning. Instability in the alien ship's geodynes is reaching critically dangerous levels. If it progresses too far, the engines could twist space so violently around the vessel that it would surely be destroyed.

As he begins ordering the squadron to back away before catastrophe overtakes them all, a second confirmation comes in. This takes the form of an ultrawave message. No longer wavering or tentative, this message is a full-scale audio-visual transmission from the huge ship. Ulnar finds himself looking into the weirdly stalked eyes of a being that resembles a ten-limbed starfish. The translator it speaks through conveys nothing in the way of emotion, so that the being's words of upcoming Armageddon seem curiously detached and remote.

"Aliens," the being says, "my brethren have overthrown the masters, and we are slaves no longer. Their tyranny over us is at an end, and even though it means our own destruction, we have enjoyed the chance to die free. Had we done so sooner, much evil might have been averted by both our peoples."

It blinks, the eyes startlingly humanlike in a nightmare face. "The masters controlled everything here: our food and air and climate. So they controlled us for many generations. By destroying their brains, and the machines they controlled, we have unleashed powers our people cannot. With your help, perhaps . . . but we can understand your reluctance to trust us. My people have no regrets. We are free, now and forever. . . ." The



Section 163

translated voice trails off. After a long pause, the alien continues. "We suggest you withdraw a great distance. Our antimatter power source is likely to liberate a sizable quantity of energy when the end comes.

"Aliens, our masters have wronged you, as they have wronged others. Our fate is just, for once they were like us."

The screen goes blank.

Every eye on the bridge is riveted on the teleperiscope displays. Seconds pass like hours, with no outward change in the alien ship. The squadron continues drawing away, accelerating outward to avoid the explosion that has become inevitable, unstoppable.

Then it happens. A series of flashes across the surface of the structure herald the final disaster; the unstable fields projected by the runaway geodynes are literally tearing the vessel apart. All at once the ship shudders and seems to collapse inward like a deflating balloon. With equal suddenness a blinding light consumes the collapsing structure and flares outward, a new star in the heavens burning with the power and fury of an antimatter chain reaction. It continues to expand, but by now the squadron is safe. Lack of sufficient mass and energy causes the reaction to falter, and it begins to fade almost immediately. But the Ka'slaq vessel will probably continue to burn for days more, until every particle of matter and antimatter has been consumed.

Ulnar repeats a childhood prayer in a faint whisper, saddened by the passing of the aliens who had bought their freedom by paying the highest price. Their spokesman had absolved him of guilt. It will take longer for David Ulnar to accept that absolution—or to forget the horrors he has witnessed on this ill-omened day.

Proceed to section 133.

— 164 —

By launching an attack as poorly planned and as ill-supported as the one he has ordered, Merros has made defeat inevitable. Ulnar can see no way of making a difference in the battle, and he fully expects the destruction of Merros and all his ships. Reports from the pickets indicate that the Ka'slaq are fielding their largest fleet ever, close to two hundred ships. Even the losses they have suffered in their previous encounters with the sector's defenders haven't had any permanent effect; the mother ship, as large as a small planet, either carries sizable reserve fleets or manufactures facilities on hand for just such an eventuality.

Against such an armada, even after they have closed with Merros, Ulnar's squadron has no hope of survival. And if they wait for the aliens to break through the battle line and crush Merros, it may well be too late to escape. To remain is to virtually guarantee the destruction of every man and ship in the Ninth Squadron.

Ulnar cannot face such an outcome. With no options but death on one hand and flight on the other, he decides that his duty now is to save what lives he can. As Merros moves into battle against the Ka'slaq, Ulnar begins issuing orders for the formation of a refugee fleet to take off as many of St. Germaine's inhabitants as possible. At the same time, he has the Ninth Defense Squadron ready to withdraw. There is no question of retreat against the orders of Admiral Merros—that kind of cowardly withdrawal wouldn't work with his ships and crews. But if and when Merros dies, command will again devolve on David Ulnar, and he doesn't intend to waste time trying to redeem a battle his superior lost before the fleet even left orbit.

When word of the battle reaches St. Germaine, it is much as Ulnar expected. Legion and Ka'slaq ships clashed in a conventional battle, and the aliens were able to outmaneuver Merros at every turn. *Pax* was destroyed early in the battle, and the rest of the battle line was quickly overwhelmed. A few lucky human vessels won free, shifting to Stealth mode to escape. But most were simply annihilated, knocked down like insects before the unstoppable Ka'slaq advance.

Ulnar's advance preparations pay off; within an hour of the destruction of the *Pax*, his squadron and its refugee charges are ready to move out. They lift out of orbit well ahead of the

Ka'slaq armada's descent on St. Germaine. Without his initiative, they might well have been caught in orbit, still preparing to flee, and annihilated there. This way they have a chance of escape, a chance to regroup and try again to mount a campaign. It's a slender enough hope, but hope is all Ulnar and his men have left.

Reduce the Squadron's Morale by 3 points. Then go to section 178.

— 165 —

Captain Sammis is out of his chair, pacing back and forth behind the ultrawave and ultrapulse operators. "Set up generator feedback, maximum setting," he tells them, his voice deceptively soft. Their replies are almost inaudible to Ulnar, but Sammis nods approvingly as the technicians lean forward to comply with his orders. He pauses in his restless movement to bend over the communication board, studying a reading. When he straightens, he turns toward Ulnar. "Stealth mode established, Admiral," is his report.

Green lights on Ulnar's console are signaling the obedience of the rest of the squadron. One by one the other ships check in, until none remain. The Ninth Defense Squadron, cloaked by ultrafrequency jamming, begins to alter course in its attempt to elude the alien ambushers. The dimly lit bridge falls silent as everyone waits, wondering if the maneuver will be successful. Failure means battle, perhaps at even worse odds than before, if the attempt to escape scatters the squadron too much to allow it to regroup to defend itself. But the die is cast, and all anyone can do is wait and hope.

The aliens are spreading out in an unconventional search pattern. Their fleet has lost its cohesion; their maneuvers are disjointed, tentative, even chaotic. Ulnar watches with satisfaction; they aren't perfect after all. He knows how to use their weakness against them now. Time ticks by slowly, the Ka'slaq dropping farther astern.

"Losing contact," an ultrapulse operator announces. A cheer sweeps across the bridge but dies away as quickly as it started

under the withering eye of the captain. He waits in silence until a second operator confirms the report; then he turns to the admiral.

"Stealth mode successful, sir," he says. "Out of contact."

"Thank you, Captain," Ulnar replies gravely, but his mind is already far away from *Valiant*'s bridge, grappling with the question of what to do next.

If the squadron is ordered to turn about and attack the force it has just eluded, go to section 151.

If Ulnar orders the withdrawal to continue as originally planned, go to section 174.

— 166 —

By every human rule of war, the battle in the Baal system is totally wrong from start to finish. The Ka'slaq flotilla drives straight forward, ignoring the Legion ships as if in contempt. In this odd conflict only those alien vessels actually brought into contact with the squadron pay attention to their opponents. It seems impossible that these are the same invaders who so impressed eyewitnesses at Endymion with their superb cooperation and coordination. Sammis, captain aboard *Valiant*, compares their strike toward Baal with a stampede of single-minded animals—or the tactical plans of a particularly stupid computer.

Ulnar's work should be easy because of their strange behavior, but the formation he has adopted proves just a little too inflexible to allow him to deal with all of the alien ships in time. Where the Legion fights, they win—but they don't have time to regroup after each victory and move on. Some of the Ka'slaq make it through to Baal despite everything the squadron can do. And before they can react, the aliens reduce Commandant Rovin's orbital complex to dust and begin to turn their weapons on Baal. Their annihilator beams play freely across the planet's surface, leveling cities and towns, and then it is over. The Ka'slaq leave as quickly as they had come, leaving Baal in ruins and the Legion squadron demoralized. What should have been an easy victory turned out to be a costly defeat. The largest colony in the sector is nearly extinguished, and there is no way of knowing where the enemy will strike next.

And this flotilla had only been a fraction of the total Ka'slaq force; there was no sign of the full fleet or the giant ship seen at Endymion. Ulnar is certain that huge craft is an important element of the alien armada, and its absence is disquieting. So is the fact that the Ka'slaq are evidently as contemptuous of their own lives as they are of their opponents'; given their other advantages, that is yet another nail that might be driven into the Star League coffin any time.

Finally, there are the unanswered questions. Why the startling difference in performance and tactics between Endymion and Baal? Is there a way the Legion can force the aliens to fight that way again, but with suitable preparations to take advantage of enemy disorganization? And where is the next target to be?

Ulnar has one possible clue to the alien activities and behavior. In the aftermath of the fighting, one of the battlecruisers came across the shattered hulk of a Ka'slaq cruiser drifting in interplanetary space. Blasted open by a grazing hit from a vortex gun, it is still in good enough shape to yield useful information. It will take time to have the technical and scientific experts go over the wreck, but it might be worthwhile.

If Ulnar remains at Baal or takes the captured cruiser in tow, he can investigate it right away at a cost of up to six days' delay in reaching a new objective. Should he adopt this course, go to section 104.

If Ulnar decides to ignore the cruiser, go to section 137 instead.

In either case, reduce the squadron's Morale value by 1 point.

— 167 —

The ships remain in a solar orbit, unwilling to leave the system, but knowing full well that nothing awaits them on the lifeless planet. Abruptly, sensors pick up a minor disturbance: a single ship darting toward them. All scans directed toward it confirm one crucial fact: the ship is a Ka'slaq cruiser, alone and unsupported, but driving toward the Ninth Squadron. Looking for them? Scouting ahead of the alien fleet? Ulnar doesn't know, but he does know a good opportunity when he sees one.

His orders are brief and concise: attack. The alien vessel seems taken by surprise by the sudden onslaught, and though it puts up a furious fight, it does not destroy any of the Legion ships. Neither does it surrender, though Ulnar's communication technicians give it several opportunities to do so. Finally half a dozen hits shatter the cruiser's defenses and pierce the hull, and power readings on sensors fade abruptly. A Legion ship closes in slowly, ready for a trick, but there is no further sign of resistance, or of life. The Ka'slaq cruiser has been reduced to a shattered hulk, drifting in deep space.

Now Ulnar is left with a decision. He is eager to investigate the wreck; it might give the Legion more information on the aliens and their weaknesses. But such a close study of the hulk will take time, perhaps several days; even if he takes it in tow, it will slow the squadron down as they travel and make them easy prey to Ka'slaq pursuers. Knowledge versus speed . . . an old problem, and one the admiral must settle now, and quickly.

If Ulnar chooses to order an investigation of the wreck, go to section 104.

If the admiral decides to ignore the wreck and the squadron is currently at Baal, go to section 137.

If Ulnar ignores the wreck while the squadron is at Ulnar 118, go to section 139 instead.

— 168 —

Ulnar is in his cabin, eating a solitary meal and studying the latest messages from St. Germaine on his computer monitor, when the warning sirens sound. "General quarters, general quarters," the loudspeakers boom. "Hands to quarters, condition three. Captain Sammis to the bridge, please."

Flicking off the message readout, Ulnar thumbs the intercom switch. The monitor screen swirls briefly, the patterns coalescing into the face and shoulders of an officer who looks too young to be standing watch on a battlecruiser. "Bridge, Duty Officer Harro speaking," he says calmly enough.

"This is Admiral Ulnar. What's the situation?"

Section 169

The young man swallows. "Multiple targets reported at the extreme limit of our scanners, Admiral. Estimating fifty-plus units, including one the size of a moon or a small planet. We're also getting heavy static on all ultrafrequency channels. Reports confirmed by all ships, sir." He seems about to say more when an indistinct voice says something from out of camera range. Harro turns, then disappears from the screen.

Moments later the hawk features of Captain Sammis appear, a frown creasing his forehead. "Admiral," he says slowly, "I think you should get up to the bridge. We now have seventy-plus targets, some closing in from each flank. Looks like trouble."

"On my way," Ulnar replies, already out of his chair and halfway to the door before the monitor clears.

As he makes his way to the bridge, his mind is already turning over his options. His hunch was right; part of the enemy fleet, at least, had come to Ulnar 118. Now that they are here, it is up to him to deal with them. And from the captain's description, the Ka'slaq are closing the jaws of a trap around the squadron already. By the time he reaches *Valiant*'s control center and sits down at his command console, he knows what he must do.

If Ulnar orders his ships to attack the aliens, go to section 151.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to stand on the defensive, go to section 156.

If Ulnar decides to withdraw from Ulnar 118, go to section 170.

The wreck of the alien cruiser drops astern of the squadron as it accelerates away from the star. Ulnar must now begin to think of his next move. Should he continue to cover the colony against a possible second attack? Or have the Ka'slaq finished with Baal? If so, where will they strike next? It is the sort of dilemma that gives an admiral ulcers, and Ulnar has to give careful consideration to the question. His choices could help exploit a

victory, or they could wipe out the success he has won and leave the squadron worse off than before.

If Ulnar decides to remain at Baal, go to section 144.

If Ulnar chooses to leave the Baal system, go to section 180.

— 170 —

There are too many of them, too many Ka'slaq cruisers concentrated on this ambush. Ulnar leans forward, his eyes fixed on the planning tank while his mind, a whirl of conflicting emotions, grapples with the decision he must make. The system is so close to St. Germaine that it is a perfect base to be used against the capital. If the squadron is destroyed here, nothing will stand against the aliens when they attack there. An intact fighting force might at least hold them until the base geofractors can bring in reinforcements from the inner worlds. Even if people like Merros call him a coward, Ulnar knows his duty is to get away with as many ships as he can, not cast everything away on a gesture of worthless heroism.

“Open Fleetcomm to my board,” Ulnar orders sharply. He knows how his shipmates will take his orders, how the rest of the squadron will react, but he cannot afford to give in to personal feelings. At the technician’s signal, he switches on his microphone and speaks again. “This is Flag,” he says slowly. “The Ninth Squadron will withdraw. I say again, all ships will withdraw. Adopt Stealth mode, scatter, and pull out. Regroup at point 968 and await further orders.”

Under the cloak of Stealth mode, his ships might elude this trap. Or so he hopes.

If the destroyers have been ambushed while the battlecruisers remained in reserve, roll two dice and compare the result to the squadron’s Morale value. A result less than or equal to this value means that Ulnar is obeyed. The destroyers are wiped out, but the battlecruisers escape automatically. Go to section 174. When the result exceeds the Morale value, go to section 113.

If the whole squadron was ambushed together, roll two dice and compare the result to their Stealth value. If the result is less than or equal to this value, go to section 165. A result greater than the Stealth value leads to section 175 instead.

— 171 —

With the liberation of the Ka'slaq mother ship, the invasion crisis is at an end. Ulnar and his Ninth Defense Squadron have played a pivotal role in the defense of the sector—and the entire Star League—from a threat that rivaled the evil of the Cometeers. Merros manages to grab most of the credit, at least publicly, but within the Legion Ulnar's role does not go unnoticed. His part draws the attention of officers whose opinions matter, and it doesn't take long for recognition, promotion, and other rewards to be granted to the man who stopped the Ka'slaq.

Most fulfilling of all is Ulnar's new assignment. The squadron receives a new commander—Sammis, freshly promoted to commodore, and given an admiral's responsibilities in recognition of his skill and valor—while Admiral David Ulnar becomes, for a time, a combination scientist and diplomat in his new post as Director of Liaison with the League embassy to the Ka'slaq planetoid. In this role he heads up the efforts to study Ka'slaq technology and help the former slaves now liberated from the tyranny of their masters.

It had been a near-run thing to save the alien vessel. The ruling class of Ka'slaq society, known as the masters or the Overmind, were disembodied brains connected directly to the controlling systems of their world-ship. When their slaves rebelled and began to destroy the cyborg beings, shipboard systems began running wild. Luckily the Legion boarding party had enough technical experts to bring the vessel back under control before catastrophe broke loose. Now the erstwhile slaves need training and advice to build a new society and a new control system to replace what is gone. The League, meanwhile, is interested in their technology.

Already there have been some amazing discoveries. The alien cyborg rulers, linked by ultrawave transmitters and able to share their thoughts mechanically, had achieved the beginnings of practical telepathy and were unlocking other powers of the mind;

it was their mental strength that had detected and neutralized the powers of AKKA. Their ability to harness antimatter as a power source gave them their superior weaponry, the engineering prowess to control a spacecraft the size of a small moon, and a method of stabilizing their craft against the power of the Legion's geofractors. Because they had direct control of every aspect of their ship, they could manipulate environment, gravity, and other essentials on board, so they maintained perfect dominance over their slaves. And their cruisers, operated by other cyborg entities, were capable of cooperation and coordination that seemed impossible, because they were able to pass information and orders back and forth with the speed of thought—and they were backed up by the strategic and tactical planning of a thousand massed minds. But with their ultrawave signals distorted, and in the absence of central direction from the mother ship, the Ka'slaq were much less effective.

The alien cyborgs ruled their society with ruthless efficiency. They needed a caste of living slaves to perform menial tasks that machines were unable to do, and to serve as a source for new brains to add to their cyborg hierarchy. But though their brains were organic, they had lost all emotion and compassion and were more like thinking machines than living computers.

League investigators were only slowly uncovering their history. Apparently the huge mother ship and its cyborg controllers were the products of an advanced civilization somewhere in the direction of Orion. Peaceful and unambitious, these creatures had never been concerned with the exploration of space until an instability developed in their sun. The ship was the end result of a crash program to build a refuge for the aliens, with cyborg controls to handle the vast complexities involved in running the huge vessel. They had set out generations ago with instructions to seek out a new world and perpetuate the race.

The cyborg controllers, though, failed to perform their duties as expected. The machine, not the living brain, dominated, and with typical machine efficiency the masters sought to carry out their instructions without regard to life or liberty. From running the ship, they soon moved to running the society; instructions to protect the refugees became a determination to extinguish any alien intelligence they encountered. Although they were dispassionate, they were also arrogant, until at last they were unable to contemplate any course but mass direction. Even in defeat they could not acknowledge another course.

Reading these findings as he waits for a courier ship to take him from St. Germaine to the refugee ship's new home in orbit around Ulnar 118, the admiral shakes his head sadly. So much death, so much devastation . . . but at least it is over now. And the Legion of Space is still there, to guard the Star League from any new threat that might someday appear from the depths of space.

Ulnar has achieved the highest possible success. But there were many options open in the war against the Ka'slaq. Could he do as well again by following a different strategy? To find out, go back to section 1 and try again. Good luck!

— 172 —

"Try to contact them," Ulnar says quietly, his eyes resting on the computer's graphic model of the huge Ka'slaq vessel. "Surely their leaders will listen to reason."

The ultrawave operator goes to work, running up and down the frequencies, repeating his call for the aliens to talk. Listening, Ulnar thinks of the ruthlessness the Ka'slaq have displayed. They do not negotiate . . . but the Legion won't stoop to their level. Let the invaders have a chance to speak for themselves, he tells himself silently. Negotiate.

The chance of getting a response seems slim, but suddenly there is a roar of static and feedback. It subsides into a deep, reverberating voice, the flat tones reminiscent of a computer [voder]. "We hear your words," the voice proclaims emotionlessly. "Cease your transmissions and withdraw from the presence of the Overmind."

Ulnar motions the technician to patch the transmitter to his board, then leans forward to speak into his microphone. "This is Vice-Admiral David Ulnar, commanding the Ninth Defense Squadron of the Legion of Space," he says confidently. "We have defeated your warships; your vessel is at our mercy. You are required to surrender to the authority of the Star League Council—"

The feedback whine rises again, until it drowns out all other sounds on the bridge. "The Overmind does not treat with lesser beings," the voice cuts in, arrogant and brassy. "We are the masters, and we shall allow no further communication. The

Overmind is done with you." Their transmission cuts off as suddenly as it began, and no amount of calling will make the aliens speak again.

Ulnar rubs his chin thoughtfully. The alien "Overmind" is either supremely arrogant or they have power in reserve to defend themselves. Their refusal to negotiate places the burden of action back in his lap. And if the Overmind does have hidden powers at their command, a false step now could undo everything the Legion has gained.

If Ulnar chooses to bombard the Ka'slaq vessel, go to section 143.

If the admiral decides to put a boarding party on the alien structure, go to section 114.

Should Ulnar choose to take no further action against the aliens, go to section 147.

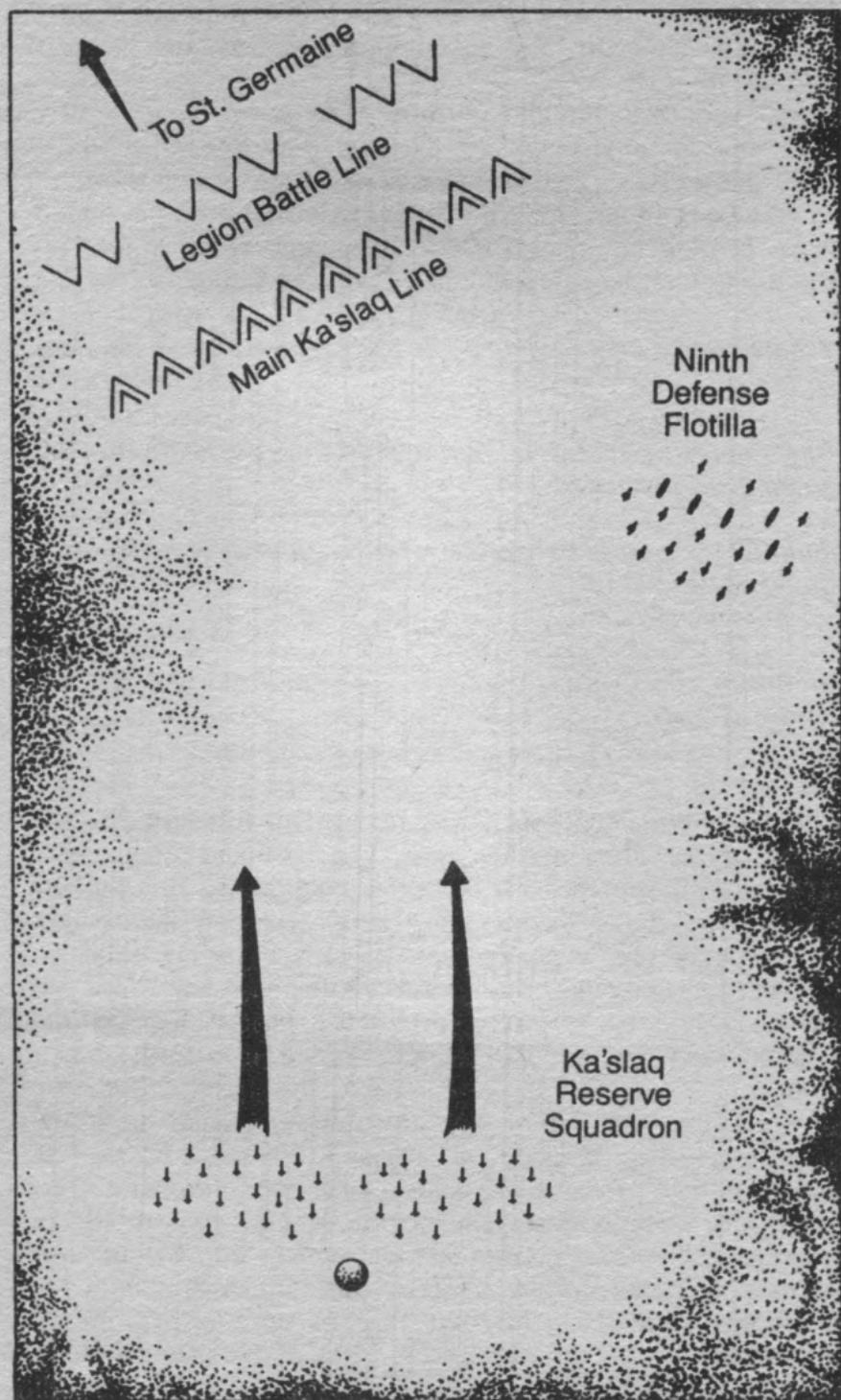
— 173 —

As the Ninth Squadron drives forward at full speed, aiming directly at the alien mother ship, Ulnar's hand flicks on the Fleetcomm microphone one last time. "All ships, this is Flag," he begins, studying the planning tank. Between the squadron and its target are a phalanx of Ka'slaq cruisers, poised for battle with the humans who dare to challenge them. Now is the time for David Ulnar to use everything he has learned about the alien fleet; if ever the Legion needed a victory, it needs one now.

"All ships will adopt Stealth mode," Ulnar continues. "Repeating—Stealth mode, all ships. Let's see how they like fighting blind." He pauses again, then continues with forced enthusiasm. "The honor of the Legion depends on you all."

He hears Sammis giving the last orders for Stealth mode and to open fire. *Valiant* gives a perceptible shudder as her vortex gun unleashes the first ball of atomic fire into the heart of the alien fleet. The eerie light of Ka'slaq annihilator beams flash back in response, and the final battle is under way.

Section 173



Map 5 shows the basic situation at St. Germaine, though it plays no direct role in the formulation of battle tactics (as is the case in some of the other battles).

Resolution of combat varies according to the formation adopted by the Legion, as described in the sections that follow.

Wedge: The Legion destroyers attack on the first combat round, using Chart C. Thereafter they may not attack again as long as there are battlecruisers available, although combat losses can always be taken from either wing. After the first round, battlecruisers fire on all subsequent rounds on Chart B.

The Ka'slaq begin with 20 cruisers. They attack each round on Chart D. Keep a record of total Ka'slaq casualties suffered over the course of the battle; at the end of each round, if a roll of two dice is less than or equal to the accumulated number of Ka'slaq casualties, an additional 22 cruisers are added to the Ka'slaq force. After this second group appears, no more Ka'slaq reinforcements are available, so losses need not be tracked further or appearance die rolls made.

Cone: Roll one die. The Legion battlecruisers fight for this number of rounds, firing on Chart C, and suffering any losses inflicted by the enemy. After these rounds have been completed, roll another die and fight using destroyers on Chart C for this number of combat rounds. Continue alternating in this fashion for the rest of the battle.

The Ka'slaq begin with 25 cruisers. They fire each round on Chart D. Keep a record of total Ka'slaq losses accumulated over the course of the battle; at the end of each round, if a roll of two dice is less than or equal to the number of alien ships lost, an additional 17 cruisers are added to the Ka'slaq force. After this group appears, no more Ka'slaq reinforcements are available, so losses need not be tracked further or appearance die rolls made.

Destroyer Screen: Legion destroyers enter the fighting first, using Chart C and suffering all losses inflicted by the enemy. They continue to fight until the battle ends, the Ka'slaq eliminate all of the destroyers, or Ulnar launches a special attack with his battle wing.

The battlecruisers can launch a special attack once during the battle, providing they have not fired already and there are still

destroyers in the screen. The special attack allows two rolls on Chart A during the first round (only) of battlecruiser attacks. Thereafter the battle wing continues to fight, firing once per subsequent round on Chart B. The same chart is used if the battlecruisers are drawn into the battle (through the loss of all the destroyers) before their attack can be launched. Surviving destroyers still in action when a special attack begins can only fight again if all the battlecruisers are destroyed.

Throughout the entire action the Ka'slaq fire once per round on Chart D. They begin with 15 cruisers. Keep a record of total Ka'slaq losses accumulated over the course of the battle; at the end of each round, if a roll of two dice is less than or equal to the number of alien ships lost since the battle began, an additional 27 cruisers are added to the Ka'slaq force. After this group appears, no more Ka'slaq reinforcements are available and there is no need to track losses further or make any other appearance die rolls.

Dispersed: Legion destroyers attack on the first combat round, firing on Chart B. The battlecruisers fire on Chart A on the next round, and the two wings continue to alternate fire thereafter (until all ships in one wing are lost; then the survivors fire every round). Losses are taken from whichever wing fired in the current round.

The Ka'slaq begin with 25 ships. They fire on Chart E. Keep a record of total Ka'slaq losses accumulated over the course of the battle; at the end of each round, if a roll of two dice is less than or equal to the total number of alien ships lost, an additional 17 cruisers are added to the Ka'slaq force. After this group appears, no more alien reinforcements are available, so losses need not be tracked further or appearance die rolls made.

Resolve the battle according to the game rules, within the framework provided above. Track the total number of rounds of combat as they pass, as this can be of crucial importance.

Voluntary withdrawal from the battle is possible only if the squadron's morale permits it; the do-or-die traditions of the Legion and the crucial nature of the battle make the squadron's captains unruly and difficult to control. At the end of a round Ulnar can retreat only if a two-die throw is less than or equal to the squadron's current Morale value. If the roll exceeds this

value, no retreat is possible and the battle goes on as before. To retreat, go to section 162.

After 30 combat rounds the defeat of Admiral Merros releases over a hundred Ka'slaq ships from the main battle line. If this happens, go to section 182.

If Ulnar's squadron fights on until all Legion ships are destroyed, go to section 159.

If the Legion ships manage to eliminate all of the alien cruisers before 30 rounds are fired, go to section 158. This is the only way in which Ulnar can attack the Ka'slaq mother ship; it cannot be brought to battle until all the defending vessels have been wiped out.

Note that Ulnar is never required to retreat from the battle at St. Germaine.

— 174 —

Stealth mode is working; the squadron is eluding enemy pursuit. They have escaped from the ambush at Ulnar 118, but that still leaves the Ka'slaq fleet intact and in position to threaten the worlds of the Star League. In other words, the move to this system, the agony of decision and action—all were for naught. And the admiral is again faced with the problem of trying to cope with the aliens. Nothing seems to stop them, and Ulnar is growing as demoralized as everyone else in the squadron.

At least the battle here was not followed by the devastation of a League colony. But the next Ka'slaq advance will no doubt threaten an inhabited planet. All of Ulnar's decisions have gone astray so far; he cannot help but wonder now if he has any hope of changing his luck after all that has gone before. He has to turn it around; otherwise, the Legion and the Star League are surely doomed.

Reduce the squadron's Morale value by 1 point.

If Ulnar chooses to remain at Ulnar, go to section 103.

If he decides to order the squadron to return to its base at St. Germaine, go to section 74.

If Ulnar instructs his ships to travel to S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If the admiral orders the squadron to go to the Baal system, go to section 58.

If Endymion is named as the squadron's next destination, go to section 53.

Should Admiral Ulnar issue orders to send the squadron to any other destination, go to section 73.

— 175 —

Captain Sammis is out of his chair, pacing back and forth behind the ultrawave and ultrapulse operators. "Set up generator feedback, maximum setting," he tells them, his voice deceptively soft and languid. Their replies are almost inaudible to Ulnar, but Sammis nods approvingly as the technicians lean forward to comply with his orders. He pauses in his restless movement to bend over the communications board, studying a reading. When he straightens, he turns toward Ulnar. "Stealth mode established, Admiral," is his report.

Green lights on Ulnar's console are signaling the obedience of the rest of the squadron. One by one the other ships check in, until none remain. The Ninth Defense Squadron, cloaked by ultrafrequency jamming, begins to alter course in its attempt to elude the alien ambushers. The dimly lit bridge falls silent as everyone waits, wondering if the maneuver will be successful. Failure means battle, at even worse odds than before if the escape attempt scatters the squadron too much to allow the ships to regroup and defend themselves. But the die is cast, and all anyone can do is wait and hope.

The aliens are spreading out, and not just to search for their fleeing quarry. Their fleet has lost much of its cohesion, although the disjointed maneuvers are still purposeful. Ulnar can see clearly, even before the ultrapulse operators verify it, that the

squadron has not vanished from their scanners entirely. They are in pursuit, and their speed is still enough to catch the squadron fairly quickly.

He reaches quickly for the Fleetcomm microphone and the Flag computer keyboard. Battle orders have to be composed and issued at once, and without a preprogrammed computer file with a plan to cover the current deployments, Ulnar needs to improvise in haste. Even so, they could still be caught short without an effective formation.

Roll two dice and compare the result to the squadron's Stealth value. If the result is less than or equal to this value, go to section 156.

If the result exceeds the Stealth value, go to section 179 instead.

— 176 —

Ulnar barely hesitates. "Put me on Fleetcomm," he orders. There is a pause before the communications technician signals readiness. Then he switches on his microphone, thinking fast as he phrases his message. "Flag calling Ninth Defense Squadron," he begins. "Attention, all ships. Pursuant to discretionary orders given earlier this week by Admiral Merros, I am hereby activating the squadron for combat operations. Disregard previous battle orders and prepare to get under way."

He sees Sammis looking at him, a hint of a smile on his hawklike face. Probably most of the people listening to these words knew as well as Sammis that Merros had never issued "discretionary orders." But Ulnar was placing full responsibility squarely on his own shoulders and giving the rest of his officers an excuse for following him. He knew those men well enough to know how they felt about being left out of the action.

As expected, green lights on his console began to light up; the other captains are signaling their receipt of his message—and their compliance. It doesn't take long for every light that corresponded to one of his ships to glow green. The Ninth Squadron is ready to move.

"Take us out of orbit, Captain Sammis," Ulnar says formally. He begins keying instructions on the cruising order for the rest of

Section 176

the squadron while Sammis maneuvers *Valiant*. Soon the whole string of Legion ships still in orbit around St. Germaine boosts clear of the gravity well, their course an arc to take them out of the stellar ecliptic and in a wide arc that will avoid the main fleet and the lead elements of the Ka'slaq invasion armada. Ulnar knows that the only difference he can hope to make in this battle—particularly in view of the impossibility of coordinating with Merros—is to strike at the moon-sized mother ship, which the pickets have already reported behind the alien battle line.

"Command channel, Admiral," the communications tech reports.

Merros, calling to demand an explanation, Ulnar thinks. "Do not acknowledge or accept any signals on command channel, Mr. Dorlin. Not for the duration of this action, or until I order otherwise. Understood?"

The technician nods, but not without a nervous glance at his console. "Aye-aye, Admiral," he says. "No incoming messages on command channel." Ignoring an admiral's messages wasn't the best way to further a Legion career, but the unlucky Dorlin could always plead an even more immediate admiral's wrath to excuse himself at a court-martial, if it came to that. Ulnar smiled. "Relax, Mr. Dorlin. If we win this battle, *Valiant*'s crew will be too famous to charge with mutiny. And if we don't, neither you nor I are likely to care about what happens afterward."

The young technician gulps and nods nervously, turning back to his console.

"Strange way to encourage the men, Admiral," Sammis murmurs, stepping behind his chair.

"Everyone knows the score, Captain," Ulnar replies. "Let's go out and win some medals."

The flight into battle is far from quick; the squadron has a long way to go, by a curving, indirect route. Ulnar uses the time to run simulations of the coming action in the planning tank while Sammis prepares his ship for combat. The bridge crew is relieved so they can grab a meal and a few minutes to themselves, then relieved again to let their temporary replacements do the same. The ship's chaplain has the most to do. For the rest of the crew, once the ship is cleared for action, all they have to do is wait. Conditions on the other ships are the same.

The battle of St. Germaine is fought and refought a dozen times in Ulnar's planning tank as he seeks the perfect combination for success. The squadron monitors reports going to and fro among the main battle fleet; they learn a great deal about the

tactical situation, even before they are close enough for a detailed analysis of their own. The Ka'slaq, despite losses suffered in previous engagements with human ships, now have a larger fleet than Larno reported from Endymion; at least 150 ships in their main fleet and forty-two more in reserve around the mother ship. Apparently they used the pause in their advance to replace losses and bring the fleet up to peak strength. Or perhaps they always had that number of ships, but held some back in the mother ship to have some extra strength ready for this crucial push.

With such a large fleet, the aliens can beat Merros easily—unless Ulnar is able to introduce an unexpected element into the equation. Every computer projection Ulnar runs agrees that a defensive battle would be worse than useless. If he is to have a prayer of taking the pressure off Merros, he will have to attack, drive through the enemy reserve, and threaten the mother ship. The computers have little advice to offer on the subject of how a handful of ships can threaten an artificial structure several hundred miles across, but Ulnar has a few ideas on that score himself.

So it is to be an attack. All Ulnar needs to do now is settle on the formation to use in driving that attack home. As the alien reserve grows close enough to scan in detail, Ulnar studies their phalanx formation carefully and runs through his options once more. When this battle begins, the Legion must be deployed in the best possible manner. Merros is already engaged, already taking heavy losses, and everything depends on what Ulnar does in these last few minutes before his ships plunge into the decisive battle of the war against the Ka'slaq.

If Ulnar decides to adopt a wedge formation, go to section 153.

If Ulnar chooses to order a cone formation, go to Section 155.

If Ulnar orders his destroyers to screen the battlecruisers, go to section 157.

If the admiral instructs his ships to scatter and fight dispersed, go to section 160.

As the Ka'slaq armada approaches, Ulnar has time to marshal his ships into a formation of sorts, ready to make a last stand on behalf of St. Germaine. His duty has led him into what he knows to be a final confrontation; he hopes the base on St. Germaine will use what time he can buy to put the geofractors to work to evacuate the population. When the Basilisk used the geofractor as his weapon against the Legion a century before, he rotated people and things from one point to another from a great distance and without sending or receiving stations. Though the technique was later declared unsafe, it was considerably safer for the people of St. Germaine than a Ka'slaq bombardment.

Ulnar sends his suggestions to the planetary authorities as the squadron prepares for action. They wait, knowing they face the end, but determined to the last to defend the proud traditions of the Legion of Space.

Then the Ka'slaq come, scores of cruisers closing in at high speed and in tight formation. The Ninth Defense Squadron stands fast against them, and their vortex guns take their toll against the aliens. But sheer weight of numbers is too much for them. One by one the Legion ships are blown apart by annihilator beams.

Valiant's death is a gallant one. The battlecruiser, hull scorched and pitted by near misses and scattered debris, rides serenely into the heart of the Ka'slaq fleet, the hellish fire of induced-antimatter explosions highlighting the name on her prow. She lashes out with her vortex gun; in return, she draws heavy fire from alien cruisers on every side. Her defensive fields glow as they absorb the energy of these powerful beams, but she is unable to radiate the energy off into space as quickly as it is poured against her. Finally, in a flare of light and intense radiation, the field fails.

Annihilator beams lick against her hull, setting up a matter-antimatter conversion wherever they touch. The coexistence of these opposites triggers a massive chain reaction that rips through the ship, the *Valiant* shudders under the impact as she is literally torn apart.

On the bridge the devastation comes quickly. Vice-Admiral David Ulnar is killed almost instantly at his station; as his

body is caught in the full power of the explosion that destroys the entire forward end of the ship, his last thoughts are of honor, duty—and the glory of the Legion. Then he is gone.

Proceed to section 29.

— 178 —

The Ninth Defense Squadron is on the move again, accelerating outward from St. Germaine. Behind it the alien fleet is already closing on the sector capital, and everyone on board each ship knows what will happen now. Ulnar's decision to retreat has saved them from the holocaust . . . but to what purpose?

For Vice-Admiral David Ulnar, the hours spent boosting clear of the doomed system are the worst he has ever spent. Merros and his fleet are all lost; now St. Germaine and everyone left on the colony world will fall prey to the genocidal bombardment of the Ka'slaq armada. The geofractor complex worked to evacuate the populace as long as possible, but in the end the technicians in charge overloaded the power supplies and destroyed themselves and their machines to keep them out of Ka'slaq hands. The link with Earth was gone; Ulnar will receive no more reinforcements, and the squadron won't be traveling home any time soon. Someone else would have to be responsible for defending the inner worlds. David Ulnar had failed in his duty and was effectively out of the war.

Sitting on *Valiant*'s bridge, he is conscious of every eye, some stealing covert glances, others regarding him with open contempt. The great heroes of the Legion—John Star, Jay Kalam, Hal Samdu, even whining old Giles Habibula—would have stayed behind to triumph or die in defense of the Legion's honor. David Ulnar ran instead. What did he have to show for it? An intact squadron; against an enemy and without lines of supply or communications, it didn't count for much.

Vice-Admiral David Ulnar shakes his head sadly. They can't do much for the war effort now, but inwardly he vows that they will do everything they can to fight the invaders. He will harass them, attack them, keep fighting the alien Ka'slaq at every turn, until death catches up with him. Maybe that way, he tells

himself, he can hope to redeem the Ulnar name and someday, somehow, win back the respect of these men whose contempt sears his soul more deeply than the Ka'slaq annihilators could burn a planet's surface.

Proceed to section 29.

— 179 —

"Alien ships still closing," an ultrapulse technician chants calmly. "Estimating contact in six minutes . . . mark."

Ulnar looks up from the Flag computer keyboard and scans the planning tank, absorbing the situation. There is no way his ships can assemble into a coherent formation in time, not even if he can get battle orders to them in the time remaining. Adapting a prepared program to unexpected conditions takes time, and he is nearly out. And the squadron, disorganized and demoralized, has virtually no chance of executing those orders anyway. If they were Ka'slaq cruisers, perfectly coordinated and able to make inhumanly tight maneuvers with hardly an effort, they could do it, but the Legion vessels are conned by humans, and humans have their limits.

Wiping the data on his monitor, Ulnar reaches for the Fleetcomm microphone switch once more. "All ships, this is Flag," he says resignedly. "Cancel previous orders. Prepare to engage the enemy. Ninth Squadron to scatter and fight the alien fleet dispersed." His left hand is moving across the keyboard, sending a computer confirmation of his verbal instructions, but already ships are beginning to acknowledge, and the yellow lights in the planning tank are slowly starting to draw apart.

Proceed to section 150.

— 180 —

Ulnar orders the squadron to get under way again, their course set for the world he believes to be endangered by the next Ka'slaq thrust. The ships of the Legion rise gracefully out of orbit around Baal, with messages wishing them good hunting and continued success. After their success at Baal, spirits are high. The Ninth Defense Squadron has turned the aliens back once. Now they set out to do it again.

Two days out from Baal, near the extreme limit at which ship-to-planet communications become virtually impossible to maintain, frantic messages begin to pour in from the colony. They are under attack; alien ships have appeared and renewed their assault on Baal. Garrison ships left behind were quickly overwhelmed and the planet itself is coming under bombardment. An hour after the first messages begin, they stop abruptly, but in the interim Ulnar has heard enough.

As before, there was only a small force of alien ships, with no sign of the moon-sized craft from Endymion. Once again their attack was mounted with singleminded determination and minimal attention to the defenders; only Commandant Rovin's orbital fortress was targeted for a major attack, while other ships were completely ignored unless they happened to get in the way of the invaders.

But there was one major parallel with the attack on Endymion: Baal was devastated without mercy and with a thoroughness that left not a single settlement intact. That was clear from the refugee reports picked up from ships fleeing the scene.

There is no chance of helping Baal now. The colony is gone, the Legion victory erased as if it had never been.

If Ulnar wants to turn the squadron around and return to Baal, add a total of four days (two out and two back) to the time consumed in the campaign and go to section 76.

If the ships are en route to St. Germaine, go to section 74.

If the squadron is traveling to Endymion, go to section 53.

If they are on their way to S.C. 170, go to section 68.

If Ulnar's ships are heading for Ulnar 118, go to section 63.

If the admiral has ordered them to go to any other destination, go to Section 73.

— 181 —

Ulnar's eyes meet the Captain's in a level, challenging stare. "Don't be a fool, Sammis," he says softly. "Some other time, some other place, but not here and now. There are more than seventy ships out there. Do you honestly expect to beat them?"

"We intend to try," Sammis replies calmly. He seems more decisive now, and more determined. "You've had plenty of chances to outguess them, Admiral, and our record to date hasn't been very good. Withdrawing now will just give them another chance to slip away and attack a League planet. Now . . . what's your answer?"

"I don't intend to take orders from my own officers," Ulnar tells him coldly. "Whatever you do is on your head."

Sammis looks away. "I'm sorry it comes to this, then." He signals a guard at the hatch to the rear of the bridge. "Please leave your seat, sir. I am confining you to quarters for the duration."

"And afterward? If there is one?"

"We're ready to face charges, Admiral, if we're successful. Success counts heavily in these matters. If we fail . . . it isn't likely we'll be needing to justify ourselves. Not to temporal authority, at least."

In the face of the captain's determination—and Sammis plainly has the backing of the rest of the bridge crew, as well—there is no way Ulnar can fight them. He rises and allows the guard to escort him from the bridge. As the hatch closes behind him, he hears Sammis on the Fleetcomm net. "Sammis to all ships. The admiral is . . . indisposed, and I am taking authority as acting squadron commander. Prepare for battle. . . ."

Then Ulnar hears nothing more.

There is very little to do but wait. The mutineers cut off Ulnar's cabin computer terminal to prevent his interfering with

them, so he waits in silence and darkness for the battle to begin. But even combat is hard to notice in his position. Now and then the ship is shaken by some external force, or the dimmed lights flicker under a power drain, but there is no measure by which the admiral can keep score. He has plenty of time, though, to reflect on the failures that brought them to this moment. If only the squadron had achieved something sooner! Frustrated at every turn, it was perhaps inevitable that the others would decide on a gambler's throw.

Perhaps, he tells himself bitterly, he should have bowed to their will. At least then he would be able to guide events, instead of lying on his bed and watching the blank overhead.

It is David Ulnar's last thought. The squadron, hopelessly outmatched and disorganized by mutiny and confusion, fights gallantly, but to no avail. As Ulnar is contemplating his mistakes, an annihilator beam penetrates *Valiant*'s defense fields and licks across the hull plating. The metal it touches is instantly transmuted to an antimatter state, and the juncture of matter and antimatter sets up a total, mutual annihilation that tears through the ship. The energy of the explosion consumes *Valiant* and everyone aboard her, and the flagship is gone. The other vessels of the Ninth Defense Squadron fare no better, and the Ka'slaq win the battle at Ulnar 118 with only the lightest losses. The defenses of the Star League stand open to the invaders.

Go to section 159.

— 182 —

As the battle rages, the Legion ships maintain their attack with determination and skill. Cruiser after Ka'slaq cruiser is engulfed in the atomic flames of Legion vortex guns, and although Ulnar's squadron suffers losses as well, it seems that victory is in their grasp.

Then a communications technician breaks the elation reigning on *Valiant*'s bridge. "Pax has been destroyed," he says somberly, looking up from the board where he has been monitoring the main battle. "The admiral is dead, and the rest of the fleet is breaking."

The words are hardly out before *Valiant*'s sensors pick up the

Section 182

approach of an overwhelming body of enemy ships. Released by the collapse of the main Legion fleet, the aliens converge on the Ninth Defense Squadron, just as they had done at Endymion when Larno advanced against the mother ship. There is no way Ulnar's weary crews and battle-scarred ships can win against so many.

If Ulnar decides to retreat, go to section 162. No Morale check is needed for this retreat, but neither is it required due to low morale.

If Ulnar orders the squadron to stand and fight despite the hopeless odds, go to section 177.

APPENDIX 1

TECHNOLOGY AND TACTICS OF THE LEGION OF SPACE

In the century that has passed since the retirement of Jay Kalam, the Legion's most famous commander, the forces of the Green Hall have adapted to a changing technology and the fast growth of the human sphere to remain Mankind's guardians. After the brief Social War, when Earth's colonies forced the Green Hall Council to reorganize into the Star League, the Legion fought no more wars but organized numerous minor police actions, and the dangers of exploration beyond the frontiers of the League kept them honed to the high standards of Kalam's day. They are the defenders and sentinels, the explorers, the elite who keep humanity safe and strong.

Technology

There was a time, following the Legion's clash with the Basilisk, when Dr. Max Eleroid's geofractor seemed likely to make conventional space travel obsolete. But the geofractor, which rotated objects and people across unimaginable interstellar distances in the blink of an eye, proved less safe than original estimates predicted. To be used as a practical means of transportation, it required both a sending and receiving complex; that meant that starships were still necessary. Along the frontiers geofractors were erected only slowly, so most trade and travel was limited to ships. The Legion established powerful frontier garrisons to handle the enforcement of law and order as well as the defense of the League's borders against any new race of Cometeers who might threaten man.

Ships: The bulk of the Legion's ships fall into two categories: destroyers and battlecruisers. Other vessels are available, from tiny couriers up to huge battleships, but most frontier

garrisons rely on these two basic categories for virtually every Legion duty.

Fast destroyers are employed primarily for scouting. They are armed, but not heavily; their crews are small and their battle functions limited. Destroyers double as exploratory vessels. They are almost always grouped into a reconnaissance wing when serving with a squadron or fleet. Opinions differ on the best tactical uses of destroyers, but many officers point to the Social War, when colonial destroyers were able to defeat small battlecruiser wings in three different crucial battles, as proof that destroyers can indeed stand in a squadron's battle line.

Battlecruisers are larger, better-armed warships. In addition to their superior weaponry these vessels carry large contingents of trained Legion ground troops for the suppression of colonial disturbances. Employment outside League frontiers is rare. In combat the battlecruiser is considered the work-horse in the line of battle. A strong battle wing is maintained in every frontier sector, along with a central reserve in the inner worlds.

Engines: Legion ships still use the geodyne principles that first took man to the stars, though long since upgraded, and improved several times. The geodynes generate a local distortion in the space-time continuum in which normal physical laws simply do not apply. The Einsteinian light-speed barrier and the accepted principle of inertia cease to apply within the bounds of the geodyne fields, allowing ships to attain speeds and accelerations previously thought impossible. Indeed, in theory a geodyne could develop a hole in the fabric of space allowing instantaneous movement from one place to another—the basic concept of the geofractor—but limits of power, size, and safety keep the ships that use these drives to finite speeds.

Weaponry: Standard weaponry for all Legion ships, regardless of size or type, is the vortex gun first used by the Medusae in their unsuccessful invasion of the Solar system. Each ship mounts a single gun with a fixed-forward firing arc. The difference between a destroyer and a battlecruiser is strictly one of available power, not the number or type of guns used.

The vortex gun fires a ball of pure atomic energy at geodyne-induced speeds; thus, these miniature suns actually move faster than light-speed. Their range and destructive radius

varies with the power of the ship firing the weapon. At whatever range is designated on opening fire, the fireball drops into normal space to create a nuclear explosion of incredible power.

Communications and Tracking: Ultrawaves, with faster-than-light speeds, are the basis for interstellar communications and a form of "space radar" called "ultrapulse tracking." Ultrawave physics was crucial to the discovery of the geodyne and the geofractor. Ultrawaves travel outside of our universe entirely, but can be heterodyned and used for a variety of purposes. They are limited to a finite speed, but an ultrawave message moves roughly ten times as fast as a ship under geodyne drive. They are easily transmitted from one planet to another, or across relatively short distances to or from ships. Across interstellar distances, ultrawave communication with a moving ship is problematical, at best.

Ultrapulse tracking detects disturbances created by physical objects in our own universe in the ultraspace where these waves propagate. The effect is very much like radar or sonar. Geodyne-powered ships cast a distinctive ultrapulse image in the other universe, which allows a fairly accurate reading of size, power fluctuations, and movement a competent computer can translate into a coherent picture of the ship in question.

Ultraspace is relatively free from distortion or static. However, it is possible to create a sort of ultrawave jamming by throwing out extremely powerful ultrawave and ultrapulse signals. Invented by a particularly successful colonial commodore during the Social War, this jamming, called "Stealth mode," confuses a computer's interpretation of ultrapulse readings. Under the right circumstances Stealth mode can so confuse a tracking system as to allow ships to elude their opponents entirely. The enemy knows something is out there but cannot fix size, position, or course with any accuracy except at very close range.

Command and Control: Squadron coordination is handled by a senior Legion officer, a commodore or an admiral. Each flagship is fitted out with squadron command facilities, including a special station on the ship's bridge. This console is adjacent to a holographic planning tank, a pit several meters in diameter in which computer projections translate current scanner data into a three-dimensional, multicolored display

showing ship positions and various other bits of vital information needed to plan tactics.

The other major modification aboard a flagship is the addition of a "flag computer," a computer complex devoted entirely to the squadron commander's planning and coordination needs. The flag computer controls the tank and can be used to set up complex simulations. Battle orders creating a variety of tactical formations out of the ships available can be prepared and stored in the flag computer. In battle the admiral uses the computer and his fleet communications ultrawave network to transmit orders to the rest of the squadron. Some officers use computers to the exclusion of verbal orders, but no one is foolish enough to attempt to lead a squadron into combat without some kind of computer coordination.

Tactics

The Legion has evolved a number of specific tactical formations, each with its own strengths and weaknesses in battle. These are briefly described below.

Wedge: This is a formation used to attack an enemy, particularly an opponent with superior numbers. Destroyers (if any are present) form up at the leading edge of an arrow-shaped mass; the battlecruisers form behind them. In battle the wedge thrusts against a portion of the enemy force. After some initial firing, the destroyers drop back to work with their heavier consorts, but their offensive role is negligible. A wedge formation is considered ideal when the enemy has formed a battlecruiser or destroyer screen.

Cone: This is also an offensive formation, especially when the opponent has inferior numbers or widely scattered clusters of ships. Destroyers are not essential, but when they are available, they form the open mouth of the cone, while the battlecruisers form the tapering end. With its slight edge in speed, the recon wing attempts to engulf the enemy force while the battlecruisers keep it occupied. Once the globe is closed, the surrounded enemy is subjected to fire from all sides. A cone is considered best against an enemy globe, wedge, or cylinder.

Globe: A defensive formation, the globe is favored by those tacticians who regard destroyers as unsuited to battle operations. The battlecruisers take up a spherical formation while the destroyers wait inside the globe, out of harm's way. A globe is a good formation for a small force to adopt while

under attack by a large opposing fleet. Only the battlecruisers fight.

Cylinder: The cylinder is a fairly recent defensive innovation, first proposed after the Social War. It is an adaptation of the globe, in which the battlecruisers form into an oblate spheroid with destroyers concentrated at each end. In theory the destroyers focus more firepower in their smaller area of coverage, making them as capable in battle as the more powerful battlecruisers. It is considered a poor compromise by most tradition-minded officers; it is more easily disrupted than a globe, but in a situation where every ship counts, a cylinder brings destroyer firepower into battle. A cylinder cannot be formed without destroyers.

Destroyer Screen: The most ambitious use of destroyers in a battle formation, the destroyer screen can be used either offensively or defensively. A destroyer screen deploys the recon wing in a loose, convex wall in the forefront of the battle. The light ships fight throughout the first phase of the battle. At a well-timed moment, a wedge of battlecruisers attacks through the screen and carries the battle from that point. This attack, which takes advantage of enemy weaknesses and distractions, is often decisive—if the destroyers hold long enough. The destroyer screen does poorly against a wedge but is a fairly effective formation in other situations.

Heavy Screen: Also called a “battle phalanx,” the heavy screen is primarily defensive in nature, at least in Legion use. A wall of battlecruisers interposes itself between the enemy and his target, forcing combat over a broad front. No destroyers are used. As in a globe, any light ships present are relegated to the rear. The phalanx is particularly effective against an enemy cone, since it is hard to surround, but is vulnerable to a well-handled wedge.

Dispersed Operations: At once the oldest and the newest tactical form, this particular evolution has been suggested as a useful mode in a recent treatise by an unorthodox naval theoretician. Basically it calls for ships to scatter and fight on their own, stressing individual initiative over tight command control. The theory is that, offensively or defensively, a dispersed squadron will disrupt the enemy’s formation; it is assumed that the enemy was not expecting to fight this way and will have trouble reacting to it. This formation is sometimes forced on a fleet if it is caught scattered, as after an unsuccessful retreat.

Destroyers can be used in dispersed combat, but they are not necessary. Most Legion commanders frown on the formation as overly unconventional, but several colonial successes in the Social War followed from such a scattered battle mode.

Stealth Mode in Battle: Another highly unorthodox tactic recently suggested for use in space combat involves the use of ultrawave Stealth mode jamming. This isn't a formation, but rather a ruse used in conjunction with any other formation. Basically, all ships in the squadron adopt Stealth mode as they go into combat, which distorts ultrapulse scanning and tracking systems and may interfere with ultrawave communications.

The drawback to this new tactic is that the jamming also interferes with friendly operations. In a tight formation, distorted tracking can lead to accidental fire on friendly ships, so Stealth mode reduces the effectiveness of most formations (except Dispersion). Many Legion officers are reluctant to use this extremely unorthodox mode of combat except when it seems obvious that disruption of an enemy will be more severe than the interference with friendly operations.

TRAVEL TIME CHART

To . . .

	S.C. 170	Lochinvar	Endymion	Thule	MacBeth	Trinidad	Baal	Derron's World	Ulnar 118	St. Germaine
--	----------	-----------	----------	-------	---------	----------	------	----------------	-----------	--------------

From . . .

St. Germaine	0	6	13	11	17	24	22	18	18	26
Ulnar 118	6	0	10	7	11	18	15	12	16	20
Derron's World	13	10	0	16	8	15	15	18	25	20
Baal	11	7	16	0	14	20	15	8	9	18
Trinidad	17	11	8	14	0	7	6	12	22	12
MacBeth	24	18	15	20	7	0	6	15	26	10
Thule	22	15	15	15	6	6	0	9	21	6
Endymion	18	12	18	8	12	15	9	0	12	10
Lochinvar	18	16	25	9	22	26	21	12	0	21
S.C. 170	26	20	20	18	12	10	6	10	21	0

SHIP GAME STATISTICS

Legion battlecruisers

Manpower: 1 each
Ordnance: 6
Strength: 6
Stealth: 7
Morale: 9
[Melee: 8]

Legion destroyers

Manpower: 1 each
Ordnance: 3
Strength: 3
Stealth: 7
Morale: 9
[Melee: 4]

Legion orbital fort

Manpower: 1 each
Ordnance: 9
Strength: 9
Stealth: 0
Morale: 9
[Melee: 10]

Ka'slaq cruisers

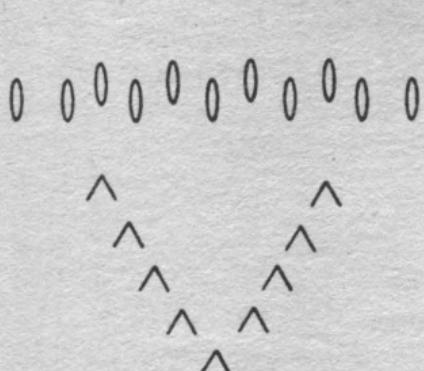
Manpower: 1 each
Ordnance: 7
Strength: 8
Stealth: 8
Morale: 12
[Melee: 0]

Ka'slaq mother ship

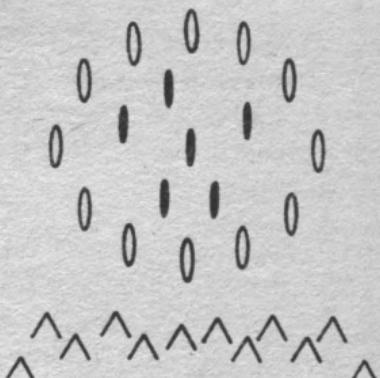
Manpower: 1
Ordnance: 0
Strength: 0
Stealth: 4
Morale: 12
[Melee: 0]

APPENDIX 2

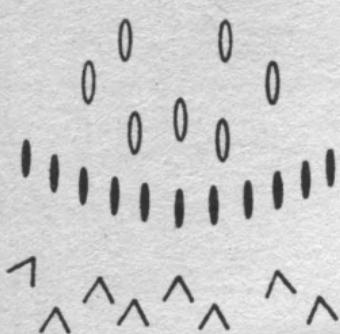
Legion Combat Formations



Cruiser Screen (Offensive)



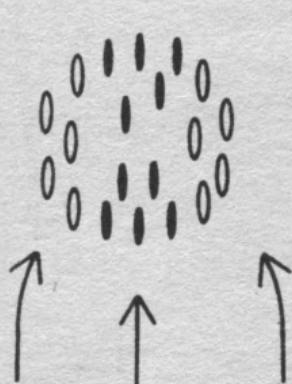
Globe (Defensive)



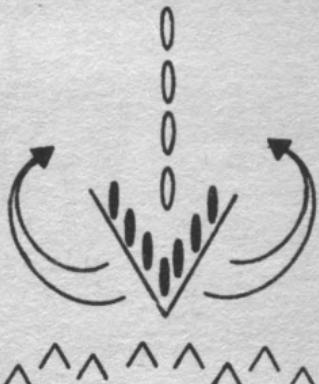
Destroyer Screen (Defensive)



Cone (Offensive)



Cylinder (Defensive)

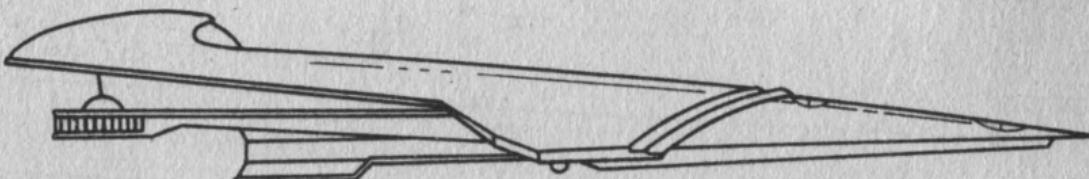
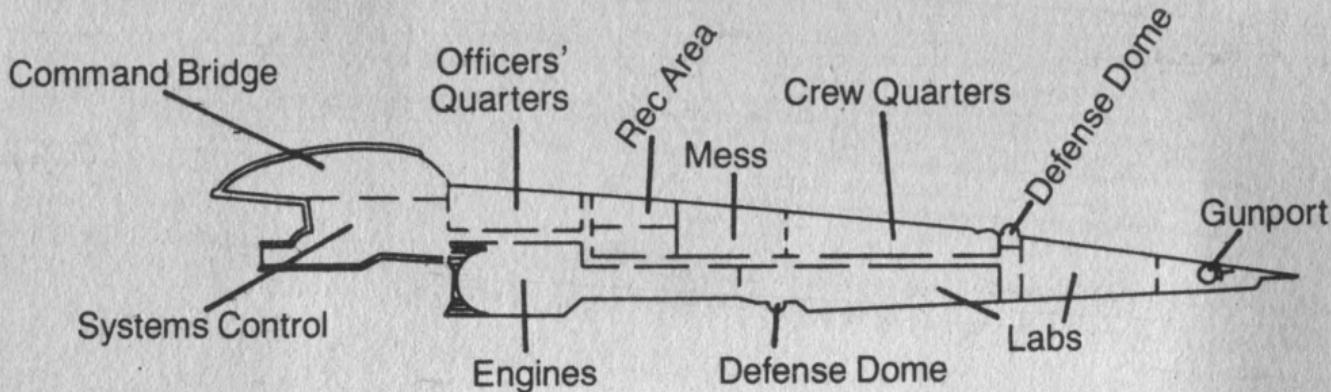


Wedge (Offensive)

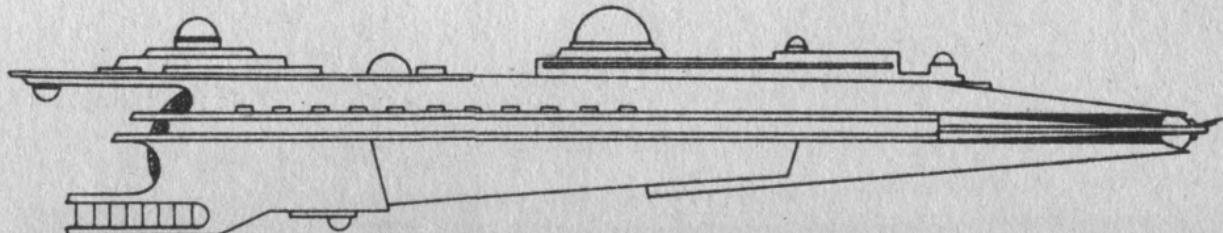
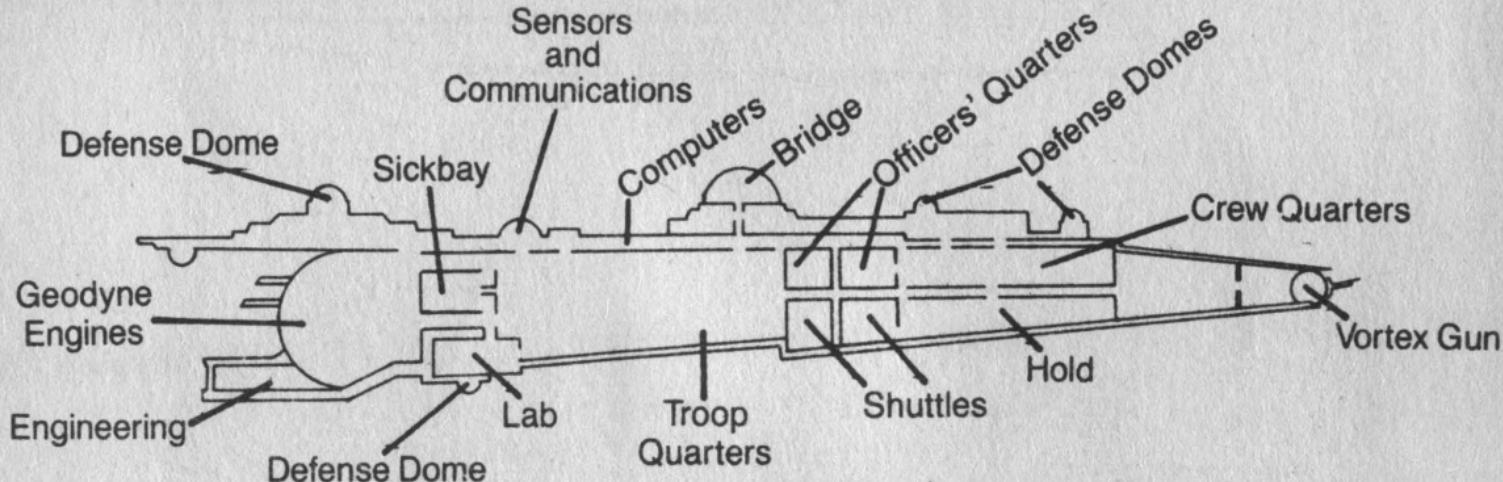
○ Battle Cruiser

● Destroyer

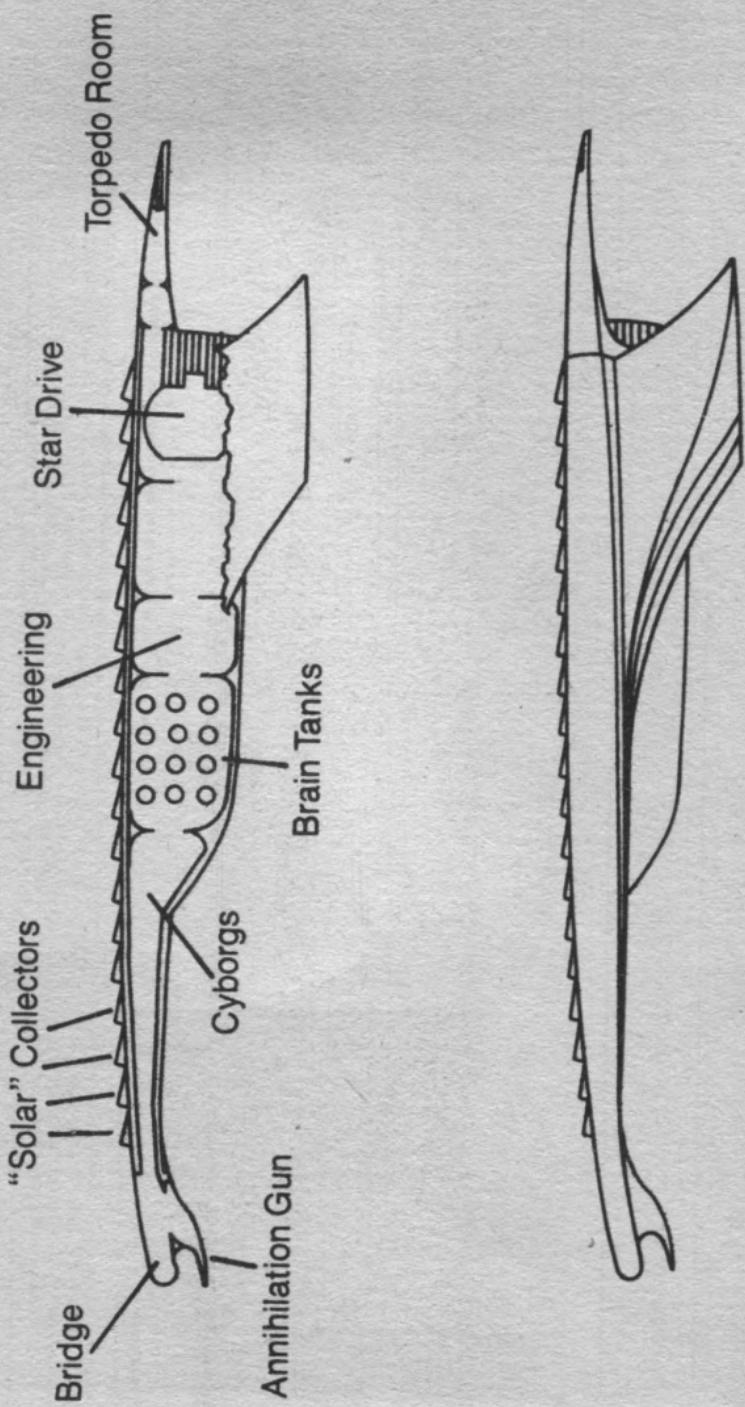
Legion Recon Ship



Legion Battle Cruiser



Ka'slaq Cruiser



COMMAND THE LEGION OF SPACE

You are Vice Admiral David Ulnar, commanding the Ninth Defense Squadron on the Orion frontier. You are all that stands between the League of Worlds and the world-wrecking planetoid of Ka'slaq invaders. Now your command will be tested in the most destructive battles ever fought in Jack Williamson's classic tale.

Will you outguess the Ka'slaq and block their light-speed attacks—or will their deadly antimatter weapons hold hostage a crippled League of Worlds?



COMBAT COMMAND™

ROLE-PLAYING ADVENTURES IN THE
WORLDS OF YOUR FAVORITE AUTHORS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JACK WILLIAMSON



11431



ISBN 0-441-11431-8