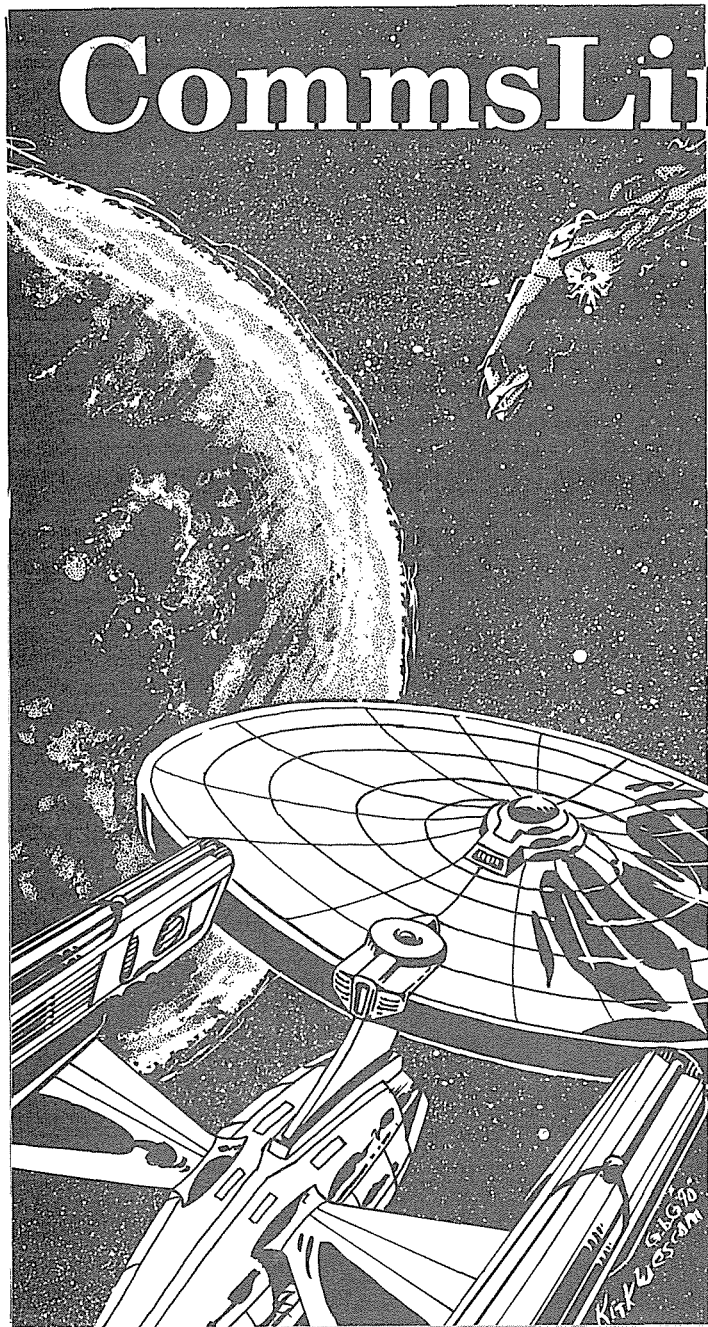


CommsLink Gambit



The *Monitor* is missing, the only sign of her a weak and unreadable distress call picked up from the Delta Triangle. Could this signal an imminent Klingon attack?

By Jeffrey Groteboer

In the years since the Organian Peace Treaty, the Federation and the Klingons have had to rely on cunning to accomplish their goals in Quadrant 3 South. Overt military action has given way to covert operations. So-called "Black Ops" have become a specialty of the Klingon Fleet as they use subterfuge and bravado to accomplish the goals of the Klingon High Command.

Communications Relay Station Gamma 6 is an automatic communications relay between the outer reaches of the quadrant and the interior of the Federation. It is only one link in a network of stations which provide a rapid flow of information between Earth and Federation ships as they patrol their sectors of space.

Less than 10 parsecs away, Deep Space Station K-9 services the commslink and the ships travelling the sector. With the Klingons 30 parsecs away on one side and the Romulan neutral zone equidistant on the other, K-9 is in a unique position, enviable only to those stationed on K-7 of Tribble fame.

The Klingons have often crossed the disputed border into Federation space on missions harassment, and Station K-9 has had its share of alerts. The station commander finally convinced the Federation to re-route the USS *Monitor* (NCC-1713) to the sector to act as protection for the otherwise undefended station.

Now, the *Monitor* is missing. She failed to arrive at Station K-9 as scheduled, and all attempts to hail her have failed. A weak and unreadable distress call was picked up from the direction of the Delta Triangle, which lies between Station K-9 and the Klingon Empire. The station commander is frantic. He believes, given recent Klingon activity in the area, that the Klingons are planning an attack on the station or the nearby system of Argo, and has initiated a priority one distress call. The nearest unassigned ship is the *Bonhomme Richard* (NCC-1712), on patrol in Quadrant 3 North. Of course, it just happens to be the vessel on which the player characters are stationed....

ON THE SCENT

Following the distress signal to its source, the *Bonhomme Richard* arrives in the Delta Triangle, a mysterious region of space which is marked on astrogational charts as "Dangerous—Avoid Entry." Unfortunately, a distress call, no matter how suspect, is something Federation ships must not ignore, and the *Bonhomme Richard* sails in.

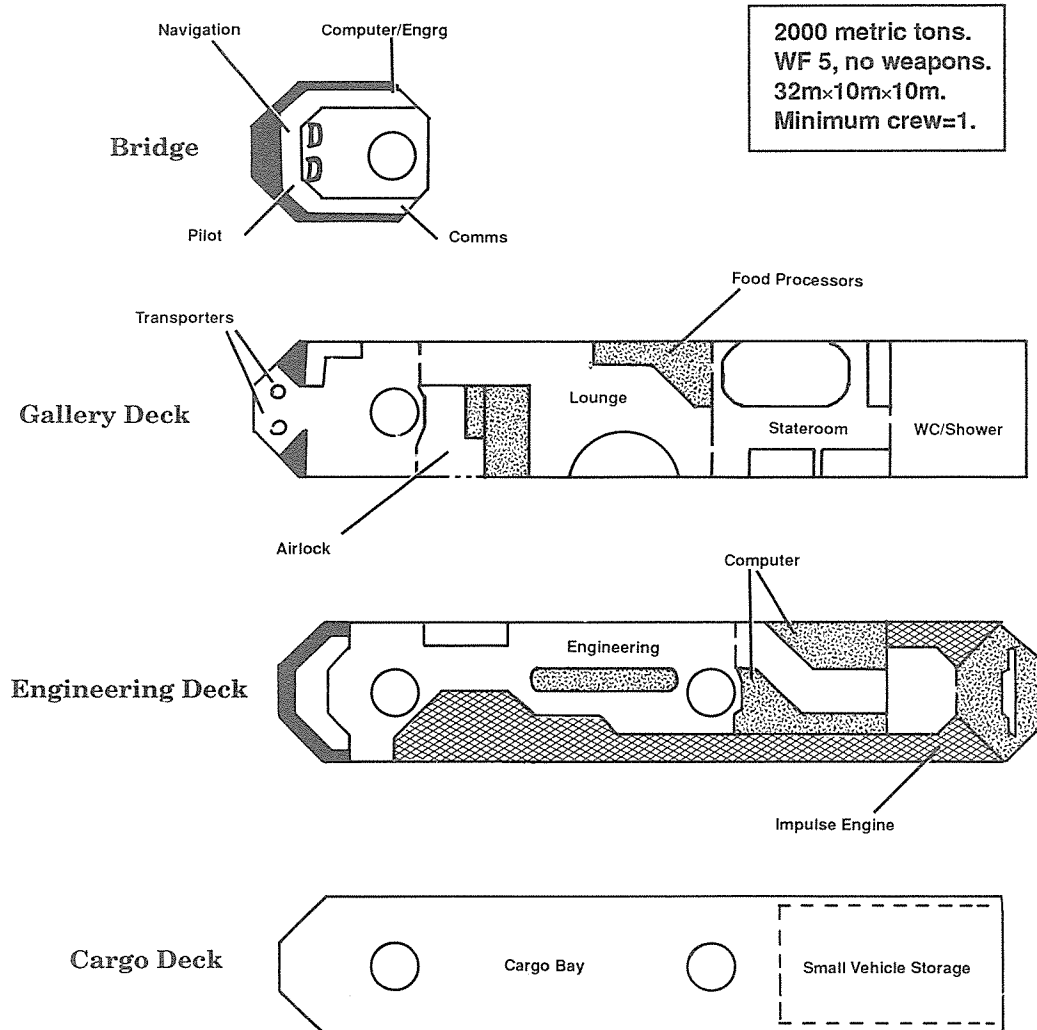
Abruptly, the signal ends, and shortly thereafter the *Bonhomme Richard* encounters the wreckage of the *Monitor*. Her hull is severely damaged, obviously from a recent battle. There are no life signs, and a damage control and emergency medical team are beamed over to investigate.

The damage control team finds the ship irreparable. The central computer is useless, but the ship's emergency marker buoy was loaded and ready for launch: The crew apparently didn't even get the chance to jettison it before the final attack which killed them and crippled the ship.

As the *Bonhomme Richard*'s science officer plays back the tape from the buoy (containing a copy of the *Monitor*'s log), the bridge crew listens:

"Captain's log, stardate 3722.6. First Officer Roland in command. The captain is dead. We were attacked by two ships—Romulans, I think—just outside the Phylos star system. The ship sustained major damage from their plasma weapons. We couldn't return fire due to their cloaking devices. Captain Cutler was killed on the second hit."

Communications Maintenance Shuttle



Impulse Engines

SPD 1, DEFL 1

5

SPEED 1

4

3

SPEED 0

2

1

Deflectors

PORT

STBD

Superstructure

4

3

2

1

"We escaped before they could attack again. They're afraid to enter the Delta Triangle. So am I, but it's the only place to run. There's no time to warn Station K-9. We took major communications damage in the attack. We are concentrating repairs on the shields and the warp drives."

The next recording has a scrambled picture and intermittent sound.

"S....date 3723.1 First Off...recording. Have ta...damage. Destroyed one sh...p.... Definitely Romulans. Two...close quarters fight...exploded right beside us. Warp...s, all weapons...last shot.... One got away...zero-three-seven-mark-eight...right toward...."

First Officer Roland's recording is interrupted by another voice on the tape, crying out, "Here they come!"

At this point, the first officer apparently forgot to turn off the recorder, because he then yells, "Evasi...right! Jettison the buoy...."

Then the recording ends, abruptly.

The crewmembers of the *Bonhomme Richard* may ask themselves some interesting questions (and the referee should not provide too many answers just yet):

- First, what were Romulans doing in this region of space?
- Why Romulans, when the Klingons have been causing all the trouble recently?

Communications Technicians

The following are the crewmembers of the communications maintenance shuttle the Klingons will attempt to destroy after completing their repairs on Argo. The crewmembers are not expecting trouble, and there's not much the shuttle can do against a *D-7* anyway!

If the *D-7* attacks them, they're history. If they survive (and the PCs ought to make some attempt to defend them once they figure out what going on), they may be used to examine Gamma 6 for tampering, or whatever else the characters can convince them to do.

The shuttle crewmembers are not members of Star Fleet. They are independent technicians affiliated with the Primonic Paelpentarikon Syatkitae (PPSk—that's Andorian for "Federation CommsLink Troubleshooting Team"), which is a quasitrade union under contract with the United Federation of Planets.

Lebeltar, Communications Crew Chief

STR 63 DEX 55 PSI 22
END 69 CHA 21 AGE 27
INT 58 LUC 81 Andorian male

Skills: Administration-40, Communication System Tech-72, Electronic Tech-66, Life Support Tech-28, Shuttlecraft System Tech-26, St. Engrg (General)-57, Transporter Opn-43, Transporter Tech-35, Zero-G Opn-19, Phaser-56, Melee-50.

Klondike Hale, Communications Technician, Mnt Shuttle Pilot

STR 58 DEX 61 PSI 15
END 61 CHA 54 AGE 34
INT 52 LUC 11 Human male

Skills: Astron/Astrog-52, Communication System Tech-37, Computer Opn-43, Electronic Tech-48, Mechanical Eng-73, Shuttlecraft Pilot-41, St. Engrg (General)-40, Phaser-28, Melee-23.

Klingons

These Klingons represent the bridge crew and chief engineer of the remaining *D-7* battlecruiser. Of course, if the referee has his own Klingons which are better balanced to his particular game, they may be used instead.

Commander K'ah Tlenh, Commanding Officer

STR 64 DEX 53 PSI 48
END 53 CHA 35
INT 58 LUC 46 Klingon male

Skills: Starship Combat Tactics/Strategy-54, Sensor Opn-54, Helm-80, Human Language-63, Phaser/Disruptor-62, Melee Combat-51.

Subcommander Taregg, Science Officer

STR 58 DEX 43 PSI 25
END 64 CHA 28
INT 52 LUC 1 Klingon male

Skills: Sensor Opn-54, Transporter-53, Computer Opn-53, Physics-41, Phaser/Disruptor-78, Melee Combat-44.

Subcommander K'a Tallak, Engineer

STR 59 DEX 49 PSI 0
END 63 CHA 31
INT 44 LUC 1 Klingon male

Skills: General Engineering-75, Transporter Tech-50, Warp Drive Engineering-72, Computer Technology-67, Phaser/Disruptor-48, Melee Combat-59.

Lieutenant K'asha, Weapons Officer

STR 58 DEX 48 PSI 0
END 50 CHA 35
INT 58 LUC 7 Klingon male

Skills: Ship's Disruptors-78, Computer Opn-57, Sensors-55, Tactics/Strategy-80, Phaser/Disruptor-50, Melee Combat-57.

Sublieutenant Amakh', Helmsman

STR 70 DEX 54 PSI 0
END 54 CHA 34
INT 45 LUC 58 Klingon male

Skills: Helm-51, Computer Opn-54, Sensors-51, Navigation-46, Phaser/Disruptor-63, Melee Combat-50.

Sublieutenant T'achh', Communications Officer

STR 57 DEX 49 PSI 0
END 53 CHA 31
INT 44 LUC 1 Klingon male

Skills: Communications-62, Computer Opn-42, Transporter Opn-45, Human Language-49, Phaser/Disruptor-41, Melee Combat-53.

- How many are still out there?
- If the first attackers were afraid to enter the Delta Triangle, who made the last attack?
- What does the number 037 mark 8 mean? If it's a course, where does it go?

The easiest question is the last. Assuming 037 mark 8 to be a course from the last position of the *Monitor*, the characters will be able to draw a line from that position directly to Communications Relay Station Gamma 6. Little other information is available here at the *Monitor*.

WHAT NEXT?

The *Monitor* can be towed to Deep Space Station K-9, but it is of little value except as scrap iron. If the characters waste too much time with the *Monitor* or extensive memorial services for the crew, they should be "encouraged" to get on with the mission by a blunt request for an update from Star Fleet Command.

The next logical place to go is to Gamma 6, the direction the Romulans were apparently taking. When the *Bonhomme Richard* arrived in the vicinity of the buoy, the buoy will appear undisturbed. Should anyone want to beam over to Relay Station Gamma 6, they may do so. It will, of course, appear completely normal unless the landing party members performs a thorough electronic inspection of the communications systems.

Finding anything unusual inside the circuitry of the commlink equipment requires a successful Communications Systems Technology roll. Secretly penalize anyone who has never been assigned to starbase duty 50% of his skill level to account for his unfamiliarity with this type of equipment. A thorough search which avoids interrupting the commlink will take at least eight hours. If the crew of the *Bonhomme Richard* obtains permission from Star Fleet to turn off the link (thereby silencing an entire sector, something Star Fleet is likely to frown upon), the search can proceed in half that time.

Should anyone be successful, refer to the Answers to the Puzzle section below for details on his discoveries.

If the crewmembers of the *Bonhomme Richard* leave Gamma 6 without finding any answers to their questions (or never even board it), they will need to search for clues. The referee should point out that the course plotted by the *Monitor* may have been erroneous and that the Argo star system is the closest known system in the general direction of those coordinates.

ARGO SYSTEM

Upon arrival in the Argo system the characters will immediately notice a *D-7* battlecruiser in standard orbit. After the *Monitor*'s reports of Romulan attacks, it will seem likely that this is one of the *D-7*s which the Romulans bought from the Klingons. If so, the crew of the *Bonhomme Richard* has just discovered a blatant breach of the Neutral Zone—a Romulan ship nearly 40 parsecs inside the Federation is cause for serious consternation. How many others have been this bold?

What the PCs decide to do about the situation is left to them. A few options are:

- Attack and (attempt to) destroy the Romulans. Of course, they would probably never learn the truth of the situation (and so would not receive commendations from Star Fleet).
- Land on the planet and try to discover what is really going on. The events on Argo are left to the referee's discretion (see The Answers to the Puzzle, below, for more information).
- Monitor and tail the *D-7* to see what happens next. If the PCs choose this option, the *D-7* will, after a few days, leave orbit and head toward a spot near Gamma 6. It will wait there for a maintenance shuttle from K-9 to arrive. If the *Bonhomme Richard* has remained undetected by the *D-7*, it will see the *D-7* attack the maintenance shuttle and attempt to destroy it. It will then, if still unopposed, turn on course for *Klingon* space.

ANSWERS TO THE PUZZLE

That the *D-7* is returning to Klingon space is the twist you were

waiting for. These are not Romulans, but Klingons. The attack on the *Monitor* was made by two Klingon *D-7*-class battlecruisers equipped with

Romulan cloaking devices. They destroyed the *Monitor* because it had discovered their presence inside the Federation.

The Klingons' mission was to plant an electronic "bug" inside Communications Relay Station Gamma 6 so it would relay all normal Federation communications as before, and also transmit those signals to a listening post inside the Klingon Empire. This the Klingons accomplished after the battle with the *Monitor*. Their sojourn on Argo was to repair battle damage, including the installation of new dilithium crystals, which can be found in limited quantities on Argo. (If the PCs landed on the planet to spy on their adversaries, they could find out much of this.)

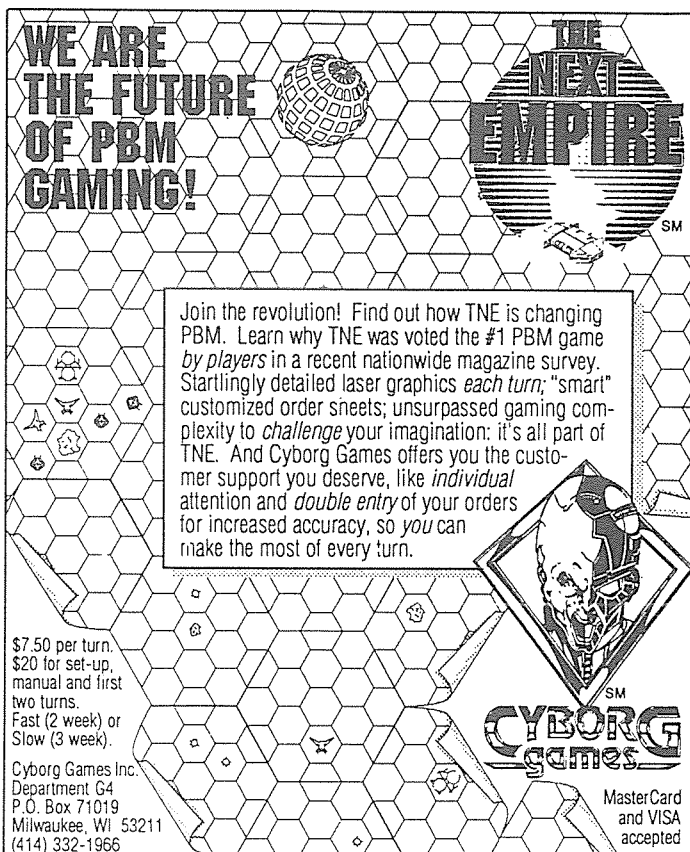
The Klingons returned to Gamma 6 because they knew the maintenance shuttle would arrive soon; on the bulkhead inside the relay station someone had thoughtfully taped a maintenance schedule—which the Klingons read with interest. Destroying the only two people in the quadrant who could discover the tampering was thought by the Klingon commander to be a necessary precaution.

ENDGAME

If the PCs debug the communications relay station, they will be hailed by Star Fleet as heroes and probably awarded a commendation. The Klingons will have a lot of explaining to do if their ships were discovered, destroyed or disabled deep within Federation space. If, however, the crew of the *Bonhomme Richard* fails to find the listening device the Klingons planted in Gamma 6, future events will favor the Klingons. Someday, some conscientious maintenance person might find the device, but what will the Klingons have learned in the meantime? Ω

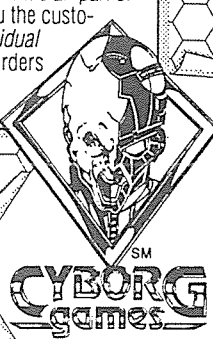
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