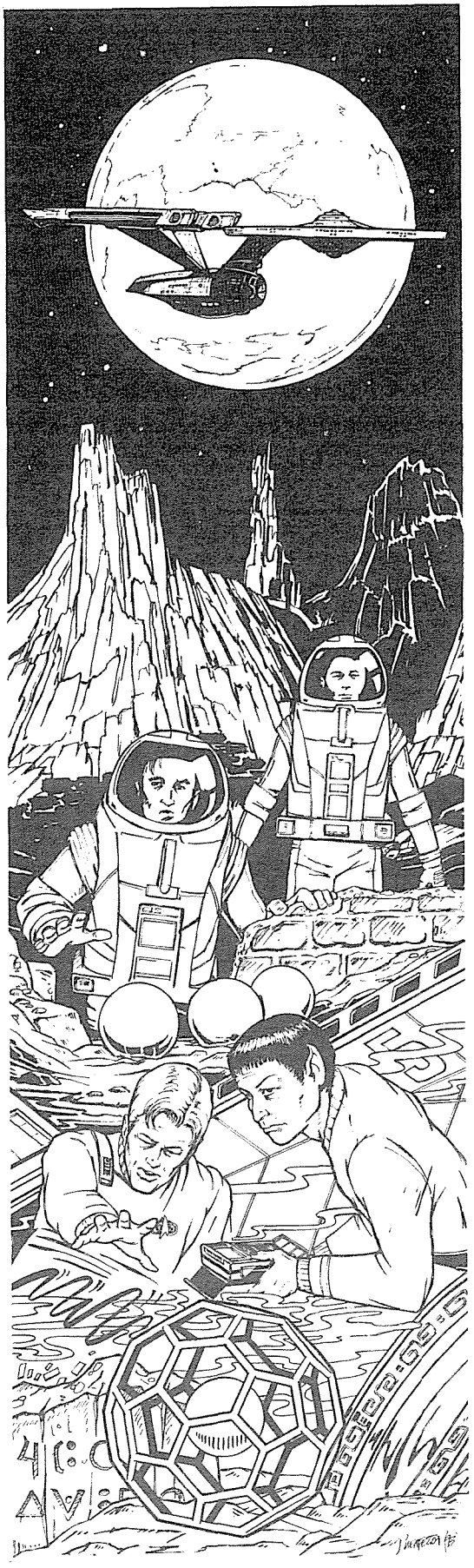
Quarantine Field



By Brian Holmes

This adventure has been designed for a group of Star Fleet characters in either an "old series" or *Next Generation* campaign. Ideally, there should be either a Vulcan or Andorian player character in the group. This is a skill-oriented race against time, in which the characters are asked to diagnose and cure infection. Many skill roles are expected of the players, and to make their descriptions easier, this adventure uses a simplified version of GDW's **2300 AD** task system. Each task roll includes an objective, a difficulty level, a skill to roll and a length of time. For example:

Task: To reconfigure a tricorder for medical readings: Routine, Computer Operation, 2D10 minutes.

The level of difficulty implies certain modifiers to the skill roll as follows: A character can perform any task in half the time, but at a level of difficulty that is one higher. Thus, if characters try to rush things, they have a greater chance of making a mistake. Characters who are cautious, and who take extra time, can roll at one level of difficulty lower.

SETTING

This adventure takes place in the main archaeology lab. The staff has returned from a planetary dig on a recently discovered world (GMs can develop this if they choose). They have brought with them a number of artifacts, including animal bones, building materials, and some glass spheres and porcelain objects that seem to have something to do with food preparation.

The archaeology lab is a three-room structure, with an exam and research area, observation room, and chief archaeologist's office. The office is like Captain Picard's ready room, with food dispenser and washroom. The observation room is mostly used for small meetings, but also contains specialized equipment, as well as controls for a set of robot "waldo" arms in the examination room. The examination room contains most of the research equipment.

SYMPTOMS

For highest drama, try to arrange things so that so that a player character Vulcan or Andorian is in the examination room, while another PC is in the observation room. Add some NPC science technicians and/or officers in each room.

One of the archaeologists is taking a sample form one of the glass spheres for material analysis. He is drilling into it to remove a bore, only a few molecules wide, when the quarantine light goes off. Quarantine force fields are automatically erected around the whole lab and in between each room. The entire lab is on one circuit, and it is not possible to lower the quarantine field in, say, the chief archaeologist's office, without also lowering it in the examination room. Before the PCs can react to this, the humans in the examination room suddenly begin convulsing, gasping for breath, and collapsing. Within a few minutes, they are dead. The Vulcan or Andorian PC in the examination room feels no immediate effect.

DISEASE

What the PCs have encountered is a silicon-based microbe that prefers to live in warm areas, such as live bodies. The microbe usually lives in the blood, where it takes in carbon dioxide and breaks it up into oxygen ions and carbon monoxide waste. Carbon monoxide in the blood is very poisonous, as it binds itself to iron-based hemoglobin and prevents the blood from carrying oxygen to the various parts of the body. Carbon monoxide poisoning manifests itself as the inability to breathe. Victims gasp for breath, while the blood and tissues of their body turn cherry-red. (Note that these symptoms are also indicative of cyanide poisoning. Cyanide poisoning is also accompanied by an almond odor, although not everyone has the ability to smell cyanide.)

The microbes themselves are not harmful, but the carbon monoxide waste they produce *is*. Carbon monoxide will also exist in the blood of Vulcan or Andorian characters, but because their hemoglobin is different (copper and cobalt based), it does not prevent the normal movement of oxygen through the body. Some other races might also be immune.

If left unchecked, the microbes will use up all of the carbon dioxide in the room in about six hours. Characters need carbon dioxide to breath normally, so even Vulcans and Andorians will be

affected in the long run. They will get light-headed, start to hyperventilate and finally die.

The PCs must figure out the nature of this crisis within that time frame in order to save their group. At this point, GMs should start keeping track of game time. Each task that is attempted uses up a certain amount of time. (GMs should be careful when different characters are carrying out different tasks at the same time.)

DIAGNOSIS

The PCs may first attempt to determine the cause of death of the humans in the examination room. The following tasks have been provided for reference:

Task: To determine that the NPCs are dead: Simple, General Medicine, 3D10 seconds.

Task: To determine the cause of death based on obvious symptoms: Routine, General Medicine, 1D10x20 seconds.

Referee: A particularly bad failure (96-00) means that the cause of death is misdiagnosed as cyanide poisoning.

Task: To determine the cause of death with a medical tricorder: Simple, General Medicine (human), 1D10x10 seconds.

Referee: There are no medical tricorders in the archaeology lab. All available tricorders are configured for material analysis, carbon dating practices and other archaeological purposes.

Task: To reconfigure a tricorder for medical readings: Routine, Computer Operation, 2D10 minutes.

Task: To determine the presence of carbon monoxide in the bodies of the living characters with a medical tricorder: Routine, General Medicine or Chemistry, 1D10x3 seconds.

Task: To asses the current risk to the PCs: Routine, average of General Medicine and Mathematics, 2D10 minutes.

Referee: Success means the PCs can determine that carbon monoxide continues to be produced in the examination room and that carbon dioxide is disappearing. The PCs establish that within six hours, there will be insufficient carbon dioxide to breath. The PCs can also determine that the observation room shows no sign of unusual carbon monoxide. Remember, however, that the quarantine field in the observation room is linked to the other fields, and you cannot drop one without also dropping the others. The PCs in the observation room are trapped, in a sense.

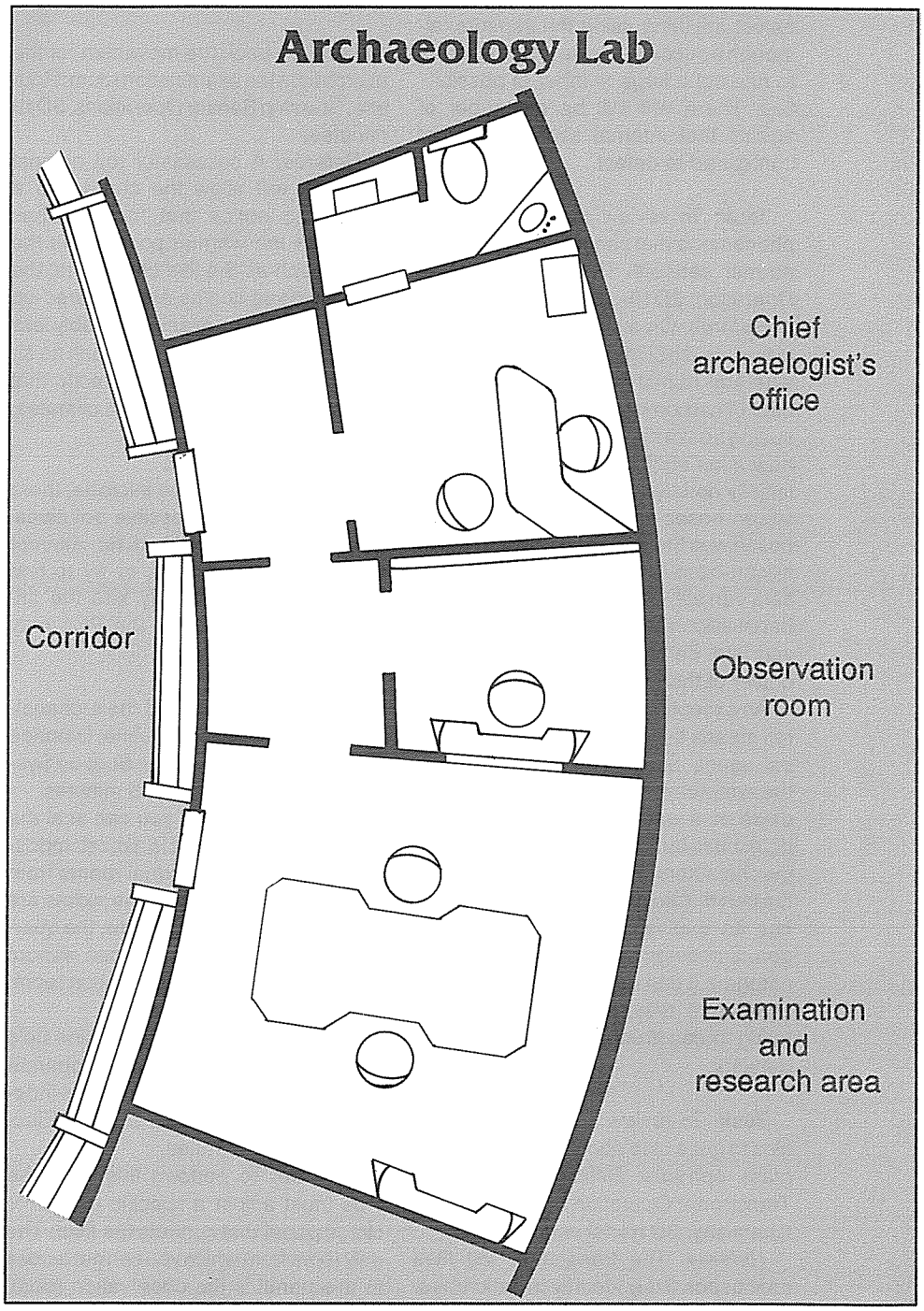
Next, characters are likely to try to determine where the carbon monoxide is coming from. They may try to ask the computer to track all chemical reactions in the room, but that would require several hours of accurate sensor data to process. Also, characters who ask for all known causes of carbon monoxide will discover that there are millions of cataloged phenomena that generate carbon monoxide as a waste product and that trying to sift through them could take hours.

Some other tasks include the following:

Task: To determine why the computer erected the quarantine field: Routine, Computer Operation, 1D10 minutes.

Referee: A successful roll means the characters determine that the computer spotted the rapid increase of carbon monoxide in the archaeology lab and interpreted it as a life-support risk. Without any apparent cause for the carbon monoxide, the computer assumed the existence of a foreign agent and raised the quarantine fields. The computer is unable to detect the foreign agent.

Task: To create a database of all known phenomena that generate carbon monoxide: Routine, Computer Op-



eration, 1D10×10 minutes.

Referee: By creating a separate database, other searches of the computer records can be handled much faster. If the players aren't computer experts, perhaps an NPC computer expert could suggest it to them.

Task: To use the internal sensors to check for known causes of carbon monoxide generation: Routine, Starship Sensor Operations, 1D10×15 minutes.

Referee: This task assumes that characters have built a separate database of carbon monoxide cases. If they have not, then the computer will have to search through millions of computer records, taking 3D10×20 minutes. In either case, the PCs will not be able to detect anything using the sensors, although a success allows the characters to rule out a large number of possibilities. There will still be a number of agents that internal sensors are not configured to detect.

Task: To review the database for phenomena that cannot be detected by normal sensors: Routine, Computer Operation, 2D10×10 minutes.

Referee: On a success, the characters will find a single medical case study, whereby human miners on Janus VI died of carbon monoxide poisoning resulting from a microbe encountered in a new mine shaft. The microbe was not initially noticed because of its complex silicon-based structure. Although Janus VI was the location of the first major silicon-based life form, Federation sensors can still only detect a limited number of silicon life forms. A counteragent was later detected by the chief medical officer of the mining colony.

An exceptional failure (96-00) for this roll means the characters find a chemical agent, Straeliothymanite, that fits the symptoms. It produces carbon monoxide as a waste product, and it is not detectable by normal sensors. But since the characters failed the roll, they missed the part that says that Straeliothymanite has an explosive reaction with nitrogen. Since normal air is three-quarters nitrogen, it can be easily ruled out. But characters may, instead, waste time trying to construct a Straeliothymanite detector.

Task: To review the transporter log files to get a clue about what was in the glass spheres: Difficult, average of Transporter Operation Procedures and Chemistry, 3D10×10 minutes.

Referee: The transporter log files cannot positively identify the microbes. However, PCs who successfully make this roll will notice a repetition of complex silicon-hydrogen-oxygen molecules that might be considered organic.

Task: To reconfigure the sensors to detect silicon-based life forms: Routine, Computer Operations, 2D10 minutes.

Task: To detect the silicon microbe using modified sensors: Routine, Starship Sensor Operations, 1D10 minutes.

Referee: This microbe is not identical to the one encountered on Janus VI, although it seems to have a similar structure. Tricorder or other sensor readings indicate that the microbe can be contained in any airtight environment.

Task: To track the movement of the microbes in the examination room: Routine, Starship Sensor Operations, 3D10 minutes.

Referee: A successful roll against this task will allow the characters a chance to notice that the microbes swarm to the warmer positions in the room, such as the live characters, the recently dead bodies and powered-up equipment. There are considerably less microbes near cooler areas such as air vents. One might guess, correctly, that the microbes do not like cold climates.

CURE

After discovering the microbe, there are at least three possible solutions: Use the transporters' biofilter, attempt to develop an antitoxin, or try to find something that naturally kills the microbe. And, of course, the PCs may think of other solutions.

Task: To seal (airtight) the archaeology lab from outside: Routine, Damage Control Procedures or Life Support Systems Technology, 2D10×5 minutes.

Referee: Although you can seal the lab from the outside, it is almost impossible to seal the individual rooms from one another. And unless the rooms are individually sealed somehow, the quarantine field cannot be dropped without killing the PCs in the observation room.

Task: To adjust the quarantine field circuits so that it is possible to operate the fields around the three rooms independent of one another: Difficult, Electronics, 2D10 minutes.

Referee: To perform this task, the PCs must adjust a specific electronic circuit panel that controls the field. The only room from which you can get across to this panel is the observation room. Hence, one of the characters in that room must actually perform the task. If no character in the room has Electronics skill, then a PC outside the room might be able to "talk" one of them through the procedure. In this case, the character who is describing the procedure makes the skill roll against the average of Electronics and Instruction.

If the PCs manage to perform the above two tasks, then they can drop the field around the observation room, transport the PCs out, then drop the rest of the field.

Task: To reprogram the transporter's biofilter to edit out the microbes based on tricorder readings: Difficult, Transporter Operation Procedures, 3D10 minutes.

Referee: Tricorder reading doesn't usually have the "quantum level" detail that is needed for biofilter reprogramming. Even if the biofilter is reprogrammed, the transporter cannot operate through the quarantine field.

Task: To reprogram the transporter's biofilter to edit out the microbes using an infected character held "in transit": Routine, Transporter Operation Procedures, 2D10×5 seconds.

Referee: If the characters are held in transit for more than 90 seconds, their patterns will degrade to the point that they can't be rematerialized

Task: To develop a counteragent to the microbe: Difficult, General Medicine or Pharmacology, 2D10×12 hours.

Task: To develop a counteragent to the microbe using the Janus VI counteragent as a base: Difficult, General Medicine or or Pharmacology, 3D10×10 minutes.

Task: To modify the lab's temperature: Life Support Systems Technology, Routine, 2D10 minutes.

Referee: The airborne microbes become dormant at –10° C. They are killed by –40° temperatures. It is safe to lower the quarantine field while the airborne microbes are dormant. The microbes will remain active inside the PCs' bodies, unless they can think of a way to lower their body temperatures.

Task: To put the infected PCs into suspended animation: Routine, General Medicine, 2D10 minutes.

Referee: By flooding the archaeology lab with cryothridium gas, the characters can be frozen, effectively killing the microbes. Ω