

Nightwatch – Danger in the Depths

A Star Frontiers Adventure

- 1 - tech expert - machinery, aquatic vehicles, robotics
 - 1 - computer expert – display info and bypass skills
 - 1 - military expert – small arms, also with aquatic vehicles skills
(or survival: marine skill)
 - 1 - biosocial with heavy skills in sciences (chemistry, biology, etc.)
and some medical (of course)
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INTRODUCTION:

Who'd want to visit a water world? For that matter, who'd bother building a huge floating city there and an equally large underwater industrial complex? That was your initial question when the GTF job posting came across your portacomp.

For years now you've worked for the UPF, serving as a special agent in a classified division code-named NIGHT WATCH. You and your colleagues work outside the military and StarLaw as moles, spies, investigators, and troubleshooters. Your mission has always been the preservation of the Frontier - that much is certain. Even you don't know your official title. You take orders from your cell chief and carry them out. You appear as a freelance mercenary, picking up odd jobs from the GTF boards that the NIGHT WATCH chooses for you. Jobs that you carry out with your own secret agenda. Your job now, along with the other agents you recognize from your cell, takes you to the water world moon of Tars, orbiting Outer Reach in the Dramune system.

Thalason Research Labs (TRL) is an ambitious R&D company, recently arriving on the corporate scene and already counting ByChem and Tachton Industries as customers. Their underwater complex sits at the bottom of the immense Kreesis Gorge, an underwater canyon at the bottom of the ocean. The gorge runs halfway round the moon and is dotted with thermal vents spewing poisonous gases and hot magma from the planet's core. The complex is a platform located on the ocean floor, mining the Gorge for minerals and rare biochemical compounds. The minerals are refined as crude semiconductor material. The biochemical compounds are extracted from the aquatic lifeforms thriving off of the warmth of the thermal vents. Heat from the vents is used for running the complex.

The situation: competitors of TRL have filed complaints with the UPF over unfair business practices. It seems TRL is undercutting the prices drastically to secure large contracts with ByChem and Tachton. How they can do it is a mystery - by all calculations TRL should be going out of business. Yet they continue to thrive and expand, catering to a greedy corporate market more than willing to ignore such questions in exchange for cheap refined materials.

The next work cycle for the underwater complex is about to begin and TRL has put out a call for temporary skilled labor. There are openings for teams of technicians to go on-site and work on

the underwater complex. The pay is good but the conditions are severe: Tars experiences hurricane-force storms on a regular basis and the underwater environment is fraught with danger.

We have reason to believe that TRL is conducting some form of illegal manufacturing to offset its reported losses. Its work with biochemical agents suggests that it may have discovered a new and highly potent drug. The Dramune system, an area replete with criminal activity, would be an ideal staging ground for massive distribution. Our efforts to discover this material, however, have been fruitless.

Your assignment will be to pose as workers and enlist for the 4-week tour. Your mission will be to infiltrate the TRL manufacturing facility, capture and analyze the biochemical materials being refined there, and discover how it is being shipped off-world without detection. Your secondary missions will be to download TRL corporate records for a list of customers and contacts, analyze their semiconductor research for signs of unfair business practices, discover the extent of culpability of the company, and flush out the party backing the operation.

BACKGROUND:

Procyon Silt

The silt sediment found at the bottom of Tar's oceans contains a unique form of crystallized silicon called K-type silicon. Silicon of this type is used in the Frontier robotics industry, manufacturing semiconductor shells that hold the positronic brains of modern robots.

A robot brain, especially that used in higher level robots, is a sophisticated positronic network housed within a semiconductor shell. This shell completely encases the brain and contains fixed pathways for the brain to communicate with the robot interface. It also serves another purpose: protecting the brain from tampering.

The advent of high-level robots on the Frontier brought concerns over the possibility of re-programming their positronic nets, overriding safety features that could render robots dangerous liabilities. For this reason, once a brain is manufactured and tested it is closely monitored to make sure it is permanently sealed within the semiconductor housing. Nothing about the interface between the inner brain and outer nervous system can be changed once it leaves the factory – the brain and its outer casing are fixed. In this way, a robot is guaranteed to retain the core programming parameters that make it a safe automaton.

TRL has discovered that the Procyon silicon of Tars can be “half-baked”. The crystalline lattice structure of K-type silicon, which is normally fixed in one configuration before installation, can be changed after installation if using the type mined on Tars. TRL scientists discovered that the shell can be manufactured and delivered to appear like a normal brain casing, but exposure to a type of radiation called Iota-type can actually re-align the structure to open new conductive pathways. In addition, exposure to Theta-type radiation fixes the structure in one position rendering it just as static as regular K-type silicon.

Unscrupulous agents of TRL grasped the possibilities of this and devised a scheme that would render the average robot re-programmable. Brain casings were manufactured with a small 'sleeper chip' embedded within, along with a tiny radio transceiver. This was placed outside of normal conductive pathways to avoid detection by Frontier inspectors. In any other type of semiconductor shell the chip would be harmless, as the conductive pathways upon installation are fixed. However, upon exposure to Iota radiation a brain casing can be made pliable again, allowing a conductive pathway for the sleeper chip to over-ride the positronic network. A follow-up dose of Theta radiation would then harden the shell to a fixed position to make it appear normal. From this point on a Procyon shell, as it is known by its brand name, is completely amenable to remote radio re-programming.

Before long Sathar agents learned of the secret innovation and seized control over TRL. Dummy companies were set up and money channeled into TRL to subsidize the manufacture of Procyon shells on a large scale. TRL was now able to offer competitive enough pricing for its shells that almost every robot manufacturer in the Frontier was using them to make their robots.

It has been the long-term goal of the Sathar to allow these Procyon robots to disseminate throughout the Frontier over the years. When the time is right a synchronized signal (code-named JERICHO) will be passed along the Frontier subspace communication net, alerting undercover agents everywhere to begin dousing their areas with the otherwise harmless Iota radiation. At this point every robot on the Frontier will be remotely re-programmed to wreak havoc, attack sentient beings, sabotage equipment, and prepare the way for a coordinated Sathar invasion. A follow-up salvo of Theta radiation will permanently fix all robots to obey remote transmissions, preventing the UPF from discovering and reversing the process in time.

At the time of the adventure, the Sathar are almost ready to put out the synchronized signal. Although the Sathar do not have a fleet large enough to start SWIII, they hope the confusion and damage to infrastructure will be enough for a smaller fleet to invade. A small fleet stands poised just outside of the Liberty system.

The JERICHO call can be sent from the TRL headquarters located on Tarl. The call is in two stages: JERICHO I will order the automated transmission of Iota radiation. JERICHO II will order the automated transmission of Theta radiation. Transmitting the JERICHO call can only be done from a topside antenna capable of subspace transmissions. Only one such antenna exists that is easily reachable – on remote floating listening station SR147 some kilometers from Thalason Alpha. Another antenna can be found in Koa city, but it is heavily guarded so it would be harder for TRL agents to get to.

Koa City – capital of Tars, a huge floating city located on the equator

Thalason Alpha – underwater city founded by Thalason, houses its refinery and workers

The NET – a large, portable mesh dome that is placed over thermal vent fields to catch the tiny biochemical agents native to the vent emissions – the net is a sophisticated mesh of tiny filaments that pump the captured chemicals downward into a set of sieves.

The Lab – TRL’s secret robotics lab, hidden in a distant part of the underwater valley – destination for refined sediment – where the sediment is cured and implanted with sleeper chips

The Catacombs – a labyrinth of tunnels dug deep under the vent fields, where the sediment used for semiconductors is mined. Robot workers do most of the deep work here. Some subs are equipped with advanced robots – these are implanted with the radio-controllable chips being used in the experimental robots – one of these robots will go crazy during the adventure due to a radio malfunction – characters will wonder why a high-level robot would be wired for radio control, something that isn’t possible for standard higher-order robots with advanced positronic brains

The Antenna: Send-Receive Station SR147 – one of very few high-powered antennae on Tars capable of transmitting subspace – although Koa City has one of these, this is a remote antennae located on an abandoned floating barge and is a left over from early colonization of the planet. It will be the target of TRL when it is ready to transmit its doomsday signal code-named JERICHO I.

ADVENTURE SECTIONS:

Alpha: Arrival at Thalason Alpha and Detective Work

- characters pose as construction workers
- characters poke around thermal vent quarry, biochem labs, semiconductor labs
- characters may notice Iota and Theta radiation levels (harmless, but odd)
- characters may discover the biochemicals are harmless
- one worker robot goes crazy in the vent fields
- call put out to disarm mad robot
- characters discover robot is radio controlled (which is illegal for a high-level robot) and was experiencing a malfunction after exposure to Theta radiation
- characters discover wreckage of a sub that knew too much – obtain coordinates to lab
- characters must retrieve drop pod from the UPF ship – carries their gear

Beta: TRL Sabotages the Operation

- TRL detonates floating platform on surface, sending it hurtling down on top of Thalason Alpha
- Party must escape the flooding city and evacuate workers and their families
- Use of state machines to control flood doors/hatches and coordinate evacuation

- Use of basic circuit analysis (power, wattage tolerance) for patching in power to non-functioning doors

Gamma: Locating the Secret Robot Lab

- party navigates treacherous thermal vent trench to get there
- party discovers large jelly-fish-like creatures moving in a herd – uses them to sneak in
- party invades and knocks out lab
- party discovers true plot behind TRL
- two subs will depart the lab, one with Jericho I onboard, the other with Jericho II

Delta: Countdown to Jericho

- one TRL squad will try to reach SR147 and transmit Jericho I
- both TRL and party must evade nasty whip mandibores
- damage from Thalason Alpha will cause a small sub to teeter into the catacombs into a free-fall – the sub contains the Jericho II transmission code that will save the day but party must reach it in time before the sub reaches crushing depths and is lost forever, prolonging the crisis until the Sathar learn of the incident and transmit the Jericho I themselves

Profiles

Tizrit Inxus (V,M) – Director of Thalason Alpha, Head of Site Operations for TRL and the real power behind the company's mission. He has purposefully placed himself behind the scenes of the company, preferring to control it on the front lines than from a board room. He originally masterminded the plan to utilize the strange properties of Tar's Procyon sediments to create a volatile semiconductor casing for positronic brains. He is the one who struck a deal with the Sathar, receiving subsidies from them that allowed him to low-ball the price of the semiconductor and make it attractive to robotics companies throughout the Frontier.

Inxus is ruthless and power-hungry. It is his aim to see the Jericho project through and be the top figure with whom the Sathar deal after they've taken control. He is oblivious to the nihilistic tendencies of the Sathar, believing they will see the advantages of enslaving the Frontier and reaping its resources rather than destroying it.

TRL assassin robots (secbots)

Inxus has manufactured a small army of experimental robots equipped with the Procyon cerebrums. All of the robots are anthropomorphic cyborgs outfitted to appear as normal Vrusk males. Each is dressed in dark gray and has identical physical features, leading some to think they may be clones. The cyborgs are all level 4 robots with onboard programming as well as the receiver chip allowing them to be radio-controlled.

ADVENTURE SECTIONS:

Alpha: Arrival at Thalason Alpha and Detective Work

Characters will arrive on the water world of Tars posing as skilled laborers specializing in saturation diving construction and mining. They will carry false identification and credentials from GTF, the megacorp that specializes in certifying and hiring out labor of all kinds in the Frontier. The party will arrive at the largest floating city on the planet, Koa City. This is a small city by normal standards, but is large enough for a small spaceport. It is cramped and dirty and is the center of activity for fishing, mining, and tourism.

Upon arrival, the party and a dozen more laborers are met by a TRL representative and four TRL guards, all Vrusk. They are greeted and escorted to a private vessel which takes them to the floating platform TRL-4. This platform features a massive power plant that uses thermal flow of the ocean to generate power. TRL's main mining facility, Thalason Alpha, sits miles below on the ocean floor. The representative wastes no time, briefing the characters on their jobs and accompanying them on a submarine ride to the station.

Once at Thalason Alpha the party is greeted by Tizrit Inxus (V,M) – Director of Thalason Alpha. Tizrit will address them in an enthusiastic and business-like manner. He will tell them that TRL is behind quota on its shipments of refined Procyon silt semiconductor material and he expects the new group to speed up production, eliminate waste, and improve efficiency. The group is then shown their cabins.

All characters and their luggage will be searched. No weapons, computers, or scanning equipment will be allowed onboard. Players should be warned of this beforehand and advised not to try and sneak anything onboard. Nightwatch Field Supply Office (codenamed Mother) has dropped an equipment pod near the installation that holds the party's equipment. It will be up to the group to sneak out and retrieve their gear.

A ring of perimeter sensors runs northeasterly between Thalason Alpha and the drop site. Each sensor is an anchored sonar buoy suspended 10 meters above the ocean floor. The buoys transmit movement of anything larger than a single person back to the security station at Thalason Alpha. Treat each sensor buoy as a level 5 security device of size type D. Each buoy has a range of 400 meters.

The group will soon be divided into two work groups. One will include the aquatic vehicles operator

Nightwatch Drop Pod

Contents:

6 heavy Duty AGS suits (fitted for characters)

6 wide-angle flashlights

6 AGS gas/poison filters

12 underwater flares

6 pressure/depth gauges

12 repellant cannisters

6 compasses

6 toxy-rad gauges

2 radiophones
6 suc-sets
6 jet scooters
1 aqua bot
1 techkit
1 robcomkit
1 medkit
2 computer access computers
1 electric/mechanical cas
1 flora/fauna cas
1 geo/chemical cas
1 medical cas
1 magnetic/robo cas
2 electronic lock-pick sets

(weapons/defenses)

6 spear guns
60 spears
24 compressed air clips (fire 4 spears each)
24 exploding spearheads

6 gyrojet pistols
18 pistol jetclips
6 pistol tangler jetclips

2 sonic disruptors
2 sonic stunners
12 SEU clips

2 grenade rifles
12 underwater frag. grenades
12 underwater poison grenades
12 underwater smoke grenades
12 underwater tangler grenades
12 frag. grenades
12 tangler grenades
12 doze grenades

4 vibroknives + 4 SEU clips
2 sonic knives + 2 SEU clips

6 kg. TD-19
12 variable timer detonators
6 radio detonators

2 inertia screens + beltpack
2 sonic screens + beltpack
2 albedo screens + beltpack

Files the Characters may find useful:

- 1 – locations of perimeter scanners outside Thalason Alpha
- 2 – turning point coordinates for safe travel among the vent fields
- 3 – turning point coordinates for safe travel through alley to secret lab
- 4 – surface coordinates of Koa City, LS147, and the weather buoy
- 5 – business report on the finances and exports of TRL
- 6 – science report on robot brain shells & the TRL method

Beta: Locating the Secret Robot Lab

At this point the party should stumble across the coordinates to a secret path through the Maris Trench, a dangerous pathway that zig-zags through the treacherous thermal vent fields. The Trench is only known to a few oceanographers that have explored the depths of Tars. It also provides a direct and covert path to the TRL underwater robotics lab.

Turn Points:

1 - N6E5	6 - S2E5	11 - N2W2
2 - N4W2	7 - N3E6	12 - S2W8
3 - N2E6	8 - N3E1	13 - N2W1
4 - N4W1	9 - N2W2	14 - N3W5
5 - N1E3	10 - N5E2	15 - N3W2

After supplying the party with these turning point coordinates, the GM then waits for the navigator of the group to plot and connect the course on grid paper. The GM then checks to see if the plot contains mistakes by overlaying the key and the plot. Any mistakes are noted. The number and degree of mistakes will determine the damage the party's sub will take during its trip.

Next, the GM supplies angles between all the turn points. The GM can rationalize this by saying that the sub's navigational computer can calculate these angles automatically. It is now up to the navigator to enter course changes as gleaned from these angles. Using two simple rules of geometry, any player should be able to arrive at the following fifteen course changes.

Navigational Bearings

- solution:

1 - N40°E	6 - S70°E	11 - N70°W
2 - N30°W	7 - N70°E	12 - S60°W
3 - N70°E	8 - N10°E	13 - N35°W
4 - N15°W	9 - N60°W	14 - N85°W
5 - N70°E	10 - N10°E	15 - N55°W

Gamma: TRL Sabotages the Operation

Delta: Countdown to Jericho