

TROUBADOUR
Episode 4:
Merchants of the Sun, Part 1

by John Richard Sullivan

John Richard Sullivan
johnrichardsullivan@hotmail.com
4107764108
3073 Benefit Court
Abingdon, MD 21009

TROUBADOUR

IV

MERCHANTS OF THE SUN

PART I

1. EXT - LAKE, RINGED PLANET - DAY

A disorienting opening, with flashing colors; brief glimpses of the rings in the sky; and discordant music in the underscoring (the ending of "Duc 2021" by the Duc D'Angelos).

CY-REEN floats on her back. She slowly opens her eyes in a state of transcendence.

The rings traverse the sky, partially obscured by the halo of the sun shining through them from behind.

CY-REEN gazes up at the rings, her wet upper chest glistening in the sun.

As the rings glimmer in the halo, flashing colors of many shades begin to obscure the image from the sides, gradually engulfing the entire image. Off-screen a strange slow distorted voice is heard.

VOICE (o-s)

Troubado -

2. INT - CY-REEN'S CABIN, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

CY-REEN awakens from a deep sleep, illuminated by multi-colored flashing lights. She squints as she comes out of somnolence.

The window shows that the flashing lights are emanating from outside the City-Ship.

CY-REEN arises from bed and makes her way to the window. She turns her head and gazes, squinting, out the window at something to her right. Her eyes grow wide and her mouth opens in disbelief.

3. INT - OBSERVATION DECK, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

HA-TRA, AS-MARA, KU-MASI and other CREW MEMBERS, garbed in their sleeping garments and squinting with disheveled hair, creep slowly onto the observation deck, slightly if unconsciously hunched over. They gaze with shock and bewilderment at something outside the City-Ship, which is bathing them in flashing multicolored light.

The object outside the City-Ship is an enormous space ship, twice as large as the City-Ship, with a bird-like shape. Its exterior is lined and decorated with gaudy, kinetic lights of many colors.

Droning music comes up in the underscoring as HA-TRA, AS-MARA, KU-MASI and the other CREW MEMBERS glance at one another, almost in fear. HA-TRA, AS-MARA and KU-MASI exchange words in sign language before returning their gaze to the spaceship outside.

The space ship sits in front of the City-Ship, facing it, as the CREW MEMBERS, seen from behind on the observation deck, gaze upon it.

*Cue opening theme music (SirRoland, "the snows are coming",
excerpt).*

Opening titles and cast intro with music.

Title card:

IV
MERCHANTS OF THE SUN
PART I

4. INT - BRIDGE, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

The wall slides up, disclosing the viewscreen, its view dominated by the kinetic neon-colored space ship.

CY-REEN stares up at the space ship in fascination.

FAI-YUM, PAL-MYRA, TI-KAL and PET-RA cluster near the rear of the bridge, staring at the vision on the screen with uncomprehending faces. All are garbed in their sleeping garments, and still look as if having just awakened from a deep sleep. TI-KAL is hunched over slightly, fidgeting with his hands. PET-RA has her arms crossed, her hands clasping her elbows.

CY-REEN turns to the others with apprehension in her eyes, the space ship looming behind her on the viewscreen.

5. EXT - THE CITY-SHIP AND SUN CASINO - DEEP SPACE

The space ship, henceforth known as the Sun Casino, coasts along several miles directly in front of the City-Ship, all silent in the vacuum of space. It faces the City-Ship in a fashion that could be described as intimidating. It is a little over twice as large as the City-Ship, and in its construction resembles a swan. Its flashing, kinetic, multicolored lights are deep and intense.

6. INT - BRIDGE, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

CY-REEN, FAI-YUM, PAL-MYRA, TI-KAL and PET-RA all sit at their stations.

CAR-AL, BAL-BEK, BYB-LOS, HA-TRA and a few other CREW MEMBERS congregate near the back of the bridge. Everyone remains garbed in their sleeping garments.

The Sun Casino faces the crew on the viewscreen, silent save for its kinetic disorienting light show.

The bridge crew are silent as well, until TI-KAL speaks up.

TI-KAL

Do we possess the means of hailing another vessel?

CY-REEN

We can hail the shuttles - but then, in that instance, we know *who* we're hailing.

TI-KAL sighs. Everyone on the bridge is silent, waiting.

TI-KAL
Well I -

Suddenly there is a glimmer on the viewscreen and an enormous face appears in medium close-up. This is MAGNUS GORDIAN. He is older than the City-Ship crew. He has long spiky hair and appears to be wearing eyeliner and a shiny glittering outfit. Behind him is a garish interior.

Everyone on the bridge reacts with startled surprise at the sudden appearance of MAGNUS GORDIAN'S face, instinctively leaning or pulling back.

MAGNUS GORDIAN smiles cordially at the bridge crew.

MAGNUS GORDIAN
Greetings. I am Magnus Gordian, owner of the Sun Casino.
The City-Ship crew stare at MAGNUS GORDIAN in stunned silence.

MAGNUS GORDIAN
It's the ship that's directly in front of you.
The City-Ship crew stare at MAGNUS GORDIAN in stunned silence.
CY-REEN leans forward.

CY-REEN
Can you hear us?

MAGNUS GORDIAN
Perfectly.

TI-KAL
Whence came your fluency in our language?

MAGNUS GORDIAN

Oh, that would be our universal language converter. A remarkable invention, and an absolute necessity on our trade routes. It translates impulses from the language center of one brain to another. Or many brains, if needed. We studied your brainwaves while you were asleep.

PAL-MYRA addresses MAGNUS GORDIAN hesitantly.

PAL-MYRA

While we slept?

MAGNUS GORDIAN

Yes, we've been tracking your vessel for some time.

MAGNUS GORDIAN affects an amused expression.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

You appear to enjoy sleeping.

TI-KAL

Yes, well, you see, we felt there was, uh, definitive need to institute a sleep structure to aid in accruing the proper number of - of decans of sleep time for our crew so as to - er - maximize our ability to function . . .

TI-KAL trails off as MAGNUS GORDIAN has turned to address someone off-screen.

TI-KAL and the others wait a moment.

MAGNUS GORDIAN turns back to the City-Ship crew.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

I'm sorry, continue.

TI-KAL

Well, I - suppose there's little else to say on the subject -

MAGNUS GORDIAN

We have certain supplements which we would be happy to sell you. They'll rid you of the need for such a regimen.

TI-KAL smiles, but with incomprehension.

BAL-BEK, BYB-LOS, CAR-AL and HA-TRA also regard MAGNUS GORDIAN with incomprehension.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

Well, now - we are utterly fascinated by you and your ship and would greatly like to commence trade with you. We have never encountered your race before, so no doubt you have much of interest to offer.

TI-KAL instinctively rises. PAL-MYRA rises along with him. PET-RA remains seated.

TI-KAL

Well, yes. Er -

TI-KAL turns to PAL-MYRA briefly before turning back to MAGNUS GORDIAN.

TI-KAL

Alas, we are somewhat ignorant of the protocols.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

You are also most welcome to come aboard my luxurious casino -

BAL-BEK stiffens as his eyes grow wide.

MAGNUS GORDIAN (o-s)

- easily, I might add, the most luxurious vessel in this or any other system.

MAGNUS GORDIAN continues to address the City-Ship crew, his face looming large on the screen.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

However, we are quite fascinated by your ship, and would be most interested in seeing it from within. We will of course observe all system regulations, and include no more than three in our party.

As MAGNUS GORDIAN continues, BAL-BEK quietly approaches TI-KAL and PAL-MYRA, and touches them both subtly on the arm. TI-KAL and PAL-MYRA turn to BAL-BEK.

BAL-BEK fixes TI-KAL with a wide-eyed stare and subtly shakes his head.

TI-KAL nods and turns back to the screen.

TI-KAL

Yes, we appreciate your interest in our city-ship. Might my colleagues and I hold conference first?

MAGNUS GORDIAN

Certainly. You may contact me on this channel.

CY-REEN looks down at her panel and studies it a moment.

TI-KAL

Very well. Many thanks, er -

MAGNUS GORDIAN

Gordian. Magnus Gordian.

TI-KAL and PAL-MYRA smile politely and nod.

MAGNUS GORDIAN'S face vanishes from the screen, leaving the image of the Sun Casino.

TI-KAL and PAL-MYRA turn to BAL-BEK.

BAL-BEK

Whether we travel to their vessel or they travel to ours, we must ensure that no potential virus or pathogen breaches our ship. If they come aboard, they must be subject to a

thorough quarantine before engaging with any member of this crew.

During BAL-BEK'S speech, other CAST and CREW are shown listening in consternation.

TI-KAL pauses and thinks for a moment, then looks at BAL-BEK and PAL-MYRA.

TI-KAL

Perhaps we should disregard their invitation and carry forth -

TI-KAL gestures at the screen.

TI-KAL

- around them.

All are quiet for a moment.

PAL-MYRA

This may very well be our species' first contact with another intelligent life form beyond our homeworld.

TI-KAL thinks for a moment. He glances back.

CAR-AL regards TI-KAL with a studied expression.

TI-KAL nods.

TI-KAL

No, Bal-Bek is correct in his estimation. The risk is too great. I suggest we carry on -

CAR-AL

There is much that could be gained.

TI-KAL, BAL-BEK and the others turn to CAR-AL.

CAR-AL

Let us at least ascertain their level of tolerance for our needs.

TI-KAL turns to CY-REEN.

CY-REEN nods and works the controls in an area of her control panel.

MAGNUS GORDIAN'S face reappears, laughing and talking with someone out of frame.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

I'm never dissatisfied with these excursions -

MAGNUS GORDIAN turns to the crew of the City-Ship.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

Yes! Yes, what did you decide?

TI-KAL

We would like to make formal invitation for you to come aboard our vess -

MAGNUS GORDIAN

Splendid! We shall beam over momentarily.

TI-KAL

I - what?

MAGNUS GORDIAN

Our matter transference beam can bring us instantaneously to any part of your vessel you desire.

The City-Ship crew is momentarily unable to respond to this declaration.

PAL-MYRA

Really?

MAGNUS GORDIAN

It's not for the constitutionally-weak, mind you, but it is another technological marvel of our great race.

BAL-BEK

Would you have the ability, then, to beam into our decontamination chamber?

MAGNUS GORDIAN pauses and turns a bemused look to the person out of frame. He then turns back to the City-Ship crew.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

Um, as you wish.

PAL-MYRA, BAL-BEK and TI-KAL smile and nod.

MAGNUS GORDIAN holds his hand up to the bridge crew.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

Ah - a moment, please.

MAGNUS GORDIAN turns to confer with someone out-of-frame.

The bridge crew wait patiently.

MAGNUS GORDIAN turns back to the bridge crew.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

I've just been informed that a rather potent shield of some kind envelopes your vessel.

FAI-YUM

Yes, that is true.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

Our transfer beam cannot penetrate through its dense electrical field. Is it possible to disable it temporarily so that we may come aboard your ship?

The bridge crew turn to FAI-YUM inquisitively.

FAI-YUM studies his control panel a moment and then looks up at MAGNUS GORDIAN.

FAI-YUM
It can be accomplished.

MAGNUS GORDIAN smiles from the viewscreen.

MAGNUS GORDIAN
Splendid!

7. EXT - THE CITY-SHIP AND THE SUN CASINO - DEEP SPACE

As seen from a different angle than before, the Sun Casino continues to face the City-Ship, both traveling along in silence through the cosmos.

8. INT - CORRIDOR, DECONTAMINATION CHAMBER, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

BAL-BEK, TI-KAL, CAR-AL and HA-TRA are walking quickly down the corridor, followed by other CREW MEMBERS. They are now wearing their regular uniforms.

BAL-BEK
Given what they imparted to us regarding this beam of theirs, they should have arrived in the chamber by now.

BAL-BEK, TI-KAL, CAR-AL and HA-TRA arrive at the decontamination chamber.

A large group of CREW MEMBERS, including DEL-PHI, ANG-KOR and ARG-OS, come the other way.

All of the CREW MEMBERS stay back as BAL-BEK, TI-KAL, CAR-AL and HA-TRA peek inside the window to the chamber.

9. INT - DECONTAMINATION CHAMBER, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

As seen from within the chamber, the faces of BAL-BEK, TI-KAL, CAR-AL and HA-TRA slowly peek around the corners of the window, eyes wide with curiosity.

Three tall and ornately dressed men sit or stand in the chamber. This is MAGNUS GORDIAN, MAGNUS AURELIAN and MAGNUS DOMITIAN. They all have long spiky hair of different colors. They stare back at the crew of the City-Ship somewhat blankly, and resemble a rock group posing for an album cover photo. They are accompanied by three ornate cases. The chamber itself is sparse, white, and containing a bench which circumvents three quarters of the room.

BAL-BEK, TI-KAL, CAR-AL and HA-TRA smile politely. TI-KAL points at something on the wall and presses a button. His voice can be heard coming through a speaker somewhere in the chamber.

TI-KAL

Can you hear us?

MAGNUS GORDIAN smiles pleasantly.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

Perfectly.

BAL-BEK addresses MAGNUS GORDIAN, MAGNUS AURELIAN and MAGNUS DOMITIAN through the intercom, speaking slowly as if still unsure of their comprehension of the City-Ship crew's language.

BAL-BEK

A meter or gauge of sorts is situated here on the wall which will inform us when it is safe to release you from quarantine.

MAGNUS GORDIAN, MAGNUS AURELIAN and MAGNUS DOMITIAN continue to stare blankly at them.

BAL-BEK

You see, our crew may not be exposed to any such - um, organisms such as yourselves from off the ship who may pose a threat to our biological systems without a thorough cleansing.

MAGNUS GORDIAN smiles pleasantly again.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

And how long does this process take?

BAL-BEK

Oh, it should be readily finished anon. The ship is currently scanning you for viruses of any sort, and low-level radiation is rendering harmless any biological contagion you may possess.

MAGNUS GORDIAN'S smile wavers as he, MAGNUS AURELIAN and MAGNUS DOMITIAN look up and around at the chamber.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

You're irradiating us?

BAL-BEK

Oh, at a perfectly safe level.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

And all this is necessary?

BAL-BEK

Unfortunately yes.

MAGNUS GORDIAN sighs.

HA-TRA breaks the awkward silence by speaking into the chamber.

HA-TRA

You comprise the first beings from another race which we have yet encountered.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

How momentous for you.

TI-KAL, BAL-BEK, CAR-AL and HA-TRA enthusiastically smile and nod.

MAGNUS GORDIAN, MAGNUS AURELIAN and MAGNUS DOMITIAN give each other resigned looks and settle in.

10. INT - BRIDGE, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

CY-REEN, FAI-YUM, PAL-MYRA and PET-RA sit at their respective stations and monitor the Sun Casino, still looming large on the viewscreen. PAL-MYRA and PET-RA are turned toward each other, their hands shielding their eyes.

CY-REEN finishes working the controls on her panel.

CY-REEN

Well - that pauses the mechanism that was attempting to shift us around them.

FAI-YUM

Strange how they kept pace with us the entire duration of their engagement, matching every automated maneuver of our engine.

CY-REEN

Evidently we hold much fascination for them.

FAI-YUM thinks for a moment and turns to CY-REEN with a smirk.

FAI-YUM

We are fascinating, aren't we?

CY-REEN laughs at FAI-YUM'S comment before turning towards PAL-MYRA and PET-RA.

CY-REEN

And what are you two on about?

PAL-MYRA and PET-RA giggle but keep their eyes shielded.

PAL-MYRA

We fear we may become entranced yet again by the lure of flashing lights.

PET-RA gazes at PAL-MYRA, her hand continuing to shield her eyes.

PET-RA

I prefer to gaze upon beauty than garish ugliness.

PAL-MYRA smiles and looks down.

11. INT - DECONTAMINATION CHAMBER, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

BAL-BEK peeks inside the window to the chamber, surrounded by CREW MEMBERS.

MAGNUS AURELIAN and MAGNUS DOMITIAN are seated on the bench, each working a handheld elongated octagonal device with their thumbs, while MAGNUS GORDIAN stands leaning against the wall, one foot up against the side of the bench, studying the CREW MEMBERS. MAGNUS AURELIAN and MAGNUS DOMITIAN both look up at BAL-BEK.

BAL-BEK smiles pleasantly and points at the meter on the external wall.

MAGNUS AURELIAN and MAGNUS DOMITIAN return to their devices.

MAGNUS GORDIAN sighs and addresses MAGNUS DOMITIAN on his right in a low voice.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

Domitian, what do they remind you of?

MAGNUS DOMITIAN once more glances up from his device.

The CREW MEMBERS continue to study them with looks of fascination through the window.

MAGNUS DOMITIAN turns back to his device.

MAGNUS DOMITIAN

Children.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

My thought precisely. And yet they appear fully grown.

MAGNUS DOMITIAN affects a lecherous smirk.

MAGNUS DOMITIAN
The females certainly are.

MAGNUS GORDIAN
It's not that type of visit, Domitian.

MAGNUS DOMITIAN
No, I suppose it isn't. Still -

MAGNUS DOMITIAN once more glances up at the CREW MEMBERS.

Various CREW MEMBERS continue to stare through the window.

MAGNUS DOMITIAN
There is potential.

MAGNUS GORDIAN stares blankly at the CREW MEMBERS.

MAGNUS GORDIAN
Domitian, I have no idea why I bring you along on these excursions.

MAGNUS DOMITIAN
Frankly, because I amuse you.

MAGNUS GORDIAN
Mm - sometimes.

BAL-BEK looks up once more at the meter and then turns to address someone. TI-KAL emerges next to him, and the two confer for a moment.

MAGNUS AURELIAN and MAGNUS DOMITIAN both look up with interest.

BAL-BEK and TI-KAL turn and nod enthusiastically at MAGNUS GORDIAN, MAGNUS AURELIAN and MAGNUS DOMITIAN.

MAGNUS GORDIAN
Showtime, gentlemen.

MAGNUS AURELIAN and MAGNUS DOMITIAN put their devices away and all three pick up their cases.

12. INT - CORRIDOR OUTSIDE DECONTAMINATION CHAMBER, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

TI-KAL turns to face the CREW MEMBERS.

TI-KAL
Is Ur-Uk present?

UR-UK and TAX-ILA emerge from the crowd.

TI-KAL
Ur-Uk, we may be in need of your talent. They have learnt our language, but employ words outside our common parlance.

UR-UK
Such is to be expected.

BAL-BEK
I am opening the chamber. If all could retreat a few paces
. . .

The CREW MEMBERS step back and the door to the decontamination chamber opens with a hiss.

In a moment MAGNUS GORDIAN, MAGNUS AURELIAN and MAGNUS DOMITIAN emerge from the chamber, bearing their cases in hand like stone tablets. They are noticeably taller than all of the CREW MEMBERS, and emerge ostentatiously, like pop stars.

The CREW MEMBERS gaze upon MAGNUS GORDIAN, MAGNUS AURELIAN and MAGNUS DOMITIAN in fascination.

MAGNUS GORDIAN gazes upon the CREW MEMBERS in wonder.

MAGNUS GORDIAN
Stunning! Absolutely beautiful!

The CREW MEMBERS continue to gawk at the visitors, but some turn to one another in confusion.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

Oh, a thousand pardons for my rudeness. It's just that we've never seen any race quite as beautiful as you in any of the surrounding systems - have we, Aurelian?

MAGNUS AURELIAN

Indeed not.

MAGNUS GORDIAN

We are the Merchants of the Sun, the Sun being the magnificent casino just outside your doorstep. I am Magnus Gordian. These are my colleagues Magnus Aurelian and Magnus Domitian.

AURELIAN and DOMITIAN bow formally to the CREW MEMBERS.

The CREW MEMBERS return the bow.

GORDIAN turns to TI-KAL.

GORDIAN

And you are the commander of this vessel.

TI-KAL

Co - mmander?

GORDIAN

Mm.

TI-KAL turns to UR-UK. UR-UK addresses GORDIAN hesitantly.

UR-UK

Could you explain the meaning of that word?

GORDIAN is taken aback for a moment.

GORDIAN

Commander. You command this vessel.

TI-KAL and UR-UK stare at GORDIAN with incomprehension.

GORDIAN sighs.

GORDIAN

You're the leader of the crew.

TI-KAL turns to the crew.

CAR-AL, HA-TRA, BAL-BEK, BYB-LOS, TAX-ILA and the other CREW MEMBERS stare back at TI-KAL inquisitively.

TI-KAL turns back to GORDIAN.

TI-KAL

Our roles on this vessel are . . . fluid.

GORDIAN

Ah, I see. Well, you'll do as well as anyone. What may I ask is your name?

TI-KAL

Ti-Kal, Physical Science Guild. This is Ur-Uk of the Linguists Guild. He may act as interpreter, as some of your vocabulary diverges from our own.

GORDIAN

That much is evident. Well, then -

GORDIAN hands his case to AURELIAN, who now looks as though he's carrying two stone tablets, and turns back to TI-KAL and UR-UK.

GORDIAN

May I greet you in the custom of our people?

TI-KAL smiles and nods.

GORDIAN grabs TI-KAL in a hearty bear hug, nearly lifting him off the ground. TI-KAL is uncertain how to react. GORDIAN releases TI-KAL, who steps back a few paces and bows.

TI-KAL
Many thanks.

An awkward pause ensues.

GORDIAN
Well, seeing as there are so many of you, that will have to suffice. Now then - our purpose here is twofold. First, we wanted to see if your vessel is as beautiful as the creatures who inhabit it. And second, as we are still exploring this system - which we have designated System 17 - we would dearly love to commence trade with your people.

TI-KAL and UR-UK smile pleasantly in reply.

GORDIAN
May we see more of your ship?

TI-KAL
Oh, yes, of course.

The crowd of CREW MEMBERS parts as TI-KAL and UR-UK lead the MERCHANTS up the corridor. Most of the CREW MEMBERS follow.

As the MERCHANTS walk along, GORDIAN notices someone in the crowd.

DEL-PHI stands in between ANG-KOR and ARG-OS, holding their hands and regarding GORDIAN with the same interest as the others.

GORDIAN smiles with amused curiosity at DEL-PHI and her companions as he and the others pass.

DEL-PHI studies the MERCHANTS, her expression turning to perplexity.

ARG-OS
Such a baffling and novel experience.

DEL-PHI

Everything in the universe is novel to us.

13. INT - BRIDGE, THE CITY SHIP - DEEP SPACE

CY-REEN, FAI-YUM, PAL-MYRA and PET-RA sit conversing at their respective stations, but the viewscreen is now concealed. They all turn to the entrance at the sound of someone entering the bridge.

TI-KAL and UR-UK enter the bridge, followed by the imposing presence of GORDIAN, AURELIAN and DOMITIAN. Because of their height in relation to the construction and design of the City-Ship interior, the MERCHANTS have to lower their heads slightly through the doorway as they enter the room. Behind the MERCHANTS several of the CREW MEMBERS crowd their faces into the doorway to observe.

The bridge crew immediately arise as the MERCHANTS enter the room.

The MERCHANTS cordially smile and nod their heads to the bridge crew.

The bridge crew bow their heads, regarding the MERCHANTS with wide-eyed fascination like the others.

TI-KAL gestures at the bridge and addresses the MERCHANTS.

TI-KAL

And this is our bridge, which you observed during your transmission, and the crew which maintains its operation.

As each member of the bridge crew is introduced by TI-KAL, we see their faces in close-up.

TI-KAL

Cy-Reen, the pilot of our vessel. Fai-Yum, her navigator. Pal-Myra, science analysis. And Pet-Ra, distances and calculations.

After acknowledging the bridge crew, GORDIAN gazes around the room.

TI-KAL

Our ship's power is self-rejuvenating, and may run in perpetuity -

GORDIAN

What kind of weapons does a ship like this possess?

TI-KAL pauses a moment and then turns to UR-UK.

UR-UK frowns and addresses GORDIAN.

UR-UK

Could you define the word 'weapon', please?

GORDIAN turns a bewildered face to AURELIAN and DOMITIAN.

AURELIAN and DOMITIAN reply with disbelieving shrugs.

GORDIAN turns back to TI-KAL and UR-UK.

GORDIAN

How do you defend yourselves?

TI-KAL and UR-UK respond with befuddled faces for a moment.

TI-KAL

Well - our city-ship can automatically circumvent any obstacle placed in its path. Actually most of the ship's operation is automated.

GORDIAN

Ah, yes, it took a considerable amount of effort to keep pace with that peculiar tendency in your vessel. We assumed it was an automated feature as you were all asleep at the time.

TI-KAL

Yes, well, we began our sleep cycle with alternating shifts, but gradually that schedule broke down and now we all just sleep together - er, simultaneously.

GORDIAN surveys the bridge crew.

GORDIAN

No doubt accompanied by the sweetest of dreams.

PET-RA, PAL-MYRA, FAI-YUM and CY-REEN reply with smiles and light laughter.

TI-KAL thinks for a moment.

TI-KAL

Let us see now - other defenses . . .

FAI-YUM speaks up, somewhat hesitantly.

FAI-YUM

The shield which obstructed your beam can be employed to protect the city-ship's outer hull from the vicissitudes of external heat and cold.

GORDIAN nods and smiles, listening.

GORDIAN

So - no weapons, then.

UR-UK

That word is unfamiliar to us.

GORDIAN glances at AURELIAN and DOMITIAN with a cryptic look.

GORDIAN

Fascinating new system we've discovered.

14. INT - OBSERVATION DECK, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

TI-KAL and UR-UK arrive at the deck with GORDIAN, AURELIAN and DOMITIAN, along with the other CREW MEMBERS in tow.

The Sun Casino looms large in space outside the City-Ship, its hyper-kinetic light display blotting out any other feature of the cosmos.

TI-KAL and UR-UK are taken aback at something on the deck.

Since the deck has been bereft of crew members, a number of cleaners are busy moving about between the furniture.

TI-KAL and UR-UK regard the cleaners with consternation.

The MERCHANTS regard the cleaners with amusement.

Suddenly the cleaners become aware of the presence of the crew and their guests. The cleaners all simultaneously come to a stop and turn towards the MERCHANTS. The cleaners then retreat in formation to the edge of the glass enclosure.

GORDIAN turns to TI-KAL.

GORDIAN

I see your robot help is properly submissive.

TI-KAL and UR-UK share a bemused look.

TI-KAL

Is it?

BYB-LOS turns to HA-TRA with a smirk.

BYB-LOS

We must remember to invite guests more often.

HA-TRA replies with a giggle.

GORDIAN steps forward and gazes up at the Sun Casino with pride.

GORDIAN

And there it is. The Sun. The crowned prince of all the stars. The greatest gift a father could ever bestow upon his son. Not even my step-brother's super-cruisers can equal the size, beauty, and luxury of the grandest ship that System 12 has ever produced.

UR-UK mouths the words "system twelve" to himself with a frown.

GORDIAN continues to gaze distractedly at the Sun Casino.

AURELIAN clears his throat.

GORDIAN turns back to the others.

GORDIAN

Ah, you must pardon me. Rarely am I able to gaze upon the awesome grandeur of my greatest achievement from the deck of another vessel. This view must be quite a treat for you, I'm sure.

TI-KAL, UR-UK and the other CREW MEMBERS reply with noncommittal smiles.

GORDIAN

Hm. Well, then - let us sit and talk trade.

TI-KAL and UR-UK offer seats to the MERCHANTS.

Due to their larger size the MERCHANTS ensconce themselves somewhat awkwardly upon the low seats, their cases in their laps.

TI-KAL and UR-UK sit opposite the MERCHANTS in the lotus position.

CAR-AL, HA-TRA, BAL-BEK, BYB-LOS, TAX-ILA, DEL-PHI, ARG-OS, ANG-KOR and the other CREW MEMBERS gather around them, some seated and some standing.

GORDIAN

Now then - we will put forward the first offer.

GORDIAN leans in towards TI-KAL and UR-UK.

GORDIAN

I must tell you that, speaking for myself, I live for these deals; especially with a new, untapped race such as yourselves.

TI-KAL and UR-UK smile with expectancy, though clearly not understanding.

GORDIAN turns to AURELIAN and DOMITIAN.

GORDIAN

Gentlemen.

With looks of confidence and an air of pomposity, the MERCHANTS unlatch and open up their cases. Once opened the MERCHANTS ostentatiously pass their hands before the items which lie within the cases.

TI-KAL and UR-UK peer inside with wide-eyed fascination.

The CREW MEMBERS crane their necks to see inside the cases, with equal amounts of wide-eyed fascination.

GORDIAN

Have you ever beheld such magnificence? The greatest collection of gems, rare stones, and baubles ever collected in seventeen systems.

TI-KAL and UR-UK study the collection with interest.

GORDIAN (o-s)

You will never find such a collection anywhere else in the galaxy.

GORDIAN gazes up and around at the City-Ship and its crew.

GORDIAN

If you have anything to equal the value of but one of these treasures, we envy you your good fortune.

TI-KAL and UR-UK nod and process the sales pitch.

TI-KAL

What is it they do?

GORDIAN furrows his brow. AURELIAN and DOMITIAN stare blankly.

GORDIAN

They bring great pride and pleasure to those who can afford their immense value.

AURELIAN

They also come thoroughly appraised.

TI-KAL and UR-UK nod and think for a moment.

UR-UK

They are of exquisite cast.

GORDIAN

As are all of you. I was immediately struck by your resemblance to all manner of rare gems.

TI-KAL and UR-UK nod and study the cache.

GORDIAN

So - we would be very interested in what you have to offer in trade.

UR-UK

Can you define the word 'trade'?

The MERCHANTS affect a deflated expression. GORDIAN sighs and rubs his forehead in frustration.

GORDIAN

Trade. The exchange of goods. The bartering of things of value.

TI-KAL and UR-UK turn to one another in perplexity.

GORDIAN grows exasperated.

GORDIAN

Right! Um, okay -

GORDIAN gestures at UR-UK.

GORDIAN

Name something you like.

UR-UK thinks for a moment.

UR-UK

Well, I'm quite fond of bushberries.

GORDIAN furrows his brow again.

GORDIAN

Okay, uh, say that you - er, Ur-Uk - have fifteen bushberries, and he - er, Ti-Kal - has twenty bushberries. So you, Ur-Uk, would like some of Ti-Kal's bushberries. So you offer Ti-Kal something he likes, or values. Something you possess that Ti-Kal would want to possess for himself.

TI-KAL and UR-UK focus and listen.

GORDIAN (o-s)

Ur-Uk, you will determine how many bushberries the thing you're offering is worth, and Ti-Kal will give you that amount in exchange for what you are offering him.

GORDIAN folds his hands and smiles.

GORDIAN

That, gentlemen, is trade.

TI-KAL and UR-UK nod and process the information. UR-UK turns to TI-KAL.

UR-UK

What could I proffer you in exchange for your bushberries?

TI-KAL puts his hand on UR-UK'S shoulder and smiles gently at him.

TI-KAL

You need not proffer anything, Ur-Uk. It would be my pleasure to pass along to you my bushberries.

UR-UK smiles and places a hand on TI-KAL'S shoulder.

UR-UK

And I would be happy to give unto you my bushberries as well.

GORDIAN looks completely flummoxed and turns to AURELIAN.

AURELIAN has his head down and is rubbing his forehead with his hand.

GORDIAN turns back to TI-KAL and UR-UK.

TI-KAL and UR-UK smile at GORDIAN pleasantly.

GORDIAN throws his hands up and then proceeds to close and lock his case, with AURELIAN and DOMITIAN following suit, disappointed expressions on their faces.

GORDIAN

Right, um, clearly, this is a concept foreign to your race. And, clearly, you have nothing of value to offer us.

TI-KAL

Forgiveness for our lack of valuable things.

GORDIAN

No matter. Your ship is nice, and I will reiterate yet again that you are some of the most beautiful creatures I have ever seen.

GORDIAN glances at DOMITIAN.

GORDIAN

Domitian is certainly in agreement.

DOMITIAN does not reply but leers at members of the crew.

A few FEMALE CREW MEMBERS glance away from DOMITIAN with discomfort.

GORDIAN turns back to TI-KAL and UR-UK.

GORDIAN

So - as we are new to your system, we would like to graciously invite three members of your crew to come aboard the Sun Casino, and experience luxury and excitement the likes of which you've never experienced before.

TI-KAL

Certainly! Many thanks!

GORDIAN

It is a privilege afforded to only a select few.

TI-KAL

Which crew members?

GORDIAN

Whichever you choose.

TI-KAL

We number three hundred.

GORDIAN smiles wryly and attempts to stand up.

GORDIAN

I'm sure you'll take your time with the selection.

GORDIAN, AURELIAN and DOMITIAN laboriously help one another up off the low seating.

15. INT - HEALING CENTER, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

BAL-BEK places a clear mask over TI-KAL'S face. The mask covers TI-KAL'S mouth and nose and is tied behind his head.

BAL-BEK

The mask must be secure for the duration of your leave. Here -

BAL-BEK hands TI-KAL an electronic box with a clip from which a long pencil-thin tube connects with the face mask.

BAL-BEK

Affix this to your belt. It will maintain the flow of filtered oxygen.

TI-KAL clips the box onto his belt.

CAR-AL and UR-UK are assisted in the same procedure by other CREW MEMBERS of the Healing Guild, including AS-MARA.

TAX-ILA, HA-TRA, BYB-LOS and some of the other CREW MEMBERS observe, along with GORDIAN, AURELIAN and DOMITIAN.

UR-UK glances over at TAX-ILA.

TAX-ILA gives UR-UK a worried smile.

UR-UK smiles and winks at TAX-ILA from behind his mask.

BAL-BEK checks TI-KAL'S box one more time.

BAL-BEK

Upon your return, have them beam you to the decontamination chamber.

DOMITIAN

Uh oh.

AURELIAN

Best bring a book.

GORDIAN, AURELIAN and DOMITIAN share a snicker.

BAL-BEK turns to the MERCHANTS with a serious frown.

BAL-BEK

The survival of our crew depends on the strict observance of these protocols.

GORDIAN holds his hands up in contrition as he, AURELIAN and DOMITIAN affect serious expressions.

BAL-BEK turns back to TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK.

BAL-BEK

You three have seen fit to volunteer for this venture.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK listen to BAL-BEK with intense seriousness.

BAL-BEK (o-s)

I accord that illumination may be gained by such exploration.

BAL-BEK fixes TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK with a determined look.

BAL-BEK

But remember - we are posited upon an island in a vast sea for an unknowable span of time. Please be mindful of our vulnerabilities.

While BAL-BEK continues, AURELIAN and GORDIAN confer in low voices.

BAL-BEK (o-s)

Should there be any perceptible indication -

GORDIAN

Remind me to ask them at some point why they're out here in the first place.

AURELIAN

Oh, what about the entrance fee?

GORDIAN

I'm waiving it, of course. They've no currency to speak of.

AURELIAN

Generous of you, given the current rate.

GORDIAN

Consider them ornamental.

BAL-BEK continues to address TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK.

BAL-BEK

How is your breathing?

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK take deep breaths. They look at each other and nod.

BAL-BEK turns back to the MERCHANTS.

BAL-BEK

This beam of yours - how does it affect physiology?

GORDIAN smiles with confidence.

GORDIAN

We have never had a single accident or injury during its deployment. Those not accustomed to this particular mode of transit may experience a touch of dizziness upon arrival, but it's only temporary.

BAL-BEK nods but his expression remains one of concern. He turns back to TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK.

BAL-BEK

We have not yet had occasion for ship-to-ship employment of our communication sensors.

BAL-BEK pauses and smiles at TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK.

BAL-BEK

Be safe.

BAL-BEK, TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK smile and bow to one another. They then touch each other's arms.

16. INT - OBSERVATION DECK, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK arrive back onto the observation deck, along with GORDIAN, AURELIAN and DOMITIAN. GORDIAN turns with a smirk to BAL-BEK, TAX-ILA and the other CREW MEMBERS who have followed.

GORDIAN

Please maintain a twelve-foot minimum perimeter so we don't gobble up any extra beauties.

GORDIAN holds an arm out apologetically.

GORDIAN

Sadly system regulations require only three at a time from ship-to-ship.

GORDIAN, AURELIAN and DOMITIAN, carrying their cases, get into position, with TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK in between them.

TAX-ILA

Wait!

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK and the MERCHANTS turn as TAX-ILA hurries over to UR-UK.

TAX-ILA loosens and removes UR-UK'S mask. She takes him by the cheeks as he clasps her waist and the two "kiss" each other in

the custom of their race: gentle biting and nibbling around the lips and mouth.

GORDIAN stares at them in bemusement.

TAX-ILA and UR-UK continue to "kiss".

GORDIAN smirks and shakes his head.

TAX-ILA steps back from UR-UK as BAL-BEK re-affixes the mask to UR-UK'S face.

TAX-ILA smiles at UR-UK with love.

UR-UK returns her smile.

UR-UK gets back into position with the others as AURELIAN pulls out his device from earlier. He presses something on it and then speaks into it.

AURELIAN

You awake? Right - beam us over from these coordinates.

AURELIAN puts his device away and he and the others wait a moment.

A short, vibrating hum is quickly followed by GORDIAN, AURELIAN, DOMITIAN, TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK disappearing, as if suddenly sucked into another dimension.

The CREW MEMBERS react in stunned surprise.

DEL-PHI, ANG-KOR and ARG-OS look on with fearful countenances.

ANG-KOR
Alah-loo!

DEL-PHI
May our friends return unscrambled.

17. EXT - THE SUN CASINO - DEEP SPACE

We move in on a section of the 'head' of the Sun Casino, as "Buddha in Monte Carlo" by the Duc D'Angelos comes up in the underscoring.

18. INT - TRANSFERENCE CHAMBER, THE SUN CASINO - DEEP SPACE

The circular transference pad sits in the middle of the room, framed in a waterfall of deep purple light descending from the ceiling. A lone OPERATOR stands at a control panel nearby. The remainder of the chamber has all the loud, bright, kinetic, colorful, glittering decor of a casino foyer.

The music continues in the underscoring as the same short, vibrating hum is followed by GORDIAN, AURELIAN, DOMITIAN, TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK suddenly appearing on the transference pad. GORDIAN, AURELIAN and DOMITIAN jerk forward slightly, but are otherwise unperturbed. TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK, on the other hand, stumble forward woozily off the transference pad, as if thrust forward by the beam, out of breath and clutching their sides and stomachs.

GORDIAN steps forward and places a hand on UR-UK'S upper back, addressing him in an amused voice.

GORDIAN
All right?

UR-UK nods, doubled over.

UR-UK
Just a little - want of breath -

CAR-AL reaches out to TI-KAL, both doubled over as well.

TI-KAL
I'm going to be sick!

CAR-AL
No! Not in the mask! Try to breathe.

AURELIAN and DOMITIAN, meanwhile, walk past all of them with indifference.

TI-KAL and CAR-AL have their arms around each other's shoulders as both are doubled over, their other hands on their knees, breathing slowly and deeply.

GORDIAN stands next to UR-UK, waiting patiently as UR-UK also attempts to get his breath back.

Gradually TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK slowly stand upright, still breathing deeply.

GORDIAN

Really, other guests have only reported a slight dizziness.

19. INT - TRAMWAY, THE SUN CASINO - DEEP SPACE

The music continues in the underscoring as TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK are escorted by GORDIAN, AURELIAN and DOMITIAN in an open tram car down a steep track along the 'neck' of the Sun Casino.

As the tram car travels down the track, lights along the walls of the tunnel create a strobing effect.

20. EXT - THE SUN CASINO - DEEP SPACE

The camera tracks down the 'neck' of the Sun Casino.

21. INT - TRAMWAY, THE SUN CASINO - DEEP SPACE

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK gaze at the strobing lights with overawed - or overwhelmed - expressions.

GORDIAN turns to TI-KAL.

GORDIAN

Feeling better?

TI-KAL turns to GORDIAN with a smile and a nod before turning his gaze back to the tunnel of light.

GORDIAN

So why are you all out here in this quadrant of space?

TI-KAL takes a moment to respond, distracted as he is by the lights and the entire experience.

TI-KAL

When we arrive at our destination, the details of our mission will be relayed to us by pre-recorded message from our Mission Designer.

GORDIAN

And what is your destination, if you don't mind my asking?

TI-KAL

Not at all. Um, we have yet to be apprised of that information.

GORDIAN glances at AURELIAN and DOMITIAN with a frown before turning back to TI-KAL.

GORDIAN

Er - what planet are you from?

TI-KAL

Well, you see, we were locked in an artificially-induced slumber for an indeterminate period of our journey, and one of its effects is that upon waking, our memories of our homeworld - including families, past experiences - have been temporarily lost.

GORDIAN opens his mouth as if to speak and then pauses in order to process this information.

GORDIAN

So you don't know where you're going, and you don't know where you're from?

TI-KAL

For the present, yes.

GORDIAN pauses and thinks for a moment.

GORDIAN

Has it occurred to you that you might be exiled criminals?

TI-KAL turns to GORDIAN in confusion.

TI-KAL

What is a criminal?

GORDIAN sighs and rolls his eyes.

AURELIAN

Whoever did this to you, then, has done you a great disservice.

TI-KAL turns to AURELIAN.

TI-KAL

We hold trust in our Mission Designer.

AURELIAN glances at GORDIAN with a smirk.

GORDIAN smirks and shakes his head.

GORDIAN

One thing is certain - you are all ceaselessly fascinating.

The tram car continues down the tunnel of light.

22. EXT - THE SUN CASINO - DEEP SPACE

We move in on the 'belly' of the Sun Casino.

23. INT - MAIN FLOOR, THE SUN CASINO - DEEP SPACE

The main floor of the Sun Casino is an enormous, towering, noisy, hyper-kinetic space. It is designed and built to resemble an actual city, scaled down, and filled with thousands of GUESTS, engaged in a variety of activities: gambling, drinking, dancing. The infrastructure comprises many tiers up to the ceiling. Multicolored lights illuminate the entire space

from many locations, creating a disorienting effect. Along one of the upper balconies, large windows look out into space.

GORDIAN escorts TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK onto the main floor (AURELIAN and DOMITIAN are absent). They stand in a small, ornately decorated open hovercraft which glides around, between, and over the GUESTS, as well as various gaming tables and bars. The GUESTS all resemble GORDIAN, AURELIAN and DOMITIAN in general appearance and clothing. No other alien species or races appear to be present.

GORDIAN

You see before you the jewel of my fiefdom. No pleasure craft in seventeen systems comes close to matching the iconic luxury and opulence the Sun has to offer. We have here the best tables, the finest food and drink, the most glamorous nightclubs, and the guest suites will take your breath away.

The 'buildings' of the city decor tower above the GUESTS.

GORDIAN (o-s)

This design recreates the largest and most beautiful city of our planet - at least the portion of the planet under my executive control.

GORDIAN affects a grimace.

GORDIAN

The remainder of the planet is under the control of my beloved step-brother.

The hovercraft glides among the GUESTS and tables. There is constant movement, noise, and flashing light, in contrast to the comparatively subdued environment on the City-Ship.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK look up and around, overwhelmed and overstimulated by all the people, activity, and noise.

As they pass one of the gaming tables, an IRATE GUEST throws coins or chips back at the CROUPIER while screaming at him.

IRATE GUEST

You stole it! You stole my money!

The IRATE GUEST reaches into his clothing as if to pull out a weapon.

Immediately sinister-looking automated flying machines - like large cattle prods - come swooping in towards the IRATE GUEST.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK look on in shock as flashes and the sound of screaming emanate from off-screen.

GORDIAN winces.

GORDIAN

Oh, you weren't supposed to see that.

GORDIAN steers the hovercraft away from the gaming tables as TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK crane their necks back to see what happened to the IRATE GUEST.

GUESTS look down from the 'buildings', pointing at the hovercraft.

As they pass by the mobile bars, GUESTS begin to take notice of TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK.

GORDIAN smiles at the reaction of the GUESTS.

The GUESTS nudge their friends and point in the direction of TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK stare back at the gawkers.

GORDIAN brings the hovercraft to a halt roughly in the center of the main floor. The hovercraft slowly lowers to the floor with a hiss.

GORDIAN alights from the vehicle and invites TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK to do the same.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK exit the vehicle, if somewhat cautiously.

A large number of GUESTS begin to congregate around GORDIAN, TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK.

A sea of faces stare at TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK with uncanny looks and smiles of delight.

GORDIAN addresses the GUESTS.

GORDIAN

Greetings, my friends! I can see you're all enjoying the magnificence and magic that the Sun Casino has to offer! To add to that magnificence I have brought along the most special of guests - please, step back a bit, don't crowd them.

The GUESTS move back slightly, still struck by TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK.

GORDIAN

Some of you have been wondering about the mysterious ship outside, and what treasure it may hold. Well, now you see a sample of that treasure before you - unparalleled physical beauty.

The GUESTS continue to gaze at TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK with gaping grins, many clearly drunk.

GUEST

Can I take one home?

GORDIAN laughs and shakes his head.

The more inebriated GUESTS start yelling at TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK.

GUESTS

Take off your masks! Take off your masks!

OTHER GUESTS

Let us see your pretty faces!

GORDIAN

Now-now, they apparently have to wear those masks for . . .
health reasons.

*One DRUNKEN GUEST moves forward and attempts to grab at UR-UK'S
mask.*

DRUNKEN GUEST

Come on, take off your mask!

*UR-UK, a look of sudden panic in his face, fights off the
DRUNKEN GUEST.*

UR-UK

No! No!

GORDIAN reaches over and pushes the DRUNKEN GUEST away.

GORDIAN

All right, that's enough, let them be.

The DRUNKEN GUEST stumbles backward into the crowd.

*GORDIAN notices that TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK appear rattled.
He smiles at them.*

GORDIAN

How about a drink?

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK turn and look up at GORDIAN.

*GORDIAN frowns and gestures at his nose and mouth, referencing
their face masks.*

GORDIAN

Oh, right . . .

24. INT - UPPER BALCONY, MAIN FLOOR, THE SUN CASINO - DEEP SPACE

GORDIAN escorts TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK up to the upper balcony in his hovercraft. GORDIAN now carries a large ornate scarlet goblet filled with a spirituous beverage of some kind.

The hovercraft arrives at a small gate in the railing along the edge of the balcony. GORDIAN reaches over and slides the gate open.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK step off the hovercraft and onto the balcony, followed by GORDIAN. The hovercraft remains in place.

GORDIAN

I thought you might want to see your vessel as we see it.

GORDIAN closes the gate as TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK approach the large window which looks out into space.

Outside, the City-Ship can be seen at a slight low angle, hovering in space several miles from the Sun Casino; but due to its size, it appears closer.

TI-KAL goes closer to the window, gazing up at the City-Ship as if mesmerized by it.

GORDIAN (o-s)

It is a very nice ship. We were so fascinated to have come upon it, alone out here in this still-largely unexplored area of the system.

GORDIAN leans against the railing, smiling at his guests and drinking from his goblet.

GORDIAN

It had the charm of mystery to it; and when we scanned the ship and found its entire crew asleep, that mystery deepened.

TI-KAL turns from the City-Ship to CAR-AL and UR-UK while GORDIAN prattles on.

GORDIAN (o-s)

As I said, our universal translator scanned your brainwaves while you were all asleep. We thought it strange that you would leave your ship so completely defenseless like that, but there it is.

CAR-AL and UR-UK smile with warmth at TI-KAL.

TI-KAL replies with the same warm smile.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK turn back to gaze upon their City-Ship.

GORDIAN (o-s)

Yes, a very nice ship, indeed.

GORDIAN frowns and shrugs as he studies the City-Ship.

GORDIAN

Could do with a bit of flash.

GORDIAN turns to TI-KAL.

TI-KAL continues to gaze upon the City-Ship.

GORDIAN

Well, clearly you like it, so as long as you're happy with it . . .

TI-KAL

I've not seen it from without before.

GORDIAN

Somehow I'm not surprised.

An awkward pause follows as TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK gaze upon their home.

GORDIAN

Well - shall we continue the tour?

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK are summoned out of their reverie.

GORDIAN, TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK turn to go, the City-Ship behind them out in space.

25. INT - FOYER, THE SUN CASINO - DEEP SPACE

An ATTENDANT holds a portable screen up to GORDIAN, who inspects it, his scarlet goblet still cradled in hand. The foyer is as gaudily lit and decorated as the rest of the vessel.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK stand and wait further away down the corridor which slopes down towards an imposing door lit in red, out of which DOMITIAN emerges.

DOMITIAN passes TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK, smiling and bowing his head.

DOMITIAN approaches GORDIAN as GORDIAN dismisses the ATTENDANT.

DOMITIAN tilts his head in the direction of TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK.

DOMITIAN

You're taking them down there?

GORDIAN

I derive tremendous entertainment value from their reactions to things.

DOMITIAN

You may want to know that word of our masked friends is spreading fast among the other guests.

GORDIAN

Ah, and what is the prevailing sentiment?

DOMITIAN

Fascination, most of it bordering on the carnal; which I can understand.

DOMITIAN casts a lustful leer back to CAR-AL.

GORDIAN

Domitian, you're delightfully consistent. How are your tables? Are they meeting their quotas?

DOMITIAN

No, business is a bit dry at the moment.

GORDIAN

It's this system. It's quite barren.

DOMITIAN

Mm.

GORDIAN

No matter - we'll soon return to System 12, and more fertile hunting grounds.

GORDIAN and DOMITIAN exchange an unusual hand gesture.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK, meanwhile, converse quietly amongst themselves.

TI-KAL

Others of our crew may still want to follow in our wake.

UR-UK

I would recommend advising them of our findings and sensations first.

TI-KAL frowns and nods.

TI-KAL

Shall we seek then to abbreviate our stay?

CAR-AL

I would be glad to make haste.

TI-KAL looks up in the direction of GORDIAN.

TI-KAL

He comes.

GORDIAN approaches TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK with a broad smile, his arms spread out.

GORDIAN

My apologies, but business has a tendency to eke out my time. The perils of governing such a magnificent enterprise as this. You see, I lease tables on this vessel to the other Magni, and there are quotas of earnings they must fulfill during each quarter.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK nod but do not reply.

GORDIAN

You have absolutely no idea what I just said.

UR-UK

Perhaps -

GORDIAN

Never mind. Now then - how far does your curiosity stretch?

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK think for a moment without reply.

GORDIAN curls his lip into a smile.

GORDIAN

Allow me to guide you through the deeper recesses of the Sun.

26. INT - PRIVATE ROOMS, THE SUN CASINO - DEEP SPACE

GORDIAN, TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK emerge around a corner into a wide, luridly lit corridor with large raised rooms situated on either side, each concealed behind an opaque, gaudily designed

screen. Muffled sounds of either pleasure or agony (or both) can be heard emanating from the rooms, creating a disturbing atmosphere. GORDIAN still carries his scarlet goblet.

GORDIAN

I grant you the rare privilege of allowing you into a section of this great vessel generally not afforded to those outside the rank of Magnus. These laboratories, if you will, are where others of my breed may apply their experiments in various . . . recreational activities.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK glance around with unnerved expressions behind their masks, the muffled cries and voices echoing around them.

GORDIAN, TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK pass by a chamber as its screen partially opens, the unsettling sounds from within suddenly growing louder. A WOMAN pokes her head around the corner of the opening and beckons to UR-UK.

WOMAN

Hey! Psst!

UR-UK pauses and turns his head back to the WOMAN.

The WOMAN leers at UR-UK, her face covered in perspiration, her lavish makeup smeared.

WOMAN

They told me about you.

UR-UK smiles awkwardly and nods.

The WOMAN looks UR-UK up and down with a feral lust.

WOMAN

I could eat you up.

UR-UK is uncertain how to respond, and turns back to join the others.

GORDIAN arrives at one of the chambers as UR-UK rejoins them. GORDIAN has his hand on a large button, and addresses TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK in a slight theatrical manner.

GORDIAN

Let us see what delights lurk behind this gilded tapestry.

GORDIAN presses the button and the screen slides open, the sounds from within bursting forth in full volume

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK react to what is before them with stunned, uncomprehending faces.

GORDIAN peers inside the room and then withdraws his face with another annoyed wince.

GORDIAN

Of course, it had to be Honorius.

MAGNUS HONORIUS - bearded, nude, vile, and dentally challenged - is seen in medium close-up, breathing, thrusting, sweating, and leering at his spectators, surrounded by cries that appear to be more of pain than pleasure.

CAR-AL looks away, clearly upset by what she sees.

A TERRIFIED WOMAN, seen in close-up with a tear-stained face, looks up with a horrified expression at TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK do not appear to understand what they are seeing. CAR-AL and UR-UK are attempting to look away while TI-KAL turns to GORDIAN.

TI-KAL

Are they - being kind to one another?

GORDIAN

What?

TI-KAL

Are they being kind to one another?

GORDIAN

I suppose that's one way to put it.

TI-KAL appears upset and confused.

TI-KAL

We have, er, a similar act in our culture.

GORDIAN

Oh, good. I was starting to worry.

TI-KAL

Not as - unhappy, perhaps . . .

GORDIAN studies TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK for a moment, clearly deriving pleasure from their reactions.

GORDIAN

Would you like to join them?

TI-KAL turns to CAR-AL and UR-UK fearfully.

CAR-AL and UR-UK turn to TI-KAL and GORDIAN with traumatized faces. CAR-AL addresses GORDIAN in a forceful voice.

CAR-AL

We wish to leave!

GORDIAN

Very well.

GORDIAN presses the button and the screen closes, the sounds from within growing muffled once more. He then motions for TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK to move on.

As they move on, the screen opens partially from within and a hand comes out, grabbing GORDIAN'S sleeve.

GORDIAN turns back with a look of indignation.

HONORIUS, sweating and leering with animalistic fervor, addresses GORDIAN in a grunting manner.

HONORIUS

Where did you get them?

GORDIAN

What?

HONORIUS

Where did you get them?

GORDIAN attempts to remove HONORIUS' hand from his sleeve.

GORDIAN

We happened upon them.

HONORIUS

I want one!

GORDIAN

You - want one.

HONORIUS

Yes! Name your price!

GORDIAN succeeds in removing HONORIUS' hand from his sleeve.

GORDIAN

I'll have one gift wrapped for you.

GORDIAN pushes HONORIUS back into the room and closes the screen again.

GORDIAN turns to rejoin TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK, but pauses. He turns back to HONORIUS' chamber, thinks for a moment, and then looks back in the direction of TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK. He then chuckles to himself, shakes his head, and moves on.

27. INT - CORRIDOR, THE SUN SHIP - DEEP SPACE

Another imposing door lit in red opens from within and TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK step through with GORDIAN behind them. GORDIAN pulls the door shut. Two ATTENDANTS stand near the door, chatting. GORDIAN, growing tipsy, converses pleasantly and obliviously with his clearly traumatized guests as they proceed down the corridor.

GORDIAN

The Magni are a robust breed and take their pleasure as they see fit. Our race believes that meritorious competition is the ultimate virtue, and that wealth bestows privilege upon those who have earned it.

GORDIAN, TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK are now seen walking down the corridor from behind.

GORDIAN

So - if you like, we can set you up in one of our platinum suites and draw credits so you can play on the house -

GORDIAN is interrupted by the sound of a latch and a woman's cry emanating from behind them.

GORDIAN, TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK turn abruptly, with GORDIAN immediately wincing yet again in annoyance.

The TERRIFIED WOMAN, nude but covering herself with a blanket, has opened the door and is running down the corridor towards TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK, crying with her hand stretched out towards them.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK stare in shock at the TERRIFIED WOMAN.

The TERRIFIED WOMAN'S foot gets tangled in the blanket and she falls to the floor.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK step forward to help the TERRIFIED WOMAN but are stopped by GORDIAN.

GORDIAN
No, no, no.

As the TERRIFIED WOMAN struggles to stand up, HONORIUS, enraged and with a towel wrapped around his loins, emerges through the doorway, bearing a cudgel. He charges towards the TERRIFIED WOMAN and grabs her by the hair.

The two ATTENDANTS watch in amusement.

The TERRIFIED WOMAN screams in agony.

HONORIUS brings the cudgel down.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK cry out at the sound of bludgeoning off-camera.

The legs of the TERRIFIED WOMAN are shown being dragged away.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK come forward again, stopped once more by GORDIAN.

GORDIAN
No!

UR-UK
She requires aid!

GORDIAN
She is the author of her own reward. We will proceed.

GORDIAN attempts to physically usher TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK forward. He places a hand on CAR-AL.

CAR-AL pulls herself away from GORDIAN and issues a full-throated cry.

CAR-AL
Take your stinking hand away!!

CAR-AL, shaken, stares at the floor as an equally shaken TI-KAL and UR-UK close ranks with her.

GORDIAN steps back with a hand in the air, affecting a placid smile.

GORDIAN
Are we finished?

TI-KAL
'Twould be best if we were returned to our vessel.

GORDIAN
Of course.

GORDIAN turns back to the two ATTENDANTS and motions for them to approach.

The two ATTENDANTS approach GORDIAN as GORDIAN turns back to TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK.

GORDIAN
An attendant will escort you back to the transference chamber.

TI-KAL nods as ATTENDANT 2 motions for TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK to follow him.

As they leave, GORDIAN addresses his departing guests.

GORDIAN
I am glad to have made your acquaintance, and wish you all good fortune on your journey to - wherever it is you're going.

TI-KAL glances back at GORDIAN but continues on his way with the others.

GORDIAN sighs with annoyance, closes his eyes, and rubs his temples. He turns to ATTENDANT 1.

GORDIAN

I want Honorius brought under control.

ATTENDANT 1

Sir, he is a Magnus -

GORDIAN

I don't care how important his family is! My family is more important! You may be interested to know that my father is the chief executive officer of our entire planet!

ATTENDANT 1 bows his head in contrition.

GORDIAN

Now this is my ship, and Honorius is disturbing my guests, and not for the first time.

ATTENDANT 1

What would you like me to do?

GORDIAN

I don't know! Drug him! Who would know the difference . . .

GORDIAN dismisses ATTENDANT 1, who leaves as AURELIAN approaches GORDIAN with a sardonic smile. GORDIAN looks at AURELIAN in puzzlement.

AURELIAN

Your father wishes to speak to you, on the Z channel.

GORDIAN sighs and once again affects a placid, ironic smile.

GORDIAN

My day improves with each passing moment.

GORDIAN trudges away in resignation.

28. INT - DECONTAMINATION CHAMBER, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

A short, vibrating hum is quickly followed by TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK suddenly emerging out of nothingness. They stumble

forward and quickly remove their masks, coughing and struggling to breathe.

CAR-AL goes to the corner, coughing and vomiting.

UR-UK bends over, coughing as well, before checking on CAR-AL.

TI-KAL, meanwhile, wipes his mouth and passes his hand before his communication sensor.

TI-KAL
Bal-Bek!

BAL-BEK'S face appears, looking with surprise at TI-KAL.

BAL-BEK
Are you back aboard?

TI-KAL
Presently in quarantine! We need you!

BAL-BEK nods as TI-KAL passes his hand before the sensor, and BAL-BEK'S face disappears.

TI-KAL turns back to the others.

UR-UK and CAR-AL are now seated on the bench, breathing heavy and staring into space.

29. INT - GORDIAN'S SUITE, THE SUN CASINO - DEEP SPACE

GORDIAN, tipsy, stares up with a forced pleasant smile, his scarlet goblet in hand.

GORDIAN
Greetings, father.

GORDIAN'S FATHER smiles down upon his son via a large rectangular screen situated high on a wall in the suite.

GORDIAN'S FATHER
Hello, Gordian. We've missed you.

GORDIAN'S FATHER is elderly and corpulent but heavily made-up, his hair meticulously styled.

GORDIAN'S FATHER
How fares your expedition?

GORDIAN
We prosper well, father.

GORDIAN'S FATHER
Finding good trade and pleasure?

GORDIAN
Exceptional.

GORDIAN'S FATHER
That's very good, my son.

There follows a brief awkward pause.

GORDIAN'S FATHER
Your stepbrother sends his regards.

GORDIAN barely nods in acknowledgement, maintaining his poker face.

GORDIAN'S FATHER
His super-cruisers have just returned from systems afar -

GORDIAN
Good for him.

GORDIAN'S FATHER evinces a moment of irritation at GORDIAN'S interruption before continuing.

GORDIAN'S FATHER
From systems afar, bearing much loot and treasure.

GORDIAN

So my stepbrother's fleet has a lot of storage space.

GORDIAN'S FATHER pauses and smiles patiently.

GORDIAN'S FATHER

Your ship is still the finest in sixteen systems, my son.

GORDIAN

Seventeen.

GORDIAN'S FATHER

It is true your stepbrother is renowned for the quantity of his acquisitions. But mere quantity cannot equal that elusive magic which only true quality can bring.

GORDIAN'S expression changes to one of perplexity.

GORDIAN

I don't under -

GORDIAN'S FATHER

I want you to bring me something special, my son; something utterly exquisite and unique, of which there is only one of its kind in the known universe. Something whose price is beyond valuation, but which many would crave.

GORDIAN looks aside in thought.

GORDIAN'S FATHER

Bring me just such a singular marvel, Gordian, and your assets will be improved considerably.

GORDIAN looks back up at his FATHER as a smile manifests on his lips.

GORDIAN

As you wish, father.

30. INT - CORRIDOR, DECONTAMINATION CHAMBER, THE CITY-SHIP -
DEEP SPACE

BAL-BEK hurries down the corridor, followed by TAX-ILA, BYB-LOS, HA-TRA and a few other CREW MEMBERS.

31. INT - DECONTAMINATION CHAMBER, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

BAL-BEK and the others stop and peer in the window.

TI-KAL, CAR-AL and UR-UK sit slumped on the bench.

BAL-BEK presses the intercom button.

BAL-BEK
Are you ill?

TI-KAL waves his hand.

TI-KAL
It will pass.

BAL-BEK looks up at the meter.

BAL-BEK
The process will accrue some time.

TI-KAL nods in acceptance and smiles.

TI-KAL
Should have brought a book.

BAL-BEK smiles at TI-KAL and turns back to the meter.

TAX-ILA smiles lovingly upon UR-UK, placing her hand on the window.

UR-UK gives TAX-ILA a weak smile.

TI-KAL passes his hand over his communication sensor.

TI-KAL
Cy-Reen.

CY-REEN'S face appears before TI-KAL.

TI-KAL

When your labors allow, you may carry us forth on our journey.

CY-REEN

Very well.

TI-KAL

Oh, and perhaps Fai-Yum could reactivate the shield.

CY-REEN

Of course.

TI-KAL passes his hand back over his sensor and CY-REEN'S face vanishes.

32. INT - BRIDGE, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

CY-REEN and FAI-YUM begin working their controls. Behind them, PET-RA sits in TI-KAL'S chair next to PAL-MYRA.

CY-REEN

'Twould appear our interval here is concluded.

FAI-YUM

Their visit to the Sun must have borne sour fruit.

The wall opens up and the viewscreen shows the Sun Casino turning around.

The bridge crew look up at the Sun Casino in surprise.

The rear of the Sun Casino now faces the City-Ship.

33. INT - DECONTAMINATION CHAMBER, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

TI-KAL'S communication sensor lights up. TI-KAL waves his hand over it and CY-REEN'S face once again emerges in the air next to his.

CY-REEN
Ti-Kal?

TI-KAL
Yes?

CY-REEN looks as if she's gazing up at the bridge viewscreen.

CY-REEN
They're turning.

TI-KAL
What? I don't -

CY-REEN
They're turning, as if they're making departure as well.

TI-KAL
Very well, I -

CY-REEN
Should I wait out their maneuver?

TI-KAL grows exasperated.

TI-KAL
I - do as you see fit!

A look of bewildered shock comes over CY-REEN'S face.

TI-KAL
What? What do you see?

34. EXT - THE SUN CASINO - DEEP SPACE

An enormous metallic chain mesh unfolds silently from the rear of the Sun Casino.

35. INT - BRIDGE, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

The unfolding mesh can be seen hurtling towards the City-Ship on the viewscreen.

PAL-MYRA, PET-RA, FAI-YUM and CY-REEN gaze up at the screen with dazed horror.

36. EXT - THE SUN CASINO AND THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

The chain mesh unfolds from the Sun Casino and engulfs the City-Ship.

37. EXT - HULL, THE CITY-SHIP - DEEP SPACE

Large boxes on the ends of the chains attach themselves to the metal hull of the City-Ship.

Cut to black.

Closing credits, silent without music.

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