



local farmer reports a flying saucer passing overhead a few nights ago. As he stood watching, red bolts, like big Roman candles, suddenly shot up from the ground beneath it. The saucer then flew off to the southeast.

If the PCs have government or law enforcement contacts, they may be "leaked" inside information about the sighting. If they work for the government (agents, astronauts, military reservists and fed/state/local law enforcement careers), they may be contacted directly by government authorities. Or they might even be driving by during the night and see the show for themselves.

BATTLEFIELD

The site is about 14 kilometers from the outskirts of the city, in the middle of some wooded rural terrain. The land is full of hills and rocks, and has reverted to its natural wooded tangle. The adventurers will need an off-road vehicle like a Hummer, pickup truck, Range Rover or off-road cycle to get through, and a brush-cutter on the front of the vehicle would be nice. It takes the adventurers an hour and a half to plow through the 2 kilometers of underbrush to reach the site.

The battlefield is just that. It was once a grove of trees. But now the trees have been cleared out in a 60-meter radius—sheared through at ground level and stacked neatly to one side. Whatever cut the trunks didn't leave any marks—the cut ends are completely smooth, almost polished. The clearing is marred by ugly craters, ranging in size from one to several feet across and up a foot deep. The craters appear to have heat-fused earth. They are angled away from the center of the clearing. Unidentifiable shards of scorched metal surround the larger craters.

The place smells. Bad. The odor of cooked meat—rancid cooked meat—fills the still air, as well as the sting of ozone and the stink of hot metal. Empaths can almost taste a lingering taint of fear and shock. Corpses—pieces of corpses, anyway—are scattered around each crater. The body parts come from dead humanoids. Not humans—these creatures are more slender, with pale skin, and three fingers and a thumb on each hand. They were wearing pale blue clothing of some unidentifiable fabric. All the limbs are scorched at the free ends.

The center of the clearing boasts two interesting features: a big crater 10 meters in diameter, located about 15 meters north-east of the center point, and a 10-meter cube of silver metal, studded with crystals, at the exact center. The cube is still and cold. It weighs about 4000 kilograms (it's largely hollow) and seems to have no entrances, seams, controls, decorations or

even patterns among the crystals. The crystals range in size from thumbnail to platter and appear to be integral parts of the metal—there are no seams between metal and crystal. No tool the PCs have will dent the metal or score the crystals. The big crater is not surrounded by body parts or metal shards; there is no lip of fused soil surrounding it like the others. It's like a hole in the ground—a perfectly round hold in the ground. And there's something at the bottom of the hole. It looks like a cross between a robot, a ground car, and a kid's toy tank. There are big arms with six-fingered gripping hands, a few arms tipped with sharp crab-claws, blackened weapons nozzles projecting from a pylon-mounted "head" turret, all arranged on a sloped-metal hull/body sitting atop the melted remnants of a caterpillar track system. The arms are frozen in place, and the whole bizarre (and faintly menacing) thing is motionless.

MACHINE LANGUAGE

Just when the adventurers are convinced that the machine is dead and harmless, it speaks! "Do you intend to destroy me?" It waits for an answer. "Yes," is an incorrect answer. The machine also interprets weapons pointed at it as a hostile act, and hostiles are to be destroyed. If the PCs offend it, the machine aims its weapons at them with blinding speed. If the PCs make no threats, the machine asks, "Are you allies of the Ziv?" If the adventurers ask who or what the Ziv are, the machine projects a hologram of a humanoid ET and identifies it as a Ziv.

If the adventurers answer that they are not allies of the Ziv, the machine says, "I am a Mark III LFDU. The Ziv are my enemy. I have been sent to destroy their base here." It extrudes several gadget-tipped arms. "I can detect their base. It is not far away. I require your assistance to restore myself to operational status. At present, my motive capability has been destroyed. I require replacement parts and raw materials, as well as transport to a place of temporary safety where I can effect the needed repairs. I await your assistance."

The adventurers now have several options:

They can try to destroy the Mark III (which degenerates into a fireball). They really don't stand much chance against this armored killing machine.

They can try to pump it for more information. It answers a few quick questions, then states that information transfer would better be accomplished in an area of safety. (See Input-Output, below.)

They can run away (leaving the referee high and dry on how to get them back into the adventure) and perhaps report the thing to the authorities. (See Government Involvement, below.)

Or they can try to assist it directly. (See C⁴, Ltd., below.)

INPUT-OUTPUT

If the adventurers ask Mark III some pointed questions, here are some of the answers it gives.

Where did you come from? Another world, apparently in a different space-time continuum.

What is your world like? Not like this one. Other details are irrelevant to the mission.

What is your mission? To find and destroy the Ziv base detected during the space-time transfer.

How did you get here? The Ziv have a space-time transfer device that enables them to transfer matter and energy between worlds. (The device is the large metal cube in the middle of the clearing. Activating the cube is possible, but Mark III believes that activation will only restore the door to its own world. It does not know how to set the cube otherwise.)

Who or what are you? I am a Mark III LFDU. (The Mark III does not explain that LFDU stands for lifeform destruction unit.)

Are you going to kill us? No. That is not part of the mission programming. The purpose of the mission is to destroy the Ziv and their base, then return to origin point to reinforce the battle there.

Who or what are you battling on your world? That information is irrelevant to this mission.

Mark III has no intention of revealing anything useful about itself or its world to these living creatures. In return, it desires books (electronic if at all possible) about the social, political and military situations of Earth. If the adventurers are actually trusting enough to provide it with such data, they deserve to have Mark III return someday to their dimension—with some of its bigger cousins.

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If the adventurers want to assist the Mark III on their own, they have to find the materials it needs and find a way to move it. The Mark III can repair its minor injuries itself, if provided with metal and silicon. Restoring its minor systems to full function requires about an hour. Replacing its motive system takes longer. It needs something like a truck chassis and drive train, and specifically requests a caterpillar-tread drive train, something only found on military vehicles and heavy construction vehicles. The cybertank weighs about 2500 kilograms and would take a tank-transporter, a flatbed equipment mover or some other heavy-duty load lifter to transport it. Just moving it requires a winch that can drag about three metric tons. Transporting it takes a JumpAbout VTOL, a heavy helicopter or a ground vehicle on

