

The Science Fiction in Traveller

Shannon Appelcline

**A Reader's Guide to
Traveller
Role-Playing Fiction**



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Traveller Role-Playing Fiction**

By Shannon Appelcline

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Preface

Award-winning reviewer Shannon Appelcline (*Designers & Dragons*) investigates the science-fiction literature that shaped the structure and content of the Traveller science-fiction role-playing game. He reviews and discusses the broad expanse of SF that influenced Marc Miller as he designed the massive background universe of Traveller, and then gives equal consideration to the novels and short stories that were inspired by Traveller.

Introduction

I think that one of the best ways to prepare yourself for a roleplaying game is to immerse yourself in its fiction. It's a way to gain a visceral, unconscious understanding of a game world — allowing you to instinctively respond to your player's action in the context of a real universe. So, when I decided to run a Mongoose *Traveller* game in 2009, I started reading.

Marc Miller has listed a number of novels that influenced *Traveller* over the years, and I began with some of those — including classics from the '50s and '60s by authors that I was largely unfamiliar with, like H. Beam Piper, E.C. Tubb, and Keith Laumer. They helped me to gain a better appreciation not just for *Traveller's* universe, but also for science fiction's history.

I could have read scores more “inspirational” novels, but instead I moved on to the novels actually written about the *Traveller* universe. Though *Traveller* doesn't have the depth of *D&D's* fiction line, I was happy to discover that there were about a dozen novels that were “Traveller” to various degrees. I read the first in August 2009, and kept reading through the end of 2010.

I think my work served its purpose. I ran an enjoyable and well-received 20-session campaign, my longest running *Traveller* campaign ever.

Being an obsessive writer, I documented everything I could about the experience. You can find an Actual Play (AP) of the run at RPGnet under “The Spinward Marches Campaign”. I also used the experience as the germ of an RPGnet GM's column about *Traveller* called “Fifth Imperium” — because back then we didn't know better and thought that Mongoose's *Traveller* was *T5*. Oh, and finally, I reviewed every one of those books I read, talking about both how good they were and what they could add to a *Traveller* game.

When Marc Miller Kickstarted his own *Traveller* novel, he learned of my fiction reviews, and commissioned me to collect them all into a book. *This is that book*.

Within you'll find 29 reviews of *Traveller* influences, novels, and short stories.

That includes my original 23, plus six new reviews written for initial release in this book, including: one influence that Marc suggested, one book I inexplicably missed (inexplicable because I had a copy of it!), and four reviews of books that have appeared since last I wrote. Those four new releases are especially exciting because they show that the world of *Traveller* fiction is continuing to rapidly grow and evolve. I look forward to seeing what's next (and vaguely dream about trying my hand at the genre myself!).

My original reviews have all been revised for this book. They've been organized, standardized, and generally edited. I also added historical notes about many of the publications, because I've become increasingly in over the history of our industry in recent years, something that's reflected in my other recent publication, *Designers & Dragons*.

Shannon Appelcline

January 27, 2016

About the Ratings

All of the reviews in this book are rated based on their "Style" and "Substance", a somewhat nebulous pair of categories used in all RPGnet reviews.

Here, they're defined as follows:

Writing Style (on a one to five star scale: ★★★★★) describes the quality of a book's writing. Does it read well? Are the characters realistic? Is the setting evocative? Is the plot interesting? Does the story have depth? Is the book *good*?

***Traveller* Substance (also on a one to five star scale: ★★★★★)** measures how true the book is to the *Traveller* game, how much it reveals about that setting, and how useful it might be for a GM looking for inspiration.

Both categories are rated on a five-point scale.

One caveat: I can't guarantee the rating scales are consistent between the books I read in 2009 and those I read in 2015 — because both my critical eye and my preferences may have changed in that time. I did my best to reassess my older ratings based on what the reviews actually said and to use that as a guide for my new reviews, but there's still a gap.

*The six reviews newly written for this compiled volume are: *The Cosmic Computer*, *Yesterday's Hero*, *Fate of the Kinunir*, *Shadow of the Storm*, [Marc Miller's Kickstartered] *Agent of the Imperium*, and *Slices of Life*.*

Traveller Influences, 1959-1979

Although *Traveller* has never had an “Appendix N” that described its “inspirational and educational reading”, Marc Miller has revealed a number of books that influenced the creation of *Traveller* over the years. In general, they demonstrate that *Traveller* is a child of the ‘50s and ‘60s. Classic authors like Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein were joined by relative newcomers like Gordon Dickson and E.C. Tubb. This section reviews *some* of those inspirations.

There could easily have been twice as many reviews in this section, but instead it cleaves to the stories that feel the most like *Traveller* — so it excludes Jack Vance’s *Demon Princes* (1964-1967, 1979-1981), for example, because their physics is so different. This section also omits some of the more sprawling series, like Poul Anderson’s Polesotechnic League. The most notable exclusion in this section is Isaac Asimov’s Foundation series, which follows the same rise and fall of civilization found in H. Beam Piper’s work ... and in *Traveller*. If you want to know more, read Appendix N. It’s finally here, in this book, combining all the books that Miller has mentioned in various interviews.

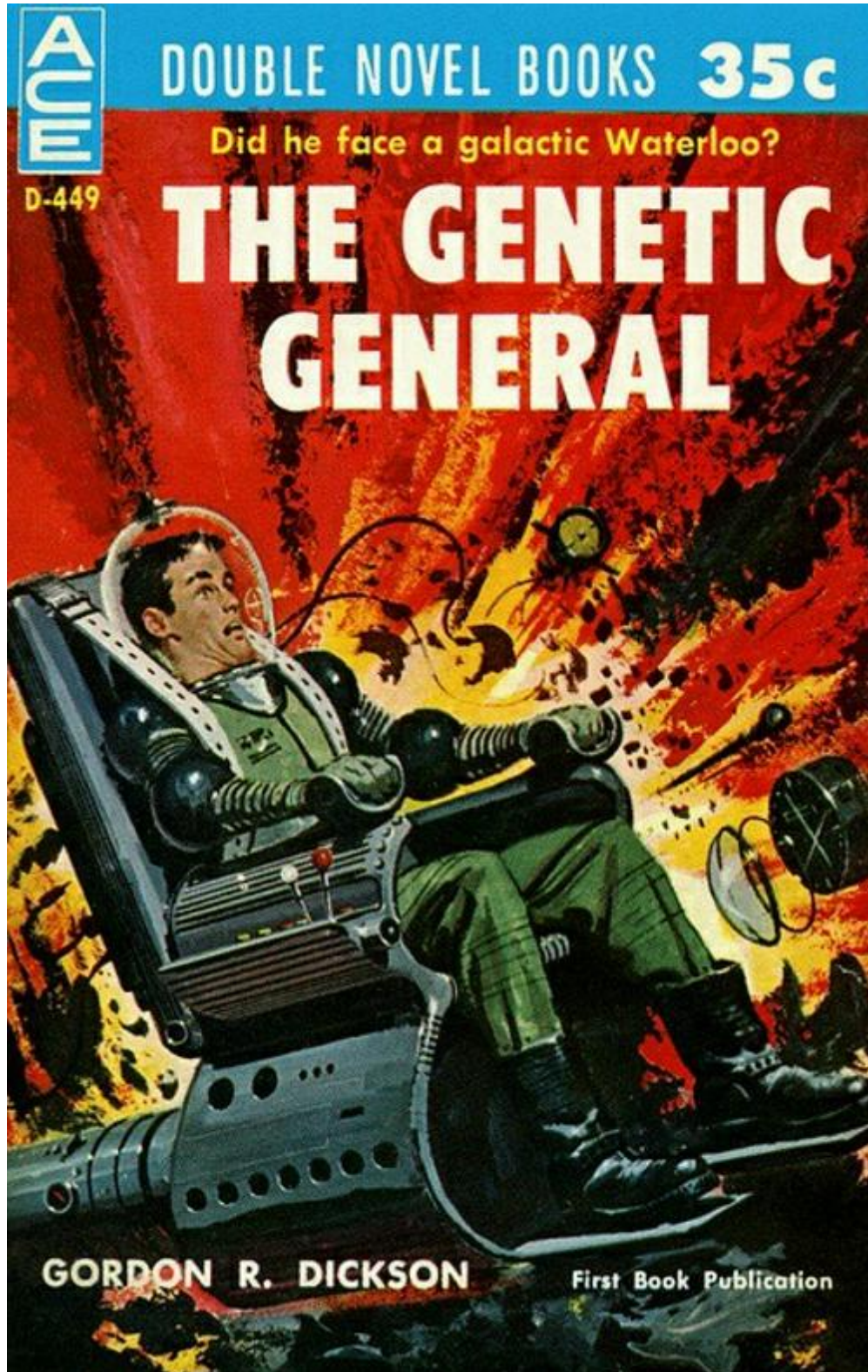
As for what follows: though this inspirational overview is ultimately incomplete its puzzle pieces reveal much about *Traveller’s* inspiration. Two entries are particularly notable. E.C. Tubb’s Dumarest of Terra series (1967-1985, 1997, 2008) is pure *Traveller* in book form — and a lot of fun to read too! Meanwhile, H. Beam Piper’s *Space Viking* (1963) reveals the same rise and fall of civilizations that’s reflected in the rise and fall of three (four?) Imperiums.

- 1. Dorsai (1960)**
- 2. The Cosmic Computer (1963)**
- 3. Space Viking (1963)**
- 4. Envoy to New Worlds (1963)**
- 5. Retief’s Peace (2005)**

6. Dumarest of Terra (1967)

7. Hammer's Slammers (1979)

Dorsai!



- ***Dorsai!*, by Gordon R. Dickson**
- Originally published as **The Genetic General.**
- **Publisher:** Ace Double (1960)
- Style: ★★★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★

Dorsai! is the story of a boy, Donal Graeme. He is a Dorsai, which is a race of man who are especially trained for battle and who are the great mercenaries of the sixteen worlds.

The story of *Dorsai!* is told in a rather unique manner. It covers nine or ten years, focusing on the story of Donal as he rises up through the ranks, beginning as a “Cadet” and very quickly moving to higher plateaus. It also focuses on Donal’s interactions with one William of Ceta.

Genre & Style

1959 saw the publication of two stories of crucial importance to the *military science fiction* genre. The first was “Dorsai!”, a serialized short story that finished up in the July 1959 issue of *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine (1930-Present). The second was Robert A. Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers* (1959). Although military science-fiction books like H. Beam Piper’s *The Petrified Planet* (1952) predated these two stories, it was *Dorsai!* and *Starship Troopers* that defined and popularized the genre.

The two books broadly divide the genre in two. *Starship Troopers* highlighted infantry and powered-armor suits while *Dorsai!* instead focuses on great naval battles in space. The near-simultaneous publication of these originating novels is probably why both subgenres of military science fiction continue to this day.

As a groundbreaker for the genre, *Dorsai!* obviously embodies many of the themes and elements of military science fiction. It also succeeds unlike much science fiction of the era by still being very readable today. Donal is a real character; you’ll care about him and enjoy watching him go through life. However, Dickson doesn’t stint on the military angle: his tactics are entertaining and believable. Put these two factors together, and you

have a top-rate biography of a military man.

Unfortunately, *Dorsai!* weakens toward the end. I won't spoil things, but I will say that the conflict between Donal and William is not dramatic enough to hold the spine of the book. In addition, the climax spins off into silly areas of philosophy that remind me of Frank Herbert — who I suspect was influenced in his creation of *Dune* (1965) by *Dorsai!*

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Though Marc Miller has listed *Dorsai!* as an influence for *Traveller*, I remain dubious of its impact.

There's no question that *Dorsai!* is foundational military science fiction, and there's similarly no question that Miller and others imagined at least part of *Traveller* as a military science-fiction role-playing game. The one has to have influenced the other in general ways. However, it's equally obvious that the specifics of *Dorsai!* didn't find their way into the *Traveller* game. Maybe *Dorsai!*'s chameleon battledress became *Traveller*'s battle dress but that seems the closest parallel. *Dorsai!*'s space travel works quite differently from that in *Traveller*, and *Dorsai!*'s military depends upon very general “contracts” for mercenaries, as opposed to the much more specific “tickets” of *Traveller*.

That doesn't mean that *Dorsai!* isn't full of great ideas for *Traveller* games; they're just more general military ideas. I like the idea of *Dorsai!*'s mercenary code, which gives mercs the right to question their merc leaders. I also like some of the ideas of *Dorsai!*'s merc contracts, such as the fact that they can be traded around, that there might be specific “loyalty” clauses that keep you from going over to an enemy, etc. It's just stuff you'd have to introduce to *Traveller* on your own, rather than building on something that's already there.

So, *Dorsai!* isn't bad for a *Mercenary*-influenced game, even if the direct inspiration isn't obvious.

Publication Notes

Dorsai! originally appeared as a serialized novel in the May, June, and July 1959 issues of *Astounding Science Fiction* (now known as *Analog*). The next year it appeared as half of an Ace double, though it was abridged and renamed as *The Genetic General*

(1960). The original text and the name were only restored a decade and a half later when it was published as *Dorsai!* (1976) by DAW Books. *Dorsai!* remains in print today largely as an eBook.

If *Dorsai!* influenced *Traveller* it was probably as a foundational military science-fiction book influencing the first military science-fiction RPG. Don't expect specifics, but do expect a fun read, full of useful source material for any *Traveller* game with a military feel.

Additional Reading

Dorsai! was the first book in Gordon Dickson's *Childe Cycle*, a science-fiction future history. It contains six novels:

- *Dorsai!* (1959)
- *Necromancer* (1962)
- *Soldier, Ask Not* (1964)
- *Tactics of Mistake* (1970)
- *The Final Encyclopedia* (1984)
- *The Chantry Guild* (1988)

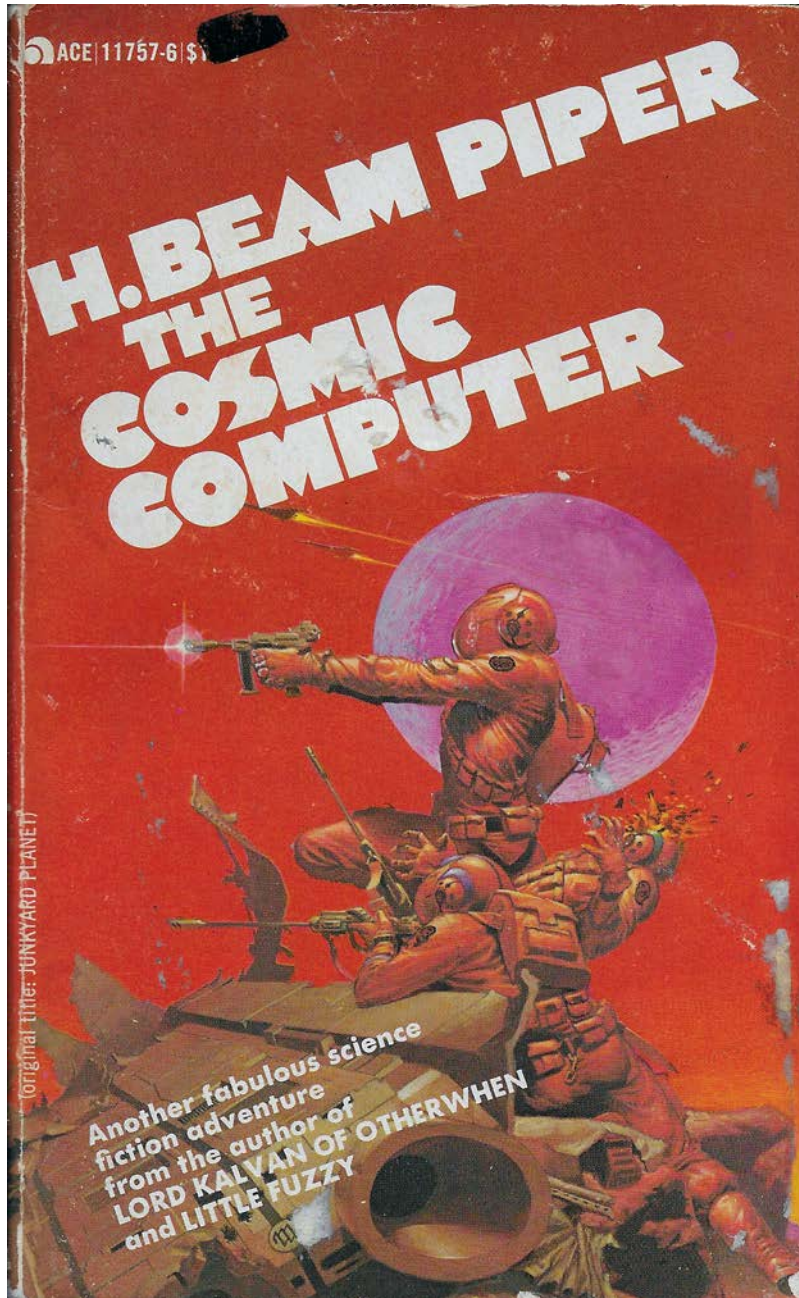
I read through *Necromancer* (★★★) and *Soldier, Ask Not* (★★★★) before I decided that the philosophy and mysticism were too much for me. Nonetheless, these later books remain good sources of military science-fiction ideas as well.

The Cycle is unfinished. Most notably, the seventh book *Childe* was never completed, but Dickson also never wrote the three historical novels and three modern-day novels that were to provide the backstory of his future history.

Two short story collections, *The Spirit of Dorsai*

(1979) and *Lost Dorsai* (1980), are set in the same universe, as are three further novels, *Young Bleys* (1991), *Other* (1994), and the posthumously completed *Antagonist* (2007). However these five additional books are not considered part of the core cycle.

The Cosmic Computer



The Cosmic Computer, by H. Beam Piper

- ***The Cosmic Computer*, by H. Beam Piper**
- **Publisher:** G.P. Putnam's Sons (1963) as *Junkyard Planet*
- Style: ★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★★★

About the Story

The System States War uplifted some of the backwaters of the Terran Federation, but when it ended those planets were allowed to descend into poverty as technology and trade fell away. On one such world, Poictesme, Conn Maxwell returns from school on Earth to fulfill the hopes of a planet. He is to rediscover Merlin, a lost artifact of the Terran Federation. However, Maxwell has plans of his own.

The Cosmic Computer is a tale of a man trying to return his planet to greatness, while at the same time fooling his fellow citizens for their own good. It's a story of archaeological digs, space travel, commerce, and trade within a trisystem, but its biggest focus is on the exploration of the human species.

Genre & Style

Often times, science fiction of the '50 and '60s is hard to classify. In those days, the genre lines weren't as rigid because the expectations for science-fiction books weren't as precise. Authors could imagine what they wanted without having to write to specific formulas. This is the case for *The Cosmic Computer*, which crosses many subgenre lines.

Today, *The Cosmic Computer* is usually classified as a *space opera*. Certainly, there's a Galactic Federation: the story of its past war, its modern neglect, and its future downfall is central to the book. However, that's all in the background; describing *The Cosmic Computer* as a space opera would be a superficial description of the book.

You could instead call *The Cosmic Computer* a *history*, since that was Piper's own inspiration. To be precise, *The Cosmic Computer* is based on the story of the Pacific Islands that were uplifted during World War II, then fell back after the war ended; the people of Poictesme's near-worship of the lost computer Merlin is practically a Pacific

cargo cult Or if you prefer, *The Cosmic Computer* is a *future history*, after Robert E. Heinlein's series of short stories and novels (1939-1950+) that portrayed a science-fiction future for mankind. Not only is *The Cosmic Computer* just a single point in a longer timeline, but it's also the history of a pivotal time on the planet of Poictesme.

However, the best categorization for *The Cosmic Computer* might be a *scientific romance*, particularly as British writers approached the genre. In other words, it's more like the novels of H.G. Wells, Olaf Stapledon, and Jules Verne than modern science-fiction novels. It takes what Brian Stableford calls an "evolutionary perspective", looking at how technological transformations can recreate the world.

Whatever its precise genre, *The Cosmic Computer* does a good job at depicting a world undergoing a monumental change. Its scope moves from the galactic to the local and back again, demonstrating how the larger world affects the smaller one and vice-versa — creating an intriguing connection between a star-spanning civilization and a planetary society.

The Cosmic Computer is a bit weaker in its plot, which wavers back and forth between returning Poictesme to the stars and finding the computer Merlin, often on a chapter-by-chapter basis. It also has cardboard characters. None of them have much depth, and it's hard to keep track of anyone but the protagonists. None of this is too unexpected for a science-fiction novel of this time.

Consider *The Cosmic Computer* an idea book ... and it's got some intriguing ones, put together in a way that's unusual for the modern market, and all the more interesting for that.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Miller has described *The Cosmic Computer* as a "strong influence", and that comes across best in the interaction between a single local planet and a larger galactic empire. On the one hand we have Piper's Terran Federation, which could just as easily be Miller's Second Imperium, the Rule of Man. On the other hand we have a single planet, Poictesme. Poictesme briefly became a part of galactic society when it was an advance base during the System States War, but then it backslid when the War ended. This is largely the result of the Federation being immense. Though the Federation has

“hyperships”, it still takes six months to travel from Terra to Poictesme.

The Cosmic Computer's depiction of these two different societies would be just as true for the universe of *Traveller*, where the scope of stellar travel is very similar. The story also offers a great explanation for how individual planets in *Traveller* could have Tech Levels so much lower than the Imperium as a whole. The search for abandoned technology that's the main thrust of the novel then offers a very natural response to that technological difference. Put these ideas together and you get a story that's important to a single planet, but still interacts with a galactic body — which is a good description of how to write *Traveller* adventures too.

Though most of the worlds name-checked in *The Cosmic Computer* don't appear in the Official *Traveller* universe, it *does* contain a Poictesme, which might be an homage to this novel. It's in the Capella subsector of the Solomani Rim. *Traveller*'s Terra and Poictesme are just two subsectors apart, but there's a dearth of good jump-2 routes between them. The best option requires about 13 jumps. Add together thirteen weeks for jumping and thirteen weeks for refueling ... and you have exactly a six-month trip!

The Cosmic Computer contains a few other possible influences. Most notably, the novel is largely about reestablishing interplanetary trade, something that's at the heart of many a *Traveller* game. The search for old tech has more often appeared in *Traveller* as a hunt for ancient artifacts, but hunting for caches from past Imperiums or for bases used during past wars could be a great adventure seed in *any Traveller* game. *The Cosmic Computer* also contains robots and computers that could come straight out of *Traveller* — with the computers being ridiculously huge, of course, though that's more a factor of the era's technology than a true connection to the *Traveller* RPG.

About the Series

The Cosmic Computer is part of H. Beam Piper's (never completed) Terro-Human Future History. It starts with the short story “The Edge of the Knife” (1957), set in 1973, runs through *The Cosmic Computer* (1963), *Space Viking* (1963), and others, and ends with the far-future “The Keeper” (1957). Piper's *Fuzzy* novels (1962-1964, 1984) are probably the best-known books in the series.

Piper envisioned his history as a cycle where many of the same themes recurred

across the millennia. This trope was influenced by Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History* (1934-1939, 1954, 1959-1961), which theorizes that civilizations cycle through multiple phases, including "the universal state", "the time of troubles", and "the interregnum". In *The Cosmic Computer*, the Terran Federation has already entered its time of troubles, with a fall soon to follow. At least five Empires rise after the Terran Federation — a history that Piper once dreamed of chronicling with a book set in every century.

This cyclical idea of history may have influenced *Traveller* as much as any of Piper's individual books, as the universal state of *Traveller* (1977) entered its time of troubles in *MegaTraveller* (1987), then an interregnum during *Traveller: The New Era* (1993). Of course, this was just the latest cycle of rise and fall, as two Imperiums preceded the Imperium of *Traveller*. *Marc Miller's T4* (1996) reminded players of that by turning back the Third Imperium's clock and detailing Milieu 0, just after the last own interregnum.

Publication Notes

The Cosmic Computer started out as a short story called "Graveyard of Dreams", which appeared in *Galaxy Science Fiction* Vol. 15 No. 4 (February 1958). It was published in hardcover novel form as *Junkyard Planet* (1963), but was quickly returned to Piper's preferred name, *The Cosmic Computer* (1964)

The Cosmic Computer reads like it was a strong influence on *Traveller*. Beyond that, it remains a great source for understanding how a local planet could be affected by changes in galactic society.

Additional Reading

Two short story collections form the spine of Piper's Terro-Human Future History (and include a timeline and some nice introductory notes):

- *Federation* (1981)
- *Empire* (1981)

In addition, a half-dozen novels are part of the

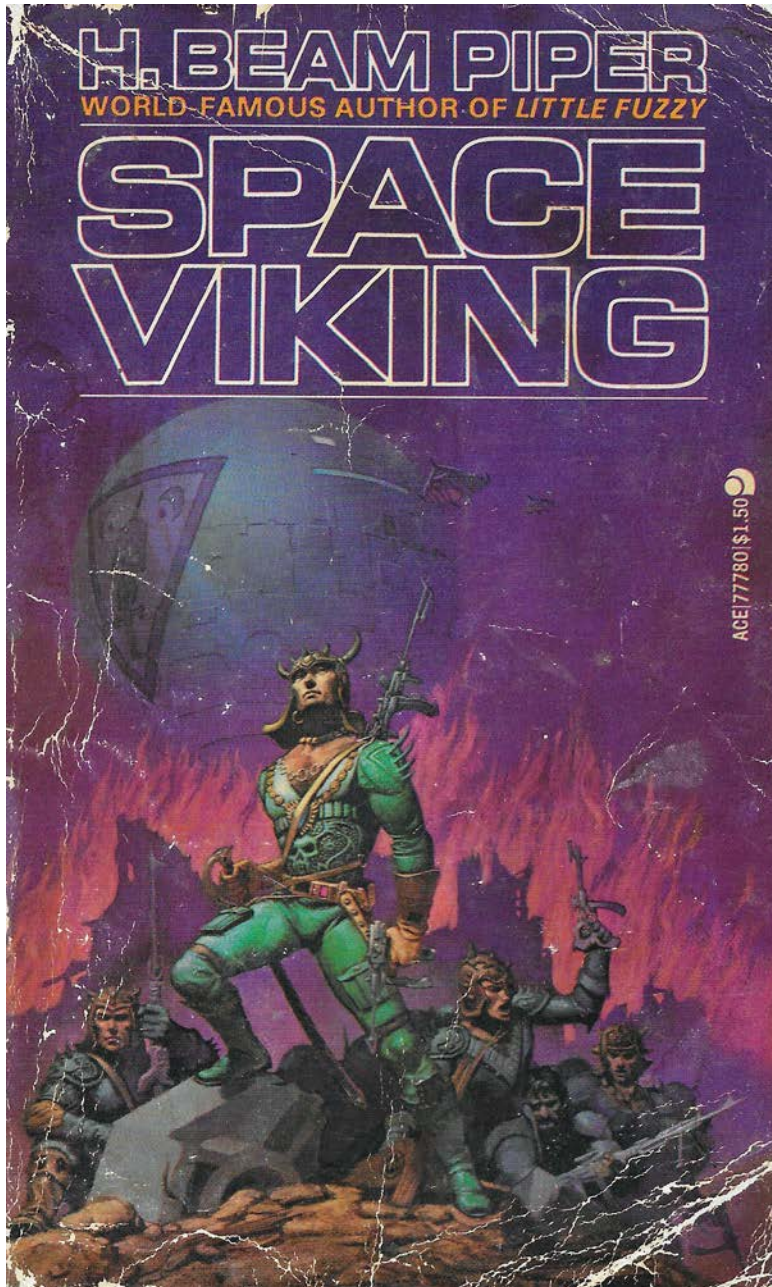
universe:

- *Uller Uprising* (1952)
- *Four-Day Planet* (1961)
- *Little Fuzzy* (1962)
- *The Cosmic Computer* (1963)
- *Star Viking* (1963)
- *Fuzzy Sapiens* (1964)
- *Fuzzies and Other People* (1984)

Piper's biographer, John F. Carr has also coauthored a few Terro-Human Federation books in recent years, including a sequel to *The Cosmic Computer*:

- *The Merlin Gambit* (2014)

Space Viking



Space Viking, by H. Beam Piper

- *Space Viking*, by H. Beam Piper
- **Publisher:** Ace Books (1963)
- Style: ★★★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★★★

About the Story

Space Viking is set in the same future as *The Cosmic Computer* (1963), but about 800 years later, after the Terran Federation has fallen into interregnum. A Dark Age has descended across the Federation's planets. Among the few points of light in these lost systems are the Sword-Worlds, a cluster of planets named after mighty weapons of lore, such as Gram, Excalibur, Morglay, Flamberge, and Durendal.

On Gram we meet Lucas Trask of Traskon. When his newly-wed wife is slain by a man who then steals his Duke's new ship, *Enterprise*, Trask decides to become a Star Viking, pillaging and looting across the universe. When he finds a planetary base to set a trap for his foe, he finds that uplifting civilization from the darkness might be a goal in its own.

Genre & Style

Space Viking is a classic *space opera*. A Federation has risen and fallen. Many of its planets have reverted to feudalism, but are now trying to climb back up to the stars. Against this backdrop, an individual like Lucas Trask of Traskon can make a difference.

I generally find that science-fiction novels of the 1950s and 1960s are heavy on the plot and light on the characterization. Piper's *Space Viking* certainly tends in that direction. The resulting prose is pretty dry, mainly because it's hard to emotionally connect with the protagonist.

Nonetheless, Piper rises above his contemporaries in this area. Though *Space Viking* could have been a very simple intergalactic tale of revenge — like Vance's first three *Demon Princes* books (1964-1967) — its main character instead evolves and grows; he moves beyond his initial anger and begins to consider what a life without his

Elaine might be.

Space Viking also has one other notable strength: its space battles. Piper writes of a world of missiles and slugs. There are no magical shields, no beams of concentrated light. Instead warfare is real and gritty, fast and deadly. Thus, Piper's scenes of warfare amidst the stars become some of the best parts of the book.

Overall, *Space Viking* is a nicely evocative book, between its space battles and its visions of humanity slowly reclaiming the stars. The actual mechanics and plots of the books are somewhat more mundane.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Since it's set in the same universe as *The Cosmic Computer*, *Space Viking's* science has some of the same *Traveller*-influencing characteristics.

To start with, hyperdrive (aka Jumpspace) is much more important in *Space Viking*, because there's more travelling in this book. The combination of this fast (but not instantaneous) travel with a lack of FTL radio is particularly well detailed. As in *Traveller*, ships are the only way that information gets transmitted across the galaxy. We thus see the importance of rumors brought by individual spacers and how hard it is to find an individual in a universe that's not truly connected — which are both fine lessons for a *Traveller* game.

Meanwhile, the ubiquity of hyperdrive makes local system travel undesirable — which is a nice contrast to *The Cosmic Computer* where it was the protagonists' only way to get out of the system. In *Space Viking* the outer planets of systems are largely ignored — a point which has consequences in the book. *Traveller* GMs should consider what this might mean in the *Traveller* universe (though the problem isn't as large there).

Moving on the planets of *Space Viking*, there's one thing that really stands out ...

That's the Sword-Worlds (or Sword Worlds, as they're called in the *Traveller* universe). I'm sure that the worlds in the Spinward Marches and those in Piper's universe aren't *quite* the same, but the feudal structure, the balkanization, and the militant attitude are all pretty similar. A book like *GURPS Traveller: Sword Worlds* (2004) or Mongoose Publishing's *Sword Worlds* (2011) is certainly a better source for the Third Imperium ... but *Space Viking* might be a fun alternative source (and it offers proof of the strong

influence this book had on the *Traveller* game).

The feudalism of the Sword-Worlds is also interesting, since the governmental structure is common in the Third Imperium. Piper uses it as a major plot point, contrasting it with true democracy, which (according to Piper's viewpoint character) doesn't work because stupid people are too easily fooled into following charismatic demagogues. That offers a nice reasoning for the feudalism of the *Traveller* universe.

Finally, the idea of rebuilding a fallen empire may or may not be of interest to *Traveller* GMs. It's not the stuff of a Golden Age campaign but if the story of the Terran Federation were that of the Second Imperium, then *Space Viking* could be the story of the Long Night, prior to Milieu 0. However, *Space Viking* could also offer insight into *Traveller: The New Era* (1992), which tells the story of the Reformation Coalition trying to bring the Third Imperium back from the ashes. Just like Lucas Trask, they're Star Vikings, and just like Trask they're uplifting planets from the darkness.

Overall, *Space Viking* feels like a pivotal text in the creation of the *Traveller* universe.

Publication Notes

Space Viking was another novel that premiered in the pulp magazines of the era. It was serialized in *Analog* (1930-Present) starting in November 1962 and running four issues, through February 1963. Ace books then published it in novel (1963) form.

Space Viking shares a lot in common with the universe of *Traveller* — perhaps even more than its predecessor, *The Cosmic Computer*. It's a great book to show what the *Traveller* universe could look like — especially if you're fond of science-fiction writing of the '60s, of which this is an above-average specimen.

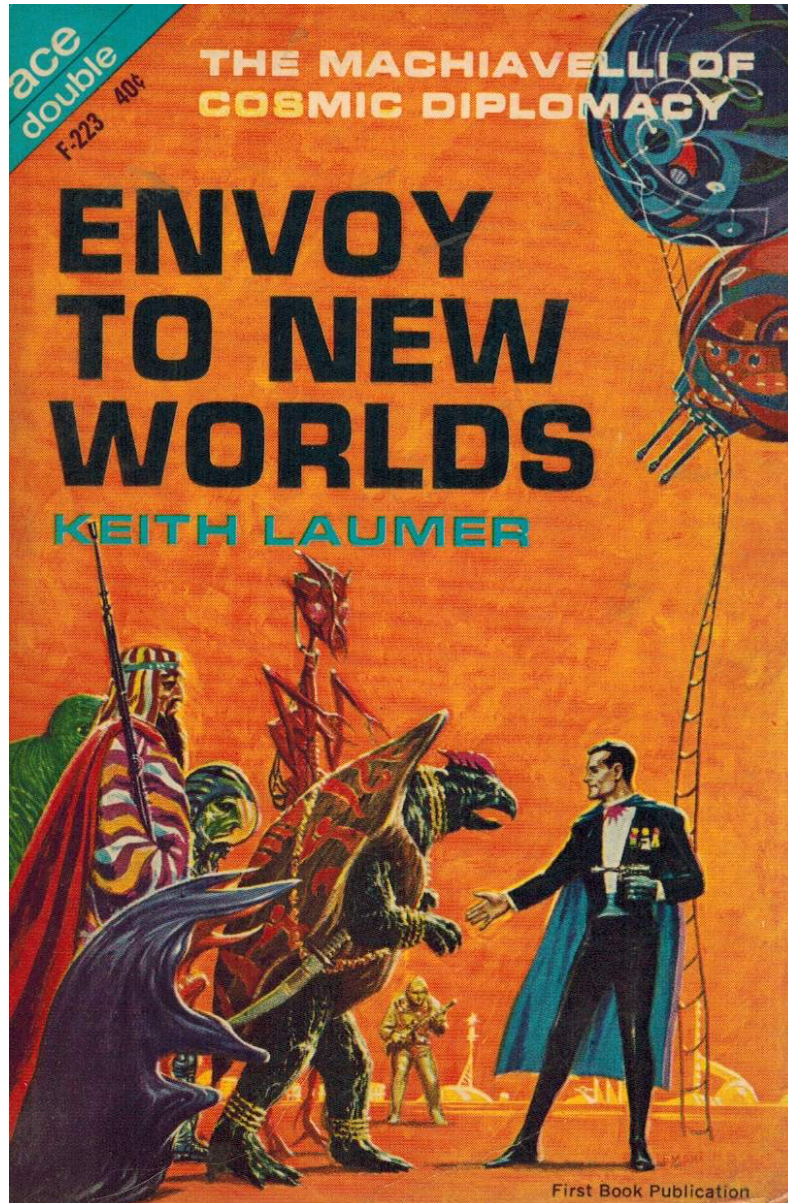
Additional Reading

Future SF writer Jerry Pournelle corresponded extensively with H. Beam Piper and planned to write a sequel to *Star Viking* ... but never did. Instead it was Piper's biographer John F. Carr who ended up coauthoring two recent sequels to *Space Viking*:

- *The Last Space Viking* (2011)
- *Space Viking's Throne* (2012)

Rumors say that a book coauthored with Jerry Pournelle, set between *Space Viking* and *The Last Space Viking* may still appear.

Envoy to New Worlds



- *Envoy to New Worlds*, by Keith Laumer
- **Publisher:** Ace Books (1963)
- **Style:** ★★★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★

About the Stories

Envoy to New Worlds is a fiction anthology. All of the stories center on Retief, a member of the Corps Diplomatique Terrestrienne, an organization that does its best to mediate disputes in a highly bureaucratic manner. However, Retief doesn't really go in for the bureaucracy; he's willing to take on a more hands-on approach — often leaving his fellows aghast.

In “Protocol”, Retief is the only one who realizes that his diplomatic party is being insulted. In “Sealed Orders”, he has to stop a war between humans and an alien race. In “Cultural Exchange”, a variety of problems come together, leaving Retief to skillfully juggle them. In “Aide Memoire”, Retief learns that sponsoring youth groups can lead to problems ... when you're dealing with aliens. In “Policy” there's a hunt for a missing heavy cruiser that only Retief seems to care about. Finally, in “Palace Revolution” Retief is right in the middle of things when the knives come out.

All of the stories are short and succinct; they mainly focus on how clever Retief is, even if he never gets the credit.

Genre & Style

As with other stories of the '60s, *Envoy to New Worlds* is hard to categorize, genre-wise. It certainly has the trappings of science fiction, as Retief is hunting for a 20,000-T heavy cruiser in one story and negotiating with aliens in most of the others. However, the trappings are just that. They're the excuse for the story.

The book's real genre is *screwball comedy* of the sort that mocks authority figures and their silly social mores. Here, those authority figures are the idiots running the CDT, who are too dumb to actually understand what they're doing. I think of *Envoy to New Worlds* as more akin to P.G. Wodehouse than most books in the science-fiction category.

Envoy is also a member of the *troubleshooter* genre, focused on a character traveling from place to place to investigate and resolve problems that the locales can't.

Stylistically, Laumer pulls off the comedy genre well. The stories read quickly and are fun. You can smirk at the failures of Retief's superiors and smile at Retief's successes.

Substantially, there's not a lot here, however. The troubles that Retief is shooting are mainly used as a backdrop for the funny. They were hard to recall, even when writing this review just a week after reading the stories. This shallowness is particularly bad in the first several stories, where the aliens are just stage props. Later stories give more depths to the aliens, such as "Aide Memoire" which details the "Fustian" race that grows shells as they age.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

I came into *Envoy to New Worlds* not expecting a very close correlation with *Traveller* and that's what I got. It's pretty hard to imagine what Marc Miller felt influenced *Traveller* in this book, because science fiction is just a backdrop, not the main focus — though I suppose you can say similar things of *The Cosmic Computer* (1963).

Laumer's aliens are the only plot element that *might* have influenced the *Traveller* universe. As noted, the Fustrians are a fine example of a carefully considered alien race. The Groaci (who show up in a few stories and in several later books) are another race that feels like it has a backstory. So, a *Traveller* GM might get some ideas for how to differentiate alien races from this book.

I'll offer a grain of salt with this: I've only read this first Retief book. It feels a bit rough, and the stories clearly improved as the book went on, so maybe there was better developed background in later books that influenced Marc Miller and could influence GMs today.

With that said, it may instead be the troubleshooter genre that drew Marc Miller in. Though the original *Traveller* game didn't focus on troubleshooting, it's a good way to direct a campaign. Marc Miller proved this in his first novel, *Agent of the Imperium* (2015).

Nowadays, there's one more element that might be of interest to a *Traveller* GM:

the diplomacy. Though there wasn't a core diplomat class in the original *Traveller* game (1977), there's one in Mongoose's core rulebook (2008). GMs interested in that sort of adventuring will find plot seeds aplenty in the Retief books.

Publication Notes

Envoy to New Worlds was originally published as part of an Ace Double, alongside *Flight from Yesterday* (1963) by Robert Moore Williams. When it was reissued as *Retief: Envoy to New Worlds* (1987), it added a new novella, "Rank Justice".

Envoy to New Worlds has also appeared as part of two other collections. *Retief Unbound* (1979) features five of its six short stories (skipping "Cultural Exchange") with *Retief's Ransom* (1971). The posthumous *Retief!* (2002) alternatively combines *Envoy to New Worlds*, two other Retief books, and the first Retief short story, "Diplomat-at-Arms" (1960).

Envoy to New Worlds is a funny but shallow book of interstellar diplomacy. If the series had any influence at all on the *Traveller* game, it's hard to see it from this first book in the series.

Additional Reading

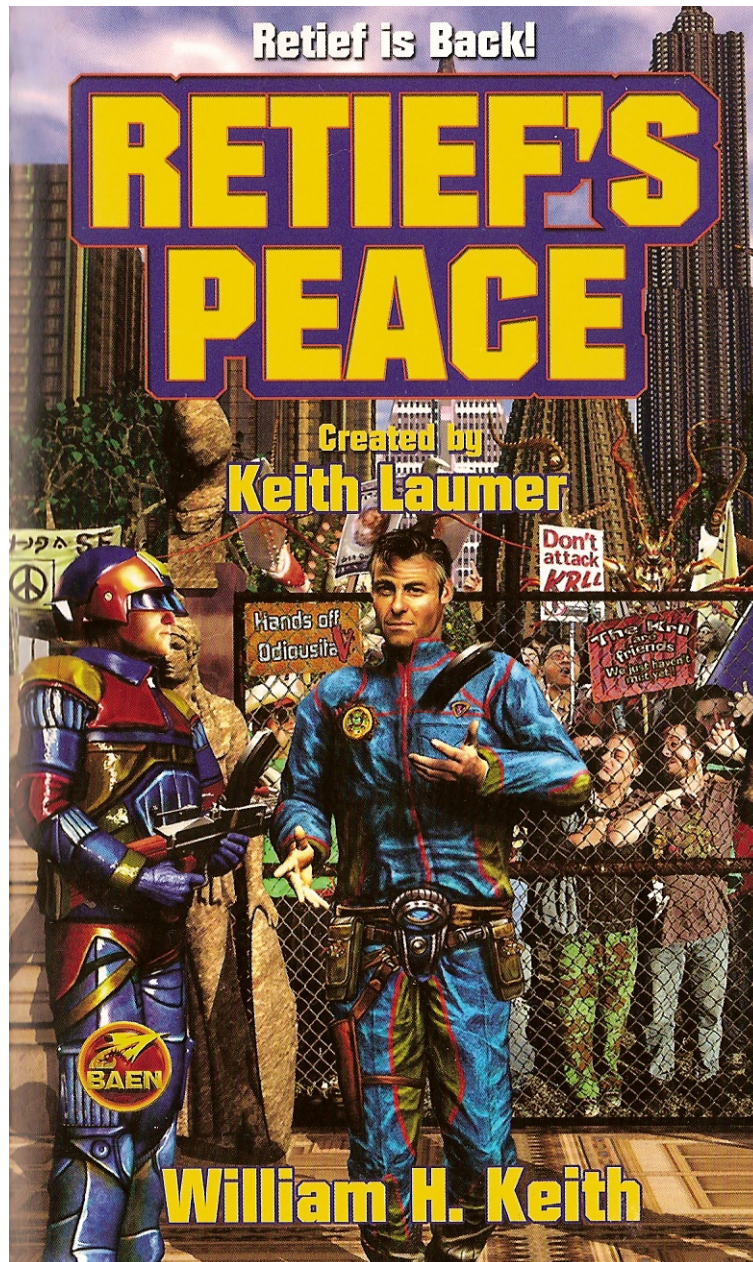
Envoy to New Worlds was the first in a long series of novels and anthologies about Retief and the CDT. The list of books in the series is a bit confusing because various collections and anthologies have juggled the stories over the years, but this seem to be the core releases:

- *Envoy to Other Worlds* (1963)
- *Galactic Diplomat* (1965)
- *Retief's War* (1966)
- *Retief and the Warlords* (1968)
- *Retief: Ambassador to Space* (1969)
- *Retief's Ransom* (1971)
- *Retief of the CDT* (1971)
- *Retief: Emissary to the Stars* (1975)

- *Retief at Large* (1978)
- *Retief: Diplomat at Arms* (1982)
- *Retief to the Rescue* (1983)
- *The Return of Retief* (1984)
- *Retief in the Ruins* (1986)
- *Reward for Retief* (1989)
- *Retief and the Rascals* (1993)
- *Retief's Peace* (2005) by William H. Keith, Jr.

The last book was written after Keith Laumer's passing by William H. Keith, Jr. ... a *Traveller* writer of old. That coincidence is interesting enough to be worthy of a review of its own.

Retief's Peace



Retief's Peace, by William H. Keith, Jr.

- *Retief's Peace*, by William H. Keith, Jr.
- **Publisher:** Baen (2005)
- **Style:** ★★★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★

About the Story

Retief's Peace is classic Retief novel of action and adventure. It's the story of a war being fought between the Concordiat and a vicious race of armored foes known as the Krll; and also the tale of the peace demonstrators on the planet B'rukley, who wish the whole thing would just go away.

(That'd be Berkeley, one presumes. A lot of the book is rooted in the Vietnam War and the peace demonstrations in the United States during that era. I'll leave the individual readers to decide whether that's to the good or the bad.)

As you might guess, the peace demonstrators end up on the doorstep of the Corps Diplomatique Terrestrienne, which means that Retief has to figure out what's really going on under the noses of his superiors ... even if he has to be thrown out of the service to do it!

The resulting story takes Retief through space, to Odiousita IV (where the war against the Krll is being fought), and back. It involves multiple alien races, spaceships, and powered armor, all coming together in a fast-paced and convoluted plot.

Genre & Style

As with Laumer before him, Keith writes his Retief book as a *screwball comedy* in the guise of a *troubleshooter* novel. If anything, Keith is even more over-the-top than Laumer, as there are many *openly* silly things in Keith's universe — including as the names of many different organizations and the fact that androids can be programmed verbally with “C” commands.

I've seen *Retief's Peace* described as a *comedy of manners*, which was a genre that I personally considered for the first book in the series, *Envoy to Other Worlds* (1963). However comedies of manners usually do more than just send up authority figures they

also tend to highlight their hypocrisy by involving them in sexually compromising positions ... and though there's a bit of that in *Retief's Peace*, it's not a strong focus in the book.

Whatever genre you slot the Retief books into, this one is even funnier than Laumer's *Envoy to Other Worlds*. William Keith has a great sense of humor. He also offers better science fiction and action adventure than Laumer did in this premiere offering. The action-adventure involves spaceship battles and a long (perhaps too long) sequence with Retief in a powered armor battlesuit. It could have been straight out of any number of powered battlesuit military SF books — if not for the bits of humor, such as when Retief sings “100 bottles of beer on a wall” to try to get the attention of stolid communication officers. (As for the science fiction: that's closely related to the usability of *Retief's Peace* for the *Traveller* game.)

My biggest complaint about Laumer's first Retief book was its lack of substance. *Retief's Peace* isn't that deep either, but it contains at least a bit of substance, thanks to meaningful interrelations between several alien species and a complex plot that makes sense.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

I reviewed the first Retief book, *Envoy to Other Worlds*, because it had been listed as an influence to *Traveller*. I didn't find much to support that, but it was an amusing read, and it left me interested to see what an old-time *Traveller* writer like William Keith would do with the series.

Certainly the core of *Retief's Peace* is not very *Traveller*-esque, with its almost instantaneous space travel, with its single-man starships, and with its zany silliness. However, there are other elements that suggest the influence of *Traveller* upon Keith's writing.

One of the first things to catch my eyes was Keith's casual use of the word “coreward”, describing the home of the Krll, and thus making them “baddies from the core” — an idea circulating around the *Traveller* community in the *MegaTraveller* era when Keith did his last writing for the game. However, “coreward” isn't just a single word; it's something that suggests a real galaxy, like the Official *Traveller* universe.

Numerous “services” are also obvious in Keith’s Retief work, calling back to the careers of *Traveller*. Both army and marines are fighting the Krll. Then we have traders who are making money in the backdrop of this “police action”. Of course Retief’s own CDT is yet another service.

Finally, the alien races might be of interest to *Traveller* GMs — just like they were interesting in Laumer’s first Retief book. There are four alien races of note, and though they’re mostly played for humor, they nonetheless have some interesting characteristics. There’s also a connection between two of the alien races that I won’t spoil, but which I think would be a lovely surprise in any *Traveller* game.

Overall, is this *Traveller*-influencing *Traveller* descendant of interest to a modern-day *Traveller* GM?

Maybe.

The humor and satire certainly bar parts of *Retief’s Peace* from being used to create a more serious universe. However, if you enjoy that type of thing, you’ll enjoy the book while perhaps pulling out a few tidbits to put you in the right mindset for *Traveller* itself.

Retief’s Peace is a fine inheritor to Laumer’s Retief stories and it contains just enough elements of interest to *Traveller* GMs that they might want to take a look at it — and at William Keith Jr.’s other books, if this one is typical.

Additional Reading

William H. Keith, Jr. and his late brother, J. Andrew Keith, were two of the first freelancers in the roleplaying industry. Their early work was for the *Traveller* game and included publications for FASA, Gamelords, GDW, Seeker, and their own Marischal Adventures. Cargonaut Press and DGP published a few lost books some time later.

The FASA RPG books are covered elsewhere, as they are linked to one of *Traveller’s* earliest novels. However the Keiths’ other RPG books may also be of interest to readers.

Cargonaut Press:

- *The Arctic Environment* (1999)
- *Faldor: World of Adventure* (1999)
- *Letter of Marque* (1999)
- *Reaver's Deep Sector Sourcebook* (1999)
- *Scam* (1998)
- *Starport Planetfall* (1998)

Gamelords:

- *The Desert Environment* (1984)
- *Duneraiders* (1984)
- *The Mountain Environment* (1983)
- *Ascent to Anekthor* (1984)
- *The Undersea Environment* (1983)
- *The Drenslaar Quest* (1984)
- *A Pilot's Guide to the Drexilthar Subsector* (1984)

GDW:

- *Beltstrike* (1984)
- *Traveller Double Adventure 5: The Chamax Plague / Horde* (1981)
- *Traveller Double Adventure 6: Divine Intervention / Night of Conquest* (1982)
- *Traveller Adventure 9: Nomads of the World Ocean* (1983)
- *Traveller Adventure 11: Murder on Arcturus Station* (1983)

Marischal Adventures:

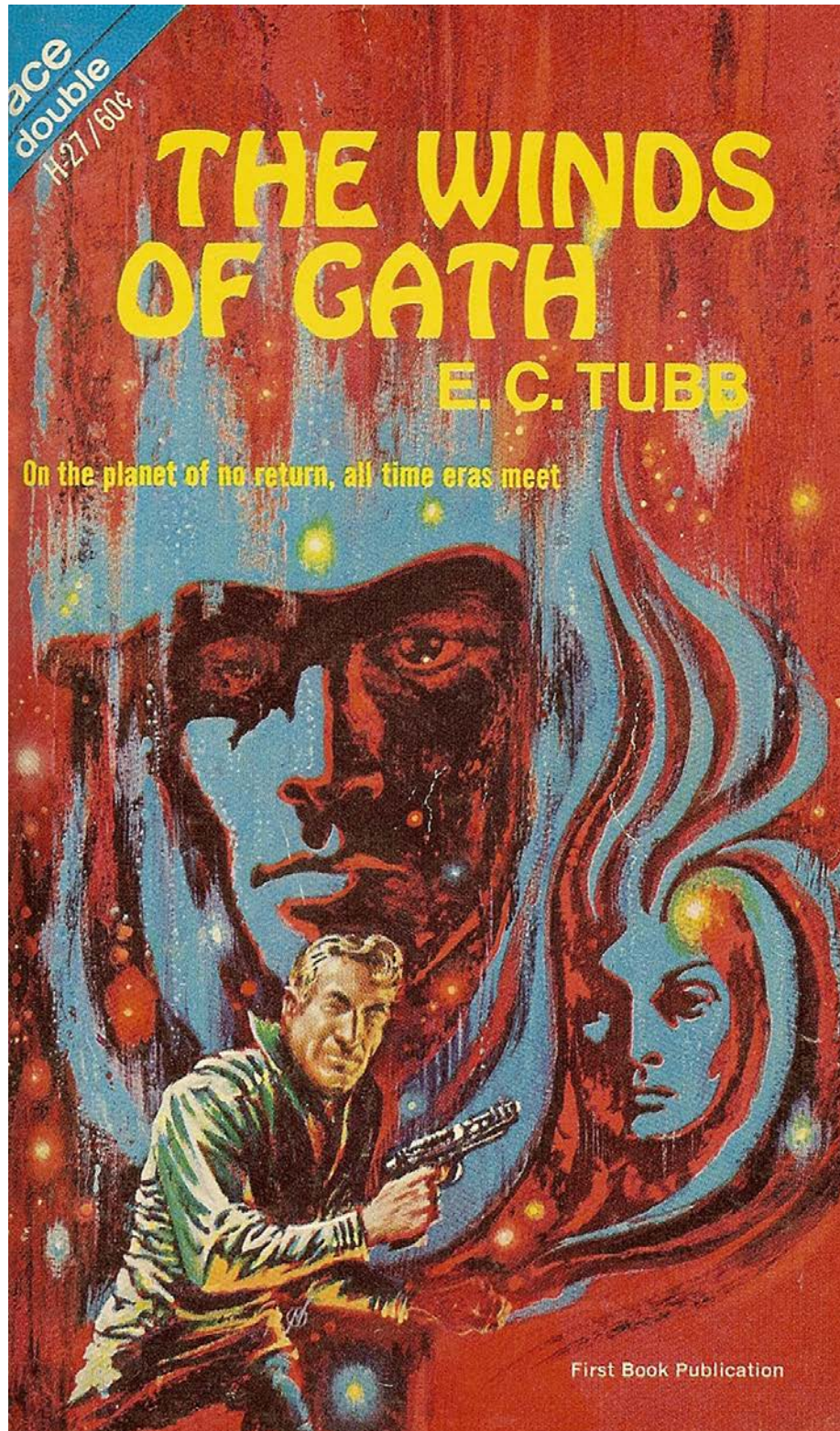
- *Fleetwatch* (1981)
- *Flight of the Stag* (1981)
- *Salvage Mission* (1981)
- *Trading Team* (1982)

Seeker Gaming Systems:

- *Escape* (1987)

The brothers also contributed to numerous multi-author supplements as well as *Traveller's* magazines — sometimes under multiple names to disguise how much work they were doing.

Dumarest of Terra



Dumarest of Terra, by E.C. Tubb

- ***Dumarest of Terra*, by E. C. Tubb**
- **Publisher:** Ace Books (1967)
- **Style:** ★★★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★★★

About the Series

The Dumarest Saga is a series of 33 books written starting in 1967 about a young man named Earl Dumarest. He left Earth as a boy, travelled toward the core of the universe, and didn't realize how far he'd gone until he tried to retrace his steps. Now, he's looking for word of Earth ... but he soon learns that there's a force working against him and that Earth might have been purposefully hidden.

Of the 33 *Dumarest of Terra* books, I've read 11 of them to date, all of them written before the advent of *Traveller*:

1. *The Winds of Gath* (1967) sees Dumarest on the dead-end world of Gath — a world of madness-inducing storms and vicious politics.
2. *Derai* (1968) has Dumarest guarding a beautiful telepath, until he becomes involved in the deadly games of Folgone.
3. *Toyman* (1969) is set on Toy, home to a super computer and corporate hijinks (and another deadly game!).
4. *Kalin* (1969) is a flame-haired girl that Dumarest must save from bloodtime on Logis.
5. *The Jester at Scar* (1970) tells of Dumarest's time on a fungus planet where he's trying to collect a batch of "golden spore" that could make a man rich.
6. *Lallia* (1971) finds Dumarest working on a freighter that crash lands. There's a girl involved in these troubles too.
7. *Technos* (1972) tells of Dumarest's infiltration of Technos, a planet with a fascist government, where state officials are moving against each other.

8. *Veruchia* (1973) is another mysterious woman. Dumarest also fights in another arena and continues to search for Earth.
9. *Mayenne* (1973) focuses on Tormyle, a sentient planet from another galaxy, that's trying to understand life.
10. *Jondelle* (1973) is a kidnapped boy that Dumarest must rescue.
11. *Zenya* (1974) sees Dumarest posing as a mercenary officer in order to search out another lost boy.

In all these early stories, the quest for Earth is largely a Macguffin — something that gets Dumarest moving, but which doesn't have much impact on the books themselves. The books are also very episodic. Dumarest's hunt for Earth doesn't notably advance, though there's some movement in his relationship with his enemies, the Cyclans.

Genre & Style

The Dumarest stories are frequently classified as *space opera* and that's not entirely unjust; the scope of the stories is very large, with Dumarest's galaxy being so big that he's literally lost in it. However, Dumarest's adventures are more often *planetary romances*. Though some of the adventures touch upon space travel, more often they occur planetside, where a larger-than-life hero depends on his wits and primitive weaponry to win the day.

Tubb does an excellent job of writing within these genres. A lot of science-fiction from the 1950s and 1960s feels stolid and dry now — even the supposedly exciting planetary-romance stories. The Dumarest books, however, remain quick, exciting, and constantly interesting.

The books are also quite well characterized, something too often absent from books of this era. Earl Dumarest feels like a real person who makes real moral choices. Likewise adversaries and allies alike are detailed, realistic people.

Tubb also gives more depth to his stories than most writers of his era by frequently stepping away from his protagonist's point of view, giving the reader knowledge about what those aforementioned allies and adversaries are doing — while simultaneously

giving readers insight into their inner nature. This is very well done, and makes the Dumarest books considerably more complex than most stories in the genre.

Finally, Tubb does an admirable job of imagining and describing his alien worlds. Most of them are so well realized that you could write a gaming supplement about them when you're done. In fact, at least one author already has!

Overall, the Dumarest of Terra books are excellent adventure science fiction that hold up to the 40 years that have passed since their writing. They're colorful, interesting, and have a remarkable amount of depth given the genre.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

When you start reading the Dumarest books, two terms will immediately leap out at you as probable borrowings for the *Traveller* game. Dumarest frequently talks about the two ways that one can travel between the stars: in the frozen cryoberths of low passage or in the drug-induced "quick time" of high passage. Those terms appear in Traveller books today.

Even more striking is the word that Dumarest sometimes uses to describe himself, as one that moves constantly among the stars. He is a traveler. (And, this wasn't an accident of language: Dumarest specifically and intentionally uses the word in multiple books.)

Overall, I suspect that *Traveller* inherited its entire conception of people moving among planets and having adventures on them from the Dumarest Saga. The individual books in the Dumarest Saga feel very much like individual adventures in a *Traveller* campaign!

The fact that the planets are quite distinct is another thing that gives them a *Traveller* feel. For example, Technos could well be a high-law-level planet with a charismatic dictator. Loame, which appears in the same book, is an agricultural client-state with insidious plant life.

Scar, the fungus planet, is more of an adventure site. It was also probably the basis of the planet Enaaka, described by William H. Keith Jr. in *The MegaTraveller Journal #1* (1991). Keith even talks about the valuable Enaakan Gold spores, some of which are used in anagathic drugs, which is a perfect match for Scar's golden spore.

There are certainly differences between the universe of Dumarest and that of *Traveller*. For example, space travel in the Dumarest books seems quite slow, hence the need for low berths and quick time (but then a multijump trip isn't fast in *Traveller*). There's also some really quirky technology; a comment in *The Jester at Scar* says that trade shipments are sent off by flinging cargo through space!

Despite that, the Dumarest books feel like another set of pivotal texts in the creation of the *Traveller* universe. Even better, every individual book could easily become a *Traveller* adventure.

Publication Notes

The Winds of Gath was originally published as part of an Ace Double (1967), alongside *Crisis on Cheiron* (1967) by Juanita Coulson. It's been published by a few other publishers since, sometimes under the simpler name *Gath* (1968). The most notable editions are probably the British edition by Arrow Books (1973, 1975) and the standalone Ace edition (1982).

The Dumarest of Terra books seem to have birthed the idea of a traveler who goes from planet to planet having adventures. Today, they remain as exciting and enjoyable as when they were written, and are thus highly recommended to GMs who want reading to inspire their own games.

Additional Reading

Tubb wrote 33 tales telling the story of Earl Dumarest and his search for Earth. In the US market, standalone Ace editions are available for books 1-8, then DAW Books editions are available for books 9-31. In the UK, attractive, numbered editions appeared from Arrow Books for books 1-27. Though there is some very light continuity, the books can generally be read out of order without any disastrous results.

- *The Winds of Gath* (1967)
- *Derai* (1968)

- *Toyman* (1969)
- *Kalin* (1969)
- *The Jester at Scar* (1970)
- *Lallia* (1971)
- *Technos* (1972)
- *Veruchia* (1973)
- *Mayenne* (1973)
- *Jondelle* (1973)
- *Zenya* (1974)
- *Eloise* (1975)
- *Eye of the Zodiac* (1975)
- *Jack of Swords* (1976)
- *Spectrum of a Forgotten Sun* (1976)
- *Haven of Darkness* (1977)
- *Prison of Night* (1977)
- *Incident on Ath* (1978)
- *The Quillian Sector* (1978)
- *Web of Sand* (1979)
- *Iduna's Universe* (1979)
- *The Terra Data* (1980)
- *World of Promise* (1980)
- *Nectar of Heaven* (1981)
- *The Terridae* (1981)
- *The Coming Event* (1982)
- *Earth is Heaven* (1982)
- *Melome* (1983)
- *Angado* (1984)
- *Symbol of Terra* (1984)
- *The Temple of Truth* (1985)
- *The Return* (1997)
- *Child of Earth* (2008)

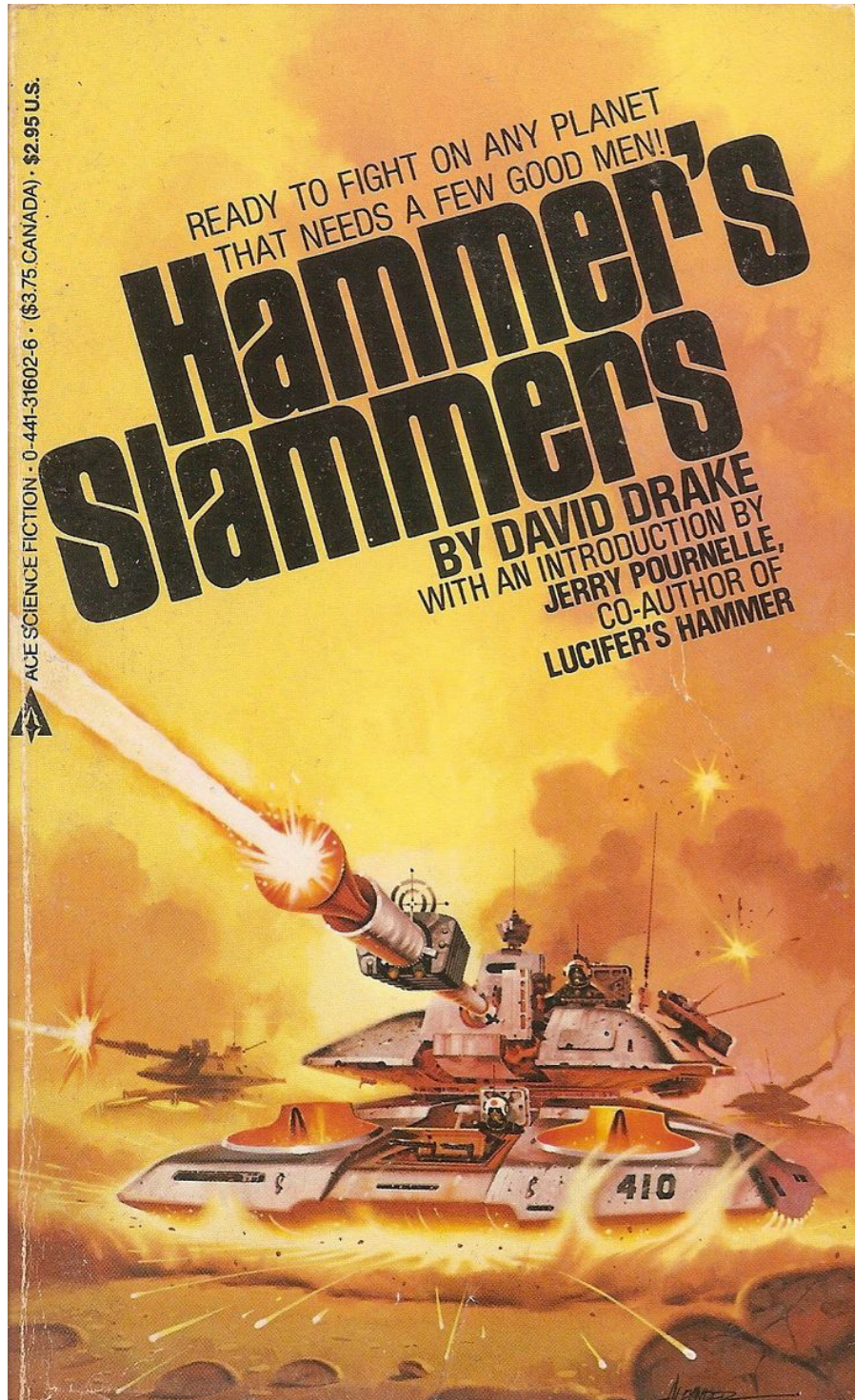
The Return and Child of Earth were only published in small print runs, and the last four or so books are all hard to get in print.

To date I've read the first eleven books, and rate them as follows:

- *The Winds of Gath* ★★★★★
- *Derai* ★★★
- *Toyman* ★★★★★
- *Kalin* ★★★★★
- *The Jester at Scar* ★★★★★★
- *Lallia* ★★★
- *Technos* ★★★★★★
- *Veruchia* ★★★★★
- *Mayenne* ★★★★★
- *Jondelle* ★★★
- *Zenya* ★★★★★

The Jester at Scar and *Technos* were the first two Dumarest books that I read, and they were almost certainly overrated as a result: they should probably be 4 stars, not 5 stars. Suffice to say: the series is an amazing discovery when you first read it; though it gets a little repetitive over time, it remains very enjoyable (and every novel is a ready-to-use *Traveller* adventure).

Hammer's Slammers



Hammer's Slammers, by David Drake

- ***Hammer's Slammers*, by David Drake**
- **Publisher:** Ace Books (1979), Night Shade Books (2006)
- **Style:** ★★★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★

About the Stories

Hammer's Slammers is a long-running series of stories that appeared beginning in 1974 and first appeared in a collected form as *Hammer's Slammers* (1979). This review instead covers *The Complete Hammer's Slammers, Volume 1* (2006), which includes the complete contents of that 1979 collection and more.

The Complete Hammer's Slammers Volume 1 contains a total of 15 different stories, running the gamut from short story to novella. In general, these stories are about people — real human beings — who happen to be at war. They're not stories of clever military maneuvers and tactical geniuses, but instead tales of how war affects the soldiers that participate in it. One story reveals what might cause a woman to join a mercenary unit and another details the terrible experiences that a different recruit has on his first day. Other tales tell of the excesses of some soldiers and how some civilians are changed just by the Slammers' interactions with them.

Broadly, the stories of *The Complete Hammer's Slammers Volume 1* chronicle the history of a mercenary company called Hammer's Slammers. However, the connectivity between them is very sparse. The first 200 or so pages of this 500-page anthology — the stories that made up the original *Hammer's Slammers* collection — have a weak through-line. The first several stories introduce new recruits and veterans, then they come together in "Hangman" (1979), one of the final stories in the original book.

Other stories in *The Complete Hammer's Slammers Volume 1* hint at the shape of the mercenary company as a whole. "But Loyal to His Own" (1975) tells how Hammer's Slammers came to be, and "Standing Down" (1979) recounts their last mission. "A Death in Peacetime" (2006), which was written for the *Complete* anthology, reveals the fate of some of the Slammers afterward. These three stories center on the big names of the

Slammers: Hammer himself and his right-hand man, the cruel Joachim Steuben. However they're very much the exception in this anthology. Most stories instead tell the small tales of individual tanks and cars and their crew.

Three of the newer stories in *The Complete Hammer's Slammers Volume 1* don't even center on the Slammers, but instead use them as backdrop. "Liberty Port" (1987) tells the story of a port that offers pleasures to mercs, among them "fully-functional" robots, while "The Immovable Object" (1998) and "The Irresistable Force" (1998) tell of a man who steals a Hammer tank and what becomes of him. Because of their wider focus, these three stories end up being three of the best in the anthology.

Beyond its fiction, *The Complete Hammer's Slammers Volume 1* also contains about a half-dozen short background pieces on the Hammer's Slammers universe. None is more than two pages' long, but they all manage to offer insight about how the mercenary system and the Hammers' weaponry works.

Genre & Style

The Complete Hammer's Slammers Volume 1 is obviously *military science fiction*. Drake presents military warfare in a very detached and clinical manner, but his stories nonetheless manage to come across as tense and exciting. Though most of these stories are pretty dry when they start out, by the end they tend to reach an emotional crescendo that feels true and real. The stories are also very personal, since they tend to be about people, not wars.

The result allows readers to make their own decisions about what war's any good for. Given the real costs — both to those killed and to those who survive — it's pretty likely that the readers' conclusions will be similar to those of author and Vietnam vet, David Drake.

Though many of the stories are individually interesting, *The Complete Hammer's Slammers Volume 1* doesn't necessarily hang together as a whole. Many of the stories feel like simple vignettes — 20 or 25 pages of text written with the sole goal of getting you to a specific conclusion. All too often the Slammers exist largely as a motif to highlight a single idea or interaction that Drake wanted to show off. The scant times where a character or plotline continued from one story to another felt like too few.

It might be that readers are ill served by reading these stories together, rather than over the 30 years that David Drake spent writing them. Nonetheless, you have to consider them as they're offered: as a single anthology.

To get the maximum enjoyment from these stories, I suggest following the advice of noted short-story author Gene Wolfe, who in his *Book of Days* (1981) wrote, "I urge you not to read one after another, the way I eat potato chips. The simple act of closing this book and putting it away for another day will do a great deal for the story you have just read and even more for the next." Personally, I read *The Complete Hammer's Slammers Volume 1* over the course of at least two months, and never read two stories in a day.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

The influence of the Hammer's Slammers books on *Traveller* is questionable. Marc Miller hasn't listed them as an inspiration for the game, but fans frequently suggest that it might have influenced *Traveller Book 4: Mercenary* (1978). Three of the short stories that made up the original *Hammer's Slammers* collection — "Under the Hammer" (1974), "The Butcher's Bill" (1974), and "But Loyal to His Own" (1975) — certainly predated *Mercenary* — though there aren't any elements that obviously jumped from Drake's stories to the *Traveller* universe.

Whether *Hammer's Slammers* directly influenced *Traveller* or not, the Slammers books are definitely good references for military-oriented science-fiction campaign. Unlike *Dorsai!*, *Hammer's Slammers* focuses on infantry, offering insight into what life might be like for the average merc. Its individual stories are a store of adventure seeds that could be used in any *Mercenary* campaign. Ironically, it's the vignette nature of the stories, which was a fault in the collection as a whole, that make them such great idea generators for *Traveller* games.

"Under the Hammer" (1974) shows the brutality of war and what a new recruit might experience. "The Butcher's Bill" (1974) covers mercs' relations with citizens. "But Loyal to His Own" (1975) shows how things can go wrong when relations break down between a mercenary unit and its employer. "Caught in the Crossfire" (1978) suggests more reasons that people might become mercs. "Cultural Conflict" (1979) is about

misunderstandings leading to war. “The Tank Lords” (1986) shows how high-tech mercenaries might be seen on a low-tech world, a contrast that’s very true to the heart of *Traveller*. “Liberty Port” (1987) portrays what mercs do while at play, and “The Immovable Object” (1998) and “The Irresistible Force” (1998) together show what might happen to a planet after the mercs move out.

Each story in the *The Complete Hammer’s Slammers Volume 1* could easily be used as the basis of a *Traveller* adventure — giving this book a lot of *Traveller* substance, whether it was an influence or not.

Publication Notes

The stories of *Hammer’s Slammers* were originally published between 1974 and 1978 in magazines like *Galaxy* (1950-1980) and paperback anthologies like *Chrysalis* (1977-1983) and *Destinies* (1978-1981). Ace Books then organized them into a short story collection, *Hammer’s Slammers*, alongside several new stories. More recently, they were collected into a larger anthology called *The Complete Hammer’s Slammers Volume 1*.

The Complete Hammer’s Slammers Volume 1 is a tome that a reader might feel ambivalent about. Though some of the individual stories are intriguing, they’re hard to read as a whole. Similarly, the stories don’t seem to have directly influenced *Traveller*, but they’re nonetheless a great source for a military-oriented *Traveller* game.

The Concordat, 1984-1988

The first *Traveller* novels weren't *Traveller* novels at all. Though author Jefferson Swycaffer was writing (in part) about his *Traveller* campaign, his stories aren't set in the Official *Traveller* Universe. Instead, Swycaffer wrote about his own milieu, The Concordat of Archive.

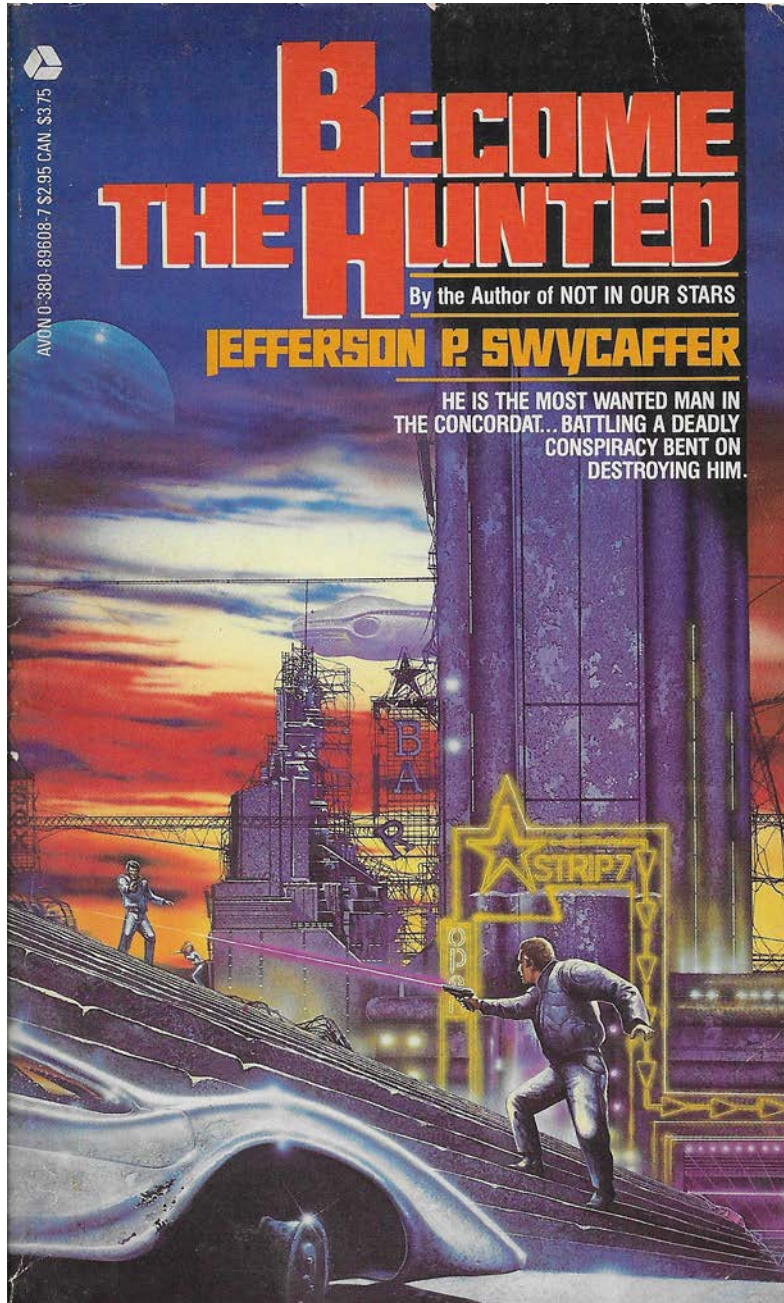
Swycaffer's stories are nonetheless a great first look at the world of *Traveller* fiction. Most obviously, they depicted the physics of the *Traveller* game in novelistic form for the first time ever. They also reveal the great diversity possible in a *Traveller* game, as the books run the range from action-adventure to military science fiction. And, though the history might not be the same, it's intriguing in its own right.

More generally, Swycaffer's books are truly historic, because they were some of the first roleplaying novels published — released just after M.A.R. Barker's *The Man of Gold* (1984) and just before Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman's *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* (1984). In 1984, roleplaying games became a multimedia concern, and *Traveller* was at the heart of that.

Sadly, it'd take another decade for GDW to catch up with an official *Traveller* book ...

1. Not in Our Stars, Jefferson P. Swycaffer, 1984
2. Become the Hunted, Jefferson P. Swycaffer, 1985
3. The Universal Prey, Jefferson P. Swycaffer, 1985
4. The Praesidium of Archive, Jefferson P. Swycaffer, 1986
5. The Empire's Legacy, Jefferson P. Swycaffer, 1988
6. Voyage of the Planetslayer, Jefferson P. Swycaffer, 1988
7. Revolt and Rebirth, Jefferson P. Swycaffer, 1988

Become the Hunted



Become the Hunted, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer

- ***Become the Hunted*, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer**
- **Publisher:** Avon Books (1985)
- **Style:** ★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★

About the Story

Become the Hunted is set in the same universe as Swycaffer's earlier novel, *Not in Our Stars* (1984), and actually occurs some time previous to it. It centers upon a minor character from that novel, Captain Athalos Steldan, and tells how he helped to create the state of the Concordat as seen in *Not in Our Stars*.

Become the Hunted is a story that is at once very small and very large. On the one hand, it's set on a single planet and centered on a single person, Steldan. He's on the run from the navy of the Concordat; although the reasons are unclear, it's pretty obvious to the reader that he's been set up. On the other hand, it's a very big story, because Steldan is being hunted for something that he's learned, something that could change the whole Concordat. (Readers of *Not in Our Stars* will soon realize that Steldan is wrapped up in the same conspiracy that Admiral Devon stumbles upon.)

Genre & Style

As a *fugitive / crime / thriller* novel, *Become the Hunted* takes a large step away from the military science fiction of *Not In Our Stars*. The writing of Swycaffer's second novel is also improved ... though it's still not great. The biggest problem is the railroading. It feels like Steldan is supposed to be free for a certain amount of time, so he remains in the clear; then when the hunter forces start to close in on him, that result seems equally inevitable.

Part of this feeling of inevitability comes from Swycaffer telling rather than showing. One of the people hunting after Steldan comments that no one has ever evaded her for as long as him, then later congratulates him for a great chase ... but we never see Steldan shining in this regard. He has some criminals make him some false identity papers, and for most of the book that's the extent of his "amazing" evasion abilities.

The book also has some minor issues regarding characterization and has a dull part toward the middle when we spend 30 or 40 pages away from the main character.

Still, *Become the Hunted* is an interesting book, sometimes even gripping — fulfilling the requirements of the genre. The plot is also original and relatively believable, as various conspirators fight to keep everything that they've fought for from unraveling. Finally, *Become the Hunted* works well as part of a coherent universe of novels, as it elucidates some of the backstory of *Not in Our Stars*.

Putting together the good and the bad, *Become the Hunter* comes out as a pretty average novel, an improvement over its predecessor.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Since it's also set in the Concordat universe, *Become the Hunter* continues to draw on some of the concepts and ideas from *Traveller*. However, that connection is much weaker here. This is probably because the story is told deep in the gravity well of a single planet, which means that the *Traveller* physics of the Concordat universe don't get a chance to shine.

However by switching to a new genre, Swycaffer illuminates another strength of *Traveller*: the ability to tell many stories in many different genres. This fugitive tale is just as true to *Traveller* as the military science fiction of the previous volume — a lesson worth learning for any *Traveller* GM.

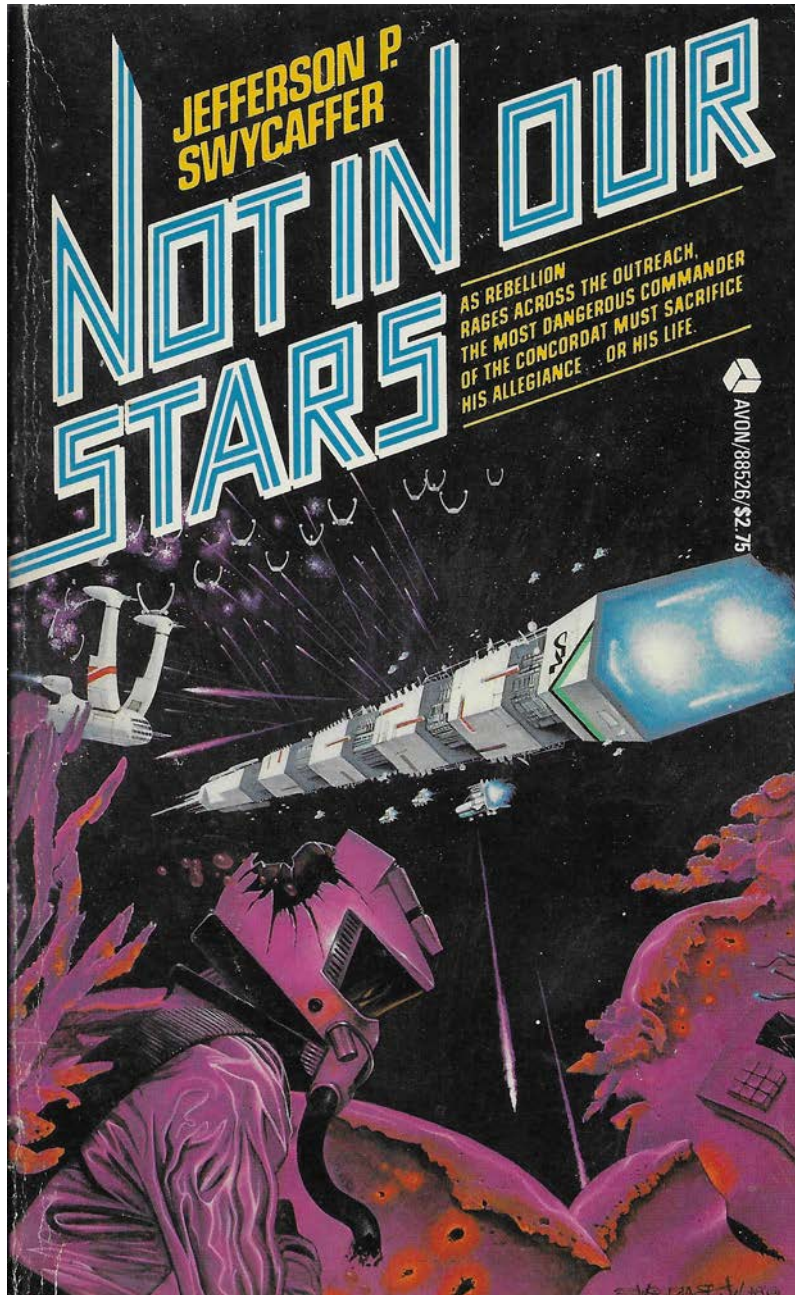
But is this book worth tracking down just for its faint ties to *Traveller*? Probably not, unless you've read other Concordat novels and want to learn more about the universe.

Publication Notes

Swycaffer notes: "Due to the urgencies of the publishing schedule, this book, although following *Not In Our Stars* into print, takes place before that book in internal storyline time-sequence. " So, it might have been in preparation before *Not in Our Stars*.

Become the Hunted is a fair book with weak ties to the *Traveller* universe, despite its roots in the game. It's a fugitive novel by a somewhat inexperienced writer, resulting in it being of only minor interest to *Traveller* GMs.

Not in Our Stars



Not in Our Stars, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer

- ***Not in Our Stars*, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer**
- **Publisher:** Avon Books (1984)
- **Style:** ★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★

About The Story

Not in Our Stars is a story set in the Concordat, an interstellar empire that is both well-aged and wide-spread. On one of its flanks lies a section of space called the Outreach, once loyal to the Concordat, but now taken over by raiders and in open rebellion as a result.

This is the background onto which Admiral Michael Devon strides. He is a hero of the Sonallan War, but for all the wrong reasons. He disobeyed orders and flaunted authority, but in the process managed to win victory. Unfortunately, those same traits may bring tragedy in the Outreach when Devon's new mission hints at a conspiracy within the Concordat itself.

Genre & Style

Not in Our Stars is first and foremost naval *military science fiction*. It centers on Admiral Devon, his officers, his fleet of ships, and one fighter pilot. There are marines too, but their role is mostly glossed over.

As military science fiction, *Not in Our Stars* is adequate if dry. Swycaffer demonstrates some of the interesting tactics of the genre — such as the power of a starship's position as related to a gravity well and the length of delays in responses in space. Some of his battles rise above their innate dryness and are somewhat exciting. But they never are better than average.

Swycaffer also tries to present *Not in Our Stars* as a *Shakespearian tragedy* and here he falls far short, perhaps because *Not in Our Stars* is also a *first novel*.

Swycaffer's biggest problem is his characters. The protagonist, Devon, is not only unlikeable, but also reacts in largely irrational ways. He's a complete jerk to most of his subordinates, and you never really understand why. Unfortunately, no one else gets

enough characterization to come into solid focus. The character that comes the closest is a fighter pilot, but there's a late and unforeshadowed revelation about him that's so surprising that you have to conclude that the character that you might have come to like wasn't the person that the author was writing about.

The plot really doesn't hang together either. The first half of the book, centering on Devon's battles in the Outreach, has absolutely no drama because it's entirely obvious that Devon's fleet totally outclasses the raiders. Then, when the plot starts to turn toward a possible conspiracy in the Concordat, the events seem contrived, and the intuitive jumps they require are unbelievable.

Swycaffer's writing is never actually bad. At worst, it's sometimes dull. It's the plots and characters that are problematic, particularly when they appear as part of an epic tragedy.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Not in Our Stars was arguably the first-ever Traveller novel. It states so clearly on the dedication page:

Several of the concepts and nomenclatures used in this story are from the games Imperium and Traveller, published by Game Designers' Workshop and designed by Marc W. Miller, to whom all my thanks for his kind permission regarding this use.

It's the physical aspects of the Concordat universe that are the most similar to *Traveller*. Fleets of ships use jumpspace to slowly move across sectors of space. Communication can go no faster than these ships, and so lines of command are tricky. There's also quite a bit about "services". There are clear distinctions between naval and marine units, but they still work together. There's even some discussion of scout ships among the naval fleets. And, none of this is a surprise, since the Concordat books were based on Swycaffer's own *Traveller* games.

The geography of Swycaffer's Concordat might have been influenced by the Third Imperium. The Sonallans and the recent war on the Sonallan Rim sound a lot like the Solomani and the Imperium's recent wars on the Solomani Rim. Meanwhile the setting of this book, the Outreach, sounds a lot like the Outrim Void, a similarly fractured space in the *Traveller* universe, just rimward of the Spinward Marches. (It's called the Trojan

Reach or Trojan Reaches in later supplements.) Outreach and Outtrim alike are opposite the Sonallans and Solomani in their respective universes.

There's just one way that the Concordat universe varies from the Official *Traveller* Universe in any notable way: jump technology is slightly different. The Concordat ships can bounce in and out of jumpspace with ease and don't seem to worry about refueling every time they exit. Perhaps jumpspace just wasn't as well defined in the early '80s when this book was written, but this isn't the jumpspace of the modern *Traveller* universe.

Though *Not in Our Stars* is a mediocre piece of fiction it's pretty good as source material to help you think about how the *Traveller* universe works. Its concepts of space warfare and the military background of the Concorat are all in tune with *Traveller*, even if the history isn't quite the same.

Publication Notes

It's somewhat surprising that Avon, a mainstream publisher, published Swycaffer's first books, but that's how the first few roleplaying novels got to press. RPG companies were quick to follow: TSR published their first *Dragonlance* novel just a few months after Avon's September 1984 publication of *Not in Our Stars*.

Not in Our Stars is an almost-average book that's large in its aspirations but held back by being a first novel. Its most interesting aspect is that it uses the physics and social ideas of a *Traveller* universe, even though the game isn't set in the Official *Traveller* Universe. Though it's not a great casual read, it a good inspirational read for military *Traveller* players and GMs.

Additional Reading

Three other early roleplaying novels were published by mainstream publishers, just like Swycaffer's first four Concordat novels:

Quag Keep (1978), a pseudo-Greyhawk novel by
Andre Norton

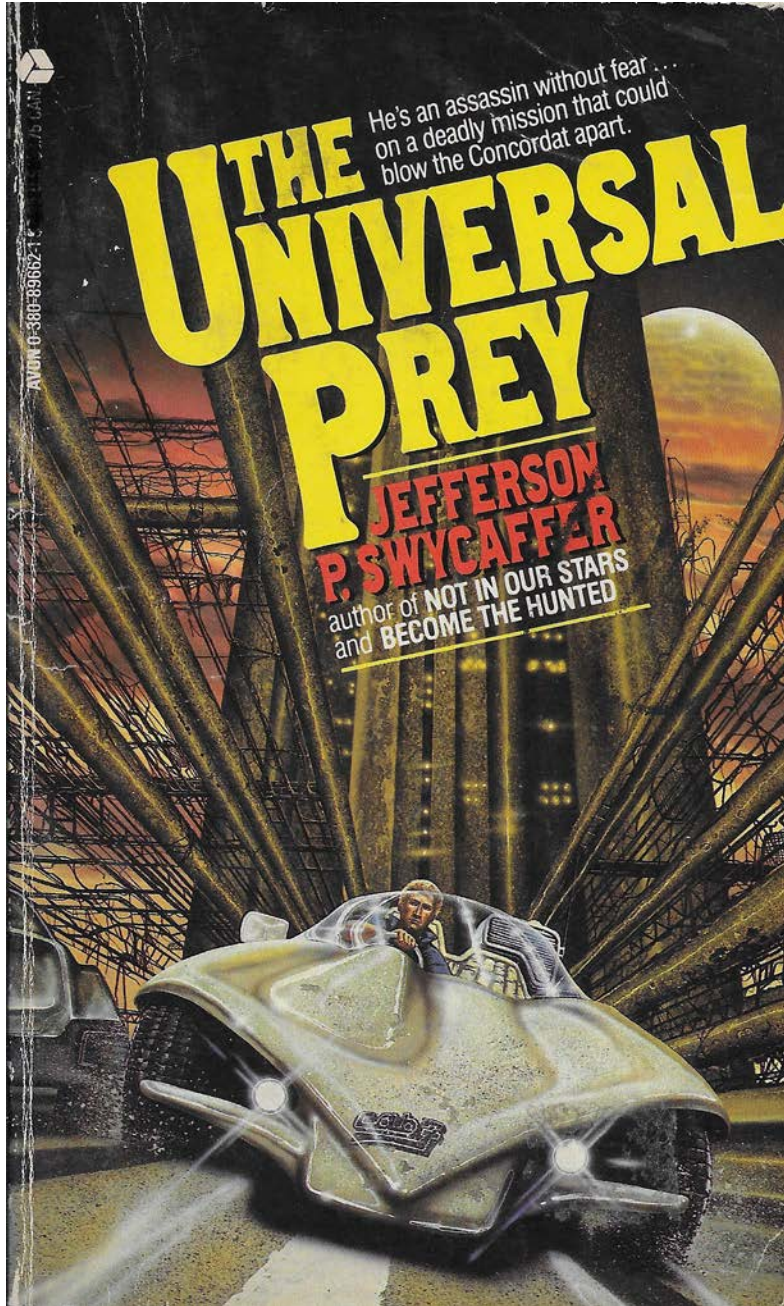
The Man of Gold (1984), a Tékumel novel by M.A.R.

Barker

Flamesong (1985), another Tékumel novel by

M.A.R. Barker

The Universal Prey



The Universal Prey, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer

- ***The Universal Prey*, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer**
- **Publisher:** Avon Books (1985)
- **Style:** ★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★

About the Story

Swycaffer enjoyed creating a coherent universe by spinning off a minor character from one book and using them as the protagonist of another. This clearly linked his stories together, while at the same time making each one standalone and fairly unique.

The Universal Prey is thus about an assassin names James Tyler, who appeared somewhat briefly in *Become the Hunter* (1985). Now, we learn that Tyler reports to the mysterious Black Book, which assigns him assassinations of importance to the Concordat.

On a balkanized planet that's recently been shaken by nuclear war, Tyler is ordered to kill the man who started the war. But, Tyler's growing conscience and the growing attention of higher-ups in the Concordat threaten to make the mission more dangerous than ever.

Genre & Style

Swycaffer keeps shifting his genre from book to book, highlighting one of the advantages of the *Traveller* game. *The Universal Prey* is a moralistic *espionage* book of the sort you might find in the '70s, where the spies weren't necessarily the good guys, even when working for the government. It's the conspiracy-soaked worldview that originated in our world's Cold War writ large.

Generally, Swycaffer's writing style continues to improve from book to book. Here his characters are stronger and their emotions seem more realistic. The plot is also just a bit more fully realized.

However, not all of those realistic emotions are necessarily of benefit to the novel.

A lot of the emotional undercurrents of *The Universal Prey* revolve around reassessing one's life and being one's own worst enemy. It feels a bit dated now, as this

was a trope of science fiction of the '60s and '70s, but the reader's mileage may vary.

An overinflated fall-in-love-at-first-sight plot, which also appeared in *Become the Hunted*, is more troublesome. Where you might enjoy the personal introspection as a personal preference, this is a much more dangerous trope for the unrealistic expectations it creates in the real world.

Meanwhile, Swycaffer's insistence of suddenly involving the leaders of the Concordat halfway through the book is frustrating. He did the same thing in *Become the Hunter* and it made the book drag; he repeats the mistake here. This idea also hurts belief in the Concordat as a real setting because it implies that the rulers of a humongous Empire involve themselves intimately in the minutia of individual worlds — something that seems pretty unlikely.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Like *Become the Hunted*, this is a pretty small story, about one man's triumphs and trials on a single planet. Unlike *Become the Hunted*, some of the story may be of interest for *Traveller* gameplay.

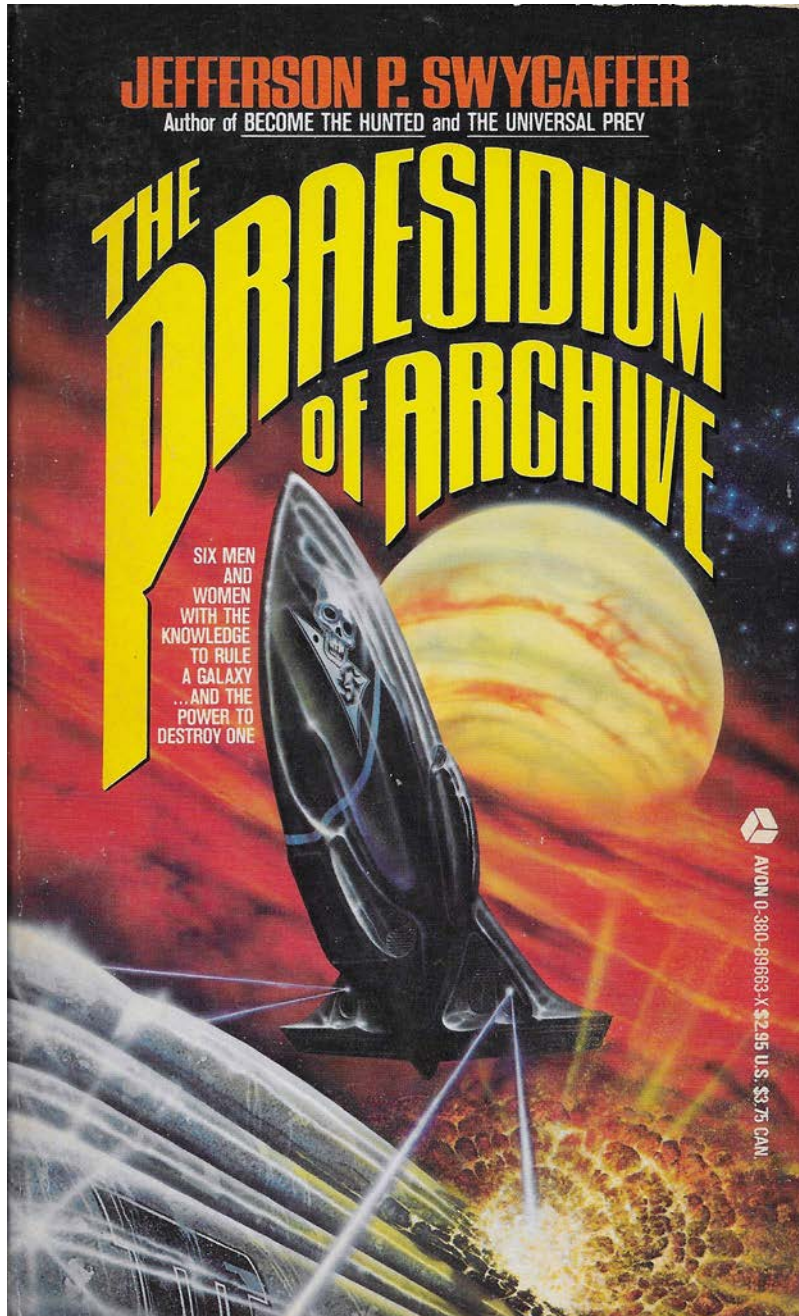
That begins with the nice depiction of a balkanized world and how those various states interacts with the Concordat as a whole. It's believable and thought-provoking. In fact the general tension between planetary independence and galactic rulership is well depicted. The Concordat seems to truly control its planets in a way that the Imperium of the Official *Traveller* Universe doesn't. However *The Universal Prey* offers up an exception to this rule: a world that's been given its own rulership. When the planet proves itself unable to govern, new conflicts arise, and they're exactly the sort of conflicts that might surround a balkanized world in the Official *Traveller* Universe too.

The Concordat's Black Book assassination program might also be interesting to *Traveller* GMs. Could the Imperium have such a program? If so, who would know about it?

Don't expect to see the trademark physics or technology of *Traveller* in *The Universal Prey*, but do expect to get an interesting look at how the governments of a planet and a galactic empire could interrelate. If that sounds like an inspiring topic, you should consider picking up the book.

The Universal Prey is an average book with strengths and faults alike. It takes a good look at how the government of an individual world can work within the purview of an interstellar government — an idea inherited from influential books like *The Cosmic Computer* (1960) that continues to be of interest to *Traveller* games.

The Praesidium of Archive



The Praesidium of Archive, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer

- ***The Praesidium of Archive*, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer**
- **Publisher:** Avon Books (1986)
- Style: ★★★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★

About the Story

The Praesidium of Archive is both a unique Concordat book and a nice capstone for Swycaffer's four books published by Avon. Unlike the previous books in the series, it's a collection of short stories, bound together by a loose frame. The frame story is set during the year-end meeting of the Praesidium — the Council of Six that rules the Concordat of Archive. Each of the six short stories tells the tale of one of its six members.

Some of these characters (especially Grand Admiral de la Noue) appeared in previous books, and some of those previous appearances felt forced. Here we instead get the members of the Praesidium in their natural element, and that makes all the difference.

The six stories are:

1. "*Case and Cause*", the story of Justicar Solme. A tale of politics and religion: how they're not allowed to intertwine in the Concordat, and what problems this causes.
2. "*The Damnable Price*", the story of Treasury Secretary Wallace. An action-adventure, centering on pirates and the rebellion they're involved with.
3. "*Escalation*", the story of Navy Secretary de la Noue. A tale of war.
4. "*A Precise, Young Death*", the story of Commerce Secretary Redmond. A tale of grief and loss in wartime and a nice flipside to de la Noue's tale.
5. "*To Live; To Learn*", the story of Foreign Secretary Visenne. A tale of negotiations with an alien race that does not understand war.
6. "*Archive Midwinter*", the story of First Secretary Parke. A tale of leadership under the threat of assassination, of people vs. papers.

None of these stories are particularly big (though war and the threat of war underlie many of them). Instead they're largely personal stories that help to define these larger-than-life characters.

Genre & Style

The previous Concordat stories varied in genre from action-adventure to military science fiction. Because *The Praesidium of Archive* de facto encompasses all of the stories of the Concordat, it might be fairest to call it a *space opera*: a large-scale science-fiction adventure.

Because of its focus on the bigger picture, *The Praesidium of Archive* does a better job of exploring the depths of the Concordat than any of the preceding novels in the series. Readers learn more about the Concordat's alien neighbors and its own social contracts. From the Sonallans to the Octigans, from warfare to religion, from space battles to piracy, *The Praesidium of Archive* shows off the many possibilities of this huge galactic empire.

The writing of Swycaffer's Concordat books has improved from book to book. Here, it reaches a well-polished and professional level. As a result, the stories in *The Praesidium of Archive* are generally well told and meaningful shorts — with the exception of “A Precise, Young Death”, which is a touching vignette, but one that goes on for too long.

Mind you, there are still minor issues. Swycaffer continues to harp on the idea that men and women working together will fall into *obsessive* love. He's also overly philosophical — which was an issue in his earlier books at times. Finally, the framing structure is weak. But, these blemishes are minor. As a whole, *The Praesidium of Archive* is the best of the four Concordat books that Swycaffer published through Avon.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

As with the other Concordat books, this one embodies the physics of the Official Traveller universe but not its setting. However, even more than its predecessors, *The Praesidium of Archive* does a great job of evoking the *feeling* of *Traveller*: it reveals a huge culture spanning the stars, but one that is split internally and at odds externally. Like

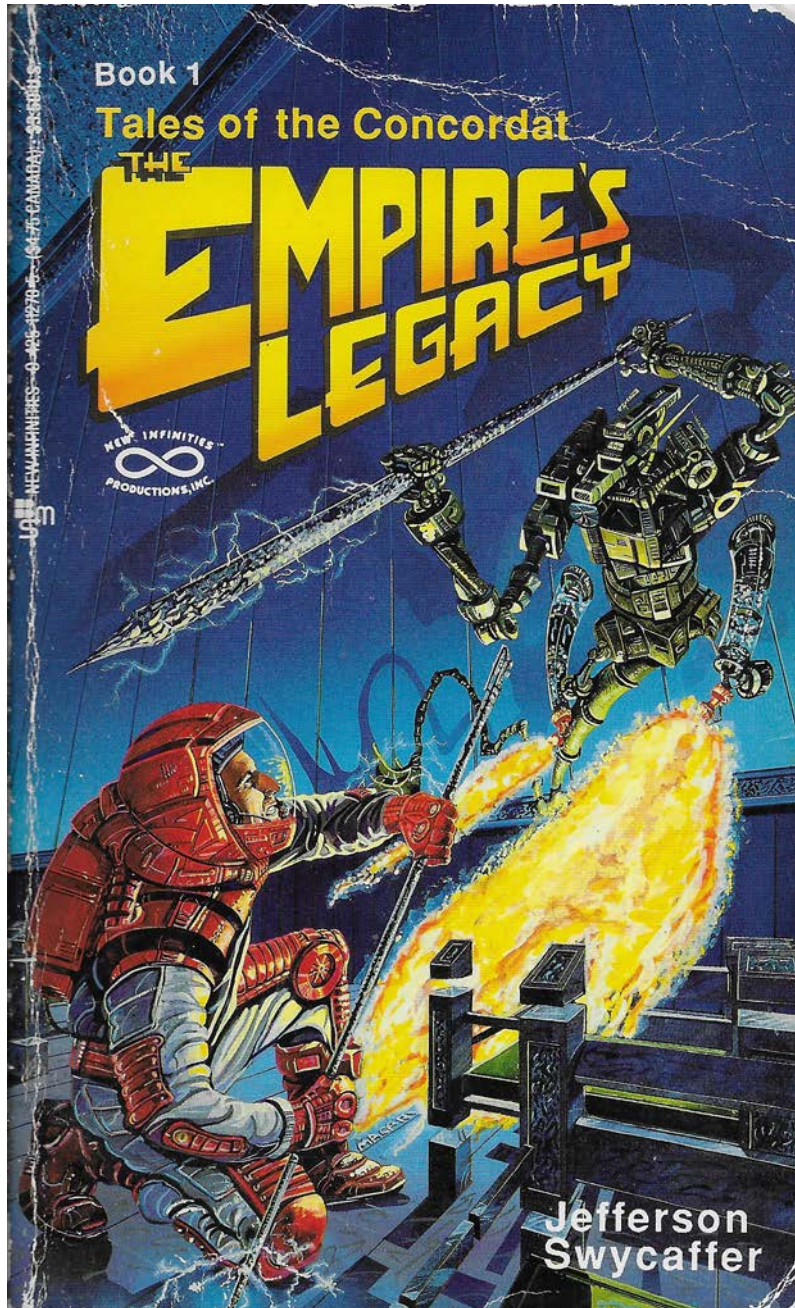
the FASA *Traveller* adventures, it demonstrates a more thoughtful sort of gameplay.

The only problem with using the stories in *The Praesidium of Archive* as source material is that they're a bit too big for standard *Traveller* play because they deal with people at the utmost echelons of society. Nonetheless, the outline for each individual short story could easily be the outline for a *Traveller* adventure in a less rarified context. They could lead a GM to: consider how laws of the Third Imperium could constrain certain uses of religion; write an adventure mashing together pirates and rebels into a confusing whole; investigate the role of war; and introduce an alien species that doesn't understand conflict at all.

The Praesidium of Archive is the best *Traveller* source material since Swycaffer's original *Not In Our Stars* (1984), because it's doesn't just demonstrate one limited adventure idea for *Traveller*, but instead offers many adventure seeds.

The Praesidium of Archive is a well-written and interesting novel about a *Traveller*-like universe. It should generate numerous story ideas for thoughtful GMs.

The Empire's Legacy



The Empire's Legacy, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer

- ***The Empire's Legacy*, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer**
- **Publisher:** New Infinities Productions (1988)
- **Style:** ★★★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★

About the Story

The Empire's Legacy is the story of Taviella-i-Tel and her friends, who together crew the *Coinroader*, a merchant ship that jumps from port to port, trying to make a credit here and there as it goes.

However, the regular routines of the *Coinroader* are upset by three things as *The Empire's Legacy* opens. First is the addition of Stasileus to their crew. He's a member of a genetically engineered race that was once slaves to the Empire of Archive that predated the current Concordat. Second is a jump-space accident that reveals the presence of a laser communication beam through jump-space. Third is the discovery of an ancient space station from the time of the Empire, located on the other side of that communication beam; it's home to technological secrets that have been lost for hundreds of years.

Thus begins a race to uncover secrets of the past — fought against others who have also discovered the communication beam and against genetic pitfalls that have been hidden within the very genome of the explorers: the Empire's legacy.

Genre & Style

Swycaffer's Avon books featured a variety of styles, but generally felt like literary fiction. It's clear that he was trying to tell symbolic and thoughtful stories that really meant something. To some extent, it felt like Swycaffer was punching above his weight class, but he was slowly growing into it — though his last Avon book, *The Praesidium of Archive* (1986) still had some flaws.

When Swycaffer revived his Concordat series for New Infinities, he instead decided to write *gaming fiction* — a categorization that's offered here without prejudice. This sort of fiction, focused on parties of adventurers wandering around and discovering

things, of often bad. But, *The Empire's Legacy* is quite the opposite: it's the height to which other gaming fiction should aspire.

In fact, *The Empire's Legacy* was the first great *Traveller* fiction. It's got exploration, discovery, history, and humanity. It's also positively revelatory, revealing more about the background of the Concordat than all four of the previous books combined — which is pretty impressive, because *The Praesidium of Archive* could make the same claim when it was published! The Concordat's background is quite interesting, with its story of a high-tech Empire that fell before the rise of the current intergalactic polity. Not only was the previous Empire much more advanced than the current one, but it was also much more evil. Thus, lots of potential plots are set up.

Though the prose of *The Empire's Legacy* doesn't quite shine, it's still packed full of great story and great background, and it offers a great example of a *Traveller* adventure in prose form. Even when compared to the professionally written influential novels of the '60s, *The Empire's Legacy* is a strong offering.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Swycaffer's previous novels had *potential* applicability to *Traveller* if you tease out appropriate background ideas and adventure seeds. There's no need to do that in *The Empire's Legacy*; you could just run the novel as a Official *Traveller* Univers adventure. Sure, you'd need to make some adjustments. Perhaps the Empire's lost base is a pre-Maghiz Darrian base run by "evil" Darrians. But, those adjustments are minor, and the novel is so full of interesting ideas and *Traveller* feel that the adjustments are worthwhile.

The Empire's Legacy's strong sense of history may also encourage GMs to plumb the history of their own *Traveller* setting. We've long known about historic secrets, such as the story of the Ancients, but this novel may encourage GMs to create something new and revelatory for their own games.

Publication Notes

After Gary Gygax, Frank Mentzer, and Kim Mohan left TSR, they formed a new RPG company, New Infinities Productions (1986-1988). They're probably best known for the infamous *Cyborg Commando* (1987) RPG, but they also published numerous

novels over their short existence, many of them with roleplaying connections. Swycaffer thus reappeared with three new *Traveller*-influenced novels, which were called the “Tales of the Concordat”.

The Empire’s Legacy is a fun read — and that doesn’t just mean fun for a piece of gaming fiction. The novel will also provide you with a full adventure for your *Traveller* game (or else tons of adventure seeds).

Additional Reading

New Infinities published two other series of roleplaying novels alongside the Concordat trilogy.

The Cyborg Commando Books

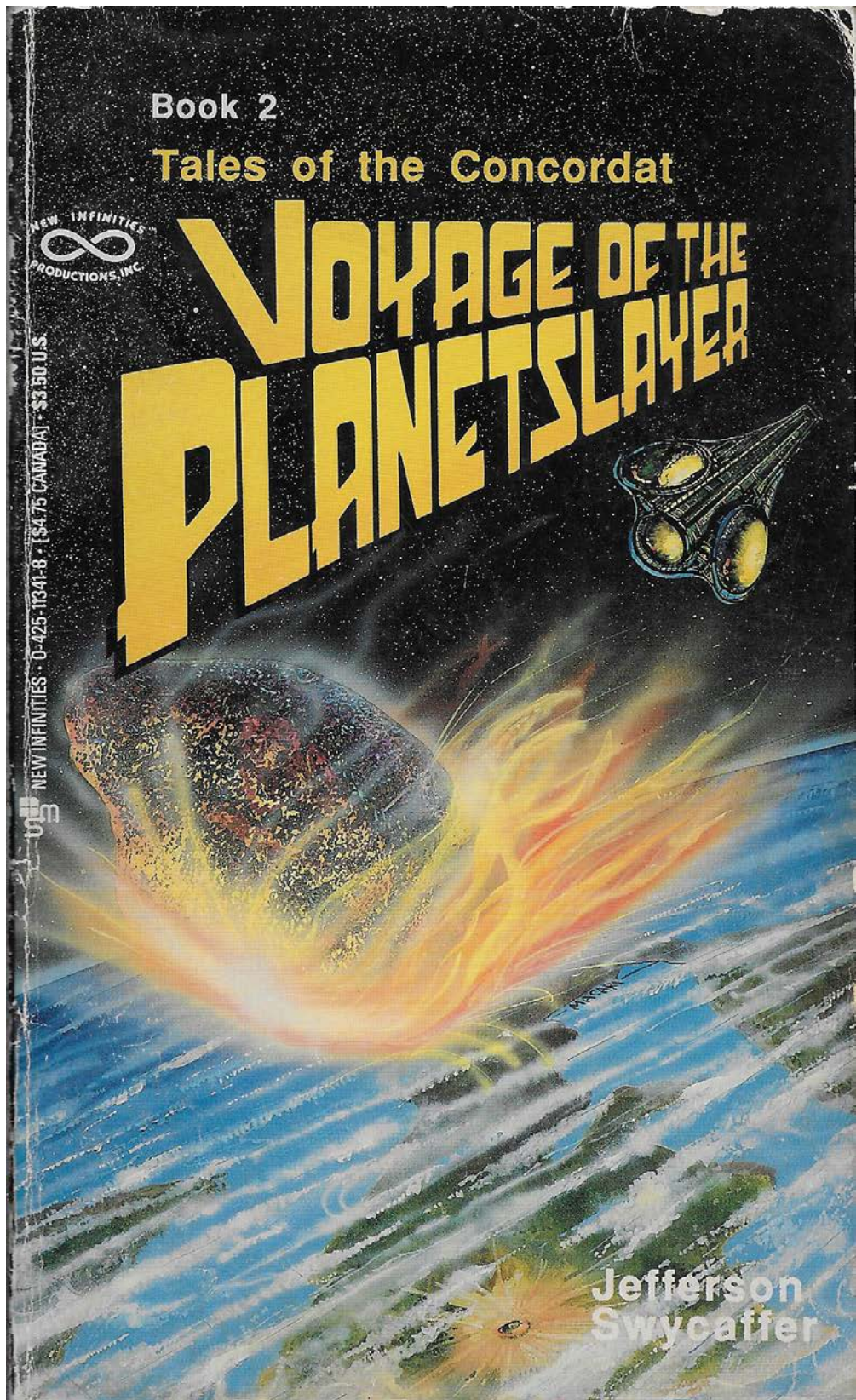
- *Planet in Peril* (1987), by Kim Mohan & Pamela O’Neil
- *Chase into Space* (1988), by Kim Mohan & Pamela O’Neil
- *The Ultimate Prize* (1988), by Kim Mohan & Pamela O’Neil

The Greyhawk Books:

- *City of Hawks* (1987), by Gary Gygax
- *Night Arrant* (1987), by Gary Gygax
- *Sea of Death* (1987), by Gary Gygax
- *Come Endless Darkness* (1988), by Gary Gygax
- *Dance of Demons* (1988), by Gary Gygax

They also produced another half-dozen unconnected books, a few of them focused on Arthuriania.

Voyage of the Planetlayer



Voyage of the Planetslayer, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer

- *Voyage of the Planetslayer*, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer
- **Publisher:** New Infinities Productions (1988)
- **Style:** ★★★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★

About the Story

Voyage of the Planetslayer follows Traviella-i-Tel and the crew of the *Coinroader* into a new adventure. Now, they've been enlisted by the Concordat to crew the *Planetslayer*, whose mandate is to terraform the planet Kythe-Correy. Sadly, that terraforming must begin with the utter destruction of the (non-sentient) life currently extant on the planet.

Swycaffer juggles four story threads in the book, built up like the plot of just about every science-fiction TV show ever. The “A” plot concerns the *Planetslayer's* trip to Kythe-Correy, the moral dilemmas surrounding whether the planet should actually be destroyed, and the conflict over that. The “B” plot centers around Stasileus, the slavish alien introduced in the previous book, who is now trying to understand what makes humans work and what they really want. The “C” plot takes place on a nearby world, where a court case judges the legality of destroying a planet — a bit too late, it would appear at first. These three plots neatly dovetail together by the end of the book. The “D” plot is a largely offscreen romance between one of the crewmembers and one of the scientists who is overseeing the planetary destruction.

Put that all together and you have a (thin) book-length plot.

Genre & Style

Like *The Empire's Legacy*, *Voyage of the Planetslayer* is gaming fiction. It again succeeds better than Swycaffer's earlier more literary work for Avon. Unfortunately, the result isn't quite as strong as Swycaffer's previous work in the genre.

The biggest problem with *Voyage of the Planetslayer* is that it takes forever to get going. Perhaps that's understandable, because once it does get going, the story only features a few main events. The plot threads also start out a little too scattered. When you

don't know they're going to come together, the subplots feel like padding for an overly sparse book.

Unfortunately, *Voyage of the Planetslayer* isn't as revelatory as its immediate predecessor either. You still get hints of the increasingly rich setting depicted in *The Empire's Legacy*, and some of those backstory elements get good attention — such as the Empire, its genetic engineering, and Stasileus' race. But it doesn't have the depth of what was laid out in *The Empire's Legacy*.

Overall *Voyage of the Planetslayer* is still one of Swycaffer's better books, but it's over too quickly without a lot happening.

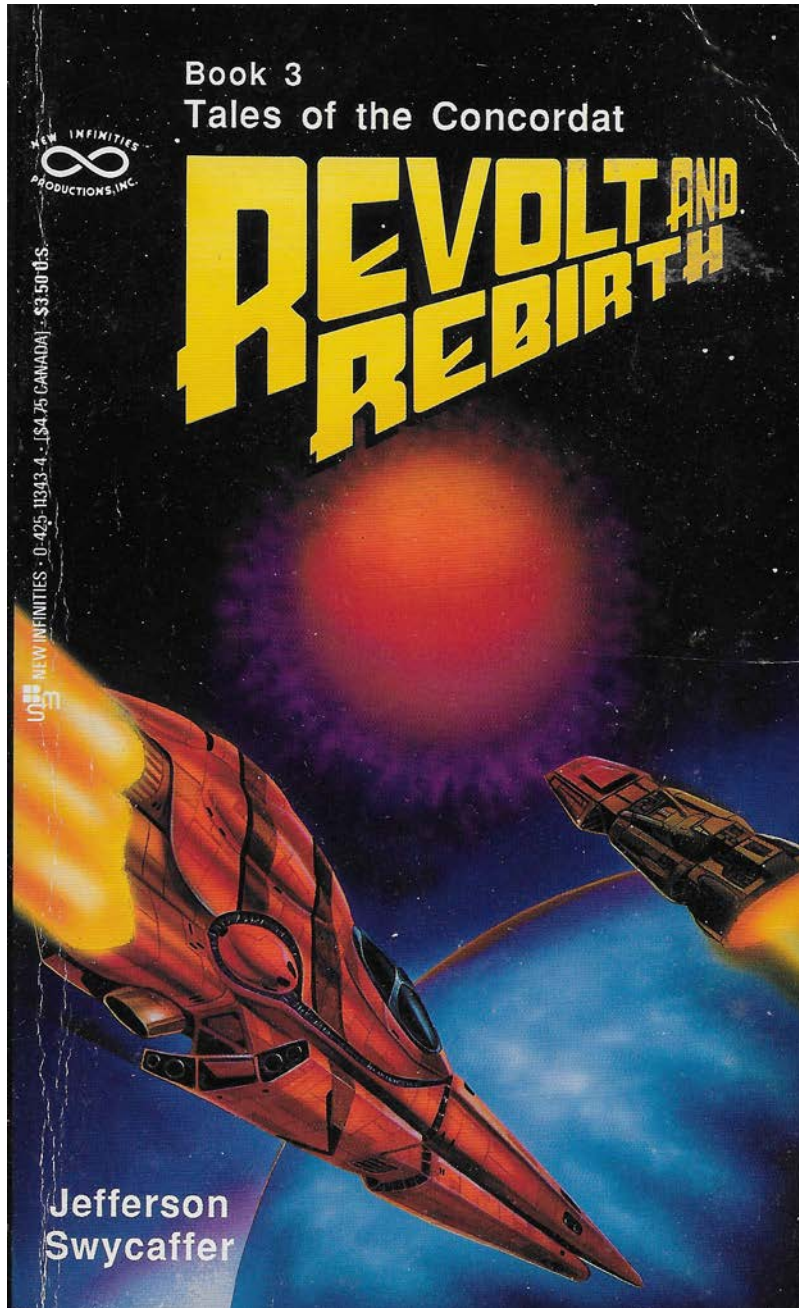
Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Like its immediate predecessor, *Voyage of the Planetslayer* would make a pretty good adventure for *Traveller*. Though some plot elements are drawn directly from the Concordat universe, you could easily adapt the story for use in a Third Imperium *Traveller* game. The result would be a unique adventure, quite different from what you might otherwise run.

With that said, *Voyage of the Planetslayer* doesn't have the depth of *The Empire's Legacy*. It's probably just a couple of hours of play. It's also not as inspirational as the previous book, which laid bare much of the history of the Concordat, offering lots of ideas for a GM to chew on.

Voyage of the Planetslayer is another successful novel from Swycaffer, but it's not quite as outstanding as his New Infinities premier. If you enjoy reading Swycaffer's work, it's worth the effort, and you'll be rewarded with the material for a short adventure.

Revolt and Rebirth



Revolt and Rebirth, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer

- ***Revolt and Rebirth*, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer**
- **Publisher:** New Infinities Productions (1988)
- **Style:** ★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★

About the Story

Revolt and Rebirth is a capstone to all seven of the Concordat books.

First, it returns the characters of the original four Avon Concordat books. That means the low-key return of the Praesidium of Archive. However, *Revolt and Rebirth* focuses much more strongly on Athalos Steldan, the protagonist of *Become the Hunted* (1985) and a supporting cast member in most of the other early books.

Second, it builds on the historical backstory revealed in *The Empire's Legacy* (1988) and *Voyage of the Planetslayer* (1988): the Empire that once ruled and which genetically manipulated its people into slavery. The discoveries made in *The Empire's Legacy* are what really get this novel rolling, while those of *Voyage in the Planetslayer* have a passing connection.

Revolt and Rebirth features two plot threads, artlessly running in alternate chapters (though the one dovetails nicely into the other at the very end).

The odd chapters center on the story of a girl named Lyra who is a noble of the old Empire and the daughter of the Sultan. We see the fall of the old Empire through her eyes and experience the last days of revolt and rebellion on Archive itself.

The even chapters focus on the story of Athalos Steldan. He has become convinced that the Concordat is stagnant and that its people are no longer vibrant adventurers; he plans to change that by creating an opera to manipulate the very fabric of society, using the knowledge of the ancient computer Sophia and the psychology of the Vernae Stasileus.

Genre & Style

With the canvas that broad, it's clear that *Revolt and Rebirth* is another *space opera*, much like the previous Concordat finale, *The Praesidium of Archive* (1986).

Swycaffer approaches a story of this scope in the right way by providing us with a few major characters to focus on, but unfortunately that focus isn't enough to make the book truly interesting.

The biggest problem is that there's almost no tension in the story of the revolt; we know how it ends, and Swycaffer does nothing to surprise us. The story of the Steldan's planned rebirth is more interesting, and ultimately what will keep you reading, but this story is also somewhat short of tension — perhaps because a fairly simple idea got strung out over too much story.

Revolt and Rebirth is enjoyable, but that's mostly due to the satisfaction of seeing the Concordat universe so fully described, not thanks to any particular zing in the writing. Generally, *Revolt and Rebirth* is better than the more “literary” books that Swycaffer wrote for Avon ... but it doesn't hold up to the adventure books that he'd previously written for New Infinities.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

This is obviously not a gaming adventure: it's both too big and too simple. Still, a GM might find story elements of interest to his *Traveller* game, as was the case with Swycaffer's Avon books.

Steldan's plot is the most intriguing through its vision of a star-spanning empire without an adventuresome spirit. Though the Concordat has particular reasons for this that don't apply to the Third Imperium, it's possible that the central idea could. Certainly, GDW thought the “Golden Age” of *Traveller* was stagnant, which is why they spiraled their universe out of control with Rebellion, Hard Times, and eventually The New Era. Might Your *Traveller* Universe have an organization that's trying to recreate the adventurous spirit of the Imperium of 1105? It's good food for thought.

Do you need to read the whole book to that kernel of an idea, though? Probably not. Overall, *Revolt and Rebirth* isn't of a lot of use to a *Traveller* GM unless he's considering using the Concordat of Archive in his own campaign.

Though not the best of the Concordat of Archive books, *Revolt and Rebirth* is a nice capstone for the series, and worth reading if you've read the six that came before. It's probably not that rich in ideas for your own *Traveller* game though.

Additional Reading

Revolt and Rebirth is the last of Swycaffer's stories of the Concordat of Archive. However, he did a bit more writing about *Traveller* in the pages of *Dragon* magazine:

“Plotting a Course for Choosy Players”, *Dragon* #51
(July 1981)

“Exonidas Spaceport”, *Dragon* #59 (March 1982)

“Antimissiles and Roundshot”, *Dragon* #95 (March
1985)

“Active Duty”, *Dragon* #102 (October 1985)

“Hexes and *High Guard*”, *Dragon* #105 (January
1986)

The New Era, 1995-2011

Though the roleplaying industry dove into fiction in 1984, *Traveller* didn't join the trend for another decade. In the meantime, the game itself evolved. The original Golden Age *Traveller* (1977) was followed by *MegaTraveller* (1987), the story of Rebellion within the Third Imperium. Then it in turn was replaced by *Traveller: The New Era* (1993).

The New Era (TNE) was the most farflung *Traveller* game ever. Not only did it use a new game system, but it also pushed the timeline ahead almost a hundred years, to a period when the Third Imperium had fallen, and mankind was struggling to return to the stars. The new game was centered in the Old Expanses where an organization called the Reformation Coalition was working to rebuild interstellar civilization. Their Reformation Coalition Exploratory Service (RCES) offered a great hook for players: it was all about exploring new worlds, digging up lost treasures, and taking over old civilizations.

What more could roleplayers want?

As it turned out, many roleplaying wanted the Golden Age of the Third Imperium back. Where the Rebellion had shattered their beloved setting, the New Era had totally destroyed it — and that left many fans unhappy. What followed was one of the first great fan revolts of the roleplaying industry.

Despite that, the New Era was a great setting for stories. Lost worlds, fallen civilizations, unbeatable enemies, villainous empires, plucky heroes — it was all here. *Traveller* was fortunate to have many of its first novels set in this evocative time period — which is probably why fans continued to write about the setting in stories of their own, even after the fall of GDW and even after new settings appeared from Imperium Games, Steve Jackson Games, and smaller RPG publishers.

1. The Death of Wisdom, Paul Brunette, 1995
2. To Dream of Chaos, Paul Brunette, 1995

3. The Backwards Mask I, Paul Brunette, 2011
4. The Backwards Mask II, Matthew Carson, 2011
5. Diaspora Phoenix, Martin J. Dougherty, 2002
6. Yesterday's Hero, Martin J. Dougherty, 2006
7. A Long Way Home, Terry McInnes, 2007

The Death of Wisdom



- ***The Death of Wisdom*, by Paul Brunette**
- **Publisher:** GDW (1995)
- **Style:** ★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★★★
- **Location:** Aubaine/Aubaine (Old Expanses 0738) to Sauler/Thoezzent (Old Expanses 0424) via Ra/Sarid (Old Expanses 0931)
- **Date:** 1201

About the Story

The Death of Wisdom starts off aboard the ship of Coeur d’Espirit, in the middle of a desperate battle during the *MegaTraveller* Rebellion. It then deftly bridges the timespan between the Rebellion and the New Era when d’Espirit finds herself misjumped far between the stars; she’s forced to take a one-way low-berth trip forward in time.

The actual story of *The Death of Wisdom* is about d’Espirit (or “Red Sun”, to use her New Era callsign) returning to the stars aboard the *RCS Hornet*, newly built by the Reformation Coalition. As she jumps from world to world, we learn a bit about the New Era. Then, on the planet of Ra, everything changes. There, Red Sun discovers a plague that’s annihilating the Hivers. Her ship may be the only hope for the survival of the species within the Coalition ...

Genre & Style

The Death of Wisdom falls squarely into the category of *gaming* fiction. Like some of the later Concordat books, it could have been drawn straight from a roleplaying game. Unfortunately, it suffers from some of the problems that are common with the genre.

First, *The Death of Wisdom* is a rambling, picaresque book. The group of adventurers randomly bounces from one location to another without a solid plot driving their story. It’s essentially a travelogue.

Second, the characters of *The Death of Wisdom* are pretty cardboard. There’s just a tiny bit of differentiation between them: they’re still quite shallow and any personality they might have isn’t taken advantage of.

The Death of Wisdom also suffers from a problem lesson common in gaming fiction: it insists on using in-game jargon.

Despite these problems common to the gaming fiction genre, *The Death of Wisdom* is still a fair book. Brunette's plotting is as strong as the structure allows and if his writing doesn't shine, it doesn't detract either. Though the book is ultimately a bit longer (or slower) than the story supports, it's still mostly enjoyable reading.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

The Death of Wisdom was arguably the first-ever *Traveller* novel. In fact, it offers a pretty good argument because the book says *Traveller: The New Era* right on the cover (and the spine and the back cover and the second page and the third page and the fourth page ...). Unlike the earlier Concordat books (1984-1988), it's set in the Official *Traveller* Universe and unlike *Force of Destiny* (2001), it was published shortly after it was written, and it was set in an era actively undergoing development from GDW. Of course some folks might not really consider *The New Era* to be *Traveller* ... but the Golden Age wasn't supported in fiction until the 21st century.

The greatest strength of *The Death of Wisdom* is unsurprisingly its portrayal of the New Era. By bringing a Remnant from the past, Brunette is able to infodump lots of details on the time period. Readers learn about the early explorations of the Dawn League in the late 1190s and see the Hiver Technical Academy on Aubaine, one of the era's most popular features. The feeling of Brunette's New Era is not as desperate as the universe of the *Traveller: The New Era* game, but readers still get the feel of a Coalition rebuilding the universe — and a look at the troubles they face along the way.

However, *The Death of Wisdom* feels somewhat atypical as a *Traveller: The New Era* adventure. The idea of another pocket empire trying to destroy (or cripple) the Coalition by genociding the Hivers is a pretty far cry from the standard tropes of *TNE* adventures — but that's a nice change from the later *TNE* books, which frequently repeated many of the same ideas; *The Death of Wisdom* instead shows the imaginative breadth of the setting.

Many other *Traveller* elements that appear in *The Death of Wisdom* are of interest to all *Traveller* GMs.

That starts with the Hivers, who get considerable attention thanks to their core importance to the New Era. *The Death of Wisdom* nicely details their twinned cowardice and their need to control. Readers will also gain a visceral understanding of why humans are suspicious of them. There's some dialogue near the end of the book that suggests that the whole Reformation Coalition might be a "manipulation" intended to drive humanity to its death against the Vampire Fleets. Though I have faith in the good will of the Hivers, it makes the reader wonder about their purpose — and it makes it easy to understand why Hivers would be distrusted.

The Death of Wisdom also contains a lot of general details about the society and technology of the *Traveller* RPG. If anything, the novel is a little too enmeshed in those details, as Brunette's decision to throw around terms like "TL" (Tech Level) and "Law Level" as in-world concepts feels a bit artificial — though perhaps appropriate, as Marc Miller himself used world codes in *Agent of the Imperium* (2015).

Finally, *The Death of Wisdom* features nice details on ships, the vastness of space, and how those two things interact in the *Traveller* universe. However, I still don't know how Red Sun's merchant ship manages a few jumps to empty space en route to other locations; I guess it must have been fitted out with extra fuel space to allow multiple jumps.

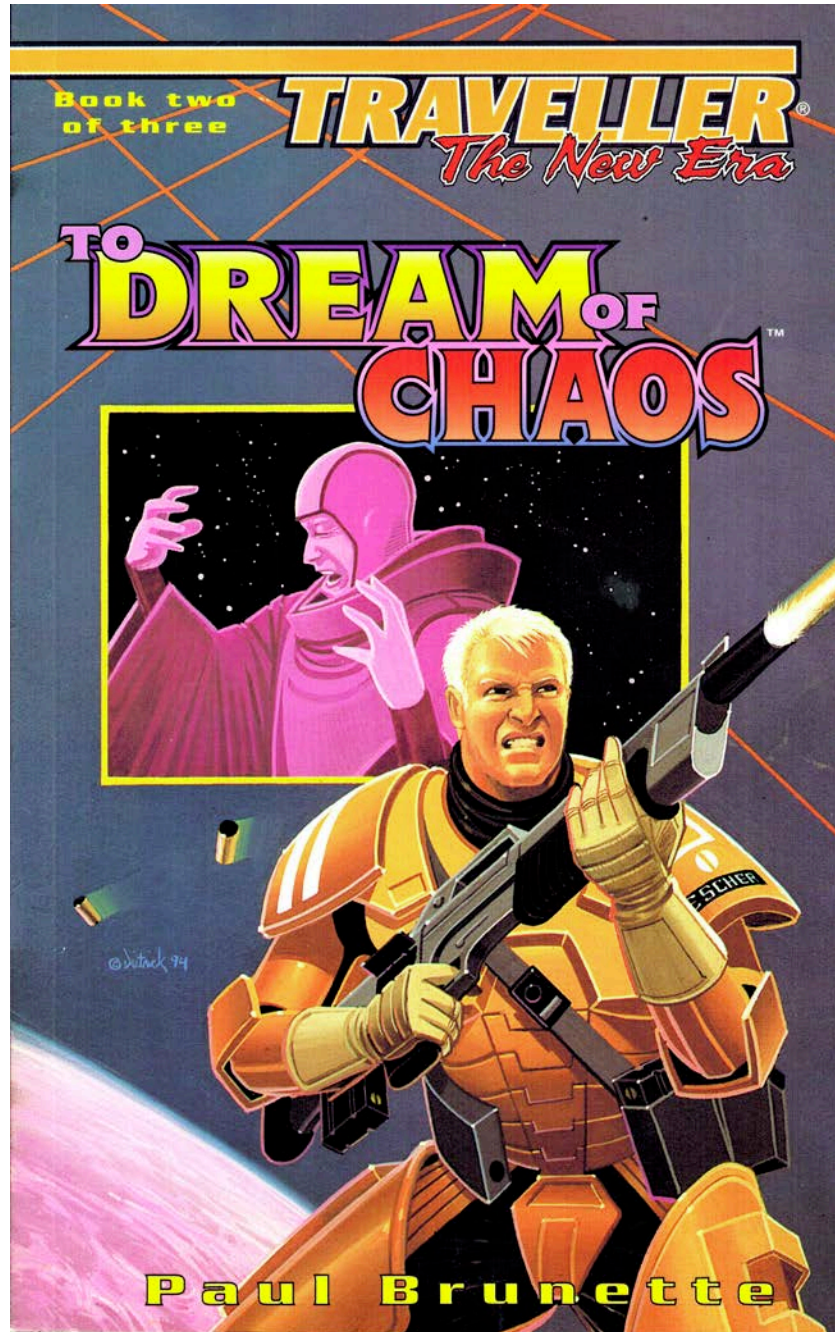
Despite its basis in the New Era, *The Death of Wisdom* offers a strong look at the *Traveller* universe that will be somewhat useful in any era (particularly if you want details on Hivers).

Publication Notes

GDW started publishing RPG fiction when they released *A Gathering Evil* (1991), the first of three novels by Michael A. Stackpole about the *Dark Conspiracy* (1991) game. It took another few years for GDW to publish *Traveller* fiction. The result, *The Death of Wisdom* (1995), was definitely the first *official Traveller* novel.

The Death of Wisdom — the first novel to actually carry the *Traveller* logo — is an adequate book that offers an interesting look at both the New Era and the hiver race.

To Dream of Chaos



- *To Dream of Chaos*, by Paul Brunette
- **Publisher:** GDW (1995)
- **Style:** ★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★
- **Location:** Mexit/Karse (Old Expanses 2125)
- **Date:** 1201 to 1202

About the Story

To Dream of Chaos is set a bit after *The Death of Wisdom* (1995). Despite the success of the *RCS Hornet's* first mission, the crew has split up. But now a new problem has arisen that no other RCS ship is equipped for, so the band needs to be put back together again.

The problem this time is that a black globe generator has been discovered out in the Wilds, on the planet of Mexit. Unfortunately, the ship that uncovered it has gone missing. So the crew of the *Hornet* must travel far beyond the Reformation Coalition's safe zone and deal with a potentially hostile government— all while juggling the differing goals of Aubaine and Oriflamme within the Coalition.

Genre & Style

Like *The Death of Wisdom*, *To Dream of Chaos* falls into the category of *gaming fiction*. It depicts a long, picaresque journey followed by a long, multi-step problem on Mexit.

As with much gaming fiction, *The Death of Wisdom* had problems with its characterization. However it's obvious in *To Dream of Chaos* that Brunette is growing as a writer, because he spends extensive time showing us his characters at work and at play, so that we know them better.

Unfortunately, the characterization is actually overkill, because it's carried to the nth degree. It's mind-numbing. Call it too much of a good thing. There was also one false note in the characterization: everyone gets way too chummy with a mass murderer from the last book, one of the prime movers in the Hiver genocide plot.

At 352 pages in a microscopic 6 or 8 point type, I can't even guess how many words are in this book, other than way too many. The characterization is a slog and the picaresque journey is a slog. It's a pity to see evolutionary writing turn out so badly. The novel's only saving grace is its solid depiction of the *Traveller: The New Era* universe.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

The Death of Wisdom was evenly split between great details about *Traveller: The New Era* and great details that would be appropriate for any era of *Traveller* play. Conversely, *To Dream of Chaos* doesn't spend much time on general *Traveller* technology and society. Instead, it's all about the New Era.

Most importantly, it's a great look at standard *TNE* adventure tropes (after the more unusual adventure of *The Death of Wisdom*). It focuses on a last-war weapons cache and the RCES' need to recover or destroy it. However, it also features problems with Virus, with a Teddy, and with a ground hog. (That's runaway computers, a tyrannical TED that rules by controlling technology, and someone from the last war who went into stasis, for those of you not up on your *TNE* terminology.)

Beyond that, *To Dream of Chaos* also has a great focus on Aubaine, the Coalition, and Oriflamme. Together they create a nice foundation for a GM running games in the era.

Publication Notes

There was supposed to be a third book in the *Traveller: The New Era* fiction trilogy. However GDW announced on January 5, 1996 that they were shutting down. The third book went unpublished — but the first two books were standalone, not parts of a tight trilogy, so it wasn't like an epic story had been left unfinished.

And years later it would be finished. Twice.

To Dream of Chaos was a slow slog that I would not have made it through if I weren't reviewing the book. It also doesn't offer much of interest for the Golden Age era of play, so it's mainly of interest to New Era GMs and players.

The Backwards Mask (I)

- *The Backwards Mask (I)*, by Paul Brunette
- **Publisher:** Far Future Enterprises (2011)
- **Style:** ★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★★★
- **Location:** Vinooks/Srys (Old Expanses 0613)
- **Date:** 1202

The Story

Brunette's *The Backwards Mask* picks up right where *To Dream of Chaos* (1995) left off. The *Hornet* is in the Wilds, having dealt with problems of high-tech weaponry on the planet of Mexit. Now they just need to make it back home.

But, things are never that easy in the New Era. Another Coalition starship, the *Cymbeline Victrix*, has gone missing outside of the Area of Operations. When the *Hornet* tracks it to the planet of Vinooks, they find a number of mysteries, among them: the floating corpse of a liner ship whose captain has gone mad; the crew of the *Cymbeline Victrix* planetside, all surprisingly apathetic about rescue; and a planet with a tech level surpassing that of the Last Imperium that somehow survived the collapse.

I won't spoil the resolution of these mysteries, but I will make one comment about the ending of the book: despite being the final book in Brunette's intended trilogy, this book is even less conclusive end than the previous one. The mysteries and plots of this particular book are wrapped up with just one dangler. But that dangler is linked to new plots — leading to what perhaps would have been another trilogy of books in the New Era, stretching from 1203 onward. Now, of course, it's mainly a historical curiosity.

Genre & Style

Link Brunette's previous *TNE* books, *The Backwards Mask* is *gaming fiction*. It falls back into the model of the previous volumes: it's a largely picaresque book, with the crew of the *Hornet* having several encounters before they finally settle on Vinooks for the balance of the story.

Again, Brunette's writing feels more polished than in his previous volume. When he wrote *To Dream of Chaos*, that resulted in his stepping outside the genre to write more about characters — but at too much length. Here he continues to focus on characters, but the writing is much tighter, creating a more interesting story.

The plot of the book also feels tighter. Though it's still picaresque, everything fits together into a more cohesive whole by the end of the book. Brunette's handling of multiple plots throughout is generally deft and his use of alternate viewpoints (including a hiver!) is interesting. Finally, Brunette creates a nice frame for the story as Coeur d'Espirit offers the book as her *memoir* of what happened. It's more experimental than the rest of Brunette's work and works fairly well.

None of this is exactly notable, but Brunette's writing is much more balanced and polished here than in either of his previous *TNE* books. Beyond that, the plot is interesting and keeps you reading.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

As with the previous Brunette books, the one's main strength is in its focus on the New Era. However, that focus improves: the vision of the New Era is stronger and more evocative than in the first two volumes. The Wilds feel more wild and forsaken; the Virus is more clearly a threat; and the effects of the downfall of Imperial civilization are more obvious.

Like *The Death of Wisdom* (1995), *The Backwards Mask* also features a strong depiction of the hiver race. This is thanks to sections written from the view point of a hiver. It's only 5 or 10 pages total, but they offered a great synopsis of how a hiver thinks — making the book useful to anyone running hivers in their *Traveller* game.

Publication Notes

The Backwards Mask was originally commissioned by GDW, but not finished

before the company closed up shop in 1996. Brunette finished the book in 1997 and released it as “fan fiction”, but it never gained much circulation. Years later, Marc Miller discovered the existence of the novel and purchased it for release as a PDF through his own Far Future Enterprises ... but in the meantime he’d already commissioned a new author to finish the trilogy.

As a result, *The Backwards Mask* is just one of two “official” endings to the *Traveller: The New Era* trilogy. Which one is canon is unknown (and they’re unfortunately largely incompatible due to some logistical issues).

The Backwards Mask surprised me. It’s the best of Brunette’s three *TNE* books, so it’s great that it’s finally been made available. If you’ve read the previous volumes, you’ll probably want to read this one, to get some closure on the main characters.

The Backwards Mask (II)

- *The Backwards Mask (II)*, by Matthew Carson
- **Publisher:** Far Future Enterprises (2011)
- **Style:** ★★★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★★★
- **Location:** Aubaine/Aubaine (Old Expanses 0738) and beyond
- **Date:** 1202 to 1204

The Story

Matthew Carson's *The Backwards Mask* begins back on Aubaine, with the crew of the *Hornet* being offered a new mission. However, this time the stakes are higher than ever, as they're told that the entire Reformation Coalition could succeed or fail based on their mission. A delivery from the Hiver Federation has gone awry, and with it a computer that stores a hundred years of technological advances that was intended to help guide the Coalition in the decades ahead. The *Hornet* must retrieve that databank, but without revealing the importance of what they're doing!

And then things get tricky. Searching for this lost ship soon brings the *Hornet* into conflict with a sector-wide conspiracy that could be even more dangerous to the Coalition than the loss of the databank itself!

Though *The Backwards Mask* is packaged as a single book, it's practically a trilogy. It comes in at about 310,000 words, which is probably as much as Brunette's entire three-book trilogy. It's even got three different major climaxes, arranged equidistantly in the book. Carson's *The Backwards Mask* is long, but it's a tight book with plenty of plot to carry it.

Genre & Style

Paul Brunette's *TNE* books were all gaming fiction, with an adventure-like focus: the *Hornet* was on the move, finding problems, then solving them. They were action-adventure stories, with the characters developing only slowly over the course of his trilogy.

Matthew Carson's *Backwards Mask* feels somewhat similar at its start: the *Hornet* is given a mission and it jumps from system to system to solve the problem, encountering things as it goes. However, this picaresque *gaming fiction* is more tightly connected than Brunette's similar adventures. In addition, Carson does a lot to expand the book beyond its gaming roots.

To start with, Carson treats the characters like real people. He often reminds us that they have real names, not just call signs. He also delves into their inner emotional worlds. Perhaps he spends a bit too much time pairing people up romantically, but having some of that was appreciated, because it was another view into the hearts of these characters. Carson gives attention to not just the main characters of the *Hornet* but also to their allies and foes alike. Again, this was sometimes used to excess, but getting some of it was very nice and helped make Carson's New Era universe a larger place.

The other thing that stands out in Carson's *The Backwards Mask* is its epic scope, something that was largely missing from Paul Brunette's trilogy. Perhaps this was a purposeful choice: Brunette might have been instructed not to bother players with metaplot, while Carson had a much more open sandbox, as *TNE* has been dead for almost 20 years

Whatever the reason, Carson is able to tell a larger story, making his *Backwards Mask* feel more important and more gripping. The stakes are higher not just for the whole Reformation Coalition, but also for the crew of the *Hornet* itself. For a moment near the end, the scale is so big that it looks like Carson is going to lose track of his main characters in the epic story that he has developed ... but just in time he manages to bring them back to center stage in an interesting and believable way.

Overall, Matthew Carson's *The Backwards Mask* feels like it's the trilogy of books that GDW should have released in the '90s.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Most *Traveller: The New Era* fiction has successfully conveyed the idea of New Era adventures, highlighting the tropes and threats of the era. However, Carson's *The Backwards Mask* is one of just two *TNE* novels to go beyond that adventure to reveal the epic stories possible in the New Era. If other books depicted *TNE* adventures, this one reveals a *TNE* campaign. The amazing thing is that Carson manages to tell that story while simultaneously tying it to an individual starship that could have been crewed by PCs in a roleplaying game.

Carson's *The Backwards Mask* of course contains plenty of detail on the New Era. The best (or at least the most unusual) focus shines on the Ithklur, a little-known alien race that received their biggest spotlight in *TNE's Aliens of the Rim, Volume I: Hivers and Ithklur (1995)*. Like Brunette's depictions of the hivers themselves, this Ithklur information could be used in a *Traveller* campaign of any era that involves the Hiver and their favorite client race.

Overall, *The Backwards Mask* will be great for any *Traveller: The New Era* GM, especially for those thinking big.

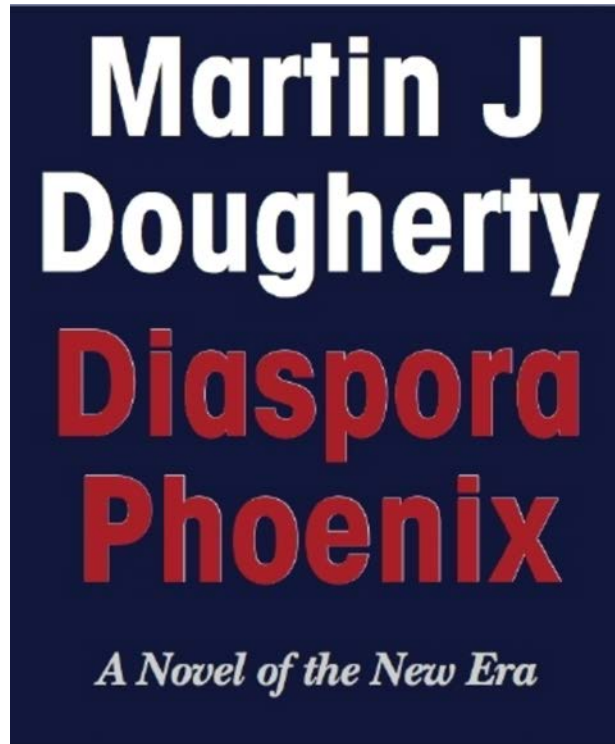
Publication Notes

Before he knew that Paul Brunette had an unpublished finale to the *Traveller: The New Era* trilogy, Marc Miller commissioned another author to finish it. As a result, there are two contradictory ends to the series, each of which was released simultaneously by Far Future Enterprises on March 1, 2011.

This was just Miller's first experiment with *Traveller* fiction. In more recent years he's commissioned a number of Golden Age *Traveller* novels, starting with *Fate of the Kinunir (2013)* and *Shadow of the Storm (2014)*.

Matthew Carson's *The Backwards Mask* is one of the best pieces of original *Traveller* fiction out there. It's a pity it wasn't published in the '90s, as it could have been a better New Era trilogy than the more RPG-influenced one that GDW did publish.

Diaspora Phoenix



Avalon
Games

- *Diaspora Phoenix*, by Martin J. Dougherty
- **Publisher:** QuickLink Interactive (2002, 2004)
- **Style:** ★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★★★
- **Location:** Cuttack/Shadigi (Diaspora 0418), Darryl/Kusgha (Diaspora 1017), Jalhoun/Shadigi (Diaspora 0215), and others
- **Date:** 1202-1203

About the Story

Diaspora Phoenix reads like a roleplaying adventure (or perhaps a campaign) that's made the jump to fiction: a group of five disparate adventurers are trapped on the planet of Darryl, which is descending into warfare. They must get off the planet alive.

From there, the story travels a considerable distance (both many light years and almost two years of time) as the adventurers jump from one crisis to another. They eventually join together with a group of independent ship captains who will form the United Worlds Alliance.

About two-thirds of the way through the novel, the story makes a somewhat abrupt transformation, changing from a story of individual adventurers to a story of politics on the New Era stage — offering a great big-picture view of the era infrequently seen elsewhere.

Genre & Fiction

Obviously, *Diaspora Phoenix* is another piece of *gaming fiction*. If the storyline wasn't pulled straight from Dougherty's *Traveller* campaign, it could have been. As tends to be the case with *Traveller* gaming fiction, this novel is pretty picaresque. It jumps from one place to another, from one adventure to the next. There's some attempt to create a bigger picture of people coming together to form a new society, but that's mainly crammed into the last third of the book (though there's foreshadowing before that).

As gaming fiction, *Diaspora Phoenix* is one of the good 'uns. It's interesting novel that's an enjoyable read. The writing is generally strong, though the book has some blemishes.

First combat is frequent and described in precise (and lengthy) detail — as if Dougherty were describing *Traveller* combat, round by round. This is great at first, because Dougherty's descriptions of fighting are evocative and detailed. However, it pales through repetition; you'll be tired of hearing about every hit and miss by the end.

Second, the characters are somewhat flat, making them hard to differentiate at times — especially since people are constantly coming and going.

Third, the disjunction between the two parts of the book is unsettling: the first two-thirds of *Diaspora Phoenix* need more big-picture focus and the last-third need more attention on the original characters. If this balance had been better, the arc of the story

would have been superb.

Even if *Diaspora Phoenix* isn't perfect, it's a solid *first novel* for Dougherty that's engaging.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Diaspora Phoenix is another great reference for *Traveller: The New Era*. As with many of the *TNE* books, the individual episodes of the novel are a checklist of potential adventures: trying to survive on a pre-spaceflight world; unearthing a lost ship (on the surface of a moon even!); escaping a war zone; infiltrating and sabotaging a religious TED's world; getting badly needed minerals; locating hi-tech equipment; finding survivors that have been cut-off for generations; and fighting against the other political powers of the New Era. If anything, *Diaspora Phoenix* has a bit more breadth in its adventure tropes than many of its brethren.

Dougherty also highlights a variety of interesting threats. One of the setting's big enemies, The Guild, is a big problem in this novel. The Vampires and the Virus also get some attention, where they were largely short-changed in GDW's own *TNE* novels.

Finally, the arc of *Diaspora Phoenix* is quite good. Though the pace of the book is off, the idea of individual adventurers coming together to form a nascent interstellar government is breathtaking. It's exactly the sort of epic storytelling that the New Era allowed, but which GDW never took advantage of because they instead defined two established interstellar states, the Reformation Coalition and the Regency — though Matthew Carson's *The Backwards Mask* (2011) showed that epic stories of a different sort were possible in the Coalition itself.

This points to another interesting aspect of *Diaspora Phoenix*: it's not placed in the traditional setting of the Reformation Coalition, but instead one sector spinward, in the Diaspora Sector. Thus, the Reformation Coalition is actually a potential threat! This expands the New Era setting in a way that no other *TNE* novel did.

The end of *Diaspora Phoenix* promises that sequels will expand the story even more ... so it's a pity they never appeared. Nonetheless, *Diaspora Phoenix* is a great resource for *The New Era*, of interest to any *Traveller* GM for that setting (but especially for those looking for a campaign outside of the Coalition).

Publication Notes

The original manuscript of *Diaspora Phoenix* was submitted to GDW in late 1993 or early 1994. Unfortunately, GDW went out of business by early 1996, and its successor, Imperium Games, focused on a different milieu (and themselves were gone within two years' time).

Enter QuikLink Interactive (QLI), where Hunter Gordon and Martin J. Dougherty gave *Traveller* a new lease on life through *Traveller20* (2002) — built on Wizards of the Coast's d20 system, which was then taking the industry by storm. QLI also published *Diaspora Phoenix*, first as an eBook (2002) then as trade paperback (2004).

Dougherty planned for four more books in the sequence, but never wrote them. They would have been “Phoenix at Bay”, “Phoenix Rising”, “Phoenix in Black”, and “Imperial Phoenix”. They would have told a story with an epic scope, eventually leading to a conflict with the Black Imperium from behind the Curtain.

Dougherty withdrew *Diaspora Phoenix* from QLI when he ceased working for them and focused instead on his own Avenger Enterprises imprint and a new partnership with William Andersen's ComStar Games. Because the trade paperback was a short print run, the novel was almost impossible to get ahold of for several years afterward. Dougherty has since made *Diaspora Phoenix* available as a new PDF (2012) from ComStar's successor, Avalon Games.

Although *Diaspora Phoenix* has numerous creaky bits that suggest an author still learning the fictional craft, it's sufficiently engaging to be a fun read, and it does a superb job of making *Traveller: The New Era* real and concrete.

Tales of the New Era

- ***Tales of the New Era Volume 1: Yesterday's Hero*, by Martin J. Dougherty**
- **Publisher:** ComStar Games (2006)
- **Style:** ★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★
- **Location:** Nicosia/Nicosia (Old Expanses 0138) and others
- **Date:** 1201 to 1215

About the Story

Yesterday's Hero is an episodic novel that reveals the career arc of Captain Lisa "Lander" Davies, RCES. It does so through a series of linked short stories.

- "*Graduation Day*" (1201). A dying starship is rescued by Davies during her graduation flight.
- "*Absent Friends*" (1202). Davies joins a salvager crew searching for a medical database.
- "*Boarding Party*" (1202). RCES Lieutenant Davies and the *Apollo* stumble onto a Vampire.
- "*Under Hostile Skies*" (1203). Davies is stranded on Lebherz after an attack on a city that's unearthed a cache.
- "*Vampire*" (1204). After a salvage mission on Mitchell, the *Apollo* faces a live Vampire.
- "*On the Carpet*" (1205). During a diplomatic mission gone wrong, Davies realizes she has become one of Them.
- "*Decapitation Strike*" (1205). The mission: to bring in the Emperor of Ephraim, an RCES captain gone bad.

- “*Court of Inquiry*” (1208). On Nicosia, Davies saves RCES lives at the cost of her career.
- “*One Vacant Chair*” (1209). Davies returns to Nicosia as a Pathfinder and rediscovers her hope for the future.
- “*Devil’s Advocate*” (1210). When Nicosia yet again rises in rebellion, Davies seeks non-violent solutions.
- “*Every Threadbare Sail*” (1215). Davies takes the *Apollo* out one last time, to protect Nicosia from a Vampire.

Genre & Fiction

Besides being a *linked anthology* of short stories, *Yesterday’s Hero* is also a *memoir* of a lifetime. The stories are sometimes *military science fiction* and sometimes *space opera*. Each of these genres contributes some interesting elements to the novel.

The linking of multiple stories into a larger arc is the most compelling aspect of *Yesterday’s Hero*. Dougherty is successful in depicting Davies’ career, but he unfortunately doesn’t do a good job of depicting similar changes in the larger universe. Both Matthew Carson’s *The Backwards Mask* (2011) and Martin Dougherty’s own *Diaspora Phoenix* (2002) hint at big events in the near future of the New Era, but none of that’s here.

The memoir aspects of *Yesterday’s Hero* are also of note, because they give Davies the opportunity to speak philosophically and analytically about the New Era ... but unfortunately that practice quickly falls away.

As for the military science fiction and the space opera ... they’re fairly unremarkable. The short stories give little room for development or surprise.

Unfortunately, *Yesterday’s Hero* has other flaws too. It generally feels like a less polished work than *Diaspora Phoenix*. Though it has some of the same issues as its predecessor — like occasionally stilted dialogue and almost entirely nondescript characters (other than Davies herself) — it also has an awkwardness that *Diaspora Phoenix* didn’t. That is especially apparent in the repeated, heavy-handed mentions of “absent friends” and how everyone is constantly dying for the good of the Coalition.

Self sacrifice. No one makes it out alive. We get it.

There are occasional nice bits in *Yesterday's Hero*, usually related to individual action scenes that are well depicted and create tension. But, those good moments are too few (and seem even fewer later in the book, when the stories are shorter and more shallow than the early ones).

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Yesterday's Hero covers the same ground as most of the *TNE* books, detailing the Reformation Coalition and its attempts to rebuild the universe. Unfortunately, that puts it into direct competition with several other novels, and both Brunette's and Carson's *TNE* novels tell that story better.

That's in part because *Yesterday's Hero* feels shallow in comparison, never delving very deep into the Reformation Coalition and its connected story elements due to the short length of these stories. Dougherty's interesting (but brief) depiction of the Ithklur is one of the few exceptions — but that largely speaks to the lack of attention that other *TNE* books give the hiver's client race. The Coalition's Pathfinders also get some brief (but unique) attention in one of the later stories.

As with most of the *TNE* books, this one is full of plot tropes that are common to the time period and that could be used as adventure seeds. Different sections show: the investigation of dead worlds; the quest for old technology; the fight against TEDs; and the problems pacifying planets. However, other books do better with these ideas.

Publication Notes

When Dougherty submitted the novel that would become *Diaspora Phoenix* to GDW in late 1993 or early 1994, he also sent them a short story called "Absent Friends". They accepted it, but never found a place to publish it before their demise in early 1996.

Dougherty wrote additional short stories for the QuickLink Interactive site when working with them in the early '00s, but afterward lost track of them. He recovered them a few years later while working with ComStar Games, which resulted in their publication as a PDF (2006).

After Mongoose picked up the *Traveller* license, all of ComStar's *Traveller* books

disappeared, but Dougherty has since republished *Yesterday's Hero*, again as a PDF (2012), through ComStar's successor, Avalon Games.

Yesterday's Hero largely returns to the same topics that are better covered in Paul Brunette's *TNE* trilogy and Matt Carson's *TNE* megabook. Though the format is intriguing, it's probably what makes this episodic novel somewhat shallow.

Additional Reading

In coordination with Marc Miller, Martin Dougherty extended the future history of *Traveller: The New Era* a generation and a half into the future, where he created a new, slightly more settled universe. Dougherty's *TNE* novels were both headed in the direction of this New New Era, which he detailed in ComStar's four *Traveller 1248* sourcebooks.

Traveller 1248 Sourcebook 1: Out of the Darkness
(2006)

Traveller 1248 Sourcebook 2: Bearers of the Flame
(2006)

Traveller 1248 Sourcebook 3: The Spinward States
(2008)

Traveller 1248 Sourcebook 4: The Freedom League
(2008)

The first two books were published in print editions and so can be found for (slightly ruinous) prices online. The last two books were PDF-only and are no longer available for sale.

A Long Way Home

- *A Long Way Home*, by Terry McInnes
- **Publisher:** ComStar Games (2007)
- **Style:** ★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★★★
- **Location:** Fisher's World/Shenk (Old Expanses 1229), Corig/Sarid (Old Expanses 1331), Helios/Sarid (Old Expanses 1234), Oriflamme/Sarid (Old Expanses 1235), Aubaine/Aubaine (Old Expanses 0738), Nike Nimbus/Aubaine (Old Expanses 0732), So Skire/So Skire (Old Expanses 1732), Tequila/Shenk (Old Expanses 1328), Wallach/Shenk (Old Expanses 1227), Slandor/Shenk (Old Expanses 1126), and beyond.
- **Date:** The New Era (1200s)

About the Story

A Long Way Home is the story of Sean McKinnie, a farmer in the Wilds who suddenly stumbles into the world of the RCES when he saves one of their operatives from death at the hands of the local tyrannical TED.

To avoid death himself, Sean is forced to flee his home with the RCES. Among the stars he will find a new career, new goals, and new love. In the end, he will return home, to help his home country escape from the oppression that it currently lives under.

Then he'll go and fight some Virus ships and 'bots too, because that's what people do in the New Era.

Spread throughout this is a story of romance, as Sean woos, loses, and regains that aforementioned "new love" found out amidst the stars.

Genre & Fiction

A Long Way Home is yet another New Era piece of *gaming fiction* — the picaresque story of a group of characters as they wander somewhat randomly from place to place and encounter danger and problems. Unfortunately, it also shows how weak the genre of gaming fiction can be when used in inexperienced hands.

The biggest problem with *A Long Way Home* is that it's dull, and that's because it's a meandering mess of a picaresque novel gone wrong. McKinnie bounces from situation to situation with little rhyme and no particular reason. He's rescued from home, then he's off at boot camp, then he's taking out a TED, then he's helping to take his home back, then he's fighting vampires. Perhaps it might have read better as a weekly cliffhanging serial, but that's not how it's presented.

Two problems make this style of story worse.

First, the author's attempts to create tension are clumsy. Things just go wrong again and again. A clamp breaks in space, sending McKinnie flying off into space. A guard spots McKinnie and his Moonshadow crew as they sneak around. Slavers capture McKinnie's family just days before he returns home. Either McKinnie is the unluckiest guy in the world or else his RCES crewmates are entirely incompetent.

Second, the author has no filter. He's unable to differentiate between what's important and what's not. Thus, at one point in the 224-page novel he dedicates an entire page to putting on a vacc suit. That's far from the only time that my eyes glazed over at stuff that wasn't important that was nonetheless described in excruciating detail.

The other major flaw with the book is the romance, which is so clichéd that it should have been in a bad romance novel. (“Don't say goodbye! NEVER say goodbye!”) It's saccharine and unbelievable, detracting from what the interest that the novel otherwise offers.

Generally, *A Long Way Home* is plot-free, heavy on coincidence, and lacking in depth. It only has two saving graces. The first is the tight writing in some tactical scenes. The battle scenes in particular have some grit and excitement to them. The second is extensive detailing of the New Era.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Most of the *TNE* novels starts with a member of the RCES going out to the stars. *A*

Long Way Home is the only publication to date that takes the opposite stance. By telling the story of a Wildser, taken into the RCES, we're given another possible entryway for *Traveller: The New Era* games.

This also gives McInnes the opportunity to wander through the Reformation Coalition on a voyage of discovery. Where previous novels tended to start on Aubaine and head outward, *A Long Way Home* instead visits several planets of the Coalition, including Aubaine, Helios, Nike Nimbus, and Oriflamme — offering GMs insights into all those planets (and their peoples).

A Long Way Home also contains good detail on some of the other political powers of the New Era — particularly the Empire of Solee, the heart of an overly long digression at one point. Finally, you encounter a lot of the adventure tropes that you'd expect, like ruins, vampires, and TEDs. It's a nice overview of the New Era that feels like it offers both better overview and more detail than Paul Brunette's classic books.

Whether it's worth trudging through the book to get to those details is another question.

Publication Notes

A Long Way Home was originally serialized in *Traveller Chronicle* #11 (October 1996) through *Traveller Chronicle* #13 (1997), which covered up through chapter 16 of the 34-chapter novel. Years later ComStar Games published a complete edition of *A Long Way Home* (2007) as a PDF. Chaosium more recently reprinted the novel as a trade paperback called *A Long Way Home: Tales of Congressional Space* (2012), which strips out all the *Traveller* references.

Traveller fans will be interested in the *Traveller* version of the book, but that's unfortunately permanently unavailable since it was only printed as a PDF. However, the three issues of *Traveller Chronicle* are now available online from Far Future Enterprises.

A Long Way Home is a piece of gaming fiction that shows off the worst excesses of the form. It's rambling, without focus, and sometimes poorly written. But there's some sweet *TNE* setting material if you're willing to dig for it.

Additional Reading

McInnes freelanced for *Traveller* throughout its many editions. His earliest article was “Medical Treatment for *Traveller*” in *JTAS #11* (1981), a magazine that he wrote for extensively. He also authored *Traveller* articles in *Challenge*, *Different Worlds*, and *The Traveller’s Digest*. In the later years of *Traveller*, McInnes worked on three major supplements:

- *COACC: Close Orbit and Airspace Control Center* (1989)
- *The MegaTraveller Alien Volume 1: Vilani and Vargr* (1990)
- *World Tamer’s Handbook* (1994)

COACC was solely McInnes’ work, while he was one of multiple contributors to the others.

The Third Imperium, 1998-Present

When the metaplot of *Traveller* (1977) first began to roll forward in the *Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society* (1979-1985), the clock began on 183-1105, the 183rd day of the 1105th year of the Third Imperium. What followed is now known as the “Golden Age”, the most beloved of all *Traveller* eras. Other than a skirmish in the Spinward Marches called the Fifth Frontier War, it was a time of stability — when GMs could run their stories without worrying about the changing universe.

Because of the era’s popularity, both *GURPS Traveller* (1998) and Mongoose *Traveller* (2008) continued it in their own ways, while smaller *Traveller* publishers also supported it in the interim following the death of *T4* (1996). It’s the most recognizable face of *Traveller*’s setting, with decades of investment ... and so it’s somewhat remarkable that there was no Golden Age fiction until the 21st century, and that even today all of the mass-market *Traveller* fiction releases have been set in other eras.

Golden Age *Traveller* fiction finally began to trickle out in 2001, and in more recent years Far Future Enterprises has begun to produce ebooks set in the popular time period. Two *Traveller* novels are set even earlier in the Third Imperium’s history: one in the years of its founding and one in the years in between.

Both the Golden Age *Traveller* fiction and these earlier stories are gathered here — primarily because neither the Milieu 0 fiction nor the Golden Age fiction would be enough for a section on its own. May that change in the years to come!

1. Force of Destiny, Dale L. Kemper, 2001
2. Gateway to the Stars, Pierce Askegren, 1998
3. Fate of the Kinunir, Robert E. Vardeman, 2013
4. Shadow of the Storm, Martin J. Dougherty, 2014
5. Agent of the Imperium, Marc Miller, 2015

The Force of Destiny

- *Force of Destiny*, by Dale L. Kemper
- **Publisher:** Cargonaut Press (2001)
- **Style:** ★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★
- **Location:** Phais Eisert/Inverness (FASA Far Frontiers 3123)
- **Date:** 1100s?

About the Story

Force of Destiny is the story of a state at war. The Protectorate, the largest pro-Imperial state in the Far Frontiers sector, has fallen into a civil conflict, with loyalists fighting against the Tellamatrixians.

However, *Force of Destiny* is a very small story set against that large backdrop. It's the story of the couriercraft *Speedy* and the priority message that she carries of a massive Tellamatrixian fleet on the move. It's the story of *Destiny*, the ship forced by bad luck to stay and face the oncoming fleet, the ship that may be *Speedy*'s only hope. And lastly it's the story of the people on these two ships — and those of their enemies.

In *Force of Destiny* we never really come to understand the civil war, nor even who the forces fighting it are. Though the events of the novel could affect the overall conflict, we will never know if they did. Instead we get only the desperate tale of the hours or days in which two Protectorate ships face a fleet of enemies that vastly outnumbers them.

Genre & Style

This was probably Dale Kemper's *first novel*, and it shows in the characterization, which is weak and clichéd. For example, the first mate that is in love with the captain seems unduly smitten and the admiral of the opposing fleet seems maniacally evil. Kemper deepens these clichés by demonstrating the clichéd emotions with clichéd

actions. One character wants to bash his head against a desk in frustration and another closes their eyes to “avoid screaming”. Though these characterization flaws were distracting, they weren’t constant enough to really harm the reading experience.

The book is also naval *military science fiction*, a genre that requires exciting and evocative space battles, and here Kemper delivers. Not only do his missiles and lasers seem realistic, but Kemper also shows the real (and terrible) effects of war in a way that few writers are comfortable doing. I think the highs of Kemper’s space battles more than offset the lows of his character clichés.

The result isn’t bad as a first effort, so it’s a pity that Kemper didn’t write more — though it’s understandable, given it took him over a decade to find a publisher for this one!

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

In the early ‘80s, FASA was one of the more notable *Traveller* licensees. Among their most famous releases are six beige-colored adventure modules (1981-1982), set spinward of the Third Imperium in the Far Frontiers sector. Most of FASA’s adventures — including the Keith brothers’ famous Sky Raiders trilogy (1981-1982) — are set in the Jungleblut subsector. However, *Rescue on Galatea* (1982) instead lies in Inverness, the same subsector as *Force of Destiny*.

An overview of the Far Frontiers sector was scheduled to appear in FASA’s *Far Traveller* #3 (July 1983), co-edited by none other than Dale L. Kemper, but FASA never published the issue. Instead FASA’s Far Frontiers got its last hurrah in *Ares Magazine Special Edition* #2 (1984), which detailed the rimward half of the sector in Dale L. Kemper’s “The Far Frontiers”. *Force of Destiny* is set in this exact same area — in fact the Phais Eisert system appears in the maps in *Ares Magazine Special Edition* #2.

Knowing how *Force of Destiny* fits into *Traveller*’s geography, we can ask, “What does it offer to a *Traveller* GM?” Unfortunately, the answer is, “Not a lot.” That’s in part because the Far Frontiers sector is out in the middle of nowhere. Unless you’re running those old FASA adventures, you probably don’t care — though the Sky Raiders adventures are classics, so you *should* be running them.

But, beyond that, Kemper doesn’t detail the setting in his novel. That’s a

purposeful storytelling decision that allows Kemper to tell one small story amidst many others in this time of war. However, as a *Traveller* GM it disappoints me; I *know* there are pro-Zhodani states and pro-Imperial states in the area, but if the civil war of the Protectorate has anything to do with that, we never learn it. The area also contains ancient mysteries like that of the Sky Raiders. There are *lots* of stories that *could* be told in this area of space, that might be of interest to GMs in the Imperium proper, but Kemper choose not to tell them. Still, the idea of a civil war in the Protectorate could be a fun story seed ...

The Far Frontiers sector later made reappearance in *The Traveller Chronicle #2-9* (1993-1995), which expanded Kemper's descriptions, partially based on material that *Ares* hadn't published. So, if a *Traveller* GM wanted, he could use this novel as part of a considerable stream of creativity that runs from the '80s and '90s — though the exact canonicity of any of it in the Official *Traveller* Universe is unknown.

Though the *Traveller* setting of *Force of Destiny* is weak, its *Traveller* science is better. The book kicks off with the *Destiny* fuel-scooping a gas giant to refuel, and in fact the whole book is about the necessity of fleets refueling at gas giants. It's a pretty small detail, but *Force of Destiny* shows how small details can be critical in *Traveller* stories.

The one bit of science that confuses me in *Force of Destiny* is the constant reference to a "shift point" — as if *Traveller* ships could only leap into jumpspace at certain points, rather than whenever they're far enough away from gravity wells. Maybe the Far Frontiers sector has different jump technology, different customs, or maybe they just speak more about points than distance.

Force of Destiny also does a good job of depicting the culture of the *Traveller* universe with its focus on military units. Their importance and how they work could be incorporated straight into *Traveller* gameplay.

Does that all make *Force of Destiny* of more interest to *Traveller* GMs? Maybe. Though it's nice to (finally) have a novel set in the classic era of the *Traveller* universe, and though it's nice to shine a light on one of the great Land Grant sectors given out to third-party publishers, *Force of Destiny* doesn't really add a lot to that background. Instead, much like the non-canon Concordat books, its use is largely in its description of a *Traveller*-like universe ... and the story ideas that might generate.

Publication Notes

Force of Destiny was arguably the first-ever *Traveller* novel. If FASA hadn't picked up the *Star Trek* license in 1982, they probably would have continued to publish Far Frontiers material (beginning with that unpublished *Far Traveller #3*), and they probably would have eventually published Dale L. Kemper's Far Frontiers novel, which was written later in the '80s. But by then they'd moved on. Kemper also talked to GDW about publishing *Force of Destiny*, but that never occurred.

Any publication in the late '80s or early '90s would have predated any of the official *Traveller* publication, but instead *Force of Destiny* sat around for a decade and a half. It was eventually picked up by Cargonaut Press (2001), but they never paid Kemper the author's copies that would have been his sole payment, leaving the legality of that edition in question.

A second edition of *Force of Destiny* (2003) was published a couple of years later by Hamster Press. It's a pretty horrible edition, with bad binding, terrible typography, and very bad editing. They clearly did send Kemper his author copies, because he occasionally offered them for sale on eBay in later years.

Marc Miller's Far Future Enterprises rereleased *Force of Destiny* as an ebook edition (2006) that appears to be much cleaner than the Hamster Press edition.

Force of Destiny is a fair book with a good basis in the science of the *Traveller* universe. Some of the characterization is rough, but if you're looking for evocative and interesting ways to describe space battles — or if you want to think more about the problems of refueling at gas giants — this is a good source.

Additional Reading

The best supplements for the Far Frontiers section re *Ares Magazine Special Edition #2* (1984) and *Traveller Chronicle #2-9* (1993-1995). Various subsectors are given descriptions in those two sources. However, the Far Frontiers also appears in a series of adventures from FASA — their six classic beige adventures and one of the adventures in a later double adventure:

- *Fate of the Sky Raiders* (1982)

- *The Legend of the Sky Raiders* (1981)
- *Ordeal by Eshaar* (1981)
- *Rescue on Galatea* (1982)
- *The Stazhiekh Report* (1983) [with *The Harrensa Project*]
- *The Trail of the Sky Raiders* (1982)
- *Uragyad'n of the Seven Pillars* (1981)

Gateway To The Stars

- ***Gateway to the Stars*, by Pierce Askegren**
- **Publisher:** Pocket Books (1998)
- **Style:** ★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** (no stars!)
- **Location:** “Farworld”, “Draen”, “Plimbo”, “Carstairs”
- **Date:** Milieu 0

About the Story

Gateway to the Stars is the story of one man, Navis Redling, as he flies his trading ship through the backwaters of the Third Imperium. Except that Navis Redling’s not his real name, but rather one that he’s bought. And, trading isn’t really his goal; instead, he’s trying to smuggle a cache of priceless Droyne artifacts.

And, the problems don’t stop there. A member of the well-known Guy-Troy race —and the founder of the biggest megacorp in the whole Imperium, the Kaal Corp — has taken passage on Redling’s ship for reasons of his own. Meanwhile, his engineer might not be what she seems as all.

If you think Redling’s ship is going to make it to its destination without drunken K’kree, an assassin Aslan, political kidnappers, and sly pirates getting in his way ... then you probably haven’t read the book, because all of that indeed happens.

Gateway to the Stars never actually finishes its main plot. Instead, it ends with a “to be continued”. Which may be just as well ...

Genre & Style

Gateway to the Stars falls into the genre of publishing that I call *licensed books*. This typically means that a gun-for-hire is brought on board to write a book in a specific setting. I find that the results tend to be more polished but less accurate than writing done

by people more familiar with the setting. Unfortunately *Gateway to the Stars* is a lot less accurate, which means that it ends up being largely inapplicable to the *Traveller* game.

Despite being a professional author, Askegren decided to write *gaming fiction*. As with so many *Traveller* novels, the plot is entirely picaresque. We have our roguish hero going on a journey. There's a bit of continuing tension due to the mysteries surrounding certain peoples on the ship, but almost all of the actual adventure is centered on the troubles that the crew of the *Gateway* gets into on each planet.

Like most gaming fiction, *Gateway to the Stars* has pretty flat characters — usually characterized by just one or two simple characteristics each: the captain is confident and skilled; the navigator is an inveterate gambler; and the gunner is stoic. I couldn't even tell you what the Guy-Troy and the engineer are like, simply what they do.

That's not to say that the writing of the book is bad. Askegren does a good job of keeping things moving. His one extended action sequence, involving a fight against kidnappers, is quite engaging. Unlike a lot of gaming fiction that I've read, this one remains interesting rather than bogging down.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Sadly, *Gateway to the Stars* is worse than useless for GMs of *Traveller*. Though it maintains the facade of a *Traveller* story, it gets the feel and the specifics so wrong that it's more likely to damage your understanding of the *Traveller* universe than improve it.

Start with the setting. It *should* be the Milieu 0 era. That was the setting that publisher Imperium Games was pushing in its *T4* line (1996-1997) and it's presumably the setting that benefactor Sweetpea Entertainment was hoping to use as the basis of a television show. It's even hinted at in Prologue, which tells of a new Third Imperium, born of the long night.

Unfortunately, the main text doesn't match up with a Milieu 0 setting — or a Third Imperium setting at all. The Imperium feels too mature to be newly created. It's also controlled by an entirely bizarre mechanism: the “Core Worlds” are a powerful political faction whose “Core Worlds Ruling Council” controls the Imperium. Individual worlds are run by “Colonial Governors”. That's right: no Barons, no Emperor, no Moot. No loosely connected polity of worlds with the Imperium largely being the government

between the stars. Even the worlds of this book — “Farworld”, “Draen”, “Plimbo”, and “Carstairs” — are otherwise unknown.

The book is also littered with errors and glitches that make it impossible as a piece of *Traveller* fiction. Rather than listing piles of specifics, I’ll instead offer up the three biggest groaners from the book:

1. The Droyne are depicted as a long-dead race of sophonts. Traders apparently race around the Imperium looking for their artifacts — which seem quite common as we more than once hear about ship holds full of them.
2. The Guy-Troy are treated like a major race that everyone in the Imperium would recognize on sight. In truth, they have to be pretty darned minor because *T4’s Aliens Archive* (1996) is the only source that discusses them.
3. Based on the point-of-view of one character (who might be crazy or something, though the book doesn’t suggest it), the Third Imperium is an entirely racist empire of human supremacists who not only think they can kick the butt of every other sophont in the galaxy but even have a secret police organization especially tasked with keeping all of those other races down.

I can’t really excuse such shoddy work on the part of a professional licensed writer, but even worse is that Imperium Games let it go through. (Thus, *Gateway to the Stars* is the only *Traveller* novel that I refused to rate with *Traveller* substance.)

Publication Notes

Gateway to the Stars was arguably the first-ever *Traveller* novel. Well, it’s only arguable because it says “The First *Traveller* novel” on the cover. It’s clearly not. Even if you don’t include the Concordat novels or then-unpublished *Force of Destiny* (2001), GDW *definitely* published two *New Era* novels (1995) during their waning days.

Gateway to the Stars was probably intended to be part of the multimedia push that Sweetpea Entertainment dreamt of when they started funding Imperium Games and *T4*. Ironically, by the time it hit bookstores, in 1998, Imperium Games had already stopped

publishing games. *Gateway to the Stars* has never been reprinted (which is probably for the best), but it's easy to find as a used book.

Don't read this book. You'll just corrupt your understanding of the *Traveller* universe. Though I've found other *Traveller* books harder to read and/or enjoy, this is nonetheless the worst *Traveller* novel in existence.

Additional Reading

Imperium Games published about 20 books for their *T4* line. Most of them were either crunchy rulebooks or adventures, but a few of them contain good background material for the Milieu 0 setting that's theoretically depicted in this novel:

- *Aliens Archive* (1996)
- *Milieu 0* (1996)
- *Psionic Institutes* (1997)

The Milieu 0 adventures might also be of interest:

- *Anomalies* anthology (1997)
- *Missions of State* anthology (1997)
- *Adventure One: Long Way Home* (1997)
- *Adventure Two: Gateway!* (1997)
- *Adventure Three: Annilik Run* (1997)

Fate of the Kinunir

Robert E. Vardeman



*Fate of the
Kinunir*

TRAVELLER

*Science-Fiction Adventure
in the Far Future*

Far Future Enterprises

- *Fate of the Kinunir*, by Robert E. Vardeman
- **Publisher:** Far Future Enterprises (2013)
- **Style:** ★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★★★
- **Location:** Keng/Regina (Spinward Marches 2405)
- **Date:** 1088

About the Story

The *Kinunir* is doomed. Any player of the classic *Traveller* game knows that. This is the story of how the ship and its crew meet their fate. It's the story of Captain Rikart Telson, XO Commander Laurel Franks, and Marine Captain Lefalle — each of who bring their own strengths to the *Kinunir*.

A variety of problems will beset the fated ship. Pirates, a stranded marquis, illegal mining, and interplanetary fighting each contribute to the end. But most importantly, there's a malfunctioning AI. *Daisy, daisy* indeed.

The fate of the *Kininur* is known. But how its downfall occurred is a totally different story. In fact, it's this story.

Genre & Style

Fate of the Kinunir is technically *licensed fiction* as the author is a professional writer who's also worked on properties such as *Star Trek* and *Tom Swift*, but his work for the *Traveller* setting has enough verisimilitude that you wouldn't notice. It's technically *military science-fiction*, but Vardeman puts just as much emphasis on mystery, espionage, and politics. It reads a bit like *gaming fiction*, but Vardeman doesn't cleave to the tropes you'd expect of a gaming session; most notably, he regular splits up the party! So maybe *Fate of the Kinunir* is simply an example of *Traveller fiction* — albeit, with a heavy focus on the military side of things.

Fate of the Kinunir could also have been a tragedy; that it's not might be its greatest flaw. Though readers might already know the fate of the *Kinunir*, it's not explicitly foreshadowed in the text, and an opportunity for tension is lost. Instead, the

Kinunir heads off into what seems like a normal mission. There's nothing ominous about it at all.

From that normal start, problems snowball, but there's no sense of gathering drama — no portents that things are spinning out of control and heading toward doom. Instead *Fate of the Kinunir* combines three major plots that seem somewhat improbable when all mooshed together: a humongous pirate base, a rebel base for a somewhat distant conflict, and that malfunctioning AI. Perhaps the idea is that only an unlikely confluence of events could bring down a Kinunir-class starship ... but when the protagonists don't recognize the danger of their multiplying problems, it doesn't seem notable to the reader either. When *Fate of the Kinunir* reaches its climax, it seems both sudden and insufficiently final.

Beyond that, the story is OK. The three main characters get some characterization, but everyone else (including the villains) is a cardboard cutout. At times, the interactions on the ship are too *Star Trek*-like, perhaps due to the writer's broader experience, but Vardeman is able to overcome that when he steps outside the *Kinunir*.

As a whole, *Fate of the Kinunir* feels like it's just connecting the dots — from the appearance of the *Kinunir* in the Keng system to its final fate. That's a pity, as this could have been a great story if it was presented somewhat differently.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

In 1979, GDW presented the debut adventure for their *Traveller* RPG: *Adventure 1: The Kinunir* (1979). It offered a first look at what *Traveller* adventures could be like, and it was remarkably open-ended. The adventure focused on the deck plans of the Kinunir-class battle cruiser, but it also offered a number of different “situations” for using those plans. Players might break into a ship on the scrap heap or be imprisoned in a Kinunir-class ship. They might need to fight past a Kinunir ... or they might search for a Kinunir-class ship lost over a decade before.

That last adventure seed forms the basis of *Fate of the Kinunir*. It tells the story of a ship lost in the Shinothy asteroid belt — the eponymous *Kinunir* that *Adventure 1* reveals was lost in 1088. And that's the very shallow bit of *Traveller* lore that this novel is based on. It's not really one of the “Imperium's Greatest Mysteries”, but it's a nice connection

to the *Traveller* RPG, and it allows this whole novel to act as deep background that could be used to expand and detail the original *Traveller* adventure.

Fate of the Kinunir is also set rather firmly in the Regina subsector of the Spinward Marches. It mostly takes place around Keng, the planet next to the Shinothy asteroid belt; it offers considerable detail on that world and its system. However, *Fate of the Kinunir* also contains references to other planets in the subsector, including Boughene and Kinorb.

Any GM running an adventure in Regina would be thrilled with all these details — not just because they help to fill in the blank spaces of the Regina subsector, but also because the details are full of plot hooks. The piracy, illegal mining, rebellion, and interplanetary warfare could be used to expand *Adventure 1* into an entire campaign set in the area.

Besides providing descriptions and story seeds for the Regina subsector, *Fate of the Kinunir* also details the culture of the Third Imperium. For example, its portrayal of the interactions between navy and marine officers on a naval vessel is quite interesting (and another detail from *Adventure 1*). *Fate of the Kinunir* similarly does a great job of showing the sorts of conflicts that rise up between individual planets of the Imperium.

There are minor problems with the depiction of the Third Imperium in *Fate of the Kinunir*. It uses the word dreadnought to depict what must be a much smaller ship and it confuses some closely related terms such as nobility and royalty, red zone and amber zone. But almost all of these missteps are throwaway lines. When *Fate of the Kinunir* looks at the Third Imperium in depth, it feels like it gets things right.

Fate of the Kinunir reveals the backstory of a classic *Traveller* adventure and wraps it up with nice story seeds and nice cultural details. The result is the first novel to offer a really great look at the classic *Traveller* universe.

Publication Notes

In the wake of the successful kickstarting and publication of *Traveller5* (2013), Marc Miller began commissioning a series of *Traveller* novels. The first of these was *Fate of the Kinunir* (2013), which appeared in ebook form in December 2013. At the time, a dozen books were planned over the course of the next year, but by the end of

2015, just one more had appeared, *Shadow of the Storm* (2014) by Martin J. Dougherty. *Fate of the Kinunir* has also appeared as a very limited print edition, sized and formatted like the little black books of *Traveller's* youth.

Though *Fate of the Kinunir* is definitely not the first-ever *Traveller* novel, it is the first-ever novel to offer a deep depiction of Golden Age era of *Traveller* play. If this is the direction that FFE is going with its *Traveller* fiction, we can only hope for more.

Though *Fate of the Kinunir* is a bit lack-luster in its depiction of a doomed Imperial ship, it does a great job of presenting the deep and rich background of the Spinward Marches in the Imperium. This novel could be mined for numerous adventure seeds, and in my opinion, that's one of the main purposes of good RPG-related fiction.

Shadow of the Storm

Shadow of the Storm

A Story of the Solomani Rim



Martin J. Dougherty



- ***Shadow of the Storm*, by Martin J. Dougherty**
- **Publisher:** Far Future Enterprises (2014)
- **Style:** ★★★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★★★
- **Location:** Barsoom/Jardin (Solomani Rim 0239), Chinon/Jardin (0536), Dolor/Jardin (0437), Zhongguo/Jardin (0438), et al.
- **Date:** 1108

About the Story

The *Stormshadow* is a new Solomani Confederation ship, captained by the disgraced Lieutenant Simon Crowe. Unfortunately, what was intended to be a series of trials for the *Stormshadow* suddenly turns into a six-jump patrol — and what should have been a simple patrol uncovers a conspiracy that might burn down the entire Solomani Rim.

Infantry assaults, political espionage, and naval battles are all part of a larger pattern that will write the future history of the Confederation ... with the ill-equipped *Stormshadow* right at the center of them.

Genre & Style

Shadow of the Storm is naval *military science fiction*. Over time, it's been one of the most popular genres for *Traveller* science fiction, which has generally been about military men commanding ships in space. It's also not a surprising genre for Martin J. Dougherty, who is a professional military history writer.

As a result, the military elements of *Shadow of the Storm* are also strong. Dougherty depicts a believable military structure and a believable captain — one who has issues with following orders without being an (unbelievable) James T. Kirk. Dougherty also shines in his depiction of military conflicts. There's a bit of infantry warfare, but most of the conflict in *Shadow of the Storm* focuses on battles between ships, and these are *delightfully* detailed in a way that's both exciting and personal — particularly the book's climatic battle.

A lot of military science fiction (and a lot of roleplaying fiction) stints on the other aspects of the book, but that's fortunately not the case here. *Shadow of the Storm* is Dougherty's third *Traveller* novel, following two *New Era* offerings: *Diaspora Phoenix* (2002) and *Yesterday's Hero* (2006). That experience shows, because *Shadow of the Storm* is a well-polished book with several well-detailed and lifelike characters.

If *Shadow of the Storm* has a problem, it's one that's been unfortunately frequent among *Traveller* stories: the novel starts out feeling too small. Much like *Fate of the Kinunir* (2013), the first of the recent *Traveller* novels, *Shadow of the Storm* begins as a standard patrol with no stakes and too little tension. This picaresque patrol has some interesting points, but it takes too long to come together — which is a pity, as *Shadow of the Storm* is an important book with serious repercussions.

You'll probably forget the meandering beginning by the time you hit the exciting end, however; Dougherty has written one of the stronger *Traveller* novels to date.

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Shadow of the Storm is the first *Traveller* novel set in the Solomani Rim, the *other* great setting of the Third Imperium (after the Spinward Marches). In some ways, it's the better of the two settings, because it has a strong plotline underlying it — of an Earth crushed by the Third Imperium that's trying to win back its independence. It's delightful to finally see that strong story depicted in the fictional medium.

Unfortunately, *Shadow of the Storm* doesn't do a very good job of setting up the backstory of the Rim. The conflict between the Solomani Confederation and the Third Imperium is alluded to, not spelled out. As a result, it's a bit puzzling figuring out how the conflicts of this novel fit into the larger history of the Solomani Rim. A true fan of *Traveller* might put together this puzzle, but a casual reader will have problems.

With that said, *Shadow of the Storm* excels in its look at the internal workings of the Confederation. Its depiction of a military ship split between naval and SolSec command is superb, as is the whole feeling of paranoia and disunity that underlies the Confederation. If you want to run a campaign in the Rim, this novel is a must-read, because it'll give you a better insight into the Confederation than anything else to date.

I'm also intrigued with the historic events being depicted in this novel, which come

to a head but not a conclusion as the novel ends. They suggest a major revolt in Solomani space under the auspices of a “Sirius Rising” group, which is more great background for a *Traveller* game.

Hopefully Dougherty will continue on with what happens next ...

Publication Notes

This was the second novel commissioned by Marc Miller following the success of the *Traveller5* (2013) kickstarter.

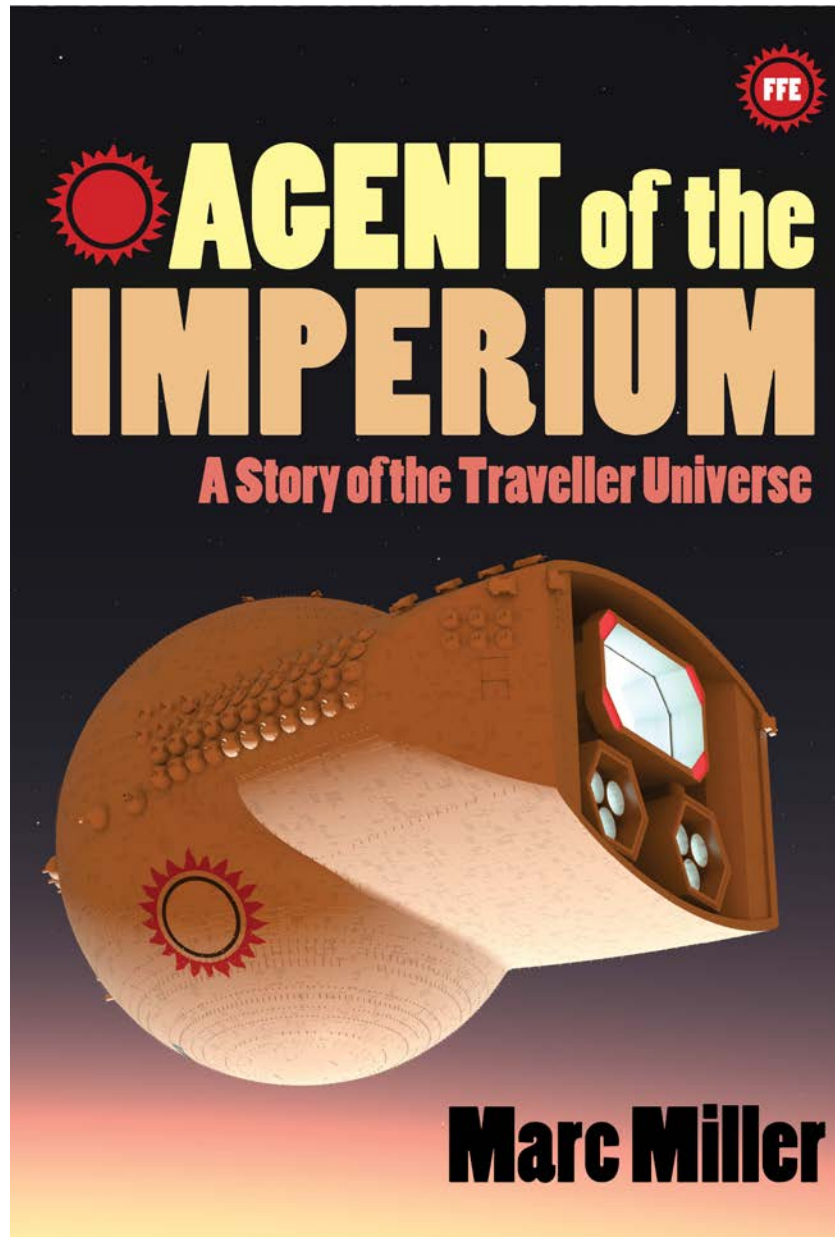
Shadow of the Storm is a well-written novel that nicely depicts the Solomani Confederation, its services, and its politics. Though you may need some *Traveller* knowledge to understand everything, once you’ve got that bootstrap, it’s a great reference for *Traveller* play.

Additional Reading

The Solomani Rim has been extensively detailed in almost every era of *Traveller* play. Some of the best gaming references are:

- *Traveller Supplement 10: The Solomani Rim* (GDW, 1982)
- *Traveller Alien Module 6: Solomani* (GDW, 1986)
- *The Travellers’ Digest #13: Earth!* (DGP, 1988)
- *The MegaTraveller Alien Volume 2: Solomani & Aslan* (GDP, 1991)
- *The Traveller Chronicle #10-11: Children of Earth* (Sword of the Knight, 1996)
- *GURPS Traveller: Rim of Fire* (Steve Jackson Games, 2000)
- *Alien Module 5: Solomani* (Mongoose Publishing, 2012)

Agent of the Imperium



- *Agent of the Imperium*, by Marc Miller
- **Publisher:** Far Future Enterprises (2015)

- Style: ★★★★★
- **Traveller** Substance: ★★★★★
- **Location:** Throughout the Imperium, but especially the Core Sector
- **Date:** Years 336 to 736

About the Story

Jonathan Bland is a dead man, but he lives on in a technological wafer that allows him to exist again for 30 days at a time as an Agent of the Imperium. When called upon, he continues the work of the Imperial Quarantine Agency — which as often as not requires the *scrubbing* of dangerous planets.

Jonathan Bland is a dead man, but that doesn't mean he's stopped learning. In fact, *Agent of the Imperium* is all about what he learns as he goes about his job over the centuries, and how he grows, evolves, and changes as a result.

The threats of *Agent of the Imperium* include rogue robots, virulent diseases, and psionic infections, but at its core it's a journey into the heart of a man who lives the most unusual life imaginable.

Genre & Style

Agent of the Imperium is unabashedly a *space opera*. Though Bland is usually dealing with local problems, they span the length and width of the Imperium. They also span hundreds of years — and include problems that the Imperium won't encounter for centuries.

In addition, *Agent of the Imperium* is a *troubleshooter* novel, much like the Retief series (1967+) that Miller has listed as an influence on *Traveller*. Here, you can see the connection; where Keith Laumer wrote silly tales of a diplomatic troubleshooter, Miller instead offers the serious and sometimes grim tales of a quarantine troubleshooter in the Official *Traveller* Universe.

Finally, *Agent of the Imperium* is a *first novel* ... but it doesn't really show. The writing is polished and the overall structure of the novel is innovative. The novel is also constantly interesting, and that's largely due to a great choice of premise. By using the

idea of a wafered troubleshooter as the basis of his novel, Miller is able to follow one of the core precepts of good writing. He starts each section deep into the story and then gets out early. What we're left with is the "good stuff".

However the heart of *Agent of the Imperium* is its superb characterization. Miller adeptly shows us the tensions within Bland's heart as he scrubs worlds; he doesn't tell us of Bland's regrets and he doesn't have Bland orate about them. Instead, he shows us how Bland reacts differently over time, and how he goes to surprising extremes to correct his mistakes. It's a rather brilliant character study (and rather stunning for a first novel).

Agent of the Imperium isn't without its flaws. Transitions to other viewpoint characters are sometimes confusing (especially when they remain in the first person). The chronology is also occasionally confusing, as it's not entirely in order. There's a good reason for this: Bland himself may learn things out of order as his wafers resynchronize across the Imperium. Still, if you're as obsessive about understanding how things fit together as I am, you'll occasionally be knocked out of the story. Finally, some of the plot threads about Bland's evolution feel unfinished — particularly a long string of chapters about a single offshoot of the Bland collective. Perhaps that just means a sequel is in order, but a bit more closure for this subplot would have been nice.

Despite these nitpicks, *Agent of the Imperium* is a strong competitor for being the best *Traveller* novel to date. (It's my personal favorite.)

Applicability to Traveller Gameplay

Agent of the Imperium continues the strong trend of recent FFE novels: it offers a deep depiction of the *Traveller* universe. In fact, it's the novel that's done the best job to date of providing a broad view of the Official *Traveller* Universe.

Perhaps this shouldn't be a surprise, because it's by Marc Miller ... but it *is* surprising that Marc Miller is able to incorporate *so* many elements of the *Traveller* universe in such an effortless, organic way. Vilani, psionics, newts, stasis globes, Geonee, naval officers, Threep, and amber zones. They're all here, and they never feel gratuitous. Somehow, Miller is able both to fill *Agent of the Imperium* with the wonders of the Third Imperium and to convince us that he *had* to include those many and varied elements to give us the complete story.

Some of Miller's references are off-handed, but others are quite deep. Many of the chapters begin with infodumps on topics like royalty, the Third Imperium, and Capital; they don't feel at all gratuitous because they inevitably tie in with the chapter itself. The in-depth discussions of the Core sector may be some of the most valuable insights in this book, but there's also an amazing amount of good material on jump drives — from details of how astrogation works to what jumpspace looks like. In fact, the physics of jump is used as a plot point multiple times in the book (showing how GMs could do the same).

Generally, the depiction of *Traveller's* science is a constant joy in this book. The amazing thing is that it doesn't feel at all dated, despite its foundation in inspirational science fiction of the '50s, '60s, and '70s. This is in part because Miller does a great job of redefining the game's classic science in modern terms. However, he also introduces more modern science like the personality wafers, which make *Traveller* feel positively transhuman without invalidating any of the past details of the universe. It should be an inspiration for *Traveller* GMs to do the same — particularly if they're using *T5* (2013), which includes some of these same trends.

Agent of the Imperium also does a great job of depicting *Traveller's* history. Because his book is set so far before the Golden Age, Miller is able to easily introduce historic elements such as the Frontier Wars and the Emperors of the Flag that could be backstory for any *Traveller* game. Again, he does so effortlessly, without dwelling on these details, and without making the history the focus of the book; some of the adventures within *Agent of the Imperium* are important historical moments, but others are smaller stories. At the same time, Miller also foreshadows some of the future problems of the Imperium — great mysteries from the final days of the classic game. It's an impressive (and surprising) trick.

Besides all of these great background details, *Agent of the Imperium* also provides great ideas for adventures. Not only could Bland's awakenings be used as the basis for *Traveller* adventures, but Miller also introduces two other great sources of adventures: the First Empire's False-Knowledge and a set of questions that Bland raises in Encyclopediopolis (chapter 27). Add together Bland's missions and these other sources of ideas and a GM could have years of play.

Publication Notes

Agent of the Imperium was funded by a Kickstarter with 970 backers. It was produced as an ebook, a softcover, and a hardcover.

Agent of the Imperium should be your first stop for *Traveller* fiction (unless you're looking specifically for *New Era* background). It's not just a great font of *Traveller* knowledge, but it's a good book too.

Short Fiction, 1993-Present

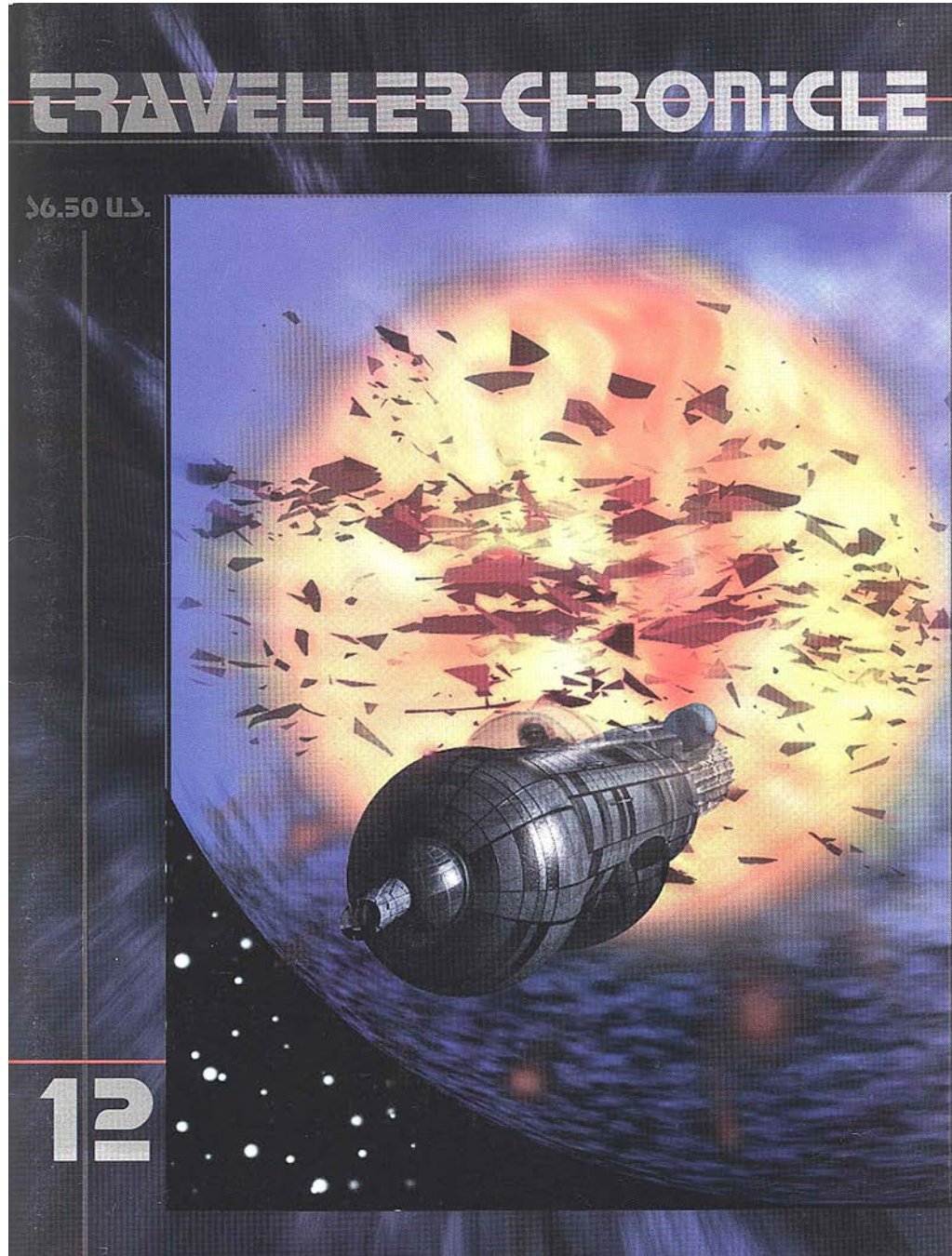
Short roleplaying stories have been a part of the industry since the beginning, most of it appearing in magazines. The earliest was probably “The Giant’s Bag”, by Gary Gygax for *Great Plains Game Players Newsletter #7* (April 1974), a narrative of one of the earliest *D&D* games. TSR published their first story with Rob Kuntz’s “The Quest for the Vermillion Volume” in *The Strategic Review Vol . II #1* (February 1976). Since, the practice has proliferated.

There have been many, many *Traveller* magazines over the years, and a few of them have included fiction. The stories from *The Traveller Chronicle* (1993-1997), the second *Journal of the Travellers’ Aid Society* (1996-1997), and *Travellers’ Aide* (2002-2003) are all reviewed here. Fiction has also appeared in other magazines such as *Signs & Portents* (2003-2011) and *Freelance Traveller* (2009-Present), but it’s been omitted either because it focuses too much on Actual Play or too little on the Official *Traveller* Universe.

In the modern day, roleplaying magazines have largely been replaced with web sites. It could be that they’re the next frontier of *Traveller* fiction publication — and in fact one of the stories reviewed here originated on a *Traveller* web site.

1. *Traveller Chronicle*, Gary A. Kalin, etc., 1993+
2. T4 JTAS, Various, 1996+
3. *Slices of Life*, Martin J. Dougherty, 2012

The Traveller Chronicle Short Fiction



- *The Traveller Chronicle Short Fiction*

- **Publisher:** Sword of the Knight Publications (1993-1997)
- Overall Style: ★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★

An Overview of the Magazine

Traveller Chronicle was a fanzine that covered a wide spectrum of *Traveller* material. It contained plenty of game material for Classic *Traveller* (1977), *MegaTraveller* (1987), and *Traveller: The New Era* (1992), but *Traveller Chronicle* was also the first mainstream *Traveller* fanzine to publish any notable amount of *Traveller* fiction. There were five standalone stories published over the magazine's existence, in issues #1, #2, #3, #8, and #12.

The Stories

- **“The Trap of Triton” in *The Traveller Chronicle* #1 (Summer 1993) by Gary A. Kalin.**
- Style: ★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★

This first piece of fiction appeared in the first issue of the magazine. It's the story of a Sol System SDB, the *Intrepid*, which receives an emergency distress signal from a ship that's crashed on the surface of Triton and is in danger of sinking into a lake of liquid methane.

Unfortunately, the writing in “The Trap of Triton” is altogether bad. It's stilted and juvenile. Beyond that, the situation isn't particularly original, nor is it told in a particularly interesting way. The result isn't worth reading for its storytelling alone.

Sol, 1110s. “The Trap of Triton” references *Traveller* technology such as SDBs, *Seeker*-class ships, grav belts, and laser rifles, while the core situation could be used as an encounter in a *Traveller* game. However, there's nothing about the background that screams “Solomani Sphere” (though later stories put it in the Solomani Rim of the late

1110s) and the tech alone isn't enough to make reading this dreadful piece worthwhile.

- **“Mercury Quest” in *The Traveller Chronicle* #2 (Autumn 1993) by Gary A. Kalin.**
- Style: ★★★★★
- **Traveller Substance: ★**

This is another story of the *Intrepid*. While visiting Earth, commander Orson Ridpath gets involved with the assassination of an Admiral of the Solomani fleet. Ridpath soon realizes that the Imperium has infiltrated Terra and is searching for the wreckage of an ancient Imperial carrier that might have crashed on Mercury ... but this is just the first part of the story.

The writing is perhaps a bit better, with the sentences being a bit less monotonous. The situation is considerably more interesting, as politics, conspiracy, and history all come to a head against the backdrop of a conflict between the Solomani and the Imperium.

Sol, 1110s. This interactions between the Solomani and the Imperium will be of interest to *Traveller* GMs running on the rimward side of Charted Space. There are enough details to start understanding the conflict — which we eventually learn is a modern-era adventure.

Meanwhile, the quest for a crashed ship from a previous war would make a fine adventure, especially with other forces trying to get to the ship simultaneously. In other words, “Mercury Quest” exceeds its predecessor by offering some interesting inspiration.

- **“Mercury Quest” in *The Traveller Chronicle* #3 (Winter 1994) by Gary A. Kalin.**
- Style: ★★★
- **Traveller Substance: ★★★**

Kalin's story concludes as Ridpath and Imperials descend to Mercury to find the

remnants of an old battle, each for their own reasons. In the end the Imperials win out, but Ridpath survives to swear vengeance.

Story by story, Kalin's writing is improving; that this one feels like a polished, interesting story.

Sol, 1110s. This is the story that finally places this series in time, putting it 118 years after the latter part of Solomani Rim War. So, somewhere toward the end of the 1108-1120 range. Based on a reference to "unrest in the Imperium", this series may be the only fiction to date actually set during the Rebellion! It also nicely shows off the tensions in the Rim during this time period.

"Mercury Quest" (Part 2) also contains some additional *Traveller* lore, such as the details about the final defense of Mercury during the Imperium's assault on the Sol System. We also get insights into the politics of the Rim, from SolSec to Imperial Agents. All told, this final story is fine reading for those interested in the Rim.

- **"Test Flight" in *Traveller Chronicle* #8 (Summer 1995), by Jo Jaquinta.**
- Style: ★
- **Traveller Substance:** (no stars)

By its eighth issue, *Traveller Chronicle* was a slick, full-sized magazine, and the quality of its content had increased correspondingly. Thus we got "Test Flight", the story of an early space flight of an atmospheric ship of some sort.

Technically, the writing is good. However, it doesn't gel as a whole. This one-page story is all dialogue, which doesn't actually describe the action (or the circumstances) of the story. There's also a lot of flippancy that doesn't feel authentic. Finally, the situation is so entirely uninteresting that it's not clear why the story was written.

Earth, Questionable Canonicity. If this story is set in the *Traveller* universe, it's really subtle. There are also reasons to doubt it's inclusion, such as the fact that the ship doesn't have grav compensators, which most *Traveller* ships would. Since it mentions "January", this could be an early story of Terran exploration, but then so could a lot of other science fiction that's not *Traveller*.

- “*An Offer You Can’t Refuse ...*” in *Traveller Chronicle* #12 (February 1997), by Mark Urbin.
- Style: ★★
- Traveller Substance: ★

The last standalone piece of fiction in *Traveller Chronicle* was another short little snippet, this time a two-page work. It tells the story of Garek Sung of the *March Hare* accepting his position on that ship shortly after the end of the Fifth Frontier War.

It’s another high-brow piece, like “Test Flight”. Again, the writing is all technically quite good. Urbin gives us a first-person point of view and tries hard to make it obvious that his character is someone with a long history. If anything, he overdoes it, so that in two short pages readers are deluged with a constant stream of old history, some of which makes sense and some of which doesn’t.

After he takes the job, Sung learns a little about the people hiring him ... and then the story abruptly stops. Which doesn’t make much sense. You’ll probably feel like you’re missing something.

Spinward Marches, 1111. The name of the ship, the *March Hare* is probably a reference to the *March Harrier* from *The Traveller Adventure* (1983). It’s also the ship at the heart of Mark Hurbin’s *Traveller* campaign for the Space Vermin RPG Association, which ran starting in 1996. “An Offer You Can’t Refuse ...” started out as “Traveller Sung Gets a New Job”, one of about 10 pieces of short fiction written by the Space Vermin players based on their games.

So, “An Offer You Can’t Refuse” gets some gameplay applicability from the fact that it’s connected to gameplay. Urbin also uses tons of *Traveller* buzz words in his piece, like Regina, Imperial Navy, Vargr, and Bwap. It all goes by pretty quickly, and will probably be meaningless to readers unless they’re already familiar with *Traveller*.

As a whole, buzzwords and origin aren’t enough to make *Traveller* fiction good, so this unfortunately ends up as a miss for its setting material.

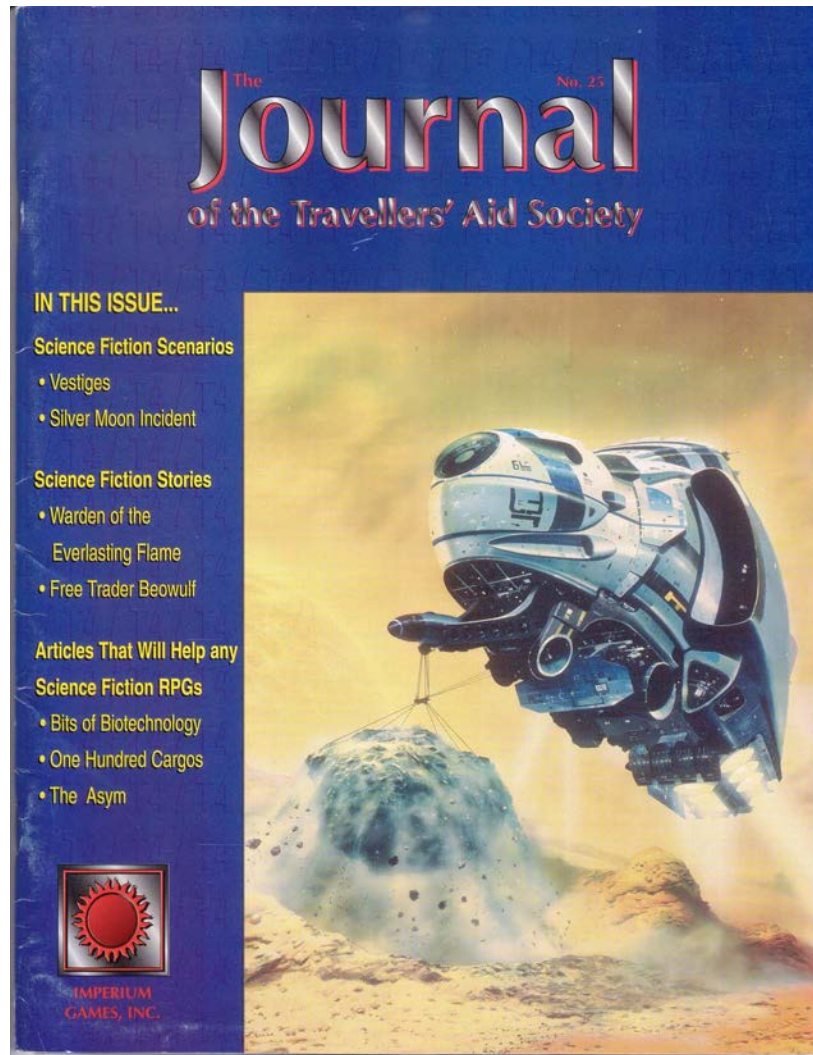
Publication Notes

The original issues of *Traveller Chronicle* were small-press publications in the latter days of GDW. They were almost impossible to get for a reasonable price until Marc Miller made them available as PDFs (2015) through Far Future Enterprises.

The magazines include one other bit of fiction: the first 16 chapters of *A Long Way Home* (2007), which were later published as a standalone book. They also contained lots of other good stuff — gaming material that was generally better than the fiction. This includes descriptions of sectors like Far Frontiers and Diaspora by authors like Dale L. Kemper and Charles E. Gannon and some nice material on Earth in The New Era.

Though *The Traveller Chronicle* was the first publisher of *Traveller* fiction, it's somewhat unimpressive. Its stories generally aren't that good, and they generally don't provide good details of the *Traveller* Universe. If you're going to pick up the magazines, it should probably be for the gaming material, not the stories.

The T4 JTAS Short Fiction



- *The T4 JTAS Short Fiction*
- **Publisher:** Imperium Games (1996-1997)
- **Style:** ★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★

An Overview of the Magazine

The *Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society (JTAS)* was GDW's original magazine, covering their original game, *Traveller*. It ran for 24 issues from 1979-1985, providing the first details on many elements of the Official *Traveller* Universe. *JTAS*' regular column, "Traveller News Service", invented the idea of metaplot. In the mid '80s *JTAS* morphed into *Challenge*, a magazine that supported GDW's other games as they appeared, then science-fiction games generally. It continued its numbering with #25 (1986) and published through #77 (1995). Issues #25-33 even included sections labeled "Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society".

This isn't the story of that magazine, which never published *Traveller* fiction other than a comic in issues #44-47 (1990)

In the mid '90s, Imperium Games published *T4* (1996), and to support it they revived *The Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society (JTAS)*. It only ran two issues, numbered #25 (1996) and #26 (1997).

Imperium Games was funded by Sweetpea Entertainment, who was interested in making a *Traveller* TV show or movie. In fact, they eventually made the *Dungeons & Dragons* (2000) movie, which suggests that we're lucky never to have seen their take on *Traveller*. They were interested in turning *Traveller* into a multimedia property, so each of their two issues of *JTAS* also included two short pieces of fiction.

The Stories

- "*Warden of the Everlasting Flame*" in *JTAS* #25 (1996), by Peter Schweighofer.
- Style: ★★★
- Traveller Substance: ★

This is the story of Cwmir, the only survivor of a disaster that destroyed his world. When newcomers from Imperial corporations descend upon his planet, he tries to warn them of the terrible weapons that still dwell below.

It's a well-told story, and one that I think is well suited to the exploratory ideas of Milieu 0 — though there's not enough detail to see where and when the story actually

does happen within the Imperium. There's also not much heft to this piece, at just three pages long, but as a short story with a single thrust, it works well.

Milieu 0. This story demonstrates the dangers that explorers might face in a Milieu 0 setting or a New Era setting, when planets are being newly discovered. Beyond that, it can remind a GM of the power that megacorps hold in *Traveller's* universe. So, consider it a thematic piece that can help get you in a *Traveller* mood.

- **“Free Trader Beowulf” in JTAS #25 (1996), by Don Perrin.**
- Style: ★★
- Traveller Substance: ★★

Perrin uses the iconic distress call of *Traveller* (“This is Free Trader Beowulf, calling anyone ... Mayday, Mayday ...”) as the basis of his story, where a Patrol Cruiser comes to *Beowulf's* aid. Unfortunately, the result is a bit awkward and doesn't have a lot of depth.

I was quite surprised at how stilted Perrin's language is at times, given that he'd already written a handful of novels by the time of this story's publication. The problem is at its worst in his dialogue. The story itself is OK, as the *Intrepid* tries to figure out the cause of the distress signal. However, there's not a lot of meat on this skeleton.

Milieu 0. “Free Trader Beowulf” is more obviously set in the Milieu 0 setting. It even hints at the politics of the time period, meaning that the setting is more than skin deep — though there's only so much you can put into a four-page short story. Beyond that, the investigation of the *Beowulf* could give a GM ideas for running a similar scenario of their own — when players pick up a distress signal in space (though that the plot as presented here descends into anti-climax by the end of the story). And of course, the *Beowulf* is another iconic piece of *Traveller* lore, just like the *Kinunir*.

- **“Hidden Cost” in JTAS #26 (1997), by Michael Siverling.**
- Style: ★★★

- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★

In this short story, a merchant captain who regularly walks a fine line with regard to the law offers to take a passenger off planet for a large fee, with no questions asked. When he gets shot, he starts to realize that he's taken on a contract with a higher cost than anticipated.

This story is well told, other than a couple of jarring metaphors that made me cringe (“a 10,000 joule smile that should have melted hullmetal”). It also nicely highlights several aspects of the *Traveller* universe, including the nobility and megacorps. Unfortunately, much like the previous stories, it's so short that it can't offer much meat.

Sylea/Core (Core 2118). Milieu 0. Of all the *JTAS* stories, this one had the strongest based in the Milieu 0 setting: “Hidden Cost” is entirely set in the Sylea Highport. It also does a good job of depicting the Imperial power structures and their schisms. Like “Free Trader Beowulf”, it'd be easy to adapt “Hidden Cost” as an adventure—and the story even includes *T4* stats to make that easy.

- **“Herlitian Dreams” in *JTAS* #26 (1997) by J. Robert King.**
- Style: ★★★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** (no stars)

This final short is set on the gas giant Herlitor. A team of doctors investigates what has gone wrong among the genetically engineered laborers who are working for the Imperium, mining liquid hydrogen.

This is a well-written story that has a very strong scientific basis. It offers up lots of interesting details of what it might really mean to work really work in a gas giant.

Milieu 0? Unfortunately, “Herlitian Dreams” also gets most of its *Traveller* background wrong. It probably suffered from the same problems as *Gateway to the Stars* (1998): gun for hire is brought in, offers better quality writing, but mangles *Traveller* setting in the process.

The genetic engineering was a bit of a stretch for the *Traveller* game. Variant

humans have appeared here and there, but the scope felt wrong. Then you have “plasma ships” that are filled with a breathable viscous liquid! Finally, the focus on Earth is bizarre, as the *T4* Milieu 0 was centered several sectors away.

Maybe this story was intended to be set in some other Milieu. Somewhere in the distant, distant past of the Imperium it might have made sense. But absent that, this is another story that could corrupt your understanding of the *Traveller* Universe.

Publication Notes

Both issues of *JTAS* remain purchasable through secondary markets, but they’re really not worth the effort.

The short fiction in the Imperium Games version of *JTAS* was certainly better than the short fiction of *Traveller Chronicle*, but perhaps that’s not saying much. It’s interesting to see a bit of Milieu 0, but only two of the four stories are definitively set in that time period — and unfortunately the two best stories were the ones that were the most ungrounded. The average result is stories that were technically good but very forgettable.

Slices of Life

- *Slices of Life*, by Martin J. Dougherty
- **Publisher:** Avalon Games (2012)
- Overall Style: ★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★

About the Book

Between the fall of *T4* (1998) and the rise of *Mongoose Traveller* (2008) and *T5* (2013), *Traveller* largely disappeared from retail shelves in its original forms— but it lived on by adapting other game systems. The story of Steve Jackson Games' *GURPS Traveller* (1998-2006) is well known because its print books are still available (often for outrageous prices) from second-hand sellers. However two other publishers are slipping into obscurity because so many of their publications were produced as part of the nascent PDF market: QuikLink Interactive (QLI), publisher of *Traveller20* (2002), and ComStar Games, publisher of *Hero Traveller* (2007).

Traveller20 is particularly notable because it introduced not just a new game system for *Traveller*, but also a new setting: the Gateway Era, set around 1000 in the Gateway Domain. QLI debuted the setting in *The Linkworlds Cluster* (2002), then supported it with both setting books and adventures. They also published a mammoth sourcebook on the era, *Gateway to Destiny* (2004).

QLI was interested in fiction from the start and published a trio of Martin J. Dougherty short stories to their web site in the ramp up to *T20*: “Pandora’s Box” (2001), “Diplomatic Extraction” (2001), and “Secret of the Ancients” (2001). They then produced a PDF fiction anthology called *Traveller’s Aide #2: Grand Endeavor* (2003), which contained yet more stories by Dougherty set in the Gateway Era; the book also previewed the first chapter of a novel called “The Big Hurrah”, set in the Interstellar

Wars era that would soon be used by Steve Jackson Games in *GURPS Traveller: Interstellar Wars* (2006).

QLI's PDFs all disappeared from the 'net when Mongoose picked up the *Traveller* license, but Dougherty decided to resurrect his Gateway Era short stories in a collection from Avalon Games, the successor to ComStar Games. *Slices of Life* thus contains the four short stories from *Traveller's Aide* #2, one of the online stories, and numerous shorter pieces of "flashfiction". "The Big Hurrah" is not included (and was presumably never finished).

The Stories

- **"Grand Endeavour" (2002) by Martin J. Dougherty.**
- Style: ★★
- Traveller Substance: ★★★★★

In this first story, Free Trader Captain Paulo Danilo of the *Eternal Optimist* learns the history of the planet Raa, then is called upon to save the crew of the *Grand Endeavour*, a ship plunging to its death after a fatal misjump. By risking his life, Danilo may right an ancient wrong of his own.

Dougherty's writing here is fairly well polished, but the story is unfocused. The first third of the story is spent on a conversation with a Vargr about the politics of Raa and why it has an Amber rating, none of which is actually important. The story picks up after that, as action takes center stage, but the introduction is offputting because it's an infodump that's irrelevant to what follows.

Raa/Frontier Worlds (Ley Sector 1927), 1000. "Grand Endeavour" is the first short story to focus on the Gateway Era, and that's probably the reason for the massive info dump about Raa — which is much more useful as setting material than story background. It provides a GM with just enough detail to run games on the world.

Beyond that, "Grand Endeavour" does a good job of depicting the feel of the *Traveller* universe in just a few short pages. The introduction's description of what a free trader does is practically a mission statement for *Traveller*, while the casual inclusion of a

Vargr helps to set the stage. However, it's the central problem of the story that really shines: a misjumping ship that's plummeting to its doom. Not only does this give Dougherty an opportunity to describe some of the intricacies of jump, but it also suggests an adventure that would be appropriate in any *Traveller* game.

- **“In Wilder Places Too ...” (2002) by Martin J. Dougherty.**
- Style: ★★★
- **Traveller Substance: ★★**

A tale of scoundrels Tal and Jandro, who are hijacked into infiltrating an archaeological mission. Unfortunately, they soon find themselves in an awful mess, trapped between psionics and a remnant race.

As with “Grand Endeavour”, the writing here is generally good. Though it drags at times, the story is more focused — describing how the two friends get into trouble, and then into even more trouble.

Ley Sector, 1000. You'd only know that “In Wilder Places Too ...” is set in the Ley Sector during the Gateway Era from the introduction that appeared in *Traveller's Aide* #2. There's nothing in the story itself that speaks to that background.

With that said, “In Wilder Places Too ...” does have some *Traveller* applicability, primarily because it's *not* a typical *Traveller* story. Most of the novels reviewed here are about ships traveling between the stars, but this story is instead about two scoundrels and the troubles they find planetside.

The idea of an archaeological dig could also be a great *Traveller* adventure, and Dougherty mixes that with psionics, a remnant race, and possibly even the Ancients. (Personally, I think he's too quick to jump to the Ancients for such a short story; there are plenty of *other* lost treasures to be found with two previous Imperiums lying in the past.) So, this isn't the deepest *Traveller* story around, but it contains elements to get you thinking about adventures other than the typical stories of ships and stars.

- **“Reactivation Clause” (2002) by Martin J. Dougherty.**
- Style: ★★☆☆
- **Traveller Substance: ★★**

The title refers to former Scout Kye Roberts, who reactivates himself when a storm strands prospectors out in the middle of nowhere. He then proves that he’s still willing to risk his life for his ideals.

This is another story that’s up to the same standards as its predecessors. It also has a bit of emotional heft to it.

Ley Sector, 1000. Like most of the stories in *Slices of Life* you’d only know “Reactivation Clause” was set in the Ley Sector in the Gateway Era if you read the original introduction in *Traveller’s Aide #2*. It’s set on a nameless planet with a big desert and a community called Pender’s Hope.

The actual *Traveller* content comes from Roberts’ status as a former scout who is reactivated. This provides some nice background on the scouts as well as a good look at the attitudes of at least one scout on “detached duty” — all of which might influence your own *Traveller* game.

- **“Wheelman” (2002) by Martin J. Dougherty.**
- Style: ★★☆☆
- **Traveller Substance: ★★**

The wheelman is Vargr Harnagh “Lifters” Loursegh, who’s hired to help Naval Intelligence freelancers to get off planet. This requires lots of reckless driving.

This story is mostly an adrenaline blast, full of shooting guns and spinning wheels. It’s enjoyable enough, except when it gets confusing.

Ley Sector, 1000. The Naval freelancers that Lifters is helping are the crew of the *Eternal Optimist*, the protagonists of “Grand Endeavour”. However, that’s (again) the only sign that we’re still in the Gateway Era — which as usual is confirmed by the

original introduction in *Traveller's Aide* #2.

The best *Traveller* content in “Wheelman” comes from the fact that Lifters is a Vargr, something that Dougherty has fun with in his descriptions throughout the text. Beyond that, the story is replete with *Traveller* references such as scouts, Solomani, multiple Vargr, marines, navy, and an air/raft ... but they're all pretty shallow details, not really explained. The best you can say is that “Wheelman” gives you the feel of *Traveller*, but not the *details*.

The ending is also pretty cool, because it mashes up land and space transport, showing how the worlds and stars of *Traveller* work together.

- “*Under the Sunburst*” *Flash Fiction* by *Martin J. Dougherty*.
- Style: ★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★

This set of vignettes details a variety of common occurrences in the *Traveller* universe, including a docking, an encounter with a Vargr, a Vilani meal, a negotiation with a herald, a ball, and a barfight. They're got good breadth, from space to cities to the wilderness. They aren't actually stories, they're just moments in time. The writing is good and these vignettes are brief enough to generally remain interesting despite the lack of plot. (Don't read them all at once, though, or they'll get old quickly.) *S*

Ley Sector, 1000. Several of these vignettes feature characters from the earlier stories in *Slices of Life*, so it's fair to guess they're all contemporary with the Gateway Era.

But how much *Traveller* insight can you gain from a story that's just a page or two in length? As it turns out, the answer is a bit, if you're concerned with the details, and that's exactly Dougherty's point. His whole purpose was to address the question, “what does this setting LOOK like?” “Under the Sunburst” provides some good answers. It's worth reading to try and get the feel of the *Traveller* universe.

- “*Pandora’s Box*” (2001) by Martin J. Dougherty.
- Style: ★★★
- **Traveller Substance:** ★★★

In this final story, Free Trader and Mail Courier Jaime Vorstaten is called to trial for purposefully jettisoning the Emperor’s mail. He explains why.

Like the other Dougherty stories in this anthology, this one is well-written. It also pulls readers along thanks to its mystery, as they try to figure out why Vorstaten did what he did.

Location and Time Unknown. Though “Pandora’s Box” doesn’t have a definite setting, it’s deeply embedded in the *Traveller* universe. That’s in large part because the central issue (or dumping the Imperial mail) is very core to the setting. However, Dougherty also mixes in scouts, the navy, and a few other features of the *Traveller* universe to provide even more Imperial depth.

Publication Notes

Slices of Life is another bit of Dougherty’s *Traveller* fiction that appeared as a PDF through Avalon Games

Slices of Life is interesting for its visceral, sometimes evocative depiction of the *Traveller* universe. It’s well-written, representing Dougherty’s growth as a fiction writer from his earliest work, but it’s not very memorable. The most disappointing thing about the stories is that they’re set in the Gateway Era, but give almost no impression of it.

Additional Reading

Slices of Life is based in a time period that unfortunately has largely disappeared. The print *Gateway to Destiny* book remains available from second-hand dealers, but at an inflated price. The rest of the Gateway Era adventures and sourcebooks are unavailable because they were only produced as PDFs.

Five sourcebooks form the core of the setting:

- *Gateway to Destiny* (QLI, 2004)
- *The Linkworlds Cluster* (QLI, 2002)
- *Traveller20 Referee's Screen / Linkworlds Cluster* (QLI, 2003)
- *Traveller20 Special Supplement 1: The Sydymics Outworlds Cluster* (QLI, 2004)
- *Gateway Domain Cluster Book 1: The Megusard Corporate* (ComStar Games, 2006)
- *Gateway Domain Cluster Book 2: The Starfall Cluster* (ComStar Games, 2007)

QuikLink also produced numerous *Traveller20 EPIC Adventures* (2004-2005) set in the Gateway Era, while ComStar linked the setting with classic *Traveller* rules in their *Gateway Domain Campaign Adventure 1: Homecoming* (2007).

The *Stellar Realms* PDF fanzine (2005-2014) adopted the nearby Empty Quarter Sector of the Gateway Era as its initial home base. Unlike the other Gateway Era books, it remains available (from its fan site) though no issues have been produced since Christmas 2014.

Appendix 1: Timeline

A Timeline of the Future

The Official *Traveller* Universe novels and stories all occur within a single chronology: the future history of the Third Imperium. Want to read them in order? Here's one possible listing. It omits a few stories of questionable canonicity or without solid dating.

Milieu 0:

- **Milieu 0.** *Gateway to the Stars*, by Pierce Askegren
- **Milieu 0.** “Warden of the Everlasting Flame” in *JTAS #25*, by Peter Schweighofer
- **Milieu 0.** “Free Trader Beowulf” in *JTAS #25*, by Don Perrin
- **Milieu 0.** “Hidden Cost” in *JTAS #26*, by Michael Siverling

Later Years:

- **336 to 736.** *Agent of the Imperium*, by Marc Miller

Gateway Era:

- **1000.** “Grand Endeavor” in *Slices of Life* by Martin J. Dougherty
- **1000.** “In Wilder Places Too ...” in *Slices of Life* by Martin J. Dougherty
- **1000.** “Reactivation Clause” in *Slices of Life* by Martin J. Dougherty
- **1000.** “Wheelman” in *Slices of Life* by Martin J. Dougherty

Golden Age:

- **1088.** *Fate of the Kinunir*, by Robert E. Vardeman
- **1100s.** *Force of Destiny*, by Dale K. Kemper
- **1108.** *Shadow of the Storm*, by Martin J. Dougherty

- **1111.** “An Offer You Can’t Refuse ...” in *Traveller Chronicle #12* by Mark Urbin

The Rebellion:

- **1110s.** “The Trap of Triton” in *The Traveller Chronicle #1* by Gary A Kalin.
- **1110s.** “Mercury Quest” in *The Traveller Chronicle #2-3* by Gary A Kalin.

The New Era:

- **1201.** “Graduation Day” in *Yesterday’s Hero*, by Martin J. Dougherty
- **1201.** *The Death of Wisdom*, by Paul Brunette
- **1201-1202.** *To Dream of Chaos*, by Paul Brunette
- **1202.** *The Backwards Mask (I)*, by Paul Brunette
- **1202.** “Absent Friends” in *Yesterday’s Hero*, by Martin J. Dougherty
- **1202.** “Boarding Party” in *Yesterday’s Hero*, by Martin J. Dougherty
- **1200s.** *A Long Way Home*, by Terry McInnes
- **1202-1203.** *Diaspora Phoenix*, by Martin J. Dougherty
- **1202-1204.** *The Backwards Mask (II)*, by Matthew Carson
- **1203-1215.** The rest of *Yesterday’s Hero*, by Martin J. Dougherty

Appendix 2: Inspirational Reading

Inspirational & Educational Reading

This book of reviews covers just some of the books that Marc Miller has said influenced Traveller. What follows is a more complete listing, including all the inspirational books reviewed here, plus books that Marc Miller noted in High Passage #2 (1981), JTAS #26 (1997), Valkyrie #13 (1997), and White Dwarf #23 (1981), plus a few more recent books by the same authors. It's an expansive list, because Miller says that "over the course of some twenty years; I read every science-fiction story and novel I could find."

A few additional references are based on the unnamed science-fiction characters included in Supplement 1: 1001 Characters (1978), which Miller listed as a good source in his High Passage interview. Identification of those characters is thanks to James Maliszewski at the Grogardnia blog, who lists them as: John Carter, Kimball Kinnison, Jason dinAlt, Earl Dumarest, Beowulf Shaeffer, Anthony Villiers, Dominic Flandry, Kirth Girsen, and Gully Foyle.

Items flagged with a * had a character appear in Supplement 1, but haven't been mentioned by Miller in an interview. Items flagged with a † are solely the supposition of this reviewer.

* * * * *

Anderson, Paul. "Dominic Flandry" series and the connected "Polesotechnic League" series: *Agent of the Terran Empire*, et. al.; *Trader to the Stars*, et al.; more recently collected as the seven-volume *Technic Civilization Saga*.

Asimov, Isaac. "Foundation" series: *Foundation*; *Foundation and Empire*; *Second Foundation*; et al.

Bester, Alfred. *The Stars My Destination**.

Burroughs, Edgar Rice. "John Carter of Mars" series*: *A Princess of Mars*, et al.,

which is also inspirational reading for *D&D*.

Dickson, Gordon. “Dorsai” series: *Dorsai!*; *Necromancer*; *Soldier, Ask Not*; *Tactics of Mistake*; et al.

Drake, David. “Hammer’s Slammers” series†. *The Tank Lords*, *Caught In The Crossfire*, *The Butcher's Bill*.

Harrison, Harry. *Deathworld*; *The Stainless Steel Rat*; and their sequels†.

Heinlein, Robert. Juvenile novels: *Rocket Ship Galileo*; *Space Cadet*; *Red Planet*; *Farmer in the Sky*; *Between Planets*; *The Rolling Stones*; *Starman Jones*; *The Star Beast*; *Tunnel in the Sky*; *Time for the Stars*; *Citizen of the Galaxy*; *Have Space Suit—Will Travel*. Also, *Podkayne of Mars*.

Laumer, Keith. “Retief” series: *Envoy to Other Worlds*; et al.

Niven, Larry. *Crashlander*. Probably the rest of the “Known Space” series too.

Niven, Larry and Jerry Pournelle. *The Mote in God’s Eye*.

Panshin, Alexei. *Star Well**; *The Thurb Revolution**; *Masque World**.

Piper, H. Beam. *The Cosmic Computer*; *Space Viking*†. Probably the rest of the “Terro-Human Future History”.

Rowley, Christopher. *Starhammer*, *Vang: The Military Form*, *Vang: The Battlemaster*.

Smith, E.E. “Doc”. “Lensman” series*: *Triplanetary*, *First Lensman*, *Galactic Patrol*, *Gray Lensman*, *Second Stage Lensmen*, *Children of the Lens*.

Tubb, E.C. “Dumarest of Terra” series: *The Winds of Gath*, *Derai*, *Toyman*, *Kalin*, *The Jester at Scar*, *Lallia*, *Technos*, *Veruchia*, *Mayenne*, *Jondelle*, *Zenya*, *Eloise*, *Eye of the Zodiac*, *Jack of Swords*, *Spectrum of a Forgotten Sun*, *Haven of Darkness*, *Prison of Night*, *Incident on Ath*, *The Quillian Sector*, *Web of Sand*, *Iduna's Universe*, *The Terra Data*, *World of Promise*, *Nectar of Heaven*, *The Terridae*, *The Coming Event*, *Earth is Heaven*, *Melome*, *Angado*, *Symbol of Terra*, *The Temple of Truth*, *The Return*, and *Child of Earth*.

Vance, Jack. “Demon Princes” series. More generally, the whole “Gaeian Reach” series†, especially the more recent *Ports of Call*† and *Lurulu*†.

About the Author

Shannon Appelcline has been playing roleplaying games since his dad bought him the Tom Moldvay *Basic D&D* ... and since his aunt bought him *Traveller Starter Edition*. He's written roleplaying supplements for *Ars Magica*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Nephilim*, and *Pendragon* and worked at Chaosium for a few years, but spends most of his time programming computers and writing technicals.

Recently, Shannon authored a massive four-volume history of the entire roleplaying industry called *Designers & Dragons*, which is available from Evil Hat Productions. The thread of *Traveller* runs throughout the series. *Designers & Dragons: The '70s* details the history of GDW; *Designers & Dragons: The '80s* discusses early licensees like FASA and Gamelords, as well as the all-important Digest Group Publications, and alternate-history licensee Steve Jackson Games; *Designers & Dragons: The '90s* covers GDW's short-lived successor, Imperium Games; and *Designers & Dragons: The '00s* examines modern *Traveller* publisher, Mongoose Publishing. The article on Imperium Games was actually the first piece written for *Designers & Dragons*, about a decade ago.

Shannon Appelcline, 478A96, Age 43, 6 terms

Administration-1, Computer-2, Jack-of-All-Trades-1, Research-1, Writer-2
030-2016

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***Dorsai!*, by Gordon R. Dickson**

***The Cosmic Computer*, by H. Beam Piper**

***Space Viking*, by H. Beam Piper**

***Envoy to New Worlds*, by Keith Laumer**

- *Envoy to Other Worlds* (1963)
- *Galactic Diplomat* (1965)
- *Retief's War* (1966)
- *Retief and the Warlords* (1968)
- *Retief: Ambassador to Space* (1969)
- *Retief's Ransom* (1971)
- *Retief of the CDT* (1971)
- *Retief: Emissary to the Stars* (1975)
- *Retief at Large* (1978)
- *Retief: Diplomat at Arms* (1982)
- *Retief to the Rescue* (1983)
- *The Return of Retief* (1984)
- *Retief in the Ruins* (1986)
- *Reward for Retief* (1989)
- *Retief and the Rascals* (1993)

Retief's Peace (2005) by William H. Keith, Jr.

***Dumarest of Terra*, by E. C. Tubb includes:**

- *The Winds of Gath* (1967)
- *Derai* (1968)

- *Toyman* (1969)
- *Kalin* (1969)
- *The Jester at Scar* (1970)
- *Lallia* (1971)

Technos (1972)

Veruchia (1973)

Mayenne (1973).

Jondelle (1973)

Zenya (1974)

Eloise, by E.C. Tubb

Eye of the Zodiac, by E.C. Tubb

Jack of Swords, by E.C. Tubb

Spectrum of a Forgotten Sun, by E.C. Tubb

Haven of Darkness, by E.C. Tubb

Prison of Night, by E.C. Tubb

Incident on Ath, by E.C. Tubb

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Web of Sand, by E.C. Tubb

Iduna's Universe, by E.C. Tubb

The Terra Data, by E.C. Tubb

World of Promise, by E.C. Tubb

Nectar of Heaven, by E.C. Tubb

The Terridae, by E.C. Tubb

The Coming Event, by E.C. Tubb

Earth is Heaven, by E.C. Tubb

Melome, by E.C. Tubb

Angado, by E.C. Tubb

Symbol of Terra, by E.C. Tubb

The Temple of Truth, by E.C. Tubb

The Return, by E.C. Tubb

Child of Earth, by E.C. Tubb

***Hammer's Slammers*, by David Drake**

**

***Become the Hunted*, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer**

***Not in Our Stars*, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer**

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***Shadow of the Storm*, by Martin J. Dougherty**

***Agent of the Imperium*, by Marc Miller**

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TravellerMap and Traveller Wiki

TravellerMap (www.TravellerMap.com)

Many of the locations in Traveller fiction are more specifically detailed on TravellerMap, the detailed online interactive Traveller mapping utility. Input a specific world name (Capital from *Agent of the Imperium*, for example) and see its location within Charted Space.

Traveller Wiki (http://wiki.travellerrpg.com/Traveller_Wiki)

Many of the details of the Traveller science-fiction universe are contained in the encyclopedic Traveller Wiki, including details about places, people, and things encountered within its compass.