AURORA
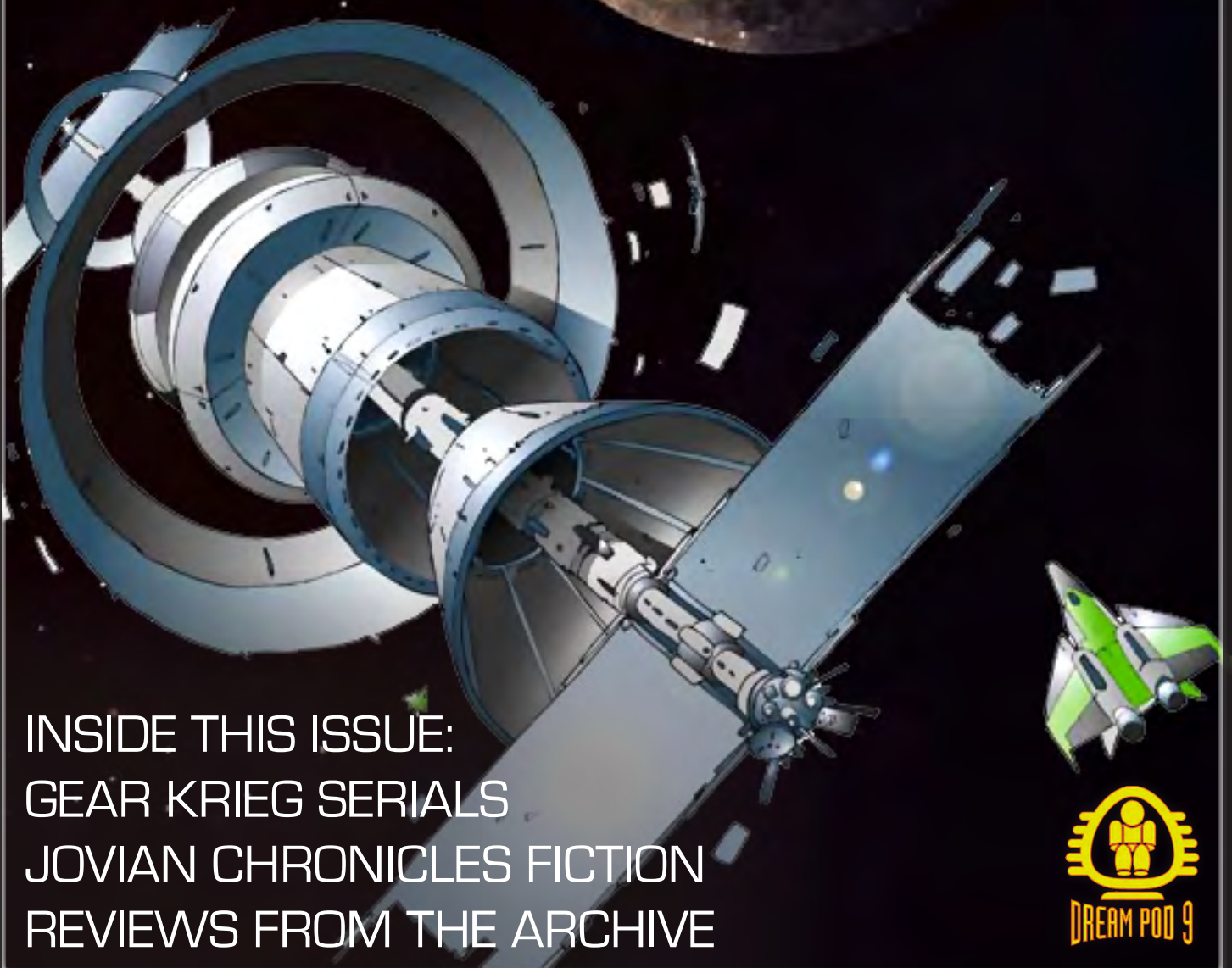
THE SILHOUETTE MAGAZINE

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:
GEAR KRIEG SERIALS
JOVIAN CHRONICLES FICTION
REVIEWS FROM THE ARCHIVE

DREAM POD 9

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I WANT YOU

FOR AURORA
NEAREST SUBMISSION DATE

From the Editor...

"At the bottom of things,
most people want to be understood and appreciated."
– Gautama Buddha

It's so easy to create an "us" and a "them".

For those gamers of us over a certain age, we were forcibly placed into a "them" category. Our hobby was not cool. We were not cool. For some it was minor ostracization. For others, ridicule, taunting, and worse, was the daily reality.

And if you were part of an ethnic or religious minority, or from the LGBTQ community, or of a disparate socioeconomic disposition, then it was a double (or triple, or...) dose.

For a lot of us, it was not a pleasant time (and for many, that's putting it mildly).

And yet, one of the things that has always fascinated me is the counter intuitive behaviour wherein a disparaged group disparages another group. They find another group and throw scorn. I say counter intuitive, because, on the face of it, we'd assume that someone who doesn't like what's happening would avoid that/similar behaviour. But, from a philosophical/ontological perspective, it makes sense that they do it in turn. For one, it's clearly the way world works, so why not participate in it? Secondly, and more profoundly though, is that it is a way of dealing with the pain. It's a form of blame throwing, a way to try to claim some power, some agency. It tries to create self-value in saying "well, at least we're not as bad as THOSE people."

Us vs Them.

I bring this up because people have been shot for being a "Them." And more still will continue to be killed for being a "Them".

I bring this up because it's just as easy to look at those perpetrators and make them a "Them."

It's perhaps easier than ever to create Us vs Them groups. With the internet we can self-curate (and, often, websites and search engines automatically curate) the views and angles and worlds and opinions that fall in lockstep with our own. We can surround ourselves with like-minded individuals, the "smart" ones, the "right" ones, the "only ones who get it."

We've been soaking in divisions since we've been born, so much so we don't even realize we're doing it. We don't recognize the "Thems" we have created, whether it is people of differing political views, religions, ethnicities, or the ways they live their lives. Let alone the geek divisions, the nerd rage topics, that themselves are legendary: Marvel vs DC, Windows vs Mac, what's the "best" or "right" version of D&D...

There's a difference between disagreeing with someone, and turning that person, and anyone like them, into a "Them."

Us vs Them is dangerous. Just like blame, it shuts down our brain, it destroys communication, interrupts empathy, and, ironically, completely removes our agency to alter the situation. We may do it to gain power, but that power is an illusion. If we're right, and they're wrong, then all that's possible is that they change or be wiped out. We have to protect ourselves, after all.

Dangerous.

For many of us as gamers, we have lived this world. We have been on the receiving end of it in a shared way that is vivid to many of us. We know what impact it can have. And we can watch our own actions, and ensure we do not repeat it, especially inadvertently, onto someone else.

"The more we try to understand each other,
the more exceptional each one of us will be."
– Judy Hopps

Welcome to Issue 10.3 of your Silhouette magazine.

Game on,

Oliver Bollmann
Aurora Magazine Editor

OFFICIAL-DP9

Justin Alexander (thealexandrian.net) -- *Archive Review: Jovian Chronicles & Archive Review: Chaos Principle*
Justin Alexander's published works include more than two hundred books, articles, and reviews. Today he is the Line Developer for the Infinity roleplaying game from Modiphius Entertainment, and he has previously worked with Dream Pod 9, Fantasy Flight Games, Atlas Games, and Steve Jackson Games. He can be found online at the Alexandrian (http://www.thealexandrian.net).

John Bell (jakarnilson@magma.ca) -- *Alfie's Tenners, Kraut Patrol*
He gets labeled a "walking-talking encyclopedia." He draws what goes through his mind. He builds what he can't afford. He walks what others would take a lift for. He'd probably trade in his bike for a real, working Ferret; but then again, who wouldn't?

Aaron Bertrand (thisnewjoe@gmail.com) -- *The Journal Part 9: History Repeating*
While a dabbler in the boardgame and video game realm, few things are quite so enjoyable over a long period as the storytelling adventure created among friends during an RPG campaign. My we all embark on many such glorious adventures!

Oliver Bollmann (auroramag@gmail.com) -- *Editor*
It all started in a hobby store one day thirty odd years ago with an odd box containing something called Top Secret. Since then games have just become a big part of his life. He's been in love with the DP9 universes since the first HG release and began his direct involvement with the Pod crew began numerous years ago. He also runs a gaming imprint *Kannik Studios at rpgnow:*
http://rpg.drivethrustuff.com/index.php?manufacturers_id=291

KRAUT PATROL

JOHN BELL

ARCHIVE REVIEW: JOVIAN CHRONICLES

JUSTIN ALEXANDER

Although often lost in the shadow of her big brother Heavy Gear, Jovian Chronicles is a great game in its own right. The Silhouette system is every bit as powerful as it ever was, and the setting — a future version of our solar system — intriguing, layered, and (literally) exploding with potential.

Dream Pod 9 has produced and supported three primary games. The first of these, their flagship, is Heavy Gear has been almost universally praised. The second, Tribe 8, has carved out a place for itself as one of the finest and most original fantasy games in the roleplaying industry.

Their third game, however, has not been quite so fortunate. Jovian Chronicles, like her big brother Heavy Gear is a mecha game using the Silhouette rules system and inspired, at least partially, by anime. As a result, Jovian Chronicles has often found itself lost in Heavy Gear's shadow.

It doesn't deserve to be.

Although there are many similarities between the games, there are also many differences. In Heavy Gear, for example, the mecha are suits of powered armor in completely alien setting far in the future, driven by an overarching meta-story and set of intriguing, deeply developed characters. In Jovian Chronicles, on the other hand, you have a hard SF world in which the mecha serve as space fighters in a setting close to home, both spatially and temporally.

Both Heavy Gear and Jovian Chronicles are remarkably strong games, and both would be in my Top 10 list for the industry. But they are there for different reasons.

THE SETTING

At a basic level a setting can be either good or bad. In general you can characterize a good setting as one based upon interesting concepts, with a great deal of depth, detail, and originality. In general you can characterize a bad setting as one which lacks an interesting concept and is either shallow, poorly developed, lacking in originality, or a combination of all of the above.

That much is simple.

A more interesting question is what separates a good setting from a superb one.

For example, why is it when I read the setting material for Deadlands or Vampire I think to myself, "Wow, that was really good!" But when I read Heavy Gear or Trinity I'm, literally, blown away? What makes one good and the other great?

After thinking about this for a long while, I've decided that the primary difference lies in breadth and versatility of the setting. For example, when I read Deadlands I think to myself, "Wow, there's a near fantasy version of the Old West, with the PCs playing western heroes. Cool." When I read Vampire I think, "Wow, there's a really neat modern gothic setting, in which the PCs will be playing vampires."

When I read of Terra Nova (the world Heavy Gear is set in), however, I think to myself: "Wow, what a great world."

In Vampire I play a vampire. In Terra Nova I can play a cop, a vigilante, a gear pilot, a spy, a terrorist, a freedom fighter, or any one of a dozen different things. As a GM I can design a campaign around, literally, dozens of completely different hooks. And all of this takes place in a richly developed world, with many different, unique cultures and political units.

Of course, you have a great deal of variety within, for example, the World of Darkness as well (particularly as you start picking up additional games and supplements), but the setting as presented in Vampire is clearly designed for the PCs to play vampires within a very specific type of campaign structure (although I would be the last to say that there isn't a tremendous amount of variation possible within that basic structure). This isn't a bad thing (far from it), but only a fool would say that the World of Darkness as presented in Vampire is comparable to Terra Nova as it is presented in Heavy Gear.

Which brings us back to Jovian Chronicles, which possesses all of the strengths of Heavy Gear in this regard.

The fictional timeline of Jovian Chronicles begins in 1999 (the original game was published in the early '90s), when the Solar Power Satellite 1 is successfully tested. By 2002 mankind has established their first permanent space station (which is true, although in the game it has the fictional name of "Freedom Station"). In 2007 a prototype fusion engine successfully generates power. Technology and space

---

ARCHIVAL NOTE

These classic reviews of Heavy Gear and Jovian Chronicles books were originally published at RPGnet and in Games Unplugged magazine between 1998 and 2002.

More notes at the end of the article. Originally Posted: 1999/08/24

exploration begins to advance rapidly and by 2024 the moon is colonized. (For those of you gasping with incredulity at this point, the designers are fully cognizant of the fact that, without a minor miracle, there's no way for a major space presence to be established inside of twenty years as Jovian Chronicles postulates. They stretched the facts slightly in this regard so that they could have an advanced spatial civilization in a future which was not so far distant as to render humanity completely unrecognizable culturally.)

In 2030 major development on orbital stations begins; in 2033 Mars is settled for the first time; in 2037 the Jovian Gas Mining Corp. is founded and the first station in Jovian orbit is built; the New Earth Project begins to terraform Venus in 2072.

And then "something bad" happens.

Social economic pressures cause several nations back home to collapse and people begin to flee Mother Earth in a massive exodus (during which Venus is settled for the first time). As chaos seizes the homeworld, Mars seizes its independence (the first stellar colony to do so). Then, in 2100, Earth disappears – rumors of major disasters and civil conflict fill the solar system, but any and all shuttles sent to investigate are destroyed. The colonies are completely cut off.

This period of isolation lasts for nearly a hundred years. In the colonies, much of this time is spent trying desperately to make themselves reliably self-sufficient; back on Earth civil war rages. Then, in 2084, the Central Earth Government and Administration (CEGA) gains control of a significant portion of Earth's surface as the Unification War ends. As Earth extends back out into the solar system, an era of peace ensues.

But such peace cannot be sustained for long. CEGA longs to return Earth to its position as the center of humanity, while the colonies (after a hundred years of independence) squabble among themselves and no longer recognize any such thing to be true. By 2210 war seems almost inevitable…..

In the year 2210 the Solar System looks something like this: Mercury, Venus, Mars, and Jupiter are all major colonies. CEGA controls much of Earth (except for the Non-Aligned States), the orbital stations in Earth orbit, and the colonies on the moon. The asteroid belt has become a sort of "wild frontier" where those unwilling or unable to live under an organized government live in small settlements. In trans-Jovian space are the Outer Realms – dominated mainly by small research stations and the THC Corporation, which exploits the chemical riches of Saturn's moon Titan.

Mercury. Mercury, the hottest planet in the solar system, was settled in order to provide raw resources to the New Earth project which terraformed Venus. It expanded in the 22nd century as disaffected Venusian colonists left to start new lives for themselves. Today it is home to the Merchant Guild. The guild served as the primary transport of goods and services in the solar system following the Fall. Because Mercury is entirely reliant upon the success of the Guild for their own survival, they have become friends of everyone and enemies of none… although that might change if CEGA's "manifest destiny" begins to conflict with their own vision.

Venus. The New Earth project began the terraforming process of Venus in 2072. In the time leading up to the events of the Fall, many businesses back on Earth realized that hard times were ahead – and left for other places. Several migrated to orbital stations, but many came to Venus. In the world of 2210, the society of Venus is the result of the mixing of the corporate cultures of Asia, North America, and Europe – with a heavy influence from the Japanese. It is controlled, behind the scenes, by the manipulative Venusian Bank – which now attempts to spread its influence throughout the solar system. Many believe that Venus largely controlled CEGA for many years, but now the puppet may be getting out of control.

Earth. After the events of the Fall and the Unification War, Earth is split into two parts – CEGA and the Non-Aligned States. CEGA has expansionist plans for the solar system at large, and earthers in general have a hard time understanding that their brethren in the colonies no longer bear as much love for the birthplace of humanity as they once did. Earthers see a manifest destiny for Earth, to bring all of humanity under its control once again and CEGA leads the charge. Many wonder, however, how long CEGA will tolerate dissension at home as well as abroad.

Orbitals. Some of the earliest space stations, the O'Neill stations in Earth orbit are home to millions of people. They are once more under the control of CEGA, but were independent during the period of the Fall. The Orbitals are a melting pot, with almost every cylinder having its own Earth-derived culture and traditions.

The Moon. Like the orbitals, the moon is under CEGA control. There are several Lunar cities, with a total population of about one million. The Selenites, during the Fall, adapted themselves to the hard realities of self-sufficiency. They possess a very Puritan work ethic as a result, with creativity and imagination discouraged in favor of doing the work necessary to stay alive.

Mars. After years of war, Mars has become split in half by a tense cold war. On one half is the Martian Federation, a totalitarian state which has sided with CEGA (although it possesses some doubts now, based on the recent destruction of Mars' orbital elevator with possible CEGA involvement, see below). On the other is the Martian Free Republic, which tends to support the Jovians.

Asteroid Belt. The belt has become home to those who choose or need to remove themselves from society. Home to countless bases formed by hollowing asteroids (with an economy often based in mining), most of the belters possess a distinct "frontier" culture. The rest of them are isolationists and fantatics.

Jupiter. As the title might suggest, Jupiter is meant to be a primary focus of the Jovian Chronicles game. The Jovian Confederation joins together three distinct states – Olympus (in Jupiter's orbit itself, with the capital colony of Elysee itself), and the two Trojan States (Vanguard Mountain and Newhome) located at Jupiter's lagrange points. Although all of these bases orbit Jupiter, it should be noted that they are (literally) millions of kilometers apart… with all the logistical nightmares (particularly in defense matters) that this would suggest. Quite accidentally, Jupiter has become one of the two major powers in the solar system (with CEGA) being the other. They are the only ones with an existing military capable of meeting CEGA on the figurative battlefield, and they are the only ones with the political clout to possibly avoid that bloodshed. Tensions run high between these two powers.

The setting, as you can see, is a rich one (particularly once you begin to add in the complex and dynamic interactions which exist within and between these general groupings) – with many different places to set a campaign, and even more hooks on which to base a campaign. I haven't even begun to skim the surface of the setting (leaving out details such as Titan, the United Space Nations, SolaPol, and the mystery of the Jovian floaters). It is easily one of the best roleplaying settings you will find. Indeed, I will say that, like Terra Nova, it is one of the best settings period — in or out of the roleplaying industry.

With all that being said, the setting of Jovian Chronicles as presented in the core rulebook does have two relatively serious problems. To explain the first of these, I must first delve into a digression.

A setting can be crippled not just through a lack of information, depth, campaign hooks, or originality. It can also be crippled by the lack of specific information.

Take, for example, the first printing of Trinity. This setting contained a massive number of potential campaign hooks – the proxies who controlled the psi orders were obviously engaged in their own personal machinations; the Aberrants who had devastated Earth a century before had returned; the mystery behind the disappearance of the Upeo wa Macho (the psi order of teleporters) had never been solved; Earth was going back out to reclaim their lost colonies; and the various alien species were engaged in their own plottings. These campaign hooks were backed up with a wealth of detailed information, a rich history, and an engaging, original universe. Unfortunately, there was one thing missing: The keys to unlock this vast treasure trove. Specifically, the original printing of the Trinity manual lacked information on who the proxies were and what their goals were; why the Aberrants had returned; why the Upeo wa Macho had disappeared; what had happened to the colonies during the years they had been lost; and what the aliens wanted.

Without these "keys", the Trinity setting was fantastic – but you couldn't do anything with it, unless you waited for the supplements to be released or were willing to abandon the two things which make using a published setting over one you've created yourself worthwhile: the ability to take advantage of published material and the fun of exploring someone else's creation. (It should be noted that the paperback release of Trinity corrected this problem; the added text can be found on White Wolf's website.)

Jovian Chronicles does not suffer from such a widespread, universal problem. However, there is one very important "key" which the book lacks. The main rulebook is set in 2210, a few weeks after an event known as the Odyssey. The Odyssey started when a group of Jovian agents were sent to Venus in order to liberate and give asylum to a Terran scientist who had perfected a "cyberlinkage" system. Their efforts to get him safely back to Jupiter spanned the solar system, and resulted in the destruction of Copernicus Dome on the Moon and the orbital elevator on Mars. One of the major Jovian colonies also came near destruction before the entire incident came to an end.

The Odyssey has had massive repercussions on the world of Jovian Chronicles, and things seem to be spiraling rapidly towards war. That makes for a very exciting game setting…. It is also creates the problem we're discussing. To whit, the setting material in Jovian Chronicles makes it abundantly clear that things are developing very rapidly in this world – within a matter of days or weeks, literally, the solar system could be at war. The situation you're left with is one in which, if you start a campaign, you're just not sure when the events

of your campaign are going to begin to supercede future supplements. This problem was compounded as Dream Pod 9 began pouring the majority of their efforts into the Heavy Gear product line, and Jovian Chronicles languished without support.

Fortunately, the release of Jovian Chronicles product has recently seen an upswing in support, and the next couple of years look particularly bright for the line. Further, you shouldn't consider this a crippling flaw by any stretch of the imagination – the great diversity and breadth of the setting make up for the lack in this one particular area. Due to the depth of material presented it is also relatively easy to start a campaign in the pre-Odyssey state of the setting, and thus give yourself a little bit more breathing room.

The second problem is connected to this one, but requires me to go off on another digression: Jovian Chronicles was originally released as a licensed supplement to R. Talsorian's Mekton game. One supplement was released, the Europa Incident. It was here that the events of the Odyssey were detailed for the first time. The Silhouette version of Jovian Chronicles reviewed here wouldn't be released for a few more years.

The problem is that the Odyssey simply isn't adequately explained in this book. It gets a four paragraph description on the first true page of game information, and then bits and pieces of it are referenced throughout the rest of the setting information (mainly in terms of telling you how people, places, and policies have been effected by different facets of the Odyssey). But the pieces don't always match up, and are almost never explained.

This is frustrating, and I finally put my finger on why: Reading the details of the Odyssey in this core book were like reading a supplement. The same way in which, while reading a module set in the Forgotten Realms, you are expected to know where the Sword Coast is, this supplement expected you to know the Odyssey in quite a bit of detail (even though they did supply the summary).

But, again, a minor problem. Overall, as I've noted, the setting is going to knock your socks off, so let's close on a positive note: The creative team down on Dream Pod 9, once again, display the loving detail which they are willing to put into a setting. A good example of this is found in the equipment chapter, where money is given an extensive explanation, complete with a basic primer of the economic underpinnings of the capitalistic system of 2210 (some of you are yawning, others of you have realized how important this information might be in, for example, a campaign where the PCs portray

traders). It also shines through when, instead of just detailing a generic "first aid kit" or "sleeping drug", the authors take the time to detail specific brands for the various equipment types, complete with some suggestive guidelines on how the GM can design their own brands.

It's this type of attention to detail, in addition to envisioning broad, epic strokes for the setting, that have made Dream Pod 9's campaign settings the industry standard in recent years.

THE SYSTEM

Jovian Chronicles uses the Silhouette Engine – so named, the designers tell us, because it "evokes many things that they hoped to build into the rules. A silhouette is simple; so is the game system. A silhouette marks the outlines of an object; the rules outline the game, helping to give form and definition to all situations. A silhouette is a shadow as a game system should be, to the point where players are not aware of it any more. A silhouette is flexible and can change shape; so can the rules."

The motif of the silhouette, as it is described here, is certainly a model which all game designers should aspire to (with the exception of the simple part, everyone knows somebody who likes a complex engine). The game designers down at Dream Pod 9 carry through on their promises – delivering a simple, easy-to-learn system, with a ton of potential.

It should also be noted that the Silhouette System is unique in that it functions both as a roleplaying engine and a fully functional tactical engine. The two systems are completely compatible, with a simple scale change operation, and, thus, allow for a number of interesting campaign types.

The Silhouette System was introduced with the first edition of Heavy Gear, in 1995. Jovian Chronicles followed it in early 1997, with several modifications. In late 1997, the second edition of Heavy Gear was released, modifying the version of Silhouette found in Jovian Chronicles. Finally, Tribe 8 was released last year, 1998.

The primary differences between these versions of the Silhouette engine lie in the skill list, the tactical game, and the vehicle construction system. Functionally, the engine is basically identical in all its iterations, although minor things have been twitched here and there.

The basic mechanic is a dice pool (but one which doesn't suffer from the usual statistical vagaries). Specifically you roll xd6 and take the highest number rolled. If multiple sixes are

rolled, you add 1 for each additional six. If all the dice come up as 1's, you have fumbled. Unless you fumble, you compare your final number to the assigned Threshold (difficulty) for the action – if the result is higher than the Threshold, then the character has succeeded.

So, for example, if you roll 3, 4, and 6 your total would be 6. If you rolled 2, 6, and 6 your total would by 7 (6 + 1).

In your basic skill test your skill determines the number of dice you roll, and your attribute acts as a modifier to your final result. For example, if you had a skill of 2 in Swimming and a Fitness attribute of 2, you would roll 2d6 and add 2 to the final result.

The only problem with this system is that higher levels of attributes end up contributing a lot to the resolution process, while higher levels of skills contribute less. I, personally, don't have a problem with that – since I tend to run more heroic type campaigns (where a person's natural talents are at least as important as what they're skilled at), but that won't cut it for everyone. Michael T. Richter, who occasionally posts reviews here on RPGNet, has suggested that changing the resolution system to a d8 base (with no other changes) would solve the problem.

CHARACTER CREATION

Character creation in Jovian Chronicles is a five-step process – the first of which is conceptualization and the last of which is simply purchasing equipment. The three steps in-between are "Select Attributes", "Select Skills", "Calculate Secondary Traits". Character creation is thus a very simple process, but it is also a very dynamic one.

This is a good point to mention another strength of the rules specifically: Dream Pod 9 takes a lot of effort to try to make these games all things to all people. To accomplish this they provide a multitude of options, this crops up most notably in character creation with the GM's decision to set the campaign at a "gritty", "adventure", or "cinematic" level. This controls the number of points which players get to create their characters, and the differences between the campaign types is discussed elsewhere in the rules.

The nice thing is that all of these options are kept simple and unnecessary – for example, specialized rules are provided for creating low-gee characters, but it's a special option so that there's no need to use it. You can use these extra tidbits as you want, or ignore them as you want. Dream Pod 9 has been very careful to keep the core of the system streamlined,

and to make sure that everything else is a simple module that can be plugged in or left unplugged at the GM's discretion. It gives you, as the gamer, a tremendous amount of power without burdening you with a lot of responsibility.

Select Attributes. Silhouette character creation is point-driven, but the points are split into two pools – one for attributes and one for skills. Unspent attribute points can be converted into skill points, but not vice versa.

The attribute points are spread across eight attributes: Agility, Appearance, Build, Creativity, Fitness, Influence, Knowledge, Perception, Psyche, and Willpower.

Select Skills. There are "Simple" and "Complex" skills, with different costs for both. Your attribute level in the closest related attribute to a particular skill imposes limits on the skill level. There are also specialization rules, which allow you to get a slight edge in a particular area of one of your skills.

Calculate Secondary Attributes. A lot of games which have a set of calculated secondary attributes start with a core of generalized attributes and then attempt to get more specific secondary attributes through various mathematical formulas and attribute combinations.

Well, in Silhouette the mathematic formulas are there and so are the attribute combinations – but the process has been inverted. As you probably noted above, the attributes in Silhouette are very specific (allowing you to specify a character with a very large body, but who is also in bad physical shape, for example) – the secondary attributes are more generalization compositions of these attributes (along with several combat-specific scores): Strength, Health, Stamina, Unarmed Damage, Armed Damage, Flesh Wounding Score, Deep Wounding Score, Instant Death Score, System Shock Score. This works a lot better, since it gives you both the specific control and the generalized usefulness of, for example, a Strength score.

COMBAT

Combat in the Silhouette engine is basically an extrapolation of basic action resolution (as it is in most games of the past twenty years).

Initiative is determined by rolling a Combat Sense opposed Skill test, in which the character with the highest score goes first, second highest second, and so forth. Tied results act simultaneously.

Two actions can be attempted during a combat round without any penalty – additional actions may be attempted, but each additional action adds a -1 penalty to all actions attempted in the round.

For combat actions the character makes a skill check against the pertinent skill, which is opposed with a Dodge skill check on the part of the defender. Modifiers cover typical combat situations (different attack ranges, speed of attacker and target, and so on) – these are all accessible through easy-to-reference tables (and can also be improvised by the GM fairly easily). There's some specific rules for handling grenades and burst fire.

If a character is injured, damage is determined by multiplying the Weapon Damage Multipler and the Margin of Success on the opposed skill check together. This number is compared to the character's Flesh Wound, Deep Wound, and Instant Death scores and the character takes a wound based on the highest score surpassed. If none of the scores are surpassed, the injury was so minor that it was inconsequential in game terms. (Example: A PC gets an MoS of 3 when shooting a bow at an NPC. A bow possesses a damage multiplier of 7, so the damage score is 21. The NPC's Flesh Wound score is 16, and there Deep Wound score is 25. So they take a Flesh Wound (since 21 is higher than 16, but lower than 25).) Each wound applies a penalty to action checks (-1 for each Flesh Wound, -2 for each Deep Wound)

Death can occur in one of two ways: Either the play takes a massive amount of damage in one hit (which exceeds his Instant Death score) and dies immediately; or from trauma caused by multiple wounds. The latter takes place when the character's action penalty from wounds exceeds their System Shock rating. Various healing rules exist which can save the character from "death" if they are reached soon after their penalties exceed the System Shock score.

Several additional rules exist covering non-standard combat options – drugs, stimulants, fire, poisons, radiation poisoning, and so forth. These work intuitively with a handful of simple charts.

In practice the combat system is simple, sleek, and dynamic. It's as smooth as clockwork, producing a fast-paced brand of action which is also very realistic when it needs to be – the unique damaging mechanic, in particular, works surprisingly well. The one thing missing from this section of the book are some solid examples. Actually, examples would be helpful throughout the rules to help clear up the problems left by the muddy wording of some passages.

THE TACTICAL SYSTEM

I have found, from experience, that while a summary of the basic components of a roleplaying system can generally be useful, a similar summary of a tactical system is both impractical and seldom illuminating. My theory is that this is because both the strengths and weaknesses of a tactical system are in the details, and therefore I would have to relate to you most or all of the system in order to give you any meaningful perspective on it.

That being said, I do feel comfortable in highlighting some of the unique strengths of the Silhouette tactical system (particularly as it is applied in Jovian Chronicles). I would also highlight the weaknesses, but I haven't really found any upon which to comment.

First off, for all the roleplayers quaking in their boots at the thought of moving miniatures or counters around a table, let me assure you that Dream Pod 9 has not forgotten you. They have provided a set of abstract vehicle rules which take up no more than a page and easily allow allow you to include vehicular combat without whipping out the hex paper.

As I noted before, a feature of the Silhouette game is the complete compatibility of the roleplaying and tactical rules. This is not a matter of conversion tables, it is a matter of both sets of rules being based upon the same engine. Because of this, it is as easy as pie to create a hybrid roleplaying-tactical campaign. The game includes a brief set of guidelines for the GM which includes extras such as hidden units, PC crew injuries, and so forth.

In turn, this should not be construed by tactical gamers as meaning that Jovian Chronicle's tactical engine is "corrupted" by roleplaying elements. The tactical engine is fully capable of acting as a strong, stand-alone game in its own right. About the only unfortunate thing at the moment is the lack of Jovian Chronicles miniatures on the market at the moment, but that situation may be corrected in the near future.

There are basically three primary features which make Jovian Chronicles unique (several of which distinguish it from Heavy Gear's tactical system as well):

First, Jovian Chronicles implements a unique vectored combat movement system which can be used in either two dimensions or three; with two, three, and even four vectors axes. The fourth vector is used for 3-D games using a hex map (so you get three 2-D axes running through the six sides of the hex, plus one vertical vector to add the third dimension).

Once again, Dream Pod 9 has provided multiple levels of complexity and accuracy depending on your experience and personal tastes.

What is a vector system and why do you need it? In space, for those who slept through physics class, there's no friction and little gravity to slow your ship down – so Newton's law ("a mass in motion will tend to remain in motion") will display its full effectiveness. On Earth, if I accelerate my car forward and then turn the car and accelerate in a new direction, the friction of the ground and the atmosphere means that my car will stop moving in that original direction (and that if I stop accelerating, my car will come to a stop). In space, however, if I did this I would keep my momentum from both accelerations (unless they were in opposite directions) and head off at an angle relative to them. In essence, unless you take an action to stop moving , you'll keep moving. And this becomes a composite equation – in which your speed forward, backward, left, right, up, and down (although these are all relative terms in space) is maintained unless you accelerate in the opposite direction. In other words, the vector system is a way in which if accelerate three hexes forward this turn, then, unless you accelerate three hexes backward next turn, your spaceship will move forward three hexes next turn as well.

This can become a logistical nightmare, and does in many games – it is very hard for you to keep track of all of your ships carry-over movement, and thus it is difficult to get a clear tactical view of the situation. Dream Pod 9 solves this problem through the use of "altitude" and "destination" counters. The former are used only for three-dimensional games (in which your ship can rise above the table surface or sink below it), but the latter are used in all games. Essentially when you finish moving your ship for a turn you duplicate the exact same move and put a destination counter for the ship down in the hex the ship would end up if the move was actually repeated. (So if you moved forward three spaces, you would put down the destination counter three spaces ahead of the ship's final location.) "So what?" you say. Well, at this point instead of moving your ship the way you would in a more standard tactical game, you manipulate the destination counter. So if you wanted to, for example, move to your right two hexes and decelerate one hex you would move the destination counter two hexes to the right and one hex back – then you would move the ship to the destination counter, and move the destination counter to its new position (two hexes to the right and one hex back).

With this system, vectored movement is handled without you ever having to wrap your end around four different numbers. If you don't believe me, feel free to try it out a couple of times.

If you don't like it, feel free to use a pure vector system – noting down the ship's momentum along each of the vector axes.

The second thing of note in Jovian Chronicles are the Lightning Strike combat rules. In a standard space tactical game it is assumed that the two sides attempt to slow and match one another's relative velocity in order to actively engage one another in combat. However, there is also a good deal of tactical and strategic advantage (in some circumstances) to building up a massive difference in the velocity between the two fleets and performing a "lightning strike" – where the two sides zoom past each other at incredibly fast speeds, getting only one or two turns of effective combat (in game turns).

Finally, Jovian Chronicles, amazingly enough, does not satisfy itself with just have space combat rules. Rules for planetary ground combat and planetary air combat are also included, plus some guidelines for tactical games set inside colony cylinders.

As a result, Jovian Chronicles easily establishes itself not only as one of the best space combat tactical games, but also one of the most versatile science fiction combat engines available. Round all of this out with the excellent Silhouette engine's description of vehicles and technology and you have a tactical game worthy not only in its own right, but for its rightful part in the complete Jovian Chronicles gaming experience.

GENERAL NOTES

Which leaves us with a just a few general notes regarding Jovian Chronicles.

The book begins with an eight page short story. I am skeptical of gaming fiction in general, and downright biased against the quality of fiction in an actual gaming manual – if I see it, I am going to think it bad until it has proven otherwise. Dream Pod 9, however, has developed an uncanny knack for it – when it is short (their Heavy Gear books have a short piece of fiction at the top of each chapter) it is evocative and useful; when it is long it is compelling and revealing. "Playing Games", the piece found here, acts as an excellent introduction to the setting – not only piquing your interest, but giving you a very real feel for what the world of 2210 is like.

The fiction also serves as an oblique introduction to the mini-campaign in the back of the book, designed to give new GMs an easy place to start. The campaign deals with JSS Valiant, the inaugural vessel in a fleet of new Valiant-class ships in the

ARCHIVE REVIEW: JOVIAN CHRONICLES

Jovian fleet. You get a little bit of intrigue, a little bit of action, and a lot of interesting possibilities. My own regret is that the mini-campaign is presented in a disjointed, abbreviated form.

Included in the mini-campaign is an eight-page full-color section, which is very welcome because most of this book is very art poor – particularly in comparison with other Dream Pod 9 products. Besides the full-color section, this fact is also mitigated not only by the cunningly rich lay-out work done with the art which is there, but also gorgeous two-page spreads at the top of each chapter. These last do an excellent job of showcasing Ghislain Barbe's phenomenal talent.

The book is rounded out, after the mini-campaign, with a chapter of "Gamemaster Resources", focusing mainly on advice for creating your own campaign. Although brief, this chapter performs with excellence. One of the more interesting ideas they present is that of a "Pilot" scenario, in which the campaign is given a test flight, just like a television show. In addition guidelines are given for various "Reality Distortion Levels" (means by which the campaign can be varied anywhere from hard SF to anime space opera) – including script immunity (at various levels of effectiveness), existential angst (you have to read these rules), and, my favorite, the "WOO Factor" (which they claim stands for (W)eapons (O)ut of (O)rdinance, but which all fans of Hong Kong Action flicks will recognize as something else altogether). They also deal with villains and give a number of campaign hooks (complete with an overview of the necessary preliminary work). A short section, but packed.

One last thing which should be noted: Jovian Chronicles features an extensive technical reference, designed not only for the pleasure of gearheads, but also a general introduction to concepts such as Lagrange Points for the neophyte.

Before moving on, I need to comment on couple more weaknesses in Jovian Chronicles. First, the entire manual is laid out in a font which is approximately one size too small – it not only strains the eyes when you're reading, it also makes it harder to find information quickly.

Second, material throughout the book is plagued with a certain vague opaqueness. One example of this which has already been mentioned is the strange occurrence of passages which seem to demand footnotes reading "here's some information about the Odyssey, which won't make any sense without knowing the details of what happened during the Odyssey, and you don't".

Another, and far more troubling, example, however, is the skill check mechanic. Like many game engines today, the Silhouette rules supply some "basic" information about the resolution mechanic before character creation (giving you some idea of the effect all these numbers you're plugging in will have in the actual engine): First how to roll and read the dice (complete with fumble rules); then they discuss action tests in general (comparing the die roll to a threshold); then they discuss opposed actions; and finally they reveal that in a skill test the number of dice you roll is equal to your skill level; and finally that there are many zero-average ratings in the game which will act as modifiers to your die roll under certain circumstances (and that Attributes are among these). In other words, they don't just give you the basic mechanic – they give you all the steps which go into making up the basic mechanic, which allows both them and you to easily vary the basic mechanic in a great number of ways.

Here's where it gets screwy. They revisit these concepts in the "Character Action" chapter, which follows character creation, and explicitly lay out how action tests should run. At this point they describe a skill test, in full, as:

The roleplaying game, like the tactical game, relies on Skill tests to determine the outcome of most character actions. Unlike the tactical game, however, the number of possible actions and Skills required to perform them is virtually unlimited.

Here's the catch, folks: At no point is it explicitly laid out that the skill test mechanic consists of a die roll with a number of dice equal to your skill level, modified by an attribute (I know for a fact this is the way it is supposed to be done based on other Silhouette systems).

This can be implied in various ways: For example, the passage about attributes acting as modifiers. Plus, each skill has an attribute associated with it. Unfortunately, both of those have other explanations – attributes are explicitly assigned as modifiers for attribute checks; and we've already discussed that in character creation the associated attribute acts as a limiter on a character's maximum skill level.

This is a massive, gaping flaw in the presentation of the rules and should definitely have been caught by a playtester.

(Looking back at Heavy Gear I can see that both editions of that game have a passage regarding "any applicable modifiers" (which Jovian Chronicles lacks), which by context would seem to include attributes – although obliquely. Tribe 8, finally, added a specific passage covering this rather basic element of the game system.)

CONCLUSION

Jovian Chronicles has a rather fair share of faults and flaws in it. It is a testament to its immense strength, however, that despite these slight foibles it still comes across as a a product of major significance, power, and potential. The setting is evocative, deep, and useful in many, many ways. The rule system is simple, flexible, and versatile. The overall feel of the product is clean, professional, and impressive. Minor flaws in presentation cannot thwart any of that, or the conclusion that derives from it — Jovian Chronicles is one of the best games on the market today. Capable of appealing to fans of hard science fiction, anime, and space opera (plus anything in-between) this book definitely deserves a place on your shelf.

ARCHIVAL NOTE

It's interesting coming to these Jovian Chronicles reviews at the current moment: I'm currently in the middle of a pretty serious Eclipse Phase binge and for some reason these two games strongly remind me of each other. I mean, there's obviously radical differences between the transhuman horrors of the one and the mecha war stories of the other. But, nonetheless, the commonalities of the Solar diaspora, tin can habs, and the like create a sense of commonality and the excitement I feel in exploring Eclipse Phase reminds me a lot of the excitement I had when I was first exploring Jovian Chronicles.

Poor, benighted Jovian Chronicles. I still strongly recommend these core products; the setting really is wonderful and the early Silhouette mechanics are a joy. But if you're looking for a case study on how to neglect, abuse, and mismanage a game there are few better candidates.

For several years after it was initially released, the game received essentially no support whatsoever. Then, when the support finally came, several disastrous decisions were made. (During this time I was working as a freelancer for the company.) Midway through the development cycle, the decision was made to cut the size of their supplements from 124 pages to 80 pages; this is despite the fact that some of these books had already been written and others were in the process of being written. Almost simultaneously the setting saw a major change in artistic direction, so that the titular good guys were suddenly rewritten as dystopic bad guys. And then the company decided to release a completely incompatible system called Lightning Strike that had supplements containing information which actually contradicted information found in the RPG setting supplements.

I bear some responsibility for this mess. I pitched DP9 a "security briefing" concept for the Jovian sourcebook: The setting material would be presented in the form of a Solapol briefing file with excerpts taken from other documents, intercepted communications, guidebooks, and the like. The structure would present useful, practical information for the GM in a format that would also allow it to be excerpted and used as handouts for the players. The line developers loved the idea and decided to revamp the entire sourcebook line to use the format. What I didn't know at the time (and didn't discover until much later), was that this included having a different freelancer rewrite an entire sourcebook that had already been finished in an effort to convert it to the new concept. (He may have also been simultaneously trying to cut 20-40 pages worth of material in order to squeeze it into the smaller book length. I was doing the same thing simultaneously while in the middle of writing my first draft.) Ironically, most of the material I wrote for the Jupiter sourcebook was then thrown out.

In any case, this was all years later: Copies of the first edition of Jovian Chronicles are relatively easy to track down and I heartily recommend that you do so. There's a lot of awesome packed between those covers.

THE JOURNAL, PART 9: HISTORY REPEATING

AARON BERTRAND

Worry is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.
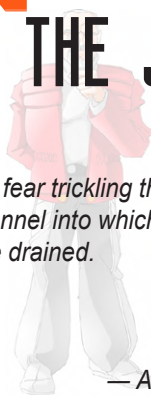
— *Arthur Somers Roche*

SATURDAY 10/13/2210 09:34 TARDIFREY TIME

An hour after the conversation about training me as an officer, Olivia introduced me to my new trainer, navigator Jaems.

"Don't teach him any bad habits." She told him in a tone that was almost a scold.

"Those are the only habits I know!" he'd shot back at her while she left the bridge for duties elsewhere. He turned to me, and began with, "Readyya?"

Jaems has an accent that's difficult to place. I'm going to avoid quoting him because I don't think I can do it justice. His speaking is so distinctive that I do think a little explanation will be useful for future reference. His catchphrase is "Readyya", which stands as a mangled form of "Are you ready?", and which he insists is traditional among people in his lunar colony. He's also a prankster, so it could be that he makes up stuff like this and commits to the joke long-term.

Our first meeting involved my foot being shoved forcefull into his face during one of the fever nightmares from a few weeks ago. Broke his nose and probably gave him a concussion. He'd tried to join the people holding me down and got kicked across the room. He still swears that his face has never recovered, which I can tell is all in good humor. The rest of the crew gives him a hard time about how I should do it to him again because he looks better than ever.

Something I didn't know about Jaems before today was the passionate love he holds for oral storytelling. I'd heard him tell some stories now and then, but as we sat together and went through the training, he'd mentioned that he does a show on the public news net, and prepares them between missions. He says we're all lucky because we get to hear the stories before anyone else, since they have to wait until we're near a space dock or within close radio contact of a planet. before he can get to some of the particular uplinks that lets him publish. Nearly any uplink could handle the communication, but time on these is costly, so he limits himself to a subset of them that are on the cheaper range, which also limits the supply of satellites he can connect with.

When I asked him about how he became part of the crew, he gave me an earful of drunken revelry, a shipment of missing fancy hats, a weightless bar fight, a sordid soiree, and some other adventures (that seemed a little farfetched). Duncan passed through on the way to another area and added a few details to the story, but I wasn't sure if anything either of them was saying was true, or if they were talking up a fairly ordinary recruitment conversation. Either way, I'd already seen Jaems in action, and putting himself into action on orders from Olivia or Duncan almost as fast as the words were spoken. We hadn't really seen combat yet, and while I don't hope that we do, I would secretly like to see this crew in action.

So, I definitely enjoyed my time training with Jaems. In fact, in the past several hours I've become acquainted enough to see how I could fill-in on navigation duties if they needed me. It's actually not a complex system for the basic user like me.

Navigational computers figure out the various trajectories and velocities of millions of items in its database--which is frequently updated with datasets distributed by the public navsat systems throughout the inner planets region. They take this data, figure out where our ship is and what it's currently doing, and provides a series of recommendations for actions to take based on where we're headed. Unfortunately, a significant flaw in the system is that it's not great at dealing with the levels of cunning a human brain can get to. When Duncan and the crew find themselves in unusual situations, the nav computer fails to provide helpful recommendations.

I asked him to show me the last few weeks of our journey, and show me when he was able to outthink the computer. He got a satisfied grin on his face and put the nav system in history mode. He explained various points along our path, and how the changing information Olivia provided him during the journey affected the computer's projections.

We were talking about the incredible mid-flight pickup we did of the cargo as we passed Mars at about the same time Olivia came running to the bridge with a critical look in her eye. Only Jaems and myself were on the bridge for the last several minutes. She held out a sensor and localized the signal from whatever she was tracking to one of the systems maintenance hatches. Duncan and the comms crewman came in and pulled the panel off and dug around inside with their own sensors.

I glanced at Jaems, and there was no sign of recognition of this sort of incident in his eyes. I looked over to Olivia as she stood behind the guys digging inside the walls of the bridge.

"What's going on?" I ask her.

She looks at me. "We have found an anomaly. These two", she says, motioning to where the captain has his head tucked inside the compartment and the crewman is about halfway inside, "are about to eliminate the source."

I didn't think Jaems knew about the anomalous signals, so I gave no sign that I had figured out what they were looking for.

"When did it start?"

"A few minutes ago. It's still transmitting in short bursts." She came over to a console by us and began poking at some subsystem I hadn't been trained in yet.

"Can we helpa, Olivia?" Jaems didn't like being idle when important stuff was going on nearby.

"Tell me about anything you've seen, heard, smelt, felt... whatever may have come up while you two were talking. Tell me especially if anything strange that may have come up, even if it seemed like nothing."

We shook our heads. Nothing had come up. James offered, "Been showin Alastair our path from ta Venus on to ta Mars. Was 'bout tae show 'im my master plan for ta asteroid belt when ye there come on deck."

(I'm sorry. It's a butchering of his way of speaking, but I wanted to try to capture it for future reference. He's actually pretty great to listen to.)

Olivia starts digging through some logs for various systems, searching thousands of lines of seeming nonsense text garbage and checking her scanner.

Jaems and I watch for a minute longer, and return to our task. James dials the timeline forward and stops at a point where the line subtly changes. He starts telling me about how he had been able to use the gravitational well of a cluster of free-floating asteroids to alter our course with better fuel efficiency when Olivia interrupted.

"Everyone stop!" She said, looking at us and over to Duncan. "What's going on in there?"

Duncan pulls his head out. "We were getting close to it, but haven't found it yet. Looks like the signal just stopped."

Olivia looks at our screen. "What did you do on here..." she looks at the scanner, "25 seconds ago?"

Jaems pauses, then tells her he was showing me his asteroid fuel-saving trick.

It was her turn to pause for a moment. "Take it back to the same point you were around Mars."

"On et." Jaems said, and we watched the screen carefully while he dialed the timeline back.

"Go further back," Olivia orders. Jaems complies. "Forward again, and stop at the same point as before." Jaems does.

From within the wall we hear a muffled cheer and thump, followed by a rumbling growl. If I had to guess, I'd say the crewman found his target and promptly forgot that he was in a small space. He handed something to Duncan and crawled out of the space, rubbing his head.

Olivia and Duncan looked at the tiny box. Jaems and I stood around them, looking down upon the little box and its hair-like wires hanging from it, now useless.

Duncan checks his scanner. "Looks like we got it."

Olivia pulls up some things related to the navigational system and tweaks with a few things on the interface. Duncan stands back with the look of a man who knows he's about to see the results of her genius and knows better than to get in her way.

"Jaems", she says, so suddenly in the quiet that had set upon our group that it sounded like shouting. She seemed to have noticed. "I'm sorry. You're not in trouble, but I need to know what you've done to the navigational system."

He shook his head. "Nut", he says, meaning "nothing". Olivia presses him, asking about the script he made for his podcasts. He realizes what she means, and explains he wrote a script that watched the navigational computer for indications that we were near a communications uplink, and when we were, it was to upload whatever recordings he'd made since the last sync and post them to the bulletin boards automatically.

Duncan asked how it could have any relationship to this device. Olivia considered it for a moment, checked the logs again, and the scanner, and nodded.

"Seems that our fancy cargo catching around Mars triggered an upload to the uplink, which wouldn't have happened except you needed to disable the safety interlink to get the computer to do what you wanted. At that moment, quiet mode was disabled and it reached-out to a Martian uplink and sent your queue." She regarded him for a moment. "It's not your fault; it was an odd situation and I didn't think about the consequences, either. I should have remembered the consequences of switching security protocols."

Duncan chimed in. "Alright, let it go, both of you. Don't worry about guilt, just tell me where this thing came from." Olivia's other skills came into play now, but she yielded to the communications crewman for a moment. He picked it up, looked it over, and checked the wires closely.

"I don't know how long it was here, but I think it was quietly logging copies of our navigational information during our trip, and waited until it detected a, well, loud enough signal that it could piggyback all the way back to its masters, whoever those are."

Duncan looked impressed, and turned to Olivia.

"Well done. That box contains our logs and a very sophisticated program designed to hide it's outgoing transmissions along other routine communications we might have. In this case, because we changed some of the paths between subsystems, whoever installed this didn't realize the device could collect, but couldn't transmit. Our safety protocols have blocked it from transmitting anything until that moment we rounded Mars. It sent probably everything it had out to the uplink, and into the hands of its masters."

"Shit." Jaems said. Shit, indeed.

Olivia looked at Duncan for a moment, something quiet passing between them, then a short nod from Duncan. She went off the bridge, and Duncan called me into his office after reassuring Jaems that there was no fault to be had except by whichever maintenance crew set the bug, and certainly none on him. Our faithful navigator didn't seem confident in that, but he loosened his shoulders a bit and returned to his work.
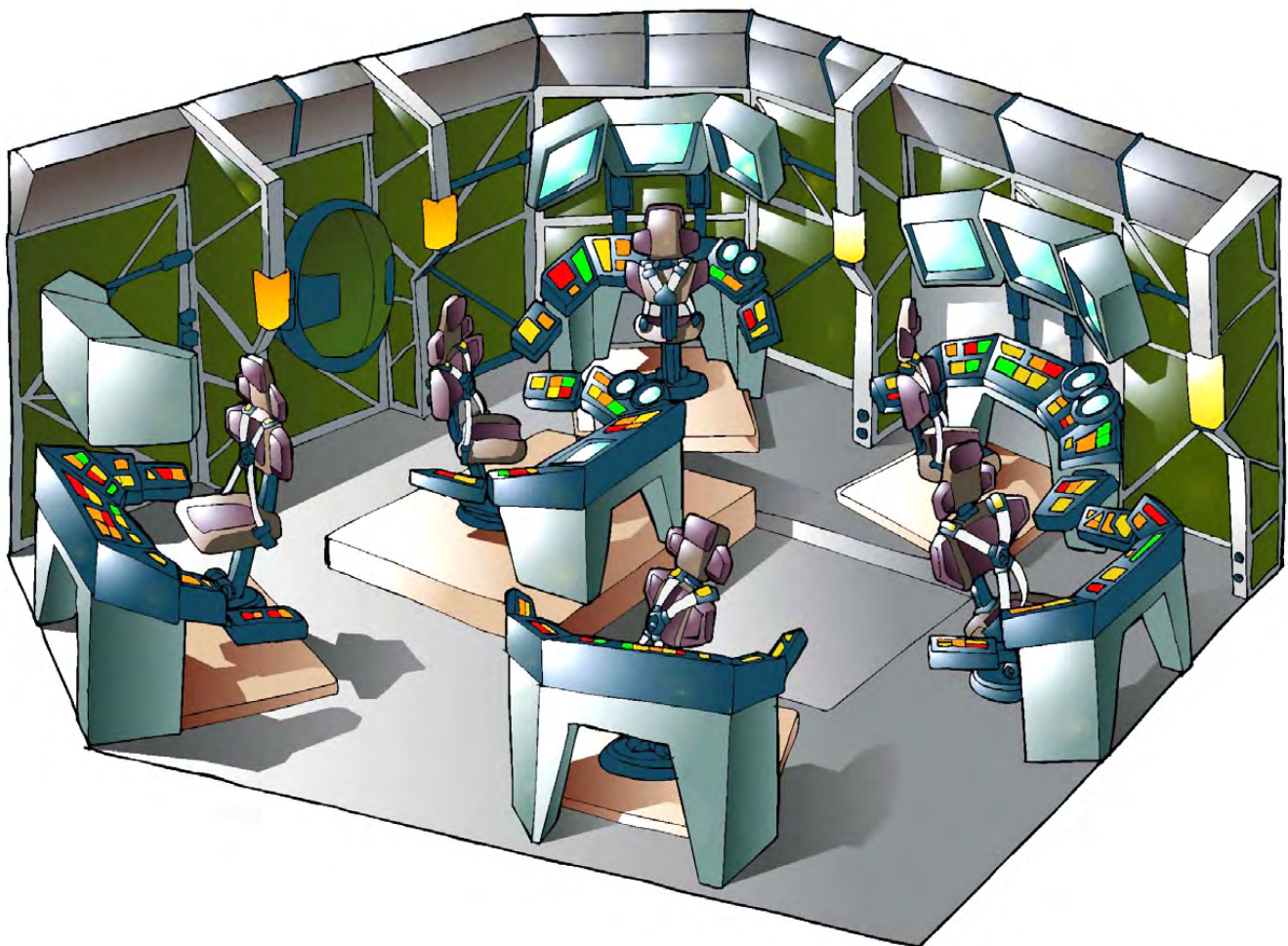
SATURDAY 10/13/2210 16:07 TARDIFREY TIME

Duncan had called me into the office and shared that he, the communications tech, and Olivia had been searching for the device that morning, as they had every morning since we got the tip about the mysterious signal was first detected. Our next step would be to figure out how much got out during the navigational replay, which the comms tech was working on figuring out now. A course correction was definitely in order, but to move without direction from our benefactor would be suicide.

I don't think Duncan typically worries about anything, but he seemed on the edge of an anger eruption as a result of the events from this morning. In his office, he let off some of that steam, and opened up about his concerns about putting the crew in danger. He embraced their enthusiasm for this mysterious trip we were on, even with the myriad know risks and hidden dangers. I got to see the weight of the crew's trust in him and the effect it had. I've never seen a leader dealing with these sorts of questions before. I let him talk and asked questions here and there, when it seemed like there was more he might want to tell. In the end, I had come to know him in an entirely new way, and found my appreciation for his leadership deeply encouraging.

Some of the things he asked about were about the crew were touching. He'd talked about his concerns about people's families, lovers, pets back home they might not see again, and even the few pets onboard who were going to have to deal with the upcoming iceboxing of the ship, and who weren't capable of understanding why we were doing it. He talked about the likelihood of trouble restarting the engine in deep interplanetary space without any dock to turn to if things went poorly. Our food supplies were probably going to have to be rationed even tighter than now, so he'd have to work out a new duty roster that included more downtime and rest because of the lowered energy levels.

He also talked about life outside the ship. He was friends with captains across the system and had resigned himself to never working jobs with them again, sharing in the joy of a major shipping accomplishment, or disrupting a band of raiders, or just having other captains to talk to when he needed a new perspective. His admiration went beyond appreciating people, it was like they had become a family spread across colonies and trade routes and in roles in worlds trying to make a new life for themselves.

When I reminded him that he was helping us change the future of the system now, he considered it.

"Well, you guys are the heroes; I just drive the chariot." He said, and sighed half-heartedly.

I saw him cutting himself short; somewhat stuck in the morass of a difficult situation with an absolutely unclear possible outcome.

"We wouldn't have survived this long without you and Olivia's talents, and without having put a surprising amount of trust in you, and not only do we have our lives, we've also got a fighting chance against the opposition. Without you, the worst kinds of people would steal what we know and destroy any hope for the future of humanity."

I went on to describe ways the crew had helped us all, and how there was a powerful network of friendships here, a group as tight-knit as any I'd ever heard of. I told him of moments I'd had or seen with the crew, how they help each other out, how they spoke about him, about the other officers, about the lives they have as a result of putting who they thought they were at risk and finding a whole new life that was theirs for the grabbing, and they all hungrily took it, and take from it still.

I don't frequently use terms like this, but I told him what he'd created on this ship was magical. He'd laughed at that, but asked me to tell him more. By the end of our conversation, which had gone for two hours before we noticed the time had passed, he had asked me to join him after dinner for more conversation and to break-out some of his favorite whiskey. I told him there was no way I would deny a shot of whiskey after the kind of day we're having.

SUNDAY 10/14/2210 9:07 TARDIFREY TIME

Well, drinking with Duncan went well. For both of us, I think. I haven't had great whiskey in a long time, and Duncan's got a great sense of taste. We talked, played cards, and I don't even know when we passed-out. I woke up a few minutes ago from the pain of a pulled muscle. His couch isn't so great for sleeping on. He, however, looked like he was getting a good rest. I know we'll need it for what's coming up, so I left him a message and headed back here.

I also want it noted for the record that the lights in the hall are much too bright and should be dimmed on a day-night cycle.

THE JOURNAL, PART 9: HISTORY REPEATING

TUESDAY 10/16/2210 8:50 TARDIFREY TIME

Our morning staff meeting was cut short after Jaems announced over the comm that he needs a second opinion on some new nav sat data. Duncan was already motioning for Olivia to head out there when James requested a second opinion.

Duncan continued the meeting at a brisk pace, cutting almost everything except for updates on our cold-flying status from various departments. With that done, we were dismissed and all followed him to the bridge.

Olivia and Jaems were working rapidly on the navigation screen. He waited, and we waited with him. Nobody wanted to interrupt the rapid discussion between the two. We tried to stand silently, but after a few minutes, Duncan gave a simple "Heya" to them and they both turned.

That was the first time that I think I've seen Olivia caught off-guard. She's always aware of who is around, who is coming and going. It was an unsettling development.

"We have reason to believe there are multiple ships on intercept courses."

Duncan went straight to her and looked at the navigation screen while they explained what they'd seen and what the various blips were. We could easily overhear.

There were six ships likely to intercept our most likely course at several different points. Some of them might not make it, but others clearly had sufficient velocity to arrive in the general area we planned to be in long before we were to arrive. Based on their sizes and movements, a mix of ships from CEGA and Venus were coming for us.

There was no hiding anywhere. They are probably armed, and far more heavily than we could ever be. The showdown we hoped to outrun is closing in on us. Duncan looked back at us, regarding us. He looked directly at me. I looked straight at him. I thought as hard as I could about how confident I am in him, his leadership, in our crew and our vessel. I knew we were right to keep our technology away from our pursuers, and would rather destroy it than let it fall into enemy hands.

Something in my expression must have made a difference, because Duncan looked at the rest of the officers again and said, "We'll have an all-crew meeting in ten minutes." The officers left to make sure everyone got the note. He nodded for me to make the announcement on the PA.

Of all the times we've drilled this as a crew, I hadn't considered how I might feel after hearing, "This is not a drill". I should have worried instead about how I'd feel being the one saying it.
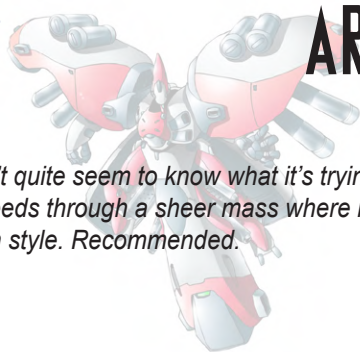
A book which doesn't quite seem to know what it's trying to accomplish, but succeeds through a sheer mass where it may fail in style. Recommended.

This is the worst Dream Pod 9 product I own, with the exception of Video Fighter. It's still better than the vast majority of the products on the market (a testament to Dream Pod 9's outstanding strengths), but is critically flawed in several areas.

First off, the book is slightly schizophrenic. About fifteen minutes into reading it I suddenly realized I had no idea what the product methodology was supposed to be. What I mean is that, when you buy a roleplaying supplement, the supplement is supposed to do something – and that something should be very specific. Deities and Demi-Gods describes deities and demi-gods for AD&D. Berlin by Night describes the city of Berlin in the World of Darkness. And so forth.

But who sat down at Dream Pod 9 one day and said to themselves: "Let's make a book with a bunch of information on the Jovian Confederation; some tidbits regarding the Martian War; an adventure/campaign set in and around the Jovian Centennial; a tactical campaign set around/on Mars; a bunch of vehicles designs for Mars, Jupiter, and CEGA; a mis-named "JPDS Campaign"; and a semi-update to the year 2213."

I began to think, in short, that the word "chaos" had been well chosen.

The second major problem is that this is a book ahead of its time. Rule number one of the design of an effective roleplaying line is that, before you can take the line anywhere, you must first establish a baseline. Rule number two would be that, when you take the game line somewhere, make sure the GMs and players have all the info they need to go there with you. Chaos Principle provides a partial update to the year 2213 (from the year 2210, which is the baseline of the setting) – and therein lies the problem: A partial update. There are too many unanswered questions about what happened in the interim for me to successfully run a campaign here.

Finally, the book is the poster child for the serious editorial problems which plagued Dream Pod 9 during 1998 and early-1999. During this time frame the Pod was suffering from a combination of personnel changeover and rushed production schedules, resulting in poorly copyedited texts – typos and editorial marks, for example, were routinely left in the text.

This book takes the award for the worst of the batch, however, with all the problems of other books, plus a page where the text which is supposed to be there has been wiped out by a mistaken cut-and-paste from another section of the book (the correct text for page 11 can be found on the Pod's website and will be corrected in future printings). (It should be noted, also, that the Pod is now over these difficulties. Their last handful of products have been spotless in my experience.)

The upside is that this 128 page book is chock full of all sorts of different stuff. Perhaps the best analogy would be a grab bag. With a grab bag you have the disadvantage that there is no coherency to what you've purchased, but you have two advantages as well: First, that you get a wide variety of stuff. Second, that you might just find a gem or two inside.

UPDATE TO 2213

Chaos Principle is primarily described as an "Original Cinematic Adventure" (or OCA). This is a wordplay on "Original Video Animation" (or OVA), a term for anime which was designed to be sold direct-to-video. Typically an OVA is a stand-alone story, even if it uses characters from a series with a story arc (which, while being limited to Babylon 5 in this country, is fairly typical with Japanese anime).

So, as an OCA, Chaos Principle is designed to be an adventure book – describing a short campaign centered around the events of the Jovian Centennial celebration. I'll be discussing that component of the book a little later on.

At a more basic level, however, the book is serving as a semi-update to 2213. An update because it provides details of events which happen between 2210 (when the core rulebook is set) and 2213, "semi" because it doesn't do a very thorough job of it. Specifically: Information relating to the Jovian Confederation is given in great detail, while events elsewhere in the solar system are covered briefly if at all.

What you end up with is almost unusable except in the context of this single product. You know, for example, that General Thorsen (the Jovian commander responsible for the Odyssey) has escaped and then went to Venus to engage in some guerilla combat… but once Thorsen is outside the Confederation's dominion suddenly you don't know what happened next (specifically, what happened on Venus).

I understand the methodology behind this (this campaign is set in the Confederation, so you provide Confederation-related information), but it's bad methodology. As I mentioned before, this book would have been much better off if it had been released two or three years from now – once we knew the Jovian Chronicles setting better and more support product had been provided. As it is, we've got this campaign out in 2213 (which you can run fairly effectively), but that's all you have. I don't know enough about the solar system of 2213 from this product in order to run a campaign there and, quite frankly, that time period is not going to be supported for some time to come yet (since now they need to backtrack and fill in all the holes in 2210).

JOVIAN CONFEDERATION SOURCEBOOK

Because there hasn't been a Jovian Confederation sourcebook published yet, it's not sufficient for Chaos Principle to simply provide an update – it's going to have to provide you with some additional setting information in order to make the campaign playable.

My problem with this section is not its competency or its completeness. Wunji Lau does an excellent job of expanding our knowledge of the Confederation from the information found in the core rulebook. You get a societal overview, a look at some of the major colony cylinders, a little historical information, a look at some major organization, and an analysis of some major characters in the setting. All-in-all, an excellent resource – and anybody wanting to set a campaign in, around, or involving the Jovian Confederation should definitely pick up this book.

No, my problem is not competency. My problem is that someday the Pod is going to have to release a full-scale Jovian sourcebook. And when that happens it's going to be exceptionally difficult to pull it off successfully. Why? Because you're going to be in the unsavory position of making a tough choice: Do you duplicate the information found in Chaos Principle? Or do you attempt to present all-new information?

If you choose the former path, then you'll have successfully produce a Jovian Confederation sourcebook which can stand on it's own. You'll be able to pick up that book, just as you should, and have the rock-solid foundation you need to run a Confederation campaign. But there are two problems. First, those of us who already own Chaos Principle will be buying repetitious material. Second, those who don't already own Chaos Principle (they're new to the line, for example), will end up with repetitious material when/if they do buy it. Either way, you're lowering the overall informational value of the two products.

On the other hand, if you present all-new information in this hypothetical Jovian Confederation sourcebook, you have now created a dependency relationship between the two products. Now, in order to have a complete foundation for a Confederation campaign, you're going to have to own both this sourcebook and Chaos Principle. You'd end up hurting the primary sourcebook by making it rely upon a secondary supplement.

Once again, these problems are created by the fact that the book is two or three years too early. If the book had been produced at some point after the release of a Confederation sourcebook than the writer could have simply assumed it as a prerequisite (and, therefore, sufficed himself with a simple update to the material found in it). Heck, with the extra space he could have then gone on to provide the additional update material in order to make any 2213 campaign feasible with the purchase of this book (see how it all hooks together?).

THE MARTIAN WAR

One of the things we learn from the update is that the cold war has suddenly decided to heat up. The Martian Free Republic (allies of the Jovian Confederation) have been implicated in the destruction of the orbital elevator during the events of the Odyssey. The Martian Federation (allies of CEGA), who controlled the elevator, are enraged by this knowledge. Tensions rise and finally break as the Federation declares war on the Free Republic. As things begin to spiral into chaos, both the Jovian Confederation and CEGA dispatch fleets to Mars.

Can you hear the ominous music playing in the background?

This is cool stuff. Things get weird, however, when the book presents a mini-tactical campaign focusing on three major battles (two on the surface, one in space). There's nothing wrong with these scenarios, but why are they here?

Before reading the book I assumed that the tactical scenarios were somehow related to the roleplaying campaign (as was done with The New Breed campaign book for Heavy Gear). Such is not the case. The roleplaying campaign has absolutely no connection to the tactical campaign (indeed, the roleplaying campaign gets nowhere near Mars).

Obviously the book is trying to make it worthwhile for a tactical player to pick it up (since they would benefit from the update material). In the long run, however, it sticks out like a sore thumb – symptomatic of the misguided grab bag nature of the book.

(On a side note: I'm not too sure how I feel about the Battle of Kurtzenheim and the events which follow it. I won't spoil it for you here, but there is a certain degree of anti-climax to it.)

THE JOVIAN CENTENNIAL

This is the core of the book – the Original Cinematic Adventure which is focused on the events taking place around the Jovian Centennial celebrations.

Dream Pod 9 does some fascinating things as designers – they always have a firm understanding of not only what methodology they're using to design a product, but the impact that methodology has (which is why the failure for a clear methodology to present itself in this product is so odd). One of the ways in which this manifests itself is in the innovative manners in which they present campaign and adventure material (reference my reviews of The Paxton Gambit and The New Breed for more details).

Here they're trying something a little different, but once again they seem to have a fairly good grasp of what the essential elements are – which allows them to play around with the other ones to their heart's content.

First, you are given a variety of tools which let you get your players involved. Primarily, the book gives you four default characters (Ariana, Jared, Khoi, and Joseph). Think of these guys as the cast of your favorite television shows – they have vivid personalities, interrelationships, etc. The easiest thing to do is to have the players step into these character's shoes and proceed.

They're not content to simply let that be the only way, though. The book also provides three different sets of "hooks" to get you involved. The first set, the "Campaign Hooks", are ways of pulling in non-standard PCs to the general campaign. The second set, "In Media Res", assume that Ariana, Jared, Khoi, and Joseph are still present and carrying out their "default actions" (more on that in a moment) – the PCs get involved in the evolving campaign at different points in the middle of the action (which is what "in media res" means).

But it is with the third set of hooks – the "Adventure Hooks" that you begin to feel that things aren't coming together quite right. These hooks suggest "alternate" campaigns which would only use the presented campaign material as a "backdrop" for the actions which the PCs are taking.

Which is a neat idea, in and of itself. It only falls apart later on, when you read past the campaign material, and hit some other stuff: Like "Secondary Effects" and "Adventure Seeds" – both of which have very similar goals. The way this should have been done would be to isolate all of this material together (preferably after the campaign material, because trying to discuss alternatives to material the GM hasn't even read yet is pretty ineffective). This would provide a sort "united front" and make it easier for the GM to access the toolbox, so to speak.

Now, for the campaign itself. It is broken into four phases ("Introduction", "Emergence", "Action", and "Climax"), each composed of various scenes. The cool part is that each scene is dynamic – with multiple entry and exit points. At this most basic organizational level, this format has a tremendous amount of potential. In the actual execution, however, things go a bit askew.

Each scene description is broken into two parts: A semi-narrative description of what happens and a set of "Adventure Suggestions". Essentially, the semi-narrative (which reads like a scene outline) describes the default actions of the pre-established cast. In other words, if you just read through these you'd have an idea of what would happen if the PCs weren't involved at all (or if the players weren't controlling the actions of the primary cast members). The "Adventure Suggestions" section then outlines exactly how the situation should be handled in game terms.

If done properly, the dual nature of the scene descriptions (coupled with the dynamic scene connections) would end up providing the best of both worlds: An active, established storyline – from which the PCs can easily deviate. In the actual practice of the Chaos Principle, however, this doesn't

happen – to the point where, if you don't generate completely original material, the PCs are going to be extremely railroaded at certain junctions.

Beyond this, there are several structurally questionable narrative choices: Such as having the default cast of four start out as two separated teams of two who have no knowledge of or connection to each other.

All that being said, the story itself is extremely engaging: A neo-nationalist group known as the Principii believe that they, and only they, can save the Jovian Confederation from its worst enemies. To do this they want to start a war with CEGA (a war which, obviously, the superior Confederation will easily win). With a senior CEGA official (Ignatius Chang) in the Confederation for the Centennial celebrations and warships on their way to Mars, the Principii see a rare opportunity: Assassinate Chang and you start a war. The PCs stumble onto the plot from different ends, meet up in the middle, and have everything come down to a climactic battle between experimental exo prototypes.

Once again, rock solid material. But the pieces just don't fit quite the way they should.

ODDS AND ENDS

Let's see… We've got an update, a sourcebook, a tactical campaign, and a roleplaying campaign. Isn't that enough for one book?

Apparently not.

There is, for example, an extensive (30 page) technical supplement – detailing equipment, technical updates, new vehicles, etc. Also, there is a completely bizarre, three page, "sample campaign". It is titled "JSPD Blue" (for Joshua's Station Police Department) and deals with the ESWAT (Enhanced Special Weapons and Tactics – i.e., they use combat exo-suits and deal with extreme situations) team on Joshua's Station. And there's some other stuff spread throughout the book in a faintly haphazard manner.

CONCLUSION

Chaos Principle could be a truly excellent book, but somewhere along the line things just didn't gel right. That being so, let me explain why I give the book the relatively high marks (double fours) that I do:

Style. Well, the book takes a hit for the handful of instances where material is unnecessarily spread out or laid out in an unintuitive fashion (for the most part, this isn't true, though). It takes another hit for the typos and the misplaced text. But it gets a boost from the fact that, where the text isn't compromised by poor editorial control, it is clear, concise, and informative. It gets another boost due to the (typically) outstanding artwork of Mr. Ghislain Barbe. It's too strong to be below average (1 or 2), and too weak to be truly outstanding (5). So this leaves me with "average" (3) and "better than average" (4). For me the strengths outweigh the flaws, so it gets a four.

Substance. It takes a hit because of the scatter-shot approach of the material. It takes another hit because of the insufficient update material. It then takes a third hit from the flaws in the campaign material. With most companies, this trio of flaws would be enough to send the book spiraling to at least an average rating, if not worst. But the Pod succeeds at packing so much material in here that it nicely counteracts these negative aspects. In other words, it may be a grab bag – but it's a really big grab bag. And the stuff in it is of above-average quality for the most part. So it slides by with a four.

Nonetheless: Probably the worst Pod product I've read. The fact that it still scores as highly as it does with me is an indication of the quality which the Pod normally produces.

And, at the end of the day, I have to strongly suggest that any fan of Jovian Chronicles pick this book up. There's just too much territory covered in it, in various forms, for it to be lacking from your game shelf.

ARCHIVAL NOTE

Hopefully the real conflict I was feeling in trying to rate this mish-mash of a product was clearly communicated in my conclusion. In retrospect, however, I feel that I was much too kind to it: The campaign material is a mangled mess that would require far too much work to actually bring to a gaming table; the rest of the material is a grab-bag of irrelevancy for anyone using the core 2210 time period for their campaign; and, with the benefit of hindsight, it's really clear that this was the first warning sign that the Jovian Chronicles product line was about to implode into mediocrity and nonsense (something which I describe in more detail in the postscript to the Jovian Chronicles review). I suspect that a more accurate rating of Substance would have been 3 (or possibly even a 2).

Article Guidelines

The Aurora Magazine focuses on the worlds created by Dream Pod 9. As such, we are primarily interested in, but not limited to, articles dealing with SilCore and Blitz! rules (variants, additions and explorations of the rules) and on fiction, mechanized designs, equipment, artwork and similar ideas that draw on the established DP9 universes. This does not mean, however, that articles that are generic in nature or that do not deal with unique or original material, only that the focus is on exploring Silhouette and it's attendant universes.

Any article that is a promotion piece for another product, be it an excerpt or a lead-in to another product, must be clearly defined as such within the article body.

No articles will be accepted that use another's Intellectual Property or Copyrighted material without an included signed permission to use said material.

Fiction may be a one-off or serial based, as desired. Please note that long works of fiction may be split into multiple pieces over multiple issues for length reasons; if you are writing a long story it is best to indicate breaks in the story (chapters, for example) that allow us to chose the best point to split the story, if necessary. Stories are encouraged to be accompanied by Silhouette CORE or Blitz! rules detail of some kind, be it stats for characters or equipment in the story, game scenarios, mechanized designs, new rules or explanations of how to simulate aspects of the story using the Silhouette/Blitz rules. This is not a hard requirement however, and stand-alone pieces will be considered and published.

Aurora is also looking for original artwork. Art may be used to accompany the article and/or for the cover of the APA as well as individual pieces. Please see below for copyright information regarding images.

Submission Guidelines

All work for Aurora should be submitted in an .rtf or .doc file. The text within should be in Arial 10pt font, and single-spaced. Hard returns should be used only to separate paragraphs (with a double hard return) or with bullet points and list items. Do not indent paragraphs. You may use italics, boldface or bullets where deemed necessary.

Tables may be included in the submission. Preferably, tables should be created with minimal lines between cells, instead using background colour and/or cell spacing for clarity. Tables may also be included in courier-font/fixed-formatting. Identify these kind of tables with the following: <<<Table>>>

The article's title should be clearly noted at the beginning of the file, followed by a short (less than 75 words) introductory text. This introductory text can either be a synopsis, a quote, story, etc. It will be used at the beginning of the article to 'set the stage'.

The file should end with the Author's name(s), contact information (if desired) and a short bio (optional). This information will be placed on a Contributing Author's page in the magazine.

Please spell check and proofread your article. English or American spellings may be used as desired.

Photos, drawings or images should be accompanied by photo credits as well as a brief description/caption for each photo (optional). Indicate within your article where the images are to be included like so: <<<Image_Filename.ext>>>. Images should be sent at a maximum of 200dpi for greyscale or colour images, 600dpi for black & white images (1-bit). Given the size of a page, images should be no larger than 7 by 10 inches (18 by 18 cm). If we need a higher resolution image, we will contact you. Images should be compressed with an appropriate method; please check the quality of your images before sending.

Copyright Guidelines

Quotes or information that are attributable to other sources are permissible in appropriate quantities, and should be identified/cited (including page numbers), preferably within the article. Be sure that each quote is written exactly as it appears in the original source.

If you wish to include photos/drawings/images with your article, please provide the photo credits (artist/photographer/illustrator and subject if applicable). You may only submit images for which you have obtained permission to include in your article.

All articles and images used by Aurora remain in the copyright of the original submitters. You, as the author, must consent to release the article for publication by Aurora, with the knowledge that Aurora will not provide any compensation other than what has been listed above, and that Aurora, as an online magazine, will be downloaded by third-parties in a PDF format. All work for Aurora is volunteer-based. Should DP9 decide at a later time to compile and sell articles within a contract will be negotiated with the author at that time.

The End Print

Please send all submissions to the following email address:

auroramag@gmail.com

Thank you everyone for your interest, and we look forward to seeing your submissions soon!

Deadline for Submissions for Issue #10.4: September 24th 2016

Historical Articles

Under this broad category are pieces meant primarily for illuminating or detailing something within the game universe. This can be truly historical in nature (describing history), detailing a region, the language, customs, architecture, technical systems, corporations, social structure, music, and more, to name a few. Articles may either be written from a neutral point of view (impartial observer from above) or written 'in character', that is, in the manner such information may be presented if it were available in the game world. See the Historical Accuracy note, below (especially important for this category).

Fiction

Any story (narrative with characters) that takes place within the established DP9 game worlds falls under this category. See the Historical Accuracy note, below, and also see the submission guidelines for further requirements.

Modules

Also known as adventures, a written collection of plot, character, and location details used by the gamemaster to manage the plot or story in the DP9 RPGs. All manner of modules are open for submission, from espionage to social to military to a combination of all three. Module submissions must be detailed enough for the GM to run the entire adventure, including descriptions and dispositions (where applicable) of major NPCs, locations, accessories and story/plot. See the Historical Accuracy note, below.

Scenarios

These are the tactical equivalent of modules, an encounter between two (or more) factions set up for combat. A complete scenario will detail the background of the encounter (the why), the forces engaged (the who -- what physical units at a minimum, regiment and designations to go the full way), the map and terrain (the where) the victory conditions (the how) and any special rules or conditions (the what). Scenarios should be designed to be balanced for each side, either via the types/numbers of units or through special circumstances or conditions. If the scenario is not balanced this must be mentioned in the background. See the Historical Accuracy note, below.

Note: Historical Accuracy

Aurora is committed to accuracy within the established DP9 worlds. All articles that take place 'within' the game world should be checked for its accuracy within the established timeline, faction dispositions, available equipment, etc. Please double check your work! You may also submit your article clearly marked as "Alternate History" and if published the article too will bear this mark. Be sure, if you submit this way, to provide in the background all that is necessary to describe what has changed.

Designs

New mechanical designs/vehicles/ships for use in the DP9 worlds. Designs must be legal and use either the latest SilCore rules (including all errata and the FAQ) or Blitz! rules. Please indicate which design rules were used. Mechanical designs should fill a void that is not already covered by another unit. Background and a description must be included with the design, while artwork is optional and preferred. See the Historical Accuracy note, above.

Artwork

Aurora accepts all artwork for consideration, no matter the media type (rendering, sketch, painting, etc) within the rules set herein. Miniature photographs will also be accepted (dioramas encouraged!). Artwork must relate to an established DP9 universe and be easily identified as such. Artwork with nudity, racial undertones, sexism or sex will not be considered. See the submission guidelines on how to submit images.

House Rules

Original rules for the Silhouette/Blitz! system and modifications to existing rules. All rules submittals must include an explanation of the rule's purpose, the rules themselves clearly written, and an example of the rule in play. If you are tweaking rules that exist within the game already, please clearly denote those as well as the reference to where the original rules reside. Do not copy any existing game rules text, only note what is changed from the existing rules.

Note that all rules will be clearly marked as "House Rules" or "Home Brew Rules" when published within Aurora, to distinguish them from official rules that can be used at tournaments, conventions, and etc. Around the home gaming table, however, we all love house rules!

Tactics

Have you won countless battles? Have a strategy you would like to share? Write a tactics article. Usually this type of article will be in a step-by-step (or turn by turn) format to illustrate the tactic. An introduction and conclusion is required to create a complete package and to convey to the reader where the tactic is applicable and how it came about.

Miniatures/Modeling

Any article on preparing miniatures, painting, terrain making, sculpting, foliage techniques, etc will be accepted. Photographs and/or diagrams are strongly encouraged.

Something Else!

We pride ourselves on the creativity of our gaming friends. If you have something else to contribue that's not listed here, please submit it!