Featured Article:

The Nightstalkers

by Michael Brown

A Note About Production

Freelance Traveller is prepared using Microsoft Office Publisher 2010 running on a Windows 7 Ultimate x64 system. The program is reasonably easy to use, and produces good results with moderate effort; it also supports advanced typographic features such as typographic quotes and apostrophes, small caps, ligatures, swashes, and stylistic alternatives (if the advanced features are implemented in the font). Generation of the PDF files is built in to this version of Microsoft Office; no additional products are needed.

The title and heading typeface is ZapfHumanist BT, a Bitstream adaptation of Hermann Zapf's digital redesign of his 'hot lead' typeface Optima, chosen as a 'tie-back' to the title typeface of the original edition of *Traveller*. The black-and-orange of the section headings is also a tie-back to *Traveller*'s origins, though we felt that the 'correct' red was too dark. The heading sizes vary from 12 to 16 points. Body text is set in Palatino Linotype, also designed by Hermann Zapf, and is set at 11 points for most body text, giving approximately the same text spacing as Times New Roman at 12 point (which was the original *Freelance Traveller* body text), but a lighter 'color'. Palatino Linotype also 'balances' better as a body text typeface to Optima as a titling typeface.

Contents

From the Editor

As I write this, it is only about two days until the start of TravellerCon/USA, and little more than a day and a half before I leave to get there. That means that this issue of *Freelance Traveller* is something over a week later than I had planned, but life is like that, sometimes.

And, unfortunately, life has been like that for a while. I'm not sure I actually got a single issue this year out "on time", where "on time" is defined as "the last weekend of the month before the date of the issue". So, I've been doing some hard thinking, and come to a decision that some—perhaps many—of my loyal readers may disagree with, possibly even be upset about:

This is going to be the last *monthly* issue of *Freelance Traveller*.

The next issue is being targeted for posting during the last weekend of November, and will be dated November/December 2015. As past double issues have done, it will carry two numbers, 071 and 072.

The following issue will be targeted for the last weekend of January, 2016, and will carry a cover date of January/February 2016. It, however, will carry a single issue number, 073, and at that point, will be on an alternate-month schedule, with issue 074 being the March/April 2016 issue, and so on.

Overall, though, I don't intend for you to "lose out"; the "standard" issue size will be increased from 28 pages to 56, or possibly even 64, and I have no intention of reducing either the quantity or quality of material that I pull together for you.

Having said that, it's time for me to remind you that good material only happens if people send it to me, or point me at it (e.g., on your blog or personal website). Any section of *Freelance Traveller* is fair game, and all of them can use more material. I'd really like to see more reviews, especially of recent material; articles for Less Dangerous Game, the Lab Ship, and the Prep Room would also be especially welcome. And artwork, especially cover-suitable art. Send them to the usual place, with my thanks. ✪

2300AD: Grendelssaga

Reviewed by "kafka"

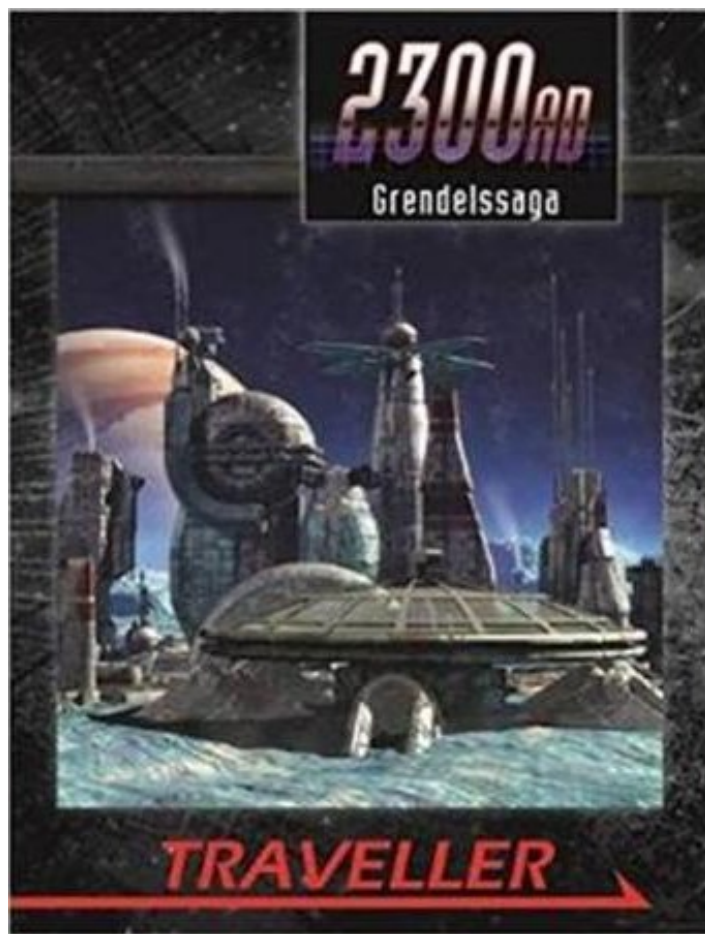*2300AD: Grendelssaga*. Colin Dunn
Mongoose Publishing http://www.mongoosepublishing.com
136pp., hardcover
US$24.99/UK£16.99

This review originally appeared on rpg.net I April 2015 and is reprinted here with permission.

Previously sold as separate linked PDF adventures, *Grendelssaga* brings these separate adventures together in one place in an impressive *tour de force* mini-Campaign centred on the insignificant, unexplored, largely uninhabited world of Grendel. Grendel seems inconsequential because of the lack of a viable biosphere for either humans or the aliens that populate the *2300AD* setting. However, what starts with a rescue mission reveals that this world holds more promise than previously understood, which in turn unambiguously shows that hard SF can be just as riveting and dramatic as space opera.

As with all my reviews of adventures, there will be no spoilers… Grendel is not just an outpost or desolate rock; it is a site of active exploration and discovery by humans in the 24th century. And, that is the root of *2300AD*: to go where no sentient has gone before – the thrilling journey of discovery of mankind among the stars. The lush garden worlds may seem to offer more in the way of intrigue and mystery – and unquestionably loads of interpersonal transactions – but it is often the isolated or abandoned locations that hold the most enigmas in *Traveller* (or any other RPG). That's why one frequents that *Keep on the Borderlands*, not bypassing it for the more exciting locale of the capital city. It is what makes Mar del Plata more interesting than Buenos Aires (or Tbilisi versus Moscow, Glasgow than Edinburgh, Oia over Athens, etc.) – the possibility and anticipation that something new and undiscovered is just waiting to happen, where authority is thin and ordinary people can truly become heroes. Such encounters may be fleeting or temporary; nevertheless, they remain more memorable than the cacophony of bright lights and noisy streets of the capital. Both are equally important locales in any *Traveller* game (or other RPGs) – but *adventure* usually happens in the borderlands and the shadows.

Grendelssaga does offer a little of the lights and streets of a Buenos Aires (not a Rio de Janeiro or even a Miami, let alone a New York, London or Athens) in the form of a visit to Beowulf in the second adventure (assuming they survive the first part). Beowulf is a lush garden world where the nations of Earth have established a firm foothold, giving a players a bit of a reprieve before embarking back again to Grendel. This opportunity gives Referees a chance to explore the nuances of the *2300AD* universe – it is both metropolitan and cosmopolitan, and also contains vast tracts of wilderness and fundamentally extraterrestrial places, each feeding a sense of wonder in a different way. Dunn has done a wonderful job in describing both locales accompanied by breathtaking yet problematic (see below) graphics. Beyond simple UWP stats, each world must have a

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character or history, which accounts for its development both as a Mainworld and as a Colony. And Dunn has prepared an excellent background for each world. Unsurprisingly, this represents some of the best writing to date for the *2300AD* line. And what would *Traveller*, even *2300AD*, or any other SFRPG, be without aliens and xenomorphs (more commonly known as flora, fauna and fungi (or in *Traveller* short form, Animals)), and this adventure has both. Threats, ambiguity, and conspiracy exist in abundance for both settings, and as the adventure unfolds there is only a partial solution to the matter revealed, giving the referee lots of room to expand the campaign (especially for referees conversant with the *2300AD* milieu—there are lots of winks and nudges to other previously released products).

This perhaps leads to an obvious question: Is Mongoose producing the same quality of stuff as GDW for *2300AD*, given the advances in technology and regressions in terms of economy? That is where some of the problems that I had with this product resided. The artwork is phenomenal, but Studio 2's printing of it is rendered like a bad photocopy of a photocopy, faded and bleeding into the page rather than the sharp, clear and distinctive images that appear in the PDF. Mongoose may employ professional editors and layout staff but this adventure does not reflect that. Rather than having information clustered in appendices at the end of the book, they are clustered at the end of each adventure. Similarly, although the writing style is very strong and evocative, it does have not a cohesive core; it feels like there were several adventures sewn together written at different times. Although this 'quilting' of products is quite common in the RPG industry, sometimes even bringing different writers together to work on segments of the same project, good editing keeps the project on track. But one gets the impression of deadlines for publication, making this work feel like a rushed job and a solo effort (or of a very small group of people). In the days of GDW, projects

were often done by small groups, or even just the Keiths – but it seems like there was a greater degree of editorial oversight that went into those products. However, with *Grendelssaga*, the writer and line editor are the same person. This has the result of producing a very tightly scripted line (with ample room in the sandbox for others to play), but quality and diversity is somewhat diminished from the GDW days.

Perhaps a problem inherited from the "GDW days" is the question of how to write an adventure (methodology) for *Traveller* or *2300AD*. Much of *Traveller* does revolve around Marc W. Miller's personal vision and design philosophy for RPGs, which is both sandbox and structured. In most cases, I do agree with an integration of solid, easy to play rules/simulations with fuzzier social science notions like history or politics. So, I will grant you, maybe, it is a matter of personal preference, but I do like a clear structure to adventures that I buy which allow them to be played right out of the box with minimal preparation, not so much in narrative, but layout. For *Traveller*, it came together with DGP's nugget format; for D&D, it is the purple prose box. These days, gamemasters do not have time to wade through realms of data to construct encounters. It is sad, but nevertheless a fact. Furthermore, newer players can easily become lost in the reams of data before getting to the crux of the encounter. *Grendelssaga* reads much more like a sourcebook than an adventure.

I do not know if Mongoose (or Mongoose writers) feel hostage to a particular style of writing adventures, but, guys – this methodology is not working. It is common knowledge that adventures are the least sold component of any game system because they are only bought by one member of the group – the Gamemaster – hence the popularity of their format in PDF which makes visual aids readily available. On the other hand, PDFs do not bring people in the game, quality sourcebooks do. Therefore, I implore Mongoose to seriously look into the quality side of their *Traveller* products – this has the possibility of being fantastic product, if tender, loving, care

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would be applied to its editing and layout. It is often said that anyone who holds a *Traveller* license is like the Golden Goose – for *Traveller* players are devoted because of the unfolding story that is told in their products. Then again, the market has become much more crowded and sparse, and The Grand Old Game has to compete against many games with narrativist arcs built-in.

I fear that Mongoose may treading water or existing in a holding pattern around GDW legacies. That is not to say that this product is not original and fantastic in its own right—but the lack of editing and solid art make it uncompetitive in a shrinking marketplace**.

This is a very, very good adventure, and, if referees have the time to make the notes and preparation for it, it can become a truly excellent and memorable adventure. It has all the right elements to make something truly wonderful. Nevertheless, it comes back to the tale of the Goldilocks and the Three Bears – no effort should be spared to make it just right. Which for Mongoose means tightening up the writing and most especially the art.

Art does cost a lot of money – both in terms of engaging the artist to get "buy-in" and to have a "consistent" look. Mongoose has done a fantastic job with their covers; interior artwork often leaves much to be desired. The marketplace has moved to full colour and detailed black and white drawings – one does not need a budget like Hasbro, as Pelgrane Press shows. Just thoughtful and good editing, as Chaosium shows in the seventh edition of *Call of Cthulhu*, and good solid writing as Arc Dream shows. Furthermore, I do get the feeling that Mongoose is increasingly viewing RPGs as a dying art form, it may well be in the former heartland of the United States – but in all my travels in Europe, Latin America, Asia show there is a huge resurgence of interest in RPGs. Not to mention, a younger generation of players just waiting to come onboard with RPGs. And, this younger generation is one that has

grown up with MMORPGs – how are the publishers of legacy lines bringing that younger audience whether we talk about demographically or geographically. So, I am not certain that Mongoose is wise in sacrificing quality for quantity at this particular moment in time.

For me the answer lies in improving aesthetic look of a particular product. A picture does tell a thousand worlds. *Traveller*, even in its *2300AD* incarnation, was part of that story. The frontiers of exploration and the creative energies of excitement that went into *Traveller* was coupled with the Space Race and *Star Wars*, and it is important to get writers and artists on board to recreate that same sense of wonder. The entire canon of *Traveller* now resides on PDF – the task for Mongoose is to really transform what a bunch of wargamers did in the mid-1970s into a completely new, yet, familiar product.

I believe the original GDW did this very well with *MegaTraveller* and *Traveller: The New Era* – even though they lost the core Golden Age SF fans, they tapped into a rich vein of popular culture which had taken a turn to the dark and was able to siphon off some of that creative outpouring into *Traveller*. I do not see Mongoose doing the same. Consequently, if *Grendelssaga* were the beneficiary of such an investment in improving the editing and ensuring great artwork, it would be truly memorable. Now, it stands along with something that I have as a resource for the world of Grendel (not even the Star System) and an adventure that I may run once. Great adventures, like *The Keep on the Borderlands* or *The Traveller Adventure* or *Walker in the Wastes* become the stuff of legend and bestow a particular aura.

Make the investment, and one will always reap the benefits much later on – which is, I think, the story of *Traveller*. Would I recommend this product? Most certainly! Would I tell Mongoose to tighten things up? Most certainly! Otherwise, they run the risk of killing the Golden Goose. Colin Dunn is an extraordinary writer with an astonishing grasp of the *2300AD* universe, and this was very clearly a labor of love, sweat and tears. It is then incumbent up-

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on the publisher to respect that work by supporting it with better layout and editing. I know economic times are tough. However, that also means that there is glut of graphic designers and graphic artists all willing to ply their trade. And, if Mongoose needs recommendations…I know people.

**Although RPGs did go through a brief resurgence in the beginnings of the 2010s, the Great Recession has taken a big bite out of disposable incomes which has included spending on RPGs. Therefore, we still represent a small niche of the hobby market. And, it becomes incumbent upon publishers of long tail products/lines to maintain a high quality product lest consumer abandon the line altogether. The problem with *Traveller*[5] is that it is a behemoth of a product, and structured as an RPG toolbox rather than a game. The market does not need a toolbox. It needs a city to be built and populated. *Traveller* has had many incarnations of toolboxes – but every dedicated *Traveller* player will tell you what keeps them buying is the rich tapestry of history that takes the player/referee on a journey from a time before the first hominids to the Heat Death of the Universe.

I do believe Mongoose is attempting this with other parts of the *Traveller* line – namely the Alien sourcebooks and anticipated full-colour Third Imperium sourcebook. However, as D&D shows, you have to pay attention to aesthetics, or risk losing further market share. ✪

Active Measures

Nightfall

by Michael Brown

Synopsis: While sheltering from a solar storm, the PCs fight for their lives against a mysterious enemy.

Setting: Any Imperial system, but there is more plot tension if the mainworld is high-tech, high-population (Trade Classification Hi or Ri).

Materials Needed: A set of deckplans for a *Broadsword*-class Mercenary Cruiser, found in *Adventure 7: Broadsword*, or *Journal of the Travellers Aid Society* #8, noting the modifications indicated in the text below. Available from DriveThruRPG.com or FarFuture.net.

Stormfront

After jumping insystem, the crew's long-range sensors warn them of an incoming front from a massive solar storm so intense that even the ship's armored hull offers little protection. They are still at least a day from the system's mainworld or any other body with a magnetosphere; the storm will hit long before that. It is assumed the ship has insufficient fuel to jump again.

Fortunately, the sensors also detect an asteroid of sufficient mass to provide some shielding, if the group lands on its leeward side. The pilot must hit the proper approach vector, which takes enough time that upon arrival, there is not much time before the storm hits. As they draw near enough, they detect another starship—a *Broadsword*-class Mercenary Cruiser—already down on the surface. It looks like her captain had much the same idea as the PCs. The asteroid is large enough to accommodate both ships.

The other craft is unresponsive to communications hails. A detailed sensor scan reveals that it appears to have suffered a somewhat rough landing; the four landing legs are firmly grounded but slightly damaged. Still, whoever was piloting the vessel managed to put it down more or less intact. As the heroes move even closer, PCs with a Naval or Scout service background can tell that the ship is long past its prime; old and battered; still spaceworthy but almost certainly decommissioned.

Derelict

The referee should keep careful track of time; the storm hits the asteroid 12D minutes from the moment the PCs land and will last 1D-3 (minimum 1)

days. While the combination of the asteroid's mass and the starship's hull can shield the party from the worst of the radiation, enough passes around and through that being caught outside means a fatal dose. Anyone caught outside during the storm takes 2D hits radiation damage immediately and an additional 1D hits per week for 2D weeks until they die or get medical treatment of Tech Level A+, which must include a course of anti-radiation drugs. The referee may impose more detailed damage (cancer, blindness, etc.) if needed.

Certainly, the heroes could simply hunker down in their own ship and wait out the storm, but they will probably want to explore the cruiser to find out why it does not respond to hails.

The cruiser's landing spot is quite uneven. The nearest clearing for the PCs' own ship is 800 meters away. Traveling overland to the derelict will cause movement penalties for rough terrain and the asteroid's microgravity. Of course, an auxiliary vehicle ignores such penalties.

One of the landing leg airlocks and lift is damaged and inoperable. The other is secured with a keypad which requires an entry code. The code can be hacked (throw 12+, DM: Electronics; takes 1D minutes), or they can force their way inside with tools, or blast their way in with weapons or explosives. Other entry options include locating a maintenance access port, or accessing the airlock at the top of the ship. This hatch is also keypad-protected, but allows access to the ship from A Deck. It is assumed the heroes enter the landing leg.

As the airlock opens, the unprotected body of a male human falls out. He is dressed in a uniform indicating he was a crew member aboard the ship, the *Stella Polare*. Any character will assume that he was 'spaced', but a cursory inspection by a PC with Medical skill will reveal that he was strangled first.

Upon leaving the lift, the team will be on the cruiser's H Deck; refer to the key below.

Most of the ship's systems are powered down, much of the lighting is either low-level or off entirely, and the computer is running in standby mode. Anyone wishing to wake it up from any terminal other than the main one on the bridge will be asked for an entry code. This code can be also be hacked (as above, DM: Computer; takes 3D minutes.)

Once the PCs enter the ship, the referee no longer has to track the storm, but will need the *Broadsword* deckplans to run the rest of the adventure.

Madman

As the team explores, the descriptions below determine any subsequent encounters. One encounter is an exception: Jeric Shaardashu (see NPCs) is the only human survivor. He moves freely about the ship, and may encounter the heroes early on. Each time the party enters a deck, throw 6 on 1D for him to also be on that deck and determine the chance of him to detect the PCs. He will then shadow them until he is discovered or catches one of them alone. Then, he viciously attacks with a large spanner (treat as cudgel). Remember to check for surprise—he will be trying to achieve it. If he does not win surprise, he simply attacks the nearest PC. See below for details of his behavior.

If Shaardashu is not initially on the deck, throw 6 on 1D once per hour for him to enter the deck.

Infected

Anyone making physical contact with Shaardashu is endangered by the vessel's real menace: a dangerous alien bacterium, harbored deep within his brain. Its particulars and its effects are outlined below. The brain damage it has caused is treatable, but not by the resources onboard.

Daybreak

Simple survival means success for the PCs and the end of the adventure. When the solar storm ends, it will be safe for them to depart the asteroid.

Rewards for the group could be substantial. They will have an intact (if old) *Broadsword*-class starship with over a million credits in its safe, cargo in its hold, and personal valuables of various crew

members. But there could be problems from the authorities concerning the final disposition of the ship and her former crew. Shaardashu, if he also survived, will need intensive medical attention. Spooky (see below) would make a great new mascot.

Medical professionals would be eager to get its hands on samples of the bug, and will take custody of Shaardashu and anyone else infected. Diseased PCs can expect to become lab rats for at least several months as their new patrons seek an effective treatment or cure.

Further adventures could involve tracking the *Stella Polare*'s previous course to discover the source of the illness, tracking down the possibly infected cutter pilot before he can cause a pandemic, or fending off attempts by unscrupulous individuals who want to obtain a sample of the bacterium for weaponization.

As always, the referee should determine the flow of subsequent events.

Stella Polare

The *Stella Polare*'s full backstory is not important to the adventure. If the PCs salvage her, and it thus becomes part of an ongoing campaign, the referee may want to create one.

Despite appearances, the vessel is not a typical *Broadsword*. Long decommissioned, she has been refitted as a merchant ship. Decks E-H, which would normally accommodate mercenary troops, are now cargo bays, linked by an elevator. The alterations allow her to carry 144 tons of cargo, but only 16 crew. She retains the two Modular Cutters, but one is missing at the beginning of the adventure; the other cannot launch while the ship is grounded. Modifications unique to the *Stella Polare* are noted in the key below. If a room or deck is not specifically noted here, the referee should use the original *Broadsword* description. The numbers and the deck designations correspond to the original *Adventure 7: Broadsword* deckplans:

There are strange events occurring throughout the ship that may appear to the adventurers as paranormal activity. All of them have rational explanations, given in parentheses after the description.

A Deck (Avionics)

No expense was spared to turn this entire deck into an opulent meeting area and dining room.

2. Several well-dressed people are seated around the formal dining table enjoying a very rich banquet. They suddenly take notice of the newcomers; then as one, come at them with knives or forks, transforming into monsters as they close. The instant any PC strikes or shoots any of the opponents, the monsters all disappear. Remember to check for ricochets and equipment damage. (The presentation holography equipment is on the fritz; it is overlaying scenes from a 3-D movie onto the actual room).

3. In the fresher lies a man's body, riddled with bullets. Scrawled on the wall in blood is a message: "IT'S HERE".

B Deck (Gunnery)

6-9. Only one double turret is installed, with a single pulse laser and a sandcaster. The other turrets are sealed off.

10. This room is immaculate but unoccupied. As the group opens the door they see a figure standing on the other side of the room. It is just their reflection in a mirror next to a wardrobe of very stylish clothing (worth perhaps Cr5,000 total). Anyone looking into the mirror for more than a combat round sees one of the following, (throw 1D):

- 1-2: the PC sees himself aging rapidly (perhaps ten years per second), finally becoming a rotted, worm-eaten cadaver.
- 3-4: the PC melts, as though made of wax subjected to very high heat, becoming a skeleton in seconds.
- 5-6: the PC sees a demonic version of him- or herself, complete with twisted, inhuman features.

Active Measures

(The obviously-malfunctioning mirror is designed to aid in clothing selection through holography).

12. The bodies of a married couple are in this stateroom's bed, locked in an eternal embrace, victims of shotgun wounds. Any PC who stoops to grave-robbing finds their wedding rings, worth Cr500 each.

15. This room is a total wreck, its contents flung violently around. A search (taking 3D minutes) will find nothing of value or interest, but every five minutes throw 2D; on 8+, the room suddenly goes haywire, with everything in the room flying through the air. Everyone within must throw DEX or less (DM: +Zero-G Combat) or take 1D hits from flying objects. The bedlam lasts 1D-3 (min, 1) combat rounds. (The grav plates are badly malfunctioning in this room. Shutting them off stops the poltergeist-like activity.)

C Deck (Bridge)

19. The bridge appears uninhabited except for someone sitting in the command chair, facing the viewscreen, who does not respond when addressed. Upon inspection, they find that she is dead of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound. Status reports are available from the displays: the ship suffered slight damage from a rough landing. One of the ship's modular cutters is missing; it launched a few days prior and never returned. No one responds to hails, but the internal sensors show that someone is active (this lets the PCs know they are not alone if they have not already encountered Shaardashu.)

21. The captain/owner's executive office is very tastefully appointed and currently a horrific scene: a woman's brutalized corpse is lying sprawled across the desk with a crushed skull; a bloody cryssteel trophy lies on the floor beneath. The office also contains the ship's papers, logs, crew information, and the ship's vault, containing money and valuables totaling a little over MCr1. To break into the vault, the group must throw 2D for 15+ (DM: electronics skill)

to bypass the keypad or do 1000 hits to the door itself. The crew roster (below) lets the party identify the bodies scattered about the ship. It indicates the person's role, their gender, and (for the referee) the location of their body on the deckplans. The referee may make up names as needed. The exceptions are Jeric Shaardashu (the sole human survivor), and a cutter pilot, who previously left the ship in one of the modular cutters.

Crew Member	Sex	Where Found
Owner/captain	F	C Deck, area 21
Pilot	F	C Deck, area 19
Navigator	M	H Deck, area 73-74 (airlock)
Sensors/Communications Operator	F	B Deck, area 12
Chief Medic	M	D Deck, area 31
Medic	M	H Deck, area 73-74 (lift)
Chief Engineer	F	J Deck, area 85
2nd Engineer	F	J Deck, area 85
3rd Engineer	M	I Deck, area 81
Clerk/Purser	M	D Deck, area 27
Cutter Pilot	M	A Deck, area 3
Cutter Pilot	M	(Missing)
Cargo Handler	M	B Deck, area 12
Cargo Handler	F	G deck, area 70
Cargo Handler	M	Jeric Shaardashu
Cargo Handler	F	G deck, area 70

23. The ship's computer is intact, but is in standby mode. Only here can the group bring it online without inputting a code. It requires 15 minutes to reboot, run a systems check and go fully active. Once it has, a code is no longer necessary to access the other terminals.

D Deck (Quarters)

27. A man is dead here of multiple stab wounds. He went down swinging; the room has been completely wrecked.

30. Originally a double stateroom, this room is now the purser's office. Ship's cargo manifests and backup financial records take up a great deal of space. Scrawled all over many of the scattered papers are quotes and passages from various literary

works which, taken together, indicate a descent into madness. Once the group organizes the records (taking most of a day), they can determine that whatever happened to the ship began with the purser, after a speculative venture on a frontier world 2 parsecs distant.

31. The ship's doctor died in this room, originally a stateroom but now the ship's sickbay. He lies sprawled across an examination table; empty hypos scattered all over the floor point to a massive drug overdose. The sickbay is well-stocked to Tech Level B and capable of providing excellent care, although not up to the task of repairing brain damage. The computer files contain notes on the doctor's frantic efforts to find a cure for a mysterious sickness on board. The standard-issue broad-spectrum antibiotic kit is also open, its contents exhausted (a clue to the nature of the infection).

34. Nothing is amiss here in the ship's galley, but the group finds a feeding bowl on the floor with "Spooky" stenciled on it; obviously a pet's name.

E Deck (Quarters)

Troop quarters for a typical *Broadsword* have been converted into a cargo hold. The air/raft entry area and the Ship's Locker were retained. While the group is exploring this deck, the communicator in the area keeps signaling, as though someone were trying to call in. If answered, the adventurer hears only static interspersed with the mysterious whispering first encountered on H Deck. (This is merely a fault in the damaged communications system)

50. The ship's locker has been broken into; most of the equipment and weapons are gone. There may be some usable items left, at the referee's discretion.

53. The air/raft is still present, but has been badly—and deliberately—damaged.

F Deck (Quarters)

Troop quarters for a typical *Broadsword* have been converted into a cargo hold.

G Deck (Quarters)

Troop quarters for a typical *Broadsword* have been converted into a cargo hold.

70. At the area marked on the original deckplans, the group finds the grisly sight of two dead women; one crushed against the bulkhead by a cargo handling unit, the driver of same dead of a gunshot wound to the head.

H Deck (Marshalling Deck)

73-74. The PCs find in the non-functional lift shaft (the opposite of the one the party used) the hanged body of a young woman, dressed in medical scrubs. Her eyes still hold a look of absolute terror.

77-80. The adventurers sense something in the hold with them, and an intermittent whispering just at the edge of their hearing. Whatever is in there is small and quiet, but every now and then makes a telltale sound behind the crates. As soon as one of the party investigates, something suddenly leaps, hissing and spitting, at them! The shocked group then catches a glimpse of a large white housecat darting behind other crates. This is Spooky, the ship's mascot (see below). The whispering seems to come from all around, and is hard to pinpoint. (The communications system is damaged. The computer's attempts to repair it has caused a cross-interface with recording devices, so the whispering is actually normal crew conversations looped back at very low volume. Manually resetting the system from the bridge stops the strange whispers.)

I Deck (Drive Deck)

81. A low inhuman moaning, accompanied by the sound of rattling chains, breaks the stillness of this deck. Tracking the sound reveals equipment still cycling in an isolated area, but it is the body of a middle-aged man that captures the party's attention. A securing chain has been wrapped around his neck and taken up by the equipment. The drag on the mechanism is producing the moaning sound. Doctors among the party can confirm that he indeed died from strangling, but not before a struggle.

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J Deck (Lower Drive Deck)

85. The ship's jump drives are located here. There has been an explosion; the maneuver drive components have not been badly damaged (so the ship can take off once repairs have been made), but repairing the jump drive will require several weeks in port. Two women were victims of the explosion. Various mechanical and engineering tools are scattered about, some buried in the victims' bodies, suggesting they were trying—but failed—to fix a problem with the drive.

NPCs

Spooky, the ship's cat

	Weight	Hits	Armor	Wounds & Weapons	Action
Pouncer	6 kg	6/3	none	-2 claws, teeth	A0F0S1

When first encountered, Spooky is very agitated but will respond to kindness. He can detect when someone has been infected (and behaves strangely when they are near) and can serve as a warning that something is wrong.

Jeric Shaardashu A49964 Age 26 Cr12,500
2 terms Merchant
Mechanical-1, Streetwise-1

Shaardashu has been a crew member aboard the *Stella Polare* for six years, but was never really accepted by the crew due to his upbringing on a rough-and-tumble planet. A bulky fellow with an aptitude for mechanical work, he is the sole human survivor of the crew, having watched his shipmates fall one by one to the malady. The disease has made him angry and violent, almost brutish; his effective INT is 2, rather than his normal 9 (and the referee should administer the progress of the disease as outlined below). He will not respond to reason and is driven by a compulsion to kill.

The Alien Disease

The ailment, a bacterial infection, was picked up on a frontier planet (in the sense of not being highly developed or populated) by the (now-dead) purser and spread quickly through the ship. An infected person is asymptomatic (but contagious—the disease can be spread by touch or other close contact) for the first 1D-3 days, except for being a bit more tired and irritable than normal, but after that, the patient experiences severe electrochemical and hormonal imbalances, expressing as pain, anxiety, rage, and a progressive dulling of higher brain function. If left untreated it will eventually cause dementia, coma, and death. Treatment takes a week, after which the victim begins healing per the rules for recovery.

Game effects: Upon opportunity for infection, throw 7+, modifying the roll as follows: -1 if ex-Scout or inoculated; -1 if END 6-; +12 if END 4-. If the character becomes infected, throw 1D for the length of the asymptomatic period. At the end of that period, throw presentation period of 1D hours (this represents the onset of the severe symptoms, not the time since initial infection). At the end of the presentation period, throw 3D and evenly distribute the result among the victim's STR, DEX, END, and INT, applying any remainder to INT. Once per day, throw the current END or less to avoid losing another point of INT. The subject will meanwhile suffer the symptoms outlined above, and will display great, even murderous, rage. The person is, of course, highly contagious. If INT falls to 2, the victim must throw END or be incapacitated with seizures, a number of them per day per original point of END. If INT falls to 0, the person lapses into a coma.

Animals can sense infected persons and react strangely when they are near. This could be a clue to astute heroes that something is wrong.

For all the organism's speed and deadliness, it is relatively easy to kill with a specific type of antibiotic. That particular type is not carried in shipboard medkits, but is commonly found in planetside medical centers of TL A+. A full, effective course of such drugs takes a week. The players may figure out that a course of antibiotics and hormonal therapy can cure Shaardashu, but such a regimen is not available until they can get him to a hospital. ✪

The Nightstalkers

by Michael Brown

The Imperium spans 11,000 worlds and a timeline of more than 1,100 years. Within those boundaries are countless technology levels, legends, rumors, and oddity. The majority of it is well understood, having been subjected to the rigors of scientific investigation or exposed to the light of truth and facts. Other things aren't as well understood, but are on the frontiers of inquiry and bleeding-edge research; the Imperial Research Stations typify much of this. Still other phenomena aren't the subject of scientific inquiry, but are constantly subjected to discussion and unscientific analysis by the citizenry.

But out in Charted Space are things stranger still. Things known only from whispers in starport bars. Things lurking in the shadows, making the unwary their prey. Things that elude the best minds and the finest science. Things even 57th Century citizens can only deem supernatural.

When such strangeness manifests, it sometimes does so in a manner that requires that it be dealt with in some fashion. Thus, there must be a group of people able to do so; trained to investigate, identify, and if necessary eliminate such supernatural threats. Such a group has been operating in the Imperium since the dawn of the empire. They call themselves the Nightstalkers ("We Dare the Darkness").

Introduction

The Nightstalkers – officially designated Imperial Interstellar Scout Service Subsection X – are a special clandestine branch of the Scouts, charged with investigating events and objects that many would consider within the realm of the paranormal. The office's existence is only apparent as a line item in the Scout Service budget (assuming one knows what to look for) and is known only to the highest levels of the Scouts, the Sector Dukes, the Archdukes, and perhaps the Emperor.

Although their primary mission is the investigation of paranormal and other events otherwise un-quantifiable, they also investigate instances of fringe or rogue science (including the scheming of the stereotypical "mad scientists"); quietly remove any Ancient artifacts found by citizens; and secure and contain any items and events that they judge to present a threat. To perform their duties, they have access to the best technology Imperial science can offer and have security classifications that allow them access to almost any information they need.

History

There have been similar investigative bodies on many worlds. Terra itself boasted several, including one sponsored by a powerful religious organization and one reporting to a law enforcement agency on the North American continent. Indeed, the Terrans had a fascination with the preternatural out of proportion to its historical level of scientific inquiry.

Comparable organizations also existed on Vland, Sylea, Zhdant (especially given the presence of Ancient devices and psionics), pre-*Maghiz* Darrian, and other human-seeded worlds throughout known space. The Terran efforts are the best known; thus, the Nightstalkers can arguably trace their distant origins to Terra.

The current incarnation was founded on Sylea around the time of the commissioning of the Sylean Federation Scout Service, the forerunner of the IISS. The legend surrounding Subsection X's creation holds that during the expansion of the Sylean Federation, a subject race unearthed something that was unidentifiable as technology-based and which they sought to use against the Syleans. The investigation of this unknown object fell to a minor office considered largely useless at the time. Over time, the SFSS realized that other incidents its agents were encountering also failed to map to the rational, and the office's scope broadened to encompass these as well.

After operating for 20 years in obscurity, the nascent Subsection X found itself in a quandary when an attempt was made by the Sylean Federation Navy to take it over. The navy had been watching Subsection X's efforts for some time, and thought some of

their discoveries would make effective new weapons systems. The Subsection resisted, but they found the very secrecy that protected Subsection X was used against it; they couldn't appeal for outside aid, because officially they didn't exist. And the SFSS was stymied by threats from higher up to have their funding slashed if they didn't comply. A deal was finally struck—the details remain a mystery—and the Navy agreed to leave the agency alone. It was also about this time that the Subsection's members adopted their unofficial name—Nightstalkers—and its equally unofficial motto "We Dare the Darkness," taken from an Old Sylean book.

At the outset, funding for the fledgling organization was a problem. Creative bookkeeping helped, as did charging fees for ridding an area of threats (capturing and removing ectotheric creatures—ghosts—proved especially lucrative) and selling a few of the less-dangerous items to the government. The establishment of several trusts ensured a steady initial flow of credits, and discreet approaches to several influential and sympathetic nobles within the early Imperial court helped in the passage of several laws which indirectly kept the organization adequately funded.

The history of the Nightstalkers has not always been positive, however. They have made several powerful enemies, including a cult that holds a malign extradimensional figure in high regard. The Nightstalkers' battles against the cult and their patron—which occasionally rage today—have become legend among Subsector X agents.

During one of these conflicts, a high-ranking leader of Subsection X came under the thrall of the being, and it took the opportunity to do great damage to the institution. Once the threat was ended, the Nightstalkers' remaining leadership expended great amounts of effort and money toward finding something to protect the organization in case something similar occurred. That item was found on a backwater world near the Great Rift. Its existence is known only to the highest echelons of Subsection X, and it's whispered that it's something capable of bringing down the entire Imperium if misused.

Soon after, the Nightstalkers made a friend in the person of a rimward Archduchess. Fueled by both her belief in the supernatural and her deep pockets, Subsection X underwent a period of upgrade and expansion that saw it become a true Imperium-wide investigative body. The relationship stayed close until the Archduchess's death; her successor did not share her views and officially cut ties with the organization, although he couldn't do away with the large endowment she left.

The Nightstalkers today still pursue their work into the paranormal, although they have a dedicated foe in a powerful supernatural nemesis and its dedicated followers. An additional problem is their funding; while adequate, it is nowhere near the levels they enjoyed almost a millennia ago.

Mission

The Nightstalkers' mission is to investigate unexplained phenomena (including, but not limited to: fringe science, paraphysical (psionic) events, and paranormal and supernatural occurrences); determine whether they are benign; and neutralize, contain, or destroy them if not. To perform their mission, the Nightstalkers employ cutting-edge Imperial technology and have access to the finest minds in the empire, both esoteric and mundane. They also enjoy near carte blanche to deal with the supernatural as they see fit, especially if it's determined that it's dangerous.

The Nightstalkers maintain secrecy at all cost in order to do their work without undue influence.

Scope

The Nightstalkers operate anywhere the IISS operates. Some are based at Scout bases; others roam space in Type S Scout/Couriers. Members fulfill their Scout duties unless the uncanny is encountered; then, the nearest Nightstalkers are activated and given effective jurisdiction over the investigation.

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While Subsection X has no jurisdiction in extra-Imperial space, the leaders tend to "look the other way" if a group needs to violate a border to investigate weirdness. Regardless, no Nightstalkers have ever "officially" ventured into any major extra-Imperial polities.

Recruitment

The Nightstalkers' ranks are small and not refilled unless there's a true need. The Subsection then goes through Scout Service records looking for likely candidates based on psychological fitness, security clearance, tolerance, and (recorded or inferred) prior contact with the unknown. The prospect is then discreetly monitored for a time to discover any physical or character flaws that might hinder their handling of the preternatural. (S)he might even be included (through records manipulation) on a Nightstalker operation. Once the nominee has passed what amounts to a secret vetting process, a delegation will approach with a recruitment offer.

During character generation, referees wishing to run a game featuring the supernatural can simply assume the PCs have already gone through this vetting process. Otherwise, each time the character cycles through the tables, the referee should make a secret unmodified Enlistment throw. Success means the Nightstalkers have determined the PC would make a good candidate for their ranks and makes an offer. The offer can be refused, in which case it's not made again and the nominee is mind-wiped to safeguard the Nightstalkers' anonymity.

A PC accepted into the Nightstalkers gains an automatic Paranormal-1 skill. Because members of Subsection X deal regularly with things and events that fly in the face of rationality and shake the mind to the breaking point, new members are put through a test to determine their Stress Tolerance (STT), the mental strength the character can call upon to preserve their sanity. Determining STT is simple in game terms: average the PC's END, INT and EDU

(rounding up). This should be listed along with skills and psionic disciplines (example: Stress-7). Each time the PC encounters something extraordinarily strange or frightening, a throw of STT or lower on 2D is required to avoid losing a point of INT. This normally only occurs once per adventure, upon initial exposure to the phenomenon, although the referee determines what constitutes "extraordinarily strange or frightening." The referee should also determine at what point a PC's INT loss begins to spill over into madness; 1/3 of normal is suggested.

To generate the Nightstalker's career, few changes need be made. If using *Book 1: Characters and Combat*, use the following as either a replacement or supplement for the Advanced Education skills table:

Advanced Education (Nightstalker, EDU 8+)	
1	Fringe Science
2	Paranormal
3	SOMAT
4	Paraphysics
5	Conspiracy
6	Continuum Science

If the character is being generated using *Book 6: Scouts*, use the following procedure: after acceptance of the Nightstalkers' offer, and determination of STT, each assignment result of Special Mission is actually a Subsection X mission. Use the following tables to determine the outcome:

Special Mission (Nightstalker)
Survival	6+
Skills	5+

The PC should also make a STT throw.

If the result indicates the individual has earned a skill, throw on the table on the next page.

In any case, the character gains an automatic initial service skill of Paranormal-1.

Kurishdam

Die	Skill Earned
1	Fringe Science
2	Paranormal
3	SOMAT
4	Paraphysics
5	Conspiracy
6	Continuum Science
7	+1 STT
8	+1 EDU
DM +1 if EDU 9+ DM +1 if 3+ terms	

New Skills

Conspiracy: The individual is skilled in recognizing and investigating events that are thought to be the work of individuals or organizations secretly working beyond the knowledge of Imperial society and authority. Conspiracies typically go beyond mere political machinations or classified information. PCs with this skill can tell when an event is mere happenstance or has unseen hands guiding it.

Continuum Science: The individual is skilled in investigating phenomena and devices that alter the very fabric of reality, including reality-warping Ancient devices, such as instant matter transporters, so-called time machines, and interdimensional portals.

Fringe Science: The individual is skilled in research that departs from or violates mainstream science, including the study of Ancient scientific advances. Canon examples include many of the lines of inquiry undertaken at Imperial Research Stations.

SOMAT: (Supernatural and Occult MATerials.) Individuals with this skill are trained in the handling and disposal of supernatural or occult hazards Examples include containment of ectotheric creatures (ghosts or phantoms), removal of unknown and/or harmful substances, and transport of cryptids (extremely rare and/or preternatural animals.)

Paranormal: The individual is skilled in recognizing and formulating plans to deal with phenomena so far outside the range of scientific plausibility it can only be termed supernatural; such as ghosts, shapeshifters, magic, and other events that defy scientific examination or explanation.

Paraphysics: The individual is skilled in the study of psionics, psionic activity, and electronic devices that utilize or extend psionic abilities, such as the thought-controlled devices aboard Zhodani vessels and many Ancient devices. The PC can also distinguish the paraphysical from the paranormal.

Equipment

The Nightstalkers use a bewildering array of equipment, from primitive (holy symbols and salt, for example) to the most advanced available. It comes from an equally bewildering array of places, from the most primitive backwater worlds to avant-garde R&D labs. Sometimes previously confiscated items are drawn from the armory and used against a current threat.

Of course, the best equipment is useless without knowledge and information. The Nightstalkers maintain databases of all known preternatural events and creatures; this database is updated with each visit to a Scout base by encrypted transmission and is accessible only by active Nightstalkers with the proper security clearances.

Since Subsection X is part of the IISS, Type S Scout/Couriers are the starships most often used. Specially-outfitted *Animal*-class Safari Ships also serve, especially when the quarry are cryptids. Scout/Couriers assigned to the Nightstalkers have been specially equipped with tanks designed to hold ectotheric or occult menaces.

Relationships

Subsection X operates from the deepest shadows of the Imperium. Almost everyone, even rank-and-file Scouts, are unaware of its existence. Knowledge of Subsection X is kept confined to the highest echelons of the IISS and nobility of Social Standing F+, including the Sector Dukes and the Archdukes. Not all Emperors have been told of the organization; it's not clear whether Emperor Strephon has been.

Unauthorized people who stumble across a Nightstalker operation are dealt with in different ways depending on many factors. In most instances, they are simply mindwiped, and all knowledge of what they've experienced is removed. Sometimes merely discrediting a subject—making them seem like a prankster or a crackpot—is enough. Rarely, someone who is unusually persistent, credible, or vocal has to be made to disappear (don't ask…)

Campaigning

Referees wishing to use this material must be prepared for a wholly different kind of *Traveller* campaign, one with two levels. On the surface, things are as they've always been, complete with starships, patrons, and pursuit of profit. But underneath is another world, one of darkness, monsters, and weird happenings. This world laughs at natural laws, mocks rationality, and sinks its teeth into banality. It is not for "hard science" devotees.

The Nightstalker campaign includes the fantastic, whether created by the referee, or borrowed from other sources. Anything is fair game in adventures featuring Subsection X. Want the team to encounter a haunted house? Stop an interdimensional incursion? Bring down a rogue sorcerer? All of those plots are possible, and more.

As seen in such popular fare as *The X-Files*, conspiracy can be a large part of events. The referee may want to create one or more behind-the-scenes powers who are manipulating events for their own ends. For example, perhaps the Vilani Shadow Emperor is back, and implementing a secret plan to restore the Ziru Sirka, or the group has stumbled onto Archduke Dulinor's plans to assassinate Emperor Strephon. All that's needed is a powerful person or group with means and a nefarious plot. ✷

Career Companion

reviewed by "kafka"

Career Companion. John Watts
Gypsy Knights Games http://www.gypsyknightsgames.com
59pp. Softcover or PDF
US$15.99(S)$6.99(P)/UK£10.48(S)£4.58(P)

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Half of this book, I did not like and the other half is truly brilliant.

However, together they do make a very good supplement to what is already on the market in Gypsy Knight Games' Alternative *Traveller* Universe – the Clement Sector.

To begin with, what I do not like is the uplifting lesser species into sentience – usually referred to as Uplifts. Uplifts in contemporary Science Fiction are a good substitute of reinforcing the alien-ness of Science Fiction without having to resort to creating aliens. And, aliens are tough to do. Unquestionably,

Requires the use of the Traveller (TM) Main Rulebook, available from Mongoose Publishing.
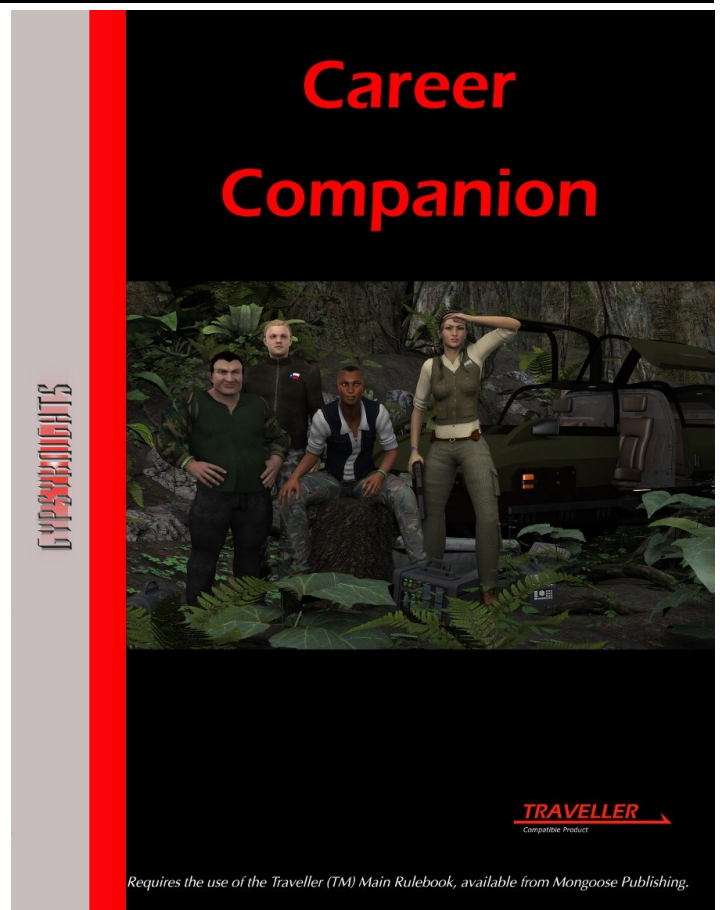
everyone can have Klingon surrogates based upon the Shōgunshoku but after a while that becomes a cliché; more interesting is to speculate what forms of new civilization will appear as we adapt to life among the Stars. Poorly done uplifts will feature lots of different civilizations that are dwarf-like due to adaptations to heavy gravity worlds or aquatic merfolk or when dolphins/bears/apes or even killer whales have been given sentience. However, I do recognize that my opinion is not shared by all. And, indeed *Traveller* throughout its history has had uplifts. Thus, what Gypsy Knight Games have done here is merely continuing a trend a trend that was pre-established. Fortunately, the uplifts are not as bad as those found in *GURPS Traveller Humaniti* but it does come fairly close. Where there is room for Uplifts it involves giving them a culture and a unique signature rather than cloning some pre-existing culture. And, this is where *Traveller* (and sadly, Gypsy Knight Games) has gotten sloppy. I would hold that uplifts in Dune or the works of David Brin are done right – but here we are treated to a sketchy and vague culture that is a pastiche of other Science Fiction worlds, ranging from the *Planet of the Apes* to a crude facsimile of Brin's work. So, unfortunately, while the rules here are good, they revert to a more childish version of *Traveller* than I play or would describe *Traveller* to others. However, those who played with *GURPS Humaniti* (and there are some good cultures in there) or *Traveller[20]* whose Gateway "races" were abhorrent and represented

the worst in *Traveller* might find some merit. But, in my own opinion – meh.

Then comes the best parts of the book which justify the whole cost of the item. New aging rules update *Traveller* from the 1950s, when life expectancy was lower. Rejuvenation and genetic therapies. These rules bring *Traveller* more up to date with forecasts of Science Fiction – when the genetic revolution will mean being able to live longer and look younger.

Next up is the revision of the Social Standing statistic, for here we have an improvement of using Social Standing akin to Credit Rating or status within society.

Next up we see the additional modifications for different careers. And, this in my humble opinion is the most brilliant part of the book. *Traveller* since its inception has rather mundane careers/classes. In most cases, they reflect an older sensibility in regard to Science Fiction, where careers were thought of as extensions of 1960 careers. The career follows the same logic, except, it cleans up the tables for life events to bring them more in line with a more gritty and realistic set of events. Mongoose tables for the most part represented some the most gonzo of situations in some of their outcomes. This provides a useful corrective against gonzo play.

The rules are good and solid. There is very little in the way of purple prose, but the artwork is good and really sets the mood, even though (like previous Gypsy Knights Games offerings) it's all Poser art. ⊙

TravellerCON/USA

TravellerCON/USA 2015 will be taking place October 9—11, at the Lancaster Host Resort and Conference Center in Lancaster, PA. Participant and referee registration is open; the full weekend is $30 (age 12+ only) and may be paid at the door. (Vendor registration is closed.) Play sessions are four hours each, with five roleplaying and two miniatures tables available each session; most have been filled, giving you a wide variety of games to play in, watch, or (if permitted) kibitz. There is a discounted room rate at the Resort; mention TravellerCON when placing your reservation. Come play with us! More information can be found at the TravellerCON/USA website, http://www.travellercon-usa.com/ ⊙

Changes of Mind

by Andrea Vallance

Part 2

228th of 2029 (054-98): Protectorate Central Command Complex, Daramm.

We touched down and checked in. It was much easier than our previous visit. I even got a salute from the young *korneet* on the security desk. Except Afira and Siish, the others were puzzled at that.

Jane was the first to ask, "OK, Isabella, how come the salute?"

Sakuya seconded before anyone could even think of talking. "Yeah, what's with that?"

"If you'd care to recall, I was actually an officer in the Imperial Navy."

Ariaryn spoke with his usual slow deliberation "No, eager young *korneet*s do not salute Imperials. They precious rarely salute their own officers. That's reserved for the silver hats[4]."

Jane kissed her lover. "Yeah, so spill."

Dodge. "Oh, I don't know, you'd have to ask him."

Sakuya tackled my dodge like an overenthusiastic puppy. "Yeah, Issee, why? He gave me a really nasty look."

"I really don't know why you're all so interested in this. It was just a salute."

Ariaryn again. "Yes," slow and deliberate, his very sharp mind turning, "the only other one he saluted was Siish, or Siishubuu Manish *Vebmral* to be more precise."

Uncomfortable. "It's really not important, he just did for some reason."

Jane wanted answers. "Siish, is there something we don't know about our *dokhtor*?"

"If Isabella doesn't want to answer, she doesn't have to. So drop it." Sometimes a big brother is handy.

Jane did not look happy at this, but, "Okay."

Sakuya however was not so easily deterred. He looked at me almost pleadingly. "Why, Issee?"

Afira took his hand; she had a way with him. "It's okay, Sakuya, not important."

He looked at her, curious still, but her answer was enough for him, at least for now.

————————

Kirsov's office was as plain as ever, guess the head of black-ops for the Protectorate needs to appear mundane and mediocre. His trusty *seror*, her hair in its usual neat but boring style, was there to greet us. I wondered about her; I'm sure Kirsov's secretary would be far more than simply an efficient clerk. "The *geenant* will see you shortly; I may get you some refreshments?"

You should never underestimate Ariaryn's powers of observation; I missed it. "He's been promoted?" A statement far more than a question.

Her answer, simple, straightforward and as uninformative as ever, "Yes."

We didn't have long to wait, hardly enough time to drink our teas, or coffee in my case and juice in Sakuya's, before Kirsov's door opened. I'm glad I'd finished mine. A smartly dressed Imperial Admiral emerged with Kirsov. His eyes fell on me immediately. "Isabella, it's been awhile."

For the second time today, everyone's eyes bored into me, including Siish and Afira's this time. "Yes, Darius, eight years at least, I think."

"You are looking well. It would seem the Protectorate agrees with you."

"I find myself comfortable here. And you are looking well too; promoted, I see."

"Yes, a few years ago. My career has been progressing well. It would seem you've gone into a similar line of work?"

"A… no, a simple ship's quack by trade."

"Mmmm… your presence here would seem to dispute that, dear."

"You haven't been in a position to call me 'dear' for a long time, Darius. But your presence here is interesting."

He smiled like some grinning cat playing with a mouse. "We must catch up while I'm here." He proffered a card. "My comm while I'm here."

"My ship leaves tomorrow, sadly."

"I'm free tonight; dinner?"

I started, "Sadly, I think…" and that's when I noticed Kirsov. Don't know what, but there was a look in his eyes, not sure how to describe it, encouraging, you could tell he didn't want me to answer no. Curious, I paused to think. It had been a long time and he had nothing to do with what happened. "But, yes, why not?" I glanced at the card; an address, a hotel in Waicir. "I'll meet you at your hotel, we shall say six, yes?" I made a point of phrasing the question in Lurglic[5], a reminder to him of what I was now.

He grinned, "Good, and you have any ideas we'd go where?" He'd got the point.

Afira piped up, "Iesejk's; was wonderful when we went there, wasn't it, Isabella, yes?"

"Yes." I returned my attention to Darius, "Yes, Iesejk's"

He bowed slightly to Afira then me, "Excellent, I shall look forward to it."

————————

When he left, the others almost instantly turned on me, wanting answers. Afira got in first, "Okay, so who is he and how do you know him?"

I thought for a moment, what to tell them, should I tell them? Yes, important: "Darius Vilis, I was involved with him when I was in med school. He was only a commodore then, but pretty high up in Naval Intelligence."

Siish now, "And he's here because…"

"Don't know, honestly," a chuckle, "And doubt I'll find out over dinner." But Kirsov had wanted me to, he obviously had a reason and I wanted to know what that was: "So, *geenant*, why do you want me to see him?"

"Just might be useful to have somebody… close to him in the future."

That would make the second time in as many days somebody had hidden something. I was ready

for that to stop. "Yes, but here and now. Not like you didn't know we we're coming. So, why?"

He wasn't ready for it to stop, however. "Exactly why I said." Very firm and quite clear he had no intention of budging, but I could tell he wasn't relaxed any more either.

I considered a moment; no, not worth pushing right now, not in front of the others. I smiled, not like I couldn't get to see him alone if I wanted; Mother had seen to that a long time ago. He was watching me as I contemplated and I could see his relief when I let it go.

"So, we should all come in to my office and get on with the task at hand?"

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He waited for us to get comfortable. "So, Siish has filled you all in already?"

He took the lead, as usual; a natural leader, my brother. "Only the barest details *geenant*,"

"Well, a pretty straight forward mission: travel to Kalu Marasiin, find a dead ship that's floating there. *Vias*, *Augusta*-class battle cruiser, killed in one of those minor battles during the war. Retrieve her datacore and bring it back. Siish has a chip with all the details. Nice easy job for you all."

I wasn't finished with him and I wanted him to know "And asking why would be pointless, I assume? It would have autowiped when she lost. Plus, not like anything on it would be remotely current."

He leaned back in his chair and grinned, "Your file covers just how determined you can be, Lieutenant." That stung; my Imperial rank, it really stung and he knew it. He wasn't letting go either. "But fair question. Your file also covers your intelligence and loyalty." Not let go, but not unfair either. "The *Augusta*s are one of the Imperium's latest ships[6]. A key unit in their fleet. About three months ago one of the survivors, an Imperial but Luriani, has come to us. Wants to rejoin his people." The was a gap, a look of disdain. Yes, any Luriani in Imperial space had a reason to leave now, I suppose. It's not pleasant being the enemy. "He tells us the *kaptan* had just reset

the autowipe when she died, so there is actually a chance it wasn't purged, a good one. Looking over the schematics would be a big help if we ever have to face the Imperium again."

"Yes, I can see that, but surely as soon as they realise we've got it, they'll take steps to make sure it's not valid. Codes and frequencies can be changed just in case something like that happens."

He laughed, "Yes, so it's important you all make sure they don't realise we've got it."

229th of 2029 (055-98): A docking bay, Daramm Up

My dinner with Darius had gone surprisingly well. The food was certainly excellent. He'd lost none of his charm, and I must say he was still just as attractive as when I was a 22-year-old med student. The conversation had been a bit stilted to start with; he clearly was pumping me to find out why I'd been in Kirsov's office. Obviously he, and by extension the Imperium, were less than fully aware of my situation. However, a couple of things he let slip gave me the distinct impression he was not totally ignorant of it, either. Still, there did appear to be genuine concern as to my well being here; he certainly wanted to know why I'd stayed. For my part, I did enquire into what he'd been doing the last eight years. He was just as good at avoiding answering those sorts of questions as when we'd been together. I found myself strangely nostalgic after. My life in the Imperium seemed so far away now, another life entirely. A tinge of melancholy about what I'd lost. But it was good to see him again, never thought I'd see anyone from that life again, especially him.

———————————

Vu and I had headed for the up port without the others; it seemed best. So here we were, standing in the docking bay where he'd tried to take Sakuya less than three weeks ago. It was uncomfortable being here, memories still raw. I forgot a moment that Vu was beside me. "Say one for the Luriani, they do know how to make a ship look good."

I looked up at *Raledenet*, she was beautiful. "Yes, it's important to us. Many things are." Us, I was Luriani now, it was important he knew that.

"Mmmm, yes, I suppose they are. I imagine the crew will not be happy to see me."

"No, they won't."

"Well, shall we get this over with?"

"Yes, Vu *lul*, I think so."

———————————

They were waiting in the common room, sitting there impassively and they were all armed. They waited a moment when we entered before Siish spoke. "You're allowed in your stateroom and in the common areas, nowhere else. You understand that?"

Vu remained expressionless, "Yes, *kaptan*."

"And if you break that rule, we will shoot to kill. You understand that?"

Blank, deadpan. "Yes, *kaptan*."

"You'll be under my and Ariaryn's eye every moment."

The first crack in his expression, a tiny smile "Yes, I imagine I will be. I really don't want any problems. I'll just stay in my room for the most part."

Siish did not reciprocate. "Three jumps and then we'll drop you off at the scout base at Kalu Marasiin, all done."

"Sooner I'm off your ship, *kaptan*, happier everyone will be, I do understand that. Now, if you'll show me to my room, I'll be out of your way."'

Siish turned to me, "Stateroom six, right next to Ariaryn's. Show our… 'guest' to his room, please, Isabella. We lift off in twenty minutes. Ariaryn will be preparing dinner as soon as we enter jump." Back to Vu, "You're free to join us. I wouldn't want you leaving with an 'inappropriate' impression of our hospitality."

236th of 2029 (062-98): Offices of Imperial Intelligence, Alsuy

Sector Chief Meiz Nohmonaa looked over the files once again. The situation was bad. To say Sakuya Trace was a valuable asset, as the files did, was an understatement. He was an inspired genius; according to the testing, his level of intellect appeared in perhaps one in tens of thousands. His particular bent, once in several life times, if that. He, of course, had no idea of what he was; typical for an inspired genius. In his head were critical secrets that could not be allowed into hostile hands. But doubtless they already were. Nothing that could be done about that now. But what he was capable of achieving would put whoever he achieved it for to the front in a vital strategic race. And he could not be allowed to achieve it for anyone other than the Imperium. The report that had just arrived made it clear Special Agent Vu had failed and failure in this matter was unacceptable now. Steps needed to be taken, the Imperium either needed him back or needed him dead. It was that simple. She needed someone she knew could get this done and had just the right person. She tapped the intercom. "West, arrange a meeting with Frifrue Teequow for tomorrow. And order in some jasmine tea."

236th of 2029 (062-98): Lake Umral, Mastiraak

Mastiraak, a nice quiet world, total population a little over three million. A backwater, its major industry was agricultural produce for Stalwart. Nobody ever came here aside from the odd tourist looking for a secret getaway. What passed for a starport here was a few concrete blast pads and prefabricated buildings in the middle of a salt flat. Perfect for us; Siish had decided to stick to such worlds. Less chance of being noticed. We were hauling twenty tons of farm machinery, five tons of mail and four of high tech 'luxury goods'. Kirsov had arranged the cargo, totally innocuous. Most of yester-

day had been taken up with its delivery. Siish had likewise decided taking a day or two for rest and relaxation would be wise. Most ships do so here; it's a nice place to unwind and we didn't want to attract attention. I was sitting by the shore of a pleasant lake in the afternoon sun. I'd brought Vu. Siish had wanted to leave him locked up in his room but I pointed out that might look a bit odd if anyone asked. He'd been less than keen on the idea. But Vu had been on his very best behaviour during jump, helping with chores and joining in at night in the common room. I had to admit, he had a very good singing voice. Eventually, Siish had agreed, but he had insisted that Ariaryn and Jane tag along and they were both armed. Discreetly; weapons were very strictly controlled here, but Vu was well aware of the fact that they were. So here I was, on a pleasant spring afternoon, sitting by the water with a man I'd been facing down with a gun a month ago. He'd brought a picnic.

Jane and Ariaryn were swimming; despite Vu's presence, Jane did not want to miss the chance and, well, Ariaryn really can't say no to her, whatever he may have thought.

"I thought Luriani normally swam naked?"

"Oh, we do, but it's a little hard to conceal a gun without a costume, don't you think?"

He just grinned, "Of course. Some more *kemse*, Manish *Wa*? It's one of my specialities."

I took a slice. He was no Ariaryn, but he was good. "Thank you. I'm not familiar with Sesheryn cuisine, but this is quite delicious."

"My mother taught me the recipe. She insisted on her children learning solid old fashioned household skills without relying on technology. She thought it built character and ensured independence."

This was the first time I'd ever heard him talk of his family. Normally he avoided personal conversations. "Probably wise, certainly appears to have worked in your case."

"She would argue perhaps a little too much."

He seemed to be opening up a little; I was intrigued "Why would she argue that?"

"She does not approve of my career. Most of my people avoid Imperial service."

I knew this; most Sesheryn were still deeply suspicious of the Imperium[7], especially after the war. "So why did you choose Imperial service?"

He leaned back. "The Imperium is the way of the future. It will dominate human space, no question, it just will. And probably a good thing. You ever hear of the K'kree or the Aslan?"

I had, vaguely. Other major races; I'd learnt about them at school, they didn't seem that important. "Yes, a little."

"The K'kree. Herbivores, unified, huge and hate all meat-eaters with genocidal passion. You really want that whole patchwork of human states to try facing them? Or the Aslan, driven by their desire to conquer land. Either would make short work of the Protectorate or my Sesheryn, wouldn't they?"

"If they got here, yes, but they're a long way off. Whole sectors away. It would take, what, almost a year for a K'kree ship to get here, let alone an invasion. Even more for the Aslan."

"The Vilani were at least as far from Daramm as the K'kree and they got here. Your Luriani friends will tell you all about that. The universe is waking up, Manish *Wa*; we need a single powerful human state or we will disappear."

I pondered this awhile, he seemed quite sincere and just a touch concerned. "Mmmm… but the Imperium. I lived there, was born there, not exactly the nicest of governments."

He leant forward. "I've read your files, your Luriani friends, just as capable of being…" he seemed to be searching for the right word, "un-nice." I shuddered, drew my knees up, arms around me and wrapped myself in myself. I just couldn't answer. He looked, realized, and was horrified, "I'm so sorry Manish *Wa*. I had no intention of dragging up such a painful past."

I just sat and rocked, not sure how long, minutes? Finally I found my voice, "I'm sorry, too. But I'd like to go now."

The look on his face was guilt; I'd seen it on Mother's. "Of course; I'll pack the things immediately. I really, really, truly am sorry."

"I know, but I'd like to go."

Notes

Earlier notes appear with Part 1 of the story.

4. Protectorate officers of flag or general rank.

5. Luriani Anglic, the native language of the *Verasti Dtareen*. It uses the same question form as Standard Luriani where the question is phrased as a statement with either yes/no or the information desired at the end.

6. The *Augusta*-class battle cruiser entered service during the later stages of the Luriani War and incorporated many of the lessons from the early fighting. Intended to rebuild the strength of the Ley and Fornast fleets, only twenty nine were commissioned before the end of hostilities (with five being lost). However, the class's production run continued post war and for many years they formed the main combatant strength of the fleets opposing the Protectorate.

7. The Sesheryn culture of the Empty Quarter emerged from Luriani-influenced free traders during the long night. The Sesheryn Feoderate was a loose alliance of independent worlds that at this stage was in the process of being absorbed by the Imperium. The Sesheryn normally retained close ties to the Luriani and most were strongly sympathetic to them during the Luriani War.   ✸

#18: Tsundoku

I wrote last time about the love of books. Or should that be obsession? Either way, it does beg the question from some visitors, particularly younger nieces and nephews, about whether I've actually read all the books on the shelves.

I used to be slightly ashamed of not being able to answer 'yes'. I used to think perhaps I should at least try containing things to a 'to be read' shelf as some do. But of late I've changed my mind.

For a start, the Japanese have a word for this: 積ん読 '*tsundoku*'.

http://www.openculture.com/2014/07/tsundoku-should-enter-the-english-language.html gives the background. I printed that picture some time ago to remind me I shouldn't waste energy feeling guilty about it. (Though I might expend energy developing better habits of not buying books I won't or can't read in the first place.)

Then I read Nicholas Taleb's thoughts on an antilibrary, inspired by Umberto Eco's comments on unread books (recently rather nicely summarized at http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/jun/26/umberto-eco-antilibrary-oliver-burkeman). "One's shelves, he argues, should contain 'as much of what you do not know' as finances allow. And don't expect the proportion of unread books to fall, either. The more you read, the more the perimeter of your knowledge increases, and the more you'll realise you don't know."

I can't claim to have read every word of *Traveller*. Aside from rare books I don't have or foreign language books I can't easily read, I suspect there are some darker corners of *Traveller: The New Era* I've never explored in detail, and I'm pretty sure some of the later issues of *Challenge* are what's prompting me to try reading them all from beginning to end now that electronic files and 10" tablets make commuting with them a doddle. And I sometimes wonder if there isn't at least one *Traveller* book sitting there actually unread in its entirety. It can be hard to maintain the momentum of reading a book that doesn't have a narrative drive.

Now that I've finished a five-year project to read a 44-volume Bible commentary series, I'm currently trying to read all the 'generation starship' stories I can find (quite a lot, as it turns out) to feed a small bibliography I thought I would add to this year's TravCon adventure. But once that's done I'm toying with the idea of systematically reading every era of *Traveller* from start to finish. I have a commute of two hours a day from which I can extract 80-90 minutes of useful reading time. I suspect such a project will take longer than five years. Perhaps I should start small and limit myself to just T4 or something. Should I read everything in chronological or published order? Should I include e-only books? Is it better to do the 'core' books of each era and then widen outwards? And what counts as 'reading' anyway in a book with rules and tables? It's a daunting prospect, but the journey of a thousand miles…　✪

Comet Busters

by Michael Gilliam

This adventure was originally posted to the pre-magazine Freelance Traveller website in 2002.

Requirements

The adventurers must have their own ship with a cargo space of at least 3 tons, and vacc suits for all of the PCs plus three. If the vacc suits prove to be a major problem, let the players find extra vacc suits in the local starport repair shop. The PC team must have at least one person with engineering skill, preferably two, and at least one with mechanical skill.

Set-up

The PCs have the only ship presently in-system. While technologically limited, the world is sufficiently advanced to have astronomical interests. Recently, a large new comet has been detected, and cal-

culations have just shown that it will collide with the planet in a matter of days. The planet's government will send a pair of generals and a squad of troops by helicopter to request the ship's captain to come with them to a nearby military base where he will meet the supreme leader. This leader will inform the captain of the situation his planet faces, and will (firmly) ask him to take on board several nuclear weapons and a nuclear weapons team and to deliver them to the comet, where they hope to to break it up. Should the captain or the other PCs prove less than altruistic the government will offer the following as incentives: land holdings planetside, 1 million credits, large business-oriented interest-free loans, and lifetime tax- and duty-free status, for each PC. This is the "Planetary Hero" monetary award, and has been awarded by this planet only a few dozen times in its history.

Should the PCs demand further payments the government will agree to anything while the crisis is pending, but will then defer payment authorization to the proper bureaucracy, which will deny any payment greater than that listed above. "This is not constitutionally authorized, …", etc.

The nukes are primitive and bulky, and will require manual detonation. Any member of the weapons team will volunteer as necessary to make the devices work.

All payment agreements will be verbal, with the government chief executive. Any payments made will be on mission success, not before.

The general population will not be notified of the impending catastrophe.

Beginning the Mission

If the PCs' captain agrees to this mission he will be immediately helicoptered back to his vessel, along with several generals, a squad of soldiers, and three wooden-crated nuclear devices. The cases have simple manual control panels on the outside, with connector jacks and hand-held pushbutton actua-

tors. They are escorted by a weapons team, two young lieutenants and a tough-looking sergeant, who are volunteering to deliver these devices and detonate them. On arrival at the ship the nukes will be loaded into the cargo space immediately and the PCs will be asked to begin their mission without delay since time is short. If the adventurers insist on inspecting the cargo before it is loaded aboard they will be permitted to do so. If there are not enough vacc suits then someone should bring up this issue now, and a frantic general search should ensue.

Maneuvering to the Comet

The weapons team will have sidearms and combat knives, both visible and concealed, as a matter of policy. "We can't allow transportation of nuclear weapons without an armed escort. Would you?" Their mission is to blow up the comet, and they'll do anything to accomplish that. If their sidearms are demanded of them while aboard ship they will comply immediately but reluctantly, handing over their visible pistols. If pressed they will then give up their visible knives. If the concealed weapons are located and confiscated then the team will begin quietly noting common gear that can be used as weapons in an emergency, such as fire extinguishers, wrenches, pliers, and the like. The sergeant has Brawling-3, and each lieutenant has Brawling-2, meaning they will be formidable hand-to-hand opponents. The team will make no attempt to stand guard directly over the nuclear devices but rather will stick together at all times, believing they have a better chance against any treachery if they work as a unit.

The approach will take about 20 hours and will be uneventful. Most free time will be spent helping the weapons team learn how to use the ship's vacc suits and how to function in a zero gravity environment, which skills they will need in order to move the weapons on the comet's surface. Also all three weapons team members will express great interest in learning how the ship flies through space, making comments such as "I always wanted to be a pilot, but I never thought I'd fly in outer space" and "I

hope my world learns to do this some day". All will ask to sit in the pilot's seat and maneuver the vessel at least once. Both officers, if engaged in conversations, will show pictures of their families. If asked about his family the much older sergeant will only comment that he is not sentimental. If pressed he will simply insist on concentrating on the mission: "I want to go over the vacc suit again. Please show me how to deal with an air leak."

If there is any serious confrontation between the adventurers and the weapons team then the weapons team will make absolutely every effort to get the mission back on track.

Arrival

On arrival at the comet the weapons team will gather on the bridge with the PCs to see what they're up against. The arrival will be very rough. The comet will be surrounded by debris, some of it capable of damaging the ship, bubbling up in the turbulent atmosphere boiling off of the comet's surface and escaping into space. Visibility to the surface will be poor. Intelligent adventurers, in the face of this obvious hull-breach hazard, will go to general quarters, all hands donning vacc suits and depressurizing major spaces. If the adventurers have not yet thought to ask then the weapons team will now inform them that they need to find a crack or depression in the comet large enough to allow manual insertion of the weapons and deep enough that a weapon detonation there will cause the comet to pop apart, thus diverting the majority of the comet mass around the inhabited planet in a large ring and minimizing the size of the pieces that do hit.

At some point during the approach the sergeant (or a lieutenant) will either locate and retrieve the team's firearms without the PCs' knowledge or he will find some suitable substitute such as a rivet gun or emergency flare launcher. Whatever he finds he will put it in his vacc suit outer pocket.

Landing

In a few hours the comet will be too close to the planet for the nuclear detonation to have any effect on its chances of hitting the planet. A short search will immediately discover two likely-looking canyons. One will be easily and safely approached, but may not be deep enough. The other is definitely deep enough, but will be dangerous to approach. If the ship lands near the first canyon it will immediately be obvious that the canyon is not deep enough and that the second canyon must be attempted. There is no time to look for a third canyon, but if the adventurers insist on trying then they will have to maneuver through debris that might damage their ship. For each turn spent looking roll 8+ on 2D, DM pilot skill, to avoid debris; failure means the ship will be hit by a rock that causes a hull breach. On approaching the second canyon roll 10+, DM pilot skill, to avoid a minor crash landing that will require continuous work by all engineers to fix before a takeoff can be attempted, and roll 10+, DM pilot skill, to avoid a collision with debris that will cause a minor hull breach in a primary living space. In the event of any damage, either from debris or from crash landing, the PCs should act immediately to begin repairs:

> *To repair hull breach damage:*
> Every 15 minutes, roll 6+ on 2D, DMs as follows:
>> +1 for each person with engineering skill working on the repair
>> +1 for each 15-minute period that has passed
>
> *To repair crash landing damage:*
> Every 15 minutes, roll 15+ on 2D, DMs as follows:
>> + mechanical skill of the senior engineer working on this repair
>> +1 for each other person with engineering skill working on this repair
>> +1 for each 15-minute period that has passed.

The engineers can work on only one job at a time, and the ship can easily maneuver even with the hull breach, so presumably the adventurers will seek to repair the crash landing damage first.

On A Refusal

If for some reason the PCs refuse to proceed and try to abandon the mission, the weapons team will draw any weapons they can, imprison the PCs in a

stateroom, and attempt to land the ship near the comet's deepest canyon. They will crash-land, automatically doing double the damage specified above (roll every 30 minutes and count 30-minute periods, rather than 15 minutes). The PCs may, of course, attempt to resist this hijacking.

On The Surface

When the ship lands, whether gracefully or not, the weapons team will immediately begin manhandling the nuclear devices out of the ship's cargo bay. Two of them will only be able to move one weapon at a time, while one remains in the cargo bay door with weapons left there while others are being moved. All of them, having little zero gravity experience, will have to work slowly to make any progress. They will request assistance from the PCs (one lieutenant will release them, if they were hijacked, and then immediately go back outside), with assurances that the PCs will not have to remain behind to detonate the bombs and that they will have time to get away.

Before (if) any PCs move out to assist the weapons team a patch of high-speed debris will strike the soldiers, puncturing their suits. The two lieutenants will die, while the sergeant will succeed in emergency patching his suit but be seriously wounded. The weapons and the ship will be undamaged. If no PCs are moving out to assist the weapons team, or if they retreat, the sergeant will again request assistance, stating that he himself is unable to continue.

If the adventurers refuse to help then the sergeant will arm the weapons and threaten to detonate them immediately if the adventurers do not complete the job. If the adventurers still refuse to assist, he will do so. The detonation will be successful and save the planet entirely on 10+, else save it but with great damage on 8+. The ship and PCs will be destroyed. The PCs will be unable, because of terrain and angle, to bring any ship's weapons to bear against the sergeant without first lifting off and

gaining altitude from the comet, which action will be immediately visible to him.

If the PCs assist involuntarily then the sergeant will supervise them with the recovered gun in one hand and the pushbutton actuator in the other. The referee will have to adjudicate further action. If the PCs succeed in placing the weapons to the sergeant's satisfaction he will dismiss them, giving them a time limit to get away before he manually detonates the nukes. If the PCs assist voluntarily the sergeant will be unable to help move the nukes but he will be able to supervise weapon placement.

Time pressure will be very high. The mission is fast approaching a point where it will be too late for the planned detonation to affect the comet's impact on the planet. The sergeant will be fully aware of that time, having marked it on his watch, and he will goad the PCs as necessary to hurry. If that point is reached before the weapons are fully placed then he will detonate the weapons immediately regardless of any other consideration. If the detonation time is getting very close and it looks as if the weapons will not be fully placed he will stop goading the PCs so as to keep them calm and working until the last possible minute. While moving the weapons under this time pressure each PC must at some point roll 2D for 12+ once, DM +DEX, to avoid injury due to haste in handling large objects in close quarters in zero gravity. Injuries will be pinched limbs. For each injury roll 2D for 12+, indicating a serious injury leaving the PC unable to contribute any further effort towards moving the weapons.

If the engineers finish repairs, they may quickly join the effort to move the nukes down the canyon.

The Find

As the PCs are moving the weapons to the bottom of the canyon, their vacc suit headlamps shining in the darkness, all will notice right away that there are strange shapes frozen into the glass-clear ice in both canyon walls. It soon becomes apparent that the shapes are several non-humanoid aliens, some artifacts, and what appears to be a ship. The aliens strongly resemble praying mantises and

are a little smaller than human-size. They wear straps carrying various items of gear, but no clothing. The ends of their "arms" have manipulatory organs with multiple opposing digits. The ship appears to be about two hundred tons or so. The tail section is not in view, and no guess as to the propulsion system can be made. The artifacts are scattered about in the ice near the aliens and near the surface.

Recovery

After the sergeant recovers from his own amazement he will continue to insist on weapon placement. When this is finished he will dismiss the PCs while he remains behind to initiate the detonation. If the adventurers have fully cooperated with the supreme leader and the weapons team from the very beginning and have otherwise been efficient then they will have enough time to attempt to recover artifacts from out of the ice, should they choose to try. They will be able to reach up to two items per PC present, for up to a total of nine items, before time pressure forces them to abandon further excavation and to head for the surface to escape the planned detonation. If they must choose between objects then the PCs can select from the following: three iridium-colored hollow tubes 3cm diameter 15cm long, two palm-sized saucer-shaped metal disks ringed with buttons, two plain silver balls 5cm in diameter, about half of an alien's head, and one entire alien arm. If the players ask if they can take pictures then remind them that their vacc suits incorporate videocams and that they can fully record, in high definition digital format, all that they see as they work.

Escape

As the PCs return to their ship any repair crew should have had six chances to repair the ship should they have needed to do so. If the ship is not yet repaired and the PCs have been efficient in their use of time then they should have two more chances to repair the damage and resume flight without having to worry about blast from the nukes. If a final roll is necessary (and successful) before flight is pos-

sible, the PCs will escape but their vessel will likely take serious damage from fragments of the blasted comet (repeat the damage and repair possibilities listed earlier in Landing). If damaged, the ship must be repaired in two hours or it will burn up in the planet's atmosphere. If the vessel is still on the surface of the comet when detonation takes place then the ship will automatically take all damage listed in Landing (no roll) and again must be repaired in two hours or burn up in the planet's atmosphere. In addition to this, each crew member must roll 2D for less than or equal to the lower of STR or DEX or be injured sufficiently to be unable to participate in any repair effort.

Aftermath

If the PCs acted in a timely manner and did not engage in excessive delays then the planet will suffer only minor damage from pieces of the destroyed comet, and they will be paid to the limit previously specified. If, however, they failed to perform expeditiously then upon their return they will find that large pieces of the comet have impacted the planet. Overall damage to the planet's biosphere and human population will be moderate and temporary. Damage to the government, however, will be fatal—the capital city, governing center, and starport will have been destroyed by a nearby strike. All who knew of the PCs' involvement in trying to stop the comet, including the supreme leader and senior military officers, as well as all who knew of any payment arrangements made with the PCs, will have been killed in the impact. If they press their case and an investigation is launched they will have little evidence of their role in this matter. Astronomers will report that they did in fact notify the government of the impending collision, but they will have no knowledge of what action the supreme leader took regarding this information. Surviving witnesses may report that an off-world ship did arrive recently at the starport near the capital, and then leave shortly before the comet fragments impacted, but none of them will have any idea who it was or where this ship went after departing. The nuclear scientists will

Active Measures

say they received valid orders to hastily assemble the devices and turn them over to the military weapons team, but they have no idea where the weapons went after that. If the adventurers made video records of their activities then the remaining governmental organs may be persuaded that the PCs did in fact contribute to the partial saving of the planet—provided, of course, that these records show the PCs cooperating with the weapons team and not needing to be coerced into taking action.

If the PCs failed to deliver the weapons at all then the planet will be severely traumatized by the comet's full impact, with tremendous damage to the population and the biosphere.

If any alien artifacts were recovered from the comet, the referee should decide what they are and what the PCs options are for retaining and using them, selling them, or surrendering them to the Imperium, a university, or some other organization for research purposes.   ✿

Doing It My Way

A 'G.I. Bill' for *Marc Miller's Traveller*

by Rich Ostorero

This adventure was originally posted to the pre-magazine Freelance Traveller website in 1996.

The military pension is much more than the thanks of a grateful nation for difficult and honorable service; it is also a very important tool of national military policy. A pension program encourages talented young troopers to re-enlist, thus preserving the soldier's expensive training and hard-won experience for the nation's benefit. Further, a pension provides an incentive for older troops to leave the service, opening the way for younger people to advance their careers. The most important (and cynical) reason for pensions is to protect the government from insurrection led by military veterans. By paying pensions, a nation provides an incentive for military veterans to not take up arms against the government. This is not a trivial concern when one remembers just what military people spend their careers doing or training to do: Killing people and breaking things. Since no government tolerates insurrection, fearful governments gladly pay pensions. However, when veterans deem their pensions insufficient, history teaches that violence is probable. American veterans of World War I once rioted in Washington, DC in protest over pension issues. The

threat of a repeat of the World War I riots—with 14 million returning G.I.s, not a million or so 'doughboys'—may have motivated the US government to inaugurate the generous postwar "G.I. Bill", a pension program in the sense of "give a man a fish, he eats for a day; teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime" rather than mere cash.

When the Sylean Federation created a professional military system, it also created a system to encourage men to spend their youth in the ranks and move on when no longer of military age. Under the scheme, veterans of the Imperial forces receive a retirement pay of Cr4,000 per annum for 5 terms service with an extra Cr2,000 per term after the 5th, for the life of the character.

After twenty years under arms, what standard of living can a veteran attain on a pension?

The first task is to define "standard of living" in *Traveller* terms; i.e. how many credits of income are required to live at a given level of comfort. The Core Rules for *Marc Miller's Traveller* (T4, henceforth) pg 64, gives the costs for long-term subsistence at four standard-of-living levels: Starvation (Cr120 per month), Subsistence (Cr300 per month), Ordinary (Cr400 per month) and High Living (Cr900 per month).

The precise meaning of these levels is not made clear in T4, but a little imagination and common

sense will fill in the gaps. In terms of the US social idiom: Starvation-level comforts equate to those of a "starving student" or a homeless person; Subsistence to those of a low-wage worker; mid-wage workers live at Ordinary comfort; and a high-salaried professional or business person could sustain a standard of High Living.

Assuming the *Traveller*-canonical Imperial calendar of 12 months of 30 days plus five Holiday-period days uncounted in a month (365 days), each level of comfort requires the (average) per-day expenditure detailed in the table below:

Average Expenditures to Maintain Standard-of-Living		
Level	Credits Per Month	Credits per Day
Starvation	120	4.00
Subsistence	300	10.00
Ordinary	400	13.34
High Living	900	30.00

The next question is: "How many days can I live at a given standard of living on a given pension?" The values in the table below are derived by dividing the annual pension amount by the per-day rate.

Days of Living Supported by One Year's Pension					
Terms	Annual Pension	Starvation	Subsistence	Ordinary	High Living
5	Cr 4,000	1,000	400	300	133
6	Cr 6,000	1,500	600	500	200
7	Cr 8,000	2,000	800	600	267
8	Cr10,000	2,500	1,000	750	333

The critical value is 365, the number of days in an Imperial year. At a duration of 400 days, the minimum Imperial pension of Cr4,000 per annum will pay for a subsistence-level standard of living with a few credits left over for Holiday gifts. By staying on for an additional four years, a pensioner can live at the ordinary standard of comfort with a much more substantial margin. Of course, it is improbable that any pension will support an entire year's High Living—or traveling.

For playability's sake, Imperial military pensions are based strictly on longevity without regard to final rank at retirement and longevity is strictly by terms, not years. This can lead to the anomaly of an Ensign—or a Petty Officer—with 5 terms of service earning the same pension as a Commander who served 5 terms. Referees may assume the pension amounts mentioned in T4 are average annual sums based upon an arcane formula used by the Imperial Bureau of Veteran's Affairs to take all the individual retiree's variables into account.

An alternate military pension system would take years of service and rank into account without breaking the Imperial treasury:

1. Start with Cr3,200 per year as a baseline pension for 20 years of service. This amount will almost support a Subsistence standard of living.
2. Add Cr375 per year (Cr1,500 per term) for each year above 20 years.
3. Add Cr200 per O-number or Cr100 per E-number rank attained. Use the amount for the highest rank.

Examples:

- *Rank O-1, 20 years (5 terms): Cr3,400*
  Cr3,200 baseline pension, + Cr200 for achieving rank O-1.
- *Rank E-7, 20 years (5 terms): Cr3,900*
  Cr3,200 baseline pension, + Cr700 for achieving rank E-7
- *Rank O-6, 20 years (5 terms): Cr4,400*
  Cr3,200 baseline pension, + 1,200 for achieving rank O-6
- *Rank E-7, 28 years (7 terms): Cr6,900*
  Cr3,200 baseline pension, + Cr3,000 for 2 additional terms,+ Cr700 for achieving rank E-7.
- *Rank O-6, 28 years (7 terms): Cr7,400*
  Cr3,200 baseline pension, + Cr3,000 for 2 additional terms, + Cr1,200 for achieving rank O-6

The alternate retirement system has several implications for character generation:

- It is intended for military or civilian characters in "ranked" professions. Characters not in a

ranked profession would get their pensions from the Imperial Economic Security Administration per the T4 pension rules.

- Officer promotions become much more important for pension purposes, which is consistent with the competitive nature of T4's officer-advancement program.
- The alternate pension system features a deliberate disincentive for senior enlisted men to try for commissions after the third or fourth term (remember, only one promotion per term, and mandatory retirement [subject to service exigencies] after 28 years); at a certain point, a senior NCO loses pension money if he accepts a commission. After all, no self-respecting senior NCO really wants a commission: why should a CPO or top-kick trade those hard-earned and well-respected chevrons for a butter-bar when nobody really respects an O-1?

While pensions may be a form of danegeld for governments, they are a resource and a spur to adventure for characters. After all, no pension ever stretches quite far enough. ✪

Foam Armour Trading/Coherent Weapons Systems

by Peter Arundel

Foam Armour Trading Ltd.

Foam Armour Trading (CEO Christine Dubois-Gilbert) is a Solomani company headquartered on Tarsus , Capella subsector, Solomani Rim. Wholly owned by the Dubois-Gilbert family, its main business focus is on personal armour, fire suppression systems and, most recently, laser weapons, range finders and designators via its subsidiary, Coherent Weapon Systems. Foam Armour Trading acquired Coherent Weapon Systems in a multi-million credit deal in order to diversify its product range – or as Christine Dubois-Gilbert herself put it; "We needed to get into the small arms market and so now we are in Coherent".

Formed less than fifty years ago as DGDC (Dubois-Gilbert Damage Control) Systems, the company initially made fire and blast suppression systems for starship fuel tanks, computers and other sensitive ship systems but a chance discovery that the foamed composite shields used for blast mitigation had very good protective qualities with respect to shaped charge (HEAP) projectiles led the company to investigate their use in personal armour – the resulting Ablative/Flak armour has been a small but reasonably profitable product selling mainly to mercenary, planetary defence and militia units.

Ablative/Flak armour

A shaped charge has the peculiar property of penetrating further through high density materials (e.g. steel armour plate) than through low density media (e.g. air or diesel fuel[1]) so a low density, foamed material could be made highly resistant to small (10 – 20mm) HEAP rounds such as those fired from Snub Pistols. It also had the secondary property of ablating when hit by laser fire although the resultant "blooming" was less pronounced than with a specialised Ablat Armour suit. Within three years a new armour material comprising thick (up to 4cm) plates of foamed composite had been developed and tested. The new material, although providing good protection against small HEAP rounds and lasers, had very little effect on regular bullets and gauss needle rounds were hardly affected at all and so the Solomani authorities could see little use for the new armour unless this could be remedied. Further research added extremely hard carbon/ceramic nanotubes to the composite matrix and an inner layer of ballistic cloth, similar to a vehicles spall liner, added further protection. The new carbon/ceramic matrix

had the effect of abrading and deflecting incoming bullets causing them to yaw and the resulting shearing forces would usually cause the bullet to fragment or, in the case of needle bullets, snap in half greatly reducing their penetration.

Official testing of the new armour was generally positive. The protective qualities exceeded standard ballistic cloth whilst offering ablative protection against lasers. Combat Armour and Battledress both provided superior protection but at many times the price. The main drawbacks noted were the degradation of protection following repeated HE, HEAT and Laser strikes and the extreme bulkiness of the armour itself. The low density plates and ballistic cloth under-suit weighed no more than a standard Combat Environment Suit but the material was thick and bulky. An example made by the testing board was that standard infantry rifles could not be shouldered properly as the length of pull (the distance from the butt to the pistol grip) was effectively increased by the thickness of the armour plate over the wearers shoulder. In other words the pistol grip was suddenly 4cm further away than it should have been. Since the standard infantry ACR and Gauss rifles used a bullpup configuration where the length of pull could not be altered significantly, the Testing Board would not recommend the armour for general adoption. They did, however, make their findings public and on the back of the results Foam Armour Trading decided to launch the armour commercially. Although not an immediate success, the new Ablative/Flak armour has been a steady seller to mercenary units and planetary defence units in the Capella subsector.

In game terms treat Ablative/Flak armour as ABLAT or CLOTH -1, whichever is better. Apply an additional -1 against HE/HEAP ammunition. HEAT, HE and Laser fire degrades the armour in the same way that ABLAT is degraded by laser fire. These modifiers apply to ALL subsequent weapon strikes not just HE, HEAT and Laser fire. The armour can-

not be sealed from the environment and cannot be combined with any other armour except Reflec. Costs Cr 700 but is only readily available in the Capella subsector.

Coherent Weapon Systems

Originally a government weapons research establishment on Tarsus until sold off in a major privatisation drive in order to attract off-world investment, Coherent Weapon Systems is a small, Tech Level 12 producer of infantry and vehicle laser systems with a product portfolio ranging from laser pointers for small unit commanders to vehicle mounted rangefinders and target designators. It is best known, at least within Solomani space, for its highly innovative laser sniping systems and its compact laser carbine/designator.

CWS Mk8(LE) Laser Sniping System

Developed for law enforcement use (hence the LE designation) the Mk 8 is built from five main sections; laser tube, power system, sighting system and the massive two part forged alloy chassis which serves as a both frame and heat sink. The laser tube is folded once in order to keep the overall length down to 80cm and forms, along with the forward chassis, the bulk of the forward part of the weapon. The electronic sighting system is split between the objective lens and CCD unit mounted co-axially with the laser tube and the output display and transmission unit mounted on the main chassis. The power system comprising the superconductor pack and recharge unit is mounted to the aft section of the main chassis and, in conjunction with its high impact composite cover, forms the stock of the weapon. The main chassis has fittings for standard tripod, bipod and vehicle mountings but is usually issued with a bipod .

The weapon has an output of 5kj and fires a 5mm diameter beam. This is bigger than a standard laser rifle and results in somewhat lower armour penetration (energy per square millimetre of beam cross sectional area is less) but conversely greater damage to the human (or alien) body. The laser tube is mount-

ed on the forward chassis which acts as a heat sink[2] as well as providing a rigid mounting for the laser and its associated sighting system. The sighting system is a low-light capable 3 to 10 times zoom unit and uses a charge coupled device (CCD) and a mirror, lens and shutter system similar to a Single Lens Reflex camera. The upshot of this is that the sight, when aligned correctly, is centred exactly where the beam will strike. At the moment of firing the sighting mirror and lens are mechanically moved from before the laser output port for the fraction of a second that the laser pulse lasts. The main problem with the system is that the mechanical action must be perfectly aligned with the laser output and each firing operation tends to move the sighting lens and mirror ever so slightly out of alignment. The number of shots taken before the misalignment becomes too great for reasonable use varies but, if treated correctly and not subjected to shocks, as many as 50 shots can be fired before dispersion exceeds 0.05 milliradians[3]. Realignment of the sighting system requires specialist tools and a qualified armourer and is not something that can be performed in the field. The entire laser tube, forward chassis and sighting system can be raised on a pantograph system 50cm above the main chassis. To do this a bipod or tripod must be fitted in order to keep the weapon stable. This feature allows the operator to stay in full defilade and still view the target through the sighting system. The sight output is via a small, hooded eyepiece with a high definition, full colour screen. The weapon status data and the sight reticle is injected into the sight picture (several variations are possible from cross-hairs to rings or mil-dot types) and as befits a weapon designed for law enforcement use, the sight picture can be transmitted via a secure link to the officer in command. The secure link can also be used to make the weapon safe remotely so an officer cannot shoot until the officer in command authorises use of lethal force.

The main chassis houses the superconductor pack which stores enough energy for 10 shots. An external battery pack (50 shots) can be attached and this recharges the supercharger pack although at a slower rate than the internal pack can be emptied. The external pack can be rechargeable or disposable with the disposable pack being significantly lighter. The composite housing that covers the superconductor pack and sight output unit also features the weapons pistol grip and trigger/switch unit. The housing is supplied with multiple butt spacers, cheek pieces and grip plates allowing the user to customise the fit to his or her liking.

Range Modifiers: CWS Mk 8 (LE) Laser Sniping System					
Close	Short	Medium	Long	Very Long	Damage
N/A	-6	-1	+4	+2	5d6+3

Armour Modifiers: CWS Mk 8 (LE) Laser Sniping System						
None	Jack	Mesh	Cloth	Ablat	Reflec	Combat
+4	+4	+2	+1	-8	-9	-8

Type	Cost	Mass	Notes
Mk 8 (LE) Laser Rifle	5000cr	6500g	Includes data link
Power pack	2000cr	9600g	50 shot rechargeable
Battery Pack	250cr	2500g	50 shot disposable

Both battery packs recharge the internal superconductor pack at a rate of one shot per two rounds.

CWS Mk 8 (Mil) Laser Sniping System

The Mk 8 (Mil) is the military version of the Mk 8 (LE) Sniper System. Although the basic chassis and lasing subsystems are identical, the military system deletes the fragile and easily misaligned sighting system in favour of an integrated, co-axial electronic sight and marked target detector placed 10mm above the laser output port. The secure data link is also deleted in favour of a military specification interface port that can be use shielded cable or low power wireless connections to a standard military radio, laser or satellite communicator allowing real-time video to be streamed to section, platoon, company or higher level commanders. In addition, the lasing apparatus is modified to allow it to be used as a target designator and range finder which when

combined with satellite or inertial navigation systems can provide highly accurate targeting data to artillery units, aircraft or ships in orbit. The Mk8 (Mil) system is also fitted with a holographic red-dot type site for short range use although the weapon is not well suited for close combat. As with the Law Enforcement model, the Military weapon comes with a bipod as standard, has fittings for tripod and vehicle mounting and retains the pantograph system for raising the laser allowing the shooter to remain under cover. In the Military version there is a system fitted which will instantly retract the pantograph upon firing if required making it more difficult for enemy units to spot the now hot laser tube and heat sink. The composite cover over the superconductor pack and sight electronics is the same as the Law Enforcement model as are the external power packs.

Range Modifiers: CWS Mk 8 (Mil) Laser Sniping System						
	Cl	Sh	Med	Long	VLong	Dmg
Holographic sight	-6	-	+2	+2	-2	6d6
Optical Sight	N/A	-6	-1	+3	+2	

Armour Modifiers: CWS Mk 8 (Mil) Laser Sniping System						
None	Jack	Mesh	Cloth	Ablat	Reflec	Combat
+4	+4	+2	+1	-8	-9	-8

Type	Cost	Mass	Notes
Mk 8 (Mil) Laser Rifle	4500cr	5800g	Includes data link
Power pack	2000cr	9600g	50 shot rechargeable
Battery Pack	250cr	2500g	50 shot disposable

CWS Mk11 Compact Laser Designator

The Mk11 is a laser carbine/designator most notable for its short length and use of an internal ten shot superconductive storage unit which is recharged from removable, disposable batteries instead of a rechargeable power pack. Using a laser tube that is folded to give an overall length of only 65cm, the Mk11 fires 3 kilojoule pulses from a 5mm aperture. Compared to a standard laser carbine the Mk11 is heavier, less capable of penetrating armour but more damaging to living creatures. Like the Mk8

(MIL), the Mk11 is aimed via an integral electronic sight which also serves as a marked target seeker and the receiver unit when the weapon is used as a range finder. The main sight is augmented by a holographic red-dot unit for close range use. Unlike many laser weapons the compact nature of the Mk11 means it has some utility in close combat although its slow recharge rate means it is only really useful as a self-defence weapon. The weapon is fitted with a vertical fore grip that can be folded out to form a light bipod for long range shots or when the weapon is being used to designate targets for laser guided munitions.

Range Modifiers: CWS Mk 11 Compact Laser Designator					
Close	Short	Medium	Long	Very Long	Damage
-2	+1	+2	+2	+1	4d6+3

Armour Modifiers: CWS Mk 11 Compact Laser Designator						
None	Jack	Mesh	Cloth	Ablat	Reflec	Combat
+3	+3	+2	+1	-8	-9	-8

Type	Cost	Mass	Notes
Mk 11 Laser Carbine	3100cr	5150g	Includes data link
Power pack	25cr	350g	10 shot disposable

The power pack can recharge the built in superconductor pack at the rate of 1 shot every 2 rounds.

These weapons was designed using BTRCs "Guns, guns, guns "third edition (3G3) supplement – www.btrc.net/3g3 - with some tweaks courtesy of *Traveller Book 8* (for communicator weights) and educated guesswork.

Notes

1. Though most people believe diesel is flammable, it isn't under normal circumstances, which is why some tanks (the original *Merkava* springs to mind) used fuel tanks as an integral part of their protection scheme against HEAT warheads.

2. Laser efficiency is around 33%, so for each 5Kj shot over 10Kj of heat must be dissipated—which sounds like a lot, but over 897j is required to raise the temperature of 1kg of aluminium by 1°C

3. This equates to a 5cm circle at 1000m range. ✿

Lost Diaries #2: The Last Cargo

by Rob Eaglestone

This story was originally posted to the pre-magazine web site in 1999.

[Diary Editor's Note: The original was found aboard the hulk of a corsair of long-obsolete design, and unknown origin. The hulk showed battle scars; remnants of the cargos described remained aboard. It was found in the outer reaches of a system in the Imperial core, on a tangential course. How long it had been drifting is unknown, but all power had long since failed; there were no survivors. The identity of "Gibreel" is unknown; the ship's papers listed nobody by that name.]

Day 176

We shoved off port yesterday, and I've got a bad feeling that something's not right. Bennett checked the liner manifests and said they were 100% Imperial, but I'm not sure. There are all kinds of funny ships out here, and cargoes change hands so fast anyway. How can he be certain the cargo is safe?

Port Tomaret's a quiet, shabby space dock. It had fuel and some supplies, but wasn't built to handle real traffic. Heck, it's only really supposed to handle insystem traffic; but since these outer systems tend to be less high-strung than mainworlds, you can get fueled (and maybe serviced) no questions asked.

Gibreel

Day 178

I'm sure that cargo ain't Imperial. Zhenchi and I pried off one of the lids, and it was full of purple basketballs. They looked organic—I'm sure they're alive (or were)—and I hate moving unclassed organics. What if they got some bug finds humaniti tasty?

We refueled and jumped for the next system. Captain says it's good policy to jump one ship per system per year, no more. We can run legit cargo too, but we really prefer to find one unique deal where we can make enough money to get us by for months. That way we can cruise around and enjoy the galaxy, you know?

Gibreel

Day 192

A little trouble in that last system: there were old SDBs there. We toasted one before we even knew what they were, and jumped out with only minor damage. We had to pull an awful lot of fancy maneuvers; I've gotten kind of nauseous because of all the evasive action and watching those boats swirl around in a drunken dance out the port.

One good thing about that system was that pathetic excuse for a merchant we sacked. Boy, did she have interesting stuff! We loaded some machinery I ain't never seen, except maybe in a magazine. Bet one is a black globe. Wonder how one got out here?

Gibreel

Day 198

Our trouble ain't over. I'm still nauseous, and half the crew are sick in bed and can't hardly move. It's jump sickness for sure. We misjumped when them defense boats were after us. Astrogator must've been in a hurry.

Gibreel

Day 207

No use asking the astrogator what happened. He died this morning. I've never heard of someone actually dying from jump sickness.

Gibreel

Day 212

Nice tidy mutiny today. Gunners thought we should break out of jump, captain says it'd kill us all. We had a nice battle on board here, five more dead and two critical. Hardly enough left to run the ship.

Gibreel

Day 216

Life support is going stale—we're way past our recharge date. We'll have to power down as many systems as possible and freeze ourselves in the low and emergency low berths. If we ever pop out of jump, someone's going to have to bail us out. Zhenchi and I repacked the black globe and other machinery, and put them in standard cargo crates marked "farm equip". Should keep interest low. Wish me luck.

Gibreel ✪

Feedback

Please tell us …
- what you think of both magazine and website
- what you think of the articles we publish
- how we can make our magazine better
- how we can make our website better
- what kind of articles you do or don't want to see
- what you think of our look
- how we can make it better

Please, give us your opinion! We've provided several ways you can do so:
- e-mail: *feedback@freelancetraveller.com*.
- feedback form at *http://www.freelancetraveller.com/infocenter/feedback/ftfbf.html*.
- Forums:
  Traveller Fanzine section of SFRPG: *http://www.sfrpg-discussion.net/phpBB3/viewforum.php?f=36*
  Lone Star at Citizens of the Imperium: *http://www.travellerrpg.com/CotI/Discuss/forumdisplay.php?f=13*
  Note: you must be registered with the forums to be able to use this method.

Traveller on the Internet
IRC: The #Traveller and #LoneStar channels

Freelance Traveller sponsors channels for *Traveller* fans on the Undernet and Otherworlders IRC networks, and the two channels are "bridged" so that if you're visiting either, you can see what's going on in the other, and talk to people there. For more information about both channels, see our informational pages at *http://www.freelancetraveller.com/infocenter/travnet.html#IRC* and *http://www.freelancetraveller.com/infocenter/travchat/index.html*. Come talk "live" with other Traveller fans about anything at all, Traveller or not, and make both channels "jumping" places to hang out!

You can also run "play-by-IRC" game sessions in either channel; please stop in and ask one of the channel operators (FreeTrav or EMT_Hawk) to schedule it, so we can ensure that the 'bridge' and the 'bartender' are set into a nondisruptive mode.

Please watch the Traveller Mailing List, the Mongoose Traveller forum, and the Lone Star section of the Citizens of the Imperium forum for announcements of Topical Talks!

News About Traveller

Recent Traveller News and Findings

September 2015

- **Christian Hollnbuchner** has released *Starships Book I000II0: Armed Naval Courier*, *Space Stations XX: Pirate Homebase*, and *Metro Liner*.
- **Avalon Game Company** has released *Kit Bag 6, Field Kits*.
- **Gypsy Knights Games** has released *21 Plots Go Forth*.
- **Mongoose Publishing** has released *2300AD: Atlas of the French Arm*.
- **Battlefield Press** has released *Warren C. Norwood's Double Spiral War*. ⚙

Submission Guidelines

What is *Freelance Traveller* looking for?

We're looking for anything and everything to do with *Traveller* – reviews of products, house rules, alternate settings, NPC profiles, world write-ups, adventures, equipment, starships, fiction, "color" articles… If you see it in *Freelance Traveller*, or on our website, we're interested in it. Even if you don't see it in the magazine or on the website, we might be interested; write to *editor@freelancetraveller.com* and ask.

Some things that we want that you might not think of as "*Traveller*" would include reviews of non-*Traveller* products that easily lend themselves to being 'mined' for ideas for use in *Traveller*, or reviews of fiction (in any medium) that "feels" like *Traveller* in some way. In these cases, your article should focus on the *Traveller*-esque aspects of the item. There may be other things, as well; if you're not sure, write and ask.

What about …

The rule of thumb is "If it's a *Traveller* ruleset, or a setting that has been published for use with a *Traveller* ruleset, go for it!". That includes the non-Official *Traveller* Universe settings that have been published for use with any version of the *Traveller* ruleset, including (but not limited to) *Judge Dredd*, *Strontium Dog*, *Babylon 5*, *Reign of Diaspora*, *Twilight Sector*, the two *GURPS* variants on the Official *Traveller* Universe, Avenger Enterprises' *Far Avalon*, and the forthcoming *Traveller Prime Directive*, and any others we may have forgotten.

…Hyperlite?

We've made the decision to support *Hyperlite* as though it were an alternate *Traveller* setting, much like *Twilight Sector* or *Reign of Diaspora*. The changes that Sceaptune Games has made to *Traveller* to get *Hyperlite* aren't really much more than the differences between Classic *Traveller*, *MegaTraveller*, *Marc Miller's Traveller*, and Mongoose *Traveller*, and converting between any of those systems and *Hyperlite*, in either direction, should be 'trivial'.

… Diaspora, or Starblazer Adventures?

If your article is about "crossing over" between these products and any of the "standard" or supported *Traveller* rulesets or settings, by all means, submit it! If it's support for those systems beyond *Traveller*, we'll accept and hold the submission, but will not print it unless/until we've had a reasonable level of expression of interest in such support from our readers.

How should I submit my article?

What needs to be in the submission?

At the very minimum, we need the submission itself, your name (for credit), and a valid email address to contact you at if we need to.

What format should I submit it in?

That depends on what you're submitting. Generally:

Text should be submitted in Microsoft Rich Text Format (RTF), Microsoft Word 2003 (DOC) or 2007/2010 (DOCX), OpenOffice Writer (ODT), or plain text (TXT). Most word processors will support one of those; if yours seems not to, please write to us for assistance. Avoid PDF if at all possible; it is difficult to reformat PDFs for our magazine or website.

Graphics should be submitted in the format that's best for the type of graphic. Most of the time, that will be GIF, PNG, or JPG/JPEG. Submitting in higher resolutions is better; we have tools to resample a picture to make it smaller if we need to – but it's not possible to make a picture larger without it becoming pixellated.

If you're submitting a graphic that you'd like to see us use for a cover of an issue, please make sure that it will fit nicely on both US Letter and ISO A4 pages—we'll crop the picture to fit, to avoid distorting shapes, so please leave reasonable "margins"; don't run "critical" imagery right to the edge where it will look bad if we crop it. A good resolution is 100 dpi or more.

Plans (deck plans, building plans, maps, etc.) may be better submitted in a vector-based format such as Corel-DRAW! format (CDR) or any format that can be imported into CorelDRAW! X4. Scalable Vector Graphics (SVG), Windows Metafile (WMF), Enhanced Metafile (EMF), Encapsulated PostScript (EPS), or Microsoft Visio (VSD) are some common vector formats that can be imported.

How do I get it to you?

Email it to us at our submissions address, *submissions@freelancetraveller.com*. Your subject line should specify the type of article that it is, and what section you think it should be put in, e.g., "Combat Rules for Doing It My Way".