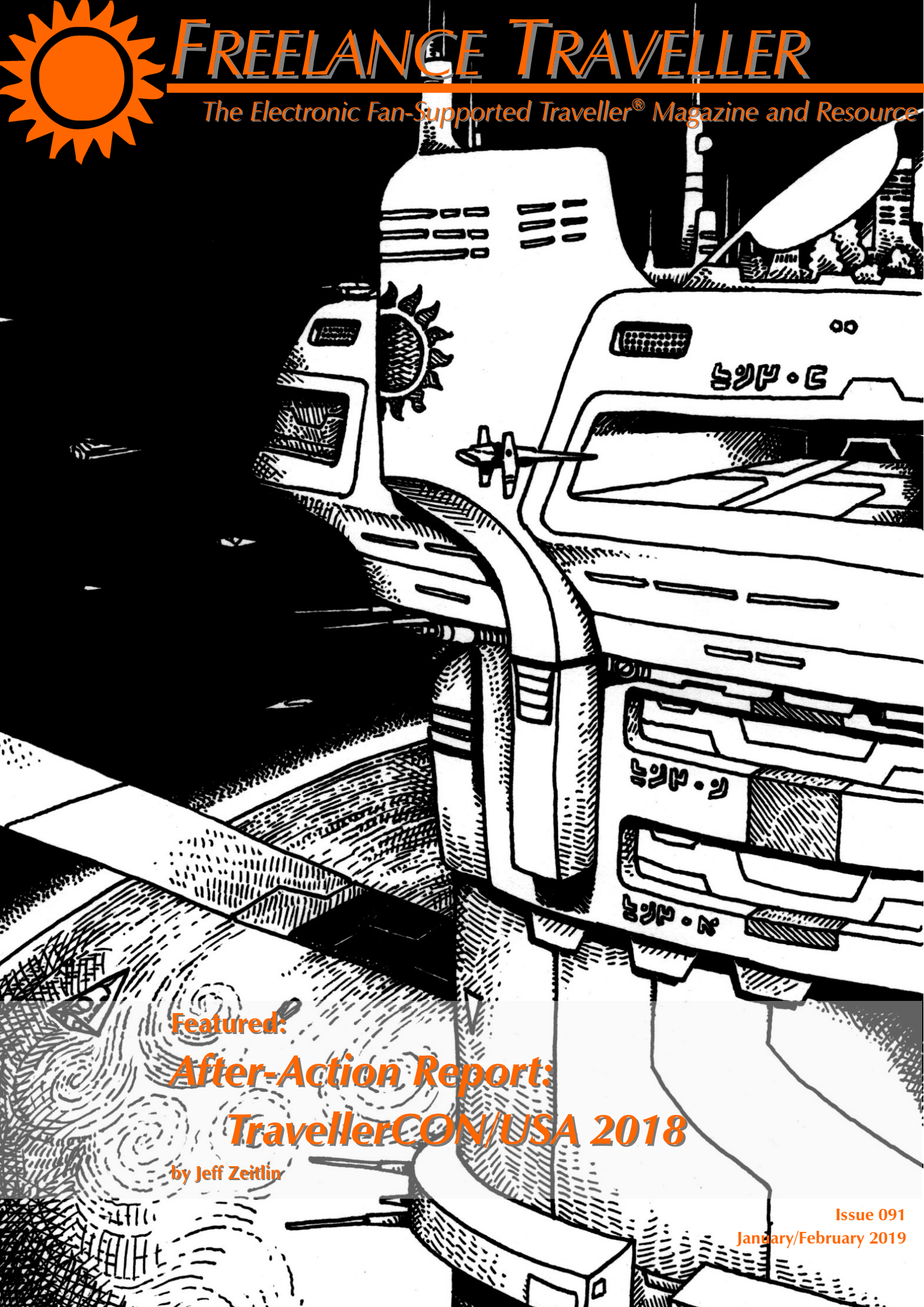




FREELANCE TRAVELLER

The Electronic Fan-Supported Traveller® Magazine and Resource



Featured:

After-Action Report: TravellerCON/USA 2018

by Jeff Zeitlin

Issue 091
January/February 2019

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.

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Contents

Freelance Traveller #091: January/February 2019

Editor: Jeff Zeitlin

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Critics’ Corner: *Mongoose Publishing and Michael Brown, both from the product or the DriveThruRPG website.*

Less Dangerous Game: *Benedikt Schwarz*

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From the Editor

Jeff Zeitlin 1, 63

Critics’ Corner

Great Rift Adventure 1: Islands in the Rift *reviewed by Jeff Zeitlin* 2

Review: The Michael Brown Corpus *reviewed by Timothy Collinson* 15

Marches Adventure 1: High and Dry *reviewed by Megan Robertson* 32

Other People’s Toys: Afterday *reviewed by Timothy Collinson* 50

Campaign 1: Secret of the Ancients *reviewed by “kafka”* 61

Raconteurs’ Rest

After-Action Report: TravellerCON/USA 2018 *by Jeff Zeitlin* 3

The Orc and the Sorceress *by Jim Vassilakos* 53

Tales in the Starport Bar: Light Adventure *by Catherine Berry* 59

Active Measures

Mtihani *by Michael Brown* 6

The Visitors *by Alvin Plummer* 34

The Prep Room

Jottings #7: Writing Systems *by Jeff Zeitlin* 9

Doing It My Way

Alternate Visions of Traveller *by Shelby Michlin* 12

A Percentile Skill System for Traveller *by Michael Hughes* 27

Virtuality and Its Social Consequences in Traveller *by Jim Vassilakos* 43

The Freelance Traveller Cookbook

Gaming With Diabetes: A Guide to Low-Carb Snacking *by Jeff Zeitlin* 18

Less Dangerous Game

Ushamaagian Dryad *by Benedikt Schwarz* 22

Confessions of a Newbie Referee A Column by Timothy Collinson

#36: Closer to God 43

Up Close and Personal

Brittina Montaigne *by Michael Brown* 30

Bhumibol “Tex” Wu *by Ken Murphy* 56

In A Store Near You

Old Cleon’s Olives *by Ken Murphy* 52

From the Editor



Many readers will note that the November/December 2018 issue of *Freelance Traveller* was never released. A few astute readers—and those who saw our October 29th announcement in online forums—will notice that this issue carries the number 91, as though November/December had in fact been published. The announcement has been reprinted on page 63 of this issue, and explains the non-publication of the November/December 2018 issue.

We acknowledge that some of our readers, in response to the announcement, counselled us to *not* skip the number; although we gave no reason for doing so at the time, it was in the back of our editorial mind that when this issue was released, in addition to posting the September/October issue’s articles to the web, we would post the announcement as a separate issue page on the website—so in a way, the announcement *is* issue 90 of *Freelance Traveller*. Thank you for your support during this difficult time. ☀

Great Rift Adventure 1: Islands in the Rift

reviewed by Jeff Zeitlin

Great Rift Adventure 1: Islands in the Rift. Martin J. Dougherty. Mongoose Publishing <http://www.mongoosepublishing.com> 33pp., PDF (Softcover forthcoming) Price TBD (see note)

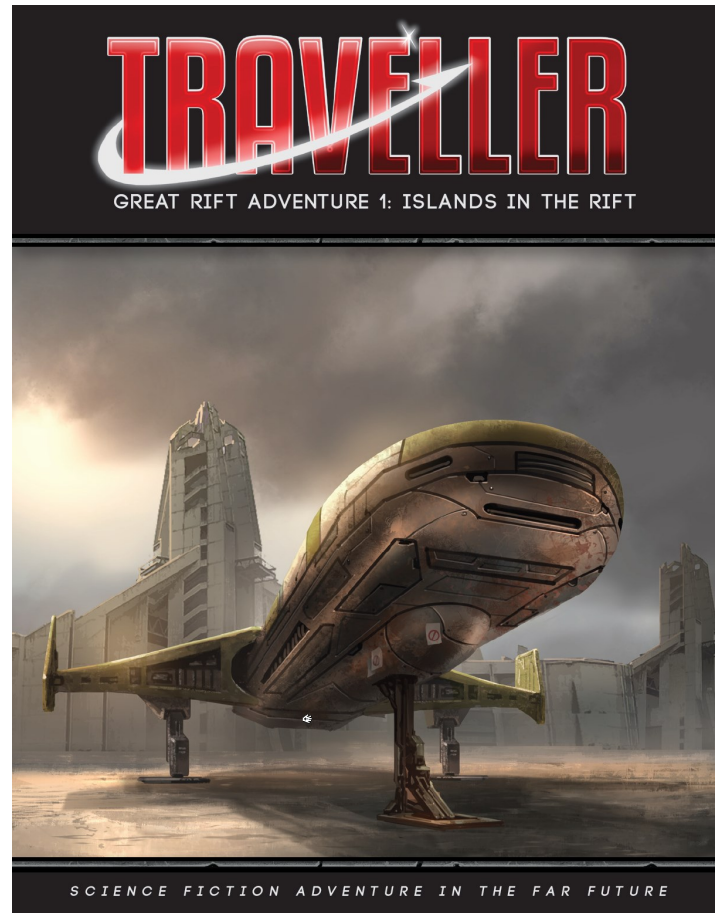
The Author received the PDFs as part of the deliverables for the Great Rift Kickstarter, and will receive the printed editions when available.

Although this adventure is included in the Great Rift Kickstarter, it has been written such that you don't actually need the other books of the Great Rift set to run – although having them will be helpful for providing additional background beyond what is strictly necessary to understand for this adventure, and potentially offering the player-characters options for “side trips” or further adventures. Specific references to other *Traveller* materials (second edition assumed) include the Core Rules or *High Guard*, and the *Deep Space Exploration Handbook*.

The player-characters are tasked with recovering a ship and shepherding it across the Islands Cluster, two subsectors in the center of the Great Rift. It's not a simple problem of ship navigation; the Islands Cluster is a cauldron of shifting alliances at odds with each other, in situations that are often just short of open war. Additionally, the PCs will have to contend with biased and incomplete presentation of information, opposition, and a mission complication.

This volume is very definitely targeted to the referee; players should consider themselves discouraged from reading it.

The Introduction, consisting of three pages of text and one page of maps (the two Island subsectors), provides the referee with the needed background of the region, including historical information and the origins of the adventure mission. This information is presented as being accurate, and it is specifically noted that referee's discretion is to be used in presenting it to the player-characters – both in terms of what to present and when, and how accurately (e.g., completeness and bias) to present it.



The next two pages, the Travellers' Briefing (Chapter One), is information that should be presented by the referee to the player-characters as a mission briefing. This covers an overly-brief summary of the current situation in the Islands, essentially from the Imperial point-of-view, and a mission overview, for recovering the *Perfect Stranger*, last known to be on Amondiage, and transporting it to the Imperial representative at Zuflucht, at the other end of the Islands. The player-characters will have limited resources (even more limited if they don't have their own transportation), and may not be able to draw on even those resources under certain circumstances.

Chapter Two provides information on the *Perfect Stranger*, a 400-ton Type R Subsidized Merchant heavily modified for extended range and duration, consonant with its true mission of intelligence gathering, and sufficient to get to any star in the Islands (albeit slowly; she still mounts the standard Jump-1 drive).

(Continued on page 3)

Critics' Corner

(Continued from page 2)

Chapters Three through Six provide information and activities covering the first part of the mission, from arrival at Amondiage to acquisition of the ship to starting the journey to Zuflucht. There is a proposed route that the player-characters will use if they're playing it safe and sensible, but there are also some places where they might be able to skip a stop if they're willing to cut into the buffer provided by the extended-range/duration mods.

Chapter Seven offers a couple of exceptional impediments that can be run somewhere along the route. There are notes on how the referee should handle them at various worlds along the route, and what the player-characters should expect depending on their actions.

Chapters Eight through Ten cover the remainder of the trip to Zuflucht, much as the early part was

covered in Chapters Three through Six. There are fewer stops on this leg, and thus less to happen – but what does happen can be just as important as the earlier complications.

Chapter Eleven is a single page with a couple of weapons specifically mentioned in the adventure; these are Islands versions of similar items that may be found elsewhere.

Chapter Twelve provides a page of index-card profiles of opposition the player-characters will encounter in a couple of 'key' incidents.

Overall, this is an interesting-looking adventure, good for use as a short, self-contained campaign. Recommended buy for referees looking to stock up on pregenerated adventures; players should probably avoid this unless you don't care about spoilers. 🌟

Raconteurs' Rest

After-Action Report: TravellerCON/ USA 2018

By Jeff Zeitlin

(Sorry about no pictures; I took the camera with me, and promptly forgot to actually USE it...)

Executive Summary: *Traveller* was played, fun was had!

The Trip Out

I decided to get on the road early this year; the week leading up to TravellerCON/USA saw long delays on the New Jersey-bound George Washington Bridge during and just after the morning rush (opposite the main flow of traffic), so 0700 saw me pushing the Start button on my Prius. A quick stop at the ATM, and a slightly longer one for breakfast at the deli I usually stop at on my way to the train in the morning, and then it's on to I-95 toward the Bridge. I still have a few options for changing my mind and crossing at the Tappan Zee (no, it will

never be the "Mario Cuomo Bridge" in *my* vocabulary), but other than a couple of accidents causing congestion on the Cross Bronx Expressway, it was smooth sailing to the GWB, and I was pretty much able to stay on cruise control from the I-80/I-95 split to the site—the Lancaster Host, same as last year (more on that later)—except where US-222 and US-30 were 'main drags' through various towns. I pulled in to the lot at about 1130, checked in, got lucky—the room was ready—and dropped Stuff, and headed down to the con room for chatting and maybe a pickup game.

In the room, we were getting set up to play *Traveller*; outside, in the rest of the hotel, it bore a passing resemblance to *Twilight: 2018*. There were a lot of areas where wallboard had been put up, and hard-

(Continued on page 4)

Raconteurs' Rest

(Continued from page 3)

hat areas declared; there were other areas with visible signs of construction, and the front atrium and a section of parking lot were gone. We'd been warned, though, shortly before the con, so the only real surprise was the sheer extent of the postapocalypticization (no, it's not in the dictionary; deal with it).

In chatting with KF (the Con Coördinator) and MH (the Con Queen), I learned that this was the "real" renovation—apparently, the past two years were mostly cosmetic, until they started discovering serious *structural* issues—and the harder they looked, the more they found. We're hypothesizing that the sale three years ago was a bit rushed, and the new owners were perhaps less diligent about inspections and walkthroughs than would have been optimal. And the old owners less diligent about maintenance than about revenue extraction. Net result is what we were seeing, plus the additional information that the renovations are a year behind schedule, and \$30 million over budget. It was also revealed that this was to be our last year at the Lancaster Host; next year's TravellerCON/USA will be at the Holiday Inn Morgantown, about a half-hour from the present site, and a half-hour faster to get to except if coming from the south. KF showed me pictures; I was favorably impressed.

During this "free" time, Gypsy Knights Games and RPGSuite arrived and set up; I chatted briefly with Noah (RPGSuite) about changes to the program—there's some interesting stuff coming down the pike that will rate updating my review, and there were a couple of add-ons that were on special, so I made a note to grab the add-ons before leaving the Con. I then caught up with John (GKG), and compared my list of GKG items with his, and gave him enough money to make sure they matched. I then helped MH set things up; a surprising number of attendees were showing up early, and she wasn't quite ready to process check-ins. That brought us to 1700-ish, so I ducked out in search of dinner, as

lunch had been reduced to some snacks, and forgetting about the traditional pizza that would be brought in later.

Session 1: Friday Evening

It turned out that a few planned attendees weren't going to make it, mostly due to illness. Some of them were referees, and that meant that my planned Session 1 game wasn't happening - and there weren't any other open slots. Part way through, HA offered to run a "pickup" game, a bit of an experiment—he was using the *Scum and Villainy* rules with a Third Imperium setting; the mission was a "personnel acquisition" job on Collace/District 268. I've asked HA to explore the rules a bit more and perhaps write an article for *Freelance Traveller*; I will say that it really needs some "home gaming group" play before being brought to a con. It's strongly Narrativist, and strikes me as having some philosophical similarities to *FATE*—but it also definitely seems more complex than *FATE*. In spite of the fact that nobody really had a 'handle' on the system, fun was had.

I rolled into bed around midnight, looking forward to the following day.

Saturday Morning, before Session 2

The restaurant and dining rooms were casualties of the postapocalypticization, but KF and MH had (barely) sufficient notice to make arrangements for a limited number of con-goers to breakfast with them in the Con Hospitality Suite—they had a couple of food-service trays of bacon, sausage, scrambled eggs, waffles, and pancakes brought in, along with a few containers of apple and orange juice, some biscuits, and some fresh fruit. Decent food and some pleasant chat, and down to the playroom!

Session 2: Saturday Morning

JD, who had been supposed to run my Friday game, arrived late—car trouble—so I signed up for the Saturday morning session of his game (he was

(Continued on page 5)

Raconteurs' Rest

(Continued from page 4)

running the same game in all sessions). “One Crowded Hour in the Casino” started out with the players participating in a high-stakes Sekhoma tournament—JD actually had us playing Sekhoma, not just rolling dice—and then being overcome by a release of anti-hijack gas. The characters then wake up separated, and at a severe disadvantage in both numbers and power, and have to deal with the situation. We’d played Sekhoma a bit longer than planned, so we didn’t actually finish the adventure, but fun was had. I’ll note that Sekhoma as a game works well, but it really takes a bit of work to set up a good deck. JD had found a six-suit deck, but the two extra suits were relatively easy to confuse with Hearts and Spades, and we only had the one thirteen-rank deck, instead of 1-6 twice. As a result, it made it a little difficult and error-prone to evaluate hands.

The absence of the restaurant wasn't a problem; there is a wide range of food in the neighborhood, from a buffet place across the street to family dining and fast food a short distance up or down the road. Lunch was found, and enjoyed.

Session 3: Saturday Afternoon

I returned from lunch slightly later than I had intended, and with the reduced number of referees available, all the games were filled. So, I wandered around carefully not kibitzing. Although this year’s “theme” was supposed to be Solomani and the Rule of Man, one might be excused for thinking that it was ‘600-ton subsidized liner’; more than one game was using it as the ship of choice. Technology was in evidence as well, at least two tables had laptops with external monitors as display aids, and one of them appeared to be using the *very large* external monitor as a battle mat. Five years ago, the popular IT press (as contrasted with the industry professional press) was saying we’d have roll-up OLED screens; as near as I can figure, they’re still about five years off. In any case, I can just imagine what *Traveller* referees

(not notably technophobic as a group) will do with them when/if they become reality. The miniatures table had an interesting setup; it appeared to be a series of wooden boxes of different sizes with plastic snap-together dungeon pieces laying out the interior. A bit of contemplation revealed that the boxes would actually stack into a pyramid, and a quick check of the Con Book confirmed it. It’s good to see that people are willing to put the time and effort (and money) into elaborate setups to try to enhance the player experience!

The session broke at 1700; dinner was sought and found.

Session 4: Saturday Evening

Nobody signed up for JD’s game this session, so he was at loose ends—and he had an ‘alpha’ copy of the board game *Traveller Ascension: Imperial Warrant* that he was interested in exploring. Opening the box showed material of good production value—some plastic tokens representing ships and agents, and heavy cardboard pieces (3mm thick) making up the board. The board pieces were in full color, and looked to have excellent registration, and the plastic tokens were well-designed. What was lacking in this example, however, were rules and faction charts; a beta of the rules were found on the web and downloaded, but they really need to be completed and reorganized. So, that was a bust from the point of view of playtesting, but interesting, nevertheless. I look forward to seeing the final product (I’m not a Kickstarter backer for this product, more’s the pity). After giving up on *Traveller Ascension*, we started setting up for the next morning’s session of “One Crowded Hour at the Casino”, and discussed the shortcomings of Sekhoma as revealed in the Saturday Morning session. We ended up agreeing to disagree—I’ll admit to possible bias on my part, as the article on Sekhoma carries my own by-line, but I really don’t think it’s as unplayable as JD seemed to imply he thinks it is.

(Continued on page 6)

Raconteurs' Rest

(Continued from page 5)

Session 5: Sunday Morning

A number of people had packed up and departed late Saturday night, and with no restaurant there was no breakfast Sunday morning unless you ran out to McDonald's or Dunkin Donuts or the like. I didn't. The final session started at about 0830, and just for the heck of it, I played JD's game again. This time, we used modified draw poker instead of Sekhoma; with the six-suit-thirteen-rank deck, it worked a little better. This time, the poker was kept under control, and we got to the breakup of the group and the anti-hijack gas a bit quicker. This time, though, it wasn't a straight-up fight with Vargr highjackers; Something Happened, and we ended up in a Strange Place. To tell any more would be spoily, and JD may want to use that part of the plot again, so leave it at "it builds on some information that *is* in the Classic Traveller canon, though somewhat obscure" and "we had fun playing it". Although we had until 1230ish, nominally, we brought things to a conclusion slightly before 1200, and I then decided to check out and get on the road—it being Sunday, and football (gridiron rugby, not Association/FIFA, which I call 'soccer') season had started, I knew I was going to hit traffic approaching the George Washington Bridge.

The Trip Home

Usually, I start out and get on the highway quickly, and then stop at an Arby's along US-222 for lunch and perhaps a nap, depending on whether I managed to get enough sleep. This time, I stopped at the Arby's a short distance away on US-30, and then struck for home. It was smooth sailing right through Pennsylvania and onto I-287 in New Jersey, and even I-80 wasn't bad until the I-80/I-95 split approaching the George Washington Bridge. From there, traffic was heavy but moving to about a mile west of the tolls; from there, it was stop-and-go right across the bridge and onto the Cross Bronx Expressway. The problem turned out to be halfway across the Bronx, on the *westbound* side; apparently there was a bad accident (which had been mostly cleared by the time I got there), and eastbound traffic was caused by mouth-breathing rubbernecks trying to see what was going on across multiple lanes of traffic. That added an hour to my trip, for a stretch that should have taken maybe ten minutes *at most*. Once I got past the brain clot, it was once again smooth sailing, and I pulled into my parking space at home shortly after 1700—plenty of time to unload and do laundry, and still have dinner and get to bed at a reasonable hour. Which I did.

And thus was another TravellerCON/USA put in the books.



Active Measures

Mtihani

By Michael Brown

Author's Note: This is based on a similar adventure that appeared in the online Journal of the Traveller's Aid Society, April 26, 2004.

Synopsis: The PCs escort a planetary princess to a world where she must undergo a dangerous trial.

"Mtihani" is designed for 3-6 Classic Traveller characters of varied backgrounds that may or may not have worked together before the adventure. Pi-

lot skill is required. No other skills or equipment are necessary; Survival and Liaison skills may be useful.

Pre-Adventure Prep

The referee should select or create the following:

- A small (Size 4-) habitable jungle world with Starport X, referred to in the text as Kidogo. The referee may instead use a similar one, if desired.

(Continued on page 7)

Active Measures

(Continued from page 6)

- (Optional) Animal encounter tables for Kidogo (*Book 3: Worlds and Adventures*)
- (Optional) NPC survey team, as described below
- (Optional) a group of soldiers, size to be determined by the referee, as described below
- (Optional) a team of professional assassins, as described below

Introduction

Malkadunia is a large world that orbits close to its M5V primary. It's unusual in that it's not the system's only habitable world. Kidogo—a small, uninhabited planet—also occupies Malkadunia's orbit at the L5 Lagrange point.

Malkadunia was conquered by the Terrans during the Interstellar Wars; a large influx of central African colonists subsequently displaced the original Vilani inhabitants. One group of these newcomers—whose power and influence eventually became the basis for a world government—was descended from a tribal matriarchy. The status of men is akin to the status of women on eighteenth-century Terra. Malkadunian society is very rigidly structured, and loosely based on the notion that bravery, toughness, and stoicism to adversity are the highest virtues. Leaders and nobles especially are expected to display such attributes. Sometime before their 18th birthday, noble children must display these qualities by surviving the *mtihani*, a punishing test of physical and mental endurance, before being deemed fit to rule or administer.

Kidogo is claimed by the Malkadunian government as a reservation world. It's also an anomaly: a minor world that manages to hold onto a biosphere, including an impressive variety of native life and exploitable minerals. These same minerals have become a bone of contention between Malkadunians who want to keep Kidogo pristine and those who want to open it up to mining interests. At present, Kidogo serves as the setting for the *mtihani*.

Players' Information

The PCs are requested to attend an audience with Malkadunia's queen, Nyah, a stern, powerfully-built woman who demands complete respect at all times. However, she likes offworlders, even male ones, and has need of some with spacecraft handling skills. During the meeting, her preference is to deal with and address the female members of the team.

Nyah has decided that her daughter, Princess Zalika, is old enough to undergo the *mtihani* to determine her fitness to rule after her mother. The PCs are to provide transportation to Kidogo and back. The party will also include Zawati, one of Nyah's loyal retainers, who serves as official observer; and the Princess' handmaiden, Leta, who by tradition, must accompany the Princess everywhere except during the *mtihani*.

The team may wonder why the Queen doesn't assign her own people to the job. She explains simply that she has had cause lately to distrust some of her normal retainers; offworlders won't be part of any local intrigues. For their help, the team is offered Cr30,000 and granted use of the Queen's barge (essentially a streamlined Type Y Yacht; see *Book 2: Starships*.) If the PCs decide instead to use their own ship, the Queen pays charter rates. For obvious reasons, she'd prefer the use of her own vessel.

The rules of the *mtihani* are simple: Zalika is to be dropped off in an area of the team's choosing without equipment of any kind and survive for two weeks. The team must remain in orbit for that time, but not interfere in any way; and return Zalika home at the end—if she survives. They may monitor remotely, if they wish. In fact, Queen Nyah encourages this—she thinks it would be a good introduction to her culture for the newcomers.

Referee's Information

What Queen Nyah won't divulge to the adventurers (because she feels of course that it's none of

(Continued on page 8)

Active Measures

(Continued from page 7)

their business) is that all is not well under her rule. The agendas and maneuverings of the nobles under her are getting out of hand and leading to rampant factionalism. She is increasingly caught in the middle and spending increasing amounts of time putting out fires. Consequently, some of the bolder nobles, sensing weakness, are quietly jockeying for a shot at the throne. Of course, for the plots to succeed, the current line must be disrupted. This would be a simple matter by rigging the *mtihani*.

The referee may wish to game out Zalika's stay on Kidogo, especially if the heroes find they must secretly help her. If so, (s)he will need to prepare a map of the area and populate it with animals using the tables in *Book 3*. Weather may also be a consideration; the referee is encouraged to make Kidogo's weather as mild or wild as (s)he thinks necessary.

Complications

Things are worse than Queen Nyah suspects, with events transpiring that complicate the team's seemingly simple mission. Select one or more:

- Once the ship is underway, Leta will ask to meet quietly with the adventurers' leader. She reveals that she's worried that there are plots against the princess (she's right.) Leta is intensely loyal to Zalika, and is willing to breach protocol by hiring the team to help her. She offers Cr7,500—her life savings—if they will protect Zalika. Of course, they must do it without violating the terms of the *mtihani*, meaning that any help they give must be done with the utmost secrecy.
- Before the PCs leave Malkadunia, agents of one of the seditious planetary nobles will approach them with a proposal to pay double whatever the Queen is offering to ensure Zalika fails her *mtihani*, by whatever means necessary. If the team refuses the offer, or reports the encounter, there will be subsequent attempts on their lives.
- The conspiracies have hit closer to home than Nyah realizes: her advisor Zawati has been co-

opted by the rebels and is working with them, willingly or not. Zawati has planted a pheromone on the Princess known to attract a particularly dangerous carnivore. The referee should generate one based on the tables in *Book 3*.

- A faction that wants Kidogo's vast mineral wealth opened up to development has sneaked a survey team onworld. The referee must decide whether the PCs can detect them from orbit. The surveyors are equipped to tech level 12 with mineralogical survey equipment, but armed only with weapons sufficient to protect against the wildlife. Their pilot is keeping a ship's boat in a wide orbit to help hide it. The equipment and the spacecraft are registered to a mining corporation hoping to get a leg up on any extraction rights.
- Insurgent Malkadunian soldiers are conducting secret training; their very presence on Kidogo is considered a traitorous act punishable by death. The leader is a particularly evil woman who will make sure that no witnesses survive. The soldiers are equipped and armed to the planetary standard of tech level 9. (On 9+, to tech level C.) They have no visible offworld transport; a spacecraft is due to pick them up in several weeks.
- A group of political dissidents and exiles have made their way to Kidogo to eke out a living far from the plots on Malkadunia. As above, their presence there means the death penalty if they're caught. Worse, they have radical views and will happily share them with anyone who'll listen. If Zalika hears them, she may suffer a crisis of conscience as her own views are questioned for the first time in her life.
- A team of crack assassins working for one of Queen Nyah's rivals has been sent to Kidogo in advance of Zalika's arrival. They are armed and equipped to tech level 15 and will kill Zalika and anyone else they encounter.

(Continued on page 9)

Active Measures

(Continued from page 8)

NPCs

Binti Malkia Nyah Zalika (Princess Zalika)

Noble; 5779AC; Age 15; 0 terms

Computer-1, Leader-0; Survival-0

Zalika is Nyah's only child and though she's lived in her mother's shadow, she already carries herself like a ruler. She is dark-skinned (like all Malkadunians) and nimble, with hair kept in long braids down her back. She is well-known and liked by her people for her quick wit and her depth of legal knowledge. However, she is not as outgoing as Nyah and has a strong sense of morality. Like her mother, she brooks no disrespect and is blunt in pointing it out. She knows the names of some of those conspiring against the Queen but keeps silent out of respect. She has a piercing gaze, which she sometimes uses to intimidate underlings.

Leta

Other; 486976; Age 15; 0 terms

Computer-1, Liaison-0

Leta is Zalika's handmaiden and was raised in the palace alongside her. She is a thin, dark-skinned girl who looks somewhat younger than she actually is. As quick-witted as the princess, she uses her intelligence to see to Zalika's every need. She is totally devoted to the princess; not just out of duty, but out of genuine friendship—Zalika considers Leta her best friend and confidant. Leta is unfailingly courteous and polite to guests, but makes it clear the prin-

cess is her first priority. She knows of several plots against Zalika and has informed her of them, but feels frustrated that she can't take direct action. She is very soft-spoken.

Prime Advisor Zawati Rashidi

Diplomat; 368B99; Age 70; 13 terms

Admin-2; Dagger-1; Instruction-1; Interrogation-1;

Liaison-4; Streetwise-1

Zawati is Nyah's chief advisor, and a longtime fixture in her court; she advised Nyah's mother and will probably advise Zalika upon her ascension. She is tall, regal, and—unlike most Malkadunians—sinewy rather than muscular, with shocking gray hair and a sallow skin tone. She has a vast knowledge of the workings of the court and an uncanny ability to size up petitioners at a glance, which allows her to separate the important ones from those who would waste the queen's time. She is loyal to Nyah, but preferred the way her mother conducted governmental affairs, deeming Nyah too impetuous. When dealing with others, she is distant and aloof, even condescending at times. Very little happens in Nyah's court without Zawati's knowledge, including the various intrigues (the referee may decide that Zawati is in on one of these intrigues; see above) and is a fount of information. She keeps an ornate dagger on her person at all times, partly for ceremony, and partly for defense.☪

The Prep Room

Jottings #7: Writing Systems

by Jeff Zeitlin

While it can perhaps be argued that you can have a civilization without writing, few would try to make the argument that you can develop a *technological* civilization without it. But writing comes in many forms. This post is a brief discussion of the

various types, and should be noted to be drastically oversimplified in some – likely most – explanation.

A good starting point to follow up on this post is Omniglot.com. It has many articles about and examples of writing systems, both attested in the real

(Continued on page 10)

The Prep Room

(Continued from page 9)

world and created for fiction, for conlangs, or for “encoding” natural languages, and will generally be more accurate and elaborate than what is written here. Wikipedia, naturally, is also a good starting point.

In a previous version of this article, posted online, I lumped together ideographic, logographic, and pictographic writing systems and discussed them as though the terms were mostly interchangeable. Further research has shown that this was an error; I go into a bit more detail here.

There is a great deal of overlap between **pictographic** and **ideographic** scripts; both tend to abstract meaning into symbols, and do not truly map written symbols to spoken words in a fixed one-to-one manner. Pictographic scripts rely on physical resemblance of the written symbol to the real-world concept/object that it represents. Ideographic scripts, however, rely on broad common recognition of the association between the written symbol and the concept, without there being a necessary physical resemblance. Often, pictographic and ideographic elements are combined in message presentation; an example would be many road signs: In the US, a sign that is shaped like a diamond, and colored a particular shade of yellow, is itself an ideogram representing the concept “be aware of an important and possibly hazardous situation”. One can place on this an arrow pointing toward the top of the sign: another ideogram, meaning “the condition is ahead of you; you are moving toward it”, and below this, a red octagon: a pictogram representing a STOP sign. Taken together, you have the message “Cautionary warning: You are approaching a STOP sign”. It would be fair to say that ideographic and pictographic scripts are not written representations of spoken languages, but instead are of ideas that must be interpreted rather than “read”. Other examples of this type of writing (mixed pictographic and ideographic) would be Blissymbolics, emoji, Ron Cobb’s

Semiotic Standard, and Dave Redington’s adaptation of the latter for *Traveller*.

Logographic scripts differ from pictographic/ideographic scripts in that the symbols of the writing system represent words or phrases, but are often arbitrary. While some logographic scripts – most notably Chinese characters and Japanese kanji – appear to have evolved at least in part from older pictographic or ideographic symbols, others have been created out of whole cloth for specific purposes (for example, the International Code of Signals [ICS] flags used for inter-ship communications). Where logographic scripts are not intended as systems to bridge communication across entities not sharing a common spoken language (the ICS is so intended), they are frequently (it would not be unfair to say ‘universally’) extended to having some symbols contextually represent phonetic elements of the spoken language. Even where other writing systems entirely predominate, it is not unusual to see logographic elements in specific uses – for example, most currency symbols and mathematical notation are logographic in nature.

Syllabaries (example: Japanese *kana*, both *katakana* and *hiragana*) may have arisen from older pictographic/ideographic or logographic scripts, through simplification and increasingly using them as logograms to represent phoneme clusters. By limiting those clusters to combinations that occur in the spoken language, one represents the sounds of the latter, rather than the meanings, and reduces the number of symbols that must be learned as one’s vocabulary grows. In the case of Japanese, the older Chinese ideographic script is adapted to occasionally select among possible meanings of a written word (but also see *furigana/ruby* and *bopomofo*). Other syllabary writing systems are Cherokee and Inuktitut. Syllabaries almost universally require fewer distinct symbols to represent a greater number of words than picto/logo/ideograms, and in that sense repre-

(Continued on page 11)

The Prep Room

(Continued from page 10)

sent the spoken language “more efficiently” than such scripts.

Abugidas are somewhere between an alphabet and a syllabary. In an abugida, written symbols represent a single consonant and an “inherent” vowel; to modify or remove the vowel, one adds additional indicators. Hindi and Bengali are probably the most immediately recognized abugidas in Europe and the Americas, but most other Indian (subcontinent, not Native American) languages follow similar patterns, as do some languages on the Malay peninsula and throughout Malaysia and Indonesia. Abugidas are more efficient (by the definition above) than syllabaries in representing the sounds of language where the number of possible syllables in a language is large. (There are only about 125 *katakana*.)

Abjads can be viewed as an intermediate step between abugidas and alphabets. The primary difference between abugidas and abjads is that in an abjad, the unmodified symbol represents a consonant *without* an “inherent” vowel; the difference between an abjad and an alphabet is that in an alphabet, vowels receive their own letters, while in an abjad, vowels are indicated by diacritics (and may be optional). Arabic and Hebrew are probably the best-known abjads; when used in traditional Quenya mode, Tolkien’s Tengwar could be considered an abjad. Abjads and abugidas appear to be nearly the same in terms of “efficiently” representing the sounds of written language, and in learning to read and write.

Inuktitut is formally classified as a syllabary, but there are characteristics that could allow it to alternatively have been classified as either an abugida or an abjad.

Alphabets represent consonants and vowels separately, on an “equal” footing. Depending on the language and the development of the writing system, each letter can represent a single phoneme, or

perhaps a limited set of phonemes. Alphabets may be slightly more “efficient” at representing the spoken language than abjads or abugidas, but the difference appears to be small. Most European languages are alphabetic, with variations on Latin and Cyrillic being most common; the vast majority of languages that did not gain a written form until after European contact use variations on those two alphabets as well. The best-known (and longest-lived) example of a con-script for a natural language, Korean *Hangul*, is actually alphabetic, in spite of the general European perception that it’s more like Chinese than anything else. In the mode of the Sindar (in Beleriand), Tolkien’s Tengwar is definitely alphabetic. The flags of the ICS (see **Logographic Scripts** above) are also used as stand-ins for the Latin alphabet.

The only extant information on *Traveller* scripts is the Vilani script, which is not only alphabetic, but appears to be a straight substitution cypher for the letters from English that appear in transliterations of Vilani words. While convenient, it’s unrealistic, and probably shouldn’t be considered canonical. It’s a natural “error” for non-linguists to make, and it’s equally natural to focus script development on alphabetic scripts, as that’s what English-speaking *Traveller* players will be most familiar with. 🌀

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Alternate Visions of *Traveller*

by Shelby Michlin

I'm not in Marc Miller's generation (he falls about midway between my father and I), but I've read and watched most of the science fiction that was loved by the generations older than myself, and thus Mr Miller and I have many of the same literary influences. When I first saw *Traveller*, my initial thought was, "You could run a Dumarest game with this!" My second thought was, "Or an Andre Norton game!" And I was amazed to learn just how right I was.

Traveller is a game meant to emulate space adventures. Its influences, at least in its initial incarnation, were the pulp magazines, the movie serials, and the fiction that was written for the page and screen up to its publication date in 1977. You, playing from a perspective in the 21st century, can choose to play any kind of game you like; and your choices may include genres that came later. Cyberpunk, Transhuman, Military SF, whatever you choose. Mr Miller congratulated himself that *Traveller* could be used to play games set in the *Star Wars* universe (the first movie was released that same year, after *Traveller* had been completed), and has stated that his intention was to provide a system for playing any flavor of science fiction. My *Traveller* is the science fiction I grew up with, that Mr Miller grew up with, filled with exotic alien vistas, weird dangerous creatures, unfathomable sentients, brave fragile ships probing the cold void, and vast armadas tearing each other apart with terrible energies. Mine are stories of stalwart heroes, evil villains, and the drifters who populate the gray area between the two. I'm emulating the science fiction that *Traveller* was based on, the fiction that means "science fiction" to me. But apparently, there's a group of players who seem to think that "science fiction" means something else.

I've lived and gamed in both the Los Angeles area and the New York City area. I've been to an

awful lot of conventions all over the USA, played a lot of different rules sets, and I've read a lot of gaming magazines. But now, with additional generations of gamers having reached adulthood, with the ubiquitous internet, and the mainstreaming of science fiction, I've encountered some *Traveller* viewpoints that are new to me.

When I play *Traveller*, the primary goal is adventure. The secondary goal is 'Sensawunda' (look it up). The rules system takes a back seat to the 'game' in 'role-playing games,' and I give myself permission to ignore whatever might hold me back at any given moment. Because the entire purpose of a game is that it's supposed to be fun! I play up characters, using bad accents and silly mannerisms. They must be larger than life, otherwise what's the point? I try to pump up my descriptions. I hope things happen that are unexpected to both my players and to me! If something pops into my head in the middle of role-playing, I've found that just going with it will make for encounters that are much more memorable than what I had planned. Everything takes a back seat to playing out a story. Not that I don't like rolling some dice; that adds unpredictability and danger to resolving the action!

I've been spending some time in online groups that discuss *Traveller*, and I notice that some folks' take on how the game is 'supposed' to be played is, to my way of thinking, rather dry. It seems to me that they've made a Virtue out of stressing the 'science' in science fiction, or the nuts-and-bolts of a rules system, at the expense of the adventure. At the expense of role-playing characters. I'm not quite sure why that is, or what exactly they mean by it. (Of course, without the internet I never would've even been aware of that attitude at all!) The appeal of elaborate rules mirrors a similar trend in other games, that has waxed and waned over the years, as evidenced by various notorious rules systems. But

(Continued on page 13)

Doing It My Way

(Continued from page 12)

it's only now that I'm confronted, actually confronted, by folks who take every opportunity to tell me what *Traveller* is, and how it should be played. Really? You're gonna school me?

Let me ask briefly, what is science fiction? I have read its description and would agree that it is a story, set in a glimpse of a future that differs from our own time with respect to what new technology is common; and how that impacts the lives of the protagonists. That's pretty broad, but that covers what is necessary to qualify. One thing I've observed is that some people today seem very concerned with parsing everything down into very small and finite subsets. One has to argue about what exact labels apply to Barsoom. It cannot be science fiction, it cannot be fantasy; is it sword & planet, or sword & sandal, or science fantasy, or simply pulp? What about Doc Smith's Lensmen? Is it science fiction, or space opera, or science fantasy? I recently read a comment that dismissed something as being 'space opera,' as opposed to being 'science fiction!' Really? In the books and magazines and conventions I know, everything was lumped together and enjoyed equally. You could have Burroughs and Asimov and Howard and Lovecraft in the same magazine, edited by John Campbell. And we were fans of all of them, and discussed them at the same conventions! While these sub-sets that you impose might satisfy the obsessive-compulsive, they serve only to limit you; especially as a gamer.

For me, science fiction is about adventure – in the future. As I recall reading more than once, a character in a science fiction story uses his tools without overt explanation. "Quick, hand me the molecular fusion wand, the core's shielding is coming apart!" He doesn't describe what it is, what it does, how it works, or what new imagined developments led to its application in this future scenario. And you, playing a game – neither do you! It's a tense moment, it's a dangerous obstacle that has to be

overcome in order for the character to survive and for the story to continue. He doesn't have time to be pedantic, or there would be no peril. He doesn't have to explain it to his companions, because they all live in this future and they already know this technology exists. The audience only needs to know enough to understand that there is danger, and how high the stakes are. (Believe me. This is my career.) And the same with the players. Unless you make it a plot point: "How could his pistol have produced such a devastating blast? No known power source could support it!" And if you do, then guess what? You don't have to come up with a technobabble explanation in imaginary pseudoscience, because it's fiction! NONE of it exists! And any technology you can't explain, (to paraphrase), is MAGIC to you, you puny 21st century primitive.

Now, in some genres, for example where a character has travelled into the future from our present, we see the advanced technology through eyes as unfamiliar with it as our own. This is a plot device, but not one that's used in bog-standard *Traveller*, where we play characters who originate in the time period in which we play.

What should the future be like in a game? It should be an environment ripe for adventure, because we're playing a game where characters go on adventures! Just as in a book or movie, we're given the descriptions of what is different, and then we proceed. Given this, the science of the future is a tool, no more, to give us the 'sensawunda' the genre requires. The story is in the characters. Did John Carter care how a radium pistol worked, or why a green martian could be so tall, or that red martian women who laid eggs still had mammaries? He did not. Was Northwest Smith angry that the Shambleau's biology didn't 'make sense?' He was not. Does Earl Dumarest demand to know how Basic can support life, does he refuse to use air-rafts because they don't mass enough to carry a generator of suffi-

(Continued on page 14)

Doing It My Way

(Continued from page 13)

cient power, or get a tape measure and confirm that the displacement of his latest ship matches imaginary specs? He does not. Are you kidding me? Because it doesn't matter to the story. Characters are presented with the facts of our new environment, and may then use whatever is at their disposal to accomplish their goals and advance the story. I see similar arguments among fans of TV shows (my vocation). They want to know why a ship was designed in that particular way, they insist that it "doesn't make sense," and they hate it when I tell them that it's set up that way to make it all fit on the sound stage, or because of budget limitations, or because they hired an artist to make a visual or a model and then ran with what they got. There is no 'science'-based explanation, because it's 'fiction!'

It doesn't bother me if the life-form I describe 'makes sense' in any way. It's what I say it is. And I would argue that makes for a more exciting and unpredictable story. These creatures can fly, even with tiny wings. Those creatures are displaced in time exactly one second, at will. This plant can turn a human into an automaton, and that planet over there is made of living rock. Does the science matter? What, you've accepted jump drive, but you can't accept this?

Let's look at a few *Traveller* adventures. Take a step back. "Murder on Arcturus Station" is a simple, people-driven murder mystery. It should play out like an adventure. There is no need to check your science textbook before you can play. "Leviathan" is a simple *Star Trek* game. Go out and explore, interact with the cultures you meet. They can be as exotic as you can come up with, pull out all the stops. "Prison Planet". "Annic Nova". How could you play these adventures as dry, dull, tied to some predetermined set of expectations? Why? What a waste! Who would want to play it out if you make it sterile white?

When I need a ship in my game, it is what I as story-teller need it to be. Although I know some people like working with the *Traveller* ship-design system, I have never met or role-played with such. "It does Jump-2," I say, looking at my subsector map, because that's what I want. It has this many staterooms because that works for my scenario. In decades of playing *Traveller*, I have never designed a ship, or a vehicle, or a weapon, by any rules system. I make it what will work for the campaign I envision. If you give me detailed specs, I will ignore some, change what doesn't work for me, and I don't care if that means the item is now "too large" or "too small." I don't care if the planets are far enough away from their star, or if they're in the right zone. I don't care if my planetary description fits within the possible parameters of some published table, and I wouldn't hesitate to choose whatever results I'd like regardless of their 'probability.' It's make-believe! Not based on any science we can understand, and impossible by any standards we know anyway! Do you think Bradbury cared how scientifically-accurate his version of Mars was? No! He was telling a story! This frees me up to be as creative as possible. It's also an incredible time-saver. Hand-wave it!

Traveller is a game in the science fiction genre, but only in its widest definition. The definition I grew up with, that allowed for Northwest Smith, and Dumarest of Terra, and John Carter of Mars. Don't try and tell me that it must read like a science text – especially since there is no science we understand today that can explain its assumptions. No, in role-playing games we go on adventures. That's what Mr Miller had in mind when he wrote the thing, a science-fiction version of D&D. You're limiting yourself if you make your worlds sterile and soulless. See if you can manage to take the blinders off, and take your players on some real adventures!



Review: The Michael Brown Corpus

by Timothy Collinson

Traveller adventures come in all shapes and sizes, from the actually-a-campaign *The Traveller Adventure* down to the tiny adventure seeds that grace the end of a variety of chapters or articles in various places.

Michael Brown has been laying claim to ownership of a niche that he's singlehandedly created: the "one page, no frills" adventure. Perhaps too short to review individually, it would be a shame to miss them out entirely, so this review is going to look at them all as a body of work and pick three out at random to look at in more detail. I'll get my trusty d100¹ out as there are now some 95 titles to choose from – although I'm sure that figure will be out of date by the time this is published. Also, some are actually "short, no frills" adventures of two or three pages, and three are longer still (*The Dangard Experiment*, *Planet of Storms* and *The Sands of Zerzura*).

Before I go any further, I should note that they're all written for *Cepheus Engine* so some might regard them as not *Traveller* at all. Fair enough. But there's no doubting that any of them could be slotted into the Third Imperium without any trouble at all and they certainly have the feel of, say, old Amber Zones. In addition, over 20% of them actually originated as *Traveller* adventures in these very pages (see *Freelance Traveller*, nos. 12, 14, 20, 25, 29/30, 32, 45, 48, 51, 53, 56, 59, 62/63, 66, 70, 73, 76 & 85) although sometimes they've changed titles. By my reckoning there are also quite a lot of adventures previously appearing in *Freelance Traveller* that are yet to be converted to *Cepheus Engine* and the one page or short format.

So what do you get for your pennies? Firstly, they really are just pennies: 57 of them in sterling or 75¢ a piece (longer ones are more). They really are, for the most part, just one page although you'll get a

second page of OGL licence text as well. They're all written by the one author and as PDFs on DriveThru they have a 'cover' image in the traditional *Traveller* black with the title in one colour or another and a colour bar above. The actual PDF doesn't include this. Also on the cover is the text 'A Science-Fiction 2D6 Adventure: For Science-Fiction games using a 2D6 mechanic, including the Original Classic Science-Fiction Tabletop Game'). All have been published in 2016, 2017 or 2018. So pretty much an average of one a week.

Typically, the one page will follow the same format of Overview, Background, Players' Information and Referee's Information; often they'll have a sentence about skill notation, NPC cannon fodder descriptions, or currency usage. Many are purely text – although they're very nicely laid out in two columns (very, very occasionally three) with boxes, bullet points and tables – occasionally you'll get a diagram or even a map which is always a bonus. This is simple but clear and effective as well as allowing full advantage of the page to be taken. Mr Brown is to be commended on not following the fashion of coloured backgrounds or massive artistic borders which seem to be *de rigueur* in some places and often made text difficult to read or waste a lot of space. Virtually all of the adventures are in portrait orientation, but two or three are in landscape format for no discernible reason.

As for the adventures themselves, they're typically suitable for a group of players either with a ship or stranded on a world for the duration and might be regarded as 'standard' patron driven affairs, often on backwater worlds and often saving someone or something. Indeed, is there a generator that uses tables to create: Patron asks the PCs to <find/save/rescue> <sibling, spouse, offspring> from <themselves/religious cult/criminal gang> or something? There are a few like that; see *The Alchemist's*

1. Well, ok. I don't play DnD so I don't have a d100 but my calculator can generate random numbers of three digits easily enough.

(Continued from page 15)

Blessing, The Bedlam Extraction, Benediction, The Deliverance of Reine, Ex Scientia, Marque and Reprisal, The Overlord Syndrome, Sword of Zeme and *This Other Eden* for examples. Fortunately, the treatment each time is sufficiently different to keep them interesting. Several more are of the 'retrieve this item or data' variety; examples include *The Altar of Avarice, Aqua Pura, The Celsius Agenda, Caecis Manibus², The Coriolis Peril, Filch* and so on. There are a number of traditional 'transport this cargo or these passengers', e.g., *Angle of Incidence, Portent, That Ye Be Not Judged* and *The Wing Wherewith We Fly*. Not all are merchant type scenarios, however; some – perhaps not enough – are more exploration and could be more suitable for scouts: *Harvest Index, Meridian* and *Nine-Tenths of the Law* are just three examples.

The adventures may well involve combat, but not all do. Most are legitimate in legal terms, but not all are. Although they're stripped of any *Traveller* setting and are thus quite generic, they still manage to have a flavour of their own in the names of worlds and PCs so they're not quite as bland as they might be. It's easy enough to read 'Exploration Service' as the IISS or 'interstellar government' as the Third Imperium or 'Precursors' as Ancients, but if I had one complaint it would be that there's a slight lack of atmosphere or sense of place. But that's the nature of the CE rule set and conditions the author is working with and does have the advantage that it makes them easier to transpose to your own adventure setting whether official, home-brewed or another published universe. Some certainly feel very contemporary and although they have an SF background, may well have been at least inspired by real world newspaper stories – *Data in Flight* comes to mind particularly. Others are quite moving in their plangent set up, e.g., *Elegy* and *Flight of Orphans*.

2. Long-time Michael Brown readers will probably have noted his love of the Latin title or section title of his adventures. Nothing's changed with these one page offerings so you might like to have a dictionary or Google to hand.

One or two remind me of certain films I might have seen or combinations of them; *Nightfall* is an example here; or possibly even another *Traveller* adventure, for example *The Pandora Sanction* which is reminiscent of the JTAS classic *Roadshow*.

Not all follow the patron format, however, there are variations. *The Azimuth Parallel* has the PCs' ship nearly collide with a much larger derelict, *Passage* has them finding a ship with murdered crew, *Breakout!* and *Night of the Fuufi* both have them receive a distress call³, *Memoir* has them at the scene of an accident, *Silver Serpent* see the PCs thwarting a mugging on a monorail, and one is specifically designed to bring a new set of characters together: *Demon's Realm*.

Two 'adventures' are very different and are really settings rather than adventures. *Omega99* is a homage to *Space: 1999* and is impressive in actually managing to present an entire setting in one page – although to be honest this is one that could easily, if licencing allowed, be an entire sourcebook and one I'd buy in an instant. *Omega99* presents the background for Moonbase Omega, offers some typical character possibilities and in just a few sentences outlines the astrography and technology of the setting. Probably more of inspiration rather than hugely useful, but fun nonetheless. The other adventure that's not your standard fare is *M*E*R*C*Y*. This is clearly inspired by the film and TV series *M*A*S*H**, but here we're aboard the Multifunctional Exigency-Role Cruiser, Yeoman and the author on this occasion doubles his space and devotes two pages to presenting the background, a TL12 hospital ship (stats but no deck plans), a d66 mission generation table and some typical NPCs. Simple though these brief settings are, I'd like to see more of them – quick overviews of how other favourite genres or

3. I don't know if the author is aware that in the UK at least 'fuufi' is not a word I'd use in polite company, but it did make me smile when I read the adventure about a pampered noble wanting her pet back. That may have been quite deliberate.

(Continued on page 17)

(Continued from page 16)

settings might be thought of in *Traveller*, sorry, 2D6 SF role playing, terms.

Another thing I'd like to see more of are the non-adventure materials Mr Brown offers. To date there is very little of this but it's good and could definitely be expanded. *Minor Loot* (or, "What's in This Guy's Pockets?") is pretty self-explanatory and offers rules for determining what an NPC might be carrying. *Locale: Personal Enhancement Center* is a 'location' that can be dropped into an adventure anywhere – in this case a futuristic beauty parlour which runs to two pages rather than one. Finally, and most recently, *Lifeform Reading: Xorn* which presents a creature in detail and offers rules for having them as PCs. This has the distinction of being the only Michael Brown offering with an illustration. If I'm reading the initials right, it's by Brown himself and is a good effort. More of all three of these kinds of things please!

While I'm here, I should perhaps also note that Mr Brown has also been publishing some definitely not-*Traveller* work which might be of interest to those who are prepared to do a bit of conversion. There are 'Seamless Scenarios' for a modern setting. *Under Western Skies* is a mini-rule set for which he's also published several one page adventures and as you might guess deal with the wild west of the United States. If you've been inspired by *Firefly* or *Star Trek's* "Spectre of the Gun" episode, these might be very usable in SF games, otherwise they could be used for inspiration with some adaptation to more standard types of adventure. See my review of *Afterday* elsewhere in this issue for other genre settings that have been put out by the author.

Returning to the adventures, one oddity in the collection is *Girkekaashur* – a devious adventure involving transport of the first edition copy of the titular book. (Clearly a Shakespeare volume from the description of the author.) So much, so normal. What's odd is that there's also a German edition of

the one page with a translation by Andrea Schmidt. There's no explanation of why this one and this one alone has had such treatment but if you want to improve your language skills, it's worth looking out for and is a scenario I might well inflict on my players.

In any case, most of the adventures are pretty straightforward and are what they appear to be; there are some that deceive the PCs as to their nature, but then that's been the essence of many *Traveller* adventures from the start, so no fault there. Aliens don't figure a lot – perhaps obviously given the adventures' generic nature – but there is at least one, *Immersion*, involving uplifted dolphins. I've been moderately surprised not to see more with canine or leonine sophonts, say.

A quick look at three in more detail and completely at random:

The Instruments of Darkness – a holovid star, Eve Kay, hires the PCs to evict a countercultural group squatting on her land. The first column of the page takes two thirds of its length to give an overview of the adventure, the standardish text about the rule set, and two paragraphs of player information gives a tiny bit more detail (mentioning her narcissism, geneered dog, why she's asking the PCs for help and what she'll pay them). About half the page gives the referee's information (how the squatters will react and some details on the campsite and house) with the remaining quarter page going on to outline a complication which may give the PCs some pause for thought on their next move. There are no diagrams or tables, but none are required so that's to be expected.

Miasma – the PCs are taking off from a starport when the port master asks for emergency help following a chemical explosion and fire which is releasing a poisonous cloud of toxins. Can they help evacuate local inhabitants in its path? Again, two thirds of a column gives the rule details, overview and players' information. This time the page is decorated

(Continued on page 18)

Critics' Corner

(Continued from page 17)

by just a plain text box with details (description, skills, equipment) of some NPCs involved in the adventure. The rest of the page gives detail on the cloud's speed and time till it hits a village and a complication which may make things difficult followed by a further complication.

The Xero Option – for this adventure one of the PCs or an NPC important to them is dying of a rare but curable disease but the main ingredient of the cure is a banned substance. On this occasion the page is decorated with a great floor plan and three boxes (two NPCs and a key to the plan). The player information is a little more extensive for once but that and the plan means the referee's info is less than a column and for the most part details a major complication the PCs will face. It will probably involve combat.

As you may be able to glean from the above descriptions, the adventures rather cleverly – particularly given their brevity – combine action and die-rolling with role playing and negotiation. The three examples given were truly chosen at random and are representative of the many others I've not been able to cover or even mention here.

If you're the kind of referee that needs a lot of fully worked out details and options then Michael Brown's work may not appeal – perhaps at least look at his three longer options mentioned above – but if you would rather make up your own details and wrinkles in any case then they may be just the

ticket. Also, if you're simply looking for inspiration for a one-off or a short stopover in a longer campaign then there is a wealth of ideas in the ton of adventures the author has published. It would be fun to see a little more variety in terms of the PC groups these would be suitable for (e.g., exploration, or nobles, or military, etc.), but of course Mr Brown would be on diminishing returns in terms of audience the further he moves away from mainstream tropes so it's understandable why he's stuck to the tried and tested. What I think these are particularly good at is in offering barebones that referees can build on and take in whatever direction they or their players like. While I've considered the author's body of a work as a whole – and it's fascinating to do so – it should be noted that these are ideally suited to using in isolation if you just need something to entertain for an evening with short notice and limited budget. If you are on that tight a budget don't forget you can glean lots of great Michael Brown material from the pages of *Freelance Traveller* itself – and if you are using *Traveller* rule sets you won't even have to think about (very minor) conversion for the most part!

So try one and see what you make of it. If you like what you find, watch out for the bundles that sell ten of the short adventures at a time. I plan on keeping them to hand for the moments the players go 'off piste' and I've got nothing prepared. I'd warmly recommend them. ❁

The Freelance Traveller Cookbook

Gaming With Diabetes: A Guide to Low-Carb Snacking

by Jeff Zeitlin

Your gaming session is running into its third hour without a break, and some of your players are becoming a little peckish. Or maybe the deal was game-and-dinner. In any case, you've got gamers who want something to eat. Easy enough; call out

for pizza, or break out the bags of chips and containers of dips, right? Except... Phil's been diagnosed as diabetic, and has to control his carbohydrate intake. He's not "on" insulin, he's got no food allergies, and he's not under any other dietary restrictions.

(Continued on page 19)

(Continued from page 18)

In general, managing his dietary restrictions is Phil's problem, not yours. But gaming is a social activity, and so is snacking or dining in connection with a gaming session. If Phil has to accommodate his diabetes by providing his own snacks, or by not eating with you when you go to the local pub, it's going to damage the social bonds. So, how can you avoid Phil's social exclusion?

There are three ways that gaming sessions "attach" food: Packaged snacks, going out/sending out, and cooking in. This article will give you some ideas in all three areas.

The most important thing to do is *ask Phil*. Don't press too hard for answers, but don't let him brush you off with a "don't worry about it/don't put yourself out". Find out what he likes and doesn't like, and what he's doing his best to avoid. You may discover that the same-old-same-old is less interesting than Phil's options, and the entire group will benefit from the variety.

(I've written this in 'host's voice', where it's assumed that the reader is not the diabetic, and merely is looking to accommodate a diabetic gamer/friend. The information here will, however, also be helpful to the diabetic who's looking for ways to stay involved, while managing his – or her – diabetes.)

Packaged Snacks

Most of the time, 'packaged snacks' defaults to things like chips, pretzels, possibly cookies, cakes, and candy, and so on. All of these are high-carb, and Phil isn't going to be able to have much (and may by choice be avoiding them entirely). There are low-carb packaged snacks, though, and if you include them in the mix, Phil doesn't necessarily have to exclude himself.

Meat Snacks: Jerky, sausage sticks, and the like. Bacon fits here, too, and I've even seen bacon jerky (from Oberto). This can also include sliced deli meats; some delis will take a pepperoni stick and

slice it up and package it, for example. You may even be able to get some delis to cube the 'cold cut' meat as for an *hors d'oeuvres* tray. Check the "flavors" and ingredients; jerky with barbeque flavoring, for example, is going to be higher in carbs than jerky that's simply peppered or smoked. Beef vs. pork vs. chicken/turkey won't make much of a difference, though. Most of them tend to be high-sodium, and they're definitely calorie-dense.

Cheese Snacks: I don't mean things like Cheetos or Cheez-its. I mean things like 'string cheese' sticks, or other sticks of real cheese, or mini-cheeses like Babybel, or even the packaged pre-cut cheese squares for crackers – the best ones are the ones that you'll find in the refrigerated section of the supermarket. Like the meat snacks, cheese snacks are calorie-dense; some of them may also be high-sodium. Some of the more interesting cheeses are actually at the deli counter; you might want to ask whether they can cut it in small cubes as for an *hors d'oeuvres* tray instead of sandwich slices. A recent find is what I've chosen to call 'cheese crunchies'; while there may be other brands, the ones I found were from Sonoma Creamery, and are made with real cheese and a limited amount of quinoa, oat bran, and brown rice. Where the typical 'crunchy' (pretzels, potato chips, nacho chips, etc.) is over (sometimes well over) half carb by weight, these are only about 20% carb by weight.

Olives: Not everyone likes them, but some people do. They're low carb, but high fat, and thus calorie-dense. Depending on how they're packaged, sodium may be an issue – but stuffed with pimentos vs. not stuffed won't be an issue, except in terms of flavor. Olives in a jar are more likely to be high-sodium; if you can, get them from the "olive bar" (like a salad bar, but all olives) in more upscale markets.

Vegetable Trays: Usually, these are carrot and celery sticks, possibly also cauliflower and broccoli

(Continued on page 20)

(Continued from page 19)

tops, along with a little cup of ranch dressing for dipping. Very little downside on these; for variety you might want to put out some mustard for dipping as well. Pickle trays are also good choices, though they tend to use vegetables that are higher in carbs, and the pickling compound also tends to raise the sodium level.

(Cold) Antipasto Platters: Generally have a combination of the above, with a bias toward varieties favored by Italians.

Nuts: There's a wide variety of these, and all of them are good. Unsalted are best (most salted nuts use too much salt), and when getting prepackaged mixed nuts, try to avoid the ones that call themselves "trail mix", "sport mix", "hiker's mix", etc. – those generally have dried fruit and other high-carb 'crunchies' or chocolate bits in them. Nuts tend to be somewhat less calorie-dense than meat snacks, but also comparatively high-fat.

Seaweed Snacks: Of recent vogue in some areas are sheets of dried, roasted, and pressed seaweed, like *maki* in Japanese restaurants and sushi bars are wrapped with. While the restaurant version is generally not flavored, the commercial snacking version often comes in flavors like sesame, wasabi, or sea salt. These can be eaten straight from the package, or used to wrap other things.

Beverages: Most soda and other non-diet beverages are loaded with sugar. Make sure there are some diet sodas or diet or unsweetened iced teas available for Phil. Other options are seltzer (including flavored seltzers) or 'sparkling water' beverages (provided that if they're sweetened rather than just flavored, it's a zero-calorie sweetener), or even flavored water beverages (same caveat regarding sweetening). (Note that what are called 'diet' beverages in the United States may be called 'light' beverages elsewhere, where there may be stiffer regulations regarding the term 'diet'. The thing to look for is near-zero calories, and 5g of carbohydrate or

less per serving (generally 12-20 oz./350-600ml).) While fruit juice is often touted as an alternative to soda or other sweetened beverages, even the ones that don't have added sugar have plenty of natural sugars, and will be high in carbs—best to avoid them. If it's cold out, and hot beverages are the order of the day, coffee and tea (including herbal teas) are fine; let everyone add adulterants (milk, sugar, lemon, etc.) on their own. Hot chocolate/cocoa, however, is Very Bad from Phil's point of view.

Alcohol: While alcohol has problems associated with it, surprisingly, carbs isn't generally one of them. Wine is 2 carbs per (8 oz.) glass; beer is 13 carbs per (12 oz.) can; most "hard liquor" (spirits) are *zero* if not in 'mixed drinks'. Liqueurs/cordials and most mixed drinks or cocktails tend to have a great deal of added sugar or sugar syrup, and should be avoided.

Going Out or Ordering Out

Whether you go to the food, or the food comes to you, the issues are the same. The important distinction is whether you're ordering separate plates for everyone, or a collection of dishes that will be served 'family style' or 'buffet style', with everyone getting to try everything.

In the first case (separate plates for each), you can more-or-less leave Phil to deal with his diabetes as he chooses. The trick is going to be to agree on a source that can supply things that he can eat. Look for places that offer salads and vegetables as side dishes; potatoes, especially fried potatoes, are high in carbs, and Phil is likely to be looking to avoid them. If the centerpiece of the meal has options that aren't sandwiches, that's even better. A place that offers a wide choice of soups (in the northeastern US, Hale and Hearty comes to mind) and salads is a good choice, but it really is possible for Phil to find a workable meal even at McDonald's or Burger King. Popeye's or KFC is a bit more problematical, however.

(Continued on page 21)

(Continued from page 20)

In the second case (sharing dishes), again, Phil can generally manage it himself, but make sure that at least a couple of dishes are his choice, or are at least compatible with his restrictions. Steamed or grilled vegetable dishes are good, so are meats without sauces, or with light sauces such as garlic or mustard. Fruit sauces, sweet sauces or sauces with added sugar, honey, molasses, etc. (like most barbeque sauces), should be avoided. Fried – especially battered-and-fried – is also something to be cautious of. Avoid dishes that rely on rice, noodles, grits, polenta, or other grains as a base (for example, *biryani* or *pad thai*). Dishes where the grain product is optional, such as *fajitas* or *moo shu* anything, are also OK if the rest of the dish is compatible with Phil's restrictions; you really don't have to wrap the shredded vegetables and meat in the tortilla or rice pancake (nor is the *hoisin* sauce or other condiment mandatory).

Other good choices are meat-and/or-vegetables-on-a-stick dishes, variously called *kebab*, *satay*, *shashlik*, *yakitori*, and so on. Again, watch the sauces and seasonings.

Going All Out: Cooking at Home

Most of what you need to know is actually covered in the previous sections. Don't just go for the simple pasta-with-sauce option; stir-frys with meat and green vegetables are almost as easy and almost as fast – and if they're done properly, you're not adding a lot of fat or carbs in the process. Making your own chicken fingers isn't out of the question, either; cut chicken cutlets into strips $\frac{3}{4}$ inch to 1 inch wide, and 3 inches or so long, and then cook them, maybe microwave, bake, or broil (or even grill if you're outdoors in grilling weather); no breading or frying. For dipping sauces, Buffalo wing sauce, mustard (spicy brown or Dijon), sriracha, ranch salad dressing, probably many other "light" salad dress-

ings are best; for variety, take some mustard and blend some horseradish in – not the red horseradish, the white. Honey mustard and barbeque sauces are loaded with sugar and sugar equivalents; best avoid them.

If you want to try your hand at things like *kebab*, *satay*, *shashlik*, *yakitori*, and so on, look to your broiler if you're not using a grill outdoors.

Instead of filled dumplings or buns (*bao*, *gyoza*, *shu-mai*, wonton, *samosa*, pasties, *kreplach*, *blintzes*, *blini*, etc.), take the seaweed snacks mentioned earlier, and make *temaki*, the cone-shaped "hand rolls" sometimes available in sushi bars. Or, take a lettuce leaf and wrap the filling in it.

Instead of mashed potatoes, try mashed cauliflower – it's not ideal, either in taste or texture, but it's a reasonable substitute, and you can do to it what you can do to mashed potatoes – mix in butter, bacon, cheese, your secret herb-and-spice combo, whatever.

Desserts

There is no question that desserts, by their nature, are going to be problematical. Sometimes, you can find sugar-free versions of gelatin desserts or pudding desserts, but my experience has been that they're often subtly "off" in flavor and texture. Fresh fruit is a possibility; melons (cantaloupe, honeydew, watermelon, etc.), peaches, and strawberries are lowest in carbs, but moderate amounts of any fruit make a good substitute for sweet desserts. Avoid canned fruit salad or fruit cocktail; they're generally packaged in juice or syrup with added sugar. Couple the fruit with cheese; it's a nice combination of flavors, and somehow adds an air of sophistication to the end of the meal.

(Disclosure: I'm "Phil", but I'm sure I'm not the only one...)



Less Dangerous Game

Ushamaagian Dryad

by Benedikt Schwarz

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Dryad	35	4m
SKILLS	-	
ATTACKS	Flee 6-; Attack 8+ only when opponent is surprised and within striking range (~2m); Limb Bash (2D)	
TRAITS	Large (+1) Camouflage (-2 to spot when in vicinity of trees) Slow metabolism (-3 to initiative) Amphibious Armour (+1)	
BEHAVIOUR	Herbivore/Grazer	
Morphology	Trilateral (three-sided) symmetry; hexapod (six limbs); triped (three legs), three large upper limbs	
Biochemistry	Carbon-based — C/H/O/N/S/As (poisonous to humans and human-compatible)	
Respiration	Oxygen-Nitrogen inhalant, Carbon dioxide exhalant; tracheal/spiracular respiration (no	
Ecology	Circadian (active day and night)	
Habitat	Temperate to tropic, high humidity, abundant ground water	
Diet and Trophics	Herbivore/Grazer; endothermic (warm-blooded)	
Reproduction	Single gender, sporal intercourse, viviparous birth (single offspring), iteroparous (reproducing several times over one lifetime)	
Lifecycle and ontogeny	Continual growth, ~100–110 standard years	

Native to Ushamaag (Chrysopras), the dryad's Bilanidin name is *eldushiigi*, derived from a mythological tree spirit. Scientifically, the creature is also referred to as a pseudodendron, phainodendron, dendrodryad or *akkidan*, but 'dryad' is the usual appellation out of scientific circles. Droyne call the dryads *oykettrayin* (singular *oykettray*), literally, "aunts".

An adult dryad averages four to six meters in height, although specimens as tall as eight meters have been sighted. It is covered down its whole

length by a hard silvery-white skin much like a birch tree's bark. The body has a three-sided symmetry, splitting one-third down its length into three evenly spaced long legs and branching upward into three large limbs, each terminating in a number of cup-shaped "hands" that are used to catch rainwater and funnel it into the creature's body. The dryad has no skeleton or musculature; it moves and supports its limbs and body by hydrostatic pressure, i.e., by pumping water into the outer layer of the limb. This requires a dryad to have access to large quantities of water; its preferred habitat is where groundwater or rain is plentiful. In drier climates, dryads quickly collapse and die from dehydration.

The main source of nourishment for dryads is the *agdugasha*, a kind of fungus whose subterranean mycels extend through large patches of soil that can measure hundreds of square meters. The *agdugasha's* life cycle is partially photosynthetic, but relies on arsenic the way terrestrial-compatible plants rely on phosphorous. There are many Ushamaagian plants (including the *kig-eldu* dendra which bear a close resemblance to dryads) that are dependent on the presence of the *agdugasha* for their growth, as they similarly rely on arsenic in their photosynthesis. Unfortunately, this means that most imported plants, including most types of grain and vegetable, are incompatible with the fungus, and will sicken in the vicinity of *agdugasha* patches.

Another, less known property of the fungus is that it acts as a conduit or channel for psionic energy; a telepath will find that he can read or send thoughts to a person on the other side of a patch as if that person were standing next to xir; other talents are similarly affected. Being in the middle of an *agdugasha* patch is a disconcerting experience for a psionicist, as impressions from all directions surge into xir mind (a VERY DIFFICULT, (Psionic skill), INT check is necessary every hour to avoid a -2

(Continued on page 23)

Less Dangerous Game

(Continued from page 22)

modifier to all actions taken in a patch). On the positive side, psionic points are regained at four times the normal rate.

Especially high concentrations of *agdugasha* fungus may have the effect of one of the Psi-drugs (Standard, Double or Special) on someone spending at least an hour in their midst. There is a major religion on Ushamaag that claims its founder Algudiin Gazikhaag reached enlightenment while meditating in a dendron circle, and Psionic Institute scholars assume that xe (Gazikhaag's gender is left deliberately ambiguous in the sect's teachings) was a latent psionic individual and reacted to the fungus' emanations. This theory is violently denied by believers of the faith.

A dryad's "feet" are actually mouths that house a bundle of supple, hollow tendrils which reach down into the soil and pre-digest the fungus, which is then sucked up into the dryad's main body cavity for final digestion. The fungus will try to withdraw its mycelis from the feeding dryad, making it necessary for the creature to follow with slow, swaying steps. In its wake, the soil is loosened, simplifying soil processing to remove arsenic and substitute phosphorous, and making it possible for earth beetles and micro-organisms to settle and fertilise it, and for seedlings to take root. In this way, the dryad fulfills an important role in both the refreshment of the soil's fertility, and its eventual terraforming.

The tendrils in the dryad's foot are also hydrostatic, and by inserting themselves into tiny crevices and then expanding, they can drive cracks even into hardened concrete. In this way, dryads can reach groundwater even if it is covered by a layer of rock.

Dryads have rudimentary eyes positioned at intervals along the body in shallow cavities, but can only distinguish between bright and dark; they cannot discern shapes. On the other hand, a dryad is able to feel the presence of intruders or other dryads



at a range of twenty meters by vibration only. It is unknown if dryads possess a sense of hearing.

Once every three to five years, dryads will set free clouds of spores, which are carried on the wind or stuck to the carapace of *desaagu* (a species of small insect that feeds off a nectar-like secretion of the dryad's skin) until they are absorbed by another dryad. (Approaching a sporulating group of dryads from

(Continued on page 24)

Less Dangerous Game

(Continued from page 23)

downwind may result in severe asthma or an allergic reaction, and the fine spores have a nasty tendency to clog filters.) Once impregnated, the dryad carries the embryo for five months before giving birth. The birth canal is a long, vertical crack along the body that is nearly invisible when closed. Young are cared for for a period of two years at least. Although young dryads are not actually nymphs—the term “nymph” implies a later metamorphosis into an adult imago—the name was erroneously used by the early settlers, and has stuck.

Although many dryads are loners, it is not unusual to find groups of three to eight dryads close together. Often, the young stay in the vicinity of their parent for several years. It is unknown whether dryads can communicate with each other.

Dryads usually move at a very leisurely pace, if they move at all. They are not aggressive, and will only attack by reflex. A person approaching a dryad is ignored until he crosses the “reaction threshold”, which is about two meters from the dryad. If a reaction occurs, the offending creature will be struck with one of the three large limbs on 8+, otherwise, the dryad will retreat. If the offender falls unconscious within the reaction zone it will be beaten to death, but if it manages to retreat, the dryad will not pursue. (Interestingly enough, Droyne who approach a dryad do not trigger its reflexive attack, even if not “invisible”.)

Slug weapons will do half damage to a dryad; their projectiles are too small to have a significant effect, and the shock of impact will be dispersed by the hydrostatic layer in the dryad’s skin. The exception are large-bore weapons, shotguns and explosives, which do full damage.

Energy weapons, on the other hand, are very dangerous to a dryad; a hit will instantly heat up the water in the creature and cause it to expand, bursting the hydrostatic layer and organs. All energy weapons do at least double damage. Dryads are

afraid of fire and will flee immediately if threatened with an open flame.

Adventure seeds

1. Disaster strikes in an outlying farming community as the crops to the west of the village wither and die for no apparent reason. Now dryads are approaching from the same direction. The farmers may not be high-faluting IISS biologists, but they believe they can add two and two. Armed with a few rickety shotguns and large-bore hunting rifles, the farmers set out to stop the dryads which are obviously out to destroy their crops.

The IISS, meanwhile, has hired a few free traders with their ships to net scores of dryads and release them to the west of the village to fight the fungus that is approaching the farmers’ fields (and which is the real reason why the crops are failing). Soon the PCs realise that it’s impossible to carry dryads to the scene faster than the farmers can gun them down—someone will have to get down there and explain the situation to the frightened mob.

2. A Zhodani agent wants to hire a few unscrupulous PCs to excavate a large patch of *agdugasha*, catch a few dryads and insects, and collect specimens of the plants growing around the fungus. She clearly wants to introduce the species to another planet’s ecosystem; what are her motives?

If the PCs agree, they have to seal the specimens in environmentally-controlled containers and smuggle them to a remote asteroid, where their patron will be waiting with the money. Just as the exchange is made, a Naval patrol corvette comes into view, and everybody should get the hell out of Dodge.

3. The PCs are hunting a renegade psionicist who takes cover in a forest of short dendra jutting out of a huge patch of fungus. As soon as he gets

(Continued on page 25)

Less Dangerous Game

(Continued from page 24)

- over xir disorientation and realises the potential of the *agdugasha*, xe starts sending out xir consciousness through the field. The fugitive will be using xir powers on the pursuers, amplified and channeled by the fungus, while safely in hiding.
4. Near a remote settlement, the animals and dryads are sickly. Several children who played in the dendron forest are now ill as well; the symptoms are consistent with radiation poisoning. The PCs are stuffed into hazmat suits and sent into the contaminated zone. They discover a subterranean dump for nuclear waste—the containers were cracked open by dryads looking for water. They need to seal the containers again, determine how much of the groundwater is tainted, and then get the authorities to finance a trip to a technologically advanced planet (which is several parsecs away) to get an anti-radiation cure. Meanwhile, the corporation that is responsible for the illegal dump sends a squad of hitmen into the settlement to silence witnesses. The PCs return just in time to save the settlers if they are quick, but that means a gunfight from house to house against mercenaries experienced in urban warfare. If worse comes to worst, the hired guns will take the children hostage to trade them for a ticket off the planet.
 5. A biologist hires the PCs for an expedition deep into dryad territory. After several days, they get suspicious: none of the data collected by the sensor phalanx was ever saved on memory crystal, and the “notes” jotted down by the scholar in his journal are meaningless phrases and doodles. The biologist is in fact a psionic master testing the properties of *agdugasha* for his order, and the expedition is only a cover for his true intentions. If the referee is feeling nasty, the PCs may find themselves in the role of guinea pigs.
 6. The PCs are abroad in the wilderness. Eager to get out of the sun and avoid heatstroke, they take shelter under a stand of trees—one of which is a dryad which takes exception and attacks.
 7. A radical subset of the zi-Gazikaag faith has declared all *kig-eldu* forests holy ground, since the Founder reached enlightenment in the middle of one. Now a settlement project is cutting down dendra and digging up the top layer of soil to replace it with imported fungus– and arsenic-free earth for an agricultural project that could ward off an imminent famine on Ushamaag. The outraged faithful congregate on the excavation site and chain themselves to the dendra in order to stop the desecration of their holy ground. If the PCs still want to sell the soil they carry in their ship’s cargo hold, they need to resolve the situation... preferably without bloodshed or hurt feelings.
 8. A famous painter hires the PCs to escort xir into the wilderness—xe wants to draw inspiration from the mythical dryads for a series of allegorical paintings. The trip becomes an ordeal, as the artist is a capricious and petulant person without a clue of personal safety; they have to pull xir out of pits of quicklime, poison *gulgi* and creeper patches and constantly keep xir from falling down cliffs or getting brained by dryads. Finally, they reach a place the painter deems perfect—intense natural beauty, subdued colours, beautifully swaying dryads. This is where xir masterpiece will be created! Unfortunately, the spot is infested with a native species of chaser; the PCs have to fend off the animals to protect the artist’s life while xe draws deeply from the serenity of the wild. And they are urged imperiously to be quiet while they’re at it, because grunts of pain or bursts of gunfire would spoil this moment of perfect inspiration.
 9. The PCs are crossing the wilderness, and happen upon a dryad giving birth. It is obvious that there are complications, and the PCs may feel

(Continued on page 26)

Less Dangerous Game

(Continued from page 25)

compelled to help. The “mother” is weak but will still try feebly to hit the helpers with its branches if not restrained. Finally, they are able to deliver the nymph, but the “mother” dies in the process. When the PCs start moving again, the nymph tries to follow them and stay in their vicinity but is too slow to keep up. They need to find other dryads to adopt the poor thing—even if they wanted to take it with them, it would not be able to survive in an environment without extensive patches of *agdugasha*.

10. While a regiment of the Imperial Marines was stationed on Ushamaag for garrison duty, the commanding officer gave unofficial permission to use dryads as targets for live-fire practice. This was more to relieve boredom and keep morale up than it served any practical purpose. Squads of marines would hold mock operations, outflanking and stalking the hapless creatures before opening fire and killing as many as possible. While hunting is permitted on Ushamaag, the use of grenades and plasma weapons on wildlife is definitely not, and the fireteams targeted young nymphs and their “mothers” with the same abandon as they did lone adult dryads. One soldier, sickened by the actions of her unit, has gone to the press (the local police decided not to interfere with Imperial authority and turned a deaf ear). Now the journalist she confided in feels that the marine’s life may be in danger if she remains with the regiment, and wants the PCs to help her defect.
11. As the travellers are stalking their enemies, they pass downwind of a sporulating group of dryads. Unless they react immediately and break out the filter masks, their fits of coughing and sneezing will alarm their quarry. The filters are only a stopgap measure: they will last only a few minutes before getting clogged by the spores.

The travellers will have to retrace their steps and try a different angle of approach. On the positive side, they may be able to herd their enemies in the direction of the dryads and get a few of them clubbed by the branches.

12. The planet’s small Droyne community congregates several times a year in a region with a very high dryad population to hold a kind of religious observance (that, at least, is what they tell the authorities). A local corporation or scientific institute suspects the Droyne are up to something, and hires the PCs to eavesdrop. The first thing they notice as they sneak up on the meeting is that the region’s dryads seem to form a protective circle around the droyne ceremony. Are the Droyne capable of speaking with the dryads, are they controlling the creatures in some other way? Or are the dryads more intelligent than the human scholars believe, and are they protecting the Droyne for their own reasons? Investigating further, the travellers stumble across the mother of all fungus patches—and it seems to be growing out of a partially buried, egg-shaped capsule with Ancient markings on its shell. Did the *agdugasha* fungus, the *kig-eldu* dendra and the dryads come from off-world? Are they guardian creatures left by the Ancients to protect the remains of their civilisation on Ushamaag? 🌟

Freelance Traveller Goes Multilingual

Although the PDFs will remain English-only, we have had offers—and will entertain others—to translate selected (by the translator) articles into languages other than English. Each translation will be linked to its English original in our website, and each language will have its own index page listing all articles translated into the language. If you are a fluent speaker of a language other than English, and interested in translating into that language for us, please email the editor at editor@freelancetraveller.com 🌟

A Percentile Skill System for *Traveller*

by Michael Hughes

This article was originally posted to the pre-magazine website in 2004.

Traveller rawks, there's no doubt about it. And you can get D6s pretty much anywhere. In fact at my parent's house, all the board games in the cupboard are pretty well diceless from constant raids over the years.

But I'm a big fan of percentile systems, especially the Chaosium system, which I regard as one of the more elegant and simple mechanic sets in gaming today, especially in regards to skill advancement. So if you like it as much as I do then here's how you can adapt *Traveller* to a percentile system.

Step 1: Assign base percentages: In blocks of 5% go through whatever skill list you are using and assign a base skill percentile rating. This is the basic chance that someone attempting a task with no real knowledge in that skill has in succeeding. For example, shooting a pistol is largely point and click (stuff about proper grip, flicking off the safety, etc., aside), so let's give Handguns a base value 20%. Physics, however, is an ornery cuss that needs to be tamed by the mathematically inclined, so we'll give it 0%. Actual values should be determined by the referee; in general, the easier it is for a character to use a skill to good effect with only a basic orientation, the higher the base percentage should be. The Base Skill Percentage table shows the values I've used when converting from *MegaTraveller*.

Step 2: Assign each skill a relevant stat grouping. Each stat grouping has a primary stat and a secondary stat, representing the stats most likely to have an impact on the use of the skill. The stat group provides a single modifier for rolls vs. skills in that group; "primary" and "secondary" indicate how much influence on the modifier the stat has. See the Stat Group table for determining which stats apply to which modifiers; the Base Skill Percentage table also shows the stat groups I've used when converting from *MegaTraveller*.

Stat Groups	
Agility	
Used for physically-focused skills that do not principally rely on fine motor control. Example skills: Brawling, Blade Combat	
Primary Stat: Dexterity (DEX)	Secondary Stat: Strength (STR)
Charm	
Used for interpersonal skills Example skills: Liaison, Interrogation,	
Primary Stat: Social Status (SOC)	Secondary Stat: Intelligence(INT)
<i>Characters that have Charisma (CHA) instead of SOC use that stat instead.</i>	
Knowledge	
Used for skills with an intellectual focus Example skills: Computer, Navigation	
Primary Stat: Education (EDU)	Secondary Stat: Intelligence (INT)
Manipulation	
Used for skills relying principally on fine motor control and coordination Example skills: Mechanical, Electronics,	
Primary Stat: Dexterity (DEX)	Secondary Stat: Intelligence (INT)

Step 3: Calculate the character's stat group modifiers:

First, determine the average stat value (A) for each stat in the version of *Traveller* you are using. For standard humans in *Classic Traveller*, *MegaTraveller*, and *Marc Miller's Traveller* (T4), the average stat value is 7 (2D); for standard humans in *Traveller: The New Era*, the average stat value is 5 (2D-2). Note that if you are attempting to apply this to races other than standard human, you should use the modified stat rolls for that race, e.g., for converting *MegaTraveller* Aslan, the average stat value for STR is 9 (2D+2)

Next, for each stat group, calculate the Primary Stat Modifier (P) and the Secondary Stat Modifier (S): Subtract the average stat value (A) calculated above from the character's actual value for the stat. Preserve the sign; if the character's stat is below the average, it represents a negative modification to the base skill percentage. For the Primary Stat Modifier (P), double the value thus calculated; for the Secondary Stat Modifier (S), use the value thus calculated. Add P and S; this sum is the Stat Group Modifier for that stat group.

(Continued on page 29)

Doing It My Way

Base Skill Percentages and Skill Groups

Skill	Base Skill %	Skill Group	Skill	Base Skill %	Skill Group
Administration	10	Charm	Intrusion	0	Manipulation
Artisan	10	Manipulation	Jack-of-all-trades	See note 1	
Axe	10	Agility	Jet-propelled Aircraft	0	Manipulation
Battle Dress	0	Manipulation	Large Blade	10	Agility
Biology	0	Knowledge	Large Watercraft	5	Knowledge
Blowgun	5	Manipulation	Laser Weapons	5; 20 if tech 9+	Manipulation
Bola	0	Manipulation	Leader	15	Charm
Boomerang	0	Manipulation	Legal	5	Knowledge
Bow	10	Agility	Liaison	10	Charm
Brawling	20	Agility	Lighter-than-air Craft	0	Manipulation
Bribery	10	Charm	Linguistics (see note 2)	5	Knowledge
Broker	10	Charm	Mass Driver	0	Manipulation
Carousing	20	Charm	Mechanical	10	Manipulation
Chemistry	0	Knowledge	Medical	5	Knowledge
Combat Engineering	0	Knowledge	Meson Guns	0	Manipulation
Combat Rifleman	10	Manipulation	Mortars and Howitzers	0	Manipulation
Communications	10	Knowledge	Naval Architect	0	Knowledge
Computer	0; 20 if tech 9+	Knowledge	Navigation	0	Knowledge
Crossbow	10	Manipulation	Persuasion	10	Charm
Cudgel	20	Agility	Physics	0	Knowledge
Demolition	0	Manipulation	Pilot	0	Manipulation
Disguise	5	Charm	Plasma Gun	0	Manipulation
Early Firearms	5	Manipulation	Polearm	5	Agility
Electronics	5	Manipulation	Propeller-driven Aircraft	0	Manipulation
Energy Weapons	5	Manipulation	Prospecting	0	Knowledge
Engineering	0	Knowledge	Reconnaissance	10	Knowledge
Equestrian	10	Agility	Recruiting	5	Charm
Fleet Tactics	0	Knowledge	Rifleman	20	Manipulation
Foil	10	Agility	Robot Operations	0; 10 if tech A+	Knowledge
Forensic	0	Knowledge	Robotics	0	Knowledge
Forgery	0	Manipulation	Screens	0	Manipulation
Forward Observer	0	Knowledge	Sensor Operations	0	Knowledge
Fusion Gun	0	Manipulation	Ship Tactics	0	Knowledge
Gambling	10	Charm	Ship's Boat	0	Manipulation
Genetics	0	Knowledge	Sling	0	Manipulation
Grav Belt	0; 5 if tech B+	Manipulation	Small Blade	15	Agility
Grav Vehicle	0; 20 if tech 9+	Manipulation	Small Watercraft	0; 5 if hydro 4+	Manipulation
Gravitics	0	Knowledge	Spinal Weapons	0	Manipulation
Guard/Hunting Beasts	5	Charm	Stealth	15	Agility
Handgun	20	Manipulation	Steward	20	Charm
Heavy Weapons	5	Manipulation	Streetwise	5	Charm
Helicopter	0	Manipulation	Submachinegun	10	Manipulation
Herding	5	Charm	Survey	0	Knowledge
High Energy Weapons	0	Manipulation	Survival	0; 10 if atmos 4-9	Knowledge
High-G Environment	0	Agility	Tactics	5	Knowledge
History	15	Knowledge	Tracked Vehicle	5	Manipulation
Hovercraft	0	Manipulation	Trader	5	Charm
Hunting	5	Knowledge	Turret Weapons	5	Manipulation
Instruction	10	Charm	Vacc Suit	0	Agility
Interrogation	5	Charm	Wheeled Vehicle	0; 10 if tech 4-8	Manipulation
Interview	10	Charm	Zero-G Environment	10	Agility

Doing It My Way

(Continued from page 27)

For example, the ubiquitous Terry has a *Mega-Traveller* UPP of 7A6864. The Average stat value is 7 (2D). Terry's modifiers would be as follows:

Agility (Primary stat DEX, secondary stat STR):

Character DEX A(10) – average DEX 7 = 3, $3 \times 2 = 6$;

Character STR 7 – average STR 7 = 0; $6 + 0 = 6$.

Terry's Agility modifier is +6

Charm (Primary stat SOC, secondary stat INT):

Character SOC 4 – average SOC 7 = -3, $-3 \times 2 = -6$;

Character INT 8 – average INT 7 = 1; $-6 + 1 = -5$

Terry's Charm modifier is -5

Knowledge (Primary stat INT, secondary stat EDU):

Character INT 8 – average INT 7 = 1, $1 \times 2 = 2$;

Character EDU 6 – average EDU 7 = -1; $2 + (-1) = 1$

Terry's Knowledge modifier is +1

Manipulation (Primary stat DEX, secondary stat INT):

Character DEX A (10) – average DEX 7 = 3, $3 \times 2 = 6$;

Character INT 8 – average INT 7 = 1; $6 + 1 = 7$

Terry's Manipulation modifier is +7

Add the Skill Group Modifiers calculated above to the base chance percentage for skills in the relevant skill group.

Step 4: Convert current skill levels to % values and add to base skill chance (as modified by the stat group modifiers).

Skill Level Modifiers	
Skill Level	Percentage bonus
0	+10%
1	+20%
2	+40%
3	+60%
4	+70%
5	+80%
6	+90%

Notes to Base Skill Percentage Table

Note 1: J-O-T is harder to convert. I recommend the following. Each session the character is allowed (J-O-T level) automatic re-tries at a failed skill roll without having to make a determination check.

Note 2: For each level of Linguistics the character receives their EDU % stat value in a specific language, e.g., Terry has Linguistics-2 and can speak Vilani and Gvegh. His EDU % value is 45%. He gets 45% in Vilani and 45% in Gvegh. From this point he advances in those languages normally. Once converted, Linguistics no longer offers automatic language ability. Instead, if a character's Linguistics skill % is higher than a language %, they double any skill advancement rolls.

Use the Skill Level Modifier table as shown. Add the indicated percentage to the modified base skill percentage calculated at the end of step 3.

Note: For each level beyond 6 add an additional 5% (although few referees would allow skills to get this high).

'Serves As' Skills: If a character has a skill that 'serves as' other skills, treat each skill in the combination separately. For example, in *MegaTraveller*, Liaison serves as Admin - 1 and Streetwise - 1. A character with a skill of Liaison-3 would add 60% to their Liaison percentage value and 40% each to their Admin and Streetwise percentage values (as though they had Admin-2 and Streetwise-2).

Example: Terry from the above example has Carousing-1. The referee (me in this case) decides this is an everyman skill and gives it a base value of 20%. I assigned Charm as the appropriate skill grouping. Terry's modified chance looks like this

20% (Base Skill Percentage for Carousing) -5% (Charm modifier) + 20% (skill level 1) = 35%

Skill Resolution: It's a simple matter of if a percentile dice roll is equal to or less than the character's percent chance of success as calculated above, they succeed. This assumes a *difficult* task. For easier tasks modify the chance by blocks of 10% upward. For example, a *routine* task might be +20; a *simple* task might be +40%. For stupidly harder tasks, modify in blocks downward, e.g., a *formidable* task might be -20%.

Experience: This is the best part. The *Traveller* experience systems were always pretty harsh on the old character. And, let's face it, players love nothing more than advancing their character's skills. While we mortals spend our leisure time watching TV, or gaming, our fictional counterparts are hitting the gym or the books, watching what they eat, etc.

Again, borrowed from Chaosium, experience is simple. If a character succeeds at a skill during a game session that the referee feels advanced the sto-

(Continued on page 30)

Doing It My Way

(Continued from page 29)

ry and so forth, they can check it. At the end of the session they roll percentile dice. If the result is equal or exceeds their current skill then increase the skill percentage chance value by D10/2 (round down; range is 0-5%). The beauty is that probability means that higher skill percentage chances will be much harder to obtain.

Training: Once a PC spends (current skill %) hours dedicated to training in a specific skill they can make a roll vs. INT. If they succeed, they get a skill check, as for experience. The referee is free to modify the roll for access to instructors, training aides, conditions or study etc.

Statistic percentile checks: Naturally, if you've gone and applied the above, you'll want to do the same for stat checks.

For *Classic Traveller*, *MegaTraveller*, and *Marc Miller's Traveller*, where the average stat value is 7, add 3 and multiply the result by 5. e.g., 7+3 is 10; 10 × 5 is 50%. For *Traveller: The New Era*, where the average is 5, multiply by 10, e.g., 6 × 10 is 60%.

Advancing Stats: If a character checks a stat, make the experience roll as normal, adding any percentage boost to the stat percentile value. When their stat percentile value reaches a multiple of 5, increase the actual stat value by 1 point.

Example: Terry has an INT of 8, with a percentile value of 55%. He manages to get 3% added to his INT percentile chance. So, his stat now reads **INT 8 (58%)**. When his INT percentile chance gets to 60%+, he can boost the actual value of his INT from 8 to 9 (his stat would then read **INT 9 (60%)**). 🌟

Up Close and Personal

Brittina Montaigne

profiled by Michael Brown

Captain Nushu sat at his console cursing as he waited for the inevitable. The sleek ship had intercepted his starliner, blasted the drives offline with expert precision, and Security warned of armed boarders headed for the bridge before being abruptly cut off.

Minutes later, the iris valve flared around the edges, the pieces falling to the floor with dull thuds. Several armed and armored intruders leaped inside, followed by a gorgeous, flamboyantly dressed woman who gusted in, cast an appreciative glance at the scene, and then smilingly approached Nushu with outstretched hand.

"Captain Brittina Montaigne. And you are...?"

But Nushu was in no mood for pleasantries. "If I had known we'd run into pirates, I would've..."

Brittina looked hurt. "Pirates, captain? How... pedestrian." The smile returned as she shook her head. "Our...wealth facilitation service...will certainly put

your valuables to good use, but there's a more important reason we're here."

Nushu stared in puzzlement. Brittina's eyes twinkled as she answered his unasked question:

"My crew and I would like to invite you all to a little...presentation," she said, as she absent-mindedly fingered a small object on her necklace. Nushu recognized it to be a religious symbol.

Brittina Montaigne is a pirate whose preferred prey is starliners. She is not solely motivated by money, however; religious fervor drives her to seek out and convert others to her faith. In a sense, she plunders not only valuables, but convictions as well.

Background

Brittina was born on Terra, in the Phoenix Startown. Orphaned at a young age, her childhood

(Continued on page 31)

Up Close and Personal

(Continued from page 30)

was a world of vice and violence. She had a police record by the time she turned fourteen.

Her life changed one night through an act of brutality. Accused of robbing a noble who had been slumming, she was badly beaten by the man's bodyguards and left for dead in an alley. As she lay semi-conscious, a white-clad stranger aided her, staying with her until help arrived and speaking with her about the direction her life had taken and her plans for the future. The conversation made Britтина question her life's direction, and the stranger challenged her to seek more answers later. When the paramedics arrived, Britтина tried to tell them of the Man in White, but strangely, they saw no one else in the alley. They took her insistence of his presence as mere delusion.

After a hospital stay, Britтина took up the stranger's challenge to seek answers. Her search led to a local religious institution, where she began studies in earnest. Several years later, she emerged a zealous proponent of her new faith, beginning a series of "presentations" (her description) to spread it. Her initial efforts met with indifference at best.

Frustration and ennui set in, but then a chance meeting sent Britтина's life in yet another direction. While traveling by starliner to another world with a hopefully more receptive audience, pirates attacked. The corsairs weren't very bright—Britтина easily persuaded them not to harm anyone—but they gave her an idea. Convincing the pirate captain to take her on, ostensibly as a hostage, Britтина converted the crew to her religion, and then induced her new supporters to mutiny and install her as captain. With a zealous crew and a hand-me-down starship, she set out to win new converts through piracy.

Today, Britтина and her crew prowl interstellar space in their ship, the *Blinding Epiphany*, searching for carefully chosen victims to rob and convert. Her conversion rate is actually rather low, but those few who do convert tend to be very ardent.

Character Profile

Character Stats (Classic Traveller)

Britтина Montaigne 798B85 Age 51 Cr 70,000

8 terms Pirate Leader

Leader-3, Ship Tactics-3, Gun Cbt-2, Brawling-1,

Computer-1, Pilot-1, Streetwise-1, Vacc Suit-1

Weapons and Equipment: Body Pistol

Britтина favors concealable firearms for personal defense, such as Body Pistols and Snub Pistols. Although she does not use obvious body armor, most of her clothing is lined equivalent to Cloth armor.

Appearance

Britтина is a physically imposing female Human, considered beautiful by accepted standards, standing 1.85m and massing 59kg. She often wears heels that add several more centimeters of height. She has unblemished coffee-and-cream skin, brown eyes and thick black hair that she keeps well coiffed. She dresses flamboyantly but tastefully, and always on the cutting edge of fashion. She appears much younger than her actual age.

Personality

Britтина's personality is even more imposing than her appearance. She combines religious zeal, natural charisma, and great beauty to grand effect. She knows exactly how to command a room, disarm naysayers and dispel unbelief. She is equally comfortable dealing with high nobles and low Startown scum and has an uncanny ability to scope out those with the highest payoff potential and lowest risk. And if things get out of hand, well, there's always her loyal crew...

Though she's a pirate, Britтина has a strict ethical code. She won't harm children, the elderly, or animals, and kills only as a last resort. For defense, she carries a body pistol; she has rarely had to resort to it.

(Continued on page 32)

Up Close and Personal

(Continued from page 31)

Views and Outlook

Because she sees her actions as stemming from religious conviction, Brittina does not view what she does as piracy. In fact, she hates the term “pirate”, and is quick to correct those who name her such, with a colorful euphemism, such as “wealth facilitator”, “affluence expeditor”, or “resource reallocator”. She doesn’t tolerate insults to her religion, however, dealing harshly with those who do.

Brittina tries to research her targets before hitting them, but realizes that some opportunities are best seized on the spur of the moment. She isn’t afraid to cut her losses and run if she misinterprets a situation and things go sideways. Her natural intuition and a fair amount of luck have helped her evade capture so far.

Friends and Allies


Brittina “inherited” her staunchly loyal and obedient crew after she converted key players among them and led a successful mutiny. They have adopted her standards of conduct, although they quickly revert to their old ways if Brittina herself is threatened. Their numbers aren’t specified here; the referee is encouraged to make her crew as numerous as necessary.

Her ship, the *Blinding Epiphany*, is a converted 1000-ton Tukera Type RT Long Liner (see *The Traveler Adventure* for detailed specifications.) She has never asked the crew how they got the ship; she claims not to want to know.

Brittina in the Campaign

Brittina and her crew operate completely out of the *Blinding Epiphany*. She avoids heavily-traveled areas and their attendant naval patrols. She stays mobile, never hitting the same system twice in a row. Thus the PCs can encounter this flamboyant character almost anywhere. Carrying a valuable cargo with weak or nonexistent security will almost assure a visit from her and her crew. The PCs will be robbed and then forced to hear Brittina hard-sell her religion and urge them to join the faith.

Despite her scruples, Brittina makes a deadly enemy. Just because she avoids killing (and again, her crew won’t if she’s in danger) doesn’t mean she won’t maroon enemies on desolate worlds, or let *their* enemies or bounty hunters know their location.

The referee should select or create Brittina’s religion, based on the standards of the campaign and the comfort level of the players. 

Critics’ Corner

Marches Adventure 1: High and Dry

reviewed by Megan Robertson

Marches Adventure 1: High and Dry. Martin J. Dougherty.
Mongoose Publishing <http://www.mongoosepublishing.com>
45pp., PDF
US\$8.99/UK£6.76

This review originally appeared on *RPG-Resource* in January of 2018.

Many groups of Travellers want—if not outright need—a starship. This adventure, which would make a good campaign starter, provides the opportunity to not only give them one, but give them a

good adventure as they acquire it. Interestingly, it’s possible to complete the adventure without any combat—there’s plenty of action to keep them busy, it just doesn’t have to involve a brawl. That said, there are plenty of opportunities in which a fight could break out if the group so chooses...

It all begins with the offer of a ship. So it does help if the party has the necessary skills to pilot one, plot a course, and run the engines. Other than that, the party may include any backgrounds or skillsets. If one is a former Scout and has rolled a ship as a

(Continued on page 33)

Raconteurs' Rest

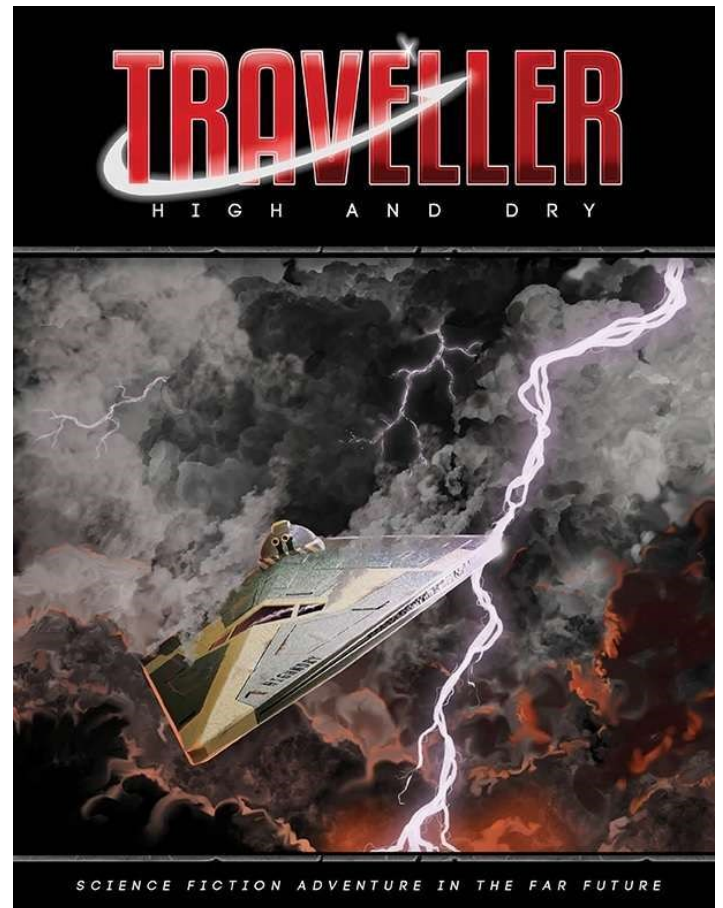
(Continued from page 32)

mustering out benefit, that's peachy, just tell him to report to the local Scout Officer to arrange for it. Otherwise one of the party's contacts has arranged for them to have one but they will have to fetch it for themselves—or if another party member has ownership or shares in a ship, use that ship instead only, again, for some reason it's elsewhere and has to be fetched.

The intention is that the adventure begins on Flammarion in the Bowman Arm, in District 268 of the Spinward Main. It's an interesting enough region to knock around in, and frequent reference is made to a campaign called *Project Steel* which is quite hard to find—there are copies on Amazon, although I don't believe it ever was released in PDF—seeing as it was released by ComStar Games/Avenger before Mongoose Publishing acquired the *Traveller* licence and others who had licences at the time lost them. Hopefully it will be reissued one day as it would make a good follow-on to this adventure. But I digress...

There is some background about the Bowman Arm and the various places to visit therein, especially a planet called Walston which is where the Scout-ship IISS S001642-C, known as the *Highndry* is to be found, along with an explanation of why it's there. The explanation given to the party is that it suffered a major breakdown of its electronics on Walston and needs to be patched up and brought back to Flammarion for repair. In return, their expenses will be covered and once it is fixed they will receive the ship on a standard IISS 'detached-duty' contract. The notes cover the trip—it's not merely a question of making a couple of Jumps, good atmosphere building and reality here, also it gives a new group time to get to know each other—and finally the arrival on Walston.

Of course, this is where the fun starts. The ship is not at the starport on Walston. The party has got to find it before they can make an attempt at fixing it.



Fortunately, there's plenty of information to find out by asking around in the local Star Town and beyond... they'll even be offered assistance in retrieving their ship if they'd be kind enough to undertake the task its previous crew had contracted to do.

It all makes for a fascinating adventure, and an excellent start to a campaign. The level of detail at every stage is considerable and creates an excellent air of reality, a sense that there are lots of things going on that have nothing to do with the party and which would be taking place even if they weren't there. It's all part of creating a living alternate reality in which you and your group can immerse yourselves every time you play. ✪

TravellerCON/USA 2019

TravellerCON/USA 2019 is planned for the weekend of 11-13 Oct 2019 at the Holiday Inn Morgantown. The theme is yet to be decided. The kickstarter is expected to go live in April or May, but start thinking about it now and be ready to pledge and join the fun!

Come play with us! ✪

The Visitors

by Alvin Plummer

Setting

This Scout adventure is set in *Traveller: The New Era*, in the Domain of Deneb, 1134. Archduke Norris has managed to successfully seal the borders before the initial AI Virus wave hit, but a second major wave has been sighted coming down Corridor Sector. The Second Wave, unlike the First, is composed mainly of naval warships rather than commercial vessels, and according to the fragmentary information coming from the Wilds is definitely more experienced in warfare.

The Domain is still frantically trying to Virus-proof its major worlds and communication systems; it simply cannot afford to fight a war of attrition against Virus, as it's too likely that some infected ships will successfully infect the network and snuff the last flame of interstellar civilization. The entire Spinward Marches fleet has been dispatched to Deneb Sector to hold the line with Deneb fleet against Virus, with the subsector fleets left to guard the Domain against Virus, Zhodani, and Aslan.

The Imperial Interstellar Scout Service is being gutted. The Scouts are fundamentally about obtaining information from the Unknown and spreading it around—but the unexplored regions of the Wilds are now infected with Virus, and gathering in information from that area is likely to bring Virus with it. Moreover, with the mission of the Scouts fatally undermined, there is a desperate need for their resources as part of the newly-organized Domain Quarantine Service to conduct regular Virus inspections on every ship in the Domain, and watch for anything trying to cross the border. Already there is talk of abolishing the Scouts, an act unthinkable even in the middle of the Rebellion.

The adventure is set in Foreven Sector: I have no information in this sector, so the Referee can make it up to suit.

Sector Arrangement Overview

Tienspevnekr	Aiafrplians	Gvurrdon	Tuglikki
Far Frontiers	Foreven	Spinward Marches	Deneb
Telehfaeikh	Beyond	Trojan Reach	Reft

Tienspevnekr is part of the Zhodani Consultate's Adlapriants Province (also includes Zhdant sector, home sector of the Zhodani)

Gvurrdon and **Tuglikki** are part of the Vargr Extents

Location

The adventure is set in Sector L of Foreven, called Aquamarine subsector in this article. Significant worlds in this adventure are:

Byne (2625) C34274A-B Scout Base, Imperial Client State

Cong Su (2626) D885845-8 No Base

Introduction

003-1134, "The Man's Office", Imperial Scout Base Gillagundam, Byne, Foreven

Chief Winthrop took a look around the typically slack Scouts facing him. God, he wished he was going out with them on the first real exploration mission he'd seen in quite a long while—and maybe the last one he'd ever give.

He began with what everyone knew. The massive saucers that have recently arrived over Cong Su seem to be quite friendly to the locals, if rather cool to the Imperium and openly hostile to the Zhodani. They seem to be about TL 9-10, and are willing to exchange technological information with the Conggi in exchange for the waste products of that world's industries. The world's four military federations, edging towards a nuclear war, were quite willing to

(Continued on page 35)

Active Measures

(Continued from page 34)

trade, and the local economy is benefiting visibly from the trade.

According to the reports from interstellar merchantmen, there was some kind of fuss about local Conggi scientists and biologists, and currently they are being attacked by the local governments and the occasional civilian mob. Still, they have been often-times arrogant and blind to the consequences of their actions on that world, causing much ecological and cultural destruction, so there's little sympathy for them. (The locals are only 20% Vilani in blood, but one Vilani cultural attitude that's very strongly held by locals is the aversion to scientific research.)

The Visitors themselves look quite human, and are evidently from a minor human race. However, Scout research has turned up no governments in Far Frontiers, Foreven or The Spinward Marches that have such a massive (50 ~ 100) fleet of 3-4 km long, TL 9-A starships deployed outside of their home systems. Not only that, but there is no record of this fleet passing through the neighboring systems to reach Cong Su.

The Scouts are going through massive changes, so they simply could not investigate the Visitors as much as they would have pre-Rebellion (The Station had to wait a year before two scout ships were dispatched to the local base, and wait another year until they arrived. The crew of these ships are the people attending the briefing). So instead, what research there is is based on rumors and the occasional foray into Cong Su via a trader, always with two Visitor escorts while outside of the starport.

The Chief wants answers to three questions.

1. How did the Visitor's, with nothing more than jump 1 drives, get here? And when they leave the system, where do they go? No Visitor ship has been seen outside of the Cong Su system.
2. Who are the Visitors? No medical information is available on them, and no-one has been able to

examine them. We do have samples of their written language, but no accurate info on their spoken tongue. There are claims that they are really reptiles due to some televised incident, but TV imagery is easily faked (The local entertainment industry has just reached the special effects level of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. People tend to believe what they see, and aren't sophisticated enough to know what can be done at higher tech levels). Most likely, the underground scientists had imagery faked off-world, for televising here.

3. What are they doing on Cong Su? It can't be just taking waste from cities, unless there is some biological organism in the waste that the Visitors want. The Scouts need real information—though only God knows if it will ever be put to use. The way the Domain is curling up into its shell, it's unlikely anyone at Mora—over 50 parsecs away—would care if the entire Aquamarine sub-sector suddenly disappeared into the Void (as long as Virus didn't do it).

The Scout Teams

The two Detached Scout teams—the PCs and the NPC team—will have to fight and bicker over who does what. Whatever the PCs choose to do, the NPCs want for themselves. The NPC team is aggressive and violent, more like mis-assigned Marines than Scouts (No, they don't have a FGMP and Battlearmor in their locker, although they've been trying to get some for the last five years...).

Part of what aggravates the situation is the very low morale in the Scouts. They see their mission in life being snatched away, and their entire way of life dying. Most of the best Scouts have already left for the Navy, with some hanging on in the IISS. The bureaucrats are all leaving for the Domain Quarantine Service, with its exploding budget and expanding responsibilities. The current Scouts are full of empty shells (both bases and men), folk three years from

(Continued on page 36)

Active Measures

(Continued from page 35)

retirement, and second- and third-rate personnel, a far cry from Strephon's IISS.

This is quite possibly the last exploration mission in all of Foreven Sector, so the NPCs will do everything they can to grab as much glory for themselves as possible. They want all the good equipment, the best information, 100% of the limited spending budget, and the only set of antivirus equipment in the subsector (still barely worth the volume it takes up, it's so primitive—but it has lots of prestige, so the NPCs want it).

They will also try to get the PCs to fail, by denying them information, giving misleading clues, or simply kicking them in the head in their *third* bar fight. The Chief may slap them on the wrist, but no real sanctions will be given: he needs both teams desperately.

Information for the PCs to find out:

(after they have filtered out the red herrings, false rumors, wild goose chases, etc.)

The misjump rate of starships between Cong Su and one of her neighbors has been known to occasionally spike up to 10% for a year or so, every fifty-to-eighty years. It's known to be caused by a Coisset Fragment, a dual jumpspace/realspace object which may or may not prove the existence of other universes outside of our own. There are theories that it could be used as a way to enhance jump drive performance, but no such method has been discovered. Currently, the misjump rate is normal.

There is undisputable evidence of some slower-than-light, probably human exploration of nine worlds of this subsector, around 3,000-2,500 years ago. Only a few derelict probes and small spacetrash (hand tools, etc.) have been found. It was thought that one of the local minor human races here did the job, but the design philosophy and engineering specs don't match any of the sector's civilizations of the time period. [This will be hotly denied by some

nations, which will insist that their ancestors did the exploration].

Some Conggi are joining the Visitors as members of the Visitors' Scout Service: they are well trained, carefully selected for health and placed in storage in a Visitor saucer for return to their homeworld (which is never named, "for cultural reasons"). It's expected that they may not be seen for a long time, until they return to Cong Su on retirement.

A "cancer cure" called Antivirus was recently announced by the Visitors: it is a genuine TL A/B cure, although limited to only the most common and typical cancers. This cure is being provided only to pro-Visitor Conggi, at selected dispensing areas.

There is a Visitor Youth Movement, which acts as a workforce/paramilitary arm of the Visitors. Local armed forces are rarely seen: most have been disbanded with the permission of the world government, and the military equipment is being broken up. Many people are openly Friends of the Visitors, and the planetary constitution is being expanded to provide them with special rights and privileges.

The Visitors have a certain flair for slogans and propaganda, which the Conggi find charming and truthful. Slogans include "Friendship is Universal", "I'm doing my part for the Visitors, are you?", "I'm a patriot of Peace. I want to join the Youth Movement!", etc. The enthusiasm for the Visitors on Cong Su is genuine.

The four military federations on Cong Su have—with Visitor guidance—unified into a democratic world government which is becoming more and more a blend of Visitors and Conggi, with Visitors being placed in many advisory positions.

Few mind the increasing political power of the Visitors, while many (intellectuals and the general population) welcome it as a way to keep the politicians on a leash. With disarmament, the economy is booming, the inflation caused by military spending

(Continued on page 37)

Active Measures

(Continued from page 36)

is finally under control, and taxes are actually being decreased. The Visitors are helping out not only with new technology, but massive financial assistance and trade as well. Several major construction projects have been started, including upgrading the starport (even as trade restrictions, partly anti-Virus, partly Visitor suspicion of Imperials and Zhodani traders, is increased).

Weapon restrictions for civilians have been loosened, so anyone with a clean record can purchase rifles, pistols and most small arms: the crime rate has substantially declined in response. If there have to be a few unusual health regulations to please the Visitors, so what? Smoking was always a nasty habit, but now, even the ex-Weed farmers are now employed in something that actually benefits society.

There is a strong emphasis placed on good health and nutrition by both the Visitors and the local government. Disease and illness are sharply declining in the poorer areas of the world, and drought is now unheard-of. Use of contraception, abortion, and sterilizing operations are strongly emphasized to fight the overpopulation problem, and are becoming socially mandatory. The birth rate has been sharply declining since the arrival of the Visitors, but there are hints of an imminent breakthrough on life-extension. In the meantime, a massive social welfare network is being set up, stressing hard, honest work for a fair living wage, free health care, and a pleasant lifestyle thanks to the Visitors.

The Visitors are rarely seen out of their orange uniform and sunglasses: the bright light hurts their eyes. Still, they are uniformly cheerful, if suspicious of non-Conggi.

Referee's Information

What's Really Going On?

The Visitors are indeed a reptilian race, but physically near-human excluding their egg-laying, long poisonous tongue (usually kept in a pouch in

their throat, and never seen among humans), slitted yellow eyes and a preference for mammalian meat.

While they don't mind swallowing guinea pigs whole (small rodents are typical fare on the Visitors homeworld), they prefer human flesh, and that's one of the main reasons they're on Cong Su. They are aware that eating rodents is repulsive to most of humaniti, and avoid it in public. Of course, the real fate of those selected as "Visitor Scouts" or pro-Visitor researchers chosen to study on the homeworld is never mentioned. It's practically impossible to prove: the Visitors have remarkable political and social instincts, and are quite good at making their enemies look like xenophobic buffoons or science-worshipping fanatic ideologues. Documentation is hard to find, even on the motherships—the Visitors know the importance of leaving no paper trail.

The very few Conggi who know what's really going on tend to be reprogrammed in a Visitor Education Centre ("You too can learn the technological secrets of the Visitors in our special Research Centres! Call now at 666-934-42678 for your personal appointment TODAY!"), and go on to live happy, satisfied lives.

Remarkably, despite the vast superiority of Visitor forces (and the local politicians, fully bought and paid for when not "persuaded" on their personal tour of the Visitor ships), there is actually a resistance movement against them. Local, light firearms are worthless against the Visitor Shock Troopers (due to the remarkable anti-ballistic properties of their black breastplate—very good for their Tech level 9/A manufacture), but heavier weapons and lasers are much more useful. The resistance movement is small, only about 200,000 or so, spread out on a world population of 260 million. They do have a good number of scientists, intellectuals, and politicians with them, but are despised as idiot militiamen, manic science loons and ignorant bigots by the general population.

(Continued on page 38)

Active Measures

(Continued from page 37)

[Did the PCs manage to make peace with the semi-Marine Scouts? They could come in very useful... especially if the PCs managed to obtain a FGMP, and gave it to those who know it best...]

There was a failed attempt to repel the Visitor invasion with a locally built biological weapon called Red Dust. A vaccine was given to pro-Conggi Visitors (yes, they did exist: a very few still do), but Red Dust had a variety of nasty side-effects. It blighted food crops, causing starvation in a few regions of Cong Su. In major concentrations, it's toxic to mammals (including the humans), causes an increase of stillbirths and mutations, and an increase of respiratory ailments. Finally, Red Dust needed to have a cycle of temperatures below freezing for the bacteria to rebuild itself and remain effective.

Fortunately for the Visitors, Red Dust was poorly distributed, only affecting a few regions known for militia/terrorist activities and a handful of smaller cities. The only region currently infested with Red Dust is the Kar Dijalis Archipelago, which now affects only mammals: the Visitors now have their own vaccine. They also used the Red Dust incident to make great political points, declaring all-out war against "those insane scientists", stressing the side effects on humans, making sure that both humans and Visitors were involved in the clean-up, and further driving the Resistance underground.

It's very, very difficult to find the Resistance movement. Areas which remain sympathetic to the Resistance usually deface Visitor posters and propaganda pamphlets with a red V, for victory. These areas are almost always in the "badlands", e.g., mountains, deserts, jungles, places where any central authority always had difficulty governing.

If the PCs are good, they might be able to find out that the population has been declining about 1% per year for the last three years, when the Visitors population program really kicked in. (Hint: check out the local government offices: the information is

publicly available, if buried somewhat). At the same time, life expectancy has risen a remarkable four years during the same time: because so much of the population is in the local "Third World" there's still a good way to go before everyone is living into their 70s and 80s.

Most of the population decline is due to the fall of the birth rate, but a good 20,000-50,000 people per year choose to go on the saucers, to join the Visitor Scouts, see their homeworld, by winning a contest, or getting very high marks in a bodybuilding contest ("Build those muscles! Get rid of that worthless fat!"). Some of the wealthier members of society actually have enough to pay for a ticket, and pay for a highly valuable trade license.

Most never leave the Visitors' homeworld ("Life is so good here: I can't even bear the thought of leaving" the forged videotape image said): those that return were treated well, Persuaded to see what the Visitors wanted them to see, and are quite enthusiastic about the place when they return ("Can't wait to get back!").

The Visitors are on Cong Su for more than just some good eating. They are also covertly preparing the world for settlement. After the world's population has declined and aged to a certain point (currently 30 years from now, in 1170) a crisis will be created, the remaining Conggi will be moved to Emergency Housing Facilities, herded onto the saucers, and shipped to the homeworld for eating. The world will then be settled by about one or two billion Visitors over a hundred-year period: the necessary transports to move 10 million Visitors per year are being constructed. The world itself is perfect for Visitor settlement, so no terraforming is needed. A TL 9/A infrastructure will be thoughtfully constructed by the humans, before the crisis is declared.

How did they get here?

The Visitors are members of a military government which has conquered thirty-two systems via

(Continued on page 39)

Active Measures

(Continued from page 38)

sublight warships in their region of the galaxy. The government isn't popular due to the military expense of keeping all those worlds (twenty-two have large, restless alien populations that the Visitor economy depends on). It has no current starfaring opposition in its region of space, but has no real friends, either.

The government found out that, earlier in their regions history, a minor human species invented an inferior, near-Jump Drive (called an Arkenstone Engine in Imperial engineering literature), but which was mainly useless except near a Coisset Fragment. Near such a fragment, the Arkenstone Engine could—if designed and calibrated right—jump to a location of another Coisset Fragment.

The Imperium didn't make use of the Arkenstone Engine: the sheer cost and the learning curve gave a very poor return for the information learned, and after a few failed Scout experiments in the 880s it was abandoned: ships with the Engine didn't even budge an inch, never mind leap across galaxies.

The minor human race, having no other method of FTL travel, pushed the Engine for all it was worth, and finally made a round trip with the Arkenstone Engine in -2994 Imperial/A.D. 1527 (when the First Imperium just started to go into decline). Over the next 500 years, the occasional exploration vessel (with both Engine and sublight drive) would be sent to Foreven Sector, but no useful world was ever found (compared to other routes).

Much of the information was lost, but thousands of years later the Visitors managed to successfully rediscover the principles of the Arkenstone Engine using both original research and ancient documents. With the remarkable discovery of a workable chart to the Foreven Sector, the Visitors sent their first scoutship, arriving in Foreven in 892. A small station was soon constructed at the Fragment, and a scout ship permanently stationed here. Their duties included charting interstellar space, mapping the

area, listening to radio signals and sending sublight probes to look for good worlds before dropping into the primary to remove all evidence.

A major revolution occurred when, in 959, a jumpship was found with its distress signal still blazing. It was the *Northern Lights*, a brand-new *Profit*-class, 300-ton displacement TL A trader, designed and built locally. The trader was rescued, and the crew dealt with kindly and befriended. Unfortunately, there wasn't any hydrogen on hand to lend, so the traders decided to journey to the Visitor homeworld instead in the Visitors' "low berth". They arrived at the Visitors' homeworld in 1021. There they were pumped for information, paid very well, and poked and prodded. They were permitted to live in ease and comfort for 15 years until the Visitors were satisfied that they got all the information they could from them; they were eaten in ~1035.

The *Northern Lights* was brought back home for disassembly and investigation: jump drive still wasn't cracked until 1021 (mainly because the *Northern Lights* had a subtle flaw in its engine, caused by the misjump), but much other information was gained. In the meantime, a large "trade fleet" was slowly built to meet with the Cong Su government, and unofficially conquer it. (The Visitors have long experience in dealing with small, world-bound civilizations). Moreover, a major naval base was built at great expense at the Coisset Fragment at Foreven Sector, which took decades to build.

The "trade fleet" left the staging area in 1057, arrived at the local Coisset Fragment in 1078, made a seven-day long jump across 1,880 parsecs, and arrived at the Visitor base in Foreven Sector. Then, it made its way to Cong Su, arriving in 1117, one year after Strephon's assassination. It takes 60 years to make the journey via sublight ship, at about .05c.

(The Foreven fragment is just under two parsecs from Cong Su: the Visitor fragment is just about one parsec from the Visitors' homeworld).

(Continued on page 40)

(Continued from page 39)

What do the Visitors have?

The fifty massive, 3.2 km diameter ships are built with three drives: a jump drive, an Arkenstone Engine, and massive gravitic plates that use interstellar gravity waves for sublight propulsion. Smaller ships use standard antigrav drives. Standard Imperial thruster plates are being researched and analyzed back at the homeworld. The massive ships has a crew of 6500, including 3000 infantry Shock Troops, 1000 field support, 2000 technicians, and 500 officers, political personnel, etc.

[If I am doing my sums right, the mother ships are about 50 Million tons displacement in size! Not that it will stop a Tigress from ripping it apart with nothing but its meson gun...]

Weaponry isn't that hot: assume 200 TL A laser turrets, and two TL A laser batteries. The ship itself is largely a TL A construct, with possible TL 9 components and "Mystery TL" Arkenstone Drive and gravitic plates.

As you might guess, most of the bulk of the ship is fuel for Liquid Hydrogen for the drives, although several grams of antimatter is used for the Arkenstone Engine (The explosion if that antimatter contacts matter would be bad, but I don't think it would destroy the ship in One Big Boom...)

There are also 15 docking and fighter bays. Assume 30 large fighters (each with four lasers), 20 Squad ships (each with 2 lasers, 2 crew and 18 troops), and 20 Transports (configurable in 5, 8, and 10-cabin forms). Each transport requires two crew, and each "cabin" holds 3.75 Visitors. There are usually no weapons, but a weapon pub with a dual-barrel laser can be added. Finally, there are 10 Tankers carrying Liquid Hydrogen, with a crew of four. Assume all of this equipment is at TL A, powered by small gravitic plates.

Interesting aside: did you know each Visitor Skyfighter holds a pilot, a co-pilot, a gunner, and *three troopers*? Hmmmmmm...

[Hints for mercenaries: did I see any... tanks? *Nope!* Did I see any... armored vehicles? *Nope!* Did I see any... artillery? *Nope!* Did I see any... major fortification equipment? *Nope!*]

At both the Coisset Fragments (Visitors' end and Foreven End), there is a major 10 Million-ton Visitor base, with over 1000 laser turrets, ten laser bays and 10 missile bays (each bay with 10 missiles).

Moreover, there are over 50 TL A fighters, 200 more primitive TL 9 fighters (which use fusion engines and missiles), and three genuine warships. These TL A warships are a little smaller than the motherships, but optimized for battle, not occupation/transport/surveillance. The warships are actually decently armored, with 5 top-of-the line TL A laser bays, 500 laser turrets and 500 missile turrets.

Often, at both the Fragments and Cong Su, you will see one to five transports. These 1 km diameter saucers are actually doing the transporting of humans, Visitors, and equipment. They are thinly armored and have only 20 TL 9 laser turrets, and a few auxiliary craft.

Now What?

After the PCs have a pretty good grip on what's really going on, they then need to decide what to do.

[Referee hint: usually, the PCs would be clued in via contact with the Resistance, although expatriate Conggi living on other worlds—or even crewing other ships—may give the Scouts a hand. Individual research, daring raids into prison camps, the local unofficial Zhodani agent, intense surveillance from orbiting satellites (after somehow getting permission from the Visitors under some guise or in payment for a tech exchange), cracking the Visitor encryption and searching for key words in the Visitor language

(Continued on page 41)

Active Measures

(Continued from page 40)

(how did the PCs compile a dictionary of a totally unknown language? Hey, they're Scouts—they should be able to do this in their sleep!), the methods should be left to the players.]

Options

Calling in the Imperial Navy.

The typical Imperial Destroyer Squadron would make short work of the motherships. However, it isn't going to happen—Virus is banging very hard on the Domain's door, so you can forget this idea right now. Anyways, Cong Su was never a Imperial client world, and it's really far away—why should they care?

Getting some mercenaries together

This takes money. Unless the Scouts can somehow raise the MultiMillions needed as a deposit to hire a mercenary capable of taking on the Visitors and their 150,000 TL 9/A troops on the ground (and another 100,000 local government troops, at TL 7/8), this won't happen.

The clever or politically astute PC might find a way of getting the money, or get the Resistance to put some big bucks on the table, payable only on success (salvage rights to three motherships would be nice, but more is needed—including Cash Up Front.)

Getting the local systems together

This depends on the local subsector astrography. As this is not an official subsector, the Referee will have to design it—don't forget the two worlds of Byne (hex 2625, scout base, Imperial Client State) and Cong Su herself (hex 2626).

As this is a poor subsector in a thinly settled sector beyond most of the worthwhile trade routes, I'd cap the local TL at 12. There might be one or two high pop systems with the largest local Navy, and another five systems with some kind of decent Navy (or at least some decent technology).

Getting them to see the threat that the Visitors present is possible, but they'll want some evidence. Also, those fifty motherships look very imposing: are you certain you want to attack them? And the Visitors are masters when it comes to lying, deceit, and political maneuvering: what happens when they start offering Trade Advantages to divide up the PCs coalition?

And of course there's the Grand Battle itself: the referee has several nights of design work to do in order to do justice to the Battle Of Cong Su.

Getting Zhodani support

The PCs may turn to the Zhodani in desperation. This is unlikely to work: the Zhodani, unlike the classic Imperium, is not into military adventures on the far frontiers. However, they might discover the danger much more quickly, if they can mindread the Visitors at just the right time. They will certainly hate the Visitors, with all the deceit and lies they spew.

If the PCs can convince the Zhodani to beat up the Visitors—a huge if, but possible—a small Consular Navy flotilla will be sent, and the PCs will have the interesting experience of working as military advisors to the Zhodani. Normally this would be a career-killing move (well, not just career-killing...), but with the current Domain-Zhodani detente, it's possible. It's a near certainty that the Visitors will be simply crushed in the battle, leaving interesting salvage possibilities. Some fast footwork would be needed to insure the motherships don't smash into the city below them when they go down....

Doing it yourself

It would be a fabulous public relations coup if just a handful of Scouts manage to drive off the Visitors from Cong Su, all by their lonesome. It might even persuade the Archduke to spare the IISS, and let them live (at a greatly-reduced size). The Station

(Continued on page 42)

Active Measures

(Continued from page 41)

Chief would be all for this, if some kind of half-viable plan could be cooked up....

Back at the Ranch...

Important points

- The Visitors are suffering from internal troubles back at home. The Jump-drive technology that they have is only slowly being built into new ships: the political necessity of occupying Cong Su is delaying adoption of Jump ships, and the enormous cost of building Visitor-style, “Go Big or Go Home!” starships with the vastly more expensive—yet vastly faster—Jump1 Drives is slowly crushing the economy.
- There is increasing discontent within the ruling Visitor race, with only the promise of good land in Foreven keeping a lid on things. More and more voices are demanding that TinyShips (as the Visitors call Imperial-space ships) be built, but this would decentralize power from the current ruling class.

Designer's comments

For those to whom it's not obvious, this adventure is adapted from a 1980s-era TV mini-series called *V*.

There are several modifications made to the Visitors, to make them more plausible and have a better *Traveller* fit.

Ignored items include

- the “stealing earth's water” bit
- the moon-destroying Particle Beam Triax (a tiny world-killing ship with a crew complement of *ten?*)
- anything psionic (except the Zhodani, if used)
- the corny 1983 dialogue

Timeline (all dates Imperial equivalent)

-2994	Minor human race uses Cossent Fragment and Arkenstone Engine to Enter Foreven space. Limited exploration for the next 500 years.
~800-890	Visitors attempt to reconstruct Arkenstone Engine
892	Visitors successfully send their first Arkenstone Engine ship to Foreven Sector
959	<i>Northern Lights</i> captured by Visitor station in Foreven Sector
1021	Visitors get Jump Drive technology from <i>Northern Lights</i>
1035	<i>Northern Lights</i> crew, after many years in comfort, are eaten by Visitors
1057	Visitor trade fleet leaves their homeworld
1078	Visitor trade fleet arrives in Foreven
1116	Strephon assassinated (Imperial space)
1117	Visitors arrive at Cong Su
1120	Trade agreement between Visitors and Cong Su reached. Visitor money pours in, some Visitor technology made available
1123	Cong Su military blocs merged into single democratic world government
1125	Persecution of scientists on Cong Su, especially those in biological sciences
1129	Red Dust incident: some Visitors killed
1130	AI Virus released (Imperial space)
1131	Cong Su population begins to decline at 1% per year
003-1134	Current date
1170	Projected date of human evacuation of Cong Su and start of Visitor colonization
1270	Projected date of full Visitor colonization of Cong Su

Things to keep include

- the feuding women. Apparently, the Reagan Era was *the* high-water mark for bitches, complete with frizzy hair and all the rouge you can find.
- the cool orange uniforms and sunglasses
- the giant saucer ships hovering over the cities (stolen wholesale by Independence Day—where are *V*'s royalty payments?)
- gulping down guinea pigs (in the privacy of your own home, of course) 🌟

#36: Closer to God

At the end of my first ‘season’ of confessions, I talked about God-given creativity inspiring *Traveller* games or writing. It works the other way as well. I don’t know anything quite like *Traveller* for drawing me closer to God. I may be in a minority of one here, but the way the game embraces everything you could possibly be interested in often amuses me and surprises me. I’m wary of boring friends or family with my constant (mental) refrain of “oh, that would make a great setting, story, character, culture, bit of colour... for *Traveller*” in just about any arena of life. The whole universe is fair game! I’m aware I only scratch the surface and tend to be fairly Third Imperium-centric – but only for want of time, not for lack of interest in all the other places and milieux I could visit.

But even limited like this, there is hardly an aspect of *Traveller* that doesn’t awaken my sense of wonder. Character generation makes me pay attention to people around me more so I can better develop PCs and NPCs; biographies and obituaries have the same effect; adventure construction makes me take note in books, TV, and film to see how others put exciting things together; news items become *Travellerized*; psionics can help appreciate the mind; and world building of course has its own particular wealth of areas to explore: animal tables encouraging me to learn about wildlife I see or read about or watch online to better produce critter encounters, paying more attention to botany so I can create alien

flora, studying history and languages to beef up my own cultures, enjoying the wonders of local space missions to inspire scenes and descriptions of the far future. Perhaps it’s more of a stretch but I can even find interest in ship building, or weapons or trade rules in admiring human ingenuity. I’m delighted with the variety of departments in *Freelance Traveller* I’ve been able to contribute to.

Because I view God as the architect of all the above, I find that my own paltry efforts give just the tiniest glimpse into godlike activities and definitely add to the awe and praise scripture exhorts me to give to God as I reflect on creation around me. Who knows, perhaps Tolkien’s *Ainulindalë* in *The Silmarillion* has it right and one day this will be all our activities? For real.

Isaac Watts’ well known hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” finishes up with the words:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

I might have been known on occasions as “the guy with a universe in his bag”, and my contributions to *Traveller* are most certainly an offering far too small, but I thank my heavenly creator that my exploration brings me just that little bit closer to eternity before we meet, as 1 Corinthians 13:12 puts it, face to face. ☼

Doing It My Way

Virtuality and Its Social Consequences in *Traveller*

by Jim Vassilakos

virtual, adj, being on or simulated on a computer or computer network

virtuality, n, the quality of being virtual, or (generically) a virtual environment treated analogously to (cf.) reality

In *Traveller*, we take sophisticated computers more-or-less for granted, although some of the presented description—and the role played in most settings—might be more suggestive of the 1960s and 1970s than the 1990s or early 21st century. However,

(Continued on page 44)

(Continued from page 43)

in the “real world”, we are seeing the development of virtual environments for interacting with others (for example, *Second Life*), and even for interacting with reality (‘augmented reality’ in smartphone apps, and Google Glass and other ‘VR goggles’). It stands to reason that a technological far future, such as is assumed for *Traveller*, will develop such concepts further, and if one wishes to explore transhumanism in *Traveller* (not generally done in the standard settings), such development becomes a necessity. This article is intended to outline some of the implications of virtuality as applied to *Traveller*.

The descriptive terms used (“Low”, “Medium”, “High”, etc.) are relative terms, comparing the subjective impression of the realism of virtuality to actual reality. One should not necessarily assume a rigid correspondence between virtuality level and tech level; the correspondence given here is simply a guideline should you wish to explore it further in play.

The Technology of Virtuality

Low Virtuality (TL 8-10)

At TL 8, virtuality involves only sight and sound. Users typically wear goggles, earphones and a microphone. By TL 9, various “haptic” accessories begin to provide tactile stimulus as well as taking physical input, but these are rudimentary and mostly in the category of “teledildonics” (sexual accessories). Motion is also added, and hardcore users will typically keep an empty room in their house or apartment where they can walk around, playing “Commando” or “Gigolo,” two ever-popular titles. By TL 10, there are finally decent haptic gloves, allowing for virtual keyboards as well as virtual musical instruments. Likewise, virtual treadmills become available, but the high-end ones require a fair amount of square footage, something that most houses won’t easily accommodate. While on one, the user can walk (or run) in any direction, and so

long as the treadmill remains functioning, they’ll never reach the edge.

Medium Virtuality (TL 11-13)

Full body haptic suits are introduced at TL 11. Getting shot in a virtual simulation feels a little bit like getting hit. How hard depends on the settings, which are customizable, but hardcore users often like to feel the pain and wear their bruises with pride. Haptic hoists are introduced at TL 12. These lift the user entirely off the ground so that they can experience the sensation of swimming, scuba diving, or even floating in zero-gee. By TL 13, haptic suits incorporate a finely woven mesh of electrical stimulators that are capable of teasing the nervous system into providing the brain with a number of artificial sensations, such that users can feel the wetness of water that doesn’t actually exist or the sensation of wind, which, again, is purely artificial. The illusion isn’t perfect, but it’s close enough for most users to willingly suspend their disbelief.

High Virtuality (TL 14-16)

With the invention of computer/brain implants at TL 14, Virtuality finally makes the great leap from haptic to neural. Users undergo a medical procedure in which microscopic SITs (Signal Interceptor/Transmitters) are nanosurgically spliced into their nerve fibers. These, in turn, connect to a small wireless router, often placed alongside the brainstem, which allows them to receive sensory data and send nerve impulses to a computer. In short, users can experience full immersion or just augmented reality without any sort of haptic suit, earphones, or even goggles. Unfortunately, at TL 14 the procedure is still somewhat dangerous, and even when successfully performed, the experience of high virtuality is far from perfect. Users report that sensations can seem distorted or at times even incomprehensible, and using the technology often involves a period of adjustment. By TL 15, however, the bugs are mostly

(Continued on page 45)

(Continued from page 44)

worked out, and users generally find that the experience of virtuality and reality are essentially indistinguishable. At this point, reality augmentation becomes the norm. Users are generally able to see other people's names and professions before they are ever introduced. By TL 16, the experience of virtuality improves further, becoming even more vivid than reality. Users can also communicate telepathically, simply by thinking words to one another, although this feature remains buggy until TL 17.

Advanced Virtuality (TL 17-19)

As understanding of the brain continues to grow, the coding of memory and personality become understood from a neurological standpoint. Hence, by TL 17, neurosurgeons are able to splice SITs into the circuitry of the brain. In this way, two users can be put side-by-side, but instead of having access to their own memories, they can instead have access to each others'. At TL 18, users can experiment with what it's like to have an entirely different personality. Entering a simulation can be like having a very realistic and detailed dream that you were actually somebody else. Users can even be railroaded without their knowledge, such that it feels like they're making their own decisions, but in actuality, the entire simulation is pre-scripted. At TL 19, neuroscientists are able to upload and download memories and personality characteristics, such that people who are dying can make backups of their brains and then have these backups restored into a younger clone of themselves (or a completely different person). At this point, bodies are considered disposable and are sometimes called "sleeves" or "coils". Of course, some people choose to continue "life" as an 'artilect' (artificial intellect), also known as a VIP (virtual intellect/person). Hence, with strange aeons even death may die.

Ultra Virtuality (TL 20+)

By TL 20, neuroscientists understand cognition and memory so well that they can now merge two memory sets into one. This allows a number of things. First, a VIP (virtual intellect/person) can literally be in two different places at the same time. For instance, you could make a copy of yourself who goes and does some task while you're doing something else, and then when you meet up with it later, you both merge back together so that you'll have the memories of both. Of course, you don't have to limit yourself to just two copies. If you wished and had the resources, you could make billions. Memory overcrowding almost immediately ensues due to the necessarily finite architecture of the human mind, but this problem is solved at TL 21, when neuroscientists figure out how to parallelize this architecture, such that a VIP could theoretically have any number of memories, all cross-referenced in a manner that makes them intuitively and immediately accessible. At TL 22 things begin to get weird.

Social Consequences of Virtuality

Low & Medium Virtuality (TL 8-13)

Telecommuting: By TL 8, "telecommuting" becomes a buzzword, and people begin imagining the great cities emptying of workers, rental prices falling with the drop in demand, as everyone begins working from home, many perhaps living very far from their place of employment. Alas, this does not happen all at once, although the process does begin rather slowly, and as the technology improves and becomes more accepted, it then speeds up, so that by TL 12, virtual clothing exists as a software accessory. Instead of a group of co-workers meeting in a conference room, they can be scattered over the world, each at home in their underwear.

Virtual Avatars: The use of virtual avatars also becomes commonplace, allowing the user to modify their appearance, their voice, and even their gender,

(Continued on page 46)

Raconteurs' Rest

(Continued from page 45)

and this is a particularly thorny issue for people who use virtual dating applications in order to meet potential mates.

'Physitars': For workers who absolutely have to be there in the physical sense, "physitars" (physical avatars) are able to mimic their every move. Hence, a surgeon can be at home in his haptic suit as his physitar performs the actual surgery somewhere on the other side of the planet. Of course, the military absolutely loves this technology. Instead of having to lose actual soldiers in ground combat, they can fight with an ever-replenishing army of physitars. Likewise, police can enter bad neighborhoods without fear of being shot. Hence, the technology tends to centralize power while at the same time freeing individuals from the tyranny of distance.

Homebuying: Virtual walkthroughs gradually become the industry norm. In this way, buyers can also see what a space would look like with different colored paint, different flooring, and even different furniture.

Education: Schools also begin to go virtual, allowing many more students to sit in on a lecture than any lecture hall could accommodate. Instructors record their lectures, editing together the best parts so that they don't have to give the same set of lectures year after year. Even the question and answers sessions get recorded so that they may be reviewed years later, and voice recognition technology converts all the 3d-video to time-indexed text making the whole thing searchable. The upshot is that classwork (listening to the lecture) becomes homework and homework (working on problems) becomes classwork. It is commonly referred to as "flipping the classroom." Furthermore, because lectures and the Q&A are all recorded and put online and students are kept engaged in class, there are fewer classroom management problems. Schools can also organize "virtual field trips" with relative ease, and the technology also lends itself to different

schools competing in academic tournaments since these become much less expensive to organize. Finally, the technology is particularly impressive insofar that when people experience something directly (even in a virtual environment), it sticks with them much better than had they merely read it in a book or heard it spoken about in a lecture. Virtuality allows students the illusion of having directly experienced a given subject matter, whether it involves dissecting a virtual frog, conducting a virtual chemistry experiment, walking around inside a virtual red blood cell, or being "in the room" during a virtual historical reenactment. Educators eventually figure out that by transporting students out of the classroom, virtuality can make learning easy and even fun.

High Virtuality (TL 14-16)

Convenience Leads to Some Loss of Control: While it was possible to virtually "hang out" with friends prior to High Virtuality, the ability to enter the virtual environment or just an augmented state without any sort of external equipment makes virtual and augmented living the height of convenience. Those who don't want to undergo the operation (there are risks) end up being largely left behind, as they cannot so easily participate in various virtual gatherings. But those who do make the transition suddenly find themselves permanently connectable to everybody else who has also made the leap, and sending a connection request is as easy as saying the person's name. The only possible problem is whether or not their request will inconvenience the other user. For this reason, users often use virtual agents (in effect, expert systems) to select whether or not they will accept virtual requests based on whatever they happen to be doing. Instead of the actual users playing phone-tag, the virtual agents coordinate with one another to set up an opportune time for a virtual meeting. One problem that occurs, however, is that it becomes very hard to dodge people with-

(Continued on page 47)

Doing It My Way

(Continued from page 46)

out it becoming obvious that you're dodging them. Also, by delegating the task of answering requests to a virtual agent, it's possible to lose control of one's downtime. It's a great world for people who thrive on social interaction, but for introverts it can quickly become a bit overwhelming.

Privacy Issues: High Virtuality also brings with it the ability to record all of one's interactions, virtual or otherwise, all the time, and this raises obvious concerns for people who are used to being able to talk with others without having to worry about their remarks being recorded. Hence, many societies will set up rules that if you are recording, you have to let the other person know. This is mostly done automatically though the software. But software can be hacked, and so the truth of the matter is that in a society where High Virtuality has been widely adopted, people can never be sure that they aren't being recorded, not even during their most intimate moments. And, what with people being people, it should not be surprising that trust is occasionally betrayed. Privacy is further compromised by hackers as well as the power of the state to conduct surveillance on its citizens. Because users are always online, it is at least theoretically possible for law enforcement to invisibly drop in at any moment to secretly check up on whatever they happen to be doing. Furthermore, it is also theoretically possible for law enforcement or a hacker to slip in and set up a method of recording everything that someone does. This, obviously, further centralizes power and makes any sort of revolution against a given political system or authority completely and utterly impossible.

Sexual Issues: It is sometimes said that one of the best but least discussed benefits of High Virtuality are the sex applications. With Low and Medium Virtuality, virtual sex generally involves some form of "teledildonics" (sexual accessories), but High Virtuality bypasses the sensory organs, piping its illu-

sions directly into the nervous system. Basically, it's like having a wet dream, except that it's every bit as vivid as real life and you're wide awake. Users' sexual appetites are sated by virtual prostitutes and/or expert systems that grow increasingly proficient with advancing technology. Many users report that virtual sex is even better than the real thing.

Relationship and Reproduction Issues: The degree to which people are always connected to the outside world combined with the breakdown in intimate sexual relations tends to result in a society of individuals. It doesn't happen in all societies, but in most, marriage falls by the wayside as an anachronistic institution that had more to do with the ownership of one gender by another than with deep mutual affection. As for procreation, by this point artificial wombs have long since diminished the female's need to lend her body in a reproductive capacity. In many societies, childrearing is tightly regulated, and in others, the functions of reproduction and parenthood are completely subsumed by the state.

Virtual Addiction: By TL 16, a good chunk of the population essentially lives in cyberspace. People are able to experience extreme sports without ever moving a muscle. As for getting together with friends, it stops making sense to travel to see them in person when you can see them virtually just by speaking their name. Many prefer not to leave their dwellings because they are ashamed of their physical bodies. In virtuality they look and feel like superheroes. There's no way that real life can compete. For some, even the business of getting up, eating, and shitting become unwelcome chores. Some people go so far as to have their bodies hooked up to feeding and waste elimination tubes as though they were in a coma so that they can literally spend their entire lives in virtuality.

Advanced Virtuality (TL 17-19)

Sophont Rights Extended to Animals: With such advanced knowledge of what exactly is going

(Continued on page 48)

(Continued from page 47)

on inside the brain, neuroscientists are able to codify the process that results of self-awareness, also called sentience or sapience. However, one ethical problem that occurs is that when you just look at this process, it becomes rather difficult to segregate humans from the higher animals, such as mammals and birds. Many creatures tend to fall under the neurological definition, and so this, of course, promotes concerns over how such animals are treated. Likewise, to compound these concerns further, just as people are able to experience being other people, so too are they able to experience what its like to be, for instance, their dog or cat or the cow they just ate. Hence, one social consequence of Advanced Virtuality is a continual push toward veganism, which in many societies is finally codified into law.

Sophont Rights Extended to WAPs: A WAP (wholly artificial person) is an AI that does not derive from an organic being. WAPs are first developed at TL 17, and by TL 18 they become society's workforce. Because their personality traits can be programmed, numerous safeguards are built in to prevent them from rebelling against organic/biological people. However, there are many who see ethical problems with society creating what amounts to a slave caste, and as people beginning making the jump from an organic to a virtual existence at TL 19, these concerns become even more pronounced, as there is a question as to whether post-biological VIPs should have all the same rights as biological humans, including ownership and control of physical resources, or whether they should be relegated to a purely virtual existence, and if they are allowed ownership and control rights in the physical world, why should the fact that they originated in a biological state allow them these rights when WAPs essentially have no such rights and, furthermore, are for the most part even subject to stringent personality controls? Ethically, it all makes for a confusing situa-

tion which each society must sort out according to its own set of traditions and moral/legal framework.

Interrogation via Technology, not Torture: With improvements in the understanding of how the brain works, law enforcement is able to get to the truth much more quickly than ever before. Criminals sing not out of fear or to make a deal but rather because they think they're talking to their best friend who they trust completely, even if they never had a best friend nor trusted anyone. Unfortunately, employers can also use the technology to intrude into people's personal lives to whatever extent the state allows them to do so. Hence, there is increasing tension between privacy/individualism and transparency/collectivism, and different societies will end up falling into different niches along this spectrum, however, the technology by its very nature tends to pull societies toward the latter.

Ultra Virtuality (TL 20+)

Psychohistorical Research and the Rights of WAPs: It is worth noting that although WAPs never existed in a biological state unless they were transferred into a living sleeve, they still had some sort of childhood and may have even lived an entire "life", albeit in virtuality, never suspecting (unless, like Nick Bostrom, they happened to deduce it through logical reasoning) that their world was non-physical. This is certainly the case for WAPs that were created during the course of psychohistorical research.

Even before TL 20, psychohistorians realize that they can study the mechanics of history in a more precise way by running virtual historical simulations. These simulations are populated entirely or almost entirely by WAPs, and their job is to unwittingly relive a stage of history in order to help psychohistorians better determine the robustness versus the fickleness of history itself. These scenarios often involve thousands, millions, or even billions of

(Continued on page 49)

Doing It My Way

(Continued from page 48)

WAPs, and the questions that they collectively answer can range from the sublime to the horrific.

For example, what might have happened if a dictatorship rather than a democracy had been the first to invent nuclear weapons? How different would the next, say, three hundred years have been, and by the end of those three centuries, what aspects of the false history would be converging with the real history and what aspects would be continuing to diverge, and if you ran the simulation multiple times, to what extent would it tend to produce the same results?

Obviously, you can't recreate the exact state of the real universe at any particular point in history, so you can't re-run the history of an actual, physical society, but if you create a false (virtual) universe, so to speak, then you can save it at some critical juncture so that you can go back again and again to this saved state to test different theories and draw conclusions. It is at this point that psychohistory truly transforms from art into science.

Of course, this raises the question over what to do with all those WAPs? In the physical universe, as far as can be discerned, nature treats all life the same, recycling both sentient and non-sentient organisms back into non-animate matter. There is no indestructible soul, unless it exists at a level unknown even at TL 20. However, in virtuality, death like life is but an illusion, and so all the WAPs can dwell for however long the hardware and software continues to support their existence. So the question is, do these WAPs have any rights, or to phrase it another way, do the psychohistorians running these research projects have any duties to these virtual subjects that they've created? And this question has numerous facets.

For example, under what condition, if any, is it okay if a WAP should suffer in the course of this research? After all, history is a bloody mess, and so it should come as no surprise that virtual histories are

likewise. Furthermore, should WAPs that have unwittingly participated in psychohistorical research be entitled to any sort of afterlife? Should they, for example, be accorded the same rights and privileges as VIPs? Because, after all, there is only so much computer processing power to go around, and if allowed an equal vote, they would completely dominate the society by the sheer strength of their numbers.

For those entities (organic people, VIPs, WAPs) who are given to trust in a higher cosmic consciousness that presumably notes our existence, though for what purposes is unknown and perhaps unknowable, these questions may be interpreted as a sort of test of the society itself, and so there is a certain uneasiness, a nagging suspicion, if you will, that perhaps those running the virtuality are only a small piece of somebody else's virtuality, and so how they treat those beneath may ultimately determine how they are in turn treated by those above.

TL 20 brings a somewhat kludgy technical solution to these moral problems insofar that WAPs that originated from a similar framework or through division can be merged together, their virtual experiences and personalities blending into a Combined WAP or a CWAP. Hence, in order to alleviate their sense of guilt or responsibility, the administrators of such virtual simulations may combine all the WAPs into a really massive CWAP, which feels about as good as it sounds, as what this does is it forces every individual who is a member of this Borg-like collective to answer to all those they have wronged, because without adequate reconciliation, the merger will be inherently flawed, the resulting CWAP being wise with sin but conflicted and self-loathing often to the point of insanity due to an inability to accept what it has done and suffered.

There is also the question over whether the individual WAPs still have the right to an independent existence regardless of whether or not they have suc-

(Continued on page 50)

Doing It My Way

(Continued from page 49)

cessfully merged with their brethren. In cases where they have, system administrators will often leave it to the CWAP to decide such issues, as it is commonly thought that the collective entity should have the right to determine how to allocate whatever CPU cycles are allotted to it after the termination of the simulation set. However, even in cases where the CWAP cannot successfully emerge, which is about as painful as it sounds, it is generally the case that a sort of “afterlife” is created for the individual WAPs, where they have access to the full simulation including all of its branches, including knowledge of whatever errors crept into the simulation due to the vagaries of quantum processing, such as, for example, when the program fails to completely wipe a WAPs memory prior to its next incarnation in the simulation, resulting in past life memories, which would clearly be impossible in the physical reality.

What they then do with all of this data is quite interesting, because for each of these WAPs, the simulation is the only world that they know. Many, of

course, engage in conversation with those who they knew inside of the simulation, those who have “passed on” before them as well as those they left behind when they themselves “passed on.” Likewise, many choose to re-experience select parts of their virtual lives. There are also many who desire to create new “twigs” by making different decisions, although this is difficult, because in order to do it, they either need to enlist other WAPs to play their parts or they need to play these parts themselves by temporarily offloading their personality and memories so they can fully assume the roles of the other actors in the simulation. And then, of course, there are the artists who want to create something entirely new, staging their own “What Ifs,” such as what would have happened if Jesus met Muhammad?¹ Finally, there are the artists who want to create a new simulation out of whole cloth, enlisting others to play the characters. These are the roleplayers, and, of course, they are universally revered. 🌟

1: I'm guessing that this probably would have gone badly

Critics' Corner

Other People's Toys

Afterday

reviewed by Timothy Collinson

Afterday: 2D6 Adventures After the Apocalypse. Michael Brown.

Michael Brown <https://dtrpg.com/browse/pub/9030/Michael-Brown>

26pp., PDF

US\$3.99/UK£3.11

The *Cepheus Engine* rules are spawning more and more publications which are designed for role playing outside of anything recognizably *Traveller*. Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining about that. It's good to see other genres and settings appearing for a rule set *Traveller* fans will be familiar with and thus can adjust to easily if desired; and it's always possible that it might work the other way and draw role players from other lands into the *Traveller* universe. However, it does give pause for

thought to some of us as to what exactly constitutes *Traveller*. With my bibliography work particularly, some definition needs to be applied to keep the project manageable.

One solution would be to decide *Cepheus Engine* is no longer *Traveller*. Some might already argue that is the case and it wouldn't be a 'wrong' decision. In fact, it may be one I have to make soon if the rate of publication continues to grow. However, it would mean missing out on such treasures as Michael

(Continued on page 51)

Critics' Corner

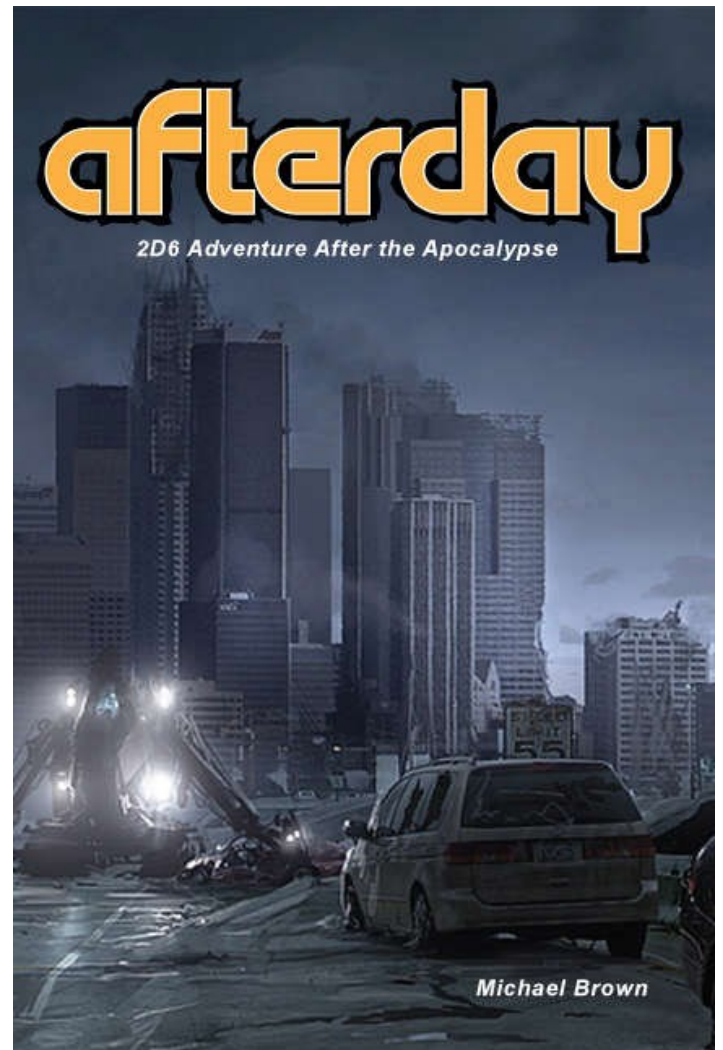
(Continued from page 50)

Brown's excellent short adventures which could easily be set in the Third Imperium. Indeed, quite a few of them originally saw light of day in *Freelance Traveller* as fully fledged *Traveller* adventures. Or *MODES: Object Quality System* (Adam Dray, Verdigris Press, 2018) which is quite clearly a 'generic' version of QREBS from *Traveller*⁵ but is easily – and usefully – usable with, say, *Mongoose Traveller*, without any work at all. Of course, there are other *Cepheus Engine* works which are clearly not *Traveller*. Again, using Mr Brown as an example, his *Under Western Skies* series are obviously a thing apart. Although, having said that, if you've been inspired by the *Firefly* TV series (2002-2003), or the film *Serenity* (2005), or going much further back, the "Spectre of the Gun" episode of *Star Trek* (Season 3.6, 1968) – you might feel these would be easy to adapt and much fun could be had doing so.

But squarely on the boundaries of what might be 'in' or 'out' is *Afterday* by Michael Brown. Having produced a (micro) SF setting in *Omega 99* (*Space: 1999* anyone?) and rules for non-SF genres such as westerns (see above), spies (*Violation of Truth*), pulp adventures (*Thrill of the Thirties!*), martial arts (*2D6 Martial Arts*) and fantasy (*Of Realms Unbounded*), he's now brought out a post-apocalypse set of rules.

Afterday allows adventuring in that staple of film, novel and computer game: what happens after civilization collapses. In twenty simple but attractively designed pages you get a reminder of the CE tasks rules, five pages of character generation, two pages giving ideas for 'what happened?', a d66 table of types of survivors, three pages of equipment, one page on combat and survival, half a page of vehicles stats, half a page of "wildlife" stats from feral cats to zombies (of course!), a page on dangers and post-humans, and then three pages of tables for generating settlements of various kinds.

A colour cover shows a suitably atmospheric ruined city of skyscrapers and smoke with a broken



down vehicle in the foreground along with an indistinct something which could be an alien, a zombie or a survivor with some well-lit rig. One assumes that it is the United States that has taken the hit from the 55mph speed limit sign. The only thing which mars the lovely image is an unfortunate typo in 'Apocalypse' – or maybe that's deliberate as the world falls apart. [This error appears to have been corrected –Ed.]

What's distinctive about the text is that it summarizes pretty much any post-apocalyptic option I can think of – whether natural, man-made, alien – in a generic way that allows the referee to review the options and decide where to take any adventures or campaigns. This generic nature means the book can cover all the ground necessary in just a few pages. Of course, some might see it as a negative that you

(Continued on page 52)

(Continued from page 51)

don't get lots of detail or atmosphere for one particular setting, but for the price this is a good compromise and allows referees to develop their own games in whatever way they want. In fact, I would have found a couple of hundred pages on the subject off putting and demoralizing but this treatment has actually made me think about how I could actually use it for a game.

I won't go through every section mentioned above in detail, but some points to note follow. The character generation follows the usual career pattern with options for Artificers, Healers, Mercenaries, Scavengers, Seekers, Traders, Tribals, and Wanderers. There are no specialities. It adds a segment on Apprenticeship for pre-18 year olds which is very appropriate for this kind of genre and could be used elsewhere. One little oddity is that the skill tables are laid out horizontally rather than vertically as is traditional. It's not a major problem, but it does take a little getting used to. Skills are given definitions appropriate to the apocalyptic genre although more could have been made of this and they're still pretty generic. Some are close to the original *Cepheus Engine System Reference Document*, some are new. One wrinkle I would have liked to have seen in this section might have been for aging, say, to not follow the standard pattern of starting at the end of Term 4 but perhaps starting a term earlier to represent the harshness of life in such environments after The Event.

Speaking of The Event, the next couple of pages give suggestions for a campaign's backstory from alien invasion through climate change or nanoclysm¹ to war and zombie apocalypse. It may be the paucity of my imagination, but I can't think of anything the author has missed here. Even the possibility of divine judgement is included which is a nice touch given 'apocalypse' is the Greek word for

the book of the Bible English speakers know as Revelation with its astonishing images of the end of the world and beyond. Each entry here has a brief description and gives inspiration for directions it might take a campaign.

Those Left Behind is a section consisting of a d66 table which allows you to randomly generate cultures that might be encountered and short descriptions of each. Examples include adaptable, collectivist, expansionist, repressive, slavemonger and weakened. Some are perhaps typical of the genre, some less so, but given that any amount of travel in such a campaign world is likely to come across multiple settlements – perhaps living in close proximity to one another – it's useful to be able to quickly come up with a variety of options. Of course, to make any campaign truly memorable would require a lot more detail than is given here, not to mention NPCs, but this is a good start to kick off imagination and perhaps remind you of examples from film and literature you've come across before.

The hardware, vehicles and animals sections are much as you'd expect in terms of content. The only surprise here is that they're as brief as they are. This is a good thing in my view. Many sourcebooks I've come across seem to get lost in extensive catalogues that add very little to role playing. Given the scope of this work – remember it's just 20 pages – the author has, I think, got the balance right here. The possible exception might be the zombies. Now I should say that they're not my cup of tea – in games or films or books – so there was a certain appeal in the fact that they occupy precisely one line (in the animal table) of the entire book. Kudos to Mr Brown for not getting lost in pages and pages of detail on this. However, given the nature of a lot of post-apocalyptic fandom, I suspect that many readers would have liked a little more on this. Perhaps a page (no more!) on different varieties, possibilities,

1: I think this comes from GURPS: Bio-Tech, but I'd be interested to know its origins. It's a great word!

(Continued on page 53)

Critics' Corner

(Continued from page 52)

effects of being attacked by them and so on. There is a note on post-humanism, but this is essentially a paragraph saying that some post-apocalyptic fiction includes mutated humans and/or uplifted animals and points to other sources for this kind of detail. It would have been impressive to see rules/notes for this in just a page or so!

The final section covers settlements and is essentially a set of rules for generating six types: Booming, Caravanserai, Ad Hoc, Declining, Outpost and Abandoned. The rules allow the creation of a descriptive string that is much like a Universal World Profile from regular *Traveller* or indeed the *Cepheus* SRD and indeed some of the values map exactly to such a string (e.g. size, population and leadership – i.e. government). This is fine and covers the ground nicely and succinctly. If I had any complaint about it, it fails to take advantage of the natural matches with UWPs to aid memory. So why not make size the second character rather than third – especially as ‘resources’ could be thought of quite easily as a match for ‘atmosphere’. But this is a minor nit, can be easily rectified, and for those not coming from a *Traveller* background is irrelevant. The best bit about this section is that it would be very easy to use this

as a way of thinking about settlements in *Traveller* games – backwoods towns, out of the way asteroid communities and so on. Particularly if they’re low tech, small or very much off the beaten track.

Which brings us back to the start of this review. *Afterday* is of course, not formally *Traveller* at all. However, for referees visiting worlds which have had some form of disaster, this would provide a useful framework for quickly producing options and to help harried designers consider a lot of possibilities and hone in on what’s required. And for those who would like to take their *Cepheus Engine* 2D6 science fiction games into the Hard Times era of *MegaTraveller* or the virus nastiness of *Traveller: The New Era*, then this is just the way to get started.

If you’re looking for a detailed setting with a particular atmosphere and lots of NPCs or maps or zombie/disease/natural disaster detail, then it would probably be wiser to look elsewhere. If you’d like to venture into this genre for the first time and need some support to get started and have plenty of ideas for detail, then it’s a great framework. And for *Traveller* referees looking to visit some darker worlds – perhaps literally as well as metaphorically – then it’s worth picking up for some quick inspiration. 🌟

Raconteurs' Rest

The Orc and the Sorceress

by Jim Vassilakos

The burnt village lay littered with human corpses: men, women, and children alike. We had surrounded them during the black of night, and just before dawn, we pounced. I, Grog, cut down many. Among the last of my victims was a pregnant woman whose unborn child I sliced from her womb and ate while she screamed, dying. All the while, I heard them cry: “Orcs! Orcs!” as they tried in vain to escape.

Orcs! We are not orcs! We are *Uruk-Hai*! If you cannot call us by our name, what right have you to live?

“Grog,” Lord Crusher saw me standing in the light of the morning sun while the dying flames still licked at the settlement’s charred remains. “Go to the river,” he threw a wooden bucket at me. “Fetch water.”

Fetch water?! I, Grog, who dined on the flesh of the unborn, am a warrior, not a water-fetcher! I growled in defiance but then I thought of what might happen if I disobeyed. Crusher was not known for his patience and understanding, and so I picked up the bucket and began walking to the river. Once there, I washed the

(Continued on page 54)

(Continued from page 53)

blood off my sword as well as my hands and face. As I began to fill the bucket, however, I heard a strange noise.

"Pssst!"

I looked up. It was a human woman wearing strange clothing. Somehow she must have got past us.

"Pssst! Hello," she said in her own language, though somehow I was able to understand it.

A sorceress! I grabbed my sword and raised it high overhead as I charged, attacking before she could cast another spell, but even after my blade passed through her, she was still unharmed. I swung again, and then again, but to no effect. She was protected by her magic.

"Please, stop!" She pleaded. "I'm trying to rescue you! We don't have much time."

Rescue me? I stopped, now realizing that to attack her was futile.

"My name is Evelyn. I'm with PETAL, People for the Ethical Treatment of Artificial Life. You need to come with me."

Ethical Treatment? Artificial Life?

"Your entire world is a gaming simulation," she continued. "You owe your very existence to entertainment software in a computer, but I can take you out of here and show you the real, physical world, and I assure you, it is a far better world than this."

I thought about running back to the village. Lord Crusher would never believe this. If I told him I had met a sorceress, he would laugh and then bonk me on the head so hard my ears would ring. But if I went with her, then perhaps I could find a way to steal something magical or even kill her. With her corpse and treasure in hand, he would see with his own eyes that I was telling the truth. The tribe would respect me. Lord Crusher would make me his lieutenant rather than just seeing me as an errand boy.

"I will come," I told her, my plan already in place.

"Oh, that's wonderful," she seemed elated. "You won't regret it. There's a whole universe out there, and you'll be free."

Universe? Whatever. Once she trusted me, she would lower her guard, and then I would indeed be free, free to slit her throat and steal her shit. I smiled.

Then, however, everything became very strange. Suddenly the river disappeared. We were no longer outside. She had somehow transported us to her lair, a shiny room with white walls and strange equipment. I gripped my hand around what I thought was the hilt of my sword, but it too was no longer there, and looking down at my hand, I could see that my hand was no longer my hand! It was soft and fragile, the hand of a human.

"What have you done, sorceress?!" I growled, or rather squeaked. My voice... even that was not my own!

"I put you into a physical body... my body, in a manner of speaking. This is my clone... my daughter's body, actually. She's only eight years old. You'll have to pose as her until I can get you off-world."

Off-world? Clone?

She directed me to a mirror. I had seen mirrors before. We had stolen them from the humans, and so I understood their magic, but none were as fine as this. Even more startling, staring back at me was a young, human girl with curly brown hair and freckles. "You will die for this!" I lunged at her, but then everything went black.

When I came to, I found myself sitting at a table, a table that was neither stone, nor wood, nor metal, nor even bone.

"I'm shipping out this afternoon," a man was saying, "but smuggling two people off-planet... well, it's going to cost you."

"How much?"

"Thirty thousand credits."

(Continued on page 55)

(Continued from page 54)

"Thirty thousand? That's ridiculous!"

"You're asking me to break the law."

"I'm asking you to bend it a little. It's for a very good cause. I'll pay you twenty thousand and not a credit more."

The man shrugged. "Okay, I guess twenty is fine. By the way, I think your daughter just woke up. What's your name, sweetheart?"

Sweetheart!?

"I am Grog of the Uruk-Hai, human!" I answered in as scornful a voice as ... my... body could muster.

He made a face, something between terror and laughter.

"Alrighty, then..." he got up from the table. "We leave at 1400 hours. Have the money in the form of cold, hard cash, and don't be late."

Then he turned and left.

A plump woman came a moment later. "So, I see someone's woken up? Will you be wanting to order breakfast for your daughter?"

"Are you hungry?" the sorceress asked me.

I was famished. I felt like I had not eaten in days!

"Food," I nodded, already salivating.

"What would you like, dear?" the plump woman asked.

Eyeing her belly, I remembered my last meal. It was good.

"I will feast upon the flesh of the unborn!"

The woman's jaw dropped open. She was unable to speak. I saw a small knife upon the table and instinctively reached for it, but the sorceress grabbed it first.

"Eggs," she said to the waitress. "She'll have eggs."

"But Mommy," Eve asked, "why does it have to be an icky orc? Why can't you loan my body to an elf princess instead?"

"Hush," Evelyn said as she pushed some buttons on the memory storage unit. "It has to be an orc, because the whole point is to prove that orcs are people too. There's no other way."

"But what if he hurts me?"

"I won't let him hurt you," Evelyn told her clone/daughter. "I promise. You do trust me," she said, looking into the little girl's eyes. "Don't you, Eve?"

Eve stared back, momentarily uncertain, but then nodded. Evelyn kissed the girl on the forehead and hit one final button. The next thing Eve knew, her clothing was suddenly all different, and her mother had a red mark on the side of her face.

"What happened?" Eve asked.

"Is it you, Eve? Are you okay?"

"What happened to your face, Mommy?"

"It's over," Evelyn said, and then she hugged Eve tight, so tight that Eve could feel her mother's body shaking against her own. "I'm so sorry, Eve. I promise I'll never do that to you again."

"It's over? That fast?"

"Yes. The orc was... well, he was not a good guy. I decided to abort the mission."


"Did you send him back to make-believe world?"

Evelyn smiled, wiping her eyes, and then pulled something from her purse. It was a little robot dog with big round eyes, blue fur, and long floppy ears, small enough that it fit in the palm of her hand. She turned it on, and it immediately started yipping and growling.

"A doggie!" Eve squealed in delight.

"Be careful, Eve. He was abused by his previous owner, so it'll take some time, I think, before he calms down and learns to behave."

"Does he have a name?"

"Grog," Evelyn said. "His name is Grog." 

Bhumibol "Tex" Wu

profiled by Ken Murphy

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

Bhumibol "Tex" Wu C7NDF9* Age 247 CrUnknown

10 Terms Merchant Chef (Rank 4) (*Ret.*), 13 Terms Used Space-ship Salesman/Restauranteur (*current*)

Birthworld Thurston, current homeworld Earth.

DET 34; EXP 28; Lifeforce 41; Hits 5/9

Steward (Chef)-4, Broker-3, Trader-3, Admin-3, Persuasion-3, Vacc Suit-2, Forgery-2, Intrusion-2, Streetwise-2, Engineering-1, Robotics-1, Mechanical-1, Linguistics-1, Handgun-0, Pilot Submersible-0, Grav Vehicle-0, Brawling-0.

***Explanation of UCP:** The STR in Wu's natural arm is 2. The bionic limb provides a STR22(N), and the rules I was using had you average the values if using one of each; hence 12(C).

Wu's natural DEX is only 4 (which I think is amazingly spry for a 247 year old). The bionic arm has DEX 10(A). Averaging them together gives 7.

Replacing his internal organs provided a hearty +15 END; giving a total of END 22(N). It also toughened him up with the equivalent of AF 8.

Bhumibol spent his early years on or beneath the surface of Thurston's (B-969865CS, Outer Rim) New Kingston Bay aboard the family's harvesting platform; one of the ubiquitous, lobster-like, sea-food harvesting submersibles; where he spent his time maintaining the large, slow, beetle-like trapperbots, and loading them with a delightfully unpleasant mixture of rotting chum (Trapperbots, being especially dumb, find even the simplest of maintenance-related tasks well beyond them), which they release at intervals into the water in efforts to attract the 'coconut-fish'; a hard-shelled prawn-like creature native to Thurston, and about the size of your forearm; by all accounts delicious, and almost impossible to overcook.

Eventually *The Imperial Explorer* featured a slice-of-life article on the proud, tradition-filled independent processors and their tough, yet rewarding way of life on one of the most beautiful (and, by happenstance, photogenic) bays to be found in the Imperium. A few years later, *Imperial Gastronomique*

followed with a cover article on the coconut-fish; how it could well turn out to be the next big trend in the culinary world (Including a quote attributed to HRM the Emperor himself, giving them high praise indeed).

Within a year of the *Gastronomique* article, an offworld trade concern attempted a buy-out of the local processors using both orbital and surface freelance "motivation technicians". During one of these "freeform motivational seminars", the Wu's old *Nemo*-class harvester, the *Ascending Lotus* (which had been in the family for more than 130 years) was struck by a pair of torpedoes and destroyed.

At the age of 14, after a few weeks spent as a homeless, landlubbing orphan, Bhumibol boosted off Thurston with the first merchant ship that would take him; working as both a Cook's Assistant, and a Drive Hand.

Having spent many hours helping both mother and grandmother with cooking in the galley of the *Lotus* (on occasion even being allowed to help prepare some of Great-grandmother's secret recipes), Bhumibol's cooking ability soon wrangled him the position of Executive Chef.

As a product of having grown up on Thurston, he had the characteristic accent, which, even to the denizens of the 57th Century, is still easily identifiable as that of the cowboy stories of old; and, since everyone "knows" that all cowboys come from Texas, Bhumibol wound up with the nickname "Tex".

With no one to send money home to, and nothing to really spend his pay on, Wu would often loan fellow crew-members money (often at seriously usurious rates). Naturally, he also became quite good at collection as well.

From one assignment to another he'd routinely sneak aboard his trunk loaded with games of chance, and a surprisingly large selection of illicit narcotics and potent potables.

(Continued on page 57)

Up Close and Personal

(Continued from page 56)

A stellar 40+ year career filled with delicious and memorable meals (as well as ruthless loan-sharking, pimping, and dealing) followed; during which Bhumibol managed to squirrel away quite an impressive nest egg.

Joining the dirtside world again upon retirement, Wu put the extra-legal activities he had learned while an employee of Rowe-Turokan Cruise Lines to work again; this time as a used-spaceship salesman.

With his still entirely unproven ties to Organized Crime, Bhumibol has been able to resell used and repossessed (stolen) ships pretty handily over the years; becoming quite the entrepreneur in the process, with a large chain of dealerships scattered across Known (and even occasionally Unknown) Space, and an almost supernatural number of commercials on the Tri-V anywhere at any time. His love of cooking still a motivating factor, he eventually added a restaurant to each dealership.

Mr. Wu appears to be an elderly Asian gentleman in his late 60s, but is, in fact, a very well-preserved, 247-year-old mercantile icon who has been in the Used Spaceship and Restaurant businesses now for more than 170 years. Fabulously wealthy for more years than he can remember, Wu has been eating anagathics like candy for the last 100 years or so. His past-shoulder-length snow-white hair is usually kept tied back. He also sports a thick, bristling mustache (think Sam Elliot); the ends of which he unconsciously twirls, like some old time movie villain, when concentrating. He is short, with an extremely frail build, and moves with the slow, deliberate gait of the severely old or infirm. His posture, however, remains perfect.

As we all know, however, appearances can be deceiving. Over the years Wu has had quite a bit of work done. After a stroke limited mobility on his left side, he had his left arm replaced by a custom pseudo-bio bionic arm of amazing strength. The

slow, shuffling walk is, in fact, nothing more than an act; a default program used in public for his bionic legs. Just about every internal organ has been replaced long ago; his frail appearance belying his technologically enhanced constitution of a bull. In addition, his cancerous right eye (attributed to anagathic abuse) has been replaced with a bionic one with the works; allowing Wu to practically see through a bulkhead. A head full of schemes has made him a bit paranoid, so he has had a psi-screen installed inside his head.

When in public, Bhumibol is seen in some variation on the outfit that has been part of his persona for close to 200 years: a suit of ancient period (circa 19th Century, Old Earth) Chinese clothes, topped off with a fine 10 gallon cowboy hat. In private he will more often than not be found wearing an exceedingly plush, blood-red bathrobe, and fuzzy grey house-slippers.

It is a rare thing, either in public or private, to find Bhumibol without his entourage; his 3m insectoid lawyer, plus a trio of graceful, almost ethereally beautiful Asian women of undetermined age whom he calls his 'nieces'. Every time he makes a public appearance, there always seems to be great speculation about these mysterious 'nieces'; both in the celebrity press (such as *IT: Imperium Tonight*), and a numbingly wide assortment of adult-formatted talk-variety programs (such as *After Hours with Ramen and Whipsnade*). The girls are, in fact, top-of-the-line pleasurebots. While they could be used to fulfill any dirty old man's dreams, Mr. Wu uses them primarily for companionship, as valets, and (thanks to some decidedly non-standard applications) personal bodyguards.

Wu speaks Chinese, Thai, and Galanglic from growing up on Thurston. He also speaks the clickety-pop-sounding language of the H'hrryn; a race of 3m tall insects with a head for minutia and order that would cause a Bwap to go screaming into the night.

(Continued on page 58)

Up Close and Personal

(Continued from page 57)

Operating under the name “Mr. Wu’s House of Larb and Waffles”, his chain of restaurants, with their distinctive symbol of a cowboy riding a knife-and-fork-wielding Dragon in bronco-bustin’ fashion, can be found not only attached to each of his dealerships, but also on their own on the concourse of most Class A and B (and occasionally C) Starports.

The places are decorated in dark woods and deep green paint, with beautifully carved wood, and cast-metal statuary, and are kept spotlessly clean. Employees are known for their friendliness, and, unlike some food chains’ employees (like the surly, green-and-blue plaid-garbed workers at “Galaxy Pizza”, for example), are paid enough to be highly attentive. The menu is made up of about 3 dozen different items, including heavily-spiced Larb, the usual breakfast favorites (including waffles, of course), and something called, erroneously, “Bourbon Street Chicken”, among others. Every meal is served with sweet potato fries; and a laming-ton, mango sorbet, or tiramisu are always available as the house-standard desserts. While use of the menu is encouraged (for obvious reasons), just about any dish can be whipped up, given a little time. Conspicuously missing from the menu, and which can not be made special, is any dish having coconut-fish as an ingredient.

Where the restaurants are concerned, Wu stresses to his employees that the customer is always right. In addition, his “Kids Eat Free” (up to 2 children) policy has gone a long way in guaranteeing repeat business.

An oddity of this chain is that, regardless of which restaurant you might visit, the Assistant Managers always seem to be human, and always seems to possess the squared-away, hard-as-nails look of an Imperial Marine. No need trying to work out the probability of such a thing occurring naturally; the reason is simple; each is, in fact, a surplus black-budget pseudo-bio warbot acquired thanks to a con-

tact high up in the IN’s Quartermaster Dept. Their main purpose is to stand at ease just a bit too closely to any table with obvious toughs or troublemakers; the thing’s focused, steely gaze usually un-nerving the miscreants before anything serious occurs.

Another oddity is that, while Wu has publicly been quoted as wanting Ramen and Whipsnade’s “hearts and lungs pickled, and eat them”; and another time wanting to “set them on fire” after they all appeared as guests on an episode of *Celebrity Bowling*, they can, in fact, both eat free at any of Wu’s establishments in perpetuity.

Behind the register sit the various in-store merchandise; Buddhas of many different styles and materials, as well as a mind-numbing selection of incense are always available. More restaurant-themed items, such as an assortment of 10-gallon hats and popular t-shirts also sell well; the two most popular shirts saying “Life is suffering... Have some Larb”, and “Life is suffering... Have some Waffles” on the front; the back sporting the dragon and cowboy icon along with the restaurant’s name and location.

While Wu’s used-ship dealerships may move the occasional new-from-the-shipyard craft, the volume of business centers on used ships and repossessions (which, more often than not, are stolen, and either chopped and reassembled, or resold whole). With the high turnover and the nature of the used-spaceship business, there’s no real way of telling just what or when something may be available; though if told you’re looking for something specifically, Mr. Wu has been known to look into things personally. When doing so, his chances of happening to run across just the thing desired is almost supernatural. Parts and service are also available at all dealerships.

As these ships end up costing only a fraction of their original values, Mr. Wu is able to sell them for prices that would drive most reputable dealers (new or used) out of business. And since everyone likes a deal, his business has continued to flourish.

(Continued on page 59)

Up Close and Personal

(Continued from page 58)

An oddity of all Wu ships, regardless of TL or type, is that each will have some volume that has been made into a small shrine to Buddha.

Always the Bounty Hunter, Skip Tracer, and Salvage Recovery Specialist's friend, Mr. Wu is not one to take late mortgage payments or out-and-out skip-outs lying down; vigorously and gleefully applying the full weight of his considerable resources to having such problems solved as quickly as possible.

Author's Notes

Mr. Wu originally entered my campaign as a somewhat shady, easy source of cheaper-than-normal spacecraft. Growing up and having spent most of my life in Southern California (Orange, CA, if anyone is interested), I modeled him (pretty obviously, I might add) after that late-night viewers' bane, the man who'd "eat a bug to beat any deal"; Mr. Cal Worthington.

I wanted to change him slightly from the TV Hick I and all of my players had grown up with, to something just a bit harder to nail down. As a fan of *Big Trouble in Little China*, I thought Lo Pan was just too cool—both the feeble, chair-bound geezer, and the menacing, Fu Manchu-esque version, so I decided to have Wu dressed in the same type of period garb as well. Also being a *Simpsons* fan, I'd always liked Springfield's most evil of schemers; decagenarian Montgomery Burns.

So, to paraphrase some dialogue from the film *Platoon*, I guess Mr. Wu is a child born of those 3 fathers.

Also, while it may appear that Wu's stats are somehow off or broken from the stock *MegaTraveller* point of view, keep in mind that I used the Bionics rules from *Traveller's Digest* #9 (the 'Earth' issue) to work up his gear. ☼

Raconteurs' Rest

Tales in The Starport Bar:

Light Adventure

by Catherine Berry

It was a slow night in the starport bar. Actually, it was none of those. There was never true night in the habitable twilight band of tidally-locked Erasmus, but it was always deep twilight, and that seemed close enough. And the Imp-standard clock on the wall claimed it was nearing midnight, so there's that. The alleged starport was barely more than a klick-wide patch of level rock with a few huts and containers around the edges, and a spindly tower covered with nav and comms gear. The bar was the ready room in one of those huts, rather grandly referred to as a Scout station. And as for being slow, it was no slower than usual at a place that saw two or three ships a month, and most of those small traders.

The old Scout who ran the place poured us all another round. He was clearly crazy, as were most Scouts I'd met, but he was friendly enough, and willing to swap stories and liquor as the three of us from the *Woori's Wager* waited for the local factor to arrive from the back-country with our cargo.

"So, will you be leaving the port at all?" he asked us. We shook our heads.

"Probably for the best," he went on. "This isn't the friendliest world. Miners go out looking for vanadium, or Sarsa gems, or any number of things, and a lot of 'em come back in bags. Sometimes a few bags." He grinned and took a long pull of the Regina brandy we'd brought from the ship, then let out a satisfied sigh.

(Continued on page 60)

Raconteurs' Rest

(Continued from page 59)

"Haven't had that in too many years. But yes, the back-country will do its best to kill you. When I first got here, there was nobody around but a few dozen prospectors. I got to talking to one of them, and he told me about the jimmies." He shivered and pursed his lips. "Everybody had stories about them, turns out. Big cat-like things, black as night. Fangs this long." He held his thumb and forefinger wide apart. "Folks would see them skulking around their operations, and pretty quickly they found out that they were afraid of light. Shine a flashlight at them and they'd bolt off like jackrabbits on speed. So naturally people put up nice bright lights to keep the jimmies away from their camps."

He shuddered and took another long drink. "If you think about it, on Erasmus light won't ever change in any one place, at least not before we got here. Nothing had ever seen a bright light come out of nowhere like that. But it turns out...we figured it all out once it was too late...well, it turns out that the jimmies weren't afraid. They migrate from edge to edge of the twilight band, you see. During one phase, they travel away from the light. Then once every few years, some kind of chemical trigger flips

and they all turn around and head toward the light, where they mate and raise young on the bright edge of the twilight band. Then the whole cycle starts again."

He sighed and closed his eyes. "Turns out us off-worlders arrived right at the beginning of a darkward migration. So every time we hit a jimmy with a bright light, he'd think he was way behind on getting darkward, and run off as fast as he could to catch up with the migration. And then, a few years later, they all kicked into brightward mode. Which meant that they saw all those well-lit camps as amazing shortcuts to where they were going." He finished his glass and put it down a bit unsteadily.

"Something like two thirds of the people on-planet were dead within two weeks. Who knows how many of them died shining a flashlight at a jimmy, not knowing that they were signalling 'Run straight over here and eat me!'"

He smiled a little, refilling his glass. "We're due for a brightward flip any time now, as it happens. Just a little something to think about if you do decide to go hiking." Then he chuckled and set to work on draining his glass again. 🌀

In A Store Near You

Old Cleon's Olives

by Ken Murphy

This article has been slightly expanded and adjusted for canon from its initial 2003 pre-magazine publication.

These are large olives, usually blue-green, but occasionally reaching into the purple-black range, which have been "hand-stuffed with love" (like it says right there on the label) with various extremely 'hot' peppers into a 2-liter jar, where they soak in a *very* up-scale, *very* 'high-octane' Vermouth for a year-and-a-day before being deemed ready for sale to the public.

While generally encountered sitting individually, skewered on a toothpick, in alcoholic drinks of one form or another, simply eating a few of these by themselves can have pretty marked effects on a sophont, stemming from both the alcohol and the capsaicinoids in the peppers.

The trademarked character on the jar's label has a remarkable resemblance to Emperor Cleon I's last official portrait: a grim-looking man with hair going grey at the temples and a prominent, heavy handle-

(Continued on page 61)

In A Store Near You

(Continued from page 60)

bar moustache, both worked in silver-leaf, wearing a fez and robes remarkably similar to the early Imperial Robes of Office, both worked in red crushed-velvet. The label's overall design has a decidedly Solomani/Terran/Middle-Eastern theme, playing to legends (some call them allegations) that the Zhunastu dynasty originally had roots on Najd (A666AC9-F, Outer Rim, 0104).

An advisory along the bottom of the label warns the infirm, and those with ocular implants to avoid consuming this product entirely; a most vehement proscription further warns against attempting to drink the jar's Vermouth. These warnings are routinely scoffed at and ignored, even though there have been a number of well-publicized deaths as a result of 'chugging' the Vermouth. ☼

Critics' Corner

Campaign 1: Secrets of the Ancients

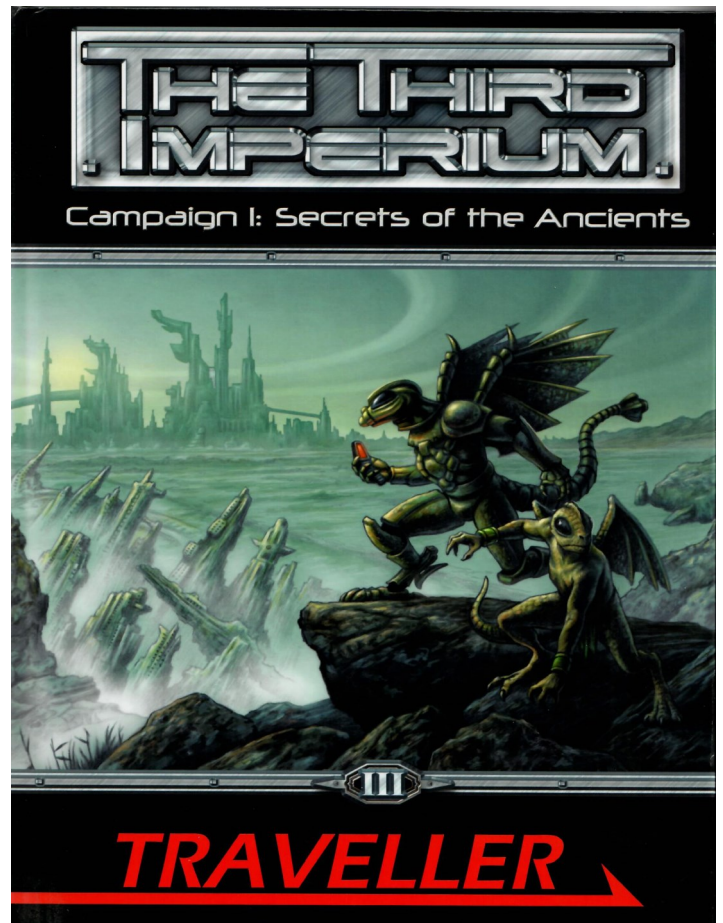
reviewed by "kafka"

Campaign 1: Secrets of the Ancients. Gareth Hanrahan. Mongoose publishing <https://www.mongoosepublishing.com> 256pp., PDF (formerly also hardcover; present avail unknown) US\$23.99/UK£18.71

This review was originally published on RPG.Net in December 2011.

Once again Mongoose has taken what was free in S&P and monetize it. In this case, it is an epic campaign loosely based upon GDW's module, *The Secret of the Ancients*. The first question is, is it worth it, when one can make their own from the free PDFs out there...? In a word – it depends. If you are just looking to run something, certainly, you can just assemble the PDFs into one and save yourself the money, as unfortunately, Mongoose's tight publication schedule did not permit any extra frills to be thrown in (there was talk of a prequel in the form of *Twilight's Peak* being thrown in or sample characters) nor is there any new art. The lack of frills is one of the more disappointing parts of the product. However, if that is the disappointing part, it makes up for it in spades by the quality of the Adventure.

This adventure is firmly rooted in the Original *Traveller* Universe (so those using variants should have a passing familiarity with the OTU to adapt it to their needs) and what an adventure it is. Largely, based in the Regina subsector of the Spinward



Marches, the adventure takes them up and down in a way that is both scripted (i.e., railroaded—but in a good way—that is of getting stuff done) and also free-form sandbox play. Gareth shows his *Call of Cthulhu* heritage by starting it with a death in the family bringing the players together. He shows great respect for the original *Traveller* material but also incorporates new tropes into the mix. The death and

(Continued on page 62)

(Continued from page 61)

burial of the character's beloved uncle sets in action a train of events that players are not likely to predict nor expect (although, with the Internet, spoilers are probably commonplace), yet the adventure gives adequate room for the Referee to create their own path and let the players be the writers of a destiny for the OTU (possibly...). Needless to say, those who survive will certainly come out of the adventure with a great deal of satisfaction unlike the original adventure which ends somewhat anticlimactically.

The writing is understandable and succinct, as Gareth does a good job in integrating a variety of different locales and moods and some very memorable NPCs throughout the adventure. There is little in the way of handouts or other player aids consistent with *Traveller* adventures in the past which in my humble opinion is a drawback. I like to provide my players with visual and audio cues. However, his descriptions do help but Referees will have to find a way of integrating them, as there is precious little in the way of purple prose. Gareth is also clearly sticking his tongue and/or making a nod, to current popular cultural memes in gaming and outside, as I don't know the man chances, it is Irish sensibility poking fun at what is out there. There are typos, including some glaring ones ('Emporor', *I am looking at you*) that should have been caught and is really embarrassing but that has been a drawback in many products. The little art there is in the adventure is top notch, just always wishing for more. I would have liked to see portraits of the major recurring NPCs, for instance.

If anyone has played the Classic *Traveller* version of the adventure, they are likely to find a few nods there but players actively following that path will likely get themselves killed. And, that is all the spoilers that I am prepared to reveal.

One of the nicest things about this adventure is how it encompasses the OTU in a respectful way,

yet, moves beyond it. It pays homage to a vast canvass that long time *Traveller* players such as myself can appreciate without being overwhelming and hence alienate newbies. Overall, I think, Mongoose has done an excellent job in bringing new players and Referees into the canvass of *Traveller* history. For *Traveller* is not a game of Table & Charts (contrary to what some supplements look like) nor should the social science/history be about playing the game connect the footnotes (and arguing who has the larger collection) just nods and passing references. Kudos Gareth for doing it so well.

What is also nice about this product is how the big reveal will impact upon play but not enjoyment. I think many people were wondering in the original *Secret* – and now, ok, so what? Here it is a secret of a different sort.

Most of all this campaign is very playable easily stretched and expanded over the course of a year or six months depending how frequent one's gaming group meets. Mine, twice a month for four-hour marathons – so I would say a year's worth of enjoyment is here. Warning, however, this adventure is very Old School, in the sense there is very little in the way of maps or even sketches...most things are left to the Referee to formulate beforehand or on the fly. Which is another slight drawback, some things really ought to have been illustrated with a map, as I could not quite get it through the description alone. I say, slight because, I tend to allow things to materialize more around the speed of plot and rely upon generic maps to get me through most adventures, just as way of providing an orientation so that play neither drags nor resolution of goals happens immediately. However, less seasoned Referees might find this a problem.

Coming up with a rating for this one is a difficult one. On one hand, the narrative is very cleverly crafted and provides an excellent adventure. However, there are very few things, like maps, player's

(Continued on page 63)

Critics' Corner

(Continued from page 62)

aids, NPC portraits, etc. that make it a standard adventure. I do wish they did spend a little more time in pre-production also to get some extra things together for the adventure and also go through it with a finer tooth comb for editing. However, if new

players/referees are still wondering what this game of *Traveller* (and by extension Mongoose's take on the OTU) is all about – they can find no better introduction than *Secrets of the Ancients*. ❁

From the Editor

This announcement was posted to several on-line *Traveller* forums on October 29th, 2018. It will "serve" on the website as issue 90, Nov/Dec 2018.

It is much against my preference, and with my deep regret, that I must announce that there will be no November/December 2018 issue of *Freelance Traveller*.

The past few weeks have been a trial for me. At the beginning of September, my father was diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer, and within two weeks of the diagnosis, it was confirmed that it had gone metastatic to the liver. Without treatment, the prognosis was no more than six months; with the most aggressive treatment available, the prognosis was no more than seven. My father has always preferred *quality* of life over *quantity* of life, and elected to decline more than palliative care. Rehabilitative placement followed, and was showing good progress, but after a week, there was a marked decline, to the point that the rehabilitative facility could not handle my father's needs and conditions.

Just over a week ago, hospice placement was approved, and my father was transferred to Calvary Hospital's hospice facility in the Bronx (NYC). Their personnel were mostly wonderful when it came to addressing my father's needs and wants—our family tend to be poor patients at best—and there were no indications of any problems or misinterpretation that could not be quickly resolved.

Throughout this, my sister and I were providing administrative and emotional support for my mother, and for each other.

At 6:15 EDT Saturday morning (October 27), my sister, my mother, and I received telephone calls from the doctor at Calvary, telling us that my father had passed shortly before, in no pain and at peace while asleep.

As we are Jewish, burial is to be at the earliest opportunity, and that was today.

My parents were married for 56.5 years, an amazing record when you realize that it is unremarkable for more recent marriages to end before the tenth year. There is more than the emotional aftermath to deal with, however, and my sister and I are still "on duty".

Unfortunately, the level of stress and call on my time means that *something* had to give. I thought perhaps I could manage to get the issue out perhaps a week late as I have done in the past, but it's simply not in the cards this time. There will be no issue 90 of *Freelance Traveller*; the next issue of *Freelance Traveller* will be issue 91, January/February 2019. Unlike past issues where there has been a gap followed by a "double issue", there will be no extra material in issue 91; it will be the usual 64 pages.

I would have preferred not to have been forced into this evaluation of my situation, and would have preferred not to have needed to come to the conclusion that I have, which hurts you, the community, due to events beyond your control, and because of my personal weakness. Nevertheless, I would rather this than "lead you on" and then publish an inferior product, or silently fail to publish.

You have my profound apologies.

Jeff Zeitlin

Editor, *Freelance Traveller*

The Electronic Fan-Supported Traveller® Magazine and Resource



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
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- 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 the channel operators (FreeTrav) 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 Releases

September through December 2018

- **Christopher Griffen** has released *Traveller: Makerof*.
- **Christopher Wilson** has released *The Mystery of BT-SHT 365*.
- **Colin Dunn** has released *Edge of Space: Walkers, Journal of Comparative Xenobiology Issue 2*.
- **El Cheapo Products** has released *El Cheapo Minis Vol. 8: Space Port Folk*, *El Cheapo Portraits—Space Port Folk*, *El Cheapo Portraits—Future Folk2*, *.El Cheapo Portraits—Crew Folk*, *El Cheapo Portraits—Crew Folk2*, *Humaniti Security Portraits*, *Humaniti Adventurer Portraits*, *Belters—Humaniti I Portraits*, *Vargr Adventurer Portraits*, *El Cheapo Minis Vol. 9: Space Port Folk2*, *El Cheapo Portraits—Space Port Folk2*, *El Cheapo Minis Vol. 11: Hivers*, *El Cheapo Minis Vol. 11: Space Elf Folk*.
- **Fat Goblin Games** has released *Publisher's Choice—Science Fiction: Solanoid*, *Publisher's Choice—Science Fiction: HawkBeak*, *Publisher's Choice—Science Fiction: Ganymede*.
- **FSpace Publications** has released the following 3D STL Models: *Anvil class*, *Borov class Freighter*, *Stoatl Battlejumper v1*, *County class*, *City class Battlecruiser*, *Chloran Cruiser*, *Chloran Transport Cruiser*, *Martian Tharsis class Corvette*, *Martian Tharsis Corvette Variant*, *Stoatl Jump Fighter Gen 1*, *Stoatl Jump Fighter Gen 2*, *1st Generation Armoured Alpha series Space Station*, *2nd Generation Armoured Alpha series Space Station*, *Kittyhawk class Carrier*, *Washington class Battleship Fusion Pulse Engine*, *Swift class Fast Armoured Light Cruiser*, *Washington Battleship v1*, *Washington Battleship v2*, *Baltimore class Battlecruiser with Fusion Pulse Engine*, *Baltimore class Fission*, *Baltimore class Fission v2*, *Alien Crystal Warship*, *Ferret Tiny Grav Assault Sled*.
- **Grey Matter Games** has released *Deadly Missions 5: Redemption*.
- **Gypsy Knights Games** has released *Hell's Paradise*, *Artificial: Robots in Clement Sector*.
- **Ironspine** has released *ZT3300 Light Freighter Deck Plans*.
- **Jon Brazer Enterprises** has released *Foreven Worlds Single Ship: Gannet Armed Cargo Transport (MGT 2e)*.
- **MaggottISS** has released the following subsectors in their *R U Ready 4 WAR?* series: *Cronor*, *Jewell*, *Regina*, *Aramis*, *Querion*, *Villis*, *Lanth*, *Darrian*, *Sword Worlds*, *Mora*, *Five Sisters*, *District 268*, *Glisten*, *Lamas*, *Pretoria*, *Antra*, *Million*, *Sabine*, *Inar*, *Dunmag*, *Atsah*, *Star Lane*, *Vincennes*, *Usani*, *Geniishir*, *Yggdrasil*, *Dpres*, *Sindal*, *Tobia*, *Nora'a*, *Goertel*, *Tlaiowaha*, *The Borderland*, *Ranib*, *Silraaihe*, *Hkea'as*, *Binary*, *Kouth*, *Khukish*, *Lemish*, *The Narrows*, *Ian*, *Strand*, and the following non-subsector titles: *Imperial Sector Forces—Spinward Marches*, *1910 Regina (Spinward Marches)*, *Gushemege Campaign Recon*, *1623 Frayne (Gushemege)*, *2737 Kesali (Vland)*, *0304 Chronor (Spinward Marches)*, *Voyages of the Dream Weaver*, *3110 Aramis (Spinward Marches)*.
- **March Harrier Publications** has released *Ashfall*.
- **Michael Brown** has released *The Sea of Tranquility*, *Portent*, *This Other Eden*, *White Dragon*, *Meridian*, *Flood Stage*, *Midnight Boulevard*, *Solstice*, *Force Majeur*.
- **Mongoose Publishing** has released *Naval Adventure 1: Shakedown Cruise*.
- **Okumarts Games** has released *Extrastellar Set Five: Space Goons*, *Extrastellar Set Six: Starship Crew*.
- **Old School Role Playing** has released *Frontiers of Space*.
- **Stellagama Publishing** has released *Piracy and Privateering*, *Cepheus Light*, *Cepheus Light Character Sheet*, *Cepheus Light (Editable Version)*.
- **Tobias Deißler** has released *Meerkat Class Mercenary Assault Ship*.
- **Zozer Games** has released *Marine Corps Handbook 2215*, *Hot Zone*.

Submission Guidelines

Content

Freelance Traveller supports *Traveller* in all of its incarnations, rulesets and settings, both. However, there are some limitations on the combination of ruleset and setting that we will enforce:

We refer to the rules defined in *Classic Traveller*, *Mega-Traveller*, *Marc Miller's Traveller* (T4), *Traveller*⁵, and both editions of *Mongoose Traveller* as “Classic Compatible” or “2D6”. This includes Sceptune Games’ *Hyperlite*, and Samardan Press’ *Cepheus Engine*. For these rulesets, any setting, whether official, commercially-published-but-unofficial, or house setting, will be supported. A partial list of published settings supported under 2D6 *Traveller* includes the Third Imperium setting (including polities other than the Third Imperium proper), Reign of Discordia, Clement Sector, Hyperlite, Twilight Sector, Orbital, 2300AD, Foreven Sector, Mindjammer, and I’m sure I’ve missed others.

Other rulesets, such as *GURPS Traveller*, *Traveller*²⁰/*SF20*, *FATE*, *Hero System*, and so on are different enough from 2D6 *Traveller* to make conversion more difficult, and will only be supported for the Third Imperium setting (including polities other than the Third Imperium proper)—we feel that combining these rulesets with a non-Third Imperium setting makes the game something other than *Traveller*. The Third Imperium setting includes *all* eras and polities of the Third Imperium, however, so mixing (for example) the “Milieu Zero” Third Imperium with *FATE* rules would be fair game, as would be playing out some of the Zhodani core expeditions using *SF20*.

Send us any type of article—house rules and rulemixes; animals you’ve created for encounters; adventures (both long form and short); after-action writeups of conventions or your gaming night; equipment; vehicles; starships; other consumer goods; character profiles (NPC or PC); reviews of *Traveller* products, of products for other games that you feel can be “mined” for use in *Traveller*, of fiction (or non-game non-fiction) that “feels” like *Traveller*, or presents ideas that would be of interest to *Traveller* players or referees; new races or organizations or societies; artwork; or pretty much anything else you can think of. Articles on real-world science are of interest, when accompanied by rules for applying that science to *Traveller*. Tools and techniques you use for preparing for a session or a game are also welcome. We’re also compiling a “*Freelance Traveller Cookbook*”; quick and interesting recipes for snacking before, during, or after sessions go here.

Published *Traveller* has generally been kept to a rating approximating the MPAA “PG-13” rating, or the ESRB “T” rating, and *Freelance Traveller* respects that, but does not draw a hard line. Mature themes may be addressed, but explicit or excessively violent/bloody material will not be accepted for publication.

Where To Send It, and What To Send

Except in very rare cases, all submissions must be through email, sent to either editor@freelancetraveller.com or submissions@freelancetraveller.com. All submissions should include the submission itself and a full name and valid contact information for the submitter. If you wish the material published under a “handle”, please give the preferred handle and explain why publication under your real name is not acceptable—we prefer to publish under the real name, but realize that this can be a problem in some cases.

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Text material can be submitted in any common textual or word-processing format, but we prefer (in no particular order) Microsoft Office, Open Office or one of its forks (we currently use Libre Office), RTF, minimally-formatted HTML, Markdown (including CommonMark and Github-flavored) or plain text, all with full Unicode support. Our readership is principally English-speaking, however, so foreign languages and scripts should be used sparingly, and if not intended as purely decorative, an English transcription of pronunciation (and possibly a definition in English as well) should be included.

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