Ten Years of
Freelance Traveller

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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From the Editor

If someone had asked me, back in 2009 when I first floated the idea of *Freelance Traveller* as a PDF magazine instead of just a website, how long I expected it to last, I would have said… well, I can't tell you *now* what I would have said *then*; I no longer have that mindset. What I *can* tell you is that I didn't expect it to last *ten years*, especially not at 300-odd pages per year.

That, however, is exactly what *Freelance Traveller* has achieved with the release of this issue: Ten years of publication. Ten years of *fan support*. If anyone tries to tell you that *Traveller* is dead or dying, you can point to *your support* for this magazine and call «*bovine fecal production*» on them.

I have said that I will keep publishing *Freelance Traveller* until it becomes evident that the *Traveller* community no longer supports it, or it stops being fun to do. At the moment, neither appears to be something that may happen any time soon, so if you want to look forward to another ten years, go for it.

And you can always help to increase the likelihood of that next ten years coming to pass, by writing for us—there isn't a single section that wouldn't benefit from some fan love. ✪

CD-ROM: Apocrypha II—Judges' Guild *et alia*

reviewed by Jeff Zeitlin

CD-ROM: Apocrypha II—Judges' Guild and other licensees.
Various authors.
Far Future Enterprises http://farfuture.net
PDF and other files on CD-ROM, ~685MB
US$35.00.

As part of their efforts to make electronic versions of all historical *Traveller* material available, FarFuture Enterprises has released this collection of licensed third-party material for Classic *Traveller* and *MegaTraveller*, from Judges' Guild and other publishers. Two other discs of Apocrypha, from other historical licensees, are available separately, and one, containing material from FASA and Gamelords, was reviewed in the March/April 2016 issue.

The vast majority of this disc is in fact the Judges' Guild material; other publishers represented on this disc include Paranoia Press, Games Workshop (before Warhammer), an early Canadian fanzine called Third Imperium, and a dozen articles that appeared in various gaming-related publications. As with most of the early third-party products, the quality is uneven – there are definitely some gems in the collection, but there are also clinkers alongside.

Many, but not all, of these items are text-behind-image PDFs; in general, if the text was clear enough to successfully put through OCR, it has been; as I did not make any effort to actually copy-paste text, I can't say whether the OCR was accurate, or whether the text was corrected after the OCR process. Production values are uneven; some material comes near to what might be accepted as 'professional' quality today, while other material looks like it might have been run off on a mechanical office printer (common at the time) and then photocopied.

You get three Sector Surveys (Spinward Marches, Solomani Rim, Dark Nebula) by Micki
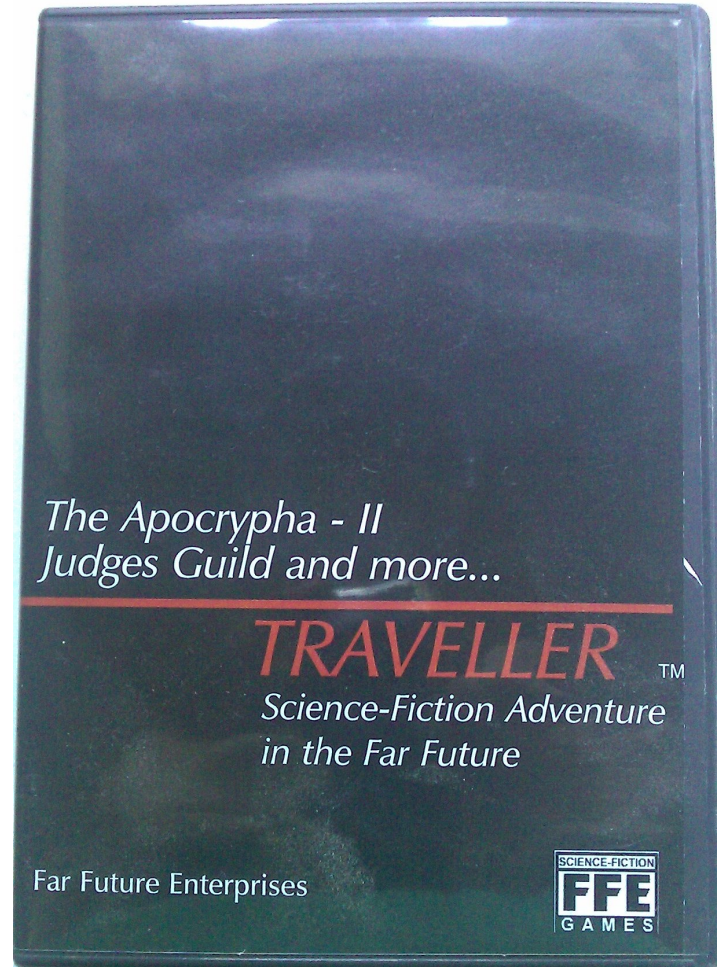
Kaufman; each of these is a 1000+-page document with standard subsector listings and maps, followed by a "description" (really a 'canned' textual interpretation of the UWP) and animal encounter tables for each and every world in the respective sectors. It is acknowledged in the preface that this is essentially computer generated; obvious signs of this are the lack of names for the subsectors (they're called "Subsector One" through "Subsector Sixteen", although the page with the list of worlds in GAL/SEC format does give the actual subsector names) and the use of fixed-pitch fonts (Courier) in places where proportional fonts could have been used without causing formatting problems. These are documents that I wouldn't think are 'wastes' if I saw them on DTRPG, but they could have been improved with a little hand-editing. Nevertheless, they're potentially useful works for a referee who needs or prefers "grab-and-go" data to generating it on-the-fly or custom prepping.

The Games Workshop material is limited to four items (two clunkers, one high-quality product, and a historical document): (1) a book of ship designs, done to a high standard of quality – except for some minor choices of title font and the imposition of margin decoration, one might easily believe this to have been done by GDW; (2) "Personal Data Files", which is nothing but the cover from the original product, displaying (most of) a filled-out personal data forms; the actual product was actually a package of 50 blank forms. It would have been nice to have a PDF version of a blank form included, as such a form would be useful even with modern versions of *Traveller*; (3) the cover for GW's "Ship Layout Sheets", which was really just graph paper ruled in half-inch squares; if you used these as the standard 1.5m grid for *Traveller* starship plans, you'd end up with workable playmats for 15mm miniatures. Of course, with today's computer and printer capabilities, one can take a high-resolution deckplan and print it to scale for any size miniature desired – the utility of this product in its original form was simply that it was a grid size that wasn't normally available in off-the-shelf graph paper; (4) GW's Writers' Guidelines, a three-page document describing the sort of material that GW would (or would not) accept and how to submit it. It is of principally historical interest, although it wouldn't be unreasonable to use it as a starting point (with suitable company, location, etc., substitutions) for writing guidelines for any version of *Traveller*, even today.

The Paranoia Press material was more uniform in quality, close to if not matching the contemporary GDW material. This disc contains three advanced character generation guides (*Scouts and Assassins*, *Merchants and Merchandise*, and *SORAG*) and two sectors (Vanguard Reaches and The Beyond). S&A and M&M could easily have been used to replace Book 6 and Book 7 from Classic *Traveller,* and *SORAG* was a credible attempt at differentiating the

Zhodani from the Imperium, before we really knew that Zhodani society and governance was strongly influenced by psionics. Both sectors were well-fleshed-out, though I felt that there were problems with this version of The Beyond; either sector could be put to good use for a campaign setting. This material isn't 'canonical' (hence the disc title, 'Apocrypha', but that doesn't detract from its quality.

The Third Imperium fanzine was published out of Vancouver BC, and followed in the same footsteps of the original JTAS that the JTAS section of early Challenge issues, later resurrections of JTAS, and eventually the magazine version of *Freelance Traveller* all did. Given the commonly-available production ability of the time, it was a credible job for a fan operation, with hand-drawn art and text printed on a mechanical printer ('daisy-wheel', not cheap dot matrix). Each issue had a selection of articles covering all aspects of *Traveller*, and ran about 22 pages (8½ × 11) per quarterly issue. There are 11 issues on this disc, representing just shy of 3 years of publication, in an era where other fanzines generally seemed to last a year or less.

Traveller miniatures weren't unknown, and there are guides to those produced by Grenadier, Citadel, and Martian Metals, plus the actual Steve Jackson Games *Cardboard Heros* (pictures printed on cardstock to cut out and fold into stand-up "miniatures"; one could still use the concept today, and with appropriate scaling, even "resurrect" these). Along with the Grenadier guide, you get copies of the scenarios that Grenadier included with their miniatures sets, and their adventure, "Disappearance on Aramat", which is still occasionally mentioned with respect even all these years later.

There were magazines that covered RPGs as a hobby, without necessarily being 'house organs' or having a specialty in choice of game. *Traveller* articles would occasionally appear in them, and eleven

of the best are included here, including some by familiar names such as Marc W. Miller and Frank Chadwick. There are also three expanded character generation processes by Bill Paley (a name which I could wish had better recognition now that I've seen his work) covering two aspects of the mercenary career that were mentioned, perhaps as throwaway lines, in Book 4, but never developed: Nautical Forces Command, or "Wet Navy", and Air and Close Orbit Control Command. The latter was eventually covered canonically in *MegaTraveller*, as *COACC* (swapping "Close Orbit" and "Air(space)"), but Bill's article predates even Classic *High Guard*. Bill also generated a career path for the "Other" career, using it to cover Spies, Civil Servants, Criminals, and Smugglers, all in advance of later canonical material. It would have been a shame if this material had been forever lost; while I can't say that this material alone makes the CD-ROM worth the price, it definitely adds value. You also get Patrick Larkin's take on the Merchant career (in advance of *Book 7:Merchant Prince*), Robert Camino's adventure, "Canard", an adventure, "Exonidas Spaceport", by Jeff Swycaffer (perhaps better known by his full name, Jefferson P. Swycaffer, and as the author of several *Traveller*-based SF novels reviewed by Shannon Appelcline as part of his Fifth Imperium column). All of these were quality articles, and may well have served to 'spread the gospel' of *Traveller* in those early days. Again, it's good that these have been preserved for us today.

Whew! That's a lot of stuff right there, and we haven't even done more than mention the centerpiece: the material from Judges' Guild. Thirty-four files make up the bulk of this disk, covering the JG corpus.

You get all four sectors that JG put out – Ley, Crucis Margin, Glimmerdrift Reaches, and Maranantha-Alkahest (M-A sector was renamed Gateway sector in later canon-compatible material).

These products came with a large map of the sector (roughly 15×22 if you assume the scan at 6700×2400 represents the size at 300dpi); subsector maps and listings for each sector, in the familiar landscape format with the map on one side and the world listing on the other; encounter tables for various environments, including deep space and circumplanetary space, along with capsule descriptions of the encounter (rather than just a single-line description like "pouncer, armored as jack, wound/weapons as dagger, A4F2S1"); world maps for a few of the worlds (in the familiar unfolded-icosahedron format); and an index, listing all of the worlds in the sector and their coordinates.

JG's *Referee Screen for Traveller* was originally black-on-green; if the banner on the first page of the PDF is any indication, it would have been … uncomfortable … to read. The PDF is black on white, and could be printed on off-white paper to make it less glaring, but still easier to read than the original. There were four pages each for the players and the referee, and when assembled, the referee and players were peering at each other over an 11×34 screen.

The *Traveller Logbook* contained tables for character generation, including such things beyond the regular UCP and career progression as habits, the reason for adventuring, elements of cultural background,… all in advance of DGP's *World Builder's Handbook*. You also get overviews of starship operations, various tables that may come in useful at various times in an adventure, and forms that you can print out and use as part of your character record or ship record. This document is provided in both 'upright' and 'rotated' form; at the time this CD was released, it wasn't common for PDF readers to allow you to rotate the view, so many of the pages in the 'upright' form will be sideways. The 'rotated' form ensures that all of the pages are oriented for proper readability without 'kitzeling' your PDF reader.

The *Astrogators' Chartbook* is a book of blank forms and instructions – really, guidelines – for using them to create maps. It was a good idea in its time, but you can get essentially the same thing with much better production quality today. The *Navigators' Starcharts* is essentially the same thing for sector and subsector mapping. Again, good for their time, but you can get better, and even computer-generated, today.

Fifty Starbases is a 'junior sourcebook' for creating starports; it also contains example maps. As with most *Traveller*, and especially early *Traveller* material, it is fundamentally table-driven, with additional notes providing ideas and guidelines. The expectations seem to be somewhat different from those of contemporary canon, but not irreconcilably so.

Starships and Spacecraft gives you the JG version of a starship stat sheet, plus line drawings and textual descriptions. Their early ship esthetic was significantly different from the designs that became iconic later; one can see a marked preference for squared-off boxy designs maximizing space-utilization (or minimizing wasted space, if you prefer). It's surprising how little has changed in nearly 40 years…

The Lazer Tank was intended to be cut out and used with 15mm miniatures for resolving armored combat. One can still use it this way, but you'll likely want to print it on cardstock for a bit of extra durability.

Ten adventures round out the set, ranging from those that are still named with respect, like *Dra'k'ne Station* and *Darthanon Queen*, to those that were forgotten but probably deserved better, like the Border Prowler trio, to those that were forgotten with good reason, like *Waspwinter*.

Overall, a good collection and a good complement to the Classic *Traveller* CD-ROM. Well worth the price, especially if you already have (or if you purchase this with) the Classic *Traveller* and the other two Apocrypha CDs. ✿

Doing It My Way

Navigation in Traveller

by Dan Corrin

This series will explore a number of concepts with navigation in *Traveller*. The rules are often unclear and the science and/or reasoning behind them not ideal. In your own *Traveller* universe you can of course ignore or alter these as you see fit. The previous article in this series covered the 100-diameter limit; future planned topics are Jump masking and courses, jumping without a survey, and exploratory navigation.

Part 2: Running vs Standing Jumps

Once a starship is out past the 100-Diameter limit (or other declared safe jump limit), the ship can jump to the next star system. Many sources indicate (or by default give transit times appropriate for) the ship accelerating out half-way and then decelerating for the remainder leaving the ship with the same velocity as it left the planet. This ubiquitous formula for in-system transport is given by $t = 2\sqrt{(d/a)}$ where t is time in seconds, d is distance (in meters or kilometers) to travel and a is acceleration in the same units per second per second. E.g. m/s^2 or km/s^2. A 1G ship has a $9.8 m/s^2$ acceleration (though it's not uncommon to fiat this to $10 m/s^2$ to simplify calculations). The formula for constant acceleration is $t = \sqrt{(2d/a)}$; this gets to the jump point in 70% of the time, but leaves the ship with a high velocity entering jump-space.

A jump made after constant acceleration is defined as a "Running Jump". The default jump is a

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"Standing Jump", though the only place where these jumps are defined is in *GURPS Traveller* which actually defines a Standing Jump as having zero velocity with respect to the destination star system. This means that it is almost certainly a Running Jump in the origin star system.

Standing Jumps take longer to position for, but are supposed to be "safer" than running jumps "In most cases, this is the safest type of jump, since it minimizes the possibility of colliding with an unanticipated particle of deep-space debris". This article will discuss this trade-off.

We are assuming that jumping maintains the ship's velocity, otherwise there are a lot of conservation laws that need to be adjusted – but if your preference is arriving in the destination system at the same speed as the target then one can use hand-wavium and say that the energy used in jumpspace adjusts for velocities. In this case a Running Jump would always be best saving time with no risk. The only outstanding question is what target is the velocity adjusted to? If one breaks out of jump due to hitting the "100D" limit of an object then that is the object the velocity is adjusted to, and is great because if the ship intersects with a random deep-space object then there cannot be a collision. What happens if the ship is programmed to come out of jump more than 100D from any object? Does it assume the velocity of the closest? The Source?

When we discuss velocity (or speed + direction) there needs to be a frame of reference that is what the object is measured moving relative to. Unfortunately there is no universal frame of reference, as Einstein demonstrated. So a Standing Jump with zero velocity relative to the planet that the ship departed from, is likely moving at 20-50 km/s relative to the Star. Using the star as a frame of reference is likely best as most object rotate around it. Stars, however, are moving on average 250 km/s rotating around the galactic super-massive black hole. Comparing them individually they average a 100 km/s velocity relative to each other. (There are some stars with significantly different relative velocities such as Kapteyn's star at 293 km/s relative to Sol, or hyper-velocity stars such as US 708 at 1200 km/s). The ship in the destination star system would likely want to use that star as its frame of reference, so when jumping into a new Star system there is 50-150 km/s change in the velocity due to the differences in the stars' velocities.

So when a ship precipitates out of jumpspace its velocity (relative to the destination star) will be determined by (a) the ship's velocity relative to the planet, (b) the planet's velocity relative to the origin star, and (c) the destination star's velocity relative to the origin star. This needs to be compared to the velocity of the destination planet relative to the destination star. If a ship decides to perform a jump from zero speed in relation to the origin planet, there is no way to adjust the relative velocity to the destination planet. This could leave the ship travelling tens or hundreds of km/s in a direction away from the planet, so not only does it need to traverse the distance to the planet, but might need to shed velocity.

The ship could be lucky and have a velocity towards the planet, but why not plan for that? A running jump would be made in the correct direction to counter-act any undesired velocity. Let's consider an example. Two stars travelling at 100km/s relative to each other, and two planets at opposite ends of their orbits travelling at 30km/s:

Because the destination star's velocity is to the right in the diagram (next page, top), the ship will have a velocity to left relative to the destination star. As the planets are moving in opposite directions as well, the ship will be moving away from the planet at 60 km/s, for a net vector of 117 km/s away from the planet (and 104 km/s away from the star). In this example the ship will need to accelerate for 3.3 hours at 1G to come to rest relative to the planet,

(Continued from page 6)

30 km/s
100 km/s
1 parsec
Jump
30 km/s
Source System
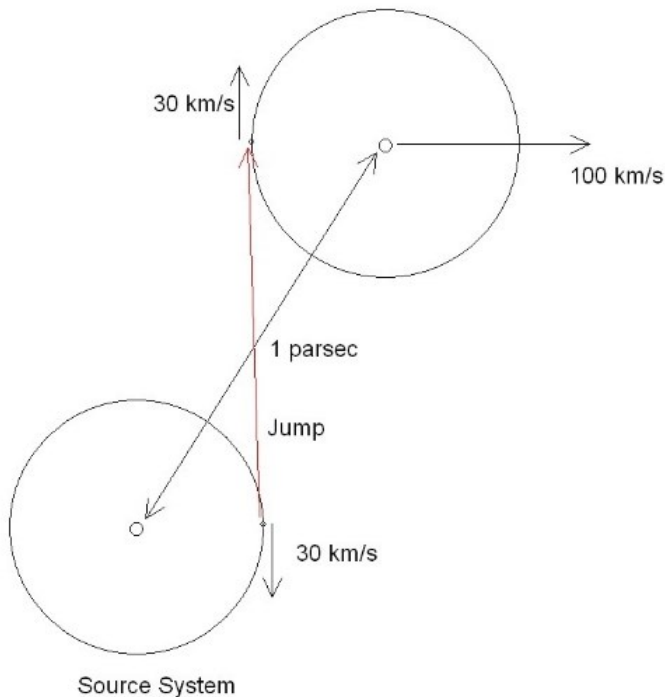
and then start its trip well outside of the 100D distance. For a size 8 medium iron planet the 1,287,934 km journey to the jump point would take 6.4 hours to arrive at rest relative to the planet. The ship could have taken 4.5 hours and ended up with a velocity of 159 km/s relative to the planet. If chosen in the correct direction that velocity is more than enough to negate the relative motions of all the bodies involved and give the ship a 42 km/s velocity towards the planet to get to the destination even quicker. (In a later article – jump masking, it will be shown that this option is not always available).

We have shown large savings for making the running jump. What makes the jump less safe? Travel out from the planet to the jump point and from the jump point to the destination planet will have a risk of encountering a small rock likely in some sort of orbit around the star. The escape velocity of the Sun near Earth is 42.1 km/s, so a random object will likely be less than that, so a ship making a running jump at 100-200 km/s *vs* a standing jump at 30 km/s relative to the star might suffer some more damage

but then again at the turn-over point the ship would be travelling at 113 km/s relative to the planet. Ships have armour for just such a thing as any in-system travel is subject to micro-meteoroids.

Let's consider encountering an object mid-jump and precipitating out. There are three places where this could happen: In the source system, in deep space, and at the destination system. At the destination system the velocity after jump is supposed to be negating as much of the relative velocity as possible, so the vector will be small, and likely in the same direction as the object giving ample time to manoeuver away from a collision. Colliding with an object in (say) the Oort cloud in the destination system or a deep-space object will effectively have a random vector in relation to the ship. The ship's velocity vector is not the same as the trajectory to the destination system, so encountering a deep space object could have the ship moving just as likely away from the object as towards it. The ship with the Standing Jump has a velocity of zero relative to the origin planet which is billions of km away. The adding of an extra 160 km/s might be worse for the encounter or better, it is random. With two essentially random vectors the chance that they are both heading towards each other is vanishingly small, but there will still likely be some component of the vector bringing them towards each other.

Let's look at an example: a 100-ton scout ship encounters an object in deep space. It needs to outmass the ship, which would mass 1,500,000 kg or so. This means that the 100D limit for such an object is 170m (using the rules from last issue), or 675m using the old rules. If the ship is travelling at only 30km/s towards the object then there is about 6ms to react. If it is travelling at 190 km/s then 1ms. Not something that a human could react to. There is only about a 2% chance that both vectors are in the same 45° cone pointing towards each other, so at least 75% of the speed is in a tangential direction. The object will

Doing It My Way

likely move about 120m in the time it takes for the ship to close, even at half that movement a scout ship is only 24m wide and a collision will likely not occur.

So there is no significant safety concern adding a larger random vector to another random vector to avoid intersecting a different random vector where the object is 1/100th the size of the encounter area. It can still happen, but not predictably.

The last consideration is another ship at the 100D jump point making a jump. If the ship is travelling to or from a different system then the optimal jump location will be completely different. If the ship is going to the same system, then it would have been observed making the jump just ahead of the ship, but even then it would have moved away – time in jump is not a constant. Lastly is a ship on a reciprocal course, e.g. it is about to leave the destination system for the system where the players ship is. As the vectors are the inverse, the ship will be (with the exception of one component) also opposite so almost zero chance of collision.

Conclusion: No commercial ship is going to take extra time to travel on the very slim risk involved in a Running Jump. So take 30% off the given travel times to jump points. Military ships flying in formation are a likely exception.   ✪

Raconteurs' Rest

After-Action Report:
TravellerCON/USA 2019

by Jeff Zeitlin

Getting There and Settling In

The schedule on the Con website showed that pick-up games were going to be possible as early as 8:00 Friday morning, but leaving at 4:00 simply wasn't in the cards for me. On the other hand, I figured I could leave earlier than I had in previous years, and be there in plenty of time to have lunch and be available for the 13:00 session of pickup games. So, I was breakfasted and on the road before 7:00, and arrived before 11:00.

This year, we were at a new site; the cost at last year's site was simply getting out of hand, and the quality of the accommodations was Not Improving. The Holiday Inn Morgantown is (a) much nicer than the old site, and (b) a bit more than a half-hour closer to me. The directions were even the same up until I reached Reading, PA, where I was directed to US422 and I-176 to Morgantown instead of staying on US222 to Lancaster. As a result, I had no trouble finding the site. The trip was pretty standard, based on past TravellerCONs – it doesn't matter what time of day you travel; the Cross Bronx Expressway going toward the George Washington Bridge is going to be slow.

Once there and checked in – I was lucky; they had a room ready for me even though check-in wasn't really open until 15:00 – I helped MF (I've referred to her as MH in previous AARs, but she's finally gotten all the paperwork straightened out and changed her name) and KF get things set up, and then ran across the parking lot for lunch at McDonald's. A double-Filet-o-Fish and a side salad later, back to the site, where I took over an unoccupied table and asked a few people to playtest a game I'd worked up. I got some good feedback on it; I'm looking into decent production (rather than the put-together-from-crafts-supplies prototypes I brought to the Con). I also arranged to take over a table for

the Saturday afternoon session, for more playtests. This brought us to dinner, which I had in the hotel lounge. The food was good, though nothing to write home about; the service could have been faster.

Session F1: Friday Evening and
Session S3: Saturday Evening

JB, one of the creators of *Traveller Ascension: Imperial Warrant*, was selling the game and refereeing sessions of it, so I took him up on the invitation to play on Friday (and signed up for a second session Saturday evening – the game was *that* good). This is a very interesting game mechanism, and it definitely plays well. There are two levels of play; at the basic level that we used on Friday, the focus is on learning the game mechanics. Once those are mastered, the second level of play (which we switched to by mutual agreement after the second turn in Saturday's session) offers additional decision options in play, without adding additional mechanics. JB explained that they'd designed in the two levels so that one could avoid 'decision paralysis' while still learning how the game is played. While learning, the game can move slowly, but once you've got the mechanics down, it becomes possible to plan your moves with a quick inspection of the cards in your hand, and then apply the effects with little delay on

Traveller Ascension: Imperial Warrant
more-or-less set up and ready to play

your turn – something that's definitely desirable when you're playing at the second level, as it's possible for actions and reactions by multiple players to 'chain', extending the time needed to complete the phase (of which there are six per game turn).

Traveller Ascension: Imperial Warrant is currently available in a Base Game, which allows for two players, and two expansions which (each) allow the addition of one or two players (you must have expansion 1 before expansion 2). Each set offers optional scenarios, in which defined goals and a defined map are provided, or you can ignore the scenarios and just play with the basic game premise, which is to explore the area bordering the nascent Third Imperium, develop the worlds economically, and bring them in to the Imperium. There are also "add-on packs" which offer additional options for play, again without modifying or adding to the basic mechanic.

After the Friday game, JB led a bit of a 'postmortem' discussion about some of the possibilities for play strategies; it's possible for players with their own 'style biases' to play together, and nobody is forced into any particular style of play. The various play styles are 'emergent behavior' rather than designed into the game mechanic, and no particular style of play guarantees victory over another – nor is it necessarily possible to have such an overwhelming lead as to make further play meaningless; each game can go its full number of turns (customizable for available time) and the play of one event can cause a chain reaction and 'turn the game on its head' right up until the last person has made a final play. Interestingly, while the 'mathematical basis' for the game is all Classic *Traveller*, the Third-Imperium-Re-Explore-and-Re-Contact 'theme' isn't 'baked in'; I could see several other possible 'themes' using the same rules/mechanics – which, given how thoroughly *Traveller* the rules are, shows how potentially flexible *Traveller* as a game is (as if we didn't already know this…).

Raconteurs' Rest

Traveller Ascension: Imperial Warrant
Saturday Afternoon game in progress

We never actually "finished" the Saturday game (although we brought it to a satisfactory conclusion); a couple of chain reactions extended phase resolutions enough that the turns took longer than had really been budgeted for, and one player's actions often changed things enough to 'throw a monkey wrench' (I believe that our British readers would use the phrase 'throw a spanner') into the works, necessitating a rethink of which options were possible and sensible. The post-mortem discussion on that came to the conclusion that the basic level is better for real-time-limited situations (like the four-hour slots at a con), but the game is definitely richer in the advanced level, without actually being any more complex, rules-wise.

Session S1: Saturday Morning

I played in "Communications Breakdown", refereed under Mongoose II rules by RN, and done well. The player-characters are a troubleshooting team that have been sent to a ship that was targeted for salvage, but two previous teams failed to report – the salvage team, and a follow-up team to find out why the salvage team went silent. To avoid spoilers, I will say only that we found some Bad «Stuff», but we had fun as clues were revealed, and we got nervouser and nervouser (yes, it is a word – now!), and

finally broke and ran scared. Since we'd made a point of "playing it smart" from the beginning of the scenario, we actually managed to find out what happened, get the information where it needed to go, avert disaster, and additionally convince the Head Office that instead of salvaging the ship, they should disassociate its atoms. While not specifically planned for a Halloween theme, it turned out to be quite suitable for the 'season', and (at least for me) that bit of meta-atmosphere added to the game.

Session S2: Saturday Afternoon

I used this session to run some more playtests of my game; as during the Friday afternoon pickup session, I got some good feedback, including some critiques that, while unexpected, were spot-on about certain aspects that I hadn't thought of. I really need a name for this game, and I need to look into the business aspects of Kickstarting, manufacturing, and marketing/selling it; the feedback I've gotten has been so universally favorable that I think eventually getting it to be a Real Product wants to happen.

High-quality battle maps, dossiers including photographs, and a laptop computer driving a desktop monitor are all part of TCUSA.

Between playtest games, I wandered around and took a few pictures; there were two or three games using computers as visual/presentation aids, and JB was running another session of *Traveller Ascension: Imperial Warrant*. Fun was clearly being had all around, and there were several games that were playing to the ostensible 'Vargr' theme for this

year's con – some with the PCs being the Vargr, others being set in Vargr space, and still others involving Vargr as antagonists.

Sunday Morning Session and Wrap-Up

A lot of people that had attended were packing up to get going early; although Monday is a minor government holiday in the US (Columbus Day), most businesses – outside banking and finance – would be open as usual, so people would be going to work. (I'm a government employee, so I get Monday off.) As a result, the Sunday morning session was fewer tables than Saturday. Nevertheless, *Traveller* was being played, and people were having fun. I pulled out my laptop and started writing this AAR, while everything was still fresh.

Finally, the last of the dice and character sheets were being packed up, and it was time for the awards. This year, due to a bit of unexpected logistical changes, we ended up with two Starbursts for Extreme Heroism (the person who was providing the plaques in previous years was uncertain if he was going to be here this year, so MF arranged a new plaque. He did make it, and brought a SEH plaque with him, so we had two.

The first SEH was won by JG, one of a very few woman gamers at the convention. She was playing in BMcA's "Who Let the Vargr Out", and during a prison break, threw herself at every attacker, allowing the entire crew to escape, including herself, while incurring near-fatal wounds in the process. This was described on the nomination slip as "Utter Vargr Viciousness".

The second SEH was won by PD in a different session of the same game (BMcA ran several sessions of "Who Let the Vargr Out"). There was an iris valve that was open to no-atmosphere; it was blocked from closing by a dead body jammed into it. PD sacrificed his life by throwing himself at the body to knock it free, saving his companions by al-

lowing it to close – with him (and the original dead body) on the airless side of it.

The PING! F*** It! was won by CL, in KF's "Prosperity for the Taking". In a face-to-face charisma challenge between two Vargr band leaders, CL's character convinced the other leader to subordinate himself to CL. In the process of getting to the other leader's base, the other leader died, and upon arrival, CL's character carried the body onto the landing ramp, tossed it off, and announced that he was the new leader of both bands. (This, naturally, required a reaction roll – which he abjectly failed!) The other band didn't accept him, and he was shot by one of his own people, who was a Vemene agent for Tukera.

Other Miscellaneous Notes

We had ten tables this year, when we thought we'd only have nine because of space considerations. Every slot that we originally scheduled was filled, and the extra tables were put to good use (that's how I had a place to do playtesting Saturday afternoon). If you do the math, that means we had planned for about seventy slots for con-goers (figuring eight per table) – and most were filled. Considering that we had a change of venue this year, which has historically meant about a 10% drop in attendees, you can see that TravellerCON/USA is a pretty solidly successful small con.

We're planning on having next year's con here, too, and may even be able to get a third room (our room this year was really two rooms with the partition between them removed). If it happens, that room will be where the vendors are, giving us as many as three or four extra tables in the "main hall", and some very preliminary thoughts and discussion have floated the idea of a panel discussion, one proposed topic being a "Referee Master Class". We've also decided that there will be a sixth formal session; enough people are starting to come early (and enough people are attending the con *in toto*) that

Raconteurs' Rest

running a formal session starting on Friday at 13:00 is viable.

I'd mentioned above that a couple of tables were using computers as visual aids. This has actually become something of a staple at TCUSA; BMcA and KP, both GM members of the Dead Game Society (DGS) Army (New England battalion), have been putting a lot of effort into the games that they run, and presentation is an important part of it – including the use of computers and monitors. I haven't played in one of their games yet; they always fill up before I can sign up – which speaks well for their efforts!

High-quality battle maps, dossiers including photographs, and a laptop computer driving a desktop monitor are all part of TCUSA.

I didn't get the chance to ask, but it looked like one game actually had someone participating via a videoconferencing app like Skype. If so, I'm pretty sure it's a first for TravellerCON/USA. I'll admit to having mixed feelings about it; I like the idea of someone being able to participate even if they can't make the trek to Morgantown – but on the other hand, the con is a chance to get to meet people and play with them face-to-face, and have good social fun – it's Just Not The Same over Skype.

The Holiday Inn Morgantown is a nice hotel. It's not a luxury hotel (that's the Crowne Plaza brand), but neither did it have the air of 'genteel shabbiness' that characterized the Lancaster Host in the last few years. Everything that I encountered worked (bar one flushometer problem that caused a minor flood in the lobby men's room on Sunday – and the maintenance man was on the scene to fix it even before I could get out to the desk to report it [some things can't be rushed or interrupted!]), and while I'd heard about a couple of other minor problems, I'm told that they were fixed almost instantly – the staff was doing their absolute best to make our stay as trouble-free as possible; this even extended to helping us with last minute prep by loaning us a paper cutter (so we could assemble a batch of Con programs) and moving in more chairs when we saw we were going to need them – and it was clear that they were willing to offer additional assistance if needed (which it wasn't, because KF and MF are experienced at running TCUSA, and because TCUSA attendees who get there early – like me – are also willing to pitch in and help). ✪

Kurishdam   The Club Room

Domina Kokeshi and Domidi Ilundoji

by Cian Witheren

Author's note: This is designed for a generic non-Imperium setting that suffered at least one long-term collapse of interstellar society, preferably lasting at least 500 years and ending approximately 200-300 years before the current campaign era. Adjusting these figures will affect the age of Kokeshi, as it depends on a period of planetary isolationism to get started, while Ilundoji depends on the resusumption of interstellar travel to have created its own colony. In the Third Imperi-

um, the region they are in should have remained fairly isolated for about the same period of time. Usage in the campaign will drop Kokeshi squarely into the antagonist camp. The worlds involved are easily changed to any Garden worlds of about the same population.

Editor's note: The age of the religions, and certain unspecified terms in this article as submitted (e.g.,"Prior Interstellar Empire") have been adjusted to assume the current Imperial era (Third Imperium approxi-

mately 1100). The planet names should be assumed local, not those appearing on star charts, and UWPs are as submitted but may vary.

Domina Kokeshi

Formal Name: *Domina Kokeshi* (doh-MEE-NAH Koh-keh-SHEE) [do'mi̩na ̩ko.kɛ'ʃi]

Translation: Followers of (*Domina*) the Righteous One (*Kokeshi*)

Linguistic Analysis (Silvetri, creole developed by terraforming crews and initial colonists): *Domina* (*Do-*) prefix for Of/To – contextual – (*Mina*) Follower, originating (*Mi*) movement and (*-na*) relative status suffix. *Kokeshi* (*Kokesh*) Righteous, originating (*Kok*) Good and (*Kesh*) Behavior/Morality, (*Shi*) singular they.

Informal Name: *Kokeshi*

Adjectival and Demonym Form: *Kokeshin*

Planet of Origin: Silveter B786998-A 204 (Adjectival form and Plural form: *Silvetri*. Demonym: *Silvetrin*)

Age: ~2800 Standard Years

Classification Tags: Deism, Reincarnation, Formal Structured, Prosperity. *Potential danger to other sophonts, hostile (non-violent) to other faiths.*

Followers: 3.5 Billion

The origins of Kokeshi are, in many ways, the origin of the culture of Silveter, a colony founded during the Rule of Man shortly before the Long Night. The young colony, of perhaps 100,000 adults, most of whom were workers involved in building the primary infrastructure required to house and feed the actual incoming colonists, was cut off from interstellar support and regressed to TL4. During this time, Kokeshi arose as the major religion, starting off in the early days from a small terraforming commune lead by the First Prophet Vidmand Fadin. After his death, control passed to his daughter Bathille, who focused on attempting to religiously dominate the growing population and created the structure of the modern church, changing it from the intended loose hierarchy of equals into an ascending bureaucracy. She is also credited with creating the matrilineal system that came to dominate Silvetri

culture and law, even amongst the other faiths that opposed Kokeshi.

Today the faith holds sway over 35% of the Silvetri population, the highest share of the seven faiths officially recognized. These include 4 rival faiths, and 2 formally recognized derivative faiths, but specifically does not count derivatives the church finds heretical (or, for that matter, derivatives of the other faiths). It has a major presence on another six worlds, including one settled and ruled exclusively by the church – Madina (B7648D9-A, 2 parsecs away).

The primary belief of Kokeshi is an ascending karmic reincarnation cycle dictated by a distant creator deity, known by the common name *Gias* (GEE-AH-S) ['gi.as] with the Heavenly Title *Davadi Kokeshi* (Great/Mighty Righteous One). The relationship between *Gias* and the reincarnation cycle is mediated by purportedly divine rules and a Heaven/Hell system, where those who consistently fail to abide the rules will fall out of the cycle and see their souls destroyed, while those who follow them over many lifetimes will ascend to live at the side of *Gias* and eventually create their own universe. These rules vary over the course of their recording: one section is concerned with the basic social contract and the proper method of prayers, another is a terraforming manual specific to the planet (with a liturgical section concerning the divinely ordained dominance of humans over alien ecosystems), the third is concerned with sumptuary laws, the smallest one is dietary guidelines and sanitation (Contrary to many reincarnation faiths, Kokeshi allows the eating of meat, since it is held that doing so helps the soul understand the natural cycle), while the last is interpretations of previous rules, proclamations from the highest ranks, and rules derived from analysis of the communion rituals (see below). Many hold the belief that *Gias* lays down specific rules for each person, which are usually given to the faithful by means of

the communion rites and dreams. One issue that lays in the history of the church, which has been the reason behind the three known derivative religions, was to pair a prosperity gospel with reincarnation – the reasoning being that the karmic cycle would not allow a bad person to be put into a position where they could amass or inherit wealth and power (provided they are of the faith, of course), resulting in a *de facto* plutocracy being in charge of the church.

Kokeshi has a rigid, bureaucratic, structure, with the main concession to interstellar travel being the decentralization of internal decision making to the highest ranked priests on individual planets. However, overall control of the church resides with the Prime Speaker, who is currently headquartered on Madina. Below the Prime Speaker lies 6 main divisions of rank, with 3-6 internal divisions within the lowest four of them, covering the almost 3.7 million clergy of the church (The preferred ratio is one priest (rank 1) per 1000 congregants, leading between 10-20 lay ministers, with a 20:1 ratio between ranks, dropping as low as 15:1). Priests are selected primarily from the wealthy, often alongside a large donation, with secondary preference given to the upper-middle class. The poor are very rarely selected for the priesthood, and only occasionally for the lay ministry.

Liturgically, the common expression is a set of four, minimally invasive, daily prayers, with a weekly group prayer and sermon lead by priests. One interesting aspect is the Communion Lottery, where a select few are chosen by lot to ingest a mild sacred hallucinogen that lasts for a few minutes at most. This is believed to bring the chosen closer to *Gias*, but actually receiving a vision is considered a matter of luck and faith – one common jokes states that you're making a call and hoping to not get the answering machine this time. A vast body of superstitions have grown up around Communion, mostly among the poor hoping to have their faith publicly

recognized – ranging from fasting, to the ingestion of particular substances. Anything that pops up during Communion is recorded before being sent to committees for review, which may lead to new interpretations of rules, but more often is believed to give hints as to past lives and soul-specific rules.

The church also maintains a list of those stated to have ascended and gained the rank title *Kokeshi*, many of whom are prayed to, believing they can interface with *Gias* on their behalf. No such roll is maintained of the damned, but many children are taught to fear sinners by taking advantage of a natural aversion to insects – and many adults take a small amount of pleasure in killing insects when convenient, believing it to be a mercy towards the soul by removing it from a tortured existence and allowing it to reach a true death. Culturally, the faithful hold *Olsuk*—Bug—as an insult usually reserved for those of other faiths. Their neighboring faiths return the favor by using *Kokeshi* to mean "self-deluding fool".

Politically, the church maintains much power on Silveter, as it once held sway over 65% of the population and helped direct the formation of the legal system and world government, but not enough to drive the other faiths almost underground again. Many still wish for that to return, but also view the non-existence of their faith on other worlds as an insult and conspiracy – after all, *Gias* has been sending the most faithful of their souls to other worlds, right? Why haven't they been able to recreate the church on those worlds? It must be a conspiracy of evil souls who have exited reincarnation without being destroyed, seeking to destroy the faith to weaken *Gias*. Needless to say, this attitude does not make them, or their very aggressive missionary activities, popular on other worlds. Only the wealthy will tend to favor them, as the prosperity gospel provides validation for their egos.

Economically, the church (and the wealthy who lead it) are very much in favor of trickle-down economics and monopolies – if *Gias* blesses one with wealth, then to be wealthy is to be a good person. To have gained wealth by unblessed means (effectively, by methods the wealthy have not gained control of) is somewhat morally grey – it is a good act, but it will mean nothing for your soul. The most holy way to gain wealth is by inheritance, followed closely thereafter by receiving it as a gift (with the expectation that this creates a debt to be settled by other means or another gift, a model strange to most of the universe) or from a lottery (Gifting is the only remnant of the mutalistic economic model Kokeshi once championed, with Inheritance – gifting that prevents the creation of a debt as one is dead in that identity – being a natural expansion when the prosperity gospel was added).

In regards to other (non-human) sophonts, the church holds them as especially damned – they are close enough to mimic, with accommodations for biology, human behavior, but can never be human in that form and are therefore subject to human domination of the alien. The end result is a belief horrifying to almost all other cultures – the faithful are permitted to slaughter and consume non-human sophonts, to remind them that the spiritual cycle has humanity as spiritually superior and to release their souls – with that lesson learned – back into the natural cycle to ascend towards human again. (Not that anyone follows this rule, or even acknowledges it. Publicly.) But for some reason, the church refuses to change this rule, instead preferring to lean on public officials to hide any evidence of eating sophonts and downgrade the charges to mere murder instead of "cannibalism of a sophont".

Kokeshi Cultural Notes

Some pertinent beliefs are listed here, especially when they might impact players.

Sumptuary laws, especially on Madina, are very serious business. The faithful might refuse to deal with characters who have an apparent social status lower than the expected wealth to own a ship (SOC A+), or who break other sumptuary laws (Admin, 9+, 1-6 hours to figure out an outfit or meal that does not break these laws for your particular social status and career). On Madina, the Impperium maintains a Class B Highport on the second moon, with it being very strongly suggested that independent owner-operators not go anywhere near the surface, as the sumptuary laws are based primarily around ownership of local assets (or being a multi-ship corporation, as that shows sufficient assets to be permitted ownership of a starship). The first thing they take is the ship. On the surface, the only extraterritorial starport is effectively a class C, with docking room for a combined 5,000dTons. The non-extraterritorial portion is Class B, and looking very nice, with room for over 150,000dTons.

Priests, and the wealthy, are forbidden to touch the spiritually unclean. This extends to not being in the same room as priests of other faiths, and the abjectly poor.

Like the other faiths of Silveter, motherhood is held to be an especially holy act. Pregnancy is the only exception to what is considered spiritually unclean, as the act of growing the body for another soul is to biologically emulate the creation of the universe, even when the mother is bearing a damned soul.

Prayer days are also mandatory rest days.

Animals and insects are considered to have souls, while plants and microscopic life do not. According to the official interpretations, the souls of insects and animals are in fact portions of souls torn apart for committing sins.

The dietary laws are mostly concerned with avoiding poisonous combinations of imported and

native life, but a few also function as sumptuary laws; for example, it is forbidden to eat a common native plant – Yultin, a decent carbohydrate source that grows like a weed – without an expensive additive derived from a modified blue orchid, even though another common native plant can be cooked to provide the same compound.

The hallucinogen used in Communion is locally called Scarlos, or more commonly Scarlet Hair. It contains a semi-decent hallucinogen, with activation time from oral preparations starting in less than 30 seconds on average, lasting for up to 15 minutes. Comparisons between it and other common hallucinogens indicates disassociative memory retrieval and temporary modification similar to brain activity in both the commonly remembered dream state and the REM cycle. A professional hallucinogen reviewer once said "Mildly trippy, but more thoughtful than most, with a low chance of a bad trip. Quick activation, short duration, and easily retained body control makes it perfect for work or artistic use. Comedown is a pain though". The plant itself is a low-lying perennial, easily mistaken for red-veined short grass, growing from a fungal system that exists in a symbiotic nitrate-fixing relationship with the root structure of the local Red Bamboo, and appears to have been given such a relationship as a cover for its importation during late-stage terraforming. As the common name suggests, the portion of the root structure harvested for the hallucinogenic compounds resembles fine strands of red thread or hair, and is sent through a relatively small number of processing steps. Exportation is extremely low, and primarily for off-world church gardens that have not started their own stock (or are forbidden importation of the plant).

Author's Note: In the OTU, it is native to another world, imported by the terraforming crew. IMTU, it is botanically named Terra Claviceps Divinorum C3av-Silveter, one of the many descendents of a genetically engineered variant of the ergot fungus that produces the hallucinogen Salvinorin A (produced by the real life plant Salvia Divinorum).

Actually tracing which specific variant was introduced to Silveter is difficult, as it bears gene markers from six different, but closely related, variants (D1-New Tokyo, G2-Veritas Ultima, Xv-Miller's System, Ku1-Intelligible Screaming, Vb4-Foolish Glory, and Ma2-Drogo) while resembling a seventh (C3-Brand New New New York Junior).

General Culture Note: The matrilineal structure of Silvetri culture tends to push men into physically active and menial jobs, while academic, artistic, and leadership roles are dominated by women. The main effect is the extended family – daughters will move out, yet still near, to start their own household, while sons will stay home until married to provide their wages to their mother. Additionally, the stigma of illegitimacy is not based on the marital status of the parents (many wealthy women maintain a few 'male mistresses', referred to as *padual*, a gender-neutral term for the unmarried lover of a married woman. *Vodual* is for the unmarried lover of a married man), but on whether the mother has provided recognition to the father (an act that either places him in her household or requires payment to support the child)– the insulting term for those without a recognized father translates as "poor-child", meaning their father wasn't economically valuable enough for the mother to add his finances to her income. For the Kokeshin, wealth plays a big part – wealthy women can get away with adding additional males, or sharing men between households, but poor women are expected to maintain, at most, one husband.

While the Kokeshin explicitly hold that the giving of a gift creates a debt, the common attitude is that gifting creates a bond between giver and receiver, one that is not settled like a debt

Domidi Ilundoji

Formal Name: Domidi Ilundoji (doh-MEE-DEE ih-LOON-doh-JEE) [do'mi̩di ̩ɪ'lun.do̩d͡ʒi]

Translation: Walkers of/Walking To (*Domidi*) the Manyfold Single Path (*Ilundoji*)

Linguistic Analysis (Silvetri): *Domidi* (*Do-*) Of/To (*Midi*) Walking/Walker, origin (*Mi*) movement, (*-di*) suffix

for action being performed by person, also used for person currently performing the action. *Ilundoji* (*Ilun*), single item of multiple forms/aspects, origin from contraction of lost phrase in one origin language, colloquial usage "Complex", (*Doji*) path, origin (*Do-*) to/of (*-Ji*) suffix marking subject as a location.

Informal Name: Ilundoji

Adjectival and Demonym form: *Ilundojin*, commonly *Dojin*.

Age: ~2300 T-Years

Classification Tags: Aspected Polytheism, Semi-Statistical Reincarnation, Informal Semi-Structured, Charitable

Followers: 675,000 (Plus unknown hidden converts on Kokeshi-dominated worlds)

Planet of Origin: Silveter. Almost all followers live on Hasnava Doji (E554556-3 623), 15 parsecs away

Ilundoji is an unrecognized derivative faith of Kokeshi, officially a heretical group. While it bears a superficial resemblance to another Silveter faith, it is more accurately a "throwback" derivation, focusing on their view of what "pure" Kokeshi was. These differences make the parent church very hostile towards them – the rejection of the prosperity gospel, almost no sumptuary laws, rejection of human dominance, a non-karmic reincarnation cycle, and a much looser structure all makes Ilundoji very attractive to the poor. In the face of these differences, the one that had them declared officially heretical is very minor – the nature of the divine. The faith is still young, with a few first generation converts still alive and telling stories of the founder, Kamina Restoran; a young priest who decided that the ethics of her position required questioning the prosperity gospel and eventually the entire faith as she knew it. While normally this would be a simple rebellion easily quashed by the church, she was able to gain a large number of converts, including several wealthy families. This turned the split into a five year guerrilla preaching campaign that started with buying an astronavigation database off some free traders, us-

ing her funding to start a covert colonization project, and preaching to flash mobs to generate cover for it all. In the end, she died at the hands of a church sponsored mob, helping the last desperate converts past the starport extraterritoriality line, an incident that would have ended poorly for the Silvetrin government if the Rule of Man Navy hadn't been passing through on patrol and liberty, giving them an excuse to take control of the situation and start a brief media war with the church. While the incident was officially resolved, the coverup generated to prevent a religious rebellion sits poorly on all sides, and the church still has a ban on any contact with them.

In Ilundoji, the divine force is nameless (more accurately, has a name that can only be spoken by the entire universe acting in harmony), both the universe and a separate entity. As any universe is massive and complex, the divine is split into multiple guiding spirits (in much the same way that a brain is split into multiple sections), which also includes souls as the least powerful of the spirits. The most powerful of these, the personifications of fundamental scientific forces, are classified as "Unspeakable", a name that carries no moral judgment but rather an acceptance of the limitations of the human form (after all, how could a person speak the language of gravity or the weak nuclear force?). The next set are the impulses of life, the organizers of the materials created by the prior group and the maintainers of the natural cycle – birth, death, photosynthesis, etc. Following them are the "guiding spirits" of species and different types of life (every species has a collective spirit, with the number of souls – the lowest level of spirit – for that species dependent on their biological and neurological complexity – so bacteria as whole have perhaps one or two souls per planet guiding them through their brief lives, animals share a soul over a small number of individuals, while sophonts are complex enough that each has a

single soul per body), followed by the impulses common to all sophonts, with sub-divisions for the natural behavioral tendencies of each sophont species, which sees the first *Daravimar Karad* (lit. "Order-opposing Spirit"), or "disharmonious spirits", (in a "take that!" to Kokeshi, *Gias* is listed as the disharmonious spirit of greed), then the souls of creatures. Reincarnation is primarily random, but the spiritually powerful are said to have the ability to pick potentially interesting lives or ones where they think they can do some good, with the end goal of spreading life and harmony so the universe has the power to create another of itself.

With that end goal in mind, the Ilundojin have very minimal issues with other societies and religions, holding that as long as the end result is a just and harmonious society then it is good. As reincarnation is essentially random, it is the duty of sophonts to help others, aiming to create a better tomorrow for the group as a whole with minimal disruptions to the natural cycle. Their rules are minimal, being mostly the standard social contract, an set of ethical guidelines, and a primarily oral collection of common superstitions (examples: dark red is said to be the most pleasing color to the spirit that governs jump travel, clear gems are the baseline decoration for any shrine to the spirit of light). The most visible superstition (taken from a suppressed folk tradition on Silveter) is the Memory Gem (most often colored glass blessed by a priest or family elder, but natural semi-precious gems have also been used), a necklace given shortly after birth (and usually designed in a prophetic haze of asceticism and fasting) that is believed to carry the memories of the life it was worn in. These gems, alongside a name plate, serve as the gravestones of the dead as their bodies are put through a natural burial/composting practice – a funeral rite responding to the relatively poor soil of their new world. The more suspicious and conspiracy minded outsiders wonder if these

gems are actually hidden psionic amplifiers, but such an example would almost certainly be one of a kind.

Much like Kokeshi, the eating of meat is allowed, but for different reasons; humans, and other sophonts, live in the natural cycle, which is spiritually pure. If a species requires protein in their diet, then it is unnatural to demand they not eat it. For this reason, meat animals are either slaughtered by hand or hunted with primitive weapons. Imported advanced weaponry is allowable for self-defense, but proactive hunting of dangerous species is not allowed.

The liturgy is very minimal, yet very complex. It consists entirely of lists of prayers and ritual actions for each known spirit, kept by the priesthood and created by a modification of the Kokeshi Communion rite – rather than it being selection by lot, communion is undertaken when an answer to a question is sought, usually finding and translating prayers, rituals, and other pleasing acts. The populace is not required to follow the liturgy (although lists are maintained of "common" prayers and rituals that don't impede too much on the lives of the faithful – as Kamina once said "proper action takes precedence over piety"). Only priests, or dedicated lay followers, are required to try and follow the liturgy, with group worship activities taking place once every few weeks. These worship activities bear more resemblance to small festivals than spiritually serious rituals – group activities and games, food vendors, some light partying, an actual ritual and group prayer of thanks to the spirit being celebrated on that day, all with the end goal of creating a small, temporary space for the spirit to come down and join the community for a day.

The priesthood is rather informal and open, with minimal structure. Priests are self-selecting, trained by older priests, given some time to get their feet

under them, and then let loose in the world (this entire process can be represented as a one term career that gives a few skills; perhaps Theology (Ilundoji) 1, Instruction 1, and some skill at handsewing (see below), giving no benefits other than Cr1000 as starting funds. Other second careers are encouraged among young priests). The structure tying the priesthood together is also informal, with the eldest priest of a community (or the person they choose) meeting in councils made up of other local communities, with messages passed between councils and occasionally a higher level of council being formed to solve a particular problem. Permanent high level councils are rare and right now, only two exist; one maintains the imported communication infrastructure running their electronic mail server (and aggressively moderated message board), while the other is their internal judiciary, which is rarely called upon now that the secular government has been set up – priests who break laws are charged as ordinary citizens, with no special treatment due to their religious position.

The priesthood was originally the government of Hasnava Doji, but have removed themselves from power. The world is run as a series of direct democracies, with every 1000 citizens forming a local council and their collective votes (and proposals) being sent upwards by representatives until an odd-numbered council of less than 22 people is formed. As usual, communications between settlements is done over an imported communications infrastructure, with runners to communities not yet tied in.

Regarding other sophonts, Ilundoji explicitly rejects the Kokeshi viewpoint – humans are not divinely ordained to rule other species, all sophonts are expressions of the divine (to say that the universe finds a form that is just one type within its internal structure to be the most holy is sheer madness, much like a human saying that one particular species of gut bacteria is the most like them).

Economically, they prefer a mutalistic gift-economy – the individual works for the community, the community provides resources. Resource exchange between communities is typically barter, but they also use the Imperial Credit. In larger communities, this breaks down to each household being considered a sub-community, which leads to either diversification of efforts or specialization to avoid competition and duplication of work. Work performed above what the community requires will actually give those excess resources or goods to the worker, who can then distribute them as they wish (but for many, it goes to the community). Gifts are a common form of excess output, providing most of the personal property of citizens, with their manufacture and exchange forming a non-monetary economy.

Ilundoji Cultural Notes

Ilundoji polyandry is a continuation of the Silventrin matrilineal system. Most notably, it is expected of young women to maintain multiple partners before selecting one primary to start their household with, and perhaps a few others. It originated with a severe gender imbalance among early converts – women, typically placed in positions of power and importance, had less dissatisfaction with the Kokeshi faith, leading to a larger number of male converts than female. Ironically, this is the same situation that lead to the creation of Silvetrin matrilineality due to more male workers than female on the original terraforming crews.

Officially, there are no sumptuary laws among the Ilundojin. However, there are unofficially enforced community expectations – most of which have to do with the amount of effort put into the item and the degree of usage. It is expected for clothing made with rare or hard to produce materials or dyes to be considered common cloths among the community, mostly being reserved for special

occasions (many have a variety of "birthday suits", clothes made specifically out of rare materials, used by youth as their clothes for birthday celebrations). Similarly, hard to produce items are also owned by the community instead of a single individual. The exception is gifts – items produced or obtained as a gift for a person are held as their personal property.

Priests are expected to make their own clothes, preferably by hand. This has lead to a grand tradition of very personalized embroidery designs. Over time, a few designs have gained religious or social meanings, with sociologists expecting a semi-formal design language to emerge within 3-4 centuries. ✪

Critics' Corner

Cascadia Adventures 1: Save Our Ship

reviewed by Megan Robertson

Cascadia Adventures 1: Save Our Ship. Colin Dunn.
Gypsy Knights Games https://www.gypsyknightsgames.com
38pp., PDF
No longer available as a separate product.

This review originally appeared on rpg-resource.org.uk in July 2016. This product and the other two Cascadia Adventure products are now available as a single product called "The Cascadia Adventures".

This adventure makes some assumptions: the party operates out of a planet called Chance in the Cascadia Subsector which is part of the Clement sector (Gypsy Knights Games' custom *Traveller* setting) and works mostly as interstellar merchants (ethically challenged or not, it doesn't matter) with the odd side-job for the Razz Casino. This holds good for all three episodes in the Cascadia Adventures series, although they do not form a story-arc; you can run them in any order or pick and choose which ones you will run at all.

Before you get to the actual adventure, there are full details—including a sketch and deckplans—of the ship the party is assumed to be using, a *Rucker*-class vessel called *Dust Runner*. Then there are a full nine pre-generated characters, all with links to each other, the ship and even the casino. Naturally you can substitute existing characters (and indeed their own ship), or use some of them as NPCs, but if this is the first adventure you are running in a campaign they are worth considering because they are already

embedded in the setting. They also all have contacts which will be useful as the adventure proceeds—details of these are supplied where they turn up along with notes on how to use them with either the supplied characters or your own.

And so to the adventure itself, beginning with a overview that explains what is going on. Basically, the Razz Casino had been hosting a politician who was about to run for high office on another planet, and had sent one of their ships to fetch him—but

ship and politician failed to arrive. The party's task is to find out what has happened and to sort it out. The adventure background contains all the information that you will need, and in succeeding pages various locations and events are provided for you to run the adventure.

Events begin in the Razz Casino, and this may be a place that your party likes to hang out anyway. A sidebar explains a neat way of presenting adventures with 'essential scenes' which a key to the plot, 'optional scenes' which add flavour and encourage role-playing but can be left out without harming the story, and 'contact scenes' which help advance the plot as they provide opportunities for the party to find something out that they need to know. The casino 'optional scenes' include details of the games of chance and shows on offer, in case the party wish to indulge.

From the beginning in the casino, the adventure should take the party to the politician's departure point, his homeworld of Roskilde, where they can commence their investigations. Plenty of ways for them to find things out are provided and it should be relatively straightforward to piece together what has transpired and lead them to the casino ship's current location. Once they get there, they have various situations to deal with—including some other folks also trying to find the missing ship—before they can complete their mission and return triumphant.

Overall it's a cracking adventure and great fun to run (I cannot speak for playing it, but they did seem to enjoy it…). It fits beautifully into the Gypsy Knights Games setting, but would not be too hard to transplant elsewhere if you want to drop it in to your own *Traveller* universe instead. ✪

Raconteurs' Rest

After-Action Report: *Signal 99*

By Joshua Levy

This is a report of running Stellagama's adventure: *Signal 99*. It is designed to be a referee to referee communication. It contains spoilers! If you might play in this adventure, please stop reading now.

Background

I run a campaign called "The Rusty Buckett", at a friend's mini-con. Once a year he invites friends to his house for a weekend of gaming. This has been going on for 11 years, and for most of those years I've run this highly episodic *Traveller* game. The players have been largely the same for all that time, so it is a comfortable group which works well together. We use **GURPS** rules, and I generally buy a couple of commercially written adventures, or download a few from *Freelance Traveller*, and then choose the best one to run.

The characters are a bunch of friends on an old, broken down starship, out to experience the Universe, assuming they can make enough money to cover ongoing repairs. They are not crooks, although they will crack a few laws in a good cause or to save the innocent.

Preparing The Adventure

I chose Stellagama's *Signal 99* because the basic genera seemed unique. There are lots of rescue scenarios out there, but this one was more complex, more morally ambiguous, and destined to eventual failure. Also, it was clearly well written and well constructed as an adventure. Finally, it involved aliens and some other actual science fiction themes.

You will need to give the adventurers a reason to visit Pavarti. The adventure does not help with this,

(Continued from page 21)

but it is not hard. My characters wanted to see some actual Ciceks and had brought a cargo of spices which grew in human space, but which Ciceks valued, to try to pay their way.

The campaign is set in a *Traveller* Universe, but a non-standard timeline (the Imperium is smaller and less important). Recently, I've been trying to add aliens from other fandoms (*Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Aliens*, etc.). Since *Signal 99* is set in the "These Stars Are Ours" (TSAO) Universe, I had to graft the adventure into my Universe. This was no problem. I simply set the adventure in a far corner of the Universe, where the Imperium was a far away thing. I think of this region of space as the Tsao Subsector. The Republic, the Empire, and so on were the local interstellar governments. The TSAO history was the local history. The highly episodic nature of the campaign meant that I didn't need to worry about the long trip to this area of space, or back again afterwards.

Before running the adventure, I recommend printing out the two deck plan pages, twice. The first time on a normal sized page, and marking all the rescue balls and live aliens on it, so you see where they are at a glance. The second time, on the largest sized pages you can, for the players to use.

Also, I would create a "run page" by cut-n-pasting all the special rules for actions on the Abductor (no matter where they are in the printed adventure), and also a 30 checkbox row, so that you can check off each minute as it occurs. The adventure has a lot of rules about the ship (opening doors, getting injured by shrapnel, etc.) and having them all on one page with a count down timer checklist was very helpful.

The rules said that for each player above four, the referee should shorten the rescue time by five minutes. I did not do this. It would have resulted in the adventurers only having 15 minutes for the rescue, and that did not seem like an adventure to me;

it seemed like an appetizer. So I ignored that part, but that was not a good solution either, because the adventurers were too successful. If I had it to do over, instead of subtracting 5 minutes per extra character, I would have either added d6 humans to be saved, or added one extra (delaying) encounter with an alien (or both), per extra character.

The Run

Note: when I say "minutes" below, I'm talking about time in the game. The whole rescue took less than 30 minutes. The game took about 5½ hours. In the post-game survey, every player thought the length was good: not too long or too short.

As you read what happened, remember that the characters were not from the Tsao Sector (in my Universe), so they did not have the baggage of history. They were a little suspicious of the Reticulans, but had not just fought a war with them. They knew the Zhuzzh were not trustworthy, but had not encountered them before, in person.

When the adventure started (with the Signal 99), the slightly sleazy political liaison started to lay a foundation of "too dangerous to rescue", but the other characters, made sure the *Rusty Buckett* dived into the rescue.

For the first few minutes I was afraid the pilot would stay in his bridge chair, to be ready to get out of there at the first sign of trouble. That would have been very in-character for many pilots. I was afraid that character would do nothing else, and the player would be bored. However, when the humans were found, the character decided he would help, although he would not leave his own ship, and he was active in the rescue.

Also for the first few minutes, the characters (and the players) thought this was going to be a normal (i.e., successful) rescue, and they'd get to salvage the ship, too! Their ace repair engineer, in his custom vacc suit, arrogantly went directly to the *Ab-*

ductor's engineering room to stop the explosion, or (if that failed) eject the engine. When all those rolls failed (and the players saw how good some of them had been), suddenly the rescue took on a new meaning. The characters (and the players) realized that this was not going to have a simple, happy ending. Success was not preordained. At that moment, as a referee, I felt the tone change.

The encounter with the Zhuzzh went perfectly, from the Zhuzzh's point of view. They were surprised by a human, but convinced her that they were there to help, and their ship was closer than the *Rusty Buckett*, so the human helped them push cold storage units to their ship. They immediately left. My reading of the adventure was that was exactly what they would have done. However, if I had it to do over again, I would have had the Zhuzzh at least try to get the character to help them get even more cold storage units to their ship. Bigger psychological impact when the character realized later she had helped a kidnapping into slavery/experimentation, etc.

The adventurers got lucky with the Cicek. My characters are not a bunch of ex-military jar heads. However, in a previous adventure, one of them did find a military grade plasma weapon. He rarely gets to use it however, since it is illegal in just about every populated planet. However, since he was in space, he carried it for the rescue, and (of course) he was the one who ran into the Cicek. What luck! There was no attempt at subduing the Cicek.

I misread the health of the Phnunk, so a character was able to get him back to the *Rusty Buckett*, but then I realized he was supposed to be dead, so he died on the med-bay table. The doctor character was glum.

A different adventurer found "Janice". It took most of the rescue, but he was able to save her. She lost most of her fingers and toes to frost bite but was able to defect to the Technate. No one ever encountered "Katrina", and she died in the explosion.

After about eight minutes, the characters had set up a "rescue conveyor belt." One was unplugging cold storage units, another was pitching them through a hole and out of the ship. Two more were using an air/raft to collect them and bring them back to the *Rusty Buckett*, and another was stowing them in the cargo bay.

When the ship shuttered, and they realized they only had a few minutes, they grabbed a cold storage unit, and left.

Summary

Worth far more than the $4 it cost. I had fun running this adventure, and my players had fun playing in it. In my post-game survey, 5 out of 5 players marked "Yes, a lot" as their answer to the question "Overall, did you enjoy the game?". The adventure was easy to prep and easy to integrate into an ongoing campaign. The players liked the alien interactions in the adventure. I hope the author creates a sequel. Maybe "on the track of the Zhuzzh" or something.   ✪

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Yenner

by Benedikt Schwarz

The infamous "Jumping Jack", native of the Karrimathan caves of Delarue IV, has proven very adaptable to new environments, and has spread widely throughout the spinward portion of the Spinward Marches. Where there are no natural caves to settle, the yenner has happily taken up a synanthropic existence, infesting hangars, store-houses, shipyards and granaries. While mostly harmless, the yenner's habits make it annoying to those who have to work in those environments.

The yenner has the look of a trilaterally-symmetric animal, but appearances are deceiving. Study of the joint and bone structure reveals that the hindmost leg appendage is, in fact, fused from two separate limbs; the yenner's ancestors were quadru-peds. The legs are jointed; the animal walks and climbs with the second joints (counted from the body) of each limb, which is equipped with small pedipalps and suction cups and enable a yenner to climb rough walls and ceilings with ease. After the second joint, the legs curve upward into "arms" and terminate in small tendrils which the yenner uses to grasp objects.

The yenner's legs are very strong, and the infa-mous sudden jumps that earned the yenner its nick-name can propel the creature up to fifteen meters in any direction without warning. This is the usual re-action when someone gets too close, and coupled with its excellent mimesis and the fact that yenners prefer dark spaces can make the first encounter a shock. Starport technicians love to tell the story of a tech who reached for his toolbox and dropped dead with a heart attack when a yenner jumped at him. The story may or may not be true, and different ver-sions of it circulate throughout the sector.

Regardless of the legend´s veracity, moving around a yenner-infested warehouse or cave is bound to be a very jumpy experience. (In game

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Yenner	8	12m
SKILLS	Recon-1, Athletics/Dexterity-3, Stealth-4	
ATTACKS	Jump and Flee 10- ([N] 6-) Attack 11+ ([N] 8+) Bite (1D-2)	
TRAITS	Small (-1), Mimesis (-2 to spot when landed, nstive enviro only)	
BEHAVIOUR	Herbivore/Intermittent/Cultivator	
NOTE	Attacks marked [N] are for third, sterile 'nest-maid' gender in presence of unhatched egg clutch.	

Morphology	Bilateral symmetry, cephalopod, tetrapod/tripod (2 hind limbs fused into single limb), triped (three limbs used for locomotion and grasping)
Biochemistry	C/H/O/N, broadly human-compatible
Respiration	Oxygen/Nitrogen inhalant, Carbon dioxide exhalant, tracheal brathing, tolerant of a wide range of tainted atmospheres.
Ecology	Circadian (active both day and night)
Habitat	Subterranean caves with at least some mois-ture
Diet and Trophics	Herbivore/Intermittent/Cultivator
Reproduction	Three genders (one sterile, "nest-maid"), very little sexual dimorphism;, conjugal inter-course, oviparous (four to ten eggs), iteropa-rous (reproducing several times during life cycle), eggs cared for by sterile 'third gender', young not cared for.
Lifecycle and ontogeny	Six months to sexual maturity, lifespan varies widely in the wild (one to twenty years), believed to be dependent on population pressure and food availa-bility.

terms, if the yenner gains surprise in an encounter situation, it will jump up suddenly, and the group's leader may have to make a DIFFICULT Leadership or Tactics roll to avoid someone in the group doing something stupid in xir shock, such as loosing a shot in panic, dropping a fragile object, or slipping xir

Less Dangerous Game

safety line. Further encounters with yenners will have a +2 bonus to the test.)

The bulbous head section, about the size of a standard gyro-ball, houses the organs and brain, as well as four semi-faceted eyes and two extendable "stalks", much like a slug's, that contain the olfactory organs. The mouth, equipped with oblong rasping teeth, is located on the bottom of the creature, between the legs, and also serves as an excretive, egg-laying, and sexual organ.

Yenner skin is tough, dry and leathery, and wrinkled, much like a raisin's. The head section is striated with darker and lighter colours. The animal's colouring depends on its primary habitat; if the yenner is taken to a different location, it will gradually assume that environment's colouring over the span of about a standard month.

Yenners are a subcategory of intermittent, classed as a "cultivator" because they actively grow certain types of nutritious lichen and mushrooms in their territory, stuffing cracks with soil or dust, inserting seeds and even watering their "crops" from a special bladder (called an "ewer organ" by the first scouts to categorise them). Some species of lichen are bioluminescent, forming web-like, glowing strands between the planted "nuclei". Most are edible for humans and Droyne (who consider some of them great delicacies), but Aslan and Vargr are advised to keep clear; an enzyme secreted by the

yenner strongly disagrees with their stomachs unless countered with certain kinase-inhibiting tablets, which are available only on planets with a technology level of 11 or higher that have a relevant percentage of Aslan or Vargr in their population.

The cultivation of crops is more or less instinctive, and in the initial surveys the yenner's intelligence was vastly overestimated. On some planets, yenners exhibit greater intelligence than usual due to environmental factors and mutation, but still fall far short of echmerials or Terrestrial dogs. Some spacers claim to have tamed and trained a yenner to follow simple commands, but those accounts may be exaggerated.

Mating season is precipitated by environmental factors such as climate or amount of available food, and is completely independent of the season. Male yenners fertilise the egg-clutches laid by females and leave them in a nest of lichen that they saturate with pheromones from a gland in their lower body. This "royal moss" is highly sought after on some planets because superstition credits it with strong aphrodisiac, fertility- and male potency-enhancing qualities (none of which are borne out by scientific tests). The pheromones stimulate growth in the eggs, and lure several sterile third-gender yenners to the spot over the next few days. Those "nest-maids" defend the eggs viciously and cultivate the surrounding area so the emerging hatchlings find an abundance of food upon hatching. Soon after the first new yenners hatch, the nest-maids gradually wander away.

There have been several attempts to keep yenners in captivity, mainly to farm royal moss. So far, the sheer amount of space that a yenner needs as its territory has proven commercially prohibitive, and yenners quickly sicken and die when deprived of enough space. No eggs have ever been hatched out in captivity, even when their environment was very carefully duplicated.
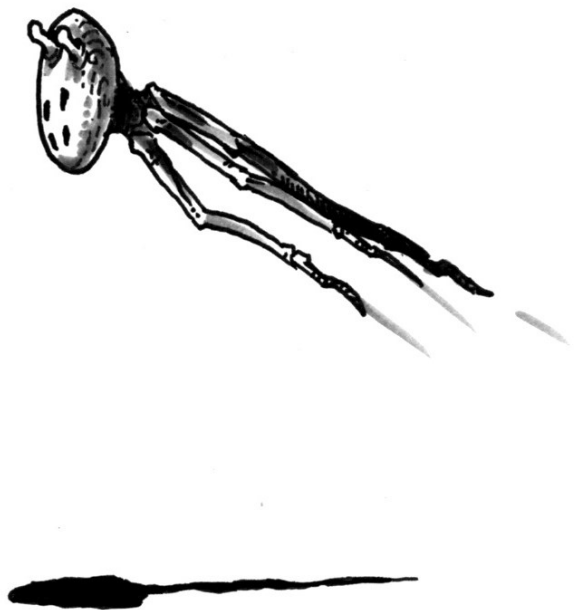
Adventure Seeds

1. As the travellers explore the caves, the narrow passage they are in suddenly opens into a huge, beautiful cavern rippling with speleothem stalagmites and stalactites, fluted curtains of rosy quartz like huge many-layered veils – all illuminated dimly by a huge web of luminous strands, the bioluminescent molds cultivated by thousands of yenners. To the travellers, this looks like the snare of a siren or trapper animal, and judging by the size of the web, the creature must be enormous. They notice stealthy movement in the corners of their vision (yenners moving about), which, if properly described, should get their nerves on edge. The Referee should have them roll lots of perception or survival checks while rolling dice himself and pretending to tick off boxes on a sheet. Crossing the cave becomes a test of nerves… and then the first yenners start jumping.

2. The downport has seen better days. To fix some superficial damage to their ship, the travellers need a hangar with enough workspace. The portmaster jerks his thumb towards a derelict hangar bay that has obviously been closed down for more than a decade. They need to go in, clear out the cobwebs, replace gunky filters, restart the generator and kick the 'bots and machines back into some semblance of life. On the positive side, getting the hangar running again counts as payment for the parts they use up in their repairs. On the negative side, there are a few yenners hiding in the corners (which the portmaster didn't know or neglected to tell the travellers about) that may jump up at the worst possible opportunity… such as when the ship's engineer is clinging to the top of the scaffolding by xir knees with five screws in xir mouth, an open can of solvent in one hand and a live plasma torch in the other.

3. The travellers are asked to smuggle a cargo of royal moss to a certain planet. The job proves tough – someone seems to have tipped off the customs authorities, who go over the cargo hold with a microscope, and there are at least two organised crime syndicates who alternately try to bribe or intimidate the travellers into turning the cargo over to them. Their ship is burglarized, the warehouse where they stashed the moss is set on fire, and the police pay them several visits. One plainclothesman in particular sticks to their case like a terrier and turns up at every opportunity with a few more uncomfortable questions. The travellers' cargo is actually a decoy: while the travellers draw all the attention, a discreet courier slips by the authorities and mobsters and delivers the crate with the real moss.

4. The conflict between two major powers on a balkanised world has bogged down into a stalemate. Trenches and gun emplacements riddle the landscape on the largest continent. The Impe-

rial fleet has taken out the aerospace forces of both sides when the war threatened to engulf the neighbouring colony (who declared their independence early on and petitioned the subsector Duke for Imperial client status). The ground forces, bereft of orbital and air support, are slugging it out across the blighted landscape. The travellers are engaged in either gunrunning or humanitarian missions, shuttling defensive arms or medical supplies and modular MASH bases to a neutral minor polity that takes in wounded soldiers from both armies and refugees running from the conflict.

The soldiers in the improvised hospital complex keep half-tamed yenners in the dugouts and trenches, where they thrive on the many kinds of molds that make the soldiers' lives miserable. One night, just as the travellers have finished setting up the hospital's new power plant, suddenly jenners start jumping up frantically from the Eastern trenches: one of the contestant powers has decided to revoke the hospital's neutrality and launched a surprise attack, disabling the sensors and tripwire alarms. As it is, the warning they got from the nervous yenners is just enough for the travellers to evacuate a number of key personnel or wounded in their ship. They are ready to take off just as the vanguard of enemy shock troops storms the complex, when a child stumbles into the hangar bay. The mother begs the travellers desperately to save her daughter, but to do so, they would have to delay their takeoff and go out into the shocktroopers' line of fire. The whole thing could be a trap, and there may be snipers lurking nearby using the girl as bait. Taking off at full power (the safest option for everyone on board) would incinerate the child with the firing thrusters or crush her with the ship's grav field. What do they do?

5. A scout of the travellers' acquaintance returns from a mission. They meet xir at the spaceport just as xir Type-S is shuttled to its berth, and xe cannot wait to spill the news. While exploring a huge natural cave system, xe examined some dead yenners and discovered that their "ewer organs" held massive nuggets of platinum and gold. Xe surmises that the yenners fill their bladders with water from the bottom of subterranean rivers and the deposits of heavy metals accumulate in their organs. Xe wants to claim the caverns and exploit them. (As unclaimed estate on a newly discovered world, the "finding is keeping" paragraph in interstellar law says xe can establish ownership unless someone can claim earlier discovery and prove this with a ship's log.) The travellers are invited to join xir in this enterprise if they can provide a bit of money to get a gold-extraction operation running.

The next day, the scout is found dead. Checking on their friend's ship, the travellers notice that the airlock has been breached and a band of unsavoury spacers is fleeing with what looks like the ship's black box. Someone has gotten wind of their friend's plans and decided to put in their claim first.

6. When a construction company moved in to erect a domed habitat in a huge natural cavern, the first yenners panicked in frenzy at the sight of the bright orange vehicles. The workers thought nothing of it, but adopted one of the less panicky yenner "nest-maids" as a pet. Gradually it lost its fear of the machinery, and soon it was seen bouncing among the grav trucks.

Then something interesting happened. The yenner was often seen rubbing itself against a tracked drill's power socket – it seemed to enjoy the slight electric jolts it got. Soon after, it went away to tend a nearby nest with newly laid eggs. A few days later, construction workers from all

over the island reported that the yenners had suddenly lost their fear of orange vehicles, and would come to nuzzle drills' sockets. It is as if the knowledge from one yenner was somehow transmitted to the others. IISS biologists suspect the royal moss must be able to store or transmit information and pass it along their roots to other patches, where it influences the hatchlings' memories. The excited scientists plunder the local university's research funds and put together an expedition; some hired travellers with a bit of experience in animal handling would probably be a good addition to the crew. There are bound to be a few memorable experiments to test the moss's surmised thought-transmitting abilities.✪

The Prep Room

The Great *Traveller* Make-Off

by Timothy Collinson

Few can have missed the success on television of programmes such as *The Great British Bake Off* (GBBO) and similar titles such as *The Great British Sewing Bee* and then translations to other countries from west (*The Great American Baking Show*) to east (*The Great Kiwi Bake Off*) with many inbetween, such as *Das große Backen* [The Great Bake] in Germany, *Hela Sverige bakar* [All of Sweden Bakes] and the forthcoming *Peče celá země* [The Whole Country Bakes] in the Czech Republic. Similar programmes have centred around crafts from pottery to painting; from gardening to make up. In the light of this – and who thought sewing would make would great TV?[1] – why not something similar centred around *Traveller*? *Traveller* as a wide open role playing game inspires creativity in both referees and players and in the games themselves, however scripted they may start out as. Why not embrace that and give an opportunity to show off something of that creativity?

This is probably not for everyone, but for keen referees particularly and those who'd like to show off both their creativity and their ability to work under pressure, the format would be ideal. While some of us like to spend an entire year writing an adventure for a convention, I know of others who don't start sketching out their ideas on paper until they arrive at a convention and are running a game that evening. At the same time, it should be possible not to overly favour writers over those who have other artistic abilities – perhaps in producing a world map, thinking up a fascinating character, or designing the outline of a perfectly playable adventure in just a few words.

Having noticed, thanks to my wife's enthrallment to such broadcasting, the similarity of the formats, it's not a great leap of imagination to propose something along the lines of the following. You might wish to experiment with ingredients and method according to taste. Beware of imperial and metric measurement differences.

Duration: 4 hours (or may be split into different sessions). This would fit into a standard TravCon slot at the UK convention (*also at TravellerCON/USA –ed.*). Alternatively, it could be an after-hours event, possibly split in two over a couple of evenings – although creativity may not be at its peak late at night and after a long day of gaming.

For a standard convention slot, it would be fairly easy to accommodate six participants in the same way as a normal game; or two or three tables could be 'run' by multiple referees coordinating with each

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1—*I've refrained from making a joke about watching paint dry as the painting version is, perhaps unsurprisingly given the artistry involved, eminently watchable.*

(Continued from page 28)

other. For larger numbers of participants, thought would have to be given to the logistics of running multiple tables, providing multiple rule sets (or expecting participants to bring their own), or arranging teams in an after-hours at-the-bar style event.

Theme: Choose a theme for the Make Off. Several may be needed if it is to be a serial event in the style of a television series with reducing numbers of participants in subsequent 'episodes' and a 'semifinal'/'final' structure. A theme isn't absolutely necessary for a one-off event, but does help to give some focus.

Example themes might include:

- scouts
- Darrians
- eve of war
- hi tech

or less concrete and more ambiguous themes such as:

- 'merchants on the edge' (the edge of space, the edge of bankruptcy, the edge of legality, the edge of insanity…)
- ancient regimes (with a deliberately lower case 'a')
- into the unknown

Rules: Choose a rule set that will be used for *The Great Traveller Make Off*. TravCon in the UK, for example, stipulates games should be run with the latest version of *Traveller* rules which means Mongoose 2nd Edition. Other rule sets may be preferred. Brave judges might allow the use of any rule set. Alternatively, sessions 1 and 3 could be decided purely on the textual descriptions and not rely on any rules at all. Session 2, the 'technical' challenge would need rethinking.

Judging: Decide on a judging format. This could be a guest judge or judges, perhaps at a convention; it could be the convention organizers doing the judging; it could be a 'blind' judging by other participants not knowing whose creation is whose or alternatively judging with named entries; or it could be a vote of all participants and observers (anonymous or not). With good preparation and logistics it could conceivably be a celebrity judge not on site if scans/photos of material can be made and emailed or communication via instant messaging maintained.

Judging can be carried out while the participants are proceeding to work on the next section, or, if being done by the participants themselves, accounted for in the timings as suggested below. Judging could be as simple as sticking entries to the walls of the venue for judges/observers to review; or as complicated as being compiled into PDFs to be circulated electronically.

Method: Split the Make Off into appropriate sessions. Below are a couple of suggestions, this could be arranged in many other ways.

1 hour: Signature Challenge
1 hour: Technical Challenge
2 hours: Show Starter

[*The Great British Bake Off* uses their 'showstopper' segment for a table-dominating bake of considerable proportions. We, of course, don't want to stop the show but get going and launch into lots of adventure!]

or: 45 minutes: Signature Challenge
15 minutes: participant judging
45 minutes: Technical Challenge
15 minutes: participant judging
90 minutes: Show Starter
25 minutes: participant judging
5 minutes: overall winner determination

Or, as an alternative again for a convention, the participant judging picks the two or three best in each session and those six or nine entries are posted for review and voting by all the convention dele-

gates overnight; an overall winner is then determined on the final day after all votes have been tallied.

Session 1: Signature Challenge

There can hardly be a *Traveller* player who hasn't created a character for themselves so this seems the obvious component of an introductory *Great Traveller Make Off* challenge. Other challenges could be used.

For example:

Instruction: Create a character which fits the theme. The character should be defined by a stat block, a list of skills and a description of no more than 300 words. Working should be shown on a term by term basis [this is to help check that they're within the rules]. Judges should look for a balance between stats, skills and description and suitability as a player character.

Of course, other criteria could be given (description only; limits to characteristics or skills; inclusion of humour, etc).

Session 2: Technical Challenge

An obvious choice here might be a starship, although that might be a little hard to produce in the time available; perhaps a small one would be feasible. Other options might include a weapon, an animal or perhaps other items from the various makers of *Traveller*[5]. If one animal is too brief for the time available, it could be an entire terrain encounter table. If a series of Make Offs was being used, different options could be used for each 'programme'. In any case, the idea is that strict limits are placed on the item in question (e.g. *a non-lethal weapon suitable for zero-g*, or *a 40kg pouncer for a thin atmosphere*). It might be interesting to generate certain limits by the organizer rolling dice in front of the participants. The idea of a technical challenge is to meet the brief precisely but also to show creativity and flair within those limits.

For example:

Instruction: Create a world which fits the theme. The world must have an atmosphere code of 5, 6 or 8; at least 30% hydrographics; a population code between 2 and 6 and a government type of 3. The description should not exceed 500 words and must minimally include notes on the main starport and two other locations. A blank world map is provided and should be marked with scale and key [a supply of coloured pencils may be desirable]. Judges should look for uniqueness and suitability within the criteria as well as opportunities for attracting PCs off their ship and further adventure.

Session 3: Show Starter

Here the aim is to outline a scenario for potential use at a convention or as part of a campaign with enough detail to allow an experienced referee to pick it up and run with it in a standard (four hour) slot. While some detailing is good, the time should generally be spent creating the components as an overall unit with thought given to playability and options for PCs and options for players.

For example:

Instruction: Create a short scenario using the given theme for six player characters with: 3 interesting locations, 2 NPCs and a plot pivot point.

or

Instruction: Choose one reason to travel between two locations, involve three memorable NPCs, four increasingly worrying setbacks and five unintended consequences; 6 potential PCs should be very briefly described.

The description should not exceed 1000 words – nugget format or mind maps are acceptable inclusions. Judges should look for thematic affinity, potential for fun[2] and beware of possible railroading or player divergence holes.

2—*if only this were quantifiable*

Notes:

One obvious point to note is a considerable difference between a bake off and this make off. Creating a physical item such as a delicious pastry requires both a knowledge of how to go about it and the actual production under time constraints. Creating an idea for *The Great Traveller Make Off* could of course be done prior to the session. For that reason, no attempt has been made to replicate the GBBO format of contestants being allowed to, for example, practice a showstopper before the actual filming of the relevant episode. Make Off participants might well want to brush up on their knowledge of certain rules so that they're not spending large proportions of their time getting their heads round something new, but they should only be given the specific challenge at the time of the event. Rules should be available as reminders; this type of activity is not recommended for complete neophytes who don't have some familiarity with the technical requirements. Of course, this would not be the case if a purely descriptive, non-rules based, approach to the Make Off was being used.

As noted at the start, it may be desirable to ensure that the Make Off is not overly emphasising writing ability – perhaps by making clear there is no penalty for spelling or grammar errors. It should be possible for those with a variety of creative bents to be able to participate and still see their ideas competing. This should be made clear in any advice to judges – whether a solo judge, or a participatory 'everyone votes' style of determining a 'winner'. It is of course, not impossible to dispense with any kind of judgement or winner altogether.

In all events, the idea is to have fun rather than take this too seriously. Organizers might want to remind participants of this and ensure that if it's being taken too seriously, then more light hearted challenges should be introduced. How much this would be a spectator sport without carefully edited filming, pieces-to-camera and interviews is left as an exercise for anyone trying this out. If, however, you do happen to have cameras and a film crew, I'll look forward to seeing the results! ✪

Some logistics to consider:

Can the relevant rule sets (or at least portions of them) be provided to each participant? (Or perhaps pairs of participants sharing?) Or are teams a better approach for large numbers?

Do you have sufficient blank world maps, sheets of squared paper, character term-by-term generation forms?

Is a document camera and screen available to show off results, or do you have an electronic solution to display creative efforts?

Will participants sit around a table together or go off into whatever dark corner they like? If the latter, will technology and internet connections be permitted thus allowing the possibility of pre-prepared material to be downloaded and used? Are online generators allowed as kickstarters?

Will technology be available/allowed to permit fair copy entries or will everything be handwritten? If the latter, will illegibility be a problem or a disqualifying feature? If the former, will this make internet access too easy or too difficult to police?

If participants (or participants and observers) are voting, do you need voting slips? Do you need to make these reasonably unique to prevent on-site forgery? Would a show of hands do or become too personal?

Participants should be clear from the outset how the judging is going to work and what criteria are going to be used so they can elect whether to participate or not.

Whoever is doing the judging, are the criteria against which entries are being measured very clear?

Are you offering a prize or prizes? Or just the fame and glory?

Are the results publishable? Have you considered how this might be done as either individual items or a set of them? Have you gathered participant permission to do this?

Foreven Worlds:

## Creatures of Distant Worlds

reviewed by Bryan Sycamore

Foreven Worlds: Creatures of Distant Worlds. Dale C. McCoy,Jr.
Jon Brazer Enterprises https://jonbrazer.com/
29pp., PDF
US$10.00/UK£7.81

What we have here is another book by JBE that this time covers a selection of Creatures that can be used in *Traveller*, but probably easily adapted to any other Sci-Fi setting with minimal fuss.

The book starts with a brief introduction that discusses how to use the creatures presented in Native Life, Dangerous Fauna, Vehicles, Pets and Entertainment. Each one comes with a couple of paragraphs describing each and then a suggestion or two for actual use. The content here is good and albeit obvious, it does provoke some thought.

The book then moves on to the actual creatures with a page dedicated to each. Each one is broken down into a description, Combat tactics, Ecology and Habitat and then some stats for each.

For example, the Shark goes into small detail about how Sharks originated on Earth and were spread by Ancients throughout known space. The combat tactics talks about hunting whilst Ecology discusses where you would find them, types of bodies of water for example. The stats then offer up stats for a Small, Normal and Large shark. Each creature is laid out the same way and this provides some ideas for use and as a one-pager can be very useful to have to hand.
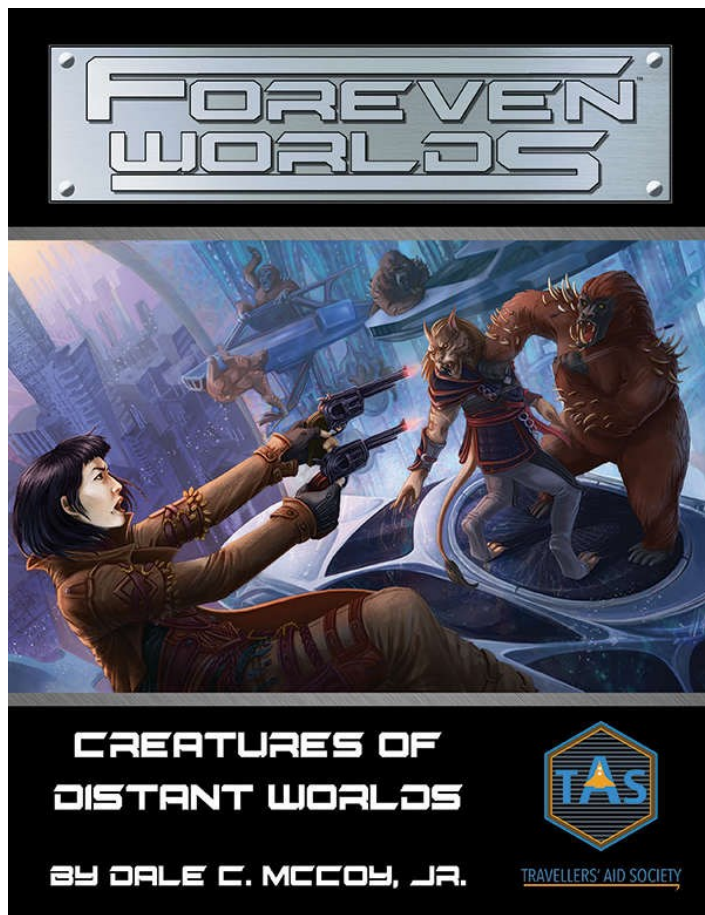
Each Animal also comes with an image of each. The art here is generally good throughout the book.

You then get an appendix which covers a series of benchmarks should you wish to create your own animals. A second appendix then offers up further details around each of the Traits.

All in all, a good addition to your library. My only criticism would be for the price, I would personally would have preferred a more content, maybe even a 1-2 page scenario with some of the creatures in actual use. ✪

#41: Ebb and Flow

To misquote Oscar Wilde, to lose one player is unfortunate; to lose two players looks downright careless.[1]

1—I don't know how well in travels, so just in case: "To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness." The Importance of Being Earnest

I'm new to actually running a campaign rather than individual games at TravCon for example. Well, I say new. The only campaign I've ever been part of – either playing or running – is my attempt to referee *The Traveller Adventure*. We've now been go-

Confessions of a Newbie Referee

ing for three and half a years. Twenty-one sessions. Just getting towards the Trade War chapter although we have had some diversions.

I guess I shouldn't be surprised that over that kind of time, players have come and gone. In as much as I thought about it at all I imagined you'd have a group and it would remain relatively static over time with perhaps a change or two. Maybe that is some referees' experience. It's certainly not mine. We had a player have an evening shift change at work after the first session so she then couldn't make the Thursday we played. We did look at changing which evening of the week we played but that was even more problematical. Another player had to drop out because he got a job in Vietnam – which I guess is fair enough.

When two players dropped out recently at the same time, I began to question whether it was something about my refereeing, of course. It's impossible not to. I still feel a 'newbie'; I still think I fail to engage the players as much as I could or give them really good decisions/actions/dilemmas to get involved with; I still think I'm rubbish at doing good NPCs. Ok, I'll admit I've managed a couple of good ones on all too rare occasions. It's the usual: impost-

er syndrome, fear, ego – all rearing their ugly heads. Best put aside – especially immediately after a session when it's all too easy to focus on what went badly rather than what went well. Fortunately I get a lift home from one of the players who has half an hour to point out some of the latter.

And of course, we have actually had people join us as well. A work colleague who mistook our *Traveller* evening for the book group evening (which runs in alternate months) and then stayed as he enjoyed it; the lecturer I'd invited almost by accident enthused so much to another lecturer that he ended up coming along and loving it. Another lecturer keeps threatening to join us but lives on the Isle of Wight so transport home afterwards is a problem; maybe one day.

I don't find it easy – particularly at present when we're at a 'low ebb' of just four players and possibly three. I find that more demanding as there's less player/player interaction. I find it a bit demoralizing when I hear other referees have 'wait lists' (in my dreams). But I have come to accept that it will only be a couple of us, most likely, that see the whole thing through and that that's the nature of a campaign.   ✺

Active Measures

Snowfall

by Joe Webb

This adventure originally appeared in response to an informal adventure contest on the (now defunct) Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society (JTAS) at SJGames, http://jtas.sjgames.com, and was posted to Freelance Traveller in June 2002 with the permission of SJGames and the author. It may not be distributed elsewhere without the express permission of SJGames and the author.

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Criteria: The adventure should feature gift-giving and a frozen landscape.

Play takes place on any world with about the following stats: Thin or very thin atmosphere, hydrosphere less than 20%, population in the

hundreds of thousands or less, moderate to low control rating/law level, about average tech level. The star system has to have a gas giant. Cordillion (2411 Trojan Reach), Esterhazy(1404 Solomani Rim) or Hammermium (2936 Spinward Marches) might be good choices.

Any player group will work, but there should be some widespread vacc-suit or zero-g skills, and probably streetwise and/or administration skills. And of course a soft spot for a fat old man with a snowy white beard, dressed in a red suit.

Active Measures

"Polar City was full of smoke and mirrors.

"Most places, they put their starports on the equator. Traditional, from back when people used ballistic engines. Anyway, you don't see ports at a pole, except here. They're doing their 'grand experiment' and the whole system is geared for it. Giving the planet 'the gift of life', or whatever their tridee talking heads go on and on about. Terraforming. So they put the port on the pole, so it will be safe.

"The whole town is only a couple of thousand overworked people. Lots of robots running around too. Kinda creepy, all those little machines jumping about. The main business of the place is making mirrors for the orbitals, and smoke. That's right, smoke. All these huge smoke stacks, belching out great black clouds. You couldn't see the sky half the time. It's for the terraforming. Looks like those coal towns we saw on Aramanx, la?

"Huh? Safe from what? Oh, yeah, I didn't tell you about the best part.

"Safe from the snowfall…"

This world is an experiment in terraforming. It is somewhat Mars-like, cold and mostly dry, with small icecaps and vast deserts. The goal is to thicken and heat the atmosphere, to make the surface a 'shirt-sleeve' environment.

Huge orbital mirrors enhance the normal sunlight. The soot from industries at the north polar starport help melt the polar ice, cutting down the albedo, increasing the heat absorption. Geneered algae pump soil-locked nitrogen into the air. There are a host of other efforts, but the most dramatic is the snowfall.

Snowfall is the nickname for a project to bombard the equatorial regions with comets and ice chunks captured at the gas giant. The snowfall heats the surface, sometimes triggering local volcanoes if they punch through the crust (but that is rarely done). It also provides additional water and methane. The vast scale needed to have an effect, however, means that this project must be run as economically as possible.

The comets (even the ice chunks are called comets once they are on their way) are set on Hohman transfer orbits. They are maneuvered into a parking orbit and then launched toward the mainworld during the 'window'. The engines are then jettisoned (to be captured and used on the next 'pod' of comets). The pod of comets (a pod refers to all the comets launched during a particular window) then coast to their target, often for months or years. Since there can be no last minute course corrections, only the polar regions of the planet have any permanent inhabitants. The orbital mirrors are regularly replaced.

The players arrive at a peak in the starport economic cycle. A snowfall is coming down in the next few weeks, so the equatorial work teams have headed into the port. Everything is crowded and expensive. Gangs and organized crime have infiltrated the rank and file, so vendettas and turf battles are nightly occurrences as they compete for the laborers' funds. Local security is overworked.

Before the players give it up, a news bulletin from the gas giant comes in. An entire icerigger crew, spacers who set up the comets for launch toward the mainworld, has been killed in an accident. Not too unusual, except anyone with Administration or Streetwise will find out that the next launch window is coming up. If the government wants to get a full pod of comets out in that window, they will need to replace that crew and fast. It will be very easy for the players to get jobs as iceriggers, at a very high rate of pay since the need is great (especially for people without gang connections). It is only for a month or so, the work is easy (if strenuous) and the pay is better than anything they are likely to see for a long time.

"Murmansk Station smelled like feet. Their air-scrubbers were running on low, like everything else in the place. Half the lights were out, brown-outs hit all the time too. And just enough gravity to make you spill your drink. Bare metal walls, bulkheads, plumbing and wiring trunks in all the hallways. Just like back on those old Dragon *boats they had us on in the Navy, la?*

"You got a moldy vacc suit and a cot, one in a stack of five, a lock box, and no place for the suit, so you wore it. You didn't pay for the showers, but you got only X liters of hot water, depending on how much your foreman liked your work. The pay was fantastic; it had to be in place like that. And my buddy, Mac, she was able to pull some strings to get us hired on at a primo level, a sweet deal. You'd think there wouldn't be much to spend your Credits on, out there in a glorified tin can. And there wasn't, not in the government stores, anyway…"

Murmansk Station is the icerigger base of operations at the gas giant. Iceriggers are vacc heads, basically low-skill level workers just coherent enough to wear a vacc suit without killing themselves. They are assigned to a work crew, and are daily shipped out into ring system. There, the crews select and weld chunks (water ice chunks a meter or more in diameter that make up the rings) into huge clusters of several thousand dtons. They shape it and spray it with reflec to keep it from sublimating too much, hang a motor on it and go to the next job. The work is mostly brute force, manhandling the chunks into the comet-cluster. At the end of the shift you log your mass (how much you say you added to the comet) and the cutter ferries you back to the Station.

Murmansk Station is built on a tiny asteroid moon. It is home to about a thousand, mostly iceriggers. The docks are small, built for the dozen modular cutters, but a couple of *Suleiman*s or *Seeker*s are usually docked too, part of the deep space Oort teams. A player run ship would have minimal docking fees while here.

Some laws are strictly enforced; most are not. Vacc suits, generic 24-hour models, must be government issue (too easy to hide weapons/contraband in private suits). Of course, there is a cottage industry in altering suits to hold weapons and contraband, and to spoof the helmet transponders and radios (the only links the riggers have out in the ice, the government/foremen can monitor unspoofed transmissions). Guns and beam weapons are prohibited, but knives and clubs are easy to get and there is a black-market in cheap gauss pistols. The security teams, dressed in well-used combat armor, are way outnumbered and they know it. Only the above rules are enforced with any regularity.

An icerigger crew numbers about 40. The crew ships out in a cutter, fitted with a 24-hour passenger module. Shifts are 12 to 16 hours, with up to four hour travel time. They move out into the rings, to areas thick with larger (1m+) chunks. A comet is usually already forming, as it takes a weeks to gather the several thousands dtons considered minimum for a comet. The crew foreman estimates the total work done (each crew is given a section of comet to fill up) and hands out any bonuses or penalties based on that. Foremen are easy to bribe.

The Station is cramped, with bare metal walls and not too much in the way of 'approved' entertainment. Organized crime has flourished, selling most any entertainment rich, bored iceriggers care to indulge in. The place is a rough frontier mining town; fist fights are common, as are protection rackets, gambling and the occasional murder. The hint of organized crime should be in the air, but not too blatant; the megacorp running the whole operation makes a sweep only when production levels drop dangerously low. (The movie *Outland* is a good model.)

A couple of days into the routine, the players will start getting hassled by small time bullies, or thieves, basically testing them to see how easy/tough a mark they are, and to see if they are aligned to any gangs. The referee should make the encounters challenging, but not too difficult to overcome. Fights out in the rings are common, for example, beyond the reach of even the minimal Station Security. Once the players have a regularly appearing enemy (say a group of two or three bullies), they should encounter that enemy pulling the same stunts on a kindly old man in the mess hall.

Claude Sinter is dressed in a beat up red vacc suit. He is fat, not uncommon in low g, and has a huge white beard, which is uncommon in low g. He is friendly and has a twinkle in his eye, since he is usually hopped up on vacuum distilled rum. The referee should set it up so that the players drive off the bullies after a short scuffle. Claude will thank them and offer to buy them drinks. He is a nice old guy full of stories (revolving around the souped-up fighter he flew as a kid in a Sword World aerospace force—"quick as a flash she was, I called her *Slayer*").

A few days later, going back to their bunks after a long shift, they come up on the bullies pounding Claude to death in a dark hall. He is in really bad shape and needs medical attention. The players should get him into the infirmary ASAP, but will have to bribe their way in (or they can attend to him themselves if anyone has the appropriate skills). Claude will be very grateful, and pull them close to tell them the rest of his story.

He was part of a group that hijacked a United Armies shipment a few months ago. A syndicate job, he didn't know what the shipment was, but worth millions or more. The syndicate was to have them lay low in this system, since they had contacts at this station. Well, he and his friends got greedy. Some of them hid the shipment (a single cargo container),

somewhere on the mainworld, probably at a Polar City freight yard. Then they were going to negotiate a better deal. It didn't work out. His friends were killed in a cutter "accident" a few weeks ago. The syndicate didn't know Claude was part of the team, and he has been laying low, hoping to get at the container. He knows what the access codes for the container are, but he doesn't know where it is. The location is inside that destroyed cutter, drifting in the rings. If the players help him find it, he will cut them in on the profits—his gift for saving him.

The cutter wreckage is a standard work crew cutter, supposedly hit by a stray chunk that blew the drive and overloaded the powerplant. It was a bomb in engineering, no survivors. Most of the bodies were recovered, but since the syndicate controlled the cleanup operation, they left the bodies of their enemies (they didn't think that they had any value). The wreckage is drifting in the main ring. The players can get out there (if they hijack/borrow/bribe a cutter or use their own ship), but they can't dock with the wreck; too much damage. Most of it is open to hard vacuum anyway.

A syndicate-hired team follows the players there. Not professionals, but they will have gauss pistols. They might be able to sneak up on the players, if they hide in the chunks. Anyway, the syndicate has been shadowing Claude, and even the bullies were in on it, trying to get him to confess to some connection with the shipment.

The info is in a chip on the body of one of Claude's friends. Claude will have told them what to look for as well as the encryption codes to read the chip. The players will have to defeat the syndicate team before they can use the information, of course. The container is in the equatorial region targeted by the incoming snowfall. That was going to be part of the pressure tactic. Snowfall is in ten days, they have that long to retrieve it.

(Continued from page 36)

By now the gas giant and the mainworld are about 10 AU apart. The players can wait for the weekly shuttle, but it probably won't get them back in time. If they have a ship, or otherwise get access to one, it might be faster to do a microjump within the system. That tactic might even throw the syndicate off their trail for a day or two.

> *"The fighters buzzed us on the third day out. We had just finished digging the container out from under that sand and here they came, popping over the horizon. Easy to see since they were the only things moving out there. Their first salvo took out the back of the* Suleiman, *and young Ildwani with it. Mac was lucky she was with us behind the dunes. Old Claude picked up the SAM launcher and boom. Took out one as they banked around for the next pass. Sweet, la?*
>
> *"When it was over, both fighters were down but we'd lost Ildwani and our ride out of there. Mac said she could get one of the fighters back together, in about a week. The sun had gone down and the comets were coming up over the horizon. They were so close you could see the jets where the reflec was boiled off. We didn't have a week…"*

Once back at the mainworld, they can get to the container, resting in the open at a makeshift landing-pad, half covered with sand dunes. They will be followed, of course. The syndicate is able to call in two *Iramda* fighters down from the pole. To make life interesting, the fighters should be able to disable any transport they have. If they survive, the fighters will attempt to land and take control of the container. If not, an overland team will arrive in a day (unless it is snowfall day, then they arrive in three days to look for remains). These guys will be professionals, armed with laser weapons.

Should the players find themselves without transport, there are underground bunkers scattered across the equatorial regions, normally used by the algae teams. They are hardened, able to survive any-

thing but a close strike. Their locations are not secret, but they are locked against vandalism. The nearest one should be just far enough away to make the players sweat to get there. A countdown race to a locked bunker would be dramatic.

Aside from the normally inhospitable conditions a Mars-like surface provides there are other dangers when traveling across the surface. Nitrogen-blooms are one. Geeneered algae suddenly releasing vast quantities of nitrogen into the air will cause tons of soil to blast into the air like a geyser. People or machines too close are hit by the sand, possibly buried.

Anyone caught in the open during snowfall is in for a bad time, too. Each impact is equivalent to about 1000 megatons, and there are about a dozen or so impacts. Anything within a few kilometers is destroyed (a good way to get rid of evidence—and the container site *will* be destroyed whether the players make it there or not). The overpressure wave can crack a foot of concrete within a dozen or so kilometers, hyper-hurricane force winds will scour the landscape for hundreds to thousands of kilometers around. Ejecta from the blasts will rain down for hours, dust storms, complete with static lightning strikes, will sweep out behind the blastwaves. The entire landscape will be altered. Even safely inside a bunker, the doors can be buried or the bunker itself lose its atmosphere integrity in the massive 'quakes.

There are several choices for the treasure. It can be a shipment of combat drug, worth millions on the street. Getting it to a fence will net the players hundreds of thousands of Credits. It can be part of a payroll shipment, traditionally done in cash. The notes will be in sequence, however; laundering it will be a big problem and the players are likely not to see much profit—certainly not the millions that are there. It might even be a new type of weapon system. In that case the customers for such a device are limited, but willing to pay. In all cases the treasure is the legal property of the Imperial Army, and

the nominal property of a medium sized crime syndicate. Both will want it back. The referee should determine subsequent events.

> *"We drank to Ildwani and counted our loot. Now that the bars were empty, Claude stuck out like a Virushi at Geonee convention. He insisted on wearing that red vacc suit, claimed it was lucky. I was sure we hadn't been followed, but there was a guy sitting in the corner booth, and I didn't think he was there for the atmosphere. Lucky.*
>
> *"Mac said we should lift soon, and I agreed. The only problem was making it across town to the berth she had lined up for us. We were going to need cover, and more luck than Claude's suit could provide, but it was doable. Polar City is full of smoke and mirrors, la?"*

✸

Smoke Test: Once In A Blue Moon

by Michael Capriola and C. A. Pella

Chapter Four

"Medical emergency! Will crewperson Nguyen report to Deck Three cargo bay with the medkit on the double."

Lubbock snapped awake, rolled over in his bed and hit the intercom. "Captain here. What the hell's going on?"

"Fu Quan here, Captain. One of the cradle's clamps tore loose and dropped one end of the probe on technician Harcourt Fenton. Chief Garcia is examining the damage. I've sent for Isabelle—"

"I heard." *Shiva on a pogo stick.* "I'll be down as soon as I get dressed. Captain out."

Quite a crowd had gathered by the time Lubbock arrived at the cradle. Garcia and Fu were going over the twisted remains of the clamp. The injured tech lay on the floor with a folded blanket as a pillow. Nguyen had injected him with a pain killer, straightened his broken leg and was even now wrapping a Mender-500™ around the injured limb. Farb was frantic.

"Captain Lubbock! This is supposed to be a sterile area. I can't have your crew wandering about in here."

"A man's been injured, Farb!"

"Don't I know it. The time we'll lose! Let's move him out of here to a place where he can be doctored properly. And this whole area will have to be resterilized."

"We can move him in a couple of minutes, Captain," Nguyen said.

"Take all the time you need, Isabelle," Lubbock said between clenched teeth. He walked over to the cradle, Farb in tow. Technicians Rayne, Stevens and Davout peered over the shoulders of the two engineers. Lubbock shooed them away. "What happened here, Don?"

Chief Engineer Donal Conan Garcia y Vega sat back on his heels and scratched at one of his mutton-chop sideburns. He looked up at the captain. "Someone spilled acid on this joint." He indicated the place. "Or deliberately put it there. It weakened the joint, with obvious results."

"Sabotage!" shrieked Farb.

"Fuck!" added Lubbock.

"We can move Fenton now, Captain."

Lubbock glanced around, focused on the technicians. "Stevens and Davout. Put your buddy on that stretcher and take him to quarters. Take the freight elevator to Deck Two, then use the personnel lift from there to Deck One. You'll probably have to angle the stretcher to fit it into the lift."

"We'll manage," Stevens said flatly. While the techs busied themselves with that task, Lubbock returned his attention to the damaged cradle. "Don, can you rig up something to hold the probe in place?"

While the Chief Engineer mulled over the request, Engineer Sprey walked in, her Vargr shadow right behind. Farb saw them and had a fit.

"She's covered in grease! And that Vargr will shed all over the place! Get them out of here!"

Arghaz smiled at Farb, not the friendliest gesture in a Vargr. Lubbock jerked a thumb at the door. Sprey nooded, and motioned for Arghaz to follow.

"Hold it a minute, Pepper," Chief Garcia called out. He stood and flashed a gap-toothed grin. "I have a little project for you. Wait for me in the machine shop." Sprey acknowledged and departed with the Vargr. Garcia pulled out a notepad and bent over the damaged cradle again.

Knowing that the situation was well in hand from an engineering standpoint, Lubbock walked over to where his First Mate was quietly watching the proceedings. The Captain motioned for the Mate to follow him out into the cargo bay.

"We have a problem, Mohammed Ivanovitch." He told the Mate about the acid. "Any thoughts?"

"Could have been accident, but who's using acid in there? No, looks like sabotage."

"Question is, whom?"

"Must be one of the techs. Probably a plant by rival firm out to see Vaughn-Payne R&D lose its contract. Then again, might not be one of the techs."

Lubbock's mouth fell open. "You're not suggesting one of the crew did this?"

"No, we've been together too long."

The Captain considered the alternatives. "Arghaz?"

First Mate Smith lifted his shoulders in a shrug. "Maybe. What do we really know about her?"

"But she's under constant supervision. When she's not working with Pepper, she's doing chores for Isabelle."

"But does Isabelle watch her every minute? And what about the Vargr's rest time? Isabelle gave her a cabin up near the galley end of the passenger deck, but that's also near the main stairwell that runs down to Deck Three."

Lubbock chewed his lip. "This isn't good. Until we figure out who's responsible we can expect more accidents."

"We could put guard on the probe bay twenty-four hours a day."

"And who will do that duty? We just don't have the personnel."

"We could pull couple of engineers off maintenance duties. And add Isabelle, too. Have them stand six hour shifts on guard duty."

"Garcia will have a fit. The engineers are doing seven-hour maintenance shifts as it is just to keep this old bucket operating. Though, I suppose we can have a complete overhaul when we return to Port Whipsnade to make up for lost maintenance time." Lubbock sighed and ran a hand through his black hair. "I'll have a talk with Garcia and see what he says." He glanced at the chronometer built into his left thumbnail. "I've got the Bridge watch in a couple of hours. I'll talk to him before then."

Smith nodded. "What'll we do about the Vargr?"

Now, that's a problem. With Pepper and Isabelle on guard duty, the Vargr would have even more free time. "I

don't know. Can't accuse her without proof, but do we really want her to have the freedom of the ship? I'll think about it."

"Too bad we ripped out the low berths and turned that compartment into space for refrigerated cargo. We could have put the Vargr in cold sleep."

"Yeah, isn't hindsight marvelous." Lubbock raised clawed hands to his temples and scatched vigorously at this scalp as though this might stimulate thought. "Gods, what a mess! I've got to think this through. I'm going to grab a sandwich on my back to my cabin. Tell Garcia I'd like to see him at his convenience."

"Aye, sir."

Lubbock strode to the stairwell and climbed up to Deck One. He came upon Nguyen in the galley wiping down surfaces with disinfectant. "Captain?"

"How's your patient?"

"Sleeping. I cleaned and bandaged the abrasions on his leg, set the broken bone and wrapped it."

"I saw."

"He's hooked up to the med-scanner." She touched the tear-drop earring on her right lobe. "The scanner's alarm is tied in to this receiver."

Lubbock nodded and dropped into a chair. "Can you whip up a sandwich for me, Isabelle?"

"Sure. Sliced rabbit on lettuce and tomato okay?"

"Yeah." The Captain put his elbows on the table and rested chin on hands. He pondered the options open to him but came up with no answers. Could they set a trap of some sort to catch the saboteur in the act? Did they have any truth serum on board? He could interrogate the techies, then. And speaking of the technicians, what if Farb himself was the culprit? That'd put a wrench in the works.

Garcia came and sat down at Lubbock's table. "You wanted to see me, Captain?"

"Yes." Lubbock sat up straight as Nguyen placed a sandwich and cup of tea before him. He thanked her and took a sip of his tea. When he set the cup down, he told Garcia about the First Mate's idea of using the engineers as guards for the probe. "I know it'll hurt maintenance work, but I don't know what else we can do."

Garcia leaned back in his chair and exhaled sharply. "Pepper is going to shit bricks."

"Well, who's running the engine room—you or Pepper?"

Garcia's face turned red. Lubbock stared at his sandwich for a long moment.

"I'm sorry, Don. This situation has me on edge. Gods know what the saboteur will target next. And Pepper has every right to worry about maintenance. Just as I know you do. If you have a better idea, I'm willing to listen."

"I wish to hell I did, Captain."

Lubbock nodded and picked up his sandwich. "I'll defer my decision until after you jury-rig a new clamp for the probe's cradle. That's our priority right now."

"Yes, sir." The Chief Engineer stood, patted Lubbock on the shoulder and departed.

The Captain suddenly had no appetite, but he forced himself to finish the meal. ✪

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. If you are a fluent speaker of a language other than English— especially (*but not exclusively!*) of languages in which *Traveller* has previously been published (*we're aware of Spanish, French, German, and Japanese*)—and interested in translating into that language for us, please email the editor at *editor@freelancetraveller.com* 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. ✪

Finding Your Way Around the Starport

By Benedikt Schwarz

This series will, over the next few installments, cover the various parts of a starport and how they interact with each other, and what travellers can expect here. Each section will be given a short description and be furnished with a few adventure hooks and possibly typical specimens of the kind of people you could meet there.

Layout

Travellers tend to spend a lot of their time at the starport. Their ship will be docked in one of the port's berths. Refuelling and maintenance take place here, as well as the trade that keeps the bills paid and the ship running. Patrons looking for a team of travellers-for-hire will frequent the portside bars, ship captains meet and swap news in the various tea houses, messages for their friends and contacts will be stored at the port's post office. Crewmen looking for work will hang around at the trade dock to try and talk to any captain who might be able to offer them a job. Passengers looking for passage will be listed in the port's system, where they can be contacted by ships going in their direction.

Many of these activities are routine and can be handled with a minimum of preparation. "I'm going to visit the known spacer hangouts to go looking for someone who might have a job for us." A general knowledge of the starport's layout helps, but a detailed map isn't necessary in most cases.

There are situations, however, where it becomes important for the Referee and players to know just what part of the starport is located where:

- The travellers are in the Brokerage section and on the run from the starport police. What route should they take to their ship's berth? Do they get there in time before a patrol outflanks them and bars their way?

- Insurgents have seized part of the starport. Can the existing troops be shifted in time to cut them off from the vital locations? Fuel storage, life support or the power plant are all vulnerable targets. Are the travellers caught between the terrorists and the starport's Marines, or can they get clear before the excrement hits the ventilation?

- The travellers are hiding a known dissident/criminal/celebrity travelling incognito. They need to get xir to a certain section of the port. Which route do they need to take if they want to avoid either crowded areas or checkpoints and patrols as much as possible?

The diagram (overleaf) shows the different sections of a typical starport and how they connect. Small circles denote checkpoints where travellers may be held up, apprehended, or searched, such as at the Navy Yard's entrance.

Sizes and appointments differ from port to port. In a given starport, certain areas may be huge, especially in the case of higher-level ports, or they may be so small and primitive as to be nearly nonexistent. Berths may be luxuriously-appointed hangars with their own atmospheric control and gravitic handling, or they may be a simple pit in the ground. There may be just a single berth or landing field for the occasional visiting scoutship, or there may be rows upon rows of tiered shipping docks for a mind-boggling volume of traffic. The shipyard could be a huge facility stretching over hundreds of square kilometers, or a simple shack with a few tools and a bit of lifting equipment. A "viceregal palace" may actually look nothing like a palace in a backwater system. I would like to refer you to Jeff Zeitlin's "Extending the UWP: Starports" and the Universal Extended Starport Profile (*Freelance Traveller* #41, May 2013), for an overview of starport sections and their respective size, and Rob Eaglestone's excellent "The Eaglestone Trade Index", (*Freelance Traveller* #51, March 2014), for an estimate of a star system's
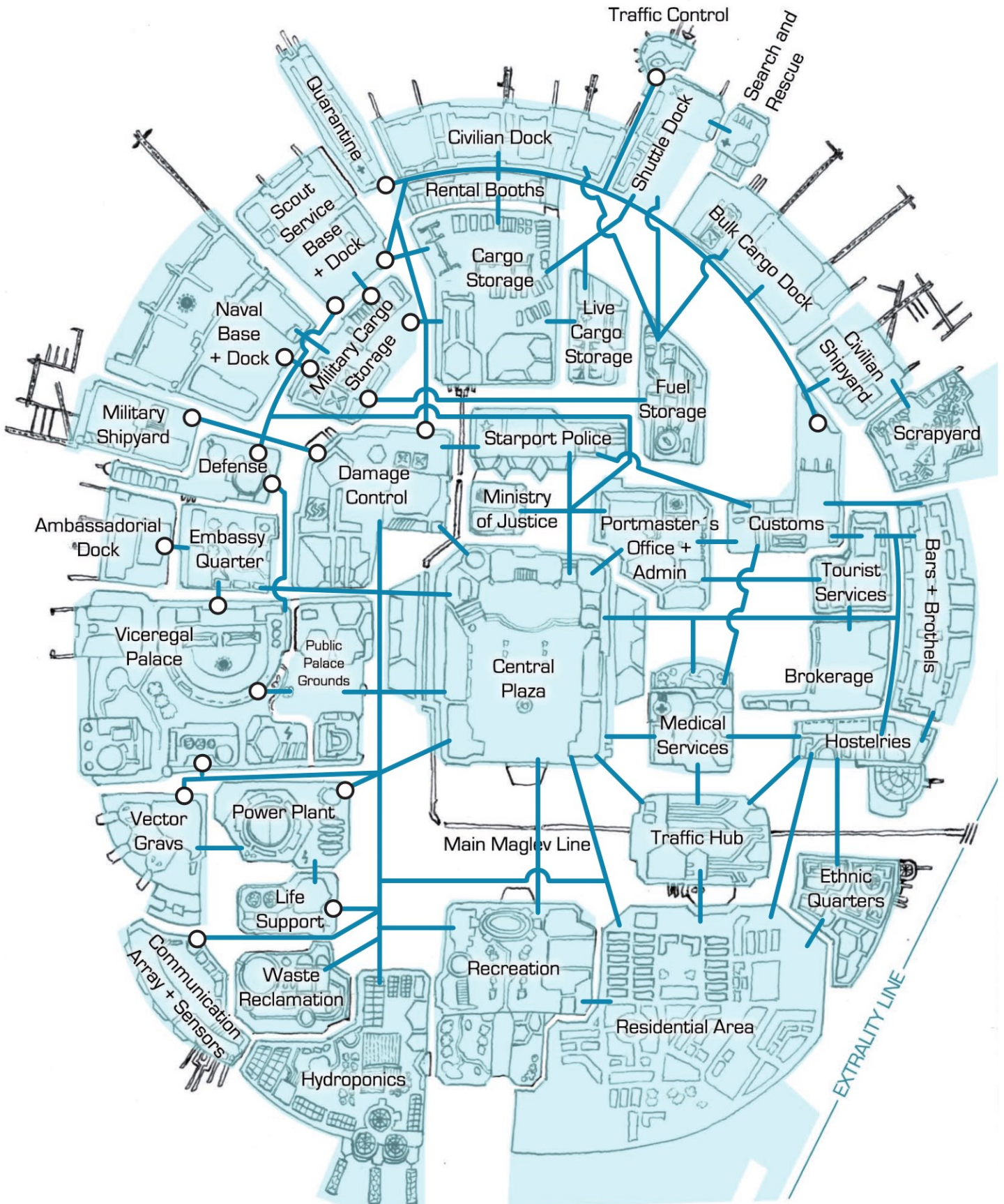
traffic density. Both have been of invaluable help in the writing of this column.

Note that the diagram contains *all* areas that can possibly be expected at a standard spaceport or starport. Not all of these areas will be present at all starports. A Class-E is unlikely to have a shipyard or a viceregal palace; even the larger ports will often lack a Navy or Scout Service base; lawless systems may not even provide customs services; and so forth. In this case, the Referee simply needs to cross out those areas and checkpoints that are not present at the port in question. The connection lines remain.

Even where all the sections are present in a system, they may still be distributed between the lowport and the orbital port. If there is a shipyard, it may be located dirtside or in orbit, or both components may have their own shipbuilding facilities. The viceregal palace may be perched on an outcrop overlooking the downport or jut out of the highport's upper levels (or the system's reigning noble may well have palaces in both ports, with a separate shuttle service or space elevator between the two). If the system has an orbital port, the Referee must use two separate diagrams for the highport and the downport, and cross out those areas on either that are not present at the respective component.

Different Layouts

Only a very few starports still conform to their original blueprints.

When a port is first built, it is tailored to the expected amount of trade, and like any rough estimate, this may or may not be correct. Political upheaval, failed subsidy programmes, shifts in trade routes, an industrial revolution on the planet or the discovery of new resources in-system may throw the projections of the best analysts out of kilter.

Every economic change reflects in the starport's layout, which is modified to fit the new situation. A starport suddenly finding itself the hub of livestock trade in the subsector may have to convert part of its cargo storage or even recreation areas into huge cattle pens. An influx of tourists may result in cheap hotels being built in storehouses, or residential areas being transformed into tourist traps. Sometimes, the modifications are cosmetic; often they are extensive and may border on the grotesque. When talking about non-standard ports, travellers commonly use the terms "shrunk" and "mushroom":

A "**shrunk**" or "**dried-up**" starport was founded on high expectations that failed to materialise. At some point of its operational life, it was decided that the traffic coming through could be managed with a fraction of the staff and facilities. There are now huge mothballed areas that are never used. On the ground, those are dilapidated empty warehouses, buildings and towers, bare blast pits, rooms full of deactivated computer banks, robots, tools and vehicles. At the highport, those areas are simply sealed off. There may still be stale atmosphere in them (possibly toxic since it likely hasn't been changed for quite a while), but more often than not, the atmosphere is vented into space to help preserve the equipment, and the facilities are exposed to vacuum. Power will be down, shutters closed, and the rooms in darkness.

Being short on personnel, shrunk starports don't usually patrol those areas. The janitorial service or night watch may check on them irregularly, but most of the time they are left alone. This makes the shrinkage areas (perhaps referred to as "decommissioned" or "abandoned") ideal haunts for criminals. Dissidents and mobsters meet their contacts in the darkened air ducts. Smugglers bribe the janitors to hide contraband in the derelict bays. Fugitives from the law may hole up here with a vacc suit or pressure tent and a few bottles of oxygen to wait out a raid. There have even been cases of the maintenance personnel diverting power and atmos-

phere to grow illegal herbal drugs in the abandoned berths, or entire black markets or gambling rackets located in a pressurised bubble in an abandoned storage area.

Where the Port Authority is corrupt, some of the "officially" decommissioned areas may even still be working—in an unofficial role, serving pirate ships and raiders safely out of view from Imperial inspectors.

"Dried-up" starports are interesting in that they may have an orbital component even if their rating is low. Often, the Imperium provides subsidies to have at least marginal activity there, in order to preserve the highport for a possible later resurgence of trade. This financial aid is hardly enough in most cases, and the personnel of those ports are usually quite adept at jury-rigging and cannibalising outdated equipment to keep things ticking.

The Navy also keeps tabs on "dried-up" starports, both inside and out of Imperial space. There are quite a few ports that are listed as being able to serve only ships up to a certain displacement, or a certain volume of traffic, but might be able to handle much larger ships or fleets if the mothballed areas were reactivated. Especially the Navy's huge capital ships are dependent on large ports. If major military action is expected along the border, the Marine and Naval logistics corps may swoop in, get the surplus equipment up and running, and the poor class-D portmaster may wake up to find himself with a superdreadnought parked against his highport and thousands of Naval troopers testing the available bars, brothels and brigs to their limits.

A "**mushroom**" port started out small but had to grow quickly as the volume of trade increased exponentially. Sometimes, this may be because the original analysts grossly underestimated the star system´s potential, or because of the decline of a rivalling system, but quite often the mushroom growth is intentional. Starports are expensive, both to build

and to maintain. Poor worlds may not have the money to purchase a Class-C outright, so they start with a simple landing field and slowly build up the port from the revenue brought in by interstellar trade. Each time the port grows, it generates more income, which is in turn invested in the modernisation of the port.

While very sensible in the economical view, mushroom ports are often a headache for administration, personnel and traders alike. Maintenance of the facilities is difficult because ducts and pipes may conform to wildly different standards from one room to the next (and the planet may even have gone through two or more tech levels since the first ones were installed). Docks, storehouses, recreational areas and malls may have been haphazardly added to the existing facilities wherever there was room for them, forcing people to take long detours as compared to the short and efficient commute of a clean layout. And yes, this issue does apply to firefighters, police and paramedics as well.

Insurgents, terrorists and criminals find more crannies to hide from the police at a mushroom port, and any defense plan against riots or boarding actions is likely to contain a lot of what-ifs. Mop-up operations in mushroom ports are notoriously difficult and involve a lot of sniping from unexpected quarters.

Mushroom highports may also have stability problems, because every bit that is added on changes the station's center of gravity and must be balanced out by its gravs and thrusters. The structural integrity is also far lower than that of a planned highport, where spars and struts would have been optimised from the start and run the whole length of the port in one piece. Such a port may be literally shaken to pieces or pulled into a decaying orbit if an especially large ship makes a crash docking or scrapes along the mooring struts. These issues mean that mushroom ports are often only able to serve a

much lower tonnage of ships than their class suggests. Of course, in the face of lucrative trade or Naval subsidies, those limitations are pretty often overlooked or ignored.

If a port is particularly puzzle-pieced, traders along the Solomani border refer to it as a "Frankenstein port" (or "frankenport" for short). The expression appears to have its origin in ancient Terran literature, but this has never been confirmed.

To create a mushroom port, the Referee will have to change some of the access lines on the diagram, or add separate areas. It is common to have a second Civilian Dock or Bulk Cargo Dock added somewhere, even if you have to drive the cargo all the way through the Residential zone to get it into storage. Feel free to experiment!

Civilian dock

This is where lighter freighters up to 1,000 dtons and passenger liners of all sizes dock. At the downport, accomodations may be fairly Spartan (an empty field and a few blast pits) or lavish (single roofed berths with their own gravity and atmospheric environment, able to simulate a wide range of planetary conditions).

Berths at the highport may be either external (simple struts tipped with docking clamps and an airlock large enough to allow freight transfer), or the whole berth may be basically a ship-size airlock that swallows the vessel whole before the outer hatch is closed and the interior pressurised with whatever atmosphere was specified. Requesting a special atmospheric mix and/or pressure beforehand may require negotiations and will almost certainly add to the berthing cost—if it is possible at all. Enclosed berths will be separated by fireproof airlocks and can be quarantined singly.

Atmosphere is pumped into the berth from either the station's Life Support or tanks stored in the Cargo Storage or Fuel Storage area. In any case, the atmospheric ducts and pipelines require constant maintenance and are prime targets for terrorist attacks, as the different atmospheric components may yield highly toxic or explosive compounds when mixed. This is why few ports have the capability to produce any but "human standard" atmosphere.

Ships can be refuelled from the Fuel Storage area via fuel trucks or pipelines. Simple maintenance and repairs can be effected here; anything more serious requires the ship to be moved to the Civilian Construction area.

Crash teams from the Damage Control and Fire Department areas will usually be on standby whenever a ship docks or launches.

Cargo will be handled by dock workers or the ship's crew themselves; it may be transferred by cargo truck to a Rental Booth rented by the ship's owner, or to Cargo Storage. Low-grade ports may lack this service, and goods must be moved by the ship's crew itself to its destination.

Adventure Seeds

1. At a shrunk downport, all operational blast pits are occupied. A low-TL courier from a neighbouring world needs a blast pit equipped with grav projectors to make a safe landing, so the travellers' ship (which is manoeuverable enough to land in a conventional pit) is bumped to one of the mothballed pits. Each pit has an enclosed hangar bay attached. The one in the mothballed berth needs to be opened manually using a power winch. As the travellers raise the storm shutter, they discover that the hangar still holds a forgotten vessel. The ship is a derelict and may still have cargo on board or star maps in its log.

2. As 1., but the vessel is owned by pirates who "parked" it here to keep it out of the way – it has become notorious in this subsector, and they wanted to wait until the worst uproar was over.

When they hear of the travellers' ship being shunted to this pit, they know they must act quickly to get their ship off the premises. The travellers are told that the starport police will visit the pit to identify the vessel, but it might take several hours since all available personnel are need to deal with the heavy traffic right now. The pirates have that long to get the characters' ship out of the berth (it sits in the way of the corsair's takeoff). Their actions may range from threatening the travellers to hijacking their ship. If worse comes to worst, they will try to blow the power plant.

3. As 1., but the hangar has recently been used as a headquarters and slave pen for a human trafficking ring. They may be able to free the few remaining slaves from the cages on the walls, but the guards left by the ring start firing on the slaves to silence them as witnesses.

4. A large Aslan/Zhodani/Baronial ship has been set up in a stand-off orbit near the highport and declared that polity's embassy to the system – the faction in question has committed some serious breaches of conduct during the last war, and isn't exactly welcomed with open arms. One of the ambassadorial staff members wishes to visit the port incognito (as incognito as a seven feet tall space lion can ever be), and arranges for the travellers to shuttle him to the civilian dock on their ship. The plan was leaked, though, and their berth's door is picketed by protesters who shout slogans and threats. The travellers are effectively trapped in their own berth until they can get permission to take off.

5. As 4., but the protesters crawl into the berth via the maintenance shafts. They are now inside with the ship, and any takeoff into space will incinerate the protesters and blow them into space when the hatch opens. The travellers will have to subdue them, without resorting to lethal force. To add to the problems, their passenger is somewhat hot-headed and so enraged by the insults (or frightened by the raw emotions xe senses in the picketeers' minds) that xe begins lashing out with a dewclaw or psychic powers if not restrained.

6. As 5., but there is a team of four assassins hidden in the crowd of harmless protesters. At the last instant, the Aslan's keen combat senses or the Zhodani's telepathy give xir a warning, and xe will tackle the targeted traveller and shove them out of the way of the silenced gunshot. To the high-strung nerves of the travellers (who may not even have registered the shot), this looks like an attack.

7. The refuelling at this berth is somewhat sluggish. When the ship's engineer checks the valves, xe discovers a time bomb wired to one of the pumps by Ine Givar terrorists – as soon as a specified amount of L-Hyd has streamed through the pump, it will go off, causing a huge explosion. The storm valves have been disabled, so the hydrogen explosion will carry back to the tanks at the Fuel Storage section. Turning off the flow will likely explode the bomb prematurely. They need to find a way to divert the liquid hydrogen and pump a harmless fluid through the rigged pump until they can have an expert disarm the bomb.

8. A shabbily dressed person visits the travellers in their berth. Xe comes from an outlying space station in the system that has been decommissioned. Part of the station's population remained there (they are an "undesirable" ethnicity on the main world, and fear persecution or discrimination if they were to return), and are now slowly starving. Xe asks the travellers to ferry a few containers of grain and protein mush to the station. Unfortunately, xe cannot pay, so xe has to resort to outlandish promises or, if worse comes

to worst and the travellers refuse, taking one of them hostage. Xe has a small bomb with a dead man's switch and a snub pistol, but xe isn't a killer, just a very desperate person who has friends and relatives starving on that rock.

Bulk Cargo Dock

Dominated by huge cranes, laser-marked unloading areas and giant container-handling equipment. Civilian freighters over 1,000 dtons dock here. Sometimes this part of the dock is also used by smaller traders that have no passengers on board and just wish to load and unload their cargo quickly. If the Civilian Dock is full, surplus free traders are also shunted here, and on large fleet maneuvers that involve more ships than the Military Dock can service, the Navy will also requisition berths here. Naval ships take precedence over merchant shipping, and the haughty Navy personnel rarely get on well with trader crews, which can lead to a lot of friction where they are crammed into the same dockspace.

The same facilities as in the Civilian Dock – refuelling, simple repairs, emergency crash teams and cargo transferral – are available here. Rather than being divided into compartments, each ship in its own blast pit, the Bulk Cargo Dock is a huge, sprawling area. In the highport, there may be one or more massive airlocks that accommodate a large ship each; after the airlock is put under pressure, the inner door opens and the ship may be taxied to its berth on gravs. Most bulk freighters do not actually land but just moor against one of the highport's many cargo airlocks.

Adventure Seeds

1. An error in clearance results in a huge 10,000 dton bulk hauler entering the berth zone – and the travellers' ship hasn't been taxied out of the way. If the travellers are quick, they can disconnect their ship from the fuelling lines and man-age an emergency takeoff – only there is nowhere to go. The airlock is blocked by the incoming freighter, so the travellers' ship has to weave between dock crew, workbots, cranes, containers and parked ships inside the huge landing bay to get out of the hauler's way.

2. As 1., but another tramp freighter's crew panic as they see the travellers' ship heading their way and start up their own vessel. They aren't as skilled or lucky as the travellers, and their ship collides with a parked free trader. The travellers have to land in a safe spot and enter the burning wreck to save the crew.

3. As 1., but the freighter's clearance to land was not a simple clerical error – the travellers find the landing bay's traffic controller slumped dead in his seat with a needle-gun wound in the back of his neck. The clearance code was entered by hand. Someone wants the travellers dead, and is ready to kill lots of innocent bystanders in order to reach their objective.

4. The travellers are hired to sniff out a band of Zhodani spies/pirate operatives/corporate mercs (insert appropriate kind of bad guys here) who are entering the port as stowaways in a bulk freighter's cargo hold. There is just not enough time to search all the stacked containers in the hold to find the one holding the insurgency team; they have to keep the docked freighter under close but covert surveillance until the bad guys emerge from their hiding place. That means the travellers have to find a place to hide, avoid patrols and security holocameras, and keep the observation up for several days.

5. The dockworkers are on strike. Already, merchant vessels arriving at the port have to be put into holding orbits, and the Port Authority has flown in strike-breakers to keep up with the demands of the cargo ships. The replacement workers are hardly skilled, cargo supervisors are

overworked (and harassed by the strikers' pickets), there is a lot of confusion, and freight gets misplaced. Some of the contents of containers delivered to the travellers' ship are not what it says on the tin. And the original owners are not happy to discover that fact. Whether it is a cargo of valuable antiques for a noble's collection, military hardware for a radical religious sect, or contraband that should have gone into the hold of a smuggling ship, the original owners will be sending a team of thugs to reclaim their stuff.

6. As 5., but the strike was organised by a hostile outside faction. Some of the strike-breakers are in fact terrorists or agents who use the bustle and confusion to a) place explosive charges at strategic points, b) stalk and kidnap a certain person and put xir in a cargo container for shipping to the faction's headquarters on a chartered free trader, or c) start taking the trade captains and dock supervisors as hostages.

7. As 5., but the containers weren't misplaced. Someone used the confusion and the new workers′ inexperience to swap cargo manifests. They want to use the travellers' ship to conveniently get rid of a batch of incriminating contraband that was burning a hole through the floor of one of the Rental Booths. The travellers may find themselves with a hold full of frozen slaves or illegal narcotics and no idea how to explain that to their destination port's authorities.

8. As 7., but the criminals will want their cargo back as soon as it's out of the system – there is already a pirate ship waiting at their destination jump point.

9. A ship captain's pet (maybe an incorial [*Freelance Traveller* #88, July/August 2018] or a podge [*Freelance Traveller* #37, January 2013]) has escaped and is now on the loose in the cavernous hangar bay. This wouldn't be a problem if it hadn't stolen something small and extremely important from the travellers (a memory chip, the ship's code key, the engagement ring of one of the travellers' lost love). It is flitting up and down walkways, cranes and lift-jacks, jumping from shoulder to shoulder on the startled deck crew and dodging between cargo crates. The travellers will have to spread out and block its venues of escape, and then try to calm the little critter until they can capture it.   ✇

TravellerMap Atlas of the Imperium

reviewed by Timothy Collinson

Atlas of the Imperium. generated by TravellerMap.com.
TravellerMap.com https://travellermap.com/make/atlas
210pp., PDF
Free

Editor's note: US and International paper sizes are somewhat different. Some near-equivalents: International A4 corresponds roughly to US Letter; A3 to Tabloid (e.g., NY Post or National Enquirer newspaper) or Ledger; A2 to Broadsheet (e.g., NY Times or Wall Street Journal newspaper); and A5 to Steno.

There's nothing Travellers seem to like more than a good map, whether it's your standard world map to give a sense of place, a local area map to plan combat, a deck plan or building plan to break into or out of the next ship/starport/museum/warehouse, or astrographic maps to choose travel routes and get a sense of the scale of the universe. Referees love creating them and players always seem to welcome them on the table to give a focus to their imaginations and decision making.

Travellermap.com takes this to *n*th degree with its fabulous array of options to display everything from the galaxy through Charted Space and sectors to individual worlds and Jump maps or even a planetary surface map. Ironically, it's possible to get lost

here for hours. In addition, data across multiple milieux is available and posters/booklets can be made from the data.

That's all very well if you're online, of course, but what if you're away from the internet – yes, it does still happen – or you just want to spend a lazy Sunday afternoon, sitting in comfort, browsing through the universe and travelling in your mind without sitting at a screen? That's where the atlas comes in. Long time *Traveller* fans may recall *The Atlas of the Imperium* from GDW, which, at the time, was impressive in its scope, but rather disappointing in its actual detail. Or lack of it. Just the system positions and no data.

However, that's all changed. Joshua Bell and his TravellerMap have finally given us the atlas we've long dreamed about: *The Atlas of the Imperium* (although it actually covers much more than the Imperium.) It is a wonderful 210 page PDF with colour throughout, and a terrific Ian Stead wraparound cover (front and back), also in colour. There is a one page chapter entitled 'Mapping the Imperium' which gives a brief in game history and some notes on using the atlas with a key to the maps and the data. A three page credits section details where the data is from and who is responsible. There is also an index and a sector diagram of Charted Space. The latter shows systems positions (i.e., sector dot maps), sector names, polities in various colours and highlights the sectors included in the atlas. The diagram covers 128 sectors (from -8,3 to 7,-4) and the atlas itself contains 64 of these in detail.

How much detail? The core of *The Atlas of the Imperium Second Survey*, to give it its full title, is – for each sector – a nearly full page colour sector map with a margin that includes the sector name, the co-ordinate location in the style used above, and a diagram/list showing the sixteen subsectors (which are also marked on the map but not with names). For each sector there is then one to three pages of system
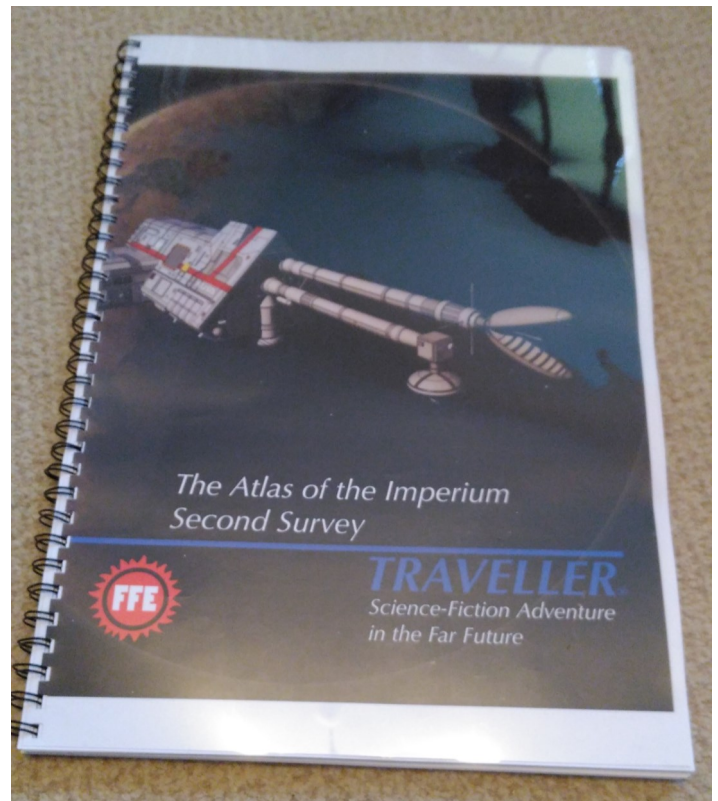
data depending on how sparse or full the sector is. This data includes not only the standard *Traveller* UWPs etc, but also the extended *Traveller[5]* information; this is presented in two columns and when printed at A3 (roughly twice US Letter size) is reasonably readable. For certain sectors such as Foreven, long set aside as a referee preserve, there is very little data and just the dot positions of the stars.

In short, there is a wealth of material here and it's wonderful to be able to browse through it, imagine worlds, plan journeys, and take inspiration from the wondrously vast Charted Space to think up any number of new adventures. Yes, of course, you can do this on the website, but for some of us there's an added attraction of being able to do it appreciate this rich tapestry away from the internet and a screen.

So much so that I'd long contemplated producing something along these lines myself. Just printing the sector maps at the largest size I could, printing the data booklets and binding it altogether. Thanks to my plans to run at least one Zero Prep game at this year's TravCon (*Freelance Traveller*, May/June 2019, p.32), I'd actually set off on this project and
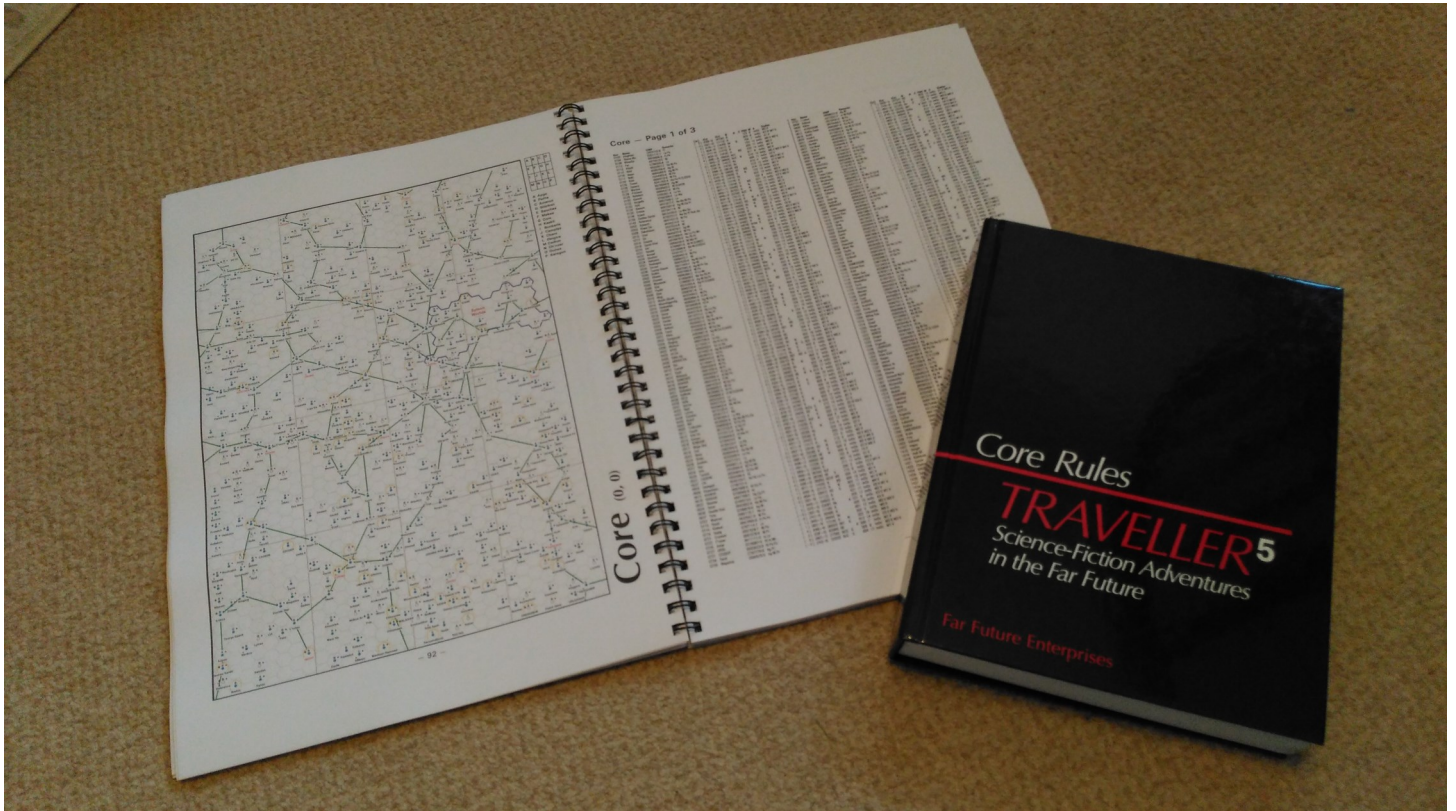
had begun to save the first of the sectors I thought I'd include. I had done some experimentation and seen that printing a sector in colour (but not on a black background) at A3 size meant a map that was quite usable even with aging eyesight. I couldn't quite squeeze on the UWPs at that size – although TravellerMap allows the possibility – but I can't easily print at the next size up, A2, and didn't particularly want to start sticking together two sheets of paper. My plan was to take a reasonable chunk of Charted Space, maybe 125 sectors worth, print out the maps and bind them together to make an atlas. It would have been a bit rough and ready however as there'd be no sector title on each map unless I added it manually, pages would be printed single sided which would bulk the thing out, I'd lose sections of the map along the binding edge, and I'd have the UWPs separately in electronic booklet files that can be created from TravellerMap.

Joshua Bell's download (lobby Marc Miller if you want to see this formally published!) saved me all this work and vastly improved the look of the finished thing. Although you lose a little bit of size

as it doesn't print to the edges of the paper, the layout and look would be much smarter, and it would include UWPs on separate pages; including the full extended *Traveller⁵* data. That last wasn't critical for my purposes, but it is nice to have. A visit to a local printshop and I had a rather lovely 'one off' kind of handout that I doubt will be replicated in too many other places. Of course, my dream would have been to print the whole thing at A2 size (double A3), with UWPs on the maps themselves, and bind the whole thing between hard covers like some old-time map folio. But I was being quoted prices upwards of £300 just for the printing. I have no idea where I would keep such a thing nor how it could be reasonably used at a gaming table.

If I could improve it all it would be to have a PDF specifically formatted for the European paper sizes – although what I have looks fine and it would also include a more detailed explanation of the UWP extensions which I'm not quite familiar with enough to be able to just read like a basic UWP string. I believe Mr Bell has both of these tweaks on his to do list. I suppose it would also be rather nifty to select

which sectors you wished to include in a personalized atlas of greater or lesser length – although to be honest, the choice already presented is pretty perfect in terms of size and decent data existing. It might suit some wanting to print it out to have the option of printing just the maps in one volume with the data in a separate volume as the latter can be printed in just black & white. It would also make it possible to refer to the data whilst looking at the map. With the atlas as it is, the data may well be a page turn away. Not a huge problem, but tricky if you have two or three players interested in planning a route simultaneously. (In those circumstances, however, it would probably be better to use a pre-prepared local area map, like a subsector map.) My only other complaint is that neither of the two copy shops I tried were able to do spiral binding along the long edge of an A3 document. One just said no, the other more helpfully – at a slight extra charge – was able to fudge something that works by using the parts of two A4 combs. This of course, is not a fault of Trav-

ellerMap but might be something you wish to consider and plan for if printing your own.

Of course, there's no actual requirement to print the thing out. The PDF is perfectly usable and searchable as it is although you might find you're using the zoom feature a fair bit if you need the data.

If you can't, or would rather not, use the internet at a gaming table but still want the fun and utility of TravellerMap, this is definitely worth considering. When I plopped it onto the tables at TravCon with a hefty thud it inevitably produced Crocodile Dundee paraphrases from those gently mocking the old GDW *Atlas of the Imperium*: "You call that an atlas? *This* is an atlas." If your games and gamers do a lot of travelling it will be really helpful, but even just for scene setting it can be useful and inspire interest. Otherwise, take a copy to your favourite nook and best comfy chair, kick off your shoes, and wander the starlanes in your imagination until your own High Passage arrives to take you away. ✵
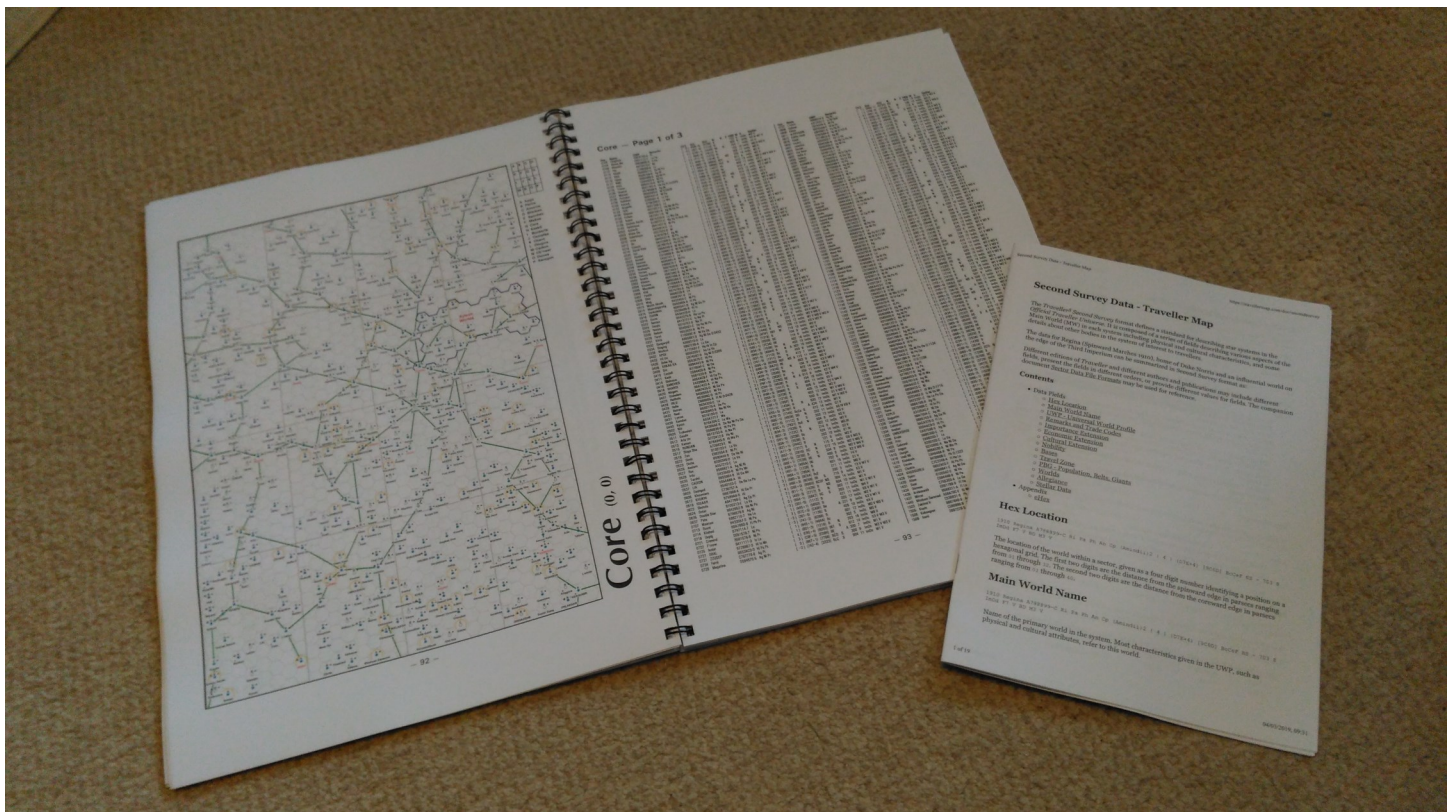
GeDeCo Scout Carbine

by Benedikt Schwarz

After the success of the General Development Corporation's Suram Rifle (a twin-barrelled breechloading flintlock for use on underdeveloped worlds; see *Freelance Traveller* #94, Jul./Aug. 2019), the IISS commissioned the Spinward Marches branch of GeDeCo to develop a short, lightweight rifle for the use of Scouts doing long-term cultural or geological surveys far from regular support – teams and individuals who might have to live off the land and manufacture their own ammunition. GeDeCo came up with the Scout Carbine, which is now produced under license by Tha'an Industries.

With its standard assembly, the Scout Carbine has a modular chamber that is capable of being adjusted to a wide range of slug calibers. The detachable telescopic sight is capable of adjusting to a new caliber of ammunition after D6 trial shots; until then, the shooter is at -1.

Using the fallback range-scaled iron sights, similarly, the shooter is at -1 until xe has gotten used to the new ammunition's behaviour after D6 trial shots. When using ammunition other than Imperial-standard slug carbine rounds, ranges may vary widely, and very powerful rounds may quickly wear out the barrels and chamber lining.

While hunting game was the proposed Scout Carbine's first purpose, the developers added a fully-automatic fire selector. Some rounds may be too weak to power the automatic loading mechanism, which is why the carbine also features a fallback bolt-action lever to clear out the cartridge and chamber a new round.

So far, any of those options are fairly typical of high-technology slug rifles, although it is unusual to see them all combined in a single weapon. What endeared the carbine to marooned scouts, though, is the interchangeable lock mechanism.

With the pull of two pins, the firing mechanism comes apart from the weapon and can be exchanged

with a secondary breechloading lock that uses a soft-alloy ball and charcoal/saltpeter/sulphur ("black") gunpowder ignited by a shaped piece of flint. All of those materials are easily obtainable even in a primitive environment and can be foraged and fabricated by the scout operative xirself. Casting tongs for the correct caliber and a set of fine scales for filling the gunpowder charge fit neatly into a pair of brackets in the carbine's stock. The weapon's bolt-action lever doubles as a loading ram that compresses the powder and primes the chamber. Either lock weighs about .5 kilograms.

Paper-wrapped ammunition cartridges for the breechloading assembly are fully interchangeable with those of the Suram Rifle, which can be obtained in gun stores throughout the outer Spinward Marches and in many GeDeCo outlets within the Trojan Reach.

The Scout Carbine in Use

The Scout Carbine, like its Suram predecessor, is very rugged and easy to maintain. There have been instances of Scouts or GeDeCo operatives arming local tribes with surplus carbines to fend off dangerous wildlife or hostile neighbours, so it is not uncommon to find them (invariably heavily modified to suit tribal tastes) in the hands of primitive barbarian warriors.

Scout ships operating on the Imperial border with the Trojan Reach tend to have at least one carbine included in the standard survival pack, along with four magazines. The survival pack is usually stowed in the ship's locker, but some scouts prefer to keep it in their vessel's air/raft.   ✪

	TL	RANGE	DAMAGE	Mass	COST	MAGAZINE	MAG. COST	TRAITS
With automatic assembly	12	200m	3D-3	5	Cr 300	15	Cr 10	Auto 2, Scope
With flintlock assembly	12	100 m	3D	5	Cr 300	1	Cr 1	Scope, ROUTINE (6+) Gun combat (slug) check to reload
Flintlock using poor homemade ammunition	12	70 m	3D-3	5	n/a	1	-	Scope, ROUTINE (6+) Gun combat (slug) check to reload

IISS Survival Pack (20 kg, Cost 600)	
Weapons	Scout carbine with automatic and flintlock assemblies; 4 full magazines, 15 rounds each; Machete
Instruments	Compass; Simple toxicity sensor; Pocket tool; Flashlight; Emergency radio beacon; Waterproof blanket/poncho; Lightweight tent; Life jacket
Expendables	2 long-life rechargeable batteries; 4 flares; First-aid kit; 2 weeks survival rations; 10 liters of water; 10m lightweight cable; 10 heating pellets, each good for one ration; 20 water purifying tablets; 20 salt tablets;

Ice Lily

by Martin Carter

This was the winning entry in Freelance Traveller Contest 2008-05.

The Ice Lily is a recently-discovered small and innocuous-looking plant from a cold world. Its natural beauty and current market rarity make it popular room-dressing for ladies of means. It also has a little secret that is just beginning to leak onto the local grapevine—it appears to be a functioning, natural aphrodisiac.

Unfortunately, the Ice Lily is extremely temperature sensitive and must be shipped in powered refrigeration containers at a temperature of between 260 and 270 Kelvin (–13°C to –3°C). Any lower and its flowers die back and it goes into its winter hibernation mode for at least a month, any higher and the plant is killed outright. Since interstellar shipment will take at least a week, the containers also need an integral light source.

Sometimes, individual plants may be shipped in refrigerated transparent display cases for direct-to-customer sale.

Export of the plant is restricted, but not illegal, and an export certificate is needed to take a consignment off its home world. At the present time, large-scale cultivation of transplanted Ice Lily has not been undertaken; the only source is the homeworld.

The BITS *101 Cargos* HazCode label for a small Ice Lily consignment might be:

`32240A3-C3035A35-[16]-(4)-pict. Fragile.`
(where 'pict' indicates a hazard pictogram - "toxic", perhaps, so nobody will eat it).

Referee's Info

Owing to the plant's recent discovery and presently-limited distribution, the crew will not be aware of the following details, but optionally one of the passengers might have the information, or a directed search of a medical database will provide it—public net searches will not.

When a plant's temperature rises above 0°C (273 K) and it dies (due to a faulty container, perhaps) it gives off a noxious vapour which, although not having any direct health dangers, has hallucinogenic and hypnotic suggestion-enhancing properties. The vapour is not only airborne, but also condenses onto clothes and surfaces to spread by contact, and may re-evaporate in other areas.

When the vapour is inhaled by a person already under the influence of a mood-lifting drug, it acts as a euphoric/aphrodisiac which, in a controlled environment, can lead to enhanced harmless fun. However, without the mood-lifter (or if the victim is under the influence of mood-depressing drugs) the hallucinogen preys upon the person's darker dreams, enhancing its victims' greatest fears. The ship's doctor may see evidence of a plague, the navigator may be convinced of a misjump, the steward, with a vampire novel under his pillow, might misinterpret a passenger's insomnia—and each victim may become highly suggestible to the authenticity of another's delusion… ✪

Critics' Corner

Ashen Stars Limited Edition

reviewed by "kafka"

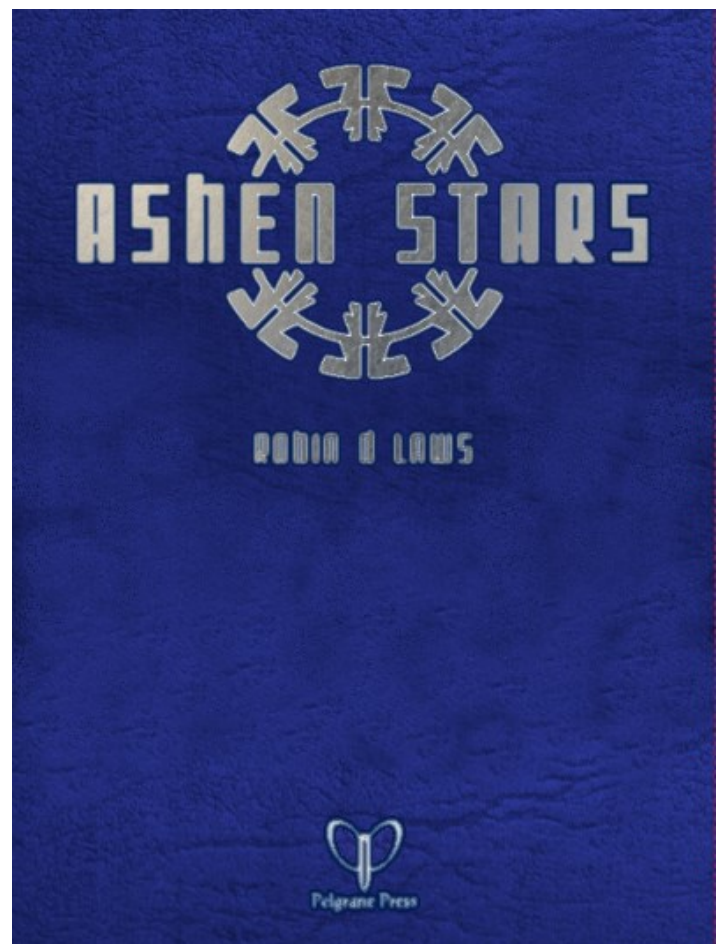*Ashen Stars.* Robin D. Laws.
Pelgrane Press https://pelgranepress.com
304pp., Hardbound (Leatherette) (May be out of print)
US$44.95

This review originally appeared on rpg.net in October 2011

Ashen Stars = *GUMSHOE* of investigative system (free and loose rules) + Space Opera. At first glance, I thought *what in the world would investigation have to do with science fiction?*, as I am sure some of you also have wondered. However, as I thought about it, almost every *Star Trek* episode revolves around investigation. But, to have it tacked onto Space Opera? Parts of it work really well and capture the fly-by-seat of your pants that *GUMSHOE* is famous for in the area of character development. And, I love how *GUMSHOE* facilitates and creates easy-to-play characters fast and easy. There is no sanity/stability axis in this game; rather, everything hinges around reputation—Altruism improves your reputation and Greed takes away prospects—a nice mechanic that keeps players on the straight and narrow. Reputation is the key to getting lucrative jobs, as all jobs are issued

through an interstellar clearing house (although some jobs could conceivably be done on the side). While this mechanic works very well for *Ashen Stars*, games that delve more into the shades of grey or deal with high level intrigue (involving realpolitik) might find this harder to adapt (but then again, maybe I am not thinking of Soft Space Opera but gritty realism…). Where it breaks down is in combat. It tries very hard to give players multiple chances to redeem themselves – again, very much like *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (as the old joke goes, the computer announces that the *Enterprise* will self destruct in 3 minutes, so Picard and company leave to discuss the matter in the Ready Room). This is very much a space opera feature that does not sit well with me, as it goes a little too much in the way of being player-friendly. For my Science Fiction games, if players act stupidly, things get deadly. But, it is so consistent with using *GUMSHOE* in a pulpish fashion having the purist streak find this not really palatable – but there are those who like their Science Fiction like those hand dripped cones – brittle hard exterior and soft and mushy on the inside. *GUMSHOE* would seem to be a perfect fit. But, here is hoping that Pelgrane will release a "harder" version or supplement that will do a "harder" version of *Ashen Stars*.

The alien player races (including humans) are straight out of space opera, so you get the emotionless hottie elf, the flesh-eating bug, and the warlike armadillo. I am glad that they did not do the *Traveller* thing and do Cats & Dogs (to be fair, the Aslan & Vargr are much more than that…but it has always been my beef with *Traveller* not to have started with more *alien* aliens). What is nice is that these aliens have their own drives and unique characteristics that are not already worn-out clichés. There is the possibility of devising your own alien player races should players want to deviate from the template but each of these races add balance to each other.

Drives and personal story arcs really propel adventures in this game, giving added depth to any game session and allow players to assume *personas* quickly and effortlessly (thus ensuring opportunities for real role play and not merely playing themselves) and also escape the "man in the rubber suit" syndrome.

The background to the milieu is equally Space Opera. Adventure is assumed to take place out on the frontier where freelancers are hired where previously an interstellar Empire once ruled. But now, thanks to a disastrous war with an alien species, as powerful as or more powerful than the Empire, the Empire has now fallen apart with everyone going their own way. This produces lots of room for rival ideologies and religions and just about any other fractious divisive belief system (such as age old rivalries, racial hatreds, etc.) to nicely complement players' own personal drives. There is a bit of *Star Wars* in there, with the Empire falling within the lifespan of many individuals but if they start young and naïve then they will not really have a memory of the good old days. Furthermore, as one last weapon this impossibly strong enemy created a meme or weapon that affects everyone's ability to remember the Past and even portions of the Present correctly. While it is integral and needed for this milieu, I found this a rather lame plot device. I always like the stories of old generals being cast aside by younger individuals ("Young Turks") with greed and ambition rewriting the history rather than artificial plot devices which reek too much of Virus (*Traveller* players will know to what I refer).

Tech is deliberately left ambiguous, as you can create virtually anything and it either works like magic or just as it does in everyday life. Careful attention is played to balance. There are no outlandish devices like lightsabers or disintegrator pistols (OK, there *are* disintegrators pistols, but they give players a shot at surviving) but the right equilibrium between deadly and mundane. As it would seem

that most problems are supposed to be solved through negotiation and problem solving. So players looking for a shopping list will have to wait for a later supplement or just wing it. Again, this is well suited to a *GUMSHOE*-type mechanic.

The art is a bit of a disappointment as I have come to expect a higher standard of art, rooted in gritty realism, from Pelgrane Press—but this art, while of a very high standard reminds me of D&D 4e – very good but just different. And, for someone who insists on gritty, dark art for space opera this is a step back to fantasy gaming (funny enough, I noticed in a series of adventures published the same time, they opted exactly for that dark and gritty style which I would give a solid recommendation that they retain for *Ashen Stars*). For outside of the cover (which I do like), it has a very pulpy feel throughout, which renders the starships as somewhat laughable. The first book of *Ashen Stars* adventures (*Dead Rock Seven*) that will be reviewed later has **excellent** art; even though it is black & white it is what I would like to see more of.

I found many things that could be stolen and used in other game systems, so if rules are not your thing, then many pieces of advice can be ported into other games. For this reason, *Ashen Stars* is certainly worth a look. For I must confess, as much as I do like the *GUMSHOE* system (and I really do), I happen to like other systems more. *GUMSHOE* provides a nice game form, between what is too loose in systems like *FATE* and overly-structured older systems like *MegaTraveller*. For this reason, I like it; it puts the tools in the players' hands to determine their destiny or doom without having to *FUDGE* it. As regular readers know that I am a *Traveller* Man – is this good for *Traveller*? Well, not really. *Traveller* is much harder than *Ashen Stars* and should stay that way. However, as *Traveller* is also a universal toolkit of sorts, if your *Traveller* game is Space Operatic then you might like this. However, if you still

mourn over the loss of *Star*Drive* or *Star Frontiers*, this rule book will give you an updated, shiny new game. As with the art, I got a distinctive *D&D/Feng Shui* sentiment to it.

Detailed breakdown of the book now follows.

All the Justice Can Buy

What did you do in the war, creating your crew is the subtitle for this section. Essentially, it is the elements of character creation. The emphasis is upon creating a balanced crew; thus, gamers used to playing traditional space opera games where there can be an all-Merc crew or Merchant crew will not be happy. However, given that all SFRPGs tend to mix up different campaign categories this should be no surprise but it is a nice way of making sure it all works. *GUMSHOE* is a points-based system, in which the number of points allocated depends entirely upon the size of the group. One interesting part of character generation is that it assumes that players will acquire their own starship straightaway rather than having to work for it, as is the case of some other SFRPGs.

The Seven Peoples

The different alien races (including humans) ranging from space elf to warrior insectoid to de-Ascended Greys to just plain old human. Although these are the default races, the Game Master can introduce new ones. But, these are the major *dramatis personae* that are the movers and shakers in this version of Galactic history. Each race has its strengths, as well as its drawbacks – again, the emphasis is upon balance although it is tilted toward the human side.

What You Can Do

Crew Packages and Character Creation are divided nicely into two aspects. Warpside Assignments (just work in space), Groundside Assignments (but born in Idaho) – I like this dichotomy as it creates much richer characters that other systems

have attempted with Homeworld Generation but having dual "career tracks", I think, is rather brilliant. Mixed Assignments – the Medic/Cleric. Abilities or what some other game systems might call Skills but because it is points-based, you can distribute them to make them aptitudes rather than learned knowledge – plus in the future where all things could be directly written on the brain – skills become rather moot. Remember, this is Space Opera, stay in school kids – this might be cool but don't be a fool.

Drives

Drives form the personal motivation for characters and explain why players do what they do. This is one of the nice features of *GUMSHOE* in that it provides a ready-made template for a character's psychological motivations – those inner qualities that make their character tick which can be used as part of the overall story arc.

GUMSHOE Rules

Unsurprisingly, lays out the resolution systems for mystery-solving and for other exciting actions. For those who are familiar with the system, Pelgrane shows the way by constantly tweaking this system and making it better. This section lays it all out in a very simple way. This section includes Tests or how to perform Tasks, how to regain your Pool Points. The Time Increments for the tasks move according to the Speed of Plot. And, the ways of improving your character and the role that Boosts play in the course of the game. And, the Hazards that can afflict your character or just the run of the mill dangers of working in a job that tries to kill you every day.

Strships

Space Combat is something that will apparently happen quite frequently…only after I read the appendix did I fully understand and appreciate the rules for Space Combat. On the plus side, it is not math-based and is very cinematic, on the minus, it provides a feel rather than actual description. Ship Classes, you were uncertain that this is a space opera game – just even a preliminary gander that the Starships listed here would tell you that you are no longer playing a game that wants to obey any of the laws of physics. Custom Ships & Repairs and Upgrades – fundamentally rules to build your own ships that will add chrome to what is a generic ship outlined above.

Navigational Hazards

Space is not safe. There are all sorts of dangers and hazards, including the all-encompassing powerful plot device. Essential a short chapter of some of threats that are (in)credible to confront and confound the crew. When the hyper drive goes down, it is more than a type 3 meson spanner that will fix it or asteroid fields are meant to be cinematic, not follow Newtonian mechanics.

Orbit

Things can be safe in orbit or they can be hazards. How very *Star Trek* that the party can beam or shuttle down to confront the exploration of a brave new world or one that sent you the distress signal and it is your job to help these people. Out of Your League is when you are outgunned/or and outnumbered – how can the *GUMSHOE* system basically save your bacon and let you get away?

Shuttles is the rules for small craft engagements rather than bigger ships duking it out…ranging from what the title implies – Shuttles to small fighters.

Tech

Explains the bits and pieces of advanced technologies the characters rely on all through their adventures, from disruptor pistols to gene-shifting viroware (my personal favourite… why not let DNA be a weapon or give traits that augment abilities … *NOT*!, this is a inconspicuous way of saying muta-

tion, but, hey this is Space Opera, so I guess mutants are welcome here) including the interesting… Unclassified Items.

The Feed and the Bleed

This section is the beginning of the GM section and goes into greater depth on the background, as well as prevailing political circumstances, the structure and history of the interstellar empire (now a fragmented polity irrelevant as all action in main rulebook takes place on the Frontier far from the Core Systems), along with burgeoning belief systems (Synthcultures ("why does this planet look like Ancient Rome?"), Ideologies ("In the Days of the Combine…things were better. No, they were not. etc."), NuFaiths (I have come here to convert you to the one true faith just stop listening to the other guy)), and the mysteries of the menacing and apparently departed alien enemy, the Mohilar. Lastly, there is a short discussion of the Bogey Conundrum or why does everyone forget.

On the Contract

The Business of Justice details the subject of surviving as a Laser, from contract terms to rates of compensation. A very good discussion the important mechanic—Reputation—basically how you move from Jane Varda to either stellar heroine, savior of worlds or scum of the universe (who nobody will even talk to). Securing Contracts and Judicial Procedures and because you serve the law—sentencing.

Worlds Are Stories

Gives the GM an idea about how to describe and populate the worlds of the Bleed (that frontier we were talking about). *Ashen Stars* provides you with as much setting particulars as one is expected to find a comparably sized Space Opera rulebook (I emphasize Space Opera, as there will be no discussion of orbital paths or why Terrestrial planets might have a ring system). It does so as a jumping off point and

little more than that. For it is designed to give the GM the tools to grow and develop the GM's own version of its science fiction of a setting as you go, on the same episode-by-episode basis the writers of a space opera TV series would employ. The GM and the players organically produce the Bleed to be what they want it to be – to allow the central narrative to meet and satisfy the wants of your central characters.

The GM and Players does without locking yourself into a pre-digested background bible (why do I get a sense that they do not like this aspect of *Traveller* (or at least how some people play *Traveller*)?) that minutely details, worlds, economies, stellar distances, planetary ecologies, lists of space stations, and in-depth profiles of NPCs who are more important than your crew.

Lots of good points here but I for one do like the flexibility of *Traveller* which allows one to create minutely described worlds and at the same time still retain enough of a sandbox – come-on guys, 11,000 worlds of just one interstellar polity allows a lot of weird $#!+ to happen. But, if you are fan of the *FUDGE* or *FATE* systems – this is pretty well old hat and second nature.

The Bad, The Worse, and the Alien

Entity Classes

Sentients—those assignments involving intelligent life – that have to be brought to justice – killing them is a big taboo. Quasi-Sentients is frowned upon but still deemed as acceptable such as Androids and Robots or Bug Eyed Monsters from LV-426. Lifeforms are essentially animals, so ok to kill unless you are a Balla/Space Elf where all life is sacred but even then it might be part of the harmony that underlies the universe – that this lion, tiger or bear be killed, lest the universe lose one of its more beautiful creations—yourself.

Aliens as Opponents and Rivals. Opponent Statistics. Entity Database (Class K) – the nastiest of all

creatures that do deserve to die or the imperative of characters to kill these lest the universe lapses into total irredeemable chaos.

Generic Xenological Threats

Non-Alien Opponents are the everyday – the routine encounters that provide the filler for any game. Most games would simply call these encounters but given the strange and alien nature of the space opera universe perhaps this name is better suited.

Running the Bleed. A good sized how-to-run-adventures for *Ashen Stars* by giving examples of how to build cases (including the all-important advice – you can buy them, as they are very difficult to fashion). Building Series, otherwise tips for a campaign. And, lastly general *GUMSHOE* tips.

The Witness of my Worth

The Witness of my Worth (sample adventure/ episode), in which the lasers respond to a distress call from a survey team on a war-ravaged planet. Has enough twists for an introductory adventure and does a good job employing the rules that it has just described, as well as introducing players to some of the stranger aspects of the Bleed.

Appendix I: Sample Names

As the name implies, sample names from all the seven peoples. Glad Pelgrane avoid the temptation to go the route of *Star Wars* with the likes of Starkiller and similarly fantastical names.

Appendix II: Space Combat Example

As the name implies, sample names from all the Space Combat Example, as this is potentially the most confusing and bewildering part of the whole book, having an actual example of what promises to be a major component in many games is a welcome edition.

Character Sheet

Why here? is my question…*Why not at the end of the book?*…but doesn't really matter.

Appendix III: Tables and Charts

A bringing together of all the major charts and tables from throughout the rules in one central place for quick reference. Kudos to Pelgrane as this a very nice feature that most game/rule books ignore but having everything in one spot makes it easier to get hold of the right rule and in a pinch can easily be transferred onto a Game master's Screen.

Index

Just as the name implies, it is a comprehensive index to the book's contents and a very good one at that. Would have been nice, if a glossary was also added here rather than having it buried within the text but as it stands now. As the fact is the index does not include the alien terminology is a shortcoming that a glossary would have fixed.

By way of a conclusion…

So, despite my reservations, I do like the game (so, yes, still a *Traveller* man). I think it is a well thought out exercise in making *GUMSHOE* into a more universal system. Parts, as noted in the review that I found questionable are more to do with style of play – Space Opera versus Hard SF. Those wanting to play in a Space Opera universe akin to *Star Trek: The Next Generation* will enjoy *Ashen Stars*; those wanting *Firefly* or even (new) *Battlestar Galactica* might have to look elsewhere. Preliminary examination at the adventures book actually improves the game substantially. However, the ideas contained in the book does offer much in the way of stimulating thought for other games and as a device for making you think – Pelgrane has another winning product here. ✪

Feedback

Please tell us …

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

Please, give us your opinion! We've provided several ways you can do so:

- e-mail: *feedback@freelancetraveller.com*.
- feedback form at *http://www.freelancetraveller.com/infocenter/feedback/ftfbf.html*.
- Forums:
  Traveller Fanzine section of SFRPG: *http://www.sfrpg-discussion.net/phpBB3/viewforum.php?f=36*
  Lone Star at Citizens of the Imperium: *http://www.travellerrpg.com/CotI/Discuss/forumdisplay.php?f=13*
  Note: you must be registered with the forums to be able to use this method.

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

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

You can also run "play-by-IRC" game sessions in either channel; please stop in and ask 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* (and *Traveller*-compatible) Releases

September/October 2019

- **El Cheapo Products** has released *El Cheapo Deck Plans Vol. 1: Danifred Light Trader*, *El Cheapo Deck Plans Vol. 2: Danifred Launch*.
- **Felbrigg Herriot** has released *Medico Service*.
- **Frontier Explorer** has released *Frontier Explorer—Issue 26*.
- **Grey Matter Games** has released *Deadly Missions 5th Edition: HALLOWEEN EXPANSION*.
- **Gypsy Knights Games** has released *Lance-class Gunboat*.
- **Michael Brown** has released *Cry the Forest Primeval*, *We Who Remain*, *Burst Transmissions vol. 2*, *Wings Over The World*, *Lifeform Reading: Yeti*, *Dossier: Megaera*, *Career: Assassin*, *Career: Nightstalker*, *The Reaping*.
- **Old School Role Playing** has released *Ghost Ship*, *The Silence of Space*, *Supernova*, *Skills and Careers of the Frontiers of Space*, *Safari*, *Gear for the Frontiers of Space*, *Welcome to Largos*.
- **Peter Rudin-Burgess** has released *Hivers I*, *Hivers II*, *Hivers III*.
- **Stellagama Publishing** has released *Liberty Ship*, *Cepheus Light* (in print).   ✺

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), *Traveller⁵*, and both editions of Mongoose *Traveller* as "Classic Compatible" or "2D6". This includes Sceaptune 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*, *Traveller²⁰*/*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.

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