30 D-Ton Ship's Boat

Bridge

Airlocks (P/S/Dorsal)

Passenger Compartment

Cargo

Drive

A Note About Production

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

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

Contents

From the Editor

Much of this issue was put together during the period when New York was under 'lockdown' due to the COVID-19 pandemic. That, plus a scheduled vacation during April, meant that I had extra time to do it—and I needed it, because the disruption to my regular routine meant that I had difficulty focusing on tasks, whether recreational like this, or my regular job (where I was really working, from home). Nevertheless, here in your hands you hold an issue that was released on time—and I've already started working on the next issue, so that hopefully *Freelance Traveller* won't miss a beat during this period when many of us are being told *not* to get together to play *Traveller*.

Freelance Traveller is only one way to keep *Traveller* going during this trying time, and I encourage everyone, as usual, to write for us, so that we're printing what you want to see and to share. We *are*, after all, a community resource.

There are other ways to continue your involvement in *Traveller*, though—several people have mentioned in other forums playing virtually—using virtual tabletop software like Roll20, or just videoconferencing software like Zoom or Skype. There's also an older technology that's still available: IRC. *Freelance Traveller* manages two *Traveller*-related IRC channels, #Traveller on Undernet, and #LoneStar on Otherworlders. Those channels are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, so feel free to hang out a while, or to leave a client idling in either. Someone will show up at some point to chat. ☻

CD-ROM: Classic *Traveller*

reviewed by Jeff Zeitlin

The Golden Age: Classic Traveller *on CD-ROM*. Various authors.
FarFuture Enterprises http://farfuture.net
PDF and other files on CD/DVD, ~840MB
US$35

As part of their efforts to make electronic versions of all historical *Traveller* material available, FarFuture Enterprises has released this collection of the canonical *Traveller* material originally published by Game Designers' Workshop. This disc covers the original publication of *Traveller* in 1977, plus the 1981 update and all supplemental material published as separate products (as opposed to articles in the *Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society* and *Challenge*, or other gaming magazines) prior to the release of *MegaTraveller* in 1987.

In the 1977-to-1987 period, *Traveller*'s core rules were published in four forms, and all are included on the CD-ROM.

A *Traveller* boxed set containing three digest-sized (ISO A5, ~5.85×8.3) books represented the 'core' version of *Traveller*. The three books, *Book 1: Characters and Combat*, *Book 2: Starships*, and *Book 3: Worlds and Adventures*, contained the complete set of rules for playing *Traveller*. This product was aimed at the player who was already familiar with role-playing, and did not include any setting information or ready-to-run adventures. When other products referred to this as one of the possibilities for needing the core rules, it was often referred to as "Basic *Traveller*".

Starter Traveller was a boxed set containing three books, *Rules*, *Charts*, and *Adventures*, formatted to US Letter (8½×11). *Rules* represented a playable-but-abridged version of the rules presented in Basic *Traveller*, *Charts* was where you found all the charts and tables referred to in *Rules*, and *Adventures* was two ready-to-play adventures, "Mission on Mithril" and "Shadows". You also got two six-sided dice (not included on the CD-ROM). This product, as its name
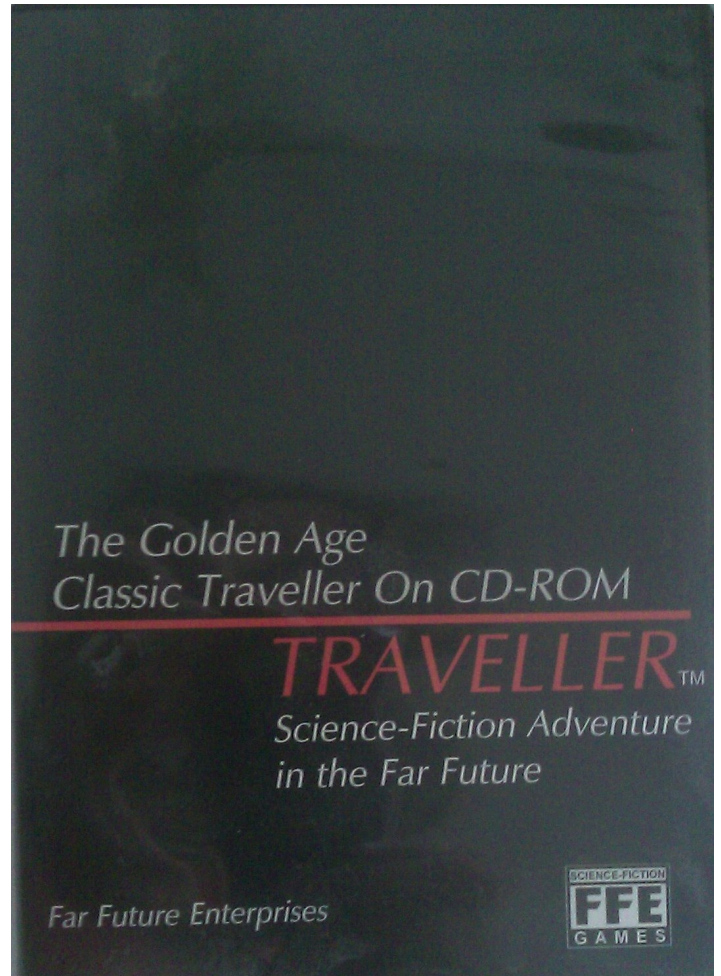
implies, was aimed at the player who was just getting started with *Traveller* and role-playing; much of the omitted rules material was replaced by appropriately explanatory material.

Deluxe Traveller was also a boxed set, which included all the material in Basic *Traveller*, plus an introductory booklet (*Book 0: An Introduction to* Traveller) and adventure ("Introductory Adventure: The Imperial Fringe"), all formatted to digest size. The charts and tables were in a separate booklet formatted to US Letter, and you also got a pair of six-sided dice and a color-on-black poster-sized map of the Spinward Marches. An actual reproduction of the *Deluxe Traveller Charts and Tables* book has seemingly been left off the CD-ROM, but the *Charts* book for *Starter Traveller* can be substituted.

Finally, a single-volume release, *The Traveller Book*, contained all of the rules and background information from *Deluxe Traveller*, including *Book 0*

(but not the "Imperial Fringe" adventure), plus two ready-to-run adventures, "Shadows" and "Exit Visa". This was formatted to slightly larger than US Letter, and was hardbound.

The PDFs of all of these – and, in fact, most of the contents of this CD-ROM – are text-behind-image, but appear to have been well-edited; copy-and-paste consistently produced clean pastes of readable text that required no editing. The images are also very clean, with no "spotting" from dirt on the scanner or pages showing their age; one might believe that the material, rather than being scanned, was simply re-set from computerized text and output to PDF. There are some exceptions; the scans of *Atlas of the Imperium*, for example, are clearly made from a well-used copy of the printed document, and the covers of the *Alien Module*s likewise.

No game is perfect with its initial publication, and in 1981, the three Books of Basic/*Deluxe Traveller* were revised and re-released. Both the 1977 and 1981 versions are included on the CD-ROM.

Core *Traveller* begat rules expansions, additional adventures, modules, board games, and informational supplements. "Books" are rule expansions, offering more detailed character generation and options for playing these "expanded" characters. There were four expansions: *Book 4: Mercenary* expanded the Army and Marine careers from Core *Traveller*, addressing them together as "Ground Forces Command"; *Book 5: High Guard* did the same for the Navy, *Book 6: Scouts* for the Scouts, and *Book 7: Merchant Prince* for the Merchant career. *Book 5: High Guard* underwent substantial revision a year after its initial release, and the CD-ROM includes both versions.

(In subsequent discussions or mentions of character generation, a "basic" career is one managed on a term-by-term basis, as in *Book 1: Characters and Combat*. A career managed on a year-by-year basis, like those in Books 4 through 7, will be called an "expanded" career.)

There was also a *Book 8: Robots* which covered the use of robots in the setting, and provided some options for using robots as characters in a game. In spite of its title, this was not a 'career', expanded or not, like the others, and I'm not aware of this book actually having been heavily used in the community.

"Supplements" and "Special Supplements" generally provided background information on a particular area, or lists pertinent to the particular topic of the supplement. They were rules-light, except for *Supplement 4: Citizens of the Imperium*, which presented basic character generation rules for certain non-military careers. "Supplements", like Books 4-8, were approximately 48 pages, and sold as separate products; "Special Supplements" were 16 pages, distributed as inserts in the *Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society* (reproduced on a separate disc as a part of the FarFuture *Traveller* Recovery CD-ROM series).

"Adventures" and "Double Adventures" presented ready-to-run adventures. Each book was about 48 pages; the "Double Adventures" were about 24 pages each, arranged much like the "Ace Doubles" science fiction novels, where you'd flip the book vertically (i.e., top to bottom) to read the "other" novel (adventure, in the case of the Double Adventures). The individual adventures of the Double Adventure booklets were, as it turned out, particularly suitable for time-limited single-session play, such as at a convention. Both the Adventures and Double Adventures were "stand-alone", not tied to a campaign. (On the CD-ROM, the Double Adventures are presented as two separate files, one for each adventure, and you don't have to re-orient the pages in your PDF reader.)

Although *Traveller* was very much humanocentric (and some would say "Yanks in Space-centric"), there was sufficient interest in having aliens in *Traveller* to result in the release of eight "Alien Modules",

covering five non-human aliens and three human societies that were portrayed as significantly different from the assumed 'default' Imperial society. These folios presented an overview of their respective subjects' history and social organization, and provided 'basic' careers equivalent to the *Book 1* careers for the default "Imperial" society. (There were additional aliens presented as articles in the *Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society*, under the heading "Contact!"; these presentations were nowhere near as complete as those of the Alien Modules.)

In addition to the Alien Modules, a set of "Modules" was released. Modules 1 and 2, *Tarsus* and *Beltstrike*, were boxed sets containing broad information about a single world so that a referee could run multiple self-created adventures on the world, plus a few pre-generated adventures with maps, handouts, character data, and so on. *Beltstrike*, in addition, provided rules for playing out asteroid mining, and a basic career for Belters. It could legitimately be claimed that these modules set a high early standard for world-building; certainly, many later products from third parties, and even some early fan material, aspired to this level.

Module 3, *The Spinward Marches Campaign*, reproduced most if not all of the information in *Supplement 4: Citizens of the Imperium*, and added background information on the Spinward Marches sector. Several linked adventures and opportunities for others are included, providing almost a "grand tour" of the Spinward Marches.

Module 4, *Alien Realms*, presented eight adventures in which the player-characters were "aliens" – that is, not standard Imperial humans. Having the corresponding Alien Modules (Zhodani, Vargr, Aslan, and Droyne) was absolutely essential, and referees were cautioned to be familiar with the information in them and to avoid falling into normal human thought patterns.

Module 5, *Atlas of the Imperium*, was a book of maps, of every sector of the Imperium. In retrospect, it was a bit of a disappointment, as that was *all* it was; there was no information available beyond what was included on the maps, which was basically location, starport, bases and gas giant presence, and the names of the high-population worlds.

At one time, war games on hexagon-marked maps with die-cut counters were popular; GDW had been a presence in that field. They chose to try to bring some of that expertise into *Traveller* and produced eight boxed games.

Imperium was a strategic war game, set in what eventually became known as the Solomani Rim, and allowed players to game out the period and wars that eventually were called the Interstellar Wars, between the Vilani *Ziru Sirka* and the Terran Confederation. The same rules were used for playing out the Solomani-Aslan wars in the later *Dark Nebula* game.

Mayday was a tactical game of starship rescue and combat. Its biggest flaw is one that persists in other tactical ship combat games today; the movement rules, while offering a good level of realism, are complex enough to be somewhat confusing and time-consuming to work out and adjudicate.

Snapshot and *Azhanti High Lightning* were tactical games of individual and group combat aboard starships. In *Snapshot*, combat is at relatively close ranges on small starships, and the rules were oriented toward that; *Azhanti High Lightning* was set on a larger starship, and the rules were complete enough to allow them to be used for combat in other environments (such as on planetary surfaces). Both games presented a handful of scenarios, but (naturally) allowed a creative referee to come up with his own as well.

Fifth Frontier War played out the eponymous bit of *Traveller* history, with both strategic and tactical elements, and both space and planetary surface elements. There are no defined battles or scenarios oth-

er than the initial disposition of the two sides, and nothing stops the players from rewriting 'history'.

Invasion: Earth allowed the players to play out the investment and conquest of Terra in the Solomani Rim War. Like *Fifth Frontier War*, there were both space and ground elements to the game, but no pre-defined scenarios.

Finally, *Striker* presented rules for using the information in *Book 4: Mercenary* with miniatures. As written, 15mm miniatures were targeted, but you could easily adjust to other sizes by simply adjusting the given measurements.

Summary

You get a lot of material for your $35; even at 1980s prices, there is easily a couple of hundreds of dollars worth of data here. It represents *Traveller* from its earliest days to its establishment as *the* Science Fiction Role-Playing game, and while some of the material may well appear 'dated', it represents a still-usable incarnation of the rules – and that's aside from its historical interest. Definitely a buy, especially if you find three other CD-ROMs you want from FarFuture.   ✪

Raconteurs' Rest

TravCon20 – After Action Report

by Timothy Collinson

[As ever, a very personal and idiosyncratic view of TravCon which may also give some glimpses into refereeing. As ever, referees called by their first names; players by an initial.]

Virus! A redolent word for Travellers however you feel about *Traveller: The New Era*. Two years ago TravCon was in jeopardy from the Beast from the East, a cold wave more formally called Anticyclone Hartmut which combined with Storm Emma and brought an unusual amount of snow and atrocious conditions to the United Kingdom. This year we were all carefully watching our newsfeeds as Coronavirus, more formally called Covid-19, was beginning to take its grip on Europe. Italy was in lockdown, sporting events were being cancelled, anxiety levels in almost anyone you spoke to were heightened. Until we were told otherwise, however, Travellers seem to be a hardy bunch and gathered as usual at Redwings Lodge near Sawtry on the weekend of 12th – 16th March 2020. I'm only aware of one cancellation, for reasons unrelated to the virus. That had the happy knock on effect that Dr A, planning on sleeping in the car park in his RV, could

now have a room. But we missed you, J! Interestingly, one of our number was able to attend because of the virus. In hospital in Germany, N had been waiting on medical treatment for something entirely different, but his bed was needed and he was discharged. Quick flight to the UK, round up his son who was also attending and they could both join us which personally I was delighted to see as I'd been looking forward to chirping together once again.

Two years ago, this was snow-covered. Not this year!

Raconteurs' Rest

Once again we filled the place, once again we were all excited to get going, and once again Andy Lilly – the convention organizer – had us starting on Thursday night. Last year's extra day had been so successful that for a second year we had seven formal adventure slots instead of five across the weekend. I say 'extra day' but strictly Andy has only added two extra sessions on Friday: one morning slot; one afternoon slot. However, for anyone travelling any distance and not wanting to miss out, that means arriving Thursday. No prizes for guessing that several had had the same idea about a TNE themed game. Indeed, Tess and I had even briefly started hatching a plan to run an impromptu game around Virus on the drive up. Fortunately, sanity prevailed. The real thing is sufficiently dreadful. As Marvin the Paranoid Android says: "life's bad enough without wanting to invent any more of it".

Once again, Tess and I coming up from the south coast took it gently and set off mid-morning on Thursday, stopped for a good lunch on the way after the rigours of the M25 orbital motorway, stopped again for sensibly priced fuel, and arrived late afternoon in time to help with unloading Andy's gear and to try and help set up tables, chairs and other paraphernalia in the right rooms. It also gave me a chance to rest knowing the rigours of what was to come. A couple of months prior to TravCon I'd been seriously down about the whole thing and wondering about whether I should attend at all. Not because I don't love it and certainly not because I don't love meeting up with old friends, but because I was feeling so tired, so unable to prepare, so doubtful that at least two of my 'offerings' were of much value and so aware of how much I pay in energy costs for fitting approximately a year's worth of gaming into 72 hours. Still, as usual, I'd booked the following Monday and Tuesday off work and could spend them abed dosed up with analgesics, tea for the sore throat from too much talking, and something decent on TV for odd moments when I was awake but unable to read or write. Fortunately, I'd run *Annic Nova* with my gaming group a couple of weeks before and that evening had gone so well that I was fired up with renewed enthusiasm for the whole event.

Also coming from the South coast were Jane and Dr A. Jane you may recall from previous write ups is a colleague from the University Library who was back for what we were astonished to work out was

Raconteurs' Rest

her fifth year! It seems like only yesterday she was a newbie. She was also, very bravely back to referee for a second time. More of that later but she clearly wasn't put off by running something I'd written last year. Though I note she was running a "proper" GDW classic rather than one of my own efforts this year! Meanwhile, Dr A is a former work colleague who used to lecture in computing and now has a business as a book publisher. Readers of the *Traveller* Mailing List may connect the dots and remember he was one of two lecturers curious enough about my enthusiasm for *Traveller* that they both joined the little group that meets for *The Traveller Adventure* every other month in a Portsmouth pub. Unfortunately Dr C had to move to Vietnam and could no longer play, but Dr A has stayed with us and had now been persuaded to give the convention a go. I was curious to know what he'd make of it. His first gaming convention; his first opportunity to play *Traveller* with real referees! I was disappointed that I wouldn't get to see his RV. With a last minute cancellation giving him a room, he chose to drive up in his rather more fuel efficient ground vehicle. Unfortunately, various logistical problems prevented us from doing a larger car share, but three piloting rolls were successfully made and we were ready to play. Thirty-three others were arriving as well giving us once again a full house, completely taking over Redwings Lodge.

Door to the Wolves

I said there are seven formal slots from Friday morning onwards, but with the extra evening you may recall that last year I attempted a 'zero prep' game which we essentially made up on the spot. An hour of character gen and then three hours of using random tables to get us going and then developing a story as we went. It actually worked really well. So well that when there was an unexpected empty game slot the following morning I gave it a second try. However, although the actual adventures had

required zero prep, my preparation to actually be able to do that successfully had been way more than it would have been to simply sit down to write an adventure. I'd dug out all the *Traveller* adventure 'generators' that exist in various books; I'd prepared die drop tables made from LEGO® bricks to randomize locations, characters, eras and rule sets; I'd collected characters and adventure seeds and starting points; doubtful of my ability to corral dozens of PDFs I'd packed a crate full of books that would help me to be ready for anything; I'd printed blank forms galore; I'd even spent a few pennies on printing a giant *Atlas of the Imperium**. In short, my 'zero prep' games were anything but and quite stressful. Of course, having done all that once, it was theoretically possible to now use that work to do it all again, but I couldn't face it.

One option, of course, would be just to chill out and relax in the bar as many were choosing to do. Or alternatively, to play smaller non-*Traveller* board games or card games that K, a game shop owner, had brought a stack of. But for me, and for others evidently, we were keen to get on. Having come all that way; having all too few opportunities to play *Traveller*; and perhaps wanting to avoid being tempted by the delights of the bar, I decided I would offer a game for those who were up for it and it turned out that seven others were indeed interested. Good job I had eight possible PCs rather than the usual six. For the really committed that meant you could play eight games across the weekend. Exhausting – as I found – but possible. It also explains why I had come up with an idea for a structured form for recording *Traveller* games at a convention and produced a booklet of 8 of them. I'd brought a dozen thinking there might be some interest and only took two home. Well, three if you count my own filled in one.

---

* reviewed in *Freelance Traveller*, Nov./Dec. 2019,
https://www.freelancetraveller.com/features/reviews/travellermap/atlas.html

Raconteurs' Rest

Also proving of interest as regards 'handouts' was my map of the Aramis subsector in the Spinward Marches. I see you your paltry black & white US Letter/A4 version from *The Traveller Adventure* or *Aramis: The Traveller Adventure*. I see you your nice A3 colour print out from travellermap.com. I even see you your snazzy 32" tablet screen (much though I love it!). I raise you a wonderful creation from my colleague Jane who has hand sewn a table-filling padded quilt of the sub-sector. It can be seen in the picture to the right. Also visible are three of this year's convention freebie – a notebook styled as a crew log of the *Angel's Share* which is the PC ship in In *Search of Angels**. The toilet roll is clearly either someone hoarding against the dearth of it in the shops after panic buying or Fred, the Steward, having over-ordered again.

A week or three before the convention I'd had an idea to save myself a lot of work. Having offered Andy two more 'Scenes from *The Traveller Adventure*' as my formal contributions to the weekend, not to mention *Annic Nova* which was fresh in my head from my gaming group in case he had an emergency slot to fill, my folders were stuffed full of TTA material. Despite having left a folder worth of material that we wouldn't need at home. What if, I thought, we took Roet Bannerji – a sort of 'baddie' that the PCs encounter – and make him and his crew the focus of an adventure that covers his actions from the 'other side' as it were? As it happened, in preparation for the chapter "Wolf at the Door" which we'd been playing in the pub a couple of years previously, I'd worked up a fully generated crew for the *Wolblutn* so that I could more easily run the final scene from that chapter when Bannerji betrays the PCs who've just helped him escape with his broken leg through the woods of Senled and Renitza. All I needed to do was print those up neatly, string together the scenes they'd appear in and let the play-

Jane P's marvellous quilted Aramis subsector map and three of the Angel's Share *crew log convention freebies*

ers take it from there. I'd have all the necessary background, I'd have details of the *March Harrier* crew – now the antagonists – and I'd have a ready-made plot of sorts. My only doubts were whether the players would want to play morally compromised characters and whether knowledge of *The Traveller Adventure* might impact their actions. I needn't have worried on either score. Yes to the first and yes to the second but it didn't matter. I thought I'd call it "Door to the Wolves" or something as a 'reflection' of "Wolf at the Door". Readers may be able to suggest something better.

SPOILER alert for TTA in this paragraph and the next four. Skip to 'Next morning…' if you're not interested. For those who need a quick catch up, Bannerji (the only named figure and the captain of the Far Trader *Wolblutn*), and sometimes his crew, appear in three chapters. In "Leedor on Aramis" it's his wallet the PCs find and return to him; they encounter his 4th Officer, meet Bannerji himself, get invited to a TAS dinner, are stood up by Bannerji who departs Aramis sharply, and finally they meet Eneri Giilaan who is willing to pay for information concerning the captain. In the chapter "Patinir Belt", the PCs rescue a prospector from his ship which has been nuked by the *Wolblutn* trying to cover its

* this terrific campaign is described in paragraph 6 of
https://www.freelancetraveller.com/features/stories/aar-travcon16.html

tracks. In the chapter "Wolf at the Door" they run across Bannerji and rescue him from an attack by Vargr mercenaries, drag him with his broken leg through the woods and hills for several days, get him back to his ship so they can leave the planet as well, and finally get betrayed by him in the climatic final scene.

[*If you don't know TTA, you may wish to have it to hand to follow some of the detail referenced here.*] So, for my purposes, I can run the adventure in three sections with a bit of trading along the way. [*For notes on the trading, see the paragraph beginning "Like me, Nigel…"*] First the 'attractions of Leedor' once again to set things up and get us introduced as well as letting me reprise the Marquis of Aramis' New Year speech (after a big build up: very short), have a Sternmetal Horizons patron brief them on the lanthanum scam, and have them maybe meet the *March Harrier* crew if Bannerji loses his wallet. Second, in the Patinir Belt, hide their transit through the belt (thank you Ewan Q for that suggestion), load the lanthanum, encounter the prospector and decide what to do about him. Finally, have them hide at the mining camp on Aramanx, encounter the Sternmetal patron again who wants them to make up the Commission, and be filmed by a news crew in the rioting their presence sets off. Have the crew split up to check out various 'economic assets' so that Bannerji and patron are at the Governor's mansion for the Vargr attack and rescue by the *March Harrier* crew; and the rest of the crew are back at the ship for when the *Harrier* crew arrive expecting to be taken off planet. (Naturally we elided over the walk in the woods so as not to leave most of the PCs out for a chunk of the evening). Events as the *Wolblutn* crew and the March Harrier crew meet up could be entirely up the players.

Way back when I'd been planning "Wolf at the Door" for the first time I ran it – we spent four evenings on it in the pub across eight months! – I'd

named Bannerji's Sternmetal companion as Loess Thingon, so that was easy. Just make her the patron at the start and then again on Aramanx. Job done. Maybe have her call it "Operation Doorway" to make sense of the title. Everything else went as smoothly as I could hope for and the players took to their characters like ducks to water. I'd given each a short back story – generally painting them as a bit useless, Bannerji's was pretty much written for me, and also everyone had a line on how they related to each of the others. The players particularly seemed to like these. In addition, each PC had two 'most likely to say' quotes. Entirely inspired by the note in TTA that Bannerji is always whining. So one of his quotes was "it wasn't my fault <*xxx*>, it was <*yyy*>". Speaking them in character and in a reasonably relevant moment could earn them a 'Benefit' – i.e., a re-roll of a dice throw. Up to a maximum of three. I pinched the idea, I think, from Dom Mooney in a game a few years back although unfortunately he wasn't with us this year to thank personally. I also learned they were a real thing called Fate points from other games. I think I've said before my ignorance about role playing anything except *Traveller* knows no bounds. The quotes, such as "it wasn't like this on my last ship", "this <piece of equipment> is a steaming pile of Cleon's droppings" or "let's see how fast this can go" were immediately being thrown around left right and centre and soon a black market trade in the polished purple stones I was handing out was rife. It seemed to be a whole sub-game so I might introduce the concept again. I'm not even sure anyone ever claimed a reroll!

Meanwhile, D was playing Bannerji himself and either unfortunately or in actual fact rather delightfully, knew TTA well enough to know all about losing the wallet. So it became a running gag that he was being super careful with his wallet and knew exactly where it was at all times (he claimed) and so on. He was determined, in his usual jocular way, to

One character in a drug induced haze finds it's all too much. (It was sherbet, officer, honest!) Apparently, P had helped retake a train but tranqed himself rather than the terrorists

tease the referee who he saw as expecting and needing this to happen. Now for about half a second I'd "wanted" events to play out as they're written in TTA – I'm a fan, after all; it's "canon"; of course it has to happen, it's written into the fabric of the universe. I was very tempted to have him make a really difficult task roll for not losing it. But a moment's thought had me realize that of course there's no actual need in this set up for that whole bit of business to happen at all. It's only required for the *March Harrier* crew to get involved so that they get involved in the "Wolf at the Door" adventure. Providing I have the *Harrier* crew at the governor's mansion/brigade HQ on Aramanx anyway (and I didn't even need to come up with a reason), events would play out as expected. So I was able to have great fun pretending to really want Bannerji to lose his wallet and come

up with ways he might do so, while D came up with increasingly inventive reasons why he wasn't losing it. I've no idea what the new newcomers to TravCon made of it, but fun seemed to be being had.

It wasn't dissimilar at the Patinir Belt. They were hiding their course, sneaking around the asteroids, loading the lanthanum and so on. However, to delay their timings I had the engineer rolling on the ever helpful *What's Wrong With the Ship?* tables [*available from DriveThruRPG*] to come up with things she had to fix. When they encounter the poor old prospector, who just wants to be friendly out in the Dark, we have the gunner keen to unleash the nuclear missiles he's been dribbling over and others backing him up; and still others not at all keen on doing something so illegal and immoral (despite their backgrounds). D of course knows full well that this is 'what happens' and is determined not to be that Captain. Once again, for my purposes, it didn't really matter, so it was a nice moral quandary that I could let the players fight about. Sorry, discuss. Aramanx then played out much as I expected although it was getting late so there wasn't scope for much more role playing of the Commission and so forth, but it wasn't necessary. As it was midnight and we'd played for a standard four hour slot, the betrayal at the end (with the weapon in the console on the bridge coming into play of course) made a nice climax. I think this may be worth writing up more fully; it was certainly fun and I'm glad I bothered with it. The only warning I would give is that it can be really mind bending to be on the flipped side of a story you've come to know quite well. My brain hurt working out the implications and inter-relationships of some of the questions and actions of the players. I think they enjoyed watching the cogs turn as I tried to work out what mattered and what didn't.

An Old Classic – *Annic Nova*

Next morning, following the usual breakfast in the bar of cereal, toast or anything you'd brought

along yourself, it was time to get the convention going formally and hover over the whiteboard in the main room where Andy would put the sign-up sheets as usual. The five games in each slot format has worked well enough over the last few years that that was continuing. Gone are the days when I first attended when there were only four choices. Of course, so much choice can be bewildering and I heard afterwards that one newbie to the convention had thought he was expected to stand back at sign-up while veterans could have first crack at the options. Fortunately, a friend told him otherwise, and subsequently he could be seen, I'm told, elbowing in there with the best of them to get a prime pick. Fortunately, I had no choice to make and no elbows to crush. One snag with the five choices is that it requires an extra referee in each slot willing to run a game and sometimes, what with changes in travel plans, sickness, or other problems, that can be an issue. A few of us, however, come with something spare up our sleeves so as to be able to run something if required. Having, just a couple of weeks before, slotted *Annic Nova* into my group's experience of *The Traveller Adventure* as something of a side adventure, it seemed obvious and easy to take that along and not have to prepare much or worry about remembering it. Just make sure I had an extra set of TTA character sheets. Andy grabbed at the offer and so, first thing, I was settling down to run that. Now, those who know it will know that it's one of the very first adventures for *Traveller* from way back in the classic days. First appearing in *The Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society*, no.1 (1979), republished as half of *Double Adventure 1: Annic Nova/Shadows* (1980), and finally (2011) reprinted in *Compendium 2* with Mongoose *Traveller* 1st Edition rules (and new deck plans). Despite its heritage, it's a very slight thing in many ways. Clearly coming out of the dungeon crawl tradition of *Dungeons & Dragons*, there is very little in the way of plot and much that is unex-

plained. If I had any fear of running it at TravCon it was that it was either too simple or too well-known and thus would either not fill a slot or not be of interest to anyone when there were other, better, options available. I shouldn't have worried. D was keen to give it a go along with four others and we had enough to make a game of it. Fearing it running short and wanting a reason for Jumping into a system far out in the boonies for the encounter with the 'ghost ship', I pulled out the trusty *What's Wrong With the Ship?* tables once again. [*For those who may have missed it on The Traveller Mailing List, my attempt at a 'rule' for using the tables, can be seen in the box. Criticism welcome.*] Although not specifically designed for *Traveller*, they're close enough and with a bit of fudging on the fly if required they were just the thing. They are d66 tables with 36 options and there are six of them so I use them as one large d666 table to keep it fresh. (The *March Harrier* is a cranky old ship so periodically I use this when the engineer fails a maintenance roll.) All I really needed was an engineering breakdown that somehow affected the Jump drive and up popped the "central aft primary jumpspace power link is overheating intermittently, roll 1d6: 1-3 cannot Jump". Perfect. A failed engineering roll meant a nice shudder and a bang and clearly something wrong.

What's Wrong with the Ship?

Roll an Engineering task once per week. DM – each decade of ship age. Failure means rolling on *WWWtS?* 1+1D-3 times.

For each task roll 2D: 1-2 needs an A-B class starport (or 1D weeks wait for part); 3-5 needs a repair yard (A-C class starport); 6-9 can be done in transit; 10-11 needs to be done in port, 12 needs to be done in a repair facility with specialist engineer(s) or a 2D weeks wait for parts. Adjust if task sems to demand it.

For any task roll 2D: 1= Simple, 2-3 = Easy, 4-5 = Routine, 6-7 = Average, 8-9 = Difficult, 10-11 = Very Difficult, 12 = Formidable.

For any task roll 1D: 1 = seconds of repair, 2 = minutes of repair, 3-4 = hours of repair, 5-6 = days of repair. DM+1 if Difficult or harder. Additional trained crew can reduce time.

Raconteurs' Rest

Meanwhile, for my players back home, I'd used *1,000,001 Characters** by Jonathan Sherlock to quickly generate the sixteen Middle passengers they'd taken on board so I whipped them out once again. The website produces *Cepheus Engine* skills, but it didn't take too long to convert them to Mongoose *Traveller* 2nd Edition. Not that it was likely to matter overly much. But I like to have it correct. What was nice is that having used them a couple of weeks before, I was familiar enough with several of them that they really popped into life in my head. Especially as I'd recently stumbled across four 25mm miniatures to start a little collection. Pre-painted for me which is even better as I wouldn't know where to start. Step forward Claudia Winkelman playing naval Lieutenant Commander Bridey Takopa! (The miniature is female, has dark hair and quite a fringe. Look carefully and it's the spitting image of Claudia – a distinctive TV presenter celebrity in the UK). We moved onto the moment of Jump and of course there's a loud bang and it fails to engage. The intermittent fault is, well, being faulty. I didn't think I'd made it particularly difficult to fix (I was just looking for an 'excuse' for the slight misJump into the outer system) but of course in the way of things, a hash was being made of repairing it. The engineer gets the pilot to come and help. The doctor looks in thinking his eye might diagnose something. Many of the *WWWtS?* items could be spread out to roles or skills other than the engineer which is great. Pilot, or comms, or computers, or even steward ("secondary hallway water dispenser" anyone?). They're all trying something and nothing's really working. Finally they notice it's the aft power link – I'd been dutifully reading out the whole rigmarole each time it was mentioned – and it clicks that therefore there must be a forward one; or a secondary one. Could they rig some sort of cross connection between the two to get things working again? Well, it turns out they could. Chalk one up to what Marc Miller calls the Rich De-

* http://members.ozemail.com.au/~jonoreita/SupplementOne/Cepheus_Engine_1001_characters.html

cision Making Environment and the wordy lines from *WWWtS?* to give a great gaming moment. The engineer (and her assistants) finally gets it fixed and off they Jump. Duct tape may have been involved. We had some interaction with the passengers just to get to know them. The steward thinks that Bridey is very fit, in both senses, so he spends time in the cargo hold exercising with her; a diplomat on his way to Yebab is being demanding; and so on. A week passes, they don't emerge from Jump. Passengers start getting restless; quelling rolls and double talk calm them down. A couple of days later they finally emerge and of course the passengers are livid to learn they're five days out from Yebab. More calming and more food and more double-talk. Great fun. All of that to give an excuse for the *Annic Nova* encounter and off we go to explore that. Though I think once again, there was some talk of not going anywhere near it. I think it was in character rather than players, but we could have quit for an early tea break if they'd so decided. Actually, even that wasn't necessary. I had *The Traveller Adventure*'s exotic patron encounter "A Point of Law" ready to go if need be (an alien Ebokin on Yebab wants passage to Junidy with her retinue). Indeed, I'd also brought with me my own four little seeds from "A Helping Hand" in *Compendium 2* in case extra bits were needed. Who am I kidding? When is there ever extra time to do everything? Still, they might do for next year. Particularly if "Zilan Wine" goes pear-shaped in terms of interest. However, in the here and now, aboard the *Annic Nova*, the exploration ran much as it had with my gaming group although this lot were much less reticent to turn on the big power breaker. They dealt with the anola family in the same way my group had: shoot the parent when it first attacks and then when the juveniles wrap themselves round the PCs' legs, put 'em all in a bag. They also had no worries about breaking down the door with the crayon drawing on – despite one of them having a compromised vacc suit from the anola attack and

another having removed their helmet to listen at the door.

Hang on a moment, you say, anolas? On the *Annic Nova*? Yes, yes, I know they're not in the text. But in order to spice up the adventure back in the Portsmouth pub, I'd thought they might be fun. They also had spiders and spiderwebs up on the hydroponics deck as it was near Halloween when they'd first been preparing to Jump to Yebab although we didn't get to that deck in that session. The anolas also linked nicely back to Pysadi and all that rigmarole which no one had forgotten despite it being three and half years back, so it kind of linked this side adventure into the main plot. Of course, why the alien craft has a family of anolas as pets on board is a mystery yet to be fathomed. ☺ In short, it was a perfect fit for a four hour convention slot and seemed to go down well enough so I was glad I'd offered it even though I'd been thinking that this would be the first thing I'd drop if Andy looked askance at my offering four games. (He's very kindly concerned about my energy levels and not overdoing it.) Had I not run the Bannerji thing the night before, I might well have run that instead of this as I was more interested in how it would work and at the same time didn't want to waste the little effort I'd put into it.

You're never far from an archaeologist

Having run two games already, it was now time for a bit of actual playing which was something of a relief. Andy's not wrong about my energy levels. Now, of course, there were decisions to make and too many great looking options. There was the chance to play in my work colleague's game *Signal GK* which was tempting, but she was also running it on Saturday when it wasn't competing with one which I only had one chance at. I could have gone for Simon B's grand miniatures game, *This Means War*, which was running all day across three slots in a continuing story that you could jump in and out of

but I wasn't quite ready to try my hand at disastrous tactical and strategic decision making again as I reported here from a couple of years ago*.

Ed Quick was offering *Duty Calls* which was very tempting with its blurb: "professional head hunters face their greatest challenges as the past catches up with them". I never did find out if the PCs were cannibals or human resource managers. In the end, though, I wanted to play in one of Nigel F's games as I had so enjoyed one of his last year and we'd got on well together.

The glorious painting and detail from This Means War!

Tin Can Alley was a fun set up. Initially I was rather disappointed. I arrived dead on play time having crammed into the lunch break not only lunch but one of my supposedly three times a day half hour 'stops'. The characters had been handed out and I had Hobson's choice of what turned out to be the gunbunny. Never really my favourite, but I decided to make the most of it as best I could. I'd deliberately binge watched season 3 of *The Expanse* in the week before TravCon as preparation for TravCon and had Amos in my head which helped. As a group of PCs we were essentially trouble shooters and 'deniable assets' sent to investigate why an archaeological team from the University of Rhylanor are experiencing thefts, breakages and delays at

* https://www.freelancetraveller.com/features/stories/aar-travcon18.html

their dig site in the Trojan Reach. To cut a long story short, made longer by one of our number finding a major clue and getting distracted from reporting it to the rest of us, we discovered a giant (90m high) robot from the Rule of Man period in an asteroid belt. Broken and without power it wasn't much use but was obviously of massive interest to the nearby Aslan as well as some nearby Belgardians (for which, read pirates!), not to mention the Imperials as well. Perhaps it would have settled the argument about exactly what tech level the Rule of Man did attain. We steered clear of that particular rabbit hole. ☺ It turned out to be the remnants of long forgotten warfare between descendants of some Yakuza inspired clans. As the Aslan hunted us, we lived to tell the tale and got the Imperials involved, but I for one would have liked to have got the (45m?) combat rifle the robot was still holding powered up and firing. No, definitely no, I was told very firmly.

Neil M runs Dirty Work *with beer and the* Angel's Share *crew log in support*

Just time for the curry house opposite again in the calm surroundings of a koi pond and an all you can eat buffet. Sadly my days of being able to make the most of such things are long past. But you can order poppadoms from the restaurant half of the building so all is not lost! One night I'm going to go over there and eat nothing else.

Chirping Up

Last year you may recall I had a wonderful time in a chirper game run by Andy Lilly with Nigel and R. It had been so overwhelmingly fun it had rated as the highlight of the entire con for me. Nigel felt similarly so in pre-convention Facebook group messages we'd hatched plans to see if we could both get into the same chirper game this year. Once again Andy was running this year's outing three times over and once again he was rewarding referees with the pick of a slot they wanted to play in per game they were running. I used two of mine to make sure Nigel and I were signed up for this as it was the only one of the three chirper sessions I could get into thanks to refereeing duties. Of course, lightning doesn't necessarily strike twice and although we had a lot of fun, we were also both very tired and along with, perhaps, it being a different group of other players (and four others instead of one other), and therefore also less face time, it wasn't quite the delight of last year. Having said that, however, I actually enjoyed the setting and plot of this one a little more than last year. In 2019 we were saving the day (quite by chance as is usually the case with these dim-witted trash collectors) on a liner that's being hijacked. Here in 2020 we were helping retrieve some lost jewelry in a city sewer. And by-the-by saving the day from some terrorists planting a nuclear bomb under a palace. It wasn't that I didn't enjoy the setting and plot of last year, but somehow both the sewers and the 'big idea' seemed much more characterful on this occasion. In any case, kudos to Andy Lilly for continuing the chirper series which has become a per-

Raconteurs' Rest

The Chirpers uncover a dastardly plot in the sewers to nuke the palace above

manent and much loved fixture of TravCon in this year's *Cavey McCaveface*. (Not sure about the title!) (I only learned afterward TravCon that apparently Andy changed the title the three times he ran the game. I completely missed that.)

Also of interest in this game was a newcomer to TravCon experiencing the madness that is a group of six grown men and women sitting around a table speaking in high pitched voices, chirruping for all they are worth, and generally causing mayhem in actions that are stupid, silly, done for comic effect or all three. B was initially in some shock I think but gamely, after a little trepidation, joined in and was soon getting the hang of it. His reaction reminded me why a couple of attendees – as it happens both in my gaming group – have an abject aversion to chirpers and anything to do with them. (See the chirper swatter Jane created for example.*) Howev-

* https://www.freelancetraveller.com/features/stories/aar-travcon16-greenhorn.html

er, at one point in the game, being rewarded for deeds past, the little tyafelm of chirpers are essentially offered their pick of any reward they like from a very wealthy ruler whose daughter they've saved. Five players immediately buying into the spirit of these particular games, come up with the most ridiculously valueless rewards they could possibly ask for (but deeply relevant to their characters of course). Poor B is visibly torn between the natural desire to make the most of this in terms of monetary value as any role player would be ordinarily and the uncertainty that he really can just ask for something essentially silly and no one will think he's letting the side down or wasting an opportunity. Of course there are double points – if any such things existed – for actually being able to use the silliness later in the game. I made a few brief notes on the game's plot but irritatingly I failed to write down any of these choices. It would have been much more interesting than what I have got a note of! I asked for a management course as I was leader of the tyafelm and my character notes said I wanted to improve my comrades and my leadership of them, but this was easily the most sensible of the choices at this point so it isn't a great example. I was playing the brightest of the bunch as leader Vax who I think I played last year. Intelligence 7!

With the Chirpers behind me, it was time for bed. It was midnight after all. Well past my normal bedtime. Straight upstairs. Do not pass Go. Do not get tempted by the bar or any small card/board games going on in there. A shame really but I was feeling absolutely wrecked. Just in passing, I don't quite go into a news blackout at TravCon but it can feel that way. This year as well as the TV in the bar sometime showing news tickers across the bottom, I also had notifications from my phone which could attach to the internet for the first time. (Previously I've been dependent on wifi which usually falls over when a small hotel is hit by 35+ geeks all with a de-
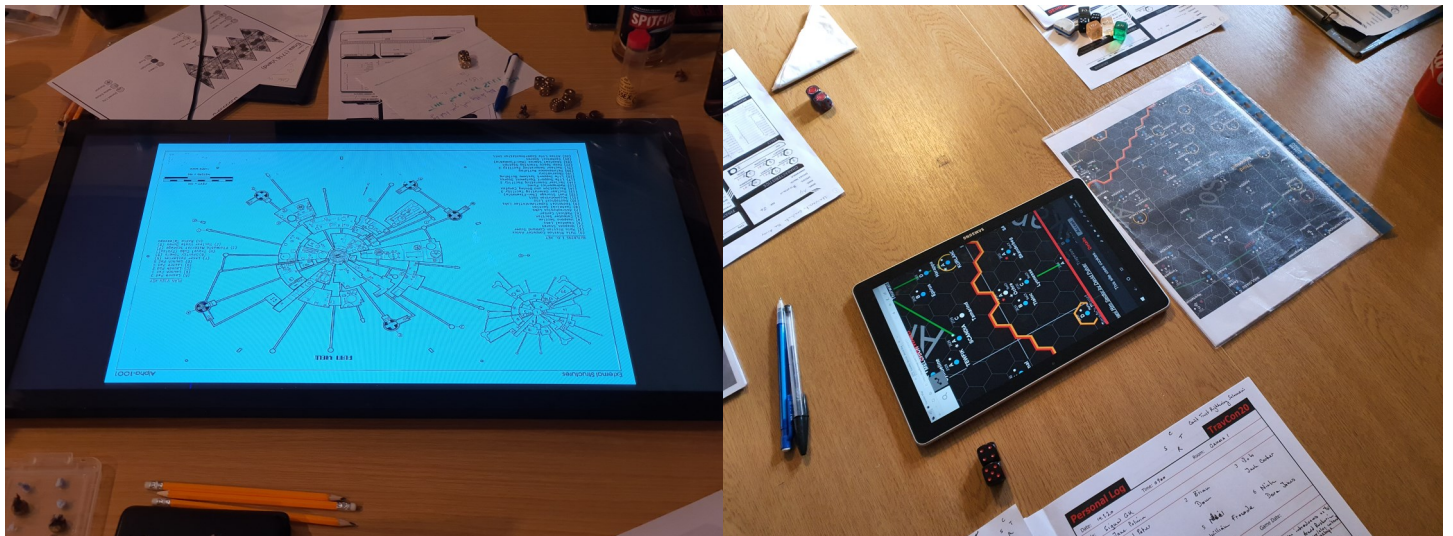
Size really does matter: a 32" tablet (left) compared to my 10" tablet (right). Both are Android devices.

vice or three.) One headline I had seen race past was that the Czech Republic had shut its borders to foreigners. Thank you virus. I was pretty certain that that spelled the end for the Erasmus week I was supposed to be spending in Ostrava in a couple of months. A pity because my two previous trips to that part of the world, one of them using no less than five trains, have been rich sources of material to mine for writing *Traveller* scenarios.

A Cry for Help

Next morning dawned bright and early. Well it dawned quite early enough thank you. I've no idea if it was bright. Indeed, I have no idea what the weather was like for either Friday or Saturday. I barely looked out of a window. There were games to play, games to run, food to grab in the interstices. Easy choice for the first session. Jane rerunning *Signal GK* in only her second outing as referee. From what I could gather at work in the weeks preceding nerves were being kept at bay. Not sure that was the case on Thursday evening and Friday morning however as there seemed to be difficulty she was concerned about with a character sheet or two. Oh, and after her experience of running it yesterday, could I bring along my tablet so she could have a world map for Ochre off travellermap.com rather than just pointing to the air? No problem. Although I was ra-

ther embarrassed about my 10" screen rather dwarfed on the table after we'd all seen Richard T's magnificent 32" monster being used in his games!* I was keen to see how Jane did (after missing playing in her running of my own adventure last year so that others could have limited seats); I was keen to give her moral support of course, and practical help if required; and I was – of course – keen to see a classic *Traveller* adventure which I really could remember nothing about. Yes, I know I gather details and go through the books for *The Traveller Bibliography*. But firstly, that particular item was added many years ago now (a couple of decades or more actually) and secondly, 'reading' an adventure is nowhere near as engaging and memorable as playing or running an adventure as I've found with *The Traveller Adventure*. That used to be just sort of 'there' in my head as vaguely known; now I feel I know every nook and cranny; every delight and fault; every byway and railroad. It's wonderful!

Off we went into a fairly typical adventure concerning a plausibly deniable team hired to extract a Solomani defector from across the border. We met the patron, did the traditional tooling up, set off to the Solomani Rim and met the contact. We hatched our extraction plan, tried to put it into action, en-

* For a pre-convention demo, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZge0X1091Y

Raconteurs' Rest
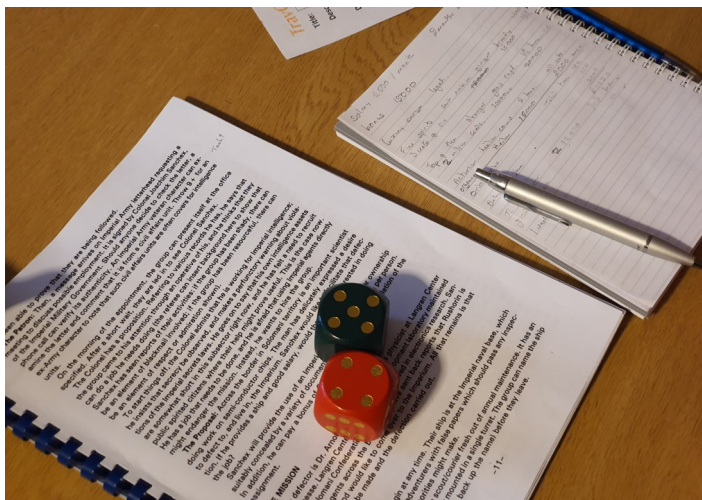
I can only dream of Jane's minimalist refereeing of Signal GK.
What more do you really need?

countered certain difficulties, switched to Plan B (or was it C, or maybe D?) and finally made good our departure with one Arnold Rushorin in tow. Now the one thing I could remember about the adventure is that the intelligent chips he is researching are the

Copious amounts of tea see Jane P through

seed for Virus in the future of *Traveller*. Or one future at least. I wasn't the only one that as a player was very dubious about Rushorin's work. In character, however, we could only see the benefits that might accrue to the Imperials if they could have the technology and/or stop the Sols getting it. Jane very competently executed a four hour session that kept us engaged, interested and enjoying ourselves throughout. She even handled one of those two second meltdowns when mind to mouth communications seize up and although you know what you want to say, nothing is coming. I'm sure we've all had them at one time or another.

It wasn't until I got home on Sunday and plucked *Signal GK* off the shelves that I came to appreciate the deeper excellence of what Jane had done. I'd not had time on the day to fully appreciate that the title hadn't quite matched our activities and I had assumed that we'd covered probably not all but much of the adventure. Dating from 1985 it could reasonably be pretty straightforward. I'd completely forgotten about some extra stuff on Ochre, the whole trip to Cymbeline etc. and the *Ad Astra*. How could I forget that? The deck plans are a key part of the book even if you're just flicking through it! I blame forgetfulness, tiredness and the capacity of TravCon to not give you time to connect half a synapse amidst all the fun. What became clear was that Jane had rather expertly extracted a key scene that had lots of dramatic potential and perfectly suited a four hour convention slot, and then layered onto that touches of her own such as secret identification signals consisting of whistling the theme tunes to *Fireball XL5* and *Thunderbirds*, or a delightfully idiosyncratic portrayal of a slightly mad scientist, to make a memorable experience that really worked. Not only that, she has ready-made sequels for future years in the remaining material! Not bad for a 'newbie' referee!

Raconteurs' Rest

Playing a Dream Character

No rest for the wicked as they say, which a recent devotional had reminded me was from Isaiah 48:22. A swiftly grabbed lunch and it was onto the next thing. Nigel once again running a game, so I thought perhaps, after yesterday, I should give something else a go. But at lunch he mentioned a detail that completely changed my thinking. Last year Nigel had revealed that he's written some *Traveller* fiction and was brave enough to share it with me. I'd read it (a couple of times), rather enjoyed it, and had fallen in love with a delightful alien who appears in some of the stories called Jiraal Sul. When I heard before the game that she'd be one of the PCs, I couldn't resist. I simply had to play and naturally wanted to play Jiraal Sul. It was a fascinating choice as it turned out. *War Graves* it was. Set in Nigel's homebrew universe of Union Space. Lots of aliens, lots of conflict, lots of love.

Like me, Nigel wanted to try to introduce actual merchant trading into a game. Like me he'd found that Mongoose rules can be fun as a solo game but don't really work as a shared enterprise with six variously interested people. Like me he'd found out that they occupy too much time for too little role playing. Like me he'd found that although not technically 'broken' they make it rather too easy to make money – particularly with a broker of any skill. (This latter can probably be most easily fixed by simply sliding the scale of profit/loss three or four points to the disadvantage of traders.) However, he had a plan. On the first night I'd tried to allow the *Wolblutn* crew to trade using the online Traveller Tools* gizmo as I had a spangly new phone with a proper contract for the first time in my life and had enough monthly data to have no fear that I could use it all weekend without incurring any extra charges. Unfortunately, even with that assistance it took a bit too much time to convey the necessary

* http://travellertools.azurewebsites.net/ Highly recommended!

info to players to make much of a decision. We did it for a couple of ports and then elided over it. Nigel had a different approach. He had pre-rolled the options for each world on one of two routes the players were expected to take. (We had to get a patron to where we'd be helping them retrieve a data core). With the prepared purchase sheets, the player with the cargomaster PC should easily be able to make choices to buy, then the ship Jumps and the sale sheets would reveal profit or loss. New set of purchase sheets, next Jump and so on. The first snag was that the player who ended up getting the cargomaster role, who bravely looked at the figures and started trying to work things out, quickly got bogged down in the numbers and choices. No problem. Given my specific interest in the subject and my two rather abortive attempts to make it work round the game table, not to mention being keen to help the game be a success, I offered to give it a go. Better yet I could do it in character as Jiraal Sul's boyfriend/cabinmate, Craig, who was young, needed a reason to stay with his love interest and could be apprentice to the cargomaster. As he was an NPC I could simply play Jiraal Sul while I also did the trading calculations. Better yet, having spent the previous Saturday going through the rules and running some simulations to reacquaint myself with the rules, I felt like I had a clue what I was doing even when numbers aren't my strong point. This was mostly just adding up with a smidgeon of subtraction, however, so what could go wrong?

Off we went and the other players were making decisions about routes across five Jumps as well as other things, and I, as Craig, was being handed purchase/sale sheets as fast as I could deal with them. Not fast enough though. I also had to factor in taxes and remember to subtract the ship's running costs and crew salaries. The PCs were getting ahead and I was falling behind. Not to worry though, one of the goals of the adventure's mission was to make at

Raconteurs' Rest

least Cr5,000,000 so we could all, as a crew, go back onto ship shares. In just the first Jump I'd made Cr7,000,000 and it only got better from there. Not every Jump was as lucrative but I think I'd made Cr17,000,000 or something by the time we arrived at the destination system. Look for the high ticket items with the biggest discount and fill as much cargo space as possible. Not enough goods? Find the next best and so on. IGNORE THE WOOD! It might be 50% off but it's only Cr500. You'll never make anything; even if you sell it for 150%. Take freight if you need to fill up (Cr1600). Craig would take a break from the figures by persuading the cargomaster he was doing a good job and enjoying Jiraal Sul showing her obvious pleasure at his money making ability in the privacy of her cabin. (Though when we all stopped to think about that for a moment, we realized it was a bit weird and onanistic.) Having been told by Nigel to ignore wood, which I'd already worked out, at one point I had one ton of cargo space that needed filling and I couldn't resist putting it down just for fun. Which, when I reported it to the crew, gave someone a rude but funny joke about Craig that I hadn't foreseen.

D and A look pensive as they worry about Just A Nasty Little Cold

Anyway, I'm quite getting into it and listening to the PCs doing stuff the alien centipede patron wants them to do in a vast wrecked ship. I'm occasionally making decisions as Jiraal Sul who is with the PCs and chatting idly over the comms with Craig stuck back in the stateroom. And I'm really pleased with the profit I'm making and my helpful neighbour player is keeping an eye on my rather unorganized columns of figures and making sure I haven't missed a decimal point or forgotten a 'luxury' tax or something. Thank you G! I sell the last cargo on the fifth world, admire the profit and share it with the crew. I look up blinking in the daylight ready to really join the fray, only to realize that the adventure has just finished, the mission has been successful and the patron is paying us off! Nigel's plan for the adventure slot to consist of about half trade and travelling, half exploring and retrieving the data core, rather went to pot when essentially he was running two games side-by-side rather than inline. One a mini-trading game and one a normal adventure. We finished way earlier than expected – although by that time I was really grateful for an extended rest before running another game after supper.

The lessons Nigel and I learned (or had reinforced) is that Mongoose trade rules are not usable around the table unless you happen to have six interested people (unlikely) or unless you go the full spreadsheet and automation route. They're also broken in terms of keeping ship finances marginal enough and needing adventure in order to really make ends meet. However, if you're content to run a dual game as described above and have an interested player, then it's just about feasible. Having said that, interested though I was for one occasion, I'm not sure I'd want to do it regularly. I did enjoy it in the context of this game however and will reread Nigel's stories about Jiraal Sul and Union Space with renewed interest and personal attachment.

Two Days Getting to Carsten

As *War Graves* finished early, we had an unexpected bit of downtime before supper. No problem. I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my time and went to my room to have a proper 'stop' before supper. Not a grabbed fifteen minutes that barely suffices, nor a 'let's just sit back from a game for a few minutes and zone out'. When I awoke many were off for a second (or third) time to the curry house next door, but I sought out those who didn't fancy that, found that Dr A was happy to drive us into nearby Sawtry for some takeaway, and set off on a mini-expedition, the only time I stepped out of the building in the entire 72 hours. With the fish and chip shop we'd been hoping for closed for renovation, we found a Chinese takeaway and placed orders. Unfortunately, being pretty much all there was in Sawtry – several of us were not counting a kebab shop – and also doing excellent food, meant the wait was rather lengthy (35 minutes) and we were only barely back in time for the next gaming session. Which unfortunately was one I was refereeing. That meant handing out the character sheets and trying to stuff my very tasty but rapidly cooling chow mein down my throat while we played. Ah well.

This time I was running not a scene from *The Traveller Adventure*, but a scene from *my Traveller*

Adventure. Those familiar with TTA may recall that between "First Call at Zila" and "Wolf at the Door", the *March Harrier* calls at Carsten and the trip from Zila through Carsten to Aramanx is described as "uneventful". The ship has to stop there for two days' worth of fuel refining before hurrying on. Not convinced that dull stopovers should be completely ignored, when my players back home hit this section I had thought I'd have fun producing half a dozen really dull tourist attractions that were on offer. Certainly nothing "eventful". I had thought it would be a half hour bit of fluff and on we would go to the main event: seeing Bannerji on the news broadcast on Aramanx and getting on with the next chapter. I should have known better. My players are really excellent at making much from the smallest of lines I feed them. An entire evening in the pub later we've had a huge amount of fun spending a day visiting several of said attractions and finding interest even in their dullness. At the end of the session, I announced moving on to Aramanx for the next session and was surprised when a chorus went up around the table, "what about day two?". Well, the rest is history as they say. I had two months to think up an adventure for Day 2, without it being too eventful, and the result was what you can find on DriveThruRPG as *Two Days on Carsten*. The very first adventure "March Harrier Publishing" published under the Mongoose TAS licence. (Thank you to the many, many of you who've bought it!)

Now I know I worry a fair bit in the days prior to TravCon that something I'm offering is adequate, or that I'm fully prepared, or that there will be any player interest. 2DoC, as I fondly call it, was top of my worries in this regard. It feels like quite a slight thing and way more role playing than roll playing and really, the attractions are indeed, boring. I've worked hard at their tedium. All very well as a quick bit of fun, but would it really sustain an entire four hour convention slot? With experienced play-

ers? When there's lots of other great things on offer? I could only see what happened and in an effort to make sure we weren't too short, I thought I'd bung in First Call at Zila as a sort of prelude. Not enough in that chapter to make me think it should be an entire 'Scene from *The Traveller Adventure*', I'd be going to miss it out, but this seemed like its moment.

I really, really, really shouldn't have worried. Between my perhaps overly long 'back story' introduction to cover the recent memories of the crew (nearly half an hour rather than five minutes as I'd thought but we did find a few rabbit holes to fall down and not forgetting my ever ready rant about the lack of a stairwell in the Church at Itzeny on Pysadi NOT just in the original GDW book but uncorrected in the Mongoose revision to the plans – arrrgh – sorry, I'm off again), between that and the players really taking on the PCs they'd been given, it was something like 2330 (from a 1930 start) when I finally opened my printed copy of 2DoC. Two days *getting* to Carsten, two players wryly called it.

We started by divvying up the character sheets. For the three *March Harrier* adventures I was running I thought it only fair as a thank you for their commitment that I should offer any of my home players first dibs on what character they took and in this session I had one. Jane took on her own Fred Squeaker which my poor muddled brain was grateful for. I might have snapped if she'd taken someone else. It's weird enough seeing TravCon attendees taking on characters I "know" are faced by regulars! Second dibs were offered to anyone who had played in a previous instalment of 'Scenes from…' and on this occasion Nigel was joining us and fancied taking on Captain Loyd as he'd watched his son have a lot of fun with him last year. Long-time readers of TML and these After Action Reports may recall that in my home group Dr A plays Captain Loyd as a lovelorn lothario desperately seeking romance and always failing (the inevitable low rolls on reaction

tables). Young Karl had played Captain Loyd last year and been just the opposite – a big hit with the women (with his very high rolls). My brain had just about accepted a parallel universe where both were true when Nigel, obviously looking to mix things up yet further, introduced us to yet another Loyd. The universes are multiplying. Indeed, one Loyd had a Schrodinger's woman in his stateroom – was it the museum guard he'd taken from Leedor or was it the kitchen maid from Pysadi? We never opened the door to find out. Now, in this universe, we had the gay one. Fortunately my "Loyd's Ladies" table was now revised to be fair to both genders and included "Lily's Lads". A bit of repurposing meant it was still good for this particular Loyd. Although that of course meant another rabbit hole to explain to those new to my version of TTA what that was all about (see TMLs *passim*). Not only was he gay, but Nigel latched on to the blurb about him hiring Lily Lee to do the Admin he doesn't like. I'd mentioned Fred was learning to Steward because neither Gvoudzon, Egon or Loyd like using that skill either. Hence, this Captain was an expert at delegating absolutely everything to other members of the crew. By the end, Lily was even delivering his chat up lines for him…

Meanwhile G had taken on Lily Lee, the archaeologist with explosives skill (it's a long story…, see also TMLs *passim*) and over the course of the evening G fell in love with her. So much so he signed up for *Wolf at the Door* the next day just to play her again. Also much loved was Adma the doctor who has learned his medical skills in a slightly unusual way – as a former enforcer with a mafia type gang. Better ways to inflict pain, you see. It certainly stopped my usual experience of medic PCs seeming a bit bland and underwritten. A veteran player took him on and really ran with it. P really warmed to this background and it was great to see the character come alive. I shouldn't forget N and R giving great service as, respectively, engineer Shell (replacing our

home game Tess, but not dissimilar) and gunner Egon. For once Gvoudzon was an NPC but for this particular adventure that was fine. It gave me a chance to play our garish cape wearing alien. Finally, E took on the "ex-Marine Captain" of TTA which was interesting because of the eight or nine players I have had at home across four years, plus now some 24 more at TravCon in four games no one has yet taken this character on. S/he has never had a name until now. So let me introduce you at last to Gil Banks. Having never met him before, E gave such a good performance of this former marine I doubt I'll quickly forget him. He was constantly in the thick of things and saving the day or saving the dying person, but never receiving any recognition for his actions. It was always the doctor or the captain or anyone but him who got the credit. Then there was the respirator… we'll get to that in a moment.

Anyway, after back story, character sorting and introductions, we'd probably spent an hour already but had had a lot of fun. We'd been introduced to the *March Harrier* and some of its 'issues' like the noisy life support system in Gvoudzon's stateroom, the body of Fox Hogan in the low berth (another long story), and we'd have had more of the *WWWtS?* tables but N kept making such great rolls as engineer Shell there were never any breakdowns. Until she doesn't and there's a toilet blockage in one of the passenger cabins which she repeatedly fails to get to the bottom of. *No problem*, says Lily, itching to make an explosives roll. *I'll sort it with a cherry bomb.* (A technical term evidently that was new to me). She's persuaded to try a plunger first but like Shell has no joy. Marginally failing her roll I decree she's unblocked the toilet but thanks to backflow(?) the adjoining staterooms on either side are now covered in grey water. Fred, the Steward, is livid and sets to cleaning up the mess with very bad grace. Jane plays the put-upon martyr so convincingly!*

* see the paragraph under A Page and Half of Notes! at
https://www.freelancetraveller.com/features/stories/aar-travcon16.html

Rum in the Dead Spacer

I think it was about now that G offered me a shot of rum. I'd been staying clear of the alcohol but this evening had decided to treat myself to a cider and then a second as my throat was getting sore, so I should have politely declined. I did try briefly. But G is something of a connoisseur so I knew it would be good and I thought it might help some of the muscle pain I'd reached by now. It was indeed good stuff. Highly recommended for CFS pain!

Derrick utterly delighted at the relaxation in rules that allowed him to run At the Double! *with* MegaTraveller *rules. Others were more delighted simply to see him back in the Referee's chair.*

The characters buy their legal insurance and trek into town to visit the Dead Spacer. Someone, I forget who, is discouraged from taking along Fox as their very own dead spacer and as I produce a plan of the hostelry and do my descriptions of the ship pictures on the wall which they pick up on very quickly, the characters take up various positions at the bar, the tables and the casino. I'm not sure the rum was helping at this point as I was picked up on a sudden deterioration in my descriptive adjectives. "Lots of shippy ships in picturey pictures on the wall."

Now I'd thought one player at least, perhaps more, might want to do some gambling at some point and *Freelance Traveller* had just been published with an article on the game of Dhe*. So I'd learned

* March/April 2020 p59, reprinted from a pre-magazine article from 1998:
https://www.freelancetraveller.com/features/culture/games/dhe.html

Raconteurs' Rest

the rules (not hard, even for me) and printed out a game board (very simple: just six boxes with large florid numbers 1-6). Several players got into this with one doing croupier duties for me and then we got into the probabilities and then I mentioned that my four page print out of the rules was actually just a few lines of rules and the rest was the *Traveller* Mailing List discussion of probabilities. So that was another rabbit hole we eventually had to escape from. The practical upshot was, after we stopped playing every round and abstracted an evening's worth of rounds, was that a fair few credits were lost. Particularly by Gil who just couldn't help himself. Meanwhile, out in the bar the whole bit of dialogue with the engineer and the bartender, whom I'd imaginatively named Rik, was taking place, the Oberlindes crew invite the characters to drink with them, the Tukera crew were poking their noses in and the Captain has slipped away for the evening with a likely lad from an SDB crew at one of the tables who was very, very taken with the Captain's stripes! (Double 6 on the reaction roll). For all that I thought it might be hard to get the altercation started if the PCs are keen to avoid trouble, with Gil around it just wasn't an issue. Bar fight!

Somewhere in there we had to sort out a mistake I made in saying there were two tables of six Tukera crew meaning there were six Tukera crew. The players had understood 2 (tables) × 6 (per table). Even so, as Gil and Shell had diverted a couple of them to the casino it wasn't long before the *March Harrier* crew had four unconscious opponents at their feet while their own damage had been minimal. Save, curiously, for Fred. Every fight he ever gets into the big seven foot bald former infantry guy seems to be last for initiative, miss his own hits/blows and eventually gets hurt. He really does have a glass jaw. Jane just sighed with resignation once again and accepted that it was his lot in life. Or was it hers? One day he'll throw a punch that connects. The enforcers arrive at just that moment and between the fact that

none of the PCs except Fred are on the floor and the fact that Rik wants to keep his Tukera custom and is blaming the *March Harrier* crew for starting it, it's impossible to persuade the enforcers that our heroes are innocent. So, off they get carted to the local lock up. That includes Lily who has stayed out of it by stepping backwards into the table the Oberlindes' crew were sitting at and was 'picked up' by a very concerned trio of crew who never had to get into the fight really to help out but couldn't resist going to the aid of a (very attractive) damsel in distress. Next morning, before the hired legal assistance get into the office to pick up the message their clients have left, Marc Miller, sorry old man Marc hault-Oberlindes himself, bails them out and employs them to take he and his Vargr PA to Aramanx.

After Hours

You can see why it took us so long to get the 'prelude' over and done with. We Jumped to Carsten and again, like my home players, I inflicted the whole 'relining the water tank' task on them so that a) they could fight about who did the job, and b) want to get into town to find a spa or something to get rid of the smell. Fortunately we steered clear of the rabbit hole that was my actual experience of doing this on a one hundred year old ship out in South East Asia. But by now it was midnight. Now, perhaps it was the effect of a good rest before supper or maybe it was the effect of the rum, but at this point I was neither tired nor in pain from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome as I often am if I overdo it – and boy was I overdoing it – and the players seemed to be really into it. So with one exception we decided to press on and I picked up the pace. A little. I ran through the tediously dull attractions that Carsten has to offer and much to my delight my favourite, the respirator collection of Teju Chishpish gets picked along with a visit to the birthplace of the first colonist. Hang on a minute cry Nigel and E simultaneously, that can't be right. Birthplace of the first colonist? Now Tess had

pointed out to me exactly the same error some three years previously so I wasn't at all troubled by it. Exactly. The blue plaque on the wall is in error. Not me! It's in the published adventure. It's the birthplace of the first child born to a colonist. They've just never bothered to correct the glitch. But E was having none of it and teasing me mercilessly about the error. He was of course quite right. I wrote the formal adventure and the 'explanation' well after the original gaming session and knowing my mistake. ☺

Meanwhile some went to the respirator collector's home and got his full spiel which is a favourite scene and NPC. I had the impression this lot of players enjoyed it as well. So much so that even before Teju had got going two of them were admiring the <double talk make/model over there> and the <double talk make/model over here>. Just how it should be. Just Teju's cup of tea. Gil took it a step further and was so inspired by the visit that he went shopping for his very own designer respirator and took to wearing it for the rest of the adventure. Which had implications…

Sadly they don't choose to visit the Museum of Geology (another favourite scene) but I'm determined not to railroad anyone despite the fact that it's at that location there is the hint about there being a possible Ancient site out near the Nadir mine. Fortunately I don't have to worry about forcing the issue as Lily has picked up something I'd said in passing and wants to do some research. So I simply present the museum's display as the results of her googling. Job done.

Next up is the Townswomen's Guild dinner. I wasn't even sure if the players would want to go but Oberlindes has wangled them invitations and off they went. All except Gvoudzon who has come down with a heavy cold. This was because originally Jane playing Fred had missed this particular session and we'd decided Fred was laid up in his cabin. Hence the whole bit the following morning with the

Pretty Young Thing and her mother turning up with heart-warming broth. Hence, also perhaps, Jane's desire to play 2DoC when she had already played two thirds of what we were doing. The dinner runs pretty much as written in the book with a couple of wrinkles. First, as Captain Loyd is now gay, my male/female seating plan doesn't work quite as well. It never occurred to me to also produce an alternative. Not to worry. We just decide the Pretty Young Thing is a male Pretty Young Thing and carry on. Secondly, Gil decides, for reasons best known to himself, to wear his respirator mask as part of his 'formal' attire. This gets very sour looks from the Matriarch running the show but she's too gracious and refined to say anything. However, Fred, playing to the hilt his longstanding 'behave decently as your mother taught you' drags Gil over to the Matriarch at the end of the meal to apologize. E gives a wonderful apology in character which is climaxed by him, still standing in front of the Matriarch, looking over to Fred with a thumbs up, a questioning look, and a barely under his breath 'is that ok?'. Well, perhaps you had to be there, but it's just a tiny representation of the fun we were having in a game and with a set of players who were really on a roll in terms of their characters, role playing and entertainment value.

In a game I'd have dearly loved to play in, Robin F running Uragyad'n of the Seven Pillars*, you can just see one of my favourite* Traveller *images of any book – the faffad'n caravan*

Next day, the crew go out to the mine which Gil is very keen to tour with no pressure from me. This rather takes me aback and makes me laugh. Prior to the session, I'd worried about this bit – remember this section was only written after the original players have decided that's what they want to do. Now I'm increasingly suspicious that there are parts of TTA that have been written in exactly that way (Pysadi comes to mind) but if you're not running a railroad, how do you make the scene happen? So in chatting with Nigel after his game earlier in the day, and knowing he was signing up for 2DoC, I'd decided to cheat and asked him, without saying anything else, to be keen to go on a mine tour. Not a problem he said, and mentioned that one of the stories he'd written and for which he was offering the URLs to anyone who cared to read them, had a small adventure in a mine. Well, that was it, I immediately retired to my room for my rest and read all of that before I slept. Maybe, I thought, it will have some cool bits of description I could use in the evening. It did. And there was a thing about a rusty old pump in the mine.

As I say, however, none of my cheating was necessary. Without a word Gil already had it in his head to do the mine tour and after a false start with my faux-Russian accent for Piotr their guide, we do the tour and go through the meta commentary on the mine diagram with the 'explosion' marked looking like the referee's handout not the player's handout*. No, no, I reassure them in character as Piotr, "it happened many years ago, no one killed in ten years, very safe, no problem". I even put in a rusty old pump just for Nigel which raised a smile. The rest of the 2DoC adventure pretty much played out as written although this group of players didn't seem to have quite the paranoia my group exhibited in planning exit routes and so on. The exception to

* See my previous award winning error regarding a secret agent hideout at https://www.freelancetraveller.com/features/stories/aar-travcon14.html

keeping to the book quite closely was that following the flister fight, the PCs rather oddly didn't take the stranded miners back to the mine but back to their own ship. No worries, by now it was half past one in the morning and time to wrap things up which we, reluctantly, did. A huge thank you to the players for the convention slot I most enjoyed this year. It went on ridiculously late, I knew I'd pay for it next day, but it was well worth it to see the PCs come to life, the "uneventful" stopover apparently really click with the players, and the feeling of *chutzpah* or more likely hubris I have about daring to 'add' my own contribution to *The Traveller Adventure*, receding in the distance. For the moment at least.

Wolf at the Door

Having seen in passing the news that President Trump had tested negative for the coronavirus, I paused for thought about alternative universes and then slept instantly and dreamlessly but it still wasn't enough. Unsurprisingly I had no one to blame but myself when I awoke in some pain and knowing I'd utterly overdone it. Chronic Fatigue is not kind to this kind of stupidity. But I knew there was just one more slot to get through and then I could collapse for three days solid. Deliberately, I wasn't due back at work till Thursday. (As it turned out I never went back. By Thursday, thanks to Covid-19, Faculty

Raconteurs' Rest
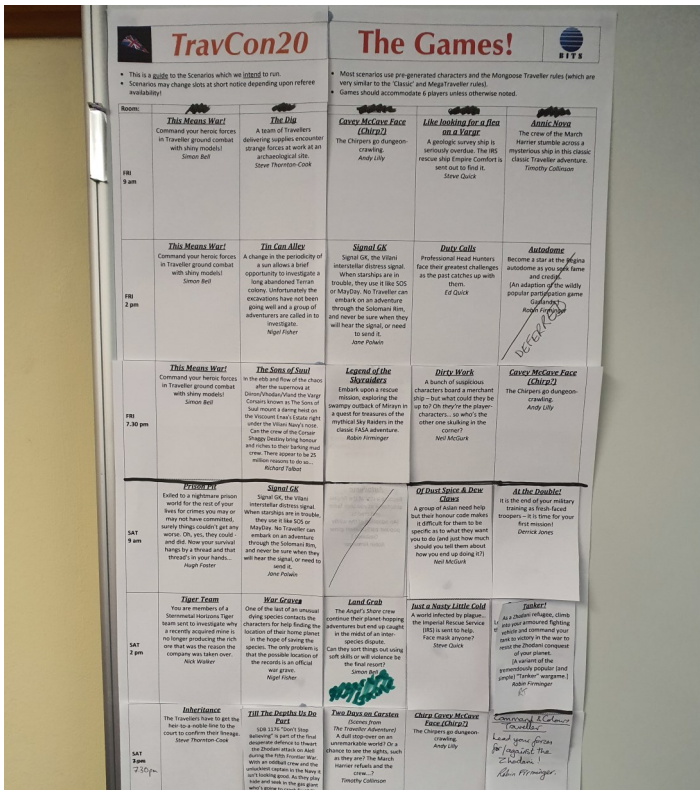
This is always so neat when we start...

Librarians such as me were being instructed to work from home for the duration.) In any case, I was really looking forward to the last session as I was reasonably excited about running *Wolf at the Door*.

If I had a worry about this it was that my group had spent four sessions on this in the pub getting through it, so was there any chance of completing it in the Sunday session? In theory, fractionally longer, but only just. Well, I promised myself, I'd keep it tight, keep it moving and not mess about. I reckoned it was possible. It was fun to see G return to reprise Lily Lee and Nigel return to reprise the Captain. Except that his son K had also signed up to play. Both of whom had played Captain Loyd Kitman. How do we decide who plays Loyd if they both want to? Let them fight it out? Let them randomly choose? OR, it occurred to me, that perhaps for this session we could have the Kitman twins, both in the 'captain' role. Maybe one called Lloyd and one called Lllloyd. (The home game Captain would of course be Loyd.) (Perhaps, somewhere there was a universe where

the administrator filling his name into a form re-allllllllly hated him.) We toyed with the idea for a moment, but finally common sense prevailed and Nigel took on the Captain and his son took on Gvoudzon. For *Wolf at the Door* it's a bit more useful to have the Vargr as a PC rather than NPC (thanks the interaction with Kfouzorr and all that back story) so that was good. Now we had Andy's daughter A joining us and playing the doctor Adma while her boyfriend D took on the engineer Shell, and her Mum, S, playing Egon. I noticed that none of the ex-military characters had been picked so I squirreled them away as NPCs in case of lots of combat. For those who know the chapter there's lots of opportunities for combat. As it happened we barely had any, evidently concentrating on the role playing.

Well not quite. I knew that *Wolf at the Door* had quite a lot of detail and description about Aramanx that's pretty much impossible to feed to the players in one large indigestible lump and certainly not doable in character. And besides, who on earth needs all the details about battalions and brigades and so on? I can only assume that's in there because of the origi-
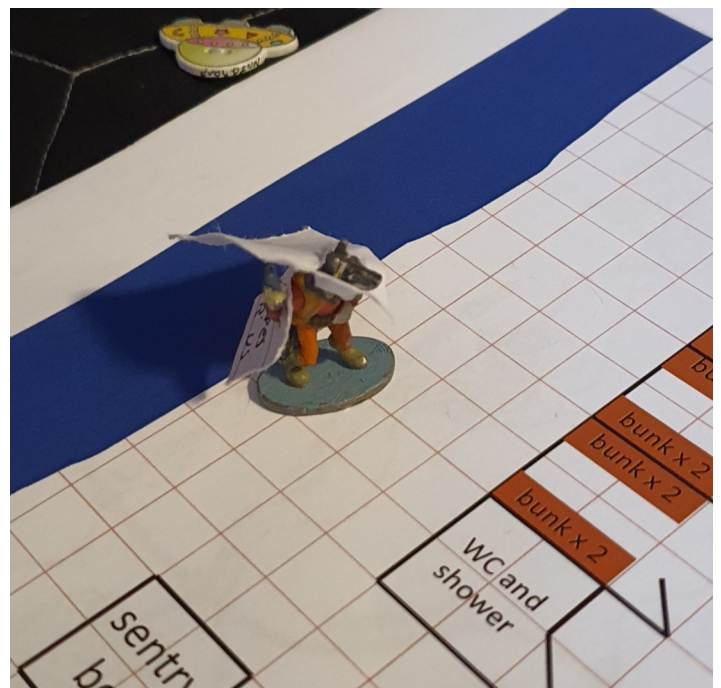
Gvoudzon, in fancy cape, approaches a Renitzan border post

nal five authors' background in wargaming. I had summary notes on it in case I was asked but there was no way I was reading it all out. Even so, in the bits I did read out, for example in the backstories of Kfouzorr or Bannerji, there was material that really wouldn't be said in character. One player pointed that out to me as a way of reducing the monologues and I took it as permission to cut to the chase. To the disappointment of another player, newer to *Traveller*, who was really enjoying the backstory. <sigh> Perhaps there were those who'd have loved the battalion details. Or maybe they were still gathered round the miniatures table next door. (I jest, that had gone on through Friday but had then been cleared up. To make way for Robin running his miniatures – or bigatures perhaps? – game on Saturday).

So they spot Bannerji on the news, go to investigate, rescue him from the collapsing mansion and head off into the woods. Just before the lunch break we do the whole bit of grabbing equipment and weapons from the battalion store under time pressure which worked well again. What was planned to be a quick lunch took rather longer as S made a sandwich run with G for several of us but there was quite a queue at the shop. We lost 45 minutes and instead of the Sunday session being the longest of the slots, it was actually a bit shorter. However, when we did reconvene I reduced some of the walk in the woods and the animal encounters and they reduced the whole messing about at a Renitzan guard hut on the river by virtually bypassing it. That was a shame I thought as we had previously really enjoyed the whole 'what's in the tin/sack/box' bit as I had labels in Renitzan (well, Bulgarian actually).

Anyway, by getting a wiggle on and not trying to replicate everything my players had experienced we got to the mining camp and, eventually, the *Wolblutn* with just enough time for Bannerji's crew to be suspicious and to be nicely detailed – thanks to my Thursday night extravaganza – and then for the

captain to betray them on the bridge with his 'autopistol in the console' dodge. Some lovely gun moments and some lovely rolls from S and daughter to save the day and bring us to an end just three minutes from the recommended finish time. Phew!

Wrapping Up

Award Citations

PFI: Using impeccable logic when trying to board another ship… "Vacc suits can deal with the harshness of space, right? So why don't we hide in the fuel lines they're using to refuel us and then when they decouple we'll be on their ship?"… everyone else, collectively: "NO!"

SEH: When each character was asked at the start of the game to give themselves a catchphrase, one chose "I never lose in a fist-fight". Subsequently she volunteered to give herself up to a police patrol ship to allow her 'colleagues' to escape; to buy time, she took a coma pill, which confused her captors for long enough that her 'colleagues' could return to attempt a rescue, at which point she came out of the coma to find herself in an operating theatre where the cops were trying to find out what was wrong with her… despite being massively outnumbered, she claimed her "I never lose…" skill, grabbed a scalpel and fought her way out of the operating room and through the ship's corridors to her colleagues, leaving a pile of bodies behind her.

Andy Lilly

The end of TravCon had arrived and after a moment or three waiting for a couple of other games to finish we had the wrap up. All gathered in the main room where there was no auction although I did get rid of a couple of handouts I no longer required to save me carrying them home, storing them in the attic, or just binning them which seemed a waste. Andy started going through the notes many had made during games on the back of the sign up sheets. People had suggested the usual PFI awards for disasters and SEH awards for heroism. Not every game had one, one or two had more than one. Scribbled up in a word or three on the white board we could run though the usual "explanations" and then voting. Eventually, with hands down winners, the SEH award went to Andy's daughter A and the PFI award went to A's boyfriend D attending for the second time I believe it was. Any suggestions of familial nepotism were wildly out of order. I don't think Andy has the time or energy over the busy weekend

to arrange something like that! The citations can be seen in the box. There was the usual round of thank yous, notes on next year, and it was time to say farewell. With virus so prevalent, Andy escaped his annual hug but we thanked him anyway.

Tess and I were on the road quickly as she had an evening event to get to back in Southampton. We didn't stop, kept up the pace on slightly emptier than usual roads, and managed the entire trip in dead on three hours. As the country closed down around us over the next couple of days and the Prime Minister strongly advising against "unnecessary" travel, virus had come within an ace of striking *Traveller*; another act of God coming close to shutting down the event. TravCon was probably the last gaming weekend for the duration. Many of us were mightily relieved, for mental health reasons if nothing else, that we'd come in under the wire. Here's hoping and praying there's no calamity getting in the way next year. ✪

The Prep Room   ?

Pacing an Adventure: Some Hints

by Jeff Zeitlin

Sometimes, your adventure has a time limit. If that time limit is measured in days (vs. hours), it may be helpful to track and pace the 'action'. Assuming that you're on the surface of a world, here are a few things that you can do:

Remember that a [standard] day is 24 hours, and that *on average*, a person needs about eight hours of sleep per night. You can get by on less for a while, but it *will* have an effect. With that understood…

In a city, allow two hours for an actual meeting, and allow additional travel time based on the city population as [city pop digit]^2÷2—that is, for example, if you are in New York City (pop ~8.5 million, pop digit 6), allow 6^2÷2, or 18 (round up to 20) minutes to get from where you are to where you're meeting. Meetings with contacts can happen during the local business day (three meetings if one is "over lunch", two otherwise), plus one in the morning (if "over breakfast") and one in the evening (two, if one is "over dinner").

Visiting a location as a tourist, with contact or alone: allow four hours, at most two per day.

Visiting a location to investigate/gather clues or data/acquire an object: If aboveboard, treat as a meeting, but allow three hours, so no more than two per day. If surreptitious, at least four hours to actually do it, and no more than one per day. Surreptitious visits may be at any time, but see below on sleep.

If a location is outside of the city, travel time is double what it would be *in* the city, *with a minimum of one hour*. Most likely, you'll only be able to fit in one meeting per day, two if one of them is "over lunch" or "over dinner".

If you skimp on sleep (six hours instead of eight), you can squeeze in an extra meeting, provided that you have meetings "over lunch" and "over dinner", *both*. However, your mental acuity is dulled, and any tasks that require rolling vs. INT are at DM –1 for each two days total that you've skimped on sleep. You can 'sleep in' to neutralize the DM by not having any meetings on a given day before "over lunch"; you cannot "store up" sleep to avoid the DM by doing this before skimping on sleep.

If you need a surreptitious visit to occur overnight (or otherwise outside business hours), you can shift your sleep cycle—but while doing so, you *cannot* have *any* meetings or activities for the day of the surreptitious visit *or* the previous day. If, instead, you do it by skimping on sleep, DM –2 for all INT-related tasks. ✪

…Continued from previous issue
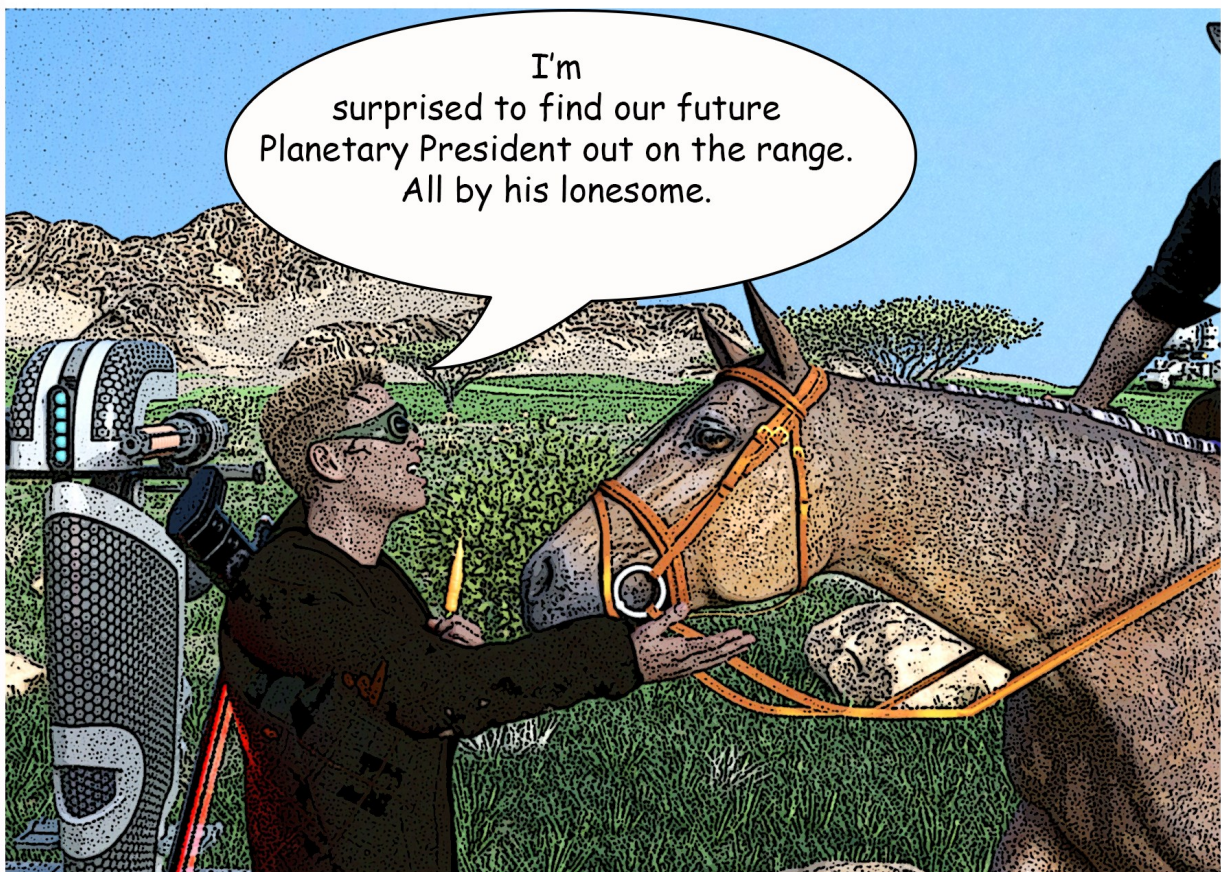
Walt: Thank you for the respect but we prefer President of the Council. Doesn't get peoples hackles up so much.

Sam: Well then John the...insert whatever title you like...was gracious enough to loan me your services and I really need them at the moment.

Walt: What's up?

Sam: Well I still got some friends in Naval Intelligence. One of 'em is up at the Freeport.

Walt: That shithole!

Sam: He has a hot smuggling tip he's really worried about. His boss won't let him follow up and it's headed our way.

Sam: I got two dammed investigators in my whole department. Wouldn't trust either of them with this. Could be big.

Walt: Whatever you need Sam.

Sam: My friend is sending down a Chimp with the details. Didn't want them put out over the air.

Walt: That's all a little paranoid isn't it?

Sam: Yep!

Walt: And Chimp? As in chimpanzee?

Sam: Yep.

Walt: You got strange friends Sam. Where am I meeting this Chimp?

Sam: Spaceport at New Plymouth.

Sam: Kiri...and for god sakes she was Orion Naval Intelligence. Of course she's good.

Walt: What's she doing on Dorlass?

Sam: Retired. Bought a ranch down on Butchers Gorge. Trying to get it up and running.

Walt: Lucky us!

Sam: Lucky you.

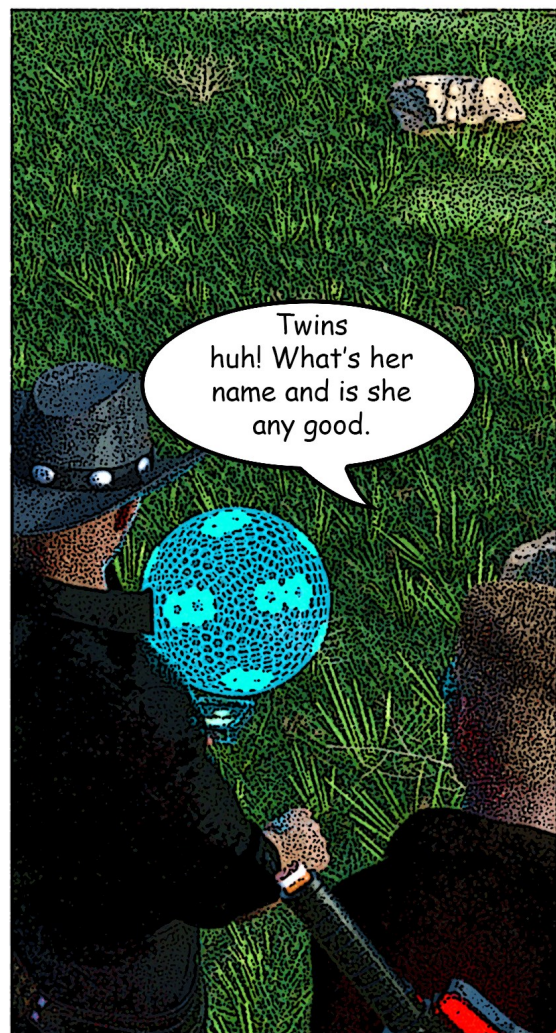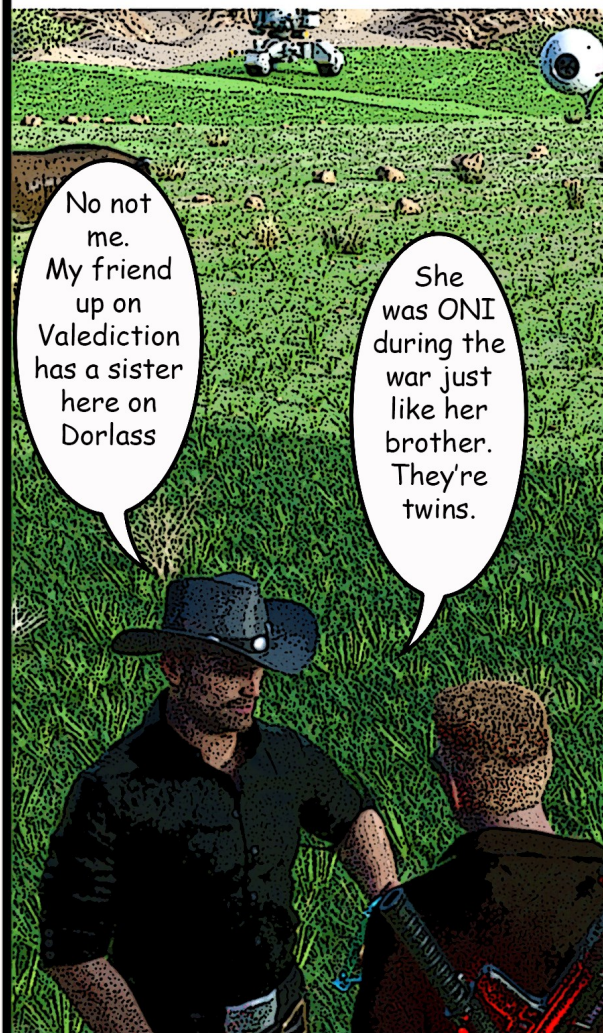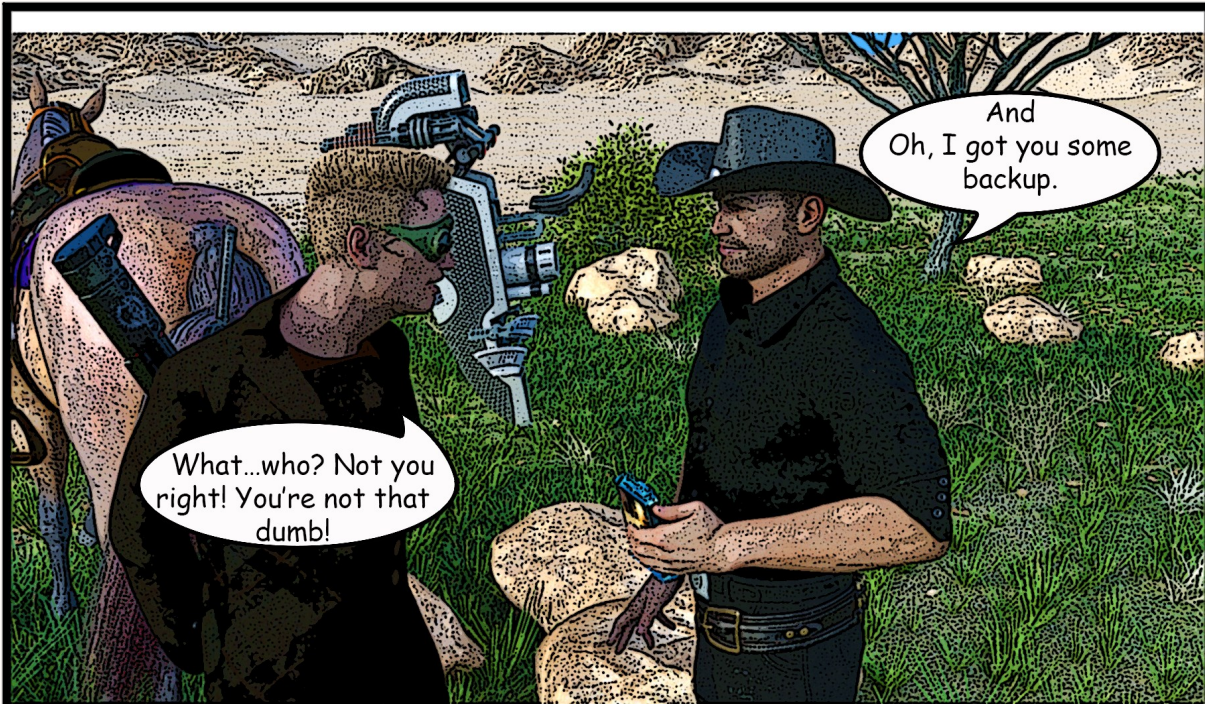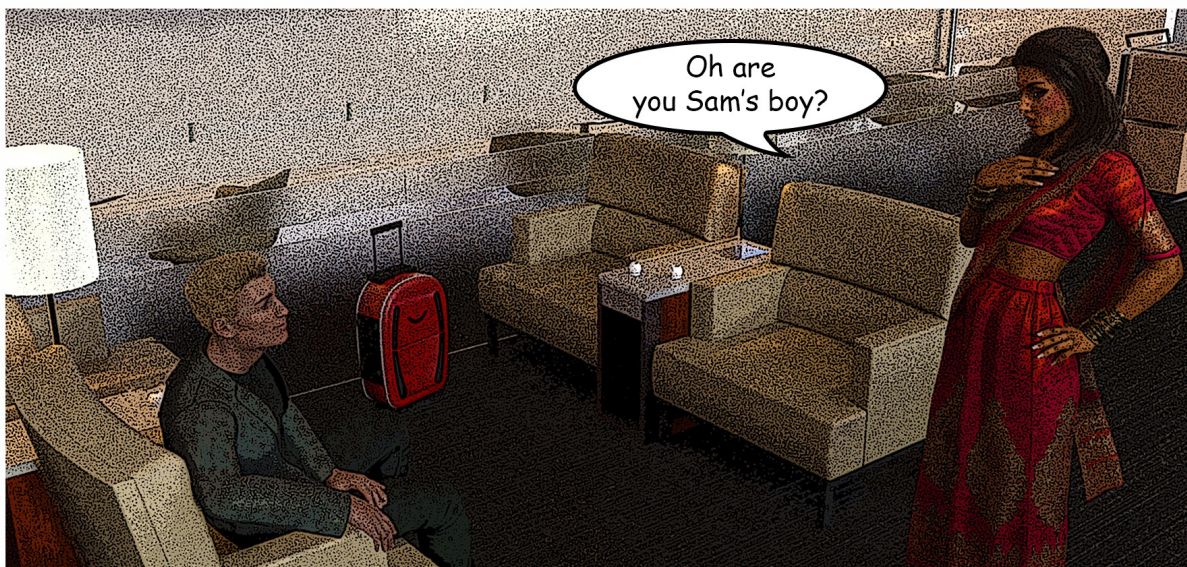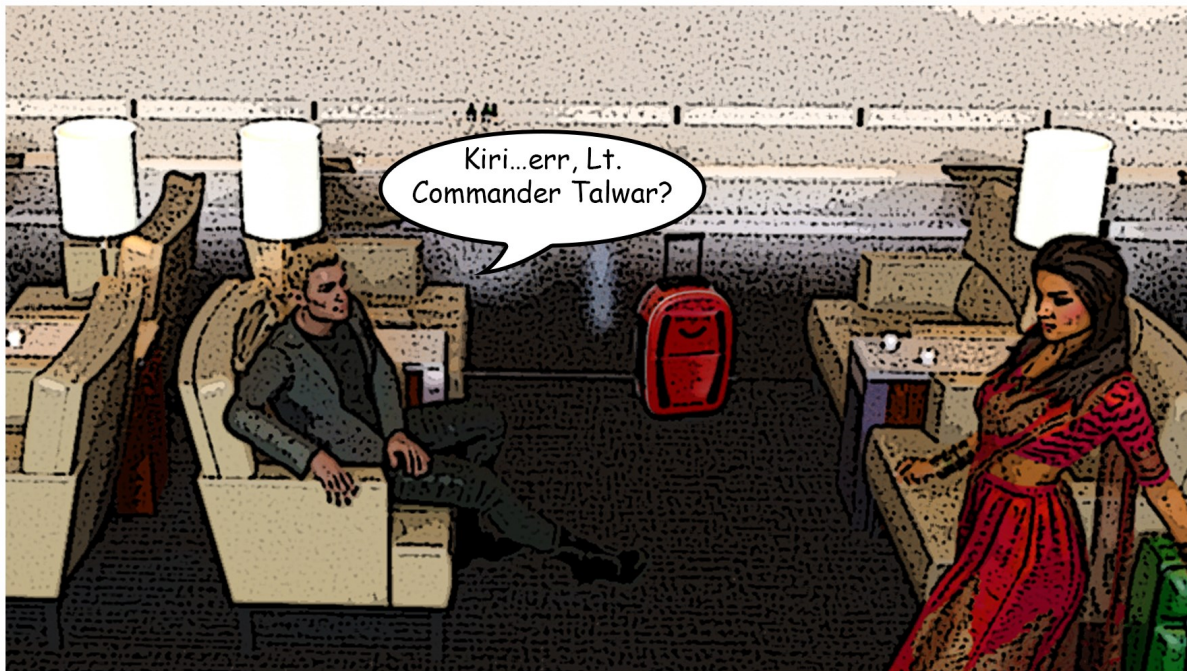## Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society

reviewed by Timothy Collinson

Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society. Various authors
Mongoose Publishing http://www.mongoosepublishing.com
6 volumes, 128pp. each,, PDF (from DTRPG)
US$14.99/UK£12.04 each

Editor's Note: This review refers to a boxed set of digest-sized paper-bound editions, delivered as part of the Kickstarter that led to their production. It is unknown at present when or at what price the paper-bound volumes will be available; the PDFs for the first five volumes are currently available at DTRPG.

The Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society has seen many incarnations. Perhaps as an 'in-world' periodical of some standing, it's had longevity in the real world that befits its stature; perhaps it's just too useful a construct to be allowed to fade away.

It first appeared as 24 digest sized volumes of around 48 pages quarterly between 1979 and 1986. These are extremely fondly remembered by fans and really fleshed out what was, at the time, a very bare bones rule set with the beginnings of what would become the Charted Space setting. Classic adventures such as "Annic Nova" in the very first issue, through the atmospheric critter art and descriptions by the Keith brothers, to the introduction of now familiar aliens, all first saw light of day in its pages. Four 'Best of…' compilations were spoilt for choice in material to include. JTAS ran for a few more 'issues' (#25-#28) as a section of *Challenge* magazine which replaced it until *Traveller* articles became merely another of the many systems it covered.

The Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society, as a title, was briefly revived in 1996 for just two issues from Imperium Games supporting *Marc Miller's Traveller* (or T4). These were US letter sized, had glossy covers and continued the numbering as issues #25 & #26 ignoring the *Challenge* sequence.

In 2000, to support the then new *GURPS Traveller* line, Steve Jackson Games produced an online version of JTAS edited by none other than Loren Wiseman – one of the originators of *Traveller*. For a year this ran weekly but it then switched to fort-

nightly and ran until 2015. It's easily the largest incarnation of JTAS although, at present, entirely electronic. As a side note, #2 of the Mongoose JTAS includes a short tribute to Loren.

In 2007 Marc Miller published a CD-ROM containing PDFs of all the original GDW issues which was entitled *The Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society* and in 2018 another CD-ROM compiling all the online issues from Steve Jackson Games, again titled *The Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society*. Keep up at the back!

Now, for Mongoose *Traveller* 2nd Edition, comes another instance of the title in the form of a boxed set of six 'issues'. Not strictly a periodical, this was published as a one-off Kickstarter funded project, but it harks back to the original 24 issues in many ways. Firstly, although PDFs can be purchased it is a physical collection of nearly digest sized volumes; secondly the content is not only similar in style to the originals, it actually reprints some of it; and
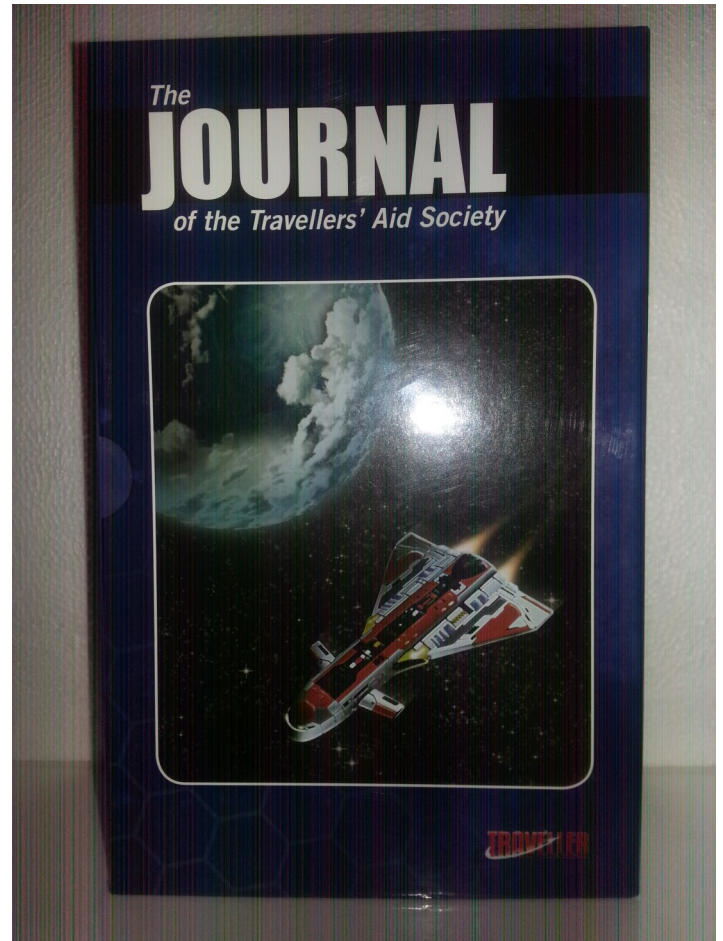
Critics' Corner

thirdly it captures the eclectic joy of the first issues of JTAS in having something for everyone and interesting glimpses into the much wider universe.

Of course, all that comes in a very modern packaging suitable for 2020. Gone are the card covers, stapled booklets and the black & white illustrations. In line with other Mongoose publications these are all colour, printed on glossy paper and attractively slipcased. The slipcase is sufficiently sturdy for the weight of the six volumes and has additional artwork by Shen Fei on one side and a word cloud on the other. Shen Fei also illustrates the six individual covers. The back covers have a standard introduction and then highlights of the issue's contents. Oddly enough, there's also an ISBN for each issue further emphasising their book-like nature rather than as a regularly issued periodical.

As for the contents, it's a mixture of recapturing some of the flavour of departments in the original JTAS as well as matching new Mongoose publications. So there are adventure and bestiary articles alongside Central Supply and Vehicle Handbook entries. Meanwhile, other departments are slightly renamed but immediately recognizable: Contact! has become Alien and Casual Encounter is now just Encounters. There are also a good number of High Guard articles covering specific ship designs as well as less rules-based articles in the department Charted Space centred very firmly in the familiar *Traveller* setting. There are also three combat-oriented articles in a small department called Mercenary. In addition, you'll find new material throughout but you'll also find reprints of classic material updated of course where appropriate to Mongoose *Traveller* 2nd Edition rules. Very roughly half the material is all new and half has seen the light of day previously. However, that latter category ranges from exact reprints of articles to reprints but with rule elements (e.g. characters skills) converted to MgT2. Or from slight revisions, through heavily edited changes or addi-

tions, to 'uses the title/concept but nothing of the original remains'. Personally I find the eclectic choices to be well made and give both a variety and modern slant which is welcome. It's good to see old favourites appearing in the new style, but it's also good to not only have rehashed material but the new as well.

One thing Mongoose fans will note is that the rules-based articles are very similar in length and approach to the chapters of the *Traveller Companion* published by Mongoose in 2018. It's very hard to come up with a reasonable distinction between the content of the two. In other words, the rules articles in JTAS could easily be further chapters of the *Companion* or the *Companion* chapters could have been additional articles in this edition of JTAS. This isn't a complaint or necessarily a bad thing, just an observation, but it does make it a little harder for Referees to quickly recall where particular rules might be. This is the reason that my own *Minibib 1: JTAS [Mongoose]* (available as PWYW on DriveThruRPG)

which has entries for every single article in all six issues of this new JTAS, also includes *Traveller Companion* chapters as though they were articles as a kind of 'bonus'. It brings all this short form material from Mongoose into one place for ease of reference and arranges it by subject.

On the subject of where material appears, it could be argued that some of the articles here could, perhaps even should, have appeared in the *Core Rulebook*. I'm thinking particularly of Jump Drive Operations (and Sensor Operations?) or some of the world building material on stars and gas giants. (The same could be said about Gas Giant Operations or Gravity and its Related Effects in *Traveller Companion*.) However, it's good to see them here whether it's something better considered of secondary importance or an afterthought since the core rules were published.
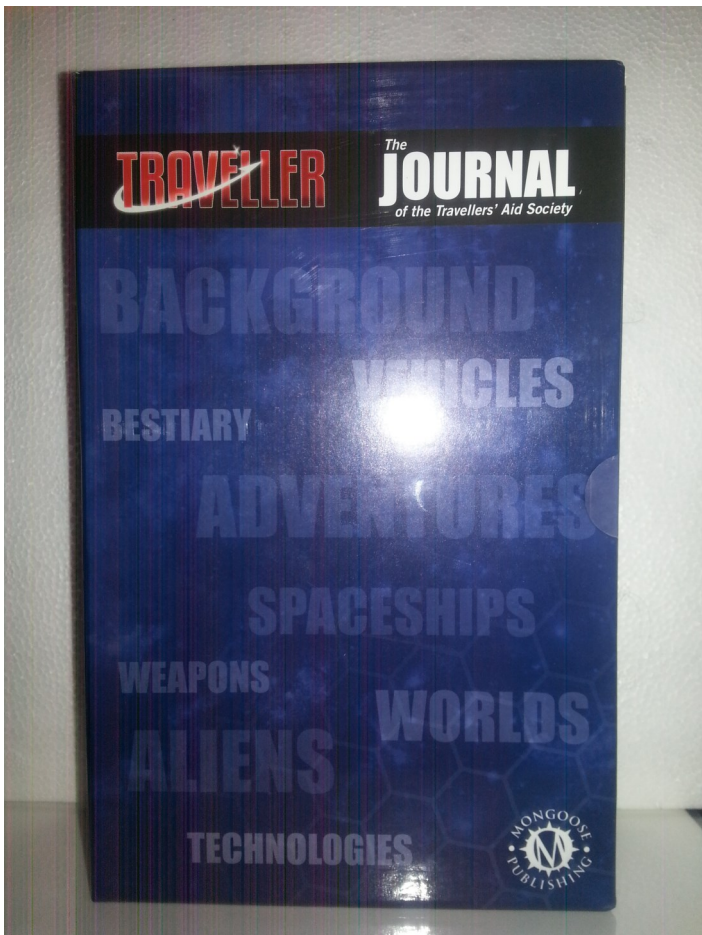
Artwork, as noted, is new throughout. Sadly that means some particularly favourite (or at least very, very familiar) classic images are gone. Views vary on the quality of Mongoose art but here it's generally attractive, perfectly serviceable, and sometimes really excellent . There's a moody image of a stock market crash in #3 for example, a very atmospheric illustration in "Last Flight of the Themis" in #2 and the same issue contains a couple of rather good Aslan scenes. One change from old to new is particularly noticeable: the Rampart fighter (in volume #2) is unrecognizable from the original in *Challenge* #27. Personally I rather like the new version and it can certainly be argued that it's much more spaceworthy and realistic. Your mileage may vary. On the other hand there's a revamp of the meson gun illustration from *The Traveller Adventure* in #4 which is fun to see. Deck plans are of course the MgT2 isometric style which I've whinged about elsewhere so won't go on about. I'm not aware of any online 2D versions for actual use in play, but perhaps they're yet to come. In their defence, they are very pretty in terms of attracting a modern audience and they are very much in keeping with the overall style of MgT2. I'm very fond of the colour hex maps on offer – usually Jump 3 centred on a world of interest; I'm not so fond of the 'blocky' (but otherwise attractive) world map (Ruie) which colours hexes as discrete blocs. I love a good coastline! However, Vland in #1 is particularly good – although split across two pages if that's an issue for you (as are the otherwise cracking plans for Siduri Station in #4). Other changes can be seen particularly in the adventures. There are 11 across all six of the issues and all of them come from the original JTAS. Generally they're both revised for rule content and much expanded which, given the brevity of some of the originals, is very welcome for harried Referees. The additions are often along the lines of local area maps/plans or vehicles which will help with running a game and these are nicely presented. Two adventures, "Critical Vector" and

(Continued from page 39)

"Pride of the Lion", are now set in Charted Space (Deneb sector and Trojan Reach respectively) rather than the unlocated worlds of the original.

As a bibliographer, one thing I find disappointing is that there are no proper credits for the authorship of the material. The authors of reprinted articles can be tracked down by referring to the original JTAS but each of these six issues simply lists authors in a group on the credits page. There's no means of determining who wrote what. Indeed, as an author I find this disappointing as well. I can see why it might be difficult to determine the exact percentage of author attribution in articles that have been modified or heavily modified but it still seems an oversight not to give proper credit where it's due and it seems even odder for the new material.

One really minor note for collectors, the Collopha (herbivore/intermittent) of #4 only appears in very early PDF releases. In later PDFs and in the print versions it has been replaced by the 10 Hit point Eaueal (carnivore/pouncer). My guess is that there were concerns about a 100,000 ton, 15 Hit land animal.

In summary, this is a very desirable collection which will enhance any *Traveller* shelf. For those using Mongoose it's not quite a 'must buy' but there's a lot of great material here that will either extend the rules for you or offer lots of adventure opportunity and background material. For *Traveller* fans using other rule systems there's probably enough here that's new and/or generic to make them worth buying particularly for those who haven't bought, or been able to buy, the GDW JTAS and like printed material in their collection. If you need further details on the contents, don't forget to check out *Minibib 1* mentioned above! I'd recommend the boxed set whether it's for nostalgia value brought up to date, or for the new material, or for the inspiration that all six issues will offer either way. I'm hoping there may yet be a second set of six in the future. ✺

Historical Author

by Paul Raistrick

Editor's note: *As submitted, this was specific to the Second Frontier War and the Spinward Marches. It has been edited to allow placement virtually anywhere in Charted Space, or in your own Traveller setting.*

"…you probably know my name from the *Arvild Blaster* stories?"

The overweight man pauses to look expectantly at you. You're seated at the other side of a stained bar table. You shake your head slightly. The fat man looks slightly disappointed, then smiles.

"No? Well, I suppose you won't have a lot of time for reading in your work." The fat man takes a drink from a glass of deep red liquid, his bald head reflects the light from the table lamp. He licks his corpulent lips with a thick red tongue before continuing.

"Well, they've been very popular, and given me a very nice living for the last twenty years. I've always been fascinated by the War, you understand, and Arvild gave me a wonderful opportunity to explore the different battles. Of course there were only so many battles during that war, so I had been quite at a loss for the subject of my next book." He leans back into the red armchair and takes another drink.

You put down the small glass tumbler of amber liquid you've been nursing. Moving your grubby ship's cap slightly to one side you ask, "So you'd like to charter my ship for a tour of some of the smaller skirmish sites?"

"Yes, that's eactly right. One site in particular has grabbed my attention. A skirmish between a

group of separatist miners and an assault group of Lord Ternham's Marines."

Referee's Information

1. The skirmish was on and around a small planetoid which is difficult to find. Once found he will want to visit the surface and look at the scene of the fight. However, he is an absolute novice in Zero-G and very clumsy. Assuming they can keep the author alive the players may find some interesting archaic weaponry or a clue to war booty.

2. As 1 except the planetoid is now the base for pirates. This is not obvious until the author has descended to the surface at which point a single armed ship arrives…

3. The author is badly in debt, but has found information about the location of a large stash of precious metals stolen from the miners during that war. He is intent on finding the stash to clear his debts. However the stash is hidden deep in the planetoid, in old mine workings and protected by booby traps. The author will need significant help to find, retrieve and sell the stash.

4. As 3, but another person has also discovered the whereabouts of the stash, and arrives with an armed group around the time that the players group arrive at the planetoid.

5. As 4, but the stash is empty. However the author notices a clue (a discarded data stick? A ship's log in a wreck floating near the planetoid?) that indicates that the stash was moved…

6. As 5, but the planetoid is also being used as a base for pirates who arrive at an appropriately awkward moment.   ✪

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 articles in this series covered the 100-diameter limit, running vs standing jumps, and calculating jump vectors; future planned topics are in-system navigation and exploratory navigation.

Part 4: Jump Masking and Interstellar Courses

Jump masking occurs when a planet or star's 100D limit is large enough to block the line of travel from a source system to the destination planet. The distance inside of a stellar system is small compared to interstellar distances, but planets are small on any system scale. For the most part we will see that normally only a star's 100D limit will be an issue for any jump.

It would seem that one would have to consider the positions of all the planets in the system to determine if there is a masking issue. Likely this is due to how we think of the solar system as a horizontal disk and would image other systems the same way. While all planets orbit in more or less the same plane, and for the most part all of the stars also orbit the galaxy in the same plane, these planes don't line up. In fact consider images of the Milky Way. The disk is always shown at an angle to the horizon in most photographs. This is because the Solar system's orbits are in fact inclined 60° to the galactic plane.

If a ship is entering a system from the "top" all the planets are completely distinct vectors, it is only when entering the system near "edge-on" would vectors have a significant chance of intersecting another body. So with two systems at arbitrary angles to the galactic plane, the chance of a jump between them hitting one of the systems edge-on is insignificant. Moreover the possibly interfering planet needs to be at the right point in its orbit to be in the way. To take our system. If one were to jump to Earth and Jupiter just happened to be at the correct point in its orbit < 1% of the time (0.44% of the circumference), then the angle of the jump vector to the plane of the solar system would also have to be within 2.55°, which given 360° of possible angles is (2.55/360) = 0.7%, combined with chance that is it in the correct point in its orbit gives a total of 0.003%. Even if Jupiter was in the orbit of Mars and masking 28.3° of the approach vectors with its 100D limit, the chance that a random vector to Earth would be masked is (28.3/360)×1.5% (smaller orbit) = 0.1%.

So planets can be effectively ignored unless the story specifically calls for it, however stars have huge 100D limits and are a serious issue. Again using the Solar system, the Sun's 100D limit is 143,000,000 km and the Earth only orbits at 149,000,000 km. This means that the Sun blocks 147° or 40.8% of any random vector to Earth. Six months later it would be blocked from another 40.8%, meaning that 18.4% are completely clear. In our case the habitable zone around the Sun is more than the 100D limit, but for some stars the habitable zone is completely within the 100D limit. *GURPS Traveller Starships* has a nice table for this which indicates that the habitable zone for G5 and cooler stars (K, M) will always be inside the 100D limit, while that for O and most B stars is always outside. That doesn't mean that the star can't mask the planet when it is behind, just that no masking occurs when the planet is on the near side. The Sun (being G2) and A, F and

some B stars have a habitable zone partially inside and outside the stellar 100D limit.

Thus travel to planets in the habitable zone of the G5-G9, K and M stars will be always be a trip to the 100D of the star. Remember though, not all destinations are in the habitable zone, and the smaller K and M stars have much smaller 100D limits as well. Also note that these limits on spectral classes only apply to main-sequence stars (92.5% of all stars, plus 6% white dwarfs and 0.5% sub-dwarfs which have even smaller 100D limits). What happens when a star masks the planet? The course needs to be set to the nearest point on the star's 100D limit to where the planet is. If the planet is on the near side ~45% of the time, then it should be only a matter of travelling the difference of distance between the planet's orbit and the 100D stellar limit. Likely only millions of km, or perhaps 12-20 hours. (This is where having accurate system maps help). However if the planet is near the edge of the sphere or behind the star then the extra travel time becomes 100s of million km or several days of extra travel.

Ideally the destination system is fully defined with stellar class and orbital bands defined and the referee can just look up the system details, but if that level of detail is not available, then we can come up with an approximation for in-system travel time. The stars with habitable zones well outside the 100D limit (O, B, A) make up less than 1% of all stars. F and G are 3% and 7.6% respectively. While M stars make up 76% of the stellar population that doesn't mean that they make up that fraction of destinations; M stars have such a small habitable zone that the likelihood of a habitable planet there is small. If we take most of the M stars (90%) out of consideration and run some numbers we would still expect 75% of the habitable zones to be completely masked. Adding in the numbers for partial and habitable zones completely outside the star's 100D limit. This means that some 83.6% of all planets will be always masked, 3%

to be never masked by the star, while 13.4% are masked while only on the opposite side of the star (e.g. Earth). [Without removing the M stars the numbers would be 94.6/0.9/4.5] This means that 97% [99.1%] of trips to worlds in the habitable zone would have extended delays for half their orbit.

While not all destinations are in the habitable zone at all, that should be obvious from the planetary UPP. Size 0 worlds and ones with 0 or 1 atmosphere are likely outside of the habitable zone. Those with a Hydrographic digit 2+ are most definitely in the habitable zone however. Even if the planet is outside of the star's masking area, as will be discussed in the next section, the ship likely can't target it anyways and will have to aim for the star.

Is the destination world masked?	
2D	**Masking status**
2-7	Destination is masked and on opposite side of star; long delay required while maneuvering through normal space
8,9,11	Destination is masked, but on near side of star; small delay incurred while maneuvering through normal space
10	Destination is not currently masked
12	Destination is never masked (from this origin)

Interstellar Courses

Plotting a course to the destination planet is just a matter of looking it up in the ephemeris and having the computer plot a course to intersect the 100D limit (as we saw above - presumably of the star) or set the distance to come out just past the star. Having the data available means we know exactly where the star is currently, irrespective of visual information in relation to the star the ship is currently at. However is it never as easy as it seems.

To compute a vector to a star the computer needs the precise angle (from the previous article ±500 mas [milli-arc seconds] or 1/7200 of a degree to hit a G star's 100D limit at 1 pc) and to get that one needs to know precisely where the starship is in relation to the source star so the computer can calculate the angle to the destination.

Some sources indicate that jumps need to be made at an exact point in time. Assuming the ship doesn't change orientation, or at least the jump field doesn't change orientation, travelling a few thousand km extra will have negligible impact on where the ship emerges from jumpspace. The ship will appear the same few thousand km different than expected at the destination. Angular accuracy is the primary concern.

As the star looks the same from all sides and the planets move, how does one know where the ship is in relation to the source star and which direction is which? There are at least three methods:

1. Ideally the ship is at a high-tech world that has several navigation satellites in orbit around the star. Just like a GPS, by analysing the signals from at least four of them the ship's exact position can be determined.

2. The star charts can have planetary information. As long as the ship can identify and accurately measure the angles to at least 3 planets its position can be determined.

3. Using "standard candles" – distant super bright stars far enough away within the galaxy that their movement can be ignored, or better intergalactic quasars. Identifying and measuring the angles to these can determine a highly accurate position. The more that are measured the higher the accuracy. [*Cepheid variable stars and pulsars can also be used this way. –ed.*]

Identifying these objects in a sky full of stars takes some time, so jumps can't be done immediately after arriving in a system. The bad effects of misidentifying a reference are so severe (appearing 1000s of AU out of position) that ships will wait the hour or so it would take to orient themselves.

As mentioned in the previous article, the angular measurement necessary to travel to a nearby (1pc) stellar 100D limit is around 75-1000 mas depending on the size of the star. A default telescope has about

a 1000 mas resolution, but we only need to know where the local star is and a number of reference point and the more measurements the better the average becomes. A regular ship may need to measure 15 or more reference points identify its exact position, while a military ship 3 or so.

While these measurements are taking place the ship needs to maintain a known speed on a well-defined course (such as a straight line or a fixed orbit) – no acceleration or maneuvering while the measurements are taking place. That means that jumping while the manoeuver drive is on ("running jump") is extremely detrimental to navigation.

Targeting a star, as can be seen, is harder than regular optical sensors can easily determine, but hitting the 100D limit for a size 8 planet would require ±8.5mas of accuracy—10 to 20 times more accurate measurements than the star. Optics cannot really get better without large apertures. While optical interferometry can make smaller optics act as if they are larger, there are issues with vibration and unequal heating. The accuracy that jumping in *Traveller* requires is so precise; targeting a size 1 planet would require that the ship be orientated within the wavelength of ultraviolet light or the size of a HEPA filter opening, and at 3 or more parsecs, we are getting to navigational accuracy less than the size of computer memory cells, So it is just as well that over half the jump journeys will end at the star's 100D limit. [To explain the analogy – imagine a computer memory chip is directly in front of the starship aiming the ship at memory cell 1576545 will hit the size 1 planet 3pc away, but aiming at one of its neighbours will mean missing].

Also in *Traveller*, there is a custom known as "jump dimming" where the ships lights are dimmed just before jump. There is likely another reason for this besides the one explanation in the starship operators' guide: reducing energy levels below what is required for the manoeuver drives.

Consider a grain of sand (0.01g) travelling at planetary speed (30 km/s) at an impact point away from the centre of mass of the starship. This impact could cause the ship to rotate ever so slightly. At 4500J of energy 12m from the centre of mass hitting a scout ships, gives a torque of about 13 arcsec/s* over 1ms collision time = 13mas, but in space there is nothing stopping that rotation so until the ship can fire its thrusters the angular change will continue. 13 mas at 2pc distance is 2,000,000 km off target – at 40m (the length of the ship) it is 0.002 mm; would in fact the ship even perceive such a small change of orientation (½ the width of a strand of spider silk)?

It is not just collisions with high-speed objects ships are not fixed in place or under any effects of gravity at the jump point. Movement within the ship, or shifting cargo can cause effects to the ships orientation – imperceptible to people, but significant to the course. Lifting a 1 ton cargo crate 2.2 meters at a distance from the centre of mass would have the same effect as the grain of sand. So jump dimming is a method of letting the crew/passengers know that all movement should be minimalized between the final course measurement and the start of jump.

This seems to paint a dark picture of interstellar travel, but having the star charts (Ephemeris) allows for the possibility of travel. 90% of the time the ship is aiming to intersect with (and stop at) the 100 diameter limit of the star which should be within the optical measuring limits of any ship. While aiming at even large planets is extremely more difficult, thanks to the ephemeris the exact distance, well within a million km, will be known and even if the ship misses the planet it will still come out close by. Intersecting the 100D limit of any but the largest planets, particularly ones more than 1pc distant is a dream for any navigator. ✺

---

* Moment of inertia of tapered triangular plate is about $mL^2/12$ – $1500000 kg \times 24^2 m/12 = 72{,}000{,}000$ kg m², so angular acceleration = $4500/7200000 = 6.1e\text{-}5$ radians/s or 0.0036 degrees/s

#44: Rabbit Holes

I don't know if there were more of them this year, or whether I noticed more, but we had no shortage of 'rabbit holes' in the games I was playing or refereeing at TravCon this year. You know the kind of thing, a moment when the actual adventure pauses for a moment and some abstruse bit of rules are discussed, or a 'what if' alternative universe version of what events are transpiring around the table is considered, or as often as not, something entirely unrelated to the game or even to *Traveller*.

I'm sure there are purists who feel they shouldn't happen, that they break the fourth wall, that they destroy the flow of the game. I suspect there are others who enjoy a bit of a mental break in a four hour game which can involve a lot of concentration and creativity. I'm pretty certain there are referees who appreciate a moment or two of down-time and an opportunity to think if they've been caught on the hop by some unexpected development.

I *know* the latter is true because I'm one of them. While I wouldn't want them to get out of hand and sometimes find myself drawing time on them aware of the clock and the amount of 'plot' remaining, I'm not averse to the change of tack that they can bring. Indeed, as anyone who has played in one of my games will know, I'm not immune from introducing them myself: sometimes by accident, sometimes by over-enthusiasm, maybe once to give myself time to think.

This year at TravCon I found myself getting a little bit side-tracked by my rant about the Itzeny Church and the missing staircase, enjoyed a discursion into ethics, and teasingly prodded a debate on the actual tech level of the Rule of Man. Fortunately, no one bit at that one, perhaps unaware of the rancour it's raised on the *Traveller* Mailing List in times past.

One rabbit hole seemed to have a life of its own as it moved between games and kept popping up in the most unlikely of places. I missed its origins but in one game I was refereeing there was suddenly a discussion of paper sizes. Did the Third Imperium use Imperial (of course!) or metric sizes? Slightly frustratingly from my point of view of wanting to be in on a joke, I had to have it explained to me why on earth we were discussing it. I can't even remember why it came up in my game – although it might have been the clerk doing a stock take in the Governor's Mansion near Tavanix in *Wolf at the Door*.

I hope players will kick me if I stray too far from the fun at hand and I certainly hope that referees would kick me if I was distracting them or players, but just occasionally it can bring lots of humour and shared experience to a convention game and may well be worth tripping over for a moment.   ✪

TravellerCON/USA 2020

While there is currently no prediction as to when Pennsylvania (or anywhere else) will get back to a state resembling "normal", TravellerCON/USA is far enough in the future that *no decision to cancel has yet been made*. The Kickstarter has been delayed, so if you've been looking for it or afraid you missed it, just stay tuned. We'll keep you informed; please watch the RSS feed at **https://freetrav.dreamwidth.org/data/rss?tag=ftmagazine**.

What's Currently Set:

- Because of a surprise rate change of a magnitude that would have been impossible at half its value, we will not be at the very nice site we had last year – instead, we have booked the DoubleTree Resort by Hilton, 2400 Willow Street Pike, Lancaster, PA

- The planned theme is "Hivers".

- Before the COVID-19 pandemic disruption, we'd gotten agreement from Marc Miller and Chuck Gannon to attend; we're in contact with them (and with some of our regular vendors) trying to confirm, as it seems that Origins has rescheduled for the same weekend as TravellerCON/USA. ✪

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. This is the fourth installment of the series; the first, in *Freelance Traveller*, November/December 2019, covered the general layout, the Civilian Dock, and the Bulk Cargo Dock; the second, in *Freelance Traveller*, January/February 2020, covered the Shuttle Berth; the third, in *Freelance Traveller*, March/April 2020, looked at Search and Rescue.

Traffic Control

This may be a simple radar tower crewed by a bored controller, or a huge bustling hive structure jutting out of the port's outer wall, studded with sensor banks and communication arrays. Traffic control is responsible for the co-ordination of all shipping entering and leaving port. Around a highport, a bewildering number of robotic buoys mark waiting zones and lines of approach. Ships entering the port's control zone are hailed and asked to identify themselves and their cargo. They may be directed to a loitering area pending a customs search by a Naval vessel, told to wait for the next open slot for docking, or given approach coordinates immediately. Ships are expected to obey all directions given by Traffic Control; if they stray from their assigned paths, they may (after a few warnings, if the controller has a good day) find themselves targeted by the port's weaponry in the Defense Center, intercepted by fighters from the Military Dock, or boarded by a Marine squad. "Endangering spatial traffic" is a serious offense, due to the amount of damage and loss of life a spaceship collision can cause.

If the official in charge of Traffic Control is diligent, the robotic buoys are regularly inspected by hand for tampering. Reprogramming the buoys has been a favourite tactic of terrorist groups in the past, and the danger this can create for shipping and the port itself is frightening. Ships colliding in the thick traffic near the port can cause immense damage, not only to each other, but also to the fragile port structure and its inhabitants; ships colliding in atmosphere or crash-landing due to falsified altitude information can devastate the port and the surrounding area, which is usually as densely urbanised as it gets on the particular planet.

Adventure Seeds

1. A group of traffic controllers has been mind-controlled by Zhodani agents who use them to guide a "shadow ship" to berth. The ship is running near-silently and equipped with stealth features, sensor-baffling and radar/lidar-absorbing hull coating. The travellers' ship inadvertently crosses the Zhodani ship's path. If they check arrivals and departures, they find that the shadow ship hasn't been registered, but one berth has been suddenly closed as "under maintenance" at the same time that the ship arrived. It may carry more Zho infiltrators, psi-enhancing drugs for the local Psionic institute, or it may be there to help a traitor defect.

2. Pirates have bribed a traffic controller. Xe is leaking the flight schedules of merchant shipping in the system to the gang. The travellers are hired to investigate.

3. As 2), but the schedules have already been leaked. The administration tries frantically to ensure the safety of all ships already dispatched that cannot be recalled. The travellers' ship is requisitioned for escort duty on outgoing freighters. If their ship has no weapons, they are hired to carry and deploy fighters instead.

4. As the travellers´ ship approaches the port, there is a sudden blackout of traffic control. There is a huge number of ships and boats on landing vec-

Traffic Control

Search and Rescue

Civilian Dock

Shuttle Dock

Quarantine +

Scout Service Base + Dock

Rental Booths

Bulk Cargo Dock

Naval Base + Dock

Military Cargo Storage

Cargo Storage

Live Cargo Storage

Civilian Shipyard

Military Shipyard

Fuel Storage

Scrapyard

Defense

Damage Control

Starport Police

Ambassadorial Dock

Embassy Quarter

Ministry of Justice

Portmaster's Office + Admin

Customs

Tourist Services

Bars + Brothels

Viceregal Palace

Public Palace Grounds

Central Plaza

Brokerage

Medical Services

Hostelries

Vector Gravs

Power Plant

Main Maglev Line

Traffic Hub

Ethnic Quarters

Life Support

Recreation

Communication Array + Sensors

Waste Reclamation

Residential Area

Hydroponics

EXTRALITY LINE

tors. Some stick to their original course, some panic and abort. Weaving through the chaotic traffic, avoiding a collision and managing a docking run call for piloting skill and good reflexes.

5. As 4), but the blackout was no accident. It was a terrorist attack/port-wide cascading reactor and life support failure/prelude to an attack by hostile naval forces.

6. A friend of the travellers', a free trader captain, has been kept waiting for days in a holding orbit. This is an act of petty revenge; he had a fling with a traffic controller's fiancée, and the man took umbrage. The travellers need to pay the man a visit or talk to his superior (who, unfortunately, happens to be girl's father and the controller's prospective father-in-law). Meanwhile, the girl has fallen madly in love with the captain and begs the travellers to get her to his ship. If they do, the trouble multiplies. The captain's pilot and current lover is a very jealous woman with severe anger issues. The girl's father will refuse to believe she went to the ship of her own free will, and will file charges of abduction against the travellers. There might even be a marine assault team sent to rescue the girl if the travellers botch the three-way diplomacy badly.

Sample Denizens of the Traffic Control Area

Hassan Mbdanti, 4557A7

traffic controller

Ground Vehicles-0, Administration-0, Law-0, Science/physics-1, Computer-2, Sensors-2, Communications-1, Carouse-0

Hassan Mbdanti is a typical traffic control employee. Of medium height and at the beginning of male-pattern baldness' onset, he wears the slate grey half-civilian uniform of the Starport Authority with pride. When off-duty, he likes going out for a few Sundowners with his friends in the more respectable part of the Bars and Brothels section. As an enthusiastic fan of the local zero-gee ballgame team, he can hold a conversation about the game's finer points for entirely too long. On almost every other topic, he is a bit of a bore. Which may be why his long-time girlfriend left him last year and took up with some adventurous space tramp. Since then, he has come to detest the freighter captains he has to guide to berth – and secretly wishes he was more like them.

Leon Dalmor Lidd 4559A8

Traffic Control supervisor

Administration-2, Law-0, Science/physics-0, Computer-2, Communications-0, Melee/brawling-1, Athletics/strength-0, Carouse-1, Leadership-1

Dal (as both his friends and his subordinates call him) runs a section of five controllers in the traffic department. Often seen in shirt-sleeves and never without his mokaberi cup, he has the look of a boxer gone to seed: tall and broad-chested, with a blocky jawbone, thinning hair and a beginning pot belly. (He actually used to be an amateur-league boxer in his student days, but his wife convinced him to stop.) Friendly and considerate, Dal tries to run his section on mutual trust and comradeship, and he does what he can to cushion his subordinates from his boss Medvedev's strident efficiency.

Lidd would like to say he trusts his team implicitly. But recently, two comptrollers were arrested by the SPA for sedition – not in his section, thank the stars – and it has been all over the news how pro-Zho propaganda leaflets were found with them. He became uncomfortably aware just how much damage a terrorist or enemy agent in the traffic control department could cause. And so he has begun to take an unhealthy interest in anything that might be out of the ordinary in his team – even something as innocuous as longer-than-usual trips to the loo.

Irika Medvedev, Esq. 273BAA

Traffic Control department head

Leadership-2, Computer-2, Sensors-0, Law-1, Communications-1, Administration-3, Persuade-2, Intimidation-2

Tall, spindly and bird-frail, Madame Medvedev is a resolute woman of indeterminable age. She has conducted the port's traffic control for longer than anyone else can remember, outlasted three portmasters, and quietly and effectively run her department all the while. A strict disciplinarian, she is held in something approaching awe by the junior traffic control personnel and is a constant pain in the behind for anyone in the middle level who is getting too complacent in xir job.

Medvedev has a long-running feud with the port's Naval command, who constantly try to gain more control over the workings of the civilian traffic authority. Up to now, they've failed to achieve anything more than petty meddling, but it's definitely not for lack of trying.

Relations are not helped by the fact that she detests the military mindset, and views soldiers as trigger-happy, pompous fools. Unfortunately, the port admiral is a fine specimen of this particular brand of officer, and the two of them cannot stand being in the same room with each other. ✪

Critics' Corner

The Zhodani Candidate

reviewed by Megan Robertson

The Zhodani Candidate. Stephen J. Ellis.
March Harrier Publishing (via TAS)
36pp., PDF
US$4.99/UK£4.01

This is a game of high level intrigue, one when the party gets to meet the likes of Duke Norris of Regina. The format is very open: the party are part of an Imperial task force whose mission is to ensure that the war-hero Marine whom the heir of the Duke of Mora is due to wed is no more than he purports to be despite a period of captivity in Zhodani hands. Designed as a one-off, each character represents a different agency, and are provided with their own personal agenda as well as that of their parent agency, carefully crafted to ensure that they will come into conflict with each other during the course of their investigations… indeed, one character's agency thinks that it is one of the other characters, rather than the would-be bridegroom, that is a Zhodani spy! There are several other subplots in play con-

cerning the bride's parentage, a few star-crossed lovers, and more to weave into the mix as well.

Much of this is discussed in the Introduction and Background, and you should study these carefully, along with the full characters provided, before play. It's suggested that if you know the players, you should allocate them according to each player's strengths and weaknesses; alternatively, give an overview of public knowledge about each character and let the players choose, or even distribute them at random. Give them plenty of time to absorb everything about their character before play begins so that they have a chance to really get into character. It's useful if there is somewhere for private conversation—between players or for chats with you as Referee—or at least material for passing notes around the table. If played at a convention, you may wish to stipulate that no player-character can be murdered/sent into exile/otherwise eliminated from the game, or at least not until towards the end of the play slot, so that nobody feels cheated. An optional basic Trust mechanic is provided, should you want a public track of which character trusts who…

You may well have revealed the main objective even before distributing the characters, but the game proper begins with the first meeting of the Task Force. This is an opportunity for the characters to introduce themselves before one of them takes the chair and the group can discuss how they wish to proceed. A lot of information that's available to the Task Force (provided they ask for it) is provided

The first part of the adventure involves the characters conducting the vetting of the war-hero bride-groom (and whatever else the characters decide to do). If the decision is that he is not influenced by the Zhodani, the wedding can proceed as planned. If they decide he's unsafe, there are various options, including the wedding going ahead with a different groom. Should there be a wedding, the next part of the adventure unfolds. The Task Force will be invit-

ed to check the guest list for undesirables, and get to attend the wedding itself. If you have previously banned violent interaction between player-characters, this is a good time to permit it.

Hints and tips for keeping things moving are provided, along with a wealth of background information. Prior preparation will pay dividends, this will be most effective if you can respond instantly to whatever the party says or does… and if the main plot and their personal sub-plots aren't enough, there's a collection of other things that you can throw in as well; as well as suggestions for locations that can be used for the inevitable private meetings to further intrigues (which may or may not offer scope for evesdropping…).

If you like role-playing-heavy games with lots of intrigue, you'll love this. Bear in mind that it really only works as a one off… although with a lot of ingenuity and plot-twisting you might be able to find a way to use the characters (as NPCs) and situation in a campaign if you can think of a reason why your regular party might be around and drawn in to what's going on. That's not really what it's designed for, though. If you prefer to use the *Cephus Engine* ruleset, there are some brief notes on skills conversion, although this game does not lend itself to lots of die rolling anyway. ✪

Your Input Helps

Freelance Traveller is always looking for new material to include. Please email us with submissions and ideas at *editor@freelancetraveller.com*, the main editorial address.

Size matters to us, not to you. Concentrate on making your article the best it can be. We'll offer suggestions that we think can fill gaps or improve an article; please take them in the spirit intended—we're *not* saying your writing is bad; we just want *Freelance Traveller* to be the best *it* can be, too! ✪

SPA Traffic Control Pinnace

by Benedikt Schwarz

With increasing trade, traffic control within a system can become a logistical nightmare for the Starport Authority. This is especially the case where the system has several outlying spaceports on different planets or asteroids, or mining stations in the belt. Each port and station has its own traffic control, and co-ordinating schedules takes a lot of effort.

The TC pinnace is one of the possible answers to this problem. It is a flexible vessel that can be employed in a variety of duties all across the system. Pinnaces are used to monitor traffic at the main take-off points along the jump diameters, accompany visitor ships from different polities to make sure they don´t stray, patrol the main trade lanes from planet to planet, maintain a net of traffic buoys and drones, and guide in damaged ships. They may act as relays for messages and synchronisation data between the different ports' and stations' Traffic Control sections. Where pirate activity is suspected, they may even courier this data to its destination in physical form, stored in data bins, to avoid interception.

While nominally armed, usually with a single pulse laser, the TC pinnace is not supposed to fight, neither to attack violators of traffic codes or in self-defense. This duty is handled by system defense boats (which often do a patrol sweep across a wide area to cover as many pinnaces as possible), or by standard pinnaces carrying two 10-dton light fighters each. In a combat situation, the TC pinnace is supposed to flee using its high acceleration, while still keeping track of the offending vessels' courses, and let Naval vessels deal with the incident.

General Layout

The basic hull of the TC is the standard pinnace with its reconfigurable wing assembly; this model was chosen because of its atmospheric capability, since one of the expected roles of this vessel was to act as a mobile traffic control tower on planets without a starport proper.

Two triple-occupancy staterooms and a commons area/pantry were added. The rest of the pinnace's cargo space was partitioned off to accommodate a traffic control operations suite and a small computer laboratory to program robotic buoys and traffic drones. Ejecting the drones is done via a specialised port mounted in the hull; recovery is a semi-EVA procedure using the main airlock located just behind the cockpit, and requires an AVERAGE, Pilot, DEX (5 min) check.

The traffic control suite is equipped with a bandwidth-5 computer. Usually this system is equipped with Intellect-1, translation, security and traffic control expert software, and can monitor the drones. In border systems, the computer may also have extensive databases on foreign customs and interspatial law. Lower-TL systems may not have access to computers of this bandwidth, and their pinnaces may provide much less electronic support to their personnel. Instead they rely on the operators' skill and ability to work under strain.

The aft portion still has a modicum of cargo space, often data drums to deliver to outlying stations, food and toiletries for the duration of the run, and occasionally special courier packages from third parties that Traffic Control may expedite on a favour-for-favour basis. Often, there is still ample free space, and it is not uncommon for crewmembers to come here to be alone, to escape the cramped conditions and avoid the others for a while. The cargo attachment points, by chance or design, are perfectly placed to string up a hammock.

The usual high ceiling of the standard pinnace's cargo hold has been lowered to a little less than 2.5 meters. The ceiling space now houses the extensive electronics, communications and sensor arrays necessary for Traffic Control duty. If something needs to be fixed, the technician has to "go aloft" via an iris valve. The maintenance crawlspaces on this deck are low (1.2 meters) and narrow; tall persons may find it

difficult to turn around. There are so many access panels that it is near impossible to check them all; rumour has it that TC personnel frequently use the space behind the panels to smuggle small packages.

At least one incident has been documented where a traffic operator, when her pinnace was boarded by pirates, cached a storage crystal with sensitive traffic data in a cable shaft and hid out for several days in one of the maintenance spaces. She was eventually discovered (severely radiation-poisoned from being too close to the unshielded active sensor bank) and executed, but the data was still hidden and uncompromised when Naval vessels reclaimed the pinnace.

Typical Duty Shifts

Usually, a shift lasts for three weeks, with two operators on duty, two on standby, and two resting. Service aboard a traffic control pinnace may be the epitome of boredom when monitoring a rather torpid area of space. Managing the traffic outside of "convergence areas" is rather easy – the ships have ample room to maneuver and keep clear of each other. It gets more interesting near stations or heavily occupied standard jump points where many ships converge in a fairly small area. Operators wear out quickly in those areas, and need to be stood down to rest at short intervals. There are situations where this is not always possible, such as when a sudden and unexpected surge in traffic occurs. In such cases, things may get very dangerous if tired-out operators assign the wrong vectors to incoming ships. ✹
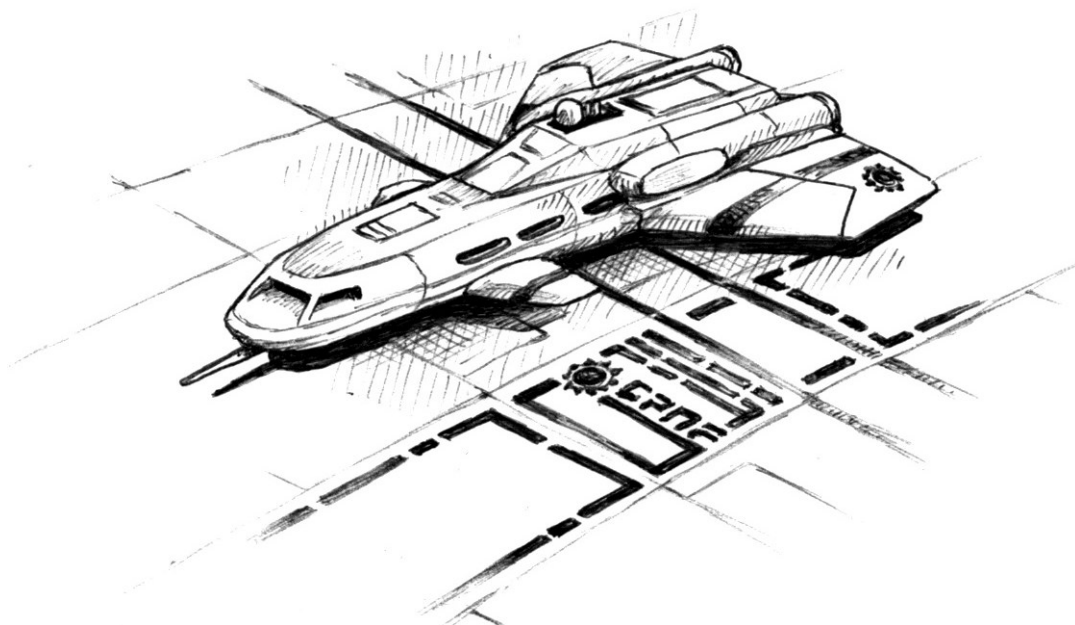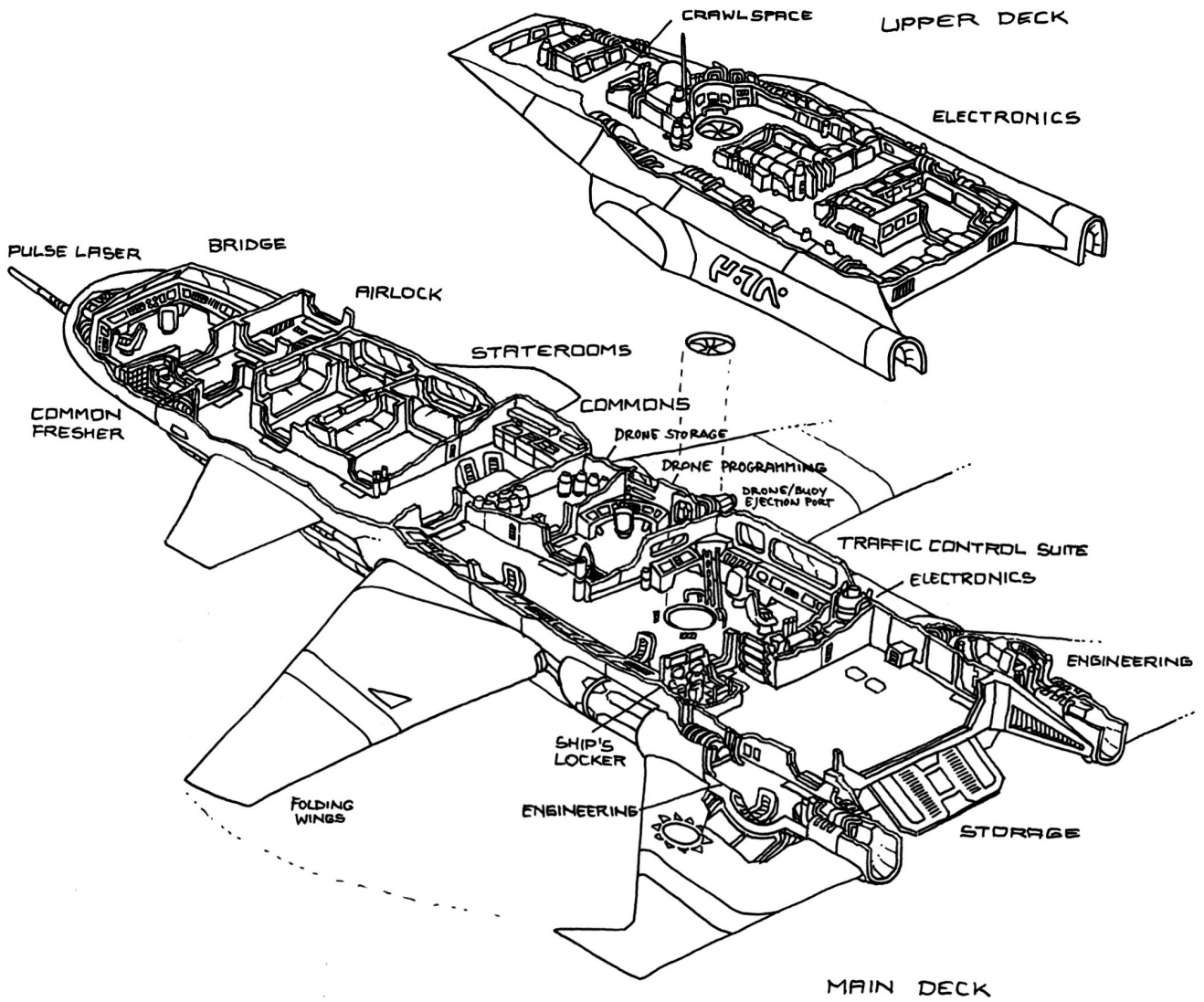
Traffic Control Pinnace TL12 (Mongoose Traveller 2nd Edition)			
System	**Description**	**Disp (dtons)**	**Cost (MCr)**
Hull	40 dtons, streamlined (16 hull pts)	(40)	2.40
Armour	None (0 hull points)		-
Maneuver Drive	Thrust 5 g (20 power points)	2	4.00
Jump Drive	None		-
Power Plant	Fusion, Power 30	2	2.00
Fuel Tanks	4 weeks operation	1	
Bridge	(8 power points)	3	0.50
Computer	Model 5	-	0.03
Sensors	Military Grade (DM +0) (2 power points)	2	4.10
Weapons	Fixed mount, usually a single pulse laser	-	0.10
Systems	Additional Computer Model 5	-	0.03
	Workshop (Drone prog.)	4	0.60
	Workshop (Traffic Control)	10	1.50
Staterooms	Standard×2	8	1.00
Cargo space	8 t (including drones)	8	
Total Cost			*16.26*
Monthly Maint			*Cr1355*
Monthly L/S			*Cr8000*
Crew and (Monthly) Salaries	*Pilot/Traffic Control operator*		*Cr7500*
	Engineer/Traffic Control operator		*Cr5500*
	Gunner/Traffic Control operator		*Cr4000*
	3 Traffic Control operators	*(each)*	*Cr3000*

Traffic Control Pinnace Notes

Calculating Crew Salaries

Traffic Control Operator is not defined in any of the rulebooks, so the salary for the role had to be made up. Since the role primarily involves communicating with other ships, it seemed reasonable to consider another role where communication with others is essential: Steward. However, the steward doesn't have the Sensor Ops skill that it would be reasonable to assume that a Traffic Control Operator would have, so that commands a premium. It seems reasonable that a similar kind of sensor operation was about half of what a Gunner does, so adding half the Gunner's salary to that of the Steward role gives a total of Cr3000. That may seem high, given that the TCO doesn't do everything that a Steward does, but consider that a TCO is very much in a similar role to an Air Traffic Controller here/now, and ATCs get premium pay because of the stress in addition to their skills. A TCO in space could reasonably be expected to see the same level of stress, so Cr3000 doesn't seem out of line (and In Your *Traveller* Universe, you might even justify *more*).

There is also no 'canonical' method to calculate an appropriate salary for someone in dual roles, such as the Pilot/TCO. Several methods have been proposed; the method chosen here is to calculate ¾ of the sum of the salaries of the two roles, and also to calculate the sum of the higher of the two salaries plus ½ of the lower, and use the higher of the two results. So, a Pilot/TCO gets the higher of [¾ of (Cr6000+Cr3000) , or Cr6750] or [Cr6000+ (½ of Cr3000), or Cr7500]—or Cr7500. Similar calculations were made for the other crewmembers with dual roles. ✹

The Shipyard

CRAWLSPACE

UPPER DECK

ELECTRONICS

ᔑ·⎔°

PULSE LASER

BRIDGE

AIRLOCK

STATEROOMS

COMMONS

DRONE STORAGE

DRONE PROGRAMMING

DRONE/BUOY
EJECTION PORT

TRAFFIC CONTROL SUITE

ELECTRONICS

ENGINEERING

COMMON
FRESHER

SHIP'S
LOCKER

FOLDING
WINGS

ENGINEERING

STORAGE

MAIN DECK

53

Smoke Test: Once In A Blue Moon

by Michael Capriola and C. A. Pella

Chapter Seven

"Boarding Party to Home Base. We've secured the missing data."

Lubbock heaved a sigh of relief. He would probably have faced an inquiry board if the search had turned up nothing. "Good work, people. Try to disable their weapons before you return. I don't want them taking pot shots at us."

"Roger that."

"Home Base out." Lubbock turned to the task of updating his report to the authorities back at Whipsnade. Satisfied, he radioed the report in. Let the authorities come out here and fix the *Pygmalion*. And make arrests if they desired, though that might wait until Farb filed a report with his supreiors.

It took another half hour before the boarding party returned. Engineer Sprey had ripped out the Seeker's turret circuitry and slagged the connections with an acetylene torch. She also had a complaint to make.

Sprey accosted the Captain in the crew lounge outside the Bridge door. "That bitch held a pistol on me until I handed over the data cubes I'd found."

"Well, the technicians are responsible for them."

"But a weapon! All she had to do was ask for them. Did she think I was going to steal them?"

"Possibly." He held a hand up to forestall another tirade. "We still don't know who sabotaged the probe cradle. The technicians don't know who to trust. No one was hurt, so forget it."

"Forget it?"

"Yes. That's an order."

Sprey opened and closed her mouth twice without saying anything, then mumbled "yessir" and shuffled off to her cabin. Lubbock went up to the Passenger Deck to get a bite to eat. He had scheduled himself 15 minutes to eat and refresh himself before he took another four-hour shift. He considered the wisdom of taking on another mate, someone to stand a regular watch and leaving the Captain free to fill the odd gaps in the schedule caused by emergencies. Someone who would be dragged out of bed because of a problem in Engineering or with the passengers or something else requiring command presence.

Twenty minutes later he was on the Bridge again. He and Cheng took the *Grendelsbane* back to its previous orbit for no other reason than to put some distance between them and *Pygmalion*. The tech team went back to work, Cheng went off duty and Lubbock settled in for what he hoped would be a dull watch.

"Captain! This is Technician Farb. Can you come down to the probe bay?"

Lubbock gritted his teeth. "Sure thing, Farb. Give me a few minutes."

"This is most urgent, Captain."

Isn't it always? "I'll be there." He switched to ship-wide intercom. "Will Mate Cheng Hua please report to the Bridge."

"I'm powdering my nose," came the reply. "Can this wait a couple of minutes?"

"I guess it'll have to." Lubbock settled back in his seat and fumed. *I definitely need to hire another mate.*

Cheng appeared on the Bridge a few minutes later, her short black hair still wet from the shower. "What's up?"

"Farb's got a problem. Take over here until I get back."

She nodded and took the number 2 station as Lubbock rose to leave.

———————————

Lubbock fumed as he donned the sterile work uniform and cap. Once properly attired, he charged into the probe bay. "OK, Farb, what's the problem?"

Farb and the other technicians present glared at him. "Some of these instruments have been tampered with. Many need to be recalibrated again, even though we've already performed that task. If we hadn't double-checked the photopolarimeter we wouldn't have tumbled to this latest sabotage. Also, some of the camera lenses are damaged. They were fine before."

"Except for camera four which had micro-meteoroid damage," Stevens corrected.

"Except for camera four. Someone went out of their way to set us behind schedule."

Lubbock folded his arms and rocked back on his heels. "Who was the last person in here before this latest sabotage was discovered?"

"Davout and I were here. We left as Rayne and Stevens came on duty. Stevens discovered the sabotage."

"Ah. Then Davout is our man."

Farb shook his head. "We were both working on the fault-protection algorithms in the CDS and the AACS."

Command and Data Subsystem was the brain of the probe. Lubbock did not recognize the other acronym. "The double-A what?"

"The Attitude and Articulation Control Subsystem determines the orientation of the spacecraft in inertial space."

"Right. Gotcha. So, the point is he wasn't even supposed to be messing with the science instruments at all on the last shift."

"That is correct."

"But he was here. Unless someone else snuck in here, it had to be either you or Davout who commited the sabotage, and I doubt it was you."

Farb looked uncertain, but Technician Rayne spoke up in defense of her teammate. "Neither man would do such a thing, Captain. Besides, I saw the Vargr heading for engineering when I came off shift. And not on the second deck, but this one, and heading back there." She pointed to the Jump-Drive room.

Now, that's odd, Lubbock thought to himself. The Jump-Drive room was normally unmanned unless in use or during General Quarters or some other emergency. The engineering office on watch made periodic trips to read off the dials there, but was Arghaz qualified to perform that task? He'd have to ask Chief Garcia about that.

"I'll look into it, Farb. If the Vargr had no good reason to be down here, we may have found our culprit." But he also knew that it was just as likely Arghaz had a legitimate reason for being down here. *Reserve judgement until you speak to Garcia.*

"You should lock up that creature."

"When I have cause, Farb. See you around." The Captain abruptly turned and walked out of the probe bay rather than face a lengthy argument. He also had to see Garcia before returning to bridge duty.

Except that it was Fu Quan in the Main Engine Room on Deck 2, Garcia having gone to bed. But the Second Assistant Engineer remembered Arghaz being told to bring some things to ship's stores on this deck at the time Rayne said the Vargr was down on the lower deck.

"Arghaz might be in the machine shop with Pepper right now, or puttering around somewhere else on the ship."

Lubbock thanked him and checked out the machine shop, finding it disappointingly empty. he de-

cided to postpone the interrogation of the ship's apprentice; right now he needed to relieve Cheng Hua.

He was just settling in at his Bridge station when the maintenance hatch to the Avionics Bay popped open and two grimy figures crawled out. Pepper looked up at him from under bangs dyed pink.

"All dressed up and nowhere to go," Lubbock said at the sight of her. She grinned and climbed to her feet, then helped Arghaz up. "How long have you been in there?"

"Almost since we got back aboard ship, Captain. We took a few minutes to eat and freshen up, then got to work."

"Which one of you was down on Deck Three when the techs were changing watch?"

Pepper wrinkled her nose in thought. "Deck Three?"

"Heading for the Jump Drive."

"Wasn't us, Captain."

"Is truth, Captain," Arghaz said. "We come into ship and put away suits and guns. We do hygiene and eat. Then go work."

"And you were together the whole time?"

"Well, not in the water closet," Pepper said. "But otherwise, yeah. Except for a couple of minutes when we were going back and forth from the Engine Room to the Ship's Locker. But neither of us would have had time to go to the FTL room and back without the other noticing."

Unless one of you was covering for the other. But he didn't say it out loud. "Okay, thanks. Carry on."

"I'd rather Cary Grant," Pepper quipped. She saluted and left the Bridge, the Vargr in tow.

Lubbock wasted a moment to puzzle over Pepper's apparent joke, but couldn't figure out why she'd want to carry a Paleotechnic Era army general named Grant. He dismissed the subject from his mind and began a systematic scan of his instruments.

————————————

Finally, some time to himself.

Lubbock lay in his bunk, propped up with pillows, and ran cost estimates on his wrist-comp. Grendelsbane Ltd could afford another mate if that person was also a qualified mechanic who would then be able to take the load off both the deck officers and the engineering staff. But they'd have to let Isabelle Nguyen go, which meant they'd all have to learn to use the med-scanners and get Medical Technician Certificates. Lubbock couldn't see himself dropping Isabelle from the crew. Aside from the fact that she was his father's cousin's daughter, he rather liked her. All the crew did.

Now there's a problem—I like my crewmates too much. But that was to be expected. Working with the same small group of people day in and day out month after month, they became a surrogate family, especially since the real family was back in Fuxi-Nuwa system. Which was why each of them shied away from the thought that a member of the crew had sold them out. Much better to blame a stranger.

If I leave the crew off the list of suspects, I'm not doing my job, Lubbock reflected. But he had no hard evidence that pointed to any one person. And without evidence he had to reply on people's word.

Enlightenment struck. Lubbock put down on his pad as his now-rested mind finally collated the flood of information it had received of late.

Technician April Rayne had said the Vargr was on Deck 3, over by the FTL room.

Pepper and the Vargr claimed to be on Decks 1 and 2 the whole time.

Captain Lubbock had suddenly narrowed his list of suspects to three names. Someone was obviously lying. ⚙

Ham Sinclair

profiled by Daniel Phelps

This article was originally posted to the pre-magazine Freelance Traveller website in 2000.

Sinclair is a Human male apparently in his late 40s who works as an Imperial bureaucrat in the Imperial agency that certifies routing of jump routes, starport Code levels, and planetary TL designations. He is also involved in trade interdictions and the caution level coding of planets.

He gives the impression of having no ideas and no enemies, but this is an impression only. He is a master of subterfuge and deception skills developed to a fine edge from years of survival in the watch-your-back-while-shafting-others world of Imperial bureaucracy. The son, grandson, and great-grandson of mid-level Imperial bureaucrats, all of whom also worked for the commerce-certification agency, he followed in their footsteps and joined the agency when he came of age and rose steadily within its ranks. Never allying himself too strongly early in his career with any of the various power brokers within the agency, he stayed within their shadows. When one of the prime factions seemed to self-destruct in a battle for control after the loss of its leader and numerous of his lieutenants in a misjump accident, he made his move. He restored the faction to power with himself as the "power behind the throne" through a masterful series of back-channel tradeoffs, vague promises, and whispered lies. Even the insiders were surprised; it was said that "he came to power by slight-of-hand - everyone's attention was focussed elsewhere and then when everyone looked back, he was there. It was as if he had been there all along and nobody had ever really noticed."

The PCs might encounter him directly, or more likely indirectly, as a patron. They might also perhaps run afoul of him in a "merchant enterprise". He is very well-connected and might be encountered in a posh but very discreet resort, restaurant, hotel, casino, etc. He might seek to use the PCs as disposable pawns. ✿

A Memory Called Empire

reviewed by Benedikt Schwarz

A Memory Called Empire. Arkady Martine.
Original Publication: 2019 (Tor/Macmillan)
Current Availability: Hardcover, Trade Paperback, eBook (multiple sources)

Released, my tongue will speak visions.
Released, I am a spear in the hands of the sun.
       - Three Seagrass´s war poem

Plot and Story

The galactic empire of Teixcalaan has spread over a sizeable part of the known galaxy. On its fringe, small worlds and space habitats live an uneasy existence, avoiding conquest or cultural colonisation by dint of political maneuvering and making themselves indispensable as trade partners. One such space habitat sends its ambassador, a young but tough and resourceful woman named Mahit Dzmare, to Teixcalaan, upon the death of the old ambassador. She teams up with her perky-but-competent Teixcalaanli cultural liaison, Three Seagrass, to solve the mystery of her predecessor´s death.

The neurological implant that is supposed to provide Mahit with the knowledge of the former

ambassador malfunctions, she discovers that he was murdered, and before she knows it, she is swept up in a court intrigue that may spell ruin for not only the Empire, but also her own home station. As the warships start maneuvering, the populace revolts, and the city´s AI algorithms begin glitching, she and Three Seagrass have little time to exert what influence they have to keep the crisis from devouring the Empire.

Genre and Style

So far this is classic space opera plot. There is a gigantic interstellar empire, decadent but still vigorous, steeped in culture and tradition, an aging, frail Emperor brooding on the throne, vicious contenders for the succession, and free communities on the fringe pitched against the Imperial political juggernaut that will eventually be eating them up piecemeal, surviving by being more inventive and practical than their hulking neighbour. There's even an alien invasion force threatening the borders, although it is mentioned only in passing.

To make sure the reader appreciates just how Byzantine and culturally intricate the Teixcalaan Empire is, we view it mainly through the eyes of Mahit Dzmare, who is a semi-barbarian often out of her depth despite having studied Teixcalaanli culture from birth and owning a quick mind. We also get glimpses from the wry and sometimes irreverent observations of her own culture by Three Seagrass. And we are awed, because it is such a compelling and magnificent view, brought to life by the protagonists enacting the scene.

Style and Technique

This is where the book excels. Description (often sidetracked by Mahit's internal narrative) is fresh, occasionally wry, occasionally sarcastic, and always insightful. Dialogue is witty and many-layered, with allusions, obfuscation, double and triple meanings in each and every sentence, giving a whole new

meaning to the term "cultural refinement". (I cannot imagine the book being translated into another language and still retaining this quality.) The dialogue's quality is on par with the best that a master like Jack Vance offers in the best of his works, and is endowed with a compelling naturalness of human emotion even through the most stilted of formal proceedings.

Following the intricate plot is difficult at first, with the many offices, ministries and power groups, and the many different political actors entering the scene. These figures' motives are at first unfathomable, and their actions seem random (to Mahit, and by extension, the reader). The author seems to have been aware of this as a problem, and successfully implemented a number of subtle literary devices to soften the impact on the reader and make understanding easier.

Teixcalaanli names are in the classic Mayan tradition of a numeral followed by the name of a flower or inanimate object: Fourteen Lever, Nineteen Adze, Eleven Conifer. The reader may hardly remember the numeral, but the second part is surprisingly easy to recall, especially since most names are subtly indicative of either the personality of the bearer or their function in the plot. Twenty-nine Bridge is the palace functionary whom the protagonists have to pass to get an audience with his Illuminated Majesty the Emperor; Nineteen Adze is a dangerous woman, sharp and forceful; One Lightning is a brash, warmongering general. This helps a lot with following who is who throughout the story.

Offices also have Mayan-sounding names, but those names also subtly allude to their functions. State-endorsed scientists are called *ixplanatl*, and the sound of the term evokes both explanation and exploration. Mahit´s companion Three Seagrass is an *asekreta* of the Information Ministry, a secretary as well as a secret keeper.

Mahit, as the heroine, also provides an anchor point the non-Teixcalaanli reader can instantly relate to. As a barbarian, her observations are much closer to our own, and help put the multi-layered Imperial culture into proper perspective. Three Seagrass and, for some time, Mahit's predecessor's mind recording, are there to unobtrusively explain political context without ever becoming a *deus ex machina*. With those practical author's devices, what might have been a chore and required a stack of notesheets turns into an enjoyable and smooth reading experience, and the complexity of the setting becomes spice rather than obstruction.

Still, the book is not exactly suitable for casual reading, even though the action is relatively straightforward. It will be difficult to remember all of the wealth of important detail (and all detail is important with Martine!) if at some point you put the book away and resume reading a few days later. Fortunately, this is less of a problem than one would think – the novel is light-hearted enough and so full of pleasant and interesting banter between the characters that it is hard to put down anyway.

Presentation

The paperback book is large, solid and blocky, not exactly easy to carry around, and quite appropriately so. This is not a book one reads casually in snatches between stops on the tram, rather a book one sits down near the fireplace to read with plenty of time to spare and a cat on one's lap.

The cover by Jaime Jones deserves special mention. It is a magnificent rendering of the Emperor's throne room (if somewhat different from the way the Imperial dais is described in the book), and it is wonderfully allusive. The book's recurring imagery of rays emanating from the Emperor (a fan of spears on the Imperial battle flag, the name of the War Ministry – Six Outreaching Palms –, even Emperors' names like Six Direction or Twelve Solar-Flare) is neatly mirrored in the depicted throne's architec-ture, with spikes radiating outward in every direction. Half of the throne is shadowed, hinting at the dangerous secrets that the ambassador (who is standing in the foreground) will have to unravel. It is this half that the Emperor averts his gaze from, and it is this half that Mahit faces. The impression is that dark shadows gather behind the throne, and if viewed that way, the rays emanating from the throne instead become a claw grasping inward at the Imperial figure seated on it.

While the throne's rays and spires all terminate in the Emperor's figure and should make him the centre of the picture, they don't. Instead, he seems to blend in with the throne's machinery, a part of the throne rather than a human being. The real focus, well and subtly done by the artist with the planes of light, is on the ambassador. Mahit is a sharply outlined dark figure standing not in a straight line from the throne, but slightly out to one side, hinting at her position as an outsider but also placing her in opposition to the plane of shadow on the right.

A Memory Called Empire and *Traveller*

While not at all related to *Traveller*, the book is a good inspiration read for anyone intending to play an Imperial noble or Aslan courtier. Especially the dialogue is something players can take a leaf out of Martine's book of, exactly the sort of acerbic threat, triple entendre or political insinuation under a veneer of witty pleasantry that should be the bread and butter of any campaign laced with court intrigue. The Teixcalaanlitzlim, with their intricate culture, conservativism, and collective air of superiority, positively scream "Vilani!". In fact, the setting is much reminiscent of the First Imperium in its heyday, and much of it is translatable to any decadent-but-still-vigorous empire you care to name. On this basis (and on that of sheer literary enjoyment, of course) I recommend it warmly to any fellow *Traveller* player. ⚙

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*. (preferred)
- feedback form at *http://www.freelancetraveller.com/infocenter/feedback/ftfbf.html*. (Temporarily down; we're working on it.)
- Forums:
  Traveller at Mongoose Publishing: *http://forum.mongoosepublishing.com/viewforum.php?f=89*
  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

March/April 2020

- **Azukail Games** has released *Sangen Geneering Heist (Cepheus)*.
- **Fat Goblin Games** has released *Publisher's Choice—Science Fiction: Retro Spaceman*, *Publisher's Choice—Science Fiction: Star Command*.
- **Felbrigg Herriot** has released *Preceptor Service*.
- **Grey Matter Games** has released *Deadly Missions 5th Edition: EASTER 2020 EXPANSION*.
- **Independence Games** (*formerly* **Gypsy Knights Games**) has released *Tim's Guide to the Ground Forces of Hub Subsector*, *Subsector Sourcebook: Earth*.
- **Michael Brown** has released *Dossier: Eirik Steed*, *Career: Barbarian*, *Career: Physician*, *Soft Ticket*.
- **Mongoose Publishing** has released *Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society Volume 4*, *Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society Volume 5*.
- **Okumarts Games** has released *Retro Space Set Eleven: Stellar Folk*, *Retro Space Set Twelve: Cosmic Threats*.
- **Stellagama Publishing** has released *Non-Humans for The Sword of Cepheus*.
- **Stu Driver** has released *Those Who Endure*.
- **Zozer Games** has released *Baltic War*, *Hostile Gunlocker*.   ⚙

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*, *MegaTraveller*, *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 nonfiction) that "feels" like *Traveller*, or presents ideas that would be of interest to *Traveller* players or referees; new races or organizations or societies; artwork; or pretty much anything else you can think of. Articles on real-world science are of interest, when accompanied by rules for applying that science to *Traveller*. Tools and techniques you use for preparing for a session or a game are also welcome. We're also compiling a "*Freelance Traveller* Cookbook"; quick and interesting recipes for snacking before, during, or after sessions go here.

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

Where To Send It, and What To Send

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

Rights

By submitting material, you grant *Freelance Traveller* a non-exclusive perpetual right to use the material in our PDF magazine and website (and mirror sites authorized by us), with minor editing for space and other suitability issues. While we generally will only use an article once, if we feel it appropriate, we'll reprint it.

The right applies to *Freelance Traveller* magazine itself, not to specific individuals associated with it. If the current management of *Freelance Traveller* finds it necessary to withdraw from association with the magazine or the *Traveller* community (not gonna happen as far as we can see), and others take over the operation of the magazine and website, the rights granted above stay with the magazine and permit the then-current operators to exercise those rights.

Formats

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

Graphics should be submitted in an appropriate format for the subject matter—in most cases, that will be GIF, JPEG, or PNG at 100dpi or higher. If it's principally line-drawing material, it may be more appropriate to submit it in a vector format; most common vector formats can be imported by our tool of choice, CorelDRAW! X4 or X6. Please try to leave some space around the edges for cropping, especially for covers. We publish in PDF in US Letter and ISO A4 sizes, and columns in the magazine are roughly 3.5 inches (actually a little more) wide.

Avoid submitting in XPS or PDF format; these are generally seen as "output-only" formats, and trying to extract material in usable form from these formats is problematical.