

FREELANCE TRAVELLER

The Electronic Fan-Supported Traveller® Magazine and Resource



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Contents

Freelance Traveller #003: Mar. 2010

Editor

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Contributors

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Artwork

Cover: *Ndege Diamond*

From the Editor: *Jeff Zeitlin, from the Freelance Traveller web site*

Fifth Imperium: *Shannon Appelcline, from the Fifth Imperium Column at rpg.net*

Critics' Corner: *Mongoose Publishing, from their web site; Jeff Zeitlin (photography)*

In A Store Near You: *Scott Diamond, from the flash application at pimpmypgun.doctornoob.com*

From the Editor

Jeff Zeitlin 1

Critics' Corner

Reign of Discordia—Traveller Edition *reviewed by “kafka”* 2

Mongoose Traveller—The Third Imperium: Alien Module 2: Vargr
reviewed by Doc Kinne 12

100 Sci-Fi Adventure Seeds *reviewed by Jeff Zeitlin* 21

Fifth Imperium

#6,7: 76 Plotlets, Parts 3 and 4: Planetside *Shannon Appelcline* 4

Doing It My Way

Abbreviated Combat Resolution *by Matt Adams* 8

Principles of Adventure Design *by Mark Graybill* 17

The Club Room

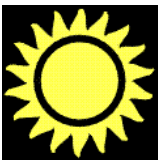
The Veloth *by George M. Sibley* 13

In A Store Near You

The Gun Shop: Gauss Squad Automatic Weapon *by Scott Diamond* 17

Freelance Traveller is published monthly in PDF form by the editor. The current issue is available from the Freelance Traveller web site, <http://www.freelancetraveller.com>.

From the Editor



It doesn't take much to make a great plenty.

As paradoxical as that sounds, it accurately describes what we've found in collecting and assembling submissions for the magazine. In this issue, a mere eight articles have, once again, put us over the twenty-page mark—and we're getting a good, continuing supply of new material.

And we're not alone. There are at least two other fanzines—*Frontier Report*, and the venerable *Signal GK*—that are, in some sense, “alive”. *Frontier Report* puts out new material, as we do. *Signal GK* is currently in the process of converting their original print run from paper to PDF—and there's been the suggestion that perhaps after that conversion is done, there will be a *new Signal GK*, with new material. We eagerly await developments; the community is proving big enough and active enough to support multiple fanzines.

Traveller is just as lively on the “pro” front, too. In addition to principal license holder Mongoose Publishing, there are several companies that are publish-

ing good-quality supplements for Traveller, and not only for the Mongoose version—support for older versions of Traveller seems to be undergoing a renaissance as well. Just off the top of the editor's head, there's Samarden Press, Spica Publishing, Studio 2, Terra/Sol Games, Comstar Games/Avenger Enterprises, MilkyFish, and two previous licensees, Quiklink Interactive and Steve Jackson Games (both of whom, sadly, seem to be winding down their Traveller production). That the “pro” front is so lively is a compliment to the community, as it says that the community is perceived as being active and interested enough to support these commercial efforts. (We apologise if we've missed anyone in the lists above—which is itself a sign of the high level of activity in the community!)

Finally, all of this activity, taken in toto, is a compliment to Traveller itself, and to the people whose vision of a SF RPG led to each successive release of the game. The interest has been maintained for over thirty years, now. We hope to be a part of that interest and that community for at least the next thirty.

Reign of Discordia—Traveller Edition

reviewed by “kafka”

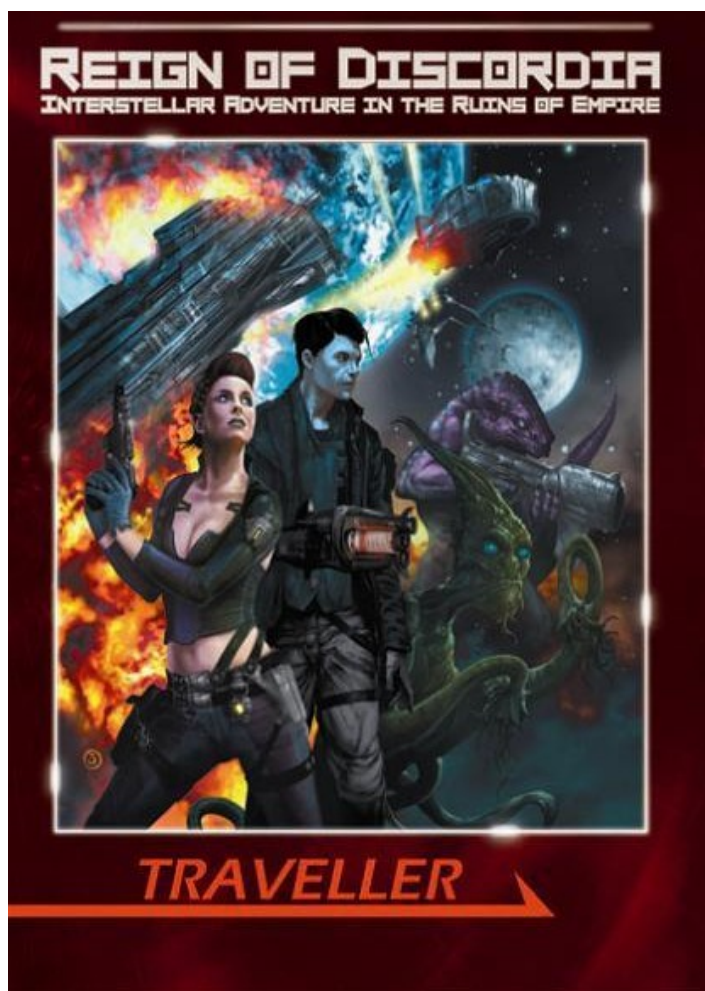
Reign of Discordia—Traveller Edition. Darrin Drader
Mongoose Publishing <http://www.mongoosepublishing.com>
168pp, PDF (Hardbound expected release April 2010)
UK£25.00/US\$34.99

(Editor's note: The author of this review presented us with a valid reason to publish this review under a pseudonym.)

Note: this is a review of the PDF currently available on DrivethroughRPG and other fine eBook sites. My copy was obtained directly from the author in exchange for this review.

This is a 168 page document replete with beautiful illustrations that introduce the setting to new players and referees alike. It is a separate campaign universe, called Reign of Discordia (RoD for short), completely unrelated to the Original/Official Traveller Universe (OTU – Third Imperium, etc.), but it does offer some suggestions how to incorporate some Traveller material into the RoD setting. Unlike an earlier product by the same name, this RoD Campaign Guide/Sourcebook is designed for use with Mongoose Traveller (MgT); you will therefore need to own the Traveller Core Rulebook. There were a few typos that made reference back to the original True20 rule set but nothing that an experienced Referee could not correct. In fact, there is very little in the way of rules or adjustments which are fine by me, as I often like to run games with both players and referees flying by the seat of their pants rather than having to look up Rule X as it applies to Situation B. In which case, reinforcing and making it a better fit with MgT than True20 which takes a layered approach to complexity.

RoD clearly falls into the New Space Opera genre. While there are dashes of Asimov and Clarke in there, this is clearly post Star Wars with lots of huge starships and funky aliens. It differs from regular Traveller, as it portrays a more cosmopolitan and integrated universe reminding me of Star*Drive or Star Frontiers, rather than a Human-centric universe of Grand Empires. In fact, it is set in the era when a Grand Empire or the Stellar Imperium has fallen



apart and like Humpty Dumpty, all the known races do not know how to put it back together again. So instead, they scheme and plot to put their race back into the saddle. Also, noteworthy is the attempt to get the Science right so again very much a book that seasoned Traveller players would appreciate.

Sections One, Two, and Four cover the RoD milieu. After mankind pulls itself up by its bootstraps and makes it to the Stars, it encounters a few alien races, fighting a few, finding common cause with others, and eventually creating a multiracial galactic empire: the Stellar Imperium. Then, the Stellar Imperium collapses chaotically due to both internal and external reasons, with parallelisms suggestive of the fall of the Roman Empire or Asimov's Foundation series or the crash that lead to the Rebellion/TNE era in Traveller. My personal take would be this would be akin to the Long Night allowing incorporating parts of the OTU back into the setting and thus pre-

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

servicing some of the High Tech Goodness that was achieved by the Rule of Man or Second Imperium. Helpfully, the author has seen it fit to include a timeline of major events.

Section Two covers planets. Stats for fifty-one are provided, broken down by the dominant inhabitants (Humans, Tallinites, etc.), or status (Former Stellar Imperium, Frontier System). This is the weakest part of the book; a paragraph on each barely provides background of each world, let alone adventuring information or ideas. The author also uses terminology for levels of liberty and wealth distribution, but neither matches his terminology to the standard Traveller UWP codes, nor, apparently, makes any effort to ensure that the standard-format UWP can substantiate his references. Also disappointing is that this section is not in colour and mired in Planetary Romance conventions such as Solid Purple Gas Giants. Also, an unusual number of Gas Giants are represented whereby different communities form upon gigantic industrial "oil" rigs (a nod back to Piers Anthony – Bio of a Space Tyrant series). In the author's defence, he does state that most of the action will take place in Space not individual worlds. As a long time Traveller player, this will take some adjusting – where strange new worlds or even familiar terrestrial worlds provide the mainstay of adventuring locales.

Section Three and Four covers the different organizations in RoD. Sixteen are dealt with, most with the potential to be either an ally to the PCs (e.g., Earth Defence Forces) or the game's main adversary (the

so-called Tribes of the R'Tillek). Each organization's history, agenda, leadership, members, member benefits, and relations are covered. I found the last to be the most important: by knowing how the organization feels about the others, I could develop adventure plots. The section gives a cursory overview of incorporating the organization and the player's race along with traditional Traveller careers. This section is rather scant but I think the sourcebook is richer for it. The background includes seven races: Gaieti, Lamogog, Relarra, Sangor, Tallinites, R'Tillek, and humans (of course). The R'Tillek are the racial foe everyone hates, and Referees are cautioned to give deliberation before permitting a player to assume the role of one. Scattered in there are bits of equipment that add the sense of wonder for the setting.

Lastly, there is a massive section on starships and a guide to running RoD (essentially, how different adventure types can be built into a Campaign) and the sourcebook concludes with a fun adventure. The starship section contains the obligatory deck plans which all MgT products seem to have. The Guide is perhaps the one area that I would like to have seen expanded, as it does not seem to provide a good sense of the milieu, making it one large sandbox (which may be a benefit to some but others might still wonder what more they can do it with). More supplements and guides are planned for 2010. If the quality continues to live up to this one then we have a winner.

All in all, I give the product 4/5 stars and look forward to many more releases in the line including the Hardcover which I intend purchasing.



This column is intended to be a referee's guide to Mongoose's Traveller, the fifth incarnation of the Traveller game system. Often it'll talk about the many printed resources out there and available to the gamemaster, supplementing my own reviews on those topics, but sometimes it'll offer more specific advice for GMing the game.

Editor's note: The initial Fifth Imperium column was published on the RPG.Net website in July 2009, and appeared in Freelance Traveller's initial issue in November 2009. The first part of this column originally appeared on the RPG.Net website in December 2009, and the second part in January 2010, and appear combined in this issue of Freelance Traveller.

If you've ever found yourself caught flat-footed and unprepared for a Traveller adventure, this article miniseries is for--full of mini-plots that you can expand out into longer adventures.

In this column, I'll be presenting 6 adventure situations that could easily kick off on any planet, each with 6 plot twists to keep things interesting, for a total of 36 more plotlets.

1. "Did anyone check the Law Level before we left?"

Suddenly, the local police come after the PCs with a vengeance, impounding ships and other equipment and trying to arrest the PCs themselves.

Plot Twists.

1. Old sins have resurfaced. The PCs are being arrested for something they did in some past adventure. Not only does this allow you revisit an old scenario (that was presumably better prepped than the current one), but it also allows you to figure out why the current planet might have ties with the old one.

2. It's a mistake. By accident, the PCs have chanced upon some criminal enterprise in a way that makes it look like they're involved. They'll need to discover this fact, then blow the criminal enterprise wide open to prove their own non-involvement.

3. It's a ploy. Similar to the above, but the police actually know the PCs aren't really involved in the criminal enterprise. They're simply trying to force the PCs to help out in their investigation of the crime. The PCs must have a reputation, ties to the crime, ties to the criminal, or ties to the victim for this to really work out.

4. It's a frame. Perhaps this trope is a little bit too tired, but still it makes for a good story. You get to figure out who is framing the characters, why they are, how they did it, and how the PCs can disprove the frame. This is another opportunity to bring old plots into the campaign, based on who you decide the framer is.

5. It's a shakedown. This is how the planetside police make their living. Do the PCs roll over or do they try and change a way of life?

6. It's the truth. Remember when some planet tried to execute Wesley for falling onto some flowers? Build your adventure around that. The players genuinely have committed a crime, but it's a ridiculous local crime. Can the PCs manage the local legal system, can they get Imperial help to override it, or can they make a daring escape?

2. "This is a test of the emergency broadcasting system."

When some type of disaster hits the local community--be it a starport, a country, or a world--the players are asked (perhaps begged, perhaps threatened, perhaps hired) to step in and solve it. Rather than rolling up this plotlet, you may want to choose an option from the listing that best suits the planet that the PCs are on.

Plot Twists.

1. It's civil unrest or the peasants are revolting. The PCs are called in to put down an uprising either: (1) so that the local forces aren't seen as oppressors; or (2) because there are insufficient local enforcers. More than a simple beatdown, this plot can lead to delicate political issues, depending on why there's civil unrest and what's being done to stop it.

(Continued on page 5)

Fifth Imperium

(Continued from page 4)

2. It's a coup. Someone has successfully overthrown the legitimate government. PCs might be asked to try and take the government back--or else just get the previous government off planet (see, also, the next plotlet). If a second coup is required, it might be less difficult than you'd expect because the new government is still young and vulnerable.

3. It's an attack. Rather than covert subversion, the community could be coming under overt attack, perhaps from another country on a balkanized world, perhaps from pirates or other outsiders, perhaps from Zhodani as an intro to the Fifth Frontier War, or perhaps from Aslan seeking land. The PCs will need to ward off this attack. Or, perhaps it's too late for that and they'll need to lead a resistance. Alternatively, it might just be a question of surviving until Imperium troops arrive.

4. It's a natural disaster. It might be storm, cyclone, hurricane, volcano, tsunami, earthquake, or something more unique, as you prefer. PCs will have to help people survive the first wave of disaster, and then they may need to do something to halt the rest of it in its track. Perhaps they can stop the disaster due to the magic of high TL technology--or perhaps it's because there's an unnatural antagonist setting the natural disaster in motion.

5. It's a technological disaster. Of course you have possibilities of computers gone wild, like the Virus of the New Era. A more contained technological disaster might involve just the robots rebelling. Alternatively, technology might stop working altogether. The PCs will have to resolve the immediate problem, find its cause, and possibly stop it from spreading beyond the planet.

6. It's a scam. Though a request is made for the PCs help (probably using one of the previous criteria), there's another reason that local officials want to get them off their ship and into the local community. Perhaps they'll be ambushed by an old enemy or perhaps the community really does need to make use of the PCs' skills--but in a way that they probably wouldn't agree to out of the goodness of their hearts.

3. "Will work for passage."

Though these adventures all begin planetside, in a game called Traveller you can expect that many of them will move up into space. Such is probably the case when a traveller approaches the passengers seeking immediate passage. This traveller might offer piles of money or a sob story; it could be a stranger or a player's contact or ally.

Plot Twists.

1. The law is after the traveller. See plotlet #1 for some of the reasons they might be on the run.

2. Criminals are after the traveller. See plotlet #4 in the next article for some additional fodder for this plot. Criminals will likely threaten or bribe characters to get the traveller back. If that fails, they will shift into action, be it sneaking onto a ship, assaulting it, or calling in some pirates when the players head toward a jump point.

3. It's just politics. The traveller is on the wrong side of a recent political change, be it a coup (see plotlet #2) or just a democratic change in leadership. However, the new politicians would prefer to keep the traveller on hand, perhaps for good reasons (he's fleeing with state secrets) or perhaps for bad ones (he needs to be killed). Face the PCs with moral dilemmas, governmental threats, police action, or bribes, as you see fit.

4. It's an emergency! The traveller has been told of a dire problem on a nearby world. You could use any other plot from this article or the next part as the reason why, particularly those in plotlet #2. Not only should you underline the time pressure as the PCs face delays or various sorts, but you should also do your best to drag the PCs into the problem on the other side, once they've gotten to know (and hopefully like) the traveller.

5. It's a race. While engaging in a race across the sector, the traveller has been instructed to "travel by spacecraft" to his next destination. However, unlike the astonishing racing reality shows of our modern day, this race is full of other contenders willing to

(Continued on page 6)

Fifth Imperium

(Continued from page 5)

engage in really dirty tactics. Thus, the PCs suddenly find themselves at the nexus of a lot of problems, as they get set up for the police (see plotlet #1), sold out to criminals (see plotlet #4), ambushed by pirates, or otherwise tempted to veer away from the course the traveller has requested.

6. The traveller is paranoid. There's no one after him, but he thinks there is. Can he convince the PCs of the crazy conspiracy that he's sure he's fleeing?

4. "Just when I thought I was out ..."

In one way or another, the travellers run afoul of a crime syndicate of some type on the local planet.

Plot Twists.

1. A frame job. This is the flipside of plot seed #1-4, but focused on criminals. For some reason they've framed the PCs for a local crime. The authorities may not be after the travellers; they may not even know of the crime. But the PCs certainly learn of things quickly, and they're going to have to dive into the local crime scene to find out what's going on before it's too late.

2. Crime is the law! Criminals have taken over the local starport and are now running it as, in part, a massive extortion scam. Ship systems suspiciously go wrong and the local 'port offers to fix them for a greatly marked-up fee.

3. Benevolent criminals. Though technically criminals, the crime cartel has a Robin Hood complex. It is rebelling against oppression in order to aid the underclass (perhaps going to the stereotypical rob-from-the-rich-to-give-to-the-poor extreme, but that's certainly not required). They see kindred souls in the PCs, and try to get their help on a particular mission.

4. A deal too good to be true. (Usually is.) The PCs are offered a great deal: trade goods for pennies on the dollar. Unfortunately, they're stolen. When the players find the goods stolen from them in turn, they may head off with vengeance on their mind--but they may reconsider when they find out that the "thieves" were just reclaiming what was theirs, and the real criminals were the sellers.

5. A deal you can't refuse. A "concerned citizen" approaches the PCs and asks them to take out a crime lord. He even offers up lots of information on the criminal operations, explains how the PCs can get government sanction for the assault on the criminals, and proposes a reward. It wouldn't take much digging for the PCs to realize that the "citizen" is a competing crime lord himself. But taking out a criminal operation would still be a good thing, wouldn't it?

6. Deal me in. What's a stop in a city without some gambling? Unfortunately, the decks are stacked in the favor of the house. Do the PCs make some trouble when they realize cheating is going on, or do they accept their losses?

5. "I'm not a tourist, I'm a traveller, dammit!"

The local planet has a particular site of interest which the PCs opt to visit. The following plotlets each suggest an interesting tourist attraction and a possible complication; you might want to use one or both.

Plot Twists.

1. A masterpiece of government. The planet has some notable governmental site (like the US capital buildings, the Roman senate, or a place where notable laws were enacted or signed). Complication: Rebels opposed to the government take over the site or threaten to destroy it--while the PCs are there, of course.

2. A psionic miracle. Some particular combination of weather, time, and landscape creates a psionic phenomenon on the planet. Perhaps people can hear the thoughts of others, their own inner beliefs, or even voices from across the universe. (Thanks to E.C. Tubb and *The Winds of Gath*.) Complication: A secret psionic institute is associated with the phenomenon and accidentally reveals itself.

3. A great shopping mall. Travellers love to shop, so offer them a mall, bazaar, or trade center which has unique items not found elsewhere in the uni-

(Continued on page 7)

Fifth Imperium

(Continued from page 6)

verse. Complication: The sellers require more than just money, such as help with some task or participation in some study.

4. A historical site. The planet includes a place of particular importance to the history of the Imperium. This could be the site of a notable battle, the crash location of a space ship, or the last resting place of a hero or Emperor. Complication: The public record of the history of the location is false--perhaps as a means to influence public opinion or perhaps because no one knows the true story. Except the players find it out.

5. A theme park. OK, maybe roller coasters and cotton candy don't make for the best Traveller adventure, but how about a theme park which highlighted the wonders of the local subsector? It'd give you a chance to make some of your background notes concrete and give PCs an opportunity to really decide, on their own, where they go next. Complication: Some of the worlds aren't very pleased with how they're portrayed. A group of protesters from one of those worlds shows up, and without careful attention, their protesting could turn riotous.

6. A bar. Bars are the heart of so many Amber Zones and patron encounters, that it would be irresponsible to not include one as a local site of interest. So how do you make it truly interesting? Combine it with one of the previous five plotlets: a government that runs out of a bar; a drink that temporarily augments psionic powers; a bar where you shop while you drink; a tavern where great things once happened; or the great theme park of all bars, covering hundreds of square miles. Complication: Need you ask? Brawls, murders, skulking spies, patrons needing help, and everything else that goes on in bars across Charted Space.

6. "A Vargr, an Aslan, and a Hiver walk into a bar ..."

This last scenario category is more generic than the others. The PCs have an encounter with a notable member of an alien race that could live in the Spin-

ward Marches, who acts mostly as a patron. Each plotlet tries to show off a significant characterization of the species. They could also easily lead off planet and to bigger things.

Plot Twists.

1. Aslan. A female Aslan approaches the party. She'll probably surprise them by breaking their stereotypes of the aliens, as she's an erudite and intelligent accountant (all perfectly acceptable female traits, but the PCs probably think of male Aslan when they stereotype). She needs the PCs to deal with a little problem of hers: a middle manager at the megacorp she works for has embezzled a large amount of money. She generally treats the PCs like male Aslan: dumb and violent. She expects them to do a bit more than just reproach the criminal.

2. Darrians. A Darrian scientist is working on genetic studies involving the many different races of the Imperium. It's hoped that her results will link up with some ancient TL16 notes to really rev up the whole, largely quiet, specialty of biotech. Unfortunately some Sword Worlder agents are working against her. They don't even want to steal her research, they just want to make sure that the Darrians don't get it. PCs are hired to engage in spy vs. spy high-jinks, protecting the scientist's labs, hunting down saboteurs, and maybe even assaulting Sword Worlder spy strongholds.

3. Jonkeereen. These genetically-modified humans, created to live on desert worlds, are some of the great wanderers and loners of Charted Space behind the claw. So, what might lead them to hire PCs? How about rumors of a desert world lying just outside Imperium space with untold mineral riches. It could become a Jonkeereen homeworld, and bring together an unwanted people scattered across the Domain of Deneb. Of course, there might be problems on the planet, it could be under consideration by other parties, and intergalactic politics might get in the way. (If you want to keep things on-world for this plotlet, just have the PCs deal with local politics for the Jonkeereen.)

(Continued on page 8)

Fifth Imperium

(Continued from page 7)

4. Vargr. A high charisma Vargr approaches the PCs. Its obvious that he expects them to look up to him, though in a casual, unassuming way. He's also offering money, so the PCs shouldn't have that much opportunity to get offended. He asks the PCs to help out some members of his pack who've gotten into trouble, and will place all of his pack's resources at their disposal. What's the trouble? Well, take it from any other plotlet in this series.

5. Vilani. An insufferable nobleman from the Vland sector is looking to hire PCs to do some "scut work" so that he won't have to dirty his own hands. Be sure to play up that arrogance and that dislike of all things non-Vilani. The work involves recovering some old technological designs from an ancient Vilani outpost on the planet, destroyed during the Long Night. The base might be guarded by ancient relics and in any case it should introduce players to the interesting ancient history of the Imperium(s).

6. Zhodani. A human approaches the PCs and asks them to kidnap someone for him. He'll describe the person, who hangs out in local bars, without giving a lot of specifics about who he is or what he does. In actuality, the victim is a Navy fighter pilot, currently on leave, out getting drunk at local bars. The patron, meanwhile, is a Zhodani; if he gets his hands on the pilot, he'll stare at him intently for a few moments, then thank the players for a job well done and pay them. When and if the PCs figure out what's really going on here (which is the theft of military secrets, since the pilot knows about some top-secret fleet movements near Zhodani space) is up to them and the GM.

Conclusion

That's it for these 36 planetside plotlets. If you count, you'll see I still owe you 4 more plotlets to make 76, which will require a special Fifth Imperium sometime in the future.

In the meantime, I'll be taking a look at some other topics in 30 days. See you then ...

Doing It My Way

Abbreviated Combat Resolution (Mongoose Traveller)

By Matt Adams

The idea behind this is that sometimes we wanted something to do the creative heavy lifting when we found ourselves saying "oh not another combat". This is for the times when we wanted to get back into the adventure and yet still experience some detail in a fight. A number of us are not hack and slash RPGers but we love Traveller.

Step 1: How the combat encounter started

Roll to determine the state of things at the beginning of the encounter. Were the players surprised? Did they have things in hand? Add modifiers to the roll as needed to indicate preparedness, incompetence, etc. The result is the die modifier added to all characteristic and skill tests for all players for this

encounter. Alternately, select the die modifier from this chart based on the player character's plans as the situation calls for.

| 2D6 Roll | Situation | DM |
|----------|------------------------------------|----|
| 2 | Ambushed by Opponents | -2 |
| 3-5 | Caught by Opponents | -1 |
| 6-9 | Unexpected Encounter by Both Sides | 0 |
| 10-11 | Caught the Opponents | +1 |
| 12 | Ambushed the Opponent | +2 |

Notes: Die modifier to be applied to all combat rolls for the fight.

Step 2: Set intensity, (indicates number of skill and characteristic tests)

The number of characteristic and skills tests that will be performed is equal to 2d6. The roll is also the value of the danger rating.

(Continued on page 9)

Doing It My Way

(Continued from page 8)

Step 3: How the encounter played out

Make a number of characteristic and skill tests from the fight tables, the quantity of which is equal to the value obtained in step 2.

| 2D6 Roll | Narrative Description |
|----------|-------------------------------|
| 2-4 | "A quick, decisive encounter" |
| 5-9 | "A stressful situation" |
| 10-12 | "An intense situation" |

Option 1: At this point, players and the referee can describe how the situation plays out in free form, possibly from a roughly sketched map. The referee and players can assign tests the following suggested ways:

- assign a number of agreed upon tests to each player character from the total count derived in step 2, or
- players may bid a number of characteristic damage points in exchange for desired tests according to what they want to narrate, or
- select tests round robin style from the lists below, taking turns

Everyone is then free to give a "vignette" description of their character carrying out their part of the encounter, making their characteristics and skills tests from their quota. Working together with other PCs gives linked test benefits as normal.

Option 2: Roll 2d6 to determine the type of combat encounter ("deadly fight", "protracted fight", "running fight", "hit and run") and then roll to select characteristics and skills from the appropriate table up to the count obtained in step 2. Characteristic and skill tests are then made and their effects are subtracted from the danger number rolled earlier (if the effect of each test is positive).

The effect of each characteristic and skill test plus modifiers is subtracted from the danger value to arrive at an eventual final result. Only positive effects count and negative effects are discarded.

(Continued on page 11)

| 2D6 Roll | Type of Combat |
|----------|--|
| 2 | Deadly Combat—Multiply the danger value by two at the end of the combat, whether positive or negative. |
| 3-7 | Protracted Fight |
| 8-10 | Running Fight |
| 11-12 | Hit-and-Run |

Deadly Combat

| 2D6 | On Foot | Involves Ground Vehicles | Involves Flyers | Involves Aircraft/Spacecraft | On Foot, in Space | Involves Animals |
|-----|--|--------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 2 | Endurance | Endurance | Endurance | Endurance | Endurance | Endurance |
| 3 | Strength | Strength | Strength | Strength | Dexterity | Strength |
| 4 | Intelligence | Intelligence | Intelligence | Intelligence | Intelligence | Intelligence |
| 5 | Strength | Education | Education | Education | Education | Education |
| 6 | Dexterity | Dexterity | Dexterity | Dexterity | Dexterity | Dexterity |
| 7 | Intelligence | Intelligence | Intelligence | Intelligence | Intelligence | Intelligence |
| 8 | Dexterity | Dexterity | Dexterity | Dexterity | Dexterity | Dexterity |
| 9 | Gun Combat, Heavy Weapons, Melee Combat, or Explosives | Driver | Flyer | Pilot | Zero-G Combat | Animal Handling |
| 10 | Intelligence | Intelligence | Intelligence | Intelligence | Vacc Suit | Intelligence |
| 11 | Strength | Strength | Strength | Strength | Zero-G Combat | Strength |
| 12 | Endurance | Endurance | Endurance | Endurance | Endurance | Endurance |

Doing It My Way

Protracted Fight

| 2D6 | On Foot | Involves Ground Vehicles | Involves Flyers | Involves Aircraft/Spacecraft | On Foot, in Space | Involves Animals |
|-----|--|--|--|------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| 2 | Medic | Communications | Communications | Communications | Medic | Athletics |
| 3 | Communications or Tactics | Reconnaissance | Education | Reconnaissance | Communications or Tactics | Reconnaissance |
| 4 | Strength | Mechanical | Reconnaissance | Tactics | Vacc Suit | Animal (Veterinary) |
| 5 | Gun Combat, Heavy Weapons, Melee Combat, or Explosives | Driver | Flyer | Pilot or Remote Operation | Gun Combat, Heavy Weapons, Melee Combat, or Explosives | Animal Handling |
| 6 | Gun Combat, Heavy Weapons, Melee Combat, or Explosives | Gun Combat, Heavy Weapons, Melee Combat, or Explosives | Flyer | Pilot or Remote Operation | Gun Combat, Heavy Weapons, Melee Combat, or Explosives | Animal (Veterinary) |
| 7 | Athletics (Endurance) or Endurance | Endurance | Gun Combat, Heavy Weapons, or Explosives | Endurance | Athletics (Endurance) or Space Sciences | Melee Combat |
| 8 | Medic | Education | Education | Education | Medic | Dexterity |
| 9 | Survival | Mechanical | Endurance | Intelligence | Zero-G Combat | Education |
| 10 | Education | Navigation | Mechanical | Engineering | Education | Endurance |
| 11 | Reconnaissance | Tactics | Engineering | Endurance | Reconnaissance | Tactics |
| 12 | Endurance | Endurance | Endurance | Dexterity | Endurance | Endurance |

Running Fight

| 2D6 | On Foot | Involves Ground Vehicles | Involves Flyers | Involves Aircraft/Spacecraft | On Foot, in Space | Involves Animals |
|-----|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 2 | Stealth | Dexterity | Stealth | Intelligence | Vacc Suit | Dexterity |
| 3 | Gun Combat | Gun Combat | Dexterity | Dexterity | Gun Combat | Tactics |
| 4 | Athletics (Endurance) | Medic | Endurance | Endurance | Endurance | Endurance |
| 5 | Endurance | Driver | Flyer | Pilot | Tactics | Athletics |
| 6 | Tactics | Driver | Flyer | Endurance | Zero-G Combat | Animal Handling |
| 7 | Athletics | Gunner or Gun Combat | Gunner or Gun Combat | Gunner or Pilot | Education | Animals (Veterinary) |
| 8 | Reconnaissance | Reconnaissance | Navigation | Navigation | Reconnaissance | Endurance |
| 9 | Leadership | Mechanical | Endurance | Pilot | Leadership | Gun Combat |
| 10 | Melee Combat | Endurance | Reconnaissance | Reconnaissance | Melee Combat | Melee Combat |
| 11 | Medic | Tactics | Tactics | Tactics | Medic | Medic |
| 12 | Dexterity | Navigation | Mechanical | Communications | Dexterity | Dexterity |

Doing It My Way

| Hit-and-Run | | | | | | |
|-------------|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| 2D6 | On Foot | Involves Ground Vehicles | Involves Flyers | Involves Aircraft/Spacecraft | On Foot, in Space | Involves Animals |
| 2 | Dexterity | Athletics | Communications | Intelligence | Dexterity | Athletics |
| 3 | Athletics | Leadership | Dexterity | Communications | Athletics | Leadership |
| 4 | Stealth | Gunner, Explosives, or Gun Combat | Reconnaissance | Pilot | Stealth | Gun Combat or Melee Combat |
| 5 | Athletics | Stealth | Gunner or Gun Combat | Gunner | Stealth | Reconnaissance |
| 6 | Reconnaissance | Gunner, Explosives, or Gun Combat | Gunner or Gun Combat | Pilot | Reconnaissance | Gun Combat or Melee Combat |
| 7 | Heavy Weapons, Gun Combat, Melee Combat, or Explosives | Driver | Flyer | Navigation | Heavy Weapons, Gun Combat, Melee Combat, or Explosives | Animals |
| 8 | Heavy Weapons, Gun Combat, Melee Combat, or Explosives | Dexterity | Navigation | Dexterity | Heavy Weapons, Gun Combat, Melee Combat, or Explosives | Dexterity |
| 9 | Dexterity | Mechanical | Mechanical | Tactics | Dexterity | Animals (Veterinary) |
| 10 | Navigation | Navigation | Dexterity | Sensor Operation | Navigation | Navigation |
| 11 | Tactics | Tactics | Tactics | Leadership | Tactics | Tactics |
| 12 | Leadership | Dexterity | Intelligence | Reconnaissance | Leadership | Dexterity |

(Continued from page 9)

Step 4: The Aftermath

If, after all the effect subtractions, the remaining danger is a positive number, this is the number of d6 dice to roll to derive a total of damage to apply across the group of characters. Armor applies. Negative danger values could be interpreted as extra effectiveness of the group towards their goal. One or two decisive characteristic and skill tests by a selected player can determine the actual outcome of the fight if this is important.

Since the philosophical approach to this resolution system is that combat is merely about survival, the precise effect of weapons was not considered. The combats simulated with this system generally assume players matched enough to their opponents for things to be interesting. However, a way to apply the effect of damage from weapons in a battle with this is to first determine the intensity of the battle (the danger number) and then have the opponents roll on this sheet as well. When gun combat, melee, or heavy weapons is rolled, obtain the damage from the weapon at optimum range and add it to the final amount of damage to apply to the opponent side.

Mongoose Traveller—The Third Imperium: Alien Module 2: Vargr

Reviewed by Doc Kinne

Mongoose Traveller—The Third Imperium: Alien Module 2:

Vargr. Simon Beal

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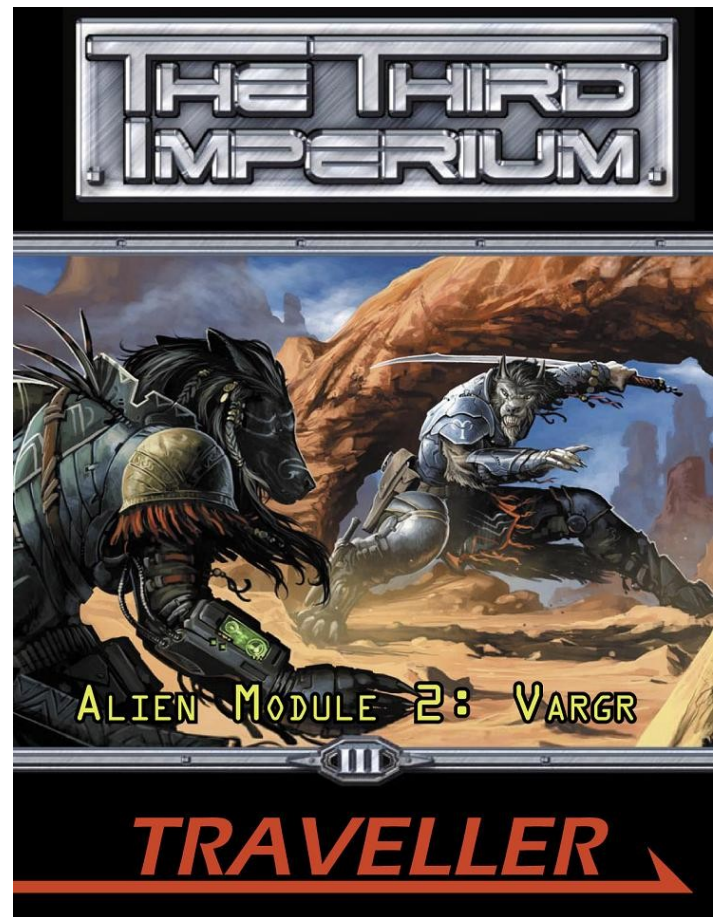
Alien Module 2: Vargr is Mongoose's second foray into presenting us the Major Races of the Traveller Universe.

Presentation

Alien Module 2: Vargr continues Mongoose's revival of the Classic Traveller Alien Modules of several years ago. Again in hardcover, Vargr presents some subtle differences between it and the previously released Alien Module 1: Aslan offering. Vargr still supports “The Third Imperium” chrome header, I think, to enable an easy differentiation between Mongoose's Official Traveller Universe offerings from the other licenses they have using the Traveller Core ruleset. They moved the title of the book to just below the chrome “The Third Imperium” banner at the top of the book for Vargr. Additionally, the painting of the subject matter that wrapped around both front & back covers of Aslan appears only on the front cover of Vargr. Both these changes I could conceivably put to increased clarity of the text. However, Mongoose's logo at the back bottom of the book has been considerably simplified. None of these things are germane to the inside content, of course, but it does seem to me that Mongoose is having a smidge of difficulty coming up with a workable “brand” and graphical presentation to stick with.

Digging In

One of the things that I've liked about Mongoose's treatment of Traveller is the way it strongly evokes the Classic Traveller feelings and yet manages to seem to break new ground. This was the impression I had from Aslan as well. I took the opportunity in this regard to actually compare what Mongoose did with



their treatment and what GDW did with their Alien Module twenty-five years ago. The differences – dare I say improvements – show up in several small ways.

Following a very similar format, Vargr starts out detailing character generation. Immediately we encounter one of the additions Mongoose has made to the race, giving us several subspecies of Vargr. The Vargr have been known for decades as a race that couldn't quite seem to keep itself together. The Ex-tents are, at best, a loose confederation. Now Mongoose has extended that metaphor into the very race itself – the Vargr are no longer a monolithic race. The book details new career paths for the Vargr as well, including Scientists, Marines, and Law Enforcement. Psions are also specifically mentioned, giving the first specific, official mention of psionics for the race. Each career has specific specializations and continues Mongoose's format of rounding out character creation with events, and mishaps, as well as the normally garnered skills and training.

(Continued on page 13)

Critics' Corner

(Continued from page 12)

The race section, as you might expect, gives details and a bit of history behind the new subspecies and also elevates the importance of the effect of Charisma (and that particular score) and how it works within the Vargr pack society. Specific mechanics are suggested putting a Vargr's charisma, and its effect on the character, on equal terms to that of an Aslan's honor.

You'll find the history, equipment, and starships sections equally detailed. The Gvurrdon Sector section gives a reasonable account detailing what is arguably the most diverse area in Chartered Space, giving this region an historical perspective, a history, and going through most of its numerous major players.

While I think the writing of Vargr compares well to that of the previous Aslan, the layout of this particular book seemed a bit slapdash and rushed. Especially toward the beginning I thought there could be a more logical placement of the tables and some of the graphics. On the first page of the character creation section, for example, you encounter a table of Vargr subspecies almost 30 pages before you are informed Vargr have subspecies. On page 41 there is

an unlabeled map of the Extents on the page before the discussion of the Extents begin.

As of this writing Mongoose has not released any errata for Vargr as yet.

Conclusion

Despite some simplification of graphics, a couple of layout problems, and a smaller page count when compared to Aslan, the level of detail given in Vargr make it a worthy addition to the Alien Modules series and the rules themselves. With the release of this volume Mongoose has tacked what are arguably the "easier" aliens. While Traveller has a reputation of its aliens not being simply "humans in rubber suits," the Aslan and the Vargr are the most human of the aliens in Chartered Space. A bar has been set. It both frightens and encourages me that looking at Mongoose's future release schedule no more Alien Modules are mentioned. We can hope and assume that the rest of our beloved aliens will be detailed and perhaps hope and assume that Mongoose is taking the time to make sure those modules are as good as the bar they have now set.

In the meantime, with the release of Alien Module 2: Vargr we now have cats and dogs living together. Can chaos in the space lanes be far behind?

The Club Room

The Veloth

By George M. Sibley

The Veloth are a Major Race living spinward of the Imperium. Though normally beyond the reach of Humanity, they have set up some shop in the Fulani Sector and appear occasionally in The Vanguard Marches. Regarded as a major problem to those around them, they are a TL-13 Empire with a wide array of subject and client races.

Physically, the Veloth are unimpressive. They are upright bipedal omnivores, similar to humans. They stand 1.4 to 1.8 meters tall, and weigh between 50 and 75 kilograms. They have digitigrade legs and walk on their metacarpals, similar to the Vargr. Each of their hands has two thumbs, one on either side of

their palm, giving them relatively strong crush and support grips. Their blood is haemocyanic rather than haemoglobin, which makes it much less efficient than red blood. Their overall physical profile is similar to humans, and equipment manufactured for one (with special exceptions, such as keyboards and footwear) can be used by the other.

As of the Golden Age, the Veloth are 98% united in a single, strong interplanetary government, called the Aashuuna Hegemony. The government is led by the Ven Aashuuna Hegemon, a quasi-hereditary and ceremonial office, supported by a Chancellor and six Privy Ministers. From the capital planet of Anem, they direct the whole of the Empire. The Hegemony is divided into five regions, called Commanderies,

(Continued on page 14)

The Club Room

(Continued from page 13)

corresponding to the core of their Empire and the four directions. The Commandants of these regions are absolute military dictators, and several times in history have they been the nucleus of civil war. Despite their great power, they do not choose their own successors - they serve a fixed term, are replaced from the capital, and are always under close supervision.

The history of the Veloth started on the planet Anem. Anem was the subject of biological research by the Ancients, who deposited six sentient species there. The Veloth, having no natural advantages, were the weakest of them. After several centuries of fits and starts and attempts to form their own kingdom, they were fully absorbed by the neighboring Urja Empire while the planet was moving through Tech Level 2. The Urja were at the absolute apex of society, and had begun to fetishize uselessness - thus providing a window for the Veloth, despite being no more than slaves, to infiltrate their society and amass wealth and influence.

In time, the Veloth were fortunate enough to produce a leader, Iqret Shardariyas, who formed a private agreement with the Urja's sepoymen to turn against their former master. After a brief yet bloody conflict, the Veloth found the once-omnipotent Urja Empire their own property in name as well as function. Iqret himself turned to writing the Holy Books - the Books of History, Rites, and Law - that continue to define Veloth society and culture. After his death, he was venerated as a God, joining their mythological Liberator as an object of worship. To this day, there has always been a Hegemon, even when the office had no power.

The Ancients were known to these primitive Veloth - the Urja had taken to worshipping an Ancient building on Anem, known as the Tower. When the Veloth took control, they destroyed the Tower, and declared that whoever built it was their enemy. Thus began their great quest to purify the galaxy, imagined as an all-consuming war. On one side was the Ancients, often thought of simply as 'The Gods,' and all their creations - that is to say, everything else in the

universe. On the other side was the Liberator, the Lawgiver, and Veloth, as well as everything the Veloth had brought under their political control.

While the Veloth haven't always functioned as a single, seamless machine - in fact, they've spent more time as rival powers than as a unified Hegemony - it's still an important image that influences their society in subtle and important ways. It's also what makes them such a threat. After all, Veloth may fight with each other, and Veloth may ally with each other, but the outside world is nothing more than the enemy, with no more purpose or importance than to be fought off, conquered, and plundered. Even knowledge of the outside is disdained - only a handful of Veloth who work in the intelligence community can even name a single other Major Race.

The core of Veloth society is the extended, multi-generational family, with one man and all his living descendants forming a social and economic unit. The head of the family is the patriarch and has tremendous power. Everything his male and unmarried female descendants produce belongs to him, and he can freely dictate what jobs they are to hold and how they are to be educated. When he dies, all of his sons become patriarchs over their own descendants. People can become emancipated from their families, sometimes even taking their descendants with them, but it's rare.

The Veloth are less than 3% of the population of their own Empire. Everyone else, bluntly, is a slave - either to individuals or to the Hegemony. The Veloth themselves are the administrators, scientists, businesspeople, and military officers of society, and even the lowest of them manages something. All other work is done by slaves. The Veloth actively seek out planets occupied by sentient life, and descend from the clouds to prop up client governments and put the planet to economic use. Over time, as the Veloth hold over the planet increases, they dispense with these client states and start running it directly. This allows further development of industry and wealth, which prompts more Veloth to come, which causes the local Veloth community to grow

(Continued on page 15)

The Club Room

(Continued from page 14)

and prosper, which eventually serves as a springboard for the whole process to repeat somewhere else.

This system is very, very good to them - even the poorest Veloth can afford a handful of servants, and the wealthiest of them live in opulence beyond even the Chinese emperors. Unlike some other empires, though (including the one they replaced), they do not fetishize idleness and unproductivity. To the Veloth, money and status are everything, and they lie awake at night scheming about how to acquire more. One of the great new fads among the Veloth is 'Freelance Pioneering,' in which a group of settlers will raise money from private investors to establish a colony on a yet-unacquired world. These settlers can use that money to buy everything from conscript workers to mobile refineries to chemical weapons and artillery, in case the locals are better cleared-off than put to work. Though they are shy about physical labor, the Veloth throw themselves into their work and take great interest in industry and technology.

In fact, their brand of tyranny is so successful that many of their subjects would never even dream of fighting back. In newly-acquired planets, the Veloth are invisible, perching in high orbit and relaying their orders in secret to local strongmen. However, once they have established themselves openly, the Veloth begin a long process of changing the local cultures to suit their purposes. In time, the captured peoples begin to think of themselves as stakeholders in the Hegemony, and even become grateful to the Veloth for 'helping' them. It's a testament to their skill as conquerors that their Navy makes intense use of kamikaze fighters.

No Veloth will ever, except for some tremendous circumstances, speak with someone from outside their Empire. Learning a foreign language is wholly out of the question. Most Veloth are capable of speaking three languages. The first, referred to as High Veloth or Star-Writing, is their ancestral language from before they were slaves of the Urja. It uses an ideographical script, in which each written character is a 'constellation' with one or more

'planets' written around it. The language itself is tonal and extremely hard to learn, with different words said at different tones to describe tense. It is a carefully-guarded secret, and non-Veloth are not allowed to learn it. Their second language, referred to as Low Veloth or Empire-Speech, was the common language of the Urja Empire. It has a regular alphabet, and is used for all technical or commercial activities. The third language, Middle Veloth or Veloth-Speech, is a synergy of the two languages. It has great flexibility and nuance, and is the standard language of the Veloth for all common activities. It is impossible to understand if you don't already speak its two parent languages. Veloth servitors will learn to speak Low Veloth and learn to write in special ideograms that reflect their jobs, and only their jobs - a kind of Simple Writing, geared to only one purpose.

The Veloth surround themselves with servants and workers for many reasons. While it's obviously helpful to have someone to do the work for them, the simple truth is that in order to feel like conquering heroes, they need someone around to have conquered. To the Veloth, pain flows downward like a river. The cream of society inflict a lot of pain on lower-class Veloth - they have to work like machines just to keep up, nepotism and corruption are rampant, and there's no free or balanced media. If there's somebody even lower than them to pick on, then these same lower-class Veloth will identify with their oppressors rather than the oppressed, especially because the presence of 'the conquered' helps them feel like the government's very expensive campaigns are paying dividends for them.

Even the lowliest Veloth need someone to boss around, and that special honor goes to the Vuri. The Vuri strongly resemble Veloth, and some believe that they are part of the same stock, like the Vilani and Solomani humans. The Vuri are used to do everything that the Veloth don't want to do personally. They are waiters, servants, valets, chauffeurs, barbers, cooks, tailors, and store-clerks. Some of them are so lucky as to learn the mystical power of writing, al-

(Continued on page 16)

The Club Room

(Continued from page 15)

though this is always done secretly. Because they constantly surround the Veloth and often work with sharp knives, they have a very meek and servile temperament, and usually think of their Veloth masters as their parents. Because of how easy it is, it is considered crass to make a Vuri cry.

The Veloth have a hearty appreciation for force-of-arms, but the actual nitty-gritty of fighting a war and getting shot at is mostly beneath them. The massive Kaenlang (three syllables - Kah-en-lang) are their go-to people for all violence-based activities. The Kaenlang are more humanoid than the Veloth, with five-fingered hands and plantigrade legs. They average 1.8 meters tall and are heavily muscled, weighing in at 180 or more kilograms. The Kaenlang have a harsh, militant culture that values aggression and discipline, and even those who don't work in the army carry around cudgels as a sign of their prowess. Because they don't speak to the Veloth as much, they tend to regard them as distant deities; those who live among them as field commanders, which military doctrine requires, have to live up to very high expectations.

The Najasat are the people of choice with regards to anything mechanical. Short and squat, the handful of humans who have seen them describe the Najasat as being very, very similar to orangutangs. They have a fully-developed hand at the end of each of their limbs, and they can comfortably write with any of them. The best use of the Najasat is to serve as crew on spaceships, but they're found in any industrial environment where physical prowess is not a necessity. The Veloth tend to have an abiding respect for the Najasat because of how they work with their intellects, and the Najasat are indeed highly intelligent. The Veloth have created for them a culture of self-deprecating humor and a cheerful yet fanatical devotion to even the dirtiest of jobs, because they see in the Najasat that same spark of life that they used to overthrow their own masters.

If the Veloth were better at what they did, then they'd be a real threat to the civilizations around them. Their culture encourages them to stick and

work together, they believe firmly in the rule of law, they have no large-group loyalties to place above the whole Hegemony, and they prize science and education - they are some of the finest biologists, genetic engineers, and especially terraformers in the galaxy. Their crowning achievement, the vacuum-capable ferrosilicophage lichen, allows them to slowly turn planets with no atmosphere into agricultural worlds. They also have extremely long lifespans, thanks to their medical science, and much of their top leadership is over 500 years old. Their knowledge of biology is so strong that they can now use Vuri as surrogate mothers, thus freeing women from the former burden of difficult 20-month pregnancies.

Unfortunately, they're reaching their limits. They have just reached TL 13, and J3 is still 20 or 30 years away. They've expanded as far as they can while still keeping their tight central control. The system that served them well when they lived on 20 planets is beginning to fail now that they're on 200, even if those 200 are close together and only 60 or so are well-populated. They're also at the cusp of social change, as TL13 and the invention of cross-species surrogates has not only increased their lifespans but has also increased their birth rates, meaning that the core worlds are having a population explosion and no new jobs are opening up. A huge social clash is on the horizon as the entrenched, conservative elite is under attack from all sides.

Veloth have no formal relations with any interstellar power, and have an official embargo against all other empires and peoples - any ship that appears in Veloth space without pre-arranged clearance will be shot down. Thus, the best way to encounter the Veloth is to wait for them to come to you. Veloth can be found at the corners of civilized space acting as traders and black-market sellers. The Veloth are sadly eager to peddle nuclear and chemical weapons to anyone who can pay them - these things can be freely purchased in their own Empire, and many a human ship has been destroyed by a Veloth missile. Some suspect that this may be part of their efforts to destabilize local governments and soften them up for

(Continued on page 17)

The Club Room

(Continued from page 16)

the inevitable takeover. At the same time, they will buy anything foreign, especially living beings, for scientific purposes. An impoverished planet can buy a lot of heavy iron from the Veloth in return for a few breeding pairs of the local wildlife. Piracy has become fashionable among young Veloth with no prospects, as well, now that there's so little work in the core.

Some describe the Veloth as a sentient plague, but the Veloth represent a fascinating - and potentially

profitable - encounter on the rims of civilized space. But be careful - everyone knows what happens when you sell your soul to the Devil . . .

The Veloth have Weak Strength and Endurance (-1) and Notable Intelligence (+2). They suffer a -1 DM to all tests when in an air pressure lower than 1.4 unless they use special equipment. Veloth who were raised within their mainstream society will have Notable Education as well as speaking their three languages. Because they have extremely long life-spans, the average Veloth encountered will have a long list of skills compared to an average Human.

Doing It My Way

Principles of Adventure Design

by Mark Graybill

I like to make sure the adventures I write for my game will give my players something they'll enjoy and remember. Over the years, I've built a list that I use to check my adventures against, and for inspiration as I write them. Since I wrote it for my own use, it's not as descriptive as it might be, so I'll give the list then go through each item to explain the thinking behind it.

- Trust.
- Conflict.
- A Big Wienie.
- A Big Whip.
- Lots of Little Wienies and Whips.
- Setting.
- Magnificent Scenery.
- A Big Bad Guy.
- Little Bad Guys.
- A Clock.
- Puzzles or mysteries, one big and several small ones.
- Campaign Tie-ins.
- A Payoff.
- A Big Confrontation.
- The Real Big Confrontation.
- An End.
- Open Questions.
- A Payout.

Trust

The players need to be able to trust themselves to deal with the situation, and trust the ref to present it fairly. Therefore the situation needs to be something they can recognize and characterize well enough going in that they'll give it a try, even when they know they don't have the whole story.

In situations where characters might have their range of choices limited, players may feel railroaded and lose trust in the referee. So it's important to build in opportunities for the characters to have choices even where, realistically, they would not have any. Even if they've run into a sure death situation, allow them a choice in how they face their death.

When players feel that they are handled fairly, and given reasonable choices, they'll get more involved with adventures more easily without feeling forced.

Conflict

At all levels. Player and/or group vs. environment, antagonist, and self. All at the same time if possible, as frequently as possible.

Conflict drives the adventure and makes it an adventurous undertaking. Conflicts come in big and small varieties. The big ones for the adventure are the Big Wienie and the Big Whip. But there should be plenty of other conflict with which the players grapple, in the form of small conflicts. I use the Conflict item on my list as a check to see that my adventure includes each of the different types of conflict,

Doing It My Way

classically listed as Man vs. Self, Man vs. Man, and Man vs. Environment. Different adventures will place an emphasis on one or two of these over the other, but will include all types. Since "Self" takes two forms in a role playing game, I also check to make sure the adventure has conflicts for both the individual characters and the group as a whole, as well as conflicts between individual characters' interests and the group's interest.

A Big Wienie

The Pull, or Big Goal

This is the thing the characters want to go after in the adventure. It should excite them and further their goals, both as a group and individually. This is why they're going, and when they falter in their resolve, it should be what they recall to each other. "Yeah, the situation stinks, our ship is getting hulled, and our patron is a jerk. But think of the payoff."

The Big Wienie should be something specific enough to refer to simply, and it should be something important enough for these characters to get in deep, possibly too deep. If it's too abstract, the party may lose their resolve once adversity arises.

I picked up the "wienie" term from Walt Disney. He used it to describe landmarks that he placed in his parks to draw visitors. For example, the Matterhorn is a wienie. It draws you toward it. When you find your way around Disneyland, you do it using the wienies as landmarks.

I use the same principle in my adventures. It is part of building the trust element of an adventure, as it gives the players a sense of understanding and control over the game. It helps them to think their way through situations and feel confident about their characters actions. It also helps them get their characters into trouble they might have avoided if they were less confident.

A Big Whip

The "push" or consequences for inaction, hesitation, or failure.

Like the Big Wienie, this is something that should excite the characters as they move through the adventure as a threat, rather than a promise. The whip

should be something that will hurt the characters or their ability to adventure as they would like in the future: losing their ship or base, for example, or their characters being crippled in some way.

Part of the design of any whip is that the referee should have a plan just in case the adventure plays out poorly for the characters. Sometimes it can open up a whole range of adventure possibilities for the campaign. What's bad for the characters should not be bad for the game.

Lots of Little Wienies and Whips

Best if tuned for individual players and their characters. Make it personal. And distracting.

These are the smaller things along the way that help drive the adventure along, or attempt to derail it. These tend to be closely tied to the players and their characters, so I have a sort of floating list of things I keep for a particular party in addition to those I build into the adventure initially.

Setting

This has to be happening somewhere, or some sequence of places. Make it a setting, not an empty sound stage.

The adventure's setting should be places that become tangible to the players. If they seem vague while you're designing an adventure, they'll be even more vague to the players.

My first really successful star city was modeled after Disneyland. The players never caught on to it, though for years I feared one would come to the game with a map of the Magic Kingdom. The combination of layout, visual landmarks, and multiple means of transport around the city allowed them to move around with confidence, complete tasks easily, and get into all sorts of trouble. The surrounding community was based on the area of Anaheim around Disneyland (in the late 1970s.) It, too, worked very well. Not only was the star city's "Matterhorn" visible well out into the local city, but the distorting effects of Disneyland on Anaheim's economy played well as the effects of a star city on a remote industrial planet.

Since then, I've made sure that I have clear layouts

Doing It My Way

and landmarks for my settings, whether planetside or a set of worlds in space. This allows players to move their characters sure-footedly through an adventure.

Magnificent Scenery

I make this a separate item from setting for two reasons. The magnificent scenery may not actually be part of the setting of the adventure. And it's easy to develop a full setting for an adventure without remembering to put it in.

At least once per adventure I put the characters in some place that deserves a florid description. It may be a part of the setting or a sidelight, such as a place encountered en route. It helps the players experience "being there" in the game, and also provides an opportunity for a bit of mental relaxation in the course of the game. These "scenic vistas" also become landmarks for the adventure in the player's minds, even if they're not involved in the main action.

A Big Bad Guy

When there's a bad side to a situation, there should be a character that exemplifies that side. This character takes the blame and is a target of hatred. They may never actually appear, but their influence is felt in the adventure.

Little Bad Guys.

Little bad guys may be minions of the big bad guy, or they may just be characters that act as obstacles in the adventure: shoddy workers, crooked salesmen, apathetic and unhelpful encounters, for example. Even if they're not on-scene, the results of their work, or lack thereof, will be.

These characters should be personalized to fit the party's characters. This is also a good place to develop either recurring characters or recurring situations for your campaign. Perhaps there's a smart-aleck bureaucrat the party has to deal with repeatedly. Or maybe one of the party always ends up getting equipment "inspected by number 7" which is guaranteed to be defective.

A Clock.

I find it helps a lot if there is some regular reminder that there is a big goal, and a time limit to reaching

that goal. It may be something as simple as an NPC that regularly whines about how they're not going to finish in time. Or blasting in the local mine shakes everything every so often. Maybe it's calls from a concerned patron. It shouldn't be too annoying or obvious, unless the game is going off track or bogging down in detail. But it also doesn't have to be too subtle.

A party member with a health condition makes a perfect clock. Stabbing pains once an hour to start, increasing frequency as the adventure progresses. Add detail to the descriptions as the game progresses, and you'll have someone telling the engineer to leave the fool machine alone and get moving. Having some regular event stop can also create a sense of urgency.

A Puzzle

Or mystery, preferably one big and several small ones.

The adventure is never going to be what it appears when first presented. Everyone knows that. There's something deeper going on, or it will go awry for unanticipated reasons.

Beyond this there need to be other mysteries. One of my reasons for adding mysteries to my adventures is to give the players something to think and talk about when I'm not dealing with them directly.

Like the little wienies, I try to make the little puzzles personal. I try to make them affect more than one character. It won't be the ship engineer's state-room door that keeps acting up, but he'll get called in on it. When he gets a look at the door they're going to have to talk to the biologist.

Campaign Tie-ins

Adventures should tie into the overall campaign. They may do it as a continuation of an over-arching story within the campaign, or as a diversion from it. But there should be elements within the adventure that remind the characters of where they are and who they are with respect to a larger universe. This adds richness to the experience, as well as helping the players maintain their perspective on how to manage their characters.

Doing It My Way

It's important to not overplay tie-ins. When overdone, they may take away the player's feelings of latitude of action, resulting in them agonizing over every little choice in the game.

A Payoff.

Let the id monsters safely run wild at least once a night, and make it feel good. (Take notes and save consequences for later.)

The payoff is what I call a scene where the characters feel free to vent their feelings through action in the game. This is when they get to trash the bureaucrat's office and files and know they'll get away with it, or shoot it out with the crooked authorities who have revealed their true nature so obviously that nobody will question that taking them out is doing a public service, space the jerk with the whiny voice, or whatever.

Normally any negative consequences should be saved for some later adventure. You want the players to feel safe about having their characters throw off the safety and start blazing away, both figuratively and literally.

A Big Confrontation.

The big confrontation should be the planned one that is foreshadowed throughout the adventure. It should appear to be the denouement of the major points of the adventure. In fact, it unlocks the way to the Real Big Confrontation.

The Real Big Confrontation.

Grendel's mama, the secret plot behind the plot, etc.

As hackneyed as it seems to have the bad guy come back stronger a second time, or the real big bad guy appear when the false one has been cut down, the fact is that as a story device this works. Even when the players know it is coming.

It's not necessary, or desirable, to come up with something that is a big surprise all of the time. Instead, it's OK to have the Real Big Confrontation not be so much a surprise, as something which casts a

new light on the adventure's events. The Real Big Confrontation is the resolution of the big puzzle for the adventure.

An End.

There has to be an end.

The adventure has to have something that marks the point where it has ended. It may be some sort of denouement, or an abrupt shift of elements in the campaign. What has to be avoided is the feeling of one game session flowing into another with no substantial change. The characters should have made a difference, either good or bad.

Open Questions.

The adventure may have ended, but there will be new questions. The resolution of the conflict will have opened up new questions. Little events in the course of the adventure will have opened up mysteries which were not investigated.

A Payout.

Ship repairs, loot bags full, money for drink, a comfortable bed for the night or a safe refuge for the moment. Don't jerk them around when they're tired and they've got their hands stuck out for payment.

Provide a wrap-up for the characters at the end. This may or may not be role-played. It puts a cap on the gaming session. If events have been kind, then this the time when the patron hands over the reward, or the medal ceremony and subsequent partying occur. If events have been less kind, this is when the characters find a disused cargo container to curl up in, or some other bolthole until the next adventure. Even in failed adventures, the character should have come away with something good.

The payout both gives the characters their rewards, and leaves them in a state from which to start the next adventure. That state should be settled so that the player's minds transition from the past adventure to preparing for the next one.

100 Sci-Fi Adventure Seeds

Reviewed by Jeff Zeitlin

100 Sci-Fi Adventure Seeds. James 'Grim' Desborough
Postmortem Studios: <http://www.postmortem.demon.co.uk>
and Cubicle 7 Entertainment: <http://www.cubicle7.co.uk>
108pp, Softcover
UK£14.99/US\$24.95

While not a Traveller or formally Traveller-compatible sourcebook, this third-party adventure seed book is generic enough that a referee can easily adapt the seeds to almost any sort of Traveller-powered campaign.

On the Shelf

A white cover with black MICR-style lettering, and the spacecraft, sun, and planet picture, combine to make this book stand out on the shelves against practically any other RPG rulebook or supplement, for any system, from any publisher.

Initial Impressions

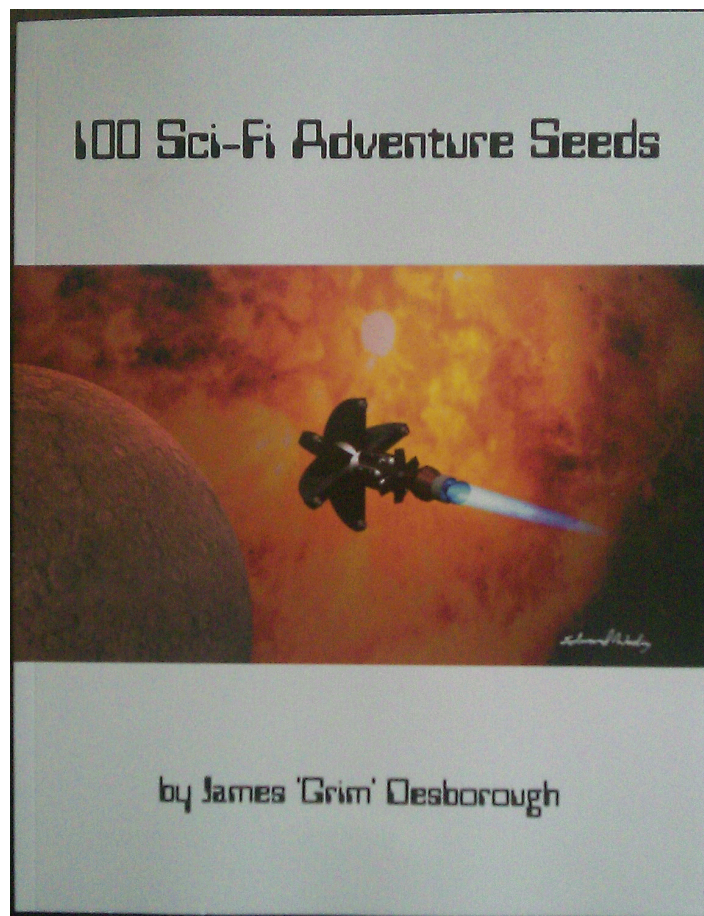
The book is well-laid-out, with a very readable font and good use of white space. Adventure seeds are one per page, with a description, three “twists”, and an epilogue for each; many also have additional notes or ideas.

On Closer Inspection

The book could have made use of a bit closer proofreading. The occasional “grocer’s apostrophe” appears, and there are some minor errors of grammar and infelicitous word or phrase choices. It is, however, really no worse than many other supplements in this respect.

There are four pages of ‘front matter’, covering a brief summary of what Science Fiction is, a contrast of the Adventure versus the Adventure Seed, and some discussion of where a referee can look for ideas.

The remainder of the book is the Adventure Seeds themselves. As noted above, each Seed has only three “twists” instead of the six that seems to be a *de facto* standard for Traveller, but few, if any, of the twists are simply variations on a previous twist –



something which is not unusual in specifically Traveller Seeds (“4. As 3 above, except...”).

The book’s utility is slightly impaired, but the reason for the impairment is one of those things that rarely gets thought of even long after publication – there’s no summary information to let the referee quickly determine whether a particular Seed is suitable for his/her campaign. Sometimes the key information is available on reading through the Seed, or the notes at the end of many of them, but having the book – or at least an index – organized by any of several categories would have been helpful.

Summary

If you, as a referee, have trouble coming up with ideas for adventures, this is a useful resource – but similar resources are available for less or free elsewhere. Think twice before purchasing this, but don’t rule it out entirely – there are some seeds in this volume that don’t follow the “conventional” adventure idea patterns, and could lead to quite the enjoyable session.

Gauss Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW)

by Scott Diamond

A heavier-duty, fully-automatic version of the gauss rifle, the gauss SAW is capable of a higher sustained rate of fire and can be used as either a man-portable weapon or mounted on a vehicle. The weapon comes equipped with a bipod, laser designator mounted in the foregrip (with both IR and visible light modes as selectable by the operator), a folding carry grip, and electronic battlesights (thermal imaging and telescopic holosight).

The weapon operates on the same basic principles as the gauss rifle and uses the same ammunition. The main difference is in the heavier barrel and mag-rail system to allow greater rates of sustained fire without overheating and failing. While previous versions of the weapon have been able to use the same magazines as the gauss rifle, it was found that this option was rarely used by the soldiers in the field, who instead wanted a higher ammunition capacity than the 200 round drums, or 40 round magazines. Accordingly, Kemmer-Lansing Gbmh has developed the G-SAW MkII mod B...called the "zipper" or "zipgun" by the troops who use it.

The 1000 rd belt box magazine allows the weapon to fire 50 rd bursts which give it the improved ability to engage up to 5 targets at a time with two chances to hit each for 4D6 damage per hit using the same ammunition and modifiers for armor and range as the

gauss rifle. The belt is actually a thin plastic strip with the needle rounds embedded within it. The battery inside the magazine powers the weapon and a geared drive motor in the receiver.

When the cap is stripped off the factory sealed magazine the end of the ammo belt pops out, ready to be engaged by the ammo feed drive. The drive pulls the belt through the receiver chamber where the rounds are accelerated down the barrel by the mag-rail system. If a round fails to disengage from the plastic belt then the drive merely continues to pull the belt out of the chamber to allow smooth feeding of the following rounds on the belt. This development of the chain drive ensures no jamming occurs in a properly maintained weapon. Failure of rounds is found to be less than 1% so no significant loss of firepower results.

If the weapon is used in an emplacement position, such as a bunker, or on a vehicle pintle mount it can be jacked into the local power source and larger capacity ammunition drums, called "Garrison Cans" and loaded with 5000 rounds, can be used to feed the weapon.

Warning: the use of these cans requires the use of an external power source to operate the weapon since these ammunition sources do not contain batteries. The manufacturer assumes no liability for malfunction of the weapon should this warning be disregarded.

Length: 1,000mm, Weight, Unloaded: 6,000 grams (1000 round drum: 2,500 grams). Base price: Cr9,000 (1000 round drum Cr800). Tech Level 12



pimpergun.doctornoob.com

Feedback

We'd like to hear what you think of Freelance Traveller, both the magazine and the website!

We want to know what you think of the basic idea of Freelance Traveller as a magazine, not just a website; what you think of the articles we publish, and how we can make our magazine better and how we can make our website better.

We want to know what kind of articles you want to see, and what you *don't* want to see.

We want to know what you think of our look, and how we can make it better.

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

You can send e-mail to us at feedback@freelancetraveller.com.

You can use the feedback form on our website, at

<http://www.freelancetraveller.com/infocenter/feedback/ftfbf.html>.

If you're a member of the SFRPG Forums, we monitor them, so you can post comments in the **General Discussion** section, at <http://www.sfrpg.org.uk/phpBB3/viewforum.php?f=45>. Please tag any commentary about Freelance Traveller with the string “[Freelance Traveller]”, or reply to our message announcing the issue.

If you're a member of the Citizens of the Imperium forums, we monitor them as well, so you can post comments in the **Lone Star** section, at <http://www.travellerrpg.com/CotI/Discuss/forumdisplay.php?f=13>. As with the SFRPG forums, please tag any commentary about Freelance Traveller with the string “[Freelance Traveller]”, or reply to our message announcing the issue.

Traveller on the Internet

Freelance Traveller sponsors a channel for Traveller fans on the Undernet IRC network, and RPGRealms sponsors one on the Otherworlders IRC network—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

IRC: The #Traveller and #LoneStar channels

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. It's generally quiet in both channels—but you can change that, and make both channels “jumping” places to hang out!

