

FREELANCE TRAVELLER

The Electronic Fan-Supported Traveller® Magazine and Resource



The Traveller game in all forms is owned by Far Future Enterprises. Copyright 1977 - 2009 Far Future Enterprises. Traveller is a registered trademark of Far Future Enterprises. Far Future permits web sites and fanzines for this game, provided it contains this notice, that Far Future is notified, and subject to a withdrawal of permission on 90 days notice. The contents of this site are for personal, non-commercial use only. Any use of Far Future Enterprises's copyrighted material or trademarks anywhere on this web site and its files should not be viewed as a challenge to those copyrights or trademarks. In addition, any program/articles/file on this site cannot be republished or distributed without the consent of the author who contributed it.

All articles in Freelance Traveller, whether in the magazine or on the web site, are copyright by their respective authors, and may not be reproduced elsewhere without the express permission of Freelance Traveller (which will generally be granted) *and* the author of the article. Freelance Traveller will not give out contact information for our authors without their specific permission on a case-by-case basis, but will where possible pass on requests for initial contact.

Contents

Freelance Traveller #005: May 2010

Editor

Jeff Zeitlin

Contributors

Jeff Zeitlin, Shannon Appelcline, Leslie Bates, Paul Elliot, Aaron Somerville, David Billinghamurst, Dave Redington, Dale C. McCoy, Jr.

Artwork

Cover: *NASA/JPL-Caltech/T. Pyle (SSC), Sade, Luca Oleastri, and Dale C. McCoy, Jr.*

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*

Multimedia Gallery: *David Billinghamurst and Dave Redington*

From the Editor

Jeff Zeitlin 1

Critics' Corner

Third Imperium—Sector Map Packs *reviewed by Jeff Zeitlin* 2

Essay Question

Jeff Zeitlin 7

Fifth Imperium

#9: Genre-ic Plot Seeds, Part Two *Shannon Appelcline* 3

Multimedia Gallery

Burrowwolf: A Traveller Graphic Novel (Chapter 1)
by David Billinghamurst and Dave Redington 12

Raconteurs' Rest

...From the Machine [Chapter One] *by Leslie Bates* 8

After Action Report (A narrative game session report) *by Aaron Somerville* 5

Doing It My Way

Travelling Light *by Paul Elliott* 10

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



A week before we released this issue of *Freelance Traveller*, we realized that we had no cover art. So, we posted a message on the TML and the forums we routinely monitor, calling an “impending panic” over it. The volume of artwork offered was astonishing, and we now have a backlog of several amazing covers—and much artwork that, while not quite suitable for covers, is nevertheless quite excellent, and will be appearing in the Multimedia Gallery. Thank you to everyone who contributed!

This issue represents another first for *Freelance Traveller*: David Billinghamurst and Dave Redington have agreed to allow their *Traveller* graphic novel, *The BurrowWolf*, to appear in installments in our magazine and on our website. We hope you'll enjoy their offering, and that you feel that it's a positive contribution to our magazine.

Speaking of backlogs, *Freelance Traveller* has a large backlog of *Traveller* products that “need” to be reviewed. There are several reasons that the editor

doesn't want to have more than one review over his byline in any issue, so we'd appreciate it if some of our readers would pick *Traveller* products—any version, any era, any setting, any publisher—and write reviews of them for us. We'd also be interested in contributions—of any type—to support the *Traveller* versions of *Babylon 5*, *Hammer's Slammers*, *Judge Dredd*, *Strontium Dog*, *Reign of Discordia*, and any other published *Traveller*-compatible settings out there.

A bit of a warning: Next month, I'm going to take a bit more space for the From the Editor column, and editorialize. I don't anticipate that anyone is going to actually be offended, but it *is* different from the normal fluff that appears here. I don't plan on making it a habit, unless you, the loyal readers, actually would prefer it. In any case, when I *do* editorialize, you are specifically invited to comment/respond; unless you tell us otherwise, your responses will, at the very least, appear on our website, and selected ones (the best-written, not based on agreement with the editor) printed in the magazine.

The Third Imperium: Sector Map Packs

reviewed by Jeff Zeitlin

The Third Imperium: The Spinward Marches Map Pack. Nick Robinson

The Third Imperium: The Trojan Reaches Map Pack. Various

The Third Imperium: The Gvurrdon Map Pack. Nick Robinson

Mongoose Publishing <http://www.mongoosepublishing.com>

each 1p, unbound poster (22"x25½")

UK£5.00/US\$9.99 each

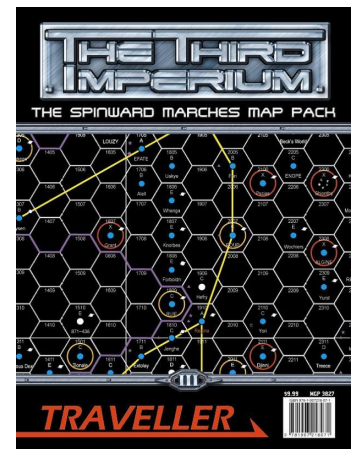
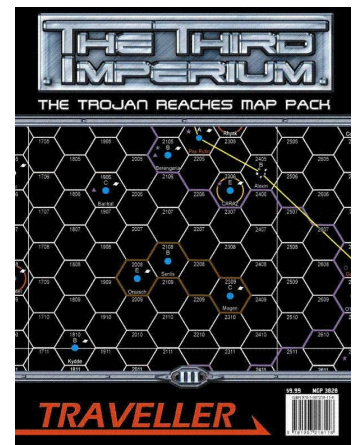
Mongoose Publishing has released three (so far) poster-sized maps of sectors that have been developed for their Third Imperium setting. The three maps are generally similar, and thus are all treated together in a single review.

On the Shelf

Maps of sectors are inherently setting specific, and these three maps are all for the "standard" Third Imperium setting. As such, they have the Third Imperium setting logo at the top, the Traveller line logo at the bottom, and a snapshot of part of the sector described in the item in the middle.

On Closer Inspection

It is perhaps misleading to call these map packs, as they each contain only a single map. That map is on slick paper, of a weight that suggests that they will be reasonably durable. The finish is highly glossy, with a black background. Each map has the sector name across the top. Text is generally readable, in white, with selected world names in red. The actual map extends across four-fifths of the unfolded sheet, with the remainder - along the right edge - set aside for the legend. Symbols (for bases and other installations) and border colors for the various polities on each map are color-coordinated, though some of the colors chosen are difficult to see against the black background. The maps generally follow long-established Traveller conventions for the meaning of symbols and the color of the world symbol, but provide little useful information without the associated sector data from other setting volumes.



There are minor errors; for example, several worlds in Subsector P of the Spinward Marches map have had their names omitted entirely.

The actual size of the map hexes is just a bit too small to allow the map to be a reasonable 'board' for a strategic-level wargame.

Conclusion

As standalone products, these are not really a worthwhile purchase; they should really be treated as add-ons to their respective setting books (The Spinward Marches, Alien Module 1: Aslan, and Alien Module 2: Vargr, in order), for which they are suited as astrology overviews. The utility, and to some extent the visual attractiveness, is marred by the choice of colors, the errors, and the size, but not to the point of an active disrecommendation of purchase.



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. This column originally appeared on the RPG.Net website in April 2010.

One way to come up with original adventures for your *Traveller* game is to set stories in other genres. In the first article in this series, I covered some of the more mysterious genres: mystery, noir, and espionage. This week I'm going to step from the unknown to the spooky, weird, shadowy, and truly scary, by looking at how the horror and conspiracy genres can be used in *Traveller*.

The Horror Genre

In many ways, the horror genre is just as wide as the science-fiction genre, because it involves those things that are scary, regardless of the specific setting. Of course, that means that horrific science-fiction is no more far-fetched than horrific fantasy (Ravenloft) or horrific espionage (*The X-Files*, *Fringe*).

I know that other writers (such as Stephen King and H.P. Lovecraft) have written far more about the particular elements of horror than I possibly could here. It should involve powerful and possibly unseen forces. They should be hard to stop and/or hard to understand. Most of all, they should play upon the terrors of the human species. That most traditionally has centered on death, but Lovecraft correctly pointed out that insanity could be a fear as well. Generally, helplessness, lack of control, and even just lack of information are some of the things that might let you scare your players.

Unfortunately, the enemy of all things horrific is information, and any far-future game filled with in-

terwebs, Xboat routes, satellite systems, and commdots is going to be full of information. Fortunately, *Traveller* gives you a very easy way to get around that: the slowness of interstellar communication. When you're investigating an alien planet or a derelict starship, you're truly on your own.

Most horror is monster-based. Alien species, whether they be sentient races or dumb animals, are most likely to fill the role of monsters in a *Traveller* game. If they're shape-shifters, carnivores, or creatures able to recover from seemingly mortal wounds, they'll be even more likely to scare—and they're all possibilities in a science-fiction game.

Psionics also offer a real opportunity for terror in a *Traveller* game, as you can drop players into dreamscapes composed of exactly what they fear most.

Finally, the trope of a deserted area can always be used to scare. The idea of a derelict starship has already been mentioned. Scientific outposts, research stations, and colonies all also offer the opportunity for strangely empty locales. After all, if there's supposed to be someone there, and there isn't, something must have happened to them.

Traveller References. The GDW Double Adventure that includes *Death Station* offers a good first look at the deserted-place horror motif. Beyond that, *Challenge* magazine often offered horror-themed adventures in its October issues. "Fated Voyage" in *Challenge* #46 is a neat ghost story, while "To Sleep, Perchance to Scream" in *Challenge* #54 is a less enthralling killer-monster adventure as is "Deadly Artifact" in *Challenge* #65.

Other References. There are plenty of scary SF/horror movies out there, including classics like *Alien* and *The Thing*. Most are, like those, of the alien-monster variety. The most famous writer of SF/horror is doubtless H.P. Lovecraft; though his Great Old Ones and Elder Gods are generally classified as straight horror, many of them are actually pretty good SF, especially for the time period.

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

The Conspiracy Genre

Is conspiracy really a genre? Certainly, I could argue that it's largely the foundation of other genres—the backstory of why your mystery, espionage, horror, or even science-fiction events are happening. However, I think that Umberto Eco proved that conspiracy could stand on its own in *Foucault's Pendulum*.

So, what makes up a conspiracy story? I think it requires secrets within secrets, peeling back like the layers of an onion. In *Traveller* you'd need to envision something that really undercut our normal understanding of the Traveller universe. Perhaps a conspiracy ensured that both the Rule of Man and the Third Imperium stayed under the control of its Vilani founders, despite the appearance of Solomani control. In the Spinward Marches, perhaps some force has controlled which areas of the sector have been colonized and which haven't. Within a subsector, perhaps a single power (be it a megacorp, an immortal individual, or an alien race) controls what appear to be several individual worlds. To really make a story fit into the conspiracy genre, include typical elements like secret societies, shadowy cabals, hidden planets, undiscovered alien races, suppressed technology, and ancient secrets to your game.

Something to keep in mind is that conspiracy can be tough. In a mystery you have to lay out an adventure-long set of clues that lead players to a satisfying conclusion, while in a conspiracy you might have to do so over the course of an entire campaign! Part of the joy of the conspiracy genre, after all, comes from slowly unveiling what was hidden.

Traveller References. There are probably fewer examples of conspiracy-genre *Traveller* games than any of the other genres I've talked about in this series thus far.

The Secret of the Ancients could have formed the basis of a conspiracy, if anyone had actually known about it. Perhaps building it more deeply into your own *Traveller* universe—creating a universe where people know and hide the secret and serve certain higher powers—might produce a campaign arc that's ultimately more satisfying than the original adventure was. (I also hear tell that Mongoose is work on a new “Secret of the Ancients” campaign, which might provide fodder for a totally different conspiracy.)

The Argon Gambit, also published in *Traveller Double Adventure 3* is another classic-era conspiracy. Burglary and blackmail lead to political intrigue. It's a nice bit of conspiracy with a basis in the Solomani side of *Traveller* space.

I tried to introduce a bit of conspiracy into my own campaign with the adventure sequence that ended with “New Humaniti”, but haven't done much with the conspiracy elements since then.

Other References. The aforementioned *Foucault's Pendulum* is pretty much the touchstone for the genre. If you want to look at other RPGs, *Nephilim* showed how to create conspiracy in a modern day or historical game (and also had awesome lists of references). In the SF genre, conspiracy stories are a bit more scarce, but would surely involve ancient, purposefully hidden secrets. Anyone have any suggestions for reading?

Conclusion

In these last two articles, I've covered the top five genres that you might want to blend with science fiction—and offered numerous ideas for plot seeds to go with them. I've still got a few more articles planned in this series, on some more unlikely genres and on the components of the science-fiction genre itself, but before I get to those, I plan to take a break, and cover a different topic, first. I'll see you in a month.

After Action Report

By Aaron Somerville

I thought I'd share an AAR from a one-shot I ran last night; it is the second one-shot I have run for gaming friends using CT. Like the first, it was set in my homebrew setting called the Terran Combine. I ran it using only the 3 LBBs plus deckplans from Traders & Gunboats.

The Terran Combine is an interstellar polity comprised of nearly 3 dozen systems in a Jump main centered around Terra. The present year is 2268; the Combine was established in 2243 as the result of a long and bitter civil war that saw the end of the Solar Republic by military uprising. Many had become increasingly appalled at the actions of the libertine Republic, and the entire confederacy of human worlds became inflamed in a war that started as cultural and ended as total. The subsequent political creation, the Terran Combine, is administered by a combined civil and military council and the single allowed political entity, the Combine Party, dominates civil life. It is broadly syndicalist and traditionalist in character.

There is extra-terrestrial life, but nothing more advanced than a terrestrial tiger or wolf.

This adventure concerned a group of adventurers with their own Scout vessel, the CAV *Juan Fernandez*, a ship retired from active service and placed on permanent reserve (inactive) with her captain, a retired member of the Combine Scout Service. The group had been contacted by an aging ex-Navy man who had been a comm operator on the CSS *Robert Maynard*, an *Ernest E. Evans*-class corvette, during the Civil War. A commerce raider, *Robert Maynard* was tasked with running down a Loyalist smuggler, the SRS *Mustang*, which had (you may have heard this one) made off with some supplies of pharmaceuticals and most importantly, an unassembled Auto-doc field surgical unit.

Robert Maynard overtook *Mustang* near the asteroid belt in the Europa system and crippled her engines. When the crew abandoned ship, *Robert Maynard* vaporized her skiff (oops! little war crime there). However, the "Sollies" had begun a push

elsewhere in the system, so *Robert Maynard* was called away. She never returned to that spot.

After he retired, the comm operator, one Ian "Wilkie" Wilkinson, checked with a buddy in Naval Administration and found no salvage record for SRS *Mustang*! Reasoning that she might still be adrift in the rather docile Europa Belt, he began saving up to hire an expedition (but there's a twist...). Enter the player characters.

The action began as the little scout precipitated from Jump Space (I use Mass Precipitation for Jump physics) into the Europa system. On board were Wilkie (sacked out in the rec room), and our intrepid crew of pregenerated characters:

"Captain" Niles Kelley - retired Scout and Party member, awarded Combine Party knife for distinguished service, discovered animal life on KA743 IV, skipper of CAV *Juan Fernandez*.

"Tallon" - a very intellectually gifted woman, but with a hard luck life. Served as a 2nd officer on a tramp freighter and picked up a variety of skills.

Terry Bessimer - an ex-Navy lieutenant who found himself in enormous gambling debt. He left his old life, assumed a new identity and is now laying low, hoping for a big score to get him out of trouble. A gifted engineer.

Russ Fraser, CMC - Oorah! A former Marine. Also, a minor celebrity. After distinguishing himself in anti-Piracy activity at the Nevsky Belt, was selected for the Marine Color Battalion wherein he fenced competitively representing the Corps. Notable attributes: Strength C and Cutlass-4!

Upon precipitating into the Europa system, the group was contacted by Naval Traffic Control, CSS *Budapest* (a *Moscow*-class Destroyer). It seems that there was actually quite a bit of Naval activity in this system, contrary to Wilkie's prediction. They were ordered to rendezvous with the CSS *John Paul Jones* (*Ernest E. Evans*-class corvette) for a routine customs inspection since they were an unregistered entry into the system. Many hours later, they were met by a ship's boat from *John Paul Jones* carrying the hulking Sgt. Makarios Ngumbane and his Marine squad, as well as the diminutive but fiery Lt. Pedro

(Continued on page 6)

Raconteurs' Rest

(Continued from page 5)

Caballero y Barkmann, Naval Customs Inspector. However, since the group hadn't done anything yet, there was no cause to detain them. Lt. Caballero y Barkmann was quite unamused at the fact that they entered the system without any cargo to sell, and expressed his suspicions.

In order to allay these suspicions, the group decided to proceed to the main world of the Europa system in order to at least look like they were there on legitimate business. They found Europa III to be a bureaucratic nightmare, not to mention overly bright from the glaring white sun, and excessively dusty. The local cuisine of salty tubers and pungent vodka did little to endear them to the impoverished planet. Appropriate reference to the film "Brazil" was made.

Eventually they made their way to the Europa Belt, and Wilkie guided them based on notable asteroids (he was loathe to tell too much information ahead of time) to the wreck of the *Mustang*. It was still there in the stillness of vacuum, somewhat the worse for wear. A 200-ton trader, the whole forward section including the bridge was smashed by a collision. The hull was open to vacuum and there appeared to be engine damage. They took up station two clicks out and flew over aboard their skiff (Tallon was the skiff pilot and consistently made high rolls). Wilkie had initially planned on skipping EVA and remaining aboard *Juan Fernandez*, but no one would back his play.

Wilkie in tow, they boarded SRS *Mustang*. Engineer Bessimer decided to begin dismantling the port laser turret for spare weapons. The rest began checking out the cargo hold. Most of the pharma was damaged but the Autodoc was in good shape, still in the original packing materials. They began checking out the engines to see what shape they were in. Maneuver and Jump were gone but the Power Plant was still good.

While on EVA removing laser barrels, Bessimer happened to notice the telltale flare of a maneuver drive in the rock field several clicks away. He correctly surmised it to be an ambush! It was asked by Tallon at this point "Wilkie, how many people did

you tell about this?" At which point Wilkie revealed, in his trademark outrageous British accent, that he did shop around the contract a bit (in actual fact, this rival crew had gotten much more information out of Wilkie than the PCs; they had learned of the probable location, and decided not only to get the salvage but to score a "two-fer" by overthrowing whoever Wilkie actually ended up bringing to the site).

They sprung into action admirably. Tallon began to reassemble the port laser turret. Kelley and Bessimer began trying to bring the Power Plant online. This would take Engineering, Electronics and Mechanical tasks. At least 2 elevens were rolled, and the third roll was high. Power was restored in half the time I had estimated. As the unknown vessel, evidently a 100-ton mining Seeker, came to a stop and launched a miner's buggy, the group managed to restore the fire control computers.

Manning the guns, the long-silent *Mustang* opened fire on the miner's buggy, but all shots went wide. The mining Seeker, *Fortunate Son*, opened fire on *Mustang* but the wild maneuvers of her own mining buggy spoiled the aim.

The buggy ducked to the forward plane, essentially out of arc of the motionless *Mustang*. It closed to board. *Mustang's* batteries opened up again, and crippled *Fortunate Son* by taking out her Maneuver and Jump drives. *Fortunate Son* did not return fire, hoping that the boarding party would take the ship. Also, pirate captain Jack "the Ripper" Gammon was unwilling to continue exchanging fire in what was clearly a losing proposition.

The buggy sped up to the opened forward hull section to disgorge its boarding party. Russ Fraser had positioned himself near there at a key point, his service revolver in one hand and his fancy Marine commemorative cutlass in the other. The side doors of the buggy were flung open, and the boarding party emerged with a leap: "Snake", with a shotgun; "Curly" with a cutlass; and "Cutter" with his trademark blade.

Russ discharged his magnum, hitting Snake in the chest and sending him floating off course with a

(Continued on page 7)

Raconteurs' Rest

(Continued from page 6)

cloud of blood. Russ simply let go of the pistol and it floated backwards; he readied his cutlass as his foes were upon him in a flash. I ruled that he would have to split his defensive malus against the attackers as there were two of them; however, that was still plenty. Russ blocked an overhead stroke and then came down and deflected a low blade thrust with his pommel. His backswing took Curly across the chest, discharging a cloud of gore from his ruined suit. Cutter thrust in but Russ dodged deftly; Lt. Fraser's response was a cutlass to the neck, right below the joint of the faceplate (newbies go for the faceplate, but Russ knew better as it is well-armored). The resulting spray of blood filled Cutter's helmet and ended the fool.

Meanwhile, not knowing how the combat would turn out, Bessimer chose to overload SRS *Mustang's* power plant. As it turned out, this was not particularly necessary. The group decided to send a text communication back to *Fortunate Son* from the buggy. Fraser's initial communication was not especially convincing, but Jack Gammon thought that it was the blockheaded Curly Trejo at the comm, so bought the explanation that Snake, the nominal leader of the away team, was injured.

Bessimer and Tallon decided to push the Autodoc crates out the open hull into space, and then abandon ship in the skiff and collect the crates later. Meanwhile, Captain Kelley and Russ Fraser flew the mining buggy (the bubble tint turned all the way to

max reflectivity) over to the *Fortunate Son*. They landed inside, but Jack Gammon was suspicious. Failing to allay his suspicions, Russ had to open the buggy's hatch with a suspicious pirate at the ready. Fortunately for Russ, the fire from Gammon's autopistol went wide, ricocheting off the interior roof of the buggy. Russ returned fire with the shotgun he had liberated from Snake, and did not miss. Jack "the Ripper" Gammon's mesh armor was inadequate to preserve him from a close range blast of the 18mm shell, and he fell back upon the bulkhead before expiring, leaving a bloody streak. No medical attention was attempted.

The group was quite alarmed when they realized that the Combine Navy was closing in on their position, and even though the closest corvette was nearly 2.5 hours out, there was little prospect of outrunning the Navy. As they began to panic, Captain Kelley's level head prevailed. Taking stock of their actions to this point, he realized that as long as they were not in possession of the Autodoc, they really hadn't committed any serious crime.

In the end, the Navy awarded them a salvage fee for *Fortunate Son* (but not for *Mustang*, which was now a burned out shell from the Power Plant overload... which they deceptively explained as being due to fire from the pirate ship) and bounties for the four miscreants they killed. Issued a stern warning against future shenanigans, they were eventually let go somewhat richer for the exchange. They stopped and picked up the still undiscovered Autodoc on their way out of the system. Mission accomplished!

Essay Question

Essay Question is designed to allow our readers to share their experiences and ideas in playing or refereeing *Traveller*, or in designing things to be used in campaigns. Each issue, we'll print one or more questions, either submitted by one of our readers, or invented by the Editor. Readers are invited to send their answers (and their questions for future issues) to us at questions@freelancetraveller.com; we'll print a selection of the answers received in each issue.

There were no responses to last month's questions, so we're letting them stand as this month's questions as well:

How do you, as a referee, encourage your players to play "in character"?

What, in your opinion, makes an alien race "interesting"? (*"Alien race" may include humans other than "mainstream Imperial".*)

...From The Machine

By Leslie Bates

Chapter One

IMS CHAUCHAT, En Route To Jupiter

Eneri Ochoa, port side laser gunner and communications geek, was monitoring visual and voice broadcasts from Terra when noticed something. He immediately brought it to the attention of the captain and his niece.

“Boss,” he said, “I just saw something weird.”

As if the present situation wasn't weird enough.

“What is it?” said Dennis.

Eneri replied, “I caught part of an analog television signal from a North American commercial station; it's part of a classic flat movie, but it doesn't match the original version we have from the C-JAMMER archive.”

Eneri played the video file. It was the scene in the fourth episode of the *Star Wars* series where Darth Vader confronts Obi-Wan Kenobi aboard the Death Star. The familiar voice of James Earl Jones spoke the classic lines as both Eneri and Dennis remembered them.

What stuck out like an exploding star was that the actor playing the role of Kenobi was not Sir Alec Guinness.

“Well, Vader...” said Obi-Wan, with a clearly mid-west American accent, “you're only a master of evil.”

“That not the right actor!” said Eneri. “Who is that?”

Dennis, being a Terran history geek, recognized the actor immediately. “That's Ronald Reagan,” he said. “He was the President of the United States at this time. And he should have retired from acting at least a decade before this movie was made.”

It was at this point that Ditzie spoke up.

“It means that we're not in the past of our own time line,” she said. “We're in someone else's past. What we do here won't affect our history in any way.”

“So its possible that we can go home?” Dennis asked.

“Yes,” Ditzie replied.

Dennis looked at her.

“I'm on it!” she said as she turned around and departed to her private space on board.

West of Moscow, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

The Chairman adjusted his fur hat and cinched in his overcoat against the deep chill of a cloudless and moonless Mid-September night. It was truly a rare occasion when The Chairman could go out for a quiet walk by himself. Of course there was always a bodyguard, who in this instance shadowed his charge from a discreet distance. One was never truly alone in the Soviet Union. Especially at the top.

The Chairman followed a path through the small pine forest, planted by captive German soldiers after the Second World War, almost by memory. The only source of light being the sea of stars beyond the tops of the trees.

He came to a small clearing. There he found a fellow member of the Politburo, identically dressed, with his face raised to the sky.

The Chairman spoke: “You should not be out walking alone in the woods on a night like this, Yuri Alekseyevich.”

“Absolutely correct, Mikhail Sergeyeovich,” the other man replied, “I should be walking on Mars.”

Even if Yuri Gagarin had not been taken off cosmonaut flight status as a result of injuries from an attack by the aliens seventeen years ago, a walk on the Martian surface was still out of the question. A manned expedition from the Earth, coasting along on a transfer orbit, would be absolutely defenseless against the aliens who marauded the Solar System.

With space denied to him, Gagarin embarked on the only other path of advancement for an ambitious man in the Soviet system: the path of politics.

Gagarin officially sat on the Politburo as a minister without portfolio. In fact, he was the Soviet representative on the secret world council that conducted the war against the aliens. And he wasn't happy about the present conduct of that war.

And when Gagarin had a bout of frustration he

(Continued on page 9)

Raconteurs' Rest

(Continued from page 8)

would go out at night meditate under the ocean of stars.

"It's Straker again, isn't it?" said Chairman Gorbachev.

"Yes," Gagarin replied.

"He still won't listen?"

Gagarin was silent for a moment, and then he replied, "Straker is effective at defending the Earth with the available tools. But he still doesn't understand that a war cannot be won solely on defense. We have to locate the alien base in the Solar System and take it or destroy it. He won't take the first step to do that."

"Is that even possible?" asked Gorbachev. "Overwhelm the aliens in their own home base?"

"We have to," said Gagarin, "therefore we will. Like our fathers' generation had to overwhelm the Fascists."

Gorbachev nodded. Both men had the unpleasant experience of being boys in the German occupied zone of Russia during the war. They were fully aware of the price paid by the older generation, in blood, to destroy the German Reich.

"So Straker must be replaced?"

Gagarin nodded in affirmation.

"He has powerful friends in the American *no-menklatura*," he said. "Especially his patron."

Gorbachev could only nod in agreement.

Boston, United States of America

In his sixty-eighth year the former president John Fitzgerald Kennedy still thought of himself as a vigorous man. He was in the process of proving this to his latest mistress when the telephone rang in her apartment.

"Oh Bloody 'ell!" the young and nicely filled out blonde squeaked in a British accent. "It's probably me Mum!"

Kennedy could only grumble as the young woman shot out of bed and charged into the living room to answer the phone.

"Family always comes first," he said.

The woman who presently called herself Nell Roche grabbed the receiver and spoke.

"Hello?"

The voice emanating from the other end the line was not her mother.

"We need to talk," said a male voice in the accent of the Highfolk. "At the usual place."

"Right," she replied.

One of the things the Highfolk had not brought to the Solar System was tradecraft, the body of knowledge of the conduct of espionage. It was one of the things that the Highfolk had to acquire from their Terrestrial victims.

Nell silently cursed.

It was a clear violation of tradecraft to call an agent at her home while she was "working" the subject. That was bad enough.

But as Nell personally studied the history and craft of espionage it became very readily clear that Mata Hari, whose tactics she attempting to emulate, was not an effective operative, but was more of a scapegoat for the gross incompetence of the French High Command. Had the head of the infiltration group understood this she would never had to put on weight in order to be attractive to the bloated idiot presently occupying her bed.

Nell looked at herself in a mirror.

She thought of herself as being too fat. But perhaps her idea of what constituted a right weight and appearance was influenced by the effects of the meager rations she was fed while growing up in the habitat.

Nell steeled herself to go back to work.

Alien Strike Force, En Route To Jupiter

The Commander of the strike force had to wonder, before he was slammed by the extreme acceleration of the landing craft, if their prey was in fact the ancient enemy who drove them from their home system.

Could it be someone else?

It was another long trip, and having to breathe through fluorocarbon fluid wasn't going to help him think at all.

Travelling Light

by Paul Elliott

“Specific throws for specific situations must be generated. Obviously, some throws will be harder than others, and many will be impossible without an accumulation of DMs based on expertise, education, dexterity, intelligence and the availability of parts and tools.”
- *Classic Traveller, Book One*

The task resolution in *Classic Traveller* has always had its critics; unfocussed, dependent on referee judgement, and fairly arbitrary from one task to the next. But it is also a useful tool. Referee judgement is used to come up with a task number, a suitable skill, one or more characteristics that may impinge on the task, plus any other Die Modifiers (DMs) that might affect the outcome. I liked this free and easy approach. Attempts have been made over the years to create a single unified task system for *Classic Traveller*, and the most famous and most well liked was the Digest Group's UTS 8+ mechanic. I didn't like it. It was lifeless and boring and reduced characteristics down to fifths ... not really in the spirit of *Classic Traveller*.

The method I outline below I grandly call the Formalised Book One Task Resolution, and it changes *Classic Traveller* (CT) as little as possible but puts a little bit (and I mean a little bit) of structure onto the resolution mechanics already outlined in Book One's skill descriptions.

My aim isn't to create a realistic fix for *Traveller*, but one that changes as little as possible, and that provides some identifiable structure for referees to work with. My guiding principle was to have a skilled individual always outperform an unskilled individual, however 'talented' (ie. Dexterous or Intelligent) he is.

Referee Decision Making

As with most CT task checks, the player will be rolling 2D and must try to equal or exceed a target number created by the referee. The referee decides on the difficulty of the task on a scale from 2 to 15; 3 is easy, 7 is moderate (avoiding red tape, for example), 9 difficult (perhaps landing a spacecraft in bad

weather), 13 formidable, and 15 virtually impossible. He must also decide on a skill or skills that will prove relevant, as well as one characteristic that might help the player character in his task attempt.

Adding the DMs Up

Next the player rolls the 2D and adds the value of the relevant skill. He also gains a bonus of +1 if his relevant characteristic equals or exceeds the task difficulty. In fact, if his characteristic is *double* the difficulty, then he gains a DM of +2 instead! When the DMs are added up, a result equal to or exceeding the referee's difficulty number is a success—just like in Book One.

Unskilled Penalties

Many of the skill descriptions in Book One give hefty penalties for attempting a task while untrained (i.e. with no relevant skill levels). How does the FBOTR handle this aspect? Default skills are those skills that the characters are assumed to be familiar with if not fully trained, skills like Vacc Suit, weapon skills, ground car, etc. As in Book One, default skill gives a DM of 0. Carry on ...

For other skills the referee must decide on their value (how rare or specialized they are). Is that skill you've requested fairly common, or is it rare? Examples of the first might be Steward, Electronics, or ATV (skills quite familiar to most characters through everyday experiences). Examples of the second include Engineering, Pilot, Forward Observer, Streetwise, Leadership, and so on (specialized skills requiring specific education or experiences to understand and attempt).

Apply a DM of -2 for lack of a common skill

Apply a DM of -4 for lack of a specialised skill

Using Two Skills in Combination

Some tasks call for skill in two different areas. Turning a missile into a drone might require both Gunnery *and* Electronics. If the referee calls for two skills that must both be possessed, then he must also double the difficulty he just set and allow the main skill to add a DM of +2 to per skill level, and the sec-

(Continued on page 11)

Doing It My Way

(Continued from page 10)

ondary skill to add the usual +1 per skill level. If the character lacks just one of the two required skills then assume to be at a default level for this task (receiving no untrained penalty). If you lack both required skills then you receive only one untrained penalty (whichever is the harshest). For example, if Pilot and Vacc Suit are required, you'd get a -4 penalty for having neither skill, not the full -6.

Example One

Lazlo (no Vacc Suit training, DEX 7) and Peterson (Vacc Suit-3, DEX 3) are trying to climb a rocky slope without damaging their suits. The referee sets the difficulty at 6 (moderate). Lazlo's DEX is higher than 6 and he receives a +1 DM, as well as a -2 DM for lack of any skill (even default). He rolls 2D-1 for a target of 6 or more. Peterson's DEX is lower than 6 so he receives no DM, but he does gain a DM of +3 for his skill. There is no penalty for being unskilled. He rolls 2D+3 for a target of 6 or more.

This example illustrates that although Peterson has a DEX of 3, it is his Vacc Suit training which counts. If I remember correctly, *Marc Miller's Traveller* (also known as T4) added the characteristic value (averaging 7) to the skill which skewed the odds in favour of the higher characteristic by a very noticeable margin. Classic *Traveller* was always a skills game and in my mind should stay that way.

Example Two

Major Teller (Computer-2, Electronics-1, INT 8) is trying to program software to give itself a catastrophic virus in 36 hours. The referee sets the difficulty at 8. Teller's INT is at 8 and so he receives a DM of +1 as well as a +2 DM for his skill. There is no penalty for being unskilled. He rolls 2D+3 for a target of 8 or more. Next, he needs to use both of his skills. Teller wants to fix a retina print ID lock. The referee assigns it a difficulty of 7 and requires Computer as the primary skill and Electronics as the secondary. Because two skills are *required*, the referee doubles the difficulty to 14 or more. Teller gains a DM of +1 for his INT (we compare that to the original difficulty value), +4 for his Computer skill and +1 for his Elec-

tronics. He rolls 2D+6 for a target of 14 or more.

And as far as the task resolution is concerned, that's it. Short and sweet. All I've really done is created an established and invisible system for incorporating personal characteristics. I think it works quite well.

Broad Skills, Basic Chargen

In the same manner I've tried to correct a similar 'perceived error' in the character creation process. The Classic *Traveller* Book One rules allow character generation using one of six different career paths and a handful of skills. Later books (specifically Book 4, 5, 6 and 7) enlarge on these careers with greater detail and a much more realistic spread of skills. Using the Book One rules, for example, it was impossible to create an Army veteran with any knowledge of weaponry bigger than an automatic rifle. Book 4 and its cousins provided all of these missing skills, but character creation using the extended systems typically took an hour or two. Since one of the beautiful things about Classic *Traveller* is that characters can be created incredibly quickly, players have to make a choice: fast but unrealistically skilled (Scouts without Survival training, or Merchants without Trader skill) or the prolonged, year by year determination of a suitably skilled character.

Thinking long and hard about this, I noticed that the four essential skill tables listed with each career in the basic chargen system is in some shape or form duplicated in its extended system. And these other tables include all of the new and useful skills. I suggest a simple transposition of these key extended skill tables into the basic character generation system. It's as simple as that. Authenticity is retained, because we're utilising 'canonical' resources, only shifted to another area of the game. This is the kind of approach I'm trying to push here.

In the plethora of tables and lists, which are these? For anyone wanting to try this, here are the tables:

Personal Development Table - Use the Army Life, Marine Life, Merchant Life, Navy Life or Scout

(Continued on page 12)

Doing It My Way

(Continued from page 11)

Life as appropriate.

Service Skills Table - Use a chosen (by the player) Office, Department, Branch or Arm Table as appropriate. An Army character might select Artillery, for example, and thus roll on the Artillery table instead of the Service Table thereafter.

Advanced Education - Use the NCO, Petty Officer, Field, Shipboard Life or Officer skill table as appropriate.

Advanced Education (EDU 8+) - Select the Command or Staff table as desired from term to term, the Admin Rank table for Scouts, or the Master's Skills for a Merchant.

Special assignments (Commando School, At-tache, etc.) play a part in the acquisition of suitable skills and I would allow a single die roll at each re-enlistment, with a result of 6 indicating a special as-

signment at some point in the last four years. To ensure a fairly even number of skills per character I recommend that a special assignment only give the character one extra skill point (perhaps chosen from those offered, or the first one in the list). The referee might allow the other skills listed for a special assignment to be picked up as 'default' (level-0) skills.

Of course there are an endless number of tweaks you could carry out on this system, but it should stand up quite well. One thing that does need attention is the use of enlisted ranks as DMs on the extended system skill tables, particularly because the basic Book One system has no enlisted ranks. One solution is to assume promotion of two enlisted ranks in every four year term. A 22 year old Marine will probably be a Private or Lance Corporal (E1 or E2), a 26 year old Marine will be a Corporal or Lance Sergeant (E3 or E4), and so on.

Happy Travelling!

Multimedia Gallery

The BurrowWolf:

A Traveller Graphic Novel

With this issue of Freelance Traveller, we start the presentation of *The BurrowWolf: A Traveller Graphic Novel*, created by David Billingham and Dave Redington. Our current plan is to post a chapter in alternate months. As usual, we will post the portion that appears in the magazine on our website the

The BurrowWolf: A Traveller Graphic Novel

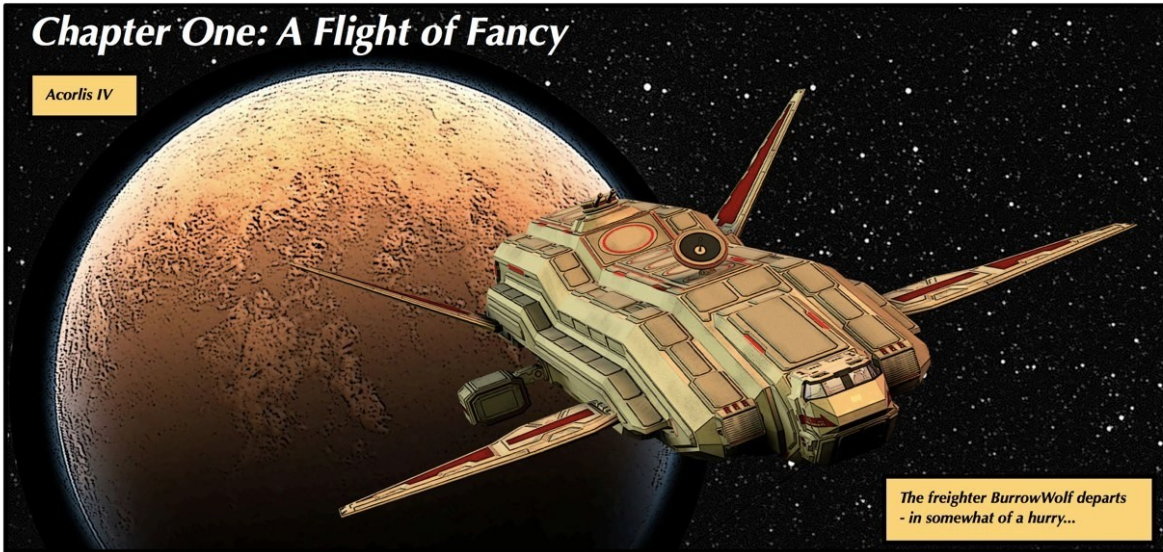
following month. You can also see it in a much more elegant presentation at Dave Redington's website, http://web.me.com/dredington/Traveller_Art/BurrowWolf/BurrowWolf.html. That site also contains chapters not yet released to Freelance Traveller, and some background information and images (like the one below) that are not part of the graphic novel. The actual graphic novel starts on the next page. We hope you enjoy it.





Chapter One: A Flight of Fancy

Acorlis IV

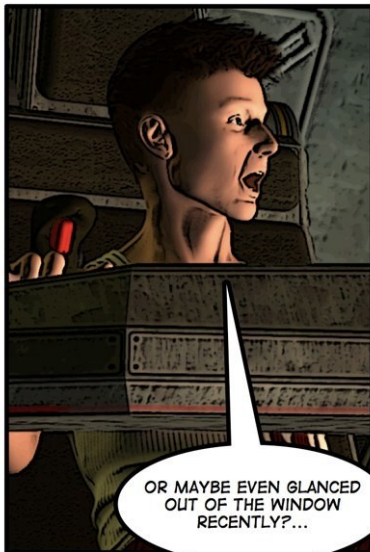


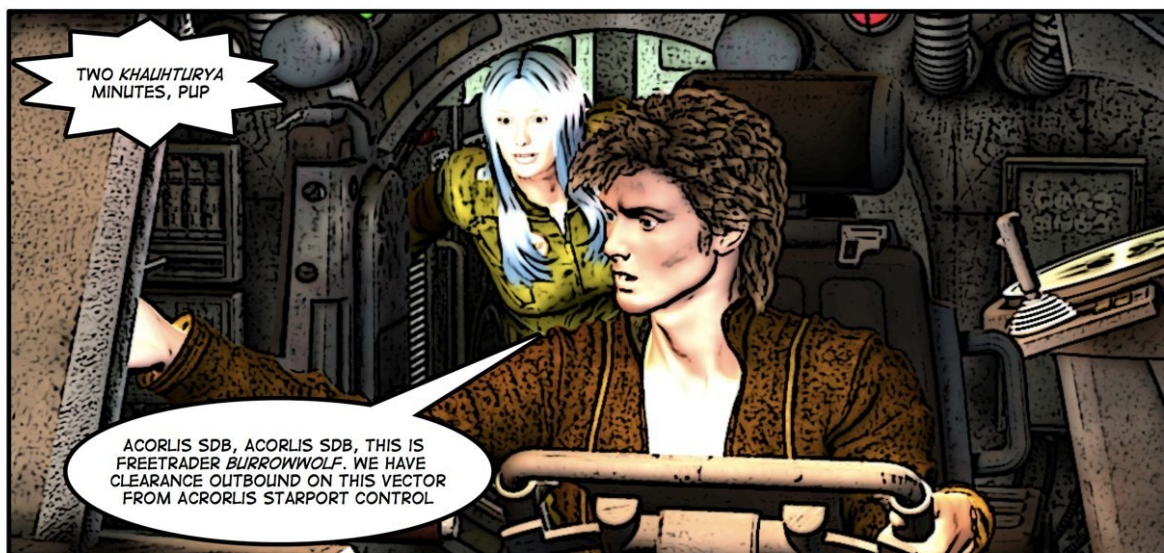
The freighter BurrowWolf departs - in somewhat of a hurry...



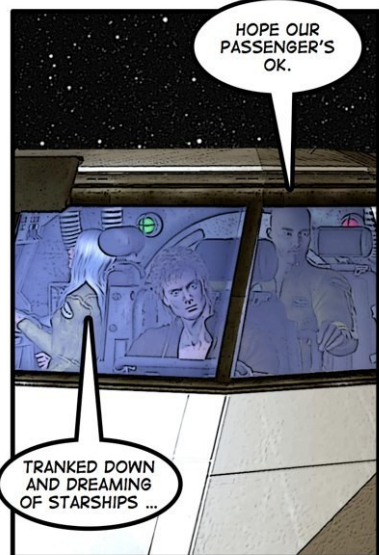
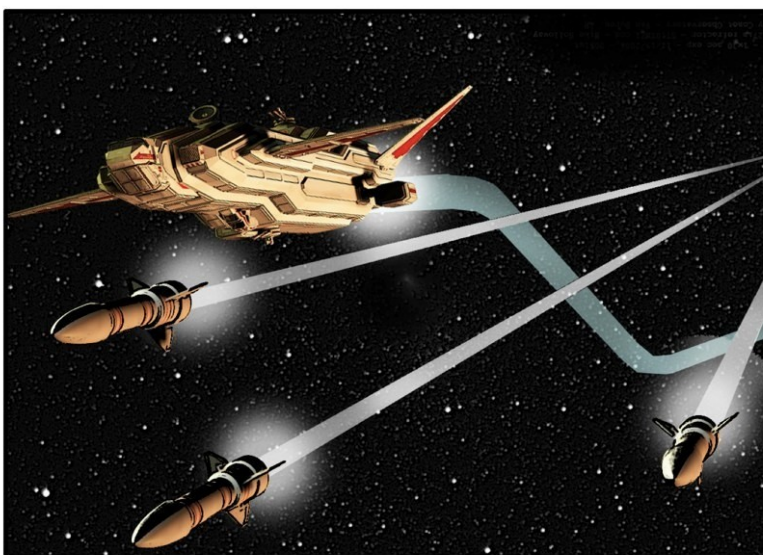
The Bridge

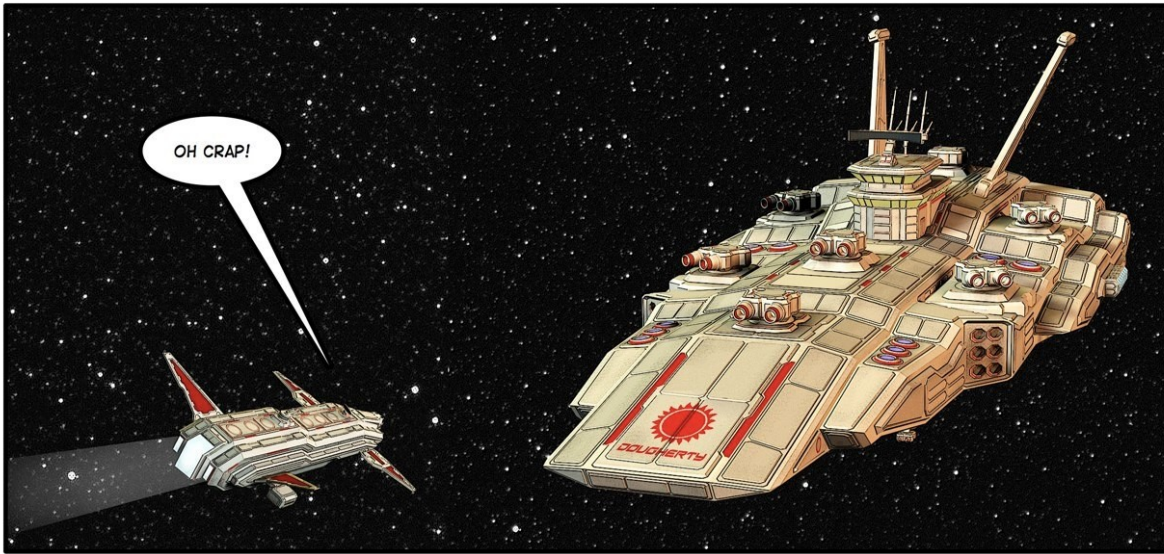


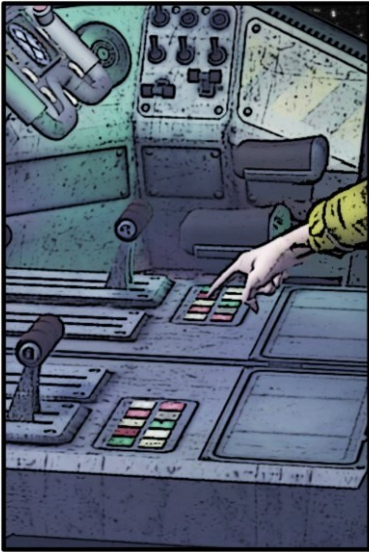




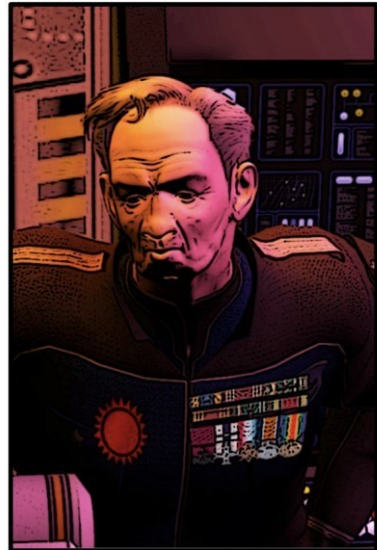








And the BurrowWolf accelerates into Jump Space



Continued in July issue...

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 **Traveller Fanzines** section, at <http://www.sfrpg.org.uk/phpBB3/viewforum.php?f=36>. 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!

