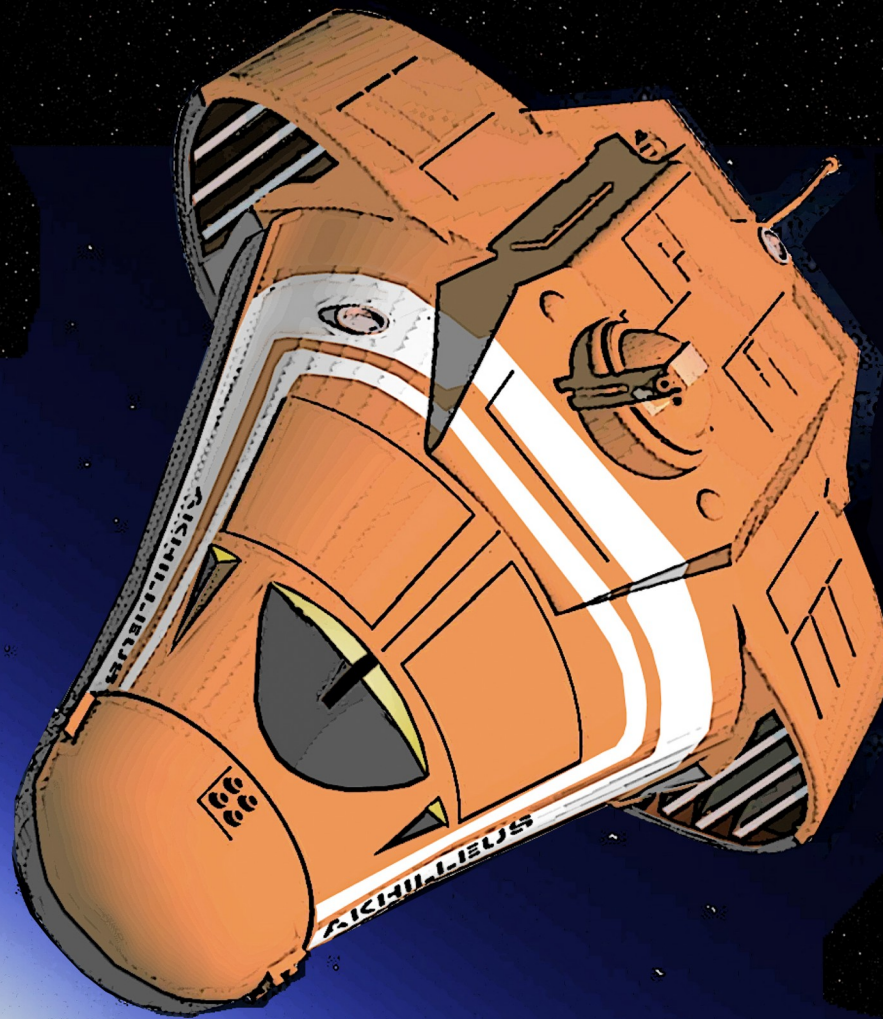


FREELANCE TRAVELLER

The Electronic Fan-Supported Traveller® Magazine and Resource



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Contents

Freelance Traveller #006: June 2010

Editor

Jeff Zeitlin

Contributors

Jeff Zeitlin, Tim Bancroft, “kafka”, William Wilson, Ken Pick, Jeffrey Schwartz, “MAG”

Artwork

Cover: *Dave Redington*

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: *Sceptune Games, from their web site*

Multimedia Gallery: “MAG”

From the Editor

Jeff Zeitlin 1

Critics' Corner

Hyperlite: The Sirius Treaty *overview by Tim Bancroft* 3

Essay Question

Jeff Zeitlin 6

Up Close and Personal

Jayson McPhearson *profiled by William Wilson* 8

Kurishdam

Lecture Hall and Library

Jump Destination: Zandisill (Glavion Cluster 05) *reconstructed by Ken Pick* 10

Doing It My Way

Second Life Traveller *by Jeffrey Schwartz* 13

Multimedia Gallery

Urliganar Grav Tank *by “MAG”* 9, 14-16

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



Last month, I said I'd be editorializing this month, but I didn't say on what topic. Upon thinking about it a bit more, I realized that I needed to address two topics that – at least for the pencil-and-paper RPG industry – seem to be related: Digital Rights Management (DRM), and Pricing Strategies.

Most people who purchase e-books, music, or software today are familiar at least in passing with DRM, and it's likely that anyone that has a long history with computers recognizes it as the latest incarnation of what was originally called “copy protection”. Today, DRM runs the spectrum from merely providing traceability right up through severe limitations on use.

Companies that insist on applying DRM to their products are, consciously or unconsciously, making two assumptions. There is data, much of which is probably classifiable as anecdotal, which call those assumptions into question, but a full treatment is beyond my scope this month. I'll just list the assumptions, and let you, the reader, decide if you want to re-

search them. I will say here that I am opposed to DRM, but that there is one model that I find relatively inoffensive.

First, there is the assumption that *every copy of a product used but not paid for is a lost sale*. In other words, if you're stealing the product, you would have purchased it if it were impossible to steal.

The first assumption leads relatively directly to the assumption that *every purchaser is a would-be criminal*.

I view DRM – even in its least-offensive form – as bad customer relations, because of those assumptions. When deciding whether to make a purchase, the existence and type of DRM is a negative factor to be weighed in the decision, because I find the assumptions behind DRM to be offensive.

Enough on the emotional arguments against DRM; let's look at some of the concrete effects of some DRM models. I'll note in passing that the DRM model that I find least offensive is that of merely “fingerprinting”

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

or “watermarking” the purchased copy of the product, so that the source of an illicit copy can at least in theory be identified, and action taken against that source. This model doesn’t really impair the utility of the product, which is exactly why it is the least offensive model.

Other models, however, impose restrictions on use. I’ve encountered or heard about the following:

Restriction to specific physical media. The product is delivered on a CD or USB “key”, with specific software for access included. The media is written in such a way that the software can detect that it is original media, and attempting to copy the product and reading software – even if there are no errors reported in doing so – will result in an unusable copy of the product (though the original will remain usable).

Registration of reading device or software. The product is keyed to (and may only be read on) a particular reading device or software, or a particular set of devices or copies of a program. The key/verification data may be stored locally, or on centralized servers.

Restriction to Distributor’s Servers for actual access to the product. The distributor never actually delivers a copy of the product; instead, the reader is expected to connect to the distributor’s servers via the internet, and authenticates for access to the user’s library.

Limitation on Number of Times the Product May Be Downloaded. This is usually coupled with the registration model.

All of the above models have their worst problems when the user has to replace a device or reinstall software.

There is one more model that should be mentioned:

Limitation on Copy/Paste and Print. Of the utility-impairing DRM models, this is probably the least offensive, and is most likely coupled with the (inoffensive) traceability method – though some distributors have been known to couple it with the more draconian models. The product imposes restriction on copying or printing, or forbids it entirely.

To the extent that the industry insists on DRM, it has largely been handled sensibly: Most publishers have chosen to allow the user to copy the product between devices and computers, and settle for tracing il-

licit copies if or when such illicit copying rises to a level that they feel they need to take notice of. Some add to this the limitation on copy/paste and print, but even then, the limits are generally not so onerous that a referee would find it intolerably difficult to make up a compact reference customized to the needs of the specific gaming group’s style.

By and large, the industry has apparently followed the “easy” pricing strategy: Regardless of whether you’re getting the printed product or the electronic product, you’re paying the same price.

The main assumption seems to be what computer programmers call an “exclusive-or” assumption – ***either a purchaser will purchase the printed and bound edition of a product, or the electronic edition, but not both***. In an age where access to computers – and specifically, ownership of highly portable computers – is becoming the “default assumption” in much of the world, there is some question whether this assumption is valid. The biggest argument against this assumption is that carrying the portable computer with the electronic editions on it is probably easier and lighter than carrying the equivalent hardcopy books.

The secondary assumption, which is really the same as the first assumption, but looked at from a different angle, is that ***every sale of an electronic copy is one less sale of a printed copy***. I don’t state the reverse, even though it’s implied, because the default assumption is the printed version, just like with non-RPG books – the electronic edition market is viewed as significantly smaller and less important than the print edition market.

There is one more assumption that deserves to be looked at in a bit more depth: ***The Consumer is stupid***. This is deliberately phrased offensively; a more polite way of phrasing it might be ***The Consumer is Completely Unaware of Cost Factors or Their Implications***.

A detailed cost breakdown is beyond the scope of this discussion; the executive summary version is that there are three areas that costs can be allocated to: Hardcopy production/distribution, Editorial, and Overhead, and that Hardcopy production/distribution accounts for approximately half of the price tag.

Given that, it doesn’t take much thought to realize

(Continued on page 3)

From the Editor

(Continued from page 2)

that, under the current pricing model, the publisher will make more profit from the sale of each electronic copy than from each printed copy – for no other reason than the Hardcopy production/distribution costs are lower or nonexistent. However, it can be argued (and in other forums, it has been argued) that this approach tends to stifle and marginalize the electronic market. (It might take a little research, but not an onerous amount, to get some quantitative costs for verification.)

There are several approaches that might do better at acknowledging the realities of the market, and encourage both purchases of electronic product, and paired purchases (buy one, get the other, either at a discount or both for a bundled price). I summarize them without discussing the advantages or disadvantages (this editorial is verging on too long as-is):

The first approach is the one successfully used by Baen Books: Release the electronic version and the print version of a product simultaneously, pricing the

print version according to common industry practice, and pricing the electronic version slightly below the least expensive print version.

The second model encourages paired purchasing: The initial purchase is made at the full price, in either edition, and the purchaser receives, as part of the purchase, a coupon or other proof-of-purchase that will permit the subsequent purchase of the other edition at a discount. Purchasers who are uninterested in both editions are not penalized for choosing one over the other, but those who purchase both are rewarded for doing so.

The third model is very similar to the second, paired-purchase model: In addition to the individual print and electronic editions, a bundled edition of both together is made, at a discount from the price of separate purchases. The purchase of the bundle – that is, of both the print and electronic editions – must be made simultaneously to get the discount.

Ultimately, the idea is to see that the electronic and print markets complement each other, rather than competing with each other, and to market accordingly.

Critics' Corner

Hyperlite: The Sirius Treaty

Overview by Tim Bancroft

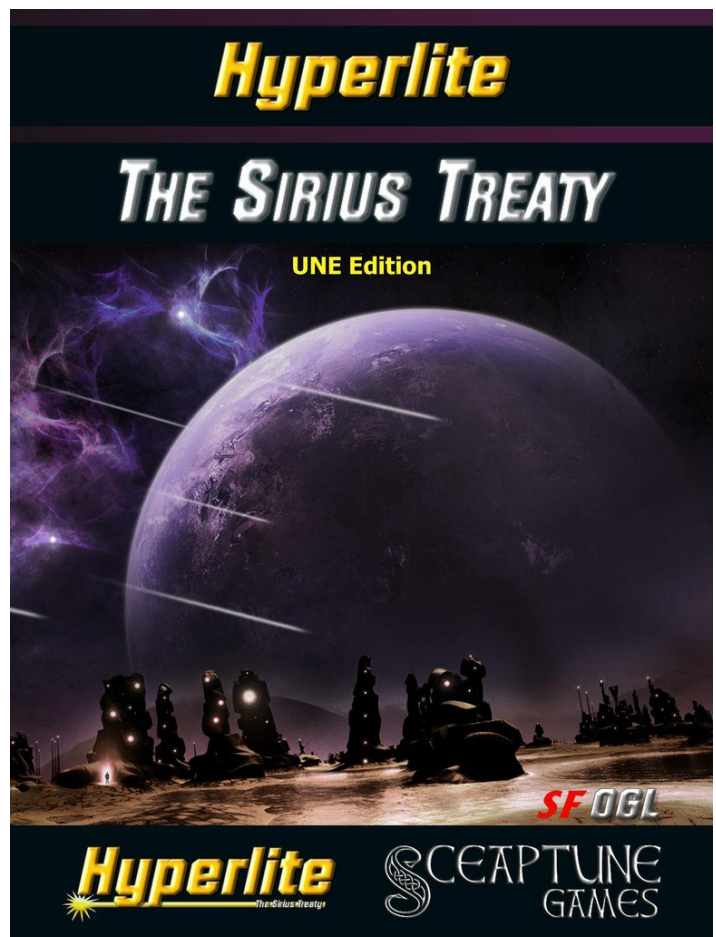
Hyperlite: The Sirius Treaty. Tim Bancroft *et alia*
Sceptune Games <http://www.sceptunegames.co.uk>
144pp, paperback
UK£18.00/US\$27.00/EU€24.00 (PDF UK£9.70/US\$15.00)

Editor's note: The author of this review is the designer of Hyperlite and an employee of Sceptune Games.

Based on the Mongoose *Traveller* (MGT) Open Gaming License (OGL) System Reference Document (SRD), this extends the much-loved 2d6 *Traveller* into a very different future history - early 24th century Earth and its colonies.

This article is meant as a quick and introductory overview of what *Hyperlite: The Sirius Treaty* is, and how it differs from *Traveller*. Due to the curious operational constraints in the universe of the Sirius Treaty, the base MGT had to be adapted and adjusted to better cope with those differences and provide a

(Continued on page 4)



(Continued from page 3)

richer gaming experience. The technological assumptions are also very different, being a projection of now, and due to the nature of the Sirius Treaty, lower-level TLs have had to be much more granular.

The key difference between *The Sirius Treaty* and *Traveller* is the setting, so we'll go over that below before explaining any rule modifications. More information can be found on the Sceptune Games website (<http://www.sceptunegames.co.uk>) under "Hyperlite". Above all, it's worth bearing in mind that anyone who has played MGT or Classic *Traveller* has found Hyperlite very easy to run with. We've also found that newcomers to the 2d6 SF rules have also quickly picked the rule base without it getting in the way of a really fun game.

The Setting: A new future, a renewal of history.

Space is big, but its history is even longer than can be imagined. Stars and star-systems are still being formed and are still evolving, their worlds cooling and, sometimes, even being lucky enough to end up in the habitable zone around a sun. It's this depth of time that's a problem for alien contact: even after the United Nations of Earth (UNE) developed a faster-than-light drive in the Foldspace Transition, it only found four other, colonising, starfaring species around our galaxy. But it also found the relics and artefacts of the Precursors, starfaring species from way back in time.

Of course, such artefacts are sometimes simple, and sometimes stunning in their complexity. Quite which is never known, but the advanced artefacts give a tremendous technological advantage to those discovering them. The struggle to claim and recover Precursors sites led to a series of low-key conflicts on backward planets that sapped the resources of the starfaring species. Many of these escalated, causing severe problems to the resource-stretched starfarers and catastrophic damage to the homeworlds of several primitive societies. Finally, a peace treaty was signed, the Sirius Treaty, and a monitoring force was constructed: the Invigilators.

Originally intended to be an independent oversight body drawn from representatives of all the

signee species, the Invigilators quickly grew out of control after they found the treaty not always being properly enforced. Using a synergy of technology from the member races, they developed their own monitor ships, weaponry and medical technology. Now they rigidly enforce the treaty's tenets, especially as regards first- or primitive- contact protocols. They permit the signee species to use technology from their own history, providing it is comparable in period to the world on which they operate.

So, now, some twenty years after the Sirius Treaty was signed, whenever a backward society is found, the UNE's Sirius Treaty Special Forces (UNEST-SF) must ONLY carry equivalent technology. So the augmented, jacked-up, chipped-up legionnaires of the UNEST-SF must go into hostile lands armed with swords and spears. Oh, and shields, of course.

But there have been problems re-engineering the ancient technology and materials and reproducing the manufacturing techniques. This leads to a great deal of negotiation along the lines of "We're so sorry, Mr Invigilator, but the cotton plants have been contaminated by our GM'd crops. We_know_the tunics are waterproof. And windproof. Oh, and tear-resistant. But, but... it's still cotton, and it contains no impregnated artificial chemicals or nanobots...". What's more, sometimes the discovery of a new, habitable planet by Earth exploratory craft is lost or tied up in the bureaucratic jungle that is the UNE's under-funded, Invigilator Liaison and Notification Department.

The Scenarios

Our convention scenarios are focussed around the exploration of new planets and are meant to highlight the potential wonders of the Precursors, the fear of the Invigilators, and pose problems based around what happens when the Treaty is broken. Of course, players take the role of Humans in the UNEST-SF and are part of a squad sent down to investigate or sort out a problem.

Such squads include Specialists, scientists given UNEST-SF training and enlisted into the Sirius

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

Treaty Special Forces. These get fast-track promotion and tend to look down on the military types (who, in turn, can regard looking after them as 'baby-sitting'). Some squad members may even come from industry or academia and be given temporary officer rank, but as Observers. This leads to a wonderful tension between the characters with seniority and helps limit the mismatches that occur when you grant unknown players an in-game authority over the rest of the group.

What we've found wonderful about the gameplay is that, most often, players try to actively avoid combat. Whilst they initially fear their opponents using hi-tech weaponry against them, they even develop a fear of the low-tech weaponry, even with the advantages of their own armour. For the problems with re-engineering technology may well give them an edge, but they are heavily reliant on their own augments, such as subdermal armour, and the combat-focused squad members become acutely conscious of their role in defending the scientists, negotiators or specialists...

...especially when facing another starfaring species that is currently ignoring the Sirius Treaty and risking all by carrying combat armour or advanced weapons down onto a Protected World.

Rule Twists

Character generation is as fun as always in Traveller, the process largely the same. A character is taken through a number of different career terms, picking up skills, experience, Mishaps and Events along the way. We found we had to vary the term length though, and very quickly discovered that a "Prisoner" or "Penal Battalion" career was needed. This turned out to be quite popular, as an enforced period of confinement gives an added dimension to those unfortunate Mishaps.

All characters have several augments (artificial implants), some of which are given to everyone, such as Liphe-cytes (immune system boosters) and subcutaneous communication links, whilst others are gained through experience or from a character back-

ground. Most Player Characters end up with subdermal armour or library jacks (database implants) – the argument is that, technically, an embedded database is not actually carried down onto the planet as it's already part of the human and is not obviously a cybernetic upgrade.

As might be expected for a new setting, the Skills had to be adjusted. On the whole they were simplified and aggregated, but the skill system is still the same old Traveller 2d6 system, with assists and effectiveness, if it is needed. The major difference is in the acknowledgement of 'Familiarity' – knowing how another species builds, copes with and makes use of materials and equipment: after all, how is a human going to know how a 2,000 year-old Precursor civilisation puts together its personal transports?

Similarly, combat needed adjusting to cope with the extended use of ancient technology. More ancient weapons are added in, and ranges have had to be adjusted to cope with the prevalence of shorter-range weapons such as bow, slings, spears and cross-bows. Again, the combat modifiers are simplified, but a few more ancient twists are provided with a more discrete difference between the use of shields and dodging. It still works fast, and is still as deadly as before; medics are still much-loved members of a team.

Interstellar travel is also very different from the Jump drive. The Foldspace Transition involves creating a fold in space and traversing the junction where the points correspond. Whilst providing instantaneous travel, it needs a great deal of power and is extraordinarily hazardous, the EM effects causing problems in all active electrical equipment – and living organisms similarly reliant on such signals. This means that humans typically need another implant to survive Foldspace transitions, but even then they have to restart their ship and are groggy afterwards. Nano-tech difference engines provide intermediate computing power until the quantum and Turing machines come online again. Foldspace may be accurate, but FTL communications are limited to ships, just like Traveller.

(Continued on page 6)

Critics' Corner

(Continued from page 5)

In the universe of the Sirius Treaty, a cruiser captain has as much independence as the frigate captains of old.

What's not in Hyperlite?

The universe of the Sirius Treaty is relatively 'hard' in terms of the science fiction it projects from today's knowledge. There are no gravity plates on starships and no magical psionics. Though much-loved in many SF universes, shields are non-existent, though if someone discovers a way to create an energy 'shield' big enough to wrap around a ship, that acts only one-way and without disrupting 'solid matter' then it will gradually be retrofitted onto UNE starships!

Most 'habitable' planets in the Hyperlite universe are assumed to be populated by unintelligent (Traveller: non-sophont) life. There are numerous ways that life can evolve without developing sophonts – even on our own world it seems that it took several hundred millions of years in the multi-billion year history of earth. Time is also taken into account, so that whilst only four or five star-faring races are currently extant in the universe, it is assumed an identifiable few had existed over the past, traceable history; many more, perhaps, may have existed beforehand.

The core rules in Hyperlite purposefully do not include any rules on starships or space combat, though an overview of the key space vessels, the cruisers, is provided as background. The majority of Hyperlite encounters are between groups of human

characters and aliens, using low-tech equipment; where space-based encounters take place they are typically on the starships. Given the technologies and weaponry involved, Hyperlite starship battles can be much more lethal than Traveller, and it is only the presence of the Sirius Treaty that prohibits the use of space-based nuclear missiles.

Hyperlite is not a licensed Traveller product. Hyperlite: The Sirius Treaty is standalone, containing its own character generation guidelines. To illustrate this, our Hyperlite books have a simple "SF OGL" logo.

Summary

Our playtesters and convention players found it is very different, fun and absorbing, many having commented on just how real the setting feels. The rules keep things flowing fast, especially when handled delicately, and players have great fun sorting out the problems on the planets they explore.

Whether investigating a Precursor ruin, rescuing downed travellers, or trying to negotiate an alliance with some primitive natives who do not realise what treasure they are sitting upon, the Player Characters are constantly faced with different and interesting challenges in difficult situations.

We keep updating and adding resources to our Hyperlite website pages (at <http://www.sceaptunegames.co.uk/shop/hyperlite.htm>). As always, we're happy to answer questions, whether via email or our forums, both of which are accessible from the website.

Have fun!

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.

This month, we get replies to our previous questions, and we add two new questions at the end.

Last month's questions:

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

"kafka"'s answer: In the past and present games, I emphasize that my games are about Role Playing not Roll Playing.

Essay Question

(Continued from page 6)

In the past, I used to photocopy relevant pages of some sanctimonious tome or do an elaborate write-up in terms of a character's background in which, I asked players to memorize. In a campaign, I would reward them with Brownie Points (a la MT) for good role playing.

Recently, I have taken to more of a role playing approach, in which I use the Mongoose Life Events tables and rather than randomize them, I ask players to choose 5 major life events and that this will be used a modifier of up to +6** in any task roll (if it can be made relevant to the Task that they are trying to accomplish) in any given play session (either defined as an adventure or particular game night - depending upon the stability of the group).

I have also have encouraged players to verbalize their skill sets and I in turn verbalize the difficulty level. I have also used props ranging from puzzles with an electronic egg timer to an attempt to speak quickly in character whilst an egg timer counts down from 10sec, 20sec 30sec forcing good players to think on their feet. Or else get blown up or worse fate.

**The modifier is entirely determined by me (the Referee) and after the modifier is "used up" then a sliding scale is applied. Therefore, I have ruled the Life Event only warrants a +3 modifier the next time it is used in a particular play session is +2 then +1 then negating.

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

"kafka"'s answer: Their history and psychology. Trying to find ways to under populate the Traveller Universe is easy with so many rock balls generated during planetary generation. However, coming up with credible alien sophonts is the more challenging parts of Traveller therefore, I have usually opted for the approach of no more than 1 per subsector (roll die 1-3 on a d10) assuming the world has a biosphere capable of supporting life.

To avoid, a Star Wars/"Monster Manual" ap-

proach, I usually keep the alien races in the background usually on reservations oppressed by the Imperium or the Imperium clustered in a few key city arcologies. A useful way of looking it, of course, is the same as District 9. Save, that the Imperium will reinforce the apartheid of aliens and humans. Notwithstanding, there are societies that are more integrated and less integrated. Determining as I said the history and their relationship to the Imperium is the first task. Then working to figure out a unique psychology that makes them "alien" which is conformity with the history then becomes easy. Figuring out how physiology and environmental considerations also play into the equation is the next step.

So, therefore, I may have very few "mainstream Imperial" the ones that I do have will have a story directly linked to the adventure that I might be running that particular game session.

Other ways that I have made them interesting is the classic Doctor Who/Star Trek method...which is present the race as an enigma. Be they technologically advanced - hence almost "magical" or believably "primitive" but in their rites and rituals illustrate that either they were once technologically superior or were in contact with a technologically superior culture. And, often, it requires the PCs or one NPC to have gone native to figure out the puzzle for success in the adventure.

New questions for this month:

What, in your opinion, are the characteristics of a "good" adventure? Does it vary based on the context in which the adventure is being run? If so, how does it vary?

Someone has just asked you "What is Traveller?". It's obvious that they want a better answer than "It's a SF/space-opera role-playing game, like D&D is a high fantasy role-playing game.". How do you answer them?

We encourage our readers to answer any question that has appeared in Essay Question, past or present, previously answered or not. We also encourage our readers to propose new Essay Questions to questions@freelancetraveller.com.

Jayson McPhearson

profiled by William Wilson

Editor's Note: This character was originally presented solely with TNE stats on Freelance Traveller's web site in 2007, with a note that the character evolved from a 1981 creation in Classic Traveller. The author has since found and provided the stats for Mega-Traveller, and they are included here.

Jayson grew up on Old Earth in the late 20th/early 21st century, by Terran Timeline. As a boy, he grew up in accelerated classes. By the time he was 10 years old, he was invited by government officials from one of the more predominate nations on Earth, at the time, to participate in a "special program". The program turned out to be secret scientific research into the field of psionics—a field supposedly unknown to the Terrans at that time.

Jayson was a natural, and, by the time he was 18, was near the top of the group. Unfortunately, certain individuals of said government uncovered info about the operation and sent forces to "shut it down".

Along with psionic experiments, the program also experimented with radically new cryogenic technology. The tech was still in the experimental stage, but animal tests proved positive. Jayson, while fleeing from government troops, sealed off an area of the underground complex and set up one of the chambers. The cylinder, along with Jayson's natural Suspended Animation talent, kept him alive. The troops never got down that far, and the complex was sealed...

When Jayson woke up, he was in a state of deep cryo sickness. It took over six months to recover. He was apparently discovered by a group of traders floating in a derelict spacecraft in Efate space in the Spinward Marches Sector. How he got there was a complete mystery; no records of his discovery and transport were ever found. When he was coherent, and could understand the language, he was informed that he was in the Third Imperial year of 1114.

Everything he knew was gone. Even for a young lad who has already been through a bit, it was hard. There was nothing to be done but to move on. He became a member of the crew and stayed with the

Free Trader Silver Wind for four years.

In 1118, the Vargr came plundering from the core in full force. Hearing of the death of the Emperor, they were unchained. The Silver Wind was captured by corsairs during the initial raids. The crew was released unharmed, however. After that, they drifted apart and Jayson decided to join up in military service.

He enlisted in the Imperial Army, Domain of Deneb. For eight years, he battled the Vargr on worlds throughout the Domain of Deneb as a commando. During his stint, he received a battlefield commission. When he mustered out in 1126, he was a Captain.

Things were getting bad in the domain. Hard times were here. The Vargr and Aslan held on to their territory and many worlds suffered—mainly the ones under the Vargr. Jayson, having enough of endless skirmishes and strike missions resulting in nothing, decided to go his own way and finance a trader himself. He acquired an old *Garu*-class Far Trader.

In late 1128, he suffered a serious misjump. His ship emerged into normal space beyond the Kuyper Belt of the Vilis system (1119 Spinward Marches). Desperate, he and his crew entered low berth after setting up a low-powered automated beacon and attempted to set up a long cometary orbit, to reach the outer planetary orbits of the Vilis system by 1248, taking their chances with the future.

TNE Profile

Jayson McPhearson

Race: Human (Pure Terran) Sex: Male Apparent Age: 45 Actual Age: 3000+

Homeworld: Old Earth E867975-8 Gravity: 1.0g

UPP: 898BE8-A-C Init: 6 Throw Range: 32m

Note: The following skills display just the level, not the asset.

Slug Pistol - 4, Slug Rifle - 3, Unarmed - 2, Wheeled Vehicle - 0, Pilot (Interface/Grav) - 6, Intrusion - 2, Stealth - 1, Combat Engineering - 1, Environment Suit - 2, Streetwise - 2, Sensor Ops - 2, Broker - 4, Astrogation - 4, Ship's Engineering - 2, Electronics - 0, Gravatics - 0, Gunnery: Missiles - 1, Gunnery: Energy - 1, Bargain - 4, Instruction - 2, Liaison - 2, Gambling - 2, Telepathy - 6, Project Emotion - 6, Project Thought - 6, Willpower Drain - 6, Life Detection - 6, Shield - 12, Probe - 6, Assault - 6, Cryokinesis - 6, Pyrokinesis - 6, Telekinesis - 12, Suspended Animation - 12, Orientation - 6, Psionically Enhanced STR - 6, Psionically Enhanced CON - 6, Regeneration - 6

(Continued on page 9)

Up Close and Personal

(Continued from page 8)

MegaTraveller Profile

Jayson McPhearson

Race: Human (Pure Terran) Gender: Male
UPP:9A9CFA Life Force: 28 Hits: 4/6 Age: 45 (3000+)
DOB: 012-(-2650 approx.)
Homeworld: Old Earth E867975-8
Starport: Excellent; Size: Large; Atmosphere: Standard;
Hydrosphere: 72%; Population: 4,500,000,00; Law Level: Moderate
Tech Level: Pre-Stellar; Trade Codes: Hi
Career(s): Merchant/Marines(Army Commando)
Terms: 8.5 Final Rank: Captain
Member, Travellers' Aid Society

Special Assignments: Commando Training, Free Trader

Awards and Decorations: MCFU x3, SEH,
Combat Service Ribbons x4, Command Clusters x3

Skills (Sum=27/27)

Brawling -1, Broker -2, Combat Rifleman -2, Demolitions -1, Electronics -0,
Engineering -1, Gambling -1, Grav Vehicle -1, Gravatics -0, Handguns -3,
Instruction -1, Intrusion -1, Liaison -1, Navigation -2, Pilot -3, Recon -1, Sensor
Ops -1, Streetwise -1, Trader -2, Turret Weapons -1, Vacc Suit -1, Wheeled
Vehicle -0, Gun Combat -0

Awareness -12, Telepathy -12, Telekinesis -12

Equipment: None

Fifth Imperium



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.

There is no Fifth Imperium column this month; at the time Freelance Traveller went to press, Shannon had not posted a column for May 2010 at RPG.Net. Fifth Imperium will return to Freelance Traveller in the month following its return to RPG.Net.

Multimedia Gallery

Urliganar Grav Tank

Images by "MAG"

"MAG" has previously done artwork for Freelance Traveller, before we became a monthly downloadable magazine. These images, not previously posted, were sent to us in May of 2008, and managed to get temporarily lost during disk cleanups and system problems. In addition to this image, other images of the Grav Tank appear on pages 14-16.

Urliganar Class GRAV TANK

Main Battle Tank of the Imperial United Armies and Imperial Marines



Jump Destination: Zandisill (Glavion Cluster 05)

Reconstructed by Ken Pick from surviving notes of Steve Marsh, c.1978-79

This system originated in 30-year-old campaign notes. This is a more generic version for insertion into any Traveller campaign.

In the original notes, Zandisill was a location for four exotic alien races, all refugee populations living in domes. This became Zandisill Prime; Zandisill Secundus was an unnamed world from another set of notes that "felt" like it belonged in the same system.

Zandisill

C323679-6/D102561-7 Carbon Cryoworld
NA/NI/Poor Trade Index -2

Zandisill System is a wide binary consisting of a carbon white dwarf (Zandisill A) with a distant red dwarf companion (Zandisill B). The two components orbit each other approximately every 80,000 years with a current separation of 300 AU. Both in-system points of interest orbit Zandisill A.

Zandisill A (Carbon WD white dwarf star) is believed to have originally been a late B/early A main-sequence star with high metallicity (enhanced carbon) and a planetary system of "Carbonaceous" worlds where carbon compounds dominated over silicon in the rocks, oceans, and atmosphere – carbides and hydrocarbons instead of silicates and water.

At the end of its main-sequence life, Zandisill A swelled into a red giant, vaporizing its inner planetary system and cooking the outer worlds; after which, it shed its outer layers in a series of core-pops and imitation-nova eruptions until only its core remained: today's carbon white dwarf, a white-hot diamond the size of a large rockball world. This dead star is only slightly more luminous than its M9 companion; after almost being boiled away by the dying star, the Cthonian remnants of the remaining planets froze under the dim white remnant. This resulted in a system of "Carbonaceous Cthonian" planets frozen in stasis, the only known such system in the Cluster.

Currently, Zandisill A has two planets of interest; both Cthonian:

Zandisill Prime (C323679-6, Orbit 6) is the system main world, a surviving gas giant core whose exotic chemical surface has attracted extensive mining/extraction industries from both major powers in the cluster as well as two minor ones. All planets closer than 5AU were consumed by Zandisill A as it became a red giant.

Zandisill II (SGG, 50 T-mass, Orbit 7) is the only surviving gas giant of the system, a Saturn-sized Uranus with a sickly blue-green atmosphere and a series of thin rings. Most of the atmosphere was swept away by the death throes of Zandisill A; what remains is highly contaminated and requires special refining to be used as fuel. Its largest moon, **Zandisill Secundus** (D102561-7), also supports resource extraction from its surface sludge and Belters working the other, irregular moons.

Zandisill B (M9v red dwarf/flare star, Orbit 12) has only a thin disk of carbonaceous asteroids and carbon dwarf planets. Due to the danger from solar mega-flares, this disk has not been settled or exploited, though there might be occasional freelance Belter activity.

Zandisill Prime

*(Zandisill A I) C323679-6 NA/NI/Poor
Trade Index -2*

Carbonaceous Cthonian cryoworld with a very thin nitrogen/ammonia/carbon monoxide atmosphere and oceans of liquid ammonia and exotic hydrocarbon sludge under a white dwarf sun. The innermost surviving planet at 5 AU (Orbit 6), Zandisill Prime is believed to be the surviving core of a small Carbonaceous gas giant whose entire atmosphere boiled off when Zandisill A died. The star's death not only boiled off the SGG's atmosphere but cooked the carbon compounds in the exposed core into exotic organic chemistry before freezing them under the remaining White Dwarf. This resulted in the exotic organic sludge now being exploited by four industrial colonies.

Zandisill Prime retains its former gas giant rotation and strong magnetic field, resulting in a day

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

only six hours long. The Small Gas Giant-level magnetosphere protects the surface completely from any hard radiation emitted by Zandisill A by trapping it in gas giant-level Van Allen belts; all approaches to and departures from the world must be either high-gee or over the polar holes to avoid radiation exposure.

Surface Conditions/Sky Picture (Z Prime):

One of the most hostile settled worlds in the Cluster, Zandisill Prime is a rugged world about the temperature of liquid nitrogen, with a low gravity (half a gee) and a Very Thin Exotic atmosphere. Like Titan with a much thinner atmosphere.

From surface, the sky is an eternal starry night, broken only by occasional cirrus clouds and two especially-bright stars: the bluish-white of Zandisill A and the blood-red of Zandisill B, flying across the sky three hours from sunrise to sunset, casting a bright starlight over a fantasy landscape of graphite-colored rugged crags dusted with CO₂ ice and snow and chaotic terrain rising from seas of inky black sludge veined with greys and browns. Occasionally Zandisill B brightens from blood-red to yellow-orange as massive flares convulse its surface; sometimes flaring bright enough to actually bring out color in the ghostly landscape – blacks, browns, and charcoals dusted with tawny CO₂ ice and whitish CO₂ snow.

Around the colony/industrial domes, trails of nitrogen/methane steam rise from the processing plants like smoke from TL6 industrial smokestacks, ghostly plumes dissipating quickly in the thin atmosphere, sometimes condensing into nitrogen rain and methane snow falling in half-gee slow motion.

Interstellar Trade Situation (Z Prime):

Eaglestone Trade Index of -2 (NA/NI/Poor) exporting Polymers, Crystals (diamond), Special Alloys, and Petrochemicals; the four colonies are utterly dependent on their mother countries.

The Colony Domes (Z Prime):

Zandisill Prime's only settlements are four colony

domes run by four separate entities, all engaged in chemical extraction from the atmosphere and oceans. All these colonies are Government 6 and Law Level 9, differing only in Tech Level. (The high Law Level is not due to oppression, but a nod to the pressure-cooker realities of austere industrial colonies with cramped quarters in a low-gee, totally-hostile environment. Think of the Corporate Installation on Io in Outland as a pattern.) Total population is 1.2 million, broken down as follows:

Arnex, the dominant system in the cluster, has the most extensive operation with a total of 500,000 Gen employees working extraction plants along the coast of the largest sludge sea, including dredging operations from sea- and lake-bottoms. This is the highest-tech operation on-world, at the dominant Tech Level of the cluster.

Cauldron, junior member of the Arnex-Cauldron Axis, has the second-largest operation with 300,000 personnel, organized as a coalition of Cauldron's three largest/highest-tech nations. This operation is Tech Level 9.

The other two colonies/operations, smaller than the two Axis powers, are coalition operations by the secondary powers in the cluster.

In the reconstructed Cluster, the larger of these two operations – 300,000 personnel, the same size as Cauldron's – is run by **Telerine** in the Dole Subcluster. The other – 80,000 Vargr – hails from the Vargr mainworld of **Macumeran** in the subcluster of the same name. Both of these operations are Tech Level 8-9, with the Telerine operation using a lot of personnel from their vassal systems: Humans from both Telerine and Korvo, and "Wasps" ("Chitin A", a pseudo-insectoid minor race) from Hamilton's Star. The "Wasps" have their own domes and installations due to their differing environmental requirements; coming from a regimented society, they take the austere pressure-cooker environment in the domes much better than humans or Vargr.

The fact that four colonies were planted on this backwater cryoworld tells you something: Zandisill

(Continued on page 12)

has some resource that is vitally important to the Cluster. Anagathics?

Zandisill Secundus

*(Zandisill A II-A) D102561-7 NA/NI/Poor/Vacuum
Trade Index -3*

Largest moon of a small semi-Cthonian gas giant in Zandisill's outer system, another Carbonaceous world. Though a vacuum world with no atmosphere, a "petroleum jelly" of crusted-over exotic hydrocarbons covers 20% of its surface, formed by the same stellar death that cooked Zandisill Prime. This resource supports a colony of 20,000, a spillover from Zandisill Prime exploiting its unique chemical composition. Also serves as a home base for insystem Belters working the outer system, plus the only source of refined fuel in the system.

Surface Conditions/Sky Picture (Z Secundus):

Surface conditions on Zandisill Secundus are similar to Zandisill Prime, except with lower gravity (1/8 gee), less exotic terrain, no atmosphere at all, and even colder (like Triton instead of Titan).

Like most moons, Zandisill Secundus is locked in synchronous rotation just outside its primary's Van Allen belts, with an orbital period and day of 120 hours. The terrain is more conventional than Prime's craggy chaos, mostly ice plains like Triton, with crusted-over hydrocarbon deposits as black as the sky filling the impact craters and lowlands.

Sky picture is as per Zandisill Prime, with the ghostly disc of Zandisill II looming permanently in the sky, flickering with polar aurorae and megalingning, phasing from eclipse to crescent to full to crescent over Secundus's 120-hour day, a faint blue-green on the side illuminated by A and almost-infrared when illuminated by B.

Interstellar Trade Situation (Z Secundus):

Eaglestone Trade Index -3 (Poor/NI/NA) exporting exotic Petrochemicals; utterly dependent on its

mother country (which may not be the same as any of the domes on Zandisill Prime).

Secundus is also the main insystem fueling stop. Though a D port, refined fuel is available at double the normal price from a locally-maintained network of fuel-skim lighters and on-world refineries. Raw fuel skimmed from Zandisill II is so contaminated it takes two or three refining passes to be useable; the best normal fuel refining can do with it is the equivalent of Unrefined. (Treat raw fuel from Zandisill II as having double to triple the penalties of Unrefined fuel.) The fuel lighters and refineries have a secondary function as chemical extraction plants, storing the more commercially-valuable contaminants.

The exotic petrochemicals from Zandisill Secundus are secondary to those from Zandisill Prime. Probably Secundus's surface wasn't cooked as completely as Prime's, and the sludge is more conventionally Carbonaceous.

Adventure Nuggets:

There are at least four rival operations insystem: The four on Zandisill Prime, a possible fifth on Zandisill Secundus (with control of the main fuel source), plus possible Belters. All these can come into conflict with each other, in a hostile environment similar to the movie *Outland*. Including "Wasp" habitats where the air is so dense and CO₂-tainted as to be unbreathable by anyone except "Wasps".

Both "settled" worlds are survival stories in and of themselves. A thinner-atmosphered Titan and an airless Triton, hostile environment worlds with none or very thin exotic atmospheres, liquid-nitrogen surface temperatures, high radiation levels, and daytime illumination between moonlight and starlight. Any hull breach or life-support breakdown would get very bad very fast.

Second Life Traveller

by Jeffrey Schwartz

SLT is a variation on Traveller meant for Second Life. We're currently using the "House Tardis Creativity System" as the house rules for this (see <http://www.HouseTardis.net>)

The main change is to make all the dice rolls disappear from the players sight—they happen behind the scenes, inside the ships, vehicles, weapons and equipment the players use.

One of the things that separates SL from other MMORPGs is the lack of a company provided character system. SL is very open in allowing the people using it to create games within the environment. In general, this leads to people learning a variety of skills—programming, 3D object building, graphic design, audio file manipulation, animation file creation...

One of the 'pearls of wisdom' that's told to folks new to SL is : "In other games, your character levels up... in SL, it's the *player* that learns things"

We decided to keep to that philosophy in SL-Traveller by making as many things as possible as realistic as possible, then letting the players learn how to do the skill.

SLT Adventures are meant to be quick (less than 2 hours) , self-contained (people can show up and play without a lot of pre-game briefing) , and intuitive in play.

The first role-play event was an "incoming Scout Orientation", run March 15th,2009. Like the first game session for many campaigns, this was where the GM and players discussed rules and how the game works. Unlike most game sessions, this involved a virtual walk-through of the Type-S Scout ship *Sierra*, getting hands-on with systems and how things worked. One comment from that game session was, "This is a flight simulator for the Type-S!"

The first adventure, "Nav Beacon", was run on March 22. Set far above the surface of Arakis and the city of Splintered Rock, it involved an orbiting navigation beacon that had started malfunctioning, and the players went off to repair it. A simple, straightforward mission intended to let people get their feet

wet, it involved lifting off, flying to orbit, finding the drifting navigation beacon... then spacewalking to stop the tumbling, correct the drift, and repair damage to it. Along the way, the source of the damage became obvious: a number of meteors moving through the area.

This adventure was also the point where the "High Realism" let the player do something that I, as GM, had only half anticipated. In the ship's computer was a file containing technical notes on the Nav Beacon. In the file were about three lines of information the really needed, but to make it a bit more of a game, I'd wanted to put more text around them as filler. I decided to cut and paste from my notes on programming the beacon, then dress them up a little with technobabble so they sounded like something you'd get from a Scout ship's library computer.

One player was clever enough, on reading this, to figure out how to use the ship's radio to link to the telemetry channel on the beacon, and thus help the crew home in on it as it drifted away from where it was supposed to be. I'd put the code in there to allow me to clean up after the game ended, but it made sense that the IISS would have such a feature so I'd included it in the documentation, then forgotten about it as the game started. It really made me smile when the Vargr sitting at the computer station said, "Found it!"

Repairing things in SLT involves clicking on the broken item, choosing the "Inspect" option to find out what seems wrong with it, then choosing "Repair" and selecting a method of repair. Different descriptions of damage match to different repair options, and a "good engineer" knows which goes to which... a poor engineer fumbles around longer before managing the repairs. Vooper Werribee was the space-walker on this mission, floating next to the beacon and figuring out what needed replaced or repaired. Here the "good engineer/bad engineer" makes a difference: drifting in zero-G is a pain in the tail, and the less time making the repair the better.

The next adventure was "Spider Station", a simplified version of the old Classic Traveller "Death Station" from Double Adventure 3. It involved an

(Continued on page 14)

Doing It My Way

(Continued from page 13)

Imperial Research Station that had missed its check in, and the IISS being called upon to investigate. The players were to make sure the scientists were safe—and if not, pick up anything that might be classified or shouldn't fall into the wrong hands, and bring it to the proper authorities. This was the first docking of the *Sierra* to another object in space, and the first “NPCs” used — a number of 2 meter wide, meter-and-a-half tall mutant spiders that the scientists had made while playing with DNA resequencing. This was also the first big test of the combat ‘rules’, including the medical ‘rules’, and the first time some of the players got to bang away with snub pistols. (One of the people on this adventure had helped beta test the combat system, and thus had a little experience with it.) The medical rules are similar to the repairing rules. When using a medical kit, it describes the wounds and offers treatment options. A good medic will avoid doing things that cause ‘mishaps’, and make choices that get you back on your feet more quickly. A bad medic... well... ‘mishap’ is a bad word.

Since then, we've had a few other adventures, and mixed in other events. The “Easter Egg Hunt” in April, the “Micro Climate Survey”, and the “Survey of Sihnon” have all drawn good numbers of players. Some adventures are re-run as an intro for people

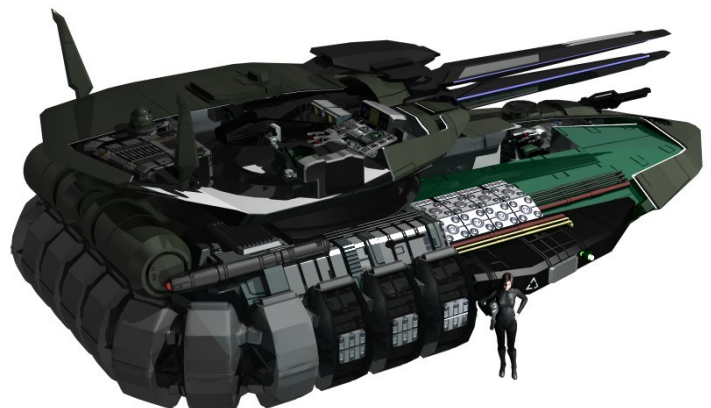
first coming in to play—such as the Nav Beacon—and others are run as fun contests, such as Micro Climate, where Scouts try to gather data while the opposing team scores points for destroying sensors. The player who collects the most data, and the player who destroys the most sensors win prizes.

The “Fiddleback” adventure, pitting a damaged 400 ton cruiser (only 1 turret working, M-Drive damaged) vs a Type-S led to the players getting hurt a bit, but managing to take out the turret and get a lucky hit that shattered the cruiser's fuel tanks — which meant it became a boarding action to retake the ship!

This fall, we changed our weekly play time to Tuesday at 5PM Pacific time, and the format changed a bit. The first part of the session is “classroom RP”, where the players learn things their characters should know, and play with the hardware. The second part is a short adventure that involves the skills just learned. This came out of the Fiddleback, where people afterwards made comments along the lines of “If I knew the missiles had more range, I would have...” or “So *that's* the advantage of HE rounds in the Snub!”

The classroom time is also a bit more welcoming for new players, as they're not being thrown into the meat grinder from the beginning, but have a chance to ease into the fun.

Multimedia Gallery



Multimedia Gallery



Multimedia Gallery



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!

Traveller on the Internet

After a long absence due to technical problems that turned out to be somewhat expensive and time-consuming to fix, the Freelance Traveller forums have returned! Because of the way they were implemented originally, no messages or user profiles were lost, and you can pick up where you left off when we had to take them off-line to identify and address the problems. They're at the same address, <http://forums.freelancetraveller.com>, and there is no

The Freelance Traveller Forums

change whatsoever in the ways you can access them—or, sadly, in the admitted deficiencies in the software—that's another long-term project that we're working on as we have the time. If you're visiting the forums for the first time, please see our FAQ at <http://www.freelancetraveller.com/infocenter/forums.html>, and our Acceptable Use Policy at <http://www.freelancetraveller.com/ftforumsaup.html>.

