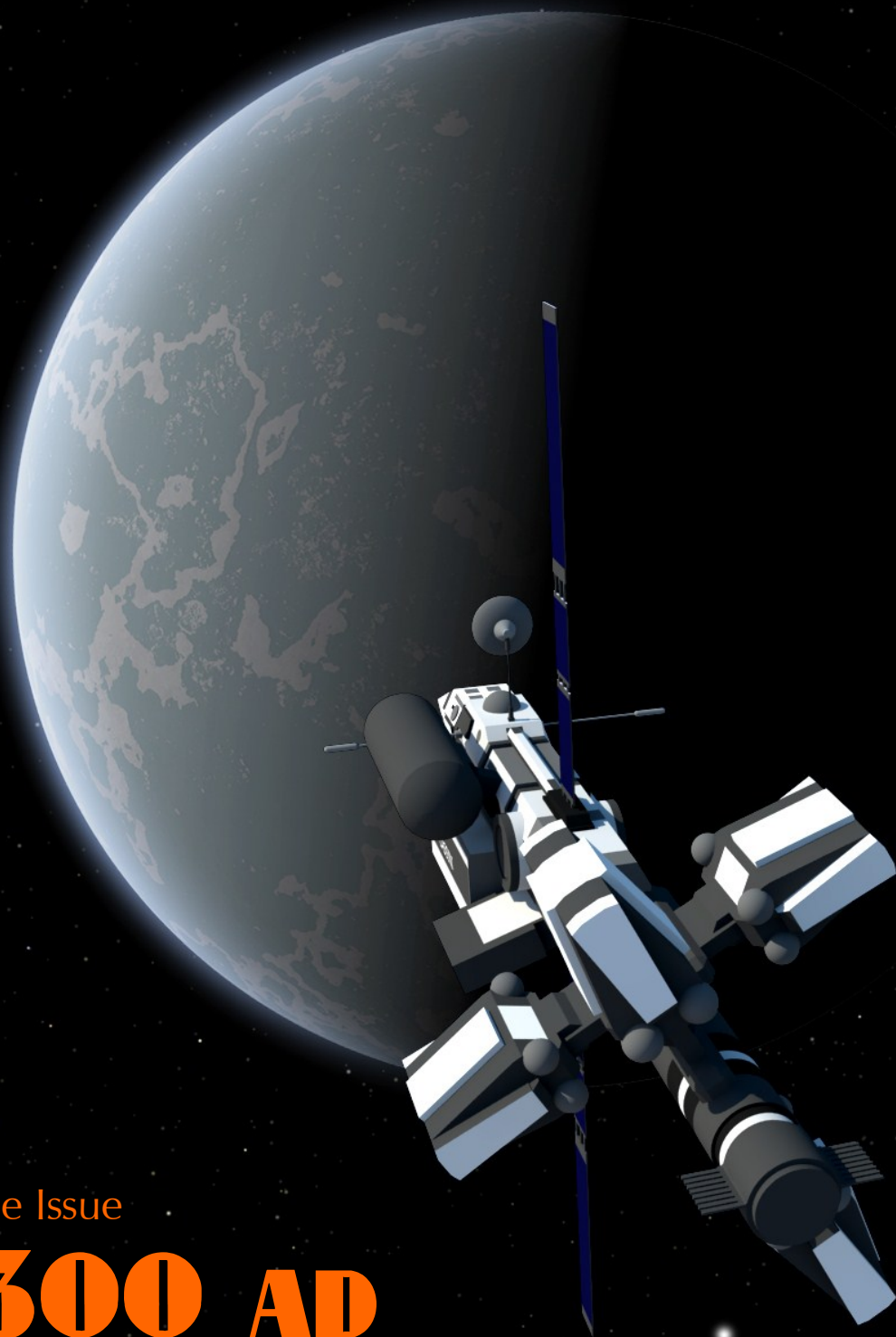




FREELANCE TRAVELLER

The Electronic Fan-Supported Traveller® Magazine and Resource



Theme Issue

2300 AD

Issue 029/030
May/June 2012

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From the Editor



We apologize for missing last month's issue; while Real Life has occasionally interfered with our getting the magazine out on the schedule we'd like, this is the first time that it has interfered so heavily that we felt we had to skip the issue entirely. To make up for it, though, we're going for a larger issue this month. We're also bringing you our first “Theme Issue”, which was something we promised back in January that we'd do occasionally. This issue's theme is “2300 AD”, to spotlight Mongoose's re-release of this not-quite-so-far future SF RPG from GDW.

It also marks the official beginning of our support for the Mongoose *Traveller* version of 2300 AD. In accordance with our mission statement, material for 2300 AD should be specifically for the Mongoose *Traveller* version of the setting; if it's written to the GDW version of the setting, or the GDW rule set, it falls outside our boundaries (we're a *Traveller* support magazine, and GDW's version of 2300 AD wasn't *Traveller*). Generic (system-agnostic) material is OK, though. As with other settings, material that's suitable for any of our sections is eagerly sought for; we'll just ask that

you flag it as being for 2300 AD (or for whatever other setting or version of *Traveller* is appropriate).

Also beginning with this issue, we're identifying the setting that each particular article supports. Look for a symbol at the left end of the black section heading bar; a miniature version of the ringed-sun logo that you see at the beginning of this article will represent material for the Third Imperium setting; the number “23” in the 2300 AD font (like used on our cover for the words “2300 AD”) will signal material for the 2300 AD setting, and we'll develop and use other symbols for other settings as needed. “Meta”-articles, like the Table of Contents, this column, and the other “administrative” inserts, will have no symbol at all (and no space left for one), and (for now, at least) system/setting-agnostic material will have the space left for a symbol, but no symbol in it.

Though this is our first “Theme Issue”, it's definitely not our last. Currently, we're collecting material for a Psionics theme issue, a Cruise theme issue, and a special theme issue for Prime Directive, when it gets released for Mongoose *Traveller*. Your contributions will be greatly appreciated. ☼

Mongoose Traveller: 2300 AD

Reviewed by "kafka"

2300 AD. Colin Dunn.
Mongoose Publishing <http://www.mongoosepublishing.com>
312pp, hardcover
US\$49.99/UK£34.99

This review originally appeared on RPG.Net on March 28, 2012, and is reprinted here with the author's permission.

2300 AD is often viewed as a strange offspring – somewhere between the Hard Space Opera of *Traveller* and *Twilight: 2000* (realistic post-nuclear war military RPG), and indeed an early version of the game was called *Traveller: 2300*. Now, Mongoose Publishing has restructured and resurrected this classic game and has it powered by the Mongoose *Traveller* rules thus creating a new universe to explore. It is completely different yet similar to *Traveller*, in the sense that both games revolve around people not technology – but 2300 AD is grittier and more realistic technology than the Official *Traveller* Universe. With time, 2300 AD became an excellent game in own right. Notwithstanding, it suffered from the same weaknesses that *Traveller* and *Twilight: 2000* were criticized for. The closing of the frontier and an all-embracing conflict that threatens to be a war against all was one of the evolutions of the original game especially when it transitioned from *Traveller: 2300* to simply 2300 AD. Nonetheless, it did offer some novel innovations to the resolution of each weakness. And, then 2300 AD went into a coma to be briefly resurrected in D20 form in the controversial 2320 AD (controversial in how it dealt with some of the loose ends of the 2300 AD).

Fortunately, one thing that 2320 AD did right was set the game back to its origins, as a game of exploration and adventure among the stars. The essential premise is that 300 years after a time of great turbulence involving and including a nuclear exchange, possibly triggered by terrorists – the world has rebuilt itself under the global leadership of France. Thus, the map of the world has been completely remade by the Twilight Years but also newly established Faster Than Light Travel called the Stutterwarp. The Twilight Years rightly reinforced and



gave the nation-state an added boast over the forces of transnationalization. Thusly, many national characteristics can played out an interstellar scramble for colonies, resources, and identity among the stars as well, as familiar themes such as international cooperation and traditional religion appearing again, as cornerstones of identity. However, the author is quick to give the things that differ from today's world such as omnipresent surveillance, computer-human interfaces that one can jack into the net (somewhat duplicating the cyberpunk vibe of the original game) but at the same very different, as it explores the full meaning what it would mean if computing was as ubiquitous as electricity is today. Furthermore, Earth's farther-flung colonies are striving towards new forms of identity, some strengthening ties with the mother country, others seeking a more independent path deciding to veer towards transhumanism, as new planetary conditions call upon colonists to adapt Human DNA to new environments.

The world that the author describes shadows the script of the original game but tweaks it, so that it is not merely a future version of the 1980s (which is

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what was what the original game originally resembled) nor a future version of the 2010s but a truly Hard SF milieu grounded in movies like *Outlander*, television shows like *Outcasts* and novels like Robinson's Mars trilogy. And, I must say this is a vision that really appeals to me. As I have always played *Traveller* in a more hard way, any game that moves it closer to this objective immediately has my respect. It does, however, make some concessions to the softer side of Science Fiction – in the form of nanites and intelligent aliens among the stars – however, like mainstream *Traveller* – humans are at the top of the pyramid – notwithstanding, perhaps some Pentapod designs or the recently discovered Kaefer race. It also refocuses the game back into a game of exploration both of the frontier but also the human condition.

Much of the book is devoted to setting up this realistic and gritty future pulling in much of the original *2300 AD* milieu but filtering it through different lenses. And, this is where the author must be commended for truly creating an original vision that synthesizes what now can be found in the basements of archaic collectors such as me and PDFs available through Drivethroughrpg. Sadly, the author has opted to avoid the fan-made marginalia which had many interesting sidetracks but in doing so has created his own unique stamp on the material – hopefully prompting more fan-development of this rich universe. The author is a one-person dynamo and has a long and extensive plan for materials but it would still be interesting to hear/see other voices engage the material. After the extensive history that leads to *2300 AD*, we begin an exploration of select worlds of galaxy where humans have begun to call home. Remarkable, geospatial maps illustrate these worlds in a grey scale (some of the resolution unfortunately lost in the printing process) but remarkably accurate and realistic. Future supplements, are going to go further and outline these worlds in greater depths and I can hardly wait. Although, what I look forward to most is when Earth will get the same treatment, as tantalizing details are suggested but I want more – as I found that GDW's Earth/Cyberpunk for the original game

rather a concession to the popularity of *Cyberpunk 2020* rather than something really thought through. And, here is hoping that the worlds of the Solar System will get similar treatment to SJG's *Transhuman Space* or *Eclipse Phase*.

After the worlds have been describes begins the meat and potatoes of the book – the adaptation rules to Mongoose *Traveller*. Remarkably, easy and clear cut rules are outlined, that provide the tweaks necessary to have it fall into place and in line with the Hard SF emphasize that made the original game so good. So, if *Traveller* was akin to *Alien* with its adventurers being civilians and working class Joes just trying to turn a profit and seek in a universe that does not care. *2300 AD* ups the ante and transports you into the universe that combines *Aliens* with *Blade Runner* with doses of *Minority Report*. And, the chargen perfectly maps onto that reality. So, it takes the basic *Traveller* chargen and appropriates it for its own purpose. And, that is how to characterize much of the remaining sections – taking the basic template that does serve as a workhorse and transform it into a fine stallion. Thus, the sections on ship construction or equipment become perfectly congruent with the mainstream Mongoose *Traveller* rules. However, as I am quite familiar with the *Traveller* rules the only point of departure was the section on bionics – which takes a different slant than the cybernetics sourcebook and is much richer as a result. The author has done a fabulous job in taking the isolated fragmentary nature of the Mongoose *Traveller* project and uniting them under the rubric of the *2300 AD*. Thus, this becomes not an Alternative *Traveller* Universe but Yet Another *Traveller* Universe – something that can be sustained over the long term. For as much as *Hammer Slammers* or *Babylon 5* (however short-lived that venture was) or *Judge Dredd* – they lacked support supplements beyond the main introduction. What Colin Dunn has done here was provide an entirely new universe to play in. And, yes, he had help, in that he could piggyback his efforts upon what GDW had done – but the difference is that upon reading this, one can see that this is an entirely fresh approach to even the *2300 AD* universe.

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Equipment, ships, guns have all been tailored for the lower-powered milieu of *2300 AD*. The rules retain rules for spinning starships and thus preserve the element of Hard SF. Similarly, while there are fusion weapons and laser weapons, these are plausibly explained within a Hard SF way. However, it is likely just as it is with *Traveller* that slug throwers will dominate the human future. First and foremost, the relative cheapest will be a factor and secondly, when one realizes how deadly a firearm discharge can be in spaceship, it ought to quickly dispel any notion that slug throwers are anarchic and antique weapons only belonging in the 20th century. Similarly, equipment lists are there as jumping up points for adventurers – those things that made *Traveller* so great – the exploration of alien environs.

Then after lots of excellent rules, we get to the weakest section of the entire book which really has to be the strongest for me - “Tips for Game masters” essentially this is the section in which it suggests to one how to actually play in the *2300 AD* universe. The range of adventurers is much greater than what is to be found in standard *Traveller*, notwithstanding, one is left the impression – great milieu but how does one actually do anything in that. Fortunately, the author does have a solution in the sourcebooks and adventures that are scheduled to follow. Thus, very quickly bringing the canon up-to-date and laying the foundation for greater adventures. And, what he has promised will go well beyond the Kaefer-French Arm conflict and the pseudo-*Cyberpunk 2020* adventures that GDW commissioned and back to the roots of the game – back to those early *Challenge* articles in which I fell in love with a game that I could never find in my local gaming stores, used the *MegaTraveller* rules to recreate and dream.

And, this perhaps, is Colin Dunn’s greatest accomplishment – he has restored the sense of wonder back into *Traveller*. For too long, *Traveller* has languished as it is seen an old person’s game – each incarnation seems to have brought it as a game of the past not of the future. Mongoose has done an admirable job at modernizing the game by introducing *2300*

AD powered by their rules they have gone one step further – they have brought the game into the future.

This book shows that it was carefully edited by the author himself (and close amigos) and is truly a work of love. It does show some signs of a D20 bleed, which, is only natural as some of this was part of the *2320 AD* project. However, in no way does it distract nor really change the nature of the game. The author has done an excellent job in bringing an imaginary into something entirely believable. The art that runs throughout the book ranges from very good to excellent. The excellent pieces resemble the art found in the main *Traveller* rulebook (sans the silly chargen pictures) and the very good pieces approximate those found in the *Central Supply Catalogue*. I can only hope that the author has the energy to continue this standard – as it far surpasses much of Mongoose’s other offerings of late. The cover as can be seen is absolutely gorgeous...and clearly, Mongoose has excellent cover artists for *Traveller* – as future and past releases show. And, *2300 AD* shows that they are getting the insides right. I understand, why, there is relatively little art expands the page count which then expands the number of pages which then increases the cost of the book. But, one still wishes that there were more art or if it could go the route of colour.

So, we come to the conclusion, is this game worth your gaming dollar. Absolutely and without question, this is the best release of Mongoose since the main *Traveller* rules – it is a complete and self-contained universe that one can expand on their own or buy supplements for. I am so impressed with this endeavour that I can hardly wait to see more in this line. Colin Dunn has not only restored *Traveller* as the King of all SFRPGs but also improved the brand name of *Traveller*. Although, Mongoose certainly deserves some credit for first and foremost employing him and secondly taking a risk by actually resurrecting this fine old game.

Traveller works because of the basic simplicity that Marc W. Miller chanced upon back in 1977 – many people may be seduced by rocket ships or strange alien vistas or even life not as we know it – but the only stories that matter are the eternal human

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Critics' Corner

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stories – the myths that carry on in our stories from the dawn of time. And, within those stories the setting is important but must remain fluid and ever changing. And, yes, sometimes, *Traveller* has stagnated but in each and every incarnation – *Traveller* resounds with the human story with all its fantastic successes (be they technological or social) as well as the pitfalls of human failure (greed, avarice, or sim-

ple facts that humanity is constructed from crooked timber). Those stories that make *Traveller* great are the stories that make ordinary people transcend those limitations and become heroes. Thus, it is not a story of becoming something greater but to recognize the greatness lies within each and everyone one of us. And, while *Traveller* maybe has devastating weapons, fantastical locations, beautiful princesses/princes – the story of human triumph remains the same. ❁

Up Close and Personal

Comstock Uri

profiled by Ken Murphy

Comstock Uri EBABA8 Age 60 (Academician) 7 terms

Geneered Gorilla

Handgun-0, Grav Vehicle-1, Brawling-0, Vacc Suit-2, Computer-1, Teaching-3, Small Craft-1, JOT-1, Foil-2, Carousing-1, Gambling-1, Medical-1, Archaeology-2, Anthropology-4, Sociology-3, Sensor Ops-2, Imaging-3, Linguistics-2 (Belter Patios) (Chinese), Bludgeon-2, Chef-5 (Latin Foods, especially Nisperos de Batata and Churros), Zero-G Environ-1

Alpha Centauri University at Foothold (or ACUF) draws thousands of students each year—including, one year, a geneered gorilla named Comstock Uri.

Comstock was a serious young student, very focused, and quickly completed the requirements for his doctoral dissertation in only 4 years. After receiving his Ph.D., he stayed at ACUF, accepting a position as an assistant Professor in the School of Cultural Sciences.

After more than twenty years of teaching, you meet some interesting people. Some of them become life-long friends. In Comstock's case, three had become ex-wives, if not friends. Another had become his fourth wife on Olde Earth, waiting on retirement for his return to her.

One year, looking over his students for the new semester, Comstock noticed his paperwork identified

a pair of sisters' point of origin as being Tethys. He was intrigued, as Tethysians are generally tall and pale, with light eyes, prominent cheek-bones and dark hair. When he actually saw these sisters in class, on the other hand, they were unusually short and wiry, though just as pale, with multiple tattoos and piercings. And they didn't look like they were following the lecture *at all*.

With a bit of pantomime, Dr Uri invited the girls for coffee in the Union after class. The Nanda sisters' native language was a difficult patois that left the old silverback clueless.

Between their laughable ability at Anglic and Dr Uri's Chinese, they were able to establish that the sisters' people were asteroid miners and scavengers—Belters.

Further intrigued, Comstock decided to tutor the sisters during the evenings. "The Doc" had always been good with languages, and began to pick up the Belter patois.

At the end of the semester, Doctor Uri decided to go on sabbatical, and travel to Tethys with the girls. While the sisters soon went back to ACUF, the giant ape spent the following 10 years living with the short, wiry nomadic miners, documenting and recording their way of life, legends, beliefs and aspirations—and producing quite the documentary along the way.

Word of Dr Uri's activities eventually reached the mining concern that owned the Tethys Asteroid Field. Fearful that this rumored documentary might portray them in a negative light (as the cheating scoundrels they were rumored to be) it was decided

Up Close and Personal

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something had to be done.

A few days later, as if on cue, the miner clanship *Rosen Ascending*, on which Uri was living, was struck amidships by an anti-ship torpedo that had apparently been floating in the asteroid field since some long-forgotten anti-piracy action. Only four survived the destruction—one of those the maimed Doctor Uri whose leg was shattered, and who was bleeding into his vacc suit at the time of rescue by a frigate from the Revenue Cutter Service.

While recovering, Uri made a statement to the TNS bemoaning the loss of his comrades and all of the data he had collected in connection with his research (this, however, was a lie, and all materials were safely hidden away. Comstock simply wanted to avoid having a megacorp's gaze focused on him ever again).

Comstock resigned his position with the University and retired. The big ape never did go back to his wife on Olde Earth.

While Dr. Uri is happy to tutor privately or offer insight into his varied fields of expertise should someone put up the money (his pension is collectable only annually, after all), retired academics are generally not in high demand unless working as a commentator or “expert” for some media franchise—an idea that Comstock finds rather distasteful, as it's neither teaching nor field work.

Comstock is an excellent teacher, but would rather be out in the field. His space-related skills, learned while living among the Belters, are a much more marketable skill set when travelling, and he has no hesitation at travelling on Working Passage.

At one point, Comstock's skill with a camera landed him a gig as a wedding photographer—not something he likes to admit to.

Comstock is huge—2.1m tall, and more than half that wide. His once-black fur has turned silver across his back and shoulders, down both arms, and across his face. His eyes are blue, and his lower right canine tooth is missing. He wears high-end outdoor clothing, and carries a large, sturdy cane (a crystaliron sword within), both to help him maneuver with his

severe limp, and to use in self defense should the need arise. Like most academicians, the good Doctor lives up to the stereotype in that he wears a portable computer on his left forearm. Unknown to everyone but Comstock, the computer has a body pistol built-in.

Comstock loves talking, especially about different cultures, and before you know it he's slipped into lecture mode. Once he's caught himself, he'll implore someone to hit him in the head with something next time he starts up. If faced by some subject he'd rather avoid, the silverback merely says he's writing a book and that usually kills the conversation dead.

Comstock is an absolutely amazing chef, having been taught by his first wife's mother, and will usually have a couple dozen Churros stuffed into his shoulder bag.

When rattled, he will sometimes gripe “I could be retired and running a Churro stand on Aretius right now!”

Uri does not drink, curse, or smoke, but does enjoy Bridge. He also likes to unwind at the batting cages. If on a ship, he'll bring along a sports bag with a couple of bats, gloves, and about a dozen baseballs, hoping to hit a few in the cargo hold.

Dr Uri may be encountered anywhere, most often where he can find interesting cultures to study. 🌟

About *The Burrowwolf*

At the time this issue of *Freelance Traveller* “went to press”, no new chapter of *The Burrowwolf* was ready for inclusion due to other pressures. We are assured that the comic will resume as soon as possible.

The Freelance Traveller Forums

We're continuing to have problems with connectivity at the intended server site, but we think we have almost everything we need on the software side to get the Forums back up and running. We hope to have something set up for limited testing soon, and are seeking volunteers for testing and discussion of various features. Interested people should contact us at tech@freelancetraveller.com. We apologize for the continued delay in restoring this service.

CDROM: 2300 AD

reviewed by Jeff Zeitlin

2300 ad CDROM. Various authors.

FarFuture Enterprises <http://farfuture.net>

PDF and other files on CD/DVD, ~680MB

US\$35

As part of their efforts to make electronic versions of all of GDW's SF RPGs (and all versions of *Traveller*) available, FarFuture Enterprises has released the entire GDW corpus for their *Traveller:2300/2300 AD* series. In spite of the original name (*Traveller: 2300*), this was a 'sequel' to their *Twilight: 2000* setting, rather than a 'prequel' to the *Traveller* setting; the name was changed to *2300 AD* for the second edition to reduce the confusion and address the objections of the by then well-established *Traveller* community, which did not receive the product well (largely because of the 'misleading' name. As *2300 AD*, it established a strong community of its own, with some overlap with the extant *Traveller* community, that still exists today).

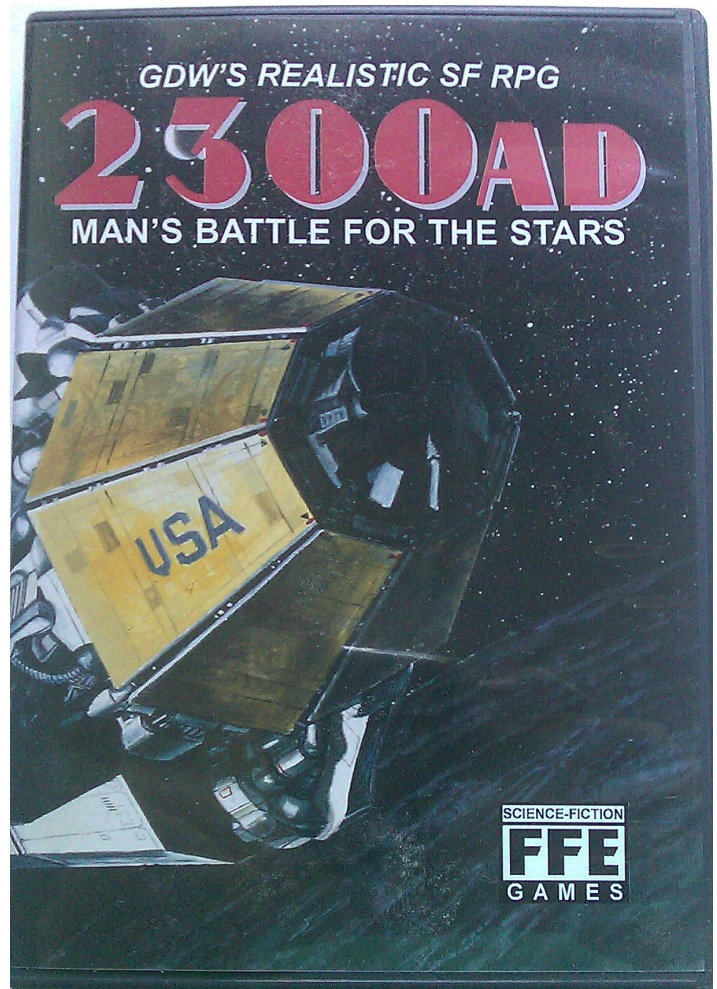
It should be noted that this material is *not* directly compatible with the recently-released *2300 AD* product from Mongoose Publishing; rather, that product is an authorized re-working and updating of some of this material, made compatible with their version of the *Traveller* system (and ironically making the original name of *Traveller: 2300* entirely appropriate, though they quite reasonably chose to maintain the better-established *2300 AD* name).

On the Shelf

The product is only available via FarFuture's website, so the only shelf you'll see it on is the one you put it on. What you'll get is a LightScribe-printed disc in a DVD (paperback-sized) case, like with the other FFE CDROMs.

Initial Impressions

If you have autorun capability, you'll see that your browser should be started, and a page loaded off the disc. This page doesn't use any special capabilities of advanced browsers; all it requires is the basic ability, established with NCSA Mosaic, to display text, links, and graphics—although with a couple of minor alterations, even the graphics could be dispensed with, and



lynx or other pure-text browsers would be usable. (If you don't have autorun, or have it disabled, load "2300AD.html" or "index.html" into your browser of choice. We'll refer to either of these pages—which are the same—as "the index page" henceforth.)

The browser and index page turn out to be essential if you intend to use the material directly off the disc, rather than copying it to dynamic media such as your computer's hard disc or a USB 'thumb' drive. This is because the file names on the disc do not provide the product names; instead, they are all numeric. The index page provides the titles of each publication in the series as a link (to the actual product file), along with a one-line text description of what the product is. You will need a program that can display PDF files, one that can display Microsoft Word documents, and one that can display plain text documents; a graphics program that can display GIF and JPG files will be useful (though recent browsers are adequate for graphic display, espe-

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Critics' Corner

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cially if they let you zoom in on the graphic).

(Obviously, if you copy the files to a hard disc or a thumb drive, you can then rename the files—but this will, equally obviously, break the links on the index page.)

On Closer Inspection


The material is “text behind scans” rather than the actual text in the file being displayed directly; the scans are clear enough to be easily readable, and I suspect that if I wanted to take the time and go to a font identification site, I would have a high probability of correctly identifying the font from the scans. Artwork is also clear, with little of the ‘smudging’ that often occurs when the scan doesn’t match the original resolution.

You get the complete canon, which in addition to all of the GDW-label *Traveller: 2300* and *2300 AD* products includes one third-party licensed product and all of the *2300 AD* articles from *Challenge* magazine, plus supplemental material including a TrueType font for the *2300 AD* titles (which we used on this month’s cover), and documents describing ‘the game’ that the GDW staff used to develop the setting, starting on the eve of World War III in 1995, and continuing to *2300*.

The readme file states that the text of the PDFs is searchable, but not completely spell-checked, and that the PDFs are “unlocked”.

The disc as released has some minor flaws; one file is missing completely, another is incorrectly located, and there are a couple of mysterious files and one folder that are never referenced or used. These flaws do not at all prevent the disc from being usable; you will simply not have the “Graphic Overview of the file contents of this CD-ROM”, and the FFE logo that links to the FFE CDROM website will display as a missing/broken graphic.

Conclusion

The system developed for use in the original *2300 AD* is not compatible with the contemporary *Traveller* system nor the modern one. The author of the Mongoose *2300 AD* sourcebook did, however, make a strong effort to keep the setting material mostly compatible. As a result, this disc can’t be said to be a waste of money for people interested in the *2300 AD* setting, whether new to it because of Mongoose’s efforts, or returning to it with fond memories. It is a setting which this reviewer perceives as having a more militaristic bent than the stock *Traveller* settings, and the setting has much more of a ‘frontier feel’ than the classic Third Imperium, but in the final analysis, it should be just as playable for multiple adventure genres, and just as entertaining. If you’re willing to put in a little effort for conversion, there’s no reason not to purchase this to use with Mongoose *Traveller’s 2300 AD*. 

Raconteurs' Rest

After-Action Report: TravCon 12

A Personal View by Timothy Collinson

Sheer terror?

Embarrassed delight?

Flabbergasted surprise?

No, these weren’t some of the reactions of the PCs at the British Isles *Traveller* Support annual TravCon. These were just some of the emotions that coursed through me as I attended my fourth convention as a player and my very first as a referee.

I wrote last year, in wrapping up a report on TravCon11 (*Freelance Traveller*, #20, August 2011), that I had been inspired to dream of running a game.

I even dumped the outline of it on TH as we both travelled down to London on the way home. His enthusiastic reception convinced me there might be an interest and the following day I sat and wrote 7000 words of notes.

Of course, I then proceeded to do nothing with it for virtually the rest of the year until, at the end of January, I realized I’d better get writing if I was ever to be ready in time for the first weekend of March. There were characters to create, an entire stellar system to build, animal encounter tables to generate, and of course the ‘outline’ had to be turned into something usable. In particular I had to actually answer all the questions I’d posed in my uncertainty

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Raconteurs' Rest

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about how to proceed. I even asked my daughter if she'd like to help out by writing a journal that would be 'found' by the PCs and give the backstory to what they'd encountered.

What was really focussing my mind was the realization that I'd not only offered to run a game, but if I was going to go to all that effort, I might as well run it twice. Andy Lilly, BITS director and convention organizer was either desperate enough or foolhardy enough to take me up on that. So, I'd be attempting to shepherd 12 people through 8 hours of gaming – which no doubt many readers would eat for breakfast.

My fear stemmed from the fact that I had not only not refereed a game at TravCon, I'd never actually refereed a game at all excepting two one hour lunchtimes with work colleagues who'd finally persuaded me to show them what I was going on about in this "Traveller thing", and my daughter and two French nephews for a couple of hours one evening. Neither groups had any knowledge of *Traveller* or even of role playing and neither experience had anyone clamouring at the door for more. Thus, I wasn't overly confident about any hidden ability to entertain. I'd settle for mediocre to average in front of real *Traveller* fans and aim to improve for another time. If it didn't all go horribly wrong.



Dom and Keith play a key moment in 'Snowblind' while Steve looks on.

Some gain their confidence through experience; I didn't have enough to draw on, so it could only be through preparation. By now my adventure was called 'Portents and Signs' (riffing on the *Mongoose* magazine title – as well as a *Babylon 5* episode) and nicely hinting at what it was about without giving anything away. I lived and breathed the creation process for the best part of a month and was beginning to feel I'd really visited the world I was constructing. But some 74 pages of maps, deckplans, tables and 35,000 words of text later, I did at least feel I had something. What, I wasn't too sure. Would it have enough of a climax? Would it be interesting to players? Could I answer all their questions? Would it even last a couple of hours, much less four?

On the Saturday before, even my daughter started writing – I'd told her Wednesday was the deadline if I was to print and bind the journal as a handout on Thursday before travelling on Friday. Like a typical student she'd left it to the last minute, but on Wednesday evening she dutifully handed over nearly 10,000 words. Handwritten. I was suitably impressed by her output but then of course had to sit down and type it all as accurately as possible. Never again in so little time! However, as I typed, I found myself genuinely moved by what she'd written based on a page and a half outline of what was required. She had really taken the brief and run with it.



Derrick, Peter, and Nick get stuck into 'Portents and Signs'

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Raconteurs' Rest

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Paul Thornbury sets the scene in 'Leviathan'.

Fearing train delays, I arrived early – Friday afternoon – at Redwings Lodge on the old Great North Road about an hour north of London. That made a change as it meant I missed travelling in rush hour and also arrived in time to help Andy and other early arrivals to set up. Chairs needed arranging, stock for sale needed laying out, Andy's command centre needed sorting. To be honest, if at that moment, I'd been told there were too many games or too few players, I'd have happily pulled the plug on running my game at all.

But no, the schedule was on the board and there was Portents and Signs. Friday 8pm and Saturday 2pm. Worse than that, when the signup sheets for the first session – the usual four games in parallel in three rooms – were put on the board, people were signing up for it. TH was the first – as good as his word, he'd said he'd be interested in playing it and I was delighted he'd have the opportunity to see how it had turned out. The story centred on the crew of a *Donosev* scout ship surveying an unexplored system on the fringes of an Imperium. Eventually, in a small tech level 0 village, they discover the descendants of a misJumped school trip which was never rescued after it went missing a hundred years before. The villagers still use sign language to communicate as the original castaways were all profoundly and incurably

deaf. Unfortunately, the magnetic field of a Brown Dwarf a couple of orbits away is collapsing which will seriously endanger life with x-ray flares. Can the PCs interact with the culture and can they (should they?) rescue the descendants?

A meal next door at the Spiceland curry house beckoned as the rest of the attendees arrived in dribs and drabs and then it was all too soon 8pm and time for the Convention to formally get underway. Seven of us retired to TAS Lounge Gamma (nicely out of the way in case of disastrous embarrassment) and launched into Portents and Signs. Yes, there were questions I couldn't answer – but other players always came up with good responses (I should have made better notes of these); yes, there were moments I feared it would all go horribly wrong – the moonlet that we all discovered orbited at 2% of the speed of the light was great fun. (I knew it was quick but had-



Charmaine in mid-roll/role playing a Droyne in 'The Oynssork'

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Raconteurs' Rest

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n't done the math!); there were even moments I thought we'd never get to the key part of the adventure as quite a lot of time was spent examining the stellar data and exploring (and brewing alcohol on) an uninhabited world; but sometime after midnight we'd reached a satisfactory conclusion.

What I absolutely hadn't expected was the more than positive reaction the game seemed to generate. I was quite taken aback. The praise for my daughter's journal handout, made all the stress over that worthwhile. Indeed, from the moment it was found it was never out of someone's hands. The one complaint was that there wasn't enough time to read it all! The scenario had gone down well and was later described as "very *Traveler*" which was a delight to hear. The snag now was that as word got about, expectations were high for the Saturday game which, with a completely different set of players, might have been a completely different experience. Fortunately, it seemed to go as well the second time around. Indeed, the pacing seemed

nigh on perfect throughout and we finished right on time. This time the PCs had spent less time with the stellar data, but more time on the key world and interacting with the villagers. There was a particularly memorable moment as Steve E and Tony H, naked and armed with nothing but a stick, faced down a vicious and rather quick pride of pouncer carnivores.

Meanwhile, despite refereeing two slots, there were still three opportunities to play. Firstly, on Saturday morning, in Dom Mooney's take on the *Challenge MegaTraveller* adventure by Dennis Myers, 'Snowblind'. This saw the PCs saving a ship from pirates, rewarded with a TL15 Far Trader if they could deliver their patron to a world across the sub-

sector, and finally uncovering a secret Solomani base. While the high tech ship was nice enough, I was personally more delighted to be awarded a knighthood in the Order of the Blue Feather and find I was off to receive it from Margaret herself at the finale!

Following another curry for those who couldn't resist, or takeaway Chinese for those who could, Saturday evening saw Derrick Jones running his first game at TravCon. This one was called 'I'm Not a Celebrity' and those who'd played with Derrick before had a feeling this would be full of fun and good humor and indeed his scenario, unsurprisingly given the title, was inspired by reality tv shows such as *Big*

Brother, I'm a Celebrity... and even, for those of a certain age in the UK, *The Adventure Game*. (Anyone else remember the aspidistra overlord?!). From the genius idea of an Automated Packet Switched Low Berth Network, through the uncertain start of finding ourselves 'on show' for others' entertainment, to the finale of a game of Stratagem (a sort of truncated chess in a vast arena), we were kept guessing and mentally stretched through-

out. Definitely a scenario that might have been published in an April issue of *Challenge*, say, but great fun nonetheless and the change of pace was very welcome after an exhausting day.

For those who had energy – or just couldn't bear to miss out on the fun – there was a late night game of MagBlast in the bar. I understand this was one of the longest games ever and eventually Derrick Jones won – retaining his inglorious title from the year before.

On Sunday, there was the final 'six-hour slot', and for this, in what must almost be a tradition now, I was privileged to play in Andy Lilly's game run-

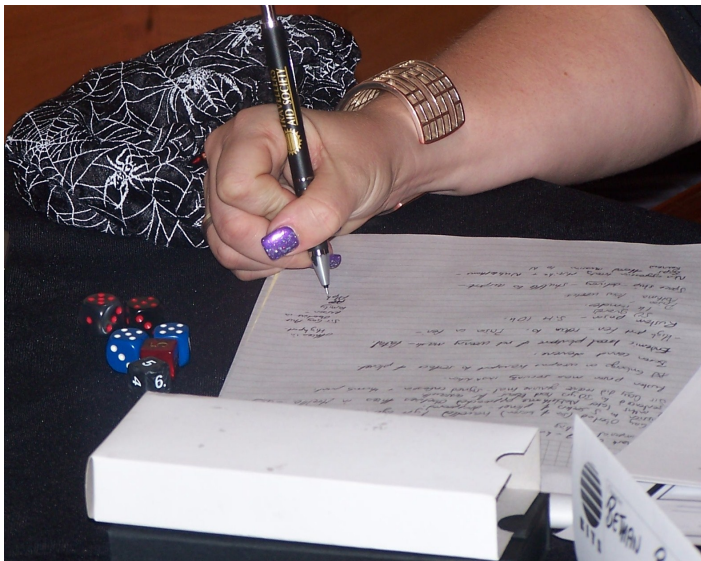


A tense moment in 'Crew to Battle Stations', run by James Firminger (bottom left)

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Raconteurs' Rest

(Continued from page 11)



Convention gifts were immediately useful.

ning 'Trading Places' written by his wife Sarah. This was a great look at the trouble you can get into rescuing a minor noble on one side of the political battle lines just before a major election. Just like 'A Thorny Problem' last year, there was lots of intrigue and well thought out background which made it feel as if the choices we made really would have consequences and could make a difference. Playing an unarmed medic in two serious gun fights was quite an interesting experience as well!

What I've failed to mention are all the other great games that were going on and that I would have loved to have played in. The classic 'Tower Trouble' has been run before and always intrigued me with its space elevator, but I still couldn't fit it in; Simon Bell continued the 'In Search of Angels' campaign with part 7: 'The House on the Hill'; there was a fascinating looking Droyne adventure, 'The Oynssork', being run by Tony Hyland; Tom Zunder ran the classic (and now Mongoose) 'Rescue on Ruie'; and there were many others as well that were all tempting. Special mention should also go to Paul Thornbury and his stunning miniatures (see pictures XXX) seen in action in 'Leviathan' and 'Lock and Load!'. Also, I mustn't forget to applaud James Firminger, Tony Hyland, and Lindsay Jackson who along with Derrick and myself were running games at TravCon for

the first time. It was especially good to meet Lindsay in person for the first time as he ran the very first PBEM Traveller game I ever joined way back before the World Wide Web was invented!

Finally it was time for the Convention to end with the usual awards, the charity auction and wrap up thank yous. The biggest thanks, of course, went to Andy Lilly and his family once again for organizing another brilliant TravCon. This year the Ping... F*** It award went to Peter D for the glorious moment when he realized a fellow PC really had said to another "Are you sure you want to sacrifice *his* life to save yourself?" His expression was priceless. The Starburst for Extreme Heroism went to Larissa for bravely storming a redoubt with a cry of "Just do it!" Her fellow PCs were not right behind her after all. In the auction, the remains of the beer were snapped up quickly, even Derrick's DIY handouts (two blank sheets of paper as a deliberately comical riposte to the referee who'd waaaay overprepared with a handout for everything) raised a couple of pounds for Help for Heroes, but the final shock was the last lot on offer. I'd given Andy my notes, handouts and my daughter's journal to auction off just to save having to carry them all home. There was a rumour that someone might offer £20 (around \$32) which seemed mightily generous. When, in the event, the final bid was £70 (\$110) with another tenner (\$16) given for the PDFs, you can safely say my jaw was



Peter wins the PING! F*** It! Award

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Raconteurs' Rest



Larissa wins the Starburst for Extreme Heroism, but Andy warns her not to 'Just do it' in the future. (Behind is the whiteboard full of award nominations.)

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on the floor. My thanks to the charitable generosity of the two final bidders quite making my year, my thanks to all twelve people who bravely took their chance on a newbie, and a huge thanks to Emma, my daughter, for her terrific work in making Portents and Signs look so good! Of course, the only snag now is how to follow that next year. But I may have caught the refereeing bug and my work colleagues now want to try out a game in the pub one evening, if not attend TravCon next year. I'd call that a Spectacular Success roll!

Lessons learned: Embrace the fear and jump right in. Preparation preparation preparation. ☼

Active Measures

Apotheosis

by Michael Brown

Synopsis: The travelers are tasked with rescuing a child thought lost many years prior, but who actually has been raised on a world under a religious dictatorship.

Setting: Mundeos, an interdicted (Red Zone) world run by a religious dictatorship (government type D in the Universal World Profile). Its' exact location and UWP is left unspecified for maximum customization. Of course, the referee can substitute any similar world that fits the campaign. The adventure can begin on any Imperial world.

Considerations: Since religion, even fictional ones, can be a sensitive subject for some players, the exact particulars of Mundeos' state beliefs are not presented here. The referee should craft the details of the creed based on the maturity and assent of the players.

Dis Aliter Visum

Because of a successful mission, or a recommendation from a prior client, a representative of Marquis Natan Kaan, the chief Imperial administrator on this world, contacts the adventurers. The Marquis has need of a group with their particular talents.

When the group meets with the Marquis, he is a mixture of elation and distress. He explains that five years ago, as his wife Marit and infant son Kaldar were traveling by starliner, the ship was attacked by pirates. Both starships were destroyed during the resulting fight. Kaan thought his family had perished. However, rumors reached him that there may have been survivors. Subsequent painstaking sleuthing by his agents revealed that Kaldar was alive! During the attack, Marit apparently stowed him away in a lifepod, which Kaan's agents determined would have been able to reach Mundeos, a nearby habitable world. Unfortunately, Mundeos is interdicted and declared off-limits by the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service.

Kaan wants to hire the PCs to retrieve his son by whatever means necessary, paying them a round MCr1 for their services. He can supply what little data he has on the world (which includes the UWP and the "Readily Available" IISS information below), a hologram of Kaldar computer-retouched to his current age of five and letters of passage to smooth over any official Imperial encounters between their current world and Mundeos. If the group does not have their own transportation, the Marquis can loan them a starship, but will deduct any damage to it from their pay. The referee should select a suita-

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ble ship -- which does not have to be in pristine condition -- based on the size of the party.

The Marquis only imposes one stipulation: the Imperium must (obviously) remain unaware of their activities, especially his part in it. He will plead ignorance should the authorities catch them. Beyond that, he is not concerned how they go about their task.

Deos Vigilare

The team will need information. A former Scout may be able to access the material under "Detailed IISS Information" below. These reports are restricted and generally require a trip to a Scout base. They also should only be available by use of rank, called in favors, even bribes; but it is still valuable data.

Upon arrival insystem, the group will encounter their first obstacle: unmanned satellites strategically placed around Mundeos that enforce the interdiction. Former Scouts among the crew will recognize the particular model: unarmed yet sophisticated; designed to detect incoming starships, record their transponder codes, and try to attach electromagnetic devices to their hull which are designed to broadcast the ship's prior presence in a Red Zone to port authorities. Destroying any of the satellites is futile; they back up each other's data and transmit copies to another secure backup on an asteroid several light-seconds away. Plus, Scouts regularly visit the system to maintain the satellites and recover recorded data and will notice if something is amiss.

The satellites' orbits are designed to monitor as much of Mundeos and its near space as possible at any given time. A capable crew may be able to devise a way to sneak past them. Possibilities include:

- The old cliché of exploiting any blind spots or monitoring gaps in the orbits
- Slipping in using very small craft or dropping in using foamed ablative reentry packs
- Hiding behind inbound meteors or other debris
- Temporarily blinding them or otherwise shutting them down
- Altering the ship's transponder codes in such a way as to hide the ship's identity or confuse the satellites' computers

The referee should determine the chances for success based on the group's actions. Note that tampering with ship transponders is illegal under Imperial law.

If the ship is detected, the satellites will broadcast a message on all Imperial frequencies warning the crew that they have entered interdicted space, the penalties for doing so, and an order to leave the system immediately to avoid those penalties. Failure to do so triggers the satellites' recording functions and the nearest ones will fire their broadcasting devices at the ship during their ordinance phase (see *Classic Traveller Book 2: Starships*) in an attempt to attach at least one. For this purpose, assume the satellite's computer has skill Gunnery-2 with a Target program running. If the machines record the ship's transponder codes, the group (and the Marquis) can expect a visit from the authorities within weeks.

Once past the satellites, the crew must find a place to land unobserved and hide the ship. Again, the referee should determine the chances for success based on the PCs' actions.

Spiritus Populi

Once on the planet, it is assumed that the adventurers will not simply walk about in plain sight, sticking out like the proverbial sore thumb. The wise traveler finds a way to blend in somehow.

The towns are compact, built with little formal planning, and centered around imposing structures which cannot be anything but places of worship. Extensive agriculture is present outside of the towns, with power supplemented by windmills. The Mundeosans are a simple people living a medieval lifestyle. The citizens' days consist mostly of hard labor in the fields; this makes them a hardy people apparently accustomed to physical labor, but observant Doctors among the visitors can spot signs of otherwise-preventable disease and disability. None speaks Anglic, and it is not likely the team has heard the native language before. Religious observances are held regularly, both informally in various public venues, and formally, in the large places of worship the urban areas are centered around. In fact, the religion's in-

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fluence is everywhere, from the architecture that imitates the temples', to the people's homespun clothing patterned after clerical garb.

Individuals wearing the equivalent of Jack armor and smocks emblazoned with a special symbol guard the towns. They appear to be the only ones carrying weapons, mostly blades and polearms, but those appearing to hold rank bear hand cannons, as described in *Classic Traveller* Book 1: Characters and Combat.) The people show them due deference, and the guards appear to have wide latitude in their duties. Attentive PCs may notice that some of the enforcers have flintlock pistols (tech level 4) instead of hand cannons and wear Mesh armor instead of Jack.

Plastered on numerous sites are large paintings and tapestries of a beatific middle-aged man in elaborate priestly dress, joined in many of them by an equally beatific boy of perhaps five. The people seem to venerate them. The boy bears a striking resemblance to the holographic image of Kaldar Kaan.

At some point as they move about, the team will eventually encounter some sort of difficulty (attention from law enforcement, threat of exposure, etc.) The GM should then introduce the following encounter: a woman suddenly steps into the situation, smoothing over any problems and persuading the team's potential opponents that they are harmless (at least, as far as the group can tell from the subsequent reactions). As the woman leads the team away, she will quietly address them in Anglic: "We need to talk, but not here!"

She will show them to a small apartment above a shop. Once safely inside, she introduces herself as IISS Contact Specialist Xusin Feris. Xusin explains that a little over five years ago, she was part of a Scout team tasked to monitor the interdiction and conduct a quick survey. Just before departure Xusin, in reviewing the amassed data, discovered anomalies in Mundeos' technological progress. The team leader rejected her appeals to extend the investigation, so she did the unthinkable: she went native, assuming the identity of Joralea, a local wise-woman, in order to confirm her findings, and forcing the other Scouts

to leave her behind. She has since quietly observed Mundeos' society, verifying her findings but not discovering who or what was behind it. She reveals that she had marked the PCs as offworlders almost from the moment she set eyes on them and knew she had to get them hidden as quickly as possible to avoid the Shrivens—the guards the PCs saw on the streets.

Xusin can fill the group in on current conditions, imparting the information below under "Detailed IISS Information" (if they do not have it already) and "Xusin's Information." Additionally, her expert knowledge of Mundeosan customs and society can be of great use. If they let her help, she adds +3 to any social interaction throw as long as she accompanies them. Finally, she knows something about the operation of the satellites above: they perform random detailed surface scans of Mundeos to catch interlopers (such as the PCs...) The starship will be detected unless the adventurers took great care in concealing it. The satellites will scan on any week that the referee throws 2D for 2 exactly. If a scan is indicated that week, throw a further 1D for the particular day. A satellite will detect the starship on a 3+, modified by their efforts at concealment. (For comparison, assume that something like total immersion in a body of water or hiding it underground gives a +6)

Xusin can also confirm that the boy in the pictures with the Grand Prelate is the Sky Child -- Domenus, in the native language. He arrived five years ago in a vessel that fits the description of an Imperial lifepod, but Xusin hasn't been able to get near him to verify his identity. She can also translate the wording on the displays. They run along the lines of "The Domenus has come to us", and "Does the Domenus have your devotion?"

Beati Possidentes

The adventurers have two options available. They can go straight to the capital and try to devise a way to sneak into the Grand Prelacy, or they can speak to the farmer who originally witnessed the lifepod's touchdown to see if he has useful information.

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The referee should always remain mindful of the planet's Law Level. A failed roll results in harassment by Shrivvers and therefore the possibility the group's true origins will be exposed. If so, they will be taken to the Grand Prelacy for further examination.

Talking to the farmer: Inquiries will direct the visitors to a small hardscrabble farm outside of town. Perin (the only name he will give) is wary of strangers and will react badly to the team unless Xusin is with them; he knows and respects "Joralea".

Perin will only talk in secret about the day he found the craft; he will relate seeing what looked like "an urn riding on flames" while tending the fields as usual. At first terrified, then curious, he discovered the baby inside. As he was trying to decide what to do, a group of Shrivvers and local clerical officials arrived and claimed child and vessel, warning Perin to keep silent under pain of death. But he has been bothered ever since by how the boy seems to have been exploited. He guiltily admits his concern that the Grand Prelate—praised be his eminence—may not have the child's best interests at heart. He also marvels at how quickly the Shrivvers showed up, as though they had foreknowledge of the vessel's arrival.

If the team has gained his trust, he also admits something else: he removed a small item when the Shrivvers weren't looking. He reveals a piece of jewelry the team will recognize as a holographic pendant. When activated, it shows a short loop of the Marquis' family: himself with a lovely, smiling woman who is cradling an infant.

Unfortunately, the visit to Perin has not gone unnoticed. Temple spies have scrutinized him since that day, and will quickly send word of the strangers who have sought him. As the PCs leave the farm, a group of Shrivvers will appear, led by a cleric who accuses them of heresy and announces their arrest. The Shrivvers will outnumber the PCs and their allies by three to one, led by a captain armed with a hand cannon. They have orders not to kill the strangers, but that won't keep them from roughing them up. Re-

gardless of the outcome, the team will be taken first to the local temple, then by animal cart to the capital.

Going directly to the capital: The team can instead travel straight to the capital, several days' journey from Xusin's town and the largest and most populous city on the planet. Xusin will suggest that they take the guise of simple pilgrims to the holy shrines to avoid Shriver attention. Accepting her recommendation may result in the Shrivvers ignoring them entirely.

The capital is bustling and cosmopolitan. This is the planet's beating heart of commerce, industry, and tourism, as well as the location of the most revered shrines. Of course, the government's presence is most keenly felt here, with Shrivvers seemingly on every corner.

The Grand Prelacy is impossible to miss. It is large compound of imposing structures set atop a central rocky hill, similar to Terra's Acropolis. The main building is the largest and most complex of the structures. Its soaring architecture and ornate décor is designed to provoke awe and respect. It is not necessary that the referee map any of the complex or its buildings in detail; temple schematics found online or floorplans borrowed from any number of fantasy role-playing games will serve.

As can be expected, the Prelacy is guarded day and night by crack units of Shrivvers, making a frontal assault a foolish and suicidal option. However, the visitors can still find many ways in. A few options include: probing for maintenance portals or entrances to catacombs; secretly replacing employees or gulling them into granting access; or using smuggled technology such as grav belts or tranq rounds.

As the PCs search for Kaldar, the referee should throw 2D once; the result on the table below indicates his location at that moment. The chances should be adjusted based on where and how the adventurers gained access to the Prelacy. Nighttime, or otherwise after normal operating hours, adds +4 to the throw:

2+: Receiving religious instruction (2D+1)

4+: Receiving 3D official guests (3D)

6+: Attending an official religious function (10D)

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8+: Enjoying entertainment (1D+3)

10+: In apartments

The number in parentheses after the description is the number of other people with Kaldar at the time. The only time Kaldar is alone is when he is within his apartments; he will be asleep on a further throw of 8+. During daylight hours, 2D servants and tutors and a bodyguard of 1D+1 Shrivvers accompany him in addition to the number of people stated above. The Grand Prelate himself is present on yet another throw of 8+; his presence doubles the number of others present. In addition, one other figure accompanies the Grand Prelate: the reason behind Mundeos' rapid tech level advance. The adventurers should each throw 10+; former Pirates or Rogues get +3 to the roll, former Navy or members of law enforcement get +1. Those successful will recognize Lotharin Zela, a dangerous brigand wanted on several worlds for murder and piracy. Only now, he is dressed as a Mundeosan official and appears to be an advisor to the Grand Prelate.

Obviously, if the group was arrested and brought to the Prelacy, they will automatically encounter Kaldar: in attendance at their trial!

Kaldar is in good health, but has been thoroughly indoctrinated into Mundeosan culture and theology. He will react to any talk of other worlds or being taken away with fear, calling loudly for the guards. Anyone found accosting the boy is subject to immediate arrest and a severe beating.

Di Favent Fortis

The Mundeosans appear to have accepted Kaldar as some sort of messianic figure. Removing him would not only spark great public outrage, the religion itself could be undermined! If the adventurers do not figure this out on their own, Xusin can apprise them of it when she gets a chance.

This is the climax of the adventure. Events will rush to their conclusion and the inevitable conflict that arises will take various forms depending on the adventurers' prior actions and their capacity for inflicting damage. A simple grab-and-run with the

Prelate and the Shrivvers in pursuit is certainly possible. So is a showy trial—giving the PCs an opportunity to expose Zela and rescue Kaldar using the existing legal apparatus—if they were captured beforehand. Zela is a treacherous man who kills without hesitation and is unwilling to see his plans burn; if he escapes, he will commandeer the team's ship. Xusin will agree to leave with the PCs, but will insist on recovering her amassed data. Another complication is that the populace may have been alerted that other Sky People are in their midst, creating a colossal crisis of faith that could eventually bring down the government. Finally, there is the question of what to do about the lifepod that brought Kaldar to Mundeos; it is in a temple specially constructed for it elsewhere in the Prelacy compound but too large and heavy to be moved quickly.

After all other events, the adventurers will still have to make it back to their ship and again run the gauntlet of interdiction satellites to escape. The referee, as always, must determine the flow of events.

De Profundis

After their adventure on Mundeos, the crew must report to the Marquis on the success or failure of their mission. If they were successful, he will gladly pay them as agreed, and can assure them that Kaldar will receive the best cultural integration services the Imperium can offer. If Kaldar is not with them, he will require an explanation why; depending on circumstances, he may agree to a partial payment or nothing at all.

If they brought Zela with them, they will discover that there is an outstanding Cr100,000 bounty on him, but they may have to reveal how they captured him to claim the reward.

Xusin will want to present her findings to her superiors at the nearest Scout base. She understands the amount of trouble she is in and is prepared to face it. Adventurers with a sense of duty to her may wish to help her by speaking on her behalf, funding legal counsel, etc., but their roles in the events may come out as well.

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Active Measures

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Amicos et Inimicos

All of the following NPCs were created using Classic *Traveller* Book 1: Characters and Combat except for Lotharin Zela, who was created using Classic *Traveller* Supplement 4: Citizens of the Imperium.

Xusin Feris (aka Joralea) (Scout) 6767B5 Age 42
6 terms Cr2D×100*
Computer-1, Jack-O-T-3, Mechanical-1, Medic-1,
Pilot-1

After being left behind by her survey team, Xusin assumed the identity of a native wise-woman (subtly using her knowledge of advanced technology to her advantage) and began keeping notes on a hand computer she keeps well-hidden in her room. She will not leave Mundeos without this vital information.

Typical Shriver (Other) 877655 Age variable
terms Variable Cr1D×100*
Blade Cbt-2, Brawling-1, (Gun Cbt-1, Leader-1)
Jack (Mesh); Blade (Hand Cannon)

Shrivers with rank have the skills and equipment listed in parentheses. The referee is encouraged to make the ones that guard the Grand Prelate much more formidable. Note that Mesh armor is a Tech Level 4 item.

Lotharin Zela (aka Zel of the Night Sky) (Pirate)
85793A Age 42 6 Terms Cr50,000*
Blade Combat-2, Brawling-1, Engineering-1,
Gunnery-1, Mechanical-1, Pilot-1,
Ship Tactics-1, Gun Combat-2;
Mesh; Auto Pistol

Zela is a dangerous pirate leader wanted on several worlds. He barely made his way to Mundeos after surviving his ship's destruction. He gained the ear of the Grand Prelate and is now a trusted advisor. Zela has been subtly manipulating the local tech level in an effort to provide for his own comfort and build devices that could help his eventual rescue. He keeps an auto pistol with 2D rounds hidden in his robes and will kill without hesitation.

Grand Prelate Joruun Lar (Other) 556BBF Age 62
11 terms MCr1.5*
Jack-O-T-3, Leader-5, Liaison-5

Joruun Lar is the ultimate head of his planet's religion and government. A sly old man with a skill for reading a crowd, he is cruelly exploiting Kaldar Kaan's extraplanetary origins and his religion's own doctrine to create an eventual dynasty. Lar is also very intuitive, and had suspected there were beings on worlds outside his own even before Kaldar and Zela showed up. Note that his SOC reflects his standing on Mundeos, not within Imperial society.

Kaldar Kaan/The Domenus (Other) 3547BF Age 5
Cr N/A
Jack-O-T-0

Kaldar Kaan is just a little boy caught up in big events. Fully integrated into Mundeosan society and viewing the Grand Prelate as his father, he views the prospect of leaving his home with great fear and apprehension. Worse, the Grand Prelate has made him the linchpin of the entire Mundeosan religion. Without him, the entire system may unravel. As with the Grand Prelate, his SOC reflects his position relative to Mundeosan society. His Jack-of-all-Trades skill should be taken to reflect his skill at games, imaginative play with toys and common objects, and other such varied childhood pursuits.

*All Cr values listed should be considered Imperial equivalent in valuables (precious metals, gems, etc.) or barter items

Pretiosum Scientia

Readily available IISS Information: The IISS has declared Mundeos a Red Zone due to the society's low tech level and widespread xenophobia. At some point in Mundeos' history, a series of disasters decimated the population. The survivors turned to their religion for comfort, and soon united under its tenets. The religious leaders later turned the creed into a functioning government, which still rules the planet today.

Detailed IISS Information (available only to Scouts): The world's supreme authority is the Grand

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Active Measures

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Prelate. This individual leads the planetary government, and serves as its top executive and paramount judge. A council of highly-regarded religious scholars serves as the apex legislative body and handles the day-to-day running of the government. All laws they create are subject to the Grand Prelate's approval. Lesser government, such as the regional and municipal level, is handled by the Temple clerics, who are directly appointed by the central government, typically for their unwavering loyalty.

Laws on Mundeos are strict and official attention is intrusive. Punishments for infractions, enforced by paramilitary operatives called Shriviers, can be harsh and include death. Official corruption is widespread, but generally tolerated in the name of the religion.

Xusin's Information: The Grand Prelate, Joruun Lar, puts forth the appearance of a charming, saintly man but is obsessed with creating a lasting dynasty by any means necessary. He keeps the people in line through a series of official pronouncements based on the main religion. Chief among these is that anything

that falls from the sky other than normal precipitation is considered of divine origin and thus property of the state, to be turned over to the nearest temple under pain of death.

Since the boy's arrival, there has been a zeal to institute a pogrom against unbelievers. Similar to ancient Terra's Spanish Inquisition, groups of suspected heretics are rounded up, taken to the nearest Temple, and "made devoted", whereupon they are returned to society as (supposedly) ardent adherents to the faith.

Xusin suspects that the Grand Prelate had intuited the existence of extraplanetary life even before Kaldar's arrival, and put the Sky Law in place to make sure that he got first crack at any advanced tech that might find its way on-planet. This may have already happened; Mundeos' tech level should be TL2; some TL4 devices are evident—much too rapid an advance to be accounted for by native innovation. (*Referee's information:* Mundeos' anomalous tech level allows the introduction of some simple or experimental TL4 devices into the adventure without fear of imbalance.)

23 Critics' Corner

2300 AD: Then and Now

By Timothy Collinson

This short article endeavours to look at some of the differences between GDW's *2300 AD: Man's Battle for the Stars* of 1988 and the Mongoose volume of 2012 simply called *2300 AD*. It's not a formal review of either product, it isn't suggesting that one is better than the other, and it doesn't attempt to go into great detail. Hopefully, however, it will give those who are curious some pointers to where the main differences lie and what you might need to consider if using both editions or choosing to ignore one or the other.

Physical differences

This is an obvious and predictable difference in the light of a nearly 25 year age gap. The GDW (second) edition came as three booklets (*Adventurer's Guide*, *Director's Guide* and *Play*



Aids) – of possibly the cheapest RPG production this reviewer owns, just paper covers – in a box that has stood up well to quarter of a century well. The new Mongoose volume is a single handsome hardbound volume of 300 pages that shows off the development of the games industry in the intervening years. Inter-

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nally, the same is true. The GDW booklets had sidebars throughout and these are gone in favour of a two column layout. Artwork is completely new in the Mongoose volume – there is less of it and in this reviewer's opinion has lost something over the clarity of the original. The Donna Barr illustrations are a particular loss. Having said that, there are world maps and deck plans galore in the new volume where the earlier edition didn't include any. The photo-realistic illustration on the cover of the Mongoose book is also a couple of orders of magnitude on from the colour line art of the GDW box. Various tables, like the artwork, however are considerably clearer in the GDW volumes.

Mechanics

GDW produced *2300 AD* as a standalone role playing game – and even dropped the *Traveller* connection after the initial *Traveller: 2300* offering in 1986. That means the box included all the rules you might find necessary. It grew out of *Twilight: 2000* as a development of that 'history' in a project GDW called 'The Game' which built the future history by actually playing it out with a large group of participants. It used six sided dice and ten sided dice.

Mongoose *2300 AD* is based on Mongoose's *Traveller* rules and the Core Rulebook is required for play. Gone is any reference to *Twilight: 2000* and that period is now simply referred to as Twilight or the Twilight War. Any mention of development via 'The Game' has also gone. (Although errors of the original such as Finland being counted as 'scandinavian' rather than Nordic have been retained.) This 'Travellerisation' of the rules means that many of the supplements (such as starships or vehicles) are compatible and it also means that many of the rules found in the GDW volumes can be dropped as they're included in the Core Rulebook: task (or 'Event') resolution, combat, animal encounters, world generation, space combat and of course character generation. These latter two have some additions to the Core Rulebook in Mongoose's *2300 AD* volume: space combat has a couple of pages of tweaks added (combat rounds of three minutes,

'tactical movement' instead of thrust rating, variations to missiles and submunitions, etc) and character generation has Advantages/Disadvantages, Core/Frontier differentiations, and the very welcome Focus and body types carried over from the 1980s. For those who learned the words 'ectomorph', 'mesomorph' and 'endomorph' thanks to *2300 AD* they're retained, as are the clubs, diamonds, spades and hearts method of determining Focus (previously a way of determining motivations for NPCs). This latter however has been somewhat revised from the original – aside from being part of PC generation rather than NPC – and spades now stand for curiosity rather than the personal power of the original. On the subject of NPCs, the original books had sidebars of tables to assist in generation such as stature, age, skill levels, clothing and personality which haven't made the new book. However, there are some example civilians, starship crews, military types and animals towards the end of the Mongoose volume. GDW included some typical crew salaries, Mongoose maintain these – all in the standard Livres of course! – but add "Expert Rates" for crew with higher skill levels.

Of course, one of the major differences between *2300 AD* and *Traveller* is starship engines. Instead of the Jump drives of *Traveller*, *2300 AD* has Stutterwarp drives – limited to 7.7 lightyears. This continues and is maintained, along with the lack of anti-grav, nuclear dampers and meson guns for example, as a key difference between the milieu. This gives *2300 AD* a grittier feel with more realistic technology it's claimed. Ships are also generally smaller with a 900 dton cruiser typical instead of the 57th century's 50,000 dtons and a maximum ship size for *2300 AD* of 10,000 dtons. And of course, the Third Imperium has some 11,000 worlds whereas the universe of 2300AD has a mere 30 which is a considerable change of scale. One thing missing from the Mongoose book is the rather interesting 'further look' notes on the Stutterwarp Drive which amongst other things looked at whether or not it might be possible to break the 7.7ly barrier and so on.

Experience and renown are also gone from the

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original which some might feel is a loss but does bring the volume into line with the *Traveller* rules. The loss of the world generation section also means that two pages of advice on world mapping has also gone which is a shame. The loss of the animal encounter material means that the interesting food chain pyramid diagrams are gone, as well as the rather iconic animal (and sentient) hit location diagrams of course. Task/Event resolution was based on a d10 roll (Simple 2+, Routine 6+, Difficult 10+, Formidable 14+, Impossible 18+) but in removing this entirely to the Core Rulebook it standardises it with *Traveller* as a d6 roll.

Background

One controversial presence in the original game was the 'Near Star List' based on the Gliese catalogue with stars from a 1969 survey. At the time, this three dimensional map was considered cutting edge for a role playing game and was as up-to-date as science allowed. Of course, knowledge and science have moved on in the 25 intervening years and much is known that makes the map somewhat outdated. However, because the map is so tied up with the setting and invalidating it would make a lot of the *2300 AD* background worthless, the decision was taken to keep the Near Star List as the core of the setting. For purists this may be a big stumbling block, for those more interested in the milieu it should present no problems and means that the older material remains useful. Having said that, GDW's presentation of the list was much clearer than the Mongoose version which is considerably harder to read – although it is in keeping with tables across the rest of the book. And where GDW listed stars in alphabetical order by name, Mongoose have chosen to use the Gliese number order which isn't perhaps as useful. (They have however reverted to the proper Gliese numbers rather than the Gliese number \times 10 which GDW used.) Also, Mongoose have integrated the companion star information rather than place it at the end of the list. Having said all that, the representation of three dimensions on a flat map is still no easier to use than it was 25 years ago!

The 'Colonies of Earth' list has become the 'Settlement List' and it adds UWP's which is extremely helpful, but it loses the year of colonization which is less so. Various colonies have been added: the American, Australian, British, German and Manchurian colonies on Alpha Centauri – which existed in GDW but weren't listed. Wellon and Santa Maria are also added to both the list and the setting. Others which have appeared: the American colonies Hermes, Avalon and Far Station 19; Warkington's Drift for the British; Eriksson for the Canadians; Gerollblock for the Germans; Sechura for the Inca; and Trilon 14 for the Trilon Corp. (The French colonies in the Mongoose book have descended into some alphabetical muddle as well.) Gone are the homeworlds of the Eber and Sung for example and there are some errors such as the Life Foundation colony DM-3 1123 becoming DM+3 1123, not to mention that some of the +/- symbols are simply missing from the Mongoose volume. The Nations of Earth list is retained, but as mentioned above is not as clear in its new incarnation.

One big disappearance is the alien race of the Klaxun. While all the others are present and correct – if somewhat minimally described, perhaps leaving the way open for future supplements, the Klaxun have gone without a mention. There's no obvious reason for this. Also gone is the sidebar information on typical alien NPC stats. Perhaps part and parcel of the development of science fiction role playing games is the lessening of the emphasis on the alienness of the alien races. In the late 80s there was much reaction against aliens that were merely 'men in suits', thus the GDW text encourages referees and players to consider just how strange the universe can be. Either this is more taken for granted by the Mongoose volume, or the play balance of actually role playing the truly alien has left us settling for what we know. Another subtle difference is that the Mongoose volume is generally more upbeat in its introduction to the background the history to the milieu. One suspects that the cold war was still too much on the minds of the original writers. Also the Kafers aren't immediately introduced as an implacable foe.

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Critics' Corner

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Interestingly, the GDW volume covers 'history' from 1700 whereas the Mongoose volume picks things up around 2000. Some of the "major wars since 2000" have also been removed including the Kafer war.

The world descriptions have been much revised and considerably beefed up – although not as lengthy as the descriptions found in the Colonial Atlas. The Mongoose volume also includes a 'Universal Nation Profile' (based on UWP) and world maps which are a great addition. Some adjustments have been made however, for example, correcting language as Tirane 'Provence Nouveau' becomes 'Nouvelle Provence', and 'Provincia de Brasil' becomes 'Provincia do Brasil', or adjusting the background a little: Wellon and Santa Maria being added as colonies on Alpha Centauri. Most of the organizations such as foundations or military units are present, often with text reproduced exactly as it was, but some have been reduced in terms of description. One omission that seems a shame is the loss of the shoulder patch insignia used as illustrations in the GDW volume.

The ship listings are one area where the Mongoose volume really does excel. The ships have been redesigned for the new rule set and have new illustrations that are based on the old ones – your mileage may vary on whether or not you prefer old or new. Deckplans however are included now which will make the vessels even more useful in play. A few of the original craft have been retained (the Anjou, Trilon SSU-21, Aconit Frigate, Kennedy-class cruiser) but most are gone including the Kafer vessels (a possible future supplement?). However several others have been added including for example a bulk carrier, a new fighter, and a beanstalk capsule which given the interest in this particular technology is very welcome (though this was covered in the later GDW volume for the setting, Beanstalk as well as Earth/Cybertech Sourcebook.)

One difference that is actually noted in the Mongoose volume occurs on page 35 with a reference to New Canberra having a "discrepancy" in the population figure from that given in the Colonial Atlas. The figure was 98 million and is now 6 million. But

in fact Amaterasu (was 119 million, now 10 million), Tirania (was nearly 18 million, now 3 million) and New Albion (was 212 million, now 6 million) have all been seriously altered as well. Tunghu has crept up to a little over 3 million (from 2,200,000) and of course as noted above Wellon and Santa Maria have been added as two further colonies not mentioned by GDW. These major reductions (and small additions) feel about right for the world as described so it's easy to see why they've been made.

On the equipment front, it's much the same list but prices have (mostly) gone up! That's inflation for you. Things are approximately three times more expensive but some have gone up by a lot more and there are some reductions. Also sadly lacking, again, are all the illustrations of equipment and weapons. Particularly in the case of the latter, for this non-specialist, they were inordinately helpful in visualizing what was being described. Weapons haven't completely transferred over, many if not most have but some have gone AWOL (the Ramirez-Abruggo BF-1, Arno 5-15, Mueller-Rivera F-7). In general these are either less useful or more marginal and in their place are new weapons (the Stracher 'Wolf' Hunting shotgun, Stracher Modell 6, Rockwell 12-39 Magnum, Traylor MX-99 Gauss Pistol, Kasakaia M-97, Guiscard F-44 Gauss Gun, DunArmCo M-600 Rotary Gun, a whole section on submachineguns and a rocket launcher). There are also now non-lethal weapons such as a plasma bazooka, flamethrower, and a DunArmCo Web Caster. There was much more in the way of guided ordnance, but now we have Pentapod weapons and various weapon accessories. The Armour section has been beefed up somewhat but is still based on the GDW material.

Vehicle design has added some variations to the Core Rulebook - or rather the rules presented in Supplement 5-6: The Vehicle Handbook. (This revises and considerably simplifies the rules given in both Supplement 5: Civilian Vehicles and Supplement 6: Military Vehicles). Example vehicles in the book all used this revised rule set. The vehicles from the 80s are all reproduced here under the new system, they've also been re-illustrated – again opinion may

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Critics' Corner

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differ on whether the new pictures are in improvement, but it's good to see them. Three additions are the Pichot 4020 cargo handler and two combat walkers utilizing the new walker design rules of Supplement 5-6.

Aside from sections that have been considerably revised or beefed up, there are some that are new in the Mongoose book: cybernetics and DNA modifications (some of which of course appeared in the Earth/Cybertech Sourcebook), robots and drones, cortex hacking (modifying *Traveller* psionic rules to allow mind reading), starship encounter tables, sample animals and NPCs, and a list of sources including all the original *2300 AD* material (which can be found on the Far Future CD-ROM for those who'd like to use it as additional support material) and other fiction, films, tv, comics and so on which can be used as inspiration. There's a good chapter on space travel and combat which includes interface travel options from beanstalks through spaceplanes to catapult operations

Additional Material

One sad loss from the original is the Travel Time table of both the *Adventurer's Guide* and the *Play Aids*. One of the most useful tables of its kind. There is nothing like this either in the *2300 AD* book from Mongoose, or the Core Rulebook. There is, however, a table that didn't appear in the original: a calendar (including important holidays) which is useful for keeping track of the passage of time in an adventure.

Another missing item is the solo adventure – possibly a first for *Traveller* – 'Terror's Lair' with the reader as American Marshal Obadiah Thomas on the trail of a drug smuggler. As the adventure was bound

up with the rule set, it's unsurprising this has been removed but its passing deserves a note for rarity value.

The world map for Earth has become a *Traveller* standard isomorphic map and although it's very attractive, the addition of physical features make it rather unclear and hard to read. The boxed set from GDW also included a Near Star List map as a separate chart which was useful, this of course is not included with the Mongoose book, but may perhaps yet be an additional pack such as the Spinward Marches Map Pack and its like.

Conclusions

It is unsurprising that there is considerable revision to *2300 AD* in its rules and setting. Role playing game design has moved on quarter of a century, Mongoose have their own style and requirements, but there's little here that should cause problems either for those familiar with the older books wanting to update, or for those unfamiliar with the GDW work wanting to explore a new setting for which they have no previous experience. There's much great gaming goodness in both editions and with Far Future making the old material easily available on CD-ROM, no reason why the best of both worlds, as it were, can't be had. Colin Dunn and team should be congratulated on keeping the spirit of the original. It should be easy enough to adapt existing material – published or homegrown – to the new rules; but those new to *2300 AD* might also want to obtain the older books for additional material and background. It's always good to see alternative milieux for *Traveller* and great to see this particularly setting brought up to date and reconnected with the *Traveller* brand after so many years. 🌀

News About Traveller

Recent Traveller News and Findings

April and May 2012

- **Zozer Games** has released *Planetary Toolkit 1: Ubar* and *Planetary Toolkit 2: Korinthea*.
- **Gypsy Knights Games** has released *The Hub Federation*, *Quick Worlds 25: Sophronius*, *21 Organizations*, and *Subsector Sourcebook 3: Hub*.

- **Terra/Sol Games** has released *Setting Update Beta* for their Twilight Sector setting.
- **Mongoose Publishing** has released *Alien Module 5: Solomani*, *The Third Imperium: Deneb Sector*, *2300 AD: Terror's Lair*, *2300 AD: The Tricolore's Shadow*, and *Special Supplement 1: Biotech Vehicles*.
- **DSL Ironworks** has released *Quick Decks 2: Expansion Pack* and *Quick Decks 3: Bay Weapons*. 🌀

23 Up Close and Personal

Estë Toivenen

profiled by Timothy Collinson

Estë Toivenen 898BB7 Finnish/Romanian female
Age: 34; Citizen: Homesteader, Rank 3
Homeworld: Joi (New Cornwall), 1.05G (Normal)
Body Type: Normal, 176cm, 69kg
Frontier Background: Vehicle – Hoverjeep, Sensory Impaired (Touch – synaesthesia)
Focus: Spades: Internal Map (+4 DM to Navigation checks), Luck/1, Manic
Gravity Modifiers: in micro-G DEX-2/STR+2, Fast; low-G DEX-1/STR+1; heavy-G DEX+1/STR -2
Skills: Drive (Hovercraft)-2, Language-2, Survival-1, Mechanic-1, Computers-1, Persuade-1, Steward-0, Athletics (Co-ordination)-1, Trade (Fishing)-1, Gun Combat (Handgun)-2, Art (Drawing)-0, Melee (Unarmed Combat)-0, Navigation-0
Equipment: Lv3800, 1 Ship Share, Stracher Modell 6

Between two palm trees a fine filament of spider thread glints in the afternoon sun. A tanned figure sits taking in the view down the beach to the waves, smelling the salt in the air, and listening to the occasional cry of seabirds. A mock-turtle is crawling slowly across the sand not a dozen metres away. Estë sketches the scene with an untutored hand and her stylus makes rapid strokes across an artist's pad. She's not quite happy with the results, and, with an impatient swipe, clears the image from the pad.

Estë Toivenen was born of a Lunar helium-3 miner from the Scandinavian Union and a mother from Romania who were first generation colonists to Joi. They built up a small fish farming business on a tropical island off the west coast of New Cornwall and bequeathed it to their only daughter. They died when she was just 20—her mother of a wasting illness and her father of a heart attack (some would say a broken heart)—some four months later. Estë now runs the place alone with some hired help at busy times of the year. She's not only fluent in her mother tongue, but speaks several Romance languages to varying degrees and can also speak Finnish. Her father named her for a goddess-like being from a favourite drama trilogy's creation back-story.



Estë packs up her gear, folds up her stool and walks a short distance down the beach. As she passes the mock-turtle she takes her leave of it with the slightest of casual salutes. Just before an outcrop of rocks her hoverjeep is just emerging from the palm shadows she parked it in. It's the work of a moment to jump on, fire her up, and head inshore along a rough trail across some dunes and into the trees.

Back in '87 Estë had fallen for the charms of a resident teacher from New Cornwall based in Weyland and for a couple of years they'd been close. There was talk of him giving up his science classes and moving out to the island to help with the farming, but a reorganisation of the school had brought promotion and a small population surge of new colonists left too much need for it to ever happen. The relationship drifted apart and Estë threw herself into work and also a study of how the coastal environment was being affected by oceanic salt compounds being deposited on the north eastern shore.

Further along the island the trail emerges at the beach once again, and the hoverjeep comes to rest beside boardwalks that lead out over the water in an extended cross hatching of jetties. Estë leaves everything behind but a portacomp which she takes with her. Glinting in the sunlight the occasional silver flash can be seen in the water between the piers.

Twelve years ago Estë began surveying fish sizes, sand deposition and erosion, reef growth and a host of other factors. Not just around her farms but all over the five mile long island of Vanyanta. As

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Up Close and Personal

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well as selling her fish in the harbour market, she's become a regular feature of island life checking sensors, taking readings, monitoring change and flow and movement. There's no one on the island who isn't familiar with her and the sound of the hoverjeep's fans often draws excited children and Estë usually has some nuts or fruit with her for just such occasions. At other more isolated spots, lone denizens of Vanyanta may turn out to catch up on the latest news or just to welcome a friendly face and pass the time of day. Along the interior island paths, Estë drives relatively cautiously following a serious accident in which her hoverjeep turned over after hitting a fallen palm hidden by a blind corner. A similar accident some five years later has produced a certain hesitancy in her driving. Along the open stretches of beach, however, she's more willing to drive at speed.

Out on a jetty, Estë moves with an agile grace as the fauxwood planks jostle quietly against their pylons. Looking down at one of the side nets of the pens that the walkways enclose, she sees some damage that she marks for repair. A gull alights on a pylon top but is soon frightened off by the scareshark sounds of a nearby monitoring unit.

Five years back the Pottsdam Corporation—possibly bankrolled by Niyazawa International—attempted to gain control of the colony on Joi. They'd spent some years planting agents in various vital positions and at the key moment of their coup, a Thursday in spring Estë always remembers, managed to topple the government briefly. Estë—with her contacts all over the island of Vanyanta was able to persuade the islanders to unite behind their chief representative and talk him into leading a popular protest against Pottsdam. Using peaceful means the groundswell of public opinion across Joi meant that after some three weeks the corporation backed down and backed out of the world, realising that if they cut their losses before any serious damage was done, on either side, they could save face to some extent.

Satisfied that all is well at the fish pens, Estë takes the hoverjeep further along the beach some distance and then heads out to sea for a few minutes.

Three VAWTs, or vertical axis wind turbines, turn lazily and the slap of water at their bases makes a counterpoint to the blades' rhythmic swish. Once again, all appears to be in order and with a now lowering sun, the hoverjeep and its single occupant heads back to shore.

Three years ago, Estë received a Squire's Accolade award for the diligence of her work keeping the community informed about the measurements she was taking and what they might mean for the future. But of more delight to her personally was a first prize she picked up at the annual Vanyanta Fayre in the hard fought category of 'Best Fish Soup'. A modest volume of local recipes has also enhanced her reputation.

It's not long before the hoverjeep is pulling up beside the main farm building and Estë hops out; her portacomp polls some final readings from a weather station set up in the yard out front. As the light finally begins to fail, the farmhouse begins to glow with the warmth of a natural light that reflects its owner. Tomorrow there's the larval drainage to supervise and the palm spider traps to set, but for now, a quiet evening of reading and perhaps some Sole soup call.

With a political interest awakened by the incident with Pottsam, Estë has become more aware of the fragility of the colony's independence. Getting advice from a couple of her neighbours, she decided to start training with a small Stracher handgun which she is becoming relatively proficient with. Interestingly, Estë suffers from—although she sees it as a blessing rather than a hindrance—the rather unusual synaesthesia and says that holding the Stracher gives her the taste of apple crumble.

Estë has some small amount of savings, a great zest for life and an interest in the spiritual. She has the basic skills required to fix the hoverjeep if need be but is also on good terms with an island mechanic who lives just down the road from her farm.

Shutting down the homestead at the end of the day, Estë listens to the sound of a breeze in the nearby palms. A scrubfowl scratches at the earth somewhere out the back and the white disc of Blanche is high in the sky just now. Estë watches for a while and then retires.





Diaspora Phoenix

Reviewed by Shannon Appelcline

Diaspora Phoenix. Martin J. Dougherty

Original Publication: 2002

Current Availability: Uncertain

Editor's Note: This review originally appeared on RPG.Net in December of 2010, and is reprinted here with the author's permission.

Author's Note: I think that one of the best ways to prepare yourself to run a game is to immerse yourself in its fiction, and thus get a real sense of its milieu. Thus, this series of reviews, which looks at some of the fiction that influenced Traveller, was influenced by Traveller, or is actually set in the Traveller universe.

The New Era time period has attracted the most attention from fiction writers; this review covers another of those stories.

This twenty-first review covers *Diaspora Phoenix* by Martin Dougherty. It was published by Quicklink Interactive in a limited-edition POD book and was available as a PDF until Dougherty withdrew from work with QLI. I suspect it's almost impossible to get nowadays, but it's another one that I hope will return in the future and that I'm including in this review series for completeness sake in any case.

About the Story

Diaspora Phoenix feels very much like a roleplaying novel—literally, a game adventure (or in this case, a campaign) that's made the jump to fiction. Herein a group of five disparate adventurers start out the story trapped on the planet of Darryl, that's descending into warfare. They have to get off the planet alive.

From there, the story travels a considerable distance (literally: both many light years and almost two years of time) as the adventurer jump from one crisis to another—eventually coming together with a group of independent ship captains who will form the United Worlds Alliance.

About two-thirds of the way through the novel, the story makes a somewhat abrupt change, going from the story of these individual adventurers to the story of politics on the TNE stage, which offers a great big-picture view of the era infrequently seen elsewhere.

Genre & Fiction

The genre of this book, as I alluded to, is “gaming fiction”. I suspect the storyline was pulled straight from Martin Dougherty's *Traveller* campaign. If it wasn't, it could have been. As tends to be the case with *Traveller* gaming fiction, this novel is pretty picaresque. It jumps from one place to another, from one adventure to the next. There's some attempt to create a bigger picture of people coming together to form a new society, but that's mainly crammed into the last third of the book—though it's certainly in the background before that.

Though I liked the overall shape of *Diaspora Phoenix*, there were three elements in it which threw me somewhat.

First is the frequent combat, which is always described in a precise (and lengthy) manner—such that it feels like Dougherty is describing *Traveller* combats round by round. I enjoyed that at first as Dougherty does an excellent job of detailing the mechanics of what is going on in an evocative way that you can visualize. However, by late in the novel hearing about every hit and miss was getting a little tedious for me.

The disjunction between the two parts of the book was also somewhat irking. I felt like the first two-thirds of *Diaspora Phoenix* needed more big-picture focus and the last-third needed more attention to the original characters. If this balance had been better, I think the arc of the story would have been superb.

Finally, I found the characters somewhat flat, making them hard to differentiate at times—especially since people were constantly entering and leaving the group.

With all that said, unlike most gaming fiction authors, Martin Dougherty is a decent wordsmith. The plotting is not perfect and there were some other issues, but overall the book was engaging and kept me reading.

Though *Diaspora Phoenix* wasn't an entirely polished novel, it was a very credible first effort, and thus I've let it eke in a “3” out of “5” for Style.

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Applicability to The New Era

In these reviews I've long discussed the "Applicability to Mongoose *Traveller*" of the *Traveller* books, but the point has come where I just have to admit that the TNE novels are largely inapplicable to Mongoose *Traveller* adventures—except as they discuss the most general ideas of technology and space travel. So, instead, I wanted to address how applicable *Diaspora Phoenix* was if you're considering running a game in that far-flung TNE period.

In short, *Diaspora Phoenix* is a great reference for The New Era.

What impresses me most about *Diaspora Phoenix* is how its episodic adventures are pretty much a checklist of possible TNE scenarios: trying to survive on a pre-spaceflight world; unearthing a lost ship (on the surface of a moon even!); escaping a war zone; infiltrating and sabotaging a religious TED's world; getting badly needed minerals; finding hi-tech equipment; finding survivors that have been cut-off for generations; and fighting against the other political powers of The New Era.

I'm also impressed by the story arc. Though I think the pacing is off, I find the idea of individual adventurers coming together to eventually form a nascent interstellar government to be breathtaking; it's exactly the sort of storytelling that The New Era allowed (but which GDW never took advantage of, because they instead defined two well-established interstellar states, the RCES and the Regency).


Beyond that, *Diaspora Phoenix* does a good job of hitting a lot of the big-picture ideas of The New Era. Though Dougherty opts not to tell his story within the traditional setting of the Reformation Coalition, he only moves one sector spinward, to the Diaspora Sector. Thus, the Reformation Coalition is a potential threat while one of the Reformation's big enemies, The Guild, is a big problem for this novel's United Worlds Alliance as well.

Besides these political governments we also gets a pretty solid focus on Vampire and (even moreso) the Virus—who I feel got short-changed in GDW's own TNE novels, but here really help to define the dangerous landscape that the Era is set against.

The end of the novel promises to open up the whole story even more, by painting politics on a big canvas, so it's a pity that Dougherty's *Phoenix at Bay*, the sequel to *Diaspora Phoenix*, never saw print (nor, for that matter, the rest of the five-book sequence that Dougherty imagined). Fortunately, you can get some of the details either in *Traveller 1248 Sourcebook 1* or in Martin's CotI forum posts.

Putting that all together, it should be obvious that I think *Diaspora Phoenix* is a great resource for The New Era that does exactly what I ask my RPG fiction to do: it elucidates the setting and provides gamemasters with ideas for adventures. I've thus given it a full "5" out of "5" for Substance.

Conclusion

Although *Diaspora Phoenix* has numerous creaky bits that suggest an author still learning the fictional craft, it's sufficiently engaging to be a fun read, and it does a superb job of making *Traveller*'s New Era real and concrete. 

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Back to a Future

An Introductory Adventure to 2300 AD

by Timothy Collinson

This adventure is designed for 4-6 PCs who are familiar with the Official *Traveller* Universe and who have perhaps been adventuring for some time. Ideally they will have heard of 2300 AD and would

like to try it out. It would also suit a *Traveller* game convention where there was a little familiarity with 2300 AD universe and more freedom to run slightly unconventional games. As it might also be being run by a Referee new to the setting, page references to the 2300 AD rulebook from Mongoose have also been provided where relevant.

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Another Day, Another Dingir Dollar

The PCs are ordinary Free Traders somewhere in the Imperium. No descriptions are provided for them and the Referee should either emphasize the banality of their existence or use it as a chance to hand out more outré characters or NPCs from the ‘Casual Encounter’ section of *The Journal of the Travellers’ Aid Society*, the ‘Up Close and Personal’ pages of *Freelance Traveller*, or similar which you never thought you’d get a chance to use. This could be the moment for a Hiver if you’ve shied away from them, a powerful psion or robot, or anything else you might have previously dismissed as somewhat unplayable.

The PCs can load up their vessel with any suitable cargo and plot the course to the next world. There may even be a class of deaf school children chartering the ship for passage to the next system. As they make preparations to depart there is a flicker at the margins of everyone’s perception. There’s no apparent explanation and the sensation only lasts a moment.

As they transition into Jumpspace everyone is violently sick and the Referee should play up on PCs’ fears that they’ve clearly misJumped badly. On the second day of Jump, everyone experiences another flicker. If the players compare notes they’ll realize that these flickers, while brief, are simultaneous.

More than seven days later—the Referee may wish to play with the PCs’/players’ fears and knowledge of misJump to extend this period, but in fact this whole introductory scene should only be a small proportion of the entire time allotted to the adventure. The longer it goes on, the more disenchanted or cheated the players are likely to feel. The misJump has emerged into completely empty space. No chance of refuelling, no chance of rescue. Indeed, even if the ship carries fuel for another Jump it’s clear that there’s nowhere within range. All the PCs’ worst nightmares about misJumps have materialized. So this is it... they’re going to die.

However long this period is stretched out, the flickering is getting worse. It’s both increasing in

duration and increasing in frequency. Eventually reality seems to collapse in on itself and after a period of apparent unconsciousness, the PCs find themselves in slowly opening tanks rather like cold berths but nothing like they’ve ever seen before. However cold berths are designed in the *Traveller* universe of the players, these tanks will be different, perhaps something like those in the movie *Alien*. If anything, the PCs should have a sense of old fashioned.

Tanked

The PCs will only come around slowly and feel fairly groggy, but will discover they’re in a chamber with six tanks in it and although lighting is minimal there seems to be power, doors open and close and so on, and nearby they’ll find there are similar chambers with sets of tanks in each. All are empty and the place is deserted. A powered down Domestic Robot (2300 AD, p.165) is nearby. It can be reactivated easily enough and will be immediately appalled at the state of the place. It will start cleaning rather obsessively but can answer basic questions from the PCs. It won’t know much however except what its job was. Near their pods are lockers containing their personal gear (which will be limited) and clothing. Depending on how the Referee operates cold berths, the PCs may be naked or dressed in minimal underwear. This may be deeply unflattering and embarrassing, or the latest in skimpy sexiness (and just as embarrassing) as preferred. As a reference, the Referee might like to use the *Red Dwarf* episode ‘Back to Reality’ (Season 5, episode 6 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Back_to_Reality_\(Red_Dwarf\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Back_to_Reality_(Red_Dwarf))) or the related novel by Grant Naylor *Better than Life*. The flickering they’ve experienced was the game universe beginning to degrade before a complete crash of the software.

The PCs have been three years in the simulated game of the far future—the Third Imperium of course—when they’d only booked a weekend break. The other chambers allow many other groups to be simultaneously playing many other games and can be booked by groups for varying lengths of time. An admin error has not only “lost” them but the compa-

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ny that had originally run the gaming suite, Soft Apples, has been bought out by Microtechnica Computers (2300 AD, p.86) and business soon went into decline. As the wing of the game suite was hibernated, somehow the PCs chamber got forgotten. While life in the Core might be highly controlled, sometimes systems go wrong and when they do the effects can be spectacularly wrong.

The Referee should now present the players with their real characters. These could be totally average Joes who chose to escape to the high adventure of the Third Imperium in which case six totally average sets of UCP statistics are offered. Note that the 'present' tense of the descriptions refers to when they entered the gaming tanks. All the characters originate from the core world Tirane (2300 AD, p.32-36) which orbits Alpha Centauri A.

Laurent LeDente 9B29B6 French male Age: 30
Citizen: Corporate, Rank 2 Analyst
Homeworld: Tirane, 1.01G (Normal)
Body Type: Normal, 185cm, 93kg
Core Background: Property/1, Art (Wine Connoisseur), Arrogant
Focus: Diamonds: Ally, Wealthy, Bigoted
Gravity Modifiers: in micro-G DEX-2/STR+2, Fast; low-G DEX-1/STR+1; heavy-G DEX+1/STR-2
Skills: Persuade-1, Advocate-1, Broker-0, Admin-2, Computers-3, Investigate-1, Carouse 0, Diplomat 0, Art (Wine Connoisseur)-0, Leadership-0, Drive (Wheeled)-0, Informatics-0 (2300 AD, p.107), Science (History)-0
Equipment: Lv25,000, Neural Jack (2300 AD, p.120), 1 Ship Share

If there was ever a stereotypical good looking Frenchman, Laurent would come close. He works analysing factory processes and automating them building, installing, and checking the computers which will run the systems. His home is near Nice-sur-Tirane in Nouvelle Provence (2300 AD, p.33-34), but his work takes him all over Tirane. He owns a small vineyard and is becoming rather chubby from his enjoyment of his own produce. He has a neural

jack implant (2300 AD, p.90) allowing direct mind-machine interface.

James Martinson 899986 English male Age: 30
Scholar: Academic Librarian, Rank 2
Homeworld: Tirane, 1.01G (Normal)
Body Type: Normal, 187cm, 86kg
Core Background: Vehicle, Longevity/2, Addiction (Vasopressin-Y) (2300 AD, p.119)
Focus: Hearts: Contact, Luck, Coward
Gravity Modifiers: in micro-G DEX-2/STR+2, Fast; low-G DEX-1/STR+1; heavy-G DEX+1/STR-2
Skills: Admin-1, Persuade-1, Carouse-0, Diplomat-1, Computers-1, Informatics-2, Science (Electronics)-1, Investigate-1, Streetwise-1, Medic-0, Comms-0, Flyer (Wing)-0, Science (History)-0, Science (Linguistics)-0
Equipment: Lv30,000, Subdermacomp (2300 AD, p.123)

James is a subject librarian at New London University in Wellon (2300 AD, p.34). He's responsible for library materials for the computing students. He buys ebooks, ejournals, databases, lectures in information retrieval and publishes papers on library applications of his current interests. He owns a street monowheel (2300 AD, p.173) but has just started taking flying lessons. He dreams of one day riding the beanstalk on Beta Canum or Earth .

Kati Brümmer 798783 German female Age: 30
Citizen: Worker, Rank 1 Apprentice
Homeworld: Tirane, 1.01G (Normal)
Body Type: Ectomorph, Fast/2, Skinny/1, 191cm, 76kg
Core Background: Property, Internal Clock, Rival
Focus: Diamonds: Contact×2, Enemy
Gravity Modifiers: in micro-G DEX-2/STR+2, Fast; low-G DEX-1/STR+1; heavy-G DEX+1/STR-2
Skills: Trade (Civil Engineering)-3, Mechanic-0, Drive (Wheeled)-1, Engineer (Power)-1, Admin-0, Informatics-0, Medic-0, Science (History)-0, Science (Planetology)-0, Trade (Weaving)-0
Equipment: Lv30,000, 1 Ship Share

Kati is a site supervisor for a large construction company based in the nation of Freihafen (2300 AD,

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p.34). Her home is in Ceske Vary and in her spare time has begun to learn to weave. Tall and thin, she feels she has to compensate for her perceived gawkiness by an over-reliance on makeup. She owns a small house in Ceske Vary outright. Kati will take great delight in proclaiming to Laurent the superiority of Freihafen wines (2300 AD, p.20).

Lilliana Suarez 7B8894 Argentinian female Age: 30
Citizen: Freelancer, Rank 2 Hacker
Homeworld: Tirane, 1.01G (Normal)
Body Type: Endomorph, Robust/2, Heavy/1, 160cm, 73kg
Core Background: Vehicle, Ally, Manic
Focus: Hearts: Contact, Sexy, Rival
Gravity Modifiers: in micro-G DEX-2/STR+2, Fast; low-G DEX-1/STR+1; heavy-G DEX+1/STR-2
Skills: Admin-2, Advocate-1, Deception-1, Drive (Wheeled)-1, Streetwise-1, Trade (Computer Construction)-1, Art (Poetry)-0, Informatics-0, Language (English)-0, Science (History)-0
Equipment: Lv30,000, 3 Ship Shares

Lilliana is a vivacious and exceedingly attractive Argentinian from Santa Maria and lives in Cordoba (2300 AD, p.36). She is self-employed doing whatever she can to make a peso. She has something of a chip on her shoulder about the ESA's initial claim on Tirane (2300 AD, p.33) so she's rather cool towards Laurent, James and Matthew. (Kati probably escapes that as she's female.) In a movie she could be played by Michelle Rodriguez (Trudy Chacon in Avatar). She owns a Bridgeport-Swift Sandpiper personal ATV (2300 AD, p.173)

Matthew Billson 8C7965 English male Age: 30
Citizen: Corporate, Rank 3 Manager
Homeworld: Tirane, 1.01G (Normal)
Body Type: Ectomorph, Fast/2, Skinny/1, 199cm, 90kg
Core Background: Property/1, Contact, Rival
Focus: Hearts: Contact, Luck, Arrogant
Gravity Modifiers: in micro-G DEX-2/STR+2, Fast; low-G DEX-1/STR+1; heavy-G DEX+1/STR-2
Skills: Mechanic-2, Admin-1, Broker-1, Advocate-0, Explosives-1, Computers-0, Diplomat-0, Leadership-1, Gun Combat (Slug Pistol)-1, Jack-of-All-Trades-1,

Melee (Unarmed Combat)-1, Science (Biology)-1, Flyer (Rotor)-1, Drive (Wheeled)-0, Informatics-0, Trade (Hydroponics)-1, Science (History)-0
Equipment: Lv10,000, Stracher P11mm automatic pistol (2300 AD, p.150), Ally

Matthew was born in New Albion but now lives in Port Ayers, New Canberra (2300 AD, p.35). He's the manager of a field operation of AMEC – the Aberdeen Mineral Exploitation Company (2300 AD, p.86) who have teams working in New Canberra. He is tall, thin and rather arrogant to those he sees as less capable than himself. He owns part of a small ranch outside of Port Ayers.

Granger Sturt B85456 American male Age: 30
Citizen: Worker, Rank 3 Technician
Homeworld: Tirane, 1.01G (Normal)
Body Type: Mesomorph, Powerful/2, Heavy/2
Core Background: Vehicle, Longevity/1, Ugly
Focus: Clubs: Rapid Recovery, Nightvision, Vengeful
Gravity Modifiers: in micro-G DEX-2/STR+2, Fast; low-G DEX-1/STR+1; heavy-G DEX+1/STR-2
Skills: Carouse-2, Drive (Wheeled)-2, Deception-1, Gambler-1, Gun Combat (Slug Rifle)-1, Explosives-1, Engineer (Stutterwarp)-0 (2300 AD, p.107), Informatics-0, Mechanic-0, Science (History)-0, Science (Economics)-0, Trade (Gunsmith)-0, Trade (Space Construction)-2
Equipment: Lv25,500, Rockwell 12-81 Magnum (2300 AD, p.148), 2 Ship Shares

Granger only arrived on Tirane from Earth a year ago and has worked in a variety of jobs, generally based in Wellon. However, he was thinking of moving to Tirania which may not have the job opportunities, but which would feel more like home. He owns a Houston Motors RangeStar (2300 AD, p.174). His looks "are against him" as they say (2300 AD, p.106) but he does heal twice as fast as normal (2300 AD, p.104) and can see better in poor light than others (2300 AD, p.104).

If the PCs are to be part of an ongoing 2300 AD campaign, the Referee may allow slightly more tweaked UCPs to provide better long term play bal-

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ance. (The above 36 characteristics are the results of just 36 die rolls in the order they appeared.) All have been kept to the same age to make skill levels roughly parallel, all have been put through the Citizen career (Core Rulebook, pp.14-15 along with the modifications of *2300 AD*, p.95) bar one who's been put through the Scholar career (Core Rulebook, pp.30-31) specializing as an "old-school academic" (*2300 AD*, p.101) and using the following table for the specialism:

1. Admin
2. Informatics
3. Persuade
4. Art (Writing)
5. Computers
6. Science (any)

The Corporate Skill Package was divided between the six characters.

Depending on just how introductory the Referee wants the adventure to be, with slightly more advanced players he or she may also wish to introduce one of the *2300 AD* alien races as a substitute for one of the above. For groups who just want to start with *2300 AD* it is, of course, possible to skip the introductory scene and start from their awakening in the gaming suite.

The suite is in Far London on Tirane and is a large building taking up virtually all of a block. It's in a northern district of the city just at the edge of a busy shopping and restaurant area. It's a warm Grandspring autumn day. There are good transport links both within the urban area and to other parts of Wellon (*2300 AD*, p.34-35).

The PCs are (were) all connected by virtue of their interest in the role playing game they'd gathered to enjoy. Immersion in the tanks was the first time they had met face-to-face having made contact over Tirane's Global Communications Network (*2300 AD*, p.12). The variety of languages the PCs speak can be overcome (*2300 AD*, p.12) with the earpieces they'll find amongst their personal posses-

sions once they've tapped into the local link network. Lilliana can speak Spanish natively and some broken English. Laurent speaks French natively and can understand English but will not admit to this or use it. Kati speaks German natively. James, Matthew and Granger speak English natively. Of course, their access to the network will be limited to publically available free sites until they're able to re-establish their identities. If the players or the Referee have a particular hankering for role playing the inability to communicate between various language speakers, it could be that the PCs can have no access to the network until they resolve their identities and get accounts once more.

Family Fortunes

The families of the PCs of course will be shocked at their return. While there was never a good explanation for their disappearance three years ago, it's still been assumed for some time that all of the characters are dead. The Referee will either need to choose or randomly assign possible relative options to each of the players:

None at all – the PC had no near relatives

Long lost cousins – the PC had no near relatives but distant cousins/aunts/uncles/nephews/nieces come out of the woodwork if the PC is seen to get a lot of money from either selling their story or in compensation from Microtechnica. Or even if they've been seen in the media and thought to have had such money.

Prodigal child – the PC is warmly welcomed back by close relatives (parents, spouse, or children depending on age of PC or inclination). This option should be used carefully in a campaign setting as it will obviously affect the PC considerably and could limit options.

The Orphans – the PC had a spouse and three children, but the spouse has since died leaving the children as supposed orphans. The PC may now have the option of 'reclaiming' the children, or be refused the possibility, or may have to take them on! Either way there are now three young ones to factor in: aged 9, 7 and 4. Also needs to be used to with care.

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Unwanted heirloom – the PC has relations but they're very unhappy to see him or her back. The PCs considerable assets have been divvied up amongst them and they don't feel disposed to 'returning' anything. Indeed, most of it has been spent.

The Second Spouse – the PC was married and their spouse has subsequently remarried. This will cause additional legal complications not to mention emotional or psychological difficulties for all concerned.

Referee's note: with six possibilities listed above, each could be assigned to a PC randomly, or selected for maximum game value, or some alternative method of selection devised. Combinations are also possible such as the orphans and long lost cousins existing, a spouse and children, or a second spouse and children.

Celebrity? Get me out of here!

It will take some time for their current situation to become apparent to the PCs. They will be able to find their personal possessions and clothing in nearby lockers. They may be able to access some of Microtechnica computer systems: 1-6 minutes, Very Difficult. (Neural Jack or subdermacomp can reduce the task to Difficult but multiply the time taken by 10.) Emerging from the gaming suite building, they'll quickly become something of a sensation if they start asking questions about who, what, why and so on.

Down the main thoroughfare outside there is a large protest march (2300 AD, p.32) going on. 50,000 people chanting, whistling, waving banners – a riot of colour and noise which will only add to the PCs' overloaded senses. There could be some of the alien races in the mix if the Referee wants to introduce them slowly. The march is currently good natured and well policed. But as with any crowd, that could change quickly. It will be difficult to get anyone's attention initially, however if they do, and there are journalists covering the march in the vicinity, someone will start listening.

Local news services will pick up their story and there will be requests for interviews and the chance of their fifteen minutes of fame. This will only be avoided if the PCs are very circumspect about their actions on leaving the gaming suite building.

The PCs will also be extremely hungry and just across the road from the suite is a Food-Extruder outlet (2300 AD, p.13). Good job it's cheap and cheerful as the petty cash they have amongst their possessions will just about cover a meal here. The Referee may wish to emphasize the number of adverts the PCs are assailed with in the short walk to the outlet (2300 AD, p.13).

They will be extremely disorientated and somewhat physically debilitated after so long in the tanks and it will take some time for them to adjust to their new surroundings. Even if the players adapt quite readily, the PCs should receive penalties to their 'normal' knowledge and abilities for some time. The Referee can use this opportunity to convey such information as required about the 2300 AD setting and of course any knowledge that the players themselves have about the setting can be put down to their memories of their lives before they plugged into the game.

If they do become local celebrities, the PCs can make the most of their fame although without any further story, the media and the public will lose interest as other events take their interest. They may be able to use their celebrity to extract additional money in compensation in return for not painting the company in a poor light.

The Company

The PCs have been missing for three years and declared dead for legal purposes. Reinstating identity will be difficult, reclaiming former money and possessions may be impossible. It could take some time dealing with bureaucracy just to get IDs to be able to function. They may spend many fruitless hours in banks finding out that it's not a question of unfreezing assets, they have no assets to unfreeze.

Of course, the PCs have some recourse to claim from the company which 'lost' them but Soft Apples

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has now been bought out and Microtechnica will have skilled lawyers to defend their case. The Referee will need to decide whether there is a legal case to answer (Microtechnica buying up the assets of the game company also inheriting such liabilities; or alternatively a legal system where passage of time or 'good faith' arguments mean the PCs don't have a leg to stand on). Microtechnica may try to settle out of court for the salaries of the PCs in Wellon Pounds $\times 3$ years and bargained up to that figure $\times 5$. *2300 AD*, p.266 gives crew salaries for various positions on a starship. Assume corporate citizens earn Lv2,500 and worker citizens earn Lv1,500 per month (half as much again for skill levels > 2). Treat Lilliana the freelance citizen as earning Lv2,000 and the academic librarian, James, as earning Lv3,000. Depending on the level of complexity desired, the Referee can detail the PCs salaries in the currencies of their home nations/colonies.

An alternative possibility might be that Microtechnica want to use the PCs for publicity purposes promoting the robustness of their products (hardware or software) and are willing to pay well for this. The PCs will get to tour Tirane and perhaps further afield as part of the work. However, that will leave the adventure with little conflict. This could, however, be a solution that the PCs offer or a judge imposes.

Courting Trouble

If it goes to trial, some months later, the company's lawyers will have had enough time to come up with a defence that may stand up. There's a loophole because the PCs have been declared dead; or a technicality due to Soft Apples going into liquidation just before it was bought up; or an existential argument along the lines of the PCs only experiencing a few months of game time and their bodies in semi-stasis haven't lived through three years. If the PCs took the opportunity of celebrity status earlier, they may now be able to use this to their advantage – getting a lawyer on their side who might work pro bono to get at Microtechnica – or rousing public opinion in favour of the plucky David against a disliked Goliath.


A Dish Best Served Cold

Of course, if the PCs haven't managed to extract any recompense from Microtechnica, they may wish to take matters into their own hands more directly. Whether it's simply to damage the company's property, computer files, share holdings, or whether it's to attempt the theft of cash or electronic transfers, or whether it's something even more nefarious or subtle, the Referee may need to generate office buildings or transport routes or computer networks for the PCs to attack.

Future Options

The PCs may seek work with their former employers. It's unlikely their former roles are still open or available, but there may be something lower down the hierarchy they could be fitted into. There may be an opportunity sell their 'adventures' in the Third Imperium to a drama production company. No one else has ever spent so long in the game world and the PCs may have taken it further than the original software designers ever envisioned. Of course, any media interviews might be spiced up with tales of derring-do (true or invented) from the players' memories or imagination.

Alternatively, several of the campaign types mentioned in the *2300 AD* book (pp.286-289) may be kicked off from here. PCs may have extracted enough Livres from Microtechnica to set up them in comfort, at least for a while, or to set themselves up as adventurers, explorers or freelance investigators. They may want to head out to the Frontier Worlds and seek their fortunes away from the limelight or the bad memories of Tirane. If none of those appeal they might like to sign up, particularly if the revenge option above was taken and they need to make themselves scarce! With Wellon currently expanding its military (*2300 AD*, p.34), there will be plenty of recruiting agencies around and the PCs may wish to throw in their lot with the space or the ground forces. But what plans does Wellon have for its burgeoning military?

If nothing else, there's always La Légion Etrangère (*2300 AD*, p.93). 



The Backwards Mask

reviewed by Shannon Appelcline

The Backwards Mask. Paul Brunette

Original Publication: 2011

Current Availability: eBook

Editor's Note: This review originally appeared on RPG.Net in March of 2011, and is reprinted here with the author's permission.

Author's Note: I think that one of the best ways to prepare yourself to run a game is to immerse yourself in its fiction, and thus get a real sense of its milieu. Thus, this series of reviews, which looks at some of the fiction that influenced Traveller, was influenced by Traveller, or is actually set in the Traveller universe.

This is one of a continuing series of reviews of *Traveller* Fiction, looking at some of the fiction that influenced *Traveller*, was influenced by *Traveller*, or is actually set in the *Traveller* universe.

In 1995, GDW put out two-thirds of a trilogy of fiction books focusing on The New Era. The third book was not published by the time GDW went out of business, and was apparently lost forever, until it was published this year. Twice.

This twenty-second review covers *The Backwards Mask*, the third book in the TNE trilogy as conceived by the trilogy's original author, Paul Brunette. Though it was not published back in 1995, it did exist. It's floated around the 'net for a while and has now been cleaned up and officially released by Marc Miller through Far Future Enterprises.

(The other version of *The Backwards Mask* is one that Marc Miller commissioned from Matthew Carson before this was rediscovered. It's also available from DrivethruRPG, and I'll write a separate review of it after I've read it.)

The Story

The Backwards Mask picks up right where *To Dream of Chaos* leaves off. The *Hornet* is out in the Wilds, having dealt with problems of high-tech weaponry on the planet of Mexit. Now they just need to make it back home.

But, things are never that easy in The New Era. Another Coalition starship, the *Cymbeline Victrix*, has gone missing outside of the Area of Operations. When the *Hornet* tracks it to the planet of Vinooks,

they find a number of mysteries, among them: the floating corpse of a liner ship whose captain has gone mad; the crew of the *Cymbeline Victrix* planetside, all surprisingly apathetic about rescue; and a planet with a tech level surpassing that of the Last Imperium that has somehow survived the collapse.

I won't spoil the resolution of these mysteries, but I will make one comment about the ending of the book: despite being the final book in Brunette's intended trilogy, this book has if anything a less conclusive end than the previous one. The mysteries and plots of this particular book are mainly wrapped up, with just one dangler—which is itself connected together with some new plots, leading to what perhaps would have been another trilogy of books in The New Era, stretching from 1203 on. Now, of course, they're mainly a historical curiosity.

Genre & Style

As I've said in previous reviews of this series, the TNE trilogy of books are clearly "gaming fiction". This one falls back into the model of the first: it's a largely picaresque book, with the crew of the *Hornet* having several encounters before they finally settle on Vinooks for the balance of the book.

However by this, his third book, Brunette's writing is becoming increasingly polished. In his previous book I felt like he was stepping beyond the bounds of standard gaming fiction, writing more about characters, rather than just plot—but that he wrote way too long as a result. Here, his characters continue to feel more three-dimensional, but the writing is much tighter.

Overall, I felt like the plotting of the book was much tighter too. Though the plot is picaresque, everything fit together into a much more cohesive whole by the end of the book. I found the handling of multiple plots generally deft and thought that some of the alternate view points (particularly that of a hiver, as I'll discuss more in a bit) interesting.

Finally, I'll note that Brunette uses a nice frame for this book, that has the main character, Couer, remembering what happened from sometime shortly after the story ends. It's more experimental than the

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Critics' Corner

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rest of Brunette's work and works fairly well.

Don't get me wrong, Brunette doesn't do anything particularly notable, but I feel like his writing is much more balanced here than in either previous TNE book. Beyond that the plot is interesting and kept me reading (and I'll have more to say about that as well). As a whole, Brunette's writing earns a solid "3" out of "5" for Style this time around, while the story is an interesting one with some intrigue and some surprise, and thus I've given it a "4" out of "5" for Substance.

Applicability to Mongoose Traveller

There are two or three sections in *The Backwards Mask* written from the point of view of a hiver. It's only 5 or 10 pages total, but I thought they offered a great synopsis of how a hiver thinks—and thus would be useful to anyone running a *Traveller* campaign. Heck, they made me want to introduce a hiver into my game right away.

Since the book is set in The New Era, that's probably the only element that's going to be of particular interest to a Mongoose-era GM. However, if

you're running in The New Era, *The Backwards Mask* is a great resource. Of all three of Brunette's books, I felt like this one gave the best perspective of what The New Era really feels like.

The Wilds feel more wild and forsaken. Virus is more clearly a threat. The effects of the downfall of Imperial civilization are more obvious.

Overall, I give *The Backwards Mask* (version 1!) a great recommendation for those GMs running in 1200+ plus. GMs in the Mongoose era of 1105 will get considerably less out of it.

Conclusion

The Backwards Mask surprised me. It's the best of Brunette's three TNE books, so it's great that it's finally been made available. If you've read the previous volumes, you'll probably want to read this one, to get some closure on the main characters. 🌟

TNE Trilogy

1. *The Death of Wisdom*
2. *To Dream of Chaos*
- 3a. *The Backwards Mask* (Brunette)
- 3b. *The Backwards Mask* (Carson)

Raconteurs' Rest

Drop Out

by Ken Murphy

Part 16

The following morning, bright and early, an enormous Sled carrying a large, metallic bladder, and sporting more than two dozen different hoses, like some sort of technological Hydra with many different feeds instead of heads, hovered some twenty meters above, and to the starboard side of the *Chicken and Waffles*; answering an order placed with its parent company for fuel the previous evening.

A trio of workmen leapt from the vehicle's gondola; landing lightly with their grav harnesses. One of the three had the proper sized hose and feed system for *Waffles* held in both hands.

Tam sat on the low ferrocrete wall, hands in her coat pockets, watching the fuemen wrestle the heavy

feeder hose into *Waffles*' access port before dogging it down-proper.

Upon the opening of a valve, the spattering, sloshing sound of refined hydrogen fuel sprayed and gurgled into *Waffles*' empty tanks, filling the air all around with the racket.

Waiting for the slow process of the tanks topping off, the fuel wranglers mainly stood around, chatting with and up Tam as she sat there. An old Food Sled sporting the look of something that had been built from scratch slid in silently near the *Waffles*; Arabic music blaring, and offering fried Halloumi cheese; Koshari, a meatless, chili-like dish; Blintzes; funnel cakes; and the obligatory smokes for sale.

As if some magic portal had opened, another Sled crept in from out of nowhere; this one blared Indian Soul, with Koshari, Yakitori, grilled meat

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Raconteurs' Rest

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skewers, cucumber salad, and green tea for sale, along with beer.

Rounding the nearby Terminal building, a smaller Sled; this one playing Tibetan chants and bell music, and loaded down with Baklava, slid up out of nowhere.

The ground defense turret, situated in the forward quarter of the ship's ventral surface, and mounting a 5Mw pulse laser controlled by the Heimdall, lazily tracked all three vehicles, ready to turn them to slag should anything unforeseen occur, and capable, in fact, of being able to destroy most vehicles.

The *Waffles'* senior officers came out, eager to try the local fare. Both the trio of fuel workers and the *Waffles'* crew bought an inordinate amount of the cheap cart food; almost wiping out the stock of all three entirely.

With her watch over fifteen minutes ago, Tam followed the officers back into the ship, leaving the First Officer outside to eat his Yakitori, his Anchor Watch having just begun.

When fueling had been completed, Hertzog signed the electronic pad one of the fuelers carried; allowing the transferal of the appropriate amount from the *Waffles'* account.

While Liberty was for seventy two uninterrupted hours for the crew, Both Kalifra and Dave had returned about a half hour earlier that morning; Kalifra having stopped and picked up a walking Dave as the Chilton chugged along. Joining the Officers for breakfast, the heavy cart food did its magic and sent the tired Tam, Dave and Kalifra toward a comfy dreamland; fat and happy.

Kalifra was dreaming of Aretuis, back when she was a kid—and a member of the sorority Shieldmaidens of Artemis. In her dream she was decked out for survival training proper, with black, reflective resin smeared under both eyes; a knife in a leg scabbard, and a small water bottle around her neck. She was tromping among the rocks and sand among the tall, flat, purple cactus, but instead of eleven or twelve, and with her shield-mate, Marti, Kalifra was

her current thirty four, and alone.

Suddenly there was a light in her eyes, and Ilsa Frieland was in her face.

"Kali," Ilsa said, "wake up now, girl. The Captain has a job for you."

Once Kalifra had gotten her head around the idea of no more sleep, she hopped into the cold shower, while Ilsa waited, sitting on the edge of Kalifra's bed. Tam lay asleep in her own bed maybe a meter away, smelling of booze, and snoring mightily.

"So what's the job, Little Sister?" Kalifra asked as she towel-dried her knee-length hair.

"Prisoner Transport." Second Officer Frieland replied.

"Ye Gods!" Brodie declared as he stretched his arms wide, almost giddy at the amount of space offered by the real king-sized bed in Carla's walk-up. "This bed is huge! Nothin' like the accommodations aboard the *Waffles!*"

Snuggled up to the big ape, slowly running a fingertip through the thick hair on his chest, Carla brushed her red bangs away from her face and gently kissed Brodie's cheek.

Within an hour, both Kalifra and Ilsa were dressed in their patchwork sets of combat armor; Kalifra carrying the heavy laser rifle, and the Second armed with a gauss pistol and a derringer.

"Oof"ing at the weight of the heavy rifle, Kalifra asked "So why is it I have the rifle again?"

"You told me once," said little Ilsa, "that you'd received Marksman training with that sorority of yours—the Maidens of Virtue, or whatever."

"Shieldmaidens of Artemis. And I was only eleven at the time, Ilsa!" Kalifra protested.

"But a Marksman, none the less. Hellfire and Damnation, that makes you our expert," the dark woman countered; checking her derringer to make sure it was ready, just in case.

"You ready?" Number Two asked as they stepped toward the large brig.

"Yessir." Kalifra replied, opening the brig access while covering the prisoners inside.

"Prisoners in a line! Hands clasped at the back of

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Raconteurs' Rest

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your heads!” Kalifra snarled, as if she’d never retired from The Navy.

“You’ll be crossing from the brig here to the vehicle bay across the way.” she nodded toward the other bay, some five meters away.

“Inside you’ll find a Chilton grav sled. You will stop at the tailgate and wait for instructions to get in..” The tall blond said; the built-in speaker in her helmet giving everything she’d just said an air of detachment, Ilsa thought.

“Any attempt to escape will be dealt with most harshly!” Ilsa said to the crowd, her helmet’s faceplate raised; a slight frown visible.

Dave Vasquez sat in the Crew Lounge, sipping pomegranate juice and waiting for his Old Scout Chicken-fried steak dinner (with real Peruvian potatoes, or so the box said) to warm up in one of the small ovens in the galley. It was his birthday today, Day 126 Imperial Calendar, and he had mixed feelings about that; on the one hand, happy to have made it to a not always easy, seven years sober; but on the other hand lonely, since no one else aboard *Waffles* identified themselves to be among The Friends of Bill W—though Dave had some pretty good ideas about who probably should. In fact, what really bothered Mr. V was going to the Terminal building the previous night and setting up for a meeting, only to sit there alone.

As he sat there, eating his meal, Dave decided that he’d go over to the Terminal again tonight and set up once again for any others who might come in out of the storm.

The prisoners were marched, brig-stepping, to the vehicle bay containing the sled. As they were lined up at the sled’s tailgate, one of the prisoners, a burly fellow with a mustache decided this was exactly where his own plan diverged from that explained to him. Using a double-fisted smash, hands still in binders, he slammed Kalifra in the neck; the impact stunning the big blond for a second as he followed up with a savage kick to her collarbone; causing her to lose her footing and stumble back against the

bulkhead. As she went down, the rifle twisted from her grasp and he was all over it. In a second he had the heavy laser rifle pointed right at her.

As she tried to lunge at him he fired, blowing a ragged hole through her bicep and shattering her suit’s rerebrace; blood everywhere. Kalifra wrapped her wounded arm around the rifle and pushed with her shoulder as hard as she could, trying to leverage the rifle upwards so he wouldn’t be able to fire on her again.

In the ensuing bedlam he fired anyway, scorching the bulkhead next to Frielander with one shot, and burning one of his fellow unarmored prisoners in half with the next; the dead thing falling thickly to the deck as two steaming piles of offal.

With her free hand she grabbed for his groin; punching him repeatedly with her armored gauntlet as she tried to grab at his testicles. The prisoner slammed Kalifra in the head with the rifle’s butt so hard that she saw stars and the helmet-provided augmented vision winked out. With a last effort, she made a last grab. Successful, she pulled and twisted as hard as she could; causing the prisoner to drop the rifle in agony.

Second Officer Frielander fired her gauss pistol, catching the burly prisoner with a burst that hit just below the chin and climbed up his face; unzipping his head in an explosion of gore.

“MOST harshly! Did you not hear me?!” She yelled at the fresh corpse; then, to the remaining prisoners, “Get in the truck NOW!” Ilsa screamed, waving her pistol in a manner that made the remaining prisoners fear they might all be killed then and there.

Kalifra was helped to her feet by Ilsa as the prisoners scrambled up into the grav sled.

“Captain!” Ilsa yelled over the comm. “We have a situation in the vehicle bay. Kalifra’s been shot. We need back-up ASAP!” Kalifra crumpled to the floor.

Ilsa bent down and quickly reached for one of a small pair of pull tabs on the right side of Kalifra’s armored breastplate. Pulling one, a huge dose of pain killers was dumped into the big blond’s system.

Ilsa picked up the heavy laser rifle as Kalifra fumbled ineffectively for it as if drugged.

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Raconteurs' Rest

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Hefting the huge rifle to cover the prisoners, Ilsa reminded them, "You've seen what this monster can do! Best you all sit tight..."

Captain Fyyg and the Doctor were on the bridge, discussing the delicious Yakitori they ate as they played chess. When Ilsa's message came in, Fyyg leapt across the table, knocking the chess set and whatever food was left to the floor as he slammed the Emergency switch, yelling "Vehicle Bay!" over the comm.

Doctor Billings sat there for a moment, stunned. "Shot?"

Within a few minutes, almost every crewman still aboard *Waffles* had turned out. While a few thought it a drill, most were armed and ready for action. Tam, drunk and already asleep, stayed asleep. As part of the supporting wave covered the prisoners, others checked on Kalifra's condition. Dave, acting as a guard, nervously watched the prisoners with a short barreled, heavy gauge shotgun in his grasp, while Number Two informed the just-arrived Captain of the situation.

"Herr Doktor!" the Captain said into the comm, knowing the old Doctor was still minutes away, "We shall be needing a stretcher team."

Looking at the body and the blood spattered everywhere, the Captain just "tsk tsk"d for a moment, taking it all in. Then, looking at his Second Officer, he said "Lieutenant Frielander. Get these vermin off my ship, please."

Squatting down to talk with the wounded blond, Captain Fyyg took her good hand and kissed it before stroking her brow. "Don't you fret, Donaldson. You Aretuisians are a tough breed, we shall get you fixed up right quick!"

"Thank you, Captain." Kalifra replied.

An hour or so later, Ilsa and Dave, both in their dress whites, pulled the Chilton, loaded with the remaining prisoners, up to the building which held the Port Director's Office, where Dave went in to see the Director and transfer custody of the prisoners.

"Respects from Captain Fyyg of the *Chicken and*

Waffles, your Eminence," Dave said, followed by his approximation of an actual, double-stomp military salute. "In our vehicle are five pirates to be bound over for Imperial Justice."

The Port Director noted the incorrect use of the honorific, but decided not to make a point of it.

Out at the Chilton, the Director's Guard were getting a very similar story from Ilsa. After pulling up the relevant paperwork on an arm-mounted data pad, one of the guards directed Ilsa to sign the document as a witness to Acts of Piracy.

Once the paperwork was done, the guardsmen escorted the prisoners before the Port Director. In the humidity, Hobson wiped his bald head with a rag. With five subjects, the Director could have easily determined all five were summarily guilty. But, noticing one of the accused was only eleven, he instead decided "Piracy! Five accused! Four sentenced to execution. The child is hereby remanded to the custody of the Imperial Marine Corps."

The child was thrown into a chair toward the corner of the room to wait for the Imperial Marines representative, while the remaining four were prodded and urged at gunpoint from the Director's Office by his Guard. "Gibbet them." the Port Director ordered as the procession left his Offices.

A few minutes later, from a nearby courtyard could be heard the multiple reports of the rifles of the Guard.

Later, in the Med Bay, Doctor Billings checked over Kalifra; once again coming to the conclusion that his patient was just too seriously injured for him, a general practitioner, to treat effectively.

"Doc," the big blond began, "Me and my arm. We've been through a lot together." she said, still loopy from the suit's pain killer.

"Of course, my dear Kalifra." the wizened Doctor replied before administering another dose of high-octane pain killers.

"Get a couple shots like Ilsa, 'n be safe as houses by the weekend!" Kalifra decided, as the meds kicked in and she dropped off, unaware that the last

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Raconteurs' Rest

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of the wondrous metabolics had been used to heal the Second Officer's leg.

"Nordel," the Doctor said to the Captain, "Please give me a hand with Kalifra, would you? I'm going to put her into the Cryoberth, to get her stabilized."

Grunting with the effort of moving the amazon into the freezer, Captain Fyyg told the Doctor, "When we're done here, we need to talk."

Several hours into the afternoon, Port Director Walter Hobson stood outside the Terminal building and looked at the half dozen gibbets, man-shaped cages that'd been hung over the many pairs of the Terminal's doors by work crews. Four of the cages were currently filled with the executed pirates from this morning, and while grim, the Director felt it sent some very definite messages: first, to Duke Eitr, to whom Hobson answered, that the Port Director handled his job swiftly and efficiently, and second, to everyone, that Nordic Prime had fully embraced the Emperor's decree, "Suffer Not a Pirate to Live!", which would, of course, make the entire Nordic Prime administration look good.

Thinking on it, the person the Port Director felt he had to thank for all this was that skinny Captain Fyyg of the *Chicken and Waffles*. After all, he could have easily spaced the pirates and no one would have blamed him had he done so. But this Fyyg, he had wanted to go through the proper channels. "Foolish fellow!", Hobson smiled to himself.

Picking up a data pad, Hobson looked over the cargo manifests for outgoing bulk that week. He had a number of favorites to whom he usually gave plum assignments (in return, of course, for a split of the profits). With a flick of the stylus, he'd reassigned six heavy pallets of industrial-grade silicon and crystals bound for Heimdall and worth close to some KCr100, from the *Hermit Squared* over to the *Chicken and Waffles*.

Later, in the Captain's Office, stood Doctor Billings before Nordel's heavy desk.

"You wanted to see me Captain?" the ashen Doctor asked nervously.

"Yes, Heinz. When we lifted off of Hargrave with you, I thought the event would benefit us both. You avoiding your outstanding debts, and us getting a skilled Doctor. In the time since I have come to the realization that you are not the skilled surgeon whom we seek. I am sure there is a niche for you somewhere, but that is not here aboard the *Chicken and Waffles*.

"What?" the old man asked in disbelief. "What about...?"

"I know—'What about Ilsa's leg?' you were going to ask. Now I appreciate everything you'd done for my Ilsa, Heinz, but that hardly counts as surgery, and was more a case of luck, really, having those metabolics aboard. If we did not have them, I daresay Ilsa would be limping about with a cane today, if not, in fact, confined to crutches or have some damned prosthetic! And I won't even mention Kalifra!

"So this is it. I want you packed and off my ship here, on Nordic Prime, Heinz. If I were you I would pack my gear in a hurry and start looking for that niche!" the Captain said, pulling a large wad of bills from his trouser pocket, and hastily counting out the Doctor's pay.

"Five, six, seven, and eight thousand Credits..."

The broken old man gathered his pay, gathered his few meager possessions from his room, his med kit from the Med Bay, and left the ship; walking out the cargo bay, right past Tam, who was sitting on a small, empty crate. She'd been reading Lewis' classic *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, but dog-eared the page she was on to stop and watch a pair of large grav Sleds approaching with cargo.

"Catch ya later, Doc!" Tam hollered innocently as the Doctor went by.

"Don't count on it, you dumb little bitch!" the Doctor hissed.

Dumbfounded, Tam just watched the old man go as she smoked a C&J from a pack she'd found sitting on a table in the Crew Lounge that morning.

"Man, what a dick!" Tam chuckled, thinking on the Doctor's 'little bitch' crack. ❁

21 Plots Planetside

reviewed by "kafka"

21 Plots Planetside. Various Authors.

Gypsy Knights Games <http://www.gypsyknightsgames.com>

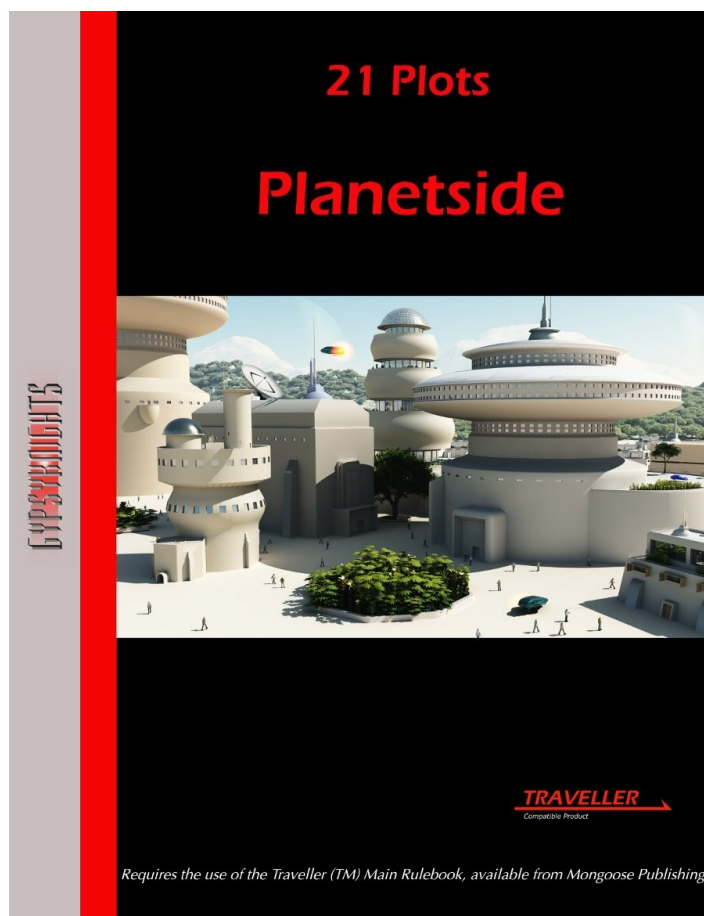
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Once again, Gypsy Knight Games returns to creating adventure hooks that are firmly grounded in a strong *Traveller* sensibility (unlike, say, the Campaign Guide). These are set in their own corner of an Alternative *Traveller* Universe that their Quick Worlds have been describing. It is very much a sandbox collection of seeds reminding the reader of early FASA offerings for Classic *Traveller* outlining the Old Expanses, save that there is no Official *Traveller* Universe reference.

Each of these adventures are planetbound, though questionable use of a starship appears in some of the scenarios, when perhaps small craft (either the player's own or in the grand tradition of *Traveller* – a rental) would have been more appropriate. Another point is that many of these worlds are very Earth-like and do not pose a greater sense of wonder that could have been explored – maybe they are saving that goodness for a campaign, so as to keep these worlds generic enough. I do not fault Gypsy Knight Games too much for this; for indeed one of the weaknesses of *Traveller* has been to leave it to the Referee to create the exotic alien environments – when in all likelihood what is out there – is not likely to resemble what is here. But, it is that grounding that also makes *Traveller* work so well; one needs not worry, for example, about the effects of too much nitrogen in an otherwise standard atmosphere. *2300 AD* does a much better job at the science.

So, the format is the same as previous *21 Plots*, a small basic setup for the scenario then the Referee can pick one of the outcomes or roll 1D6 and completely freeform it or build it up to a comprehensive one shot



with maps, stats, and whatnot. What makes these adventure seeds so *Traveller* is that they are grounded in a realistic and dirty future where people's jobs may be in space but they still remain jobs – they're ordinary jobs who have a chance at becoming local heroes, sort of like the old television series, *The Dukes of Hazzard*. Furthermore, there are wheels within wheels, in the sense that adventures rarely are what they seem at the beginning. Certainly, the means are there to allow you to reach the end but it is the journey (hence the name of the game) that is what is the most important part. Gypsy Knight Games has nailed it to a fine art; that is not to say there are not some sour choices, but, more frequently the Referee is rewarded with the sweet nectar of old fashioned *Traveller* goodness. ☼



The Backwards Mask

reviewed by Shannon Appelcline

The Backwards Mask. Matthew Carson.

Original Publication: 2011

Current Availability: eBook

Editor's Note: This review originally appeared on RPG.Net in April of 2010, and is reprinted here with the author's permission.

Author's Note: I think that one of the best ways to prepare yourself to run a game is to immerse yourself in its fiction, and thus get a real sense of its milieu. Thus, this series of reviews, which looks at some of the fiction that influenced Traveller, was influenced by Traveller, or is actually set in the Traveller universe..

This is one of a continuing series of reviews of *Traveller* Fiction, looking at some of the fiction that influenced *Traveller*, was influenced by *Traveller*, or is actually set in the *Traveller* universe.

In 1995, GDW put out two-thirds of a trilogy of fiction books focusing on The New Era. The third book was not published by the time GDW went out of business, and was apparently lost forever, until it was published this year. Twice.

This twenty-third review covers *The Backwards Mask*, the third book in the TNE trilogy, as conceived by author Matthew Carson—who was commissioned to write it when Paul Brunette's original conclusion was thought lost. It's a PDF release that's available from DrivethruRPG.

(Paul Brunette's original novel was later rediscovered, and Far Future Enterprises published that, also at DrivethruRPG. My review of that earlier book can be found at RPG.Net or in this issue of *Freelance Traveller*.)

The Story

Matthew Carson's *The Backwards Mask* begins back on Aubaine, with the crew of the *Hornet* being offered up a new mission. However, this time the stakes are higher, as they are told that the entire Reformation Coalition could succeed or fail based on their mission. A delivery from the Hive Federation has gone awry, and with it a computer that stores a century of technological advance that was intended to help guide the Coalition in the decades ahead. The *Hornet* must retrieve it, without letting on the importance of what they're doing.

Things turn out to be more complex, though. Looking into this lost ship soon brings the *Hornet* into conflict with a sector-wide conspiracy that could be even more dangerous to the Coalition than the loss of the databank itself.

Though *The Backwards Mask* is being sold as a single book, it's practically a trilogy. I suspect its total word count is similar to the word count of Brunette's original set of three books, and it's even got three different major climaxes, arranged equidistantly apart in the book. Thus, though the book is quite long, it's also pretty tight (though there were some places that I thought an editor could have improved things, as I note below).

Genre & Style

The previous books in this series, all by Paul Brunette, were clearly gaming fiction. Though Brunette's writing had improved by his third volume, the structure of that book was still very adventure-like: with a ship on the move running into a problem, then solving it. Brunette's focus was clearly more on action and adventure than on character, though that also improved as the trilogy went on.

Matthew Carson's book starts out feeling somewhat similar: the *Hornet* is given a mission and it jumps from system to system to solve the problem, encountering things as it goes. However, these picaresque adventures tend to be more tightly connected than those in previous books. In addition, Carson does a lot to expand the book beyond its gaming fiction roots.

To start with, he treats the characters like real people. We're reminded often that they have real names, not just call signs. He also delves deeper into their inner emotional worlds. I felt like he spent just a bit too much time pairing people up romantically, but having some of that was appreciated, because it was another view into the worlds of these characters.

There's also some good attention spent not just on the main characters of the *Hornet* but also on their allies and foes alike. Again, I did at times feel like this was used to excess, but getting some of it was very nice and helped make Carson's TNE universe a larger place.

(Generally, I thought that this *The Backwards Mask* could have used a bit more attention from an editor

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Critics' Corner

(Continued from page 41)

willing to help the author cut some of the material to get to the core of the story, but it was a minority of the time I felt that material had gotten too long.)

The other thing that really stood out in this volume was its epic scope, something that was largely missing from Paul Brunette's original trilogy. And, I should say that may not have been the fault of Brunette in the least. Writing gaming fiction for a game being actively developed can be a very different thing, because you don't want to undercut gamemasters and players across the world. Carson had a much more open sandbox, as TNE has been dead for almost 20 years.

What's notable, though, is that Carson did use that bigger canvas to tell a larger story. The result is great. It makes this *The Backwards Mask* feel more important and more gripping. The stakes are higher not just for the whole Reformation Coalition, but also for the crew of the *Hornet* itself. I was momentarily afraid near the end that Carson was going to lose track of his main characters in the epic story that he'd developed, but just then he managed to bring them back to center stage in an interesting and believable way.

Overall, Matthew Carson's *The Backwards Mask* feels to me like it's the trilogy of books that GDW should have released back in the 1990s. It does a great job of highlighting the adventure and the epic story that's possible in the New Era, while simultaneously tying that to an individual starship that could have been crewed by players of the RPG.

So, overall: the writing was generally good, particularly for fiction originating in the gaming world, and

thus I've given this Backwards Mask a "4" out of "5" for Style. The scope of the story tone is great and thus I've given it a "5" out of "5" for Substance.

Applicability to Mongoose Traveller

The vast majority of this book is only going to be applicable to people gaming in The New Era. However, it does a great job of supporting that era. Whereas Brunette's original books gave me ideas of TNE adventures that I could run, this one suggests an epic TNE campaign.

More broadly, there's some real nice detail here on the Ithklur, who have really only been seen previously in TNE's *Aliens of the Rim: Hivers and Ithklur*. If you're running a *Traveller* campaign in any era that involves the Hiver, this *The Backwards Mask* gives some great details on one of their client races. (There's much more depth in the RPG supplement, but I think you can get more visceral detail out of novels, as I suggest in my premise to this series.)

Overall, though, *The Backwards Mask* is most useful to GMs thinking about The New Era.

Conclusion

Matthew Carson's version of *The Backwards Mask* is one of the best pieces of original *Traveller* fiction out there. It's a pity it wasn't published in the '90s, as I think it would have been a better TNE trilogy than the more game-influenced one that GDW did publish. 🌟

TNE Trilogy

1. *The Death of Wisdom*
2. *To Dream of Chaos*

3. *The Backwards Mask*

(Two versions, one by Paul Brunette, the other by Matthew Carson)

Theme Issue Call For Submissions

We've already decided on what our first few Theme Issues should be, and we'd like you to think about generating content aimed at them. While not all types of article will be relevant to all themes, we won't rule out any specific kind of article for any particular theme (our imagination may overlook something that you spot).

As indicated in January's "From the Editor", we'll accumulate material and hold it until we have enough to make the theme issue, then announce it and print it. The usual policies regarding rights and credit apply.

These are our currently planned themes:

Psionics: Don't feel that you have to focus on the Zhodani

for this one; there's lots of room beyond them. But you don't have to avoid them, either...

The Cruise: What's it like? What's the ship, the destination, the activities, the adventures (expected and unexpected), the stories...? Tell us!

Traveller: Prime Directive: The publication of this Theme Issue will signal the beginning of our support for a new setting. If we get material for this one early, though, we have a chance of being able to put this issue together so that we can print it for the same month that the sourcebook is released. 🌟



Coffee and the Coffee Maker

by Amber Darkotter

Ah, coffee. That one drink that nearly everybody knows of. There are as many words for it as there are languages, and discussions of the merits of various cultivars, roasts, and blends can often take on the tone and intensity of religious disputations.

Although not unknown even in the Ziru Sirka, coffee didn't really become popular until the Rule of Man, when the Solomani spread throughout the Ziru Sirka and beyond. The biggest consumers of coffee, according to the Imperial Bureau of Statistics, are the Imperial Navy, the Scouts, the Marines, Engineers, Programmers, Spacers of any kind, and Pretentious Artists. In fact, the Imperial Navy is renowned across Known Space for having the best coffee, with an entire section of the Logistics Department dedicated towards sourcing, growing, and distributing it. The Army, for some strange reason, prefers Tea.

Where there is agriculture, there is at least one coffee cultivar. Even orbital cities routinely have coffee in their hydroponic gardens, and the typical colonization package includes a hydroponics garden module specifically for it. Not every cultivar is noteworthy, however; most are only seen outside their home worlds if someone brings a personal supply of ready-to-brew ground coffee with them as they leave the planet. The higher the quality of the cultivar, the more widely known it is likely to be, and the higher the demand (and the price!) will be. Certain legendary cultivars from Terra are said to be unavailable at any price (with the entire output reserved to the Imperial Family); cultivars prized by various high nobles or entertainment mega-stars may command per-kilo prices of hundreds of credits; and the Navy's controlled-conditions 'standard' cultivar commands Cr1000 per kg on the black market (the Navy prohibits its distribution or use outside of its own facilities). Many factors go into determining the quality and desirability of a particular cultivar; no two cultivars are ever quite alike, even if one is descended from the other. Gravity, temperature, sunlight spectrum, atmospheric composition, compatibility with the local biosphere, area of the planet they were grown on, growing techniques, and a host of other factors all affect the quality.

Most people will find acceptable cultivars from worlds where the atmosphere doesn't have any smelly gasses prevalent. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of coffee roasts, but they can all be divided into four categories: Light, Medium, Dark, and Double Roast, with various sub-varieties in each category. There are also a few space stations dedicated to growing coffee in tailored conditions, but the vast majority of them are attached to Imperial Naval Bases with access being strictly limited. No one knows why, but conspiracies abound...

On rare occasions, total coffee crop failure has been encountered, due to a plant disease running wild, natural disaster, or sabotage. In such cases, there is generally a good emergency response, with nearby worlds providing emergency bulk shipments of green beans, ground coffee, and hydroponic starter groves of preferred cultivars. In at least one case, it was rumored that the cause of the crop failure was a deliberate attempt by a neighboring world's primary coffee cultivator to get a foothold on the world; it was never proven, however, and an attempt to have coffee crop sabotage declared outside the Imperial Rules of War ultimately failed, but not without extensive debate.

Coffee in Trade

Coffee provides many opportunities for trade, as both the product itself and the tools needed for it are in high demand. The prices below are the retail prices; see the "Cargo Lots" section below for handling it as a trade good.

Coffee Beans: Depending upon roast, quality, and fame of the brand, can be anywhere from Cr20 per kilo up, with the majority of widely-available cultivars in the Cr35-Cr50 per kilo range. Most brands of beans will have instructions on the optimum low-berth settings for the storage of up to 100kg.

Ground Coffee: A half-kilo of pre-ground coffee in a can, sealed in with an inert gas to prevent degradation of the product. Costs Cr15 and up per can, with prices of Cr20-Cr35 being common.

Creamer: Some people prefer to temper the flavor of the coffee, with high-fat milk products being preferred. Others consider such people to be heathens or worse. Creamers come in solid (powder) or liquid form.

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Cost Cr5 per 250g of solid creamer, or per 500ml in liquid form.

Coffee Grinder (TL9): Various grinding tools occupy this tube with a wide opening on top and a removable cup on the bottom. One side, you put in the coffee beans and set a dial for your preferred grind. Push a button and the beans are ground, ending up in the removable cup. Can process up to 20 grams of beans every six seconds, with the cup holding up to 300g of ground coffee. Costs Cr50, mass .7kg. Has a pair of batteries lasting up to 20 minutes, or it can be plugged into a power supply for longer run times.

Coffee Maker: There are three basic methods that are used to go from dry ground coffee to the liquid ambrosia so widely enjoyed: Press, Perk, and Drip.

In a Press, the ground coffee is permitted to steep in near-boiling water for a few minutes, then the water/ground coffee combination is compressed through a filter to yield the final product. Press coffee tends to be stronger for the same amount of ground coffee, but also more bitter, and usually leaves a bit of sediment in the cup. It is nevertheless considered to be a proper method of preparation for certain styles of serving.

Perked coffee, made in a “percolator”, places the grounds in a filtered basket at the top of the serving pot, and fills the bottom with water. There is a one-way separation between the two, so that when the water boils, it is forced up a tube in the center of the device until it is above the ground coffee, which it is then allowed to fall through, and back into the bottom. The water is thus passed through the ground coffee multiple times. The filter basket and used ground coffee is then removed from the device, and the coffee served. Perked coffee tends to be hotter when first served than either Press or Drip coffee, but also slightly more bitter. This style does have its adherents, but in general, perked coffee is considered inferior in flavor to drip coffee.

Drip coffee is generally considered the best method of preparation. Water is heated to near-boiling—but definitely *not* boiling—and then is allowed to drip through the ground coffee and filter into the pot. Few of the heavier compounds that cause bitterness are present in the final product, and there is no sediment in the pot when the correct filter is used.

There are several sizes of coffee maker, described below. The drip method is available in all sizes below; the largest commonly available percolator is equivalent to the “Half-Pint”, and the largest commonly available press is equivalent to the “Standard”. Generally, the term ‘coffee maker’ will be understood to refer to a drip system. The amount of ground coffee needed as stated below is based on 15g of ground coffee per 250ml of brewed coffee; a higher ratio of ground coffee to water yields a stronger brew, which some people may prefer.

Note: the size of a “cup”, or a single serving, is somewhat culturally dependent, and most commonly ranges from 150ml to 300ml (though certain subcultures and the Navy have been known to consider a “cup” to be as much as 500ml, and serving sizes up to 1000ml—or more—aren’t unknown). For the purposes of defining the size of coffee makers, “one cup” will be assumed to be 250ml.

The “Standard”: The “standard” coffee maker is the most commonly seen size; it reaches its technological perfection essentially at TL8. It can produce up to 16 cups (4000ml) of coffee, requiring 4.75l of water and 240g of ground coffee. Costs Cr75, mass 2kg. Replacement coffee pots Cr20.

The “Half-Pint”: an 8-cup model, called by an old term for something small. Uses 120g of ground coffee and 2.4l of water. Costs Cr50, mass 1.25kg. Replacement pot Cr.15. Most commonly seen in small offices.

The “Bachelor”: Makes 4 cups. Seen primarily in Army offices, as a concession to the Army’s relatively few coffee drinkers, and the occasional guest who prefers coffee to the Army standard beverage of tea. The next most common use is as a personal coffeemaker (e.g., in college dormitory rooms) where the user prefers fresh-brewed. Uses 1.2l of water and 60g of ground coffee. Costs Cr30, mass 0.75kg. Replacement pot Cr13.

The “Singleton”: Makes 2 cups. While few people thought this size would be of any use, it turned out to have a surprisingly strong niche among people who use the process of preparing coffee as a meditative exercise, and among those who absolutely couldn’t bear to have coffee that had been sitting in the pot for any length of time. Uses 0.6l of water and 30g of ground coffee. Cr45. Mass 0.5 kg. Replacement pots are often unavailable, but can occasionally be found for Cr25.

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The “Full Deck”: The Imperial Navy uses a custom design of approximately the same size, but many large offices use this commercial equivalent, brewing 32 cups at a time. Uses 480g of ground coffee and 10l of water. Costs Cr120, mass 5kg. This unit comes with the Single Cup Server, rather than a removable pot.

Coffee Mug (TL Varies): By definition, the coffee cup or coffee mug holds one serving, regardless of the size of the serving. The smallest cups, used in certain cultures for ceremonial purposes, hold 150ml; the Navy’s “Watchstander” mug holds a full 2000ml. (Purists do not consider the “Watchstander” to be a mug, as it is generally acknowledged to be ‘about four cups’, where ‘cup’ means ‘serving’, rather than the formal 250ml measurement.) There is wide variation in shape, color, material, quality, and various other bells and whistles; personalization and customized designs abound. They typically come in two types, the open topped common mug, and the sealable travel mug. Extremely experienced spacers are able to use an open topped mug in any conditions, even zero-g (Task: Formidable, DEX, Zero-G Env), and the middle of combat (Hope that no one shoots at you!). There are persistent rumors that such actions are the main test to become a Bosun in the Imperial Navy... Cost: Cr5 and up—very up. Mass depends on size and material; a typical 250ml ceramic mug will mass about 100g.

Options

Brew Timer (TL 8): When a coffee maker equipped with a timer is preloaded with water and ground coffee, the timer can be set to start the brewing at a specified time. Usually set for the start of the next watch. Typically adds Cr5 to the price of the coffee maker, mass negligible.

Presser (TL 10): A small gravitic presser is included in the unit, allowing for greater flavor and less water usage. Essentially converts a drip coffee maker into a press, with all the benefits and disadvantages. Adds Cr150 and 750g of mass to the price and mass of the coffee maker.

Sealed (TL 8): By incorporating valves into the coffee pot, the contents are prevented from spilling during rough maneuvers. Combined with a Brewing Press-

er, it becomes possible to brew coffee in zero-g. Adds Cr25 and 250g.

Bulkhead mounting (TL 11): Using specialized mounting brackets, it becomes possible to stick a coffee maker just about anywhere on ship. Prevents it from being knocked around by rough maneuvers and battle damage. Does nothing for the coffee pot itself, just the brewing unit. Cr. 150, weight 1kg.

Pot Lock (TL 11): The common nickname for the method used to prevent the coffee pot from being knocked out of the brewing unit. It uses similar technology to the Bulkhead mountings. When combined with Bulkhead mounting, a presser, and the sealed option, allows the crew to stick the coffee maker literally anywhere on the ship and still have it work. Cr100, mass 900g.

Single Cup Server: Replaces the coffee pot with a holding tank of equivalent capacity. The tank has a spigot, allowing dispensing any desired amount (up to the capacity of the tank) without having to lift a full pot. Cr50, mass 250g. Standard for “Full Deck” coffee makers; common option for “Standards”, not available for “Bachelor” or “Singleton”.

Cargo Lots

The prices above represent retail purchase. Typically, the consignee will pay half that amount for the bulk shipment (i.e., if the retail price is Cr100 per unit, the bulk shipment will be paid for assuming Cr50 per unit in the lot). The merchant who is doing speculative trade in coffee and coffee tools should expect to pay about 80% of what the consignee will pay (i.e., if the consignee pays Cr50 per unit, the merchant should expect to pay Cr40 per unit). Take the above retail figures and multiply by 40%, then multiply by the number of units per dton, in the table on the next page, to calculate the base price per dton (before applying the trade rules).

Coffee and Other Races

With all the various races that humans have come in contact with, it’s almost impossible to list all the reactions to coffee. Here’s the major races though.

Hivers: The universal reaction—as far as humans know—is an intense dislike. There are unconfirmed reports that coffee shipped into the Hive Federation’s

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territory is confiscated and destroyed, and traders have claimed to have witnessed Hive government operations targetted at eradicating coffee growing on Hive Federation-controlled worlds.

K’Kree: K’kree consider the odor distasteful, but those who can get past it report the flavor as acceptable. As a knock-out brew, it has no real competition.

Droyne: They vary between ignoring it and spending hundreds of thousands of credits to import it. No Droyne has actually been witnessed drinking it, though.

Aslan: Most Aslan will avoid coffee as a recreational beverage, as it appears to have a pacifying (i.e., anti-aggression personality change, rather than merely being a sedative) effect on them. There are indications that it may have an enhancing effect on mental processes, so controlled medical use is not unknown as part of the treatment for injuries resulting in brain damage.

Vargr: The caffeine in coffee is considered a mild neurotoxin, and thus most Vargr will refuse to drink it. There is some demand among Imperial and Julian Vargr for coffee where the beans have been processed before roasting in a way that removes most of the caffeine.

Adventure Hooks

- One day into jump, the coffee maker has malfunctioned, and the engineer isn't sure he can fix it!
- Surprisingly, an otherwise rather liberal theocracy bans coffee. A community of nonbelievers want some smuggled in.
- The party makes contact with someone who claims to have some Navy coffee for sale.
- Something in the local environment has made the coffee from the local cultivar extremely vile. They are desperate for a new cultivar.

- The papers all looked right, and the mass and container type was correct, for a shipment of green beans. When the purchaser opened the containers, however, it turned out to be toxic chemical waste. Naturally, judgement went against the party, even though the court agreed that evidence unambiguously showed that the party themselves had been defrauded, and they now have to refund the purchaser’s money. This leaves them with the toxic waste to dispose of—legally and safely, at their own expense—and with insufficient funds to pay their port fees. They’ve got to come up with some money, quickly—but who on the planet will trust them? And, if they do manage to get back off-world, can they recover from the seller?
- The players have a lucrative contract to bring some coffee from Terra to a non-aligned world in Spica Sector. Unfortunately, their route brought them to a world recently taken over by the Hiver megacorp Star Patterns Trading, and the Hivers want to confiscate and destroy the coffee, even though it’s not destined for Hiver space. ☼

Coffee-Related Quantities Per Displacement Ton

Good	Quantity per Displacement Ton
Coffee Beans	6000kg (green); 5000kg (roasted) Shipped in specialized containers
Ground Coffee	Not shipped except as a pre-consigned emergency supply (freight, not cargo)
Creamer	7000kg (solid); 28000kg (14kl) for liquid
Coffee Grinder	3000 units
Coffee Makers	
Full Deck (32-cup)	560 units
Standard (16-cup)	1400 units
Half-Pint (8-cup)	3200 units
Bachelor (4-cup)	3500 units
Singleton (2-cup)	7000 units

Critics' Corner

Designers and Dragons

reviewed by “kafka”

Designers and Dragons. Shannon Appelcline
Original Publication: 2011
Current Availability: Print and eBook

Off the Table

Editor’s Note: This review originally appeared at RPG.Net in November of 2011 and appears here with the author’s permission.

Shannon Appelcline should need no introduction to deeper readers of RPG.net, as one of one the movers and shakers of this great web resource. His col-

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Critics' Corner

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umns on *Traveller* and his gaming advice all piqued my interest over the years that I have been visiting this site. Not to mention his work over at Skotos Tech Inc. should let anyone know that he is “one of us”. Thus, when I started reading his columns on gaming history I was intrigued and interested to read more. For often one reads about one company’s history in tiny blurbs that the company together, otherwise it is hunting and finding and piecing together multiple documents sometimes based on little more than hearsay or worse written by former employees with a need to lash out at their former employers. Then there were some solid volumes that were written in the heyday of tabletop Role Playing (the 1980s) by outside “experts” – these were often pedantic and dry but nothing much has been written save scholarly treatises on gaming theory in recent times. One notable exception was Dietz’s *Horsemen of the Apocalypse* but that was written over a decade ago. Thus, I read Appelcline’s history of gaming columns with great interest but always felt cheated somehow – that is because they were laying the ground for a book.

And, boy, what a book! From its faux leather binding to its clear renditions/scans of games gone by was a trip back to my youth. Upon reading this book, it more than a trip down memory lane but a comprehensive and complete history right up to the publishing date of Summer 2010 (and supported beyond with a web page). The fact that is so up-to-date gives its distinction from other books and its depth is unparalleled by even earlier volumes. Some companies get more attention than others but scarcely could I find a company that even had a vague recollection of not covered. So, if you ever wondered what happened to company X...look no further than this impressive volume. Furthermore, the language is crisp and nothing is wasted in terms of flowery purple prose. Accurate brief descriptions of lines and gaming systems go hand- in-hand with gaming histories. Mongoose/Appelcline has done an amazing job in editing his web columns and transferring them into

book form. For the book both reads like a conventional text but also has embedded in hypertext that would lead the reader to other sections (nice although if included page numbers – if one is looking to nitpick). Although, I found this made this book very fun to read and re-read as a result of its superior layout.

So, if you like Designer Notes, you will find the offerings here meager but meaty enough to get you want to read more by tracking down some of these obscure references. For this work has been meticulously researched and references many out of print volumes – making any gamer worth their salt jealous of Appelcline’s gaming collection. Interspersed throughout the text is interesting quotations from company founders culled from interviews. What I found so fascinating is how egotistic and narcissistic many of those early game companies were in protecting their Intellectual Property. One wonders if role playing games would not be more popular if there was not more collaboration and cooperation in those early days. It tries not to pass judgement but occasionally bias creeps in, such as the catastrophic effect that the CCG industry had on tabletop gaming or TSR/WotC/Hasbro’s domination of the industry.

However, these biases must be understood, as this is an accurate reflection of what was/is the state of the industry today in North America...a severely fragmented and fractured marketplace hampered by a credit crunch and diminishing consumer spending power. Nonetheless, this is not the whole picture – for maybe I am wrong but it would seem centre of gaming has shifted away from North America and been inserted into Europe. This is somewhat covered in tracts dealing with British companies but there has been a venerable explosion of role playing in Germany, Spain, France and Sweden – all of which several magnitude better quality than some of the offerings currently available in North America. Furthermore, gaming conventions are proliferating across Europe – and here’s the kicker – the lingua franca still remains English.

The other limitation of this work is the lack of a comprehensive index – both a subject index and a

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Critics' Corner

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name index – this is perhaps the books greatest flaw. There is also a need for more illustrations. Several fans of the gaming columns took it upon themselves to create elaborate maps tracing out the developments of their favorite company's fortunes and waning periods as well as their critical mistakes (a pity that some of these maps were not included) – but that can be done for 2nd edition. Sometimes, I found myself lost in memory lane, so more details about products that I spied in the gaming store but never having the money to buy would have been welcome – but that would be a book of reviews and not a history of

the industry. Also, something that was rather surprising is how short thrift the Old School Gaming companies got. Maybe, it is my locale but old school gaming is actually bringing people back into gaming.

All said and done, this is a fantastic and invaluable work but not for the faint of heart, it took a good 10 days to read it and another 5 days to re-read and digest it. It is the perfect gift for the lifelong gamer – those geeks and freaks, my wife likes to call us. I look forward to a second edition that would rectify those minor drawbacks noted above and also provide some histories of the preludes – wargaming, interludes – CCG and possible futures – virtual tables. 🎲

In A Store Near You

FastPack EMT

by Michael Wakefield

Fuel fires, Plasma discharges, Radiation, Extreme Temperatures, Chemical and Acid burns are but a few of the Dangers of space and planet bound life. Transcomb Medical Technologies (TMT) bring you a quick and easy to use product in convenient sizes to negate some of the hazards of space travel.

FastPack EMT is a transparent gelatinous self-adhesive patch made of a biogenic compound developed by TMT (a subsidiary of Tri-Corp, LIC). Designed for primarily external wounds, FastPack EMT will increase the healing rate and recovery time from burns caused by plasma, fire, chemicals and acid along with the effects of exposure to radiation and extreme temperatures. Each patch is a self sealed antiseptic unit which protects from chemical, viral, and biological contamination, and limited external lacerations. When activated (by ripping the activation panel from the adhesive and placing on the affected area), the patch seals the area and begins the regeneration process until the patch is used up (turning a bright pink color) or the wound healed.

The FastPack EMT dissolves dead and damaged skin and tissue and recombines it with the biogenic material to create new skin and tissue while filtering the blood of damaged cells and toxins.

Game Effects: The FastPack EMT will reduce the severity of the wound by one level (i.e. critical to severe of that wound only). It will also stop all bleeding within 1D6 minutes and stop further damage caused by all known chemical, viral, and biological contamination and can possibly reduce the effects of unknown contaminants by 50%.

Points of external damage from the treated wound are reduced by 1D6 + 5 + Character's END DM per 12 hours. It will remove decontaminate and repair radiation damage at a rate of the characters base END × 5 per hour to a maximum of 2000 rads per patch. Healing is up to the maximum 20 points per patch.

Side Effects: Overuse may cause it to be less effective (reduce base END by 1 point per 24 hours of use for calculations of healing) and is *not* intended to be used internally (Task: Difficult -2, Skill, END) as death may occur.

The system effects only soft tissue and cannot mend bones. 🎲

FastPack EMT Costs and Contents (TL13)

Pack Type	Contents	Weight	Cost
Basic	5 ea 20cmx10cm patches		Cr5000
Medic	2 ea 30cmx20cm patches	200g	Cr12000
Evac	2 ea 50cmx50cm patches; 1 ea 100cmx50cm patch	900g	Cr18000

Note: Each kit contains its listed contents plus the listed contents of all lesser pack types, plus standard medkit supplies



Damnthing

by Scott Diamond

This article is reprinted from the pre-magazine Freelance Traveller. It was originally posted to the website in 2009.


The damnthing is a solitary tropical-zone coastal fish that lives and hunts in coral “forests” and under rocky coastal shelving, waiting for prey above it to be silhouetted against the light of the surface. Then it darts out of its lair and up at the prey item. To kill, it slashes at the underside of the prey with a whip that has razor sharp crests of bone running along the last 20cm of the 4-meter tail. The damnthing then waits till the prey weakens or dies before moving in to eat it. Damnthings have dislocating jaws and large sharp, rasping teeth on a prehensile tongue. This is used to quickly gouge out massive chunks of meat out of the prey as fast as possible before other predators (including other damnthings) come to contest the food supply or territory. A damnthing will defend itself with either the tail or tongue depending on the range to the threat. But when hunting it will only strike with the whip.

Damnthings are highly territorial, and one will control an area of several square kilometers of coastline. A damnthing will live its entire life in the same territory, only venturing out to make quick frantic dashes out in search of a mate, or prey if poaching along the edge of another’s territory. They are hermaphroditic and bear live young. The young are capable of fleeing for their lives from the hungry parent within seconds of being born. Typically a damnthing will have up to 10 young at once, once a year. After mating the sperm can be stored and provide fertilization of 3 -4 batches of ova.

Damnthings are slender and eel-like in shape and contour, flaring to a flat broad head that looks snake-like. The head has 2 sets of paired eyes; one set is

highly developed and situated on either side of the head. These distinguish color, shape, depth perception, and all the usual things eyes do. They are small for an animal this size, and fairly short range – the animal can only really see clearly out to approx. 10 meters even in the crystal clear shallow waters they live in. The other set are directly on top of the head and are simple eyes capable only of light and shadow detection. These are the ones which spot the prey on the surface as the animal sticks its head out of its hole.

The hide is iridescent blues and greens, with a bright splash of fluorescence around the gills and along the jaw line. The three pairs of fins set bilaterally along the body are orange to bright red. Damnthings can mate about once every 3-4 months. When ready to mate, the damnthings display a spectacular fluorescence and color pattern that runs all along its body. Biologists believe this helps the animal find the scarce mates along the coasts, and by displaying its readiness to mate avoids an attack by another damnthing protecting its territory. It is popular among the tourists to take out glass-bottomed boats as the sun sets to watch one damnthing after another during mating displays.

Sport fishing of the damnthing is done by divers using themselves as “lures” to tempt the animal out of its hole and then spear it with explosive-tipped bolts. The divers equip their suits with various color bands, vibrators, frills, and reflective bits to attract the interest of the near-sighted animal. The suits are named after the lure style, i.e., “Wurgling Bugle Worm”, or “Humming Nimble Tosser”, and while novices wear armor to protect themselves, professionals often do not – instead relying on experience and reflexes to know when the fish will attack with tail whip or rasp. 

Classic Traveller Statistics:

Coastal Ocean Terrain	Standard world, Standard or Dense atmosphere, 50%+ hydrographics						
	# Enc	Mass	Hits	Armor	Wounds	Weapons	
(Swimmer) Pouncer	1	700kg	35/15	Cloth	18/10	Thrasher, teeth+2	A(surprise) F? S2

Feedback

Please tell us ...

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

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

- e-mail: feedback@freelancetraveller.com.

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

- Forums:
Traveller Fanzine section of SFRPG: <http://www.sfrpg-discussion.net/phpBB3/viewforum.php?f=36>

Lone Star at Citizens of the Imperium: <http://www.travellerrpg.com/CotI/Discuss/forumdisplay.php?f=13>

Note: you must be registered with the forums to be able to use this method.

Traveller on the Internet

IRC: The #Traveller and #LoneStar channels

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

You can also run “play-by-IRC” game sessions in either channel; please stop in and ask one of the channel operators (FreeTrav or EMT_Hawk) to schedule it, so we can ensure that the ‘bridge’ and the ‘bartender’ are set into a nondisruptive mode.

Please watch the Traveller Mailing List, the Mongoose Traveller forum, and the Lone Star section of the Citizens of the Imperium forum for announcements of Topical Talks!

Information Center: Request for Information

Here is a list of all of those publishers that we are aware of that are currently putting out material for *Traveller* (any version) or *Traveller*-compatible material not specifically for *Traveller* (this list is based on products that the editor owns, and notifications from “follow your favorites” from DriveThruRPG). If you know of others, or if any of those on this list are not in fact currently operating/publishing, please write and let us know. We'd also appreciate either lists or pointers to lists of all of the *Traveller* and *Traveller*-compatible material put out by any of these companies, or any companies that we may have omitted from the list. If you have contact information, we'd appreciate that as well.

List of Traveller/compatible Publishers

Avalon Game Company
Avenger Enterprises
D.B. Design Bureau

DSL Ironworks
FarFuture Enterprises
Forever People
Game Designers' Workshop(!)
Gypsy Knights Games
Jon Brazer Enterprises
K-Studio
Loren Wiseman Enterprises
Mongoose Publishing
Postmortem Studios
QuikLink Interactive
Samardan Press
Sceaptune Games
Scrying Eye Games
Spica Publishing
Steve Jackson Games
Terra/Sol Games
Toxic Bag Productions

Submission Guidelines

What is *Freelance Traveller* looking for?

We're looking for anything and everything to do with *Traveller* – reviews of products, house rules, alternate settings, NPC profiles, world write-ups, adventures, equipment, starships, fiction, “color” articles... If you see it in *Freelance Traveller*, or on our website, we're interested in it. Even if you don't see it in the magazine or on the website, we might be interested; write to editor@freelancetraveller.com and ask.

Some things that we want that you might not think of as “*Traveller*” would include reviews of non-*Traveller* products that easily lend themselves to being ‘mined’ for ideas for use in *Traveller*, or reviews of fiction (in any medium) that “feels” like *Traveller* in some way. In these cases, your article should focus on the *Traveller*-esque aspects of the item. There may be other things, as well; if you're not sure, write to editor@freelancetraveller.com and ask.

What about ...

The rule of thumb is “If it's a *Traveller* ruleset, or a setting that has been published for use with a *Traveller* ruleset, go for it!”. That includes the non-Official *Traveller* Universe settings that have been published for use with any version of the *Traveller* ruleset, including (but not limited to) *Judge Dredd*, *Strontium Dog*, *Babylon 5*, *Reign of Diaspora*, *Twilight Sector*, the two *GURPS* variants on the Official *Traveller* Universe, Avenger Enterprises' *Far Avalon*, and the forthcoming *Traveller Prime Directive*.

...**Hyperlite?**

We've made the decision to support *Hyperlite* as though it were an alternate *Traveller* setting, much like *Twilight Sector* or *Reign of Diaspora*. The changes that Sceptune Games has made to *Traveller* to get *Hyperlite* aren't really much more than the differences between Classic *Traveller*, *MegaTraveller*, *Marc Miller's Traveller*, and *Mongoose Traveller*, and converting between any of those systems and *Hyperlite*, in either direction, should be ‘trivial’.

... **Diaspora, or Starblazer Adventures?**

If your article is about “crossing over” between these products and any of the “standard” or supported *Traveller* rulesets or settings, by all means, submit it! If it's support for those systems beyond *Traveller*, we'll

accept and hold the submission, but will not print it unless/until we've had a reasonable level of expression of interest in such support from our readers.

How should I submit my article?

What needs to be in the submission?

At the very minimum, we need the submission itself, your name (for credit), and a valid email address to contact you at if we need to.

What format should I submit it in?

That depends on what you're submitting. Generally: Text should be submitted in Microsoft Rich Text Format (RTF), Microsoft Word 2003 (DOC) or 2007/2010 (DOCX), OpenOffice Writer (ODT), or plain text (TXT). Most word processors will support one of those; if yours seems not to, please write to us for assistance. Avoid PDF if at all possible; it is difficult to reformat PDFs for our magazine or website.

Graphics should be submitted in the format that's best for the type of graphic. Most of the time, that will be GIF, PNG, or JPG/JPEG. Submitting in higher resolutions is better; we have tools to resample a picture to make it smaller if we need to – but it's not possible to make a picture larger without it becoming pixelated.

If you're submitting a graphic that you'd like to see us use for a cover of an issue, please make sure that it will fit nicely on both US Letter and ISO A4 pages—we'll crop the picture to fit, to avoid distorting shapes, so please leave reasonable “margins”; don't run “critical” imagery right to the edge where it will look bad if we crop it. A good resolution is 100 dpi or more.

Plans (deck plans, building plans, maps, etc.) may be better submitted in a vector-based format such as CorelDRAW! format (CDR) or any format that can be imported into CorelDRAW! X4. Scalable Vector Graphics (SVG), Windows Metafile (WMF), Enhanced Metafile (EMF), Encapsulated PostScript (EPS), or Microsoft Visio (VSD) are some common vector formats that can be imported.

How do I get it to you?

Email it to us at our submissions address, submissions@freelancetraveller.com. Your subject line should specify the type of article that it is, and what section you think it should be put in, e.g., “Combat Rules for Doing It My Way”.

