



FREELANCE TRAVELLER

The Electronic Fan-Supported Traveller® Magazine and Resource



Featured Adventure

Vlezhdiets

by Michael Brown

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A Note About Production

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

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

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Jeff Zeitlin, Ewan Quibell, Mike Cross, “kafka”, Michael Brown, Colin Michael, Scott Diamond, Andrea Vallance

Artwork

Cover: .Kraki H. Wodenssen

From the Editor: Jeff Zeitlin

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From the Editor



Why do *Traveller* and similar games (e.g., *Stars Without Number* or *Diaspora*) hold our interest? What keeps us coming back for more, even after a generation?

Recently, I (re)read a novel—science fiction, specifically the *Star Trek* novel, *Prime Directive*—and I think the authors, Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens, hit on the answer: *Le rêve d’étoiles*, the dream of stars.

The general perception of the role-playing game is that it’s a hobby for “kids”—usually implying people of ... limited ... maturity. Certainly, the *Traveller* community has such people in it. But, somehow, it seems like a major part of the community’s membership is drawn from older people, people whose *children* are at the age when they’re starting to think about college, and perhaps themselves getting into gaming. People who grew up in a period when hope was starting to turn into cynicism, but the hope was still there. A peri-

od when manned space exploration was still a dream that looked like it would continue to happen. And we wanted to be part of it. Some of us—perhaps most of us—still do, though we’re mostly resigned to it not being in our lifetimes.

In a way, that’s what *Traveller* is all about. Yes, we fight wars, deal in political intrigue, make our fortunes as merchants, and so on, but we could do that here on Terra, and we could play our games set on Terra, past, present, future, or parallel-world. But we don’t; we play *Traveller* instead. Because underneath it all, it’s the dream of stars, of *being out there* or *going there*, regardless of what we’re *doing*.

And perhaps it’s also about keeping *le rêve d’étoiles* alive, refusing to give up that hope.

Do you think I’m right? Do you think there’s another reason? Please write and share your thoughts. ☪



Mongoose Traveller Adventure 1: Beltstrike

reviewed by Jeff Zeitlin

Mongoose Traveller Adventure 1: Beltstrike. Lawrence Whittaker
Mongoose Publishing <http://www.mongoosepublishing.com>
softbound, 96pp
US\$24.99/UK£16.99

Mongoose's first complete adventure for *Traveller* sets a high standard for future adventures, blurring the line between 'adventure' and 'campaign'.

On the Shelf

Beltstrike is written such that it does not depend on the Third Imperium setting; it depends on the *Traveller Core Rules* only. As a core adventure, it sports the standard black cover with *Traveller*-and-arrow logo; for adventures, the latter is a deep blue that is almost invisible against the black. The adventure carries the tagline "Face the Sonares Frontier", referring to the system in which the adventure is set.

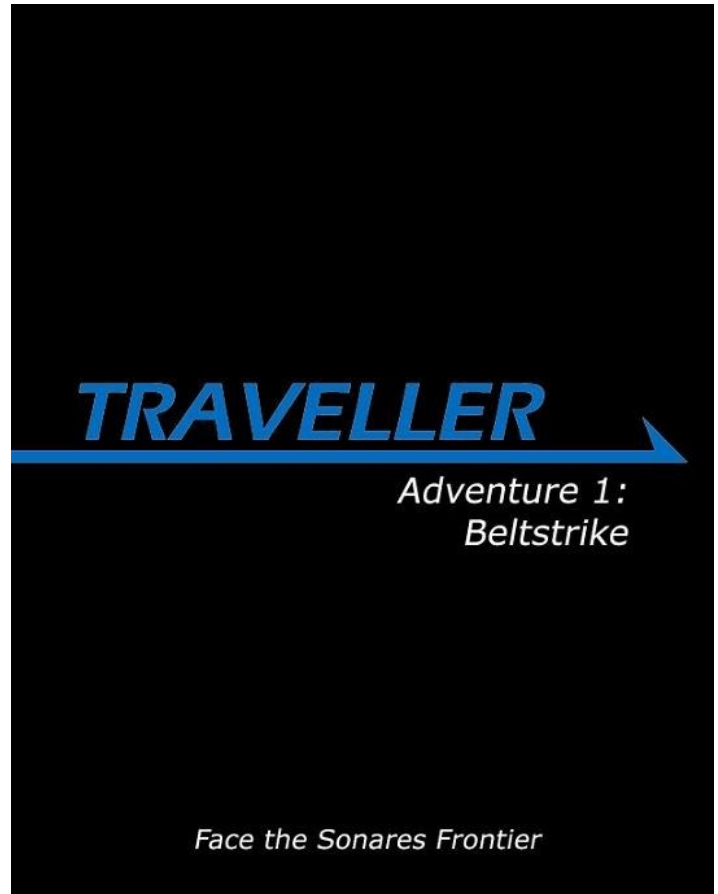
Initial Impressions

Beltstrike is more than an adventure; it expands on the core rules by providing additional rules for detailing the composition of an asteroid belt and mining it, and for generating Belter characters. A section on equipping a belting expedition follows; all this can apply to belter adventures anywhere.

The adventure proper follows. This includes a section on the Sonara system, with a particular focus on the Schaffer Belt (where most of the action occurs), and a set of scenarios.

On Closer Inspection

The Sonara system is a developing society, but not quite up to FTL. Gear is limited to TL9, as are spacecraft, though the adventure describes two type of available spacecraft as matching the Type A Free Trader and the Type R Subsidized Merchant, but with cargo capacity increased and the jump drive omitted. Specifications and deck plans for a mining platform are provided, as well as for a 'seeker singleship' which looks like a variation on the Type S.



The initial scenario, "The Factory", serves to introduce the major players and key personalities. It includes a survey and evaluation of a mining platform. The platform turns out to contain secrets which the player-characters may or may not discover; these secrets can affect developments later on. There is also an option for the platform to have been occupied by pirates; if the referee takes that option, there is the potential for what should be a simple survey-and-evaluation to degrade into a dungeon crawl and pitched-battle scenario.

Once the survey is done, the adventure becomes a waiting game for the player-characters, and "Signals to Noise" provides several mini-scenarios that can be used to fill the time. "The Shoranan Habitat Run" involves shipping parts and equipment needed to rehabilitate the platform from "The Factory", and has some options for intrigue, ship-to-ship combat, and boarding actions. "Spindrift" offers the opportunity for prospecting and claim-jumping, if certain events transpired in "The Shoranan Habitat

Critics' Corner

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Run". "Factory Shadows" ties back to one of the secrets that might have been revealed in "The Factory". Finally, "Miscellanea" simply reveals a fact that can be used by the referee as a hook for additional adventures. There is no set order to these mini-scenarios, other than "Spindrift" being dependent on "The Shoranan Habitat Run".

Once the waiting game is over, it's time to actually repair the platform and recommission it. "Working Them Angels" provides a mechanic to simulate this, and also to potentially provide hooks for adventure sessions. This is essentially the entirety of "Resurrecting the Machine"; it also forms the backdrop to the mission in "Factory Online" and the events of "Rogan's Return".

Once the platform is recommissioned, "Adventures in the Chlaer Radical" establishes the pattern of 'business as usual' for a belt mining com-

pany, and provides a few mini-adventures that can be tossed at the players in any order.

Together, "Working Them Angels" and "Adventures in the Chlaer Radical" also present an enigma to hang further adventures on.

Finally, "Belt War" threatens the entire system with major upheaval, and the player-characters are positioned to be right in the thick of things, potentially making a difference in the final outcome.

Conclusion

Beltstrike sets a high standard for future core adventures; in the early days of *Traveller*, something this well-developed would be considered a campaign, rather than a mere adventure. Even played through to a conclusion—and there is plenty of opportunity to "get sidetracked" and take it in a different direction—the referee is left with plenty of hooks to hang further adventures on. This volume is unquestionably worth the money, and should be a part of every *Traveller* library. 🌟

In A Store Near You

NHR 2000 Sensor Drone Robot

designed by Ewan Quibell 2012-12-10

Robot ID: NHR 2000 Sensor Drone Robot, TL10, Cr63,714, URP=4Fx01x, STR=4, DEX=15, INT=0, EDU=1
Hull: 1/1, Size=0.0945kl, Config=5SL, Armor=1E, Unloaded=0.0249 tons, Loaded=0.02504 tons
Power: Batt=0.04326 Mwh, 1/2, Solar=0.00321 Mw, Duration=1.43 on batteries
Loco: 1/2, LoPwrH-GravThrust=0.4 tons, NOE=40kph, CruiseAtm=750kph, TopAtm=1000kph, MaxAcc=16G
Commo: Radio=Contx2 (5000km), Interface=Brain, Program, Power
Sensors: ActEMS=Dist (5km)
Off: Hardpoints=1
Def: DefDM=+3
Brain: NHR Low Function 10: CPU=Linearx7, Storage=Stdx11, FundLogic=LoData, FundCmd=LtdBasic, Software= Grav Vehicle-1
Control: Panel=0
Other: Cargo=0.00014kl, ObjSize=Small, EM-Level=Faint
Comment: Cost in Quantity=Cr 50,971

The NHR 2000 Sensor Drone is New Home Robotics' first foray into Grav-powered robots. The robot is designed just to relay the data gathered from its active sensors back to base via one of the radios,

while being controlled via the other. NHR found that the initial market for them was limited due to the duration of the power source, and the time it took the solar panels to re-charge the batteries (1.36 hours), however, they are starting to be picked up as flexible/fixed hovering sensor platforms using direct power attachments that can then break out and report on specifics as the operator may wish.

While the drone is about the size of a basket ball it weighs only 25kg and thanks to its grav drive is incredibly fast. Once spotted and identified the NHR 2000 can be onto anything in its sensor range in a matter of seconds.

Some owners have customised their NHR 2000's by swapping out the NHR Low Function 10 brain with a NHR Low Function 100 to allow for Recon-1 to be added at the expense of batteries and autonomous duration, however this is seen as acceptable if the NHR 2000 is deployed as a flexible/fixed hovering sensor platform. 🌟



Extending the UWP: Starports

by Jeff Zeitlin

Editor's Note: This article was originally posted to the pre-magazine Freelance Traveller web site in 1996.

Introduction

Starports tend to take on a certain importance to a frequent Traveller. They are a focus for certain necessary activities, and they provide services that Travellers of all types find desirable. However, the typical Universal World Profile provides only for a single-character descriptor for a starport or spaceport—the familiar A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, X ratings. These ratings give enough information for routine activities—they answer the questions “Can I get fixed here?” and “Can I get fuel here?”.

There are other activities that take place at a starport—Quarantine, on the Frontier and inter-polity borders is one such activity; cargo loading and unloading is another; and various kinds of services, including tourism-related services, will be available. This article outlines an extended profile to give the Traveller information at a glance about the starport and its suitability for a particular purpose.

The Universal Extended Starport Profile

The format of a Universal Extended Starship Profile (UESP) is presented as the UWP Starport value, followed by a dash, followed by ten characters. The characters are interpreted by position as follows:

1. Overall Rating—the UWP Starport code
2. Ground Component.
3. Orbital Component.
4. Ship Construction Capability.
5. Ship Repair Capability.
6. Dock Size.
7. Fuel Availability.
8. Non-Living Cargo Handling.
9. Living Cargo Handling.
10. Business Facilities.
11. Tourist Facilities.

Each character has a specific meaning, which, when combined with the ratings in other areas,

gives an overview of what to expect at the starport. Note that no distinction between orbital ports and ground ports are made; it may be assumed that ports with an Overall Rating of A or B have orbital components; C ports may or may not, and all other ports are ground-based only.

Ground Component Rating

This describes the overall level of service at the ground-based portion of the starport. The same codes are used as for the Overall rating, with X meaning that there is no ground-based component for the starport. Note that any construction or docking facilities at a ground component will apply only to spacecraft and starships with hull configurations of SL and/or AF (streamlined and/or airframe). Ground-based starports should be assumed to have all facilities at the listed levels in the remainder of the profile, if the Ground Component value is the same as the Overall Rating value. In the event that they differ, the “Minimum” values listed under “Standard Expectations”, below, are assumed.

Orbital Component Rating

This describes the overall level of service at the orbital portion of the starport. The same codes are used as for the Overall rating, with X meaning that there is no orbital component for the starport. Orbital starports should always be assumed to have all of the facilities at the listed levels in the remainder of the profile, if the Orbital Component value is the same as the Overall Rating value. In the event that they are not, the “Minimum” values listed under “Standard Expectations”, below, are assumed.

Ship Construction Capability

This code represents the ability of the starport to construct spacegoing vessels. The code that appears here represents the maximum hull rate (displacement tonnage) that can be constructed, as an exponent of 10 (e.g., 10-dton fighters use a code of 1, 100-dton scouts a code of 2, and so on). A Ship Construction Capability of 0 implies that there are no ship construction facilities. As the construction of

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Doing It My Way

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a ship with hull rate 10,000,000,000 is unlikely in the extreme, letter codes A through I have the same meaning as codes 1 through 9, respectively, except that such letter codes represent an inability to construct jump-capable ships. A code of X indicates that the port constructs military ships only, and does not publicize the constructable hull rate.

Ship Repair Capability

A starport can automatically perform annual maintenance and structural repairs on any ship that it could construct. This rating represents its ability to repair ships that are larger than it can construct, up to a limit of the port's dock size. Codes are one of the following:

Ship Repair Capability		
Code	Definition	Description
0	None	Repairs to large ships are not possible.
1	Cosmetic Damage	Adjustments and refinishing are available. Replacement Parts are not generally available
2	Light Damage	Drive parts are not available. Adjustment and remanufacturing or reconditioning of old drive components is possible. Parts for other systems are easily available.
3	Heavy Damage	Similar to Annual Maintenance. Some parts may not be immediately available.
4	Annual Maintenance	Heavy maintenance needed annually. Includes replacement of drive components. Parts needed are generally available immediately.
5	Structural Repairs	Load-bearing (stressed) members and hull sections can be replaced.

Dock Size

This code is interpreted the same as the code for Ship Construction Capability. "Docking facilities" refers to specific locations for a ship to position itself, with at least minimal communications and access control facilities. Letter codes are not used, except for X, which refers to a port that permits only military craft to dock. The 0 code is used for starports that have no docking facilities.

Fuel Availability

This code represents the type of fuel available, and, in the case of unrefined fuel, the method of availability.

Fuel Availability		
Code	Definition	Description
R	Refined	Refined fuel is available from port facilities.
U	Unrefined	Unrefined fuel is available from port facilities
D	"Dipping"	Unrefined fuel is available through "dipping" under control of port authorities.
W	Wilderness	Unrefined fuel is available through "dipping" without restriction.
X	No Fuel	No Fuel is available

Non-living Cargo Handling

This code represents the level of loading and unloading services for non-living cargo available from the starport.

Non-Living Cargo Handling		
Code	Definition	Description
0	None	No cargo-handling facilities are available.
1	Crew	Minimal storage facilities are available. Manpower and equipment must be arranged for by the ship's crew.
2	Manual	Manual loading only; powered equipment (e.g., forklifts, grav lifters, motorized carts, etc.) is not available. Special packaging is not available.
3	Small	Powered and grav equipment is available. The maximum cargo that can be loaded in a single operation is 50 dtons.
4	Medium	The maximum cargo that can be loaded in a single operation is 100 dtons. Special packaging for Flammable, Gas, Corrosive, Radioactive available.
5	Standard	Cranes and heavy anti-grav equipment are not available. The maximum cargo that can be loaded in a single operation is 250 dtons. Special Environments are not available; other special packaging is.
6	Large	All special packaging, including Special Environment, is available. The maximum cargo that can be loaded in a single operation is at least 1000 dtons.
7	Special	Generally limited to Depot starports or the largest Class A ports. Essentially any loading need can be met, including loading a starship into the hold of a sufficiently larger starship. These ports may be pre-empted for military use during active hostilities.

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Doing It My Way

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Live Cargo Handling

This code represents the level of loading/unloading and life-support services for living cargos. Note that these codes apply only to broadly terrestrial-compatible life forms. The capability drops based on the need of an ungeneered human to survive in the required environment as follows: If a human needs a class C environment suit (basically thermal clothing and/or filter masks), life forms from that environment can be handled at the indicated level. If a class B suit (pressure differential) is required, life form handling is at one level lower. If a class A suit (protection from corrosives or extreme pressure differentials) is required, life form handling is at two levels lower. Note that these codes assume that all life forms involved are for a single cargo, and are all of the same type. Many starports are able to handle several live cargos at once.

Living Cargo Handling		
Code	Definition	Description
0	None	No live cargo handling or maintenance facilities are available.
1	Contained	Small animals caged or otherwise contained (e.g., aquaria, terraria, etc.) can be maintained for up to one week
2	Kennel	Single medium-sized animals (e.g., dogs, cats) can be maintained for up to one week.
3	Pack	Groups of medium-sized animals can be maintained for up to one week
4	Stable	Single large animals (horse to elephant size) can be maintained for up to one week.
5	Herd	Large groups of large animals can be maintained for up to one week.

Business Facilities

This code describes the ability of the shipowner or operator to conduct business without leaving the starport. It includes availability of brokerage services, legal assistance (both barristers and solicitors), obtaining permits and clearances, and other business-related services. The availability of any particu-

lar service implies that all services with lower codes are also available (i.e., Solicitor availability implies availability of Barristers, Trans-shipment, Brokerage, Permits/Clearances, and Communications).

Business Facility Availability		
Code	Definition	Description
0	None	No business facilities are available.
1	Recorded Communications	A Recorded message may be left for later transmission to planetary surface or nearby cities.
2	Live Communications	Real-time communications are possible between the starport and the planetary surface or nearby cities.
3	Permits	Permits and clearances can be arranged.
4	Brokers	Starport officials can arrange an initial meeting with a broker. Brokers may have offices in the port
5	Trans-shipment	Trans-shipment of cargo to the planetary surface or nearby cities can be arranged.
6	Barristers	Trial lawyers can be arranged.
7	Solicitors	Legal assistance of all types can be arranged.
8	Consulate	Consular or Diplomatic services are available
9	Name it	Any desired service is available, perhaps for a price.

Tourist Facilities

Most planets consider it advisable to make it easy for tourists to visit—tourism, after all, brings in offworld money, which makes it easier for the planet to engage in offworld trade. Nevertheless, there can be a wide variation in the quality of service that an incoming tourist can expect to experience. This code provides a guideline on what to expect. Note that there is a high level of overlap with business facility availability—it is occasionally difficult to draw a line between tourist and business facilities; both codes should be examined by all travellers. The tourist facility codes are on the next page. As with Business Facilities, the existence of a service implies that all services with lower codes are available.

Standard Expectations

As was indicated earlier, the single-character starport/spaceport code allows you to assume a certain level of facilities at a port. The table below

Tourist Facility Availability

Code	Definition	Description
0	None	No tourist facilities are available.
1	Recorded Communications	A Recorded message may be left for later transmission to planetary surface or nearby cities.
2	Live Communications	Real-time communications are possible between the starport and the planetary surface or nearby cities.
3	Customs	Customs/Health/Immigration or Quarantine (where applicable) are available.
4	Shopping	Shopping (usually duty-free) and dining facilities are available
5	Trans-shipment	Transfer of baggage or small packages to the planetary surface or nearby cities can be arranged.
6	Emergency	Emergency medical help is available. Criminal lawyers can be arranged.
7	General Assistance	Non-Emergency medical help can be arranged. Legal assistance of all types can be arranged.
8	Extended Stay	Transient residential facilities (B&B, Hotel, etc.) are available. Consular or Diplomatic services are available
9	Name it	Every courtesy is extended. Any desired service is available, perhaps for a price.

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shows the minimum and “normal” facilities levels in UESP format for each single-character port type. The “minimum” profile represents what various rating organizations in the Imperium consider absolutely necessary to gain a specific overall rating; the “normal” profile represents what extensive experience has shown is typical for a starport of the specified rating. 🌟

Starport Standard Expectations

Overall Rating	Minimum for Rating	Normal Expectation
A	A-AX547R5077	A-AA647R6488
B	B-BXD44R5077	B-BB445R6388
C	C-XCX24U4055	C-XCD34U4276
D	D-XDX13W2053	D-XDX24U3C64
E	E-XEX03X0000	E-XEX04W1021
F	F-XFD13U5051	F-XFD23U5151
G	G-XGX03W2041	G-XGX13D3061
H	H-XHX02X0000	H-XHX02W0021
X	X-XXX00X0000	X-XXX00X0000

Kurishdam

At Home, We Do It Like This

Slice of Life: Technology’s Effect on The 30th Century Family

by Mike Cross

By the 30th century, technology and societal evolution have created a whole host of family types. These cover a bewildering array of options almost as numerous as the human population. What all have in common, though, is that technology has affected them in some way or another.

By definition, the family is a group that consists of parents and children. Its prime anthropological purpose is to create a stable environment for the creation and raising of children. And, not coincidentally, it is child bearing that technology has impacted the most. The invention of the exo-womb ranks above even birth control as the single most significant technological innovation in human repro-

duction. With the creation of the first external wombs in 2487, human population saw a significant spike. The freeing of women from the physical burdens of pregnancy and childbirth, combined with the burgeoning technology of genetic manipulation, enabled the human population to soar and sociologists therefore cite the exo-womb’s creation as a significant factor in the subsequent waves of human exploration that have occurred.

When the exo-womb was first conceived, one of its key advantages was believed to be an increase in female productivity, since they’d be relieved of the physical burdens of the creation of children. However, the technology’s development overlapped with that of Artificial Intelligence, which made the need for increased human productivity moot as AI productivity quickly outpaced any possible human productivity gains.

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In fact, the development of Artificial Intelligence was another technology that greatly affected families. Another key function of the family is to provide economic support for its members. With the leaps in productivity provided by technologies like Artificial Intelligence, the need for families to provide economic support has been diminished. Especially for those on the dole, economic factors are no longer a prime motivator bringing people together in family groups. For those who cannot or will not provide for themselves, society or the state steps in and provides them with a generous level of economic support. Those who are members of economically successful family units do have access to far more economic resources than those who rely solely on the state. Studies have shown that children from economically successful families are far more likely to themselves have successful careers and are more likely to rise to decision making positions in the public or private sectors.

Other technologies have greatly affected 30th century families. Genetic manipulation or gene-fixing has revolutionized humanity some saying it has ushered in an age of Transhumanism. A child born in 2991 has significant advantages over one born in 1991. This genetic optimization is aimed at eliminating birth defects and potential mental instability and enhancing physical appearance. Within certain socially-accepted parameters, these genetic alterations and 'tidying up' are not considered mutations, but only acts of responsible parenting.

On the other hand, genetic blueprints that create Scientifically Induced Mutations (SIMs) are considered mutations in polite galactic society. Despite

Transhumanism refers to a process of evolution. It is the interim stage of humanity as it transitions from human to whatever humanity may evolve into. An example in the Twilight Sector Setting would be mutants. Ghosts could be advanced as one example of Post Humans. They represent something that humanity might evolve into.

this, many families choose to create their children utilizing one or more genetic blueprints, for a number of reasons ranging from environmental adaptation to providing a perceived genetic advantage to their progeny.

Education is another area where technology has affected the family. A subsequent "Slice of Life" article will examine in detail 30th century education. It is sufficient in this article to note that such technologies as EdSoft programs, which are education software making use of Agent or Intellect programs to create adaptive and customizable teaching tools, exist. Combined with an instructor which can take the form of anything from a robot or BioCon to a stuffed bunny, these programs can take a child from infancy to an advanced degree.

One of the primary consequences of this technology is that it has made obsolete the traditional school setting except as an education and/or socialization choice. Needless to say this has been welcomed as a brilliant breakthrough in some Stellar Nations like the Orion Confederation and the UUP and as a threat to social stability in others like the APR.

In the realm of the law of unintended consequences, technology's effect on life spans greatly affects the 30th Century family. For example, longer life spans means there are often more family members and more family generations in each family group. Since family members often support each other this has had a positive effect both economically and socially. Surveys have shown that families with more generations participating are generally happier and more socially responsible.

One effect that might be considered negative is that with longer life spans, opportunities for advancement in the workplace are fewer, as centenarians hold onto their positions leaving fewer high level jobs available for younger people. This often affects families who are in their prime reproduction years. One result of this is that potential parents are putting off reproduction till later in life. This will

undoubtedly spawn its own set of consequences in the centuries ahead.

Increased longevity has also played havoc on family trees; combined with exo-wombs you can now be younger than your brother or sister's grandchildren. In instances like this traditional family titles like niece or nephew (or great niece or nephew) don't really tell the short hand story of familial relationships anymore.

Further clouding the whole family thing are cases of interspecies marriage and marriage to Artificial Intelligences. Exo-wombs make children possible in these types of pairings. Science has been working on genetic blending so close biological relatives like homo sapiens, chimpanzees and gorillas can produce blended offspring but there are likely legal impediments to this type of reproduction in many jurisdictions based on religious or societal concerns. In physical appearance a child of such a union will strongly favor one species but will have biological contributions from all parents. (Genetic blending has also made it possible to have more than two biological parents.) Artificial Intelligences can purchase fully functional BioCons of any species they desire if they wish to mate with another sentient. If they were to choose another Artificial Intelligence and

opt to create a biological offspring instead of merely programming one (biological would definitely be cheaper than creating an A.I. offspring), a situation where a biological entity had a digital entity as a sibling could exist.

How does this affect my game?

This article goes mainly to setting background but beyond that it can go a long way to help you create character background. It can also be invaluable in informing you on PC or NPC motivations. There might even be adventure hooks hiding somewhere in here as well. Here are a few EdSoft specific hooks suggested to me by one of our insiders (Andrew Welty).

- The players could be hired to smuggle EdSoft programs into the APR.
- Players could be hired to plug a corporate leak. The Leak it turns out is due to an EdSoft program of a key employee's child. The program having been designed to gather intelligence.
- The APR has been corrupting EdSoft programs to subtly brainwash children. Perhaps a child reacts to the brainwashing violently and the players are called in to figure out what happened. 🌀



Active Measures

Vlezhdiets

by Michael Brown

Synopsis: The group helps a Zhodani Intendant recover a family heirloom lost by her father during the Fifth Frontier War.

Setting: Spinward Marches, post-Fifth Frontier War (1107-1110). The adventure begins on Jewell.

Additional Sources: Some material taken from *Alien Module 4: Zhodani* (1985, GDW).

Chapter I: An Earnest Young Woman

The team is enjoying some welcome R&R on Jewell (Spinward Marches 1106). One night, as they pass a Startown bar, a commotion erupts within.

Almost immediately a pretty, olive-skinned woman two meters tall with long black hair (experienced PCs will recognize her as Zhodani) bursts through the doors, away from the upheaval, and up the street toward the PCs. A group of thugs brandishing improvised weapons (bottles, clubs, etc.) follows close behind. As she catches sight of the adventurers, the woman stops short, clearly uncomfortable and momentarily unsure of what to do. If the group gives her a sign that they intend her no harm, she asks them (in heavily-accented Anglic) for help.

If challenged, the hoodlums, numbering one more than the number of PCs (minimum six), hesitate but do not withdraw, loudly demanding the

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team hand over “that filthy Zho”. It is assumed the visitors have enough compassion to refuse, in which case the toughs attack. Regardless of how the referee generates the opponents, they should not give the adventurers too much trouble.

After dispatching the heavies, the team needs to get their new acquaintance to safety, as the bar is still in uproar and the authorities are approaching. Once safe, the woman introduces herself as Evliapremiepr, an Assistant Supervisor in a Consular office based on Chronor (Spinward Marches 0304), asking them to call her Eve. She entered Imperial space a few weeks ago (with permission; she can produce papers) and was traveling with a hired guide looking to recover a family heirloom lost by her father during the Fifth Frontier War. Unfortunately, the establishment they chose in which to take a break was very anti-Zhodani.

Realizing the guide did not make it out of the bar, Eve wants to check on him. Anyone doing so will discover that he was badly injured and taken away in an ambulance. If the police spot the visitors, they will of course want a word with them.

It is now apparent that the success of Eve’s mission hinges on her securing new guides. She cannot pay much up front—the Imperium limited the amount of funds she could carry on her—but she could arrange for payment vouchers through a Zhodani embassy. If the team owns a starship, Eve can negotiate a charter.

Chapter II: An Uncommon Fighting Force

As the party travels through the sector, they need to be aware that anti-Zhodani sentiment still runs, especially where Zhodani fleets attacked. Eve could be subject to bigotry and violence at any time, and the adventurers, by extension, might be considered collaborators. The group must carefully plan for her appearances in public. Her presence modifies Reaction throws by -2 except where noted.

PCs who have had no prior contact with Zhodani now have an excellent opportunity to perhaps explode some Imperial myths and propaganda. For her part, Eve is quite willing to answer any questions they have as long as it is not simply a way to take advantage of her.

The object she is looking for is a lozenge-shaped crystal about 6 cm by 4 cm, set in a gold pendant on a neck chain. It is of no monetary value, but has boundless sentimental value to her family. Eve cannot fathom a guess as to why an Imperial would want to have it, but she is confident that it has not been lost or destroyed.

Eve’s father, Iavashliatlas, was a noble and an Officer of One Thousand in the Consular Guard (about equivalent to an Imperial Marine Lt. Colonel). He saw action in several battles in Jewell and Regina subsectors as an elite Commando, trained to use his teleportation ability as a shock tactic. He also participated in the invasions of Regina and Ghandi, and the siege of Efate. He was wounded several times and nearly killed twice. The task before the group is to discover where he saw action, who his Imperial opponents were, determine which of them would have taken Eve’s family treasure, and—if the individual is still alive—track them down. Eve has his journal, returned to her family after the war. In the uncensored pages are accounts of the above, as well as slices of life as a Consular Guard. Iavashliatlas’ last entry in the journal was in late 1109. A family friend who served with him supplied what happened afterward: Iavashliatlas disappeared early in 1110 during a mission; the pendant was later seen in the hands of a male human, but the friend only got a glimpse of him during an evacuation.

One other intriguing item also appears in the journal. An object Iavashliatlas called simply the “*olezhdiets*” (the closest Anglic translation is “precious thing” or “valuable item”) first appears in an entry from late 1108. Iavashliatlas did not offer details, but hinted it was worth a fortune, and wrote of his desire to find it again once hostilities ended.

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The major battles mentioned in the journal were intense, involving fleet elements and ground action. PCs with a military background can find which Imperial forces opposed the Zhodani, but such records would be kept at the naval base at Efate.

Chapter III: An Icy Reception

Efate (Spinward Marches 1705) is a cold world with a naval base that is home to the Imperial 213th Fleet. The siege it suffered during the Fifth Frontier War created a great deal of lingering anti-Zhodani bigotry. The team must take this into consideration during their visit. Remember that Eve will not disguise herself, but she might agree to stay out of sight on the ship or in a starport hotel. If the group takes her along, they will suffer -4 on reactions with any Efati they encounter.

In addition to racial prejudice, there is also a lot of paramilitary activity. The Ine Givar rebels find Efate fertile ground for their operations, and mercenary recruiters do a brisk business. Throw 10+ once per day while the adventurers are on-world to witness a terrorist attack or to be approached by a mercenary recruiter. Helping to subdue any malcontents gains the team a +1 reaction modifier from the Naval base personnel.

Eve can still be of help in the group's quest for information even if she does not accompany them. Through her Psychology and Non-Verbal Communication skills, she can give them pointers on what to look for in reactions, giving them a +1 on social interactions while on Efate.

Access to the Efate Naval Base is not hard. There are areas that cater specifically to civilians, especially those considering a career in the Imperial Navy. The subsector Office of Naval Records is near the center of the base, 10 kilometers from the entry point. Naval Records is restricted; unless any of the group is active or retired Naval personnel, they are confined to the public records halls, where they can access declassified historical library data (heavy on Imper-

al propaganda). This tells them the Imperial units active at the times and places mentioned in Iavashliatl's journal, but not the unit rosters. To get that information, the team needs one or more members who make a good Reaction throw and have some combination of the following: active-duty Naval status; high rank; a very good reason to have the information; potent connections; or high SOC.

The group can, of course, devise other methods of getting the desired information, but military bases are generally prepared for such shenanigans. Security is tight; infractions are not tolerated. The referee should impose a blanket -4 on any plans the group creates, to reflect the difficulty of getting past base security. This modifier should also be imposed on any attempts to sway base personnel, hack into the computer systems, break into secure areas, etc. Failure means the raising of alarms and the group's possible arrest as traitors. If Eve is with them when they are caught, they will be shot on the spot!

Eve may be able to help the group using Clairvoyance. However, it is likely that areas of the base are psionically shielded, rendering her ability useless.

Assuming the party gets the information, they now have a list of 30 names (five officers, 25 enlisted) that correlate to the times and places in the journal and who are still alive. Eliminating women and non-humans from the list leaves three officers and fifteen enlisted. Applying the logic that Marines see the most ground action leaves one officer and five enlisted, all are scattered around the subsector.

Chapter IV: A Few Good Men

The six former Imperial Marines all left the service and settled on different worlds in the Marches:

Jamal MacCrimmon is still on Efate, having left the military to care for his ailing father. He collects curios in his spare time, and has a room packed with all manner of knick-knacks (if the group needs something of a rare or unusual nature, MacCrimmon has it on a throw of 12 exactly; throw Reaction to see if he is willing to sell it). Unfortunately, his

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impressive collection does not include the pendant. If shown an image of it, he recalls seeing it (or something like it) on a Zhodani officer he encountered briefly on Ghandi. He can confirm that a lot of trophy-taking went on, though he never indulged. If Eve accompanies the party, he will not attack, but is noticeably uncomfortable around her.

Brandt Vaslovik is in a hospital on Mongo (Spinward Marches 1204), undergoing long-term treatment for PTSD. To interview him, the team must first get permission from his doctors (reaction throw; DMs: +Medical skill, +1 SOC B+), and then make a subsequent reaction throw of 8+. If he refuses, they may try again the next day. Unfortunately, Vaslovik's experiences left him with a deep hatred of Zhodani; he will attack Eve on sight if she is present and reacts to her companions at -4 thereafter. The facility's doctors call the authorities immediately if there is any disturbance.

Joran Yong-Pak lives with his family on Extolay (Spinward Marches 1711). He is friendly but reluctant to talk about the war. He grudgingly admits that trophy-taking occurred, despite official condemnation. He insists he did not take part, comparing it to desecrating the dead. One night in the barracks, he overheard someone in his unit gossiping about another soldier having the asteroids to take a necklace off a fallen Zhodani. Although he does not know to whom the speaker was referring, he knows the offender was not in his unit. (The team can use this information to refine their list; Kaarin Rushakim, Jamal MacCrimmon, and Brandt Vaslovik were also in his unit, leaving only Napoleon on Jiles and Etera Irkhamar, see below.) If Eve accompanies the team, he bears her no particular ill will but is wary around her. He does not recognize the pendant if shown an image of it.

Napoleon Jiles went to the bright lights of Regina and is currently living the playboy life. The group likely encounters him out on the town, wom-

en and drinks close by. He has a mean streak which manifests as cutting remarks and disdain for non-military types. If shown an image of the pendant, he remembers seeing it in the hands of an officer, after a surprise raid on a secret Zhodani base on Ghandi. He will not tolerate Eve's presence, denouncing her as a "demon mindstealer" and the PCs as turncoats.

Kaarin Rushakim tries to expiate his sense of guilt for participating in the war by throwing himself into charitable works on Feri (Spinward Marches 2005). Barely out of his teens, he has developed a profound distaste for violence. He does not recognize the pendant if shown an image of it. He also does not object to Eve's presence, in fact apologizing to her for his part in the hostilities. The charities he supports are those that promote non-violence and eventual reconciliation with the Zhodani.

Through clues gained by talking to Yong-Pak, MacCrimmon, and Jiles, the team can deduce that an officer took the pendant off a Zhodani after a raid on a Zhodani base. A search of the records indicates that the officer, Etera Irkhamar, was on Ghandi at the time, and participated in the raid. His world is their obvious destination.

Chapter V: A Fateful Meeting

Baron Sir Etera Irkhamar retired to a comfortable home on Kinorb (Spinward Marches 2202). The team has little trouble finding him: he is well known, and spends much of his time running his estate and pursuing his winemaking and fitness hobbies.

When the group arrives at the estate—a large plot of land in a picturesque valley an hour from the starport—they are challenged at the main gate by security guards with orders to detain anyone not having prior invitation. Once the group states their identities and their business, they are put in touch with the estate's officious Chief of Staff, who determines if the Baron should be bothered with such bumpkins, reacting to them at -2 (DMs: +Liaison skill; +1 if any of the group has SOC B+). If Eve is with them, however, the Chief bluntly informs them that the Baron does not allow representatives of the

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Zhodani onto his grounds and ends the conversation. If the group makes trouble, they will face an additional 1D guards armed with ACRs and equipped to tech level 9.

If the group is allowed in, they are directed to the main house, where—under the watchful eyes of the Chief and a guard—they are ushered into a fabulously-appointed (and clearly designed to impress) trophy room, filled with images and mementos of the Baron's prior adventures. They spot Eve's pendant the moment they enter, prominently displayed in one of the glass cases.

Soon, the Baron—a brusque, physically-fit man accustomed to wielding a lot of influence and getting what he wants—enters. Irkhamar is accustomed to being shown a certain level of deference, and if that is lacking—or he perceives any sort of disrespect—he abruptly orders the PCs out under guard. He refuses to part with the pendant, seeing it as just spoils of war and a victory against the “Zho menace.” An entreaty to return it to a family that just wants it back falls on deaf ears and causes him to wonder aloud why a group of Imperials would want to help “the enemy.” If the group presses the issue, he ends the discussion as above.

If Eve can monitor the exchange, she notices that Irkhamar's body language changes subtly upon mention of the Zhodani, signaling not aggression, but fear; he seems to be hiding something.

The group now has a decision to make. They certainly will not want to give up, having come so close. Even Eve does not want to go back to the Consulate empty-handed. It looks as though the team must turn to other means to recover the pendant.

Chapter VI: A Clandestine Operation

The group needs accurate information about the mansion. Eve can help by using her Clairvoyance ability, but will not knowingly take part in a crime. Other methods of gaining the necessary information include using starship sensors to “paint” a rough set

of floorplans; gathering what information they can from the planetary datanet; or attempting to bribe or trick estate staffers into giving them information.

The referee is free to create as much of the mansion as necessary to accommodate the PCs' plans. The only required room is the ground-floor one containing the pendant. Serviceable floor plans can be found online in a pinch (search for “manor house floor plans” or “mansion floor plans”).

The estate security relies mostly on a cadre of armed guards (see above) who patrol on regular shifts. The estate's remote location also serves as a barrier to unwanted guests. At night, the guards are supplemented by trained animals (dogs are assumed, but the referee can substitute any suitable creature). The few electronic devices consist of alarms mostly scattered in sensitive areas; these are only activated at night.

The guards patrol in pairs, encountered on throw of 8+. At night, the presence of the animals (one for every three guards) adds +2 to the throw. Patrols immediately confront intruders and call for backup, consisting of 1D more guards arriving in 4D combat rounds. If the estate watch cannot handle the situation, they will call for regional law enforcement, which arrives in 3D×10 minutes.

If the group is captured, the guards will lock them in an estate outbuilding until the authorities arrive to collect them, about an hour later. Irkhamar will move the pendant to a safer place, requiring the group to find it all over again.

Chapter VII: A Daring Chase

Once the team secures the pendant, their troubles are only just beginning. Irkhamar can and will pursue the team to exact revenge and keep his secret (see below). He has large financial resources and a wide circle of contacts to help him.

Their first problem is getting off Kinorb, fast. Fortunately for them, Irkhamar's vengefulness prevents him from simply calling the police to pick them up; he wants to deal with them himself. But he makes two calls: one to a starport contact to try and

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have the group's takeoff delayed until he can get there. The contact, a loyal, but low-ranking SPA employee, must go through channels, giving the heroes a chance. Travel time to the starport at normal speed is one hour at cruising speed; at the end of that hour, throw 9+ for the starport to execute impoundment. Impose a -1 DM for every 15 minutes the group shaves off that hour. If their ship is impounded, they can only leave by breaking Imperial rules, with all the attendant problems. The other call is to some Startown types to run interference for him through rougher means. This group, numbering the same as the PCs, will be waiting to engage the adventurers in a firefight.

Regardless how the group escapes, the SPA controller can supply Irkhamar with a list of possible destinations based on readings from system Traffic Control sensors. Armed with the information, Irkhamar pursues them in his own starship; the referee can use whatever ship best fits the adventure, but it should be somewhat more powerful (better armed, more jump capacity, etc.) than the PCs' ship.

Once they are safe, the group can examine the pendant. It is actually a psicorder (see "Equipment", below). Eve is a non-telepath and unaware it is a psicorder, so she suffers the described effects. Afterward, she can retrieve the stored message.

The crystal projects a hologram of a star system, with a blinking cursor indicating the position of something traversing the outer system and information (in Zhodani, of course) that when translated gives detailed sensor readings. Simultaneously, Eve receives a telepathic message. (The exact content is not important to the adventure; it is basically a last letter from Iavashliaztlas to his family, with his wish that they can make use of his discovery.) Location information is sparse, but includes enough physical system data that identifies the system as Zircon (Spinward Marches 1110).

The PCs may choose their own route to Zircon, but Irkhamar will do the same and pull out all the stops—short of outright lawbreaking—to catch up to the group and get his due. Of course, he attempts to stack the deck in his favor. Before leaving Kinorb, he fires off several messages via x-boat and private courier to allies in star systems along the team's supposed course, asking them to intercept the group and await his arrival.

The referee will thus have some work to do, keeping up with the positions of the team's ship, Irkhamar's ship, and the x-boats, determining whether or not they are on a given world at the same time as Irkhamar or his agents (in which case an encounter is automatic), creating the numbers and strengths of the opponents (use the PCs strength and capabilities as a guide), and determining the outcome of any encounter. Events need not be all combat; some of Irkhamar's agents may simply spy on the group and pass along pertinent information when Irkhamar arrives.

Whatever occurs, the group should feel a touch of paranoia, never sure when they might be attacked, or who they can trust.

Although he is angry, Irkhamar is not stupid; he is not an open lawbreaker, even if he has a clear shot at his enemies, unless that enemy is Eve herself; then he will try to kill her immediately. He should also be allowed to survive any direct conflict with the party, to give him a chance to be in on the endgame later.

Chapter VIII: A Misleading Destination

Zircon is not an Imperial world; it is a member of the Federation of Arden, a small interstellar state between the Imperium and the Zhodani Consulate.

Once the PCs reach Zircon, PCs with Navigation skill can try and match the information in the crystal with what is known about the system to find the *vlezhdiet*s. This is time-consuming, even with computer help. Each day, the referee should throw 2D for 12 exactly to succeed, unless the players remember that the crystal data is from 1108. Then they can immediately throw 2D for 11+ (DM: +Nav skill), and

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further daily throws will also be at 11+, DM +Nav. On success, they learn the object's new position: interstellar space, one parsec rimward of Zircon.

While the group is in-system, they have a choice of staying off-world (perhaps in the outer system where Iavashliaztlas first encountered the *vlezhdiets*) or making port. If they stay off-world, they can avoid Irkhamar, but may be challenged by an Ardenese System Defense Boat (*Supplement 7: Traders and Gunboats*), which will want to know the group's business in the system. Throw 9+ once per week for this to occur.

If the Ardenese discover the group's mission (by either loose lips, or investigation by Federation of Arden agents) they will doubtless want in on whatever the group finds and insist an "observer" (with carte blanche in securing anything valuable for the Federation) accompany the team. Worse, the Federation is not the only one with agents on Zircon; Consulate and Imperial spies also have operations on-world. They may also pick up on any indiscreet adventurer talk, and deal their respective governments in on the proceedings. This is a situation where it definitely pays to keep one's mouth shut!

Chapter IX: A Fabulous Treasure

The group is nearing the end of its quest. They know where the *vlezhdiets* is; they simply have to retrieve it. Irkhamar also probably has a good idea where they are headed, and makes a last-ditch attempt to avenge himself and safeguard his secret.

Once the team arrives at the location, they may begin their search. The sensor data can help them pinpoint the *vlezhdiets*, but a cubic parsec is a lot of area to search. The referee can make this as easy or as difficult as necessary, but it is recommended that the group have at least a full day of searching first.

Irkhamar's ship jumps in shortly after the party's, and he immediately begins searching for them. Again, the referee determines the difficulty of this. Once he locks on, he closes the distance as quickly as

he can, preparing for a final showdown in deep space. For maximum drama, he and the adventurers can find the long-lost *vlezhdiets* at the same time.

The nature of the *vlezhdiets* is left deliberately undefined, allowing the referee to customize it as needed. It should be extraordinarily valuable, though that value need not be purely monetary.

Similarly, the matter of how Irkhamar's terrible secret comes out is left to the referee. The team could have found out his atrocities previously, or perhaps on the verge of victory, he lets it slip while gloating. Nonetheless, he would be in big trouble with the Imperium were it to come out, and so considers it worth killing for.

Chapter X: A Satisfactory Conclusion

Regardless of who wins the final showdown, the adventure is over. The victor can claim the *vlezhdiets*. If the PCs lose, Irkhamar will try to kill them to preserve his secret. If the PCs win, they will have Irkhamar at their mercy, and have the question of what to do with the *vlezhdiets*.

Its very nature may make the decision for them. If it is of material value, the PCs will face threats from organizations, agencies, and criminals (organized and otherwise) who want it. Forbidden knowledge means someone may be very displeased at the *vlezhdiets'* discovery (perhaps that is what actually happened to Iavashliaztlas...) The Imperial, Zhodani, and Ardenese governments will all want in on it; or move to possess it. Eve suggests the latter, turning the *vlezhdiets* over to a joint delegation and demanding a hefty commission for finding it.

If Irkhamar's actions, past and present, come to light, he can expect to face a review by his noble peers; this will not go well for him. If the adventure is part of an ongoing campaign, this will make him one of their most dedicated recurring enemies.

The adventurers can also claim as many minor rewards (favorable news stories, more job opportunities, romance, etc.) as the referee sees fit to bestow upon them. But one of these comes when someone asks Eve to describe her relationship to them. If she

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has been well-treated, she begins to answer "They are my guides..." Then she stops, looks squarely at the heroes and corrects herself:

"They are my friends."

NPCs

Evliapremiepr ("Eve") 68398A; Age 38; Cr 30,000

5 terms Asst. Supervisor

Admin-2, Computer-1, Liaison-2, Psychology-2,

NVC (Non-Verbal Communications)-2

Psionic Strength: 8; Talents: Clairvoyance (5), Telekinesis (8).

High Passage×2

A minor Zhodani government functionary, *Evliapremiepr* (who has adopted the simple nickname Eve), has left home on a quest into an area of space she considers barbaric and dangerous to recover a family heirloom. Her credits indicate her ready liquid assets. The referee can equip her with whatever non-weaponry items he feels she needs on her voyage through Imperial space

Special Skills: Eve has two skills found in *Alien Module 1: Zhodani*: Non-Verbal Communications and Psychology. For referees who do not have *Zhodani*, simplified summaries (specific to Eve) follow:

Non-Verbal Communication: The ability to read intent by observing body language. On a throw of 6+, Eve can determine the other person's reaction level and what they are thinking and feeling. This may be misinterpreted as telepathic ability.

Psychology: A highly refined science among the Zhodani. Eve can persuade others to back her plans and goals. The game effect is to modify reaction rolls. After the reaction throw, Eve must throw 11 or less (her INT + Psychology skill) to successfully raise the reaction by her skill level (+2). Failure means the reaction result is lowered by 2 instead.

Playing Eve: Zhodani culture is open, honest, and embraces psionic abilities. Eve's outlook reflects her culture, and guides her actions:

In general: The best summary of Eve's viewpoint is "Truth, Justice and the Zhodani Way." She is honest (brutally so, by Imperial standards) and forthright. She withholds judgment on Imperial culture, but is convinced that it is inferior to her own. She understands the Imperial prejudice against psionics, and does not use her powers openly, but is uncomfortable hiding them, regarding such an act as a form of deception. This avoidance of deception extends to such instances as using disguises, "little white lies", and similar. She dresses and conducts herself in such a way as to deflect attention.

At work: Eve is dedicated and thorough. She is fully confident in her skills and training and scrupulous in her dealings with others, expecting the same in others. She is loyal to her companions but will not engage in blatantly criminal activity.

At play: Eve enjoys many of the same things as Imperials do, such as music, art, and good food. Once the group gets past her professional demeanor, they will find her to be friendly and upbeat. She may consider the PCs friends if she is well-treated.

In a fight: Eve is a pacifist. Her preferred reaction to danger is to leave quickly. She will not directly harm opponents with her telekinesis, preferring instead to use it to cause hindrances or distractions.

Baron Sir Etera Irkhamar A68D6C Age 52; Cr 35,000
8 Terms Marines (Colonel, Retired)

Sword-5, Cutlass-1, Mechanical-1, Revolver-2, AFV-1, Tactics-2, Vacc Suit-1

Sword, Cutlass, High Passage, Travellers'

Exemplary service during the Fifth Frontier War brought Irkhamar military honors and a patent of nobility, which he parleyed into wealth and political connections. He counts nobles on several neighboring worlds, Imperial judges, and military officers as friends and has several favors he can call in at any time. His credits above represent liquid assets he has at any given moment.

Behind the veneer of heroism and service, however, is a dark streak. Irkhamar committed atrocities against Zhodani forces and indulged his vengeful

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nature whenever his superiors were not looking. He is hopelessly intolerant of Zhodani, and disdainful of anyone beneath his station; especially those he deems disrespectful.

Playing Irkhamar: Irkhamar is not just a stock villain; He is dangerously cunning and a shrewd manipulator of circumstances.

In General: Irkhamar is brusque, no-nonsense, and used to getting his way. Possessed of a quick temper and a vengeful streak, he is a thoroughly unpleasant person to be around unless one is a noble or a military officer; such individuals view him as simply hard-charging and ambitious—claims he would not deny.

At work: Irkhamar is a workaholic. He keeps long hours and expects others to be as driven. The only times he winds down are during the pursuit of his hobbies (see below) and when entertaining invited guests. He rarely leaves the estate grounds on non-business trips.

At play: Irkhamar throws himself fully into his hobbies, winemaking and physical fitness. His wines, while unremarkable, earn him a modest income on the planetary market. He maintains a strict exercise regimen, including his weapons skills, and is almost as fit as he was in the military.

In a fight: Irkhamar is a merciless opponent. His integrity is easily offended, and he takes umbrage at the least affronts. He always uses his tactical ability to plan his actions and bend events to his advantage. He is also not above throwing underlings at opponents while he lurks behind, searching for weaknesses. In direct conflict, he favors swift, brutal force to best a foe.

Equipment

Psicorder: A psionic device utilized in the Zhodani Consulate but regarded as rumor in the Imperium. A psicorder is a crystal that can record mental images. Telepathic individuals can use one without harm, but non-telepaths must attune their minds first (succeeding in a throw of Psionic Strength or less) or suffer a psychic backlash resulting in being stunned for 2D combat rounds before they may use the device. Non-psionics suffer stunning automatically and must throw END or less or suffer brain damage resulting in the permanent loss of 1 INT. When activated, the crystal can project mental images externally like a hologram, and “play back” a telepathic message. Such messages can be keyed to a specific individual if that individual is well known to the one making the recording. Possession of a psicorder is course highly illegal in the Imperium. ☸

News About Traveller

Recent Traveller News and Findings

April 2013

- **Terra/Sol Games** is running a new Kickstart for *Six Guns: Lasers*. The initial goal is now lower, with some of the things they'd like to do tied to stretch goals. They have also released *Twilight Sector Podcast 2*.
- **FarFuture Enterprises** has started shipping Traveller⁵ to Kickstart supporters and beta participants. General availability is expected shortly.
- **Gorgon Press** has released *Wallpaper: Garuda MSV*, *Wallpaper: Taking the plunge!*, and *Wallpaper: Chiron-class Hunter*.
- **Christian Hollnbuchner** has released *Family Car: Cherry 4x*, *Starships Book 100II: Geological Survey Craft*, *Starships Book 10100: Light Privateer Hopper*, and *High Altitude Interceptor*.
- **Gypsy Knights Games** has released *Farragut-class Wallpaper* and *Atlas-class Wallpaper*.
- **Sceptune Games** has released *Hyperlite: The Sirius Treaty, 2nd Edition*.
- **Mongoose Publishing** has released *2300AD: Rescue Run*. ☸

Ancient Trails: Witness to History

reviewed by "kafka"

Ancient Trails: Witness to History. Filamena Young, Michael Cross. Terra/Sol Games. <http://terrasolgames.com>.

24pp., PDF.

FREE.

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

Another exciting chapter in the *Ancient Trails* campaign arc for Terra/Sol Games that expresses some of the best *Traveller* writing seen in a long time. And, the fact that this is free and can be used in a one- or two-shot makes it perfect for the aspiring referee. Only basic familiarity with the Terra/Sol (sub)sector is required to playing this game, thus making this the perfect generic *Traveller* adventure that can be dropped into any *Traveller* Universe.

The action and basic premise of the adventure is to find out the location of ancient spires of clearly artificial origin, seen in a vision by the party's patron. Both the glove and whip can be employed to get players on track but not in an overly aggressive way just the way that referees have always done in the past. The problem is that the anomaly is located on a prison planet where a potentially ruthless psychopath has taken up residence. The nice thing is that the description of the planet perfectly captures a Prison Planet, unlike the GDW/Mongoose version—there is no reason why the planet itself must be so inhospitable that it is the prison without walls. Australia and numerous other penal settlements spring to mind. The environment of the planet is lovingly described; the only thing that was missing was the flora and fauna described—although one could easily consult Mongoose's *Animal Encounters* to quickly generate it. The spires present a mystery—which is the best part, as I have realized that Mongoose presents the Ancients as a McGuffin whereas previous versions of *Traveller*, including Terra/Sol's take, have always presented the Ancients as an enigma. And Terra/Sol's Precursors are probably not going to be the Droyne, anyhow (whoops, spoilers).



The writing is clear, crisp and engaging throughout. It reads as a chapter from a saga that the Keeper really wants to share. There is mild nudging, rather than railroading, in the direction of getting tasks done, but nowhere is the overwhelming presence of the referee felt. The writing is designed to make the referee as an equal participant in the adventure. Supplementing the adventure are some audio files, along with truly fabulous artwork, making this series highly desirable. And one cannot beat the price. I am sure that the entire campaign will ultimately be assembled together for a modest fee, along with enhancements to the adventure itself, but no matter—if the quality is maintained, it will be well worth the price.

The adventure makes skillful use of the *Traveller* rulebook, as well as Terra/Sol's supplement, but with an understanding of how *Traveller* works, it could easily be ported into any other system. It is big on description (role playing opportunities rather than 'roll playing') that makes it also worthwhile even if you don't play *Traveller* but are seeking a top SF RPG. 🌟



Schwartz-class Modular Spacecraft and Modules

designed by Ewan Quibell

CraftID: *Schwartz-class Modular Spacecraft Frame*, TL7, Cr341,388
 Hull: 9/23, Disp=10, Config=0M, Armor=35C, Unloaded=32.612 tons
 Power: -
 Loco: -
 Comm: -
 Sensors: -
 Off: Hardpoints=2
 Def: -
 Control: -
 Accom: Mounting for up to 190 tons of modules
 Other: ObjSize=Small, EmLevel=None
 Comment: Construction Time=24wks single, 18wks multiple, Cr273,110 in volume

This modular space frame can accept any combination of 10-, 20-, 30-, or 40-ton modules up to 190 tons in total. The frame is capable of accepting spacecraft in lieu of modules to the same tonnage specification, as long as their configuration is such that they don't interfere with the other modules on the frame. The usual positioning is to have quarters modules forward with drives (or spacecraft) aft.

As thrust modules may be mounted at any location, it's also possible to use spacecraft engines to power the frame and attached modules.

10 ton High Performance Rocket Module

CraftID: *High Performance Rocket Module*, TL7, Cr3,314,681
 Hull: 9/23, Disp=10, Config=4USL, Armor=35C, Unloaded=110.9024 tons, Loaded=156.3538
 Power: 1/2, Fission=5Mw, Dur=2yrs
 1/2, Loco=3.9Mw, Dur=1/3
 Loco: 1/2, HiPerf Rocket=195 tons thrust, Dur=1hr
 Comm: Radio=Dist×3
 Sensors: Magnetic=VDist, Radiation=VDist, Headlights×2
 Off: Hardpoints=1
 Def: -
 Control: Computer/1bis, Panel=Electronic×23
 Accom: Seat=Cramped
 Other: Cargo=0.4514kl, Fuel=120kl Cryo, 0.24kl Radioactives, ObjSize=Small, EmLevel=Faint
 Comment: Construction Time=24wks single, 18wks multiple; Excess power=8.8812Mw; Cr2,651,744 in volume

This high-performance rocket module provides significant thrust for a short duration. A workstation

and seat are provided for engineering staff to carry out any necessary maintenance or upkeep (in vacc suits, as no life support or enclosed environment is provided). Access to the computers, controls and sensors is via either direct link or radio as necessary.

Gannon-class Launch

CraftID: *Gannon-class Launch*, Type QL, TL7, Cr4,263,440
 Hull: 9/23, Disp=10, Config=1AF, Armor=10C, Unloaded=24.14859 tons, Loaded=94.969
 Power: 1/2, Fission=5Mw, Dur=365/1095days
 1/2, Loco=3.9Mw, Dur=18min
 Loco: 1/2, HiPerf Rocket=195 tons thrust. MaxAcc=2.05G, NOE=40kph, Cruise=850kph, Top=1133kph, Agility=1
 Comm: Radio=Planetary (50,000 km)×2
 Sensors: Radar=Regional (500 km), Magnetic=VDist, Radiation=VDist, ActObjScan=Diff, ActObjPin=Diff
 Off: Hardpoints=1
 Def: DefDM=+4
 Control: Computer/1bis×2, Panel=Electronic×23, Env=BasicEnv, BasicLS, ExtLS
 Accom: Crew=2 (Pilot, Copilot), AirLock, Seats=Adequate×8
 Other: Cargo=56.720406kl, Fuel=36kl Cryo, 0.12kl Radioactives, ObjSize=Average, EmLevel=Faint
 Comment: Construction Time=24wks single, 20wks multiple, Excess power=7.8261 Mw; Cr3,410,752 in volume

The *Gannon*-class launch is fitted with modular connectors to allow connection to the *Schwartz*-class modular frame, where its rockets can provide thrust if needed. Designed to allow for planetfall and short operations, the launch has insufficient radiation shielding for long-duration missions, thus, the crew usually wear vacc suits for added protection.

While connected to the frame, the launch's computer, sensors, and controls can be accessed by either direct link or radio, depending on the location of the module on the frame.

The *Gannon* class has the ability to take cargos of 56 tons (4 dtons) into orbit, which it achieves in a little under 6.25 minutes from a 1G planet.

20 ton Modular Cargo Module

CraftID: *Cargo Module*, TL7, Cr1,190,945
 Hull: 9/23, Disp=20, Config=0M, Armor=35C, Unloaded=113.6996 tons, Loaded=379.8999
 Power: 1/2, Solar=0.0191Mw, Dur=Unltd
 Loco: -
 Comm: Radio=Dist

The Shipyard

(Continued from page 19)

Sensors: Magnetic=VDist, Radiation=VDist
Off: Hardpoints=1
Def: -
Control: Computer 0, Panel=Electronic×32
Accom: -
Other: Cargo=266.2003kl, ObjSize=Small,
EmLevel=Faint
Comment: Construction Time=24wks single, 18wks
multiple; Cr952,756 in volume

This cargo module accommodates cargo that can be shipped without the need of temperature or pressure control. It is not expected that there will be any need to access these modules while the boat is in transit either to inspect the cargo or undertake maintenance to it.

The solar panel provides the complete power requirements for the module, and access to the computer, sensors, and controls can be achieved by direct link or radio, depending on the location of the module on the frame.

20 ton Modular Enclosed Cargo Module

CraftID: Enclosed Cargo Module, TL7, Cr86,075
Hull: 18/45, Disp=20, Config=8USL, Armor=50P,
Unloaded=218.5845 tons, Loaded=426.1205
Power: External=0.4395Mw
Loco: -
Comm: -
Sensors: Magnetic=VDist, Radiation=VDist
Off: Hardpoints=1
Def: -
Control: External=Computer 0, Panel=Electronic×3
Accom: Env=BasicEnv, BasicLS, AirLock×2
Other: Cargo=207.536kl, ObjSize=Small,
EmLevel=Faint
Comment: Construction Time=24wks single, 18wks
multiple; Tunnelled volume=216kl;
Cr68,860 in volume

This cargo module, shaped from a planetoid, is for those cargos that need to be shipped in a sealed, regulated environment, with standard radiation protection. Access to the module for cargo inspection during transit is via one of the air locks, and the module needs to be attached to a power and computer source to function correctly, and to gain access to the sensors. The normal configuration on the modular frame is to connect the enclosed cargo module directly to a quarters module via their respective airlocks to allow for shirtsleeve (direct) access, power and computing requirements.

While relatively cheap to build, the costs associated with finding and retrieving suitable planetoid hulls are significant for a TL7 spacefaring society.

40 ton Ion Drive Module

CraftID: Ion Drive Module, TL7, Cr10,990,940
Hull: 36/90, Disp=40, Config=4USL, Armor=35C,
Unloaded=786.9365 tons, Loaded=814.8719
Power: 1/2, Fission=15.26Mw, Dur=2yrs,
Loco: 30/60, Ion=1.52 tons thrust, Dur=2yrs,
Comm: Radio=Distant×3
Sensors: Magnetic=VDist, Radiation=VDist,
Headlights×2
Off: Hardpoints=1
Def: -
Control: Computer=1bis×2, Panel=Electronic×86
Accom: Seat=Cramped
Other: Cargo=0.13812kl, Fuel=53.2608kl Ion
Reaction Mass, 0.732kl Radioactives,
ObjSize=Small, EmLevel=Faint
Comment: Construction Time=24wks single, 18wks
multiple; Excess Power=0.0067Mw;
Cr8,792,752 in volume

This ion drive module provides minimal thrust for a long duration. A workstation and seat are provided for engineering staff to carry out any necessary maintenance or upkeep (in vacc suits; no life support or enclosed environment is provided). Access to the computers, controls and sensors can be via either direct link or radio as necessary.

40 ton Modular Quarters Module

CraftID: Quarters Module, TL7, Cr 9,402,035
Hull: 36/90, Disp=40, Config=8USL, Armor=50P,
Unloaded=535.5165 tons, Loaded=564.7605
Power: 1/2, Fission=8Mw, Dur=2yrs
Loco: -
Comm: Radio=System×3
Sensors: Radar=Planetary, Radar Direction Finder,
Magnetic=VDist, Radiation=VDist, PassIR,
LightAmp, ActObjScan=Diff, ActObjPin=Dif
Off: Hardpoints=1
Def: -
Control: Computer 0×3, Panel=Electronic×243
Accom: Stateroom=Small×13, Env=BasicEnv,
BasicLS, ExtLS, AirLock×2
Other: Cargo=207.536kl, ObjSize=Small,
EmLevel=Faint
Comment: Construction Time=24wks single, 18wks
multiple; Tunnelled volume=216kl; Excess
Power=0.5055Mw; Cr 68,860 in volume

This quarters module, shaped from a planetoid, allows for the crew of the frame to enjoy complete radiation protection in a fully-enclosed environment. Access to the other modules of the frame can be gained via the air locks and EVA operations up and down the spine as necessary.

The Shipyard

(Continued from page 20)

One of the 13 staterooms is normally converted to a Zero G gym in order for the crew to spend significant time exercising to limit muscle and bone degradation that results from living in microgravity for extended periods of time.

The quarters module can be directly connected to other modules on the frame to enable centralized control. Modules that can't be directly connected can usually be linked via radio, allowing the computers available across the various modules to act as a significant central computer resource if needed.

While relatively cheap to build, the costs associated with finding and retrieving suitable planetoid hulls are significant for a TL7 spacefaring society.

40 ton Modular Beam Laser Module

CraftID: Beam Laser Module, TL7, Cr54,168,890
Hull: 36/90, Disp=40, Config=4USL, Armor=35C, Unloaded=3270.252 tons, Loaded=3499.761
Power: 25/50, Fission=757Mw, Dur=2yrs
Loco: -
Comm: Radio=System×3
Sensors: Radar=Planetary, Radar Direction Finder, Magnetic=VDist, Radiation=VDist, PassIR, LightAmp, Headlights×2, ActObjScan=Diff, ActObjPin=Diff
Off: BeamLaser=xx3
 Batt 1
 Bear 1
Def: -
Control: Computer/2×2, Panel=Electronic×469
Accom: Crew=2 (Engineer, Gunner), Stateroom=Small×2, Env=BasicEnv, BasicLS, ExtLS, AirLock×2
Other: Cargo=2.40896kl, Fuel=18.168kl Radioactives, ObjSize=Small, EmLevel=Faint
Comment: Construction Time=24wks single, 18wks multiple; Excess Power=0.00614Mw; Triple Beam Laser Turret; Cr 43,335,110 in volume

This beam laser module provides a triple beam laser turret and enough power to keep continually firing for two years. Two small staterooms are provided with the module to serve the needs of the gunner and engineer required to run the module. The module does not provide enough radiation protection for some aspects of in-system travel so it is usual to connect it to a quarters module directly by airlock to allow a shirtsleeve environment and so

the gunner and engineer may either live in the quarters module or stay there for radiation protection when necessary. The sensors and computers are usually operated from the quarters module.

10 ton Missile Module

CraftID: Missile Module, TL7, Cr17,678,880
Hull: 9/23, Disp=10, Config=8USL, Armor=50P, Unloaded=328.1795 tons, Loaded=304.9635
Power: 1/2, Fission=21Mw, Dur=2yrs
Loco: -
Comm: Radio=System×3
Sensors: Radar=Planetary, Radar Direction Finder, Magnetic=VDist, Radiation=VDist, PassIR, LightAmp, Headlights×2 ActObjScan=Diff, ActObjPin=Diff
Off: Missile=x02
 Batt 1
 Bear 1
Def: -
Control: Computer/2×2, Panel=Electronic×113
Accom: Crew=1 (Gunner), Stateroom=Small, Env=BasicEnv, BasicLS, ExtLS, AirLock×2 Magazine=(30 battery rounds)
Other: Cargo=0.18402kl, Fuel=1.008kl Radioactives, ObjSize=Small, EmLevel=Faint, Battery Rounds=3
Comment: Construction Time=24wks single, 18wks multiple; Excess power=0.20418Mw; Triple Missile Turret; Tunnelled volume=108kl; Cr 14,143,100 in volume

This missile module mounts a triple missile turret and has space for 30 battery rounds, as well as accommodating its gunner in a fully radiation proof shirt sleeve environment. The module can be accessed via the airlocks that can also be connected to other modules directly as required. 🌟

The Freelance Traveller Forums

Our connectivity issues appear to be mostly resolved; the main issue at this point is having the time to put everything together. 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.

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.

Marsh Animals

by Scott Diamond

Heffalump

Marsh Terrain						Gehenna		
Qty	Animal	Mass (kg)	Hits	Armor	Wounds and Weapons			
1D-1	Heffalump (herbivore grazer) (mammalian hexapod)	6-8000	50/12	Ablat	none	A(no)	F8	S1

A gigantic herbivorous grazer, the Heffalumps of Gehenna live entirely in the flooded wetlands and feed on the vast algae and weed-choked mats the float in the marshes. The animal has no predators other than the Spindizzys that drink its blood and some tissues, and the Crybaby, which tears off ragged pieces of the Heffalump's outer hide layers. The mammalian Heffalump lives in family groups of 4-5 members consisting of a male, 1-2 females, and 1-2 young. It is unknown how long they live, or how they mate, ...or much really about them at all, since it is hazardous to get close enough to them to study them for long. This has nothing to do with the Heffalump, but rather the environment it lives in.

The Heffalump is truly a gentle giant and placidly wanders through the marshes at a pace slower than a man walks, vacuuming up the algae mats with its flaring, wide mouth. The mouth is lined along the lips with hundreds of small palps that sort through the mats for the algae and choicer weeds to pass into the maw. The Heffalump is about as tall as an African Bull elephant, but much wider and is a hexapod. The back of the Heffalump provides a surface for all varieties of marsh plants and mosses to grown on and appears a micro-ecosystem in itself. With Spindizzy floaters constantly bobbing about above and around the beast, small bushes sprouting off the upper layers of the constantly shedding hide, and the mossy flanks draping into the water, the animal looks like a small moving island, particularly with the gray jagged patches of its rugged outer hide looking like rock.

The hide of the Heffalump is the main reason for humans being concerned with the animal other than

for purely scientific reasons. It is layered and constantly sloughing off the hard, calloused outer sheets as newer layers move up from underneath. This is thought to be a defensive adaptation to prevent plant and parasite growth from overcoming the animal, since in the environment it lives in nothing that moves slowly or stands still is unscathed by the constant assault by either plant or animal life. The underlying sheets of hide, when one gets down to the last few layers before entering into blubber and fascia, are prized for their fine leather when cured properly and harvested fresh. This layer is harvested by cutting away and tearing off the outer calloused sheets, and then cutting away sheets from the prime layer without cutting too deeply. If cut too deep the animal can be vulnerable to severe infection and will usually die. Cut too shallow and the leather will spoil when cured. After the leather layer is harvested, the harvester is required by law to surgically staple (a pneumatic gun is used) a semi-permeable polymer sheet to protect the hide from infection while it heals – usually this takes about 6-8 months. A single Heffalump, though large, can only sustain four sheets of leather being harvested from it at one time—more and the animal will start to become too stressed to continue. This isn't because of pain, since if the leather is harvested properly no nerves will be cut, but because of how rapidly infection will start to set in from the aggressive parasites, bacteria, and molds in the area.

Each sheet of leather harvested is sufficient to produce four luxury-quality items such as jackets or similar. The leather is red to deep burgundy, and has a fine 3-dimensional effect to it from the soft

Less Dangerous Game

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whitish marbling that is brought out in the material when properly cured and stretched. The buttery soft leather products made with the hide are worth 4-6 times the price of regular hide leathers.

The risks associated with harvesting Heffalump hide, other than that associated with the weather and marsh terrain are the Spindizzys that will near-constantly float around any Heffalump as they feed;

the Crybabys that cruise the shallows and feed off the shed scraps of hide or tear off sheets from the Heffalump's legs, and the Madcows that frequent the shoreline and will trample to death anyone they can pin down with their palps. Since harvesting a single sheet of leather can take up to 30 minutes, attack by either the Spindizzys or a Crybaby or two is almost certain. Harvesters work in teams of two or more to ensure safety.

Crybaby

Marsh Terrain							Gehenna		
Qty	Animal	Mass (kg)	Hits	Armor	Wounds and Weapons				
1	Crybaby (carnivore pouncer) (amphibious hexapod)	30	9/3	Jack	1D+2 (Teeth)	A(surprise)	F(surprised)	S2	

The Crybaby is an amphibious ambush predator that feeds opportunistically on the shed hide strips of the Heffalump. The animal also feeds on fish and small animals that come near the shallows of the shoreline and sand bars of the wetlands. Crybabys are shiny brown with dull red lateral stripes and large blue eyes. They are shaped roughly like an enormous, six-legged salamander and have a fairly short, tall tail that they use for swimming. The Crybaby is largely solitary, though it will often be seen congregating in non-social groups along the shallower parts of sand bars where the animals will make the loud, carrying vocalization that is their territorial display. The sound is described as that of a crying or whining baby, hence the name.

Crybabys are a threat if a person is trying to harvest Heffalump hide since the harvester will be standing in waist-deep water that will almost certainly have 2-3 Crybabys swimming around feeding off the Heffalump hide scraps and the animals swimming in the giant's shadow. A Crybaby is not particularly vicious, but they are remarkably unintelligent and so will bite anything they find to see if it is worth eating. The Crybaby will usually only bite once, then swim off to find something else to eat, but the wound may attract more Crybabys and the risk of infection from swamp water will be high.

Crybabys will bury their eggs in the mud along the shoreline, where both the eggs and the Crybabys often become food for any nearby Madcows.

Madcow

Marsh Terrain							Gehenna		
Qty	Animal	Mass (kg)	Hits	Armor	Wounds and Weapons				
1	Madcow (omnivore gatherer)(mammalian hexapod)	5-600	24/6	Cloth	1D+2 (Palps [as horns]), 2D+3 (Hooves)	A(yes*)	F(no*)	S3	
* Always attacks if opponent is within 50m, or if surprised or attacked									

Other than the Spindizzy swarms that live in the Gehenna wetlands the Madcow is the most dangerous animal found in that environment. The Madcow

is about the size and rough shape of a Terrestrial bull cow with an outsized, bottle-shaped head equipped with heavy undershot jaws designed for

Less Dangerous Game

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tearing up the heavy roots the animal eats. The animal is also equipped with tiny red eyes that move independently on low mounds on either side of its head, giving it good vision in nearly any direction. The large, leaf-like ears twitch all around to hear threats, and the black, wet-looking hide is covered with a thick, spiny bristle. The Madcow has two heavy, arm-like limbs tipped with three finger-like limbs that have razor-sharp hooves on the ends. These "palps" are used to catch and pin down animals caught by the Madcow as they come to drink so they can be eaten. The Madcow's other four limbs are used exclusively for motion and attack on any threats.

Madcows spend the vast majority of their time grazing on the heavy roots and tubers found along the 50m wide wooded edge of Gehenna's marshlands. Here the Madcow will often rise up to its full height of 2 meters to look around over the bushes

and grass, and then plunge its head down into the mud to root out food. One of its favorite foods is Crybaby eggs, which will cause a frenzy of digging when found. Fights will often break out among Madcows that come across such caches in numbers.

If a predator or person surprises a Madcow within 50m the animal will charge out of the water and attempt to pin them down with its palps. A successful strike will result in being pinned to the ground and having the Madcow stamp on them with its front legs. The Madcow will then rush into the water and watch to see if the threat runs off or lies there (and is then left alone), or make another rush at the threat if any fight seems left in it. Most local predators, other than the Spindizzy, will try to avoid fully grown Madcows. Madcows are solitary, though they do bugle in the Spring to attract mates. Both sexes bugle, and there is no obvious dimorphism. Since no one would want to get close enough to Madcows in any number there is little else known of the species. ❁

Raconteurs' Rest

For Luck

by Andrea Vallance

Part 2

321st of 2024 (147-93): A field hospital on Alsuy

I woke, my head hurt, as did pretty much everything else. There was a *dokhtor* nearby; she whispered something to an orderly and came over. She smiled "I see you've returned to the land of the living, then. How are you feeling?"

I tried to move; I couldn't, my arms were full of tubes. "I hurt."

She chuckled, "Not surprised." She picked up a glass jar of metal fragments from the bedside. "We dug this out of you. It's a miracle you could move at all, let alone drag two grown adults across three kilometres of rain soaked battlefield."

"How is she?"

"Which one?"

"Sheska."

The *dokhtor* grinned "She'll be fine; we're bringing her out of her slow coma²³ in a day or two. She'll need a few weeks, but should make a full recovery."

I suddenly realised, *which one*. "Melissa?"

the *dokhtor* looked grave now. "She'll live. She's lost both legs and an arm, but she will live. We'll be shipping her back home for facial reconstruction next week. She should be awake by then, though, if you'd like to see her first."

I nodded, "Yes, very much, I would."

She smiled again. "I'll arrange it. But in the meantime, you should get out of bed. It'll do you good to get some air and your *kolant* wants to see you. I'll have the orderly fetch a chair."

"Why can't I just walk?" I didn't understand the need for a chair.

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She looked me up and down. "Take a look at that jar of shrapnel again; you're in a chair for at least the next week, *dokhtor's* orders."

It was spring and the flowers were in bloom, the hospital gardens were awash with colour. It had been the estate of the Baron of Alsuy before the war. But he'd bolted when we arrived, left on one of the few transports that got out. But the Imperial defence had been rallied by a crusty old knight. Seems she'd sent the *Geenal* commanding our forces a note, very specifically suggesting we requisitioned this place, for the duration. Apparently, she did not appreciate the baron's unseemly departure. I sat in my chair looking at the blooms, thinking what I could do with them. Sheska had been right—*kulfi* was relaxing. There were quite a few Imperial patients here, too, and a few guards posted discreetly around. I could see our *kumpane* commander *Dteruaa Majkor* approaching and he had the *batalian* CO *Elkes Kolant* and *Kirsov Mrigadeer* with him. *Elkes Kolant* was in her mid-fifties, she'd been a Guard all her adult life and she had a reputation as being very fierce. And *Kirsov*, well, he served in the *Verasosal*, that's how he lost his eye and he was just plain frightening.

I saluted as they drew near, they both returned mine. The *majkor* spoke first "Colin Gakharii *Kirsov Kirsov Mrigadeer* and *Liadtee Renal Jkiadt Riaal Elkes Kolant*, may I introduce *Ariaryn Despi Ora Mman Mman Piaviadt*."

The *Mrigadeer* smiled and stroked my cheek²⁴ "It's an honour to meet you, *Piaviadt*; you're quite the hero."

I was lost for words, didn't know what to say. All I could manage was, "Thank you, sir."

He roared with laughter. "You know, that's the second time this Guard has called me 'sir'; I'm not sure how I should take it."

Elkes Kolant laughed along with him. "He obviously knows you, Colin." She turned to me. "Well, *piaviadt*, quite a performance, two wounded colleagues and three Imperial marines, you're up for a medal, an SV if I have anything to do with it."

There was only one thing I could think of, though. "*Kolant, Barii?*"

Her voice changed. "We think we've found him; we're waiting for DNA confirmation. My deepest sympathy and sorrow at your loss, *piaviadt*."

It was war, I knew that; people die. But *Barii*, it just wasn't fair "Thank you, *kolant*."

She could see how I felt. "It pays not to dwell on these things, *piaviadt*, war is brutal and you'll likely lose more friends. But anyway, I have something for you." She pulled a box from her pocket. "I think we can return *Osidt serganet* to command." She handed me the box, a single brass chevron. "Congratulations, *vebee korpai*, take good care of your squad for us."

322nd of 2024 (148-93): A field hospital, Alsuy

I'd checked on *Melissa*, still in a coma, covered in bandages. The only thing that told you she was alive was the beeping of the monitors. I wondered if she'd thank me for saving her. I wheeled my chair towards *Sheska's* bed, she was awake now, so I was told. She was sitting up, she smiled when she saw me. "My hero." Her eyelids batted, I blushed. "Oh I still do so love it when you do that."

"I'm just glad you're okay, *kucuin*, I was worried."

She laughed, "Yes, I'm fine, thanks to you, so I'm told."

I froze again. "Uhhh... Err... I... I... I couldn't leave you."

She reached over and kissed me. "I knew kissing you was lucky."

I liked when she kissed me. "So how long they keeping you here?"

"Couple of weeks, they say. Nothing too serious, though." She lifted her shirt, there was a huge scar

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running from her breasts to her navel. "I doubt I'll be wearing scanties any time soon."

I reached over and took her hand. "Well, I think they look sexy, make you look exotic." I kissed her.

It was her turn to blush. "Always the gentleman, aren't you?" She looked down. "What happened? I remember Barii being hit, then nothing."

"There was a bombardment, to clear a landing zone for some Impie marines. I... we were in the middle of it, so I took you back."

She fixed on my eyes. "Melissa?"

I didn't know what to tell her, they were friends. "I found her on the way back, I got her too."

"Bad?" She already knew the answer.

"Yes, but she's alive, they're shipping her home soon."

She smiled at me again. "Well, I think you deserve a medal for it, lover."

I chuckled "Apparently, I'm getting one."

326th of 2024 (152-93): A field hospital, Alsuy

I was walking again. I'd be back with the unit in a few days, but Melissa was being shipped out today. She'd come out of her coma yesterday. I'd wanted to see her then but they wouldn't let me. I entered her room. She was laying there, tubes, wires, face covered in bandages. One arm was all I could see. I wheeled myself to her side and took her hand. I heard a voice, harsh and metallic, coming from her throat not her mouth "Who's there?"

"It's me, Ariaryn."

Silence, then just one word. "Why?"

"Why what, Melissa?" I already knew the answer.

"Save me. Why?"

I couldn't answer, to me it seemed obvious. "I just couldn't leave you there, you'd have died."

"Look at me, better off dead." There was no emotion in that artificial voice, but you could sense the anger and pain in her words.

"You don't mean that Melissa, you can't."

"Yes I do! Hate you, should have left me to die."

"Melissa, I couldn't, just couldn't!"

"Should have." You could tell she wanted to cry. Worst thing, wanting to cry, but even that had been taken. "Hate you. Go! Never see you again."

"Melissa... I couldn't."

"Go! Never see you again"

It hurt. I guess I didn't understand how she could feel like that. "Melissa..."

"Go!"

I sighed and left her.

15th of 2025 (206-93): On Patrol, Alsuy

Melissa had been shipped home the next day. I'd told Sheska what she'd said. Sheska said I'd done the right thing, that she'd come to see it, but I didn't think so. There'd been too much hurt in her. She was right; eighteen was too young to be a cripple. There were six of us now, no longer the green recruits we'd been just two months ago. Barri and Melissa had brought home reality to us and we were careful now. That, and we'd seen our fair share of action. The fighting had been hard, but we were mopping up now. Out on patrol, clearing out the last remnants of the Impie forces. I'd put Sharik and Renal out on point, the rest of us moving cautiously; it was getting on to dusk and ambushes were the Impies' favourite thing. I heard Sharik on comms, "Hold up, think I saw movement in a house up ahead." I held up my hand and we all went into a crouch.

I quietly responded, "Anything on thermal?"

A pause, then, "Not that I can see, *vebpail*."

I only just managed to suppress a chuckle. "Enough of the *vebpail*, thank you, it's Ariaryn. And hold tight, we'll come up and check it out."

The rest of us joined Sharik and Renal. I turned to them. "Anything?"

Renal whispered, "Nope, probably just Sharik seeing shadows."

I wasn't willing to take that chance "James and I will check it out, rest of you cover us."

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We worked our way carefully forwards, the sun had set and it was hard to see in the half light. I raised my visor to feel the air, nothing. James whispered "Looks clear, Ariaryn." He stood, there was a stuttering of automatic fire and he fell. I threw myself down and returned fire, I heard the squad open up too. I turned to James, I could see blood but he was groaning, alive. Good. I called on the comms, "Dešpi, lay down cover with the SAW²⁵, Sheska and Renal get up here." I heard the stutter of Depsi's SAW and heard the two of them join me. "Sheska, get James back and call in medevac; Renal, with me."

I saw Sheska shoot me the dirtiest look, then she softened, lifted her visor and kissed me "For luck lover. Don't get yourself killed now." She grabbed James and started back.

I could hear the SAW and the sputtering of Sharik's rifle giving us cover as we worked towards the house. Fire came back, there were bullets flying everywhere. We crawled on our bellies and slowly worked closer. I heard another rifle join in, Sheska, that gave us maybe five minutes before medevac arrived. We had to damp it down before then. We were fifteen, maybe twenty metres from the house. I whispered to Renal, "Grenades, then charge." She nodded. We cycled our launchers under the barrel, aimed, and fired. Two grenades sailed through the windows. There was a flash and boom. We stood and rushed forward, yelling. One rifle as we got close, I threw myself on the wall by the door and looked at Renal on the other side. She pulled another grenade, I twisted, kicked the door and she threw. I felt the blast, we charged in and sprayed the room with fire.

There were three bodies, bent and broken. That didn't disturb me; I'd seen a lot in the last two months. It was the fourth that did. Maybe fifteen, just a boy. He lay there, insides hanging out. He looked at me soundlessly, eyes pleading. I hesitated,

Renal just stood beside me. I glanced at her, she nodded again. I raised my rifle.

24th of 2025 (215-93): Rear areas, Alsuy

James' wound had not been too bad, a week in hospital and two weeks light duties. But that put us down to five and out of the line. First week had been spent with us doing all those wonderful fun military things like whitewashing rocks, digging latrines, painting fences and polishing things. Now, with James back, we'd been assigned to 'friendship' duties, helping build a hospital for the locals, winning over native support. Wasn't so bad, beat the hell out of being shot at, certainly. There were always kids around, Sheska loved kids, she was forever handing out candies and making little gifts for them, paper dolls, fluffy animals, balloons. The kids loved her. We were supposed to be putting up a new wall, but Sheska was with a bunch of kids, miming a story for them. Dešpi chuckled, "You're going to have to watch out, you know, she'll be wanting some of her own soon."

I looked at him and laughed, "We're just *eeshren*, not even started thinking of practising, let alone a match and children."

I hadn't seen Renal standing behind us, so I gave a tiny start when she spoke. "I would not be putting any money on that." She looked at Dešpi. "Either of you. I've listened to Sharik and Sheska talking, practice is definitely on both their minds. And children not far behind, I'd wager."

I turned to face her. "I'm only nineteen!" I spluttered. "She's only nineteen! Who goes planning their match at nineteen?"

She slapped me playfully. "You really know nothing about women do you?" Then there was a sigh "And none of us know when it's our time, or what this war will do to us." She looked at the ground for a while, then spoke again "Melissa, she can't have any now. Makes you think, Ariaryn, makes you think."

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I looked over at Sheska again, the joy in her eyes as the children mobbed her, the sound of her laughter as she started a tickle fight and I thought. Then I smiled, Renal was right, it made you think.

32nd of 2025 (223-92): Raid on Alsuy

It was over, Alsuy was secure. The 2DFR was scheduled for rotation out, back for refitting. We were supposed to pick up two new members to bring us back up to strength. We'd be shipping out tomorrow. We were all anxious to get off this world, due for leave. I was watching Sheska swimming, her hair flowing, limbs moving rhythmically, gracefully forcing her through the water. She smiled and called "Come on in pook face, it's fine." I smiled at her and started to remove my top. The sirens blared and looked up. I could see bright blue flashes, jump exits. I counted ten and still more. I looked at Sheska, she'd seen them too. I started to pull my shirt back on, she laughed "They'll be hours later, join me, ten minutes, plenty of time." I smiled, pulled my shirt off, unbuckled my belt and joined her. Ten minutes, not too much to ask.

34th of 2025 (225-93): Raid on Alsuy.

It was just a raid. Land, do as much damage as you can, then get out. Well they'd done their damage and now they wanted to leave. Just, we had no intention of letting them. To get out, they'd have to take out at least one missile field. Of course we'd defend them but no way of knowing which field. That is, until they attacked. Now we knew, this field, held by one understrength battalion facing down an entire regiment of crack Imperial drop troops. Reinforcements were on the way, but they would take hours to get here. So, we had to hold. We'd been holding awhile, our ammunition was running short and they were still coming. Despi and Sharik were manning the central foxhole, keeping up an almost constant fire with the SAW. I heard him on the comms, "Down to four belts, then we're over to mags, Ariaryn."

James and Sheska were in a pit on the right flank, Renal and I on the left. She turned to me. "We have to pull back, we're going to be overrun."

I knew she was right; if we stayed any longer we'd all be dead. I looked around, I could see the other *sektons* of our *patoon*, they all looked in about the same situation. I switched my comms to HQ. "*Lekhtenant*, we can't hold here any longer, ammunition's just about out and we're about to be overrun. We need to pull back."

Her heard her voice, she was calm but you could hear the note of desperation "No, *vebpail*, we have to hold. Use your damn bayonets if you have to."

I turned to Renal. "Well, you heard the lady. We stay."

She chuckled. "I'll fix bayonets then."

It was about five minutes after when Delta *sektion* off to our left collapsed. I heard Peter's voice as he screamed they were coming, then nothing. We tried to shift our fire to cover the gap, but it was no good, they were through our line. The comms crackled again, Iyaiee *Lekhtenant's* voice, "*Patoon* to all *sektons* pull back, all pull ba..." then her voice was silent, too.

I turned to Renal, she nodded. I looked around and hit my comms. "Sheska, James, rendezvous in the central pit, then we fall back as a unit." We dashed along the narrow slit trench that connected our pits, the other two were already there.

Despi was still above the parapet, keeping up a steady fire "Last belt, Ariaryn," still his calm, collected self. I smiled at that.

I took a breath and looked at the others. Muddy, exhausted, scared. "Right, Despi, one last burst to keep their heads down, then up, out, and back. Turns to cover, we'll be fine." I grinned, a false grin, but we'd all make it, I was sure of it.

Sharik turned to help Despi dismount the SAW. I'm not sure what happened, maybe she stood up a little too high, maybe just dumb bad luck. We knew she was dead before she hit the ground. Time

Raconteurs' Rest

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seemed to freeze, Despi's head turned as he saw his lover's disappear. I'd seen that look before, steel eyed calm, focused on only the pain and anger. They tell you a Luriani who loses control is a danger to all around them. They're right. Despi turned his attention to the SAW, a constant stream of bullets, aimed and focused, nothing else in the world for him other than that gun and the oncoming Imperials. I swung my rifle butt and caught him in the side of the head, hard. He fell, I hit him again, unconscious now. "James, help me with Despi; Sheska and Renal, cover us as we pull back." I took one arm, James the other and we pulled him to his feet. "Okay, ready," a pause, "Go!"

We scrambled over the parapet and dash as fast as we could to the rear. Bullets were flying everywhere, I could hear Sheska's and Renal's rifles crack as they fired. We ran, dodging, weaving, making our way through the storm. We found a shell hole and fell into it. We lay there breathless, panting. Sheska lifted her visor, I could hear the fear in her voice "We can't stay, Ariaryn."

I couldn't help it, I smiled "You reckon. But we need to catch our breath, dumbarse." A few moments, then, "Okay, again. Go!" Out into the tumult of fire again, running, trying just to stay alive in the hail of metal.

We ran, finding cover where we could, taking turns carrying Despi, he was coming round now, but still in a daze. I don't know how long we ran. Seemed like forever but finally we made it to *kumpane* HQ. A grizzled *serganet* met us; he barked "Report!"

I saluted and replied "Beta *sektion*, *lan patoon*, or what's left of us." He looked at Despi, I just replied, "His lover died."

He nodded, then barked again, "Medic! You four reload and come with me."

A medic came and took Despi from us. We watched as he gently lead him away. We grabbed

some more ammunition, then followed the *serganet* back into the firing line.

The fighting went on for hours, back and forth, a confused mess as we tried to push them back. I watched as a battle erupted in the air above us. Our interceptors, their fighters, shuttles landing to take them away. We were losing, they were getting away. It stuck in my throat as I thought of Sharik just laying there somewhere. I could feel the anger in me, I hated these people. It was near dusk when we were relieved. A *kaptan* told us to head to the rear and get some rest. None of argued, we were exhausted. We found some food and ate in silence, the battle draining from us as we sat. I turned to the others, "I'm going to check on Despi." No one said a word.

I found the clearing station and searched. I couldn't find him. I asked an orderly, she looked grave and lead me to a room. He looked so peaceful. The anger in me exploded. I grabbed her by the throat and forced her against a wall. I screamed, "How? How? He was fine. How? Who?"

She struggled against my grip, gasping as my hand squeezed. I heard a click. A soft voice "Let her go, and we'll say no more about this, *vebpail*." I turned, a *seror*, his pistol drawn and pointed at me. He repeated softly, "I said, let her go, and we'll say no more."

I looked at him, the pistol and then her. I let my grip slip, she slumped down. I collapsed into a chair, my head in my hands and just mumbled, "How?"

He embraced me and spoke kindly, "It's all right son, just sit a while." He picked up Despi's chart and studied it. He looked at the orderly. Again softly and kindly, "How did this happen?"

She was young, not much older than me. Her voice was still quaking with fear "He was only left alone a few minutes. There was so much chaos. We don't know how he got the gun."

He spoke, still soft and kind, "I understand; it's not your fault, *piaviat*, nobody's fault." He turned to

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me and took my hands "It's tragic, *vebpail*, but these things happen." He looked at Despi and shook his head "Tragic, just tragic." He returned his focus to me "ID, please, *vebpail*." I presented my arm, he scanned it, his voice still soft and concerned "You're on a week's compassionate leave, Ariaryn," he checked his reader, "all of your team. There's a G-Carrier²⁶ leaving for the rear in fifteen minutes. Take some time to grieve son."

55th of 2025 (246-93): Protectorate Naval Base, Secord

Alsuy was finally behind us, back in the Protectorate for rest and refitting. We were due for a two week leave, but we'd all been summoned to see Elkes *Kolant*. To say we were nervous was an understatement. We sat outside fidgeting. James was the first to speak, "So Ariaryn, why are we here?"

I looked at him and sighed, "I know as much as you do. We'll find out soon enough. And quit pacing."

Renal chuckled slightly, "Yes, James dear, you'll wear a hole the carpet."

"Just want to know why we're here, *vusisti*²⁷." I smiled at that; the two of them had decided to practice when we were on the transport back to Secord, got the chaplain to perform the ceremony the very same day.

Sheska gave me a dirty look. I knew why, too but I snapped, "What?"

She kept looking, that 'you know what' look. "*Vusisti*, nice ring to it, you think?" I just kept my mouth shut. Not worth an argument.

Renal laughed and held up her left arm showing off the practice band²⁸ James had bought her. "No, not a ring, dear, we can't wear them; a bracelet."

I was so glad the door opened and Tanaka Mmi-eret appeared right then. This was not an argument I was going to win. "The *kolant* will see you now."

We stood, I took a breath "Right, here we go." Sheska just glared at me.

Elkes *Kolant*'s office was spartan, one of the many on the base, pressed into service while Secord was the 2DFR's temporary home. She was busy with some paper. We stood expectantly, then she looked up "Ah, Mman *vebpail*, Yeenal, Eadaasa, and Dolman *piaviats*, good of you to come." I managed to suppress a smirk, not like we had a choice. "Firstly, congratulations Yeenal and Dolman on your practice, good to have some cheerful news," she smiled at Renal and James, then continued, "I've been reviewing your performance on Alsuy," we all took an anxious breath, "exemplary, I think," and let it out, "yes, definitely. I've recommended you all for commendations, in fact, with luck, decorations." She beamed at us, we all just stood there speechless, mouths open. "Mmmm, not exactly the reaction I was hoping for."

I spoke, "Thank you, *kolant*, it's just," I paused, "well, Melissa, Barri, Sharik, Despi, half of us, *kolant*."

There was a soft, sad look in her eyes "Yes, I know. But this is a war, people die. You get used to it, sadly." She beckoned us to sit. "There is another thing I wanted to discuss. Your futures."

James spoke now. "Our futures, *kolant*?"

"Yes, *piaviat*, your futures. The 2DFR took heavy losses. Normally you'd all be up for leadership of your own *sektions*. But given," a pause, "everything, I thought you might like to stay together. So I was wondering if you'd like me to also recommend you for *Verasosal*²⁹ training?"

Again we just stood there, mouths hanging open. She was smirking. This reaction, she seemed to be expecting. Finally I spoke, "Thank you." I looked at them, one by one they nodded, I turned to the *Kolant*, "I think, yes, *kolant*, we would like that."

She smiled "I'll arrange the paperwork, then. That's all, dismissed." She went back to her papers. We stood to leave when she added, "Oh Mman *vebpail*, if you'd be so kind as to stay a moment. A word in private."

Raconteurs' Rest

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The others looked at me; I just shrugged, I had no idea what she wanted. They filed out and I sat. The *kolant* looked up “She’s a good woman, your Sheska don’t you think?”

I wasn’t sure what to say, all that came out was “Yes.”

Elkse *Kolant* smiled “Yeenal and Dolman, they’re practicing now.”

I understood; I did want to, but Sharik and Despi, I didn’t want to leave her like that. “But... the war, *kolant*. Who knows what might happen, and I don’t want to leave a widow. It wouldn’t be fair to her.”

She looked at me, an odd serious look, “Yes, Ariaryn, none of us know. Time is precious in a war. You might want to think on that.” She went back to her paperwork “That’s all, *vebpail*, dismissed.”

Notes

Notes numbered 1 through 22 appeared in Part 1 of “For Luck”.

23. A coma induced by medical slow drug. It speeds up the body’s natural healing rate by a factor of thirty.
24. This is a normal Luriani gesture of greeting, stroking the right cheek with the back of your left hand. It is roughly the equivalent of the Terran shaking hands.
25. S9a Squad Automatic Weapon, the fire base of a Protectorate infantry squad.
26. A large general purpose contragravity vehicle. Frequently used for troop transport.
27. *Vusisti*, term for a partner in a *vusis* or practice relationship.
28. Luriani relationship status is marked by the wearing of a bracelet or wrist band. The precise nature can be determined by the specific type. A practice band would be silver with three red stones.
29. The Protectorate’s most elite special forces formation. Its recruits were drawn from all branches of the Protectorate military. ☪

Critics' Corner

Other People's Toys

Stars Without Number

reviewed by “kafka”

Stars Without Number. Kevin Crawford.
Sine Nomine Publishing. <http://www.sinenomine-pub.com/>
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I really wanted to like this book—but in the end found myself disappointed. It seemingly had everything that I would want in a game...

Sandbox play – check. Old School Philosophy – check. Simple Rules – check. Interesting Science Fiction Background – check.

So what went wrong with so many things that were right? *Stars Without Number* no doubt is a fine game, but in so many ways it is an incomplete game and a game that relies too much of smooshing two great games, Original *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Traveller*, together – the resulting ooze is *Stars Without*



Critics' Corner

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Number. But, for a Peanut Butter & Jam sandwich to work, you gotta have the bread, and *Stars Without Number* seems to be interesting tasting goo because there is no bread to hold everything together.

The game uses the standard combination of physical and mental characteristics to describe a character in 3D6 rolls. It is suggested that these rolls can be used as modifiers but it remains unclear from the onset how they may be. Also, being a Science Fiction game, nothing says origin like Home world modifiers – yet do the rules accommodate this? Unfortunately not, as the rules for world generation are so vague that they could be used to justify any trope. So, characters are essentially grounded in GM fiat.

Then players can choose between three basic classes, Expert, Warrior and Psion. An Expert can be an expert in just about anything but very little guidance is suggested how this might play out. So, (s)he could be the greatest criminal mind in the galaxy and would have to build skills accordingly. Yet, how these skills are added and their progression is nowhere listed in *Chargen*. I suppose that players start off as 0-level characters and progress from there. But, that hardly makes them an expert save they can retry their skill set. Also, Warrior is meant to encompass everything from a Seasoned Space Marine to a low tech Barbarian. What makes a Warrior, a warrior, is his/her combat bonuses? Is a Naval Gunner a Warrior? Guess that depends upon the Game Master. And, the Psion is the Magic User-Cleric combo, where there are abilities beyond explanation, which can include healing and also low level combat stuff. However, as this is Old School, where are the possibilities for cross training or multi-classing? I could not find references how to do this. Also, this is a level based game which provides no reason for the party to together.

Sure, GMs can find workarounds; but it is not like some games, in which a common career path or career intersections facilitate party formation. So,

yes, it is old school in that players are dumped at the doorstep of the dungeon but even old school games provided some sort of bonding process, whether it is the old, tested and true Starport bar or as I indicated common career paths and mustering out at the same time and awaiting transport from Crate City. *Stars Without Number* does not offer any similar mechanic.

Also, there is the assumption that players will play run-of-the-mill humans. Alien characters are suggested but no ready-made races are provided. I realize that ready-made aliens are problematic, as they tend to fall into stereotypes. So, I do applaud *Stars Without Number* for not going down this route. The alien generation is nice, simple and colorful but it is somewhat reminiscent of the Demon Generation tables in the 1st edition DMG. Flynn's Guide to Alien Creation does a much better job in creating believable aliens. Sorry, Flynn, for my earlier adverse review; I can now see yours is a superior product.

Robot generation follows, with lots of ideas thrown in but without the rules to really support them. There were concepts mentioned in the text but I could not find out what they meant or how they affect players or play. One thing that is commendable is that the robots are built in to be weaker than standard human player characters thus always giving humans the advantage. This ensures game balance and that the game is not with player groups composed of Terminators running amok. But, still I am not sure if Robots are things like R2D2 or R. Daneel Olivaw or something else.

World generation, as noted above, seems incomplete. Yes, there are standard *Traveller* tropes of desert world or totalitarian world but nothing links these together. Thus one can have wildly different combinations without anything to show for it other than dice rolls. Now, I am the first one to admit that *Traveller* WorldGen is flawed but *Stars Without Number* does not correct for *Traveller's* drawbacks. Rather, worlds are viewed as Kingdoms would be in a Fantasy RPG rather than semi-closed systems of different planetary bodies, economies, polities under

Critics' Corner

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one rubric, thus removing *Stars Without Number* from the category of Science Fiction and putting it more in line with Space Fantasy.

The History. Well, what can I say... *Stars Without Number* follows the familiar trope of a great and mighty Galactic Polity then calamity—in this case, something called “The Scream”, a psychic tsunami that wiped out the Jump Gates and left thousands of worlds isolated, save in the frontier where they still used the old turnkey system of Spike Drive. Thus, you have a frontier with lots of slow ships and leaving authority in the hands of individual captains rather than some sort of elaborate chain of command structure. The Scream also wiped out most of the psychics in space, so that your chances of finding someone who practices that old folksy religion is rather rare. So, if your tastes in Science Fiction are Space Opera then you will have no problem accepting these premises. However, mine are more of a Harder bent, so, I want to see humanity leave the womb and fight to survive and while the history provides this as a tacked on option, it seems that it was added as an afterthought. Space Opera is the dominant mode for the history. In my humble opinion, as it not grounded in a real world, it is not really a true history. True, my beloved *Traveller* has gaping holes but it does seem to have made some attempts at founding and building relationship with that slippery and sneaky term, ‘Real World’. I found the idea of a Mad Scientist chancing upon FTL very pulpish. So, I found some of the background very reminiscent of *Fading Suns*, a Space Opera game that I really enjoy rather than elements of Buck Rogers which this game also has a similar vibe to it.

Similarly, the section on Factions was flat compared with NuFaiths of *Ashen Stars* or the multitude of heresies that line the *Fading Suns* universe.

Equipment lists were purposely left vague. Which I don't know... part of the Old School game moment is collecting stuff. So, I would agree that

some things should be left vague but I found that players always are looking for the proverbial Swiss Army Lightsaber/Portable Shelter. Better to have a comprehensive list of a high tech hardware store (TSR's *Star*Drive* did this quite well) along with stats than just this is a Sword +1 and that is a Blaster +3. Then again, I applaud the simplicity and sleekness of the rules. But, still, maybe, I am just getting old but I don't want to figure out the stats for a Rapier versus a Broadsword.

Also, the starships seem to be virtually absent and how can you have a game of Science Fiction roleplaying without starships? So, from what I can surmise, it is a ‘small ship’ universe, but it's a really big universe...much of the galaxy. But, are systems mapped? Is there a realistic star chart? No, maybe, I am not Old School enough but if you want to get somewhere – don't you need a map?

So, I found this game to have lots of tools that can improve any SFRPG. But, the Mongoose version does tweak out some of the problems of the PDF but as it is also incomplete... It could be better. Maybe, the supplements address some of these issues, maybe they do not. If I get a chance to review the supplements, I will tell you. So far, I have not got a reply from the publisher.

The art inside is phenomenal and that is one of the reasons that I wanted so much to much to like this book. It captures a vibe and tone that is perfect for Science Fiction gaming. So, I can hope that the artists can find their talents employed by Mongoose/Far Future for the different adaptations of *Traveller* that are currently out there. They are not as good as what Terra/Sol Games has put out but they're pretty damn good.

I also liked the inclusion of Designers' Notes, as they proved to be invaluable in getting a handle on what the milieu is actually about. For there is not much chrome and trim adorning the game – it has just the basics. Maybe, one can go overboard with history, but that is the problem with some of us *Traveller* players – we like the Social Science aspect

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of play that complements the Hard SF... So here's hoping more publishers will include Designers' Notes either in the text itself or as a freebie off the website.

There is a lot that is commendable and even very interesting suggestions in *Stars Without Number*; it is a veritable toolkit of ideas and concepts. However, the toolkit has major gaps in its writing that cannot easily be filled in without any intervention. Rules

are not placed together. Take Skill advancement and Acquisition – is it placed in Chargen. No, it is located elsewhere... Similarly, Skill Checks are left entirely to the fiat of the Game Master. So, it gives the impression that are lots of shiny tools but when you are looking for something to be explained more or it simply is not there. I am a big fan of doing things on the fly but it still needs a framework for doing so. So, *Stars Without Number* will certainly give lots of tools that I can incorporate but not make me want to play this game which is what they were meant for. ☸



Amber Tours, Ltd.

By Colin Michael

Editor's Note: This adventure was originally posted to Freelance Traveller's pre-magazine web site in October 2004.

Assignment for TAS Journalist characters:

Beginning three years ago, an Amber Zone was declared for a popular tourist world on a busy section of the Spinward Main. The tourism business fell off quickly, and visits over the following year totaled about one-third of what had been record numbers in the previous year. Urban warfare in several of her major cities and sporadic attacks in major population and tourist centers intensified the next year and tourism declined slightly.

However, a strange phenomena started in the third year. Although fighting continued and tensions were very high, new tour agencies began to find ways of meeting pent-up demand for tours, especially to the ancient ruins and holy sites on the world. Tourism has increased in the past year and is projected to return to about 80-85% of pre-Amber volume. TAS is bewildered at the lack of effect that their Amber rating is having and has assigned the character(s) to do a hard-hitting, investigative piece for next quarter's Tourism Review publication.

Possible outcomes and story cores:

1. You find that the fighting, though continuing, has subsided to the point that tour agencies are able to easily avoid danger.
2. You learn that pent-up demand has allowed tour agencies to raise prices to the point that they can afford their own security measures using a network of forward observers and informants.
3. You find that both sides in the battle have capitulated to the tourism industry by agreeing not to carry on open hostilities in certain areas.
4. Both sides in the fighting have been financially crippled by the loss of tourist credits. They are each actively promoting tourism through off-world advertising campaigns.
5. All appears as in #1 above, but only one agency, Amber Tours Ltd., seems to be truly able to provide safe travel. They are secretly importing banned arms to buy their safety.
6. As #5 above, but instead of supplying arms to just one side, they are selling arms to both sides and working to keep the war going. Most of the tourism on world goes through this one agency, and those that don't often meet with serious trouble. Amber Tours Ltd. has a large mercenary force that protects their own tours, foments hostilities between factions, and carries out intimidating attacks against rival tour agencies. ☸



Nemesis-class Pursuit Ship

reviewed by Jeff Zeitlin

Nemesis-class Pursuit Ship. Michael Thomas.

Spica Publishing. <http://www.spicapublishing.co.uk>

16pp., softbound

US\$11.54/UK£5.47

The first Ship Book does a reasonable job of presenting the material, but it doesn't feel like it's the best it could be.

On the Shelf

Face on, you see a black cover with a rendering of the ship with a planet in the background, but no other space-scape, in a light-blue-bordered box. Above this box is a matching blue stripe displaying Spica's name/logo, and below is a similar blue stripe displaying the name of the product. Below that is the *Traveller* Compatible Product logo.

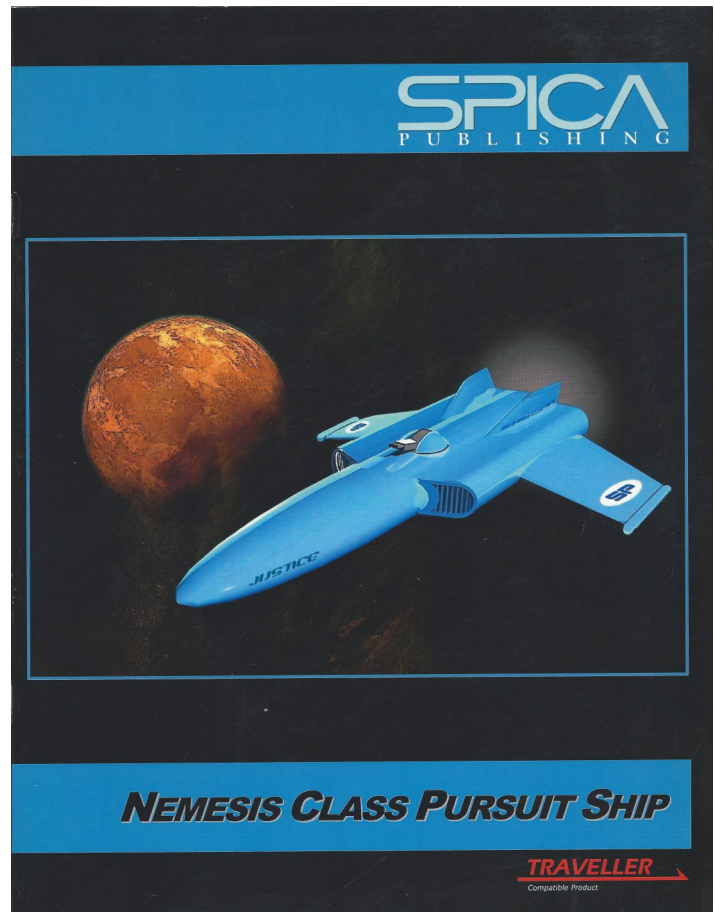
Impressions

The cover rendering (repeated in greyscale on the title page) looks incomplete; the artist seems not to have applied any textures to the basic shape, giving an image that looks like glossy injection-molded plastic rather than painted metal. The rest of the artwork is better, ink drawings with good detail.

The description of the ship takes up a quarter of this volume, and one might reasonably argue with the order in which the material is presented; the author placed the room-by-room descriptions before the stat block and deck plan. The numbers on the room descriptions do not match the room numbers on the plan, and some areas marked on the plan are not described.

There is a brief "in-character" sidebar focusing on the three crews profiled in this book, but it's too brief to give a good picture of any of them, and the ship doesn't actually appear in any useful fashion.

Following the ship description are the profiles of three different crews, each using the *Nemesis* in a different role: system patrol, bounty hunting, and criminal organizational enforcement. The crew descriptions also include some comments indicating variation in the use, maintenance, or equipping of the basic *Nemesis*. The 'ship personality' will be heavily influenced by the crew and usage, but in all cases, it's



clear that the premium performance (100t, J2, 6G) comes at the expense of comfort; the ship can only be described as 'cramped'.

The following two pages profile three different ship's vehicles: An ATV, a 'spinner' (basically an enclosed air/raft), and an armed and armored open air/raft. None of them are presented with enough detail to really establish a 'vehicle personality', but it does show the range of possibilities.

Two more pages present adventure seeds using the *Nemesis*, either as the PCs' ship, or as opposition.

The remainder of the book is credits, introductory material, and the Open Game License.

Conclusion

Future Ship Books could be improved by ensuring that the description matches the deck plan and putting the stat block and deck plan before the description; by expanding on extra equipment such as vehicles; and by including adventure material where the ship is a focal point of the adventure. Unless you have a 'thing' for hardcopy, purchasing this in PDF, at just under half the listed price, might be a better choice. ✪

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

3Hombres Games
Avalon Game Company
Avenger Enterprises
Christian Hollnbuchner
D.B. Design Bureau
DSL Ironworks
Expeditious Retreat Press

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

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 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*, and any others we may have forgotten.

...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 pixellated.

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”.

