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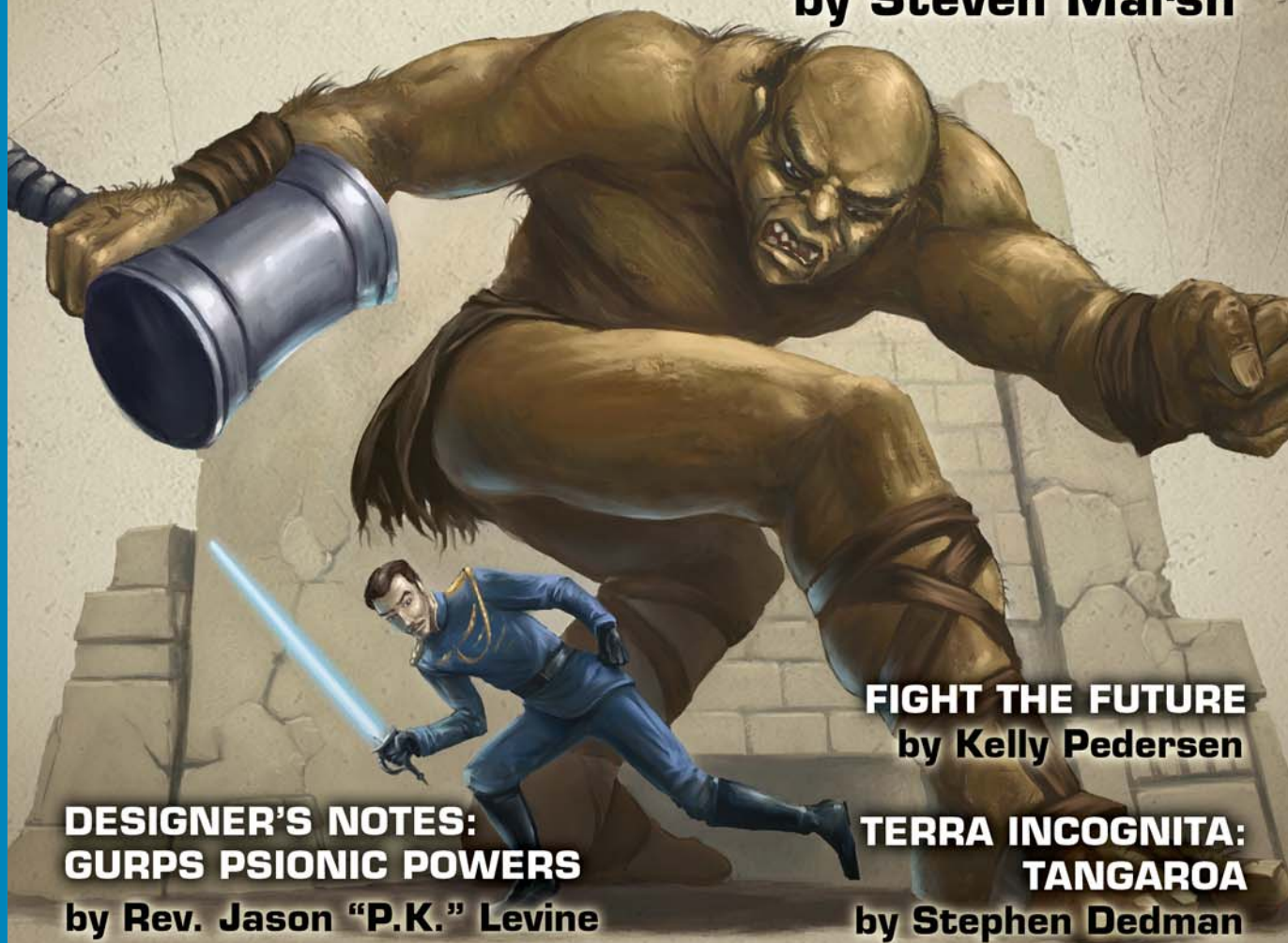
SPACE OPERA

DOOMSDAY WEAPONS
by Steven Marsh

FIGHT THE FUTURE
by Kelly Pedersen

DESIGNER'S NOTES: GURPS PSIONIC POWERS

by Rev. Jason "P.K." Levine

TERRA INCOGNITA: TANGAROA
by Stephen Dedman

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

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Brown: In Every Issue (letters, humor, editorial, etc.)
Dark Blue: **GURPS** Features
Purple: Other Features
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IN THIS ISSUE

Whether epic encounters between massive starships, or memorable matches between psychically enhanced warriors, space opera puts the fantasy in high-tech. This issue offers readers a selection of exciting additions to space-opera campaigns.

Steven Marsh provides potential galaxy conquerors with four *Doomsday Weapons.* From the sinisterly simple System Silencer to the horrifying Madness Bomb, potential emperors should be able to find something suitable for their diabolical schemes. And they're all generic, so they fit into most space-faring campaigns.

If you'd spent your points on precognitive abilities, you could've read *Designer's Notes: GURPS Psionic Powers* before Rev. Jason "P.K." Levine had even written it. For those who didn't spoil the fun preemptively, this article is a fascinating collection of discarded design options, peeks under the hood, and other insights. It also comes with a psi-centric setting with cyborgs, degenerate humans, and psionic agents.

Kelly Pedersen shows players how to *Fight the Future* with five new **GURPS** martial-arts styles that rely heavily on gear from **GURPS Ultra-Tech.** Soldiers, thieves, and star-roaming knights will all find something new to bring to the battlefield.

Because space operas need interesting destinations, **GURPS** author Stephen Dedman has obliged with some details on *Tangaroa.* This backwater planet is a favorite pilgrimage site with potential for some interesting ecological and archeological finds.

This issue's handout – the *Space-Opera Scanner* – can add verisimilitude to the gaming table. Players can assemble their own bulky "high-tech" space-opera scanners and use them to analyze plants and rocks or keep track of select ship functions.

Andy Vetromile and Matthew Pook make "as big as space" game suggestions with this issue's *Recommended Reading. Odds and Ends* offers some bonus space-opera tips, as well as presenting *Murphy's Rules.*

The *Last Word* on space opera is our biggest word yet, and is almost certainly illegal (and impossible) in **Scrabble.** Find out what Chris Birch, coauthor and line developer of Cubicle 7's **Starblazer Adventures: The Rock and Roll Space Opera Adventure Game,** has to say about the genre.

FROM THE EDITOR

CUE THE HEROIC FANFARE!

When the black of space glows bright compared to the dark hearts of sinister forces . . .

When the speed of light pales in comparison to the racing of a hero's pulse . . .

*When the sky's not the upper limit but the lowest starting point . . .*

. . . the time is right for space opera.

Space-opera settings are often relentlessly optimistic. And why is that? Because, at their core, space-opera tales are about one person making a difference. Space is such a huge concept to grasp, it's comforting to believe that one hero or group of heroes is significant. If it weren't for your actions, the citizens aboard a space luxury liner, the colonists on a frontier world, or even the entire cosmos would be irrevocably changed. Knowing your actions matter on a grand scale can be a great motivation for the *players,* never mind the PCs.

Even if you aren't in a true space-opera game, the material in this issue can still make an appearance in most space-related games. Most of the threats in *Doomsday Weapons* can be toned down to less cataclysmic levels, and they'd be especially appropriate for space-faring supers campaigns.

Similarly, while the martial arts in *Fight the Future* (which uses **GURPS Ultra-Tech**) and the colony world of *Tangaroa* fit well in a space-opera setting, they'll work great in other settings, too. Furthermore, many of our readers enjoy peeking behind the curtain in *Designer's Notes,* and this installment for **GURPS Psionic Powers** also includes some variant humans perfect for any psi-based campaign. Mix and match!
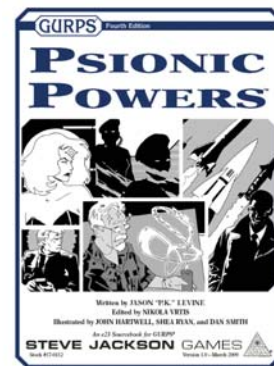
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And, of course, if you had ideas for future themes or issues you'd like to see, any of the aforementioned communication methods are the best way to make your wishes known. Remember: We can't give you what you want if we don't know about it!

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*I'm pro-handouts; I like the addition to the new format **Pyramid.** It's a fun gimmick and hopefully I will be able to use some of them later.*

– jimminy, on the Steve Jackson Games forums

DOOMSDAY WEAPONS

BY STEVEN MARSH

One element common in many space-opera stories is the "doomsday device": a contraption dangerous enough to turn the tide against the forces of good – permanently! Devices capable of destroying planets have been a staple of sci-fi tales since the pulps, and creative futurians and evil masterminds have come up with much more clever ideas over the years.

This article explores four pseudoscientific constructs intended to challenge heroes brave enough to hop in their spaceships and protect tomorrow. Most of them are designed to be threatening enough that it would be highly detrimental to leave them in the hands of the bad guys, yet they are coupled with enough problems and drawbacks that none but the most morally gray "heroes" would consider keeping and using them themselves.

> *Take your time. It's not like we're facing total annihilation or anything.*
> — Harper, **Andromeda**

THE SYSTEM SILENCER

Despite emerging from a pulp era – where instantaneous worldwide communication truly was the stuff of sci-fi – many space-opera settings still rely heavily on information technology. The System Silencer is designed for a setting where Faster-Than-Light (FTL) communication is possible (although, if it's not, see *System Shell*, pp. 5-6); in fact, it works best if such FTL methods are commonplace.

The System Silencer can completely block all FTL communications within its effective range. How much range this requires to be a "doomsday device" depends mostly on the interstellar situation. The typical assumption is that "world" and "system" are roughly synonymous in a space-opera setting, and – as the name implies – the System Silencer can jam incoming and outgoing FTL communications throughout the star system. Of course, the range can be varied to make the device more emotionally resonant to the campaign. In a setting where interstellar travel is rare or nonexistent, and where most of the action takes place in a single star system, the System Silencer blocks communications between worlds of that system. Conversely, in epic campaigns, the System Silencer can eliminate the possibility of incoming our outgoing FTL communications in clusters of stars, or – for truly star-flung settings – even among an entire galaxy!

Description

The System Silencer can be as large or as small as makes sense within the science of the setting (so much as the science of anything makes sense in a setting). It could be a heavily armored space station or satellite moon, requiring a coordinated spaceship attack to destroy. Alternatively, it might be an outpost or a portion of a land-bound fortress, infiltration and destruction of which calls for a small group of heroes. For more exotic ideas, any of the possibilities of the System Shell (pp. 5-6) can be used as well, although – given the relatively benign power of the Silencer in comparison to other ideas in this article – that might be overkill.

Variations

Besides a myriad of possibilities for the size, shape, and placement of the device, most variations for the System Silencer stem from how it jams communications. If all signals suddenly stop, then it might be simply a matter of someone within the affected system hopping to the next system over, making the distress call, and hopping back home. In this case, the "doomsday device" is more an annoyance. (This assumes the Silencer isn't being used to stop messages as part of a larger plan that makes it impossible for vessels to get into or out of a star system, of course.)

What if the Silencer is actually a sophisticated artificial intelligence that intercepts all messages, and then provides noncommittal responses to the person trying to make an incoming or outgoing message? "You have no need to visit us here at Delta Cephei. Everything is fine here. Thank you for calling. Good day." This could be even spookier than a cessation of contact; what if the heroes are the ones who stumble across such responses? Can they convince others that the answers they're receiving from the Silenced system don't quite make sense, or will they just seem paranoid?

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*Get more planetary doomsday weapons and their support fleets in **GURPS Spaceships 3: Warships and Space Pirates.***

As a more innocuous example – that is, perhaps, too subtle for space opera – a greater and greater delay starts being introduced in communications by the Silencer. Hardly anyone will notice if there is a pause of one second between delivery and receipt of a message . . . unless, of course, that delay extends to one second per day the device is activated. At the end of an Earth month, there's a half-minute delay between messages. If left uninvestigated for a year, there's a six-minute gulf between message and response. This may not seem like a lot, but when the center of the galactic empire needs to wait 12 minutes to get a response to "Did you hear and understand that last instruction?", it can spell a subtle sort of doom.

Campaign Uses

By itself, the System Silencer probably isn't much of a "doomsday device." To be certain, at its worst, it has the *potential* to do significant harm. For example, if a System Silencer were placed on the throne world or bureaucratic center of a galactic empire, the entire interstellar government could threaten to collapse, given enough time. Similarly, if a neutral system were strategically important enough, a sudden cessation of communiqués from it could be seen as proof of an act of war among antagonistic empires, sowing the seeds for galactic conflict.

For the most part, the System Silencer is best used to set the stage for a larger mystery. Why have efforts to contact Delta Cephei suddenly failed? (Or, conversely, why is it impossible to contact the rest of the cosmos when within the Delta Cephei system?)

SYSTEM SHELL

The System Shell is designed for a sci-fi universe where FTL travel takes the form of jumps or hyperspace trips, usually from system to system, although – as explained in *Variations* – it can work in most other settings as well. The Shell takes the basic idea of the System Silencer and expands it one step further: What if, instead of it being impossible to communicate with another star system, it's impossible to get there *at all?* Or, conversely, what if it suddenly becomes impossible to *leave* a system?

The basic vision of the System Shell simply prevents any spaceships from entering the affected system. Programming the coordinates and pressing the buttons to "jump" to that location simply fails; attempts to exit hyperspace at the appropriate time do not succeed; and so on. It's as if the exit and on ramps on a freeway were sealed off with concrete pylons; with the System Shell active, there's no way to exit or enter the "freeway" at that point.

In settings with "jump gates" or fixed travel points, the System Shell is easy to incorporate; that entrance/exit location simply fails to work. In settings with presumed but unfixed jump points – such as "anywhere within 5,000,000,000 miles of a star" – the System Shell can block access to that star system, by doing its super-scientific shenanigans throughout the entire area.

Adventure Seeds

We've Got a Problem Here – Over: The heroes are on a planet dealing with another crisis, when they discover their efforts at getting word back to their superiors are continually thwarted. Now they need to deal with their immediate crisis without the possibility of outside aid *and* try to figure out where the communications failure is.

We Are All Fine, Thank You: The adventurers are some of the only ones who are in regular communication with a backwater world on the fringes of civilized space. So when their attempts at communicating with old friends results in only flat, emotionless responses, they grow concerned. Can they convince others that there is a problem, or convince themselves enough to investigate the situation?

For campaigns where FTL travel is a matter of flipping the switch and enabling the ship to go "faster," the System Shell can be more challenging. After all, if the Shell works to (say) 5,000,000,000 miles of a star, what keeps someone from travelling 5,000,000,001 miles from a star, and using whatever not-quite-faster-than-light (but probably pretty darn fast) methods of getting there? Many space-opera settings presume some sort of "impulse" drive that often operates at, say, 0.9 times the speed of light; this might enable one to get from Neptune to the sun in about 4.5 hours. Even extending the range of the System Shell to double Neptune's orbit would only require FTL travelling to right outside that range, resulting in a nine-hour trip to the sun . . . interstellar inconveniences are *not* the stuff of doomsday devices. In this case, the Shell might deflect FTL drives, preventing them from shutting off near the system. It might take trial and error to figure out a "safe" distance.

Of course, in universes without FTL communications (and only FTL travel), the System Shell also serves the function of the System Silencer. If courier ships and informants can't make the interstellar journey to or from a place, they are essentially cut off from communication. In the broad case, it is up to the GM whether or not the System Shell also functions as a System Silencer; although it's engaging to have a system that is both silent and inaccessible, it can also be quite spooky to be utterly unable to leave or enter a system, but to still be in constant contact.

Description

Since the System Shell and System Silencer have similar broad ideas ("block all 'X' into and out of a system"), they can have similar appearances. In general, the System Shell is a more "sinister" effect, and probably benefits from something big and flashy – a moon-sized battle station that perverts the laws of physics is not inappropriate here. However, a more low-key depiction of the device can also be used. For example, in a setting where star systems are connected via single points of entry – such as the jumpgates in **Fading Suns** – access may be denied via a more subtle effect ("subtle" for space opera, that is), such as nanobots swarming over the jump-point.

Despite what's presented in numerous space-opera movies, most planets exhibit a variety of terrains.

The vision of a monolithic "jumpgate" being covered with swirling liquid metal should be a suitably epic-feeling effect without the need for a gargantuan satellite.

Variations

Most variations on the System Shell arise from what effects it has besides blocking exits. Some possibilities include:

Rerouting: Ships within the Shelled system that attempt to leave just fail, as normal, while ships that attempt to enter the system are routed elsewhere. This rerouting could be the next system over, or the Intergalactic Warlord's Home System! The latter option, however, may not be that different from . . .

Destruction: Ships that attempt to enter or leave the system are just destroyed! This is a true "doomsday" option, and it is an excellent possibility for universes where "jumpgates" or star systems are not required as destinations and where limitless FTL travel is possible (especially if FTL travel isn't cheap or cannot be accomplished without direct sapient involvement). After all, if the System Shell destroys all ships that attempt to use FTL engines within 5,000,000,000 miles of Delta Cephei, there won't be many volunteers to risk killing themselves by testing the 1,000,000,000-mile mark (boom!), 2,000,000,000-mile mark (boom!), etc.

Corruption: What if all those aboard vessels that use FTL to arrive within a Shelled system become infected or corrupted by some kind of sinister effect? (This is an especially appropriate possibility in settings where psionics, metaphysics, or a "dark side" exists to exert corruptive influence.) Of course, if outbound traffic isn't restricted, then the system simply becomes a tarpit of evil. That is, the whole plan is to accumulate a sinister army, and then turn *off* the System Shell and allow them to escape . . .

Another variation centers on how long it takes the System Shell to "harden." Maybe it merely becomes more and more difficult to get into the affected system (giving heroes a chance to pierce the barrier and look for clues before it's permanently sealed off).

Campaign Uses

The System Shell is excellent for a mysterious doomsday threat, and it becomes more threatening the more important the world is! If it suddenly becomes impossible to get into or out of the only system in the cosmos that supplies jump-crystals, then the universe suddenly turns into a much more chaotic place.

From a gaming standpoint, the biggest issue is resolving how the GM can make it possible to *undo* this damage. If the heroes are trapped inside the locked-off star system, then the problem is trivial; it simply falls to them to find and destroy the System Shell and reestablish contact with the rest of the galaxy.

Adventure Seeds

I'm Not Locked In Here With You . . .: There is only one jump route connecting enemy territory to civilized space, and that system has always been of huge galactic importance. So when that world suddenly becomes inaccessible, it effectively seals the two sides from each other. This raises the question: Are the adversaries trying to keep the heroes' worlds from accessing theirs, or are they trying to trap someone or some*thing* within civilized space?

Bad, Meet Worse: An important world is sealed off via a System Shell, and most efforts at communicating with the system have proven impossible. Scientists allied with the heroes believe they can generate a hardwired override on the FTL drive, enabling one ship to enter the cordoned-off system. Probably. They assure the heroes there's less than a 40% chance the entire ship will be destroyed. However, the scientists warn that, even if the override works, it's almost certainly going to short out every system of note in the vessel; the heroes will need to work fast if they want to repair their ship and keep the lack of life support from killing them all. As a slight complication, there is a strong likelihood that the system in question is being used by the enemies to amass an enormous fleet with which to terrorize the galaxy . . . and that likelihood encompasses the fact that there will probably be enemy ships near where the heroes' disabled ship appears. Good luck; the cosmos is counting on you!

If the PCs are on the outside, then the adventure requires some sort of counter-McGuffin to pierce the barrier at least once. Maybe some kind of superscience can undo the effect of the Shell . . . one time only. (This power might even be tied to a special or unique ability of one of the investigators, thus keeping it from being a permanent solution to the problem.) Or maybe the Intergalactic Bad Guys have a "garage door opener" that lets *them* pierce the System Shell, as needed. In this case, the adventure could revolve around the heroes' attempts to procure such a device, so they can break into the affected system and put things right themselves.

The Infinite Mines

Typical space mines are the bane of many an interstellar traveler, and Infinite Mines take this concept and increase the danger to an almost unimaginable level. The name isn't quite accurate, but the Infinite Mines nevertheless pose a potentially catastrophic threat to the cosmos!

Typical mines are placed to endanger a specific location – usually by exploding and destroying the intruder. In contract, Infinite Mines are more akin to mechanical "organisms," doing what they can to survive and thrive. Like their more traditional interstellar counterparts, Infinite Mines are placed in space lanes, damaging vessels as they try to go from world to world. Unlike more traditional models, however, Infinite Mines have the means and ability to replicate.

Some common planetary terrains include: desert (or tundra), forests (or jungles), mountains (with or without volcanoes), oceans, plains, and wetlands.

What If the Heroes Get Their Hands on These?

Most space-opera settings in movies and books don't deal with the possibility that the heroes might lay claim to the doomsday devices, but gamers tend to take a "if it's not nailed down" approach to loot.

The System Silencer and System Shell are both potentially useful to good guys. For example, it might be desirable to keep outside elements from visiting a system during a vital peace conference or if it's quarantined. From a game-balance standpoint, all that's required is for the Silencer and/or Shell to have deleterious effects beyond their stated ones. For example, maybe they draw their power from the geothermal energies of the planet on which they reside, or from that system's sun. Prolonged or unthinking use of the Silencer or Shell might result in rendering that system uninhabitable within a generation or two.

It would be insane for the heroes (or their allies) to try to use the Infinite Mines for their own means, but they're welcome to try. If the very thing that makes them so dangerous – their pods – is sufficiently neutralized, then they become little more than mines that "regenerate." Furthermore, even if the heroes or associates try to harness the Mines for good, the pulps are filled with tales of people who try to use technology for noble purposes, only to have it backfire horribly.

If the forces of good are tempted to use the Madness Bomb on their enemies, then maybe they need to turn in their "forces of good" badge; planetary genocide is seldom noble. Still, the mutagenic effect of the Bomb might be of interest, especially if it's the only way to introduce psionic abilities in a subject. How successful any such research will be is (of course) up to the GM, but – if the PCs are sufficiently motivated – it *can* serve as the basis for a campaign-changing plot twist: "Universe X is now Universe Psi!"

There are three distinct and related types of Infinite Mines. The first is the standard "drone." These explode like traditional space mines, although they may be tougher or weaker as desired. (Having a variety of explosive types is probably most advantageous to the Infinite Mines, since it maximizes both their destructive and reproductive abilities.) The second type of Infinite Mine is the "replicator." These self-propelled vessels swarm around the debris and hulks of damaged and destroyed ships, and they use the raw materials the damaged vessels provide to create *new* Mines of all three types. The final type of Infinite Mine is the "pod." These attach discreetly to undamaged (or minimally damaged) vessels, hoping to detach along a new space lane . . . ideally one where its scanners fail to detect the presence of many other Infinite Mines – since a dearth of other Infinite Mines means the lane is new territory. Once in a new lane, the pod converts itself to a drone or a replicator – whichever sort it can't detect nearby. This generally means the Infinite Mines need two different pods to infest a space lane fully, although it's possible for two pods to attach to one ship.

The danger the Infinite Mines poses is one that threatens the foundations of a cosmic republic or empire. If the act of moving from world to world can either destroy a vessel or sow the seeds for new lanes to become dangerous, then interstellar travel may eventually become outlawed or suicidal. No interstellar community can survive the unending closing of its travel routes.

Description

Infinite Mines most likely resemble their more "mundane" counterparts, although – in the grand space-opera tradition – they might be painted black or otherwise look more "sinister." The pod Mines are designed for camouflage, so they are the smallest and most deceptive of the three kinds. The replicator Mines are furtively moving and coldly calculating, capable of hiding among the debris they turn into Mines.

The drone Mines exist only to explode and damage; whether or not they move under their own power depends on whether or not they can accomplish their jobs being motionless. Some space-opera universes have fast-moving "torpedo"-style mines, the better to chase down errant elements. In others, they are immobile but (probably) difficult to see, existing only to be blundered into by those insufficiently skilled with sensors.

The Infinite Mines are not a quantum leap forward for the universe's technology in how they destroy ships, so much as what they do with vessels once they encounter them.

Variations

Differences in the Infinite Mine concept revolve around how it accomplishes its mission. If Infinite Mines can be programmed to avoid infecting certain space lanes, then they become *much* more useful to nefarious elements, who would otherwise need to be mad to use them (see below).

The explosiveness and "infectiousness" of the Mines will affect how dangerous they are. If the Mines are more likely to kill a ship than infect it with a pod, then they become more dangerous as an individual encounter, but less dangerous to the cosmos. Conversely, if the Mines are more likely to infect than destroy, they become more dangerous universally – since they could spread throughout the galaxy – but less dangerous per individual encounter.

Campaign Uses

In a universe where adversarial forces have any kind of contact with "good" portions of space, the use of standard Infinite Mines is probably not the brainchild of a rational mind.

Some space-opera planets are composed of nothing but buildings, simply being one continuous cityscape.

After all, there's nothing to prevent the Mines from infecting the adversaries' space!

Of course, this equation changes considerably in universes where the Mines can be triggered to affect only one kind of ship. For example, a space-opera setting might have sinister forces who use gargantuan living creatures for their spacefaring (unlike other societies in the galaxy). If the Mines are designed only to interact with and assimilate inorganic matter, then the Infinite Mines suddenly become that much more logical.

As a plot element designed to be thwarted, the Infinite Mines needs to be designed with some kind of weak spot in mind. Perhaps finding the right subspace frequency will allow law-abiding vessels to detonate the Mines remotely, or maybe ships' shields can be calibrated to withstand the explosive forces of the Mines. (Of course, finding that calibration will no doubt require a dangerous incursion into enemy space.)

It is possible to deal with the Mines in a more mundane fashion: slowly traveling each lane and detonating them, methodically making sure all vessels are devoid of pods before entering a new space lane. However, while "slow and methodical" might suit the Grand Fleet, that's not the motto of space-opera heroes!

Finally, the Infinite Mines can make a great campaign background element, explaining why certain regions of space are "off-limits" to law-abiding forces. After all, it only takes two errant pods to bring doom to the rest of the cosmos!

Adventure Seeds

If Space Travel Is Outlawed, Only Outlaws Will Travel in Space: The solution to a problem endangering all of civilized space is located among the Forbidden Worlds – so named because they are believed to be infected with a kind of device that could prove catastrophic if allowed to infect known space. The heroes' superiors make it clear in no certain terms that, should they enter the Forbidden Worlds, they will become fugitives . . . but the heroes know that, if they *don't* enter that region, the cosmos might be doomed anyway. What to do?

Clean Up on Space Lane Four: The point of origin for the Infinite Mines has been determined – the heroes' ship! The PCs must now backtrack their most recent trips, looking for clues that will enable them to locate the point of origin of the deadly devices. Of course, this will entail travelling back across areas of space already known to contain the Mines.

THE MADNESS BOMB

Many space-opera settings have psionic or metaphysical abilities but no reliable way to generate them within a populace. Many space-opera settings also have bombs or devices that can bring devastation to an entire world. The Madness Bomb covers both of these possibilities in one horrific swoop.

When launched at an inhabited world (or possibly when activated within the planet's atmosphere), the Madness Bomb sparks the latent psionic potential within the entire population of that world. Unfortunately, most sapient minds aren't equipped to handle the strain. As a result, for most people, the Madness Bomb spells only death. Worse, those whose abilities are awakened and augmented are driven mad by the experience – often homicidally so. At its simplest, then, the Madness Bomb kills most of the population of a world and empowers those who are left with staggering abilities. Should some or all of the survivors travel off-world with their abilities (either utilizing powerful psionic effects or simply taking a ship from the ravaged world), those beings pose a considerable threat to the cosmos.

Description

Assuming the mutagen is of a quantity that it must mix with the atmosphere to ensure a high enough concentration to affect its global victims, the Madness Bomb that houses it is a gargantuan construct – a size worthy of the "doomsday device" label.

Of course, this doesn't have to be the case. A relatively modest bomb can still have a global impact. The Little Boy and Fat Man bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki caused worldwide radiation levels to rise, and they were of a relatively modest size (comparatively speaking). Still, the genre generally demands that "big effects call for big gear."

Given the size of the weapon, it's up to the GM to determine how it can be stopped (and up to the heroes to figure that out). Destroying the Bomb – or the vessel transporting it – while it's in space is probably the best bet; any kind of attack on the weapon while in orbit is likely to cause almost as much damage as the Bomb itself.

Should a Madness Bomb detonate, it's up to the GM to determine how long it takes for the mutagenic effect to take hold. Space opera usually demands that planet-affecting weapons do their dirty work fairly quickly – within minutes or even seconds – even though it would take days or weeks (or more!) for a "realistic" Madness Bomb to expose everyone to its output. Still, even a slower Bomb can be dramatically appropriate, especially if heroes or important allies need to escape off-world to safety before the effect reaches them.

Despite the horrific outcome, the Madness Bomb is designed to be relatively "clean"; it targets people, and other forms of life – plus buildings and vessels – are left intact by its effects. Of course, a society's collapse coupled with its remaining citizens becoming psionic psychopaths could prove detrimental to a world's infrastructure in other ways.

Variations

Most methods of tweaking the Madness Bomb concept revolve around altering the percentage dead, the percentage augmented, how powerful the augmented become, and how crazy they are. In general, the Madness Bomb concept works best if a "shipful" of survivors is an incredibly dangerous prospect (at least an adventure-oriented threat to any group of PC heroes, and possibly more).

If the force that uses the Madness Bomb has more than one, then the ratio can be tweaked so that an early test generates a significant threat *and* makes it clear that any further uses would be catastrophic. For example, if 1 out of 10,000 people survive the mutagenic effects and become powerful psis, then a Madness Bomb dropped on a colony world containing 200,000 people would generate 20 psis who – if they escape off-world – can become powerful threats themselves. Of course, if that 1-in-10,000 ratio endures and the weapon is detonated on the Republic's throne world housing billions, it would probably spell the end of that society.

The level of "madness" should be appropriate to the campaign, and should generally create villains at the far end of the scenery-chewing space-opera spectrum. For example, in settings where psionics exert corruptive influences, or where metaphysics can draw one to the "dark side," maybe the Madness Bomb is a one-way ticket to the extremes of those types of malevolence. Otherwise, assume that the Bomb instills effects proportional to the powers it bestows, drawing from the unsavory disadvantages or flaws of the utilized game system. For example, in **GURPS,** using a 1-to-5 ratio would mean 1 point of socially unacceptable disadvantages gives 5 points of psi. (See **GURPS Psionic Powers** for many ideas on abilities to purchase.)

The notion that the Madness Bomb instills psionics is core to its concept – otherwise it's just a generic "kill everyone" bomb – and may prove antithetical to settings where there are no psi or metaphysical forces. However, the Madness Bomb could be a perfect excuse to bring those powers into the setting. Alternatively, other effects can be dropped on the planet instead; for example, maybe the Madness Bomb introduces cell-altering nanotechnology to a world's atmosphere, and those it doesn't kill are converted into raving cyborgs.

Campaign Uses

The Madness Bomb is actually an appropriate (sinister) choice for typical space-opera "evil empires." If detonated on a world somewhat tucked into the good guys' space, it both destroys one of their planets and introduces the possibility of mad psis running amok. Since the infrastructure is left largely intact, it renders that world perfect for recolonization.

Adventure Seeds

Planet of the Mutates: The heroes find an immunization to the Madness Bomb mutagen, but they crash-land on a world before they can make its composition known. Worse, one of the Bombs is activated on the planet the heroes are on! Can they find their way to a new ship – or figure out how to repair their old one – while fighting off threats who are (literally) insanely powerful?

You Never Forget Family; They Won't Let You: If a player wants to play someone with psionic powers (especially in a setting where they're not common), let him! But tell him he needs to take a number of disadvantages as well . . . including amnesiac (his origins) as well as a number of "mystery" disadvantages. As the truth of his origin comes out – perhaps including encounters with other powerful psis who refer to him as "kin" – it will point to a problem more potentially catastrophic than the universe has ever known.

The Bomb is also a good choice for a "mysterious" doomsday weapon, since its effects – mad psis – can be met far from the scene of the crime. The encounter with a group of evil psi-users can lead to information that leads to more evil psis, which can lead to information on the common link that unites them: a little-visited world that's been strangely quiet in the past few cycles.

From a gaming standpoint, in most space-opera campaigns, the number of Bombs available should be limited, or should require significant time between deployment. Otherwise, it becomes too great a threat for mosts heroes to have a shot at stopping.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been contributing to *Pyramid* for almost 10 years. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son Sam.

Leia: *"The more you tighten your grip, Tarkin, the more slip through your fingers."*

Tarkin: *"Not after we demonstrate the power of this station."*

– ***Star Wars IV: A New Hope***

DESIGNER'S NOTES
GURPS PSIONIC POWERS
BY REV. JASON "P.K." LEVINE

Let's start with an obvious statement: I love psi. I think psychic abilities, when done well, are a complement to pretty much any game that involves the supernatural or pseudo-scientific. Luckily for me, **GURPS** offers some of the best psi rules to be found in any RPG. The rules for psi in **GURPS** *Third Edition* were fun and easy to understand, and those for *Fourth Edition* are infinitely customizable and a marvel of game balance. (It is no coincidence that David Pulver, one of today's best RPG authors for my money, had a guiding hand in both systems.) So I set out to write something that would combine *Third Edition* flavor and presentation with *Fourth Edition* rules and mechanics, with liberal dashes of fun stuff stolen from other systems and works of fiction.

My mantra was to keep it simple and fun, and don't ever bog things down with unnecessary calculations or complications. With the help of my peers (big ups to Beth and Scott), my real-life gaming group (especially Alan and James), and some of the best playtesters an author could have (thanks to *all* of you), I think that mantra was realized.

In a book this full of crunch, there was no room for a sample campaign setting. This is rectified here with *Agents of PSION*, which matches psis and space (a natural combination). The various boxes sprinkled throughout the text are unrelated to the setting; they contain behind-the-scenes information, deleted abilities, and optional rules that were cut from or otherwise didn't make it into **GURPS Psionic Powers.**

AGENTS OF PSION

It is the year 2209 and mankind has colonized much of the solar system. Unfortunately, mankind has also split into three mutually hostile factions. The original Humans, known for their well-developed (if few in number) psis, control Earth. Mars is dominated by the Bonded – humans who have merged with a symbiotic bacteria that gives them several advantages (including resistance to psionics) while increasing their natural aggressiveness. The Upgraded – cybernetic humans who have merged their minds with artificial intelligences – control

a few of Saturn and Jupiter's moons (and much of the asteroid belt), but no planets.

This setting mixes the morality of space opera (the "basically good" Humans versus the "basically bad" Bonded, with the Upgraded serving as wild cards) with an intentionally small scope (just the solar system) and the absence of any superscience apart from psychotronics. The latter two choices keep psionics front and center in the campaign; for example, a skilled enough teleporter can theoretically jump from Earth to Mars, while no reasonable amount of training would enable a jump from Earth to Alpha Centauri. The default assumption is that the player characters will be elite members of Earth's PSION Agency, tasked with a wide variety of duties, from investigating strange phenomena to secretly raiding or sabotaging Bonded facilities.

THE THREE RACES

The only known "aliens" in this setting were once human stock, but that does not make them any less alien in mentality. (Still, they are all considered "human" for the purpose of Telecontrol, etc.) Even "normal" humanity has been colored significantly by its development of psychology into parapsychology. Any race may use Disguise skill to appear as another race, at only a -2 penalty. All races are TL10.

Humans

Over the past 200 years, mankind came to rely more and more on technology, until the rapid evolution and secession of the Enhanced (below) provoked a social backlash. Humans intentionally "crippled" their A.I. to prevent it from becoming more than a basic tool, and turned to the social sciences. In the early 22nd century, the British-based Parapsychological Studies Agency unlocked the secrets of psi, leading to significant social improvements across all areas of life. Earth today remains separated into various countries, but the major powers trade openly and rarely go to war, putting most of their effort and money into internal development.

Space navigation mishap! The ship stopped mid-trip, and the engine needs to be repaired or restarted.

Strange Psi Techniques

Psi Techniques are probably the biggest addition to *Fourth Edition* psi. While they are based on existing rules from **GURPS Powers** (see *Under the Hood: Psi Techniques,* p. 9 of **Psionic Powers,** for details), they expand on the concept, allowing the psi to effectively train in power techniques to remove temporary enhancement penalties. This is a powerful addition to the power technique rules, and is only really balanced when combined with Skills for Everyone (**GURPS Powers,** p. 162).

For the most part, the psi techniques in **GURPS Psionic Powers** are fairly self-explanatory. A technique such as *Distant Use,* which defaults to skill-4 and lets you use a touch-only ability at range, is just adding the +40% Ranged enhancement. However, a few are especially complicated and deserve special mention for those who've been scratching their heads trying to duplicate them.

Crippling Attack (Cancellation): This does not add an enhancement. Instead, the penalties are derived from the rules on using Neutralize to cripple abilities (*Crippled Abilities,* **GURPS Powers,** p. 156). The 2 FP cost was left in for game balance.

Blue Screen (Confuse): Adds Cosmic (Affects both living and Electrical targets), +50%.

Particle Beam (Lightning): Replaces Surge, Arcing (+100%) with Surge (+20%) and Armor Divisor (5) (+150%). The extra +80% on Surge is so similar to Armor Divisor that this can be considered a simple "leveling up" of the enhancement.

Thunderbolt (Lightning): Buys off Environmental, buys off Nuisance Effect, and adds Overhead (total +60%), all limited with Accessibility, Only under an active storm (-40%), for a net +36%. Much more complex than what you'd see in play, but the only way to really achieve the effect (and the playtesters were nearly unanimous that it needed to exist).

Unsupervised Change (Weather Control): Adds Independent (+40%) and Extended Duration ×30 (+60%).

Restore Limb (Cure): Adds Restore Limb (+80%), but then has to tack on another -2 penalty because that's how that enhancement works. The penalty could be replaced with an extra 2 FP cost, but since psi techniques already work that way, it's the same effect.

Anesthetic (Sleep): Adds Advantage, +50%. The advantage is High Pain Threshold (Noncombat use only, -50%) [5].

Flat Edge (TK Bullet): Bends the rules a bit, by asking, "What would an enhancement that turned pi into pi+ be worth?" It came out to +20%.

Retention (Borrow Skill): Adds Persistent (+40%) plus Extended Duration ×3 (+20%), treating Extended Duration (in this case) like Area Effect (see *Additional Psi Technique Guidelines,* p. 10).

Double Strike (Mental Stab): Adds Link (+20%) to *both* Mental Blow and Mental Stab, for a total of +40%. Stretches the rules, but well within the realm of "GM's call" (or, in this case, "authors call") for a special exception.

Omniscan (Telescan): Sneakily uses the extra effort rules to boost the base advantage (Detect Known Minds [10]) by 100% (Detect Minds [20]) instead of actually adding an enhancement.

While roughly one in 1,000 Humans has some vague empathic or intuitive knack, only one in 100,000 Humans has serious psychic capability – enough to develop psionic abilities, Talents, and skills. About 90% of these potentials can go on to learn a few levels of a single ability, while 9% are able to learn multiple abilities and 1% can develop multiple powers. Basic psi tests (and visits from agents with Psidar) identify potential psychics in grade school, where they are given additional, specialized training. The general public's opinions on psis ranges from distrust to adoration, though even detractors will usually give grudging respect to those "clearly doing good" (like most agents of PSION, p. 14).

Humans are built using the standard **GURPS** rules. They may not have any Anti-Psi abilities and will *very* rarely have Psychic Vampirism. Any Human PC who wants to be a vampire must take a 10-point Unusual Background *and* the -5 point Social Stigma (Psychic Vampire), which causes other Humans to react to you at -2 (or -4 if they have Intolerance (Bonded)) if they realize that you have Psychic Vampirism abilities.

Bonded

37 points

Today's terraformed Mars has a weak, carbon-dioxide-rich atmosphere; this makes it possible for a Human to breathe with only a special filter mask, and improves the temperature from "intolerably freezing" to simply "freezing." However, when mankind first colonized Mars in the mid-21st century, the population lived in domed habitats connected by long, airlock-capped tubes. A seemingly innocuous bacterial infection spread rapidly through over 25% of the populace before it was identified as a form of native life. Symbiotic, it enhanced its hosts' natural abilities as well as their natural aggressions. The medical staff was unprepared for this, as the infected broke out of their quarantined areas and assaulted the remainder of the population. In the claustrophobic environment, this quickly led to all survivors becoming what would later be known as the Bonded.

Bonded society evolved seemingly overnight into a meritocracy; true power goes to those strong enough to seize it.

Space navigation mishap! Due to incorrectly input coordinates, automatic computer rerouting around obstacles, engine trouble, or something else, the trip was extended by several hours. This could cause the crew to miss a deadline or avoid the worst of a disaster.

The Technique of Which We Do Not Speak

Some Psi techniques are actually a special case of *Using Abilities at Default* (**GURPS Powers,** p. 173). That is, the use of the technique lets you temporarily treat the base advantage as though it were a different advantage altogether! For simplicity, the point-cost comparison was made between the most basic builds of the two advantages. For example, the *Astral Crossing (Astral Travel)* psi technique allows one to momentarily switch Insubstantial [80] into Jumper (Spirit; Limited, Astral Plane) [80]. This new advantage (Jumper) costs 100% of what the base advantage (Insubstantiality) did, and is a similar trait, for a net -8 penalty.

So, why wasn't this option included in the *Under the Hood* box? To follow the mantra of *keeping things simple.* Psi techniques are a new concept, and one which has the potential to cause some significant head-scratching. Throwing a curve-ball like this at a first-time reader wouldn't help the situation. So let the truth be noted, that *almost* all psi techniques are a combination of *Temporary Enhancements* and *Power Techniques,* while a few special ones mix *Using Powers at Default* and *Power Techniques,* instead; both versions cost 2 FP.

The following psi techniques use this special case.

Spectral Dodge (Astral Celerity): Enhanced Move to Enhanced Dodge.

Astral Crossing (Astral Travel): Insubstantiality to a limited Jumper.

Cloaking (Astral Travel): Invisibility to a limited Morph.

Deep Scan (Electric Vision): Detect to Penetrating Vision.

Channeling (Spirit Communication): Medium to Channeling.

Animalism (Emotion Sense): Empathy to Animal Empathy.

Harden Bone (Damage Control): Injury Tolerance (various to Unbreakable Bones).

Despite this change – some say because of it – they were able to rebuild everything destroyed in "the becoming" and continue to develop Mars into a tolerable place to live. Relations with Earth slowly soured as the need for trade lessened; the Bonded began seeing other Humans as weak. By the turn of the 22nd century, they officially declared themselves a new race and cut off contact with Earth altogether. Conflict followed almost immediately, beginning a cycle of wars, truces, and cold wars that would continue to this day.

The symbiont in Bonded provides them with the ability to survive, unaided, on the surface of Mars, enhanced physical abilities, and exceptional protection against psionics. Bonded may buy Anti-Psi and Psychic Vampirism abilities freely; no other powers are compatible with their physiology and psychology. Telereceive is considered a Psychic Vampirism ability for the Bonded *only,* renamed "Steal Thoughts."

Bonded characters must always have Psionic Shield and Psychic Armor at the same power level; a Bonded who wishes to improve either must spend 10 character points to buy them both up simultaneously. The benefit to this is that the Bonded may use the Psionic Shield skill for *both* abilities; there is no need to buy a Psychic Armor skill. This is a 0-point feature.

Bonded resemble Humans, except for their ruddy skin (similar to an all-over sunburn), which looks and feels *slightly* leathery.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+1 [10]; HT+1 [10].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Will+2 [10].
Advantages: Filter Lungs [5]; Psionic Shield 2 [4]; Psychic Armor 2 [16]; Temperature Tolerance 4 (Cold) [4].
Perks: Blood Healing; Pressure-Tolerant Lungs (Thin) [2].
Disadvantages: Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Bloodlust (15) [-5]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Selfish (12) [-5].
Quirks: Chauvinistic [-1].

Features: Psionic Shield and Psychic Armor mated.
Racial Skills: Intimidation (A) Will-1 [1]-11; Psionic Shield (H) Will-2 [1]-10.

Enhanced

53 points

The Enhanced are a very young, very diverse "race." On Earth, after the turn of the 22nd century, humanity was in a state of social flux. The shock of fighting the Bonded – dealing not only with the war, but with the concept of humans no longer considering themselves human – served as a catalyst for many serious underlying issues. Civil war broke out in many countries, as many new, extreme lifestyles gained popularity. Transhumanism – the desire to use genetic modification, digital recreations of one's own mind, and the like to advance beyond the limits of human form – became increasingly common.

Brain implants had existed for some time, in the form of cell phones, internal databases, and other gizmos, but in the mid-22nd century, European scientists developed the means for such implants to *fully* interface with the mind. With this new technology, one could copy one's mind over to a computer implant with 100% resolution, where it could be edited, adjusted, or integrated with an existing A.I. As this was only one of many "outrages" at the time, it may not have received as much attention as it should have . . . but within a decade, many transhumanists had begun experimenting with self-hacking.

Earth was stunned when it happened – hundreds of spaceships were simultaneously stolen, commandeered, or flown out of scrapyards after being falsely logged as unrepairable. Tens of thousands of secessionists simply left Earth behind before anyone realized what was happening in time for space defense forces to react properly.

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*For details on over 300 extraterrestrial lifeforms, grab **GURPS Space Bestiary** (available as a PDF from e23).*

A short text transmission a few hours later explained everything. These "Enhanced" humans had been holding discussions via information encoded in uploaded media files. Only a person with a powerful brain implant could translate it, using a unique combination of data decryption and natural linguistic thought patterns. After a few years of debate, they decided to leave, and began setting plans in motion.

Today, the Enhanced are a "race" only in the sense of their common traits. Any single Enhanced has likely upgraded his body and mind in unique ways, making an encounter with one somewhat unpredictable. The combination of Compartmentalized Mind, Digital Mind, and Electrical represents that the human brain of an Enhanced is vulnerable to Telepathy, etc., while the computer within is vulnerable to Cyberpsi and other EK abilities. Anyone who wishes to dominate both "halves" must employ both types of abilities.

Enhanced may learn psionic abilities, but not very well. Put simply, computer brains and psi don't really mesh. Enhanced cannot have more than one level of psionic Talent. If an ability has a limited number of levels, the Enhanced can only learn it to half those levels (round up) – for example, since Suggestion has 7 levels, an Enhanced could only have Suggestion 4 at the most. If the ability has no restriction on levels, he can buy levels equal to half his Will, rounded up. Ergokinesis is the sole exception to this rule – an Enhanced may buy Ergokinesis abilities and Talent normally.

An Enhanced appears Human, but with a noticeable flap of skin covering a modular interface jack just below the left temple.

Advantages: Absolute Timing [2]; Compartmentalized Mind 1 [50]; Digital Mind [5]; Lightning Calculator [2]; Photographic Memory [10].
Perks: Accessory (Interface Jack) [1].
Disadvantages: Electrical [-20]; Reprogrammable (Computer Side Only, -50%) [-5].
Features: Limited psi capability.
Racial Skills: Computer Hacking (VH) IQ [8]-10.

PSION AGENCY

Over the decades, the Parapsychological Studies Agency grew into a government-chartered bureau with the resources to develop and train psis, put together psionic teams whose abilities would complement each other, and plan clandestine operations that made use of their agents' special abilities. Now known as the Parapsychological Studies, Improvement, Optimization, and Neutralization Agency (or PSION Agency for short), the Agency advises and works with governments from all over the world. This is made possible by the firm rule that PSION agents will never be sent into a country without the full knowledge and cooperation of that country's government; their primary purpose is to act in the best interests of Earth as a whole.

PSION agents are not military troops, but will frequently be assigned as consultants to space fleets during times of war. During times of peace and cold war, they focus more on intelligence gathering (and counterintelligence), domestic assistance, and homeland security. A team of agents may be sent to Kiev to assist the police with the discovery of a kidnapped officer one week, then secretly dropped into a Martian industrial area to foment an uprising the next.

The template below represents a trained agent of PSION with one or two powerful abilities or a wide range of weak ones. It is a very "loose" template, with most options for customization left wide open for the player. PSION trains its agents well, but it does not force a particular form of indoctrination upon them.

PSION Agent

300 points

You are trained to use your psionic abilities and personal skills to help defend the Earth.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 11 [10].
Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [5]; Per 13 [5]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].
Advantages: Patron (PSION; 6 or less) [15]. ● 150 points spent on psionic abilities and Talent. ● A further 65 points spent on improved attributes, personal advantages and perks.
Disadvantages: Duty (PSION; 12 or less) [-10]; *and* Vow (Place the needs of the Earth and humanity above my own) [-15]. ● -25 points in personal disadvantages and quirks.
Primary Skills: Acting (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Disguise (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Expert Skill (Psionics) (H) IQ [4]-12; First Aid/TL10 (E) IQ [1]-12; Judo (H) DX [4]-10; Mental Strength (E) Will+1 [2]-14; Mind Block (A) Will [2]-13; Observation (A) Per-1 [1]-12; *and* Tactics (H) IQ-1 [2]-11.
Secondary Skills: 24 points spent on the skills for your psionic abilities.
Background Skills: Area Knowledge (Earth) (E) IQ [1]-12; Area Knowledge (Solar System) (E) IQ [1]-12; Computer Operation (E) IQ [1]-12. ● 15 points spent on personal skills.

*For three space-bound adventures, check out **GURPS Space Adventures** (also available as a PDF from e23).*

Control Limb

This sample ability for Biokinesis (*Psionic Powers,* p. 72) was voted off the island and replaced with Strike Sense . . . but I liked it too much not to include here.

Control Limb

6 points/level*

Skill: Control Limb (DX/H).

You can take control of part of a person's body. This requires a Quick Contest. For this initial "takeover attempt" only, you roll against your Control Limb *power level* instead of your skill. Add a +2 bonus if you are trying to control an arm or leg, or a +4 bonus to control just a hand or foot, and apply normal range penalties (p. B550) to the target. The subject (who must be within 200 yards) resists with his ST.

If successful, you have control over that body part for as long as you concentrate. This should be interpreted liberally. In all cases, use your Control Limb skill to take any of the following actions – treat the limb as having DX equal to your skill level and its normal ST.

You can use an arm to attack – including making the subject hit himself! You can drop weapons, pull triggers, push buttons, and so on, as long as the subject is already holding onto the appropriate item or he's within arm's reach of it. Control of just the hand limits you to dropping items or manipulating those already held – though if the subject goes to punch someone, you can splay his fingers so he hits for half damage while taking *full* punching damage to his own hand.

Control of a leg allows you to kick any subject within range – you can make him kick himself, but at -1 damage due to the awkwardness. More effectively, you can make him fall down, automatically, by removing support. If you control just the foot, you can halve his Move, or twist it suddenly so he must make a DX-3 roll to avoid falling while walking.

* The variant Control Limb (Short Range) costs 4 points/level. This replaces the normal range penalties with a flat -1 per yard, to a maximum of 20 yards.

Statistics: Telekinesis (Accessibility, Limbs Only, -10%; Animate Life-forms, Partial, +20%; Biokinesis, -10%; Increased Range ×20, +40%; Short-Ranged 2, -20%) [6/level]. The variant Control Limb (Short Range) reduces Increased Range to ×2 and raises Short-Ranged to 3. [4/level].

Total Control

Hard

Default: Control Limb-9; cannot exceed Control Limb.

You can take over the target's entire body! You must first roll against this psi technique. If successful, you may roll the usual Quick Contest of your power level (with no +2 or +4 bonus) against the subject's ST. If you win, you have complete control over his body; use your skill level as his DX for all purposes. His Move cannot exceed your original margin of success (in the Quick Contest), however. Note that while you can lock his jaw, you cannot force him to speak, emote, etc., as your control is not that fine.

TECHNOLOGY

The tech in this setting is TL10 with no superscience except for psychotronics ("psi-tech"), which is at approximately TL9^.

Psi Amplifiers

The psi amplifiers from *GURPS Ultra-Tech* (p. 94) exist, with some minor rules changes. Any rules not explicitly changed below remain the same – amplifiers must be tuned to the individual, can cause a power surge, etc. (Add the power *and* Talent boosts together when rolling for a power surge!)

Amplifier Throne: Adds up to +2 to the user's psionic power levels (no effect if an ability is non-leveled or at maximum strength already) and up to +4 to his Talent for *all* the abilities of one power. $400,000, 2,000 lbs., external power. A throne that can amplify *all* the powers of a single psi simultaneously is $3,200,000, 16,000 lbs., external power.

Backpack Psi Amplifier: As above, but adds +1 to the user's power levels and +2 to his Talent. $80,000, 30 lbs., D/1 day. One that can amplify *all* the user's powers is $65,000, 50 lbs., D/6 hours.

Spaceships

The following rules reference the *GURPS Spaceships* system.

All TL10 non-superscience modules are available. In addition, the following superscience is available, all explainable as telekinetic developments of psychotronic technology: TL10^ Standard Reactionless Engines, TL11^ Tractor weapons, and the Artificial Gravity and Gravitic Compensators design features. None of the design switches are applicable. The existence of psychotronics offers additional options and modules as well.

Habitat [Any]: One cabin may be exchanged for a psi amplifier throne (above). This costs an additional $200K for a single-power version or $3M for a universal one. The latter is ubiquitous on PSION ships while the former (for Anti-Psi) is very common with the Bonded.

Teleportation Drive [Any!]: This psychotronic drive allows a single psi (or gestalt) to treat the ship as being part of his body for the purpose of using Autoteleport. This allows a sufficiently powerful porter to move a ship great distances, but at some risk. Cost is identical to that of a Stardrive Engine.

Space navigation mishap! The ship wound up at the wrong destination – maybe even the wrong universe!

It is invariably combined with one (or more) psi amplifier thrones (above), but these are purchased separately.

The drive can also accommodate those who only know Exoteleport, but it does this by treating the Exoteleport power level as if it were Autoteleport. For example, a psi who only had Exoteleport at a power of 10 would roll against Exoteleport skill to move the ship, but the distance would be as though he were using Autoteleport 10.

ADVENTURE IDEAS

Your bold and brave agents are now ready to face the dangers of the universe! What tricky task will require their special abilities next?

Glitch-Head: One week ago, an Enhanced offered to turn over some valuable intelligence on an asteroid base in return for asylum. Since it goes without saying that he had made some enemies, it was no real surprise when his hacked corpse was found floating in space. ESP what you can from it, track down the hackers, and get that posthumous intelligence for us.

Run, Doc, Run: Dr. Gibson Carter (University of Nebraska) has made some interesting breakthroughs in psychotronic tech – his theories suggest that one could crank up a PK Shield enough to protect a building . . . or spaceship. At least, that's the theory. Right now, his prototype tends to just short out a lot. Nonetheless, it somewhat works, and that's enough to have some serious thieves and assassins out to get it. Keep him alive – if this tech can work, Earth needs it.

WTFO: Keep this to yourselves. Israel's patrols have picked up a ship hulk on their sensors that doesn't match anything we've seen before. Might be some new Bonded warship. Might be some Enhanced weekend project. Might be . . . well, better not speculate. We need a team to accompany their investigating ship. Guess who?

A Variant Perk

A few playtesters wanted to see this alternative version of Dowsing (*ESP Perks,* ***Psionic Powers,*** p. 42) included in the book, but in the end it didn't make sense to devote so much word count to a single perk.

Dowsing (Utility)

You can locate one type of modern, buried utility (e.g., electrical lines, water mains, cable connections, etc.) This requires slowly walking around the grounds of a building, taking one hour per acre of the lot (minimum 15 minutes), or twice that if you cannot tell where the utilities connect to the residence (since you don't know where to start). After this time, make a Per (plus Talent) roll; you may substitute an appropriate Per-based Professional Skill if better. If successful, you have a rough mental sketch of the path from the building to the nearest primary connection for the utility. On a critical success (or a normal success, if you spend the whole day walking the grounds), you know the exact path of the utility connection, down to degrees and fractions of an inch.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reverend Pee Kitty, sometimes known as Jason Levine, is the co-author (with Scott Maykrantz) of the ***GURPS Creatures of the Night*** series and the author of ***GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 5: Allies*** and ***GURPS Psionic Powers*** (of course). Praise "Bob."

Limited by Margin

Mental Stab (***Psionic Powers,*** p. 65) includes a custom limitation, "Damage cannot exceed margin of victory, -50%." This limitation is *not* necessarily a universal one! In fact, it only makes sense for an advantage with 10 levels. For other leveled advantages, you can use this universal (if somewhat complicated) version.

Limited by Margin

Varies

Your advantage does not always take effect at full power; it depends on your margin of success (or margin of victory, for a resisted ability). Its value is -5% times the required margin of success (minimum 2, maximum 10) for full power; lesser margins give you proportionately less power.

In other words, for -10%, your ability works at full strength if you succeed by 2+, or half strength if you succeed by 0 or 1. For -15%, you have full power with a margin of 3+, 2/3 power with a margin of 2, and 1/3 power with a margin of 0 or 1. For -35%, you have full effect if you succeed by 7+, 6/7 if by 6, 5/7 if by 5, and so on, down to 1/7 for a margin of 0 or 1. Obviously, this limitation is far simpler in play if you match the required margin of success to the level (or an exact fraction of the level) of the advantage.

Example: Zzap has Burning Attack 12d (Limited by Margin 6, -30%) [42]. If he shoots someone, his laser does 2d burning damage for every point by which he makes his attack roll, to a maximum of 12d (with a margin of success of 6 or more). His opponent's defense roll doesn't affect this.

He later wants to buy the limitation down to Limited by Margin 5 (-25%), but the GM threatens to cut off his soda privileges if he does that, because it doesn't divide evenly (and fractional dice are no fun). So he instead earns more character points and buys it down to Limited by Margin 4 (-20%), and now he does 3d burning damage per point of success (now hitting his 12d maximum if he succeeds by 4 or more).

SPACE-OPERA SCANNER

In classic space-opera settings, people often wield devices that look less powerful and are bulkier than the gadgets we have in our own pockets. Why? Who knows; it's *science!*

The Space-Opera Scanner is an effort to bring a bit of "retro-future" to your larger-than-life sci-fi tales. Print out one or more of the main units on p. 18 on cardstock (for durability). Print one for each player, as appropriate. It's designed so that it looks good held and moved around (as if it were a handheld gizmo), or lying flat on a surface (where it more closely resembles a space-opera control panel). The other pages in this section can be printed on cheap regular paper or more durable cardstock.

When you print all pages in this section, make certain that the "fit to page" option is turned off! (This option might be called something else in your preferred PDF program.)

Assembly and Variations

Cut the three white boxes in the top left-hand side of the device, to form its "windows." Cut out the white box at the top edge of the sheet. Fold the sides in toward the back of the "front" (center) panel of the Scanner. The narrow side section should be under the wide side section (which is the back of the device). The Scanner can be further assembled in a few different ways.

Slider: Glue the narrow side section under the wide side section to form a thin tube. Cut the information sheets as strips. The strips can then be inserted and slid up and down as needed. This is most useful when players are using the Scanner to keep track of information, such as the **GURPS Spaceships** options on pp. 23-24.

Single Card, Full-Size: Assemble as above, but put a staple (or a thin layer of glue inside the Scanner) 3.5 inches from the top of the device page (just below the row of colored boxes). Then cut the sheets into their constituent rectangles. The cards can be inserted into the top. (The glue/staple keeps the card from sliding down the bottom.)

Single Card, Handheld: Cut the scanner 3.5 inches from the top of the device page (just below the row of colored boxes). Next, put a piece of clear tape along the bottom edge. Then cut the sheets into rectangles, as before. This creates a smaller version of the scanner.
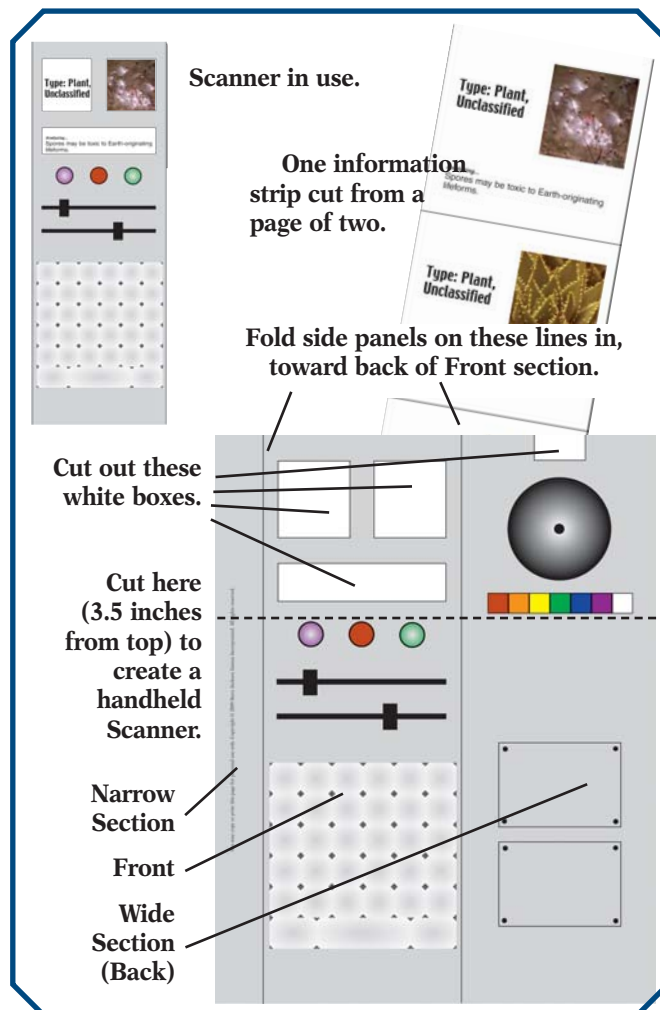
Usage

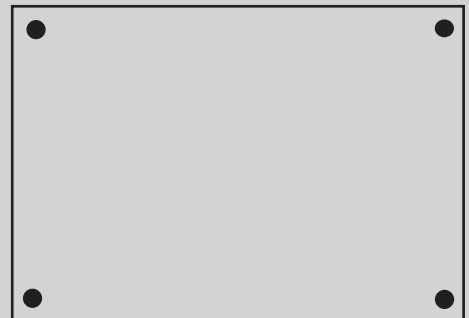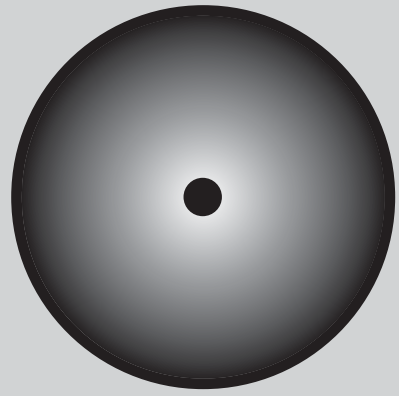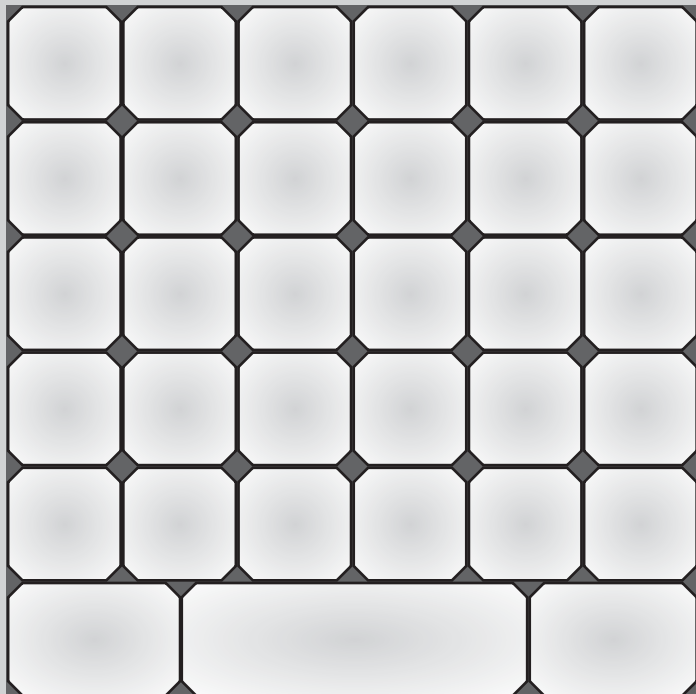The Space-Opera Scanner has a variety of applications.

Information: The cards are designed so that the GM can give information to heroes who use the Scanner. He can write clues ahead of time within the long horizontal boxes. Similarly, the cards can be used by the *players* to keep track of information;

for example, they can write down clues provided by the GM about the various images.

Tracking: By using the pre-formatted information tracking cards for **GURPS Spaceships,** the Scanner can become a control panel that lets players keep tabs on important info in a visual way. Similarly, the blank cards can be used for tracking other information, such as current hit points, wound levels, or hero points, as appropriate to the system. Just record the possibilities ahead of time on blank cards.

Real-World Prop: It can be helpful to have a prop that enables players to signify when their heroes are trying to gather or analyze information. After all, a hero who's using two hands to take a reading is one who doesn't have a hand on a blaster . . .

Scanner in use.

One information strip cut from a page of two.

Fold side panels on these lines in, toward back of Front section.

Cut out these white boxes.

Cut here (3.5 inches from top) to create a handheld Scanner.

Narrow Section

Front

Wide Section (Back)

Type: Plant, Unclassified

Analyzing...
Spores may be toxic to Earth-originating lifeforms.

Type: Plant, Unclassified

Analyzing...
Pod measures three feet long. Material requires processing before being edible.

Type: Plant, Unclassified

Analyzing...

Type: Plant, Unclassified

Analyzing...

Type: Plant, Unclassified

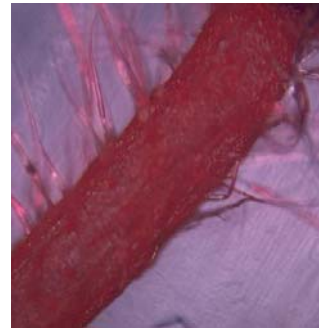*Analyzing...*

Type: Plant, Unclassified

Analyzing...

Type: Plant, Unclassified

Analyzing...
Sap currently present on plant contains many necessary vitamins.

Type: Plant, Unclassified

Analyzing...
Animal embryo of unclassified origin growing inside plant.

Type: Plant, Unclassified

Analyzing...

Type: Plant, Unclassified

Analyzing...

Type: Plant, Unclassified

Analyzing...

Type: Plant, Unclassified

Analyzing...

Type: Mineral, Unclassified

Analyzing...
High-quality energy released when dropped and shattered.

Type: Mineral, Unclassified

Analyzing...
Error occurred while analyzing: Select one item for analysis.

Type: Mineral, Unclassified
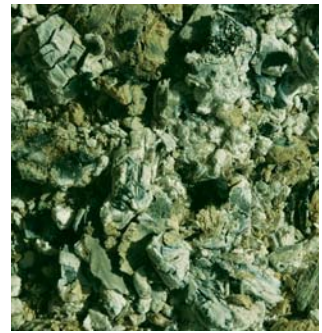
Analyzing...

Type: Mineral, Unclassified

Analyzing...

Type: Mineral, Unclassified

Analyzing...

Type: Mineral, Unclassified

Analyzing...

**Type:
Microorganism,
Unclassified**

Analyzing...
Rapidly grows in water and dim places.
Rare.

**Type:
Microorganism,
Unclassified**

Analyzing...
Found growing only in off-world food
supplies.

**Type:
Microorganism,
Unclassified**
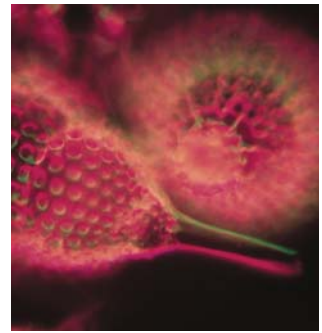
Analyzing...

**Type:
Microorganism,
Unclassified**

Analyzing...

**Type:
Microorganism,
Unclassified**
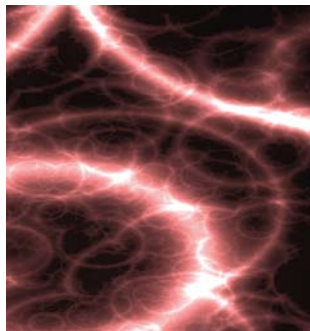
Analyzing...

**Type:
Microorganism,
Unclassified**

Analyzing...

Piloting Maneuver — Closing Maneuver

See **GURPS Spaceships,** p. 55, for basic rules and modifiers.

Piloting Maneuver — Controlled Drift

See **GURPS Spaceships,** p. 56, for basic rules and p. 55 for modifiers.

Piloting Maneuver — Evasive Action

See **GURPS Spaceships,** p. 56, for basic rules and p. 55 for modifiers..

Piloting Maneuver — Hold Course

See **GURPS Spaceships,** p. 56, for basic rules and p. 55 for modifiers..

Piloting Maneuver — Retreat

See **GURPS Spaceships,** p. 56, for basic rules and p. 55 for modifiers..

Piloting Maneuver — Uncontrolled Drift

See **GURPS Spaceships,** p. 56, for basic rules and p. 55 for modifiers..

Force Screen, Adjustable — Not Angled

Use listed dDR. (Ships with heavy screens may a spend second Power Point to double dDR.)

Force Screen, Adjustable — Angled: Front

2x listed dDR in front; 1/2x dDR in center and rear. (Ships with heavy screens may a spend second Power Point to double dDR.)

Cloaking Device — Not Activated

Uses no Power Points when not in use. See **GURPS Spaceships** for additional rules.

Force Screen, Adjustable — Angled: Center

2x listed dDR in center; 1/2x dDR in front and rear. (Ships with heavy screens may a spend second Power Point to double dDR.)

Cloaking Device — Activated

Uses 1 Power Point when activated. See **GURPS Spaceships** for additional rules.

Force Screen, Adjustable — Angled: Rear

2x listed dDR in rear; 1/2x dDR in front and center. (Ships with heavy screens may a spend second Power Point to double dDR.)
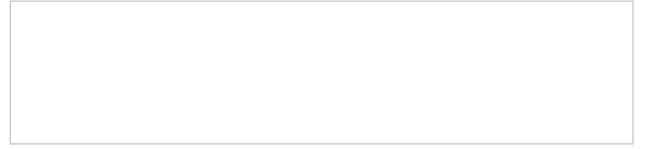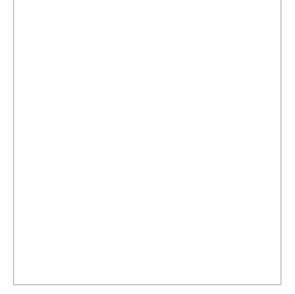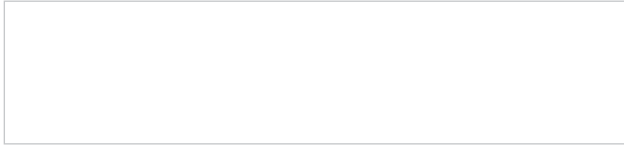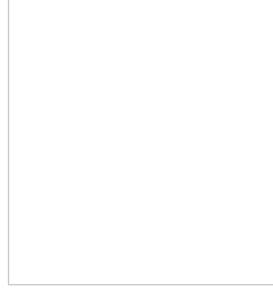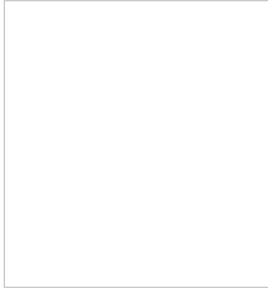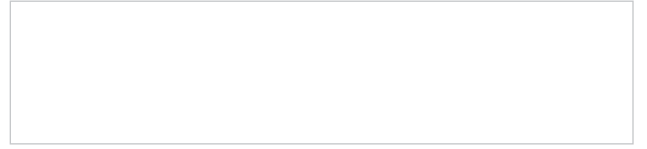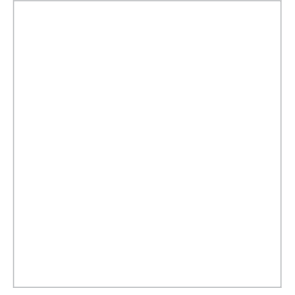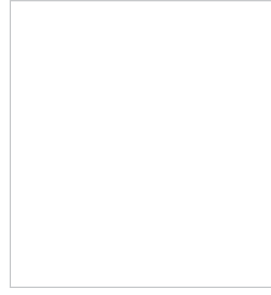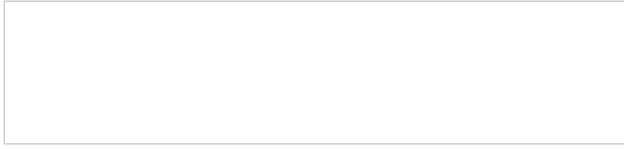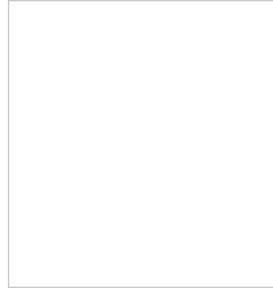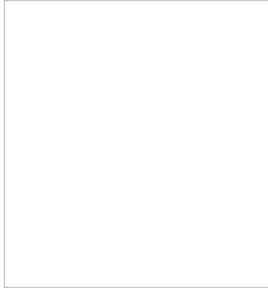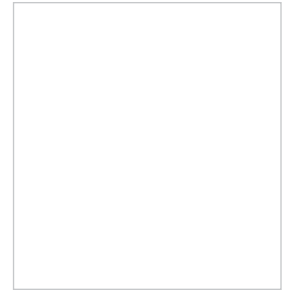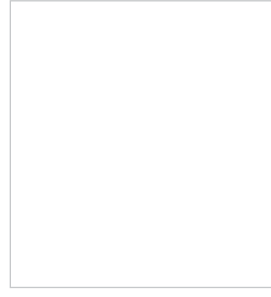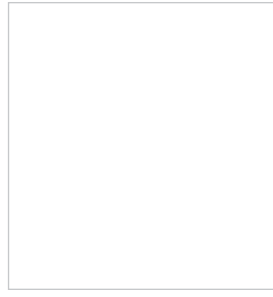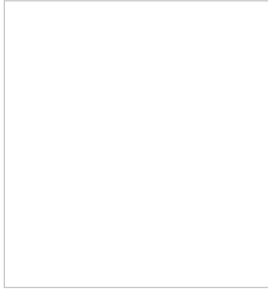
FIGHT THE FUTURE

BY KELLY PEDERSEN

It is a truism that skills are adapted to take advantage of new technology: computers changed research, plows revolutionized farming, sails altered boating. This is no less true for combat skills. Even unarmed skills such as boxing have taken advantage of the march of progress, creating new protective equipment, new training tools, and so on. Therefore, as technology continues to advance into the far future, we should assume that innovative forms of combat will be developed to utilize the new weapons and equipment created by science.

Presented here are five new melee martial-arts styles, designed to take advantage of some of the advances described in *GURPS Ultra-Tech.* All are intended to be generic, although some will only be viable depending on what set of superscience assumptions the GMs allows in their campaigns.

Note: An "*" in the style description indicates a new technique or perk, described in this article.

BATTLESUIT-BLADE

3 points

Battlesuit-Blade is a knife-fighting style, typically practiced by special-operations troops. Ultra-technology, particularly at TL10 or higher, can make melee weapons viable against battlesuits. Technologies such as vibroblades (*Ultra-Tech,* p. 164) and superfine (*Ultra-Tech,* p. 163) or hyperdense (*Ultra-Tech,* p. 164) composition, when combined with the strength enhancement of powered armor, give melee weapons a fair chance of penetrating even battlesuit DR. Special-ops troops practice knife styles for when missile or laser weapons are impractical – stealth missions, locations where stray shots may do unacceptable collateral damage, and the like.

Battlesuit-Blade is a military style first and foremost, and it doesn't waste time on pondering philosophical questions or ritualism. However, practitioners tend to pride themselves on using style and finesse rather than brutal violence. A fight that is ended with a single well-placed thrust is preferable to one that ends with the opponent hacked apart. Of course, the height of elegance is coming home alive from a successful mission, and all results are judged with that in mind.

Stylists typically fight with two knives, using the primary hand to attack and the off-hand to defend. Practitioners try to choose the best knife available at their tech level, to insure maximum effectiveness. Without superscience, this is usually a superfine long knife at TL9, a superfine vibroblade long knife at TL10, and a hyperdense vibroblade long knife at TL11 and above. If monowire is available, that is usually preferable at TL9 or TL10. If they exist, nanothorn blades (*Ultra-Tech,* p. 164) are sometimes used as the primary weapon, in order to reduce a foe's DR.

Battlesuit-Blade practitioners typically fight in a cautious, precise manner, preferring to wait to deliver a single, fight-ending strike, rather than waste their time with several ineffective or minimally effective blows. Full Evaluates, followed by targeted attacks to the enemy's skull or vitals, are typical of fights with a Battlesuit-Blade stylist. When fighting another battlesuited opponent, strikes at the suit's critical areas, such as power and life support, are also popular. Deceptive Attacks often take the form of a sudden switch of which hand is attacking and which is defending, trying to catch a complacent foe by surprise.

Since it is associated with special-ops troops, Battlesuit-Blade has acquired some of their mystique. Tales of stylists capable of fighting in pitch darkness, reading their opponent's moves perfectly, and attacking effectively with both knives at once are often circulated.

Skills: Battlesuit; Main-Gauche.
Techniques: Attack From Above (Main-Gauche); Back Strike (Main-Gauche); Battlesuit Training (Main-Gauche)*; Bind Weapon (Main-Gauche); Disarming (Main-Gauche); Retain Weapon (Main-Gauche); Reverse Grip; Targeted Attack (Main-Gauche Swing/Throat); Targeted Attack (Main-Gauche Thrust/Battlesuit Vital Area); Targeted Attack (Main-Gauche Thrust/Skull); Targeted Attack (Main-Gauche Thrust/Vitals).
Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Sensitivity.
Cinematic Techniques: Dual-Weapon Attack (Main-Gauche); Dual-Weapon Defense (Main-Gauche); Springing Attack (Main-Gauche); Whirlwind Attack (Main-Gauche).
Perks: Off-Hand Weapon Training (Main-Gauche); Quick-Sheathe; Quick-Swap (Main-Gauche).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Ambidexterity; Combat Reflexes; Fit or Very Fit; Reputation (Special-ops trooper).

Unarmed martial-arts styles are always useful. See GURPS Martial Arts for a wide selection of options.

Disadvantages: Bloodlust; Overconfidence.

Skills: Armory (Battlesuit); Fast-Draw (Knife); Judo; Stealth; Thrown Weapon (Knife).

Techniques: Armed Grapple; Choke Hold (Main-Gauche); Feint (Main-Gauche).

BATTLESUIT DRILL

4 points

Battlesuit Drill is taught to ultra-tech soldiers in order for them to get the most use out of their powered armor in melee combat. The style is almost as old as the technology itself. The utility of training in hand-to-hand combat using a battlesuit's enhanced strength is obvious to everyone.

Battlesuit Drill style is brutal and direct, suiting its military nature. Practitioners aim to cripple and incapacitate a foe as quickly as possible, with the minimum of effort. The training is intended for occasions when the heavy weapons typically carried by battlesuited troops are impractical (such as in space habitats, where punctured pressure hulls can spell disaster) and for when troops want to take enemies alive. The style places heavy emphasis on the locks and throws of the Judo skill. Judo holds are useful even against armored targets; against a target with flexible or no armor, a limb lock is frighteningly effective when combined with a battlesuit's strength enhancement.

A stylist tends to divide opponents into two categories: those who cannot penetrate his armor, and those who *can* (mostly enemies with their own powered armor). Against the former, adherents of this style usually attack without much concern for defense, using mostly All-Out Attacks and trusting to their battlesuit armor to protect them. Any of the All-Out Attack variants are favored, but using All-Out (Double) to quickly establish a grapple and begin applying damage and All-Out (Strong) to increase damage for an already-applied hold are particularly common. Stylists usually go for limb- or head-locks to cripple or for choke holds to incapacitate quickly and relatively safely. Battlesuit Drill also teaches a small body of tricks for using Judo parries aggressively, relying on battlesuit strength to seriously damage the opponent's weapon or hand and damage resistance to protect from the negative consequences of a failed parry.

Against battlesuit-equipped foes and other opponents capable of penetrating their armor, Battlesuit Drill practitioners take a much more cautious approach. This sort of fight generally calls for the Evaluate maneuver, followed by Defensive Attacks. Stylists also make heavy use of Feints. When fighting opponents who can be damaged by limb locks (such as opponents in flexible armor), the usual aim is to establish a lock and then inflict enough damage to cripple the limb, repeating until the opponent surrenders or is rendered incapable of fighting. Against targets in hard armor, a Battlesuit Drill stylist will usually try to establish a pin, holding the opponent until an ally with a weapon capable of penetrating the foe's armor arrives.

Since Battlesuit Drill is a simple style, taught to many soldiers as part of basic training, few tales of particularly cinematic abilities have cropped up. However, yarns of the storyteller's old battlesuit sergeant, who could punch through a dreadnought's faceplate, shatter a bunker door with one well-placed kick, or catch an enemy's punch in his hand, do circulate.

Skills: Battlesuit; Brawling; Judo.

Techniques: Aggressive Parry (Brawling); Arm Lock; Battlesuit Training (Judo)*; Choke Hold; Feint (Judo); Judo Throw; Leg Lock; Sacrifice Throw; Wrench Arm; Wrench Leg.

Cinematic Skills: Breaking Blow; Power Blow.

Cinematic Techniques: Backbreaker (Judo); Hand Catch; Snap Weapon.

Perks: Power Grappling; Skill Adaptation (Backbreaker defaults to Judo); Suit Familiarity (Battlesuit).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Fit or Very Fit.

Disadvantages: Bloodlust; Overconfidence.

Skills: Armory (Battlesuit).

Techniques: Breakfall; Disarming; Ground Fighting.

> *Sir, we both know there's only one man here who's capable of combat. A man who's had training, both physically and mentally.*
>
> *– Captain Devers,* **Space Mutiny**

FORCE SWORD-AND-SHIELD COMBAT

3 points

This is a force-sword style with more visual similarity to medieval knightly combat than to fencing. It can be used as the elite art of the noble class in a space opera game. To have it parallel the role of sword-fighting in medieval times, when the blade was a common tool of the battlefield, there should be campaign justification to make it useful. Consider limiting ranged weapons, either by simply saying the relevant technology hasn't been invented, or by other setting considerations, such as the unpredictably dangerous interactions of lasers and force screens in the *Dune* series. For a *very* campy "knights in space" feel, add robot horses and "force lances" as well.

The faux-medieval trappings aren't necessary for this style to be in use, however. It can also coexist with other force-sword disciplines – the Defense Bonus provided by force shields is an obvious advantage. Force Sword-and-Shield Combat might be the style preferred by "normal" force-sword wielders. In a setting with mystic psychics running about and using their powers for enhanced attacks and defenses, the DB of a force shield gives non-psychics something of a competitive edge.

Some classic space-opera characters: reformed pirate, metaphysical mystic, hot-shot pilot, deep-space scout, noble space-patrol officer, cantankerous medic, too-logical scientist, double-crossing security officer, and brilliant technician.

Force Sword-and-Shield Combat style relies, obviously, on the force sword (**Ultra-Tech,** p. 166) used in conjunction with the force shield (**Ultra-Tech,** p. 192). Stylists usually use the shield to block and the sword to attack, but few neglect the utility of the parry, particularly when fighting opponents armed with easily destroyed non-force weapons. Tactics are usually similar to the historical Sword-and-Shield Fighting style; a practitioner of Force Sword-and-Shield Combat typically stands off and tries to strike at the opponent's vulnerabilities, relying on Evaluate and Wait. Some stylists develop a particularly acute ability to judge a foe through Evaluate, allowing devastatingly effective blows. Against other force sword wielders, they use Beats with the force-shield to push the opponent's weapon out of line, permitting easier attacks. When fighting against an opponent without a force sword, a stylist typically focuses on destroying the foe's weapon, attacking the enemy once they are disarmed. Adherents of Force Sword-and-Shield Combat also focus on attacks to the limb, relying on their weapon's superior damage and armor penetration to quickly cripple foes; they move in for the kill once opponents are helpless on the ground.

Cinematically, this style displays most of the same stunts and feats as Force Swordsmanship: mental and physical resistance, hypersensitivity, and projected mental and physical strength. However, it has fewer flashy leaps and vaults, relying more on forcing the enemy to move and resisting opponents' attempts to shift the stylist. A student of this style doesn't move around the battlefield as fast as a Force-Swordsman, but he moves when *he* wants to, and so does his foe. The GM can allow the Push skill to work through the medium of the force shield for attempts to move enemies, instead of treating it as an unarmed attack.

> *So, what type of combat training do you have?*
>
> *– James Kirk,*
> ***Star Trek** (2009)*

Skills: Force Sword; Shield (Force).
Techniques: Back Strike; Counterattack (Force Sword); Feint (Force Sword or Shield); Targeted Attack (Force Sword Swing/Arm); Targeted Attack (Force Sword Swing/Leg); Targeted Attack (Force Sword Swing/Weapon).
Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Body Control; Immovable Stance; Kiai; Mental Strength; Power Blow; Precognitive Block*; Push.
Cinematic Techniques: Dual-Weapon Defense (Force Sword or Shield); Timed Defense (Force Sword or Shield).
Perks: Chi Resistance (Any); Grip Mastery (Force Sword); Rolling Stone*; Shield-Wall Training; Special Setup (Power Blow works with force sword); Special Setup (Push works with force shield); Sure-Footed (Slippery); Sure-Footed (Uneven).

Optional Traits
Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Enhanced Block (Shield); Enhanced Parry (Force Sword); Fit; Forceful Chi; psionic Talents; Weapon Master (Force Sword and Shield).
Disadvantages: Code of Honor; Sense of Duty (Close friends and companions).
Skills: Armoury (Force Shields); Armoury (Force Swords); Fast-Draw (Force Sword); Karate; Savoir-Faire (Dojo); Wrestling.
Perks: Weapon Bond.

MONOWIRE MUGGING

6 points

This style is in no way formalized – the name is a joking reference to the use many of its adherents put it to. This is a style practiced in the low-class, dangerous areas of high-tech cities. Stylists may not *all* be criminals (the style is very useful for self-defense), but public perception paints them that way, nonetheless. Obviously, this style can only exist in a setting that allows monowire superscience technology. It develops at TL10, when the monowire switchblade (**Ultra-Tech,** p. 163) becomes available. Before that, people using monowire will simply adapt another style to make use of the improved blade technology. If stasis superscience technology exists, then at TL12, the stasis switchblade (**Ultra-Tech,** p. 164) can be substituted for the monowire switchblade in this style.

Monowire Mugging uses the monowire switchblade as its weapon of choice. Stylists prefer, above all, to attack from surprise. To someone using this style, the ideal fight is one where the opponent never even realizes that combat has started until after he's lost. In addition to weapon skills, the style teaches concealment techniques to hide the student's blade and the art of readying the monowire switchblade for combat almost instantly. It also teaches a body of grappling techniques, in order to allow students to keep opponents at close range.

Practitioners of this style prefer to use their weapon's properties to their full advantage. Stylists often talk about the "close-" and "far-side of the street," referring to the range that the fight takes place at. The close side is inside an opponent's effective reach, and the far side is outside it. Whenever possible, a Monowire Mugging adherent will try to stay in one zone or the other. "Being in the middle gets you hit by a truck" is the common wisdom. Usually, a stylist will try to start a fight at the extreme range of the monowire switchblade, hopefully surprising the enemy with his reach. He uses steps and retreats, if necessary, to maintain this distance. If the enemy manages to close more quickly than the Monowire Mugging stylist can move, then he generally tries to step into close combat.

As already mentioned, Monowire Mugging stylists prefer to initiate a fight from surprise. The standard opening gambit for a student of this style is a Committed or All-Out Attack (Strong) against a limb or the head, hoping to end the fight immediately. Against a target they are sure is not anticipating an attack, stylists will usually use Telegraphic Attack as well.

Although they prefer to avoid it, stylists do know how to fight a battle against an aware and alert foe. In such cases, they tend to rely on speed, favoring quick strikes at limbs and weapons, trying to disarm and disable the enemy before serious damage can be done to the Monowire Mugging student. Committed or All-Out Attacks are preferred while still outside the opponent's reach, particularly All-Out Attack (Long), which allows even greater reach with the switchblade. Once an enemy has closed to his own effective range, an adherent of this style takes a more cautious approach, often choosing Defensive Attacks or even All-Out Defenses, until an opportunity presents itself to either widen the gap again or get inside the foe's reach. When stepping into close combat, a Monowire Mugging stylist will usually use Wrestling to establish a grapple, to ensure that his enemy cannot open the gap again.

Monowire Mugging is often claimed to teach cinematic stealth and methods to achieve ideal ambush positions, as well as the ability to fight in pitch darkness. In combat, cinematic Monowire Mugging fighters are reported to be able to attack readily from unexpected positions, such as seated or prone, and to be able to take out multiple foes in a single lightning-fast move.

Skills: Fast-Draw (Force Sword); Force Sword; Holdout; Monowire Whip; Wrestling.

Techniques: Crack; Entangle; Feint (Force Sword or Monowire Whip); Ground Fighting (Force Sword, Monowire Whip, or Wrestling); Targeted Attack (Force Sword Swing/Arm); Targeted Attack (Force Sword Swing/Weapon); Targeted Attack (Monowire Whip Swing/Neck).

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Invisibility Art; Light Walk; Lizard Climb.

Cinematic Techniques: Fighting While Seated (Force Sword or Monowire Whip); Whirlwind Attack (Force Sword).

Perks: Form Mastery (Monowire Switchblade); Quick-Extension (Monowire Switchblade)*; Quick-Sheathe (Force Sword); Sure-Footed (Uneven).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Combat Reflexes.
Disadvantages: Reputation (Thug).
Skills: Brawling; Shadowing; Stealth.
Techniques: Disarming.

SHOCK BOXING

4 points

Shock Boxing is the art of using the zap glove (***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 165) in combat. It develops at TL9, but persists through higher tech levels, with some users adapting the style to the neuroglove (***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 165) at TL10. Shock Boxing is primarily a self-defense and competitive style. Better equipment exists if you want to actively go out and kill people. However, zap gloves are very useful for getting the odds on your side in an unexpected fistfight, and some sport combat enthusiasts consider fighting with the gloves as a sort of "extreme boxing."

From a tactical point of view, this style is fairly simple. Shock Boxing stylists generally take a cautious initial approach; using Evaluate and Defensive Attacks, they try to land a hit and stun the opponent. Stylists enjoy using the Aggressive Parry technique both to block an opponent's attack and to gain another chance at stunning the attacker. Once that is achieved, a Shock Boxer will usually open up, throwing Committed or All-Out Attacks while the stun effect prevents the opponent from retaliating, and using Telegraphic Attacks to take advantage of the reduced defenses of the target. If willing to use lethal force, a Shock Boxing stylist will usually take a turn to switch the gloves over to the "kill" setting, once the opponent is stunned. When fighting multiple opponents, a student of this style will usually try to stun all of them first before switching to offensive tactics to finish any of them off.

Shock Boxing also teaches a range of grappling techniques, primarily to allow a stylist fighting an armed opponent to enter close combat and make the foe's weapons less useful. Few complex grappling methods are taught, however. The standard tactic is to stun the target with the gloves, then use a choke hold until the foe submits or is unconscious.

A cinematic Shock Boxing stylist is capable of devastating punches and can control his own metabolism to resist the effects of zap glove attacks and other negative afflictions. In a fight, they are said to be capable of moving with a punch, avoiding the brunt of even a successful hit, and rumors tell of the dangerous "one-finger punch" capable of penetrating an opponent's vital organs or eyes. They also practice attacking with both hands simultaneously, often with one glove set to stun and the other to kill, getting the best of both worlds.

Skills: Boxing; Boxing Sport; Wrestling.

Techniques: Aggressive Parry; Choke Hold; Low-Line Defense; Uppercut.

Cinematic Skills: Body Control; Power Blow.

Cinematic Techniques: Dual-Weapon Attack (Boxing); Lethal Strike (Boxing); Roll with Blow (Boxing).

Perks: Neck Control (Boxing); Rapid Retraction; Skill Adaptation (Lethal Strike defaults to Boxing); Special Exercises (Striking ST 1).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Fit or Very Fit; Resistant to Electrical Attacks.
Skills: Fast-Draw (Ammo); Savoir-Faire (Gym).
Techniques: Counterattack (Boxing); Feint (Boxing).

An error in space navigation could put the crew in survival mode – or it could turn into a profitable opportunity.

New Perks

Quick-Extension†

You can extend or retract a variable-length weapon *quickly*. You can make a Fast-Draw roll against the relevant skill to reduce the time it takes to change Reach by one turn. If it only takes one round to switch normally, then you can do it instantly.

You must specialize by type of weapon: Quick-Extension (Monowire Switchblade), Quick-Extension (Variable Force-Sword), etc.

Rolling Stone

Just as a boulder gathers momentum rolling downhill, your Evaluate bonus increases geometrically with time. Where a normal fighter gets +1, +2, and finally +3 to hit after three turns, you get +1, +2, and then *+4*.

New Skill

Precognitive Block

IQ/Hard

Defaults: Precognitive Parry -4
Prerequisites: Weapon Master; Danger Sense or Precognition; and Shield skill at 18+

This skill allows you to block attacks that normally come in too fast to block – bullets, beams, etc. – *without* having Enhanced Time Sense.

This skill works exactly like Precognitive Parry (**GURPS Martial Arts,** p. 62), except that it applies to the Block active defense instead of parries. If this skill is allowed in the game, then Precognitive Parry should default to it at -4.

New Technique

(Environment Suit) (Skill) Training

Average

Default: Any Environment Suit skill
Prerequisites: Any Environment Suit skill; cannot exceed prerequisite skill +4

This technique allows you to increase your effective level in an Environment Suit skill for the purposes of *one* DX-based skill. You must choose two things: the Environment Suit skill (Battlesuit, Diving Suit, etc.), and the DX-based skill it applies to. When wearing the appropriate type of suit, use your level in this technique, rather than your level in the Environment Suit skill, to calculate the cap for the relevant skill.

Example: Sergeant Flynn has a Battlesuit skill of 14. However, he has Battlesuit Beam Weapons (Pistol) Training at 16. When wearing a battlesuit, his Beam Weapons (Pistol) skill is capped at 16, not 14.

About the Author

Kelly Pedersen lives and works in Saskatoon, Canada, where he continues to search for a job that will both pay for gaming books and allow him enough free time to participate in gaming sessions. He feels that writing for *Pyramid* is a good step toward fulfilling both of these goals. He enjoys a wide range of game systems and styles, but he remains committed to annoying his friends by pointing out, "You know, we could do this with **GURPS.**" In his free time, he bothers his cat.

The author would like to thank Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch for the writeup of the Rolling Stone perk, and permission to use it in this article.

New forms of combat will be developed to use the new equipment created by science.

TERRA INCOGNITA
TANGAROA
BY STEPHEN DEDMAN

A resource-poor world with a chilly climate, little useful land, and marginal atmosphere, Tangaroa was considered of minimal value as a colony world – but it was habitable enough to be chosen as a new home by a splinter sect of the Holiness Church of New Damascus, who considered themselves persecuted by their less devout neighbors. Their settlement at Point Revelation supported a population of nearly 2,000 fairly harmoniously for nearly 60 years, until a charismatic young preacher began predicting that the community was doomed. The preacher, Mark Trent, then moved away from Point Revelation, living as a hermit until a few followers joined him.

Forty days after Trent left, a massive avalanche destroyed the church at Galilee Bay during the Sunday morning services, burying nearly everyone alive. The few survivors from the town joined forces with Trent's followers to salvage what they could, and Trent's shack became the center of a new settlement, known as Mountainside.

Decades after his death, Trent is revered by the surviving Tangaroans, referred to simply as The Prophet or The Seer. Two of his sons and one daughter rule the Mountainside Revelation Church, all of them claiming to have inherited their father's gift of prophecy. His other 11 children have left Tangaroa – some starting new churches on other worlds, and some changing their names and living normal lives.

The Mountainside Revelation Church places a high value on psionic abilities, including at an untrained level, and all converts are tested for ESP and telepathy; even Danger Sense and Empathy are regarded by the Mountainsiders as proof of holiness. One of the church's darker secrets is the large number of novices who've died trying to test their precognitive talents in a Russian-roulette-style game of chance involving pure and poisonous water.

Some conspiracy theorists offworld claim that the Revelation Church is actually a training facility for telepaths and espers for military or intelligence organizations . . . and in campaigns where psi powers are possible, that may even be true. In any case, Tangaroan gunnery officers are famed for their skills at point defense, and Tangaroans are not welcome in any casino (perhaps fortunately, devout Mountainsiders are forbidden to gamble for money). In a non-psi setting, the Danger Sense, Empathy, and Intuition advantages will be slightly more common among Tangaroans than most races; if psi powers are permitted with restrictions, many Mountainsiders will have Unreliable powers of Clairsentience, Mind Reading, Precognition, or Special Rapport.

PLANETOLOGY AND ECOLOGY

Tangaroan water is dangerous to drink without adequate filters. Each untreated pint consumed does 1d-4 toxic damage.

Part of the year, Tangaroan air sickens those without breathing filters. During the windy season, the moss-like plants that cover much of the land release their spores. These are mildly hallucinogenic, though some maintain that it's the spore's toxin that awakens the psi sectors of the brain.

Anyone inhaling the spores must make a HT-2 roll every 30 minutes to avoid losing 1d-1 FP (1d+1 HP, on a critical failure). Prolonged exposure also causes Flashbacks or Phantom Voices (roll HT every day after exposure to recover). If the victims have pre-existing Phobias, even at quirk level, they will need to make Fright Checks as though confronted by the objects of their fears. Characters who are overconfident, impulsive, or megalomaniacal will become more so. Anyone with the Lecherousness disadvantage experiences less-descriminating desire. Those who have the Gluttony disadvantage may try to eat the local (poisonous) flora or fauna. Someone with the Paranoia disadvantage makes all self-control rolls at -5, with failure meaning he flees his companions, commits sabotage against them, etc.

The ecology of Tangaroa is roughly similar to that of Earth's Silurian period. Aquatic life is abundant, but land animals (apart from imported species) are rare. The largest animals are the water-dwelling, eyeless, eel-like serps, which range in size from inch-long larvae to 90' cartilaginous leviathans (use statistics for snakes for lengths up to 30'; see p. B458). Serps never venture onto dry land, but they can sometimes be found in water as shallow as 1/20th of their length. No species are venomous, but their bites often become infected.

Other marine species resemble jellyfish, leeches, and primitive molluscs. These, like the local plants, can be turned into food by high-tech processors, but taste vile (Will roll at -2 to eat). They are naturally as poisonous as the water. Though many native species have evolved bilateral symmetry and spinal cords, none have evolved limbs (or even fins), bones, or complex eyes.

HD 4588 (Lux Benigna)

Primary Star HD 4588 (Lux Benigna): Spectral type G0 V, mass 1.1 solar masses, age 5.3 billion years, effective temperature 6,000 kelvins, luminosity 1.32 solar luminosities, radius 0.0049 AU.

Orbit 1 (Lux Benigna I, a.k.a. Tamar): Orbital radius 0.14 AU, diameter 0.91 (7216 miles), density 0.8, mass 0.6, world type Standard (Chthonian). Trace atmosphere, hydrographics nil, average surface temperature 840K (1,052°F), surface gravity 0.728, apparent day 0.1 years (resonant). No moons.

Orbit 2: Orbital radius 0.28 AU, asteroid belt.

Orbit 3 (Lux Benigna II, a.k.a. Zarah): Orbital radius 0.55 AU, diameter 0.10 (793 miles), density 0.7, mass 0.0007, world type Tiny (Rock). No atmosphere, hydrographics nil, average surface temperature 530K (494°F), surface gravity 0.07, apparent day 238 hours. No moons.

Orbit 4 (Lux Benigna III, a.k.a. Perez): Orbital radius 1.1 AU, diameter 0.28 (2220 miles), density 0.8, mass 0.017, world type Small (Rock). Trace atmosphere, hydrographics nil, average surface temperature 390K (242°F), surface gravity 0.224, apparent day 27.5 hours. No moons.

Orbit 5 (Lux Benigna IV, a.k.a. Taragoa): Orbital radius 2.2 AU, diameter 0.973 (7716 miles), density 1.1, mass 1.013, world type Standard (Garden). Marginal atmosphere, hydrographics 87%, average surface temperature 270K (22.6°F), surface gravity 1.07, apparent day 42.2 hours. One moonlet (David).

Orbit 6: Orbital radius 3.8 AU, asteroid belt.

Orbit 7 (Lux Benigna V, a.k.a. Judah): Orbital radius 6.4 AU, diameter 10.45 (82,869 miles), density 0.22, mass 250, world type Medium Gas Giant. Surface gravity 2.29, apparent day 12.1 hours. Five moons and 13 moonlets.

Orbit 8 (Lux Benigna VI, a.k.a. Joseph): Orbital radius 10.9 AU, diameter 8.22 (65,185 miles), density 0.18, mass 100, world type Medium Gas Giant. Surface gravity 1.48, apparent day 10.7 hours. Four moons and 13 moonlets.

Orbit 9: Orbital radius 19.6 AU, empty orbit.

Orbit 10 (Lux Benigna VII, a.k.a. Maacah): Orbital radius 33 AU, diameter 7.07 (56,065 miles), density 0.17, mass 60, world type Small Gas Giant. Surface gravity 1.2, apparent day 17.3 hours. Six moons and eight moonlets.

Leviathan Serps

ST: 100	**HP:** 100	**Speed:** 5.00
DX: 9	**Will:** 10	**Move:** 5 (water)
IQ: 2	**Per:** 7	**Weight:** 40-60 tons
HT: 11	**FP:** 11	**SM:** +10
Dodge: 8	**Parry:** N/A	**DR:** 5

Bite (10): 11d-1 cutting. Reach C.

Constriction (10): 11d crushing + follow-up: Quick Contest of ST vs. victim's ST or HT; if win, victim takes creature's margin of victory in damage. Reach C.

Traits: Aquatic; Berserk (12); Blindness; Doesn't Breathe (Gills); Doesn't Sleep; High Pain Threshold; Pressure Support 2; Slow Eater; Temperature Tolerance 5; Vermiform; Vibration Sense (Water).

Skills: Brawling-10; Stealth-8.

SOCIETY ON TANGAROA

The vast majority of Tangaroans belong to the Mountainside Revelation Church, and have the following disadvantages: Disciplines of Faith (Mysticism), Honesty, and Sense of Duty (The Church). Many Mountainsiders who don't have any psionic abilities suffer from the Delusion that they do, and act accordingly. Other common disadvantages include Pacifism, Truthfulness, and Vows (chastity, sobriety, no gambling, etc.).

ECONOMY

Tangaroa is marginally self-sufficient, but it exports almost nothing beyond electronic religious texts. Its trade volume is negligible. There are no regularly scheduled flights to the planet, but it is close enough to other trade routes that free traders will carry pilgrims and mail between Tangaroa and nearby worlds when the price is right.

Wealthier Tangaroans reside in well-equipped kivas built deep into the sides of the mountains; the poorest live in pressure tents or modified cargo containers on the plateaus and ledges.

TRANSPORTATION

Tangaroa's mostly rough terrain and ice-cluttered oceans make travel difficult, so few Tangaroans will venture further from Mountainside than they can walk in a day. Some of the wealthier citizens own exo-spider ATVs (***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 225) or hover jeeps (***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 227), which they hire out. The hospital has a utility vertol (***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 229) equipped as an ambulance. Nevertheless, Tangaroans are generally more comfortable with skis, sleds, pack mules, kayaks, and rafts.

SECURITY

Tangaroa has no standing army. Law enforcement is left up to the churchwardens, who have the power to recruit watchmen, search-and-rescue parties, etc., when needed.

Epsilon Eridani is one of the nearest sun with planets known to be orbiting it. This stellar body is nearly 6.2 × 10^{13} miles from Earth. At light speed, it would take a ship about 10.5 years to get there.

Planetary Characteristics

Class of Primary Star: G0.
Mean Orbital Distance: 2.2 AU.
Orbital Eccentricity: 0.1 (perihelion 1.98 AU, aphelion 2.42 AU).
Obliquity (Axial Tilt): 34° (strong seasons).
Annual Period: Year 4.84 Earth years (1005.4 local days).
Apparent Solar Day: 42.2 hours.
Diameter: 7716 miles (0.973 times Earth's).
Density: 1.1 times Earth's.
Surface Gravity: 1.07 g.
Volcanic Activity: Light.
Tectonic Activity: Moderate.
Average Surface Temperature: 22.6°F (270K).
Hydrographic Coverage: 87%.
Atmosphere, Composition: Marginal.
Atmospheric Pressure: Standard (0.88 atm).

Population and Economy

Habitability: 7.
Resource Value Modifier: -3 (scant resources).

Affinity: 4.
Settlement Type: Colony, approximately 106 years old.
Technology Level: 8.
Carrying Capacity: 150 million people.
Population: 1,600 humans.
Population Rating: 3.
Average Annual Income Per-Capita: $21,700 (**GURPS** dollars).
Typical Wealth: Struggling.
Economic Volume: $30 million per annum (**GURPS** dollars).

Government

World Unity: World Government.
Government Type: Theocracy.
Control Rating: 4.
Installations: Religious center.
Spaceports: Class II ground facilities at Mountainside.

Punishments for proscribed behavior on Tangaroa range from fines and public shaming for nonviolent crime to imprisonment pending permanent exile for violent, serious, and/or repeat offenders. Imprisonment means house arrest for landowners, or a 10′ cell in a modified cargo container for the less fortunate. Prisoners are given water, but they must depend on their own wealth or charity for everything else.

Aaron Cruz, Mountainside Churchwarden

119 points

Aaron Cruz is one of Mark Trent's many grandchildren, but as he lacks the common family traits of charisma and a silver tongue, he has settled for a mostly administrative position as undersheriff and head of starport security.

Cruz is the first person most visitors to Tangaroa meet, and he often comes across as pedantic and officious. He is normally easy-going, but he reacts badly to anyone he thinks is lying to him – and he often finds it difficult to tell a joke from a deliberate lie. He takes the local laws very seriously, and he will enforce them to the letter, especially if he catches someone trying to smuggle any contraband (however harmless) through his starport. However, he is also absolutely dependable and usually the first person called upon to lead search-and-rescue parties. His other duties include issuing warrants, collecting fines, managing the prison, and occasionally teaching Sunday school.

Aaron has a windburnt brown complexion, crewcut dark brown hair with widow's peak, and hazel eyes. He's a healthy man of 46 who's otherwise unremarkable-looking. He weighs 170 lbs. and is 6′1″ tall.

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 12 [20].
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24; HP 12 [2]; Will 12 [5]; Per 13 [10]; FP 12 [0].
Basic Speed 6.00 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9; Parry 9 (Brawling).

Social Background

TL: 10 [0].
CF: Tangaroa [0].
Languages: Standard (Native) [0].

Advantages

Clerical Investment [5]; Danger Sense [15]; Fit [5]; Legal Enforcement Powers [5]; Religious Rank 2 [10]; Sensitive [5]; Temperature Tolerance 2 [2].

Disadvantages

Disciplines of Faith (Mysticism) [-10]; Duty (Church; 12 or less) [-10]; Honesty (6) [-20]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Pacifism (Cannot Kill) [-15]; Sense of Duty (Mountainsiders) [-10].

Quirks: Attentive; Chauvinistic; Dislikes robots; Exercises and prays every day, no matter what; Minor Addiction (Coffee). [-5]

Although real-world space is pretty boring, there are plenty of interesting things to encounter in cinematic space besides other ships. These include abandoned (or set) traps, battlefield debris, comets, cosmic storms, drifting alien artifacts, nebulae, space-dwelling organisms, and wormholes.

Skills

Administration (A) IQ [2]-11; Area Knowledge (Mountain-side) (E) IQ [1]-11; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Pistol) (E) DX+2 [4]-13; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Climbing (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Computer Operation/TL10 (E) IQ [1]-11; Criminology/TL10 (A) IQ [2]-11Detect Lies (H) Per+2 [8]-15*; Driving/TL10 (Hovercraft) (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Security) (A) IQ [2]-11; First Aid/TL10 (E) IQ [1]-11; Forced Entry (E) DX [1]-11; Forensics/TL10 (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Guns/TL10 (Shotgun) (E) DX [1]-11; Interrogation (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Judo (A) DX-1 [2]-10; Law (Local Police) (H) IQ+1 [8]-12; Leadership (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Observation (A) Per [2]-13; Running (A) HT-1 [1]-11; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-13; Search (A) Per [2]-13; Shortsword (A) DX [2]-11; Skiing (H) HT-1 [2]-11; Stealth (A) DX-1 [2]-10; Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Survival (Mountain) (A) Per-1 [1]-12; Theology (H) IQ-1 [2]-10.

* +1 from Sensitive.

In Maori mythology, Tangaroa is a god of the sea.

BEN ROSS, MECHANIC

151 points

Ben Ross arrived on Tangaroa shortly before his 14th birthday. His mother, like most pilgrims to the planet, believed that she had latent psionic powers. It took her more than a year to become disillusioned, and another four to raise the money for passage offworld. By this time, Ben had completed an apprenticeship to Mountainside's most successful mechanic and decided to stay.

Ben Ross was 26 when his employer died, leaving him the business, and his years at Mountainside had taught him a degree of discipline that had been lacking in his youth. Though not a believer, he mostly obeys the laws of the church. On the occasions when his fondness for sex and money get the better of him, he's been careful not to be caught.

At 28, Ross is still single and (as far as he knows) childless, though not always celibate. His knack for dealing with machinery is regarded as almost supernatural among the largely low-tech Mountainsiders. He's wealthy by local standards, owning two (used but well-maintained) exo-spider ATVs; a hover jeep; a large garage with workshop; a portable robofac; and a small but comfortable and well-equipped house. Apart from his vehicles, his main form of indulgence is his biathlon gear – skis and Gauss rifles, particularly the latter.

Ross will usually be found near the starport when a ship is due. Apart from the possibility of getting gossip about offworld sporting events, he also tries to pick up women who won't be staying on Tangaroa for long, rather than complicate matters by starting relationships with anyone who might expect him to be faithful. Visitors may also encounter him if they need mechanical repairs, or to hire a vehicle.

Ross has a tanned complexion, blond hair and mustache, and blue eyes. He is a long-limbed, boyish-looking man, weighing 155 lbs. and standing 5'11" tall.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 11 [5]; FP 12 [0].

Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9; Parry 9.

Social Background

TL: 10 [0].
CF: Tangaroa [0].
Languages: Standard (Native) [0].

Advantages

Appearance (Attractive; Off-the-Shelf Looks, -50%) [2]; Artificer 2 [20]; Fit [5]; Flexibility [5]; High Manual Dexterity 2 [10]; Temperature Tolerance 1 [1]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages

Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Bloodlust (15) [-5]; Disciplines of Faith (Mysticism) [-10]; Greed (15) [-7]; Honesty (15) [-5]; Lecherousness (15) [-7]; Overconfidence (12) [-5].

Quirks: Alcohol Intolerance; Chauvinistic; Prefers having sex in vehicles; Proud; Skeptical of psi powers. [-5]

Skills

Area Knowledge (Mountainside) (E) IQ [1]-10; Armoury/TL10 (Small Arms) (A) IQ+2 [2]-12*; Boating/TL10 (Motorboat) (A) DX [2]-12; Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Carpentry (E) IQ+2 [1]-12*; Climbing (A) DX+2 [1]-14†; Computer Operation/TL10 (E) IQ+2 [4]-12; Current Affairs/TL10 (Sports) (E) IQ [1]-10; Driving/TL10 (Hovercraft) (A) DX [2]-12; Driving/TL10 (Mecha) (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Erotic Art (A) DX+2 [1]-14†; Fast-Draw (Long Arm) (E) DX [1]-12; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2]-10; First Aid/TL10 (E) IQ [1]-10; Freight Handling/TL10 (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Guns/TL10 (Rifle) (E) DX+5 [16]-17; Jumping (E) DX [1]-12; Mechanic/TL10 (Hovercraft) (A) IQ+4 [7]-14*; Mechanic/TL10 (Legged Motive System) IQ+5 [12]-15*; Mechanic/TL10 (Vertol) IQ+3 [3]-13*; Merchant (A) IQ+1 [4]-11; Navigation/TL10 (Land) (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Observation (A) Per-1 [1]-10; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-12; Sex Appeal (A) HT [1]-12‡; Skiing (H) HT+1 [8]-13; Survival (Mountain) (A) Per [2]-11.

Techniques: Precision Aiming/TL10 (Rifle) (A) [4]-13.

* +2 from Artificer.
† +3 from Flexibility.
‡ +1 from Appearance.

New solar systems, spatial anomalies, and sources of raw materials are often found by taking the long way to the ultimate destination.

Followers of the Mountainside Revelation Church strive to make their desolate world more bearable.

ADVENTURES ON TANGAROA

Here are some ideas for adventures on this subtly dangerous planet.

Rock of Ages

When a geologist doing a survey of Tangaroa discovers a fossil-rich site hundreds of miles from Mountainside, xenobiologists charter the heroes' ship to take them to the planet. The thought of the expedition angers the Mountainsiders, who think fossils are created by the devil.

As there's no place near the site where the ship can land, the scientists hire an ATV from Ben Ross and pay the PCs to come along as assistants. Ross has commanded the autopilot to track the ATV to the dig, so the Mountainsiders can locate and destroy the find. This programming can be easily disabled by someone with even a little hacking skill.

Have the Mountainsiders managed to discover the site by other means – such as psionics? Have they sabotaged the ATV? Which commandments are they prepared to break in order to destroy the fossils?

Dangerous Game

Winter sports are popular on Tangaroa, and the PCs are hired to transport Tangaroan athletes to the sector's Winter Games. When they arrive, however, they learn that the biathlon champion, Michael Garcia, has disappeared – and his beautiful wife, Eve, has been found dead in their home, shot with a 3mm needle rifle. Garcia's rifle is also missing.

Cruz forbids the team to leave until Garcia is found, even though Garcia's rival biathlete, Ben Ross, is eager to take his place. If the investigators want to be paid, they'll have to join in the manhunt – helped, or possibly hindered, by Ross and a posse of Tangaroans who might or might not have psionic powers.

If Garcia is a fugitive, then he's armed and an excellent shot. If he's been murdered by his wife's killer (Ross is the obvious suspect), then the PCs may be in even greater danger.

Call Me Jonah

When a robot created to study Tangaroa's marine life disappears, the last images it transmitted suggest that it was swallowed by an enormous serp. The scientists who built the robot are offering a $25,000 reward for its retrieval Unfortunately, its batteries (recharged with solar panels) are failing, and its transmissions can only be detected intermittently. The robot was built around a modified aquasled, and a serp large enough to swallow that can easily swallow a human . . .

STEPHEN DEDMAN

Stephen Dedman is the author of *GURPS Dinosaurs* and the novels *Shadowrun: A Fistful of Data; The Art of Arrow Cutting; Shadows Bite*; and *Foreign Bodies.* He has also written a number of *Pyramid* articles and other RPG material, plus more than 100 short stories published in an eclectic variety of magazines and anthologies.

He is co-owner of Fantastic Planet, a science fiction and fantasy bookshop in Perth, Australia, and is trying to save enough experience points to buy off the long-standing Poverty: Struggling disadvantage. For more information, check out **stephendedman.com.**
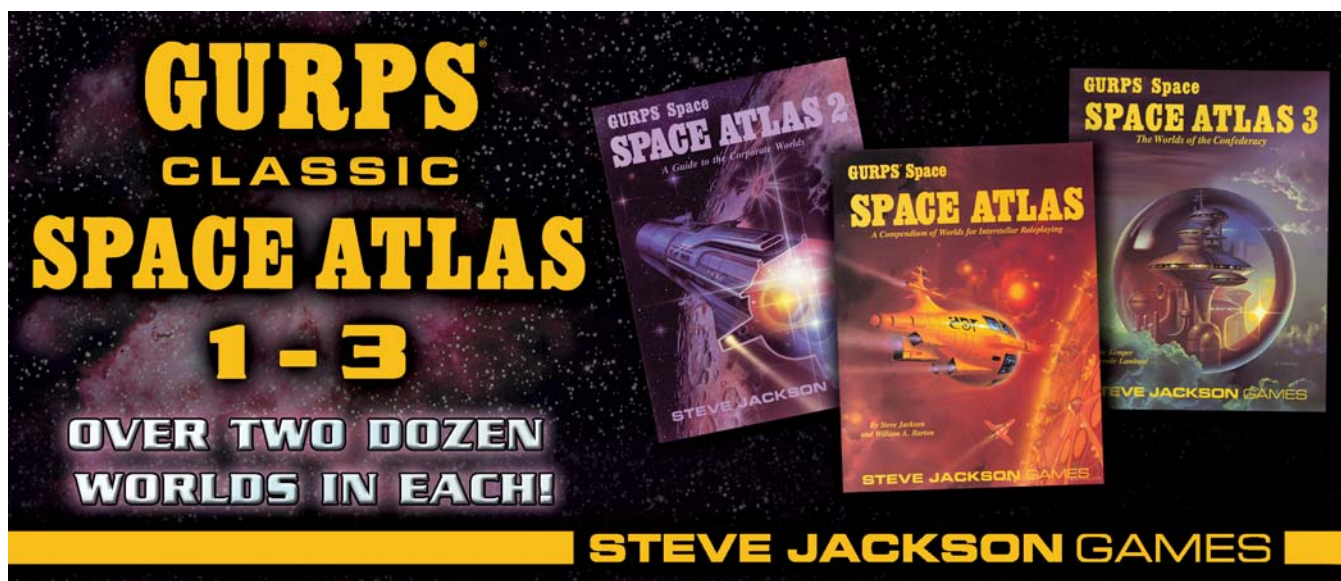
Random Thought Table

Four Tips for Space-Opera Games

by Steven Marsh, *Pyramid* Editor

We're living up to the *Random Thought Table* moniker this month, as we take a dash of random ideas we didn't quite have room for elsewhere. None of these "rules" are writ in stone, of course, and it's possible to provide counterexamples to any of these and still have a rip-roaring game. Nevertheless, these items are probably right more often than not when it comes to space opera; if nothing else, trying to think of counterexamples can get the creative juices flowing, which is always conducive to good gaming.

Blast your creativity to the stars!

Space Opera Is Mutable

More so than many genres, it's possible to incorporate a variety of adventures under the space-opera umbrella. Do you want to run a "hard" military sci-fi adventure with fleet movements and strategic planning? No problem; the heroes find themselves placed in control of a fleet of ships, in a backwater sector of space where none of their cinematic shenanigans will save them.

Do you want to run a Conan-style near-fantasy tale? Simple! The heroes crash-land on a technologically regressed planet, where they immediately find themselves captured by a tribal warlord. Now, armed only with whatever low-tech gear they can scavenge, they need to fight their way out, discover whatever secrets the planet holds, and escape!

Do you need "magic"? A space-opera setting can have psionics or superscience that can simulate the effects you need. Trying to do horror or low-powered adventures? The baddie is able to neutralize the cinematic effects the heroes wield. And so on. So long as the players are willing to go along with a crazed idea, a space-opera game can probably support it.

Avoid Extremes

This may sound odd, but space-opera games have a hard time living down to too much extremism on an extended basis. The problem with extremes is that it's all too easy to write yourself into a corner. What do you do for an encore?

For example, the original *Star Wars* trilogy had a bunch of extremes. A planet that seems to be nothing but ice. A planet that's nothing but desert. A planet that's just a big cloud. A planet that's just a big forest. Unfortunately, by painting in such broad strokes, it was difficult to do anything that felt new afterward. When we come back to Tatooine in *Return of the Jedi*, the universe doesn't feel like an infinite canvas but more like a small suburb; if there are infinite worlds, why are we back here? By the time the audience makes additional trips to the same planet in the prequel trilogy, the sprawling universe feels more like a one-bedroom efficiency apartment: "Our kitchen is also our dining room, and it's next to the guest/living room. Oh, and the seat of the sprawling crime empire? It's the same world as the birthplace of the one who'll bring balance to the force, and – through unrelated events – the home of his son. Weird, eh?"

Now, extremes are really flavorful, but leave yourself some wiggle room. For example, "the most-feared bounty hunter in the cosmos" is a really tasty morsel, but once the heroes kill him, then what? "Oh, no! It's the *second*-most-feared bounty hunter in the cosmos!" That just doesn't have the same ring.

The **GURPS Space Atlas** series (available as PDFs from e23) offers vital information about new worlds to visit for business or exploration.

But no flavor is lost if you simply recast it: "He's the most feared bounty hunter in five systems." Or even, "He's one of the most feared bounty hunters in this sector." Heroes who are up against such a threat aren't going to breathe a sigh of relief, thinking, "Thank goodness there might be tougher bounty hunters out there; we can keep our guard down!" No, they'll take the same precautions they would for the most-feared bounty hunter in the cosmos . . . only, if/when they take care of him, all future bounty-hunter waters won't be tainted by "second-best" concerns.

LET HEROES CORNER THE MARKET

As a converse to the previous advice, if a player wants his hero to be the best in the group at a skill or ability, then by all means let him do so. The "pilot" hero should never need to worry about someone else in the group overshadowing his ship-flying abilities, nor should the metaphysicist be concerned that another PC will develop psi abilities that eclipse his. (This advice applies to most RPGs, but it's especially important in space-opera games, where heroes are often little more than a cliché with a blaster.)

This doesn't mean that PC abilities can't overlap. Pretty much every published adventure for the original **Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game** from West End Games could be muddled through with Blaster and Dodge skills, so it's understandable if players of that system focus on that. But even so, if one of the heroes pegs himself as "the best trick shot for 10 parsecs" or "a master of all things acrobatic," then another PC shouldn't be able to steal his thunder.

FORTUNE FAVORS THE BOLD

Or, as the citizens of Latin Oneowon say, *fortes fortuna adiuvat.* In a true space-opera game, if the players spend more time deliberating their course of action than firing up the FTL drive, it's possible they're just not getting in the spirit of things. If need be, have Space Nazis burst in with blasters and keep the action moving.

Conversely, the GM should reward practically *any* course of action over inaction. Sure, in the real world, "Let's cruise

around space looking for clues" is an incredibly bad idea . . . but such notions just plain work in a space-opera universe.

In game systems with "hero points" or other game-altering effects, doing something decisive and interesting to the "audience" is almost certainly worth one of those points – especially if the situation the heroes end up in as a result needs such points to escape the new peril!

Space is as infinite as we can imagine, and expanding this perspective is what adjusts humankind's focus on conquering our true enemies, the formidable foes ignorance and limitation.

– Vanna Bonta

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over nine years; during that time he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son Sam!, who is a two-year-old force of nature entirely worthy of his exclamation mark.

ODDS AND ENDS

SET PIECES

Looking to spice up a space-opera encounter? Try one of these unusual set pieces.

No Gravity! Any encounter is radically different if there's no (or limited) artificial gravity. Imagine how (say) the Death Star rescue from *Star Wars: A New Hope* would change without firm footing.

Odd Gravity! By the same token, modifying the "rules" of gravity can mix up a mundane location. Imagine an eccentric mogul's mansion with artificial gravity active on all walls. Maybe he has a jogging track that's a Möbius strip!

Is That Possible?! Space opera usually has the technology to pervert the laws of physics, and they usually use that power for fairly trivial reasons. Barroom fight? Boring. Barroom fight in the Burning Bar, where everything is engulfed in (harmless) flames? Interesting! And it becomes even more so if the bad guy (or a hero) can flip off the "harmless" switch on the flames . . . Other ideas include incorporating lightning, plasma, and "impossible" structures made of water or sand into a location.

.. .., ...! Most space-opera settings tend to keep the volume cranked to 11, but there's something to be said for silence. An ordinary firefight in a spaceship hangar becomes much more interesting when the heroes can no longer hear the bad guys, their weapons, explosions, each other . . .

It Moves?! In a space-opera setting, anything can be a vehicle. Flying mausoleums, submarine palaces, and giant treaded academies all make for a nice change of pace. Heroes often try to leave places, but it's rare for places to try to escape the heroes.

What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

Ships can become damaged from all kinds of problems: being in battle, hitting space debris, sabotage, or coming too close to a natural phenomenon. Rather than simply marking off some points, spice up the adventure with problems in specific systems. Here are some examples.

- A control panel sparks and explodes, causing injury to nearby crew.
- A corridor becomes blocked with debris or exposed cables or pipes.
- A generator for the protective energy field is damaged, reducing the entire shield's effectiveness.
- The gravity goes offline.
- A hatch on a cargo bay is destroyed, causing some cargo to spew into space.
- The hydroponics bay or food-processing center ceases to function.
- Life support goes offline.
- The main lights go out, with illumination coming only from working control panels and emergency lights.
- The maneuvering system is down.
- A pipe in the waste-removal system explodes, filling the ship with a terrible stench and possibly showering someone with contaminated sludge.
- A water pipe bursts, flooding an area of the ship and stopping water from getting to some parts.
- The weapons-control system ceases to function.

MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND

WAIT, THE PRINCESS IS A WOMAN?!?

IN D6 SPACE (West End Games), YOUR AVERAGE PERSON FAILS TO NOTICE OBVIOUS FACTS 25% OF THE TIME. CHILDREN MISS THE OBVIOUS 66% OF THE TIME.
-S. Marsh-

Got a *Murphy's Rule* of your own? Send it to murphy@sjgames.com

GRAND, SWEEPING GESTURES

BY ANDY VETROMILE

You can't tell a space-opera story without making grand, sweeping gestures – both in the context of the game and at the table itself. It should be done as Gene Hackman says, "Like a Sergio Leone Western . . . with everything larger than life." Not that real life is rife with starfaring battlecruisers, but the action is all over the top.

Cosmic Encounter has gone through more releases (and re-releases, and . . .) than you can shake a force sword at. Right now, it's sitting comfortably at Fantasy Flight Games (**fantasyflightgames.com**) where it and all its fanciful new components can be had for $59.95, though for adaptation purposes, any copy should do just fine. None of the action is space opera, but the aliens certainly are. They can provide inspiration to GMs looking for that strange race with unknowable secrets, the sort of enigmas uncovered by the early agents of science fiction. The gaming group could encounter void-based ETs who try to contain intruders in a vast empty hole in space, for example, or whose powers multiply according to how many enemies they face. They might be vexed by intelligent viruses (who may or may not be hostile), or face the caretakers of a world-, galaxy-, or universe-destroying mega-weapon. Choosing a couple of races lets the GM set them at odds, so now the players can stumble into the backdrop of a unique war against which to play out the latest adventure. Make those endless combinations and possibilities work for you.

On the roleplaying end of things, and operating under the assumption that any game has to serve *some* sort of purpose, this may be a good time to pull out *The Secret of Zir'An* ($39.99, hardcover or PDF, Paragon Games). As a setting unto itself, this product offers up too little consistency to create a coherent world, but in the hands of a skilled storyteller, it has many of the elements needed to buckle a few swashes. A pseudo-science-fantasy setting, *Zir'An* never actually zeroes in on a single view of its setting or offers reasons why some things are high-tech and others are positively barbaric. However, the pieces can be made to show color in a space opera if they're pulled out and employed judiciously. Sky-borne cities, psychically resistant peoples, and creatures who can tap the collective consciousness of their race to gain knowledge are a few examples from the pool of available components.

Space: 1889 is another RPG that has a foundation of pulp-novel derring-do (a Victorian society intent on colonization) but elevates it into space and onto other planets in the solar system – now the sun *really* never sets on the British Empire. Mars has its complement of various races, travel through the aether is wondrously achieved with antiquated scientific notions, and the setting comes complete with lizardmen. Lots and lots of lizardmen. A new version of this classic is forthcoming from Pinnacle Entertainment (**peginc.com**), but in the meantime, many of the supplements are available either as reprints or PDFs. Check with former publisher Heliograph (**heliograph.com**) for information about the current state of the line.

Playing *Around the World in 80 Days* ($37.95, Rio Grande Games, **riograndegames.com**) may not be something the GM can put to use at the table every session, but the idea of traveling to one's destination via a variety of methods under a time limit fits well with a star-spanning adventure.
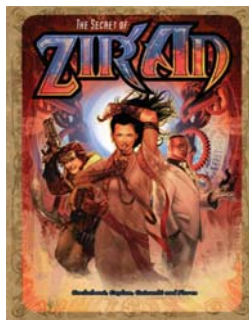
Space navigation mishap! The ship failed to leave port because the coordinates were input incorrectly.

The best advice for any space opera game is to never do anything in a small way.

The locations would have to be replaced with more exotic star systems or fantastic planetary scenery, of course, but a lot can happen along the way as the heroes trade out grumpus steeds for shuttlecraft, then solar-sailed vessels for wormholes or cosmic eddies. The game has an agent who relentlessly tracks the players, so the protagonists can have dogged pursuit should the GM choose to send the Patrol after them. He can widen the scope if he likes with **Amazing Space Venture** ($49.99, SherCo Games, **shercogames.com**). We've mentioned this one before, but it bears repeating as it's a rich vein of space exploration in a tidy little package. As the heroes make their way to the next star system in this tile-laying game that borrows heavily from **Carcassonne,** they may be assaulted by whatever the GM pulls out of the counter and unit stacks, from mysterious and disused space stations to pirates bent on claiming booty to star lanes that dead end at supernovas.

If you want your adventure a little less abstract, **Galactic Destiny** ($60, Golden Laurel Entertainment, **goldenlaurel.com**) determines the fate of many worlds amid a swirling galaxy with a good system of military, political, and diplomatic action. The players get a chance to create their own laws during the game – just like the senate scenes from the *Star Wars* prequels, except it's interesting, engaging, and actually bears on the plot. The game also allows factions to rebel against the rest of the galaxy; characters acting in an amoral fashion are subject to degeneration and even demonic control; and a monstrous alien force lurks behind the scenes waiting to strike when society as a whole grows too weak. It really amounts to a roleplaying game wrapped up into board-game form, a trick others have tried without nearly as much success.
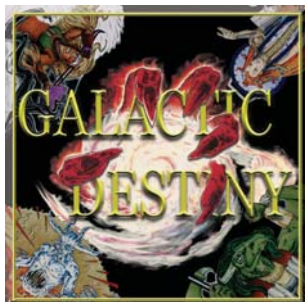
Those with a concomitantly deep desire to see things play out at an almost painful strategic level can seek out **Freedom in the Galaxy** (SPI and later Avalon Hill). With multiple levels of difficulty, this late-1970s wargame attempts to cash in on the then-current tide raised by *Star Wars* (there it is again). The rebellion must disrupt things for the dominant government in a series of star systems, making it too expensive for the empire to maintain its grasp on power; meanwhile, the bad guys must stomp them like fungus. Fans of long, slow campaigns with lots of character development can run their game in parallel with this one, giving both time to ripen and mature. (The game also includes a dashing hero and his lovely space-princess love interest – the designers hadn't seen George Lucas' third installment by that point.)

Once you have your setting, the characters need a mission of some sort, and Steve Jackson Games offers something that might serve in **Ninja Burger** ($24.95, **sjgames.com**).

The titular warriors in the game are made to deliver fast food to a multitude of increasingly difficult locations (everything from an office building to a military installation), so all the GM has to do is turn a ridiculous notion like a double-burger into something even more outrageous like the Hyper-Neutron Destabilizer. Use the cards to determine the target and the complications the team faces, and send the heroes to meet their MacGuffin-riddled fate. (Adding the cat-girls from Steve Jackson Games' **SPANC** is an exercise best left to the GM; he knows his game – and his players – better than anyone.)
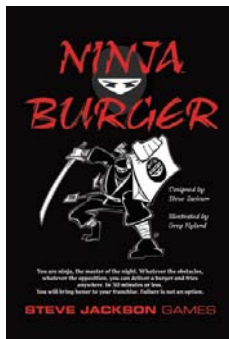
For anyone who wants truly epic adventure, of the sort found in *Lensman* novels and others, look for a copy of **Mutant Chronicles: Siege of the Citadel**. Originally released in the States by Pressman Toy Corp., it's now a miniatures game from Fantasy Flight Games ($29.99 for the starter set, **fantasyflightgames.com**). Not only does FFG have swell figurines (for use on the tabletop if not in the actual game), the play is more accessible. The **Citadel** version started players out weak and the villains strong . . . very strong (again, this is for those who seek *Lensman* levels of head-stomping). It was almost impossible for the two-man teams to actually survive most of the earlier missions (one player each adventure set his units aside and ran the extra-dimensional invaders). Furthermore, if the campaign model was followed, by the end, the more-experienced humans were begging for fresh alien meat to show up just so they had something to shoot at and wipe out with absurd ease. At least with the miniatures game, you get to make up your own scenarios based on the units' point totals.

Doom ($59.95, Fantasy Flight Games) is a good third option – most of the missions have already been tested and constructed for you. Additionally, good tactics have a better chance of winning the day against the slavering, otherworldly hordes of unnatural beasts. (Fewer rules questions, too.)

The best advice for any space-opera game is to never do anything in a small way. Never have the PCs walk when they could run, run when they could fly, or face the evil villain when they could face him *and* all his minions. If this seems like a tough scenario to set up, take several games from this list and throw them at the players all at once. They'll love it. No, really.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Vetromile is a freelance writer and editor with an insatiable taste for games. He's been reviewing them for over 10 years and still can't wait for the next release. He has also edited several **GURPS** books.

Recommended Reading
Space Is Big
by Matthew Pook

This article's title manages to be both trite and exactly sum up what the space-opera genre demands. It needs a canvas big enough for its larger-than-life protagonists, its conflicts between galaxy-spanning polities, its battles involving leviathan-sized starships, and its fantastic technology. It demands that men be real men, women be real women, and real aliens be whatever the special effects and makeup budgets can afford, all in a bygone age when that was the done thing. The genre asks for just a little romance, plenty of heroism and melodrama, and spaceships that go woosh (even in the vacuum of space). The space-opera roleplaying game has to embody all of that and let the players play up to the genre. It also has to allow room enough for the GM to create his material.

There is an RPG that captures the origins of the genre's name, defined by science-fiction fan Bob Tucker in 1941 from the earlier terms "horse opera" and "soap opera." Based upon Joss Whedon's *Firefly* television series, the **Serenity Role Playing Game** ($39.99, Margaret Weis Productions, **margaretweis.com**) is best described as a "space western." It is perhaps a drier and grittier approach to science fiction than space opera normally allows, and its scale remains too small for the space-opera genre (although it could slip in under its sensors).

Meanwhile, **Thousand Suns** ($24.99, Rogue Games, **rogue-games.net**) and **Traveller** ($39.99, Mongoose Publishing, **mongoosepublishing.com**) both possess space opera's sense of scale. Their inspirations are not space opera, but the imperial science fiction (which followed space opera) of Poul Anderson and Isaac Asimov. Each author posited a future interstellar state too large to be ruled directly from its capital, due to the lack of FTL communication and slow FTL travel. Both games can do space opera, but with effort, although the 12° system mechanics of **Thousand Suns** offers the greater flexibility to run a more cinematic game of style.

Most people, however, when they consider space opera, think of *Star Wars* and, in particular for most gamers, only the original trilogy. For them, the **Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game** (West End Games, 1987) remains not only the original, but also the best way in which to battle an imperial government. Its rules are fast and furious, with play designed to be cinematic, and its many sourcebooks were considered to be *Star Wars* canon. It has also been called the perfect licensed RPG, and for our purposes it certainly exemplifies space opera. There have been pretenders to this crown, from the *Star Wars*-like **Shatterzone** (West End Games, 1993) to the swashbuckling **Star Ace** (Pacesetter, 1984; now $7.95, Ronin Arts, **roninarts.com**) to **Hardnova][Space Action Adventures** ($12.49, Precis Intermedia, **pigames.net**), but none have taken it. Neither have any provided as good an introduction to the hobby as the **Star Wars Introductory Adventure Game Box Set** (West End Games, 1997). For now, the *Daring Tales of the Space Lanes* series (Triple Ace Games, **tripleacegames.com**), though written for **Savage Worlds,** provides excellent scenarios aplenty to run for that system or to adapt to another.

Another entry into the space-opera genre comes from StoryArt and its **Rocketship Empires 1936** ($8.99, **lulu.com/RocketshipEmpires1936**). The setting opens in 1919 with the Martians arriving on Earth. They've come not to invade but to make an offer: In return for advanced starfaring technology, mankind would drop its internal rivalries and join the Martian Hegemony as mercenary forces. Not only would this remove mankind as a future threat to the Hegemony, it would provide forces for a conflict that the Martians are losing. This agreement, signed with the League of Nations and known as the Hegemony Accord, only extends to within 25 light years of Earth, a region known as Neutral Space. Beyond this area lies Free Space, comprised of outward radiating Nationalized Corridors. In this space, Earth nations have expanded into the British Star Empire, the Kingdom of Holland (with its restored Dutch East India Company), Reich Space, Soviet Space, and even a new Papal state funded by public subscription. Earth's banned internal conflicts have been exported to Free Space: Cossacks from White Russian Czarist space conduct pirate raids for slaves and loot in the face of Red Russian expansion. Communists ferment revolution against the Chinese Star Republic.
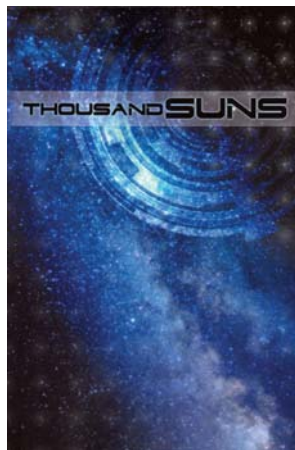
It is a very sobering feeling to be up in space and realize that one's safety factor was determined by the lowest bidder on a government contract. – Alan Shepherd

Space is big. Really big. You just won't believe how vastly hugely mindbogglingly big it is. I mean you may think it's a long way down the road to the chemist, but that's just peanuts to space.

– Douglas Adams, **The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,** *BBC Radio 4, 1978*

The Confederacy-inspired Star Confederation is recognized as separate from the American Federal Territories. Civil war looms in Spanish space.

The setting is full of little details, such as the League of Nations intelligence agency being the Order of the Golden Dawn, hints at something dark out in Jump Space, and the Martians restriction on archaeological sites. Various vessels are detailed (such as the *Hurricane II* snub fighter and the Lockheed Martin Model 14 *Super Electra* fast transport), though no deck plans are provided. An easy design system allows starship creation simply by filling a given hull size's various slots. Perhaps the best aspect of ***Rocketship Empires 1936*** is that it is virtually system-less, enabling the Director (GM) to use the rules of his choice. The adaptation process is greatly eased by a set of guidelines for the Director. Overall, ***Rocketship Empires 1936*** presents an engaging setting with which to do "Saturday matinee cinematic" or "tubepunk" space opera.

Another entry into the genre is ***Hellas: Worlds of Sun and Stone*** ($45.95, Aethereal Forge & Khepera Publishing, **hellas-rpg.com**), which casts the myths and peoples of Ancient Greece into a science-fiction setting. Coming in a colorful book in landscape format, ***Hellas*** describes itself as, "A generational space opera depicting Hellenistic Heroes overcoming fantastic odds to save their worlds and create a legacy for themselves, either by succumbing to fate or realizing their heroic destiny."

Some aspects are slightly different from history, while others not. There are only 12 gods, for example, but known space looks like a map of the Eastern Mediterranean. Interstellar travel is conducted by following the currents across the Pathalassa (or "cosmic all sea"), with each ship deploying a "slipsail." Numerous classical races are included to play, such as the Goregons with their hypnotic stare and the Zintar (powerful cephalopods who become centaur-like using four-legged robot walkers), but humans (or Hellenes) dominate and are considered the favored of the gods, as are all player heroes. Character creation is a detailed process. A player needs to determine how his hero is fated to die, to give a suitably heroic ambition, and to select a god as a patron. As his Glory grows, his patron deity will grant increasingly powerful gifts. The game's multi-generational aspect is carried out during a Respite or Winter phase, much like the Arthurian RPG, ***King Arthur Pendragon*** ($34.99, White Wolf, **arthausgames.com**). While other foes exist, such as the Persian-like Zorans, the game's metaplot opens with the recent destruction of Sparta. This marks the return of the Atlanteans,

masters of life and death who were thought destroyed in an ancient civil war with the Hellenes.

Hellas' Omni System mechanics do feel bland, but the game encourages heroic roleplaying (including having the players describing their heroes' actions in play in true heroic style), and the result is a muscular space opera. The only way to make it more muscular is to have the players roleplay the gods too, as in the film *Clash of the Titans* or John Wick's ***Enemy Gods*** ($12, Wicked Dead Brewing Company, **wicked-dead.com**).

If we contend that space opera requires a big canvas, it also needs a big game to handle that canvas. At 632 pages, ***Starblazer Adventures: The Rock and Roll Space Opera Adventure Game*** ($49.95, Cubicle 7 Entertainment Ltd., **cubicle-7.com**) is *that* game. It is based on the British *Starblazers* science-fiction comic book of the 1970s and 1980s. That series showcased self-contained stories, often with recurring elements, such as the Fi-Sci (Fighting Scientists of Galac Squad), the Star Patrol, and Cinnibar the barbarian warrior of Babalon. Both a sourcebook for the comic books and a roleplaying game, *Starblazer Adventures* is lavishly illustrated with the comic's black-and-white art that imparts the grandeur (and slight retro cheesiness that echoes the gray world of the 1970s) of its alien worlds, spaceships, and star monsters. Mechanically, it uses a pleasingly easy variant of the Fate 3.0 system (originally seen in the superb pulp action ***Spirit of the Century***), which encourages mechanical and roleplaying interaction between the characters and their environment. Character and campaign creation is expected to be a collaborative process, while the GM is provided with example upon example of aliens, starships, space monsters, war machines, mandroids and robots, worlds, and organizations, all drawn from the comics. GMs also get an easy-to-use tool and the guidelines with which to create new elements. The perfect toolkit nature of ***Starblazer Adventures*** is good enough to capture the interest of any science-fiction GM, but the flavor of the comic manages to give this RPG both a grim grandeur and showcase its options. Just as the genre demands, ***Starblazer Adventures*** keeps its canvas large.
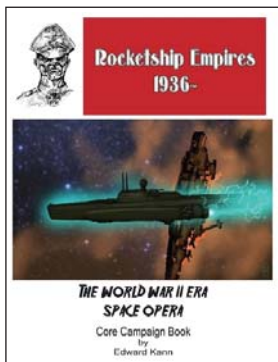
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matthew Pook resides in Birmingham, England, with the requisite pair of black cats and a perky Goth (not obligatory, but fun nonetheless), plus more games than he can eat. A pedant and proofreader by day, a reviewer by night, he has been gaming for nearly 30 years. He has been saying mostly good things about those games for almost 10 of those years now.

LAST WORD

WITH CHRIS BIRCH

For the *Last Word* in each issue of *Pyramid,* we chat with someone in the game industry known for his work in the topic field. This month we talked with Chris Birch, coauthor and line developer of Cubicle 7's *Starblazer Adventures: The Rock and Roll Space Opera Adventure Game,* the 632-page hardcover that just saw its release in July.

PYRAMID: So, Chris, what's the last word on space opera?

CHRIS BIRCH: Wooooooooohooooooooo!

"Wooooooooohooooooooo!" eh? Very onamotapoetic! Is there a definition?

I think that space opera is more a feeling you get when you realize the sheer opportunity for adventure on a galactic scale.

So, it's an exhilaration of knowing not even the sky's the limit?

Yes, it's the gleam in the kid's eye as he opens the present with the toy rocket ship, the guy poring over the deck plans for a vast battle cruiser, the dad reading epic tales of the end of the universe to his daughter and seeing she's drifting away with the story.

> ## Wooooooooohooooooooo!
> ### – Chris Birch

In a space-opera RPG, how do you channel that infinite possibility into a course of action? Unless the PCs are being led around by the nose, it seems there's a danger that – if anything's possible – then you might have a hard time deciding.

Of course, and I think space opera does really unlock the imagination. The secret is to give clues to plots, and let the players unlock the story with you. I'm a big believer in constructed plots that give players space to fill in the details; after all, how do you know your players will get excited by fighting ancient aliens, as opposed to learning who killed those aliens and bringing them to justice? Sometimes the real creativity is in the awesome interaction of GM's mind and player spontaneity.

Are there any "wooooooooohooooooooo" moments you can think of from your own gaming?

My first playtesters were all non-gamers; I'd recruited three couples I knew for some dinner parties where we'd play "this storytelling game" set in space that I was writing as a book. Their characters had encountered a space station that had been taken over pirates but was mysteriously deserted. One of the players was probing the station for life signs with her psionics and used what the Fate system calls a Declaration to indicate her character "felt a disturbing presence." I ran with it, and we went from a pirate story to a scary horror movie, as the presence took her over and led her to the cargo bay to open a container they'd bought aboard. We left the night on a cliffhanger with her friends shouting, "Noooooo . . . !" as she went to open the container door . . .

I'd prepared this whole pirate encounter, but my friends were so excited by the idea of something dark that I rolled with it. We talked about it for months after. So, I think true space opera is about opening the doors to creativity. Anything can happen in space: vast star creatures, lost worlds, ancient races, planet-sized war machines, dimensions, and warp travel. A GM has to be prepared to open his mind to the endless possibilities of space and, in doing so, can help players have those truly "wooooooooohooooooooo" moments.

If you lived in the **Starblazer Adventures** *universe and were given a ship and a crew to do whatever you wanted, where would you go?*

Hmm . . . It reminds me of an epic space-opera love story where the prince of a world goes on a journey, visiting all the ancient cultures of the galaxy to prove his love for the princess. I'd probably sail to the center of the universe to see the sights that ancient races have strived to see, and find the truly epic places in the galaxy that inspire awe or fear.

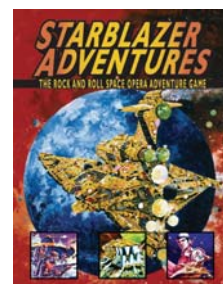*More awe-inspiring than a 632-page RPG?!*

Well, as a younger gamer, those early space-opera RPGs were the ship and the crew to take me where I wanted to go. But it was like getting in to this amazing starship and turning the power on to find out we didn't even have a warp drive. I always felt those games were lacking the tools and the substance to really fire my imagination.

Yes, it is nice to hold a core book that **feels** *like it won't leave you hanging in the void of space. So what's neat, new, and interesting with Cubicle 7 nowadays?*

Well, a new home, new friends, a whole schedule of games . . . We've joined the Rebellion Group (a major British video-game developer whose sister companies include Abaddon Books, *Death Ray* magazine, and Mongoose Publishing), so it's all turrets on autofire!

Plus, we've finally got **Starblazer Adventures** in print, which has been my personal intergalactic mission this last three years. The release of **Starblazer Adventures** has opened the door to a ton of new games: a huge setting called **Mindjammer** in October that does the whole transhuman-space theme for **Starblazer;** and the very exciting **Legends of Anglerre** at Christmas, which is **Starblazer** with a massive +10 battleaxe – an epic fantasy RPG that's compatible with **Starblazer Adventures** and based on the fantasy comics in the *Starblazer* series.

Starblazer Adventures *is available at* **cubicle-7.com.**