PYRAMID

DEEP SPACE

BAZAAR
Nathan M.M. Meluvor

SPACE PIRATES
Adrian Tymes

SPACE WRECKS
David L. Pulver

AETHYRIC SPACE
Christopher R. Rice & J. Edward Tremlett

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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Cover Art
Alan Gutierrez

In This Issue

Fire up the thrusters and get ready for adventure . . . that-a-way! This issue of *Pyramid* is devoted to deep-space exploration, with an emphasis on excitement and adventure.

Some space settings are magical . . . and that's literally true in *Aethyric Space!* Join Christopher R. Rice and J. Edward Tremlett as they take you on a tour of a complete space-opera campaign setting, where Ritual Path magic empowers strange spacefaring vessels. Discover the history, rules, setting, and gear of those who aspire to use aethyr.

Shopping isn't something that's just a safe activity between adventures; sometimes it can be downright *Bazaar.* This crossroads tethers together the impossible to make your shopping dreams a reality. If it's available to purchase, you can probably find it in this systemless location!

If you're looking for loot in all the wrong places, you can do worse than exploring *Space Wrecks.* **GURPS Spaceships** author David L. Pulver takes you on a tour of four different space wrecks, complete with appropriate **Spaceships** stats for what heroes might unearth. For each vessel, you'll discover the history, the disaster, and the possible rewards intrepid investigators might cart off.

If you find yourself in a bad sector of the galaxy, watch out for *Space Pirates.* Learn about various types of ne'er-do-wells that heroes might run up against (or even ally with!), complete with a sample setting that includes **GURPS** character-building guidelines and **Spaceships** vessels that such inexorable entrepreneurs might use.

Not everyone is just some random mook in a rubber mask; often the inhabitants of those far-flung worlds have *An Alien Way of Thinking.* These new **GURPS** traits will let you represent strange ways that an extraterrestrial race might interact with the world.

In this month's Random Thought Table, we'll look at pressing your luck and how it's an especially appropriate element to introduce to interstellar investigators. With this issue of *Pyramid,* you'll get new places to see, new faces to be, and lots of stuff to buy or sell for the right fee. The stars are your destination, and this issue's your ticket!

Anyone who sits on top of the largest hydrogen-oxygen fueled system in the world, knowing they're going to light the bottom, and doesn't get a little worried, does not fully understand the situation.

– John Young

FROM THE EDITOR

SET COURSE FOR THE MYSTERIOUS VOID

One of the things I loved about the old *Star Trek* television series (and, to a slightly lesser extent, subsequent shows) is that it really allowed for the notion that "space" exploration could mean darn-near *anything*. A planet-eating corn Bugle? A giant Abraham Lincoln? Space hippies? Time travel to the 1930s? The literal edge of space? All of these were possible . . . and more.
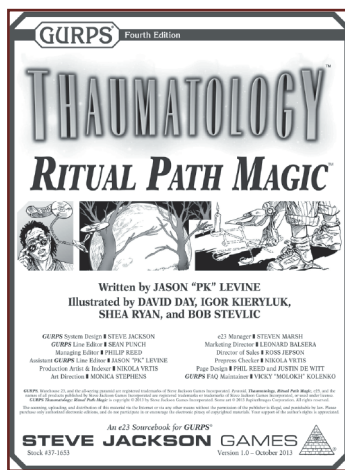
There's definitely room for campaigns where space feels familiar and well-trodden. Not every game needs to be a nonstop litany of mind-blowing revelations. In a lot of ways, science fiction works best when there's a baseline level of wonderment that's treated as normal. Faster-than-light travel? Replicators conjuring perfect food and drink? Robots able to carry on fully human conversation. Yeah, it's all nice. (Look at how mundane you likely treat your own Internet access, and compare it to someone from 1977: "You can conjure practically any song, book, movie, or television show from the ether on a device you put in your pocket?! Along with any fact or item of trivia? *And* you can use it to avoid telephone calls?!")

But I've also wandered through my own town – a relatively small city, in the grand scheme of things – in the wee hours of the morn, and found myself surprised by elements that are just off the beaten path, or things that I thought were true that I now need to recast in a different light. And if a town of 100,000 people can hold surprises, why should I imagine the vast expanse of the universe can be any *less* surprising? (It also helps that I have the direction sense of a blindfolded Roomba, so the odds of my wandering into something new and interesting are greatly increased over what's experienced by competent navigators.)

This issue, then, is an ode to ways the untapped parts of the galaxy can still surprise us . . . in both totally new ways and in aspects that feel both familiar yet perfectly suited for the infinite canvas of a universe of possibilities. It's a great big universe; enjoy the ride!

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

So how was this voyage to new and uncharted realms? Did you find something here you'll bring along in the cargo bay? Or should something remain hidden among the stars? Let us know your thoughts privately via email at **pyramid@sjgames.com,** or by joining the public discussion at **forums.sjgames.com.**

Additional Material: Jason "PK" Levine

AETHYRIC SPACE

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE
AND J. EDWARD TREMLETT

Ship's Log: 2.4.2305.

Encountered another Regency capital ship today. It was line-riding to Gamma-Tau 76, just like us, and going so fast I couldn't even order bodyforms before it was alongside. Their Battle-Casters were on promenade, as usual, and there was a scary moment when they seemed ready to attack.

Thankfully, they held fire, and were well past us a second later. Apparently the Understanding still holds, even this far into the uncharted territories. Or maybe they don't care to waste resources they could use against the Fau? I hear they've been taking a beating lately.

But that's the third capital ship this week. That leads me to believe they're "saving" more planets along the route. If so, I hope we get to Gamma-Tau 78 first – we really need that aethyr-ring, and it would be extremely awkward if we both tried to establish a Presence there.

*Awkward **and** dangerous . . .*

They say that outer space is magical. They have no idea how right they are.

Once one leaves the seemingly staid cradle of a star system, what was once called "magic" reigns supreme over cold and barren technology. A species that makes it that far – claiming their cosmic Birthright – is in for a massive shock, as this discovery makes interstellar travel a lot easier than expected. Journeys between stars take only days or weeks instead of generations, ships can be grown instead of built, and the frail human form can be changed to suit any environment.

This revelation brings many undreamed-of opportunities, but also presents complications, dangers, and the true meaning of fear. In corners of the galaxy we haven't yet begun to glimpse lay star-spanning civilizations far older than the whole of our recorded time – endlessly fighting and out-maneuvering each another to claim systems rich in magical energy and transmutable resources.

All the while, they dance between a *truly* ancient and powerful empire that can brush them aside any time it cares to, and an oncoming menace too terrible to ignore.

In a universe ripe with such dangers and opportunities, only one thing is for certain – once Earth's children claim their Birthright, there is no going back. With that in mind, this article provides a startling, new magical framework for deep-space campaigns, where the word is flesh and steel, interstellar conquest is unavoidable, and mages are the most powerful resource of all. It gives the history of this version of the universe, presents a number of star empires that rely on magic, and reveals a terrible threat that devours it whole.

This article requires **GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions** or **GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic,** because that is the magical system used in this campaign setting. The **GURPS Spaceships** is highly suggested for designing space-faring craft, and **GURPS Space** is handy for its wealth of character templates and planet-creation information.

THE WAY OF THE WORLDS

*The **Orthrus** floated just outside the node – whining like a dog impatient for a walk.*

It was a brand-new capital ship: miles long, filled with the latest of everything, and ready to establish Presence in at least five aethyr-rings. The crew was already aboard and bodyformed for the journey, and the bridge crew was about to teleport over.

*As the crew worked and waited, anxious to be away, Pathfinder Gaius Nielson connected himself to the **Orthrus'** engines for the tenth time in as many hours. Reaching out to touch the aethyr-line they floated upon, he could see it reaching from here to Sirius. He could also see the next line, leading to Ross 128, and the lines and rings after that, heading to their eventual destination – deep within the Uncharted.*

*"Soon," he whispered to the **Orthrus.** It whined a little less at that.*

The great secret of the universe is simple: all magic comes from the stars.

The blast that creates a star recreates the birth of the universe itself. That small replica of the great miracle – in which *nothing* became *something* – brings forth light, heat, and possibly life. Where there is life, or its potential, there is magic; when the magic is irrevocably destroyed, it is gone.

Most of the magic in that burst of life-giving energy – *aethyr* – rushes outward to the edges of the solar system, and congregates where the heliosphere meets the inner edge of the Oort cloud. The sphere of where this mystical energy lies is known as an *aethyr-ring,* and is connected to the aethyr-rings of other, nearby stars by powerful *aethyr-lines,* which are anywhere from thousands to millions of miles across.

Between the star and the aethyr-ring, in the so-called *null-zone* (or NZ), magic is a rare and unusual phenomenon, wielded only by mages. But once at the aethyr-ring, and then beyond, the true Birthright of every sapient being becomes readily available, allowing for all to learn and work magic.

This makes the aethyr-ring a hive of mystical activity. At massive, aethyr-rich *nodes* – free-floating or nestled within the ice – immense banks of support staff work around the clock to change the faces and fates of entire worlds. Connected by powerful communications enchantments, they cast spells both great and small for clients, charges, soldiers, and statesmen inside the null-zone.

They haul citizens and matériel between the inner planets at blinding speed, transmute matter, cast defensive and offensive spells through others, and ensure that a level of peace and decorum is maintained.

Meanwhile, construction crews mystically assemble great ships to be sent out to neighboring stars. Pathfinders have their souls wound into these mighty line-riding spacecraft, and then take the ships from aethyr-line to aethyr-line – circling the aethyr-rings of other systems as they make their way about the universe, there to explore and exploit new systems in uncharted places.

If a world's predominant lifeform has not yet reached its aethyr-ring and asserted its Birthright, then *anyone* can establish a Presence there for themselves. Once this control is established, it is very difficult for the indigenous lifeforms to reverse the process – especially if the usurpers have no intention of giving up without a fight.

It is a harsh reality, but one that meshes perfectly with the expansionist urge of any empire. The aethyr-ring ignored this day *will* someday spawn a star-faring civilization. These will most likely be rivals or enemies – rarely allies, and *never* friends.

So do the great star empires go ever-outward, scouring the uncharted territories for living systems, and harvesting the raw aethyr (commonly called *starstuff*) between. They turn the populations of entire worlds into citizens, soldiers, or slaves, and mine their planets and moons for ore and gas to transmute into building materials, weapons, and food. All the while, they fight off enemy empires, small nuisances, and strange entities, and keep an eye on both galactic horizons for the two greatest threats to them all.

The Long Story

It could be argued that humanity has left its cradle at exactly the right time. Any sooner and they would have been conquered or swept aside. But with the Galaxy in crisis, and things in flux, the children of Earth have numerous opportunities to grow, learn, and make a name for themselves. How long this will last is anyone's guess.

The First Ones

The first civilization to discover its Birthright was the Dafne, some seven billion years ago. They colonized much of the galactic center, but whether they were curious explorers or ruthless conquerors is unknown. Some legends say they sheltered like a tree, some say they devoured like a black hole – perhaps both views have merit.

They reigned for two billion years and then vanished, leaving puzzles, ruins, and a power vacuum behind. For a dozen millennia thereafter, numerous smaller civilizations tried to replace them. But their ambitions were ended by the Fau, whose plague of ships – named the Maw by its few survivors – appeared.

Swift and relentless, the all-devouring fleet headed toward Dafne space at speeds that should have been impossible off-line. Massive machines unfolded to eat living worlds, causing their aethyr-rings to release power, and all lines radiating outward to collapse. The loose mystical energy was eagerly licked clean by the fleet, which then moved on to the next aethyr-ring, and the next, leaving a darkness

Fortunately, the mysterious Zauber appeared – forging their own empire atop the bones of the Dafne, and erecting a mighty borderline. When the Fau tried to cross, the Maw was wrecked upon it, but the Zauber did not expand upon their victory. Apparently, they preferred to be left alone.

In their shadow, empires came of age, fought among themselves, and paid the ultimate price for daring the borderline. This endless cycle of development and devastation turned the Fau into legend, then myth – only to be proven real a billion years later when a new Maw appeared.

The Kingdom

The Fau resurfaced from a different angle of the galaxy's eastern edge, traveling toward the center for 50 millennia. As before, it was destroyed at the Zauber borderline, leaving only stunted, nearly annihilated star empires to mark their passing. Then came another billion years of expansion and decline, followed by 50,000 in which the ancient foe returned, only to be seemingly destroyed once more.

But one billion years ago, a new empire, arising from the eastern reach of the Norma arm, stood against the Fau when they marched. This empire (called the Kingdom), forged from the ruins of a war-torn world, had conquered enough aethyr-rings to create a fleet capable of taking on the latest Maw. That task accomplished, they absorbed the empires the Fau had weakened, and wisely left the Zauber alone.

For eons, the Kingdom expanded ceaselessly – gladly making war against all comers. But then an accident of untested magic turned their king into an immortal idiot, and the new leadership decided to be more cautious. Now called the Regency, they sought neutral Understandings with more-advanced neighbors, only invading those in need of "saving."

Understandings and Upstarts

One neighbor they were too late to "save" was the Sheefan Expanse. Some 150,000 years ago, this highly mercantile empire slid along the southeastern curve of the Scutum-Centaurus arm, and encountered the Regency. Their adeptness at using magic within null-zones gave them a decisive advantage, at least for a time.

In the shade of their conflict, many other civilizations came into being. Most notable was the Union, who began their march toward galactic enlightenment 16 millennia ago. Starting in the southern parts of the Scutum-Centaurus arm, just north of humanity's home in the Orion Spur, they became a nuisance to the Regency *and* the Expanse. Fortunately for the Union, their excellence in gathering starstuff made them a force to be reckoned with, and the larger empires decided to leave them alone.

Then, 3,000 years ago, unthinkable disaster struck the Expanse. Their homeworld, Da Sheefani, exploded, causing the hub of the empire to lose its magic. Attempts to learn what happened resulted in recrimination and regicide. Badly wounded, they offered an alliance with the Union against the Regency – one their former foes accepted, and profited from, for a time.

A thousand years to the day of Da Sheefani's destruction, the alliance declared total war upon the Regency. Their shared tactical advantages were *almost* a match for the Regency's magical prowess, but that was enough to score some early victories. However, once the Union's starstuff collection became badly compromised, the Sheefan's poor leadership began losing battle after battle.

The Nightmare Returns

The battle raged for a thousand years, resulting in virtual stalemate and burned systems. It might have gone on longer, but then came word that a new Maw had been seen. It seemed the Fau had been marching for tens of thousands of years, somehow escaping detection until they were almost upon the Sheefan Expanse.

Thanks to the Regency's continuity, all major civilizations knew of this threat, and were willing to accept Understanding. The empire did *not* offer one to the Sheefani, though, as their dwindling empire stood before the march of the Fau. Wisely, the Union took advantage of the offer – abandoning their alliance for the rotten fruit it had become.

In the thousand years since, the three major active empires have been primarily fighting the Fau, but still sniping at one another. Understandings keep empires from declaring war, but do not stop small skirmishes between their ships and soldiers. The Sheefani suffers, the Union flourishes, the Regency endures, and the tides of war and chance occasionally smile upon the small and defenseless.

THE PLAYERS

"Agreed then," the Union negotiator said, raising a freshly poured glass of something red and bubbling to Captain Barnes: "Your ship and crew join our fleet in a short-termed endeavor against the Regency's. If successful, we allow your ship to ride the Boson-65 Line unmolested by our ships in perpetuity."

STARSTUFF

"I'm pinned down!" Lieutenant Heller shrieked at her group operator as Regency troops killed yet another of her team. "Can't you send me some fire lines?"

"Hang on," the mellifluous voice whispered in her ear: "You're not the only team I'm casting for, you know."

"Gang it," she sighed, reaching into her belt and taking out the tiny pouch she'd won playing Faro on Altair-8. "Guess this was the special occasion I was saving you for, friend."

She shook the powder out onto her tongue. It tasted like spun sugar and pure power. In seconds, she felt alive again.

Seconds after that, she was making fire lines of her own.

Not all the aethyr from a stellar birth is trapped by its aethyr-ring. In the vast spaces between star systems, tiny granules of raw magic – *starstuff* – drift outward until they collide with those of other systems, forming shimmering pockets in the blackness. Gathered into sufficient quantities, this most precious of substances can defy the null-zone and overcome the effects of being off-line.

Its value is a matter of supply and demand, as well as life and death. Not every grade of citizen has enchanted contact gear, dedicated support staff, and a license to do anything. Less elevated people have to call or write in a request, hope they're answered in a timely manner and that those in charge of distributing the material believe the intended use is worthy.

Hence the great desire for this most precious of resources. It can power illicit magical devices, activate illegal spells, journey secretly from city to city or world to world, or simply save one's life in a tight situation. Its possession is often seen as a mark of refinement, but its unauthorized use may carry a heavy penalty – possibly even death.

The starstuff trade forms a great deal of the high-end commerce of the galaxy, with countless, minor civilizations engaged in its collection and sale. Huge nodes – placed at the conjunctions of aethyr-lines, or halfway between aethyr-rings – send out countless ships to harvest it. Meanwhile, pirate craft (and rival empires) constantly raid to gather the stuff to bedevil their foes, enrich their coffers, and supply it to their secret operatives.

Barnes was about to ask what "unmolested" meant, but the somewhat blank-eyed servant who'd served their drinks walked into a wall, spilling the bottle all over himself.

"Please pardon Kylyt," the negotiator sighed, watching him puzzle over how to clean himself. "He wasn't that smart when he murdered my 30th-great-grandmother, 2,000 years ago, and immortalization hasn't helped."

"I see," the captain said, suddenly glad of the death penalty.

Humanity has doubtlessly encountered the older, more established empires. Whether they have become allies, enemies, or wary neighbors depends on moral, technological, and circumstantial questions.

The Regency ("The Gods")

A billion years ago, a dying planet's two races discovered their Birthright in time to stave off planetary annihilation. Since then, the insectile Phaphio – a melding of those races – have been "saving" the galaxy, one benevolent invasion at a time.

Led by the Chamberlain and his Military Council, in the name of their immortalized, idiot King, they oversee some 7,500 worlds from their home aethyr-ring of Paramount. About 200 planets have gained full citizenship; the rest are enslaved to the third generation to earn it.

The Regency are undisputed masters of space combat. Their ships are the fastest and most protected, their battle-casters are eerily effective, and their shock troops are clad in the most fearsome bodyforms. Such is their troops' prowess that some say the Phaphio believe they *are* the gods lesser beings mistake them for.

The Union ("The Reasonable")

The Union desires to bring enlightenment to worthy planets. Absorption into the Union hopefully follows, but woe unto those who refuse or prove unworthy.

The Union boasts 6,000 worlds, 1,500 of whom are full members. It is headquartered on the patchwork planet of Ombra, made up of pieces of each full members' home planet. The chief movers are the Ser-Se, beings glamoured to appear as freakishly beautiful, androgynous members of whatever race is currently observing them.

While the Union's fleet is massive and varied, and almost a match for the Regency in numbers, their chief expertise is starstuff. Their methods of collection and refinement are the best in the galaxy, and they keep most of it to power their off-line stealth cruisers and exploratory ships.

The Sheefan Expanse ("The Star Striders")

The Sheefan Expanse was the primary rival of the Regency 3,000 years ago. They were also masters of almost half the quadrant. Now a reduced shadow of themselves, they only have the Fau to thank for their continued existence – perhaps not for much longer.

The remnants of the Sheefani royal family hide out on the city-planet of Tarzom, all too aware of their dwindling number of worlds (500 major, 750 minor). As the Maw approaches, entire systems scramble to escape, no longer interested in dying for the Expanse.

The elfin Sheefani have a magical advantage: a race of twins – usually fraternal, rarely identical – each is mystically connected to their other. When they go into an aethyr-ring, one stays behind to be the operator; any spell one casts upon himself instantly affects the other. This mastery of boots-on-the-ground combat magic made them a force to reckon with once, but now the true war lies in the stars.

The Fau ("The Plague")

The threat posed by the Fau cannot be understated. Their fleets are called the Maw because they leave giant black holes in the magical map of the galaxy – system after system turned dark in their wake.

No one has ever seen an actual Fau, at least that they know. If they have a home beyond the galactic rim, no one knows of it. All that is known is the shape of their massive, world-consuming ships: multi-hinged, grinding mouths that expand out to eat gas giants.

These World Eaters are surrounded by multiple, massive groups of smaller fighters, with ultra-sharp wings and retractable blades. The "Tooth Ships" swarm enemies, slicing off pieces and crew members, then fly back to the World Eater to deposit their prizes before returning to battle. They don't stop until all opposing ships are skeletonized wreckage, floating in space.

The Zauber ("The Companionless")

One of the great ironies of the galaxy is that its oldest known civilization wants no contact with its neighbors. Ships that enter where the mysterious Zauber hold sway do not tend to return. When they *do* they are badly damaged hulks, tumbling through space the way they came.

There are stories, of course. Some say they're what's left of the Dafne, after two billion years' worth of unimaginable chrysalis. Others say they're horrible monsters from before this universe was created – sleeping in massive, planet-sized crypts, tended by slave races, and awakening only to feed.

Some rumors suggest that the Zauber hold all the answers. They may know the secret of true immortality, interdimensional travel, and magic no one has even *dreamed* of. To some, this justifies the horrendous risks of contact.

CHARACTERS IN AETHYRIC SPACE

The Maw moved toward Cycnus-3 – Tooth-Ships flying like bees from a hive. Two dozen capital ships went up against it, firing all they had. Enough firepower to crack a planet, but still they had no chance.

*They ordered our cruisers in after even the **Periboea** was shredded. I disobeyed, turning about and making for the aethyr-ring. The others died behind us, screaming.*

*On the line to Kyon-87, I dared look back. Something **unfolded** behind the swarms of Tooth-Ships. Mouths inside of mouths, larger than the planet.*

*It bit down. Cycnus-3 **cracked.** The ring went dark.*

Thankfully, we were just far enough down the line before it collapsed. The Maw ignored us, marching to the next star instead.

By some luck, we had just enough starstuff to fly to the nearest port. But it was a half a year's journey, and by then, we all had bounties on our heads.

*So you tell me, friend – why **not** turn pirate?*

Aethyric Space is a TL10^ cinematic space-opera campaign where blade and blaster go hand in hand, but only magic can save the day. Technology can be powered with batteries, magic, or *both;* pre-programmed alternate forms are standard equipment; and immortality can be yours . . . for a terrible price.

The following traits will be helpful to the GM and players alike creating characters in this campaign setting.

ADVANTAGES

Anyone can cast spells in *Aethyric Space* as long as they have at least 1 point in Thaumatology, though they do so by defaulting to the appropriate Path skill at -6. Note that Magery 0 does not exist in the campaign (see *Magery,* below). Energy Reserve (Magic) (**GURPS Powers,** p. 119) may also be taken by anyone, but it's especially common among those who have trained as catalysts (those who have cultivated themselves as magical "batteries" for other casters to "tap") or pathfinders (casters whose sole purpose is to power spaceships; see *Pyramid #3/64: Pirates and Swashbucklers,* p. 31).

Externalist Training

1 point/level

Those without Magery can cast spells normally (often with help from a grimoire or by being in an aethyr-ring or aethyr-line), but are at -5 to all rolls. This trait allows you to buy off that penalty at 1 point per -1. At level 5, you suffer *no* penalty. Mages (whether or not they also have Ritual Adept) do not need this trait at all.

Magery

See *Ritual Path Magic,* p. 5

Magery 1 is fairly common among all the magic users of the various empires, while Magery 2 or 3 is rare enough that the possessor will be well treated. Magery 4 or higher represents

someone with a powerful tie to magic, and they are scooped up rapidly by their empire's magical services branch.

Anyone may purchase up to four levels of Magery in *Aethyric Space.* However, only internalists (those with Ritual Adept, below) may exceed this limit, though they must also purchase a special Unusual Background (below). Thus, only internalists may possess a Path skill higher than 16.

Ritual Adept

See *Ritual Path Magic,* p. 6

Internalists have the ability to work magic outside of an aethyr-ring or -line and this trait is how they do it. In campaign terms, they carry magic within themselves, allowing then to cast in null-zones (albeit at -1 to -10). This advantage is an inherent trait that may only be bought by those with the Unusual Background (Internalist) (see below).

The GM may permit characters to purchase higher levels of Ritual Adept (Time). If so, Ritual Adept (Time) 2 allows the caster to tap energy sources *instantly* and lets that person ignore up to -4 in penalties due to haste (including the penalty to cast a Blocking spell). Level 3 lets you ignore up to -9 in penalties due to haste. Each additional level costs 10 points, but spells can *never* be cast as a free action – they always take at least one second to cast.

An ancient and magical space-opera campaign setting.

Shapeshifting

See p. B83

Most of those who rely on bodyforms (p. 10) use spells to gain access to them. Dedicated *changelings* (those who practice using many bodyforms) may purchase their frequently used shapes as Alternate Forms with character points instead of casting a spell. Extremely powerful or versatile changelings can take Morph instead, often with Preparation Required (p. B114).

Unusual Background

see p. B96

Catalytic Magic: You ignore penalties for working together with other casters. When working together, the main caster can tap your mana reserve as if it were his own. You can use Thaumatology (instead of Path of Magic) to refill your mana reserve. When you sacrifice your FP, treat it as HP; when you sacrifice HP, treat it as ER. *10 points.*

Internalist: You may raise your Magery above four levels and may also learn Ritual Adept. If the GM decides that humanity's "edge" should be easy access to magic anywhere, this trait becomes a 0-point feature for humanity. *10 points.*

Aethyric Space Templates

All of the templates in **GURPS Space** are suitable for *Aethyric Space* campaigns, with the understanding that technical skills can be buttressed by complementary magical paths out of a sense of necessity. The Path of Matter might fix the ship while you're line-riding, but if you're in a null-zone, you need Electronics Repair.

Everyone in *Aethyric Space* is entitled to magic, unless they have a trait that somehow denies access to their birthright. It's not unknown for certain cultures to cut off criminals' access to magic as punishment – sometimes *permanently* – which could account for this! Moreover, some people are occasionally born without the ability to use magic inherently, but are also walking null-zones. Treat this as Mana Damper (p. B67) or Static (**GURPS Powers,** p. 98).

Magic-users can be represented with the following template (and an appropriate lens if applicable).

Aethyric Caster

100 points

You've been trained at using magic common in the *Aethyric Space* campaign setting. This base template represents an *externalist* – a magic user who does not have Ritual Adept, but instead relies on his intelligence and training to cast spells. To create other types of casters mentioned in *Words of Power*, p. 5, use an appropriate lens.

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 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [-5]; Basic Move 5 [0].
Advantages: Magery 1 [15]. ● A further 25 points chosen from IQ +1 [20], HT +1 or +2 [10 or 20], Per +1 to +4 [5/level], FP +1 to +6 [3/level], Energy Reserve 1-6 (Magic) [3/level], Luck [15], Mind Shield [4/level], or one additional level of Magery [10].
Disadvantages: -30 points chosen from among Addiction (Starstuff) [-20], Delusions [varies], Destiny [varies], Disciplines of Faith (Ritualism *or* Mysticism) [-5 or -10], Frightens Animals [-10], Obsession (Become a powerful mage) [-10*], Overconfidence [-5*], Reputation [varies], Supernatural Features [varies], or Weirdness Magnet [-15].
Primary Skills: Thaumatology (VH) IQ+1 [12]-13. ● Choose one Path skill at (VH) IQ+1 [12]-13. ● Choose one Path at (VH) IQ [8]-12. ● Take the remaining *five* Paths at (VH) IQ-1 [1]-9.
Secondary Skills: Hidden Lore (Ley lines) (A) IQ [2]-12 *and* Meditation (H) Will-1 [2]-11.
Background Skills: Computer Operation/TL10 (E) IQ [1]-12; Spacer/TL10 (E) IQ [1]-12; *and* Vacc Suit (A) DX [2]-10.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

Lenses

Battle-Caster (+50 points): Increase Magery by 1, for 10 points. Also add IQ +1 [20], HT +1 [10], Attribute Substitution (Innate Attack defaults to IQ) [1], Innate Attack (any) (E) IQ [1]-13, *and* a combination of 8 points in Path of Body, Path of Matter, or Path of Energy. Ritual Mastery for favorite combat magics and preferred bodyforms are commonplace, but not part of the lens.

Catalyst (+50 or +100 points): Replace Magery 1 with Externalist Training 4, for -11 points. Reduce your primary Path skill by one level, for -4 points. Add HT +1 [10], Energy Reserve 15 (Magic) [45], and Unusual Background (Catalytic Magic) [10]. The higher level also adds Regeneration (Fast; Mana Reserve only, -0%) [50].

Internalist (+50 or +100 points): Add Ritual Adept [40] and Unusual Background (Internalist) [10]. If the GM has made Internalist a 0-point feature for humans, also add another level of Magery. The higher level also adds *either* Regeneration (Fast; Mana Reserve only, -0%) [50] *or* another five levels of Magery [50].

Operator (+50 points): Spend 50 points in increased IQ, Energy Reserve, Magery, Path skills, or Ritual Mastery (typically communication spells; see p. 10).

Pathfinder (+50 points): Add 3D Spatial Sense [10], Detect Aethyric Lines (Vague, -50%) [10], *and* Energy Reserve (Magic) 10 [30]. When choosing Path skills for these types of casters, they almost always have Path of Magic as their primary Path. Catalyst pathfinders are *highly* prized for their ability to near-endlessly power a ship they are on.

Magic

Magic works as per **Ritual Path Magic,** with a few changes.

Limited Collection of Spells

● Despite Ritual Path magic's flexibility, casters have only a limited collection of spells they "know" and can perform without penalty. These "spell familiarities" use the same rules for skill familiarities (p. B169), but are for *magic*. Every two points spent on magical skills (p. 10) gives you one known spell at character creation. Unfamiliar spells cause a familiarity penalty equal to (total number of spell effects × 2) *and* either double the casting time (for non-adepts) *or* use the non-adept times (for adepts). You can eliminate these penalties by studying a spell for (eight hours × its penalty). Ritual Adept halves these penalties (round up), while Natural Caster (**Ritual Path Magic,** p. 12) or other casting Talents give the usual reduction in time associated with having a Talent. A successful Teaching roll helps to reduce this time by a further 5% per point of success. Grimoires automatically reduce time by (5% times *half* the bonus); round down. Time cannot be reduced below 20% when accounting for all sources (high Magery, a teacher, access to a grimoire, etc.).

● Ritual Mastery includes familiarity with the associated spell; the rules above are for spells for which the caster does *not* possess Ritual Mastery.

● Some spells have simply not been *invented* yet. The GM decides what spells are available and what is not.

● Neither Path of Spirit or Path of Undead exist – but the GM may allow them to be "invented" if he wishes. This means that there are only seven Path skills.

● Hopping dimensions or traveling in time is currently understood to be impossible.

● There is no transformative magic for living, sapient beings *other* than bodyforms (see below) – the process drives the subject *mad*. Plants and beings with an IQ of 5 or less are affected (usually); magically altered "battle-beasts" are popular assault weapons with all races.

● Communication spells (either via Path of Energy or Path of Body) automatically use long-distance modifiers (p. B241) instead of the standard range penalties (p. B550). Additionally, adding a flat +10 energy and a Lesser Strengthen Magic effect allows the caster to *ignore* range penalties completely.

Magical Skills

The following skills are considered "magical": Alchemy, Astronomy, Autohypnosis, Dreaming, Esoteric Medicine, Exorcism, Expert Skill (any supernatural), Fortune-Telling, Hazardous Materials (any esoteric), Herb Lore, Hidden Lore (any supernatural), Innate Attack, Meditation, Mental Strength, Occultism, Physics (Metaphysics), Ritual Magic, Symbol Drawing, Thaumatology, and all Path skills.

Using Starstuff

Starstuff uses the rules for raw magic from **GURPS Thaumatology,** p. 227, with the following modifications. Raw magic reduces the number of Greater effects of a ritual by one *or* gives 20 points of mana for a spell; otherwise, it's used as per **Thaumatology.** "Flavored" raw magic can be broken into concepts (e.g., death, weather) or Paths (e.g., Path of Energy). Work Raw Magic becomes a ritual whose parameters are Lesser Sense Magic + Lesser Control Magic, costing 7 energy.

The Raw Magic Store advantage (**Thaumatology,** p. 228) becomes 25 points/level. This is cheaper than Energy Reserve because once raw magic is spent, it cannot be easily refilled – new sources of it must be *found*.

Using more than (HT + Magery / 10) points of raw magic (starstuff) in a 24-hour period requires a Will roll. Add a penalty to this roll equal to (number of points used past threshold - 1) × -2. Failure means the mage is addicted to its use and cannot use his own mana reserve at all until he kicks the habit. Critical failure results in the same, but the caster loses a point of HT as well.

Aethyr Benefits

Aethyr-rings, aethyr-lines, and nodes give an energy reduction to spells: *rings* give 5% to 10% (1d-4 × 5%), *lines* give 5% to 15% (1d-3 × 5%), and *nodes* give 5% to 20% (1d-2 × 5%). When rolling randomly, the minimum discount is 5%. This stacks with other energy reductions, like traditional trappings.

Spells with the range modifier also get a boost. Being on a *ring* allows for communication spells to be used with no range penalty. *Lines* allow spells to use the long-distance modifiers (p. B241) to calculate range costs for non-combat spells. *Nodes* also permit using long-dstance modifiers with combat spells!

Mana reserves and Energy Reserve (Magic) automatically refill on lines at a rate of one point per 10 minutes on a line, per five minutes on a ring, or per minute on a node.

Tales whispered in all empires speak of "super-nodes" that reduce spell costs by 15% to 30% (10% + [1d × 5%]) and restore mana at a rate of one point per *second*.

BODYFORMS

Bodyforms need a special spell to be individualized to the caster. This requires *two* Lesser Transform Body effects, a bodyform "package" to be purchased as Altered Traits, with duration (an hour is typical) and subject weight modifiers. The ritual is *always* a charm. Furthermore, Bodyform spells have a special drawback and a special benefit.

● Activating the charm takes at least 10 minutes of meditating and focusing one's mind on the change. This can still be done instantly, but requires a Will or Will-based Path of Body roll at -1 per minute shaved off (-10 allows this to be done instantly like any other charm). FP may be spent on a 1:1 basis to negate the penalty to the initial roll. When the focusing is done, make a note of the margin of success of the roll, subtract it from 10, and then treat that as a *percentage* of lost capabilities. For example, if you only succeeded by 5 and your bodyform gave you +6 to ST, you'd get +3 to ST instead.

● Bodyform charms can be used *anywhere* – even in an null-zone (apply the usual penalties there just like you would for an adept; see *Ritual Adept,* p. 8).

The following example is common among all empires.

Starchild Bodyform

Spell Effects: Lesser Control Magic + Lesser Transform Body ×2.
Inherent Modifiers: Altered Traits, Starchild meta-trait.
Greater Effects: 0 (×1).

This spell is cast as a charm and gives the subject -2 to ST, +1 to DX, Doesn't Breathe (Oxygen Storage, ×50), No Degeneration in Zero-G, Radiation Tolerance 2, Sealed, Temperature Tolerance 50, and Vacuum Support for the next hour. It uses the rules for bodyforms (above).

Typical Casting: Lesser Transform Body (8) + Greater Transform Body (8) + Lesser Control Magic (5) + Altered Traits, Starchild meta-trait (88) + Duration, 1 hour (3) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). *115 energy (115×1).*

I felt something . . . it awakened, but now I need to know how to wield it.
*– Rey, **Star Wars: The Last Jedi***

Aethyric Spaceships

It's left up to the GM to determine the exact nature of each empire's technology, but each faction should have its own "edge" as both a race and with their technology. All ships use a magical power plant of some variety, with Earth specifically using mana engines (very primitive compared to other races; see *GURPS Spaceships 7: Divergent and Paranormal Tech,* pp. 13, 14) or amalgamation engines (see *Pyramid #3/64: Pirates and Swashbucklers,* p. 31), which require mages and which *only* humans know how to create and use. Moreover, such power plants are often accompanied by a mundane method of power generation.

Reconfigurable systems (*GURPS Spaceships,* p. 24) that turn one form of power plant into another are common among all empires. Large-scale versions of aethyric batteries (below) are available as well and use the rules for MHD turbines (*Spaceships,* p. 20) except that they are recharged by spending twice the listed duration inside of an aethyr-ring.

Battle-caster squads use the normal rules for weaponry, require double the normal workspaces, but do *not* require ammunition (though Power Points are still used as the battle-casters draw from the ship's power plants to enhance the lethality of their spells).

New Equipment

Some empires use magically powered batteries. For them use the following.

Aethyric Battery (TL^)

An aethyric battery is similar to a mundane battery or power cell, except that it can be recharged using magical energy. This doesn't require any particular spell or ability, instead determine the mage's "magical ST" by adding his Magery to his IQ; use this number to determine his magical Basic Lift with the *Basic Lift and Encumbrance Table,* p. B17. A full charge requires the mage to concentrate continuously for seconds equal to (3,600 × battery weight in lbs. / magical Basic Lift).

An aethyric battery costs twice as much as a normal battery or power cell of the same size. "Respooling" this energy into FP is possible, but not very efficient – aethyric batteries yield FP equal to their weight × 3 to power spells, rituals, etc. LC4.

About the Authors

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Bazaar

by Nathan M.M. Meluvor

Space is big. This is so often brought up in science-fiction settings that even the average person tends to realize it. People more often forget space is *old:* All of human history is a sliver of time in the universe. By the time humans have mastered space travel, how many other civilizations have done so as well? How long does their travel continue? Life in the universe may persist for trillions of years, yet even the longest-living human empires cannot claim even a thousand.

Bazaar is a product of the antiquity of space: an enormous space station at a major interstellar "crossroads." No one knows who built the initial framework, nor how long ago it was erected, but stories of its existence are found in the records and tales of virtually every spacefaring people. Even saying that it has been "built" is a mischaracterization. Bazaar is a fractured mess of a structure, cobbled together from the technological remnants of innumerable contributors.

It is still being added to and torn apart. Residents of Frizzenpan trade an ancient generator of unknown make for a new fusion engine. A human starship is disassembled, the wings repurposed as bracers for the dilapidated girders of the Green Apron Hotel in Jin-Tau Phrix. Escaped medical nanobots "repair" the DNA of the West District's lungs in Urbe Colombi. Alterations happen more quickly near the surface; within a few hundred years, the entire top mile of the station might change. At deeper levels, changes might occur on the scale of thousands or millions of years.

Live together like brothers,
and do business like strangers.
– Arabic Proverb

Why Visit Bazaar?

A common reason to visit Bazaar is to find something that can't be found elsewhere. Generally, if it can be bought anywhere, it can be bought there. It has become known as Bazaar for a reason! If TL12 goods exist in the universe, a few are tucked away in the depths of the station. A simple motivation for people is finding high-tech wonders. This may be because the party comes from a lower TL society or wants to turn a profit or learn hidden secrets. A party of already high-TL adventurers may need replacement parts or rare fuel that can't be found anywhere else this side of the galaxy.

These motivations assume a campaign where the group consists of established spacefarers. It's possible that they could simply stumble upon it in an exploratory campaign. This allows for a more sandbox feel (see *Tone, Flavor, and Campaign Structure,* below). It is also possible to play Bazaar natives, either in a game taking place entirely on Bazaar, or using it as a home base.

Tone, Flavor, and Campaign Structure

Bazaar is suited to a few different tones. Playing near the station's surface, it meshes well with mystery, noir, or pulp games. Here, visitors interact with strong personalities of either inhabitants or other offworlders, perhaps competing for the same resources, or trying to make a living after being stranded. In deeper parts of the station, the game can take a horror tone (uncovering terrible aliens or ancient mad AIs) or something akin to dungeon fantasy, with adventurous sorts exploring forgotten passages to the station's core.

A key feature of Bazaar is working not just with a variety of tech levels, but also technology paths (***GURPS Ultra-Tech,*** pp. 8-11). Bazaar is particularly suited to safe-tech and retrotech. The technology path or tech level of the party may not match that of their current location on Bazaar! A retrotech party might find themselves outgunned by gangsters wielding heavy laser pistols. Conversely, they might wander into a backward province still using gunpowder weaponry, which could allow a GM to run a Western adventure within a space-opera campaign. The choice of technology path (both of the party and region) can greatly influence how a game in Bazaar will feel, from an adventurous neo-Western game to an outgunned horror race for survival.

Bazaar is less appropriate for hard science fiction. Without superluminal travel, the idea of a galactic crossroads is less plausible, although it is possible for the party to be of low TL and find itself at Bazaar in a generation ship or similar conveyance. Aside from specifics of space travel, the *core* tech level of Bazaar is in general assumed to be at least TL10, though this could easily be changed.

Bazaar is obviously perfect for a "treasure hunt" campaign wherein the party seeks some sort of MacGuffin, be it a rare superscience artifact deep in the core, or just convincing the Metschani mob boss to sell that much needed fuel. With such an adventure, the GM can control how much a part of the campaign's setting Bazaar will be, because the spacefarers are likely to stay however long it takes them to get what they came for. The GM can adjust the challenges of the scenario to lengthen or shorten time spent on Bazaar, as well as guide the party to those regions that the GM especially wants them to visit.

Exploratory adventures – such as those where Bazaar is happened upon by accident, or visited for more anthropological reasons – allow the GM to take a more sandbox approach. The the adventurers are going to be less driven toward a single object and are therefore more likely to wander and experience more of the station.

Geography and Location

Bazaar orbits a very small, very cold brown dwarf (**GURPS Space,** pp. 128-129) in otherwise interstellar space. The star in question is of minimal mass and is 14 billion years old. The station moves around this star very closely, at 0.078 AU, and at minimal eccentricity.

Bazaar is slightly larger than Pluto, around 800 miles across. Due to its small size, it retains no natural atmosphere. Unlike the moons of a gas giant, there is no charged particle field. While the brown dwarf does have a strong magnetic field, it does not have another nearby star from which to draw in charged particles.

The station is slightly ovoid in shape, with a surface area nearly the size of Australia. This is only the *exterior* area as Bazaar is hollow, so there's far more usable space than just the outside.

The surface itself is entirely covered in cityscape, some of which is enclosed in large domes (see **GURPS Ultra-Tech,** p. 71). Depending on the presence of superscience and TL, these might be force-field domes; others are simply interior habitats. Since its star doesn't produce any light, installations requiring such (for example, farms) are relegated to the interior. Outside of the buildings, the station is uninhabitable; the average temperature is 80 K.

The surface cityscape creates a crust, from which buildings protrude outward. The shape of the crust is irregular and in flux; it is determined by where different building happen to connect, rather than by design. The domed cities are an exception; the crust meets around the entirety of the dome's edge. Within the crust and buildings, there is a uniform atmosphere, breathable by Bazaar natives. Within this framework, the domes are essentially single buildings, with sub-buildings inside of them. Whether this atmosphere is breathable by the party is up to the GM. In a setting with multiple varieties of alien life, environmental suits and bioengineering are common sights.

Below this crust, there are more diverse features intermixed with the city: hydroponic farms, life support systems, and even small seas. Unlike most planets, heat and pressure do not increase as one goes deeper into the station.

For parties that can travel faster than light, getting to Bazaar is not difficult; it is located on a crossroads of major shipping routes. *Without* superluminal travel, it would be very difficult indeed. One way to deal with this is to put Bazaar midway on a space highway (see **GURPS Space**, p. 41) or perhaps at an intersection of several such highways. This allows for a party of much lower TL to get to Bazaar without granting them higher tech.

Culture on Bazaar

Bazaar is made up of Grecian style city-states. No substantial overarching government exists, though they do have a loose alliance in case of emergency. There tends to be free travel between them, although some are more restrictive about who may enter (especially the domed cities). Occasionally, it can be unclear to a traveler when he or she is transitioning between one city or another!

Bazaarite city-states run the gamut of governmental structures. Most of the societies on pp. B509-510 can be found on Bazaar, with the notable exception of anarchy. Whenever a city-state fails and anarchy breaks out, bordering states simply take over the land.

On the surface, most of the states are corporate states, caste systems, or oligarchies. Domed cities tend toward monarchies and feudal systems, though the largest domed city, Citadel (see p. 14) is an Athenian democracy. Beneath the surface, odder governments tend to crop up. Many societies in the interior of the station are more isolated and sometimes less friendly toward travelers – the surface societies are far more exposed to outside trade than the subsurface dwellers.

Racially, Bazaar is overall integrated, with whatever spacefaring life exists in the campaign setting making an appearance. Due to Bazaar's great age, there might even be lifeforms unique to the station. Bazaar natives will likely have biomodifications to allow them to be breathe the ubiquitous atmosphere of the station. Different species may segregate into different neighborhoods or even city-states, according to the campaign.

While hundreds of languages are used throughout the station, its lingua franca is Bazaarite, a language as untraceable in origin as the station. At the surface level, almost all natives can understand, read, and write Bazaarite, though they may not be able to speak it (due to biological limitations). The language does have several dialects; domed cities especially are prone to dialectalization. If computer-aided translation is not available, interpreters will be a common and necessary service.

Throughout Bazaar, there is no common currency, and much trade is conducted via barter. However, because of the particular needs of the station, a desirable trade item is fuel, measured by the gigajoule (see **GURPS Space,** p. 182). Fuel being absolutely vital, each gigajoule is typically valued around $25 rather than the usual $10.

> ## *Gravity*
> Bazaar is essentially a macrohabitat (**GURPS Ultra-Tech,** p. 71). This means that it will experience either microgravity or rely on superscience contragrav technology. As described here, the latter is assumed. Bazaar's core houses a massive contragrav engine, which provides the gravitic effect of a much larger planet throughout the entire station. In a more realistic campaign, the effects of microgravity on party members not equipped for it should be taken into account. Natives can be assumed to be genetically modified to handle the low gravity. Without contragrav, the surface gravity would be less than 0.05G. This would allow much more exotic structures, and a GM could use it to build twisting spires taller than gravity-bound skyscrapers.

Life on the surface of Bazaar is defined by trade. Different areas deal with this fact in different ways. The more regulated the trade in a region is, the more likely that region is to be safe, although more expensive. Many corporate states handle all trade through their corporation, whereas oligarchies may demand taxes in the form of gigajoules. In any case, be it taxes, tithes, or protection rackets, such areas usually have a vested interest in the safety of their shoppers. However, more regulated areas are *also* more likely to have black markets, which can be as dangerous as any of the "free" markets across the station . . .

> ### Names
> Naming a site can be especially effective in establishing the sort of tone the GM would like for an area. Names needn't follow any standard convention; the described sites were given designations based on how evocative of a tone. Jin-Tau Phrix sounds far more exotic than does the Green Apron Hotel; Frizzenpan far more enjoyable a place than the mysterious "tank."

CITADEL

Citadel is the largest domed city on Bazaar. At 25 miles in diameter, it's slightly larger than modern New York City. However, this is only its *horizontal* size. The city protrudes about two miles into the station. The shape of the dome continues along its original angle, so much of the city is actually *beneath* the crust. If the setting allows for it, while Citadel's dome is physical, it would have a backup forcefield dome. The city is filled with skyscrapers, most of which are interconnected with bridges, walkways, and lines of public transport. The native population (around 12 million) lives in several massive arcologies in the central district. The remainder of the city is dedicated to goods and services for travelers.

Access to the city takes place beneath the crust and is carefully guarded. Trade is free within Citadel; however, *entrance* is not. Gaining admission to the city is expensive and can be paid only in gigajoules. Once this fee is paid, visitors may trade and travel freely within the entire city, save for the central arcologies. They may do business not only with the citizenry, but also with each other; open markets designed especially for this are ubiquitous. Many frequent visitors to Bazaar operate primarily out of Citadel; it is very easy to make a living as a trader in the city, and it's very safe.

Currency is a division here. The citizens tend to provide primarily *services* and require payment in gigajoules. Traders provide mostly *goods* for barter.

Citadel is the safest city on Bazaar, so long as one obeys the laws of the city, and do not interfere with the natives. Citadel is an Athenian democracy, and residents are *proud* to be citizens and they take their civic duty seriously. Crime is not tolerated, either by the guards or by the majority of the citizenry. Lawbreakers have few rights, and citizens have free reign to deal with them as they see fit. This is not to say there is no crime; it exists, but it is *discrete*. Smuggling can be extremely profitable to those talented enough to succeed at it . . .

Adventure Hook: Acquiring Antimatter

Citadel is one of the few places where antimatter can be legally bought on Bazaar. Most cities do not allow antimatter trade, due to the risks involved. Citadel, however, is stable enough for it to be safely produced. The gigajoules used to buy entrance into Citadel are used to manufacture antimatter, in carefully controlled conditions. Although *buying* antimatter is legal for travelers, *selling* is restricted to citizens. The legal acquisition of necessary fuel is one adventure option; however, the theft of it from one of the arcology-factories is perhaps the more exciting prospect. If the GM wishes to incentivize the heist option, price can be used as a lever. Citadel has a monopoly on legal antimatter on Bazaar, and the prices reflect this. If a campaign does not allow for TL11 goods, use this hook for an exotic fuel of the GM's choice.

URBE COLOMBI

Urbe Colombi is built along a small canyon in Bazaar, caused by a major impact some time in the unknown past. Uniquely, the impact was not with an inanimate object, but with an alien organism. (The exact nature of that organism has been lost to time.) At some point after the impact, an attempt was made to remove the still-living behemoth. This was difficult as it had begun to attach itself to the station. The idea was proposed to radically alter its DNA and thus remove its capacity to cling so tenaciously. The creature was thus spliced with a common animal, not unlike a pigeon (or perhaps something else). Suffice to say, this proved ineffective. The creature continued its limpetesque attachment to the station, and soon after, bred asexually, something the engineers of this solution had *not* planned on. Due to the creature's newfound genetic instability, its offspring varied dramatically in form and size. They soon spread to every corner of the canyon it had made on impact. Eventually, the original creature died. Its bones still make up structures in the city, but its descendants, known locally as "the chillins," still roam the area.

For longer than anyone cares to remember, Urbe Colombi has been a place people avoid if able, due to the infestation of "chillins." Although it is strictly speaking owned by a nearby corp-state, its low value ensures only the most egregious breaks of the peace are punished. In point of fact, Urbe Colombi is controlled by a family mafia called the Metschani. They collect protection money from those unfortunate or poor enough to call the city their home, many of whom are recent immigrants (usually visitors unable to get off the station, who could not get citizenships elsewhere). In return, they keep the "chillins" in at least some degree of check, hunting down and killing those that turn out to be dangerous.

Few people visit Urbe Colombi to purchase goods. Rather, it is a good place to hide or obtain services of a less than moral nature. The geography especially is suited toward the former – structures making up the city were intended to fill in the canyon, but this is by no means a complete process. The city is poor, and repairs are ad hoc at best. The canyon resembles less a planned structure than a series of independent modules, forming a colorful, twisted landscape, that *mostly* holds together. If one wishes to lose a pursuer, its labyrinthine structure of tubes is ideal.

Adventure Hook: An Alternative Payment

Visitors wish *very* much to not live in Urbe Colombi. This can be difficult to avoid though, if one ends up in debt to the Metschani. The family will often offer an unlucky traveler shelter on usury and so entrap them in the city. However, the mob might offer forbearance on such a debt in exchange for exterminating particularly nasty chillins. The GM is encouraged to be creative in designing the vermin. Depending on the tone of the campaign, they might be a mere annoyance, or a constant and real fear for the citizens of the city.

THE GREEN APRON HOTEL

Jin-Tau Phrix is a medium-size city-state, but a very wealthy one. While the city itself is rather small, its starport is one of the few on Bazaar capable of harboring especially large ships. Many of the wealthiest visitors of the station pass through it, even if they do not stay. The city boasts many high-class restaurants, hotels, and other amenities, especially near the starport. None is so infamous among those "in the know" as the Green Apron Hotel.

The Green Apron is modest in size compared to its towering competitors, and more rustic in appearance. It takes a trained eye to notice how "top" the top shelf of their bar is, or how secure are their private rooms. For the past 30 years or so, many of the top traders in Bazaar have held informal gatherings or private meetings at its tables. It has become a mark of whether one is a real "Bazaar trader" to conduct business at the Apron, rather than one of the more conventionally high class establishments. Of course, many traders patronize both, frequently using private deals conducted at the Apron to shark deals within the wider community. Most of the patrons are polyglots, though the staff and those in the know emphatically speak only Bazaarite within the hotel. Speaking other languages within the hotel, or using a translator, is a sure way to become marked as an outsider.

Insiders also make each other in other ways. Jin-Tau Phrix is a feudal system, and the baron that controls the Apron's district does not allow energy weapons therein (though they are legal throughout most of the city). Those that enter the hotel armed need limit themselves to old, chemical firearms. Insiders tend to carry these wherever they go on Bazaar, as a way of identifying each other. Insiders have a special respect for each other, and tend to favor each other in trade.

Adventure Hook: Insider Trading

Those new to trade on Bazaar – or those that have been long outside the circle of Apron patrons – are rather envious of the sort of information and insight that such people have on the Bazaar market. Some newcomers might pay extremely well for inside information on the goings-on of the hotel and its regulars. The information-seekers might be greedy outsiders trying to break into a tough market, or simply poor sops who had been swindled. Obtaining such knowledge should be no easy feat. Despite its appearances, the Apron's security is top of the line, and its patrons are expert at telling those who are of their class from those who are not. Such an operative would either need to be very good at subverting ultra-tech security measures, or convincing the extremely paranoid that he is one of them.

> ### A City's Services
>
> Bazaar shares many features with a city, one of the most important of these being that it is in a certain sense homogenous. This is to say that no matter where the adventurers enter Bazaar, the GM is fully capable of placing most essential services within a practical distance to the party; it does not matter from which side one enters New York, for example, a visitor needn't travel more than a mile or two to find a hotel, food, etc. The party should not have to work to locate their essentials. Nonetheless, one of the notable features of Bazaar is presence of otherwise rare commodities. When the party comes seeking such an item, the GM is free to dictate any number of avenues to unearthing it.

THE HOLE IN FRIZZENPAN

Frizzenpan is, in essence, a junkyard. It consists of three mid-sized domes, two arcology towers, and a small starport – all arranged roughly in the shape of a club suit. As parts are dismantled and discarded throughout the evolution of the station, Frizzenpan takes them in, offering free garbage disposal for the various cities. The native government, a representative oligarchy (members of the ruling council are elected, but rule for life), allow travelers to enter freely, scrounge as they will, and pay a fee for what they take with them. Citizen-tinkerers make a living either assembling parts for travelers or renting mechanical shops. Many a stranded traveler owes his leaving Bazaar to a juryrigged engine assembled in Frizzenpan.

In the center of the three domes is an energy conduit that powers the entire city. The source of this conduit is under a large pile of mechanical detritus, but if one should follow it, it travels down into the station. This mechanical line circumvents the borders of various cities, pushing deep beneath the crust. At the source of the power conduit is very large tank of hot chemicals, around 10 miles in diameter, and 30 miles deep. This tank makes use of the slight tidal effects of Bazaar's orbit. In essence, it acts as a massive heatsink, preventing long-term damage to the station, and transferring it out as power.

The tank, however, is in uncharted territory in the depths of Bazaar. Many outflows snake off of it, drawing in heat from throughout the station. No one on the surface of Bazaar knows what lies down here. Whatever it be, it is autonomous, self-sufficient, and *isolated*. Options include maintenance systems (possibly malfunctioning, likely defensive), long forgotten inhabitants, escaped chillins, or whatever else the GM finds suits the adventure's tone. The GM should feel especially at liberty, in the deep parts of the station, to have the adventurers encounter things not seen elsewhere on the station, or even in the campaign world. Here, investigators can find the most ancient aspects of Bazaar, which can be as wonderful or horrible as the GM sees fit.

Adventure Hook: Repairs in the Deep

Frizzenpan relies on the tank for power. However, it has fallen out of memory, having run perfectly for millennia. When problems start, the hole is discovered. The natives might be willing to pay someone to search out the power source and find out what is wrong. However, savvy adventurers might realize that the tank is essential not just for Frizzenpan, but the entire station. The exact nature of the problem is up to the GM; how they use this information is up to the repair crew . . .

BUILDING AN ADVENTURE SITE

Bazaar is open to a variety of sorts of site. First, how much of an area PCs will interact with is key. Jin-Tau Phrix can be loosely defined, because the PCs are meant to be concerned primarily with the Green Apron. Conversely, Citadel is given more details on the workings of the city, because visitors are going to be affected by what Citadel is *wherever* they go in the site.

The station as a whole is not given a single tone, flavor, or even genre, and an adventure there needn't be either. Frizzenpan is a good example of this. The surface part is meant to be somewhat lighthearted. This allows the GM to especially catch adventurers off guard when they reach the much darker world of the power tank. Certainly, some combinations work better than others (see *Tone, Flavor, and Campaign Structure* on pp. 12-13), but how these ought to come together is up to the GM. One can easily stick with a single driven storyline on Bazaar, in which case the adventure sites should reflect this. Frizzenpan is again a good example; it progresses very linearly from one tone to another.

Conversely, a GM might build sites somewhat more loosely, allowing the players some control over the tone. The Green Apron Hotel might have a very Western feel to it, with its retrotech firearms and a foreboding, saloonesque atmosphere. The players have plenty of room to affect the flavor of the game with how their characters react to such an environment; the adventure could seem far more along the lines of 1950s espionage should they try to infiltrate the inn by stealth rather than by force of personality (or actual force).

Bazaar is intended as a location where the GM can present vignettes not possible elsewhere in his universe. Certainly, an entire campaign could be set there, but it is especially suited to the GM who has thought, "I would like to put my players through X, but it doesn't fit." Adventures in Bazaar are an excellent break from a larger campaign, allowing the players to experience something different before delving back into their characters' larger story. In such a case, one of the best ways to build a site on Bazaar is just to determine what sort of respite should be taken, and what sort of site reflects that. For example, a GM running a high-tech space opera could provide a Western interlude in the Green Apron, or a surprise dash of horror in the Frizzenpan's power tank. The possibilities are as endless as they are potentially *bizarre*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nathan Meluvor is a philosophy grad student with degrees in liberal arts and linguistics, and altogether too little ability in confining himself to one subject. He has lived in a variety of far too small, yet remarkably affordable apartments, with his endlessly patient wife, where he tends to spend his time neglecting schoolwork in lieu of researching his campaigns.

Eidetic Memory

Space Wrecks

by David L. Pulver

Tales of terrible maritime disasters and subsequent efforts to discover what went wrong and to locate and recover the wreck have exerted an enduring allure. As humanity travels to the stars, stories of legendary star wrecks will have the same appeal . . .

Several examples of "famous" star wrecks that the GM can use as the basis of adventures are described here.

Finders Keepers?

If a human-dominated interstellar government exists, it may well extend ancient Terran maritime practices to questions of interstellar salvage. Typical legalities are:

Salvage. If you recover something lost or abandoned in space that has a legal owner, you're obliged to make arrangements to return it them (or the appropriate authorities), and they're obliged to pay you a reward commensurate with its value. Of course, its value may have decreased significantly if it's in a severely damaged state, obsolete, etc.

Treasure Hunting. If there's no real owner – e.g., a centuries-old wreck, alien Precursor vessel, etc. – the rights may go to the finder. However, if the treasure is discovered within a region of space claimed as sovereign territory by a particular nation, planet, or other political entity, that group usually has a claim on it. This may also apply to wrecks that have a clear line of descent, e.g., if the Terran Star Empire claims to be the successor state to the Earth Confederation, they may assert ownership of any wrecked 400-year-old Earth Confederation warships. A government who claims ownership of a wreck *may* pay a reward to a finder, but otherwise, the "profit" for finding such a vessel is likely to be mainly scientific interest and/or selling the media rights for the discovery.

Black Markets. If you can't legally sell it but it's potentially valuable, there's the option of using Contacts or Streetwise to track down an appropriate under-the-table buyer. Black markets in antiques, second-hand spaceship parts, alien artifacts, or valuables all exist. Of course, you run the risk not only that the authorities may crack down on you for selling illegal treasure or salvage, but that you might be suspected of more serious crimes like piracy, especially if you attempted to resell it to the type of fence who handles stolen goods. In addition, disturbing wrecks without reporting them could result in charges for disturbing graves, which in some states (e.g., theocracies) could be very serious . . .

Reporting. Interstellar law may follow the maritime convention that you're legally required to report any wrecks or similar discoveries. Attempting to avoid this requirement or concealing the origin or location of wrecks may lead to legal penalties and total forfeiture of any rights to the salvage or treasure recovered.

Recovering legendary wrecks continues to appeal to the adventurous.

Wreck of the Blue Rhapsody

This wreck is probably one that the adventurers should simply stumble upon while operating in a lightly traveled frontier system in deep space.

The first thing any group notices coming into the system is some interesting scenery – an especially beautiful ring around a large gas giant. Sensors will detect a slender 180' vessel with a 300-ton streamlined hull. While long-range infrared detectors show the ship is relatively cold and appears powered down, the radar signature and reflected light curve are unusual. Visual examination shows this is because the vessel's hull is covered with glittering blue and red glass flowers. The ship itself has bright yellow paint job and the name *Blue Rhapsody*. There are no obvious signs of damage apart from some minor wear and tear on the hull from micrometeorite impacts. An Engineering roll or checking ship-type databases may identify the ship as a *Bird of Paradise*-class luxury star yacht, a several-year-old design.

The party's library computer may contain data on famous missing starships. If they have access to old news reports, or follow musical history, they may be familiar with the story of the missing space yacht from several years ago.

The Story

Blue Rhapsody was the personal star yacht of "Emperor" Indigo Blaze, an interstellar musical super star. Former lead singer-songwriter and guitarist of the group Positron, the charismatic Blaze left them to start a wildly successful solo career that won him billions of fans across the sector. At the peak of his fame after recording interstellar chart-toppers *That Ain't My Starship* and *I Love Earth So Bad*, he married girlfriend and *Cosmic Cooking Show* host Lily Jean Parajuli (to the horror of millions of teenage fans).

After a star-studded reception, Blaze and Lily Jean piled their mountain of wedding gifts aboard *Blue Rhapsody* and departed for a planned multi-system honeymoon . . . but they never returned. After missing their expected rendezvous by five weeks, a multi-system search was attempted to locate *Blue Rhapsody,* but without success. The prevailing theory was that Indigo Blaze, an indifferent astrogator and notorious drug abuser, had probably gotten high and crashed into a star, wandered naked out an airlock, or forgotten to program his emergence from hyperspace, dooming himself and his unfortunate bride – a fate that only added to his enduring legend. That Lily Jean had purportedly attempted to sober him up as a condition to marriage with her patent detoxifying diet recipes merely added to the irony; Blaze had as many detractors as fans, and his list of jealous rivals could fill a passenger liner roster, starting with his former Positron band mates.

Since their disappearance, endless court battles have been waged between various heirs and competing media companies and representatives over Blaze's status (missing or legally dead) and the disposition of his estate; as a result, his entire back catalog has fallen into legal limbo; a similar fate also befell Lily Jean's cosmic cookbook empire. For the billions of fans of his music, however, his star remained undimmed, and indeed a cult has arisen (the Eternal Blaze) that considers his disappearance a sign that the fateful trip was his bodily "last jump to heaven" . . . cult members and other fans have, of course, reported numerous "Blaze sightings" (with or without Lily Jean) and miracles resulting from playing his music or contact with various relics (such as old concert tickets, posters, and program booklets); genuine originals now command premium prices.

The Disaster

Two weeks into their honeymoon, their initial period of rapture turned into a series of petty arguments, drunken recriminations, and growing paranoia. This finally exploded during a trip to view a beautiful ringed planet, planned as a highlight of the tour that would symbolize their vows. The stop led instead to Blaze throwing his wedding ring out the airlock and claiming he should have never married Lily. The two newlyweds went crazy and attacked each other in a mutual orgy of destruction. Blaze used his guitar as a bludgeon while Lily Jean went at her hubby with a carving knife. Having finished him, she killed herself in the swimming pool.

Much of this was recorded with the ship's security system. The why is trickier to figure out, but the investigating group might figure out that progressive poisoning with overdoses of the psychotropic drug Devo, with which their wedding supply

of antique Terran beer had been spiked, caused their discord. This was the result of a revenge plot by a former writing partner and bandmate Miklos Abramzo of Positron, Blaze's former group, who had been jealous and blamed him for breaking up Positron and eclipsing his career.

Possible Salvage

Although the two owners of the yacht are dead, it's still protected by their state-of-the-art onboard security system. This included automatic defense globes armed with laser rifles in the corridors, and the couple's 8'-tall robot snakeman bodyguard Boa Klaws, a genetically engineered cyborg half-man half-snake programmed for absolute loyalty. Armed with a pair of monowire-edged katana and a heavy blaster rifle, he was more than capable of taking on most threats, but was completely helpless when his master and mistress destroyed one another in a drug-induced fit of paranoia . . .

Besides the ship and crew itself, there are several items of note.

● A huge wardrobe containing outrageous Indigo Blaze costumes ($100,000+ to fans), the diamond-encrusted white silk wedding gown of Lily Jean ($120,000), and an entire closet full of somewhat outdated but very costly women's fashions ($20,000+).

● Blaze and Lily's personal sports car, a 20th-century Ford Mustang replica (actually built in the 22nd century) equipped with a contragravity lifter engine. Worth $280,000.

● Blaze's blood-stained guitar (an original antique Fender Stratocaster worth $230,000).

● Blaze's pair of very fine Japanese katana ($20,000+).

● A stack of half-opened wedding presents from dozens of VIPs who were famous glitterati in the interstellar music industry when the yacht disappeared. By tracing the various labels and cards, investigators could get a sense of who is interested in Blaze.

● Numerous empty beer bottles and a well-stocked liquor cabinet, including six of the original 22 bottles of rare Golden Tsing-Tao Brahma-Bud Real Ale, said to be an authentic recreation of Terran beer at the dawn of the space age (and very hard to get in this corner of the galaxy). The crate of beer has the message "Enjoy the beer on your nuptials, old mate: no hard feelings!" (Handwriting analysis can trace it back to Miklos, who has long since moved to a different jurisdiction with no extradition treaty to where Blaze came from . . .)

● A huge black and golden fur rug with attached paws that have 8" claws. It is obviously from some beast that makes a grizzly look like a teddy bear (it's a transzarian devil tiger). Blaze's body is wrapped in the rug.

● Inside Blaze's skull, a neural interface-linked computer containing the lyrics for a new song he was working on the time of his death. A sacred text to his fans!

● The original cookbooks of Lily Jean, annotated with various adjustments to recipes; worth $140,000 to her publisher.

● A very well stocked kitchen with $20,000 worth of rare ingredients; in the stove, the remains of a tunnel-snake-and-kidney pie dinner Lily Jean was cooking.

● A huge number of tacky heirlooms, prizes, awards, posters, and kitsch from the newlyweds' respective spheres (cooking shows and rock music).

Who Owns the Wreck

The ongoing legal dispute overall ownership offers plenty of opportunity for intrigue . . . as well as parties who would rather see Blaze and his wife stay lost.

Bird of Paradise-Class Fast Yacht (TL11^)

This is a small space yacht designed for speed, comfort, and ease of operation. It has a SM +7 streamlined hull that masses 300 tons and is 45 yards long. It only carries two to four people, but they are provided with numerous amenities, including an office, bar, sauna, large swimming pool, and automated sickbay. The hangar bay is usually outfitted with one or two luxury vehicles (typically a limo, air car, or sports car).

Front Hull	System
[1]	Advanced Metallic Laminate Armor (dDR 7).
[2]	Control Room (C8 computer, comm/sensor 7, three control stations).
[3]	Habitat (luxury cabin).
[4]	Habitat (luxury cabin).
[5]	Habitat (office; five tons steerage cargo).
[6]	Hangar Bay (10 tons).
[core]	Habitat (two-bed sickbay with automeds).

Central Hull	System
[1]	Advanced Metallic Laminate Armor (dDR 7).
[2]	Habitat (gym establishment).
[3]	Habitat (bar establishment).
[4]	Fuel Tank (filled with water; used as swimming pool).
[5]	Habitat (sauna establishment; opens onto fuel tank).
[6]	Tertiary Battery (one turret with 3-MJ improved ultraviolet laser; 14.5 tons cargo).

Rear Hull	System
[1]	Advanced Metallic Laminate Armor (dDR 7).
[2]	Engine Room (one workspace).
[3!]	Stardrive.
[4!]	Stardrive.
[5!]	Hot Reactionless Engine (2G).
[6!]	Hot Reactionless Engine (2G).
[core]	Fusion Reactor (two Power Points)

The ship has gravitic compensators and artificial gravity. Normal crew are a pilot and optional co-pilot/engineer, although robots are often employed.

Currently, *Blue Rhapsody* is lightly damaged. The ship is down to dHP 44 and the fusion reactor is disabled. Lack of maintenance has reduced her to HT 10.

TL	Spacecraft	dST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ	dDR	Range	Cost
Piloting/TL11 High-Performance Spacecraft												
11^	*Bird of Paradise*	50	-1/5	13	4G/*c*	300	29.9	+7	4ASV	7	2×	$15.68M

Top air speed is 5,000 mph.

WRECK OF THE *HEXANNA*

This adventure seed is for a group who own their own starship and are willing to take on odd jobs.

Bavaria Ingold was the brutal planetary dictator of Kabta IV, where his Reflectionist movement was responsible for the murder and forced cyborgization of 1.7 million political dissidents. Eventually a popular uprising overthrew Ingold.

Survivors of the Kabta IV death factories have attempted to track down ex-Reflectionists to bring them to justice, a process that has taken decades as many of them have hidden under false identities or body changes.

Abraxus Fiddle received a tip about one of the most notorious escaped Reflectionists, Anabel Greaves, who was a senior member of the regime's Black Mirror secret police unit. According to the report, she was living under an assumed alternate identity, possibly as a merchant sailor named Penny North, who was the cook aboard a small freighter called the *Hexanna*. As deputy commander of the prison-hospital complex known as "the Oven," Greaves was personally responsible for the forced brainstripping of 133,567 people. She must face justice!

Unfortunately, tracking down the *Hexanna* is complicated. During the last space war, it was posted as missing while carrying a military cargo, one of countless ships that were lost to space mines, commerce raiders, or privateers. Maybe it was blown up with Greaves/North aboard. However, Fiddle has

The Reflectionists must face justice!

sorted through years of war-era records. One of these suggests a ship matching *Hexanna*'s profile was part of a convoy that was swarmed by raiders in the Remillia system, an obscure backwater place near the frontier.

Ship-log reports from the *Swiftsure,* one of the few vessels to escape the raiders, indicated the *Hexanna* had been hit early in the battle. It had attempted to evade by diving into the thick atmosphere of Remillia VI, but had been pursued by enemy fighters and shot down. Whether it was destroyed or had simply crashed remains unknown. According to survey data, Remillia VI is a hostile world with a dense corrosive atmosphere and high gravity.

Abraxus Fiddle wants to hire the party to travel to Remillia VI. Their mission is to use their ship's radar to search for wreckage of the *Hexanna*. If they find any, they are to land and determine whether the ship had any survivors. If they find human remains, they are to secure DNA samples so that their identities can be determined, and make sure that Penny North did indeed perish. Fiddle will pay reasonable expenses plus $100,000, with another $50,000 if DNA sampling or other evidence can identify or clear Penny North. (GM can adjust the amounts as appropriate.)

The System

Remillia VI is a big, freezing-cold planet with a dense, foggy nitrogen-methane-ammonia atmosphere. Under an orange haze, the surface temperature is -270°F. Topography consists of mountains, lakes and small seas of ammonia or liquid ethane. Most of the planet's surface is covered in thick slime, and strange reefs and towers of the stuff rise out of the sea – evidentially an exotic organic carbon-compound, possibly a crude life form.

The solar system may also be dangerous. It's an old war zone. Either side may have left behind space mines (missiles programmed to lie in wait in a low-power state until someone appears, then attack) or even robot fighters.

> *We saw her first. Open salvage. Finder's keepers.*
> *– Seamus Harper, in* **Andromeda** *#3.10*

Possible Salvage

The *Hexanna* was a perfectly ordinary star freighter (use the *Star Flower* class from **GURPS Spaceships,** pp. 6-7). Radar search for the *Hexanna*'s wreck may take several hours, but diligent use of Electronics Operations (Sensor) skill eventually locates large metal object of the right size near the planet's equator on the shores of a lake of liquid ethane.

It may be that the *Hexanna* is splattered all across the landscape or otherwise totally destroyed. Or perhaps some other salvage team has recovered the vessel years ago. Alternatively the GM could choose one or more of these more complicated possibilities.

Fiddle Is Right. The wreck of the *Hexanna* exists but is half-submerged in a shallow lake of liquid ammonia or ethane. Parts of the ship are flooded, but others are still sealed off. The crew were killed by combat damage or the crash landing. One of the crew's corpses is indeed Penny North (identifiable by vacc suit tags). A DNA check (which could be performed by a search party with appropriate gear) may indeed reveal that she really is Greaves, the notorious war criminal. Moreover, there are possibly other gains: a ship's locker containing $50,000 worth of decades-old-but-usable repair tools, survival gear and weapons; and a partially flooded cargo hold with a military cargo that may be anything from 40,000 pairs of army boots to intact powered armor or nuclear missiles.

Things in the Lake. As above, but the lake is not empty. The weird organic structures in and about the landscape are "hives" inhabited by bizarre alien blob-creatures. Some of them are also nesting in the ship. Thanks to their exotic physiology, they are unusually resistant to high-tech weapons, and highly corrosive. While not interested in eating humans, they have an affinity for the sort of composites used in the investigators' suits or gear . . .

Survivors. Perhaps some of the crew survived the wreck, but with their ship crippled, placed themselves in suspended animation. Is one of them Penny?

Nobody Home. The wreck exists and there are signs of survivors, but also signs that someone else got there first. Perhaps it was salvaged by whoever the "enemy" was in the most recent war. If so, the quest to bring Greaves to justice may have additional steps. Perhaps she was taken prisoner by the enemy, and, if the war ended in a treaty rather than a defeat, either never repatriated or still imprisoned. Maybe Fiddle will want to hire the party to "cross the line" into a neighboring hostile state to try and locate her . . .

WRECK OF THE *DEVIL'S ISLAND*

The *Devil's Island* was a prison transport that vanished somewhere in the sector six months ago, along with hundreds of notorious criminals . . .

This star wreck can be encountered by the PCs by accident, most likely drifting in deep space in some backwater system many parsecs from where it was supposed to be.

The ship is giving off an automated distress beacon, but shows little obvious sign of damage.

Alternatively, the adventurers may be actively searching for it, perhaps as members of the Patrol or Space Navy, or even associates of one of the criminal gangs or pirate brotherhoods whose members are incarcerated there.

Background

After a lengthy career in the interstellar navy, the aging 10,000-ton assault carrier *Righteous Wrath* was declared obsolete. However, the ship's drives and life-support systems were still functional. Instead of being scrapped, it was transferred to the interstellar corrections bureau for use a prison hulk. Its heaviest weapons were stripped out (leaving only a few defensive batteries), and its marine barracks and vehicle bays were converted into prison cell blocks. Renamed *Devil's Island,* the ship was condemned to spend the rest of its days orbiting the red dwarf XY-7207, home to a population of the galaxy's most notorious convicts and a small force of guards, medical staff, and security robots.

After 20 years, government budget cutbacks eventually led to the decision to transfer the operation of several prison stations and ships, among them *Devil's Island,* to private firms. The prison was taken over by Galactic Correctional Services Inc. (GCSI). After another six years of operation, GCSI eventually decided to centralize all its prison facilities in a single location, the prison world Purgatory III, while selling the other stations and ships for scrap. Noting that specifications showed that *Devil's Island's* drives were still operation, GCSI decided to save on transport costs by ordering the prison staff to fly the starship to its new destination. GCSI sent a team of pilots and techs to make the ship operational, after which the starship embarked on its last voyage to Purgatory. It was supposed to be a five-week trip through a series of backwater star systems – but the *Devil's Island* never arrived . . .

For security reasons, the *Devil's Island's* schedule was not publicized. GCSI were reluctant to reveal they had lost a ship full of hardened criminals, and it took them over six weeks before they reported her loss to the interstellar patrol. A search of systems along the route failed to turn up the missing ship.

Notable Crew

At the time of her disappearance, *Devil's Island* had 19 crew (wardens, ship crew, and guards), 30 security robots, and 251 inmates (140 men, 80 women, and 31 aliens). The prison warden was Benedict Thorn (age 32), and the captain was Calindy Phung (age 36).

"Benny" Thorn was a corporate whiz-kid from GCSI management. He was sent to oversee the transfer process, replacing the spit-and-polish "Old Man Jones," who had been the prior warden. He was resented by most of the old Corrections Bureau staff (those not replaced by robots) who had stayed on after GCSI took over. His team's slide presentations on the Purgatory system (a jungle world teaming with poisonous vegetation that inmates would harvest for GCSI) were leaked to the inmates. The presentation came close to triggering a riot. He's now a captive of Denzil Yamamato.

Cally Phung had been cashiered from her prior career as a freighter pilot following a drunken near-collision with a star liner. She had joined GCSI to fly prison shuttles and kept her nose clean; this was her first independent command of a starship. She's now a captive of the pirate chieftain.

Emilia Stewart was *Devil Island*'s engineer, who'd been assigned well before the GCSI takeover. She had argued against the transfer and had sent memos to GCSI saying that the ship's aging drives might not stand the strain. Offered a chance to resign, she had stayed aboard in order to nurse them. Emilia is hiding in the ship's ducts.

Notable Inmates

Leo "the Brain Surgeon" Kazinkari (age 180). A rogue doctor, over a career spanning 180 years he successively transferred his brain into the bodies of some 60 former lovers (of various sexes), while also cannibalizing their brains.

Alia Aldrin (age 19). Infamous super hacker whose prank disrupting the interstellar mailing system address protocols caused sector-wide chaos. She was partially responsible for 20,000 deaths on Sandalphon IV from a motile cephalovoric fungi epidemic when an expected vaccine shipment ended up half way across the galaxy. Aldrin was instrumental in hacking the security systems of the prison ship. With the help of a couple of security robots she has taken over, Aldrin is now sealed in the ship's control room (with the corpses of the bridge crew). Although the controls were badly damaged in the rioting, she does have access to the communications system. Her pastimes include playing Indigo Blaze rock songs over the transport's PA system and trying to dupe any approaching ship. She doesn't trust most of the other factions, but gets along a bit better with the pirates.

Denzil Yamamoto (age 57). Head of the Devo Cartel, a powerful crime family principally involved in drug trafficking and extortion. Arrested for contributing to the delinquency of a minor (all they could pin on him). Believed to have been running the syndicate from his prison cell. Several of his gang are also with him, forming a powerful block. They've also taken hostages/slaves from among the surviving crew, and they have a freezer full of food and corpses.

Hector Mordred Zhang (age 36). Leader of a small fleet of space pirates, the Underdogs. A cashiered naval officer who turned to crime to pay off gambling debts, his flagship, the *Third Man Walking,* captured or destroyed 47 commercial vessels and two warships, among them the armored transport *Prinz Walter* with its cargo of gold bullion. Zhang and a dozen other pirates were captured during a police sting operation during a high stakes poker game on Ringo II. Most of the pirates are inmates aboard the *Devil's Island,* and they are currently holed up in and around the engineering sections and lower cell blocks. However, his lieutenant, Doberman Kayle, and the *Third Man* escaped (and was never heard of again). Some say Kayle tipped off the police behind the sting. For added challenge, Kayle's pirate ship may be actively searching for his boss, and could possibly arrive at the same time as the party . . .

The Disaster

Chief Engineer Emilia Stewart was correct. The ship's aging star drive malfunctioned somewhere along the route, resulting in a "misjump" or other astrogation error, which left the vessel several parsecs off course with its main drive burned out. As the crew struggled to deal with the problem, a riot broke out. Under cover, Alia Aldrin used a stolen computer to hack the electronic locks and free several prisoners. Soon, different gangs and factions (the pirates and the drug gangs) fought one another, the guards, and the security robots, while inflicting bloody revenge on suspected informers and other pariahs. About two-thirds of the inmates and guards were killed. The rest fled on life pods, which were then destroyed when Alia took control of the ship's weapons. The engine drive room and bridge were wrecked, although power and life support are still functional. However, the food is rapidly running out and cannibalism has set in . . .

The ship is divided into various armed camps in a post-apocalypse-on-board style, with food and supplies being stockpiled. Some minor factions are trying to get together with others to fix the drives, trading surviving captive ship's officers as tokens, but others have given up. A few killer inmates, such as "Leo the Brain Surgeon," stalk the ship's corridors like vengeful ghosts . . .

Devil's Island Prison Ship (TL10^)

The 10,000-ton *Irascible*-class assault transport *Righteous Wrath* was converted into a prison hulk and renamed *Devil's Island*. In its current form, it is an unstreamlined saucer-shaped vessel some 100 yards in diameter, with a mass of 10,000 tons. It uses contragravity for planetary landings. The *Devil's Island* spent several years as an orbital prison hulk before making its last journey. These statistics reflect the *Devil's Island* at the time of its disappearance.

Front Hull	System
[1]	Metallic Laminate Armor (dDR 20).
[2]	Control Room (C9 computer, comm/sensor 9, 10 control stations).
[3]	Habitat (luxury cabin, four offices, 54 cabins).
[4]	Habitat (10-bed clinic with five automeds, laboratory, briefing room, 235 tons steerage).
[5]	Hangar Bay (300 ton capacity).
[6]	Secondary Battery (10 turrets with 32cm missile launchers).

Central Hull	System
[1]	Metallic Laminate Armor (dDR 20).
[2]	Habitat (60 cells).
[3]	Habitat (60 cells).
[4]	Habitat (59 cells, office).
[5]	Habitat (60 cells).
[6!]	Secondary Battery (10 turrets with 300 MJ ultraviolet lasers).
[core]	Open Space (prison exercise area).

Rear Hull	System
[1]	Metallic Laminate Armor (dDR 20).
[2]	Habitat (59 cells, office).
[3!]	Hot Reactionless Drive (1G).
[4!]	Stardrive.
[5!]	Stardrive.
[6!]	Contragravity Lifter.
[core]	Fusion Reactor (two Power Points).

What happened was, you had drifted right through the core systems, and it's really just blind luck that a deep salvage team found you when they did.

– Burke, in **Aliens**

The ship has artificial gravity and total automation. Currently down to HT 9 due to neglect and has only dHP 110 left. Stardrive and bridge are disabled.

TL	Spacecraft	dST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ	dDR	Range	Cost
Piloting/TL10 (High-Performance Spacecraft)												
10^	*Devil's Island*	150	-2/5	13	1G/*c*	10,000	665.2	+10	1,302ASV	20	2×	$768M

Top air speed is 250 mph. Handling is 0/5 in atmosphere.

WRECK OF THE *TRIPLE ELVIS*

The pride of the great shipping company Terra-Athena Star Lines was its *Masterwork* class of 900' luxury space liners. Each of these 30,000-ton cruise ships were outfitted with the most comfortable fittings of their day. These vessels were unusual for ships of their size in being highly streamlined, in order to provide a complete surface-to-surface transit experience without the annoyances of having to transfer to shuttlecraft or orbital elevators.

Each star liner was named for a particular Old Earth work of art that had survived into the interstellar era and which Terra-Athena had, at great expense, purchased for that vessel. Many were from the collection of Valerie Kensington, the multi-billionaire CEO of Terran-Athena whose own personal quest was to "spread Terran culture across the galaxy" using the *Masterwork* liners as her ambassadors. Of course, some people opposed her decision to risk invaluable works of human history by taking them into space. Despite claims that the *Masterwork* liners were among the safest of interstellar vessels, the critics were vindicated when, six years after her launch, the *Triple Elvis* vanished forever, taking with it not only 1,457 crew and passengers (including several famous VIPs), but also her namesake, Andy Warhol's famous painting.

On her final voyage, the *Triple Elvis* was commanded by Captain Jules Cavendish (age 41), a 22-year veteran who had previously served as first officer aboard another Masterwork liner, the *Campbell's Soup Cans*.

The Disaster

The *Triple Elvis* was traveling between systems when it picked up a distress call. The vessel in trouble was the scientific survey ship *Galapagos* (from a well-known science foundation), returning from a long-range voyage beyond the frontier.

The immense liner took *Galapagos* into its cavernous shuttle bay to render assistance. Unfortunately the *Galapagos* had one of those alien encounters typically reserved for horror movies – not a biological threat (they were alert for that) but rather a cybernetic Precursor artifact (e.g., a self-replicating swarm of parasitic or mind-controlling microbots), which possessed the crew and turned them into meat puppets.

As the crew and passengers of the *Triple Elvis* were gradually taken over, the surviving officers, realizing what was happening, became afraid not just for their own lives but that the infection would spread back to civilization. They sabotaged the ship's power and life-support systems (perhaps by rigging an improvised EMP weapon created through overloading the magnetic containment systems in the fusion reactor). This halted the infestation but at the cost of their own lives as the ship was crippled.

Possible Encounters

When the PCs find and investigate the *Triple Elvis*, they might discover some interesting things.

● The abandoned *Galapagos* inside the hangar bay holds a few weird artifacts (salvage recovered from the alien Precursor site that the survey team found).

● Signs of passengers fighting each other throughout the ship.

● Signs of electromagnetic pulse damage throughout.

● Weird cerebral hemorrhages or the like inside the brains of some of the combatants (from the Precursor mind-control microbots that had taken them over)

● A few life pods were jettisoned, but there are no galactic records that anyone else ever recovered them, and no shipboard records of where they were headed.

- Some of the Precursor alien bots might have survived, powered down, trapped in shielded sections of the ship, or awaiting a fresh infusion of energy.
- A few Elvis-inspired bizarre touches, such as a squad of Elvis-impersonator lounge club or waiter robots, who may be controlled by an alien intelligence, if the microbots are still functioning.
- The alien cyber-mind might have been simply confused by its initial "awakening" and is actually not as hostile as it seemed. Or it has some other purpose in mind, e.g., returning to its home world, or restoring its lost race back to life.

Possible Salvage

The big prize is the art gallery of Elvis memorabilia of which the centerpiece is the *Triple Elvis* by Andy Warhol (1963) – an 82' × 69' painting (silk-screened ink and silver paint) depicting three images of Elvis Presley dressed as a cowboy. The painting is kept within an environmentally sealed transparent diamond case. It was ensured for $150 million, but might fetch more to the right buyer depending on the fashions of the moment. On the black market, it would sell for less to the average dealer (usually about 7-10% of legal value); since it is considered a Terran cultural treasure, it would be impossible to legally sell.

If recovered, the liner is potentially valued at around 10% ($70 million or more) of its original price for salvage of its hull and components. In addition, the painting is worth $150 million or more. There's likely another $20 million or so worth of personal goods and luggage aboard, ranging from jewelry in the ship's safes to expensive wines.

> *A sound man is good at salvage,*
> *at seeing nothing is lost.*
>
> *– Laozi*

Masterwork-Class Star Liner (TL11^)

These ships were built with 30,000-ton streamlined hulls. The *Triple Elvis* and her sister ships went through a number of refits over their service life. The statistics represent the liner at the time of her disappearance. The *Masterwork*-class generally operated within well-policed systems and thus did not carry any armament, relying on hired escort vessels when necessary.

Front Hull	System
[1]	Light Alloy Armor (dDR 15).
[2]	Habitat (196 cabins; two luxury cabins).
[3]	Habitat (30 cabins; a 20-bed clinic with 20 automeds; 75 establishments comprising 10 bars, 10 casinos, 10 nurseries, 10 massage parlors, 10 gyms, and 25 shops).
[4]	Habitat (100 luxury cabins).
[5]	Open Space (art gallery, with paintings).
[6]	Open Space (garden).
[core]	Control Room (C10 computer, comm/sensor 11, 15 control stations).

Central Hull	System
[1]	Light Alloy Armor (dDR 15).
[2]	Habitat (100 luxury cabins).
[3]	Habitat (100 luxury cabins).
[4]	Open Space (pool).
[5]	Habitat (100 luxury cabins).
[6]	Habitat (100 luxury cabins).

Rear Hull	System
[1]	Light Alloy Armor (dDR 15).
[2]	Hangar Bay (1,000 tons).
[3!]	Stardrive.
[4]	Cargo Hold (1,500 tons).
[5]	Cargo Hold (1,500 tons).
[6!]	Hot Reactionless Engine (2G).
[core]	Fusion Reactor (two Power Points).

The ship has gravitic compensators and artificial gravity.

Currently, *Triple Elvis* is heavily damaged. The ship has been reduced from 200 dHP to -57 dHP. The hangar bay (rear 2) and stardrive (rear 3) are completely destroyed. Other systems have been disabled, including the forward armor (front 1), three habitats (front 2, center 3 and 5), the engine (rear 6), and one cargo hold (rear 4). Lack of maintenance has reduced it to HT 9.

TL	Spacecraft	dST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ	dDR	Range	Cost
Piloting/TL11^ (High-Performance Spacecraft)												
11^	*Masterwork*-class	200	-2/5	13	2G/*c*	30,000	4,145.2	+11	1,452ASV	15	1×	$783M*

* Excluding artwork.

Top air speed is 3,500 mph.

About the Columnist

David L. Pulver is a Canadian freelance author. An avid science-fiction fan, he began roleplaying in junior high with the newly released **Basic Dungeons & Dragons.** Upon graduating from university, he decided to become a game designer. Since then, David has written over 70 roleplaying game books, and he has worked as a staff writer, editor, and line developer for Steve Jackson Games and Guardians of Order. He is best known for creating **Transhuman Space,** co-authoring the **Big Eyes, Small Mouth** anime RPG, and writing countless **GURPS** books, including the **GURPS Basic Set,** *Fourth Edition,* **GURPS Ultra-Tech,** and the **GURPS Spaceships** series.

SPACE PIRATES

by Adrian Tymes

Your group wants to buckle their swashes and make people walk the plank. You also want to ply the sea of stars, visiting ports that serve entire planets and breathing manufactured air and gravity with all that entails. And there's a decided lack of barnacles.

With a little preparation, the essence of swashbuckling adventures can translate to space, and even benefit from it. This article addresses the major issues of such translation, then gives an example setting.

> *Could be anything. Meteorite strike. Space pirates.*
> *– Nagata, in **Doctor Who** #9.9*

SWASHBUCKLING SPACE ADVENTURES

Types of pirates, available tech, and what parts of realism to ignore are all ideas to consider before creating a science-fiction swashbuckling campaign.

PIRATE TYPE

As in any piracy campaign, one of the most important questions is what type of pirates you are dealing with. Being in space affects the standard types and offers new ones.

Actual Bandits, Unsupported

These pirates either destroy ships and loot the cargo, board ships to steal cargo (sometimes passengers for ransom), or board and steal ships. Without a place to offload any goods they don't plan to use, such endeavors are short-lived, as it is impossible to hide in space if the authorities have reason and means to track a ship and a rough idea of where it is. A crew that was press-ganged into service might comply just enough to not get thrown out the airlock. When the authorities arrive, they may award the ship to the party while their former captain is escorted away, if said authorities believe the crew will put it to good use.

Alternately, some forms of FTL travel provide difficult-to-scan spaces that must be traveled through. If a pirate ship can hide in hyperspace, its expected lifespan is extended, but it still must find a place to make a profit from its loot. Spacecraft are much more expensive than boats; any pirate intent on profit must find a way to recover the costs, or the most profitable action would be to sell the ship.

Actual Bandits, Supported

Whether privateers with a letter of marque, or just a crew with a pirate haven to hide in, pirates who have a way to avoid reprisals may make a career of it. This requires the least changes from sea-borne piracy – but the question of who sponsors the pirates, and how they deal with pressure from others to stop, must still be answered. These pirates also require booty profitable enough to justify not selling the ship.

Entertainers

Any civilization has had to deal with piracy well before making it into space. There will be legends and cultural remnants, which may be alluded to for entertainment. For instance, the anime *Bodacious Space Pirates* features "space privateers" who work with insurance agents and "rob" passenger liners, essentially a cabaret funded by insurance scams. Likewise, "traveling entertainers" has been a cover story and side job for adventuring parties for ages, as it gives an excuse to travel with little oversight.

Asteroid Miners

There is a lot of potential wealth in space, between rare minerals, solar energy, and zero-g manufacturing. If there is a weak interstellar government (for instance, one that collects taxes based on a citizen's home planet), those who live in space might be accused of "pirating" the common services this government provides. One or the other side might deliberately adopt pirate tropes, either to insult or as a badge of honor, such as calling mining "plundering the treasure buried in asteroids."

If they are successful enough, asteroid-mining pirates could become a major economic force, which may scare existing planet-based elites into further marginalizing them. Space pirates of this type will eventually form their own law, formal or not, and may have to deal with actual piracy from other groups. Pirate clans naturally form in this environment.

Transatmospheric Raiders

A planetary government might have no power projection capability beyond its atmosphere. In this case, even a small TL9 spaceship with total life support and enough fuel and power (or an orbiting base to resupply) can be formidable – diving in, doing something, and fleeing before the law arrives. "Pirate" is among the least objectionable terms the planet's government will call them. Whether they are Robin Hoods, freedom fighters, marauders, ill-informed meddlers who make things worse, or mere thieves depends on what they do and who you ask. Accurately assessing situations from orbit will be critical to their success.

Rebels, Smugglers, Etc.

Anyone with a spaceship who is doing something someone else disapproves of might be called a "space pirate." These fall into one of the other categories, sometimes as a cover story. A "privateer" could be an armed courier for goods its government wishes to keep secret, where sending an openly military ship would provoke an incident. Conversely, asteroid miners might seek to overthrow those who claim power over them, and make use of convenient means at hand.

Space pirates in some campaigns might end up visiting Bazaar (see pp. 12-16) to sell their cargo or purchase supplies.

SEA VS. SPACE

On the one hand, outer space is no ocean. There is no water. Radiation is everywhere, as are micrometeoroids (and, near many places of interest, debris at perilously high velocities). Even the air is missing, and the lack of convection can be as much of a problem as asphyxiation.

On the other hand, the open sea is hardly friendly to human life. Weather aside, the water is not drinkable without energy-intensive treatment, fishing is only viable where there are fish, and if suddenly denied a boat or any other way to float, a human must swim or sink. The basics of survival are largely the same: bring a properly equipped ship, keep it in working order, and get to port before your supplies run out.

Swashbuckling adventures, which focus on personal action, will usually skim over the details of ship operation. So long as the ship is handled competently and gets the crew where it needs to go, that is all that matters. Once it comes time to board another vessel, several details become relevant.

Vacc Suits

Decide whether it is standard for space crews to wear vacuum suits during boarding actions.

If not, there is a reasonable expectation that fighting will not breach the hull, and opening an airlock into space won't have any ill consequences. This implies some level of commonly accepted chivalry, with consequences for "clever" boarding parties who attempt to employ vacuum as a weapon. The GM should warn the players if this expectation is present and their characters are about to violate it.

If wearing vacuum suits is standard, then the Vacc Suit skill is important, and every spacer will have it at a good level. Furthermore, everyone will be wearing some degree of armor, unless the GM declares that standard vacc suits in the campaign are DR 0. Airlocks and internal pressure doors may have to be forced open, but manual overrides will be present for this purpose on all but the most paranoid ship designs. Accidents can kill as easily as a bullet or laser.

Gravity

A ship's gravity is either zero, low, normal, or high. In zero gravity, things float and keep moving until they hit something, and Free Fall skill comes into play. In low gravity, extremely high and long jumps are possible; while there are DX penalties, the normal range of actions is otherwise possible. In high gravity, there are DX and ST penalties.

Most ships cannot adjust their gravity, although some have different gravity in different sections. For instance, ships that spin to simulate gravity have zero gravity at their core, normal gravity at their edge, and low gravity between. Acrobatics and Jumping skills can be more useful than Running to cover long distances quickly.

Ship Terrain

A ship at sea has an open deck, with multiple enclosed decks below. A spaceship is all enclosed decks; the open exterior is rarely of interest. Room-to-room fighting is the norm, and weapons powerful enough to breach the hull are discouraged.

Ships' deck plans are determined by their gravity source, if any. Spin gravity means concentric circular decks. Ships under constant, gravity-simulating thrust have many small decks, like a small skyscraper. Artificial gravity may mean either of these, or a few long decks similar to a sea ship. Large ships with artificial gravity, or ships with no gravity, may have more complex deck plans.

Every room contains equipment (which can be used as cover or to control some part of the ship), supplies, or cargo. A room with nothing in it is empty storage, wasteful unless it is expected to be filled with cargo later.

SCIENCE!

Any space pirate setting employs technology much more advanced than we enjoy today. TL10 or higher is recommended: a space pirate is to today's (TL8) space crews as a 17th-century (TL4) Caribbean pirate was to ancient Roman (TL2) naval crews.

For a good space-swashbuckling campaign, do not get bogged down in the details of how this works. Spacecraft will have enough fuel for the voyages they undertake unless it is dramatically important that they might not. (If using *GURPS Spaceships*, reactionless drives can trim this bookkeeping, representing reaction drives efficient enough that fuel is a tiny fraction of ship mass.) Making FTL common can cut a lot of time between star systems. Radiation should not be a day-to-day concern; ship designs keep exposure to cosmic rays and solar flares low, and cellular repair enzymes in any ship's or station's food heal 10 rads (even "permanent" doses) every 12 hours.

Wildcard Skills

More importantly, PCs and NPCs alike have been raised in an environment where all of this happens routinely; it is no more wondrous to them than citrus preventing scurvy is to us. In many settings, educational technology has advanced alongside other fields: Han Solo, hardly a scholar among his peers, had engineering and astrographic knowledge that would have granted him numerous honorary doctorates on modern Earth. Wildcard skills (p. B175) can represent the fruit of such education, with these caveats:

● The GM should set a list of acceptable wildcard skills, using the examples on p. B175 or in *GURPS Power-Ups 7: Wildcard Skills* to make sure no wildcard skills are not too broad. ("Everything My PC Will Ever Want To Do!" is not a valid wildcard skill.) The GM should limit the number of points that can be spent on any one skill.

● For wildcard skills that cover both physical and mental activities, record the DX-based and IQ-based levels separated by a slash. For instance, if a character has Space Pirate!-13/11,

plotting a course with Navigation would roll against a skill level of 11, while shooting with Guns would see a skill level of 13.

● Where the skills require a tech level, use the campaign's default tech level.

● Wildcard skills should not automatically remove familiarity penalties. In the example setting (below), someone who used Pilot! (*Power-Ups 7,* p. 34) to pilot an *Angler* would be at -2 to skill when piloting a *Super 49er* while getting familiar with its controls.

● If some have access to these skills and others do not, access is a 10-point Unusual Background (Wildcard Training).

● Characters can use a wildcard skill as a base, then add points into a skill under the wildcard. For instance, someone with Science! (*Power-Ups 7,* p. 35) at IQ level could add 4 more points to Physics to gain that skill at IQ+1. It is inefficient to do this for more than two skills within the same wildcard skill; the GM should allow players who want to improve a third skill to reallocate the points in individual skills into higher levels of the wildcard skill, to reflect greater ability through diverse training.

EXAMPLE SETTING: THE EXPANSE

Having discovered how to manufacture wormholes, humankind has spread throughout the stars. Earth stands as a tombstone, plagued and poison to its children, thwarting all efforts to reclaim it. There is peace for now, with humanity governed by the Venusian Pact, an alliance of colonies formed to support colonization and the population of far stars to forever prevent a repeat of humankind's near-extinction. The Pact is opposed internally by the House of People, a faction that promotes development of existing colonies. Dancing around this divide are the space pirates, who combine development and expansion by doing without traditional colonies. And everywhere, individual heroes are determining humanity's future.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Accurate records are sparse, but historians agree, humankind kicked itself off Earth. Biological warfare resulted in the Plague: a multi-vector weapon designed to mutate, spread, and kill. Even today, strains of it war for dominance among simpler life forms; all mammalian life on the planet has gone extinct. Over 100 million people were evacuated to lunar colonies, most in cryostasis for want of life support.

Humanity struggled, but survived. Venus was terraformed in mere decades, by adapting the Plague's trick of using several methods in concert to overwhelm the problem. There was now enough living space. Soon, Mars was made habitable, too. Then someone chanced across the trick to making wormholes.

By now ideologically locked into spreading humanity to save it, the government pressed forward with colonization missions. However, this required people – and there were not enough to support an advanced technology base as it was. Natural population growth was not nearly fast enough, so mass human cloning was authorized. While that first

generation was growing up and automated child-rearing was being worked out, "parent" was a full-time job for a greater fraction of the human race than ever before. Cloned babies soon outnumbered natural-born, a trend which is slowing but still exists today.

For better or for worse, mass cloning provided a test bed for genetic augmentation. New subspecies were formed, always with the best of intent, though for varying definitions of "best." Racial discrimination arose. While it has faded over time, it still sends people to the stars; the space pirates' meritocracy favors what one does over who one is, so a catgirl has the same shot at a captain's seat as anyone.

The space pirates organized about three decades after interstellar colonization began. When an increasing number of people made their homes outside of gravity wells, the planet-focused government – along with a coalition of businesses concerned about the economic impact of asteroid mining – launched a media campaign to make the public distrust space-based businesses. One captain summed up their response thusly: "If we're pirates, then get me a parrot and hoist the Jolly Roger. Arr, me and my hearties are off to plunder some buried treasure!" Rallying around this cultural banner, the "space pirates" may be the most extensive case of turning an insult into a badge of honor in human history.

It has been over a century since the evacuation. Few now live who remember humankind on Earth. Everywhere there is building and colonization and discovery. Trade is loosely regulated; some planets have turned to sponsoring privateers to boost their revenues, and the Pact Navy never has enough spare ships to hunt them down. On many low-population colonies, a single spaceship can bully the planet – or save it from a tyrant. Even in more populated systems, individual acts of heroism can inspire billions.

THE NET

All colonized worlds have at least one artificial wormhole in orbit sustained by a giant ring-shaped space station, called a Gate. More developed worlds have several Gates. Each Gate connects to one other Gate, with no perceived space or time between them; the two Gates are sometimes thought of as two sides of the same station. The Gate network, known as the Net, enables rapid transit from one world or star system to another. Gates are kept in a geostationary orbit, defining the limits of authority: anything below the Gates is subject to the planet's government; anything at or beyond the Gates is the Pact's exclusive jurisdiction.

This is the backbone of interstellar traffic. Some ships generate their own micro-wormholes; this is how systems are surveyed and the equipment to construct a Gate is shipped to its destination. (Gates' wormholes are not themselves sent via wormhole, but via near-c automated couriers. There is a five- to 10-year lag between finding a promising world and connecting it to the Net.)

THE EXPANSE

As far as most people know, "the Expanse" is space-pirate slang for the asteroids, comets, and other non-planetary objects drifting around a solar system, which they use for habitats and mining. Officials grumble about solar-flare radiation and other space hazards cutting short the lives of the families who live here; in practice, life support on any object intended for long-term habitation in space completely mitigates these problems. While some systems have small Gates for quick traverse from planet to planet, and some of these connect to asteroid habitats, popular belief is that only romance causes space pirates to speak of all systems' Expanses as a single region.

Trusted space pirates sworn to secrecy know that the Expanse includes many Gates not registered with and unknown to the Net; several link to systems with no other human presence. Space pirates can use this to travel in secret, but they more often use them to reach newly tapped asteroid belts in uncolonized systems for quick mining. All unregistered Gates are rigged to self-destruct in case of discovery, to prevent evidence of this network from getting out.

Rumors have leaked despite the space pirates' best efforts. The Pact's and House's spy networks know, but they find it a useful secret to keep. Still, this is home for most space pirates, with the less trusted (including those born in the Expanse but not yet old enough) kept away from unregistered wormholes. Anyone with Patron (Space Pirates) and Status 1 or higher, or an appropriate Security Clearance, may know the secret of the Expanse.

MAJOR FACTIONS

Officially, all of humanity has one government: the Pact. Worlds are largely autonomous, so long as they pay taxes, uphold minimum human rights, and do not try to take over other worlds. Unofficially, the House has gathered its own military and enforces its will on weaker planets, and both the Pact and the House grow increasingly nervous about the space pirates.

Venusian Pact

The Pact is the government, headquartered on and named for Venus. Modeled after Earth's federal governments, it has an elected senate which appoints a president. It is dominated by aging idealists; the oldest members walked Earth before the Plague and often prioritize the future over the present.

The Pact operates the only official interstellar military, split into the Navy (spaceships) and Marines (infantry), with a blurry line between them (the Marines help planetary governments with problems on a planet or Gate, while the Navy handles everything else, but many issues cross that boundary). With no external threat, the military mediates disputes between planetary governments. Both branches run their own, sometimes conflicting law-enforcement operations (the Interstellar Patrol and the Police Corps, respectively), which act as two more branches.

The House of People

The House is a collection of business moguls, planetary governors, and religious leaders who seek better conditions for existing planets. That is what they profess; when they get their way, the results are often better conditions for themselves and marginal improvements for the average person. Still, the promise of a better tomorrow attracts popular support, and the House makes things substantially better for everyone just often enough to keep people believing their advertising.

Their private militias have clashed with the Pact on several occasions – each time with care taken to deny their link to the rest of the House. More often, they clash with space pirates, who object to certain practices seen as greedy, selfish, or outright tyrannical. The House portrays such attempts as ignorant meddling that inevitably makes things worse. The truth is somewhere in between and obscured by their decades-long media war for the hearts of the public.

Space Pirates

The popular image is of leeches on society, who fritter away their days in the vast reaches of space away from "proper" and "responsible" lives on the ground. They romanticize the ideals of ancient Caribbean pirates while (usually) not actually making a living stealing other peoples' wealth. While that last part is correct, statistics tell a different tale for the rest.

A quarter of humans live on a space-pirate habitat or ship. Asteroid mining, an industry they dominate, is the number one source of raw materials and a substantial primary contributor to humanity's wealth. Their loose, informal codes are humanity's second most widely obeyed legal system, below the Pact's own laws. Space pirates operate in a clannish fashion not unlike the mafia and yakuza of pre-Plague Earth, though operating in the open and easily adopting newcomers into their extended "families."

Clan heads ascend to their position as much through popularity as effectiveness; their sheer wealth allows them to tolerate practices that are financially less than efficient but achieve desirable (to the clan heads) social ends.

Their most public face is Centauri Station in Alpha Centauri, constructed after no planets in the system were deemed suitable for terraforming. Alpha Centauri's Expanse is well known as a web of connected settlements that collectively govern themselves as if the entire system was a single planet; it was concern over this growing network that prompted the backfiring "space pirate" media campaign. With public attention on Centauri Station itself, unregistered Gates are kept at least three Gate pairs away. The system's richest asteroids have been mined out, so most of the habitats have turned to mineral laundering, "producing" ores obtained from systems off the Net.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Beyond wildcard skills (p. 27), a few character creation rules require special explanations for this setting. See *GURPS Space,* pp. 224-226, for a list that applies to most science fiction worlds; notes specific to the Expanse are here.

For numerous templates for genetically modified humans (upgrades and parahumans), turn to *Transhuman Space: Bioroid Bazaar.*

3D Spatial Sense

see p. B34

While someone with this trait may know which way is "up" relative to a ship's gravity, knowing which way a ship is pointing after it goes through a wormhole requires navigating by the stars (or by nearby landmarks, if coming out near a planet or other significant object). Knowing how to do this quickly is part of Navigation (Hyperspace).

Claim to Hospitality

see p. B41

Since it allows for lodging in most inhabited systems, Claim to Hospitality (Space Pirates) is a 10-point advantage, suitable for anyone who has been introduced in space-pirate society on friendly terms. They keep records, accessible through the Expanse, of anyone who has been introduced, and anyone on their blacklist.

Duty

see pp. B133-134

Long-term occupants of any space-pirate habitat are expected to give back to society in some way, which can be represented by a Duty (Space Pirates; 6 or less).

Patron

see p. B73

Although many who work for them might think that the Pact and the House act as Patrons, in most cases, they do not provide assistance, or their assistance is better represented by other advantages (such as Legal Enforcement Powers). However, the space pirates do act this way, and are a 30-point Patron (power rivaling an interstellar government), with Equipment (+50%) and Minimal Intervention (-50%). They have enough material wealth that the recipient can keep anything they receive, but if someone asks for help, the space pirates may provide what they think the requester needs, whether or not it is what you asked for), as modified by frequency of appearance. Note that any big gifts, such as a spaceship, should be rare events, preferably before the campaign.

Rank and Status

see p. B28-29

Different types of Rank and Status are used by the different powers. Space pirates, with their loose authority, use only Status as a general means of determining one's place in society. Nonetheless, personal, quasi-feudal loyalties are not uncommon, and quite a few space pirates have Merchant Rank for their own ships (gaining +1 to Status with Merchant Rank 2-4, +2 for 5-7, and so on). The House, in an attempt to recognize authority figures even if they have not specifically climbed the House's ladder, accords Administrative Rank (House) to its members equal to half (round up) of any other Rank.

Officially, the Pact has one military service with four branches (Navy and Marines using Military Rank; Patrol and Police using Police Rank), and Police Rank equates to Military Rank when they interact. In practice, most officers know better than to assume they know how to do the other branches' jobs; the flag officer ranks require cross-training.

Wealth

see p. B25

Wealth is the most cost-effective way for PCs to own a spaceship, whether reflecting a down payment on a ship they purchased or a gift.

When choosing to finance, a bank can provide a loan for the rest of the cost of the ship, for the ship owners to pay with interest; typical rates vary from 2% of the rest of the ship's cost every month for six years, to 1% every month for 12 years. In this case, someone needs to take an appropriate Debt.

For a gift, the GM may wish to require a partial Multimillionaire level to avoid winding up with too much capital: 65 points of Wealth – Multimillionaire 0.6 – comes to $30,000,000, enough for an *Angler,* p. 31, and some supplies.

While there is much wealth to go around, it tends to get concentrated. Many people owning their own spaceships is one means; terraforming, cloning, and Gates are also major wealth sinks. The richest people own entire planets, but must answer to the Pact (and, increasingly, the space pirates) if they mistreat their residents.

Space Sickness

see p. B156

While there is regular space travel, wormhole transitions are the only free fall that most people experience, and are not enough to trigger this. The GM should only allow this disadvantage if there will be a substantial chance of exposure to free fall.

SAMPLE SPACECRAFT

Space pirates would not be space pirates without a means to travel the black beyond. For detailed rules on spaceships, including weapon statistics, see *GURPS Spaceships*. See Patron and Wealth, above, for the most common ways that small adventuring crews get a spaceship.

Angler-Class Armed Modular Transport

The *Angler* is the most common ship class in the Expanse. It is named for the long, flexible manipulator that can extend from just behind the front-mounted control room and reach behind the ship (just far enough to get into the hangar and cargo bays, allowing fast cargo handling as if the ship was always at a port, per *Spaceships,* p. 44). This arm retracts out of sight when not in use, as do the weapon turrets; some people think the ships are unarmed and all designed the same. Little could be further from the truth.

Many *Anglers* use their cargo bays as is, and even remove the weapons for more cargo, but the bays are designed to accept modular upgrades. Common modules include additional habitats (for an automed, a minifac, or cabins for more crew), combat systems (additional ECM, in combination with upgraded armor, weapons, and power plant), enhanced sensors for surveying unexplored systems, or passenger seating to transport up to 20 people for 24 hours per bay replaced (with provisions stored in the hangar bay).

Further differentiating them is their use. *Anglers* are a favorite of space pirates, who mostly work in small teams. The Pact Patrol, after years of trying to come up with a better ship, settled for using the same class they have to chase down. No small number of merchants appreciate its adaptability. Used *Anglers* are common among planetary survey fleets. With all those users, some nefarious types rely on stock *Anglers* to remain anonymous.

Anglers take a crew of four: a pilot, an engineer, a sensor operator, and a captain. In combat, the captain and engineer can operate the turrets. However, on some ships, the crew consists of one person, who can program the turrets to intercept incoming projectiles and rely on the autopilot while

performing maintenance on the ship. On other vessels, the maximum crew of eight includes dedicated damage control and gunners.

The hangar bay of the base model is intended for smaller (up to SM+3) vehicles or to act as a cargo airlock – say, to salvage a drifting wreck. The most common variant (and the one described below) is the *H-Angler*, which enlarges the hangar bay to admit a trio of SM+4 vehicles.

Front Hull	Systems
[1]	Light Alloy Armor (3 dDR).
[2]	Robot Arm (dST 50).
[3-4]	Modular Cargo Hold (15 tons capacity each).
[5]	Control Room (C7 computer, comm/sensor 6, 3 control stations).
[6!]	Stardrive (Wormhole) Engine (FTL 1).

Central Hull	Systems
[1]	Light Alloy Armor (3 dDR).
[2!]	Medium Battery (300 KJ very rapid-fire advanced laser, 30 MJ ultraviolet laser, 12 cm electromagnetic gun).
[3]	Modular Cargo Hold (15 tons capacity).
[4]	Fusion Reactor (de-rated, 1 Power Point).
[5]	Engine Room (one workspace).
[6, core]	Habitat (2 cabins each).

Rear Hull	Systems
[1]	Light Alloy Armor (3 dDR).
[2]	Antimatter Plasma Torch Drive (1G acceleration).
[3-4]	Modular Cargo Hold (15 tons capacity each). *Note:* In the *H-Angler* class, these become Hanger Bays (10 tons capacity each).
[5]	Hangar Bay (10 tons capacity).
[6, core]	Fuel Tank (15 tons antimatter-boosted hydrogen providing 120 mps delta-V each).

An *Angler* is streamlined, winged, and comes with artificial gravity and a digital chameleon hull (*Spaceships,* p. 30) that is more often used to sport distinguishing marks or as a backup ship-to-ship messaging system than for stealth.

TL	Spacecraft	dST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ	dDR	Range	Cost
Piloting/TL10 (High-Performance Spacecraft)												
10^	*Angler*-class	50	-1/5	13	1G/120 mps	300	85.8	+7	8+0SV	3	1x	$27.055M
10^	*H-Angler*-class	50	-1/5	13	1G/120 mps	300	75.8	+7	8+0SV	3	1x	$27.085M

Top air speed is 2,500 mph. Handling is +3/6 in atmosphere.

Super 49er-Class Mining Ship

The *Super 49er* class is the most iconic space-pirate ship: an asteroid miner with pirate aesthetics. The "mask" on the front, which protects the ship against mining accidents and during atmospheric reentry, is in the shape of a skull, with "eyes" for sensor clusters and "teeth" lining a giant hinged jaw. The jaw is tipped with a diamond-edged chainsaw used to chop off sections of asteroids, which opens to a hangar bay that passes material to internal cargo holds and processing

systems. While not as common as *Anglers*, there are millions of *Super 49ers* in service. Unlike most ship designs, their blueprints were commissioned to be given away, and are freely available at any spaceport.

These are the ships of choice for less adventurous space pirates. It is not uncommon for space pirates to "retire" to one of these, using their family as crew (or adopting the crew as family), and the layout of a standard *Super 49er*'s habitation area encourages this.

Typical positions on a full crew are captain, executive officer, pilot, navigator, sensor operator, chief engineer, doctor, two geologists, and 14 technicians, although fewer crew can be used. Significant non-crew personnel, such as the crew's children and a teacher for them, are common.

Super 49ers are named for things associated with mining or treasure hunting, such as *Pickaxe*. However, with so many of the class in service, many names get reused. If two or more in the same area share the same name, they are referred to by their name and the last three (or more, if necessary) digits of their registration number, for instance *Pickaxe-421*.

Front Hull	Systems
[1]	Steel Armor (7 dDR).
[2]	Science Comm/Sensor Array (comm/sensor 11).*
[3]	Maw (15d cutting d-damage).*
[4]	Hangar Bay (300 tons capacity).*
[5-6, core]	Cargo Hold (500 tons capacity each).

Central Hull	Systems
[1-2!!]	Super Stardrive (Wormhole) Engine (FTL 2 each).*
[3-5!]	Mining (each can process 50 tons/hour of rock into ore and other raw material.)*

Central Hull	Systems
[6!]	Refinery (can smelt 150 tons/hour of ore and other raw materials into components).*
[core]	Cargo Hold (500 tons capacity).

Rear Hull	Systems
[1]	Antimatter Plasma Torch Drive (1G acceleration).*
[2]	Fuel Tank (500 tons antimatter-boosted hydrogen providing 120 mps delta-V).
[3-4]	Fusion Reactor (two Power Points each).*
[5]	Habitat (24 cabins and 1 luxury cabin with total life support, Science! lab, 2-bed sickbay with 2 automeds, 1 classroom or bar, captain's office, 15 tons steerage cargo).*
[6]	Control Room (C9 computer, comm/sensor 9, only 6 control stations).*

* One workspace per system.

Super 49ers are streamlined, winged, and come with artificial gravity. They do not have enough power to activate all systems at once; typically, either the wormhole drives or the mining and refining systems are in use.

TL	Spacecraft	dST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ	dDR	Range	Cost
	Piloting/TL10 (High-Performance Spacecraft)											
10^	*Super 49er*-class	150	-2/5	13	1G/120 mps	10,000	2,320	+10	50ASV	3/0/0	4x	$1.581B

Top air speed is 2,500 mph. Handling is +2/6 in atmosphere.

About the Author

Adrian Tymes is a jack of all trades and master of some, having done everything on Lazarus' list except die gallantly, though he hopes to avoid death for quite some time. He is something of a mad scientist, with a knack for reverse engineering the world. He enjoys being inspired by science fiction, with results including multiple patents from robotics to nanotechnology, the first residential solar installation in his city, and research work that played a small part on the path to artificial retinas. He thrives in the Silicon Valley startup scene, finding problems and solving them.
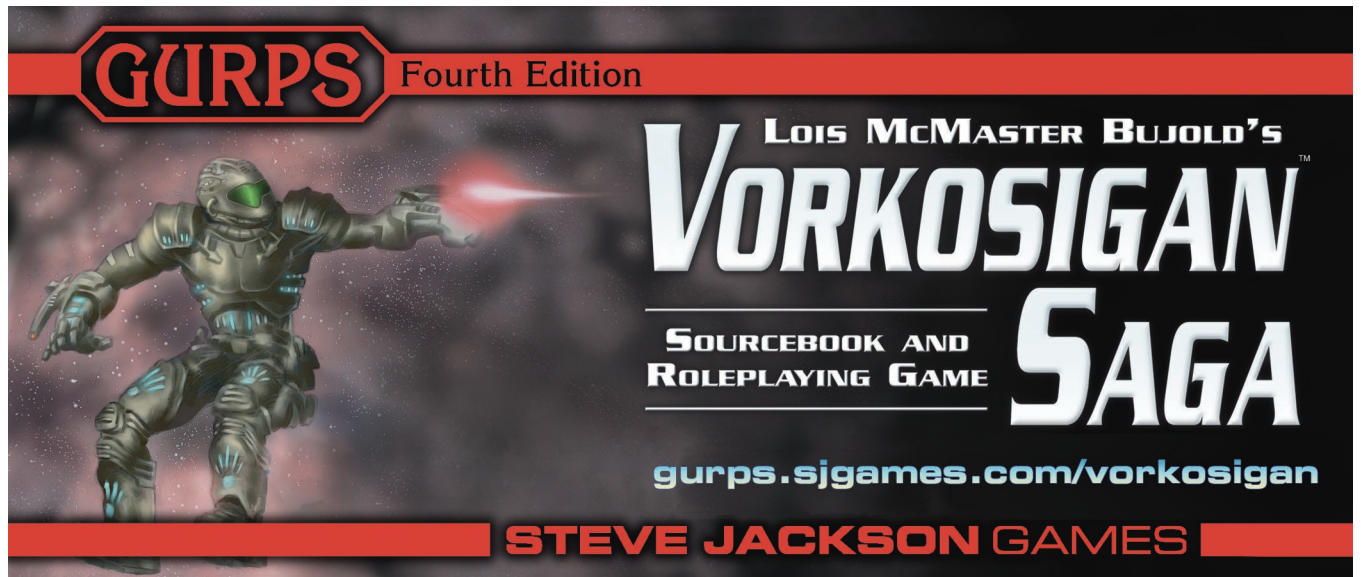
An Alien Way of Thinking

by Rory Fansler

Some minds are just so different that they are very hard to relate to. Authors of pulp science fiction often had aliens who thought at different frequencies and were unable to be read telepathically. Other stories related beings so alien in concept that communication was all but impossible.

Experiencing the World

Different Rate of Thought: Altered Time Rate, Enhanced Time Sense, and Decreased Time Rate may affect how such a being thinks and communicates. Those who think faster than you may seem distracted and inattentive, but perhaps they are just bored and waiting for you to catch up or get around to saying the next word. Those with Decreased Time Rate may seem stupid or confused when in reality they are just having trouble keeping up with you.

Different Senses: Humans rely on sight and sound for most of their communication, but how would it be for a race without them? These beings would have different words and ways to describe things and experiences, assuming a way could be found to converse with them. They may use different methods, such as smells, touch, vibration, or even generating their own energies (light, radio, etc.) to communicate.

Improved Math Skills: Computers work through math, so why not a race with Intuitive Mathematician? Imagine everything described in precise mathematical terms, with many concepts represented by well-known formulas.

Improved Memory: Races with Eidetic or Photographic Memory may use symbols or ideograms to communicate complex information in a shorter time. They would have an easier time remembering what various icons or pictographs stood for, so why waste time piecing together long phrases to describe things?

Superior Senses: A race where everyone had the same enhanced sense would tend to notice things a human may overlook. Things could be described in more subtle and detailed terms. For example, a race that used normal sight but had 360° vision may likely see and relate to the world in a way hard for a human to understand: "There is no 'front,' 'back,' or 'side'; only near and far."

These can all contribute to making various races more distinct and enhance the flavor of a setting. **GURPS Powers: Enhanced Senses** offers additional inspiration for alternate ways of experiencing the world. Some new advantages are described below. (Nonlinear Thinker and Unusual Frequency are inspired by Digital Mind.)

Low-Grade Telepathy

15 points

In some settings, telepaths can only communicate at short distances and with other telepaths. This ability allows the user to communicate with other telepaths, though they must also have this ability to hold a conversation with you. Those who do have mental abilities can easily shut you out. They must be in easy speaking distance for this ability to work as it takes a -1 IQ penalty per hex distant. A Hard technique can be learned to offset the range penalty for those who learn to "speak" louder.

Statistics: Telesend (Accessibility, Only on those with telepathic abilities, -20%; Short Range 2; -20%; Telepathy, -10%) [15].

*For general ideas about designing non-human cultures, see **Making Something Alien,** from **Pyramid #3/35: Aliens.***

Nonlinear Thinker

5 points

You view time all at once instead of in the linear fashion of most other beings. This allows you the opportunity to gain several related advantages (but they are not automatic); see below.

Mental powers are at -5 when used on you unless they have Time-Spanning (**GURPS Powers,** p. 109). Beings with this trait are typically Insubstantial but can be hurt with powers that have Time-Spanning added to them. Most other abilities can simply be sidestepped as the entity knows when they are coming. See **GURPS Powers,** p. 119, for an example, or simply add Cosmic, Godlike Tricks, +300% to Insubstantial for those who can attack from outside of time.

Typical Advantages: Altered Time Rate, Enhanced Time Sense, Jumper (Time), Precognition, Psychometry. Abilities with the Hypersensory modifier (**Enhanced Senses,** pp. 8-9).
Typical Disadvantages: Megalomania, Overconfidence.

Perk: Avatar

You can project a mental image to accompany your telepathic abilities. An avatar allows you to be easily and quickly recognized if there is any doubt to your identity, and determines the impression left with the people who don't know you. You can hide your avatar, and you can change aspects of it, but the fundamental concept remains the same.

Unusual Frequency

5 points

You think at a frequency of thought different from typical beings; specify either High Band or Low Band. Mental powers thus have a hard time with you. Powers with the Telepathy modifier need to be designed for your race or have Extended (High Band) or Extended (Low Band) to affect you. Either version of Extended is a +20% enhancement. In some settings, this enhancement can be learned or used with Temporary Enhancements (*GURPS Powers,* p. 172). Additionally, some campaigns give all animals one or the other version of Unusual Frequency as a feature, or only select species have it.

You can be sensed by those with normal telepathic senses. However, they sense you as background noise, a fuzzy feeling, or an irritating whine.

In a setting where Telepathy is very common, increase the cost to 10 points.

IMMERSIVE CONVERSATIONS

Some aliens take mental communication to a new, more intense level. The mental powers in *GURPS* are primarily designed with a pass/fail process in mind. However, what if psychic encounters were more interactive? *GURPS Supers,* p. 127, describes psychic duels, *Pyramid #3/83: Alternate GURPS IV* introduces *Possessions Under Control,* and *Pyramid #3/97: Strange Powers* gives us a glance at *High Psi.* Of course, *GURPS Psionic Powers* explores telepathic abilities and techniques in great detail. Here is another option for dramatic meetings of minds.

Setting Up the Location

You can set up a mental space for psychic interactions. Both abilities described below create a room that must be entered voluntarily; create a relevant Affliction to force people to enter.

Everyone has their own mental counterpart in the area and interacts with the following modifications. IQ replaces DX, Will replaces ST, and all other attributes remain the same, though everyone is effectively unarmed and has no mundane equipment. Mind Shield acts as DR; if it has the Profiling enhancement, it grants a flat +1 to active defenses. Mental abilities work normally, though everyone counts as in physical contact. Experienced duelers may buy abilities that only work in this realm; this is a -50% limitation to each trait.

Channeling (Mind)

9 or 10 points

You can invite anyone who touches your mind with a mental power into a special part of your psyche reserved for such interactions. Telepaths must include the Telepathy power modifier, but nontelepaths might have the option to learn this ability (if that would be appropriate for the campaign world).

Statistics: Channeling (Mind) [10] *or* Channeling (Mind; Telepathy, -10%) [9].

Jumper (Mind)

20 points

You can create a psychic room that anyone can enter as long as they have an ability using the Telepathy power modifier, including this one. This can allow several psychics to interact (handy for keeping a party together) or enjoy their own conference room.

Statistics: Jumper (Mind) (One realm only, -20%; Projection, -50%; Telepathy, -10%) [20].
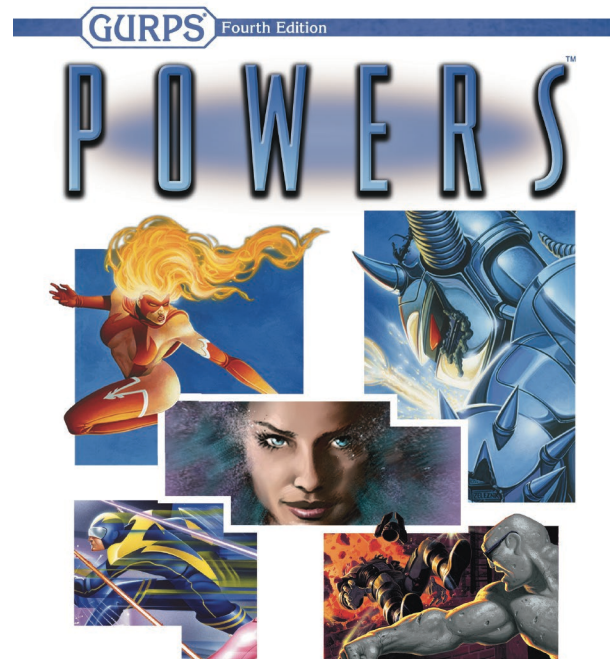
Dreaming

see p. B188

This skill can be used to make minor cosmetic changes to your person or the landscape while in the psychic room. Any such changes can be countered by other people in the arena with a Quick Contest of Dreaming. Aside from the decorative applications, this ability can be used as a Ruse (*GURPS Martial Arts,* p. 101) in combat.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rory Fansler (also known as "refplace" on the forums and elsewhere) is a fan of pulp science fiction. This article was inspired by the likes of Doc Smith, Roger Zelazny, and James H. Smith.
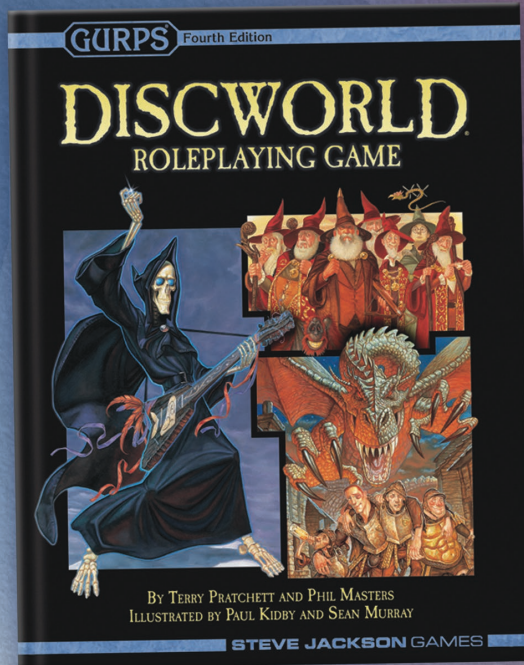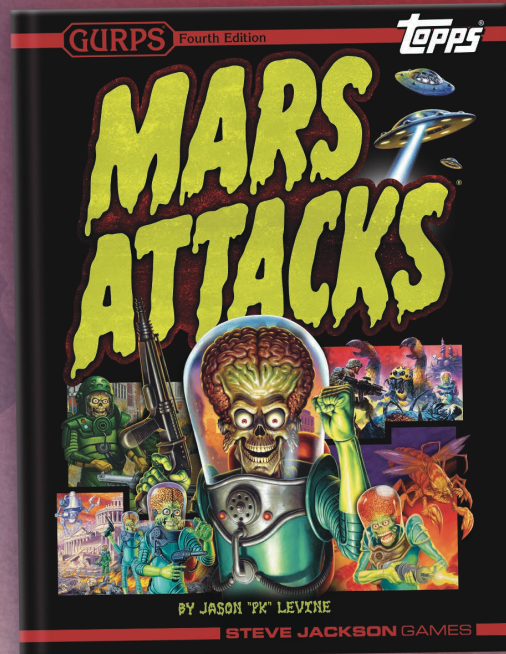
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Random Thought Table

Push Your Luck!

by Steven Marsh, *Pyramid* Editor

There's a notion in some games about pressing your luck. That is, you have some level of reward (or lack of punishment), and you have an opportunity to risk those gains for the opportunity of greater rewards. One of the most-fun examples I've encountered in recent years is *Zombie Dice,* where players can continue rolling the dice to gain more points, but – if the dice fall the wrong way – you'll lose everything for the round. The math of the game is simple enough to intuitively grasp in broad strokes, and it's structured so that – at some point – someone will *need* to push their luck in some fashion . . . even among the most conservative players.

As I type this, I've just seen *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (not really a SPOILER ALERT because I speak obliquely, but if you don't want to read anything about the film, I understand; just skip to the next paragraph). In that film, the good guys and the bad guys have at least one opportunity apiece to "push their luck," risking their current progress (or opportunity to cut their losses) to potentially advance their goals.

> *Well believe me, Mike, I calculated the odds of this succeeding versus the odds I was doing something incredibly stupid . . . and I went ahead anyway.*
> *– Crow T. Robot, in **Mystery Science Theater 3000: The Movie***

The notion of pressing your luck is instrumental to many roleplaying games. For example, in the traditional dungeon crawl, the notion of pushing your luck manifests in the idea of should you continue adventuring deeper into the dungeon, or should you return to town to heal, sell the loot you have, and plan for future adventures?

What makes the concept of "tempting fate" so interesting is that it takes what's normally a single point of interest for gamers – "does what we're doing work?" – turn into *two* juncture points: "Should we do the thing?" and "Does it work?" (or, if the heroes don't do the thing, "How can we mitigate the effects of not doing it?"). This seems obvious, but it means that each possible plot point can be milked for *twice* the drama (but see p. 36).

In a spacefaring game, this risk-reward ratio is arguably at the height of all gaming. The stakes are frequently significant ("We're in a tin can in the middle of literal nowhere"), the potential reward is huge in a lot of cases, and the cost of failure is often life-or-death . . . or, at least, being marooned on Asteroid-90210 for however-many months.

An Actual Choice

To make pursuing risky actions an aspect of the campaign, the most essential element almost always required is an actual honest-to-goodness decision. "If you don't retrieve the Crystal of Destiny, the galaxy blows up" isn't really a choice, because not doing it means that cosmos ends, everyone dies, and the players go to check their Facebook accounts.

Similarly, in the original *Star Wars* from 1977, "let's blow up the Death Star" isn't an example of pressing your luck, because there is no viable option presented. If the heroes choose not to do so, then the movie (and campaign) is basically over.

What if, instead, the heroes analyze the Death Star plans and realize they really have two options. The first is the desperate, one-in-a-million attack on the Death Star's weakness. The second is more subtle; owing to a flaw in the Death Star's primary weapon, using its planet-destroying weaponry more than once in a week will cause it to overtax its systems and "burn out" . . . in all likelihood, for at least a year. This second option, then, is to let the Death Star blow up Yavin . . . knowing that, if they do so, they've bought themselves a year to regroup and come up with a safer plan. In the case of the second option, then, the "epic battle" is actually just trying to provide enough cover for the rebels to escape the planet, letting the Death Star destroy an empty base stripped of most of its utility.

For pressing your luck to be an effective choice, the decisions need to be obvious and binary. "Do we explore the signal of the pulsating star, knowing that we only have enough fuel to get there?" is a straightforward, knowable choice. Similarly, the odds of success should be at least fathomable, if only in broad strokes of "this is a pretty risky plan" or "the odds of this succeeding are practically nil."

No Choice Survives Contact With Players

Although decisions in a "press your luck" scenario should be straightforward, most players I've gamed with have had a knack for coming up with their own twists on the options presented.

For the most part, I think this should be encouraged! You want players to feel they have agency in their own heroes' fates, and that the decisions they make are meaningful ones. So, how does going off the beaten path usually play out? In my experience, one of a few ways.

- *Almost like an existing choice.* If the heroes decide, "Let's wait a day before we explore the signal on the pulsating star," and there isn't any particular urgency to the mission, then "waiting a day to investigate the signal" just collapses to "investigate the signal."
- *An existing choice, but better or worse.* If (unbeknownst to the heroes) the pulsating star is going to emit radiation that disables their ship, and they'll only have three days to fix it before Something Bad happens, then delaying a day before exploring will mean they only have *two* days to reaper the ship and solve its mystery.
- *Something amazing.* Players sometimes have an incredible ability to see an option you hadn't considered. If that short-circuits a "press your luck" scenario and ends up working, great! The players will (justifiably) feel like geniuses, while you can file away your plans for tweaking to fit another adventure.

RISKS

The heroes should know what stakes they're risking in the endeavor. In most cases, it's some kind of resource: "We only have enough fuel to get to the next locale or get home," or "We've mustered this crew for 11 months, and we've only got a month left before we need to do some serious renegotiation or find something that will *really* catch their interest." Especially in a larger-scale conflict, perhaps one that uses **GURPS Mass Combat,** the resource could be military: "We risk losing our support ships if we press the attack on the final crippled battleship."

Other times, the protagonists could lose access to opportunities. For example, the bounty hunters might have only one chance to follow a trace route through an uncharted segment of hyperspace before the signal disappears.

Still other times, the heroes are risking *themselves.* This is incredibly common in larger-scale stories, where the key characters might be more-or-less expendable. For example, the space scouts might stumble onto a plot that they have an opportunity to report to higher authorities (the safe option), which also provides time for the plot to come to fruition; or they can try to learn more about the scheme or even thwart it before it can come to pass . . . but if they're caught or killed, then no one will know about their efforts.

REWARDS

In a similar way, the rewards for pressing your luck should be clearly defined, so the heroes understand what they're trying for. The heroes may not realize the full extent of their possible rewards, but they should have a decent idea of the "floor" of what they hope to achieve. For example, they may (correctly) suspect that successfully kidnapping the Emperor's son will throw the Emperor off-guard, but they may not know if the absconded prince is the next in line to the throne, a vital mastermind, or one of a dozen children.

Although ability rolls to amass information or figure stuff out come in handy for learning more about potential outcomes, a "press your luck" possibility shouldn't be presented too strongly by the GM unless the heroes *already* have some kind of idea of the minimum they can (correctly) expect to get out of it.

THE LADY NEBULA OR THE TIGER SYSTEM?

Now that we have our building blocks, what are some examples of pushing your luck that might get the heroes' juices flowing?

- The adventurers find a large alien artifact. It seems to interfere with the shields of their ship, reducing or entirely neutralizing their defensive capabilities. The PCs can tell the device is almost certainly harmless itself, but there are indications of extraordinary abilities (including, possibly, the ability to dampen *enemy* shields, if its adverse side effect can be harnessed to affect others). If they transport it back, they're risking their lives. If they don't, they either risk leaving it wherever it is (possibly for someone else to discover), or they need to try to destroy it (which – if that's possible – might have its own unfortunate consequences).
- The spacefarers have a huge surplus of a specific kind of cargo. They only have enough fuel to make it to one destination; they can either return to a safer system (to refuel and repair their craft), or they can use their remaining fuel to travel to a system that is currently going through a fad of desiring that cargo. The heroes know the fad won't last long, so – if they want to maximize profits – they need to press on . . . but the system is *just* on the outskirts enough that specifics of the political or environmental situation are hard to come by (outside of "we want your cargo!").
- The heroes capture an enemy general. He's a considerable prize for what he knows and could possibly reveal. However, he claims he has no love for the side he's been conscripted to, and is willing to help strike against his former masters. Predictably, he urges quick, decisive action, because the machinations of war will quickly render his knowledge moot as they change codes, alter strategies, etc.

The heroes understand the risks and can try to mitigate them (he could be lying, acting quickly means not amassing as many resources as might be desirable, etc.), but the fundamental choice breaks down to whether they play it safe and deliver the general to superiors for information that won't ultimately be useful, or act on his information now and possibly inflict a huge strike against the opposition.

LET THE DICE FALL

Once the heroes have made a decision about pressing their luck, let events play out as the adventurers' own abilities and the winds of fate allow. If the group knows that pressing their luck will *always* be successful (or *always* be a failure), then the players don't really have a choice. But if they're allowed to court destruction and succeed or fail based on their own skill and fortune, then the victories or setbacks are theirs alone.

And if you're still stuck trying to figure out if something worked or not, a round of *Zombie Dice* would make a fine simulation . . .

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 10 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.

ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10 . . .

In larger-scale conflicts, it's often difficult to project how much impact the heroes can have in an individual situation, or whether it's worth it to forget the odds. In this case, it can be useful for the GM to present some kind of rating for how bad or good the greater situation is. For example, the GM might say something like, "In the grand scheme of things, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is the Bad Guys are utterly thwarted and 10 is the Bad Guys completely conquer the galaxy, you're at about a 6 currently. Doing the risky thing will result in a 2-point shift in a direction, depending on the mission's success. If you do the safe thing, then you're only risking about a 1-point shift in direction."

Alternatively, if the GM wants something that feels more *GURPS*-y, you can tie that scale to (say) a 20-point spread. In this case, the Bad Guys might be at about 12 currently, and doing something risky might shift that by up to 4 points in either way (depending on success), and doing something safe will only shift it by 1 in either direction. If that number is persistent in the campaign, you can use it for "chance of bad things happening" rolls; rolling the current rating or less means that the Bad Guys do something interesting with their power and make the lives of the heroes more difficult.

As a final variant of the above, you could have *two* scales . . . one for how well the bad guys are doing, and one for how well the good guys are doing. (It's possible for both sides of a conflict to both be doing well or poorly at a given time!) Pressing luck may shift either or both in either direction. Then, you can roll on the Bad Guys' rating for random events that adversely affect the heroes, and roll on the Good Guys' rating for events that help the heroes. If both happen at once, that's a *lot* of mayhem . . .

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