



Starburst



December 1996

Issue: 30

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HIWG LIVES!

By David Schneider



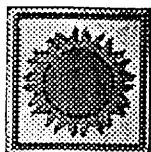
Hi there everyone, yes I know it's been awhile since the last *Starburst*, umm, I've been busy... Anyway, exciting things are going on with the (finally) release of *Traveller 4*. This issue will contain a review of the game which **Imperium Games** put on it's home page. I got a quick glance at a copy when I was Melbourne recently, and I can tell you that it was pretty sharp. The artwork is clean and clear, and there are some pretty darn nifty colour plates of wonderful pictures done by Chris Foss. The hardcover book is just superb. I am awaiting my copy with baited breath & I suggest that you all rush out and order one immediately.

Okay, and now onto some house work. **HIWG Australia** has been pretty well inactive for some time now. My intention in restarting *Starburst* is to attempt to put a little more life back into it. At this point the Yiklerzdanzh project is mostly finished and is available to be viewed on the internet on "*Grant's Yiklerzdanzh Project Home Page*". If you've got net access go take a look. Until further notice I am going to presume that anyone who sends me their name and address, or is already on my mailing list, is a member of **HIWG** and will send them a snazzy *Starburst* kind of regularly. All you have to do in return for this massive favour is tell people that **HIWG** exists and for Gods sake send me something to put in the newsletter. I'll take most anything including humorous articles about things that could be related to *Traveller* or even about other areas of Science Fiction & SF gaming. Just send me stuff, okay? If you don't want a *Starburst* anymore then send me a letter or you're just gonna keep getting 'em.

For the record the release of *Traveller 4* has renewed alot of the enthusiasm that I lost for the game when the whole virus thing came out. I hope it has a similar effect on you too.

IMPERIUM GAMES

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Review of Marc Miller's Traveller by Joe Walsh

The following is my review of the fourth edition of the Traveller rules, entitled "Marc Miller's Traveller," abbreviated T4. The review begins with an overview of the entire system. Following that, there is a chapter-by-chapter review. Finally, I give some general feelings, a numerical rating for the work, and a recommendation.

System Overview: T4 has errors; some are serious, most are not. T4 is not TNE Second Edition; the only thing it has in common with TNE is the starship systems (and even that has been changed from FF&S). T4 truly is, as IG claimed, "Classic Traveller (CT) updated based on 20 years of RPG experience." Take "The Traveller Book (TTB)," add a new task system, some more character classes, a new die-rolling convention or two (1/2 dice, X- targets instead of X+ targets), a consolidated and updated skills listing, and the aforementioned modified TNE starship creation system, and you'll have the essence of T4.

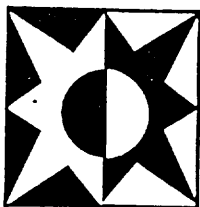
The book begins with a short history of the Traveller game, outlining the early years, MegaTraveller, Traveller: The New Era, and the fall of GDW and and FFE/IG's subsequent actions. It's a good (if short) summary, and those new to the Traveller system will probably get a good feeling from knowing the system they're buying has such a long history. Also included in this section is a sort of Mission Statement for Traveller, stating Marc Miller's desire to return to a simpler gaming system while allowing for increasing complexity for those who desire such, through additional materials.

Chapter 1 (What's in this Book)

This material is mostly pulled from TTB. Topics include, "What is a Role-Playing Game," how to referee, etc. In short, this is the section included in every RPG ever made.

Chapter 2 (Character Generation)

The new system is a cross between the basic and advanced CT systems. For example, careers are resolved in four-year terms, but the character now receives four skills per term instead of one (plus possible additional skills for commission and promotions). This, coupled with the pre-career schooling options and four to seven initial skills make for characters well able to compete with the best characters generated under any previous



Akigura Union



Traveller system. There are eight schooling options and ten main careers, allowing for a wide variety of characters to be created.

There are other differences between the T4 and CT systems. Under T4, there are no longer survival throws. Instead, a throw is made for injury. If an injury results, the character is discharged honorably from service, is healed, then begins his or her adventuring career. A minor difference is a change in terminology from "Reenlistment" to "Continuance," which has less of a military connotation. Unfortunately, this section has many typos (as do almost all sections of the book). Worse, there is a serious error: the mustering out rules do not match the character generation tables. The rules state that the character receives additional rolls on the Cash or Benefits tables based on his or her rank achieved. Rank 1-2 yields one additional roll, Rank 3-4 yields two rolls, and 5-6 yields three rolls. Yet on the character generation tables, ranks proceed from E1 to E10, and from O1 to O10 (or O7 in one case). While CT aficionados will know what is meant by ranks 1 through 6, new players will undoubtedly be unable to reconcile the text with the tables.

There is another error in this section. In the services portion of character generation, the skill tables do not have cluster/cascade skills listed in bold (they ARE listed in bold in the schools/colleges section, though). This will confuse people at first, until they memorize which are clusters/cascades and which are not.

Overall, the characters generated under this system will have more skills and higher characteristic scores than those generated under any previous system. Whether this is good, bad, or indifferent depends on the individual. I personally like the new system.

Chapter 3 (Skills)

The skills list is about the right size, giving players enough skills to easily differentiate their characters without giving so many that it becomes unwieldy. The skill descriptions are good, providing enough detail to give referees an idea of which situations each skill will be useful in.

The Skills List and the Skills Descriptions are supposed to have some skills in italics, which is to connote those skills which may be used at level-0. Unfortunately, no skills are listed in italics. However, the skills descriptions do note which skills may be used at level-0 by use of the word "default" in the heading. This is not as convenient as the promised italics, but that is not a serious error.

Chapter 4 (Tasks)

This chapter is only two pages long, which I count as point in T4's favor. Many games are plagued by overly complex task systems that list dozens of die modifiers. This task system does not succumb to that failed methodology.

The only thing controversial about the Task System is its reliance on 1/2 dice. That is, in some situations it will be necessary to throw

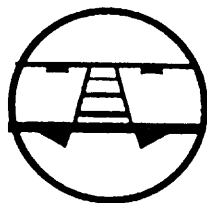
a number of dice, designating one as a "half die." The roll made on this die will be halved (rounding up). Some players do not like this method any more than I enjoy an overly complex task system. Overall, I think this may cause some slight decrease in sales, but I think the rest of the system is robust enough that those who really want to play Traveller will put up with the 1/2 die rolls.

Chapter 5 (Ground Combat)

The combat section looks good. 8 pages of text, one page of tables, and it covers just about everything you'd want it to (in a basic book), from hand-to-hand to artillery, tanks, robots, and other forms of ground combat. It is possible to cover all of this (in a basic way) in 8 short pages because of the robust task system. I'm impressed.

You can still tell Traveller has its roots in wargaming. The original rules shine through in this section, and their flavor is retained. However, the consolidating effects of having a task system has vastly simplified the combat rules over what appeared in CT. Once you memorize the task system, combat will go very quickly. The only error I found in the section is in the discussion of explosives. They don't mention whether a grenade is thrown at a target HEX or a target INDIVIDUAL. Since the system uses range bands, I guess I can see why they didn't mention it. But, it'll be hard for inexperienced players to resolve hand grenade attacks. They can figure damage, but not to-hit. Most will probably be able to puzzle it out though. Here is a list of things I like about the combat system:

- 1) Multiple actions: A character can now make a number of actions each round up to his or her related characteristic score, but at a penalty. A person with Strength 8 can make 8 Brawling attacks per round, for instance, but each attack will have relatively little chance of succeeding (unless the character is very highly skilled).
- 2) Called Shots: You can do a called shot for increased damage (two kinds), decrease damage (two kinds), or to disarm.
- 3) "Holding" your actions is covered well.
- 4) Special Rules: In addition to the Tactics Pool and Endurance rules that are familiar to most of us, there are also Strength and Dexterity Pools. Strength pools allow one to increase the damage done by non-ranged attacks. Dexterity pools allow one to avoid being hit by non-ranged attacks (no dodging bullets, darn it! [G]).
- 5) Initiative: Initiative is done more logically (I got a taste of this in the Starship Battles game, and it works well) now. The side that wins the initiative moves LAST but attacks FIRST. That way, they can react to the other side's movement, then fire attack before the other side does. This is more playable than realistic, but from experience, I know it does work well.



S'raak Empire



Chapters 6 (Equipment) and 7 (Vehicles)

The equipment sections (comprising the Equipment and Vehicles chapters) are well-done, and have fewer typos than the first few chapters (the character creation chapter has the most typos). There is a sampling of equipment given in these chapters, much the same as that given in The Traveller Book. The full list, of course, will be in the Central Supply Catalog supplement.

There are also side-bars giving some examples of specific models of vehicles with very detailed descriptions and specifications. I like this. (BTW, the book uses side-bars the way they should be used: sparingly.)

The basic equipment section has a few new items in it (including a non-lethal weapon and a not-very-lethal weapon, both commonly used for personal protection a la mace/pepper spray and stun guns). The pictures given of various pieces of equipment are well-chosen. The text is well-written and informative. I usually skip equipment sections until I need a specific item, but this one has some gems in it that make it worth reading.

Overall, the equipment chapters were done well.

Chapters 8 (Spacecraft), 9 (Space Travel), and 10 (Space Combat)

We all know about the starship design sequence (developed by Guy "Wildstar" Garnett, and dubbed the Quick Ship Design System (QSDDS)), so I won't go into that, except to say that IG, in attempting to squeeze this last-minute-change into the book was forced to put the tables in completely out of order. The Hull Table, although it should be consulted first, is on the third page. The Thrust Plate Potential table appears a few pages later than the Thrust Plate Drives table, even though those tables should be consulted together.

More seriously, IG left out two critical tables, making it impossible to use the QSDDS system to design jump-capable ships. This is the only other serious error that has been found in the T4 rule book. The section on travelling, "Lesser Known Aspects of Space Travel," etc. are all pretty much right from The Traveller Book. The big news is the space combat system. For you space combat fans, please remember that this, like all the systems in the book, is the BASIC system. You won't be stuck with it.

That said, the Basic Ship Combat system is excellent for those of us who are fans of ship combat, but who don't want something that takes all day. This system is simple, smooth, and streamlined. It is actually easier than the Traveller Starship Combat system alpha-tested at Gen-Con. It's a stand-and-blast sort of system, in short. I applaud the inclusion of this system. IG and FFE did the right thing.

I look forward to the release of the system shown at Gen-Con, but this will do for now. More importantly, this system will allow newbies to jump right in and engage in starship battles. It will whet their appetites for the (two? three?) more complex ship combat systems to come.

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Chapter 11 (Psionics)

This is mostly straight out of "The Traveller Book," with the notable addition of a Psionist prior service! That's right, there is a somewhat-hidden 11th character type in T4! (I was rather surprised to run across the generation table in the Psionics chapter.)

Also included is a Telekinetic Damage chart, which shows just how lethal such a skill can be. The maximum damage listed is 33D!!

Chapter 12 (World Generation)

This is almost completely a copy of the same chapter from TTB. Since there are no major changes, there's nothing to review. Sadly, there are no forms provided for use with this section.

Chapter 13 (Encounters)

This is a combination of the Encounters and Animal Encounters chapters from TTB. The notable exception is an inclusion of short (1/2 to 4/5-column) descriptions of each of the major and minor races of Traveller. Also included is a bit of info on including aliens in a Traveller campaign (administering them, role-playing them, creating new ones, etc.). Interestingly, the example encounter table from TTB was used. In TTB and in T4, it is labelled as the encounter table for Regina, which won't be contacted for quite some time after Milieu 0. That one will probably confuse some newbies! "Where the heck is Regina on the Core Subsector Grid? Eh, I'll just call one of these unnamed planets Regina. What could it hurt?" ;)

Chapter 14 (Referee's Introduction)

Once again, this is mostly taken from the Introduction in TTB. Also included is the Character Experience section, which has much better allowances for skill improvement, learning new skills, and improving characteristics (somewhat like the system I proposed on the Traveller Mailing List several months ago).

Chapter 15 (Running Adventures and Campaigns)

This stuff is right out of TTB's "Referee's Guide to Adventuring," right down to the well-known "basics, push, pull, gimmick, enigma" method. Once again, not much to review here.

Chapter 16 (Trade and Commerce)

This is right out of Book 7, Merchant Prince. We're back to trade



goods being designated C-9 Ag Ni Cr 7,000. I'd hoped for something more, but I guess that, like the space combat enthusiasts, I'll have to wait for the appropriate supplement.

Chapter 17 (Exit Visa)

Exit Visa is one of the adventures that was included in TTB. It has been updated to make sense under the setting and rules of T4 (ie, different equipment, different date, etc.), but is otherwise very similar to the original.

Chapter 18 (Rubicon Cross)

This is a completely new adventure. It is a well-crafted scenario, and should serve well as a means of getting new referees and players excited about Traveller. Sadly, unlike TTB, no other adventures were included. Also, no mention was made of "Basic Traveller Activities," which in TTB offered a list of suggested solo activities for players and referees to engage in between sessions.

The Rest of the Book

The final few pages include: Core Subsector data, Core Subsector Grid, the Traveller character sheet, some Library Data (right out of TTB, once again) and a pretty good Index.

Forms

On page 13, in the "What's in this Book" section, they kept the paragraph on forms from The Traveller Book:

"Scattered throughout several chapters are various prepared forms. One is used to record the specifics of the character, for instance. Another records data about a starship. The forms provided are intended for use by the referee and the players as they generate information during the game. They have been printed on the page for maximum ease of photocopying. Once two copies have been made, they can be positioned side by side on the photocopier and multiple copies can be run off."

This is almost completely wrong. Yes, there is a character sheet. It takes up a whole page. Making two copies, as they suggest, makes no sense for ease of further copying, since it takes up a whole page and not 1/2 page as in CT. Furthermore, the starship form is tiny, about 3 inches by 4 inches. It is toward the binding on the page, and the page has other information on it which you would not want to copy. Hardly suitable for copying unless you go to rather more effort than



should be required.

I have found no other forms in the book. Most notably missing are the Sector Map Grid and the Sector Data Form. IG or someone else should rush a Forms Pack to the market, so that players and referees who don't have the CT forms can more easily keep records, generate sectors, etc.

Rating the T4 Book

My overall score for T4, if it had been completely error-free: 100 out of a possible 100. (This assumes no typos, no other errors, and the inclusion of better/more forms.) [That is, I think the ideas behind the book are rock-solid.]

My overall score for T4, if it had been without the errors in chapters 2 and 8 (character generation and ship design), but otherwise unchanged: 95 out of a possible 100. [Meaning that all of the errors I have found, excepting those in Chapters 2 and 8, are trivial, saying only to the reader that IG was sloppy and/or rushed in preparing the book.]

My overall score for T4, errors and all: 85 out of 100. [Meaning that the errors in chapters 2 and 8 are serious enough to knock their score down considerably, but they still receive a solid "B" grade.]

My Recommendation:

Read the book and make your own decision, above all. I've tried to give people a feel for the system, but there's nothing like seeing it for yourself. That said:

If you are a fan of CT and would like to see new products for your favorite game, this is probably the system for you. The plethora of new products planned for T4 will almost certainly satisfy every type of player.

If you are a fan of MT but wish it hadn't been done quite the way it was, this may be the CT update you've been wishing for since 1987.

If you are a fan of TNE, this is probably not what you are looking for. If you like TNE's starship systems a lot, but like some of the things about CT and MT, you may enjoy T4. But if you think TNE is the best incarnation of Traveller you've seen yet, you probably won't like T4. (This one is an almost uneducated guess, as I have never played TNE and I've only read the rulebook for it once. But, comments from TNE players at Gen-Con, while perhaps not representative of all TNE players, concur with my opinion expressed above.)

Conclusion

I believe T4 to be a worthy successor to the Traveller name. There are only two serious problems with the book. However, both of these errors can be



cleared up with a single page of errata. Clearly, that is far better than GDW did with MegaTraveller.

This ends my initial review of T4. I hope it has been informative for those who haven't had a chance to look at the game yet. When you do see it, please post your own opinion of Marc Miller's Traveller to the Traveller Mailing List.



The CITIZENS OF THE IMPERIUM is the official fan club for Marc Miller's TRAVELLER. As a member you will receive a quarterly newsletter that will inform you about the ever changing world of TRAVELLER. Also as a member, you will receive a CI card and dogtags that will get you into special convention events and guarantee member-only products and merchandise. And if that was not enough, you will be able to register your characters in the official Imperium Register. When you register your character, your character's name and characteristic cannot be duplicated as long as you retain your membership.

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PRODUCT LIST
TRAVELLER

RELEASE DATE: August 1996

The TRAVELLER game system rules will be consolidated and restated based on the original and Classic TRAVELLER rules (revised in light of 20 years of role-playing experience). This foundation for every TRAVELLER player and referee will include a task system and an emphasis on reasoned simplicity for players and progressive layers of complexity for referees. Marc Miller.

STOCK #: 1000 \$25.00

STARSHIPS

RELEASE DATE: November 1996

Turn to this reference for detailed information about the starships of the TRAVELLER universe: statistics, ship names, anecdotal information, illustrations, deck plans. Don Perrin.

STOCK #: 1100 \$20.00 Internet special of 10% off = \$18.00

ALIENS ARCHIVES

RELEASE DATE: November 1996

TRAVELLER has produced volumes of information on the universe's many alien races, however, we plan to include several more minor races. By compiling old materials, as well as adding an alien race generation system, players can integrate alien races into their travels and adventures. Timothy Brown.

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CENTRAL SUPPLY CATALOG

RELEASE DATE: December 1996

The original TRAVELLER game has never had a complete listing of equipment. By compiling equipment listed in all published books, and adding to that with original material, we are creating the basic reference for equipment every player character needs. Greg Porter.

STOCK #: 1200 \$22.95

MILIEU 0: The Third Imperium

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The essential background for adventuring in TRAVELLER is provided in a number of Milieu books, each detailing an era in the long history of mankind in space. Milieu 0 chronicles the emergence of the Third Imperium from the Long Night, extending its reach to re-explore and re-conquer the vast interstellar territories that have been untouched for 1700 years. Covers the early years of the Third Imperium, its history, structure, economics, and library data. Also includes many adventure hooks and adds direction to players and referees. STOCK #: 1400 \$22.95

FIRST SURVEY

RELEASE DATE: December 1996

This vital companion to Milieu 0 is an atlas of the 50 or so sectors that were the Vilani Empire and its surrounding territories. The star systems of the Sylean Federation are well defined. Farther and farther out, systems are less well-defined. Each adventuring group determines its own survey results for each system they visit. Lester Smith.

STOCK #: 1410 \$22.95

JOURNAL OF THE TRAVELLERS' AID SOCIETY

Imperium Games will continue the legacy of the JTAS by starting with issue 25. Our purpose is to support the TRAVELLER universe with adventures that any referee can pick up and run at a moment's notice and to support role-playing adventures in general, as long as their themes and content are consistent with the ideas of the TRAVELLER universe.

Stock No./Issue	RELEASE DATE	COST
11000-#25NOV '96\$5.00
11000-#26JAN '97\$5.00
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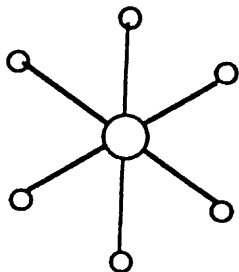


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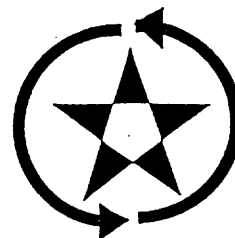


Murphy's Laws of Combat

1. If the enemy is in range so are you.
2. Incoming fire has the right of way.
3. Don't look conspicuous -- it draws fire.
 4. There is always a way.
 5. The easy way is always mined.
6. Try to look unimportant -- they may be low on ammo.
7. Professionals are predicable, it's the amateurs that are dangerous.
8. The enemy invariably attacks on two occasions:
 - a. When you're ready for them.
 - b. When you're not ready for them.
9. Teamwork is essential -- it gives them someone else to shoot at.
10. If you can't remember, the claymore is pointed at you.
11. The enemy diversion you have been ignoring will be the main attack.
12. A "sucking chest wound" is nature's way of telling you to slow down.
13. If your attack is going well, you have walked into an ambush.
14. Never draw fire, it irritates everyone around you.
15. Anything you do can get you shot, including nothing.
16. Make it tough enough for the enemy to get in and you won't be able to get out.
17. Never share a foxhole with anyone braver than yourself.
18. If you are short of everything but the enemy, you are in a combat zone.
19. When you have secured an area, don't forget to tell the enemy.
20. Never forget that your weapon is made by the lowest bidder.

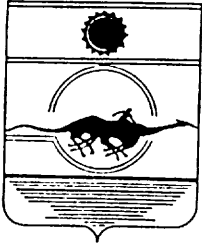


Carillon Harmonies

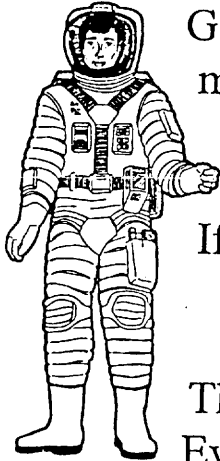
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