

# VOYAGES SF

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*For hobby enthusiasts of  
adventure gaming.*

## IN THIS ISSUE:

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Fighters

Corsair Contention

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AUTODUEL™**  
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Haunted Car

**STAR WARS™**  
Gunsmiths

**2300 AD™**  
Encounter At  
Hesperus



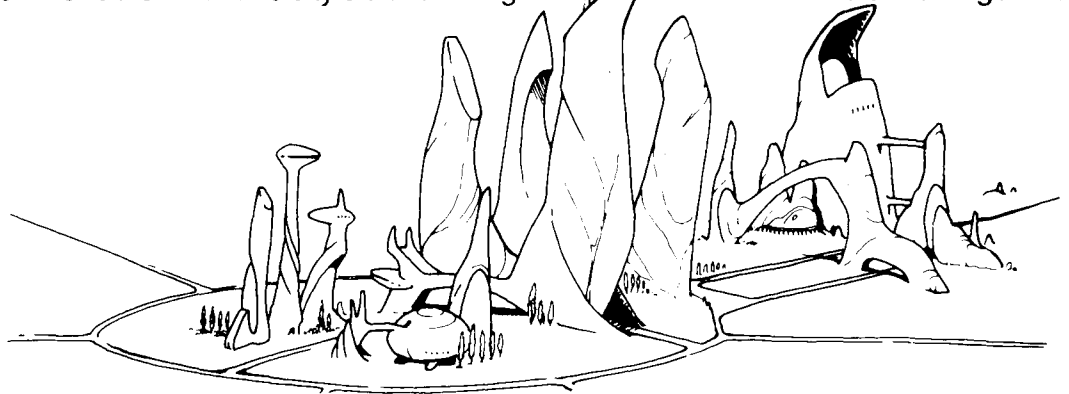
# KNIGHTFALL

THE LOST LEGACY  
OF THE LONG NIGHT

Innocent traders run afoul of local politics and are caught up in the battles of the Rebellion itself. But that's just for starters! They become prisoners of war, then fugitives. Along the way, they learn of a fabulous pre-Imperium lost city of high-tech wonders. Can this city's treasures give one side the advantage that will win the Rebellion?

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plus assorted random  
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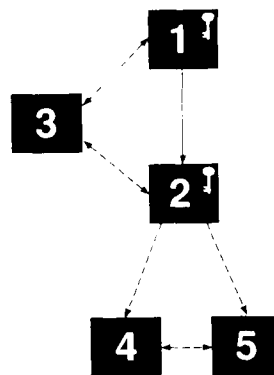
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## WELCOME ABOARD

Welcome to our first issue of the new year. We have some good news for our readers. With our next issue (#15) we are going to a full-bleed cover. In case you don't know what this means, the illustration on our cover will fill the entire cover from edge to edge. This will increase the illustration quality of our covers and make the magazine more attractive on magazine stands.

We're pleased to see that our readers continue to rate VOYAGES SF as their second favorite magazine. Considering the number of competing magazines that support our industry, we are honored by this rating. But we're not going to sit on our laurels. VOYAGES SF will continue to improve.

In our last issue, I failed to list Herb Altonburg under "Artists in this issue." My apologies, Herb. Also, our Reader Survey listed two articles which were not in that issue, and did not include one that was, entitled "The Fort Bliss Class Destroyer." This is because last minute changes were made in the contents of last issue, and I overlooked correcting the Survey. Sorry folks. We'll certainly try to avoid this mistake in the future.

- James B. King

### VOYAGES SF 13 SURVEY RESULTS

Mechanics Of Adventure Gaming.....	3.7
Katlin C. Buchannon.....	3.5
Raid On The North Pole.....	3.2
Exercise.....	2.8
Bounty Hunters.....	2.7
Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.....	2.5
CommLink.....	2.2
Reviews.....	2.2
Rails In The Asturias.....	2.0
Sanity In Space.....	1.7
Q1: Is this issue better than our last? 50% said no, 33% said yes.	
Q2: Including yourself, how many people read this issue? 2.0	
Q3: Rating in order of preference the most recent issues of the gaming zines you read, where would you rate this issue of VOYAGES SF (1 is high)? 1.8	
Q4: What one game would you like to see more coverage of? MegaTraveller, Shadowrun, 2300 AD, SpaceMaster, Legionaire, Sky Galleons Of Mars, Justifiers.	

# VOYAGES SF

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# commmlink

Publishers desiring more informative write-ups of their releases should send advance announcements and/or product samples.

From FASA's Never Deal With A Dragon



Question mark indicates release date unknown. Parentheses indicate intended release date. Dates not in parentheses indicate item available at preparation of this column.

## The Adjutant

**MegaTraveller:** Tracked Vehicles, \$4.95, Dec  
Wheeled Veh., \$4.95, Dec  
Grav Vehicles, \$4.95 (Feb)  
Waterborne V., \$4.95 (Feb)

## B. T. R. C.

**Space Time:** Border Run, \$8.95? (Jan)  
Warpworld, \$19.95 (Feb)  
Guns, Guns, Guns - More Guns, \$8.95 (Feb)

## Chaosium

**Call Of Cthulhu:** Fatal Experiments, \$18.95, Nov  
Dark Designs, \$18.95 (Feb)

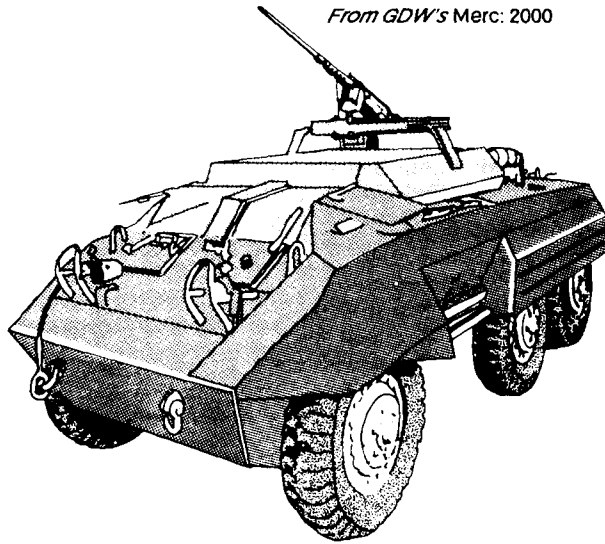
## FASA

**Shadowrun:** Downtown Militarized Zone, \$30, Nov  
Harlequin, \$12, Dec  
Shadows... Twilight, \$8 (Feb)  
Ivy & Chrome, \$8 (Feb)  
Never Deal with a Dragon (novel), \$4.50, Nov  
Choose Your Enemies Carefully (novel), \$4.50 (Feb)

## GDW

**Cadillacs & Dinosaurs** RPG, \$18, Dec  
Dark Conspiracy, \$20 (Feb)  
**MegaTraveller:** On the Edge, 96 pp. \$10 (Apr). Adventure anthology. Seek fortune, join a border guard patrol, or sneak into an interdicted world. Written for the Spinward Marches, but playable in any location. By Mike Stackpole.

From GDW's Merc: 2000



**Twilight: 2000:** Soviet Cbt Vehicle Hbk, \$12, Nov  
Infantry Weapons of the World, \$12 (Jan)  
Bangkok, \$12 (Mar). Villainous scum of half of Asia gather here to wheel, deal, and entertain themselves. Whatever you want, whatever you need - somebody has it in Bangkok.

**Merc: 2000,** \$16, Dec  
Gazetteer, \$12 (Apr)

## Games Workshop

Confrontation, \$34.95 (Dec)

## Hero Games

**Champions:** Olympians, \$9 (Dec)  
Road Kill, \$7 (Jan)

## Iron Crown Ent.

**Cyberspace:** Cyberskeller, \$10 (Jan)  
**Metal Express:** Overkill: Ptolemean Wars, \$14, Nov  
Black Guard, \$8, ?

**RoleMaster:** Dark Space Scrbk, \$14 (Dec)

## Leading Edge

**Phoenix Cmd:** Civilian Weapons Data, \$8.95, Dec

## Mayfair Games

**DC Heroes:** Justice League Scrbk, \$12, Nov  
**Chill:** Access. Pck, \$13, Nov

## Palladium Books

**TMNT:** Mutants in Avalon, 64pp, \$9.95 (Jan). Adventure sourcebook for the *After the Bomb* series. Includes new mutant animals, giant insects, knights and magic. Cover: Kevin Fales. Interior art: Larry MacDougall. By James Wallis.

**Beyond/Supernatural:** Boxed Nightmares, \$11.95, (Nov). 80 pp. adventure sourcebook includes rules for creating secret organi-

zations, three new monsters, seven adventures. GM tips on playing horror RPGs. Plus 16 pp satirical tabloid newspaper that provides clues and source material for the players and short silly articles to tickle the funny bone.

**RoboTech:** Invid video #2, \$29.95 (Feb)

**Rifts:** World Book 1: The Vampire Kingdom, 164pp, \$14.95 (Mar/Apr). The bizarre vampire secret societies of Central and South America will be completely described and mapped. Includes cities, slaves, villains, monsters, and adventures.

## R. Talsorian

**Cyberpunk:** When Gravity Fails, \$12, ?  
Night City Scrbk, \$15 (Feb?)  
**Mekton:** Mekton Empire, \$14, Dec

From GDW's Cadillacs & Dinosaurs



## Seeker

**MegaTraveller:** Empress Marava II 25mm deck plans, \$11.95, Nov

## Stellar Games

**Knightfire:** Nowhere Men, \$9.95 (Feb)

## Steve Jackson

**Awful Green Things From Outer Space,** \$19.95, Nov  
**Gurps:** Time Travel, \$16.95, ?  
Martial Arts, \$14.95, Dec  
Psi-Tech, \$16.95 (Feb)

## Task Force Games

**Starfleet Battles:** Basic boxed set, \$29.95, Nov

## Timeline

**Morrow Project:** Personal & Vehicular Blueprints (reprint), \$7.95, Nov

## TSR

**Buck Rogers XXVc:** Earth in 25th Century, \$9.95, Nov  
Deimos Mandate, \$6.95 (Jan)  
Character Record Sheets, \$8.95 (Jan)  
Sargasso of Space, \$6.95 (Feb)

## West End Games

**Star Wars:** Galaxy Guide 6: Tramp Freighters, \$13, Dec  
Galactic Races (min.), \$12, ?  
Domain of Evil, \$10 (Jan)  
The Graveyard of Alderaan, \$10 (Feb)  
**Torg:** Cyberpacity Sourcebook, \$18 (Feb)  
Queenswrath, \$12, Dec  
GodNet, \$15 (Jan)  
High Lord of Earth, \$12 (Feb)

## Whit Prod.

**Chicago 2050:** World Report, \$20, ?



From Palladium Book's Mutants in Avalon

## Prologue

Donald Torvalt leaned back in his executive chair and smiled. Soon. Soon it would all come together. When the hired team of runners failed to retrieve the missing datachips, Fugitake-Norbert Corporation would quickly go out of business. Then, he could openly go to work for Johanssen Toys, Inc. With the datachips that he had so carefully purloined from research, he had been able to write his own ticket with Johanssen. Within the hour, the team would be back and they will have failed. He had made sure of that.



# The Go-Betweens

A Shadowrun adventure

*Glen Allison*

## Introduction

The PCs are hired to be go-betweens in an exchange of a credstick for stolen datachips. Mr. Torvalt, an executive for Johanssen Toys, Inc., gives them the ransom payment and directions as well as a description of the missing datachips. When the PCs go to make the exchange, things go wrong. Not only do they lose the ransom payment, but they don't get what they came for either. When they go back to their employer, Mr. Torvalt is unwilling to cooperate and will not give them any help. He is really working for Johanssen Toys, Inc., a rival business firm, and arranged for the item to be stolen in the first place. He hired the PCs for the go-between job because, in his opinion, they would be the easiest to dupe. That information can be had from the company's databanks with a little work. The PCs should find this information, retrieve it, and figure out a way to get the information to Torvalt's boss, either for revenge or at least to bolster their ailing reputation following the go-between fiasco.

Explanation of "Downloading The Data:" Whenever you see this heading, read the section below it aloud to your players. It sets the scene and tells the players a little of the information they would know.

## The Hiring Process:

### Downloading The Data:

"Here you are, stuck in a too small elevator, on the way to the fifth floor of the Coorsomn Building. Finally, the elevator grinds to a stop and the doors hiss open. You step into a reception area with a desk in front of you. The secretary, a brunette, looks up and says, 'You must be the people Mr. Torvalt contacted. Follow me, please.' She's gorgeous, and, as she turns to the intercom, you wonder to yourselves if perhaps she is free after work tonight. But, on second

"Jerking your thoughts away from what might have been, you realize you are being led to a set of carved, double doors. Opening them, the brunette brings you face to face with your new employer. 'Here are the people you requested, Mr. Torvalt. Is there anything else you need?'"

"The man across the desk from you shakes his head and motions for her to leave. The silence grows. Suddenly, he speaks in a gravelly, bass voice, dropped to a near whisper. 'It's about time you got here. This is important, and we don't have a lot of time. I need the services of several people to do a little job for me. You have been selected because of your reputation for getting the job done.' He half turns, reaches into a drawer and slaps several drawings on the desk in front of you. They look like schematics for three or four different types of datachips.

"Torvalt speaks again, 'I am willing to pay you 5,000 nuyen each to deliver a ransom payment to the thieves who stole these.' He points to the datachip plans. 'I need the prototypes back immediately. The job shouldn't take more than a few hours out of your day, or rather, night. Will you take the job?' He leans back with an inscrutable look on his face as he awaits your answer."

### Backstage:

Once the team accepts the job, however incomplete the details have been up to this point, Torvalt speaks again. "I knew I could count on you to do it. Now, here is what you need to do. First, I give you half of your payment now. You'll get the rest when you deliver the datachips. Second, study these datachip plans so you know what they look like. And third, deliver the ransom credstick to the people with the goods at midnight tonight. You are to meet them at the Terry Avenue dock on Lake Union. Finally, you bring the chips here to me at five a.m. I will arrange for you to get in by way of the south entrance and loading dock."

The Fugitake-Norbert Building is located at the intersection of Bell Street and Second Avenue, across the street from Damian's, a large first-class restaurant. It is an eight story building made of brick. The main entrance, revolving glass doors, is on the west side of the building.

### Fixing The Glitches:

The only real problem that can occur here is that the players decide not to take the job. If that seems to be happening, Torvalt will up the ante and offer six, seven, or even eight thousand nuyen each. But he can only pay 2500 up front and of course he has no

intention of paying the rest, anyway.

### Donald Torvalt

Torvalt is second-in-command of Research and Development Security for the Fugitake-Norbert Corporation. He has worked there for ten years and has, until recently, been content with his job. Last year, someone from Johanssen Toys approached him and made him an offer that was very interesting: If he could supply something, say, prototypes of something Fugitake-Norbert was working on, Johanssen Toys would give him a job as Head of Security in their company.

Torvalt was definitely interested. Months later, he saw his opportunity. The prototypes for a new type of datachip to be used in advanced game simulations had been delivered. He replaced the prototypes with some failed attempts that had been discarded earlier and smuggled the real stuff out in a portable video game.

The prototypes have been discovered missing and the Chief of Security and the Head of Research and Development are about to lose their jobs. A ransom demand has been received, asking for five million nuyen for the return of the missing datachips. Torvalt wrote the ransom demand and mailed it himself. He has hired some people to do the datachip-ransom switch for him.

To make sure that the exchange failed, Torvalt searched for weeks to find a team that was still a little green and inexperienced. They had to have a reputation but they had to be gullible and trusting (if that's possible in a team of shadowrunners). Finally, he came up with a list of possibles. He then ran a psychological profile on the members of all teams on the list and chose the most likely team. Needless to say, Donald Torvalt does not have a high opinion of the PCs.

#### ATTRIBUTES

Body: 2  
Quickness: 2  
Strength: 2  
Charisma: 4  
Intelligence: 6  
Willpower: 5  
Essence: 3.8  
Reaction: 5

#### CYBERWARE

Datajack with 200Mp  
of Memory

#### SKILLS

Computer Theory: 5  
Etiquette (Corporate): 8  
Negotiation: 6  
Psychology: 9  
Sociology: 6  
Firearms, Pistol (Ares Predator): 4

#### GEAR

Ares Predator II (15-clip, 6M4)

## The DoubleCross Swap

### Downloading The Data:

"The breeze feels cool as it blows across Lake Union and past your faces. It brings the smell of rotting fish, mixed with the odor of soy French fries, fried fish, and soyburgers from the restaurant several blocks up the street. A few straggling pedestrians are hurrying home after working a late shift somewhere. The silence seems to echo off the walls of surrounding buildings. In the distance, the sound of a powered boat breaks the quiet, slowly growing louder. You can hear the water lapping against the pilings around the dock as you stand there holding the ransom. The almost full moon shines down on you out of a nearly cloudless sky.

"Looking around nervously, you see no one on the dock. Some crates are piled to your left, creating shadows that seem darker than they ought to be. Movement catches your eye there. A rat, larger than any rat has a right to be, scrambles out of the shadow and runs across your shoes, disappearing into the darkness.

"Then, you hear the click of a weapon being readied and a low

voice from your right says, 'Well, you're finally here. Let's get down to business. Show me the credstick.' At this, a shadowy figure steps out into the dim light. He's dressed in what looks to be black leather with red trim, and he is wearing a heavy pistol in a belt holster. In his left hand, he holds a flashlight. He steps toward you and holds out his right hand. 'Let's see it,' he says."

### Scouting Astrally:

"You soar out across Lake Union, looking down at the dock. No magic down there. There are several people down on the pier near the crates, but no activity. The people seem keyed up, excited maybe, or nervous."

### Backstage:

The man's name is Smilin' Jack and he is not alone. In the shadows are his sidekick, Frankie, and several others of his gang, "The Midnighters." Their job is to take the credstick in exchange for the stolen datachips. What Smilin' Jack doesn't know is, the datachips aren't the right ones. The PCs don't know this either because Torvalt showed them incorrect drawings.

Jack will make the trade and then attempt to do what he is really here for — kill the PCs!

"The guy in black steps back and smiles. 'Okay Frankie, waste 'em,' he yells. Suddenly, the dock is filled with the thunder of exploding guns as the man in black fades into the shadows. Bullets splinter the crates and ricochet off into the night."

As the fight begins, have the gang start to fade back to the end of the pier. Here they will drop off the end of the pier but the PCs will hear no splashes. What they do hear is the roar of a motorboat, then they see a low black shape arrowing away into the darkness across Lake Union.

After the battle, the PCs should try to find out who these people were. If the PCs returned fire, a body can be lying on the pier that can, with a little work, be indentified. The corpse would have a lapel pin, a full, gold moon with a silver star slightly off center on the front, that many Street Contacts would be able to identify as belonging to the Midnighters gang.

### Smilin' Jack

Smilin' Jack rarely smiles — only when he is in a fight or about to start one. He never talks much. He prefers to let his Ares Predator II and his Uzi III do most of the talking. He has the makings of a Street Samurai and he leads the Midnighters. Jack wears black leather clothes and has a Midnighters pin on his lapel in the shape of a golden, full moon with a silver star in front of it.

#### ATTRIBUTES

Body: 6 (8)  
Quickness: 4 (5)  
Strength: 6 (7)  
Charisma: 4  
Intelligence: 5  
Willpower: 5  
Essence: 0.25  
Reaction: 4 (+8)

#### GEAR

Hand Razors, Retractable (3L2)  
Uzi III (16-clip, 4M3), Smartlink  
Ares Predator II (15-clip, 6M4), Smartlink  
Smartgun Link, Right Palm  
CyberEyes with Low Light and Flare Compensation  
Wired Reflexes: 2  
Muscle Replacement: 1  
Dermal Plating: 2 Armor of (6/4)

#### SKILLS

Armed Combat: 4  
Bike: 5  
Etiquette (Street): 4  
Firearms: 6  
Stealth: 4  
Unarmed Combat: 6  
Gunnery: 3  
Leadership: 3

**Frankie**

Frankie is a good friend of Jack's. He is only just getting started in this business but has made a good impression on Jack and the rest of the Midnighters. If Frankie dies, Jack will do his best to go after the people who did it. Frankie is dressed almost exactly as Smilin' Jack is up to including the lapel pin.

**ATTRIBUTES**

Body: 4  
Quickness: 4  
Strength: 5  
Charisma: 6  
Intelligence: 6  
Willpower: 4  
Essence: 5.4

**SKILLS**

Armed Combat: 2  
Car: 2  
Etiquette (Street): 2  
Firearms: 3  
Stealth: 4  
Unarmed Combat: 3

**GEAR**

Hand Razors, Retractable (2L2)  
Ares Viper (10-clip, 4M2)  
CyberEyes with Low Light  
Lined Coat Armor (4/2)

**Midnighters Gang Members**

The Midnighters wear dark clothing, some leather and synthleather as well as black denim. All of them wear a Midnighters pin.

**ATTRIBUTES**

Body: 5  
Quickness: 5  
Strength: 4  
Charisma: 5  
Intelligence: 5  
Willpower: 4  
Essence: 5.7  
Reaction: 5

**SKILLS**

Armed Combat: 4  
Bike: 4  
Etiquette (Street): 4  
Firearms: 4  
Projectile Weapons: 3  
Stealth: 4  
Unarmed Combat: 3

**GEAR**

Hand Razors (2L2)  
Retinal Modification-Low Light  
Knife (2L1)  
Colt America L36 (9-clip, 3M2)

## Uncooperative Confusion

**Downloading The Data:**

"False dawn is almost here at 4:45 a.m. The south door at the loading dock is open and unlocked as had been arranged. What a relief, since the exchange certainly didn't go as planned. You carefully and quietly walk to the stairs that lead up to the fifth floor and Mr. Torvalt.

"A few dim lights are shining as you open the stairwell door into the reception area. The gorgeous brunette is no longer there. You can see light shining from under the door to Torvalt's office. You knock at the door. You hear a chair creak, and Torvalt speaks in that unique gravelly voice, 'Come in, it's not locked.'

"As you enter the room, you see that Torvalt seems unchanged from this morning. He speaks again, 'Well, have you got them? If I can get them back into Research and Development before eight o'clock, very few people will know they've been missing.'"

**Scouting Astrally:**

"Zooming upward, you drift through an air conditioner vent. Everything is quiet. After searching for a time, all you can find are three ordinary people: two security guards and someone in

Torvalt's office. Zipping across a hallway, you glide through a desk and computer monitor as you head back to your buddies. Taking one last glance around before you scoot out the front door, you don't see anything of interest to report."

**Backstage:**

If the players return with the datachips, Torvalt will examine them and declare them fakes. He will refuse to pay the rest of the agreed price and will berate the PCs for slipping up.

If the players want to try again to get the real chips back, Torvalt will refuse any help. He will tell them that their reputation has now been shot to pieces and they are useless and there is no point in trying again. "You will never work in this town again," he says, "You can stake your life on it."

Remember that Torvalt is happy about what happened and he certainly isn't surprised by the results. He planned it that way. After all, he gave the wrong datachips to the Midnighters in the first place and told them to try to finish the PCs' team off if possible before they left. No matter what happened, Torvalt will throw the PCs out of his office in disgrace. And if the players are observant, they may notice a strange lilt in Torvalt's voice — almost as if he's happy about what happened.

**Fixing The Glitches:**

If the players decide that force will aid their cause, don't forget that Donald Torvalt has a gun. And his desk has a bulletproofed shield that pops up at the touch of a button, to protect himself against just such a happening.

And if the players decide to keep the datachips, not knowing they are useless, someone on the team should have an attack of honor and demand that they complete the mission as agreed. Besides, if the players try to sell the datachips to someone else, word will soon get out that they sold defective merchandise.

## Information, Information, Who Has The Information?

**Downloading The Data:****If the team goes after the Midnighters:**

"There it is. The apartment building looks quiet. No sign of activity outside either. Still, there's a creepy feeling about the place. As though you've missed something. Wait, there's someone at the window upstairs. And that car in the parking lot has someone sitting in the front seat, several someones as a matter of fact. So...it won't be as easy as you thought.

"Suddenly, there is a bright light in your face and thunder in your ears. You've been spotted. It's time to rock and roll!"

**Scouting The Apartment Astrally:**

You drift slowly across the parking lot and through the branches of a small tree. Nobody is using magic out here or in the apartment building, but you can see a couple of people in a parked car in the middle of the parking lot. It looks as though somebody is keeping an eye on the approach to the building.

**Going After Data At Fugitake-Norbert:**

"You plug in and start moving into the computer system. Ahead, you can see the Fugitake-Norbert complex sitting like a monstrous pyramid against a bright blue haze. There seem to be obvious gates to get inside but you're sure they are guarded. Maybe you can slip in past them..."

"Sure enough, it worked. Ahead is the main entrance. You glide up the steps and through the front doors. Inside is the floor



directory. Aha, there it is. The Research and Development section is well marked. And looking closer and digging much deeper, you can find Torvalt's personal files. R & D security looks tough but nothing you can't get through with a little time and luck. Now, Torvalt's stuff looks like it has a personal army in front of it. If you can con your way past that, you've got it made. Now all you have to do is scoot down the bright neon hallways to the right places, grab the information, and run."

#### Backstage:

Certain computers, such as Lone Star or even some public databases can identify the Midnighters gang from symbols, colors, and names/I.D. from captured or dead gang members. If the PCs track the Midnighters down and manage to talk to them, they will find out that they had been hired by Torvalt.

Accessing Fugitake-Norbert's computers will reveal that the datachip plans that the PCs had seen were not the real thing. If they dig into Donald Torvalt's files, they will discover a list of shadowrunner teams with their names on it. But all the other teams are more experienced than the PCs are — the other teams all have a more established reputation. Buried deep in a subfile is information about psychological profiles on all teams and members along with a recommendation that the PCs' team be hired as the go-betweens because they would be more gullible than the others. Another file lists several gangs as well as some of the shadowrunner teams on the previous list. Also here is a recommendation to hire the Midnighters to exchange the fake datachips and terminate the PCs' team with very extreme prejudice. Obviously, Torvalt is up to something. But exactly what that would be is still a mystery.

The setup here is to allow the PCs access to the computer data. If you as referee want to detail the computer system, go ahead and map it out, IC and all.

#### Fixing The Glitches:

The main problems that might come up here are: 1) The players decide to do nothing, and 2) The players don't find the information needed to put together what's going on. In the first case, explain to the players that their reputations are at stake here and anything they can do to make things right will be in their favor when the next job offer comes along. In the second case, you as referee will need to prod the players a little. If they don't have a Decker on the team, they can hire someone to do the computer job. A Street Contact can name the Midnighters as the most likely gang to fit the description given by the PCs and probably even suggest where they can be found if anyone would be so foolish as to go looking for them.

### Mopping Up Afterwards

Now, the PCs have all the information available about what was going on. The easiest option for improving their reputation is to arrange to speak with Donald Torvalt's superior, the Chief of Security, at Fugitake-Norbert. You as referee might have to give them a little help in putting it all together. But, in any case, Torvalt's boss will be pleased to have information and proof (if possible) of Torvalt's wrongdoing. The PCs might decide to go after Torvalt personally, and that's okay too. But, if they do, they had still better talk to the Chief of Security at Fugitake-Norbert. If they don't, their reputation on the streets will remain be lousy.

#### Awarding Karma:

Divide 10 Karma Points amongst the surviving team members. Refer to page 160 of the *Shadowrun* rulebook to award individual karma. ★



## Trade & Conquest

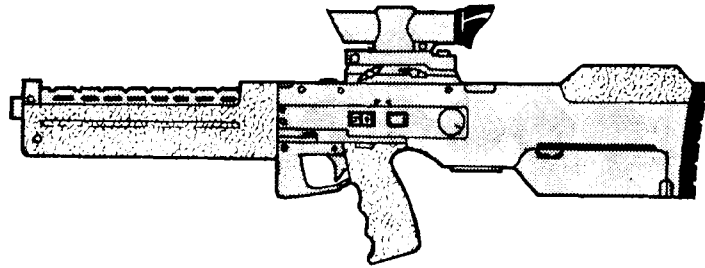
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The rules for improving equipment, in **The Star Wars Rules Companion**, state that it takes time, credits, know-how, and skill points. Below are optional rules for improving blasters which do not require the expenditure of skill points—at least, not to increase blaster die codes. Rather, the player can now use skill points to develop *Gunsmithing*, a skill specifically used to repair and modify hand-held blasters (a separate skill could also be developed to work on projectile weapons, from which the

# Gunsmiths In Star Wars



## Optional rules for repairing and improving blasters

*James B. King*

term *gunsmithing* originates). Those who are employed in gunsmithing are often referred to as 'blaster technicians.'

Players who wish to develop this skill should write Gunsmithing on the blank line under the attribute **Technical**. The beginning skill level is equal to the attribute level, and can now be improved like all other skills.

Using Gunsmithing skill requires the use of specialty tools. Such a tool kit can be purchased for 1000 credits. Attempting to use the skill using common tools instead of the appropriate specialty tools causes all difficulty levels to increase by one level.

### Repairing Blasters

Having a player character with this skill will now make it possible to present situations where weapons may be damaged and must be repaired. For instance, weapons might be dropped from great heights, run over by ground vehicles, or struck by other blaster or melee weapons. In these instances, treat all hand-held blasters as having a Strength code of 5D, as their construction is fairly rugged to withstand abuse and hard use.

Refer to the FALLING AND COLLISIONS TABLE when appropriate, and to the SHIP DAMAGE column of the DAMAGE SUMMARY chart to determine the extent of damage, then refer to the chart below to determine the required repairs. Follow the standard Technical repair procedure.

DAMAGE RESULT	REQUIRED REPAIRS
Lightly damaged	Difficulty: Easy. Parts required at 10% of weapon purchase price
Heavily damaged	Moderate. Parts required at 25% of weapon purchase price.
Severely damaged	Difficult. Parts required at 50% of weapon purchase price.
Destroyed.	Weapon is a total loss and cannot be repaired.

It is also now possible to hire a gunsmith to repair damaged blasters. In this case, double the above cost for component parts to

reflect the fee the PCs are charged for the gunsmith's services.

### Improving Blasters

Blasters can be improved in two ways—their accuracy can be improved and their damage code can be increased. Improving a blaster that has already had a lesser, similar improvement does not change the requirements for the new improvements, as the earlier modified parts are removed and replaced.

Note that, on planets with a highly restrictive government, it is illegal to improve weapon damage codes. It is also illegal by Imperial edicts for civilians to own pistols with damage codes beyond 4D.

Use the charts below to attempt improvements to blasters.

#### ACCURACY IMPROV.

Improve maximum range ratings in meters to 10% above standard (round fractions up).

Improve maximum range ratings in meters to 20% above standard.

Improve maximum range ratings in meters to 25% above standard.

#### DAMAGE IMPROVE.

Improve damage to +1 pip above standard.▪

Improve damage to +2 pips above standard.

Improve damage to 1D above standard (maximum improvement).

#### REQUIRED GUNSMITHING

Difficulty: Moderate. Components required at 10% of weapon purchase price. Reduce damage code to 1 pip less than standard (4D damage becomes 3D+2).

Difficult. Components required at 25% of weapon purchase price. Reduce damage code to 2 pips less than standard.

Very Difficult. Components required at 50% of weapon purchase price. Reduce damage code to 1D less than standard.

#### REQUIRED GUNSMITHING

Difficulty: Moderate. Components required at 10% of weapon purchase price.

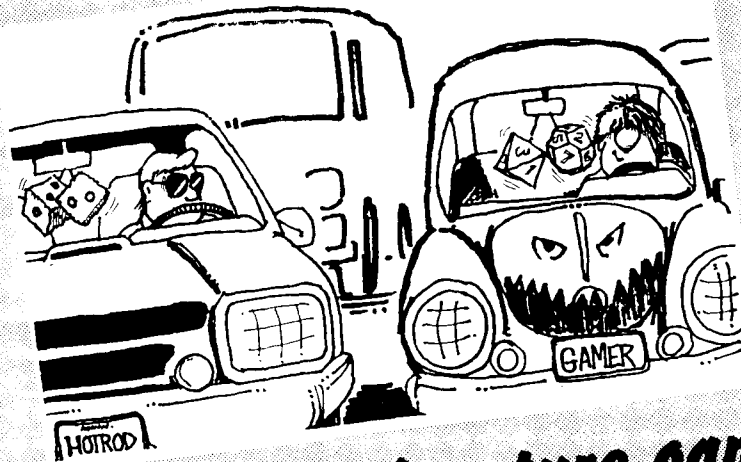
Difficult. Components required at 25% of weapon purchase price.

Very Difficult. Components required at 50% of weapon purchase price.

▪Note that the standard damage code for a blaster with improved accuracy is the new, lesser, modified damage code.

Actually modifying a blaster takes much more time than simply making repairs. Should the PCs hire a gunsmith to do this, triple the component cost of the job to reflect the fee they are charged for the gunsmith's services. ★

# It's A Gamer's Life



## Cartoons of adventure gaming

Compiled by James B. King

Facsimile of cover

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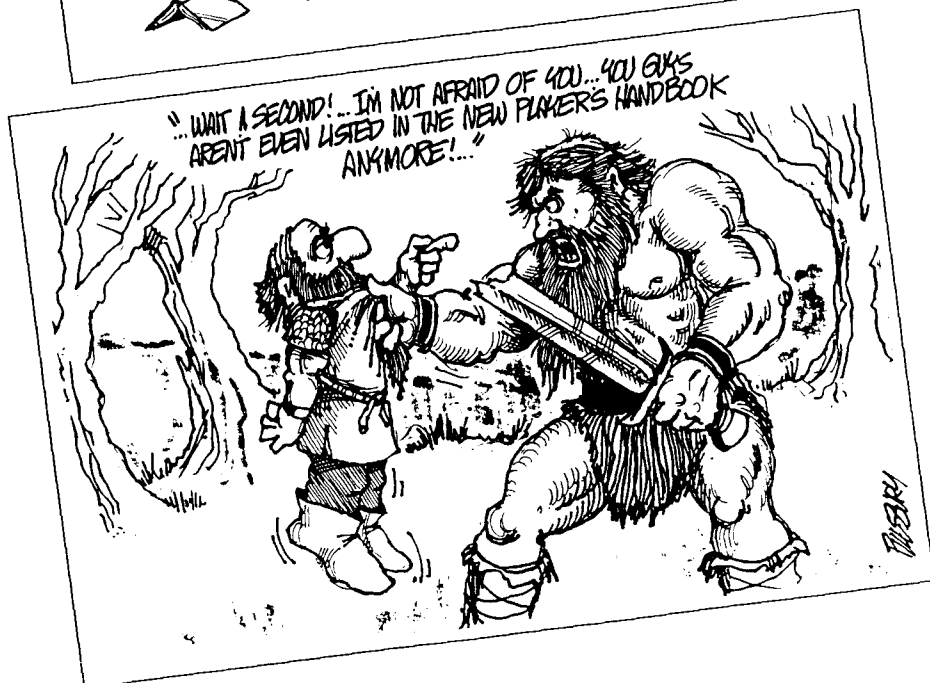
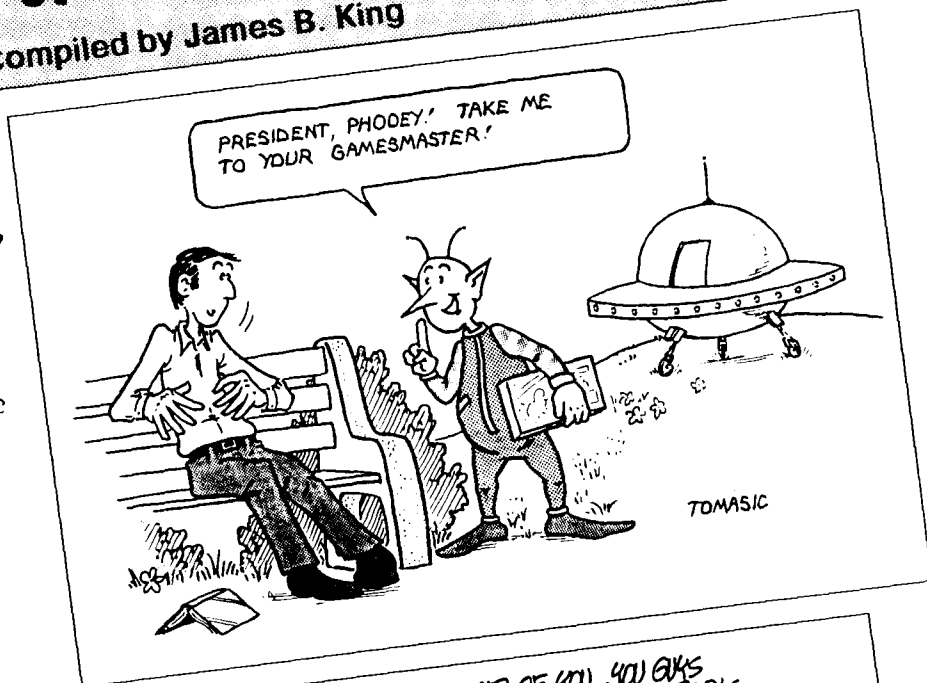
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# Unofficial Combat Errata For The Palladium Roleplaying Systems

*Aubrey Forest Melchert*

The combat system provided within the Palladium Roleplaying games is one which is heavily based in the abstract, and is so abstract that combat eventually degenerates into a series of die rolls and the subtraction of hit points. To add greater flavor and variety to the system, not to mention some much needed realism, I have devised the following combat errata and hit location charts. They have been thoroughly play-tested and I'm sure that you'll find them an excellent addition to the combat portion of your roleplaying experience.

## Called Shots Against Living Targets

When engaged in combat—melee or ranged—PCs, NPCs and monsters have the option of making a called shot to a specific area of the body. Called shots should be made as usual—the attacker rolling a 12 or better to strike the desired target. If the roll was below 12 but above 5 the attacker must consult the Random Hit Location Table for the appropriate hit location. When a called shot is successful, the attacker rolls damage and divides the sum of the damage by 10 (rounding down) and adds this number to the roll of a D20. The resulting number is then compared to appropriate Damage Result Table, the effects of damage taking place immediately.

## Dodge And Parry Bonus

Certain areas of the body present a more difficult target to the attacker attempting a called shot, and therefore are easier to defend. When a called shot is scored, the indicated Dodge/Parry bonus is added to the defender's roll in addition to all other bonuses.

## Saving Rolls vs Pain

Some areas of the body, such as the arm

or leg, may act reflexively when damage is scored there. In these cases, a special save is required to prevent the reflex. The standard Save vs Pain is a 12, with the M. E. bonus vs psionics serving as an allowable modifier.

## Penalties

All penalties incurred during combat are cumulative and in effect until the character receives proper treatment for his injuries, unless otherwise stated within the Damage Result Tables (i.e.: Stun damage, although cumulative, will wear off after a given period of time).

## Critical Strikes

On occasion a blow may be so successful that its effect results in multiple critical strikes. For instance, a blow to the head might instantly kill someone if enough damage is done. A Critical Strike x3 does three times the damage that would normally be scored. If a natural Critical Strike is scored in addition to any other critical damage, consider the damage cumulative. Thus a natural Critical Strike plus a Critical Strike x3 would do four times the normally stated damage.

## Disarming An Opponent

To successfully disarm an opponent a character must first successfully entangle

the hand or arm bearing the weapon. Then in the next melee a contest of strength is rolled between the attacker and the defender. In this task the attacker adds any melee combat bonuses to strike, plus any bonuses to damage (bare-handed only) to the roll of a D20 and compares this to the defender's roll of a D20 plus any melee combat parry and damage bonuses. If the attacker's roll is greater than the defender's, the defender is disarmed. If the roll is tied, the two continue to grapple. If the defender rolls higher, he has freed himself from the grapple.

## Random Hit Location Tables

Characters performing a called shot must declare their targets before rolling. If no target is declared, then it is assumed that all hits will fall somewhere on the main body. In this case, and also in the case of a missed called shot in which the number was greater than 5 but less than 12, use the Main Body Hit Location Table. In cases where non-combat related injury is sustained, such as falling from a great height, etc., use the Basic Random Damage Determination Chart. In either case, once the location of damage is determined, consult the appropriate Damage Result Table for the effect of the damage sustained.

*Origins '91*

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**RANDOM HIT LOCATION TABLE ONE:****Main Body Hit Locations – Roll D10**

1.....	Head
2-3.....	Upper Torso
4-6.....	Lower Torso
7.....	Right Arm
8.....	Left Arm
9.....	Right Leg (Thigh)
10.....	Left Leg (Thigh)

**Note:** In the case of the Random Hit Location Table One, the defender gains a dodge bonus for the area hit only if one roll is made on the chart for that attack.

**DAMAGE RESULT TABLES****Head/Upper Torso**

Defender receives a +3 to parry/dodge for the Head. +3 for the Upper Torso

1-3.....	Normal Damage
4-10.....	Stunned D4 melees (-6 Strike, Parry & Dodge)
11-13.....	Stunned D6 melees
14-15.....	Stunned 2D4 melees: Critical Strike
16-17.....	Stunned 2D6 melees: Critical Strike x2
18.....	Knocked Out D4 melees: Critical Strike x3
19.....	Knocked Out D6 melees: Critical Strike x3
20.....	Knocked Out 2D4 melees: Critical Strike x4

**Arm**

Defender receives a +3 to parry/dodge. Save vs Pain to keep hold of any item in hand.

1-10.....	Normal Damage
11-15.....	-2 Strike/Parry with arm
16-19.....	-4 Strike/Parry with arm; -6 Save vs Pain
20.....	Arm paralyzed, useless; -10 Save vs Pain

**RANDOM HIT LOCATION TABLE TWO:****Basic Random Damage Determination – Roll D20**

1-2.....	Head
3-4.....	Upper Torso
5-8.....	Lower Torso
9-10.....	Right Arm
11-12.....	Left Arm
13-16.....	Right Leg
17-20.....	Left Leg

**Lower Torso**

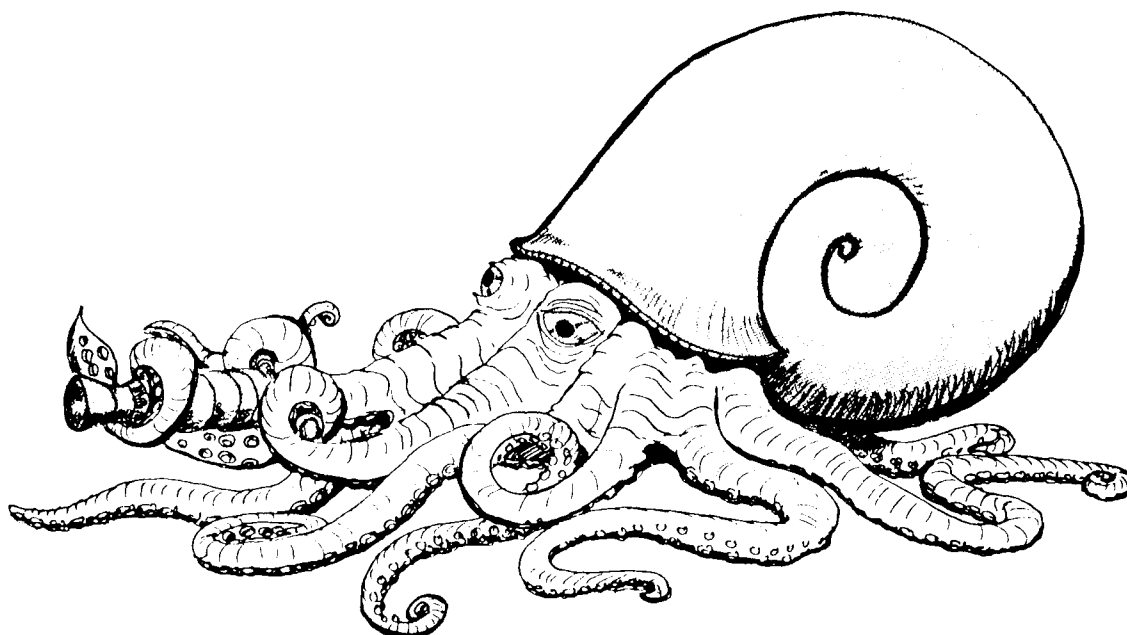
Defender receives normal parry/dodge bonuses

1-9.....	Normal Damage
10-11.....	-3 to Speed
12-15.....	-5 to Speed; -1 Strike, Parry & Dodge
16-18.....	Stunned D6 melees; -2 Strike, Parry & Dodge
19.....	Stunned 2D4 melees; -3 Strike, Parry & Dodge; Critical Strike
20.....	Stunned 2D6 melees; -4 Strike, Parry & Dodge; Critical Strike x2

**Leg**

Defender receives a +2 parry/dodge. Save vs Pain to continue any movement. Failure means that the character is on his knees, -4 to initiative next round.

1-10.....	Normal Damage
11-15.....	-2 Speed/Dodge
16-19.....	-4 Speed/Dodge; -6 Save vs Pain
20.....	Leg paralyzed, useless; -10 Save vs Pain to remain standing on leg. Speed and dodge reduced by 1/2 if one leg; by 1/4 if both. ★



# Solomani Space Fighters

Two space fighter designs for MegaTraveller

*Matti Laakso*

## Thunderstreak Class Heavy Fighter/Interceptor

**CraftID:** Solomani Fighter/Interceptor  
Type SF, TL 14, MCr190.36

**Hull:** 108/270, Disp=120,  
Config=1AF, Armor=50G  
Unloaded=3701.4 tons,  
Loaded=3819 tons

**Power:** 37/74, Fusion=5004Mw,  
Duration=16/48

**Loco:** 19/38, Maneuver=6,  
NOE=180kph,  
Cruise=3150kph,  
Top=4200kph  
Agility=4

**Commo:** RadioComm,  
MaserComm

**Sensors:** Active EMS=Far Orbit,  
Neutrino=10Kw,  
Passive EMS=Interstellar,  
ActObjScan=Rout,  
ActObjPin=Rout,  
PassEngScan=Simp,  
PassEngPin=Rout

**Off:** PlasmaGun=x03  
Batt 1  
Bear 1

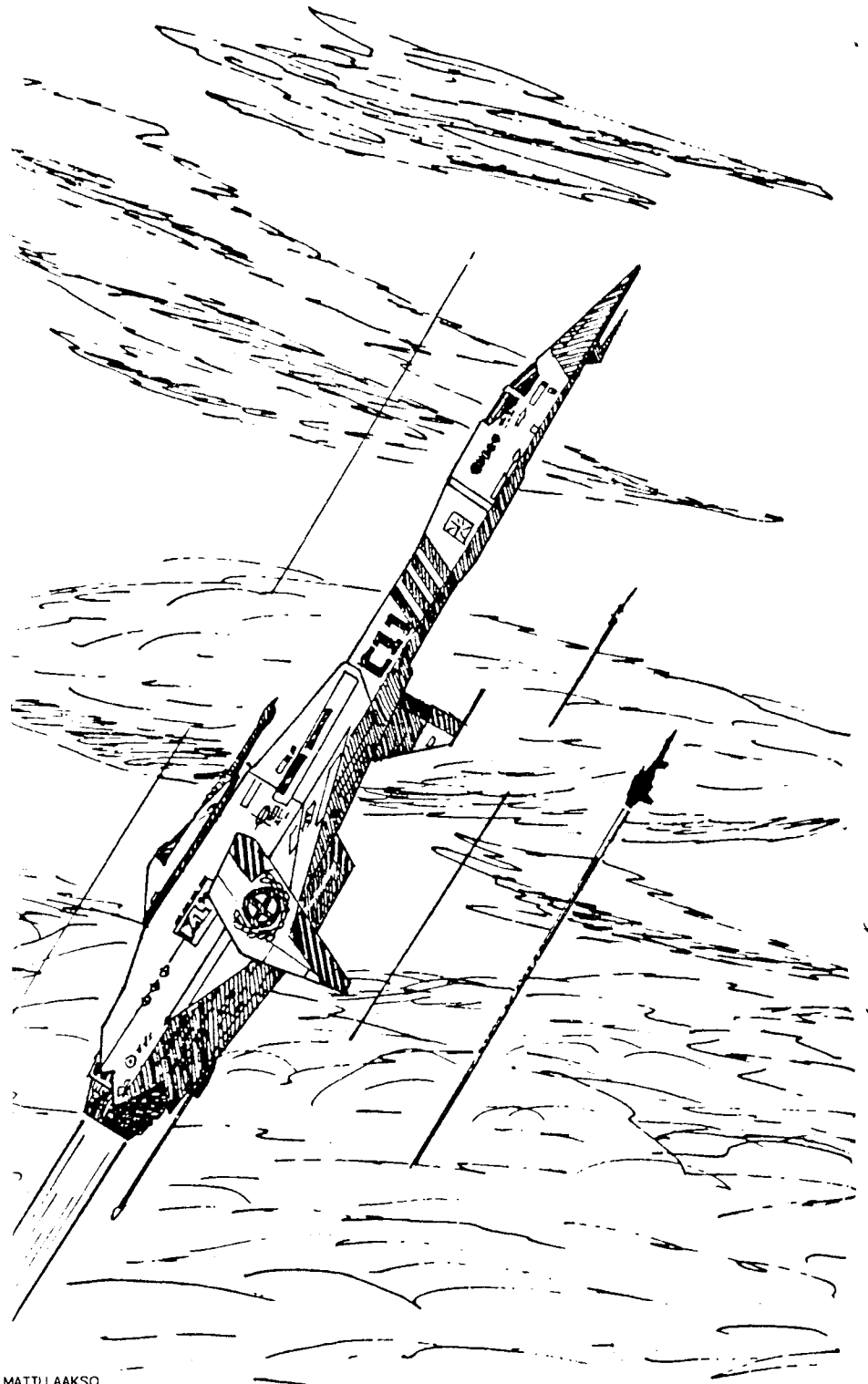
Missile=x03  
Batt 1  
Bear 1

**Def:** DefDM= +11

**Control:** Computer=6 x3  
Panel=Holodynamic link x53  
Special=HeadsUp  
Environ=BasicEnv, BasicLS,  
ExtendLS, Grav Plates,  
Inertial Comp.

**Accomm:** Crew=3 (Bridge=1,  
Engineer=1, Gunner=1),  
Staterooms=1,  
Small Staterooms=1

**Other:** Cargo=42.8Kliters,  
Fuel=1067Kliters  
Fuel Scoops  
ObjSize=Average,  
EM Level=Moderate



## Huitzilopochtli Class Fighter

**CraftID:** Solomani Fighter, Type SF, TL 15, MCr 74.97

**Hull:** 23/56, Disp=25, Config=1AF, Armor=50G  
Unloaded=324.5 tons, Loaded=338.5 tons

**Power:** 3/5, Fusion=612Mw, Duration=18/54

**Loco:** 4/8, Maneuver=6 (non-gravitic),  
NOE=190kph, Cruise=3150kph,  
Top=4200kph, Agility=6

**Commo:** RadioComm, MaserComm—far orbit

**Sensors:** EMMask, Act EMS=FarOrbit,  
Neutrino=10Kw,  
Pass EMS=Substellar,  
Densitometer=LoPen/250km,  
ActObjScan=Rout, ActObjPin=Rout  
PassObjScan=Rout, PassObjPin=Rout  
PassEngScan=Simp, PassEngPin=Rout

**Off:** PlasmaGun=x03

Batt 1

Bear 1

**Def:** DefDM= +15

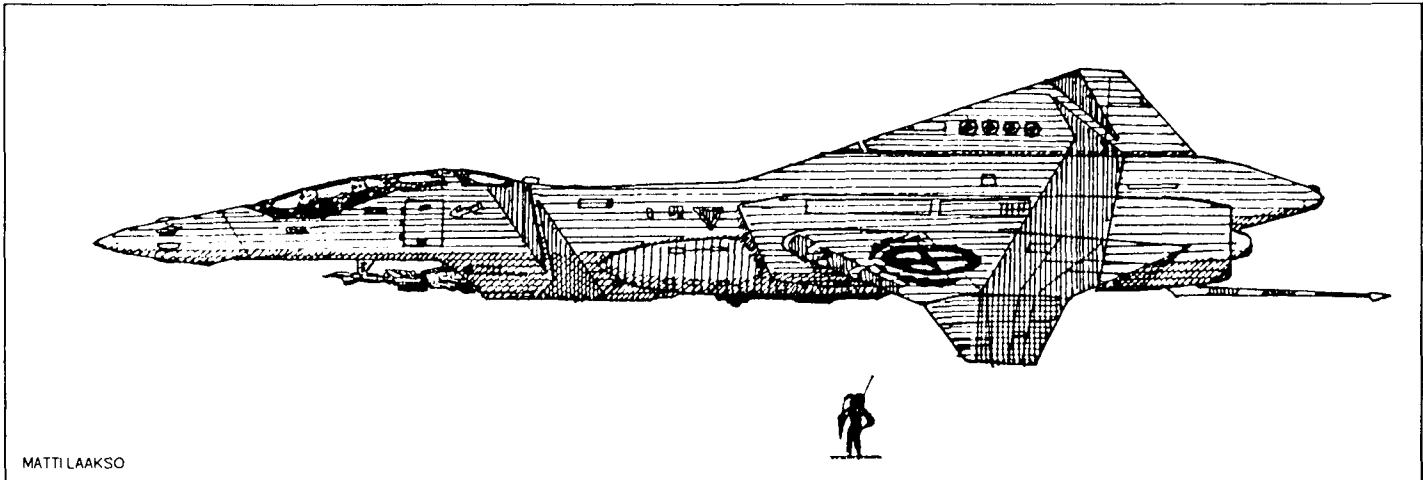
**Control:** Computer=7 x3, Panel=DynamicLink x10,  
Special=HUD, Environ=BasicEnv, BasicLS,  
ExtendLS, Grav Plates, Inertial Comp.

**Accomm:** Crew=2 (Pilot/Gunner=1, Cmdr=1),  
Seats=Roomy x2, Bunks=1

**Other:** Cargo=3.75Kliters, Fuel=145.5Kliters  
Fuel Scoops

ObjSize=Average, EM Level=No emission

Huitzilopochtli is the most advanced Solomani fighter. Unlike most Imperial small craft designs, Huitzilopochtli (Imperial designation SF-AT 1114) uses powerful fusion rockets for propulsion. The major drawback with non-gravitic drives is their high IR signature. The name "Huitzilopochtli" is an Aztec name for their god of war. ★



MATTI LAAKSO

## VOYAGES SF 14 READERS SURVEY

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4 \_\_\_ Combat Errata For Palladium RPGs  
5 \_\_\_ Solomani Space Fighters  
6 \_\_\_ The Case Of The Haunted Car  
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Q2: Including yourself, how many people read this issue?

Q3: Rating in order of preference the most recent issues of the gaming magazines you read, where would you rate this issue of VOYAGES SF (1 is high)?

This is a *GURPS AutoDuel* or *Car Wars* adventure for two to five players, plus a GM or referee. It might be a good idea to have another person to play the opponents and NPCs. This adventure is described in mostly GAD terms, but CW conversion stats are provided.

### The Players' Set-up

The players are in a medium-small fortress town somewhere in the Midwest. They are relaxing in the Brass Bullet Cafe, talking about upcoming duels and other assorted news. A tall, dark-haired man enters. Seeing them, he approaches, and if they do not notice him, he clears his throat.

"I see you folks are duelists," he says. "My name is Doug Kendall, and I'm the Mayor of Cedarville. My town's about twelve miles away.

"About a month ago, the city council decided to build a new solar power station. The present one's over thirty years old and falling apart. Within a few days of the decision, some strange things started happening. A car without a driver has been blazing into town along the road leading to the new station site. New parts for the old station started turning up on people's lawns. And everyone on the council's been getting postcards with weird messages on them.

"Then a week ago, that driverless car attacked our two police cars. They're both badly shot up, and we're pretty short of cash right about now.

"Two nights ago, the car attacked the Fire Chief's house. His eldest daughter was seriously injured. She's in the hospital here, recovering.

"I'd like to ask you for your help. I want you to go after this haunted car, see who's behind it, and see if they have something against our building the new station. We'll give you free rooms at the town hotel, free meals, and half off all repairs and reloads that aren't too unusual. Will you accept our offer?"

They should, or they're out of the adventure. Getting to town is no problem. Cedarville has only 900 people, so it's too small for most gangs to bother with.

### Once In Town

As soon as the players arrive, give them a map of the town. (You'll need to draw the map yourself. Any road map of a small town will do.) There's no great celebration when they arrive; only if the PCs do their job will the townspeople start partying.

The town is similar to other small midwestern towns. It has a small police force (seven officers, one cruiser), MONDOs, and a city administration. The one thing that distinguishes Cedarville from other small towns is that most of the people make their livings by selling home-grown vegetables and home-made arts and crafts.

All previous incidents involving the haunted car have gone this way: the car comes up Dry Creek Road quickly and leaves the same way. Anyone who tries to follow it loses it at the Dry Creek bridge. It disappears in a bright flash, followed by plenty of smoke, and out of nowhere a large log is on the opposite side of the bridge.

The PCs can now think the situation over. They can plan, conduct research, whatever. The



# The Case Of The Haunted Car

An adventure for GURPS AutoDuel

*Robert L. Collins*

PCs should not know when the next attack will come (there's been no time pattern).

This next attack should be against the PCs, specifically one of their cars. It should come when the PCs are asleep or otherwise occupied. The car will pull up to the hotel (where the PCs cars are parked) and take two shots at the nearest target vehicle, then leave along it's usual escape route.

### The Bad Guys

The haunted car is operated by a remote control unit hidden nearby the town. Running the car is a small group of "professional" gunmen.

**The haunted car:** Mid size, standard chassis, heavy suspension, medium power plant, 4 PR radials; turreted laser, smoke screens right & left, spike dropper back; remote control receiver;

Armor (LRFP): Front & Back 4/18, 3/12 other sides; 4798 lbs., \$23,400.

**The sending set:** Remote control transmitter, Hi-res targetting computer, long distance radio; 210 lbs., 16 cubic feet, \$7100. (Driver +0, Gunner +0.)

The group also has three Hawks, two Stashers, and a Vigilante pickup. There are twelve men in the group; ten soldiers, a leader, and an expert. Each gunman has an SMG with two clips and body armor. The leader, "Bull" Barton, has an AR, a .44 pistol, and improved body armor. The expert, Lou McCoy, has a 9mm pistol and body armor.

In addition to the vehicles the "gang" has two tool kits, a portable computer, tents, about ten weeks of food, and a tripod MG with two clips.



Everything is kept at their hidden base outside of town. The base is on a path leading away from Dry Creek Road, blocked by a wrecked vehicle.

### The Game Is Afoot!

If the PCs suspect an informer, they'll have to do some digging. Only after a thorough search of the plans for the new station (4 hrs of Research rolls) will they find the fellow who's going to lose his job.

A Research-4 roll at City Hall will come up with an old map of the area. It shows a small path near the site. It might suggest that something is hidden or buried at the end of the path. (This is where the bad guys are hiding.)

A few of the citizens will confront the PCs as they move through town. They'll tell them about old Gus McCann, one-time owner of the site property. Eleven years ago, the council wanted to buy the land and put an armory on it. McCann refused to sell, vowing that his land would never go to the city. A week later he died. Some will say they've seen his ghost prowling the streets. Others will report "weird goings on" out there. They're convinced this is the reason these attacks have been occurring.

As mentioned earlier, one man will be losing his job when the new station goes up. A trip to the bank and a few questions to the manager will reveal he isn't a big saver. Whether he's in on the crimes is up to the GM.

There are two gangs working the area. Both are small (less than fifteen members), don't have steady names, and aren't being ruthlessly pursued by the police (neither commits crimes that cause outrage or make determined enemies). Either gang could be the "soldiers," but they won't be the brains behind the haunted car.

There was more than one solar company in the bidding for Cedarville's new plant. Half a day and a Research-5 roll will reveal one of the failed bidders, Southwestern Solar, is teetering on the edge of bankruptcy.

Talking to the Mayor for at least 90 minutes will reveal that businesses have approached the town about putting up factories of one kind or another on the site. Cedarville has always said no; perhaps one of those businesses doesn't like that answer?

And what of the hidden "something" the records hint to? They don't go beyond hinting; many records were lost during the Food Riots. It's possible that another company owned the land before Mr. McCann.

If the PCs head out to the station site, they'll find the bridge unblocked, but Dry Creek Road beyond that point is more or less off-road. Any paths that head away from it look even worse. One can't be traversed because an old car is in the way.

This is the hidden base, of course. The car has an anti-theft system linked to grenades. Unless a Lockpick-3 roll is made, moving the car sets off the grenades, and a siren. The gunmen will show up within a few minutes with all weapons and two cycles. The car has no tires.

East of town, next to and east of Dry Creek, is dense forest. PCs trying to walk through it will not only have to deal with typical midwestern fauna,

but must make Stealth rolls every five minutes if they're trying to sneak up on something. In addition, all Navigation and Tracking rolls are at -3 (-1 in winter only).

### Solving The Case

The PCs have plenty of suspects. Ideally, the GM will have the answers. In this adventure it's up to the GM to decide which is the real culprit. One of the gangs should be in on the attacks, hired by someone. The "something" that's hidden, if it exists, should either be gasoline or chemicals (hazardous or merely unique).

Attacking the site should be out. Overland movement is extremely difficult, and there's no chance for surprise. There is one way of getting in unseen: wait for the next attack by the haunted car, sneak inside, and hide until it returns to the base.

The possible informer can be a help and a hinderance. If the operation's controller is well financed, it could give the informer bugs and have him plant them. Even if the controller doesn't have a lot of cash, it still has to keep in touch with it's agent. If the GM allows the informer to exist, he should make the PCs work to get him or her on their side.

Another idea is to negotiate. This would be best if there really is something hidden. On the other hand, if the PCs and the gunmen start talking without letting the brains know, things could (and ought to) get a lot uglier.

Don't let the PCs go through the adventure

without getting some kind of satellite survey of the area, if you allow such a thing in your GAD campaign. It's expensive (\$15,000 at least), and might be confusing, but it should give the PCs a good idea of the "gangs" supplies. If there's something hidden, it will positively reveal what it is on a roll of 16 or less, but the PCs will have to have an expert interpret the results.

Give the PCs one Experience Point for surviving, two if things ended without violence, and one more if they made any friends, either in town or elsewhere.

### Character Notes

The abilities and skills of the citizens and the gunmen should be reflected by the PCs, with the townsfolk not at all powerful, and the hired guns equal to the PCs.

Most of the NPCs can be improvised, or based on stock NPCs. The NPCs who might need work beforehand are the Mayor, the Police Chief, the City Clerk, the head of the power station, the informant (if he exists), Barton and McCoy, and the leader of the "ghost mob."

### Conversion Notes

This adventure will work in any background that has powerful corporations. It won't work in places with powerful authorities. It can be set in the present with a few changes. It might even work as a horror adventure, with the haunted car really being haunted. Of course, eliminating ghost cars isn't as easy as gangs and corporations. ★

## FUTURE VOYAGES A Look At Our Next Issue

### Recruiting For Paradise

A MegaTraveller adventure

### "Idiots Don't Drive BattleMasters"

BattleTech fiction.

### Government Espionage In AutoDuel

Notes and guidelines on playing a spy, complete with an adventure!

### Advanced Task Resolution In GURPS

Optional rules for added realism.

### 2300AD Ship Profiles

Complete with notes on making your own models.

### Character Portraits

Full body illustrations useful as player or non-player characters. We delayed this an issue to really do it right. Works from a number of talented artists will be displayed in this presentation.

**These articles and more, plus Commlink, Words To Game By, and Reviews next issue. Look for it in April!**

[10 JUNE, 2301 — **Contre-Admiral Jean-Paul Bertrand's staff announced that the Eta Bootis Defense Fleet will depart to engage the Kafer vessels currently attacking the Hochbaden system (less the two Australian vessels *Bushranger* and *Kangaroo*, which are still on patrol near Arcturus).]**

[13 JUNE, 2301 — (excerpt from the communications log of *H.M.A.S. Bushranger*): "...What do you mean the fleet went off to Hochbaden? Send a courier off ASAP to bring the Defense Fleet back. The whole frigging Kafer fleet dropped into Arturus to discharge their stutterwarp drive. They'll be here in a few days!"]

[18 JUNE, 2301 — In the Hochbaden system, the French battleship *Tallyrand*, with **Contre-Admiral Jean-Paul Bertrand onboard, was completely destroyed in a one-on-one engagement with a Kafer battleship. This leaves the Ukrainian commander, Kontr-Admiral Sergei Sergeivich Borodin in charge of the combined Earth Defense Force here in the outer French Arm of space.]**

*Taken from The Human-Kafer War by Alex Shane, pub. 2312.*

[21 JUNE, 2301: 2107 hours GMT — Tanstaff Starport]

Two men stood in the lighted doorway to a prefab shelter, one of many on this side of the starport. Both wore the typical khaki drill uniform of the British Commonwealth of the 24th century. Round garrison hats with black visors, short sleeves, pressed slacks, black, low top shoes polished to within a centimeter of their 'lives' completed the perfect recruiting poster image that all military forces wish to project. One of the figures had a lot of gold braid on his visor, and was the one standing just inside the doorway. Off in the distance, a transport blimp, a common sight on colony worlds, was on final approach to the main landing circle for LTAs (Lighter-Than-Air vehicles).

"Welcome aboard, Mister Greenwood." Alexander 'Sandy' Shane told the young man who was standing in Shane's quarters. "See you on the *Bushranger* tomorrow." One final shake of the hands, then Greenwood snapped off a sharp salute in the fine British tradition. Shane returned it in the same fashion.

Shane watched the retreating back of Lieutenant Greenwood as the wind ruffled both men's pressed khakis. The brown giant Tithonus filled the sky as if it were some god watching the strange workings of man on its moon, *Aurore*. Appearing off to the side of Tithonus was the red shining dot of Arcturus, the star by which the enemy passes to reach Eta Bootis.

The starport looked like any old airport on any of the hundreds of worlds that man now inhabited; the tower lights flashed their warnings to aircraft landing and taking off, and lights shined in offices throughout the administration block. But this starport was also the ground base location of the United Nations Space Fleet Headquarters and *Aurore* (Mission) Control. Security teams on foot or in hovercraft patrolled the perimeter of the starport looking for any Kafers that might still be around.

A feminine arm curled its way around his waist and a head came to rest on his shoulders. "Sandy, duty comes early tomorrow."

Shane closed the door and turned to face Beth Anderson. He stared into her face and encircled her in his arms.

A smile spread across her face. "What's wrong, Commodore? Have I broken out in bloodsucker spots?"

"Ha, ha. Have no fear of that, lass. I was just thinking how we're lucky that we have this time together before going back up."

Beth disentangled herself from his arms to step back and let him admire the view. A red ribbon tying back her raven black hair also served to frame her lovely face. Her brown eyes shined with the glow of passion. Barely containing her ample body was a black satin and lace bustier with g-string and thigh-high, sheer stockings hooked up by garters. "By the smirk on your face I can tell you like...*everything*," she softly stated.

Shane smiled, tossed his hat off to a chair in the corner, and put his arm around Beth. "Shall we retire to the bedroom and finish practicing

"In my first briefing with Bertrand, he played down what happened dirtside," Shane said, grimacing. "All he talked about was his final victory over their fleet."

"That jerk couldn't find his own asshole even if someone helped. The Kafers stomped his ass twice before he finally got that 'victory' of his."

"Why, Beth, darling. Do you talk this way about me and others of such high rank with your other friends?" Shane asked, teasingly, turning onto his side so that he could rest on an arm and look down into her face.

Beth answered with a quick kiss, "Of course not, Sandy. I've only told the female staff what a lousy lover you can be at times."

Shane collapsed back into bed. "Oh — Well! That's different. It's nice to know what the entire squadron thinks of me."

Beth laughed. "What?! You thought I was serious about that? You're more uptight than I thought you were. How 'bout I massage your neck? That always helped before."

"Oh, might as well. Yesterday — I was one of the greatest lovers of all mankind. Tonight — the lousiest. How the mighty have fallen."

[22 JUNE, 2301 — Long range sensor probes have reported the arrival of the long awaited Kafer invasion force. The Australian ships plus the three merchant ships hastily fitted out with weaponry have left orbit to engage a lone Kafer battleship apparently making a reconnaissance of *Aurore*. This is one reporter's wish of good luck and good hunting to the newly formed Colonial Defense Squadron.]

*The Human-Kafer War by Alex Shane, pub. 2312.*

[22 JUNE, 2301: 2107 hours GMT — Eta Bootis I (Hesperus)]

Five ships going into Harm's Way.

The gas giant cataloged as Eta Bootis I (named Hesperus by the first human explorers) loomed ever larger in the viewports of the five little spaceships. Two of them looked like hunters. Various shades of gray, white, and gold coated their hulls. The other three were glaring white and each as massive as a skyscraper. To an outside viewer, the five ships would appear to "blink" into existence in one spot, then blink out, only to reappear millions of kilometers away; the effect of vessels using stutterwarp.

The lead ship was of the *Kiev* class. Purchased from the Russians six years ago, it was a lean, knife-like design ninety meters long with two thick wings rotating around the fuselage containing the majority of the living quarters for the crew. Along the main hull were five twin-laser mounts and three missile bays. Near the point of its needle-like prow was its name — *H.M.A.S. Bushranger*, and right next to it, the proud flag of Australia.

Bringing up the rear was a slightly larger, barrel-shaped vehicle with huge solar panels, the *H.M.A.S. Kangaroo*, a ship based upon an old French design, mounting fifteen lasers, with a lander to carry twenty marines into combat. The three *Hudson* class cargo carriers were hastily modified to be warships by mounting four lasers

## ENCOUNTER AT HESPERUS

2300<sup>AD</sup> fiction inspired by the  
adventure book "Invasion"

*Don W. Shanks*

'docking maneuvers,' Commander?"

"Aye aye, sir."

Later, the two lovers rested in each other's arms and stared at the darkened ceiling. Finally, the quiet was broken by Beth.

"What do you think about our new computer operator?" she asked.

Sandy thought for a moment before answering. "Amazing that he was able to live through the first Kafer invasion. If ever someone suffered through a walkabout, he did. You should have seen his eyes as he told me about his cousin's farm northeast of here. We were over at the O-Club, tossing back a mug or two, when Malcolm told me about his cousin, dying after their group staged an ambush. Between trying to hum a chorus of *Waltzing Matilda*, his cousin quoted: 'I hope you will remain with me here till I am quite dead. It is a comfort to know that someone is by.' It was told to John King by Robert O'Hara Burke in 1861 on their failed exploration of the Outback."

"Hearing about it from behind the door was enough for me. Now it looks like we're in a full-blown war with them."

and were carrying two American SIM-14 missile packs each; three hastily converted freighters way overdue on their maintenance schedules, with civilian crews trying to act like military spacers.

Onboard the *Bushranger*, the flagship of the Aureore Colonial Defense Squadron, its crew watched their monitors closely for the lone Kafer scout vessel that was supposed to be near this world.

In a small broom closet of a cabin, a lone figure in shorts sat at his computer terminal. A mug of lukewarm tea rested near the person's right elbow, waiting to be emptied. "Sandy" Shane finished reading a report on his computer screen and saved it under the "Ship's Papers" file. Then, he called up a data readout of the squadron's position. Satisfied with his findings, he turned his terminal off and finished dressing for duty as his mind reviewed the current situation.

The little fleet left the comfortable embrace of Tithonus, a gas giant five times larger than Jupiter. The world of Aureore was officially listed in the star atlas as Eta Bootis IIc (meaning that it was the third moon orbiting the second planet of the Eta Bootis binary system). Eta Bootis A was named Muphrid and Eta Bootis B, Rubis. The systems two stars orbited one another with an annual separation of 1.425 AU (Astronomical Units). The system was first visited by the French. In the 2240s, France, Ukraine, and a cartel of American corporations set up a colony on the tidally locked world now named Aureore. The colony grew in size and population in the next fifty-eight years.

Then, on April 4, 2298, the peace was shattered. A large fleet invaded the Eta Bootis system from the general direction of Arcturus, attacking the human fleet and destroying it. By April 8, the aliens had begun landing on the planet. For three months, the fighting was severe at best, brutal and desperate at worst. The Earth fleet at Hochbaden, the next world within the 7.7 light year range of stutterwarp vessels in the direction of Earth, eventually defeated the aliens and sent them retreating. But the stranded Kafers on the planet fought on for another year, waiting for reinforcements. Over 300,000 people, mostly civilians, died in that war. The economy was shattered. Citizens of Aureore developed a bloodlust against the Kafers. If a citizen of Aureore was asked how to fight the war against the Kafers, a typical answer would be to round up the bloody lot and do away with them on a scale that would have made the ancient, infamous Hitler green with envy.

Commodore Shane reflected over the recent past on the fringe of human space. *For three years we have stationed an international fleet in this system. Bertrand didn't even try to seek out the aliens, just keep them away from the colony. Admiral Borodin was supposed to be a tactical genius, but he didn't want to make any waves.*

Shane mumbled to himself under his breath, "The German Kommodore Wilhelm Lutke is about the most aggressive of us all. And then the American, Rear Admiral David Farragut Parker — but he's a little too concerned with seeking glory rather than protecting Aureore." *But the three of us agree that the fight for Eta Bootis should be waged at Arcturus. Now Bertrand had to go off and leave me to protect the whole system with an*

*ad hoc squadron. What bloody fools the lot of them are!*

Shane stepped out of his quarters and entered the small companionway that was painted in green and brown earth tones. From there it was a short distance to the hub and the entry way into the null-gravity part of the destroyer. Once through, he grabbed onto the "fireman pole," then moved hand over hand to the Tactical Action Center (known simply as TAC) of *H.M.A.S. Bushranger*. Alexander Shane, a lean, fit gentleman in his late fifties with streaks of silver beginning to appear in his blonde hair, floated through the hatchway with the grace of a ballet dancer in zero-g and pulled himself into the command chair. Shane was filling in as acting captain of the *Bushranger* while Captain O'Conner recovered from wounds suffered at Arcturus. Shane was dressed in the same off-white coveralls that some how harkened back to the Alpha Centauri War in appearance; rank displayed on the collar tabs, Ship and Destroyer division patches placed on chest and upper left arm below the Australian flag patch. Zippered pockets



covered almost the entire outfit, usually empty.

On Shane's right was the computer operator, Lt. Malcom Greenwood, an individual diminutive in appearance, but long on intelligence; a man who had endured the rigors of the Kafer Invasion the first time around while on leave. Along the cabin's walls were other computer consoles and their operators. Lt. Richard Lemmons manned the Fire Control computer while several Chief Petty Officers operated the Remote Control consoles that guided the smart missiles and sensor drones. Ensign Judy Mayer operated the main sensors console. All were rugged individuals, the finest examples of Australian heritage.

"All right mates, where is the little bugger?" Shane asked while buckling himself in.

Lemmons answered, "Drone number two still has a positive track of the target. It is closing in on Hesperus. It looks like the Kafers are going to sling shot around it to arrive at Tithonus."

"Nothing about the rest of the enemy fleet, Mayer?"

"Not a peep, Captain. I guess they're waiting on their mate's report."

Malcom cut in, "As far as I can determine, sir,

we are still in their sensor shadow. The bastards haven't smartened up yet."

Malcom was referring to one of the few known facts about the enemy that humans on the colony world labeled as 'Kafers.' These two meter-tall, non-human bipeds were real killing machines. The backs of their heads and torsos were protected by a tough, horny carapace. Their small eyes were recessed under large brow ridges, and their mouths bore an impressive array of hooks, needles, siphons, and mandibles that allowed them to impale, tear, cut, shred, chew, suck, handle, and partially digest their food. Their hands were equipped with three mutually opposing thumbs and lacked the strength of a human's grip, but were surprisingly dexterous for a creature with a reputation for being stupid and strong. Since the first encounter several years ago in this very same system, humans had wondered why it took a few seconds or even longer to respond to an attack. But, when a Kafer did respond, it was as if the creature had suddenly been transformed into a cunning, innovative, and deadly opponent.

Lt. Greenwood knew about these creatures from personal experience. He was a member of the famous 'Ramrod Teams' operated by the city of Tanstaaf. Several times, he had found himself in close combat with these creatures. None of those times were very pleasant was what Sandy was told.

Shane looked at the computer-generated tactical on the big screen. The whole solar system was laid out and orbital mechanics were just happening to help the defenders of Aureore. Tithonus was on the opposite side of the twin suns from Arcturus. The Kafer fleet appeared to be discharging the static buildup in their stutterwarp drives near Eta Bootis V, Astraesus, a small gas giant.

"This lone Kafer ship is either scouting the way or has an anxious captain," Shane stated. Malcom nodded in agreement.

The Commodore thumbed his headset mike button on and said, "Bridge, Shane here. Sound Battle Stations, Commander Foster. Plot intercept course and make best speed

to target." Then, turning towards Lt. Linda Fairchild, "Call up the other ships and have them go to Battle Stations. Inform Aureore Control that we are now engaging the lone Kafer warship."

"Aye aye, Commodore," Lt. Fairchild replied.

The target that the small human fleet was heading for was a large, dirty, green-colored, multi-spherical craft that had been identified as a battleship code-named *Alpha*. This information was flashing in the lower right-hand corner of the big display screen.

"Time?" asked Shane.

"2118 hours, sir," Lt. Greenwood responded.

"Lt. Fairchild, tell the merchant captains to launch one missile pack each, and we will take care of the guidance instructions."

"Aye aye, sir," the lieutenant replied.

Mayer's voice went up a note, "Drone is now reporting that target is an 'Improved Alpha' battleship. It is launching six missiles."

Shane looked over to Greenwood. "Have the merchants launched the Sim-14s yet?"

"We're getting two from the *Hasegawa* and one from the *Bangkok Kangaroo* is telling us that the *Doris May* has launched two."

"Tell *Kangaroo* that we will handle anti-missile fire control while the rest of the squadron fires their lasers at the battleship," Shane ordered, focusing back on the tactical plot screen.

Even with missiles equipped with stutterwarp, time can drag by while waiting for the incoming strike. Yet it can flash by too quickly to respond to the situation.

*Personally*, thought Shane, *I prefer to fight by remote control. Wouldn't want to fight hand to hand with a Kafer; not after what Malcom told me.* Aloud, "Bridge, bring us about 275 mark 190." Turning to look at Malcom Greenwood, he said, "Once the freighters have unloaded all their missiles, have them fall behind *Kangaroo* and us."

"I have received reports that the three freighters have fired off the first pack of three missiles each," Malcom replied.

Lemmons spoke up now. "I've used three SIMS to block the incoming Kafer missiles one-for-one. The others have so far made it past the counter-battery fire — damn! Spoke too soon, there goes another one of ours."

Out in space, the ten meter long silver tubes of death closed in on their respective targets and exploded. Invisible laser beams pumped up to gigawatt power via their own nuclear destruction, cutting into human and alien vessels alike. The *Hasegawa* was like a massive block of wood that some god had taken a power drill to.

Alexander Shane stared at the data readouts coming in over his computer screens. The alien battleship lost one of its four rotating "arms" that he assumed provided artificial gravity in the same manner as such devices on human vessels. And some hull plating would eventually join the small, thin ring of debris orbiting this planet. He peered over at Malcom. "Well, mister, I guess we showed 'em a g'day, what?"

A smile appeared on Malcom's previously grim face. "Aye, sir. That we did. We've taken some minor hull damage. *Kangaroo* took an engine hit, power plant output reduced by thirty percent."

"What about the freighters?" Shane asked. "Did they get all their missiles off?"

"No, sir. *Hasegawa* didn't get hers off. Also, *Hasegawa* took most of the incoming missiles. She's heavily damaged in engineering and the forward hull is just so much Swiss cheese now. Mayer, on sensors, was telling me that *Hasegawa* is losing atmospheric pressure." Malcom directed his attention to communications. "Lieutenant Fairchild, raise the *Hasegawa* for an updated damage report."

"Will do, sir."

Shane rubbed his eyes, then focused on the plot board. "Tell those other two freighters to fire off the rest of those missiles."

Again, Lt. Fairchild worked her comm board, carrying out her orders.

Commodore Shane called up the video image of the *Hasegawa* on one of the smaller monitors at his console. Ice crystals trailed behind the huge spacecraft from the engineering/crew quarters like the smoke trail an airplane leaves behind when shot down. The bridge tower was nothing but a blackened stump of metal. "Linda," he said quietly, "have the *Doris May* pick up any survivors off the *Hasegawa*, and inform *Aurore* Control about her."

Greenwood interrupted. "Commodore, another group of missiles inbound!" Within seconds, lasers from the alien battleship impacted the *Bushranger*, jarring everybody.

"Continue tracking the bastard and have those freighters fire off all remaining missiles. Lasers! Fire off another salvo at him!" barked Shane.

The human fleet plunged deeper into the gravity well of the gas giant after the enemy, who was attempting to hide in the thin ice ring about *Hesperus*, trading laser fire all the way.

"TAC, this is bridge," Foster called. "That last laser barrage reduced us to quarter power and number three laser turret is completely gone."

"Damn, muttered Lemmons. "Damage Control, Lemmons. How come status of number three laser has not been called up to TAC?" Whatever the answer was, only the lieutenant heard it.

Shane keyed his mike. "Very well, Commander Foster. Carry on."

"Commodore," Malcom called out, "the Kafer has hidden in the ring. He's gone dead on us. We're not detecting anything on our sensors."

Shane rubbed his brow, then called up to the

she couldn't see his knees behind his console. They were pumping like mad, as if Shane was trying to inflate a blimp all by himself back home on his ranch.

The two warships closed in on the wounded Kafer, with the freighter *Bangkok* actually keeping station off of *Kangaroo's* port side, while her sister ship, the *Doris May*, recovered both the living and dead off the *Hasegawa*.

"Lemmons, how many missiles has our friend out there fired off so far?" Shane asked.

Looking up from his computer screen, Lieutenant Lemmons answered, "Fourteen in all, which means he should have six left."

"Mayer, what about our drones. Are they still around?"

"Only Number One now, sir. And it's damaged."

"Send it on into the rings. I want that Kafer."

"Yes, sir."

### [23 JUNE, 2301: 0142 GMT — Off *Hesperus's* Rings]

It took the *Aurorean* Colonial Defense Squadron almost four and a half hours to find any new signs of the *Dafer* battleship, and the *Bangkok* suffered greatly when three Kafer missiles, programmed to act like like mines, suddenly came to life and speared the huge ship on invisible lances of nuclear energy. Several hits in the power plant area caused the *Bangkok* to explode, killing all onboard. The EMP pulse of the ship's nuclear reactor exploding blossomed, then quickly faded.

Before anyone could even mourn the loss, Mayer called out, "I've got 'em! 357 mark 047. He's coming right at us!" she exclaimed, her voice raising in pitch in the heat of the moment.

On the TAC display screen, the blip that was the Kafer warship was moving on an intercept course with the human squadron. Shane switched one of his video monitors to long range scan and input the coordinates of the enemy. On the small screen, the wounded giant climbed majestically

out of the plane of the ring's orbit. Shane noticed that the enemy battleship had suffered a major blowout in the forward sphere area.

"All weapons are to fire and keep on firing till the tubes melt. Hit 'em!" Shane ordered.

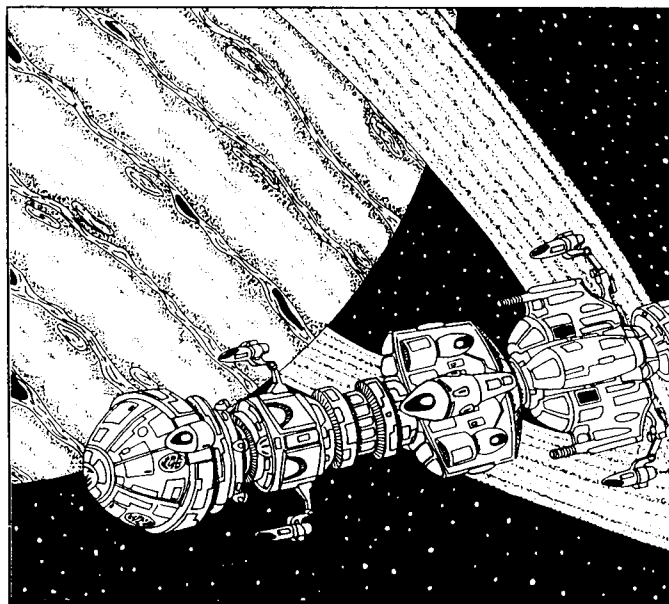
Lieutenant Lemmons and the petty officers under his control directed their remaining missiles at the onrushing target. The lights dimmed as the ship's lasers went into action. "Lemmons here. Assign mount four as close in, anti-missile battery."

Greenwood spoke up. "Commodore, *Kangaroo* has just lost her starboard solar panel. Her lander has also been hit. She's jettisoning it just in case it might explode."

"Acknowledged. What is the damage report on *Hasegawa*?"

"They're repairing the thrusters to get the ship back underway to *Aurore*. She may yet be salvagable."

At that moment, a Kafer missile exploded and all of its pre-targeted beams impacted on the *Bushranger*, blowing off one of its missile bays and the deepsystem scanner, and hitting the forward hull and one of the rotating limbs. The



bridge again. "Foster, have Lt. Commander Zeigler plot a search pattern in the rings. Close to within 10,000 clicks of the last reported position of that battleship."

"Will do, Commodore," Foster replied.

Malcom stared thoughtfully at Shane. "Commodore, that Kafer has now had enough time to analyze our attack. The bloke is getting smarter. This looks like a trap."

"I know, Lieutenant." It looks like a trap to me as well. But we just can't hang around out here waiting for it to come back out and play." Shane directed his attention to Ensign Mayer. In the red light of the TAC center, she appeared to be getting panicky. "Ensign, I want you to be really alert now. Can't have that bastard show up on our rear all of a sudden, now can we?"

Judy turned to face him, sweat glistening on her fair face. "Don't you worry, sir. That Kafer won't ever have the chance to do something like that with me around."

"Now that's the spirit, Mayer. Don't let 'em intimidate you and you'll do fine," Shane said with a smile, noticing that his words had the expected effect as she appeared somewhat calmer. Luckily,

sensor feedback caused the console to blow up in Judy Mayer's face. Lt. Fairchild called for a medical team to come to take care of the young woman as Commodore Shane unbuckled from his chair and grabbed a fire extinguisher to help one of the petty officers put out the electrical blaze.

Thick smoke soon filled the red lighted room. Coughing, Shane started to order everyone to put on their oxygen masks, but they had already done so. He settled back into his chair and took his own advice.

"Bridge, Shane here. Put our bow on to that battleship and keep us like that. Don't let 'em get our profile again."

"Understood, Commodore. We're having to stop the gravity drum now because of vibrations," Commander Anderson replied.

Shane could tell something was wrong. "Beth, is something wrong up there?"

"Yes sir. Commanders Foster and Rhodes are dead. They — they were fighting a fire here on the bridge when the forward starboard viewport was hit. Both of them were sucked out before the automatic viewport shield slid into place." After more than two hundred years of living and working in space, most people would still call a blow out being 'sucked out'. There was a slight pause before she continued. "Zeigler and I are holding on and the ship is still answering the helm."

At least Beth is still alive, Shane thought. "Okay Commander, we will grieve after the battle. Not now. You're First Officer now. Tactical out." Then, averting his attention to Lt. Greenwood, "Malcom, switch sensor control to your board. Status on the Kafer?"

"Looks like our missiles have totalled his engines. He's just coasting now; stutterwarp emissions read zero. The command pod looks totally destroyed."

"Commodore, message coming in from Aureore," Lt. Fairchild reported. "Kontr-Admiral Borodin and the rest of the fleet have just returned to the system. They are now heading for Astraeus and the remaining Kafer vessels."

Two Med-Techs trailing a casualty basket popped open the hatch and propelled themselves over to the slumped figure of Judy Mayer. Carefully, they strapped her into the basket and left as quietly as they entered.

Shane looked at the time readout on the bulkhead wall. It read: 0156 — 23 JUNE 2301. Then he looked over at Greenwood. "Is that battleship dead yet?"

Greenwood nodded. "Yes sir. Still getting some life form readings, but all power generation systems are reading at zero levels."

"Lt. Fairchild, direct the *Kangaroo* to close and send over a boarding party to capture that thing."

They were looking at the video screens when the magnified view of their defeated enemy blew up into millions of pieces.

"Then again, Lieutenant, maybe not. Stand down from Battle Stations and inform the squadron to turn back towards Aureore. I want a full damage report put together for my inspection

within two hours. I'll be in my cabin."

"Very happy to do so, sir."

### [23 JUNE, 2301: 0204 hours GMT — Eta Bootis I (Hesperus)]

Feeling like the rock of ages, Shane returned to his office/cabin. The gravity drum was stopped, awaiting repairs, so he floated through what the crew labeled as "The Main Gate" and down the companionway to his quarters. Sweat stains under his arms matched those of the other crew members that he passed in the companionway. Finally, he arrived at his cabin. For a minute or so he just held onto the nearby handhold, then slid the thin metal panel of a door open, entered, then slid it back into place. He allowed himself to calm down, readying himself to write those damn

CAN SHARE A BOTTLE OF VODKA AND YOU CAN RELATE WHAT HAS HAPPENED AT ETA BOOTIS I.

Then, after reading the first letter, Shane called up the second and began to read.

TO COMMODORE ALEX SHANE  
FROM REAR ADMIRAL D. F. PARKER:  
SANDY YOU OLD OUTBACK AUSSIE BASTARD.  
HOGGING ALL THE GLORY AS USUAL. AT  
LEAST THIS TIME YOU SAVED SOME FOR US.  
SEE YOU BACK ON AURORE.

Alexander Shane smiled while reading the messages. Two very different individuals saluting him for a job well done. He laid down on his bunk and stared at the ceiling. The question that all warriors face raced through his mind, one that even the first cave-man must have thought after killing his fellow man.

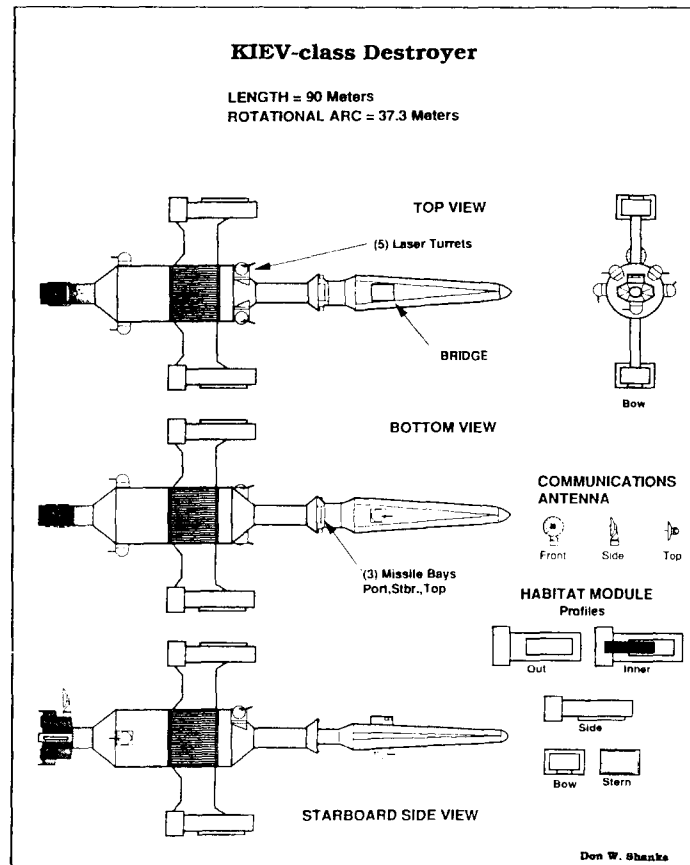
"Why?" Shane asked his computer terminal. He didn't expect any answers to be forthcoming from it. *It's all well and good, he thought, that we find a need to clown around amongst ourselves to help ease the burden of our deeds. And to grieve over our comrades and just maybe, a worthy opponent. It doesn't make much sense — but it is a comfort. And generally, we are not heartless, it is simply that we are all victims of war.*

The Commodore got up and went back to ship's business. Letters to write, reports to fill out. And for tonight at least, the citizens of Aureore could rest without fearing another invasion. But he was interrupted by a knock at his door.

"Come in," Shane said.

Beth Anderson slid open the panel and looked in. Shane could tell even from where he sat that she was tired. Her brown eyes were red; ruptured blood vessels from the brief exposure to vacuum. She didn't say anything, just entered the cabin and closed the door behind her.

Sandy waved her over to him and pulled her into his lap. "You can let go now, Beth," he whispered into her ear, and they both held one another close.



letters every military commander sometimes finds himself having to write. A beep sounded from his personal computer. Over the intercom, Lt. Fairchild spoke, "Sir, I have two messages for you. One from Admiral Borodin, the other from Admiral Parker."

"Send 'em on down to my computer, Lieutenant."

"Already waiting for you, sir. Fairchild out."

Tapping a few keys and entering his security code, the dark green screen came to life, filling with amber words.

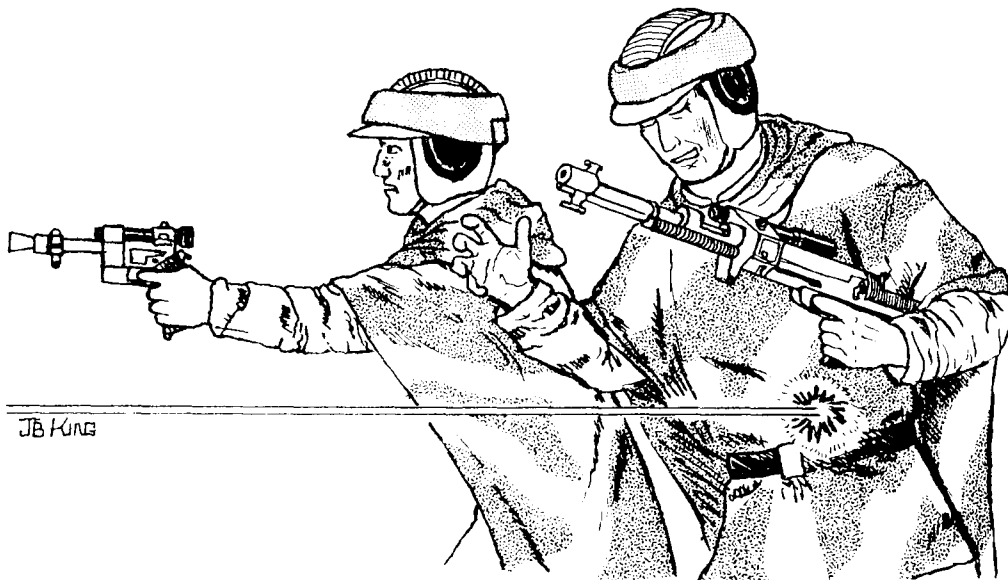
TO COMMODORE ALEXANDER SHANE,  
AUSTRALIAN NAVY, CMDR ACDS  
FROM KONTR-ADMIRAL S. S. BORODIN:  
EXTEND TO ALL IN YOUR COMMAND MY  
HEARTFELT GRATITUDE AND PRIDE IN THE  
SUCCESS OF YOUR MISSION. I LOOK  
FORWARD TO A MORE QUIET TIME WHEN WE

[FROM THE SIEGE OF ETA BOOTIS —  
23 JUNE, 2301 — The Aureorean Colonial  
Defense Squadron engaged a Kafer  
battleship, destroying it at a cost of one  
ship destroyed and another badly damaged.  
Sixty-seven are listed as killed in  
action, twenty-three wounded. Five are  
missing, presumed dead.

— Borodin's fleet has arrived back in  
the Eta Bootis system early this morning  
to engage elements of the Kafer fleet now  
tagged 'Task Force X-Ray,' driving them  
away.]

*The Human-Kafer War by Alwx Shane,  
pub. 2312. ★*

In many game systems, when PCs engage in combat there are real possibilities of serious impairment or lasting physical damage, which is appropriate as combat is a frighteningly violent event. But in *Star Wars*, combat doesn't offer the same threat. Yes, a PC can die from a Mortal Wound, and will expire within twelve rounds without treatment, but you drop him in a tank of bacta and in 2D weeks he's back to his good ol' self, no worse for wear! It's just too easy, too forgiving. Below are optional rules and suggestions to make combat a little less "clean," allow for longer term results, and increase the opportunities for real role-playing.



## Rejuve Tanks

The *Star Wars* rules state that bacta promotes rapid healing. While the normal healing process occurs much more rapidly, normal scar tissue should remain. (You may recall that Luke Skywalker, in **The Empire Strikes Back**, came out of the bacta tank bearing facial scars from his run in with the Wompa.) Because Wounds are far more numerous than Incapacitation and Mortal Wounds, we will ignore them here, as being concerned with scar tissue from Wounds would probably bog down the events of your campaign.

Scar tissue which remains after healing from Incapacitation or Mortal Wounds can be removed through cosmetic surgery and a return to the bacta tank, following the guidelines below.

**After healing from Incapacitation:** (DR  $\geq$  2xSR) Scar tissue is surface only, resulting in unsightliness. Cosmetic surgery is at a Moderate level, followed by 2D hours in a bacta tank. Note that this does not apply to a character who becomes Incapacitated from receiving two wounds, but only to a single weapon strike that causes Incapacitation.

**After healing from a Mortal Wound:** This is a wound that would have killed the character if prompt medical attention had not been undertaken and should be thought of as doing serious bodily harm. Even after being healed, the character suffers a penalty of -1D to Dexterity and related skills due to muscle impairment. This surface and internal scarring can be removed through a medical procedure requiring two operations,

# Effects Of Wounds In Star Wars

*James B. King*

the first at a Difficult level followed by 2D days in a bacta tank. The second operation is identical to that for Incapacitation.

Effective roleplaying can be used to cause players to consider the unsightliness of major scar tissue. (Some character types, such as the Bounty Hunter, Outlaw, Merc, etc., may not consider their scars to be unsightly and may be proud to bear them or consider them to be a personal statement.) "...Well, after you approach the attractive customs clerk in

your usual flirtatious manner and pump her for information, she responds rather distantly, and her attention is continually drawn to the raised, deep-red scar tissue covering the side of your neck below your left ear..."

If a player chooses to leave his scars unremoved, have him or her record them as part of the character description. Cosmetic surgery can, of course, be conducted to remove them at any time in the future.

## Medpacs

The *Star Wars* rules state that a medpac is expended when used. To me, it seems a little silly and very wasteful to include computerized diagnostics in a throw away package. Also, it would hardly require as many supplies to treat a Wound as it would to treat a Mortal Wound.

Instead, consider a medpac to be a computerized, refillable medical kit containing three points worth of supplies. Treating a Wounded patient uses one point, an Incapacitated patient two points, and a Mortally Wounded patient three points. A medpac which is emptied of supplies can be refilled for 60 credits.

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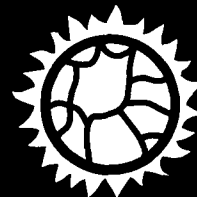
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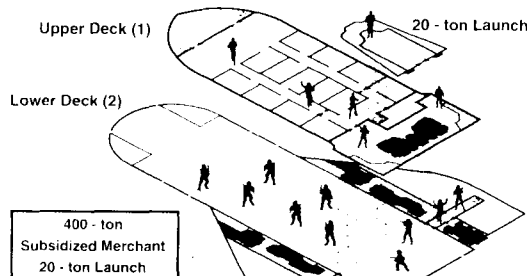
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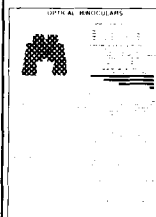
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## Introduction

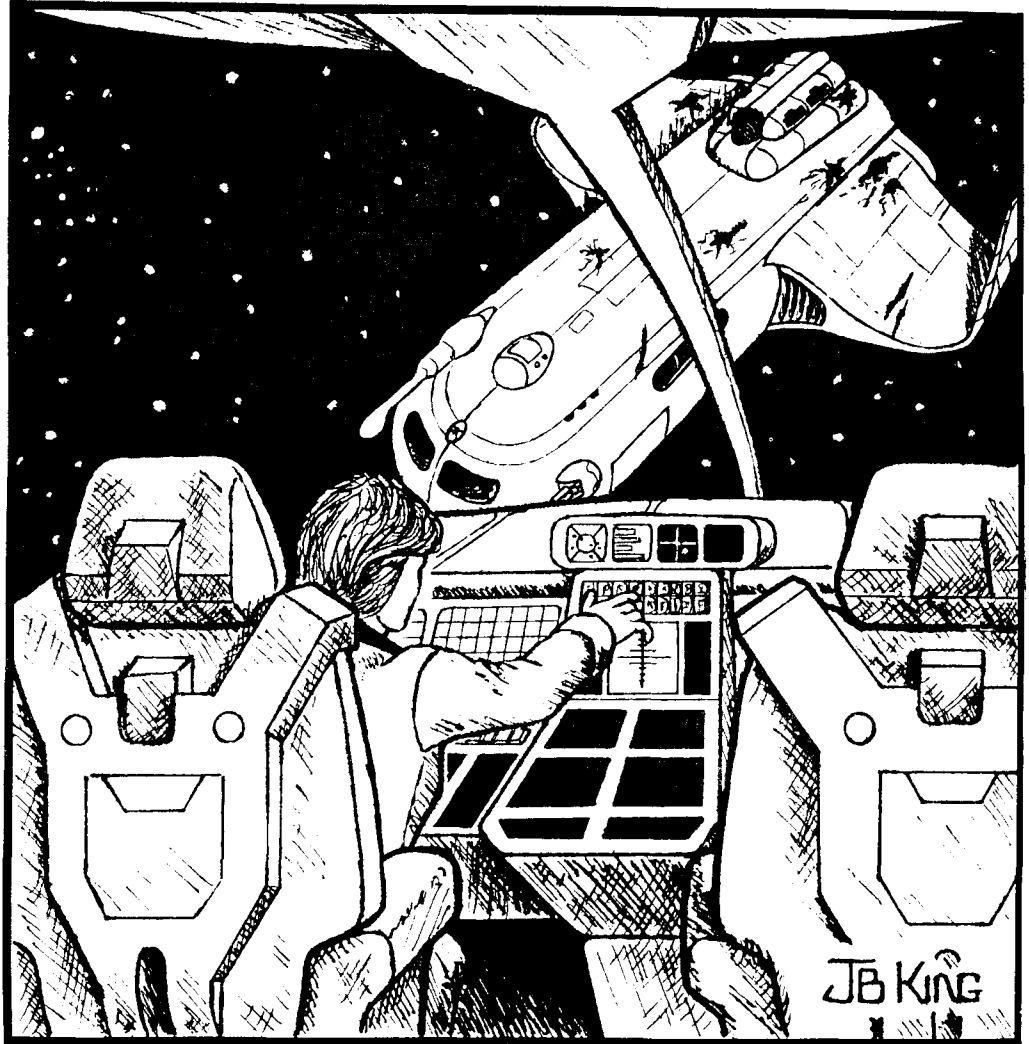
This scenario is intended for use with *Mega Traveller*. To make it easier to use in a continuing campaign, no specific location of occurrence is mentioned: virtually any frontier location would be appropriate, though the actual planet this adventure begins near should likely be one with a lower star port rating. It is not required that the player characters have their own ship. With a little modification to this scenario, they may simply be passengers or crew aboard a vessel of other ownership.

## Vessel In Distress

When the PCs' ship exits jumpspace near their destination planet, they detect alternating signals GK and SOS (see Signal GK, *Imperial Encyclopedia*). Radio communication reveals that the vessel, a Subsidized Merchant, was severely damaged by laser fire from a pirate Corsair. Luckily, the merchant is armed and was able to return fire. Several hits were scored on the Corsair, apparently doing damage, as the aggressor ceased the attack and maneuvered away. Unfortunately, the merchant's maneuver and jump drives are now inoperative. As the vessel was decelerating prior to jump, it is now heading into deep space at an uncontrolled speed equivalent to one gee. However, it is only about 20,000 kilometers from the PC' ship.

As the characters are likely aware, Imperial law requires that they respond to a vessel in distress. There are no other vessels in orbit, and, as the stricken merchant is now almost 100 diameters out, it would take several hours for a craft to reach it from the planet.

Through continued communication the picture becomes more grim. The merchant's hull is pierced in several locations. Engineering is in vacuum, as is the cargo deck, and there are hull fractures in the passenger section that are leaking the atmosphere out faster than the life support can replace it. Although the ship does have a number of vacc suits equal to the number of persons on board, as required by Imperial law for commercial transport, in reality, many are nonfunctional. Though this situation is serious enough, there is another even more urgent. Several passengers and crew are wounded, and one crew member was killed — the ship's doctor. A passenger with some medical skill (level 1) is



# Corsair Contention

A MegaTraveller adventure

*James B. King*

attending to the wounded, but she is afraid one of them, a young girl, won't last until she can be transported planetside and doesn't know what else to do for the child. (A low berth is not available. Most have been removed; the remaining are occupied.)

The merchant captain pleads with the PCs to make all haste to reach his ship and give aid. It should be quite clear by now that the need for their assistance is urgent.

## Aid And Assistance

When the group arrives they will need to divide to work on tasks fitting their

individual technical skills. The most urgent needs are medical attention for the wounded, restoring the hull's integrity, and restoring maneuver. Other task needs, such as electrical, can be created to involve characters of other skills.

This is a good opportunity for the group to make new acquaintances with grateful passengers — travellers often need a favor themselves, and they may run into some of these people again (hang on to those NPCs).

## A Shadow

Surely, at least one of the group will



stay aboard their vessel as the pilot. If that person is operating detection sensors (which will likely be the case, knowing a pirate ship is in the area), they may detect a vessel maintaining a parallel trajectory at some distance. No transponder signal is detected, but radio transmissions are picked up, even if the ship is not detected on sensors: they are in some form of code, or possibly an unfamiliar language.

The vessel is the damaged Corsair. As the pirates lack beam communication gear, they are using a code to communicate with a second vessel that is maneuvering in from its station around a distant gas giant.

## Under Cover

After the adventurers have successfully restored the ship's systems (or possibly while they are working to do so), the captain (or apparent PC group leader) of the adventuring travellers is approached by one of the merchant's passengers, Victor LeClair, who requests to discuss an urgent matter in privacy. When they find such a location the man declares himself to be a field operative of Imperial Naval Intelligence. LeClair claims he has been under cover for several months inside a pirate organization — the very pirates who attacked the merchant. After discovering the locations of field bases and cache sites, he faked his accidental death before leaving so as to not alert the pirates at his disappearance. But they are apparently on

to him, as the pirates' operations planning did not include a raid in the system they are currently in. LeClair must get his information to INS, and he wants the characters to take him to the nearest naval or scout base as quickly as possible. He will pay all costs to do so, and assures the group that they will be rewarded. (**Note:** The base should be at least a couple jumps distant.)

The player may question the validity of Victor LeClair's story. Using a small, composite knife removed from a small sheath concealed in his belt, LeClair slits the side of his boot sole and removes a patterned, plastic card. Not only is it proof of his identification and rank in Naval Intelligence, it is a Naval Warrant of Provision, more difficult to counterfeit than Imperial currency. It is with this that he will pay transportation costs. When used, Imperium-member worlds must supply any and all operational needs requested by its holder (within reason), which may even include the use of troops or commandeering a ship (LeClair can claim to commandeer the PCs' ship, but he would prefer their cooperation, and he could hardly force them by himself if they resisted, though he may point out his official right). The proper naval agency later provides reimbursement for all provisions supplied.

(**Note:** The Spinward Marches, through Archduke Norris, has declared loyalty to Lucan's Third Imperium. However, if this scenario is played out in a region controlled by another faction, and LeClair is an operative of the prevailing government's Naval Intelligence branch, similar Naval Warrants would likely be issued.)

After the PCs have agreed to help LeClair, he will successfully bribe the merchant captain to record him as killed in the attack, after which the body was accidentally jettisoned into space during the confusion. He hopes to throw the pirates off his tail, and avoid placing the PCs in possible danger of revenge.

The shadowing Corsair has now maneuvered to extreme sensor range and will continue to do so until it is lost. LeClair will want to refuel and leave the system as soon as possible. If there is cargo to unload or sell, that is acceptable to him if it is done quickly, but he will vehemently oppose attempting to acquire other cargo to take on before beginning the jump to the next system.

## Lt Cdr Victor LeClair

585A87 Age 34 4 terms Cr(Warrant)

Navigation-2, Handgun-2, Ship's Boat-1, Communications-1, Computer-1, Forward Obs-1, Liaison-1, Brawling-1, Bribery-1, Intrusion-1, Grav Vehicle-0, Laser Weapons-0, Vacc Suit-0

Starport B, Medium, Thin, Wet World, Mod Pop, Low Law, Avg Stellar

## Lying In Wait

When the PCs arrive at the next system, they will find a vessel waiting for them. The pirates determined where LeClair was likely going and beat him to the jump (figuring he would be on the PCs' vessel). They will recognize the PCs' ship by its transponder signal and attack.

If the PCs ship is roughly an even match for the Corsair, then it will be the vessel that attacks (with its previous damage repaired for the most part). If the PCs' vessel is larger or more heavily armed, the referee should choose a pirate vessel more appropriate (this is the second vessel that was in the system this scenario began in).

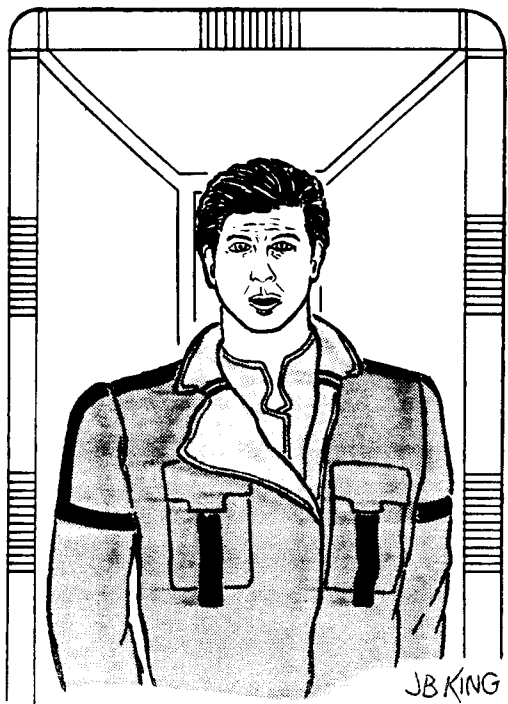
After this ship-to-ship combat is finished, the group can continue on to the Imperial base (assuming the PCs are victorious and their vessel is spaceworthy). LeClair will pay for any and all damages to the group's ship and, upon arrival at the base, will arrange for a monetary reward (amount determined by the referee).

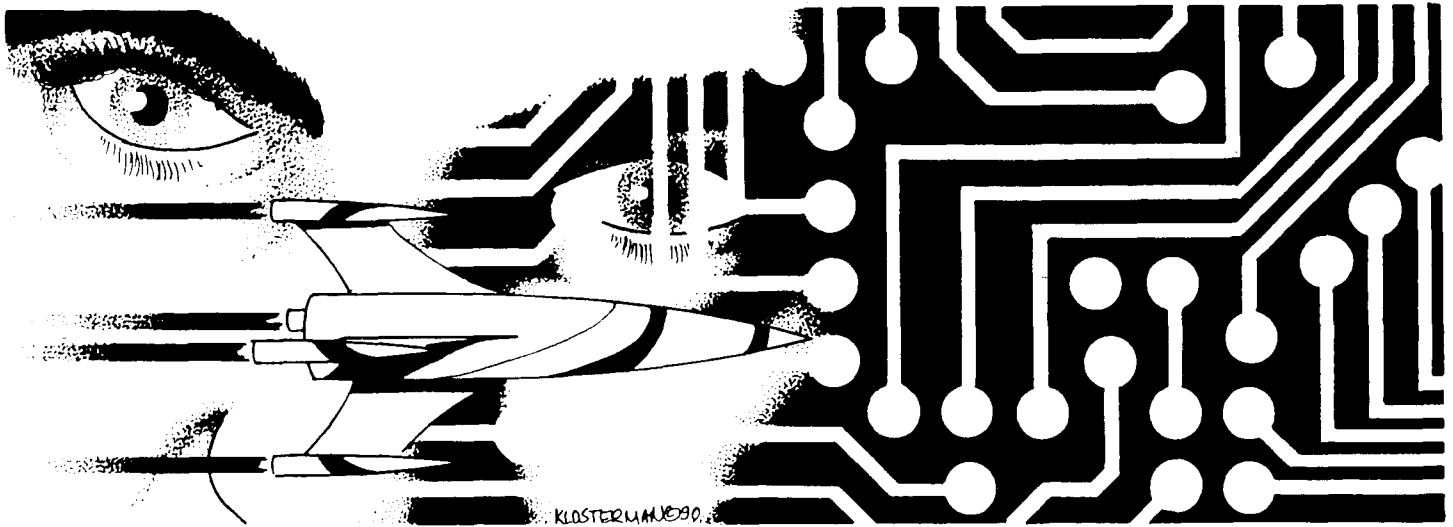
A few weeks later, the travellers will see or hear a media report stating that naval elements staged coordinated attacks on three separate, confirmed pirate outposts in the subsector. The navy has not released further details or the number of vessels destroyed or captured.

The players may consider the possibility that some pirates escaped and may worry about acts of revenge aimed at them.

## Referee's Notes

If the PCs do not have their own ship, the group can be passengers or crew on a commercial vessel that answers the helpless merchant's distress signal. After LeClair obtains passage on the same vessel the players are on, he can hire them as body guards to escort him to the nearest Imperial base. In the next system, the PCs can actually be involved in the ensuing combat if they have to help repel armed boarders trying to kill or capture LeClair. ★





## WORDS TO GAME BY

*Jerry Campbell*

New Year's greetings! I'm going to review more than my normal three books, to give you more ideas for literary escapes on these long winter nights when the snow's too deep to go gaming.

Quite a bit of new SF has appeared since the last issue of this mag; some of it is good, most of it mediocre to poor. No surprises there.

What caught me off guard, this time around, was that one of those mediocre novels had some VERY interesting ideas for SF gamers! Let's look at that one first...

### The Galactic Silver Star

Kevin Randle. 200 pp, 1990 Ace SF

I have the feeling that Mr. Randle is or was a *Traveller* player by the way he ties high and low tech weaponry, humanoid aliens and 'evil' big governments/megacorporations into his story.

The main character of this book, a young soldier named David Jefferson, is a true anti-hero. Turning coward under fire on an alien world, he is mistakenly awarded the U.S. Army's (yes, you read that right) highest award: the Galactic Silver Star. The tale rambles on from there to its somewhat depressing conclusion.

While he presents some very interesting ideas, particularly with a gamer's point of view in mind, Randle just doesn't have the narrative skill to make them go anywhere. Get this one from the library, or at a yard sale.

### Masters Of The Fist

Edward P. Hughes. 281 pp, 1989 Baen Books

In issue #12 of **Voyages SF**, I made mention of a tale that dealt with the practical application of a tank, after the war is over. [Included in **After Armageddon Vol. 9, There Will Be War**. Ed. by Jerry Pournelle.] This book is a collection of that, and other related tales, set in Ireland at any time in the near future.

M/Sgt. Patrick O'Mear, the book's central figure, finds himself cast in the role of Hero, in the common *and* classical senses of the word, after

showing up with his stolen tank in the town of Barley Cross. Due to his "heroic" performances, the good folk of the town elect him Lord of the whole area, endowing him with both the titles and privileges of the nobility of old.

A sparkling good read, well worth the effort to find a copy.

### The Gifts Of The Gorboduc Vandal

Paul O. Williams. 210 pp, 1989 Del Rey SF

In the far-distant future, when mankind has spread out through the galaxy, when the colonies of the colonies have long since become the "Old Worlds" and Terra is more myth than "Home"...therein lies a tale. Actually, several tales, according to the author, whom I occasionally correspond.

The Gorboduc are, by and large, a much feared warrior race of humans, not unlike the Dorsai in martial prowess, but subscribing to a fanatical Code of Conduct that makes Bushido look pale.

This isn't a story about fanatical warriors, though. Rather, it's a treatment of human diversity, beliefs, language, ideas, and ecological impacts.

If you want to play aliens that are completely human, this book will show you how. It's a little hard to get into, at first, due to the sheer "alien-ness" of the Gorboduc. Pressing on past the first chapter will provide a reward well worth the effort. The space battles and ideas for "dirty tricks" when equipping your ships...well, read it and see!

### A Princess Of Mars

Edgar Rice Burroughs

Originally published in 1912(!), this classic is a "must" for anyone who claims to be a SF fan and/or gamer. It's been reprinted so many times, and in so many languages, that you should have no difficulty getting hold of a copy.

Classic Victorian fantasy; this is the story of one John Carter, late of the Confederate Army, who is somehow transported from a cave in

Arizona to the plains of Barsoom, the native name for the planet we call Mars. His adventures with the aliens there, and the detail in which E.R.B. goes into describing their various societies, are no less than fantastic.

*Space: 1889* players ought to really enjoy this and the two books that follow it. There are actually eleven 'John Carter of Mars' stories, but I'm only a fan of the first three. Form your own opinion.

Worth whatever trouble you have to go through, if only to experience the "incomparable" Dejah Thoris. The description is an understatement.

### Little Fuzzy

H. Beam Piper. 174 pp, Ace SF

Another old classic, this first came out in 1962 and has gone through several reprints.

The story line goes something like this: You are a big corporation (shades of *Traveller*!), with the sole rights and charter to a Terra-like world that, as far as you or anyone else knew when you got the charter, has no indigenous sapients. You spend lots of money and time developing the planet for colonization, and mining it for a jewel mineral that exists nowhere else in the galaxy...when up pops a heretofore unknown race of sentients! They're not advanced (TL 0 on the *Traveller* scale), they're not even big, but they're so gol-darned *cute* that they get noticed, and you're about to lose your shirt *and* your charter! What're you going to do? Read the book and find out.

One of three in this series that Piper wrote, it was so popular that two other writers also penned books for it!

Got a favorite book that I have yet to review, that would be of interest to gamers for gaming ideas? Let me know! When filling out the Reader Survey, add a comment to the effect that you want to see your favorite book(s), and what they are, reviewed in **Voyages SF**! I don't promise to sing praises of whatever stories get chosen for review, but I will be fair! ★



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**MegaTraveller:** Bird Of Prey-Part 1; The Shattered Imperium. **Star Wars:** Anatra Dora (plans); Carrier Assignment (adven.); Modified Space Combat (rules). **SpaceMaster:** Linguistic Ties.



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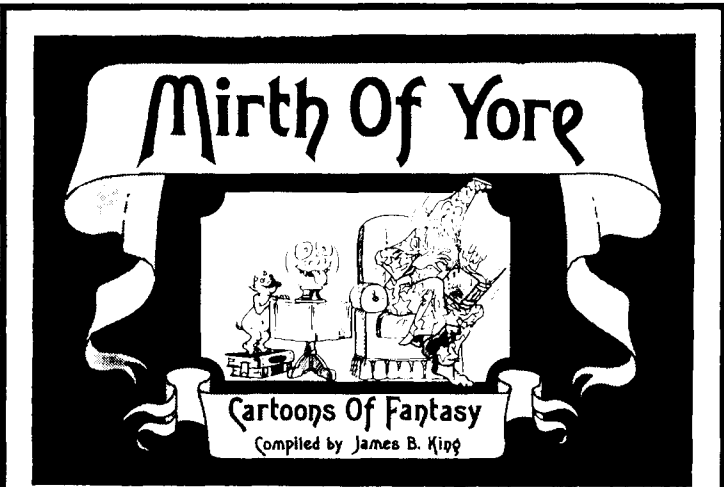
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## Rifts

256 pp rule book. \$24.95.

*Game Design:* Kevin Siembieda. *Editors:* Alex Marciniszyn, Thom Bartold. *Cover Artist:* Keith Parkinson. *Interior Paintings:* Kevin Long, Keith Parkinson. *Additional Color/Painting:* Adam Siembieda, Keven Siembieda, Larry MacDougall. *Interior Artists:* Kevin Long, Kevin Siembieda, Larry MacDougall.

*Publisher:* Palladium Books, 5926 Lonyo, Detroit MI 48210.

### Background

*Rifts* is set in a world ripped apart when a nuclear holocaust took place. The deaths of at least a billion people triggered an overload of the magic (ley) lines. The surging power tore gaping holes in the dimensions of space and time at the points where the ley lines intersected. This released even more energy that killed even more people, which increased the energy levels of the rifts in the dimensions. The energy surged across the earth. Earthquakes buckled the surface and Atlantis rose from sea again, sending the ocean inland and killing millions more. As more people died, the energy increased, which killed more people, and the power built, increasing in geometric progression.

The released energy destroyed the Earth as we know it. To quote Kevin Siembieda, "Rifts is a role-playing game that explores the Earth created by the rifts. An Earth that has been irreparably changed and is still changing. An Earth more alien than any world one might find in another galaxy. A world where man must not only conquer himself and the environment, but a place

where the environment is ever changing and the life forms one must compete with are not human."

### Layout

*Rifts* has ten basic sections: Glossary (1 pg), Character Generation and Skills (27 pp), Combat (12 pp), Occupational Character Classes, Racial Character Classes, and Psychic Powers Descriptions (81 pp), World Overview (16 pp), Magic Skills and Spells (30 pp), Weapons and Equipment (38 pp), Cybernetic and Bionic Gear (14 pp), Weapon Equipment Statistics (6 pp), and a Game Master Section which includes information on Intelligent Supernatural Monsters (9 pp). Also included are 16 color pages in the center of the book.

### Game Mechanics

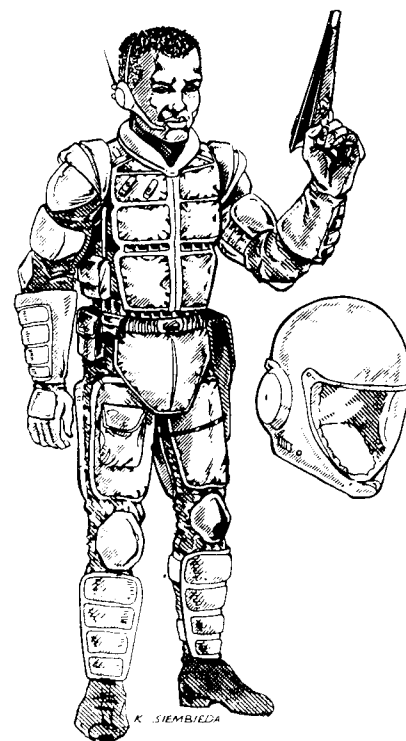
To create a character, you need the standard 3D6. You roll these dice eight times, once for each of the character's attributes. If you roll a total greater than 15 for any one attribute, you get to roll another 1D6 and add that to the original total. Nowhere do the rules state whether you must assign each dice roll to each attribute in the order rolled, or whether you can make eight rolls and assign them as you wish.

To determine Hit Points, start with your Physical Endurance and add a D6 roll. Related to Hit Points is your S.D.C., or Structural Damage Capacity. Depending upon which profession, or Occupational Character Class (O.C.C.) you choose, you roll a certain number of dice. When you receive damage, it is first subtracted from your S.D.C. When this is used up, damage is subtracted from your Hit Points. When your Hit Points are gone, you're dead. Depending upon who you are and what kind of equipment and armor you have, you may have to determine your M.D.C., or Mega-Damage Capacity (see the section on Mega Combat).

Next, you find out if your character can use psionics. There are three ways to get psionic ability. First, you can choose an R.C.C. (Racial Character Class) that uses psionics. Second, you can pick an O.C.C. that can use minor psionics. Or third, you can roll randomly for the ability. You have a nine percent chance of getting Major Psionics and a sixteen percent chance of getting Minor Psionics.

Finally, you get to decide on your character's profession, if you haven't done that already. O.C.C.s and R.C.C.s range from Cyborgs, Glitterboys, and Rogue Scholars to Line Walkers, Dragons, and Techno-Wizards. There are 31 Occupational Character Classes to choose from and if this isn't enough you can import something from one of Palladium's other RPGs, since they all use the same mechanics.

Now you pick your gear and weapons and determine starting money. Then you determine your character's alignment. Once you have done this, you can flesh your character out with a series of Optional Rules that allow you to pick or randomly roll on charts to decide upon other information, such as birth order, weight, height, age, disposition, family origin, sentiments toward non-humans, and insanities (phobias, psychoses, etc.).



### Combat Resolution

Hand-To-Hand Combat uses the same system used in Palladium's *Heroes Unlimited* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. First, everyone rolls 1D20 to determine Initiative (highest goes first). Then the Attacker rolls 1D20 to attack. Anything higher than a 4 will hit, but not all hits will do damage as armor S.D.C. can absorb some or all of the damage. The Defender now gets a chance to Dodge or Parry. If there is no successful Dodge or Parry, the Attacker rolls 1D20 for Damage. If the Attack roll is a "natural 20," then that attack is a "Critical Hit," which does double damage. Combined Critical Hits do triple damage. The Defender can attempt to roll with the punch or kick (if bullets aren't involved). If the Defender can match or beat the Attacker's Strike roll, he/she takes only half damage from the attack.

Mega Combat involves powered armor, tanks, planes, and robotic vehicles. The big deal here is that all things have S.D.C., but tough-skinned Defenders can have M.D.C. (Mega S.D.C.) to represent lots of armor protection. Heavily gunned Attackers can also have M.D. (Mega Damage) weapons.

### REVIEW IN BRIEF

**RIFTS=2.76**

Game Complexity: *High*

**RULES=3.0**

Clarity=3 Realism=3

Flexibility=3 Playability=3

**DEVELOPMENT=2.3**

Background=3

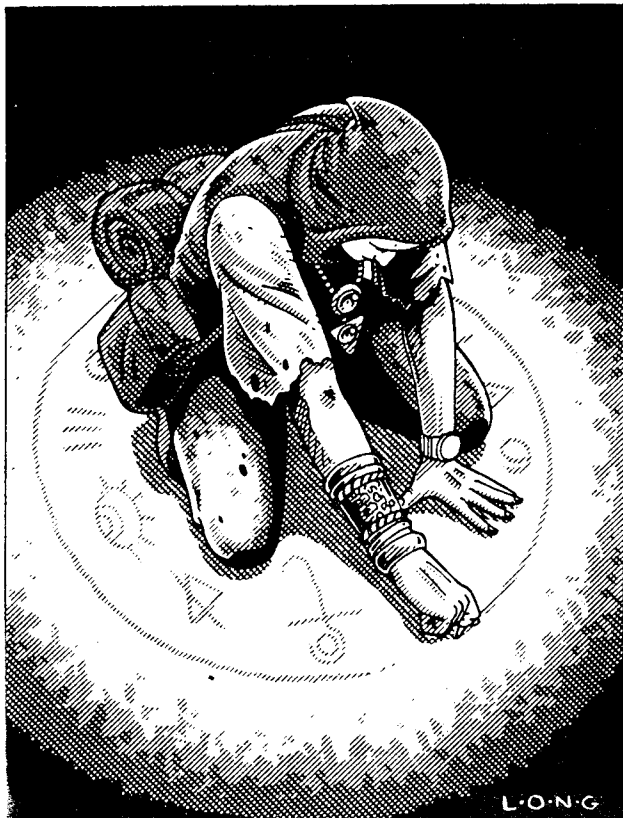
Technology=3 Scenarios=1

**PRODUCTION=3.0**

Cover Art=4 Interior Art=4

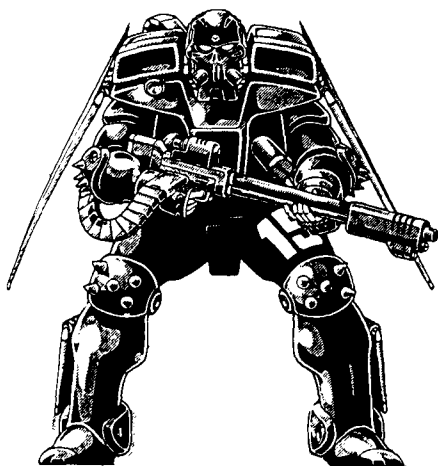
Layout=3 Editing=3

Charts=3 Record Forms=1



## RATINGS

4 = Excellent    3 = Good    2 = Fair  
1 = Poor



One M.D.C. equals about one hundred points of S.D.C. and one M.D. point equals one hundred points of normal damage. Weapons that do only S.D.C. damage cannot an M.D.C. opponent even if the combined damage is greater than 100 S.D.C. points of damage. M.D. weapons need only inflict a couple of damage points to completely blow an S.D.C. opponent away.

### What I Liked

The artwork is mostly very good. And there is a lot of it, with about one illustration on every other page. The cover art by Keith Parkinson is excellent as are the interior color plates. I like the large selection of character classes available to choose from and there is good variety in the available skill listings.

One nice touch is the suggestions for incorporating other Palladium RPGs into *Rifts*. This game can stand alone, but having sourcebooks (other Palladium RPGs with

the same game mechanics) already out there is nice. And also, if you already have one of Palladium's other games, you already know the system and you can jump right in without having to learn the basics all over again.

### What I Didn't Like

*Rifts* is a bit skimpy in detailing some things, like animal and people encounters, for example. There is information on a typical Coalition Warrior, a typical High-Tech Bandit, a typical Coalition SAMAS, the Xiticix (insect-like aliens from another dimension), fury beetles, and typical monsters. There are charts for creating Supernatural Monsters and Animalistic Predators. But where are the normal animals and people? There must be at least some of them in the world somewhere. A couple of pages of "normals" would help this game better stand on its own.

I have a couple of other complaints. First of all, there was no attempt to provide an introductory adventure in the rule book. Nothing. Zip. Nada. There aren't even suggestions for creating your own that I could find. The second complaint I have is this: THERE IS NO PLAYER CHARACTER RECORD SHEET included to copy for use during play. Why not?

### So... What About The Game?

First of all, this is not a game for beginning players. It is too complex for referees and players who have less than six months to a year (or more) of gaming time under their belts. But if you have already played or refereed a Palladium RPG, then you shouldn't have much trouble with this one. However, *Rifts* requires a lot of development work on the part of the referee because the *Rifts* world after the holocaust is not going to be very detailed when only sixteen pages is devoted to the task.

If you want an RPG that covers all the game genres, *Rifts* will do the job. The is not unreasonable for what you get and the art is nice. Just don't expect massive or equal amounts of detail in all aspects of the game system. I thought the game was put together well and I liked what I saw, but until Palladium brings out a sourcebook on the world of *Rifts* and/or several adventure modules, I wouldn't recommend it unless the buyer is willing to put a lot of work into getting ready for play. (Palladium has since announced the future release of several sourcebooks. -Ed.)

- Glen Allison

## Reich Star

Role-playing in a terrifying future that might have been

241 pp perfectbound book. \$19.95 (\$2.50 P & H).

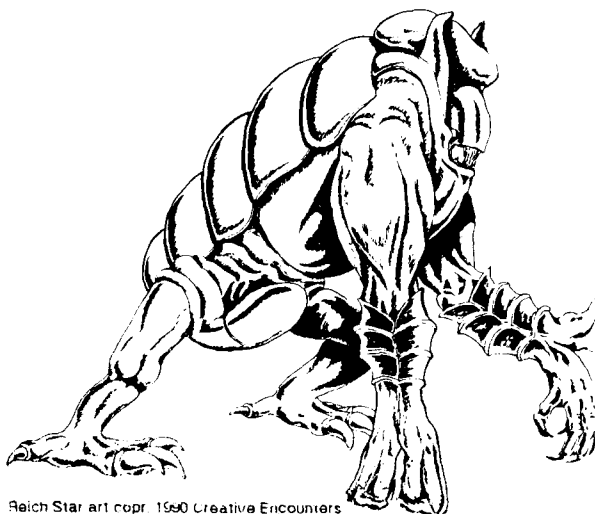
*Game Design:* Ken Richardson. *Authors:* Ken Richardson, Simon Bell. *Editor:* Simon Bell. *Cover Artist:* Greg West. *Interior Artists:* Peter Hollinghurst, Dave Eadie, Ken Richardson, Alan Bishop, Simon Bell, Ian Gonzales, Cheryl Davis.

*Publisher:* Creative Encounters, 1616 W. Hudson Blvd., Gastonia NC 28052.

*Reich Star* paints a dark picture of an alternate past and future where the Axis forces of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan won World War II when German atomic missiles devastate London and New York. Even America is divided in half by occupying Axis forces. Then begins a dark, frightening future where brutality and injustice are as rife as we can envision a successful Third Reich as being. That injustice has been carried into space with the Nazis, and three alien races now exist in virtual slavery. But things are not well in the Third Reich. The cold war with the Empire of Nippon (Japan) has existed since shortly after the war. And now, unrest is gaining momentum. Bombings, assassinations, and minor military actions are becoming a true threat to the stability of the Reich. But these freedom fighters face a daunting task, for the might of the Reich is vast. And everywhere, the Gestapo is watching....

I was intrigued by the premise of *Reich Star*. It is fiction which takes root in fact. And, because the villainous Reich actually did exist and was the instrument of terrible injustice, it is easy to jump right into this game with a fury to dedicate yourself, through your character, to the destruction of the Third Reich. Am I saying I would play this game? Yes, I would, though there are some things I have problems with.

The designer strived for realism, and it's here, and claims to have aimed for a balance between realism and playability. But the rules have to many modifications, too many "special guidelines" for me, as I like things more simplified. But simplification always comes at a cost to realism, and many gamers who prefer realism may not see any



Reich Star art copr. 1990 Creative Encounters

## REVIEW IN BRIEF

### REICH STAR=3.0

Game Complexity: *High*

### RULES=3.3

Clarity=3 Realism=4

Flexibility=3 Playability=3

### DEVELOPMENT=3

Background=4 Technology=3

Scenarios=2

### PRODUCTION=2.6

Cover Art=3 Interior Art=2

Layout=2 Editing=2.5

Charts=3 Record Forms=3

problems. There are some rules that I was especially pleased with. For instance, this is the first RPG where I've come across rules for attacking a male by "hitting 'em where it hurts." Well, there's no arguing with the fact that it's an effective place to strike.

Other rules I enjoyed was the procedure for applying the Constitution Rating. A chart shows the level of activity a character is capable of, determined by his Constitution. Combat, poison, disease, and even prolonged physical activity will reduce the current level of the Rating. The chart is not only applicable to damage sustained, but also shows a character's daily endurance. For example, a PC with a Constitution of 24 is capable of eighteen hours of activity per day, where a PC with a Constitution of 18 is only capable of twelve hours of activity. Damage might reduce you to a Rating of 6, which allows only one hour of activity, and a Rating of 1 puts you in a coma. A Rating of 0 is, of course, the threshold of death, though a character is not actually dead until further damage has used up his Life Points, which are equal to the average of the ratings Strength, Constitution, and Willpower.

When creating a character, the player is free to distribute a set number of points to establish his or her 10 characteristics. Skills and advantages are acquired by spending a number of points equal to the PC's Intelligence Rating, though additional points can be acquired by taking Disadvantages, such as Missing Eye, Allergy, Phobia, Death Wish (my personal favorite), etc. The skill listing is extensive enough to satisfy most gamers.

Psychic (or "psionic") skills are included. (Any more, it seems "psionics" are as required in a SFRPG as starships are. My only complaint is that they seem to easy to come by in *Reich Star*.)

The quality of artwork in *Reich Star* ranges from a few excellent pieces to a lot of fair illustrations to some poor pieces. The most striking illustration in the book is a side view of a starship piloting cockpit, in all its complex detail. The illo looks very much like the extremely high quality technical work of design illustrator Sid Mead (which may have been a source of inspiration). Unfortunately, the overall illustrative quality is brought down by so many fair to poor drawings, which is sad because, with the current competition of so many companies and games, good illustration is a primary initial factor in determining what a gamer will buy. I

myself buy games and supplements with the intention of using the art in games I'm actually playing.

*Reich Star* is an appealing game, especially so because of the premise. I do, however, expect to see publisher get some heat over it, because of some of its content. The Nazis thought little more of non-Aryans than they did of Jews. This is reflected in *Reich Star*. In the future Reich, Blacks and Slavs are enslaved races, just as the alien races are. Not only that, but "Negro based music referred to by the terms "rock," "jazz," and "blues" will not be tolerated." Readers who take offense to this should realize that the Reich and what it stands for is presented as despicable, and the PCs can join in the struggle for the downfall of the Reich. A disclaimer is found in the front of the book which does state that *Reich Star* is, if anything, presented as being anti-Nazi.

*Reich Star* is a game that players will find easy to get into the spirit of. It's also very reasonably priced, costing less than the average price per page. As far as future support goes, reference is made to a miniatures rules Warbook, and miniatures manufactured by Prince August are due out soon. I myself would like to see more source material for the game. But I hope they hire more skilled artists.

— James B. King

## Attack Of The Humans

96 pp perfectbound book. \$16.

*Game Design:* Devin Durham. *Original Concept and Guidance:* Phil Morrissey. *Contributions to Design:* Amy Stuart, Matt Fairleigh, John Macdonnell, Tim Baum. *Cover Artists:* Phil Morrissey. *Interior Artists:* Marty Salsman, Phil Morrissey, Tom Verre, John Sies, Mark Wallace.

*Publisher:* Rapport Games, 1031 East Battlefield, Suite 114B, Springfield MO 65807



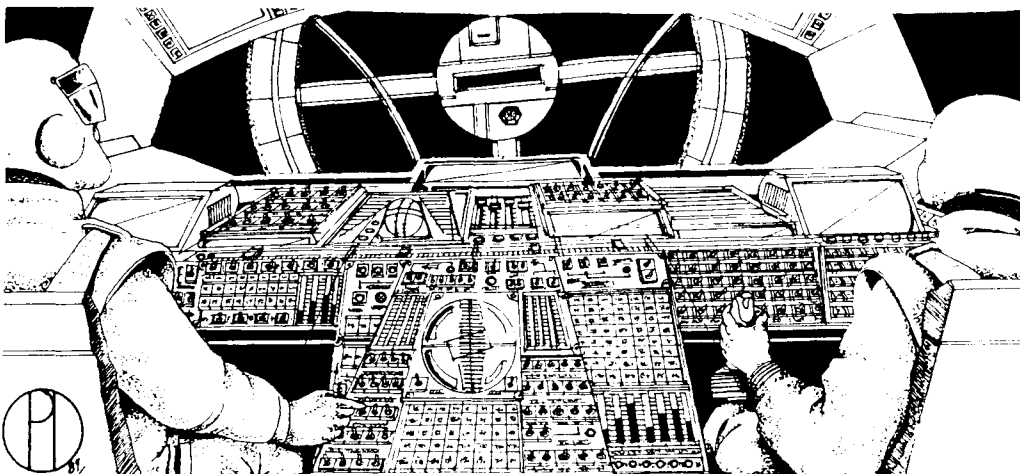
Attack Of The Humans art copr. © 1990 Rapport Games

### Background

The whole idea of this game is to KILL MONSTERS! That's it. But you should have fun while doing it. For most of history, the monsters have had the upper hand. Now it's our turn

### Game Mechanics

**DEVELOPING A CHARACTER:** First of all, there are only three character classes: Brainiac, Athlete, and Typical Person. Each PC has only three attributes: Brains, Fitness, and Common Sense. These attribute numbers are already predetermined to start developing a character. Next, the player finds out how many attribute points are available to turn into potential skills and potential cash (each point translates into \$150). Experience Points received during play can be converted into increased Attributes, new or improved skills, or cash. After



## REVIEW IN BRIEF

### ATTACK OF THE HUMANS=3.2

Game Complexity: *Low*

### RULES=3.25

Clarity=3    Realism=3  
Flexibility=3    Playability=4

### DEVELOPMENT=3

Background=3    Technology=3  
Scenarios=3

### PRODUCTION=3.3

Cover Art=4    Interior Art=4  
Layout=3    Editing=3  
Charts=3    Record Forms=3

this, the player rolls on the skills chart to determine what skills (s)he will start the game with. Now the player purchases any equipment desired. The equipment lists cover weapons and body armor only. Everything else has to be located in....a "J.C. Penny catalog."

**USING SKILLS AND COMBAT:** Skills can only be improved to a rating of 5. A rating of 1 means that the PC has some knowledge and a 5 means the PC has the knowledge of an encyclopedia on that particular subject. To use a skill, the player rolls a six-sided die. A roll equal to or less than the skill level is a success. A roll of six is always a failure. "Skill Combinatics" is a feature of AOTH that allows a player to combine different skills to accomplish something. Just add the skill levels together and roll the dice. Several players can also combine skills, but each player must roll to try for a success. Probably the only reason players would try this is when no one has all of the required skills to have a chance of succeeding.

Combat is broken down into turns of five seconds. Each turn is broken down into five sections: Humans Move, Monsters Move, Humans Attack, Monsters Attack, First Aid. To hit something in combat, a player must roll two dice; a six-sider and a ten-sider and add the results together. The base to hit is eight or less, but skill levels in appropriate weapons and/or other modifiers can affect that base number.

Each PC and Monster has something called DL, or Defense Level. This is the same as Hit Points. A human's DL does not go down (it drops when a PC gets hit, but it comes right back up before the next round) when (s)he gets hurt but a Monster's DL does go down (and it stays down the way you expect Hit Points to behave). Weapons have two somethings: AL, or Attack Level (this is attack damage) and Lethality (which is how likely a weapon is to kill).

Humans also have something called Health levels: Normal, OK, Wounded, Unconscious, and Dead. If a successful Lethality roll is made against a PC, the roll pulls the Health down by the number rolled on the die. This is the only way a PC can die in combat and even then they might not be dead. Once per adventure, a PC can be resurrected if teammates can get to them in the same turn that they died and give them successful First Aid. If they die a second

time during any given adventure, they are really dead.

### What I Liked

There are several things I like about this game. It's short. It's simple. And it's funny. The artwork is all cartoon style and is well done. Reading through the book provides all sorts of chuckles and guffaws. It's a laugh-a-minute. And I like the idea of using a mail order catalog for an equipment list.

### What I Didn't Like

Using a mail order catalog is a good idea, but not everyone is going to want to haul one of those puppies around to game sessions. A short, one page list of some very basic equipment would have a good. And a few pictures in the 29 pages of monster listings would make that section a little more interesting.

### So...What About The Game?

I like it. But I'm not sure that I would admit that I play AOTH. I'm supposed to be a serious gamer and this could ruin my reputation. Actually, I'm only kidding about that. I think many people would get a kick out of a short session of AOTH. I cannot see this game as one that people would play continually, but most people need a "humor" break once in while and I can see referees pulling this one out time and again to have some quick and easy fun. Just reading the book will give you a laugh. I'd say buy it and, right about the beginning of April, pull it out and surprise the rest of the group.

— *Glen Allison*

## GURPS Cyberpunk

128 pp sourcebook for GURPS (includes "Campaign Plan" sheet for photocopying). GURPS is recommended for effective use. \$16.95.

*Game Design:* Loyd Blankenship. *Additional Material:* Brian Edge, Cheryl Freedman, Steve Jackson, Mike Nystul, Creed Lambard, David Pulver, Alex Von Thorn, Karl Wu. *Cover Artist:* David Schleinkofer. *Interior Artists:* Carl Anderson, Angela Bostick, Rick Lowry.

*Publisher:* Steve Jackson Games, Box 18957, Austin TX 78760

### Background

"Cyberpunk" is a name given to a genre of science fiction which includes a dystopian society, computer networking (often with an artificial intelligence or two within the network), direct human interfacing into that network, one or more cyborgs, is usually set in the future, and almost always has anti-heroes for protagonists. As a story form, it's been effective for at least 25 years, though the term itself has become common only in the last decade.

Lately, cyberpunk is making official inroads into rolegaming via *Shadowrun*, *Cyber*

*Space*, *Cyberpunk*, and now *GURPS Cyberpunk*. How does this anti-hero genre fit into the concept of rolegaming? A very good question. But let's first look at the rules themselves.

### Layout And Components

The *GURPS* books always have the highest production standards; *GURPS Cyberpunk* is no exception. The illustrations seem to be awfully sparse for this genre; there should be LOTS of pictures to give a taste of the *alienness* of such a gameworld. (Though there is an illo of one young lady with what appears to be an artificial navel showing through a see-through shirt of sorts on page six which gives an unreal feeling.) The two page bibliography shows that Loyd really did do his homework, and the index makes it possible for the prospective GM to actually *find* things in this huge mass of text.

Comprehensive indexes should be mandatory in all games. The *GURPS* sourcebooks excel in this; I only wish other game publishers would follow suit. Strong bibliographies not only offer the gamer a list to "follow up" on one's new interests, but give the work itself authenticity. When using nonfiction texts, one trusts the research of a book with a huge bibliography. I'm not sure "trust" is a proper word when dealing with the cyberpunk genre, but a good GM likes to feel his game is accurate.

### Game Mechanics

This is *GURPS*, which you either like or you don't. *GURPS* permits you to play it either simply (quick) or with lots of alternate rules (realistic, but slow). It requires work on the part of the gamesmaster to pick and choose the various rules, background, and flavor of the game when it is played.

*GURPS Cyberpunk* demands more work of the GM than the average fantasy, horror, or sf game. *GC* includes so many rules additions — methods for simulating new programs, breaking into systems, defining exactly what the world of programs ("cyberspace") is. The rules for "netrunning" (breaking into and adventuring inside of computer memory) alone run 35 pages! This is a genre so complex that each GM will have to do as much work as the average sourcebook writer would. It might have been less daunting to have actually designed a specific world background, as was done for

## REVIEW IN BRIEF

### GURPS CYBERPUNK=2.64

Complexity: *High*

### RULES=2.25

Clarity=2    Realism=3  
Flexibility=2    Playability=2

### DEVELOPMENT=2

Background=2    Technology=3  
Scenarios=1

### PRODUCTION=3.67

Cover Art=3.5    Interior Art=2.5  
Layout=4    Editing=4    Charts=4  
Record Forms (one only)=4



GURPS Cyberpunk art copr. 1990 Steve Jackson Games

*Shadowrun.*

## What I Liked

If you're using this sourcebook strictly as research for a campaign, it's well worth it. You'll not use all the data within it, any more than you'd use ALL of an encyclopedia. It does a good job of putting all the known and speculated data about cyborg parts and futuristic computer hacking all in one place. The index goes a long way to making the data accessible.

## What I Didn't Like

The price springs to mind. Yeah, I know that the cost of books is going up, but for \$16.95, I'd like to actually be able to open up the thing and PLAY. *GC* is a research volume. Perhaps I've been roleplaying too long, but I grew weary of all-encompassing encyclopediac rules during the days of *Chivalry & Sorcery* — and those other loooong sets of rules FGU used to publish.

Perhaps it's my dislike for the genre itself, but I found too much emphasis on the dystopian (called "gritty" in today's fandom) type of story. *GURPS* has always adapted itself to any style of play (our favorite tends to be the "cinematic"), and *GURPS Cyberpunk* leans too much on the side of the downer syndrome. To its credit, it *does* include six sidebars for we who are tired of the anti-hero (read: villain) genre.

Finally, SJG seems to behave just a little sensationalistic in their recounting of an odd incident. The Secret Service seemed to have some idea that the manuscript for this sourcebook contained some hints and tips for computer crime. (Put your money back, all ye potential hacking hoods. The source-

book — as printed, at least — is less useful for computer crime than any BASIC programming handbook!). They raided the SJC offices, taking manuscripts, computers, disks, and ruining a good bit of office furniture or equipment. It's no real surprise to anyone that our government has a terminal case of stupidity, so a cover blurb proclaiming "The book that was seized by the U.S. Secret Service!" really *is* no message. After the financial burden which the raid cause them, no one can fault SJG for using any promotional technique to sell their merchandise. Nor can anyone blame

them for a little bit of righteous indignation.

## So...What About The Sourcebook?

It's an encyclopedia, not a campaign module or an adventure book. As such, it's nearly all-encompassing and daunting. Since SJG kindly puts their authors' names on the covers, every regular *GURPS* player who sees Loyd Blankenship's name knows that this will not be a "quick and dirty" set of rules, but will cover everything which Blankenship was able to find.

Gamesmasters hoping to find a pre-packaged scenario or two herein will be disappointed. There are none. This sourcebook is strictly a reference book; imaginative plots will have to be provided by the GM. There are a few idea germs, designed to help the new GM determine the type or style of campaign...and that's as close as you'll get to an official *GURPS Cyberpunk* adventure (for the immediate future, at least).

One of these germs is a very clever idea. In it's section on "Cross-genre cyberpunk," it suggests the entertaining background of FASA's *Shadowrun*, where cyber and net technology intermingle with magic. *Shadowrun* players who have given up on that game's mechanics might think about using *Shadowrun* as source material and *GURPS Cyberpunk* and *GURPS Fantasy* for playing rules.

We never did address the issue of the anti-hero cyberpunk genre fitting into a heroic role playing campaign, did we? Guess you'll just have to read the side bar, entitled "Cyberjunk."

— Chester Cox

## CYBER JUNK

Let me make it very clear that I don't like cyberpunk. It can work in fiction (and has, very well at times), but it's just too opposed to a continuing campaign in rolegaming. That is, if you define rolegaming as I do.

Rolegaming is an opportunity to *role play*. This seems obvious, but I read many arguments about players preferring to "power game," whatever that means. What it *seems* to mean, so often, is that the player(s) are only handling violent conflict (i.e. — combat systems) and calling the game finished when the fight scenes are over. To be sure, that is their right to play thusly, but it *isn't* role play.

If we take this first assumption (and that's really all it is; take it or leave it), then the ethical player, the moral player, the player who's really in it for fun and wants to face the other players with no shame, gets a thrill from playing a heroic character. The character may or may not be powerful, handsome, rich, or any of the above — but the character will, when the chips are down, "do the right thing."

Popular fiction is steeped in the tradition of the average guy who rises to the occasion, from Moses to Kal-el. We're also fond of the scoundrel with the heart of gold, who can be counted on to show up when really needed. Han Solo, or Rick (*Casablanca*) are typical of the characters which bring us back to the movies over and over.

Cyberpunk depends on a dystopian setting, where there appears no solution to the ills of the world or society in which the protagonist is trapped. Much of the message of a good cyberpunk (yeah, *there's* a contradiction in terms!) story is of the "If we don't straighten our act NOW, this is the sort of living hell we're condemning our children to" variety. In cyberpunk, the protagonist is unavoidably out for him or herself only...and the world is that much sadder for her or him.

As a story, this works. **Brave New World** is a nightmarish classic which would lose its message if the good in mankind ever triumphed. In rolegaming, it means every player knows that their character will never make a real difference in the game world, and that each player will play an unlikable, selfish boor.

I found it sad, and not a little disturbing, that there were so many AD&D players who thrilled at playing evil anti-paladins. For those of you unfamiliar with the anti-paladin character class in AD&D (touted in **Dragon** as a non-player character class, but immediately embraced by adolescent boys with little social life), these are characters which worship evil gods & demons, make sacrifices of human children, push little old ladies down stairs, stab their mothers in the back, and undoubtedly are the people who cut you off on the freeway today. They have NO redeeming value, except to be cut down by a good guy.

I find it just as disturbing that there seem to be so many people wanting to play criminals in a hellish society with no escape. Is real life becoming that difficult to handle?

— Chester Cox



## Knightfall

96 pg book. \$10 (*MegaTraveller*).

*Design:* Joe D. Fugate, Sr. *Cover Artist:* Paul Alexander. *Interior Artists:* Rob Caswell, Tom Peters, Mike Vilardi, Blair Reynolds, Kate Leberz-Gelinas.

*Publisher:* Game Designers' Workshop, P.O. Box 1646, Bloomington IL 61702-1646.

**Knightfall** is a campaign adventure which starts out with the PCs plying the trade routes of Massilia Sector — a highly contested region between the factions of Lucan, Dulinor, and Margaret — amidst the chaos of the Rebellion. The adventure successfully portrays what life is like for the common citizenry caught in a civil war — and what the costs are when they are suspected of supporting an opposing faction. Ultimately, the PCs go in search of "The Shimmering City," an ancient city of fantastic technology which is believed to have fallen into obscurity during the Long Night. The origins of this city come as a surprise, and are not what most players will initially believe.

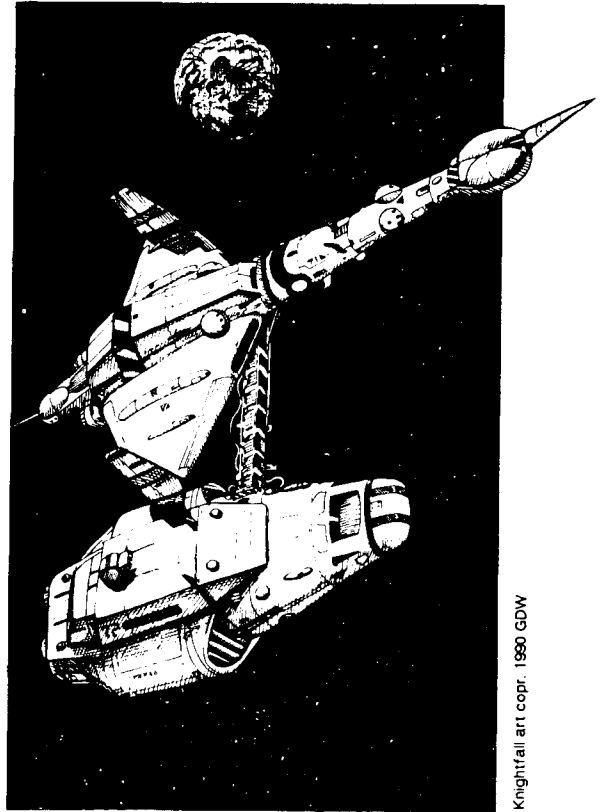
**Knightfall** is a very complete and satisfying package reminiscent of **The Traveller Adventure**, a campaign length adven-

ture the likes of which I myself have long wished GDW would publish more of. What makes **Knightfall** even more appealing, least to me, is the fact that this adventure gets away from the more military plots of the material published since the release of *MegaTraveller*, and presents a merchant-oriented adventure with a richly varied mix of plotlines similar to many earlier *Traveller* adventures.

**Knightfall** uses a "cinematic" nugget format with an opening scene for each. Many of the nuggets are optional, and many of the key nuggets do not require a particular order. This nugget format is quite successful and allows a lot of freedom in how the referee applies them to his or her campaign. And, because of the broad and varied plotlines, the bulk of this campaign book could be successfully used in a number of science fiction RPGs.

Boiled down to one sentence, **Knightfall** is a well designed adventure that will provide several rewarding playing sessions. *MegaTraveller* players will not want to miss this one.

— James B. King



Knightfall art copy. 1990 GDW

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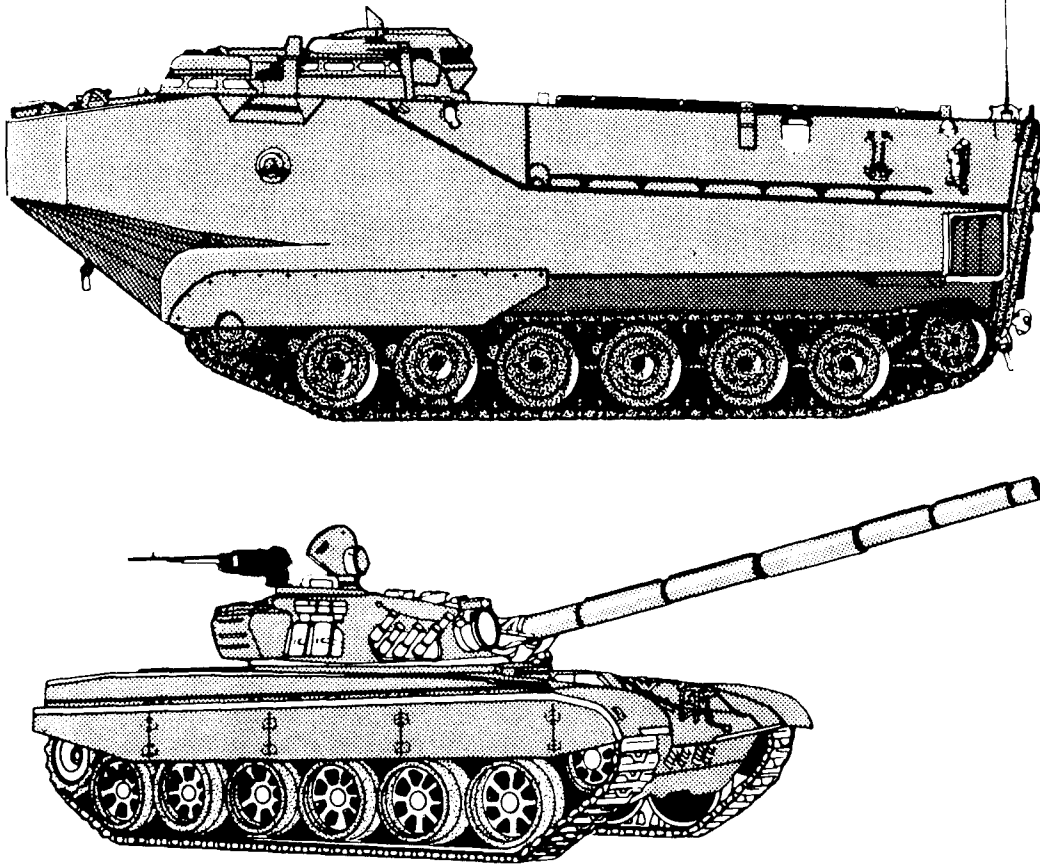
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## American & Soviet Combat Vehicle Handbooks

104 pg books. \$12 each (*Twilight: 2000 2nd Edition*).

*Design:* Loren K. Wiseman, Frank Chadwick. *Vehicle Illustrations:* Steve Venters, Kirk Wescom, Steve Bryant, Shea Ryan, Cain Budds. *Pencil Illustrations:* Tim Bradstreet, Grant Goleash.

*Publisher:* Game Designers' Workshop, P.O. Box 1646, Bloomington IL 61702-1646



American & Soviet Combat Vehicle Handbooks art copr. 1990 GDW

Each of these handbooks contain vehicle listings and stats for over 60 combat vehicles of various types: light reconnaissance, cargo workhorses and general support vehicles, anti-aircraft, infantry fighting vehicles, engineer vehicles, artillery, and, of course, main battle tanks. But that's not all. Each book also contains an overview of major military units (army corps, divisions, brigades, regiments) for each side, providing a historical summary of action, current location and approximate strength. Unit organization is also examined, informing players how units were structured at the onset of war and how and in what numbers various vehicles were deployed to each unit. Obviously, the units will no longer have this same organization and troop and vehicle strengths, but this data is not only interestingly informational, it is indicative of the organization likely to be found in current factional elements.

My first thought when I first opened these

handbooks was "wow." The quality of illustration is exceptional, among the best in the gaming industry. Every vehicle is illustrated, but the truly impressive illustration is the large number of pencil illustrations that will just blow you away — they look almost real enough to do just that! Most are obviously done from photographs, and I wouldn't be surprised if they all are. To make a good thing even better, each handbook includes eight pages of color plates depicting various vehicles in the color schemes and markings of the units they are assigned to, with complete descriptions of the vehicles depicted.

Obviously, these books are well worth purchasing. *Twilight: 2000* players, don't overlook these books. In fact, if you're a military hardware fan, these books are worth having even if you don't play *Twilight: 2000*. The quality of illustration is that good.

— James B. King

## The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of

33 pg booklet. \$9 (*Morpheus*).

*Adventure Design:* Craig Sheeley. *Additional Design:* Devin Durham. *Cover Artists:* Marty Salsman, Bob McFate. *Interior Artists:* Phil Morrissey, Marty Salsman.

*Publisher:* Rapport Games, 1031 E. Battlefield, Suite 114B, Springfield MO 65807

This is the first supplement for the *Morpheus* RPG. It provides an adventure for levels 1-3 as well as source material covering the Morpheus Tower where the "mind games" take place. The body of the module is stapled, but simply inserted loose inside the cover, which is because floor plans for the Morpheus Tower are printed on the inside cover.

The interior art is plentiful and good and I also liked the cover. The adventure, though perhaps a little too short, is different, but would be good for learning how the game's systems work. It has a very linear progression, which will restrict players somewhat in their actions. Some additional material on possible optional actions would have been helpful.

A section of NPCs with stats and a picture of each is included. This is a good section, but the material is spaced out at one NPC per page and the information provided didn't require that much space. If the stats had been condensed a little and the extra space used for additional adventure material, I would have been happier.

This module seems at first glance to be a bit expensive for what you get. But if you play *Morpheus*, you'll find this module to be useful. The idea behind *Morpheus* is rather different and a referee might sometimes find him or herself stumped for a creative idea or a way to get going. What you sometimes need is a catalyst to start things flowing or a springboard to leap from to start creating your own material, and **The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of** is just that. And that makes the price worth it.

— Glen Allison





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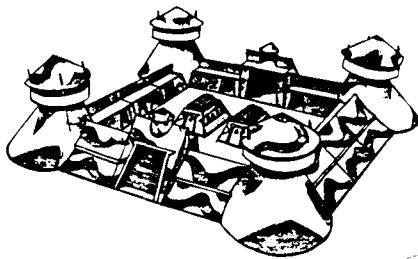
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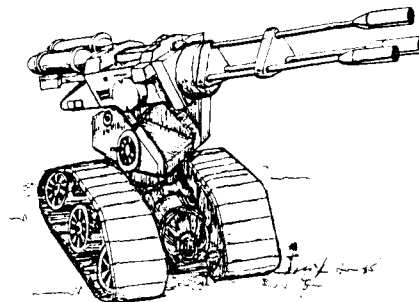


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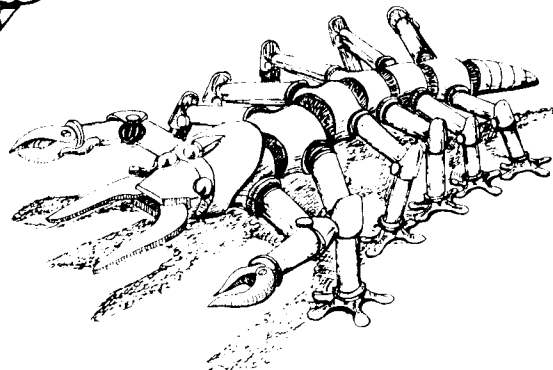
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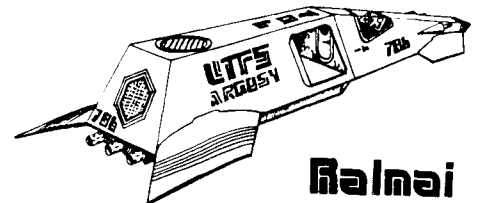
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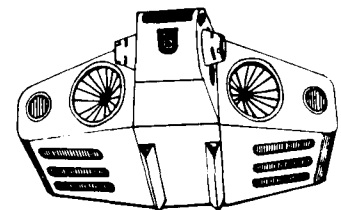
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