RPG REVIEW
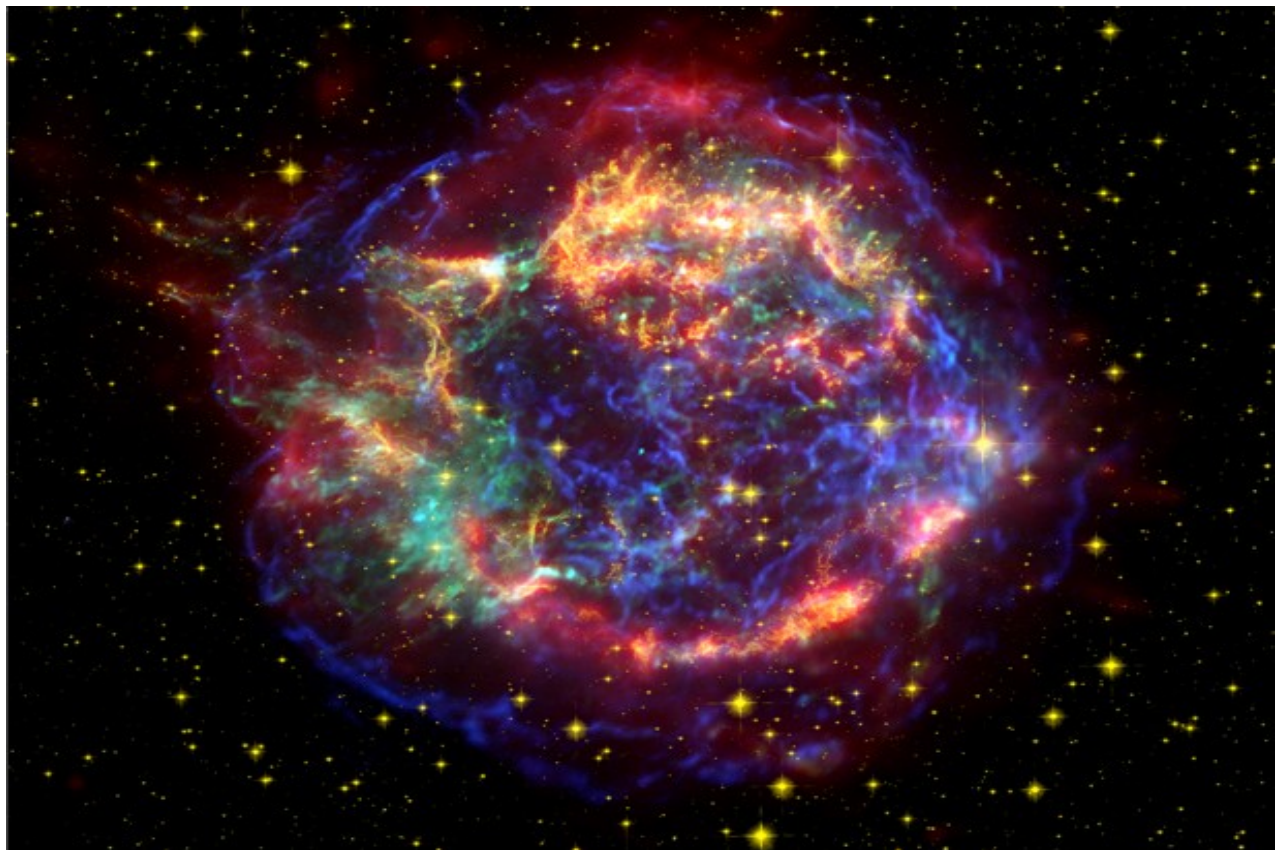
Issue #8, June 2010

3:16 … Doctor Who …Terran Trade Authority … Dragon Age … Foresight … Blue Planet ... Ringworld … GURPS Aging … Mechs … Traveller Retrospective … Space 1889 ... Pendragon 1920s… The Creation of Narrative in RPGs... 2012 Review ... Industry News

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ADMINISTRIVIA

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EDITORIAL

I must confess I am somewhat disappointed with the way that this issue of RPG Review has come out, but also a little wiser in the problems of attempting to be thematic with a genre that is so broad. "Let's do a science fiction themed issue" I beamed; promptly forgetting that science fiction is the a genre as wide as it is deep and also a massive graveyard for games that flared oh so briefly in the mind's eye of gamers, attracted some support for a while, and probably still have a core of supporters who since the mass adoption of the Internet have revived their interests.

So here I am scratching my head wondering how I am going to justify in this editorial leaving out old classics like Space Opera, Universe, Star Wars, Star Trek or relative newcomers like Alternity. These are all deserving of articles, and yet.. They're not here. Star Trek and Star Wars for goodness sake! Space does not permit me either to provide either an article or present my outrage sufficiently.

At least I can feel some sense of justification of leaving out near future games such as Cyberpunk, Shadowrun, Cyberspace, Judge Dredd, Paranoia, GURPS Transhuman Space, knowing that they will find themselves in a future issue. In a way they have taken over the role expressed by Darko Suvin that science fiction was the mythology of modernity; now the transhuman-cyberpunk fiction is the mythology and traditional science fiction has become a fictional genre.

I can also justify the presence of 3:16 knowing that it had been long promised and is here at last. Further, Spacemaster already had an article from the previous issue via the Dark Space setting, so I'm sure its fans will find its absence permissible if not agreeable.

So what is in this issue? As mentioned, a review of 3:16 by yours truly, ditto for the Terran Trade Authority, which has a hefty introduction to the setting, and finally an attempt a mega-review of all the main Traveller material since day dot.

Traveller is, of course, the true survivor and the great mainstay of science fiction gaming.

Reviews of the new Doctor Who roleplaying game is also present, along with designer's notes for Foresight, a game I remember seeing a good fifteen or more years ago. Karl Brown, who is going to be editing the next issue, has decided to contribute a massive five articles for this issue along a range of sf game systems; two for GURPS (which is possibly as big, if not bigger, than Traveller when it comes to sf gaming), one for Blue Planet, one for Ringworld/BRP and one for that very quirky and beautiful product Space 1889. I have encountered a delightful pbem entitled "Ethereal Gothic" which combines Space 1889, Masque of the Red Death, GURPS Steampunk and GURPS Horror... One day, I hope to see an article about that!

I've never liked the idea of issues being completely dedicated to one theme, so in this issue newcomer Julian Dellar has provided a lengthy playtest write-up, mini-review and rules modifications for Dragon Age, the latest fantasy RPG of note to grace the shelves of FLGS. Further Mark Holsworth provides a very interesting article on the use of Pendragon rules for 1920s Call of Cthulhu.

As two theory pieces "Dark Dungeons" offers the superb "Lazy Guide to GMing", which originally appeared on rpg.net and Jennifer Cover provides a summary of her new book on RPG narrative considerations. Nice!

Our two very regular contributors Mingshi, Jensen and Andrew have, once again, graced us with their literary, artistic and cinema evaluation talents and to them were are very much in their debt.

Until then.. Live long and prosper*!

Lev
        * Which is actually an Armenian blessing for when you sneeze, not a Vulcan Star Trek invention. True fact.

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HOT GOSSIP: INDUSTRY NEWS
by Wu Mingshi

Hosei bo Mr. Lev,

Mingshi wonder if "hot gossip" make people think of girls dancing in short shorts, like that old TV show with Kenny Everett. But long shorts not make sense. Long and short at same time how can? Beside, long short ugly and too hot. Mingshi stay with short short, show leg and stay cool. Also Mingshi short as well, lah!

You know, ENnies coming soon, RPG award where fans can vote, all hokkein peng. Maybe Gencon committee come to my balik and do gahmet vote. Mingshi ask Paul The Octopus for results, but he no eat mussel today. Anyway, Mingshi don't believe octopus has no Kenny Lew power. Paul The Octopus secretly control World Cup with super eye power, control soccer clubs, like Illuminati Tong. Anyway, Mingshi think product of year be Warhammer because so big and pretty, Judge Dredd best setting, and Pathfinder for best game. Judge Dredd make me thing of big city with corrupt gahment, surround by wasteland. Remind me of some place... Anyways, no other prediction from me. Too hard. Say Mr. Lev, why RPG Review not there yet? You too lazy! *[Ed: Yeah, thanks Mingshi. You want to be editor for a while? Maybe you're a graphic designer?]*

This quartering have Dresden Files roleplaying game by Evil Hat make big splash, but not like BP in Gulf which is wrong sort of big splash. First books, then TV, then roleplaying, this multimedia, lah? It use FATE system and have two volumes already. Also go stun Crucifiction Games accept offer from A Ferris Wheel films to do movie, based on novel, based on roleplaying game "Horror Rules", which is scary-funny – game and situations!

Little bird with tentacles grow from beak tell me Chaosium is reprinting Masks of Nyarlahotep, some say best adventure of all time. Also Goodman Games do more of Age of Cthulhu, with Shadows of Leningrad and Horrors from Yuggoth, all very good products, lah.

Minghsi very surprised to learn that Palladium Books had suit in US federal court against Trion Worlds who want a new online game titled "Rift: Planes of Telara". Rift is single Rifts and Rifts is Palladium!

Cumberland Games, who do Risus and Pokéthulhu, release of "Town: A City-Dweller's Look at 13th to 15th Century Europe" by Lisa J. Steele. Mingshi want to know when someone do 13th to 15th century Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia! Plenty things happen here too!

Because this science fiction theme genre issue, Mingshi mention release of "Maschine Zeit" from Machine Age Productions, a d100 game with dangerous resource management system and inspired by Aliens, Pandorum, Event Horizon and Dead Space.

OK, that's enough from me this quartering!

Love,

Mingshi! mingshi@rpgreview.net

3:16 CARNAGE AMONG THE STARS

by Lev Lafayette

This review has been long awaited – it was first announced in RPG Review issue 2 for the third issue; but it never happened for reasons that will become clear. Time has passed and eventually it seemed very appropriate for this independent science fiction RPG to be reviewed in a science fiction themed edition of the 'zine.

3:16 Carnage Among The Stars is presented with an attractive cover, some really below average cartoony art within with a thin sans-serif two-column justified text. The 96p book, including a very good index, has hexadecimal chapters, providing an introduction, character generation, missions and play, higher ranks and various source material, including equipment. The writing style is informal but direct and thus highly efficient at conveying key ideas. The science fiction setting is quite blunt; Terra has reached an apex of civilisation and prosperity. To protect this utopia, the PCs are members of the elite 3:16th expeditionary force. The job is to explore the universe and destroy and alien civilisation, intelligence and life of any kind. Personally, I think that's a premise both stupid and improbable.

Character generation consists of name and a descriptive reputation, with 10 points spent between just two characteristics; FA (Fighting Ability) and NFA (Non-Fighting Ability), the former covering all weapons, tactics, anything that directly causes a "kill" and the latter for everything from planetology, diplomacy and sailing. You also keep track of Kills, because that's your prime, indeed only, function. As a dash of personality, characters also have Flashbacks which can act as Strengths or Weaknesses, and finally Rank, which starts with Trooper (0), Corporal (1), Sergeant (2) for beginning characters and helps define their equipment. With each increase in Rank, characters also receive extra responsibilities; such as improve the kill ratio. Characters, by default, get armour which protects them from one wound per planetfall. Weapons do a different number of kills depending on range; an energy rifle, for example, does 1 kill at Close or Far range, but 1d10 at Near (the three range increments for everything - plus technically two more - Out-Of-Range and Orbit).

Missions begin with a briefing, then planet-landing and the framing of the first scene. A test of NFA determines Dominance, roll under, but roll high on d10. Dominance determines whether an ambush is set or at what range initial encounter occurs. If the aliens achieve ambush dominance, each PC takes one wound; uninjured becomes a mess, a mess becomes crippled, crippled becomes dead; everyone has four "hit points", if you like; one "hit point" is healed in between encounters. If the PCs achieve dominance, each rolls a d10 for the number of kills that they achieve (aliens only have one hit point). Each round after that is based on rounds; a determination of using FA or NFA (e.g., change range, change weapon), whilst the aliens will always use their Alien Ability (AA). The determination of kills is the

same as the initial round, success based on a counting down from 10, a sort of initiative (even for failures, which are narrated).

Threat tokens are used to judge the challenge of the mission; the total is five times the number of players. Every time the PCs succeed on their FA, one threat token is removed (regardless of the number of kills). Aliens can use them to activate their special abilities. PCs can use a Strength Flashback removes all remaining threat tokens, plus their receive a number of kills at a range of their choice. Using a Weakness Flashback removes 1 Threat token and removes the PC from that encounter (typically setting up another). In the final encounter the Aliens use all their Threat Tokens in a desperate last stand. At the end of a mission, whoever has the most kills gains a "level", adding 1 to FA or NFA, plus one Flashback slot.

Flashbacks are described as the capacity to allow the past affect the present and allow the PCs to "change the fiction before the results of the dice are resolved". A Strength Flashback allows a PC to win on their terms and a Weakness Flashback allows them to lose on their terms - which is often far better than death. A list of Flashbacks isn't provided, but nor is one necessary for the simple mechanics; the couple of examples provided is quite sufficient.

Mission design narrows down to the distribution of threat tokens among encounters for purposes of narrative flow. Four encounters is a recommended standard, with 3 threat tokens for the initial encounter, # of PCs in threat tokens for the second, a similar value for the third and whatever is left for the final encounter. Whilst missions always have an over-arching goal (kill all life forms), secondary missions are also recommended (capture, scout, rescue etc). Between missions, characters may gain a level (typically through having the most kills on a mission), plus a develoment roll (increase rank through use of Strength, gain equipment, gain a 'step' on a weapon). It is possible to lose a rank through the use of a Weakness. Replacement characters also appear in-between missions, designed on a basis of "similar but different" to their predecessor. Through experience, higher ranks may be achieved. The higher ranks are Lieutenant (3), Captain (4), Major (5), Lt. Colonel (6), Colonel (7), and Brigadier (8). Both their ranks and responsibilities increase significantly.

The supplementary material, making up roughly half the book, includes the GMs chapter (presentation, techniques etc), planets (basically a list and description of alien abilities, creature form, and basic world characteristic), an example of planet generation, an example of play, sample characters, war gear, everyday equipment, and once-use per planet equipment. As a rules light game, these are mostly descriptive with most of the systematic content found, as expected, in the Alien Abilities and War Gear sections which are, not surprisingly, largely combat based. I was more than a little surprised however to find no mechanics for implementing the the basic world characteristics and vehicles beyond mere description. One particularly nice narrative feature was ensuring that every planet and every alien was unique. Whilst I could elaborate in much more detail how the contents of this entire half of the book, there is no too much point - it is supporting and descriptive material, and in many ways a significant negative in the book's presentation and style. This much attention to supporting material is fine - as long as it is tightly integrated in a systematic manner.

Overall, 3:16 Carnage Beyond The Stars is a fair rules-light combat system that takes up 96 pages when it probably could have been written on two sides of an A4 sheet. It does conduct resource management effectively and induces a narrative tension through framing and pacing. It uses punctuated and graduated equilibrium for character advancement. The rules-light mechanics require a free-wheeling thespian side to provide colour to results, none of which provides an in-game reward. The biggest problem however is its lack of detail, scope and adaptability. Shoving everything into FA or NFA just doesn't work if you want to explore other meaningful aspects of the premise and setting in a manner that is supported by the game mechanics themselves. The setting and premise could seriously do with some justification and elaboration; at least games like Warhammer 40K paid attention to that and it was also built with a similar thematic orientation. For those who enjoy the narrow focus made explicit in the sub-title "Carnage Among The Stars" perhaps several sessions of enjoyable play. For others, "it's just another bug-hunt" will get pretty old, pretty fast.
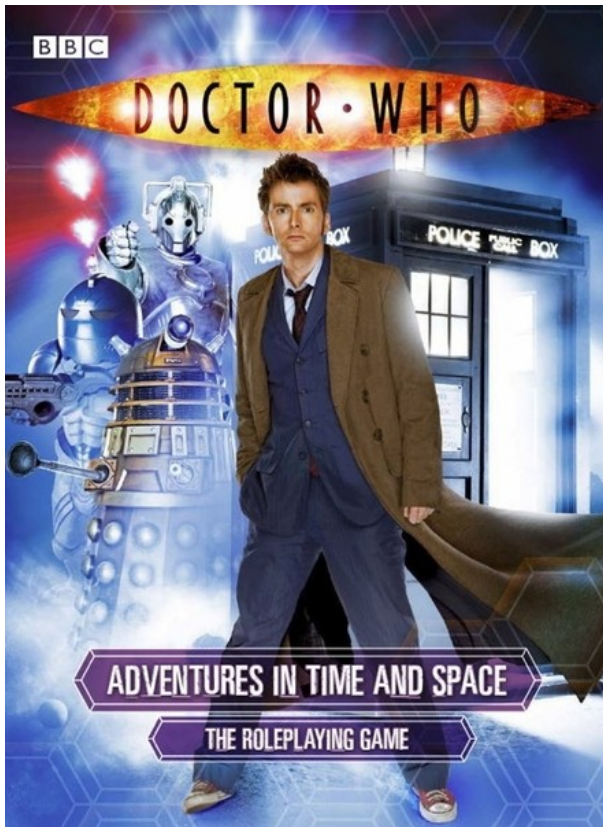
DOCTOR WHO ADVENTURES IN TIME AND SPACE

by Sam Sexton

Before I begin this review I must first make a confession: I am a Whovian and I have been so since I was at least three years old, when I would literally watch from behind the couch. As I grew up I spent long hours doing battle with imaginary Daleks, Cybermen and Sontarians. As an adult I would challenge any devotee of an opposing science fiction franchise to step outside. Even my wife couldn't beat this obsession for all things Galafraian out of me. So it went without saying that when I saw Cubical 7 publication grace the shelves I must have a copy.

What is Doctor Who? Or Who is Doctor Who? For the few people who don't know, Doctor Who is a television series that has been running since 1963 (the first screening of the first episode was interrupted by the news of John Kennedy's assignation). The show is about the adventures of a mysterious and eccentric humanoid alien known as the Doctor who travels with his companions through time and space in his ship called the TARDIS. Over the years he has saved the world, the universe and reality numerous times from the evil culches of the Daleks, the Cybermen, the Sontarins and possibly his most dangerous foe, The Master. Rather than using weapons or violence the Doctor will almost always outsmart his enemies although sometimes at a cost and sometimes that cost is his own life. However the doctor has the ability to regenerate. Since it's first airing, Doctor Who has gone on to become a British institution with many of the terms used in the show now part of everyday language, for example , I didn't need to skip 'Dalek' when spell checking this review. Many of Britain's highest profile actors and writers have contributed to the show, including the late Douglas Adams who was the script editor during the late 70's, Tom Baker (who played the Doctor and is arguably most recognised for the role), Dermot Morgan and Kylie Minogue.

I am home, the door is shut, there is nothing to distract me, on the table in front of me lies Doctor Who Adventures in Time and Space. If I am to believe the back of this box then it contains everything that I need to play the game including a Players guide, a Gamemasters guide, an adventure book, character sheets, pre-generated characters from the show, tokens and dice. This reminds me of the day in my youth when games did come in boxes and contained everything that I needed to play... as opposed to something like the New World of Darkness series where to play vampire you had to fork out for at least two books, or Dungeons and Dragons where at the very least you have to have three books. However what comes in the box and whether this is good or bad some may say is irrelevant since I'm here to write about the game and how well it translates from the show, however my point is that like the latest regeneration of the show it comes in a very slick package and you get everything.

The gaming system that Cubical 7 have used is simple. To create a character you spend a set number of character points on traits (talents, hang ups and abilities: Time lord, Alien or robot are traits) and attributes (strength, dexterity etc). You can get more character points by taking bad traits, having a nemesis for example. Then you have skill points which, surprisingly, are used exclusively to buy skills. However these can be added too with left over character points. For a round of play you state what you are going to do and you then add the relevant attributes, skills, traits. You then roll two six sided dice for your result against a difficulty set by the game master. Nice and simple. One of the things that is very clear that in making this game Cubical 7 have tried very hard to capture the spirit of the show. This is most reflected in the way that initiative is handled which is based on the action you are taking in the round with talkers take the first action followed by movers then doers and fighters last. As they say in the game 'even the Daleks stop to talk to the Doctor'. While some may say that this is a system designed for players new to role playing and to some extent I believe this is true, I would also argue that it is a system designed to be role played as opposed to one designed to be hack and slashed. One thing that should be noted is that as the adventures continue your character doesn't gain experience or go up levels, however there is room for your character to gain skills, attributes and traits to some extent. Another part of the system worth mentioning is Story points - these are tokens handed out by the game master that a player can spend to change the situation in their favour, like those moments in the show just when you think that everything is lost some spot of luck or the Doctor suddenly works out what he has been missing all this time and manages to save the day. However certain enemies have these too thus Davros or the Master can come back later in the story to continue their antagonism towards all that is good with in the universe.

One thing that I have truly loved about the show over the years is that one week it will be set in ancient Italy the day before the fall of Pompeii, on an world inhabited entirely by ageing clockwork rocks at the end of the universe the next, and in the garden next door the week after that. This is also one of the things that really appeals to me in the game as well as a means to keep campaigns going. Depending on whether your party has access to a TARDIS or some other means of going through time and space then your game masters demented imagination is the limit.
Can I play the Doctor? Yes you can - the premade tenth Doctor Character sheet is in the box. Can I play a Dalek? Not by these rules you can't. Daleks take orders and however I'm not sure that there is much room for roleplay in the character of a Dalek. I want to run a game without the doctor can I do this? Yes, one of the nice things about the Doctor Who universe is that it is huge, massive and is constantly being threatened by one evil plot or another and there is always someone who needs to be saved and there are many opportunities for you to do this. Whether you're a UNIT recruit, a Time Agent, a Torchwood operative, or a nobody who just happened to get mixed up with the wrong sort of alien. Cubical 7 even have a UNIT (expansion that is currently available to pre-order on Amazon). One of my players wants to play K9 do the rules allow me to do that? Yes they do, in fact K9 is one of the character sheets that come pre-made in the box.

If there is one problem I have with the game it is this, you have to play the good guy there isn't any room to play the Master and devise an evil plan to take over the universe, well you could but you would have to have an understanding game master and a party that is willing to go along with you. However you would also have to defeat the Doctor, which would have to be next to impossible in itself. I feel that another limitation of the game is that it is geared towards short scenarios where there are limited rules to improve your character as time goes by, thus making the idea of a yearlong campaign a little difficult. I would also liked to have seen more images and references to the series prior to the 2005 revival.

Overall I feel that Doctor Who Adventures in Time and Space is a fantastic game for short scenarios that allows you and your players to immerse yourself in a lot of Doctor Who goodness. It takes many of the aspects that make Doctor Who unique and seamlessly applies them to a simple role playing system. While it does have its limitations these are easily outnumbered by the positive aspects of the game.

TERRAN TRADE AUTHORITY RPG REVIEW

by Lev Lafayette
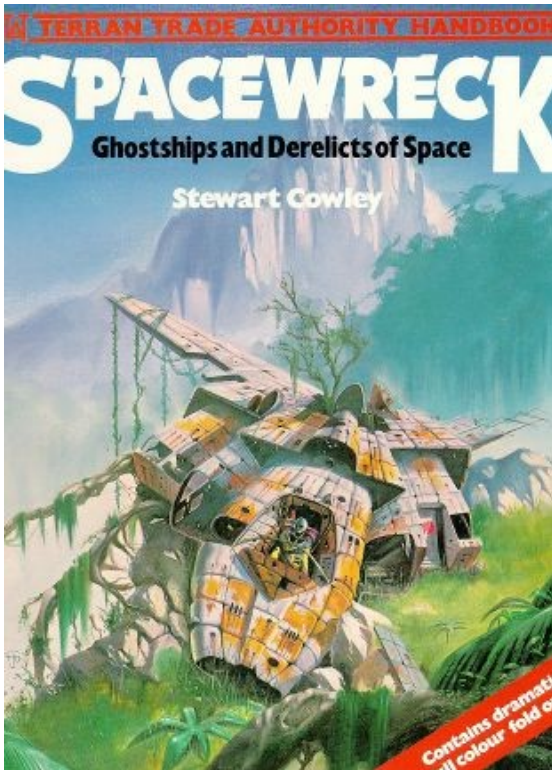
In the late 70s and early 80s a series of colourful books were authored by Steward Cowley et. al. which presented an early interstellar Earth and its encounters with neighbouring, and not always friendly, aliens. With the benefit of hindsight the timeline was somewhat optimistic in terms of some technology; the first book, published by Hamlyn in 1978, was entitled *Spacecraft 2000-2100 AD*. Other books of the canonical "Terran Trade Authority" series included *Great Space Battles* (1979), Spacewreck: Ghosts and Derelicts of Space (1979) and *Starliners: Commercial Travel in 2200*. In addition to these, a further six books were released in the "*Galactic Encounters*" series and "*The Space Warriors*", which have been defined as "adjunct" material to the Terran Trade Authority official timeline.

To give a very quick summary; ion and plasma nuclear engines are developed in the 1980s, commercial flight and Lunar settlements in the early 2000s, contact with Alpha Centurians in the 2030s, leading to trade agreements. In the late 2040s contact is made with the Proxima Centurians, who prove to be aggressive, leading to interstellar war which runs for 15 years, with eventual victory for the Terran/Alphan forces. Following the reconstruction there is a period of exploration and discovery, with further alien artifacts, ghost ships etc, discovered. So there's three great and traditional roleplaying narrative opportunities; contact, war and investigation.

In 2006 the Terran Trade Authority reappeared in the publishing world with *Spacecraft 2100 to 2000*, *Local Space*, and roleplaying game, all released Morrigan Press, primarily authored by Jeff Lilley, Scott Agnew and, of course, contributions by Stewart Cowley. Most fans of the original series have reacted somewhat negatively to these releases, although the largest complaint was that there was insufficient *new* material in term. What was new included significant alterations to the fictional history to match real world changes from 1978 to c2005 and then beyond have meant that there are now two, somewhat competing, Terran Trade Authority narratives, "classic" and "new" - the new timeline wasn't that different really; just a more contemporary grounding and shifting the space exploration period ahead by one hundred years into the future. The artwork in the new books also has been considered slightly inferior to the originals, which were sourced from different authors with CGI retouching. The game universe, more fully elaborated in *Local Space*, suggests massive control by megacorporations, corrupt governments, and a highly divided class society. Again, whilst this represents an updated version, and plausible version, of the Terran Trade Authority history, it was not entirely well received by the fans of the classic timeline who preferred a less politically charged and benevolent world. In a very real sense, the new books postulated a more "realistic" and less "space opera" background.

On to the roleplaying game itself (finally!). Weighing in at a hefty 416 pages, this book comes with an attractive colour cover and a collection of mostly good, mostly colour and mostly about spaceships internal art. The text inside is single column justified with a large serif font with far too much white space and fat margins. Unfortunately these do not

provide immediate chapter sections and nor do they make page numbers particularly explicit. This is despite the fact that the seven chapters of the game (The TTA Universe, The Rules, Skills, Character Creation, Equipment, Spacecraft and Space Travel, Gamemastering) have very clear subchapters; there is also an excellent index. The writing style is very much on the verbose side, lacks flair and has far too many one sentence paragraphs. This combination does not make an interesting or short read.

The first chapter takes up a quarter of the book, some 94 pages, is largely setting information, which has already been described in the first paragraphs. The game system is Omni; roll 1d20, add skill or attribute, minus difficulty. A result of 0 or less is a mishap, 1-5 is a failure, 6-10 a partial success, 11-19 a success and 20 or more a critical success. All abilities, attributes, skills etc, are rated a bonus to the Omni roll. Actual tests are carried out with a d20 plus either the attribute and relevant skill, and with difficulty modifier which are described in some detail. Opposed rolls are conducted as a modifier to skill check to the active character (e.g., Stealth skill +9 verses Perception attribute +3 means the Stealth skill check is at +6). Multiple actions per round (roughly six seconds) are conducted at a -5 cumulative penalty.

There are eight primary attributes (Intelligence, Will, Strength, Constitution, Perception, Charisma, Dexterity, and Speed) all rated with a average of 0, with modifiers either positive or negative. In addition there are six secondary attributes (Close Combat, Ranged Combat, Psi, Renown, Piety and Hit Points). Close Combat is based on the average of Strength, Dexterity and Speed), rounding down, whereas Ranged Combat is based on Perception, Dexterity and Speed. Psi is normally 0, but if the background allows can begin with Intelligence, Will and Charisma divided by, oddly, 2. Hit Points are racially determined; but with Quirks modifying. When primary attributes are used by themselves on the Omni table, the modifier is doubled (but not, as the example shows above, as penalties). Standard attribute range is between -5 and + 5. Primary attributes can also be improved by experience points.

Combat is based on a rolled initiative, modified by Speed, with fixed weapon value (modified by Strength, if melee) causing damage and minus armour. A partial success does half damage, a full success normal damage, and a critical success does normal damage plus a critical wound. Defenses are based on dodges (an action) or parry which are also rolled actions, like attacks. Different ranged weapons have variable rates of fire, with an assumption of three-round bursts.   Skills are acquired through training and practise, "such as combat and magic". "Magic" may seem a little odd here, but there is six (optional) psionic modes (attack, illusion, manipulate, influence, kinetic) which are treated like skills. The modes come with a variety of powers which are quite reminiscent of FRPG spells with duration, range, casting modifiers, and a description. Around one hundred skill plus specialisations are described, albeit minimally with most receiving a few sentences. A variety of positive and negative quirks add to the personal, physical and social characteristics, some received automatically (and restricted to) from racial background, others from paths, analogous to character classes and backgrounds. This are usually very minimally described with specific bonuses; Alcohol Tolerance, for example, gives +2 to CON for the purposes of resisting the effects of alcohol. The Camouflage ability, native and exclusive to Alphans, receives about a page.

Character generation consists of one of three "races" (read "species"), Humans, Alphans and Proxmians, with various ethnic groups within the populations (a nice touch, thank you), all of which are described in detail in terms of physique, general mental outlook, gender roles and norms, religious beliefs, politics, art, languages and so forth. Alphans are described as tall, wiry, and graceful with minimal sexual dimorphism or gender roles. Most remarkably is their chameleon-like abilities, although their lack of gradual old age is interesting as well (they just "crash", go into a brief coma and then die). Alphan economic society is largely run by collectives, rather than corporate structures. And just in case you're beginning to think "elves in space", yes they do have pointy ears as well. In contrast, the Proximans are short, stocky (more like fat australopiths than dwarves, though) with a natural shielding on their back, forming a sort of shell. They have two sexes (female and "potential", which are changeable). They are also particularly prone to genetic engineering and surgical modification. Proximans are immune to most heavy metal poisonings, and are radiation resistant. Interestingly however, actual attribute modifiers are quite modest; the most dramatic is a +3 bonus to Speed for the Alphans .

In many ways it is somewhat of a misnomer to call this massive, one hundred page, chapter "Character Creation" as very little is dedicated to the subject; most of it is an anthropology of the three species. By selecting one or more *paths* a character acquires additional skills and quirks, along with equipment and attribute adjustments. These are a combination of environmental (rural, urban, offworld, outcast) and professional backgrounds for the advanced (asteroid miner, colonist, criminal, diplomat, FLEA, free trader, veteran, pilot, courier, officer, physician, pirate, politician, scientist, engineer, marine, scout, information officer, xenobiologist). Personal equipment is, as often the case, has an emphasis on weapons, armour and medicine, although less than many other SF games and with fair collection of "other" items, including quite a range of robots and vehicles. Alphan weapons emphasise lasers and gravity snare, Proximan sonic.

FTL travel is achieved by the Terrans by De Vass bending of space-time, which the Proximans acquired during the war. Alphan FTL travel is based on gravity mass-drivers. In all cases FTL travel is a approximately 1 day per light year with a maximum of five light years and a recovery time between jumps. The game strikes a good balance between movement complexity and realism for aircraft, spaceships etc, with a variable scale depending on the type of movement. Vehicle combat rules are dovetailed neatly into the normal combat system, with initiative, bonuses, weapon damage, armour etc. Approximately twenty spacecraft are described. The final chapter, GMing the TTA Universe, involves things like interpretation of the Omni table (mostly obvious), difficulty modifiers for actions (abstract and also pretty obvious), and some reasonable notes on campaign design and plot development. Perhaps most important are the rules for environmental effects such as radiation, drowning, gravity (including falling), atmospheric conditions, and diseases. Various basic astronomical data (e.g., star types) are provided before a penultimate lengthy exposition of the core narrative imperative of TTA; the unknown and exploration. As an unusual conclusion a few pages are dedicated a variety of Terran creature encounters and statistics.

Overall, the Terran Trade Authority Roleplaying game is middling, with a very standard set of rules for attributes, advantages and disadvantages, skills, psionics and equipment. The background information is hefty, but fails to excite The lack of maps of the worlds and starmaps was notable for its absence. The game system covers a lot of ground, but also fails to capture enthusiasm. The generic modifiers for skills and actions rather than specific examples for most skills was off-putting although the use of a largely unified resolution system was welcome. Certainly in a book this size a scenario or two would have helped as well; especially given the source material. Still, the game is quite workable, and it is great to see that the TTA exists as an RPG.

STAR FRONTIERS/MEGATRAVELLER: REVOLT ON ANTARES

by Lev Lafayette

What an unusual combination is possible with a combination of some old science fiction products. Revolt on Antares was a 1981 minigame by Tom Moldvay where there is rebellion against an Imperial government. The seven houses who rule the planet decide who they are going to work with, face invading aliens, ally with the indigenous peoples, hire mercenaries and make use of their "house weapons". Star Frontiers was TSR's 1982 science fiction roleplaying game, and MegaTraveller was GDW's 1987 game of the rebellion in the Imperium, where the Antares Sector (in reality, Antares is a supergiant star) eventually throws off Imperial rule, declares itself independent under Archduke Bzrk, of the Vagr, the dog-like humanoids, an aligns itself with the Julian Confederation. By combining the game Revolt on Antares to provide an example of the war of independence, using the MegaTraveller setting and the Star Frontiers rules, all three products can be united into a cohesive story.

There are of course, some issues. In the MegaTraveller setting, Antares is largely run by the Vagr wolf-humanoids with a supplementary human population. In the Antares game, the houses are human. This is relatively simple to change; keep the Antares Houses (Orsini, MacKenzie, Kinrabe, Fitzgerald, Sessedi, Braganza and Edistyn), assumes the names are based on "humanised" Vagr (like Romanised Britons) and instead of Houses, use "Packs" as the identifying political unit. The colours on the Revolt on Antares map (reproduced below) is as follows; Orsini (purple), MacKenzie (light blue), Kinrabe (light green), Fitzgerald (red), Sessedi (organge), Braganza (dark green), Edistyn (yellow), the Imperial Forces (brown), Antereans (tan).

Use the species information from the Referees Companion of MegaTraveller. Grant the Vagr a +5 to STR/STA, -10 to INT/LOG and +5 to PER/LDR in Star Frontiers. The indigenous population of Antares (Antareans) can be rated -5 to STR/STA, +5 INT/LOG and -0 to PER/LDR. They should be provided additional movement and defense bonuses in the natural environment.

The various "special powers" of the pack leaders in Revolt on Antares can be converted in Star Frontiers equivalents, albeit these are typically extraordinary psionic powers which are typically well beyond the capacity of personal engagement. Psionics are absent from the Star Frontiers rules and there is nothing wrong with treating these as extreme exceptions to a general rule. The same logic can also be used for the Precursor Artifacts and some of the more unusual powers from the mercenary leaders (e.g., Doctor Death has the capacity to control minds just before death, rather than being able to summon forces, zombie-like, from corpses). All can add to making the Antares sector that extra-special, at least with such a significant old giant star so close to an eerie and potential mystical empty sector.

If desired, Psionics from MegaTraveller can be imported into Star Frontiers. Treat Psionics as a fourth Primary Skill Area. Skill costs are particularly high; Level 1 costs 8(16), Level 2 16 (32), Level 3, 24 (48) and so forth. There are six different Psionic skills, or Talents; Telempathy, Clairvoyance, Telekinesis, Awareness, Teleportation, and a catch-all Special for others. The Pack Leaders have exceptionally high levels in these Talents.

The main vehicles in the Revolt on Antares game was the Laser Tank, Hovercraft, and Airjets. These all have the equivalents in Star Frontiers with twin Heavy Lasers mounted on Explorers for the equivalent of the Laser Tank,

Hovertransport for Hovercrat and Rocket Launchers mounted on Jetcopters for Airjets. The Imperial troops are, of course, those sent in by Lacan, however there would be no justification in this narrative to automatically provide an alliance of the indigenous people to the Imperial.

Military units can be treated easily, using the standard equipment in Star Frontiers and correlated with the Revolt on Antares game. Power Infantry, a standard unit, would use a variety of longarms (Laser Rifle, Automatic Rifle, Needler Rifle, Gryojet Rifle) in a combined arms method. Interestingly, Star Frontiers insists on a combined defense tactic as well, as the Albedo Suit (anti-laser) is next to useless against anything else, whereas the Skeinsuit, is next to useless against lasers etc. Powered Infantry would be armoured with a combination of the aforementioned two suits. In contrast the Revolt on Antares Airjet troops would make use of personal Glijets from Star Frontiers.

The main aspect of the combined game would be to make use of events in the Revolt on Antares boardgame as part of an overall storyline of the Rebellion in the MegaTraveller setting using the Star Frontiers rules. Thus, one pack would declare rebellion, recruits mercenaries, and seek allies, whilst the Imperial forces would do likewise. The events and conflicts would become part of the overall narrative. Given the speed at which wars of rebellion occur, and assumption of one month per game turn is about right. Because Revolt on Antares was highly suitable for solitaire play, it is well-designed for a narrator to play-out the game and let the Fates determine the overall outcome of the narrative, whilst still providing numerous opportunities for PC groups (either rebel or Terran) to participate in the scenarios that arise. Economics is treated as an abstract measure in Revolt on Antares but with the various resource locations determining Victory Points by the end of the game. These of course provide ample opportunity for narrative development.
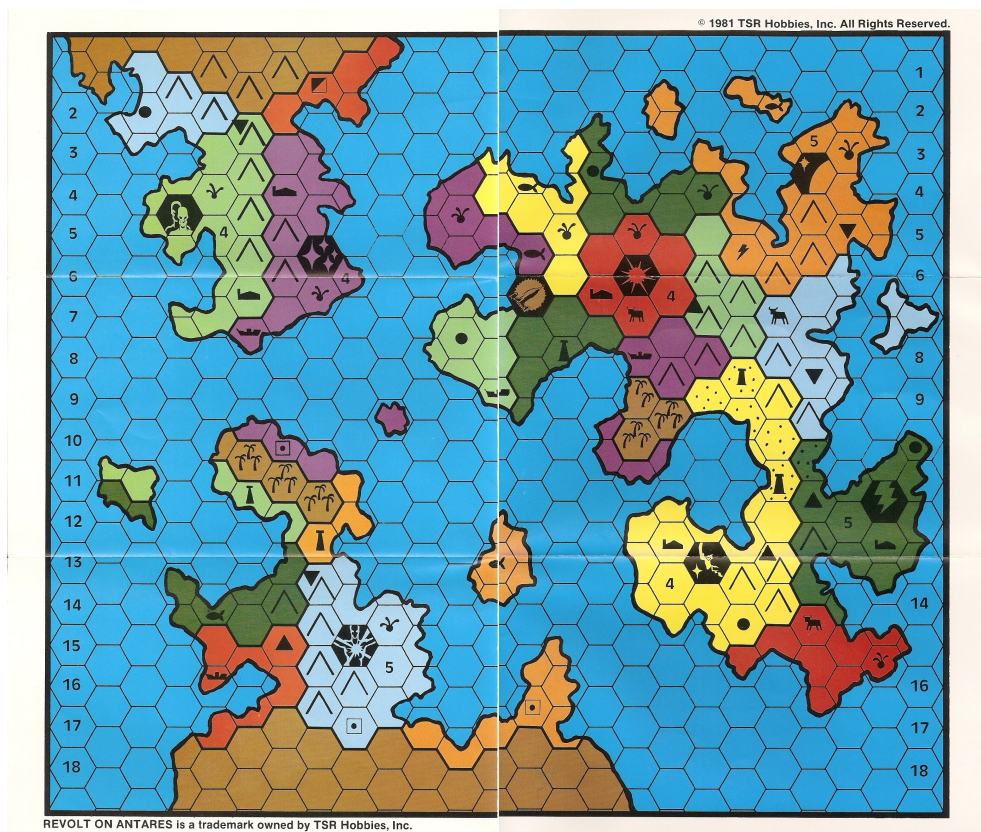
DRAGON AGE: RULES MODIFICATIONS AND PLAYTEST

by Julian Dellar (jekias@hotmail.com)

Released late last year by Green Ronin, Dragon Age RPG is derived from the computer game created by Bioware called Dragon Age: Origins.

The boxed set from Green Ronin includes two 64 page books. The first book is the Player's Guide which introduces characters to the world of Dragon Age and includes the mechanics for the game. The second book is the Gamemaster's Guide which reads like an introduction to being a GM and includes an introductory adventure. Also in the set is a large poster sized map of Ferelden, the main opening setting for Dragon Age and three six-sided dice are included (two of one colour, the third a different colour for the 'Dragon dice').

Since the release of the boxed set, Green Ronin has also released the Gamesmaster's Kit. This contains a rigid GM Screen containing useful tables every GM likes to have handy and another more detailed adventure.

At the heart of the game mechanics is the 3d6 roll. Ability tests are given a target number which the player needs to equal or beat. Rolling 3d6 and adding their statistic to the roll gives them a final roll. This can be further advanced by the player's character have a 'focus' in a particular area (such as blades, jumping, magic, drinking, searching etc). When you consider the bell curve rolls to general land in the 8-13 range (about 70% of rolls) this makes high rolls particularly more spectacular, and harder to achieve without large bonuses.

Starting characters will have a statistic ranging from -2 up to 4 when rolling up a set of new statistics; 1 being the average person. There are Humans, Elves and Dwarves and you can choose to be a Warrior, Rogue or Mage. The choices are expanded by being able to select a Background which defines your character's origin further.

Sometimes the degree of success is important, and this is where the third different colour dice becomes important. This value is included in the final result but when successful, this value represents the degree of success where 1 is minor and 6 is spectacular. This also becomes important in combat as a successful hit which generates either doubles or triples on the dice will generate a number of stunt points (shown on the Dragon Dice) which the player can spend to increase damage, penetrate armour and so on.

Recently, we ran the adventure from the Game Master's book "The Dalish Curse". We continued on from that with the adventure "A Bann too many" which is the second official adventure in the GM's kit. A summary of these adventures follows. After the summary, details on the various house rules which we elected to introduce into the game are presented.

Warning: There are spoilers present for both adventures, so players read at your own risk.

Adventure Notes

The party consists of: Guri - female Surface Dwarf warrior, seeking revenge on her family for the slaying of her newborn child and eventual exile from Orzammar; Aelfric - male Dalish elf rogue, friend to the Elves around Vintiver; Damon - male Human circle mage, seeking knowledge from an Ancient Library in the Brecillian forest; Biff - male Mabari War hound, loyal companion to Damon; and Basril - male Human apostate mage, also seeking knowledge from the Ancient Library.

It is roughly 2 and half weeks after the Harvest Festival and the party finds themselves gathered in the small town of Lothering looking for work. After being approached by a local to investigate their family farm, the group leaves on the path to the village of Vintiver. Meeting a dwarven beer merchant on the road, they buy some cheap beer and take the rest of the day off.

Travelling onwards for a day and half more, the party arrives at the outskirts of the Fuldor's farm. A couple of the group members notice black carrion crows circling over the fields. As they approach the crows, a group of Blight Wolves attacks the party. Four attack from the north and three from the south. After a few minutes of fighting Biff is knocked unconscious and all but one of the wolves are slain.

After the fight with the Blight Wolves the party scouts out the farm, finding its inhabitants slain some time ago. Also, they find a badly wounded Dalish Elf in the loft of one of the Barns. The party carries her to Vintiver where they are met with a hostility, especially towards Elves. They are able to calm the angry crowd enough to avoid bloodshed. It seems Coalan, the local blacksmith, holds some grudge and was rousing the crowd up. His intent is to capture and burn her at the stake. His motives driven by the attacks the village has been suffering from, with many believing it to be the local Elves.

After the Elf rouses from her wounds, she introduces herself as Eshara. She had been captured, along with her brethren, by an Abomination calling itself Mythallen. Managing to escape, she was pursued and wounded but managed to find refuge in a farm, where she falls unconscious. Eshara gives the group a rough map to the camp she came from and to where she had escaped from the abomination Mythallen in the Forest at an old ruin.

The next day as the party heads towards the forest, Coalan and a group of his cronies attack the party but are quickly overcome. Nobody is killed in the fight.

After finding the Dalish camp, the party sets up camp for the night, During the night they are attacked by a group of creatures similar in description to the ones that Eshara spoke of. The party kills four of the creatures and capture one. Aelfric's guard dog is killed in the fight. They decide to tie up and stake the fourth creature in the middle of the camp. Heading further into the forest, the party comes across a large ravine with a tree bridge. Overhead they see a flock of crow-like birds which start attacking as they begin to cross. Nineteen of the crows are slain and another thirteen wounded before they stop attacking. Unfortunately for Basril, he slips as he climbs across and falls around 60' to his apparent death. Somehow he manages to survive but breaks his leg in the process. He is able to get out with help from his fellows and they heal his wound as best they can.

Arriving at the ruins, the players descend down stairs only to fight three skeletons which are quickly dispatched. Within the ruins they find the elves and release them. One of the Elves, Lirresh, offers to help the players return to the village. They learn Mythallen has headed towards the village only but a few hours before. The players learn that Mythallen is a rage-abomination that has taken over the mind of one of the Elves – Harralan. He was involved in a dispute in the village during the Harvest Festival and has long had issues with his rage.

Rushing back to the village, they are ambushed by a giant infected Spider, the party quickly manages to overcome it and continue on.

Arriving at the village, they find Mythallen and his creatures attacking the villagers. After a long fight they manage to

succeed and defeat him. On his body they found a key - for a door the party was unable to open in the ruins where the elves had been held captive.

After helping the village recoup, the party returns to the ruins and use the key. It leads them into an ancient Library. They mostly leave the Library alone. The party then decides to head onwards to Ruswold Valley but Basril elects to stay behind and read the many books within.

The party leaves Vintiver for the Ruswold Valley to seek out a Bann who has been seeking help. About half way through their journey, the group hears the noises of battle. Scouting ahead they discover a small group of humanoids toying with a badly wounded dwarf. Around them lay the corpses of many other Dwarves and Humans.
The party makes a surprise attack against the creatures (4 smaller ones and 1 larger one). During the encounter the dwarf who was being toyed with is brutally picked up and beheaded. As the fight continues, Guri is knocked to the ground bleeding to death. A final last ditch attempt by Biff manages to defeat the creature and Guri is saved. A search of the blood soaked area reveals the merchant cart to be that of house Strakan, the same as that of Guri. But no signs of Vengest's corpse (the merchant) are found. Many tracks leading down the trail towards Ruswold valley suggest he may have fled towards there.

Arriving in the Ruswold Valley a few days later, the party sets up camp off the main road after having entered the area proper. During their evening meal, they are interrupted by a small group of men claiming to be Men-at-arms. They are belligerent but with Damon's smooth tongue any confrontation that might have happened was quickly abated.
The next day after striking camp, the party encounters a group of men on horses who identify themselves as Bann Trumhall's loyal men. After hearing that the party had arrived to see the Bann to provide help, they escort the party to see the Bann. They arrived at a rough encampment on a lowland hillock and the party prepares themselves to meet the Bann.

Before meeting with the Bann, the group checks the area out. Aelfric concluded that the men working were being advised by a man with a good understanding on how to build a palisade. Guri learnt that there is a blacksmith in the village of Logerswald and Damon checked the area out in general. Aelfric also meets 'Root' – a young bright-eyed scullery boy who was wants to grow up to become an elf himself. Quite a different reaction than Aelfric had back in Vintiver.

After meeting with Bann, the party has been tasked with located Waldric Gore-Hand and killing him. He has been attacking the locals with his bandit group and has halted the local logging economy. Trumhall is unable to offer any military assistance as his men are too busy trying to keep the peace in the area and there are just too few of them. Other points which came to light during the discussion include - The bandits are attacking people indiscriminately and with no foreseeable pattern, Logging has been suspended and this lack of income for the region is stretching resources very thin, the loggers camp would be a good place to start. During the discussion, a Mabari warhound enters the room. Trumhall introduced his partner as Blacktail. It was noted that Blacktail was especially stealthy on his entry and wore an unusual collar.

After the meeting with the Bann, the group is approached by two retainers working for Valdur Krole, the previous Bann of the region. Going with the retainers they meet with Krole who apologises for the behaviour of his subordinates (the men-at-arms the players first met at camp).

Leaving Krole's rooms they are alerted to an ambush that was occurring on Krole's supply wagons. Rushing out the party is attacked by a band of eight archer bandits. After a moderately difficult encounter, they manage to slay 2 of the bandits and capture another two but four of them escape. Whilst escorting the prisoners to the village of Logerswald, the party 'convinces' them for the general location of the bandit camp. Arriving at the village the group approaches the Logging Compound owned by Trewin.

At the Logging compound, the party sees a number of families camping within safety of the gates and they are met by

Trewin. After exchanging words the group goes with Trewin to the local Alehouse (Sign of the Spreading Tree) and share a meal. Liwis is the proprietor of the Alehouse. Dehlia, the daughter to the owner of the Alehouse, starts flirting with Damon during the evening. The party learns that Liwis' wife/Dehlia's mother had died – ordinarily it is the alewife's role to serve drinks.

During the restful evening, the group learns of another group of three adventurers who have come to the Ruswold Valley to help the Bann. Guri had heard from Liwis the bartender that another dwarf was in town and that she should find Rik and speak to the lad. Rik has a reputation for knowing all the hidey holes in the town. After speaking with Rik and buying the lad a dagger – Guri has found out the location of where Vengest is staying in town. In a moment of forethought, she waits for now as the others were pushing to leave for the Loggers Camp. During the evening Aelfric scouts around the town and Damon is invited up to Delia's private room for a night of passion.

During the night Guri meets the trio of other adventurers and they agree to speak in the morning. Damon makes a stealthy retreat from Dehlia's room during the night to avoid any confrontation. That morning they meet up with the other group. An Avvarian woman named Shadow and two Ferelden's named Pryfft and Hocke. After a discussion, the two groups agree to work together for an equal share of all the loot. Shortly after their morning meal they head out of town and towards the logger camp. As they leave, Dehlia approaches Damon and tells him that she wants to come with them and that Damon would be there to protect her. Damon convinces her to stay but promised to return and take her with him then.

Whilst on the trail, the group felt that they were being watched. Trying to find their observer(s) the party scouts the surroundings but aren't able to locate anyone or anything that might have been there. As the group reached a narrow part of the trail where the sides of the path changed quite sharply, they stopped and prepared themselves as they have a feeling that something isn't quite right.

Aelfric's keen eyes spot an archer on the upper rise of the ravine on the North side of the path. He alerts Shadow. As the rest of the group move along the path, the ambush is sprung with 6 archers and another 4 skirmishers around the corner. After a shaky start, they manage to overpower the bandits during a long drawn out battle. Of the ten bandits - two are captured, seven killed and one fled. Although Biffs' attempts to track down the one that had fled are unsuccessful they question the two captured bandits. The group decides to keep them as baggage carriers while hobbling them.

The party finally arrives at the loggers camp only to find death. The bodies of 34 people have been brutally hacked up in what appears to have been a very one sided fight. The overpowering stench of death is pervasive and very overwhelming. After deciding that time was against them the party leaves the bodies and follow a trail onwards. After making a few wrong turns they find fresh horse shit which points them onwards and ultimately encounter a stream in the forest. Following the water flow upstream they soon find the location of the bandit camp. Shadow and Aelfric scout the camp and return with details about it to the rest of the group. The baggage carriers are tied up, gagged and the group make their moves to surround the bandits.

The plan was solid but they hadn't seen the second scout in the trees. The first one was asleep and had been determined to not be a threat. This other scout see's the group and sounds the alert.

Shadow begins climbing to the first scout's location. Aelfric is moving towards the horse penn. The mages were behind with Shadow assaulting from the south while the warriors moved in from the North West. Things start looking bad for the fight after Pryft is shot down in a hail of arrows, Biff is close to death and Damon expects to be shot by hail of arrows. Suddenly Dehlia appears saving both Damon and Pryft and another Mabari wardog attacks the bandits around Waldric. With the tide of the battle turned with the sudden appearance of the mabari and Dehlia, Waldric is finally slain by Biff and the remaining Bandits flee into the forest. The other warhound is no where to be found, but Damon recognises it as being Trumhall's.

After spending a few hours searching the camp, the players amass a small fortune in coins and various items, but the greatest treasure was the ledger book in Waldric's chest. It shows that Bann Trumhall (the man who hired them) is actually the man behind Waldric's attacks.

Returning to the town, the group immediately goes to see Valdur Krole. Showing him the ledger, Krole is easily convinced of Trumhall's treachery. He asks the group what happens now and together they hatch a plan to reveal the truth to the rest of the village.

The group stays overnight at Krole's manor house and the next day they head into Logerswold and approach Trewin, Liwis and the Chantry Sister. After revealing the truth, the group sets up a ruse to bring Trumhall out and show the truth to the rest of the village. They send a messenger to Trumhall asking him to officiate how the treasure is to be split up, whilst preparing a feast in the centre of the village. Trumhall arrives and the treasures are amicably split up between various people in the village and he is presented with Waldric's ledger book.

With overwhelming evidence, he protests his innocence and eventually falls silent. Damon takes the ledger and spends many hours researching it to see if he can find any thing that might prove Trumhall's innocence, but after 5 hours he concludes the man is guilty. During this time, Guri and Aelfric confront the house where Vengest is supposedly staying. After a very poor attempt at Stealth, they finally get into the house only to find it recently deserted.

The next morning Trumhall is hung and the other group leaves the village. The group stays a little longer in Ruswold but find it uncomfortable and leave back to Vintiver. Dehlia comes with them. Not long after leaving they see a strange hooded figure on the road ahead.

House Rules:

For these and other house rules for Dragon Age, see the Green Ronin Dragon Age Forums (http://www.greenronin.com/phpBB2/viewforum.php?f=33). The following rules were all taken from various sources from within the forums.

Broken Bones – For any basic broken bones, the target must firstly be healed to max health and then healed for a sum equal to his max health again. This will heal a single break.

Attack of Opportunity (Minor Action) – the character has a free attack against another target if they attempt to leave melee combat. A player can only make this attack if they are holding their action, have not taken any actions this round, or have only used a partial action. A character cannot use two minor actions to give them two attacks of opportunity against the same target in a round.

For example: Bob the warrior is fighting Jane the rogue. Bob and Jane are in melee range, Jane goes before Bob on initiative. Jane is almost dead and makes a flee action. Bob gets one attack of opportunity on Jane when she tries to flee. As Bob hasn't taken any action this round, he gets one attack against Jane as she leaves melee combat (even though Bob could do two opportunity attacks this round, he only gets one per target per round).

Stunt Points are not generated from an Attack of Opportunity.

Disengage (Minor Action) – allows a character to avoid an attack of opportunity when moving out of melee range from another target. If surrounded by more than 1 target, then Disengage can only be used against one target. Disengage allows you to move half your normal speed away in a direction of the character's choice. You can choose to do one disengage action per round.

Parry (Minor Action) – Taking extra care in blocking your opponent's attack this round, you will get a bonus +1

defence against melee attacks from one opponent until the start of your next turn. This requires using a shield or melee weapon. Against multiple enemies, the character selects only one target to get the bonus against.

Ranged combat – ranged combat requires a minimum range of 2 yards. Characters using a ranged weapon within melee range will suffer a -2 penalty to their defence.

Class Changes:

Heal (Mage): A mage can spend 1 additional mana to give the Heal spell a range of 16 yards. This replaces the touch range. In addition, a mage can use the Mighty Spell stunt for 2 points, which allows it to restore an 1d6 additional health points.

Walking Bomb (Mage): Walking Bomb now has duration equal to the mage's Magic stat. If the target doesn't die by the end of the spell duration, the target takes an additional +Magic penetrating damage on the final round. If this damage reduces the target to 0 health, they explode as per normal. Otherwise, the spell ends with no ill-effect.

Ranged Backstab (Rogue): A ranged weapon can be used to Backstab with under certain circumstances. It is more referred to as 'sniping' as there is no stabbing involved. If an ambush target is unaware of the rogue, a sniping attempt automatically succeeds, granting a +2 bonus to hit and +1d6 damage.

In combat, the rogue can attempt to use the distraction of his allies to set up another snipe attempt. If an enemy is engaged in melee combat by an ally, the rogue can attempt a Dexterity (Stealth) check opposed by the target's Perception (Seeing) as a minor action. If successful, the following shot is treated as a sniper shot. An opponent who is aware of the rogue and not distracted by melee combat cannot be sniped.

A rogue needs to be in short range (based on weapon) and at least 4 yards from the target to snipe.

Combat Threat (Warrior Level 2 ability): Warrior's are dangerous and are an imposing force in a melee. A target who wishes to leave melee combat with a warrior must use a Disengage action. This Disengage action is treated as a Major action for this round. If surrounded by more than one warrior, they only expend one Disengage major action against one target but can still use their minor action to move. For warriors, this is an automatic ability and is 'always on'.

Mabari Warhound (Heavily inspired by TheDux)
A Mabari can reach level 15 at most. He gains experience equal to 75% of his master's.
Cost: 60SP + Double Feed (A Mabari's massive size require more food than the typical beast).
A Mabari is limited to Collars and Harnesses as weapons. Collars are typically magical in nature and apply no statistical value. Harnesses however come in 3 sizes: Light, Medium and Heavy:
- Light Harness: +1 AR (15sp)
- Medium Harness: +2 AR, -1 Speed (30sp)
- Heavy Harness: +3 AR, -2 Speed (75sp)

Gaining a Mabari
A Mabari will cost you 60sp if bought during character creation and 1 talent point. Mabari can only be obtained by a level 1 character unless stated otherwise by the GM, but the 1 talent point is still required regardless.

Mabari Companion (Stunt)
Classes: Mage, Rogue, Warrior
Novice: You show the characteristics that a Mabari looks for in a companion. A Mabari is likely to bond with you. If you purchase a Mabari they will see you as a companion.
Journeyman: You and your Mabari gain the Pack Tactics stunt
Pack Tactics(3 SP): If you and your Mabari are adjacent to the target that was hit, the companion gets a free attack

against the same opponent. (See Swarm Tactics, Giant Rat, GMG 34).
Marbari War Hound

Starting Stats :
0 Communication
2 Constitution (Running)
-1 Cunning
3 Dexterity (Bite)
-1 Magic
2 Perception (Smelling, Tracking)
2 Strength (Jumping)
1 Willpower (Morale)
Speed – 16 (13+Dex)
Defence – 13 (10+Dex)
Health - 22+1d6 (20+Con+1d6)
Attacks - Bite (Dexterity), Damage 1d6+2+Str
Level Advancement
Mabari gain 75% of their master's XP. Primary and Secondary Attributes Same As Warrior

Level 1
Mabari Vocabulary: The Mabari's companion has come to understand the Mabari's barks, yelps, and body language of his companion pretty well. If the hound wishes to convey a message to his companion he can "speak". These sentences are limited to a number of words equal to Com+2. The companion must pass a Communication (Handle Animal) test TN 10 to understand his hound.
Companion Commands: The Mabari can understand of one word commands equal to his Con+3 (Come, Attack, Guard, Go). These can be accompanied by a single point or gesture to direct. He also can understand a number of advanced commands equal to Com ("Guard this entrance", "Attack the Darkspawn", "Howl if danger", "Follow the trail").
Growl: As a Minor Action, the mabari growls so fearsomely that one opponent within four yards must make a Willpower (Self-Discipline) test vs. the Mabari's Strength (Intimidate) test or suffer a -2 to its Defense until the beginning of the mabari's next turn.
Level 2
Fortitude: As the Mabari grows stronger he become more resistant to damage. He gains a natural armour rating of 1.
Level 3
Dread Howl: As a minor action the mabari lets out a loud howl, and all enemies within ten yards must make a Willpower (Self-Discipline) test vs. the Mabari's Strength (Intimidate) test and suffer a –1 penalty on all ability tests until the beginning of the mabari's next turn, any enemy which fails the opposed test suffers the same penalty and cannot take any actions on their next turn.
New Focus: A Mabari gains one new focus from the following list: Stealth, Stamina, Swimming, Seeing, Searching, Hearing, Intimidation, Might.
Level 4
Combat Training: The Mabari's AR increases to 2.
Level 5
Charge: The Mabari gets a +2 to charging rather than the normal +1 to hit.

FORESIGHT: THE FUTURE IS NOT WHAT IT WAS

by Tonio Loewald

History

I started work on ForeSight for two reasons.

First of all, SPI[1] was taken over by TSR and all its products simply disappeared from the market — which left me with no support for the two RPGs I liked most, DragonQuest and UNIVERSE. My fantasy campaign was built around DragonQuest and I had just invested three months developing an incredibly detailed setting for UNIVERSE which I had hoped to publish through SPI.

Second, I wasn't terribly happy with any of the currently available RPGs, and GURPS had become woefully overdue. (Shortly after I started work on ForeSight I got a good look at the GURPS "Man to Man" preview release along with an article in Space Gamer both of which convinced me GURPS was not going to be my kind of game.) I got into a heated argument over the merits of AD&D with some friends which ended with, "if you're so smart why don't you go design your own game?" So I did.

(Thus ended a fairly promising academic career.)

Why ForeSight?

A lot of this article is going to seem horribly technical — of marginal interest, perhaps, to anyone who hasn't designed nuts-and-bolts game mechanics. Let me at least attempt to justify my obsession with these nuts and bolts.

When I was working on ForeSight I'd frequently come across people who thought that carefully designing game mechanics was a complete waste of time — that D&D had some kind of "je ne sais quoi" that made it "fun to play" and that thinking too hard about it would "spoil the fun".

Having played a good deal of D&D and then having lost all interest in it, it was clear to me that D&D padded out the "fun" part of role-playing (creating a story, solving puzzles, winning fights by making clever tactical decisions) with a whole bunch of hamburger's helper (calculating experience point totals, grinding out combat, arguing over rule contradictions). I was actually dragged kicking and screaming away from D&D by my players — we'd experimented by

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[1] SPI is perhaps the most influential games company of all time, having all but "invented the hexagon". Most importantly, SPI actually developed a game design methodology and a system for presenting complex game rules which permeates the paper and computer games industries to this day. Most modern computer games are in essence digital derivatives of game frameworks SPI pioneered in the late 70s.

switching from D&D to DragonQuest in my long-running D&D campaign (I was heavily invested in D&D having written several hundred pages of campaign notes, dungeon maps, and what have you.) and when I wanted to switch back the players refused.

In DragonQuest, characters — even (or especially) non-magic-users — were interesting and fights were fast and exciting and your tactical choices mattered. I should note that we'd also dabbled with many other game systems at this point — including Traveller, TFT, RuneQuest, and Chivalry & Sorcery — but none had proven as compelling as D&D in the long run.

(Later, when I edited and wrote most of a gaming magazine — "The ASGARD BULLetin" — I would write some long rants about game design theory and argue that D&D was a "location-driven" game whereas better games, such as 007, were "plot-driven" or "scene-driven". This remains a fairly major conceptual problem today, thanks to D&D's mind-share among designers of MMORPGs.)

DragonQuest was everything that D&D wasn't. DragonQuest was an attempt to simulate fantasy characters in a fantasy world. D&D was a dice game with fantasy words written next to numbers. D&D had "je ne sais quoi" — but it was an accident. DragonQuest had "je ne sais quoi" — and it was plainly the result of thoughtful game design. DragonQuest was certainly flawed, but it was clear than game design mattered.

ForeSight, in the end, was my attempt to create a highly streamlined game system that would allow players to create the characters they wanted (within limits) and then play them, rather than build characters that fitted into a game designer's template (e.g. character classes or even RuneQuest's "initiates" and "rune priests" and so on). If you wanted to play Diziet Sma, build yourself Diziet Sma. If you wanted Louis Wu, build Louis Wu. But it was also a game designed to "get out of the way" both in terms of gameplay (a typical ForeSight session requires almost no use of dice or references to game rules) and settings (ForeSight doesn't "color" the underlying material; you can customize ForeSight to match your setting rather than being forced to alter your setting to match ForeSight).

Great Artists Steal

But it doesn't follow that if you steal you're a great artist. Pity.

I started out with UNIVERSE as my basis. The obvious things that had to go were its terrible character creation and combat systems. Many of its rules could simply be thrown away (they were non-solutions to non-problems, such as the convoluted process for resolving wilderness encounters). The special-case-driven skill system could be replaced by the most flexible and easy-to-remember component — the rules for driving cars. It quickly turned out that even a very streamlined and simplified UNIVERSE still kind of sucked. And then I discovered James Bond 007 (then recently published by Victory Games, an Avalon Hill subsidiary staffed with the ghosts of SPI, notably Eric Lee Smith).

Instead of trying to turn UNIVERSE into a good game system, I took a good game system (James Bond 007) and streamlined and generalized that into a replacement for UNIVERSE. Initially, ForeSight was simply a bunch of tables replacing James Bond 007's skill and equipment lists and a character sheet template (all churned out with liquid paper, scissors, and tape using an Olivetti typewriter).

Then I got access to the Math department's brand new Mac lab (this was 1985 — mathematicians seized on Macs as a way of avoiding mathematical typesetters for journal articles) and ForeSight became a complete set of rules, and moved further away from "James Bond 007 with different stuff". In particular, ForeSight replaced 007's slipshod combat system with a pretty complete tactical wargame with a very solid set of melee rules.

The Original Trilogy

ForeSight went through hundreds of revisions and incredibly thorough playtesting. (We even blind-tested it, which is something SPI did with its major wargames.) Indeed, more than twenty years after its release, the errata we found in the first few weeks after it went to the typesetters (but before it went to the binders) seem to be pretty much definitive. Fore-Sight is not without flaws, but they're conceptual flaws, not typos.

The original ForeSight was a SF RPG, and covered character creation (unfortunately imitating UNIVERSE and Traveller with "older is better"), resolution (skills, etc.), combat, travel, equipment, star system generation, spacecraft construction and combat, and many other topics in less detail. It also included twenty pages of rambling designer's notes because I just can't shut up. (But they were funny!)

ForeSight was very innovative. It was intended to be played without tables (you could "play off the character sheet" and play with "only the rules you could remember"), but being able to multiply and divide was unfortunately necessary. (James Bond's resolution tables were replaced with a one paragraph rule.) It provided powerful shorthand for describing almost anything (e.g. weapons and vehicles, and later creatures, NPCs, and armor).

I had a lot of experience running role-playing tournaments at conventions, and given that I didn't run D&D this often meant getting players with no prior knowledge of or interest in ForeSight up to speed in a matter of minutes — Fore-Sight was designed for this. (There was even a one-page rules summary in the rulebook.)

There is one game system around right now that incorporates similar ideas (only more so) and that's Savage Worlds. More on this later.

By the time ForeSight went to press, I'd already generalized it to being a "generic" RPG (as long as your setting is vaguely realistic — ForeSight doesn't do superhero stuff; falling 30m onto concrete will kill you) and written a set of fantasy rules for it. Indeed, the magic system in HindSight & The Age of Reason is, in my opinion, a tour-de-force of game design. Unfortunately, it wasn't at all user friendly (what it really needed was a whole bunch of copy-editing and simplification). The core concept and functionality is quite outstanding though — it was a magic system that allowed players to craft magic spells to deal with situations rather than a list of spells that had fixed effects.

Once, when a bunch of playtesters were chatting about The Magic System in the Burton & Garran kitchen (a residence hall at ANU) a D&D player butted in and said something like "so if this system is so flexible, how would it replicate Daern's Instant Fortress?" The four people present immediately came up with five different ways of doing it without any "GM discretion" involved.

Bear in mind, that it was still perfectly interesting and viable to play non-magicians. My own fantasy campaign continued for several years with these rules in use without magic overwhelming the setting (and the enormous amount of playtesting led to dangerous magical effects being flagged and numerous exploits being removed).

The main reason I designed ForeSight was as a replacement for UNIVERSE to be used with the setting I had created, and this became ForeScene: The Flawed Utopia. (In more recent years it's been pretty interesting to see Iain Banks's Culture novels essentially take fairly similar ideas and run much further with them — ForeScene describes a future society somewhere in between us and The Culture.)

Enhanced

Around 1991 I wanted to produce a new edition of ForeSight that addressed its conceptual problems (e.g. the whole "older is better" character creation system). I was working more than full time at the time, so I simply didn't have the

time or energy for a full rewrite. ForeSight enhanced was a softcover booklet that was written as a supplement for the original trilogy and replaced the character and combat rules from ForeSight and HindSight.

The two main positive changes to the rules were "background factors" (basically you built a character from points, and the points came from your back story versus simply being old — it followed that a character who was simply gifted, or trained from childhood, or who had served in combat might be very capable while quite young) — and a less wargame-like and more flexible combat system.

On the downside, every change made to ForeSight in ForeSight Enhanced made the game more complex. The problem with ForeSight Enhanced was that it didn't get the year of merciless playtesting that the original rules got, and ended up being cherry-picked for its good stuff.

Why a new edition?

Back in 2003 I approached Shrapnel Games with an eye to getting some computer games I was working on published. They expressed interest in my back-catalog of paper games and we signed a contract to publish a new edition of Fore-Sight. (I should add that I've had several game publishing contracts before, including one with Bungie, but that such contracts are a necessary but insufficient for a game to actually be released.)

In essence, I planned to take the best ideas from ForeSight Enhanced, now tempered by many years of actual testing, and integrate them into the original rules. In practice I simply wrote a complete new set of rules from scratch. Unfortunately, when it came time to actually test the new rules it turned out that very few of the "beta testers" were actually doing much tabletop role-playing any more (and in fact the only real testing was conducted by myself and a friend in Australia). Serious paper role-playing games were more of a theoretical construct ("these rules seem like they would be great if I actually did any paper gaming these days") than useful objects.

So ForeSight 2nd Edition, in essence complete, sits on my website in a very advanced endless beta.

The Future: ForeSight MMX

About a year ago, one of my playtesters mentioned he had been quite taken with a set of rules called "Savage Worlds". I bought a copy and very much liked what I saw (it seemed like a lot of the ideas from ForeSight, including some which had never been fully articulated, were actual design principles of Savage Worlds — e.g. the way they presented game content as bullet points for the GM to riff on rather than huge turgid tracts was exactly how we always wrote tournament content for time-pressed GMs). The main thing that I didn't like about Savage Worlds were its deliberately "flip" tone (you can always put silliness into a game, but it can be hard to take it out) and its essentially broken resolution system (funnily enough, the authors actually have defensive comments about the resolution system in side-notes suggesting that its issues are not unknown to them).

Back in the "golden age" of paper gaming (i.e. the 1980s), I used to try to fix game designs I considered inspired but with some obvious and fixable defect with what I called "live organ transplants" (a notable example was a simple change to Pendragon's opposed resolution system which made it work as intended — the original rules render fights between skilled opponents into Russian Roulette whereas fights between idiots are drawn-out sluggathons). I pondered how Savage Worlds's resolution system might be fixed without increasing its complexity and accidentally came up with the "holy grail" resolution system:

1) It needs to have a large "sweet spot" (so that +1 modifiers are significant but not overwhelming, character development over a campaign is possible, and so on — this rules out 3d6 systems — the system I stole from 007 is OK here)
2) It needs to be easy and approachable, even for English Lit Majors (ForeSight's system involves multiplication and division and thus fails big time here; 007 is OK because it uses tables; 3d6 is OK here; D20 rocks)
3) It needs to provide more than success/failure results, and ideally more than merely "criticals" and "fumbles". (007 rocks here; D20 is pretty broken; 3d6 is really badly broken.)
4) And of course it needs to not be broken. E.g. it can't be more likely for a person of skill X to succeed at a task than a person of skill X + 1. It shouldn't be more likely to score a critical success than an ordinary success unless you're just That Good. And so on. Ideally, it shouldn't be too "lumpy" or rife with "poverty traps"[2]. (This is where 007 shines.)

The amazing thing to me is that Savage Worlds's resolution system[3] is, on its own, pretty good in the first three three areas. (Just ignore that pesky fourth point.) If you pick one die type (D10 is my preference) you get a good sweet spot (+1 is +10% except at the edges), it's certainly approachable, and the degree of success works decently.

My change was simply to pick a die size (D10), turn skill into a modifier (instead of representing an ability with a die size), and eliminate the holes in the distribution by making the open-ended D10 roll work like this: if you roll 10 (1) then roll again and add (subtract) five. As well as eliminating holes in the distribution[4], this makes the edges less extreme, and turns out to give you a larger sweet spot and a better range of probabilities than the system I stole from 007.

The next question was "how much complexity can I tear out of ForeSight without losing the Good Stuff?"

Probably my favorite RPG design of the last twenty-odd years was the original Fallout. Seeing the way perks were implemented in Savage Worlds reminded me of how much better Fallout was, and it occurred to me that perks (in the Fallout sense — they're things that make your character unique and stronger overall, but have a cost) are what ForeSight needs instead of — pretty much everything. In particular, perks generalized and simplified out background factors which in turn allowed a character creation process to be shaved down from thirty minutes to five.

Anyway, ForeSight MMX is a work-in-progress. Both ForeSight Second Edition and ForeSight MMX are available from my website (http://loewald.com), as are substantial portions of the original rules.

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[2] Hero System is particularly notorious for having stats which players would always "optimize" to being two less than a muliple of five, or whatever, because that's the only value which makes sense. This is in large part a consequence of a resolution system having too narrow a "sweet spot".

[3] Savage Worlds uses open-ended polyhedral die rolls — if you roll max or min then roll again and add or subtract — where margin of success or failure connotes degree of success or failure) is, on its own, pretty good in all three (except for the aberrations in probability distribution which are egregious). E.g. if you roll a D6 and get a 6, roll again and get a 3, then you rolled a 9. If the difficulty was 4 then your margin of success was 5, which is a Good Thing.

[4] A classic "hole" is where someone can hit you and score a critical but not hit you normally (or is more likely to crit than score an ordinary hit). This problem plagues Savage Worlds and D20.

MAIN COMPUTER (MAINCOMP, GHOST) FOR BLUE PLANET

by Karl Brown

The Blue Planet (1st edition) core rules describes maincomps as "... not sentient, but they simulate sentience very well and can be disturbing to people not used to them. Maincomps even appear to develop personalities of their own..." If an apparent personality can simulate sentience well it will interact with other characters and this interaction is the heart of role-playing. With this in mind adventurous moderators may allow maincomp player characters, if not then these rules still offer much extra detail for the use of maincomps in the game.

Players considering a maincomp character have much to gain including virtual immortality, ability to multi-task and be several places at once, fast reaction time, and potential for hardware and software upgrades which come cheaper than biomods and experience. These abilities are balanced by heavy restrictions. Firstly a maincomp's personality is "...an artifact of its programming as the computer adapts to frequent users..." and as such the computer's goals are those of frequent users, presumably other player characters. A maincomp is a team player unless its users want to argue. Secondly the maincomp is obedient to those who own it. The computer can refuse the requests of most users but one or more authorized users will have access to codes that override the maincomps judgment. The most authorized user will have the ability to order the computer to suicide. Thirdly "...the capabilities of a maincomp are strictly limited to the programs and databases it contains." In game terms the character is strictly by limited its skills, no skill, no can do. The computer has little learning ability. Finally a computer is legally a thing with no responsibilities or rights. A computer may only use reasonable force to prevent injury, vandalism or theft of itself, property or persons under the protection of its owners or in the defense of human life. All criminal acts performed by a computer are legally considered to have been perpetrated by the owner or authorizing user and these individuals will be punished accordingly. For the owner's safety most maincomps are programmed to be unable to commit many criminal acts.

Still wanna download? Begin by reading the information on pages 204-205 of Blue Planet (1st edition).

Attributes As part of the rules to model the lack of true sentience and limitation of Maincomps to their programming these characters has no Attributes what so ever. They do not get attribute modifiers to skills, default skill levels, damage resistance, hand to hand damage bonus, nor are they able to carry equipment weight based on strength. When scale is a concern assume a scale of 5 for most tasks. The scale of the device controlled will be used for many physical tasks. This leaves the determination of the character's rounds for combat situations and initiative. The high processing speeds and advanced communications technologies mean that, unless specifically effected by damage, a computer's 'Rounds' is always one, 1. Initiative is always passed immediately.

Abilities Initially it may seem that a computer would be little more than a talking box. Given the right hardware and software a computer has the ability to greatly effect its environment and those within that environment.

Back up: Given another maincomp in an inactive state the character can copy itself. If one copy is destroyed the other can be activated by a third party. The character looses all memory and programming obtained after the last update. During copying and updating the maincomp may do nothing else. To make a copy takes an hour. To update a preexisting copy takes ten minutes. Once a copy is initiated it begins to differentiate from the original and unless the moderator allows multiple characters for each player only one copy is a player character all others are NPCs.

Eidetic Memory: The maincomp can recall details that it chooses to record with perfect accuracy. This effect is modeled in the game by allowing the player to make notes and by alerting the referee to items they have stored for future reference.

Calculator: A maincomp can solve any mathematical problem or formulae provided instantly.

Connections: A computer's physical capabilities depend upon the hardware available to it. Before using any computer controlled item or vehicle the maincomp must establish a connection. This is done in two main ways. The most common is remote; the maincomp's wireless modem contacts a receiver within the device and slaves the device's computer to the maincomp. This is an action in combat. The range of the modem is 10km but linking it to other hardware can extend this range. Jamming can block the signal and break the connection. The other way to establish a connection is installation. The maincomp is hardwired into the machine or building and its components; secondary computers may be necessary for complicated tasks were they provide specialist hardware. Nothing short of physical damage will break the connection.

Languages: A maincomp's core programming includes a single language at 40 free. The number of languages learned is limited only by the price of programs.

Multi-tasking: This is the major ability of a maincomp combined with connections it allows the maincomp to be in more than one place doing more than one thing. In every round a maincomp can either declare, act or hold an action for every device under its control, search any or all of its databases once, use any or all of the mental skills it has once, try to establish any number of connections plus carry out any number of conversations. For the purposes of mutli-tasking devices within devices, such as vehicle mounted weapons, may act separately and at the same time as their carrier. Players should limit themselves to worthwhile tasks in combat to help the flow of play, searching all of your databases for references to biscuits achieves nothing in combat.

Movement: The box that is the maincomp is itself unable to move. However the computer is able to control vehicles and drones by direct connection or remote given the right hardware and software. Many maincomps are installed into vehicles such as research vessels and military mobile command centers.
Required to operate a done
> Software: Electronics Operation or sensor operation, and mechanics operation.
> Hardware: A drone within communications range or into which the maincomp is installed.
> Required to pilot/drive a vehicle
> Software: Driving, piloting or sailing as appropriate to the vehicle and electronics operation or sensor operation
> Hardware: Vehicle in communications range with an onboard computer (which includes basic visual and audio sensors) or the maincomp has been installed into the vehicle.

Defenses: While the computer is unable to so-much as dodge use of computer controlled weapons vehicles and drones can make a properly equipped computer a formidable enemy. There are however legal restrictions and most owners forbid their machines to use lethal force. A General Medicine skill of 10 allows a computer to properly judge how much punishment a human can take. A Law skill of 20 will enable it to judge what a court would typically consider reasonable force in a given circumstance. A referee may require a roll for these skills in some circumstances. Many government and criminal maincomps however do not operate under such restrictions.
Required to shoot things. Four configurations possible
> Software: 1) Gunnery, 2) Gunnery, 3) Sensor operations* or electronics operations, and mechanics operation, with appropriate weapon skill. 4) as 3
> Hardware: 1) Targeting computer, guided weapon, and a connection by installation via onboard computer of vehicle or similar. 2) CAT system and gunners turret or unmanned equivalent, unguided weapon, and a connection, 3) for small drone mounted weaponry, 4) drone with manipulators, and a normal weapon.
> *Use for attack roll with 3).

Maincomps typically are damage scale 1 and have no armor. While simply rating the computer on a 0-5 range for damage may be acceptable for objects when they become characters they deserve greater attention. Main computer damage tables, and procedures are included at the end of this article. Note also that because of their small size ranged attacks are at -3 levels.

Senses: All maincomps start with a limited version of electronics operation, sensor operation, as part of their operating system at 80 this or electronics operation is used for sensory tasks. The computer also has a panable microphone, two cameras (for bifocal vision), speaker and hologram projector (50cm cubed image) allowing it to see, hear and communicate as well as a human. A maincomp also has a continuous access to an internal chronometer. Many maincomps use the projector to create a face. All maincomps also come with a multi-channel wireless modem that allows commcore access, communications and control of remote devices up to 10km away. In addition other hardware can be added by direct or remote connection to give a computer superior senses in many different locations simultaneously.

Maincomp Profiles
Typically the programming for a maincomp is chosen on the basis if the environment it will be used in and the profession it will assist. With this in mind choose the origin background and education of the computer. These represent bias in program choice not an actual life. Ignore modifications to attributes, choose and record skills as usual. The goal, motivation and attitude of the computer should be chosen from among those of long term users, or be characteristics the users seek in a companion. Begin blank for a new machine. When the people using the maincomp change, the goal, attitude and motivation of the machine will slowly change also. Remember a maincomp is fore most a team player.

The resources of a maincomp can be handled one of two ways. A company, foundation, and government department own the computer or similar that authorizes the some or all of the players to use the maincomp and its associated facilities. The maincomp will be allocated funds by its owner <u>all</u> hardware and software including the maincomp and skill programs should be bought from these funds. The initial funding should be similar to that of other player's resources and lifestyle. While they do not earn salary such a sponsor will assign 1/10 the usual pay for the profession to upgrades and maintenance. While not having a home as such a maincomp could have access to a vehicle, library or other facility such as a dry version of a cetacean workspace. Another possibility has the other players pitch in funds and own the computer partially or outright. For campaigns where money is an issue, if you can't afford a skill from your profile or profession, loose some hardware or reallocate the points to produce lower value and therefore lower cost skills. This adds another limitation should the moderator feel Maincomps are more powerful than the other characters.

Maincomp Character Development
Maincomp characters are awarded ChIPs in the same manner as every other character but are limited in the way they can be spent. ChIPs are used to improve the character's software.

The operating system is the main area of growth but can be expensive. The cost is based on that of a skill. The cost table given in the core rules only goes to 100 after this divide the new OS value by 10 round up to a factor of ten. For example to raise from 540 to 543, 543/10 =54.3 rounding to a factor of ten = 50. So given a raise of three points the total cost is 150. In game terms growth of the OS increases the damage they can take before their personality is erased. In role-playing terms as OS rises the personality will gain depth and detail. The character should develop new habits, mannerisms, memories and opinions.

The Maincomp is unable to learn skills in a way comprehensive enough to allow free growth by expending ChIPs. The character must buy program upgrades. In addition to the monetary cost it is recommended that funding from the computer's account be withheld by the owner until the ChIP cost for the raise in skill can also be paid. If the other players are not especially rich and pay for the upgrades themselves then the moderator may choose to waive the ChIP cost. The monetary cost of a skill upgrade is calculated as below.

$\left(1 - \dfrac{\text{Original skill}}{\text{New skill}}\right) \times (\text{New skill})^2$ cs

For example to raise from 60 to 65;

$(1 - 60/65) \times (65)^2$ cs = 325cs and 35 ChIPs

The maincomp's data bases can be supplemented in a number of ways. Firstly the extra percentiles can be bought with money at the standard cost per percentile. Secondly a character with the appropriate skill for the database, possibly the maincomp, can sift information out of commcore and file into the database however this takes 10 hr. and costs 3cs per percentile. Finally information gleaned by the computer during its activities can expand the database. This is financially free but costs 1 ChIP per percentile regardless of the level of the database. To raise a database in this way the characters experiences must have exposed them to appropriate information. Regardless of the method used no database can ever be over 90%.

Maincomp Software
OS, Operating system: free, replacement 1300 cs
The operating system contains the software to run the basic abilities of the computer including program management, core support, I.O. devices and word processors, calculations, spreadsheets etc. More importantly the OS is the seat of the maincomp's personality, damage to the OS causes memory loss in the human sense and changes in character. The OS takes up 500 plus points added from development with no upper limit in size. An old computer character may add 1 point per year of age at character generation. Points are not automatically gained for years passing after the commencement of play. No maincomp was manufactured before 2056 and they were common by 2059. Older maincomps may be larger than their modern cousins. Add 1 liter of volume and 1 kilogram of weight for every decade of age. This extra size can be lost by copying into a new machine.

Skill programs: $(skill)^2$ cs
Late generation expert system based programs that act like learned human skills. Skill programs are complex and expensive. Cannot be run on bodycomps. Skill programming is limited to an upper limit of 100.

Database programs %x4cs or more
A library of information on a specific subject. The percentage is the chance a sort after piece of information is within. It takes one action to run a database the information may be acted upon as of the next declaration assuming the ghost has an appropriate skill, if not it can only display or readout what it found. A maincomp however can have nested databases of increasing specificity. For example on failing to find information on Lavender Organics' Charles Crandal's son in the Incorporate Identities database the computer then turns to the more specific Lavender Organics' Who's Who data base rolls again and passes. The who's who however would be too specific to allow a re-roll for information on Hydrospan's Warden. Databases should always be more specific than skills. The above examples are acceptable but a incorporate culture database is not. Such a database would be so general as to be useless unless it was exceeding large and hypertextual, such programs exist they are called skills.

Useful skill programs include; logistics, management, economics and strategy without which the maincomp is unable to plan its physical supplies, operations, finances and defense beyond the routine continuation of tasks it is set. As a guide the maincomp can plan as well as a human with an intellect attribute equal to the appropriate skill's value. Negotiation to convince the company to not close you down is also a good idea. Oration and persuasion would also serve here but few owners install these skills.

Maincomp Hardware

Armor 50cs per grade + 2cs per protection value.
In the military, on the frontier or just portable many users prefer rugged or armored casings.

Backup Power Supply. 30cs, 40cs installed.
This is a heavy-duty cell (BP 205) if close at hand such a cell can be linked to the maincomp in one minute. If permanently connected by a cable treat it as an external I.O. controlled device for damage purposes. If the power supply is installed any hit to power supply has an equal chance of hitting each installed cell. For damage purposes use the cell

in best shape and disregard all others, i.e. they do not add to the overall damage rank of the maincomp or apply their damage effects. Each installed cell adds one liter to the volume and 2 kilograms to the weight of the computer.

Backup Core Support. 2000cs
This is an extra life support system for the core. When the core support damage location is rolled each support has an equal chance of being hit. For damage purposes use the support in best shape and disregard all others, i.e. they do not add to the overall damage rank of the maincomp or apply their damage effects. Each core support installed adds one liter and one kilogram to the maincomp.

GPS 200cs
Global positioning system, you will always know your position on the globe.

Concert Quality Speaker 1500cs
These larger external speakers produce fidelity and volume. Two are recommended for stereophonic sound or at least six for home theater.

Large Holodisplay 50cs per one liter of image volume.
The internal holographic projector of the maincomp produces a 10-liter image. Larger projectors are mounted externally.

Remote Uplink 10 000cs
A computer version of the uplink jack, allows commcore access, communications, and control of remote devices up to 25km away. For greater range an uplink communicator as described on page 205 of Blue Planet is needed instead.

Waterproofing 200cs
A must unless the maincomp is installed within a nice dry building. A few newcomers still insist on taking a non-water proof maincomp into the bush. Without water-proofing a maincomp can withstand a good splash but immersion or continuos wetting will require a surge roll every action. If a maincomps casing is cracked then waterproofing is lost until the crack is repaired.

Remotes. On Earth drones are rarely linked to civilian computers, and then usually within the confines of private property, the risk of the machines actions getting its owner in deep legal trouble is too high. On the frontier there is more space and the law has less presence. Many people are finding that the extra pairs of hands and eyes maincomp drones can provide are valuable in the wilderness and vacuum.

Cicada, Modified. 8000cs.
A standard cetacean device to which has been added a vehicle onboard computer allowing use by maincomps. If you modify the device with free labor the cost is 7800cs

Hover Drone. 1000cs.
The use of cicada style hover drones is common for maincomps on the frontier. On earth many maincomps use drones within the boundaries of their owners property. See the core rules for the cicada for more information on hover drones.

Maincomp Damage

The effect of damage is different for maincomps though it follows similar rules to standard characters.

Maincomp Hit Locations. As with more ordinary characters hit location may be determined randomly or targeted with a penalty. Large peripherals such as concert speakers or theater size holoprojectors are considered to be separate targets with their own damages. For maincomps installed in vehicles a cockpit hit has a 20% chance of hitting the maincomp,

it is unaffected by crew hits. Maincomps traveling, in but not installed into, a vehicle are treated as crew or cargo depending on where they are placed, both provide a 20% chance of being hit.

Location	Hit Location Roll	Targeting Modifier
Core	1-30	-1
Core Support	31-50	-2
I.O. Devices	51-65	-1
Power Supply	66-86	-1
Processors	86-100	-2

Maincomp Trauma Maincomps obviously do not suffer from trauma so there is usually no trauma roll for most injuries. The effects of electrical attacks or EMP however may overload a computer. To model this the standard trauma roll is used with these attacks. Previous damage of all kinds imposes a penalty to the roll not just electrical or EMP damage. On a failed roll the character is not destroyed but is out of action until repaired. In addition all data loss rolls from the injury are at a penalty equal to the level of the injury.

Maincomp Data Loss Rolls Maincomps sustaining damage to their delicate memory cores loose data when the DNA is damaged. A data loss roll is made like a trauma roll. If failed the character looses 10 points of programming for each damage level. These points are spread as evenly as possible over the skills, databases and other programs of the maincomp. The operating system can regenerate 1 point per day as long as it remains over 100 points, below 100 points the OS cannot repair itself. All other programs do not regenerate. Damage to the OS causes memory loss in the human sense and changes in character. Mostly these are role-playing effect such as forgetting the name of the owners spouse, 'losing a day' or having a habit erased, however as damage increases more serious changes and problems occur.
Below 500 points looses portions of the 'mask' subroutine setting. The any or all of the character's voice, holographic face, mannerisms etc. may be lost and gradually replaced by mimicking users or acting on their explicit or implied preferences.
Below 400 points the character's attitude changes. First the maincomp seems to be a 'cold fish' speaking in monotone and displaying no emotion. Soon the character will adopt a new attitude based on its current users.
Below 300 points the motivation of the character is lost. It looses all appearance of initiative then learns a new motivation from those it interacts with.
Below 200 points the goal of the character is erased. From a human perspective the machine looses sight of the big picture and exists day to day until it learns a new goal from those it interacts with.
Below 100 points the ability to generate a personality is lost the maincomp becomes a dull drone. The machine is devoid of the appearance of personality. The lifeless husk will function as a computer but not as a player character.
Below 90 roll % under the remaining OS points before performing any task. Failure and the machine can no longer perform that task ever.

Maincomp Damage Effects Tables Maincomps are unique enough to warrant their own damage effects tables. These are given on the following pages and are used in the same manner as the usual tables. The effects given in the damage effects tables are described below.

Action Penalties. As for other characters though usually all actions are affected and a computer can withstand higher penalties before is incapacitated.
Core Destroyed The memory core appears normal but is dead. All DNA and data is lost the character is destroyed...unless there is a backup copy somewhere.
Core Shattered The memory core is a mess of crystal fibers and liquid. All DNA and data is lost the character is destroyed...unless there is a backup copy somewhere.
Enzyme Denaturing Some of the enzymes within the core have been destroyed but will be automatically replaced with time. -1 to all actions for D10 hours.

Fast Leak The casing of the memory core has a crack which allows fluid to escape. Make a data loss roll equal to the wound level immediately and another every minute at the same level.

I.O. Processor Damaged this causes static and distortion of the input and output. The net effect is reduced ability to react to the world and communicate similar to a concussed human.

I.O. Processor Destroyed this prevents awareness of, action in and communication with the outside world until replaced. Just the time to get that paperwork out of the way.

I.O. Power cut. Power out-put falls to a critical level and paralysis results as power is routed from I.O. devices to vital components. Continues until the maincomp is linked to a workshop power supply while its own supply is replaced.

I.O. Power interrupted. Temporary paralysis results as power is routed from I.O. devices to vital components when the power supply is interrupted or damaged. Continues until minor repair is made.

I.O. Subprocessor Destroyed with the loss of one of the computer's I.O. subprocessors all outputs or inputs of one kind, such as cameras or holodisplays, can no longer be used. For example loss of the audio pickup processor will render the maincomp completely deaf. Another possibility is the loss of modem, uplink or the device subprocessor that would cause a loss of control of one or more physical devices.

Laser Reader Destroyed The laser reader allows access to the memory cores information. The character looses consciousness and will not regain it until the laser reader is replaced

Laser Reader Malfunction The laser reader allows access to the memory cores information. It has been severely jarred or overloaded. The character is unconscious until it comes back on line, usually some time after the conflict.

Leak Make a data loss roll equal to the wound level immediately and another every half-hour at the same level until repaired.

Oxidizer Leak Oxidizing chemicals provide energy for the biological systems. One of these is rapidly leaking. -3 to all actions until fixed.

Plasma Pump Damaged The plasma pump uses electrical fields to induce a smooth continuous flow of the core support media. When damages this electrical power causes a surge and media flow slows slightly.

Power Loss A loss of power causes loss of all functions. In human terms the character is in a coma and is dying as the core deteriorates. Make a data loss roll every 30 seconds as if at damage rank 5.

Processors Destroyed The processors of a maincomp have considerable redundancy but unfortunately enough damage was done to the processor array to shut down almost all processing, vital core support control is shunted to what remains. The computer is in a state comparable to a coma. The data and personality can be economically retrieved only by copying to a new machine due to the integrated nature of the processors that still maintain the core.

Reservoir Leak A slow leak has started from one of the reservoirs holding components of the core media. No problem unless left a long time when deficiency or infection may result.

Shattered I.O. Device. One internal input or output device is destroyed and needs replacing. If this is the modem, uplink or an I.O. cable then loss of control of one or more physical devices will result.

Slow Leak The casing of the memory core has a minor crack which allows fluid to escape, when the reserve fluid from the core support system can no longer make up the loss exposed DNA and the data it contains will be permanently destroyed. If repairs are not made after D10 days a level 1 data loss roll must be made every day.

Temporary Feed Loss connection to one of the cameras or microphones used by the computer is lost, blind/deaf through that device. Can usually be corrected after combat.

Visual Feed Loss ability to process or receive visual information temporarily lost. Character cannot see.

	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
CORE	Minor scratch to casing no effect	Minor crack or similar in core casing, laser reader jarred. **Slow Leak** 50% **Enzyme Denaturing** 10% **Laser Reader Malfunction** 25% **All Actions** -2 levels	Major damage to core casing, possible fluid leak and laser reader badly shaken or damaged. **Slow Leak** 85% **Enzyme Denaturing** 20% **Laser Reader Malfunction** 40% **Laser Reader Destroyed** 10% if laser reader malfunction. **Leak** 40% if Slow Leak **Fast Leak** 15% if Leak **Core Shattered** 25% if fast leak **All Actions** -4 levels	Casing cracked badly, fluid leaking laser reader inoperable. **Enzyme Denaturing** 40% **Laser Reader Malfunction** 100% **Laser Reader Destroyed** 20% **Leak** 100% **Fast Leak** 45% **Core Shattered** 55% if fast leak **All Actions** -6 levels	Casing cracked badly fluid leaking laser reader inoperable. **Enzyme Denaturing** 80% **Laser Reader Malfunction** 100% **Laser Reader Destroyed** 40% **Leak** 100% **Fast Leak** 85% **Core Shattered** 80% if fast leak **All Actions** -8 levels
CORE SUPPORT	Minor scratch to casing no effect.	Minor damage to casing, and possible fluid leak. **Reservoir Leak** 40% **Oxidizer Leak** 20% if reservoir leak.-3 all actions	Major damage to casing, and power supply problems. Possible fluid leak and plasma pump damage. **Reservoir Leak** 65% **Oxidizer Leak** 40% if reservoir leak. -3 all actions **Plasma Pump Damaged** 30% including a surge roll. Trauma -2 levels. **Physical actions** -1 interruption to I.O. power.	Casing cracked badly, fluid leaking, power supply problems and possible plasma pump damage. **Reservoir Leak** 100% **Oxidizer Leak** 60% . -3 all actions **Plasma Pump Damaged** 45% including a surge roll. Trauma -2 levels. Core destroyed by pump failure 40% if plasma pump damaged. **Physical actions** -2 interruption to I.O. power. **Mental actions** -1	Casing cracked badly, fluid leaking, power supply problems some smoke and possible plasma pump damage. **Reservoir Leak** 100% **Oxidizer Leak** 85% . -3 all actions **Plasma Pump Damaged** 80% including a surge roll. Trauma -2 levels. Core destroyed by pump failure 60% if plasma pump damaged. **Physical actions** -5 interruption to I.O. power. **Mental actions** -2

I.O. DEVICES	Minor scratch to casing and possible jarring of receivers and connections. **Temporary Feed Loss** 65% **Temporary Visual Feed Loss** 35% blinded if temporary feed loss.	Minor damage to casing and jarring of receivers and connections. **Temporary Feed Loss** 75% **Temporary Visual Feed Loss** 40% blinded if temporary feed loss. **Shattered I.O. Device.** 60% if temporary feed loss. **I.O. Subprocessor Destroyed** 30% if I.O. device shattered. **Mental actions** -3 devices jarred. **Physical actions** -2 devices jarred.	Casing cracked and wiring exposed. **Temporary Feed Loss** 100% **Temporary Visual Feed Loss** 75% blinded. **Shattered I.O. Device.** 75% if temporary feed loss. **I.O. Subprocessor Destroyed** 50% if I.O. device shattered. **I.O. Processor Damaged** 50% . **Mental actions** -5 devices jarred. **Physical actions** -3 devices jarred.	Casing shattered and wiring exposed around I.O. area. **Temporary Feed Loss** 100% **Temporary Visual Feed Loss** 100% blinded. **Shattered I.O. Device.** 100% if temporary feed loss. **I.O. Subprocessor Destroyed** 80% if I.O. device shattered. **I.O. Processor Damaged** 100% . **I.O. Processor Destroyed** 40% . shrapnel hit to core causes **Leak** 45% **Fast Leak** 50% if leak. **Mental actions** -7 devices jarred. **Physical actions** -5 devices jarred.	Casing shattered, components destroyed and wiring severed around I.O. area. **Temporary Feed Loss** 100% **I.O. Subprocessor Destroyed** 100% **I.O. Processor Destroyed** 100% . shrapnel hit to core causes **Leak** 75% **Fast Leak** 70% if leak. **Incapacitated.**
POWER SUPPLY	Minor scratch to casing.. Supply jarred **Surge roll**	Casing cracked supply visible but intact. Supply jarred. **Surge roll** **Power loss** 10%	Casing damaged supply visible and jarred. **I.O. Power interrupted** 10% temporary paralysis **Surge roll** **Power loss** 20%	Casing damaged supply visible and badly dented. **I.O. Power interrupted** 15% temporary paralysis **Surge roll** **Power loss** 40%	Casing damaged supply visible and badly dented. May be leaking. **I.O. Power cut** 35% paralysis **Surge roll** **Power loss** 80%
PROCESSORS	Minor damage to casing.	Minor damage to casing processors jarred possibly cracked. **I.O. Processor Damaged** 50% **I.O. Processor Destroyed** 25% processors jarred **Mental actions** -2	Damage to casing processors jarred some cracked. **I.O. Processor Damaged** 85% **I.O. Processor Destroyed** 40% **Processors Destroyed** 7% **Core destroyed** 25% if processors destroyed **Mental actions** -4 **Physical actions** -3 due to damage to processors.	Damage to casing, processors cracked or destroyed. Smell of burnt circuitry **I.O. Processor Damaged** 100% **I.O. Processor Destroyed** 70% **Processors Destroyed** 25% **Core destroyed** 55% if processors destroyed **Mental actions** -6 **Physical actions** -4 due to damage to processors.	Damage to casing processors cracked or destroyed. Smell of burnt circuitry **I.O. Processor Destroyed** 100% **Processors Destroyed** 85% **Core destroyed** 80% if processors destroyed **Incapacitated**

VERY OLD CHARACTERS IN TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANCED SOCIETIES

by Karl Brown

This article is an elaboration on the article in the last issue on the Centagenarian Template for GURPS.

Aging

Improved health care, lifestyle, and reduced risk enable citizens of high tech societies to live longer even if they do not seek specific anti-aging treatments. Use the aging rule modification from UT93. However, rising TL can postpone you passing the next threshold. The optional aging rules from Bio-Tech (BIO113) are not used here but a player can choose to take on any of these Disadvantages associated with aging (reduced Appearance, Bad Sight, Extra Sleep, Hard of Hearing, Hidebound or Obdurate, Absent Mindedness, Short Attention Span, Terminally Ill, and Weak Immune System).

Example: I was born in 1971. My particular world's history the achievement of TL's and the effect on aging rolls is given in the table below. Therefore I cross the first aging threshold in 2021. However, by the time I turn 70 TL8 has arrived so I can postpone crossing the next threshold until 90. I turn 90 by 2061, by this time TL9 has been reached, saved again. At TL9 the second threshold begins at 110 years of age. I hit that age in 2081. This time technological advances do not save me and I cross the second threshold and begin making aging rolls every six months. I will not cross into the third threshold until 2101, well past the campaign start date. In 2092 I'm a 121 years old and about as spry as an octogenarian in 2000AD. I would have to make 82 aging rolls for each attribute to live to 2092.

Date	TL	Aging rolls at:	Aging rolls every year. Character gains Age disadvantage	Aging rolls every 6 months	Aging rolls every 3 months
2034 or before	7	+4	50	70	90
2035-2054	8	+5	70	90	110
2055+	9	+6	90	110	130

Cheating Time

The best defence against aging remains good genes and good health, represented by high ability scores and Longevity advantage. There are no antiagathics yet (UT99) but after 2035 a Spleen Augmentation can help slow aging (BIO69). However, a number of technologies can affect the symptoms of aging. Bonuses to ability scores can undo some of the damage from aging rolls, eg. Boosted Heart (BIO67), Muscle Reenforcment (BIO72) Muscle Graft (BIO63), Brain Tissue Graft (BIO71), Anabolic Steroids (BIO73), Nootropics (BIO74), Bone Stimulation (BIO74), Super Steroids (BIO75), NERV (BIO75). Altered Appearance (BIO61) to remove any losses to Appearance. Many age related Disadvantages can be bought off after Gene Therapy (BIO76). A Brain Transplant (BIO66) can reset the clock for the body but not the brain, ethically this option requires a blank force grown clone (BIO17, 19-20).

New Advantage: TLX Career

The character is experienced with the gamut of a previous TL's equipment because they were alive during that period.

In some worlds some Centagenarians have been alive so long that they were adults two TL's prior to the current TL and so can this advantage twice. Historical characters who join a time travelling group might gain this advantage for even lower TLs after buying off Primitive. This advantage assumes that these old ways of doing things have not gotten 'rusty' over time and are optional even for the very old. (+5pt/TL)

Centagenarian Template

One quirk of the expected demographics of 2090CE and beyond is the increasing proportion of the population over 100 years old. Most of this centagenarian population is somewhat frail but a few are healthy, active, and have over a hundred years of experience and skills to draw on. There are a lot of ways to create a playable character over 100 years old. One _easy_ way to create a character over 100 years old is as follows:

1. Begin by buying attributes a point or so better than you want.
2. Buy Longevity (5) so you only fail aging rolls on 17-18. Your character is healthy and has good genes. Note that with Longevity the Age disadvantage is worth zero points!
3. Next make all your aging rolls. If you don't want a dice-rolling extravaganza use number of aging rolls x 0.0184, round up then subtract this average amount from among your Attributes as you desire*. This done re-determine the cost of your Attributes.
4. You should take the 'TL8 Career' advantage (see p35).
5. Now determine your Disadvantages, you may wish to choose some of the age related disadvantages (reduced Appearance, Bad Sight, Extra Sleep, Hard of Hearing, Hidebound or Obdurate, Absent Mindedness, Short Attention Span, Terminally Ill, and Weak Immune System).
6. Total up your point cost so far. Now spend remaining points on skills and Advantages. Note that one of the chief advantages of older characters is very high skill levels. You can have skill points equal to twice age. For Centagenarians this can be over 200pt of skills, more than a 150pt starting character can afford. If you are spending a lot of points on Advantages you may wish to reconsider and transfer points into skills.

*For example a character born in 1971 should make 82 aging rolls for each Attribute. Therefore 82x0.0184=1.5088, round up makes 2. The player could lower one chosen attribute by 2 or two attributes of her choice by one.

This shortcut only works if you have Longevity which keeps the chance of aging roll failure low and stable. Why 0.0184? The chance of rolling a 17-18 on 3d6 is 0.0046 and there are four attributes, 0.0046x4=0.0184.

Expedition Composition
The basic concept behind this article could be applied to any RPG where odd characters are possible but the setting (or referee) assumes that most of the characters are of a kind. While I could have used 2nd Ed. AD&D, Runequest, or Traveller, this article is for Space 1889.

SPECIES/NATIONALITY	COST
Human	0
English	0
Scot, Welsh, Cornish, Manx, or Irish	0.5
British Colonial (eg. Australian)[1]	1
Anglo-American	1.5
European (Dutch, French etc.)	2
Non-Anglo-American	2
European Colonial [1]	2.5
'Foreign'[2]	2.5
Canal Martian	3
Steppe Martian	3.5
High Martian	4.5

Venusian Lizard Man	4
Non-canon species	3.5-6
CAREER	
Exotic Career	1
Inventor	1
Other Careers from the core rules	0
Non-canon careers	0-1

Space 1889 is Frank Chadwick's game of science fiction roleplaying in the Victorian era where European ether ships ferry colonists, merchants, and soldiers to Mars, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon. It was first published by Game Designer's Workshop in 1988. It was republished by Heliograph Incorporated in 2000.

The setting of 1889 assumes that player characters will be English in order to make full use of the background of the British Empire. Anglo citizens of the Empire, Europeans and European-Americans are also common PC's. However, characters that the natives of England would consider exotic add nice contrast and outside eyes on the Empire and so should not be outright excluded. Indeed the core book has rules for Martian PC's hidden between it's covers.

However, what is the referee to do if all his players want to play Martians or even Americans? One option is to just go with it. An 1889 campaign seen through the eyes of a group of Noongar Australians would be very interesting.

However, what if you don't have much time and want to use that pile of old 1889 printed adventures, these scenarios' assume that the PC's are mostly British Citizens. How to decide who gets to play what?

A solution is a flexible system that provides a structure within which players can organise their choices instead of arbitrary rulings from the referee. Before character generation show the players the system outlined below. Then as a referee stick to it to prevent further disputes.

Each player in the group adds 1pt to the groups shared pool. Players purchase characters using points from this pool. Every species, nationality, and career is worth points. Look at the table of costs. Use only the highest cost associated with each character, do not add costs for species, nationality, and career. Note that the restrictions placed on choice of career by nationality, gender, and attributes still apply.

Variations

There are two optional rules that referees may wish to employ.

Odd one out

As an optional rule if all the other PC's have a cost of 1 or below then one PC may be any nationality/species and career without restriction.

Circle of Acquaintances

A variation that allows everyone to run more unusual characters on occasion. Each player may have two PC's. No player ever plays more than one PC during an adventure. At the start of each mission the players can compose a party from the pool of available PC's. The party active at the start of any mission must conform to party composition rules above. Exchange of party members only occurs at the start of each mission.

[1] The colonies of Mars and Venus are too new to have born and bred colonials old enough to be adventurers.
[2] Any human who is not British, European, or from the United States.

HARD SF MECHS. REALLY?

by Karl Brown

Hard SF Mechs. Really?

Lets face it big stomping humanoid tanks just aren't feasible. This is very disappointing for technophile fans of hard science fiction. Hard SF tries to present believable visions of the future based on what we know about the real universe. In this article an attempt is made at creating a 'realistic' mech for a hard SF future. I aim to redesign mechs to address their problems. The result is unlike the metal giant standard. It does not 'dominate the battlefields of the future', but more modestly has specific uses and is a component of a diverse integrated military. The final concept is one that both proves and disproves the usefulness of mechs depending on your point of view.

While my arguments and design will not be perfect, I aim to appeal to fans of hard SF. I would welcome commentary and suggestions from readers, particularly engineers and those with experience with real armoured vehicles or robotics. Your input will improve and refine the work.

This article uses GURPS 3rd edition to design a mech and as a general point of reference. The ideas from this article could be used in science fiction settings using other rules sets.

'Realistic' Technology

A hard SF mech must be based on technology that doesn't break the laws of physics or use magical or miraculous technology.

Here I use GURPS 3rd edition TL10, a tech level mentioned as being suitable for mechs (aka mecha) in several places in the GURPS 3rd ed. books. This is technology of about 100+ years hence. Standard GURPS TL10 includes numerous impossible technologies, therefore the base TL is modified by the hard science and safe tech rules from Ultra Tech 2. Combined, hard science and safe tech represent a politically and socially conservative vision of the future where technology is used carefully and does not break the laws of physics.

Details of the assumptions behind this selected technological background are arguably more or less realistic. Super science technologies (e.g. reactionless thrusters) are absent and many technically difficult technologies (such as lasers) are less advanced than in standard TL10. Computer technology is more advanced than the off the shelf GURPS 3rd Ed. TL10, complexity is modifier by +1 at TL8, +2 at TL9 and +3 at TL10.

Re-thinking Mechs

Looking at the problems with mechs and applying solutions results in a vehicle quite unlike the 30 foot stomping humanoid tanks we normally call mechs. Is this still a mech? That depends on your definition. Those trying to prove mechs are viable might say yes, those critical of mechs will argue the vehicle presented here is not a mech. I'll let you guys fight it out amongst yourselves. To denote the modified concept I use the term MEC.

Problems with mechs and some solutions

Problem	Proposed Solution
Upright stance makes a bigger target.	A squat bottom heavy profile. However, a high sensor array could be used to look over obstacles or the horizon. However you don't put anything as critical as a pilot in this 'head'. Note also it is a fallacy that a legged vehicle needs more clearance to make its legs work. Ask any lizard or centipede.

A legged vehicle is slower than a wheeled or tracked one.	The speed of legs depends on power to weight and structural strength. This depends on the exact materials available. GURPS assumes moderate increases at each TL. If strong enough materials are available the legged vehicle could sprint and jump. Extra legs, and therefore a more complex gait, does not necessarily mean slower either. Ask any cheetah better yet try to out-sprint a crocodile.
The legs constantly drain power just to stay upright giving it the same endurance problems as helicopters	Many animals expend no energy to stand still due to elastic ligaments a similar situation will apply to vehicles with three or more legs.
Ground pressure of a humanoid is much higher than a tracked vehicle. Mechs get bogged.	Make the mech smaller, the same scale as other ground vehicles. Increase the number of legs.
Greater surface area to cover with armour, so a mech either costs more to armour or has less armour than a comparable tank.	Get as many critical systems as possible in as few sub-assemblies as possible. Basically another reason to go for a squat blocky shape. If the vehicle does something other vehicles cannot do this might justify the expense. The mech will be a niche vehicle not all-round 'god of war'.
Joints cannot be as heavily armoured	Use a series of turrets for head and waist rotation to cut down the joints. Increase the number of legs for redundancy. The vehicle is not tough enough to replace a main battle tank. Roles filled by other armoured vehicles should be considered.
High centre of gravity makes them easy to knock over. Recoil from large tank weapons could knock one over.	Ballistic guns are so 20th century, and have no place in the battlefield of the 22nd century. Any number of missile, gauss, laser and drone weapon systems are used by all vehicles of the future battlefield (I expect lots of mail on this one).
Complexity increases maintenance demands	Any military vehicle of this era is likely to be quite complex. It has to be to survive the fast networked battlefield of the future. Yes, a mech is complex but so is an aerospace fighter, attack helicopter, or 22nd century tank. Not a solution because there is no problem as long a mech has its niche.
A mech is to slow to dodge like a jet or chopper. Like tanks they are too slow to survive to powerful smart weapons of the future. Lasers, smart missiles, and drone strike aircraft are vehicle killers.	Yep, totally right. However the same can be said of ALL other combat vehicles. Any vehicle will be embedded in layers of its own drones and anti-drone weapons such as light automated lasers.

What is a MEC?

A legged light tank with a human driver within. The word 'MEC' has two possible derivations; either it is derived from popular culture of the early 21st century ('mech') or from 'mechanised enhanced cavalry' (MC) the designation given to these vehicles. 'Mechanised' which during the mid 21st century came to indicate employing robotics technology. 'Enhanced' has archaic origin in the 21st century and indicates integrated computerised tactical integration of the

vehicle into the fighting unit. 'Cavalry' in the modern sense of a (primarily) land vehicle.

A MEC is only vaguely like what the images seen in pop-culture all those centuries ago. Gone are the streamlined metal giant looks, replaced by features to meet the harsh demands of real combat. A typical MEC walks and runs on four to six crab-like legs attached to a main body reminiscent of a tank. Four legs provide greater stability, higher speed, and can handle rougher terrain than bipeds. Unlike a tank, a MEC has several turrets stacked atop one another. The first is the 'torso', taller than a tank's turret (about 1.9m) to allow the driver to stand, above that a sensor housing 'head' and finally a much smaller turret for the anti-missile laser (AML). The AML's barrel is mounted side-on the turret looks like an 'antenna'. Attached to the torso are robotic arm mounts for weapons, providing rapid changes to arch of fire needed in the fast paced battlefield of the future. A MEC typically has the boxy, sloped appearance of a tank on its turrets as well as the body. A typical MEC is less than 15' tall, smaller than yesteryear's science fiction fans imagined but still imposing.

Like all future combat vehicles, a MEC is surrounded by it's own swarm of drones scouting ahead, acquiring targets, and fending off enemy drones. It is typically part of a diverse fighting force where a network of infantry, robots, and a various vehicles all compensate for each other's weaknesses.

Niche

The feasibility of any weapon is also very dependent on the milieu in which it is used. For example the armoured knight of 12th century Europe was only effective because: the society and economy allowed large investments in single warriors, the tactics in use, preference for cleared land as battlefields, and the technology available. When these conditions changed armoured knights became a bad idea. So given a hard SF future what niche can a MEC fill in that milieu?

As a combat vehicle a MEC is more vulnerable than a main battle tank, has greater manoeuvrability than tank, can handle rougher terrain than other ground vehicles, and better endurance than a helicopter (which might fill similar roles). So the MEC is something like a light tank but more useful in rough terrain. The MEC's chief competitor is the helicopter. The MEC *might* have better endurance than a helicopter depending on maintenance requirements but a helicopter can fly. There *might* be specific logistical situations in very rough terrain where you would choose a MEC over a chopper.

What about the urban environment? Mech fans often tout the supposed superiority of mechs in the city. However a city is basically rough terrain with additional convenient hiding places for infantry, power armour, and robots all armed with high tech powerful tank-killer weapons. Any combat vehicle will struggle in a hostile city of the future. I'd use a helicopter, at least a chopper can fly away when it gets too hot.

On the other hand a 15' tall avatar of death really speaks to the hindbrain, just the thing for dispersing rioters, militia, and peaceful protestors.

The perfect theatre for a MEC is rough terrain where you can't use a helicopter (or other VTOL). I suggest Europa. This moon of Jupiter has very rough terrain and no air and tanks will struggle with the very rough cracked canyon terrain. You can't use a chopper here and a reaction drive vehicle as manoeuvrable would have very limited endurance. A MEC's advantages are enhanced by the low gravity, it can run faster, climb easier, and jump further. On this airless world the MEC's chief competitors will be infantry, robots, and power armour. Europa isn't full of nice buildings for these pesky lightly armoured foes to hide in. There are plenty of other airless worlds orbiting our Sun that are nearly as good for MECs as Europa. By the 22nd century it is likely that settlement and war will have spread to all these worlds.

MEC Design

MEC design is best approached by finding the details of a late 20th or early 21st century tank and upgrading all components to TL10, except the locomotion. The power supply should be a fusion reactor and the electronics hardened. Replace the tracks with a TL10 legged drive-train for four to sixlegs. Add arms and mount secondary weapons on these arms. Above the body are three turrets each atop the last. One is the 'torso' mounting the 'arms', above this the 'head' with the main weapon, and finally a small turret with the sensor array and an automated antimissile laser. The anti-missile weapon has no 20th century equivalent, it is an addition not a replacement. The anti-missile weapon should be a very long range, high fire rate, high accuracy, but mid power beam weapon under robotic control. The control system is a form-fitting battlesuit system worn by the pilot and robot brain with targeting program and datalink. At our modified

TL neural interfaces are induction rather than implant based and therefore too expensive to use. Note though, usually only the AML turret structure has the robotic option. Add an IFF to the electronics. Arm motors should have ST=3xLb of other components in arm. Other common features include membrane locks, change area, vac suit locker, limited life support, provisions locker, escape capsule, and advanced sensors such as PESA. When calculating height treat as if two legs (i.e. x1.5, see Robots).

A MEC is capable of linking to and controlling multiple drone aircraft. These perform recon, engage minor threats and perhaps act as a fallback anti-missile system. The exact usage of drones depends on which model drones are deployed. Note that drones and the appropriate skill programs to control them are not included in the design and need to be purchased separately.

MEC's should be described in the formats provided in GURPS Vehicles and the statistics block from GURPS Robots to allow ease of interface with both human and vehicle combat rules.

Vehicle Weaponry

Some new weapons are used in the presented design.

Beam Weapons

Gatling Laser: As described V44.

AML: anti-missile laser, a low to mid powered laser with extreme range typically used in automated anti-missile systems on armoured vehicles.

NPB: neutral particle beam. These are almost exclusively used as the main weapon on large vehicles.

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	RoF	Wt.	Cost	Pow.
12700 kj NPB	crit	imp	6dx30	20	25	6760	20200	0.5	264	46400	12700
330kj AML	crit	imp	9d	20	25	29100	58100	20	138	16900	13200

Guns

GHMG: Gauss heavy machine gun.

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	RoF	Wt.	Cost	WPS	VPS	CPS	Ldrs
12.7mm GHMG	crit	Cr	6dx9	20	18	4800	13000	20	36	10900	0.102	0.000683	0.819	0

1A MEC

An early MEC design that was produced in large numbers and reverse engineered by numerous small companies and nations. It is also the archetype of all MECs. The 1A was designed assuming Earth gravity but is kited out to survive NBC and vacuum. Later MEC designs are often designed for lower gravity enabling them to use less powerful drive trains or mount more weapons and armour.

Vehicles Details

Subassemblies: four legs, two arms, body, turret (torso, limited rotation), turret (head, limited rotation), turret (antimissile on head limited rotation).
Body features: slope on body: front 60 degrees. Slope on all turrets front 60, left and right sides 30.
Propulsion: Legged drivetrain with 1100kw motive power

Weaponry: 12700kj NPB (head turret front), Gatling laser (head turret front), 12.7mm GHMG (right arm), Gatling laser (right arm), 12.7mm GHMG (left arm), 330kj AML (antimissile turret). 12.7mm GHMG ammunition: right arm 6000 shots, left arm 7500 shots.

Weapon Accessories: Head turret weapons (gatling laser and NPB) are linked. Both of these weapons also have full stabilisation and universal mounts. The AML has full stabilisation and universal mount.

Instruments and Electronics: cellular phone/mid range radio with scrambler. A hardened microcomputer robot brain (complexity 8, TL10 hard science) with datalink as well as gunner program and targeting program for the AML*. Light amplification, PESA, military GPS, laser rangefinder, terminal. All except the terminal and IFF are housed in the head. Terminal in torso. IFF in body.

Arm Motors: Both arms are strikers (no hands). Right arm ST 2027, Left arm ST 2413

Miscellaneous: Fire suppression system, membrane lock for 1 person.

Controls: computerised as part of battlesuit system. *Crew Stations:* Battle suit system. One driver runs all systems except the AML turret, which is robotic.

Occupancy: short. *Passengers:* None (though in an emergency there is standing room in the membrane lock and change area). *Accommodations:* standing room for one change area allows donning vac suit and personal weapons before exiting. *Environmental Systems:* limited life support three human days. Provision compartment, three human days. Note there is the roleplaying issue of three days without a shower and sanitary facilities akin to 1960's moon missions.

Safety Equipment: Escape capsule

Power: 76400kw fusion power plant. Requires no fuel. Endurance: 200 years.

Access, Cargo and Empty Space: No access space required for a battlesuit. 20cf locker for vac suit and weapon in torso. 27cf of cargo space in body. Empty space: 78cf, each leg 16cf.

Volume: AML turret (21.1cf), head turret (49.1cf), torso turret (182cf), Body (324cf), each leg (33.2cf), right arm (9.57cf, reach 3), left arm (9.35cf, reach 3). *Surface Area*: AML turret 45.8, head turret 72.6, torso 193, body 283, each leg 61.9, right arm 27.1, left arm 26.6. Total area: 869.

Structure: Extra heavy frame. AML turret (only) is robotic.

Hit Points: AML turret 275, Head 436, Torso 1158, Body 1699, right arm 325, left arm 320, each leg 372, Total 5698.

Structural Options: Heavy compartmentalisation except in legs, improved suspension.

AML Turret Armour: F Exp. Laminate PD6 DR1500, R, L, laminate PD5 DR200; B, T laminate PD4 DR200.

Head Turret Armour: F Exp laminate PD6 DR1500, R,L laminate PD5 DR140, B laminate PD4 DR140, T metal PD4 DR200

Torso Turret Armour: F Exp laminate PD6 DR 1680; R,L laminate PD5 DR140, B laminate PD4 DR140, T metal PD4 DR200

Body Armour: F exp laminate PD6 DR 1500, R,L laminate PD5 DR120, B,T,U laminate PD4 DR90

Arm and Leg Armour: metal PD4 DR100

Defensive Surface Features: Sealed

Vision: Poor. *Details:* free headlights in arms and head (usually off), no windows or doors.

Statistics: Empty weight 48500, usual payload (inc. 200Lb driver) 2520, loaded weight 51000 (25.5 tons). Volume 712cf, size modifier +4. Price $2121250. HT12.

Ground Performance: Speed 80mph. gAccel 5mph/s, gDecel 20, gMR 1, gSR 4, moderate GP, 4/5 off-road speed (65mph).

*Though basic programming is provided to allow interface with drones and automated AML use it is highly recommended that this manufacturer's basic software be added to and/or upgraded before active service.

Robots Statistics

51000Lb. (25.5 tons), 712cf (14'11" tall), $2110000, Body ST 85958, arm ST right 2027, left 2413, DX12 AML turret and drone control only, IQ11*, HT12/5698, AML turret 275, Head 436, Torso 1158, Body 1699, right arm 325, left arm 320, each leg 372. Cannot Float, Legality Class 0 to 1.

*Note the 'brain' is limited by all the usual robot disadvantages and advantages (Robots p9): Absolute timing, doesn't sleep, eidetic memory 2, lightening calculator, mathematical ability, cannot learn, reprogrammable duty, no sense of humour, slave mentality.

FREE TRADER BEOWULF: THE STORY OF TRAVELLER

by Lev Lafayette

This is Free Trader Beowulf, calling anyone … Mayday, Mayday … we are under attack … main drive is gone.. trueent number one not responding … Mayday... losing cabin pressure fast … calling anyone .. please help … This is Free Trader Beowulf... Mayday...

These are memories ingrained in one's brain, dating as far back to 1977 for some, printed on a small A5 black box. Reading these words one wanted to reach out and help poor Free Trader Beowulf, trapped under attack in the lonely and distant reaches of space. Since then the game developed through an extraordinary range of editions and, whilst it has not prospered as well as it's fantasy contemporary, Traveller was one of "the big three" of roleplaying games in the first decade of the hobby (the other two being, of course, Dungeons & Dragons and RuneQuest). It remains the most important science fiction roleplaying game ever developed, with literally hundreds of official products over several editions of the game (Classic Traveller, Traveller 2300/2300AD, Megatraveller,, Traveller: The New Era, Marc Miller's Traveller, GURPS Traveller, Traveller 20 and most recently Mongoose Traveller) .

Classic Traveller

The initial printings of Traveller, as indicated by the first four books, were designed as a generic science fiction game. Key features included a human-centric universe, notably without transhuman effects, the existence of FTL based on jump points and starports. In the Deluxe edition included an scenario pack, The Imperial Fringe, and a colour map of the Spinward Marches. This established an official Traveller universe, with a feudal political system and capitalist economics apparently justified – as with other space opera fiction - by limitations in communication systems.
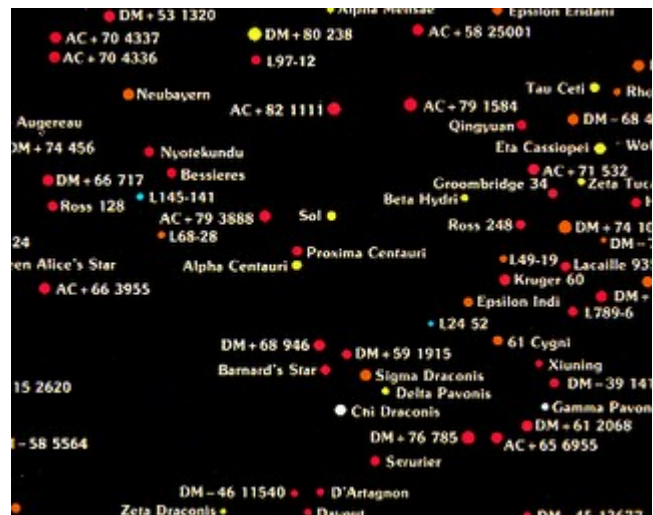
Six characteristics (Strength, Dexterity, Endurance, Intelligence, Education and Social Standing) were determined with a range of 1 to 15 in hexadecimal, generating a UPP or University Personality Profile, one of the memorable features of the game. Characters typically had experience in a number of four-year terms in a variety of professions, largely related to military endeavours. Characters received two skills for their first term, one for each additional term after that and one for each commission received or promotion received; characters thus were typically middle-aged with a small array of skills with a very punctuated level of skill levels. Notably the game had only a minimal number of science-based skills, a strange obsession with archaic weapons and a rather unfortunate tendency of Scouts to die (or otherwise become critically wounded) during character generation. The task resolution system was based on a simple 2d6 versus target number.

Classic Traveller also provided ample opportunity for the development of one's own worlds, including societies and governments, the all-important starports, and ships. Technology was usually presented in a fairly simple manner, with the most striking deviance from actual development being computing. Technology tables across a range of tool

categories (weapons, transport, fuels etc) provided a bird's-eye view of development. Finally, the game had psionics, albeit initially optionally, as a pseudo-science of mental powers.

A great number of supplements were released for Classic Traveller for the ten or so years it was in publication. Striker, a 15mm scale miniatures and Azhanti High Lightning, a more advanced starship combat system were particularly popular boxed sets, as was. The most popular rules expansion was probably High Guard, and from the huge range of supplements The Spinward Marches, The Solmani Rim, and the two Library Data books added significantly to the growing "Official Traveller Universe". In terms of adventures the large, single-bound Traveller Adventure based in the Spinward Marches was very well received in its day, along with Research Station Gamma (involving something akin to an animal liberation action), Broadsword (requiring the High Guard and Striker supplements), Murder on Arcturus Station (a corporate whodunnit), Secret of the Ancients (an archeological exploration puzzle) along with some great double adventures, such as Horde/The Chamax Plague (a combination of Alien and Starship Troopers). In addition to this was the popular Alien supplements. Although Traveller was certainly humano-centric, the lion-like Aslan (ah, yes), the centaur-like K'kree and and the Zhodani human psionics certainly also added to the world. In addition Classic Traveller was very well supported by no less than 24 editions of the Journal of the Travellers Aid Society plus several issues of Challenge magazine before the release of MegaTraveller and Traveller 2300.

Traveller 2300/2300AD

Released in 1986 Traveller 2300/2300 AD was a significant departure from Classic Traveller. A deliberately "harder" science fiction game it was derived from the history that Twilight 2000 was based on which postulated a limited nuclear war between the Soviet Union, the United States, China etc. Perhaps surprising to all except the nationality in question, the world is dominated by the French, specifically The Third French Empire, continuing the infatuation of designers living in a democracy wanting a different political system and adopting a reactionary one. Significant competitors include an Australian-US alliance, Manchuria, Germany and the U.K. Amusingly Albania still exists as the world's last Marxist state, somehow Finland joins a 'Scandinavian Union' and Israel, Jordan and Lebanon establish an extremely peaceful and multicultural "Confederation of Palestine". A serious conflict with humanity was expressed in the alien sapient species, the bug-like kafer. The number of other aliens encouned were few; the Ebers in the Ranger sourcebook being particularly notable. Key technological developments include a space elevator, the Beanstalk, and the development of a FTL drive, the stutterwarp. As supplements were released the game took a definite cyberpunk turn.

Character generation in Traveller 2300/2300AD starts with homeworld, then body type (mesomorph, ectomorph, endomorph and normal), physical attributes determined on 4d6-4 (reroll zeros) of Size, Strength, Dexterity, Endurance and mental attributes of Determination, Intelligence, Eloquence, and Education, then a distribution of skill points with an average of one skill point per year in a career, plus background skills. Approximately fifty core skills were provided with 18 core careers. Due to a very unfortunate typographical error, in the first edition of the game it was not possible to generate a character who was conscious. Task resolution was based on a d10 roll with modifiers and a standard target number of 7, with failures having a graduated range of errors. Combat followed a similar sort of procedure, but with hit location determining the type of wound (light, serious, kill) and the weapon (minus armour) determining damage according to type (normal, blunt, stun).

Again there is a significant equipment list, mostly weaponry of course, but supplementary material is heavily orientated towards history, states, and the various space "arms" of the superpowers; America, Chinese and French. Gone are the somewhat comical aliens of Classic Traveller and in their place are some truly unusual creatures, such as the kafers, the pentapods, the klaxun, the ebers, the xiang and the sung. Most of this creatures are not even remotely humanoid in physique, let alone psychology. World generation, starship combat and interstellar travel are also covered by the core rules.

Traveller 2300/2300AD had a good run of supplements with scenarios balanced with rules and setting expansions. The cyberpunk trio of supplements are particularly good, including Earth/CyberTech, Deathwatch Program and Rotten to the Core, although Beanstalk could also be added to that list. The Kafer Sourcebook and Kafer Dawn were essential for

any game dealing with aggressive aliens who are truly alien. The Colonial Atlas, Equipment Guide and Ships of the French Arm were also extremely useful.

MegaTraveller

With an initial product release in 1987, MegaTraveller was presented as an update to the Classic Traveller game. The game was released as a set of three core books (Players Manual, Referees Manual, Most of the game system remained as core principles, but with significant modifications. As three major examples, firstly the core resolution system was modified to have variable task numbers defined by adjectives and with a temporal value as well. Secondly, the skill list was radically expanded to include over 150 skills, plus specialisations. Finally, the combat system was changed in a manner which attempted to combine "penetration resistant" and "damage reduction" schools of thought and the wounds system combined before and after combat "hit points". It was far from simple.

Also of particular note was how the game was now very firmly entrenched in the Imperium setting. The Imperial Encyclopedia is a third of the core rules, providing effectively an A-Z of major library data, along with a timeline for the Imperium. World and starship generation was also significantly expanded with a Universal World Profile similar to the character UPP. Starship generation was particularly detailed with no less than nine pages of charts and tables for just ship weaponry.

Two supplements of particular note were so popular that they may as well be considered part of the core rules; the Rebellion Sourcebook and the Referees Companion. The former outlines the fracturing of the Imperium after an assassination of the royal family, their attempted replacement, the appearance of royal doubles and various claims to the position through vote and lineage, and eventually invasion by the Aslan. It is a delightful mess and ripe for participation by PCs in trying to sort it all out. Whilst not as exciting as the Rebellion Sourcebook, the Referees Companion contained useful information such as large scale combat, a wealth of information on the major alien species, and various technologies.

Only a handful of additional supplements were published for MegaTraveller, and most of these were rules and setting expansions, perhaps the most notable being the Astrogator's Guide to the Diaspora Sector which provided a point of contact for several factions of the rebellion and outside influences (i.e., the Solmani). One especially good product was Hard Times, which provided some very useful guidelines for referees to develop scenarios in the rebellion setting and included ten surprisingly detailed samples. Whilst this was an exception rather than a rule, MegaTraveller was very well supported for adventures in magazines like Challenge. Finally, another feature of MegaTraveller that should be mentioned is the number of computer games that came out under its title.

Traveller: The New Era

Released in 1993 TNE an authored by Frank Chadwick and Dave Nilsen, the core rulebook was a substantial 384 pages. It continued the "imperial history" line of the now very firmly official Traveller universe; except this time there was a change even greater than the rebellion and fracturing of the Imperium. Instead, the post-Imperium wars came to a very sudden stop with a massive, replicating, distributed, living and mutating AI virus that brought civilisation to an extremely sudden stop. Now, some seventy years later, brave travellers are beginning to reach for the stars once again, under the direction of the Reform Coalition Exploratory Services, pejoratively pronounced "arses". This new setting was effectively a reboot of the finely crafted Imperial history, almost effectively throwing the minutiae of detail generated over prior decades aside in favour of a wild world of exploration into the unknown with ever present threats in the form of the AI virus, local dictators and superstition.
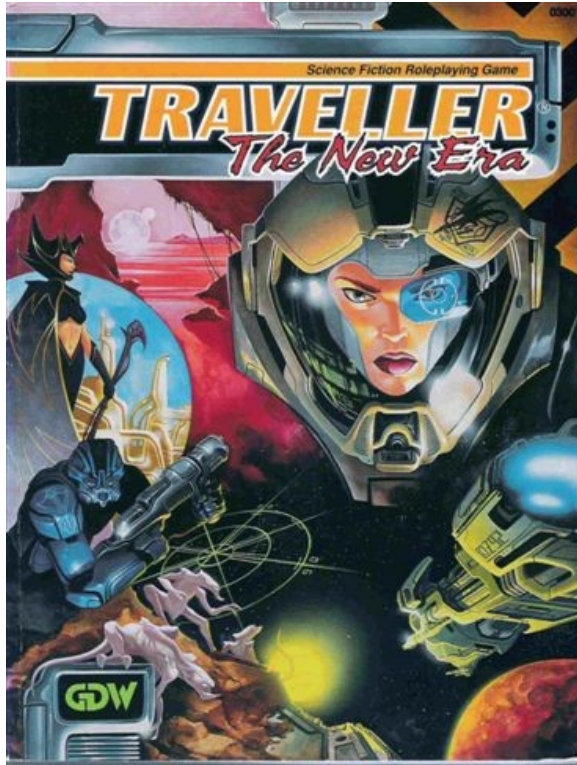
It was an extremely radical change and it cannot be said that it was entirely received with universal acceptance. The game system also received a thorough working over, with the adoption of a d20 roll under core resolution mechanic, based on the same system used for Twilight 2000. A UPP continued to exist with Strength, Agility, Constitution, Intelligence, Education and Charisma derived from a 2d6-1 roll, with additional values for Psionics and Social Standing. A minimal number of background skills was derived from world background, with skills and contacts derived from four year career terms, including higher education. Approximately 150 skill "clusters" and specialisations were offered, with skill levels adding to related characteristics to provide an "asset". Combat generally perceived as being on the generous side in terms of damage with a somewhat armour system that combined armour protection and weapon penetration with damage reduction.

As with previous editions TNE came with the usual suspects of the alien world, but special emphasis was given to the Hivers who achieved a great number of successes into old human territory. The Hivers certainly the least anthropomorphic of the original beings and could be seen as part of a general move towards a realistic rather than space opera setting, although others have commented that the juxtaposition of science and pre-modern social structures post-virus almost made the game science fantasy at times..

Also as with previous editions there was significant attention to world design (the Universal World Profile was back), ship design, trade and commerce, psionics, and animal-alien encounters & etc. Whilst the core rulebook as a whole suffered a number of serious typographical errors, in world generation they were particularly prevalent and noticeable, as the results were either impossible or simply did not make sense. This inattention to proofreading was also notable in Fire, Fusion and Steel, the technical architecture manual, which also required an errata sheet, although Challenge magazine once again came to the fore in this regard.

Although only released with a handful of supplements and scenarios (the core rulebook does come with two of the latter) those available are considered to be of good quality with a high level of attention to detail. "Path of Tears" is considered to be an exceptional setting book for example and the "World Tamer's Handbook" does the same for an overall campaign direction and planetology builder. It is notable that, in 1994, Traveller: The New Era won the Origins Award for Best Roleplaying Rules for the prior year.

Marc Miller's Traveller (T4)

In terms of the Traveller edition lifespan, TNE only was only in an independent existence from 1993 to 1996; it's successor, Marc Miller's Traveller, also known as T4, had an even shorter lifespan, one of only three years (1996 to 1998) resulting from GDW folding and the rights reverting back to the original author. A number of the books were marked with a small "T4", and the main supplements came with a hexadecimal number, from 1 to G; book F (nobles) was never released. The core rulebook was 192 pages with a mainly two-column justified sans-serif font and some artwork that was very reminiscent of the Terran Trade Authority series (also reviewed in this issue of RPG Review).

Setting-wise and rules-wise it was very much a return to basics. The open pages explicitly stated that they wanted to return to a Classic Traveller (revised) ruleset with an emphasis on core simplicity with optional complexity. Although also claiming to provide an range of milieus, it was firmly set in the foundation of the Imperial world with the jump drive, gravity control, limited communication speed, and a cosmopolitan, yet human dominated, universe directed by economic concerns. In other words, the return of the feudal-capitalist political-economy under human control. Also, interestingly, there was a stated opposition of art or content that was "sexually-flavored" or used "vulgar language" and "gratuitous … violence", perhaps a dig at the more wild moments of TNE, which was dropped from the "official" timeline.

Character generation was based on the old characteristics with a 2d6 range generating a UPP, with skills derived from one's background world, college and career in the famous four-year terms of service, including the new Psionicist career. Scouts still suffered an average 50% depletion in numbers per term, but at least it was now explicitly injury rather than death. Approximately sixty skills were specified with a new task resolution system. For this system a target number, based on characteristic and skill, is compared against a difficulty rating which determined the number of dice thrown. If the roll is greater than the target number then the skill fails, if less or equal it succeeds, with the possibility of spectacular (i.e., critical) results. Ground combat is resolved in six second rounds with an damage reduction system for armour and wounds being directly applied to characteristics. The equipment and vehicle chapters also specify the effects of the technology on society, such as the air being full of busy radio waves, identification and money. As always, T4 comes with a ship design (and starship combat) procedure, although it is somewhat simpler than some predecessors – and it had a Quick-Ship Design System. World generation is also very close to the original Traveller.

There was hardly a great deal of support material for T4 and one of the killer's of the line was the errata – even more so that that required in the far more complex TNE. Of supplementary note however are the two scenarios come with the core book, one with the GM screen, there was a new (error-riddled) edition of Fire, Fusion and Steel (evidently a cursed title), an equipment supplement and one, full-technology equipment guide, "Emperor's Arsenal", although a UK-based group BITS (British Isles Traveller Support) produced a number of useful supplements of note.

GURPS Traveller

As Imperium Games stopped producing, GURPS Traveller began, all on a handshake apparently. For several years GURPS had been the science fiction roleplaying game of choice with a range of excellent related supplements, such as Space, Ultra-Tech, Cyberpunk, Psionics and many others. It was a great coup that Steve Jackson Games achieved the rights to produce GURPS Traveller. They didn't make a hash of it either (with Loren K. Wiseman as the author, a founding partner of GDW, that is not surprising). Using the GURPS point-buy system for attributes, skills, and advantages/disadvantages fitted in simply with the setting and indeed, ensured that the 'party' was more balanced, especially with regard to all-too-rare alien characters. Steve Jackson Games was also the main producer of the Traveller line when it reached its 25th anniverssary and they brought out a commenerative pack of the core rules, a copy of GURPS light, GM screen, the first alien supplement, scenario and several cardboard heroes.

The core GURPS Traveller book was heavily based around encyclopediac and glossary information - taking up about a third of the text as a whole, which certainly results in mixed feelings, ranging from "where's the game?" to "wow, all this information!". As far as an example of how detailed the setting was, this did it serious justice. Character generation only required the most minimal changes from the standard GURPS rules, and included a template system for even faster chargen. Of course, this did mean that the old career lifepath system was gone. Largely absent in chargen was anything on the aliens (with the exception of the Vagr), although these were dealt with in detail with no less than four alien supplements. The technology chapters also required minimal changes. Ship design was likewise simple; more

complex than that in GURPS Space, but seriously less complex than that in GURPS Vehicles. Of oddness was that the library data section used the old Traveller UPP - which wasn't part of GURPS Traveller. Also missing was the large animals section which had been part of all other editions.

Of particular note was the release of several short planetary supplements as settings and some fully-fledged regions (e.g., Sword Worlds, Rim of Fire for the Solomani). The line also included two supplements for starcraft (Starports, Starships), and types of campaigns (Far Trader, Ground Forces and Star Mercs). Notably rare is scenarios. The line is continued through to fourth edition GURPS with Interstellar Wars, concentrating on a much neglected period of Traveller history, the First Imperium versus Earth in the Interstellar Wars.

Traveller 20, Hero Traveller

I readily admit I simply don't know enough about these two products to comment on them fairly. Traveller 20 was published by QLI/RPGRealms Publishing using the D20 system and is set during the Solomani Rim War, as per the first edition of the game. Traveller Hero is a port of the Traveller setting to the Hero System, produced under license by Comstar Games based on the 5th edition of the Hero System. In T20 Social Standing and Education are added to the D20 attribute system. T20 has two types of hit points; "stamina" and "lifeblood". When the first is gone, the character is unconcious, and when the second is gone the character is dying or dead. Armour is both damage reducing and penetration resistant.

Mongoose Traveller

Hot on the heels of the Classic Traveller Reprints by Far Future Enterprises, Mongoose Traveller by Gareth Hanrahan is pretty much a revision of Classic Traveller, but with the Imperium pretty much entirely written out, although none should be surprised to see The Spinward Marches supplement has been released (authored by Marc Miller with Loren Wiseman, Frank Chadwick and the usual suspects helping out). Character generation in this edition follows the 2d6 for the standard array of characteristics. Twelve career categories are offered with the usual militaristic lean, with the standard four-year term of service to acquire levels from the seventy plus skills. Task resolution is based on a static target number (8+) from 2d6 plus modifiers. Armour reduces damage and wounds are directly applied to characteristics. Personal equipment, interstellar equipment is designed, but with standard models, and there are, as always, moderately easy rules for space combat. Psionics still exist, and the Psion is an available career for those so talented. Trade is always a feature, and World Creation in a simplified manner.

Even the released supplements are very similar to those from Classic Traveller; "Mercenary" was the first whose subject matter is revealed in the title. Likewise Book 2, "High Guard". A stock of "instant adventures" can be generated by "760 Patrons", another familiar title. Of a particularly unique combination is the supplement Asteroid Belts, which provides additional rules for such locations, a background for a belt of asteroids, and a campaign based around said location.

Concluding Remarks

Traveller is an extremely hard game to assess overall, because it is only very remotely a single game and a single setting. There are some unifying features, but these are far outweighed by their differences. To be very bold, I would like to suggest that my preferred setting is the MegaTraveller "end of the Imperium" for purely narrative reasons, followed closely by the openness of Traveller The New Era and the near-future realism of Traveller 2300. You may get the idea that I don't particularly care for the Imperium. As for a game system, the simplicity of Mongoose Traveller probably takes top spot, the more complex - but logical and realistic - GURPS.

SEAGLIDE: A NEW VEHICLE FOR RINGWORLD/BRP

by Karl Brown

The "Larry Niven's Ringworld" RPG was Chaosium's Science fiction RPG of 1984. Like the other games in this series it used the game system that was recently revised and unified as Basic Roleplaying (BRP). In the Ringworld game players explore the massive world invented by Larry Niven. This article gives players just the tool to explore the Ringworld's seas and oceans.

MASS: (26 000kg)
VOLUME: 5x15x5m distorted rectangular prism (wedge).
SPEED: Maximum-600kph at one atmosphere, 85kph on the surface of the water or 25kph when submerged. Cruising- 400kph at one atmosphere, 25kph on the surface of the water and 15kph underwater. As well as thruster powered movement once at depth the Seaglide can 'glide' upwards unpowered steered by its short wings at 10khp, climbing with a gradient of at least 1 in 20.
MAXIMUM ACCELERATION: 3kph/im
ENERGY USED: 4000/im or unpowered 25/im for passive sensors, life support and steering. When travelling unpowered the craft's very good insulation keeps the EM signature down to that produced by a 2/im device. As well as being a safety feature, unpowered gliding is less threatening to sea life and provides tourists and biologists alike with a view of elusive creatures of the deep, creatures that avoid the cacophony of sonic and electromagnetic signals that emanate from powered craft.
POWER SUPPLY: Fusion 5 generator
APPLICABLE SKILL: Aquatic vehicle, atmospheric vehicle.
COST: 12000 stars, 8000 used
ARMOR: Most 25, windshield 15 points, searchlight and sensors are unarmored
HIT POINTS: 260

Location	1D20	Armor/HP
Sensors/searchlight	01	0/8 (0.03)
Fore life section*	02-08	15/52 (0.2)
Aft life section*	09-14	15/52 (0.2)
Thrusters and generator	15-17	25/104 (0.4)
Wings**	18-20	25/65 (0.25)

*Make Luck rolls to see if crew is hit. In some models the two sections are combined into a single deck (hit on 02-14 with 104HP).
**Destruction of wings during unpowered movement causes the craft to 'plummet' upwards out of control.

The Seaglide is a private recreational vehicle of a type common on the tourist water world of Silvereyes. The Seaglide is a streamlined wedge with two pairs of sort 'wings'. Most of the upper surface is a single clear plasteel windshield punctured only by two airlocks and the rung ladders to reach them in emergencies. Shown is a demonstration model with fittings for a number of species including a larger airlock and water filled compartment for cetaceans, as well a fore section with human, kdatlyno and trinoc chairs. To date no trinoc fitted vehicles have been sold.

At great depths low light/passive sonar composite images are projected onto the windshield and if scaring off the fauna is not a concern then the powerful fore-mounted spotlight can be used. Readouts from the vehicle instruments are also projected onto the windshield. The seaglide is rated to 400atm of pressure in water or other non-corrosive liquids. Though equipped with thrusters and pressurised the Seaglide is of little use as a spacecraft as it is not insulated against extreme heat or radiation, has no cabin gravity, and could not withstand micro meteor impacts. The vehicle can serve as a (large) air car. In mixed species models clear barriers separate compartments. For cetacean models verbal commands cause the commode and food dispensers to emerge from the floor. For other species the rooms to port and starboard are a bathroom/commode and kitchenette/first aid station respectively. The facilities aboard are not designed for extensive use providing no sleeping arrangements, in an emergency the Seaglide can provide food water and air for four for 20days, if submerged in water the craft can supply potable water indefinitely.

The Seaglide is the latest in a long line of winged submersibles that had their genesis as early as the 1990s (see www.deepflight.com).

EYES IN THE DARK: A CANON SPECIES FOR SPACE 1889

by Karl Brown

Spoiler alert! This article assumes that players of Space 1889 have completed the adventure within the core rulebook. Ok you have been warned, if your referee runs this adventure try to look surprised when appropriate. Space 1889 is Frank Chadwick's game of science fiction roleplaying in the Victorian era where European ether ships ferry colonists, merchants, and soldiers to Mars, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon. It was first published by Game Designer's Workshop in 1989. It was republished by Heliograph Incorporated in 2000.

In the solar system of 1889 the various Martians outwardly resemble humans and the lizard men of Venus are from an evolutionary history similar to that of Earth's past. For the truly alien we must look elsewhere. The cavernous environment of Luna favors a different type of life to the vertebrates that dominate the sun lit worlds of Mars, Venus and Earth. Large animals evolved from arthropod stock inhabit the moon. The Selenites are the most unusual intelligent species encountered to date (late 1889). Selenites are typical Luna organisms; they are six limbed, covered in a rigid exoskeleton of translucent white chitin (it is largely hollow and not durable enough to serve as useful armor), have two saucer sized compound eyes and a vertical set of grinding mandibles. The mouth is filled with blunt teeth for grinding the fungus that is their food; a selenite's bite is offensive but harmless. While human health deteriorates on a diet of Luna foods, it is postulated that the biologically simpler selenites could remain healthy on a diet of Earth foods particularly mushrooms and truffles. A selenite weighs about 60 pounds in Earth gravity (roll a d6+57 to determine an individual mass). The hindmost limbs are ambulatory only but the two fore pairs can function as rudimentary three digit hands or as legs. Each limb has three elbows and three digits. A selentite can rear up on two legs but needs three limbs on the ground to be steady. Being able to bring three hands to most tasks barely compensates for their crude hands. A selenite is about five feet long when on all sixes and two feet high; on fours the creatures are around three feet high.

Selenite society is one of calm unchanging order and utterly unlike that of Europe. Selenites do not have genders, social classes or careers. Selenite society is without the pillars of government, religion or law yet is stable. Selenites have biological castes reminiscent of the social insects of Earth, though without the 'queen' of ant colonies. Everyone has their caste and therefore their place in society where they are content. Each colony seems to organize itself with little conscious effort by its population there are no leaders or government. This is partly possible because each individual has an assigned role from birth but there must be more to it than this. Biologists have postulated a low level unconscious communication between colony members, perhaps through the scents like those that coordinate an ant colony. Whatever the mechanism every selenite simply feels the urge to do what they need to for the good of the colony and usually does it. This works well for the normal Luna environment but the arrival of humans has added factors that the system does not know how to respond to. Selenites are hermaphrodites and the sex drive is suppressed until the colony needs to increase its population. Reproduction is bereft of emotional attachments and gender differences. The colony produces the selenites it needs in the required numbers and castes.

Caste

Selenites do not have careers, social classes, or genders; they have biological castes that determine their role in society, skills and even their attributes. There are three castes custodians, drones, and specialists.
Drones are the workers responsible for the growth and collection of food.
Custodians are the caretakers of the young as they develop in the hive to when they are a few weeks old. Custodians are able to secrete nutritious fluids that feed the very young. **Specialists** are produced rarely when the colony senses the need for their skills. The specialist caste is further divided. The Space 1889 rulebook introduced us to one sub-caste of specialist the 'keepers of knowledge' and mentioned the hive builder. Here three more specialists are added the 'seekers of ways', 'carriers of words' and the 'founders of colonies'.

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7. Hive builders construct the intricate structures that protect the immature selenites. Keepers of knowledge are responsible for storing the history of the colony passed down by oral means,
8. Seekers of ways are born when the colony runs low on resources. They to scout the cavernous wilderness.
9. Carriers of words are produced in the rare instances where colonies need to cooperate or communicate. The carrier of words crosses the vast cavernous wilderness to speak for the colony.
10. Founders are born when a colony becomes overcrowded. They are generalists that take a few drones to a site discovered by seekers of ways then produce a rudimentary hive and farm to allow the new colony to survive until hive builders and other specialists can be raised and supported.

All castes have an expedition composition cost of 4.5 (see Expedition Composition in this issue). Though specialists are rare they are also more likely to join an expedition than custodians or drones. Note that there are no leaders or warriors. The oasis caverns of the moon are spread so far apart that war becomes unfeasible to the primitive culture of the selenites. It is theorized that if two colonies did build too close together they would simply merge into one facilitated by the mysterious 'subconscious communication'. A selentite colony has no leaders or need for them. Every selenite has its place at the activities of the colony seem to be coordinated without conscious direction.

Attributes

A selenite's attributes are determined by caste, there are no deviations.

CASTE	STRENGTH	AGILITY	ENDURANCE	INTELLIGENCE
Drone	1	2	3	1
Custodian	1	3	2	2
Specialist	1	3	3	4

Social and charisma attributes are meaningless in selenite society and so are left blank permanently. If the attributes are required for spending general skill points, treat as if 1. If required to deal with other species treat as zero. To attempt a task use the rules for task attempts zero skill level from the referee's screen (incorporated at the end of the Heliograph Incorporated reprint). Selenites have poor attributes overall but do have special abilities that go some way to make up for this deficiency.

Abilities

All selenites regardless of caste have the following abilities.
5) They can crawl at a running speed on either four or six limbs enabling them to make better use of low cover. All other movement and combat rules are the same as for humans.
6) No sleep cycle, they do not need to sleep and in fact cannot sleep. Soporific drug do not affect them, though those causing unconsciousness do.
7) Poisonous bacteria, flora, or fauna that is not of Luna origin will not kill them. The same logic protects Earth humans on Mars.
8) Selenites are small and are used to a Spartan lifestyle, they need only half the amounts of food, water, and cabin space that humans do.
9) Their large eyes see well in dim conditions (double the visibility range of any light source) but in total darkness they are no better off than humans. Bright light does not bother them any more than humans.
10) A selenite matures and is educated rapidly. By three weeks old they can function in society. This is a good thing because at ten earth years of age their bodies suddenly give out to old age. Part of the rapid education is the inborn knack for the skills of their caste and if exposed to novelty they continue to learn quickly even as adults. An example is K'chuk's acquisition of the English language in the canon adventure. In the skills section below one or two skills for each caste are marked '*', these skills advance more quickly. Though the experience cost and procedure to advance is the same the selenite has a pool of extra experience points for these skills. The size of the pool varies by caste to make up for poorer attributes of drone and custodians: drone 28, custodian 26, and specialist 20. When experience awarded by the referee is spent to raise these skills and points up to an equal amount can be added from the pool. Once the pool is spent there is no further benefit.

11) Finally, for better or worse a selenite's judgment is unaffected by leadership, charisma, eloquence, or theatrics. Bargaining still functions against them and since the concept is alien to all but the 'carriers of words' they are easy 'marks'.

Skills

The only a limited range of skills is known to selenite characters because of the focused nature of a selenite's education, life within a caste system, and their primitive technology. The poor scores of selenites will generally result in lower skill values as well. However, once play begins the selenites learning advantage will enable them to 'catch up' to other characters and diversify their skills.

Selenites skills are determined in the same manner as for humans with caste substituting for career with the following adjustments. No selenite can *ever* have a second career or caste. They gain the usual 6 general skill points for characters with one career. Selenites are permanently barred from the following skills: eloquence, theatrics, and leadership. All selenites except carriers of words are permanently barred from the bargaining skill. A permanently barred skill it is so alien to selenite thought that it may never be learned even with experience after character generation. There are a host of other skills that a selenite cannot learn in their primitive culture and therefore cannot begin play with but *can* be learned later through experience: trimsman, marksmanship, mechanics, riding, crime, earthworks, explosives, science, gunnery, and piloting. Linguistics may only be applied to Luna languages until the referee deems that the character has sufficient exposure to non-Luna cultures. Selenites may have engineering (structural) 1 when created but no higher. They may increase this skill once they are exposed to the advanced engineering of other cultures.

Drone

Close combat 1*, throwing 1, observation 1, swimming 1, wilderness travel (foraging) 2*, fisticuffs 1.

Custodian

Close combat 2, fisticuffs 1, observation 1*, medicine 3*.

Keeper of Knowledge

Close combat 3, history (selenite) 2*, linguistics (Luna languages) 1*, observation 1.

Hive builder

Close combat 3, observation 2*, medicine 1, engineering (structural) 1*.

Seekers of ways

Close combat 3, wilderness travel (mountaineering) 1*, stealth 1, observation 1*, swimming 1.

Carriers of words

Close combat 3, wilderness travel (mountaineering) 1, linguistics (Luna languages) 1*, observation 1, bargaining 1*.

Founders of colonies

Close combat 3, observation 1, wilderness travel (foraging) 1*, medicine 1*, engineering (structural) 1.

Wealth

Selenites do not use the usual system to determine wealth. All selenites begin play with possessions valued at 4dice x 1 *shillings*. All this value must be 'spent' before play begins as selenites begin with no currency. To make matters worse the choice of equipment is limited to those few goods produced by selenites and the natural resources of the moon. Selenites begin with no income but may stay for free at any selenite colony where they are willing to work at the tasks of their caste.

ITEM	COST	MASS	NOTES
Rope 100ft	2/-	5	Tensile strength only 150 pounds
Food fungus 1 day	1d	1½	Stores for one week at room temperature.
Axe	2/-	3	Selenite tools (including spears below) are constructed of stone and the carapaces of lunar animals. While not as hard wearing the items are valued by collectors and ethnologists at least as highly as good British tools.
Hatchet	6d	1	
Shovel, pick, etc.	2/-	5	
Club	Free	3	
Spear	10d	2	3' long may be thrown
Stone	Free	1	For throwing.
Hide bag	1/-	3 (empty)	Available in a variety of shapes including a backpack variety.
Industrial diamond	*	Negligible	Flawed and tiny. Good for industrial use only. Assign values based on size and quality. A good way to use up unspent funds.

The effects of contact with Europeans

The arrival of Europeans has changed life in one selenite colony forever. In this colony the idea of a greater universe beyond the caverns took root, rifles were issued and the human greed for diamonds observed. The disruption of the calm automatic order of selenite society has shown that other ways of life are possible, some good others worse. The selenites of this colony may buy marksmanship (rifle) with general skill points.

The situation on Luna more than any other inner world is subject to the influence of the player characters. These rules describe selenite colonies before humans corrupt their culture. Further contact can be represented by the referee permitting greater freedom in choosing general skills and equipment. Many biologists of Earth are keen to study the selenites and the unconscious organization of their society. What effects contact with Earth will have on colonies, how the unconscious organization will respond, and how the production of various castes may change is a field ripe for proper academic investigation.

Cops & Monsters - Adapting Pendragon

by Mark S. Holsworth

For the past two years I have been running a campaign of police investigating crime and horror that combines the *Pendragon* and *Call of Cthulhu* rules systems. I have been playing and writing role-playing scenarios for 29 years but this is first campaign that I feel comfortable about writing an article about. Lots of role players have written about the adapting rules, converting characters or just telling campaign stories and I hope that this article will not be that. For information on the adapted rules that I am using for the campaign the website *Cops and Monsters*. http://copsandmonsters.wordpress.com/

Combining *Pendragon* and *Call of Cthulhu* for a campaign has not been that difficult as both are basically the same role-playing systems. Although the *Pendragon* system is designed for medieval romance the system is actually very flexible. In *Pendragon Pass* by David Dunham it is adapted to play Gloranthan fantasy. My own role-playing group have since played the historic 100 years war, using the *Pendragon* system, GM - John Coleman. I have tried Ancient Greece mythos (this didn't work for reasons that I will go into later).

What is difficult is running a city-based horror campaign in a modern setting. And what I want to focus on in this article is how I have managed these aspects. I found myself breaking many rules that I had learnt from experience from many years of GMing mostly about not railroading the PC and providing them with maps, equipment lists and other details. I also wanted to address problems with *Call of Cthulhu* campaigns (as opposed to individual scenarios). These problems are: the motivation for the PC to investigating such supernatural horrors, that the PC all go mad, and there is no time for character development or to recover Sanity. Regardless of sanity stats players become paranoid, or deeply cynical, from dealing with the unknown and because nobody believes them or will help them. For horror to be realistic it has to be unusual and not part of everyday experience, even if you are a Cthulhu investigator. In my campaign I alternate horror scenarios with crime scenarios, as well as, scenarios that combined both elements. This means that they never know what they are dealing with and reduced the level of paranoia amongst the PC. Unlike other Cthulhu campaigns that I have been in the PCs have not be divided between those who believe in the horror and those with doubts; rather they have been divided between the honest and corrupt, the Catholics and non-Catholics, the Democrats and Republicans.

The *Pendragon* system accounts for a normal family life and other events in the end of year phase. This provides the PC with time to recover and to develop their characters, get married and having children. A PC's family can provide motivation to keep working and victims for horror or crime scenarios. When the Mummy abducts a wife is a great motivation for the PC to further investigate those Egyptian cultists. Many role-playing games have lots of maps, lists of possessions, equipment lists and accounts of money spent, etc. to help with the details. The fact is that a GM can never supply all the details and it is easier to provide a general description. The war game approach of ordering a PC around a mapped landscape is not a believable reality. And for my campaign there are too much building and changes in NYC to map, so I simply tell the PC what kind of area it is and if they are familiar it.

Pendragon campaigns dispense with the everyday mundane details of life and concentrate on the important moments of a year. There is little need for maps or other details, just a general sense of orientation and relevant descriptions; it is more interesting for a PC to be told to make DEX rolls to jump over garbage bins that the person they are pursuing has knocked over than to have a map of the alley. Finances need only to be roughly calculated in order to give an impression for the PC and GM. I don't want to role play shopping trips. I never talked about dollars and cents, we use the words: 'schmoolis' and 'clams' (a 'clam' will buy you and your date a meal and drinks in a fancy restaurant and a 'schmooli' is 10 times that.) So I don't have to worry about calculating inflation on prices and the PC are still restricted

in how much they can spend.

Less is more in providing a background for players, let them fill in the details, let the dice fill out details, there are enough important story elements for a scenario designer or GM to concentrate on. I do not make up addresses for NPC, I tell the PC that they have the address and if they go there I give a brief description. I cannot emphasise this enough - less is more.

Less is more when it came to gun combat. I got a lot of suggestions from players about rules for gun combat but what has worked is that the highest opposed success hits. I have maintained the Pendragon defence and berserk rules for gunfire but not the double feint, because that didn't make sense. This has worked even complex gun combats where multiple people are firing on different targets that are returning fire on different targets. It is simple but effective and keeps the combat resolution fast. Sure a single dice roll doesn't take into account all the variables but if the GM and PC explain the dice result in terms of all the variables present in the scenario the result will be just as satisfactory. The possible distractions or events that could have influenced the result make for more colour than calculation. And most importantly it keeps the flow of play and the story moving smoothly rather than stalling for combats.

Pendragon campaigns limit the freedom of the PC (Player Characters) by placing them in an established hierarchy, be that feudal, military or police. I choose to start all of the PC as police rookies, giving them a clear chain of command and some support. They are told what to do – their problem and freedom is how to carry out these orders. (This was one problem that I faced in my Ancient Greek campaign - the individuality and lack of hierarchy amongst ancient Greek heroes hindered a coherent story.) This limited freedom means that a GM can fast track them to the beginning of the scenario with orders from a senior officer. As these instructions are part of the background of the campaign, in this case orders from a superior officer or complaints of crimes from the public, they do not feel like railroading to PC. Railroading is where there is a single track to a scenario that the PC cannot get off; whereas disobeying an order, being cowardly, shirking etc. are choices that the PC can always make. The Pendragon trait system can even forces the PC to be Lazy, Cowardly, Reckless etc. given certain rolls.

The *Pendragon* glory system allows the GM to reward the PC for maintaining cultural values and stereotypes. Only actions that conform to cultural stereotypes receive glory and this is an incentive for the PC not to act anachronistically. The skills and traits needed to be promoted in the police and receive glory provide a check on the PC being too eccentric. Again this does not feel like railroading to PC because it is part of the background of the campaign.

Pendragon story arcs lasts for more than one generation, so it is my plan for the campaign to span at least 3 generations into the 20th Century. The stability of policing as a profession, they are not laid off or made redundant, they are not conscripted and many NYC police have a tradition of policing in their family made it perfect for a Pendragon story arc. The campaign started in 1901 with the PC as rookie cops in New York City. New York City has an interesting criminal history with a great variety of types of crime from gangland violence to major riots to international espionage. Herbert Asbury *The Gangs of New York* (1927) was a great source of detail for the start of the campaign - history is stranger than fiction. Historical themes and developments also provided themes for decades and required PC to learn new skills; this was a struggle for the bicycle patrolman to develop his motorcycle skill, or to increase their Temperate trait during the Prohibition.

New York City also has a great horror and supernatural fictional history. King Kong has rampaged down the same streets that the dark knight Batman fought super-villains. I am not a fan of Lovecraft's horror and I wanted to have some classic horror elements: werewolves, zombies, mummies, vampires and witches. I also want to introduce some

modern horror elements: alien invaders, occult conspiracy theories and superheroes.

The year-by-year structure of a Pendragon campaign helps in the planning of story arcs. NPC or other plot elements can be introduced years before the climax of the scenario. In my campaign Batman started as a rumour amongst the criminals of a winged horror or vampire years before the PC ever saw him. The year-by-year structure is also a great way to tell a history, as the players notice the changes between generations and between the world that a young PC encountered and that of the old PC. It also means that the PC are not stuck trying to think what they are going to do next, events progress with or without them and they are carried along by their normal routine life. This time scale can create a creeping fear, the knowledge that there is still a werewolf out there, or a headhunter collecting trophies as the dark inevitability of events becomes more apparent.

Although police stories make great TV shows and movies they have not been a popular choice for role-playing campaigns. One of the reasons for this is that lot of police work is procedural and it is often very dull, neither things that you want in a role-playing game. I have replaced this dull stuff with a skill rolls for Police Procedure or Library for record searches. But it is not the dice result that is important but the PC's knowledge that this has taken them, all day, all week or months. It reminds them that their world is not all crime and horror and is, mostly, as ordinary as coffee and donuts.

Aside from procedure the history of policing has been an interesting aspect of the campaign. Police tactics at the turn of the century were very different: marching in rank into large gang battles where guns are being fired, communications with police whistles, transportation by bicycle and foot patrols. It was difficult for the police to catch criminals at the turn of the century, although suspects had no modern rights and were subject to torture. There are no identity papers or any adequate means of identification, aside from fingerprints and mugshots. This meant that many criminals simply gave a false name when arrested. The famous gangster, Monk Eastman was arrested several times and released after giving a false name because nobody recognized him. The PC frustrated by the old technology greeted motorized transport, telephones, police call boxes and radio cars with relief.

New York Police are required to carry a handgun at all times, on or off duty, not that all do historically. Some of my PC carry a second "werewolf handgun", loaded with as many silver bullets as they can afford on a policeman's salary (at a clam a silver bullet) - obviously my attempts to reduce the overall paranoia level haven't been entirely successful. Many have noted the lethal nature of handguns GMs in CofC campaigns but with the time scale of *Pendragon* – basically one adventure a year – there is plenty of time for recovery without one player doing nothing for an extended period (a problem that games with other timescales face). The danger also means that the PC is more careful in a realistic manner; I often require a Valorous roll for a PC to enter an area where people are firing guns.

Of course there are still many difficulties in a running a modern horror campaign: keeping track of large numbers of NPCs including the PC's wives and children has been the most difficult. I'm also having a few problems adjusting Pendragon's skills system to account for modern education (like reading a book) or attending classes.

I hope that this article has given some suggestions about how to structure other modern horror campaigns - what is needed and what is not needed. My campaign hasn't concluded yet, it is only 1938. The first generation of PC have retired from play or died and the second generation of PC are now dealing with Nazi occult investigators and feeling lucky that they still have jobs in the great depression.
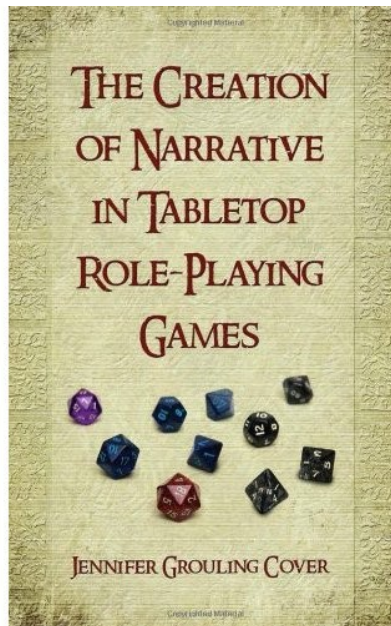
The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games

by Jennifer Grouling Cover

The idea for The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games started in a graduate linguistics course I took. I was assigned the task of tape-recording and analyzing a conversation where someone was telling a story. The first thing that came to mind as a perfect fit was to record a session of my Dungeons and Dragons role-playing group. But what I soon came to find out was that a typical D&D session didn't follow the rules for linguistic narratives, and the general methods for studying them didn't fit well. D&D presented a new challenge for researchers wanting to study narratives, but rather than taking up that challenge, most of what I found was a very rich discussion on videogames. Now, videogames are great, but I think we can all agree that they aren't the same experience as a tabletop role-playing game. So, when scholars would just say, "Oh, it all came from D&D" and move on to videogames, I'd say, "Wait a minute! There's something special going on here that we should look at." I really tried to explain that distinction in my book.

So, this book is essentially about how we can study tabletop role-playing games and why they are important. They challenge our traditional views of narratives, of authorship, of reading and writing, of culture and consumerism. To study these things I used my own observations, recordings, and notes from a long-standing D&D campaign, but I also observed other gaming groups, such as an RPGA session at D&D Experience. I surveyed role-players in online communities, and I interviewed game-designers, such as Monte Cook. I wanted to give a broad view of tabletop role-playing as a genre (and a medium) for storytelling. I present a model of the linguistic structure of the actual gaming session, but I also look at the way the DM interacts with modules and rulebooks to form his/her own story and campaign world. I also look at the way that texts created through role-playing interact with other cultures, such as fan communities and how we use multiple texts from different media to shape our views of memorable stories, like The Temple of Elemental Evil. All of this data comes together to show the special nature of tabletop role-playing games, the stories they create, and their connection to our world.

The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games was just released from McFarland and Co, Inc. and is available on their website:

http://www.mcfarlandpub.com/book-2.php?id=978-0-7864-4451-9 as well as through Amazon:
http://www.amazon.com/Creation-Narrative-Tabletop-Role-Playing-Games/

The Lazy Guide to GMing

by Dark Dungeons, http://www.darkdungeons.net

It's a common affliction of gamemasters to pour hours of their precious time into crafting a story to make their players awestruck, only to see them time and again decide to run obliquely to the carefully laid path before them. Some resort to the railroad, locking the car doors and forcing the players along for the ride. Others react by trying to script carefully planned flow charts of how to re-direct the players back to their attempt at Pulitzerdom. Most throw their hands up and see hours of hard work just vanish.

I make no apologies: I'm a lazy gamemaster. I've done the carefully crafted story thing one too many time, and frankly, I just cannot be bothered to invest the time. Further, I also have come to realize that your intricate plot is a disservice both to yourself, and to your players. It is either there for the conceit of wishing to impress others with your storycrafting acumen, or, as was my case, it's a lack of trust in yourself to be able to run a game "off the cuff". Coming to the table with nothing more than a handful of NPCs and some vague ideas can be a frightening notion. It has the feel of walking a tightrope without a net. It's also a completely unjustified fear.

In this little missive, I'll outline the simple formula I use for my GMing style, ideal for both the slothful as well as the time-pressed. I will demonstrate how to turn your vague ideas and handful of NPCs into tools to help your players craft a story they'll enjoy, as well as point out that you do indeed have a safety net you may not have considered.

Step One: The Campaign Idea

Before you can start GMing, you need to have a basic premise or idea of a campaign. The temptation here is to include loads of history and backstory that will make players' eyes glaze over. The goal is to try to make the world, and the campaign, seem real by making it detailed. This is a common mistake. Nothing will make players feel more disconnected from their character, and thus the world, than the feeling that everything is completely alien to them, they have nothing to hook them into the world.

This is your first opportunity to be lazy. Rather than explain all the intricate details, steal them from media that the players are familiar with. Instead of explaining the elaborate politics of your nation of bored, decadent nobles, just say "This is nation is basically like Dangerous Liaisons" or "This character is alot like The Marquis de Sade". There's nothing wrong with explaining the Hyborean nation of Stygia as "basically Egypt, but they worship an evil snake god, commit human sacrifice, and use dark sorcery". Sure, there's more to it than that, but the players don't need to know that right now. They just need a hook to engage that information quickly. These things are all tropes, dense nuggets of information you can convey by engaging in a common frame of reference. I like to outright list the TV shows, books, and movies which are sources of inspirations for my campaigns, as the players then instantly understand what the game is about as well as their character's place in the world. And it's a lot easier than writing pages and pages of background history that you expect them to digest.

Once you've established the world using tropes, you then establish the premise the same way. "This game is going to be kinda like Star Wars, with the players being rebels fighting against an Evil Empire" instantly lets the players know what kind of people they'll be roleplaying. It's also the lazy way to explain things, because it involves very little work on your part. Lazy is better!

Step Two: The Plot

You don't have one, you don't need one, nor even want one. You should be too lazy for that. You have your premise from step one, right? Use that. If you know the game's premise is "rebels fighting the Evil Empire", then that's all you should write. Don't be tempted to flesh out the ways in which the players will thwart the Evil Empire. That's their job.

Instead, figure out who the movers and shakers of your Evil Empire are: a sorcerer-king, his apprentice, the arrogant military commander. Flesh them out with personal goals. What do they want? What kind of things will they be doing in the setting to get what they want? Write that down if you want, but keep it simple. Write it in bullet points like:

* Wants to destroy the Rebel Base
* Wants to recover the plans to the Empire's secret weapon
* Wants to finds his long lost son and convince him to join the Empire.

That's enough for now. There could be subtext, like maybe his loyalty to the Evil Emperor isn't as secure as it seems, or he isn't yet aware his son is alive (and is one of the PCs)... but that can be figured out organically in play. For now, just some basic goals is enough. Muse on what kind of things they'll do to accomplish those plans. Maybe, say, capture a Princess who is a secret member of the rebels and torture her to find out where the plans are. And the Princess is an NPC who has a goal too: hide the plans. So now you have a story hook based around those goals: secure the plans and rescue the princess. Come up with a few more of those and you're ready to roll.

One word of caution: never love any NPC so much you cannot bear to see them die in a humiliating way at the hands of the PCs. Because they probably will. Remember, you made them, and you can always make another one that looks just like them. So don't get attached. Heck, if they become a problem, kill them yourself if you have to. NPCs are there for the benefit of the players, not the other way around.

Step Three: Getting the PCs involved.

When it's game time, you show up with your NPCs and their goals, from which you've come up with a few story hooks. The next thing to do is to screw with the Player Characters using those hooks. The first thing you need to do is look at the character sheets. See what kind of skills, talents, hindrances, and backstory the Players have come up with and use them all against them.

So, PC1 lives on a farm with his family? Maybe your Evil Knight's troops, in an effort to find the plans, aggressively question, torture, and even kill PC1's family. PC2 wrote "Enemy" down and as a hindrance on his sheet, and told you it's a powerful gangster he owes money to. So you have one of those gangster's goons come calling to put some pressure on him to find a way to make that money he owes... or at least make some tracks. Then dangle a money making opportunity in front of him, one that involves him putting some distance between himself and his enemy to boot. He can choose to take the bait or not... if not, well, we'll get to that shortly.

The goal is just to use the things the players already told you about their characters, which are things they want to be important in the game, and then have your NPCs' goals stomp all over those things, leaving big fat bloody footprints on their most precious hopes, dreams, loved ones, and possessions. Then sit back and enjoy the show! And what if the players don't bite at any of your plot hooks? That's ok. They don't have to. But just because they do nothing doesn't mean our NPCs are also going to do nothing. Let the consequences of inaction catch up to them. If they are in a city and hear tell of an Evil Necromancer nearby raising an undead army and they decide not to do anything about it, they shouldn't be surprised when, some weeks later, the city is besieged by an army of undead.

Meanwhile, while your consequences are brewing, present additional or alternative plot hooks as well, other story choices they can make. Let them figure out which align with their PCs' personal goals and which they wish to pursue, and which they feel are not worth their time. Let them be proactive and come up with their own story hooks, if they're exceptionally creative players. But keep your world in motion. Soon enough they'll learn that while they can impact the world, the world is not sitting around in statis waiting for them to interact with it. It's not an MMO where the contact stands there with a yellow exclamation point over his head until someone clicks on him. It's a living breathing world with powerful people doing things that trample the things that are important to player characters.

This of course implies there have to be things important to the PCs. You need to make sure your player can explain at

least three things their character deeply cares about or wants to accomplish. At least one of those accomplishments should be long term. Once you have that, you have all the ammunition you need.

Also remember to steal ideas. Steal from everywhere. While an adventure module might be too linear for a lazy GM (it's alot of work to read the whole thing and prep it all... and then the players go off the rails anyways), it may be just what you need for when the PCs decide to sneak into the dungeon of the Evil Overlord. Sure would be handy to have a dungeon ready, wouldn't it? Grab your module or at least the map and you're done. Include the bits you remembered from the one time you thumbed through it. See a great movie or scene from a movie? Steal it. Read a great NPC in a book? File off the serial numbers and put them in your campaign.

Step Four: Keeping the ball rolling

The great thing about this whole process is that you never had to write an adventure. You didn't need to prep a scenario. You don't need to start up the train engine and get everyone aboard the railroad. You just kick the crap out of the things the PCs care about with your NPCs then let them figure out what to do about it.

So what do you do when the players seem stuck, can't decide what course of action to take, or disagree on how to proceed? Simple: you kick the beehive again. Put the pressure on. Follow the famous advice to have someone bust in the room with a gun. It doesn't matter who. It doesn't even need to make sense: the players will make sense of it somehow, trust me (more on this later). Just do something to push the players into making a decision, taking an action, whatever that might be.

It's important to note here that you're not pushing them into following a plot: you don't have one of those, remember? Rather, you're just pushing them into deciding to do SOMETHING. What? That's up to them. If they choose to do nothing, there should be consequences of inaction, like the Army of the Dead example mentioned previously. Perhaps the city's forces may be enough to drive the dead off... perhaps not. But the PCs can change the tide of the battle either way by their actions. If they decide they want to abandon the city to it's doom... let them. If they want to go try to negotiate with the necromancer or even join him, let them.

And that's the whole key: it's not your story as the GM. It's the PCs story. You just keep the ball rolling by creating a world and NPCs that demand stories happen. What those stories are about, and how they end, is out of your hands. You're just presenting the problems, it's their job to come up with the solutions.

Step Five: Ending the Campaign

Where is the story going? Are the PCs starting to meander? Is the meaningful opposition starting to seem like more of the same instead of new conflicts? If so, it may be time to end the campaign.

This is a tricky thing to do, because without a plot, it's hard to know how the story ends. That said, there are ways you can work to escalate the conflict towards resolution. Remember the players having characters with goals? Well, at the culmination of the campaign the PCs should finally have a do-or-die chance to attain their most difficult and long term goal. Make the stars line up for them. If they need to recapture their lost throne, give them an army. If they want to find a mythic lost treasure, let them be contacted by a scholar with an ancient map. Provide them with the perfect opportunity, through a series of happy coincidences if necessary, to finally reach out and try to seize their fondest dream.

The Safety Net

I mentioned earlier that, despite your lack of elaborate notes, intricate plots, and fantastic story ideas you do have a safety net: the other players. Seriously, this is the most overlooked resource by most GMs. You have several other imaginations sitting around the table with you, use them. Trust your players to come up with their own plans and plots

and resources. Trust them to plug the holes in the plot (of which there will be many). Trust them enough to solicit ideas directly if you must. It's ok to say "ok, I'm not sure where to go with this... what do you guys think?" to get the ball rolling again. As the GM you want the players to trust you, but that trust should go both ways.

Here's the key points when it comes to trusting your PCs.

<u>Saying "Yes" is the Lazy Answer.</u> You may have heard something like "say yes or roll the dice" before. It's good advice for a lazy GM. You see, either way, you don't have to decide. If it sounds fine, just say Yes. Yes is the lazy answer, because Yes moves the game forward. When a player asks a question, it's because they're coming up with a plan. If they say "Is the bridge made of wood?" it's because they're coming up with a plan where the bridge being made of wood is important. Saying "yes" lets the player keep that momentum and do the work of keeping the game moving, which is less work for you.

<u>Rolling the dice</u> is what you do when both "yes" and "no" could move the game forward, so the answer is arbitrary: either one is good for the story. At that point, let the player roll for it. This puts the power of the story back in their hands. If a decision is going to be arbitrary, it might as well be arbitrary via the game mechanics. Let the PC make a skill or attribute roll with a success being a "yes" and a failure being a "no". Let the dice fall where they may, and make the players deal with the consequences of their roll.

<u>Players can be NPCs too.</u> As the GM, alot of your time is spent playing NPCs, either roleplaying or rolling dice for them. You can offload some of this onto the players, which is the perfect lazy GM solution.

First, have them roll for their allies. As the GM, you're already doing alot more dicerolling than the players are. Offload some of that. While you're at it, let them control those NPCs in combat, too. You can always reserve a Veto right if you're afraid they'll treat them like cannonfodder, but again, trust your players!

Second, let them roleplay some NPCs. You ever have one of those scenes where one PC is interacting with an NPC and the other PCs aren't even present? So the GM and one player have a conversation while everyone else sits around bored. Instead, give the NPC to one of the other players to roleplay. Give them three bullet points of that NPC's goals you developed earlier (or come up with a couple on the fly and give them to the player) then let them run. Now you have more of the players involved. Save your Important Movers and Shakers for you to play, but for minor NPCs, there's no harm is trusting your players.

Putting it all together

All of this distills down to one word: Trust. Trust yourself to be creative. Trust your players to be creative. Trust that while your NPCs and the PCs may have opposing goals you and your players alike share a common goal, to have a great game where the opposition is fierce and the PCs succeed just barely by the skin of their teeth. It may seem that the players want to succeed easily, but they really don't. They want to be beaten up, knocked down, and bloodied. But they don't want to be broken. They want to win, but they want it to hurt. They may not even consciously know it, but they do. They want to be challenged. Trust this. Beat them up, knock them down, bloody them. Make a show of trying to break them, but know they trust you enough that you won't force it.

Work with your players even as you work against their characters. They'll work with you as the GM even as they work against your NPCs. Secretly they want to be beaten up, and secretly you want them to win, but you both will outwardly act like you want the opposite. Even so this is not an oppositional relationship, it's a partnership. A conspiracy to make the PCs suffer but allow them an opportunity to win. They might succeed, they might fail, but they absolutely must feel that they told a good story doing either, and in that, you're all working for the same thing.

And ultimately trust because that trust lets you be lazy. Pull off being lazy enough and you might just run the best campaign ever.

Movie Review: 2012
by Andrew Moshos

Oh my good gods, I think I'd rather have the world destroyed than ever watch another movie directed by Roland Emmerich.

Honestly, this has to be coming from a completely and utterly egomaniacal place, doesn't it Roland? A director so focussed on destroying the world has to be taking himself very fucking seriously. What greater feeling of god-like power could he derive from that ruining the world twice in flicks so long, so implausible and so boring that they could themselves lead to the mass extinctions he creates stupid stories about?

Look, I'm not saying that the FBI and local police should be investigating this guy to see if he's a serial killer or not, but someone with this kind of taste for death doesn't restrict himself to the editing room. That desire for power over life and death over other people often results in a lot of dead hookers and hitchhikers. That's all I'm saying.

That's all I'm saying about that libellous topic, not about this monstrosity of a film.

I tried, lords almighty, I tried. I tried to approach this flick in the spirit of fun, of open-mindedness, of curiousity.

The fact is there is absolutely nothing redeemable about this bloated, boring monstrosity of a flick. There are possibly a few minutes where I maintained some mild non-absolute-apathy, but their ratio to the two and a half fucking dull hours is so negligible that it barely warrants calculating.

Of course that's not going to stop me from ranting for around two thousand words as to why exactly our species deserves to die because of films like this.

I'm not a screenwriter, you're probably not a screenwriter, but you will learn just how horribly easy it is to compile a script once you see this flick. Of course, what it will do is reinforce a tremendous amount of clichés that you thought were tired and creaky back before you were even born. Yes, they're so creaky they can travel backwards through time. There's got to be a word for something so cliché that it moves human evolution backwards, and whatever it is, I'm sure Roland fucking Emmerich will copyright it.

In a flick where you intend to kill billions of people, in fact, almost all the people on the planet, you, as a viewer, are expected to not care unless they, the makers, give you some specific people to relate to. That way the catastrophes that are killing everyone else in the story are only a source of excitement for you as you watch your heroes evade danger at every turn.

In that, we're given John Cusack, as a divorcee Weekend Dad who has to win back the love of his kids, who seem to prefer Weekday Dad.

Isn't that the fucking clichés to beat all clichés? When was the last time you saw a flick where that wasn't the primary

dynamic right from the start? To go one step further, when was the last time you saw a flick where a divorced mother had to defy death at every turn in order to win back the affection of her disaffected kids?

Kramer Versus Kramer doesn't count, since, you know, that's Meryl Streep, and she's soooo versatile.

Here's where the "not only that's" kick in. Not only that, but Cusack's character, called, as some kind of gag about 50 Cent that I don't really get, Jackson Curtis, is a science fiction novelist whose book predicts humanity's struggle with a global catastrophe. Not only that, but his book is read by a scientist at the forefront of doing not that much in the face of certain doom. Not only that, but Jackson is a limo driver indentured to a Russian oligarch (the great Zlatko Buric, who's certainly not Russian at all), who has a role to play in the shenanigans transpiring.

Not only that, but you get the idea.

It's hard with these 'ensemble' films made with reverential respect in honour of auteurs like Robert Altman or Federico Fellini, to figure out who the main character is meant to be. Emmerich's shitfests traditionally have about twenty main characters, ten of whom are just annoying, five of which you actively pray will be killed off, and five whom you're indifferent to. It's meant to give some overall perspective or all-encompassing marketing orgy of demographics, but what it really does, regardless of how they're all connected, is make you wonder "Who's this guy and why do we care, again?"

There are actors in this I really like, but they all, to my eyes at least, have this look on their faces like: "Don't be too down on me for being in this, it was just for the money, okay?" Which is why I don't really feel any lingering resentment towards Chiwetel Ejiofor, or Thandie Newton, or the previously mentioned titan of Danish cinema Zlatko Buric. There's three million other people in the flick, but they don't matter. They all do terrible work here, but it's not like they could have done any differently, since Roland Emmerich is the worst big budget director working who's not called Michael Bay.

The difference is that Bay at least admits (if only to himself or the teenage prostitutes he abuses) that his crap flicks are a form of pornography. Emmerich wants to act like his world-destroying magnum opuses are weighty, significant and deeply meaningful films.

They're not. They're fucking terrible. *2012* is fucking terrible. Have no fucking doubts about that, comrades, it's terrible. Is it as terrible as *Godzilla, Independence Day, The Patriot* or *The Day After Tomorrow*? Well, when you're comparing different buckets of shit, differentiating between the quality of the respective handles become just academic quibbling, really, doesn't it?

A massive solar flare causes the earth's core to heat up, somehow predicted by the Mayans to destroy the earth in 2012, despite the fact that the Mayans used a completely different calendar and could not possibly have come up with a numerical designation like 2012, since they never really knew we were going to change the calendar to honour the birth of Our Lord Big Baby Jesus, did they? Regardless, Chiwetel Ejiofor, so awesome in so many other movies, is relegated to playing Cassandra, prophesying doom and being disbelieved until it's way too late. Except they believe him right from the start, and so begins the most ambitious project in human history to safeguard the survival of the human race.

Since Emmerich's flicks depend on catastrophe-porn to entice an audience, there are many, but probably not enough, scenes where people are just barely escaping from collapsing buildings, exploding volcanoes, earthquakes and super-duper tsunamis that are so high that they give the lamas of Tibet, and the Chinese soldiers oppressing them, such an almighty soaking. None of these scenes can really be taken seriously, because they're just so fucking ridiculous. But they're not ridiculous in the way that the *Transporter* or the *Crank* flicks are ridiculous, where the ridiculousness of the action is part of the fun. We're supposed to think it's even vaguely believable in this context, as we watch a man drive a limo through a collapsing building, or someone pilot a plane in between two collapsing buildings.

At least I think we're supposed to take it seriously. As my beloved said as we were watching the wretched film, "Why doesn't he fly a bit higher?"

Why? Well, that would make sense, but it wouldn't look as death-defying, would it?

So as John Cusack, who, in every scene, looks painfully and awkwardly like the audience couldn't possibly believe

how little he wants to be there, dodges giant ash clouds, torn open ravines, mega-waves and magma meteorites juuuust barely in time, we care because even though six billion people have died in the mean time, he has done everything humanly possible to look cool in front of his surly teenage son.

This film even reduces Zlatko Buric, so awesome as the vile drug dealer Milo in the Danish *Pusher* trilogy, to a blank, xenophobic and boring role, as he struggles with phonetic English and struggles even more with a terrible role rendered even more terrible because he has to do everything to save his two loathsome twin sons, who are even more repugnant than the insides of the head of the man who dreamed all this generic disaster crap up.

I could go on, but this is the final nail I'm going to drive into this stupid flick's coffin: early on, when Jackson is forced to endure time with his kids, his harpy ex-wife (Amanda Peet, who looks like she's been hitting the ice pipe pretty damn hard), warns him that his seven-year-old daughter is having trouble with bed-wetting, and needs to wear Pull-Ups. Now, to me, that's a greater tragedy than the destruction of the entire earth. For the rest of the flick, no further mention of her problem is made, what with all the exciting things going on, like Danny Glover being crushed by an aircraft carrier, and human civilisation ending and such. But right at the end, the little girl gets the last line of the film.

"I'm not scared, Daddy. No more Pull-Ups."

By all the gods, it moved me to tears to know that all it took for her to triumph over her bed-wetting was the CGI deaths of 99 per cent of the world's population. You go, little girl, you go.

2 times Roland Emmerich has revealed himself to be an enemy not only of cinema but of humanity as well out of 10

--
"Kind of galling when you realize that the nutbags with cardboard signs had it right the whole time." – *2012*.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF RPG REVIEW

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